

Writing FAQ

How can I get published?

Oh, this is such a huge question. It's like asking "how do I get on a professional hockey team?" There are entire books written on getting published. There's no single route to publication, Ask ten authors how it happened to them, and you'll get at least a half-dozen unique answers.

To get a glimpse at the process, check out these links below. But be warned, this isn't something you can read today and pop your book off to a publisher tomorrow. Expect to do research—lots of it. And get rejection—lots of it. Getting published can take years of effort.

http://www.publishers.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=32

<http://www.writersandartists.co.uk/author-advice/get-published/>

<http://www.claredunkle.com/Design/pubbasics.htm>

Can you help me get published?

I'm often asked for contact names or "inside tips." Sadly, I'm just not that tuned into the New York publishing world. My contacts are limited to my agent and editors, and you'll find their names in the Acknowledgements of any of my books. You are free to submit to them so long as you follow their guidelines for submissions.

My advice? Make your own contacts. Attend conventions and conferences and meet the agents and editors in person.

Will you take a look at my book/story/idea?

I used to read work and comment on it, both in my many years in critique groups and later, as a "new" author. But for a number of reasons, I've been advised to cease-and-desist. So as much as I'd love to help, I can't.

However, I'm a strong believer in the value of critique groups, once new writers feel comfortable with their work and are ready to seek constructive criticism. The best way to find a group is to attend a writing workshop or conference in your city and ask around.

An alternative is an online group, like the one on my discussion board. The group is hidden from non-members, but you can find details on it by clicking here.

Do you have any advice for aspiring authors?

Practice, practice and practice some more. Read everything you can get your hands on and write whenever you get the chance. I know we like to think writing is some great art form, but it's more of a craft and the only way to improve at a craft is to work at it. That means not only writing but actively working to improve by taking courses, reading writing books, joining writing groups, seeking feedback and, perhaps most importantly, learning how to accept and apply feedback.

How do I know my story is original enough?

What I've learned is that there's no truly original ideas. What *is* original is what we, as writers, do with our idea. Give twenty writers the premise "female werewolf struggles with her identity" and you'd get twenty very different books. As a writer, yes, you need to look past those "done to death" plots, but only to come up with an idea that's reasonably fresh—not wholly original, but unique enough that an editor won't say "oh, that's been done a *hundred* times before."

I can start stories, but I never finish them. Why?

First, make sure you know where you're going every step of the way. Nothing kills a story quicker than lack of planning—you hit a point and don't know what comes next, so you give up. Second, don't edit as you write—just get it down. Editing gives you too much time for second guessing. Third, speaking of second guessing, don't be discouraged if the story doesn't seem as good as you envisioned it. This happens to most of us—the picture in our head is so much clearer and more "alive" than what comes out on paper. It'll look better when it's done...trust me.

How can someone with a job and/or family find time to write?

It's not easy, and I'll be the first to admit it. It took me six years to write *Bitten*. My main problem was allowing myself time to write. Other things always seemed more important. It's hard to give yourself the time to write for an hour when there are three baskets of laundry piled behind you. But we all deserve (and need) personal time, right? No one would argue that we should be denied hobbies because we have a job and a family. So think of writing as that: your hobby. That way, you aren't looking at the bottom line—will this ever make any money?—but simply as much needed personal time.

What I found worked was not waiting for those elusive pockets of time to appear (they never do) but scheduling in writing like any other activity. A half-hour a day would be great, but two hours every Sunday afternoon is fine, too. Pretend it's an appointment and put it on the calendar. Make sure everyone in the family knows that you'll be as unavailable as you would be if you were going to a doctor's appointment. If that doesn't work (as it often doesn't with small kids!) then actually leave the house, go someplace and write. And once it's scheduled, treat it like an appointment. You wouldn't cancel an appointment to fold laundry, would you? So let the laundry wait and take your writing time. Even if it never pays off in six-figure book contracts, you'll get something from it: the personal satisfaction that comes with any creative endeavour.

Do you recommend all aspiring authors get an agent first?

I don't recommend that "all" writers do anything...except read and write as much as they can. The decision to get an agent or not, in my opinion, rests on two factors. Where you plan to sell the book and whether you have the personality to do an agent's work yourself.

First, do any of the publishing houses you're looking at submitting to accept unagented work? If you're trying to place a genre novel with a big publisher, the answer may be no. A smaller house, a literary novel or category romance does not necessarily require an agented submission.

If you can submit without an agent, then the question becomes "should you?" Selling a book without an agent requires the ability to approach editors and sell your book, then deal with contracts, negotiations, etc. If you can do that, you'll save yourself an agent's fee. For me, my agent more than earns her cut—she's there for me at every stage from brainstorming through to career advice.

I want to write a book/story, but I have no idea how to format it?

Typewritten, 12 pt "readable, common font" (Times New Roman, Courier etc), double-spaced, single-side of the page, 1 inch margins all around, pages number at the top with your surname and the story/book title (in case the editor drops a page and doesn't know who it belongs to!).

That's it. Now, if you want to know how to format dialogue, when to break paragraphs and chapters, etc, then the answer is very simple—grab a few novels from your shelves and check. I'm constantly amazed at new (and not so new) writers who mis-format and say they've "never been told how to do it." If you're a writer, you have novels (I hope!) Use them as a guide.

Someone told me x is a rule of writing. Is that true?

There are no rules in writing (except "tell a good story" but that should go without saying.) Instead there are guidelines—ways that most writers do things and that the average editor and reader seems to like.

Examples of guidelines? Here's one: minimize your use of adverbs. Here's another: whenever possible use "said" and "asked" as dialogue tags, instead of something more flowery ("wailed," "bemoaned," "snarled," "blubbered" etc) What if, as a writer, you find a lack of adverbs and the constant use of "said" unbelievably dull and the sign of an unimaginative mind? Then ignore those guidelines. You'll find NYT bestselling novelists who do. So long as the rest of your writing is exceptionally strong, you'll might be able to get away with it. Guidelines exist to guide the writer. They are not hard-and-fast rules.