

# GETTING PUBLISHED FAQs



Finished your first manuscript? Part way through a promising work-in-progress? Have a great idea for a story? No matter where you are in the process, getting published can be a challenge. The Writers' Union of Canada is here to help. Consult our frequently asked questions to understand your next step.

## **I have an idea for a story. How do I get started?**

If you want to write a story, then sit down and start writing! You may want to enroll in a writing workshop or creative writing class through your local college, university, or board of education. That way you can get feedback on your work from your teacher and your fellow students. If there's a writer-in-residence at your local library or school, you can also get feedback on your writing there. Lots of people have great ideas but it's not a poem, story, or novel until you sit down and do the work.

## **My ideas are really fabulous but I'm not a writer. Where can I find a writer to write up my ideas and split the profits for the novel I'm thinking about?**

There isn't really a commercial market for ideas. It's the written expression of an idea, the part the writer does, that has worth. If you have a story that you believe has commercial value but you need assistance with the writing, you can hire a ghostwriter. This means you would be paying a writer to do their full-time job so you would need to have the funds available to do that at the outset. For more guidance on this topic, check out [writersunion.ca/get-published/ghostwriting](https://writersunion.ca/get-published/ghostwriting).

## **How do I find a publisher?**

If you're seeking a traditional publisher — one who takes on the financial responsibility for publishing the work and in return pays you an advance and royalties — take some time to do your research and choose carefully which publishers to approach. A visit to a good independent bookstore (or their website) with a large selection of Canadian titles will help you select appropriate publishers to approach. You can also consult publishers' online catalogues to see recent releases. Current titles will tell you a lot about the types of books a publisher is interested in.

Beware of targeted advertisements from publishers soliciting manuscripts. These are usually "vanity publishers" that will publish your book, but you'll pay all the costs. If you're looking to traditionally publish your book, we don't advise you pay a fee to the publisher. (For information about self-publishing your book, which does include paying for publishing services, see below.)

## **What's a query letter?**

A query letter, or a letter of inquiry, is a cover letter asking if the publisher is interested in publishing your work.

Keep your cover letter concise. Introduce yourself and your work in one page — two at the most. Like any letter where you're applying for a job, you want to give the reader enough information that they'll want to contact you for more. Mention how long you've been writing and where your work has been published (for example, stories or poems in literary magazines). If your book is nonfiction, relate your expertise in the given field. You may want to include a chapter-by-chapter outline as well.

Make sure your letter is free of typos and that the company and contact name are spelled correctly. Spend some time on the letter. You spent months or years on your book; a few days on your cover letter is worthwhile. If you can't write a compelling cover letter, the reader may not think you can write a compelling book.

### **Do I need an agent?**

You don't need to have an agent to be published in Canada. In fact, the vast majority of books published in Canada don't have an agent-assisted contract! There are also so few agents that it can sometimes be easier to find a publisher on your own. However, there are some publishers who don't accept unsolicited manuscripts at all and will deal only with agents. It's your decision whether you should pursue an agent or a publisher first. For more on this topic and a listing of agents in Canada, visit [writersunion.ca/get-published/literary-agents](https://writersunion.ca/get-published/literary-agents).

### **Should I self-publish?**

We have a whole how-to booklet on this very topic! Here's what the author Eve Silver has to say:

Decide *why* you are considering self-publishing. Is it because you think the project isn't good enough to draw the attention of an agent or editor? If the answer is yes, if you think self-publishing is the easy, fast route for a book that is less than your best, think again. Readers demand quality. Self-publishing should be a choice not a fallback. Self-publishing means creative control, but it also requires you to take on creation, editing, production, distribution, marketing, and sales, or hiring people to carry out some of these roles. If you have an entrepreneurial bent, are ready to take on a steep learning curve, and enjoy the idea of having ultimate control over all aspects of your project, then self-publishing is a great option.

If you want a deeper dive, check out How to Self-Publish at [writersunion.ca/writers-how-to-series](https://writersunion.ca/writers-how-to-series).

### **How do I protect my idea from theft?**

In Canada, you automatically hold the copyright to any original work you produce whether or not it's published. (There can be exceptions, for example in some cases where you have been employed to write the work.) Copyright in a work remains with the author or their heirs for the life of the author plus fifty years, unless you assign your copyright to someone else. We always advise authors to keep their copyright — don't assign copyright to your publisher.

Remember, you can't copyright an idea or a title; only the written expression of your idea. Someone else might also write a book on jungle cats from outer space but it's not a problem unless they use your words.

### **How can I get financial assistance to write?**

Check with the Canada Council for the Arts, your provincial or territorial arts council, and your local arts council to see if you qualify for any of their granting programs.

### **Further resources**

We have plenty more resources for writers available at [writersunion.ca](https://writersunion.ca). Find tips on submitting to magazines and journals, submitting to book publishers, negotiating your first contract, and protecting your copyright.

- > If you're looking for help polishing your work before submitting to agents and publishers, consider having your manuscript evaluated by a professional writer. Get the details at [writersunion.ca/get-published/manuscript-evaluations](https://writersunion.ca/get-published/manuscript-evaluations).
- > If you're ready to submit your work, consider our Directory of Canadian Publishers, a searchable online database that lists publishers who accept unsolicited manuscript. Listings include information about genres, categories, and any specific submission instructions to help you find the right fit for your manuscript. The Guide also includes a helpful introduction with quick tips on finding a publisher, submitting a manuscript, and negotiating a contract. Learn more at [writersunion.ca/writers-how-to-series](https://writersunion.ca/writers-how-to-series).

### **Best of luck on your writing and publishing journey!**