



your
book!

HOW TO GO FROM **FIRST DRAFT TO PUBLISHED AUTHOR**

Is traditional publishing
or self-publishing the
best option for you?



ProWritingAid

BY KATHY EDENS, KYLE MASSA & LISA LEPKI

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▶ INTRODUCTION

You just typed “The End” on your first draft. Time to celebrate, right? Break out the champagne and start dreaming about royalties, film deals, and the critical acclaim you know is coming your way.

Then, once you’ve gotten that out of your system, it’s time to get to work. You have quite the journey ahead to go from draft to publication, and there are many routes you can take to get there.

Where should you start?

Right here.

This book will help you take that rough draft and turn it into a publishable manuscript. Then we’ll show you the paths you can take to get it published. We help you explore your options, from traditional publishing to self-publishing and hybrid models, and point out the areas of interest along the way.

Countless hours – even years – of trial and error have gone into our contributors’ advice. It is our hope to save you that time and smooth your path, whichever one you decide to take.

So get ready to turn your draft into a manuscript and get it published.

Let’s get started.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In order to get advice from the most experienced publishing professionals, we have asked a number of fantastic people to guest author certain chapters for us. Who better to tell us about publishing on Kindle, for example, than the Kindlepreneur himself Dave Chesson? So keep your eyes open for different names and perspectives as you go along.

We’ve presented tips and advice in chronological order so that reading the book from start to finish will take you step-by-step through the process. However, if you find it more helpful to dip in and out, just use the section and chapter headings to choose which ones are relevant for you.

WHIPPING YOUR MANUSCRIPT INTO SHAPE

- Questions to Ask to Tighten Your Story
- Editing With an Editing Tool
- How to Work With Beta Readers
- How to Work With Editors

▶ CHAPTER 1. QUESTIONS TO ASK TO TIGHTEN YOUR STORY

You've got your rough first draft. Now it's time to tighten your story. Technical edits make it easier for your reader to get through your words and enjoy the world you have created.

HERE ARE THE QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ASK OF YOUR MANUSCRIPT:

■ ARE YOU TRYING TOO HARD TO IMPRESS?

We all get it. You're a wordsmith. You have a vocabulary that would stop a wildebeest in its tracks. That doesn't mean you need to use only polysyllabic words to show off your prowess to readers. Common words help readers understand your meaning immediately without turning to a thesaurus to figure it out.

Good writing doesn't mean having the biggest, most complex vocabulary. Just because college professors speak in these mind-bending academic terms doesn't mean you must use them to impress your readers. In fact, your readers prefer you to use words that the average middle-schooler would easily understand.

Check your manuscript's readability score to make sure your readers won't feel overwhelmed or too distracted by the writing itself. Allow readers to focus on your ideas, not your vocabulary.

■ DID YOU GET TOO CUTE WITH PUNCTUATION?

Are you the queen of ellipses? Do you love those little dots that urge your readers to further contemplate your meaning? Here is the truth: a few dots are fine; too many are annoying. It's like putting on too much perfume, hoping that you won't have to shower as much. Just, yuck.

Overusing parentheses, colons, em dashes, and more make your readers focus on a sentence's structure instead of its meaning. Your punctuation should be as unobtrusive as possible. Give your readers easy-to-read guides along the way: a comma here or a new sentence there to help them breeze through your prose. Don't make them stumble over punctuation and try to figure out what the heck you're trying to say.

■ HOW LONG ARE YOUR SENTENCES?

Long sentences meander around your meaning, leading your readers down one path and then abruptly switching to another and confusing them along the way, resulting in an uncertain understanding of what you truly meant to say and the particular point you intended to make.

That last sentence was a doozy! Over 40 words long, and what did it really convey?

Cut down long sentences specifically to separate your thoughts. A good rule of thumb is to offer your readers one concept to take in. When you try to give them too much to assimilate per sentence, you risk losing them. The last thing you want is for a reader to toss your book aside because it's too hard to follow your train of thought. Let's try that first paragraph again:

Long sentences meander around your meaning. They lead your readers down one path and then abruptly switch to another. The result can be an uncertain understanding of the particular point you intended to make.

See? Your brain takes in each point individually, which makes a bigger impact.

Use the sentence length check in your editing tool to identify when you've gone beyond the recommended average number of words per sentence. You can also use the **pacing check** to determine where you've slowed down and convoluted your meaning by using too many words or adding too much backstory. Both reports will help you winnow out the excess verbiage that adds nothing to your story.

Fewer words and strategically short sentences tighten your story and keep readers engaged.

■ CAN YOU CUT UNNECESSARY ADVERBS?

Several experts recommend you eliminate adverbs. In fact, our favorite quote on the subject is:

“The road to hell is paved with adverbs.”

STEPHEN KING

Who are we to argue with the King of Horror?

Did the door in your manuscript “shut loudly” or “bang closed”? How about your main character? Did she “sigh heavily” or “release her pent-up frustration in a loud huff”?

Do you see how the adverbs in these examples skirt what you really want to portray? You want your readers to feel what your protagonist is going through rather than seeing what you see through your narrator’s eyes. Take yourself out of the picture and eliminate adverbs. Instead, use strong nouns and explosive verbs.

Look at these examples:

Weak verb + adverb	Olivia ran quickly to school.
Strong verb	Olivia sprinted to school.
Weak verb + adverb	Hannah spoke quietly to her daughter.
Strong verb	Hannah whispered to her daughter.
Weak verb + adverb	Matthew stared angrily at Ethan.
Strong verb	Matthew glared at Ethan.

Writers often find a lot of adverbs in their first draft when they go back and edit and that’s fine. Worrying about every single word when you are on a writing roll can ruin your momentum. Sometimes you just need to get the words down. Just don’t forget to go back and add some oomph to those those weak verbs.

■ CAN YOU ELIMINATE REDUNDANT REDUNDANCIES?

What is a “free gift”? Aren’t most gifts free? (I’ve never had to pay someone to receive a gift; have you?)

Are you guilty of using “absolutely necessary” or “absolutely essential”? If something is either necessary or essential, it can’t be halfway; it’s absolute.

Don’t give the characters in your book “advance warning” or have them “advance plan” an outing. “Advance” means “before”, so it’s redundant, and an “armed gunman” is obviously someone with a gun – duh.

Were your main character’s eyes “green in color”? Why not just say his eyes were green? Did she “clap her hands” in excitement? What else would she possibly clap but her hands?

Other extraneous words you can cut are “start to.” Did Glinda the Good Witch “start to wave” her magic wand or did she just wave it? Did your main character “start to tell” his significant other he couldn’t go to the symphony that evening, or did he just say it like it is?

Be ruthless. Look at each word and cut, cut, cut.

EXPERT HELP!

Jerry Jenkins, the world-famous, best-selling author of dozens of books including the famous Left Behind series, has an easy-to-use checklist for tightening your story. It includes some of the techniques listed above, as well as many other potential improvements such as maintaining a single Point of View in each scene. He has very kindly allowed us to include a version of the checklist here: ►

I HAVE:

- Deleted throat-clearing, freeing my opening of unnecessary scene setting, backstory, background information, or anything else that keeps me from getting on with my story.
- Chosen the simple word over the complicated one. Anywhere I could have simplified, I have.
- Omitted needless words.
- Deleted even subtle redundancies, such as “he clapped his hands” or “he shrugged his shoulders.”
- Deleted *up* and *down*, except where necessary.
- Deleted *that*, except when necessary for clarity.
- Not over-explained. (Instead of “He walked through the open door and sat down in a chair,” you would write, “He walked in and sat in a chair.”)
- Avoided quotation marks around words used in another context, as if the reader wouldn’t otherwise “get it.”
- Avoided telling what’s *not* happening, such as, “He didn’t respond,” or, “The room never quieted.”
- Used strong nouns and verbs instead of overusing adjectives and adverbs.
- Avoided hedging verbs, such as smiled *slightly*, *almost* laughed, etc.
- Deleted the term *literally* when I actually mean *figuratively*.
- Deleted unnecessary stage direction, telling my reader only what he or she needs to know in each scene—nothing more.

(Especially for fiction)

I HAVE:

- Maintained a single Point of View per scene.
- Avoided clichés—not just words and phrases, but also situations.
- Resisted the urge to explain, showing rather than telling. For example, not, “It’s cold,” which is merely flat, telling narrative, but rather, “She shivered,” which is descriptive language, showing a character in action, letting the reader experience the story and deduce what is going on without being told.
- Primarily used *said* to attribute dialogue, rather than any other option.
- Included specifics to add the ring of truth.
- Avoided similar character names or even the same first initials to keep characters distinct.
- Avoided specialized punctuation, timesteps, font sizes, ALL CAPS, *italics*, **bold facing**, etc.

SELF-EDITING IN ACTION

Jerry Jenkins and our founder, Chris Banks, worked together to create a free training video so that you can see these self-editing techniques in action.

Check it out on Youtube here:



▶ CHAPTER 2. EDITING WITH AN EDITING TOOL

You are responsible for editing your own book.

There. I said it.

So many writers think that their job is to write their first draft, spend a bit of time proofreading it and running their spellcheck, and then they send it off to an agent or publishing company, assuming that they will do the hard editing work for them once they have accepted your book. This will not happen. Editor and agents are sent hundreds of manuscripts each month. If yours is full of issues and amateur mistakes, those agents will never get past your first page or two.

You have to remember that most editors are well-trained and they know these techniques. They know what clean writing looks like, and they have several red flags that they look for: passive voice, adverbs, nominalization, dialogue tags. Too many of those will almost always put your manuscript out of the running. That's why ProWritingAid's software is designed to find the constructions that flag those issues.

THE BEST EDITOR FOR YOUR BOOK IS... YOU!

Honestly. You know better than anyone what you want to say.

Editing tools exist to help you self-edit your work more effectively. They won't fix your writing for you, they just highlight potentially problematic areas so that you can go back and see if they can be improved. They check your spelling and grammar, just like the checkers in Word or most writing platforms. But we all know that **good writing is about more than just correct grammar**. Right? A good editing tool looks at a range of potential issues that go way beyond grammar into style and craft.

We hear you say "software is never going to replace a human editor!" Yes! Yes! A thousand times yes! Writing is about magic. It's about allowing your readers to experience the emotions of your characters, to get swept away in their romance or terrified by their monsters. A computer can't do that; human editors can.

But there are a lot of things that computers can highlight that will improve your writing: are you using enough sentence length variation? Are there phrases or constructions that you have used too many times in one chapter? What is your readability score?

An editing tool is about clean writing. There is a craft to good writing. There are techniques that have been developed and honed by authors for hundreds of years.

This is not to say that you shouldn't use a copyeditor at all. You can. But the text that you send to them should have been thoroughly and mercilessly polished by you. Not only will it result in a better manuscript, but it will save you money (editors are not cheap!)

EXAMINE THE TIME

Editors are only human, so we can't expect them to plow through our work at the speed of sound. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly how long the process should take, but the **SfEP (Society for Editors and Proofreaders)** gives a solid estimate here:

“It is not easy to give an average number of words per hour that can be used to estimate how long proofreading will take. However, a basic rule of thumb for a straightforward, mostly text, publication is to allow for a proofreading rate of about 10 pages per hour with about 300 words per page.”

Now let's say you require edits on a 300-page novel. If I'm doing my math right, that would take roughly 30 hours of editing to complete. Assuming those 30 hours are spread around an editor's other projects and time commitments, it would take several weeks (or even months) to get your edits. And that's not even considering vacations, delays, subsequent edits, or rewrites.

Plus, you want your editor to be able to focus on the core content as much as possible. If they need to spend time fixing basic grammar and style issues, it will take them twice as long.

EXAMINE THE COST

For the average writer, editing tools are often far more cost-effective than editors.

The **Editorial Freelancers Association** estimates editors cost between \$30 and \$60 per hour.

Let's compare that to popular editing tools. Licences start at \$60 for a year of service. For the same price, you'd only get one or two hours of your editor's time. So we can clearly see why so many writers opt for editing software to tighten their document as much as possible before they send it to their editor.

EXAMINE THE FREQUENCY

Editors aren't on-call, and they almost never work exclusively with a single writer. They've got other projects and other considerations in their lives. If you blog weekly, it's unlikely that you'll find someone to edit every post.

Editing tools, on the other hand, don't have prior commitments. They're excellent for writers who churn out daily or weekly content.

SO ARE EDITORS EVEN NECESSARY?

Don't mistake editors for video store owners; they haven't been made obsolete. Editing tools are powerful, yes, but there are still essential tasks they can't complete. For example, there's no editing tool on the market that can help with developmental editing. If you have a collection of scenes and need someone to unify them, only a human can help.

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Premium users have no word count restrictions, and have access to our software integrations with MS Word, GoogleDocs, Chrome, Scrivener, Open Office and more.



▶ CHAPTER 3. HOW TO WORK WITH BETA READERS

So far, we've focused on self-editing. But there is a key group of people who can act as that all-important fresh pair of eyes each time you redraft.

Beta readers are our first line of defense against a sloppy manuscript. They let us know when we're being wordy, confusing, and maybe even a little pretentious. Perhaps they'll even catch a continuity error or plot hole that you've missed in the redrafting process. For many writers, beta readers are essential partners on the path to publication.

If you've never worked with beta readers, they might be a foreign concept to you. In this chapter, we'll help you find, work with, and learn from your beta readers.

WHAT IS A BETA READER?

Beta readers are kind souls who read manuscripts before they're published. They offer feedback and suggestions on your work-in-progress, as well as their general impressions.

WHERE DO I FIND BETA READERS?

They're not hiding in caves or anything (usually).

Beta readers are all around you. They could be your friends, family, co-workers, or, best of all, your fellow writers. You might even find beta readers through social media or writers' groups.

Your task: Ask people if they'd like to read your work in progress and offer feedback by a certain date. That's it. If they say yes, you've got yourself some beta readers.

HERE ARE SOME GREAT PLACES TO LOOK FOR A BETA READER ONLINE:

- absolutewrite.com
- critiquecircle.com
- critters.org
- The Goodreads Beta Group
- mywriterscircle.com
- Beta Readers & Critiques (Facebook group)
- scribophile.com

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Now that you've found your readers, it's time to get them into action.

Start by sending a message thanking them for their help, then send them your manuscript together with a list of questions. This is usually done by email with a digital copy of the manuscript attached, but you can always use snail mail or even hand-deliver a hard copy.

Whatever method you choose, make sure to be specific, both in your questions and your timeframe for responses. This makes the process easier, both for you and for your readers.

In your case, you'll get feedback better tailored to particular aspects of your work. For your readers, good questions narrow their focus. After all, dumping a several-hundred-page manuscript in front of someone and saying, "How do I make this better?" is pretty overwhelming.

10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR BETA READERS

- 1 Are there any parts where you lose interest? If so, where?
- 2 Are you confused at any point in the book? If so, where?
- 3 How would you describe this book in one sentence?
- 4 Does this book remind you of any others? If so, which ones?
- 5 Are there any scenes you'd recommend cutting?
- 6 Are there any places where you'd like to see more detail?
- 7 Do you feel that the main character has a clear and satisfying arc? Why / Why not?
- 8 Do any supporting characters feel underdeveloped? Which one(s)?
- 9 Does it feel like this story begins in the right place?
- 10 Does the setting feel authentic?

Remember, unless you give a timeframe your beta readers might never give you feedback. Yes, a deadline might feel a little awkward, especially if you're working with friends or family. But it is one of the best motivators.

Still, account for delays when choosing your target date. For example, if you need three months to synthesize your feedback and create your final draft, ask for beta reader feedback four months prior to your final draft date. That gives a nice cushion in case someone needs more time.

Finally, since you'll review your beta readers' feedback constantly, getting written notes is essential. Ask your beta readers to write notes as they read and send them to you once they're finished.

I'VE RECEIVED MY BETA READERS' FEEDBACK. NOW WHAT?

Now's the fun part – though it might feel overwhelming at first.

Your beta readers have given you excellent recommendations for your book. It's just that they almost always give you too much. Your job is to use only the suggestions that make your story better.

To start, read through everyone's comments. Depending on how many betas you've got, this might take hours. Don't change anything in your manuscript yet – just think about the comments you've received. And don't be discouraged if it seems like your story has tons of issues. Every first draft does.

While reading, look for patterns. If most readers say, "I love the heist scene at the beginning," you've probably nailed it. Likewise, if most readers say, "Your antagonist is underdeveloped," you probably need to address that issue.

Notice the word "most" in these examples. I use it intentionally because with beta readers, you'll rarely find a consensus on anything. Expect some amount of disagreement on every topic.

That's why at this stage, you just need to read the comments. Understand your beta readers' feedback. Internalize it. Think about it. Give yourself a solid week to sift through the feedback. Only then can you move onto the next step.

HOW DO I INCORPORATE BETA READERS' FEEDBACK INTO MY WORK?

Now that you've spent seven days (or more) thinking about all those comments, decide which ones improve your story. That's the purpose of this entire process, so that should be your only objective. If you believe a piece of feedback improves your story, use it. If it merely changes (or worse, harms) your story, ignore it.

This can take some getting used to. However, ignoring a comment doesn't mean you think the commenter is a dope. Rather, it just means you don't think the suggestion improves the story you're trying to tell.

You can also test out a suggested change. For instance, perhaps half your beta readers came up with the same suggestion but you're not convinced it will be an improvement. Save a version of your current draft under a unique title, e.g. "Draft 5 with beta change", then implement the change and see if you like it. If not, you can always revert to plain old Draft 5.

In the end, beta readers will always give you more than you need. They'll have tons of suggestions and quibbles and questions. Take what works and disregard the rest.

HOW CAN I REPAY MY BETA READERS?

For most beta readers, a simple "thank you" is all it takes. Still, you can always take that extra step. Buy them a coffee, send them a card, or thank them in your acknowledgements section. They'll appreciate it (and they'll be more likely to do it again in the future)! Or, if you're working with fellow writers, offer to be a beta reader for them in return.

CONCLUSION

Now that you know what beta readers are, where to find them, how to use their feedback, and how to repay them, there's only one thing left to do...start working with them!

Get out there and go for it (after finishing this book, of course)!

▶ CHAPTER 4. HOW TO WORK WITH EDITORS

You can't see your own writing objectively. It's impossible. Since you gave birth to it, you're so connected that you can't see its faults and imperfections.

As we explored in the previous chapters, first, you should always perform rigorous self-edits. Second, bring in your beta readers. Then, always hire a professional editor to look at your work objectively and help you polish it into the best possible story you can tell.

A professional isn't someone with an English degree who just hung out a shingle. The best editors spend years at publishing companies gaining experience, often with years of mentoring by more experienced editors. They understand how to help you take your manuscript from rough draft to a finished masterpiece.

That said, just like authors who specialize in different genres, you need an editor who specializes. Maybe you need help with the big picture to make sure your narrative arc works or that you've fully fleshed out your characters. Or perhaps you need another pair of eyes to help you find silly punctuation and grammar errors. Let's look at the different types of editors.

DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

A developmental editor is someone who can look at the big picture and scour your story for:

■ PLOT

How well does your story arc work? Does it continually increase the tension and leave the reader with a satisfying ending?

■ CHARACTERS

Have you created three-dimensional characters who are engaging and memorable? Are there any characters that add nothing to your storyline? Can you delete or combine them with another character?

■ POINT OF VIEW

Is your point of view consistent? Is it confusing or does it work well?

■ PACE

Are there lulls in the pacing? You know, those dead spots in the middle where absolutely nothing is happening to move your story forward.

This is the first pass after you've done your rigorous self-editing. A developmental edit usually ends in some rewriting, rearranging, and even deleting entire chapters. Your editor will write tons of notes on what's working and what needs to change. He or she will give you the clarity you need to understand how readers will engage with your story.

COPYEDITING

If you have the bigger picture items under control, then you need an editor who can look at paragraph level details like transitions, rhythm, and excessive wordiness. This is a closer look at your manuscript that focuses on the language of your story to make it shine.

Your copy-editor plays a vital role in making sure all your facts check out, that your timeline is error-free and that there are no continuity errors.

If you're going down the traditional publishing route, you can submit your manuscript after this stage, but if you're self-publishing, you'll need a proofreader as well.

PROOFREADING

This is the nitty gritty: spelling, grammar, punctuation and any corrections to layout or typesetting. Your proofreader looks at each word, piece of punctuation and formatting. Because errors will slip through. It happens to the best of us.

You want to present your best work to readers. They're pretty savvy and will point out any errors or discrepancies they find, no matter how small. Some will even rate your work poorly because of simple errors you should have caught before hitting "Publish."

HOW TO FIND AN EDITOR

Now you know what type of editing you need done, let's look at how you can find an editor. Here are a few suggestions:

■ ASK A TRUSTED WRITER

We all know other writers; maybe you met one at the local coffee shop or writers' group. Or maybe you've connected with someone online through a forum or social media. Cull your connections for names of editors whose style might meet your needs.

■ READ AUTHORS' ACKNOWLEDGMENTS PAGES

Usually at the back of a book, authors acknowledge everyone who helped make their book a success, especially their editors. Read acknowledgements from books in the same genre to find an editor who specializes in your field.

■ USE A TRUSTED SOURCE

There are three major respected sources within the industry: **Writers & Artists**, **Society of Editors and Proofreaders**, and **Alliance of Independent Authors**. All of the editors and proofreaders on their books are guaranteed professionals.

Once you have names, try to find online testimonials from other writers. You'll make a better decision with more information. If you can't find anything online, you can contact the editor to request a test edit of one chapter. You'll likely have to pay for this service but it's well worth the investment to see if his or her editing style fits your needs.

Finally, most editors are booked months in advance, so start the search process several months before you expect to finish your manuscript.

HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR EDITOR

Remember, your editor is a professional with years of experience, someone who has read and evaluated dozens or even hundreds of manuscripts. You can trust their opinion and rely on them to have your story's best interests at heart. An editor is dedicated to helping your story be the best possible representation of your vision as a writer.

Consider it a two-way relationship between professionals. You should treat your editor as you would any other professional you work with.

Make sure you and your editor agree on a set of expectations from both sides. For example, establish mutually agreeable deadlines and make sure you meet them. Answer emails and phone calls promptly. Respect their time and they'll respect yours. Follow your agreements up with a contract.

Once you've covered the preliminaries, send your manuscript to your editor. Most ask you to send it via email in a Microsoft Word document. Your editor will use the "Track Changes" functionality to show you their suggestions. They might include extra documents that include other notes on structure, style, etc.

If this is your first book, the initial feedback can be a blow to your ego. Don't open the email from your editor until you're in the right frame of mind. Understand that you're paying this person to give you constructive ways to improve your book. Your editor's sole purpose is to critique your work, not pat you on the back. If you need someone to tell you how wonderful you are, send your manuscript to your grandma.

Don't email your editor back immediately. Sit with her suggestions for several days. Try to look at them objectively to find the value. If you're still responding emotionally, take a few more days to ruminate until you can accept your editor's comments.

This doesn't mean you should blindly go through your document or click on "Accept All" in Word's Track Changes function. Spend the time needed to go through each suggestion and understand why your editor made it. It's the only way you'll learn from your mistakes.

Trust us... once you've gone through several edits, you'll develop a thick enough skin so that the process improves your manuscript considerably. And you'll find the next time you sit down to write, the experience has made you a better writer and storyteller.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We've said it before and we'll say it again: if you're self-publishing, don't forget to send your manuscript to a proofreader as the final step. You need that last pair of eyes so you're putting your best work out there. Seriously—well worth the money spent.

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING VS. SELF-PUBLISHING

- How to Choose a Publishing Track
- Traditional Publishing
- Self-Publishing
- Hybrid Publishing



▶ CHAPTER 5. HOW TO CHOOSE A PUBLISHING TRACK

Your manuscript has progressed from rough draft to polished piece. Great work! Now it's time for the next big decision: how to get your story out into the world.

Self-publishing or traditional publishing? Which is the right track for you?

Well, it depends. There are as many reasons to choose one over the other, and in fact, each book you write is different and has different needs. So how do you decide the right course? We've devoted this entire chapter to help you discover it.

A FEW MYTHBUSTERS FIRST

Many writers looked down on self-publishing in the past (some probably still do), but it's lost its tarnish. Several popular authors are now self-publishing, and indie-published books are reaching new heights. So if you think self-publishing is all vanity press, let's bust that myth right now.

Another mindset we need to dispel: All you need do for traditional publishing is write the book, they will take care of the rest. Nowadays, publishers require authors to have a platform and help market the book. While you're solely responsible for marketing and promotion when you self-publish, you're not off the hook by going the traditional route.

Finally, self-publishing is not a way to land a traditional publishing deal. You've heard about Andy Weir's *The Martian*, no doubt. He self-published first and a traditional publisher picked him up, followed by a nice movie deal. But there's a reason you don't hear about this happening to other authors. It's the exception, not the rule. Unfortunately the rule is: traditional publishers are loath to consider self-published books.

Now, let's look at some questions you need to answer to determine which publishing route is right for you.

WHAT DO YOU WANT MOST FROM YOUR PUBLISHED BOOK?

This is often a sticky question to answer. Part of us wants to see our book in all the bookstores and on the New York Times bestseller list. We want to read major media reviews about how wonderful it is. If this kind of attention is important to you, pursue a traditional publisher because they have the connections for a wide distribution path.

The majority of self-published books are sold online as a print book or an eBook. Not many brick-and-mortar stores will carry a self-published author with a single title. Bookstores want to know that if the book doesn't sell, they can send it back to the publisher and not lose money.

If it's more important that you have full creative control over your book, self-publishing is the better route for you. Once you sign the contract with a traditional publisher, you transfer your rights over to them. They can change the title, make edits, and even design it in a way you don't like. A publisher might be open to your suggestions, but ultimately the book gets published their way. With self-publishing, you make every decision right through to the end.

WHAT IS YOUR GENRE?

Certain genres lend themselves better to each route. For example, some of the best-selling self-published books on Amazon are romance, erotica, and science fiction. What's not so easy to sell online are children's books and literary works. In addition, if you're writing a book for the classroom, you'll want to find a university press with a stringent peer review process.

Before you decide on a publishing track, do some research. Pinpoint your genre and find out where similar books are being published. If you already have ties to your specific target audience, you might be better off self-publishing. But if you find your genre only gets picked up by one of the five big publishing houses, you'll want to pursue traditional.

ARE YOU AN ENTREPRENEUR OR DO YOU ALREADY HAVE AN AUTHOR PLATFORM?

Self-publishing means everything is on your shoulders. You need to find an editor and a cover designer. Then you need someone who can design your book's inside or learn how to do it yourself. Handling the marketing, sales, and distribution takes motivation and persistence. It's not something you can skimp on if you want to sell books.

Maybe you already have a platform or a way to reach your target audience. A perfect example is Jane Friedman's books, *Publishing 101* and *The Business of Being a Writer*. She had a large email list of fans who would be interested in *Publishing 101*, so she self-published. A few years later, she wrote *The Business of Being a Writer* to target university classrooms, and chose University of Chicago Press to publish and promote it. Professors rarely opt for self-published textbooks. Friedman knew her target audience aligned with her email list for the first book, but not the second, and she chose different publishing routes accordingly.

If you have an entrepreneurial spirit, taking control of your book and its destiny may not frighten you. However, if you want to work with an experienced team who can guide the process, traditional publishing is the way to go.

There is a middle ground called hybrid publishing. You hire someone to take care of the design, marketing, sales, distribution, and more, but you keep full control over your book. We'll cover that in more detail in **Chapter 15**.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Don't let frustration or impatience change your mind. It takes time to **find an agent** or a publisher if you want to go the traditional route. If you're set on a big publishing house, don't stop trying after only a few rejections. It can take months or years to get a traditional publishing contract and see your book in print.

On the flip side, a bad reason to self-publish is because you want the instant gratification of seeing your book on the market. It takes surprising time and effort on your part to make self-publishing work. Remember, most traditional publishers and agents aren't interested in taking on a self-published book.

Finally, if you write a series, think long and hard about this decision. Once you decide which route to go, stick with it for the entire series. Traditional publishers won't pick up your series after you self-published the first one or two books. On the other hand, you can build momentum if you self-publish your series by quickly releasing the next book to keep your target audience engaged.



▶ TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

- Pros and Cons of Traditional Publishing
- What a Traditional Publisher Does and Doesn't Do for You
- Finding an Agent
- Writing a Pitch
- Negotiating an Acceptable Traditional Publishing Contract



▶ CHAPTER 6. PROS AND CONS OF TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

You may think a traditional publishing contract is the ultimate in validation and appreciation for your writing abilities. Here are the shiny parts (the pros) and dirty underbelly (the cons) of the traditional publishing industry.

PROS

Here are four advantages of going the traditional route.

■ 1. YOU HAVE AN AGENT TO HELP YOU

Most publishers expect you to come to them through an agent. Your agent knows the publishing industry inside and out and will negotiate the best deal for you. They don't make money unless you make money, so they fight to get your manuscript in front of the right publishers.

In addition, your agent makes sure your contract focuses on your best interests, and they make sure you get an advance, good royalty rates, and reasonable deadlines. Then they make sure you get paid what you're due. Your agent will invest time in building your career as a writer.

■ 2. YOU GET A PUBLISHING CREW

A traditional publishing contract comes with a whole crew of individuals dedicated to making the most of your manuscript. And the best part is, you don't have to pay them. The publisher picks up the cost for editors, designers, cover artists, sales and marketing staff, and more.

They're in this industry to make money, so they usually have the best and brightest professionals taking care of each book.

■ 3. MORE VISIBILITY AND BETTER CONNECTIONS

Traditional publishers have connections that can get your books in the right spots in the right locations. They also provide more visibility that could lead to international book deals, author events and readings, and even literary award recognition.

Most people working in the publishing industry have a tremendous reach that can help your career grow faster and offer you a chance at becoming well-known.

■ 4. MORE TIME TO WRITE

Since the route to traditional publishing can take anywhere from months to years, you have more time to write than if you self-published and are responsible for everything. Your publisher will take care of editing, front and back cover material, inside design, and more, leaving you free to work on your next novel.

CONS

Now let's flip over the traditional publishing rock and see what's crawling beneath.

■ 1. YOU'LL EARN FEWER ROYALTIES

Again, publishing is a business and traditional publishing houses are in it to make money. They'll take their cut after covering all of their expenses and overhead, your agent will take a cut, and you'll get the little that's left.

You also must cover your book advance before you earn any royalties, so there are no guarantees you'll make any money if your book doesn't sell as expected.

■ 2. IT MOVES SLOWLY

It can take months or years to find an agent and for your agent to find a publisher. And then more time passes while the publishing house gets around to your book. From the time you sign a book deal until the time your novel hits the shelves could be several years.

Also, publishing houses usually pay out royalties bi-annually, so you won't get a regular paycheck. Only getting paid twice a year could put you in a financial bind.

■ 3. LOSS OF RIGHTS AND CREATIVE CONTROL

When you sign a book deal with a traditional publisher, you're giving up your rights. In essence, you're allowing the publishing house to take control and get your book ready for release. Sometimes contracts are complicated and cause difficulties for authors.

You also lose creative control over your novel. The publisher decides what the cover looks like, what the blurbs on the back and inside cover will say, and could even change your book's title.

■ 4. IT'S HARD TO ENTER THIS SHIFTING INDUSTRY

It seems like the publishing industry changes almost daily, which makes it hard for an author to break in. Going the traditional route means you'll more than likely receive more than your fair share of rejection letters. *Gone with the Wind* was allegedly rejected by 38 different publishing houses before it was finally picked up. You may try for years before someone shows any interest in what you've written.

And once you're in, the people on your team can change at any time. Editors and designers change jobs, your publishing house may merge with another company, and others on your publishing team may get fired or promoted. Either way, you lose your team and have to build relationships with new individuals.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The biggest issue with a traditional publishing book deal is the contract. Make sure you read your contract and have your agent review it in detail. Some publishers will try to get all the rights which can leave you in the lurch. We'll go over what to look for in the contract details in **Chapter 10**. Otherwise, weigh the pros and cons to see if the traditional route is right for you.



▶ CHAPTER 7. WHAT A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER DOES AND DOESN'T DO FOR YOU

Does this picture sound familiar? You've finally nailed a coveted publishing contract. Now your life will be full of a national book tour, appearances on popular morning television talk shows, and guest spots on the hottest radio stations. Your publisher will reach out to publishing houses in other countries to market your book abroad. They'll make sure your book is in its own display at the front of all Barnes & Noble stores. You know, like they do with John Grisham, James Patterson, Stephen King, and others. In fact, you're certain your publisher will take every opportunity available to get your book in front of readers and help you sell a gazillion copies. Movie rights are the logical next step.

The hard truth is it's not all rainbows and unicorns. In fact, you're lucky if you get a four-figure advance, especially if it's your first book. While you will get a bit of marketing help from your publishing house, they expect you to carry some of the weight as well.

Let's look at what you can and can't expect from a traditional publisher.

WHAT A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER DOES

A traditional publisher looks at hundreds, even thousands, of books a year and may only publish a handful of titles. The biggest houses publish tens of thousands each year though. HarperCollins says on its website it "issues 10,000 new books each year and has a backlist (both print and digital) of over 200,000 titles." That's a lot of books and you can't be everything for everyone. So most publishers divide their list into A, B, C authors as a way to determine where to spend their money.

Here's what a team at a publishing house does for every book, regardless of the list it falls on:

■ PLANNING

There are quite a few steps involved to take your manuscript and turn it into a published book. Your publishing team will figure out a launch date and work backwards to conclude when each piece of the puzzle needs completed.

■ EDITING

Most publishers have a development editor responsible for making your book the best it can be, like fixing gaping plot holes and making sure the characters are fully developed. Occasionally, though, they will ask for this stage to be done before you submit your manuscript.

■ DESIGNING

Publishers work with a designer to make the inside of your book as pleasing as possible for readers. They also have (or will find) a cover designer to create a unique jacket/cover that stands out from the rest.

■ COPYEDITING

Once the manuscript is fully developed, the copy-editor checks for consistency, continuity and accuracy of content. This is the last stage any significant changes can be made.

■ TYPESETTING

After copyediting, your book will be typeset. The typesetter will follow instructions from the designer on layout, chapter headings, font size and style, page numbering, etc.

■ PROOFREADING

The proofreader catches any errors introduced during typesetting and does a final check on spelling, punctuation and grammar throughout.

■ PRINTING

Publishers have a production manager who manages the process of printing hardbacks, paperbacks, and eBooks. They will decide on the size of print run and which platforms to use for the digital version.

■ DISTRIBUTING

Your publishing team works out how to get your book from the printers to bookstores and how to distribute online. Part of this process includes sending out catalogs to those responsible for buying books, trade journals, and other venues.

■ MARKETING

Your team will send out review copies and post on social media and other online places to get the word out about your book.

As you can imagine, for A-list authors, publishing houses do a lot more.

WHAT A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER DOESN'T DO

Unless you're a big-name draw on their A-list, it's highly unlikely your publisher will do any of the following:

■ SEND YOU AROUND THE COUNTRY ON A BOOK TOUR

The whole reason for a book tour is to get you plenty of media coverage and sell more books at signings. This is just not financially feasible for publishing houses today. As the media's budgets become more constricted, you can't expect the coverage you once could during a book tour. Plus, people just don't turn out for book signings like they used to, unless you're Stephen King. This doesn't prevent you from setting up your own local events, however. You could always look at organizations, businesses, and local schools that might enjoy your writing wisdom. You want to get your name out in front of as many people as possible, but you should expect to have to do this yourself.

■ INVEST A LARGE BUDGET IN YOUR BOOK

The reality is they save their big budgets for the A-listers, who are more likely to get most of their time and money. While your book will still appear in their catalog, the A-list authors will get front page or full-page spreads with big, impressive layouts. You'll still get some support, like sending your book out for review, but prepare to only get the baseline treatment unless your book garners quick attention like a celebrity mention. The best thing you can do is talk to your publisher six to nine months before your launch. Tell them what you plan to do to generate interest in your book. Coordinate efforts and build on each other.

■ MARKET YOUR BOOK MUCH AFTER ITS LAUNCH

Think about HarperCollins launching 10,000 books a year. If you're not on their A-list, expect little activity from them post-launch. Once your launch has passed, they will turn their efforts to the next set of books coming out. Pretty much any marketing or PR post-launch is up to you. Therefore, most publishers require new authors to already have an established platform to whom you can market. You'll still be responsible for

things like sending notes to your email list, updating your website, and posting on social media.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The most important elements provided by a traditional publisher are invisible to you as an author. They take care of planning, printing, and managing your book from manuscript to when it hits the proverbial shelves. Just remember, they're in it to make a profit, so everything they do, every decision, is with an eye on the bottom line.

If you do decide that you want to pursue the traditional publishing route, the next three chapters are focused on helping you find an agent, pitch your book, and negotiate a book contract. If you think self-publishing will be a better fit, skip ahead to the chapters on **self-publishing**.

▶ CHAPTER 8. FINDING AN AGENT

The first step in finding an agent begins with actually finishing your work. This might sound obvious to some, but to others, it must be said.

If you're an unpublished author, you must have a complete work to show your agent. Writers like Jodi Picoult and Neil Gaiman might be able to get away with proposals and half-finished manuscripts. Someday you might be able to, too. But not today.

Also, edit your work. There's a common misconception that writers don't need to edit. Some seem to think that sloppy manuscripts with good ideas will still appeal to agents. False! Ugly, unpolished manuscripts will be thrown away and never read again.

COMPILING A LIST OF AGENTS

Now that your manuscript is ready for sending, you've got to find someone to send it to! There are several ways to look for your agent.

As with many searches, the internet is a great place to start. Aside from a classic Google search (i.e. "Literary agents"), try these sites:

- WritersMarket.com
- Pw.org
- AgentQuery.com
- PublishersMarketplace.com
- Duotrope.com

These are a few of the best, but feel free to expand your search further.

Another effective, albeit less obvious, method is to check the acknowledgements section of books similar to yours. If a writer thanks their agent in their book, that's essentially an endorsement of the agent's skill.

One more note on this stage: All agents have submission guidelines. Read them! Make sure you're not submitting your crime novel to an agent who's seeking non-fiction. Furthermore, send your work in the requested format to the correct email address

with the right subject line. These steps are simple, but essential. If you overlook them, the agent might never read your work.

THE DREADED QUERY LETTER

Okay, you've completed your manuscript, given it a thorough edit, and compiled a list of agents. Now it's time to write your query letter.

Did a chill just go down your spine? Some writers hate query letters. "I'm just not good at selling myself," they say. "Agents should just read my book. Then they'll know how good it is."

I don't like query letters, either. But the reality is, agents get tons of submissions every day. They don't have time to read them all. They need a sample of your writing to prove that you know what you're doing. That's where the query letter comes in.

A lot of people don't think of the query letter as a writing sample, but it really is. If you've got errors in it, it won't fill your prospective agent with optimism about your work. If you can't grab the agent's interest in the cover letter, that tells them you probably can't grab a reader's interest, either. Make your cover letter as good as it can be and you'll reap the rewards.

The structure of a good query letter is simple. ▶

1 Start by using the agent's name so they know twenty other agents aren't BCCed on your message.

2 Next, sell your story. This might sound counterintuitive since you haven't yet introduced yourself. But agents are selling books, not people. Leading your query with your mini-bio isn't half so interesting as leading with the actual story.

3 Make sure to highlight the essential elements of your story: character, setting, and plot. Also, since agents are trying to sell your work, make sure to mention your genre and intended audience.

Dear Ms. Jones.

Can a slow-moving arboreal mammal become a Broadway sensation? That's the question at the heart of my novel, *A Sloth is Born*. It's a contemporary fantasy story about Stella, an anthropomorphic sloth who moves to Manhattan to pursue a career in musical theater. The intended audience is young adult and middle-grade.

My name is Kyle A. Massa and I'm a writer from New York. My work has been twice nominated for the Hugo Award and my short fiction has been shortlisted for the Pushcart Prize. Since you previously represented Lydia Hardknuckle's *Tears of the Anteatr*, I believe my book is an excellent candidate for your expertise.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kyle A. Massa

[phone number]

[email address]

4 After that, introduce yourself (briefly!) and explain why you've queried this agent in particular. Realistically, you're probably querying several other agents simultaneously. But do your best to make each one feel special.

7 Finally, finish with a thank you and your contact information.

5 No, I haven't actually been nominated for any of those awards. But if I was, I'd be sure to include them in this letter. The same goes for prestigious writing programs, conferences, and workshops.

6 Comparing your work to other existing properties – especially those previously represented by this agent – demonstrates an understanding of the industry (and that you've done your homework).

Try to keep all this to a few hundred words at most. Remember, agents are reading tons of queries, so you must snag their attention. Rambling and going off-topic are sure-fire ways of losing it.

IS IT OKAY TO SEND A FOLLOW-UP MESSAGE?

Yes, but be reasonable. If you send a follow-up three hours after your initial query with the subject line “Just checking in,” you’re invariably going to annoy the agent. That said, there’s nothing wrong with a bit of healthy persistence.

Most agents list an average response time on their website. For example, “We try to respond to all queries within one month of receiving them.” If you haven’t heard back within their estimated response time, absolutely send a follow-up. Mention your name, the title of your work, the date you submitted it, and a polite note inquiring on its status. You’ll likely get a response. If not, this agent probably isn’t someone you’d want to work with, anyway.

ACCEPT REJECTION...

I don’t mean to sound pessimistic here—it’s just how the system works. With so many writers querying relatively few agents, you’re going to be rejected by the majority of people you contact.

Don’t get discouraged! There are many reasons an agent might turn down a prospective client, and many of them have nothing to do with talent. Workload, similarity to an existing client’s material, timing, expected commercial value... these are just a few of the variables agents factor into every decision. So if an agent rejects your work, don’t take it as, “I think you stink.” It’s likely more along the lines of, “This just isn’t right for me.”

...BUT KEEP ON PERSEVERING!

Keep querying. Keep trying. With these tips and more, you’ll find your agent.



▶ CHAPTER 9. WRITING A PITCH

“Why should I read this book?”

Every book pitch must answer this question. “Because it’s good” is not an acceptable answer.

A great book pitch has several key elements. In this chapter we’ll list them, elaborate on them, and show you how to unify it all. Let’s get started.

BEGIN WITH A LOGLINE

In the film industry, a logline is a one-sentence description of the entire story. Here are some examples that might sound familiar:

- *In a galaxy far away, a farm boy, a smuggler, and a princess attempt to overthrow an evil intergalactic empire.*
- *A young Kansas girl travels to a distant land and seeks a wizard’s help in returning home.*
- *An underdog boxer from Philadelphia takes on the heavyweight champion of the world.*

Notice how we cover character, conflict, and setting with each logline. Some book plots are going to be too complex to make this work, but it’s a useful exercise to try. It gives a clear blueprint for your story and forces you to be succinct.

The logline need not appear in your pitch, though it can if you like.

THE FIRST LINE

If you decide to use your logline as your first line, proceed to the next section. If you want something catchier, read on.

To paraphrase **Joseph Sugarman**, the purpose of the first sentence is to get readers to read the next one. That means the first sentence of your pitch is arguably the most important of them all. Take your time in writing it.

There are several ways to approach the first line. You might try a question:

Is there a layer of reality beyond our perception?

Or you might start with something pithier:

Time is elastic.

Or you might streamline your logline:

Emma’s greatest fear is her own reflection.

No matter what method you choose, do your best to inject that “gotta find out” quality into your opening sentence. It’s the best way to get readers to proceed.

THE SUMMARY

Next, excite readers with your story. Your logline can help immensely with this step since it’s already got those important elements built in. Highlight the details that excite you most about your book. Expand on the ideas that made you want to write it in the first place. If you’re excited about your summary, it’ll show through in your writing.

Some writers struggle with this step because they find gushing about their own work feels disingenuous. We understand. Imposter syndrome affects most (if not all) writers during their careers. Yet we can’t let that stop us from writing a great pitch!

If you dislike pitching your work, pretend you’re pitching someone else’s. Call it “hers,” “his,” or “their” book instead of “mine.” You’ll be amazed at how different it feels just to pitch in the third person instead of the first. It removes that natural self-doubt and allows you to concentrate on what really matters: your story!

Lastly, give enough to be compelling, but don’t give away your ending. The summary (and the pitch in general) is just the appetizer. The book itself is the main course.

SHOW HOW IT’S DIFFERENT

This isn’t a specific section of your pitch, but rather a general note to keep in mind as you compose it. How does your work differ from others? What makes it unique?

Remember, your objective is to convince people to read your book. Offering something different is one of the best ways to do it. Show the distinct traits of your characters, the quirks of your setting, the implied twists of your plot. This will get your pitch to stand out from others.

REVISE!

Just like any other writing, a pitch needs revision. Eliminate all typos and grammatical errors (**ProWritingAid** can help with that). After all, sloppiness will not earn you readers.

Share your pitch with friends, family, and fellow writers. Ask them where they're intrigued and where it needs work. Most importantly, ask them if they want to read your book after reading the pitch. If not, improve it.

WHERE TO USE YOUR PITCH

Now that you've finalized your book's pitch, it's time to spread it around. For authors seeking traditional publishing, pitches are best shown to agents and publishing houses. But even independent authors can use their pitch. Post it to your website or use it as the description for your eBook.



▶ CHAPTER 10. NEGOTIATING AN ACCEPTABLE TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING CONTRACT

Before we talk about what to look for in a traditional publishing contract, let us be very clear:

WE ARE NOT LAWYERS. Don't mistake this chapter for legal advice. You should always consult an experienced publishing lawyer or agent before signing a contract with a publisher.

We cannot stress this enough when negotiating any publishing contract: Publishers are in the business to make money. Every contract they offer will put their best interests first, not yours. You can't very well accept a publishing contract without reading the fine print and then complain later that it's not fair. And if a publisher isn't willing to negotiate, move on.

Every new writer's knee-jerk reaction when they hear "We'd like to publish your book" is to scream like a small child and cry, "Yes! Where do I sign?" That instinct is fine, as it's a huge deal to get to this stage. But express the squealing in the privacy of your own home. Then calmly talk to your would-be publisher and agree on certain key deal-breaker points before they put anything in contract form.

If you've carried out the conversation by phone or Skype, you should ask the publisher to email you a memo based on your discussions. Then, once you get the actual contract, review and negotiate the finer points. Remember, this is a business transaction, and your contract is legal and binding.

Your contract should state clearly what each party can and can't do. An attorney or agent must be able to interpret what each clause of the proposed contract means. It's a red flag if anything is ambiguous.

The whole of this chapter is a conglomeration of expert advice from authors, agents, lawyers, and others with experience in the publishing industry. While each publishing company uses unique contracts and terms based on their business needs, any contract should include the following elements in one form or another.

ADVANCES

This is what it's all about, right? How much is the publisher willing to pay you for publishing your book? Are you going to get six figures? Slow down, cowboy.

The size of advance you're being offered tells you a lot. Publishers, big and small, offer advances anywhere from zero (yes, this happens) to \$10,000 or more. (If you're the Obamas, it could hit seven figures, but that's a very rare scenario.)

The key question is: Does the advance cover your time and investment in your manuscript? If you're writing a non-fiction book like a cookbook, you probably invested in professional photographs, ingredients, and lots of cooking to narrow the recipes down to their best essence. You need to make sure your advance covers the costs and time invested in this project.

The amount a publisher is proposing also tells you how successful they feel your book will be. Smaller advances could mean they plan to publish a limited amount of books and set aside limited funds for marketing and publicity. They want to test the market and see how well your book sells before they print a hundred thousand copies. They need to recoup their costs after all.

ROYALTIES

Some publishers play with royalties, so if this is your first rodeo, have an experienced legal professional go over your contract to make sure you're getting what you deserve. You want a contract that gives you different percentages for hardbacks, paperbacks, and eBooks. For example, hardbacks cost more to produce, so your royalty percentage will be lower. Paperbacks are less expensive, so expect a little more, and eBooks have no print or storage costs, so should result in the biggest royalties.

Also make sure you understand what the figures mean. Some publishers pay net royalties and some pay gross. Net means they pay you royalties on the amount after deducting discounts. For example, if

your publisher sells copies of your book to Barnes & Noble for half of its cover price, they only pay you a percentage of the discounted sales. Depending on how your publisher sets this up, paying net royalties may be fair or not.

Another negotiating point is higher royalties based on the number of copies sold. For example, you could get 10% on sales up to 25,000, 15% on sales up to 50,000, 20% for sales between 50,000-100,000 copies, and 25% on sales over 100,000. If you write a great book that hits the best-seller lists, you want compensated for your success.

You probably feel the royalties and advance are the most important points to negotiate in your contract, but other elements are just as important.

RIGHTS

It is incredibly important to understand who owns all applicable rights and what happens to those rights down the road.

A basic publishing contract grants your publisher the right to reprint your words in specific formats like hardback, paperback, or eBook. It also covers in which countries or territories the publisher has the right to publish your work and sometimes includes subsidiary rights, which can get complex.

Here's what you should focus on:

- Does the contract give your publisher the rights to publish in North America only and in English only, or does it extend to every country and language around the globe?
- Who owns the right to license your book to the film or television industry and to merchandisers?

Make sure you understand what the contract says the publisher will actually publish. For example, if your publisher only wants to publish in digital format and you had your heart set on seeing your book in print, this could be a negotiation point.

Your contract should also state what happens to the rights if either you or the publisher fail to uphold the respective parts of the bargain. Do all rights revert to you or do they remain with the publisher? You also need to know what happens to the rights once your book goes out of publication.

CREATIVE CONTROL

A sticking point for some, you can negotiate who has the final decision. Maybe you love your title and don't want it changed, or the publisher wants to change the ending. Usually the publisher ends up with the decision-making rights, but you can negotiate a middle ground.

With the help of an experienced agent or legal counsel, you can insert language about reasonableness and expectations that makes the final decision less of a "yes" or "no" proposition. And be specific about whether you want the publisher to consult with or get your approval on the title, cover design, and big edits.

Another point is the right to control marketing for your book. See if you can get your publisher to include their marketing plans in the contract. That way, you have some legal chops if the publisher doesn't promote your book as originally agreed.

OPTION CLAUSE

Some authors don't pay attention to the option clause. Then they're blindsided by a non-compete agreement that says they can't publish another book for X number of months or years. Read this clause carefully to make sure you're not constrained by cumbersome requirements on your next book or books.


For example, you may see your book leading to other published material, not just more books. (Consider the Harry Potter universe and the other published material that's sprung up over the years.) The option clause is where the publisher will restrict your rights to compete with the book they're publishing.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This is certainly not an all-inclusive look at what you should scrutinize in your publishing contract. Since we're not legal experts, we tried to avoid recommending what's "best" in a publishing contract. Only you can determine what is best for yourself. But please do so with the help and guidance of an expert agent or attorney.

▶ SELF-PUBLISHING

- Pros and Cons of Self-Publishing
- Designing Your Cover and Writing Your Blurb
- Kindle Direct Publishing and Other eBook DIY Publishers
- Creating Your eBook Files (ePub or Mobi)
- Advice from a Self-Publishing Company

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a black tablet. The tablet screen displays a page of text in a serif font, which is a standard Lorem Ipsum placeholder text. The background is a blurred blue and white pattern, possibly a person's clothing or a background wall. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the texture of the person's skin and the surface of the tablet.

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▶ CHAPTER 11. PROS & CONS OF SELF-PUBLISHING

You may have heard about traditional publishers changing a book's title, creating awful cover designs, and even insisting on editing – all against the author's wishes. Self-publishing, sometimes called independent or indie publishing, is a choice more and more writers are taking to **gain financial and creative control over their work**.

The following pros and cons will help you decide if you should pursue self-publishing over traditional publishing.

PROS

There are six major advantages to self-publishing:

■ 1. YOU HAVE TOTAL CREATIVE CONTROL.

Did you come up with an amazing title for your book? When you self-publish, no one can take it away from you. And if you have a book cover created or do it yourself and hate it, you can change it. No one will ever force you to accept a cover you hate. You can choose the creative people you work with rather than accepting the ones a publisher assigns to you. It's up to you to decide on the right look and feel for your book.

The nice thing about total control? If your book ends up a dud, you can make as many changes as you like to the text and cover and re-publish it, either as a second edition or under a completely new title. You're empowered to make decisions that, when you traditionally publish, are out of your hands.

■ 2. YOU'RE RUNNING A BUSINESS.

Think of yourself as an entrepreneur who decides the course of their business: everything from design choices to marketing, distribution, and goals for the future. You'll be learning new skills and realizing you have hidden talents like a knack for marketing.

This also means you learn from your failures, just like start-ups do. Start-ups that realize their mistakes and take action to correct them have a better chance at succeeding than those that bury their heads in the sand when failure hits. Because you can always count on a mistake or failure—or two or three. The difference is not whether they'll happen but how you respond.

■ 3. YOU'LL EARN HIGHER ROYALTIES.

When you go the traditional route, you get on average 10% of the proceeds from book sales, depending on how your contract is structured. When you self-publish your eBook on Amazon KDP, for example, you get 70% royalties. So even if you sell fewer books by self-publishing, you can still make more money.

Another consideration is that traditional publishing houses usually only pay royalties twice a year, so you're waiting on payment every six months, which can make budgeting hard. Digital publishers like Amazon pay every month, making it easier to manage your money.

■ 4. YOU RETAIN THE RIGHTS.

If you read the chapter on **negotiating an acceptable traditional publishing contract**, you know the fine print can take away all your rights. As such, you can't do anything with your book without the publisher's permission. Self-publishing means you retain all the rights to your work.

Say you want to pursue international publication. You can when you self-publish. Retaining rights also lets you pursue other publishing avenues like audiobooks and film rights.

■ 5. YOU CAN PUBLISH IN YOUR OWN QUIRKY LITTLE NICHE.

Do you write space cowboy love stories set in a dystopian future? You can find your own niche, regardless of what the publishing industry says is popular right now. Because you know there are readers out there who want your stories; you just need to find them.

No market is too small for a self-publisher. And when you self-publish, you choose the price. So you might find a quirky little niche where readers will pay higher prices for well-written books.

■ 6. YOU CHOOSE WHEN AND HOW.

You can go to market when you want to publish your book, which is a lot better than waiting months and sometimes years for traditional publishing. You can choose to print on demand, meaning you don't have to print a run of thousands of copies at once. And if

you plan on publishing several books, you can create your own publishing house and distribute your books under your own listing, rather than under a third party.

The most important advantage is that you can keep your self-published book “on the shelves” as long as you like. When you publish an eBook on Amazon, it’s there indefinitely. But when you traditionally publish, bookstores will only keep your book a couple of months and then rotate it off the shelves to make way for new books.

CONS

On the other hand, all the freedom you enjoy with self-publishing comes with a few disadvantages. Here are six cons you need to consider.

■ 1. YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES.

Unless you were a professional editor in another life – and even then – you want to hire an editor to help you make the most of your book. And you likely don’t have the necessary design experience to create your book’s cover and layout. You will need to hire a professional team to help you whip your book into shape.

If you don’t plan on marketing your self-published book, you must hire a publicist or someone with book marketing experience to help it get noticed. Otherwise, if no one knows it’s out there, no one will buy your book.

■ 2. YOU MUST FIND AND HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE.

If you’ve never worked with freelancers, this can be intimidating. There are nefarious individuals out there willing to take advantage of naïve, green writers. But there are also seasoned indie authors willing to share their expertise with you to help you along the way.

You can go through services, but you’ll pay more. You need to find reputable freelancers, designers, editors, and others who you trust and can afford. It can be difficult the first time.

■ 3. YOU’LL FACE STIFF COMPETITION.

Since the barrier to entry is low in self-publishing, your book is fighting a wave of other books for the limited attention of readers. If you don’t already have an author platform, it can seem like climbing Mt. Everest trying to get your book in front of its intended audience.

You’ll learn how best to market your work to your niche. One important piece of advice from experienced indie

authors is to keep publishing new pieces and fine-tune your marketing efforts as you learn.

Which leads to the next point...

■ 4. YOU MUST BE A MARKETING MASTER.

You’ll wear many hats as a self-published author, but perhaps the most important one is a marketing specialist. How well your book sells is in direct correlation to your marketing ability. The better you present and market your book, the more sales you can generate.

Marketing includes everything from online ads to social media and a solid online presence. You must market and sell your book because no one else will do it for you—unless you hire them.

■ 5. IT’S HARDER TO GET REVIEWS AND ACCLAIM.

Traditional publishers get reviews for their authors, but as an indie, you’re on your own. And most literary prizes don’t recognize self-published books. Not that it can’t be done; just that it will take time and effort on your part.

Getting reviews by esteemed critics and other authors helps validate your book in the minds of readers. Imagine if you had a glowing review from Stephen King or JK Rowling. It might boost your sales a bit.

■ 6. IT’S A STRUGGLE TO GET YOUR BOOK INTO BOOKSTORES AND LIBRARIES.

Librarians and bookstore purchasers scour the catalogs that traditional publishers put out several times a year. They base their book purchases on the catalog descriptions and reviews of others.

You’ll be your own sales department, which means you must get in touch with the right person at libraries and bookstores. It’s hard to get them to invest in an indie book, but you can do it. It just takes a lot of hard work on your part.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The most important thing when you self-publish is to treat it like a business. If you don’t have an author platform, it will be harder.

You’re an entrepreneur and your product is your book. You’re responsible for every facet of your operation, from creating the product to designing and publishing. Finally, to make a success of self-publishing you must become expert at marketing and sales.

Does it sound like the right fit for you? If so, read on to find out the essentials on cover design and writing your book synopsis.

▶ CHAPTER 12. DESIGNING YOUR COVER AND WRITING YOUR BLURB

By Savannah Cordova from Reedsy



GUEST AUTHOR ALERT!

We asked Savannah Cordova from [Reedsy](#) to write this chapter. Reedsy is a marketplace that connects authors and publishers with the world's best editors, designers, and marketers.

DO-IT-YOURSELF

If you decide to **design your book cover yourself**, there are a few key things to know. For one, unless you already have some illustration or graphic design experience, you'll probably want to use a high-quality, royalty-free image on a site like **Shutterstock** or **Unsplash**.

Then make sure you edit it with actual design software like **Canva** or **Photoshop** – don't just put text over an image on Microsoft Word, tempting as that might be. You want your cover to look as polished and impressive as possible, so invest in the good stuff!

Lastly, keep in mind your cover's dimensions. If you're planning on distributing it as an eBook, Amazon recommends 2,560 pixels long x 1,600 pixels wide. Other platforms use similar dimensions, so those guidelines should work for them too. For a print cover, you'll need to take into account the page size and trim. **Amazon** have helpfully provided explanations and diagrams on paperback page and cover sizes. You'll need to know the page count for your book to calculate the width of the spine. If in doubt, hire a professional to help.

HIRING A PRO

If you choose to commission a cover designer, know that it will still be a highly collaborative process. You'll work together to come up with a cover that stays true to your vision while utilizing their expertise – especially in terms of your genre and target demographic. This will ensure that you end up with a cover that both looks great and is commercially viable.

As you might expect, the most crucial aspect of working with a designer is communication. Let them know your ideas early, while remaining receptive to their thoughts. Again, they're the expert, so trust what they have to say! However, don't worry about losing creative control. Remember that a good designer will listen to your feedback too, and never force you to accept a design that doesn't work for you.

One of the most important parts of self-publishing your book is figuring out the cover design and book description. Remember, these tools are paramount to your sales – especially on Amazon and other eBook distributors, where first impressions really count! Virtual customers can't just pick up your book and flip through it, so you have to capture their attention in other ways.

With that in mind, here's how to expertly navigate the process of designing your cover and writing your blurb.

DESIGNING YOUR COVER

There are two possible routes you can take for your cover design: either do it yourself or hire a professional designer. Self-designing means you can exert complete creative control over your cover, and it does tend to be less expensive. However, a pro designer brings tons of knowledge and experience to the table, and may be a good investment if you have a particularly ambitious cover design in mind.

So before you determine which path to follow, think about how you want your cover to look. Are you after something more modern or traditional? Simple or elaborate? Gather inspiration from book covers you like, especially other popular books in your genre, so you know what works.

Once you have this vision in your head – ideally with some sketches or sample images for reference – you'll be ready to make it a reality.



FINISHING UP

Whether you go with a pro or not, try to come up with a couple different design concepts for your cover, each emphasizing a distinct element: perhaps one has the title in a larger font, while the other has a more vivid illustration. Then you can do some A/B testing with Facebook or Google Ads to see which version people prefer.

Finally, once you've come up with the perfect design, it's time to export. For an eBook, all you need is a high-quality JPEG. If you're using a print-on-demand service, you should be working throughout to their requirements for the front cover, back cover and spine.

It can be pretty intimidating to think about everything that goes into your cover design, especially if you're not a designer yourself. Luckily, this next part is something that every author already (more or less) knows how to do: writing about their work!

WRITING YOUR BLURB

While you can get someone else to write your blurb for you, it's definitely doable (and more fun!) to **create it yourself**. Indeed, for many authors, writing the blurb is one of the most exciting parts of the self-publishing process. However, it's also a critical part of your marketing package. Here are some tips to help you get it right.

BLURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

Your blurb should make any prospective reader just as excited about your book as you are (well, almost as excited). You need to invest them in the characters and plot in the space of less than 200 words – which means there's no room for dilly-dallying. Most blurbs have just one or two sentences of exposition before jumping into the main point of intrigue:

“Lisa Jeffries is a quiet bookworm who's always enjoyed her after-school job at the library. Until the day she discovers something seemingly impossible on its shelves.”

From there, you can introduce one or maybe two more characters (depending on how important they are to the story) and build suspense to pull the reader in even further. Take a look at blurbs from bestselling books that are similar to yours and see how theirs are structured; you can't go wrong with emulating proven success.

The one thing you should never do in a blurb, however, is reveal the ending – unlike a synopsis that you would send to an agent. Instead, the end of your blurb should heighten the stakes and create rousing questions for the reader:

“With the help of her friends, Lisa sets off on a quest to return the spellbook to its rightful owner. But what will she have to sacrifice – and what if it's already too late?”

OPTIMIZING FOR AMAZON

The other essential part of writing a blurb – especially if you're putting out an eBook – is **optimizing it for Amazon**. Naturally, you want the description to be enticing, but there's much more you can do to maximize your opportunities.

Contrary to what you might think, you don't want to “keyword stuff,” as we say in the business. This means using too many genre-specific words in your description. So for example, if you've written a romance novel, don't describe it as “Two long-lost soulmates get a second chance at timeless love in this inspirational, heart-wrenching, steamy forbidden romance.”

One or two such keywords sprinkled into your blurb will give your readers a better sense of what your book contains. But more than that looks awkward and forced, and can even hurt you in customer search results if Amazon's algorithms detect something fishy.

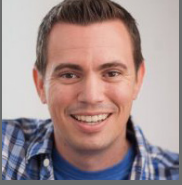
Finally, this aspect of optimizing your blurb should be obvious, but it's worth stating nonetheless: make it irresistible. Imagine that you'd never read your own book before, but you stumbled across it on Amazon. What could the description say that would make it almost impossible to ignore? Whatever you're thinking, put it in your blurb – now's the time to go all out.

That's it for this chapter on designing your cover and writing your blurb! With these new tips and tricks up your sleeve, you should be well on your way to self-publishing stardom in no time.

Next up, self-publishing expert Dave Chesson will talk you through the biggest eBook publishers.

▶ CHAPTER 13. KINDLE DIRECT PUBLISHING AND OTHER EBOOK DIY PUBLISHERS

By Dave Chesson, Founder of Kindlepreneur



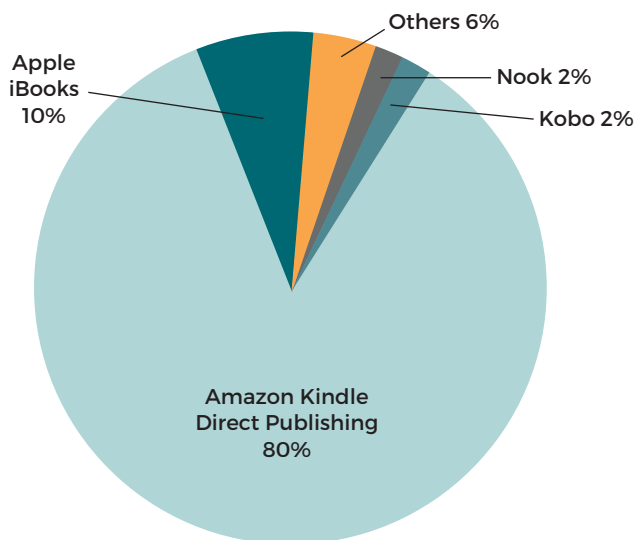
GUEST AUTHOR ALERT!

We asked self-publishing guru Dave Chesson from **Kindlepreneur** to write this chapter for us.

Self-publishing really isn't as scary as it seems. In fact, by arming yourself with just a little bit of knowledge, you can successfully manifest great book sales on your own.

BUT WHERE TO BEGIN?

Well, there are several self-publishing platforms out there. In a specialized report by AuthorEarnings.com, they found out exactly which self-publishing zones attributed to the highest number of book sales (in English-speaking countries).



Okay... So, it looks like KDP is the clear choice here. But let's take a quick look at what the others can do for you.

■ APPLE IBOOKS

This is definitely worth investing in if you are a Mac user. (Or even, if you're not.) Within the Apple bubble, the iBooks app is downloaded much more than Amazon's Kindle. This can put you in front of the Mac

and Apple Community, many of which are friendly to independent authors and artists.

■ KOBO

Kobo only takes up a very small percentage of sales, but there is a very good reason for checking them out. Two words: International sales. Just by uploading to Kobo, your book will reach out on a global scale. Over 200 countries will have access to purchase it. Also, Kobo just made a deal with Walmart and will be responsible for distributing books and eBooks to their stores.

■ NOOK

For those authors out there opting to not go exclusive with Amazon, Nook may be a great platform for you. It can become another sales avenue for you to build your profile when not tied down by KDP Select. (More on this later.)

■ THE KING OF THE SELF-PUBLISHING WORLD: AMAZON KDP

It goes without saying that Amazon is cornering the market when it comes to self-publishing.

Love it or hate it. Facts are facts.

But there is good reason for it. With multiple royalty options in multiple countries, it's easy to see why many writers – veterans and newbies alike – choose to use Amazon. On top of that, they have a great program called KDP Select.

KDP Select is a program where authors can opt-in to provide 90-day exclusivity to Amazon. In return, Amazon places their books in the Kindle Lending Library. This gives Amazon Prime users the ability to check out your book for free with no due date.

"Wait... So how does that work? How do you make money from that?"

Glad you asked. You see, every time a user checks out your book, you get paid for each book borrowed. That's pretty sweet. Plus, by enrolling in the program, you have the ability to avail of either a free book promotion or a Kindle Countdown Deal (a discount promotion deal).

So, do you know what it takes to get started with KDP?

STEP 1. CREATING AN ACCOUNT

Before you start any sort of publishing with KDP, you must first create an account. This is much easier than you might think. First, head over to <https://kdp.amazon.com/> and register. You can either use an email address or a pre-existing Amazon account.

The second step is probably one of the most important parts of your whole KDP experience: entering your tax information. This is required prior to publishing any of your works with Amazon. To do this, select “Update” in your Account Information. Here you can enter your tax info and get started with publishing your book!

STEP 2. REGISTERING YOUR BOOK TITLE, SUBTITLE, AND COVER

Now it’s time to add your book. In order to upload your book, you must first register it in your KDP Account Profile. You start doing this by adding your book’s title and subtitle.

The screenshot shows the 'Kindle eBook Details' section of the KDP registration process. It has three tabs: 'Kindle eBook Details' (checked), 'Kindle eBook Content', and 'Kindle eBook Pricing'. The 'Language' field is set to 'English'. The 'Book Title' field contains 'The Very Best Book Title Ever'. The 'Subtitle (Optional)' field contains 'According to me'.

Now what’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Sorry Shakespeare, but books are a bit different. A book’s title is the first thing that your readers will actually read. And if it isn’t snappy, interesting, or intriguing, they probably aren’t going to read much further.

A subtitle is completely optional. Many books don’t have them or need them. But that does not mean they aren’t useful or a good part of your work. They can definitely add to the attractiveness of your title. But remember that just like your title, they need to be kept interesting.

Another aspect you should pay close attention to is your book’s cover art. Make sure your art and font go well together and do not create an eyesore. And this

should go without saying but... keep the cover art and font relevant to what you are writing.

STEP 3. CREATING YOUR BOOK DESCRIPTION

If your book’s cover and title are the first things your reader sees, then the description is surely next up.

The screenshot shows the 'Kindle eBook Cover' section. It offers two options: 'Use Cover Creator' or 'Upload a cover you already have (JPG/TIFF only)'. The second option is selected, and a green box displays the message 'Cover uploaded successfully!'.

The trick is... don’t treat this as just a book summary. Look at your book description as advertising copy. Your first sentence should be gripping and thrilling and leave the reader wanting more. So give readers just enough to entice them into wanting the whole thing.

This is what your book description should do. **Don’t take this step lightly.** Be sure to spend some real quality time putting this together. And flip back to the previous chapter to review **writing your blurb.**

STEP 4. CHOOSING THE RIGHT KEYWORDS

You’ve got your description put together, your title just right, and your cover art perfect. Now what?

Well, now you need to make your book easy to find. This is accomplished through keywords. Amazon only allows a limited number of keywords so each choice you make counts.

So, how are you going to select the right keywords?

The screenshot shows the 'Keywords' and 'Categories' sections. The 'Keywords' section has a prompt 'Enter up to 7 search keywords that describe your book.' and several input fields containing terms like 'character development', 'writing', 'writing fiction', 'writers', 'how to write a book', 'edit my manuscript', and 'how to write a novel'. The 'Categories' section has a prompt 'Choose up to two browse categories.' and a 'Set Categories' button.

The first step you need to take is to create a master list of usable keywords. Now this is much easier said than done. Fortunately, tools such as **KDP Rocket** can help to make this task a breeze.

STEP 5. ENTERING THE RIGHT CATEGORY

Not only do you need to put the right keywords on your book, you need to place your book in the right category. I mean, you wouldn't want to be selling your space marine sci-fi thriller alongside a sultry cowboy romance novel. Right?

A big factor to take into consideration is the competition of the category. You should search for an applicable category with minimal competition. Amazon has thousands of different categories you can choose from. The amount of categories may seem like an advantage. And it is, but only if you know how to exploit them.

As mentioned before, tools like KDP Rocket can help you make quick work of choosing the right place for you.

STEP 6. UPLOADING YOUR BOOK

It's time. The time we've all been waiting for. Uploading your book! Simply import your Word doc and you're off to the races! Right?

Wrong.

The very first thing you need to do before uploading your manuscript is to convert it into an acceptable Kindle-supported format. These formats include:

- MOBI
- RTF (Rich Text Format)
- EPUB
- Adobe PDF

For compatibility with Amazon, I recommend creating a MOBI file. (More about this in the **next chapter**.)

Once you have converted your book into a Kindle-accepted format, it's time for upload.

1. Log in to your KDP account
2. Go to "Your Bookshelf"
3. Click "Kindle eBook Actions" next to the applicable book
4. Click on "Upload eBook Manuscript"
5. Pour yourself a celebratory drink... Congrats!

STEP 7. ESTABLISHING ADS AND COLLECTING ROYALTIES

I bet you're sitting back just watching the money roll in now. Aren't you?

No? Why not?

Advertising. Or the lack thereof.

Now, there are some schools of thought that may say... "Word of mouth is the only advertisement you need." That's not entirely true. But it's not entirely wrong either.

Word of mouth is awesome! It gets people talking about your book. The more people who talk about it, the more people are likely to buy it. But how do they know you even have a book in the first place? How are you going to get that buzz started?

You guessed it. Ads. And Amazon Marketing Service (AMS) ads are a great place to start.

AMS is a pay-per-click ad program that Amazon manages for you. It puts your ads in front of people who are searching for something just like your book. Like any new trade, AMS requires a bit of practice to perfect. But don't get discouraged. There are courses out there designed to teach you about AMS ads like the completely free course offered by **Kindlepreneur**.

What about those royalties though? How much am I going to get paid?

The screenshot shows the 'Royalty and Pricing' section of the KDP interface. It includes a 'View Service' button and a section to 'Select a royalty plan and set your Kindle eBook list prices below'. Two radio buttons are present: 35% (unselected) and 70% (selected). Below this, a table shows pricing for Amazon.com with a list price of \$9.99. The table has columns for Primary Marketplace, List Price, Rate, Delivery, and Royalty. For the 35% rate, the delivery is \$0.00 and the royalty is \$3.50. For the 70% rate, the delivery is \$0.06 and the royalty is \$6.95. A note states 'Must be \$2.99-\$9.99 *' and 'All marketplaces are based on this price'.

Primary Marketplace	List Price	Rate	Delivery	Royalty
Amazon.com	\$ 9.99 USD	35%	\$0.00	\$3.50
		70%	\$0.06	\$6.95

Well, that depends on a number of factors: your sales location, the price of your book, delivery costs, etc. For Amazon KDP eBooks, you have the option to choose between one of two options, a 35% royalty or a 70% royalty. Both options have distinct advantages.

35% ROYALTY

35% of your list price without VAT for each unit sold

Must be priced:

- **Less than 3 MB**
Minimum Price \$0.99 Max Price \$200.00
- **Between 3 MB and 10 MB**
Minimum Price \$1.99 Max Price \$200.00
- **10 MB or greater**
Minimum Price \$2.99 Max Price \$200.00

70% ROYALTY

Your royalty will be 70% of your list price without VAT

- Less delivery costs (average delivery costs are \$0.06 per unit sold, and vary by file size)
- Must be priced between \$2.99 to \$7.99

So, you may be asking yourself, why would anyone choose the 35% royalty? Great question.

In truth, this is more about Amazon trying to control the pricing on their platform. Otherwise, you might find books doing pricing wars against each other and either driving down the price or driving up the price. This way, just about every eBook is going to be priced between \$2.99 and \$9.99.

IN CONCLUSION

Choosing the right publishing platform for your self-published endeavor doesn't have to be a hard task. For those wanting to operate outside of Amazon, there are many good options out there. For those planning on using Amazon, be sure to do your research.

KDP is a wonderful platform for your book. It provides not only a place for listing, but includes advertisement opportunities and quality royalty options. Just make sure you follow these simple guidelines and set yourself up for success!



▶ CHAPTER 14. CREATING YOUR EBOOK FILES (EPUB OR MOBI)

Snap fingers. eBook appears.

Well, as you know from the previous chapter, it doesn't quite work like that. There's no magic spell to create an eBook. What it takes is a little knowledge to learn the ropes.

In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at the most common eBook formats, what needs to be included in yours, and the apps that make eBook creation easy. Let's begin.

WHAT TYPE OF FILE SHOULD I CREATE?

There are several eBook file types, but there are two essentials: EPUB and MOBI.

EPUB files can be read by most e-readers and reading apps. Nook, iBooks, Google Play Books, Adobe Digital Editions, and Aldiko all support the EPUB format. It's clean, simple, and elegant. Almost all eBook creation apps support .epub file extensions.

And then there's MOBI, which is a file type exclusive to Amazon Kindle. You might think that a one-platform format couldn't be all that useful. But MOBI is. Truth be told, it's almost essential. Amazon still owns a huge share of the eBook market. If you want the biggest possible audience for your book, it needs to be on MOBI.

Ideally, you'll find an app that can create both of these formats, and possibly more. But before we get to that, let's quickly recap your eBook's contents to make sure everything's in place.

WHAT NEEDS TO GO INTO MY EBOOK?

■ COVER

Check out **Chapter 12** for all the info on designing great covers.

■ COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Remember to add a page at the front of your book with the standard copyright information. This usually includes your name and the year of publication, a

statement about reproducing your work, a disclaimer about the characters and setting, and a credit to the cover designer.

■ TABLE OF CONTENTS

This is an essential element of any ebook. Most eBook creation apps build your table of contents for you, but it's easy enough to do on your own. Simply include a list of your chapters at the beginning, then link to each within your file.

■ THE CONTENT OF YOUR BOOK

You've hopefully got your final draft ready to go by now. If not, go back through **Section 1**.

■ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is where you thank all those who helped you put the book together. You can include friends, family, beta readers, designers, editors, inspirational teachers, other authors whose books were valuable resources... the list is almost endless! Look at a few examples from books you own to decide what style and length this section should be.

■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Every book has an About the Author section. It might feel weird writing your own, but after readers complete a book, they want to know more about the person who wrote it. Plus, this is your chance to link to your website, email sign-up and social media accounts. That way, readers will be in-the-know when you publish your next book!

WHAT APP SHOULD I USE?

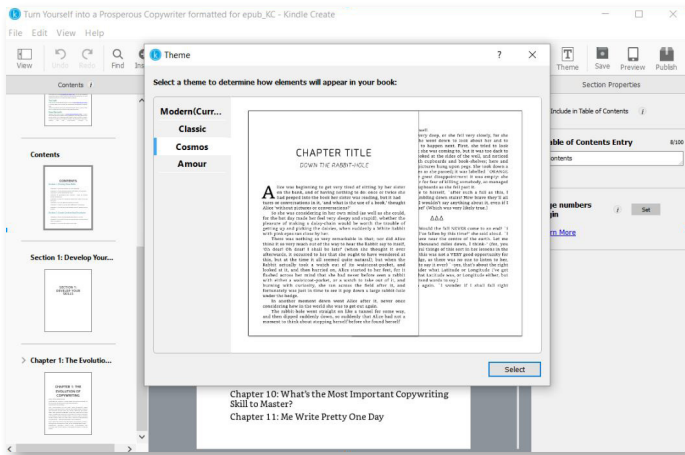
There are several different ways to create eBooks. It's up to you to choose the best option for your work. Here we'll cover some popular apps for eBook creation, along with the pros and cons of each.

■ KINDLE CREATE

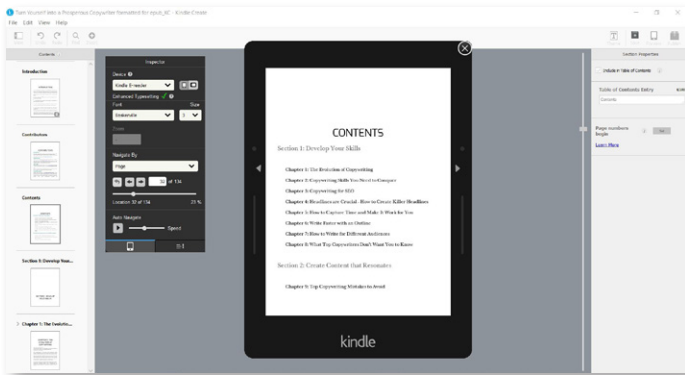
Kindle Create is free to download from Amazon.

You can select from different formatting options, fonts, arrangements, and more. Most basic functions are intuitive, though some (such as adding links) must

be performed on your file before uploading to Kindle Create.



Another neat thing about Kindle Create is how it shows you exactly what your book will look like. You can select from several different devices to see how it looks on each one, including tablets, phones, and classic Kindles.



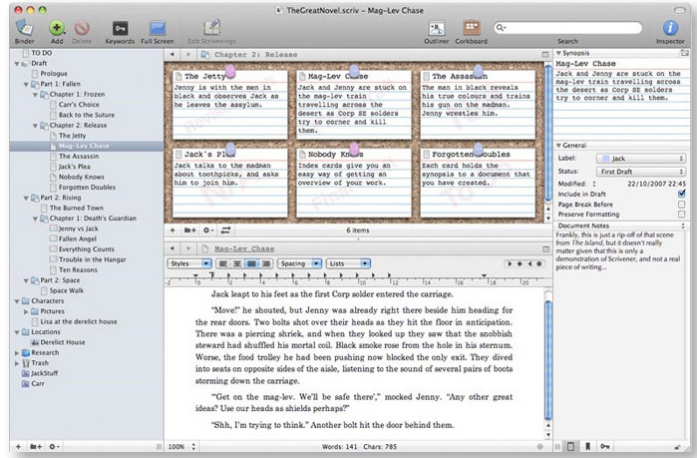
Pros: Free software, clean look

Cons: Much prep work must be done outside the app, formatting can be finicky, poor help documentation, only creates MOBI file type

SCRIVENER

Many novelists love Scrivener, and for good reason. It's a product made by novel writers, for novel writers. You can arrange chapters, save tons of info, and when you are finished, you can also use it to create your eBook file.

I like this method since you get to keep everything under one roof. All the writing and file creation is done in one program, meaning there's no losing your progress or anything like that.



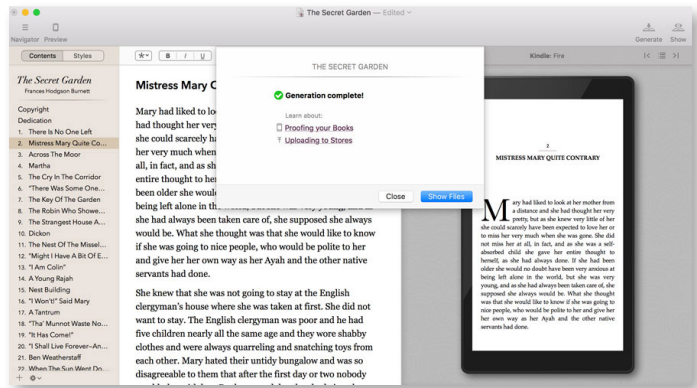
Scrivener is a paid service (\$45 for a standard licence), and in all honesty, it can be a bit overwhelming. Since it does so much, I had to read through the program instructions several times just to make sure I knew what I was doing. Powerful, but maybe a bit much for some writers.

Pros: Everything under one roof, exports to multiple file types

Cons: Not free, can be overwhelming

VELLUM

Vellum is the luxury brand of eBook creation software. It's indie author and publishing guru Joanna Penn's program of choice for creating eBooks. In her words, Vellum "is absolutely brilliant and makes formatting fun!" Sounds good to me.



I've tried this software and I must say, it's excellent. Clean formatting, intuitive control over the layout, simple table of contents generation, the ability to preview your book on multiple devices—it's all included, plus more.

Vellum also offers a vast collection of help documentation, which is often necessary for a program

with this many features. There are handy question mark links on almost every section of the app which bring you straight to the relevant pages. Super handy.

Finally, Vellum exports to pretty much any format you can think of: Kindle, Apple Books, Nook, Kobo, Google Books, and EPUB. That's a huge boon in its favor.

However, the phrase "what you get is what you pay for" certainly applies here. Vellum is excellent software, and therefore accordingly expensive. There are two base plans: Vellum Ebooks (\$199.99) and Vellum Press (\$249.99). The former allows for unlimited creation of eBooks only. The latter allows for unlimited creation of both eBooks and paperbacks.

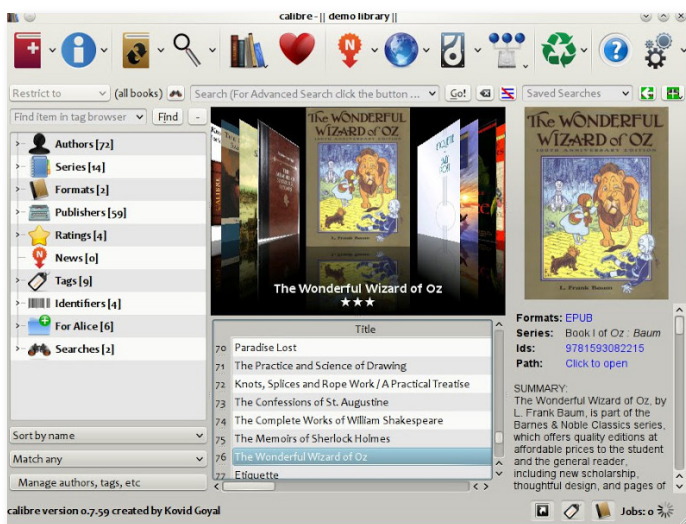
In my opinion, this program is absolutely worth the price, if you can swing it. If you can't, the other options listed here are still totally serviceable (albeit not as flashy).

Pros: Intuitive, flawless formatting, extensive help documentation

Cons: Pricey!

■ CALIBRE

Unlike our previous three examples, **calibre** is an open source platform. This means it's a program that's publically available for download and modification. Being open source gives calibre some unique advantages.



For one, it is free to download and use. It's also a powerful tool for converting files to and from almost any format, including Word docs, HTML, RTF, MOBI, and EPUB. This is especially valuable if you plan on selling your eBook on multiple websites and in multiple forms.

However, calibre can be a bit tricky to use, especially for those who aren't technically inclined. The software is not built for ease, and it seems to have been created with the assumption that users would have a high skill level with computers. For example, to make formatting changes to the eBook, one must dive into the file's HTML and tinker with code. Easy for some, challenging for others.

Pros: Free and powerful

Cons: Complex

■ GOOGLE DOCS

This is one you might not have thought of, but it can be effective if it fits your needs.

Like calibre, **Google Docs** is free. All you need to do is create a Google account. It functions just like any word processor, though it has the advantage of being accessible from multiple devices since it's web-based cloud software. For example, you can work on a Google Doc from your laptop, then continue working on the same document while you ride the subway to work via your cell phone. Nothing is saved to hard drives, so you can work from almost any device with an internet connection.

Though Google Docs is excellent for writing, it's bare bones for eBooks. The only formats it produces are PDF and EPUB, which won't get you very far with websites like Amazon. Good for starting out, but probably not robust enough once you grow.

Pros: Free, great for working on multiple devices

Cons: Limited file types

WHICH SOLUTION IS BEST FOR YOU?

Balance the pros and cons of each product. Price, quality, and ease of use are all important determining factors, but you might have other considerations.

Finally, if the product comes with a demo, use it. There's no substitute for first-hand experience.

▶ CHAPTER 15. ADVICE FROM A SELF-PUBLISHING COMPANY

By Andre Calilhanna



GUEST AUTHOR ALERT!

We asked Andre Calilhanna of self-publishing giant **BookBaby** what advice he could share with you.

If you're planning to self-publish your book - especially if this is your first time through the process - you should start planning the book production process way before you finish your manuscript. There are plenty of decisions to make when it comes to self-publishing, and some of them will affect your book's content. Maybe not the story, but certainly your book's cover, your metadata, the descriptions you'll include on the book and in your promotions, the format of the book(s) you'll produce... there's a whole world ahead of you as you transition from "writer" to "publisher."

Yes, it can feel overwhelming, but the more you know, the less intimidating it will be. Call self-publishing companies, do some research. Figure out what questions you need to answer and what decisions you need to make and you'll soon be on your way to publication.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

If this is your first time self-publishing, you may find yourself thinking about the elements of a book in ways you never considered. Making decisions about cover design and interior design, for instance. Do you know the difference between the two?

Cover design seems pretty straightforward: it's the cover of your book. Of course, if you're creating a physical (print) book, there's also the back cover to consider.

Designing a book cover isn't as straightforward as you might think. There are a lot of elements that require consideration: some are driven by genre and your intended audience, some are industry standard elements, and some relate to marketing your book.

One thing is for certain: you don't want to skimp on your cover. Your book cover needs to grab attention,

give your potential reader some major clues about what's inside your book, and stack up against every other published book - traditionally published and self-published - on the market. And your cover has to achieve all these things at full-size as well as in tiny, thumbnail form. Better make sure you get a professional on the case.

Interior design, or interior formatting, relates to everything you see on the inside of your book, including the title page, the table of contents, chapter headers, fonts, running headers, footers, page numbers, line spacing, the number of columns per page, etc. It is important that your final manuscript documents are free of errors and formatted correctly to result in a smooth production process and a professional-looking finished product.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

Are you making an eBook, printed book, or both? What type of binding do you plan to have? Softcover or hardcover? With or without a dust jacket? What about paper stock?

Some of these decisions are purely about your preference as a reader, some may be based on economics, and others may be a matter of market expectations. Either way, having a clear idea of what you want will ease the process of book production.

Knowing your intended audience is another key, not only in marketing your book, but in deciding on things like trim size and the design elements of your cover art.

YOU CAN'T RUSH A MASTERPIECE

One definite requirement for a writer on the verge of publication is patience. The process will take time and trying to rush it will only result in frustration (at best) or an inferior, flawed finished product - which is the LAST thing you want after pouring so much of yourself into writing your book.

First, make absolutely sure your manuscript is free of errors (at least as certain as you can be). Have your manuscript professionally edited. It's not a luxury or

an add-on, it's what every serious author does. Editing software is a great first pass (**ProWritingAid** scoured this chapter!), but do you think a single traditionally published book hasn't been professionally edited and proofread at least once before publication? Why should a self-published book be any different?

And yes, you should give your manuscript a final read after it comes back from an editor or proofreader before submitting for production. It adds time to the process, no doubt, but the expense and additional time it will take to make corrections later in the production process are much more costly and inconvenient.

DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP

In some ways, sure, a book is a product, like anything else. The conversion, printing, binding, boxing, and shipping are akin to so many other products that flow to market. But, of course, a book is NOT just a product. A book has the capacity to change lives, tell stories, move people to tears, and have a significant impact on another human being. And more than that, it's your life's work (or at least one chapter of it). It means a lot to you, the author, and you want to be certain the people producing your book are invested in making sure the finished product is everything you imagine it will be.

Start your book production process early on in the writing process. Try to imagine your finished book as you write. Let it inspire you. Make a connection with the company who will produce your book and figure out what you need to know. It will allay much of the uncertainty you feel as you ponder the unknowns of the self-publishing process and it's one giant step toward declaring that, "I am a published author!"

▶ HYBRID PUBLISHING

- What is hybrid publishing and why should you consider it?
- What to Look for in a Hybrid Publisher
- Questions to Ask a Hybrid Publisher



▶ CHAPTER 16. WHAT IS HYBRID PUBLISHING, ANYWAY? By Tom Corson



GUEST AUTHOR ALERT!

We asked Tom Corson-Knowles, Founder of **TCK Publishing**, to help you make sense of hybrid publishing.

WHAT IS HYBRID PUBLISHING AND WHY SHOULD YOU CONSIDER IT?

Hybrid publishing is a very broad and downright confusing term used to describe publishers that operate using some aspects of traditional publishing and some aspects of self-publishing.

There are thousands of hybrid publishing companies out there, and some hybrid publishers operate so differently that you wouldn't even think to compare one hybrid publisher to another. Similar terms that can describe some hybrid publishers include vanity publisher or subsidy publisher, although some companies that are labeled as hybrid publishers operate much more like a traditional publisher or small press.

You should know that the term "hybrid publisher" is still very new, and the definition of a hybrid publisher is still very much up in the air. If you asked ten publishing experts to pick the hybrid publishers out of a list of publishers, there would be a lot of disagreement and contention.

Within that umbrella term, though, we can pick out specific groups. Here are some of the different types of hybrid publishers:

■ HYBRID PUBLISHERS WITH EDITORIAL STANDARDS

Hybrid publishers with editorial standards do not simply accept any submission. Their editors review submissions and pick a small percentage of manuscripts to publish. Because of this, these publishers tend to have higher editorial standards and provide better editing services than self-publishing service companies that accept submissions from any author who is willing to pay.

■ CROWDFUNDING PUBLISHERS

These publishers only offer a book deal to authors who have proven sales or demand for their book via crowdfunding. Some crowdfunding publishers have their own bespoke crowdfunding platform, while others use existing platforms like Kickstarter or IndieGoGo.

■ SELF-PUBLISHING SERVICES

Self-publishing service companies simply sell publishing services. They don't have editorial standards, and they are the modern-day equivalent of the old vanity press.

■ TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS THAT SELL SELF-PUBLISHING SERVICES

Some traditional publishers or small presses sell self-publishing services. They're essentially the same as a self-publishing services company, except they often tend to have more experience when it comes to actually editing, designing, distributing, and marketing books given their history as a traditional publisher.

■ SMALL PRESS PUBLISHERS

Because small press publishers often operate similarly to editorially curated hybrid publishers, it can be hard to tell them apart. Basically, a small press is a publisher that pays royalties and doesn't charge authors any fees for editing, design, publishing, or marketing services. An editorially curated publisher often charges fees to the author to subsidize the publishing costs.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A HYBRID PUBLISHER

Because there is so much confusion about exactly what a hybrid publisher does and doesn't do, you ought to treat every hybrid publisher as its own unique entity. Do your research to find out exactly how they operate.

Here are the some of the key things to look for:

■ ROYALTIES AND ADVANCES

Even though some hybrid publishers do pay royalties, they often do not offer advances. The good ones pay

higher royalty rates than traditional publishers, which means you'll earn more money for each copy of your book sold through a typical royalty-paying hybrid publisher than you would with a traditional publisher.

■ FEES

Some hybrid publishers charge the author fees for services from editing to printing books to marketing. Generally speaking, I don't recommend working with a hybrid publisher that charges fees because there's a good chance you might not earn back your investment.

If you want to pay to get your book published, I recommend you either self-publish or hire a self-publishing services company to publish your book for you.

■ PRINT RUNS AND PRINT ON DEMAND (POD)

Most hybrid publishers don't do print runs (unless the author is paying for the print run). Instead, they'll use POD to print books when they are sold via retailers like Amazon. This helps eliminate inventory, reduce risk, and make sure you and the publisher don't have thousands of books sitting around in a garage or warehouse that will eventually end up in landfill.

■ MARKETING

Marketing is what sets apart a great hybrid publisher from the rest, and could even make working with a hybrid publisher a much better choice than holding out for a traditional publisher.

A great hybrid publisher should be able to provide advice, guidance, and support with the following:

- Creating and implementing a marketing plan
- Creating and improving your author website
- Digital marketing, including building your email list, social media marketing, and SEO
- Amazon promotions, Amazon ads, and marketing campaigns

QUESTIONS TO ASK A HYBRID PUBLISHER

Here are the questions you should be asking your hybrid publisher (or any publisher you're considering **signing a book deal with**).

- How are royalties calculated? What is the royalty rate?
- Does the author have to pay any fees whatsoever, including printing costs, marketing costs, editing costs, design costs, or other?
- Do you offer advances?
- What is the publishing timeline (from the time we sign the book deal until the date the book is released and available for sale)?
- Do you provide developmental editing, copyediting, and proofreading?
- In which format(s) will you publish my book – eBook, print, and/or audio?
- Are your books available through a distributor for physical retail distribution?
- Do you pay for placement in bookstores or physical retailers?
- Do you have a sales team that will help get my book on bookstore shelves?
- Do you provide marketing services? If so, exactly what services will you provide? Does the author pay or does the publisher?
- Who owns the copyright—the publisher or the author?
- Do you provide any additional services or benefits I should know about, such as foreign language rights sales or distribution I couldn't get if I self-published?
- Do you submit your books to trade reviewers?

▶ CONCLUSION

One of the bright spots in the publishing industry, regardless of the track you decide to take, is how those who have gone before are willing to help the rest of us. This book and its many chapters comprise the accumulated experience and knowledge of writers just like you – those who wanted to reach readers with their words and figured out how to make it happen.

In conclusion, hopefully you've found fuel for the journey ahead and a road to travel.

Now let us leave you with one final thought...

A published author is a writer who never gave up.

Persevere, friends.



▶ ABOUT PROWRITINGAID

ProWritingAid analyzes your writing and highlights potential improvements. Each report focuses on a particular area of your writing.

Some reports will provide quick fixes that will allow you to polish up a short piece of writing. Other reports will go in depth and reveal areas where you can do more to improve your writing style.

While ProWritingAid is not going to do your job for you, it will make your job easier. You'll improve your writing style as you use the reports because you'll become more aware of the mistakes that you make, just like having a real-life writing coach guiding you. Not every suggestion will work for every writer, so you'll have to use your own judgement.

THE WRITING STYLE REPORT

The Writing Style Report is one of the most popular and comprehensive reports that ProWritingAid offers. We all know that there is a lot more to good writing than just correct grammar, and these suggestions are based on the same ideas you would learn in a university writing course.

The Style Report highlights several areas of writing that should be revised to improve readability, including: passive and hidden verbs, over-reliance on adverbs, repeated sentence starts, emotional tells and much more. These suggestions are the same as a professional copy-editor would give you (in fact many of them use ProWritingAid). If you are going to send your writing to a copy-editor then, by fixing all these mistakes upfront, your editor will be able to focus on the more important aspects of your work, such as tone of voice. You'll get a more polished piece of writing as a reward.

THE GRAMMAR REPORT

The Grammar Report is like Microsoft Word's grammar checker but with super powers. We use the latest artificial-intelligence algorithms to catch all those issues that Word's grammar checker misses. What's more, our team of copy-editors have input thousands of specific checks that they have come across in their years of editing. For example, they noticed that many

writers write "adverse" when they actually mean "averse", so when this comes up, the software will offer a short explanation about how the two words are different. This additional understanding means you can make sure you select the correct word not just this time, but every time. You'll eliminate all the embarrassing errors from your text and learn not to make them in the future.

THE OVERUSED WORDS REPORT

Writers should be wary of many words and phrases in the English language that are indicative of poor writing style. Intensifiers like "very", for example, actually weaken your writing, or hesitant words like "just" or "maybe" make your writing feel unconvincing. Words like these are fine in moderation, but when overused can undermine your ideas. In this report, we'll flag the problematic words and phrases that are commonly overused by writers, and help you to eliminate them. As you work through them, you will begin to recognize and avoid using them in the first place.

THE CLICHÉS AND REDUNDANCIES REPORT

Clichés are the crutch of the lazy writer! Don't rely on someone else's dusty old imagery. Brainstorm for innovative new ways to express your ideas. Fresh metaphors will leave a much stronger impression on your reader.

Never use two words when one will do the job. Redundant wording adds quantity to your writing, but not quality. Every word in your writing should be there for a reason. This report helps you eliminate the clutter.

THE STICKY SENTENCE REPORT

Sticky sentences wobble around without getting to the point. They are hard to follow, and should be rewritten to increase clarity.

Every sentence contains some words that don't have any actual meaning; they just hold your sentence together: *and, in, the, of,* etc. These glue words are empty spaces in your writing that your writer needs to get through to reach your meaning. Statistics show

that published texts have a low percentage of glue words, and so should your writing.

THE READABILITY REPORT

Being a great writer is not about using fancy words – it's about communicating meaning to your readers. If they have to look up words or decipher your language in any way, they will be distracted from your ideas. This report uses the top readability tools out there, including the popular Flesch Reading Ease Score, to analyze your writing and highlight those sentences that will be hard for your reader to understand.

THE REPEATS CHECK

Writers often mistakenly use the same word several times in the span of one paragraph because it's foremost in their mind. But those repeats can set off an echo in the reader's mind – that subconscious feeling of "Didn't he just say that?" Too much of the same word or phrase can be irritating to read and, worse, it can detract from what you are trying to say. This report highlights repeated words and phrases in your document so you can use a more diverse vocabulary.

THE SENTENCE LENGTH REPORT

Writing that uses varying sentence lengths keeps the reader's brain engaged. Some should be short and punchy, others should be long and flowing. Sentence variety adds an element of music to your writing. ProWritingAid creates a visual representation of your sentence lengths so you can pick out areas where you should add more variety. Too many long sentences may result in a monotonous text, or too many short sentences may result in a choppy text. You can see at a glance where adding more short, medium or long sentences will round out the piece.

THE PRONOUN REPORT

Inexperienced writers often rely on pronouns to keep the narrative moving: "He did this", "She did that", "They ran there", "I found out." It's dull. On average, published writing contains only 4-15% pronouns. If your writing contains a higher percentage than that, then you need to replace your pronoun-heavy passages with more dynamic wording.

THE TRANSITION REPORT

Transition words are the road signs in writing – they help your reader move smoothly between ideas. Transitions like "similarly", "nevertheless", "in order

to", or "as a result" help you show your readers how separate points go together to support your larger idea. They illustrate agreement, contrast or show cause and effect. One in every four sentences (25%) should contain a transition. If your transition score is less than 25%, you should consider adding more road signs.

THE CONSISTENCY CHECK

Consistency is essential in writing. It makes it feel professional and polished. The Consistency Check highlights inconsistency of spelling, hyphenation, capitalization, and punctuation. It also checks to make sure that you are consistently writing in either American English or British English.

THE PACING CHECK

Great fiction always contains fast-paced sections, such as dialogue and character action, as well as slow-paced sections, such as introspection and backstory. Both are essential to create a strong narrative and believable characters, but you never want your readers to feel bored or bogged down by too many long, slow passages. Use ProWritingAid to monitor your slow-paced sections to make sure your readers never lose interest.

THE DIALOGUE TAGS CHECK

Most dialogue tags, aside from "said" and "asked" break that cardinal rule of writing: show don't tell. If you write "Jane exclaimed" after her dialogue, you are depending on a word to get Jane's emotion across. Instead, show it to your reader with her actions. Describe how Jane's eyes bulge with shock. Make everyone in the room turn to look at her outburst. Use ProWritingAid to highlight all your dialogue tags and get your emotion across in a stronger way.

THE CONTEXTUAL THESAURUS

The contextual thesaurus allows you to explore a range of synonyms by double-clicking any word. Unlike most thesaurus suggestions, our report offers replacement words that fit within that context of that sentence.

THE DICTION REPORT

When it comes to writing, less is more. Too often, writers try to sound authoritative by saying simple things in wordy ways. Why write "has the ability to" when you can write "can"? You're just using more words to say the same thing, which makes your writing less clear. We'll find these unnecessarily verbose phrases so you can make every word count.

THE ALLITERATION REPORT

Alliteration creates a pleasant rhythm when reading and so is often used in fiction, poetry and even advertising. Spark creativity by using ProWritingAid to highlight all instances of alliteration in your text.

THE HOMONYM CHECK

Homonyms are words that sound the same and are spelled alike but have different meanings – and they slip past spellcheckers all the time! Our check will also catch homographs (words that are spelled the same but sound different and have different meanings) and homophones (words that sound the same but have different spellings and different meanings). If you write *He lost his patients* but really meant *He lost his patience*, your spellchecker won't flag it as an error. The ProWritingAid tool will highlight every word in your document with a homonym, homograph and homophone so you can double-check that you have it correct.

THE ACRONYM CHECK

The Acronym Report creates a list of all the acronyms you have used. Misspelled or inconsistent acronyms are not usually picked up by normal spell-checkers, so this list allows you to easily scan for errors. It can also help you create a glossary of acronyms for your text.

THE HOUSE STYLE CHECK

Create customized reports to look for specific issues based on your needs. If you are a sports writer, input all the players' names to make sure that they are spelled correctly. If you are a fashion designer, create a rule that "fall collection" should always be flagged and corrected to "autumn collection". If you're writing for a client, you can input their style guide rules into ProWritingAid and the software will flag any deviations for you. Create the ProWritingAid report that YOU need.

THE PLAGIARISM REPORT

Plagiarism is a major concern for many people, especially those writing academic works. The plagiarism checks performed by ProWritingAid will check your work against over a billion web-pages and articles to make sure that you have correctly cited any unoriginal content. It is easy for unoriginal content to slip into your work, and the consequences can be disastrous. You need to purchase credits to use our plagiarism checker, available from as little as \$10.

OVER 20 TOOLS IN ONE

We've just taken a look at some of our best writing and editing tools. ProWritingAid is continually evolving to make sure writers have everything they need in one piece of software. Try our free version now and see what **ProWritingAid** can do for you.