

spread_{the}word looking out for London's writers

FAQs

**Frequently Asked Questions -
a guide to getting your writing noticed**

Get more information at

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Writing for Theatre

1. How can I get a play that I've written published?

Some publishers require that your script be produced – either professionally or in amateur theatre – before they will consider publishing. Some require nothing more than a good script. Get a copy of the *Writers' And Artists' Yearbook* (A&C Black) or *The Writers' Handbook – Guide To Writing For The Stage And Screen* (Macmillan), which both list dramatic publishers and their submission criteria. You'll also find copies in the reference section of your local library.

2. Can I send my play directly to a theatre?

Yes, there are theatres that welcome unsolicited scripts from new writers. These include the Royal Court Theatre, The Bush, The Gate, Soho Theatre and other fringe theatres.

Some also have schemes that can help new writers develop their scripts and may offer advice on funding. When thinking of submitting a script to a theatre it's vital that your work fits the artistic remit of that particular theatre, so it's worth calling them direct or visiting their website beforehand to ensure they accept unsolicited work and that your play is suitable for them.

3. How can I get a play that I've written produced?

Getting a play produced is a chicken and egg situation. Theatre companies are reluctant to produce your play if you have no track record. But you can't establish a track record if no one will produce your play.

Entering your script in competitions/festivals is a good place to start as prizes often include having your play produced by an established theatre company. It's also worth finding out what grants are available that may help you produce your play yourself. Visit the Arts Council website at www.artscouncil.org.uk for more information.

Amateur, youth or community theatre companies are another good starting point if you're trying to break into the market. You'll have to convince them that your play is something they'll want to take on and if they agree you will probably have a very small budget, but you'll have stepped onto the first rung of the ladder.

Profit-share companies – small or new companies or those that may have lost funding – are another possibility. In these companies the writer, director, actors etc all share any profits the play makes. It's rare that you'll actually make a profit, but the chances are your play will have been produced by a fairly skilled team. www.writernet.co.uk, the website specifically for dramatic writers, publishes *Script Routes*, a guide of over 100 theatres and new writing companies. Alternatively pick up a copy of *The Writers Handbook – Guide to Writing For The Stage and Screen* (Macmillan).

4. Where can I find details of playwriting courses?

www.writernet.co.uk lists courses, workshops and seminars for dramatic writers. www.literaturetraining.com lists details of short courses, undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD level creative writing courses around the UK. Click on the Training and Events and Higher Education links.

Fiction

1. How long is an average novel?

The length of an average novel is anything from 60,000 to 100,000 words.

2. Can I submit my work directly to publishers?

There are still publishers that accept unsolicited manuscripts. However, the 'slush pile', or work that has been submitted directly from members of the general public, is not high on their list of priorities. You can easily expect a wait of at least six months if submitting work in this way.

The best way to be sure is to refer to the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* (A&C Black) or *The Writers Handbook* (Macmillan). You will find copies in the reference section of your local library and in most bookshops. Both contain lists of UK publishers, the genres in which they publish and whether they accept unsolicited manuscripts.

Never send work to publishers who only accept work from literary agents. No matter how good you think it is, it won't be read and you would have wasted a lot of paper!

3. What is the correct format for submitting work?

Your work should be on one side of A4 paper and double line spaced with an inch wide margin all round. Pages need to be numbered consecutively, with the title of your work at the top of each page.

Always check what the publisher or agent asks you to submit by referring to the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* (A&C Black) or *Writer's Handbook* (Macmillan).

As a general guide, a brief covering letter, one-page synopsis and three sample chapters (including your opening chapter) are an acceptable submission. Never send a whole manuscript unless you have been asked to do so.

4. I only write short stories, how easy is it to get these published?

Short stories are enjoying an overdue and welcome comeback thanks to the Save Our Short Story campaign (www.theshortstory.org.uk) and anthologies set up specifically to provide more avenues for the genre, such as Tell Tales (www.telltales.co.uk).

Book publishers are coming round to the idea slowly and have begun to publish short story collections from some of their more established writers. If you are unpublished you will find it difficult to get a collection of short fiction published. Instead, you can build your portfolio by submitting your stories to magazines (see publishing fiction in magazines) or competitions (see Grants/Awards).

5. Do I need an agent?

Finding an agent is a good idea as many publishers will only consider work that has come through an agent.

Agents have an in-depth knowledge of the publishing industry and will have formed good relationships with commissioning editors in a range of publishing houses. They will know how best to submit your work and which publishing houses are likely to be interested. They can also negotiate a better contract for you if you are lucky enough to be signed.

Refer to the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* (A&C Black) or the *Writers Handbook* (Macmillan) for information on their areas of publishing and which agents will best suit your work.

Poetry – for page and performance

1. I want to perform my work, how can I do this?

Many people have their first taste of performance poetry through open mic sessions, where members of the audience are given the opportunity for impromptu poetry performances. www.poetrylondon.co.uk lists London events, some with open mic sessions. www.poetrykit.org lists national and worldwide poetry events.

You should attend as many events as possible and approach live literature promoters with your contact details once you are confidently performing your work.

2. What is a poetry slam?

Poetry slams deliver performance poetry with a competitive edge. Competing poets are allocated the same amount of time to perform and each is then judged, either by a panel of judges or the audience.

3. How can I get my work published?

You can start by submitting your work to magazines and by entering reputable poetry competitions, which will help you build a portfolio of published work. www.winningwriters.com publishes a list of competitions to avoid as well as the best free contests to enter.

With a strong portfolio you can then approach small presses. Check out a copy of *The Small Press Guide*, which lists poetry publishers and magazines.

4. Where can I find details of UK poetry publishers?

The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook (A&C Black) and *Writer's Handbook* (Macmillan) list UK publishers of poetry as does *The Small Press Guide* (Writers' Bookshop). You can also contact The Poetry Library, Level 5, Royal Festival Hall, London SE1 8XX, enclosing an SAE for a list of poetry publishers. The Poetry Society website at www.poetrysociety.org.uk provides comprehensive information and advice on submitting poetry.

Writing for Broadcast – The *writersroom*, BBC

1. How do I submit work?

The Writers Handbook – Guide for Stage and Screen (Pan) is a good resource for finding production companies, radio stations and producers. Check the submission guidelines for the company you intend to submit to.

Visit the BBC writers room website at www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom to download free Script Smart software, which you can use to format your work using industry-standard layouts, although Writers Room will accept scripts that are not formatted as long as they are clearly typed and double spaced.

2. Should I copyright my script before submitting?

There is no official registration system in the UK for copyrighting work. Thus your work is automatically copyrighted as soon as it's produced. In order to protect the copyright of your work you can lodge a copy of the work with a solicitor or deposit it in a bank. Alternatively you can post a copy to yourself by special delivery, so there is a clear date stamp on the envelope. Don't open the package when it comes back to you in the post, as this will provide proof of the date and content of your work.

It's also important to keep earlier drafts and notes to show evidence of how the work progressed. Visit the government website www.intellectual-property.gov.uk for more information.

3. How should I format my work?

Standard script font is 12 point Courier. You can download Script Smart, free industry-standard software, from the BBC's Writers Room website at www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom, although some organisations will accept scripts as long as they are double-line spaced, on single side of A4 paper.

Always check the submission guidelines of each company before sending in your work.

Professional Development

1. Where can I find information on writing courses?

Spread the Word – www.spreadtheword.org.uk runs courses and workshops for writers of all genres in London.

Nationwide, www.literaturetraining.com lists creative writing workshops and courses around the UK. www.ucas.ac.uk can provide details of all UK higher education courses. Hot Courses (available in newsagents) and at www.hotcourses.com lists university, adult education, short courses and evening classes nationally.

2. How can I become a writer in residence?

You can either apply for writer in residence vacancies or approach organisations you think may be interested in buying into such a scheme.

When applying for a writer-in-residence position, make sure you describe your experience in detail, highlighting how your skills will benefit their organisation. Find out which local partners the organisation works with, and how you can incorporate them into your residency. Be honest about the skills you have and show how you can gain those criteria your application may lack. Think about why you want the residency and what you hope to achieve.

If you are interested in working in schools you must register with the National Association for Writers in Education (NAWE) www.nawe.org.uk. You'll also need to be CRB checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. Literature development agencies run writer in residence schemes. Contact the Arts Council on 0845 300 6200 for information on those working in your area.

You will also find details of writer in residence vacancies at www.literaturetraining.com and www.nawe.org.uk.

3. I'd like to run my own writing workshops. How do I go about doing this?

It's worth getting in touch with literature development agencies such as Spread the Word and other organisations that run regular programmes of events and workshops.

If you are thinking of running writing workshops in schools you have to be registered with the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE www.nawe.org.uk) and be CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked.

If you are thinking of running your own writing workshop locally it's worth finding out which sections of the community are not currently being targeted and think about tailor-making a course that can fill an existing need as there may be funding available from the local authority to help you set up. You may also be eligible for a Grants for the Arts award from the Arts Council. Visit their website at www.artscouncil.org.uk.

4. Can you give me information about distance learning writing courses?

The International Centre for Distance Learning (www.icdl.open.ac.uk) provides information on distance learning courses. www.hotcourses.com is also an invaluable resource for identifying these types of courses.

5. How can writing workshops improve my work?

Writing workshops can help writers explore their ideas in a supportive and creative environment. They can help with writer's block, provide inspiration for new ideas and help you develop different aspects of the creative writing process alongside other writers. Literature development agencies run regular programs of workshops, events and classes. Contact the Arts Council on 0845 300 6200 for details of literature development agencies working in your area.

DIY publishing/vanity presses

1. How do conventional publishers work?

If a publisher is interested in your work they will pay you an advance to secure the right to publish, and negotiate other subsidiary rights such as translation, film/TV options or serial rights, depending on the contract. The publisher will then undertake to pay for the production, marketing, distribution and promotion of your work.

Because the advance you are paid is an advance on royalties (ie the percentage you actually earn when each book is sold), the publisher needs to earn this amount back in book sales before you can then begin to earn author royalties.

Thus, if you are published by a conventional publisher you pay nothing to have your book published.

2. What is self-publishing?

Writers who decide to self-publish have decided to cover the cost of production, marketing and distribution themselves. You are effectively acting as publisher for your own book. You will be in control of the design and typography of the book, decide how many copies you can afford to print and decide how you will promote and sell your work. If you self-publish you own all the printed copies of your book and will keep the proceeds of every sale.

However you also bear the entire risk of losing money if your book does not sell.

3. What is 'vanity' publishing?

Vanity publishing is so-called because it appeals to just that.

Publishers in this area will often send out an excessively glowing report on your work, then offer to publish for a fee. You will effectively be paying them to publish your book.

Companies that work in this way don't call themselves vanity publishers and may describe their activities as co-operative, self- or subsidy publishers. Also, once the books have been printed, you won't own them. The books you've paid to have produced will be owned by the publisher. You'll receive a number of free copies (usually about 10 copies), but will then have to buy

further copies at a discounted price. Take note, for each copy that is sold you will only receive a royalty – the majority of each sale is kept by the publisher.

4. What is a print-on-demand (POD) publisher?

Traditionally publishers use batch printing to produce books (ie books are produced in batches of thousands of copies at a time), which keeps costs (and prices) down. Print On Demand publishing uses digital technology to produce any number of books – even single copies - whenever they are needed.

POD services are often run online and vary widely in their terms. Many services are free or low cost for the setup of your book. However they don't provide you with anything like the service of a bona fide publisher. They are usually non-selective so the quality of work they print varies enormously, and generally they don't edit or market your book, so you're on your own.

The printer will set the price and will recoup their money by taking substantial percentage of sales, leaving you, in effect, with a royalty. However the principle of POD is that the purchasers of books pay, and that you don't, so it shouldn't cost you anything.

If you are considering this kind of publishing, bear in mind that books that produced in this way cost more per copy as a result.

If you want to find out more, possibly the best-known POD service is www.lulu.com

As with vanity publishing, be very wary of any companies that want you to pay a large fee upfront or want to retain rights to your work.

5. Are these accepted forms of publishing?

In certain genres, such as poetry, self-publishing is an accepted form of publishing.

Also, some writers of fiction who have self-published have then gone on to get publishing deals from conventional book publishers as a result, although this is the exception rather than the rule.

On the whole, writers should be very wary of going through the route of vanity or print-on-demand as you could end up spending a great deal of money for very little return.

Writers' groups

1. How can I find a writers' group?

Check with your local library. Some writers' groups will meet regularly there and even if they don't the chances are they could advertise their group on the library noticeboard. The National Association of Writers' Groups www.nawg.co.uk lists writers' groups all over the country so visit the website to see if there is a group local to you.

Literature development agencies that work in your area will also have information about existing writing groups. Spread the Word works in South and West London and in the Thames Gateway area of east London. The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers publishes a list of literature development agencies and writers' groups nationally at www.fwwcp.org.uk.

2. How can I set up my own writers' group?

It's worth getting in contact with your local library, especially if there isn't already a writers' group based there. Advertise in the local paper and in writing magazines – *Myslexia* magazine has a comprehensive list of literary events, workshops and groups around the country. Contact literature development agencies working locally and let them know your plans.

3. Is there funding available to help set up writers' group?

Your local authority may provide funding for groups based in the local community. Contact your local council offices to see what grants may be available. The Arts Council also has funds for eligible individuals or groups who would like to set up arts-related projects through its Grants for the Arts programme. Visit the website at www.artscouncil.org.uk for more information.

4. How can I benefit from joining a writing group?

Benefits include the opportunity to read and discuss your work with others and bounce ideas off other members of the group. You can share resources, contacts, information, writing techniques, organise readings, produce anthologies or magazines and apply to deliver grant-funded projects. Writing is a lonely and very insular pastime and writing groups can provide support and inspiration and the chance to exchange ideas with other writers.

Getting feedback on my work

1. Where can I get my work professionally assessed?

The Literary Consultancy, a professional reading agency can provide a written assessment of your work. The Literary Consultancy also has links with literature development agencies, agents and publishers and employs a team of highly skilled editors, writers and poets to assess your work. For more information and their fees visit their website at www.literaryconsultancy.co.uk.

The Poetry Society offers poetry critiques through its Poetry Prescription Service. Visit the website at www.poetrysociety.org.uk.

Scriptwriters can have their work read at Writernet. Visit their website at www.writernet.co.uk for more information.

2. How much can I expect to pay?

Literary Consultancy prices: for fiction, children's and non-fiction prices start at £150 for a 1-2 page synopsis plus up to 50 double-spaced pages. Short stories up to 3000 words cost £75 and poetry up to 300 lines costs £90. For a full list of fees and how to submit visit the website at www.literaryconsultancy.co.uk

Poetry Society critiques cost £50 for up to 100 lines (£40 for members). For more info visit the website at www.poetrysociety.org.uk.

Writernet charges £30 (£18 if you subscribe), less if you are part-waged or unemployed. Visit www.writernet.co.uk for information.

3. Will literary agents give me feedback on my work?

Some literary agents will give you constructive criticism on your work, some won't. If your work is rejected and you don't get any feedback, don't hassle the agent, you'll make yourself unpopular and make an agent reluctant to take you on. If you want a critique of your work, and are not getting this from agents or publishers, you can pay to have your work professionally assessed. See *Where Can I get my work professionally assessed?*

Publishing fiction in magazines

1. How do I submit my work to magazines?

When submitting work to magazines it's important to send work that fits the magazine brief. The best way to find this out is to buy the magazine and read the fiction they publish to acquaint yourself with the style of writing the magazine publishes. Click on www.theshortstory.org.uk for a list of UK magazine publishers that publish short fiction.

2. How much do magazine publishers pay?

The amount depends on the magazine and the word count expected. Mainstream womens' magazines may pay anything from £200 to £400 for 1000 words. Some literary magazines or journals may pay smaller amounts or nothing at all, but you will benefit from the kudos of being published by them and it will add to your portfolio of published work. Check with the relevant magazine's fiction editor.

3. What sort of word count should I aim for?

Check with the magazine you intend to submit to. Mainstream women's magazines publish stories that are anything from 800 to 2000 long for weeklies or specials. Literary magazines and journals can often accept stories up to 5000 words.

Getting published on the Net

1. What is an online blog?

A blog is an online diary that is updated frequently, with the most recent entry the most prominent.

2. How can I copyright work I publish on the net?

The same rules apply for work published on the net as for work in print. There is no official registration system in the UK for copyrighting work. However there are a number of international conventions on copyrighting, in which the United Kingdom has membership, which state that copyright should be automatic.

Thus, as long as your work fits into one of the categories of material protected by copyright it is automatically copyrighted to you as soon as it is produced.

When publishing on the net it is recommended that you include the copyright symbol ©, your name and date on every page, so that anyone visiting the site can clearly see who holds the copyright.

Visit the government website www.intellectual-property.gov.uk for more information.

3. Where can I find information about online writing courses?

Check www.literaturetraining.com. Hot Courses (www.hotcourses.com) also lists online courses as does the International Centre for Distance Learning (www.icdl.open.ac.uk).

Grants/Awards/competitions for writers

1. I am an unpublished writer in the process of writing a novel, are there grants available to help me finish it?

You may be eligible for a Grants for the Arts award from the Arts Council. Contact them on 0845 300 6200 for information or visit www.artscouncil.org.uk

2. Where can I find out about writing competitions?

www.literaturetraining.com lists current competitions and awards that are inviting submissions as does *Myslexia* magazine. Visit www.myslexia.co.uk to subscribe.

3. What grants/awards are available for published writers?

The Royal Literary Fund provides grants for published writers in financial difficulty. Visit its website at www.rlf.org.uk for more information. The Society of Authors www.societyofauthors.net also has grants for published writers. You may be eligible for a Grants for the Arts Award from the Arts Council. Contact them on 0845 300 6200 or visit its website at www.artscouncil.org.uk.

Journalism

1. How do I approach magazines/newspapers with feature ideas?

Always submit work to the relevant section editor. Call the magazine / newspaper to find out who this is.

Know the target readership – the feature must be something the publications readers will be interested in reading about. The best way to do this is to read the publication you intend to submit to. Try to include a headline or sell that will catch the editor's eye.

Send a proposal, rather than the full article, and be sure of what the human interest angle is. Refer to *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* (A&C Black) for magazine/newspaper listings and information on approaching editors.

2. Will they consider work from previously unpublished writers?

Yes. Editors want good ideas or new angles on existing ideas. If your proposal can offer either of these, then you are in with a good chance. *The Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* (A&C Black) contains useful information about submitting work to editors.

Copyright

1. How is my work copyrighted?

There is no official registration system in the UK for copyrighting work.

However there are a number of international treaties on copyrighting, which the United Kingdom has signed. These state that copyright should be automatic without the need for formal registration. So, as long as your work fits into one of the categories of material protected by copyright it is automatically copyrighted to you as soon as it is produced.

You do not have to do anything to obtain the legal protection of copyright, however while the text of your writing will be covered, bear in mind that you cannot copyright ideas.

While protection is automatic, difficulty can arise in *proving* that you own the copyright if a dispute arises. You will for instance have to show that you wrote the disputed text first. See section 2 for more information.

There are various private companies that hold unofficial registers of copyrighted work, but check carefully before deciding to proceed in this way, and be sure of what you're paying for.

Visit the website www.intellectual-property.gov.uk for a list of materials protected by copyright and for more comprehensive information on copyrights, designs, trademarks and patents.

2. How do I prove the copyright of my work?

You can lodge a copy of the work with a solicitor or deposit it in a bank.

Alternatively you can post a copy to yourself by special delivery, so there is a clear date stamp on the envelope. Don't open the package when it comes back to you in the post, as this will provide proof of the date and content of your work if you ever have to prove the copyright.

It's also important to keep earlier drafts and notes to show evidence of how the work progressed.

Good luck with your writing, and remember, Spread the Word is here to support writers across London so if you have any further queries, call us on 020 7735 3111 or visit our website at www.spreadtheword.org.uk

Spread the Word works with London writers at all stages of their careers to help them achieve their full potential. Using professional writers we provide expert advice, training and guidance, as well as public performances and an extensive range of online resources. Our events are uniquely innovative, take place across the Capital and are aimed at writers of all levels and backgrounds. Most are open to anyone and you do not need to be published or have any qualifications to take part.

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