

SOME ESSENTIALS FOR ACHIEVING PUBLICATION

by Anna Jacobs

Nothing is guaranteed in the publishing world, but the following approaches won't hurt if you're working towards publication as a novelist.

KNOW YOUR CRAFT

The main ingredient for success is good writing. What do I mean by that? I don't mean aiming at the literary markets – they don't have a monopoly of 'good' writing – but aim at telling a story so well that it draws in readers and gives them pleasure, satisfaction and maybe a few surprises.

'Good' writing is different for every author, given that we all have different voices and write in a variety of genres, but it helps to have a sound knowledge of the basic tools of the trade, whether instinctive or learned (or both) eg careful handling of point of view, realistic characterisation, good plotting, dialogue, grammar - all those little things that add up to prose that doesn't jar. And then one has to practise using those tools, which takes time - a lot of time.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Writers also need to take account of the expectations of their readers. Prose such as Dickens produced, with its long and detailed descriptions and narrative, is neither enjoyed nor needed by the average reader today, though it was extremely popular then. What your readers will expect depends on the genre you're writing in, whether the warmth and happy ending of a modern romance, the shivers of a horror story, the

fast-paced action of a thriller – there is no shortcut to reading widely in your chosen area of the fiction landscape till you know exactly what sort of thing readers expect.

And also, in this instant society of ours, pace is important, too. Whether it's a gentle tale or an exciting one, you can't afford to bore today's readers at any stage in your story. They'll want a quick entry into the action and then writing that keeps them interested.

PRACTISE, THEN PRACTISE SOME MORE

You become a good writer in the same way as you become good at anything else ie by training, practising, writing - and then writing a whole lot more. Many people in the industry believe you don't become a good writer until you've written half a million (some say a million) words. You have to *do* it, not just read about it. So if you want to get published and be successful, you can't treat writing as a 'little hobby' in which you dabble from time to time. You have to pay your dues first by learning to produce good material whenever you write, however you feel. A good comparison is to an Olympic athlete – similar years of training and effort are needed to achieve publication.

GET IN THE INFORMATION FLOWS

As well as practising your writing, it helps to know what's happening in the industry. Interact with other writers and join writers' organisations, join on line writers' groups and chat with writers from around the world, visit relevant web sites, go to the occasional writers' conference or workshop. Read industry publications and newsletters.

CHOOSE WORKSHOPS/COURSES WITH CARE

Choose workshops or courses with care. Make sure you have a clear idea of what they're offering and that it's what you need. Also, check that they're being run by people who have succeeded, not by those who have never achieved publication – even if they do know all the 'rules' and theories. After all, you want to learn successful approaches not unsuccessful ones, don't you? If this sounds harsh, well, that's life. You want value for money! And since most writers learn their trade in their spare time, value for time invested as well.

READ A LOT

Yes, I know, I say it in all my articles, but it's so very important! Even after having 22 novels published, I still read 3 books per week by other authors, mostly novels but also non-fiction as I need to do plenty of historical research. And I still learn a lot from my reading.

So - read widely in your genre so that you know what plot ideas have been done to death, and also what works and doesn't work in a plot. (You can learn as much from a bad book as from a good one.) Read near and outside your genre to broaden your understanding. Read bestsellers to find out what's so special about these books.

And then, get your head down and write!