

Choosing a Publishing Path

Created by Rue Sparks *(not for redistribution)*

WHAT ARE THE PUBLISHING PATHS?

- Traditional Publishing “The Big Four”
 - Macmillan, Hachette, HarperCollins, and Penguin Random House
 - Each has Imprints for specific niches
- Indie Publishers
- Self-publishing
 - Author-published, including print, ebook and audiobook
 - Wide
 - Kindle Unlimited
 - 35% of ebook sales in the US in 2024 were self-published
- Hybrid
 - Mix of any of the above

Note: It's not unusual for authors to hop between different paths throughout their careers

TRADITIONAL STEPS: #1 QUERYING AGENTS

- *MANUSCRIPT MUST BE COMPLETED AND EDITED*
- Query Package
 - Cover Letter
 - Synopsis
 - *First Pages/Chapters/Words of Manuscript
- Send to Agents
 - DON'T say it's the next “Harry Potter”
 - Too large and unspecific of a claim
 - Answering two questions:
 - “Why would this specific agent want to take on this book?”
 - “What is unique about my book that is still marketable”
- Agent requests “Full” (Full Manuscript)
- If offer given, ask questions before signing
- Contract

Note:

You will often wait to hear from agents for months, and you may end up sending a LOT of queries before you get a ‘full’ request. It is a SLOW process.

**What the “First..” entails depends on the agent. ALWAYS read their requirements.*

TRADITIONAL STEPS: #2 PROPOSAL TO PUBLISHERS

- Agent creates a Proposal
 - DO say it's the next “Harry Potter”
 - Answering the question:
 - “What about my book can appeal to a lot of readers”
- Sends Proposal to Publishers (Querying Part 2...)

- Contract Negotiations

INDIE PUBLISHERS

- *MANUSCRIPT MUST BE COMPLETED AND EDITED*
- Proposal Package
 - Cover Letter
 - Synopsis
 - *First Pages/Chapters/Words of Manuscript
- Send to Publishers
- Publishers request “Full” (Full Manuscript)
- If offer given, ask questions:
 - What happens to the rights should publisher ‘go under’
 - Which rights are they claiming (US only, international, audio, etc)
 - Which costs will be covered? Ie, cover, formatting, marketing, etc
 - What marketing are you expected to do on your own?
 - What marketing will the publisher do?
- Contract

NOTE:

Not all indie publishers take direct submissions. Some will require you to go through an agent, just like traditional publishers. Always check their requirements

**What the “First..” entails depends on the publisher. ALWAYS read their requirements.*

SELF-PUBLISHING

- Control **every aspect** of publication
 - Manuscript Editing & Proofreading
 - Formatting & Covers
 - Distribution
 - Printing
 - Marketing
- **Choose where to spend your time and money**
 - Triangle of priorities: you can choose **two**
 - Time, Money, and Quality
 - Choose for each part where you want to focus
 - What do you learn to do yourself and what do you hire out?

HYBRID

- Are allowed to publish with an indie and/or traditional publisher **AND** self-publish
 - What projects do you want more direct control over?
 - What projects may a publisher not be interested in, but you still want to create?
 - Advances vs. royalties on self-published works
 - Debut’s have value to traditional publishers, but are difficult to get picked up

PATH ADVANTAGES

- Traditional
 - May get an advance
 - More work is done by the publisher

- Indie Publishers
 - Some of the same advantage of traditional depending on publisher
 - Serve more niche markets
- Self-publishing
 - Keep control of your own work
 - You get paid a higher royalty per book

Note:

An advance is an 'advance' on royalties. You will have to wait for your book to 'pay out' before you see royalties from book sales.

PATH DISADVANTAGES

- Traditional
 - Can be extremely difficult to get picked up
 - Have to go through the Query process
 - For most contracts you will still be doing most of your own marketing*
 - Possibility of being dropped if your book underperforms
 - Don't get royalties until your advance 'pays out'
- Indie Publishers
 - Have to go through the proposal process
 - More likely statistically to go under within a year or so
 - For many publishers you will be doing most of your own marketing
 - "Long tail" method, better for those with 15-20 books or more
- Self-publishing
 - Takes a lot of research, education, and time
 - Will be doing all of your own marketing
 - Everything comes out of your pocket

Note:

Unless you're one of the few top books a traditional publisher decides to champion that year, you're unlikely to get out of doing a lot of your own marketing.

IT'S A TRAP!

- Publishing is full of **scams**
 - **Writer Beware** (from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association)
 - Blog talking about specific things to watch out for:
 - Impersonations
 - Overseas scams
 - SFWA website has specific resources
 - Lists of irreputable individuals and organizations
 - Warning signs to look out for during every step
- **Bad actors**
 - Agents and/or publishers that have a bad reputation
 - Agents
 - Take on too many authors and don't follow through
 - Misrepresent their capabilities/resources
 - Scams

- Publishers
 - Overpromise and underdeliver
 - Retain rights to books they never publish
 - Drag a book along and then drop them
 - Scams
- **Vanity Presses**
 - “Pay-to-Publish”
 - Author pays the publisher to publish their book
 - Often exorbitant amounts for services
 - Require you to do everything through them
 - Rarely do they market their books
 - High cost, low value
 - Not always the wrong choice if:
 - You’re aware of what they are
 - You only want to have published a book
- **Spam/Scam Services**
 - Services
 - ‘Influencers’ selling their services
 - Bookstagram accounts for paid reviews/posts
 - Some ARE legitimate and/or helpful but most don’t need to actively recruit
 - Cold-call emails promising
 - Higher Google rankings
 - SEO optimization
 - Marketing
 - Editors, Covers, Formatting, Videos, Design, etc
 - Vet whoever you hire
 - Ask for recommendations and check them out
 - Make sure they’re a fit for your niche
 - Editing/Proofreading: Ask for sample edit
 - Visuals & Video: Ask for a portfolio
 - Are they using Generative AI?
 - Your decision if you allow, but transparency is key
 - Lookalikes
 - People that spoof legitimate accounts
 - Download all or most of the actual person/companies posts and repost as their own content
 - Reach out to authors directly to scam money, claiming costs for services

WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU?

- “Why is it I want to publish this book?”
 - Be honest. THERE'S NO WRONG ANSWER
 - Want to become a prolific author
 - Write to the mainstream/broader audience
 - Write closer to current trends
 - Traditional is the easiest gateway but largest hurdle out of the gate
 - Focus on getting your debut to the right publisher
 - Want to see yourself in publishing?
 - More concerned with an engaged audience than a large one
 - Want people to come back again and again
 - Niche market that isn't as 'marketable'
 - Self-publishing gives most control, most work for you
 - Want to just have finally published that book
 - Vanity press (with a good reputation)
 - Self-publish and get limited copies for friends and family
 - Smaller indie publisher who publishes similar work
- You **DON'T** have to stick with your original plan
- You **DON'T** have to stick with just one

RESOURCES

GENERAL PUBLISHING

- **Let's Get Publishing Series** — David Gaughran
- **Starting From Zero** - David Gaughran free (yes, really) self-publishing course <https://davidgaughran.com/>
- **Writing Craft Books Series** by Joanna Penn

EDITING:

- **Salt & Sage Incomplete Guides** by Salt & Sage Books
- **The Emotional Craft of Fiction** by Donald Maass
- **Writers Helping Writers Series** (Emotion/Conflict/Occupation/etc Thesaurus)
- **Save the Cat! Writes a Novel** by Jessica Brody
- **Writing the Other** by Cynthia Ward & Nisi Shawl

MARKETING:

- **Newsletter Ninja 1 & 2** by Tammi Labrecque

WRITER LIFE

- **Writer Beware**
 - Blog: <https://writerbeware.blog/>
 - SFWA: <https://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>
- **Dear Writer: Writer You Need to Quit Books** - Becca Syme
- **Quitcast** - Becca Syme: <https://www.youtube.com/c/BeccaSyme>

- **Big Magic** — Non-fiction book by Elizabeth Gilbert
- **Fire Up Your Writing Brain** — Susan Reynolds



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