Nowick Gray

A Simple Guide to Self-Publishing

Learning the Curve

Learning the Curve:

A Simple Guide to Self-Publishing

by Nowick Gray

A Simple Guide to Self-Publishing

An up-to-date guide to the self-publishing landscape. Find out what your options are, to suit your budget. Compare traditional publishing with hybrid solutions including print-on-demand and ebook publication, on a do-it-yourself or assisted basis. Includes tips and resources for writing, editing, and formatting your book, along with design requirements and promotional strategies.

keywords

learning curve, self-pub FAQ, self-publishing, Amazon, Kindle, CreateSpace, how to self-publish, print on demand, ebooks, formatting

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Introduction: A Map of the Territory

With the explosion of ebook and print-on-demand publishing, you have the opportunity today to publish a book with full control over its presentation to the world. You can manage the whole process, from writing and editing to formatting and cover design, on a do-it-yourself (DIY) basis. Or, you could choose instead to stick to the writing, pay for professional editing, and leave the book production entirely to a traditional print publishing house—provided they accept your book from the daily avalanche of submissions.

Is there any middle ground? There is, and we might call this the "Assisted" publishing option. If you don't have unlimited time, patience, or understanding of the technical requirements of every phase of publishing a book, or the good fortune to land an established publishing house, you can benefit from professional help from freelancers to assist at any stage along the way. Instead of a set menu (or cooking from scratch at home) you order what you need à la carte.

This guide will help you navigate the publishing territory, presenting options for you to choose to suit your needs. It will also give you the tools and directions necessary to proceed on the journey to bring your book to the reading public—with an emphasis on *self-publishing*, either by the do-it-yourself or the assisted path.

Let's break down the primary stages of the process of bringing a book to publication:

Project phase	*Do-it-yourself Publishing*	*Assisted Self-Publishing*	*Traditional Publishing*
Writing	the lone wolf artist	critique partners developmental edit	developmental edit (rare in-house now)
Editing	self-editing	beta readers pro editing	in-house copyeditor
Formatting	follow crib sheet	pro formatting	in-house design
Cover design	from scratch online templates stock cover art	pro cover design	in-house artist
Publishing	Amazon (Kindle, CreateSpace), Smashwords	design support printing services	printing and distribution partners
Promotion	personal networking	publicist street team	limited support

The Assisted path gives you room to work with your budget, as you can get the help you need from a combination of volunteers, trade partners and paid freelance work. The result will be more professional than a product that screams "DIY"; yet you don't have to waste a decade or more trying to convince a random traditional publisher or agent that your creation is more deserving than their multitudes of other candidates.

Hybrid Solutions

As with any categorization, you will find some solutions between the above boundaries. For example, even with the DIY path you will need to pay for actual printing costs if you order physical books to sell on your own. But you don't have to order a garage full of books; that's the game-changing magic of **print on demand (POD)**.

The beauty of POD technology, for the indie publisher, is that you can bypass the cumbersome business of warehousing and order fulfillment, not to mention the capital outlay for huge print runs with uncertain sales prospects. Books are printed one at a time upon order by a customer (or bookstore), yet at rates that are competitive with retail book pricing. You can order whatever number you want to use for gifts, review copies or direct sales. Or you can choose to let all your book sales get processed online by Amazon.

Print on demand can be done through Amazon's CreateSpace program with no setup fees; you pay only the cost of the books you order for resale. Or you can take the same PDF source file and go to your local print shop offering book production. They will charge a nominal setup fee and then a per-copy cost for printing, with volume discounts. Some printers might even offer an order fulfillment option; or you can take your boxes of books to sell at direct local venues, or find local bookstores willing to sell them on consignment.

To take another example of a hybrid approach, some publishers are traditional in the sense of vetting only quality work they can sell, but they choose the more economical (and ecological) solution of print on demand. This approach bypasses the conventional bricks-and-mortar system of warehousing, shipping in bulk to bookstores, and remaindering what doesn't sell. Such **hybrid publishers** likely will not offer an advance on royalties, but on the other hand they will provide cover art, editing, book design, and limited promotion, all without charging the author a dime.

Another hybrid approach is one that many naïve authors choose when looking for the Assisted path. Once rightly labeled **"Vanity" or "Subsidy" presses**, companies filling this hybrid niche exploit would-be authors by promising the full spectrum of publishing services—for exorbitantly high fees. "Acceptance" by such a publisher has nothing to do with the quality of the work submitted, or the lack thereof; it is a business deal with a bottom line of thousands of dollars, paid to the publisher for nothing more than the satisfaction of seeing one's book in print, and empty promises of mass distribution and sales. Writers' organizations rightly warn members now that these "self-publishing solutions" are scams, pure and simple.

With that being said, you can shop around and compare prices for the specific publishing services you need, between these hybrid package providers and what **freelancers** charge for the same services, or what you can do yourself. Armed with a little knowledge of what you can do yourself, and what you will need to pay for otherwise, will give you the best combination to suit your needs, with creative control and a reasonable budget for publishing your book.

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Formatting for Self-Publishing: Ebooks and Print-on-Demand

Formatting for Amazon's CreateSpace (CS) or other print-on-demand distribution requires a simple conversion from your book's PDF file. The task is then reduced to producing the appearance you want in the original document. You can do this in Microsoft Word and then simply save as a PDF for uploading to CreateSpace.

The first thing you need to do is decide on the size of your finished book. CreateSpace calls this the "trim size," and it will determine the page layout of your manuscript as well as the cover design template. Consult the CreateSpace guidelines and choose the trim size that suits your requirements and the type of book you are wanting to print. The most popular sizes for fiction, for example, are 5.25 x 8, 5.5 x 8.5, and 6 x 9. The larger of these sizes also works well for nonfiction titles such as memoirs. Later in this book you will find more specific tips for DIY formatting for print.

Kindle ebook formatting has a different set of style points to apply to the appearance of your book's contents, to optimize reading on devices with small and variable-zoom screens. The first step (as with preparing for PDF) is to clean up your manuscript in Word, simplifying the text styles in preparation for ebook conversion. Again, in a later chapter you will find a list of other key formatting tips to apply before ebook presentation. These modifications include: hyperlinked Table of Contents entries; inserting consistent page breaks where needed; and adjusting layout of lists, tables and images. For ebooks you can upload your native Word document directly to Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) platform and to your Smashwords dashboard.

Cover design is another matter, trickier to tweak for specific book sizes, and critical to have a professional impact, along with a compelling text "hook" to attract reader interest. This is the one area most recommended to "go pro." But again there are some assisted options out there, including Amazon cover creator tools using templates, or commercial templates you can use with your own title and text.

While an **ISBN number** is necessary, you can use one assigned by Amazon or Smashwords, or apply to your country's ISBN agency on your own.

Distribution, Sales and Promotion

Now for the bad news. Can you guess what every one of these avenues of publication has in common? You will have to do the bulk of your book's promotion and marketing yourself. Yes, even if you have a big-name publisher taking you on, with a hefty advance. Yes, even if you pay the big bucks to a vanity press. Yes, even if your book appears in Amazon/CreateSpace's Expanded Distribution channels. And yes, even if you pay a publicist to do the dirty work of getting the word out there.

For your finished ebook, both Kindle and Smashwords offer comprehensive distribution at no charge. In the case of Kindle, there are various distribution channels included within the Amazon network. In the case of Smashwords, the advantage is that other platforms are also included (Apple, Kindle, B&N, Kobo, and more). You can publish on both Kindle and Smashwords, with no conflict.

When it comes to retailing of printed books, with every option but the traditional one, you are at a disadvantage, since bookstores use the old conventional model and established distribution channels to manage their stock. With a hybrid publisher, CreateSpace, or your own imprint as the publisher, you are virtually invisible on the retail playing field. CreateSpace and some hybrid publishers offer such channels in theory, but the reality is that in all of these cases, the bookstores and libraries will not order such titles on their own. At best you can approach them in person—perhaps donating to the local library for greater exposure, or placing a few titles on consignment on the bookstore shelf.

Here are the three basic choices to consider:

1. If your **primary sales channel is Amazon** (online ordering), that's the simplest because from Amazon/CreateSpace, everything is taken care of for you. Orders are filled by print on demand, and sales and royalties are tracked and paid automatically.

2. If you want to **sell physical books directly yourself**, you can still do this with bulk discount orders from CreateSpace, or separate local print runs (technically requires having your own ISBN number, not a CS-assigned one).

3. If you're seeking the route of **standard industry distribution to bookstores**, in my opinion the do-it-yourself publishing model is not the way to go, for a few reasons—chiefly the retailer's need for wholesale pricing and returns. Better to go the route of a traditional publisher who will handle wholesale discounts and ordering, warehousing and returns (all taking a majority bite out of that "100%" royalty, plus additional red tape and extra fees along the way). Plus, bookstores are still going to need some arm-twisting to pick your book, especially with a generic publisher, and they won't display it on par with the more reputable publishers.

If bookstore sales are your target, shoot for a Big-5 blockbuster or quality literary press; or, settle for option 2 and take books around to offer on consignment at your friendly local bookstores.

The income part of the equation—even with a big traditional publishing house—is always a long shot; it will depend primarily on your own personal and online networking efforts.

You believe in your work, so you will meet this challenge using the people skills and time and money at your disposal. There is endless good advice out there, in other books and online, about book promotion; you will find a summary of promotion pointers in chapter 6 of this book. After the satisfaction of seeing your book in pixels or print, you will have to find your own way through the dozens of different strategies and tactics, tips and tricks, to do the marketing tasks that suit your personality and style and are tailored to your unique book and its intended audience.

Nowick's Rules

Writing

1. There are no rules.
2. There are conventions.
3. Write what you know.
4. Research what you don't know.
5. Get into the groove.
6. Don't edit until after.
7. Trust your voice and vision.
8. Imagine alternatives.
9. Honor your writing studio.
10. Edit before publishing.

Self-Editing

1. Learn the rules.
2. The purpose of rules is clarity.
3. Bend the rules with intention.
4. Identify and honor your writer's voice and vision.
5. The reader is always right.
6. Aim for consistency.
7. Shape with variation.
8. Make use of another editor.
9. Accept feedback with honesty and grace.
10. You, the writer, have the last word.

Publishing (and Self-Publishing)

1. It's not about you, the writer.
2. Reading is tactile.
3. Promotion is social.
4. First impressions matter most.
5. Books are judged (bought) by their covers.
6. The Book is dead, long live the Book!
7. Readers are fickle; quality counts.
8. Publishing is public.
9. Stay engaged, for the long haul.
10. Enjoy the harvest feast.

Writing Help

Usually writers approach an editor with a book that's already written. Occasionally I get inquiries from writers who are stuck at the very beginning of the writing process, usually due to some form of limiting self-concept such as "I can't write" or "What I write is no good." My advice to just about anyone is, "If you can speak, you can write."

As an editor, my basic job is to clean up a piece of writing only where needed. I don't start with the premise that it's "no good." Rather, I look for ways to improve the presentation for a larger audience. The book starts with the integrity of your own voice and style, and comes to completion with the editor's attention to detail, in the quest for optimum clarity of communication.

Writer's Block

The best treatment I know for the dreaded writer's block is—wouldn't you know—to write. Obviously that's deceptively simplistic advice, so here's the catch: *write, don't edit (yet)*. That means don't worry about correct usage, or rules from elementary school, or what your mother will think, or whether it's a best-seller or fit for the shredder. Just write.

An excellent exercise to remedy writer's block is called freewriting. That means putting the pen or pencil to paper, saying *Go* and not stopping until you come to the end of a page (or ten) or the egg timer rings after three minutes (or thirty), and you can then take a breath and say wow, I am a writer.

Writers Groups, Critique Partners, Beta Readers

One of the most valuable steps you can take, as a writer preparing your manuscript for publication, is to get input and feedback from your peers: literate friends, other writers, people you can exchange work with via online literary forums. Live and written feedback through a local **writers group**, or group connecting online, can offer invaluable pointers and perspective as well as support in improving your work and advancing your career. You can find a critique partner with whom to exchange work in progress, and if you work well together it can develop into a long-term working relationship beneficial to both. Or you can send out your manuscript between drafts to a number of people you connect with as **beta readers**, who are willing to read your book and offer feedback at whatever level you might find useful—from catching typos, to telling you the character with the Southern accent just ain't cuttin' it.

Editing Help

Stages of Editing

1. Self-editing. Once you have something on paper (or virtual paper), you can switch hats and turn to editing, rewriting, pruning, chiseling, embellishing, and all the other tricks of the writer's trade. To give you some tools to help at this secondary stage of writing, I offer some specific tips and resources for self-editing, along with a handy self-editing crib sheet to cover some of the stickier decisions of correct usage.

2. Feedback from others. When you have done what you can to produce and polish with your own powers of creativity and discernment, it's time to take off your hard hat and ask another pair of eyes to look at your work. Ideally that will mean sharing in a live or online writers' group, exchanging work with a critique partner, or sending a draft to "beta readers." You can then incorporate each type of feedback into further revisions of your manuscript.

3. Professional editing. The final and necessary stage of editing is to hire a professional editor to evaluate and correct your work.

You may choose to enter this stage earlier, when the work is still in development. In this case you have no problem producing written work, but you are stuck halfway along, needing help sorting out issues of structure, focus, pacing, style, or character development. Here is where the job of the developmental editor comes in—at the intermediate stage between composition and final polishing.

If you have a finished draft in place and a deadline to meet, you may be ready for a final copyedit right away, bypassing the lengthy process of garnering feedback from peers. Or you may have covered all the bases yourself and with critiques offered by others, and need just a final proofing before publication.

HyperEdits can help with all these aspects of professional editing, customizing the service to fit the needs of your situation and the unique qualities of your work—or streamlining the process with a standard rate and quick turnaround if you prefer. A free sample edit provides me with a preview of your writing project and you with a sample of the kinds of changes I would suggest. Email today for a free estimate, or with any further questions you may have.

Tips and Resources for Self-Editing

We are in the midst of a digital revolution today, when it's easier than ever to break into print. Yet the consensus in the publishing industry remains where it always has been: to be successful as a writer you will need a professional editor to provide the necessary perspective, the eye for detail that will inevitably escape the author's own gaze.

That said, you can benefit by doing the best job you can, self-editing your own work before paying a professional. At the very least, you will save money by correcting preventable errors before hiring someone else to do the same. With that advantage in mind, I offer here a few tips and resources for writers who are willing to take the time to put their own best work forward before the final stage of paid editing.

Rules are Tools

Too often writers attempt to follow grammar "rules" they were taught in grade school, only to mix them up, transpose one rule onto another, or miss the evolution of language and convention past former standards. The bottom line is, *rules are tools*, made to achieve what you should aim for above all: clarity.

The Ear Test

Read your own work aloud. Especially with dialogue, you will be able to catch false notes, repetitive words, awkward rhythm and punctuation. Printing a hard copy to read from adds the additional, visual dimension to this step, allowing you to catch errors that your eyes glaze over on the computer screen.

Self-Editing Crib Sheet

Here's a handy crib sheet you can consult for some of the trickier aspects of self-editing. I consult these guidelines frequently myself, even after years of professional editing, due to differences between style guides, different formats of publication, and subjective or contextual considerations. This section includes guidance to help you choose the correct uses of ellipses, hyphens and numerals vs. numbers.

Ellipses

The rules about use of ellipses (three dots to indicate a pause or missing text) are complex and made trickier because of the difference in display between word processors and various print formats. The first option to consider is that you may use the traditional four dots to include a period, and otherwise, use three; or you can simply use three in every case.

The other issues are typographical. Technically in manuscript format the ellipsis is three periods with a full space between each. With modern word processors it makes more sense to substitute the special ellipsis character which combines three closely space dots into one symbol—thus preventing its breaking across lines. But in the case of a word at the end of a line, if you follow the rule to add a space before the first ellipsis dot, the ellipsis will appear on the next line. The solution is to do without the extra space before the single ellipsis symbol; that way it will stay with the preceding word.

To sum up, here is the solution I favor… "I choose to use only a following space… using simply the 3-dot system… with one space after except with closing quotes…"

Hyphens

Most of my corrections, when proofreading work that comes across my desk, go to commas and hyphens (or the lack thereof). I won't wade into the issue of commas here, because there is ample guidance out there to follow the rules, and besides, much depends on personal taste, sense of rhythm and pacing. Which brings us to hyphens, where again the *Chicago Manual of Style* offers leeway in following such guidelines as "hyphenate adverb–adjective combinations before a noun." Another resource to consult is a recent dictionary. The key tests are for ambiguity and readability, in context. Thus, for example:

- much loved friend; much-loved music; music was much loved
- ever faithful groupie; sweet smelling flower
- decision maker, policymaker; his all too brief career
- well-known crook; ill-fitting garment; least-desirable comment
- better-prepared feast; much better prepared feast

Numbers Rules

When do you write *6*, and when *six*? Is it 4.5 billion, or eighty million? And who says, anyway, how it's supposed to be? For general purposes including creative writing, the go-to manual is the *Chicago Manual of Style* (see Style Guides in the Appendix). Here is my breakdown of the essential rules regarding numbers vs. numerals:

- spell out in most cases to ninety-nine, and approximations (some four million souls)
- sixty-one thousand, two hundred thousand, three million or 3 million; 4.5 billion
- 3 percent (or in technical writing, 3%); chapter 6
- 18 April 1931 or April 18, 1931; on 5 April.…Then on the sixth,…
- '80s or eighties or 1980s; eight o'clock, 6 a.m. or 6:00 a.m.

Self-Publishing

Publishing and Self-Publishing Help

As a complete book editing service, HyperEdits offers help beyond the basic steps of proofreading and copyediting. You can get consultation and critique for your work in progress with a developmental edit. You can choose the level of copyediting you need. And when your book is ready to be published, I can format your manuscript to meet the requirements of Kindle or Smashwords, for ebook distribution, or the free print-on-demand service offered by Amazon CreateSpace.

Any of these steps you can do yourself, and I will provide you with some free guidelines to help you format correctly if you choose. Or you may find it more efficient to let me use my time and experience to prepare your book for submission to Amazon or Smashwords. If you have another printer or publisher in mind, I can use their guidelines to format your book or ebook for you.

If you choose to go the route of traditional publishing, the formatting of your manuscript is more straightforward. You might need extra help in crafting a query letter or book proposal, however. In this ultra-competitive arena, pleasing these gatekeepers is critical to your success.

The same challenge applies after publication, when it comes to convincing readers to buy on the basis of your "killer blurb"—an apt phrase since it will kill or pique the reader's interest. This book description of one or two paragraphs, online or on the book's back cover, can also benefit from the expertise of an editor to hone and polish your wording.

Layout, Formatting, Interior Book Design

Ebook formatting and CreateSpace formatting are slightly different, even though you will likely join the Kindle ranks and use both Amazon platforms, for digital and physical copies of your book. Document setup and layout varies because the media involved yield a quite different reading experience.

The first step is to have a clean Word document to start from. Here's a handy do-it-yourself guide to cleaning up your manuscript in Word in preparation for ebook conversion.

HyperEdits Formatting Service

Formatting Options

Ebook formatting will vary depending on the e-publishing platform you choose. Kindle is the first choice because Amazon holds the vast majority of sales. And you may as well start with Kindle Select, meaning exclusive rights for three months, to try to build exposure through Kindle Select's unique promotional features: loans, free book promos, and Countdown Deals.

Once you have experimented with Kindle Select, you can leave your titles there and publish also on Smashwords. Once on Smashwords, your book will be listed automatically on other sales platforms such as the Apple iBookstore, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and more.

Smashwords uses the .epub format, while Kindle uses .mobi. Like Amazon, Smashwords offers its own tools for do-it-yourself formatters (here's a handy crib sheet distilling the basics for you). Or, you can bypass the learning curve in favor of an ebook formatting service like HyperEdits.

Layout and formatting for print on demand through Amazon CreateSpace is more challenging than ebook formatting for Kindle or Smashwords. It's more in the realm of book design, with numerous additional aspects important to consider when holding a physical book in your reader's hand.

Pricing

Hyperedits aims to simplify the process and reduce your costs by offering the basic formatting necessary to get your book in print with a professional appearance. This formatting step, while necessary, doesn't include cover design or any of the other peripheral tasks of publishing, such as book description, ISBN, bar code, or metadata such as categories and keywords. You can do these easily through the Amazon or Smashwords self-service process.

Prices will vary according to factors such as book length, photos, table of contents, and the state of the original manuscript you send. Here are the prices (in US$) for various formats and discount packages:

Ebook (Kindle or Smashwords): **$75–125**

Ebook pkg. (Kindle plus Smashwords): $100–150

Print (PDF file for CreateSpace or other publisher): **$100–$200**

Amazon pkg. (Kindle plus CreateSpace): $150–300

All-in-one pkg. (Kindle, Smashwords, CreateSpace): **$175–325.**

Email with your project needs and I will respond with a confirmed estimate based on your manuscript.

See the appendix for an overview I provided a previous client comparing commercial "self-publishing" options with services and pricing I offer.

Format Crib Chart by Platform

If you choose to do your own formatting in Word, you can use the handy crib notes below as a checklist for the most important specs.

Preformat

- Don't include your cover image in your ms file.
- Remove tabs, double line-spaces (create extra space with section paragraphs, 12 pt. before).
- Strip or reapply styles.
- Indent by .25 or .3 inch.
- Turn auto-hyphen and widow/orphan OFF.
- Use em dashes, curly quotes, ellipses.
- Apply All Caps or Small Caps via keyboard, or font size, not Word menu.
- Fonts: use serif only; max. 3 per book.
- Insert images via Insert menu; text wrap "in-line"; 9:11 ratio best.

Kindle

- Cover dimensions 1600 X 2560 (1:1.6) @350 ppi, < 5 MB.
- No headers, footers, page nos.
- Use manual page breaks before chapters or major sections.
- Add "Go To" bookmarks: insert for "Start" and "TOC."
- Use keywords in opening blurb.
- Tables left, not justified.
- Single line spacing.
- Times New Roman 12 font.
- No superscripts, subscripts, smart fractions.
- Replace All Caps with Small Caps.
- Images > 300 ppi; add line break before caption.
- Word doc or docx (or filtered HTML, EPUB, or in a pinch, MOBI).
- Preview HTML, EPUB in KindleGen (free software from Amazon).
- 650 MB file size limit.

Smashwords

- Cover image 1400 min. width; 1600 x 2400 (1:1.5) works well.
- Define paragraph centering within the Style.
- Paragraph return or two before and after a page break. Remove all section breaks.
- Title page: include "SmashWords Edition."
- Images max width 500 px.; center, w/o indent; heading style will cause page break first.
- File upload: doc or epub (via Calibre: Web page, filtered).

CreateSpace, POD

- Embed fonts on cover (& interior).
- Insert Odd section break (new page) for each new chapter (replace page break).
- Use wingdings or webding ornaments for section divisions.
- Drop Caps: Insert, select "Drop Cap" > "Dropped."
- Page numbering: "Different First Page," for new chapters.
- Header text: make 25% transparent; minimum header space.375–.5 . Author name outside left (even); title outside right (odd).
- Chapter heading: start at least 3 line-spaces down from the top of page.
- Full justification.
- Font size 11-12, single linespace 115-125% [= +1-2 pts.] "at least." Space to 10-12 words per line. Standard is Garamond 11.
- Use 5–12% extra letterspacing with All Caps and Small Caps.
- Font kerning ON.
- Embedded fonts required. Option in PDF save dialogue: ISO19005-1 (PDF/A).

Cover Design

Conventional wisdom will tell you that the main selling feature of your book is the cover, and for this reason you will need a professional cover designer. There are alternatives out there, however. A professional cover design will not guarantee your book's success. You also need a compelling book description and, if it's a printed book, a catchy back cover blurb. You will need excellent reviews. You will need a strong social media network or other community of potential readers. (Oh yes, and you will need a well-written, professionally edited book. But you already knew that.)

As for the alternatives in cover design, for ebooks it's easy; you can use the free cover creator at Amazon (as I did for My Country); or choose a template from an affordable (around $75) outlet like selfpubbookcovers.com (as I did for Strange Love; add-on service for paperback cover is $125.). To hire a designer (as I did for PsyBot) can cost $600 or more, but you can get a pro design for under $300.

Please note: cover design and layout is not included in HyperEdits book or ebook formatting services.

For more pro cover designers, see this list compiled by Smashwords.

Book Descriptions and Back Cover Blurbs

No matter how good your book is, or how extensive your marketing campaign, the crux of the transaction is the book description. This crucial paragraph or two appears online with your book cover or in print on the back cover. On the strength of this humble blurb rests the whole enterprise of writing, publishing and promoting your book. So work it like the precious metal it is. And if you need a second opinion, give me a shout. You can read more about crafting an effective query and book description here.

These paragraphs are the most important writing you will do for your book. They are what the potential reader will see first, when browsing the Amazon pages or the shelves in the local

bookstore. If you are submitting to a traditional publisher, they are what your prospective agent or publisher will see in your query letter or book proposal. They can make or break the deal you aim to strike with your reader.

Here are some tips and guidelines for writing an effective pitch for your book.

Order HyperEdits copyediting services to tweak, polish or rewrite your book blurbs for you. Use the custom editing rates to request feedback of any kind (maybe you'd like us simply to choose the best blurb among your three favorites).

Front Matter

In the opening pages of your book, the "front matter" contains pages for the title and author; copyright, ISBN, and other cataloguing information; and, optionally, a dedication, preface, or prologue.

Back Matter

The pages after your book are the "back matter."

First include a call to the reader to "Join [the author's] mailing list to hear about new releases first…"

Then add blurbs for other titles you have published.

Add a note requesting reviews: "If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review on its Amazon page…"

Submitting to Online Booksellers

Create an Account

Kindle: https://kdp.amazon.com/help?topicId=A37Z49E2DDQPP3

CreateSpace: https://www.createspace.com/Products/Book/

Smashwords: https://www.smashwords.com/upload

ISBN

You can obtain an ISBN cataloguing number for your book for free when you upload to Amazon (Kindle or CreateSpace) or Smashwords. Or you can supply your own, if you have a publisher's imprint.

If you publish a new edition of your book, or change the title, it will need a new ISBN. A new edition applies if there is at least a 15 percent revision of content; or if there is an added preface or other material; or if the book has been redesigned.

The CreateSpace ISBN is intended for publication with Amazon only, so technically if you took your PDF to another printer instead, you would need your own ISBN. If you publish at CreateSpace with your own ISBN, you will miss out on the listings for academic and library acquisitions. On the flip side, those acquisitions likely won't happen anyway without your active

promotion. And when promoting your titles to libraries and bookstores, the more general consideration is that your own publishing imprint may sound more reputable than the catch-all "CreateSpace" as "publisher of record."

Note to Canadian authors: Getting listed at Amazon.ca can be a challenge. If you use the CreateSpace-supplied ISBN, it happens automatically. But if you use your own ISBN, the titles will not necessarily show up on Amazon.ca for months.

Kindle Previewer

KDP provides a handily online previewer for reviewing the appearance of your book before final approval. If you wish, you can also download a free Kindle previewer to use on your computer desktop. Go to: http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?docId=1000765261

Metadata

Regardless of which platform you use to publish, you will need to supply basic key details about your new book:

- Title, Subtitle
- Categories (2)
- Age range, grade range
- Description: 750 words max. This will fuel the interest of your potential reader.
- Author bio: 475 words max. Show how you are qualified to write this book and help your reader.
- Keywords/phrases: (CS 5, KDP 7)

Category

Choose "Browse subjects" at Amazon Books to display possible categories. Look especially at Kindle Store categories; this is a different list than the one that appears for you to choose from when uploading to Kindle. To choose from the retail Amazon or Kindle Store categories, select "non-classifiable" when uploading your ebook; then email KDP via your dashboard, with the request for a new category including full Kindle Store path.

Note: for fiction, Amazon Fiction "Themes" have replaced categories.

Another resource for properly categorizing your book is the BISAC list, which you access within the CreateSpace dashboard when uploading your book there. You can study it beforehand if you wish. Go to: https://www.bisg.org/bisac-subject-headings-list-fiction

Book Description

A tight, concise blurb for your book that makes people want to read it! (150-200 words visible, up to 750 words total).

Author Biography

Who are you? What makes you interesting as an author? (120 characters).

Keywords

Keywords and keyword phrases help people find your book in searches. (Choose 7 for Kindle, 5 for CreateSpace).

Here are some good online resources to assemble and refine keywords:

Kindle Category required keywords | Google AdWords | Ubersuggest

Include book subcategories as keywords. Don't include keywords already appearing elsewhere in metadata (title, genre); don't include spelling variants.

For higher visibility, you can add keywords to the bottom of your copyright page: "Subjects include…"

Kindle Pricing

Avoid $1.99

$0.99 = 12x more sold

$3.99 = most revenue

$7.99 = most read

Royalty drops to 35% if price is below $3.00; allows opt out of lending program if you wish.

Author Platform and Book Promotion

For many indie authors, and even new authors offered contracts by traditional publishing houses, the rush of impending fame collides head-on with the harsh reality of book marketing. Your book marketing and promotion success will depend on your own networking efforts, even if you're cruising on an advance from a big NY publisher. While HyperEdits cannot walk you through the book promotion mine fields (or strawberry fields, depending on your personal inclination to network and sell), I will outline here the main elements contributing to a successful book launch.

Author Website or Blog

The core of your author platform is your author website or blog. This can be as simple as an Amazon Author Page or Facebook Page (as distinguished from your personal Facebook page), or a free blog hosted at Blogger.

The next step up is to register your custom domain name and set up a hosting account for your own website. You can do this yourself with minimal hassle at a site such as Hostgator. You will have access to a self-service control panel and even some free tools for basic page design.

Website design can be simplified with ready-made templates you can customize with your own content and style choices. WordPress offers many such templates. For more creative designs and flexibility, you can hire a web designer or choose an intermediate platform such as Zoho, Weebly, Squarespace or Headway, that allows you to manipulate standard design elements on the fly.

If you wish for further guidance or help with your website or blog content, or with website setup and design, please see my post at HyperLife Editing Services on "Help for Your Web Page Content or Design." I offer affordable rates for proofreading, copyediting, or rewriting web page or blog content, as well as basic website design and maintenance.

The cost of setting up your online writer's platform depends mostly on how much customization you need. With WordPress, for instance, you can choose a ready-made template and be off and running in a couple of hours or less (much of this you may be able to do yourself).

A minimal layer of customizations is readily available within each template's appearance settings... through the WordPress dashboard/menu. Again this is moderately simple for either you or me to do (an hour or two).

If further customization is required, I switch to an intermediate interface called Headway which allows fine-tuning to get the exact appearance you envision. This might require 3-4 hours or more.

The number of pages you set up will be a key variable. With WordPress, additional pages are easy to generate, once the template is customized and in place.

As far as the other platforms go, all of those are designed to be user-friendly for do-it-yourself setup and design, just as the basic WordPress platform is. The simplest solution is to have simply a single-page blog at Blogger. But a website with multiple pages is more comprehensive and a better long-term solution for a writer's platform. You can still start small with a single blog page for your website, and add other content (see below) as you are able to or inspired.

A good preliminary question to consider is how often you plan to update your blog entries. More frequently is better, in terms of both Google ranking and reader engagement.

To whatever extent you may require web design services, I would recommend first sketching and considering your basic layout vision and elements such as pictures/slide shows, columns, a set home page or home page showing latest blog, and main secondary pages such as bio, contact page, and books gallery page, and separate book pages. For ideas, take a look at various other author's sites/blogs, or scan the free template selections at any of the above platforms. I use a WordPress template at nowickgray.com.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

"Build it and they will come." Such was the promise, and even the reality of the Internet a few years ago. But those days are gone, as Google has applied ever more sophisticated criteria to rank websites and direct traffic. Today you have to be both savvy and active in creating fresh, original content. Social media reputation plays an increasing role in bringing more visitors to your site. (The new motto is more like, "The rich get richer," if wealth is measured in numbers and social clout.)

Title, Headings, Keywords. For search engine rankings, the most important ingredient by far is the title tag—which may or not be the same as the visible title of your page. If you click Ctrl-U from the browser page, you can see the HTML code and look for <title> (a few lines in). This is also what appears on the browser tab. Depending on your website design interface, you can customize the title tag; in many WordPress themes by default your pages make the coded title the same as the visible title. Just make sure you make that title contain the keywords you most want. Then include these keywords again in your first paragraph, a few times (but not too many to appear spammy). Include perhaps some variations of phrasing and spelling. You can also use keywords in additional headings, bold text, image "alt" text, and links to other pages on your site or elsewhere.

Description. It helps to craft a short paragraph to attract visitors to your site when it does come up on Google. This is the "description" tag which will appear in the page code after the <title> tag. If you notice (via Ctrl-U) that your current pages don't have them, look in your website interface for a way to add such a description tag to each page, specific to that page.

Original, fresh, reputable content. Google rewards sites with regular blog updates, as it reinforces your reputation as a site offering fresh, engaging content. Static or copycat pages, by contrast, are penalized.

Links from other sites and social media. The other strategy important to Google is to get other sites and social media outlets (the more popular the better) to link to you using those same keyword phrases you are targeting.

Appendix/Reference

Cost Comparison Chart

Here's an overview I provided a previous client comparing commercial "self-publishing" options with services and pricing I offer.

Basic formatting services (not incl. editing)	Typical commercial "self-publishing" company: $3–4000+	HyperEdits formatting for Amazon Kindle, CS: $175–325 package deal
eBook creation and distribution	$800	$75–125 depending on layout
Custom interior POD formatting	incl.	$100–$200 depending on layout
Additional publishing services		(incl. by Amazon, DIY or hire out)
Custom book cover	incl.	free / $100 / $400CS / Template / Professional
ISBN, LCCN, Bar Code	incl.	ISBN: free, $10 or $99 choices; LCCN: $49; Bar Code free
Author Royalties	"100%"? Not really: see fine print, hidden fees!	30-70% depending on price you set, format and sales channel
Amazon, B & N, retail outlets	incl.	incl.
Bowker Books in Print	incl.	incl.
Physical copy to proof	incl.	under 10 with shipping
Author copies	5 copies free	5 copies, ~$25 plus shipping
Custom website, 1 yr. hosting	$400	free Amazon listing, CS eStore pg
Copyright registration	incl.	not necessary
Online sales reporting	incl.	free through CS or Amazon
Submission to search engines	$100	one-click submission to Google
Back Cover sales copy	$200	Draft and edit (0–$50)
Yearly book ordering fee	$100 + annual fees	n/a
Returns program	$200 + annual fees	n/a
Expanded distribution	not incl.	incl. with Amazon
Website order fulfillment	$500 + annual fees	free through CS or Amazon

Writing & Editing Style Guides

The Elements of Style

Chicago Manual of Style

American Heritage Dictionary

Oxford Dictionary

Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary & Thesaurus

Thesarus.com

7 grammar rules you really should pay attention to

Reference: CreateSpace online guides

YouTube Steps from Word:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXA9STXZmO4

CS Blog: Step by Step from Word:
https://forums.createspace.com/en/community/docs/DOC-1482

How to Create an Interior PDF: (includes Templates for Word):
https://www.createspace.com/Products/Book/InteriorPDF.jsp

Automated: Interior Reviewer:
https://www.createspace.com/Tools/InteriorReviewer.jsp

Ready-made Templates

http://www.bookdesigntemplates.com/template-gallery/#Fiction

About the Author

Nowick Gray is the author of an eclectic range of literary fiction and creative nonfiction, making use of genre conventions with innovative structure and style. He has placed work with traditional publishers and also self-published, with ten titles currently in print. Nowick has also worked as a professional freelance copyeditor since 2000, with his HyperLife Editing Services now offering help with self-publishing as well as proofreading and copyediting. He lives and works in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Join Nowick Gray's mailing list to hear about new releases first.

Visit the author's website at NowickGray.com and editing website at HyperEdits.com.