

The 5 Big Mistakes Most Writers Make When Trying to Get Published...

And How YOU Can Completely Avoid Them!



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Are you an aspiring author having a hard time uncovering the straight story about getting successfully published?

If so, you've come to the right place because you're going to read about aspects of the publishing experience that are not often discussed in a truthful, informative way.

Whether a traditional publisher is producing your book, or you are striking out on your own as a self-publisher, the final product is indeed a sheer labor of love.

But that's not all you want, is it?

You want your book to be SUCCESSFUL. You want people to buy your book, to read your book, to love your book—and you want to MAKE MONEY.

It takes a lot of effort to make that happen. Unfortunately, many writers trip themselves up with mistakes they could have easily avoided. I've been through it and I'm glad that I can share my experiences with you.

How to Get the Most Out of This Report

- **Throw out your preconceived notions of what it means to be published.** That also means tone down as much as possible on the high emotions you may be feeling. I know the book is "your baby", but some decisions must be made with a business mind and not a writer's heart.

- **Keep asking yourself, “How important is this book to me?”** As I said before, this takes a lot of effort. And you thought writing the book was hard! You really have to know how far you are willing to go in terms of time, money and energy to make your book a success.
- **Take notes.** We are writers, after all! So keep writing as you read this report. Taking notes will help you stay focused, plus by the end of the report you will have the beginnings of a solid action plan for your publishing adventure.
- **Ask questions.** It helps to have someone in your corner to bounce ideas off of. Have a mentor, a support group or a writing buddy. And, of course, The Book Sistah is on your side. E-mail me and I’ll address your issue in my newsletter, “Ask The Book Sistah!”

Okay, are you ready? Let’s tackle these pesky Publishing Mistakes!

Cheers,

Sophronia

Sophronia Scott
“The Book Sistah”



**Mistake #1:
Not Being Open to the Editing Process**

Editors and editing are getting a bad rap—they have been for years. Writers think that unless their words sail through the editing process unscathed, they have failed somehow as authors. Or worse, they take everything personally and feel that they bleed with every stroke of the editor's red pen.

In fact, the editing process can be a freeing exercise for both the writer and the book. Usually at this point in the process—when the book has been sold and already exists in some draft form—the writer is often sick of the work and can't stand to look at it again. You might be all out of ideas and all out of steam.

That's where the editor comes in, armed with a fresh eye and fresh ideas. A good editor can see the missing parts of a book. Or she might see a neglected passage or character that could be developed into a major force in the story.

There is a catch to this: While you can't take things personally, you do have to know your work well enough to know when to say yes and when to say no to an editor's suggestions. That takes confidence and an understanding of your craft.

You might have to ask yourself how devoted you are to your book because a change the editor suggests might involve some serious work on your part.

In the original version of my first novel, my main character was married. Her husband was fairly prominent in the story, but even more prominent was an old boyfriend of hers. She still had lots of serious chemistry with this guy.

My editor suggested that we make the character single, dropping the husband character all together and telling the story of the relationship with the old boyfriend.

I knew immediately what she was talking about. The parts of the book with the boyfriend had even been easier to write, that's how much energy was in those pages. But dropping the husband character meant rewriting the entire present day storyline, plus creating new story around the boyfriend. We're talking about 100 pages of work in all.

It would have been easy for me to be overwhelmed by the task, but I was committed to the story and I saw how these changes would give me a much better book, so I went for it.

The changes paid off: to this day, the boyfriend is one of the most talked-about characters in the book. And my readers loved the romantic aspect of the story. If I had not been open to the suggestion and to the extra work, this opportunity would have been lost.

Before submitting your manuscript for editing, make a list of notes for yourself.

- **Which parts of the book do you consider to be the weakest?** They might be the parts where you felt you were

flying by the seat of your pants while you were writing it, or you just knew you were patching it up until something better came along.

- **What characters would you be willing to cut if you had to?**

Make a few notes on what you would have to do if you did cut someone. You might delete a character, but his dialogue is crucial to the storyline. How will you make up for that missing dialogue?

- **Which plot lines could use a better idea if you had one?**

- **What would you add to the book if you had the chance?**

You might be surprised to find that your editor will pick up on exactly the things you felt insecure about anyway. The list will help you to see that you were already thinking along those lines so the editor's comments won't come as a total shock to you. They may even feel like welcome solutions!

Mistake #2:

Missing Deadlines

The minute you sign on the dotted line there's a deadline. You may already know that, but many writers don't know this: you only get part of your advance when you sign the contract. You don't get the rest until you deliver the finished manuscript.

That's simple enough and you would think that would be motivation enough to complete your book on time, but it is amazing how many writers do miss their deadlines.

I would read about these situations with shocking regularity, usually in the New York Times. A writer would sign a contract and then be months, sometimes years, beyond their deadline.

I didn't understand it—there were so many writers out there desperate for book contracts. It just didn't make sense not to follow through once you got one.

Then a few years ago, when a major corporation gobbled up a fairly large publishing concern, the corporation sent shockwaves through the industry by cleaning house. It cancelled the contracts for all books that were past their deadlines! There were a few big name authors in the mix as well. Talk about putting the fear of God into the industry!

To me that was the scariest part of getting published: I was scared to death of missing my deadline. I knew I had to prioritize and be disciplined in major ways. Here's how you can do it.

- **Get clear with your editor about the amount of work that needs to be done on the manuscript.**
- **Map out on a calendar your workdays.** Be honest with yourself about how long it will take you. Leave time for the manuscript to “rest” so you can re-read it and make more changes before you turn it in.
- **Make appointments with yourself to work.**
- **Keep your editor up to date on your progress.**
- **Put all other assignments aside.**

**Mistake #3:
Making Weak Cover Choices**

Authors can get very emotional about the covers of their books. And rightfully so: your book is an artistic expression, whether it is fiction or non-fiction, and the cover is the reader's first encounter with that expression.

But the cover is something else as well: it's your first opportunity to make a business decision concerning your book. You can't tell a book by its cover, but you can certainly sell one (or thousands) because of it!

Unfortunately, many authors allow this to become a bone of contention between themselves and the publisher. They want refusal rights, or they want someone they know to do the artwork, or they want their name in huge type above the title despite being an unknown. It's interesting how many times I've been asked, "Did you have any say in your cover choice?" especially when they learn that the cover of my first novel features the photo of a woman who looks nothing like the main character in the book.

"Yes, I did," I tell them. "And I love the cover." Here's why.

There was an earlier version of the cover and I liked that one as well. It showed the face of a beautiful woman and the images of two men behind her. The background was green and the title and my name were in this wonderful black Art Deco font.

But then I heard from my editor, "The marketing department wants a stronger cover." I didn't understand, I thought this one was fine, but I was open to seeing what the art department would come up with next.

The new cover had me seeing red—literally. It was all red and the image of the woman was now full length and she wore a slinky red dress. I saw immediately what the marketing department meant by a stronger cover.

This red beauty would pop from the bookshelf. It captured the eye with both the color and the attractiveness of the woman. I didn't care that she didn't look like the character. Readers would pick up this book and I knew they would buy.

My thoughts were confirmed when, after the book was in stores, I heard from a high school classmate whom I hadn't seen in years. He wrote to me and told me he had been in a bookstore shopping and had been drawn to a red book by the pretty woman on the cover. It wasn't until the book was in his hands that he realized that it was my book! Yes!

Now this isn't to say that a publisher can't be wrong sometimes. I had a friend who ended up designing his own cover (and a great one too) because his publisher's art department kept coming up with wrong concepts. They just didn't "get" his book.

What I am saying is give them the benefit of the doubt. In most cases, the people doing the work have been selling books their whole careers so they know a thing or two about what they're doing.

If you're self publishing and the chore of designing your own cover is in your hands, here are a few things to keep in mind. If you're publishing through the traditional route, these tips can help you evaluate your art department's handiwork:

- **Go to a bookstore and do a survey of book covers.** It's better if you look at the new books section because those are usually all displaying with the covers facing out. What colors stand out the most? Are there photos or drawings on the cover? What kinds of fonts are used?
- **Hover for a bit and notice which books people are picking up the most.** Then get your hands on those books and really study them. What is it about the covers that draws your eye? When I did this exercise, I was pleased to learn that my publisher did the book being chosen the most! The same artist ended up designing my cover as well.
- **Take notes on the covers you like and what you like about them.** If you're being published through a traditional publisher, share this information with your editor and ask her to pass it along to the art department. If you're publishing your book yourself, share this information with the person creating your cover. While your cover won't be an exact copy, of course, you will be more likely to approve of what is presented to you because you will have a sense of having had input.

**Mistake #4:
Starting Your Marketing Too Late**

Your book is coming sooner than you think! If you're self publishing, it could be ready in just weeks. If you're using a publisher, your book's galleys (or review copies) will be ready 6-8 months before your publication date.

And check this out: Your book could be listed on Amazon.com as early as eight months before it is shipped and appears in stores! That means people can pre-order it and receive it hot off the presses when it's ready. You don't have to be J.K. Rowling with the latest Harry Potter book to have advance sales!

But if you aren't aware of any of this you could be missing key opportunities to make your book successful right out of the starting block. If you can show that your book has strong advance sales, it will make bookstores want to stock it because they see that people want it.

Having your own review copies of your book will help as well. This is the time when you start sending it out to other authors and "known notables" to collect those glowing blurbs that go on the back of your book. Your publishing house can print these reviews in its catalog and it's another way to help distributors see that yours is a book they should stock.

Here's how you can best take advantage of the time before your book is born.

- **Know your production calendar.** Get dates from your editor of when galleys will be available, when the catalog featuring your book will be printed and, of course, the publication date of your book. When is the last possible moment you can submit a blurb? If you're self publishing, create your own production calendar and plan accordingly.
- **Start an e-newsletter** (also known as an ezine) to let people know about your work and your upcoming book. You can use it to encourage those advance sales. An ezine is one of the best marketing devices available and you can produce one for little or no cost. My friend Alexandria Brown, "The Ezine Queen," has taught thousands of small business owners how to do just that. Check out her "Boost Business With Your Own Ezine" system. It tells you step-by-step how to publish, grow, and profit from a simple ezine that you can send out as little as once a month! Learn more and get her free report, "The 3 Simple Secrets to Publishing an Ezine That Makes You Money," now by clicking [here](#).
- **Get freelance assignments.** Now is a great time to write articles and publish a byline that says you "are the author of the forthcoming book..."
- **Get copies of your galleys and carry them everywhere!** Ask for blurbs whenever and wherever you can. You never know whom you're going to meet. I happened to be at the car wash one day and I met the rapper Ice-T! He was waiting in line with me. I told him about my book and gave him a copy. Another time I met a woman who happened to be good friends with the author E. Lynn Harris and she passed my book on to him. Who

knows if anything will come of these connections, but in one instance I had a photo taken of me giving my book to the actor Hugh Jackman. Well, I haven't heard from Hugh since, but I've gotten a lot of mileage out of having our picture on my website!

Mistake #5:**Not Being Clear About What You Want Out of Your Book & Budgeting Accordingly**

How will you assess whether or not your published book has been a success? Many writers would answer, "Well, when it makes the New York Times Bestseller list, of course." But it is highly unlikely that's going to happen, especially if you are a first time author and there are only going to be 10,000 copies of your book in print.

There are exceptions—"The Lovely Bones" for instance—but how likely will it be that you can generate that kind of buzz for your book? Even if you could, that doesn't guarantee success either. Kurt Andersen, a very big name in the writing business and co-founder of "Spy" magazine published his first novel, "Turn of the Century", to much buzz and fanfare. It was called "a blockbuster" debut. Did it sell well? No.

But if Kurt Andersen had decided that his book would be a success if it were well regarded, well reviewed and appeared on a few top ten lists, then he could call it a big success.

Why is it important to think about what you want for your book? Well, publishing a book is a great thing. Not many people get to do it. And

because of that you might have wildly romantic visions of what your life will be like after you publish your book.

Here's some news: after you publish, life goes on pretty much as it did before. Your book will not necessarily be a big life-changing event. And if that's what you've built it up to be, you will be sorely disappointed.

However you can still be wildly happy with the process and the results. Here's how you do it:

- **Assess your situation and set realistic goals for yourself.** Ideally these will be goals that will help you feel good about the process and motivate you for your next project. For instance, your goal might be to build a readership so you can be assured of an audience for your next book. Or, if you are self-publishing, you might have a goal of catching the eye of a traditional publisher and selling the rights.
- **Ask yourself: Is this about publishing "a book" or "books"?** Some authors know they only have one book in them. They want to get their story out there and that's it. Others know they want to develop a writing career. Your goals will differ depending on how you answer this question.
- **How do you see your writing career shaping up?** It's okay to dream big, but don't forget to plan as well. What do you need to make your fantasy happen? If your dream is to have a New York Times bestseller, what kind of book would you have to write that would warrant a huge press run that could generate huge sales? Maybe that will be your second book, but what can you do with your current book to help you take big steps toward that

goal? Perhaps this first book will help you find an agent (or a better one). Maybe your talent will attract the attention of someone who could offer you the chance to ghostwrite an A-list celebrity's biography. Anything can happen!

And now, the REALLY big question: how much are you willing to spend to make these goals happen? Yes, spend. Authors often have to put out their own funds. Self-published writers already know this, but authors published by the big name companies may be taken by surprise.

Possible expenses include travel, advertising and the services of a publicist. I funded my own 12-city "tour" visiting books clubs that had read my novel. I also hired a publicist for the better part of a year. These were large investments, but my goal was to build a readership for my future writing career. I felt the best way for me to do that was for people to experience me firsthand. My efforts were successful because I have the sales to show for it.

If you don't know your goals and how much you're willing to spend, you will be stumped (or shocked) every time someone gives you an estimate or price for what you want to buy. When you do know, it will be easier to say, "No, that's too much." Remember, it's not about what others have paid; it's about what YOU are willing to pay.

Conclusion

We have covered so much ground here. I know it may seem overwhelming, especially after you've already spent considerable time and energy producing that labor of love, your book. You would think your job would be done!

Well, that part of your job is done. The part where you act as your book's best advocate is just beginning. If you go into it well informed, the process can be easy and fun! After all, you just spent months all alone in your room typing up the book. Now you get to go out, be in front of people, TALK to them about your book and enjoy the fruits of your efforts. How great is that?

And I know it can seem like the whole publishing process is this big scary mystery over which you have no control. I hope you have learned here that there are key moments where you do have control—and plenty of choices. Being prepared and making those choices will make all the difference in producing your book in the way you find most satisfying.

Like the saying goes, "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail." I will always have plenty of tools available to help you plan well. Here's how you can use me to your best advantage:

- Make sure you read my newsletter "**Ask The Book Sistah!**" every **Tuesday** for great information on publishing and lots of tips to help you have a more satisfying writing life. You'll also be the first to learn about my



newest resources that will include reports, workshops and teleclasses with publishing insiders to assist you in your writing career.

- **Send me questions!** E-mail me at sscott@TheBookSistah.com. I will answer your questions in the newsletter and that way everyone can benefit from the information.

Good luck on your journey. If you get stuck, remember you can always ask **The Book Sistah!**

About the Author

Sophronia Scott, "The Book Sistah", has over fifteen years of experience as a professional writer. She honed her craft working with some of the best (and toughest) editors in the world during her career at "Time" and "People" magazines.



She published her first novel, "All I Need to Get By" with St. Martin's Press and Sophronia was hailed by no less than Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as potentially "one of the best writers of her generation."

Sophronia holds a bachelor's degree in English from Harvard. She is also a professional life coach, having graduated from Coach U. She has coached dozens of clients to satisfying life and career decisions through her company, Creative Coaching Plans. Sophronia is a member of the Author's Guild, the Women's National Book Association, the International Coach Federation, and the Association of Writers and Writing Programs.

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