

FACT SHEET NO. 5

How to find a Publisher

Despite the fact that there are literally hundreds of commercial book publishers in Australia today, this number is far outweighed by the number of writers seeking publication of their novels, anthologies, autobiographies and non-fiction works. The days when publishers casually sorted through a select number of manuscripts with the aim of uncovering a masterpiece, or an unknown writer who deserved to be catapulted to fame, are over; today's world of publishing is a highly competitive one, in which overworked editors battle with a regular over-supply of manuscripts. Publishing is, after all, a business like any other, and as such it is geared towards profit. Those writers most likely to succeed in attracting a publisher's interest, therefore, are those who adopt a business-like approach to the writing and subsequent marketing of their manuscript. So how do you go about getting a book published? Here are some pointers.

1. Make a list of the publishers you think might be interested in reading your MS. The larger, well-known publishing houses (eg. Penguin, Macmillan, etc.) will publish all kinds of books, so they are a good place to start, but it is worth listing a cross-section of publishers who you may or may not have heard of. A technique used by many authors to ascertain which publishers might publish their particular kind of manuscript is to visit a bookshop, find books which are similar in style or content to their own, and check the spine or the inside cover to see who has published them. These may be good publishers to approach with your own manuscript.

Full details of publishers can be found in "Publishers" on page 2556 of the *L - Z Yellow Pages*, as well as in books such as 'The Handbook for Victorian Writers' (available by sending a cheque for \$18 to Victorian Writers' Centre, 156 George St, Fitzroy, 3065). The more expensive *Australian Books in Print* (D. W. Thorpe) also provides a listing of publishers and is at most libraries. In addition, each issue of FAW's publication *The Australian Writer* prints a regular **Survey of Publishers** which provides valuable information on which publishers are currently considering submissions.

2. Once you have your list, contact your first choice and find out the name of the editor who is relevant to your type of book - eg. fiction editor, children's editor, etc. Large publishing houses will have many editors, in which case you should request the name of the commissioning or chief editor. You should also ask to have the publisher's "Guidelines for Writers" sent to you, if they have any.

3. Contact the editor, ideally by phone. Explain your MS in a way that SELLS it - editors tend to be very busy so your "spiel" has to be brief! Then ask the editor if they would be interested in reading your MS. If they're not interested, then you've only lost the price of a phone call (and perhaps a tiny bit of self-worth) - if they would like to see your MS it is probably best to send:

- Synopsis - one or two pages describing the plot of your MS, its highlights, its potential market and why you think it is in the publisher's interest to publish it.
- CV - A brief curriculum vitae describing who you are and what (if any) writing credits you have
- Sample chapters - probably your first three
- SSAE - large enough for the return of your submission

4. Wait for the editor's reply! This could take up to six months. The best thing writers can do to help editors during this period is to leave them in peace. Frequent phone calls are unlikely to be welcome.