

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE SIGNING WITH A PUBLISHER

(This is not a complete list but should help you get started. For additional information, see handouts.)

A new type of publisher is becoming more popular. The modified traditional or fully-assisted publisher typically does not require the author to have an agent. The manuscript is submitted, often online, for the publisher's consideration. If accepted, the writer doesn't normally get an advance, but neither will she be asked to pay for services. (If there is a charge for services please see Book Publishing Process Worksheet for an idea of what such services might cost.)

In these models, the publisher prepares the book for sale and shares in the profits. The publisher may retain certain rights and controls over the book. Before entering into such a contract, the writer should be fully informed as to what services are being purchased and what strings may be attached. Here are some questions one should ask (or to know the answers to) before signing a contract with any publisher (also, see other handouts):

1. Is there an advance? If so, how is it paid - up front, in installments (how and when)?
2. Is the author required to pay a fee? If so, what services does the fee cover?
3. How much will you have to pay to purchase your own book wholesale (you'll want to do this for book signings and promotional events.)
4. What will be your share of each sale? What will the publisher get? Remember this comes out of profits, which are reduced by two factors before you get a cut:
 - a. The publisher's costs
 - b. The share that Amazon or any online seller takes

5. Who sets the price for the print book and ebook? Does the author have the right to change the price at some point? If not, what is the duration of that restriction?
6. What is the duration of the contract?
7. Go to the webpage of the publisher and see what other books they've published. How do they look? Are the covers professional-looking? Are the titles something you wouldn't want to be associated with? If all is good so far, check further. Go to Amazon.com and read the first few pages of a few of the books. Are they properly laid out? Any typos?
8. Will the publisher set up an author page on Amazon.com for the author?
9. How will they help publicize the book? (Since they're getting a share of the profits, it would be nice if they would help you sell.) Most publishers will say, "We have a website where your book will be displayed, and we have a Facebook page, Goodreads page, and Twitter account." Be advised that this will yield nothing in terms of sales. However, it is the minimum to be expected of any reputable publisher. Some publishers provide training for support, such as online classes, chats, and other interactions with their marketing people, to help you learn to better promote your work. If the publisher is prepared to offer such support, that's a very good sign. I recommend you view the publisher's web site to evaluate how professionally your book might be featured or displayed.
10. How will you know if you sell any books? Typically, the publisher will offer you a way to log into their website to see the quarterly – or ideally, more frequent – sales figures. Alternatively, they'll email you a report, or send one via U.S. mail. The more access you have to real time sales, the better you can judge whether your marketing efforts are working, so this is important. It's also a way to judge whether or not your publisher is very motivated, service oriented, transparent, or modern. If the publisher says, "We don't use social media," for example, I would assume they are inadequate.