



# Publishing for Literary Societies – a Quick Guide

by Anita Fernandez-Young (2011); updated by Linda J. Curry, Cally Phillips, Marty Ross (2018)(©Alliance of Literary Societies 2011)

Most literary societies publish something during the period of their existence: a newsletter, perhaps a journal, or even something more substantial such as a book of articles about, or inspired by, a single author, or a collection of poetry by the members. With modern technology, it has never been easier to re-publish out-of-print work, which offers another way of getting your author back into public consciousness. This is a very quick guide on how to start, including basic information about print and digital publishing, designed to answer some of the questions we are often asked.

## WHAT IS A PUBLISHER?

These days the boundaries are blurred. Traditionally a writer would need a publisher to act as mediator, but today anyone who is responsible for putting words and images (and music, of course) into the public domain can be a publisher. When you produce a newsletter, it is a publication. When you write an article on a website it is 'published' digitally. Obviously, this carries advantages and disadvantages. There may still be occasions when you want to deal with a 'traditional' publisher but, increasingly, literary societies (and everyone else) find themselves actually acting as publisher in their own right. So it's important that you understand some of the basics of publishing. Here goes!

## Publishing restrictions

Anything you write and put out into the 'public domain' is published. You can publish anything you like (as long as it's legal) by yourself. However, with power comes responsibility, right? Don't publish anything likely to be regarded as inciting other people to commit crimes and don't publish anything you know to be untrue (except what is obviously intended as fiction), and you should be perfectly OK. You should be aware of the basics of copyright, especially when considering publishing other people's work. Remember that publishing on a website, though digital, is also publishing and the same rules of good practice, common sense and copyright apply as in print format.

## Copyright

Do not take issues of copyright lightly! Writing is a job like any other, and people who make their living by writing are entitled to protect their livelihood. However, most of the questions likely to arise with regard to literary societies are quite straightforward. If you wish your publication to own the copyright of its contents you need to get contributors to sign their rights in their work away to you. Otherwise, the following statement should cover you:

The moral and legal rights of the Authors whose works are contained in this publication have been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. No part of any work within this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

This clearly applies to printed material rather than electronic. So, if you are circulating your material electronically, you will need to modify the statement appropriately.

In general terms, copyright belongs to an author during their lifetime and for a period of 70 years after their death. The more complex issues are beyond the scope of this guide, but it's a good rule of thumb that, if the words or pictures you want to use were created within the last 70 years, you need to get someone's permission to (re-)publish.

Illustrations are another important issue. There are picture libraries which will allow you to use their copyright images on payment of a fee – sometimes this is a manageable sum for a small literary society, so it is always worth finding out. There are also sites like Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/>) which have Creative Commons images. Find out more at <https://creativecommons.org/>. These are either free to use or free to use as long as you cite the owner. As publisher, it is your responsibility to ensure that any image you use from whatever source is properly attributed and paid for if copyright requires that. It is a myth to think that you can just 'grab' an image from the internet and re-use it.

If you can't afford to use the images you want, you may have to try some alternatives. You own the copyright in your own photographs, so use them when you can. If someone you know is good with pencils or paints, ask them to create their own version of an image for you.

But, whether you are using a text, an image or a map, always, always check whether it is copyrighted or not, and if so, ask for permission to use it from the copyright holder. For more about copyright law see [https://www.copyrightservice.co.uk/copyright/p01\\_uk\\_copyright\\_law](https://www.copyrightservice.co.uk/copyright/p01_uk_copyright_law).

## Legal Deposit

Another important factor of publishing (not least because it can have cost implications) is the responsibility to provide copies of published work as follows: 'Publishers and distributors in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland have a legal obligation to send one copy of each of their publications to the Legal Deposit Office of the British Library within one month of publication.'

This law applies to your printed publications if they have ISSN (journals/newsletters) or ISBN (books) numbers. It does not apply to society newsletters simply produced for members, or bookmarks, fliers and advertising materials. Nor does it (currently) apply to publications which are only produced electronically. Under the Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003 and Legal Deposit Libraries (Non-Print Works) Regulations 2013, web-spidering software accesses websites and preserves e-publications in the legal deposit archives. Find out more about Legal Deposit at <https://www.bl.uk/aboutus/legaldeposit/introduction/>.

Having given you an overview of the basic definitions and responsibilities of being a publisher, we will now turn to the most usual areas of publishing undertaken by literary societies. These include: websites, newsletters, journals and books.

## WEBSITES

Remember that publishing on a website is also publishing. Putting articles up online can expand your 'reach' as regards readers, and having 'a members' only' area allows you to keep items and articles private to members only if you wish.

It goes without saying that a literary society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century really benefits from having a website. It can be free to set up and run but you should always remember that the basic rules and restrictions of publishing apply, both to print and digital activity. Platforms such as wordpress ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)) and weebly ([www.weebly.com](http://www.weebly.com)) have good, free 'hosting' options, but if you do not already have a society website, you will need to invest in a domain name (the name of your website) suitable to your society. The only options were once dot.co.uk or dot.com, but there is an increasing array of extensions (the bit after the dot) and you may want to drop the 'co' (company) in favour of org (organisation) or simply style yourself [yoursociety].uk. There are other, more expensive options including: .club, .scot and .london (at increasing prices.) You pay annually to keep the domain name ranging from £9 to £50 a year. This is just for the name of your website address and does not include the 'hosting' (i.e. the actual space where you publish).

## NEWSLETTERS

First things first. You need to ask yourself (or your society) a number of questions:

- Where will the material for the newsletter come from? You need to be sure of a regular source of material both in quantity and quality to sustain the endeavour.
- How often will you produce it? Options include monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, seasonally or bi-annually. Each has its own benefits and constraints.
- How will it be distributed? Will it be entirely electronically distributed (the cheapest method) or will there be paper copies? It is becoming common for societies to offer a choice between paper and e-copy. This can reduce your print/postage costs.

While one person may take responsibility for the production of a newsletter (see our notes on editing below), it is still a combined effort. Your society should be able to agree answers to the above questions as they all have an impact on what is the most effective way to answer the question that actually should be asked first:

- What is the goal of the newsletter?

Everyone has had experience of receiving out-dated newsletters: the days of accepting a newsletter which tells you of an event that you've just missed are long gone. People expect to receive information in a timely and relevant manner. With digital options, there is really no reason for people to be getting out-of-date information. As such, the traditional function of the newsletter is changing. Your society has to work out what the purpose and function of your newsletter is and where it fits into what we might grandly call your 'publishing portfolio'.

Many societies these days will find that a mix and match approach suits best. It is not always possible to please all the people all the time, but with some planning and organisation it is possible to give most of your members useful and timely information as a standard. You may have to learn some tools, but the tools are there at your disposal and, if used wisely, will save both time and money and improve your relationship with members and the wider public.

### Digital

If you choose to go the digital route, there should be no cost involved. There are plenty of word processing/publishing software packages out there for all levels of ability and, of course, these days many newsletters are produced and sent online using Mailchimp or similar dedicated platforms (see [www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)). Styled 'marketing automation' services, these have the advantage of offering you templates to work from and allow you to comply

with data protection by keeping your member details in one place so that you can send regular e-newsletters to all members with computer access at the touch of a button. Essentially, they provide ways to design and distribute short form e-newsletters which are then sent automatically as emails to your members. There's a small learning curve, but they offer the benefit of keeping regular contact with members and the free option is generally good enough for most literary societies' use.

## **Print**

If you are going to create a small newsletter which you will distribute to members and friends, you can do it yourself at all stages or turn it over to a printer once it is ready for publication. If you choose print newsletters (or a combination of print and digital), you need to factor in the costs of production – namely printing and distribution. It is perfectly possible to photocopy newsletters on a home printer of good quality these days. Bear in mind the size and weight – more than a couple of sheets of A4 folded in an envelope can go over the letter post weight limit. A lot of colour images in a newsletter can become very expensive on print cartridges.

You may have a member who owns or leases a photocopier, or you might find a local photocopying service which will give a good discount for quantity. If you are producing large newsletters, in volume or size, you might want to consider getting the newsletter printed and distributed for you. Some community groups offer photocopying facilities at discount rates to not-for-profit groups and it is well worth shopping around to find out if something is available which can keep your newsletter printing costs to the minimum.

Whatever method you choose, you will still, in all cases need to do the designing, writing and editing 'in house'.

## **JOURNALS**

If you want to create a journal, a more substantial collection of essays or other material relating to your society or its author/s, you may want to get it properly listed with its own ISSN (International Standard Serial Number), a catalogue number which will give you certain advantages. You could obtain this yourself or you can find someone else who already publishes journals or books to do it for you. There is no fee for the ISSN, although you may have to pay a publisher a fee if you use one.

The advantages of having an ISSN for your journal are that it makes it easier to identify your journal from others with similar titles when librarians are ordering it; and academics and others can search for it and cite it more easily. Although you will have to deposit one or more

copies (see above for more information on Legal Deposit), this means that your journal will be saved for the future and can be read by a wider public. For more on ISSNs and how to get them, see <http://www.issn.org/services/requesting-an-issn/>.

Having an ISSN does not protect the copyright of your journal, contrary to popular assumption. See above for more on copyright issues.

A journal is a more ambitious project, especially for a young or small society, but that's no reason to shy away from it. The same general approaches are appropriate as to a newsletter: you will need an editor, a title (*The Journal of the Litsoc Society* is perfectly acceptable), possibly a logo, a format and some content. It's a good idea to look at a few literary journals from other societies before you start; you will be able to consider what format and size they are, how many articles they include per issue, and what additional information they provide to subscribers or contributors.

When you approach contributors it is usual to include brief advice, including the editor's address, and sometimes a word limit, if this is appropriate; for example:

- Contributions to the journal should be sent in Arial 12pt, to the editor at:
- Please do not send contributions longer than 5,000 words
- We are happy to publish papers on the topic of....

Your first issue should be something special, to launch it to your society and your public. One way to create a splash with your first issue is to confine it to invited contributions from well-known writers on your subject. Another is to publish the contributions to your most recent conference or symposium or day-school, if you have held one. You could also make a point of inviting your president or chairman to write an introductory paper explaining why the society has decided to launch a journal at this point in its history: there may have been popular demand, or a special event in the life of the organisation which has prompted it. Or it may be that there is now a university department making a specialism of your topic of interest which is keen to take most of the responsibility for the publication, since a new journal dedicated to a literary topic might be expected to have an academic impact.

One of the biggest issues for literary societies is how to achieve a balance in their journals between the interests of academics and the interests of enthusiasts or amateurs. If, in addition, the journal is to be used as a record of the society's activities and membership, the editor will need to be very sensitive to these different constituencies. However, there is no reason why academic writing should be dull and uninteresting, or the contributions of

amateur writers who enthuse about their subject be superficial and irrelevant. Making sure that everybody has the opportunity to express themselves on topics of interest to both parties, in suitable language and discourse, is the job of the editor.

You may decide that you want to create a 'refereed journal'. This is a journal which contains articles which have been through a peer review process; i.e. before being accepted they have been reviewed for their quality by recognised experts in the field. You might have academics within your membership, or on your committee, who could take on these roles as a goodwill gesture (and it is also something to add to their CV).

With the slimming down of shelf space in university libraries, more and more institutions are subscribing to e-publishing licenses for journals. License providers like EBSCO might be interested in entering into a (non-exclusive) agreement with you to provide e-copies of your refereed journal if they feel that it is of sufficient quality, thus providing you with an additional source of funds. It's also good advertising for the society!

There are likely to be three sections (at least) in any journal: the main contributions or articles; a review section (not necessarily in every issue), containing reviews of relevant books, articles, broadcast material or stage works; and a support section with information about the journal itself and the society which publishes it. The latter section may be divided between the beginning and the end of the journal and sometimes appears inside the front and back covers; you will have to decide how much of this support material is needed on an issue-by-issue basis. The demands of advertisers, if you are lucky enough to attract them, may also need to be taken into account.

## **BOOKS**

There has never been a better (and cheaper) time for literary societies to consider publishing books. Whether this be books about your author or society history or indeed republishing out-of-print works (or 'forgotten', 'lost' or 'overlooked' works), you can publish digital or print society editions which will both promote and enhance the reputation of your author and society – if you get it right. They are unlikely to make a large financial income, but at least with modern digital technology (which includes both print and digital publishing), the outlay is affordable. This is a project that can be highly worthwhile for any literary society, but of course it has its own learning curve. There is plenty of help available (paid and free), and it is something to consider seriously. We hope to provide a more comprehensive guide on this subject soon.

## **EDITING**

Once your newsletter, journal or book has been designed and written, it's time to edit. Consistency is the golden rule of editing. A publication which contains different spellings of the same word, a mix of American and British spellings, different-sized headings and typos will look sloppy and amateurish. You don't need to be a professional editor to achieve a consistent and professional-looking publication, but you may find it helpful to set out a style sheet before you begin. Common items to be included for the house style include: how numbers will be dealt with (spelling out one through nine, and using figures subsequently is one option); the formatting of headings; book titles and journal items; double or single quotation marks (single is the British standard, but the all-pervasive influence of Microsoft Word has made the American double quotes marks more common); how longer quotes will be dealt with (indented, put in italics or otherwise indicated); what system of referencing will be used; how to label figures, etc.

As the editor gets to work, it can be useful to note any problems which arise (for example, pp.156–159 or pp.156–9, etc.), find the best guidance, and then make a note of it to be added to the style sheet.

It is essential to back up all work done, preferably several times (Dropbox, for example, plus a USB drive or two).

Version control must be carefully observed, so that you do not end up printing the wrong version of a text that you have agreed with its writer. Many people simply use the date to indicate the version, or v.1, v.2, etc., and FINAL.

Proofreading needs to be done by at least one person other than the editor. By the time the editor has gone through a piece three or more times, he or she will be unable to see the most glaring of errors. Another reader may also have more expertise in some area of your subject matter and thus help to avoid howlers.

## **ADVERTISING IN NEWSLETTERS AND JOURNALS**

The advantage of attracting advertisers is obvious – they will pay for insertions and so will help to make your publications self-supporting. Decide what you will charge for full-page and half-page advertisements and make sure that all your readers know that you will be happy to put their advertising in – as long as it is for products or services appropriate to your newsletter or journal.

Your lead-time between issues may dictate what sort of advertising you are able to take, but such things as conferences and symposia, special issues of journals, special events, DVDs, CDs and limited edition pictures or illustrations, specialist booksellers, books and so on, are all likely to appeal to your readership.

Most advertisers will want you to tell them what your anticipated circulation is, so think about how many copies you will be distributing to your members and to institutions with an interest in the contents. This will be an indication of the circulation, although people who buy or receive a copy may also pass it on to other readers. Do not expect to cover your printing and distribution costs by advertising; regard it as an additional, welcome sum which will make a contribution to income.

## **PRINTING AND DISTRIBUTION**

Standard procedure for print jobs is to get three quotations/estimates, but as you get to know the local printing firms you will probably settle on one which is good to work with and produces the quality and consistency of work that you require. There are a good many small printers around who will quote for short-run printing at short notice. Bear in mind that small firms outside city centres have lower overheads; that university printers are sometimes, but not always, cheap and reliable (get them to quote like anybody else); and that printers who know what they can do will be quick to work out a price. If you have to wait for a quotation, it is likely that the job you are asking for is not really part of their core business. Once you have found a good printer who does what you want, you may well continue to use the firm for many years, but don't lose sight of the improvements in production methods which have emerged in recent years – faster machines, better image reproduction and so on – and make sure you're happy with your printing firm.

Make sure that your publication is error-free before you submit it to the printers. Printers are not publishers. They will print exactly as you deliver, with no editing. Any work that has to be corrected at a late stage will be very costly.

Some printing firms also offer a postal service. You provide them with the mailing list and they pack the printed copies into envelopes and post them (but check their data protection policy!). The mailing list data should be supplied by you afresh each time. The postal rates they use are usually 30-40% cheaper than if you took the envelopes to the post office.

If you are doing your own distribution always keep in mind the costs associated with your publication – they can vary widely depending on size and weight of envelope.

More guidance on book printing and distribution will be available in *Book Publishing for Literary Societies* which will be published in spring 2019.

## **AND FINALLY...**

Hopefully this guide has given you the answer to some questions, and perhaps suggested other questions to address within your own society in order to make sure that you use publishing in all its modern forms to best advantage in the advocacy and promotion of your author, and with the ultimate goal of keeping your membership well informed.

**The benefit of an umbrella organisation like the ALS is the expertise of its members. If you have corrections to this Quick Guide, or additional information which you feel should be included, please contact us via the website.**