

Publishing Poetry

The paths to becoming a published poet

While no part of writing poetry could be called “the easy part,” actually publishing those poems could definitely be called “the hard part” of being a poet. From finding a home and an audience for your poems, to getting books on shelves and into the hands of readers, what happens after the poem is written can be overwhelmingly difficult to navigate. The League has prepared this brief resource as a starting point for poets trying to get their work out into the world.



Individual poems

Publishing individual poems is a crucial part of building a portfolio and connecting with other poetry professionals.



Traditional publishing

Traditional publishing typically refers to when an author submits a manuscript to a publisher or agent for consideration.



Self-publishing

Self-publishing has widened in scope over the past decade, and can now include independent or assisted self-publishing.

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Staying Vigilant

Protecting your art and reputation

Questions to ask before submitting anywhere

Do they have a professional presence, including a .com, .ca, or .org website?

Can you find evidence of their past publications?

Do they seem to be well-regarded by other professional writers?

Is their editorial team established and professional?

Does your work seem like a good fit for this venue?

Do they seem to have an independent editorial process, or does everyone who submits get published?

Common phrases

Simultaneous submissions: when a poem or manuscript is submitted to more than one place at a time

Previously published: when a poem has appeared, online or in print, already; this includes personal websites and social media

Any time you are asked to pay a submission fee, do a bit of research into the contest, journal, or publisher first. See if you can find past winners, or if you can verify it's an established and professional venue.

Traditional publishing never asks for payment from the author. If a publisher is asking for payment to cover an initial print run, editing costs, or marketing, this is an indicator that the publisher may be assisting self-publishing.

If a publication or contest is asking for a submission fee and not offering any payment (like a cash prize or payment for publication), this is something of a red flag; investigate more before making your decision to submit.

Individual Poems



Print and hybrid journals and magazines

- May have specific application times, themes, or guidelines
- May be paid or unpaid
- May have modest submission fees
- Likely to only accept submissions by e-mail or through a portal



Resources like **Duotrope** and **Chill Subs** can help writers sift through the myriad opportunities that are out there, with filters for print, online, paid, unpaid, submission fees, etc.



Online publications

- May be published daily, weekly, monthly, or on no set schedule
- May be run by just 1 or 2 people
- Often do not provide payment
- Often do not charge submission fees



Readings and performances

- “Feature sets” are when a poet is booked in advance to read for 10-20 minutes; these are often paid to some degree
- Open mics provide the opportunity for poets to share 1-2 poems with a live audience



Social media

- Publishing poems on social media or a personal website will make the poem “previously published,” and ineligible for many contests and publications



Subscribe to the League’s monthly newsletter *Between the Lines* to receive a comprehensive list of current opportunities each month!



Contests and prizes

- Often have submission fees up to \$30 per poem
- Should have cash prizes
- Often include publication as a prize

Traditional Publishing

The term “traditional publishing” typically refers to a process in which a writer submits a manuscript for consideration, receives an advance and royalty structure, and receives editorial and marketing support from the publisher. In traditional publishing, the publisher is taking on the risk of investing in the creation of a book, rather than the author having to make the investment.



Submitting your manuscript

Many publishers have specific application windows and formatting requirements

Usually, traditional publishers will not have a submission fee for regular submissions, but may host manuscript contests with fees.

Some traditional publishers will only accept manuscripts through an agent

Contracts & timelines

It will take at least 6-12 for your manuscript to be reviewed

It will usually take at least another 1-2 years for a manuscript to be published once it is accepted

Your contract should outline your advance, royalty payments, rights, and print run(s)

On making a book

Your publisher should:

pair you with an editor for substantial edits, as well as a copy editor;

ask for input on cover and design elements, though the final choice is theirs;

provide marketing support by way of distribution, events, and submitting to awards



Poetry publishers tend to be among the smallest of the “indie” publishers, and can be difficult to find. Check out the Literary Press Group or your provincial publisher’s organization as a starting point!

Self-publishing

Self-publishing refers to when a book is produced by the author, with no external “vetting” process between conception and publication. Many self-published books are of excellent quality - the result of self-publishing boils down entirely to the will and intent of the author.

We have separated the two main ways of self-publishing into “independent publishing” and “assisted self-publishing” for clarity, but these are not widely used terms.

Independent publishing

Author is responsible for all aspects of publication from start to finish. Typically, authors will use a print-on-demand service, like Copywell, Lulu, or Amazon for the physical printing of the book.

Assisted self-publishing

Sometimes called “vanity publishing” or “pay-to-publish,” assisted self-publishing happens via an organization that will often call itself a press or publisher, but does not have an independent editorial review process.



Traditional publishing will never ask the author to cover the costs of producing a book, including editorial and design. Through traditional publishing, authors only need to pay to acquire additional copies of their own book, usually at a 40% discount. **If the author is being asked to contribute to production costs, the book is likely considered to be self-published.**

Elements of self-publishing will include

- Typesetting and layout
- Submitting to awards
- Distribution, sales, and marketing

- ISBN and legal deposit
- Front and back cover design
- Editing and proofreading