



THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF AUTHORS
TE PUNI KAITUHI O AOTEAROA (PEN NZ INC)

ADVICE FOR WRITERS

There are three branches of publishing: Academic, Educational and Trade. All have their own distinct ecosystem. By 'Trade' we mean general publishing, of books you would find in a bookshop.

For all aspects of writing and publishing, work continually to improve your craft and your business skills and knowledge of the literary sector.

In Trade publishing there are also distinct routes: publishing traditionally with a publisher who produces print and digital copies of your work, and via self-publishing.

There are some hybrid options, where a publishers will help co-publish: and provide editorial, design and proofreading, distribution and marketing services, and the writer pays for the printing.

If you are wanting to publish with an established press, research where and to whom you should submit your manuscript. Research the publisher, the genres they publish and target your submission. Publishers have information on how to submit on their websites.

The NZSA offers free contract advice and as publishing opportunities have dwindled in the current market, (which is a whole other talk) writers have found new ways to get work published. We see increasingly creative contracts from poetry chapbooks as art pieces - to local independent, and international and multinational presses, offering traditional print contracts or digital-only. And hybrid publishing and bespoke client publishing, where the author pays for all elements of a publishing service.

It has never been easier, in the history of the world, to self-publish. To write, put up online and send work into the ether. But that doesn't mean you should jump in and do that.

There are companies who assist self-publishing, offering digital platform release and print on demand options. If you google publishing, Google will quickly start bombarding you with the ads from a swathe of international companies that cater to self-publishers.

There is a warning here - In the sea of companies offering contracts to self-publish, there are sharks. Some of these companies have great reputations; others not so much and other writers' experience is well-documented. So, research. Check before you sign any contracts – and there is a Writers Beware website who lists them.

When you release work, either submitting to a traditional or hybrid publisher, you get one chance – so it should be the best work that it can be – the best you can do at that stage of your writing career.

THE FIRST THING – is get a professional assessment and edit, then rewrite – rinse and repeat – do the work on the manuscript to make it the best it can be, as you get one chance to publish and one chance to submit.

There is NO way to escape this, I've heard many reasons why people want to skip this, usually they say because my neighbour/mother/children read it and loved it – but they would love it if you wrote the phone book. They love you - so you must get feedback from an impartial professional.

All writers must get a professional edit and manuscript assessment. Some people get offended by this, but the most famous and experienced writers work with feedback from beta readers and editors to write and rewrite manuscripts.

As Hemingway said – you must 'kill your darlings' and edit, rewrite, and re-edit time and again. A bestselling NZ writer told me only a fortnight ago she had finished her new novel, then realized it was written from the wrong point of view. A total rewrite of 120,000 words. Be prepared to do the work!

There are some pithy truisms in writing – This is Dr Paula Morris's answer when asked how to write a book, 'Start and keep Going'.

... And Revise, Revise, Revise.

NZSA often receives phone calls saying, *'I've written a book, what should I do now?'*

This is a warning sign. It means that person wrote without a plan, without an intended market, and without doing any work along the way to build their market or reputation as a writer.

Here is a sobering fact: There are somewhere between 750,000 and 1,000,000 books published every year in the English language in the US alone, more than half of those— are self-published. On average, they sell less than 250 copies each.

It's a competitive market, so your book must be the best it can be.

THINK ABOUT YOUR INTENDED MARKET

This is where the *business of writing* comes in – if you are writing crime, read all current crime novels, join the blogs and websites for enthusiasts, research all the awards and opportunities in that genre. Go to author talks, join crime writing newsletters and research the websites of the writers you like. Likewise, this applies to other genres: romance, young adult, literary fiction – whichever genre you are in, this market intelligence is vital.

Whether you are self or traditionally published you will need a marketing profile and a website, most authors have a website, where people can sign up to get their newsletter, and in time, news about the book you will release. Your website will also include biographical information and your writing CV.

Many authors start to build up a writing CV by first submitting pieces to journals and newspapers, whether stories, poetry or flash fiction, or personal essays. It's a way of getting your name known. Every piece published in papers, magazines, journals or on-line needs to be in your writing CV. Each time something is published, this goes on your professional writers CV and your website – along with courses you do in creative writing.

What you do with your book to promote and support its release follows the same trajectory whether you are releasing a book yourself, or via a traditional publisher.

There is a science in what you need to do to self-publish *a series* – and NZSA run masterclasses on the specifics. Take the courses and learn from professionals the best way to proceed.

Writers need to invest in learning their craft, to constantly improve, and also to learn the 'business of writing' – contracts, tax, pricing, marketing and communications et al.

JOIN A WRITERS' ORGANISATION

The first thing a writer should do is join the union! The NZSA Te Puni Kaituhi o Aotearoa (Pen NZ Inc) has been representing the interests of writers since 1934.

Writers' incomes in NZ average \$15,800 pa (2020 Horizon Research/CLNZ). Our crucial advocacy around the Review of the Copyright Act and the PLR Review, needs your support, so we can protect your creative rights and your ownership of your intellectual property, so you can earn from your writing.

NZSA provides ongoing communications about the literary scene, administers prizes and awards, mentorship and assessment programmes, a Learning Hub of professional development events (in person and online) and shares opportunities for writers.

A national office supports 8 regional branches who offer monthly meetings, writing groups and collegiality. NZSA is represented on industry boards and committees such as PLR Advisory Group, We Create, The Coalition for Books, the Book Awards Trust and Copyright Licensing NZ; provide contract advice and liaise across the literary arts sector.

NZSA supports the development of your writing as you progress through your career and an emerging, mid-career or established writer, and is an organisation run by writers, for writers.

What happens at the publication end of writing remains a mystery for many. We know that around 45% of our membership self-publishes both in book and digital form. Many publish with traditional publishers but also self-publish.

Digital books can be uploaded by Ingram Spark, Amazon direct or via other providers.

What you do with your print book to promote and support its release follows the same trajectory whether you are releasing a book yourself, or via a traditional publisher.

CHECKLIST

- Join NZSA and a local writing group and get regular feedback on your writing.
- DO a creative writing course and professional development workshops.
- Send your manuscript to an assessor for detailed feedback. Listen to what they say and do it. You get one chance and want your book to be the best it can be.
- Use Startwrite and apply to the NZSA Complete MS, or Mentor and Youth mentorship programmes working with a professional writer to progress your manuscript.
- Enter competitions: flash fiction, poetry, short stories and begin to build a literary CV.
- Establish a writers' profile: website, photo, biographical information for your author persona, samples of your writing – a list of publications, start a newsletter that people can sign up to.
- “Kill your darlings”. Write, re-write and re-write. Polish.
- Think about how you will sell and market your book (before it is finished, before it is printed, before it is designed).
- Research local publishers to see whose list would suit your book. Target those publishers and research their websites to see what the instructions are for submitting.
- Once a manuscript is complete with structural edit and proofed, think about formats for that genre.
- Invest in a professional designer for both the layout of the book and the jacket design and artwork.
- Contact the National Library and request an ISBN.
- Order an EPS of the barcode (send them the ISBN) for the back cover (can be scanned in store) from Barcode Technologies.
- Cost the project: quotes for printing, design and editing, manuscript assessment; to set the NZRP, you must factor in booksellers' discount, GST, and possibly sales or distribution commission to establish the selling price.
- At least 6 months before release, contact distributors, unless you will do this yourself. Distributors have sales agents who approach bookshops and book chains.

- Prepare an ATI – Advance Title Information sheet for the distributors, containing information about the book, information about you. All ordering and sourcing details. Include any readers quotes.
- NZSA has an agency agreement with a NZ distributor, who carries individual self-published books via an NZSA account, yet another NZSA member service.
- Load the title, ISBN, price and release date and availability information into the two Global bibliographic databases: Bowker and Nielsen.
- Booksellers buy at least 3 months ahead of release – Whitcoulls looks at new titles 5-6 months ahead of release. Your book needs to be presented to bookshops 3 months in advance of release date.
- Create a publicity and marketing plan: this may include a launch, creating a review list, prepare a media release with title and biographical details; consider special interest groups who you should target for direct sales (eg gardening groups/ specialist retail and media gardening outlets if it is a gardening book).
- Send out your review copies and information three months ahead to long lead media ie. The glossy publications, submit to newsletters of interest groups.
- One month before release send out your review copies and media release offering interviews. Or hire a publicist to do this (at least 3 months pre-publication).
- DO not do any interviews or media before the books are in the shops or available to buy (less than 10% of people will seek out a book they hear or read about, if the shop doesn't have it then, they forget it).
- Books release into the store.
- Complete media interviews.
- Share reviews and interviews on your author website and social media pages through facebook, Instagram, twitter and snapchat.
- Keep marketing yourself.

