



*A Three-Step Guide
to Becoming a
Published Author*

By
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Introduction

So ... you've finally finished your novel. Congratulations! That was the easy part! Now, you must embark on the publishing journey—which can last at least a year or longer.

When most writers finish a novel, they see the next bestseller sitting in front of them. And why not? You've poured your heart and soul into your novel and you want it to be a success. But what most writers don't realize is that finishing a novel is only the beginning. Becoming a published author requires a bit of patience, perseverance and flexibility. Three things that I had to learn the hard way.

There are many classes you can take on how to become a better writer. But there aren't really any classes on how to navigate through the publishing world. When I finished my first novel, I thought that all I had to do was find an agent and I'd be a published author in no time. Needless to say, I was misinformed. In fact, I had no information at all. I was flying by the seat of my pants and figuring things out as I went along. I made plenty of rookie mistakes and fell into a few pitfalls along the way. But I learned a lot throughout the process. And now that I've been around the publishing block a few times, I can pass that knowledge on to you. My hope is that you take all of the information provided in this e-book and use it to help you achieve your dream of becoming a published author. I want to help you avoid making the same mistakes and falling into the same pitfalls that I did.

The publishing process comes down to three essential steps. The first step is to try and secure a “big time” publisher (think Random House). This should always be your first goal, because it offers the biggest reward. If that doesn't work, the second step is to secure a mid-level or small publisher. Lastly, you can go the self-publishing route. Many writers become frustrated with the publishing process right away and self-publish too soon. Some writers prefer self-publishing because of the freedom to sell their book their own way. But I ask you this: would you like to be as successful as J.K. Rowling? Or would you rather self-publish as a matter of pride and principle? I think I know what your answer might be.

Step One: Always aim for the sky!

As I said in the introduction, your first goal should always be to sign with a big time publisher. A big publisher has the resources and marketing tools to take your book directly to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. Big publishers have a lot of money at their disposal, so you can expect a well-designed cover, a sound editing job and the feedback you need in order to make your novel the best that it can be.

Every writer dreams of signing with a big publisher. I know I did. But you can't just send your manuscript to Random House and expect a reply. Big publishers only work through literary agents. Therefore, your first task upon finishing your novel is to secure a literary agent.

There are plenty of resources available to help you find a literary agent that is right for you. I prefer to use <http://www.agentquery.com/> because the search system is so easy to navigate. It allows you to search for agents based on the topic of your book, so that you can make the proper pitch to the right agent. Never, ever pitch your book to the wrong agent. For example, don't pitch a fiction book about vampires to an agent who works primarily with non-fiction authors of cookbooks and history books. It gives the impression that you are just blindly choosing an agent, and it's also a waste of your time.

Once you have found a couple of agents who are interested in the same genre as your novel, it's up to you to sell it to them in a pitch letter. The professional term for this is called a "query" letter. Most agents receive hundreds of query letters in the course of a week, so it's important for you to make your letter stand out. My first attempt at writing a query letter was a complete disaster. So I decided to take a query letter writing class. It helped immensely. **(Anything you can do to help yourself in this process is a good idea! Take courses, seek advice and gain information. It will all be beneficial in the end.)** In the class, I learned the proper etiquette and the right way to gain an agent's attention. Most agents make their decision after reading the first two lines of a query letter. They will either ask to see more of the book or they will kindly reject it.

Remember in the introduction when I said that becoming a published author requires patience? Sometimes agents will get back to you right away, sometime they won't respond for a month or two. Relax—it's all part of the process. For agents, time is money. So they will be spending the bulk of their time on projects that bring in money. As a potential new author, you have to sit on the counter a bit. You aren't making them any money yet.

Then the rejection letters will start flowing in—I guarantee it. Now, not only do you need patience but you also need perseverance. This is the point at which most aspiring writers become frustrated, throw in the towel and self-publish. But did you know that Steven King was rejected 30 times before someone took a chance on his manuscript for *Carrie*? What would have happened if he had given up? I ask that you see this part of the process through, because it just takes one—one—literary agent to say, “Yes.”

I actually had a literary agent who was interested in one of my novels. I was e-mailing back and forth with her for a couple of months. But instead of being patient, I became frustrated. She liked what she read, but she was busy with a couple of other projects at the same time. So I began searching for mid-level and small publishers that don't require literary agents. I found one, sent them the manuscript and a couple of days later they told me they wanted to publish it. Without thinking twice, I ditched the agent and went with the publisher. That, my friends, is a big “no, no” in the world of publishing. I could have built a relationship with the agent and worked with her on other books, but because I was impatient I burned a bridge. As for the publisher, they were very nice and supportive but they were also very inexperienced. After a year, they closed shop because they took on too many projects at once. I am grateful to them for giving me my first published book, but I know now that I should have waited it out with the literary agent instead. I even tried contacting her to apologize for my naivety, but she never responded. The point of the story is this—**be patient!**

As to how patient you should be, there is no right amount of time to wait. And there is no right amount of query letters to send out. It's all about what feels right to you. Personally, I think that a year is a good amount of time. If, after a year, you haven't had any bites from literary agents then move on to step two with peace of mind.

Step Two: Do the next best thing.

After a year of sending out query letters and getting no response, you might feel a little defeated. But I urge you to keep your head up! There are plenty of wonderful, respectable and experienced mid-level and small publishers out there. And the best part about these types of publishers is that you don't need a literary agent. However, you still need a good pitch in order to sell them on your book.

It's important to research mid-level and small publishers before you contact them. When I decided to work with my first publisher, I didn't do any research on them whatsoever. So when they folded a short year later, it came as a surprise to me. In today's information age, you can find just about anything on the Internet. Make sure that you know enough about the company and the types of books they publish in order to make an informed decision about whether or not to pitch them your novel. Once you find a publisher that resonates with you, send them a pitch letter. You can even use the same query letter that you used to pitch to literary agents. If they like your idea or the premise of your novel, they will usually ask to see the first three chapters. Some might even ask to see the whole manuscript.

After my first publisher folded, I reissued my first novel myself through a self-publishing company. But I was in the middle of writing the sequel and I also had an idea for a non-fiction book. I really wanted to find a good publisher, so that I wouldn't have to do all of the marketing myself. **(More on that and self-publishing later.)** I did a little research and found [Publishing Syndicate](#). I had interacted with one of the owners before when I was published in [Chicken Soup for the Soul: Celebrating Brothers and Sisters](#). I reached out to them and now they are republishing my first book, and publishing the sequel. It's funny how things work out. I can't tell you how wonderful it is to work with an experienced publisher that's been around the publishing block. I remained open and flexible throughout the entire editing process and soaked up the constructive criticism with gratitude. My books are better off for it and I am so excited about the way they turned out. **(Flexibility is key. Keep an open mind and don't resist changes that could make your novel better.)**

Step Three: Take the reigns!

If you are unable to secure a mid-level or small publisher, or you don't find one that resonates with you, that's okay. Self-publishing isn't what it used to be. You can self-publish a book very easily these days, thanks to the Internet and digital technology. In fact, many writers prefer self-publishing because they get to say and do what they please without any editors, agents or publishers weighing in. There are many benefits to self-publishing and they include:

- Total control over the cover, editorial changes, marketing, etc.
- It's inexpensive and you keep a majority of the profits.
- You can sell the book when and where you want.
- Your book will still be on Amazon.com and other online retailers.
- You don't have to spend any time sending out query letters.
- You're a published author!

Self-publishing doesn't carry the same "stigma" that it did years ago. There are a variety of stories about writers who self-published books that went on to become very successful. Some even became bestsellers. Most entrepreneurs publish their own self-help books and sell them on their websites. My friend Maria, who runs a wonderful self-help website for high-achieving young women leaders, wrote and [self-published her own book](#). It's been a great success!

When you self-publish a book, you are in charge. This means that you not only have to design a cover or find someone to do it for you, you also have to handle all of the editing and marketing as well. If you're a go-getter and you love being in control, then self-publishing is perfect for you. I prefer someone else to handle all of the marketing and business side of things. I'm a writer, so my job is to write. I don't want to worry about the other stuff as well. But that's me. You could be cut from a different cloth and you might welcome the challenge of being solely responsible for getting your book out to the masses. It's not impossible, it just requires a bit of determination.

In conclusion . . .

There you have it—a three-step guide to getting published. It's a process that takes time, but we've already discussed patience. Knowing these steps doesn't guarantee anything, but they are certainly helpful. Now you can enter the publishing world with a plan, and that gives you confidence and reassurance.

Let's recap, shall we?

1. Go for the big publisher first and be patient. Give yourself at least a year to pitch query letters to agents and make improvements to your book.
2. If the agents aren't biting, aim for mid-level and small publishers instead. You don't need an agent and you are more likely to receive individualized attention.
3. If you have exhausted all of your options, consider self-publishing. Just remember that the success of your book rests on your shoulders.

With a big publisher, the marketing reach is the greatest. This means that you will be able to reach a wider audience. That's why securing a big publisher is the number one goal. Your reach is smaller with a mid-level and small publisher. And with self-publishing, your reach depends on, well, you.

No matter who asks me for publishing advice, I always tell them the same thing that I am telling you. Follow this process and see what happens. It's based on my own experience in the publishing world, so I've been where you are. I know how confusing and overwhelming the entire process can be. With a little direction, you'll feel as though you're on the right track. You may end up being comfortable with self-publishing in the end, or you may end up as a new Random House author with a bestseller on your hands. You never know! And if you have any questions for me or you just need some encouraging words, contact me directly: LynsD21@gmail.com. I will gladly respond!

Resources

I used the following resources as I navigated my own way through the publishing process. They may come in handy for you, too!

Literary Agents

- www.agentquery.com
- www.pw.org

Writing Help

- www.writersdigest.com
- www.writingclasses.com

Self-Publishing Tools

- www.lulu.com
- www.lightningsource.com/

A Little Inspiration

As you embark on your publishing journey, keep in mind that some of the most famous writers of our time had their fair share of rejections and roadblocks. Here are just a few:

- **J.K. Rowling** was rejected by a dozen publishers, including HarperCollins. Bloomsbury, a small publisher based in London, took a chance on her. We all know how that turned out.
- **John Grisham**, author of *A Time To Kill*, was rejected by a dozen publishers and 16 literary agents before he was published. Grisham is now one of the most recognizable authors in the world.
- **Judy Blume**, my favorite author of all time, was rejected consistently for two full years before breaking into the publishing world. Blume is now considered to be the gold-standard for young adult fiction!