

So You Want to be a Writer?

Sharon Jaynes
www.sharonjaynes.com

At least once a week someone stops me in the hall, shoots me an email, or approaches me at a conference with one of two questions:

- “I want to write a book. How do I start?”
- “I have written a book. How do I get published?”

The truth is, everyone’s journey is different. What God had planned for me will be very different from what He has planned for you. He spoke through a burning bush once. He told a man to build an ark once. He wrote on the wall once. That certainly doesn’t mean that He couldn’t do all those things again. However, it does show me that how God speaks and directs one person is uniquely individualized for that person’s calling.

Jeremiah 29:11 God said, “I know the plans I have for YOU.”

With that said, there are some helpful steps you can take to get your book written and published.

1. Start Writing

If you feel that writing a book is what God has called you to do, my advice is just START. Pound the keys. Pick up the pen. Pour the words out of your mind and onto the page. It easier for God to put more in that pretty little head of yours when you have emptied out some space and put those words

on the page. Don't worry that the writing is not perfect. Don't be concerned that the words don't flow as poetically and poignantly as you had hoped. You can spiffy all that up later. Just pour them out.

I would suggest getting a notebook and just start writing down you thoughts, your stories, and your impressions. Make a note of what God is teaching you. Did a sermon impact you? Did a certain Scripture jump off the page and into your heart? Has God been stirring you with a message that keeps coming up time and time again? Write it down.

What happens from there is yet to be seen. However, nothing will happen if you don't START.

2. Hone Your Skills

It is not enough to be a "good" writer. The world is full of "good" writers. It is not enough to have momma, aunties, uncles, and close friends to praise your work and tell you how proud they are of you. Publishers and editors are looking for "great" writers. They are looking for writers who have honed their skills. And keep in mind, the best writing is re-writing.

3. Attend a Christian Writer's Conference

One of the best ways to learn is to hone your skills is to attend a Christian Writers Conference. I would save my pennies to attend the best you can afford. Writer Ellie Kay wrote the following advice:

"So you have a dream of being published? How badly do you want it? What are you willing to sacrifice to achieve it? If you're not willing to lay down the bucks to attend writers conferences, take writing courses, purchase the resources you need and fund **the**

dream for the long haul---then you're probably never going to be published. If you're not willing to invest the time to develop the craft and perfect the proposal, then you might want to consider getting a job at the mall instead. www.elliekay.com

You might want to join a writer's group, invest in a professional critique service, or take a writing class at your local college. I have included a list of resources below that I have collected over the years. These will be invaluable to you.

4. Read Good Writing

One thing that inspires me to be a better writer is to read great writing. I love books, and well-written words on the page inspire me to untangle my thoughts and tie up loose ends.

5. Move Beyond Rejection

After you have honed your skills and prepared your proposal, then you need to buckle your seat belt and be prepared to go the distance. Here is some very important advice...Be prepared to be rejected. Be committed to press forward.

Rejection is simply part of the process. The difference between a writer and a published author is that the published author did not give up. Several publishers rejected my first manuscript. Today, I have published eighteen books, and they are all with publishers who had originally sent me those nice little rejection letters years before.

I would encourage you to read the following blog post: [When You Hit a Wall of Rejection](#) and keep moving forward to get on the boat!

How to Prepare a Proper Proposal

Again, I am going to send you to Ellie Kay and her article...Here is her advice.

Best Advice for Getting Published?

Save your pennies and go to one of the best writers conferences you can afford. You cannot spend your money any more wisely than this. It's like going to Writing College in a weekend. Have a proposal prepared (check into the resources listed to show you what a good proposal looks like) in advance. Make appointments with the editors in attendance if the conference offers that opportunity. The art of getting published is like the art of getting any job. Networking, face-to-face connections, can make all the difference. You might want to bring a digital camera and take a quick pic of you and the editor, so when you contact them at a later date, they remember who you are.

Editors are people who are flooded with paper. When they can connect a real face (and not a nut-case) to a good writing sample, you've just moved up your chances of being published. Mail out five book or article queries at a time, in batches. You could grow old and die by sending out one book proposal at a time and waiting for a publisher to accept or reject it.

Book Proposal Guidelines

Each publisher or literary agent has their own guidelines and it's important to follow them like a roadmap, because that's what they are—a guide to getting where you want to go in the publishing

world! Go to the *Sally Stuart's Christian Writer's Guide* (in the resource section) for specifics on each publisher. The section below gives an example of a well-accepted standard for book proposals. Be sure to read it for specifics about the difference between non-fiction and fiction proposals. Try not to obsess over the minor details of your proposal. There are far too many different ways to create one. Remember, in a sense, this is your job application. Present yourself as a professional and let your idea and your writing do the speaking.

COVER LETTER

The cover letter should include your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address. It should sum up the plot or idea in a single paragraph, as well as giving the book's title and estimated word count of the entire manuscript (not page count). If the book is not completely finished, estimate when you might be finished. The cover letter should not be more than one page.

Below is a good link for help:

<http://www.powernet.net/~scrnplay/Queryletterbk.html>

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

The sample should be the first three chapters or fifty double-spaced pages, printed single-sided and unbound. Please make sure the pages are numbered. (Please use Times Roman 12pt font or a similar very readable font.) Do not print out the pages so they look like actual book pages. Print double-spaced on one side of the page in black ink on 8" x 11" white paper, use 1" margins all around and don't justify the right margin.

SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE

We will not reply to you unless you include an appropriately sized SASE with sufficient postage. A letter-size SASE for a written response is preferred. There is no need to include a large envelope for the return of the entire proposal, unless you want the whole thing back. Do not expect us to track down your email address to send a rejection letter. However, if we are interested we may either call or contact you via e-mail for more information.

NON-FICTION Proposals

Your non-fiction book proposal could include the following:

- 1) A one-sentence summary of your book:

- 2) Create a 75 word summary of the book. Imagine that this is what will go on the back cover of the book.

- 3) A half page to one page overview of your book including (a) an identification of its uniqueness (the distinguishing “hook” that will draw your reader in: What will motivate a person to pick up your book?) and (b) what you hope to accomplish in the way of transformation in the life of the reader:

- 4) A brief profile of your reader with a clear explanation of the problem he or she faces and how your book provides a solution. Also, list any additional audiences you expect your book will attract:

- 5) A listing of other books available that are similar to yours and a brief explanation of how yours is both different and/or better:

- 6) A description of potential marketing channels to which you have

access (e.g., contacts you have in key organizations, groups you speak to regularly, key people you know who might endorse your book, etc.):

7) Your qualifications to write on this topic and a list of your writing experience and educational/career background. If you have published previously, what are the titles and approximate sales to date of your books?

8) A chapter-by-chapter annotated outline that clearly summarizes the overall content and key ideas of each chapter:

9) Projected word length of the manuscript:

10) Expected completion date of the manuscript:

<http://www.writenowpublications.com/catalog.htm>http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1932124640/acwpresswhereyou/002-2910262-8437605?_encoding=UTF8&camp=1789&link_code=xm2

11) Three sample chapters of your book:

FICTION PROPOSALS

Follow the basic information above in the non-fiction proposal section, but realize that the biggest difference between the fiction and non-fiction proposal is the synopsis. While the non-fiction proposal requires a chapter-by-chapter analysis, the fiction proposal should be a maximum of three single spaced pages that present the entire story. Don't worry; your synopsis will be the worst writing you've ever done. That is okay. Just tell the story in quick form so we can know what happens after your sample chapters.

Create a Promo Sentence and a Sales Handle (these are the bits you see on the front cover of a novel or as a headline across the back cover. In addition create back cover copy that tells the story without giving it away (back cover is usually around 75 words) Examples (from the cover of the novel *Oxygen*):

Promo sentence:

A mission gone desperately wrong - and no way out short of blind faith...

Sales handles:

A tragic accident or a suicide mission?

Back cover copy:

In the year 2012 Valkerie Jansen, a young microbial ecologist, is presented with an amazing opportunity to continue her research as a member of the NASA corps of astronauts. When a sudden resignation opens the door for her to be a part of a mission to mars, her life dream becomes a reality.

Dreams turn suddenly to nightmares for NASA and the crew as an explosion cripples the spacecraft on the outward voyage. The crew's survival depends on complete trust in one another - but is one of the four a saboteur?

Since fiction can be entertaining and taps the emotional center of a reader here are some other helpful things to include in your proposal:

In a single sentence, state your purpose for writing this novel. Why did you write (are you writing) this story? What are you trying to prove about life with this story?

Describe your protagonist's quest. What does he want or need? What is his goal? For what does he yearn?

What is at stake in this story? If your protagonist doesn't attain his goal, so what? Why does it matter and why should the reader care? What are the consequences?

What is the "takeaway value" of the story? How will the reader be changed for having read it?

If this is a Christian novel and you had to choose a scriptural foundation for the book what verse would you use?

(Thank you Ellie Kay for that great instruction! To read the entire article, visit www.elliekay.com and request "Wanna be a Writer" file from assistant@elliekay.com)

Sharon, can you mentor me?

I wish I could mentor each and every person who asks. In the past, I have tried to do just that. But with my own writing, speaking, and traveling, it has become impossible. I hope you'll see this article as a bit of mentoring...just enough to get you started.

As you peruse the list below, please don't get overwhelmed. I have not read all these books or attended all these conferences, but I have studied

many of them, and attended writer's conferences. I have also taught at a few of them.

Now, hear me on this...do not wait until you have read the books or attended the conferences to start. Remember START is the first step!

The list below is compiled from suggested reading by some of the best of the best. Each book has a link so that you can read the summary and decide which would be most helpful to you.

Christian Writer's Conferences

Below is a list of Christian Writer's Conferences. I have expounded on the first two because they are ones with whom I have had first hand experience. These others are in alphabetical order.

Speak Up with Confidence sponsored by Carol Kent

Speak Up with Confidence includes three tracks: Speaking, Writing, and Leading. It is held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a city that is the home base for many Christian publishers. Attendees often get to meet with anywhere from two to four different publishers. They also host a pre-conference optional workshop on preparing your book proposal for presenting it to one of the professionals during the conference. Visit www.speakupconferences.com for more details.

She Speaks sponsored by Proverbs 31 Ministries

She Speaks is a conference hosted by Proverbs 31 Ministries, held in Concord, North Carolina each July. It is a conference for training and

equipping writers and speakers. And including sessions on how to more effectively share your story, build your platform, and grow your sphere of influence. Visit www.SheSpeaksConference.com for more information.

[Christian Leaders and Authors Seminar \(CLASS\)](#)

[American Christian Fiction Writers Conference](#)

[American Christian Writers Conferences](#)

[Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference, Ridgecrest, NC](#)

[Colorado Christian Writers Conference, Estes Park, CO](#)

[Florida Christian Writers Conference, Bradenton, FL](#)

[Glorieta Christian Writers Conference, Glorieta, NM](#)

[Greater Philadelphia Christian Writers Conference, Philadelphia Biblical University](#)

[Montrose Christian Writers Conference, Montrose, PA](#)

[Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference, Mount Hermon, CA](#)

[Oregon Christian Writers Conference](#)

[St. David's Writers Conference, Beaver Falls, PA](#)

[Sandy Cove Christian Writers Conference, North East, MD](#)

[Write-to-Publish Conference](#)

[YWAM Woodcrest School of Writing, Lindale, TX](#)

On Great Writing

[You Are a Writer \(So Start Acting Like One\) e-book by Jeff Goins](#)

[On Writing Well by William Zinsser](#)

[Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith by Madeleine L'Engle](#)

[The Forest for the Tress by Betsy Lerner](#)

Especially For Novelists

[Writing the Breakout Novel by Donald Mass](#)

[The Plot Thickens: 8 Ways to Bring Fiction to Life by Noah Lukeman](#)

[The 38 Most Common Fiction Writing Mistakes: \(And How to Avoid Them\)
by Jack M. Bickham](#)

[Self-Editing for Fiction Writers by Renni Browne and Dave King](#)

[Write Away by Elizabeth George](#)

[Techniques of the Selling Writer by Dwight V. Swain](#)

Writing in General

[Stein on Writing by Sol Stein](#)

[Woe is I by Patricia O'Conner](#)

[Eats, Shoots & Leaves by Lynne Truss](#)

[Bird by Bird by Anne LaMott](#)

[The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White](#)

Publishing

[How to Write a Book Proposal by Michael Hyatt](#)

[The First Steps You Must Take To Get Your Book Published by Michael Hyatt](#)

[Advice for First Time Authors by Michael Hyatt](#)

[How to Get Published if You Don't Have a Platform by Michael Hyatt](#)

[The Ugly Truth about Getting Your Book Published by Phil Cooke](#)

[Get Published: A 21-part audio course on becoming an author by Michael Hyatt](#)

[Sell Your Book Like Wildfire by Rob Eager](#)

[Book Proposals that Sell by Terry Wallin](#)