

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Deciding whether self-publishing makes sense for you
- » Creating and editing your manuscript
- » Choosing from book design and print options
- » Distributing and promoting your book
- » Checking out a brief self-publishing timeline

Chapter **1**

Welcome to Self-Publishing!

Whether you know it or not, just about everyone has a unique story to tell, experiences to share, knowledge to disseminate, or a creative imagination that allows them to brainstorm incredible stories. Because you've started reading this book, you're likely one of these people. If you've ever dreamed of having a book published with your name prominently displayed on the cover, you're in luck! For more people than ever before, self-publishing has become a viable way to get your book published and accessible to a potentially vast audience.

Most book publishing companies aren't willing to work with first-time authors who have little or no professional writing experience, but this situation is no longer a roadblock for getting your book published. Again, thanks to new digital publishing technologies, just about anyone who has good writing skills and a great idea for content can have a book professionally published and made available to the general public in print, digital, and/or audio formats. This process is called *self-publishing*.

This chapter provides an overview of what being a self-published author involves. The rest of this book takes you step-by-step through the entire self-publishing process. Use this second edition of *Self-Publishing for Dummies* to find out what you must know so that you can put your knowledge and ideas into writing and publish your own book.

Figuring Out Whether Self-Publishing Works for You

Self-publishing offers many awesome benefits. It allows ordinary people — business leaders, celebrities, entrepreneurs, educators, students, retired people, or stay-at-home parents (that is, just about anyone) — to become a published author for a relatively low financial investment. What's required, however, is a tremendous amount of time, creativity, and discipline to write, edit, design, publish, promote, distribute, and sell your book (if you want to be successful — and who doesn't want to be successful?).

When you get hired as an author by a major publishing house, your job is simply to write the book's manuscript and perhaps gather some or all the artwork that's included within that book. For this work, you're typically paid an advance and a royalty on book sales. Various experts working for the publisher handle all the other steps (and there are many of them) in the publishing process. Keep in mind, the author is expected to participate in the marketing process when working with a traditional book publisher.

Self-publishing is different. As the author, you're still responsible for writing your book's manuscript, but you're also responsible for every other aspect of the book publishing process. The good news is that if you have a great idea for a book or knowledge that you want to share, but you're not already a skilled writer, you can find many professional ghostwriters to help you transform your thoughts, knowledge, experiences, or ideas into a professionally written and polished manuscript.

For other parts of the process, you can also find skilled editors, graphic designers, illustrators, publishing consultants, and book marketing specialists to provide any skills you're currently lacking. And you can hire these pros on a freelance basis to help out. In other words, you don't have to handle all the steps involved with self-publishing by yourself. Even when you hire a wide range of freelancers and companies to handle major steps in the publishing process, you're ultimately the decision maker and the person in charge of the entire project — from start to finish. *Note:* The more you hire and rely on other people, the more expensive the self-publishing process becomes.



REMEMBER

Self-publishing has two major benefits:

- » **Control:** You get 100 percent creative control over every aspect of the book's content, layout, design, format, pricing, distribution, advertising, and marketing.
- » **Profits:** Instead of just getting an advance plus a royalty on sales, you get to keep most of the profits generated by the sale of the book.

We explore these two benefits (and many more) in the following sections.

Chapter 2 talks specifically about why you should consider self-publishing, and you can discover the benefits of the process. It also reveals how just about any type of content — fiction or nonfiction — can be self-published and transformed into an e-book, paperback, or hardcover. You can also find out what specific skills you need to become a self-published author.



WARNING

Don't get too excited just yet! Although self-publishing does offer an amazing opportunity for just about anyone to have their book professionally published, compared to having your book published by a major publishing company, self-publishing has a few drawbacks, as well. I also go over these drawbacks in Chapter 2.

Gathering the Right Publishing Tools

Before you sit down to write a potential bestseller, gather the proper writing and publishing tools. (Chapter 4 focuses on the equipment and tools that you need to successfully write a book.) Some pre-writing tasks that you need to accomplish include

- » **Creating a comfortable writing environment:** Pay attention to your writing location and the furnishings you use, but also focus on the lighting and temperature where you will be writing.
- » **Identifying and minimizing distractions when you're writing:** Get rid of that TV or messaging app that pulls your mind away from writing, and find ways to adjust your work habits that allow you to stay focused.
- » **Putting together the perfect writer's toolbox:** Make sure that you have everything you need, not just a good word processor.

What you need in your writer's toolbox varies, based on what format(s) you ultimately want your book to take. For example, beyond just a word processing program, you need specialized software to format and publish e-books; and you have to have separate applications to design the look and feel, and prepare your manuscript for printing in the form of a traditional hardcover or paperback book. Which applications you use depends on several factors, including whether you want to print the content within your book in black and white or in full color, for example.



REMEMBER

As an author, you need certain tools to make the writing process easier and maximize your productivity:

- » You can use a Windows PC or Mac desktop or laptop computer that's equipped with a powerful word processing program (such as Microsoft Word or Google Docs) and that has access to the internet and a printer.
- » Some people opt to do their writing by using a tablet (such as an Apple iPad, Samsung Galaxy Tab, or Microsoft Surface Pro) that has an external keyboard attached. However, for most writers, this is a secondary writing tool.
- » Of course, you can also plan to write the first draft of your book freehand by using a pad and pen. (If you go this route, expect to wind up with a very tired hand!) You can find applications that automatically transform your handwriting into editable text on your computer or tablet, so you have options.

Putting Together a Winning Manuscript

The beauty of self-publishing is that you can transform almost any type of content into a professionally published book. Depending on the type of book you're writing, a full-length manuscript may be anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 words (or longer). A compilation of poems or short stories, a photobook, or a cookbook that contains recipes follow different formats altogether. Meanwhile, a kids' book is typically less than 500 words, but a book that contains chapters can be as long as 20,000 words, while a book targeted to a middle school or young adult audience can be between 50,000 and 80,000 words. Be sure that you understand your audience and the book-length and format they're accustomed to reading.



REMEMBER

Coming up with the perfect book idea — something that's unique or that offers a new twist on something that's been written about before — is an important step in the book writing and publishing process. Equally important, you need to research your information and make sure that you have enough interesting and informative content to fill an entire book. You then need to properly organize the information so that the reader can make sense of and make use of it.

Starting with an outline and an audience



TIP

The trick to writing a successful book involves first brainstorming and carefully outlining exactly what you plan to write, and then clearly defining your book's audience. Make sure that the content within your book (and later all the marketing for it) targets that specific audience. I explain how to determine your target audience in Chapter 3. Not only do you need to define who will potentially want to read your book, but you also must then make your published book accessible to this audience and market it so that the right people find out about its existence.

Most authors begin the writing process by creating a detailed outline for their book's manuscript before they start researching, writing, and adding visual elements such as photos and illustrations. Chapter 5 focuses on how to prepare an outline, research the content for your book, and decide what elements you want to incorporate into your manuscript.



REMEMBER

Everything within your book must be completely original, unless you have written permission to include someone else's copyrighted materials within your book. Plagiarism is something you want to avoid as a writer. Meanwhile, developing your own voice as a writer is something that you want to establish early on when your writing career is taking off. In Chapter 5, I focus a bit on AI tools for writers and why you should *not* rely on them to create your manuscript.

Fine-tuning your manuscript

The manuscript editing process requires several steps. An excellent strategy has you begin by editing your own work, and then hiring a professional editor to fine-tune the manuscript. In Chapter 6, find out what a professional editor does and how to hire someone who's highly skilled. Editing requires a very different skillset than writing, and people train for many years to master how to edit well.

Keep in mind that software and online-based tools can do a pretty good job helping you fine-tune your manuscript, as well as correct grammar and spelling errors. But *none* of these tools is a replacement for hiring a professional editor to review your manuscript before the layout and design process, and then again before it goes to press.

Prepping the manuscript for publishing



REMEMBER

In the publishing world, the document that you create, containing your written work and supplemental materials that will eventually be published into a book, is referred to as a *manuscript*. After you edit the manuscript and format, lay out, and design the pages to look like pages within a traditional book, the finished

document is referred to as *galley*s. This galley content gets printed as a traditional softcover or hardcover book, or formatted as an e-book.

An *e-book* is a published book that's distributed in a digital format such as epub, PDF, or a platform-specific format. Readers can access it by using a dedicated e-reader (such as an Amazon Kindle or a Barnes & Noble Nook), on a computer screen, or on the screen of a mobile device (including a smartphone or tablet). The pages of an e-book look exactly like the pages of a traditionally printed book, but among other things, the reader can choose the typeface and font size for the text displayed.

Dealing with Administration and Design

Depending on what your goals are for the book, some self-published authors establish their own small publishing company (a formal business entity), especially if they plan to directly sell and distribute their own printed books. Discover, in Chapter 7, why you may benefit from forming a company.

Taking care of the administrative details

Even without establishing your own publishing company, you need to complete some administrative tasks before your self-published book goes to press or is released in any digital format. For example, based on how you plan to distribute and sell your book, you likely need to acquire a unique International Standard Book Number (ISBN), a Library of Congress Control Number, and a copyright. Chapter 8 outlines how to accomplish many of these tasks. (However, in some cases, if you hire a printer that specializes in working with self-published authors, the printer often handles most or all these tasks for you — but for a fee. See Part 3 for more info on print and digital publishing choices.)



TIP

Many companies offer comprehensive publishing solutions for self-published authors, including print-on-demand (POD) and small-print-run printers. These companies can handle some or all of the necessary administrative tasks on your behalf. Using one of these comprehensive publishing solutions can help first-time authors because the service makes the whole process easier and saves you considerable time. However, depending on which service you hire and what tasks you expect it to handle, you'll need to pay for their work upfront and out of pocket — which is a financial investment on your part that could be anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars. You can read more about short-run printers and POD companies in Chapter 12 and Chapter 13, respectively.

Crafting a book design

In addition to the many administrative tasks that you (or someone on your behalf) must complete before a book gets published, you need to lay out and design the manuscript, as well as create the book's front and back covers. These tasks apply to both traditionally printed books and e-books. However, you can more easily and quickly complete the process for e-books than for what will ultimately be a traditionally printed softcover or hardcover book. You can handle these steps yourself, using desktop publishing and graphic design software (see Chapters 9 and 10 for details about tools used for page layout and cover design), or you can hire a professional graphic designer to do this design work for you. Chapter 9 focuses on how to design and lay out the interior of your book, using desktop publishing software running on a Windows PC or Mac. Chapter 10 provides information regarding how you need to create the most impressive and high-impact front and back cover possible.



TIP

You've probably heard that saying, "You can't judge a book by its cover." Well, when it comes to self-publishing, the appearance of your book's cover and a well-written book description both play a huge role in whether readers are likely to purchase your book. Hiring an experienced book cover designer is one of the expenses you should splurge on during the publishing process.

Checking Out Your Printing Options

Printed books come in all shapes and sizes, and you have options when it comes to printing your book. Based on which printing method you choose, going with an industry standard trim size will keep your costs down. A printed book's *trim size* refers to the dimensions of the book (it's width and height). Page count determines its thickness. The most common trim sizes for standard books are: 5 × 8 inches, 5.5 × 8.5 inches, or 6 × 9 inches.

Here are the major self-publishing print options:

- » **Traditional printing:** Using offset printing technology to publish a large quantity of books at one time. Major publishing houses use this process, and it offers many advantages (but also a few drawbacks) for self-published authors. Unless you know, with 100 percent certainty, that you can sell hundreds or thousands of printed copies of your book, don't pursue this printing method as a self-published author.



TIP

» **E-book publishing:** The least expensive way to publish and distribute a book. Because using a dedicated e-reader, a computer, or a tablet has become a very common way for readers to acquire and read books, it makes sense to have your book available in popular e-book formats. I cover how to create, publish, and distribute e-books in Chapter 11.

If you want (or need) to keep your initial financial investment low and know that your target audience tends to like e-books, strongly consider pursuing e-book publishing exclusively. When you use specialized software (such as Vellum), you can create and publish e-books more quickly, easily, and affordably than you can print books. In fact, you may be able to publish an e-book entirely by yourself.

» **Short run printing:** Have a relatively small number of books printed in one batch. In fact, you can initially order just a few dozen or a few hundred copies of the book. You have to pay a higher printing cost per book than you do with a traditional printing option, but the financial risk is much lower if your book doesn't wind up selling as well as you expect. You can find out more about this printing option in Chapter 12.

Consider this option if you plan to sell your book directly to readers in-person or online, but you don't want to commit to a large print run that you need to pay for upfront and then need to warehouse until you can sell the copies.

» **Print-on-demand (POD):** The most viable option for many self-published authors who want to create and sell printed copies of their book. Despite having a few small drawbacks, POD requires a relatively low initial financial investment and requires the author to maintain little or no inventory. With POD, individual copies of your book are printed one at a time when they're ordered. Each copy is then shipped directly to the buyer by the POD printer. See Chapter 13 for details.



REMEMBER

Before choosing which printing and publishing option is right for you, consider your goals, your distribution plan, and your budget for the book. (Keep in mind that marketing, advertising, and promotions for your book — both online and in the real-world — also require a separate, but typically significant, investment.)

No matter which printing and publishing option you choose, plan to develop a good rapport with the company that you work with. If you plan to pursue only e-book sales for your book, the publishing process is somewhat easier because you'll team up with Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple Books, and other e-book distribution services to handle the sale and distribution of the digital edition of your book.

Delving into Distribution

As a self-published author, one of the biggest challenges (besides writing the book) is getting it into the hands of readers. You can sell your book in many ways; the trick is to find distribution methods that work best for your book and allow you to achieve your sales goals.

Distributing a printed book

For printed books, here are some common distribution methods:

- » **Online booksellers:** In Chapter 15, you can find out about distribution options through online booksellers, such as Amazon (www.amazon.com), Barnes & Noble (www.bn.com), and Apple Books (www.apple.com/apple-books), which for many self-published authors is the most viable and inexpensive way of making a book available to the public.
- » **Retail distribution:** Chapter 16 focuses on traditional distribution through brick-and-mortar retail bookstores and other specialty retailers. Unfortunately, retail is the most difficult distribution method for self-published authors to utilize.



WARNING

When you try to distribute your book through major retailers, you compete head-on with major publishing companies that are supported by teams of professional salespeople who have well-established connections with key buyers at the various retailers. You can be at a huge disadvantage in this situation, but as you can see in Chapter 15, your book can find its way onto the shelves of major bookstores and mass-market retailers if you have the budget and can overcome the challenges that small publishers face when trying to set up this distribution method.

- » **Direct online sales:** These days, creating an e-commerce-oriented website for your book is an extremely viable option for self-published authors. With such a website, you can take orders, process online payments, and then ship out the books directly to customers. Assuming that you can keep your printing costs down, direct online sales can easily become one of the most profitable sales options for you.



REMEMBER

If you plan to sell your own book to distributors, wholesalers, retailers, booksellers, or individual consumers, you need to deal with warehousing, order fulfillment, and shipping. Chapter 16 provides an overview of what's required when it comes to distributing printed copies of your book.

Distributing an e-book

As an author, if your budget is tight and you want to focus exclusively on e-book distribution and sales, the e-book route can provide you with an incredibly lucrative opportunity. However, to be successful, you need to make your e-book available in several popular digital formats so that it's compatible with Kindle and Nook e-readers, Windows and Mac-based computers, as well as iOS and Android-based mobile devices. Not only do you need to publish your e-book in multiple formats, but you also need to create a publisher account with major e-book sellers because those sellers will ultimately distribute and sell your book for you. These online-based sellers include

- » Amazon (www.amazon.com)
- » Barnes & Noble (www.bn.com)
- » Apple Books (www.apple.com/apple-books)
- » Kobo (www.kobo.com)

The benefit to working with these established e-book sellers is that they handle the order processing, payment collection, and digital distribution of your book in a way that's copy protected (so the buyer can't make unlimited copies of the digital e-book file to give out to all their friends, for example). In exchange, as the author, you pay the e-book distribution service a sales commission up to 30 percent of the e-book's cover price. However, you can sell and distribute e-books yourself by using more complicated methods — through your own website or through social media, for example. Check out Chapter 11 to explore all of these options.

Getting Noticed: Publicity and Marketing

Your book won't sell, no matter how good it is, unless you develop a comprehensive, effective, and well-timed marketing, publicity, and advertising campaign to reach and convince your intended audience to purchase the book. This kind of campaign requires an upfront financial investment on your part — above and beyond what you spend to get the book published.



TIP

When composing your book's description and any promotional content that'll be used online, be sure to make the text SEO-friendly, which will make it easier for people to find via search engines and various search tools. This is covered in greater detail within Parts 4 and 5.



WARNING

Reality check: Very seldom does a first-time author have readers breaking down their door to get copies of their book. Often, for a self-published book to achieve sales success, you need to target it to a clearly defined niche audience that you determine has an interest in whatever you plan to write about. Ultimately, you'll want to market and promote your book to a niche audience that you determine how to reach with your sales efforts.

Looking for free publicity opportunities

You can find ways to generate free publicity in all forms of media. Radio, television, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, social media, blogs, podcasts, and vlogs provide one of the most powerful and cost-effective ways for self-publishers to generate awareness about their book. If handled correctly, you can transform public awareness directly into book sales.

In Chapter 18, you can find out how to develop the publicity materials that you need to promote your book properly; I cover items such as the press release, author bio, author photo, and the media pitch letter. Chapter 19 focuses on how to use these materials to generate media reviews, articles, and features about your book. The easiest way to get your publicity materials out there, without having to hire a public relations firm or marketing agency, involves initially focusing on obtaining publicity online through podcasts, vlogs, blogs, YouTube channels, and social media influencers who cater to your book's target audience.



TIP

As a self-published author, you need to have reviews written about your book in mainstream media and podcasts, as well as on websites and in blogs. Equally important, you need to generate positive reviews and ratings from your readers that ultimately get published on online book retailers' websites. A reader who has never heard of you as an author is much more likely to purchase and read your book if they see hundreds or thousands (if possible) of positive ratings and reviews.

Paying for advertising

You can educate potential readers about your book through paid advertising, which enables you to deliver your exact marketing message to a highly targeted audience, through specific media outlets. To get started, the most cost-effective means of advertising involves going online, using search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!, as well as popular social media platforms (including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok). Chapter 20 covers how to create effective ads to promote and sell your book — both online and using traditional media outlets.

Offering related products and services

Whether your book sells for \$9.95 or \$29.95, your profit potential is ultimately limited because the book itself is a low-priced item compared to most other products that have higher profit margins. As a self-published author, you can add to your profits in a variety of ways:

- » Use the recognition and credibility that you receive as a published author to repackage your book's content into other, higher-priced items, such as videos and audiobooks.
- » Hold lectures and host seminars or training programs related to your book's topic.

Check out how to generate additional revenue streams from the content of your book in Chapter 21.

Making the book itself a marketing tool

Some business leaders and consultants, for example, use their self-published book as a sales and marketing tool for the products or services that they offer. They give away the book to prospective new customers or clients to demonstrate the author's knowledge and competence, and to encourage new business. In this case, the author doesn't plan for the book to earn revenue on its own. Instead, it's a marketing expense that will potentially generate profitable new business.

Surveying a Brief Self-Publishing Task List and Timeline

Self-publishing your book isn't a fast and easy project. Plan on investing considerable time into each step of the process, especially when it comes to writing the manuscript. Don't take shortcuts!

Unfortunately, you just can't determine how long it will take you to sit down and write the full-length manuscript for your book until you begin writing and understand more about your personal work habits as a writer. For some people, the researching and writing process takes just weeks. For others, it takes months or even years. After you complete your manuscript, you can more accurately calculate a production timeline for your book, based on the printing and publishing decisions that you make.

After you finish your manuscript, with proper planning, you can potentially have a book professionally published in as little as two to three months. In 60 to 90 days, you could be a published author. Table 1-1 shows a rough list of tasks that you need to handle after you finish writing the manuscript and tells you where this book covers the task related details. Use the table as a guide for detailing the timeline for your self-publishing project.

TABLE 1-1 Post-Writing Tasks and Timeline

Task*	What It Involves	Expected Timeframe	Chapter or Part with Details
Establish your publishing company	Set up your business as a legal entity and give your publishing company a name.	1 week	Chapter 7
Edit the manuscript	Hire an editor and review edits	1-4 weeks	Chapter 6
Choose a self-publishing option: e-book or print	Hire a printer and distributor; get quotes and evaluate services; determine a format and design for the options that you choose	2-4 weeks	Part 3
Design and lay out the book	Complete on your own or hire help per chosen publishing method(s)	1 week	Chapter 9
Apply for an ISBN, barcode, and copyright	Handle depending on the publishing process and the company	A few hours	Chapter 8
Set the cover price for your book	Based on the book's format, length, publishing method(s), and so on	A few hours	Chapter 8
Create your book's front and back covers	Hire a graphic designer (even for e-books)	1 week	Chapter 10
Plan and implement a comprehensive promotional campaign	Outline marketing, public relations, and advertising efforts	Ongoing after plan creation	Part 5
Develop an online presence	Create an e-commerce website and social media accounts to promote and sell your book	Ongoing after creation	Chapter 17
Set a publication date	Decide the exact date your book will be available for sale. This will typically be dictated based on the distribution method(s) you choose.	Varies	Chapter 8

(continued)

TABLE 1-1 (continued)

Task*	What It Involves	Expected Timeframe	Chapter or Part with Details
Begin preselling your book	Put together and send out press materials, promote the book to potential distributors, line up booksellers to sell the book, take out ads, and so on	Ongoing after a few weeks of setup	Part 5
Have your book listed (and sold) through online booksellers	Engage with Amazon and Barnes & Noble, for example	Several days	Chapter 14
Publish and ship the book	To consumers, booksellers, retailers, and distributors, as appropriate	Varies	Part 4
Continue promoting and marketing your book while you take orders	In-person book signings or author appearances; social media activity	Ongoing	Part 5

*Some of the tasks in the table can occur simultaneously.

While you develop your timeline, allocate ample time for each step of the publishing process so that you wind up with the best possible finished product. For example, a professional editor may take several weeks to edit your manuscript. It can then take a professional graphic designer at least a week or two (potentially longer) to create a professional front and back cover, and they'll need additional time to do the layout and design work for your book's interior.



TIP

When you read each chapter of this book, consider how long each step of the process may take you, based on your unique lifestyle, responsibilities, available budget, and personal situation. Make sure that the timeline and deadlines you set for yourself are realistic, using the timeline estimates that you can find in each chapter. Stay focused on your goals and deadlines, and work hard to achieve them.



WARNING

Don't set and announce a publication date for your book until you accomplish all of the necessary tasks to have the book printed and you get a reliable timeline from your printer (or e-book publisher and distributors) about printing/publishing your book. Expect delays to happen at various steps along the way and build some wiggle room for these delays into your overall timeline. For example, your editor or graphic designer could get sick, your printer may have mechanical issues with their press, or your e-book distributors may be delayed when it comes to adding books to their respective databases because of an influx of new submissions.