

The *Tenacious* *Writer's* Guide to Success

Five Steps to Being
a Published Author

by Sara Whitford



Dearest Writer,

There is a reason you downloaded this booklet.

You just know that there is absolutely NO REASON why you should have to seek someone else's permission to be successful.

You have an amazing book idea. So why should you have to wait for the gatekeepers to nod and pat you on the head and say it's good enough?

You're tenacious. You're determined to see your book published and you're done with letting others decide whether or not the world should be allowed to read what you have written.

It's your book. You have something important to say. Get it out there and let readers decide.

Go do your thing, Writer! I'm cheering you on!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping 'S' and a trailing flourish.

*“Believe you can and you’re
halfway there.”*

— Theodore Roosevelt

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Take Control of Your *Story*

No matter where you are in your writing journey — whether you've been working on a writing project for weeks or years — I want you to understand one thing: That book that you want to write is important. You have something to say.

The only person who should get to decide whether or not your book gets published is you.

In the traditional publishing world, you have to write your manuscript, revise it until you think it's perfect, then shop it around in hopes of finding an agent who thinks you, and your book, are worth their time.

But let's face it: Book agents are contacted by countless writers every day, so finding a book agent who wants to represent you is like finding a needle in a haystack.

Once you have finally found a book agent, it's their job to try and find a publisher who is willing to take on your project.

And to add insult to injury, after enduring the emotional rollercoaster that was finding an agent, now you have to go through the same thing again while that agent shops your book to potential publishers.

You get to relive that shopping-your-book-around anxiety ALL OVER AGAIN! Sound like fun?

Not to me!

Ok, so let's just say your needle-in-a-haystack agent gets you a publishing deal. You haven't even made a penny yet, but you basically already owe them money. By this, I mean they're guaranteed a cut from your the money you're getting paid from both your advance and your royalties, and typically in the neighborhood of 15%.

This whole process may take months, or even years, and then even longer for the book to wend its way through editing, layout, design, and distribution channels to be launched at some point far in the future.

Meanwhile, if you had just taken control of your story, your book could already be published, and the revenue is all yours.

So write the story you want to write or write the non-fiction book you want to write. Whip that manuscript into shape, and then *you* publish it yourself!

Take Control of Your *Timeline*

What do I mean by timeline? I mean anything having to do with the time it takes you to write a book and then to see it through to publication.

When an author is traditionally published — in other words, if an author is signed to a contract with a publishing company — that author (perhaps unless its J.K. Rowling or Clive Cussler) is at the mercy of the publishing company's timeline.

Sure, you can ask for extensions now and then, but the bigger issue is likely to be the snail's pace at which they get your finished manuscript edited, published, and to market.

I had a very talented writer friend who was working on her first novel the same time I was working on mine. She was determined to get a publishing contract. Meanwhile, I never considered one.

I published my first book and was already getting lots of positive reviews before she ever even got her publishing contract.

She said she thought it was worth the wait, since after all, it was a small publishing company and they cared about

their writers. It wasn't going to be like one of those big publishing companies where you're just another number. She felt very fortunate to have the situation she did.

Well, guess what! I had already published my second book by the time her first book was finally published. And then that small publishing company that signed her folded. They were bought out by another publishing company that took over her contract! The new company published her second book in the series, but she hasn't had anything else published since then.

It's a shame because she's such a talented writer!

What I do know is if she had gone ahead and independently published her novels, she'd likely have already put out several titles in that series and she would be bringing in some nice, steady revenue with her loyal readers.

One thing I will tell you about *your* timeline, though: The longer you take to write your book, the harder it's going to be to decide that it's ready to go. You'll nitpick it to death. You'll be looking for a perfection that you will never find.

Commit today to take action and finish that manuscript so you can get it ready for primetime and publish it!

Take Control of Your *Design*

I don't know about you, but I had very specific ideas for how I wanted my book covers to look, and even the book interiors and all of the marketing materials surrounding my books. At the very least, I knew the vibe I wanted all of that to give to potential readers.

I had put so much work into each of my novels that they were like a part of me. It just wouldn't feel right having someone else come in and make the final decisions about the first impressions that my books would make on the world.

Is it possible if my books had been published by some big company that the covers might look somehow more professional or impressive?

Perhaps. But they would lose that connection to me. They would become commodities designed by committee rather than artwork created by — or at the very least, directed by — the author.

One of my favorite parts of having created the designs for all of my novels is that I own all of the brand assets. I bought licenses to the stock images for each cover. (And in case you're wondering, no, that doesn't have to be

expensive! There are even free sites where you can get gorgeous stock imagery, but more on that some other time.)

I handpicked the title and interior fonts that I would use. If at some point I decide I want to freshen up all of my books with new cover designs, I can do that. I don't have to get permission from a publisher and I don't have to wait for them to pay artists to rework them.

These days, with so many online resources available for creating affordable high resolution graphics, or even totally free resources, I just don't see the advantage of dealing with all of the negatives of publishing contracts just to have those expenses covered by a publisher.

Because let's face it: You're still paying those expenses. The only difference is, they're coming out of the cut you pay to the publishing company from your royalties. You don't think they're going to pay designers to do the art just because they like you, do you?

As you are working on your manuscript, be thinking about what kind of feel you want your book to have. How do you imagine the cover? Go online and browse fonts to see which ones would look good.

Even if you choose to hire someone to design the cover, you'll at least have some idea of what you want.

Take Control of Your *Marketing*

In talking to fellow authors over the years, I've learned that publishing companies will help you with that initial burst of marketing when your book first debuts, but after that, you're on your own!

And sometimes that first effort is kind of lackluster. If you think you're going to get a stand-up display in your local Barnes & Noble, just know that it's probably more likely that you will be struck by lightning in your lifetime. There is only so much real estate in retail stores and meanwhile there are thousands of new books published every single day in just the United States, nevermind what's happening in the rest of the world!

So, now that we have an understanding about the fact that a traditional publisher isn't going to guarantee your success with killer marketing, you need to think about what it means to be able to take control of your own marketing.

Author websites, social media, ebook promotions, email lists, Goodreads, local media, the possibilities are endless!

You have a world of options available to you. There are tons of ways to get free publicity for your book, and a wide range of options for paid advertising opportunities.

In addition, you have the opportunity to put your book on sale, or even make it available for free — for a limited time, if you want. (Don't knock it! It's a proven strategy that can be a great way of getting quick, widespread exposure for an author's whole catalog. I'm speaking from experience!)

And going beyond the opportunities to get your book in front of the eyeballs of all those potential readers, you also get to decide the vibe you want for your marketing campaigns! After all, who knows your book and its content better than you? This is the best way to find *your* readers.

Does this mean any old thing you put out as marketing materials is going to be good? No, of course not! But what it means is you need to be authentic. That's how you are going to find that loyal fanbase that's going to stick with you from book to book because they know what to expect and they love it!

There are so many different ways you can learn about book marketing. This is attainable information. The publishers don't have some secret formula, and as an independent author-publisher, you'll have opportunities that traditionally published authors won't have!

Take Control of Your *Money*

Here's where we're going to get down to brass tacks.

One of the number one reasons why people want a publishing contract is because of money.

Either they think that they are going to be paid more money as an author if they have a publishing contract, or they think it won't cost them as much to take care of all of the business aspects of book publishing.

Both of those beliefs are wrong. Let me tell you why.

Literary agent Mark Gottlieb explains:

“Under standard royalties, an author gets roughly 20 to 30% of the publisher's revenue for a hardcover, 15% for a trade paperback, and 25% for an eBook. So, very roughly, every hardcover release that earns out brings the author something like 25% of all revenue earned by the publisher. This percentage would drop once the paperback comes out, if it sells in significant numbers.”

Source: <https://literaryagentmarkgottlieb.com/blog/are-royalties-fair-a-publisher-weighs-in>

Did you notice something interesting in that quote?

“an author gets roughly 20 to 30% of the *publisher’s revenue* for a hardcover, 15% for a trade paperback, and 25% for an eBook.”

Who wrote the book? The author, for goodness’ sake!

To be fair, this is what the traditional publishing industry is all about: to make money off of the commodities produced by their worker authors. It’s not inherently a bad thing. I’m all for making money, but I’m also for keeping as much as possible of what you’ve worked so hard to earn.

Let’s look at the numbers for an independently published author who chooses to set up distribution directly with the major online vendors: Amazon, iBooks, Google Play, Nook, and Kobo, the author will receive 70% royalty for every ebook sold.*

(*Amazon does have a lower royalty percentage for authors who price their ebooks outside of the \$2.99USD to \$9.99USD range.)

For print books, the royalty structure is more complex. If you publish print books via KDP, the rate is 60% royalty based on the list price for books sold on Amazon and 40% royalty based on the list price for books sold through Expanded Distribution (basically, everywhere else).

In other words, as far as royalties go, the author gets to keep 100% of his or her own earned royalties if they independently publish their books.

Depending on the distribution channels you choose, if you choose to use a book publishing service, you may pay a small fee to that service, but the point is the option is there for you to enjoy all of your own earned royalties.

Additionally, you'll get paid monthly if you're dealing with the vendors I mentioned previously. On the other hand, according to AuthorsGuild.org, if you have gone the traditional publishing route, you'll get paid royalties only twice a year, and sometimes on books that were sold as much as nine months earlier!

So what about the part where a writer thinks being a traditionally published author is going to cost them less since the Publisher will be paying for things like cover design, interior layout, editing, etc.?

Well, that's nonsense. As I said before, a publisher isn't paying for those things because they're a philanthropist! The publisher is paying for those things in hopes of making money, and they'll cover their investment by taking it from your royalties (like we talked about earlier!)

It's true that if you only plan to traditionally publish one book and you don't really *want* to be a successful author,

you can pull a fast one over on the publishing companies. Sure, you can get a few thousand dollars advance and then never bother doing your part to market what they've contracted, or writing anything worth anything again. You'll make your little bit of money and leave them with nothing to show for it.

But if you're reading this booklet — and especially if you've read this far! — then I know that is not who *you* are. You *want* to get your book out there. You want to be a successful author. You want to command the helm of your own ship of success.

And let me tell you what: You can totally do this!

You are putting your heart and soul into what you write. Don't give the power of your success to someone else.

Isn't it time you step out there and make it happen?

Writer, take control!

Next Steps

You've made an important decision to *go for it*. Don't lose that forward momentum!

Commit to the following steps and you *will* be moving towards your goal of being a published author. I have included some links with each step to help you along.

☐ Finish your manuscript if you haven't already.

➡ <http://bit.ly/write-tip-index-cards>

➡ <http://bit.ly/stuck-switch-things-up>

➡ <http://bit.ly/write-as-if>

☐ Commit to getting it professionally copy edited.

➡ <http://bit.ly/get-a-copy-editor>

☐ Publish that book!

➡ <http://bit.ly/self-publishing-dos-donts>

➡ <http://bit.ly/publish-for-free>

☐ Make a marketing plan and stick to it.

➡ <http://bit.ly/author-websites-101>

➡ <http://bit.ly/how-to-market-your-book>

☐ Write to me and let me know how it's going! I want to cheer you on! Here's a special link just for you.

➡ <https://www.sarawhitford.com/writers-only/>

Happy Writing!