

SELF-PUBLISHING PRIMER

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A Writer's Words, An Editor's Eye
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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Chapter 1 — Introduction	2
Chapter 2 — What is traditional publishing?	3
Chapter 3 — What is vanity publishing?.....	5
Chapter 4 — What is subsidy publishing?.....	6
Chapter 5 — What is self-publishing?	7
Chapter 6 — What are the pros and cons of self-publishing?	8
Chapter 7 — Who should self-publish?	9
Chapter 8 — How do I write my book?.....	11
Chapter 9 — How do I set up a self-publishing company?.....	13
Chapter 10 — What do I need to know about copyrights and ISBNs?	15
Chapter 11 — How much does self-publishing cost?.....	17
Chapter 12 — What do I need to do and when do I need to do it?.....	19
Chapter 13 — Do I need a Web site ... and should I make my book available as an e-book?	23
Chapter 14 — How can I market and distribute my books?	25
About the Author	27



Chapter I — Introduction

This e-book began life as a series of fourteen posts about self-publishing on my blog [A Writer's Words, An Editor's Eye](#) in February 2007. I had touched on the subject of self-publishing in [Finding a Publisher](#), but posts on other blogs and comments from my clients convinced me there was a need for more depth on the subject.

At the time I started the series, the following disparate views of self-publishing had recently been posted:

Richard Hoy, in [The Supposed Problems With Self-Publishing on the BookLocker Guide to POD and Ebook Publishing](#), said: “But here is the elephant in the room no one wants to talk about—the traditional publishing process sucks. Many manuscripts go unpublished every year not because they are bad, but because traditional publishers don’t know how to find the book’s market in a cost-effective manner. That is where POD publishers like BookLocker can provide a real service, as long as the return on investment is good.”

Paul Genesse, in [How do I get published? on The Blog of Fantasy Author Paul Genesse](#), said: “Self-publishing non-fiction is somewhat accepted if you travel and give talks on your area of expertise and have a need to sell material to people in your field of interest, but if you are a fiction writer self-publishing can be the kiss of death.”

In a recent conversation, my client, David Bowles, author of [The Westward Sagas](#), told me how glad he is that he decided to self-publish his historical fiction. “Unless you’re a big name or have a big platform that would attract a national audience, self-publishing is the only way to go. You row your own boat, but to be successful, you have to research and line up a good editor, designer, and printer.”

A new client, an interior designer writing a book to help people decorate their own homes, listened to the information that you’ll find in the next few posts and determined that self-publishing was the best route to publication for her.

You might be surprised at some of the successful authors who have self-published their work throughout history. Visit [John Kremer's Self-Publishing Hall of Fame](#) to learn more.

To the cynic, it might look like I am a fan of self-publishing because much of freelance editing is for self-publishing authors. However, that is the reverse of what actually happened—I was a fan of self-publishing first and then started working with writers who want to self-publish.

However, self-publishing is definitely not for everyone. [The Tricky Art of Self-Publishing by Foster J. Dickson at Writer's Resource Center](#) gives a brief overview of the topic and suggests some cases where self-publishing is appropriate.



Chapter 2 —What is traditional publishing?

Before you can decide if self-publishing is appropriate for you, you have to understand what it is and how it compares to other forms of publishing. This is not designed to be a glossary of publishing terms, and others may disagree with my terminology. But the descriptions that follow make it easy for my clients to understand the different types of publishing.

Most people understand what is often called [traditional, trade, or commercial publishing](#):

- A company—a mega-conglomerate in New York or a small regional press anywhere—contracts to publish your book.
- The company pays all the costs of production and does all the work to publish the book.
- You as the author are paid a royalty (which can be as small as 6% on gross sales and can vary considerably depending on the publisher, the author's previous publishing experience, whether the author or an agent/attorney negotiates the contract, whether the royalty is calculated on gross or net sales, and more).
- Since books are returnable to the publisher if not sold by the bookstore, a certain percentage of the royalty payments will be held in reserve to cover returns.
- A publisher usually specializes in particular genres and requires a query letter first. If the query letter captures the editor's interest and the subject of the book fits what the company is seeking, you may be asked for a proposal (a synopsis or outline and sample chapters). If the editor likes the proposal, you may be asked for a complete manuscript. A manuscript under serious consideration may be reviewed by several different people. The process may take months (even years).
- Only a small fraction of the books submitted to traditional publishers are accepted for publication. Many are rejected because they are bad, but many others are rejected because they don't fit what the publisher needs at that time. Writers hate to get that standard rejection form letter: "Your manuscript does not meet our publishing needs at this time." But it doesn't mean you don't have a great book—it just means that your book didn't make the cut of the relatively small number of books the publisher considered the best fit to what the marketing department expects to be able to sell in large numbers.
- Some publishers will consider manuscripts only from literary agents, so the writer may have to go through the process of finding an agent before finding a publisher.
- Most writers who choose this publishing route spend several years writing and querying publishers and receive many rejections before their first manuscript is accepted.
- Publication can take a year or two ... or more ... from the time the contract is signed until the book is available in bookstores.

- The writer has little control over the process—a publisher may change the title, require extensive edits in the manuscript, and choose a book cover that the writer doesn't think is appropriate for the story.
- Except in rare cases, the publisher devotes very little promotion to a first-time author's book.
- The publisher is responsible for distributing the books to bookstores and other retail outlets, so your book will generally be widely available (at least from the large companies; distribution is more limited from small presses).
- Books published by trade publishers have credibility with reviewers, booksellers, and the public because they have been through an extensive vetting process before being published.
- Authors must promote their book to some extent for the book to sell well, but the distribution in bookstores and the credibility of the publisher makes it easier to sell large quantities of books.

Next, we'll talk about the other end of the publishing spectrum.



Your manuscript is only one of a huge mountain of manuscripts a traditional publisher faces.

Chapter 3 —What is vanity publishing?

The last chapter covered traditional publishing. At the other end of the spectrum is [vanity publishing](#):

- A company contracts with you to publish your book.
- The company charges you for all the costs of production, but it does the work you have paid for to publish the book.
- Manuscripts are not screened; if the author has the money to pay the fees, the company will publish the book.
- Often, the company does nothing more than create a cover (possibly from a template), lay out the interior, and print the book; if the author wants editing or an original cover design, each service is an expensive add-on.
- You as the author may be paid a royalty (after you've already paid all the costs of production), but books are generally not widely-distributed and marketing is nonexistent without more expensive add-ons (and the value of the marketing is likely to be far less than the cost).
- Or you may receive hundreds or thousands of copies of your book to market yourself.
- Because the vanity publishers are well-known in the publishing world, bookstores do not generally stock these titles and reviewers don't review them.
- Many of the vanity publishers now call themselves [POD publishers](#) and offer authors print-on-demand services. With POD, authors don't end up with a garage or bedroom full of books—books can be printed as orders are received. The quality of POD books varies considerably, and the convenience of being able to order books one at a time (and sometimes expensive set-up fees) can increase the cost so much that a book could become too expensive for the market.
- The company may call itself a traditional, subsidy, POD, co-op publisher—or some other innocuous-sounding name. However, if you pay very high costs and do not receive the full gamut of publishing services, the publisher is really a vanity publisher.

Next, we'll talk about subsidy publishing.



To a vanity publisher, the most important thing you'll write is a check.

Chapter 4 —What is subsidy publishing?

We've talked about traditional publishing and vanity publishing. In the middle of these extremes are subsidy publishing and self-publishing.

We'll talk more about do-it-yourself publishing in a future chapter, but here we'll address subsidy publishing:

- A vanity publisher can look deceptively like a subsidy publisher; in fact, all vanity publishers ARE subsidy publishers—the author pays a company to publish the book—but in my mind, at least, not all subsidy publishers are vanity publishers.
- The two primary differences between a legitimate subsidy company that is a viable option for an author and a vanity publisher to avoid are these: 1) while the subsidy publisher will make a profit on all the services it provides, the author will receive value for the money spent; and 2) while a subsidy publisher will not be as selective as a traditional publisher, a legitimate one will screen and edit the manuscript rather than printing anything that the customer pays for.
- Many subsidy publishers use POD technology and may call themselves POD publishers. You will find good information and advice about POD from [The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America](#), [Writing-World.com](#), and [The Publishing Game](#).
- Authors who choose to use a subsidy publisher need to compare the prices, services, and reputations of various companies. You can find a [price comparison chart of POD publishers at Publishing Basics](#). Order copies of a few of the titles published by the company to judge the quality for yourself. Research online, and ask authors who have used the company about their experiences.
- Subsidy publishing will be more expensive than self-publishing, but you will not have to spend the time or learn what is needed to publish a book.
- Subsidy publishing may be a good choice for an author who is publishing a single book for a limited audience—a family history, for example—especially if the author has neither the time nor the interest in production.
- Subsidy publishing is probably not a good choice if you want your book in bookstores or if you expect a large volume of sales to a wide audience.

Next, after all this background, we'll talk about self-publishing.



Subsidy publishing may be a good choice if you want to see your book in print without doing the work of self-publishing.

Chapter 5 —What is self-publishing?

We've talked about other kinds of publishing, including subsidy publishing. Sometimes authors believe that subsidy publishing is the same as self-publishing because the author pays all the costs of production in both. In [Subsidy Publishing vs. Self-Publishing](#), Writing-World gives a good explanation of the differences between subsidy publishing and self-publishing.

Now let's look at self-publishing:

- Rather than dealing with a publishing company, you the author create your own publishing company. You become a businessperson as well as a writer.
- You as the author and publisher are responsible for all the costs of publishing the book. You own all the books that are printed, and you receive all the income from sales.
- You are in complete control of all aspects of publication, including editorial decisions, design/layout, cover art, and printing. No one else can put a cover on your book that you don't think accurately reflects the content. No one can make you edit out a secondary plot or change the title of your story.
- You retain all rights to your book.
- With the total control comes total responsibility. You have to learn what is involved in publishing and either perform every task yourself or hire someone else to do it. If you don't make it happen, it doesn't happen.
- You can usually publish a book much faster than a traditional publisher.
- Because anyone can self-publish a book—and there many poor quality self-published books hitting the market every day—they lack the credibility of books published by a conventional publisher. Bookstores and reviewers are often reluctant to review or carry self-published books.
- The author is totally responsible for promotion, marketing, and distribution.

Next, we'll consider the pros and cons of self-publishing.



As a self-publisher, you will run a business.

Chapter 6 —What are the pros and cons of self-publishing?

The pros and cons of self-publishing may seem self-evident from the description in the previous chapter. However, let's break down the characteristics of self-publishing into benefits and disadvantages.

Advantages of self-publishing include:

- You, the author, are in complete control. Your book cannot be rejected or changed by a publisher who may not have the same vision for the book that you do.
- You can bring your book to market much faster than a commercial publisher would.
- You own all the rights to the book and all the books that are printed. You make all the profit.
- You set your own price and marketing strategies.
- You can take advantage of your personal platform, your niche market, your target audience that a publisher might not be able to reach. You can use your book to build your credibility as a professional, to promote other products, or to supplement a speaking career.

Disadvantages of self-publishing include:

- You must become a businessperson as well as a writer.
- You must pay all the costs of publishing and marketing.
- You must either learn how to do every task involved in publishing your book or find and hire competent people. Either way you will have to learn new skills and spend time on production and marketing in addition to writing your book.
- You must learn to treat your book as a product, not just as your creation, and to make decisions based on business and marketing considerations.
- Self-publishing lacks the prestige of commercial publishing, and you will find it challenging to get reviews and distribution in bookstores.

For **other views of the pros and cons of self-publishing**, read the following articles:

- [Find a Publisher, Co-Publish or Self-Publish:Which One to Choose?](#) by Mary Embree for [Small Publishers, Artists & Writers Network \(SPAWN\)](#)
- [Pros and Cons of Self-Publishing](#) from Gropen Associates, Inc.
- [Writers, Readers and Self-Publishing](#) by Ambrose Musiyiwa of Blog Critics Magazine

Next, we'll look at who should self-publish. Is self-publishing right for you and your book?

Gather information before
deciding which way to go.



Chapter 7 — Who should self-publish?

We've looked at the pros and cons of self-publishing, but that doesn't answer the question of whether self-publishing is appropriate for you and your book. Let's look more closely at who should self-publish:

You might be a good candidate for self-publishing if ...

- You like being in control, handle responsibility well, and are good at making decisions.
- You understand that being in control means hiring help, asking advice, or delegating some aspects of publication that you're not qualified or don't have the time to handle.
- You enjoy being an entrepreneur or at least are willing to treat your book like a business.
- You have the self-motivation and initiative to see the project through from beginning (writing the manuscript) to end (promoting and selling books).
- You can adapt from writing in solitude to communicating your marketing message in public.
- You want your book published in less time than the one to three years typical in commercial publishing.
- You are willing to take risks and spend money in anticipation of greater returns.
- Your book appeals to a niche market that is hard for a mass-market publisher to reach.
- You have a platform—you have a reputation as an expert in your industry; you are a public speaker with the opportunity to sell books to your audiences; you are part of the community that makes up the niche market for your book.

You might not be a good candidate for self-publishing if ...

- You do not like responsibility and making decisions.
- You want to be in control—and that means you don't listen to anyone else's advice.
- You don't want to deal with the business or you consider your book an artistic creation and not a product.
- You are easily distracted or discouraged or you don't like to handle complex projects.
- You like the quiet life of being a writer and do not want to become actively involved or you do not have (and not are not willing to learn) good communication skills.
- Your book is timeless so it doesn't matter when it's published.
- You are risk-averse or don't want to spend your own money.
- Your book has a wide appeal to a mass market, and you expect it to sell hundreds of thousands of copies.

- You do not have a platform to use to sell your book and are not willing to do what it takes to develop one.

For **other views of who should self-publish**, read the following articles:

- [The Pro's and Con's of Self-Publishing by Annette Graf on Go Publish Yourself](#)—this one includes some good questions to ask yourself
- [Self Publishing Your Own Book: When Should You Consider It? by Donna Mascle on To Publish a Book](#)—this one says real writers, control freaks, and money grubbers should consider self-publishing
- [Self-Publishing FAQ by Moira Allen at Writing-World.com](#)—this one talks about reasons NOT to self-publish and what kinds of books are best for self-publishing

The next chapter will give you resources for help with writing your book.



Weigh the pros and cons and consider your strengths and preferences to decide if self-publishing is the right choice for you.

Chapter 8 —How do I write my book?

Advice on writing your book would fill volumes, but I will give you a few **tips and some good resources** to get you started.

As a freelance editor, I do sample edits for prospective clients. Frequently, I point out some major areas the writers can work on themselves to improve their writing before they work with me or any other editor to make it even better.

Here is the advice I most often give first-time writers:

- **Read other books in your genre** to see what is already on the market and what you can offer that is different. You can also learn about writing from reading other books, as described in the book [Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them](#).
- **Read books about the craft of writing**, such as [Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life](#) by Anne Lamott or [Writing Down the Bones](#) by Natalie Goldberg.
- **Write your book about some thing or some one.** That may sound ridiculous, but many writers don't really know what their book is about. Or maybe the writer knows, but no one else can tell. I read the first chapter of what the writer said was a tribute to his father. A dozen or more characters were introduced—none of them the father—and they were all treated as equally important. I couldn't identify with any one character—remember character starts (at least phonetically) with the word "care." If readers care about your characters, they are more likely to want to read the rest of the story. If you are writing a self-help, advice, or how-to book, make it clear whether your book is about how to help your disabled child learn better or about how schools should teach disabled children.
- **Open your book with a hook**—something to grab the reader's attention and compel them to keep reading. Most writers, especially fiction writers, start their story too soon, with lots of back story that doesn't engage the reader. Writers are often told to write their book, then discard the first dozen or so pages (maybe even the first four chapters) to start the book at the real beginning. Readers don't need to know your character's life history in the first chapter. Start the story with action and weave the back story in. Even in nonfiction books, you need a hook—it may be a promise of how the book will help readers, a question to get them thinking, an unusual twist on common knowledge, something that will garner interest immediately and keep the reader wanting to learn more.
- **Whenever possible, write in active rather than passive voice.** In active voice, someone does something; in passive voice something is done. "Write in active voice" is active; "your book should be written in active voice" is passive. Learn more at [Active and Passive Voice at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab](#) and in the [Grammar Handbook at the Center for Writing Studies](#) of the University of Illinois.

- **Write your book for readability**, not to impress people with your vocabulary. Of course, if you are writing a technical book for a professional audience, you will use industry jargon and the level of writing appropriate for the subject and the audience. But if you are writing for the general public, check the readability (you can do this in Word through the grammar check function) and try for around the eighth grade level. Peter Bowerman suggests [Seven Steps to a More Readable Book](#) from his book [The Well-Fed Self-Publisher: How to Turn One Book into a Full-Time Living](#).
- **Pay attention to grammar, spelling, and punctuation.** If you need help with these items, you can find help at the [Guide to Grammar and Writing](#) from the Capital Community College Foundation or in a book such as Strunk & White's [The Elements of Style Illustrated](#).
- **Join a local or online writers group, attend seminars and workshops, and network with other writers.** ForWriters.com offers a list of [national, local, and online writers groups](#).
- **Take advantage of the many excellent resources for writers online.** You'll find links to several Web sites for writers on my [Resources for Writers page](#). [Preserving Memories: How to Write a Family History](#) will be especially helpful if you are writing a memoir or family history but also has information helpful for any kind of writing, especially in the list of resources. You can also do a search for "writing + the genre of your book" for information about specific kinds of writing: memoirs, fiction, how-to, historical, etc.

If you've decided that self-publishing is for you, the next chapter will discuss how to set up your publishing company.



Get help with your writing if you're stuck or frustrated.

Chapter 9 —How do I set up a self-publishing company?

You've written or are writing a book. Now you understand what self-publishing is and you've decided to self-publish your book.

Where do you start?

- **Decide what type of business to establish:** sole proprietorship, LLC, or corporation. Most self-publishers start as proprietorships, but you may want to look different [ownership structures](#) and discuss them with your legal and accounting advisors.
- **Choose and register your company name.** Although I don't recommend you hide the fact that your book is self-published, I do recommend you choose a business name that sounds like a business, not the author's name. You may choose a name that relates to the subject of your book, but remember you may write more books in the future—you may even decide to publish books for other writers—so you don't want your business name to be too specific. [The Small Business Administration's Small Business Planner](#) includes advice on choosing a name and business structure as well as how to set up different kinds of businesses.
- **Decide on an address and get a business phone line.** Although you are probably working from your home, you may want to use a mail box with the post office or with a company like Mailboxes, Etc. or the UPS Store. Not only will such an address protect the privacy of your home address, but it will also look more like a business. And you will need a separate phone line, especially if you are going to take phone orders.
- **Set up a business checking account and a bookkeeping system and apply for a sales tax permit.** Your system can be fairly simple—just be sure you have some way of easily keeping track of income and expenses and taxes. If you plan to sell to bookstores or distributors, you will have to have an accounts receivables system as you will be waiting 45 to 60 days (or more) for payment. Check with your state comptroller or the appropriate office in your state to find out the sales tax requirements.
- **Determine how you will distribute your books and what types of payment you will accept.** If you sell to bookstores or distributors, you will invoice them for the list price less their discount (usually 40% to 50%) and wait for a check. But if you sell books directly to customers—from a Web site or in personal appearances—you will need to be able to accept credit cards or you will miss out on a lot of sales.
- **Learn about the business of publishing**—things like ISBNs, bar codes, and copyrights in Dan Poynter's [The Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print, and Sell Your Own Book, 15th Edition](#) or from Tom and Marilyn Ross's [Complete Guide to Self Publishing: Everything You Need to Know to Write, Publish, Promote, and Sell Your Own Book \(Self-Publishing 4th Edition\)](#).

For other views on how to set up your company, read the following articles:

- [Setting up and Running Your Publishing Business](#) by Dan Poynter
- [Should I start my own publishing company?](#) in the FAQs of Self-Publishing.com
- [Basics of Self-Publishing](#) by Moira Allen on Writing-World.com

The next chapter will cover copyrights and ISBNs.



Get professional advice to ensure you're setting up your business correctly.

Chapter 10 —What do I need to know about copyrights and ISBNs?

Writers often ask me if they need to copyright their book before they send it into the publishing world—either to a freelance editor or book doctor to polish the manuscript or to agents and editors to seek publication. In fact, **your words are copyrighted the minute you put them in “fixed form”**—handwritten on tablet paper, typed in a word processor, recorded in audio format, or any other form. However, you will want to **register** your copyright AFTER the book is published.

[The U.S. Copyright Office](#) says: *In general, copyright registration is a legal formality intended to make a public record of the basic facts of a particular copyright. However, registration is not a condition of copyright protection. Even though registration is not a requirement for protection, the copyright law provides several inducements or advantages to encourage copyright owners to make registration.*

Copyright registration costs \$45, and you can learn [how to register](#) on the Copyright Office Web site.

There is no need to register the copyright before the book is published because if there are “substantial and creative” changes, you will have to re-register. Most books go through several revisions before publication, so it’s best to wait until the copy is final before registering copyright. You should not worry about editors, designers, printers, or other publishing professionals “stealing” your work. Professionals would not stay in business if they stole from their clients. If you have any doubts about the integrity of a person or company you are considering doing business with—don’t. Find someone else. You have to trust anyone helping you throughout the process of getting your book published.

Whether or not you register your copyright, you will have to comply with [mandatory deposit](#) and deposit two copies of your published book in the Library of Congress within three months of publication.

If you want to sell your book in bookstores, it must have an ISBN (International Standard Book Number). This is a unique 13-digit (expanded in January 2007 from 10 digits) number that identifies your book in a specific edition; books published in both paperback and electronic formats will require two different ISBNs. The ISBN identifies the country, the publisher, the title/edition. You cannot use an ISBN from another publisher because the publisher prefix is permanently assigned to the publisher of record. If you are considering publishing with a POD or subsidy company, the publisher of record will be that company—not you. You cannot have complete control over your book if you do not have your own ISBNs.

The ISBN agency in the US is R.R. Bowker, and you can [apply online](#). The regular processing fee for a block of 10 ISBNs is \$275. Ten sounds like a lot if you're planning only one book, but if you publish in more than one format, you will need a number for each format. And even if you publish only one book in one format and never use the other nine ISBNs, I consider this a wise investment to maintain complete control of your book. If you intend to publish a lot of books, you can save money by ordering larger blocks.

After you receive the list of ISBNs assigned to your publishing company, you **must complete a form or register each book online** so Bowker has a record of what title/edition carries each ISBN. This information is then published in Books in Print, and any bookstore or library can get the information needed to order your book.

The ISBN will be included in the bar code on the cover of your book. You can find sources for bar codes on the Bowker site, but your book designer or printer can probably provide the bar code as part of their service.

Once you are registered with R.R. Bowker and have your ISBNs, you know **you are officially a publisher**.

Next, we'll talk about how much self-publishing your book will cost.



Copyright and ISBNs are important steps in self-publishing.

Chapter 11 —How much does self-publishing cost?

Every author considering self-publishing wants to know how much it will cost. I'll give some general ideas, but there is a huge variation in costs based on many factors: the length of your book, the method of printing, what kind of cover art you want to use, how much editing your book requires, and more. Marketing is another important element for success in self-publishing, but I'm not going to include those costs in this here.

The major expenses to take a book from the final draft of your manuscript to a published book include:

- **Editing:** No matter how good a writer you are, you need another pair of eyes reviewing your manuscript. Editors commonly say, "I can catch everyone's mistakes but my own," and that's true for all of us. The cleaner your manuscript is before you hire an editor, the less it will cost. So use spell and grammar check and edit your own work several times. Follow the advice I've given in previous posts: [Ten Tips for Self-Editing](#) and [Editing: Turning Dreck into Prose](#). Then shop around for a freelance editor; ask for sample edits and price quotes so you can evaluate both the quality of the work and the cost. Some editors charge by page, some by the word, and some by the hour. Rates can range from a low of \$4/page, .01/word, or \$20/hour to a high of \$40/page, .20/word, or \$125/hour. Editing a book can range from \$500 to \$20,000, but if you have done a good job of self-editing, you can expect the cost to edit a 50,000 word book to be **\$1000 to \$2500**.
- **Copyright and ISBNs:** We covered these items in the last post. You will spend a little over **\$300** for these two items.
- **Layout:** If you're on a very tight budget, you can lay out the book yourself in Word by following the instructions in [Perfect Pages: Self Publishing with Microsoft Word, or How to Use MS Word for Book Design, Typesetting, and Page Layout in Formatting Your Books for Desktop Publishing and Print on Demand](#) by Aaron Shepard or [The Non-Designer's Design Book, Second Edition](#) by Robin Williams. However, you may be happier—and less frustrated—with a professional designer who has experience in book design. Like editing, the prices vary considerably, but you can find a designer who will do an excellent job for **\$250 to \$500**.
- **Cover design:** Here again, you can spend a lot of money or a relatively small amount of money. The cover is no place on skimp on quality. In spite of the wisdom that "you can't judge a book by its cover," people do. Your cover has to be eye-catching to capture readers' attention and make them want to pick up the book and read it. However, you don't have to have original artwork (which can be very expensive)—personal photos for a memoir or family history or stock photos can be turned into beautiful covers by a creative designer. If the designer doesn't include the bar code in his fee, you need to add that cost to your total. A cover design using a stock photo should cost you **\$250 to \$500**.

- **Printing:** The unit price and total outlay will vary greatly depending on the printing process. If you use a POD printer, you will probably pay a set-up fee of \$100 or \$200, then pay \$3 to \$10 per copy of your book. Your initial cost is low, but your unit price may be too high to be able to make a profit selling through retailers that require a significant discount. If you use a printer, your initial investment is considerably more, but your unit cost is significantly less: about \$1.50 each for 3,000 copies (\$4500), \$2.00 each for 2000 copies (\$4,000), or \$3.00 each for 1000 copies (\$3,000). Many self-publishers begin with a print run of 1,000 copies (**\$3,000**).

So, what's the total?

- **\$4800 on the low end** for 1000 copies
- **\$8000+ on the high end** for 3000 copies

Remember, this does not include marketing and distribution costs—this is just the cost to go from a manuscript to a printed book. And these are average numbers; your costs may vary, but if any of the items is far out of the ranges described above, you should take a closer look.

For other views on the cost of self-publishing, read these articles:

- [Pre-Press:Book Design, Typesetting & Layout by Dan Poynter](#)
- [How much does it cost to self-publish a book? by Ron Pramschufer](#) on Publishing Basics—this describes the cost for a “casual hobbyist”
- [How much does it cost to self-publish a book? Part 2 by Ron Pramschufer](#) on Publishing Basics—this describes the cost for a “serious hobbyist”
- [How much does it cost to self-publish a book? Part 3 by Ron Pramschufer](#)—for the “professional”

Next we'll talk about what you need to do when.



Understand the costs before you begin your self-publishing venture.

Chapter 12 —What do I need to do and when do I need to do it?

Many of the tasks you will need to accomplish to publish your book must be done simultaneously, and you can self-publish a book much faster than the timeline below. In fact, Fern Reiss has a book, [The Publishing Game: Publish a Book in 30 Days \(The Publishing Game\)](#), that tells you how to self-publish your book in 30 days.

But this is my **suggested schedule** designed for a first-time self-publishing author who has a busy life and doesn't want to be caught in a time crunch:

- **Start building your platform.** Even before you write your book, begin marketing activities to build your audience. In [How to Pump UP Your Blog to Sell More Books—Pt. I](#), Dorothy Thompson at Pump Up Your Online Book Promotion says “EVERY AUTHOR NEEDS A BLOG”—and she means every author, published or not. Become active or increase your visibility in organizations that are part of your platform. Always think about how to extend your influence and enhance your credibility. Marketing will be an ongoing activity as long as you want to sell books.
- **Research, write, and self-edit your book.** The amount of time it will take you to take your manuscript from an idea to a polished final draft depends on how much you have to research, how fast you write, how much time you devote to writing, and how much revising you do. You can learn to write faster by following the advice in books such as [Write Your Ebook or Other Short Book—Fast!](#) or [Writing FAST: How to Write Anything with Lightning Speed](#). However, most writers I work with seem to take a year or more on average to finish their books.
- **Create your own deadline.** Decide when you want to publish the book so you can schedule all the tasks you need to complete at the right time. Look for an event that you can tie to your book launch. Is there a professional meeting or a trade show in your industry that would be a good place to introduce the book? Is the book, a character, or a main event in the book tied to a particular holiday or season? My client, [David Bowles](#), author of [Spring House \(Westward Sagas, Book 1\) \(The Westward Sagas\)](#), scheduled his book release around the 225th Observance of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse—the battle was a major event in the story, the observance was taking place at the national military park that includes his ancestor's farm that became part of the battlefield, and he had the opportunity to speak at a Mitchell reunion about the family history that is the basis of his book.
- **Set up your company and get your ISBNs during the time you are writing your book.** If you will be incurring significant expenses for research (such as traveling to specific locations), you will want to set up company up early in the process to be able to take advantage of business expenses. The process of creating a company, even a corporation or LLC, takes only a few weeks, but give yourself plenty of time to consult with your attorney and accountant long before you are ready to publish your book. Allow a month to get your ISBNs before the book is ready for the designer.

- **Research and make decisions about your book.** How long will it be? What formats will you publish? What kind of cover will you have? To make good decisions, you will need to learn about publishing (you'll find many good articles, Web sites, and books listed throughout this e-book) and talk to publishing professionals—editors, designers, and printers.
- **Choose an editor.** Some editors prefer to wait until the manuscript is completely finished before they begin editing. However, I like to work with authors from very early in the project. Usually I find that the last chapter of the book takes a lot less time to edit than the first because the writer has improved his writing significantly by following the advice I gave earlier in the process. When I edit chapter-by-chapter, I still do several more rounds of edits on the complete manuscript, but there are fewer problems than there would be otherwise. And whether you are going to have the manuscript edited chapter-by-chapter as you write or wait until you finish the manuscript, allow several weeks—even months—to find an editor. You want to check out the competence and price, but just as importantly, you want to find someone who is passionate about your project, someone you trust, someone who you are comfortable with. And many editors like me have waiting lists, so you need to get on the schedule or your preferred editor may not be available when you need him. You'll find tips on finding and working with an editor in my two-part series [Working with a Professional Editor](#).
- **Select a layout and cover designer and printer.** Whenever possible, get recommendations and ask for samples of books designed or printed by the artists or companies you are considering. Compare quality, prices, and turn-around times to find the suppliers that best meet your needs, then get on their schedule so you can meet your deadline. You can work on this a little at a time as you write, or you can do it while you set your manuscript aside for a time as part of the editing process. The less you know about publishing, the longer it will take you to gather information and make decisions. I recommend you allow yourself three months for this process. If you plan to use original artwork, you will need more time (as well as more money) to find an artist who can create your vision.
- **Have the book edited and read by others.** If you do not work with an editor throughout the writing process, you will send the manuscript to your editor when you have finished writing and self-editing. You may also want to ask other people to read the draft and give you feedback. If you belong to an organization related to your topic, for example, and have been building your platform within the group, some of the members may be willing to read and comment on your manuscript. This can be particularly helpful for books that contain information that the editor may not know—professional knowledge, historical facts, family history. People with the same interests may make suggestions to strengthen the book that an editor unfamiliar with the topic wouldn't. If you get favorable comments, you can also ask if you can use the quote on the back cover of the book. Often, people are flattered to be asked for their advice and delighted to be quoted on a book cover. Depending on the editor's schedule and how many readers you use, you

will need to allow one to six months for the initial stage, then another few weeks to incorporate any suggestions from the readers into the edited copy.

- **Send advance reading copies (ARCs) of the book to reviewers.** Many newspapers, magazines, and book reviewers won't review self-published books, but some reviewers—especially online review sites—welcome self-published books. And you can also get reviews in specialty publications—genealogy publications for family histories, professional journals for your industry, alumni magazines from schools you have attended, and newsletters of organizations related to your subject. To have the reviews available when the book is published, you need to send the ARCs as early as possible—but not until the book is fairly well-edited. You can put a disclaimer that the book is still being edited, so a few errors won't cause a bad review—reviewers are accustomed to reviewing ARCs. However, don't send it before the book has been through a professional edit (at least the first round) because excessive errors will result in a bad review.
- **Deliver the book to the layout and cover designer.** I usually use one person for both of these tasks, but you may choose two different people. Again, time required will vary with the designer's schedule, but I usually allow at least one to two months for design work and approval of proofs. Even though you feel confident that the manuscript was perfect when you sent it to the designer, you need to proofread carefully. You may find errors that were missed until the book is in the final format, and designers make mistakes, too.
- **Set up your distribution channels and Web site and get your merchant account.** While you are waiting for the designer to finish, you can get serious about marketing. When you have a Web site you can take advance orders—which will help you raise money to pay production costs—or at least start collecting names for a mailing list. You then have permission to notify your mailing list when the book is available. You can also take pre-orders from your platform—your family and friends and the people in your industry or affinity organizations.
- **Line up promotional activities.** You may find it difficult to schedule a booksigning in a chain bookstore, but independent stores often welcome local writers. If you are willing to speak in public, check out opportunities to speak to groups interested in the subject of your book that will allow you to sell the book at the events. Look for special events to promote your books. One of my clients, [Janet Kaderli](#), author of the children's book [Patchwork Trail](#), has signed books in a quilting store as part of a special promotion by a quilter's organization. The young girl in her book learns to make a quilt, so even though the book is fiction, she sold books at an event that drew people interested in the theme of her story.
- **Have the book printed.** Your choice of printers and formats as well as the printer's schedule will determine how long it will take to get your books from the printer. And remember, here again, you will want to approve a proof before a thousand or two books are printed. If you use a POD printer, you can have the first copies in a few days. If you use a printer in another state, you may have to allow a week or more for shipping. Usually, you can expect to have your books

printed and ready for you in one to two months.

Promote ... market ... sell books.

For other views on what to do and how to publish your book, read these articles:

- [Publishing Basics](#)—free e-book from Self-Publishing.Com with subscription to newsletter, which I find very helpful
- [Preparing Your Book for Publication by Moira Allen](#), author of [Writing.Com: Creative Internet Strategies to Advance Your Writing Career](#)
- [Design Crimes by Jonathan Gullery](#) of RJ Communications' [Book Design Service](#)—Jonathan has done a beautiful job on the interior and cover design for several of my clients
- [Finding and Working with a Cover Designer](#) from 1106 Design
- [John Kremer's Personal Filing Cabinet for Book Publishing, Self-Publishing, Selling Books Online, Book Promotion, Print-on-Demand, Book Publicity, and Marketing Bestselling Books](#) by the author of [1001 Ways to Market Your Books, Sixth Edition \(1001 Ways to Market Your Books: For Authors and Publishers\)](#)

Next, we'll talk about Web sites and e-books.



Plan and schedule to complete your book project on time.

Chapter 13 —Do I need a Web site ...and should I make my book available as an e-book?

Writers who expect to sell their books in personal appearances or through brick-and-mortar stores may not see the value of having a Web site. But even if you don't want to sell your books online, it's **important to have your own Web site**:

- **Readers and the media expect writers to have Web sites.** Journalists are using the Internet more and more for sources, and you want to be findable if a reporter is doing a story related to the subject of your book.
- **You can provide more information about your book and yourself than what is on the back cover or in an online bookstore.** Readers love to find out “inside information,” like why you came to write your story, and they like to read excerpts—which can lead to sales when they get hooked on the story and want to know what happens.
- **You can use your Web site content to demonstrate your expertise and establish credibility.** A blog or articles about something related to your book provide a valuable service to Web site visitors searching for information. When readers find the information you provide interesting or helpful—or both—they are more likely to buy your book.
- **You can use your Web site and an e-mail list created from site visitors to keep readers informed** of your booksignings, speaking engagements, and other events ... and you can promote your next book.
- **You can sell books from your Web site**, or, if you prefer not to take orders online, you can link to an online bookstore that carries your books. However, remember that you will give a 40% to 55% discount to the bookstore, and you will be selling the book at retail on your Web site. Selling your own books on your own Web site, like personal selling, will be more profitable than selling through other distribution channels.

Many authors don't see the need to publish their books in electronic formats because they don't really understand the **advantages of e-books**:

- **The costs of production and distribution are negligible.** Once you create an electronic file, you can offer it for download over and over again with no printing, shipping, warehousing, or distribution expenses.
- **E-books can be read on numerous devices**, not just at the computer. [eBookMall](#) and [Fictionwise](#) have information on a number of different devices, including PDAs, handheld computers, and dedicated reading devices. Readers who enjoy e-books usually have a favorite device. I prefer to read e-books because my eyesight is very bad, and I can adjust the font and lighting on my [eBookWise reader](#) for more comfortable reading than most print books.
- **Some avid readers prefer to buy e-books because they cost less and don't take up space on their bookshelves.** They can buy more books with their book-buying budget.

- **The lower price of e-books encourages readers to try new authors and publishers**—if they don't like the book, they haven't wasted a lot of money. If they really like the book, these same readers will often buy a print copy as well for their "keeper shelf."
- **Readers who are looking for something to read NOW may order an e-book online** when they wouldn't (or couldn't) make a trip to a bookstore or wait for delivery of a print book from an online store.
- **E-book stores will carry your book** for you if you prefer not to, but it's fairly simple to deliver e-books on your own Web site.
- **Publishing your book in electronic format will give you more opportunities to sell more books to more readers.**

For other views on Web sites and e-books, read these articles:

- [How They'll Find Your Book Online \(or\) Winning at Search Engine Optimization by Fern Reiss](#) at The Publishing Game
- [Ten Top Reasons Authors NEED a Web Site by book coach Judy Cullins](#)
- [Do You Need an Author Website? by Moira Allen](#), an excerpt from her book [Writing.Com: Creative Internet Strategies to Advance Your Writing Career](#)
- [Do You Need An Author Web Site? by Dawn Seewer](#) on FictionFactor.com
- [Use an Email Newsletter to Promote Your Book by Fern Reiss](#) at The Publishing Game
- [E-Book Resources](#) on my Web site—follow the links to helpful sites about e-books

Next, in the final installment of this series, we'll talk about promoting and marketing your books.



Making your book available as an e-book can bring you new readers.

Chapter 14 —How can I market and distribute my books?

To cover marketing and promoting would require volumes. We've talked in previous chapters about building a platform, creating a Web site, and lining up speaking events and other promotional events. In this final installment of the series, I'll highlight a few **suggestions that I consider most important** in marketing and promotion.

Top tips for successful self-publishing authors:

- **Start building your platform early.** Although this has been said before, it's too important not to mention it again. You have to find an audience of people interested in the genre of your novel or the subject of your nonfiction book.
- **Always wear your marketing hat.** Take every opportunity to let people know about your book—standing in line at the grocery store, networking at a business meeting, sending out your Christmas letter...everywhere and everybody. People are fascinated with writers, and you never know when you're going to meet someone who will not only buy a copy of book but also tell others. Hand out lots of business cards with your contact information and where to buy your book.
- **Carry books with you wherever you go.** If you start up a conversation waiting in the post office and find someone interested in your book, don't expect them to remember—and get around to ordering it. Offer to sell it to them on the spot.
- **Create a brand identity.** My client David Bowles has built an identity around The Westward Sagas. That's the name of his [Web site](#) and part of the subtitle of each of his family history books.
- **Target your marketing.** Don't imagine that everyone will be interested in your book. Figure out who are likely buyers and focus your marketing efforts on those groups. If you've written a book about retirement planning, your audience might be professionals and entrepreneurs several years from retirement. If you've written about how to stay active during retirement, your audience will be people who are nearing or already retired.
- **Find as many distribution channels as you can.** Join the [Amazon Advantage](#) program to sell your books through the popular online bookstore. If you have also published your book in electronic formats, search for e-bookstores. If you want to sell you book in offline bookstores, look into [Baker & Taylor](#) or regional distributors in your area. Look for outlets other than bookstores that attract your target market: veterinarian offices for a book about pet care, park gift shops for a book about the area, hobby stores for a book about the world's largest baseball card collection.
- **Join organizations that offer educational and promotional opportunities to small publishers:** [PMA](#), [The Independent Book Publishers Association](#); [Small Publishers Association of North America \(SPAN\)](#); [Small Publishers, Artists, and Writers Network \(SPAWN\)](#).

- **Be creative and realize that you can't use the same marketing methods the large publishers do.** As a self-publisher, you aren't likely to get reviews in major newspapers or get booked on Oprah to talk about your book. Focus your efforts where they will be most effective. Submit your book for reviews in trade journals or association newsletters related to your subject, and aim for media coverage by your hometown newspaper or local TV station. Instead of an expensive book tour across the country, take a [virtual book tour](#).
- **Share your knowledge and expertise.** Volunteer to speak at civic organizations if the membership is a good match to your target market. Submit articles to the community newspaper or business journal or other publications whose readers would be interested in the subject of your book. Ask for permission to sell books at your speaking engagements and for brief information about you and your book for publications.
- **Look for unusual venues to sell books.** [Grace Anne Schaefer](#), who writes novels about prehistoric Indians, does very well selling her books at Indian pow-wows.
- **Take advantage of online communities and promotional sites.** Four of my favorite places to promote, network, and learn about marketing are, [Authors on the Net](#), [Books We Love](#), [Book Marketing Network](#), and [Nothing Binding](#).
- **Use promotional materials that are unusual, appealing, and identified with your book or you as the author.** Many authors give away pens, pencils, and bookmarks, but your promotional item is unlikely to stand out from other pens. One novelist gives away small packages of tissues with a label: "Other readers say you'll need these when you read My Book." Another whose book has a heroine who loves tea gives away tea bags with a tag about her book. If you wrote a book on growing wildflowers, you might consider giving a pack of seeds with a short tip on planting them and the purchase information for your book.
- **Use your Web site and e-mail list** to stay in front of people who are interested in your subject or your books.
- **Stay enthusiastic about your book and always share that enthusiasm with others.**

For other views on promotion and marketing, read these articles:

- [Book Marketing Tip of the Week](#) by John Kremer, the author of [1001 Ways to Market Your Books, Sixth Edition \(1001 Ways to Market Your Books: For Authors and Publishers\)](#)
- [Selling Books Outside the Bookstore by Fern Reiss](#), author of [The Publishing Game: Bestseller in 30 Days \(The Publishing Game\)](#)
- [Writers Write: Book Promotion](#), articles, blog, and resources

You will continue to market and promote as long as you want to sell books, but we've come to the end of this e-book. I hope you find it helpful. If you have questions or suggestions, please [e-mail me](#) or leave a comment or [my blog](#). I'd like to hear from you!



May you reach the top of the ladder of self-publishing success!



About the Author

Freelance writer and editor Lillie Ammann specializes in working with self-publishing authors. She also writes and edits documents of all kinds for businesses, nonprofit organizations, and individuals.

Her contemporary romance novel, [*Stroke of Luck*](#), is available as an e-book, and her romantic suspense novel, [*Dream or Destiny*](#), will be published in late 2007 in both print and electronic formats. Read more at her blog, [*A Writer's Words, An Editor's Eye*](#).

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The *Self-Publishing Primer* is designed to provide basic information to help writers determine whether self-publishing is right for them, and, if so, what steps they need to take to self-publish their book. It is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to self-publishing but includes links to many other, more comprehensive resources.

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