



## FIVE PROVEN WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING PUBLISHED

by Julie H. Ferguson

Professionalism, or the lack of it, can make or break aspiring authors. Sometimes you find it hard to believe you are a professional writer when you have not had anything published but you must learn to cultivate the quality. Undertaking certain tasks that demonstrate you are serious about your calling is part of the transformation. Editors and agents look for proof of these in everybody's query letters and bios.

**1. Membership in a writers' group.** Writing in isolation is not only hard, it is foolhardy. Writers of magazine articles or romance, poetry or how-to books, and everything in between, must present their written word for critique before submitting it to editors or agents. Writers' groups abound, even in the smallest communities, and provide the essential forum for your work where it can be improved by fellow writers. I know several highly successful authors who still belong to a critique group and maintain that they cannot write without it. (Me included!) If you cannot find a suitable group or one close enough, the Internet has many where you can post your latest chapter or article for review by others working in your field or genre. Look for a group with a varied membership -- some beginners, but also some published authors, of many genres -- for these are the ones that will give you the most guidance and encouragement. Then stay with it.

*"I have been an active member of the Shoreside Writers for seven years."*

**2. Participation in writing/publishing courses.** Nothing shows your commitment to writing better than regular attendance at workshops, courses, and writing classes, even if it is simply an annual grammar refresher. Even though I teach at writers' conferences, I still attend them as an ordinary participant and enrol in courses put on by my local university extension department. I know one agent who not only insists that her clients attend courses but also checks with their instructors about their performance. An editor who sees no indication of your ongoing education in a query letter or submission is going to be anxious about your professionalism.

*"Last year I graduated from the creative writing diploma program of my local community college."*

**3. Awards/publishing credits.** Serving your apprenticeship includes getting something published somewhere that you can list in your bio. As you work on your first book, also work

on getting into print. Whether you get paid or not, doesn't matter, nor does the subject matter. Editors simply find it reassuring that another has had enough faith in your writing to publish it. "Pacific Poet *and* Mountain Madness published three of my poems this year and Skiing Safety bought my latest short story, 'Lost Out of Bounds.'"

Novelists and poets must also enter contests with the idea of eventually achieving at least a place. Writers' magazines and websites, as well as writers' associations, regularly list local and national contests and their rules, so you can start small and build up to the really prestigious ones.

"My creative non-fiction piece, 'Curtain Call,' placed second in the 1998 Pacific Writers' Annual Short Story Contest."

**4. Attendance at writers' conferences.** Surely one of the most motivating events in any writer's life, conferences are also essential to developing your professionalism. They provide the current trends and changing requirements in your area of endeavour, especially in this electronic age, and allow you to mix with published authors, editors, and agents. Aspiring authors have the opportunity to present their works in progress to the experts and discover whether they are on the right track or not. Your attendance at conferences demonstrates to publishers just how seriously you take your career and how hard you are working at improving your skills.

"I have attended the Surrey Writers' Conference for the last four years and the Whidbey Island Writers' Conference in 2000."

**5. Promotion skills.** Publishers don't acquire books, they acquire authors. Authors who show potential for a series of books and for name recognition are ideal. Add to that, someone who is outgoing and personable, interviews well on radio and TV, and who can deliver workshops or keynote speeches with flair, and the publisher is going to be really happy. Writers need to develop their speaking skills, their connections, and promotional ideas for their book, so that prospective publishers or agents get a two-for-one package. Non-fiction writers must also be able to demonstrate a track record in presentation skills.

"I have been a regular commentator on public education for my local radio station and am proud to be an full member of the Canadian Association for Professional Speakers."

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