

DIARY OF A “NO-NAME” WRITER

How to Get Started Writing a Book

While all of the kids in the neighborhood were out playing tag, riding their bikes or roller-skating down the city sidewalks, I was sitting in my bedroom, pen in hand, writing the next world’s greatest novel. I wasn’t much of an artist, but I did my best to draw little illustrations to accompany my mythical stories about travel to faraway places and other equally exciting adventures. I had a great imagination!

At age 5, my first manuscript was published – a column-long poem called “The Little Black Horse” – in the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper. Time moved on. . . I finished school and worked at many types of jobs. Still, I had that childhood dream of becoming a famous writer lodged deeply in my heart.

But, just how do you become a writer anyway? Then, once you become a writer, how do you get anybody to read your book? College journalism classes are helpful, but I never went to college and never took a formal journalism class either. So, if I can do it, so can you! I want to encourage you. . . everybody has a story worth telling. . .and every story is worth documenting in a book.

This is very simplified because of limited space, but the best way to start is to start! Like with any project that seems overwhelming when you look at the whole of it, the best thing is to take that first step, no matter how insignificant it may seem. Sit down and write down 5 to 10 major points to your story (whether fiction or non-fiction). Fashion those points into Chapter Titles; then place each one at the head of your paper or Word document.

Ok, now jot down everything you want to talk about under each of these sub-topics. Some people call this “brain-storming.” Don’t worry at this point how it looks or sounds; just get it all down on paper or on your computer. After you’ve done this, it’s time to go through each page and “fine-tune” it. Add adjectives and adverbs to make your writing more interesting and exciting. Check all of the spelling and grammar for accuracy. You might ask a friend that’s good at writing and English to help you – or invest in a creative writing book or course. When this is all finished (be sure it is typed and double-spaced), you have a manuscript! Congratulate yourself on a job well done. This is a great accomplishment!

This is how I wrote *The Answer Book for Troubled Times*, which you can preview on Google if you’d like to investigate the results. (<http://www.healingforamerica.com>)

How to Get Your Book Published

Ok, so now you’ve got your manuscript completed. What next? Well, every writer needs to get their book published. In years gone by, only a very small percentage of books that

were written were actually published and an even smaller percentage of those books made it to the bookstore shelves. Today, it is a different story – almost anyone can get their book published.

There are different types of publishers you can consider. First, and most coveted, is the traditional royalty publisher. You give them your manuscript; they review it to see if it fits their target audience. The publisher determines whether your future book will be “saleable.” Does it have a message or story line that will “sell” and make money for them – and you? The benefit of this type of publishing is that they absorb the costs of editing, design, marketing and printing your books. But, since the publisher assumes the risks and expense of the project, they also will hold the rights to your book and receive the larger percentage of profit from the books they sell. You will probably receive a 5% to 12% royalty for each book sold by the publisher. Unfortunately, we live in a society where “brand name” counts and none more so than in the publishing industry. Sadly, most would-be or “no-name” authors do not receive publishing contracts from traditional royalty publishers. However, even famous authors had to start *somewhere*, so it’s still worth checking into. Who knows? You could be the one to write the next million-copy best-seller!

More likely, for most of us, there is another option. Scores of “self-publishing” companies have risen up on the publishing horizon. One word of caution though. . .Check these out carefully on their websites including reviews from other authors who have used them. Most self-publishers will allow you to retain the rights to your book, which means you can seek other avenues of publishing and marketing apart from their efforts. The self-publisher will take your finished manuscript, design the book covers, edit the text, obtain an ISBN number and barcode, and assemble it all together into a professional-looking book. You will pay a fee (which varies from publisher to publisher) for their services upfront for which the self-publisher will produce your book, and then market it online, to media, and to distributors.

From both types of publishers, you can purchase copies of your own books at discounted prices and sell them at retail value; therefore, making a larger amount of profit. But then, you also have to figure in your marketing, storage and shipping costs. Both types of publishers will also expect you to do some marketing on your own (the subject of my next article #3) and not rely totally on the publisher’s marketing efforts.

As for my book, *The Answer Book for Troubled Times*, which you can preview on Google or on my website: (<http://www.healingforamerica.com>), I decided to self-publish and wholly retain the rights to my book. There are many good, practical online and printed sources of information to help you locate publishers, and learn the ropes of how to present your manuscript and what to look for when choosing and negotiating with a publisher.

How to Market Your Book

Some authors who publish with traditional royalty publishers leave all of the marketing up to the publisher. With this type of publishing, you are likely to receive more extensive marketing efforts on behalf of the publisher because they cannot recoup their cost investment nor make any profit without marketing and selling your book.

Self-publishers may publish thousands of books with limited staff and they receive fees for their services upfront, so their motivation for marketing your book is not quite as strong as that of a traditional royalty publisher. The self-publisher will probably get your book on Amazon, Barnes and Noble.com and other online book sources as well as submitting information about your book to the major book distributors, from whom bookstores usually order the books they stock on their shelves. For an extra fee, the self-publisher will also create a press release, which they will send to various media sources. Also, for an extra fee, they offer signs, postcards, even video trailers, and other marketing tools you can utilize yourself.

As mentioned in my previous article, only a small percentage of the thousands of books written daily ever get into the bookstores. However, you can send your book along with the requested information you will find on websites such as Barnes and Noble, Borders and other large booksellers. Follow their instructions carefully because they receive so many submissions that they only review those that are submitted correctly. Even though the bookseller may not carry your book on their store shelves, your book will probably be listed and available through their distributor for store sales personnel to order when people ask for it by title or author.

Space here won't allow me to give in-depth descriptions, but following is a partial list of marketing avenues you can pursue (in addition to your publisher's efforts in your book's behalf) to get the word out to the public about your book:

1. Book signings can be arranged at major and smaller bookstores.
2. Sometimes, smaller bookstores will accept your books on a consignment basis.
3. Send news releases to TV, radio, newspaper and magazine editors for free publicity.
4. Contact guest coordinators for television and radio talk programs to book interviews.
5. Look for book fairs and other locally-based events where your book may be showcased or exhibited.
6. Send copies of your book with an interesting, introductory letter to book reviewers.
7. Contact airports, hotels, grocery stores – anywhere you see books for sale – and ask how they purchase their books. Many of them work with distributors. Get the contact information and you can follow up with the distributors to ask them to carry your book and stock it in the stores they service.
8. Social media: Feature your book on your personal Facebook page, Twitter or My Space. Or, start a group or fan page especially for your book.
9. You can set up an affiliate program, where “affiliates” will advertise your book on their websites for a portion of the profits you receive from book sales.

10. Create your own website (or hire a web designer to do this) where you can advertise and sell your book. Some self-publishers give you your own book page on their website. Many other traditional forms of advertising are also available to help you get the word out.
11. Public Relations firms or literary agents can help by booking speaking engagements and talking up your book with their many contacts. Check local schools, libraries, etc. for opportunities to speak about your book.

There are many good website examples and more, detailed information online to help you implement some of the marketing ideas listed above.