RECOMMENDATIONS TO NAVIGATE YOUR WRITING CAREER: THE BASICS

Each person’s writing experience is his/her own unique journey, life adventure, or an outlet to express that creative side. Not every recommendation will fit exactly into every writer’s timeframe or success, but a solid start will help you gain an advantage in a crowded market.

Take that courage to move forward and start writing!

1. WRITE WHAT YOU LIKE

* Don’t follow the trends because they might pass by the time you’re ready to publish.
* If you like fantasy, write fantasy. Read fantasy books from different authors. This applies to different genres and topics.
* Write a good story that you’d like and readers would want to read.

2. JUST WRITE

* Make the commitment to write. Set aside time to write.
* Write the first draft, then go back and edit, and edit some more. You need to complete the framework of your manuscript in order to put the story together, then add the finer details.

—Use outlines, graphs, a whiteboard, a chalkboard, notes, or any system that

works for you to piece your story together.  
 —Check grammar, sentence structure, and rules for writing dialogue.

* Don’t spend too long getting the first draft done. You might edit your manuscript 3 – 12 times by the time you’re done. And your editor(s) will edit more.
* 70,000 – 80,000 words is a general rule for debut authors. 100,000 words or greater might be acceptable for science fiction and epic fantasy.
* Keep writing. You’ll only get better.

3. REFRESH YOUR WRITING

* Study writing styles, grammar, and structure through books, classes, or workshops. We all need a refresher.
* Attend writing workshops, writer groups, book clubs or reading groups, and book/writing events. You can learn a great deal or something new from avid readers, fellow writers, seasoned writers, or people in the industry.
* REMEMBER – Not every manuscript or book follows the same format. Writing general fiction vs. children’s vs. memoirs follow different guidelines.
* Support writers. Attend book discussions or author events. They might be where you want to be in the near future and provide you insight.
* Read a lot of books.

4. GET A PROFESSIONAL EDITOR

* I CAN’T STRESS THIS ENOUGH.
* You might need to hire two or three editors.
* Not all editors are the same.

—Has this editor done editing in your genre or type of work?

—Is this editor familiar with the book writing industry?

—Review his/her work. What other books has this person edited?

—Ask if the editor does content, grammar, structure, or general editing.

—Review fees. Some editors charge by word, pages, or hours/time.

5. BETA READERS

* Optional.
* Select people who are interested in your genre or topic and/or like to read and critique books. From an outsider standpoint, they might notice what you don’t see in your manuscript that can be helpful to fine-tune your work.
* Keep in mind, your family or very close friends might only give you positive feedback you want to hear, omitting any potential adjustments that could improve your manuscript.
* Request feedback from people you trust, people in certain professions (technical, librarian, other writers), people you value their opinion, and people in your writing group. You might need to use a non-disclosure agreement.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING

* If you’re already on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr) or use Podcasts and YouTube to promote yourself or a platform, then you have an advantage when you’re ready to publish because you’ve already established a following.
* Build your brand.
* Establish an author website.
* Network.
* Be polite, professional, playful, funny, engaging, encouraging, informative, and/or supportive on social media.
* Promote your book(s) and work. Some authors provide a free copy of their book or short story on social media.
* Take caution not to over promote.
* Offer book giveaways and contests.
* Use social media or advertisements as tools to promote your work. Remember, they do not guarantee success or sales.
* Avoid arguments, attacks, and lengthy debates unless you’re ready to defend yourself and take the consequences. Politics and religion are hot topics.
* Avoid making negative comments or attacks on other writers, editors, agents, or publishing houses. Don’t allow your personal feelings or emotions to cloud your judgment. This might hurt your professional career.
* Avoid arguing with reviewers. It’s subjective. This can appear petty or lead to endless debates.
* Watch out for trolls and bots.
* Avoid attacking companies and people you do business with to create your book. Be cautious of companies or people who post negative comments, air their grievances, or attack customers on social media. The unnecessary drama is not helpful to your writing career.

7. AGENTS

* Query an agent to represent you and your book. This is a professional letter to an agent or agency to ask for representation.
* Publishing houses do not accept unsolicited manuscripts unless they are promoting a book submission or they request them directly from you or an agent.
* Agents and agencies do not accept manuscripts unless requested. Please read each agent’s guidelines and adhere to their specifications. You want to be on their good graces and have them review your work. It’s very competitive.
* If you’d like someone to represent you in order to sell your work and negotiate a contract with a publishing house, then you’ll need to get an agent. This is not a guarantee you’ll get your book published with a publisher. The agent needs to sell your work to the publisher.
* Avoid personal attacks on agents or publishers. Be polite and professional. They might remember the negative more than the positive. This could hurt your career.
* Publisher’s Marketplace lists what type of books agents are looking for and which book and author they represent. You’ll need to register and pay for this service. *Publishers Lunch* (a newsletter) is free.
* Look at authors’ acknowledgement page and see whom they mention as an agent.
* Look at publishing houses and subsidiaries to see what book in your genre or topic they represent to search for agents.
* Don’t be afraid to sell your work to an independent or smaller publisher. This might lead to greater exposure. You might be able to get your manuscript published directly without an agent. Keep in mind, you might need a lawyer to review any contract.

TRADITIONAL vs. INDIE PUBLISHING/SELF PUBLISHING

It’s recommended to try the traditional route first, whether through an agent or smaller press before indie publishing. Some authors do both.

1. TRADITIONAL

* An agent should support you and help negotiate a contract with a publishing house. It’s okay to change agents if it’s not the right fit.
* An agent and publisher understand the writing and marketing business of books.
* The publisher promotes your work and spends money to get your book produced. You’ll still have to do some of your own marketing.
* An agent and publisher will help you navigate and grow your career.
* Your book will have more opportunities to be in bookstores and libraries.
* You might receive a steady income depending on the work you produce.
* You’ll have contracts, expectations, and deadlines. ie The publisher might request a certain number of books in a series at a certain time.

2. INDIE PUBLISHING/SELF PUBLISHING

* You control your writing career.
* You can write any story you like.
* You set your own deadlines.
* You can set your own price on each book as long as it’s within the parameters the publisher sets.
* You might have higher royalties than traditional publishing if your book sells well.
* You pay for all the costs to produce your book.
* You need to hire all the professionals to produce your book – editors, book cover designers, photographers, and publishers.
* You organize and pay for all your promotions, book events, and vendor opportunities unless you’re able to obtain a sponsor or promoter.

Ebook Format:

A. Mobi – used by Kindle

B. ePub – used by Nook, Google Books, Kobo, Apple books

Print Books:

Popular companies used are Kindle (formally CreateSpace), IngramSpark,

Barnes & Noble Press, Lulu, BookBaby. There are others.

GOOD LUCK AND KEEP WRITING!