



GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING



WHY SELF-PUBLISHING?

Self-publishing has now become a major force in the book world. It gives a great opportunity to get your work into print, if you're not one of the lucky few who are able to land a trade publishing contract. Here's how to make the most of the opportunity it provides, and how to avoid the pitfalls.

So why should you self-publish?

- It's extremely difficult for most authors to get a book accepted by a conventional publisher. They won't even look at most submissions, however great their literary merit, unless the author is already famous or successful. Most of them cherry-pick just a small number of titles each year and look at very little else. This is because they make their money by investing in books – the right books. They have to make a profit from sales to stay in business, so they can't afford to spend time and money on titles that aren't likely to bring a substantial cash return - in other words, sell lots and lots of copies.
- Conventional publishers will take control of a

book, making their own commercial decisions about how it should be edited and designed. They will publish in their own time and often keep authors waiting for many months.

- Conventional publishers will pay only a modest royalty to the author and keep the bulk of any profit, as a return on their investment in the book.
- Conventional publishers will control the rights, taking a share of any further profit opportunities the book offers.
- Conventional publishers may decide to withdraw a book at any time if it's not selling well, whatever the author thinks.

Generally speaking, self-publishing houses do not invest in books but provide a service to authors. This means the author pays, but in return he/she gets far more control – and potentially more profit.

A good self-publishing house will:

- Accept most submissions, provided they are good enough to be published, once the manuscript has been brought to a publishable standard.
- Ensure that each book has been edited and designed to a professional standard – the trade standard - before publishing it.
- Share the editing and design process with the author, taking into account his/her preferences.
- Work to meet the author's requirement with regard to timescale.
- Pass the bulk of profits from the book to the author – the publisher's money comes primarily from the editing and production fees charged to the author.
- Allow the author to keep the rights.
- Keep the book on the market indefinitely.

One of the key changes in self-publishing is that today some of the most forward-thinking houses, including Mereo, may agree to contribute to the cost of a book. **IF** they believe that it has a real chance of substantial sales, from which both the author and the publisher will profit.

It is not surprising that an increasing number of established authors are now taking the self-publishing route alongside those who simply want

a book out for personal reasons. They know they will have far more say over the way their book is edited, designed and published, and if the book is successful it can make far more money, because the author gets a much bigger share of the profits. This does of course mean that the author's work is not finished when the book is published – if you want sales, you're going to have to promote and publicise it.

Pick the right publisher

Unfortunately many self-publishing companies, including some of the biggest, are not very open about the way they operate. We have heard countless stories of authors having their work 'accepted' and then being told they will have to pay a four-figure 'contribution' towards the cost of publishing. At Mereo, we believe in plain dealing. So how do you know who to trust with your book – and your money? Before you take the plunge and sign an agreement, ask these questions:

- Do they employ full-time publishing professionals who really know books?
- If so, will these professionals be looking after your book personally, or will you be dealing with a junior member of the team who lacks knowledge and experience?
- Will your manuscript be edited to a professional standard before publishing? Very few books are good enough to publish without editing, but editing is a time-consuming (and therefore costly) process and some self-publishers rather overlook it.
- Will your book be individually designed to a professional standard, with a cover that's good enough for the bookshops? The cheaper self-publishers tend to keep their costs down by using a limited range of scenic images along with very simple standard templates.
- Are there any hidden charges? Some self-publishing firms make a show of 'accepting' a manuscript as if they will be paying the costs, but then after 'reviewing' it they will ask for a contribution towards those costs, perhaps a large one. In effect they are making you pay for your book through the back door. Authors in this position often imagine the publisher is going to make their money from sales of the book. Unfortunately the publisher usually knows that sales will be few.
- If the service is cheap, why? No one can edit, design and publish a book properly or give you a personal service for a few hundred pounds. A bargain price can only mean that very little time will be spent on your book, because the time of professionals in editing and designing your book has to be paid for.
- Are they UK based? Some of the biggest self-publishers are international firms based in the US (though this is not always obvious from their websites) and may not be able to offer the level of personal contact or understanding of the UK market you can expect from a locally-based publisher.
- Google them to see what their authors are saying. A decent publisher will be able to show plenty of positive testimonials.

What about an agent?

Wouldn't it be great to get an agent - he or she will be sure to find a lucrative publishing deal for you while you get on with your next best-seller. Trouble is, just like publishers, agents are extremely choosy – they have to be. They know they will have to spend many hours networking, phoning and emailing to get a deal for even the best book, and like trade publishers, they have to see a return for their investment. So they pick their authors with great care and will be working with only a handful of the most commercially promising at any one time. They are unlikely to be interested in new writers unless they have something really exceptional to offer.

Legitimate agents take their fees from a share of the profits in the book – beware of agents who charge for their services.

What sort of book should you write?

If you have already written your book, it may be a bit late to ask this question. If you're not concerned about sales, you can of course write about anything you like. Many people write a book to get something off their chest, to expose evil doings or just to put their experiences on record for friends, family and descendants. Others simply write for the pleasure of writing, and having done so, wish to have and to hold their work in a tangible form. But if you are hoping people who don't know you will pay good money for your book, you are entering a very different arena. Please remember:

- Personal stories do not sell unless they are truly extraordinary and of real interest to people who have never heard of you. Sadly, experiences like bereavement, serious illness or struggling with divorce, life-changing as they may be to you, are just not unusual or interesting enough to sell to the wider world unless your story is exceptionally powerful and well told. That doesn't of course, mean you shouldn't write your book – just don't expect people who don't know you to buy it.
- Whatever the topic, you should keep your book reasonably short, because the length of your manuscript will make a big difference to the cost of producing your book. Editing a 100,000 word manuscript will take an editor four times as long as editing one of only 25,000. Long books are also more expensive to typeset, print, bind and post, so the cover price will be higher, which may put buyers off. However, very short books may leave the reader feeling short-changed. We suggest that if the economics of publishing your book are important to you, you should aim for about 40-80,000 words. We have produced several books of 200,000 words or more for authors who don't mind the extra cost, but we suggest you regard that as roughly the practical limit.
- Don't add too many photographs, if you care how much your book is going to cost to design and print. Colour pictures will also add to the retail price, which could deter buyers. For most books, roughly 20-60 is a good number. And be ruthless in making your selection – poor quality is forgivable on old family snapshots, but not on modern colour photos.
- Books about true crime, war, disaster and topical issues such as the Middle Eastern crisis are among the top sellers. Business books may sell well if you are writing as an authority, with a track record of success. Romantic, erotic and historical fiction are evergreen top sellers. Crime, horror and science fiction may sell well IF you have a following - and if you build one, you can keep on writing for and selling to the same people.

- Factual books which people will use for reference, such as a guide to an area you know well or an introduction to a sport in which you're an acknowledged expert, may sell well, and could keep on selling.
- Funny books - if they really are funny.
- Lots of people write poetry and would like to see their work in a book – that's great, but it's unusual for people to buy poetry books by 'amateurs' unless they know the author or are following them in some way, so please don't expect commercial sales. Many submissions of poetry we receive at Mereo are too short to be bound into a sensible paperback book. You need enough to fill at least 60 or so sides, which usually means roughly 50-60 short poems or 30-40 longer ones.
- Children's books may seem easy and fun to write, but writing a good one is harder than it looks – and it's harder still to make money from

them. If you want to set down in print at your own expense a charming story you've written for your children, that's great, but if you're hoping to sell it, please remember that half the parents, grandparents and aunts in the country have had the same idea and the competition is fiercer than the Gruffalo. Most children's books submitted to Mereo are also too traditional – check out the market, it has moved on. And there's an economic factor – it's far more expensive to produce an illustrated book for young children than a text-only paperback. Most such books supplied to the trade are printed by the containerload in far-off countries such as Poland and China, which is the only way of making them affordable in the shops. On a small print run in the UK your costs are likely to dictate a cover price which is far too high for the market. This is why only a tiny few of the most original and entertaining children's books will ever sell in any quantity.

PRINCIPAL PUBLISHING GENRES	FICTION	General Action & Adventure Biographical Christian / General Coming of Age Contemporary Women Crime Cultural Heritage Dystopian Erotica	Fairy Tales, Folk Tales, Legends & Mythology Family Life Gay Ghost Gothic Graphic Novels Historical Horror Humorous Lesbian	Literary Mystery & Detective Noir Religious Romance Romance / Historical Sagas Satire Science Fiction Sea Stories	Short Stories (Multiple Authors) Short Stories (Single Author) Sports Superheroes Television Tie-In Thrillers / General War & Military Westerns
	NON-FICTION	Antiques & Collectibles Architecture Biography & Autobiography Body, Mind & Spirit Business & Economics Computers Cooking Crafts & Hobbies Drama Education Family & Relationships Foreign Language	Study Games Gardening Health & Fitness History House & Home Humour Juvenile Fiction Juvenile Nonfiction Language Arts & Disciplines Law Literary Collections	Literary Criticism Mathematics Medical Music Nature Performing Arts Pets Philosophy Photography Poetry Political Science Psychology	Reference Religion Science Self-Help Social Science Sports & Recreation Study Aids Technology Transportation Travel True Crime Non-Classifiable

How good is your book?

Amateur authors are famously blind to their own failings, and the less said about some manuscripts we have seen at Mereo, the better. However, many of the better self-published books are as good as anything on the bookshop shelves and deserve to do well. Curiously, it's often the authors of the worst manuscripts who claim they have written a best-seller, while many beautifully-written books are presented very modestly by authors with few expectations.

Like those hapless contestants in The X Factor, you may be tempted to believe friends and relations who assure you that you are going to be a star and your book is the best thing since the last John Grisham. People close to you simply won't tell you the truth, even if they know what the truth is. However a good self-publisher, having taken a look at your book, will diplomatically let you know if it is not publishable

without further work at your end, and what that work should be (there will usually be a charge for a detailed review). If the basics are there, the editor will work with the author to turn it into a polished book.

You may not feel your book requires much editing work, but bear in mind that if it is to be offered for sale, a poorly-written or carelessly-edited book runs the risk of getting picked on by amateur internet 'reviewers' who are all too eager to find fault. It is not unusual for anonymous individuals who take a dislike to a book, or have some personal axe to grind (perhaps they have a friend who's written a book that competes with yours), to post unfairly critical reviews on Amazon etc. This will do neither your reputation nor your publisher's any good – one reason why Mereo will not publish books which have not been properly edited.

Writing your book - If you haven't written it already

PLANNING YOUR BOOK - PERSONAL STORY

Plan and write your story in **chronological order**, at least initially. Start at the beginning and finish at the end. Any other approach will cause confusion for you in later revision, for your editor and eventually for your readers. It will also make it very easy to leave things out. Once you have a completed MS you can start thinking about subtle devices such as starting the story with a key passage from the middle before going back to origins.

If there are two or three threads to your story – your career, home life and sporting success, for example – some relaxing of this rule will be necessary to avoid constantly switching between subjects. So you might devote a chapter or two to your first job, for example, followed by one on how you got to play tennis for your county, then on to a section about meeting your partner and getting married, before returning to how you left your job and set up your own business.

Make up your mind **what kind of book** you're writing (see above). One of the commonest problems with books submitted to Mereo is that they cross genres – a light comedy which contains passages of horror, a memoir which combines rose-tinted memories of a country childhood with an account of a meteoric career in insurance broking. This is fine if you're publishing the book for personal reasons, but if you're hoping to sell it to people who don't know you, your book needs to be all of a piece.

Similarly, keep to the **central theme** of your book. If your story is about how you spent ten years with nomads in Siberia, don't tell us all about your tour of the sights of Europe on the way home – it will just come across as an anti-climax.

Simplify your story. If you recount the full story of your life, recording everything of passing interest that happened, it is not likely to make for a good read (and it will probably be far too long). That's because

real life is messy and involves many side turnings, blind alleys and random experiences which have no bearing on anything else. Be ruthless in leaving these out unless they are genuinely entertaining (funny stories are fine).

If you want people to buy your book, approach your story with a **positive attitude**. Life stories which read like one long grumble against injustice and ill fortune (however justified) will attract few readers. Focus on the humour, the achievements (without boasting too much), the good friends you made, how you won through against adversity in the end.

Talking about **boasting**, it can be extremely difficult not to sound pleased with yourself if you are writing about a successful life. But no one likes a show-off, and false modesty and playing the innocent are even more annoying (“I was surprised to get a three-minute standing ovation and you could have knocked me down with a feather when the chairman took me on one side and told me it was the best presentation he had ever seen...”) so we suggest you just don’t tell your readers this sort of thing, if you don’t want them to throw the book aside in disgust. They will soon work out from your story that you were good at your job. You could always list your achievements soberly in an appendix, like a CV.

Vary the pace. If you tell your story at the same speed all the way through, you will soon send the reader to sleep. Speed your way over the incidentals (‘After three more weeks of dawn starts and greasy breakfasts I had had enough...’ but then slow right down to deal with the key moments – ‘He turned, one hand fingering the knife. I took a step back. My throat was dry. Somewhere in the distance, a bell rang...’

Avoid too much **repetition**. If you’re describing events which happened several times in your life – starting a new job, winning a sporting event, hospital treatment – it gets tedious if you describe each one with the same level of detail. Focus on the key ones, gloss over the rest.

Don’t split the story into too many **chapters**. Some authors seem to start a new chapter on every other page – it breaks the book up and makes it very scrappy. Around 10-20 chapters is about right for most books. Authors often tend to follow the one subject, one chapter rule (one about Fred, one about Alice, one about hang-gliding), but this falls apart when you have only a page or two about one topic and 30 pages about another, and in any case a good book should maintain a continuous narrative, rather than consisting of a series of disjointed essays on separate subjects.

It feels natural to end a chapter when you have finished with a particular topic and then start the next chapter with a new one, but if you want to create a page-turner, it is much more satisfactory to end each chapter with a hint of what is to come – ‘As I said farewell to Beirut for the last time, I felt a sense of relief that I had survived. Little did I know that an even greater test awaited me back in England.’

PLANNING A NOVEL

This is not the place to go into the complex craft of novel-writing (some books that may help you are listed at the end). Suffice it to say that the novel is an extremely demanding form and yours is not likely to work if you just start at the beginning, let the story develop as it will and finish when you’ve had enough. Successful novelists plan meticulously, then review and revise many times. Your plot must be watertight and credible, your characters interesting, original and well differentiated and your narrative compelling – not easy!

A FEW ESSENTIALS:

Your **central character** must be someone the reader can identify with and care about, an original, credible, interesting and attractive blend of qualities and flaws.

He/she will almost certainly undergo some sort of **journey**, metaphorical or actual (very likely both),

through some kind of adversity to ultimate triumph or redemption.

The story must be **believable**. Beggars from the slums do not metamorphose into professors and princes (except in fairytales), and middle-aged Sunday school teachers do not develop the ability to disarm three gunmen just because they are feeling cross.

The **plot** must work, without loose ends or nonsensical turns of events, and lead to a satisfying conclusion which is neither predictable nor absurd. A well-crafted novel keeps several threads hanging in the air to tantalise the reader, then knits them together at the end in a way which is believable, yet unforeseen. This is a very difficult skill.

Don't write about anything that doesn't have a **job to do** in your novel. Introduce a cat if it is going to be used to demonstrate a character's cruelty or soft-heartedness, not because you like cats. Describe a storm if it will cause a shipwreck, not because you enjoy writing about weather. And don't introduce spare characters just for fun.

Keep to a **consistent point of view** – usually the point of view of the central character. You can use internal monologue ('what on earth was he going to do now?') but only for your main character, the one the reader is supposed to be identifying with. He/she cannot describe anyone else's thoughts. To present information which is not in the central character's head, you have to open a new 'scene' - section or chapter– written from the new character's perspective.

WRITING THE TEXT

Not everyone has an ear for good, compelling prose, and no rulebook will enable you to write it. But there is help out there; there are books, websites, clubs and learning institutions devoted to helping writers do it better. Here are some of the most common problems with manuscripts submitted to Mere, and how to deal with them.

First, **relax**. Avoid the temptation to sound important or clever, to take yourself too seriously or to show off your literary skills. If in doubt, simply write as you would talk initially, then sharpen the text into good English.

Vary **sentence length**. When all your sentences are about the same length, it makes for a very tedious read. Make sure you use a few short, punchy ones among the longer ones, particularly at the beginnings and ends of paragraphs, while avoiding anything that is so long it loses its way and leaves the reader gasping for breath.

Paragraph breaks - a new paragraph is suggested when there is a slight change of subject or point of view, or a jump in time. Imagine the scene you're describing is being filmed. When the camera cuts to a different view or angle, that's often the equivalent of a new paragraph. There's no rule about how long a paragraph should be, but very long paragraphs (only two or three per page) will make the text indigestible and very short ones (20-30 words) create a jumpy, staccato effect (unless they are required by the conventions of handling direct speech) – both are to be avoided.

With new sentences and paragraph breaks, it helps to imagine reading the text aloud to an audience. Where would you pause for a couple of seconds? Where would you let your voice rise or fall? Where would you speed up or slow down? This will help you to decide where the paragraph breaks should be, and when a new sentence is required. When there is a jump in time or a change of scene, a good technique is to use a line break (an extra space) to indicate that there's a natural break in the story.

DIRECT SPEECH

Handling conversation is something very few people can do well – in fact at Mere we often have to rewrite it. When you put words into a character's mouth, try to imagine how they would sound when spoken. People tend to speak in fragments, with pauses and repetition – they do not use well-

constructed sentences, conditional clauses, unusual tenses or abbreviations. No one says 'I will telephone you at 9 am after speaking to our production manager', they say 'I'll call you in the morning when I've had a word with Tom'. Having said that, don't try to be too naturalistic – you don't want your dialogue to look like a transcript of a court hearing. Real people repeat themselves, ramble and waffle – in books this would be boring and unreadable.

Don't use direct speech to deal with a long factual argument or explanation – much better to say 'He explained that...'

Certain conventions in written English should be kept out of direct speech. Punctuation in particular should be very simple. The colon and semi-colon just don't work when spoken (how do you voice a semi-colon?) and nor do phrases in quote marks, as there is no audio version of an inverted comma.

If you must insist on rendering a regional accent, please minimalise it, with just enough dropped aitches and slurred consonants to tell us that the speaker is, for example, a Yorkshireman. Passages in full dialect are dreadfully tedious to read.

Here s some advice on the rules for putting direct speech on paper:

- Use inverted commas (speech marks) at the beginning and end of each quote. If the whole sentence is in quotes, the closing one comes after the full stop. When you have a paragraph break in a long speech, put an opening quote mark at the start of the new para but do NOT put a closing quote mark at the end of the previous one – this is to show that the quotation is continuing.
- Do not put direct speech in italics. Reserve italics, if you use them at all (other than on book titles etc), for words which are thought (see below).
- Start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes, but don't start a new one if the same

speaker is continuing, unless (as above) it's a very long speech.

- Many amateur writers of fiction seem to feel readers will know who is speaking without being told. Not so - we often see passages in which it is difficult or impossible to identify the speakers. You should label each quoted statement with a 'said Fred', 'added Jim' etc, except in a long two-part dialogue where it's obvious the speakers are alternating.
- Resist the temptation to try endless substitutions for 'said', such as 'confirmed' or 'stated', just to avoid repetition. It's ugly and unnecessary.
- Put the 'said Fred' etc in after the first quoted sentence or phrase – don't leave it until the end of a long statement. For example, "Let's go" said Fred. "We can always come back tomorrow and..."
- There should be no spaces after the opening quotation mark or before the closing one.
- If the quote ends in a full stop, exclamation mark or question mark, there should be no full stop after the closing quotation mark.

There needs to be a clear distinction between words which are thought and those which are spoken. You can write 'he thought, "I wonder how I'm going to explain the hole in the ceiling"', but a more subtle and elegant way of doing it is to put the words which are thought in italics, without quotes: *How on earth am I going to explain that hole in the ceiling?* Better still, use internal monologue without quotes, as mentioned above – how on earth was he going to explain the hole in the ceiling?

NAMES AND PLACES

Introduce people and places at the right point. Explain who someone is the first time you mention them, and then do not repeat it. Full names and titles need only be given once (Dr Andrew Smith becomes

Andrew or Dr Smith), except when people are reintroduced after an interval.

It's good style to remind the reader of the name of the central character in your 'scene' at intervals, eg at the beginning of a new paragraph, instead of endlessly repeating 'he said...' or 'she turned...', particularly if it isn't absolutely clear any longer who we are talking about.

Give all your characters names (false ones if necessary), if they feature more than once. It may seem obvious, but we see many manuscripts in which eg 'Mike's sister' or 'the friend' are referred to repeatedly without being given names – very clumsy.

Real people can be given their real names, as long as you don't say something that could lead to action against you.

Names of fictional characters deserve considerable thought. To quote the novelist and professor of literature David Lodge: 'In a novel names are never neutral. They always signify, if it is only ordinariness'. In real life names often don't fit the people they belong to – in a novel, they can and should fit, however subtly, either through the meaning of the name or its associations. You might pick a name like Mr Moody, Mrs Fussell, Miss Primley, Christian, Virginia or Randy for its obvious connotations, or choose names that are typical of the class, age group or background you are describing, as long as you avoid the boringly obvious - not all elderly aunts are called Agatha or Gertrude. You could go deeper and check the original meanings of names for another layer of significance – Philip means horse-lover, for example.

Avoid the obvious - Brett, Darcy, Scarlett, Kate, Rebecca etc for the names of romantic heroes and heroines have all been done to death. Don't give a 'baddie' an unusual name that might actually belong to someone – if there is just one Sebastian J Skrank

out there he might sue. Beware of descending to farce (unless of course you are writing a farce, or a children's book).

A good tip is to notice and collect names from the real world and use them as needed in your writings. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy series author Douglas Adams named a swashbuckling character Hotblack Desiato, after a London estate agency (the firm is still going strong, unlike, sadly, Adams).

Avoid writing about places you don't know, but if you have to, do some research. The internet allows you to cheat – Google Earth and Streetview will put you almost anywhere on the planet.

DESCRIPTION

It's important to put the reader into the setting you have created. That means some description of key scenes is important, but you don't need to go to great lengths. If description is not your forte, words like 'jungle', 'slum' or '1970s housing estate' will act as shorthand, immediately evoking a certain kind of scenery; the reader will fill in the details. But don't leave it at that - you do need to say what's special about your jungle, your slum or your housing estate.

In a factual book, don't short-change the reader with picture-postcard adjectives. There is no point in telling us that the scenery was 'amazing', the landscape 'awesome', the food 'unbelievable' or the weather 'terrible'. These are words for inarticulate or lazy writers. Show the reader, in words, just what was amazing, awesome, unbelievable or terrible about it.

Try to weave a personal viewpoint into descriptive passages to make them come to life. When you describe a building, for example, don't run through its features like an estate agent's brochure - tell us how your character pushed the door open and what he saw when he looked around.

STYLE, LANGUAGE, GRAMMAR AND OTHER MATTERS

This is a big subject and you are advised to get a book (or three) on the subject unless you are very sure of your skill with the language, but here are some basics, arising from our own experience in editing manuscripts.

The **passive voice** is to be avoided in most cases. It is much better to say 'we decided to build a new factory' than 'it was decided to build a new factory'.

Sentence structure defeats more people than you would believe. Sentences can be as long or as short as you like, as long as they are assembled correctly – sentences that lose their way are a terrible obstacle to the reader. Fragments (verbless sentences, in effect) are fine, as long as they are short and deliberate. It's OK to begin a sentence with 'and' or 'but'. It is not OK to have two buts in a sentence. In our experience the most neglected punctuation mark is the full stop; many, many writers fail to recognise when a sentence has died on its feet and it's time to put it out of its misery and start a new one.

Wage war on gratuitous **capital letters**. Capitalitis is a national disease to which few people are immune, and many of the manuscripts we receive are full of nouns with unnecessary initial caps, usually on the words the writer feels important and is used to seeing capitalised within titles - director, doctor, solicitor, company, centre, university. These can take the editor a long time to correct. No noun needs a capital unless it is part of a title or name, eg 'the church was called the Parish Church of St Stephen'. Even admirals and archbishops get lower case, unless you are referring to a specific individual.

Words and phrases from a **foreign language** are usually italicised, at least on the first occasion, unless they have been adopted into English.

Collective direct speech. It's surprising how often people write such statements as 'They said, 'We're

going to the pub later, why don't you join us?'' People never speak with one voice, unless they are taking part in a church service or a military drill, so the speaker should always be an individual.

Confusion between tenses is very common among amateur authors – particularly the pluperfect. This is the 'double past', the tense to use when the event described was in the past at the time of description, eg 'he had told him not to do it'. Using the wrong tense isn't just a technical detail, it can confuse the meaning and may have the reader (and the editor) scratching their heads.

It's normal in conversation to switch to the **present tense** when giving a blow-by-blow account of an event – 'this bloke comes up to me and says...' You can do this in writing too, notably to deal with particularly intense passages describing feelings. But it needs to be carefully controlled, and any one passage needs to be consistently in one tense or the other, or the reader will become very confused about what is happening now and what happened some time ago. Some authors set out to write a whole book in the present tense, but soon discover that it is pretty much impossible to write narrative text without resorting to the past tense.

Try not to contract **punctuation diarrhoea** – using two or more exclamation marks for emphasis, combining exclamation marks with question marks or typing long trails of dots or gratuitous capitals. They have no verbal counterpart and will make you look inarticulate. And again, they are very fiddly to correct.

Use **exclamation marks** only after actual exclamations and short, sudden statements such as 'He's behind you!', not in an attempt to show that a statement is odd or amusing. The words should speak for themselves.

The trail of dots... (properly known as the **ellipsis**) is written as three dots with no space in front. It is used only to indicate an unfinished statement and is not a substitute for a comma, semicolon etc.

We prefer not to use **full points after initials** – eg we would write A J Smith and USA. Mr, Mrs and Dr really don't need full points either.

Plurals do not have **apostrophes**, including those of numbers and abbreviations – eg 1970s, MPs.

The harmless little **comma** seems to cause more trouble than any other punctuation mark. You ought to know how to use commas, because they can be critical to meaning (consider the difference between 'he stopped waiting for me' and 'he stopped, waiting for me'). There is no rule in English that says you can't use one before 'and' or 'but' – it should be treated as a guideline only. Sentences are often hobbled by slavish adherence to this rule.

The comma has half a dozen separately-defined functions, and you should never use one just because it seems a long time since you last stuck in some punctuation. But this is not the place to go into all the subtleties of comma use – if in doubt, check out a grammar guide.

Beware the **ambiguous pronoun** – when you use him, her, them etc, is it clear who you're referring to? If not, repeat the name.

Numbers – there is no hard and fast rule, but with larger numbers and precise quantities we favour numerals, while with shorter numbers and those used in a more general sense we favour prefer letters, so we would write 'our profit increased from 4% to 11%' but 'he kept over a hundred sheep'.

Brackets – stick to the normal curved brackets. The square bracket is reserved for use when something has been inserted by the author to add information within a quotation, for example 'I wandered lonely as a [cumulus] cloud'.

Italics and inverted commas (quote marks) – It is customary (though by no means compulsory) to use italics on the titles of creative works, ie books, plays and films, and on the names of ships. They are not used on the names of establishments, companies, brand names etc.

Italics can also be used for emphasis where the word emphasised is not obvious from the context, eg 'at least she is not wearing a *green* silk dress'.

Inverted commas (quotation marks) are not used on the names of people or places, though they may be used as a substitute for italics on book titles etc as above. They are used when the reference is to the word itself rather than the person or thing it stands for, eg 'I thought 'Marmalade' was an odd name for a boat'.

TITLES AND CHAPTERS

If the book is just for you and your family and friends you can give it any title you like, but if you want it to have any success commercially, it will need a strong title – one that reflects the flavour and theme of the book but at the same time hooks the buyer in and makes it appear an interesting read. Titles should be short – no more than half a dozen words. They should also be distinctive, so the book can be found and identified easily on the internet.

Totally straight, descriptive titles ('An Introduction to Flower Arranging') are fine for purely factual books, although a more original, whimsical title may help attract attention to the book, but for books written to entertain you need something more interesting. 'My Life At Sea' would be a plain, boring title for what the reader will assume is a plain, boring book. 'Herrings and Hurricanes' would be better. Double meanings work very well ('Stormy Waters').

If you have a title in mind, check on the internet to see if there's another book out there with the same one. If there is and it's a different kind of book it doesn't matter too much, but otherwise you should think again.

Chapter titles also help to 'sell' a book, so they should be interesting and intriguing, not just headings. Novels are often presented with numbered chapters only, but factual books usually benefit from named chapters. A good editor will write suitable headings for you if it's not your forte.

Many authors like to add little quotations from poets, politicians etc at the heads of the chapters (correctly called epigraphs). This works well, as long as they are appropriate and fresh – if they are quotes we've all heard before, they will make your book look ill-informed and unoriginal.

QUOTED MATERIAL

If you have used material from other people's work you will need to acknowledge it by naming the source publication and the author, particularly in professional and technical books. It is the convention in publishing that you may quote 400 words from copyrighted text in a single extract without seeking permission, or 800 words in total. Short quoted extracts of a line or less are usually best included in the paragraph, while longer quotes of several lines are given a paragraph of their own and set in a different font, or put in quotes.

PREFACES, FOREWORDS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, DEDICATIONS AND OTHER MATTERS

At the beginning of the book:

The **preface** (optional) is designed to explain how or why the book was written.

The **foreword** (optional) is usually written by someone other than the author at their invitation, and acts as an introduction and endorsement of the book. It is most definitely not spelt 'forward', as many people seem to think.

The **contents** lists the material in the book, with page numbers. One is required in most books, but you do not need one if the chapters are numbered but unnamed, as in many works of fiction.

You may wish to include a **dedication**, which will usually say something like 'To Mary [or whoever], without whom this book could never have been written'. You don't need to head it 'dedication'.

Acknowledgements are the author's thanks to people who have helped in some way, by providing information or giving permissions.

Credits should be given to anyone who has given permission to use pictures, quoted material etc, eg 'The picture on page 17 has been used by kind permission of...'

You may want to include a **disclaimer** if you are concerned that you may, for example, have used a picture without permission because you could not trace the copyright owner, or to make it clear that fictitious characters are not intended to refer to actual people.

The **introduction** (useful in a factual book) is a summary of what the book is about and what it is intended to achieve. It is usually the last item before chapter 1.

At the end of a factual book:

An **epilogue** is sometimes included to sum up the book and 'sign off'.

A **postscript** may be written to bring the reader up to date on events since the book was written or add supplementary information.

Appendices are the place to put reference material such as tables of data, or explain particular matters in more detail.

A **glossary** may be included if specialist or technical language has been used.

A **bibliography** points the reader to further reading on the subject or related subjects, and/or to sources used by the author; important in academic or technical works.

An **index** is included in a factual book where the author wants readers to be able to find references in the book to particular people, organisations or events. Compiling an index is an exacting and time-consuming task, and it really has to be done by the

author. There is nothing automatic about the process, as editorial decisions have to be made about which terms and which occurrences of those terms are to be included. By no means should you index all names, places etc in your book, only those which people may want to look up, and not passing references, only informative ones.

A properly-structured index requires the (expensive) services of a professional indexer, but an author can compile his/her own simple index. Wait until the typesetting is complete and then use the wordsearch

facility in Adobe Acrobat to find each occurrence of each indexed term, decide whether it's worth including, and list the page number. This cannot be done until the book's artwork is final – jump the gun and you may have to do it all over again, because adding or subtracting material could change all the page numbers that follow.

An index can easily turn into a can of worms for both the author and the typographer, so if you do need an index we suggest you keep it simple.

Presenting your manuscript

PREPARING YOUR BOOK FOR SUBMISSION

You've spent months, perhaps years, working on your book, and finally you hope it's ready for publication. In fact almost every manuscript requires some attention from an editor before it is in good enough shape to publish. Even the best submissions contain minor errors of spelling, punctuation or syntax (correct relationships between words), while many manuscripts need partial rewriting to make them read well. All authors, however good their command of English, make mistakes.

No book should be published until the manuscript has been carefully checked and corrected, and no reputable publisher will agree to put out an uncorrected book, because it will reflect badly on them. Astonishingly enough, some very big self-publishing companies do appear to publish books with little more than a computer spellcheck. Some of these are full of mistakes, and there are some real car crashes out there. We have seen books for sale on the internet which were packed with spelling mistakes and grammatical howlers.

A decent publisher will make sure the book reads coherently and is not confusing or repetitive. At Mereo we will also check out and correct any errors of fact we notice, such as historical and political

references. If your book is for private use only, say a family history, that may be enough. But if you wish to offer your book for sale, whether fact or fiction, it may need more thorough editing to ensure it does not disappoint the independent reader who is being invited to spend money on it. Before we offer a book to the book-buying public we like to make sure that the story is coherently told, with a clear focus, and that the right events are dealt with in the right order. We will want the people and places in the story to be properly introduced and described. We'll highlight any omissions which will leave question marks in the reader's mind, and recommend the deletion of irrelevant or unnecessary detail.

A good editor will be happy to sort all this out for you and turn your rough draft into a polished book, in collaboration with you, but it will save you time and money if your MS is in reasonably good shape before you submit it (see 'the editing process' below.)

If you are going to show your manuscript to someone else – a friend with literary skills, or a family member for example - do so before submitting it for editing. This will save you time, money and possible embarrassment when well-meaning friends try to put their stamp on the book after it's been professionally edited.

The edited text should be as final as it can possibly be before it is sent to the studio, because making changes from there on is likely to be messy and expensive.

PRESENTATION

There is little point in trying to format your manuscript to look like the pages of a printed book - it will simply appear home-made, and the first thing the editor will do is get rid of all your fancy formatting. It should be written in Word, with minimal formatting other than paragraph indents and page numbers. Courier is a standard industry typeface for manuscripts, but any clear font, such as Verdana or Helvetica, will do fine (if the editor doesn't like it, it can be changed in a couple of clicks). The ever-popular Times New Roman is not ideal because the very fine punctuation marks can be hard to check. Resist the temptation to set the title and headings in a different, fancy font, which will just show everyone that you're an amateur. Just use the same clear font throughout, unless you specifically want to indicate that certain passages, eg quotations, should stand out when typeset.

Always use A4, regardless of the eventual format of the book, and set generous margins top, bottom and sides, and wide line spacing (around 1.5-2). This makes it much easier for an editor to work on a printout if necessary.

Text should be ranged left ('ragged right'), not justified both sides, at the editing stage – it is easier both to read and to edit. It will usually be set justified both sides when it is typeset for the book.

Boxes, tables, graphic devices, indents, columns, bulleted lists etc should be used as little as possible, because of the problems they cause in typesetting.

Do NOT include images or graphics in your word document – they will have to be stripped out before editing. Send them separately, as a set of individual numbered files, with an accompanying and matching list of captions.

Remember that the page numbers on the manuscript will not match those in the final typeset text - they are just a working reference. Nor will the page turns match those in the printed book, so you shouldn't worry if, for example, a heading falls at the bottom of a page.

If you insert page numbers, use the page numbering option in Word – don't write them in the main text, because they will move around during reformatting and will all have to be weeded out manually.

If your book does not exist as a computer file, we can work from a printed or even handwritten text, but we will need to have it scanned or typed on to a computer, which will incur extra costs.

PICTURES AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

Factual books are usually improved by the inclusion of pictures, whether they are photographs old or new, paintings, drawings, diagrams or old documents. Illustrations add to the interest and impact of the book, but they also add to the printing cost, particularly if they have to be in colour, so it's best to be selective.

If you are taking photos for your book, shoot them at high resolution. Graphics, tables, diagrams etc should be supplied as separate files. If you are preparing your own, make sure the publisher can use them before you do too much work.

Bear in mind that when a large drawing or graphic is reduced to fit the page of a book, fine detail may disappear or become illegible. Detailed maps, family trees etc may not be reproducible at the size of a book page - they may need to be simplified, or divided into two or more separate images.

All illustrations will need to be supplied as separate JPEG files, clearly numbered for reference, with captions in the main text (if they are to be used among the text) or on a separate file cross-referenced to the numbers. Do not compile them on a Word document, pdf or Publisher file, except possibly for separate reference.

If the image has been created by someone else, they will automatically own the copyright. Your publisher will advise you, but you should do what you can to obtain permission for all third-party illustrations to be used in your book, including those downloaded from the internet.

Usually pictures will be printed in sets of glossy pages, generally one or two depending on the number there are. If you want your pictures to be embedded in the text at certain points, you will need to specify this. Don't expect them to appear exactly beside the sentence they refer to as the typographer has to allow for page breaks. Books with embedded pictures will usually cost more to edit, design and print, particularly if the pictures are in colour, as they will need to be printed on coated paper. Amazon, incidentally, tend to put much higher prices on books with colour photos.

TALKING ABOUT REAL PEOPLE IN YOUR BOOK

Publishers are often asked if an author can write about other people and their actions in, for example, an autobiography, without getting into trouble. From the legal point of view, you should have nothing to worry about as long as you don't risk contravening the laws of libel, professional confidentiality and state secrecy. However, we suggest you assume that anything you say about a person may get back to that person or their friends and relations and consider whether they might feel offended, compromised or embarrassed. If in doubt, you

should change names and other details so they cannot be identified.

Sometimes an author has a grudge against someone and is determined to expose their evil doings in a book. Don't expect a publisher to agree to this, because however justified your allegations, it could involve the firm (and you) in expensive legal action.

COPYRIGHT

We are often asked to help authors to register copyright, and there are firms out there that will take your money for the privilege. In fact copyright exists automatically in any original work. You just have to make sure you can prove that you wrote it, in the unlikely event that someone tries to pass off your work as their own. With electronic files, this is really easy. Just share the file with someone – your publisher, a trusted friend, a solicitor – anyone who will acknowledge receipt and possession of a copy of the file on a certain date. You will then be able to prove in perpetuity that you wrote it first.

Having said that, we hear from authors who are wary of sharing a manuscript with anyone else at all, in case it is somehow stolen. One prospective client even insisted on bringing her MS to show us, then taking it away again, in case we fiendishly took the opportunity to copy it and sell it. The truth is that unless your book is the original diary of Adolf Hitler or an undiscovered novel by Dickens, it has virtually no value to anyone but yourself.

WORKING WITH A PUBLISHER

THE EDITING PROCESS

When you send your manuscript to a publisher, it will help to tell them something about the background to the book and what your plans are for it. Is it just for the family, or do you hope to sell it commercially? Has it already been edited by a third party? Is it all your own work? Has it been published before by someone else?

Don't expect the publisher to actually read your book before initially responding to you – if publishers read every manuscript sent to them, they would never get any work done. An editor should review it, sampling passages to see how much work it needs and what kind. Once they have assessed the MS and know the full length (in words), they will be able to advise you of the likely costs. Subtle issues such as problems

with the plot and characters (if it's fiction) won't emerge until an editor gets to work. The editor should then discuss with you how they can be dealt with.

Provided the basic ideas and material are there, a good editor can do almost anything with a manuscript, transforming clumsy, plodding, confused, ungrammatical prose into a sharp narrative that will make the book a page-turner. At the very least, the editor will correct and polish up the English.

Naturally, the more work the editor has to do, the greater the cost. Fees will be based not just on the editing time but the time likely to be taken up with your revisions, amendments and enquiries, briefing the studio and dealing with designs, cover text etc. A good self-publishing house will be willing to attend to all these things, rather than simply feeding your book through the 'sausage machine' and forgetting about it.

Some authors claim to have edited their own books. Certainly you should check and revise your MS over and over until it's as good as you can get it, but most people make the same habitual mistakes in English and you will inevitably be blind to yours, otherwise you wouldn't be making them in the first place. It's also unlikely, however talented a writer you are, that you will have as good or correct a command of English as a professional editor. That's why even the world's finest authors all work with editors.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that your English-graduate daughter or ex-teacher friend down the road can edit your book for you. They may well be able to tidy up the English a little, but there's a world of difference between an experienced professional book editor and someone who is simply good at English. We advise you, at least if your book is to be sold to the public, never to put your trust in an amateur 'editor'.

In working on a factual book, the editor should point out to the author any passages where something has not been fully explained and more detail or more colour is called for; you should also be told where

your manuscript is too wordy or goes into irrelevant detail. With fiction too, the editor will alert you to problems that you as the author have to address. Editors can't develop characters, work out an effective plot or add creative description – or at least, if they do they are not editing so much as rewriting, bringing in their own ideas and creativity, so it's no longer entirely the author's book. But the editor will tell the author if these elements are not working properly, for example if characters are not differentiated – eg (very common in romantic novels) the principal female characters are all beautiful and haughty and the men are handsome and devious. And a big hole in the plot which the author may not have noticed should be immediately obvious to an editor, mainly because he/she is reading it with fresh and critical eyes.

There are several kinds of editing process, which may be handled serially or all at the same time, depending partly on the available budget – because even reading the average book takes several hours. A **structural edit** is a fundamental review of the manuscript, looking at every aspect of it, from vocabulary to characterisation. The editor will look for errors, inconsistencies, issues which are not explained properly, stylistic problems, poor description or limited use of language. He/she will suggest adding material where for example a setting has not been described clearly, or deleting passages where the story goes off at a tangent. A structural edit is a big job – on a full-length book it is likely to take several days at least, and cost accordingly.

Copy editing focuses on the detail, correcting grammatical and syntactical errors (the way words are combined), narrative order and exposition, the way the story is told. Errors such as spelling mistakes and wrongly-constructed sentences will usually be corrected at this stage, but in case they are not...

Proofreading is an additional process to follow editing, used routinely by trade publishers but less frequently by self-publishing firms because of the

cost, which in the case of self-publishing has to be borne by the author. It is designed to check for hard errors in the text such as missing punctuation, misplaced breaks and spaces and errors with capitalisation or case. It is an exacting task and should be left to a professional. If you know someone who has a precise eye for the printed word, you could ask them to do it for you as a favour, but it is unlikely to be as good as paying a professional. Bear in mind that there are many grey areas in English and the proofreader should be briefed, for example, on your preference for the use of capitals on words which do not strictly require them.

When your edited text comes back for you to check, the chances are you will have a few changes and comments to make before you're happy to sign it off. But do respect the editor's expertise. If you think he/she has introduced a repeated error in spelling, punctuation or grammar, ask before correcting it back. Otherwise your time and the editor's may be wasted. We have frequently had capital initial letters wrongly put back where we had taken them off, and correctly-placed commas rearranged wrongly by authors who felt they knew best. One manuscript we worked on had full stops after every quoted line of speech, even when it wasn't the end of the sentence. We took them all out – there were several hundred – before sending it to the author for sign-off. When we got the MS back we found they had all been put back in again.

FORMATS, FONTS AND PAPER

The standard size for a paperback is 5"x8" (125mm x 175mm). This is the most appropriate size for most books up to 100,000 words or so with not too many pictures. Longer books, or those which have a large number of pictures, may be better printed at 6"x9" (150mm x 225m). Very long books, or those with pictures or graphics which need to be reproduced at relatively large size, may be better at the next size up, 10"x8" (250mm x 200mm). Sometimes authors ask for specific odd sizes – anything is possible, but because of the extra work

involved in cutting and sizing and the likely waste of paper, this will add to the cost.

The typographer will adjust the text size and type area as necessary to allow for the length of the book, using relatively large type and/or generous spacing for a short book, and tighter setting for a long one. Authors, particularly older authors, often ask for a generous font size, which is fine as long as the book is not too long – 200,000 words set in 12pt Bembo is going to make your book difficult to lift, let alone to read. And don't forget that bigger books cost more to package and post.

If you buy a cheaply-produced paperback book on line, chances are it will have been printed on brilliant white, untextured paper – rather like copier paper. Better-quality books are printed on a more traditional off-white wove paper which is easier on the eye and gives a better feeling of quality.

If you are publishing a substantial book such as a lengthy family memoir, you may like to have some copies printed as hardbacks. There are two ways of doing this – casebound, which means the board cover is overprinted with the same cover design as the paperback, or a plain board cover (which may be overprinted with a plain title) covered by a separate dust jacket. A new version of the paperback cover design will be needed for the dust jacket, as content is needed for the flaps (usually some additional text about the book or the author). Hardbacks are much more expensive to produce in small quantities than paperbacks, so most authors just order a few for friends and immediate family.

THE DESIGN OF YOUR BOOK

If you have an artistic bent, you may be planning to design your own cover – there's plenty of software out there that will help you. Unfortunately it's harder than you think to create a good cover, particularly one which will make the public take your book seriously. The publisher may be happy to take your ideas on board and incorporate an image supplied by you if appropriate, but cover design is a highly specialised job for which many technical and visual

parameters must be taken into account, and it really needs to be left to the professionals, using dedicated professional software.

For the book to have any chance of selling to the world at large, the cover needs to look as good as those you see on the stands at the big bookshops. It needs to work both close up and at thumbnail size. It must give the book impact and appeal, and like the title, it should reflect the tone and subject matter of the book.

If you do submit a home-grown cover design and the publisher accepts it without challenge, you should be suspicious – they may simply be taking the easy option and saving themselves the trouble and expense of doing the job properly. Remember, self-publishers do not rely on selling your book to make money, because they know that most of their books will have very modest sales.

Along with the cover, the designer will prepare artwork for the text of the book, using a suitable font, setting and type area. If you have particular requirements here, such as keeping it legible for older eyes, you should tell the publisher, but again, you need to trust the professionals – they know what they are doing, or should do. It may be worth asking them to typeset just a few pages first and show them to you, in case you don't like the treatment.

THE PUBLISHING PROCESS

Once you have approved the text and the design, the book will be signed off for printing. There is bound to be a certain delay before a) you receive your copies b) it is listed on Amazon and the other retail sites and c) anyone actually buys it. It is likely to be several months before you receive information about sales and eventually, royalties. Publishing is a protracted business, though with a good self-publishing house it is a good deal less protracted than it used to be. The whole cycle, typically, from submission of text for editing to availability on the market, ought to take about 3-4 months, but if there

are delays along the way because of a need for revisions or new material for example, it may take longer. The publisher will have allocated certain time slots for work on your book and if you send it back requiring extra work which was never planned, there may be a delay.

As mentioned, one of the key differences between self-publishing and conventional publishing is that self-publishers do not have the same vested interest in selling your book, because they make their money from fees for editing, design and production. A trade publisher has to market your book to get a return – a self-publisher doesn't. But a good self-publisher will want its books to do as well as possible and accordingly should be prepared to help its authors to promote their books, by for example printing publicity flyers and helping them with internet marketing techniques. The good news, of course, is that the author will get a far better return for every copy sold.

WHEN YOUR BOOK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED

Self-publishing a book is a bit like launching a boat. Think of the publisher as the boatbuilder who designs, builds and delivers the vessel and finally puts it safely in the water for you. After that, it's really over to you. What happens to it and how far it goes will depend on the captain, the crew, the weather, the tide, other shipping and all kinds of other factors.

Getting your book published and 'out there' is just the start. If sales are important to you, you still have a lot of work to do. A good publisher will help and advise you, but remember self-publishers, generally speaking, do not make their money from sales, so unless you have agreed with them that they will market your book for you in return for a share of the proceeds, you are the one who needs to make sales happen.

There are essentially three ways your book might get sold – through the internet, through bookshops and directly by the author.

SELLING THROUGH THE INTERNET

On-line sales are vital for most self-published authors, as their books are not likely to be stocked in bookshops. Amazon is now overwhelmingly in charge of the book market, so for most people publishing a book means a listing there. (Amazon's own CreateSpace system allows authors to manage the publishing process themselves at very low cost, all the way to printing, but it is no substitute for using a professional editor and designer, so the end result is only as good as the author's own skills. The same applies to Lulu, the other major self-publishing package.)

Whoever publishes your book, they will probably put it on Amazon more or less automatically. The publisher will upload digital files for the book to Amazon, who will use them to print copies on demand to meet orders. Only if your book is selling in quantity will Amazon want copies to be supplied in bulk by the publisher.

Amazon lists a sales ranking for each book (look under 'Product Details') at the bottom). Given that it lists several million titles, you might think a ranking of say 25,000 is not bad, and suggests your book is selling in reasonable numbers. In fact (although Amazon don't elaborate on how their rankings equate to sales) it would appear that only the top 10,000 or so titles sell in any quantity. Books rated lower than that will be selling only a handful of a copies a week at best.

SELLING THROUGH THE TRADE

The bookstores do not, on the whole, buy self-published books. They are interested only in the most commercial titles, usually handled by conventional (trade) publishers and supplied to the shops through a very small number of wholesalers who control the book trade. This means there are

only two ways you will ever sell a book through, for example, Waterstones – by getting it accepted by a trade distributor supplying these wholesalers, or by coming to an arrangement personally with a particular store which has a reason to stock your book, usually because it is about that particular area or you are well known in the town. Mereos is unusual among self-publishing companies in having an arrangement with a distributor who will place suitable books with the trade. Most self-publishing companies do not have this direct entrée to the trade, and their only sales come through Amazon etc, or via the author.

Naturally distributors will take only the most commercially-promising books, those they expect to sell in reasonable numbers, and if they don't want your book, that is their decision. No one can force your book into the trade.

There is at least a six-month lead time for trade distribution, because they plan well in advance, so you need to see the publishing of a commercial book as a fairly long-drawn out process.

Please note that the retailers expect to buy books in for no more than 40-45% of the cover price. So on a book retailing at say £12, they might pay the author or publisher £5. There won't be much left from that by the time you have paid for printing and delivery. You might feel your book ought to be sold for say £7.99 to encourage sales. It may well do that, but the £3.50 or so the retailer would pay for copies would not even cover the printing cost. In the trade, such prices are only possible with big-selling titles which are printed by the thousand, often overseas. Most of the books you see on sale in the shops have been printed like this.

HOW MANY COPIES WILL YOUR BOOK SELL?

This of course is the \$64,000 question (if only such sums had anything to do with most publishing returns). We hear on the news of books selling hundreds of thousands, even millions of copies, and the author tends to imagine that if *Fifty Shades of Grey*

could sell 100 million copies then surely his/her own rather similar offering, *Twenty Tones of Pink*, should at least sell 1 per cent of that.

The truth is that even a thousandth of 1 per cent of *Fifty Shades*' sales would be a spectacular result for a work of fiction by an unknown author. With over 200,000 books being published in the UK alone each year and several million titles on Amazon, there just isn't room for most books to sell more than a few hundred copies at best. Authors often assume that all their friends will buy a copy. They may tell the author they will (they often pretend they already have), but when the sales figures come back, the bitter truth emerges. The computer and the services of self-publishing companies have put publishing a book within the range of most of us, but they have not increased the number of people who are out there to buy them.

And don't forget the bandwagon effect – publishing sensations come from books which are truly new and original, not the 'me too' copies that follow them.

Having said that, if your book is indeed original, topical, funny, sexy, shocking, enlightening, moving or inspiring – the sort of book that gets talked about – it may sell hundreds or even thousands of copies, particularly if people start recommending it to their friends and posting enthusiastic reviews on line, or if you are very well known. But that is unusual. And however good it is, your book is very unlikely to sell in any quantity without investment in promotion, and possibly not even then.

HOW TO HELP YOUR BOOK TO SELL

Fortunately there are lots of things an author can do to get people to notice their book and start notching up some sales. Here is some advice.

Direct marketing: You will have heard this term often. It means targeting the consumer directly one to one - unsolicited marketing, eg emails, letters, phone calls and leaflet drops.

Public relations: To sell your book, you first need to

sell yourself to the buying public. You are your own expert and know your book best. You may wear many hats in this position - marketing manager, author, public speaker. You just have to show yourself as best you can and promote yourself and your book.

A specialist PR consultancy can make an enormous difference by targeting stories about your book at the right media, and the right journalists. A few column inches in the right places can suddenly create a demand for you and your book. But it will only work if the book – and you - are interesting enough for them. There are far more opportunities to promote factual books, particularly topical ones, than fiction.

If you're doing your PR yourself, phone your local radio station and tell them about your book and ask if they would like to interview you on air. If you are having a book promotion you could also take this opportunity to advertise it on commercial radio. Organise the event well in advance and check that the radio can interview you beforehand.

Phone your local paper's newsdesk and tell them you are a local author and that your book has just been published (of course you should wait until the book is available). When the reporter interviews you, make sure you have important details written down to give him/her such as title of book and your name as it appears on the book and the URL of a website where it can be purchased. However don't expect the media to fall over themselves to interview you unless your book is of real local interest, as many, many people are publishing books now and they cannot cover them all.

Check out your local library and see what local magazines are available that might be interested in your book; the librarian might have a list for you to copy.

Bookstore/hotel promotions: You can ask your local bookstore if they would be prepared to let you put on a book signing event on their premises – stress that you are a local author. The store will want to make sure it is worth their while, so you will have to negotiate costs with them. The bookstore may prefer that you

bring your own books and charge you a fee for the use of the venue, or they may prefer to buy a number of the books and keep the profit from them.

Check out your local hotels and see what they charge for the use of one of their venue rooms for half a day. Consider the kind of person your book is aimed at and work out whether they would be able to come in the morning, afternoon or evening – do they work, are they retired, will they be away on holiday? July and August is not the best time.

Promote the event by phoning, emailing and writing to your friends and contacts asking if they will support you. Announce it in the local paper, on the local radio or through flyers and posters. Put posters up in appropriate places – for example if it's a romantic novel for women you might target local hairdressing salons or fashion shops, if it's about football, the local sports shops.

Bookstores: The stores are very choosy about what they put on their shelves as they can only stock a tiny fraction of the millions of books on the market. However local bookstores are often willing to stock a small supply of books by local authors, especially if you tell friends that it is available there and the bookstore owner knows this.

Local organisations: Your book may have special interest for some local club or organisation, depending on the subject – a local history society, sports club or church body. Or they may be interested in you because of who you are the job you do or some public post you hold. Depending on your book's subject, you may well find societies happy to take you for a speaking engagement – eg churches, reading circles, book clubs, Women's Institutes and history societies. Your local library may like you to arrange a reading session, especially if it is a children's book. Target your market. You may find that societies in other areas would be happy to give you a speaking engagement. If it's a business book then you could offer your speaking services to a conference on the subject.

Finding your niche: A book about aircraft probably won't get coverage in the national press, but it may get space in a magazine devoted to aircraft, and the same applies to any subject which has associated titles dedicated to it – sport, natural history, cookery, warfare etc. Is your book about your local area? Then maybe your local Tourist Information Centre may take a few copies on sale or return (bear in mind that they will pay you only a fraction of the retail price.)

Check out conferences and meetings relevant to your subject. They often have book displays – e.g. big Christian get-togethers tend to have bookstalls during and after the event, so if your book deals with God and Christianity then take a stand.

Online community: The internet provides a host of opportunities to plug your book, and your audience is unlimited. Get yourself a website, or create a Facebook page. You may also use My Space or Twitter, or start a blog (weblog). Here are a couple of useful links to blogs to get you going: www.blogsearch.google.co.uk and <https://www.blogger.com/start>. Don't just research blogs on your niche market, have a good look around, since you might pick up some good ideas from other people.

You Tube: There is pretty much nothing you can't put on You Tube, including your new book. Get a friend to video you talking about your book, perhaps in an apt setting. If you're good at putting yourself across in an entertaining way, this could work very well, because an interesting author will imply the book is interesting too. But it works the other way too – so don't try this if you are going to come across as boring or nervous.

Useful references

BOOKS

For the full story on the ins and outs of writing and publishing books, you need look no further than ***How Not to Write a Book***, by Chris Newton (Mereo).

Also recommended:

How Not to Write a Novel, Sandra Newman and Howard Mittelmark

The Art of Fiction, David Lodge

Writing a Novel and Getting Published, Nigel Watts

The Penguin Dictionary of English Grammar, R L Trask

Eats, Shoots and Leaves, the zero tolerance approach to punctuation, Lynne Truss

The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook Guide to Getting Published, Harry Bingham

The Ultimate Guide to Writing Marketing, Dee Blick

Wannabe a Writer? Jane Wenham-Jones

USEFUL WEBSITES

Society of Authors www.societyofauthors.org

Society for Editors and Proofreaders <http://www.sfep.org.uk/>



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