

Amy's Two Cents on How to Attempt to Get a Trade Book (i.e., Not a Textbook) Published by a Traditional Mainstream Publishing House

STEP ONE: Write the book. For first-time authors, very few publishers will extend a contract based on a concept alone, especially for a work of fiction. A majority of the people who ask me for advice about getting published have not actually produced a manuscript yet. Writing the book is a good test of your commitment level. If your project is nonfiction, you can try submitting the first three [very well written] chapters if they're accompanied by an extensive proposal that maps the remaining chapters.

STEP TWO: Convince a literary agent to represent you. Mainstream publishers receive too many submissions over the transom; their editors almost always require that prospective projects be submitted through an agent. Get your hands on a copy of the *Literary Market Place*. Most public libraries carry it, and there is an online edition as well, though I believe a fee has to be paid to access it that way. The LMP is the industry's yellow pages. The agents' listings include all contact information as well as descriptions of the types of books they acquire. Although I know of one success story from a nontraditional agent who required a fee before she would represent a work, I generally don't recommend working with agents who ask for a nonrefundable fee up front. Traditional agents and traditional commercial publishers take no money from authors when the manuscript is being shopped. In the traditional publishing model, the full brunt of the financial risk falls on the shoulders of the agent (who may not get a penny for all this labor if, in the end, the book doesn't get published) and the publisher, who pays for all costs associated with editorial, design, printing, marketing, publicity, sales, and shipping. (Yes, costs are obviously reduced for digital editions.)

UNIVERSITY PRESSES may ask authors to pay for artwork rights or other production costs, and UP editors generally work directly with prospective authors, sans agents. Familiarize yourself with the specialties of the UP you wish to approach. Most university presses do publish a few trade (i.e. non-academic, non-technical) titles, but very few projects come with the offer of an advance.

SELF-PUBLISHING has become much easier through digital media, particularly through Amazon's self-pub division, but DIY books are generally most effective for serving a limited, very targeted audience, such as an author's personal circle of friends, colleagues, clients, or relatives. The best self-published books are honed by an experienced editor and an accomplished designer who were hired by the author to provide quality production assistance. Also, unless the author already has a substantial marketing platform, self-published books are at a disadvantage when it comes to publicity, distribution, and literary awards, making it difficult (though not impossible) for them to attract a wide following.