

Submitting to publishers: A checklist

Is your material ready to send?

The slots for publication are limited, and the competition is fierce, so it is better to have some strong text to show the submissions team rather than just an idea pitch. Only send your submission when it is *as close to finished as possible*.

Make sure you have:

- ☐ read and reread it and made sure it is as tight and well researched as possible.
- ☐ tried to get as much *honest* feedback as you can so that you can work on the weaker aspects before you submit.

Have you done your research?

If you don't have an agent, and you are contacting publishers on spec, then yours is an **unsolicited manuscript**. Smaller, local publishers are the ones most likely to accept these and that are also, I find, the best to approach if you're starting out. But how do you know which of these is most suitable?

Things to try:

- ☐ Check out *The Writers and Artists Yearbook*. It gives a list of publishers with a brief description of the types of books they publish and whether they accept unsolicited manuscripts.
- ☐ Visit your local bookshop and library, look for titles comparable to your own, and see who published them. These are the publishers most likely to be receptive to your work.
- ☐ Once you have created a list of publishers to contact, visit their websites. Most will have a history of the company and list past and present publications, which should help you confirm if your work would fit with their imprint list.
- ☐ Check the site for submission guidelines – these will tell you exactly how to best present your work for assessment (Hard copy or email? Sample chapters or just a pitch? etc.)
- ☐ Make a list of those submission guidelines or print them out and cross each point out as you go. Make sure you follow these to the letter! Following a publisher's submission guidelines proves that you have thought about the process and customised your proposal to suit them.

What else should I include in my submission?

If a publisher requires specific information, then make sure you provide it, and then consider adding some of the following (unless the submissions guidelines tell you not to!).

Some of the things to include:

- ☐ A self-addressed stamped envelope (if you want your material returned to you) and (though this is optional), a stamped addressed postcard that can be returned as a way to confirm receipt.
- ☐ A *sample* of your book. However, publishers vary on what they want that sample to be: they may ask for consecutive chapters, or representative chapters that cover the big plot movements; they may ask for a number of chapters; or a set number of words – check the submissions guidelines!
- ☐ A synopsis – what is your book about?
- ☐ A cover letter with a bit of information on you – if it is a hard copy submission, make sure to include your contact details!

- ☐ A separate page on marketing, to include:
 - ☐ Unique selling points (Is it the only book on this topic? Does it offer a unique perspective?)
 - ☐ The book's sales potential (how many copies is it likely to sell?)
 - ☐ The intended market (Who would read the book? What would make people buy your title over all others?)

What you can bring to the marketing, e.g.:

- ☐ Have you been published elsewhere? (in any journals, magazines or even with another book publisher?)
- ☐ Have you ever won any awards for your writing, or received any grants/bursaries?
- ☐ Do you have a large social media following? How many followers?
- ☐ Do you have any media contacts who would guarantee publicity (in newspapers; blogs, vlogs, or on TV, radio etc.)?
- ☐ Do you know any famous types, ideally in the field you are writing about, who would be willing to endorse the book?

A publisher is a business at the end of the day, so do not underestimate the importance of the bottom line. They need look at the figures, to see if they can guarantee enough sales to cover the cost of production.

What should I exclude from my submission?

Sometimes, less is more ...

Things to leave out:

- ☐ A note that says how much your mum/dad/granny/local baker loved the book.
- ☐ A photo of yourself – it doesn't matter what you look like, it will not guarantee you a book deal.
- ☐ The whole manuscript (unless that is what you are asked for in the submission guidelines).
- ☐ Tales of personal tragedy (it's heartless to say this, I know, but unless that tragedy/illness/triumph over adversity is related to the manuscript, don't include it.)

Okay, so now what?

You've posted in the manuscript and it's been a few weeks with no response, what should you do?

- ☐ Wait
- ☐ Continue to wait
- ☐ Wait some more

Honestly, we all know the saying, 'the squeaky wheel gets the grease', but if you hound the already frazzled submissions team then you won't be doing yourself any favours. The presses that accept unsolicited manuscripts will usually receive hundreds every month, and many don't have dedicated submissions teams – instead the editorial team will try to fit some submission reading in and around working on 'live' projects. This means that the response time can be quite high, and you will most likely not receive any feedback on your work. Response times *should* be given in the submissions guidelines, so only send a gentle nudge when that time has passed. The editors will thank you for your patience!

Getting elevated from the slush pile is not easy, but the more preparation you do before sending your manuscript, the better your chances are that your book will be seen by the right person. And that can make all the difference!