



**GHANA BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
(GBDC)**

**PUBLISHING A BOOK:
GUIDELINES FOR NEW
AUTHORS**

2020

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PUBLISHING A BOOK: GUIDELINES FOR NEW AUTHORS

Book publishing involves a number of significant processes. The first step is coming up with a book idea and moving on to plan, draft and then finalise the writing. An author or publisher may have the book idea. In the end the author puts this idea into writing and creates the manuscript for publication.

Some authors find it difficult to get their manuscripts published, hence this document is to give important guidelines to authors, especially new authors, on how to get their manuscripts published. There are two main ways for authors to get their manuscripts published; these are (i) traditional publishing and (ii) self-publishing.

1. **Traditional Publishing:** This is the conventional way of book publishing where after the author has finished writing the book, he/she takes it to a publisher. The publisher assesses the author's manuscript and decides whether to publish it or reject it. If the work is publishable, the publisher enters into a contract with the author. The publisher then takes the author's manuscript through the book production process. The transaction between the author and publisher could be in the following forms:

- i. **Outright Sale of Right:** The publisher buys the economic rights in the author's work. This means that, the publisher pays the author upfront, and owns the economic benefits which accrue from the sale of the book. The author still retains the "moral right" in the book. This means the writer must be mentioned as the author of the book at all times.
- ii. **Royalties:** The publisher takes up all cost of producing the book, and pays royalties in the form of a percentage on copies of books sold. The publisher sometimes makes an advance payment, especially during manuscript preparation and before sales.
- iii. **Vanity Publishing:** This is where an author pays the publisher to have the manuscript published. The books are offloaded to the author to do the marketing.

2. **Self-Publishing:** This is a type of publishing where the author acts as the publisher, and hires the services of an editor, typesetter, artist, proofreader, printer and booksellers to help produce and sell his or her work. A self-publishing author must adhere to the standards and guidelines governing book publishing.

This document mainly focuses on the traditional way authors can get their manuscripts published either in print or electronic form.

STEPS IN TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

The Writing Phase

It is always advisable to do some research on the publisher an author would want to publish with. This will help the author know the publisher's specialisation and interest in order to tailor his/her manuscript to suit the publisher's publishing programme. Some publishers have *Author Guides* which can be asked for and studied to help make choice of genre and theme to publish. In this way, authors do not get too many rejections when their manuscripts are done.

Publishers deal with two types of manuscripts: solicited and unsolicited. Solicited is when publishers develop the book idea and look for authors to write them. Unsolicited manuscripts, on the other hand, are the ones that are brought in by walk-in authors.

1. Determine the Target Readership

The author should first identify the target audience and the type of book he/she wishes to write. In other words, the author should be market-oriented rather than being product-oriented.

Literary works fall under two main categories — fiction and non-fiction.

- i. Fiction:* This is an imaginative piece of writing based solely on the author's imagination as well as events happening around.
- ii. Non-Fiction:* This genre is based on true life experiences and established facts. It could be a biography, memoir/autobiography, coursebook, humanities, science, etc.

2. Request for Publisher's House Style Manual

It is advisable for the author to request for the publisher's House Style Manual, if available. The publisher's House Style Manual is a document which details a set of instructions or guidelines a publishing house has outlined for authors and editors. This manual gives information on how the content or items in a manuscript should be presented before it is submitted to the publishing house.

The key to writing a good manuscript is to be consistent and clear; therefore, every publisher would expect that from authors. The manual usually spells out use of language, spellings, abbreviation and acronyms, presentation of date and time, font, style and formatting, etc.

3. Editing the Manuscript

If the author has not been in contact with any publisher prior to the writing, the manuscript should be well-edited before presenting it to a publisher. Sometimes, publishers reject manuscripts because they have too many typographical errors and are not well written. The author must vigorously comb through the manuscript, to check spelling, grammar, etc. It is

advisable to let a second person or two other persons, who are unbiased and capable of giving constructive critique or feedback, to go through the work. After receiving the feedback, the author must make all the necessary revisions. It is best to submit a neatly typed work to a publisher. Do not plagiarize or violate the copyright law.

The Publishing Phase

4. Scout for Reliable and Credible Publisher

If an author has not been dealing with a publisher during the writing phase, the author must scout or search for a publisher who is credible to take the manuscript through the book production process. The publisher could be a corporate establishment or an individual. There are a number of publishers in the country, specializing in various areas of publishing. The Ghana Book Development Council (GBDC) has made available on its website a list of book publishers in Ghana. The author could select a suitable publisher.

5. Submission of Manuscript to Publisher

The author would have to submit the manuscript to the publisher for assessment. The publisher will assess to know if the manuscript falls within the publishing house's area of specialization as well as the House Style Manual. The submission could be accompanied by a synopsis, usually one page, which gives a summary of the manuscript. The submitted manuscript could be either accepted or rejected based on the publisher's assessment. The manuscript could be rejected on the grounds that there are some weaknesses in the writing, or it was badly written. The author should not be discouraged or abandon the project altogether. The author could ask the publisher the possible reason(s) for the rejection.

6. Launch Meeting

A launch meeting is scheduled after the publisher accepts the manuscript for publication. This is where the author meets the publisher's team that would be involved in the publishing process of the book. The team meets to discuss the timeline to commence and complete the work and other relevant issues regarding the work.

7. Negotiating and Signing of Book Publishing Contract

Undoubtedly, the author is the first owner of the right to publish the work he/she has created. Nonetheless, an author can sell outright his/her right in the work to a publisher through the signing of a publishing contract. A publishing contract is a legally binding agreement between an author and a book publisher. It outlines the obligations and rights of each party in the agreement. It also details the financial arrangement between the author and publisher. Authors have the ability to bargain and negotiate with publishers, with regard to royalties or any form of payment. Generally, royalty rates range from 7.5% to 15% of sales for paperback and

hardback books. For electronic books, royalty rate could range from 25% to 50% or more since the publisher does not pay for costs such as printing, binding, warehousing, or shipping, etc.

Note that this stage of signing of contract happens earlier in the process in a case of solicited manuscript. With solicited manuscript, the agreement will include responsibilities of both parties such as writing timelines, mode of presentation and packaging of the manuscript, advance royalties, etc.

Contracts may differ with respect to book, author or publisher. It is advisable for the author to get legal advice when it comes to signing of contracts with any publisher and make sure he/she understands each clause in the contract.