

Self-publishing

A step-by-step guide
for authors

www.writersguild.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss contracts, employment issues or any elements outlined in these guidelines you can contact our books representative by email: **books@writersguild.org.uk**

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Introduction

Over the past 20 years there has been a significant move away from traditional book publishing towards self-publishing, driven by several factors. Our reading habits have changed, in part as a result of the rise, reach and accessibility of the internet, while libraries and book shops (and the high street) have declined.

The melding and merging of many written forms, genres and disciplines has also meant the traditional road to getting a book published has changed irreversibly and authors can now be in print (or virtual print) by the simple click of a mouse.

However, the publishing path is still a precarious one to follow and conquer. Luckily, the WGGB has got over 60 years' experience of dealing with the industry and can help you find your way through the self-publishing minefield, so you cannot only survive but succeed.

Getting started

You're thinking of writing a book, or have written it, and want to get it published. The only problem is that traditional publishers are either not taking submissions or are not interested in your work. They might only take commissions for books through agents and if you don't have one, you might fear you can't get on the authorial starting block.

You may well have considered self-publishing but been put off by how complicated it all seems. You might not feel confident about technology or think it will cost too much to do. Indeed, when you are published by a traditional publishing house, a lot of the work is done for you and you automatically work with editors and illustrators, publicists and so on. Thus, it can feel daunting to consider doing the job for yourself.

Fortunately, the process of getting a book published via self-publishing is pretty much the same as with traditional publishing. However, there are a couple of different approaches you can take when it comes to self-publishing:

1. You are in full control and do most of the work, occasionally engaging others to undertake specialist tasks. This is generally the cheapest option, and you'll keep all the rights to the book.

2. You hire a company to oversee the entire project, beginning to end. This is a more expensive option, and you may have less control, but you could find it easier to let someone else take the reins if you're not comfortable going it alone. As with option one, by publishing this way you'll also get to keep all the rights in the book.

If you are going for option two, it's important to **beware** of 'hybrid', 'contributory', 'paid-for' or 'vanity' publishers. It can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between these publishers and companies that undertake genuine self-publishing services. As with point two above, hybrid, paid-for, vanity or contributory publishers will offer to undertake some or all of the publication services, but the key difference is that they will insist that you assign them some rights in the book. The fees that they charge are also usually much, much higher than those being offered by a genuine self-publishing company. WGGB and the Society of Authors have released a report, *Is it a steal?* warning against these practices. You can read the report [here](#).

With hybrid, paid-for, vanity or contributory publishers it is very unlikely that you'll ever see a return on your investment, and they should be avoided at all costs. If you are a WGGB member and think you have been offered one of these contracts, but are not sure or need further advice, you can submit your contract to the WGGB contract vetting service and we will look at it for you. Just email your contract to casework@writersguild.org.uk and we will get back to you. If you are not a WGGB member and want to take advantage of the service (which is available to Full and Candidate Members), you can join [here](#).

Do you need an agent?

A literary agent is not necessary for you to self-publish your book. However, it may be helpful to your career, especially if you ultimately want to be published by mainstream, traditional publishers who largely only take commissions from represented authors.

Also, be aware that even if you have an agent, they may not want to be involved in self-publishing or may think you should not self-publish. So, if you want to do it, you may have to do it alone, despite being represented by an agent.

However, an agent may well be interested in you if you have an interesting life story, an unconventional or path-breaking career, or if you simply have a cracking idea. They are more interested if you are thinking of writing more than one book – they like to invest their time and energy.

FINDING AN AGENT

You need to have written a saleable manuscript in order to find an agent. You have a far better chance of finding one if you are already published, with a good track record of sales and reviews, but most will also accept unpublished manuscripts.

Your agent will be your business partner, so you need to choose wisely, and choose someone who will be a good match for you and your working style. Not every agent will want to work with self-published authors, but negative attitudes towards self-publishing have already changed and continue to improve.

An agent can be useful in a number of ways. All agents have their own way of working, but some of the things they may help you with include:

- Managing all the different parts of publishing, as they are experts in all areas of the industry
- Helping to sell your next idea to a traditional publisher
- Helping to sell translation rights (especially international), film rights, and handling media bookings
- Advising on contractual issues
- Helping with marketing the book through contacts.

Overall, the main benefit of an agent helping your self-publishing process is that you can dedicate most of your time and energy to the creative process, with less focus on the business side. They will also be experts in creating opportunities and strategies for your future career, using your work as a springboard.

Of course, an agent will take a cut of your book's profits, typically 10 or 15%.

If you want to be entirely in control of the process and the royalties, then bringing in an agent may not be for you.

If you want to find out more about getting an agent, look at the section in the [Writers' & Artists' Yearbook](#), which is published annually (WGGB members receive a 20% discount and the code can be found in the Members' Area of our website). Also, you can look at the [Writers Online website](#) which has practical advice and help. The annual [London Book Fair](#) (usually held in April), also has a wide number of national and international self-publishers who attend (you can find further information in the Resources section on page 19).

Diving into the process

This is a guide to the process of self-publishing, costs, and further help/information. Please note that the costs contained in this guide are just that – a guide. There are various factors that affect the cost of getting your book published, such as the word count, type and quality of paper, black and white/colour printing, and level of services you require. These variations will be pointed out, and you can decide what will best suit you and your book.

EIGHT STEPS TO SELF-PUBLISHING YOUR BOOK

(Assuming you have written your manuscript)

1. Get it edited
2. Think of a great title
3. Have the inside formatted, designed and compiled
4. Get the cover designed
5. Have the whole book proofread
6. Get the book made
7. Register your book
8. Market and sell your book

Steps 1 and 5: editing and proofreading

Having your book edited and proofread is an important quality control check on your work, as new pairs of eyes will see things in the text that you don't and make suggestions you wouldn't have thought of. When you self-publish, you take control of how the editing and proofreading process will work. Editing may be included in your package with a self-publishing service provider; if this is the case, make sure you check how many editing/proofing 'passes' are included in the price, and how much extra you will have to pay for more passes. If it is not included, you will be responsible for hiring freelancers to edit your work (See 'hiring editors and proofreaders', below).

Editing involves everything from shaping and structure of the work to sentence-level tweaks, while proofreading is the final quality-control stage of preparing your book for release. In traditional publishing, the proofreader will pick up any small issues in the text that other editors may have missed. There is no fixed process in the industry, but you will want to have a good think about what you want your editing process to look like, how many editors you would like to be involved and what is cost-effective for you.

The stages of editing often go something like this:

- Developmental editing
Big picture editing: structure, narrative voice, plot, pace, characterisation
- Line editing
Sentence-level editing: form and flow. Also known as stylistic editing
- Copyediting
Sentence-level editing: layout, spelling, punctuation, grammar
- Proofreading
Micro editing: errors, consistency, layout, format.

You can find many freelancers offering these different services online. There are some suggestions on finding freelancers in the Resources section on page 19.

Hiring editors and proofreaders

You will want to ensure that any editors you hire are well-versed in the rules of writing but are flexible enough to make sure they don't edit out your unique voice or tamper with the intention of the work. If you have the resources, you can pay an editor for a two-to-five-hour trial edit, so you can get a flavour of their ideas and working style. Remember, you don't want to hire an editor until you feel you have made your manuscript the best it can be; this is a common pitfall that places too much responsibility on the editor's shoulders.

You may want to hire a different editor for each stage. In traditional publishing, there will often be two to three editors involved in the process. However, this will depend on your resources and different packages that editors offer.

Developmental editing is the most expensive stage, and proofreading is the least expensive. Other factors that affect the price include:

- Style, eg an academic text with a niche style guide will cost more
- Flexibility of deadline, eg a tight turnaround will cost more
- Your experience, eg a beginner's writing may require more editing time.

These are the suggested minimum hourly rates for editing from the [Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading](#), at the time of writing this guide (the National Union of Journalists also has a 'rate for the job' guide covering editors and proofreaders on its [website](#)).

Proofreading	£25.70
Copyediting	£29.90
Substantial editing, rewriting	£34.40

Of course, many editors will charge more or less than these prices; they are a guide only.

Step 2: finding a great title

You need your book title to be snappy, evocative and fitting for its genre – essentially, it should grab people's attention, and the book should do what it says on the tin. Think, would you pick it up if you saw it on the shelf? Short titles tend to be best.

It's also good to check other titles that are around, to make sure you aren't duplicating, or too closely referencing another work (some writers find it best to have a working title before writing the book).

Step 3: inside design and formatting

Acknowledgements, dedications etc

It is standard practice to include acknowledgements and/or dedications at the start or end of your book. It is a way of thanking those who helped you get it to the point of publication. You may want to read a few different acknowledgement pages to get a feel for the different ways authors write and personalise them.

If your book is edited or proofread by someone else, make sure the acknowledgements and dedications are included in the final draft as they can get lost in the process.

Indexing

Normally, only non-fiction books require indexes, and usually only books of over 100 pages in length. Traditionally, it is expected that an author will pay for an index as it is an extra. It is helpful to think about the purpose and audience of your book, and who would find an index useful – for example, they are particularly handy in academic texts for students. Will the index get enough use to justify the cost (whether that be your money or time)?

You can hire a professional indexer or write your own index – though this is a specific process you will need to research and will most certainly be very time-consuming. It is essential to be accurate and up-to-date and if this is not your thing, it is best to hire a professional for accuracy.

Hiring an indexer

You can find an indexer through the [Society of Indexers](#). You will want to find someone whose specialisms match the topic and style of your work.

At the time of writing, the Society of Indexers recommends rates of £26.15 an hour, £2.95 a page or £7.90 per 1,000 words for an index to a non-academic text. They state that the indexer should see the proofs of the text before agreeing to a fee, and you will also need to agree a timescale together.

Writing your own index

Index entries are made up of three main elements: main headings, subheadings, and locators (usually page numbers). When authors create their own indexes, it is harder for them to see the work from the outside and to tell what would be most useful. Thus, common pitfalls include indexing either too much, too little, or unhelpful entries.

We recommend searching online, and using the resources in this publication, to research guides to the process of indexing your own work.

Illustrations

In adult, non-fiction books, including images and illustrations can greatly improve reader engagement and recall, as well as enhancing the book's aesthetic value. You can also use them to nuance the tone in your book – for example, adding humour. You may even want to include some in your fiction book; that is up to you.

You will need to find an illustrator who understands the message of your book well and can translate that into drawing. You may want this to be the same person designing your cover, depending on the style. The best way to get an idea of someone's work is by looking at their portfolio, and testimonials/reviews.

Different illustrators will charge differently, and there are a number of criteria that affect the cost, including the amount of illustrations required, their level of experience and how intricate the illustrations are required to be. The copyright of the images will also always belong with the illustrator unless specifically stated in the contract. Illustrators will typically only sign over this right if they are bought out for potential loss of future earnings in addition to their initial fee, which can be very expensive.

Formatting

This will be a different process depending on whether you choose to create an ebook or a print book. See 'Step 6: get the book made' for further information.

Step 4: cover design

The importance of a striking cover design and graphics cannot be overstated in selling your work.

In order to communicate to a designer what their job will be, you'll need to write a book cover design brief. In an ideal world, the designer would read the book before getting to work on a design, but this usually just isn't feasible. It is your responsibility to communicate the key bits of information about your work.

As with all elements of marketing, the key is to know exactly who you are targeting. Think about identifiers like age, gender, occupation, hobbies/interests, and location. Other pieces of information that will be useful to the designer include:

- Any text you want included in the design
- The message of your book: what do you want people to think about and feel?
- Important characters or plot elements you would like represented in the graphics

- A blurb that communicates the spirit of the book
- The setting of the book
- Things you definitely don't want the designer to include – this includes colour schemes and images
- Examples of other covers that inspire your ideas.

For an experienced designer, you can expect to pay £500+. You also may not only need a cover design; you may need some images for marketing too. These extras may be charged at an hourly rate, on top of a flat fee for the cover design.

When choosing a designer, you will want to consider:

- Their style and genres they generally work on
- Their back catalogue of work
- Their level of experience in book design
- Their price.

Step 6: getting the book made

Printing vs ebooks

The internet has changed the landscape of publishing quite considerably. We now have ebooks and print-on-demand services, as well as traditional book sellers. Before you start self-publishing, you need to decide *how* you want your book to reach your audience and have an idea of what you want the final version to look and feel like. If you are getting a physical book printed, how big will it be? Are there lots of pictures or photographs? Who are the key audience? These are just some of the things you'll need to think about when planning the production of your book.

Ebooks

Ebooks are electronic versions of your book, available for readers to download onto their devices. There are some upsides to self-publishing this way:

- There are lower upfront costs, as you will not need to pay printing costs for the physical copies of your work. This also means that you do not need to factor in storage or transportation costs which can affect your profit margins
- Many of these platforms are free to use, and you can use more than one of them. Some of these savings can be passed onto the customer, making your book more attractive in a highly competitive market, but it also means that you can expect a higher cut of the royalties too!

There are numerous ebook platforms out there but some of the most well-known are [Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing](#), [Google Play Books](#) and [Kobo Books](#). Each operates slightly differently, but they all provide detailed guides on how to use their service.

Ebook formatting

Each distribution site will offer guidelines on how they want their ebooks formatted. There is a standard ebook format called EPUB. This is used by most distributors except Amazon, who use a format called MOBI.

If your book is text-heavy, like a novel, you will want to format your book as a standard EPUB. This format means readers can change the size, font and background colour of the text as they read. If your book has more elements to it (eg a cookbook or textbook), you may want to use a fixed layout EPUB format, meaning you design the layout of all the elements and they will stay in place, rather than flowing differently on different devices. Note that the Amazon store does not host fixed-layout EPUB books. You will have to weigh up the pros and cons of these different distributors.

The main considerations are to choose a clear, simple font and ensure you insert page breaks at the end of each chapter. You can hire freelancers to format your ebook or do it yourself to upload to your chosen distribution site.

Print on demand

Print on demand, sometimes abbreviated to PoD, is a system where books are printed one by one when they are ordered by the customer, usually online. The benefits of this are:

- Only enough copies are printed as are needed, meaning you don't need to worry about storage space and costs
- It reduces your upfront costs as a publisher
- It's a more environmentally sustainable way of using resources.

However, PoD can lead to higher prices for your readers and/or lower profit margins for you, because the unit cost of printing each book is higher than printing in bulk. It also means your books are unlikely to be stocked in bookshops, as they usually prefer to have the option of returning unsold books to the publisher.

Bulk or 'offset' printing

This is how larger publishers will operate, printing off hundreds or thousands of copies to keep unit prices low and profit margins high. As a self-publisher you can also opt to go down this route, but you will need to factor in storage space and costs, and what happens if you are unable to sell all your books. You will also need to pay a significant fee upfront to get all your books published. However, in return you will be able to print off each book at a lower unit price than you would through PoD.

Print formatting

As with ebook formatting, you can hire a freelancer or do this yourself. You can simply use Microsoft Word to format your book. Your chosen distribution platform should offer guidelines on the specifics. Some platforms, such as Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, offer Word document templates to format your book into. Some common key points are:

- Pick a serif font (unless your book is large print or a children's book)
- Use size 10 or 11 point
- Ensure all body text is the same size and style
- Indent all the first lines of your paragraphs
- Leave a comfortable margin around the text, usually 1.5cm on the outside edge, and 2-2.5cm on the edge where two pages in a spread join together (called the 'gutter').

Costs

The costs of printing books, through either PoD or bulk printing, will be affected by several factors. These include:

- Length of the book (pages)
- Dimensions of the book
- Paper thickness
- Whether printing is in black and white or colour
- Binding
- Cover type and thickness.

Books can come in all shapes and sizes, but standard UK paperbacks come in one of three dimensions, or formats: Format-A is 110mm x 178mm, Format-B is 130mm x 198mm and Format-C is 135mm x 216mm. Most fiction books are produced in Format-A or Format-B with the latter often used for novels.

As with sizing, there are a plethora of options available when it comes to choosing the type of paper the inside and cover of your book can be printed on; this will affect the cost of printing your book. As a general rule, UK fiction books have inside pages with a gsm (grams per square metre) of anywhere between 60 and 100, but most often they are 80gsm.

Here are some example prices of some PoD providers, using their standard page size:

Provider	Price per page (black and white)	Price per page (colour)	Price for cover and binding (per unit)
Kindle Enterprise Publishing	£0.010	£0.045	£0.700
Writersworld	£0.010	£0.035	£0.950

Sustainability

If you are printing hard copies of your book, you may want to think about environmentally sustainable options. There are a growing number of printers who offer eco-friendly services, but there are certainly less of them than regular printers. You can also expect to pay more to print on fully recycled paper and/or use vegetable ink. Some things you may want to think about with regards to sustainability:

- 100% PCW certification: 100% recycled paper does not necessarily mean 100% post-consumer waste recycled, which is more sustainable
- 100% PCF certification: post chlorine free paper is the most sustainable option
- Green e-certified certification

- FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification, ensuring the paper comes from responsibly managed forests
- As with other printers, get as many quotes as possible to compare prices
- You may have to mark up the price of your book to match the printing costs
- If you do use eco-friendly printing, ensure any green certification logos are displayed in the book.

Step 7: registering your book

An ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is a 13-digit code to identify your book and its specific edition. You can purchase ISBNs in the UK through the Nielsen ISBN store online (listed in the Resources section on page 19). You are not required by law to have an ISBN for your book, but they are used by publishers, sellers and libraries to order, stock and list your book and are extremely useful. You will need a new ISBN for any updated edition of your work. A single ISBN costs £89 at the time of writing. As is mentioned later in this guide, sometimes PR companies include the cost of an ISBN as part of their package.

In the UK, your work is automatically protected under UK copyright law. It is good practice to use the copyright symbol (©) on your work, alongside the year it was created, to actively display your intent to claim copyright protection.

Step 8: marketing and selling your book

Royalties and contracts

Once you start selling your book, you'll start to receive royalties. If you are a member of WGGB, we strongly recommend having our experts read over any contract before you sign (see page 5). Even getting a peer to read your contract is better than signing it without scrutiny.

With a self-published book, you could earn up to 70% of the royalties. The way you receive royalties will depend on the platform you are using to sell your book.

Remember, royalties do not equal profits: the profits from your book will be what is left of the royalties after expenses have been paid off.

Marketing your book

You are in charge of marketing when you self-publish your work. You can either manage it all independently or hire a PR professional to take care of some or all of the process (see Resources, page 19). The main benefit of a PR professional or company is

their contacts; they will be able to reach industry players that you can't. Whether you hire a PR professional or company or not may partly depend on how well-connected you feel you are already. If you have an agent, you may already have access to some useful contacts.

What a PR package may include:

- Writing a press release
- Creating graphics
- Writing key marketing text (blurb, author biography, keywords)
- Assigning subject classification codes, which the industry uses to categorise books for sale; assigning an ISBN
- Handling metadata management (information about the work that makes it searchable online)
- Contacting wholesalers, retailers and distributors about the book
- Helping you get onto national and local TV and use social media platforms
- Blogging, podcasting etc (you'll have to find ways of producing podcasts).

PR packages vary greatly in price; it is best to shop around and find a deal that suits you. What parts of marketing do you need help with? What parts would you rather do yourself? Talk to a few professionals/companies and get a feel for what they offer.

Your marketing strategy will depend on you knowing your target demographic(s) very well and tailoring a plan to reach them. For example, younger readers are now more likely to be reached via Instagram and Twitter than Facebook.

Marketing yourself

Remember, the popularity of your work is also based on how you sell *yourself* as an author: it's not just about the published work itself. What is your story? How did you come to write this book and why?

Your strategy may include:

- Book launch event
- Running your own website and/or blog, making a podcast, and generally making it easier for readers to find your work and increasing your online presence

- Strong and frequent social media presence – Instagram, Twitter, Facebook
- Interactions with audience on social media – competitions, giveaways etc
- Outreach to radio stations, websites and TV shows, offering interviews and features based on you and the book – they are always hungry for ‘talking points’
- Outreach to reviewing platforms via email
- Maximising distribution channels
- Using Amazon’s promotional tools and programs on offer (if you are published with them)
- Ensuring your book is on Goodreads, where readers and bloggers can leave reviews and the engine will recommend your book to potential readers
- Use Google Alerts, a service that allows users to monitor new content matching their search terms
- Metadata – ensuring all of your online content is described accurately and specifically in title tags, copy, descriptions, images and other media, making it more discoverable to searchers
- Podcasting
- Price promotions to accelerate sales
- Get an ISBN number so booksellers can carry your books
- Local reading/signing events.

Top tips

- Create a strong overall strategy before you dive into the process – work out your costs
- Shop around and compare prices for different freelancer services, printers and publishing platforms
- Find a great title and unique selling point (USP)
- Know your audience to create a detailed marketing strategy
- Develop a ‘business’ and ‘can do’ mindset to match your creative one.

Resources

Alliance of Independent Authors

www.allianceindependentauthors.org

Not-for-profit membership organisation for self-publishing authors, with lots of useful information.

Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading

www.ciep.uk

Non-profit body promoting excellence in English language editing, featuring suggested rates and other resources.

Chartered Institute of Public Relations

www.cipr.co.uk

Professional body representing over 10,000 public relations professionals, featuring a searchable register of current members.

Goodreads

www.goodreads.com

The world's largest website for readers and book recommendations, with a mission to help readers find and share books they love.

London Book Fair

www.londonbookfair.co.uk

Annual in-person event in London's Olympia, usually each April, attended by publishing professionals (including self-publishers) from around the world.

National Union of Journalists

www.nuj.org.uk

Trade union for journalists whose website features a [Freelance Fees Guide](#) and [Freelance Directory](#) of members who provide editing, proofreading, design, desk top publishing, public relations and illustration services.

Nielsen ISBN Store

www.nielsenisbnstore.com

Online store allowing you to purchase ISBNs plus other services.

Reedsy

www.reedsy.com

Featuring a community of one million authors and 2,500 freelance professionals with lots of free educational resources.

Self-Publishing Advice Conference

www.selfpublishingadviceconference.com

Online conference run in association with the Alliance of Independent Authors featuring self-publishing expert speakers.

Society of Indexers

www.indexers.org.uk

Professional body for indexers, allowing you to search for professional indexers.

Writers' & Artists' Yearbook

www.writersandartists.co.uk

Expert advice, a lively community, editorial services, plus the one-stop-shop for the WGGGB-recommended *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* and *Guide to Self-Publishing* (WGGGB members receive a discount off these publications – visit the Members' Area of our website where you will find the discount codes).

Writers Online

www.writers-online.co.uk/

Advice, opportunities, information, news and networking from the world of writing.

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