

Advice for Young Writers

Publication is a great reward for all effort a writer puts into a finished work. To find a publisher for your work, you might need to call on the help of a teacher, librarian or parent. Other writers will offer advice, but don't often directly assist new writers in getting their work published. They're too busy trying to get their own work published (you'd be surprised at how many rejection letters professional authors receive).

One of the hardest lessons I had to learn as a young writer: commercial publishers don't publish books written by kids. That didn't stop me from writing them, of course. And in fact, years later, a book I wrote as a kid was accepted for publication. I had to submit and rewrite it many times before it caught the eye of a publisher. Obviously, patience is a vital requirement for a writer, along with hard work and persistence. And reading! Don't forget to read and read and read! Read until your parents warn you you'll ruin your eyes and your friends forget what your face looks like because it's always buried in a book. Keep a journal where you can record your stories, your ideas for stories, and observations about life in general. Just be careful it doesn't fall into the wrong hands. Remember what happened in *Harriet the Spy*.

If you are absolutely determined to have your book published RIGHT NOW, there are websites that offer self-publication services. Have your parents or a teacher check out these websites to make sure they're legitimate and not out to rip you off.

While I was waiting for publishers to come to their senses and publish my wonderful books, I kept busy writing short stories, poems and essays. This is an excellent way to build your skill, and there are many markets for this kind of writing by young writers:

- Check for local papers and contests in your area.
- Canadian Aboriginal Writing Challenge www.our-story.ca
- Cicada Magazine - an international print magazine that publishes writing by teens.
www.cicadamag.com
- Claremont Review - an international print magazine that accepts manuscripts by writers 13 to 19. www.theclaremontreview.ca
- Cricket Magazine - an international print magazine that holds monthly writing and artwork contests for young subscribers 9-14. www.cricketmagkids.com

- Hamilton Public Library annual Power of the Pen contest, poetry and short fiction, for ages 12-18. Look for it in the spring. Check the Teen Page at www.hpl.ca
- KIdsWWwrite - e-zine for young authors and readers. www.kalwriters.com/kidswwrite
- New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams - a print magazine edited by 8 to 14 year-old girls. www.newmoon.org
- Owl Magazine - a print magazine for 9 to 13s. It accepts drawings, poems, short stories and photos for publication. www.owlkids.com
- Skipping Stones - an international print magazine that accepts manuscripts by writers 8-16. www.SkippingStones.org
- Stone Soup - a print magazine of writing by young people up to age 13. www.stonesoup.com
- The Cyberkids.com website accepts work for online publication. www.cyberkids.com
- Toronto Public Library Young Voices Contest for Teens (age 12-19). <http://torontopubliclibrary.typepad.com/teens/young-voices-magazine.html>
- Windscrip, the Saskatchewan Writers Guild's e-zine of high school writing <http://www.skwriter.com/publications/windscrip>

Advice for Grown Up Writers

The Writers Union of Canada (TWUC) offers an excellent overview of the manuscript submission process. Their Getting Published page will tell you how to find a publisher, how to make a submission to a publisher, including that most dreaded of all tasks, composing a cover letter. www.writersunion.ca

There are no shortcuts to publication. It is the writer's responsibility to learn about publishing, to read the books, articles and websites that will educate you about the process. As with young writers, a published author will be unlikely to assist you in finding a publisher or editor. When it comes to manuscripts, publishers and editors rarely take recommendations from other authors.

When I have a new manuscript to send out, I go to the bookstore and write down the names of all the publishers who have published books similar to mine. I check each publisher's website for manuscript submission guidelines. The fastest way to find this page is to do an Internet search

on the publisher's name and the word *submission*. Every publisher has their own guidelines. You can also write them and ask for guidelines.

Joining a writing group is helpful for some people. I was lucky enough to join a group with published writers who gave me much-needed encouragement and excellent advice. Joining professional writing organizations such as your provincial writer's guild and CANSCAIP (Canadian Society for Children's Authors, Illustrators and Performers) will provide a wealth of information and support. CANSCAIP has a FAQ page for aspiring authors that you might find useful: <http://www.canscaip.org/CANSCAIPFAQs>.

Most professionals don't recommend self-publication if you hope to reach a widespread audience and become a career writer. There are exceptions to the rule, but in most cases self-publication is expensive and you don't sell many copies. However, if you simply want to share your story and don't care about costs, self-publishing can be very rewarding. There are many websites to help you get started.

Professionals also do not recommend looking for an agent if you have never been published before. Established agents prefer to represent published authors. As a new writer, you will benefit from learning about the world of publication on your own rather than having someone else represent you. The Writers' Union of Canada has extensive information about agents on its website, www.writersunion.ca.

Tip: When searching a library catalogue for resources about writing, using the subject keyword *authorship*.

Best of luck to you!

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