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An essential guide to  
writing and publishing.

blurb

# Writers Resource

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# Kit

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# Writers Resource Kit

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Writers Resource Kit</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	As you like it	3
2.2	Research it	6
2.3	Assistance and support	9
2.4	Had we but world enough, and time	10
2.5	Develop it	12
2.6	Quality control	13
2.7	Edit it	15
2.8	Show and tell	17
2.9	Portfolio	19
<b>3</b>	<b>Publishing</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1	Cover letters	22
3.2	Manuscript layout	24
3.3	Submission	25
3.4	Working with a Literary Agent	27
3.5	Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow	28
3.6	Royalties	30
3.7	Copyright	32
3.8	ISBN/CIP	35
3.9	Distribution	37
3.10	Self-Publishing	39
3.11	Bask	47
3.12	Summary of the Publishing Process	48

<b>4</b>	<b>Have a Question?</b> -----	<b>49</b>
<b>4.1</b>	Members of the English Advisory Panel -----	50
<b>4.2</b>	Members of the Chinese Advisory Panel -----	52
<b>4.3</b>	Members of the Malay Advisory Panel -----	54
<b>4.4</b>	Members of the Tamil Advisory Panel -----	55
	<b>ANNEXURE A: Self-Publishing Services</b> -----	58
	<b>ANNEXURE B: Useful Links</b> -----	59
	<b>Glossary</b> of Publishing Terms -----	61

*Preface*

## About Us

*R. Ramachandran  
Director,  
Singapore Writers Centre*

I have heard many complaints, from publishers and writers alike, about the woeful lack of literature on the Singapore publishing scene. Writers do not know what they should do with their completed manuscripts while publishers are bogged down with lengthy explanations of technicalities.

Clearly, there is a need for a comprehensive guide to the Singapore writing and publishing field. The *Writers Resource Kit* is the crystallisation of our expertise and experience in providing writers and publishers with specialised suites of services tailored for their special needs.

As it enters its third print, we begin to realise, the extent of aspiring writers who have stories to tell.

This third edition of the *Writers Resource Kit* retains its key feature as a comprehensive guide to the book publishing process. It answers many of the most

commonly asked questions and incorporates personal accounts from Singapore writers, their paths to publication, their pains and achievements.

The *Writers Resource Kit* is a project undertaken by the SINGAPORE WRITERS CENTRE (SWC), a one-stop service and networking centre where the writing community in Singapore can gain access to a myriad of services and resources tailored for their special needs.

The SWC will continue to spearhead efforts to develop a vibrant literary arts scene. With the support of our members, comprising various corporate and government agencies, we hope to realise our vision of establishing Singapore as the Asian centre for publishing and the literary arts!



# 1 Writers Resource Kit

Singapore's media sector has been performing strongly, posting a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.0% between 1995 and 2005. In 2005, The industry contributed S\$4.9 billion in value-added (VA) and S\$18.2 billion revenue to the economy, employing some 53,000 workers. Singapore's media sector consists of several industries, including TV broadcast and production; publishing and printing; film; music; as well as interactive and digital media (source: SINGAPORE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD, 13 Aug 2010).

Indeed, the publishing scene has been uncommonly lively in recent years. We have seen Singapore writers such as GERIE LIM and JIM AITCHISON producing unprecedented strings of bestsellers. Critically-acclaimed poets like CYRIL WONG and YONG SHU HOONG are making waves in literary festivals aboard. Increased infrastructural support and

more assistance schemes have seen a wealth of new writers like O THIAM CHIN appearing and reshaping the Singapore literary arts scene.

The outlook may be buoyant, but the optimism has yet to trickle through to the ground. In the Singapore literary scene, the common litany of complaints from members of the writing and publishing community includes: a limited audience base, an infertile reading culture, and a blatant disregard for the creative arts. MR FONG HOE FANG, Publisher at ETHOS BOOKS, shares some statistics on the Singapore book trade: "If a work of Singapore Literature can sell 500 copies, its author is applauded as a 'hero'. Works of popular fiction that can sell 4,000 copies or more are hailed as best-sellers."

This *Writers Resource Kit*, compiled by the NATIONAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE (NBDCS), aims to give a comprehensive survey of the Singapore writing and publishing field. This compact guide offering practical advice and a rich array of insights into the book trade focuses on the two main aspects of the publishing process—writing and publishing—as well as some auxiliary aspects, such as sales, marketing, publicity, and distribution. We hope that this will serve as a source of pragmatic wisdom for beginners eager to discover more about the terminology, strategies and conventions of publishing.

## 2.1 As you like it

# 2 Writing

Some people are consumed with a feverish urge to write. They wake up in the middle of the night, compelled to scribble thoughts that just cannot wait till daylight. Then again, there are others who want to write a book but have no idea what to write about. The latter is a common scenario in Singapore where the oft-repeated refrain is “nothing happens”.

The mundane details of life can inspire startling works, and this is true of any discipline. WALT DISNEY’S little muse was the humble mouse, NEWTON’S the unassuming apple. Many a writing career was launched by the simple ability to observe ambient happenings. CATHERINE LIM keeps her mind tuned to the lives of Singaporeans, and metamorphoses them into scathing commentaries on the unpredictability of urban

living. This is why her first collection of short stories is titled *Little Ironies*. Some of the best ideas are usually not plucked out of thin air; they come from our immediate lives, often from within cherished memories, which are then moulded by our imaginations into resounding tales that poignantly affect our hearts and minds.

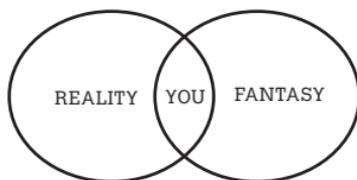


Fig 1: Diagram of you and your writing material.

Write what you know best—this is Ho MINFONG's take on the matter. Most of her books, including *Sing To The Dawn* (1975), *Rice Without Rain* (1990) and *The Clay Marble* (1997), were narrated from the viewpoints of female protagonists who have issues with home. In these books, the girl's reactions to leaving home are central to the plots. This mirrors her experience when she first left home, as one of the more significant, intense and traumatic stages of her life that she keeps re-visiting.

Professional writers also feel that it is easiest to write about a subject that interests them. Bestselling Singapore author GERRIE LIM, intrigued by the US\$12.6 billion adult film industry, has produced numerous articles for publications ranging from *Penthouse Variations* magazine to *The Wall Street Journal*. His fourth book, *In Lust We Trust* (2006), chronicles his ten-year journey through the curious and complex world of the porn star, in his capacity as the International Correspondent for the trade journal *AVN Online*. What interests you, whether it is body piercing or

professional gaming, could very well lead to a viable book idea if market conditions are favourable.

Most importantly, writers need to read. CYRIL WONG, poet and co-winner of the 2006 SINGAPORE LITERATURE PRIZE, advises budding writers. "Read and don't stop reading the works of other poets. Don't limit your reading list to writers from the last century either, which many people tend to do, as if the poets writing now are not to be trusted. Poetry is ever-changing and always evolving to incorporate new styles, voices and philosophies about life and society. Read and keep reading. The more unique you think your authorial voice is, the more likely it is that you are unconsciously copying somebody else's style of writing."

Reading also opens up vistas and unfurls infinite possibilities. Read what is being published, understand what the publishing industry is looking for and why. The deluge of fantasy books flooding our bookstores is generally attributed to *Harry Potter's* phenomenal success. Similarly, JIM AITCHISON'S *Mr. Midnight* series was a phenomenal bestseller, with sales reaching 400,000 copies in 2006. To date, over a million copies have been sold across countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. This is because the series caters to an Asian market with a predilection for horror and suspense. Market trends are volatile and the most successful authors are those who are exceptionally clued up about what is happening within the publishing industry and gear their work to those demands.

## 2.2 Research it

Research is a vital tool that can bring writers closest to a character's feelings and to behaviour that emerges from these feelings—not all of us can attempt murder just to get under the skin of a serial killer. Newspapers, journal articles, books, radio and television programmes, and the Internet, are all valuable resources, veritable rabbit holes into which the imagination can dive.

Without relevant investigation, the best-conceived narratives can end up insipid and unconvincing. Preliminary research will help to provide the framework needed to prop up a plot and it can also add a touch of technical sophistication. FELIX CHEONG, author of three books of poetry, *Temptation and Other Poems* (1998), *I Watch The Stars Go Out* (1999) and *Broken By The Rain* (2003), brought out the performative elements of his dramatic monologues by researching on method acting and how puppeteers create characters. For a more realistic narrative, COLIN CHEONG, award-winning author of *Tangerine* (1997), did copious research on warplane models. Before many bestsellers are created, vast amounts of in-depth, unrelenting research and insider information would have to be analysed, only after which can the author begin the narrative—much like how an actor gets under the skin of a character.

Research also involves identifying your audiences and their needs. The level of your success with a particular book rests on your ability to appeal to your intended audience. If you can find a genuine need and meet it, you deliver value to the reader. Diet books fly off shelves because they appeal to millions of affluent and image-conscious office workers. The sales figures

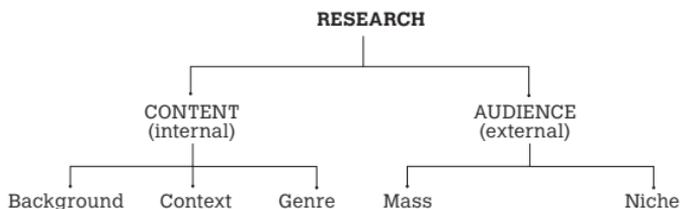


Fig 2: Chart of research areas for the budding writer.

of JIM AITCHISON'S *Mr Midnight* series are making waves because he takes an innovative research approach to cater his works to a specific market segment. The best-selling author organises discussion group sessions with children aged seven to nine and gets them to come up with ideas for the series.

Rarely will publishers move on with a book that is not commercially profitable. This is why publishers look upon novels more favourably than they do books of poems. The former has mass-market appeal while the latter relies on the support from a much smaller niche audience. In the Singapore market, the genre that most publishers leap at is 'self-help'. ADAM KHOO'S titles on studying techniques and wealth creation feed into a society bent on, and willing to pay for, advancement and professional development skills. Now into his fourth self-help book, this entrepreneur and self-made millionaire has seen all his titles grace best-sellers lists in bookstores.

Nevertheless, there still exist rare publishing firms that run on smaller earnings. A case in point would be Firstfruits Publications, the proud publisher of four short-listed poetry collections for the English category of the Singapore Literature Prize in 2006 and 2008 respectively. ENOCH NG, founder of the publishing house, cites his love for the written word as a motivating force: "A book can take me very far—from a reader

and lover of books to a publisher of authors". A veritable bookworm, he even learnt typesetting and design through self-help books in the initial stages of running his one-man publishing firm.

Independent publishing firms like FIRSTFRUITS PUBLICATIONS may not have the major resources that big publishing firms can draw on but they have a much smaller breakeven point. Despite this, small publishers still feel the pinch. ENOCH NG operates a parallel translation and design business while FONG HOE FANG, publisher at ETHOS BOOKS, runs a design firm, the incomes of which go towards supplementing the revenues from their publishing businesses.

Then why stay on in publishing? FONG HOE FANG, when so questioned, blithely replies: "I don't know." He relates how the publishing arm of his business had been set up: "I was approached by a couple of young poets, ALVIN PANG and AARON LEE, to publish their poetry collections. And suddenly, I was young again." He also recognises the role of literature as a repository of national memories and a custodian of marginalised voices. "Let the small guys have their voice," he emphatically states.

Indeed, as SHIRLEY LIM laments, the publishing world is a hard industry. But it is a necessary industry. Like paper milling or steel foundries, it is vested with little glamour, but it is a necessary enterprise since it is so absolutely essential to the literary arts.

## 2.3 Assistance and support

Galvanised into action by the edict to become a global city, part of which includes inculcating a vibrant creative arts scene, government bodies are offering more assistance and opportunities to emerging writers. The NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL provides financial and non-financial assistance to artists, writers and poets. Emerging writers can apply for various grants, scholarships, and bursaries. For more information, log on to ([www.nac.gov.sg](http://www.nac.gov.sg)).

The SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION ([www.sif.org.sg](http://www.sif.org.sg)) is dedicated to preserving the Singaporean identity and the sense of national belonging, while supporting Singaporeans in building on their achievements overseas. Writers can apply for Singapore Internationale, a grant that awards each individual/group applicant an amount of up to S\$20,000. This grant is open to Singaporeans and Permanent Residents who are able to present different facets of Singapore to an overseas audience through their talent and creative works in the arts and culture.

Similarly, the Publishing and Translation Grant from the NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL aims to raise the profile of Singaporean authors and to wide access to their work both locally and overseas. This grant is worth up to \$20,000 or 50% of editorial, translation, production, printing, marketing and distribution costs.

In addition, the MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY offers a wide-ranging variety of development and funding schemes have been tailor-made to help media professionals and companies turn their

visions into reality. More about available schemes is at [www.smf.sg](http://www.smf.sg).

Singapore writers also enjoy a 90% tax exemption on royalty income under the Income Tax Act Section 10 (14). Simply put, this means that writers will only be assessed on 10% of the gross royalties they have received for their work. Full details can be found at the IRAS website ([www.iras.gov.sg](http://www.iras.gov.sg)).

The MINISTRY OF EDUCATION is another government resource that is supportive of Singapore literature. It has included works by Singapore writers, for instance *Heartlanders* by DAREN SHIAU and *Off Centre* by HARESH SHARMA, in the school curriculum. The former is a coming-of-age tale of an average Singaporean boy while the latter is an insightful exploration of the mentally ill and their struggles. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects that may be too controversial for a government body to endorse. References to race, religion and sex should be handled in a sensitive and mature manner.

## 2.4 Had we but world enough, and time

A desire to write, no matter how burning, is one thing; sitting down to pen a work is another. It takes a great deal of discipline and commitment to produce a manuscript. Most writers do not have the luxury of spare time for this avocation—only a handful of Singapore writers can afford to write full-time. There are always other jobs, other pressing concerns that relegate writing to the pitifully few minutes of stolen time. Yet, writers need that block of time, that good two or three years, where they can

focus on their art and hone their craft, so reckons TAN HWEE HWEE, author of *Mammon Inc*, who won the SINGAPORE LITERATURE PRIZE in 2004.

One possible solution would be to seek opportunities for fellowships or residencies. For SHIRLEY LIM, academic and acclaimed writer, life as a writer has been discontinuous. "My life as an academic has been one long progression, and my familial life a daily reality." The bulk of her novel *Joss and Gold* (2002) was written during fellowships and residencies; the first at the East-West Centre in Honolulu, the second as Fulbright Distinguished Lecturer in Singapore, and the tying up of its many strands, at a writer's retreat on Puget Sound near Seattle.

Effective time management also helps to free up small pockets of time. Time spent on trains, walking the dog or even queuing up for food can be spent productively to conceptualise an outline or a particular scene for your book. Even the much dreaded National Service experience can be an unexpected boon. CYRIL WONG relates how his National Service experience gave him time to reflect, and the critical distance to write about himself in short, concise passages that eventually became poems.

Writers can devote a few hours per week to writing and record their jottings in order to keep track of their progress. ROBERT YEO, one of the leading playwrights and poets in Singapore, encourages budding writers to persist in the exercise. "Have the will and stamina to do this in the long haul. Take progressive steps. Be a middle-distance runner and then go on to marathons."

At the same time, there are others who refuse to let writing become a menial chore. GWEE LI SUI, author of *Myth of The Stone* (1993) and *Who Wants To Buy A Book Of Poems?* (1998) describes

his writing journey: “I can only create when there is something that has become coherent, which then compels me to express it. If there is no such clarity, I won’t force the project; my art is not a workhorse.” Until the moment comes, the important artistic virtues are patience and vigilance—patience to wait for the time to act and alertness in collecting data.

SHIRLEY LIM is also of the opinion that writing cannot be rushed because it is a heuristic process. “The writing of *Joss And Gold*,” she shares, “took 21 years. One discovers what one thinks or feels or invents as one writes. This process is not one of mechanical reproduction but creative generation. In that way, the creative process takes over and even the writer would not be able to predict what it will generate.”

## 2.5 Develop it

It is difficult, but all the great writers had it. For BLAKE it was an imaginative muscularity, for LEWIS CAROL, a whimsical lilt and for KAFKA, a stark intensity. Editors look for a distinctive style of writing, the mark of authorial brilliance, which makes a book impossible to put down.

EDWIN THUMBOO, an Emeritus Professor in the NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE and one of Singapore’s most distinguished poets, advises writers to create an idiolect, a dialect of their own expressing their personal styles. This is very relevant to Singapore writers writing in English. The English language does not merely have British and American origins; it also has broad international influences and this sheer breadth means that English carries the rich ideological strains of cultural and historical association. Singapore writers therefore have to decide

which aspect of the language best conveys their narrative message.

He cites an example. Learners of the English language are taught the phrase “to extend a warm welcome”. The phrase would be appropriate in its European countries of origin because of the chilly weather—a warm welcome would literally bring about pleasant and delightful respite from the cold. However, in Singapore’s tropical climate, the phrase hints at the sweltering heat experienced by her residents. Singapore writers thus have to create original symbols and metaphors that can best encompass their experiences and identities.

SHIRLEY LIM has dispensed the same piece of advice for decades—to keep writing. Writing is a craft; practice and devotion keep the craft honest. They also keep it ready for that unexpected moment of genius. Such visitations by the muse are fleeting and vanish if the tools are not ready. FELIX CHEONG concurs. Writing is hard work; it involves a delicate balancing act, a sum total of talent, skill and insight. Inspiration is overrated, not all it is cracked up to be, but craft achieves only mechanical objects without some of that inspiring breath.

## 2.6 Quality control

Apart from a distinctive personal style, publishers are also on the lookout for quality. Technical competency and stylistic sophistication are immediately apparent; shoddy writing is loose and confusing, and sticks out like a sore thumb. Aim to write simply, clearly, expressively. Works of good writers also have a thematic coherence that makes it easy for readers to follow.

ALVIN PANG, poet, recipient of several SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION and NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL grants and founder of online poetry anthology, *The Poetry Billboard*, shared his views with us: "A good novel is one that works for the reader on every level—and that is nearly always the result of dedicated and detailed technical proficiency; precise control of words, structure and pace, characterisation based on knowledge of what makes people tick. There is also that quality of imaginative vitality that transcends clichés of speech and thought."

In addition, verbosity is generally not well tolerated. Good writers get to the point and capture the attention of their readers,

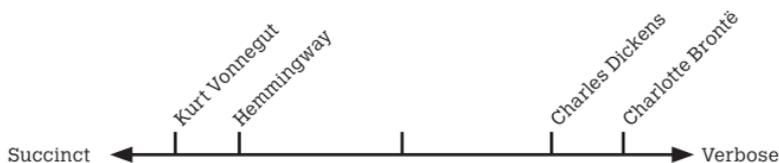


Fig 4: Diagram of some authors and their verbosity.

drawing them into the plot. Long, winding narratives not only drive up costs of production but also cause readers' interest to wane. Hone your manuscript; pare it down to its essence. Avoid clichés, too many adverbs and adjectives, clumsy phrases and boring rhythms. Ho MINFONG, reminiscing on her first novel, confesses: "If I had to write *Sing To The Dawn* again, I would take out at least one third of the adjectives and adverbs that I used. Because it was a first book, I felt like I had to get everything in there. I wouldn't say it's over-written but if I had to write it now, I would do it in a simpler way."

## 2.7 Edit it

Especially upon completion, manuscripts have to be painstakingly pored over. The old adage about writing being 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration is certainly true at this stage. Common faults that need attention are spelling and grammatical errors, lack of clarity and repetitiveness. These can be overcome by reviewing grammatical rules, coupled with thorough checks.

If you do not possess the necessary skills, it is always good to engage a freelance or professional editor. He/she can help strengthen and improve the manuscript. Professionals can assist in refining overall structure and content, providing information on how your book is likely to be received by booksellers as well as by its target audience of readers.

The best way to find a freelance editor is to look for the editor's name on the acknowledgement page of books similar to yours; most authors thank their editors in the acknowledgements. Often these editors, although employed by publishing firms, are willing to work on editing jobs for a fee. And even if they cannot—because some editors are prohibited from taking on freelance assignments—they may be able to recommend other freelance editors.

The NATIONAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE'S website ([www.bookcouncil.sg](http://www.bookcouncil.sg)) maintains a list of freelance editors in Singapore whom you can try approaching. The SINGAPORE BOOK PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION ([www.singaporebookpublishers.sg](http://www.singaporebookpublishers.sg)) also provides a list of freelancers on its website.

Alternatively, there are professional organisations on which websites you can post a request for editors, such as THE SOCIETY OF

EDITORS AND PROOFREADERS, UK, the EDITORIAL FREELANCERS ASSOCIATION, US, and the INSTITUTE OF PROFESSIONAL EDITORS LIMITED, AUSTRALIA.

There are different levels of editing:

- **Manuscript assessment or critique.** A broad overall assessment of your manuscript, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses.
- **Content editing** focuses on structure, style, and content.
- **Line editing.** Editing at the sentence level with the aim of creating a smooth prose flow.
- **Copy editing.** Correction of common errors, incorrect usages, logic lapses, and continuity problems.
- **Proofreading.** Checking for typos, spelling/punctuation errors, formatting mistakes, and other minor problems.

Some editors use different terminology such as “light”, “medium”, and “heavy” editing. Thus, it’s important, before hiring an editor, that you’re clear on exactly which level of editing you need.

The EDITORIAL FREELANCERS ASSOCIATION, US offers a helpful chart of common rates for editorial services ([www.the-efa.org/res/rates.php](http://www.the-efa.org/res/rates.php)). As an estimation, depending on the state of your manuscript and assuming that most editors work at the rate of eight pages per hour, the overall cost of editing a 300-page manuscript might run up to about \$1,000.

A less expensive option that some authors are turning to is engaging retired General Paper tutors for copyediting services. These tutors might not be able to give professional feedback on the commercial viability of the book but they will be able to correct grammatical and spelling errors and help to sort out stylistic inconsistencies.

## 2.8 Show and tell

Show it to someone whose work you respect, and accept some friendly feedback. An objective opinion is critical, even for established writers. Observers, having the advantage of critical distance, might be able to point out discrepancies and provide constructive comments.

Mentorships also provide invaluable opportunities for emerging writers to refine their writings and bounce ideas off established authors. TOH HSIEN MIN, author of two collections of poetry, *Iambus* (1994) and *The Enclosure of Love* (2001), and the founding editor of the *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, speaks fondly of his mentor ARTHUR YAP, "More than poetry, what he taught was character, conviction and self-belief".

Aspiring writers will no doubt be glad to hear that the MENTOR ACCESS PROJECT (MAP), organised by the NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL (NAC), has been re-launched on 30 June 2007. First started in 2000, MAP is a 12-month mentorship programme to ensure the sustained development of young and emerging writers by providing them with mentorship opportunities and ongoing critical feedback. The programme covers the genres of poetry, prose, creative non-fiction, graphic novel and drama ([www.nac.gov.sg](http://www.nac.gov.sg)).

NG YI-SHENG, playwright and author of *last boy* (2006), supports the restoration of the MAP. He says, "although a number of organisations run programmes like writers gatherings, with some even starting poetry sharing sites online, the problem is that there are many bad poets out there: people who don't even realise that originality of imagery and variation of language are central to good poetry. A structure like MAP allows budding

writers a systematic and professional setup to develop their skills. Moreover, much of a writer's development is a matter of discipline. A mentor is mostly there to exert pressure on the writer and to force the writer to enforce guidelines he already knows upon his writing."

YI-SHENG also feels that today's young Singaporean writers and playwrights have abundant resources and opportunities—the problem lies with networking. "It has been very easy for me to find people who were willing to support me because I was in the right places at the right time. I signed up for camps, workshops and competitions with writers and directors where I was able to tell them, 'I want to be a writer', and they helped me."

Book talks and launches; Literary Conventions and Conferences; Master classes and courses; these and other book-related activities will present opportunities for young writers to meet professionals in the publishing field. GWEI LI SUI recalls how he met a publisher, GOH ECK KHENG from LANDMARK, at the book launch of his first book, the graphic novel, *Myth of the Stone*. At some point, he passed GOH the manuscript of *Who Wants To Buy A Book of Poems?*, and it was kept in a drawer for years. He did not hear from GOH until, one day, he got a call that went: "Gwei, did you remember that funny book of poems you submitted to me long ago?"

"No."

"Well, we found 2 other new poets"—they turned out to be, of course, Felix Cheong and Alfian Sa'at— "and we want to issue the 3 of you together. Are you game?"

Such book-related events give you chances to talk through your proposal and check its feasibility with publishing professionals. They also provide you with useful contacts should you decide to send your manuscript to a publishing firm for

consideration. There is no substitute for meeting different editors and publishers, sizing them up and using your instincts to decide which ones may be appropriate for your book.

## 2.9 Portfolio

The costs of publishing a book can be disproportionately high. This is why publishers are loath to accept the works of beginning writers. A newcomer bursting onto the literary scene needs a large capital investment for publicity purposes. On the other hand, seasoned writers have already built up a name for themselves that firms can capitalise on. It is thus important for emerging writers to build up a portfolio so that editors can have a sampling of what they can do and assess them accordingly. One way to do this is via competitions.

To first-time writers, competitions provide valuable exposure and much needed publicity. NG YI-SHENG's big break came in 1998, when he won the SPH-Theatreworks 24-hour playwriting competition for two consecutive years. Sign up for literary mailing lists such as the National Book Development Council of Singapore's and the National Art Council's to receive mailers on such competitions.

Unpublished writers can also take part in the SPH-NAC Golden Point Award (GPA), Singapore's biggest creative writing competition in the nation's four major languages: English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. It is open to all Singaporean citizens or PRs who have yet to publish a solo work. There is no age limit and entries may be written on any subject and theme ([www.nac.gov.sg](http://www.nac.gov.sg)).

The NATIONAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE and SCHOLASTIC ASIA have also jointly launched the Scholastic Asian Book Award, an award which promotes the understanding of the Asian experience and its expression in innovative and creative forms. It is an annual prize given to an unpublished fiction (manuscript or translation) targeted at children written by writers in Asia or of Asian origin ([www.scholasticbookaward.asia](http://www.scholasticbookaward.asia)).

With the advent of the Internet, there are now a number of alternative portals for writers to feature their works. Actively submit your works to online poetry sites and magazines. Blogs can also serve as tools to build and propagate an online persona. The NATIONAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE's online publication, *ewordnews*, accepts submissions from writers, poets, artists, photographers and other members of the creative arts community. The *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore* (QLRS), an online journal that promotes the literary arts in Singapore, also welcomes contributions of previously unpublished writing ([www.qlrs.com](http://www.qlrs.com)).

# 3 Publishing

The publishing field can be considered a difficult one to break into. Professionals have, in an unflattering analogy, likened their trade to disaster sites where manuscript debris lie in abject slush mounds. Every publishing company, large or small, has a whole stack of unsolicited manuscripts from hopeful writers- also known as the "slush pile". Here are a few pointers to ensure that your manuscript does not end up in one of these ignominious literary dumps.

Do not submit anything that is less than your best. Only when you are certain that no further changes humanly possible can be made to significantly enhance your work, is it time for submission. Do your homework and find out which publishing houses specialise in printing books close to your work. The NATIONAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE has also

compiled for you a database of local publishing firms and their specialities ([www.bookcouncil.sg](http://www.bookcouncil.sg)).

There are a number of distinct strategies for submitting your work—each one requiring different amounts of background preparation—to enhance the acceptance of your manuscripts. Publishing firms usually do not require writers to submit their completed manuscripts; they prefer a query letter, or a rough outline of your book idea and a book proposal. Nevertheless, submission guidelines vary from firm to firm; it is always useful to check on the submission policies of the publishing firm concerned.

### 3.1 Cover letters

Submissions should be accompanied with a cover letter. A good cover letter is one page, never longer. It provides editors with a snapshot of your book idea to pique their interest and prompts them to ask for more. Like a resume, a cover letter needs to compel attention and respect. It must be typed perfectly, free of any spelling, punctuation or grammar mistakes, in a clear typestyle, 12-point size. It is usually upbeat in tone and broad in scope. Do not, for example, discuss how much you expect to be paid or how long it may take you to write. You want to generate excitement, not get editors bogged down in the gritty details. Networking then comes in useful because letters addressed to a specific editor or agent, with his/her name spelled correctly tend to get processed faster than an envelope addressed to “The Editors”.

Every cover letter should contain three essential elements:

- A brief, yet tantalising, description of the book.
- The identity and size of the audience for the book.

It would be useful to include a few competing titles, preferably three, so that editors can gauge the size and scope of the potential market.

- The biodata of the author and why he/she is expertly qualified to write the book.

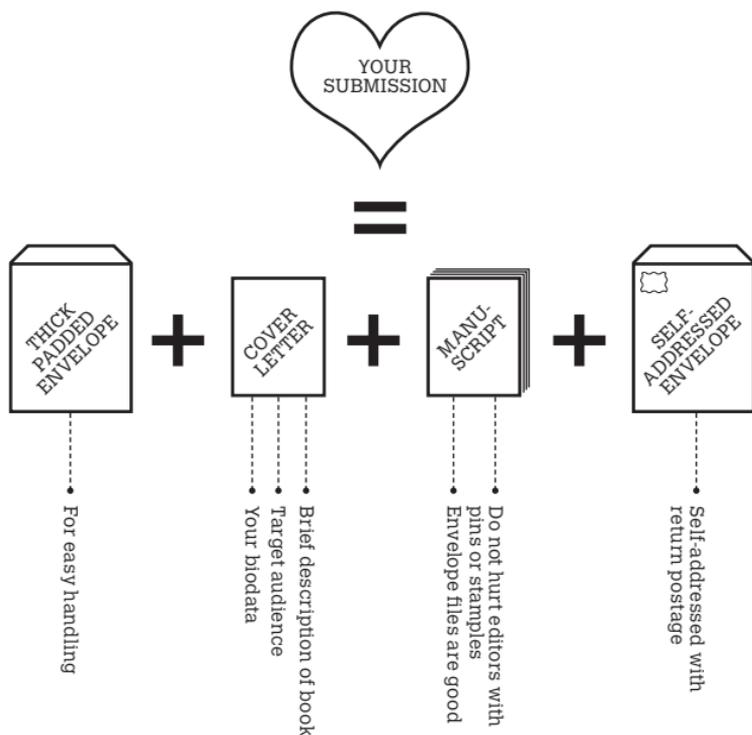


Fig 5: Breakdown of a submission

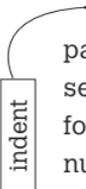
## 3.2 Manuscript layout

Requirements may vary slightly from one publishing firm to another, but there is indeed a widely accepted manuscript layout. EDMUND WEE, Managing Director of EPIGRAM, relates how he once received, to his chagrin, a thick stack of handwritten manuscripts. Not only does this make for difficult reading on the publisher's part, it also makes for difficult writing for the author. Your manuscript should be typed, double spaced, on one side of good quality A4 white paper, with wide (2-4cm) margins all around. This allows space for future editorial changes or instructions to the typesetter.

Paragraphs should be indented. Do not leave lines between paragraphs unless they are meant to indicate the end of a section. This is so that the length can be estimated accurately for printing and costing purposes. In addition, do include the number of words at the end of your manuscript. In a book, new chapters start on new pages, with each page numbered consecutively through the entire manuscript. Do not start each chapter with page 1.

Manuscripts are usually submitted in hardcopy for ease of reading. Do not pin or fasten pages together. Stabbed, bleeding editors are not receptive ones. Do not put pages in a ring binder too. Editors might want to bring manuscripts home—a heavy manuscript that cannot be split up into convenient sections might be a nuisance. An envelope file is enough to keep pages together and tidy. Also, send the manuscript in a strong padded envelope. Ordinary envelopes tend to split if the parcel is heavy.

Do include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you wish to have your manuscript back. It is also advisable to keep a copy



indent

of your manuscript. This is particularly pertinent when you are submitting unsolicited work—publishers are not obliged to return your submission and will not be responsible for lost manuscripts. There are also certain publishing houses that do not mind electronic submissions. Information on the manuscript format can usually be found on the company's website.

### 3.3 Submission

After formatting your manuscript, send it to a publishing house whose work resonates with your subject matter. What to include in your submission package? Here are some general guidelines:

- **Fiction:** A cover letter, a 1-2 page synopsis, and a sample of your manuscript.
- **Non-fiction:** A proposal consisting of an overview, a detailed chapter outline, author bio, 1-2 sample chapters, and a brief analysis of readership and similar titles.
- **Picture Book:** Author – send your manuscript in its entirety. Illustrator – provide sample illustrations, original artworks are usually not required.

Be sure to include all your contact details of where you can be reached. As mentioned before, always check on the submission policies of the publishing firm concerned.

The unwritten ethos of publishing etiquette demands that you submit to one publisher at a time. This is termed 'exclusive submission' and it guarantees that you are allowing only the one publisher an opportunity to consider your book for a set length of time.

The drawback of this approach is that the set length of time is usually two months, after which, writers may then send their manuscripts to other publishing houses for consideration. All authors get pitched to a level of feverish anticipation during the seemingly interminable wait. This takes its toll on the saints among them; similarly on the psychopaths, not to mention the 98% in between.

Perhaps the only thing that writers can do is to brace themselves and carry on with their daily work routines. Should the manuscript be rejected, send it to another publishing house. Even then, success is not guaranteed. TAN HWEE HWEE, acclaimed author and winner of the SINGAPORE LITERATURE PRIZE 2004, reminisces about her initial publishing experiences during which she received about 400 rejection slips for her pains.

Alternatively, you may submit the same manuscript to more than one publisher at the same time. This strategy of multiple submissions may be the best way to rouse healthy competition for your book. Just be sure to mention in your cover letter that it is being submitted to other editors simultaneously.

Nevertheless, conflicting views abound regarding the issue. DR PAUL H. KRATOSKA, Managing Director of NATIONAL UNIVERSITY PRESS PTE LTD, states that while sending letters of enquiry to more than one publisher is generally acceptable, he would be taken aback if other publishers were willing to look at entire manuscripts if they had been submitted to more than one Press. The problem with multiple submissions, he feels, is that once a publisher agrees to consider a manuscript, they begin to invest resources such as editorial time and payment to referees. No publisher can afford to do this without an assurance that they have exclusive rights during the review period. Multiple

submissions are likely to damage the reputation of an author because the practice is widely considered to be unethical.

## 3.4 Working with a Literary Agent

Writers who want to try submitting to a foreign publisher can consider using a literary agent. Even though horror stories abound about the aftermath of a bad agent, there are good reasons for working with an agent. For one, many international publishers will only accept submissions from an agent, and an agent will also make sure that your manuscript fits neatly into the categories the publishers have set out. An agent will negotiate your publishing contract terms ensuring your rights are properly protected. Finally, you may find it difficult to keep up with who is who in the publishing industry and the current trends.

When looking for a suitable agent, you will need to research the agents who work in your area of publishing, and determine if they are qualified and a good match for you. Find and read articles on finding and evaluating literary agents, what to expect, and what you should and shouldn't pay for. There are valuable online resources on finding and checking the credibility of literary agents. Here are some useful links:

- AgentQuery ([www.agentquery.com](http://www.agentquery.com)): a searchable online database of agents
- Predators and Editors ([www.pred-ed.com/pubagent.htm](http://www.pred-ed.com/pubagent.htm)): a comprehensive list of agents: ones who should be avoided have a **not recommended** notation.

- Publishers Marketplace ([www.publishersmarketplace.com](http://www.publishersmarketplace.com)): It has a listing of current most visited agents' pages.
- Check with associations like the Association of Authors' Representatives (US) and Association of Authors' Agents (UK): Agents who are members with such associations are usually reputable ones.
- Search reputable publications with an online presence such as Publisher's Weekly or Publishing News, which regularly report on who's selling what to whom.

It is hard work finding the right literary agents for your work. However, no matter how desperate you feel, avoid agents advertising on the Internet. No agent who is successfully placing books with publishers needs to advertise

### 3.5 Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow

There is only one thing to do after you have sent your manuscript. That is to wait. If you do not hear from the publisher after two months, call the publishing house, or send a copy of your letter, for sake of good order. State that you understand items sometimes go astray in the post.

A publisher cannot publish all the manuscripts he receives and must return most of them to their authors with a rejection letter. Such letters are usually formulated in general terms and if an author receives such a standard letter, it is fruitless to

continue the correspondence. Instead, check if the manuscript is still tidy. Then, send it to the next publisher.

The longed-for phone call offering to publish will probably be greeted with great amounts of ecstasy. Daily ablutions are conducted amid song and dance; you have irrepressible urges to smother that highly perceptive editor with kisses. Amid the first-sale euphoria, it is easy to overlook the perils inherent in the morass of contractual minutiae.

Most publishing houses follow up with a meeting to discuss the terms, after which, the author will have to sign a contract. Generally speaking, the author's agreement or the contract between the author and his publisher covers the following issues: when the author shall deliver his manuscript and what he must supply in addition (i.e. illustrations and indexes) as well as the amount of alterations he is allowed to make without charge after the manuscript has been set in type.

The agreement also outlines the publisher's obligations: when the books will be published and when the royalty will be paid. It also quotes the number of copies the publisher can produce, the approximate price of the book when published and outlines the procedures to follow if the book should be reprinted, or if it has to be sold at a reduced price.

Many writers are afraid to ask an editor for specific details; for fear that such questions will anger the editors, or brand them as inexperienced. Writers have a perfect right, however, to ask how much they are going to be paid, and when their works might be published—assuming these details are not spelled out in the acceptance letter or contract. If writers do not ask questions, they are sending the signal that they may be too timid or inexperienced to stand up for their writings or their rights.

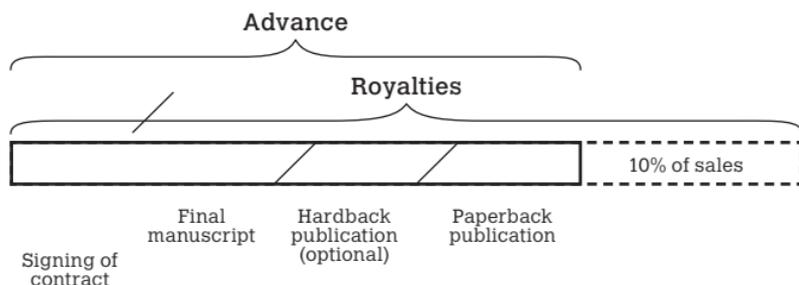


Fig 6: About advance and royalties

Upon settling the contractual issues, you are likely to be given an advance. An advance is a lump sum to be paid usually in three or four installments: the first upon signing a contract, the second on final acceptance of the manuscript, the third on hardback publication and the fourth, up to one year later, on appearance of the paperback. This is a non-refundable advance, a fee that will be set against hoped-for future sales of your book. This is all the money you will see unless or until your percentage of the total sales (usually 10% of the cover price of the book) reaches the advanced amount. If this happens, you will begin earning your 10%—the proportion may rise to about 15% after your sales pass certain agreed-upon milestones. If your sales never reach that amount, you do not have to return any unearned advance.

## 3.6 Royalties

The payment to authors for writing is called a royalty. The amount of royalty depends on the sale of the book. The amount is big if the sale is big, but the author will receive nothing, apart

from the advance, if the book does not sell. Royalty is paid to the author on the basis of the book's selling price. The author gets a certain amount per copy and this is multiplied by the number of copies sold. The royalty rate varies from author to author, project to project.

On the higher end of the scale, the royalty can be 10% of the book's retail price. It is however not unusual for first-time writers to be offered 10% of the book's nett price—this means the price of the book after deducting the discount given to book stores, usually set at 35 to 40%. The royalty rate can also rise with increasing sales. It could be 10% for the first 2,000 copies 12.5% for up to 10,000 copies and 15% for above 10,000 copies sold.

Many authors bemoan the fact that they only get 10% of the retail price of the book. They often question where the rest of the money goes. Here is a breakdown of the pricing of the book.

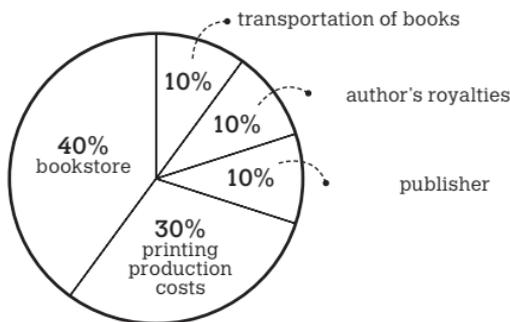


Fig 7: Breakdown of the pricing of a book (example)

## 3.7 Copyright

Authors of a copyrighted work have the right to reproduce, publish, perform, communicate and adapt their works. These exclusive rights form the bundle of rights called copyright; they enable copyright owners to control the commercial exploitation of their works.

For works to be protected by copyright, they have to be original and expressed in tangible forms such as in writings, recordings or films. Originality means that there is a degree of independent effort in the creation of the work. It is not a question of whether the work has creative merit or not. In Singapore, authors automatically enjoy copyright protection as soon as they create and express their works in a tangible form. There is no need to file for registration to get copyright protection.

If however, authors wish to secure evidence of ownership, there are a number of self-help measures that they can employ. One way is to register their works with the ASIAN SCRIPT REPOSITORY (ASR). This provides a dated record of the writer's claim to authorship of a particular work. The ASR assists writers in asserting their proprietorship over their works and in establishing the completion dates of written material, helping to circumvent the problems in proving priority of ownership. For further information, visit the SCREENWRITERS ASSOCIATION (SINGAPORE) website ([www.screenwriters.org.sg](http://www.screenwriters.org.sg)).

Copyright is a form of property. It can be licensed or transferred and whoever creates a work owns it. The Grant of Rights clause in a publishing contract is one of the most crucial. It states the specific rights granted by the author to the publisher, either as an all-inclusive bundle (the granting of all rights and

interests in the author's works to the publisher) or as a distinct, individual right within the copyright bundle (i.e. only the right to publish in print).

This makes for a confusing read. Some publishing contracts can meander on for pages, in legalese that would make one's eyes glaze over if they were not already going blind from the small print. Before authors sign a contract, they need to know what they are authorising the publisher to do with their materials and what are the rights they retain after publication. If authors are uncertain about the meanings of terms like 'exclusive', 'distribution', 'publication', the best approach is simply to ask the editor.

A common issue that arises in publishing is determining what rights have been granted by the author to the publisher. In some cases, only publishing rights have been granted and the author retains the rights to exploit the manuscript in other media (i.e. adaptation to screen or stage). At times, this is unclear not only to the author but also to the publisher. TRINA HA, director at the Corporate Department and the Media and Entertainment Practice Group of SAMUEL SEOW LAW CORPORATION, relates how a client was negotiating with the publisher for the rights to adapt a novel into a screenplay, only to discover much later that the publisher did not have such rights. Ironically, the author did not even realise that he had the rights.

Many authors have bones to pick with publishers on the copyright clause. ROSEMARY LIM, writer and co-winner of the SINGAPORE LITERATURE PRIZE MERIT AWARD (1998), is of the opinion that publishers cannot expect to own every right in the universe of a writer's output unless they are going to use those rights, which right now most do not. Given the limited market in Singapore, writers need to promote themselves outside Singapore but have

no motivation to do so if they have to first get permission from the Singapore publisher to sell their stories overseas, and after that, pay the Singapore publisher up to 80% of the fees from the sales when the publisher has done none of the work.

DILIP MUKERJEA, best-selling author of books in the *Creative Brain* series, agrees. Stung by his publisher's passivity when it came to promoting his books overseas, he decided to take matters into his own hands. After lengthy negotiations with his publisher, he took the rights of his books back and embarked on the self-publishing route. Since then, he has been managing the international sales of his books via his website.

Most publishing contracts in Singapore assign worldwide rights of a work to the publisher. Trina Ha feels that this is really a matter of negotiation and bargaining power: the author can choose to grant the publisher only the publishing rights and only for certain territories. For instance, an author could grant publishing rights only for the Asia-pacific region, which leaves the author free to search for another publisher for USA and Europe.

If publishers insist on worldwide publishing rights, there are various contractual conditions that authors can negotiate for to protect the author's interests. Some examples include setting a timeframe whereby the rights to certain territories would revert back to the author if the publisher does not obtain distribution for the book within those territories. Another possibility would be the application of a different royalty structure with the author getting a larger slice if the deal was secured by the author.

The bottom line is: authors should not give away rights that they do not want to lose. One common mistake authors make is to assume that they will never want to use a piece of work again. Since market conditions are perpetually in flux,

this might become a cause for regret. You never know when it will be advantageous for a reprint of an old article, or when a new anthology will put out a call for stories similar to the ones whose rights you just sold. If you have not retained reprint or anthology rights, you will miss such opportunities that might arise in the future. Look out for clauses that give the publisher the right to reprint, resell, or distribute your work without paying you additional money. Finally, do ensure that you are being adequately compensated for the rights you do sell.

It is therefore critical to ensure that publishing contracts are well-drafted and clearly set out the rights of author and publisher. If in doubt, engage the services of a legal advisor to ensure that your interests are protected and that the terms are fair. There are law corporations with expertise in the field of intellectual property law. These firms are aptly positioned to advise clients not only on ownership issues relating to intellectual property rights, but also how to exploit such rights across different platforms and media and how to structure such deals.

### 3.8 ISBN/CIP

All authors, including self-published authors, have to apply for an INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BOOK NUMBER (ISBN) from the NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD (NLB). The ISBN is an internationally accepted code that provides a unique numerical identification for a publication. It consists of 13 digits divided into four parts. An ISBN uniquely identifies a publication. Publishers, book suppliers and libraries worldwide use ISBN as a reference number for selection and acquisitions. Publications with ISBNs assigned are easily

identifiable and retrievable. Application is available online at (<http://deposit.nl.sg>).

Under the NLB Legal Deposit Act of 1995, all publishers are legally obligated to deposit two copies of any material published in Singapore with the National Library Board, within four weeks of the date of publication. Publishers who contravene or fail to comply with this requirement are liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding S\$5,000. The purpose of legal deposit is to preserve the published national literary heritage and make them accessible to present and future generations. More information at (<http://deposit.nl.sg>).

The Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) service provided by the NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD can also be a useful tool for authors. Under the programme, the NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD's Bibliographic Services staff creates a catalogue record, containing information about the author, title, publisher, date of publication, price and the INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BOOK NUMBER (ISBN). The record is created and arranged according to internationally established standards, which makes it possible to distribute information about publications throughout the world. Email [NLB\\_CIP@nlb.gov.sg](mailto:NLB_CIP@nlb.gov.sg) for application forms.

Another platform that authors might be interested in, as a medium to showcase their works, is the NLB online Repository of Artistic works (NORA). This is a digitised collection of previously unpublished works, out-of-print works or excerpts of works by prominent Singapore writers and artistes for long-term archival and storage. It serves as an online source of reference for people interested in Singapore literature and the arts. The database currently houses mainly literary works by Singapore writers including poetry, plays and works of fiction by prominent Singapore writers and poets. These include ISA KAMARI, FELIX

CHEONG, MOHD PITCHAY GANI, PETER AUGUSTINE GOH, STELLA KON, the late KUO PAO KUN, KIRPAL SINGH, EDWIN THUMBOO, ELEANOR WONG, ROBERT YEO, and more.

## 3.9 Distribution

The last link in the publishing process is distribution. This much-misunderstood business has borne the brunt of attacks from authors and publishers alike; mainly because it has been perceived as charging unnecessarily steep fees. Nevertheless, distribution is a crucial aspect of publishing because it attends to the logistics of getting the published text to the consumer.

Distribution is concerned with three aspects: sales, marketing and stocking. Distributors act on behalf of publishers to ensure viable sales channels—that books are sold in as many bookstores as possible. Bookstores prefer to purchase books through distributors because this reduces administrative overhead costs. It is more convenient for bookstores to deal with one distributor carrying many titles, instead of with multiple small publishers, each touting skimpy selections. Some distributors also use direct marketing tactics to sell their books. This can take the form of arranging book sales during school assemblies, book talks and seminars.

After the books have been placed in stores, distributors have to promote them to ensure viable sales figures. They then take on marketing roles in the areas of public relations and promotions, securing favourable book reviews in popular media, as well as organising author tours and in-store promotions.

JOHNSON LEE, one of the two Directors at MARKETASIA DISTRIBUTORS PTE LTD, explains why book talks and in-store promotions are

advantageous marketing strategies. Most bookstores put up posters and utilise their promotional tools to ensure that sufficient publicity is given to an event. Posters are put up and mailers disseminated to databases. Such measures create hype and generate publicity for authors. More importantly, bookstores have to place additional orders for the titles being promoted to ensure that there are sufficient copies for members of the audience to purchase, should they be so inclined after participating in the session.

Finally, distributors have to take charge of stocking and fulfillment, ensuring that bookstores carry enough copies of books and replenishing stock levels when they run low. For the roles they play in sales, marketing and stocking, distributors usually demand 60% of a book's selling price as their fees. While this may seem steep to the publisher, in reality it is not. The distributor has invested resources and incurred expenses (i.e. freight, warehouse, phone bills and even fines for illegal parking) months before they begin to catch sight of any income. With the standard bookstore demanding 40% of a book's retail price as payment, the distributor is only left with only 20%, much of which goes towards administrative costs.

To help defray the risks, distributors include in their contracts certain clauses concerning payment. First is the fact that they do not owe the publisher anything until they have been paid by the bookstores. Often, the time lapsed between payment to the distributor and from the distributor to the publisher is 60 to 90 days. Distributors will also retain the right to detain a portion of the money due to the publisher for a set amount of time. These measures protect the distributor against the possibility of having unsold books being returned to the distributor for full credit. If these books are not selling

well in other stores, they will in all likelihood be returned to the publisher at the publisher's expense.

Many distributors are not keen on establishing direct working relationships with authors; most prefer to distribute titles published by prominent publishing firms. DAVID BUCKLAND, General Manager at PANSING DISTRIBUTION PTE LTD, thinks that this is in part because of quality assurance. Titles that publishers take up must be of a certain quality for the publisher to invest resources and manpower in them. Another consideration is that publishers possess the expertise to circumvent legal issues; they help to ensure that books do not contain defamatory remarks. If books written by self-published authors sprout slanderous allegations, the outraged parties will most likely take up the matter with the retailers and distributors.

The woes of this beleaguered trade do not end here. In this fractured industry, distributors have extremely localised functions. They are thus not able to ride on the economies of scale afforded by global distribution networks. As yet, there are no international distributors. Currently, publishers have to deal with various distributing firms to get their books out to multiple markets. They can do this via attending major trade fairs, such as the Frankfurt Book Fair, to source for suitable distributors to distribute their titles.

### 3.10 Self-Publishing

Self-publishing is the publication of a literary work by the author without the involvement of a third-party publisher. This is usually undertaken at the expense of the author who maintains control

over the process. The author also retains all rights to their work, which is otherwise signed over to the publisher.

Most books and other publications in earlier centuries were self-published, and many great authors self-published their original work including WILLIAM BLAKE, VIRGINIA WOOLF, WALT WHITMAN, WILLIAM MORRIS, JAMES JOYCE, RUDYARD KIPLING, DH LAWRENCE, EDGAR ALLAN POE, EZRA POUND, GEORGE BERNARD SHAW and MARK TWAIN. In recent times, successful self-published authors include TOM PETERS, and *Eragon* author, CHRISTOPHER PAOLINI.

It was not that long ago that “self-published” implied a lesser quality work not publishable in the mainstream, but a lot has changed in a very short time. The publishing landscape today is dominated by self-published authors (now more correctly referred to as “independent authors”) who represent the new majority with more than 76% of all books published in 2009 being self-published.

What has brought about this change? Primarily, **Technology**.

**1. Print-On-Demand (POD) technology** has made it possible for authors to produce a high-quality book, one book at a time, which means no warehousing or storage costs, and so the old imagery of the self-published author with stacks of unsold books in their garage is immediately dispelled.

The cost to the author to produce a single book depends on the number of pages but as a guide, a 250-page novel would cost approximately US\$3.85 per book. With a Recommended Retail Price (RRP) of say US\$10, the author would earn a royalty of approximately US\$4.14 per book, i.e. 42% which is significantly higher than the 10% one might hope to earn (gross) under contract to a publishing house. An independent author therefore

needs to sell just one book to every four books sold by a traditionally published author to earn the same income.

## **2. E-books**

For many bookworms, e-books have changed the concept of reading, and unlike generations before them, the “now generation” does not associate books and reading with browsing a bricks-and-mortar bookstore to buy a printed version of a book.

Since the first Kindle launched in 2008, there has been a plethora of e-readers and other devices introduced to a growing number of readers. Arising from this increased level of market competition, the cost of e-readers has fallen. As a result, e-book sales reached triple digit growth in just one year. Publishing industry guru, Mike Shatzkin says that within five years, e-books will account for 50% of the market (up from 8%). Printed books sold in bookstores will account for 25% (down from 72% today) while printed books sold online will account for 25% of the market (Source: The Idea Logical Company, [www.idealog.com](http://www.idealog.com)).

It is also worth noting that various big name authors have chosen to self-publish new releases and/or their backlisted titles, for example, JOSEPH A. KONRATH, and two-time PEN/Faulkner winner, JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN. The trustees of the estate of James Bond author, IAN FLEMING have also decided to self-publish the 14 books in the series as e-books much to the disappointment of the publisher of the printed versions, PENGUIN. ANNE RICE is also reportedly considering publishing her future work solely as e-books.

Since most of those in the publishing industry did not foresee the e-book revolution, the vast majority of author

contracts do not provide for e-book rights. These rights therefore rest with the author.

### **Onus is on YOU**

Being an independent author though, does not mean you can skip the traditional publishing processes. For any chance of success, you **MUST**:

1. **review**, rewrite, learn, allow time for your work to mature, review, rewrite, learn... infinitum. One draft and a rewrite or two is not enough unless you are a proven, star performer with a corroborating million-dollar contract.
2. **edit** your work to the highest possible standard. You can edit your own work as a preliminary step, and as a writer, you should at least know the basics for sentence construction, punctuation, spelling and other writing elements and rules such as Point of View. However, all books benefit from the services of a reputable, professional editor, and independent authors must invest wisely in copy editing at the very least and line-by-line editing if budgets will allow. The emphasis though is ensuring your chosen editor has the necessary skill and qualifications—check credentials thoroughly.
3. **engage** professionals to undertake vital design elements for example covers and interior layout, especially with regard to print versions of your book. When it comes to e-books, as of 2010 at least, simple is best. Smashwords ([www.smashwords.com](http://www.smashwords.com)) have produced a Style Guide with easy-to-follow steps to change your word document into a user-friendly e-book.

## Pros and Cons of Independence

### Pros

1. **Time to market:** Your book can be ready for publication in a short period of time, from 6-12 weeks, ensuring that you do not miss a market opportunity. By comparison, a publishing house will take 18-24 months before your book will see a shelf, and that is only after you have invested months or years querying agents without whom you cannot approach most publishers. By the time your book is on the market, you may well have lost an opportunity if interest in your genre has since subsided. This is another possible reason why 70% of authors published with a publishing house are not able to earn back their advance.
2. **Rights:** Independent authors retain all rights to their book. When you sign your rights over to a publishing house under a publishing contract, the publisher can do whatever they like with your work without your approval.
3. **Control:** The independent author is free to make whatever changes they wish with regard to the content, cover and interior design of their work. In contrast, publishers may consult the author about editorial changes and cover selection, but the decision rests with the publisher. This may result in elements of the story being changed against the author's wishes, or covers chosen that might cause an unnecessary backlash for the author.
4. **Longevity:** Books published by independent authors will never go out of print unless the author chooses to withdraw it from sale. The average life span of a book printed through a publisher is approximately 18 months,

at which time the book is “backlisted” and is no longer produced and printed by the publisher. This is not sufficient time, for a debut author particularly, to build a platform and garner a fan base. One author called his publisher to order copies of his book for a book signing and only learned then that his book had been backlisted after just six months on the market.

5. **Royalties:** Independent authors earn significantly higher royalties per book—30 to 70% compared to 10% or less for traditionally published authors.
6. **ISBN:** In Singapore especially, it is easy to obtain an ISBN for your book via the Legal Deposit Office and it’s free. You can apply online at (<http://deposit.nl.sg>). An ISBN is not essential for an e-book, but is desirable.
7. **Services:** There are numerous companies that offer publishing services to the independent author with packages to suit any budget (see Annexure A). These packages can include a range of add-ons for example editing, audio and e-book publishing, marketing, promotional material, press releases etc.
8. **Print as required:** Your book will be printed as and when it is purchased through any of the numerous online outlets or distribution channels. You no longer have to order large quantities of your book and find storage space. Authors can also order copies of their book as required.
9. **Distribution channels:** Distribution used to be a con for independent authors, but many global distributors e.g. Baker & Taylor and Ingram, now distribute books by independent authors, which means titles are available for purchase by bookstores, libraries etc. While the bricks-

and-mortar bookstore remains the domain of publishing houses, there are numerous other non-bookstore channels accessible to the independent author e.g. corporations and businesses that offer gifts to clients and customers, gift shops, schools, libraries etc.

## Cons

1. **Costs:** Independent authors are responsible for the costs of producing and publishing their book. Depending on which strategy, company, package and add-on services you select, this can be expensive. This is where organisations such as the ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT AUTHORS ([www.independent-authors.org](http://www.independent-authors.org)) can assist, and ensure you engage a credible company and do not pay for services that will not generate a benefit. However, e-books can be created and uploaded to Amazon.com, Smashwords and other online stores at little expense other than the cost of design for the book's front cover.
2. **Bookstores:** Bookstores prefer to stock books offered by a distributor and some local distributors still do not buy books from independent authors. However, independent authors can approach bookstores and arrange to sell their book "on consignment." On consignment, the bookstore will issue a Supply Agreement for a quantity of your book. However, you will only be paid when stock sells. In order to secure a Supply Agreement, you will need to offer other industry standard terms and conditions including a discount off the Recommended Retail Price (approx 30-40%), and 90-day payment terms etc. After a time, unsold books will be returned to you at your expense (note though that this is the same for

authors with a publishing house i.e. “returns”). Note: independent authors should not become obsessed with a need to have a bookstore presence as there are numerous other avenues available for book sales.

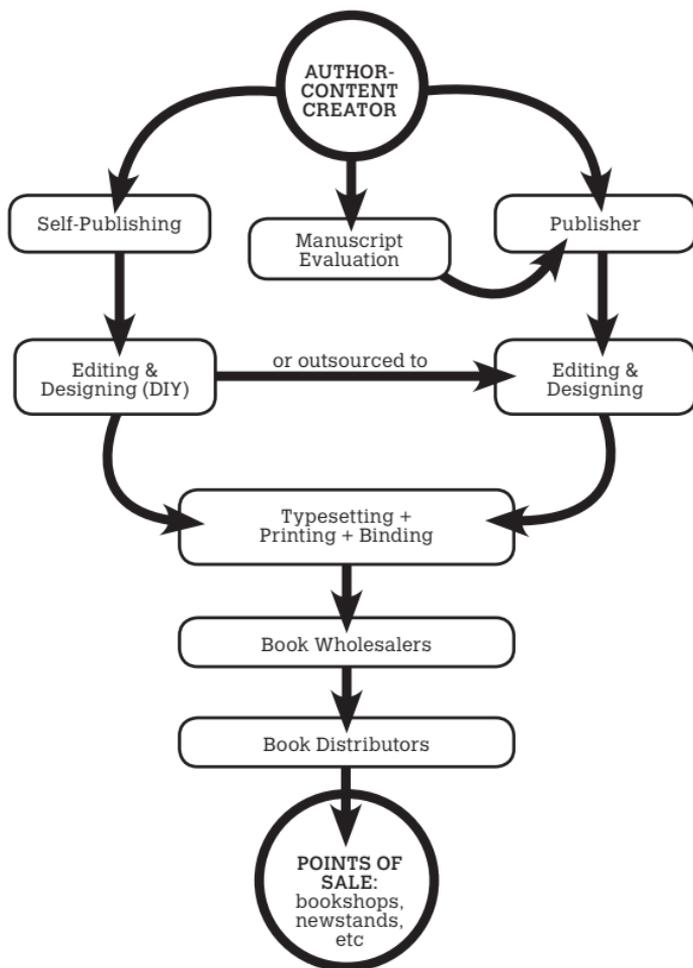
3. **Marketing & Promotion:** Independent authors are responsible for the marketing and promotion of their book, however this is now the case for the vast majority of traditionally published authors as well. All authors must market and promote their book at their own expense. Marketing and promotion is not necessarily a con—some authors thoroughly enjoy selling and promoting themselves and their work as, after all, it is a product they know better than anyone. While some marketing activities can be expensive, there is a lot one can do on a limited budget.
4. **Time and energy:** Many authors think that once their book is published their work is done. This could not be further from the truth. Once published, the real work begins and one must be prepared to invest time, energy and innovative thinking to ensure their book is a success.

The publishing landscape has changed. Self-publishing, or being an independent author, no longer carries the stigma of the past and it is now possible to self-publish with respect. This is evidenced by the changing attitudes in the publishing industry, for example, Publishers Weekly, an esteemed publication, now reviews self-published books, something they would never have done just two years ago. Gone are the days when self-publishing was virtually synonymous with self-defeating.

## 3.11 Bask

After ironing out the technical folds of the publication process, it is now time to take a breather. Writing is about creation, the same ecstasy that Pygmalion himself felt when his sculptured woman came to life. In addition, as acclaimed author Shirley Lim succinctly puts it, the greatest joy of being published is being read. The opportunity to share your works with like-minded individuals can be a source of immense pleasure. Enjoy the book launches and promotional meetings; get feedback on your work and start writing your next book!

## 3.12 Summary of the Publishing Process



## 4 Have a Question? Ask our Advisors

Budding writers, who have doubts or queries regarding the often-bewildering facets of the publishing process, are welcome to seek advice and assistance from members of our advisory panel.

The advisory panel comprises publishing consultants, established writers and legal advisors experienced in the book trade. These professionals from the four official language groups will provide answers to any writing and publishing enquiries that you might have.

Email us at [swc\\_info@bookcouncil.sg](mailto:swc_info@bookcouncil.sg) with your queries.

The SINGAPORE WRITERS CENTRE (SWC) will collate the enquiries. At the end of every month, the Centre will collate and pass these enquiries to the advisors. Writers can expect an answer for their queries by the second week of the next month.

Enquiries may be worded in the four main language

Have a question?

categories, i.e. English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Advisors may choose to reply in these language categories.

Advisors will be expected to give only a general overview. For specialised services such as manuscript review and editorial advice, and legal assistance such as in-depth legal advice or contract review, advisors may inform the SINGAPORE WRITERS CENTRE that these services are chargeable.

## 4.1 Members of the English Advisory Panel

**Philip Tatham** is the publisher at MONSOON BOOKS in Singapore. He has over ten years experience in publishing and has worked on illustrated books, encyclopaedias, fiction and narrative non-fiction. Philip established MONSOON BOOKS in 2003; he has attracted some highly respected authors to be published under the 'monsoon' imprint and has produced a number of regional bestsellers.

MONSOON BOOKS publishes fiction (general and literary) and narrative non-fiction (biography and autobiography, memoir, true crime, travelogue and literary journalism), with distribution throughout Asia, North America and ANZ. Monsoon's authors hail from Britain, Ireland, America, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand.

**Chua Hong Koon** is the Publishing Director at AMOUR PUBLISHING PTE LTD, a local publishing company focusing on Christian and general trade books. Hong Koon has more than 30 years of

publishing experience. He has published many types of books, from children's books to assessment books, reference books, textbooks, trade books, professional books, and now Christian books. Having worked in OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS and PEARSON EDUCATION for many years, Hong Koon has had the opportunity to work with authors from many countries.

Hong Koon is an EXCO member of the SINGAPORE BOOK PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION, and he chairs the Copyright Subcommittee. He has a Science degree and also a Law degree.

**Trina Ha** is a director in the Corporate Department and the Media and Entertainment Practice Group of SAMUEL SEOW LAW CORPORATION.

She specialises in the practice of corporate and commercial law with an emphasis on intellectual property law and media and entertainment law. Her practice in these fields is buttressed by her extensive exposure to a wide range of transactions over the years (including legal documentation for the financing and production of feature films and television programmes, option rights on books, agreements for development and licensing of computer games, franchise and distribution agreements, and technology transfer agreements).

In 2000, she co-authored a volume on Media Law published by BUTTERWORTHS as the first title in the series of *Singapore Precedents and Forms*.

**Tan Hwee Hwee** grew up in Singapore and the Netherlands. She read English Literature at the UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA, where she graduated with First Class Honours. She has a Masters in English Studies from the UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD and a MFA in Creative Writing from NEW YORK UNIVERSITY.

Her short stories have appeared in *PEN International*, *New Writing 6 ed AS Byatt* and won numerous awards with the BBC.

Have a question?

She published her first novel, *Foreign Bodies* (Penguin), aged 22, while she was still a graduate student at the University of Oxford. *Foreign Bodies* was featured on the front page of the Wall Street Journal for being “the first novel by a Singaporean author to receive critical acclaim in the UK and the US”. In 2001, she published her second novel, *Mammon Inc* (Penguin), which received widespread critical acclaim in Asia and spent over two months on the WH Smith Top 20 bestseller list in Asia. *Mammon Inc* was also adapted for the stage during the 2002 SINGAPORE ARTS FESTIVAL, where it sold out all its performances.

Tan has received numerous awards from the NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL, the NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE, the NEW YORK TIMES FOUNDATION and the BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION. She received the Young Artist Award from the NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL in 2003, the highest arts award given to an artist under 35. *Mammon Inc* won the 2004 SINGAPORE LITERATURE PRIZE.

## 4.2 Members of the Chinese Advisory Panel

**Dr. Chua Chee Lay** is a Chinese linguist, educational technology researcher, award-winning poet and a dedicated educator who has been commended for Excellence in Teaching by NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. He received an overseas scholarship from NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY (NTU) to pursue his MA and Ph.D. in Chinese linguistics at the UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON, USA. He was formerly the Sub-Dean, Arts and Social Sciences Cluster in NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION (NTU), Chief Researcher

for CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES RESEARCH LAB, Asian Languages and Cultures Academic Group in NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION and Advisor for Pre-School Curriculum Development at the MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (SINGAPORE).

Currently, he is the Chinese language tutor for Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, as well as the President of the Republic of Singapore, His Excellency S R Nathan, and the Minister for Defense, Rear Admiral Teo Chee Hean. Dr Chua is now the Director for CHINESE LEARNING LAB.

**Denon Lim Denan** was the news editor for LIANHE ZAobao from 1884-1994. He is currently the Executive Director and Chief Editor of LINGZI MEDIA PTE LTD, one of the leading Chinese publishing houses in Singapore.

His involvement in the publishing and editorial field for more than twenty years has made him a famed publisher for books of Chinese content. Apart from endorsing the publishing of local works, he also places emphasis on the publications and promotion of Chinese books for local youths.

Denon is also a committee member of the SINGAPORE CHINESE PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION and THE SINGAPORE BOOKSELLERS AND STATIONERS ASSOCIATION.

As a poet, Denon started writing in his teenage years. His poetry won the second prize of the GOLDEN POINT AWARD in 2001. In 2003, he won first prize in the GOLDEN POINT AWARD. He has published numerous collections, among them *Meng Jian Shi*, which was shortlisted for the SINGAPORE LITERATURE PRIZE 2006, *Kauiile Wangzi*, *Wanju Wangguo*, *Hanhan Gege Wo Wen Ni*. He has also edited many local Chinese works.

## 4.3 Members of the Malay Advisory Panel

**Anuar Othman** first started writing at the age of 18. His short story, *Hashimoto-san*, won the 1st prize in the 1997 Golden Point Awards: SPH-NAC Short Story Writing Competition and the third prize for the Mimpi Shakespeare (Dream Shakespeare) Competition in 1999. In 2001, he won 1st prize in the poetry category.

In 1998, he read Creative Writing in WEST DEAN COLLEGE, England. In 2000, he attended the International Writing Program at the UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, USA.

Anuar Othman has published 11 books to date. Besides short stories and poems, he has also written radio and television plays, literary essays, novels and song lyrics. Currently, Anuar teaches creative writing in schools. He was selected as the ambassador for the NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD in 2006's Celebrating Libraries campaign.

**Associate Professor Kamsiah Abdullah** is the head of the Malay Language and Culture Division of the Asian Language and Culture Academic Group at the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY. She teaches curriculum studies, which includes Malay language teaching methodology, language testing, Malay linguistics and sociolinguistics.

She is presently the principal investigator of a mother tongue project with the CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE (CRPP) and has delivered academic papers in conferences and seminars both locally and abroad. She has

authored several books and also writes articles for scholarly international and local journals such as the *Singapore Journal of Education* and *Sekata*. She has contributed chapters to a number of Malay and English books and was the editor of Malay magazines, *An-Nisa'* and *Titian* from 1996 – 2002.

## 4.4 Members of the Tamil Advisory Panel

**Mohamed Iqbal** or **K.T.M. Iqbal** has contributed poems, literary articles, short stories and radio plays to the region's newspapers, magazines as well as radio programmes since 1957. To date, he has published seven poetry collections. He received the S.E.A. Write Award in 2001 and the KALA RATNA AWARD in 2004 from the SINGAPORE INDIAN FINE ARTS SOCIETY.

# Members of the Advisory Panel

Tamil

Chinese

Malay

English



**Dr. Chua Chee Lay**  
Writer



**Anuar Othman**  
Writer



**Denon Lim Denan**  
Writer



**Dr. Kamsiah Abdullah**  
Writer



**Mohamed Iqbal**  
Writer



**Philip Tatham**  
Publisher



**Trina Ha**  
Lawyer



**Chua Hong Koon**  
Publisher



**Tan Hwee Hwee**  
Writer

## **ANNEXURE A** Self-Publishing Services

About Books, Inc	<a href="http://www.about-books.com">www.about-books.com</a>
AuthorHouse	<a href="http://www.authorhouse.com">www.authorhouse.com</a>
Book Force UK	<a href="http://www.bookforce.co.uk">www.bookforce.co.uk</a>
Bookpal	<a href="http://www.bookpal.com.au">www.bookpal.com.au</a>
CreateSpace	<a href="http://www.createspace.com">www.createspace.com</a>
DellArte Press	<a href="http://www.dellartepress.com">www.dellartepress.com</a>
Dog Ear Publishing	<a href="http://www.dogearpublishing.net">www.dogearpublishing.net</a>
iUniverse	<a href="http://www.iuniverse.com">www.iuniverse.com</a>
Love of Books	<a href="http://www.loveofbooks.com.au">www.loveofbooks.com.au</a>
Lulu	<a href="http://www.lulu.com">www.lulu.com</a>
Outskirts Press	<a href="http://www.outskirtspress.com">www.outskirtspress.com</a>
Schiel & Denver	<a href="http://www.schieldenver.com">www.schieldenver.com</a>
Seaview Press	<a href="http://www.seaviewpress.com.au">www.seaviewpress.com.au</a>
Self Publish Australia	<a href="http://www.selfpublish.com.au">www.selfpublish.com.au</a>
Self Publishing, Inc	<a href="http://www.selfpublishing.com">www.selfpublishing.com</a>
Sid Harta Publishers	<a href="http://www.sidharta.com/au/">www.sidharta.com/au/</a>
WestBow Press	<a href="http://www.westbowpress.com">www.westbowpress.com</a>
WingSpan Press	<a href="http://www.wingspanpress.com">www.wingspanpress.com</a>

## ANNEXURE B Useful Links

Assistance

Showcase

Legal issues

<b>Association of Independent Authors</b> www.independent-authors.org	☐		
<b>Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore</b> www.iras.gov.sg ↳Tax issues	☐		
<b>ISBN application</b> deposit.nl.sg			☐
<b>Media Development Authority</b> www.smf.sg	☐		
<b>National Arts Council</b> www.nac.gov.sg ↳Mentor Access Project ↳Golden Point Award ↳Publishing and Translation Grant	☐		☐ ☐ ☐
<b>National Book Development Council</b> www.bookcouncil.sg ↳ Singapore Writers Centre ↳ eWordNews		☐	☐ ☐
<b>Quarterly Literary Review Singapore</b> www qlrs.com		☐	
<b>Screenwriters Association (Singapore)</b> www.screenwriters.org.sg			☐
<b>Scholastic Asian Book Award</b> www.scholasticbookaward.asia		☐	
<b>Singapore Book Publishers Association</b> www.singaporebookpublishers.sg	☐		

**Assistance**

**Showcase**

**Legal issues**

**Singapore International Foundation**

[www.sif.org.sg](http://www.sif.org.sg)

☐

**The Arts House**

[www.theartshouse.com.sg](http://www.theartshouse.com.sg)

☐

# A Glossary of Publishing Terms

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## A

**Advance:** An amount of royalties paid to a writer before the product is released

**AI Sheet:** Advance information sheet. A single page document produced by publishers to alert the trade to a forthcoming title.

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## B

**Back list:** Titles already in print by a particular publisher. These should be studied, together with their front list, before submitting proposals to them.

**Blurb:** The short description of a book usually printed on the back cover or in the jacket sleeve.

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## C

**Cover:** This refers to the outer pages of paperback books only. Hardbacks have jackets.

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## D

**Draft:** A stage in the life of a manuscript. The first draft is the first complete (or almost complete) version of the manuscript. Early drafts are sometimes called rough drafts because they are not fully developed or polished. A final draft occurs many drafts later when the work is deemed to be finished. Differences between drafts can vary from a few spelling corrections to a fundamental rewrite of the entire body of the text.

# E

**eBook:** A version of a book designed to be sold as an electronic download from the Internet.

**Editor:** The publisher's representative in working with the author, editors have several functions, which vary according to the size and complexity of the publishing house. In general, there are two types of editors: those who manage a publishing program—the sponsoring editors and those who check manuscripts for accuracy, style them and help transform them into printed pages—the editing supervisors. With Singapore publishing firms being of a smaller scale, the job scopes of the twain often merge.

--> **Sponsoring Editor:** Sometimes called an executive editor, a senior editor or a project director, the sponsoring editor is responsible for

managing a publishing program. In a typical publishing house, there are often one or two sponsoring editors for each major discipline and for each level. It is the sponsoring editor's responsibility to plan and publish as many books as are needed to serve a particular market. To do so, he/she must constantly keep in touch with current subject-matter developments and market trends. Some sponsoring editors are subject-matter specialists themselves and they are capable of helping authors plan books, even helping them to write it if the need arises.

--> **Editing Supervisor:** The editor who shepherds a manuscript from typescript to finished book is called an editing supervisor or a production editor. The typical editing supervisor is an English major; many possess advanced

degrees in English and have had several years of experience in producing books. Some supervisors plan and gather illustrations, reorganise and rewrite copies, figure out ways to display tables and charts and oversee art and design.

--> **Copy Editor:** Working under the supervision of the editing supervisor, the copy editor is the last bulwark of defence before a manuscript goes to print. The copy editor pores over a manuscript very carefully, often several times. He tightens up loose sentences to make them clear and direct; guards against redundancies, contradictions and inconsistencies; corrects grammar and usage; and establishes uniformity in capitalisation, spelling, abbreviation and other points of style.

--> **Sub-editor:** The copy editor's counterpart in newspaper or magazine

publishing. The sub-editor is not a deputy editor; his/her job is to edit the material before it goes to the printer.

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## F

**Front List:** The list of books a publisher is planning to launch in the coming year or so.

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## I

**ISBN:** International Standard Book Number. This identifies every edition of every book to enable efficient ordering and stock control in libraries and bookstores.

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## J

**Jacket:** The loose paper covering that wraps around some hardback books.

## L

**Literary Agent:** A specialist sales person trusted by publishers to filter out bad or unprofitable writing. Agents will handle all contractual negotiations, chase royalty payments and take a percentage of the author's income for their troubles. Good literary agents should offer editorial advice which may help an author improve his book.

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## M

**Manuscript:** Literally means a handwritten book, but the word is in general use today to mean any unpublished work whether typed or in a word processed format.

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## P

**Proposal:** A suggestion of a book idea made by an author to a publisher. Similar to a submission, but sometimes

relating to a book which has not been written.

**Proofreading:** Carefully reading through a manuscript to look for errors.

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## R

**Royalty:** A payment made to an author based on sales quantity or sales income.

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## S

**Self-publishing:** When an author arranges and pays for the publication of their own book, either in print or on the Internet, and in effect becomes a publisher in their own right.

**Slush pile:** The pile of book proposals, samples and manuscripts that sits on an editor's desk. Usually it refers to unsolicited manuscripts which hang around for longer because they are a lower priority than submissions that the publisher has actually asked to see.

**Spine-on:** A bookshop shelf can display books either face out with the covers showing, or spine-on, where only the spines are available.

**Submission:** Typically a covering letter, synopsis and a couple of sample chapters submitted to a publisher.

**Synopsis:** A summary of a book or other written work, usually not much more than a page in length. Typically a book chapter would be summarised in no more than one paragraph in the synopsis.

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## T

**Typescript:** Refers to an unpublished book in typed form, although usually synonymous with manuscript.

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## V

**Vanity publishing:** When an author pays a publishing company to publish their books.

### **Let Us Know What You Think**

We try hard to make the Writers Resource Kit the most comprehensive and thorough source of information about publishing. Your views on what we are doing and how we can make things better are important to us. Do feel free to offer suggestions and comments by sending us an e-mail at [swc\\_info@bookcouncil.sg](mailto:swc_info@bookcouncil.sg)