

Developed by:
Heidi Petermeier, Program Officer I
Jean Norman, Community Based Instructor III
Claudia C. Collins, Ph.D., Area Specialist, Aging Issues



Senior Wellness Series

Creating an Autobiography: Publishing Your Memoirs

FACT SHEET 12-10



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For more information please contact Heidi Petermeier or Claudia Collins at 702-257-5588.

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Creating an Autobiography: Publishing Your Memoirs



Now that you've started writing your life story, you may be wondering how to go about getting it published. **The Library of Congress registered about 166,000 new book titles for copyright in 2009.** It's easy to dream about the fame and fortune that will come with the best seller that is your life. Unfortunately, that is not the reality for most published authors. Writing books is not just a creative process; it's a small business.

Many authors publish their own books, either because the market is small for the type of books they write or because they want to retain full control. Even authors who have agents and are published by big publishing houses have to sell each book to the publishers and are expected to help market their books.

Perhaps all you want is to make a few copies for family members, but you want them to look professional, like real books. This guide to publishing and self-publishing will get you started.

Approaching a Traditional Publisher

There are two pathways to mainstream publishing, such as Random House, Simon & Schuster, Little Brown or other companies responsible for your favorite authors:

- ▶ It's a long shot, but you can send your manuscript directly to a small publisher that accepts direct submissions. A big publisher might pick up the book later.
- ▶ You can get an agent, who will send your manuscript to large or small publishers for a percentage of the proceeds.

One resource for finding agents and publishers is *Writer's Market*, which has been providing publishing contact information since 1921. The print edition, *Writer's Market* or *Writer's Market Deluxe Edition*, can be found at your local bookstore or library. The online guide costs about \$40 for an annual subscription. *Writer's Market* also offers tips on getting published and manuscript formatting, and the online version features a personalized searchable database with submission tracking tools.

It is important to be able to use a computer, as most of the book business is done through email these days. Because a traditional publisher pays the expenses of publishing and marketing, it may give the author only a small percentage of the sales as royalties. Before you contact an agent or publisher, read their website carefully. The website will include submission guidelines that will tell you whether your book is the right genre for that agent or publisher. Many will not accept memoirs. All published authors say it takes many rejections before a manuscript is accepted, so don't give up.



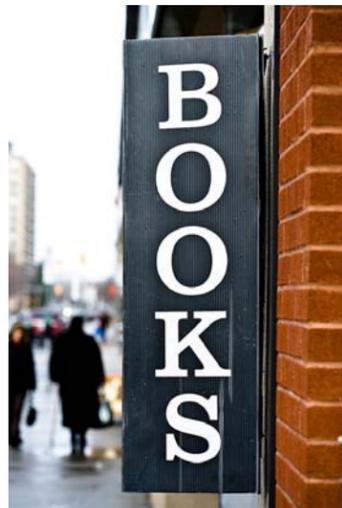
Going Solo: Self-Publishing

Self-publishing is not new but is increasing in popularity as many authors decide to take book publishing into their own hands. **In 2010, about 30 percent of new books were self-published.** With self-publishing, the author should retain all rights and pay for services as they are used, such as editing, graphic design and printing. Good self-publishing businesses treat authors as clients and ensure they retain final control.

The cost of self-publishing varies widely, but an author should expect to pay at least \$1,000 to get things going. Marketing will be an additional cost, but a well thought-out marketing plan will increase sales of your book. Ultimately you will be your book's best salesperson. **Other tips:**

- ▶ Have your book professionally edited.
- ▶ Be sure to investigate any company before signing a contract.
- ▶ Have the right cover design package; title, cover, book size and interior features.
- ▶ Don't forget to create the digital edition, or e-book, to sell on Amazon.com.

Common Publishing Terms:



Copyright. Registration with the U.S. Copyright Office. It protects your work. It can be done at www.copyright.gov.

I.S.B.N. International standard book number. Needed if books will be marketed to bookstores.

POD. Print on demand. Individual books are printed as they are ordered and mailed to the buyer, usually within 48 hours.

Reading fee. A charge to evaluate a manuscript. It may also be called a membership fee. Avoid those who charge a fee.

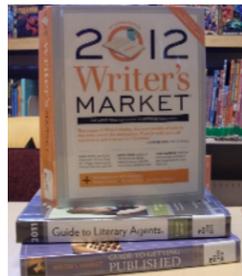
Subsidy publishing. An agreement where the author and publisher share in the costs of printing. This can be good or it can be a scam. Do a thorough background check first.

Vanity press. Authors pay for publishing and marketing their books. Publishers make profits largely by selling books back to authors. Most vanity publishers use sales tactics and low introductory pricing. They may call themselves "traditional" publishers. Be wary.

Online Resources:

- ▶ The Independent Publishing Magazine: www.mickrooney.blogspot.com
- ▶ Writer's Digest: www.writersdigest.com
- ▶ Preditors and Editors: www.pred-ed.com

- ▶ LifeStories Book: www.lifestoriesbooks.stephenspress.com
This publisher is specifically for memoirs and personal histories and is based in Las Vegas, Nev.



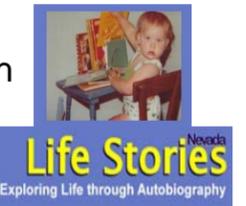
Find resources at the library too.

Personal Publication



If you just want to publish a few copies for your friends and family, there is no need for ISBNs, agents or the rest. Here are some suggestions to create your personal publication:

- ▶ Using a printed copy of your document, put it in a notebook and be as creative as you wish with photos, colored paper, designer covers, scrapbook supplies, etc.
- ▶ Burn your story and photos onto a compact disc (CD) to easily distribute to family and friends. Office supply stores carry products to help with this type of project, complete with CD labels you design and print. For a more professional CD project, local computer printing/design businesses may offer this service for a fee.
- ▶ Laminating, binding and booklet printing are an option and can be done at most office supply or copy stores, like Fed Ex Kinkos, at variable costs.
- ▶ Create a photo book, with optional captions, using websites such as Snapfish.com or Shutterfly.com. Projects are saved in your website account. Prices start at \$13.
- ▶ If you want a professional-looking book, online services such as lulu.com or CreateSpace, a division of Amazon.com, can do small projects.
- ▶ LifeStoriesNevada.org offered by the *University of Nevada Cooperative Extension* is an online repository for stories done through the program's memoir-writing workshop. It is free, and you retain complete control of the story. Anyone can read and print parts of your story so identifying information is deleted to protect privacy. The website also provides writing tips, resources and workshop information.



A final useful tip: Join a local writers group. Most local areas have organized groups and can be easily found through a Web search or websites like meetup.com. Community libraries may have information, too, on these types of meetings as well as local bookstores. A writers group can offer constructive criticism and you can learn from fellow authors' experience. They may also be able to recommend agents, publishers or self-publishing options. Groups in Las Vegas, Nev. can be found at: www.meetup.com/Las-Vegas-Writers & www.hendersonwritersgroup.com.

Other fact sheets in the *Creating an Autobiography* series include *Starting the Process* and *A Family Keepsake*.