



# **10 Deadly Mistakes with Agents and Publishers**

By Stephanie Hale

## **Introduction**

### **Sink Or Swim Time**

Are you unintentionally killing your manuscript stone dead before it even lands on an agent's or publisher's desk? In all likelihood, you probably are. I've worked with hundreds of writers, and more than 90 per cent of them are making similar mistakes when sending out their manuscripts.

It's no secret that publishing has changed. Increasingly, publishing houses are led by sales teams with commercial aims. Literary agents, by necessity, have had to adopt these values too. Even professional authors are struggling to adapt. It's sink or swim time. Writers have to develop new tactics to keep abreast of these changes. If you don't, you won't survive in what is an increasingly unforgiving climate.

This is your wake-up call! If you keep getting rejection letters, it's time to take action. If you want different results, it's time to change your methods and learn new skills.

If you're making any of the mistakes mentioned in this report, the important thing to remember is that they are fixable. If you learn some simple marketing tricks, you can create a submission package that will have agents and publishers clamouring to read your book. Get this right, and you may be taken on by an agent or publisher who has previously rejected you. I know this based on professional experience. This is why I've been so successful in helping my clients to get noticed by top literary agents. On the other hand, I've seen plenty of talented writers fall by the wayside, with their manuscripts gathering dust, simply because they refused to change their ways.

At a time when publishers and agents are receiving anything between 200 and 1000 manuscripts per week, you have two choices. You can carry on doing what you're doing. Or you can learn what agents and publishers are looking for, and put all your efforts into delivering it.

You see, there is a 'magic formula' for success in the current climate. There are simple methods to make your book stand out. Learn this formula and you'll give your book the head-start it deserves. Ignore it, and your book may end up in the slush pile along with all the others waiting to be discovered.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 1 Forgetting Your Reader**

Publishing houses aren't charities. They are there to sell books and make a profit. If they're going to the expense of printing several thousand copies of your book, they want to know they'll be able to sell it.

It will help you no end if you can show them why your book is going to sell and who they are going to sell it to. What is special about your book? Who is likely to buy it? Why should they choose your book rather than someone else's? This principle applies equally whether your book is commercial or a title for a niche market.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 2**

### **Weak Sales Pitch**

Most authors don't know how to flag up the selling points for their books. Hardly surprising really, as most writers don't work in marketing! They therefore don't know how to write a sales pitch for their manuscripts.

This usually means putting a little sparkle into your synopsis and introductory letter to arouse curiosity or engage interest. A more complex marketing plan involves identifying your target readership, and making comparisons with market leaders in a similar field to your own.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 3**

### **Uninspiring Synopsis**

Your synopsis is probably the most important page you're going to write. Get this wrong and you won't even be allowed on the starting block, let alone allowed to run the race.

Don't waste this opportunity! Put twice as much effort into your synopsis as any other page in your book. This is your chance to sell your manuscript. It's vital to get it right.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 4**

### **Long-winded Submission Letter**

Publishers and agents are busy people. They don't have time to read a long introductory letter detailing your professional career, or telling them that children at your local school have read your book and loved it.

Your submission letter should be no longer than two pages of double-spaced A4 maximum. If you can make it shorter than this, even better.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 5**

### **Dull Sample Chapters**

Imagine yourself in a room filled with thousands of books. All these books have white covers. There's little to distinguish them. You know very little about the books. You know even less about the authors. Yet you must select the best one. Your professional reputation depends upon it.

Faced with such a challenge, what would you do? How would you find the gem? Would you read every book cover-to-cover, patiently waiting for the plot to unfold? Or would you skim through the opening pages, tossing aside anything that seemed dull or ordinary?

Start your book with something startling, memorable, or original. This can be a challenge, a question, or a crisis. You want to grab your readers' attention. You don't want your manuscript to end up on the reject pile before it's even been given a chance!

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 6**

### **Poor Layout and Presentation**

There is a standard presentation expected in the publishing industry. Publishers don't want single-spaced pages in 10 point typeface. They don't want fancy fonts or coloured paper. You may think it will grab their attention. It will, but for all the wrong reasons. It's your job to convince publishers that you're professional and businesslike.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 7**

### **Failing To Research Your Market**

Do a couple of days' research before sending out your manuscript. Who are the best agents and publishers to send it to? Who is likely to be most receptive? It's no good haphazardly sending to every agent listed in **The Writer's Handbook** or **The Writers' & Artists' Yearbook**. In order to increase your chances, you need to make your targets as precise as possible.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 8**

### **Sending Out Work Before It's Ready**

You may be anxious to get your book published. But if you sent it out before it's ready, you'll end up doing yourself more harm than good.

Make sure someone else with a credible reputation has read your book before you send it to agents and publishers. If possible, get professional endorsement. This means finding a reputable author or editor to read your book. You can then use their comments as part of your sales pitch.

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## **Deadly Mistake Number 9**

### **Getting Bugged Down by Small Detail**

Often when writers revise their books, they focus on deleting the odd sentence here or tweaking the occasional paragraph there. They change colons to hyphens, and full-stops to commas. They get so bogged down by the smaller detail, that they lose sight of the bigger picture.

When revising your manuscript, direct your energies at your plot. Ask yourself if there is enough drama or intrigue to engage a reader's interest. Are there enough challenges, conflicts or questions in your book to keep up the plot momentum? Are your chapters logically structured? Do you open your book with a bang rather than a whimper?

## **Deadly Mistake Number 10**

### **Pestering**

There is a fine line between pestering and perseverance. Writers sometimes forget that agents are giving their services for free up until the moment that a manuscript is sold. This means they are covering the considerable costs for staff, time, and paperwork, with their own money. This is a tremendous privilege, not an automatic right.

Making a nuisance of yourself by hassling agents, is unlikely to result in anything positive. It's important to know when it's ok to chase an agent, and when it's best to wait for them to contact you.

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### **Conclusion**

#### **You Can Fix It!**

I've outlined 10 deadly mistakes, though there are many more than this. I expect you may recognize some, if not all of them. The good news is: all these mistakes can be put right.

One step won't get you across a desert. However, if your step is the first of many, you will eventually arrive on the other side.

Few dreams are achieved without massive action. You have to be prepared to go the extra mile, to take risks, and go to lengths that other writers are not. Determination, faith and courage will help you find your own magic carpet.

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