

Caveat Scriptor!

Let the would-be writer beware! Anyone foolhardy enough to embark on a career as a writer – whether it be an academic treatise, a novel, or even an article – should first read this!

People think that writing as a profession is glamorous; that it is just about sitting down and *churning out* words on a page, or more likely these days on a computer screen. If only it were! So what exactly does writing a book entail? Being a writer is about managing a galaxy of contradictory feelings: elation, despair, hope, frustration, satisfaction, and depression – and not all separately! Of course, it also involves carrying out detailed research: first to establish whether there is a market for the planned publication, and second into the content of the book. Sometimes, however, instinct takes the place of market research and the contents are dictated not by plans and *exhaustive* research but by experience and knowledge.

Once the publication has been embarked upon, there is a long period of turmoil as the text takes shape. A first draft is rarely the final text of the book. Nearly all books are the result of countless hours of altering and reordering chunks of text and deleting the embarrassing bits. While some people might think that with new technology the checking and editing process is speeded up, the experienced writer would hardly agree. Unfortunately, advanced technology now allows the writer the luxury of countless editings; a temptation many of us find hard to resist. So a passage, endlessly reworked may end up nothing remotely like the original, and completely out of place when compared with the rest of the text.

After the trauma of self-editing and looking for howlers, it is time to show the text to other people, friends perhaps, for appraisal. At this stage, it is not wise to send it off to a literary agent or direct to publishers, as it may need further *fine-tuning* of which the author is unaware. Once an agent has been approached and has rejected a draft publication, it is difficult to go and ask for the revamped text to be considered again. It also helps, at this stage, to offer a synopsis of the book, if it is a novel, or an outline if it is a textbook. This acts as a guide for the author, and a general reference for friends and later for agents.

Although it is tempting to send the draft to every possible agent at one time, it is probably unwise. Some agents may reject the publication out of hand, but others may proffer some invaluable advice, for example about the content or the direction to be taken. Hints like this may be of use in finally being given a contract by an agent or publisher.

The lucky few taken on by publishers or agents, then have their books subjected to a number of readers, whose job it is to vet a book: deciding whether it is worth publishing and whether the text as it stands is acceptable or not. After a book has finally been accepted by a publisher, one of the greatest difficulties for the writer lies in taking on board the publisher's alterations to the text. Whilst the overall story and the thrust of the book may be acceptable, it will probably have to conform to an in-house style, as regards language, spelling or punctuation, etc. More seriously, the integrity of the text may be challenged, and this may require radical redrafting which is unpalatable to the author. A book's creation period is complex and unnerving, but the publisher's reworkings and text amputations can also be a tortuous process.

For many writers, the most painful period comes when the text has been accepted, and the writer is waiting for it to be put together for the printer. By this stage, it is not uncommon for the writer to be thoroughly sick of the text.

Abandon writing? Nonsense. Once smitten, it is not easy to escape the compulsion to create and write, despite the roller-coaster ride of contradictory emotions.

Exercise 1: select the best answer

1. In the planning stages of a book, ...

- A. Instinct can replace market research
- B. market research can replace instinct
- C. market research is essential
- D. instinct frequently replaces market research

2. The problem with the use of advanced technology in editing is that ...

- A. it becomes different from the original
- B. it is unfortunate
- C. it is a luxury
- D. many writers cannot resist changing the text again and again.

Exercise 2: Complete the following text, which is a summary of the passage, using words from the box below. There are more words and phrases than spaces, so you will not be able to use them all. You may use each word or phrase only once.

People often associate writing with _____. But being a writer involves managing conflicting emotions as well as _____ or instinct. Advanced technology, contrary to what might be thought, does not make the _____ faster.

When a writer has a draft of the text ready, it is a good idea to have a _____ for friends, etc. to look at. If an author is accepted by a publisher, the draft of the book is given to _____ for vetting, _____. _____ are then often made, which are not easy for the writer to agree. However, _____ is compelling, even though there are _____.

editing process	first draft	alterations	Roller coaster	research
beware	glamour	summary	writing	publishing
readers	a literary agent	publisher	dictating	ups and downs

Exercise 03: Using a dictionary, provide a definition of each of the following words. Choose the definition that best suits the context.

1. churning out =
2. exhaustive =
3. fine-tuning =
4. out of hand =
5. to vet =
6. unpalatable =