

# Writing Tips from Ellen Cassedy

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## A Writer's Best Resource: Your Local Library



What's the world's best resource for writers? The hands-down answer: your library. Chances are you're underutilizing this valuable resource. Here are six ways to make the most of the library in your community and beyond.

### **1. Plan your writing project.**

Your library and librarians can be tremendously useful in helping you decide what you're going to write.

"The best time to approach librarians is actually before you write your book," says Dana Lynn Smith. "Chatting with librarians in your subject area can be a big help in determining the demand for a particular topic and refining your approach to the topic."

Nothing beats plopping yourself down on the floor in the relevant section of your library's stacks and taking a look at what's there – and what's not. How have other writers approached your subject? What gaps need filling?

A library is also an efficient place to find out which publishers are interested in a book like yours. In addition to browsing the stacks, visit the reference section to consult such resources as [Literary Marketplace](#).

## **2. Research your subject.**

Use your library to read widely for background information, or to search for something very specific. Do you need to know what your 19th-century character would have worn on a cold winter's day? Your librarian can point you to an illustrated reference book that will answer that question in a flash. I use non-fiction children's books for a quick education on a topic I'm new to.

If the local public library isn't quite enough, check out your local college or university library. Most allow access to community members, and some will even allow you to borrow books for an annual subscription fee.

## **3. Recharge.**

Are you stuck? Spend a couple of hours at the library looking at, for example, the first pages of half a dozen novels. How do the best memoirists draw the reader in? How do non-fiction writers structure their tables of contents?

Consider sitting down at a library table and doing a little writing – or a lot. Working in a space that honors literature can comfort and inspire.

#### **4. Be a Local Author.**

Many libraries have a special display section for books by local authors. Suggest that your librarian acquire your book, or donate a signed copy for circulation. “Local” can mean where you live now, where you once lived, or the place your book is about.

Upload a video about your book to your library’s “social catalog.”

Speak. Give a talk at your library, maybe even before publication.

Use the bulletin board to post a flyer, start a writers’ group, or connect to a book club that will host you.

#### **5. Sell your book to libraries.**

Libraries account for 10 percent of all book sales. Library readers increase sales by spreading the word to others.

In sending out a mailing to libraries, include a cover letter; a “sell sheet” including the book’s cataloguing number, keywords, price, distributor, format, and synopsis; a brief bio; and – very important – reviews. (Librarians depend on reviews to guide their acquisitions.)

Use these resources:

- Selling Your Book to Libraries, by Dana Lynn Smith.

- The American Library Association's state-by-state directory of public and academic libraries. Includes addresses and websites, which allow you to access catalogs.
- www.WorldCat.org. Tells you which libraries carry your book, lets you search the collections of 10,000 libraries worldwide, and offers social media features. (For example, you can post reviews of your book.)
- ALA's fact sheet on marketing to libraries. Includes special information for self-published authors.

Specialty libraries – e.g., religious, business, or medical – can be important markets. In keeping with the theme of my book, I searched mailed to Jewish- and Lithuanian-themed libraries listed on the internet.

## **6. Expand your reach.**

Explore scheduling a talk at libraries when you travel. Or simply drop in and suggest they acquire your book, or donate a copy.

ALA's "Authors for Libraries" program offers ways to connect with librarians around the country, including putting your name on a list of authors invited to speak at libraries (nominal annual fee).

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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.