

# **Guidelines for New Authors**

**Introductory advice  
for independent writers**

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# Introduction

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I receive many editing/proofreading requests from first-time, independent authors looking either to self-publish or to submit to a publisher. For those writers with little or no knowledge of publishing, marketing and editorial production, the process of taking a manuscript to market can feel daunting.

I offer the following introductory guidelines in order to help you, the independent writer, make the right decisions, in particular to ensure that you are working with the appropriate editorial consultant and that you have begun to think about some of the core issues in the publishing process.

More experienced writers and self-publishers will no doubt be aware of the issues addressed and that ‘[t]here is a very big difference between self-publishing and self-publishing well’ (Allison Winn Scotch, [The New Era of Self-Publishing](#), *Writer Unboxed*)

## Financial success – an honest appraisal

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Making a financial success of publishing a book is hard. Please be realistic. The media often reports on self-publishing successes such as *50 Shades of Grey* author E.L. James and the *Wool* trilogy's Hugh Howey. These kinds of outcomes are, however, rare. If you are looking to generate a serious income stream from publishing, I'd advise you to have a plan B. Be optimistic and passionate about your writing, but be practical, too, in order to avoid disappointment.

Thousands of authors receive rejections from publishers and agents every year; and while self-publishing has never been easier, these organizations are ultimately distribution, not marketing, platforms. Making serious money from publishing is difficult even for an author with a publishing deal – advances vary hugely; see this article from Rachelle Gardner: [What's a Typical Advance?](#) Royalty rates from publishers will differ, too, and will depend on the subject area and the assessment of sales potential. Sales figures achieved by likes of James Patterson, J.K. Rowling, Stephen King, E.L. James and Stephenie Mayer are not the norm for the average first-time novelist.

See also Sophie Playle's [Self-Publishing Essentials: Working Out Your Budget and Potential Earnings](#), and her blog more generally for useful advice for writers and self-publishers.

I offer this information not because I want to discourage you from writing and publishing, but so that you can make an honest and realistic assessment about the challenges of making a living wage from your art.

## Marketing assessment

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If you are self-publishing you will need to ask yourself the same questions that a publisher will ask you if you are submitting to them directly or via an agent: (1) who is my book aimed at, (2) what genre does it fit into, and (3) how will I reach that market? The success of your book will be as dependent on your marketing plan as on the quality of your writing. You might also like to think about:

- getting your book reviewed
- building an author website (take a look at the sites of crime novelist **John Barlow**, speculative fiction writer **Michael K Rose**, *Wool* author **Hugh Howey**, YA fantasy novelist **Louise Herman**, and **Catherine Ryan Howard** for just a few examples of good practice)
- joining relevant social media networks on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn
- doing interviews (e.g. online, radio, print media)
- blogging about your writing/publishing experience, useful tools you have come across, writers' resources, and other great books that will be of interest to your target market, all of which will offer your potential customer added value
- arranging local bookstore promotions
- writing press releases
- penning articles for local newsletters, press and online media about your journey as an author
- pricing strategies (e.g. discounts and special offers)
- advertising a competition with the prize being free copies of your book

The following is a small selection of articles and resources that you might find useful:

- [Building Profile on the Web – a Guide for Authors](#) (excellent advice from Chris Hamilton-Emory of Salt Publishing)
- [Marketing Your Book](#) (The Book Designer)
- Joanna Penn's *How to Market a Book* is available as an ebook from Amazon and Kobo, and with [premium audio Q&A support](#)
- [10 Winning Marketing Strategies for Your Self-Published Book](#) (Robert Bidinotto)
- [Book Marketing for Indie Authors](#) (Alliance of Independent Authors)
- [New Self-Publisher's FAQ](#) (Creative Minds Press)
- [Ideas to Use Audio to Get The Word Out](#) (Thomas Sullivan on *Indie Author News*)
- Members of the [Goodreads Author Program](#) can access a number of marketing tools including blogging and event promotion (Goodreads)
- [Do You Know These 9 Huge Opportunities Even Smart Authors Miss?](#) (Book Designer)
- [PR and Marketing for Self-Publishing: Do's and Don'ts](#) (Writer Unboxed), though see the [Marketing Category](#) in general
- [Content marketing advice](#) from Copyblogger: funnelling as 'a way of organizing your works so that one product leads logically into another'
- [Getting Book Reviews: The Methods Award-Winning Authors Use – A Study](#) (eBook Author's Corner)

# Formatting tools

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## Ebooks

The following formatting tools will be of use if you are creating your book in Word, Scrivener or Sigil. You might also consider hiring a professional formatter to get your book in shape for epublication.

- [Smashwords style guide](#) (Mark Coker, Smashwords)
- [Amazon Kindle publishing guidelines](#) (Amazon)
- [Book design templates for Microsoft Word](#) (Joel Friedlander, TheBookDesigner.com)
- [How to Publish an E-Book: Resources for Authors](#) (Jane Friedman)
- [No First Drafts, No Fancy Formatting: Tips for Keeping Editing Costs Down](#). This excellent article by Caroline Kaiser is well worth reading
- [At a Glance: Formatting for Lulu](#) (Beyond Paper Editing) but see also these related articles on the same blog: [Find the Hidden Formatting that will Mess Up Your Ebook](#); [Use CrossEyes to Prevent Ebook Formatting Problems](#); [How Create an Ebook With Sigil: It's Easier Than You Think](#); [Formatting Principles for Ebook Authors](#); and [How to Format Your Ebook the Simple Way: A Word-to-Ebook Cheat Sheet](#)
- [Scrivener](#) (Literature & Latte) ‘... a powerful content-generation tool for writers that allows you to concentrate on composing and structuring long and difficult documents.’ Allows export to a variety of file formats: Word, RTF, PDF and HTML, ePub or Kindle (requires KindleGen)
- [How to Format an eBook for Kindle](#), [Advanced eBook Formatting for Kindle](#) and [Using Scrivener to Write and Publish an eBook](#) are three easy-to-follow articles by David Masters on the Freelance Switch blog

- See also this Wikipedia listing of [editing systems](#), including which output formats are supported
- **Jutoh**: a value-for-money ebook creation/conversion tool. Recommended by Corina Kock MacLeod on the Beyond Paper Editing blog: [From Word to Jutoh: Ebook Creation Made Easy](#)

## **Print**

If you are designing for print publication, Joel Friedlander's [Printed Book Design 101](#) is free guide that aims to help you create a professional-looking end product.

## **Book jacket design**

If you are looking for advice on cover design, take a look at this article on the Salt Publishing blog: [10 Ways to Create a Bad Book Cover](#).

You might also be interested in the [Cover Factory](#). Run by the Hamilton-Emery Design Partnership, it specializes in the creation of book covers (print and ebook) for trade and academic publishers and self-publishing authors. Owners Jen Hamilton-Emery and Chris Hamilton-Emery are also the owners and directors of the independent publishing house Salt and have over twenty years of book design and publishing experience.

## Using the appropriate editorial service

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Invest your editorial services budget wisely by working with the provider whose service portfolio is relevant to your experience, skills and stage in the process. Note that the price will vary horizontally by supplier and vertically by service type.

If your book has not been edited at some level, it might not be ready for proofreading. If it requires a lot of line-by-line rewriting in order to make sense, you would be wise to hire a copy-editor before you consider investing in proofreading services.

### A note on formatting

Before handing over your file to an editorial professional, consider the excellent advice from editor Arlene Prunkl: [A quick guide to formatting your manuscript for editing](#). Says Arlene, ‘Sometimes I receive manuscripts that have been meticulously formatted as though that version is the one that will be going to press. This is well-intentioned but a mistake. Please avoid using multiple, fancy fonts or other unusual design elements or formatting to try to make your manuscript look like a finished book. You’re not at the design stage yet, and an editor will only undo all your efforts, stripping them out to get a plain version ready for editing.’

That time spent reformatting the document will also cost you money, so do your bank account a favour and take a look at the full article!

### Choosing the right person to help

When choosing your editorial freelancer, consider the following:

- Give yourself enough time to find the right person rather than making a panic-booking at the last minute. You may find that some of the people

you are interested in working with are not available at short notice. If you do the research ahead of time you're more likely to be able to hire the person you want.

- Contact several freelancers and ask about their specialist subject areas and/or their career background. It's about finding the right fit. There are scammers out there, so it's worth being vigilant to ensure you work with an experienced professional who is fit for purpose.
- Ask to see a portfolio of projects they've worked on that match the profile of your own piece of work (their websites might include this information). This will give you an idea of how experienced they are and the degree to which they'll be comfortable with the language of your project.
- Can they supply good references or positive reviews from clients? Take particular note of testimonials from publisher clients; they expect their freelancers to meet professional, industry-recognized standards and won't commission – never mind provide endorsements for – those who don't meet those standards.
- What training have they completed and what other qualifications do they have that are relevant to your project?
- Are they affiliated with a national editing/proofreading society such as the UK's Society for Editors and Proofreaders, membership of which requires adherence to a professional code of conduct and demonstration of a certain standard of competence and/or level of experience?
- Make sure you agree on what's expected – proofreading is different from developmental editing, copy-editing, copywriting and indexing. Be clear about the deadline for completion of the work and what the payment terms are.
- Be prepared to send your prospective editors/proofreaders a sample of your work so they can evaluate whether they are best suited to help you, how long the job will take and what the fee will be.

Here's a summary of the different levels of editorial intervention that you might like to consider for your own project.

## **Beta reader**

To start off with, consider asking some beta readers to give you feedback on your book. These should be people whom you trust to give you an honest opinion, but whom you will not be offended by if they are critical! A beta reader's job is to assess the project with a critical eye, rather than just being a supportive friend or partner who tells you what they think you want to hear. Any critically constructive feedback at this stage is of tremendous value. Not only is it free but it might show you where core elements of your book need reworking. It also gets you used to having your work reviewed.

## **Ghost writer**

If you think you have a great idea for a book, but your writing skills are below par, you might consider working with a ghost writer.

## **Professional reviewer**

If you are confident about your writing skills and have completed a first draft, it's wise to get it critiqued by a professional reviewer. Here, an experienced editor will offer you a detailed assessment of the overall style, structure and content of your book, outlining its strengths and weaknesses. They will not be working on the book line-by-line but rather assessing the bigger picture.

## **Structural, substantive or developmental editor**

If you are looking for deeper, more hands-on intervention, you could be ready to work with what may be termed a structural, substantive or developmental editor. Here the editor will give detailed advice about, for example, overall plot, characterization, point of view, and whether the various elements of the book are working well together and supporting each other. Again, they will not be working on the book line-by-line, but taking a view of the bigger picture.

## **Copy-editor**

Once you are happy with the overall structure and plot of your book, then you will be ready for a copy-editor. According to the Society for Proofreaders and Editors, 'A copy-editor makes sure that an author's raw text, or copy, is correct

in terms of spelling and grammar and is easy to read so that readers can grasp his or her ideas [for example, by querying any awkward non-standard phrasing]. Copy-editors improve your text without damaging your authorial voice.

A copy-editor also tries to prevent embarrassing errors of fact, alerts the publisher [or self-publishing author] to any possible legal problems and ensures that the typesetter can do a good job.’ Copy-editors concentrate on working with the text line-by-line rather than viewing the body of work as a whole (as in the case of the editorial functions mentioned above). Further excellent advice on what a copy-editor does can be found [here](#).

## **Proofreader**

The final stage of the process is proofreading – the quality check. A proofreader will work line-by-line with the text to:

- eradicate any remaining grammar, punctuation and spelling errors;
- ensure consistency from a textual (e.g. hyphenation and capitalization), typographical (e.g. size and style of fonts used for different elements of text) and layout (e.g. line spacing, text alignment, and paragraph indentation) point of view;
- ensure that any cross-references in the text are correct; check that the contents list directs the reader to the correct page;
- ensure page numbers and running heads have been rendered appropriately.

Again, the SfEP offers some more detailed advice about the role of the proofreader [here](#). See also my article: [Proofreading – what’s it all about?](#) (The Proofreader’s Parlour).

## **Related information**

- [Which editorial services does your manuscript need?](#) Extremely helpful and quick-to-navigate diagram from editor Cressida Downing to help you make the decision about which kind of editorial service you need (Writers & Artists).

- See also this excellent series on the Catherine Ryan Howard’s Catherine, Caffeinated blog by Robert Doran, editorial director at Kazoo Independent Publishing Services: [Why Hire an Editor?](#); [Structural Editing For Self-Publishers](#); [Copy-editors: What They Really Do](#); and [Proofreading Explained](#).
- [Different Kinds of Editing](#) (Author–Editor Clinic).
- [What to Look for in an Editor](#) (Author–Editor Clinic).
- This article, [How \(and Why\) to Choose a Copy Editor](#), is definitely worth a read and explains why hiring the right type of editorial consultant will help to stack the odds more in your favour and how you might go about researching prospective editors.
- The UK’s [SfEP’s Directory of Editorial Services](#) lists entries for over 500 members in the UK who specialize in different genres and who offer the writing, editing and proofreading services outlined above. Members have a broad range of skill sets – some offer writing, developmental editing, copy-editing and proofreading services. Others offer only one or two of these services, depending on their training and skill sets.
- More national professional editorial societies and editorial directories are available at the end of this booklet.

## Self-editing advice

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It stands to reason that in order to keep the reins on your publishing budget you'll want to do the best possible job during the self-editing process. The following resources might be of interest.

- **No First Drafts, No Fancy Formatting: Tips for Keeping Editing Costs Down** (*Caroline Kaiser*)
- R.L. Trask's *The Penguin Guide to Punctuation* is one of the most treasured titles on my bookshelf. Immensely readable and very short!
- **Grammar Bites** blog from The Publishing Training Centre
- **Two Ways to Improve Your Writing Before You Begin** (Beyond Paper Editing)
- **Commas, Characters and Crime Scenes** is a blog hosted by editor and writer Marcus Trower. The blog specializes in helping authors with the earlier process of self-editing, but Marcus also offers copy-editing services to independent authors
- **Make Your Writing More Readable** (Beyond Paper Editing)
- **Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing** (Grammar Girl)
- If you want to reduce the amount of time (and time is money) your editor or proofreader spends on knocking consistency into your book, take a look at this article by my colleague Ali Turnbull: **Knit your own style book**. Or, for a more detailed account of how to go about developing your own house style, try Christina Thomas' **Your House Style: Styling your words for maximum impact**, published by the SfEP
- I highly recommend Imogen Olsen's *Editing Fiction: A Short Introduction*. Published by the SfEP, it costs £5. While it's written for the

professional editor, there's a huge amount of super advice that the writer can apply when self-editing

- My colleague Mary McCauley, an editor and proofreader from Co Wexford in Ireland, has created two useful tools that help both writers and editors to track important information that ensures consistency. The tools, “Timeline and Plot Tracker” and “Character Tracker”, are available on her website and are accompanied by an explanation of how and why to use them: [Manuscript Management Tools for Fiction Authors](#)
- Here's a super blog post from the Beyond Paper Editing crew on some useful tools you can use to clean up your manuscript before you send it to a professional editor or proofreader: [Editor's Tip: Cleaning Up Your Manuscript Can Save You Money](#)

## Distribution channels

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If you haven't yet considered how you are going to distribute your book, here are a few channels you might consider:

- **CreateSpace**: An Amazon company that enables writers to publish print copies of their book
- **Kindle Direct Publishing**: An Amazon company that enables Kindle-ready publishing
- **Smashwords**: Digital publishing in a variety of formats including EPUB, LRF (Sony Reader), mobi (Kindle), PDB (Palm Doc), HTML, and PDF
- **Blurb**: print and digital
- **Lulu**: print-on-demand platform

Take care to research each one, in particular their terms and conditions, to ensure you are happy with the royalties you can earn and the distribution rights you are granted.

## Taxation issues and distribution channels

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If you are a non-US citizen and don't yet have a Tax Identification Number from the IRS, some American distribution channels withhold 30% of any revenue earned.

The various forms you are required to fill in (as recommended by Amazon and Smashwords, for example) in order to avoid this can be confusing and time-consuming.

I'd recommend reading and acting on the following excellent advice from Catherine Ryan Howard: [Non-US Self-Publisher? Tax Issues Don't Need to be Taxing](#). Having tried it myself, I can vouch for the method – 15 minutes on the phone and I was sorted.

## Legal issues to consider

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Some self-publishing authors may be faced with legal considerations. Examples include:

- Copyright clearance for images or graphics
- Fair use of music lyrics or scores
- Trademark and brand-name usage
- Passing off
- Intellectual property rights
- Acceptable length of quotation without copyright breach

Copyright laws can differ between countries, so if you're in doubt as to whether the text or images in your book (or on its cover) are in breach of legal regulations, check before publishing. While a copy-editor may point out any problems, it is ultimately the responsibility of the author to ensure compliance.

Here are some useful resources to help you with your research:

- [UK Copyright Law factsheet](#) (UK Copyright Service). On the sidebar of this page there are links to more useful advice including fair use, copyright myths, duration of copyright and seeking permission
- [Copyright](#) (US Copyright Office). Includes links to copyright basics, registering a work, law and regulations, and a range of factsheets
- [The Legal Side of Self-publishing](#) (Kateproof)
- [Legal Issues in Self-Publishing: What Authors Need to Know](#) (Huff Post)
- [Self-Publishing Basics: A 5-minute Guide to Copyright](#) (Book Designer)

- **5 Top Legal Issues for Authors and Self-Publishers** (Book Designer)
- *Copyright Law for Writers, Editors and Publishers* (Essential Guides) by Gillian Davies (available on Amazon)

## Further resources (selected)

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This is just a tiny selection of some of the resources available online that might be of further use to you. They're given in no particular order.

- The **Writers & Artists** website is an excellent resource for new authors, offering articles, advice, courses and editorial service provision for each stage of the process. It's worth scouring this website thoroughly before making firm decisions about the next move.
- **Writer's Digest** has lots of useful information, not least a free publishing guide entitled **The Self-Publishing Checklist** and an article advising on word counts for different genres: **Word Count for Novels and Children's Books: The Definitive Post**.
- Imogen Olsen's *Editing Fiction: A Short Introduction*. Published by the SfEP, it costs £5. While it's written for the professional editor, there's a huge amount of super advice that the writer can apply when self-editing; there is also an excellent list of resources for the self-publisher, including information about creative writing classes and support groups, copyright, writing and self-publishing blogs, and books and websites to guide the first-time novelist.
- **The Literary Consultancy** aims to offer 'expert, market aware editorial advice to writers at all levels writing in English, and help them understand how the publishing industry works'. TLC offers a number of services including editorial manuscript assessment, mentoring, tips and events for writers.
- I've referred to the **Beyond Paper Editing** blog elsewhere in these Guidelines but this is a super general resource if you're a writer looking for tips from professional editors. The people behind BPE are Corina Koch MacLeod and Carla Douglas, two experienced writers and editors who know their stuff.

- Another excellent resource is Jamie Chavez’s [Read>Play>Edit](#) blog. Her Short Saturday series has lots of useful tidbits that for the independent author, and her longer articles offer rich guidance that a new author would do well to heed.
- [The Passive Voice](#) is a blog about writing, editing and self-publishing. There’s a long list of categories on the right-hand sidebar that will be of interest to the independent author.
- [The Independent Publishing Magazine](#) is an online resource for independent publishers, self-publishers and the publishing industry in general.
- [Armed with Pens](#) ‘is a resource dedicated to helping writers and editors, working within all fields of literature and magazines, achieve the best work they possibly can’.
- [Catherine, Caffeinated](#) is the website of self-published author Catherine Ryan Howard. Of particular interest to new authors will be the section of posts on self-printing and self-publishing [here](#).
- The [Playle Editorial Services blog](#) has some good advice for writers and self-publishers.
- [Writer Beware Blogs!](#) is a super resource that posts regularly about publishing and writing scams, and other problems that the self-publisher could face. Scrolling down the sidebar will bring you to a list of other writers’ resources and blogs of interest to the new author.
- [The Self Publishing Magazine](#) is well worth a look. Subscriptions cost £20 a year at the time of writing. It regularly provides wise advice about the realities of self-publishing, including marketing and printing. A must-read article available for free is [Advice for Self Publishers](#).
- Literary agent [Rachelle Gardner’s](#) website/blog contains a wealth of information for the new author including information on query letters, getting published, finding an agent, and promoting your book.
- [The Naked Author: A Guide to Self-publishing](#) by Alison Baverstock (Bloomsbury 2011).

- Anthony Haynes' blog, [Monographer](#), has a great selection of articles and resources for self-publishers; the Links section of his [Creative Writing Studies](#) blog is also a mine of useful information for the author.
- The Writing and Publishing Advice section of the [Book Editing Associates](#) website has a good selection of articles on writing, editing and publishing. The Book Designer's free 24-page booklet entitled [10 Things You Need to Know About Self-Publishing](#).
- [Writer Unboxed](#) includes lots of advice and information for the self-publisher. Use the Category search box on the left-hand sidebar. The info on marketing and publicity is particularly interesting.

# List of professional editorial societies (worldwide)

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Most of the editorial societies listed have searchable membership directories.

## **Australia**

[Institute of Professional Editors](#) (IPEd); regional chapter links include searchable membership directories

## **Canada**

[Editors' Association of Canada](#) (EAC)

## **Germany**

[Verband der Freien Lektorinnen und Lektoren](#) (VFLL)

## **Ireland**

[Association of Freelance Editors, Proofreaders and Indexers](#) (AFEPI)

## **Japan**

[Society of Writers, Editors and Translators](#) (SWET)

## **Netherlands**

[Society of English Native-Speaking Editors](#) (SENSE)

## **South Africa**

[Professional Editors' Group](#)

## **Spain**

Asociación Española de Redactores de Textos Médicos (AERTeM)

## **Transnational**

BELS: Board of Editors in the Life Sciences

Council of Science Editors (CSE)

Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME)

European Association of Science Editors (EASE)

International Society of Managing and Technical Editors (ISMTE)

Mediterranean Editors & Translators (MET)

## **UK**

Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP)

Society of Indexers

## **USA**

American Copy Editors Society (ACES)

American Society for Indexing

Bay Area Editors' Forum (BAEF)

Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA)

Northwest Independent Editors Guild

San Diego Professional Editors Network (SD/PEN)