

A Beginner's Guide to Self-Publishing



A mini-ebook from
Mental Health @ Home

mentalhealthathome.org

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Chapter 1: Intro

Perhaps you've always dreamed of writing a book, but you didn't think it was within the realm of possibility. Or maybe you've seen fellow bloggers publish books, and that has piqued your interest. What's holding back? Do you not feel confident in your writing abilities? Do you have no idea how to even begin to go about it?

Whether you think you're capable or not, I'm here to tell you that yes, you can. Self-publishing isn't that difficult, although it feels like there's a lot to learn at first, and it doesn't have to cost you a dime.

This mini-ebook covers the fundamentals that you need to consider on your publishing journey. So set aside your doubts, and let's plunge forward into the realm of self-publishing. You've totally got this!

Chapter 2: Publishing Options

There are three main routes you can take to get your book out in front of people. Before we get to self-publishing, we'll quickly cover the other options, traditional and hybrid publishing.

Traditional Publisher

This is the route most of us are familiar with, and it's the way books typically get into major bookstores. A publisher decides that they're interested in your book, and they assume all of the financial risks associated with bringing your book up to professional standards and getting it to market. If they're sufficiently keen on your book and think you truly are the best thing since sliced bread, they may even pay you an advance.

This is the most difficult option to access, and you should expect to receive multiple rejections. The first step is often finding an agent, as many publishers won't accept manuscripts submitted directly by authors. You'll probably need to pitch your book to multiple agents, and if an agent agrees to take it on, then will come the attempts to find a publisher.

If, like me, your focus is mental health, Trigger Publishing (www.triggerpublishing.com) is a U.K.-based mental health publisher that was set up by the Shaw Mind Foundation. They've published work by several people who are active in the online mental health community. Authors can submit directly to them without an agent. I've heard that they expect authors to have an established social media following and actively promote the book on their social channels.

Aeon Books (<https://www.aeonbooks.co.uk/KarnacPub.asp>) and Jessica Kingsley Publishers (<https://www.jkp.com/uk/write-for-us/>) also publish mental health-related books, and submissions don't require an agent.

If you do want to try finding an agent, the first step is to identify agents who are interested in the genre of book that you're writing. Once you've identified some potential targets, the next step is to figure out exactly what they're looking for when it comes to pitches, since you don't want to give them an easy excuse to ignore your book. From there, go wild sending out pitches. Be prepared for rejection; unfortunately, it's just part of the game.

A few examples of websites with agent listings:

- Manuscript Wish List: www.manuscriptwishlist.com/find-agentseditors/agent-list/
- QueryTracker: querytracker.net
- Publishing... and Other Forms of Insanity: publishedtodeath.blogspot.com/p/agents.html

While going the traditional publishing route certainly has its advantages in getting your book out there for the world to see it, your royalties will be a smaller percentage of sales than if you opt for self-publishing. Working with an editor at a traditional publisher can obviously be very helpful in making your book the best it can be, but it also means giving up some of the creative control over the project.

Hybrid Publisher

Hybrid publishers offer something somewhere in between traditional publishing and self-publishing. They don't accept just any book for publication, so in theory, there's some assurance of quality compared to self-publishing. You also have the publisher's experience to hopefully improve the quality of the final published product. However, you as the author need to foot the bill for the initial costs associated with publishing the book. These costs will be laid out in the contract they offer you, and you'll need to figure out if you're likely to generate enough sales to recoup those up-front costs.

What the publisher will do for your money needs to be clarified right from the beginning. I once read a blogger's book that was put out by a hybrid publisher. Grammar was not this writer's strong point, and the publisher went ahead and released the book riddled with grammatical errors. It looked like a copy editor hadn't been within miles of the manuscript. I don't know how much this writer paid, but they were robbed, plain and simple.

That's not to say that all hybrid publishers will try to take advantage of you, but you'll need to be very careful to look out for your own interests as an author.

Self-Publishing

Self-publishing offers you complete control over every aspect of publishing your book. There are several platforms you can use; Amazon is by far and away the largest. The main ones are:

- **Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing:** kdp.amazon.com
- **Kobo:** writinglife.kobobooks.com
- **Barnes & Noble:** press.barnesandnoble.com
- **Apple Books** (formerly iBooks): itunespartner.apple.com
- **Google Play:** play.google.com/books/publish/u/0/

You don't have to be exclusive to one platform, although Amazon offers you incentives if your ebook is published exclusively with their KDP Select program, which we'll cover later. Aside from that, you can publish with any or all of them at the same time.

There's no cost associated with self-publishing your book through the platforms listed above. You set a price, and the platform will pay you royalties based on your book sales. If you choose to offer a paperback edition (which can be done through Amazon or B&N), a printing fee will be deducted from each sale, and then you'll get your percentage royalty based on the list price minus printing fee. Paperbacks are printed on demand when people order your book, so there's no need to establish an inventory to keep in stock.

If you're looking for some extra assistance, Barnes & Noble offers to connect you to third party support services, so you can pay to get help with editing, design, or marketing. Kobo can also connect you with design and editorial services.

Google has ventured into the self-publishing world through Google Play. They started off only taking a select number of new publishers, but now they've opened it up for anyone to publish.

I'll quickly mention Scribd, which is a site that allows you to upload content that can be read by subscribers. Maybe it's just me, but it seems remarkably difficult to figure out how/if/when you get paid. If you want to check it out, go to www.scribd.com/upload-document

Publisher/Distributors

Publisher/distributors will publish your book and distribute it across multiple bookselling platforms. They can simplify things for you, but any time you're adding in another layer between yourself and your readers, there will be some decrease in the amount that you make. Essentially, you end up paying (directly or indirectly) for the increased ease, but that may be the most worthwhile overall for you.

Smashwords

An interesting looking option in this category is Smashwords (www.smashwords.com), which does ebooks only. They have a style guide to let you know how they want you to format your ebook, and they'll take care of adjusting the formatting so that it fits the specific requirements for each of the various distribution channels. They'll offer your book for sale on the Smashwords website, and you will get 80% royalties on those sales.

They will also distribute your book to Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Scribd, Overdrive (used by many libraries) and more. You earn 60% on those sales. There is no cost associated with publication; they make money on commission from sales.

Ingram Spark

Ingram Spark (www.ingramspark.com) charges an upfront fee (USD 25 for ebook or USD 49 for both ebook and print). They give you the option to publish a hardcover or paperback book. They distribute to major platforms like Amazon, Kobo, Barnes & Noble, and Apple Books. They also have a selection of free self-publishing resources, but you do have to provide your email address to get copies.

Blurb

Blurb (www.blurb.com) will publish your book and distribute it on their own platform, plus they allow you to go through Ingram to reach other platforms. Their pricing guide lays out the associated costs. www.blurb.com/pricing#/

Lulu

Lulu (<https://www.lulu.com/>) is another option. You can publish an ebook for free, plus there are options to do paperbacks, hardcovers, or add publishing service packages.

Tip

If you want to keep things as simple as possible and just publish in one place, Amazon should be it. Whether you like Amazon or not, it has a huge portion of the book market. If you want to be able to run Amazon ads to sell your book, you'll want to go through KDP directly. There may be a way to run ads if you publish indirectly through a publisher/distributor, but if there is, I haven't figured it out yet.

Chapter 3: Writing

The nice thing about self-publishing is that you decide what you want to write about, your readers decide what they want to read, and nobody else is getting involved.

I have no great wisdom to share about the writing process. Personally, I don't find it helpful to set a target word count for the day, and I don't push myself to write every day. I don't write in order from beginning to end; I create an outline and fill in bits and pieces here and there as I go. However you want to write is "allowed". If you're having writer's block, try shifting your attention to another project for a while.

If you seem to be permanently stuck, think about what your expectations are. If they're really high and you're setting yourself up for failure, that's not going to be conducive to letting the creative juices flow. The reality is that you can't fail at self-publishing. There's no arbitrary bar that you have to leap over to be a "real" author with a "real" book. If the only copy you end up selling is to your mom (and me, because I want to read your book when it comes out), then that's okay. Your book is still good enough, and you are still good enough.

Word count

Your target word count will depend on the type of book you're writing. The Write Life (<https://thewritelife.com/how-many-words-in-a-novel/>) recommends:

- **Fiction:** 50,000 to 110,000
- **Young adult:** 50,000 to 80,000
- **Standard non-fiction:** 70,000 to 80,000
- **Memoir:** 80,000 to 100,000
- **How-to or self-help:** 40,000 to 50,000

These suggested word counts matter if you're trying to get published through the traditional route, but if you're self-publishing, the world is your oyster.

If you're publishing a paperback edition, more word count means more pages means higher printing costs. That may not have any relevance at this stage of the game, but it's still good to know.

Useful Resources

Cherish Editions is the self-publishing operation that's associated with Trigger Publishing, a mental health publisher. They have some good tips on writing a health memoir: <https://cherisheditions.com/useful-resources/>

Scribe has free self-directed online courses on writing non-fiction and writing memoirs. They also have an ebook on The Scribe Method for writing nonfiction. <https://scribewriting.com/resources/>

Writer's Digest has articles, competitions, online writing workshops, and more. <https://www.writersdigest.com/>

Helping Writers Become Authors has tips on novel-writing, from outlining to structuring scenes. <https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/>

Chapter 4: Editing

Editing is a major part of getting your book ready to publish. Obviously, you want your book to be the best it can be before you release it out into the world. You'll need to do basic proofreading for spelling and grammar, look for stylistic consistency, and check formatting and headings, and on top of all that you'll have to edit for content. Are you expressing your ideas effectively? Are there sections that need to be pruned down or expanded?

Editing your own work can be hard to do. We tend to read what we know is supposed to be there rather than what's actually there. I find that it's helpful to do brief chunks of editing at a time, and stop as soon as I notice I'm starting to skim. Reading in different formats can be helpful; I might see things in the Kindle Create app that I missed in the Word document. Zooming in or enlarging the font can make it easier to notice mistakes. You can also corral a friend or family member in to check for obvious mistakes.

Online Editing Apps

Perhaps grammar isn't your strong point. Or maybe you just have a hard time seeing your own work clearly. Maybe you have your favourite clichéd phrasing crutches that you use more often than you should. Apps can be a good way to compensate for any blind spots you might have in this area.

Grammarly

Grammarly (www.grammarly.com) seems to be one of the best known. It's available as an extension for Google Chrome, so it will automatically check anything you're writing within your web browser. To check Word documents, you can open them using Google Docs. Grammarly picks up spelling and grammatical errors as well as style issues.

I started using Grammarly not that long ago. It doesn't pick up everything, but it does manage to catch a lot. I don't always agree with its suggestions, but overall I find it very useful, and it's the main editing tool in my toolbox.

ProWritingAid

ProWritingAid (prowritingaid.com) is available as a Google Chrome extension or in a premium version. It checks basic grammar and spelling, as well as clichés, redundancies, plagiarism, and readability. I find it a lot less helpful than Grammarly.

Hemingway App

You can copy and paste text into the website (www.hemingwayapp.com), or use the downloadable desktop version. It gives you a readability grade and highlights problematic elements like hard to read sentences and passive voice.

Cliché Finder

You can paste text into the Cliché Finder site (cliche.theinfo.org), and it will point out any parts of it that are highly clichéd. Chances are you have a few go-to clichés that you use more than you actually realize.

OneLook Thesaurus

If you tend to reuse the same word or word combinations over and over again, OneLook Thesaurus (www.onelook.com/thesaurus/) will give you ideas of alternatives that you can use. You can input single words or phrases.

Hire a Pro

Just to be clear, you don't need to hire a professional editor. However, if you've got some extra money to spend, it's one way to help make your book the best it can possibly be. Reedsy (reedsy.com/editing/book-editor) is one place to go to find experienced freelance editors. Rates will vary depending on whether you want a simple proofread, a more thorough copy edit, or developmental editing that goes even deeper. This blog post on Reedsy gives you some idea of what to expect: blog.reedsy.com/freelancer/how-to-set-your-freelance-editing-rates/

Consider the rate you're quoted in light of what you're likely to earn in book sales to help you decide if this is a good choice for you. To really be able to take advantage of a good editor, you need to get the book in people's hands first.

At some point in the editing process, you're just going to have to decide that the book is done. You could get caught in a cycle of endless editing and minute revisions, but it's not going to make your book any better. Do what you can, and then allow your baby to leave the nest.

And if you happen to notice a typo post-publication? It's quick and easy to make the change and upload the new file to your self-publishing site – no harm, no foul.

Chapter 5: Prepping & Formatting the Manuscript

Formatting can be a pain in the butt. The more platforms you're planning to publish on, the more different formatting requirements you'll have to adhere to. A big benefit of going with a publisher/ distributor like Smashwords is that you just have to stick to their format, and they'll take care of the rest.

Chances are you've been writing your manuscript in a word processor that can save in .docx format. To publish an ebook, that will need to be converted at some point along the way to a format that can be displayed on an ereader.

Reflowable Ereader Formats

Ereader formats are “reflowable”, which means that they aren't broken up into set pages. Instead, the amount of text shown to the reader on a “page” will be adjusted based on the size of the ereader and the user's preferred text size. Formats like .docx and .pdf are non-reflowable. Epub is a reflowable format from Adobe that is not device-specific. The reflowable format used on Kindle devices is .mobi.

Epub

When publishing with Kobo or Google Play, you'll upload an epub file. Converting a document from .docx to epub isn't all that difficult, although some of your formatting may not transfer over perfectly. There are various online and downloadable converters, but one of the easiest options is Google Docs, which can convert a Word document to epub.

To check if any of your formatting got lost in translation on the way to epub, the epub document can be viewed in Adobe Digital Editions, which is free to download from <https://www.adobe.com/solutions/ebook/digital-editions/download.html>

For Barnes & Noble, you can upload an epub or docx file. If you upload a docx file, make sure it follows the formatting specification that B&N outlines, otherwise some of your formatting may not convert properly. Uploading an epub file will ensure that your formatting is maintained.

If you're using Apple Pages as your word processor, you can export a file straight from Pages into epub format.

Mobi

Mobi is the format used by Kindle ereaders. If you're publishing through Amazon KDP, you'll use the Kindle Create software to do all the formatting. If you want to sell (or give away) your book in mobi format elsewhere, like your website, converting to a mobi file is a bit more of a production, since word processors won't save in that format.

Calibre (calibre-ebook.com) is free downloadable software that allows you to convert between a number of different file types, including docx, epub, and mobi. It's what I use to create the mobi book files that I have available for purchase on my website. Reedsy (blog.reedsy.com/epub-to-mobi-converter/) also has an online converter that lets you upload an epub file and it will generate a mobi file.

Smashwords

Smashwords has a style guide to help you put together your manuscript, and they will then reformat it to meet the specific requirements of each distribution platform. You can find the guide here: www.smashwords.com/books/view/52

Paperback Formatting

Paperbacks have different formatting requirements than ebooks. The publisher you decide to go with will lay out the specifics of what they expect. You can set up the formatting in a Word document yourself without too much difficulty, or you can use a template from the publisher. Amazon's Word template can be found here: kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G201834230.

Try to minimize the use of special characters. Amazon is picky about what they'll allow, but they won't necessarily point that out to you. I wasted a significant amount of time and frustration over a paperback manuscript that Amazon refused to accept (but wouldn't tell me why it was refusing it). After a great deal of fussing around, I realized it was because I'd used an emoji asterisk that it wouldn't recognize.

My personal preference is to prepare the manuscript early on in the required paperback formatting. I've found this easier than writing a manuscript with no particular formatting and then have to go back later and switch it up the create both ebook and paperback-compatible formatting.

Front Matter and Back Matter

The "front matter" is everything that goes before the main body of your work. This can include the title page, copyright page, dedication, table of contents, and foreword or preface.

You don't need to have a copyright page, but it's a standard part of a book, and it's easy to do. There's more detail on copyright in the next chapter. There are several pieces of information to consider including on your copyright page:

- Copyright © YourName Year
- All rights reserved (this means you reserve all of the rights associated with being a copyright holder)
- Your book's ISBN, if applicable
- Your publishing imprint, if you've created your own
- Any appropriate disclaimers, such as your book being a work of fiction, or not intended as medical advice, etc.

When figuring out your wording, it may be helpful to look at a traditionally published book that's in the same genre as yours and see what wording they've used.

For more info on setting up a copyright page, these articles can help you out:

- blog.reedsy.com/copyright-page/
- www.bookdesignmadesimple.com/copyright-page-template/

The “back matter” is anything that comes after the end of your manuscript, and this can include an appendix, glossary, reference list, and about the author page. All of this is optional, but an author page is a good way to let your readers know a little more about you, as well as point them in the direction of your website.

Reedsy has more info on front and back matter here:

blog.reedsy.com/front-matter-back-matter-book/

Chapter 6: Cover design

Your book cover is the face that your book presents to the reading world. The more appealing your cover is, the more likely people are to notice your book and think about buying it.

Design Elements

Fonts

Certain fonts are more popular for book covers, such as Baskerville, Chunk Five, and League Gothic. Using a classic font will give a more professional look to your cover. Try to use only one or two fonts on the cover; anything more than that and it may not look as cohesive.

These are a couple of good resources for more info on fonts:

www.coverdesignstudio.com/typeface-font-book-covers/

www.canva.com/learn/the-ultimate-guide-to-font-pairing/

Font size

The title should be 48pt or above, the subtitle and the author's name should be between 18-36pt, and descriptive text can be 10-12pt.

Colours

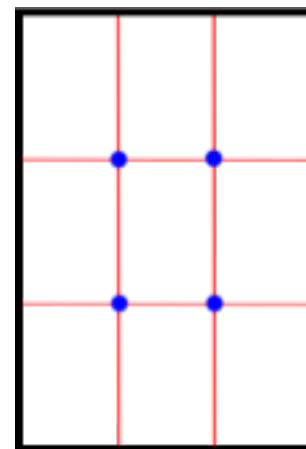
Colours can have a huge impact. Make sure that your font colours are clearly visible over any background colours. Everything should be easily decipherable on the small thumbnail image that will accompany your book's listing on retailer sites.

Cover Design Studio has a helpful article: www.coverdesignstudio.com/best-colors-book-covers/

Composition

The rule of thirds is a commonly used principle in graphic design. Divide the design area into three rows and three columns. The points where the lines intersect will be the focal points.

The top left focal point gets 41% of the viewer's attention, the top right gets 20%, the bottom left gets 25%, and the bottom right gets 14%. Try to place the key elements of your cover design to correspond to these focal points.



Canva

Canva (www.canva.com) is a wonderful thing. It has a large selection of book cover templates, many of which are free. You can adapt and customize these however you want. No artistic/design talent is required. You can use font effects like lift or shadow to help your text stand out from any background images.

Canva allows you to save your cover image in jpg or png format. If you're publishing on Amazon, the Cover Creator paperback cover tool will allow jpg or png, but your ebook cover must be in jpg format.

Canva Learn has helpful info, including this post on cover design that has plenty of examples: www.canva.com/learn/book-cover-design-50-amazing-covers-you-will-want-to-pick-up/

Amazon Cover Creator

When you publish on Amazon KDP, you're given the option to design your cover using their Cover Creator tool. It's not a downloadable app; rather, it's used on the KDP book editing site. I find it pretty clunky, and there's limited freedom as to what you're able to do. The selection of cover templates and colours is narrow, too.

If you're publishing a paperback with KDP, you can use their Cover Creator to design the spine and back cover of your book, and upload your own image file to use as the front cover. Cover Creator leaves a box of empty white space on the back cover that will be where the book's barcode will end up going. Text will be printed on the spine only if the page count is high enough, making the spine wide enough to allow for text.

A colour is a colour is a colour, right? Yeah, not so much. There are different colour spaces that are used for different purposes. RGB (red-green-blue) is used on the web, and for your ebook. CMYK (cyan-magenta-yellow-black) is used for paper printing, like for your paperback. Hex codes (e.g. #FFDA89) are another way of representing colours.

If you're using Canva, it lets you play around with your colours using hex codes, and saves files in the RGB colour space. That's great for your ebook, but not necessarily as great for your paperback. When you upload your file, KDP processes it and converts it to CMYK. That can change the colour — sometimes, a lot. That means that the thumbnail that shows on your paperback's Amazon page won't look the way you want it. KDP is aware of this, and says that it's just part of the process, and there's nothing they can do.

The significance of the change seems to depend on the colour. My first book's cover was purple, and the change was quite minor. My second book's cover was teal, and it looked awful. I spent a year fussing around with the stupid thing until I figured out the CMYK, and I signed up for a free week trial of Photoshop to change up the colour space. Finally, I was able to get the cover looking like I wanted it to.

Amazon has guidelines for cover images that can be found here:

kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G201113520

Hire a Designer

Your book's cover is going to be a key selling feature, so you want it to look good. If there's one thing that you're going to shell out money for as part of your self-publishing adventure, getting a designer to do your cover is probably your best choice. However, it's certainly not affordable for everyone, nor is it something that you have to do.

There are plenty of options. One example to check out to give you some idea of what's involved is 99 Designs, which has good online ratings: 99designs.ca/book-cover-design

Chapter 7: Preparing to Self-Publish

Okay, so you've finished writing your book. This chapter covers a few more bits and pieces that are involved in bringing your book to life.

Write a Book Description

If your cover is the first thing that people will notice, your book description/blurb is probably the second. This description will be able to accompany your book across whatever publishing platform you choose, and you'll probably want to put it on the back cover of your paperback if you decide to publish a paperback version. It lets readers know what your book is about and why they should want to read it. It should be concise, yet also give a pretty good idea of what to expect from the book.

KDP paperback descriptions

Amazon KDP has a strange quirk when it comes to book descriptions. If you have multiple paragraphs in your ebook description, the end result that will show up on the book's product page will be formatted in multiple paragraphs just as you entered it. For whatever reason, though, for the paperback, Amazon ends up lumping it all into one paragraph. If you do want to have separate paragraphs in your description, you can HTML line break tags in the book description field.

Let's say you entered this in the description field:

Paragraph 1.

Paragraph 2.

The result on the product listing page would actually show up as:

Paragraph 1. Paragraph 2.

In order to actually separate your paragraphs, you need to bookend each paragraph with the tags to start break `
` and end break `</br>`.

So, if you entered:

`
Paragraph 1.</br>
Paragraph 2.</br>`

On your product page, it would be displayed as:

Paragraph 1.

Paragraph 2.

Reedsy and Ingram Spark offer some insights on writing a stellar book description:

- blog.reedsy.com/book-description/
- www.ingramspark.com/blog/how-to-write-a-good-book-description

Set Up an Author Profile

If you're selling on Amazon, Amazon Author Central allows you to set up an author profile, plus you can see customer reviews and track your book's sales ranking. There are separate Author Central systems for the US and the UK that don't share information, and you might as well get yourself set up on both. You're able to upload photos and videos, and you can link your blog so that your most recent blog posts are displayed on your Amazon author page.

authorcentral.amazon.com | authorcentral.amazon.co.uk

ISBNs and ASINs

Every book has a unique number associated with it, and you'll need one of these numbers for your book. This is less of an issue with an ebook, as the distributor will generate their own number for you.

ASIN is the Amazon Standard ID Number, a 10-digit alphanumeric identifier that's used specifically for ebooks published by Amazon. Amazon will automatically assign an ASIN to any ebooks you publish.

ISBN is the International Standard Book Number, which is 13 digits (older ISBNs were 10 digits). You'll need an ISBN for any print books published. If you're self-publishing a paperback, the publishing platform can issue a free ISBN for your book. That ISBN number is linked to that specific publisher/distributor, so if you were publishing a paperback on Barnes & Noble you wouldn't be able to use your Amazon ISBN for the same book. Under your book listing on Amazon, the publisher field will say "Independently published".

You can assign an ISBN to your ebooks if you wish, but it's not necessary. The ISBN for your ebook would need to be different from the ISBN for your paperback.

Purchasing your own ISBN

If you're so inclined, you can obtain your own ISBN. This belongs to you rather than to a particular distributor, so you can use the same number with different distributors for your book, which means that, to book sellers, libraries, and search engines, it's all the same book no matter where it came from.

Each country has an agency that handles ISBN numbers. You'll be asked to provide a publisher name; this can either be your own name, or you can create your own publishing imprint (mine is Mental Health @ Home Books). Check if there are any legal/tax implications where you live that might be associated with creating your own imprint.

US: Bowker: www.bowker.com

In the United States, Bowker handles ISBN allocation. There's a fee for this, although you may be able to gain a discount through your publisher (e.g. Amazon). You can choose how many ISBNs you want to publish, and then assign them to your books.

Canada: Library & Archives Canada: www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/isbn-canada/pages/isbn-canada.aspx

In Canada, you can get ISBNs for free through Library and Archives Canada. They'll assign you a range of ISBNs, and you can generate a new ISBN within that range for any subsequent books that you publish.

UK: Nielsen Agency: www.nielsenisbnstore.com

Australia: Thorpe-Bowker: www.myidentifiers.com.au

Digital Rights Management (DRM)

Digital Rights Management makes it harder to copy digital content, and thus harder to pirate your work. That's great in theory, but it can end up creating a hassle for your readers if they're trying to read your book on multiple devices. And while it will probably stop the average person from copying your book to give to their friend, DRM is unlikely to be much of an obstacle for the kind of pirates you're more likely to be concerned about.

There are a couple of key DRM systems to be aware of: Amazon's and Adobe's. The rights are linked to your Kindle ID and Adobe ID respectively.

My impression is that for most self-publishing authors, DRM isn't sufficiently useful for it to be worth potentially bothering your readers with.

Copyright

Copyright laws are specific to the country you're in. While you probably automatically have copyright protection once you have created a work, if you ever needed to follow through on

copyright action against another party, it can help to be registered with the federal copyright office. This registration has an associated cost, though, so it may not be worth it for you to pursue. It's not something I've done with any of my books.

Here are sites where you can find further details:

- U.S.: www.copyright.gov/registration/
- Canada: www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/cipointernet-internetopic.nsf/eng/h_wr02281.html
- U.K. www.gov.uk/copyright
- Australia: www.nla.gov.au/about-copyright

You may notice post-publication that if you do an internet search for your book, it may appear to be available through some random or sketchy-looking sites.

If it's a paperback on a random but legit-looking site, it may be because you've made your Amazon paperback available for extended distribution. If you've got your book listed with Kobo, they supply ebooks for multiple booksellers around the globe; U-Buy is a big one that I've come across. In these cases, you should still get royalties for any sales of your book.

Then there will be the sketchy sites. If what shows up in the Google search result is a PDF or some other file to download, chances are probably slim that it's your book and much higher that it's a sketchy link or it's a malicious file that you really don't want. Don't click the download link, but if you're curious, see if there's a Google Cache view available (click the upside down triangle that may appear next to the URL in the Google search results).

Some sites appear to offer free downloads if you sign up for an account. It's probably not the best idea to sign up, unless you're okay with them having your email address and spamming you until the end of time. Instead, hunt around on the site and see if there's a way to file a DMCA notice.

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) is an American law that offers quite sweeping copyright protection of digital material. It allows hosting companies to take down material from a site when they receive a notice that it's infringing on someone's copyright. Countries outside of the U.S. don't have to adhere to this U.S. law, but in many countries, internet hosting companies will act on DMCA notices.

Have a look around the sketchy site claiming to sell your book to see if you can find anything about where to submit DMCA notices. If not, you should be able to find an email contact to report abuse the WhoIs lookup sites <https://whois.domaintools.com/>

Overall, though, the chances are pretty low that anyone who would be inclined to actually buy your book is going to instead choose to try to download it from some sketchy website. It's worth plugging your book title into a search engine on a somewhat regular basis to see what it's going online, but what appears to be a copyright violation may not be worth the energy of getting worked up about.

Chapter 8: Publishing Your Book

Keep in mind that for all of these sites, there will be a delay before your book, and any changes you make to it, gets published, since the site needs to approve your changes first. Usually, this happens the same day, but not necessarily.

Amazon – Kindle Direct Publishing

KDP (kdp.amazon.com) is the section of Amazon that handles self-publishing of both ebooks and paperbacks. KDP has replaced Amazon's old platform, CreateSpace. KDP has plenty of resources available to help you learn the ropes. KDP Jumpstart takes you through step by step from start to finish: kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G202187740

KDP University offers additional support in the form of webinars and videos:
kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G200783400

Kindle Create

www.amazon.com/Kindle-Create/b?ie=UTF8&node=18292298011

To prepare your ebook manuscript for publishing, you will need to load your docx file into Amazon's downloadable software called Kindle Create in order to convert it to the proper format. Personally, I'm not a fan of Kindle Create and its lack of functionality, but that really doesn't matter, since it's not something you're given a choice about. Images in particular can be annoying to work with.

Headings may or may not get converted properly into Kindle Create, and the table of contents may require some fussing around with. Even after three books, it still takes me a while to do all the needed fussing around to get a book ready to go in Kindle Create.

KDP Select

kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G200798990

You have the option to enrol your Kindle ebook in KDP Select. KDP Select locks you into a 3-month term of exclusivity with Amazon for selling your ebook (it doesn't apply to the paperback). The benefits of KDP Select are eligibility for 70% royalties on sales in Brazil, Japan, India, and Mexico (probably a minor benefit for most people), availability of your book through Kindle Unlimited, and the ability to offer five free ebook promotional days for every 3-month period.

Kindle Unlimited is Amazon's monthly ebook subscription plan, and each month, all of the funds

in the Kindle Unlimited pool get divided up based on how many pages of your book were read through Kindle Unlimited. It can be a good way to get exposure for your book, but chances are you're not going to earn all much through KDP Select payments. To give you some idea, in the six months that my first book was enrolled in KDP Select, I made \$26.

If you do choose to enrol in KDP Select, keep in mind that at the end of your three month term, your KDP Select enrolment will automatically be renewed for another three months. If you cancel before the end of the three months, you'll stay enrolled for the remainder of your current term and then it won't get renewed.

Setting up a KDP ebook

The first section in the ebook setup is the ebook details page. This is where you'll enter the book description. You can choose two categories for your book to be listed under as well as 7 search keywords you'd like to be associated with it.

The next section is ebook content. You can choose whether or not you want to use digital rights management, which was discussed in the previous chapter. You'll upload both your manuscript file from Kindle Create and your book cover image. You have the option to enter an ISBN if you want, but it's not necessary as the book will be known by the ASIN that Amazon assigns to it. I used my own ISBN simply because I get them free to use with my publishing imprint, but otherwise, I can't think of any reason to use your own ISBN for an ebook. This section is also where you'll enter presale information if you decide to offer that.

The final step is ebook pricing. Here you'll choose whether or not to enrol in KDP Select. If you're publishing your own work, you'll select that you have worldwide distribution rights. You can use KDP pricing support to see the price that Amazon predicts will earn you the most royalties. You can choose the 35% or 70% royalty plan, and it will show you the price range your book needs to fall within in order to be eligible for the 70% plan. When you enter a price it will show you how much you'll make in royalties per book. You can enrol in Matchbook to let people buy your ebook at a discount if they buy your paperback. I've never done this simply because it didn't sound like a scenario that would be likely to happen.

Then that's it, you click publish!

Paperbacks

Amazon allows you to sell paperback copies of your book as well as ebooks. The paperbacks are print-on-demand, meaning that when someone places an order, a copy will be printed by Amazon in the purchaser's region and shipped to them. This means that there are no costs incurred with needing to maintain an inventory on hand.

The first setup section is paperback details. Here you'll enter your book description, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, you'll need to use HTML break tags if you want your description to be separated into multiple paragraphs. You'll also be able to select your categories and keywords. The categories for paperbacks are not necessarily going to be exactly the same as the categories for ebooks.

The second section is paperback content. Here you'll enter your own ISBN if you have one, or indicate that you'd like Amazon to assign you one. Next, you'll select printing options. You can choose colour printing, but obviously that will cost more. The standard size for a KDP paperback is 6"x9". Select the "no bleed" option unless you have images extending to the edge of your pages.

The next step in this section is to upload your manuscript. Amazon will spend quite a while thinking about this and deciding if it likes it or not. As mentioned in chapter five, I nearly drove myself bonkers (or at least more so than I already am) trying to upload my 2nd book because KDP had a hate-on for a special character I'd used.

Next up is your book cover. We already touched on Amazon Cover Creator and its colour issues in chapter six. The image you upload for your needs to be a much higher resolution image than your ebook cover. The image size can be up to 50 MB, although I've found that certain large, high-resolution files won't load even though they're under the 50MB limit.

Cover Creator also has fields for you to enter book details on the back cover, author details and photo, and text for the spine of the book. Your book has to be at least 100 pages to be thick enough to have print on the spine.

Once your cover is all done you'll need to launch the book previewer. It will take its sweet time, then show you what your book will look like. Take the time to look through the whole thing to make sure everything looks right. KDP will show you your printing cost per book before you move on to the next section.

The final setup section is rights and pricing. It will show you the minimum required price given the cost to print your book, and once you enter a price it will show you what your royalty amount will be.

You can choose to make your Amazon paperback available for expanded distribution through other US distributors including those that deal with public libraries, although making it available doesn't necessarily mean that a bookseller or library is going to order it. You'll earn lower

royalties for any sales through expanded distribution channels. Amazon says it can take up to 8 weeks for a book (and any changes made to it) to be available through expanded distribution networks. There's more info on this available here:

kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/GQTT4W3T5AYK7L45

Book categories

KDP will let you pick two categories for each book. The options you have to pick from come from the BISAC subject headings list, which you can find here <https://bisg.org/page/BISACEdition>.

The weird thing, though, is that those aren't really the categories Amazon uses on its site. I haven't found anywhere that Amazon publishes a list, but there's a way to do your own exploring. If you go to Amazon's main page, switch search from "all" to "books" and then search with a blank search field. On the left hand screen, there's a long list of subject headings. Clicking on one will take you to its subheadings, and you can browse around to find what fits with your book. From that initial books search, you can also find Kindle ebooks and browse from there, as the subject headings are a little different for paperbacks.

So, what can you do with that information? Despite only being able to pick 2 categories when you set up your book, you can actually have up to 10—you just have to ask. To do that, when you're in KDP, go to "Help" in the top right corner of the screen. Then scroll down, and click "Contact us" in the bottom left. From there:

1. Click "Amazon product page and expanded distribution"
2. Select "Update Amazon categories" from the dropdown options
3. Enter the information it asks for; categories might not be the same on each Amazon store (.com, [.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk), etc.); if you'd rather not hunt around to follow up on all of them, just go with the extra categories you found for your primary marketplace.
4. Send message

Presale

KDP allows you to make your ebook available for pre-order up to 90 days before the release date. This can be used as part of your marketing campaign. It's also a handy way of setting a specific release date. Unfortunately, KDP doesn't allow the same for paperbacks. There's a delay in submitting your book and having Amazon approve it to be published; it may happen the same day, but it may take up to 3 days.

If you're aiming for a certain launch day in terms of your marketing, you'll probably want to submit the paperback for publication a couple of days beforehand to make sure it's ready to go.

Book listing

When your book goes live, your paperback and ebook should be linked, so when you look at the listings on the Amazon website, there are buttons to switch back and forth between the two editions. This may be delayed, or it may not happen automatically. With my first book, I had to ask Amazon to link them, but with my second book, they were linked immediately.

Any ratings/reviews you receive will show up in both of your linked editions. Amazon UK is its own entity when it comes to reviews, so reviews left on the U.K. site don't show up on the US site and vice versa.

You'll also see how your book is ranking in the categories it's listed in. This is recalculated frequently so there can be massive fluctuations in fairly short periods of time.

Barnes & Noble

For Barnes & Noble (press.barnesandnoble.com), you'll upload your manuscript in ePub format and your book cover. The next step is to enter your book description and author description. You can choose up to 5 categories and subcategories for your book as well as keywords.

If you'd like to publish a paperback with Barnes & Noble, this can be done by adding a new version to the ebook you've created.

When you set your price, B&N will show you a handy little circle graph so you can see how much you'll get in royalties per sale. You can also pre-schedule sale prices for specified dates.

Kobo

To publish on Kobo (writinglife.kobobooks.com), you upload your .epub file into their Writing Life site. You'll be prompted to enter an ISBN if you have one, select 3 categories for your book to fit in, and enter a book description.

You'll then choose whether or not to use digital rights management and whether to make your book available to libraries through the Overdrive system.

The last step is to set the price. You can also pre-schedule sale prices.

Apple Books

To publish with Apple Books, you need to be using an Apple device. I'm normally very pro-Apple, but Apple's publishing process, which is supposed to be easy, seems a bit less streamlined than it could be.

You used to be able to publish from Pages, but if you needed to make adjustments to the epub file it generated, you had to download iBooks Author. Apple has recently done away with iBooks Author, though.

You can publish straight from Pages – at least kinda sorta not really. There are a few more steps.

iTunes Producer (<https://itunespartner.apple.com/en/books/tools>)

iTunes Producer is downloadable software that gets you ready to sell on iTunes. Why it needs to exist as a separate step is beyond me, but hey, what do I know? To add to the pain in the ass factor, to sign in, you need to generate an app-specific password (which you can do from <https://appleid.apple.com/>) to sign in to iTunes Producer. I just don't get it.

iTunes Connect (<https://itunesconnect.apple.com/>)

iTunes Connect is where the action happens and you'll enter the metadata for your book, including the book description, genre, and category. This is also where you'll enter the price in your base currency of choice.

After I initially panicked because my book had published using the wrong title, I had a secondary panic because I couldn't figure out how to pull the stupid thing down. While iTunes Connect seems like a logical place to go to make changes to your book, you actually need to make those changes using iTunes Producer.

Overall, publishing on Apple Books was a hassle that didn't lead to a lot of sales.

Google Play

You'll set up your book in the Google Play Partner Centre (play.google.com/books/publish/u/0/). You're prompted to enter the book description and select genres for the book. The manuscript is uploaded in epub format, and you'll upload the cover as well.

For pricing, you can choose the currency you want for your base price, and then select "worldwide" or specific regions to make your book available in. You can schedule sale prices in advance. There is the option to enter email addresses of "content reviewers" that you wish to send free copies to.

So, How to Choose?

Amazon is a must if you want to be able to reach a large audience. If you want the simplest option, going exclusively with Amazon and enrolling in KDP Select is probably a good bet. I'm happy that's the route I chose when I published my first book.

Once I had more experience I decided to offer my books on all of the platforms that were mentioned in this chapter. At the time of writing this, I've sold a couple of copies on Google Play, one copy on Apple Books, and none on Kobo and Barnes & Noble. The vast majority of sales have been on Amazon.

If you want to put in the time and effort to list your book on all the platforms, you increase your chances of getting some sales, but whether that translates into actual sales is a whole other question.

Chapter 9: Selling Your Books & Tracking Sales

Regardless of how much money your book does or does not make, you still want to keep track of how much you're making. It may be something you need to declare on your income tax, so it's nice to have records. Before we get to that, we'll take a brief look at pricing and how royalties are calculated.

Pricing & Royalties

The publishing platform you use will have set royalties that it pays based on your sales. The standard for ebooks seems to be 70%, although it will be lower if your book is very low priced or if it sells in certain countries. Amazon KDP has more info here:

https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G200641280

For paperbacks, the publisher will let you know what the printing costs for the book will be; longer books will have higher printing costs. Your royalties are calculated based on the retail price, minus the cost of printing. Royalties are lower for paperbacks; with Amazon, it's 60%, and only 40% if it sells through an expanded distribution seller. All of this information will be displayed when you're setting your book price.

When deciding how to price your book, there are a few factors to consider. If you price it ultra-low, there's some risk that potential readers may not take it seriously. If you price it too high, it will make it hard to sell your book. Even if you immediately discard very high and very low prices, it can still be a tough decision. You can change the price after publication, so you can always adjust up or down based on how the book is doing. When publishing with KDP, you can choose to go with a price that KDP predicts will maximize your royalties.

My second book I priced too high out of the starting gate. I listed the paperback at \$9.99 because it was substantially longer than my first book, and because I thought the book was worth it. I ended up dropping the price down to \$8.99 and then again to \$8.49. The Kindle price is \$5.49.

My first book is \$6.99 for the paperback and \$4.40 for the ebook. It's doing quite well, but it sells far more paperbacks than ebooks, and don't make nearly as much on the paperback. Still, I'd worry that increasing the price would hurt sales, so I keep the price where it is.

You'll also need to figure out how much difference you want to have between your paperback and ebook prices. For the paperback, you'll have printing costs plus a lower royalty percentage, and making the same amount per book may require a substantial difference between your ebook

and paperback prices. My personal preference is to accept making less on the paperback rather than jack the price up.

Amazon

On the sales dashboard, you can select a time period, and it will show a paragraph indicating how many paperback and ebook units you've sold, how many pages have been read through Kindle Unlimited, and royalties from the Amazon stores in various different countries.

You can also generate a report as a downloadable spreadsheet from the sales dashboard. It's a bit unwieldy, though; you can get a much simpler report from the prior month royalties section of KDP reports.

Apple Books

iTunes Connect has a sales & trends section, which is fine... if you can actually see it. The first 6 weeks I had my books listed, when I clicked on the sales and trends button I just got a blank white screen. When I reported this to Apple, they wanted screenshots. Um, okay, blank white screen coming right up... Anyway, they fixed it, but I'm not sure if that's a problem that other people will end up encountering as well.

Barnes & Noble

B&N has a nicely laid out sales reporting dashboard that shows you royalties, units sold, and payments, with easy to interpret graphs.

Google Play

This is one of the rare instances in which I'm unimpressed with Google. You can't view sales reports on the Google Play Partner Centre site; you have to specify the dates you want and download a CSV (comma-separated values) spreadsheet.

Kobo

The Kobo Writing Life dashboard shows you your sales for the current month and all-time sales, and you can also look up sales by a specific range of dates. You have the option of looking at figures for each book if you've listed multiple books, and you can view sales by country.

Chapter 10: Marketing

Marketing isn't necessarily going to be something that comes easily. It's a different set of skills from being an author, but as a self-published author you'll end up wearing many different hats. I'm by no means an expert on book marketing or marketing in general, but here are some ideas to think about.

I tend to think there's an inherent value in your book showing up in search results, even if it doesn't directly translate to increased sales. Whether or not there's actually any real value to this, there's something very satisfying about plugging your book's title (along with your name if the title is common) and having most of the results that come up on the first page be about you and your book.

Amazon has some suggestions in its Amazon Author Marketing Primer:

amazonauthorinsights.com/tagged/amazon-author-marketing-primer

Free Book Days

Amazon allows you to have five days out of every 3 month period where you can make your ebook available for free, but only if you're enrolled in KDP Select. You can do all of your five days at once, or you can do them individually.

This is a good way to get your book in front of more people, including some of your regular blog readers who might not have the extra money available to spend on your book. Even though you don't get royalties from these freebies, you can still get valuable reviews. When you're publicizing your free book days, ask readers to leave a review or a rating on Amazon or Goodreads. Most of them won't, but it's still good to ask.

Book Giveaways

Goodreads has connected with Amazon to do giveaways. This is a contest that Goodreads users in the U.S. and Canada can enter for a chance to win a copy of your book. Users must also have an Amazon account to facilitate delivery of the book. You can give away either ebook or paperback copies. Giveaway packages are priced at USD 199 for the basic package and USD 599 for the premium. help.goodreads.com/s/article/Giveaways-best-practices-1553870940582

Personally, I've never done a giveaway. I think it comes down to whether you think the hype the giveaway generates is worth the money you spend on it, and to me, it seems like that would be

tough to do. If your book's audience and your blog readership match up, an alternative would be to do a giveaway on your blog, and provide the winner with either an ebook version or mail them a print copy of the book.

Getting Book Reviews

If people are considering buying your book, seeing a positive review can be the nudge they need to go ahead with a purchase. There are a few places that reviews can be helpful. Reviews on blogs or on book websites like Goodreads can help bring your book to people's attention.

Probably most important, though, is to get reviews on bookseller websites (e.g. Amazon), especially if you're running ads on that site. Keep in mind that Amazon is very strict with their review guidelines, and will sometimes ban people (like me) from leaving reviews. Goodreads is another very helpful place to have reviews, and they're not as fussy as Amazon over who can leave feedback. And just a hint, Goodreads allows you to leave a rating for your own book, although it's probably a bit tacky to do a written review as well.

Your non-author friends probably won't realize how important reviews are, so give them a nudge or two. Even if they don't want to write a full review, they can still leave a rating.

If you know other authors or authors who do book reviews on their blog, go ahead and ask them if they'll do a review of your book. Standard practice is to offer to provide them with a PDF copy (or other format of their choice). You can also seek out book review bloggers who you think might be interested in your book. If you're running a free book promo, include a request in your promotional posts for people to leave a rating/review on Amazon or Goodreads.

Some author sites have book review programs, which are covered in the next section.

Finally, you may well get some bad reviews. Sometimes they just don't like the book, sometimes it's just not what they were expecting (or perhaps they didn't even bother to read the book description), and I suspect that other times people like to get a bit trollish. Try not to take it personally, and resist the urge to comment on the review and try to defend yourself.

Bad reviews are most problematic if you haven't got a lot of other reviews to balance it out, at which point it becomes time to light fires under people's butts to leave you positive reviews.

Book/Author Websites

There are a number of book sites that allow you to add your book to and create an author page. Even if these don't end up generating sales, they offer an easy way to set it and forget it, get your name out there to the world, and boost search engine visibility. Some of them offer useful informational resources as well.

Goodreads

www.goodreads.com/author/how_to

Goodreads is hugely popular for readers, so you'll definitely want to be on there. The Goodreads Author Program is how you'll do that. You can set up an author profile, allow readers to ask you questions, publish blog posts, run giveaways, and set up ads.

Goodreads won't necessarily add your book automatically once it's been posted on Amazon, for example, so you may need to manually add it on the Goodreads site. You need to be set up as an author to have librarian privileges to manually add books.

AllAuthor

<https://allauthor.com/>

You can create an author profile, add your books, and enter your cover in their cover of the month contest. There's also a tool to create GIF banners to use for promotions as well as a tool to create 3D images of your book covers. Some are available free, but the premium membership offers a much wider selection.

You can get a featured listing on their site with a premium membership option or a one-time payment of \$24.

AuthorsDen

<https://www.authorsden.com/>

You can create listings for your books, and interact with others in the community. A paid membership gives you more exposure and the opportunity to get your books reviewed. The lowest tier membership allows you to run two free ads on the AuthorsDen site, while the higher membership tiers offer unlimited ads.

With a paid membership, you can request reviews from fellow readers through the site's book review program. There's no extra cost for this, but there's also no guarantee that anyone will choose to review your book. <https://www.authorsden.com/bookreviewprogram/requests.asp>

Bookbub

partners.bookbub.com

On Bookbub, you can set up an author profile and a book page. Readers can review your book on Bookbub. You can also run ads for your book. I'm not convinced that Bookbub's reach is broad enough for it to be all that useful for most self-published authors, but it takes very little time to at least set up your author profile and book listing.

Booklife

booklife.com

Booklife is run by Publishers Weekly. You can set up a book page and an author page. They have some good informational resources as well on the different steps in the self-publishing process, as well as a directory of providers of various services related to publishing a book.

You can submit your book for free to be considered for a review by Publishers Weekly. The standards are high and it seems like the chances of them actually reviewing your book are slim, but hey, it's a free chance at something that would get your book in front of a lot of new eyes.

booklife.com/about-us/review-submission-guidelines.html

For high visibility, you can advertise your book in Publisher's Weekly or at trade shows. There's also a book content with a cash prize, and your entry fee guarantees you a PW review of your book. <https://booklife.com/about-us/the-booklife-prize.html>

IndieBookLounge

<http://indiebooklounge.com/login.php>

It's free to list your book on this site.

LibraryThing

www.librarything.com/about/authors

You can become a verified author on LibraryThing and add information to your book listing. LibraryThing allows users to catalogue their own book libraries and write reviews. My books haven't gotten any interactions there, but it's easy to set up.

On Your Blog

Your blog will be a great way to promote your book. Finding the right balance of promoting enough to get the word out but not going overboard may be hard to find, depending on how marketing-wise you are. Marketing is definitely not a strong point for me, and I worry about being too pushy, so I don't really have any good advice to give on achieving that balance.

In the lead-up to a book release and around the time of the release you'll probably want to do plenty of blog posts about your book in order to get the word out. On a longer-term basis, mentioning your book at the end of each blog post is one way to keep spreading the word without being in people's faces about it.

One thing that's easy to set up is a page on your blog dedicated to your book. Match the page's title to the title of your book. Search engines pay attention to pages that have a lot of links pointing to them, and you can help with this by building a lot of internal links across your site pointing at your book page, and by your book page's links on other websites, such as author sites. On my book page, I also include excerpts of reviews people have written and links to the review, which is also handy for me in keeping track of them.

When you use your book cover image you use on your blog, make sure to enter the book title and your name into the alt text field. That will allow search engines to recognize what the image is, and your site will probably come up high in the search listing if someone happens to do a Google Image search of your book's title.

Lastly, I would caution you that it's easy to fall into the mental trap of thinking that just because people read and support your blog, they are likely to read and support your book. Let's pop that bubble right now, because chances are that most of them won't. That's probably not going to feel very good, but I think it's better to expect a so-so response going in, so then the crash down to earth won't be so hard when it happens. I'm sure it's something that varies depending on your genre and how closely it matches up to your blog readership, but moral support isn't necessarily going to translate into opening the wallet.

That may sound bitter, but it's not. I just think it's important to be realistic about expectations, and as a first-time author, it can be very hard to gauge what's realistic. Your blog is still going to be an important place to promote your book, but I think the key take-home here is that you'll want to use other marketing avenues as well.

On Your Social Media

I'm not a big social media user. I'm on there, but I don't spend a lot of time there, so I'm not the best source of guidance in that department. What I've found difficult is finding a balance between promoting your book but not going overboard with it (or at least the way it feels to me) on social media. Using a social scheduling tool like Tailwind or Hootsuite can help to make this easier.

If you're on Twitter, definitely use one of your book tweets as your pinned Tweet. Any time anyone tweets about your book, retweet it. On Pinterest, you can start a board for your book and include book-related pins for the various author sites you've signed up with.

On LinkedIn or Facebook, consider creating a page devoted to your book. I made a company page for my blog on LinkedIn, and then a showcase page for my books.

Get creative with your social media promotion. Design cool images on Canva. Use quotes from your book to help catch potential readers' interest.

There's really no right or wrong with this, and only you are going to know what's the best fit for your audience of followers.

Quora

www.quora.com

Ok, so Quora isn't your standard social media. It's a question and answer site where anyone can post either questions or answers. Some authors promote their books by responding to questions on Quora and working a mention of their book into the answer. This may or may not be easy, depending on what your book's about. It may be worth experimenting with as a free option to get some attention for your book.

The Takeaway Message

Promoting books is hard. Once a book has racked up a number of sales, the Amazon algorithm will be more likely to put it in front of people. At the beginning, though, potential readers are unlikely to just stumble across your book. Promotion's not my strong point, and it seems to have taken about 6 months of slow sales on Amazon before the algorithm started to warm to my books. So don't give up.

Chapter 11: Advertising

Advertising can help you to generate a steady stream of sales after your book has been released. There are a number of different places where you can advertise, and the site(s) you choose should be based on where you think potential readers might be likely to hang out.

There are two main ways of paying for advertising: cost per click (CPC) and cost per thousand impressions (CPM, where M=mille/thousand). With CPC, you pay each time a user clicks on your ad. If they don't click, you don't get charged. With CPM, you are charged every thousand times that your ad is displayed to users.

Ad campaign reports will give you average cost of sale (ACOS) figures, which is your money spent on advertising as a percentage of the dollar value of the sales driven by your ads. You can then compare this to the royalty percentage you get on your sales to determine whether your ad campaign is paying for itself.

Amazon

To advertise on Amazon, select “promote and advertise” next to your book listing on the KDP site. Alternatively, use this URL: <https://advertising.amazon.com>. The KDP help section specifically for advertisements can be found here: https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G201499010

You can choose between sponsored product ads or lockscreen ads. Sponsored product ads show up when people do searches on Amazon. Lockscreen ads show up when people unlock their Kindle ereaders, and are based on the areas of reader interest that you choose to target for your ads. You don't have to design an ad; your ad will consist of displaying your book info.

Manual and automatic targeting

When setting up your sponsored product ad campaign, you can choose between manual or automatic targeting. Manual targeting means you choose your own keywords, and with automatic targeting, Amazon will pick the keywords it thinks will work best for your book. With manual targeting, you can also use negative targeting, which involves picking search terms that you don't want your book ad displayed for.

My personal experience was that Amazon picked pretty useless keywords for automatic targeting, and my initial trial with it fell flat. For targeted ad campaigns, you can choose essentially as many target keywords as you want, but you do want to be selective enough that

you're not showing your ads to people who are looking for something entirely different from your book.

You can choose whether you want your keywords to be broad (which will include close but not exact matches), phrase (the exact words, but in any order), and/or exact matches. My preference is to use broad terms, but once your campaign is underway, you can check if any of the terms are so broad that they're capturing search queries that you don't want.

Picking good keywords is a trial and error process. You want them to be specific enough that your ad will get seen by people interested in your kind of book, but not so specific that they won't end up in front of many eyeballs.

You can have up to 4000 keywords per ad group if you're so inclined. I tend to start with around 50, and then narrow that number down based on performance. My longest-running ad campaign now has 20 keywords.

Bidding

Amazon operates on a cost-per-click (CPC) pricing model. Each time any ads are being displayed, Amazon conducts a virtual auction. It takes all of the available bids for particular search terms at that point in time and decides on the winning bids that will then have their ads displayed. You only pay if someone clicks on your ad. The actual amount you pay may be lower than your bid, depending on the other bids for that auction.

You can set your daily amount that you're prepared to spend (minimum \$1.00), and then specify what amount you're willing to bid for each of your target keywords. Amazon will suggest a bid range that's likely to be successful based on similar ads, although sometimes it doesn't have enough data to come up with a suggested range. You can adjust your bids as often as you want.

There's also the option to use dynamic bidding, which allows Amazon to adjust your bids either down or both up and down depending on the estimated likelihood of you making a sale. You can also adjust bids by a certain percentage depending on ad placement – the first page of search results and product details pages.

Negative targeting

Negative targeting allows you to pick keywords for which you don't want your ad to display. It may not be obvious when you're first setting up your campaign what negative terms you should use, but that's ok.

Once your campaign is underway, you can view the search terms report, which shows you what search terms people have entered that led them to click on your ad. Some of these may be quite irrelevant, which wastes your money.

If I'm advertising a book about depression the illness, and someone clicks on my ad after searching for the Great Depression, that's highly unlikely to result in a sale for me. If I add "Great Depression" as an exact negative search term, an ad for my book will no longer turn up if someone searches for Great Depression.

As another example, my book on psych meds doesn't contain flashcards, but people commonly search for psychiatric medication flashcards. If that's what they're looking for, it's probably not a good use of my money to show ads to them, so I added that as a negative search term.

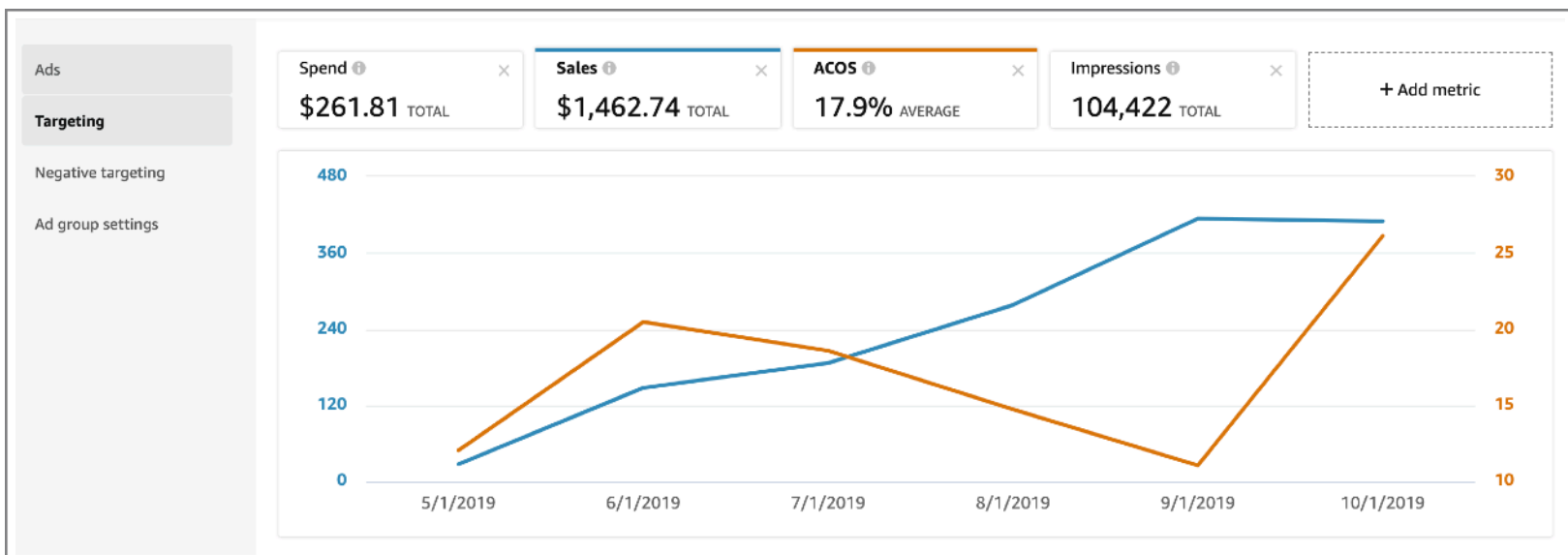
Search terms

This shows you what search terms people have entered that have led them to click on your ad. This is particularly useful in deciding what keywords to use as negative search terms so you're not wasting your advertising budget. It can also give you ideas to get more specific with your search terms, which may allow you to get clicks at a lower price since there's probably less competition for more specific keywords.

Monitoring your campaign

Once your campaign is underway, you'll be able to view how much you're spending and your sales associated with each target keyword. I recommend being fairly proactive with it. I view my ads a couple of times a week and make small adjustments as needed to make sure I'm getting the biggest bang for my buck.

It takes a while to get comfortable with the Amazon ad reporting, because there's a whole lot going on. What's going to be most relevant is the "targeting" display, which is shown in the images on the next page.



The above screenshot shows what the top part of your targeting report will look like. In the top right corner, you can click “+ add metric” to see more figures, and you can also remove metrics you don’t want to view. I like to look at spend (how much I’ve spent on ads), sales (value of sales generated by ads), ACOS (average cost of sale), and impressions (how many times my ad has been displayed to the world). Because of the way the graph is constructed, it won’t necessarily be that helpful, but the figures above the graph are good to know.

If you scroll down from part of the page shown in the previous screenshot, you’ll see something along the lines of the screenshot below. From here you can add new keywords. Clicking the “Columns” button at the top towards the right will allow you to select the columns you’d like displayed.

Filter: Active status = All but archived

Filter by

<input type="checkbox"/>	Active	Keyword	Match type	Status	Suggested bid	Bid	Impressions	Clicks	Spend	Orders	Sales	ACOS
Total: 30							104,422	892	\$261.81	217	\$1,462.74	17.90%
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	anti-anxiety medication	Broad	Deliveri	\$0.97 \$0.47-\$1.94	\$ 0.39	-	-	-	-	-	-
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	antidepressant side effects	Broad	Deliveri	No current data	\$ 0.37	2	-	-	-	-	-
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	antidepressants	Broad	Deliveri	\$0.93 \$0.50-\$1.86	\$ 1.45	5,154	30	\$11.51	11	\$71.23	16.16%
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	antipsychotic side effects	Broad	Deliveri	No current data	\$ 0.34	4	1	\$0.18	-	-	-

Let's break down the items in the third row, for the keyword "antidepressants", moving from the left to the right column:

- **Active:** toggle back and forth between active and paused
- **Keyword**
- **Match type:** broad, phrase, or exact match
- **Status:** Delivering means it's up and running. If your campaign is out of budget for the day, that will show up here.
- **Suggested bid:** Amazon will suggest an amount and a range of bids that it thinks will work for that keyword. It's a useful suggestion, but don't treat it as gospel.
- **Bid:** this is where you enter your bid for that keyword
- **Impressions:** For this particular keyword my ad is getting displayed a lot. The other keywords shown aren't getting displayed much, which could be because I'm not bidding high enough, or because people just aren't searching for those terms.
- **Clicks:** shows how many times people have clicked on your ad over the course of the campaign; these are what you're paying for
- **Spend:** This is the amount spent for all clicks during the campaign. You can see for the one click on the antipsychotic side effects keyword it cost quite a bit less than my bid.
- **Orders:** how many times people have clicked on your ad and purchased your book
- **Sales:** your total sales amount, which will be substantially higher than what you actually earn
- **ACOS:** Your target ACOS will depend on how much you're making in royalties per book sold. I've been trying to keep my overall ACOS around 20%, which means for every \$20 that I spend on advertising I'm generating \$100 in book sales.

Amazon is the only advertising platform that I've tried personally. I regularly check how my campaign is doing and adjust my bids as needed for the various terms I'm using. I look at what keywords are resulting in sales, as well as what terms I'm spending money on that aren't generating sales. If keywords aren't getting many impressions, I consider whether it's worth bumping up my bid.

Amazon will send you emails when you're getting close to your daily max spending, and then again when you've hit your daily max. They'll suggest that you increase your daily amount, but only do this if your ACOS and sales warrant it. When you hit your daily max, your ads won't display again until the next day, which probably isn't going to be the end of the world.

Other Advertising Options

I haven't tried running ads anywhere except Amazon. For my non-fiction books, Amazon seemed like the only one that would be a good fit. However, for books with a broader potential audience, I suspect Goodreads could be a good bet.

Goodreads

For Goodreads ads (www.goodreads.com/advertisers/ad_home), you enter the text that you want displayed as part of your ad. You can display ads to all users, or you can target your ads based on age, country where the reader is, fans of specific genres, or fans of certain authors. Depending on the nature of your book (especially if it's nonfiction), this is probably going to end up being a lot less specific than Amazon. Your daily budget must be at least \$1.00, and the minimum bid per click is \$0.10.

Bookbub

On Bookbub (partners.bookbub.com/ads/new), pricing for ads is done by auction, and you can opt for a cost per click or cost per thousand impressions strategy. Mental health books don't seem to have a huge presence on Bookbub, so this wasn't an option I considered it all. Before spending money on any kind of ads you want to make sure your target audience is actually going to be spending time on that platform.

Booklife

Booklife (booklife.com/about-us/pw-select.html), which is affiliated with Publisher's Weekly, has a PW Select book promotion plan that costs \$149. Your book ad is displayed in Publisher's Weekly, the Booklife site and social media, and the Booklife newsletter. You also get a digital subscription to Publisher's Weekly included in the package price.

Search engines and social media

You can venture out beyond the book world to advertise on social media platforms or search engines (e.g. through Google AdWords). You will have the ability to reach new potential buyers, but you'll want to be extra careful with picking your keywords to make sure your ad is getting displayed to searchers looking for books.

I haven't done any social media ads, so I really have no idea how effective they'd be for selling a book. I think it makes the most sense to go with the platform that you feel most comfortable with and are most familiar with how they display ads.

Here are the advertising links for some of the major sites:

- ads.google.com/home/
- www.facebook.com/business/ads
- ads.pinterest.com
- ads.twitter.com/login
- business.instagram.com/advertising/

A Tale of Two Ad Campaigns

When I started advertising for my first book, *Psych Meds Made Simple*, I had very little idea what I was doing. I kept my budget low at \$1 per day, and every morning I would check my stats and make little adjustments. It wasn't too hard to find keywords that worked for my book, and I was able to maintain around a 20% ACOS. After a few months, I decided it made sense to increase my daily budget, and I started selling more books. It's now doing really well in its categories, which I think helps fuel even more sales.

When I released my second book, *Making Sense of Psychiatric Diagnosis*, I decided to start off really aggressive with my ad campaign, in the sense that I set a fairly high daily budget and high bid prices. My goal was to figure out the most effective keywords quickly, and then focus in on those for a more restrained ongoing campaign.

Unfortunately, that didn't work out so well. Many of my keywords were related to the DSM (the psychiatry diagnosis manual). The problem was, a lot of people searching for the DSM weren't actually looking for a book like mine. The real problem, though, was that they were clicking on my ad before deciding they weren't looking for a book like mine. That cost me money. I did generate some sales when I was bidding high, but it wasn't enough to make up for all the other people clicking on my ads, and my ACOS was really high.

I was frustrated by this, but in hindsight, I probably should have had some idea that this might happen. Advertising is all based on keywords, and if you can't come up with keywords that are a great match for your book, it's going to be hard to generate sales. Ideally, you want keywords that are specific enough that people who click on your ads are going to be keen on your book, but you don't want them so obscure that people only search for those terms once a month.

Overall, though, I'm pretty impressed by the reading public's willingness to click on Amazon ads, and they'll continue to be my medium of choice for advertising.

Chapter 12: More Resources

Here are a few sites where you can find further information.

Booklife (booklife.com/)

This was already mentioned in the marketing section. Booklife has tips on publishing, marketing, and managing your book. It also has listings of services that can help with various aspects of self-publishing.

Just Publishing Advice (<https://justpublishingadvice.com/>)

This site has lots of articles on writing and self-publishing.

Reedsy (blog.reedsy.com/learning/courses/)

Reedsy has some free email courses and blog posts covering various aspects of self-publishing. It also has a directory of service providers related to self-publishing.

Digital Publishing 101 (digitalpublishing101.com/learn/)

DigitalPublishing101 has free publishing 101 and marketing 101 online courses, as well as a paid 1-on-1 self-publishing assistance service.

Author Associations

There are a variety of author associations that you can join. Many of these have paid memberships, but the sites listed below have free membership options. These associations can offer useful information on publishing, plus they may do well in search engine rankings when searching for your name.

- **Association of Independent Authors** (affiliate membership is free): www.independent-authors.com
- **Authors Alliance:** www.authorsalliance.org
- **Non-Fiction Authors Association:** has some great free downloads, with info on ways to generate book reviews, Amazon ads, a book launch checklist, a goal planning worksheet, DIY publicity tips for authors, sample query letters, and a self-publishing checklist nonfictionauthorsassociation.com
- **The Authors' Guild:** membership is paid, but there are some free resources on topics like finding an agent, submitting your work, and publishing contracts. www.authorsguild.org/member-services/writers-resource-library/

Chapter 13: Conclusion

Even if you manage to bungle every single step along the way to self-publishing, that still shouldn't stop you from charging in full steam ahead. If you want to be an author, be an author. Just because your book is self-published doesn't mean that either the book or you as an author have any less value. Your voice is as deserving as anyone else's of being out there in the world.

In terms of expectations, I think it's far better to aim low and hopefully be pleasantly surprised than to aim high and be disappointed. Also, give people time. You might hope that people will pick up your book and give feedback right away, but remember, they're operating on their own timelines, not yours. It doesn't mean they don't care.

Lastly, be proud of yourself. It's an amazing feeling to publish your first book, and you deserve it!