

**Publishing Culture:  
Commissioning Books in Australia,  
1970–2000**

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## Glossary

### Industry Terms

<b>acquisition</b>	acquiring a work, either through unsolicited manuscripts or other means, such as literary agents, and then developing that work for publication
<b>advance</b>	a sum of money paid to an author against future royalties due
<b>backlist</b>	titles published before the current publishing program for which there is continuing demand, and which are therefore kept in print
<b>bottom line</b>	the financial considerations to be invested in publication
<b>camera-ready</b>	finished typesetting and illustrative copy ready for reproduction. Also called camera-ready art or copy
<b>commissioning</b>	initiating a work by approaching a writer with an idea and shaping the idea for publication or taking an author's idea and working with them to develop the work for publication
<b>co-publish</b>	when two or more publishers publish the same content and cover the costs of their own book production and print runs
<b>copy editing</b>	editing the manuscript to correct errors and inconsistencies and to standardise style and expression; marking up manuscript for design and typesetting
<b>designer</b>	a person trained in graphic design, responsible for designing the covers, typography and page lay-out of a book
<b>editor</b>	the person who shapes the text into publishable form, responsible for the production of publications, working on schedule and within budget. May work in-house or out-of-house, shaping and developing the overall structure of a work
<b>freelancer</b>	independent contractor employed on an hourly or daily rate, or on a fee for each project, as copy editor, designer or other out-of-house member of the production team
<b>front list</b>	newly published books recently released which constitute the current publishing program
<b>imprint</b>	a section of a publishing company's list with its own identity, such as Penguin Books' Puffin imprint

<b>in-house</b>	using staff members, rather than freelancers or sub-contractors
<b>list</b>	the whole output of books from one publisher or of one section of a large publisher which might have, for example, a cookery list, a children's list, and so on
<b>literary agent</b>	the person who represents the writer to the publisher and brokers the terms of agreement on behalf of the author, with in-house senior editors and publishers
<b>manuscript</b>	the original copy for a book, prepared by the author and sent to the publisher for editing and production. Also called typescript or hard copy if printed from a disk
<b>mass market</b>	the general public rather than a specialised market
<b>mid-list</b>	the steady sellers in a publisher's list that often remain in print
<b>off-shore</b>	publishers often contract work overseas, particularly printing or colour separations
<b>out-of-house</b>	using freelancers or other independent contractors
<b>overheads</b>	the underlying costs involved in running a company or department regardless of productive activity — rent, electricity and salaries, for instance
<b>proofreading</b>	reading, checking and marking final page proofs
<b>publisher</b>	the person who develops a 'list' of publications which give the publishing company its own style and identity
<b>reader</b>	person who is sub-contracted by the publisher to read and assess a manuscript's potential for publication and provide the publisher with a reader's report and recommendations
<b>reprints</b>	a second or subsequent printing of a particular edition of a book, in which minimal corrections have been made. If there are substantial changes, the book will be produced as a new edition, rather than a reprint
<b>rights</b>	the permission to use an author's work in different ways, such as the right to sell it in foreign countries, to publish in magazines, to broadcast on radio or make into a film, and so on
<b>rough</b>	artist's or designer's preliminary sketch or layout
<b>slush pile</b>	unsolicited manuscripts received by publishers

<b>tie-in</b>	a book that is released to coincide with a television show or film and which features a reference to that film on its jacket and in its promotional material
<b>title</b>	a single book from the publisher's list
<b>trade books</b>	books that are sold to the public through bookshops and other retail outlets
<b>typesetting</b>	the assembly of the manuscript text into edited, typographically correct lines, now usually performed using computers and laser printers or by photographic means
<b>turnaround</b>	the amount of time it takes to produce and publish a book

### **Abbreviations**

<b>aka</b>	also known as
<b>email corr.</b>	email correspondence
<b>int.</b>	interview
<b>pers. comm.</b>	personal communication
<b>rrp</b>	recommended retail price

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## Abstract

This study primarily examines the cultural and commercial practices of editors and publishers who commission and acquire content in independent Australian publishing houses. My research spans a 30-year transitional period in book publishing from 1970 to 2000 — a period marked by rapid and unstable shifts in publishing culture, reflecting wider social, political, economic and technological change. In a global market economy, more than ever before, the acquisition of local content is critical in fostering original ideas and works by Australian authors.

A series of semi-structured interviews with editors and publishers provides a direct source of personal experience and professional industry-based knowledge. These narratives address and engage with individual and collective values, beliefs, assumptions and attitudes which reflect particular personalities and publishing styles. They also contribute to an understanding of the editors' and publishers' commissioning role, where knowledge and content are taken up and developed and publishing decisions are made. An analysis of editors' and publishers' responses further explores the diversity of commissioning and acquisitions environments in which they live and work. Publishing houses are profiled and works of fiction and non-fiction are identified and discussed in an attempt to unpack how and why they were commissioned and developed for publication, and to what social and cultural effect. The dynamics of organisational structure and publishing culture are explored by analysing general and specific publishing models. Editors and publishers discuss how publishing companies operate and offer insights into, and perceptions of, organisational structure and publishing culture and, importantly, how both impact on commissioning practice.

Issues of identity, representation and institutionalisation are identified as they relate to developments and trends within publishing and public culture, as a whole, and the ways in which they intersect. This nexus of culture and power is explored through the cultural production of Australian content, and in particular, in Chapters Five and Six, with the impact of second-wave feminism on Australian publishing culture and cross-currents in the production and publication of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works.

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## Industry Interviews

1. Sue Abbey, University of Queensland Press, Queensland.  
25 February 1999 and 11 October 1999.
2. Mandy Brett, IAD Press, Northern Territory.  
22 January 2001 and 5 February 2001.
3. Rachel Bin Salleh, Magabala Books, Western Australia.  
17 August 1999 and 18 October 1999.
4. Ray Coffey, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Western Australia.  
8 December 1998 and 1 October 1999.
5. Jane Covernton, Omnibus Books and Working Title Press, South Australia.  
25 October 1999 and 22 November 1999.
6. Sophie Cunningham, Allen & Unwin, New South Wales.  
14 December 1998 and 15 September 1999.
7. Josie Douglas, IAD Press, Northern Territory.  
21 June 1999.
8. Vern Field and Kirstin Schneider, Sybylla Feminist Press, Victoria.  
27 August 1999.
9. Sylvia Hale, Hale & Iremonger, New South Wales.  
15 December 1998 and 12 October 1999.
10. Susan Hawthorne, Penguin Books and Spinifex Press, Victoria.  
16 December 1998 and 28 September 1999.
11. Stephanie Holt, Sybylla Feminist Press, Victoria.  
17 December 1998 and 16 February 1999.
12. Laurin McKinnon, BlackWattle Press, New South Wales.  
1 March 1999.
13. Sally Milner, Greenhouse and Sisters Publishing, Victoria and  
Sally Milner Publishing, New South Wales.  
4 March 1999 and 28 February 2000.
14. Craig Munro, University of Queensland Press, Queensland.  
24 November 1998 and 30 September 1999.

15. Margaret Ruhfus, Aboriginal Studies Press, Australian Capital Territory and Magabala Books, Western Australia.  
7 October 1999 and 19 October 1999.
16. Jocelyne Scutt, Artemis Books, Victoria.  
16 February 1999 and 12 October 1999.
17. Bruce Sims, Penguin Books, Victoria, Magabala Books, Western Australia, ABC Books and Bruce Sims Books, Victoria.  
4 December 1998 and 22 September 1999.
18. Elizabeth Weiss, Allen & Unwin, New South Wales.  
10 December 1998 and 20 September 1999.
19. Jackie Yowell, Penguin Books, Victoria and Allen & Unwin/  
Silver Gum Press, Victoria.  
17 November 1998 and 12 October 1999.