

## Chapter 1

### Being an Author

All successful academics become authors, but we rarely think about what that identity means. Authorship is a responsibility: to be honest, accurate, and clear. It is also an expression of ourselves: our way of thinking, our values, and our intellectual commitments. What we write, how we write, and where we publish tells others what we have learned, and also who we are. Seeing your name on the cover of a book is thrilling. Adding the title *author* to your name is a source of pride.

Publishing is a form of self-presentation, and we want our readers to see us at our best. The publishing process enlists others to help us – editors, peer reviewers, proofreaders, and designers – but the final responsibility is ours. The standard line in acknowledgments, “any remaining errors are my own,” sums it up, but we want to do more than avoid errors. We want readers to be impressed by our research and convinced by our arguments. That is why, throughout this book, I emphasize quality over quantity, and care over haste.

Writing for publication often makes scholars nervous. The stakes are high, and we are exposing ourselves to criticism and judgment. We hope that an editor or peer reviewer will praise our work, and that ultimately readers will praise and cite it. Realistically, we expect some minor criticism or suggestions. We may even be prepared for more extensive criticism which, if tactful and useful, may help us to improve our work. We know it is best to deal with criticism before making our work available to a wider audience. What we are not prepared for is rejection.

*Handbook for Academic Authors*

When our work is accepted, we share our happiness with colleagues. When it is rejected, we keep our disappointment to ourselves. That very natural response unfortunately makes an author receiving that first rejection believe (despite the statistics on acceptance rates) that this has never happened to anyone else. At some point, something you write will be rejected by a journal or book publisher. To lessen the trauma, I'm going to tell you the story of this book – now in its sixth edition, with thousands of copies sold around the world. The story begins with a rejection letter.

In 1985 I completed a manuscript that I titled “A Handbook for Academic Authors” and asked a colleague to read it for me. I knew he was an excellent critical reader, though totally tactless. I revised my text to respond to his many comments and sent the manuscript to University Press A, which I thought was an obvious fit. They rejected it almost immediately, with what I suspect was a form letter. I was irritated, but because it clearly hadn't gone to outside readers I felt the rejection had nothing to do with the quality of my work. The next day I sent query letters and sample chapters to twelve publishers: six university presses, and six commercial publishers of quality nonfiction. Soon two more rejection letters arrived on a single day: a university press editor informed me that it was an excellent idea but more suitable for a trade publisher; a trade editor said it was an excellent idea but belonged at a university press. Two more form rejections followed.

Then I got a phone call from Colin Day, an editor at Cambridge. He was enthusiastic about the manuscript, and we talked for quite a while. I told him I was thinking of adding a chapter on the economics of publishing, and he said that he was an economist and would be delighted to help me with that. He asked me to send a complete manuscript. One of the trade publishers also expressed interest, but Colin's enthusiasm won me over. After I had responded to the peer reviews, Cambridge's equivalent of a faculty editorial committee accepted the manuscript, and Colin sent me a contract.

Six months after the book was published, in 1987, I got a form rejection letter from Oxford University Press in response

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to my 1985 query letter. And that spring I gave a talk about the book at the annual meeting of the Association of American University Presses (now the Association of University Presses). At lunch, I was seated next to the editor at University Press A who had signed that first rejection letter. Somewhere around the salad, she said, “I love your book. I wish we had had the opportunity to publish it.”

I’ve told this story because I want you to know that rejection happens to everyone, but also because it illustrates how unpredictable and quirky the process can be. An editor at Cambridge was excited enough to pick up the phone; an editor at Oxford didn’t bother sending a rejection until he was cleaning his office. Some trade editors thought it was a university press title, while university press editors thought it was a trade title. The editor at University Press A had completely forgotten that she had rejected a manuscript that she now wished she had published. In the end, my book found the right home. So will yours.

### **Understanding Each Other**

Writing and publishing are discrete processes, but they are interdependent. Why write if no one will publish your work and make it available to readers? What is there to publish if no one writes? Despite their interdependence, academic authors and publishers of scholarly books and journals do not always understand each other very well. Publishers and journal editors lose sight of the tremendous pressure to publish felt by scholars, particularly untenured and contingent faculty. Authors do not take the time to learn either how publishing works or how to use it to their advantage.

Publishers’ indifference to the scholar’s plight serves a purpose. An editor who remains conscious at every moment that the fate of another human being is at stake may lose objectivity and not make the best decision. Especially in an era of scarce academic jobs and inflexible administrative demands for productivity, failure to publish early and often may end

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an academic career. But the editor who too generously takes that into account and publishes marginal manuscripts may also end up on the job market. Authors' ignorance of publishing, though, is both self-imposed and self-destructive. It is not difficult to learn how the world of scholarly publishing works, and it is wise to make the effort. Once you understand what publishers want, it is easy enough to provide it, and to improve your chances of publication. This book is designed to help you do that, whether you are a graduate student, tenure-track or contingent faculty member, independent scholar, or established academic writing your first textbook or book for general readers.

### **How to Use This Book**

In an ideal world, people would write only when they had something important to say. Discovery or inspiration would be the driving force. In the real world, though, discovery and inspiration have to share space with the pursuit of practical goals: a job, tenure, money, and influence.

If you are seeking your first academic position, tenure, promotion, a higher salary, or a better job, you will focus on writing for your peers. Depending on your field, that will mean articles for scholarly journals and possibly a book. Because university administrators believe that the peer-review procedures of journals and scholarly book publishers guarantee the scholarly value of their publications, their acceptance of your work is seen as evidence of its value. Chapter 2 explains how to find an appropriate journal for your work and how to speed up the refereeing process; it also offers suggestions for effective article writing and for revising conference presentations for publication. Chapter 3 is devoted to ways of revising a dissertation for book or journal publication. Chapter 4 describes the variety of book publishers and tells how to decide which would be best for your book. It explains how to submit your work and suggests ways to make responses more prompt and acceptance more likely. Chapter 5 tells how to work with a

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publisher, including ways to negotiate your contract, and discusses how to seek grants for publication costs. In Chapter 6, I offer advice on editing multiauthor books and volumes with many contributors, and compiling anthologies.

If you already have tenure and are happy at your institution, you may want to earn some money from your writing. Journals do not pay their contributors, and few scholarly books generate significant royalties. Writing textbooks, however, can be profitable, though the money is not quick or easy. This is not really an option for the untenured, though, because most university administrators mistakenly exclude textbook writing from scholarly activity: mistakenly, because although textbook writing does not require original research, it demands a comprehensive knowledge of the field and an original perspective on it. Chapters 7 and 8 will help you write a textbook, find a publisher, and see the project through to completion.

Many academics want to share their ideas with an audience beyond their colleagues, and many trade publishers and university presses support the writing of serious nonfiction for nonacademic readers. At the very top of the pyramid, citizen scholars like Paul Krugman, Jill Lepore, and Neil deGrasse Tyson take their research to nonspecialist readers and have access to platforms for their ideas in the media. They can influence the public in matters beyond economics, history, and astrophysics. To make the leap from specialized scholarly work, you will need to write a book that nonacademics will read, that will be reviewed in newspapers and popular magazines, stocked in bookstores, and achieve a respectable sales rank on Amazon.com. To extend your influence, you will need to write op-ed pieces and maintain a blog with a lot of followers. None of this is easy, it is time-consuming, and not all disciplines lend themselves to such communication. Chapter 9 discusses the writing, publishing, and economics of trade books.

Chapter 10 explains the mechanics of authorship, regardless of whether you are writing a journal article, monograph, textbook, or trade book: how to prepare an electronic manuscript, obtain permission to quote and to reproduce illustrations, proofread, and index a book.

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Because money is so often a source of friction, I have summarized the economics of book publishing in Chapter 11. I explain why some books are so expensive, and where the money goes. I also discuss the impact of digital technology and open access.

Chapter 12 discusses new opportunities in digital publishing.

Finally, the bibliography, which is briefly annotated, lists books on writing, guides to journals in various fields, style guides, and further information on most topics covered in the book. It is organized topically, following the order of the text.

In addition to the pleasure and pride of seeing one's ideas and words in print, publishing can lead to security, status, wealth, and influence. Surely it is worth the effort to learn a bit about it. This book is an introduction to scholarly publishing. The serious writer needs a few other books as well.

### **The Author's Bookshelf**

Anyone who writes should own *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White. This brief volume solves the most common difficulties of grammar and diction and offers sound, memorable advice on clear writing. (Full information about this and all other works mentioned in this book is provided in the bibliography.)

You also need a good dictionary. The Merriam-Webster dictionaries, in print or online, are the most generally accepted, though some prefer the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Another popular choice is the *Oxford American Dictionary*. If you plan to write a book, you will need *The Chicago Manual of Style*, either the print edition or access to the online edition. Nearly every book publisher relies on it, and it is the authority for many fields on note and bibliography style. It also provides help with grammar, proofreading, and indexing. Certain disciplines have their own style manuals, such as the *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association or the *ACS Guide to Scholarly Communication* of the American Chemical Society. Many of these are available free online. If you deal

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with British publishers or journals, Judith Butcher's *Copy-Editing: The Cambridge Handbook* will be helpful.

If you become interested in the world of academic publishing, you may want to subscribe to the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* (formerly *Scholarly Publishing*), published by the University of Toronto Press. If you do not subscribe, make sure your library does and take time to browse through it occasionally. *The American Scholar* includes at least one article a year on some aspect of book publishing, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* frequently includes news and feature stories on scholarly publishing.

### **The Publishing Partnership**

While authors are worrying about getting their work published, editors are worrying about acquiring high-quality manuscripts. Journal editors have issues to fill; book editors have lists to populate. It is a single process viewed from different angles: the reputations of authors and publishers ride on the same work. Frequent citations benefit both author and journal; criticism or retraction embarrasses both. When a book is well reviewed or wins a prestigious award, both author and publisher share the glory. The book that succeeds commercially puts money into both the publisher's coffers and the author's pocket. When a book fails – critically, financially, or aesthetically – author and publisher share the disappointment. Why, then, is there conflict between partners?

Ignorance is one source of conflict. The author who does not understand the refereeing process, does not read the contract carefully, and does not learn to proofread will be unhappy with how long it takes to get work accepted, will feel cheated on discovering that the publisher will not provide an index, and will become outraged when a reviewer points out typos.

Illusions about money are another source of friction. An author whose book is priced at \$40.00 and whose royalty is 10 percent figures "\$4.00 per book, and they're printing 1,500, so I should get \$6,000." Unfortunately, the royalty may be paid

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on net receipts (20 to 40 percent less than gross), 100 copies may be given away free for reviews and publicity, and not all the other copies will be sold. When the first royalty check arrives and the author gets, say, \$1,500 – knowing that the first year is probably the best – disappointment sets in. With disappointment comes suspicion. Where does the rest of the money go, anyway? Authors who do not know what it costs to produce a book and who do not understand prices and discounts are apt to think mistakenly that presses are getting rich from their labor. They are not. University presses do make money on some titles but rarely more than the authors do. Successful trade books make money, but authors should not be misled by the six- and seven-figure advances paid to a handful of best-selling authors, former politicians, and celebrities. For most serious nonfiction books, royalties are respectable but far from extravagant. Textbooks, too, should make money for both author and publisher, with the amount depending on the number of students who enroll in the relevant courses, the book's share of the market, and the book's longevity.

Some authors and librarians, struggling to deal with high prices for journals and books, hoped that digital media would eliminate the need for publishers, or at least reduce prices. It is unlikely that publishers will disappear: the value they add in acquiring, reviewing, selecting, and improving articles and books is real and comes at a price. Paper, printing, ink, and postage represent a small part of scholarly publishing costs. In addition, publishers must meet readers' expectations that digital media will have useful features not available in print, increasing costs. Technology has not provided any budgetary relief for libraries. Open access does eliminate price tags, but it does not reduce costs: it shifts them from subscriber to author or funding source. It also imposes new responsibilities on librarians. Throughout this book, I explain the financial implications of various policies and technologies, and Chapter 11 discusses the economics of scholarly publishing in some detail. I hope that this will reduce one source of mistrust. Chapter 12 will, I hope, contribute to constructive discussion of new media and their uses.



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Editorial changes can lead to disputes. Most writers have worked hard on their manuscripts, and many resent any attempt to alter their words and punctuation. They view the editor's suggestions as attempts to take over their books, and they see editorial queries as questioning their authority. The editor, however, is trying to correct errors, clarify meanings, and eliminate clumsy constructions in order to make the author's book better. I have had ten books published, and although I have occasionally disagreed with an editorial change (and discussed it civilly with the editor), 99 percent of the time I have been grateful for having been spared embarrassment and for ending up with a more readable book. I hope that the sections in Chapters 5, 8, and 9 on working with your editor will help you to develop happy and productive editorial relationships.

Perhaps the most frequent complaint from academic authors is that their publishers are not doing enough to market their books, and that they must take on much of the publicity and promotion themselves. The advent of social media has accelerated this trend. The level of marketing effort, and the types of marketing activity undertaken, will depend on the nature of your book and the publisher's estimate of the size of the audience. Chapters 5 and 9 explain the marketing strategies of scholarly and trade publishers and suggest ways authors can help to reach the largest possible market.

Much of the conflict between authors and publishers is rooted in the very interdependence that makes them partners. Authors may resent having their professional status and even their livelihoods rest in the hands of editors and publishers. And just as faculty members often comment on how great teaching would be if it weren't for the students, publishers occasionally long for the day when books would magically appear without authors. With a little understanding, however, the two can work together productively. This book is, therefore, an effort at making peace as well as informing. The writer who understands publishers will be more successful in dealing with them and will make publishers' lives easier. Writers may view my effort as one-sided, because all the instruction

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is directed at them. Throughout the book, though, I have set high standards of behavior for publishers and have suggested ways authors can hold publishers to these standards. For most authors, publishing is rewarding and even fun. The same is true for most editors, or they would be earning their living in some other way. I hope that this book will make it easier for authors and publishers to work together, for their mutual benefit and for the benefit of their readers.