



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

The NZSA guide to publishing

It has been said that writing a book is easy; the **real** work begins when you try to get it published. It may be an exaggeration, but the writing world abounds with heroic failures - manuscripts which should have been bestsellers, but never went beyond that dusty file at the bottom of a wardrobe simply because the writer gave up on publishers and publishing.

In this booklet, we offer some advice to writers who are preparing to send a manuscript out into the world. These ideas won't guarantee publication, but it might get your foot in the door. Let's start with the commonly-asked question ...

How do I know if my manuscript is good enough to be published?

You can't know this. But what you can do is make sure you have done everything to the best of your ability – here's a checklist:

- Our first recommendation is for the writer to have the manuscript professionally assessed. An assessor will take an objective look at the work and provide a detailed report on the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscripts, as well as offering specific ideas and suggestions on how the manuscript can be reworked to make it more publishable. We recommend using members of the NZ Association of Manuscript Assessors. They can be contacted through this website: www.elseware.co.nz/nzama
- Do you have any personal doubts about your manuscript? This is called intuition. Maybe your manuscript isn't ready to go out. Put the thing away for a while, have a break, keep mulling over the contents. It may be that you need to do another rewrite. Many a good manuscript has been sent out too early to a publisher, only to be rejected, when given a little more time the manuscript might have been improved. There is no hurry to send out your work – the publisher can wait for your genius!
- Make sure technical issues have been addressed - paragraphs are correctly formatted; manuscript is in 1.5 or double spacing; work has been proofed (not just Spellchecked); paginate the manuscript. If your work is over 90,000 then bite the bullet and cut it. Publishers aren't very interested in looking at large manuscripts.

What to do when you are ready to send out your manuscript

The most important step you can take towards publication is to match your manuscript to a suitable publisher. Penguin Books probably won't be interested in a poetry collection, but Steele Roberts might. Then again, Steele Roberts isn't likely to want a book of pie recipes. Although they might possibly look at a history of the pie in New Zealand.

So how do you find out where to take your manuscript? This is the time to do some research:

➤ **Visit your local bookshop.**

If you have written a science fiction novel, go to the sci-fi section and see what else is available in the genre. Find a novel which is closest to what you are writing, and make a note of the publisher. Also note what other publications are on the shelves which might be considered your competition – this is your market.

➤ **Visit publisher websites.**

Publishers list their forthcoming titles and their back list on their websites. This will give a lot of useful information on the kinds of books they publish.

➤ **Directories.**

The New Zealand Writer's Handbook, 5th edition. Published by Bateman and available from bookshops or from the NZSA - \$25 for members, \$29.95 for non members.

Every professional New Zealand writer ought to have this book in their reference library. It is a recommended text for many writing courses around the country. Crammed full of useful advice to improve your chances of having work accepted by editors and publishers working in all print media. Also has a section on e-books and electronic publishing. It shows you how to assess the potential market for your writing.

A directory of book publishers and distributors, with informative notes about the type of work each publisher is currently publishing, is available from BPANZ (Book Publishers Association of New Zealand) - P O Box 36 477, Northcote, Auckland. \$12 including postage, \$8 for NZSA members (quote your membership number).

➤ **Write a query letter or email.**

Write directly to the publisher. This will save postage and time, as well as allowing the publisher to say yea or nay to seeing your project. Give a brief summary of the work – no more than a paragraph – and where you see it fitting in the market. If you are a published writer, mention this, and attach a CV. If you are a beginner writer, however, do not mention this.

What do I do once I have found a promising publisher?

Now that you have some information up your sleeve, the next important step is to submit your work. Take some time over this, again aiming to get everything right. Here is another checklist:

- Make sure your CV is up-to-date. Include what is relevant – any publishing successes, however minor, and any attendances to writing workshops or classes. Avoid putting in the irrelevant, for example, hobbies, pets, children.
- Write a one page synopsis of your work, making it sound attractive as possible (there is a sample fiction synopsis on the NZSA website members-only page). This is literally a pitch to sell your work.

- If it is a non-fiction manuscript then list other publications in your area. Also briefly outline the scope of the work – for example, the photographs, graphs or other materials which might support the text.
- If it is poetry, then try to succinctly summarise your major theme(s), and perhaps note any influences. Also any impressions about where your work sits within contemporary poetry trends.
- Write a brief covering letter. Here is a sample letter:

Janine Bloggs
125 Mary Street
AUCKLAND
jgbloggs@clear.net.nz

15 June 2007

Trixie Smyth
Impressive Publishers
Private Bag 22 340
Blossom Bay
LUCKY TOWN

Dear Ms Smyth:

Please find enclosed my novel manuscript, *Many Cold Days*, for your consideration.

This is my first novel and is the story of a young rodeo rider who sets out to find his father who abandoned him as a child. It is set in the South Island and is approximately 83,000 words long.

I have won awards for my short fiction and have been published in several anthologies (my CV is enclosed). Also enclosed is a courier pack for the return of the manuscript if you are unable to use it.

Sincerely

[signature]

Janine Bloggs

Next, package up your work with as much care as you have spent writing it. Do not get the manuscript bound – this only annoys editors. Use bubble plastic or a box so that the manuscript does not arrive damaged. And include stamped, self-addressed return packaging.

Now you wait. If, however, several months pass without you hearing anything from the publisher, then contact them, enquiring politely after your manuscript. The average time a publisher might hold onto a manuscript is around three months.

Self-Publishing

If you feel as if you are banging your head against a brick wall trying to get your manuscript accepted by a publisher, here is one alternative – publish it yourself.

Again, an important step is to have your manuscript assessed or edited by a professional. This will cost a little bit of money, but long-term it is very worthwhile (and can also be claimed off your tax if you are self-employed).

There are a number of companies who publish books for writers. The NZSA recommends Pindar (previously Egan-Reid). Check out their website: www.egan-reid.com

Below is the experience of one New Zealand writer with publishing ...

“A number of years ago my novel manuscript was turned down by two major publishing houses in New Zealand. I then had it assessed by an experienced assessor who felt it was well worth publishing and took it on himself to approach both publishers to ask them to have another look at it. They did. And turned it down again. At which point I dumped it in a drawer to be forgotten.

Then, in 2004, I heard of the Richard Webster Popular Fiction Award for an unpublished novel, and once more dragged out my manuscript. My novel came third.

I was into a second novel by that stage, and sent that to a different assessor, who was so positive about my work that (having had this one turned down as well) I decided to investigate the possibilities of self-publishing - hiding behind a nom de plume in case the whole thing proved a disaster!

That done - and in spite of zilch marketing skills (thank heaven for POD and short print runs) I decided to do the same with my third novel. And now it is off to Frankfurt! I've given up counting how many years have gone by since I began the first draft but it's been quite a journey.”

For further information, the Society of Authors publishes a handbook on self-publishing. Other booklets are *The Business of Writing*, which explains publishing contracts, *Marketing Your Book*, and *Writers and Tax*. These are available from the office: \$10 for members, \$15 for non-members.