



Week 4 Audio Transcript

Sally Collins Pitching To Publishers

Dealing With Rejection

Let's talk about rejection. The first thing to know is, join the club. Authors all love those stories about famous writers who were rejected time after time: Stephen King with his novel *Carrie*, William Golding with *Lord of the Flies*, John le Carre, J.K. Rowling. Miles Franklin couldn't get *My Brilliant Career* published in Australia, and it was eventually published in the UK with a bit of help from Henry Lawson. So you're in exalted company.

Publishers know the same stories, and we just grit our teeth and hope like hell that we don't reject the next *Hunger Games* – but this is a risky, subjective business, and I'm pretty sure we all can look back and wish we'd decided differently. Hopefully though, that's only true in one per cent of cases – we hope that the other 99 per cent of the time our rejections will be appropriate!

I've been lucky as a writer, because all of my books have been commissioned before I wrote them. But I've still had to pitch proposals to publishers and I've had rejections. So even once you're established and have a relationship with a publisher, you still need to go through some hoops.

Your book proposal might be rejected for all sorts of reasons that have nothing to do with how good the idea is, or how well you have written it. Here are some reasons you might be turned down:

- Publishers work to a budget, which is an equation of projected sales generated from the titles they commission. They have a target for how many titles they must commission and the projected sales across their list. They might have filled their requirements for the year in a particular area, say, young adult fiction – which also means that their editorial team is up to capacity and they simply can't handle any more titles.
- The publisher needs to keep a balance in their list, often trying to achieve an attractive (and profitable) mix of mass market, literary, crime, zombies ... or in non-fiction, they need to cover diverse areas such as biography, health and business. They may have commissioned their “quota” of books in your area for the coming 2 years.
- They might have decided to withdraw or reduce their involvement in that subject area – perhaps they want to build their profile publishing current affairs and “serious” biography, and pull back on humour or self-help.
- Maybe you've sent your proposal to the wrong publisher – maybe your idea just doesn't match with their list because it's too mass market/Australian/academic.

So don't take rejection personally, but do take it as an opportunity to review what you are sending out. It will be a while since you put your proposal in an envelope, and you might have a fresh perspective on it now.

It's a good opportunity to pull your concept apart: are there better points of comparison to other titles, new public interest in the subject area, does your one-sentence pitch really catch the essence of the story? Maybe it's time to workshop your proposal with your writers group, or go online and get advice from one of the US literary agents who offers interaction through their blog.

If you believe in your concept, the one thing not to do is to give up. Getting published is never easy, whether this is your first book or your tenth. Perseverance goes a long way to ensuring your success.

Copyright The Australian Writer's Marketplace and Sally Collins 2014

The development of the course has taken us a lot of time and resources. The content all online courses from The Australian Writer's Marketplace are covered by copyright. We don't place any DRM on the downloadable content but we do ask that students direct friends and colleagues to the full course rather than share the work directly. Revenue from the course will enable us to continue updating and expanding our offerings.