

How To Stay Unpublished Forever—Ten Easy Steps.

(A little humor for other writers)

By Babette deJongh and Jessica Trapp

1. Follow everyone's advice. Let contest judges, critique partners, helpful friends, relatives, and strangers at McDonald's screw with your voice. If a contest judge doesn't like your heroine's name, is offended that you've used the word crotch, or isn't familiar with your favorite medieval words like "ere" and "mayhap," then by all means, change your manuscript. Everybody's got an opinion, and why should yours count for more than everyone else's? What the heck to do you know anyway? After all, you're only the person who has spent countless hours reading, researching, and writing in your chosen genre.
2. Follow no one's advice. Defend your work to the death. Even though everyone agrees you haven't given enough description of place to make your story world clear to the reader, don't waste your time going back in to add that description. You can just explain to each individual what you meant to show. Pay no attention to all those contest judges who suggest you read Techniques of the Selling Writer by Dwight Swain. Don't even consider learning about little details like active voice and POV. Your writing is just fine no matter what they say. Who needs to learn and grow as a writer? Not you, no sir. Just keep on doing exactly what you're doing, and tell all those interfering busybodies exactly where they can shove their suggested reading lists. In fact, maybe you should write them a nasty note or email telling them how awful they are because they didn't think your work was perfect. That'll teach 'em. And you'll win lots of friends and willing critique partners in the process.
3. Work in a vacuum. Hoard your manuscripts and refuse to share them with the world. What might happen if you confess that you're a writer, and give someone the opportunity to read and assess your work? The outcome could be uncomfortable. Someone might suggest you learn your craft. They might even—heaven forbid—tell you about a creative writing class nearby. Or even, YIKES, know somebody who knows somebody who could help you further your career. Then you might have to send your baby out into the cold cruel world. Oh, no. You don't want to do that. Then you'd risk the worst fate of all: Someone might not love your work. An editor or agent might tell you NO.
4. Start something new before you're finished with the current project. New ideas are so seductive, and sagging middles are so tedious. Just think how much

faster you can write if you never finish anything. Ten half-written manuscripts are better than one finished one. Right?

5. Be a perfectionist. Keep polishing and refining that first manuscript until every word is as perfect as you can make it. This may take twenty, thirty years, even fifty years – but who’s counting – the object of this article is to show you how to stay unpublished FOREVER. Shove aside ideas for new projects. The old one’s still not quite finished. When everyone you know agrees it’s perfect, when every comma is exactly where it needs to be, then—and only then—you can answer the call of your muse and move forward with a new project.
6. Play by ALL the rules. If a contest judge tells you industry standard is to start a manuscript halfway down the page, follow that rule! If another judge tells you to start your manuscript a third of the way down the page, follow that rule! Of course there’s not a rule book, but don’t let that stop you from following the rules. Just pick up a contest score sheet; that’ll give you an idea of what you should be doing. It doesn’t really matter that most score sheets are skewed to favor short contemporary. Even if you’re writing a long epic fantasy set in medieval Wales, you should follow those short contemporary rules. It is absolutely essential that we all conform to the same narrow standard. Readers can’t handle change; editors can’t stand individuality. Make your book read like everyone else’s, make your voice sound like everyone else’s. Follow the rules at *all* costs.
7. Don’t write until everything else is done. You know you won’t be able to concentrate anyway, not until the house is spotless, the bills are paid, the laundry’s done and the silverware’s sorted. So don’t even bother. Get everything else taken care of, *absolutely everything*. Every detail of your life must be neatly nailed down. How could you possibly even THINK about writing a book when you have a junk drawer in the kitchen, underwear that needs ironing and weeds to pull in the yard? If you finish your house, go clean your mother’s. Then -and only then- if you have time, write.
8. Say YES to everyone. Volunteer to spend hours doing pointless grunt work nobody else wants to do. Baby-sit for friends on a regular basis, especially if their kids require constant supervision. Answer the phone every time it rings and talk for hours with long-winded friends. Invite in the neighbors when they show up on your doorstep unannounced. Have long lunches with any acquaintance that asks—even if you don’t especially like them. Once word gets out that you’re an easy mark, you’ll always have a good excuse to put off your writing—and let’s face it, sometimes, sitting down to that blank screen can be a little intimidating.

9. Consider the odds. How many people say they want to write a book but never publish? How many people write and write and write and never get published? Don't lie to yourself. You don't stand a chance. Here is a secret that only an elite group knows: Real people do NOT actually write those books that fill the shelves in bookstores – aliens beam those books in. You're wasting your time. Go ahead and give up—or just quit for the next twenty years.

10. Burn out. Don't take time to nurture your physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being. Don't take the time to build strong relationships with family and friends. Don't spend time alone refilling your artistic well. Don't read. You just don't have time for that stuff. You're a writer.