

# Guidelines for new authors

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# Guidelines for new authors

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# Guidelines for new authors

## Introduction

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're 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 'It]here is a very big difference between self-publishing and self-publishing well' (Allison Winn Scotch, *The New Era of Self-Publishing*, *Writer Unboxed*).

If this is the start of your publishing journey, I'd also recommend that you visit, bookmark and subscribe to the [Writer Beware blog](#) (it's free). Its aim 'is to track, expose, and raise awareness of the prevalence of fraud and other questionable activities in and around the publishing industry' ([Writer Beware](#)). By subscribing, you'll get regular updates about the numerous scams being operated by unscrupulous people seeking to take advantage of inexperienced writers and self-publishers. I have no affiliation with Writer Beware but I applaud its mission.

I hope you find these guidelines useful and wish you every success on your writing journey.

*Louise*

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# Guidelines for new authors

## Financial success – an honest appraisal

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're 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, the organizations that enable it 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 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. Also worth reading is Denise Cowle's [How much does a proofreader cost?](#) (though the advice can be applied to other levels of editing).

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

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## Marketing assessment

If you're self-publishing you will need to ask yourself the same questions that a publisher will ask you if you're submitting to them directly or via an agent: (1) at whom is my book aimed, (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](#) (though Catherine now has a book deal) 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've 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

See the [case study featuring Andrew Langley](#) in this book. Langley is a superb example of a self-publisher who's approached marketing with a professional publishing head on him.

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

- [Marketing Your Book](#) (The Book Designer)

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- 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)

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## Formatting tools

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

- *The Mechanics of Self-Publishing Ebooks* is a 10-minute primer designed to help the independent writer create an ebook with minimal stress and professional results.
- [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

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- **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're 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.

My free booklet *The Mechanics of Self-Publishing Print Books* is a 10-minute primer designed to help the independent writer create a print book with minimal stress and professional results. It flags up some of the classic formatting problems that can lead to reader disengagement.

## Book jacket design

If you're 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 20 years of book design and publishing experience.

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## Using the appropriate editorial service

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're 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.
- Get quotations from several editors or proofreaders once you've decided which services you want to commission. Find the professional who's a good fit for you, even if it means waiting for them. It may be that your preferred editor is booked up for a few months. It can feel frustrating to wait, but bear this in mind – if they're in demand,

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perhaps they're worth your patience. 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.
- Finally, consider saving up so that you can mimic the mainstream publishing industry and commission multiple rounds of editing.

## The different levels of editing

If you're unsure about the level of intervention you need for your project, take a look at the table below, which gives you a broad idea of what the different levels of editing can include.

As you can see, I've allowed for a degree of overlap. This is because the terminology that independent editors use to define their levels of service provision differs widely. For example, my pre-publication proofreading service is called Proofreading Standard. My copy-editing

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service falls under the rubric of Proofreading Plus. It's therefore advisable to discuss what you want and what the editor can offer before the editing starts.

Substantive (aka structural, content or development) editing	Line editing	Copy-editing	Proofreading
Book level	Sentence level	Sentence and word levels	Sentence, word and layout levels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure: chapters and scenes help readers' comprehension</li> <li>• Relevance to intended audience</li> <li>• Completeness: no missing core information</li> <li>• Plot: engaging, makes sense</li> <li>• Characters: authentic and engaging</li> <li>• Point of view: consistent, unambiguous, navigable</li> <li>• Pace: provides comfortable reading experience</li> <li>• Logical and coherent narrative flow: drives the novel forwards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate paragraph and section breaks</li> <li>• Appropriate grammar and syntax</li> <li>• Authentic phrasing</li> <li>• Avoiding repetition of words or phrases</li> <li>• Clarity of meaning</li> <li>• Clear dialogue expression</li> <li>• Conciseness</li> <li>• Consistency in minor plot, timeline or character details</li> <li>• Correct word choice</li> <li>• Elegant sentence flow</li> <li>• Flagging similarities in names or events</li> <li>• Readability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate paragraph and section breaks</li> <li>• Avoiding repetition of words or phrases</li> <li>• Clarity of meaning</li> <li>• Consistency in minor plot, timeline or character details</li> <li>• Correct word choice</li> <li>• Correctly punctuated dialogue</li> <li>• Flagging similarities in names or events</li> <li>• Standard and consistent spelling and punctuation</li> <li>• Standard grammar and syntax</li> <li>• Standard paragraph indentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate paragraph and section breaks</li> <li>• Correct word choice</li> <li>• Correctly punctuated dialogue</li> <li>• Consistency in design of text and image elements</li> <li>• Highlight stacked hyphens</li> <li>• Removal of extraneous letter and line spaces</li> <li>• Standard and consistent spelling and punctuation</li> <li>• Standard grammar and syntax</li> <li>• Standard paragraph indentation</li> <li>• Widows, orphans and short lines flagged up</li> </ul>

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Here's a little more detail about the wide range of services available.

## 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're 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're 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.

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## Copy-editor

Once you're 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:

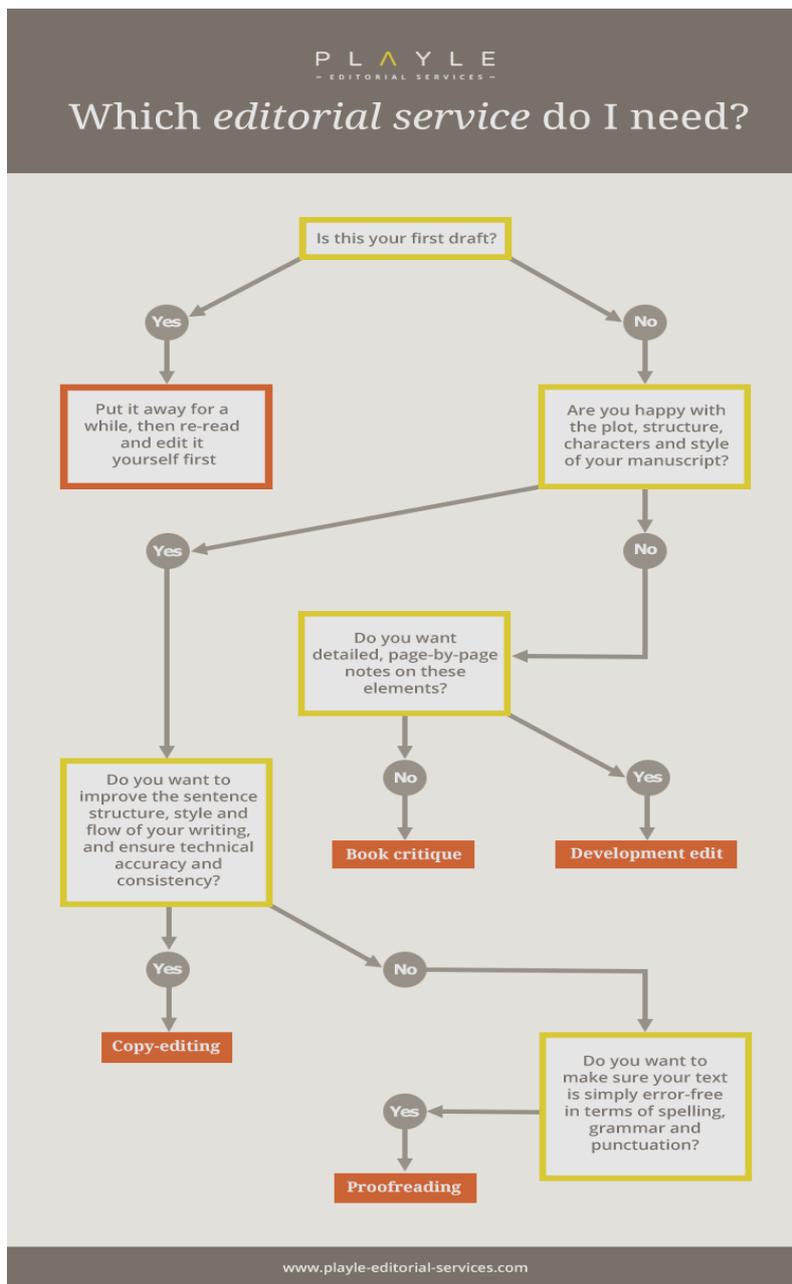
- eradicate any remaining grammar, punctuation and spelling errors;
- ensure consistency from a textual (e.g. hyphenation and capitalization), typographical (e.g. size and style of fonts used for different elements of text) and layout (e.g. line spacing, text alignment, and paragraph indentation) point 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). I'd also recommend reading Susanna J. Sturgis's [Proofreading 101](#) before you decide to hire a proofreader.

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Which service should I choose?

The following infographic aims to help you map a possible path through the editorial process. There is no one true way, though – myriad factors will determine which is the best choice for you.



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## Be realistic – Gandalf isn't an editor or a proofreader

That's right – Gandalf isn't an editor or a proofreader. He's a wizard. If he did my job, he'd be able to carry out all of the editorial stages I've discussed in this chapter and find every single error and inconsistency in a book *in just one pass*. That's because he has magical powers – unlike publishers and independent editors.

In the real world, though, you'll have a budget, and some of you will have to make difficult decisions about which services to commission and which to omit.

It's not for me to tell you where to invest your budget – universally applicable advice is impossible given the number of factors to consider. What I can tell you is that it's very rare that I can carry out a basic proofread for a book that hasn't been line or copy-edited. Proofreading is the stage where 90% of the sentence- and word-level problems (and 100% of the big-picture work) should've been fixed – it's a final level of quality control.

In a nutshell, *good to go* will not be where you're at when the work's complete if you've hired a proofreader for just one pass of a book that still has problems with structure, coherence, point of view, readability, clarity, repetition, formatting, grammar, punctuation and spelling. *Good enough* will have to suffice.

On the other hand, if you commission a just copy-edit, and your editor makes several thousand changes to knock the text into shape, there will likely be some left-over snafus. Here, too, it's unrealistic to expect perfection in one pass. The publishing industry doesn't believe it's possible and authors shouldn't expect such from the editors and proofreaders. Again, if you only hire a copy-editor, that's fine as long as you accept good enough over good to go.

## Where to go for advice on honing your craft

Writers' workshops and groups afford the self-publisher a safe and supportive space within which to work and learn from fellow writers and instructors. Groups like these are not just useful in terms of developing skills related to either the macro elements of writing (book-level issues) or the micro elements (sentence- and word-level problems); you'll also be able to connect with others who are taking the same path as you, and join them in seeking advice on how to structure the journey of writing, drafting, putting aside, rereading and redrafting.

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Online self-publishing forums and blogs offer a wealth of advice on commissioning third-party assistance – the whats, hows and whys.

## Related information

- Read 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).
- [Why are book editors so expensive?](#) and [The other reason book editors are SO expensive](#) (Small Blue Dog Publishing).
- [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.

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## Self-editing advice

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)
- Lisa Poisso's blog, [Clarity: Tools & Skills for Authors](#), offers advice on editing and revision
- Sophie Playle's [Self-Editing Your Novel](#) is a free ebooklet that aims to help writers save their pennies and get the best service from an editor
- R.L. Trask's [The Penguin Guide to Punctuation](#) is one of the most treasured titles on my bookshelf. Immensely readable and very short!
- [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's [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

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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](#)

- The [Tech Tools for Writers](#) blog offers quick, user-friendly posts that advise writers on the use of self-editing, formatting and efficiency tools, including macros, apps and file storage systems
- This series of articles from Arlene Prunkl entitled 'Dialogue in fiction' (I-V) is must-read stuff for the fiction author, though any writer would do well to take a look at all the categories available on her blog – it's an excellent resource
- 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](#)
- [My Author's Proofreading Companion](#) provides independent self-publishing writers with guidance on how to tidy up a Word document using find/replace strings in Word

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## Working in Word – using Track Changes

- It's more than likely that your editorial professional will use Microsoft Word's Track Changes tool when amending your file.
- Track Changes (TC) allows the user to view a Word file in several different modes: (1) Final: Show Markup, (2) Final, (3) Original: Show Markup, and (4) Original.
- Switching on TC enables you to see every change made and any comments written for your attention. When I return a proofread manuscript to an author, I supply two versions of their file: one with all my amendments visible (via TC) and another 'clean' version with all the changes embedded for ease of reading.
- In a file with TC switched on, you, the author, have control over those amendments you wish to retain and those you wish to discard (using the Accept or Reject options).
- If you need guidance on how to work with TC, my colleague Mary McCauley has put together an excellent summary of online articles about using, customizing and troubleshooting this tool: [Writers' Resources: How to use Track Changes in your Edited Manuscript](#) (Letters from an Irish Editor, November 2015).

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## Developing your writing skills

If you're in the early stages of your writing career, it's worth considering how you might develop your skills by taking courses. The benefits are several-fold:

- You can learn from experienced professionals with a proven track record of helping budding writers to build confidence and skill through advice, support and feedback
- Classroom-based courses will provide you with the opportunity to meet, learn from, and share your experiences with others who, like you, want to hone their craft – and all within a friendly and sympathetic environment
- Online courses will provide you with the flexibility to develop your writing skills at your own convenience – you choose the time and space you dedicate to your learning
- You'll save time and money on editing costs further down the line – the more you can do well yourself, the less intervention you'll require
- The better you write, the better the experience for your readers. In the longer term, that's more than likely going to impact on the quality of the reviews you receive and the number of books you sell
- And last, but certainly not least, becoming a better writer will provide you with satisfaction and pride in your writing achievements

So, what's on offer? There are too many courses available to list them all, but the following are supplied by genuine and trusted providers in the UK. I'll continue to add to (and internationalize) the list as I become aware of additional options. And don't be shy about asking your fellow writers what they recommend. Sometimes the best advice comes from already satisfied customers.

- Curtis Brown: [Three-Month Online Novel-Writing Course](#)
- [Faber Academy](#): [Getting Started: Beginners' Fiction](#)
- [Faber Academy](#): [Writing a Novel: The First 15,000](#)
- OpenLearn (The Open University): [Approaching prose fiction](#)
- OpenLearn (The Open University): [Start writing fiction](#)

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- [Unthank School: and Introduction to Screenwriting](#)
- [Unthank School: Becoming a Writer](#)
- [Unthank School: How to Write a Novel](#)
- [Unthank School: Online Fiction Workshop](#)
- [Unthank School: Putting the Story in History](#)
- [Writers' Centre Norwich: Starting to Write Poems](#)
- [Writers' Centre Norwich: Starting to Write Prose Fiction](#)
- [Writers' Centre Norwich: Writing Prose Fiction: Intermediate](#)

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## On writing: Sorting the rules from the preferences

In a bid to participate within the international editorial community, I curate a UK-based blog called the Proofreader's Parlour. I've also several books that help aspiring editors and proofreaders build and promote their editorial businesses. In other words, I know what it's like to sit on the other side of the fence and actually write.

Writing well means understanding the difference between a rule and a preference. In the world of the written word, these two things often become confused. Take the following example by a (rather rude) commenter on one of my blog posts:

'This is well-argued in respect of the logic employed. Sadly the errors in the article undermine the author's authority. I am not going to list every error, but let's start with the following and assume that Louise is British because she refers to a twenty-pound note (not realising that any numbers from nine should be shown in digits) even though she uses American spellings such as "recognized" and "specialized" to which many UK clients would rightly object.'

The commenter was misinformed on both points:

- How a writer chooses to render numbers is down to a style preference. Says *New Hart's Rules* (Oxford University Press), section 11.1.2: 'It is normal to determine a threshold below which numbers are expressed in words and above which figures are used; depending on the context, the threshold may vary. [...] The threshold provides only a general rule: there are many exceptions to it [...]'
- The -iz form is not American spelling. It's a perfectly standard variant in British English and has been used for over 400 years.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of myths about 'rules' in writing. Sorting out what's right or wrong versus what's preferred or asked for can be tricky for the inexperienced author.

## How do you sort out the rules from the preferences?

There is a difference between choosing where to place an apostrophe and choosing how to spell 'focused'. You can get the first one wrong because different placements will create different meanings. You can't get the second one wrong – but you can be inconsistent;

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'focused' and 'focussed' are simply variants of the same word and both are correct in British and American English. So, how do you work out what's a rule and what's a choice?

- Check a good-quality dictionary or reference manual if you're unsure. Oxford Dictionaries Online is a great place to start because it shows spelling variants – e.g. whiskey/whisky, organize/organise, centre/center – and explains whether these are equally acceptable across different regions, more likely to be used in one particular part of the world, or distinct to a particular area.
- Refer to a style manual. A good-quality style manual should distinguish between a rule and a preference. See the example from *New Hart's Rules* above on number expression as an example. Which style guide you choose should be relevant to your audience. If you're working with a publisher, the press will probably have its own house style, or refer you to a preferred guide like *New Hart's Rules* or *The Chicago Manual of Style*. If you're a self-publishing author, you can create your own, though a professional editor and proofreader should offer this as part of their service. Creating your own style sheet enables you to record decisions about hyphenation, numbering, capitalization, spelling variation, punctuation style, etc., and enforce common-sense consistency without becoming bogged down in overly prescriptive 'rules' taught to you by someone who thought they knew better.
- Check online resources from grammarians and linguists to help you separate the good sense from the nonsense. That way, you can defend your decisions.
- Consider your audience. Certain types of writing (and those who will be reading it) bend more easily to particular style choices. Website copy that needs to communicate big ideas in small spaces may lose its wow factor if the writer worries too much about avoiding certain grammatical choices; articles for publication in specialist magazines and journals may require the writer's adherence to specific publisher house-style preferences or academic traditions; and engaging fiction writing, especially dialogue, can be damaged when character voice or idiom is buried by grammatical pedantry. Broadly speaking, a good piece of writing will be sensitive to its audience. Variations in punctuation style, idiom usage, spelling and grammar abound, but they are just that – variations, not mistakes.

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## The most common myths debunked ...

There are plenty of excellent online articles highlighting common things that writers are told are 'wrong' when in fact they're perfectly fine. I've provided a summary here, though if you read the linked-to articles in full you'll quickly realize that the same sticking points arise time and again.

**Myth 1:** Verbs with -iz suffixes are Americanisms (for example, specialise vs specialize). This isn't true. In fact, use of the -iz form has been around for over 400 years and is a completely standard variant that's recognized, and widely used, within UK publishing and beyond. Consistency is what you should look out for.

A word of caution, though – take care not to apply the style globally to your text. There are some words that must retain their -is suffix (e.g. compromise, advertise). [Oxford](#) provides a useful list of the most common words that must be spelled with -is. If you're in doubt, look up a word's spelling in a good-quality dictionary that includes variants.

**Myth 2:** You can't split an infinitive. Wrong – you can. There are numerous online articles debunking this myth, but one of my favourites is [Language Myths](#) by Patricia T. O'Conner and Stewart Kellerman (Grammarphobia). They write: 'Writers of English have been merrily "splitting" infinitives since the 1300s. It was perfectly acceptable until the mid-nineteenth century, when Latin scholars – notably Henry Alford in his book *A Plea for the Queen's English* – misguidedly called it a crime. (Some linguists trace the taboo to the Victorians' slavish fondness for Latin, a language in which you can't divide an infinitive.) This "rule" was popular for half a century, until leading grammarians debunked it. But its ghost has proved more durable than Freddie Krueger.'

**Myth 3:** You can't use a preposition at the end of a sentence. This is incorrect. You can use a preposition at the end of a sentence – in fact, sometimes it's far more comfortable for your reader. Says the [OxfordWords blog](#): 'Most of us learned in school that ending a sentence with a preposition was a mistake. This "rule", however, is misguided, dating from the 17th century, when several notable writers tried to codify English to fit more neatly with Latin grammar. Clearly, there are instances where attempting to avoid ending a sentence in a preposition results in a statement that is either over-formal or simply poor English.' Consider the following examples:

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- There's no chair for me to sit on.
- He had no one to play with.
- Darling, come on in!
- The football match is over.
- Get that dog out!
- We had to do several sets of exercises with no rest in between.

Recasting these sentences to avoid the end-of-sentence prepositions would likely render the text stilted and unrealistic.

Myth 4: You mustn't begin a sentence with a conjunction. This is yet another dose of hypercorrection – obviously, you don't want your writing to be boring, so it pays to not overdo it, but there's nothing grammatically wrong with starting a sentence with a conjunction. And in some cases it can even add punch to a sentence (see what I did there?). Richard Feloni, in [10 popular grammar myths debunked by a Harvard Linguist](#), reviews linguist and cognitive scientist Steven Pinker's *The Sense of Style* (published by Allen Lane in 2014), and writes: 'Teachers instruct young students that it is incorrect to begin a sentence with a conjunction (and, because, but, or, so, also) because it helps keep them from writing in fragments, Pinker writes, but it's advice that adults don't need to follow. Avoid writing an ugly "megasentence" full of connected independent clauses, and feel free to start a sentence with a conjunction' (Business Insider UK, 2015).

Myth 5: You must place two spaces after a full point. Actually, please don't – it looks awful on documents produced with modern word-processing software such as Word or InDesign. Publishers don't do it; nor do professional typographers. When we do it, it makes the text look gappy and amateurish. You can do a quick search and replace in Word to remove double spaces (simply click Ctrl H, and then type two spaces into the Find What box and a single space in the Replace With box).

This supposed typographical rule is a hangover from the days of monospaced letters on typewriters; these had only one font that gave equal space on a page to a wider letter such a 'w' and a narrower symbol like a full point. Go to your bookshelf and pick up any contemporary professionally published book; I promise you this – all full points will have a single space after

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them. For an entertaining discussion of the issue, read Farhad Manjoo's article [Space Invaders](#) (Slate, 2011).

Myth 6: You can't use 'they' as a singular pronoun. This old chestnut gets a lot of peevish in a pickle. It's a shame because it's a rather splendid solution for those who want to write clearly and succinctly while avoiding gendered language. It's been in use for a while too – from at least the sixteenth century.

Some publisher house styles demand the avoidance of the singular 'they'; others embrace it, given that, as Arike Okrent notes, 'It's perfectly good English. It sounds completely natural. Great writers like Shakespeare and Austen used it' ([4 Fake Grammar Rules You Don't Need to Worry About](#), Mental Floss, 2015). [Oxford Dictionaries](#) concurs. Note, though, Oxford's [follow-up caution](#): 'Two things are matters of fact, however: many people use it, and many others dislike it intensely. If you're writing something, it is therefore advisable to consider who might read it, and what their views might be.'

Myth 7: You shouldn't start a sentence with 'However'. Wrong again – of course you can. Getting the punctuation right is the key.

(a) When it's being used in the sense of 'Nevertheless' or 'But', it acts as a connector or conjunction with the previous sentence:

- The weather's been awful recently. However, it's due to brighten up next week.
- I'm taking a gap year to travel around Europe. However, I'll resume my studies in a year's time.

Note that when used in this sense, it should take a comma after it so as not to make your reader think it's being used in the sense of (b), below.

(b) 'However' can also be used to mean 'in whatever way' or 'regardless of how'. In this case, I wouldn't place a comma after it because it would interrupt the sentence.

- However you get there, just be sure to arrive before 4 p.m.
- However much you think you know about grammar, there's always someone who'll insist that you adhere to their pet peeves.

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Mignon Fogarty provides a good overview of the issue in [Starting a Sentence with 'However': Right or Wrong?](#). She also provides some thoughtful advice about avoiding placing 'However' at the beginning of a sentence: 'Sometimes it's still a good idea to avoid it because a lot of people think it's wrong. I don't advise starting a sentence with 'however' in a cover letter for a job application, for example. You don't want your résumé to get dumped because someone thinks you've made a mistake even if you haven't' (Quick and Dirty Tips, 2013). Depressing, but worth bearing in mind!

## Final thoughts ...

First, consider Jonathon Owen's reminder that good writers should never ignore register. 'There's a time and a place for following the rules, but the writers of these lists typically treat English as though it had only one register: formal writing. They ignore the fact that following the rules in the wrong setting often sounds stuffy and stilted. Formal written English is not the only legitimate form of the language, and the rules of formal written English don't apply in all situations. Sure, it's useful to know when to use *who* and *whom*, but it's probably more useful to know that saying *To whom did you give the book?* in casual conversation will make you sound like a pompous twit' ([12 Mistakes Nearly Everyone Who Writes About Grammar Mistakes Makes](#), Arrant Pedantry, 2013).

Second, bear in mind that some people's 'rules' are actually just their pet peeves. Taking time to understand the difference between a rule and a preference will at least enable you to defend your choices. However, don't be surprised if some sticklers still object to your decisions – there's no consensus. Says editor and writer Stan Carey, 'There are local and institutional conventions, but since English lacks an official language academy, there is no universal Standard English. Pick a version and you will find it riddled, as Geoffrey Pullum wrote, "with disorder, illogic, inconsistency, oddity, irregularity, and chaos". Amidst such ragged variability, clarity is desirable and elegance is admirable, but while certain rules facilitate these qualities, others are misguided myths that undermine them' ([Descriptivism vs. prescriptivism: War is over \(if you want it\)](#), Sentence First, 2010).

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# Guidelines for new authors

## Common snags in beginner writing

I've worked with many independent authors. Some are experienced, some are developing, and some are absolute beginners.

If you're in the early stages of your self-publishing journey, you'll probably welcome any help you can get. So, here, I'll summarize the problems I most often come across in beginner writing, especially in novels, so that you can raise your game and lift your writing to the next level more quickly.

Also, paying attention to these issues at draft stage will reduce your third-party editing costs further down the line.

## Rushing to publish rather than hushing to polish

Some new authors are so desperate to publish that they omit the drafting stage. Hush time means putting the book aside for a while and revisiting and self-editing with fresh eyes. If you don't go through the drafting stage, you're less likely to spot problems with plot, pace, readability and repetition. And that means your book will not be ready for the later stages of editing like copy-editing and proofreading.

Editor and writing coach Lisa Poisso has some excellent advice on managing the drafting process strategically: [How to revise the early drafts of your novel](#).

## Overwriting

### *Too much detail*

Some beginner writers don't trust their readers to fill in the gaps. This results in writing that gives too much detail. The narrative becomes laboured, boring even. There are some excellent examples in Christina Delay's [5 Steps to Avoid Overwriting](#) (Jami Gold blog); it's what Gold calls 'giving too much stage direction':

*Imagine if an author described a character traveling from a store to their home by listing every single action:*

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*'She inserted the key into the ignition. Turned the key. Waited for the engine to engage. Slipped the engine into reverse. Expertly maneuvered the car out of its parking spot ...'*

Gold recommends getting straight to the point – unless, of course, something important happens in the detail that's key to moving the story forward. If it's just detail that mimics the mundanity of real life, strip it out.

## *Repetition*

Watch out for repetition, especially 'wow' words. If Jo thunders down the hallway, her face like thunder, you have a problem. If the reader is told that Mike is 'in agony' and 'agonized' several times in one paragraph, the fat (and think of some synonyms!).

High-intensity scenes of fear, danger, desire or confusion are those most prone to repetition and over-explanation in beginner writing, usually because the author is worried that the reader might not understand what the character's experiencing. Gold calls these 'emotionally overwrought passages of purple prose'.

When drafting, consider creating a list that features key moments of disclosure and emotion/response. By mapping these moments, you can see whether the descriptions lie in close proximity to each other, and whether you've already provided enough detail earlier in the book. Then cut accordingly. Less is more.

## *Show and tell*

Showing and telling is another consequence of not trusting the reader to fill in the gaps.

- 'Help yourself to coffee if you wish. It's over on the table.' She pointed in the direction of the coffee table.

The bold text in the example above simply repeats what we already know and it's therefore superfluous. It's another issue to watch out for at self-editing stage. Removing this kind of detail makes the writing leaner and sharper.

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## Logic flop

Logic flop happens when writers try to avoid conjunctions (probably because they've been told that conjunctions are boring and shouldn't be overused). This can lead to grammatical hiccups that disfigure the writing and trip up the reader.

- Running barefoot along the corridor, Oisin bolted into the bedroom.
- Oisin ran barefoot along the corridor and bolted into the bedroom.

In the first example, we have a character doing two things at once – running through one place *while* he's making his way inside another. The second, edited version introduces a conjunction that brings logic and clarity to the sentence. Conjunctions are a perfectly natural way to join connecting action clauses that happen one after the other, and shouldn't be avoided simply on principle.

## Reluctance to use contractions

The use of contractions isn't always appropriate, particularly when the writer wants to introduce formality (e.g. in a historical setting or in academic non-fiction) or emphasis. However, in contemporary novel writing, the narrative can feel laboured if contractions are excluded, especially in dialogue.

In real life, people don't say things like 'we are going' and 'I would have liked to' so it's often better to offer the contracted form. If in doubt, say the words out loud. If the likes of 'we're going' and 'I would've liked to' sound more natural in the context of your book, then use contractions. Readers won't notice if you do, but they might stumble if you don't.

## Overuse of exclamation marks

Take care not to overuse exclamation marks. Too many can be distracting and overwhelm the text. Sometimes it's clearer if it's simpler. Exclamation marks can detract from the gravity of a statement, making it sound upbeat when a different mood was intended – tension, fear, anger, danger. If you've used the right words to convey the mood, the exclamation mark will often be superfluous.

If you do decide that an exclamation mark is necessary, don't use more than one. Compare the following:

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- 'I can't believe she said that.'
- 'I can't believe she said that!'
- 'I can't believe she said that!!!'

Read them out loud and decide which one best conveys the speaker's disbelief. I think the first does the job perfectly well. The second introduces a light-heartedness that may or may not be appropriate. The third is overkill.

## Speech tagging – he said/she said

Arlene Prunkl's 'Dialogue in fiction' series is my recommendation for independent authors who want free, detailed guidance on managing fiction dialogue effectively. **Part III** addresses speech tags (among other things), though the whole series is well worth reading.

Beginner authors can be reluctant to overuse he said/she said constructions, even though they're the most discreet way of tagging.

Prunkl says, 'Your job, as a newer writer, is to show emotion through the dialogue words themselves, not through the tags.' She therefore recommends avoiding tags such as 'hissed', 'sighed', 'laughed', etc. – not because they're not good words but because they're not words that describe the action of speaking. To hiss is to make a sharp sibilant sound; to sigh is to emit a deep, audible breath that expresses relief or sadness; to laugh is to express amusement through spontaneous sounds and movements of the face; to say is to utter words – and that's why 'said' is an effective speech tag.

Take a look at these examples; the bold versions are clean, effective examples of managing dialogue tags in a way that won't trip up the reader.

- 'You think I care?' she laughed.
- 'You think I care?' she said, laughing.
- 'I'm done with you,' she sighed.
- She sighed. 'I'm done with you.'

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## Formatting too early

Focus on making your book look beautiful after the bulk of the editing has been done. Fancy fonts and heavily designed text are difficult to work with at editing stage.

Furthermore, the layout might have to be reworked if there are major additions or deletions to the text during structural editing and copy-editing.

Word's styles palette is sufficient prior to the design stage. You (or your copy-editor) can introduce consistency to the different elements of the book (chapter titles, headings, quoted matter, main text, captions etc.) in a way that's clear and simple. See also [A note on formatting](#).

## Unrealistic expectations of what's possible in one pass

Some beginner writers think that one pass – a 'final proofread' carried out by a third-party professional – is enough to guarantee absolute perfection. It's not. The mainstream publishing industry doesn't believe it's possible, and nor should the independent author.

If you hire a professional to proofread or copy-edit your Word file, and that file has *not* been through previous rounds of extensive and meticulous editorial revision, there will likely be thousands of amendments – spelling, grammar, syntax and punctuation errors and inconsistencies; layout problems with regard to spacing and paragraph indentation; inconsistency with regard to character names and traits, and across word forms.

Don't expect your editor or proofreader to say, 'I've made 8,000 revisions to your document, compiled 67 queries, spotted four problems with character-history consistency, noticed two character-surname changes, offered 200 suggestions for alternative wording, and I guarantee that, in spite of this, I have not missed one single literal or contextual error.'

Get as many fresh eyes on your work as you can afford. If budget's an issue, that's fine, but make sure your expectations reflect this. See also [Be realistic – Gandalf isn't an editor or a proofreader](#).

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## Creating a style sheet

Creating a style sheet enables you to record decisions about hyphenation, numbering, capitalization, spelling variation, punctuation style, etc., so that you can bring common-sense consistency to your writing.

Some writers prefer to focus on writing, letting an editor or proofreader deal with consistency. That's absolutely fine but it's worth having a conversation with your chosen editorial professional to ensure that you both understand who will be determining the style.

- Are you happy for the editor or proofreader to make those decisions?
- Are you writing for a publisher who has its own house style?
- Do you have particular preferences that you want to be reflected in your writing?

It's useful, especially in fiction, to keep track of not only spelling and formatting choices but also any key features of the main characters. That way, inconsistencies can more easily be flagged and checked for context (for example, is it a mistake that a teetotal character has taken an alcoholic drink, or is this a deliberate part of the plot?).

If you'd like to see a sample of the style sheet I use for copy-editing and proofreading, visit the [For Authors](#) page on my website and scroll down to 'Want to see a style sheet?'. Feel free to download a copy and adapt it for your own use.

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## Distribution channels

If you haven't yet considered how you're 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're happy with the royalties you can earn and the distribution rights you're granted. Further down the line, don't be afraid to revisit the original choice you made – providers may introduce new options or amend the terms of existing plans, so what works for you now may not be in your best interests in a year's time. There's absolutely nothing wrong with testing different distribution models and revising your choices accordingly.

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## Taxation issues

If you're 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're 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.

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## Legal issues to consider

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)

# Guidelines for new authors

## Case study – the marks of a professional independent author

I've been blessed with the opportunity to work with some fabulous independent authors in my career. Those who have really made their mark in the indie publishing world know how to write, but they also know how to brand themselves as professionals. In one sense, they've taken the 'self' out of self-publishing.

### What's wrong with 'self'-publishing?

Nothing at all – it's one of the most democratizing concepts to have taken root within the publishing world in the past decade. Thousands of talented writers have published their books without the aid of a traditional publishing contract. That's given us, the readers, an opportunity to access great stories that haven't attracted a mainstream press's interest because the author isn't a known name, the genre is considered unfashionable, or the author hasn't acquired agency representation.

The problem is the word 'self'. It implies that the author does all the work themselves, and that the standards and conventions associated with traditional publishing are thrown out with the dishwasher. The savvy author knows this isn't the case. Instead, 'self' refers to taking personal responsibility for managing those professional standards – employing third-party gatekeepers with specific skills (editors, translators, designers/typesetters) for some parts of the publishing journey.

### What marks the professional independent author?

Professional independent authors are recognizable precisely because they behave just like any big-name author – they are interesting and discoverable.

Being interesting to readers requires the independent author to write great stories with engaging characters. It also requires holding the reader's attention by ensuring that the content is free of DIY red flags like unconventional layout; micro editorial problems such as spelling, punctuation and grammar errors and inconsistencies; and macro editorial problems such as confusing point of view and plot inconsistency.

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Being discoverable to readers requires the independent author to market themselves such that their publishing brand is accessible, attractive, engaging and recognizable across multiple platforms and in multiple formats.

## Case study

Rather than just writing a to-do list, I thought it would be more interesting to present a real-world case study featuring one of my favourite indie writers – Andrew Langley, author of the **Nathen Turner supernatural thriller series**. Langley is an independent author who exemplifies professional independent publishing practice. I know his books well because I worked on them – but I'd have paid to read them for pleasure. Let's take a look at how he's made himself interesting and discoverable, just like all those big-name authors in the market.

### *Being interesting*

High-quality content: To date, Langley has two books under his belt – *Mirror on the Soul* and *Dark Nights of the Soul* – and a third due for launch in 2017. He's a great writer, and knows how to spin a yarn and have a giggle at the same time. I loved these books. The characterization is strong, the pace is spot on, and the author never loses sight of the fact that his readers want to be entertained. The world he's built around the protagonist, Nathen Turner, is page-turning – and that's what readers are paying for.

Professional layout: Langley's taken steps to give his books the same level of professional attention they'd have received if he'd gone down the route of securing a mainstream publishing contract. Layout-wise, he has a creative background and was able to do his own typesetting. He followed publishing industry-recognized layout conventions, so his books look just as good as any novel published by Penguin or HarperCollins, and they wouldn't look out of place on a shelf in a branch of Waterstones or Barnes&Noble. When readers open one of his books, they're not faced with wonky paragraph indentation, inconsistent line spacing or oddly spaced margins. Instead, they see what they're used to seeing in any mainstream published novel, and that means they concentrate on the story he's telling.

Editorial assistance: Content-wise, he's a great writer but he knows that self-editing has its limits. Each book is sent to third parties for professional editorial review and copy-editing in Word. When the final post-design page proofs are ready, the proofreader climbs on board.

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That's exactly how mainstream publishers play it, and it's good practice for the independent author, too.

## *Being discoverable*

Website: Langley's created a dedicated author website with a custom url:

[www.andrewlangley.co.uk](http://www.andrewlangley.co.uk). Websites with host suffixes look like DIY jobs. They function the same as customized urls but they look amateurish. Can you imagine Lee Child, Ian Rankin, J. K. Rowling or Stephen King having '.wordpress.com' tacked onto the end of their domain names? No, you can't. Neither can Langley. And nor should any independent author who wants their books to be taken seriously.

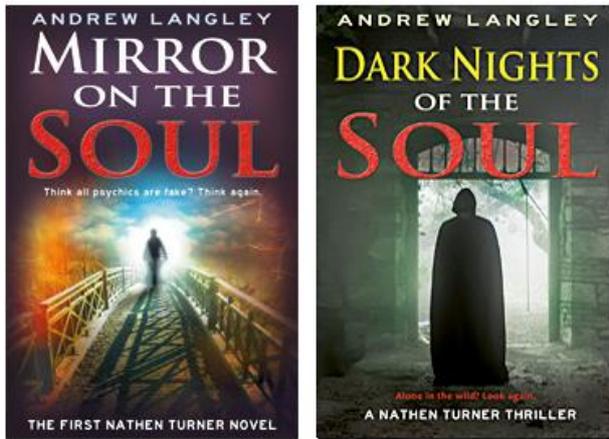
Accessibility: Langley's made his books available across multiple distribution outlets – Barnes&Noble, Amazon, Waterstones – and in multiple formats (ebook, hardback and paperback). That means readers have a choice about *where* they buy the Nathen Turner books and *how* they read them. Indie authors who fail to acknowledge readers' preferences are missing out on a potential income stream.

Social media: Langley's not relying only on his website and word of mouth. He's also harnessing the power of social media to engage with writers and readers and to share news about his writing. Not only is this an exciting way for the indie author to engage, it's also sound business practice. When you share high-quality fresh content to relevant third parties, and others re-share and link to that content from other websites, your search rankings improve (which means increased visibility and sales). Don't underestimate the power of social media – even if you don't like it, you should still use it precisely because many of your potential readers and reviewers are using it. Good marketing is about putting your customers' preferences before your own.

Identity: Take a look at the eye-catching images and continuity of title design on the covers of *Mirror on the Soul* and *Dark Nights of the Soul*. Both books are distinct, and yet recognizable as being from the same writer's stable. The titles themselves follow a theme – a particularly effective tool when a writer is producing a character-based series. What Langley has done with the identity of the Nathen Turner series covers is what Bantam have done with Lee Child's Jack Reacher series covers. Again, this type of recognizable brand identification is nothing more than good publishing business practice.

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Fan engagement: Tweets and Facebook status updates aren't the only way to engage fans. The professional independent author should consider complementary tools with which to engage their potential readers. Langley's created a fun video trailer that introduces us to his protagonist. There's also a blog and the option to sign up for the Haunting Tales Newsletter. Langley thinks these add-ons are a good idea. HarperCollins concur (see the [I Am Number Four](#) fansite based around the Lorien Legacies series). So should you.

## Summing up

All in all, Langley is doing just what Harlan Coben (a favourite big-name author of mine) does on his author website: drawing his readers into the stories he's written, sharing a little of his own history, and making it as easy as possible for book lovers to engage with him and his novels – and all within a framework of recognizable, accessible and professional branding. Here's Langley in his own words:

*I looked at what all the mainstream publishers were doing – good and bad – and then decided on an approach I believed would connect with readers. From my perspective, the writer has one goal in mind – to entertain and engage with readers. You wouldn't go and buy clothing that had stitches missing and was poorly made, and I feel it's the same with books. If the novel looks like a school project, why would somebody buy it?*

Wise words. The lesson is this – even though you're not publishing your novel through a mainstream publishing house, you can still produce, brand and promote like one.

*Louise Hamby*  
PROOFREADER & COPYEDITOR

# Guidelines for new authors

## Further resources (selected)

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.

- My free Mechanics series: *The Mechanics of Self-Publishing Ebooks* and *The Mechanics of Self-Publishing Print Books* are two 10-minute primers designed to help the independent writer create books with minimal stress and professional results.
- 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.

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PROOFREADER & COPYEDITOR

# Guidelines for new authors

- [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'.
- [Writer Beware](#) 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.

# Guidelines for new authors

## List of professional editorial societies (worldwide)

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)



# Guidelines for new authors

## 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)

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