



PUBLISHING SUBMISSIONS BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

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The publishing industry uses company specific guidelines in order to handle submissions from authors. This guidance is intended to accompany the [Book and Publishing Industry's Professional Values](#) which encourages the publishing industry to support a culture we can be proud of – one which is *‘welcoming to all, respectful of all, and supportive of all’*.

This document is aimed at helping industry professionals and authors understand the minimum they should be able to expect from each other in relation to the submissions process.

Note: we use ‘author’ to include writer, illustrator, translator or other creator.

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A. Good practice for publishers

Dignity, respect and professionalism

When processing submissions, be mindful of the person behind the submission who has invested their hope and much time in their work or proposal, and is trusting you to consider their creative work with respect.

When setting up a submissions process:

1. **Consider best practice in relation to accessibility:** can you offer access assistance at the start of the process if it is needed? Further help and advice is available here: [a guide to alternative formats for accessibility - Scope for business](#)
2. **Provide clear up-to-date submissions guidance:** give as much information as possible about:

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- a. For what genre of work will submissions be considered (or not considered), and from whom (authors, or only agents)?
 - b. If unsolicited submissions (i.e. submissions directly received from an author) will not be considered, make this clear.
 - c. In what format – specify if you only accept digital submissions and give your formatting requirements. If you accept hard-copy submissions, be clear about whether they will be returned and, if so, how.
 - d. Do you prefer a query letter or pitch letter before a formal submission is requested? Make this clear.
 - e. Clarify whether your submission requirements are different for different genres (e.g. fiction, non-fiction, children's & young adult).
3. **Transparency:** where possible, give information about who will be reading the work, and what they are looking for. If using AI to filter submissions or for other purposes, you should give a guarantee that there will be human oversight, that the final decision lies with a human, and that AI will not be used in a way that infringes the author's rights. The work and the author's identity should not be accessible by generative AI at any time without the author's consent. If authors have concerns about the possible involvement of AI, clarify how they should raise those concerns.
4. **Clear 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. Any response is better than silence.
5. **Manage expectations about time frames:** authors understand that you receive a high volume of submissions, but they are anxious for a response. Providing an answer within three months cuts down stress on both sides. Rejections should be sent as swiftly as possible and should be worded with compassion and professionalism whilst being clear and direct. It might be helpful to clarify on your site the reasons why it takes time – they may seem obvious to the publisher but may not be immediately apparent to authors.
6. **If you are inviting tenders for a specific project, be clear about:**
 - a. How many authors are being asked to submit.
 - b. Whether tenders will be paid for.
 - c. If there is more than one stage to the process and what additional work might be requested.
 - d. If some or all the contractual terms for the project are already fixed, ensure they are clear to those who might consider applying.
 - e. The deadline by when applicants (successful or not) will hear back from you.
 - f. The material submitted will be treated in confidence and all rights remain with the author unless and until the tender is accepted and full contract terms have been agreed.

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- g. Clarify which elements of the tender process need to be treated in confidence by the author.
 - h. Inform those who have submitted if the tender is unexpectedly closed or cancelled.
7. **Respect and reflect the industry professional values:** the principles underlined in the [industry statement on professional values and behaviours](#) should be respected.

Contract terms and rights

- 8. **If a submission is successful,** specific contractual terms should be negotiated and agreed in writing between the parties before any use is made of the submission. Unless and until full terms have been agreed - not just a 'deal memo' - the author retains all rights in their work and the submission must be treated in confidence.
- 9. **Support authors in taking professional advice:** consider adding wording to the submissions page on your website and when issuing a deal memo or a contract making clear that you are happy for the author to discuss any proposed terms with the Society of Authors' team of specialist advisers or other professional advisers, and that you will allow time for this to happen before the author has to make a decision.

Data protection, confidentiality and legal compliance

- 10. **Confidentiality:** check that your internal processes ensure the confidentiality of submissions and avoid conflicts of interest or inadvertent copying of ideas or work. We recognise that submissions may need to be reproduced and circulated to those responsible for accepting or commissioning them, ensure that this is kept to a minimum. See also point 4 about safeguards relating to AI.
- 11. **Record-keeping:** maintain practical internal processes for the receipt of proposals to ensure that they are recorded. Data should be kept in accordance with current data, privacy and confidentiality laws.
- 12. **Data protection:** in line with your Data Protection Policy*, ensure you destroy unsuccessful submissions together with the author's personal data once the process is complete. If you wish to keep data for the purposes of later contact or commission, you will need to ask the author's permission to do so. If you accept hard copy submissions, ensure these are not original documents or artwork before securely disposing of them.

**Data protection policies and processes should be up-to-date, clear and easily accessible via your website explaining how submissions and personal data will be processed securely, how long they will be kept, and how data is used and subsequently disposed of. For further advice and guidance, see: [Policies and procedures / ICO](#).*

Thank you for reading this guidance with a view to providing best practice in your submissions process, and for looking after the authors on whom the publishing industry depends for its success.

B. Guidance for authors submitting work to publishers

The below is most likely to be relevant to authors who submit their works directly to publishers. For authors represented by agents, the submission process will be handled by agents on their behalf. A gentle reminder that all members can reach out to the SoA if they have questions.

When submitting your work directly to publishers we advise that you:

1. **Follow the publisher's submission guidelines** ensuring that you read and adhere to the publisher's submission process (which can be found on the publisher's website). The guidance exists to ensure a smooth process. An indication that unsolicited submissions are not acceptable should be respected.
2. **In the absence of clear guidelines** submit your work via email to the relevant submissions address. If submitting in paper form, never send originals, only copies. Don't assume that what you send will be returned, even if you include a stamped, addressed envelope.
3. **Submit a complete and professional application:** provide all the required and relevant information to assist those receiving it to review your proposal objectively and fairly. Do not overload your submission by including further information or materials.
4. **Respect professional boundaries and any guidance from the publisher** in relation to preferred contact methods, schedule, timeframes, working conditions, or what the publisher will read.
5. **Accept a rejection as final:** do not expect to enter into correspondence about the application after receiving a rejection. Be mindful that the publisher has to consider a huge volume of many submissions and send out very many rejections. Remember that the publisher is not rejecting you personally, but is indicating that the work is not right for them at this time.
6. **Respect confidentiality:** refrain from posting on social media or other public channels about any acceptance until the publisher has confirmed it is happy for you to do.
7. **Be professional at all times:** the principles in the [industry statement on professional values and behaviours](#) should be respected.

Contract terms and copyright

8. **Read all submissions guidelines carefully.** If you have questions or if they concern you in any way, raise a query and discuss this with the publisher in the first instance. You can consult the Society of Authors or take advice from another professional adviser before proceeding.
9. **If your submission is accepted and you do not have an agent to assist you, it is essential that you** have the resulting contract vetted by a professional. Advisers at the Society of Authors can help members understand what is being offered. All contracts should be negotiable.

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10. **Beware of scams:** individuals sometimes pose as editors as part of scams to try and extort money. If you receive unsolicited emails asking for money, please be cautious and seek advice.

Data protection, confidentiality and legal compliance

11. **Request confidentiality:** publishers should make sure submissions are treated confidentially. Some authors however find it reassuring to state in writing that the submission is being sent in confidence, and that it is subject to data privacy and intellectual property laws. And best practice, to confirm that it is you who controls the rights, is to include a copyright notice on all work submitted in the format: TITLE © AUTHOR'S NAME, YEAR.
12. **Evidence:** retain an exact copy of your proposal together with the date submitted, and the name and relevant details of the person to whom your proposal was submitted.

C. A final reminder...

In accordance with the [Book and Publishing Industry's Professional Values](#) it is essential that all participants in the publishing process hold themselves to the highest standards of professional behaviour.

We believe that an industry commitment of this kind can support an industry-wide culture we can be proud of.

Further resources

- [Code of Practice | Association of Authors' Agents \(agentsassoc.co.uk\)](#)
- [Code of Practice on Author Contracts - Publishers Association](#)
- [Agency submissions best practice guidelines](#)
- [Competition submissions best practice guidelines](#)
- [The APC Code of Practice](#)

We will consider all feedback and update this guidance periodically.

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