



Publishing in South Africa: What Publishers Do

1. Introduction

PASA promotes best practice and the highest standards of ethics in publishing amongst its members. The relationship with authors is central to publishing and South African publishers pride themselves on sound and honest business practices in dealing with the authors who write for them and foster writing talent in all sectors of society and in all South African languages.

Below is a short explanation of the tasks publishers undertake in conducting their business. While the majority of these tasks corresponds across the different publishing sectors, some are particular to a specific publishing sector. As such, a short differentiation of the various sectors in the greater South African publishing industry is included. Managing the publisher-author relationship is a professional function undertaken by publishers across the board. It is a relationship at the very core of the industry and a function in which publishers invest substantially.

South Africa has a respected publishing sector which contributes to knowledge attainment, nation building and development across the African continent more generally. Any substantive copyright changes are likely to undermine this national professional sector, leading to loss of specialist skills and capacities, and solutions being sought increasingly outside of the country.

2. The Sectors

Most people will be familiar with books published for a general audience, the books one typically would find in retail bookshops. These books are published by the sector of the publishing industry that is commonly called the “Trade” sector. There are other sectors too, Educational, TVET, Academic and Scholarly. This Section deals with publishing practices in the other Sectors first before coming back to the Trade sector.

2.1. Educational

Educational publishing refers to the publication of learning and teaching materials that are aimed at the school curriculum from pre-school to Grade 12. The core of educational publishing is usually a textbook, with its accompanying teacher’s guide, which are available mostly in printed format but are increasingly also published in digital formats. Educational publishing also encompasses a range of other materials that are required to support the curriculum, such as reading schemes, literature, dictionaries, atlases and wall charts.

Publishers respond to tenders or calls for new books by the Department of Basic Education, and are regulated by a stipulated curriculum.



Copyright assignment often occurs in respect of works such as educational and academic textbooks. For works of this kind it is likely that the publisher did the research for the project, identified, approached and briefed an author or authors to write it, and managed the writing process. Copyright assignment is often applicable where a book has multiple authors, as it allows the publisher easily to manage the intellectual property of the team of authors. The assignment of copyright also enables publishers to respond immediately to requests for content without the administrative delays of requesting permission from authors. This ensures content can be reused for the financial and reputational benefit of the authors.

2.2. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

This sector produces textbooks for students at the TVET colleges in South Africa, which offer technical or vocational training. It thus has similarities to the academic sector, but the procurement and distribution model is completely different as the TVET system is more centralised.

There are 50 public TVET colleges, each with several campuses, as well as numerous private TVET colleges across the country. The TVET sector produces books – overwhelmingly in print – for two different levels: the National Certificate (Vocational), or NCV, and the National Accredited Technical Diploma (NATED). All textbooks for the TVET colleges are produced in South Africa.

The core of TVET publishing is usually a textbook, with its accompanying lecturer’s guide, which is in most instances available in print and digital formats. Published educational and TVET works rarely come from self-promotion by authors. For syllabus driven works, educational and TVET publishers play the more creative role in responding to the syllabus, carrying out research and then commissioning authors to write for them.

Although there is no universal rule, publishers of works for the TVET market normally pay royalties to the authors from the sales of the works they write.

2.3. Academic

The academic publishing sector is geared towards publishing textbooks for the university and university of technology markets. Print remains the format of preference, although all academic publishers have invested in new technologies and new digital products.

The relatively small size of the academic market in South Africa results in strong competition for influential authors at key institutions. Publishers draw authors from the higher education sector or research institutes who are active researchers and educators in their field of scholarship.

The involvement of commercial publishers in academic publishing activities is important due to the excellence of quality that results from a competitive market place, as well as academic freedom. Profits that result from such publishing activities ensure that their activities remain sustainable, and that content



development may continue alongside the requisite investment in learning technology, distribution channels and platforms.

The South African market is very small, therefore publishers try to produce a book that meets the requirements of a number of institutions, while maintaining a fit with the differences in curricula that are evident.

- The lead author or general editor will take the role of the initial reviewer of content, and many author teams review each other's chapters.
- Publishers use plagiarism checking software like iThenticate to check for any IP problems that need to be rectified.
- Publishers find external reviewers to provide input and feedback, and changes may be recommended ahead of publication.
- In many disciplines, a technical editor is employed to check calculations, questions and information that needs to be checked by a subject matter expert.
- The book is edited for language and pedagogy, and several iterations of the typeset (designed) page proofs are checked by the author team and by proofreaders.
- Artwork is created and third-party copyright permissions are checked and paid for.
- Publishers also invest in the additional multimedia assets that are included in ebooks to make these interactive.
- References are checked and an index is produced.
- Publishers commission and invest in additional material that support lecturers and students including substantial investment in questions and solutions to assist in teaching and learning.

The support material is distributed via electronic platforms that require substantial investment and ongoing maintenance and support. These include digital platforms like eBook reader applications and content management systems, learning management systems and other educational technologies like adaptive learning.

2.4. Scholarly

The scholarly publishing in South Africa consists largely of four university presses and a few independent presses linked to research organisations. Their main objective is to contribute to dissemination of research in book form, and in some cases by way of journal articles, written by local academics. The scholarly market in South Africa remains small, but enjoys a good reputation both nationally and internationally.

The scholarly publishing sector positions itself globally in terms of readership, as most of the publishing houses sell, distribute and disseminate their books and journals worldwide or seek for their books and journals to have a global impact. To enable international dissemination, scholarly publishers need to keep up with technological developments (XML based publishing, ORCID's for authors, ONIX metadata, etc) at large costs to small organisations.



International impact is key for authors. In the case of book authors, international impact is at least as important as the payment of royalties, which payments are relatively small due to the constraints of high publishing costs in a very small market. For authors publishing in the scholarly sector, benefits of publication are linked to academic prestige and reputational factors. Publication is key to academic progression for individual authors. In scholarly journals, there is typically no demand by authors for royalties; the author wants professionally edited, peer-reviewed and globally discoverable publication of his or her research.

Publishers manage the peer-review process. This plays an important role when universities claim DHET subsidies on behalf of their authors, as the DHET relies on publishers' evidence and confirmation that peer review was done to an acceptable international 'best practice' standard. DHET subsidies are paid to universities, who all have different policies regarding how much is kept in central funds and how much is distributed to faculties and eventually to the academic authors themselves. Generally, peer-review across the sector is of a world-class standard, which enables the South African sector to compete effectively with scholarly and academic publishers from across the world.

Academic journal authors have the choice to publish in publications which are available on a subscription basis and also in publications where the cost of publication is paid by the author or a funder upfront and then published under an Open Access licence. Publishers publish both subscription journals and Open Access journals, and even some books are being published on an Open Access basis. The business model for recovering publishers' significant editorial, production, marketing and online costs is different for subscription and Open Access models – under the subscription model, their costs are recovered by sales of the journals, whereas in Open Access publishing, the cost is recovered from the upfront author publication charge.

Most scholarly presses have diversified their publishing lists to cater for wider readerships. They may also publish textbooks for the academic market, or "cross-over" general non-fiction books that sell predominantly to a general trade market. As such, they need to invest in marketing and promotion to the local audience as well.

2.5. Trade

The trade publishing sector publishes books for a general audience. Trade books include fiction, nonfiction and books for children and young adults, and are typically the books one would find on shelves in book stores, and on bestseller lists. For local trade publishers, the domestic market remains the most important source of income. Trade publishers frequently publish new editions of books in print and digital simultaneously, especially in fiction, but print sales heavily outweigh digital sales.

The majority of trade books are sold through bookseller chains. The library market has shrunk considerably in recent years, and attempts to reach markets through other channels, such as online retailers or direct sales, have still not fully come to fruition.



Trade publishers go to great effort with sales and marketing. They send out catalogues or provide metadata to online retailers, but they also have dedicated sales staff, who inform booksellers about new titles and suggest titles to acquire. Similarly, a marketing team is employed and a dedicated publicist is assigned to generate maximum publicity for each published book. Tasks include sending out review copies, creating promotional items, social media marketing, and arranging author tours.

Authors of trade books have a wider readership and tend to have a higher profile and media reach. Trade publishers therefore have a heightened reputational risk – they would suffer serious damage if they mistreated their authors.

3. General functions of publishers

3.1. Publishing agreement

Publishers carry the costs of having publishing agreements drafted and kept up to date, recognising the importance of having the agreement expound the legal, administrative and financial aspects of the working relationship clearly and unambiguously.

To encourage fair contract terms between publishers and authors, PASA and ANFASA (Academic and Non-Fiction Authors' Association of South Africa) mandated their respective copyright committees to draft a document recording the standard terms for book publishing contracts. The ANFASA-PASA Agreement on Contract Terms ("APACT") is aimed at fostering and upholding a constructive and cooperative relationship between authors and publishers. As a framework for promoting cooperation between authors and publishers, as well as an understanding of contractual relationships between them, this document is not static, but subject to development and adaptation by ANFASA and PASA. This is in line with the evolving nature of the publishing industry itself. The first version of APACT was published in 2012, and an updated version was released in 2016. It is available as a free resource on the websites of both PASA and ANFASA and can be accessed here: <http://www.publishsa.co.za/file/1472202535llj-apactdocument.pdf>.

3.2. Pre-publication

The publisher typically either commissions or receives manuscripts, trains/develops authors where necessary and guides the writing process, edits the manuscript, designs and prints them as books or alternative formats, and invests in advertising and promotion to generate maximum sales. The editorial and production processes entail substantial financial investment on the part of the publisher, which results in significant added value through editing, design and layout, indexing and proofreading. Publishers either employ editors, marketers and designers to develop the book, or they contract outside service providers – both at great cost to the publisher.



Experience and expertise during the origination process results in a more refined product which has a better chance of succeeding in the market place. Due attention to production details includes the assessment of the quality of paper, printing and binding in the case of a printed book, and in the case of an e-book, ensuring that digital files are clean and comply with the highest industry standards.

3.3. Sales, marketing and distribution

Publishers make a great effort to establish and maintain sales and distribution channels. This is true across the sectors. While educational publishers are dependent on state and provincial government departments for the majority of orders, they also distribute their products through a variety of other sales channels. Publishers keep a watch on demand for their products in order to manage their stocks and, in the case of hard copies, to decide on reprints to meet high demand.

Each sector in the publishing industry has its own markets and its own distinct customer bases.

Importantly, publishers invest in distribution networks (both for physical stock and electronic products) and infrastructure that facilitates the accessibility of books and materials. Publishers continuously invest in new technologies and publishing media. This ensures that publishers maintain viability and competitiveness, which not only advances the best interests of the publishing industry, but also serves the authors whose work is published.

Publishers understand that it is not possible for every student to buy every book they require. That is why educational publishers invest in options that aid in the development of low-cost editions, course-packs, adaptations and reprint titles, as well as supporting local and university libraries – all of which provides access to the best-in-class learning material at a fraction of the cost of an equivalent imported title.

3.4. International dissemination

Ensuring international exposure and recognition for authors is an important focus for publishers in the scholarly and trade publishing sectors. As it is tailored for the South African education market, the publishers in the educational, TVET and academic sectors have a more local focus.

International dissemination is achieved through export, print-on-demand facilities, rights trade, or co-publishing partnerships. For trade publishers, participation in international book fairs and establishing a network of subagents in key territories plays an important role in selling foreign and translation rights to their books. Information on rights sales and the progress and reception in other formats and markets, forms part of the dialogue between the author and the publishing house about the dissemination of his or her work.



3.5. Rights management

The copyright in the work includes subsidiary or secondary rights and uses. These are rights which allow further forms of exploitation of the work, which includes licensing the content of the book to other publishers for publication or production into other formats, languages, as well as adaptations. The publisher does not exploit these rights directly as a primary right, but will license or sell them to third parties if authorised by the author. The income received from the third party is then divided between the author and the publisher according to the royalty division agreed upon in the publishing agreement. Subsidiary rights can be an important additional revenue stream for both the author and the publisher.

Managing subsidiary rights is a service publishers provide to authors. It entails a hefty administrative load. Each permission request or licence requires negotiating a fee for use of the work, drafting and concluding a contract to regulate said use, invoicing the third party and following up on payment and distribution to authors as necessary. Publishers either employ full-time staff members to deal with these types of requests, or outsource rights management to freelance service providers.

3.6. Copyright enforcement

Publishers go to great lengths to protect the intellectual property embodied in the works they publish, and to therefore protect the economic interests of themselves and of their authors. Many authors do not have access to the required resources to pursue copyright enforcement actions and rely on publishers to protect their economic interests through publisher membership of organisations such as the Southern African Federation Against Copyright Theft (“SAFACT”).

A problem academic, educational and TVET publishers face in selling their books is photocopying and resale of photocopied books. The industry has made attempts to stamp out this practice in co-operation with SAFACT. Incidents of piracy (both in print and digital book formats) continue to emerge, and publishers work closely with SAFACT to investigate and prosecute offenders.

Similarly, trade publishers rely on the services of SAFACT to deal with widespread incidents of digital piracy – where offenders remove metadata from e-books and distribute and sell those e-books without consent. Depending on the circumstances, publishers also appoint legal counsel to address infringing conduct, at substantial cost to the publisher.

3.7. Royalty payments

The publishing agreement stipulates when royalty statements will be provided and royalty payments remitted to the author. Statements may be sent twice yearly or annually calculated to the end of the publisher's financial year. Royalty payments are usually made within 2-3 months of such dates.



Royalties payable include income generated from subsidiary rights, including DALRO distributions, as well as royalties on book sales. DALRO distributions occur six-monthly and income received from licences granted by DALRO is divided between author and publisher in line with the subsidiary rights clause in the publishing agreement.

Should the royalties payable be below a certain amount (this ranges from R100 to R500), the royalties will be carried forward to the next payment period.

Publishers not paying royalties is a breach of contract on the part of the individual publisher, not the norm or general practice. Publishers go to considerable effort to ensure that authors' personal and bank details are up to date in order for royalty payments to be remitted. They also generally maintain a high level of auditing and accountability in disclosure to authors of royalty income due to them. Authors are provided with detailed royalty statements which contains sales and stock data as well.

3.8. Reversion of rights

The publishing agreement sets out the procedure for reversion of rights to the author. Typically, the relevant clause would state that, if the book is out of stock, the author may request that the publisher reprint or publish a new edition. If the publisher fails to do so within an agreed timeframe, the rights revert to the author.