

12 Tips for Building Your Book Publishing Resume

1. **Read.** People in book publishing view the world through the lens of books. Pay attention to what is being published right now and follow lists like the *New York Times*. Well-known books often act as a shorthand when pitching a new book (*it's X meets Y!*). Follow trends, learn the expectations of different genres, and indulge your own tastes. If you want to write or edit middle grade fantasy, you should know the middle grade fantasy market as thoroughly as you can.
2. **Pay attention to other entertainment media.** Book publishing may be slow but it's interconnected, and trends that break quickly in other media often trickle down into books. So, pay attention to what's happening in film, TV, podcasts, and games. No, it's not going to melt your brain! Find, embrace, and indulge your interests. As a student, you're always inundated with coursework and requirements, but it is professionally and personally valuable to find times for the things that make you you. Fly your freak flag high, because your unique interests are valuable. If you love true crime, you might be well-suited to editing true crime books. You know the audience well because you're in it, and have your finger on the pulse of what's hot, what's missing, and who's who.
3. **Get a job in a library or a bookstore.** Any way you can put yourself around books is good. At a bookstore or library, you have the chance to observe reading habits and see how books are merchandised and sold to consumers, as well as how stores and libraries interface with publishers.
4. **Take a class.** Lots of universities offer some kind of certificate program related to manuscript editing or book publishing, and many of them offer courses both locally and remotely (University of Chicago and UCLA Extension, for example). Any of those skillsets – developmental editing, copyediting, proofreading - are good things to have on your resume. Mediabistro also offers online courses in copywriting, editing, marketing, social media, and more.
5. **Apply to a post-graduate publishing program.** These are multi-week programs that attract top industry members and focus on teaching recent college graduates the basics of publishing. Beyond the hands-on educational component, these programs usually culminate in private job fairs and are excellent networking opportunities.

Columbia Publishing Course (6 weeks)

(2020 application and program dates will be posted in December 2019)

Denver Publishing Institute (4 weeks)

Early acceptance deadline: February 26, 2020

General admissions deadline: March 26, 2020

Program runs: July 12 – August 7, 2020

NYU Summer Publishing Institute (6 weeks)

Priority application deadline: January 31, 2020

Final deadline: March 16, 2020

Program runs: June 1 – July 20, 2020

6. **Apply to master's programs related to publishing.** A number of colleges and universities offer master's degrees in editing and publishing. These might help you be competitive in getting a job, but remember that nothing beats hands-on experience in terms of career development and advancement. Learning to edit a book is best learned through an apprenticeship as an assistant, not in the classroom. For a list of graduate publishing programs, visit:
<http://www.bookjobs.com/publishing-programs>.

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7. **Surf job listings.** Publishers Weekly, Publishers Marketplace, Bookjobs, and Mediabistro are industry-specific places where employers list openings. Publishing is a big umbrella with many different roles and tracks under it, so check out what kinds of jobs are being advertised and familiarize yourself with the required skillsets.
8. **Pursue internships!** Publishers, certain professional organizations (like the ALA), agencies big and small, book distributors (like IPG), and publicity firms are all places to look for internships. Beyond those, brainstorm internships opportunities that would allow you to develop the skills you found in those job listings, even if the internship isn't explicitly related to publishing. Running social media accounts for a blogger, or assisting a professor in their own book publication (research, indexing, etc.) would be great options.
9. **Follow authors, agents, editors, publishers you like on social media.** Go down the rabbit hole of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and blogs. Learn who's who by immersing yourself in the social media "neighborhoods" where publishing professionals are. Start with your favorite author – who is her agent? Who does that agent seem to retweet? What about that podcast he just appeared on, do they have an account?
10. **Attend a conference.** These can be tricky, as they are not cheap to attend and are usually directed at a specific audience that you might not quite be in as you're exiting undergrad. Some are very craft focused and aimed at aspiring writers, while others emphasize niche industry topics and are aimed at experienced publishing professionals. Some are broad, while others focus on a particular genre. Decide what you're hoping to get out of attending a conference – networking, industry insights, craft lessons – and do some research to see if there are any right for you. Occasionally, conferences may even have student rates, or your career services office might offer grants to subsidize attendance.
11. **Keep working on your writing skills.** If you're going to be in a position where you're evaluating, acquiring, or working on other peoples' writing, your skills need to be top-notch. That's not to say you need to write great fiction if you're going to critique fiction, but you do need to be able to clearly and concisely communicate your ideas and be good at critical analysis.
12. **Review books.** Create your own book review blog, offer to review for your local newspaper, or reach out to an established review blog or magazine and inquire about joining the team. This is a great way to keep reading—and writing—regularly and to work on those critical, evaluative skills – plus, you'll get free books!

A Brief Look at the Publishing Food Chain

Author – has the big idea and turns it into a manuscript

Agent – represents the manuscript and the author in the marketplace

Editor – finds, buys, and edits the manuscript

> **Production** – makes the manuscript into a book

> **Sales** – sells the book

> **Marketing** – supports the book

> **Publicity** – promotes the book

> **Subrights** – exploits rights in the book (audio; translation)

Book buyer – selects the book for its retail channel

Book seller or librarian – hand-sells the book/recommends the book to readers

Consumer – buys the book (we hope!) and reads the book (finally!)

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10 Tips on Query Letters

Browne & Miller Literary Associates, like most established literary agencies, receives hundreds if not thousands of emails each month from authors seeking representation. Though all do get read, only the most compelling queries are given serious consideration. It is a daunting exercise for a writer to condense an entire book and his/her expertise into a short, sales-y missive. However, as most agents will not look at unsolicited materials, a query letter remains the most important tool an author has for garnering initial interest in his/her book. There is an art to writing a great query, but it is an art that can be mastered!

1. **A query letter is professional business correspondence and should be treated as such.** Overall, a query “letter,” even if it’s an email, must be highly polished: no spelling mistakes, typos, grammatical errors, or emoticons. 1-2 pages in length.
2. **An author should query ONLY when she/he is truly ready.** For new fiction authors, a novel is always sold on a completed manuscript. The author should indicate what material is available to send and the completed manuscript length (i.e. word count). We advise new authors to write a detailed synopsis of the book – between 5 and 25 pages – too, as we usually ask for a synopsis and 3-5 sample chapters before asking to see an entire manuscript. For a non-fiction project, an author should have a completed book proposal which includes a minimum of 3 sample chapters ready to send.
3. **A query letter should clearly identify the genre or category the proposed book fits into and also provide some insight on general market positioning.** Know what you’ve written! What is it? Where does it fit in the marketplace and on the shelf? What is it like? Do your homework: visit a bookstore, talk to a librarian, become familiar with other works in the genre, read widely, etc. “Tweeners” are always a problem.
4. **A query letter must offer a brief overview of the work that is clear, compelling and makes one want to read more.** A query letter is a *sales letter* and a punchy, persuasive, concise description of the book is often the hardest thing for its author to write. But the one-liner – the take away – is really important, as is the brief description overall. It’s akin to an “elevator pitch” or back cover copy. Example: *Paula Dean meets Sookie Stackhouse in An Étouffée to Remember, an 85,000 word cozy mystery starring intuitive Southern food stylist Kat Kit who lands in the hot seat when the mayor of her colorful Louisiana bayou town is found murdered and her missing Japanese cleaver is the murder weapon.*
5. **The focus of a query letter should be on the ONE book the author is trying to sell.** We always advise against mentioning other unpublished works in a query letter, as agents don’t necessarily want to know that an author has other unpublished manuscripts sitting on the shelf.
6. **A query should offer information about the writer.** Agents want to know about an author’s writing and publishing background which would include: association and professional organization memberships (i.e. RWA, MWA, etc.); conferences attended; awards and prizes and nominations; contest wins or notable mentions; published works (even short stories, articles); academic background. This would also include info on the author’s PLATFORM: social media presence and followers; speaking engagements; media coverage.
7. **If the author is querying several agents, she/he should state this in the query letter.**

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8. **A query letter should clearly include the author's contact information, including email address and phone numbers.** Make sure your contact info is included IN your email query; do not rely only upon your return email address.
9. **Carefully follow each agency's query guidelines.** Browne & Miller, for example, does not open attachments and will not read any unsolicited material. However, some agencies do accept proposals, synopses, or chapters along with a query. Most agencies now widely post their query and submission guidelines online. Authors should also know what types of works each agent/agency represents. For example, don't query an agency about a picture book if said agency indicates they do not represent children's books.
10. **No gimmicks!** We have seen our fair share of the bizarre over the years including query letter "glitter bombs," handwritten queries on scented, colored paper in colored ink, queries containing nude photos, queries on candy bar wrappers, queries accompanied by alcohol, music, stuffed animals, animation, not to mention numerous gimmicky emails. Unfortunately, email seems to give some aspiring authors license to be shockingly casual in their correspondence, if not downright rude. These types of communiqués are all memorable, but we did not pursue a single one of the books presented. Creativity is appreciated, but authors should present themselves professionally and appropriately overall.

Where to Look for a Literary Agent

The Association of Authors Representatives www.aaronline.org

Legitimate agents and agencies in the book world are not required to be members of the Association of Authors' Representatives (AAR), but many agents in the US are. To qualify for AAR membership, agents must have sold a minimum number of books and pledge to abide by a Canon of Ethics.

Publishers Marketplace www.publishersmarketplace.com

A great place to research literary agents; not only do many agents have member pages, but you can search the publishing deals database by genre, category, and/or keyword to pinpoint the best agents for your work.

Manuscript Wishlist www.manuscriptwishlist.com (@ManuscriptWList on Twitter)

www.AgentQuery.com About 1,000 agent listings and an excellent community/resource for any writer going through the query process.

www.QueryTracker.net About 200 publisher listings and 1,000 agent listings.

www.writersmarket.com About 400 to 600 agent listings. Monthly subscription fee.

The Guide to Literary Agents blog is also a good resource for info related to literary agents.

<http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents>

At the Library:

- Literary Market Place (annual).
- (Annual) Guide to Literary Agents (from Writer's Digest Books)
- Jeff Herman's Guide to Book Publishers, Editors & Literary Agents: Who They Are, What They Want, How to Win Them Over (annual)
- Writer's Market: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published (Annual) (from Writer's Digest Books)