

16.

Cookbooks and Texts

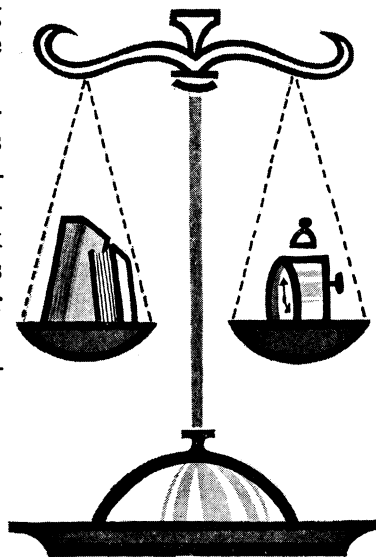
How to weigh
the many problems

CONSIDERING the long lists of cookbooks currently on the market and the new ones constantly pouring in from publishers' presses, it might seem that to write another cookbook would be to take a great big gamble. And it is!

But, you say, some persons who write cookbooks do win against all the odds, do make money and gain prestige. That, too, is true.

Before you jump to conclusions, however, analyze the situation. Perhaps that new, best-selling book is backed (directly or indirectly) by some company willing to invest heavily in promoting it. Perhaps the author has hit upon a really new subject that would have wide appeal. Perhaps hers will be a "personality" approach — if she is a national figure in fiction or in some other field. Perhaps she is equipped to publicize her book through a chain of restaurants or cooking schools or lectures. There is usually some reason (other than its containing reliable, well-written recipes) that makes a new cookbook an outstanding success.

*All factors should be
carefully weighed before
you consider writing
any book!*



You have, shall we say, realized all this, and still you are convinced that your cookbook idea will be a winner. You are certain that you have enough unique material to make an interesting book. What do you do first?

First step is to make a study of books on the market. Look over the assortment of cookbooks in all of the book stores and book departments in your community. Study titles, tables of contents, and layout. Talk with men and women who sell books. Talk with librarians. Study catalogs or lists from various cookbook publishers.

As you see and study that vast accumulation of books, and lists of books, ask yourself the next question: "Does my idea duplicate too many other cookbooks on the market?"

If it doesn't, and if you still feel your idea is a new and right one, ask yourself that biggest question of all: "Can I afford to gamble 6 to 12 months of writing time, plus costs of recipe testing, art work, typing, etc., against the possible royalties I may receive from sales?" Figure it out. How many books would you have to sell, at somewhere around 30 to 50 cents royalty on each book, to repay that investment and pay a profit? Can you sensibly hope to sell that many books?

These questions and comments are not intended to discourage you. They are meant to help you recognize facts and possibilities, and make up your mind on the basis of knowledge rather than mere hope.

Having faced all of these, you may wish to pursue the project further. Now what?

At this stage in the proceedings, you'd better begin querying book publishers. You have been studying cookbooks everywhere, jotting down addresses of publishing companies, writing them for descriptive brochures on the cookbooks they put out. You check through those titles to see that your idea has not already been covered thor-

Private Printing

Should you have a cookbook privately printed? There is no complete answer to that question. If you do contemplate such a step, better make it a small book that can be sold at a sensible price. Know in advance exactly what the book is going to cost to produce and how you are going to sell and distribute it. A book done by a group can be a collection of miscellaneous recipes; one done by an individual should, ordinarily, be swung around some one subject, as "Canapes and Appetizers."

oughly. Or, if your idea is an adaptation of a more or less standard subject, such as quantity cookery, you will cross off every publisher who already has a relatively new book on the subject. If he already has a quantity cookbook, he is not likely to want to bring out another one to compete with the first.

Pick a publisher whose books appeal to you as being well done: well edited, and typographically and artistically inviting. Write that publisher — and at this time only that one publisher — the best letter you can work out. Tell him enough about your idea so that he can judge whether his company would care to go into the matter further. Give him your table of contents, tell him whom your book is aimed for — specifically — and what's distinctive about it. Tell him about yourself, too — your experience, your previously published books or articles, etc. — so he can judge whether you are enough of a writer, enough of an authority to write on your chosen subject.

You may be sure your letter is telling him a great deal more about yourself than you know. It tells him whether your mind is clear and sharp, or foggy or lazy. It tells him whether you are thinking of the book from the publisher's standpoint of *selling* and the reader's standpoint of *buying*, or merely from your own personal wish to see a book with your name on bookstore shelves.

If that particular publisher says he is not interested, try another, and so on — one at a time in order of your preference. If no publisher wants it, you may feel pretty sure it is considered a poor risk from the sales standpoint. You'd better forget the whole thing and turn to something else without feeling too much disappointment. But file your material away carefully. You are almost certain to find a use for it later!

If a publisher does express interest, he will tell you what he wants next from you. It probably will

Group Effort

Is your church or club group planning to put out a cookbook? If so, you must have an editor in charge, plus an editorial staff. There must be a production person to follow through; a financial committee to check costs and see to it that the book is kept within that budget; a sales committee to sell the book; and a publicity person to get the book before the general public.

TIMING

Planning to do a cookbook? Better allow 6 to 12 months for writing it; another 2 or 3 months for ironing out details with the publisher, and perhaps up to a year for manufacturing the book and launching it.

TITLE CHECK

Think twice before you decide on a cookbook title that does not contain one of these three words: *cook*, *cooking*, or *recipes*. If you wish to check on whether your proposed title has been used previously look in the *Cumulative Book Index and Books in Print*, drawn from the *Publishers' Trade List Annual*, in your library or large book store or book department. Also check *Publishers' Weekly* for titles of books just off the press or about to be published.

THE PUBLISHER

There's a difference between publishing and printing. A publisher is one who has the organization to help with editing the manuscript and handle details of planning and production, as well as the machinery not only to manufacture books, but to promote, distribute, and sell them to dealers. He usually takes his own risk financially, pays a royalty on books sold. A printer almost never assumes such responsibility. He merely follows orders.

be a complete outline with as big a sample of the manuscript as you can provide. Unless you're already an established "name," the samples are going to be the basis for decision, rather than merely the idea.

To work up your outline and sample chapters, you must now start on that big task of seriously organizing your material.

If you think of a cookbook as a *collection of booklets*, you will find it easier to begin the job of planning the book and organizing your material. Think of each chapter as a booklet devoted to just one phase or segment of the general subject.

Set up an assortment of folders, one for each of the proposed chapters. Distribute your collected recipes among them. As you work, you will weed out some that seem too commonplace, others that do not quite seem to belong in the pattern that is forming more clearly in your mind. You will think of other recipes that the book seems to need. You will have ideas for dishes that you could work out to make those chapters more unique, interesting, and valuable to the readers. All this comes to mind while you are thoughtfully sorting and distributing recipes, rather than merely refileing them in an unthinking, routine way.

From here on it is a matter of how well you can organize that outline, how well you can write. Once you get this material to the publisher, the decision rests with him. A word of advice is in order here: take plenty of time to work out that outline and sample. They must be right before you let them go.

If and when the idea is really accepted, a contract will be forwarded to you to study and sign. Then there will be more conferences and more correspondence to iron out various problems and to shape and dramatize the book the way that

seems best to both. Compromises will be necessary. New ideas will be injected, to be rejected or adopted or adapted.

Eventually you will have a definite mental picture of the book to work toward. You will know the number of pages, and other necessary details. You will know the date when the manuscript must be in the publisher's hands and the scheduled publication date. You will have worked out a fairly definite outline for the arrangement of chapters and of material within each chapter. Now you are ready to produce.

Get off to a good start. Begin with something especially appetizing and appealing, rather than with page after page of glossaries, definitions of cookery terms, tables of vitamins and minerals, prosy and obvious advice about how to plan meals or equip kitchens. No one knows how many possible sales are discouraged by dull beginnings, but door-to-door book salesmen say that the appearance of the opening pages of a book determines whether they make a quick sale or no sale at all. Salesmen in book departments say the same thing!

In writing, get freshness and originality in your wording. But be wary of labored cuteness as you are wary of using slang or hackneyed phrases. Don't work too consciously to develop a style of writing. Instead, work for simple clearness and unaffected freshness. The less obtrusive, less "put on" a style is, the better it is. Write to a person, and you are not likely to go wrong, so far as style is concerned. Above all, don't write in a hurried way, even though you are working against a deadline.

Send your manuscript to the publisher in the best possible shape but be prepared to work on it further, as his editors come up with good ideas. Keep a carbon copy so you can exchange thoughts and answer questions. Your book is on its way!

WHAT ABOUT COPYRIGHTS?

Cookbooks are frequently copyrighted in the author's name. Most other books are copyrighted by the publisher. A copyright in the United States endures for 28 years, may then be renewed for another 28 years. The publisher takes care of having the book copyrighted. If you want to have a privately printed book copyrighted, get Application Form A from the Register of Copyrights, Library of Congress, Washington 25, D.C. Free.

"Copyright Law of the U.S.A." may be purchased for 15 cents from the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.

ROYALTIES

Most contracts call for starting payments to the author of any book at 10 per cent of the retail price, with arrangements for a slightly higher rate after a certain sales volume has been reached.

Other Types of Home Economics Books

TO PREPARE AN INDEX

1. Go through page proofs of books carefully, underlining in blue pencil all words to be indexed. Underline sub-entries in red pencil. Make marginal notes of items to be cross-indexed. This done, you are ready to figure the general plan of the index.
2. Go through proofs again, this time making a card for each underlined word and each item to be cross-indexed. (Cards 3x5 inches are a good size to handle.) Be accurate in making up these cards; note page numbers carefully.
3. Arrange cards alphabetically, using a box that allows room for re-arranging.
4. Using a well-indexed book as a guide, go through the cards; consolidate the entries, then type them, following the style decided upon.
5. Check carbon copy of index against marked-up page-proofs.

CHEERFUL NOTE

Not all buyers of cookbooks are users of them. Some are collectors who buy every interesting new cookbook or every one along a certain line. Happily, this group helps to swell sales — and royalties!

These rules of effective writing apply also to writing in other home economics fields: sewing, child development, home decorating, arts and crafts, gardening, and other types of home how-to-do-its. That is, the textbook, like the cookbook, may be considered a collection of booklets or lessons, each a unit in itself, yet a part of the overall subject. The textbook, however, more frequently is written to order, because a publisher has seen a need. But an author may have sensed this need and written on her own initiative to fill what to her is a void.

This chapter in this book dealing with writing for homemakers is not the place to go into complete detail on writing the home economics text. But if you are working on a textbook, give earnest thought to the following questions. Prospective publishers will be considering these points as they examine your manuscript in light of a need and the filling of a need:

1. *For whom is the book intended?* Write for one person — preferably a real person whom you know — rather than for “a broad, general audience.” Write for a definite *one* and your publisher may reach thousands. But write for thousands and you may be so indefinite as not to *reach* one.
2. *Does it fit the needs of great numbers of teachers in reaching students?* Keep point No. 1 in mind here — from the teacher’s standpoint. The student is the one to be reached, of course, but it must be done through the teacher.
3. *Does this book really teach?* A number of textbooks now in use are made up of discussions about subject matter rather than of lessons to be learned and applied.

4. *Does it recognize current teaching methods?*

Great changes are being wrought in education. The textbook writer must be in step with the times — certainly not behind. Right now the trend is toward choosing simple material and presenting it simply. "Education for today's living" is the usual keynote of freshest, newest books on homemaking — foods, textiles, and the like.

Educators are recognizing that the student does not need to learn everything that the teacher knows. Thus texts and reference books now tend to emphasize the pertinent facts and procedures a student needs to know, and to show her how to put her new knowledge into everyday practice.

There is perhaps less telling the student to act in a certain way, more setting up of typical homemaking problems and coaching the student how to search out or reason out the best answers. At least that is one aim.

5. *Is the style of writing fresh and up-to-date?*

Is it informal yet dignified? Is it clear cut? Is there variety in sentence length, with a minimum of long, involved sentences? Are the words simple and meaningful, rather than empty syllables?

6. *Will this book be of permanent value to the reader?* Will she want to keep it and refer to it because it offers something she will not find elsewhere — at least in so usable a fashion?

Once you feel reasonably certain that the text you visualize does live up to these requirements, you are ready to approach a textbook publisher by letter. He will probably proceed much as the publisher of cookbooks proceeds. From then on it is a matter of working out details with him, provided he is interested in what you have to offer.

One other thing might be added here. If you

WHAT ABOUT FICTIONIZED COOKBOOKS?

Some successful cookbooks for children and some for adults have been written in story form. Generally speaking, however, the direct, non-fictionized approach is preferred by publishers and by cookbook buyers.

HOW TO REVIEW A COOKBOOK

Along with giving a word picture of the book and what is in it, tell why it will appeal to certain types of readers. Never base your opinion of it on your own personal likes and dislikes. If you don't care for it, why mention it at all? Adverse comment, particularly when written in smarty vein, does no one any good.

LOOKING AHEAD TO REVISION

Many cookbooks and most textbooks need to be revised from time to time. It's a good idea for the author to keep a revision copy at hand, writing in marginal notes or changes or additions to be made when a revised edition is brought out.

"Some cook books are primarily reading cook-books, others are cooking cookbooks. Some, happily, are both."

"There are three things a cookbook needs if it is to sell: (1) fresh point of view; (2) personality; (3) steady promotion."

"We have a standard by which we judge cook-books. Do the recipes make us hungry and impatient to start experimenting? If they don't, we tend to suspect the book."

TRENDS IN TEXTBOOKS

Current practice is to put home economics facts and procedures into simple home language instead of the stilted, impersonal scientese so long considered the correct way to write a textbook.

The trend, too, is toward writing textbooks that tie in with visual aid programs (films, slides, and the like); or vice versa, toward developing visual aids that tie in with textbooks.

are seriously interested in doing some special text, make it a point to attend national and state home economics conventions and to study the textbooks on display at such conventions. Brief chats with the publishers' representatives in charge of such book displays frequently lead to serious discussions and, later, to contracts!

COMPARATIVE SIZES OF TYPE

This is a sample of 6 point type (solid). As you can see, type of this size is hard to read — especially in a line the length of this. It is sometimes used for captions — especially on a small page. But 8 point solid is preferable.

This is 8 point solid, set for comparison with the paragraph above to show the difference effected.

This is 8 point on a 9 point body. (In other words, there is a little "air" between the lines.) Although it is small, it works well in small blocks of copy.

This is 9 point type on a 10 point body. This, or 9 solid, is frequently used for recipes or leaflets.

This is 10 point solid in Baskerville face. It is easy to read and usually a better choice than 8 point or 9 point. In this particular type face, 10 point is satisfactory when set *solid*, as in this sample. Other type faces may need a point or two of space between lines for best results. Set solid, 10 point runs 7 lines per inch; 8 point solid gives 9 lines per inch; 6 point solid gives 12 lines per inch. Type faces in general are better with 1- or 2-point spacing, however.

This is 10 point Primer set solid, for comparison with the 10 point Baskerville solid above. Notice that the feeling here is not as "comfortable" as in the Baskerville lines because the face is bigger.

The pages of this book are set in 10 point Primer on 12-point body, giving 6 lines per inch. The face is one which is improved by some spacing, as shown here.