

# Writing Tips from Ellen Cassedy

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## Finding a Publisher: 7 tips and a slice of apple cake



The other day I got together at our neighborhood café with a woman who's written a memoir about her girlhood in war-torn Europe. It's time to look for a publisher. Do I have any advice?

I do. But only if we share a slice of apple cake.

At first, I can tell that what I'm saying is pretty much along the lines of what my companion expected. Before long, though, as I dig deeper into my own

experience, I realize I feel passionately about what it means to publish a book. And I make some suggestions she hasn't anticipated.

My first piece of advice is to take her time in developing a list of prospective publishers. Don't rush it.

**Find out who publishes books like yours.** Comb the catalog and the shelves at the local library; ask the librarian for help. Do the same at your local bookstore. Troll through the website of that giant online bookseller we're all familiar with.

**Read acknowledgments pages** to find names of agents and editors. (If you don't have the book in hand, you can often find acknowledgments pages on [Google Books](#).)

**Carefully study websites** of publishers and agents. Consider self-publishing.

**Group your list** in order of preference: Tier One (your dream publishers), Tier Two, etc.

**Follow instructions to the letter** when submitting your work.

With those logistics behind us, we get into the heart of the matter. My accumulated wisdom boils down to **seven tips**:

**1)** Finding a publisher may take longer than you can imagine. Several years is not uncommon.

**2)** Having a book published as a privilege, not a right. Do you really need to expend energy complaining about the injustices and disappointments? (If so, turn your complaints into action – see [Vida](#), [Authors Guild](#), etc.)

**3)** Much about finding a publisher is out of your control. You **can** influence some aspects of the process, though. Focus on those.

**4)** Rewrite and rewrite and rewrite. Even after you think you've finished your manuscript, the writing process is probably far from over. When the first rejections roll in (as they will), give yourself time to look over your query letter or proposal and revise.

**5)** Writing the book itself is only one part of being an author. Look for a range of enjoyable ways to engage with your material.

**6)** Reach out **before** the book is published. Doing so will help you figure out where the heart of your book lies and become articulate about it, build your confidence and commitment, and demonstrate to publishers that you know how to reach your audience. Invite friends to a reading in your living room. Find a library, community center, or organization to host your talk. Write a piece for a blog or local newspaper.

**7)** Reach out to experts or other “validators” who can check facts and perhaps write a brief endorsement you can use to approach publishers and speaking venues and eventually put on your book's back cover. You'll build a community for yourself that will enrich your life in ways you can't foresee.

By now our coffee cups are empty and only crumbs of apple cake remain.

My companion sums up what she's heard:

"In order to grow into the best advocate for my memoir," she concludes, "I should start talking about the book now, rather than wait till after it's published. And after I do get it published, its success will depend on what I do."

Exactly.

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Ellen Cassedy is the author of *We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust* (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2012). To see all of her Writing Tips, visit her website at [www.ellencassedy.com](http://www.ellencassedy.com).