



# The Forest for the Trees (Revised and Updated): An Editor's Advice to Writers

By Betsy Lerner

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Quickly established as an essential and enduring companion for aspiring writers when it was first published, Betsy Lerner's sharp, funny, and insightful guide has been meticulously updated and revised to address the dramatic changes that have reshaped the publishing industry in the decade since. From blank page to first glowing (or gutting) review, Betsy Lerner is a knowing and sympathetic coach who helps writers discover how they can be more productive in the creative process and how they can better their odds of not only getting published, but getting published well. This is an essential trove of advice for writers and an indispensable user's manual to both the inner life of the writer and the increasingly anxious place where art and commerce meet: the boardrooms and cubicles of the publishing house.

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### **Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #43913 in Books
- Brand: Riverhead Books
- Published on: 2010-10-05
- Released on: 2010-10-05
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.30" h x .80" w x 5.40" l, .57 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages



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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

One feels for Betsy Lerner's writers. Oh, sure, Lerner must be a fabulous agent. But too bad for them: In gaining her as an agent, they lost her as an editor. How rare and wonderful it must have been to have such an advocate, advisor, and, yes, admirer so firmly ensconced in publisher territory (at various times, Houghton Mifflin, Ballantine, Simon & Schuster, and Doubleday). In *The Forest for the Trees*, Lerner reflects on writing and publishing from an editor's point of view. There are so many books by writers and agents promising to disclose what editors really want; here, finally, is one straight from the source. Like all experienced editors, Lerner has seen writers at their best, and at their worst. "Like shrinks," she says, editors "have a privileged and exclusive view into a writer's psyche, from the ecstasy of acquisition to the agony of the remainder table."

To writers, particularly unpublished ones, editors can seem imposing figures determined to thwart their success. They won't take calls, they don't offer feedback--sometimes they don't respond to queries at all. Guess what: Editors don't lug home hundreds of pounds of manuscripts to read each year because they aren't looking for good writing. "An editor gets off," says Lerner, "on the thrill of discovering a new writer." Editors crave "succinct, well-written cover letters," inspiration that comes from within (as opposed to from the bestseller list), and "catchy, clearly targeted title[s]." They detest unsolicited phone calls, "query letters that sound as if they were penned by Crazy Eddie," and writers who offer to "write it however I want it" (it's "like saying I'll be straight or gay; you tell me, I have no preference"). Lerner is aware of how excruciating it is for a writer to wait for feedback on his or her work. But she also lets writers in on a little secret of her own. "I'm always anxious about the author's response," she confides. "Will he or she take to my editing?" --*Jane Steinberg*

#### From Library Journal

Lerner's credentials include editorial stints at Houghton-Mifflin, Ballantine, Simon & Schuster, and Doubleday. Working now as a literary agent, she shares an insider's perspective on the publication side of writing. Definitely not a "how-to" book or a style manual, this chatty, informal volume is anecdotal and encouraging to the novice or amateur writer. The first part describes various types of writers Lerner has worked with over the years and how a writer's personality influences both the writing and the ability to get published. Stronger and more helpful, the next section covers the process of manuscript submission and offers concrete advice about literary agents, query letters, multiple submissions, working with editors and publicists, and dealing with rejection and writer's block. Because of her unique approach, this book will find its audience among writers groups and workshops. Recommended for libraries supporting this activity.

-Denise S. Sticha, Seton Hill Coll. Lib., Greensburg, PA

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#### Review

"With an early promise not to 'Strunk you over the head with rules about style,' Lerner... provides inspiring, uncondescending advice for writers." -"Entertainment Weekly"

"[Lerner] doesn't preach on how to write a book but rather tries to help writers and would-be authors cope with such problems as 'being alone with it.' It's a survival course. She wants to help the writer who cannot get started embark, the writer stalled between projects ignite. She wants you to be an effective 'self-promoter' and not a 'self-saboteur.' The book is also an affirmation that late bloomers can become successful writers." -

"The New York Times"

"[Lerner] has a wicked sense of humor. But don't think that means her book isn't brilliant. It is. Cleverly disguised as a sensible reference work, [this] is in fact a riveting safari through the wilds of the writer's brain, as well as an honest and unpatronizing guide to publishing from every angle. Its tone is singularly authoritative, compassionate, irreverent, and unafraid. Unquestionably a gift to writers of every persuasion." -"Newsday"

"Betsy Lerner's style is economical and witty. "The Forest for the Trees" should become a permanent part of any writer's or editor's personal library." -"The Seattle Times"

"Solid, insider advice on every step of the publishing process... With this book, Betsy Lerner becomes what every writer hopes for--a friend in the business." -"Chicago"" Tribune"

"Lerner describes the self-promoter, the natural, the wicked child, and the downright mentally ill. She explains the ambivalence that almost every writer feels about writing for oneself versus writing for the public... Her beautifully written book of observations and advice seems to be coming from a friend." -"Columbia"" Journalism Review"

## Users Review

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#### Kimberly Mason:

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