

Publish, Don't Perish: Surviving in Today's Publishing World

Introduction

Introduction to your instructor

I am a multi-published author in mystery, romantic suspense, and paranormal romance. I've been published with 3 small publishers, and I am starting my foray into self-publishing on e-platforms (Kindle, Nook, etc.)

I've been writing for publication since 2003. I sold my first book in 2006.

What does it take to get published?

- You have to have discipline, energy, and desire.
- You need knowledge: I'll help point in the right direction.
- Talent.
- A willingness to learn; it's a never-ending process.

What does it take to stay published and be successful?

- There are many ways to define 'success in publishing'
- You can consider the New York Times list, but that's problematic: it's not based on books sold, but books reported.
- You can use royalties given, but that's problematic because of how royalties & returns work.
- YOU decide what is Success for you: is it just getting published? Is it selling X number of books?

Introduction to fiction and publishing

- "Age" markets: children's, tweens, young adult, adult
- Types: fiction, non-fiction, self-help, how-to
- Genres and sub-genres: Go into any bookstore and see how books are divided.
 - Science Fiction
 - Time Travel, High Tech, 'Space Opera'
 - Romance
 - Romantic Suspense, Paranormal Romance, Category Romance (Harlequin, etc.)
 - Mystery
 - Cozies, Police Procedural, Amateur Sleuth
 - Thrillers
 - Spy, Assassin as hero, Political
 - Fantasy

- Urban fantasy, Vampires/creatures, Fairy Tales
- Horror
 - Supernatural, Apocalyptic
- Types of publishing
 - Big Houses: The Six Sisters
 - Bertelsmann (Random House, Knopf, Doubleday, Ballantine, Crown, etc.)
 - Pearson (Penguin, Berkley, Dutton, New American Library [NAL], Viking, Putnam, etc.)
 - HarperCollins (Avon, William Morrow)
 - Holtzbrinck Publishing (Tor, Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, Forge,
 - Time Warner (not much fiction?)
 - Simon & Schuster (Atria, Scribner, Pocket, Touchstone)Four of these are foreign-owned
 - 300-400 medium sized publishers
 - Harlequin (Intrigue, SuperRomance etc.)
 - Dorchester (?? Had financial trouble lately)
 - Kensington (Zebra, Pinnacle, Brava, Citadel)
 - Baen (all science fiction & fantasy)
 - 10,000 small publishers
 - Samhain
 - The Wild Rose Press
 - Jasmine Jade
 - Loose ID
 - Samhain
 - Self-published
 - You format the book for uploading to an e-publisher or a print publisher (Lulu, etc.)
 - You pay for or design a cover (for print and for e-use)
 - You sign an agreement with SmashWords or Amazon for royalties which are deposited to an account for you.
 - Vanity publishing
 - You pay to have your book edited, produced, etc. Typical costs are between \$3000 and \$15000. You 'hand-sell' your book (ie., sell out of your car).
 - There are some successes: Vince Flynn, John Grisham, etc.
 - It requires time, effort, and money.

An overview of what goes into a book

I teach a class on this, so I won't go into detail

- Who is in your book? Characters: these are the protagonists. Most people start a book with a very clear idea of their characters. You also need strong villains (bad guys) who are as strong (if not stronger) than the hero and heroine. All of your characters need to be well-rounded.
- What is happening in the book? This is the plot, the events that move your characters forward. The plot has to be believable whether it's a science fiction book or a historical, based in fact.
- Where and When for the book. Setting is where the book takes place. Setting is often linked with a time -- for example, Victorian England or Puritan America. That's why I group Setting & Time together.
- Why are the characters doing what they do? This is the goal, the motivation and the conflict that drives the plot. This ties in with a well-rounded protagonist and villain.
- How do you make the story unique? This is your talent, your style, it's how you pace a book, it's the mechanics of a book (grammar, etc.). This can't really be taught but it can be learned.

First Steps

Decide what you want to write

- Novel
 - 50k to 100K words
 - SOME publishers will take more than 100, less than 50
- Short story
- Novella
- Poetry
- Non-fiction

Why do you want to write?

- Is it for fun?
- For publication?
- To teach?
- To demonstrate?

What defines success for you?

- Do you want to be on a NY Times list?
- Do you want to earn a living at writing?
- Do you just want to be published?
- Define your success and what it might take for you to reach it.

How much do you want to invest in this?

- You'll need a web presence; you'll need a computer
- You'll need time
- You have to learn to use Word or a similar program – and become comfortable using it
- You'll need discipline
- You need to develop tough skin: you'll get rejections and you have to deal with it

Set realistic goals

- What will fit in your life? Can you set aside time and when?
- How much do you want to do to make this happen?
- Do you want to set a word goal (X number of words a day)
- Don't compare yourself to others
- Find what works for you

Tools to help you with writing and the query process

- Craft books
 - Don't take them as gospel

- Heck, don't take MY word as gospel
- Read, consider then take what works for you
- Writing organizations
 - Few organizations accept unpublished members
 - Those that do have 'tiers' of membership
 - Organizations can be a boon and a bane: you often end up doing a lot of volunteer work and lose track of why you're there
- Writing conferences
 - Every professional organization puts on a conference
 - There are also independent conferences
 - See the Shaw Guides (my web site)
- Critique groups, critique partners
 - You can usually find like-minded people through classes
 - It's important to know the purpose for your group: many become just social outlets
 - Set rules & adhere to schedules if you want to make them work
 - Learn to critique: be fair, be honest, be polite
- Classes
 - Community Ed classes, like this one
 - The Loft has many learning opportunities
 - The U has The Compleat Scholar opportunities
- Online opportunities
 - Many Google groups and Yahoo groups dedicated to writing
 - Do a Google search or a Yahoo search
 - One place I started: Charlotte Dillon's RWR Community. I met other authors there, we formed our own online group (see my web site).
- Techniques
 - Write the entire book at one pass? Edit as you go?
 - Chapter-by-chapter?
 - Outline the entire book? Outline a chapter? No outlines at all?
 - EXAMPLE
 - I usually start with a way to murder someone
 - Then I come up with "Why?"
 - Then I start thinking about characters
 - For example: A friend is a reporter for a small-town newspaper. She told the story of the front page news: *Pig Digs Up Sheriff's Flower Bed*.
 - ✓ I thought: what if there was a body there?
 - ✓ And what if the body was the heroine's ex-husband?
 - ✓ And what if the cop investigating it was her old boyfriend?
 - ✓ Why is he in town? Why did the ex-husband leave her?

- As you see: often I don't even think about "how did he die" or "who did it." I'm more concerned with laying in the surrounding plot. The rest will take care of itself
- Staying Organized: Your Writing
 - How do you keep track of your characters?
 - How do you keep track of your setting?
 - How do you keep track of the timeline?
- Staying Organized: Craft/Business
 - Keep track of your queries
 - Do your research and keep track of what agents are good for you
 - Try to meet them if you can
 - An agent/author relationship is a business relationship that has to be a good fit
 - A bad agent is worse than no agent at all
 - No, I don't have one. I've never looked for one. I'm not trying to break into the Big Time. If I wanted to break into the Big Time, I'd need one.
 - That said, yes, I've pitched to them. It's good practice.

Gaining Momentum: Brainstorming the Project

There are five plots in the world. It's all in how you present the material.

- This is an exaggeration, but you get the idea
- Romance plots: amnesia, secret baby, hidden heiress, etc.

What are you writing?

- What's the hook?
- Why do you think this is sellable? Do you care if it's sellable?
- What's the marketing plan: who are you targeting? Who will be interested?
- Why do you think it's interesting? Will others want to read it?
- Is it a cliché? What makes it different from other stories?
- If you write to sell, there are certain realities of the genre (romance = HEA, for example).

Brainstorming

- Take two opposite plot points and try to make a book (for example, "a minister and a drug addict fall in love")
- This has ready-made conflict and character arcs
- Look for that kind of thing as you consider your project
- Who do you brainstorm with? (ANYONE WHO WANTS TO)

What is necessary in a book?

- Conflict
- Characters
- Plot (going from A to B)
- Motivation
- Goals
- The structure:
 - Introduction/start
 - Rising action
 - Climax
 - Falling action
 - Resolution

Now go back to your ideas for your book/project. Are those elements in there?

- Is there a full project there or do you have scenes?
- This often happens: you imagine a story but you don't imagine the FULL story.
- You can see the scenes but are not sure how to fit them together.

How do you take your brainstormed idea and get going?

- You can start writing scenes and try to tie them together later
- You can plot the book
- You can jot down ideas and then start to write
- You can outline
- Seat of the pants? Outline? It's up to you
- Here's my process:
 - Start with a challenge: what if an old love came back into your life?
 - Not enough conflict. What if that old love tried to kill you before?
 - Why didn't he get arrested?
 - He was in the CIA and they helped him escape.
 - Why is he back?
 - What does he want?
 - How long has he been gone?
 - Start to write: Chapter 1: Open with a HOOK.
 - Introduce hero, heroine, conflict, setting, and risks in chapter 1.
 - End chapter 1 with a hook.
 - Repeat for chapter 2.

The Ugly Stuff

How do I write this? The basics

- Font: Times Roman, Book Antiqua, or Courier
Check your publisher's web site. They'll have guidelines. I use TR or BA.
- Margins: 1" all around
- Tabs: don't use them. Use a style sheet with auto indent
- Chapter breaks: use a hard return (control-Enter) to make a page break
- **WRITE SOMETHING: you can edit crappy writing but you can't edit a blank page**

What words do I use?

- Tagged dialog
 - He said, she said. Try to avoid.
 - Use action instead (*John walked to the door. "I'm going."*)
- Action words
 - Avoid adverbs.
 - Let your words do the talking.
 - Try to create the sounds in the reader's heads. Don't tell the reader.
 - Use all five senses: make sure to include them throughout, but not all in every scene.
- Your character will 'lean' toward one sense.
- Descriptions (KISS)
 - Use just enough to set the scene. Let imagination do the rest.
 - Compare to known things: "I was called Gidget because of my unfortunate resemblance to Sally Fields".
 - Find something people know and mention it ("the ancient wooden office chair creaked alarmingly as I tilted back")
 - How much is *too* much? When you have the desire to skim over it, the text is too much.

Editing your work

- Step away then review.
- Let it sit for a while then come back to it.
- Work on something totally different.
- Find your flaws & catalog them. Put sticky notes on your computer.
- Read it out loud.
- Finding your problems.
- Learn to be objective: IT'S NOT YOUR BABY. ACCEPT CRITICISM.

It's finished. Now what?

You've written a book/play/novella. Now what?

- Editing
- Self-editing
- Editors for hire: Kelly Marstad (KellyKirch@gmail.com), Anne Frasier, <http://annefrasierediting.blogspot.com>, Anna Genoese, <http://www.aleuromancy.net/>
- Critique partners
- Advice: let it sit for a while, re-read it, then read it again.
- Editor or agent feedback: take it? Leave it?

Tools of the trade

- Conferences
 - A chance to pitch your idea
 - A chance to talk to other authors
- Synopsis
 - EVERYONE has to do these
 - They're 4-5 paragraphs about your book
 - ONLY the high points, not every sub plot
 - Mention 3-4 characters MAX
- Blurb
 - Essentially what goes in your query letter
 - It's usually 200 -300 words, summarizing your story
 - Introduce your character names
 - Use adjectives to describe them ('spunky', 'anxious') or their profession ('injured cop Jude Brenner is facing forced retirement...')
- Pitching
 - Go for "high concept" if you can (Romancing the Stone meets A Night at the Museum with a bit of Mission: Impossible thrown in).
 - Think of the elevator pitch: "What do you write?"
 - Mine: "Mystery with a touch of romance – romance with a touch of gray"
- Tag line
 - On the cover of the book: "I was murdered in my previous life. Now I have a chance for revenge...if my killer doesn't find me first."
 - Must be quirky, catch the eye, be BRIEF
- Query package
 - Letter
 - 2-3 paragraphs
 - TO THE POINT: "My romantic suspense book is 85,000 words long and is set in Long Island in 1930."
 - 1st Paragraph: genre, length, market

- 2nd: blurb
- 3rd: brief info about you & why you can successfully market it
- Synopsis
 - See above: 1-2 pages MAX
 - High points of the story
- First chapter(s)
 - Check the publisher's web site
 - First chapter? First 3 chapters? First 50 pages?
- Query email
 - NO ATTACHMENTS
 - Include everything in the body of the email
 - Usually just synopsis & query
 - They'll ask for more if they want it

Offers: what does it mean?

- Contracts
 - Read carefully
 - Get a lawyer? It's up to you
 - Look for: reversion of rights
 - Royalty
 - Right of first refusal
- Royalties
 - They vary: usually one for e-books, one for print, one for audio
 - See my web site for links to an explanation: it's complicated, with returns, etc., unless you're with a small press
- Publisher expectations
 - You MUST hit your deadlines; yes, you can ask for extensions, but don't do it often
 - You must promote your book
 - You'll be expected to pay for at least some of the promotion
 - You'll be expected to go to conferences, do book signings, etc.

Rejection

- What it means
 - It's not personal
 - Everyone has rejections
 - Remember our stats on publishing? Expect rejection
 - Some are good, some are bad
- How to handle it
 - Consider the words: were they positive? Negative?
 - If there are suggestions: consider them
 - Is there validity there?

- Is it a throwaway rejection (“not right for our house”)
- Did they ask you to resubmit?
- Did they ask for an exclusive (RED FLAG)
- What to take from it
 - It's all part of learning

Promotion

- What's expected of you
 - Anything and nothing
 - You do what you want to do and can afford to do
 - Ask your publisher what's expected
 - Do what you're comfortable doing; otherwise it'll come through in the promo
- What you can do
 - Online promotion (Internet savvy only)
 - Groups (Yahoo, etc.)
 - Blogs
 - Twitter
 - Facebook
 - My Space
 - Banner ads
 - Author packages at review sites
 - Chats
 - Book store signings
 - Mailings
 - Newsletters
 - Advertisements
 - Libraries
 - Conferences
 - Newspapers (media releases): not useful any more
- Promotional reality
 - When push comes to shove, you're selling most of your work to strangers
 - You're selling yourself as well as your work
 - Don't be surprised if your friends don't buy – many people say they will, but they won't
 - You're always in the spotlight; you always have to think before you speak or type those words
 - ALWAYS maintain a consistent digital presence. “Fans” are watching.