Author stories

Simon Greenall
The late Simon Greenall (author of many titles including *Reward*) tells ELT Teacher 2 Writer how he got started as an author...

"Because I had always wanted to write, although not necessarily for ELT, I was looking out all the time for opportunities to pursue my dream career. When I became a teacher, I was working and socializing with people who had already started writing for ELT. One of these friends, Judy Garton Sprenger, was looking for a co-writer on her latest ELT project, a coursebook for the First Certificate exam, and she asked me if I'd like to join her. Of course, I leapt at the chance, and we produced our first book within about a year. But I felt I needed to get more books on the way, and it wasn't until about four years later and two or three more books, that I began to feel I'd got started as an ELT author."

Roy Norris (author of our title *How To Write Exam Preparation Materials*)
Roy is the author of a number of coursebooks, including *Ready for FCE* and *Ready for CAE*.

"As head of Cambridge exam classes at IH Madrid, then DOS in Vilnius, I'd written a fair amount of supplementary material for other IH teachers to use in their classes. I enjoyed it, and a number of colleagues encouraged me to try and get something published. I let it be known to as many people as possible that I wanted to write, including editors at the local offices of one or two publishers in Madrid. My big break, though, came in 1999 at the Madrid TESOL conference, where I was giving a talk on preparing students for FCE. The late David Reilly was present: he had previously been at IH and was now working as a publisher for Macmillan. I told him of an idea I had for a video resource book. This came to nothing, but he passed my name on to a commissioning editor at Macmillan who was looking for someone to write a new FCE course. I wrote a sample unit, which they liked, and eighteen months later *Ready for FCE* was published. It was a very tight writing schedule and an incredibly steep learning curve, but it was certainly worth it: once you have one book published, it's likely that further writing offers will follow."

David Gray tells us about his slightly 'hammy' way in to becoming an ELT writer.

"Luck (and being a great believer in meeting new people) had a lot to do with me getting involved in writing. In the process of carving pieces off a tasty ham and drinking more wine than was good for any of us at a party in Madrid in the early 90s, a colleague from the British Council, her partner and I discovered a shared interest in motorcycles, mountains and photography. The partner, it later turned out, was setting up the ELT branch of a Spanish educational publisher and needed writers. Apparently my ham-cutting technique had convinced him (I can't think what else could have - we said not a word about ELT at the party) that I was just the man for the job*. With a few twists and turns along the way, I've been doing it ever since… and I still cut a mean ham.

*Actually, now that I think of it, I seem to remember the evening degenerated into lusty singing of Irish songs very much later, so perhaps that was what did the trick. Ah, life's rich tapestry…"

Pete Maggs started his writing career in Japan.

"In the 1990s I taught in Japan and later set up a private language school there. By then I had written a lot of materials for my classes and we used the 'original materials' angle as the school's USP. The first thing I wrote that was published was a piece for the local international magazine. It was actually an anecdote about how a colleague of mine had come to grief in class when trying to give a frank and open answer to the question 'Do you have fun in your bedroom?' (The Japanese student was actually asking the much more innocent question 'Do you have a fan in your bedroom?'). The moral of the story was something like teachers should pause before trying to answer a potentially loaded question and Japanese learners of English should be aware that a dropped article can sometimes cause great confusion.

Although it was well received and I was invited to submit more, it was another couple of years before I got my first proper writing contract. After returning to the UK in 1997, one of my first students turned out to be an editor at Heinemann Macmillan, and she offered me some resource material writing. At around the same time I also became a regular contributor on *Inside Out*, written by my teaching colleagues Sue Kay and Vaughan Jones. With over ten years teaching experience behind me, I had a lot of my own materials I could refer to and adapt and a lot I wanted to get out there.

Writing has been a great experience. The best lesson I have learned is once you've worked with people who know they can trust you to turn in a decent piece of material (on time!), the work seems to keep coming in."

Our very own **Sue Kay**, who's best known as an author with Macmillan Education and Pearson tells us her story of getting into writing...

"I started my TEFL career in Lyon, France, at a private language school called Wood Language Studies. I arrived in Lyon fresh off my IH Prep Cert and penniless. I took on some extra typing work in the evenings to earn enough money to pay the advance month's rent on a flat. The typing job involved transforming grammar exercises from *Contact English* by Colin Granger into oral drills for the language lab.

Almost immediately, I slotted into the role of 'Materials Person' at the school, and from then on, I was always the person who wrote stuff for teachers to use. I loved drawing and cutting things up. After three years of doing that (and quite a lot of teaching), I applied for a job at the British Council in Paris to work in their Resources Centre. I was really disappointed not to get the job, and still have the rejection letter.

But I ended up at the Lake School in Oxford. Being an old hippy, I loved the fact that it was a teachers' cooperative. Again, I became self-appointed 'Materials Person' there, and when

Simon Greenall came to the school to do some classroom observations, I dragged him into the staffroom and showed him all the communicative activities I'd written to liven up *Headway*, which I found a bit static. Simon was suitably impressed (or perhaps a bit browbeaten) and these worksheets later because the *Reward Resource Packs*.

Simon Greenall was doing a lot of promotion for his Reward series at that time and being the new girl, I was dead keen to pick up any of the trips he didn't have time to do. That's how I met Vaughan Jones. He was working in marketing for Heinemann ELT and he was in charge of me in Italy. 'Recipe for disaster' I hear you say. Well, no actually. We talked about our ideal coursebook over a salted fish and quite a bit of wine, and by the end of the meal we'd decided that the ideal coursebook doesn't exist, so we'd better write it!

It was still a time when unsolicited manuscripts were given the time of day, and Mike Esplen, then MD of Heinemann ELT decided to give us a chance. I reckon it was Vaughan's 35-page marketing plan that did it. Thanks to the best ELT publishing team EVER (including Sue Bale, Karen Spiller, David Riley, Karen White and Des O'Sullivan), *Inside Out* was born and the rest is ongoing history.

I've worked hard at all this materials writing, and I think I've got a bit of a flare for it, but I also happened to meet the right people at the right time. So I'm delighted to be involved in ELT Teacher 2 Writer with Karen Spiller and Karen White and have the opportunity to give all those gifted 'Materials People' out there a chance to be noticed by the right people."

And here's **Vaughan Jones'** story and some great tips …

"Having spent most of the 1980s teaching and training in France, Japan and Spain, I was offered a job as a sales rep with Heinemann ELT (now Macmillan) in 1988, based in Madrid. For ten years I worked my way up the sales and marketing career ladder: first Spain, then Japan, Taiwan and Korea and finally a job in Oxford as Regional Manager for Western Europe. It's not an obvious route into writing, but promoting books for a big publisher gives you invaluable background knowledge:

- You meet thousands of teachers teaching in thousands of different contexts.
- You work with lots of authors and editors on publishing projects large and small.
- You begin to understand why some projects are successful and some are not.

On reflection, like so many things in life, getting a break in publishing is as much about being in the right place at the right time as it is about your writing credentials. However, you can help your case by considering the following:

Make sure publishers know who you are. Get yourself a profile as a conference presenter, or as a key person in a teaching organisation, or as a blogger or offer to trial materials and write reports. This can often lead to one-off projects writing worksheets or tests or other supplementary materials. It gets your foot in the door.

See the big picture right from the start. Don't bother writing a complete draft of your cherished project. Unsolicited manuscripts generally end up in the bin. Remember, you are pitching an idea, a vision, a concept. You need to think long and hard about why your project suits that particular publisher for that particular market sector for that particular time. When Sue Kay and I first talked to Macmillan about *Inside Out*, I'm sure they were as impressed with our marketing ideas – the fact that we'd even thought of a name for the course! – as they were with our two sample units. For publishers, it's an investment decision. They need to believe.

Stick to your guns. The publishing process is a collaborative one. Your ideas and your material will often be criticised or rejected – and usually for good reason. It's a steep learning curve. However, don't believe that publishers know all the answers: they don't. If you're not happy with the direction your project is taking, then say so. Within reason, back your own opinions and judgement. You might be right!

Finally, I'm still convinced that better teaching materials are produced when the writer-publisher relationship is a partnership (i.e. royalty-based) rather than employer-employee one (i.e. fee-based). A partnership – albeit an unequal one – means shared risks for shared rewards. It means a shared investment of time, energy and money. It means having a voice at the table. On bigger projects, go for royalties every time."

Here's **Hugh Dellar**, whose belief in the Lexical Approach led to a career as an author …

"I started teaching back in 1993, and spent the first couple of years struggling to find ways to manage the illegally photocopied versions of *Headway* I'd been instructed by my school in Jakarta to work from. As I tinkered around with exercises in the book, adapted and added to, I slowly started writing my own little alternative lessons and using those instead of the material I'd been given to teach. Much of it was no doubt horrendous, and probably of far less use to my students than the coursebook, but it did help me slowly start to get to grips with the rough flow of how things worked. I should add that I was also somewhat sort of haunted by a probably throwaway comment made to me early in my career by my very first DOS at St. Giles Central - Maud Dunkeld - about how I was 'the sort of person who ends up writing coursebooks'.

What really galvanised me, though, was doing my DELTA in 1995 at Hammersmith and West London College and having a sort of Damascene moment when reading *The Lexical Approach* by Michael Lewis. It rang very true to me, especially after a couple of years spent struggling with Indonesian, and was to have a huge influence on what I subsequently went on to try and achieve, which was really a way of systematizing the vastness of the lexicon according to level, and in the process subverting the dominant grammar-driven syllabus that prevailed.

In short, from the very beginning, I was always quite ideologically driven and quite taken with the idea of the coursebook as some kind of weapon of war or instrument of change.

With a friend I'd made on the DELTA course, Darryl Hocking, I started talking about material we felt was missing, and we worked on several draft units based around certain conversations. We became obsessed. We spent months recording almost everything we ever said, and transcribing it all, noting down patterns and recurrent themes and chunks, and then tweaking and twisting the material. We made our own listenings and trialled all the material in class before finally deciding we ought to see if we could attract any interest in it. I seem to recall reading an article around this time detailing how one should go about submitting proposals for potential new published material to the big houses.

We collated a few draft units and wrote market gap reports, and so on, and sent various copies out. Very soon afterwards, we went for a lengthy afternoon at OUP, who we slowly realised were far more interested in picking our brains on how the lexical approach might pan out in coursebooks than they were in our actual drafts, which we were reliably informed 'there was no market for'. Once we'd been offered another project, Darryl stormed out, leaving me to politely make my exit also.

The following day, the phone rang and a gruff Yorkshire voice said 'Hello. This is Michael Lewis. Can I talk to Hugh Dellar?' and I swore at Darryl, said I knew it was him and slammed the phone down … only for it to ring again three minutes later with a more insistent Michael Lewis on the end of it! Once we got over our disbelief, we hopped on a train to Hove, had a meeting in a pub and were told that the material we'd sent in was shaky, unfocused and unusable as it stood, but also that it 'had potential'. Michael and Jimmie Hill offered to help us turn it into a coursebook, and in the process to teach us to put such things together. That pub lunch resulted in the *Innovations* series, which as it happened, turned out to have rather more of a market than previously predicted!"

John Chrimes

"I began teaching 20 years ago but started ELT writing in 1997 when I was working in Colombia. I had been teaching for a few years and was offered the chance to write ESP materials for the centre to use on a national project. I enjoyed the work tremendously, working to a brief and yet staying creative, hitting deadlines no matter the cost and working collaboratively towards a goal. These would be key lessons for the future.

I did an MA in English for Specific Purposes in the hope I would get a chance to learn the small stuff and apply it to the big stuff as well as be around like-minded people who I could learn from and grow my knowledge and enthusiasm. Did this teach me how to write? No, but I felt confident I could look critically at work and know what I was talking about.

I was involved on ESP writing projects in the Middle East, Spain and the Far East, mixing general ELT and some EAP and ESAP. If there was an opportunity to write I took it. What I noticed is a bit obvious which is that the more you do it the better you get and the better you are able to visualize output toward a coherent workable end-product. There came a point when I felt I wanted to publish for a wider market and not just in-house. I had thought for several years about an ESP title that was missing so I decided to write it. No, I hadn't submitted a proposal, contacted a publishing house or pushed the idea around conferences

and social media ELT networks. I would of course now heavily recommend all of these. I just wrote it with the aim of setting up some sort of publishing platform and seeing where it would go. Well it took me to Garnet Publishing who took on the project once I'd finished. I then went on to write an ESAP coursebook for them. I am currently working with Kaplan on VLE materials for online learning and ELT print materials.

So, here are 5 things I think:
• Throw yourself in. You will learn how to do the small things en route. No two projects are the same so do not 'play safe'.
• Team skills are a CV cliché. But you will need them to write successfully. Think co-authors, editors etc.
• No it's not 'your baby', it's theirs. Don't be over-protective. Be prepared to rip it up and start again. Take comments and feedback and act on them.
• Be proactive. Go after projects and be prepared to start small.
• Make sure working on your own and not being micro-managed is for you. In some ways it's the opposite of teaching.

Evan Frendo (author of our title *How To Write Corporate Training Materials*) tells us how he got involved with ESP materials-writing and when he knew he'd 'made it' in publishing …

"In the mid-nineties I was working full time as an in-house trainer at a Siemens factory in Berlin. It was a wonderful job – I was responsible for the language training of over a thousand employees, and my boss was in Frankfurt, miles away. Part of the job involved developing materials for use in my own classroom.

At the time Siemens, or at least the part of Siemens I worked in, had a number of full-time trainers. All of us developed specialist in-house materials, this being seen as an important part of the services we were providing. No expense was spared – we even had our own film studio to make videos for the various courses we were developing. And this is where I was introduced to the tricks of the trade of writing ESP materials, and where concepts like specificity, authenticity and relevance really began to take on meaning. With time I became responsible for more and more writing, until by the early noughties I was managing teams of writers producing very focused materials at very short notice.

It wasn't long before mainstream publishers made contact. The first project was a teacher's book for a popular business English course in Germany, published by Cornelsen. This was followed by other projects, including a business English course book for Compact, and an ESP course for Accountants, again for Cornelsen. None of these projects were huge money spinners, at least not when compared to writing in-house training materials, but they allowed me to develop the contacts which are so important in this industry. But I felt I was still dabbling around the edges of the publishing world, and I was still only writing for German publishers.

My real international break came when I was asked to review an early draft of an intermediate business English student book called *Double Dealing*, to be published by Summertown. I had no idea who the author was, but it was very clear to me that they had

considerable experience of working in companies. This was the language of the workplace, not the language of the business press. This person was an insider. Evidently I said the right thing in my feedback, because not long afterwards I was invited to write the workbook for the course. This was followed by a partnership with James Schofield, and together we produced follow-up course books at the pre-intermediate and upper intermediate levels. Around this time I was also asked to write a methodology book for Longman called *How To Teach Business Englis*h.
And then, one day, someone asked me to autograph a book I had written. There's no feeling like it. And that was when I finally felt that I had made it into publishing."

Here's **Verity Cole**'s story …

"My route into writing isn't particularly direct. After a decade of teaching ELT, I wanted to broaden my skill-set, but the possibility of writing didn't occur to me. Instead, I chose to train to become an editor. I was lucky enough to be offered the position of Development Editor at Cambridge University Press. In this role, and later, as a Publisher for Pearson on their adult coursebook list, I was privileged to work with some very talented and experienced writers which gave me a good insight into the writing process. It also made me aware of an ambition to write which had to be curbed for the time being, as writers, with good reason, don't generally appreciate heavy-handed editors replacing chunks of their carefully crafted copy!

With hindsight, I've realised that editing is a very useful training for wannabe writers. It gives you a good idea of the type of constraints that writers work under when creating material for the international market, it makes you aware of what works on the page and what doesn't, it alerts you to the importance of flow and balance in the material and it wakes you up to the need to be creative under time pressure. It also brings home the fact that ELT writers don't work in isolation but as part of a large and highly-skilled team.

I took the step into freelance life in May 2010. One of the things that appealed about being self-employed was the variety it seemed to offer. It has certainly fulfilled this expectation. Last month, I did some editorial work on a couple of adult courses for different clients, organised and attended a recording session, ran a teacher training course for teachers of IELTS and wrote my first batch of test items. My interest in testing and examinations also led to my first writing project: *IELTS Introduction Study Skills* by Macmillan. Writing material which seeks to foster rather than test skills in lower level IELTS students proved quite a challenge but it was very rewarding and confirmed that I have well and truly caught the writing bug!"

Karen Richardson (author of our title *How To Write Worksheets*) tells her story of getting involved in writing, which includes some really good tips for new writers.

"While working at a primary school in London, I won a national children's story writing competition. The prize was a writing course that promised to get my work published. It didn't.

Then I moved to Germany and started teaching in the world of EFL. Primary materials, back then, were in short supply, and I had the idea of sending an adapted version of my story to German ELT publishers. Langenscheidt was interested and after a few more tweaks, they published my first book. This lead to more writing for the same publisher, in fact I still occasionally write and edit for them today, almost 15 years later.

But teaching primary wasn't really my thing. General English courses for adults, and more and more Business English courses came my way. I got involved with the English Language Teaching Association in Stuttgart (ELTAS), joined the committee and took on their quarterly magazine.

This lead to contact with more ELT publishers and their reps and I started writing and adapting Business materials for Hueber Verlag. Getting involved in my first large coursebook project was a steep and sometimes painful learning curve but luckily for me, after two years I was able to escape with my heard-earned new knowledge and take refuge in the Macmillan ELT camp.

As is often the case, knowing the right people helped enormously (which is why I whole-heartedly support this project). Mark Powel introduced me to Anna Cowper (then at Macmillan) and under her skillful guidance I contributed in various degrees to wonderful series such as *In Company*, *The Business* and *English for Law Enforcement*.

For me as a slightly impatient person, the only downside of writing books for publication is the time that can lapse between writing and publication: two years is not unusual. Therefore I am so happy that Lindsay Clandfield asked me to work with him on a report from IATEFL in Aberdeen (where we were both presenting for Macmillan) for Macmillan's Onestopenglish. In the five years since then, I have been sharing writing the weekly Guardian news lessons for OnestopEnglish with Tim Bowen as well as writing the monthly Business Spotlight lessons.

I'm pretty sure this is my niche; the turnaround time, from receiving the article to seeing it edited, in layout, and online is around two weeks. A great improvement on two years! This isn't to say that I'm not open to other challenges. In addition to writing regularly for Onestopenglish I'm currently involved with a Business English coursebook series with Cornelsen, and of course throughout all this I have continued teaching. These days it's almost exclusively Business English in companies and at the University of Cooperative Education in Stuttgart.

If I were asked to give advice it would be something along the lines of: Spread your net wide, but never lose sight of the chalkboard!"

Rachael Roberts (author of our title *How To Write Writing Activities*) tells her story of getting published, and warns of the 'slush pile'.

"In the mid 1990s I was training up as a CELTA tutor at International House in London when a trainee, who happened to be a publisher (not ELT), asked me if I would be interested in

writing a grammar practice book which took a discovery approach. At the time there wasn't really anything like this on the market. So, with some help from my colleague Rob Dean (a talented illustrator, and now a trainer for Pearson) I wrote *Discover Elementary English Grammar*. It was a great experience but I learnt the hard way that it's important to work for a well known publisher if you actually want to sell a good number of copies!

About five years later, I was working at an FE College in the Midlands, teaching a lot of IELTS. The students we had were no more than intermediate level at best, but the materials available at the time all seemed to be aimed at higher level students. As a result, we wrote a lot of our own materials and spent a fair bit of time complaining to each other that nothing else was available. Eventually, together with a couple of colleagues, Andrew Preshous and Jo Gakonga, we put in a proposal to Macmillan to write a lower level IELTS book. We didn't hear anything for a very long time and, I learnt afterwards, our proposal had basically gone on a slush pile. I now know that sending a proposal on 'spec' is probably not the best way to get published. However, this time, luck was on my side because it turned out that what we were suggesting was, in fact, what Macmillan had already decided to do and when they were looking for authors somebody remembered our proposal! As a result we wrote *IELTS Foundation*, which has just gone into its second edition. This experience then led on to writing further books for Macmillan, Pearson and OUP."

Julie Moore (author of our title *How To Write EAP Materials*) tells us how she moved from teaching to lexicography to writing ELT materials …

After a few years as an EFL teacher, I realised I loved explaining language, but wasn't so keen on the teaching lifestyle. So, I did an MA specialising in lexicography and corpus linguistics and from there, I got a job as an in-house lexicographer at CUP working on their learner's dictionaries. After a while, I went freelance working on dictionaries for all the big ELT publishers. I started branching out into doing bits and pieces on other ELT materials and when CUP asked me to do the corpus research for their *Common Mistakes* series, I asked if they'd got authors for all the levels and soon found myself with my first two publications (for CPE and IELTS) which have since been translated into several languages and one of which is now into its second edition.

Over more than two decades of freelancing, I've worked on all kinds of projects; dictionaries and reference books, self-study materials, coursebooks for children and adults, exams and digital content. I also went back to the classroom, teaching for 10 years on Bristol University's EAP courses. That led me into work on EAP materials including co-authoring an EAP coursebook (*Oxford EAP*), two academic vocabulary practice books (*Oxford Academic Vocabulary Practice*) and of course, my ELT T2W title!

A few years ago, I rather lost my mojo and became disillusioned with ELT publishing. I toyed with a career change and embarked on an MA in Forensic Linguistics which was fascinating, but ultimately didn't work out as a career option. So, I came back to ELT and decided to refocus on the things I enjoy most. I realized my first love was still vocabulary and corpus research, and I've since gone on to co-author *ETpedia Vocabulary,* written a position paper on the revised *Oxford 3000*™ word list and carried out corpus research for both coursebooks

and reference titles, including some fascinating work on language change for Collins COBUILD.

Here's **Sue Leather's** story. Sue is the author of our title *How To Write Graded Readers*.

"Well, like many ELT writers, I started off writing my own materials as a teacher, and then trainer. At the same time, I wrote articles for magazines like Practical English Teacher, Modern English Teacher and English Teaching Professional. Then in 1989, I wrote my first book. It was a reader for the Oxford Bookworms series, called *Desert, Mountain, Sea*. It was a retelling of three stories of adventurous women, which I pitched to the publishers myself. That book is still in print, and continues to sell well. Around that time I also co-wrote a methodology book called *Safety and Challenge for DELTA* and another reader for Heinemann - this time an original.

When I went freelance in 1995, I got my 'big break'. I happened to live near Philip Prowse, who was planning a new original readers series for Cambridge University Press. He had read *Desert, Mountain, Sea* and liked it. Would I be interested in joining a small team of writers who would each write an original story to pilot? Of course I said yes! Luckily, I had a story I wanted to tell. I wrote *Death in the Dojo*, and it was published in 1999. From then on, I didn't look back, as they say. I wrote about nine or ten original readers for CUP, one of which - *Dead Cold* - won the Extensive Reading Foundation award. Then in 2006, I was approached by Rob Waring to work with his team on a new series of original fiction for learners for Heinle/Cengage Learning - Page Turners. I have written a number of books for the series, as well as becoming Joint Series Editor. That has been wonderful as I've improved my knowledge of writing, but also of story-writing and development editing other writers.

So I suppose you could say that one thing led to another!"

Katherine Stannett talks about her move from inside a publishing house to becoming one of its authors.

"I spent six years working in-house for two big EFL publishing companies as an editor. I enjoyed my work, but as I began to move up the career ladder, I started to feel that I was losing touch with the stuff that I really enjoyed doing - working with texts, looking at the small details, thinking about how activities, games and songs would work in the classroom. Becoming freelance in 1998 was a liberation - no more looking at contracts and royalty agreements, no more sitting in on endless meetings, and a return to working with books at a textual level. It wasn't long, though, before some over-enthusiastic editing led to rewriting, which in turn led to writing material from scratch! I started writing supplementary material: songs, tests and DVD workbooks to begin with, then a couple of teachers' books. There followed a few years of combining both jobs - writing and editing - and then my big writing break came when I joined with Colin Granger to write levels 3-5 of the Macmillan course *HotSpot*. I was very lucky to have the opportunity to work with and learn from such an experienced author. I now spend 70% of my time writing, but like to keep up the editorial work as well."

Lots of useful tips here from **John Hughes**, author of our title *How To Write Audio And Video Scripts*. From journals to Business English, to *Life*.

"I started out as an ELT author simply by preferring to write my own classroom materials than using those in other people's books. I also taught a lot of business English and ESP which taught me how to take authentic documents from the students' jobs and turn them into useable classroom material. The next step in my 'apprenticeship' was to write a lot of articles and materials for journals such as *English Teaching Professional* and *The Guardian Weekly* newspaper. I didn't earn much money but seeing work in print is motivating and working with an editor is a huge learning curve. As a result of my work appearing in journals, mainstream publishers approached me with small writing projects such as resources for websites or photocopiables for the back of teacher's books. This was a great introduction to the world of ELT publishing and taught me how to write for deadlines, and write for the widest range of teaching contexts. This stage in a writer's development is often the crunch moment because it's one thing to write materials that you like using but it's something else to be able to write to order. As a result it's also sometimes the point at which people decide that being a professional ELT writer isn't for them. Having written teacher's books, I moved to workbooks and finally onto writing student books. Now I've been author and co-author on well over twenty titles as well as writing additional and online materials. Once you take this step into writing you also realise that being an freelance ELT author doesn't stop with writing. It means you need to acquire the skills of running yourself like a business, so agreeing contracts, doing your accounts, doing promotional work for publishers and keeping yourself up-to-date with the world of ELT. It's a full-time job with a lot of overtime!"

Philip Kerr, author of our title *How To Write Vocabulary Presentations And Practice* and *Straightforward* (Macmillan) among other titles, reminds us that there are many ways of getting involved with publishers before becoming an author.

"I'd always enjoyed producing my own materials, and when I started teaching I had little choice as the only resource I had was the coursebook (*Practice and Progress*). Later I started giving presentations at conferences, writing short articles for teachers' magazines, and so on. Before too long, I was approached by publishers who asked me to pilot materials and write readers' reports. This seemed to go well and I was then asked if I would like to start producing materials myself. One thing led to another ... I never actually wanted to be a professional writer of teaching materials: it just sort of happened!"

Pete Sharma tells us how he wrote Summertown Publishing's first book ...

"I first became a writer by accident. As a language teacher, I simply wanted a book on CD-ROM, but such a book didn't exist. So, I offered to write one, and wrote a proposal, but established ELT publishers turned me down. A book on technology would take too long from conception to print. It had to "refer to technologies not yet invented", one rejection letter said! What a priceless sentence - I'm still trying to work that one out. I said to Louis Garnade, owner of the then-Oxford English Book Centre: "I wanna write a book." He replied:

"I wanna start a publishing company." So he started Summertown Publishing and I wrote their first book! It was a wonderful reply and it changed my life forever. Thanks, Louis."

Ceri Jones tells us her story of persistence paying off as a new writer ...

"When I was teaching in Italy in the early 1990s a friend and I spotted a gap in the market that we thought we could fill - for an integrated skills resource book. We got in touch with an editor we'd met at a local conference and she talked us through the basic steps for writing a sample. We set aside a couple of days to do research and write our first few lessons. Tania - my co-writer - did the illustrations, we wrote the rationale and sent our proposal off to the big 8 as they were at the time. Over the next nine months we ticked off the rejections one by one. When we'd more or less given up all hope, we received a letter from OUP. It seemed like our proposal had finally managed to land on the right desk at the right time. They liked the basic idea but needed us to rewrite the material to fit the brief for a speaking skills book to supplement the *Headway* series (*Talking in Pairs*). That first writing project was great fun. We wrote the text on simple word processors, literally cutting and pasting the pages by hand with scissors and glue, and sent them off by snail mail (allowing at least ten days for delivery). Fifteen years later we were still writing together on the new edition of *Inside Out Advanced*, this time on PCs, in different countries, by email and on the internet. Materials writing has changed so much in the last fifteen years!"

Paul Dummett is the author of our title *How To Write Critical Thinking Activities* and a number of ELT business books and the Upper Intermediate level of *Life* (National Geographic Learning). It's his turn to tell us how he got into writing …

"Ever since doing my CELTA, I have always liked to write my own material and was generally loath to rely on others' course books, which is rather ironic, because I now rely on others using mine! My DoS used to say 'There's no need to re-invent the wheel', but actually I think it is necessary, if you have an enquiring mind and want to keep your teaching fresh. Also by doing that, now and then you come across an idea that's a real winner – a bit like in sport, when you hit a particularly sweet shot and it all seems worth it. If you're someone who has a good eye for a stimulating text or listening passage, that's an excellent place to start. The joy for me in writing is still in the research and seeking out source material that is interesting and generative. I first got into publishing because Heinemann ELT asked a colleague, Colin Benn, and me to review a low-level business book proposal. We thought it was poor and so they said 'Do you think you can do any better?' ... and we did!"

It's **Jonathan Bygrave's** turn to tell us how he got into writing and offers some useful tips for teachers looking to get involved with publishers.

"Like many teachers I was a dab hand at creating worksheets for my students. I found it satisfying to create them, rewarding when they worked well in class and irritating when they flopped. I clearly remember one student asking me never to use one of my worksheets again. Then, sometime in the late 1990s, a teacher I was working with passed on a letter he

had received inviting him to submit a sample for a book. He wasn't interested but thought I might be. The publisher was based abroad. I duly did the sample and was offered the contract - a £3,000 advance and a 6% royalty. I worked hard on the book for quite a few months and once it was written and published I never heard from the publisher again, although I did get the advance. The moral here is (1) you won't get rich off advances and (2) if you're working for a small independent publisher who is based abroad, keep a note of their address.

Sometime later I saw an ad in the *Guardian* looking for web editors to work on the new Pearson (Pearson Longman as it was then) websites. I applied, offering my book as proof of my publishing acumen and a website domain name I had bought but done nothing with as proof of my technological know-how. The weekend before the interview I read a book on HTML coding. Most of it went over my head but remarkably they gave me the job. Then the dot.com bust came and I moved across to book publishing. At the same time and somewhat unusually, I got an opportunity to write something for Pearson in my free-time – some workbooks to go with a secondary level course. I have had several very lucky breaks in my career but that was one of the biggest.

In total I spent five happy years working for Pearson, learning about the publishing process, observing and talking to teachers all over the world and learning what I was and wasn't capable of. If you work for a publishing company you need to be very good at multi-tasking. I wasn't. Schedules drove me crazy, budgets were unpredictable and checking proofs required an eye for detail that I didn't have. I found that I just wanted to focus on the material itself. I decided to take heed of the signs and gracefully resign. The workbooks I had written made that possible, as did the support of the people I had worked with. What also helped was that I didn't have children at the time and the fact that I was unlikely to earn much money for the foreseeable future bothered me less than it would do now. So morals three and four are: take opportunities when they arise and get used to the idea of writing in your free time. It's possible that you will spend two or more years working on a project which doesn't sell well and the advances won't keep you going for long (see moral 1). There is a reliable route into writing. It involves contacting all the major publishing houses and offering to write reports on material that is being developed. If you do write a report, give an honest opinion of the material and if you identify problems, suggest ways the material can be improved. Then ask for assignments to write photocopiable material, online exercises, etc. Perhaps send some samples but don't write a whole book – publishers have a global view and they know what kind of material they want. It also helps enormously if you are willing to present material at conferences and other events. From there, with the contacts you develop and persistence, it's possible to make a career out of writing, just so long as you aren't sensitive to critical feedback."

Here's **Lindsay Clandfield's** (author of our title *How To Plan A Book*) story about getting involved with writing...

"Ever since I started teaching I was writing my own materials to use in class and share with colleagues. But the first thing I ever wrote that was properly published was for a magazine called *It's for Teachers*. It was a series of activities on the UN Year of the Refugee. Very

shortly after that I got my first break with a big publisher through onestopenglish. This was in 2001. I wrote into the Lesson Share competition and won. I wrote in again, and won again. This continued until I was given a regular spot, writing the American-English vocabulary lessons and then the Speaking lessons.

Writing for onestopenglish eventually led to other things with Macmillan. I wrote some resource material for courses in Latin America, and then some material for the course *Inside Out*. I also got another big break writing resource material for a course with Oxford University Press, *New English File*.

Once you've started writing, and publishers know you and trust your work, there will often be more stuff out there. I was lucky enough to move on from resource material to writing a level of a big course with Macmillan (*Straightforward*). And then after that came the really big break, being the lead author on my own course *Global* (again, with Macmillan).

During this time of materials writing I also got involved with writing books especially for teachers with Delta Publishing. This kind of project is often more fun to do in a team, I found. I wrote two books for teachers with Delta over a period of five years.

The route I took to becoming a full time writer was the long one. I started off small, and just kept going. I think it's very unlikely for anyone to jump right in at the deep end (writing your own course) and I wouldn't recommend it anyway. It took me more than ten years to get where I am now, and I feel I wouldn't be here if I hadn't put in the regular work all that time."

Sarah Jane Lewis tells us that her path into the ELT world was perhaps 'not your conventional route' …

"In 2008, fresh out of university and bitten by the book bug, my dream was to one day work in publishing. I began by doing a series of internships at literary agencies and in editorial departments of commercial publishers around London, including at the home of Harry Potter, Bloomsbury Publishing. I was immediately captivated by the whole process of taking a book from initial idea to final product, and my love of editing began. Of course, as with any good book, there is rarely a happy start. Publishing is notoriously difficult to break in to. That, coupled with having graduated into one of the largest global financial crises in modern history, saw me searching for jobs for months with no luck AT ALL. So, I decided to go back to the drawing board. With a love of languages and having spent an enjoyable part of my degree studying linguistics, I decided to apply for a TEFL course. Not knowing much at the time, I sought advice from my former lecturer who gave me some wonderfully encouraging and career-defining advice. This is when I was first introduced to the CELTA. I enrolled on a course at International House London and spent four of the most challenging weeks of my life! A three-year degree has nothing on the pressures of the CELTA. It was literally plan, teach, eat, plan, maybe sleep, repeat. I soon realised that I loved explaining language. One particular moment stuck with me. While discussing possible careers, my teacher suggested 'you could write the books'. Although I didn't quite know how that was even possible yet, it

struck a chord with me and so I set out to do exactly that — write the books. It was the catalyst that launched me into my ELT publishing career.

My break came when I found a job as an editorial assistant at a small ELT publishing office in Greece and I moved lock, stock and barrel to Athens — where I've been ever since. After spending eight months learning the fundamentals of ELT publishing, I got the opportunity to do some small supplementary writing work for Pearson Longman Hellas. I jumped at the chance to be more creative and pursue my passion for writing, and so my freelancing journey began.

Over my 12 years of freelancing and running my publishing services business, I've had the privilege to work with all the leading ELT publishers as well as many smaller independent ones. I've met many wonderful ELT teams and professionals who have helped guide and support me. Many of them have taken me under their wing and taught me all there is to know about the ELT publishing industry. With each project, I would learn a new area of the job and take those skills on to the next. Continuously compounding my knowledge, practising and refining my skills. I always say that the best way to become a writer is to simply write and write often. That combined with my natural curiosity, appetite to read absolutely any and all ELT teaching/editing/writing resource books going, and ongoing publishing and editorial training, has helped me build the successful career that I have today.

I started out writing exam preparation material and progress tests to accompany student books. One of my first major projects was authoring all the tests for the teacher's resource package on the Achievers series for Richmond Santillana. From there, I got the chance to do bits of supplementary writing and editing on many exciting series, including OUP's *Everybody Up* and *Oxford Discover*, and it snowballed from there. Over the years, I have worked on no fewer than 500 different individual projects, from primary to secondary, adults and exam, student books, workbooks, teacher books, print, digital and online. As well as materials writer, I've also worked as development, content, copy and proof editor, editing across many titles, including *Mindset for IELTS*, *Unlock*, *Evolve*, *Super Minds* (CUP); *Optimise* (Macmillan); *Upper Secondary Plus Study Skills* (British Council); *Time Zones*, *Reading Explorer*, *Pathways*, *Look*, *Life* (NGL).

Among some of my proudest achievements include being part of authoring teams on leading series. My most notable titles include my Collins Peapod Readers, two Student's Books for OUP's *Oxford Skills World* series, two exam preparation books for the A2 Cambridge English exam with Collins, two teacher books for Macmillan's *Share It!* series, and two test books for Pearson's *English Code* series.

This coming year sees me busier than ever as I continue writing on OUP's new flagship series, *Beehive*, and I begin another editing project with CUP. I'm also planning to give back to the ELT community and help the next generation of publishing hopefuls by launching my own YouTube channel as well as an ELT freelancer newsletter. So, watch this space!

My advice to anyone starting out would be to start small and find your own niche. Set yourself apart from everyone else, create a website to showcase your talents and then

promote yourself across social media. Stay curious, build knowledge in your area and keep connected to the wider ELT community. We're a friendly bunch!"

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https://www.lmpublishingservices.com/

Here's **Lewis Lansford's** (author of our title *How To Write And Deliver Talks*) story about getting involved with writing ...

"After getting my MA in TESOL in the late 80s, I taught for several terms at the Center for English as a Second Language at the University of Arizona. Like most teachers, I developed worksheets and activities to supplement coursebooks – the early stirrings of a writing career. After that I took a job as a language trainer at Sumitomo Electric Industries in Osaka, Japan, working with engineers and business people. It was written into the contract that I would develop new courses and materials for the company, and I found that I really enjoyed that aspect of the job – especially the engineering topics and technical English. After two years at Sumitomo in the mid '90s, I was recruited by Longman Asia ELT in Hong Kong to develop and edit materials for the Asia market. I moved to the UK in the late 90s and began work as a freelance ELT project manager with Pearson, Macmillan, OUP and a couple of other publishers and schools. That role offered the opportunity to do bits of writing that were needed to fill gaps in the projects I was managing: review units and worksheets at first, then entire workbooks. Through the years, the incidental writing increased, and by 2009 I had become a full-time ELT materials writer with a wide network of publishing contacts who came to me with projects – meaning that it's not always the case that writers write books and then try to find a publisher. My early book projects were technical English for Oxford University Press: *English for Cabin Crew*, *English for Oil and Gas*, *English for Engineering*. From there I branched out into academic English with *Unlock* for CUP, and then to full coursebooks with National Geographic Learning, starting with the *Keynote* series and moving on to the *Perspectives* series. Looking back, it appears a coherent career trajectory, but as it was unfolding, I was really only ever focused on the next opportunity. I've been lucky to have found a job I love that has slowly evolved as I've stuck with it."

And **Ros Wright** (author of our title *How To Write ESP Materials* and co-author of *How To Write Teacher's Books*) tells us how her determination and interest in ESP led to her writing a prize-winner …

"I have to admit to being a bit of a coursebook fanatic. Aside from using them in class, I've also selected coursebooks, adapted and evaluated them, studied them and edited them. These days, I write and promote my own coursebooks, review other peoples and, in this Dogme era of materials-lite teaching, even find myself defending them.

In 2003, studying for an MA in ELT Materials Development, I had the good fortune to work with the 'subversive' Brian Tomlinson, whose passion was turning ELT coursebook design on its head and who was, without doubt, ahead of his time. As students, we berated the rather

rose-tinted view of the global coursebook, while our tutors warned us of the economic perils of venturing too far into the proverbial niche market.

A short spate as Assistant ESP Editor provided me with invaluable insight into the world of the commercial publisher. Suddenly, the global nature of the coursebook became all too apparent. In 2005 coursebooks with real purpose were yet to hit the market in any big way and I found myself part of a very small but utterly determined team, firmly convinced that the future was bright and almost definitely 'ESP'!

My first coursebook *Good Practice: Communication Skills in English for the Medical Practitioner*, written with Marie McCullagh, arrived on the shelves in 2008 and although, like most ESP materials, is no money spinner, did allow me to live out my coursebook fantasy. Features included authentic texts, real-world tasks, spoken as opposed to written grammar, and even a DVD featuring real clinicians and unscripted dialogue. The ESP icing on the cake came in the form of an endorsement from Jonathan Silverman, renowned expert in the field of medical communications.

Good Practice was shortlisted for the 2008 British Council Award for Innovation and then went on to win the inaugural BESIG-David Riley Award for Innovation in ESP in the same year. More importantly, it also led to further projects, particularly in Medical English: a course in EAP for medical students, a series of coursebooks for nurses, and there is hopefully more on the way.

Comparing my career path with some of my more illustrious peers, I feel fortunate indeed. There was a certain amount of 'being in the right place at the right time'. Being part of the 'ESP Revolution' in the mid-noughties was definitely a major contributing factor. However, collaborating with some of the most forward-thinking editors in ESP, notably Claire Sheridan and Anna Cowper, as well as very like-minded co-authors, has also played a significant role in enhancing my career. It remains to be seen which major publisher agrees to indulge my next coursebook fantasy: developing enhanced patient skills in English through TV medical drama. *Holby City* anyone?"

What has surprised you about how the publishing industry works?

Lindsay Clandfield (author of our title *How To Plan A Book*) replied …

“I never realised the full economics of it before really. Like how much the book distributor or book seller gets from the book (sometimes 40% of the cover price). Or how hard it is to get permissions to use things like pictures, songs, video clips in published material. I also never realised how much work publishers devote to researching new books and getting feedback on existing ones. They often get a bad name in the teaching profession, and they don't always get it right but the publishers do an awful lot of work on the materials we all use.”

What's the most valuable lesson you've learnt over your writing career?

Katherine Stannett (author of Macmillan Education's *Hot Spot* and other titles) answers the question and includes some great tips …

"Lots of valuable lessons! Including:
Negative feedback can be painful but it's also valuable. Try to respond to it constructively.
Read everything you can. Any interesting article, website, piece of news - take a copy (incl. details of source) and file it.
When you're trying to rewrite an article or a piece of information, read it through several times, then put it away and write without referring to it. Go back later and check your facts. It's a good way of ensuring that your writing is original and different.”

John Hughes (author of our title *How To Write Audio And Video Scripts* and several titles for National Geographic Learning

“I sent my first book proposal to Jimmy Hill at (what was then) Language Teaching Publications. I received a rejection letter but unlike most publisher rejection letters his was very long and detailed. He explained why they couldn’t publish the book and he gave me detailed feedback. I remember he said: "A good idea is not always a book." In other words, we may have an activity or something that works well in class but it doesn’t necessarily transfer into the format for publishing.”

How do your students influence your materials?

Hugh Dellar replies …

“Massively. I'm lucky - and possibly rare - in that I'm very much first and foremost still a classroom practitioner. I've loved teaching ever since I first started, and still wake up excited at the prospect of going into my classes. I've taught almost everything I've written that's

ever ended up being published and have been able to tweak, adapt and sometimes even totally scrap as a result of seeing how things go in class. I've also come to understand the real nature of the problems students have when learning, what they find easy and what's hard, what they enjoy doing in class and what they don't, what works well and what doesn't and so on, so there's been a constant loop between my writing and teaching, yes.'

What book or material you've written are you most proud of and why?

Evan Frendo (author of our title *How To Write Corporate Training Materials*) replies…

"Probably *How Io Teach Business English* (Pearson, 2005). It is the only book I have written specifically for teachers, and it is on the reading list for lots of business English teacher training programmes."

Roy Norris (author of our title *How To Write Exam Preparation Materials*)

"*Ready for FCE* will always be the book I hold most affection for. It was my first, and the learning curve was very steep – there was no ELT Teacher 2 Writer in 1999. Along with teaching, I was working twelve hours or more each day for seven days a week. My wife was – and still is – extremely supportive, and we didn't have any children then. I was just a work machine for 18 months, writing the Student's Book and the Workbook on my own, piloting the material at International House, Madrid, and also finding time to write material for the Teacher's Book. I couldn't and wouldn't take on so much now, but when you're starting out, you pull out all the stops. With new editions I'm able to put right some of those parts of the book that lacked the benefit of experience, but when I do these revisions, I'm still pleasantly surprised by some of the material I was producing then, despite the inexperience and the pressures."

Lindsay Clandfield (author of our title *How To Plan A Book*) replied …
"That would have to be *Global* [published by Macmillan Education]. It has been a huge ambitious project and it nearly wiped me out but I'm so happy with the result. I'm proud because the final result is what we (I and the other authors) wanted for the course, and it all really came together. Being a lead author on a six level course sold all over the world is a great honor. I still can't believe it's finished (well, the first edition at least)."