

Authors Guild Launchpad:

Checklist for Book Marketing & Publicity

Please consider this document a list of possibilities, rather than a true “checklist.” The best course of action depends on you, your book, the market conditions at the time of your book’s release, and many other factors.

Contents include four sections:

→Publicity

→Marketing

→Launch, Tours, & Events

→Mental & Emotional Planning

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→Publicity

Publisher Conversation

What are your publisher's marketing and publicity plans for your book? What is the timeline for whatever actions they will be taking? What do they expect you to do?

Freelance Publicists

Do you have the budget and the need to hire an outside publicist? What would you like them to do for the book? Would help on the marketing end or an assistant be more useful?

Timeline

What is the publicity timeline for your book? Will there be print or e-galleys (ARCs, advance reader copies)? When will they be ready? When will the jacket be finished? When will the book be listed at online retailers? A timeline can help you map out your outreach or work with your publicist (in-house/freelance) on outreach.

Author Questionnaire

Have you filled out an author questionnaire for your publisher? Many publishers use these questionnaires to get a sense of an author's contacts and networks.

Elevator Pitch

Do you have a short description/pitch for your book that you'd feel comfortable sharing at a party or other contexts (including an actual elevator)?

Comp Titles

Think about what 2–4 books your book is in conversation with, especially titles that have come out in the last couple years. This can help for publicity outreach, conversation partners, and more.

Galley Letter

Some publishers create galley letters to send to potential reviewers—will yours do that for you? Some places don't use them at all. If your publisher doesn't create one, do you want to make one yourself?

Galley Date

When will galleys be available? Will there be e-galleys only and, if so, do you want to print any galleys?

Hi-Res Author Photo

Do you have a hi-res photo, with photo credit in the file name, ready to share when needed?

Hi-Res Book Cover Jacket

Do you have a hi-res jpg of the book cover ready to share?

Cover Reveal

There are few general/literary outlets doing cover reveals these days. That said, is there a specialized outlet that might be particularly interested in your book? Is there something unusual about the cover design process? Is there a newsletter that might be a fit for a short Q&A announcing the book?

Pre-Pubs

Will your publisher be submitting your book to the trade publications? If not, is this an action you can take? The major pre-pubs are *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Kirkus Reviews*. Kids' books can also be submitted to The Horn Book, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (BCCB), and *School Library Journal* (in lieu of *Library Journal*). Indie publishers can also submit to *Foreword Reviews*. Many people submit to Shelf Awareness as well.

Publicity Outlets

Make a list of places you'd like to see your work reviewed, or to be interviewed, or to contribute an original piece. What are your top 10–20 targets?

Network List

Create a list of your networks. Be expansive: Think about the groups you're a part of, in addition to friends and family—professional networks, parenting groups, hobbies, classes, clubs, alumni orgs, etc. Consider what is the best way for you to keep track of this information; often an Excel or Google Sheet will work well. Include names, affiliations, and email addresses, or other ways of connecting (social media, LinkedIn, friends-of-friends). You can use these lists for pre-order emails, specific asks (to interview you, to talk about the book on socials, to come to events, etc.). You can also create a list of people you aren't connected to but might want to be aware of the book (reviewers, columnists, influencers, etc.).

Talking Points

Some books can benefit from talking points; generally, all authors can benefit from figuring out what you want to say about your book. Beyond an elevator pitch, what do you most want to share about the book? What are the top five things you'd like people to take away from reading it?

Press Release

Ask your publisher if they will create an updated press release — this might be a re-configuring of the galley letter, along with any pre-pub coverage.

Finished Books

When will finished books be available? Will your publisher be sending out media copies? What copies would you like to send, and can you write notes to your receivers?

Google Alerts

Consider setting up Google alerts or a different alert system, or schedule regular times to "Google yourself"—think about whether you want to receive information through alerts or searches, or have a publicist or other publishing team member who will be alerting you when anything runs about your book. You can also set up alerts if your book focused on a certain issue area to be aware of how that topic is being discussed in the news.

Excerpts/Original Pieces

If you are interested in writing original pieces, think about the kinds of pieces you'd like to write. What are the topics? What is the length? Where do you see it running? Do you have any relationships with editors at outlets? Does your publisher have connections that could be helpful? Is the piece tied directly to the book, or is it tied to you as a person with your specific interests/hobbies (dancing, knitting, ice hockey, making candies, etc.). It can also be helpful to pull excerpts of various lengths from the book—this could be pitched for first serial (often a paid piece that runs before on-sale) or for general excerpt, as well as for readings at events. You could also consider proposing lists to outlets like *Electric Lit* or *The Wall Street Journal* that run "5–7 books on ____," with ____ being a topic related to your book or your body of work.

Book Clubs

The big book clubs (Read with Jenna, Good Morning America, Oprah, etc.) often do their book picks very far in the future. Is your book one that might possibly be a pick? Has your publisher submitted it early on (often before a publicist is assigned, if you have an in-house publicist)? There are many other kinds of book clubs as well—what might be a fit for your book? These include ones with magazines, local and national NPR programs, social media influencers, and so forth.

Beyond Pub Date

Consider your bandwidth—how do you want to keep getting word out about your book? Do you want to continue to actively promote it through events in the future? Could you be a conversation partner for someone else with a book coming out? Are there academic institutions that might consider your book for class adoption? Are there original pieces you'd like to be writing and pitching? Are there new outlets you've found that might be interested in your book? Is there an upcoming anniversary or other important date related to your book that could be a peg for coverage? Do you want to continue to focus on this book or concentrate on new work?

→Marketing

Social Media Platforms

What social media platforms are you on? How are you using them? Do you want to try others? In what ways do you imagine using each platform? Keep in mind the plethora of platforms, including LinkedIn. Are there groups or spaces that are talking about topic of your book? What feels exciting and sustainable to you? What are you curious about trying, rather than what you dread? Where are conversations taking place that you'd like to be a part of?

Update Social Media Info

Update your bio with your book title, on-sale date, buy link, etc., as they become available. Consider "pinning" information or updating your profiles' banner images or other graphics with your book jacket/on-sale date, etc.

Cover Reveal

While cover reveals may occasionally be a publicity question, these days they are often the purview of marketing. Think about your communication channels—are you on social media? Do you have a newsletter? Do you have a website? Do you have a mailing list? Do you have a network of friends who might also post for you? Wherever you post or share, be sure to include the jacket and a pre-order link. You could also tag your press, anyone on your publishing team, and anyone who blurbbed your book.

Identify Potential Giveaways

Are there places you could do a giveaway? This could be physical or virtual—galleys or swag (t-shirts, tote bags, bookmarks). What timing might be useful to you? What actions are you wanting people to take—leave a reader review, come to an event, tag a friend, host a book club, spread the word another way?

Claim Authors Pages

There are a number of places where you can claim your author page, which often offers access to special features or the ability to make updates, link your books and different editions together, and so forth. These include Goodreads, Amazon, and Bookbub. Make sure that your bio is up-to-date, and alert your publisher if there are any mistakes in your book's listing.

Website

It is very helpful if every author has a website—even just a simple landing page with your book jacket, information about you, and a contact form of some kind is wonderful. It does not need to be expensive or complicated. The Authors Guild's [Web Services](#) offer many options. If you have a website, it's a good time to update prior to publication. Make sure that your bio and other information is correct, that all links and any contact forms or newsletter sign-ups work, and that you've listed any other ways readers can find and follow you.

Freelancer Marketing

If you have the resources, and feel that your book would benefit from marketing support beyond what your publisher provides, you might consider hiring freelance marketing help. Such help might include social media support, starting a newsletter, designing postcards or other material, creating an influencer campaign, and so forth. Some firms and individuals offer both publicity and marketing support; others specialize in one area.

Designed Images

Designed images can be useful to post on social media—these can include quotes from the book, blurbs, on-sale information, and more. Your publishing team might create these images, or you could do so using Canva or other software—they will have templates that follow the specs for various uses (an Instagram story, a Facebook banner, etc.).

Pre-Order Email

A pre-order email to your list of personal and professional contacts can be very useful in seeding early awareness of the book. These emails can take different forms and be sent in different ways (search online for tips to send bulk emails while avoiding spam filters). You might wish to include how you came to write the book and why it's important, as well as any early blurbs. Some pre-order emails are long and encourage people to spread the word through social media, leaving reader reviews, invite you to events, etc. Some are more concise and just highlight the pub date and link(s) to preorder.

Email Signature

Consider your email signature. Does it list your book and pub date? Is there a pre-order link and/or link to your website? Do you want to include your jacket, or any other information?

Quotes

It can be useful to pull quotes from the book, either to use as designed images, refer to in interviews, or use in newsletters or other posts. This can be done in concert with pulling any excerpts for possible publicity use, but can be a separate action as well. Good quotes stand on their own and are usually concise in length.

Swag

Sometimes people like to make swag to send as a "galley package" or with finished books, to use as a giveaway, to bring to conferences and festivals, or simply to thank their publishing team. Swag might include clothing (hats, t-shirts, sweat bands, socks, etc.), tote bags, coffee cups, beer coasters, food items, branded bottles, and so forth.

Bookplates

Consider making custom book plates for your book or ask if your publisher can provide bookplates. They often have branded ones or they can make them for you. Bookplates add a personal touch while providing a good solution to autograph books in bulk or to send to readers who have purchased a copy.

Newsletter

Many authors have newsletters. As with social media, newsletters are only a good choice if you have the bandwidth and commitment to keep them going. There are a variety of platforms for sending newsletters (Mailchimp, MailerLite, Substack, etc.), as well as simply doing it through your regular email account. Consider if you want to monetize a newsletter, what the focus will be, why you want to write one, and how you will gather subscribers. Think about what newsletters you like to read and why, and how yours might find its footing.

Finished Book Email

Along with a pre-order email, sending out an email when your finished books arrive (usually around a month or so out from pub date) is another good moment to raise awareness about the book. You might have pre-pub reviews to include, as well as any launch/event dates.

On-Sale Date Email

A final email to your group of contacts can be useful on pub date, to celebrate the day and mention any media or events happening. Such an email can also express appreciation for those who pre-ordered the book or otherwise helped raise awareness.

Influencer List

Along with your network lists, creating a list of influencers can be very useful for your marketing team or for your own outreach. These can be pie-in-the-sky and more attainable ideas. It's good to list a person/group, along with where you'd most want them to post, why they are on the list, and if you have any means of contacting them beyond a cold outreach.

Reading Group Guides

Reading group guides, which are often 12–15 questions long, can be useful to include on your publisher's website or on your own. You can also get creative with these! Are there fun actions a book club could do while discussing your book? Are there also more personal questions you might include that could carry the conversation in different directions? Is there a visually appealing way to design a reading group guide that readers could download to use for their discussion?

Advertising

Advertising can cost an enormous amount of money, but it doesn't have to. If ads are an option, and one your publisher won't be doing, consider social media advertising, newsletter spots, or places like LitHub or the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP), as well as more niche outlets. Keep an eye out for where you've seen other sponsored ads for books, and reach out to ask for their ad packages; these will include both rates and specs for the options they offer.

Postcards/Notecards

Postcards are an inexpensive choice, and can be designed/printed online. They might be simple, with the jacket on one side and a quote/blurb/other info on the other side, or could be designed as a series of postcards with some creative element related to the book (such as a recipe, series of quotes, puzzle, etc.). Postcards can be sent on their own to your networks and media outlets, and/or used as notecards for writing a handwritten note to send with a galley or finished book.

Academic Marketing

Some publishers have academic marketing departments, which concentrate on marketing outreach to academic institutions. You can ask your publisher if they do this kind of outreach. You can also research professions and programs yourself and send a cold email offering a reading copy/pdf of the book (so they can consider the book for course adoption). There are companies like the Brian Murphy Group that also specialize in academic marketing outreach.

Library Marketing

Library marketing is especially important for kid lit, getting books in front of educators and librarians. Ask if your publisher has a dedicated library marketing department and if there is anything you can do to help them do their job better—such as writing blog posts or letters to teachers or librarians to accompany their outreach and sales—or if there are other opportunities you might be eligible for.

Beyond Pub Date

After pub date comes and goes, posting or sharing news about your book doesn't have to end. Consider how often and in what ways you want to post in the future, as well as what kind of advertising or other outreach you might continue to do—for instance, are there anniversaries or themed months that your book might fit into? Are there times of year, like graduation or back-to-school, that are a fit for your work? As you move further past pub date, think about how you can integrate mention of your book in ongoing conversations, rather than posts that are more directly about your book.

→Launch, Tours, & Events

Launch Event

Launch events are a beautiful way to celebrate your book. If you have an indie or chain bookstore in your area, ask if your publisher could pitch an event for you. If they can't, consider reaching out yourself. Having a relationship with your local bookstore matters, whether it's an indie or a B&N. Buy books, talk to staff, offer to be an interlocutor with authors coming through town to help bring a crowd. Support them so that they will support you, too. When you reach out about your own launch, include your pub date and information about the book and what kind of audience you could bring out to a store. Don't count on a store or venue to have a built-in audience—be prepared to do your own outreach to your communities. Launch events are often in conversation with another writer, but they can take different forms. Might you include music or food? Are there options for drinks or audience participation? Do you want to show any images? What would feel meaningful and festive to you?

Tour

Many publishers aren't sending authors on tours. If you want to go on a tour, you may be asked to foot the bill yourself. It's important to consider where you have networks of people who would come out to an event, as well as why you want to get on the road. How much time, money, and enthusiasm do you have for booking a tour and doing the legwork to get people to turn out? Can you parlay an appearance into other types of publicity coverage?

Kid lit: If you are going on tour, ask your publisher if they will be working with bookstores who will partner to also set up school visits or story times with books that count towards the bestseller list. When you're not launching a new book, school visits are a great way to sell your book, have a dedicated audience, and expand your reach. Schools will sometimes have a budget for an honorarium, or you can ask for a minimum book buy from the school in lieu of a speaking fee.

Tour Graphics

If you do go on tour, graphics for your events can be a useful way to spread the word. These can include a graphic for the whole tour, as well as ones for each individual event. Sometimes bookstores or venues might create these graphics, but often you might need to create your own. Such graphics could mirror any quote/blurb graphics you've created, with a similar color palette or other ways to tie to the jacket.

Festivals

There are dozens of festivals that occur around the U.S. every year. Some of the larger ones are the L.A. Times Festival of Books, Brooklyn Book Festival, Texas Book Festival, Miami Book Fair, Portland Book Festival, and Bay Area Book Festival, but there are so many others in both large and small cities. You can Google to find festivals and their usual times, and sign up for their mailing lists or keep an eye on their socials for when their submissions period opens (often this is about 9 months before the festival). Make sure you send everything a festival asks for if you choose to submit. Most festivals do not pay travel/hotel costs, so keep that in mind as well.

Paid Engagements

Some authors have speaking agents, while others book paid engagements through their own contacts. Events in bookstores are not paid, but ones with other venues might be. Don't be afraid to ask if a venue has a budget for a speaking fee or honorarium. Speaking agents can be a challenge to find, but you can research different agencies and see how they consider possible additions to their lists, or ask your agent/publisher/friends if they might be able to connect you with one for a conversation. Many agencies will only take authors on if they've demonstrated they are regularly booking paid engagements.

Other Venues

Bookstores aren't the only venues. Are there other spaces in town that host writers? These could be arts or community centers, nonprofit spaces, or other organizations related to your book. Could you propose an event that matches with their audience/clients?

Partner Orgs

Partner organizations can be a good way to get the word out about your events. These could be cultural or religious orgs, alumni groups, or other organizations that have a dedicated following and would agree for their name to be featured on your event listing and in turn help promote the event to their community.

Books for Sale

Keep your publisher updated about your events, so that they can help make sure books will be available for sale. For some small presses, you may need to do the sales yourself, or see if you can find an off-site bookseller. Check with your publisher and the event space to make sure books can be part of the gathering.

Connections

Think about your connections. For all these possible events, are there people you know who could open the door for you to have an event? Are there connections that might lead to other types of inclusion at events?

Conversation Partners

When you think about your publicity network list, keep in mind possible conversation partners—who might be a good fit to be your interlocutor at an event? Who has strong connections in a community and could get people out to an event? Beyond your own network, are there other writers or public figures with whom you'd like to have a conversation? How might you reach them to propose an event?

Conferences

Conferences can be another good space for events and also generally to make connections. Are there panels you could present on? Are there conferences your publisher attends that might highlight your book? Keep in mind that many conferences book very far in advance.

Academic Talks

Do you have a relationship with an institution where you might be invited to give a talk? Through any academic marketing outreach that you or your publisher did, were there any professors or programs that expressed an interest in your book? Might you propose a class visit or campus talk to them?

Alumni Events

In addition to general academic talks, did you attend any schools that might be interested in having you come speak? Depending on the school and your book, this could be elementary/middle/high schools, as well as colleges and other high ed programs. Some schools have alumni weekends or opportunities around commencement, graduation, or reunion times.

Online Events

While online events often struggle to translate into book sales, they can be a wonderful way to raise awareness and also allow people who can't come in-person to an event to hear you read/have a conversation. Think about what kind of audience you might have for an online event. Who could host it? Who would you want to come? What special touches might you offer that would make the gathering memorable? Who could you be in conversation with that perhaps you couldn't be in-person?

Booksellers

Bookseller support can be a wonderful way to spread the word about a book. Speak to your publisher about their relationship with booksellers. Is there outreach they are doing on that front? Is there any way you can support their efforts? If you have relationships to particular stores (in your current town/hometown, other places you've spent time, where your book is set, etc.), then there might be good ways for you to reach out and offer a galley/e-galley for a bookseller to take a look at. If you get newsletters from various stores and see a bookseller talking about a book that is related to yours, that can be a bridge to mention in your outreach. Remember that booksellers, like everyone else, are incredibly busy, sometimes change jobs, and are hearing about thousands of books every month. Be thoughtful in your outreach, and don't expect a response.

Reading Series

Reading series are a strong part of many literary communities in cities large and small. What are the reading series in your area or other places you might want to go? Do you have a relationship or connection to the series? How might you think about successfully pitching yourself to be included? Reading series tend to book up far in advance, but are not necessarily tied to pub date.

IndieNext

IndieNext is an initiative of the American Booksellers Association (ABA). Every month, booksellers whose stores are part of the ABA nominate books to be included on monthly lists. You can see the lists and deadlines on the ABA site. The list is not big and tends to lean very novel-heavy. Your publisher might do outreach to booksellers with this list in mind.

Corporate

Corporate engagements often fall in the paid engagement camp, though not always. What connections do you have in this space? Are there employee resource groups (ERGs) that might invite you to speak? Are there other opportunities that a company has to bring in speakers? How might your work fit with their interests?

→Mental & Emotional Planning

Define Success for Yourself

How would you define success for this particular book? This might be sales, but isn't necessarily. What are your long-term goals as a writer? How might this book serve those goals?

Consider Your Resources

What do your resources look like? These could include money, time, and energy, but expand your consideration to things like design skills, social media, large networks, public speaking, etc.

Create a Budget

What money is available to you for the publication process? If you have a budget, how would you like to spend it? Some options might be freelance publicity/marketing, website design/update, branding classes, newsletter creation, virtual or in-person assistant, babysitting costs, tour events, designed materials like postcards, and so forth.

Time

How much time do you anticipate having to devote to publicity/marketing/events from now until after publication? What are your pressure points for time?

Reading Reviews

Do you want to read reviews? Do you want to look at consumer reviews on Goodreads/Amazon when they are available? Might there be someone in your orbit who could screen them for you? If you feel you have to read reviews, how do you usually receive criticism/praise?

Control or No Control?

What do you feel is in your control and what isn't in your control? How will you keep these things in mind? It can be helpful to ask this question at different stages of publication; for example, you have control over getting the word out about a launch event, but not over who will show up.

Priorities

What are your personal, professional, writing, and book priorities? How do you anticipate these priorities interacting with each other this year? How will you decide what to prioritize when your resources may be depleted?

Support System

Where will you lean for support during the publication process? Are there other authors you're in community with? What role do your family, friends, colleagues, and others play? Who can you talk to about the emotional process of bringing a book into the world?

Communication Plan

How do you want to use your communication channels, whatever they may be, to get word out about your book? Do you prefer a planned approach (scheduling posts, creating a timeline, designing materials, etc.) a more relaxed approach (posting when you are able to), or a combination?

Get Comfortable Discussing Your Book

Along with an elevator pitch and, possibly, talking points, consider how you're talking about your book—are you communicating what is important about the book? What were some challenges and joys along the way? Why is this a book you felt you had to write? Who do you think might feel particularly engaged by it?

Communicate with Your Publishing Team

Whoever is your main point person at the publisher, tell them what you are thinking of doing (events, making swag, reaching out to local bookstores or schools, etc.) and ask them what they are doing, and see how they might be able to help. They may be planning to do the same things as you, so communicate! They may tell you NOT to do something either because they know it doesn't work and would be a waste of time/resources or because they are doing it themselves.

Publication Day: Emotions

Publication day can bring a host of emotions. How are you honoring yourself and your book today? What actions might you take to feel supported on pub day? What might you do that is internally focused and what might you share in community? How much time do you want to continue to devote to publicity, marketing, and events? How do you see this in relation to your long-term goals?

Post-Publication

Consider the publication process, including what was in your control and not in your control. What did you find to be challenges—did they surprise you? What did you particularly love? What was an action you were proud of? Have you heard from readers? What was that like? What do you wish had happened, and what are you grateful for that did occur? How will you carry this experience forward with you as you continue to write?