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Research
Resource
Guide —
How to Get
Published

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Introduction

Have you considered publishing a work of fiction? Were you overwhelmed by the abundance of options available to you? This resource guide is aimed at UNT student with concentrations in creative writing, but it is for anyone who has considered publishing a fictional work and could use help sorting through all the benefits and obstacles the publishing world offers an aspiring author.

This resource guide was written by Technical Writing 4250 students to aid UNT English majors, Creative Writing concentration, with starting research for publishing their manuscripts. The material is organized chronologically, from Before Publication to Avoiding Scammers.

The first section, Before Publication, provides steps authors should take before beginning the publishing process. The guide continues with Publishing Options to highlight the two options available for aspiring authors to publish their manuscripts. This section focuses on traditional and self-publishing and weighs the major advantages and disadvantages of the different publishing methods. The following sections illustrate the essentials for traditional publishing and self-publishing.

The Traditional Publishing section reviews the follow topics:

- What is a literary agent?
- Why should I hire or not hire a literary agent?
- How do I find a literary agent?
- What is a query letter?

The Self-Publishing section provides information about editors and self-publishing distribution options. This section reviews the following topics:

- What does an editor do?
- Do I need an editor?
- How do you find an editor?
- Print vs. eBook?

The final section, What About Scams?, provides the common scams to watch out for and their definitions.

Sources are included throughout the guide to provide a starting point for further research.

Before Publication

Before you begin the submission process, even before you start to look for a publisher, you will want to complete the first steps.

- Complete the manuscript
- Choose a title
- Know the genre
- Know the genre's word count
- Hire an editor

One of the first things a publisher will look for is a completed manual. This shows that the author has a good work ethic and is serious about being published. Publishing new authors is risking for a publishing

company. They have no guarantee that the work will successfully sell; however, a finished manuscript assures the publisher of the author's commitment and allows them to see what they're investing in. Most publishers and agents will ask for a partial or full manuscript when reviewing your query letter. (For more information on query letter see the section below on Writing a Query Letter.) The next step is to choose a title and discern the genre.

The title may be subject to change, depending on the opinions of the publisher and agent, but it's good to include to show commitment to the manuscript. A genre, however, is quite important. Publishers and agents work with specific genres, so it is necessary to find one that is familiar with representing and publishing similar manuscripts. A fantasy agent will be more inclined to take on an author of a fantasy manuscript than a mystery agent would be.

There are six commonly known fiction sub-genres:

- Fantasy
- Science fiction
- Mystery
- Horror
- Romance
- Realistic fiction (sometimes called just fiction)

The [California Department of Education](#) provides the definitions for the fantasy, mystery, and science fiction genres.

It is also recommended to research the typical word count for the chosen genre. Some publishers receive fiction manuscripts with word counts that exceed 100K and are forced to send it to editing for paring down. It costs money to publish larger works, and many publishers are not going to risk the extra expense with new authors. If the word count has greatly exceeded the typical word count, look for an editor. Most publishing houses will have in-house editors, and literary agents often have editor contacts. However, before submission, it is recommended to find someone to perform the first edits to polish the manuscript for review.

College students are often on a tight budget, so these new authors may want to start small. Creative writing students can have an advantage when it comes to looking for the first editor. Often, fellow creative writing students, or other English or Technical Writing students, may be interested in checking manuscripts, for a small fee, to gain more experience.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [“Should You Write the Whole Book?”](#) by Rachelle Gardner, a literary agent with Books and Such Literacy Agency and author of *How Do I Decide: Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing*
- [“All new and revised: On word counts and novel lengths”](#) by Colleen Lindsay, a former literary agent
- [“How to Submit to a Literary Agent”](#) by Agent Query

Publishing Options

There are two publishing options: traditional publishing and self-publishing. See the sections below for more information.

Traditional Publishing

In traditional publishing, the publisher handles the printing, distributing, marketing, and warehousing for the book. The publisher buys the rights to the book and pays the author royalties. In most cases, publishers have in-house editors and illustrators. They design the cover art and format the book for the author.

For more information, see the Traditional Publishing section.

Self-publishing

In self-publishing, the majority of the work falls on the author, but the author will retain all the rights to the book. In most cases, printing, distributing, warehousing, and marketing are done out of pocket by the author. However, this removes the publisher, and their fees, from the equation. A literary agent is also not required for self-publishing.

For more information, see the Self-Publishing section.

Should you traditionally publish or self-publish?

Deciding on the route to publish your work usually depends on your goal. Sometimes it is rewarding to simply have the work in print, other times the goal is to sell as many copies as possible to earn a living. Self-publishing is good if you have a time-sensitive manuscript, have a fan following, or want to retain full control over the process and work. However, if you don't know how to find readers, or wish to be sold in a brick-and-mortar bookstore, it might be more advantageous to have a publisher handle it for you.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [*2014 Writers Market*](#) by Robert Lee Brewer
- [*The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*](#) by Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry (UNT)
- [*Get Your Book Published!*](#) by David Weldon (UNT)
- [*How Do I Decide? Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing \(A Field Guide for Authors\)*](#) by Rachelle Gardner, a literary agent with Books and Such Literacy Agency

Traditional Publishing

Traditional book publishing is when a publisher, from a publishing company, or house, offers the author a contract to print, publish, and sell their book. The publisher buys the rights to the work and pays the author royalties, a percentage of gross sales or a price per unit sold. Many publishers have in-house editors that they will use for performing the second and final edits to the book. Before pitching your manuscript, it is important have it completely written and perform at least a first edit. Publishers like to see that you are capable of completing work and have a semi-polished piece of writing for review. Often, it is necessary for authors to find a literary agent to help find a publisher and pitch the manuscript. See the section over literary agents to learn more.

Note, sometimes publishing houses do not provide adequate editors. It is recommended for authors to find their own editor to review the manuscript before submission to a publisher, and sometimes to review the manuscript alongside the publishing house editor. Often literary agents will have contact with excellent editors. See the section Editors for more information.

For more information on royalties, use the following source as a starting point for research:

- [*Get Your Book Published!*](#) by David Welday (UNT)
- [*2014 Writers Market*](#) by Robert Lee Brewer
- [*The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*](#) by Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry (UNT)
- [*“How Book Royalties Work”*](#) by Rachelle Gardner, a literary agent with Books and Such Literacy Agency and author of *How Do I Decide: Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing*
- [*“How to Publish a Book: An Overview of Traditional and Self-Publishing”*](#) by Writer’s Digest

Literary Agents

A literary agent is someone who represents writers and their written work to publishers, and aids in the negotiation of contracts and publications.

Why should I hire or not hire a literary agent?

While it may be possible to present your book directly to the publisher, it is often less successful. Publishers call these proposals unsolicited manuscripts, meaning a manuscript that was not proposed by an agent. Publishing houses are hectic. Often, publishers don’t have time to review all of the submissions that they receive. A literary agent gives your manuscript credibility, and you don’t pay agents upfront. They earn their living by selling your work and charging a commission or percentage from the sales. Many publishers prefer to work with a literary agent who has pre-screened the manuscript and has deemed it worth their time. A literary agent will also be able to find publishers that are looking for manuscripts like yours.

An agent is a negotiator between the author and the publisher, assisting the author by

- Negotiating contracts and payments
- Finding manuscript editors
- Solving problems

Authors who choose to self-publish their manuscripts do not need to find a literary agent; while others choose to pursue a publisher without an agent. According to the July/August 2011 issue of *Poets & Writers*, “the majority of authors who manage without an agent are either poets-God bless them-or lucky writers who found great publishers, usually of the independent variety, that allow them to achieve their artistic dreams (which are not necessarily the same as financial ones).” It is very possible to publish without an agent, but many authors greatly benefit from having one.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [*2014 Guide to Literary Agents*](#) by Chuck Sambuchino
- [*Get Your Book Published*](#) by David Weldon (UNT)
- [*On Writing*](#) by Stephen King
- [*The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*](#) by Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry (UNT)
- [*Poets & Writers*](#) (July/August 2011 issue, UNT)

How do I find a literary agent?

Literary agents seem daunting to find; however, there are numerous agents to choose from if you know where to look. The *2014 Guide to Literary Agents* by Chuck Sambuchino is a great place to start. The book details steps on locating agents and, in the back, includes lists of potential agents and ways to contact them. Chuck Sambuchino also contributes to a listing of new literary agents on the writer's digest webpage. Another great place to look is in actual books. Check out the acknowledgment sections of favorite books to see who managed the authors. They may be accepting new clients or have links to other agents on their website. Attending writer's conferences can also lead to agents. Many conferences around the world invite agents to attend and give the attendees a chance to meet new agents and propose manuscripts.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [*2014 Guide to Literary Agents*](#) by Chuck Sambuchino
- [*2014 Writers Market*](#) by Robert Lee Brewer
- Chuck Sambuchino's [list of new agents](#), author of *2014 Guide to Literary Agents*
- ["How Do You Find a Literary Agent?"](#) by Rachelle Gardner, a literary agent with Books and Such Literacy Agency
- [Agent Query](#), a database of literary agents
- Attend writer's conferences
 - [DFW Writer's Conference](#)
 - [2014 Writers League of Texas Agents and Editors Conference](#)
- Join a writing group
 - [The Writers League of Texas](#)

Writing a Query Letter

A query letter is a single page letter introducing you and your book. Publishers and literary agents use query letters to get an idea of who you are and what your book is about; however, that does not mean they are looking for a biography or a full synopsis. A query letter usually consists of three paragraphs: the hook, the mini-synopsis, and the about-the-author. The hook is a one or two sentence tagline for the book. It should draw the reader in. You want your publisher or agent to be excited or intrigued. Follow this with a mini-synopsis of the book, roughly 4 to 5 sentences. The last paragraph should include details about the author to give the publisher a sense of who you are and your qualifications.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [*2014 Writers Market*](#) by Robert Lee Brewer
- [*The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*](#) by Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry (UNT)
- [*The Writer's Digest Guide to Query Letters*](#) by Wendy Burt-Thomas
- [*The Writer's Guide to Queries, Pitches and Proposals*](#) by Moira Allen
- [*Writing the Perfect Book Proposal: 10 that Sold and Why*](#) by Jeff Herman (UNT)
- [“How to Write a Query Letter”](#) by Rachele Gardner, a literary agent with Books and Such Literacy Agency and author of *How Do I Decide: Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing*
- [“How to Write a Query Letter”](#) by Writer's Relief
- [“Successful Queries”](#) by Chuck Sambuchino
- [“The Query Letter”](#) by the Writer's Digest

It is also recommended to indicate the genre of the book, word count, and reason for contacting this specific publisher or agent. Before submitting your letter, research the person that you're sending it to. Often agents and publishers have specific requirements for query letters, like including a certain number of pages of the manuscript.

Self-Publishing

Self-publishing is what it sounds like—you pay a self-publishing company to publish your work. Unlike traditional publishing, which comes with a chance of rejection, self-publishing guarantees the publication of your work. However, it is especially important for authors interested in self-publishing to find editors to review their manuscripts.

There are many self-publishing companies, including

- [Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing](#)
- [Lulu](#)
- [Nook Press](#)

For a more comprehensive list of self-publishing companies, see the Writer's Digest [“Directory of Self-Publishing Companies.”](#)

Editors

There are two types of editors: content editors and copy editors.

A content editor focuses on the organization and readability of the manuscript. Content editors help authors reorganize plot points, add details to light scenes, or make the hard decisions on what to cut out. Some call it “book doctoring” while others call it rewriting, but, whatever the term, this service is invaluable. An experienced content editor is able to organize your thoughts and help you write fluently so that your audience will follow the plot and hear your “voice.” Content editors can be broken down into two groups: developmental editors and substantive editors. Their jobs are exactly how they sound.

Developmental editors help authors begin their manuscript by refining the concept, figuring out the audience, and developing characters. A substantive editor helps the author dig deeper into the plot of the manuscript by adding details, developing scenes, and fleshing out ideas.

A copy editor focuses on the grammatical structure of the manuscript instead of the organization and the major and detailed plot points. This group can also be broken down into two sub-groups: copyeditors and proofreaders. Copyeditors check for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. They alert the author to inconsistencies and help with word choice. Proofreaders work on the completed manuscript. They check the formatting of the manuscript: headings, page numbers, typeface, and verify that the suggestions from the copyeditors have been properly corrected.

Do you need an editor?

Do you need an editor? Absolutely. But unlike with doctors, you don't need numerous opinions. Editing is an important process in manuscript publishing; don't shop around for a specific opinion. The editor's job is to poke holes in your work and make it more effective and easier to understand. Find a content editor and a copy editor, or someone who excels at both, that you like and find to be the most credible. Make sure to ask questions about experience and ask for a list of references and completed works.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [*Developmental Editing: A Handbook for Freelancers, Authors, and Publishers*](#) by Scott Norton (UNT)
- [*Editors on Editing: What Writers Need to Know About What Editors Do*](#) by Gerald C. Gross (UNT)
- [*Jeff Herman's Guide to Book Publishers, Editors, & Literary Agents 2013*](#) by Jeff Herman
- [*Get Your Book Published!*](#) by David Weldon (UNT)
- [*"10 Things Your Freelance Editor Might Not Tell You—But Should"*](#) by Brian Klems for Writer's Digest
- [*"Why All Self-Publishers Need a Good Editor"*](#) by Kelly Sargent

How do you find an editor?

Before finding an editor, decide what help the manuscript requires. Does it need content editing or copy editing? Editors may seem daunting to find; however, there are numerous to choose from if you know where to look. Attending writer's conferences is a great way to find editors. Many conferences around the world invite agents to editors for attendees to meet. Other authors attending the conference may be able to suggest excellent editors. There are numerous editor's circles (see some listed below) where authors can look up and interview potential editors.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [*Jeff Herman's Guide to Publishers, Editors, and Literary Agents*](#) by Jeff Herman
- ["Find an Editor"](#) by Lisa Tenor, book writing coach
- ["Freelance Editors"](#) by Rachelle Gardner, a literary agent with Books and Such Literacy Agency and author of *How Do I Decide: Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing*
- ["How to Find an Editor"](#) by Erika Liodice, author of *Empty Arms*
- ["How to Find the Just-Right Freelance Editor"](#) by David Carr, book editor from California
- [Editorial Freelancers Association](#)
- Professional editors alliances
 - [Words Into Print](#)
 - [Independent Editors Group](#)
 - [The Editors Circle](#)
- [Writer's Digest Critique & Editing Services](#)
- Attend writer's conferences
 - [DFW Writer's Conference](#)
 - [2014 Writers League of Texas Agents and Editors Conference](#)
- Join a writing group
 - [The Writers League of Texas](#)
 - [Romance Writers of America](#)

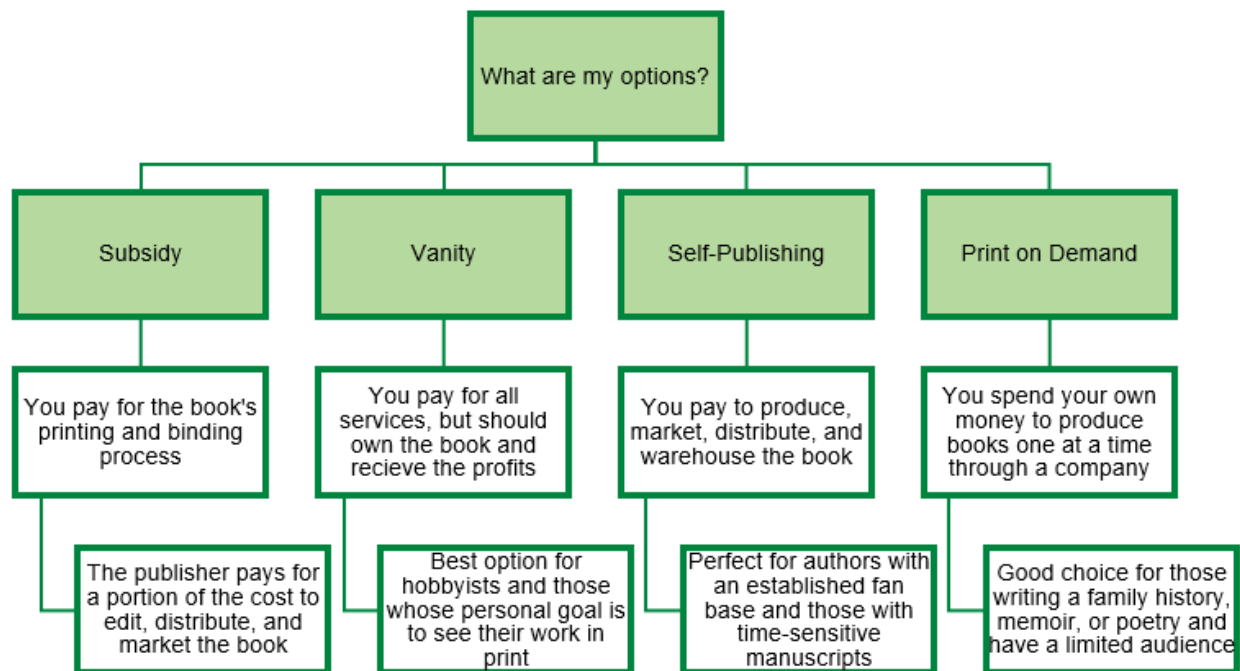
Self-publishing options

When self-publishing, you have the choice of whether to publish your book in print or as an eBook. While it is satisfying to see your hard work in print, eBooks are quickly overtaking print in popularity. eBooks allow the author to set the sale price. Print books must be set at higher prices to account for the actual cost of printing, while eBooks can be as low as \$0.99. However, the new standard price for new authors is \$2.99. Authors have found that, while \$0.99 gets a lot of downloads, it may not be as profitable.

eBooks offer a number of features, such as:

- Portability for readers
- Easy formatting for authors
- Very little fees for selling or producing
- Distribute globally
- Be on the market quickly

Self-Publishing Models



Print and eBooks will require marketing, but eBooks can be sold directly online without having to worry about storing inventory. While there is still a market for print books, it may be more profitable to begin with eBooks and move into print once a fan-base has been developed.

The following sources can be used as a starting point for research:

- [*The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*](#) by Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry (UNT)
- [*The Fine Print of Self-Publishing*](#) by Mark Levine
- [*The Well-Fed Self-Publisher: How to Turn One Book into a Full-Time Living*](#) by Peter Bowerman (UNT)
- ["How to Self-Publish an eBook"](#) by David Carnoy
- ["How to Successfully Self-Publish a Kindle eBook"](#) by Michael Hyatt
- ["DIY: How to Self-Publish an E-book"](#) by Alex Palmer
- ["Self-Publishing a Book: 25 Things You Need to Know"](#) by David Carnoy

Avoiding Scams

An easy way for scammers to get money is to pretend to fulfill others dreams on pure faith, and, unfortunately, publishing is not immune to scammers. Being aware of them and their methods can help you avoid financial loss or worse. Meg Schneider, author of *The Everything Get Published Book*, describes the common self-publishing scams to avoid.

Meg Schneider, author of *The Everything Get Published Book*, describes the common self-publishing scams to avoid:

- Upfront fees
- Generic solutions
- Broad appeals to gain writers—credible agents and publishers do not send out a broad appeal for writers. They don't need to advertise.
 - Note, "Real agents do not represent short stories, poetry, magazines articles, or children's books, you don't need an agent to approach publishers for these things" (Doyen, Schneider 206).
- "Coinvestment" requirements—paying for a company to publish the manuscript, but the author must sign over all rights
- Contests for "pay-to-play"—some contests offer a large cash prize, for a fee. Often, authors' manuscripts will only be published if they purchase copies.
- Large commissions

It can be hard to spot dishonest agents or publishers. To get tips and advice on how to tell the disreputable from the reputable, see the following sources:

- [*Dan Poynter's Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Book*](#) by Dan Poynter (UNT)
- [*The Everything Get Published Book: All You Need to Know to Become a Successful Author*](#) by Barbara Doyen and Meg Schneider
- [*The Self-Publishing Trap: Look Before You Leap into the Pay-to-Publish World: Discover the Difference Between Self-Publishing Scams and Traditional and Indie Publishing*](#) by D.L. Hughs
- [*"How to Avoid Self-Publishing and Traditional Publishing Scams"*](#) by Halina Zakowicz
- [*"Literary Agents"*](#) by Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America

Conclusion

Now that you are more familiar with the publishing process, we encourage you to not just sit there; sit there and write. If you choose to attempt publishing the traditional way, remember rejection is a part of the process. Some days will feel harder than others, but remember *Gone with the Wind* was rejected 38 times, and J.K. Rowling received 12 rejections for the *Philosopher's Stone* before being published. Writing books is like any other job; however, as many authors may say, a much more fun and inventive job. Keep trying, and remember "confidence is going after Moby Dick in a rowboat and taking the tartar sauce with you" (Zig Zigler).