

Tips for Publication & Inside a Real Writing Group

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Tips to Publication for Fiction

- Write a one page double spaced synopsis to a publisher. That does NOT mean a summary of your book. It means a pitch where you excite the publisher about your concept.
- A one page over view of who you are, your background, your project to show the publisher your background.
- The first page of your book matters.
- Three chapters as a sample of your book is enough to send, because if the publisher likes your writing, he/she will call for the rest.
- Since the “slush” pile is so big at most publishing houses, don’t send a full manuscript unless requested as the THICK envelope turns them off.
- You can send the whole picture book manuscript since it is small.
- Do NOT write for a market if submitting a manuscript for trade.
Publishers are looking for original and innovative works
- If writing for an educational market then follow exactly the publisher’s guidelines
- Check to see if a publisher is publishing your style of writing through looking at their websites on line and in bookshops to see what they are publishing.
- Join a writing association
- Join an online network like jacketflap
- Become active in the writing community
- Be prepared for rejections and where there is a comment, learn from it if relevant.

- Be in a writing group. What is a typical writing group? See below:-

Inside a Children's Writers' Critique Group at SCBWI Headquarters

This writing group meets at The *Hughenden Hotel*, the home of SCBWI Australia & NZ once a month to workshop their children's and YA writing. There are five people in the group. The ideal size is usually between 3 to 5. Too many in the group makes the meeting too long and difficult to manager.

There are four copies of the each writer's work handed out. Each writer has written, rewritten, changed and manipulated their words before the meeting. They hope that their writing is brilliant of course. There is nervous energy among the social chatter. They settle into the Reading Room at *The Hughenden*, papers are distributed and then they look at each other. Who is going to begin? It's usually the person who read last at the previous meeting although everyone wants to be first. The first reader gets the longest critique in practice.

They start. The first person reads her work aloud, while the others in the group mark the manuscript over coffee and angst. Ego is laid bare for the group to analyze, discuss, annihilate. It can be confronting. The reader waits expectantly for individual and group praise, adoration and acclaim. It is crazy because that is not what they are there for. Without honest editorial, there will be no growth in their writing. So the adoration has to wait.

There is an unspoken rule. State the good aspects of the work first, then tell the truth. Here comes the conflict. To accept editorial direction if relevant HURTS. Sometimes, the response is defensive – 'You don't understand.' 'Let me explain.' 'It's not overwritten.'

If a writer doesn't want to accept the critiques of the rest of the group, there is an agreement to stop. There is no point in giving comments, when someone doesn't want to hear. It just leads to conflict, endless justification by the writer, distress and even tears. If this happens at EVERY workshop with the same writer, then she/he has to leave the group. It is too frustrating for everyone and no one gets anywhere.

Another area of real conflict is TIME. Everyone has waited all month to read their writing aloud to the group. Rules have been set that say NO ONE is allowed to read for more than fifteen minutes. Then there is a fifteen minutes discussion about each piece read. Half an hour per person, means that the writing workshop is a two and a half-hour session. That's as much as they can take. If it goes beyond that it is too tiring and they end up not workshopping the last person's work properly. It's unfair.

Inevitably someone wants to read for as long as possible. They know it's breaking the survival rule. It doesn't work, because no one can keep focused for a marathon workshop session.

The fifteen minute reading passes, and the reader continues. Everyone nods. Okay another five minutes won't kill us. Then it is ten, twenty, thirty extra minutes. The reader intersperses the monologue with comments like "hope you don't mind," "it's just a few more pages".

Everyone does mind. The reader has to be stopped. "Time's up. We really like what you've written, but we need to move on."

If one writer dominates the group, the writing group will fall apart. Everyone has to get something out of it.

Tips & Writing Groups

The writing group usually become friends as well as writers. To be part of the group they all have to believe in each other's writing, so that they trust each other when giving a critique. They email each other parts of manuscripts in between if they urgently need advice. They talk on the phone and act as a support group on the roller coaster ride of being a writer.

There are other forms writing groups take including online critiques and sending manuscripts before the groups meet .However the commonality of writing groups is that the members of the groups are 'insiders' and understand the process, the heart ache and the successes on the roller coaster of being an author.

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