

TRANSPARENCY

Author Care A Toolkit for Authors



**THE SOCIETY OF
AUTHORS**

ALCS

Author Care

A Toolkit for Authors

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Introduction

This author-care toolkit comes from the Society of Authors (SoA), a trade union for all kinds of authors with more than 12,000 members. The SoA provides information and guidance and lobbies and campaigns on the behalf of authors.

We hope that this resource will help authors navigate a complex industry and empower them in their professional relationships with publishers, agents and other publishing professionals.

While much of the advice we offer applies across the industry, we have focused here on trade publishing (by which we mean books published for a general audience and sold in ordinary bookshops, whether physical or online).

There are many different paths to publication, however, and the SoA also serves academic, educational and self-published authors. Each of these sectors has its idiosyncrasies, which we hope to address in future author-care publications. So if this toolkit doesn't cover your area, please keep in mind that the SoA has other resources – and that we are here for all authors.

Remember: you are not alone.

How to use the toolkit

In the pages that follow, you'll find realistic context on the publishing industry, and honest information about the challenges that authors sometimes face. The toolkit also outlines [three principles of author care](#). You can use these to set your expectations, shape your discussions with publishing professionals and empower you in negotiations.

You will also find pragmatic guidance on the best ways to [address problems](#) and advice on [managing challenges](#) and finding support. Of course, many authors' experiences are happy ones.

Please note that we cannot cover every aspect of the publishing journey. If you need more detailed advice, a good starting point is the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*, or you can explore [the general resources on the UK publishing industry](#) listed at the end of the toolkit. SoA members can also access unlimited, tailored advice through the advisory service.

What is author care?

And what does it mean for me?

‘Author care’ is about how publishers, agents and other publishing professionals relate to, support and communicate with their authors. It covers everything outside the core contractual issues of publication and payment – all the details that can make the publishing journey feel more or less positive.

We believe that three overarching principles should guide publishing professionals in their relations with authors. They are:

- **transparency** – clear information about what authors can expect from agents and publishers and what is expected of authors during publication or agency representation. The open sharing of submissions processes and publishing plans wherever possible.
- **support and inclusion** – being open to authors’ needs and requests for reasonable adjustments and taking account of these throughout agency representation and at each stage of publication.
- **respectful communication** – professional and timely communication with authors that includes providing updates if there are any changes to the publishing plans and allows space for authors to raise queries or concerns.

Good author care will vary, of course, from author to author and project to project. So in this toolkit we describe how you can use these principles to assess what good author care looks like in practice, and whether you are receiving it at different points in your publishing journey.

In general, good author care means that you should be confident that you can ask questions, negotiate on terms, ask for accessibility needs to be taken into account, be fairly remunerated, and have input into how your work is published. You should receive clear, honest and helpful information during the publishing journey. You should be respected as a creator, because without you there would be no published work in the first place.

Above all, good author care is consistent with the [Industry Statement on Professional Values](#), a code of practice endorsed by the Association of Authors’ Agents, Booksellers Association, The Publishers Association, and The Society of Authors. The Statement consists of ten commitments to values and standards of professional behaviour, including to freedom of speech, promotion of diversity and inclusion, respectful communication, dignity and respect, support for professionals with a disability or illness, and personal privacy.

Of course, it’s a two-way street: authors should also be transparent, supportive and inclusive, and respectful in their communications with publishing professionals. If you’re not sure how to manage a professional relationship or handle a difficult issue, see [our tips and pointers](#) to help you deal with it in the best way possible.

State of the Industry

It's important to have an understanding of the challenges that authors face today and how these shape authors' experiences as they navigate the industry. Nielsen BookData reports that 498 books per day were published in the UK in 2024. It is difficult for authors in all kinds of genres and at all stages of their careers to make their work stand out.

Professionals across the publishing industry report under-resourcing and high staff turnover. This can affect authors in many ways, from a lack of investment in editing and promotional activity to long waits for replies to enquiries at all stages of the publishing process. Some authors find that they do not have a dedicated contact in-house and that contract negotiations and accounting queries can be protracted or inefficient.



We celebrate and actively promote and cultivate diversity and inclusion in all its forms, including but not limited to the nine protected characteristics cited in The Equality Act 2010 as well as socio economic status, educational background, caring responsibilities, and geographical location, and we condemn abuse and the incitement of hatred of any kind.

Industry Statement on Professional Values

Progress has been made towards making a more diverse industry over the last ten years, with both publishing workers and authors placing a greater emphasis on inclusion.

However, there is still a long way to go and the improvements made so far may prove precarious. The publishing workforce, for instance, is less diverse than in 2022, in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic background (*UK Publishing Workforce: Diversity, inclusion and belonging in 2024*, The Publishers Association). The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education revealed [a significant reduction](#) in the number of children's books with a racially minoritised

character in 2023, in contrast to previous years' increases. Although there have been increases in the number of disabled people working in publishing, they are still under-represented in the workforce, according to the Publishers Association.

There are also disparities between authors. In 2022 the UK Authors' Earnings and Contracts survey undertaken by the CREATE Centre revealed that professional authors' median earnings have nearly halved since 2006, dropping from £12,330 to £7,000.

Within that broader picture of decline, the pay gap between men and women is widening, and Black and multi-heritage authors report lower incomes than white authors. In 2020 a study authored by Dr Anamik Saha and Dr Sandra van Lente also concluded that authors from ethnic minority backgrounds are marginalised or disproportionately excluded by the publishing industry.

Though there is less data available, disabled and d/Deaf authors are likely to face similar challenges. In 2019 the Royal Society of Literature's report, *A Room of My Own*, stated that disabled authors are more likely

to report low incomes than non-disabled counterparts.

The rise of generative AI is, of course, having a huge impact on the industry, and the full economic and ethical implications for authors are still unfolding. This is a fast-moving area and the most up-to-date information can be found on [our website](#).

So how do authors make a living against this backdrop? Almost all have a portfolio career with a number of different sources of income, and often take on non-writing work. This is partly because of the overall decline in author earnings, as demonstrated by the Authors' Earnings and Contracts survey. It is also because the income from publishing deals and licensing agreements often arrives in instalments, with long gaps between payments. A book advance, for instance, may be paid in three or four instalments (on signature of contract, delivery of the book, and eventual publication of paperback and hardback). When any advance has earned out, royalty income is traditionally paid only once or twice a year.

At the SoA, we recognise how difficult it can be to earn money as an author, and we are working to address the imbalance at the heart of the contractual relationship between author and publisher. We do this through the individual advice we give to members on their publishing contracts and by pushing for legislative reform, alongside other creator organisations. 2025 marks the ten-year anniversary of the SoA's CREATOR campaign for fair contract terms, and we will continue to protect, and fight to improve, author incomes.

A note on online services and scams

The internet is teeming with companies offering services to authors. It can be increasingly difficult to distinguish between legitimate offers and scams. Many authors now report receiving emails from people or companies offering to represent or publish their books.

Be wary: reputable agencies and established publishers do not usually make unsolicited approaches to authors in this way. If you ever feel unsure about whether or not you have received a genuine commission or offer, check our website, which has detailed information [on scams](#). SoA members can also [seek advice directly](#).

References

Centre for Regulation of the Creative Economy (CREATE) (2022), [UK Authors' Earnings and Contracts 2022](#).
Publishers Association (PA) (2024), [UK Publishing Workforce: Diversity, inclusion and belonging in 2024](#).
Royal Society of Literature (RSL) (2019), [A Room of my Own](#).
Saha, A. and van Lente, S. (2020), [Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing](#).

What good author care looks like when... you submit to an agent



Getting your manuscript out there can be both exhilarating and stressful. It may require a lot of patience. Understanding the process of submitting to (or 'querying') agents and learning how to navigate it will give your book the best chance.

Transparency

Agents' websites should offer up-to-date guidance on the type of submissions that will be considered, and clear information

on the process and timeline. Agents should comply with GDPR (data protection) legislation and respect and protect your intellectual property rights. Your submission may be circulated internally but should not be disseminated widely and to individuals external to the agency.

Support and inclusion

Agents should follow best practices to ensure accessibility and inclusion. Some

submissions software may inadvertently exclude some disabled people, neurodivergent people or people with other access needs. For example, partially sighted authors might benefit from large print, while dyslexic authors may require a different file format. To support all authors, clear contact information should be provided so that anyone needing an accessible alternative can easily reach out.

Respectful communication

Communications with authors should be clear and professional at all times, including when a submission is not successful. Further detail can be found in our [Agency Submissions Best Practice Guidelines](#), which are free to all. SoA members can also seek individual advice.

Tips for authors

- If a submission is unsuccessful, rejections will be final. It is important to accept the agent's decision and be respectful in your communication with them. It is rare for agents to provide detailed feedback, if any. Always speak to agents with respect and professionalism, even if you receive a rejection.
- If there is no information about response time on an agency's website and you haven't heard anything back from your initial submission after six weeks, send a polite follow-up email. Our view is that there should always be a response but if you still haven't heard anything after three months, it is likely that the submission has been unsuccessful.

- Finding rejection difficult is understandable but try not to be disheartened. Agents look for works they believe will generate income. Their criteria may include perceived marketability, existing commitments, the fit with a list, and so on. Rejection does not mean you are not a writer.
- Agents earn their income from the commission on your work when it is licensed to publishers or producers. They should not charge a fee for submissions or fees to edit your work, either before or during representation. If you are asked to pay submissions or editing fees, seek independent advice from a union. The SoA can help members by advising where an agency is not acting in accordance with good practice and industry standards.
- If you want to find out more about how to find the right agent and what to include in your submission to an agent, some great tips can be found in the [Writers' and Artists' Yearbook](#).

The truth is that busy agents often do not have time to read beyond the first few pages if it is not gripping them. This is the hard reality of huge numbers of submissions going in... Ensure those first pages are hitting the right notes for the type of book being submitted.

Vaseem Khan, author.

What good author care looks like when... you are represented by an agent



If you receive interest from an agent, it is usually a good idea to set up a meeting or a call with them to discuss an offer of representation. It is an opportunity to find out whether you would have a good working relationship, particularly if you have offers from multiple agents.

You can ask what kind of editorial input they would make, how they would pitch your work and to which imprints and editors. You might also reach out to a current author on their list to try to find out whether you and the agent would work well together. If an offer is made, you should have time to seek independent advice and to have an open discussion about the terms of representation.

Transparency

An agency agreement should be in place before representation begins. The agreement should set out the scope of the representation, the term of the agreement, the commission that the agent will take and how to terminate. You should have time to seek independent advice about those terms. The SoA is happy to advise members, and provide information on typical terms and rates of commission.

An agent should always act in your interests, taking into account your priorities, needs and preferences. This is part of an agent's fiduciary (legal) duty and they cannot prioritise their interests above yours.

Support and inclusion

A good agent champions your work, advocates for you and provides encouragement and support. They are someone who ‘gets’ your writing. They should also understand and accommodate any access needs. To facilitate access conversations with your agent, consider using an Access Requirements form. A free template is available to download from [the webpage of the SoA's Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses network](#).

Respectful communication

Agents should set expectations as to how and when you'll hear from them. Your agent should confirm your preferred methods of communication. They should keep you informed if there are any changes to the usual timeframes for contact (e.g. if they are away or on holiday).

Agents should offer constructive feedback when needed and relay any updates (good or bad) in a timely and professional manner. This might, for example, relate to feedback from editors when your work is ‘out on submission’ (i.e. being submitted to commissioning editors). Agents should remember that passing on bad news (kindly) is better than avoiding doing so and remaining silent.

Tips for Authors

What if I can't get an agent?

If you want to be published by a major publishing house, you are very likely to need an agent. Most trade publishers will not take direct submissions. However, it is possible to work as an author without an agent. Some smaller publishers of fiction do accept unsolicited submissions (see [below](#) on submitting directly to publishers). Writers of poetry or short stories may not need an agent to submit to publishers.

It is better to spend time and effort finding the ‘right’ agent rather than signing with any agent for the sake of having one. Being unagented does not devalue you as

a writer, and finding a suitable champion for your work can take time – and a lot of rejections.

What if I don't hear from my agent?

Lack of communication is not necessarily bad news. Agents are human. They may have other clients demanding their attention or be deep in an edit or book-fair preparation. They may simply be away from the office. Be aware that it is not unusual for submissions to editors to take weeks, or months in some cases, before there is any news. Agents may also be unaware of how their apparent silence is affecting you – each author is different, after all.

If you are becoming concerned, set up a call or meeting to touch base and establish some feasible communication guidelines, if these are not already in place.

What if I want to part company with my agent?

If you feel that your agent is not meeting expectations, first consider:

- Are the issues within your agent's remit, or does the fault lie elsewhere – with a publisher, for instance?
- Is this a pattern of behaviour, or a one-off mistake or wrong move?
- Have you communicated your thoughts? Your agent may make improvements given the chance.
- Do you believe the trust and good faith between you can be saved at this point? Is it worth saving?
- On balance, do you feel that they are still the best person to champion your work?

You can usually end representation at any time, and changing agencies is very common (check your agency agreement for the notice period). While it can feel incredibly personal, remember that this is a business relationship first and foremost. It's

crucial to bear in mind that while you only have one agent they will have many authors, each requiring bespoke care and attention. It may be that they value your work and see your potential but don't have as much time to devote to you as you would want. Your career and well-being are your priorities, even if making the decision to leave feels daunting.

What if my agent stops representing me?

This is a common occurrence and not necessarily a negative reflection on you. The agent may be making this decision in light of completely unrelated factors. They may not feel that they are able to champion your work as well as they could. They should, however, provide you with an explanation and, if not, you can absolutely request one.

Ultimately, you do not want to be represented by someone who does not want to represent you. It is preferable for things to end so that you're free to seek something better. If you're unsure what to expect when representation ends, see the Association of Authors' Agents [code of practice](#). Agents will continue to earn commission on any deals negotiated by them while they represented you, even if the money is earned after their representation of you has ended.

What if things become contentious?

Very rarely, respectful communication can break down. If things become unpleasant or the situation starts to affect your well-being, see [our tips and pointers](#) for help with the possible next steps. SoA members can also discuss the issue with one of our advisors and benefit from one-to-one advice.

Sometimes moving to another agent is the right thing to do, for a variety of reasons. You might feel your agent has lost enthusiasm for your work. You might have met another agent who you believe would be a better fit at this stage of your career.

The important thing to remember is that, no matter how well you get along on a personal level, it's a business relationship, and in my experience agents understand that sometimes authors move on in the same way they sometimes drop authors. And because it's a business, you need to go about it in a professional way. Pick up the phone. Be civil and don't burn bridges. If they've done deals for you, they will still be responsible for collecting royalties for those books.

Mark Edwards, author.

What good author care looks like when... you submit directly to publishers

Some authors will find themselves submitting their manuscripts or book proposals directly to publishers without an agent. Whereas agents usually submit directly to an editor, you might find yourself submitting through a generic email address or portal on the publisher's website. The key principles of transparency, support and inclusion and respectful communication still apply.

Transparency

Publishers' websites should offer clear guidance on the type of submissions that will be considered, and information on the process and timeline for a response. Publishers should comply with GDPR (data protection) legislation and respect and protect your intellectual property rights. Your submission may be circulated internally but should not be disseminated widely and to individuals external to the publishing company.

Support and inclusion

Publishers should follow best practices to ensure accessibility and inclusion. Some submissions software may inadvertently exclude some disabled people, neurodivergent people or people with other access needs. To support all authors, clear contact information should be provided so that anyone needing an accessible alternative can easily reach out.

Respectful communication

It is best practice to ensure that no submission is unanswered. Automated responses are acceptable to acknowledge initial receipt of a submission, but even a brief personal note is preferable if the submission is not accepted. Communications with authors should be clear and professional at all times, including when a submission is not successful.

See our [Publisher Best Practice Guidelines](#) for more information. These Guidelines are free to all but SoA members can seek individual advice on any submissions queries.

Tips for authors

- If there is no information about timeframes for responses on a publisher's website and you haven't heard anything back from your initial submission after three months, send a polite follow-up email. If you still haven't heard anything after that, it is likely that the submission has been unsuccessful, even though our view is that there should always be a response.
- Remember that the publisher is not rejecting you personally, but is indicating that the work is not right for them at this time.

What good author care looks like when... you receive an offer to publish your book and a contract

It is an exciting moment to receive an offer of publication. If you do not have an agent, you will find yourself dealing with the contract. If you have an agent, it will be up to the agent to handle negotiations as the terms of the author-agent contract dictate. However, you should always have a chance to review the contract and to raise any queries with your agent. The author should always sign their own contracts, rather than the agent signing on the author's behalf.

Transparency

Publishers should be prepared to discuss the terms of any deal and explain clearly how the publisher's undertakings are specified in the contract. Negotiating is normal and expected. A publisher might refuse to negotiate on a certain point or points but they should always explain their position so that you can make an informed decision. You should always be able to ask questions and receive transparent, timely answers.

Support and inclusion

Publishing contracts are complex and legally binding agreements that in some cases last many years, so it is important to ensure that the terms are appropriate. No author should be pressured to sign an agreement without the requisite time to seek guidance, and to negotiate. *Always seek independent advice before signing any agreement*, even if you have received contracts before.

We encourage publishers to consider sending authors an Access Requirements form. (A free template is available to download from the webpage of [the SoA's Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses network](#).) This ensures that every author's access requirements are understood and met throughout the publishing journey. If your publisher doesn't do this, do state your own needs. You are free to use the template above.

Your publisher should support the right of every author to seek advice. If you are a member you can contact the SoA for contract-vetting services. While they are not lawyers, the highly experienced SoA advisory team can offer unlimited, bespoke and confidential contract advice to members. We also give members access to our detailed guides to publishing contracts and fee-based commissions, among other resources. Non-members in receipt of a contract can join and have their contract vetted or may wish to seek professional legal advice.

Respectful communication

Each author and each book are unique and authors should feel empowered to negotiate the terms that matter to them. No trade publisher should object to a polite request to amend, clarify or improve the proposed terms for publication.

Tips for authors

- It's unlikely that your contract will be perfect. If you are negotiating on your own behalf, we recommend identifying and prioritising the areas of the contract that are most important to you and focusing on these during your negotiations. If you do not achieve all the improvements that you hoped for, this is not necessarily a reflection on your negotiation approach. Please don't be put off negotiating in future! Negotiating and asking questions about a contract helps you understand each deal fully and develops your business acumen as a professional writer.
- The SoA can help members identify the terms that are standard or common in agreements. We can help clarify what your deal breakers may be, so that negotiating does not feel overwhelming.
- Remember that you are not *bound* to commit to a poor deal. Do not be pressured or rushed into signing something for fear that it is the only offer that will come your way. You should also negotiate on a 'subject to contract' basis, which means that your agreement is dependent on seeing the full terms. When you see the full terms you can make your final decision. If the deal really is not right and you struggle to find a better offer, it may be best to shelve that book for a while and get on with writing the next one.
- Be clear at the outset about when and in what circumstances you can terminate a contract, and what the consequences will be. The wording of termination clauses in contracts can be complex, so take advice.

Non-traditional forms of publishing

While this toolkit focuses on traditional publishing, authors should be aware of minimal investment publishing, and paid-for publishing (once known as vanity publishing). These models are very different, although they are not always easy to distinguish when an author receives a publication offer.

In *traditional publishing*, the publisher makes an upfront investment in the work. They will pay an advance or fee and commit to an initial print run – of, say, 5,000 copies. In *minimal investment publishing*, your book is usually only available in print-on-demand or e-book versions, so it will probably not appear in physical bookshops. Typically, there will be little or no advance payment to the author. In *paid-for publishing*, the author pays for the entire costs of publication. This last model is sometimes known as 'subsidy', 'contributory', 'hybrid' or 'partnership' publishing.

In all three models above, the author gives the publisher control over, and a large share of, the income from a set of rights (e.g. to publish as a print book, e-book and audiobook). In self-publishing, by contrast, the author pays any costs but retains all rights and full control over their book.

It's important to seek guidance on any deal. With minimal investment and paid-for publishing in particular we urge caution and stress the importance of seeking independent advice. You can read more about paid-for publishing in [Is it a Steal?, a joint investigation](#) by the Society of Authors and Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

What good author care looks like when... your book is edited

Publishers should be prepared to explain their editing process so that you know what to expect and what level of editorial work the publisher will invest. You should know in advance whether the publisher will undertake structural editing or only light copyediting. It should also be clear what happens if author and editor cannot agree, and that the author has the final say over any significant changes to material coming out under their name.

Transparency

Clear timescales should be given for the author to receive and respond to editorial comments, and to be sent proofs. Both you and the publisher should check the proofs for errors. If a delivered work does not meet the standards expected, or if there are problems with the text, you should be informed as soon as possible.

If the text is likely to require the editorial input of someone who is not the main editor, such as an authenticity reader, authors should be informed in advance, and should be told what that person's role will be and the reason for their input. In some cases, seeking legal advice before publication may be necessary.

Support and inclusion

To foster a culture of inclusion in the editorial process, authors should know in advance what form an edited text will take. Publishers should take into account accessibility needs that may affect timelines, including how quickly an author can respond to suggested amendments, and what format works best for them. For example, some disabled authors, including those living with chronic conditions, may benefit from more flexible deadlines.

Respectful communication

Publishers should acknowledge that the work an author produces is personal to them, even if it does not touch directly on personal subjects. Respectful and timely communication and empathy are essential for a positive working relationship. Communicating changes to the work clearly is essential.

Tips for authors

- When receiving comments from your editor, take time to process and consider the feedback.
- If you are delayed with your responses to an edit, or think that you might need more time, be open and honest with your agent or editor. Ask for changes if you need them.

After you've had a chance to contemplate the feedback from an editor, work out which comments you agree with, which you don't and which you understand but would prefer a different solution. You don't have to make every change suggested – it's your work – but you have to have a considered reason not to make a change. Remember that the editor or agent wants the best for your work. They might not have the right solution but they have experience and are often right about the root problem.

Claire Wade, author and founder of the SoA network, Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses (ADCI).

When staff change...

As an author, you might feel the impact of personnel changes at a publishing house. Different teams might take over at different points in the publishing journey, particularly in larger publishing houses. Your main editor, for instance, might not be the person who acquired your manuscript. In other cases, a company or a publisher might employ a freelancer in editorial, publicity, marketing or another team to work on your book for a finite period of time. A permanent member of staff working on your book might leave the company. In these scenarios, your publisher should support you and make clear who your new point of contact is in the relevant team.

If possible, consider setting up a meeting with the new team to discuss any changes to the plan for editing, producing or promoting the work. Agent Caro Clarke reflects on their experiences with changing editors:

“I have had good and bad experiences when it comes to an editor changing midway through a book, so I have now learned that it's important to set up a meeting as soon as possible with the new team and to find out exactly who will be doing what.

Everyone will want things to go smoothly so it's a case of reaching out, meeting in-person or speaking on Zoom/phone call, and communicating your needs clearly. Obviously, it's important to be respectful of people's time. It isn't the new team's fault and sometimes they aren't given the appropriate handover time. During a meeting I will always list outstanding queries or tasks, any access needs and what was discussed before to get everyone up to speed. It is unlikely that everyone involved will be gone so lean on your agent, if you have one. You might reach out to the editor's assistant, the publicist or anyone else you've been in touch with if you're not getting the help you need. Publishing is a team effort and, while your closest champion may not be part of your book's journey anymore, there will be others working with you.”

What good author care looks like when... it comes to marketing and publicity

There is a huge spectrum when it comes to marketing campaigns, from those featuring billboards and prominent public advertising to modest efforts to publicise the work on social media. Publishers who do undertake promotion will arrange different marketing and publicity strategies for different books, with any efforts usually concentrated around the date of publication.

Transparency

Before any publishing contract is signed, the publisher should explain clearly and candidly what plans they have to promote the work. They should update you throughout the publishing schedule as to the level of marketing and publicity they have assigned to the book.

The publisher should explain what will be expected of you and what level of support they will provide. For many authors, it may come as an unwelcome surprise to discover that the burden of promoting their book falls to them. The publisher should be open with the author if this is to be the case.

Authors should not be led to believe that each book on a publisher's list will receive the same level of promotion. This is not how most publishing businesses operate. Publishers should make only realistic predictions about how their promotional activity might affect sales.

Marketing and publicity may drive decisions regarding the title of the book, its cover design and other aspects of production. If this is the case, you should be informed about how this information shapes the publisher's plans.



Support and inclusion

Any marketing or publicity strategy that involves the author's input and labour should be shaped around the author's needs, access requirements and consent. Some authors may need to receive interview questions in advance, for example, or for event locations to be accessible.

Contracts often stipulate that the author will participate in a certain amount of promotional work. You should not feel pressured, however, to take part in promotional work that makes unreasonable demands on your time, finances or emotional resources. Authors are entitled to set boundaries. If for instance you do not feel comfortable using certain social media platforms, you should not be obliged to use them.

Promotional activities, especially if they are unpaid, should be subject to advance, mutual agreement. Publishers should pay reasonable expenses for travel and accommodation.

The publisher's publicity team should arrange safe and appropriate media and public appearances and activities for the author, whether online or in person. Ensuring such safety is important for all authors, but particularly for those writing about personal, traumatic or contentious subjects.

Respectful communication

Publishers should make it clear whom the author should contact at every stage of the publishing process, and when they can expect updates, in particular with regard to marketing and publicity. Authors should be able to suggest opportunities, while understanding that the publishers might want to co-ordinate a campaign themselves.

You should always be able to voice concerns and receive answers to questions, and should feel listened to in a respectful and professional way.

If you feel that your expectations are not being met

Marketing and publicity are areas in which authors often feel let down by their publishers. Many authors report feeling misled. In reality, only publishers with dedicated marketing and publicity teams are able to offer substantial promotional efforts.

Although each situation is unique, publicity and marketing activities tend to be greater when a significant upfront investment, such as an advance, has been made as part of the publishing agreement.

Be aware that sometimes even the most extensive, well-thought-through campaigns do not lead to substantial sales. Trends or consumer appetites are not within the control of you or your publisher.

If you still have concerns, these [troubleshooting tips](#) may help you with the next steps.

After publication...

After a work is published, publishers usually have control over production, stocking and distribution, and make decisions regarding what formats are available for purchase. Your publisher should keep you informed, particularly if a work is being put out of print. It can be upsetting to find that your work is no longer available for sale, and authors should have time to take on board what is happening and consider their options. If you're not being kept informed, don't be afraid to ask.

Publishers will take sales into account when making stock decisions. Warehousing costs can also affect decisions on high-discount sales (i.e. discounted bulk sales, typically with lower royalty rates for the author) and reprints. If your work is remaindered or is not reprinted, it may be for reasons outside your control.

Royalty statements, and the royalty portals provided by some publishers, should keep authors informed about stock levels. Publishers should notify an author when a book is being made unavailable so that the author can promptly revert their rights (i.e. take back the right to publish) and consider other options. (This will be subject to the termination clause in the publishing contract.) Many authors self-publish backlist titles while continuing to work with a traditional publisher on new titles. If you are experiencing problems regarding availability of stock or the reversion of rights, you may need to seek expert advice. These [troubleshooting tips](#) may help you with the next steps.

What to do if things go wrong



Many publishing journeys are happy and most niggles can be resolved if they are tackled without delay and in a friendly and constructive manner. But of course problems can arise. You might feel, for instance, that an agent or publisher is not being transparent. A publisher might not ask about or take into account your access requirements. It might be difficult to contact a publisher or agent, or the responses that you do receive might not be appropriate or respectful.

If a problem arises...

- Act promptly. Letting things drift will not help.
- Try to identify what exactly the problem is, and how it might be resolved. What would you like to achieve, ideally? If you have an agent, reach out to them. Many agents will troubleshoot on your behalf.
- Communicate your concerns to the other party in a professional way, and allow time for them to respond. Ten to fourteen days is a reasonable timeframe.

However, if your concerns are urgent (e.g. you suspect the publisher is in financial difficulty), seek advice immediately.

- Keep good records of your correspondence.
- If the response is not satisfactory, assess the relationship. Has it completely broken down or could it be salvaged with a meeting or phone call?
- Consult an expert (in confidence). Do not go public or engage on social media. It only leads to a deterioration of the situation. The SoA can give detailed, bespoke advice to members.
- Start friendly, even if you don't feel it. It is easy to move from friendliness to something more forceful; it is very hard to do the opposite.
- Seek to resolve any issues directly with the relevant person. If necessary, things can be escalated to a more senior level, particularly if you are not receiving a response at all. The SoA can support members here. On rare occasions, it is necessary to rely on a more formal procedure.

If you feel bullied, consult the SoA if you are a member, or another expert. Check whether your publisher or agent has a policy for dealing with such situations.

Remember that freelancers have protection from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. If you think that you have experienced discrimination, we advise reaching out to an organisation such as Acas for more information about your options.

If a problem is not resolved satisfactorily, any author can reach out to the SoA to discuss issues in a more general, industry-level setting. While it may be disappointing that you didn't get the outcome you wanted, it may be an opportunity to get the industry to change.

The road to resilience

Writing can be an incredibly tough career. Authors often report feelings of isolation, rejection, anxiety, imposter syndrome and being overwhelmed – and this can happen at any stage of the writing process or the writer's career. You may have been told that as a writer you need to build emotional resilience. But how?

Find your author community

For some, an author community will be vital in tackling feelings of isolation and for receiving support. Sharing work and experiences with friends or family – people who will naturally have your back – is helpful, but they don't necessarily understand the unique nature of the business.

- The SoA has a large number of local and regional groups for members. There are also special-interest groups covering poets, translators, children's writers, educational writers and comics creators, as well as writers with disabilities and chronic illnesses, and writers who act as carers.
- There may be a local writing group in your area or online. Speak to your library or local bookshop, or search online.
- The regional writing and literature development agencies connect and nurture talent, and run writing groups and competitions. New Writing North offer a list of development agencies [on their website](#).
- Mentoring opportunities are offered by the National Writing Centre and regional literature development agencies.



- Some publishers and agencies support author networks or offer other resources. Ask them.
- Look for authors' blogs, articles and Substacks on emotional resilience and community.
- For any industry or contractual queries or worries, the SoA advisory team is on hand for members. You are not expected to know everything or tackle these complex issues alone!

Writing can be an isolating business: if we can share our experiences, applaud achievements and commiserate with setbacks in the context of a Society of Authors local group, then that is surely a good thing.

Linda Buckley-Archer, author.

It can be difficult to avoid comparing yourself to other authors, especially your peer group. Watching others succeed while you are still waiting for your turn can lead to negative and debilitating feelings. This is entirely normal but there are ways to work through it. Author Gill Paul offers this tip:

When a friend posts that they're a Reese Witherspoon pick, or a Sunday Times bestseller, or that they've signed a big new deal, I alleviate my intense envy by immediately posting effusive congratulations. It makes you feel better, I swear. Also, remember that everyone presents the sunny upbeat news on social media and few tell you that their last book bombed.

With your author community behind you, bad news may feel less personal. Those rejection letters, bad reviews or poor sales figures become par for the course, rather than an example of individual failure.

Prioritise your mental health

Protecting your mental and physical health is an important part of building emotional resilience.

- Don't be afraid to inform your agent, editor or peers if you are struggling and need additional support or adjustments, such as an extension to a deadline. (Members who are unsure how to approach this can seek

advice from the SoA.) You may find that telling someone instantly provides relief from mounting stress.

- Seek professional support from a therapist, counsellor or equivalent, if this is an option for you. Wellbeing in the Arts provides access to relatively affordable counsellors who understand the unique challenges of working in the creative industries.
- The illustrated guide, [Mental Health for Creative Freelancers](#) (downloadable from the SoA website) addresses common issues experienced by creatives. It provides solace and advice. Many other blogs and articles by fellow authors on this topic are freely available online.
- Many mental health charities maintain free helplines offering immediate support. See the resources below.

Be kind to yourself

A writing career can affect your mental health. The job is solitary and often precarious, and 'self-care' may only scratch the surface of what is required. Still, some authors find that certain practices can make a real difference when implemented routinely. From getting out in the fresh air to celebrating the positives and having a break from social media, there are many small things you can do to show yourself compassion and build resilience.

Remember that your book's reception is not a measure of your worth. If you're prone to immersing yourself fully in your work (as many writers are), give yourself permission to step away. Engage with other aspects of your life. Ask yourself, 'What would I be doing in my downtime if I weren't an author?' – and commit to doing that.

It's not selfish to put yourself first. If you struggle with productivity anxiety, self-care and downtime should be at the top of your to-do list. Be mindful of your time boundaries, and separate work from personal life. Writing is an exposing, vulnerable process, so have a safe space to process those emotions. Find the balance between excitement and detachment – enjoy the journey without letting it consume you.

Joshua Fletcher (@anxietyjosh), MSc MBACP Psychotherapist.

Building a sustainable career

A great deal of advice is aimed at debut authors, but challenges can arise at all stages of an author's career. With the experience of your first book or books under your belt, you will be more familiar with the publishing process but many experienced authors still need plenty of advice and support. Don't feel you ought to know everything.

Living up to the buzz around your debut or any successful title can be daunting, and you may feel pressure to complete a draft of your next work. If you can, keep momentum going by starting your next book in the time between delivery of the previous one and publication. That gap may be as long as 18 months in a traditional publishing contract. You may want to connect with your author community to share experiences.

Securing a new deal can be tough if sales of your previous book were not strong. Publishing is an industry heavily reliant on data. Sometimes your publisher or agent might suggest using a pen name or trying another genre. This might be tough news to take, so look at [these tips](#) for how to work through this period.

If the next deal hasn't materialised, self-publishing is a viable option. Some authors find they love the freedom and control. Be aware that, in reality, few authors make a living purely from writing books. Most maintain work outside of writing. Even many successful authors maintain other income streams throughout much of their career.

Reviews: looking after yourself

A glowing review can be an incredible boost, but it is all too easy for bad reviews to be the ones that stay with you – whether published in newspapers and magazines or readers' reviews online. As author and clinical psychologist Philippa East explains, 'as humans, we're naturally programmed to scan for threat, in order to avoid being eaten by lions. Stopping to smell the pretty flowers tends to be secondary. This means that, unless we are very careful, negative information will always lodge in our brains more saliently than positive.'

If you get a bad review from a reader, don't challenge personal opinion. It will only make you look bad. Let it go. If a reviewer makes incorrect factual assertions, however, you can politely correct the facts, either on social media or via the publication's editor, where relevant. And it might sound obvious, but you do not have to read your reviews. Reviews are written for readers, not for authors. Many authors choose not to read them.

If you are experiencing trolling (where you are being sent abusive and hurtful comments on social media) the SoA does not advise engaging or retaliating. Block trolls immediately, switch off notifications, and take a break. Further advice on trolling is available [on our website](#).

Resources

Publishing industry resources

[The basics of copyright](#) is available from the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society website.

The [Code of Practice](#) from the Association of Authors' Agents sets out good practice for literary agents in the UK.

[How publishing works](#) is an overview of the publishing process produced by the Publishers Association (PA).

[An Industry-wide Statement on The Book and Publishing's Professional Values](#) is a useful statement of general principles.

[Is it a Steal?](#) is the SoA and Writers' Guild of Great Britain's report on paid-for publishing in the UK.

[The National Centre for Writing offers resources](#) for authors across the UK, maintains a list of organisations that support authors, and runs events and courses.

[The Debut Writers' Academy Diaries](#) from the publisher Orion shares tips and insights for published and unpublished authors.

[The Royal Society of Literature](#) maintains a list of organisations that provide financial, editorial and pastoral support, as well as offering awards and grants to authors.

[The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook](#) offers practical advice and information about the industry. There's an annual print edition, and supplementary articles are available online.

Mental and financial well-being

The [Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service \(Acas\)](#) exists to improve workplace relationships.

[Advice UK](#) maintains a list of charity, government and other resources to help you navigate the welfare system.

[Citizens Advice](#) offers free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities in relation to money and other issues.

[Mental Health for Creative Freelancers](#) is an illustrated anthology addressing common issues experienced by people working in the creative industries.

[Mind](#) can talk to you about where you can find help, and about medication and treatments, and more. Their Infoline is open weekdays 9am to 6pm on 0300 123 3393.

[The Samaritans](#) The free Samaritans phone line is available 24 hours a day throughout the year on 116 123. It is for anyone who wants to talk.

[Turn2us](#) helps people in financial hardship gain access to welfare benefits, charitable grants and support services. They also maintain a list of organisations offering grants to help pay for household appliances etc.

[Wellbeing in the Arts](#) maintains a helpline on 0330 123 5574. They provide counselling for workers in the creative industries.

Creators' associations and organisations

[Alliance of Independent Authors \(ALLi\)](#) is a global membership association for self-publishing authors.

[Association of Illustrators \(AoI\)](#) is a professional body for illustration in the UK and beyond.

[The Black Writers' Guild](#) represents professional and emerging British writers of Black African and Black African-Caribbean heritage and includes over 200 published Black writers, including Britain's best-selling authors and leading literary figures.

[The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society \(ALCS\)](#) is a not-for-profit membership organisation that collects money due for secondary uses of writers' work. It also promotes and teaches the principles of copyright and campaigns for a fair deal for writers.

[The Society of Authors \(SoA\)](#) is a UK trade union for all types of writers, illustrators and literary translators with over 12,000 members.

[Writers Guild of Great Britain \(WGGB\)](#) a trade union for writers in TV, film, theatre, audio, books, poetry, comedy, animation and videogames.

How the [SoA](#) can help

SoA members receive free, unlimited, confidential advice on all business aspects of the profession. No question is too small – the advisors are happy to answer them. Membership includes access to our resources, guides and quarterly magazine, *The Author* – as well as clause-by-clause vetting of any contract, including publishing and agency contracts. We cannot offer bespoke advice to non-members, but we publish general guidance as part of our support of the wider author community.

Final words...

We welcome [feedback](#) on this toolkit. Has it been useful to you as an author? Is there anything that you would improve? This is not the last word in author care and the industry is ever changing. Your views will help us keep this resource up-to-date and relevant.

If you are interested in finding out more about membership of the SoA, go to [our website](#). Don't worry if you aren't yet eligible for full membership; you can still join as an Associate and access all the same membership benefits. Subscription rates start from £22.75 per quarter and are tax-deductible. Get 20% off your first year of membership by using the code **ACT20**.

