



# Dating with Non-Fiction

## Simon Whaley

There are, on average, 125,000 new books published in the United Kingdom every year. Approximately 20% (25,000) are novels. The rest are non-fiction. The opportunity for having a non-fiction book published is therefore much greater, so why not make your first book a non-fiction one? This means creating a relationship with a publisher, so let's go on a date!

### Lust

Lust is the overwhelming emotion that gives us the courage to ask someone out on a date. Whatever subject you want to write about, you must have a lust for it. The enthusiasm will show in your writing. Many authors write about their hobbies, because they interest them. Have you already had some success with articles on the subject? Is there a subject you specialise in as an article writer? My walking book, *Best Walks in the Welsh Borders*, is a collection of interesting walks in my local area. Walking is a hobby I enjoy, but I also regularly provide walking articles to several different magazines.

### Know Who to Date

Although blind dates are fun, they may also be a waste of time. Knowing who you are dating makes a world of difference. Before you even put pen to paper, find a publisher to date first. Would you go out with a cricket-obsessed date, if you're only interested in ballet? Find a publisher who already publishes books on your subject of interest. Publishers prefer to stick with the market they know best. Don't send you car maintenance book to a social history publisher. Look in bookshops, libraries and search Amazon. Internet dating is all the rage these days (apparently!).

### Mimicry is Flattering

When we like someone, we copy their body language. If they cross their legs, we cross ours. If they sip their drink, so do we. It's the same with non-fiction. Publisher's love a series of books. With a series, they know:

- how many copies bookshops may buy,
- the book's retail price, and the cost of production,
- how many copies they need to sell to make a profit.

However, don't think that you have to write the series. Instead, see if your book will fit an **existing** series. My first book was *100 Ways For A Dog To Train Its Human*. The publisher had already published *100 Ways For A Cat To Train Its Human*, written by another author. A friend's first published book was *100 Ways For A*

*Chicken To Train Its Human*. Have you spotted the trend? See the mimicry? It's not copying, because the books focus on different animals, but the style, format, length and tone are the same. I wrote my dog book to fit the publisher's 100 Ways format, and sales now exceed 250,000 copies.

I did the same with, *Best Walks in the Welsh Borders*. Other authors wrote *Best Walks in North Wales* and *Best Walks in South Wales*, so my book follows the same format, but covers a different area.

### What to Wear?

Do you spend hours deciding how to dress to impress? The same goes with non-fiction. A novel has to be written in full before it can be submitted. A non-fiction book is different. Usually, the publisher commissions the book from a proposal, and then asks you to write the book. The proposal is the first impression you make on a publisher, so dress carefully:

**Underwear** – Give your proposal a front sheet, bearing the title of your proposed book, your name, address, email address, telephone number, and state that it is a book proposal.

**Shirt / Blouse** – Follow with a brief introduction about your book, who your target reader is, and what the demand is for your book. Use quantifiable figures. For my book *Fundraising For A Community Project*, I told the publishers how many applications the National Lottery grant scheme (Awards For All) received from community groups over a 12 month period. The chicken book author, used circulation figures of chicken magazines to indicate the number of people interested in chickens.

**Trousers / Skirt** – Detail how many chapters you will have, and provide a brief paragraph for each one, explaining what is covered, and the level of detail.

**Shoes** – Give a total word length for the book and say if illustrations or photographs will be needed. State whether you can supply the images, and in what format.

**Overcoat** – The biggest garment reflects the biggest part of your proposal. Show publishers your style and writing capabilities by including the first chapter, (or at least 5,000 words, if your chapters are short).

### Make-up

Remember first impressions, so type your proposal to impress. Most proposals can be emailed (John Hunt Publishing imprints only accept electronic submissions), although some publishers still prefer a paper copy via the post.

### Eye Contact

What do you do when you meet someone new? You ask for their name. Find out who to address your proposal to. Get a name and check the spelling.

### Previous Flirtations

Have you ever investigated who else has been out with your date? Look at the books your target publisher has already printed about your topic. How does yours differ? The fact that they've published books on your topic before is a good sign. It means they know about the market, and possible buyers. Your book though, must add something new. In a series, it should complement or enhance the existing range. My *Best Walks in the Welsh Borders* covers a different area to the publishers existing books in the series covering North and South Wales.

### Chat-up Lines

Do you impress your date by telling them about your best achievements? Do exactly the same with your prospective publisher. Why are **YOU** the best person to write **THIS** book? For *Fundraising For A Community Project* I told the publishers how I'd spent six years liaising with community groups as part of my job working for a local authority grant scheme.

Have you had articles published on this topic? Include

copies with your proposal. It doesn't matter whether you were paid for them or not. They prove that you can write about the topic for a specific reader.

### A New Relationship

Send your proposal when you're ready. Be prepared to wait for a response. Don't be despondent if the publisher rejects it. Not every date works out does it? Go through the same process again with another publisher. *Best Walks in the Welsh Borders*, for example, began life as *Welsh Border Walks* and then *Walks in the Welsh Marches* before I hit it off with the publishers Frances Lincoln.

When a publisher does commission you to write the book, always deliver what you promised in your proposal. It could be the start of a long relationship, with many more babies (I mean books) to add to your family!

### Biography

Simon Whaley is the author of over a dozen books, including *The Positively productive Writer*, *Photography for Writers* (both Compass Books). His latest book is *The Complete Article Writer*. For more information about Simon, visit his website at [www.simonwhaley.co.uk](http://www.simonwhaley.co.uk)

# Carrying the Flame

In a society that is often indifferent to poetry and history, I think it is important to understand how significant poetry has been to mankind in the past. The rhythmic arrangement of words, sounds and meaning, has been with us since the beginning of language. Poetry quite simply imitates the way of the world: Everything in life has its own rhythm and music: hidden inside our bodies are the circulation of blood and the automatic movement of our breath. In nature the seasons follow one another without fail. The migration of birds always happens at the same time of the year, their individual and repetitive songs never change. Hibernating animals know when to sleep and when to wake. It is almost as if life itself responds to some hidden ideal of movement and sound. This is what Plato believed at a time when Greek drama showed an extraordinary genius for poetry and music. Much later Shakespeare's poetry and musical rhythms underpinned his understanding of human nature and gave his plays a universal appeal. Yet he was a man of his own time, completely aware of the physical and political world about him, its men and women, great and unknown.

We look back and are influenced by masterpieces that were written before our era. There is nothing but good in that attitude and yet we must, by the same token, be open to contemporary influences and try to be adventurous in our choice of words and rhythms, just as Shakespeare was.

T.S. Eliot writes in his article "Reflections in *Vers Libre*" for the *New Stateman*: *In an ideal society one might imagine the good New growing naturally out of the good Old, without the need for polemic and theory.*

So while it is crucial that we value this wonderful background to our art and craft, it is vital that we too, in however small a way, keep the flame of this ancient art alight in our own way in our own day.