

THE NONFICTION MARKET: A BIG OPPORTUNITY!

By Kathy M. Slaughter

Good morning! My name is Kathy Slaughter. I am a retired elementary schoolteacher with 21 years of experience. I have taught second, third, and fourth grades as well as being a Reading Intervention Specialist, and a Language Arts, Social Studies, and Gifted Specialist. I earned my degrees from the University of Houston. My children's alphabet book, H is for Houston, is now with a publisher, and should be out in early 2015. I am currently working on books about Austin and Dallas in the same format.

This morning I would like to give a brief overview of the nonfiction writing and publishing process. If you want to publish, your chances are better with nonfiction. Publishers are looking for manuscripts that are innovative, new, and draw high interest. When you check bookstores, magazine racks, and public libraries, you will find many more nonfiction articles and books than fiction.

Part of my job as a specialist was finding resources for teachers. Sometimes it was difficult to meet their needs because there are not enough nonfiction books available. Teachers are begging for nonfiction articles and books to support their instruction.

Published nonfiction articles make an excellent addition for your portfolio if you want to write nonfiction books, short stories, or novels. Generally, it takes less time to write an article, so you would be able to publish several before you begin larger projects. These published articles enable you to develop credibility as a writer.

Before we look at the process of writing nonfiction, let us look at what it is. Nonfiction is writing that deals with facts and events. Fiction writing is made up from a writer's imagination.

When writing nonfiction, there is a variety of format options:

- Articles
- Books
- Cookbooks
- Essays
- Journals
- Manuals
- Memoirs

The first step in writing nonfiction is to choose your topic. Pick one in which you are an expert or that you want to know more about. When you do your comprehensive research, you will be an expert. Also, pick your target audience: early reader, middle grade, young adult, or adult. Choose a topic that will appeal to a large number of readers, either in the general market or a specialized field in which you are writing. For example, I wrote my Houston book for a specific audience: second graders in Houston. I chose this audience because the State of Texas social studies curriculum for second graders mandates that the students learn about their community.

Next, do your market research to see if there are articles or books in print about your topic. Check Amazon, Barnes & Noble, local bookstores, Goodreads, and other related websites that have books on your topic. On Amazon, you can see the sales rank of each book to get a sense of its popularity. Material that is three or four years old should not be considered competition. That material has been around for a while and could possibly be outdated, depending on the subject. Be sure to check not only the topic, but also age levels and reading levels. If there are books about your topic, ask yourself, "How can I put a different spin on it? What can I write to make it different and fresh or offer another point of view?"

After doing my market research for the Houston book, I found nothing for children to use for research except adult material. I spoke with my school librarian and my district's social

studies coordinator, visited the Houston Public Library, Barnes & Noble, Blue Willow Bookstore, Amazon's website, and the Goodreads site.

Consider whether you want to write an article or a book. An article has a tighter focus than a book, as well as shorter text length. You must narrow down your information because there is not room for everything. A book enables the writer to explore a wider range of sub-topics under the umbrella of the topic.

There are five major publishing markets. One is the education market, which is mainly curriculum-related and is for libraries and schools. An example would be my H is for Houston book for second-grade students who need a resource when researching Houston.

The second market is the electronic market. Today most books, magazines, and newspapers have an electronic version that you can access on e-readers, iPads, or tablets.

The third market is the magazine market. General interest magazines cover a wide range of interests. Examples include biographies, crafts, how-to's, nature, and sports. Specialized interest magazines cover such subjects as cars, curriculum, dogs, interior decorating, and parenting, to name a few.

The fourth market is mass-market, which focuses on a large market. These books are designed to fit in racks near the checkout counter at stores. The price is lower to attract impulse buyers.

The fifth market is the trade book market. These books are larger. They are higher in price than mass market books. Often, but not always, they are printed in smaller numbers. Trade books are sold "to the trade" in traditional bookstores. Trade books may be originals not preceded by a hardcover edition.

If you are going to publish traditionally, determine where to send your manuscript. Three excellent resources are Magazine Markets for Children's Writers, Book Markets for Children's

Writers, and Writer's Market. You can buy these books on Amazon or at Barnes & Noble, or check them out from the library. The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators website also gives a certain amount of access to this information. These books are updated and published annually and contain information from hundreds of publishers. You can learn if a publisher is accepting submissions, what type of submissions they accept, what genres they are looking for, their audience, contact information as well as whether they accept submissions from individuals or agents only. Publishers' websites will give you the most current information.

In today's market, there are two different options for publishing: traditional publishing and self-publishing. With traditional publishing, a writer sends a query letter about their manuscript to an agent or publisher. A query letter summarizes the idea of the article or book, describes how the audience would benefit, and why you are the person to write it. If you send the publisher a query letter about a book and they are interested, they will ask for a proposal. Publishers do not ask for proposals for articles, just query letters. A book proposal provides more detail about the book.

A proposal includes:

- An overview of the book - several paragraphs telling what the book is about.
- The format of the book - is it mass market or trade, is it illustrated, how many pages, what will the book look like?
- Describes the market - who will buy the book?
- Competition - what else has been written about the topic and how is yours different and better.
- Promotion - how you will sell the book - speaking engagements, school visits, book signings; also where your book will be sold.
- Writer bio - information about you that tells why you are qualified to write the book.
- Table of contents
- Sample chapter - offers a sample of your writing.

Often, but not always, publishers' websites tell exactly what they expect for proposals.

Writer's market books, Writer's Digest and The Writer magazines have sample query letters and

proposals, as well as discussions about how to write them. Another good resource is *Formatting & Submitting Your Manuscript*.

Now you are ready to research your topic. There are two types of resources: primary and secondary. A primary source is research you have conducted yourself, such as interviews, experiments, surveys, personal experience and anecdotes. Historical documents, which include diaries, journals, and memoirs, are also primary sources.

A secondary source is information you get from texts that has been compiled from others such as books, periodicals, and websites. It is best to use mainly primary sources because they will be first-hand information as opposed to secondary sources, which are filtered through the eyes of other writers.

There are many types of resources available to use to research your topic:

- Articles
- Books
- Historical documents
- Internet resources
- Interviews
- Letters
- Reference desk at the public library

The Internet is a wonderful resource, but I must caution you, there is a lot of good information out there, and there is a lot of unreliable information out there. One thing I look for in evaluating Internet resources is, who is the writer? I want to know what their qualifications are to write the information. I avoid articles without a writer's name. Is the information reliable if the writer does not add his or her name? Another thing I check is the date the article was written. This information may be good, but if it was written several years ago, it may be outdated. When reading the article I check for the writer's bias. There might be a time when writing a persuasive piece that you would want a writer to take a certain point of view; but most of the time you would use an objective writer. Be sure that the information has a list of works cited--are the

sources credible and authoritative? Also, check the suffix of the Internet address. Edu is educational, com is commercial, mil is military, gov is government, org is organization or nonprofit, and net is network. Generally, government, educational, and organization sites contain more reliable information than the commercial sites. Sometimes commercial sites are biased in favor of their product.

If you are unsure of any website, either check it out further or do not use it. It is always better to be on the safe side because you want to have accurate information and your name will be on the article or book. Use these same guidelines when you evaluate other sources.

Beware of using such websites as Wikipedia since its users collaboratively develop it. The information may not be of the highest quality since anyone can add or change information. When I read something on Wikipedia that I like, I evaluate the source the writer used. If it meets my criteria, I might use it, but cite that source instead of Wikipedia.

Books about Houston were the first resources I looked at to gather my topic information for the Houston book. I went to several different public libraries, searched my personal library, and went to bookstores to look for information about the topics included in my manuscript. I looked at material and pamphlets from my school district's social studies coordinator. I also spoke with my school librarian. Several times, I called the Houston Public Library's reference desk to ask questions. Fourth grade social studies Texas history textbooks were helpful as well. The Internet helped in finding other books and resources. Since I had a different topic for each of the 26 alphabet letters, I had a lot of research to do.

To document my library or borrowed book resources, I copied the front cover, the copyright page, and the material I needed. I could then return the books and have the material for necessary citations and future use. That material was for my files only. When I used something

from the Internet, I printed the whole article so I would have the material I needed, the Internet address, and other material needed for the citation.

To make sure your resource citations are correct, several good references may be purchased, checked out from the public library, or found online. I would recommend *The Chicago Manual of Style* and the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). They contain examples of all types of research citations.

After your article or book is finished, you have options. If you have written a book, you may select part of it to turn into one or more articles. For example, my *H is for Houston* book has 26 different topics. I could write at least 26 articles. To use the *A is for Astrodome* as an example; there is so much information available about it, that I could write articles about persuading the City of Houston to repurpose it instead of tearing it down, how the Astrodome was designed, how AstroTurf was developed, etc. The opposite is also true. If you have written articles, you might compile them into a book. For example, if you have articles about growing, caring for, and propagating plants, you might include them in a book about gardening. If you have written an article or book about an historical event, you could write a novel surrounding that event. For example, if you wrote an article or book about the Civil War, you could write an historical novel such as *Gone with the Wind*.

Do not forget about your website and blog. Full articles and sections of articles or books can be posted on either of these. On my website, I posted an article about the San Jacinto Monument, and have articles about Charlotte Allen and Reunion Tower that I am working on to post. These will showcase my writing and serve as resources for readers. I will eventually add little bits of my *Houston* book to spark interest and publicize it before it is released. Conversely, if you have a blog or website, you can use that material to write articles or books. Print articles can be published in e-zines and print books can be published as e-books.

That is nonfiction writing and publishing at a glance. If you have been thinking about writing, try it with nonfiction. Read, read, read first, then pick up the pen and paper or keyboard, and as Nike says, "Just do it!" I guarantee your life will be enriched!

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