

## Surviving Rejection

by Hazel Edwards

[www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com)

All these books were initially rejected as manuscripts at least once and have since sold well and even gone into other media formats such as radio serials, translations or have been performed.



Never give up!

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If you are a beginning writer, not being accepted for immediate publication is the first rejection. That's the hardest. Creators of heavily autobiographical works, often take rejection of their titles personally as if their lives are valued at nothing. Separating the feeling of being personally rejected from the work itself not being accepted, takes practice.

There are 57 varieties of rejection, including a bad review, criticism or being overlooked. Not being read is another kind of rejection.

Pragmatic reasons for rejection include the small market, writing on speculation and the odds of getting out of the slush pile being a gamble of 1.1000

Rejection is the norm. Knock-backs on reasons of lengthy, tone, style, subject matter, timing or just NO REASON can all wound. Creators need emotional insurance. Writing more or recycling is a form of emotional insurance and defusing the wounding impact of ideas being ignored. Doing some market research about prospective readers and 'tweaking' the project to suit, will also reduce rejection.

Creators tend to feel rejected, a lot. It's the status quo.

One reason is the size of the gap between the personal aspiration and the public reality.

All writers know they are Nobel Prize quality, in their heads; it's just the transition to page or screen which creates the gap. And not all judges have 20: 20 vision.

Timing is vital. Not all readers respond immediately a creator has offered their work to public exposure. There's often a considerable time lag.

Maybe the topic is ahead of its time? Or badly phrased?

Being over looked is probably rejection with a longer impact.

"I've been long-listed, instead of short listed!" is one witty response we should all adopt.

For some, being left out, left off or ignored energises them into starting something new.

A bad or inaccurate review affects most creators. Except the writers who claim not to read them

A few negative comments can niggle because there is some truth; others are so outrageous that laughter is the best remedy

I've had some memorable critics.

Picture book 'Feymouse' about a large and clumsy cat born into a family of highly talented mice was disparaged as a homosexual's 'coming out'. I'd been expecting more genetic criticism about cat and mice mutant genes. 'Coming out' is fine. Nutritional Nazis condemned the cake eaten by the roof-top hippo, saying it should have been no-sugar carrot cake because of obese child readers and their parents. When I collaborated with psychologist Dr Helen Mc Gath on 'Difficult Personalities' (Choice Books) and 'Friends Love Sex (later re-issued as Friends) the comment was. 'How would a children's author know about sex, because children and sex are incompatible.'"

Obviously it's difficult to NOT reply to unfounded criticism but if the reviewer's claims are extreme enough, laughter is an appropriate reaction.

Literary etiquette does not allow an author to reply to a good review or even to an inaccurate one. (Occasionally I've been provoked into writing an article about the ethics of reviewing and offering it to the parent publication as my indirect response to an ignorant critic of mine or others' work.)

Being rejected for the ideas content or the way it was written is a different matter. Quality of writing? Or scope of unusual ideas?

Feeling artistically overlooked when some significant literary short list is announced is a common reaction.

Writers in for the permanent work style of self employed freelancer have to develop ways of sustaining themselves such as:

- Diversifying, and have emotional investment in other projects at different stages.
- Re-cycling that rejected project in another format or to another prospective market.
- Re-read and maybe re-write to higher quality or different audience.
- Share with small group of peers
- Reassure self that the project is high quality but maybe political, timely or economic reasons stopped it.
- Detour to a new project to feel enthused.
- Rationalise that one in ten projects get up.

Taking it personally and complaining about judges' ignorance or bias, or 'putting down' competitors is futile and self destructive. Even if you have 'pulled' a project for moral reasons.

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Although it's useful for authors to be 'listed' or award winners, ultimately commercial sales count more. The dilemma is that the size of the marketing budget determines how well a book or author is promoted and that is often linked to award listings and whether titles are even entered. It can be expensive to enter six copies for every contest and some publishers decide the book isn't worth the risk.

Years ago, the ms for a humorous non fiction book about domestic time management was rejected by Paul Hamlyn Publishers with the comment 'We don't publish fiction.' Subsequently it was published elsewhere and did well as 'Houseworking; The Unsuperperson's Guide to Sharing the Load.

Maybe it's time for a Rejection Quote of the Year contest?

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Check [www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com) for links to places supportive to writers such as the Australian Society of Authors and the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators.(SCWBI) 'The Business of Writing for Young People' co-authored with Goldie Alexander is available via both authors' websites. So is 'Houseworking; The Unsuperperson's Guide to Sharing the Load.'

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