

Hints for Young (and not-so-young) Writers on Getting Published

by Hazel Edwards

Read twice, once as a reader and next as a writer to observe the technicalities of characterisation, humour, etc. How does that writer get their ideas across?



After 'Where do you get your ideas?', the most common question at literary talks, web chats or festivals is, 'What should I do to become a published author or illustrator?'

Answering depends upon the age of the questioner. To suggest that school kids compete for commercial publication against adult writers is (probably) unfair given the fact that slush piles in major publishing houses are full. However, don't give up hope if you are not one of the rare 13-year-olds being published, as there are other possible avenues of publication for younger writers:

- Contribute to print or online school or club magazines. During this process, you'll learn layout, editing and writing to a deadline.
- Listen to community radio or Radio RPH (Radio for the Print Handicapped) Children's Hour (1179). Your reviews and work can be read on air.
- Enter any junior sections of competitions which require the discipline of a length and deadline. Just getting an entry in on time and to length is an achievement.
- Become the family scribe and write up holidays, postcards, emails, etc. with photos, cartoons or illustrations.
- Blog—which is a kind of electronic autobiography—but remember a web log is public so don't reveal ALL of your secrets.
- Try audio stories, either recorded within the school sound system and broadcast in classrooms, or on your own equipment such as

an iPod.

- Performance is another kind of publication, so why not act out your story/script for an audience?
- Song lyrics are the new poetry. Perform them with musical backing.
- Stand-up comics need their own material. Write and perform your own.
- Send your stories to magazines which publish young writers such as Ozkidz in Print, PO Box 267, Lara, Victoria 3212 or on the web: www.ozkidz.com.au.
- Use your computer skills to create, design and self-publish your own limited edition book.

The following hints are relevant for 'new' writers, regardless of age:

- Read more! How many books, magazines or audio books have you read in the last week? Read widely in the area in which you want to write. A new writer needs to absorb the 'shape' of that kind of writing and consider reading as research, not just procrastinating pleasure. Read twice, once as a reader and next as a writer to observe the technicalities of characterisation, humour, etc. How does that writer get their ideas across?
- Utilise audio books so you can listen while travelling or exercising.
- Establish the habit. Write regularly, for a set time or number of words. Expect that not everything you write will be usable.
- Don't be precious about 'when I write'. Just get started.
- Experiment with different

formats: scripting, how to's, 10 funny hints, how to survive a brother, what NOT to do at Gran's place, manga illustrations, maga-books, cartoons, etc.

- Volunteer for regular 'freebie' newsletters or do a column or cartoon strip, so you have to meet deadlines.
- Keep an ideas notebook (electronic, notepad or audio).
- Increase your output. If you write more and get it out there, mathematically you have a better chance of publication. Also, producing more is emotional insurance against being flattened by rejection because you still have other ideas out there.
- Check out online magazines, web sites and e-books, which provide faster publication than print.
- Diversify. Write varied length projects. Collaborate with those who have other skills. Write non-fiction, not just short stories.
- Create or join a 'wordswap' group of peers and read your work aloud for constructive comments.
- Wallpaper your bedroom with multi-coloured rejection slips. It will teach you to have a sense of humour and will also make a great photo for your web site.
- Self-publish via your own computer, rather than 'vanity publishers', as some of them have been known to charge excessively for books that go nowhere.
- Read and contribute reviews online to sites like www.insideadog.com.au, which is run for youth by the State Library.
- Mentors are in short supply, but do your utmost to find one! The Australian Society of Authors (ASA) is a good place to start: www.asauthors.org as well as the writers' centre in your state.
- Think about WHO you are writing for, and shape the work for them, not just your own personal pleasure.
- Long is not better than short; it generally indicates lack of editing.
- Plan to have other jobs in addition to writing because you need something to write about! Try work experience. Graphic designer, Dave Liston,

originally designed the *Outback Ferals* book cover as work experience. It turned into a real commission and his first published cover.

- Many blogs are excellent electronic autobiographies, but many are self-indulgent meanderings. Consider whether the reader wants to be entertained and/or informed and then meet that need.
- Visit author web sites. They often explain how books were written or have literary links. One good resource is the Australian Centre for Youth Literature. For more information, visit: www.slv.vic.gov.au/about/centreforyouthliterature/youthlit.html.

Start writing now!

Hazel Edwards is best known for *There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake*. Her web site: www.hazeledwards.com has links to sites of interest for young writers and the stories behind some of her 170 books including her latest, *Cycling Solo: Ireland to Istanbul* (Brolga/ Pan Macmillan), which was co-written with her cartographer son, Trevelyan Quest Edwards, from his original blog. You can also view the WIP (work-in-progress) article on how *Antarctic Close-up (Making Tracks* series, National Museum) was written around the telescope used in Mawson's 1912 expedition.

The Business of Writing for Young People has hints on crafting for different genres and preparing manuscripts for publication and is available directly from: www.hazeledwards.com.