The Utlimate Self-Publishing Guide

A Thorough Handbook

HAPPIE LIT WORKS

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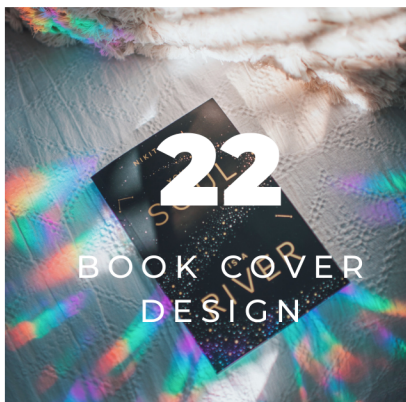
WRITING

GETTING INSPIRATION
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FINISHING YOUR STORY

01

What inspires you to write? Current events? Odd happenstances? A work of art? Learn how to harness inspiration from everyday life and begin your self-publishing journey.

GETTING INSPIRATION

"If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." - Toni Morrison

Some of the best ideas come when you least expect it, but a writer does not have to wait for that moment to get an idea for their next project. Creatives, no matter their outlet, find inspiration from life itself, or more so the elements of it. Fiction writers may dredge up an idea out of thin air and create something meaningful, or they can become inspired by true events and base a story around an ideal or realistic topic.

You'll find that many of your/society's favorite fictional stories are based on existing issues that authors mask using lovable and relatable characters, made-up settings, and outlandish plots. Let's look at an example–The Hunger Games series.

"One night, I was lying in bed, and I was channel surfing between reality TV programs and actual war coverage. On one channel, there's a group of young people competing for I don't even know; and on the next, there's a group of young people fighting in an actual war. I was really tired, and the lines between these stories started to blur in a very unsettling way. That's the moment when Katniss's story came to me"– Suzanne Collins, quoted in the School Library Journal article, "A Killer Story: An Interview with Suzanne Collins, Author of 'The Hunger Games' | Under Cover"

The Hunger Games is just one example of how a fleeting moment of inspiration can morph into an iconic piece of literature that sparks a pop culture and political movement. Inspiration can come from anything–it doesn't have to be based in reality, but it should have a point or a bottom line. Toni Morrison's quote is perfect because your writing should have some motivation or drive. Even if you are writing a story in a saturated genre, you have a duty to yourself to complete that story whether or not it is publicly consumed.

GETTING INSPIRATION

If you find that you have the urge to write, but can't keep your creative juices flowing, considering doing any of the following to get your mojo back:

- Watch movies, TV shows & the news
- Look up writing prompts
- Listen to music
- Visit popular places and take notes of your surroundings (your local library, a park, a mall, a church, etc.)
- People watch
- Document your dreams (if you can remember)
- Look at photographs (a picture is worth 1000 words, right?)

There are plenty more ways to spark your creativity, but if you ever find yourself stumped, just refer to what the late, great Toni Morrison said.

Here's some homework for you: Make a list of your favorite books. Under each book, explain why you love them as a reader. Now, put your author hat on and evaluate the book as a writer. What storytelling mechanisms did the author use that piqued your interest? You'll want to adapt those mechanisms to your stories and avoid the ones you didn't like.

GETTING INSPIRATION

DEVELOPING YOUR IDEA

Now you have your idea – what now?

It's time to flesh it out! Some writers can begin a novel with a simple concept and flesh out the details as they write, while others prefer to do extensive planning and research before they even write the first sentence. You must discover your own method to your madness, but there is nothing wrong with experimenting with both!

A lot can come from right off the top of the head when you get in your zone, but you can also end up stumped. Regardless of how you tackle your writing process, you should have a plan, even if there isn't much to that plan.

Develop a timeline or a plan of action for your project–that way, you stay organized. It can be very easy getting side-tracked when working on a long-term project, so set goals and do your best to follow them. You can download the free Writer's Ultimate Resource Complex Storyline Guide, or you can use any other story planner.

Another important part of the development process is the research component. Even if you're creating your own world with a brand new concept, you will most likely still need to do research in some aspect. It's important to understand your scope of knowledge so you don't write unrealistically. Don't get overwhelmed with this process, though; figure out what you don't know, think you know, and need to know more of and base your research around those elements. Be confident in what you know, but don't be afraid to confirm your assumptions.

DEVELOPING YOUR IDEA

WRITING OUT YOUR IDEA

Now is the time to put your plans into action.

Writing should be the most enjoyable part of the process because your creative juices can flow and flourish. Though you should have fun while writing your story, you also need to keep in mind all of the elements that make a solid story: *an interesting premise, a strong introduction, good story development, and a three-dimensional protagonist the reader can root for*. Let's look at each component one by one:

The Premise: The premise is the story idea or concept. It briefly summarizes your entire plot, and you should be able to explain your premise in a sentence or two. To set your story apart from others in its genre, you'll need some defining story elements that are highlighted in the premise. This defining story element could be a major obstacle or even an ironic turn of events or happenstance. Let's compare:

> **Premise 1:** A family of 8 goes on a cross-country trip.
> **Premise 2:** A con-family of 8 running low on funds travels across the country to evade the cops.

Which premise would you rather read about? Both premises are foundationally the same, but premise two is more specific and hints of a more action-packed story. That's not to say premise one doesn't have promise; because it's broad, the writer can create as many obstacles and conflicts as they'd like. However, it's not direct and otherwise is very bland, so when pitching your ideas, be concise and detailed without giving away major spoilers.

A Strong Introduction: Once you've sold your reader on the summary, you'll need to keep them engaged with your introduction. The introduction is the hook and arguably one of the most important elements of the story. If the beginning is weak, the reader won't be compelled to finish the book.A strong intro comes in many forms, but here are a few solid ways you can start your story off with a bang:

- Start with a defining event or moment.
- Start with an action.
- Start with dialogue.

Every reader has different tastes, so you won't be able to please everyone, but starting your story off with an immediate move in the plot will generally keep readers wanting to read more. Avoid beginning the story with long detailed descriptions unless a major plot movement immediately follows the description. There are plenty of opportunities in a story to describe settings and characters, so instead of starting the story with a long exposition, focus it on a point that a reader will want and need to read more to get to the resolution.

Three-Dimensional Protagonist: 3-D characters have realistic thoughts and emotions and act/react on them; readers can feel their plight and celebrate their successes. *Note*: the protagonist does not have to be "good." They are the vessel in which the story is being told through or around, which means it's their world that the reader lives in. Just as you experience various thoughts and feelings and behave accordingly, readers should get the same realism from your characters. Having your characters consistently make bad decisions for the sake of creating a story does not make them three-dimensional. You must show the reader why your character makes those decisions and ends up in the predicaments they do. Why do they feel the way they do? You can answer those questions with an in-depth analysis of your character's background. Ask yourself:

- What happened to my character that caused them to think the way they do? *Ex: A traumatic event; major change in life circumstances*
- How does your character respond to problems they face? What triggers them and how do their triggers manifest? *Ex: they flee; they fight; they get angry and lash out. They may experience flashbacks or blackout; they may daydream*
- What can/will make them change? *Ex: An apology; discovering their passion; moving away*
- What do you want your readers to think and feel as they take this journey with your character? *Ex: to despise the character; to feel sorry for them; to root for them.*

Good Story Development: There are a few elements to good story development – continuity and lack of plot holes, strong character development, a dynamic climax, and a satisfying resolution and catharsis. Continuity is very important. When your story does not transition and flow seamlessly, the story telling structure becomes more distracting to the reader than the story itself. Seamless stories keep your audience engaged and focused on the plot.

WRITING OUT YOUR IDEA

When developing your characters, you must make sure there's less to be desired. Your audience should root for your characters and feel connected to them. Creating three-dimensional characters (see the section above for more info) that learn and grow throughout their journey engages the readers. Create backstories for your main characters and do a character analysis, noting defining personality traits, physicality, and other aspects of the character that will affect the story.

The climax should be epic; it doesn't have to be action-packed, but it marks the "turning-point" in the story, so it should be a standout moment. Climaxes usually consist of the final battle or face-off, with a major event that shift's the character's emotions and actions, or where the main character has an epiphany and gets the confirmation they need to either change their course or remain on their path. The climax should make the reader yell and scream for the protagonist and should encourage them to read until the end.

A good climax must transition into a satisfying ending and give the reader a "catharsis" or resolution within themselves. The ending, is just as important as the beginning because it can set the tone for future books, should that be in your plan. You can download WUR's Story Planner for free here to help you plan out the story's chain of events.

More Story Development Tips:
- Storyboard your idea. Get some note cards and sketch your story's events
- Use character maps. This helps you keep track of how all your characters are related and how they impact the story.
- Take notes as you write. Notate any points in the story to remind you to revisit it later. Also note why you want to revisit it.
- Just write. Don't get discouraged if the story is not living up to your standards. That's what drafts and editing are for.

FINISHING YOUR STORY

This section focuses on knowing when to finish your project for the story's sake and when to finish your project for your sake.

FINISHING YOUR STORY

As a creative, you either know exactly how you want your story to end or you have no idea how to end it and there seems to be no in-between.

No matter how much you plan, as you develop your story, it can quickly take a turn. The important thing is not pressuring yourself to finish how you planned, but to take your time and finish when you feel it is ready. As you finish your story, keep in mind the elements of storytelling you gravitate towards when you read books or watch films. What captivates you about the endings? Make a short list and try to incorporate your findings into a solid ending you and your readers can be happy with.

Before you "finish" your story, you should feel a certain catharsis when you have reached that point. If you don't feel like it's complete or you feel that it's missing something, you need to evaluate what you believe that "it" is.

Every creative–be an artist, a musician, a writer–knows when their project is complete. Trust your instinct to tell you when it is time to start the next step or go back to the drawing board, and don't be afraid to start from the top. It is your project, and only you know when it's complete.

Once you've given it your all and you believe it's done, you need to think about the next step, which is editing and whether you will do it yourself or have a professional edit your story for you. The next section will help you decide what is right for you and give you the tools you need based on your editing choice.

REWRITES & GENERAL EDITING
THOROUGHLY EDITING YOUR WORK
BETA READERS & GETTING AN EDITOR
KNOWING WHEN YOUR WORK IS COMPLETE

02

Your first draft is never the final – in fact it's never even
close to the final. Know that the initial editing process
will be tedious, but highly necessary.

REWRITES & GENERAL EDITING

There are a few key factors you or an editor must consider when editing your work.

Development, spelling & grammar, fact-checking, and style. These core elements dictate the readability of your work and are essential in creating seamless work. We will revisit those elements in the *Thoroughly Editing Your Work* section of this guide.

Before you turn your work over to an editor (or decide to edit it yourself), you will need to read through your project. This will help you identify moments you should come back to and note the spelling and grammatical errors throughout the story. Here are some important tips for doing a read-through:

- Stay encouraged. Remember, it's a draft! Drafts aren't supposed to be perfect.
- Focus on just reading. Don't edit it at all. This will be hard, especially when there are glaring errors, but a read-through is just that–a read-through.
- Highlight any inconsistencies and redundancies you need to address later.
- Take notes on parts you want to rewrite and make sure that the rewrite will remain consistent with the flow of the rest of the story.
- Run a line through parts you want to discard. You'll still want to see what it says just in case you decide to keep it or move it somewhere else (this applies to editing the physical copy of the manuscript. If editing on the computer, use Track Changes or another editing element that will allow you to reinstate changes made.)

The reason you'll want to read through the work before editing is because you must have a big picture of your story. Yes, you planned, wrote, and finished the story, but unless you did so in one day and remember every little detail you wrote, you'll need to get a complete feel of your piece.

Once you've read it, you'll know how relevant and urgent your notes and observations are. Some development notes you took at the beginning of the book may have worked themselves out by the end or maybe more problems arose as you read and you realize that the story isn't as focused as you thought. Read-throughs are an integral part of the editing process and is a must-do to get an initial analysis of your work.

Before you rewrite any parts of your story, make sure that the parts you want to rewrite enhance the story. Every moment should lead to another purposeful moment. Any parts that don't help your reader understand the theme of your work should be revised or taken out. You'll know it's a moment worth revising when you have to read it again to understand it or it makes little sense in the context of the rest of the chapter or story.

After you make a revision, read through the entire paragraph out loud to make sure it flows the way you envisioned it. If it does, great; you've just improved your project, but if it doesn't, you have two options: rework the revision or take the part out. Read the paragraph minus the revision and see if it works without it; then you'll know how to proceed. Consider these basic editing tips as you complete your revisions:

- **Read your story out loud.** This helps you see spelling or grammar errors easier. You can also use the "Read Aloud" feature in MS Word to read your story for you.
- **Use a thesaurus to find stronger words.**
- **Make sure your punctuation is correct/necessary**. Did you put a period, but you meant a question mark? Are all those commas necessary?
- **Consult style guides.** Style guides are industry-standardized guidelines that keep writers consistent. For instance, a standard style guide might tell you to spell out the numbers zero through nine and type the numerals 10 and up. You can choose to follow that guide or not, but you must remain consistent in how you stylistically write and edit your piece.

WRITING OUT YOUR IDEA

THOROUGHLY EDITING YOUR WORK

So, you've done your read-through, made notes, and incorporated your revisions.

Now is the time to get into the nitty gritty. Once you dive into the deep hole of editing, it's hard to get out; it's time consuming and the struggle between keeping and discarding content is at its peak, but remember that not everything you write is necessary nor will it further the plot. Once you get your focus, giving your work a "deep cleaning" will be a little easier.

As mentioned in the *Rewrites and General Editing* section, there are a few aspects editors must pay close attention to while going through their drafts: development, spelling and grammar, fact-checking, and style. Here's a breakdown of each and some tips on how to improve each element:

Development: This is something you looked at as you completed your read-through and rewrites. The development of a story deals with the flow of events. How well does each moment move from one to another? Are you telling the story in the most effective way? As mentioned in the previous sections, you should have a strong sense of the story development *before* you write because this keeps you focused. You don't have to know exact details before you write, but you should know the general direction and have a firm starting point. In the *Good Story Development* tab of the *Writing Out Your Idea* section, there is a list of important factors that go into good story development. Always make sure that you're planning those elements ahead of time so that you have reference points and aren't constantly creating ideas out of thin air, which could mix you up later when editing your story.

As you edit your story for its development, focus your attention on what *does not* make sense and what *does not* elevate your story.

You'll also want to keep a look out for moments that are necessary but could use more clarity. During this stage of editing, you should to refer back to your story planner (if you used one), which gives you an at-a-glance look at your story, and see how you can make your changes without messing with the course of the story.

If your changes make sense, make your revisions and read the entire page before and after the change. This ensures the change doesn't disrupt anything and also helps you know whether you should reword or rework anything else around that part of the piece. There are plenty of story planners you can download or access for free or for a fee, but our free [Complex Storyline Planner](#) hits all the important areas of story planning development.

Spelling & Grammar: These two elements take the least amount of time to fix and can be fixed during the writing process. Most if not all word processors (MS Word, Google Docs, etc.) have an automatic spelling and grammar checker integrated in them so that you recognize glaring issues, but you can purchase or use a free version of many other online spelling and grammar checkers to take a deeper look and identify more complex grammar errors. We have an entire breakdown of the best spelling and grammar checkers on our [Editing](#) page, but we have an exclusive 20% off code for ProWritingAid that you can use today! Use code: **KUZG9MS4PZ**!

> A word of caution: *you should not solely rely on those checkers.* They don't always recognize intent or context, so some recommendations the system may suggest will be wrong. When using a spell or grammar checker, make sure you read the sentence to check that the suggestion will enhance readability *and* not change any meanings.

When going through this phase of the editing process, you'll also want to look at your word choice. Did you use the *strongest* word? Did you use the *right* word? Now is the perfect time to make sure you didn't mix up to, two, or too or their, there, and they're. If you find that you did get mixed up, don't worry or feel bad; these types of words, also known as homonyms and homophones, stump even the best of writers because they sound the same! Remember to read the entire context of the phrase and change it to the correct word.

THOROUGHLY EDITING YOUR WORK

When deciding the best word for a specific instance (instead of "mad", you might say "furious"), use a thesaurus. We recommend <u>thesaurus.com</u> or our favorite, <u>WordHippo</u> (They both also have apps too!).

Fact-Checking: This term here means a bit more than making sure what you're saying can be factually proven; fact-checking here also means that your story is written realistically, even if the story is fantasy or factions of it are based on imagination. You should do the proper research and incorporate your findings so that readers don't second guess your knowledge or authority.

Regardless of the type of book you're writing–fiction, non-fiction, poetry, etc.–there probably will be some level of fact-checking involved. Your story could be based in a mythical land, but if the inhabitants of your planet are vegetarians, then you'll need to do research on the vegetarian diet and make sure you don't divert from the essence of vegetarianism. Fiction and creative writing give you a lot of freedom, even with these sorts of rules, but you can still create an imaginative world rooted in fantasy that explores realistic elements.

When tackling nonfiction work, fact-checking is the most important element because you are positioning yourself as an authority figure on a subject and also because of the threat of legalities. You cannot present content to your audience filled with half-truths or baseless insinuations. You have a specific duty to ensure that everything you're writing is founded and sound.

Style: When editing for style, you'll want to focus on aspects that affect the readability of your work. This includes:
  - Wordiness
  - Voice (Passive/Active)
  - Clarity/Conciseness
  - Colloquialisms (Informality/Formality; depends on the type of writing and when it's used)

Avoid wordiness at all costs. It adds complexity to your sentences and makes it harder for the reader to follow your thought. The best way to minimize it is to break up your long, run-on sentences into two or more smaller, simpler sentences.

Voice is a compilation of many writing elements that make up the structure of a piece. The "acceptable" use of voice depends on the type of writing you're doing. Passive voice is okay (where the subject noun follows the verb in the sentence; *The verb is being done by the subject*), but in most instances, you should aim to use active voice (where the subject noun comes before the verb in the sentence; *The subject does the verb*). You can identify passive voice by referring to the phrase above–the verb is being done by the subject–and identifying any sentences that match that structure.

Example: *The grass was cut by the gardener.* To change it to active voice, remember the phrase the subject does the verb and change the sentence accordingly --- *The gardener cut the grass.* You'll notice that the meaning of the sentence doesn't change, but the second sentence is stronger, firmer, and a little shorter.

When you have moments where there are multiple subjects and actions happening at once, clarity is especially important. It's easy for a reader to get mixed up and make wrong assumptions about what they're reading when the wording doesn't give as much context as it should.

Example: *Penelope and Georgina love to play outside. "Let's go!" she said.* These two sentences, though clear and concise on their own, do not provide context to the situation presented. Who is she? Penelope or Georgina? Because there are two subjects mentioned in the first sentence, but only one ambiguous subject mentioned in the second, readers will get confused about who is talking. In this scenario, replacing she with the name of the girl speaking will solve the clarity problem.

You'll also want to watch out for sentences where there are dangling modifiers (a word or phrase that unclearly modifies another word). These also cause confusion because it's not clear what the phrase before it is referring to. To fix those issues, be concise and make sure that the subject that is being modified by the phrase appears right after the modifying phrase.

Colloquialisms (informal, casual phrases) are accepted in normal speech, like talking with friends or in an informal setting, but they are frowned upon in published work. You can get away with it in fiction writing, more specifically in dialogue, but you'll want to refrain from using it often other than that. Examples include contractions like "ain't" or using "gonna" when trying to say "going to."

THOROUGHLY EDITING YOUR WORK

BETA READERS & GETTING AN EDITOR

Finding a beta reader is the perfect way to get constructive feedback prior to publishing your book.

A beta reader's job is to read the book as a normal reader would and raise questions, concerns, and critiques about your work where necessary. Though they're great to have, they are not always professional editors, so consider their thoughts, but you don't have to implement all of them. You can find listings of beta readers on websites like CritiqueMatch, the Goodreads Beta Reader Group, or in Facebook writing groups. and they will assist you for free, though some will charge a fee.

Give your beta reader some time to get through your work and be open-minded when receiving their critiques. They are there to help, so don't get discouraged or defensive about your work. Once you've gotten the feedback and have considered their suggestions, carefully go through your work and make the necessary adjustments. Now is also a good time to make sure that the story you have now is the story you want to publish.

If you've chosen to hire an editor, you'll first need to establish your budget and base your search around that. Just a heads up; many editors cost $1,000+, with some charging hourly, and others charging per page, or even per word. Our website has a list of websites to find independent editors within various ranges.

An important thing to keep in mind when looking for an editor is finding one that will work with you beyond the initial edit they complete. You don't want a one-and-done editor. You'll need someone who doesn't mind working with you to ensure you understand their input and that they understand your reasoning.

KNOWING WHEN YOUR WORK IS COMPLETE

Much like knowing when you're done writing your project, you'll need a firm grasp on knowing when editing is complete, and the project is ready for publication.

For some, editing is the most difficult part of the process because things have to be added, taken out, or revised and it can be frustrating. When the book has gone through all the editing stages, read the story from start to finish, and do your best to remain critical, but not hard on your writing. Of course, getting rid of all errors should be your primary goal at this stage, but if you finish and you feel good about what you've read, you're done. If you don't, or you noticed issues, address those issues and begin again.

The key to completing your work is remaining diligent but staying sane. Don't drive yourself crazy trying to meet a deadline.

Focus on the work. It'll be ready when it's ready. True art and creativity cannot be rushed.

BOOK FORMATTING

INDUSTRY STANDARD BOOK SIZES
FONTS
TEXT SIZES & SPACING

03

Once you've completed the editing process and
you believe your book is ready to go, now is the time to
format your book.

INDUSTRY STANDARD BOOK SIZES

In this section, we will focus on formatting your book yourself.

INDUSTRY STANDARD BOOK SIZES

The first thing you need to consider is the size of your project. There are "industry standard" sizes, meaning most or all retailers will accept your book, but there are some special sizes that, though not sold by all sellers, can still be formatted and sold through some self-publishing outlets. The size of your book dictates the number of pages your project will be and that will determine the cost of printing each copy of the book, so keep that in mind when deciding the size. You should also consider the genre of your project. Children's books are notoriously bigger than fiction because they contain pictures and larger printed words.

There are different standards for each type of book. A good way to decide the size of your book is to look at books in your genre and use their measurements as a guide.

[Reedsy](#) lists out the industry standard sizes to include the following measurements:
- Fiction: 4.25 x 6.87, 5 x 8, 5.25 x 8, 5.5 x 8.5, 6 x 9
- Novella: 5 x 8
- Children's: 7.5 x 7.5, 7 x 10, 10 x 8
- Textbooks: 6 x 9, 7 x 10, 8.5 x 11
- Non-fiction: 5.5 x 8.5, 6 x 9, 7 x 10"
- Memoir: 5.25 x 8, 5.5 x 8.5
- Photography: Whatever you see fit!

The publishing outlet you go with will have these options for you to choose from and some may offer a few more options. Check to see if your outlet has some templates you can copy and paste your content in to make the formatting easier.

FONTS

When formatting your book, fonts need to be at the forefront of your mind.

Font is important because it dictates the literal readability of your work. Cool fonts may add a certain aesthetic, but if your readers can't read the words, they're not effective.

The general rule about fonts is to use a simple serif font for the body of the work and you can reserve the more creative lettering and fonts for the chapter titles or headings and the title on the cover. While picking two fonts for those sections, consider two fonts that look good together. There are many articles that list out great font pairings (yes, it's that serious), so if you're stuck on what you want to use, consult 1, 2, or 3. If all else fails, use Times New Roman or Garamond for your body.

You can download more free fonts from FontBundle, FontSquirrel, 1001FreeFonts, and more or use the fonts you already have in your word processor!

FONTS

TEXT SIZES & SPACING

Text size is worth serious consideration too because not only does it affect the readability of your project, but it also adjusts the number of pages your book will be.

You'll want to keep the fonts between 10 and 12, but if you're writing a children's piece, larger fonts like 12 or 14 are recommended. Your chapter titles or headings should be only a few points more than the body, unless you have a specific/creative reason to make them bigger; so if your body is 12, your heading should be 14.

Line spacing isn't as serious of a concern, because it has little effect on the readability of the story. You might consider the amount of spacing if you want your book to appear longer than it is or to make it shorter than it is.

When considering both text size and spacing, think about who your audience is. If your audience is younger, you may want to shy away from thicker books with no line spacing as opposed to general fiction readers whose tastes in those elements vary.

TEXT SIZES & SPACING

BOOK COVER DESIGN

CREATING A CONCEPT
HIRING A DESIGNER VS. CREATING YOUR OWN

04

While you're writing, you should also be thinking about the visuals for this project – the front cover, the illustrations (if applicable), the color scheme, and whatever else is required to add to the reader's experience.

CREATING A CONCEPT

By the time you've completed your story, you should have an idea of a book cover concept, meaning its general look and feel, colors, and/or design.

The concept you have can be as basic or extensive as you'd like, but this is something that you should take your time developing throughout the writing process.

Book covers are the most important marketing tool for your book. Why? Because the phrase "don't judge a book by its cover" is not plausible advice in the literal sense. Many Readers do judge books by their covers, so a cover that isn't of quality will not help make a reader want to grab the book.

When creating your concept, focus on the theme of your story and then visualize how it can be expressed in one image. You should think of the colors and consider art styles too because these also help make or break the appeal of your cover. If you're stumped, look at some covers of your favorite books. What was appealing to you? The art and illustrations? The lettering? The bold colors? Did it evoke a certain emotional response or even a memory? Take it a step further and browse through a selection of books at a library or bookstore. Make a note of all the books your eyes gravitate towards and ask yourself why they caught your eye. Using your own experience as a reader as a reference point, you'll get a grasp on how readers might react to your material.

HIRING A DESIGNER VS. CREATING YOUR OWN DESIGN

Once your concept is complete and you're happy with it, now's the time to design it.

You can go one of two routes–create it yourself or hire someone to do it for you (or if you're "in the know," get someone to do it for free).

If you create it yourself, you should first understand that you have a slight uphill battle, not just with the design aspect–especially if you don't have an eye for graphic design–but from a resource aspect. If you aren't a graphic designer, you most likely don't have the software on hand to create the most aesthetically pleasing version of your concept, which can be a downside, especially when your book will be up against other published works that used book designers. If you don't have typical software, don't worry–there are cheap and *free* programs you can use to create an awesome, professional looking cover. Here are a few you can check out:

- Canva
- PlaceIt
- Fotor
- Flipsnack
- PosterMyWall

If you opt into getting a book designer, you'll have the benefit of ensured quality, but it will come at a cost. You'll want to articulate your concept to them well so they can create your vision. Be sure to find a designer who incorporates revisions into their pricing so you aren't paying extra for them to do their job. On that note, also be patient. Designing takes time, so try not to rush the designer. If you are stretched for time, give the designer a firm deadline and ensure that they can meet it. You can find independent freelancers on sites like:

- Upwork
- Fiverr
- Reedsy
- 99Designs

VANITY, INDIE & TRADITIONAL PRESSES
SELF-PUBLISHING OUTLETS
UNDERSTANDING COSTS, WHAT'S AT STAKE & YOUR PLACE

05

You have an amazing idea that you believe deserves to be published, but if you're going to self publish, or even get published with a nontraditional publisher, you are going to have to shell out some money. You need to know everything at play when you decide to go down this rabbit hole and understand your place as an author and/or a publisher.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE: VANITY PRESSES, INDIE OUTLETS & TRADITIONAL PRESSES

You're reading this guide because you've either decided to self-publish your own book, or you are in the midst of deciding and want to weigh your options.

Whether you publish your book on your own terms or through a separate press, you should know and understand the different types of presses, their benefits to you, and the drawbacks of doing business with them.

As you are already aware, you can self-publish your own book. Many people opt into creating their own publishing press for the sake of professionalism and with the intent to publish more books under their press. Some may decide to publish their book without creating their own publishing house, which will mean that the self-publishing outlet they published through have rights to their title(s).

There are quite a few types of presses to be aware of when creating your own or publishing through another entity, so here is a simple breakdown of some of them:

- **Indie Outlets:** also lumped with self-publishing, these outlets have rapidly grown more popular over the years, but the act of self-publishing is not new. This is the most hands-on publishing experience you'll have. Publishing through these outlets will mean some money will have to be paid for certain services, but thanks to print-on-demand (POD) technology, you are no longer forced to order an inventory of books and sell them personally; you can sell your books online through various major booksellers and retailers without having to lift a finger. Another upside to publishing through an indie outlet or creating your own is that you, the author, has 100% ownership of your own work.

- **Vanity Presses:** the name stems from the "self-interest" these types of publishers have when taking on projects. These presses charge up-front fees to publish a book, often require the author to purchase their inventory after publication, and assume rights and ownership of all published works. Vanity presses may be the easiest publishing option because they typically don't turn projects away and they take care of the publication process, but it is not the cheapest.

- **Traditional Presses:** publishing through these outlets are probably the most sought after because books published by these publishers do the best. Traditional publishing houses have large "machines" behind them, employ the best editors, publishers, designers, and even marketers in the business, and are household names. The books that make the cut often see great success in the market, but the first and biggest hurdle is getting your manuscript seen by these presses. Typically, you'll need a book agent that will shop your book around and sell these publishers on the idea or the manuscript themselves. One huge upshot to traditional publishing is the pay day. Instead of the author having to pay upfront fees, these publishers will pay for the rights of the book (meaning they now own the title) and will pay royalties based on sales.

There are pros and cons to each type of press, but you must have firm goals in mind for your project and stay true to them when it comes time to decide how you'd like to publish your book.

SELF-PUBLISHING OUTLETS

A perk of self-publishing is that there are many publishing outlets at your disposal that provide intuitive, user-friendly publishing experiences.

Though some outlets require some form of payment before publication, most offer free services and may take a portion of profits so you don't have to pay out of pocket. Here's a list of the publishing outlets you should consider:

- Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing
- Barnes & Noble Press
- Ingram Spark ($49 book set-up fee/title)
- BookBaby
- Lulu
- Apple Books
- Google Books
- Smashwords
- Draft2Digital

When deciding what outlet to publish through, consider all of the features you're getting with each:

- Format: what formats do they published? (eBook, paperback, hardcover, a couple of them, or all of them?)
- Publishing fees: most outlets don't charge upfront fees, but some do. Think about that as you look through their other features and determine whether the fee is worth paying.
- Profit/Royalties: each outlet offers competitive royalty percentages.
- User-friendliness: How easy are you able to navigate their website?
- Distribution: how wide of a net does each outlet cast when it comes to distribution? Can your book be sold in bookstores, carried in libraries, and purchased on large online retailers?
- Knowledge Library: how in-depth are their resources? Can you readily find an answer to your questions?

You'll have to determine for yourself which of the above features are most important to you, and make your decision based on what boxes each outlet checks.

UNDERSTANDING COSTS, WHAT'S AT STAKE & YOUR PLACE

The self-publishing route is not a free or a cheap one.

You'd really have to be "in the know" and have favor in some high places to get a book printed and published for free, but that's not to say it can't be done. Many sources will give you various price ranges for self-publishing a book, but because the services you'd have to pay for vary in price, be prepared to pay a few hundred to a few thousand dollars to publish your book.

Here is the list of all the charges you should expect to pay:

- Editing
- Book Formatting
- Book design
- ISBN(s)
- Book Set-Up Fee (not always applicable)
- Promotion
- Cost of Proof(s)
- Inventory Costs
- Copyright (optional)

You can avoid most of these costs by doing everything yourself, however, you risk decreasing the value and/or success of your work if you are not a professional or moderately knowledgeable in these skills.

There is one way you can publish your book for free; it generally doesn't make you much money, but if your intention is to "get your name out there", you can digitally publish and sell your book through your own selling channel (website) or publish your book on a blog or website like Tumblr and Wattpad and let people read your story for free. No money lost, little to no money gained. This can be a great way to introduce yourself to the world and gain a loyal audience before officially publishing your first work.

As you can see, you need more than just a good idea and manuscript–you need money to self-publish. Make no mistake–it does take spending money to make money, but the hard reality is that many self-published writers barely break even. You should strive for excellence and professionalism, but if you're able to edit, format, or design (or have the hook up) your own work, you will alleviate a large chunk of your costs. However, as mentioned before, you may do yourself and your work a disservice if you aren't properly trained and knowledgeable in those areas of expertise.

As a self-publisher or indie publisher, you are positioning yourself at the very bottom of the totem pole. For mild or moderate success, you'll need a solid marketing plan and good promotion, but it will take the book getting into the right hands for it to achieve *The Martian* or *50 Shades of Grey* success (yes, those two books were self-published!).

That's not to discourage you; in fact, you should strive to work even harder to get your book to the level it deserves, but that also means you must be willing to invest in your project. Investing in your book means you're investing in yourself.

So what's at stake? Well, it depends on how you look at it. Self-publishing can be a winning scenario because it takes the rejection out of the process and puts complete control, ownership, and money into your hands. However, to do it correctly, there has to be a level of understanding and a good deal of research involved in properly publishing your book. One wrong decision can take away your control, ownership, or will cost you more money, so having the necessary information to make the project work is pivotal. To start, check out self-publishing guides (like this one!) and others listed on WUR's website or do a search. Once you've read up on the basics, you'll have the tools necessary to strategize and map out your plan of action.

UNDERSTANDING COSTS, WHAT'S AT STAKE & YOUR PLACE

PROMOTION

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Promotion is the biggest and most unpredictable element of this process. Nothing is sure fire, but this guide will help you better your chances of getting your book seen.

SELF-PROMOTION

Self-promotion is a frugal, self-published writer's best weapon in a market full of books that have PR agencies and big-name publishing companies behind them.

Social media has boosted the game for indie writers and publishers, giving them the same opportunities for exposure as the traditionally published books can get.

The first thing you'll need to do is develop a marketing plan. It should be concise and cover all bases you wish to touch. If you don't have experience in creating plans, you can either have a professional create one for you (may cost some money), or learn the components of a plan (book description, market research, target audience, goals and strategies, pricing your product, branding, tactics, budget, calendar/timeline, evaluation) and develop one yourself. Here's a great guide to help you further identify what you need to create your plan and why each component is important.

When figuring out your tactics, or the tangible methods you'll be using to promote your book, consider both digital and physical approaches like these:

- Create professional social media accounts for you and/or your book
  - Utilize ads on social media and other websites, or use Google Ads.
  - Create daily postings for your social media accounts.
  - Cultivate relationships with book promotion accounts and inquire about a shout out.
- Plan a book signing/event.
- Plan a giveaway or pre-sale campaign.
- Get showcased on a book blog.
- Create a commercial for YouTube.

SELF-PROMOTION

RUNNING ADS, THE BASICS

Disclaimer: Running ads does not guarantee book sales. In fact, promotion in general does not guarantee book sales.

It's a hard truth, especially because promotion is monumental, but running a successful ad campaign is an art and only if done effectively, you may see a nice return on investment.

If you haven't already, you should create a communications or marketing plan for your book (as mentioned in the previous section). You should know your goals and objectives, your target audience, what ad channels you want to use, how much money you want to spend, the time-frame of your promotion, and how you'll evaluate the results and success of your campaign. Your plan doesn't have to be too intricate, but it should be completely developed before jumping into the creation of your actual campaign.

Before you run anything, you'll need to learn your systems. Facebook and Instagram ads coincide and run concurrently, so if you want to run both, you'll only need to learn the Facebook platform, but it's important to understand what your options are so you don't under prepare your ad or attempt to advertise something that is against Facebook's advertising guidelines. Self-publishing outlets like Amazon or Barnes and Noble have their own promotional tools you can use, and all vary in ease of access and user-friendliness, so if it helps, limit yourself to only using a few platforms and focus on perfecting those campaigns.

To begin, you'll need to understand the associated costs of your ad and how final charges are dictated. Generally, you would be paying "cost per click", meaning that for every click of your ad, you'll pay a small fee (usually in cents, unless you opt into a larger fee). You'll mostly see this method used in Google Ads and your publishing outlet ads service. If we look at social media ads, they operate a bit differently. They often charge by "impressions". Impressions are the amount of people who see the ad. These people don't have to interact with the ad, but if it shows up on their feed and they scroll past it, that is an impression.

Facebook allows you to choose your pricing based on the amount of people or "impressions" you want to reach in your time frame. The price is not guaranteed–if you choose to pay $5/day to reach up to 4,000 impressions/day, your ad may not actually reach that amount of impressions, so that means that if you chose to run a 10-day campaign for $50, you will pay less than that if those impression numbers weren't met.

The amount of impressions your ad reaches is a good start, but you don't want to stop there. You want interaction with your ad. You want customers to do something, but for that to happen, your ad must be compelling enough for them to want to "learn more" or "shop now" and solidify the sale. To make an ad relevant, you should understand your target audience and create your ad based around what appeals to them. Facebook has more freedom with this, as it allows you to load your own photos, videos, and verbiage, while running an ad with Amazon or the like may have a more standard ad or "sponsored post" that limits you to only creating a message with a character limit. The upside to promoting through Amazon is that you will pay per click so you'll get a better view of how many people were interested in at least learning more about your book.

When running an ad through Amazon, you'll have the option to link your book ad to certain keywords and phrases you believe your audience would search. It's important that you take advantage of this feature because, though you want everyone to see your book, it will certainly get lost in other sponsored posts and ads if you don't focus your messaging to specific areas.

Amazon also allows you to run a free book promotion and discounted book promotion for your Kindle books if you are enrolled in KDP Select, which is a group that allows you to make money from [Kindle Unlimited](#) and [Kindle Owner's Lending Library](#) as long as your eBook is exclusively sold on Amazon. The free or discount promotion is great to opt into because your book will surely get downloads.

Going back to the cost of advertising, you can spend as little or as much as you like, but spending more will mean you have a higher chance of gaining interest, getting clicks, and generating sales.

RUNNING ADS, THE BASICS

HIRING A PROMOTER

You can promote the book on your own, but unless you already have a loyal following, your promotional efforts are not likely to be seen by many.

Hiring a book promoter or a publicist could be your ticket to reaching a massive audience, but that ticket will come at a hefty price (we're talking *thousands* of dollars). There are book promotion sites and accounts that will promote your book for a one-time fee or a recurring fee depending on the package you order, but truth be told, the chances of that money spent resulting in a book sale is very slim. The reason is that those accounts promote tons of books at a time, so your tweet, Facebook post, or even Instagram shout out quickly gets run over by other books being promoted. With that being said, you can certainly try those services out, but use those services sparingly.

If you want more reach with a higher chance of a book sale, you might consider contracting a book promoter or publicist to work directly with you to create a marketing plan and help get your book seen in higher places. Before you meet with a publicist, you'll need to know the following:

- What are your [SMART] goals for the book?
  - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant/Realistic, Time-Based
- Who is your target audience?
- What is your budget?

If you can answer these questions, your publicist will have a solid starting point. So, what will the publicist actually do? Well, it depends on what you want them to do and how much money you're able to pay them, but generally, the promoter will generate press releases for media, submit your book for reviews, and help plan everything listed under the self-promotion section. This [blog post](#) lays out all the services a publicist can do for you. The key difference between them and you is that your publicist will already have the connections that you would have to spend time to cultivate. Their existing network will also be comprised of people and services that you wouldn't immediately be aware of or have access to as a self-published author. If you are willing to pay the price, getting a book promoter will be a good investment.

PRE-SALES

When self-publishing and using a self-publishing outlet, your online pre-sale options are limited; some outlets do not offer pre-sale options at all, while some may offer restricted tactics.

Collecting pre-sales isn't a necessity, but it is a good marketing tool pre-release that can help get your book in public before it comes out.

If you want to do a pre-sale campaign, but your publishing outlet doesn't have that option, you can set up your own pre-sale plan. To do this, consider setting up a website or an online sales channel outside of your publishing outlet account, and offer pre-sales through those channels. People can purchase the book and be added to a distribution list once the book is officially published.

Keep in mind that when using self-publishing outlets, you will most likely be selling your books through the *print-on-demand method* (each order gets printed individually, packaged, and sent by the outlet, no inventory required.) *You won't be able to take an inventory of books using one of these outlets until you officially publish the book*. This isn't a bad thing, but it will mean prolonged waiting times between the time you collect pre-orders to the time those orders get sent out.

One way to do this is to collect pre-orders, publish the book, order an inventory of the ordered books and send them/give them out yourself. You can also choose to send the books individually through the publishing outlet, but keep in mind shipping costs.

If you decide not to go the POD route and plan to get the book printed and stock an inventory, you can use the same method as above, but you'll have the luxury of not waiting for copies of the book to be delivered, as you will get the completed project prior to announcing publication.

For added success, pair the pre-sale campaign with a special pre-sale price or gift. You can sell the book at a discounted rate for a certain time frame, do a giveaway or sweepstakes where the names of people who pre-ordered your book are automatically entered to win a nice prize, or you can offer the gift of exclusivity where those who get pre-orders will have the book a select period of time before the rest of the public.

There are a few conventional and unconventional ways of earning pre-sales. You should decide whether you will collect pre-orders when you make your marketing plan.

ISBNS, COPYRIGHT & OTHER THINGS

ISBNS
COPYRIGHT
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07

Your work as an author or publisher is never done. There's a lot to consider and work on, even after your book is published and thriving. This section touches on the future and what you should consider going forward.

ISBNS

An ISBN is an International Standard Book Number. It is a 10 or 13-digit unique identifier that is required to publish a book.

This number must be claimed <u>during </u>the publishing process. They can be used to search for a specific project and are also required for all books sold in a bookstore, an online retailer, or a library. An important note about ISBNs: *they are not only unique to title, but they are unique to format–paperback, eBook, hardcover, etc. With every format you publish your title, you'll have to give it a new ISBN.*

As a self-publisher, you'll have to acquire one of these numbers and in most cases, you'll have to pay a one-time fee. Depending on the website, the price may change, but the standard fee for ISBNs is $125/number. Bowker Identifier Services (Bowker) is the official ISBN agency for US publishers. There are other places you can purchase individual ISBNs for cheaper, but Bowker is legitimate, you are the owner of that ISBN, can name yourself or your publishing company as the imprint (publisher), and you save more money when you purchase in bulk than you do the "cheaper" sites. You need to be careful when purchasing from those sites because though it appears you're saving money, you're giving them the ownership of that ISBN (and your title), so they will be listed as the publisher of your book.

Bowker offer these options:
- 1 ISBN for $125; great for publication of one book in one format
- 10 ISBNs for $295; great for publication of one to three books in two or three formats each–*often recommended for self-publishers*.
- 100 for $575; great for small publishers who plan to publish many books in various formats
- 1000 for $1500; great for small publishers who plan to publish many books in various formats.

There's one way of avoiding the ISBN fee, and that's giving up your right as the publisher–in other words, allowing another publisher or publishing service to list themselves as the publisher instead of you or your company.

ISBNS

You can do so by publishing your book through publishing sites like Amazon (KDP), who give you the option of using your own ISBN or getting a free one. If you choose to get a free one, the imprint listed will be Kindle Direct Publishing. If you want your company listed, you'll need to supply the publishing service a number you purchased. If the imprint listing is not important to you, then it's cost-effective to take the free ISBN option. Please note that if you want your books to be picked up by libraries, you must purchase your own ISBN. Libraries won't accept books with ISBNs assigned by KDP or Ingram Spark–they must be associated with a press or you.

Barcodes: Barcodes are the graphic on the back of the book that show the ISBN and the price of the book. These are required when selling your physical book through larger distribution services and sellers, like a Barnes & Noble store. These are more useful to the retailer than the publisher for inventory purposes, but you can purchase them separately or with a package on Bowker and other ISBN sites. *Remember:* Bowker is the official ISBN agency, so if you intend on selling your book through physical bookstores, you should purchase it through Bowker. You can also save the barcodes for later if you don't use them when you buy them. Barcodes are also good to have when you're working with a book designer, are getting the books printed, and want to sell the books through a traditional retailer (bookstore, or you keep an inventory and sell through your own website). The book designer can place the barcode on the back cover during design, and it will be valid.

When you ***don't*** need an ISBN: The only time you won't need an ISBN for a book, is if you have a project you're giving away in a digital format. You often see this done with free digital downloads brands promote in order to build their email lists. If your project is something you simply plan to give away or not sell traditionally, then you don't need an ISBN. *Side note:* giving away books is a great marketing technique. Read more on that in the *Self-Promotion* section!

ISBN

COPYRIGHT

The first thing you need to know about getting your work copyrighted is that *you don't have to get your work legally copyrighted for it to be protected.*

Read that sentence again. *The fact is, your work is automatically protected under copyright law as soon as it's published.*

Legally copyrighting your work protects you from an unlikely litigation and protects your work from getting "copied" verbatim. That last part is key–in order to win a copyright infringement case, the plaintiff must prove that the work or idea was stolen directly from them and used illegally. The only difference between getting your work legally copyrighted and not is the award of damages and court fees.

Though it's not necessary, registering your work(s) with the U.S. Library of Congress is a safe bet. You can begin the process by going to copyright.gov, create an account, and begin your registration. Keep these few things in mind: there are different costs for different types of copyright, and you can also copyright parts of your book or a whole collection instead of individual parts (if your book is an anthology). You should read through the [FAQ](FAQ) on the copyright website to get a full understanding of how to register your work.

You may also come across other websites that offer copyright services, but they're not recommended unless you don't mind paying for the convenience of not filling out the registration yourself. You'd be paying extra for the service and providing them the same information as you would have to the Copyright office, so it's best to do it yourself.

If you're registering your own work, you'll already have all the information you need to register, but if you're registering someone else's work, make sure you have exact names, addresses, titles, and emails so there is no delay in processing. The standard price to register one literary work by one author is $65, but there is a lower fee for "Single author, same claimant, one work, not for hire"–or one work that contains no previously copyrighted or written parts for $45.

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The second option should only be used if your work is 100 percent original and doesn't contain quotes or references to any other published works. You can view the complete fee schedule <u>here</u>.

Once you've submitted the information and paid the fee, you'll have the option of submitting the manuscript digitally or mailing a copy of the published book to the Library of Congress. The quickest way is submitting the manuscript digitally, but some cases may require you to send the physical copy. Please note that you only need to do one of these–do not send a copy and submit it digitally. You'll receive a confirmation that your book was accepted and if there are any issues with the registration, you will be notified of the issues and will be able to address them. If there are no problems, be prepared to wait between three to eight months to receive the official certificate of registration in the mail.

A clever way to ensure copyright of work without going through the copyright process is to mail a copy of your published work to yourself and keep the package sealed. Your envelope will be date stamped which will serve as proof of date range of publication.

COPYRIGHT

OTHER THINGS

Your book is published and you've even sold some copies to strangers. You can breathe easier now, but don't get too comfortable.

Your book is now out for the world to see forever, and you should be proud, but your work is never done.

You can't let your momentum stop once you've sold some books. Never stop promoting it. Never stop being proud of your accomplishment. Never stop writing.

Order some copies of your book, sign them, and keep an inventory. You never know when someone might be interested in purchasing your book. If you have them on hand, you can solidify that sale. Don't be afraid to promote your book on your social media, in fact, now is the time to create your brand as an author.

How can you get started? Refer to this and this. If you don't have one already, get yourself a website. This will require an investment, but a worthwhile one. Here, you'll be able to post project updates, share news, and more. Your website will also be the perfect place to host giveaways and exclusive sales on your books that readers can't find anywhere else. In addition to your website, be sure to create a mailing list. Your mailing list will be the bridge between you and your readers. It doesn't have to be fancy, nor do you have to reach out daily (in fact–don't do that. You'll overwhelm your readers and it could result in a high unsubscribe rate because they may consider it spam). Reach out when you have meaningful content and news to share. It's the perfect way to keep your readers in the loop while making them feel included in your process.

If your book is about a social issue, find out if that issue has a dedicated month (October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month, etc.) and put together an event to not only promote the issue, but your book as well. You can even go as far as to donate some of your earnings to a nonprofit that does great work on that issue.

OTHER THINGS

Do you know any other authors, or even just have friends who want to sell something? Plan a joint event where you all can market your businesses and products and invite the public out to shop.

These are just a few ideas, but there are plenty of ways to keep your momentum going. Are you thinking about writing a sequel or has this process inspired you and given you another idea to work on? You may be excited to jump right into the next project, but make sure you give yourself time to regroup and evaluate the process you just went through. What worked and what didn't? Do you plan to hire a professional and need to save some money? Can your story planning process be better? Consider all the variables and think about ways to improve yourself.

Embrace reviews, no matter how good or how scathing they come. Reading is a subjective form of entertainment, and your book won't impress everyone, but if you've been able to get reviews, listen to your readers. They make up what could be your loyal readership.

OTHER THINGS

Continue to write and never stop striving to reach the level you believe you deserve.

For more writing resources, visit our website www.wur.happielitworks.com where you'll find loads of links to writing resources from across the web.

Happy writing!