

Self-Publishing a Book

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1. What is your goal for your book?

If your goal is to publish your book for posterity, for your friends and family to read, it won't take a lot of time or money to put out a satisfactory book. However, if you are hoping for a bigger audience, it's going to take a lot more work and be more costly. My goal was to put out a hardback book with a dust cover, even though I was advised against it due to cost. It is much more reasonable to print your book as a paperback, and that is what is generally recommended.

2. Find resources for beginning writers.

Self-publishing is done online, with the writer submitting his or her book usually in Word. It gets printed *exactly* how you submit it! Most beginning writers need help to complete a polished Word document in the correct format for printing.

If you choose to go with a publisher who specializes in helping authors get their book into print, they can be a wonderful resource. My publisher, Shires Press gave me a lot of good information and advice every step of the way and even gave me referrals for editors – as part of their package deal which I had to pay for. (See #5 below)

If you don't want to pay for this assistance, there are many blogs and websites online that can help you improve as a writer and as a self-publisher. I didn't use them since my publisher was helping me, so I can't recommend any specific ones. Start exploring! There is a Writer's Center in Bethesda, which I have heard good things about, but haven't used myself.

If you're serious about your book, hire a professional editor.

It's a good idea to get family and friends to be your early readers, and their input can be invaluable in helping you edit, but at some point you will probably need a professional editor if you want a professional product. There are multiple levels of editing, from manuscript evaluation done early in the process (to look at how the book works as a whole), to copy editing (to proofread the final draft for every typo and word error.) You could also look for editors online, for instance with *Linked In* or other resources. I was

lucky that a family member helped me with both the writing process and publishing process, every step of the way, and I had other family members and friends who had skill in editing, yet I *still* hired a professional editor because it was important to me to have the best book possible! I got referrals for editors from the independent publishing company that I hired to put out my book for me – they knew a first time writer like myself didn't have money for an expensive editor, so it was affordable for me.

4. Self-publishing a truly professional book is difficult.

Anyone can self-publish now, but creating a book that looks as professional as a book published by a traditional publishing house is difficult and requires a minimum investment of a few thousand dollars. It's hard to get everything perfect. If you've never done book formatting, Microsoft Word can be challenging and you may decide to pay someone to format your book. (I did.) When deciding on book size, paper color, fonts, spacing, page numbering and other technical matters, it is very helpful to take time to carefully observe professionally printed books. For my book, I picked one book I thought was beautifully made, and I used it to guide my decisions.

5. Consider “Package” deals from self-publishing press.

Once you've written your book, you can hire a publishing company to help you self-publish. You can do a search in Google for the companies you're considering and find testimonials -- good and bad -- from authors who've used it. I was pleased with Shires Press, who published my book. Their set up packages start at \$150 and go up to \$750. These prices don't include editing, formatting or cover design.

6. Marketing a self-published book takes work!

The biggest mistake people make when it comes to self-publishing is that they expect the book to magically sell. I admit to making this error! You have to be a self-promoter. For many writers, this is hard to do, or they may not want to spend the time required. I'm struggling with this myself!

Some ideas I'm using to promote my book:

Have a book release party. Mine was a small one for invited family and friends, with refreshments, readings, and books for sale at the venue. You can have a

bigger one for the general public to attend, but you'll have to decide how to publicize the event.

Post it on Facebook (or other social media) – I sold quite a few books this way.

Get reviews in local newsletters and papers, get interviewed for local radio.

Takoma Park has a book fair each fall that accepts some local authors to sell their books at the event.

Make bookmarks to give to anyone you meet who shows an interest in possibly buying the book. The bookmark has the website name on it so people know where to buy it online.

Brainstorm other places your particular book might be of interest – for example, I have approached a local university about using my book as a text for a special education class.

You may have always wanted to see your book in a bookstore, but bookstores aren't usually that interested in carrying self-published books. In my case, with a hardback book, the percentage charged by bookstores is greater than my per book profit margin so I would lose money placing them there, except at the bookstore of my publisher, Northshire Books.

Getting your book online is important. My book is on a very nice bookstore website, northshire.com associated with my publisher, but it's not on Amazon or any of the other bigger sites. This makes it much harder for people to find it!

Even if your book is great, there's a good chance you won't sell many books. The average print self-published book sells about 100-150 copies. You may not have a hit on your hands, but the rewards of seeing your writing in print may be more important to you, as it is to me.

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