

WORKING with Self-Publishing Authors: The Agony and the Ecstasy

Session instructor – Arlene Prunkl

www.penultimateword.com

info@penultimateword.com

778-478-0877

Highlights and talking points:

- Self-publishing (indie publishing) vs. vanity publishing. The idea that it's considered vain to want to publish one's own book is outdated and silly. Self-publishing is an entrepreneurial venture just like any other.
- Develop a solid knowledge base about the self-publishing industry. Self-educate on the Internet before spending money on books. (Type "how to self-publish a book" into a Google search to get started.)
- Indie authors need advice in all aspects of self-publishing, and hundreds of options are available to them. If you don't know the answer, know where to find the answer. Build up a network of connections with other editors, book designers, indexers, proofreaders, e-book specialists, illustrators, printers, and self-publishing companies.
- Become familiar with all the steps in the self-publishing process. (To get started, read my blog post here: <http://penultimateword.com/editing/the-editorial-process/>.) Learn about the many different kinds of self-publishing models.
- Help indie authors avoid scams, especially with certain exploitative and deceptive publishing services companies, sometimes called *author mills*, that cost a lot but provide little but poor-quality service and an inferior final product.
- You'll need flexibility and versatility in several key areas, including the genre(s) you wish to work in, the rates you charge and how you charge them, and your approach to dealing with all kinds of different clients.
- Should you generalize or specialize? Fiction or nonfiction? Or should you choose another niche market like sci-fi, children's, memoir, or self-help? Weigh the pros and cons of each (some genres are more lucrative than others, for example).
- Become proficient in your chosen genre. If you want to edit self-help, study how to *write* a self-help book. If you want to edit memoir, study how to *write* a memoir. A great deal of information on writing niches can be found on the Internet.
- Fiction editing requires a separate skill set. Again, you won't always find information about *editing* in certain fiction genres you'd like to specialize in, so become familiar with *writing* techniques in those genres.

- Proficiency in all levels of editing is an advantage. Most of the indie work you get in will require much more than copy editing or proofreading.
- Even if you decide to become proficient in only copy editing and proofreading, educate yourself about what the other editing levels entail so you can identify them when you encounter them and then recommend another editor.
- Teaching. Be prepared to be a coach, mentor, confidante, and hand-holder. Most indie authors need guidance from start to finish with not only the self-publishing process but with how to improve their writing.
- You may become more emotionally invested with your clients than you would working for a publishing house. Strike a balance between being warm, friendly, and professional and becoming the author's new best friend (save the Facebook friendship for after the editing is complete).
- Client communication should be positive and gentle in tone. Indie authors can be particularly sensitive. Strive to gauge the client's personality from the outset, and take the appropriate tone going forward, both in e-mail communication and in your Track Changes comments and evaluation reports.
- How much should you charge? Set a rate you can live with—and live *on*—and don't sell yourself short. Yes, many indie authors are on a budget, but many others can and will pay what you want.
- How to cope with poorly written manuscripts? Again, diplomacy is needed. Suggest a manuscript evaluation if the project isn't ready for editing. Recommend writing resources; perhaps recommend a stronger editor. Sometimes you'll have to withdraw from the project.
- Plagiarism and copyright issues can happen with indie authors. This requires a keen eye and a great deal of diplomacy. If the author doesn't acknowledge these issues, it may be best to withdraw from the project. Include a 30-day (from start date) withdrawal or termination clause in your contract.
- How to deal with delinquent clients? 1) Ask for 50% to 75% of payment in advance. 2) Make sure you're covered in your contract (e-mail me if you'd like to see my extensive disclaimer clause). 3) Engage the services of the EAC mediator. 4) Engage a lawyer or consider small claims court.
- Read my other blog posts on the advantages and disadvantages of self-publishing:
<http://penultimateword.com/book-marketing/16-advantages-of-self-publishing-over-traditional-publishing/>
<http://penultimateword.com/book-marketing/the-advantages-of-traditional-publishing-over-self-publishing/>
<http://penultimateword.com/services/self-publishing-or-traditional-publishing/>
- Enjoy the experience of working with self-publishing authors. You'll often feel more deeply invested in the author's success than you'd be working in-house. And you'll develop a bond and closeness with the author that may lead to repeat business, referrals, and even long-term friendship. It's a highly rewarding career!