

Writing for Publication: Thoughts and Experiences

By: Andrea M. Morrison

Writing for publication is an individual experience. By sharing my story, I hope to help motivate and inspire writers. Many writers, librarians and researchers shared their writing tips with me in my journey as a writer: co-authoring a book, editing a book, and writing journal articles. My goal is to share information on how I achieved this while working in my position at Indiana University, Bloomington, as a librarian cataloger and maintaining state and national service. This article will address the stages of research and writing: the idea conception, networking, doing the research, setting goals, writing, editing, and publishing. I found outlining my writing plan useful to me throughout the process, therefore I present writing stages and writers' tips in an outline format. My experiences are given at the end of each stage. This article also illustrates the general writing process of my two main projects: co-authoring a book published by Greenwood Press in 2004 and editing a contributed volume published by ALA Editions in 2008. My hope is that these experiences may interest and inspire you on your own journey as a writer.

Thinking and Inspiration Stage

Imagine! Imagine! Imagine! Brainstorming and visualization are two excellent tools for a writer to use in the beginning. Your idea may be inspiration from your *professional* position, a service position, reading challenging ideas from articles, books, blogs or discussion lists, or even a growing awareness of a unique research need. Read other articles, especially in journals that you are considering as possibilities for article submissions, if you are interested in book publishing, find publishers and publication sponsors for topics that interest you and read widely in those areas.

- Write down your inspirations for writing and research. Don't screen anything out. Don't judge

at this stage. Your brainstorm may be worthy of your attention at a future date or may connect to another idea. Let the ideas flow and keep a file or journal of them.

- Think outside the box – nothing is 'wrong' in the early stages.
- Know your personal values and work on what truly appeals to you and what you personally value as a product.
- If you can identify it as a need, all the better. If you aren't interested in a book, think about book chapters, articles, e-journals, Web resources and databases, or other creative products.
- Look at people who have accomplished professional research that you admire. How can you model your work after theirs?
- Look at research articles. How can you pattern your research after theirs – a similar topic, theorem, partnership, methodology, use of statistics?
- Find uninterrupted time and review your written list of topics. Give yourself at least an hour or so. Repeat. Day dream. Imagine yourself researching and finishing writing on the topic. Does it inspire you? Does it fire up your enthusiasm? If it does, narrow your list to several ideas that intrigue you and you are willing to share with your colleagues and move on to the next step.

Bouncing ideas off of trusted colleagues is one of the most important steps for the writer at the beginning of the process. Many of us would probably like to develop our ideas alone. Networking can enrich your ideas in new and unforeseen ways. You don't have to speak with an expert on the topic, just talk to colleagues whose good opin-

ion you trust. Force yourself, if need be, to contact others and discuss developing your idea. Think of it in terms of a workflow. While these stages may work seamlessly together, it helps me to think of achieving a concrete step in the process.

- Fine tune your idea by lots of consultation – at first informally, later more formally.
- Identify the colleagues and friends you want to share your idea with. Don't be hesitant to ask people you know who are knowledgeable in the field and that you may know distantly as colleagues. Most of us are pleased and proud to give our opinion to advance the body of knowledge in librarianship. Call, e-mail, or catch us at conferences in a free moment, whatever you prefer.
- Try to give yourself uninterrupted time or you may find yourself interrupted with an important work-related problem right when you are trying to figure out a writing topic. Make time to schedule a lunch, work break, or time after work to discuss your ideas. Give your ideas respect! Not every idea will be worthy of the time to develop and write about it, but you, as a writer, are worthy of time spent thinking about writing topics, what is important to you and how you would like to develop it.
- Absorb the feedback, and think about it. Write down your thoughts if possible. What idea is worthy of your time and effort? What inspires you and also would be helpful to your colleagues? Does the current literature show this topic is needed? If you are unsure – ask someone more knowledgeable. Do your colleagues recommend expanding an idea? Did they recommend other contacts that you can network with? You may hear that someone else is writing on that exact topic and will soon be published. What a timesaver for you!
- Put these notes away for a few days at least. Do more reading or networking. Find appropriate electronic lists, blogs, wikis or contacts to continue consulting and finding background on your research.
- Review your notes after a few days or weeks. Do you still like the idea? That's okay to put some

aside and start fresh! The one you finally settle on is the one that you find inspiring and are enthusiastic about even after many times through this cycle.

- Finalizing your theme. One idea keeps motivating you. Your reading and networking supports it and there are no major obstacles to proceeding with writing. When you visualize yourself working and completing the project, you get a sense of satisfaction. You can do this! You have finalized your theme.
- Use your contacts to clarify problems and to help provide possible solutions to minor obstacles. Perhaps you are a good writer with a good idea, but don't know how to sell your idea to a publisher. Perhaps you are a good editor in search of writers or a co-author. Perhaps you are an enthusiastic writer, but jump over the everyday grind of research. There are solutions to all of these problems. Keep on reading! And always feel free to ask other authors in your field for advice. You may receive the advice on getting a co-author or an editor that will lead you to publication.

In my experience, serving on local, state and national library organizations gave me the contacts to network about publication. Attending meetings and programs inspired me. I found people interested in discussing similar ideas informally. One person, Barb Mann, agreed to co-write the book *International Government Information and Foreign Country Information: A Subject Guide* with me. I didn't know her well and our interactions had been through a group project for GODORT. We took a chance on each other and found the experience very rewarding. It led to many new opportunities.

Many of my key consulting contacts about publishing ideas were colleagues working with government documents in state and national library organizations. Some were colleagues from my own institution, Indiana University, with interests in many areas of librarianship who shared an interest in writing. These colleagues gave me feedback on writing, editing and publishing. I am grateful for their encouragement and advice, without which, I may not have published. I also found inspiration

and support through our local organization InU-LA (Indiana University Librarians' Association) (<http://www.indiana.edu/~inula/>) which provided monetary support and encouragement.

The state group, INDIGO (Indiana Networking for Documents and Information of Government Organizations), is an organization of librarians, library staff, government officials, professors and others interested in networking about federal and state government information in Indiana. (<http://www.lib.purdue.edu/govdocs/indigo.html>) Another state organization, the Indiana Library Federation (ILF), (<http://www.ilfonline.org/>) provided me with contacts and support through District and annual conferences. The American Library Association group that supported me was GODORT (Government Documents Round Table) (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/godort/index.cfm>).

Goals and Planning Stage

Think about how you want to make progress on researching and writing your theme. Use goals and planning to organize your writing, if possible before you begin or in the early stages of writing. What works for you and your personality? Some people do well with a written outline to organize their thoughts. Some people will want to jump in and start their first draft and edit many times. Plan when you want to write and make time for it. This is a good time to be honest about yourself -- it will pay off. When do you have the energy to write? Are you a morning or evening person? Do you realistically need a day or half day off work to write?

Checkpoints and Deadlines

- Give yourself checkpoints to refuel your progress. Expect some things not to work smoothly, and readjust as needed. Deadlines can be an invaluable tool.

- Sometimes life interferes with normal *progress* on your project. Re-evaluate your priorities. Perhaps you may have to take a hiatus and then return when life is more manageable.

- Supervisors and colleagues at work or in professional associations are invaluable resources. Touch (instead of Check) base with them when you hit a roadblock.

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Deadlines

- Some projects have a final deadline or you may need to give yourself one. You may even want to give yourself an early deadline because you want to give your writing to one or more colleagues to edit.

- Large projects need many deadlines. I personally think without an external or internal deadline for stages of large projects, large projects may be too difficult for most of us to manage.

- Deadlines also help the writer maintain writing as a priority before the work is due.

- When the writer is also trying to manage work, life, personal affairs, service responsibilities and other professional responsibilities which may interfere at any time, a planned and firm deadline can save the project from getting side-tracked and help you maintain progress.

Motivation

- Self Motivation is key. Know what to accept and be prepared! Use visualization and imagine your final project during this and all subsequent stages in writing. It will help you throughout the planning, writing, publication, and post-publication stages to keep things simple and focus on what's important. Remind yourself of these often and think about them or rely on a friend to remind you. They will help you focus on the positive result of your writing and avoid the self-criticism which is deadly to writing progress.

- Will you be happy if it is in print, but it is not as excellent as you had hoped it would be?

- If it is not the absolute best product you can make, but it is helpful to people in reporting your research, will you be satisfied?

- Will you be happy that you worked on it even if there are flaws?

- Will you let go of the work you spent a lot of energy on, but can't use?

Writing and Editing Stage

Writing is likely to progress more smoothly if you have set plans, goals and deadlines for the process. Use or learn improved time management

skills. Some writers will do best writing at specified times of the day and regular times throughout the week. This may work well if you've already identified the time of day when you have the most energy and creativity. I personally found that much of my writing was tied to my deadlines. It also helped when I had a co-author and a deadline when to send her a chapter for review. When she would send me a chapter she wrote for review, we mutually agreed upon a deadline to return it with comments, using the word processor's editing functions. On occasion, when it was impossible to meet the deadline by word processing, we faxed the edited manuscript.

One last recommendation about deadlines – read any publisher contract very carefully. Carefully consider whether the final manuscript due date is realistic for you. Ask questions before you sign. Consult with colleagues and read about signing contracts in the literature. Some titles are suggested in the annotated bibliography.

In my writing I recognize it helps me to get words on a page and edit later. I also realize that I may edit a text ten to twenty times completely before I am satisfied. I carefully review the solicited editing from my colleagues and word by word choose what to accept, rewrite, or reject. Most of my experiences with editors have been excellent. They give me good advice and tell me where the communication of my ideas and the organization of my writing fails. I pay attention to their concerns, and have logical reasons when I dissent from their suggestions.

Be humble! It's hard to accept colleague's criticism. If you have a journal or book editor, it may even be more difficult. This is the time to understand that perfection is not required. In my opinion, it is the communication of the idea and the final product which matter.

Evaluate Writing Challenges

- If you are stuck, STOP, RE-EVALUATE, DON'T SPIN YOUR WHEELS

Time Management

- Make time outside your regularly scheduled time for performance. Write when best for you:

get up at 4:30am, stay until 7pm, or work at home until 1am. If it works, persist with your schedule. If it doesn't work and your writing is not productive, change your schedule.

- Arrange with your supervisor or work for writing time during regular work time.
- Make time at a different location or space, where interruptions are minimal

Feedback

Just as you needed feedback in the inspiration stage, you need it in the writing stage. Unless you are an experienced writer working on a known subject, consult on your progress. Have colleagues critique your work. Ask about organization, concept, clarity, wordiness, and anything else that concerns you as a weakness in your work. Definitely ask them to give you feedback about your strengths! It keeps up your motivation to continue writing and researching. When you are ready, ask for specific editing. I used the editing function in *Microsoft Word* to manage editing and it worked simply and easily.

- Send a file to a long-distance colleague for feedback or editing.
- Carry a copy of your file to conferences and network with new people. Perhaps one of them would share their time with you and scan your work briefly at the conference or take it away for a more detailed review. Either way you've made a good contact that could lead to both future collaborations with that person and possible service opportunities.
- Check with family and friends. Many writers have a trusted family member or friend with excellent editorial skills, even if they are not expert on the topic.

Communicate with Your Publisher

- You may have one editor or you may have several for a long project. Don't expect them all to share the same vision. For the 2008 book, I had an acquisitions editor who edited and approved each chapter and sent it back to me to re-edit and compile. This really helped the book have a simi-

lar voice and style. However, after the final manuscript submission to ALA Editions, the copy editor revised all words with detailed attention, rejecting some of the first editor's word choices.

- If you have a publisher, communicate regularly with your editor. Send updates before your deadline so they know your progress. This is especially useful for new writers as established writers may have a routine and a relationship already with their editor.

- Ask questions during the process. Don't wait for the end. It would have been much more useful for me to ask some of my questions about style, capitalization, spelling, etc. before I even had the full manuscript to submit for the book I edited. As I edited one chapter, questions would arise, and now I know I'd check base with the editor frequently on these questions in any future writing project.

Apply for Funding/Leave to Support Your Work

- Apply for funding at any stage of writing. Consider taking a formal or informal personal or work-related leave, research leave or sabbatical.

- If you are uncertain where to begin, make an appointment with a knowledgeable librarian, someone in your HR office or your supervisor and ask for advice.

- Meet with your supervisor about your project and communicate regularly. Their support can be necessary and invaluable in getting approval for time off.

- Apply for a grant, award, leave or sabbatical. You can also request informal time off. Be specific about what you need and why. It is motivating to get the acknowledgment in funding or paid leave that your project is worthwhile. It can sustain your drive to succeed and complete your project during a time of low motivation.

- Expect that you won't get all funding you apply for. Some responses will be negative or positive in part.

Publication and follow-up stage

Build on your creative endeavors

- Prepare a presentation on your book or article topic at a conference.

- If you are writing or editing a book, submit an article on a specific topic you have already researched.

- Serve in positions related to your writing. The networking and support will help you and your colleagues.

- Consider contributing by presenting on your topic at a conference either during writing or after publication. It reinforces your writing, shares information with your colleagues, and you will learn more yourself. Get as much out of your research as you can in articles, publishing, presentations, etc.

Publicity

- After the product is complete or almost complete, plan presentations and writing to distribute your research and create publicity. Post to electronic lists or if you prefer not to self-advertise, ask colleagues to post for you.

- Go to conferences such as the ILF annual and district conferences. Give presentations and hand out flyers. My presentations led to invitations by other conference committees to present on international government information. I was also invited to other institutions in Indiana to give presentations.

- Submit articles to Indiana Libraries or other appropriate journals.

- Traditional publishers have advertising and marketing strategies. Expect publicity to be less than what you would like as an author. Ask about what is normally sent, and if you would like additional publicity sent, ask them about it. You may need to be your own advertiser and spread the good news about your publication.

Know What to Accept and be Prepared!

- Imagine your final project

- Will you be happy if it is in print, but it is not as excellent as you planned or hoped it would be? Think about whether you don't like the cover or presentation of the book.
- What will your attitude be about errors in the final publication?
- If it is not the absolute best product you can make, but it is helpful to people in reporting your research, will you be satisfied?
- Will you be happy that you worked on it even if there are flaws?
- Think about what you will do with the work you spent a lot of energy on, but can't use.
- Do you have any ideas for more publicity?

My Experiences

What did I learn co-writing *International Government Information and Foreign Country Information: A Subject Guide*, co-authored with Barbara J. Mann Greenwood Press, 2004? (<http://www.greenwood.com/catalog/OXIGF.aspx>) I was the lead co-author of this reference book on international and foreign government publications for Oryx/Greenwood Press and authored 15 of the chapters. Originally a colleague who was a published writer was approached by an Oryx Press acquisitions editor. I had helped her a little on a previous book and she asked me if I was interested in the project. I took the opportunity and found a co-author. The acquisitions editor worked with me to develop the book proposal and get it approved. This book is a subject guide for users in academic, public, and school libraries, and other researchers and it is aimed at a beginning to intermediate audience. It provides subject chapters on significant resources for international and foreign government information. Both print and online resources are included. Each chapter also contains lists of resources with abstracts, user guides, and research strategies. No current guide of this type existed at the time of its publication and it filled a reference void. I was able to obtain two months of research leave for this publication during 2001-2002.

When I disagreed with the other author or editors

on text, I used the editing function to change it and noted my reasons. Sometimes the note would make it clear that my rewriting was a suggestion. I usually accepted any reasonable change that solved the problem. I also learned to value clarity of writing above my own way of phrasing ideas.

Sometimes I did get stuck in the writing and editing process. All the writing seemed to need continual improvement and URL addresses and names of organizations needed constant updating. The first draft revision of the entire manuscript, I spent too much time rewriting. At one point I refocused on my goal to meet my deadline. I rewrote less material. It worked out fine as there was plenty of revision needed after the copy editor returned comments on the manuscript.

During my time writing the first book, I served in different positions on the ALA/GODORT's International Documents Task Force. I reported on the book at the meetings and gained valuable insights and contacts through networking. I volunteered and was invited to present on international government information at ILF and INDIGO conferences. Once published, I reported on my work in appropriate state and national organizations and that led to my next book because I met many librarians interested in publishing on government information.

During the writing, I applied for grants several times for each project. Most of the grant applications to my institution received full or partial funding. Only one never received funding, and I found out there was stiff competition that year. Outside your institution the competition may be even harder. I applied for both paid leave and funding of research projects in travel funding, funds for assistants and incidental expenses such as calling and mail expenses. I applied for a two month research leave 2000/2001 and a one month research leave in 2006. I received the 2000 Readex/GODORT/ALA Catharine J. Reynolds Award. This award provides funding for research in the field of documents librarianship. It was critical to me in support of my first book, *International Government Information and Foreign Country Information: A Subject Guide*. It gave me needed monetary and moral support. This award is recognized yearly at

a GODORT awards ceremony at ALA conference, and recognized in GODORT publications, thereby encouraging the awardee to network more widely concerning their project. I received a InULA Research Incentive Grant in 2004 for my second book, after having accomplished preliminary work on the project.

What did I specifically learn in editing *Managing Electronic Government Information in Libraries: Issues and Practices*, sponsored by the Government Documents Round Table, ALA Editions, 2008?

I was inspired by a GODORT member encouraging members to write and publish for GODORT – that there was a great need for the organization and in the current literature. After completing the first book, I developed this book using the experience from the first. I planned the book to be a fundraiser for GODORT and to fill a need for basic information for librarians about the changing nature of electronic government information in libraries. When I presented the book proposal to GODORT's Publication Committee, I received excellent feedback about how to improve the proposal. I changed my proposal many times, finalizing the details and taking advantage of this feedback. A year later the proposal was approved by the Publications Committee and the GODORT Steering Committee. My main goals were:

1. GODORT would receive all the book royalties.
2. I would be the project manager with full creative control and the liaison to the publisher.
3. The book would be a model publication project for future GODORT publishing.
4. I would select and invite GODORT members to be chapter authors, to share their knowledge. The project was announced at conferences, but not via electronic lists, and chapter authors were approved by me.
5. The audience must be public, academic, school and special libraries.
6. The book must feature research and best practices, with practicality the priority, not

comprehensive scholarship.

The chapters, focus, authors and proposal were not finalized until they were submitted to ALA Editions, which had the right of first refusal. A development editor worked with me on the details. It was almost two years from the beginning before the agreement (contract) was signed between GODORT and ALA Editions, naming me as project editor and liaison.

One of my best decisions was to decline to be chapter author. I found I had plenty of creative input in writing the proposal and revising and editing authors. Some authors required more editing because the writing skills varied, but all authors had excellent knowledge to impart. I expected that if I paid attention to the smallest details that I would be pleased with the outcome. I didn't let anything go by because editing at this level was new to me and I knew I had a lot to learn. I was amazed at the amount of editing I did before manuscript submission, although it varied for chapters. ALA Editions had a development editor review the entire manuscript before it was accepted and sent to copy editing. Her job was to keep the language, tone and organization similar for the book, and I had the final say on content. The development editor had to approve the manuscript before final submission and so did the GODORT Publications Committee. We worked on it chapter by chapter, with my review of all the preliminary editing, and consulting the authors and GODORT Publications Committee liaison for the project as needed. Authors also did a lot of rewriting. ALA Editions had a strict policy on word count and it required severe word trimming. We lost over 10,000 words, but in the end the manuscript was better. Sometimes I needed to explain to the editor that her changes compromised meaning and propose new language. I particularly enjoyed the editor's blog during this stage (<http://blog.alaeditions.org/index.php?s=Morrison>). The final manuscript was submitted three years after the proposal, with most of the delay on the publisher's end. During the process, I sent regular updates to authors, volunteer editors and GODORT officials and reported regularly on the book's progress. The manuscript was finally submitted to the publisher's copy editor, with instructions to cut even more text.

In November and December 2007, I worked intensively with the copy editor, who was contracted with ALA editions, approving changes, solving problems, and answering questions. He was excellent and taught me a lot in the process. I consulted with authors and gave them their copy-edited chapter to review. At the end of this process, I was given a week and a half to review the manuscript proof. With the GODORT Publications Committee's approval, I proofed the manuscript only requesting help from the nineteen authors and co-authors as needed.

Time management on this project was challenging during several weeks in 2007 and 2008. The editing of the draft manuscript, the copy-edited manuscript and the proof required me to spend some focused time at work, even beyond an approved research leave of three weeks. I found my work supportive of this project. All during the project, I regularly worked evenings and weekends and was conscientious about managing my work time, service, and writing in balance.

Advice Taken

In summary, the most valuable advice that I can give is to share the advice I found most useful. These tips may help your next writing project to reach publication. I took to heart the *technique of visualization*. I used this continually to motivate planning and progress. I also used this to accept that my final project would not be perfect. *Assign your time realistically*. We can extend with too many commitments of work, service or research. As one colleague put it – makes yourself a sign of “no, no, no!” and post it where you can see it!

Ask others for help. Speaking to others, even for five minutes, inspired me in ways I couldn't conceive. Colleagues were generous in writing, editing, and being a sounding board. Consulting others could jump-start a writer's block or lead me to new resources and contributors. Even small contributions helped make a solid foundation for the project. Collaborating with others on a project encourages me to share my own talent and develop new projects. Sometimes the timing is not right for a colleague to contribute, but that may change. Some are joy to collaborate with – a gift to you and to the profession! Consult them in the future and

let them know they are appreciated! Collaborate with others in a way that compliments your own strengths and weaknesses and always be sure to thank them! *Take advice*. Accepting the advice of other writers and editors may be difficult. It may feel like a blow to self-esteem. In accepting that my work is not perfect, I accept that rewriting is a normal part of the writing process.

Expect to edit many times. I found it made my work much better. In most cases I either accepted editing suggestions or reworded the text. I learned to cut words more often and am still learning how to say things concisely.

Accept challenges. Writing for publication is not easy, especially when we have many other commitments. It is very important to follow through on contracts and responsibilities; however, life happens. People in the publications world understand this. When life gets tough, make an honest assessment of where you stand and *communicate the problem*. There may be solutions of which you are unaware that can keep your publication on track.

Communicate the joy of publication. It is not self-aggrandizing to share the product of your hard work and imagination with colleagues who will benefit. In the academic world, marketing tends to be infrequent and less than authors prefer. Let others know what you have accomplished, making appropriate announcements with the help of colleagues. Also, giving presentations and lectures is valuable to the profession and helps you enjoy the fruit of your labor. In the end, sharing and discussing your writing process helps to inspire others and motivate yourself.

Be inspired.

Bibliography

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The Chicago manual of style (15th ed.). (2003). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Online with subscription: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html> Registration (free) required for the "search the manual" function (to retrieve citations for the printed text.) The tools in this manual help authors prepare manuscripts for submission to the University of Chicago Press, and also help writers, editors, and publishers at other organizations who are looking for models for procedure and content. Tools include: examples of Chicago-Style documentation, manuscript preparation, sample correspondence, proofreading, and process charts for the writing, editing and publication process. Many other style manuals have equally useful information.

Gordon, R. S. (2004). *Librarian's guide to writing for publication*. New York: Scarecrow Press. [Available to Emerald for Librarian members and subscribers] This author has published widely on this and other library topics. In the Librarian's Guide, Gordon states that one of the ways we maintain the integrity of our profession is through creation of a robust body of professional literature. Although many librarians have worthwhile ideas to contribute, she explains why many refrain from writing for publication. Gordon tries to unlock our writing creativity in this book, with practical advice for librarians at any stage of their publishing career. She addresses common problems such as writing blocks of librarians: fear of rejection, concern about the quality of writing, and the perception that the writer has nothing to say. The section "Publish, don't perish" banishes some of the mystique surrounding the library publishing process, giving practical tips for improving writing and getting published. She also covers getting started, queries and proposals, writing and editing, networking, marketing and promotion, the business of publishing, and taking advantage of opportunities. Publisher interviews, a bibliography and index are included.

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Powll, R. P. & Connaway, L. S. (2004). *Basic research methods for librarians* (4th ed.). Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited. Consult this book for library science research methodology. It covers broad aspects of research and librarianship: developing and selecting the research study; survey research and sampling; data collection techniques; qualitative research methods; historical research; data analysis; writing the research proposal; and writing the research report. It also includes "How to get published in LIS journals: a practical guide," by Daria De Cooman.

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Writer's Market. Cincinnati, Ohio: F & W Publications (Writers' Digest Books), website www.writersdigest.com. This annual publication is in most libraries. Every edition provides a directory for writers' markets and articles for writers on writing basics, personal advice, and beyond the basics, covering everything from query letters to the business end of writing. The 2009 edition includes articles on writing for business, editor FAQs (tips for editor). Minding the details discusses contracts and agreements, rights and the writer, selling subsidiary rights, copyright, finances and taxes, which academic writers will also find useful.