

SELF-PUBLISHING STEP BY STEP

Self-publishing gives you control over your book from the manuscript all the way through publication, distribution, and marketing. That freedom also means that you are responsible for assembling your publishing team, making production decisions, handling your metadata, and learning how the various platforms work. You do **not** have to do everything yourself. One of the biggest advantages of being an indie author is being able to hire professionals for the areas where you need help.

1. Writing Your Manuscript

Begin by drafting your manuscript and focusing on getting the story onto the page rather than trying to make every sentence perfect immediately. If you notice changes you want to make while drafting, consider keeping a checklist of things you want to address during revisions and continuing forward as though you have already made those changes. This can help prevent you from repeatedly rewriting the same chapters instead of finishing the book. Once the first draft is complete, take some time away from it before beginning revisions so you can return with fresher eyes. Writing groups, beta readers, workshops, and critique partners can also help at this stage, but remember that feedback is information, not an instruction you must follow.

2. Self-Editing and Professional Editing

Once the manuscript is complete, begin with your own revisions before hiring an editor. Look at the larger story first, then work down toward individual scenes, paragraphs, and sentences. Professional editing can include several different services, and not every book needs every type of edit:

- **Manuscript Evaluation:** An editor assesses the manuscript's strengths and weaknesses and provides feedback, usually in the form of a written report. This can be useful when you want professional guidance but are not ready for a full edit.
- **Developmental Editing:** Focuses on the big-picture elements of the manuscript, including structure, plot, pacing, character development, themes, worldbuilding, and overall story logic.
- **Line Editing:** Focuses on the way the story is written at the sentence and paragraph level, improving clarity, flow, voice, rhythm, and readability.
- **Copyediting:** Addresses grammar, spelling, punctuation, continuity, consistency, usage, and other technical elements of the manuscript.

- **Proofreading:** The final quality-control pass, completed after the manuscript has been formatted, to catch remaining typographical, grammatical, spacing, or formatting errors.

You may not need every service. The appropriate editing process depends on your manuscript, experience, budget, and what your book needs.

3. Formatting Your Book

Once your manuscript has gone through its major edits, it needs to be formatted for each format you intend to publish. Print books require careful attention to trim size, margins, page size, bleed, headers, page numbers, chapter openings, and the overall interior design, while eBooks require responsive digital formatting. Tools such as Microsoft Word, Scrivener, Atticus, Vellum, and other dedicated formatting programs can help, or you can hire a professional formatter. KDP provides free manuscript templates for print books, but remember that a template is a starting point rather than a substitute for checking your final file. Always review the final PDF or EPUB rather than assuming the formatting software has caught everything.

4. Designing the Cover Art

The fact is, people judge books by their covers. Your cover needs to communicate your genre, tone, and audience quickly, particularly because readers will often first see it as a tiny thumbnail online. Before hiring a designer, research current covers in your genre and identify what visual conventions readers are accustomed to seeing. Give your designer a clear brief containing your genre, target audience, synopsis, themes, preferred colours and typography, examples of covers you like, required formats, and any elements that are important to the story. Also make sure you understand exactly what you are receiving, including ebook, paperback, hardcover, audiobook, source files, and licensing or copyright terms.

Some places to find professional cover designers include:

1. Miblart

Miblart offers custom book cover design and other publishing services, with designers working across multiple genres. When comparing services, review current package details rather than relying on old pricing screenshots or blog posts, since packages and prices can change. Miblart also offers services beyond cover design, including formatting and promotional materials.

Website: [Miblart](#)

2. GetCovers

GetCovers is known for offering lower-cost cover design packages, making it an option for authors working with a smaller production budget. It offers different levels of service depending

on whether you need an ebook cover, print-ready cover, or additional design work. As with any designer or service, review the portfolio carefully and make sure the style fits your genre before ordering.

Website: GetCovers

3. Reedsy

Reedsy allows authors to search a marketplace of professional book designers and request quotes directly from designers whose portfolios fit their project. Current Reedsy data puts typical cover projects around **US\$550 –1,500**, with the final price depending on experience, genre, complexity, formats, and whether the design requires original illustration or other bespoke work. Fantasy, romance, and science fiction can be more expensive than simpler designs.

Website: Reedsy

4. 99designs

99designs allows you to either hire a designer directly or run a design contest where multiple designers submit concepts based on your brief. Current book-cover contest packages start at **US\$299**, with higher tiers available, while one-to-one book-cover projects currently show an estimated range of approximately **US\$279 –999**. The platform states that its book-cover packages include full copyright ownership.

Website: 99designs

5. Fiverr

Fiverr is a freelance marketplace where you can find designers at a wide range of price points. The advantage is the enormous number of available designers and styles, but quality can vary considerably, so don't choose based solely on the cheapest listing. Look through a designer's complete portfolio, check reviews, confirm exactly what files and rights are included, and make sure the designer has experience with your specific genre.

Website: Fiverr

6. BookBaby

BookBaby offers professional cover design as part of its broader self-publishing services. Its current cover-design service starts at **US\$399**, although the final cost depends on the project requirements. It can be useful for authors who want to purchase multiple publishing services from one company rather than coordinating several freelancers.

Website: BookBaby

Important: Do not assume that the cheapest cover is the best choice, but you also do not need to spend thousands of dollars. The most important thing is finding a designer whose portfolio demonstrates that they understand your genre and can create something that looks professional at thumbnail size.

5. Creating the Copyright Page

Your copyright page is part of your book's front matter and generally contains information such as the copyright notice, copyright holder, publisher or imprint, ISBN information, edition information, and relevant rights or permissions statements. You may also include disclaimers, credits, trademark notices, website information, or other publishing information appropriate to your book. Your exact copyright page will depend on your country, publisher/imprint structure, and the type of book you are publishing, so use a reputable publishing template or have your publishing professional review it. Remember that copyright protection itself does not depend on putting a copyright symbol on the page, although a copyright notice is standard publishing practice.

6. Utilising Templates

Templates can save enormous amounts of time, particularly when you are learning the technical side of publishing. KDP provides free templates for print books, and other formatting programs provide their own templates or built-in layouts. Templates are particularly useful for establishing margins, trim sizes, page dimensions, chapter formatting, and other technical requirements. However, never assume that because your manuscript fits into a template it is automatically publication-ready. You still need to inspect the completed file carefully and make sure it meets the requirements of the specific printer or retailer you are using.

7. Polishing the Draft and Proofreading

After your major edits are complete, give the manuscript a final polish before sending it into production. Once the book has been formatted, complete a **proofread of the actual formatted file**, because new errors can appear during formatting even when the manuscript itself was clean. For print books, order a physical proof copy and read through it while looking specifically for issues such as widows and orphans, awkward page breaks, missing text, incorrect headers, blank pages, image problems, and chapter-opening errors. For ebooks, test the EPUB on multiple devices or apps and check links, table of contents navigation, images, chapter breaks, and other interactive elements.

8. Uploading to Self-Publishing Platforms

There is no single self-publishing platform that you have to use. Your choices depend on whether you want to publish exclusively or widely, whether you want ebook distribution, print distribution, or both, and which retailers and countries you want to reach. Some platforms allow you to publish directly to a retailer, while aggregators such as Draft2Digital distribute your book to multiple retailers from one dashboard.

1. Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

KDP allows authors to publish ebooks, paperbacks, and hardcovers directly through Amazon. KDP is free to use and currently offers 35% and 70% ebook royalty options, with the 70% option subject to territory, pricing, and other requirements. Importantly, **the 70% royalty price range changed in July 2026**: on Amazon.com, the range is now **US\$2.99 – \$12.99**, rather than the older **\$2.99 – \$9.99** range commonly found in older publishing guides.

KDP Select is optional. If you enrol an ebook in KDP Select, the **digital edition must be exclusive to Amazon/KDP during the enrollment period**, although physical editions can still be sold elsewhere. KDP Select also makes the ebook available through Kindle Unlimited and provides promotional tools such as Free Book Promotions and Kindle Countdown Deals.

2. Apple Books

Apple Books allows authors to publish ebooks directly to Apple's book marketplace. Authors can manage books, pricing, territories, preorders, and sales information through Apple's publishing tools. It is particularly relevant if you want to publish wide rather than relying exclusively on Amazon. Check Apple's current technical and account requirements before uploading, as the publishing workflow and requirements can change.

3. Draft2Digital

Draft2Digital is an ebook and print distribution platform that allows authors to distribute through multiple retailers and library channels without individually maintaining every retailer account. It can distribute to stores including Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and other channels, depending on the author's selections and current distribution agreements. One major advantage is centralised management, especially for authors who want wide distribution without uploading the same book to every retailer. Because aggregator fees and distribution options can change, check Draft2Digital's current pricing and retailer list before publishing.

4. Barnes & Noble Press

Barnes & Noble Press allows authors to publish ebooks and print books directly to Barnes & Noble. It is particularly relevant for authors who want direct access to the Barnes & Noble ecosystem rather than relying on an aggregator. When publishing print editions, pay close attention to the available trim sizes, print specifications, pricing, and distribution options offered at the time you upload.

5. IngramSpark

IngramSpark is primarily important for print-on-demand and wide print distribution. It can make eligible print books available through Ingram's distribution network, which bookstores, libraries, and other booksellers use. This does **not** mean a bookstore is automatically going to order your book. Distribution makes the book available for ordering; bookstores still decide what they stock.

Before publishing through IngramSpark, understand wholesale discounts, returnability, print costs, metadata, ISBNs, and your chosen distribution settings. These decisions can affect how attractive the book is to bookstores and how much you earn per sale.

6. Kobo Writing Life

Kobo Writing Life allows authors to publish ebooks directly to Kobo's international ebookstore. Kobo has a particularly significant presence in markets outside Amazon's strongest territories, making it an important consideration for authors publishing wide. It also provides tools for pricing, promotions, preorders, and sales reporting.

7. Google Play Books

Google Play Books allows authors to publish ebooks through Google's ecosystem. Google currently offers a **70% revenue split on ebook sales in more than 60 supported countries** for partners who have accepted its updated terms, and the previous price-band restriction for that split has been removed in eligible territories. Because the exact split can depend on the country and account terms, check the Partner Center information for your specific market.

8. PublishDrive

PublishDrive is an aggregator that distributes books to multiple retailers and library platforms. It has historically used subscription-based pricing rather than simply taking a percentage of every sale, but pricing structures and included distribution channels can change. Compare the current subscription cost against your expected sales before choosing it, particularly if you are a newer author.

9. Lulu

Lulu offers print-on-demand publishing and distribution, including global distribution for eligible books. Its current global distribution service can make qualifying books available through Amazon and other online retailers and creates an Ingram listing that allows bookstores to order eligible books. Lulu's current distribution requirements include having an ISBN, appropriate retail markup, and an eligible format.

Lulu also updates print costs periodically, so do not rely on old production-cost examples when calculating your profit. Its current pricing tools allow you to calculate manufacturing costs, distribution options, and potential revenue.

10. Smashwords

Smashwords is no longer a separate platform you should treat as an independent publishing option. **Smashwords became part of Draft2Digital**, so authors looking for the former Smashwords distribution ecosystem should use Draft2Digital instead.

11. BookBaby

BookBaby provides publishing-related services including editing, design, formatting, printing, and distribution. It is different from a straightforward retailer upload such as KDP because it operates more as a paid publishing-services provider. It can be useful for authors who want multiple production services handled through one company, but compare the total cost carefully with hiring individual freelancers and using direct publishing platforms.

Remember: You do not need to upload to every platform listed above. Decide first whether you want **Amazon-exclusive**, **wide ebook distribution**, **wide print distribution**, or some combination.

9. Uploading to Book Discovery, Review & ARC Platforms

Getting your book onto retailer websites is only part of making it discoverable. Reader communities, book databases, review platforms, and ARC services can help readers find your book and give early readers a place to record their reviews.

Reader Discovery & Review Platforms

Goodreads: Goodreads remains an important reader-facing platform where people can add books to shelves, track reading, rate books, and write reviews. Authors can use the Goodreads Author Program to manage their author profile and add books through the Author Dashboard. In 2026, Goodreads also has a significant backlog of librarian-added books, so using the Author Program can be particularly useful rather than waiting for a manual addition.

The StoryGraph: The StoryGraph is a reader-focused alternative to Goodreads with features such as mood and pace tracking, reading statistics, content warnings, tags, recommendations, and reviews. Make sure your book has an accurate listing and metadata, particularly genre, format, publication date, and ISBN.

LibraryThing: LibraryThing is a book-cataloguing and reader community platform with reviews, tagging, discussions, and reader programs. It can help with long-term discoverability and reach readers who enjoy cataloguing and discussing books.

BookBub: BookBub is particularly useful for author discovery, reader followership, promotions, and deal-based marketing. Authors can create an author profile and use BookBub's tools to build a following and promote books when eligible opportunities are available.

BookCrossing: BookCrossing focuses on physical books being passed between readers and tracked through the platform. It is less important as a conventional review platform but can be an interesting option for authors who want to experiment with physical-book community engagement.

Bluesky: Bluesky is **not a book database or review platform**, but it can be useful for book discovery and author networking. Authors can use it to connect with readers, reviewers, other authors, book communities, and genre-specific conversations. Put Bluesky under your social-media and marketing section rather than under book-uploading sites.

ARC Distribution Platforms

NetGalley: NetGalley is a professional digital review platform used by librarians, booksellers, educators, reviewers, and other book professionals. It can provide exposure before publication and help generate reviews and professional feedback. For an independent author, the cost can be significant, so many indie authors use a co-op or other service that provides access rather than purchasing the most expensive option independently.

BookSirens: BookSirens connects authors with readers who want to receive and review advance copies. Its current pricing includes options for public and private ARC campaigns. The current public promotion model lists **US\$10 per ARC plus US\$2 per reader found through BookSirens**, with an author subscription option also available.

BookSprout: BookSprout is designed specifically around ARC and review management. It provides secure review-copy distribution, reviewer management, automated reminders, and

tools for collecting reviews. It currently offers a free account for getting started, with paid plans beginning at **US\$9/month** and additional plans for authors running larger or more advanced campaigns.

BookFunnel: BookFunnel is particularly useful if you want to run your **own manual ARC team** rather than relying entirely on a public ARC marketplace. You can use it to securely deliver ebook files, manage individual readers, and use features such as watermarking and controlled access. This gives you much more direct control over who receives your ARC and makes it useful for private ARC teams, reader magnets, and bonus content.

The important distinction is that **BookFunnel is primarily a secure delivery and reader-management tool**, whereas services such as NetGalley, BookSirens, and BookSprout are more directly focused on connecting authors with reviewers and managing review campaigns.

You can also find companies that provide author services, such as ARC Management, Cover Reveal Blasts, Online Book Tours, and Release Day Blasts.

10. Email Marketing & Newsletters

Email marketing is one of the most useful long-term tools for an indie author because it builds a direct audience rather than relying entirely on social-media algorithms. Start building your list as early as possible, ideally before your first book launches. A reader magnet, such as a free short story, bonus scene, prequel, novella, sample chapters, or other exclusive content, can encourage readers to subscribe.

Use your newsletter to announce releases, cover reveals, preorders, ARC opportunities, sales, giveaways, events, behind-the-scenes content, and personal author updates. You do not need to email constantly. A consistent monthly or biweekly newsletter can be enough, with additional emails around major launches when appropriate.

Newsletter Platforms

1. beehiiv

beehiiv has a free **Launch** plan that currently supports up to **2,500 subscribers** with unlimited email sends. The free plan includes newsletters, a website, analytics, recommendations, custom domains, and other tools. Paid plans add features such as email automations, advanced analytics, monetisation tools, and additional functionality.

2. MailerLite

MailerLite is designed around email marketing, landing pages, forms, automations, and newsletters and has historically been popular with small businesses and creators. Check its

current free-plan limits before signing up because subscriber and monthly-send allowances can change.

3. Mailchimp

Mailchimp is a long-established email marketing platform with templates, audience management, segmentation, and marketing tools. Its free plan is now much smaller than many older self-publishing guides claim: current information lists **up to 250 contacts and 500 monthly sends**, with a daily limit of 250 sends.

4. Substack

Substack combines newsletters with a public publishing platform, allowing subscribers to receive posts by email while also reading them online. It is particularly useful if you want your newsletter to function partly like a blog or ongoing publication. Authors can also use Substack's paid subscription system if they want to offer paid content.

5. Kit (formerly ConvertKit)

ConvertKit is now branded as **Kit**. Its current free plan supports up to **10,000 subscribers** and includes unlimited forms, landing pages, broadcasts, tagging and segmentation, and other creator-focused tools. More advanced visual automations and automation sequences are part of paid plans.

6. Flodesk

Flodesk focuses heavily on visual design and branded email marketing. It isn't free, but it can appeal to authors who prioritise attractive, highly designed newsletters and want a simpler pricing structure.

Also worth knowing: StoryOrigin and BookFunnel can be used alongside your newsletter provider for reader magnets, newsletter swaps, ARC management, and other reader-growth activities.

Newsletter basics:

- Have a clear signup form.
- Give readers a reason to subscribe.
- Send a welcome email or welcome sequence.
- Make your unsubscribe link easy to find.
- Do not purchase email lists.
- Keep your subscriber list organised and permission-based.
- Follow applicable anti-spam and privacy laws, including Canada's **CASL** if you are operating from Canada or sending commercial electronic messages to Canadians.
- Back up important subscriber information where appropriate and make sure your chosen platform complies with your privacy requirements.

11. Marketing Your Book

Start marketing before publication rather than waiting until release day. Start by identifying your target readership, your genre, your comparable authors, and the ways your audience actually discovers books. Your marketing can include social media, newsletters, reader magnets, ARCs, preorder campaigns, author websites, advertisements, giveaways, influencer outreach, newsletter swaps, podcasts, interviews, blog features, and in-person events.

Your cover, title, subtitle if applicable, book description, categories, keywords, metadata, author branding, and retailer pages are all part of your marketing. A book can be beautifully written and still be hard to discover if its packaging doesn't clearly communicate what it is. You do not need to be on every social platform. Choose the places where your actual readers spend time and build a sustainable presence there.

Remember that marketing is not only about selling the current book. A strong marketing system should also make it easy for readers to discover your other books, join your newsletter, follow you, and keep reading your work.

12. Attending Conventions, Events & Building Your Author Website

In-person events can be an excellent way to meet readers, sell books, build relationships with other authors, and become part of your local literary community. Look at conventions, book fairs, library events, bookstores, author signings, literary festivals, genre conventions, and independent author events that fit your audience. Before paying for a table, investigate the event's attendance, audience, table fees, sales policies, location, and whether authors are actually permitted to sell books directly.

Your author website should function as your central online home. At minimum, consider including your books, biography, contact information, newsletter signup, event information, links to retailers, and a way for readers to learn about upcoming releases. Unlike a social-media profile, your website is an online property that you control and can use regardless of changes to an individual platform's algorithm or policies.

13. Managing Emails, Administration & Personal Assistants

As your publishing business grows, there will eventually be more administrative work than one person can comfortably manage. This can include answering emails, organising event applications, updating spreadsheets, preparing newsletters, scheduling social-media posts,

managing ARC teams, uploading metadata, organising files, processing orders, and coordinating freelancers.

A virtual assistant or personal assistant can take over some of these repetitive tasks, allowing you to spend more time writing and doing the parts of publishing that require your direct involvement. Start small rather than immediately handing over everything. Create written procedures, shared folders, calendars, passwords through a secure password manager, and clear boundaries around what an assistant is and is not authorised to access.

If you hire someone to work with your readers or business, treat the relationship professionally. Have a written agreement covering responsibilities, payment, confidentiality, access to accounts, ownership of work, and what happens when the working relationship ends.

Concluding Thoughts...

Self-publishing does not mean doing absolutely everything yourself. It means **you are the person making the publishing decisions**. You can hire an editor, proofreader, formatter, cover designer, publicist, virtual assistant, accountant, or other professional whenever you need one.

Your first book will teach you an enormous amount, and your process will probably change with every subsequent book. Publishing platforms update their rules, prices, royalty structures, and features regularly, so always check the official platform documentation before making a final publishing or financial decision.

Most importantly, give yourself permission to learn as you go. There is no single "correct" way to be an indie author. There is only the publishing process that makes sense for **your book, your readers, your budget, and your goals**.