The ESSENTIAL GUIDE to SELF-PUBLISHING BOOKS for CHILDREN

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A Glossary of Self-Publishing Terms
Dear SCBWI Member,

It is SCBWI’s mission to support our members in creating high-quality content for children and young adults. Whether you publish independently or through a traditional publisher, we’re committed to supporting your publishing career with up-to-date, relevant information and resources.

We’re thrilled to bring you this comprehensive guide to self-publishing children’s books. The guide contains the best advice available on how to set yourself up as a successful publisher of your own content. Karen P. Inglis and Orna A. Ross have created a guide that’s informative and inspiring! Inside, you’ll find:

- A map for navigating the seven steps of self-publishing
- Practical information about marketing and promoting your book
- Guidelines for choosing the right self-publishing services and platforms
- Models for setting up your author/illustrator business

We’re proud to include The Essential Guide to Self-Publishing Books for Children in our many benefits for independently published members. Whether you’re a children’s book creator just starting out or already well-published, we hope you find this book invaluable in your independent publishing journey.

Sincerely,

Sarah Baker | SCBWI Executive Director
The last decade and a half in publishing has changed everything for those involved in the making and selling of books, and none more than authors—including the authors of books for children and young people.

Since the launch of Amazon Kindle in 2007, e-reading and self-publishing have moved mainstream, unleashing a ferment of creative and commercial activity: new publishing platforms, new literary forms, and new genres.

In children’s publishing, young people have been increasingly consuming digital media of all kinds: digital e-books, story apps, picture book apps, and interactive stories that present narratives on touch screens with multimedia features.

Cumulative evidence shows that children’s and young people’s engagement with books, whether measured by visual attention or observer ratings, is greater with digital than print. Webcomics companies are adapting popular children’s and young adult (YA) books into their formats, and popular online stories are moving into print.

Another trend is toward subscription reading for older children and YA books. Young people who read fiction these days are more likely to have read something at Webtoon, Tapas, or Wattpad than a print book from the bookstore or library.

While some see online literature and webcomics as separate from the traditional publishing market, independent authors have been quick to exploit this opportunity.

This is one of the biggest advantages of self-publishing: the ability to respond quickly to changes in what young readers, their parents, and teachers want. Another is higher earnings. At ALLi, we have members who have foregone six- and, in one case, seven-figure traditional contracts because it is more commercially and creatively satisfying to do it yourself.

Self-publishing is not for every author. Successful independent authors need to be honest about their strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats they face. They are open-minded about technology and tools and how to market as well as produce books. They are willing to fail, learn, grow, and improve in their publishing and their writing. This is what it means to go “indie” as an author, and it has brought extraordinary success to some.

The coauthor of this book, Karen P. Inglis, is one such. She has sold 300,000 copies of her children’s book, The Secret Lake, in English and managed a direct translation into German, and she’s now beginning to sell well in Germany, alongside foreign rights deals into seven other territories and counting.

Self-publishing has also been a game changer when it comes to diversity and representation in books, opening the door for authors to publish their own books on their terms, without the need for a book deal or the approval of an agent or anyone else. This has been good news for marginalized authors, says independent author Crystal Swain-Bates. “A wide range of authors now have the ability to publish stories that readers want but traditional publishers won’t invest in because they don’t think they have mass-market appeal.”

This heralds the most profound change of all brought about by the self-publishing revolution, and one that is only beginning to make its mark: increased author confidence. As the cap-in-hand, publish-me-please mindset fades in the author community, as more and more authors take up the challenge of independence, it is changing everyone’s sense of what’s possible. And, as more hardworking and serious writers self-publish, the quality and variety of books available to readers continue to improve.

Today, change is still the order of the day in self-publishing. Ahead lie artificial intelligence, virtual reality, the blockchain, and no doubt other tools and tech that we don’t even have names for yet! Independent authors are well placed to meet these challenges with confidence.

Whatever comes next, indie authors, the new fixtures on the publishing landscape, are here to stay—and in so many ways, here to lead the way.
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PART ONE
BECOMING AN
INDIE AUTHOR
Before we get into the particular demands of self-publishing children’s books, we’re going to consider the advantages and disadvantages of self-publishing, the growth in the sector over recent decades, and why self-publishing experts recommend that children’s authors self-publish using a variety of platforms and formats all over the world.

Advantages of Self-Publishing
» You have creative and commercial control.
» You earn far more money per copy sold.
» You aren’t limited to industry standards (e.g., typical 32-page picture books).
» You can publish books far more quickly.
» You don’t have to go through the punishing rejection cycle of trying to find a publisher.
» Each book builds on the last as you work with editors and designers and become more skilled at the seven steps of publishing.

Challenges of Self-Publishing
» There’s a lot to learn the first time.
» You pay the bills for editing, illustrating, printing, distributing, and marketing up front.
» You have to find trustworthy tools and services to work with while avoiding sophisticated scams and profiteering services.
» You have to learn management and marketing skills as well as the skills for creating the books.
» You may meet some resistance from schools, libraries, festivals, and other institutions and gatekeepers—though this is lessening as more curators embrace self-published books.

One of the main challenges of self-publishing is developing an indie author mindset. This emerges in different ways for different authors. To distort Shakespeare’s fine line in *Twelfth Night*, some indie authors are born independent, some choose independence, and some have independence thrust upon them.

The born indies come straight into writing through self-publishing. For them, it’s the obvious and only choice. Then there are those who consciously choose self-publishing for its creative and commercial rewards: the speed, control, and direct relationship with the readers. With time and dedication, they also do well.

It’s those who come to self-publishing reluctantly, because they’ve repeatedly tried and failed to get a trade-publishing deal, who have the hardest time. Most indie authors need help and support when starting out, but an author who’s dreaming of a publishing contract is rarely in the right mind to be a good publisher themselves. They are more likely to fall away, defeated not so much by the job of self-publishing as the mindset they’ve brought to it.

The rock on which you build your publishing business as an indie author is your intellectual property (IP) and your understanding of its value. When you self-publish, *you*—not the services you hire or the rights buyers you make deals with—are the publisher.

The laws of copyright give you exclusive, legally secured rights to reproduce and distribute your own books; publish, perform, or record them; profit from them; and authorize others to do the same.

Authors have the power of copyright on their side, but every day, they disempower themselves—by naively signing away their rights, choosing poor self-publishing services, or working from assumptions about publishing that are outdated or just plain wrong.

Understanding how self-publishing has evolved over the past few decades helps us understand this fundamental principle.

Self-Publishing 1.0
The first modern shift toward making self-publishing a good prospect for most authors began in 1985 when the Apple LaserWriter printer made print book printing cheaper and easier than ever before. Known as “desktop publishing” (because the printer fit on a desk rather than taking up a large room), it offered cheaper and easier production of print books; however, distribution and marketing challenges were insurmountable for most. Bookstores (the main sales vehicles for print books) and review outlets in mainstream media by and large refused to engage with self-published books, and most children’s book authors understandably chose to work with third-party publishers.

In the 1990s, US company Ingram launched Lightning Source as
a printer and distributor of what became known as print-on-demand (POD) books. Digital e-books and audiobooks began to appear, alongside online bookstores and digital-only publishers. At the same time, personal expression was being facilitated on message boards and storytelling websites, and authors were starting their own websites and blogs. As an increasing number of authors began to experiment with the new digital offerings, Self-Publishing 1.0 was born.

Self-Publishing 2.0

The next change in the industry was the mass-market “e-paper technology,” and the first e-book reader was released by Sony in 2004. However, it wasn’t until 2007 that Self-Publishing 2.0 took off, when Amazon delivered a technological trifecta:

1. The Kindle e-reader combined with
2. Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), a digital publishing platform, and
3. Direct access to Amazon’s online bookstore, the largest in the world.

Coming with this vast online bookstore attached made KDP different from any previous way of producing and distributing electronic books. Suddenly, it was easy for readers to buy an e-book and download it immediately.

Soon, Amazon purchased CreateSpace (now KDP Print) for print book production and launched Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX). ACX serves as a platform for audiobook production along with a marketplace to bring together authors and narrators to connect and create audiobooks together. Now authors had direct input into all three book formats and were primed for speedy growth.

Amazon then added a subscription model, Kindle Unlimited (KU), to the mix, offering all-you-can-read packages to readers and paying authors according to the number of pages read.

Retaining all publishing rights, authors could now reach their readers through various online retail stores in three formats: audio, electronic text (e-book), and print book. Emerging at the same time were social networking tools, like Facebook, Twitter, Goodreads, and Wattpad, which helped facilitate social media marketing. Open-source software made building websites cheap and easy.

As Self-Publishing 2.0 exploded, more self-publishing platforms came into the e-book marketplace: Apple Books and Google Play Books (2010), Kobo Writing Life (2012), and Nook (2013), as well as thousands of smaller publishing platforms and services around the world, and aggregator services, like StreetLib (2006), Smashwords (2008), Draft2Digital (2013), and PublishDrive (2015), to service them. And Ingram, long the dominant player in POD with Lightning Source, started a division called IngramSpark, expressly for small and micro-publishers, including indie authors.

Like Amazon, none of these platforms invested in the publishing process as a trade publisher would—nor did they license any IP. This was the radical change at the heart of Self-Publishing 2.0: the author, not the publishing service, became the publisher.

The IP rights—the income source—were not licensed, assigned, or transferred. They remained with the author, or whichever rights owners uploaded the books. No money exchanged hands until a book was bought; the service then took a printing fee (for print books) and commission on each sale.

Authors took to the new way in droves, and growing author empowerment and a new level of publishing and business acumen in the community brought us into the Self-Publishing 3.0 era.

Self-Publishing 3.0

Self-Publishing 3.0 is the era of author enterprise. At first, authors were happy just to see their books out in the world, but many soon realized an important fact: how books were bought and sold had changed, forever. From the moment an author pressed “publish” on an online platform or uploaded a book for sale on their own website, they were in business. Authorship was no longer a career, mediated by publishers, agents, critics, universities, literary organizations, and other gatekeepers, but a business where the reader became the most important focus.

For indie authors in the Self-Publishing 3.0 era, working life has more in common with other creative entrepreneurs who run passion-powered businesses—visual artists, filmmakers, healers, performers, activists, and musicians—than with authors who choose to exclusively license all their rights to one traditional publisher, or one self-publishing service.

Readers are also beginning to appreciate the new publishing landscape, becoming more comfortable purchasing directly from creators, joining crowdfunding, becoming patrons through Patreon and other outlets, and relishing premium products and opportunities for access and closer connections to authors.

Through computers, smartphones, e-readers, and audio devices, millions of readers are now directly available to children’s book authors, if we can capture the attention of their parents and educators and persuade them to buy our books. Increasingly accessible and with a quicker turnaround than traditional publishing, self-publishing is becoming more and more attractive to children’s book authors.

Self-Publishing 4.0

The next era in self-publishing has begun, with exciting new technologies unfolding rapidly. There has truly never been a better time in publishing history to be an author, but it can sometimes feel overwhelming.

To succeed in self-publishing, it’s necessary to develop a creative mindset, exploring the possibility of our own growth and expansion. This is the most important skill we can develop as creative writers and publishers. Keep an open mind and know that thousands of indie authors have been where you are, and overcome the obstacles, to self-publish successfully.
A successful children’s book has generally pleased two readers: the child who enjoyed reading it and the adult who purchased it. While adults may be the primary buyers, children are the ones who will decide whether the book will be read, passed on, and treasured. So, it’s the children you should keep in mind as you write.

The best children’s books are grounded in ideas that inspire and connect with children. Anna Bowles, a children’s book writer and editor in the United Kingdom, writes:

A lot of beginners write about children as we adults often see them: as cute and slightly comical little beings. But what children actually want are stories where they are the heroes, driving the action, facing challenges, and making choices.

Ask yourself:
» Why do you want to tell this story?
» What is your story about?
» Is your idea and theme relatable to children?
» Is it unique?
» Is it marketable? What would make it more marketable (please more readers)?

Recall what you liked to read at the relevant age. Bounce ideas off children you know. Above all, don’t be afraid to switch things up. Consider suggestions, explore and experiment, and wander down different creative avenues. But don’t forget to research the market for your type of book, considering ideal age group, genre, niche, and micro-niche.

The categorization of your book is the foundation of your publishing, from editing to design to marketing. The closer you can stay to the market conventions of your niche while producing and promoting your book, the better it will likely sell.

Children’s literature ranges from board books to young adult novels, so your target age range may be anywhere from zero to eighteen. It’s important to know your target audience’s age so you can deliver what your readers expect in terms of length, style, topic, and treatment.

Understanding these aspects of your story enables you to “write to market,” so your book will actually sell.

**RESEARCHING THE MARKET**

Search children’s book and a phrase that describes your book on Google. Once you’ve found books that are similar, look at the descriptions. Figure out how your book is different and preferably better.

The age ranges below are indicators of children’s book genres; they’re general guidelines accepted by the industry and should not be viewed as restrictive. Instead, use these categories to think about your ideal reader.

**Picture Books (ages 0–6)**

A picture book relies on both illustrations and words to tell the story; the word count is low, usually 500 words or fewer. Board books (a type of picture book) for babies and toddlers can have fewer than 100 words but still need a strong story and are far more challenging to write than you’d think—until you’ve tried.

Examples of picture books:
» The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
» Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak
» Sulwe by Lupita Nyong’o
» The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats
» Heather Has Two Mommies by Lesléa Newman
» Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña

**Early Readers (ages 6–7)**

After picture books comes early reader fiction: books for children who have graduated to more words than pictures but aren’t yet ready to tackle long blocks of text. Early readers range from 2,000 to 5,000 words, though there’s still a fair share of illustrations. These early readers usually come in series, so kids can devour one after another to build their reading skills.
Examples of early readers:
» *Elephant & Piggie* by Mo Willems
» *Juana and Lucas* by Juana Medina
» *Amelia Bedelia* by Peggy Parish
» *Horrid Henry* by Francesca Simon
» *Jasmine Toguchi* by Debbi Michiko Florence

**Chapter Books (ages 7–9)**

From early readers, children progress to chapter books, which you probably remember from your earliest book reports! Chapter books are pretty quick reads that tend to come in series; their word count is slightly higher, around 5,000 to 10,000 words per book. You’ll still see pictures in chapter books, but you’ll notice they’re less common and often appear as sketches rather than full-color illustrations.

Examples of chapter books:
» *Junie B. Jones* by Barbara Park
» *Magic Tree House* by Mary Pope Osborne
» *Dyamonde Daniel* by Nikki Grimes
» *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney
» *The Magnificent Mya Tibbs* by Crystal Allen

**Middle Grade (ages 9–12)**

Middle grade books are for kids who want something a little more advanced in terms of both prose and story. These fully independent middle grade readers tackle books from 30,000 to 50,000 words, with even fewer illustrations than their predecessors—though there may still be some pictures, especially to accompany chapter headings.

Examples of middle grade novels:
» *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang
» *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* by Janae Marks
» *Millicent Min, Girl Genius* by Lisa Yee
» *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina

**Young Adult (ages 12 and up)**

Young adult (YA) books are for readers ages twelve and up and usually cover stories and themes relevant to coming-of-age and leaving home. YA novels are generally 60,000–75,000 words in length (although YA fantasy novels may approach 90,000–100,000 words).

Examples of YA novels:
» *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
» *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo
» *Elatsoe* by Darcie Little Badger
» *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

Browse through the books at your local library or bookstore, or even online on Amazon, to see what new children’s titles look like, what kinds of stories they tell, and what topics they cover. Children’s books with diverse characters, written by authors from underrepresented communities, are in demand—as are those about famous historical figures.

Trends like these should by no means dictate your work, but they do reflect the tastes of children as well as the concerns of the parents and educators who will actually be buying your book. Keep them in mind as you go along.

**DETERMINING YOUR BUDGET**

The fact that children’s books are generally shorter than adult books doesn’t automatically mean they’re cheaper to produce. In fact, the illustrations for children’s picture books alone can cost anywhere from $2,000 to $10,000; though they generally don’t exceed $6,000. Each author’s circumstances will alter the costs incurred in the process; a more polished manuscript, for example, will be less expensive to edit.

Giving estimates is difficult as individual cases differ so much. However, you should expect to spend at least $5,000 to self-publish a children’s book—more if it’s a picture book.
Amazon's biggest selling point is Kindle Unlimited (KU), a linked customer-facing program which is part of their KDP Select platform. This platform sells e-books only. Authors’ e-books are made available free to customers who sign up for a KU account, and authors are paid royalties based on the number of page-reads their book gets each month. KU can be lucrative, and many writers of YA and adult e-books make a living on their KU income alone. You only get access to this if you sign up to KDP Select exclusively. (NOTE: While you’re in KDP Select, customers who don’t sign up for KU can still buy your e-book; you receive the usual royalty on those sales alongside any page-read royalties.)

Another benefit of joining KDP Select is that you get access to promotional extras, such as countdown deals or the option to offer your e-book for free for five days in any ninety-day period. If used effectively, these extras can help boost flagging sales, raise the profile of a forgotten backlist title, or get your book off to a great start.

You can’t use these tools unless you go exclusive with Amazon, and you have the flexibility to pull your books in and out at any time, so why do experts recommend “going wide” and avoiding exclusivity?

First, many self-publishing experts believe the best way to have a sustainable author business is to develop income from multiple sources. That way, you’ll be insulated somewhat if one of them dries up. If you rely on Amazon for your income, and Amazon makes a change to KDP Select that negatively impacts your sales, you’ve just lost all your income.

The author who chooses exclusivity, whether through a traditional publishing contract or self-publishing through KDP Select or ACK exclusive, cuts off multiple territories and opportunities. While you may have good reasons for making that choice, do not make it without due consideration.

Using KDP Select discerningly, rather than having all your books there all the time, can make sense at the start. Being able to offer your e-book for free for a set number of days each quarter can be invaluable for raising your book’s profile on Amazon. It can also be useful for garnering early reviews for picture books if you’ve created an e-book version. Many picture book authors use this tactic by sharing information about their free days in parent groups on Facebook. As picture books are quick to read, the chances of getting reviews are greater than for books for older children.

If it’s your first book and you need income and reviews to help you get on your feet, it may be a good idea to go exclusive for a short time. Once your author platform is more established, it might be more beneficial to be nonexclusive and diversify your income. Moreover, if you want to get your children’s e-books into libraries or bookstores, you need to be wide as Amazon doesn’t currently (as of the time of writing) distribute to libraries, and bookstores prefer Ingram.

You’ll hear about indie authors who swear that income from other retailers can’t match what you can make on Amazon, but evidence from many successful self-published authors indicates that’s not true for all. And while it may be true in the short term for some, it’s also true that it takes a long time to build an audience on every retailer, including Amazon. The longer you wait to go wide, the longer it’ll take to build those readerships.

Ultimately, only you can decide which route is right for you at this time. It’s definitely not recommended for anyone to pull books in and out of KDP Select repeatedly as it can destroy any audience that’s been built there or on other platforms. Use KDP Select at the beginning only, if you intend to go wide, or become an Amazon author and stay there, if you’re comfortable fully relying on a single platform.

There’s no one right answer regarding format, platforms, and more because each project is different. As you read through this guide, keep in mind that you’re in control and can choose to add or subtract any service at any time. Consider your publishing program and how each choice will affect your bottom line.
All publishing starts with the manuscript. However, before you even think about sending your book out into the world, you’ll need to make sure your story is of publishable quality by utilizing the services of a professional editor. And before you pay someone to work on your story, it’s important to get your manuscript in the best possible shape with self-editing. There are different stages of self-editing and it’s important not to confuse them.

**SELF-EDITING**

**Deepening and Developing Your Manuscript**

This is the redrafting and rewriting you do after you’ve written your first draft. Questions you should ask yourself through this stage of the self-editing process include:

- Does my book have a clear story that engages young readers?
- Are the characters memorable, with distinct voices?
- Is the language too simple or too complex for my target audience?

**Correction and Clarification**

This stage of self-editing may include beta readers. Beta readers, though not publishing experts, can give you an idea of how your story might be received.

In the case of children’s books, beta readers might include children’s librarians, nursery or primary school teachers, children in your target age group who you (ideally) don’t know, or parents of younger ones (for picture books).

Use both children and adults as your test audience. The children can tell you how enjoyable the story is, while the adult audience can comment on your themes and other more complex elements.

**PROFESSIONAL EDITING**

When you’ve done all you can do and can’t see another improvement that can be made—that’s when you bring in the professionals. Good professional editors are invaluable. In addition to adding ideas, asking open questions, and suggesting solutions in the early stages, editors will appreciate and reinforce your creative intentions. Worthwhile editing services will increase the professional look and quality of your book, alert you to major problems, and help you with challenges. But not all editing is the same, and as you progress through the writing process, you’ll need different levels and types of editing.

It’s important to understand what type of professional editing you need and to base price and time expectations accordingly. Editorial time and costs for children’s books will vary as intended age group affects length, plot complexity, language, number and nature of any planned illustrations, and suitability of themes, all of which will need evaluation.

Professional editing falls into three broad groups: developmental and content editing, copyediting, and proofreading. Depending on your writing experience and early feedback on your first draft, you may need all three. In some cases, you may get away with combining the first two.

**Developmental and Content Editing**

This can also be called book doctoring, manuscript appraisal, structural editing, substantive editing, and many other names as these terms are used loosely and in divergent ways.

Once you have revised and gotten feedback on your story, if you or any of your beta readers have doubts or reservations about your overall plot, characters, or pacing, developmental/content editing is what you’d want to explore. If this is your first children’s or YA book, it’s highly likely you’ll need this service.

Regardless of what you call it, content editing is a down-and-deep look at the manuscript that’s likely to require major rewrites in most cases. And while this level might identify glaring grammar and punctuation errors in passing, its focus is on the big picture. In the case of children’s books, use of language, age of characters, character journey, and story theme—not to mention word count—are all contenders for the editor’s red pen.

At the point of needing this editing service, you’re still several passes away from being ready to publish.

Cost will vary according to the length and complexity of your manuscript—and how much feedback it requires. Clearly, in the case
of a 500-word picture book you’re struggling with, the amount of time required from a development editor would be a lot less than for a middle grade or YA novel. As for picture books, your “editor” will likely combine the functions of structural editor and copy or line editor.

Copyediting and Line Editing
Once you feel you have a solid manuscript and are finished making major changes, you can move on to copyediting/line editing. At this stage, editors will do a thorough scrub of the manuscript, looking for things like:
» Consistency of voice or style
» Grammatical errors
» Issues with rhyme or rhythm (for rhyming stories)
» Factual errors (especially important for nonfiction books)
» Fluidity of language—and perhaps suitability of language for the age group (Though this should have been addressed previously if a structural editor was used.)
» Aesthetics (such as repetitive use of certain words, phrases, punctuation, or fragmented sentences)
» Linguistic efficiency

This phase of editing leaves you with a clean manuscript ready for design and layout of the final output.

Proofreading
The final step in any professionally produced manuscript is proofreading. When your manuscript has gone through its final edits, design, and Layout, a proofread aims to find any final errors that have slipped through the cracks. Originally, proofreading meant reading the physical page proofs to make sure that everything was ready for print. Now, it’s also your opportunity to check digital files for any final problems and oversights and catch any grammatical errors or errors that may have been accidentally introduced during a previous round of corrections.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN EDITOR
Genre and Subject
First and foremost, you’ll want to select an editor who specializes in and has substantial experience with children’s books. Experience brings an understanding of the nuances of a particular genre that goes far beyond technical competence and is vital in content editing. You also want someone with experience editing books for the age group you’re writing for and, better still, in the subgenre of your title. For example, if you’ve written a middle grade fantasy, you’d ideally find an editor who enjoys working with this genre and is savvy to the rules and particulars of writing fantasy. If you have a picture book, you’d certainly want someone who specializes in this format.

Similarly, if your work is nonfiction or touches a subject that tackles emotional or sensitive themes, it will be helpful if your editor has experience with this type of book. In some cases, editors may also recommend sensitivity readers.

Compatible Styles
Editing requires a close working relationship between the author and editor, and it’s important to find one who meshes well with your style, personality, and writing process. You won’t always agree with your editor’s advice, but having a deep level of compatibility minimizes friction and allows for a synergy that will bring out the very best in your work.

Samples
For books with longer word counts, such as middle grade or YA novels or chapter books, it’s not unreasonable to ask your prospective editor to edit a short sample of your writing to determine if you’re a good match and to see their work firsthand. This is an important part of gauging compatibility and is strongly advised before committing to the full editing process.

A sample edit gives you insight into the editor’s style and process and allows you to see what you’ll receive for your money. Additionally, it gives the editor a better sense of the extent of editing needed so they can provide a more accurate estimate.

The length of the sample can vary, and while some editors provide this for free, others charge a standard or discounted rate.

For picture books, it’s more likely that they’ll take a look at the book in its entirety and provide high-level commentary about the nature of required fixes along with a quote. Expecting sample editing for these shorter books isn’t realistic.

Partial Edits
If you’re unsure how much editing your work will require, consider hiring an editor for a partial edit of your work. In editing a few chapters, your editor can spotlight areas that are a consistent problem for you. For example, you may have a favorite phrase that creeps into your work too often or a penchant for the passive voice.

Once a partial edit reveals these issues, you can perform another round of self-editing to clean up the known problems. Then you can go back to the editor with a cleaner manuscript that requires less work, saving you money.

Multiple Rounds of Editing
Confirm whether the editor offers multiple rounds of edits at a discounted rate, or just a single pass. For copyediting and proofreading, a single pass may be sufficient, but developmental/content editing tends to be an iterative process requiring several rounds.

Availability
Finally, be aware that editing can be a time-consuming process, and popular editors may have a waiting list. Don’t leave this step for the last-minute stages of your publishing process; research and book your editor in advance whenever possible.

EDITORIAL QUESTIONS ANSWERED
Where can I find an editor?
SCBWI members can find a list of freelance children’s book editors in The Book: The Essential Guide to Publishing for Children. You can also check out the ALLI’s Service Ratings for editors that give good value and adhere to ALLI’s code of standards. If that fails, try the free directories of nonprofit professional associations for editors, such as ACEs: The Society for Editors in the United States, the Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading in the United Kingdom, or a similar body in your territory. You can also ask for referrals from other authors.

What’s the best way to work with an editor?
Ask the editor what they want and how you can make the process easier.

One tip is to provide your editor with a style sheet. A style sheet lists all the proper nouns in your story so the editor knows how character names, places, and special words should be spelled. It may also include
some usage items, like how to deal with numbers—do you spell them out or use numerals? Other things you can do to make your editor’s job easier include asking them any questions you might have as comments in your manuscript so they can answer them in their report; providing information that will help them keep track of all the details in your book; and prioritizing their emails in case they have questions.

Is it okay if my editor is also an author?
If the author in question has made a professional career of editing and has the relevant training and experience, then they may be a good fit for editing your book.

What does an editor cost?
Expect to pay from around $150 to several hundred dollars for a developmental edit or copyedit, depending on the book’s length. (If you have a well-written, perfectly pitched picture book, costs may come in a little lower. And if you’ve written a three-part epic YA fantasy, costs are likely to come in higher!) Proofreading is sometimes quoted per word, with typical rates in the range of $0.01 to $0.03 per word. Often, proofreaders will charge by the hour.
With the text of your book nearing completion, you’ll begin to turn your attention to presentation. On the outside, your cover design will package your book to attract your target audience. Inside, you’ll need to format and style your text and any illustrations to create a professional and pleasant reading experience that’s appropriate for your target reading age. This section outlines what writers need to consider when working with book designers and illustrators.

**STEP 2: DESIGN**

**COVER DESIGN: NOVELS**

Your book’s cover is arguably the most vital marketing tool at your disposal. It’s the first impression readers will have of your book and your brand as an author.

Consider that thousands of titles are added to online retailers every day, all of them vying for attention. A professional-quality cover that looks good, represents your story, is suitable for your target reading age, and clearly represents genre and subgenre is essential in this increasingly competitive market. Therefore, finding a cover design artist willing to work with you to ensure these criteria are met is equally important.

**Identifying Your Design Needs**

Knowing in advance what you want for your cover can help create smooth interactions with your designer. However, being too rigid in your specifications can cramp the designer’s style, potentially depriving you of that creative flair that makes an exceptional, unique cover. Remember that you’re hiring a cover designer not only for their technical competence but for their artistry and ideas as well.

Design trends surge into prominence and fade into clichés, so you’ll want to get a feel for what’s working in your genre. Browse the top-selling children’s titles in your genre on Amazon, and note which covers you find especially eye-catching and which leave you cold. Cover designers may ask you for examples of covers you like, which can help identify the general approach you’re looking for.

If you plan to write a series, think now about whether you want a specific look that brands all your books. Check out other children’s series or collections of stand-alone titles. Are you looking to do something similar with your titles? Now’s the time to let your designer know.

**Technical Considerations**

Investigate the technical requirements of the online platforms where your book will appear. For example, Amazon displays tiny thumbnail images of each book. If your cover image or book title is unrecognizable at this small size, you will lose potential sales. These technical considerations may affect your subject or presentation choices.

Before taking on a project, your cover designer will also need to know what trim size (book dimensions) you’ve chosen. Look at comparable published books to consider your options. Choosing a trim size should be part of your research—you’ll want your book to be the same or similar size to others in your genre. (Tip: If using POD, check that your ideal size is available from both Amazon KDP and IngramSpark—the main self-publishing platforms experts recommend you use together.) Typical sizes for children’s novels are 8” x 5”, 8.5” x 5.5”, and 9” x 6”.

You’ll also need to specify which interior paper color you’ll use—white or cream—and also paper thickness (as it affects book dimensions). Most picture books use white paper, whereas most fiction books for older children use cream. There are exceptions, though, so do your research to help make your decision.

E-books require an industry standard EPUB format. In the past, Amazon required its proprietary MOBI format. In 2021, they started moving toward the EPUB format. Full-color picture books (fixed-format) can still (as of the time of writing) be submitted in MOBI format.

Be sure to identify your goals and requirements before approaching a designer.

**Finding a Cover Designer**

Word-of-mouth referrals are useful starting points for finding a good cover designer, but you’ll still need to do your homework. What works for someone else’s book may not be right for yours, and authors may not be aware of best practices for design.
Nonetheless, these referrals are worth investigating as a happy client is one indicator of an excellent service provider.

While researching your genre’s trends and tropes, you may find a cover of exceptional beauty. Look for credits on the back cover or copyright page as you might want to hire the artist for your own book. SCBWI’s online Illustrator’s Gallery is a browsable gallery of illustrator portfolios to peruse. Many of SCBWI’s illustrators have created covers for children’s books and are open to working with self-publishing authors. Adobe’s social media platform for illustrators, Behance.net, offers portfolios from illustrators and designers worldwide; to work with those professionals, you’ll need to negotiate your own contracts.

With print books, you have not only the front cover but also the back cover with blurb (and spine!) to think about. Choosing appropriate fonts and text layout will be crucial—in the wrong hands, your cover will scream “self-made” no matter how wonderful the front cover illustration is!

In short, seek out a professional book cover designer experienced in your genre.

Assessing Cover Designers

A skilled cover designer demonstrates a wide range of styles and mood in their work. Look through your prospective designer’s portfolio. Do the covers all look the same? Do they repeatedly use similar graphic elements, fonts, or stock photos?

A designer who displays only repetitive cookie-cutter designs may not have the artistic range needed for the arresting, beautiful cover your book deserves. While you want your book to have a similar look and feel to other books in your genre that are doing well (to draw in buyers), you also want it to stand out from the crowd with a unique design.

Pricing

Design services can vary widely in price and billing approach. Some charge by the hour, some assess fees based on the complexity and difficulty of the work, and some charge a flat fee (as low as $99 for a “premade” cover and starting around $250 for custom children’s book covers).

Regardless of the pricing model, more expensive does not always mean better. Comparison shop to find high quality at reasonable prices.

Source Files

Many cover designers will provide the source files (such as PSD or INDD files) for the cover on request, so you or another designer can make minor adjustments in the future. This valuable perk is by no means standard, but it can be extremely helpful if the trim size, length, or other details of your book change and the original designer is unavailable. For example, audiobook covers are generally formatted square regardless of the print book’s original size. Be sure to ask about this during negotiations.

If you provide illustrations that you own, expect to receive the source files as a matter of course.

Designing Your Own Cover

It may be tempting to cut corners by designing your own cover, especially if you have some artistic talent. However, before choosing this approach, consider the following:

» A professional cover is one of the most important factors in the sales success of your book.

» Design demands more than talent, or familiarity with Adobe Photoshop. It requires a solid grasp of layout, composition, color psychology, typography, the conventions of genre, and other facets of illustration.

» Book cover design involves technical considerations that go beyond the art. What looks good on a full-size canvas may not work as a tiny Amazon thumbnail. What works well as a striking piece of stand-alone art or photography may not work as a commercial sales tool.

If you have a strong professional background in graphic design and have researched the specific requirements of cover design, DIY design may be a viable option. Most authors, however, would be strongly advised to seek a professional designer rather than risk an ineffective or amateur cover that will hinder the book’s success. Finally, be wary of online “cover generators” and templates. These seldom produce an appealing design, and in the hands of an amateur, they are capable of producing monstrous eyesores.

Legal Considerations

Whether you choose to get a cover image from a design service or design your own, you should familiarize yourself with the legal issues surrounding copyrights and licensing for any images or fonts used. Before paying or signing a contract with a cover designer, be sure you know who owns the rights to the design and how the cover can be used by both parties. Also, bear in mind that stock photo services often place restrictions on the number of copies that may be printed. Your cover designer should be able to provide these details.

INTERIOR DESIGN: NOVELS

Most books for children up to age twelve are sold and read in hard copy, so from a design perspective, this is where your priorities will lie. However, there are good reasons to create an e-book version as well to support your marketing. Once your print layout is finalized, you’ll need to create both a print-ready interior PDF file and one or more EPUB files that can be read on Kindles and other e-readers.

Your print-ready PDF can be exported from several programs. The industry standard for layout and design is Adobe InDesign. It’s a complicated program to learn and requires a paid subscription, but it always produces superior results. One resource to make it understandable is Book Design Made Simple by Fiona Raven and Glenna Collett, which lays out formatting a novel step-by-step with excellent screenshots. An alternative stand-alone paid program is Affinity Publisher.

Creating a print layout in a word processor, such as Microsoft Word, can be done, but self-publishing experts only recommend this for simple novels. Formatting a novel in Word requires a solid understanding of how Styles are used. Creating a layout in web-based photo design programs is also discouraged. If you decide to hire a layout designer, look for those who use professional programs.

One alternative is to look for templates for your preferred program that format the typical elements, such as running heads, page numbers, table of contents, etc. Book Design Templates offers high-quality Word and InDesign templates.

There are three main choices for designing the interior and converting it into the files needed to produce your book:

» DIY: This is feasible for middle grade or YA novels and chapter books with fairly simple designs, using either Word (if proficient with Styles) or free or paid tools.

» Outsourcing: This is also recommended for middle grade and YA novels or illustrated chapter books if you’re looking for quirky
COVER, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND INTERIOR DESIGN: PICTURE BOOKS

The above information also holds true for picture books, however, picture books have a unique 32-page layout that accommodates illustrations. If you’re not an illustrator, you will need to hire one. This means you will have to take on the role of art director as well.

Keep in mind that picture books should be a marriage of pictures and words. Each should play an equal role in telling the story. The “show and tell” rule of picture books states: If you’re saying it with words, you don’t need to show it in the pictures. And if you’re showing it in the pictures, you don’t need to say it with words. As a writer, you should plan to collaborate with your illustrator and leave room for them to bring ideas to the table.

When looking to hire an illustrator, search for a style that’s going to bring your story to life. Examine as many portfolios as you can. SCBWI’s Illustrator Gallery is a perfect resource as it includes hundreds of illustrator portfolios. You can limit your search to just local artists or search throughout the globe. There are advantages to working with local artists, such as face-to-face meetings, but you can still have a successful working relationship with someone anywhere in the world, as long as you clearly communicate your wants and needs.

Make a list of potential illustrators. Chances are not all of them will be available or within your price range. Establish your overall budget and have an amount you’re willing to pay for your book’s illustrations before attempting to make contact.

Keep in mind that illustrating a picture book is a time-consuming and laborious process that typically takes months to complete. A good starting price for a 32-page book would be $3,000 or more. The final price will depend on the medium used to create the art and the amount of detail needed to do your story justice.

Look for an illustrator with some experience if possible. An illustrator who’s completed a book and/or successfully worked with self-published authors may be more expensive but will save you time and potential headaches during the process.

Once you find an illustrator willing to work on your book, you’ll need to create a work for hire contract. Any experienced illustrator will be familiar with them and may even have a template you can start with. You can also find contract templates on legal help websites. The contract should include the entire scope of work, as well as the conditions, payment, phases, time frame, etc.

Work with your illustrator on the contract and plan for the development of the work. If the illustrator is willing, divide the work into three stages:
1. Concepts and character development
2. Page breakdowns, thumbnails, and sketch dummy of the entire book
3. Final full-color illustrations

You, acting as the art director, will need to approve and sign off on each stage of this process before moving to the next. Working in this fashion will provide opportunities for you to revisit your manuscript to see if any edits are needed to better accommodate the evolving illustrations. It will also provide natural points for you and the illustrator to review your working relationship. If necessary, this can also allow you to dissolve the contract if things are not going as planned.

Please note that illustration and graphic design are separate disciplines. Not all illustrators are graphic designers. Your illustrator may not have the knowledge or experience needed to complete the interior and cover design or even the basic layout of your book. You will need to discuss this with them up front. If the illustrator cannot perform this work, you will need to hire a graphic designer to do the layout, cover design, and pre-press work needed to send the final materials to your designated printer. It will also affect your budget.

Don’t be afraid to ask your illustrator questions about their capabilities, limitations, and working process. The key to any good working relationship is communication. The better you can work together, the better your book will be.

DESIGN QUESTIONS ANSWERED

How easy is DIY book design?

The time and effort required to do it yourself depends on your book type; the older your reader, the simpler your task.

For middle grade or YA novels with no illustrations, it will be a matter of choosing the font, type size, and line spacing and designing chapter heads, scene breaks, and front and back matter. If you’re familiar with Word and have access to the required fonts, it’s possible to use a Word template that matches your chosen book dimensions and convert it into the files needed for print and e-book production. (These interior templates are free to download from KDP Print’s platform and other sources.) If you’re familiar, InDesign offers more flexible layout options.

For chapter books with black-and-white illustrations scattered throughout, there’s more to think about in terms of image quantity and how and where they should be placed to keep young readers engaged. You’ll also need to ensure images are saved at the right resolution for print and inserted correctly to prevent downsizing, which can lead to blurry graphics in the final pages. Again, while this is possible in Word, being competent in InDesign is better.

For picture books, unless you’re looking for the most basic of designs, with images on one side and text opposite, DIY is recommended only for those who are committed to learning complicated programs, such as InDesign or Affinity Publisher. For those who want to publish consistently year after year, learning these programs will strengthen your publishing program. For example, if you license foreign rights, you’ll be able to send the correct files without hiring the designer for the extra services.

How long does the cover design process take?

It depends on the designer. Some designers are booked several months or more in advance.

When the designer starts working on your design, however, you can expect to receive your first draft after a few days or weeks. Once it comes in and you provide feedback, most designers will turn around revisions a few days later. The entire process takes a few weeks on average, and subsequent books once the designer’s familiar will take less.

Should my book cover be designed before or after I finish writing?

On balance, this is best done once you’re sure the story won’t change—in other words, once you’re at the copyediting stage. If
you brief your designer before this, you risk incurring additional (unnecessary) costs as you change your brief.

When should I brief my interior illustrator?

As with the cover designer, hold off until you’re sure the story won’t change substantially. This usually means you’re well into the copyediting stage and the overall structure of the story is set. For illustrated chapter books, this is about the time when it’s safe to plan what interior images you’ll need.

For picture books, brief your illustrator only when you feel that your storyboard flows satisfactorily. At this point, ask for pencil drawings; once you’re happy with them, include them in a full mock-up with your text. This way, if issues arise with the story, you haven’t paid for full-color illustrations that would then need to change! (Alternatively, use your own stick drawings or image notes on your storyboard to create a full-size mock-up. Then, once you’re satisfied with the flow, ask for the pencil drawings and test with readers.)

As you can see, there are a few ways you can do this, and it will depend on how confident you are with your story and what level of input you want to give to the illustrator.

How tightly should I brief my illustrator?

When hiring an illustrator, be sure to discuss how you’ll work together and whether they want to be briefed for each illustration or prefer to have the freedom to interpret for themselves. You both need to feel comfortable with the arrangement, and if you can’t agree on this, you’ll need to look elsewhere.

Is there a checklist for formatting?

Yes! The Independent Book Publishers Association offers a free checklist so you can be confident you have formatted your book properly: ibpa-online.org/page/standards-checklist-download
Print production involves the manufacturing, storage, and delivery of the printed book, all of which must be in place for sales to occur. For e-books, once the book’s been formatted, production is virtually complete as you now have a digital file ready to distribute to your readers.

PRINT AND E-BOOK PRODUCTION

For a first-time self-publishing author, print production might feel daunting. However, once you understand your options, as well as the platforms and tools available to help you, you’ll likely feel more comfortable.

Print on Demand (POD)

The majority of self-published authors use POD production for their physical books, whereby each book is printed when needed rather than in bulk up front. This method has higher per-unit costs than traditional printing methods, such as offset printing (which requires print runs typically in the thousands to achieve these lower costs). The benefits of POD for the author are that there’s no risk of being stuck with unsold stock and no need to worry about deliveries, stock control, and warehousing. Further, since each book is printed as needed, any errors found in a manuscript can be corrected almost instantly.

POD printers are usually connected to the retail industry and will also charge a distribution fee.

Amazon’s KDP platform and IngramSpark are the front-runners for POD production for independent authors. They use a worldwide network of printers to rapidly produce individual copies of books as needed and deliver them to customers directly or to distributors or wholesalers, who in turn supply bookshops, other retailers, educational institutions, and libraries.

In addition to using POD, you can order short runs of your book from both KDP and IngramSpark for use at school visits, book signings, and other events as well as to supply local bookshops directly. Each site has a tool to help you calculate author copy costs.

KDP and IngramSpark have different advantages for self-publishers, and as stated earlier, experts recommend you use them together. KDP gives authors access to Amazon’s incomparably huge customer base, with the bonus of rapid fulfillment for those customers.

IngramSpark is a sister company to Ingram Wholesalers, the largest wholesaler in the United States, which is used across the industry by booksellers, libraries, educational distributors, gift shops, and anyone else purchasing books at wholesale prices. When you POD with IngramSpark, your books are automatically listed in Ingram’s wholesale catalog; essentially, your book becomes available industry-wide. They also offer superior international fulfillment.

Note that KDP does offer an Expanded Distribution service, which piggybacks on Ingram’s industry-wide and global distribution data feed. However, KDP charges extra fees for this, so experts recommend opting out of it and then using KDP Print and IngramSpark simultaneously.

Not only can you earn better royalties this way for your non-Amazon sales, but you also have direct access to your non-Amazon sales data.

Offset and Specialty Printing

Historically, offset printing has been the preferred method for large publishers due to economies of scale—with minimum orders starting in the low thousands. Offset printing is typically required for books over 800–1,200 pages, specialty books with odd trim sizes or unusual paper, and art or photography books that require higher print fidelity. None of these are likely to be relevant or cost-effective for indie authors of children’s books, unless you have a best seller for which you plan to make a special edition. Most children’s book indie authors will find POD to be more forgiving, more affordable, and a better fit for online sales.

That being said, there are some children’s authors who do use offset printing, most notably for color picture books, often raising the money to fund the up-front costs for print runs of 2,000 or more books through Kickstarter and other crowdfunding campaigns. For more information, see “Using Kickstarter to Fund Your Self-Published Book” in SCBWI’s The Book: The Essential Guide to Publishing for Children.

This is a huge learning curve and suitable only if you have a strong sales track record and a robust sales and marketing plan. You also need to be prepared to put in many (possibly hundreds of) hours setting up and promoting your campaign.

Short Digital Print Runs

One option that can successfully complement POD is short digital print runs in the low hundreds from independent printers who are not...
also acting as publishers. Typically, you might order this stock for use at school visits or other events where you expect to sell in solid numbers. The per-unit cost if you’re ordering over 100 copies (and certainly if close to 200) may well be lower than KDP Print or IngramSpark author copies. This is something to explore if the need arises but will only make sense if your cash flow allows for it and you’re certain there’s demand for your book in those numbers in the medium term.

In the case of picture books, short digital print runs also offer you the chance to get “silk finish” (coated) paper for your interior pages—something that’s not offered by most POD currently. Again, you’d need to be sure there’s sufficient demand for your book if ordering in the hundreds as the up-front cost for interior color is high.

Converting Your Files for Print or E-book

If you decide to do it yourself, once you’re happy with your interior layout, you’ll need to convert your manuscript into a digital format that’s ready for POD or e-book production.

» For your print book, you’ll need a print-ready PDF file. This is an exact replica of the book’s interior and much larger in size than a standard PDF because of embedded fonts and other technical wizardry. You can export these from Word (with the correct plug-ins), InDesign, or Affinity Publisher. Most printers require a PDF exported to this standard: PDF/x-1a:2001; ask your printer for their specifications. If the standard’s not possible, choose the highest-quality PDF available in your program.

» To create an e-book version of your chapter book, middle grade book, or YA novel, you will need an EPUB file. These are “reflowable,” meaning the reader can choose font size and style, which will affect the size and flow of the text and any images. This is fine for middle grade and YA novels as well as illustrated chapter books where the image placement isn’t critical (in the sense that if the image flows to the next page and leaves a gap on the screen, the reader can still make sense of the story).

» To create an e-book of your picture book, you’ll need a fixed-format e-book for Amazon and a fixed-layout EPUB for other online stores. These files keep the text and images together in line with the PDF print book design—this is vital for the integrity of picture book stories, which rely on the interplay of the words and images together.

» One crucial consideration for publication on the Amazon Kindle platform is file size. Kindle charges a delivery fee ($0.15/MB in the United States) that’s negligible for novels but can add up significantly for picture books, which can easily be 20MB, thus canceling out your profits.

Remember: If you’ve outsourced your layouts, your designer will provide these files for you. If you choose to DIY all the way, more information about conversion tools is below.

Paid File Conversion Tools

When it comes to paid file conversion tools, you’re generally paying for formatting your book as well as file conversion. Formatting is the process of laying out your manuscript for print or e-book production. Formatting has significant overlap with manuscript conversion, but usually involves a more rigorous process that includes layout, chapter headings, indentation, optimization of illustrations and other images, and so on.

Print books will faithfully reproduce the appearance of your manuscript and generally require more effort to establish a consistent style. E-books, on the other hand, have greater limitations in style, font, and layout, so formatting e-books is as much a matter of stripping away unnecessary formatting as imparting new styles.

Both e-books and print books benefit from professional formatting, but there are a number of formatting tools that create beautiful e-books; paid formatting software generally includes manuscript conversion features as well.

Vellum is a popular formatting suite that is currently available only to Mac users. For Mac users, it scores highest for creating print and e-books simultaneously for middle grade and YA novels and illustrated chapter books. There are some design limitations in terms of font choice and size, but overall, these are outweighed by the many advantages, including ease of use, program speed, and automatic warnings about image size. Crucially, the software allows you to preview the print layout and easily move images around to avoid ugly gaps at page ends. When creating e-books, it also makes it easy to include store-specific links to your other e-books for cross-marketing. Finally, with one click, you can...
move from print preview to previewing your title on different types of e-readers. Once you’re happy with what you see, Vellum creates both a print-ready PDF and EPUB file for you.

Picture books can be formatted using Vellum by exporting full-page images (with text embedded) from your design program, importing into Vellum, and formatting them with page breaks. This method puts individual print pages on individual e-book pages and cannot show double-page spreads that are a hallmark of picture books. It’s a workaround, and not optimum, but it does produce files accepted at most EPUB retailers.

Other popular tools include the following:

» Scrivener is a popular word processor designed for authors that can import your manuscript and export to a variety of formats. Note: It’s only useful for novels.

» Anthemion Jutoh is a low-cost, full-featured e-book editor that can produce EPUB, MOBI, and other formats. Again, it’s most useful for novels.

» Recent versions of InDesign can export your manuscript to EPUB format for novels or picture books. However, the picture book conversion can be uneven, so be sure to proof it in several e-readers.

You might also check out Atticus software, which offers a similar tool to Vellum for both PC and Mac users, alongside other benefits.

These software tools are capable of producing a sales-ready e-book with no further work needed as long as your clean and professionally edited manuscript has been set up properly.

AUDIOBOOK PRODUCTION

Audiobooks are a popular format—and even the preferred format for many readers. The cost of production can be daunting, however. Audiobook production is usually billed by the finished hour, meaning the total work required to produce one hour of the final product. Costs may run upwards of $250 per finished hour, with the average children’s audiobook weighing in around five hours in length.

These fees may seem high, but consider that it takes six to eight hours of narration and editing to produce one finished hour of audiobook, so that five-hour audiobook may require thirty to forty hours of actual production time.

It’s difficult to match the quality of professional audio production at home. Narration is a deceptively difficult profession, one that requires a lot more than an appealing voice and clear diction. It requires specialized equipment, editing software, and on-the-job experience. It also requires time, which is often in short supply for indie authors.

Indie authors who want to record their own audio should invest in a high-end audio setup and a dedicated recording “studio” environment. Under no circumstances should you attempt to produce an audiobook with a cheap microphone headset, or worse, with text-to-speech software. The first will generate poor quality that’s unlikely to pass retailer requirements, and the latter will sound alien and robotic. (Even for science fiction, that’s not a recipe for success.)

Most authors rely on an audiobook producer, such as ACX or Findaway Voices, to handle this process. These services help pair authors and narrators to create high-quality audiobooks. Alternately, you can look for independent voice professionals.

Authors using these services will identify their project and what characteristics they’re seeking in a narrator—vocal quality, gender, age, accent, special dialects, and so on. For example, ACX lets the author browse the available narrators and listen to samples of their work. Findaway Voices sets up auditions with a selection of likely candidates, and the author chooses their favorite. Some also allow you to upload a sample of your manuscript, which interested narrators will audition for by providing a brief recording of your work.

Payment generally takes one of two forms, as specified in your contract:

» Payment Up Front: The author and narrator (or author and service) agree on a per-finished-hour rate. If the author can afford the initial investment, this is often the preferred method of compensation. It involves less risk for the narrator, and after the distributor’s fees, all subsequent profit from the audiobook belongs to the author, for the life of the audiobook.

» Payment Split: The author and narrator split all profits from the audiobook according to a given percentage. This kind of partnership puts a heavy burden of risk on the narrator because the narrator’s investing many hours of work with no guarantee that the audiobook will sell. It’s more common among newer narrators trying to build their experience, and it can be a great alternative for cash-strapped authors. However, because of the risk, narrators may be unwilling to consider this option without evidence of good sales and good reviews for the book.

Comparison shopping is vital for audiobook production. Shop around to find the service with the best fit for your goals. Then, within that service, find the best narrator for your audiobook.
**STEP 4: DISTRIBUTION**

Distribution refers to the process and logistics of getting your book to the consumer. Before you decide which distribution channels are best for your book, make sure you’ve done all you can to make your book discoverable by creating accurate and accessible metadata.

**METADATA AND ISBNS: HOW YOUR BOOK IS FOUND**

Metadata refers to the details of the book outside its actual text: title, author, publisher, page count, language, price, and publication date. It also includes the book description for your online sales pages and keywords and subject categories, all of which will help make your book discoverable online. When you upload your book to KDP and IngramSpark, you’ll be asked for these details.

There are various systems to catalog and track this information, but in retail environments, the ISBN and Cataloging in Publication (CIP) data are most important.

**What is an ISBN?**

ISBN stands for International Standard Book Number, and each component is important. It’s internationally recognized; it’s a standard format used across many platforms and companies; and it’s specific to books.

The ISBN is used to identify and track your book through complex distribution chains so interested parties can request and order it. It’s unique not only to your book but to a specific format, language, and edition of that book. For example, a hardcover edition of a book will have its own identifier separate from the paperback, e-book, and audiobook versions. This allows retailers to avoid confusion and deliver the precise product a customer requests.

**Do you need an ISBN?**

Whether you need to purchase ISBNs is a controversial topic in the indie community. Proponents argue that it’s a necessary part of professional book production, providing a globally recognized, enduring, and standardized means of identifying and cataloging your books. Opponents object to the cost and question the need for direct (author) ownership when retailer-specific ISBNs are available at a discount on many retail platforms. On some platforms, such as Amazon, internal identifiers may take the place of an ISBN. Self-publishing experts recommend you buy and use your own ISBNs as they identify you as the publisher of record.

**How do you obtain an ISBN?**

Each country has a registrar responsible for assigning ISBNs to books. In some countries, ISBNs are a function of a government agency, which may distribute them for free or at a low cost. In others, ISBNs are managed by an appointed registrar who sells registrations, sometimes for a substantial fee. In the United States, the sole appointed registrar for ISBNs is R. R. Bowker; in the United Kingdom, it’s Nielsen Book.

However, some publishers, distributors, and retailers act as resellers, purchasing large blocks of numbers at a discount and then providing or reselling them to authors. KDP Print and IngramSpark both offer ISBNs. In this case, the reseller remains the owner of the registration, and the only access the author will have to the ISBN metadata is through that reseller.

Experts generally advise you to purchase your own ISBNs directly from your national registrar so you’re the official owner. An ISBN identifies you to all interested parties—bookstores, libraries, catalogs—as the publisher of your book, now and in the future. Owning your ISBN registration leaves you in control of that data, allowing you to make changes at any time.

In contrast, purchasing a discounted ISBN from a reseller strips you of that control. You won’t be able to use that ISBN with other retailers or distributors, and should the reseller go out of business or divest itself of its publishing arm, you may be left with no way to update your data.

Most paid registrars offer significant discounts for bulk purchases of ISBNs. It’s advisable to purchase a block of ISBNs to cover all the formats you might conceivably produce in the future.

Although some use barcode and ISBN interchangeably, these are two different concepts. While you’ll likely have to pay for an ISBN registration, the barcode is simply a representation of that number. Do not pay for barcode representations or images of an ISBN; there are many online tools that provide this utility at no charge, and both KDP Print and IngramSpark will create free barcodes for you as part of the publishing process.
The US Library of Congress revised the self-publisher’s access to CIP data in 2019–2020. Self-publishing authors can visit loc.gov/publish/ prepubbooklink/ to submit CIP data and LCCN requests.

After obtaining an LCCN, you can use the service available at CIPBlock.com to obtain the full CIP block for your books. In countries outside the United States, the CIP data is often kept at a national repository or library and not printed in the book.

While not required in the same way as copyright, CIP data is something librarians look for. When it’s missing, they’ll often peg the book as poorly self-published.

Once you’ve made your book discoverable with the correct metadata, there are a myriad of services and platforms available to put your work in the hands of readers. Each has pros and cons, depending on your needs.

What is a distributor?

A distributor, in its most general sense, is any company that provides products to retailers, libraries, or other wholesale customers instead of directly to consumers. Distributors handle the logistics of shipping and delivery, manage billing on the author’s behalf, and in some cases act as the sole vendor from which retailers can obtain a book.

Many companies (including KDP Print and IngramSpark) work as both printers and distributors, producing books as well as making them available to various retail venues. Each service—printing and distribution—invokes fees. These “printer-distributors” mostly act as passive wholesalers who simply respond to book orders, whereas active full-service distributors have a sales team dedicated to placing books with retailers.

Although the term distributor is used to refer to both types of service, understanding the distinction between a passive wholesaler and an active, sales-oriented distributor is crucial.

PRINT BOOK DISTRIBUTION

Distribution to Online Retailers

Distribution to online retailers is a reasonably straightforward proposition if you’re using POD production. KDP feeds into Amazon, while IngramSpark feeds into Ingram Wholesale. Most online sales will come through these two distribution services, which are backed by their POD printing.

Using KDP Print for Amazon distribution ensures fast delivery to Amazon customers for your books around the world with a 60% royalty (after print costs) for each sale. You also have direct access to your sales data.

Both Ingram and Amazon offer multiple standard and nonstandard trim sizes, and both offer glossy and matte cover options. The difference in print quality is broadly the same. Both platforms also provide good customer service should a batch of books prove defective—always a possibility with any print order.

IngramSpark offers some extras: hardcover books (clothbound with a dustcover or casebound, where the cover image is printed on the hardcover) and large-print books, which are popular with libraries. KDP Print also offers hardcovers. Be sure to check whether your preferred size is available in their program.

Both platforms require the same elements to set up a book (interior file, cover file, metadata), but KDP Print makes the publishing process far easier.

Some bookstores refuse to order books distributed by KDP Print because of a bias against Amazon—if your book is available through IngramSpark, you won’t have this problem. And even when bookstores have a general bias against self-published books, you can at least clear the first hurdle by getting into Ingram’s catalog, which means if a reader asks for your book, the store can order it.

The downside to IngramSpark is that it doesn’t have its own online store like Amazon. Also, its platform is less user-friendly, and it charges setup and revision fees for each book. After all these considerations, experts recommend using both sites in tandem.

You can order books from either service at cost for your own use, which allows you to maintain a personal stock for book signings, consignments (sale or return), or direct-to-consumer website sales.

How do I set up KDP Print and IngramSpark together?

Most self-publishing experts recommend using both IngramSpark and KDP Print together to maximize exposure for your books and get the best royalty rates while doing so.

When setting up your book in KDP Print (using your own ISBN), do not enable KDP’s Expanded Distribution option. This way, Amazon will only sell your books on its own stores. (Remember: The Expanded Distribution service it promotes is provided by IngramSpark anyway.)

When setting up your book on IngramSpark, opt in to all sales channels except Amazon. Set your own royalty and wholesale discount rates. And be sure to use the same ISBN (the one you own) you used on Amazon.

Distribution to Physical Bookstores

Although distributing your book to online sellers is fairly simple, distributing your print book to physical bookstores is more challenging.

First, there’s the matter of persuading these retailers to carry your book. Using a service that boasts “tens of thousands” of retailers and libraries in their distribution network, such as Ingram, will not ensure that your book is stocked by these retailers; it only ensures that a retailer who wants to order that book has the option to do so. Few retailers will be interested in ordering and stocking a fairly obscure book. It takes time to build up your authorial presence and sales, so unless you have a blockbuster debut, finding retailers to carry your book in store can be a significant challenge.

Second, there’s the matter of wholesale discounting. Physical bookstores expect a wholesale discount, typically 55%, which enables them to sell the books for a profit at list prices. This is the industry standard for brick-and-mortar sales, and you must price your books while considering this discount to still make a profit.

Finally, bookstores will expect the ability to return unsold books for a refund. This incurs some uncertainty for the indie author, as a sale to a bookstore is not necessarily final. It also may result in losses: Depending on the agreement, the author can be liable for shipping costs to return unwanted books, or the author can specify that returned books be destroyed, the cost of which comes out of their pocket.

When you set up your book with IngramSpark, you’ll need to specify...
your wholesale discount and confirm whether you’ll accept returns. Paying for returns can completely devastate an indie author, so it’s best to avoid it unless you’re specifically targeting physical bookstores for your sales with the help of a sales team, you have a marketing plan driving demand for your book, and you have a business plan that accounts for returns. This simply isn’t possible with POD books. The upside to remember when considering brick-and-mortar distribution is that even if a store chooses not to stock your book, they will still be able to order it from IngramSpark if a customer requests it.

Some successful self-publishing children’s book authors have had success connecting with and supporting local bookshops by selling to them directly on consignment (sale or return) and setting wholesale discounts for wider distribution on IngramSpark.

**E-BOOK DISTRIBUTION**

As you know, most sales for authors of children’s books up to age twelve will be in print. Nevertheless, having e-books available not only caters to customers seeking them, it also gives you additional marketing opportunities to support sales of your print books. For this reason, it’s important to understand the choices you have for e-book distribution.

The main decision you’ll need to make regarding e-book distribution is whether to distribute solely to Amazon—by opting for their KDP Select Program or by “going wide” and uploading your e-book not only to KDP but also to the main e-book online retailers, including Apple Books, Kobo, Barnes & Noble, and Google Play Books. In fact, there are so many e-book retailers that managing uploads would be a daunting task. For that reason, many indie authors use e-book aggregators instead. Another option would be to upload your e-books directly to the key sites mentioned above—giving them direct access to sales data and pricing with a slightly better royalty rate—then use an aggregator for the rest.

**E-book Aggregators**

An aggregator is a term normally associated with e-book distribution. Aggregators typically provide e-books to multiple distributors, giving authors access to potentially thousands of online retailers from a single point of entry. It’s a great way to widen your e-book’s availability without having to deal directly with a multitude of services.

The electronic format is particularly well suited to this kind of arrangement. Authors upload their e-book file (or a manuscript to be converted) and select the networks and retailers where they wish to distribute their book.

Aggregators may charge a flat fee or a share of royalties (typically 10% of the sales price) for this service.

**Deciding on Your E-book Distribution Strategy**

In choosing your e-book distribution strategy, you’ll first need to consider which platforms offer advantages for signing up directly, and whether those benefits outweigh the convenience of using an aggregator.

Signing up directly for Amazon’s KDP platform is relatively easy, grants you full and immediate control over your books, and gives you access to powerful marketing tools, such as the Amazon advertising platform. This not only allows you to run pay-per-click ads, but also gives you optional access to Amazon’s KDP Select Program, which offers additional marketing opportunities in return for exclusive distribution of your e-book for ninety-day rolling periods.

Because KDP is so tightly integrated with Amazon’s retail operations, there’s little benefit to using an aggregator or outside distributor to reach Amazon shoppers.

If you’re comfortable managing multiple accounts and navigating the online interfaces of major retailers, you may also wish to sign up directly with Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Apple Books (requires a Mac), and Google Play. Direct access to these sellers maximizes control over your e-book sales and marketing data and provides slightly higher royalties. In some cases—for example, with Kobo—you also get access to promotional opportunities that are not available if you use an e-book aggregator.

For the countless remaining retailers, the centralized management of aggregators is a blessing to any indie author and well worth the small cut of royalties charged by these services.

However, avoid e-book distribution services that try to lock you into exclusive contracts. Most do not require this, and some indie authors leverage the strengths and scope of multiple aggregators. If you do use multiple aggregators, you’ll need to compare their distribution channels to avoid overlaps.

**Uploading Your E-book Files**

To upload, you’ll need the properly formatted EPUB file, the cover file, and the book’s metadata. Be ready to price the book, including for foreign markets. PublishDrive did a nice series on e-book pricing in different global regions. While it’s becoming dated, the strategies to consider for each region are still helpful:

- Southeast Asia: publishdrive.com/pricing-an-ebook-in-southeast-asia.html
- East Asia and India: publishdrive.com/pricing-east-asia-india.html
- Eurozone and Eastern Europe: publishdrive.com/pricing-eurozona-eastern-europe.html

**E-BOOK DISTRIBUTION QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

**If I put my e-book in KDP Select, can I publish it anywhere else?**

You cannot publish your e-book anywhere else if you’re enrolled in KDP Select. The enrollment term is for ninety days at a time, but if you request to leave sooner, they’ll often oblige.

However, Amazon exclusivity is for your e-book only. That means you can still publish your paperback, hardcover, and audiobook in other places.

**Can I make my e-books free on all platforms?**

Most e-book retailers allow you to set your e-book’s price to free—Amazon, however, does not. That said, if you set your book for free on other retailers and use the contract information at the bottom of your KDP dashboard to let them know, it will normally eventually price match your book.

Free books can be a good promotional tool—as already discussed for KDP Select. Some authors like to make certain books, such as the first book in a series, permanently free (“permafree”) to drive sales for their other books.

**Should I use an e-book aggregator or go direct?**

Experts recommend always uploading directly to KDP and, if you’re going wide, ideally also to Apple Books, Kobo, Barnes & Noble, and Google Play Books as you’ll have more control and direct access to your sales data. Use the e-book aggregators to expand your reach into markets you can’t tap directly—they’ll get your e-book into retailers you’ve probably never heard of.
All e-book aggregators have unique offerings; investigate which one’s best for you. Draft2Digital is used by many indie authors and could be a good place to start your research. As mentioned earlier, some authors use more than one.

DISTRIBUTION TO LIBRARIES

Another service that deserves a special mention, is low-tech, and has been around a long time is libraries. The people who work at libraries know books inside out. Many of them treat authors like rock stars. And they talk to readers all day long.

They are arguably the most important influencers in the book ecosystem. And they do an amazing job for the reading and writing community.

If you establish yourself locally—connecting with your local school’s librarian when looking for early beta readers or offering to do library events and readings—there’s a good chance you’ll persuade your local library to order your book.

If you want to get your books into libraries, the first thing you need to know is that libraries buy from distributors, not directly from publishers or authors. So you’ll need to get your book into a library vendor catalog—by uploading your titles to the right book distributor.

Unlike bookstores, where purchases are often dictated by a head office, most libraries operate independently. Each library has its own policy, ordering stock from catalogs or a chosen book supplier based on its community profile. And each has its own budget to spend as it wants, within broad parameters.

There are three kinds of libraries that stock children’s books: public, school, and special. Each has a different purpose and orders different types of books:

» Public: These government-funded local and national libraries serve the general public.

» School: With smaller budgets than public or academic libraries, school libraries are important for children’s and YA writers.

» Special: Privately run, these corporate or charity libraries are devoted to specific purposes, with budgets from tiny to huge, and are significant for niche writers of children’s books.

It’s easy to obtain a list of libraries through your local, regional, or national library association. The next task is to understand which distributor supplies their books and how to get your books distributed by these companies and organizations.

Print Books

Any library can access book ordering information from Amazon, Ingram Wholesaler, or smaller distributors. Often they’ll set up accounts at a preferred vendor and use it for most of their purchases. You may want to ask your targeted library where they have vendor accounts.

Educational distributors specialize in providing books to schools, school libraries, and other outlets for educational materials. In the United States, Follett School Solutions and Mackin are the major educational distributors, but look for one of the many local or regional distributors. Some educational distributors, such as Perma-Bound and Bound to Stay Bound, specialize in creating library editions of print books, which feature heavy-duty bindings. The educational distributors do not carry stock, but instead place orders with the publisher or wholesaler when they receive an order. It’s important to be listed in as many of these company’s databases as possible. Then, school librarians can order from their favorite vendor in their favorite formats.

Unfortunately, some of these companies prefer not to work with self-publishers. Do some research to find contacts who can give you access to the right personnel to consider your books.

E-books

OverDrive is one of the biggest e-book library providers in the world. If your books are listed in OverDrive’s system, you may see sales from South Africa to Alaska. While you can ask to be distributed directly to OverDrive, they often prefer to work with an aggregator.

The most library-friendly e-book distributors with global reach that you can access directly as an author-publisher include:

» Draft2Digital: distributing e-books via partnerships with OverDrive and Hoopla

» Kobo Writing Life: a sister company to OverDrive, the largest distributor of e-books to libraries

» Self-e Library Journal: offering access mainly to US libraries

Audiobooks

Audiobooks are a growing market segment for libraries. Findaway Voices is a distributor of audiobooks to retail and library distribution partners globally.

There are different distributors in different countries, and a little research should uncover the information you need. For example, in Australia, ALS Library Services supports authors in submitting books for possible inclusion in their monthly promotional listings to libraries. Many libraries work with multiple vendor partners, and the previously mentioned “go wide” advice applies to the library distributors as well: List your book widely with as many outlets as possible.

If you only have time to do one, Kobo Writing Life’s arrangement with OverDrive gives wide access and the highest rates for a single click of a button. OverDrive is Kobo’s sister company, so it pays the exact rate you would get if you had a direct OverDrive account (50% of your library list price) without the hassle of managing separate accounts or any aggregator royalty cut.

How You’ll Get Paid

When you do get your book into one or more libraries, you’ll get paid through one of two models:

» OC/OU is “one copy, one user” and is the standard library model, mimicking that of physical books. Libraries purchase a single copy and can loan it to one library patron at a time. When one person has your book checked out, no one else can “borrow” the book until the first person has “returned” the digital book. If a library wants to be able to loan the book to more than one person at a time, they’ll have to “purchase” another “copy.” Payment to authors under the OC/OU model is usually three times the list (retail) price; however it will be a single payment at the time the library purchases your title.

» CPC stands for cost per checkout. This is sometimes referred to as “simultaneous use” and means libraries can loan the digital book product (e-book or audio) to multiple readers at the same time. Payment to authors under this model is one-tenth the list price per loan. So, your payments will be smaller per reader, but there is the potential for payment with each reader. This model also promises greater exposure for your book, simply because more readers at a time means more people talking and recommending your book to others.

Contracts can vary widely, so check with each vendor to see particular payment models for their service.
TEN CHILDREN’S BOOK MARKETING IDEAS

1. Create marketing links and messages (including email sign-up incentives) in your book’s back matter.
2. Make sure your Amazon Author bio page is completed in key markets—review competitor authors’ pages for ideas.
3. Create an online presence with a website or blog and include a mailing list sign-up.
4. Add social media now or later (or not at all if it’s really not for you).
5. Approach local libraries, bookshops, schools, playgroups, and any relevant visitor centers.
6. Contact local press, magazines, and community websites.
7. Research local events and fairs.
8. Provide free copies to your beta readers and ask for honest reviews of your book.
10. Experiment with Amazon Advertising and research other advertising options.

Steps 1 and 2 are crucial and should be in place before you start marketing.

Outsourcing Your Marketing

Hiring a service to help you market and promote your book—and you—is tricky. We’ve long-wished that book marketers and PR agencies would offer their services on results-based payment. There’s no other service where the customer is told, “The bill is thousands of dollars, and I may get you no return on your investment.”

There is also no other service where you’re more vulnerable to having your dreams of success exploited. Writers, beware! Only outsource your marketing as a last resort and only if you have budget to spare. Ensure your chosen service is experienced in children’s book marketing. Check LinkedIn. Check out other works they’ve promoted along with any reviews or testimonials from children’s authors.

Know What You’re Being Offered

Some authors choose a paid service because they’re daunted by the thought of marketing and promoting their books. Yet many services offering “marketing” are offering no more than leaflets, business cards, and a website or showing an author how to set up a social media account.

Printed bookmarks, posters, business cards, and the like are not marketing services; they are materials. If this is all that’s being offered by your service, you are effectively on your own when it comes to marketing and promoting your book. These days, there are plenty of sites—many free or low-cost, such as Canva and Book Brush—that you can use to create your own marketing materials using your book cover images.

Good marketing and promotion services bring more to the table than this. They work with the author to introduce fresh ideas and suggestions and are willing to take the author’s own ideas on board. They plan and implement strategy over several months. They know what strategies work for books in a particular genre.

The service should not just be using the author’s provided contact list. The service should possess its own lists of press and bloggers and other tools and resources. A “press release” should involve the provider sending targeted information to particular journalists and bloggers, not a blanket, standard email.

If you do decide to outsource, ask specifically about services that take time (your most precious asset) and distinguish these from materials. Don’t sign with anyone before creating a clear marketing plan so your marketing agent or publicist knows your goals. If you’re a first-time author, for example, you might just want to get readers for your book.

STEP 5:
MARKETING

The access to readers that the self-publishing revolution has brought has been a boon for authors, but it has also introduced new challenges. Chief among these is discoverability as thousands of titles enter the market each day. The explosive growth of the number of books available to readers has created an overcrowded field in which most titles rapidly disappear into obscurity. Surfacing your book and bringing it to the attention of readers is one of the most challenging tasks you face as a publisher.
in the hope of getting early reviews and not be overly focused on sales or income. A specialist children’s book marketer of giveaway campaigns who can demonstrate the ability to deliver a certain amount of new readers might be right for you in this circumstance. Or if you’re trying to increase your social media presence, hire someone with proven experience in this. These things are easy to check.

In addition, come up with a payment plan that you’re sure you can afford. Be aware that it’s unlikely your costs will be recouped through new book sales. Marketing is a long-term game.

Again, outsourcing is not a route experts recommend for children’s authors except as a last resort, and only if you have budget to spare. You know your book best, and you are its best salesperson. Think hard before looking at outsourcing, and don’t do it before trying the many free promotional opportunities out there, such as newsletter swaps, guest posts on other children’s author’s sites, and free social media marketing using Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

**REVIEWS**

Positive reviews provide valuable reassurance to consumers trying to decide whether to make a purchase.

Reviews are the holy grail for children’s authors and are typically harder to come by than for adult books as your readers are not buying directly nor are those under age thirteen supposed to be posting online. Plus, most children’s books are read in print. This all means the chances of your reader posting a spontaneous review after finishing your book is highly unlikely!

**Customer Reviews versus Editorial Reviews**

It’s important to understand the distinction between customer reviews and editorial reviews because the rules governing them differ greatly. It’s also important to be aware of how to avoid contravening the rules for getting reviews.

**Customer reviews**

Customer reviews are meant to express the opinions of consumers, free of incentives or other manipulation. These are the comments you find on retail sites, such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Waterstones; review sites, like Goodreads; or children’s book–specific sites, such as The Children’s Book Review in the United States and Toppsta in the United Kingdom.

As we’ve seen, few consumers leave reviews, and it can be especially difficult for new children’s authors to amass positive comments and ratings on retail sites. That scarcity has given rise to various services designed to get customer reviews. But many of these services are unethical and may violate retailer rules. This could lead to your reviews being stripped in the best case, or your account suspended in the worst.

Customer reviews should always be organic. Exchanging money, discounts, or other incentives for a review deceives consumers who believe they’re reading a peer’s unbiased opinion. Authors should never purchase customer reviews in this way.

However, there is a notable exception: advance review copies (ARCs), which are free copies of a book given to reviewers. This is a long-standing practice in the industry and is not considered an incentive valuable enough to distort the reviewer’s opinion.

Additionally, there are some services that act as an intermediary between reviewers and the author. The author may appear to “buy reviews” from the service, but if the service is simply distributing ARCs on the author’s behalf and not attempting to influence the content of the review, this is perfectly acceptable. If the service is essentially bribing reviewers with gifts, coupons, sweepstakes entries, redeemable points, or other incentives, an author using that service is sailing into murky waters.

An author purchasing fraudulent reviews may face condemnation and disciplinary action by retailers when caught, so be sure you know exactly how a review service is obtaining reviews. Avoid any company with even a hint of unethical conduct.

There are, however, ethical tactics that children’s authors can use to get reviews. They include but are not limited to:

- Connecting with local schools and libraries when your book first comes out and offering free copies as part of your launch, with a request for an honest online review in return (without obligation)
- Requesting reviews in the back matter alongside other marketing messages, such as links to download free posters, crosswords, or other materials relating to the book—be sure to make it clear that an adult must sign up
- Connecting with bloggers who specialize in children’s book reviews
- Using online platforms, such as BookSirens or StoryOrigin, to connect with children’s book reviewers

**Editorial reviews**

Editorial reviews occupy a different space—both literally and figuratively—than customer reviews. While customer reviews provide the opinion of shoppers’ peers as social proof, editorial reviewers rely on reputation and experience to lend authority to their words and are usually kept distinct from customer reviews.

Traditionally, publishers submit books to review journals who then review the titles as part of their business practices. However, self-publishers often have to pay for the same service.

Companies such as Kirkus ($325–$475; kirkusreviews.com/indie-reviews/) and BlueInk ($395–$495; blueinkreview.com/purchase/) stand out in this field. These companies have earned the trust of readers with a history of unbiased reviews and good practices. Because editorial reviews are clearly identified as such and these companies maintain a separation between the reviewers and any compensation from the author, there’s no conflict of interest in their being paid. For example, at the time of writing, BlueInk states that its reviews are posted not only on their website and in their newsletter but also syndicated to the Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) and posted on Ingram’s database and Goodreads. BlueInk’s reviews of selected self-published titles also run in Booklist magazine, read by 60,000 librarians. In the United Kingdom, LoveReading4KidsUK offers a similar service that’s paid but follows strict guidelines around impartiality.

The value of an editorial review is often debated. A glowing review from a well-known source may persuade consumers, but will the average reader recognize an editorial reviewer as an authority? Will the review carry more weight with school librarians? Empirically, there’s little evidence that an editorial review increases sales, and certainly not to the extent that an author will recoup the cost of a high-end review service. It’s an investment without a clear return, although it may contribute to the overall impression your book makes on shoppers, especially in the education market.

If you choose to purchase an editorial review, keep in mind that it’s an unbiased review, so there’s no guarantee that it will be positive. While most services give you the option to suppress a negative review, there are no refunds if the reviewer posts a scathing assessment of your work.
AWARDS AND CONTESTS

Winning the right book award can be a catalyst for discovery, raising a self-published book out of obscurity and into the spotlight. How valuable that spotlight can be varies greatly, but recognition from an esteemed panel of judges can increase a book’s credibility, visibility, and marketability.

But it comes at a price. Contests can be expensive, especially if you’re entering a number of them (entrance fees are usually between $75 and $200 per category). In addition to the entry fee, you’ll also pay to ship multiple copies of your printed book (e-books generally upload for free).

A few contests offer cash prizes to top winners, and the best contests give you usable feedback even if you don’t win the main award.

However, some book awards are set up to make money for the organizers rather than recognizing the accomplishments of the entrants. There are very few nonprofit contests, and most contests produce good revenue for the organizers and sponsors as well as increased traffic to their website as you spread the news of your win. Some are not really competitions at all but ploys to get you to use a vanity press or self-publishing service. If you’re invited unexpectedly to enter a “contest,” it’s more than likely one of those. Some are even “pay-to-win” events, where you receive an “award” just for entering.

SCBWI hosts the annual Spark Award contest for SCBWI members who have self-published a children’s book in the current calendar year. There is no fee to enter. Spark winners receive a $1,000 cash prize, seals to display on their book, the opportunity to teach a digital workshop about their publishing journey at an SCBWI event, and the chance to be featured in the SCBWI online bookstore. Winners also get the opportunity to attend any SCBWI Conference of their choice tuition-free.

Consider submitting your books to any children’s book award that’s appropriate, from the American Library Association awards, such as the Newbery, to the Green Earth Book Award honoring environmental appropriate, from the American Library Association awards, such as the Newbery, to the Green Earth Book Award honoring environmental

MARKETING QUESTIONS ANSWERED

How do I balance writing and marketing?

When you’re writing your first book, the natural tendency is to put all your energy into writing and getting the book ready for publication. That’s normal.

When you publish your book, however, you have some difficult questions to answer: Do you start writing the next book or do you market your first book? How much time should you spend marketing versus writing?

These are deceptively difficult questions, especially if you’re a part-time writer and have limited time to write.

Some writers divide their time fifty-fifty, sixty-forty, or seventy-thirty between writing and marketing. Others schedule specific time in their calendar for marketing.
The most common advice, and the most practical, is to structure your marketing so that you can do one thing per day that will help you sell more books.

For example, you might send an email to ten book bloggers every day until there are no more to email. This might take you fifteen to twenty minutes a day. Or you might spend ten minutes per day tweaking your Amazon ads. The key is to keep it simple.

Marketing doesn’t have to be overwhelming. Breaking it into small chunks is a smart strategy. Just like you can exercise with fifteen minutes a day or learn to write your book in fifteen-minute increments, you can also market with small amounts of time.

When is the best time to start marketing my book?

Now. Right now.

It’s never too early to start marketing your book. That’s right—start marketing your book even if you’re not finished with your first draft!

There’s a principle in marketing called the Rule of Seven. It means that customers need to see your product seven times on average before buying. The Rule of Seven applies specifically to advertising, but it’s good practice to start talking about your book early and often so that readers will have repeated exposure to it by the time you publish.

Inevitably, the next questions are: “What if I’m an unknown?” “What if I don’t have a platform?” and “Why should anyone listen to me?”

It’s okay to start marketing when you’re an unknown. It’s not a waste of time. In fact, if no one’s watching, it allows you to make some critical mistakes and learn from them.

If you don’t have a platform, that’s okay, too, because now’s the time to build it.

What is an author platform and how do I build one?

An author platform includes anything that helps readers understand who you are as an author, what your books are about, and where to buy them.

An author platform can be composed of many aspects, but for most self-publishing children’s authors, it begins with:

» Your website (often transactional, so readers can buy your books right there)
» Your mailing list or online community
» A tribe-building medium, such as a blog, podcast, or YouTube channel
» Social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Pinterest

There’s plenty of free advice out there on using these options, and a good bet when starting out is to follow accounts of authors like you to see what they’re doing. You can then decide which platform(s) feel like the right fit for you and start from there.

At the very minimum, a website is required. It tells readers and book buyers—parents, teachers, and librarians—who you are, where to find your books, what’s new with you, and how to contact you. If you want to be taken seriously as a writer, you need a website.

Don’t think of your website merely as a shop; it should also tell your story. People can learn a lot about you from your website, so take the opportunity to share as much as you can with a combination of evergreen content and news updates (text and images) that truly reflect your writing life and your voice. This is all part of building your author brand.
Book promotions are limited-time incentives to attract the interest of readers. Utilizing limited-time markdowns, free-download days, giveaways, contests, and other events can boost revenue and bring in new readers. Those readers may go on to buy other titles now or in the future, or even become lifelong fans.

The efficacy of any given promotional strategy can’t be guaranteed, but when used wisely, they can reap great benefits for an author. For example, it may seem counterintuitive to give away a book for free to raise revenue, but if you’re releasing a new book in a series, having a period of free downloads for the first book can bring in new readers who would otherwise not have purchased the new book.

ADVERTISING
Finding the right platform, audience, and approach for an ad campaign can yield tremendous rewards, but this process comes with a steep learning curve and often involves extensive trial and error.

Amazon Advertising
One of the hottest advertising platforms currently is Amazon, available to any author who self-publishes through KDP. At the time of this writing, authors can advertise with Amazon in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and Australia. There are a variety of ad types—some with custom text alongside your book cover and some without. Depending on which one you create, your ad might appear next to Amazon search results, in a scrolling strip below product pages, or in a panel in different placements on product pages for competitor books, including below the Buy button or on Kindle lock screens.

Amazon uses an auction system combined with algorithms (probably based on a combination of relevancy, bidding tactics, and sales history) to determine which ads are shown. Users pay only when a customer clicks on the ad, which keeps costs down while experimenting with different strategies.

Ad setup is extremely simple and can be tailored to any budget. However, the process of fine-tuning your ads to yield consistent returns is surprisingly complex, and creating an ad that scales up will take time to master.

There are several free courses and guides on how to use Amazon ads, including free webinars and online guidance from the Amazon advertising team. You’ll also find free and paid-for courses online. There are several free online courses that don’t specialize in children’s books but are useful nevertheless to understand key principles. One good example is Dave Chesson’s Sell More Books with Amazon Ads course.

If you have budget to spare and wish to leave no stone unturned, Mark Dawson’s Advertising for Authors course covers not just Amazon ads but also Facebook ads and more. The course is not tailored for children’s authors, but the key principles still apply.

Facebook and Instagram Advertising
Facebook’s advertising program takes targeted marketing to a new level. You can specify the day and times your ads will appear, the geographic regions, and the demographics of your audience (including parents of children in a certain age range, grandparents, and so on). You can target mobile users, desktop users, or both. You can display your ad only to users with a particular interest or lifestyle. And you can tailor your marketing push to fit any budget.

It’s an unprecedented level of control.

The interface for creating an ad is mostly user-friendly, but the plethora of options can be overwhelming at first.

There are no firm statistics, but anecdotally children’s authors of books for up to age twelve have struggled to make Facebook ads work for them—other than in specific circumstances (books that offer personalization), that deal with niche topics (children’s emotional or medical health), or that are relevant to holiday periods or special days (Christmas, Father’s Day, or the first day of school).

A big difference to be aware of (and beware of!) between Facebook and Amazon ads is that Facebook will normally spend your entire daily budget, no matter how it’s set. By contrast, Amazon rarely uses the full daily budget and authors can set daily budgets at more than they expect to spend in the hope of encouraging a wider reach. For this reason, it’s important to learn the ropes before launching a full Facebook ad campaign.
BookBub for E-book Promotion and Discovery

BookBub, a website that promotes free or discounted e-books to highly targeted lists of avid readers around the world, is considered the gold standard for e-book discovery services due to its huge audience and strong track record of boosting sales and attracting new readers.

BookBub offers two forms of promotion: advertising and featured deals.

» BookBub advertising

Authors and publishers can bid to run pay-per-click or pay-per-impression ads to go out with BookBub’s newsletters, with the ads linking to their sales page on a chosen platform. The ads are quick and easy to set up, and you can stop and start them at any time. However, these are e-book ads, which may not work for books for young children.

Consider this option pretty low on the list for children’s authors unless you have a strong-selling middle grade/YA story that you think will appeal to adults or perhaps a middle grade series where you make the first book free or 99¢. After all, we know that some children read e-books, and given that BookBub customers specify which genre they’re looking for, we can assume that those who signed up for children’s books are doing so for a reason. You may get your book in front of parents who have signed up on their child’s behalf, who then go on to buy the whole series either on Kindle or in print.

It’s worth testing this out. Remember that BookBub targets ads to people who like specific authors. Before you start, build a list of authors who are successful with books similar to yours; these will become the target authors for your ads.

» BookBub featured deals

As an alternative to advertising, you can apply for a “featured deal” to help boost visibility of your book during a price drop. BookBub will include your book in a curated list sent to members who have signed up to receive children’s books.

BookBub describes these members as “power readers who often go on to become loyal, long-term fans of the authors they discover on BookBub.” They will also email any readers who’ve clicked on the book to encourage them to follow the author. These deals aren’t easy to come by—and BookBub tends to favor authors whose books are “wide” rather than in KDP Select.

Adult and YA authors have had huge success with BookBub featured deals, which can have a profound effect on Amazon rankings, especially if run in conjunction with other promotions around the same time. However, given that this is an e-book tool, featured deals are probably only worth pursuing if you write a series for teens or older middle grade children—with the assumption that some read e-books and their parents may be tempted by a free or 99¢ offer, which may then get you buy-throughs.

Note that to be considered for a BookBub promotion, your book must be full-length, free or discounted by more than 50%, and not available at a lower price within ninety days of the promotion. To understand more about how BookBub marketing works, visit support.bookbub.com.

Other Advertising

Most agree that Google ads do not work for children’s books. However, other social media platforms offer advertising options. Depending on your preference and where you’ve built your author platform/audience, you may want to investigate Pinterest, TikTok, or other social media platforms’ advertising options.

OTHER PROMOTIONAL TOOLS

Contest and Giveaways

Contests and book giveaways can stir up excitement among your readers. Services such as Amazon Giveaway, Goodreads Giveaways, Rafflecopter, and KingSumo provide features to help you organize, run, and advertise these events and distribute prizes to winners automatically. Costs for these management services vary. If you decide to use them, read the rules to ensure you’re complying with their terms and conditions.

KDP Select for E-book Promotion

As mentioned earlier, Amazon’s KDP Select is an optional program within KDP that requires authors to sell their e-books exclusively through Amazon for a ninety-day term. In exchange for that exclusivity, the author is granted five days of book promotion, either making the e-book free or offering a discount with a countdown timer.

These promotions can be outstanding tools for boosting readership and sales. For maximum impact, you can pair them with other e-book discovery services as the added exposure amplifies the effect and can even boost your book to the top of its Amazon sales category. If you know authors who write in the same genre as you, you can also plan a joint promotion where you all put your e-books on discount and agree to share the promotion on your social media sites and with your respective mailing lists. (For balance and fairness, this works best for authors with a similar sales record and similar-sized mailing lists.) New readers—who in the case of children’s authors will be parents or teachers—can be given the option to join your mailing list, of course.

Press Releases

One final marketing and promotion tool, which was critical to old-school marketing, is public relations (PR). Press releases are a staple of traditional PR and an important means of connecting with mainstream media. Whether this is an optimal approach for author-publishers is a matter of perennial debate in the self-publishing community. Like everything, it’s only by exploring and experimenting yourself that you can know whether it’s worth the time and money for you.

The quality of the contacts is paramount when sending out press releases, and in the case of children’s books, we generally recommend keeping your PR efforts local. Prepare them yourself and send them to newspapers and magazines in your area, where the local connection is likely to strike a chord.

Sending your releases wider is unlikely to result in coverage unless you have an exceptional news hook.

An effective press release is one that’s carefully tailored to the recipients and targeted to those most likely to broadcast news of the book. Don’t be seduced by companies offering press release services that essentially blast one carbon-copy press release after another to an aging mailing list—or worse, simply posting them on a press release website. A shotgun approach will not work here.

Beware also of publishing services that charge a hefty markup for creating a press release. This is often the hallmark of vanity press. For a
further discussion of what to be aware of, see “Evaluating a Service” in Part Three: Self-Publishing Services.

**PROMOTION QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

**Should I hire a publicist?**

PR services are expensive, and they’re not likely to generate a return on your investment. For this reason, be wary of any service that says it can guarantee a return on your money as it may be an unscrupulous provider. In general, experts don’t feel this is a wise choice for children’s authors unless you’re extremely busy trying to manage your best seller alongside a myriad of other tasks.

**How long should a book promotion last?**

Work toward focusing all activity into a three-to-four-day period as that will give you enough time to effectively promote and adjust—and plays to Amazon’s algorithmic preference toward recency.

For more information on press releases and publicizing your book, see “Publicizing Your Published Book” in SCBWI’s *The Book: The Essential Guide to Publishing for Children*. 
While authors tend to focus on book sales to readers as the endgame of the publishing process, each book actually represents several sets of rights, which are secured by copyright. E-book, POD (in multiple formats, like hardback and large print), and digital audiobook are all formats we can publish ourselves with relative ease. When it comes to international editions, translations, stage adaptations, film, merchandising, large print runs, and more, it becomes more efficacious to license rights to other companies, services, or individuals.

As a self-publisher, if you’ve followed the advice in this book, you’ve retained ownership of all your publishing rights. This gives you a tremendous advantage over the author published by a third-party publisher.

When we talk about authors’ selling rights, we’re actually referring to the legal right authors have to grant permission (called a license) to others to exploit some of their exclusive rights, such as the right to reproduce the book in print or digital formats, translate the work, or make a film based upon the work. Selling your additional rights is not something to even think about until you’re already selling well in your book’s original language in at least one format.

Under the proper circumstances, these rights can potentially be more valuable than the original book rights, so it’s important to understand the licensing terms and rewards being presented.

Selective Rights Licensing

When a third-party publishing contract is signed, the author is licensing the right to publish that book in exchange for an advance, royalties, and some publishing services (editorial, design, etc.). Selective rights licensing involves making sure that any license offered is exclusive to that rights buyer only for publication in a specific format (e.g., print only) within a specific territory (e.g., United States only) for a specific term (e.g., five years). Self-publishing experts recommend a selective rights licensing approach for independent authors.

Rather than granting or assigning all the rights in a title to one publisher, each right is a separate package that can be individually licensed in exchange for compensation—sometimes in the form of a flat fee, but preferably as royalties or residuals (a percentage of sales revenue). The author should aim to minimize the territory and term for which the license is granted.

licenses to publish come in many flavors. They may be exclusive (only the licensee has permission to use the work) or nonexclusive (more than one person may use the work at the same time). The license limits what can be done with the rights. They may be limited to a particular use (editorial, noncommercial, educational), format (print, e-book, web), duration, or territory.

Imagine your book is a shopping center, and you are the landlord. Each empty shop represents a set of rights. There might be one shop selling print books in English, one selling audiobooks in Spanish, another selling e-books in Mandarin, and another selling movie tickets and downloads. If your book goes mega and is amenable, your center might even, like Harry Potter, include a theme park.

Since your rent depends entirely on how much each shop sells, you want to rent to companies that have the wherewithal to use those particular rights to make money for you both. In other words, you shouldn’t grant rights to the French translation of your book to an English-only publisher unlikely to exploit them.

As you learn about, and begin to utilize, the opportunities outlined in this book, keep this landlord analogy in mind.

Licensing is the term to use in discussions with rights buyers. They may speak of “granting” or “assigning” rights, but as indie authors, we want to license nonexclusively and selectively rather than hand across the whole suite of rights to a buyer who has no real plan.

A rights license is not a transfer of ownership. “Use it or lose it” is the proper attitude for authors to have toward publishing rights buyers.

Rights buyers will push hard to acquire world e-book rights,
audiobook rights, and print rights. You will hold hard to limit the format, territory, and term. These three are your mantra as a rights seller: format, territory, and term.

And your watchword as a selective rights licensor is nonexclusive. Licensing all rights to one buyer, without due consideration, is an expensive mistake we’ve seen too many authors make.

Primary Rights and Subsidiary Rights

For an indie author, primary rights means e-book, print, and audio as these can typically be taken care of themselves using the self-publishing model. Subsidiary rights (sometimes known as sub rights) are rights outside these big three. The most common sub rights sold by indies are foreign language, TV, film, merchandise, and games.

Until very recently, audio was also treated as a sub right, but new indie services and digital downloads mean authors can now do audio direct using services such as ACX and Findaway Voices—though many indie authors choose to (selectively!) license audio rights to an audiobook publisher.

As you might imagine, subsidiary rights can be valuable commodities. J. K. Rowling wisely retained her subsidiary rights for the Harry Potter series, and in 1999, the film rights alone for the first four books netted her approximately $2,000,000. Royalties following that initial deal earned millions more.

It’s imperative that you understand the value of your copyright and know which rights you’re signing away in a contract and for how long (term) and where (territory).

Be especially wary of contracts that empower the other party to license or sell rights on your behalf. Some exploitative contracts permit this without any input on your part, which means the publisher could sell those valuable subsidiary rights for a pittance. Whenever possible, retain control over the future of your work.

Some self-publishing services (and all trade publishers) aim to retain rights for a certain period of time in exchange for marketing or promotional services. If you choose to go this path of assisted publishing, it’s of the utmost importance for you to completely understand the rights implications.

What, if anything, are they giving you as compensation? In trade publishing, it should be royalties and ideally an advance. The size of an advance is usually the measure of the publisher’s confidence in a book.

If a self-publishing service wants the rights to your material but is also asking for payment, it’s a strong indication that this service is unlikely to be working in your best interests. Beware!

A rights licensing marketplace, like PubMatch, can help you connect with buyers, but it’s important to be realistic. Rights buyers are heavily saturated with a great deal of material arriving on their desks every day. Selling rights can be a challenging proposition, so approach it with balanced expectations.

PubMatch can help break down some barriers for rights holders and simplify the rights process, but licensing rights is not easy and requires the same sort of dedication as selling your book directly to readers.

PubMatch

PubMatch is a paid service for facilitating international rights deals. It’s a partnership between Publishers Weekly (PW) and the Combined Book Exhibit family of companies, which aims to facilitate rights deals outside major book fairs, like Frankfurt and London. Although PW is based in the United States, it has international connections, including a partnership with the London Book Fair and the ALLi.
The self-publishing sector offers four separate service streams for authors: independent, assisted, vanity, and hybrid. Below are descriptions of each.

Independent Self-Publishing Services

Hired on an individual, freelance basis by authors who want to maximize their control and their return on investment.

Independent self-publishing services are companies and freelancers hired by independent, self-publishing “indie” authors who upload their own books directly to self-publishing distributors and operate as the creative director of their book publishing and author business. Services in this sector vary from individual local freelancers to global companies, like Amazon KDP and Apple Books.

The option to take a more independent route—uploading finished book files directly to one or more of the large online retailers and distributors and directly hiring editors, designers, virtual assistants, and marketing services—is used by most independent authors who make a good income.

This means making choices that maximize your creative and commercial advantage, drawing together online tools and collaborators to supplement your own competencies and self-taught skills and getting into hands-on book preparation and production: learning by doing.

For first-time authors, this path takes them on a steep learning curve, which is why some people like to break themselves in gently by starting with the support of a full-service package.

Yes, the independent option is most likely to give a commercial return on the author’s investment of time and money, but juggling multiple service providers can create additional overhead and headaches in the form of research, billing, and coordination.

Time-strapped authors may instead choose to purchase a comprehensive, full-service publishing package from a single vendor for the convenience, or a smaller bundle of related services.

Assisted Self-Publishing Services

Covering the entire publishing process and hired by authors who want more support or who value time over money.

Assisted self-publishing services are companies and sole traders that provide help to authors for a fee. Though assisted, this is still self-publishing, as it’s the author who funds the expense of publication. Some of these services bundle the seven steps of publishing into packages. Some offer “hybrid publishing” arrangements that adopt some of the practices of trade publishing and physical bookstore distribution.

Authors shopping in this sector need to exercise caution. These packages tend to have a higher price tag, and the author usually pays a premium for the convenience of one-stop shopping and more personalized service.

Contrary to what you might hear from some authors, not all assisted services charging higher-end fees are a waste of money, dishonest, or vanity services by definition. As with most situations, it’s not a question of price, but of value for money. What are you paying for? Does it have real tangible value in terms of helping you produce a great book or reach more readers?

It’s rare to find a company that specializes in every aspect of book production, especially one with a limited staff and resources. Thus, you may find that a self-publishing package provides excellent editing and formatting, but lackluster cover design. Or they may provide outstanding design, but ineffective and costly marketing.

You are statistically less likely to receive high quality from a company that provides a wide range of services than one that focuses exclusively on one service. Examine the company’s work for each publishing process you need assistance with, and whenever possible, use companies that allow you to opt out of specific services.

Agent-assisted self-publishing services

While many authors like to have an agent on their side, remember that the purpose of an agent is to make you more money than you can make for yourself. If your agent hasn’t sold any rights for you or hasn’t provided significant publicity opportunities, you may be on their books, but you don’t really have an agent.

The response of literary agents to self-publishing varies widely. Some are not interested at all, seeing trade publishing as the arena where they make money for themselves and authors. For others—and, it must be said, the less-successful agencies—self-publishing provides a way for them to stay afloat in a changing publishing environment.

What has come to be called agent-assisted self-publishing can take
many forms. At one end of the scale, it means an agency encouraging an author to upload unsalable manuscripts or out-of-print backlist books and showing them how, without taking any payment. The reasoning is that self-published titles can give a revenue boost to the author’s trade-published titles, which the agency does represent; every improvement to an author’s platform is worthwhile.

At the other end are unscrupulous agents actively seeking unpublished writers to “assist,” calling for the author to finance production and marketing, while the file gets uploaded in the agent’s name and account. For the work of managing the digital dashboard, the agent receives 15% of income for the life of the book.

Some authors believe, or are persuaded, that choosing this route and paying that 15% will smooth a pathway to trade publication.

Few of these deals are good for authors, who lose their ability to directly manage their books indefinitely. We advise that authors do the same due diligence as with any self-publishing service. Take time to understand what you are giving up in order to be agent-assisted, and what you stand to gain.

Key considerations when it comes to agent-assisted self-publishing include:

1. Who holds the rights and for how long? Always ask about reversion and beware of early termination fees in contracts.

2. What is the commission split? With Kobo, Apple Books, and some KDP territories, the maximum author commission is 70%. No digital publisher or literary agency can get you more than that. If you question closely, you may find they’re using the same platforms and giving you less, a percentage of their receipts, and sometimes minus their costs. So, what are they offering in return for this lower commission?

3. What marketing support is provided? Marketing is the only commercial reason you may want to go with an agency or digital publisher. It’s crucial to ask what marketing they’ll be doing that you can’t do for yourself. If it’s Facebook ads, who’s in charge? What about reviews? Blog tours? Is their proposed support ongoing as digital marketing needs to be? If it’s showing you how to manage social media, that’s not marketing; it’s training. Consider whether you really want to sign away your rights in return or if you’d rather invest in a short-term course and learn to do it yourself.

Vanity Self-Publishing Services

For the most part, this controversial sub-stream of the assisted services sector is to be avoided.

Many vanity services (also called “vanity publishers”) engage in ineffective, substandard, misleading, or in the worst cases, outright deceptive practices, with the intention not of bringing books to readers but of extracting as much money as possible from authors. They sell a dream, presenting expensive services in a manner that exploits new authors’ hopes for their work. They exaggerate and blur lines so naive authors believe they have been published, when all that has happened is their book has been printed, often at greater cost than they would have paid their local printer.

Like bad used-car salespeople, these publishers fail to point to the scratches on the body (the flaws in the book) or the cracked chassis (the lack of real distribution or marketing services in their offering).

We regularly hear of naive or uninformed authors who are left with a basement, attic, or garage full of books they have been pressured into buying that they have no hope of selling. Such operations, some charging five-digit fees, proliferate on the internet.

There are also services that have used false addresses in affluent areas to reel in the unwary author; services where the personnel use false names and aliases; services that take a fee and an exclusivity license, not allowing the author to publish elsewhere; services that require the author to purchase a substantial number of copies of the book; and a great many services that trade on misleading promises and vague language.

The worst of these operators will do anything to get the author to pay for services, and often shoddy services at that. Work that hasn’t been read is lauded, the “gatekeeping” of trade publishers is demonized, a veil of complexity is thrown over the publishing process, and sales reps bombard the prospective customer with emails and phone calls that urge them to do the right thing by their book.

These exploitative services are legion. A Google search for “self-publishing services” will return advertisements for many of the worst operators, all promising success.

Assaulted with omnipresent, aggressive marketing and high-pressure sales, any novice author starts their self-publishing journey in peril.

Author Solutions (one of the worst offenders)

When it comes to author services, one company tends to get particular attention due to its size, global reach, and the unfortunate support of well-known publishing brand names. Author Solutions is the umbrella name for a network of controversial companies distrusted by authors in the know.

Tragically, despite innumerable complaints, multiple class-action lawsuits, and constant rebuke by author watchdogs, Author Solutions is often the first port of call for uninformed writers seeking a publishing service. Novice authors are lured to its aggressive marketing and omnipresent advertisements. Because they do not research the company’s background, many prove to be easy prey.

Even those aware of Author Solutions’ reputation need to be vigilant: There is no publishing house called Author Solutions. It trades under a variety of imprints, including Xlibris, Archway Publishing, LifeRich Publishing, iUniverse, Trafford Publishing, Abbott Press, Balboa Press, AuthorHouse, Partridge, Palibrio (its Spanish language imprint), and WestBow Press.

Some of these imprints are more author-centric than others, but none follow what the ALLi Watchdog Desk promotes as best practices or fully abide by their Code of Standards.

The authors in one of the suits against Author Solutions alleged breach of contract, unjust enrichment, and various violations of the California Business and Professional Code and New York General Business Law. Ultimately, Penguin Random House was dismissed from the case, along with some—but not all—of the claims against Author Solutions. The case was settled in August 2015 and discontinued, but not before revealing that only one-third of Author Solutions’ revenue comes from selling books to readers; two-thirds comes from selling services to authors.

The terms of the settlement were not released.

Hybrid Self-Publishing Services

Publishers don’t ask for payment. This has long been the position of savvy authors. A publisher pays you. A self-publishing service is paid by you.

In recent times, there have been huge changes in the self-publishing sector; it’s not always so clear-cut now. Varied business models,
methods of working with writers, and approaches to marketing and distribution are emerging, including companies attempting to blur the line between both models—offering a traditional publishing framework but charging the author to balance the cost of production. Sometimes referred to as subsidy publishing or joint publishing, hybrid publisher is the term most widely used to describe this crossbreed of publisher and self-publishing service.

Hybrid presses are an exception to the rule that publishers don’t ask for payment. Authors must be wary of questionable services that use this exception to justify exploitative charges as well as vanity presses that use this more acceptable term to cover up exploitative practices.

There are legitimate hybrid publishers but, as SCBWI advisor Jane Friedman puts it, “the term has become popular among companies that wish to put a new, ‘innovative’ face on a very common, age-old activity: charging writers to ‘publish’ while not doing the most challenging parts of the publishing process: marketing and promotion and rights licensing.”

Adding to the complexity is the confusion between hybrid publishers and so-called hybrid authors. These are not, as you might think, authors who work with hybrid publishing companies, but a term used by some to describe authors who both traditionally publish and self-publish.

To add even more confusion, some trade publishers, including Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster, have aligned with some of the most egregious vanity services. Simon & Schuster even offers a meeting with its executives as one of the “perks” of their overpriced self-publishing service, Archway. No wonder authors are confused.

In a traditional publishing relationship, the publisher is responsible for the development and production of a book and, in return for these services, retains a large share of the sale price of every book sold. The publisher never takes money from the author, and profit is dependent wholly on the success of the book.

In an assisted self-publishing relationship, the author pays for specific services. The service provider makes their money primarily from the sale of services, and it’s the author who bears responsibility for the success of the book.

Hybrid publishing attempts to straddle the line between these two models, offering a traditional publishing framework, including curation and physical bookstore distribution, but charging the author to offset the cost of production.

Although there are ethical and reputable hybrid publishers, there are many more substandard services that have turned to hybrid publishing, sometimes as a means of camouflaging exploitative vanity press operations. The term can give a veneer to a business model that’s actually geared toward extracting as much money as possible from the author.

The model is fraught with danger for a couple of key underlying reasons.

Every author should at least consider the independent option of keeping as much control as possible, hiring freelance assistance for editorial and design, and uploading books directly to self-publishing platforms, like Amazon and Apple. But if you can afford it, and it makes sense in your circumstances, having a reputable company hold your hand through the process can be comforting and make things easier to negotiate, especially for the first time.

It’s also good to avoid inexperienced or underperforming freelancers who may mean well but don’t have the correct information or competencies to do more for your book than you can yourself.

Authors must understand the value being offered and the values of the service company making the offer. In general, experts recommend purchasing services à la carte rather than as a package of bundled services. When services are separate, it’s easier to assess the quality, value, and performance of each. Breaking out services individually also eliminates the common problem of package bloat, where low-value, high-markup services are used to pad the perceived value (and cost) of a package.

Always check terms and conditions as some service contracts may limit your opportunities and control. Control of your rights, control of your metadata, and control of your positioning, marketing, and promotion are rights that are not to be given up lightly, even to a trade publisher offering an advance and royalties—and certainly not to a self-publishing service.

Burden of risk

Traditional publishers earn their money from book sales. If the book does not succeed, the publisher does not profit. The central maxim of publishing is that income should flow from publisher to author, but in a hybrid publishing arrangement, the publisher collects payment from the author up front. If the book fails to sell, the hybrid publisher has already been paid. It’s the author who loses.

Hybrid publishing shifts the burden of risk to the author. For this model to be beneficial to the author, that burden requires compensation in the form of significantly improved royalties. Regardless of the compensation, it’s always the author who potentially stands to lose money and the publisher who gains in this relationship.

Low incentive to promote

Because the hybrid publisher receives money in advance, any investment in promotion and marketing comes out of its profits. With money already in hand, there’s an inherently lower incentive for hybrid publishers to invest those funds in the promotion of the author’s books.

Not all hybrid publishers are exploitative, but authors must take great care to weed out those that are.

Evaluating Hybrid Publishers

Here’s a partial list of what you should look for when evaluating hybrid publishers:

» The company acts in the full capacity of a traditional publisher, providing multilevel editing, design, publishing, distribution, marketing, sales, and accounting services.

» The publisher has a well-established track record of professional conduct, high quality, and successful marketing as either a traditional publisher or fee-for-service provider.

» Submissions are curated; the publisher declines submissions they cannot successfully market or do not fit the company’s focus.

» The publisher offers compensation commensurate with the burden of risk shouldered by the author. At the absolute minimum, a 50% share of the net (from distributors/retailers) or its equivalent is appropriate.

» The publisher sells books to readers, not the author. Mandatory purchases of books is unacceptable, whether stated explicitly or as a hidden charge in the guise of “bonus author copies.”

» The publisher has a clearly articulated strategy for marketing and promoting its titles.

» The publisher offers services and advantages that aren’t generally available from fee-for-service providers, such as superior distribution or media contacts.
» Rights and licenses granted by the author are fully leveraged by the publisher, with appropriate compensation. Unused rights automatically revert to the author within a set period of time.
» Contract terms are unambiguous, protect the author as well as the publisher, expire within a reasonable time, and define the circumstances when the contract may be terminated.
» The publisher profits from the sale of the books, not author fees. Fees charged to the author are specifically to offset publication costs, with proper accounting.

If you’ve heard of a service and are unsure whether it’s legitimate, visit ALLi’s Service Ratings page here: selfpublishingadvice.org/best-self-publishing-services/
With the rapid growth and evolution of the self-publishing industry, the number of providers serving authors has grown as well. Just as indie authors must learn aspects of publishing, distribution, and marketing, they must also learn to appraise potential service providers to protect themselves from exploitation.

View Service Websites Critically
A prospective self-publishing service’s website is a good place to start your research, but always remember that the website is a marketing tool under the provider’s exclusive control, designed to present it in the best possible light. It should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism.

The manner in which the information is presented may prove even more useful than the information itself. Is the website professionally designed with well-edited copy? A provider that can’t be bothered (or doesn’t know how) to present its offering professionally is likely to cut corners on your work as well.

Is information about pricing and services presented clearly, up front, and without evasion? A provider that doesn’t disclose pricing or is vague about the services provided may be trying to conceal vital information.

Does the marketing pitch rely on intimidation or attempt to belittle you or prey on your insecurities? Does it falsely claim that the provider’s services are the only path to success? Does it drip with contempt at a particular sector of the publishing industry, either indie or traditional? These are all signs of a company that tears down authors rather than building them up and supporting them.

Examine the Service’s Work
If possible, look up examples of the service provider’s work. If the company provides cover art, are the designs eye-catching and unique, or are they repetitive templates? If it provides editing, are their books free of errors? If it provides marketing and publicity, is the book easily found outside the provider’s website?

Don’t rely on the carefully selected examples spotlighted by the company. These are cherry-picked to show their best. You’ll want to see a random sampling of the work they typically produce, one that includes examples of the good and potentially the bad.

Listen to Other Indie Authors
When shopping for a service provider, the recommendations of trusted friends and colleagues are invaluable. Each person in your circle of friends is one node in a much, much larger network, so by asking for recommendations, you’re not only tapping into their experience, but the experiences of their friends and colleagues. Take advantage of the power of that network.

Author groups on social media are another strong resource. If you’re not a member of a group that includes seasoned, professional, indie authors, you’re missing out on a priceless source of information.

Seek Out Complaints
It’s somewhat counterintuitive, but complaints can be one of the best indicators of a provider’s quality of service. As mentioned earlier, glowing reviews may be solicited by the provider itself or posted by naive clients who are unaware that they’re being exploited.

Complaints, on the other hand, are a glimpse behind the polished facade the provider presents. Watch for the following:

- **Quantity of complaints:** Dissatisfied customers are an inevitable part of doing business. At some point in the life cycle of any business, something will go wrong, a customer will be unhappy, and they will complain about it online. These isolated negative reviews should not be an automatic disqualifier when evaluating a service provider. However, when the number of complaints is substantial, it suggests a problem with the way the provider is serving its clients.

- **Consistency of complaints:** Watch for recurring themes in complaints, especially issues concerning hidden fees, poor customer service, worthless services, or services not delivered. These patterns may reveal incompetence or predatory behavior. Communication is particularly important as predatory providers tend to shower new clients with attention until they have the client’s money in hand. Then the communication abruptly dries...
up, and the client is relegated to voice mail limbo while the next person is being courted.

- **Reactions to complaints:** Be on the lookout for threatening, blame-shifting, rude, vindictive, or litigious responses by the provider’s representatives. This is a bright red danger sign that signals an abusive, unprofessional operation.

**GOOD SIGNS**

Companies with a strong track record for pleasing clients tend to share certain characteristics. Look for these traits—and note when they are absent.

**Information Up Front**

- A good company website provides information up front and in plain, jargon-free English. You shouldn’t have to root out information buried in the depths of the site. Providers should clearly and frankly explain what services they provide, how it’s done, and what it will cost.

**Competitive Pricing**

- Low cost is always attractive when combined with high quality. As an author starting out, the trick is to aim high, in terms of publishing standards, but to keep your costs to a minimum. A careful and critical assessment of the company’s work is key here as well as comparison shopping.

**Realistic Empathy**

- The provider makes every effort to understand your book, your ambitions, your abilities, and your budget, while also giving you a reality check about commercial viability.

**Positive Track Record**

- There’s nothing more valuable than the experience of another author you trust. Seek out recommendations and advice from your friends and author community.
- If possible, contact some of the authors who have worked with the company to get their firsthand assessment. Although authors may be willing to discuss this in a public forum, they’ll be far more candid about their experiences and success with a publishing service if you contact them privately and off the record.

**Good Team**

- Staff should be tactful and pleasant. You should get a sense of teamwork, with everyone behind your project.

**Clear, Author-Friendly Contract**

- You should see a formal contract, clearly worded in terms you can understand. The copyright should remain with you, the author; you should not be tied to any fixed time period or bound to exclusivity. Rights granted should cover only the minimum needed to perform the work.

**Contacts and Connections**

- Where appropriate, the provider should have established relationships within the entire distribution chain (distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and readers) and an online shop. It should also be able, and willing, to direct you to other distribution channels.

**No Unreasonable Fees**

- A lot of money can be made from authors after they publish. One way companies do this is through correction or alteration fees, which means if you find an error in your book and want to change it, you’ll have to pay. This is one feature of IngramSpark we don’t love. We look forward to the day all authors can make the changes they need without penalty.
- Even the best providers charge these fees, but it’s how much they charge that separates the good from the bad.
- It’s worth noting that for some services, such as cover design, correction fees are standard and appropriate. The terms governing these changes should be clearly defined in the agreement or contract.

**WARNING BELLS**

Substandard companies also tend to have predictable traits. Be aware of these warning signs, and if you see them, be prepared to walk away.

**Providers Who Ask for Your Rights and Charge You for Them**

- There are some publishers who will ask for terms of up to three or five years, plus exclusivity, and charge you fees on top of that.
- In the publishing business, an author expects compensation for the rights they give up. This compensation generally comes in the form of a royalty payment on each copy sold, and sometimes an advance on royalties while the book is produced and distributed.
- The advance and the royalty are an exchange for the author handing over the right to print, copy, publish, and sell the work. These are valuable assets, and no provider should ask for them without offering suitable compensation.

**Providers Who Act Like Car Salespeople**

- This is a common occurrence in the self-publishing world, especially with certain package providers. After contacting the provider, an author can be bombarded with emails and phone calls urging them to publish. Authors should be given facts and left to decide, not saturated with sales pitches that lack information.
- In our experience, this tactic of high-pressure sales is usually practiced by companies whose interests lie with rapid turnover and conveyor-belt profit models rather than those invested in supporting the author.

**Representatives**

- Beware of the title representative. In the publishing world, as in many other industries, representatives exist to sell you something. So, if a self-publishing service talks of “putting you through to a representative” or “your rep,” you may be in for a sales pitch. Be ready to put the phone down and move on if this turns out to be more marketing and hype than useful information about the service.

**Vagueness**

- Providers that offer comprehensive information up front are the best ones to deal with. When you’re deciding whether a company can provide what you need at the right price, you don’t want to dig through their website or pages of marketing to hunt down information one fragment at a time.
High Prices
» Price and value are two distinct metrics, and more expensive doesn’t necessarily mean higher quality.
» Always assess what you’re paying for and what it will take to recoup. High prices put authors in debt, and it can take years, if at all, for them to break even. Be value-conscious and crunch the numbers on any prospective purchase.

Hidden Fees
» When you realize that KDP, Kobo, and Apple Books charge no service fees, give authors access to many readers, and provide up to a 70% royalty rate (in the author’s favor), it really does put other providers into perspective.
» Look closely for costs like revision charges, annual fees, renewal fees, or down payments. Watch also for low royalties and commissions. With today’s technology, there’s no excuse for providers masking their own profit with high administration fees or inflated manufacturing costs that bite into your revenue.

Required Purchases
» Publishers should be selling books to readers, not authors. Avoid any publisher with a contractual requirement to purchase copies of your own book. This is a common vanity press tactic used to extract more money from authors.

UNNECESSARY ADD-ONS
The following services are commonly used to pad self-publishing packages, either as an add-on service or a bundled feature with questionable author value.

Please note that these services are not inherently bad. However, they deserve extra scrutiny when their price tag is concealed among other bundled services.

Copyright Registration and LCCNs
Copyright registrations in the United States and other jurisdictions are simple and inexpensive. In the United States, where copyright registration is a prerequisite for filing suit against infringing parties, the process can be completed online in about five minutes, at a cost of $35.

Similarly, obtaining an LCCN is as simple as opening a free account and submitting your book’s information. There is no cost, and you’ll receive the LCCN within a few days.

There is no credible reason for an author to pay $100 or more for these simple, inexpensive processes.

Press Releases
To be successful, a press release must have an engaging headline, a unique angle, and informative, well-crafted content. It should be part of an intelligent marketing strategy, and it must be targeted to the right journalists at the right venues. There is an art to writing effective press releases.

With that in mind, consider these press release headlines churned out by one provider as part of its publishing package:
» A Breathtaking Thriller That Delves into the Mayhem and Enigma of Deceit and Evil
» A Breathtaking Thriller That Delves into the Mayhem and Enigma of Deceit and Love
» A Breathtaking Thriller That Delves into the Mayhem and Enigma of Deceit and Faith

Inclusion in Catalogs
Catalogs from obscure publishers flood the market today. When mass mailed to retailers, libraries, or journalists, these unsolicited catalogs are destined for the trash heap.

Don’t waste good money on dumpster lining.

Another red flag is expensive display advertising in magazines like Kirkus and Publishers Weekly. Readers do not read these magazines, and those who do—librarians and book industry people—generally make buying decisions based on the editorial, not the ads. Be wary of such packages unless you have a clear strategy that includes them.

Publicity and PR Campaigns
An effective PR campaign is carefully targeted and multifaceted. Unfortunately, some assisted self-publishing services take a quantity-over-quality approach, blindly spewing out the aforementioned press releases and catalogs to every agent, publisher, or media outlet they can find. Professionals despise this kind of shotgun approach and tend to delete them on sight. And obviously, these communications do no good if they go directly into a wastebasket or spam folder.

Before considering a paid publicity campaign—and they’re not cheap—find out exactly what you’re paying for. How exactly will it promote your brand?

Look for independent evidence of the provider’s successful campaigns. Are clients being featured on radio and TV segments? Are they being covered by journalists? Or is there no trace of those authors outside the provider’s website?

If there’s scant evidence these campaigns are working, you’re not likely to be the exception.

Complimentary Copies
Complimentary copies of your book are nice to have but weigh their value against the price you’re paying for the whole package.

In the continental United States, ten copies of a 240-page book will cost approximately $48 on KDP. That’s a tiny percentage of the cost of some assisted publishing packages, so keep the relative benefit of this perk in perspective. In these instances, the term complimentary just means the cost of the books has been factored into the price of the package already.

Retailer Previews
Google Preview, Amazon’s Look Inside, and other retailer previews
are free benefits available to any author publishing on those platforms. Needless to say, if service providers try to take credit for that feature as a value-added service they’re providing, they are not being entirely honest.

Retailer previews are standard features provided free of charge, so scratch this one off any list of supposed benefits a service provider offers.

Closed Awards and Recognition Programs

These are a common ploy among the larger vanity press schemes. By purchasing a package, you become eligible for an award or “recognition program.” It’s essentially a pay-to-play contest that’s only open to the small subset of authors who have coughed up several hundred dollars to the vendor. The award itself carries little significance for the average reader, and so the contest provides more benefit to the seller than the author.

Accounting

Proper accounting is not a feature; it’s a requirement for any reputable service. If a provider lists accounting as an added benefit, cast a skeptical eye on the claim. If it charges you a fee to access an accounting dashboard, turn and walk away.

Proofs

Does the provider expect you to accept its work without your review or approval? If it’s a reputable company, it shouldn’t. Digital previews and proof copies are a requirement for any service that prepares your books, not a benefit that sets it apart.

Social Media Promotion

Social media can be an excellent channel for promotion, but there’s more to it than simply churning out ads. Be wary of service providers who promise social media promotion but lack the audience and engagement to make it work.

For example, a provider claims it will increase your exposure by promoting your book to its Facebook fans. On inspection, the Facebook page has just under 1,000 fans after three years of operation—an unimpressive number for a provider that offers social media services. Worse, each post is an advertisement that has at most one or two likes.

If the provider can’t successfully promote its own products and services, how will it promote yours? If it can’t hold the interest of people who have explicitly liked its page, how will it gain the attention of an audience that doesn’t know you?

Author Page on the Service Provider’s Website

Unless the provider attracts massive traffic, a page on its website—even one that’s prominently featured—is not a valuable offering. Beware of claims of improved exposure without solid numbers to back them up.

One word of warning about metrics: Don’t be misled by the term hits when a provider describes its web traffic. A hit is simply a request for one element on a page: an image, a video, a script file, a font, etc. A single visit to one page may generate dozens of hits. Providers that describe their web traffic in terms of hits may be trying to deceive you, or they may be genuinely unaware of the uselessness of that metric.

Either one is cause for concern.

Reviews

Due to widespread author dissatisfaction, high cost, and a lack of tangible results, editorial reviews in general are considered a poor investment, even when purchased from a respected source, such as Kirkus. When purchased from a provider that carries no name recognition among readers, they are no more credible than your aunt Becky’s glowing praise.

If you do opt to purchase an editorial review, either à la carte or as part of a package, be sure the reviewer has credibility and name recognition. If the provider is reselling a review from a third-party service, like Kirkus, comparison shop to see if it’s gouging with huge markups. Unscrupulous providers often resell reviews at astronomical markups, sometimes as much as 700% over Kirkus’s already-steep pricing.

ASSESSING FEES

Working with a dedicated provider of a single service is a clear proposition: You pay x, and you receive y. But in a package of services, fees may not be itemized, so poor value and inflated prices can easily be concealed amid a lengthy list of services.

Perform your own cost breakdown by itemizing each service included in the package. If it’s unclear what services are being provided—a lack of transparency and clarity that should be considered a red flag—ask the service provider to explain in detail what you’re getting for your money.

Now, with a detailed list of services, you can comparison shop. Look for companies that specialize in each service and try to select services that match your candidate’s offerings as closely as possible. Gather fees from a variety of services to determine the prevailing range of prices.

Use only reputable, vetted services for this as you don’t want to judge the value of a service against the worst examples in the field.

Finally, with a range of prices for these services in hand, you can determine the average cost for each. Add them up and compare the total to your candidate’s quoted price.

This method offers only a rough assessment. It’s sometimes hard to find services that are equal, and there are countless hard-to-quantify factors that can affect the price of a service—quality, experience, and so on. But in the absence of other indicators, this method can give you a quick estimate to guide your decision.

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Copyright is one of the main types of IP. It allows copyright owners to protect against others copying or reproducing their work. Copyright affords an author the exclusive legal right to publish, perform, or record a literary work; profit from it; and authorize others to do the same.

Copyright law, policy, and practice underwrite the publication and sale of books. The income that every author and publisher receives derives from copyright law.

There’s no international copyright law. It varies by country and is enforced more in some countries than others. In the United States and Europe, copyright law entitles the author to commissions and royalties for their lifetime plus seventy years.

That copyright has real and significant value can be seen in how it’s ever more vehemently contested by three competing interests:

- **Big Tech:** Internet-based publishing platforms, like Google, Facebook, and Amazon, that authors use to publish and/or promote books.
- **Big Content:** Global media corporations, like Penguin Random House, News International, and Hollywood, where authors license publishing rights. Large self-publishing services, like Author Solutions, also fall into this category. Some of these companies grab rights as well as charge service fees.
- **Big Legal:** Large legislating territories and blocs, like the United States or the European Union, that aim to modify the power of Big Tech and Big Content.

Independent authors who are both writers and publishers and who actively manage their own publishing rights need to understand the importance of copyright and how to assert their rights with third-party publishers and self-publishing services.

Copyright law, policy, and practice are fundamental to an author’s ability to publish and trade books, create successful author businesses, and earn income from their work.

Copyright does not protect ideas but the expression of ideas. Protection exists from the moment of the work’s creation in a fixed, tangible form, and authors do not have to apply for or file for copyright; though in some territories, notably the United States, registration of the work with a copyright office is necessary in the event you want to bring a case against an infringer. Registration can also prove useful in the case of disputed rights with Amazon or other publishing platforms.

In general, the assertion of copyright with the appropriate copyright page in your published book is sufficient to assert your rights.

**Copyright Protection**

In the United States, registration with the [US Copyright Office](https://www.copyright.gov) is required to bring a lawsuit against someone who has infringed your rights. This is a moot point for most authors, however, as the cost of filing a lawsuit in the United States can exceed $100,000, which is beyond the means of the average indie author.

Copyright registration can also be useful for proving ownership of a work. If a retailer, such as Amazon, challenges your ownership due to perceived similarities to other works, a copyright registration may serve as a quick and authoritative evidence of your right to publish.

It costs $45–$65 to register online with the US Copyright Office. The service is available not only to US citizens but to any resident of a country that holds a copyright treaty with the United States and any author whose work is first published in the United States.

Copyright registries exist in other countries, but many of these are private entities with no legal authority. This is especially true in the United Kingdom and other countries that lack a governmental copyright registry. Such services are of limited value but may still serve as formal proof that copyright was established as of the date of filing, in the event of a suit.

Beware of the “poor man’s copyright,” the practice of mailing your work to yourself in a sealed envelope and relying on the postmark to establish the date of your work’s creation. These tactics are easy to fake and in most jurisdictions have no validity.

**Piracy**

Book piracy is the commonly used term for the unauthorized duplication of copyrighted content that is then sold at substantially lower prices in the “gray” market.

Piracy is an ever-present irritant for author-publishers, and no book is beneath the notice of the pirate networks that illegally distribute copyrighted works.
Traditionally, though, a copyright page has one or more of three elements, all optional: copyright notice, rights reservation statement, and disclaimer. Feel free to cut and paste any of the following, entering your own details, as appropriate.

1. The Copyright Notice
   This declares to readers that you are the owner of the copyright. It has four components:
   1. The word copyright: Because the copyright symbol isn’t recognized in some countries, reiterate it as a word so there’s no confusion.
   2. The copyright symbol: ©
   3. The copyright owner’s name: Your name or pen name
   4. The year of publication: Note that this is the year you publish the work (not the year you first created it).

2. The Rights Reservation Statement
   This statement informs the reader that rights are reserved under the copyright notice and should be respected.
   The classic statement, which you’ll see in most trade publisher’s books, reads something like:
   
   All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher and copyright holder, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.
   
   But given that the statement just reiterates the rights already granted by copyright protection and publishing contracts, others now feel this is overkill and prefer a shorter formulation. Something as simple as the following is sufficient:
   
   All rights reserved.
   
   Or:
   
   All rights reserved. The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

   The author’s moral rights are a feature of British law. This highlights the fact that there’s no global copyright legislation. Different countries have different laws, and for example, the United States and many other countries don’t recognize the distinction of moral rights.

   The Berne Convention of 1886 is an attempt to get over these differences; it’s an international agreement that mandated several aspects of modern copyright law, agreed to by all countries that are party to the Convention (fifty-one, including the United States and United Kingdom, to date). They agree to mutually recognize the copyrights held by each other’s citizens—so the Convention provides for moral rights—the right to claim authorship of the work and to object to any mutilation, deformation, or other modification of the work that would be prejudicial to the author’s honor or reputation.

3. The Disclaimer
   Disclaimers are not a full protection against being sued, but they are widely used in book publishing. Here are some standard disclaimers if your book requires one (not all books do).
FOR FICTION:

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

FOR CREATIVE NONFICTION:

This is a work of creative nonfiction. Some parts have been fictionalized to varying degrees for various purposes, with some names, dates, places, events, and details changed, invented, and altered for literary effect or to protect the privacy of the people involved.

FOR MEMOIRS:

The events and conversations in this book are accurate to the best of the author’s ability; some names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of others.

COPYRIGHT QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Should I copyright my work?

The short answer is that your work is copyrighted the moment you affix it to the page. You don’t have to take any additional action to copyright your work.

Some countries, such as the United States, do ask that authors register their copyrights with the government, however. If your country offers this option, we recommend it, even though there’s usually a small fee associated. In the United States, registering your work protects you if you need to file a lawsuit for copyright infringement and gives you access to more monetary damages.

Can I use a song lyric, quote, or another person’s work in my book?

No, unless you have the content creator’s permission.

Songs are copyrighted, and it’s expensive to get permission from a record label to use famous song lyrics.

Quotes are also copyrighted.

The general rule is to always ask permission before using another’s content in your work. If you can’t get permission, don’t use the content.

When do I need to attribute the creator of a copyrighted work?

Let’s say you want to use an image on your blog. First, get permission from the image creator. You cannot simply download the image and start using it—it’s copyrighted.

Many works have a Creative Commons license, which is an alternative to copyright. The Creative Commons statement governs how the rights holder will allow the work to be used. You can use a site like Creative Commons Search to find images to use. Be sure to follow the Creative Commons license, though—if the license requires attribution to the creator, be sure to give attribution. When in doubt, always give credit to the creator!

If you prefer to avoid Creative Commons, you can purchase royalty-free images (also known as stock images) from sites like Shutterstock. Many of these sites offer plans where you can buy a la carte or download a certain number of images per month.

There are also websites for royalty-free stock videos, audio, and other types of content.

If you make a change to my book, do I need to copyright it again?

Generally speaking, if you live in a country where you have to register your copyright, you don’t need to register a new copyright if you make minor changes to your book, such as to correct typos.

If you make enough changes to warrant a new edition of the book, then it’s best to register a new copyright since much of the content will be different and will therefore benefit from a new registration.

Can I use trademarked company names or products in my book?

A trademark is another legal protection for IP that identifies and distinguishes a company or product in the marketplace. A classic example is the Coca-Cola logo and its slogan “Share a Coke.” If you see those on a can of soda, you know you’re looking at a Coca-Cola product. If you manufacture soda, and you create a similar logo or slogan that makes customers think you are Coca-Cola, that’s trademark infringement because Coca-Cola will likely be harmed by losing customers.

In general, companies like to protect their names and products. They typically like to approve any mention of their brands, even in books. This is because they want to control their brands and anything associated with them.

Avoid using any trademark in your book’s title or subtitle. That is direct trademark infringement because it could confuse customers into thinking your book is affiliated with the trademark. For example, if you write interactive novels, you can’t call them Choose Your Own Adventures because that term is trademarked.

Avoid using trademarked company names or products in your book’s keywords to avoid any allegations of trademark infringement. Research current trademarks in the United States at uspto.gov/trademarks.

Using trademarks in your book’s manuscript is a different story. Sometimes, using brand names in the text of your manuscript is unavoidable. This is particularly true with nonfiction. For example, it would be almost impossible to write a book about car repairs without mentioning car brands. You can’t write a corporate history of Google without referencing its products. That kind of reference is okay.

Avoid using trademarks in your book’s text whenever possible. Trademarks can also date your work. Companies go out of business, product lines go out of style, and the names you mention in your book today might be unrecognizable to future readers, which may provide a poorer reading experience.
Setting up for success as an independent author of children’s books often means seeing your books as part of a bigger picture and considering business models that are shaped around your books. If your books have a teaching element, for example, you can set up a course that positions you as an expert, authority, and thought leader in your field. If you write fiction or poetry, your value to the reader may be amusement or inspiration. What sort of experiences can you create for the reader that expands on or deepens the effect of your books?

This is different from being a freelancer or employee—doing work for others to meet the bills. This is integrating activities that support your mission as a writer, and your passion as a person, into your author business.

For the entrepreneurial author, this offers a real alternative to taking a day job. For the fully fledged “authorpreneur,” it offers a higher return and expanded reach, growing income and influence while simultaneously feeding into your book production and sales. It’s easier to create an author business that lasts over the long term and is capable of ongoing growth and expansion (i.e., sustainable and scalable) if you incorporate other products.

If you’re a US-based author, you’ll need to set up your business following standard US business guidelines. If you plan on generating revenue from the sale of your self-published book, that revenue will be subject to taxes, which means you—like it or not—are going to become a small business owner.
Starting a small business for your self-publishing enterprise is actually pretty easy if you break it down into the following steps:

1. Make a list of potential names for your business.
   Choose an official name for your business to register with the state and other local authorities. It can be something as simple as your name plus the word "books".

2. Determine the appropriate structure for your business.
   You'll need to establish your business as a separate entity from your personal accounts and assets. There are a few options for how to do this:
   - **Sole Proprietorship:** A sole proprietorship is the most basic type of business to establish. There’s no distinction between the business and you (the owner). You’re entitled to all profits and are responsible for all your business’s debts, losses, and liabilities. You don’t have to take any formal action to form a sole proprietorship, but you do need to obtain any necessary licenses and permits from your local state, city, and/or county authorities, depending on where you live. If you use a name other than your given name in a sole proprietorship, it’s called a DBA, which stands for doing business as. For example, “Jane Doe, DBA: Unicorn Books.”
   - **Limited Liability Company (LLC):** An LLC is a hybrid type of legal structure that provides the limited liability features of a corporation and the tax efficiencies and operational flexibility of a partnership.
     The “owners” of an LLC are referred to as “members.” Depending on the state, the members can be a single individual (one owner) or two or more individuals. LLCs aren’t taxed as separate business entities. Instead, all profits and losses are passed through the business to each member of the LLC. LLC members report profits and losses on their personal federal tax returns, just like the owners of a partnership. LLCs are a little more complicated than sole proprietorships but offer more protection for your personal assets in case of a lawsuit or debt collection.
     You can also set up your business as a simple partnership or as a more complex corporation. It’s always best to seek the advice of a lawyer or accountant to help determine which structure will work best for you.

3. Check to see if your business name is available as a URL.
   If it is, register and lock down the URL with your business name. If not, move to the next available name on your business name list.

4. Set up an email account.
   Once you’ve identified your new business name, set up an official email address with the name.

5. File articles of organization with the state.
   You can file articles of organization yourself pretty easily in most states; many offer online registration. If you seek assistance from a lawyer or accountant, they can help you do this as well.

6. Obtain an employer identification number (EIN).
   You’ll get an EIN when you file with the state.

7. Open a separate business checking account.
   Open a new checking account in the name of your new business and get a business credit or debit card. Remember, all your business expenses are deductible. Use this account to pay for anything related to the business of selling your books. Make sure that any revenue generated from the sales of your books flows into this account as well.
   It’s important to keep the expenses and revenue generated from your books separate from your personal bank accounts. This makes it much easier to record expenses, file the proper returns, pay sales tax, and generally keep better track of your accounts.

8. Get a reputable accountant.
   Or, if you’re the do-it-yourself type, get good accounting software.

9. Set up a website.
   Create a website using the URL you acquired earlier. You can set this up with any of the many web hosting companies. Shop around and find what works best for you. You’ll also need to build a website to showcase yourself as an author and sell your books.
10. Set up your transaction privilege tax (TPT) account, if applicable.
   If necessary in your state, this account can help cover sales tax payments. The privilege tax definition can vary depending on your state and industry so do your research to see what your state requires.

11. Set up an online payment account.
   An online payment account, such as PayPal or Square, can be used for online sales as well as in-person debit or credit card sales at book fairs, festivals, or wherever you choose to sell books. Make sure that all revenue goes into your business account.

   Once you’ve established your small business, you’re ready to start selling books. Remember, many of your expenses can be deducted as business expenses—business travel, internet, computers, retirement plans, healthcare, life insurance, liability insurance, and more. Talk to your accountant or tax preparer to learn more.
The following business models are those most widely used by successful independent authors in all areas and genres of publishing. To run many of these business models, you’ll need an online transactional store for readers to purchase your books, a fan following, and a high-traffic website or social media presence.

MODEL 1: BOOK SALES ONLY, ONE OUTLET: WRITE FAST, PUBLISH OFTEN

As mentioned earlier, self-publishing experts generally recommend that authors eschew exclusivity, but we know there are many indie authors who make a living using this publishing model. It’s probably the most visible publishing model in the self-publishing community, through Amazon’s best-seller lists and promotion engines. Authors employing this business model are usually Amazon KDP authors, often in the exclusive KU arrangement, writing in a popular genre, publishing fast and often, and always with a close eye on the Amazon algorithm.

Many authors employing this model do not buy their own ISBNs and publish only in e-book format, so there are fewer children’s book writers using this model than in other genres, like romance, crime, and science fiction/fantasy. The advantage of this model is its simplicity. You can focus just on writing books, and the marketing methods that send a book up the charts on Amazon, and harness the power of the Amazon algorithm to find new readers. The downside is that it’s risky to be bound exclusively to one distribution outlet.

MODEL 2: BOOK SALES ONLY, PUBLISHING WIDE: MULTIPLE FORMATS, MULTIPLE RETAILERS

Authors using this model publish through multiple outlets. The indie author community refers to this model as “going wide,” and it means publishing through a variety of distributors rather than going exclusive—usually, uploading e-books directly to Apple Books, Google Play Books, Amazon KDP, and Kobo and using e-book aggregator distributors, like Draft2Digital, PublishDrive, and StreetLib, to reach the rest; print books go to Amazon KDP and IngramSpark and audiobooks go to ACX and Findaway.

The aim is to reach as many readers as possible by being available not just through as many distributors as possible, but also in as many formats as possible and across as many territories as possible. The advantage of this model is its diversity and stability, allowing the author to grow a consistent readership steadily over time.

There are popular Facebook groups focused on wide distribution for print books and e-books called Wide for the Win (facebook.com/groups/wideforthewin/announcements) and Wide for the Win Kids (facebook.com/groups/1272835553053286). There’s also Marketing Audiobooks Wide (facebook.com/groups/835962743892598) for audiobooks.

MODEL 3: BOOK SALES PLUS SPEAKING OR SCHOOL VISITS

In this model, book income is supplemented by speaker or performance income at events. Off-line, there’s a fee plus back-of-the-room book sales at a physical, paid performance. Online events try to mirror the physical experience and have also added some new income stream possibilities.

For example, nonfiction authors use free or paid online video webinars to lead people to buy their books and often upsell to other premium products, like online courses. Novelists, poet podcasters, and YouTubers give paid online performances, sometimes called laptop concerts, web revues, or internet events, where they air their work as audio or video content for a fee.

These events can be reader-directed, making the show available online for a small fee, or suggested ticket price, or donation and reaching audiences who can’t physically attend a performance. They’re hosted on platforms like StageIt or more informally using social media tools, like Facebook or Instagram Live.

Or the events can be venue-directed, whereby authors stream a series of paid online events through the platform of venues that would typically pay for a live performance, sometimes with the cost of an e-book included as part of the ticket price. Libraries, arts centers, museums, historical societies, and retirement homes are all good venues for authors, and the talk or performance can be streamed from the venue as part of a multi-author event or festival.
MODEL 4: BOOK SALES PLUS TEACHING: SUPPORTED LEARNING
The time-honored way for authors to supplement their writing income is by teaching at a university or school. Now it happens online, too, in the form of guided digital courses, mentoring, coaching, and consulting. The difference in this model is that it’s active teaching in a learning-supported environment. The author sets assignments, which are monitored and graded, along with class chat sessions and other feedback opportunities. There may or may not be accreditation, but this model aims to give students a full, pedagogically structured classroom experience.

Marketing strategist Dan Blank is a good resource. For more than a decade, Dan has worked full-time with thousands of writers and creators to develop a human-centered approach to marketing and reaching readers through his company, We Grow Media.

MODEL 5: BOOK SALES PLUS AFFILIATE INCOME
Under this model, authors supplement their book income by recommending products or services to other authors. They often recommend products and services to their readership they have used and believe in. The products are often linked to the author’s subject matter, theme, or world, and the author promotes them through blog posts, articles, videos, and podcasts with affiliate links to the products. We see this model a lot in nonfiction. Done properly, being an affiliate for other people can be a win-win-win proposition:
» Readers win because they get curated, experienced, and balanced recommendations for products and services they need, saving time and frustration and reducing risk, without paying a premium.
» Bloggers win because they fulfill their mission to help readers and make passive income at the same time. Recommending resources not only gives them subjects to blog about that their readers are going to be interested in, but also creates a perfect environment for content marketing, where their writing is what leads to interest in the affiliate product or service.
» Producers win because they can put a large, committed, and educated sales force—their affiliates—in the field to market for them. By supporting the affiliators, they magnify their marketing in the affiliate product or service.

The secret to having a positive affiliate business is to only recommend products and services, and people you have used yourself or, if it’s not something that fits your business model, is thoroughly vetted and approved by a trusted independent party.

MODEL 6: BOOK SALES PLUS ARTICLES, POEMS, OR SHORT STORIES
Independent authors using this model are writing material that complements their books, as distinct from those who are journalists on other topics as a day job. These authors write shorter articles, poems, and stories, derived in some way from their book material, that are also an income stream in themselves—paid contributions to traditional media outlets, like newspapers or magazines; new media-crowdsourced payment sites; direct sales through programs like Kindle Vella; or their own websites or patron sites, like Patreon. The work done for other media also helps build attention for the author’s books and other products.

MODEL 7: MEMBERSHIP MODEL: BENEFITS FOR CLOSE READERS
In this model, authors invite keen readers to subscribe monthly or annually to a membership program that offers various benefits. This model often works better for nonfiction; although some fiction authors and poets are achieving great success.

There are four types of membership models: how-to, motivation and accountability, community, and access.
1. The how-to membership sites solve a distinct problem, e.g., how to play guitar or how to run a business.
2. Motivational memberships offer encouragement and support toward achieving a goal. Members share their struggles and successes and hold one another accountable.
3. Community memberships, also known as connector memberships, offer people a place to connect and belong. Members are united around a common cause or life experience, which the author writes about.
4. Access memberships are for fans who want more from the author, who may offer online chats, “Ask Me Anything,” or some on-the-spot writing or reading.

MODEL 8: INFLUENCER INCOME: SPONSORSHIP OR ADVERTISING
Some authors have followings that are attractive to brands, which sponsor an aspect of an author’s work in return for exposure to the followers and fans. Individual books can also be sponsored or carry advertising.

The Bulgari Connection by Fay Weldon (2000), for example, was sponsored by the eponymous Italian jewelry company. Under the deal, Weldon was required to mention Bulgari at least twelve times but was happy to mention them thirty-four times. Sponsorship and advertising in books is controversial—some authors decrying it—but it’s being increasingly used in the internet age.

MODEL 9: BOOK SALES PLUS PATRONAGE AND GRANTS
Many literary novels and deeply researched nonfiction books begin with a thank-you to a grant body or award that “made the book possible.” A grant can be a boon to a writer, and there are many stories from the nineteenth and early twentieth century of writers who could not have continued without their benefactors, e.g., W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, James Joyce and Sylvia Beach.

Wealthy patrons have never been as generous to writers as they have been to visual artists, however, and around the mid-twentieth century, the professional author was more likely to find support from the Arts Council or a literary organization, which offered various endowments and awards.

The internet brought about the possibility of crowdsourced patronage, through direct donations on author websites or through Patreon or similar platforms.

Indie author and creative business coach Jason Zook raised significant money for his first book through crowdsourced sponsorship. Starting on page one at $600 and decreasing the price per page by $3 ($957, $954, $951, etc.) to page 200 (priced at $3) brought in over $60,000 for the inner pages, plus inside cover flaps at $5,000 each and front and back covers at five-figure sums, before selling a single copy of the appropriately named Creativity for Sale.

MODEL 10: BOOK SALES PLUS RIGHTS LICENSING OR MERCHANDISING
As discussed in earlier chapters, independent authors are selectively licensing some of their publishing rights to partners, rights buyers, and licensing operators in their home territories and abroad. Authors
are also mining their own merchandising, translation, and multimedia rights. This model requires the author to have significant success in book sales.

One of the early success stories of self-publishing is US author Hugh Howey, with Silo, his series of postapocalyptic science fiction novels that started in 2011 with the self-published short story Wool. Howey retained full e-book rights, while signing a deal for film rights to 20th Century Fox and a print-only US and Canadian rights deal with Simon & Schuster. Half a decade later, he said:

> Every author should begin their writing career self-publishing, even if their dream is to be with a large publisher... Write a lot, write great stories, publish them yourself, spend more time writing, study the industry, act like a pro, network, be nice, invest in yourself and your craft, and be patient. If you can do all of these things, you’ll earn some money. Maybe enough to pay a bill every month... Maybe enough to quit your job. Thousands of writers are doing this [now].
>
> —Hugh Howey

**COMBINATION MODEL: MULTIPLE STREAMS OF INCOME**

It’s also possible to combine a number of these models and enjoy multiple streams of income in addition to book sales.

Some of these business models might be anathema to you; others more appealing. The important thing is to know which model you’re using, and stick with it.

These business models represent what’s working now in 2022, but with our changeable industry, the future might hold ten more possibilities, and what works for you today may not tomorrow. It’s all part of your evolution—as a person and a business. The benefit of being independent is you get to choose how you run your business. If something doesn’t work, or stops working, you can experiment and iterate until you get it right.
Does all this sound overwhelming? Don’t worry; there are as many ways to be an indie author as there are authors who want to self-publish.

As publishing economies transform from being scarcity-driven (where demand is controlled by supply) to abundance-driven (where demand is cultivated through relationships), each of us can create our own market forces, our own readership, and our own books, in our own way. We can go as fast or as slow as our creative development and personal circumstances allow.

And we don’t go it alone. We have the support of other authors, publishers, and publishing services. From traditional publishers and hybrids to digital-only imprints and an abundance of self-publishing services, there have never been so many ways to make books and reach readers.

Whatever stage you’re at, as a writer or as a publisher, you can quite easily unfold the next step—once you know the pros and cons of the different options available to you.

Those who are best equipped to ride this wave of change are authors with:

» A diversity of outlets through which they publish “wide”
» An e-commerce website to sell their books and other products and services directly to readers
» A willingness to work with other indie authors in the children’s book genre to mutually grow impact, influence, discoverability, reach, and income
» A diversity of formats, products, projects, and services
» A determination to limit the rights, terms, and territory of any rights licensed to others
» An insistence on fair partnerships and publishing contracts
A GLOSSARY OF SELF-PUBLISHING TERMS

A

**active income**
Income derived from payment for hours worked. The defining feature of active income is that when you stop working, the income stops; employee jobs and freelance work are examples of active income
*compare: passive income*

**adhesive casebound**
Standard binding for hardcover books that uses glue to hold the interior to the cover
*also: perfect binding*

**Adobe InDesign**
A popular professional book formatting and design software

**advance**
A sum of money paid to an author up front by a publisher, on signature of contract, as a pre-payment of expected royalty payments issued in exchange for a license to publish. An author’s advance is usually paid in four installments: after signing the contract, after delivering the finished manuscript, after publication in hardback, and finally after publication in paperback and e-book. The advance needs to be “earned out” before the author receives additional money

**advance information sheet (AIS)**
A short document providing basic book details and information about a book’s availability and ordering methods
*also: book flyer, fact sheet, pub sheet, sell sheet*

**advance print run**
The printing of a book before the book’s official release date, usually for publicity purposes

**advance review copy (ARC)**
A draft of a book distributed to beta readers or reviewers prior to publication
*also: advance reader copy, advanced review copy*
*compare: proof*

**affiliate**
To officially attach or connect to an organization

**affiliate marketing**
A marketing arrangement popular with authors and self-publishing services where an online retailer pays commission to an external website for traffic or sales generated from its referrals

**aggregator**
*see: e-book aggregator*

**ALLi Watchdog Desk**
Service from the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) that monitors the practices of companies and individuals in the self-publishing services sector

**Amazon Author Central**
A free Amazon service that allows authors to create author pages, promote their books, and monitor their sales rankings and reviews

**Amazon marketing services**
An Amazon program that allows sellers to bid on advertisements displayed alongside search results, product listings, and customer review pages

**Amazon Standard Identification Number (ASIN)**
A unique ten-character identifier for an Amazon product
Apple Books
An e-reading, publishing, and retailing platform that makes books available for sale in 52 countries to be read on Apple Inc. devices, like iPad and iPhone; one of the Big Six self-publishing technology companies

ARC
see: advance review copy (ARC)

assisted publishing
Umbrella term for all companies that provide personalized publishing services to authors for a fee, including hybrid publishing, partnership publishing, and subsidized publishing. Some of these services bundle the seven steps of publishing into packages; some offer hybrid publishing arrangements that adopt some of the practices of trade publishing, including curation and physical bookstore distribution. Authors shopping in this sector need to exercise caution
also: assisted self-publishing
compare: author-publishing, indie author

audiobook
A recording of a book being read aloud by the author or another narrator

Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX)
Amazon-owned audiobook marketplace that matches authors with professional narrators and producers

author brand
A consistent message and representation of an author’s identity and image that helps readers connect with them and their books
see: book brand

author collaboration
Authors formally working together, under a contract, to benefit mutually. Authors have always collaborated to write, but author collaboration is a new and growing movement in publishing
see: joint venture

author comps
see: comps

author cooperative/collective
A group of authors who work together to leverage the skills of the group in order to advance everyone’s publishing efforts

author platform
A structure that gives leverage and visibility to an author and their books. It gives the author the ability to sell books and allows readers to discover and understand what an author does and what to expect from their books. It has three components: who you are, what you say, and who you can reach

Author Solutions
A vanity press that operates under a variety of imprints and warrants caution

authorpreneur
Entrepreneurial author-publisher who runs a successful business by globally exploiting their own copyrights through a variety of formats and platforms

author-publisher
An author who self-publishes for profit; may also publish other authors
also: independent author, indie author, micro-publishers

author-publishing
Independent self-publishing by authors
B

Babelcube
Company that connects authors with translators and internationally distributes translated books

back matter
The sections of a book following the last chapter. It can include acknowledgments, an afterword, appendix, bibliography, glossary, index, etc.
also: end matter
compare: front matter

backlist title
A print book that’s been published in the past but is still in print

back-of-the-room sales
Sales made by an author or publisher from a book table or booth at a live event. Widely used by nonfiction authors who are also speakers

best-seller rank
see: sales rank

beta reader
A person who provides early feedback or a critique of a book prior to professional editing

bibliographic data
Specific information about a book, including title, author, publication date, and price
see: metadata

Big Six
The six largest providers of self-published books, e-readers, and self-publishing production technology; includes Amazon, Apple Books, Google Play, IngramSpark, Kobo, and Nook
see: Apple Books, Google Play, IngramSpark, Kobo, Nook

BISAC
An acronym for Book Industry Standards and Communications, which is maintained and developed in the United States by the Book Industry Study Group (BISG). Bookstores and libraries in the United States may require publishers to provide a pre-categorization with BISAC when submitting data throughout the book supply chain

BISAC codes
The BISAC subject headings list; a standard used to categorize books based on topical content

bleed
Excess printed area that’s trimmed after printing. Having it in your files ensures that full-page images take up the entire page and aren’t left with a fine, white edge after trimming

blog hop
A list of web links that appears on multiple blogs, allowing readers to hop from one blog to the next in the series
also: blog link-up

blog tour
A series of prearranged blog posts, usually scheduled during the months just before and after a book launch

body copy
The text of the book that appears between the front and back matter

book block
PDF files that comprise all book content, except the cover
also: interior
book blurb
Quote, or paragraph of text, on the back of a book, giving readers a flavor of what the book is about as well as other information or quotes from other authors, celebrities, or media mentions
also: cover copy
compare: book description, endorsement

book brand
Identity and image of a book represented by the cover, copy, and blurb that indicate the book’s promise to the reader
see: author brand, brand book

book comps
see: comps

book description
Description of a book on online book retailers, like Amazon, Apple Books, and Kobo, that enables readers to determine whether they want to buy it. Typically, longer and more targeted to purchase behavior than the book blurb
compare: book blurb

book distribution
see: distribution, distributor, e-book aggregator, wholesaler

book doctoring
see: content editing

book review
Published opinion of a book that can be posted by professional reviewers or readers in a variety of outlets, including book review publications and retailer websites
see: editorial review

book trailer
A video advertisement for a book, much the same as a film trailer

Book2Look
A widget offering samples from your book alongside social links

BookBaby
A popular self-publishing service that provides a wide range of services

BookBub
An e-book discovery service featuring a free daily email that notifies readers of discounted e-books. Indie authors can advertise on the platform and submit their books for approval for deal offerings

Books In Print
A catalog published by Bowker, usually in digital form, primarily for use by bookstores and libraries, with listings of millions of books with ISBNs

bound proof
A proof copy that looks like a finished “real” book, with cover attached and pages to final trim size; used as ARCs
see: advance review copy (ARC)

Bowker
A for-profit corporation that’s the sole provider of and registrar for ISBNs in the United States

brand book
An official document explaining a brand’s identity and presenting its standards, visual identity, font, grammar and punctuation choices, etc.
also: brand guide, brand manual, style guide

business model
A replicable model for the successful operation of a business, identifying sources of revenue, intended customer base, products, and financing details. This guide posits ten possible business models for self-publishing authors based on profit income
see: product mix, profit income
C

Calibre
E-book file creation and management software

case bound
A book in hardcover format; a type of binding where the cardboard cover is either wrapped with printed paper ("printed case wrap") or a solid color material, such as colored paper (which can be textured to look like linen) or leatherette. Solid color case wraps are typically foil stamped on the spine with the author’s name and book title

click-through
The process of clicking on a hyperlink or online advertisement to reach the target destination

click-through rate (CTR)
The average number of click-throughs per hundred ad impressions, expressed as a percentage

click-to-open rate (CTOR)
A metric used to measure the effectiveness of email marketing campaigns

CMYK
A color model for print books that uses cyan (C), magenta (M), yellow (Y), and black (K);
compare: gray scale, RGB

codex
The form of a physical book, which may be handwritten and constructed of vellum, papyrus, or similar materials but most commonly now produced on paper and printed

colophon (1)
Book production information, often including typeface details and information related to the artwork

colophon (2)
The device or logo of the book’s publisher or author

commission (1)
A percentage of book sales paid to an author by a self-publishing service or retailer; often confused with royalty payments
see: profit income, royalties

commission (2)
To order or authorize the production of publications, services, or materials

comps
An abbreviation for comparables; other authors who compare to a specific author and other books that compare to a specific book

content editing
Editing with a focus on broad textual issues, such as structure, pacing, character development, veracity, and relevance
also: book doctoring, developmental editing, manuscript appraisal, structural editing

content editor
A person who conducts a content edit

content marketing
Creation and sharing of useful materials and media, like videos, blogs, and social media posts, to generate leads for a book or other author products or services

conversion
The process of putting a manuscript into a digital format suitable for use by a publisher, such as converting a Word document into an EPUB file
co-op advertising
A type of advertising where cost is shared among different companies; in publishing, it’s when the publisher pays for print materials for customers, ads in the retailer’s magazine, and store displays

copy editor
A person who edits the manuscript material (copy) to ensure the text, and any illustrative material, is expressed clearly and accurately

copyediting
Editing with a focus on the detail at the line level—syntax, grammar, verb tense, word usage, punctuation, and consistency—as well as double-checking facts, such as dates, names, etc. In fiction, it includes recognizing continuity and plot errors
also: line editing
compare: proofreading

copyright
The exclusive, legally secured right to reproduce and distribute works of original expression; it’s one of the main types of IP and allows the copyright owner to protect against others copying or reproducing their work. Copyright affords an author the exclusive legal right to publish, perform, or record a literary work; profit from it; and authorize others to do the same. Works that fall outside copyright terms are said to be in the public domain
see: piracy, publishing rights

copyright page
Page traditionally in the front matter but can be found in the back matter that indicates the copyright status of a book; may also include cataloging data

CoreSource
Ingram Content Group’s e-book distribution platform

cost of sale (COS)
Accumulated total of all costs used to create a product or service, including overheads and fixed and variable costs

cost per click (CPC)
Internet advertising model used to direct traffic to websites, where advertisers pay the website owner when their advertisement is clicked; also used to refer to the cost charged for each click-through from the ad to the product
also: pay per click
compare: cost per impression (CPI), cost per mille (CPM)

cost per impression (CPI)
Internet advertising model where advertisers pay for the number of times an ad is shown on a website, regardless of whether it’s clicked
also: pay impression
compare: cost per click (CPC), cost per mille (CPM)

cost per mille (CPM)
Internet advertising model where advertisers pay each time their ad is displayed; also used to refer to the cost to display an ad to 1,000 viewers
compare: cost per click (CPC), cost per impression (CPI)

co-venture
An undertaking whose costs and responsibilities are shared by more than one company or publisher
see: joint venture, partnership publishing

cover spread
The entire cover of a physical book, including the front, spine, and back

CreateSpace
Amazon-owned publisher and distributor of self-published print books; replaced by KDP Print
see: Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

Creative Commons
A nonprofit organization dedicated to building a globally accessible public commons of knowledge and “a more equitable, accessible, and innovative world culture” by helping people and organizations share knowledge and creativity more easily; promotes the power of open licensing and global access
Creative Commons license
A free, simple, and standardized way to grant copyright permissions, ensuring proper attribution while allowing others to copy, distribute, and make use of those works; an alternative to copyright notices that makes it easier for authors and others to share creative and academic work as well as access and build on the work of others.

creative self-publishing
An approach to author-publishing that emphasizes the unique qualities of an author and book in its particular marketplace. It begins in the first step of publishing (developmental editing) and is carried through all seven steps.

credit line
Line of text assigning credit to the owner of the copyright of the material being referenced.

crowdfunding
Funding a project by raising small donations from many contributors; generally used in publishing as a step before a book is published. Many author-publishers run crowdfunders as a pre-order campaign for an upcoming title.

crowdsourcing
Gathering information, feedback, or work on a project by requesting input from a large number of contributors. Crowdsourcing powers many digital publishing platforms, including crowdfunding platforms that raise money for book production or promotion. The book design and developmental editing process can be crowdsourced, and publishers, including author-publishers, can use crowdsourcing to pitch ideas to readers, encourage reader feedback on a book, build a fan base, and incentivize readers to promote a book on social media.

customer acquisition cost (CAC)
A measure of how much money a new customer has cost an author to acquire.

customization
Modifying a book or other product or service using pre-established templates and scripts to fit a reader’s unique preferences.

dedication
Author’s statement of appreciation or compliments to a specific person, group of people, place, or thing, usually found in the front matter

demy octavo
A popular book format, which measures 216 x 138 millimeters, or 8.5 x 5 inches

design
The second step of publishing when the book cover and interior text are configured; book design consolidates the content, style, format, and sequence of the various components and elements of a book into a single coherent unit
see: publishing

developmental editing
see: content editing

developmental editor
A person who deals with the overall organization of a manuscript rather than the small details, such as spelling and punctuation
also: content editing, editorial

digital printing
A method of mass-production printing using toners on a press that prints directly from a digital-based image; more suitable for shorter runs and most often used for POD books
compare: offset printing

digital rights management (DRM)
Systematic approach to copyright protection for digital media, including books, to prevent unauthorized redistribution and restrict how consumers can copy content they’ve purchased. In publishing, it’s difficult to enforce and an irritation to readers

direct-to-reader sales page
Place where readers can order books directly from the author, resulting in higher net profit

discount
A reduced price; there are two kinds in publishing: a retail discount (for readers) and a publisher’s discount (for wholesalers, distributors, and retailers)

discoverability
The process of making a book visible and accessible to readers. In digital book publishing, it refers to having good metadata, SEO, and publicity so books show at the top of relevant reader searches and are recommended by search engines
see: marketing, metadata, search engine optimization (SEO)

disintermediation
Removing intermediaries from a supply chain or transaction sequence. In self-publishing, it refers to removing agents, publishers, wholesalers, and others from writer-to-reader supply and transaction

distribution
The fourth step of publishing when the book is made available to readers for purchase
see: distributor, wholesaler

distributor
Company that warehouses, catalogs, markets, and sells books to bookstores, libraries, and wholesalers on behalf of a publisher
compare: e-book aggregator, wholesaler

do not compete clause
Clause found in many publishing contracts that bars the author from publishing additional work that might compete with the book licensed to the publisher; indie authors need to check the implications for such a clause on their self-published work

Draft2Digital
A popular e-book aggregator and publishing service
E

EAN barcode
Barcode with the ISBN transferred into a machine-readable form. The electronic scanning lines printed on the back cover or book jacket are encoded with information about the book, such as title, publisher, and price
see: ISBN

e-book
An abbreviation for electronic book; can be read on dedicated readers or on devices like phones, tablets, or computers

e-book aggregator
A distribution service that circulates e-books to retailers and other distributors. Popular services include Draft2Digital, PublishDrive, and StreetLib
compare: distributor, wholesaler

economy of scale
Savings in per-unit cost achieved by mass production

editorial
The first step of publishing when the words and subject matter of a manuscript are revised, amended, improved, and rearranged for clarity, simplicity, brevity, and artistic effect
see: publishing

editorial review
A professional critic’s opinion of a book published online or in a periodical
also: review

e-mail marketing
Promoting products or services to list subscribers via email

embossing
Special treatment used to raise a portion of a book cover, often the title; can only be used on paperback books and dust jackets
encumber
To create restrictions on how publishing rights may be used

end matter
see: back matter

endorsement
Short review of a book written by a well-known author, professional, or personality in the author’s genre/niche. Endorsements can be used for promotional purposes or placed on the front or back cover or in the introductory pages of the book
also: endorsement quote
compare: book blurb

endsheet
Paper glued to the inside of a hardcover case, which also becomes the first (unprinted) interior page of the book. Standard endsheets are white, but they can be colored or printed
also: endpaper

epilogue
A section or chapter at the end of a book that comments on or draws conclusions about what has happened or been explained within the text

EPUB
A common e-book file format

epublishing
The publication of digital works, such as e-books
e-reader
A handheld device on which electronic versions of books, newspapers, magazines, etc. can be read

Espresso Book Machine
A machine that can print and bind any book as POD within five minutes

e-tailer
An online retailer

exclusivity
A publishing contract that binds you solely to one self-publishing service, trade publisher, or retailer
compare: go wide
Facebook advertising
A form of advertising that allows sellers to choose their target audience on Facebook based on demographics, behavior, or contact information

first rights
The exclusive right to publish a work for the first time

Fiverr
Budget marketplace of freelancers offering digital services in 250+ categories

format
The size, type, and binding of a book, such as e-book, hardback, large print, or paperback

formatting
The process of designing a book for electronic distribution with the desired layout, fonts, and appearance
compare: typesetting

formatting tag
Written code inserted into a manuscript to alert a formatter

front list
Books in their first year of publication

front list title
A book published recently, usually in the current year

front matter
The sections of a book preceding the first chapter. It can include acknowledgments, copyright, dedication, foreword, preface, table of contents, etc. Since the advent of digital publishing, much of this information has been moved to the back of the book to maximize the benefit of the Look Inside functions
also: prelims
compare: back matter

compare: back matter

full cover
Single image file containing the front cover, spine, and back cover

full-service distribution
Wholesalers and distributors who perform a broad range of services, including stocking inventory, operating warehouses, supplying credit, employing salespeople, and delivering goods
galley copy
see: proof

genre
A general category for a creative work, e.g., romance, science fiction, or mystery. The three macro genres are fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Within these, there are large genre categories, such as children’s books, and subgenre categories, such as children’s books ages four to seven. Knowing the genre, subgenre, and niche is essential for effective book marketing
see: niche

ghostwriting
Writing all or part of a book on behalf of a collaborator whose name will be listed as the author

glindex
Combined book glossary and index

go direct
To publish books to a retailer without the use of an intermediary service, like an aggregator or distributor

go wide
To publish or sell books through a variety of services and retailers
compare: exclusivity

Goodreads
A social media site owned by Amazon just for books; readers can connect with friends, get book recommendations, write reviews, and make reading lists

Goodreads advertising
Pay-per-click advertising on Goodreads

Goodreads giveaway
An online book giveaway that any Goodreads member can enter

Google Adwords
Text-based ads that show up next to Google search results, graphic display ads that show up on websites or apps, or YouTube video ads that show up during videos

Google Play
Digital distribution service for books and other content operated and developed by Google; one of the Big Six self-publishing technology companies

Google Play Books
Partner center where authors and publishers submit their books so readers can search for and preview them on Google Books and, in a growing number of countries, buy the e-book on Google Play

Google Preview
Google Play’s interface for viewing excerpts of an e-book before buying
compare: Look Inside

gray scale
A color model that uses only shades of black
compare: CMYK, RGB
H

halftone
A representation of an image using dots of varying sizes

hashtag
A word or phrase immediately preceded by the number sign (#); when a hashtag is clicked, other social media updates containing the same keyword or topic are shown

house ad
A self-promotional ad run on an author’s website to sell their own products

HTML
Stands for hypertext markup language; a standardized system for tagging text files to achieve font, color, graphic, and hyperlink effects wanted on web pages

hybrid author
An author who uses both trade and self-publishing services
compare: hybrid publisher, indie author

hybrid publisher
Company that provides a mix of trade publishing and self-publishing services in the same contract. Hybrid publishers have varied business models, methods of working with writers, and approaches to marketing and distribution, but all curate the books they help publish.
compare: hybrid author, vanity publishing
iBooks
Former trade name for Apple Books

impression
A single display of an advertisement or web page

imprint
A name used by a publisher to identify its books. A single publisher may have multiple imprints, which are usually genre-specific
see: publishing house

inbound marketing
Marketing model that relies on the initiative of customers to find, connect with, and purchase a product rather than advertising benefits, e.g., content marketing, social media marketing, and search engine optimization

income streams
Different methods of earning income; examples include earned income, derived from trading time for money; business income, derived from accumulating assets; and royalty income, derived from licensing a product or idea
see: active income, business model, passive income, product mix, royalties

independent (indie) bookseller
Retail shop owned by an individual, partnership, or small business that sells books to the general reader

independent (indie) publisher
Smaller publisher outside the Big Six publishing corporations that can range in size from medium enterprises to micro-publishers, like individual companies and self-publishing authors
see: author-publishing, micro-publishers

independent self-publishing services
Companies and freelancers hired by self-publishing indie authors; services in this sector vary from individual local freelancers to huge global companies, like Amazon KDP and Apple Books

InDesign
see: Adobe InDesign

indie author
A person who acts as the creative director of their own books, whether through self-publishing, assisted self-publishing, or traditional publishing

Indiegogo
A popular crowdfunding platform for authors

Ingram Content Group
A division of Ingram Industries that manufactures and distributes POD books
see: IngramSpark, Lightning Source

Ingram ipage
An online platform for bookstores to search, order, and manage books
see: CoreSource

IngramSpark
A large producer and distributor of POD books and e-books; one of the Big Six self-publishing technology companies

Instafreebie
A streamlined way to send book copies to reviewers, beta readers, or bloggers by providing a link for people to download the book for free

institutional sales
Book sales to schools, libraries, and universities, especially by children’s book and textbook publishers
intellectual property (IP)
Classification that protect books under copyright law

interior
All content within a book, except the covers
compare: book block

IPR License
Platform for authors, publishers, and agents to list and license publishing rights, providing access to a global marketplace; owned by the Frankfurt Book Fair with the Copyright Clearance Center

ISBN
Stands for International Standard Book Number. A unique numeric identifier for a particular edition and format of a book; each version of a book (e.g., paperback, hardcover, e-book) will have a different ISBN. The owner of the ISBN is the publisher of record
jacket
The front cover of a book
also: dust jacket

joint venture
A business arrangement where two or more parties agree to pool their resources for the purpose of accomplishing a specific task, which can be a new project or another business activity
see: author collaboration, partnership publishing

JPEG
A format for compressing image files; the most common format used by digital cameras

Jutoh
An e-book formatting software compatible with Mac, Windows, and Linux
K

KDP
see: Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

KDP Select
An optional KDP program that requires exclusivity in exchange for promotional tools and subscription
see: Kindle Unlimited (KU)

KENPC
see: Kindle Edition Normalized Page Count (KENPC)

Kickstarter
A popular crowdfunding platform for authors

Kindle
Proprietary e-book reading device designed and marketed by Amazon that allows users to browse, buy, download, and read e-books and other digital content via wireless networking to the Kindle Store

Kindle app
Application providing access to Kindle books directly in a web browser or on a phone or other device. It syncs the user’s furthest page read, bookmarks, notes, and highlights between Android, PC, Mac, iPad, and any Kindle device, including Audible audiobooks

Kindle Cloud Reader
Web-based version of Kindle app that allows users to read Kindle books on a web browser without a Kindle device; it also allows offline reading without internet access
see: Kindle app

Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)
Publishing and distribution platform for e-books provided by Amazon to authors and publishers

Kindle Edition Normalized Page Count (KENPC)
Amazon KDP payment method for books enrolled in KU, calculated using standard formatting settings of font, line height, and line spacing and measuring the number of pages read in a book, starting at the Start Reading Location (SRL). Non-text elements within books, including images, charts, and graphs, count toward a book’s KENPC

Kindle Forum
A popular online discussion forum dedicated to publishing on Amazon
also: KBoards.com

Kindle singles
Amazon’s curated digital imprint for short works, primarily novellas, short fiction, and long-form journalism

Kindle Store
E-book retail store operated by Amazon as part of its online retail website that can be accessed from any Kindle reader or Kindle mobile app

Kindle Unlimited (KU)
KDP program that allows subscribers to read e-books in the KU catalog for free; enrollment is mandatory for KDP Select authors
see: KDP Select

Kobo
A Toronto-based company that sells e-books, audiobooks, e-readers, and tablets; one of the Big Six self-publishing technology companies

Kobo Writing Life
Digital self-publishing platform that allows authors and publishers to easily create, edit, and upload e-books to Kobo
landscape
The orientation of a book that’s wider than it is tall
*compare: portrait*

launch party
Celebration of the publication of a book; it can be hosted at any location, but popular spots include bookstores, libraries, coffee shops, or the author’s home. Some authors choose virtual book launch parties online. Launch parties are less significant for digital publishing (e-book and audiobook) than print sales in bookstores, though a lot of activity in early weeks can establish a book’s ranking in online stores

lead magnet
A specific deliverable (like a free e-book download or other product) used to entice readers to join an author’s email list

legacy publishing
Trade publishing (somewhat derogatory)

Library of Congress Control Number (LCCN)
A unique identifier assigned to books by the US Library of Congress

license
Legal permission granted to someone other than the original holder of a right; for example, permitting a publisher to print a work for which you hold the copyright
*compare: copyright*

Lightning Source
Ingram printer and distributor of POD books, mainly used in trade publishing

limited edition
A book printed in limited numbers, usually for special editions

line editing
*see: copyediting*

list
The books a publisher or imprint has available for purchase or commissioned

list price
Recommended retail price of a book as set by the author or publisher
*also: recommended retail price, retail price*

literary agent
A person who acts as an intermediary for an author in transactions with trade publishers and other rights buyers in return for a percentage of an author’s advance, royalty income, and sometimes sales commissions. They can also manage an author’s career or business, from helping them develop book ideas to negotiating book deals with publishers and other rights buyers. Some agents also facilitate the relationship between author and editor
*see: rights licensing*

litho printing
A method of mass-production printing using wet ink and printing plates; more suitable for longer print runs
*also: lithography, offset printing*
*compare: digital printing*

Look Inside
Amazon’s feature for viewing excerpts of an e-book or print book before buying
*also: Search Inside*
*compare: Google Preview*
makeready stage
The point in the printing process when a publication is ready to be printed

manuscript
Text and images of a book prior to the interior layout process; the electronic text file prepared by the author for editors and designers

manuscript appraisal
see: content editing

manuscript conversion
see: conversion

marketing
The fifth step of publishing when awareness of a book and its author is generated among book distributors, retailers, and readers; it’s an ongoing, repeatable activity that positions an author and their books to be discoverable
see: discoverability, promotion, publishing

marketing plan
Strategic plan that details the documents, activities, and deliverables needed to market an author and their books

mass-market paperback
Smaller, less expensive version of a book that’s usually printed well after the hardcover and trade paperback versions have been made available

media kit
A package of key information to send to media or journalists, retailers, book bloggers, event planners, editors, or anyone who plans to write about an author or a book; may include an author photo and bio, book cover image, full synopsis, one-sentence description, book details, frequently asked questions, excerpt, and reviews or media coverage
also: press kit

metadata
Bibliographic information about a book, including title, author’s name, book description, ISBN, publisher, genre, publication date, and price. It may also include the categories and keywords a reader or other book buyer is likely to type into search engines when looking for a book. On publication, this data automatically feeds into various data systems, including publishing catalogs and stock lists, and is passed to the rest of the trade, including readers and other book buyers
see: bibliographic data

metadata mining
The automated extraction of metadata from electronic documents

micro-publishers
Small publishing enterprises, including sole trader author-publishers; some provide specialized information to a niche readership by subscription

micro-publishing
Publishing performed by micro-publishers. Publishing involving very small print runs or individual volumes printed on demand

Microsoft Publisher
Formatting tool that converts Microsoft Word documents to PDFs; not widely used by self-publishers as it does not convert to EPUB

MOBI
Amazon’s digital format for Kindle e-books
NaNoWriMo
An abbreviation for National Novel Writing Month, a nonprofit program that encourages novelists all over the globe to write a 50,000-word novel in thirty days. NaNoWriMo is both the event and the name of the nonprofit organization that coordinates the annual event.

NaPoWriMo
An abbreviation for National Poetry Writing Month, an international NaNoWriMo spin-off.

NCX
Navigation control file for XML applications, used in EPUBs to define the table of contents.

NetGalley
An online site where book reviewers, librarians, booksellers, educators, and media professionals request complimentary e-books in exchange for reviews.

niche
A specialized target market characterized by a particular interest, topic, or subject.

Nielsen
The sole registrar for ISBNs in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

99 Designs
A popular crowdsourced provider of book cover designs. See: crowdsourcing.

nonexclusive contract
Legal agreement where the publisher does not exercise exclusive rights over the materials published in a book.

Nook
Barnes & Noble’s line of e-readers and associated retailer; one of the Big Six self-publishing technology companies.

novel
Long-form fiction with more than 50,000 words in length. Compare: novella.

novella
Mid-form piece of fiction from 10,000 to 50,000 words. Compare: novel.
offset printing
A method of mass-production printing where images on metal plates are transferred (offset) onto rubber blankets or rollers and then to paper
compare: digital printing

off-the-book attention
A mention made of a book outside the context of a book review, such as on a talk show

online bookseller
Internet-based bookstore
also: online retailer

online marketing
Advertising, promoting, and selling books and other products on the internet
P

P2P lending
Loaning money to individuals without the systems and processes typically put in place by traditional financial institutions. Instead, the transactions are often handled by digital platforms that use an algorithm to manage transactions between parties. (P2P stands for peer to peer or person to person and refers to anything that’s decentralized and direct)

PageRank
A proprietary link analysis algorithm developed by Google to assign a numerical score to each page of a set of hypertext documents based on the number of referring links. The algorithm also takes into account the rank of the referring page; thus a link from a high-ranking page counts more than a link from a low-ranking page

Pages
Apple Inc.’s word processor that allows users to quickly create documents on their Apple devices

paper weight
The thickness and sturdiness of paper (not the actual weight of a sheet of paper), e.g., everyday paper used in most home printers is 20lb.

partnership publishing
A publishing arrangement where both the author and publisher contribute financially to the book’s production, sharing risks and rewards
also: hybrid publisher, shared publishing, subsidized publishing, vanity publishing
compare: author collaboration, hybrid publisher, joint venture

passive income
Income not directly tied to active work. Typical passive income sources are front-loaded with active work that you’re paid a small amount for, while the bulk of the income comes later. Interest, dividends, and royalties are prime examples
compare: active income

pay per click
see: cost per click (CPC)

pay per impression
see: cost per impression (CPI)

pbook
A physical, printed book generally constructed of a number of sheets of paper, bound in cardboard
see: codex

PDF
Stands for portable document format, a file format popular for its cross-compatibility, particularly in keeping layout and fonts as intended; the preferred file format for POD and fixed-layout e-books

pen name
A fictitious name adopted by an author and printed on the title page and byline of their works in place of their real name. Self-publishers often use different pen names for books in different genres
also: literary double, nom de plume, pseudonym

perfect binding
Standard binding for paperback books that uses glue to hold the interior to the cover
see: adhesive casebound

permafree
A book permanently available for free from online retailers; a strategy used to increase visibility and gain new readers by giving away a book, often the first in a series; also used by affiliate marketers or associated product promoters

permission
Agreement from a copyright holder that permits the reproduction or publication of copyrighted material; the process of securing agreements from the copyright holder
personalization
The ability to insert a reader’s own contents and personal data (e.g., children’s names), which intensifies the reading experience and supports reader empowerment and agency

see: customization, segmentation, targeting

PickFu
A service that helps authors carry out split tests on cover designs and book titles

piracy
Individuals or companies that copy and distribute books for free or for profit, without obtaining permission from the author or publisher; an infringement of copyright. In recent years, there’s been a growth in e-book piracy websites. There is debate about how much piracy actually costs authors and publishers in lost sales, and some authors have even welcomed piracy as a discoverability tool

pitch emails
Emails targeting publicity contacts and other influencers to get coverage for a book or author

plant costs
Initial costs incurred by a traditional printer in preparation for the first print run of a given title

platform
The computer hardware or online system used to run a program or digital tool

Platform as a Service (PaaS)
A computing platform that typically includes operating system, programming language execution environment, database, web server, etc. Popular examples include AWS Elastic Beanstalk, Google App Engine, and Microsoft Azure

POD
see: print on demand (POD)

podcast
Online audio broadcast available to stream on a website or download

portrait
The orientation of a book that’s taller than it is wide; most books are portrait

compare: landscape

prelims
see: front matter

compare: back matter

premades
Customizable book cover designs

preorder
Marketing tactic that offers readers the opportunity to reserve a copy of a book prior to its official release date

press release
An official announcement that provides information, including publication date and endorsements, about an event to reporters, bloggers, and other media outlets.

press-ready files
Generally, two PDFs of a laid-out interior and full cover

Prime Reading
A program that allows Amazon Prime subscribers to read free e-books from a catalog of approximately 1,000 titles selected by Amazon

print on demand (POD)
Printing books in small quantities, as needed and to order, using digital printing methods
print ready
The final layout file, usually in PDF format, of a book that’s ready to go to the printer

print run
The number of copies printed in a single order

printing signature
A group of interior pages (typically in multiples of 16) printed on large sheets of paper and then folded. The minimum size is four pages each; for books with page counts that can’t be easily divided, additional blank pages are used to complete the group

product mix
The total range of products and services offered by an independent author
see: business model, income streams

production
The third step of publishing where the book is constructed in audio, electronic, or print format
see: publishing

profit income
Derived by selling a product (e.g., a book) for a higher price than it costs to make; the amount left over after the costs of the seven steps of publishing a book, or the costs of producing another product, project, or service, have been covered; the main source of income for self-publishing authors
see: business model, commission (1), royalties

promotion
The sixth step of publishing, where concentrated sales-driven activity behind a particular book is done for a particular period of time; taking one book and bringing it to its target readers, with enticement to buy
see: marketing, publishing

proof
A copy of a book printed for final inspection and correction of errors; they may be very simple with blank covers. Publishers send proofs to journalists and bloggers to review a book before publication
also: galley copy
compare: advance review copy (ARC)

proofreading
The final editorial stage before a book manuscript is formatted and typeset, with a focus on the text at the word level: misspellings, accuracy of captions, headings, page numbers, typos

pseudonym
see: pen name

public domain
Books outside copyright protection; anyone may reproduce, sell, or otherwise use any part of them without having to obtain permission

publication date
Official date when a book is released to the public for sale. For distribution of print books in bookstores, it’s set for a few days after the book’s arrival in stores to sync with marketing and publicity
also: pub date

publicist
A professional or press agent who promotes a book, often by generating free advertising

publicity tour
Public circuit an author makes to publicize a book, either prior to or soon after the publication date

publishing
The process that turns an author’s manuscript into a book to be sold and/or licensed at a profit; includes seven steps: editorial, design, production, distribution, marketing, promotion, and rights licensing
publishing house
Smaller companies that operate independently within a corporate publisher; each house in turn includes several publishing imprints
see: imprint

publishing rights
The right to exploit an author’s IP by publishing a book or producing associated publications and formats (e.g., TV show, film, translation, etc.). Self-publishing authors retain all rights, aside from those selectively licensed to publishers and other rights buyers in a particular marketplace or format. Publishing rights are generally granted to a rights buyer by license, in return for a royalty (i.e., percentage of sales income). Flat-fee payment offers for publishing rights should generally be rejected
see: subsidiary rights

PubMatch
Rights management platform that allows authors and publishers to trade publishing rights and permissions with publishers, agents, and other rights buyers; owned by the London Book Fair

purchasing recency, frequency, and monetary
see: RFM
Q

QR code
Stands for quick response code; a machine-readable image with black-and-white squares typically used for storing URLs. Publishers use them to draw readers from print content to an online purchase page, supplementary digital content, or social media page.

query letter
A one-page communication sent to influencers, literary agents, publishers, and other rights buyers to get them excited about a book or other project proposal.
also: query email
reader acquisition cost (RAC)
A measure of how much money a new reader has cost an author to acquire
also: customer acquisition cost (CAC)

Reedsy.com
Premier online marketplace for indie authors to hire designers, editors, and marketers who have proven experience in the publishing space

region
A geographical area served by a publisher or retailer. For example, Amazon operates separate regional websites for Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States; publishers and other rights buyers may license rights in specific areas
also: territory

remainder
A book returned to the publisher after not having sold, often offered for later sale at a discounted price
see: returns

residuals
Royalties paid to a writer for a repeat of a play or television show

responsive web design
Websites that resize automatically to fit any screen on any device: desktop, mobile, or tablet; all author websites should be responsive as it increases the number of people reading e-books on phones and other devices

returns
Books returned from book retailers to the publisher and refunded after failing to sell
see: remainder

reversion
The process of reclaiming rights licensed to a publisher

reversion of rights clause
Clause found in many publishing contracts that outlines the conditions under which rights will go back to the author

review
see: book review

RFM
Stands for recency, frequency, and monetary; a digital book marketing principle: Recency asks, “How recently did the reader purchase?” Frequency asks, “How often does the reader purchase?” Monetary asks, “How much has the reader spent?” A higher RFM means a higher ranking on online store algorithms

RGB
A color model that uses red (R), green (G), and blue (B)
compare: CMYK, gray scale

rich black
A range of deeper black hues made up of all four ink colors that should be used for large areas of black in books printed in color
also: four-color black, 100% black

right readers
The specific readers who are most likely to buy an author’s books, based on demographic information, subjects of interest, values, and needs

rights
see: publishing rights, subsidiary rights
rights licensing
Assigning the right to publish, produce, or otherwise exploit a book’s content or characters in exchange for royalties (a percentage of sales revenue) or a flat fee (less often and less desirable)
see: selective rights licensing

ROI
Stands for return on investment. The amount earned from a book, product, or project versus the amount of money the owner spent (fixed costs and associated costs) to produce it

royalties
Payment in return for the right to license a copyright, usually expressed as a percentage of the book price; the main source of author income in trade publishing. Often confused with sales commissions paid by self-publishing services
see: commission (1), profit income
saddlestitch binding
Pages bound in the gutter with two staples; commonly used for booklets

sales funnel
A process that converts website and social media visitors into paying readers by convincing them to purchase books

sales handle
A one-sentence call to purchase found on the back of a book and in its advertising

sales rank
A ranking calculated by Amazon on the basis of daily sales and downloads of a book
also: best-seller rank

Scrivener
Popular editing and organizational software designed specifically for self-publishing authors

search engine
A software program that collects data from files available on the web and puts them in an index or database that users can search; the results provide links to the pages matching the user’s search in their original location

search engine optimization (SEO)
The process of making a web page more easily findable and indexed by search engines or more relevant to particular topics in order to attract more visitors

Search Inside
see: Look Inside

secondary rights
The right to resell a work after its first publication

segmentation
A marketing strategy that takes a target market and breaks it into smaller groups based on interests, common needs, or priorities
see: customization, personalization, targeting

selective rights licensing
Assigning the right to publish, produce, or otherwise exploit a book’s content or characters on a nonexclusive basis, carefully limiting format, territory, and term
see: rights licensing

self-publishing
A form of publishing where the author oversees the publishing process, retains control over creative decisions and disposition of publishing rights, and bears the costs of production

Self-Publishing Advice Center
A popular outreach service from the Alliance of Independent Authors that offers a blog, podcast, books, ratings charts, and other resources. Available at SelfPublishingAdvice.org

self-publishing service
A company or freelancer commissioned by an author to provide any of the seven steps involved in publishing a book: editorial, design, production, distribution, marketing, promotion, or rights service; some companies offer a full or multi-service package
see: assisted publishing, hybrid publisher, partnership publishing

sell sheet
see: advance information sheet (AIS)

serialization
A subsidiary publishing right by which extracts from a book may be published by a newspaper or magazine
service marks
Trademarks used to identify services
see: trademark

shared publishing
Partnership or hybrid publishing

shelf life
The time an unsold book remains on the shelf of a retail store before being replaced by fresh or better-selling stock

short discount
A smaller-than-typical discount on books purchased by retailers and wholesalers

short-run print
Printing of a limited number of copies of a book in a single print run; can now be as low as 300–400 copies. For fewer copies, digital printing is generally a better option

Shutterstock
A popular crowdsourced provider of high-quality licensed images, videos, and music

side sewn
Special binding method used for hardcover books with low page counts (fewer than 64 pages). Printing signatures are stacked on top of one another and then sewn together before being glued into the hardcover case. Side-sewn bindings require special file preparation for books with crossover images
see: printing signature

slush pile
Unread and unsolicited manuscripts submitted by authors for consideration to traditional publishers (somewhat derogatory)

small press
Smaller publishing house that releases books often intended for specialized audiences

smart contracts
Computer programs that automatically execute legally binding contracts. These automated and often blockchain-based computer protocols facilitate, verify, or enforce digital agreements, saving time and reducing costs in common legal and financial transactions and potentially replacing lawyers and banks

Smashwords
A popular e-book retailer and aggregator

Smyth sewn
Special binding method used for hardcover books. Each printing signature is sewn individually before all signatures are sewn together and then glued into the hardcover case. This binding affords maximum durability
see: printing signature

social media handle
A name (preceded by @) used on various social media platforms, including Instagram and Twitter

social media marketing
Use of social media platforms to connect with customers to build brand, increase sales, and drive website traffic. Platforms vary in popularity across time, but some major ones that have held popularity for more than a decade are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and YouTube. All are used effectively by authors to build readership and drive sales

special sales
Book sales through non-bookstore outlets, such as restaurants, gift stores, and health spas

spine
The edge of the book’s binding; the spine connects the front and back covers and faces out on a bookshelf
spine width
Calculation for the width of a book's spine in the cover file, based on the page count, including any blank pages needed to complete printing signatures, and the weight of the paper stock being used.

spiral bound
A method of binding where wire or plastic is wound through holes punched along the side of a book.

Start Reading Location (SRL)
Location where a book begins; used by Amazon KDP to determine pages read under the KENPC payment method; set generally at the first page of chapter one.
*see: Kindle Edition Normalized Page Count (KENPC)*

structural edit
*see: content editing*

style (1)
Author's way of writing, which can include word choices, punctuation preferences, and formatting decisions.

style (2)
Specific layout of text or a variation of the presentation of a word (such as page headers or the use of a specific font).

style guide
Detailed list of an author's preferences in spelling usages, character names, grammar, dialogue, and punctuation. Many authors develop these on their own and send them to their editors as a guide, but if the author doesn't, an editor may create one during the copyediting process. Many editors use a generally accepted guide for the book's genre, e.g., *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
*also: style sheet*

subsidary rights
In a publishing contract, the rights that are kept separate from the core publishing license between publisher and author and governed by other (sublicensing) arrangements. They include the right to publish a work based on the original material but in a different format, e.g., serialization rights in newspapers or magazines, translation rights, film or TV rights, merchandising rights, or print rights in a different country (territory rights). Digital publishing has seen rights that were traditionally subsidiary become core—most notably audiobook rights. Self-publishers generally retain digital rights and selectively license sub rights, limiting the format, term, and territory as much as possible.
*also: sub rights*
*see: publishing rights*

subsidized publishing
Publishing services offered to authors by companies on a fee-based or hybrid publishing model.
*see: assisted publishing, hybrid publisher, partnership publishing*

swipe copy
Copy-and-paste text that can be used by others for ease. Widely used in affiliate marketing to make promoting an offer more convenient for affiliates.

synopsis
Overview of what a book is about and what makes it special that's sent to editors, publicists, sales teams, retailers, journalists, reviewers, and others. It should be longer than the cover blurb and include a tantalizing summary of theme, structure, or plot; a hint of the conclusion (fiction and nonfiction) and style (literary work and poetry); and the most noteworthy features of the book and/or author.
tagline
A catchphrase or slogan, especially as used in advertising; typically used in fiction to attract potential readers to the story concept

target audience
also: target market
see: right readers, targeting

targeting
Devising a promotional campaign to appeal to a segment of readers based on their particular genre, niche, or interests
see: customization, personalization, segmentation

term
A fixed period applying to a publishing or rights purchase contract. The rights buyer seeks to extend the term; the rights seller to limit it

termination clause
Clause found in many contractual agreements that specifies particular behaviors, actions, or events that would result in nullification of the contract

terms and conditions
The stipulated or agreed-upon requirements or conditions under which an action is undertaken or an agreement reached, e.g., the amount of an advance, the percentage discount awarded by a publisher to a bookseller, or the sales commission charged by a self-publishing platform

territory
see: region

thumbnail
A small representation of a larger image, intended as a preview

trade bookseller
Any company that distributes books to the general public, including superstores, chain stores, independent bookstores, and online retailers

trade paperback
A book bound with a paper or heavy stock cover, usually with a larger trim size than that of a mass-market paperback

trade publisher
A company that invests in publishing manuscripts submitted to them by authors and controls most creative and marketing decisions. Trade publishers bear the cost of production and promotion in exchange for a sizable percentage (typically 90%+) of the profit from a book
also: traditional publisher

trademark
A type of IP consisting of a recognizable sign, design, or expression that identifies products or services of a particular source apart from others. They can be registered and take many forms, e.g., words, slogans, logos, shapes, colors, and even sounds
see: service marks

traditional distribution
Books are printed ahead of time and stored at a warehouse; book wholesalers and distributors then fulfill orders

trim size
The dimensions of a page of a print book expressed always as first width, then height

typesetting
Professional preparation of a book for print with the desired layout, fonts, and appearance
compare: formatting
unbound proof
Proof with interior pages not bound together; pages may not be trimmed to the final book size, and the ink color and quality may be different

unique visitor
An individual who accesses a website

unit cost
The production or base cost of printing and putting together a book

universal link
A link used by authors to simplify the process of discoverability by directing customers to one place that allows them to choose their preferred online retailer

university press
A publishing house owned and operated by a university. Such presses typically issue academic material, often including works by their own academics

unsolicited manuscript
Manuscript sent to a publisher that did not request it; most publishers say they do not read unsolicited submissions

Unsplash
A popular crowdsourced provider of free imagery and pictures

Upwork
The largest online marketplace connecting businesses and skilled professionals

URL
Stands for uniform resource locator; the address of a web page

UX
Stands for user experience; what a user of a particular product (e.g., e-book, e-reader, or author website) experiences when using that product
vanity publishing
Traditionally, any publishing service that charged a fee; more recently, an exploitive service that trades on authors’ dreams of publication, with excessively high fees, substandard service, and often the pretense that they’re trade-publishing houses
also: vanity press
compare: assisted publishing, hybrid publisher, partnership publishing

virtual book tour (VBT)
An advertising strategy centered on publicizing a book on the internet, including book giveaways and ads on websites frequented by the target audience

watchdog
A person or group that monitors the practices of companies providing particular services or in particular sectors
see: ALLI Watchdog Desk

wholesaler
A company that buys books in large quantities from publishers at high discounts and sells them to bookstores, libraries, and other book outlets at mid-level discounts
see: distributor

YA
Young adult fiction