

Can you help me get my story published?

You've written a story? Wonderful! That alone is worth a hearty congratulations.

Can I help you get it published? Truthfully, the only "pull" I have with any of the publishers I've worked with is just enough for me to get my own manuscripts read and considered (although that really is no small matter!). Most authors don't have the kind of influence that would allow them to get someone else's story into the hands of an editor. However, I can provide some tips. And I can point you toward some really solid resources. It's up to you to do the research and to take on the hard, often painful work.

Painful? We're talking about books for kids – stories featuring bunnies and talking dump trucks! How painful can it be?

To be honest, the journey toward getting traditionally published is a much more brutal trek than you might expect. That's been my experience. It's been the experience of every published author I've ever met. So, be sure to check the thickness of your skin before grabbing your hiking poles.

The first thing you should keep in mind is that every traditional publisher is receiving thousands of manuscript submissions every year. Some are receiving TENS of thousands. A deluge of manuscripts "created" by Artificial Intelligence (don't get me started) have only made an acquisitions editor's job a hundred times harder. Consequently, most publishers will now only accept manuscripts submitted through a reputable literary agent.

So, I should look for an agent?

Maybe. Probably. (Sigh.) Yes, I suppose so. There was a time when more publishers were open to un-agented manuscript submissions. That time has passed.

That said, I do not personally have an agent. A small handful of publishers remain who accept query letters and manuscripts directly from authors. They are few and far between. By the time I finish writing this paper, there will likely be fewer still.

Okay, now that *that* cheerfulness is out of the way, here's a splattering of Dos and DON'Ts.

- Unless you are an author/illustrator, DO NOT submit your manuscript with illustrations. Do not hire your old college roommate or your brother-in-law or whoever to illustrate. When a publisher accepts a manuscript, they track down and assign an illustrator. They want and, by all means, should have that control.
- DO learn how to properly format a manuscript, and DO learn how to properly craft a query or submission letter.
- DO read, read, read popular contemporary books in the same genre you are crafting.
- While you wait to hear from that editor or agent, DO keep writing! DO keep submitting materials. Hone your craft. Build that pile of manuscripts that are ready to be submitted. When that first rejection letter comes in, you'll feel better knowing you have other agent query letters or other manuscript submissions out there. (Side note: Most publishers are now working with a "If you don't hear from us within four months, this means we are not interested" policy.)
- DO join SCBWI! Join the national organization. Join your local chapter! Attend workshops. Attend webinars. You'll learn a BUNCH!

- DO join a critique group! You'll gain so much from your crit partners, and they will keep you honest about staying on top of the hard work.

Finally, here are two directories you'll want on the shelf. Be sure to get the most recent releases. Publishing companies are constantly shifting staff around. Editors move among houses. And, more importantly, publishing companies are regularly adjusting their submission's descriptors – what they want (and don't want) and what they will accept (and won't accept).

Book Markets for Children's Writers, published by Institute for Writers

Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market, published by Writer's Digest Books

Wishing you the very best!

Peace,

Eric Ode

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