

Weegie Wednesday Etiquette

As writers or aspiring writers we all have our completed works in the bag. We also have pieces we have never finished, now languishing in a drawer or in a long unopened folder on the laptop. We have projects we are enthusiastic about – perhaps several running parallel to each other – and we may be a fair way along the road to completing them. Or perhaps we have just started and are full of excitement and energy over our fresh new idea.

We'd love to get our writing published, of course we would. And we'd love to get paid handsomely for every copy flying off the bookshelves in the High Street stores. That's a dream, a perfectly understandable and reasonable dream. And why not? Why not dream?

Now, Creative Writing courses are great. Apart from being tremendous fun pretty much most of the time, there is a lot to learn about the craft of writing. In addition to the teaching, one of the elements these courses normally include is advice on getting published.

The students are told to buy or borrow a copy of the 'Writer's and Artist's Yearbook'. Once this year's edition is in the feverous writer's hand they are to note down only those publishers or agents who explicitly state they deal with the genre the writer is working in and who accept unsolicited submissions. After that it's a matter of going to their website and reading their submission policy very carefully. Often they ask for the first three chapters of a novel, for instance, with a synopsis and a cover letter. Whatever they say, that's what the writer must do. It's important to note the name of the submissions editor and address it to her or him. A package sent to whom in may concern will inevitably find its way to the bottom of the pile.

Some courses teach a different policy. Rather than expediting the precious manuscript off, carefully printed and lovingly signed, to someone the writer has never heard of before – and if they want any probability of success they'll have to expedite it to many someones – the writer is advised instead to get to know people. They should network. They should show their face and be seen.

This is exactly where Weegie Wednesday comes in. Networking is the very first thing Weegie Wednesday is about. It is for sharing ideas between writers, students of writing, publishers, librarians, teachers of writing, and agents – and many more.

It is not for turning up with your manuscript, homing in on the first publisher you can sniff out, and wringing it into their hand.

Weegie Wednesday was set up to allow people with a genuine interest in any or all aspects of writing and publishing to get to know each other socially and to learn from one another. It is about discovery – not about selling. It is about opening one's mind to the ideas and experience of those who have perhaps spent a lifetime in the business. Above all, it is about having a pleasant time with people of like mind. Some members have even met people they now consider good friends.

At Weegie Wednesday we have only a small number of professional publishers who still come along regularly. This wasn't always the case. There are a number of success stories arising from publishers meeting the sort of writer they were looking for at a Weegie Wednesday event. But far fewer come now. We worry that it is the behaviour of some aspiring writers at our events in the past which has put them off. We worry that fewer of them come along because the fear of spending an evening as the doings surrounded by the proverbial flies is greater than the hope of stumbling across the next new book they'd love to get into print.

So what should you do if you're holding *The Great Scottish Novel* in your hands, freshly printed,

the hot paper burning your fingertips with its desire to get snapped up and published? The advice is this: put it down and leave it at home. Come along to Weegie Wednesday and have a nice time. Talk to people and find out their interests, what they've written, what they're writing now. Talk about things unrelated to writing. You have no idea what can come from a random conversation. Nor should you expect 'the miracle' to happen your first night. Come along regularly and become a feature. You never know when someone will approach you and say 'I've seen you here before but never had a chat. What are you writing?'

And that person may say 'Really? I know someone who might be interested in that'. Or maybe not. But that isn't the point. The point is to be a writer and to be part of the scene, to be giving as much as you're getting. It's about just being there.

The 'scene' itself, of course, is more than Weegie Wednesday. Edinburgh has the City of Literature Salon on the last Tuesday of every month. It takes place in the Wash Bar on The Mound. Admittedly, the timing is awkward as it starts at 6pm. But it's the same set up as Weegie Wednesday. You turn up, you write your name and interests on a sticker, you listen to a speaker for around ten minutes, then you get to know people. Simple. Oh, and they give you a free glass of wine and nibbles.

Then there is Aye Write! Go to that. Turn up at events and workshops, listen to what people have to say. Mingle afterwards and strike up conversations. Expand your knowledge, get to be known. But let it be about writing and books and your genuine interest in both. Don't push – it puts people off.

There are also book festivals. [The Edinburgh International Book Festival](#) takes place in August and [Wigtown's](#) in September. But there are [book festivals in Scotland](#) nearly every month of the year, plus smaller meetings and workshops in Glasgow, Edinburgh and other places. In addition to that, if you write in a genre there are specialist conferences every year. [Eastercon](#), for example – the British National Science Fiction Convention – was in Glasgow in 2104, and it takes place in a different UK town each year at, well, Easter time. The same advice applies to events like these. Go along to enjoy yourself as writer and lover of books. If you do get the chance to meet a potential publisher or an agent, or perhaps a writer you admire, then introduce yourself politely. DON'T PUSH! Strike up a conversation on a topic you think they're likely to be interested in. Just chat with them, and if they think you're fairly non-threatening they'll likely ask about your work. If what you do isn't what they want they'll say so. Just accept it. But they may also say that they know someone who might be interested in your project, here's their details and mention you met me here. Result!

Most of all be yourself, talk about what interests you and be ready to be surprised.