

What is PRO? And Why Should I Care?

By Tami Brothers

This past year, the women and men of Romance Writers of America swarmed Atlanta for our yearly conference. Sadly, I had just started back to work full-time and was unable to attend this stellar event. Many of my friends did though and for the most part, everyone had a great time and learned loads of information crucial in their writing careers.

On the down side, there was one comment overheard and retold that is the inspiration for this article. While standing in a line, someone noticed the PRO designation on my friend's badge, turned to her friend and asked what PRO meant. Not caring that she was overheard, the woman proceeded to explain PRO as "a name for all those people who can't get published."

I was floored by this comment. After all, unless an editor snatched up this woman's first manuscript, she too had once been eligible for PRO status. This left me wondering how many other people aren't aware of this program or have this completely skewed opinion of what it means. I knew instantly there was a need for more information.

So, for everyone's benefit, here is the exact wording of the PRO Membership Requirements from the RWA Policies and Procedures Manual as of April 2007:

6.2.1 Any RWA General or Honorary member may apply for PRO membership if the member:

6.2.1.1 is not PAN-eligible, and

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6.2.1.2 has a completed work of romantic fiction of 40,000 or more words, excluding collections of short stories, novellas or poetry, and

6.2.1.3 has submitted this work to a literary agent or romance publisher, either RWA-Recognized or other, in which the author does not participate financially in the production or distribution of the work.

6.2.2. An application must be submitted to the Office with the following information:

6.2.2.1 Member's name.

6.2.2.2 RWA membership number.

6.2.2.3 Name of qualifying work.

6.2.2.4 Name of qualifying publisher or literary agent.

6.2.2.5 Acceptable proof of submission as outlined in section 6.2.5 OR the signature of either two chapter officers or one chapter officer and the PRO chapter representative, following their review of all documentation and affirmation that the member meets the requirements for PRO membership. If the member belongs to two or more chapters, the member may choose which chapter will submit the required paperwork.

6.2.2.6 Any other information deemed necessary to process the application.

6.2.3 Each application is subject to review and verification by the RWA Office staff and/or the PRO Liaison.

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- 6.2.4 Acceptable forms of proof of a completed manuscript may include a disk or CD copy or a printed copy of the work. (Note – If you bring your work on a disk, bring a laptop computer so that you can prove this to the Board members signing off on your application)
- 6.2.5 Acceptable proof of submission may consist of one of the following:
- 6.2.5.1 Electronic or printed correspondence (including “receipt” postcards) from any publisher or literary agent requesting the full manuscript or stating receipt and/or review of submitted work.
- 6.2.5.2 The signature page or a copy of the contract signature page indicating sale of a romance manuscript to a non-RWA-Recognized Publisher in which the author does not participate financially in the production or distribution of the work; if works are not published in the member’s name, proof of pseudonyms or corporate identity must also be provided.
- 6.2.5.3 A proof of mailing (receipt) with addressee clearly marked.
- 6.2.6 An applicant who successfully meets these requirements will receive an RWA Pro Pin. The pin will be mailed directly to the Chapter President from the Office unless the member or chapter officers request the pin be mailed to the member. The PRO pin may be awarded only once in a member’s lifetime.

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With that said, why should you care about becoming a PRO member? After all, if everyone has the above opinion, why do I want to belong to this group?

First of all, that is the ONLY negative comment I have ever heard about our PRO members. In contrast, most people feel becoming a member of PRO is an honor. It shows they are working toward becoming a published author. With a completed manuscript and proof of submission, it is the next 'step' on the ladder towards reaching that publishing goal.

RWA recognizes this hard word and has made available quite a few benefits directed specifically towards our PRO members. Because PRO focuses on the business side of writing, rather than craft, these benefits are listed in the PRO-Members Only section. I'm listing them below as a quick reference.

-The **Popular PRO Forums** – These are yahoo groups where members can discuss the writing business, learn the latest information about PRO and RWA, and learn from regular classes led by published authors and other publishing professionals. These loops include PRO-Org (the main, overall PRO loop) and PRO-Class (where the periodic boot camps are held). There is also Ask-An-Author-PRO that is not an RWA-affiliated e-mail loop, but that has some wonderful advice from many different published authors.

-**PROspects** is the quarterly newsletter of RWA PRO. This on-line newsletter is full of business and market articles and links targeted specifically towards PROs.

-The annual **PRO Retreat** held at the RWA National Conference. The retreat is four hours of great business-of-writing information offered by published authors, editors,

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agents and other publishing professionals. During this special event, the **PRO Mentor of the Year** is recognized, as are the PRO graduates from the past year.

-The **PRO Career Series** are booklets that offer extensive information on various business topics such as marketing/promotion, the author-agent relationship, career basics and a continually growing list of relevant topics.

-After current and recent RITA and Golden Heart finalists, PRO members are able to **sign up for editor and agent appointments** at the National Conference prior to non-PRO members.

-And finally, there's the **PRO pin** denoting a member's PRO status that can be worn on conference badges. (This information was compiled by Trish Milburn, National PRO-Liaison, 2007)

As you can see there are quite a few benefits to applying for PRO membership. If these don't tempt you, then look closely at all of the extra activities our local chapters do to help each and every one of us on our career paths. I know some people eventually reach their goals on their own, but why struggle up those ladder rungs when there are so many outstretched hands willing to give you a boost along the way?

If you're interested in becoming a PRO member, you can find the PRO application on the RWA website listed under the Members Only section. Or you can locate your local PRO-Liaison (me) at one of the monthly meetings. That person will be more than happy to give you a printed application to fill out.

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If you're eligible but have not applied, consider this one of those helping hands. As a fellow PRO member, I speak for just about everyone when I say we welcome and encourage you into the group; and we'll be among the first to celebrate when we get to kick you out of PRO and into PAN.