

—JACE CLAYTON

“Find an agent by consulting your people—any supportive bunch of fellow writers, editors, dreamers, what-have-you, calling on their collective wisdom to steer you in the right direction.”

—ARAMINTA HALL

“Never believe a writer who says they don’t need an agent because it saves them money; agents earn their commission a hundred times over, and without them most of us wouldn’t earn a penny.”

—CATHERINE LACEY

IV. FINDING AND WORKING WITH AN AGENT

Finding an agent is a bit like finding the love of your life online: not impossible, but it’s unlikely that you’ll get it right the first time.

V. WORKING WITH AN EDITOR

You and your editor have the same goal: to make your book as whole as you can. Remember this—it’s easy to forget, particularly when your editor asks you to implement changes that seem unfamiliar to you.

“You must respect the work that your editor does, the other books she has published, the insights he has on your book and other books. You will not always agree, but you must have respect for their way of thinking. You must also know where your own terms differ from their terms. An editor brings the perspective of the publishing market to your work, but a great editor also knows how to protect your art from the necessary crudeness of the market.”

—CATHERINE LACEY

“Remember these two things: You’re very lucky to have found someone that loves your work enough to tell you when it sucks. And if your editor tells you something is boring, it is.”

—TAMARA SHOPPIN

—HÉCTOR TOBAR

When I start a book, I stand at the front door of a building I haven’t yet entered. But I can sense the beauty of what’s inside.”

—JEFF VANDERMEER

“The book is like a big, old building. Each day I sit down to write, I enter a room in that building and live in it. The first room might contain a scene from my protagonist’s love affair; the next one his journey on a ship across a tropical ocean; and then a door might open to a tense family dinner with his mother, with mashed potatoes steaming on the table.

—JEFF VANDERMEER

III. THE WRITING PROCESS

There was a year in my life when my process meant writing first thing in the morning, every single day, before doing anything else. That time is definitively over, but I have other ways of getting writing done now that better suit my life and ongoing projects.

VI. SELF-PROMOTION (ON YOUR OWN TERMS)

It’s okay if you don’t have 100,000+ followers on Twitter, don’t understand how to employ a hashtag, or start nervous sweating at the very idea of being interviewed. You’re most effective when you’re comfortable and confident while telling other people about your book. Of course, it helps to be open to trying new things, but trust your instincts.

“There must be a firewall between your public book life and your private book life, or creativity. For example, I try to be offline while writing the rough draft of a novel. And when I am in the midst of promoting one novel, I try not to work on another piece of fiction. You need to protect your creativity and then fit promotion into your life.”

—JEFF VANDERMEER

“If my digital house was burning down, it’s my email list I would save. I wouldn’t think twice. As a person who makes a living writing books, it’s the most important piece of data I possess, and it’s brought

—LISKA JACOBS

“Rothko thought if he could wrap you in a color you’d feel the emotion contained within it. I use paint samples to choose colors that represent the city or town the novel is going to take place in; I tape them together so they overlap. If I blur my eyes, ‘Red Rye’ and ‘Morning Light’ and ‘Felt Green’ and ‘Roman Yellow’ transport me to Rome, the setting of my next novel.”

—CATHERINE LACEY

II. MAKING AN OUTLINE

Some writers find creating an outline useful — like a map, an outline can nudge a writer in the right direction. Other writers find an outline disrupts the most rewarding aspects of the writing process — discovery.

—CATHERINE LACEY

“While outlines are essential for crafting works of nonfiction, I believe them to be the enemy of good fiction. When one can see around every narrative corner, all tension and sense of discovery is lost. No matter what other proficiency the writer has, the work is stale.”

—ROBIN SLOAN

me more value — commercial, emotional, everything in between — than I can articulate. Email lists grow slowly, so the best thing you can do for your future self is to just start one immediately. Do it today.”

SUMMARY

So: Pay attention to your subconscious. Take careful notes. Sit down to write with a plan in mind, but leave room for discovery. Find collaborators who understand you and your work, and who make you want to do better. Listen to — and learn from — your editor and agent. Use resources with which you’re comfortable for letting people know about your book. Have fun.

—HÉCTOR TOBAR

“When I begin to think about writing a book, it’s because I’ve been presented with an idea that I know can become many worlds, or a kind of universe unto itself.”

—JOSHUA WHEELER

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