

# CJ's Writer Thoughts

## Where to Begin:

Writers often ask me where they should start in trying to get their manuscript published.

I always tell them, I am no expert. I used the hunt-and-peck method, because I didn't know how to begin, who to ask, or where I should start. But I am glad to share a few things I learned by trial and error to get you started.

One of the first things I always suggest is, get your work (and your name) *out there*. Join some writer groups and communities online and post your work. And if you ever hope to be published, for heaven's sake, *use your own name*.

If you hope to sell your books someday, you want your work, and your name, to be *recognized*. How else will anyone know what you've written?

The web is full of excellent writing by cutsie pen names like "fluffy kitten" or "Pearl Onion", but it isn't professional, or wise, especially if they ever want to publish under their real name at some point. No one will know who they are ...

There are many writing communities online, but a few of my favorite ones are Authors Den (fiction, non-fiction, essays, articles, poetry), PoemHunter (poems, lyrics), and the Arcanum Café (mostly poetry).

Most offer critiquing of your work by other writers, with helpful suggestions as to how to make necessary changes. Of course, you should also read and critique the work of other writers, in return. I've read some excellent writing through these communities and I've also made some lasting friendships.

Another step that will get your work and your name noticed: create a website to showcase your work. There are many sites online that offer to host free websites. Often they have different looks and designs to pick from and, with a few choices on your part, your site will be up and running in just a few minutes.

Once you have your website set up, submit the URL to search engines, link it to a blog you may have, or put the link to it on your page in communities like Facebook. Again, you want to gain as much visibility for you and your work as you can.

Okay, you've posted your work at writing communities and you have a website, or blog. And you're getting some excellent feedback from both. Now it's time to decide if this is enough for you.

Are you satisfied, merely having a nice following, or do you still want to be published so bad that you can taste it?

If you answered 'yes' to the above question, then the next step is to go to a bookstore either in your community, or online. Invest in a copy of the Writer's Digest book that applies to the particular type of work you do.

You'll find Writer's Digest books for poetry, fiction and non-fiction, memoirs, and so on. They also have one for children's writers and illustrators. These books come out once a year and they will be like a Bible to you for facts and information, i.e., where and how to send your work to magazines, periodicals and

publishers.

When it comes to submitting your manuscript to publishers, be careful. *Always read their rules* for submissions. Each publisher is specific in how they want to be approached by writers.

Some only want agented material, so you'll have to forgo those, unless you want to take the time to try and get an agent. (There are Writers Digest books geared to getting an agent, as well).

Some publishers will only accept *exclusive* manuscript submissions. This means you send your manuscript *only to them* and then wait for them to either accept, or reject, your work for publication. It can take anywhere from three to six months to hear back from them ... and there are some cases where it takes even longer ... and still other cases where you won't hear back -- at all.

There are also a few who require you to submit a query letter first. If they are interested in hearing more, based on what you said in your query, they will *invite you* to send your manuscript.

Here's a little heads up about manuscripts and submissions:

Never send your original manuscript, only a copy.

Always make sure it's spell-checked.

Always double space.

Put the word count in the top right corner.

If the publisher says *no staples* ... they mean *no staples*. Use a clip.

Always include a SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope), or you will *never* hear from them.

Nothing will get your precious manuscript trashed faster than sloppy work, spelling errors, and *not following their rules*. Again, each publisher is *very specific* with their submission guidelines. Refer to your Writers Digest book (your submission Bible) for every publisher you send to.

The competition is fierce these days. Publishers can have three-foot piles of manuscript submissions, sometimes monthly. Believe me, I've seen the piles.

They get so many manuscripts, they can afford to be picky. But don't worry, most of the information you'll need is explained somewhere in the Writers Digest book you buy. There are also interesting articles and interviews peppered throughout, so you actually gain a lot by buying a copy.

I've left one of the most important steps until last. Edit, edit, edit.

Cut out all unnecessary dialogue, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, anything not crucial to the story, as well as any obvious fillers. Read your manuscript out loud. See how it sounds. Edit.

Read it out loud to others and get their opinions. Edit again.

When you've edited, edit again, and then again. Read it aloud to yourself and others one last time, before taking it to the post office.

I know this seems extreme, but if *you* don't tighten it up, be assured, their editors *will* -- and your finished book might not end up the way you want it to be.

That's about it. I'm sure I've forgotten a few things worth mentioning, but at least you have a guide to getting started. If you have any questions, you can always email me. I will be happy to help in any way I can.

Just one more thing. If you're like me, you'll get a pile of rejections, before you get that one 'yes', but that's okay! Don't take it personally -- if you joined those writing communities I mentioned above, you will be somewhat used to having your work scrutinized.

But also keep in mind that a rejection might only mean that what you sent to that particular publisher on that particular day wasn't what they were looking for at that particular time. You may have sent the ultimate best story about a little purple duck, when they were looking for one about a green pony. They never tell you.

You can't wear your feelings on your sleeve. **Be persistent and persevere.** Remember, it only takes one 'yes' and you're published.

I wish you success!