

The Simple 2-Step Plan for Getting Published

Step 1: Be good.

Step 2: Be persistent.

The nitpicky details:

Step 1: Be good.

- First, get an honest assessment of your skills as a writer. Show your work to a writing teacher or a professional writer and ask their honest opinion of your strengths and weaknesses.
- When you are inevitably told that you're not quite ready for prime time, take steps to improve your craft:
 - Take a writing class (for example, in the Boston area, there's a writing school called Grub Street, and the Harvard Extension School has a good creative writing department).
 - Go to writing workshops (most literary and some media science fiction conventions have low-cost or free workshops, like WisCon, Boskone, Shore Leave, Readercon, Arisia, DragonCon; there are also more expensive workshops like Viable Paradise, which is one week long, or Clarion, which is six weeks long). To find out more about workshop opportunities, network with fellow fans to see which workshops are right for you.
 - Read books on the craft of writing (check out your local library before plunking down hard-earned cash--not all books work for everybody). One of my favorites is *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*. Ursula K. LeGuin's *Steering the Craft* is also quite good.
- Join a writing group. Ideally, the members should be at roughly the same skill level as you, but you should also feel like you have something to learn from most, if not all of them. If the group does not mercilessly rip apart every submission and then hand back the pieces wrapped in a pretty bow, find a new group.
- Start learning about science fiction and fantasy markets. Go to market lists like www.ralan.com or www.spicygreeniguana.com. Bookmark the Black Hole response time page so you can get a sense on market return times (www.critters.org/blackholes/). Join an Internet community that discusses writing and markets (www.broaduniverse.org is a good one). Get a realistic view of how tough the market is so that when the rejections start pouring in, you can put them in perspective.

Step 2: Be persistent

- Keep track of all your submissions: where they've been, when they were sent out, when they came back, where they're going next.
- When a rejection comes in, feel free to mope, but also make sure to get it to the next market on the list within 24 hours. (Exceptions to the 24 hour rule can be made on an ad hoc basis, but let them be the exception rather than the rule.)
- Strive to sell to professional markets. They will be more helpful to your career in the long run.
- If you find yourself running out of markets for a story, don't give up. Do more market research.
- If it helps, then make a deal with yourself: you will work your butt off for a full year to try to sell your first story. After a year, if you don't succeed, you can stop. It may help you deal with the rejections better if you know that you have an endpoint in sight.

If you're trying to get a novel published, then there's a Step 3.

Step 3: Network!

- You'll have a much easier time making your first sale if you've made a connection with an editor in advance. For instance, I was able to send my novel directly to an editor at Tor rather than to their slush pile because I hobnobbed with said editor at a workshop. I'm hoping to make other contacts at other publishing houses so that if Tor rejects the novel, I have someone else to turn to.
- (*Networking is also helpful for short story sales, but not nearly as much as for novels.*)