

Getting a Good Review for Your Literary Work

By Elizabeth Lucas-Taylor

The review process is one of the most important functions of marketing your book and the process begins early. Reviews are a reviewer's honest response to your work and it is important for you to provide as much information as you can to a reviewer to get a favorable response.

A comprehensive review can be anywhere from 100 to 1000 words in length and will/should include at least one quoted passage from your reviewed work by the reviewer. From this review, you will be able to extract a favorable "blurb" to use in your advertising.

When you send a book off for review, you will never know for sure whether your work will be reviewed well, or if it will be given a write-up which is completely off the mark and unrecognizable. Unfortunately, this does happen. And in the beginning, you will make judgment errors as to where you send your books for review. Here is an understanding of how and why reviewers do what they do and how you can ensure your book has the best possible chance of being given the best review.

1. Start early, at least 3-4 months before your book is due to hit the market. Provide an Advanced Readers Copy [ARC] to your reviewer. This is a pre-publication copy, which should include the publication date, cover art, and a description of the finished book; and the price should be included with the promotional material, as well as being clearly marked ARC. Pre-publication copies ensures the review is completed in a timely manner to join with the rest of your book promotion efforts. These pre-publication copies can also be bound galleys from your publisher if your publisher provides them.
2. Some websites and reviewers prefer a hard copy. This isn't always possible so early in the production of your book. Ask if you can send an ARC, and replace it with a hard copy later on, if needed. The reason is that review copies are often auctioned off for a charitable cause, or used in drawings, or incentives, etc. ARC's can also be used in the same way, so be sure to autograph your ARC's as you would a book.
3. Be aware that all books submitted, which don't have a return address and the publisher's or author's name, or are no longer available in print, or are available only in a limited geographical area are eliminated from a reviewer's list right off the mark, unless the reviewer's guidelines state otherwise. Do be reasonable in your expectations. Your book review need to be done in a timely manner. It's hard for a reviewer, at their own time and expense, to justify promoting a book in the trades when people can't buy it or it is no longer available.

Note: Because of the proliferation of used book sites/sales and re-issues by publishers, and Amazon and others re-sales websites, this rule is changing. Always check reviewer guidelines to be sure. When in doubt...ask.

4. If you send a disk, give some clue on the disk label as to its format, title, etc. Label it correctly, and neatly, and so it is legible. Computer software varies from reviewer to reviewer and country to country and there are viruses to consider, as well as security protection. Publishing houses also vary greatly in their formats. If a reviewer can't open and read your work, a reviewer can't very well review your work.
5. Next, reviewers weed out obvious rejects or books that don't fit within their guideline parameters. This is because of time constraints, not because your work doesn't have merit. Any press releases and other information you send along with your work in a neat, organized package are especially helpful, and this is probably the most important purpose of your promotional material. Convince the reviewer how good your work is.
6. A synopsis is very helpful to a reviewer. It is impossible to read all 300 to 500 pages of every book sent to be reviewed. What you send will be exactly what you want to see in a review anyway. If the press release or flyer is well written, it will help the reviewer give a more accurate and fair review of your work. Send a synopsis with your review material.

7. For poetry, give the theme and/or genre, and anything else, which sets your poetry book apart from others. Give a background of your complete body of work, contests won, publications, etc. The reviewer needs to know enough about your collection of work, and you, to get your potential readers [and reviewers] interested. Tell the reviewer where you are coming from. The reviewer wants to write a review, which will benefit you and your sales bottom line. Give as much information as you can in a brief, organized manner.
8. Send a thank you note to your reviewer. This is a professional courtesy to remember the people who helped you along the way. Every aspect of you and your book is linked to other people through shared experiences, good and bad. Chances are you will meet these folks again and again throughout your writing career. Don't burn bridges, especially if you do not get a favorable review. Be courteous at all times. It's the difference between 'those that get there', and 'those that don't'.
9. Each reviewer, magazine, and periodical has their own guidelines for submission. Read their instructions carefully, and follow them to the letter, so you make their 'keeper' pile.
10. Don't relax your standards or your courtesy after a single success. Each work should be better than the last. Reviewers take note of this in their reviews and they will remember you, your courtesy, and especially your lack of it.

Note: A review is not the same as a critique. Reviewing and critiquing are two different disciplines.

HOW TO MAKE AN ARC [author's review copy] :

Use an edited copy of your manuscript. It doesn't have to be the final version that ends up being the book, but it must be edited and error free if you want to insure a favorable review. You can print one side or both. Consider too how the pages will be flipped when read, and copy accordingly.

1. Open up a word processing document in Microsoft Word and go to the **'file'** tab on top. Click on it.
2. Scroll down to **'page setup'** and click on it. This brings up a menu. Click on **'paper size'**.
3. CHANGE paper size from Portrait to Landscape. Click on OK at the bottom of this window. Go to the **'format'** button and click on it. Scroll down under the format menu to **'columns'** and change the columns from one to two columns. Click on OK and close this window.
4. Cut and paste your manuscript document into this file, and single space.
5. Now, check each and every page of your manuscript and sort out the paragraph spacing and line breaks. You will have floater lines that need to be adjusted whenever you cut and paste such a large document.
6. Run a **spell check** on the entire document. When in doubt use a dictionary.
7. Print off a separate page for each from your word documents: author bio, publication credits, book blurbs, press releases, copies of flyers used to promote, and a short one or two page complete synopsis, in case the reviewer doesn't have time to read the whole book. Print these up separately, single column. Space/center/whatever so you have one document per page. These are to be inserted at the front of your ARC, after the cover. Colored paper is good. Use white paper for the actual manuscript.
8. Your publisher will provide you with a 'tif' color copy of your cover; have it printed up in color on heavy stock. [Download the information onto a floppy. This is what Kinko's will use to make up posters, covers, etc.] Re-page manuscript document as necessary. Start your ARC pagination with the first page of your story as page 1. It isn't necessary that each column be numbered, but that each page of the ms story line has a number. When printed out, check to make sure all the pages are there and in order. Very important.

9. Print out, assemble pages, and make sure all the pages are there, and in the correct order for each ARC. Make everything about your ARC as pristine and as neat as you can make it. In the front of your ARC, add a short bio, any press releases, publishing history if you have one, work in progress [WIP] if you have one, a synopsis of your work, and samples of flyers. Your ARC in its entirety is next.
10. Spiral or comb bind so the pages lay flat for ease of reading by the reviewer.
11. Make 10-12 copies of your manuscript. It doesn't have to be done all at once, but this will be the number of reviews you will strive for. If your book is POD, it has a longer shelf life than a traditionally published book, and you can continue getting interviews for the life of the book.
12. Autograph your ARC and mail it off to the first reviewer on your list that you've queried.

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