

## How to Become a Pearson Longman Author

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*This article is based on one which originally appeared in the ELT Gazette. David Riley has worked for many years in ELT as a teacher, manager, publisher and author.*

SO YOU WANT to write ELT text books. This article aims to help you get noticed and get published.

Of course, you could publish yourself: falling print costs and the internet have made this cheaper and easier than ever. But if you want to write a book rather than run a business, there is a lot to be said for working with an established publisher like Pearson Longman who can provide editorial, design, production, distribution and marketing services.

### Getting started

Some authors vault to the top in one go: discovered at a conference, their first piece of published writing is a major course book. But this is increasingly a rarity. Most authors nowadays work their way up, starting with writing tests, photocopiables and workbooks before finally – if their work is considered good enough – being commissioned to write a course book.

The reason for this progression for authors is an increase in the speed and complexity of ELT publishing.

### Speed and complexity

In the past a single author or a small, self-contained team of two or three would write all or most of the components in a series. Levels were published one at a time and it might take eight or more years to complete a series. Teachers are no longer willing to wait this long.

At the same time, the number of components has increased – there are photocopiable activity packs, websites, CD-ROMs, test booklets...

As a result, courses have come to be written by multiple teams, each responsible for different components and/or levels. Some authors never even need to meet each other.

This is good news for the aspiring author. It means more opportunities for budding authors as publishers now need far more writers. But how do you get that first commission? Three common first steps on the ladder are writing reviews of other people's material, submitting unsolicited proposals and presenting at conferences.

### Writing reviews

All publishers like to say that they have become more 'market driven'. In everyday terms, this means that decisions about what to publish are based on input from teachers as much as on inspiration from authors.

As a result, increasing amounts of materials in development are sent out to classroom teachers who read them or teach with them and then fill out questionnaires or write reports. Becoming a reporter can be an opportunity to demonstrate that you are insightful, aware of developments in ELT and can express yourself well in writing.

Pearson Longman is usually on the look out for new reporters: don't hesitate to send in your CV. Keep it short and relevant. Include contact details, relevant qualifications, teaching experience and publications. Attach it to an email and send it to the relevant person – see the [Contacts List](#).

Use the message in the body of the email to make sure your CV goes straight to the right person or people.

1. State clearly that you are interested in becoming a reviewer
2. Say which country you are based in.
3. Specify what specialisations best match your experience.

Specialisations include Primary, Secondary, Business English.... List only fields you have convincing experience in: don't count the one-to-one class you once had in a bank as Business English if you have spent the rest of your career in primary education.

A final note on report writing: when you come to write a report, don't allow your ambitions as a writer to distract you from doing a good job: there is little as annoying as a reporter who is trying to score points rather than help the process go forward. The best way to promote yourself is to write a report which is well-written, honest and relevant.

### Submitting unsolicited proposals

Some authors make their first contact by sending an unsolicited proposal to a publisher. This is a great way to demonstrate your ideas about teaching and learning and to reveal your potential as a materials writer.

But first of all, some bad news: now, more than ever, most unsolicited proposals are rejected. All large publishing companies work to long-term plans – usually five years. In other words, they have decided what books they need to publish and are looking for authors to write them. The problem for you is that no publisher is going to share this confidential information with anyone outside the company. As a result, the two commonest reasons for rejecting an unsolicited proposal are, maddeningly: (1) 'We're already doing something like that' and (2) 'We aren't planning to do anything like that'.

In spite of this, unsolicited proposals can be successful.

- If your material is very convincing, plans may be changed in order to pick it up. But don't rely on this.
- Sometimes you can be lucky: your proposal might land on someone's desk and turn out to be just what they are looking for. Given that ELT, like any community, has its zeitgeist, this is not as unlikely as you might think.
- If a publisher is impressed by your writing they may ask you to write something else for another project, perhaps a workbook, a resource pack or a teacher's book to start with.

The two main things you can do to give your proposal the best possible chance are to get it to the right person and to make it easy to read.

### The right person

Publishing companies are large organisations with offices in many countries. Any one employee knows only a limited number of their colleagues. This means that proposals

sent by mail and addressed to 'the editor' or 'the commissioner' can spend weeks circulating from desk to desk before arriving where they should – if they ever do.

Luckily, sending a proposal to Pearson Longman is relatively simple. Attach it to an email and check the name of the person to send it to at the [Contacts List](#).

As above, use the body of the email to make sure your proposal goes to the right person.

1. State that you are sending an unsolicited proposal for consideration.
2. Say what kind of publication you are proposing – e.g. a self-study DVD, a coursebook...
3. State briefly what type of user or learning situation it is intended for, e.g. Japanese upper secondary schools, Business English...

### Making it easy

Once your proposal has made its way to the right desk, it is inevitably going to be in competition with whatever other things that person has to do. This means you can improve your prospects by considering your materials and making your proposal easy and pleasant to read.

The procedure described below makes your proposal simple to navigate by breaking it into four documents, each with its own clearly differentiated function. These are a rationale, an outline, sample materials and your CV.

#### 1. Rationale

The rationale briefly sets out the aims of your proposal. The two main topics you should cover here are market and methodology.

**Market.** Publishers don't expect you to go into great detail about marketing issues. All you need do is show clearly who the book is for. This is likely to include:

- target students: language level(s) and age range
- type of institution where it would typically be used
- if it is general English, ESP, focused on an exam...
- if it is intended for one particular country or group of countries

As you would probably guess, if your target market is very small (e.g. advanced English for Lithuanian telephone engineers) publishers will be reluctant to invest no matter how good your work is. You can revise your proposal to see if you can expand the size of your target market but be careful if you do this. A book which is aimed at disparate and ill-matched markets is likely to be of little use in any of them.

**Methodology.** A proposal for a coursebook is not an academic essay. Nonetheless, when you start to write materials you implicitly take some sort of stance on what constitutes good classroom practice, how learning takes place and how content should be selected and organised. You will need to make this position explicit.

Don't be afraid to refer to your own experience (e.g. 'This works for me') but back it up with well-constructed arguments and reference to other situations, other books or research. Ultimately, you want to show that your book is well thought out and will work for a large number of teachers, rather than being perfect for a niche group.

Think carefully about accepted approaches to teaching like PPP, task-based learning or the lexical approach and how your material takes account of them or why you have rejected them.

Avoid sweeping statements such as 'Recent research has shown...'. Publishers are not fools. Tell them what research you are talking about or don't mention it at all.

If you find you can't explain why you think something is a good idea, it may be time to ask yourself some hard questions.

In most cases, two pages is enough. Regard it as an advertisement rather than a thesis. If you arouse interest you will get lots of opportunities in the future to explain your ideas in depth and detail.

### Outline

This explains how your publication will be structured. For example, if you are proposing a coursebook you will need to give an idea of how long it will take to teach a unit and how many units there will be in the whole book. Will the units follow a predetermined plan or will they vary? What language areas or topics will be covered? List the components you think are necessary, such as student's book, workbook, video, website, CD-ROMs, etc. It's useful if you can include a draft syllabus in this section.

One page, excluding the syllabus, is usually enough to cover the outline of the book.

### Sample materials

The sample materials are the heart of a good proposal. Many experienced publishers will read them first. If they fail to convince, it will not matter much what is in the other documents. Conversely, if they succeed, imperfections in the other documents may be forgiven.

Provide at least ten or twelve pages of writing organised in a teaching unit or units. If you are proposing a course, concentrate on the students' book. Only provide workbook exercises, teacher's notes, etc if there is some innovative feature in these components which you need to demonstrate. If there are scripted listenings, include the scripts.

### CV

Supply a one-page CV focusing on your ELT experience and qualifications, especially in the area you are proposing material for. It will arouse extra interest if you have experience of training other teachers and if you have previously published – whether books, articles or reviews.

### Presenting at conferences

This is an uncertain route but one that has worked for a number of now well-known authors.

Publishing companies are heavily represented at teaching conferences like IATEFL. Among the attendees will be publishers (sometimes known as commissioning editors in other publishing houses) hunting for someone to write a workbook for Poland, a teacher's book for a new business English course or even a students' book. Good publishers will invest time in watching anonymous teachers in small rooms present their ideas and materials. This is your opportunity. Your sparkling presentation, supported, of course, with excellent handouts, may lead to a request that you submit sample materials for a component or a new course.

### Protecting your work

Authors sometimes worry that when they show their work, the publisher may steal their ideas and get someone else to write the book.

In fact, this is extremely unlikely.

Publishers are not only – or even mainly – looking for ideas. They are looking for authors. If they like your ideas they will normally want you to write. In any case, you hold the copyright in any works you create in your own time using your own materials unless you grant it to someone else through a contract.

Some authors do send materials to themselves in a registered envelope which they keep without opening in order to show they wrote them before a particular date. I am not aware of any instances where this has been tested in a court of law.

People may tell you that writing, e.g. '© Jim Smith 2007' in the footer of your document protects your rights. It doesn't. But it does help if you put the title of the proposal and page numbers.

### **A last word**

If you don't immediately succeed with your submission, keep trying. Some authors try for years before they get their break. The best of luck to you.

David Riley