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# Publishing, Self-Publishing, and the Tri-Wizard Tournament

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Unless you've been hiding under a rock the past few years, you've at least heard about J.K. Rowling and Harry Potter. No, she's not self-published. And yes, her books have sold, to quote Carl Sagan, "billions and billions." However, venturing into the world of publishing (or self-publishing) can feel more hazardous to your health and well-being than entering the Tri-Wizard tournament without a wand. This article is the first in a LONG series of articles on the ins, outs, and in-betweens of publishing and self-publishing. Read and be happy.  
Publishing, Self-Publishing, and the Tri-Wizard Tournament

Unless you've been hiding under a rock the past few years, you've at least heard about J.K. Rowling and Harry Potter. No, she's not self-published. And yes, her books have sold, to quote Carl Sagan, "billions and billions." However, venturing into the world of publishing (or self-publishing) can feel more hazardous to your health and well-being than entering the Tri-Wizard tournament without a wand.

In the coming weeks, we'll be producing a series of articles that will unravel the mystery of publishing and self-publishing, and hopefully get you on the track that is best suited for your needs and desires. While we can't guarantee that this series will help you be the next J.K. Rowling (only one more "Harry Potter" book to go!), we'll help you come away with a plan and strategy to publish or self-publish your book.

First, we'll provide the foundation for writing and publishing a book. Like any structure, you need a good foundation. Since most people (writers are people, too), dislike spending time on research and preparation, we'll do that work for you.

This means providing some definitions, history, and background information about publishing and self-publishing. Who are the players? What are their stats? What's the difference between print on demand (POD) and offset printing? When should you self-publish a book? When should you hire a literary agent? What's the difference between the hundreds of self-publishing or print on demand companies?

So many questions, so little time.

First, let's cover a few definitions.

Depending on with whom you talk, you'll hear different definitions of "traditional publishing" and "self-publishing." But, before we go there, I have a short rant about "published authors."

Here's the deal. If you paid to have your book published, you are not a "published author." Sorry. That title goes only to those who are PAID to have their books published; otherwise, you are a "self-published" author. More on this in a bit.

A Traditional Publisher is a company whose primary (or sole) source of income is the sale of books, who provides a royalty to the author for book sales, who charges no fees to the author for publishing, and (this is important) who is more concerned about selling books than signing new authors.

Unfortunately, there are a few self-publishing companies who promote themselves as traditional publishers (Publish America in particular), yet have dismal sales records for books. While they may claim success for a few, the vast majority of their authors sell (buy?) no more than 100-200 books.

One way you can tell if a publisher is a traditional publisher is by the level of scrutiny they give your book. Do THEY think it will sell? Do they want to take this book on, and possibly lose money in the deal? Companies like Publish America who entice authors with claims about how many authors they've signed or books they've published, make money by having many authors sell a few books. And, I suspect that most of these books sold are actually bought by the author and the author's friends. Beware the company whose sales pitch includes the number of new titles they've published this year.

So, that leaves us with self-publishing. The easy definition is that a self-publishing company isn't a traditional publisher. Unfortunately, it's not that easy because there are hundreds of flavors of self-publishing.

Later in this article series, I'll go into more detail on the variations of self-publishing, providing specific examples of each.

Here's another important definition: Print on Demand is a technology that allows a single copy of a book to be printed economically and quickly. Print on demand is not used to distinguish between traditional publishing and self-publishing, because both kinds of publishing companies use the print on demand technology. You'll read more about print on demand and offset printing in a future article.

Are you a self-published author, or a published author? See if your publisher meets the definition above. Was publishing your book as easy as filling out an online form and submitting your manuscript? Or, did you have to hire an agent, find a publisher, and sign a lengthy contract - without ever spending a dime?

Stay tuned for more detailed information about publishing and self-publishing. Don't worry, though, if you're a yet-to-be-published author. Later in this series, I'll discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each form of publishing and self-publishing - and how to ensure that the route you choose is right for you.

Next up: The History of Publishing