

How to write and publish a book in NZ

What sort of book should you write?

A well written and presented timely book can create its own demand. Rely on your intuition. Look at what you can offer and ask yourself, would I pay \$20 or \$30 for a good book on this topic? Then look at what's presently available, if anything, and decide whether you can come up with something better.

If you feel good about it, go for it. Ignore negative people.

Excel all existing similar books

Study all the best-selling similar books in your intended price range. Ensure that your book builds upon their foundation and excels them in many respects.

However still rely on what appeals to you personally, and what feels and looks right

How to write well

Writing courses are not necessary. If you can converse in an interesting manner you can write well.

Write just as you would speak face to face with a respected friend on a subject that enthuses you.

The most important quality of writing is that you hold your reader's interest. To do this, stick to the point and do not include one unnecessary word that does not bear directly upon the topic you are writing about.

Use a computer

Handwriting is an inefficient way to write a book, as it takes about four drafts to get a text right.

Use Microsoft Word on a computer with a printer and you will only have to write once.

You also have the advantage of a spell checker and your time will be more usefully spent editing, polishing and rearranging your paragraphs for maximum clarity.

Write from the heart but test the results

Write what you feel your readers need to know. Never write for money alone, it seldom works. Write what you would be proud to show your parents.

Keep your writing vivid by removing every unnecessary word, and never use a long word where a short one will do just as well. Keep most of your sentences short, within two lines.

Remember, the worst sin of a writer is to bore his or her readers.

When you feel your draft is as good as you can get it, print off about five copies and give them to typical target readers for evaluation. Tell them you won't be offended by their comments. Tell them that you want the text to be as clear and interesting as possible. Ask them to write their comments, corrections etc in the text using a red pen or a highlighter. Also ask them to mark any sentence that

does not make immediate sense on first reading.

If they fail to read your manuscript (actions speak louder than words) or do not seem stimulated by it, you are failing – ie, your writing is not yet good enough.

Armed with their comments, go through your work again. Rewrite and keep rewriting until you get an enthusiastic response.

Virtually any subject can be made stimulating in the hands of a competent writer.

Only test your manuscript on intended readers

Only submit your manuscript, or parts of your manuscript to people typical of your intended readership – ie, children, if it's a children's book, not a school teacher, or a librarian.

Your manuscript should have the appearance of the finished layout of the book, including font sizes etc. and include all illustrations where possible.

When you are satisfied you have done your best, do a final spell check (computer grammar checkers are virtually useless) and have a competent school teacher or similar person edit your manuscript for flow, consistency and clarity.

Finding a publisher

Publishers tend to specialise in only a few broad categories. Suitable publishers can be identified and addresses located through a public library with the help of a capable librarian.

Submit an outline and sample chapter to each of the publishers (not necessarily only those in NZ) and await a reply.

A follow up letter is worthwhile if you do not hear back within a month. Even a negative reply is better than no reply.

If you cannot find a publisher interested in publishing your book, consider printing and publishing it yourself (see the following sections on **Printing your book** and **Marketing your book**).

If your book does interest a publisher they will usually want both the full printed manuscript and a digital file of your work.

Be prepared to rewrite sections and to have your work edited by an experienced editor.

Printing your book

The steps are much the same whether done by yourself or a publisher.

When a book is finally accepted by a publisher, he or she normally pays all the costs involved in producing the book, ie photos, printing, binding, etc.

Sometimes a special arrangement is negotiated with an author regarding photos or drawings.

3000 copies is a typical NZ print run.

If you are publishing the book yourself, obtain quotes for the cover, the printing and the binding (they are all separate operations) from several experienced book printers, preferably situated nearby.

Book printers also require text from a computer file.

The colour and weight of the paper will need to be chosen. This affects the price considerably. Too heavy paper can make the book stiff to open, and yellowish paper looks cheap. Also avoid shiny paper except in books where photographs are very important.

Avoid tiny print, no matter what your printer suggests, especially in non-fiction books. 12 or 13 point is good, along with plenty of white space. Ask them to typeset you a page in several different fonts and font sizes for comparison. Choose the one that looks the best to you and to several other people you show them to, who are your intended readership.

Costs of printing

Expect to pay all up, about \$4 for an A5 size paperback of about 170 pages with white paper and a print run of 3000. (About 2.5 cents a page.)

Supplying the text on a computer file, (you can email it) saves you a lot of money. If the printer or publisher has to retype the text from hand written sheets the cost of the above book could increase by as much as 40% for the first print run.

The cover

This important part of your book can either be designed by yourself, your printer, your publisher, or a design artist.

The best result is generally achieved by an experienced bookseller drawing on the resources of all the above.

The end result from a design artist left to herself or himself tends to be abstract and is seldom effective in selling a book.

Don't skimp on the cover. Your cover is the advertisement for your book. It needs to be hard sell, highly enticing and to stand out when displayed in the midst of many other books.

Take a colour proof printout into a bookshop and test it. A high gloss laminated type cover is almost mandatory nowadays.

Marketing your book

When it comes to promotion, nobody is going to be as enthusiastic as you. Just about anything you can do will profit both you and your publisher. Get as much media exposure as possible.

Ask your publisher for advice, or an experienced marketer.

A publisher may want you to appear on talk-back shows or in shop presentations.

It is also a good idea to write up an interesting review of your book and send copies of the book, along with the review to the features editor of as many newspapers as possible. If your book is reviewed you will often find parts of your own write up quoted word for word.

Libraries are hungry for readable NZ books, especially if they are better than anything else

currently available. This can lead to extra sales as library users decide to buy copies for themselves.

Most publishers do their own distributing to shops. A photo of your book is normally inserted into the catalogues of sales reps to show to bookshop buyers.

Royalties

Royalties vary according to contract. A royalty of 10% on retail sales, paid quarterly is typical. However royalties may be lower on the first edition.

Alternatively, obtaining a large number of free books to sell yourself by mail order or other means can be more profitable.

Costs of production are not deducted from royalties.

You have to trust a publisher to a large degree regarding royalties. However you will know how many copies are printed, so when it comes to a reprint you should have been paid for about 95% of those copies.

If you are self-publishing you can sell your books through a book distributor — usually supplying them about 100 -150 copies at a time.

Their normal profit margin, which allows for the shops' mark-up is retail price, less 60%. You are paid when the distributor has been paid by the retail shops, usually three months later.