



# HOW TO BECOME A PUBLISHED WRITER



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## How to Become a Published Writer

This guide has been created to assist you in tailoring your work for the publishing market. It provides 'how to' resources that will help you navigate the ever-changing world of writing. *How to Become a Published Writer* is a practical outline for Mississippi writers to work their way through the complex processes in today's publishing markets. It offers tips and resources about crafting and submitting a manuscript. It also provides networking links to the literary community.

You are welcome to download the online version of this document from the website: [www.arts.state.ms.us](http://www.arts.state.ms.us).

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Write on!

## **Improving Your Writing Skills**

Have you always dreamed of being a successful writer, but wondered how to get started? The first objective is to sharpen your writing skills. This can be accomplished by attending conferences and community workshops.

WRITER'S CONFERENCES provide direct access to successful writers, publishers, and agents. Some sessions provided at conferences include critique of your work and writing exercises. For those willing to commit some time, a three-day or longer residency can immerse you in a writing environment.

Discover millions of resources and information at your fingertips by typing "writing conference" into Google or another search engine? Start by narrowing your search to conferences in your region. Then, research the colleges and universities throughout Mississippi. Specific sites to consider are:

- The Academy of American Poets ([www.poets.org/index.php](http://www.poets.org/index.php))
- Writers Conference and Centers (<http://writersconf.org>)
- Poets and Writers ([www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org))
- The Writing Life:  
[www.clarke.public.lib.ga.us/pathfinders/writing/writinglife.html](http://www.clarke.public.lib.ga.us/pathfinders/writing/writinglife.html))

Community workshops offered across Mississippi are attended by people just like you, beginners and not-so-beginners, who love to be with other writers and talk about writing. Participants in a critique group read each other's work, discuss ideas, and offer valuable advice. Experienced writers often participate in these sessions and are willing to share their knowledge.

Some community workshops are devoted to readings such as "LAOS" (Local Artists on Stage) where participants read their work in a coffeehouse setting. These events serve as gathering places for local literary communities and they offer guidance, support, and potentially rewarding connections. This is also a way to find out what the public thinks of your work.

Reading series come in all shapes and sizes. Some take place in bookstores or libraries, others in less conventional literary venues such as parks, community or religious centers. Experience levels can range from established to unpublished writers. Often these events serve as the area's literary community gathering point. For information regarding reading series and schedules, check the calendar section of the local newspaper, search online, or just start asking around. To post your event(s) on the Mississippi Arts Commission's Website calendar, go to: <http://www.arts.state.ms.us/calendar/index.php>.

Contact local writers' groups to learn more about the community workshops in your area. To get assistance in finding writing groups contact the Mississippi Arts Commission: Diane Williams, (601) 359-6529 or [dwilliams@arts.state.ms.us](mailto:dwilliams@arts.state.ms.us).

## **Editing Tips – Preparing the Manuscript**

Once the words appear on the page, you have to get on with the editing. Here are some tips that can get you on the right path.

1. REWRITE! Revise your writing several times to make sure it presents well on paper
2. PROOFREAD. Read, re-read and be sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors.
3. READ your work aloud. It will help you catch small mistakes. Concentrate on the tone and rhythm of your work.
4. LET the piece sit for a while. Sometimes the best revisions occur after you have had a period of time and distance from the work. Then re-read with fresh eyes.
5. PREPARE your work in a presentable fashion. Type it on clean paper with standard type fonts and margins. Every market or contest has its own specific formatting rules – follow the guidelines carefully.
6. ARRANGE your submission in a clear and effective manner. Often, the order can influence how the body of work reads.
7. CRITIQUE. Have someone else read your work. You might find someone in a writer's group or workshop. You may have a reliable friend, mentor, or teacher. Choose someone you can trust to be honest and thoughtful about your writing. It may help to have several people look over each draft. A good critique will address such issues as your work's grammar, plot, style, and overall effectiveness.
8. CONSIDER hiring a professional editor. Investigate your options and check the credentials of the copyeditor before you hire them. Editors often work with only one aspect of your work. For example:
  - Substantive Editing – dealing with clarity of subject, logic and consistency, sentence analysis and syntax.
  - Copyediting – Line by line, grammar and punctuation, sentence structure, passive voice, word choice, consistency of details, spelling, consistency of style, and clarity.
  - Proofreading – Details missed in editing stages: spelling, punctuation, stylistic, serious grammatical errors in heading/footer, widow/orphan, bad hyphen breaks, etc.

Good starting places are:

- Editorial Freelancers Association ([www.the-efa.org](http://www.the-efa.org))
- Copy Editor ([www.copyeditor.com](http://www.copyeditor.com))

## **Publishing – the Writer’s Market**

Once you feel confident with your writing, you might want to market it. For short pieces, you can contact magazines and journals directly with your queries. For longer pieces, such as novels, you will need to find an agent for professional publishing houses, or consider self-publishing.

Mississippi has many magazines and literary journals across the state eager to showcase local authors, especially if your work is short and of local interest. These are good markets for beginners.

Most major publishing houses require writers to be represented by an agent. Finding an agent is difficult, but may be easier once you establish a reputation. You might meet an agent at a writers’ group or through a fellow writer. There are websites that purport to help you find an agent. Good luck!

1. CHOOSE A MARKET. Your favorite magazine might just be the place to start. Be sure your submission fits their style and genre. If you have a specialized subject, you usually can find magazines on that subject at a local bookstore, or online. Here are just a few sources:
  - Horror Writers Association ([www.horror.org](http://www.horror.org))
  - Romance Writers of America ([www.rwanational.org](http://www.rwanational.org))
  - Mystery Writers of America ([www.mysterywriters.org](http://www.mysterywriters.org))
  - Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America, Inc. ([www.sfwa.org](http://www.sfwa.org))
  - Society of Children’s Book Writers & Illustrators ([www.scbwi.org](http://www.scbwi.org))
2. EXCELLENT RESOURCES for locating specific writing markets are writer’s directories. Examples of widely used resources such as *Writer’s Market*, *Novel and Short Story Writer’s Market*, and *Poet’s Market*, can be found in local bookstores or libraries. The directories list journals and presses that publish new writers, where they are located, and whether or not they pay contributing writers.
3. LITERARY JOURNALS are another place to find information. Most journals have a webpage and some publish exclusively online. The online journal may have an archive of past issues where previous contributors’ works may be read to get a sense of what the journal will publish. The website usually posts submission guidelines, contest information, and contact information.
4. QUERY THE MARKET. Unsolicited work often ends up not being reviewed. Learn how to write good query letters and to target publications specializing in your work. Some magazines look for a particular category/genre of writing: work from a certain state or region, by specific age groups, by new writers, or concerning a particular theme or context.
5. Consider these sources for magazine prospects:
  - Council of Literary Magazines and Presses ([www.clmp.org](http://www.clmp.org))
  - Duotrope’s Digest ([www.duotrope.com](http://www.duotrope.com))
  - NewPages ([www.newpages.com/npguides/litmags\\_online.htm](http://www.newpages.com/npguides/litmags_online.htm))

- Poets & Writers (<http://www.pw.org/magazine>)

### **Creating a Cover Letter to Publishers**

1. FOLLOW the specific directions required by the publisher. Each publisher has rules concerning simultaneous submissions, page count, font and format. This information can be found on the publisher's website, in an issue of the magazine, journal or by contacting the editor.
2. ADDRESS your cover letter to the editor of the genre to which you are submitting. If at all possible use the person's name. Your submission may very well make it to the editor's desk. Be sure to let the editor know that you enjoy reading the publication.
3. INCLUDE a short bio, a list of previous publications (if you have them), titles of the pieces you are sending, your contact information, and whether you are sending simultaneous submissions to other publishers. CHECK the simultaneous submission policy before submitting dual submissions of the same work. Some publishers will not review work that is under consideration by others. Some editors request a brief description of your work written in just a few sentences. Do not include this information unless requested. The best cover letters are short and concise (one page).
4. THE TONE of the cover letter should reflect the tone of the writing sample. Do not write a humorous cover letter to introduce a serious submission.
5. PROOFREAD AND EDIT. Read and reread to make sure there are no mistakes in spelling and sentence structure in your cover letter.
6. SEND only the requested number of pages or manuscripts. Pay attention to mandatory word limitations. Most magazines will want to see only one story at a time, though many will consider three to five poems submissions.
7. MAIL your submission unfolded in a large envelope with the correct amount of postage so that receipt of your work will be acknowledged. You may choose to place a SASE (Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope) or postcard for them to acknowledge your work. More and more publishers are now doing this over the Internet.
8. DOCUMENT and track where you have submitted your work (include the titles, dates, and locations). It may take a journal several months to respond. If your poem or story is accepted by a publisher, immediately contact the other publishers to withdraw your submission.
9. FINALLY: Once you have submitted your work, expect to wait before receiving a response. If accepted, review the rights to your work before agreeing to have it published. If rejected, wait a couple of months before sending more work to the same publication, but do not hesitate to send your work elsewhere. Many wonderful manuscripts are rejected several times before they are taken seriously by another publisher.

## **Copyrighting Your Original Work**

For more information regarding copyrights for creative work, Library of Congress numbers and ISBN numbers:

- National Writers Union ([www.nwu.org](http://www.nwu.org))
- U.S. Copyright Office (<http://www.copyright.gov/faq.html>)
- Writer's Write® Resource Link ([www.writerswrite.net/websrch3.cfm?search-copyright](http://www.writerswrite.net/websrch3.cfm?search-copyright))

## **Agents**

MANY PUBLISHERS (Specifically of fiction and non-fiction) will not read unsolicited manuscripts. This may be because they require authors to use the services of an agent. The most effective way to find a good agent is through word-of-mouth. Ask other writers, teachers, and mentors if they can suggest a successful, reputable agent for your work. Another option is to research the agents your favorite authors use. There are also many websites that will provide information about agents who will help represent your work.

- Writing.org ([www.writing.org/html/a\\_agents.htm](http://www.writing.org/html/a_agents.htm))
- WritersNet ([www.writers.net](http://www.writers.net))
- WritersMarket.com ([www.writersmarket.com](http://www.writersmarket.com))

## **Self-Publishing**

Self-publishing is a viable alternative to traditional publishing houses, but you must be willing to promote your book. However, this is generally true even if published by a traditional publishing house. Many find self-publishing surprisingly inexpensive and that it meets their needs.

Local community groups can direct you to reputable self-publishing houses. Books on self-publishing can be found at your local libraries or bookstores. *The Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Work*, by author, Dan Poynter, is just one resource.

Do your homework first. Compare what each self-publishing house offers. Don't be discouraged because you don't know the language. As you compare what self-publishing houses offer, you learn the differences. Take your time, don't be too anxious and you will make an informed decision you will be pleased with.

## **Vanity Presses**

If your interest is in a small or specific audience, self-publishing might be the way to go. Nevertheless, avoid vanity or "subsidy" presses. These presses hold authors responsible for all costs, while aiding very little with marketing or placement. Further information regarding vanity presses can be found at:

- Poemtree ([www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter09.htm](http://www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter09.htm))
- Aeonix Publishing ([www.aeonix.com/vanity.htm](http://www.aeonix.com/vanity.htm))

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

For answers about the publishing world, there is information on Poemtree's website relating to:

Hiring an agent ([www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter03.htm](http://www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter03.htm))

Copyright ([www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter04.htm](http://www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter04.htm))

Magazine Submissions ([www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter05.htm](http://www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter05.htm))

Where to Submit your Writing ([www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter06.htm](http://www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter06.htm))

Trunk Press ([www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter07.htm](http://www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter07.htm))

What is a Publishing ([www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter08.htm](http://www.poemtree.com/Jerome/Publishing-Chapter08.htm))

## **Grants and Awards**

If you are looking for monetary assistance to continue your writing, you might want to apply for grant money and awards.

- Academy of American Poets ([www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/61](http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/61))
- Creative Capital Foundation (<http://creative-capital.org>)
- Funds for Writers ([www.fundsforwriters.com](http://www.fundsforwriters.com))
- Mississippi Arts Commission ([www.arts.state.ms.us/grants/for-individuals.php](http://www.arts.state.ms.us/grants/for-individuals.php))
- Pen American Center ([www.pen.org/page.php/prmID/1351](http://www.pen.org/page.php/prmID/1351))
- Poets & Writers ([www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org))

Use your favorite Internet search engine to learn efficient ways to research additional opportunities.

## **Contests**

One way to gain professional experience in by writing is to enter contests. There is a multiplicity of community, regional and national contests. Always investigate a contest's reputation before paying any entry fees. You can find sources for contests on the Internet, in writing magazines, in journals, or by consulting members of your local writer's group.

A CHAPBOOK is a small collection of poetry (approximately half the size of an average collection). It is a great way to start publishing. Many small publishing presses run annual chapbook contests. Here is just a few of the resources that you might find:

- Open Directory Projects [www.dmoz.org/Arts/Writers\\_Resources/Contests Poetry Magazine](http://www.dmoz.org/Arts/Writers_Resources/Contests_Poetry_Magazine)  
[http://www.pw.org/content/grants\\_amp\\_awards\\_your\\_guide\\_writing contests](http://www.pw.org/content/grants_amp_awards_your_guide_writing_contests)

For up to date information on grants, awards, and funding opportunities for writers, contact Diane Williams, Arts Industry Director, [dwilliams@arts.state.ms.us](mailto:dwilliams@arts.state.ms.us), at the Mississippi Arts Commission. The Commission will add your name to the program director's e-distribution list and you will receive periodic updates.

### **Additional Resources**

- Academy of American Poets ([www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org))
- American Society of Journalists & Authors ([www.asja.org](http://www.asja.org))
- Artslynx International Theatre Resources ([www.artslynx.org/theatre/](http://www.artslynx.org/theatre/))
- Authors Guild ([www.authorsguild.org](http://www.authorsguild.org))
- Contemporary Poetics Research Center ([www.bbk.ac.uk/cprc/](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/cprc/))
- Dust Books ([www.dustbooks.com](http://www.dustbooks.com))
- E Server Drama Collection (<http://drama.eserver.org/plays>)
- Electronic Poetry Center ([www.wings.buffalo.edu/epc/presses](http://www.wings.buffalo.edu/epc/presses))
- Fondren Theatre Workshop ([www.fondrentheatreworkshop.org](http://www.fondrentheatreworkshop.org))
- Gotham Writer's Workshops – online ([www.writingclasses.com](http://www.writingclasses.com))
- Gulf Coast Writers Association (<http://gcwriters.org/>)
- Horror Writers of America ([www.horror.org](http://www.horror.org))
- Jabberwock Review ([www.msstate.edu/org/jabberwock/](http://www.msstate.edu/org/jabberwock/))
- Mississippi Humanities Council (<http://www.mshumanities.org/pages/>)
- Mississippi Review ([www.mississippireview.com/](http://www.mississippireview.com/))
- Mississippi Writer's Guild (<http://www.mississippiwritersguild.com/>)
- Mississippi Writers Page (<http://www.olemiss.edu/mwp/siteinfo.html>)
- Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute (<http://www.mwti.msstate.edu/>)
- Mystery Writers of America ([www.mysterywriters.org](http://www.mysterywriters.org))
- National Novel Writing Month (<http://www.nanowrimo.org/>) – November
- National Poetry Foundation (<http://www.nationalpoetryfoundation.org/>)
- Northstar Think Tank ([www.selfpublishing-biz.com](http://www.selfpublishing-biz.com))
- Novelists, Inc. ([www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com))
- Poetry Daily ([www.poetrydaily.org](http://www.poetrydaily.org))
- Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org))
- Poetry & Literary Magazines, Journals, Ezines – 2008  
(<http://www.fglaysheer.com/LitLinks.htm>)
- Poetry Society of America ([www.poetrysociety.org](http://www.poetrysociety.org))
- Publishing Game ([www.thepublishinggame.com](http://www.thepublishinggame.com))
- Publishing Game/Agents  
([www.thepublishinggame.com/art\\_howtofindaliteraryagent.htm](http://www.thepublishinggame.com/art_howtofindaliteraryagent.htm))
- Romance Writers of America ([www.rwanational.org](http://www.rwanational.org))
- Science Fiction & Fantasy Writer's of America ([www.sfwaw.org](http://www.sfwaw.org))
- Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators ([www.scbwi.org](http://www.scbwi.org))
- Soc. of Children's Book Writers & Illus. /Reg. Chap. ([www.southern-breeze.org](http://www.southern-breeze.org))
- Southern Quarterly ([www.usm.edu/~soq/](http://www.usm.edu/~soq/))
- Theatre communications Group (<http://tcg.org/>)
- University Press of Mississippi ([www.upress.state.ms.us/](http://www.upress.state.ms.us/))
- Valley Voices, Literary Review, 14000 Hwy 82 W, #7242, Itta Bena, MS 38941
- VOX Press ([www.voxjournal.com](http://www.voxjournal.com))
- Western Writers of America, Inc. ([www.westernwriters.org](http://www.westernwriters.org))
- Winning Writers ([www.winningwriters.com](http://www.winningwriters.com))

- Women Playwright's Initiative ([www.womenplaywrights.com](http://www.womenplaywrights.com))
- Writer's Guild of America ([www.wgaeast.org/](http://www.wgaeast.org/))
- Yalobusha Review ([www.olemiss.edu/yalobusha/](http://www.olemiss.edu/yalobusha/))

## Mississippi Arts Commission

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The mission of the Mississippi Arts Commission is to be a catalyst for the arts in Mississippi. Our vision is to support and celebrate Mississippi's creative spirit.

For information on the Mississippi Arts Commission's programs and services, contact:

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