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## QUESTIONS—*Answered by* Teresa Trujillo *on Publishing*



**Teresa Trujillo** has been in the printing and publishing business for nearly thirty years. She is an organizer of the Orange County Writers Meetup Group and owns a book publishing company in Fullerton, California. Teresa is also our guest judge for the [WOW! Fall 2006 Flash Fiction Contest](#).

[www.mybookworkshop.com](http://www.mybookworkshop.com)  
[www.ClassroomWriting.com](http://www.ClassroomWriting.com)

### **1. How many hands does the manuscript go through to get to the senior editor?**

There is no firm number answer to this question. If an author works with a small publisher there may only be one or two individuals in the decision making process. If the author is working with a large publishing house it is conceivable that an unsolicited manuscript would first be reviewed by an intern assigned to the slush pile, followed by an acquisition editor, group editor, senior editor, and executive editor, then publisher. But, this is dependent on the management structure of each publishing house.

### **2. How do manuscripts end up in the “slush pile?” And, emerge to be published?**

It is estimated that only 3% of the material submitted for publication actually is published. There are a lot of dead trees in the slush pile.

### **3. What are the current trends in publishing today?**

Trends change as fast as the wind blows. Current wisdom is that chick lit and memoirs have been a little overdone in the last few years—so these segments are cooling-off for the moment. Shoppers will see a lot of A-list fiction authors publish books between now and the holiday shopping season. The publishing industry is worried that there will be buyer fatigue and that many of the books will remain on the shelves after the holiday shopping season.

#### **4. How has online networking influenced the publishing industry?**

The publishing industry has been slow to fully adopt online and internet strategies. Big publishers like the business model that has worked for them for decades. Online networking has allowed authors to interact with more of their fan base. A strong author fan base translates to book sales. Authors are using the internet to communicate with book clubs, online chats, blogs, and other online communities.

#### **5. What is the job of a publicist?**

A publicist's job is to get the author and book mentioned in the mainstream press. They will schedule interviews with radio, television, and print journalists. They will also act as the book tour coordinator.

#### **6. There have been a lot of mergers and acquisitions in many major publishing houses. How has this affected the industry?**

There have been many changes in the publishing industry in the last 10 years. While there has been consolidation at the major publishing houses, technology has allowed smaller publishers to enter the market in increasing numbers. Alas, this has not increased the number of titles entering the marketplace, which stands at about 90,000 titles each year. Conversely, over 120,000 titles go out-of-print every year.

**“If a publisher passes on a manuscript, it is a business decision, and not a personal slight.”**

#### **7. Would it be rude to ask the local bookstores if they'll permit a book signing?**

Not at all. Bookstores are in the business of selling books, and author signings help sell books. Authors might find more success making this request at independent bookstores than at the big chain stores. Some of the big chains have policies on signings that don't favor authors—but authors should still ask.

## **8. What do you consider “requested material?”**

I think this is a little different for every publisher. You should be able to clarify what the publisher is expecting from you when they contact you. You can also use the [Writer's Market](#) to find out more information on each publisher.

## **9. What's the biggest challenge for an unknown author to overcome?**

Being unknown—of course. I always encourage writers to submit works for publication in magazines and journals so that they can start building a “writing resume.” This is easier for non-fiction writers to accomplish due to the numbers of magazines covering vast topics. But, there are still avenues for fiction writers to publish shorter works to create some type of notice for their work.

## **10. What are the percentages for manuscripts received that are (a) Publishable—without editing? (b) Publishable—with editing? (c) The “no way” ones (d) Actually published?**

There are no manuscripts that are publishable without editing. Whether the editing is for content, spelling and grammar, length, or clarity-- all manuscripts require some amount of editing. Unfortunately, most authors are too close to their own work to objectively edit their manuscripts adequately. Whether a well-written manuscript is publishable depends on if there is a market for the work. I can't take a financial risk on publishing a book I don't think I can sell, so I may pass on a well-written manuscript for purely business reasons. I have seen a lot of manuscripts that are “no way” deals for me, but might fit another publisher's marketing and sales plan. The main reason that many manuscripts are not published is that the business people who manage publishing don't wish to wager/invest their money in books that won't make money for themselves and their investors. I do see a lot of badly written material. I can usually identify something that I do not want to work with within a few pages. Remember, publishing is a business—and writing is a creative art. Art is not something that is universally appreciated. If a publisher passes on a manuscript, it is a business decision and not a personal slight.

## **11. How many books have to sell before the publisher makes money?**

This depends on the individual book. What I can tell you is that many publishers lose money on the majority of their catalog. The top 10%-30% of their catalog allows them to lose money, or make a long term investment on the rest of their offerings. One big blockbuster can pay for a stable of “also ran” titles. A “long term investment” may be a new author who they think will develop a following as their work matures. In 2004 the average book only sold 3,500 copies—and that was a year that JK Rawlings had Harry Potter in the bestseller list! The publisher will only make a few dollars over the production and marketing cost of the book—so it is plain to see that more titles lost money than made money.

**“He who has the gold  
makes the rules.”**

**12. Any suggestions for how a new author could get her first review?**

Participate in writers’ workshops and contests. Many universities offer some type of writing workshop and review contests for new and emerging authors. There is a list of annual writing contests in the [Writer’s Market](#). Don’t invest in contests with high entry fees. Anything over \$25 is excessive.

**13. When do review copies come out? Who sends the review copies out?**

Review copies come out four to six months before the publication date. Many magazines are working on editorial three months before the cover date. So, to make the media cycle for magazines, the books need to be in the reviewers hands four, or more, months in advance of the book’s delivery date. The publisher’s marketing staff will handle the review copies and related materials.

**14. What chance does a new author have to get reviewed by some prestigious places like Library Journal or Booklist?**

Fiction authors have less of a chance for review than non-fiction trade book authors getting reviews.

**15. How meaningful are reviews?**

I think independent booksellers are more of a factor in the success of a new author than reviews. Independent booksellers actually know their customers' reading preferences, and make individualized recommendations to readers who are more likely to follow the advice of a trusted bookseller than a reviewer. After all, the reviewer doesn't really care if you purchase a book at all—and the bookseller wants to make sure you keep coming back to the store to buy their product. Which one is more invested in the relationship with a happy reader? Emerging authors are better served by developing relationships with independent booksellers than chasing elusive reviews. The independent's can cause a groundswell of support for new works that will push sales in the larger markets. The biggest change in bookselling in the last two decades has been the decline in independent bookseller while the mega stores flourish. This is bad news for emerging authors.

**16.** Since most senior editors work with established writers, the new writer often has to find their own support team. That said, would you recommend having a professional critique service look over a manuscript before submitting?

I recommend that every writer join a critique group. Most of these groups are free, or very low cost. The writer's challenge is to find a group that they are comfortable with who has a competent leader. The group has to be capable of offering constructive criticism in such a way that the author grows as a writer. Conversely, the author must be open to input from other writers. I always recommend that writers find a competent proof reader and pay for proofing services. Nothing sinks a manuscript faster than bad spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Most editors won't look past a badly prepared manuscript.

**17.** How much fact-checking does a publishing house do? Or, is that basically left up to the author?

Little or no fact checking is done by the publishers. The challenge of fact checking came to light earlier this year when the website [www.thesmokinggun.com](http://www.thesmokinggun.com) exposed James Frey's fabrications in his "memoir" *A Million Little Pieces*. Publishers need to trust that the work an author represents as factual, original, or unique is as represented. It is too ponderous and expensive to fact check every piece of work destined for publication. Unfortunately, publishers were faced with several high-profile deceptions by authors in 2006. If publishers find it hard to trust new authors, it will make it harder for unpublished writers to find someone willing to gamble tens of thousands of dollars (or more) on their work. By the way, authors found in violation of their contractual obligation to provide work as described can be held liable for damages in a court of law.

**18.** How important are contacts in the business? Can conferences help?

Conferences can help authors make contacts. Choose conferences wisely. At a really big conference (Maui) it's hard for an author to be seen or heard. A better option would be to find a well-respected writing program and apply as a student. Iowa, UC Irvine, Cal State Long Beach, UCLA, Harvard, and many other programs will help authors hone their writing skill and introduce them to industry professionals in a much more meaningful way than a conference can.

**19.** What do you wish authors knew or would do *before* submitting their manuscripts?  
Or, what's your pet peeve regarding authors/manuscripts?

If I listed all of the things that make me crazy when I review a manuscript it would take a week to read. First and foremost—spell check! Incorrect grammar, spelling, and punctuation will distract the editor to the point that they will only see the blemishes and not the hard work. Next, submit the manuscript in the accepted format 10 or 12 point, Times Roman typestyle, double spaced. Nobody in the editorial department wants to see the author's attempt to design the book. Don't format headlines, subheads, and various devices that take emphasis away from the words on the page. Those devices will get entered on the page by the design team. Authors should never harass the publisher about their unsolicited manuscript. It only makes me less likely to want to read it and/or work with an author who may prove to be difficult in the long term. If a manuscript is truly good, and submitted to the right publisher, at the right time, in the perfect market conditions, and the hand of God points to your perfect manuscript—your prayer of publishing might be answered. The golden rule of publishing is *“He who has the gold makes the rules.”* Learn to play by the rules.

**20.** The Publishing Industry used to be a glamorous profession, with martini lunches and swanky cigarette holders, as written in Rona Jaffe's best-selling 1958 novel, *The Best of Everything*. In this day and age, it seems as though the Publishing Industry is all about lugging pounds of Xeroxed manuscripts through crowded train stations, answering persistent phone calls, and non-stop emails.

**Do you think Rona Jaffe's era is long gone, or do you still have some fun?**

Most professionals in the publishing industry work very hard. Hard work and talent is what drives the industry. There are very few celebrity authors. In my humble experience, more authors are like Jack Nicholson's character in “As Good As It Gets” than Meryl Streep's editor in “The Devil Wears Prada.” Although I have got to attend a couple of Kentucky Derby and Breeders Cup races and parties!