

Questions supplied by WGA:

1. Why should I self-publish?
2. What different models of self-publishing are there? What are the pros and cons of each model?
3. What are the steps toward self-publishing?
4. What does it take to be successful at self-publishing?
5. How expensive is self-publishing?
6. Can I make money as a self-published author?
7. How can I obtain funding for my project?
8. What is the difference between self-publishing and vanity publishing?
9. How can I distribute and sell my self-published book?
10. How can I promote my self-published book and get readers interested?
11. How can I get my self-published book reviewed?

Self-Publishing FAQs

For the purposes of this FAQ, the term “indie” or “indie author” is used to refer to self-published / self-publishing authors.

Some replies include links to third-party websites. Please note that these sites may include pitches or incentives to purchase services or resources. Please do your own due diligence to decide if any serve your needs and goals.

The WGA provides these links as general resources and does not endorse any third-party services or websites.

FAQs

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1. Why should I self-publish?

Self-publishing is when the author of the work is also the person in charge of the work getting published. As opposed to traditional publishing, where a company or publisher handles, supervises, or manages many of the tasks related to book publishing, self-publishing means the author makes all the decisions and sources all the component aspects.

Self-publishing is for anyone who prefers direct control over aspects of book production and publishing such as, but not limited to, editorial, marketing, design, and timelines. As a result of this direct, hands-on model, and with the use of platforms such as Amazon and Kobo, etc., indie authors can earn up to 70% of the cover price of one copy of a book. However, keep in mind that overhead costs such as production and marketing, as well as multiple factors related to distribution, means a lower net revenue than that straight-across 70%.

Large traditional publishers often work on timelines of 18 months to 2 years per book; this is the time between when a manuscript is purchased by the publisher and when the book is released to the public for sale. Smaller presses will have shorter timelines than that. Generally, self-published books will make it to market much faster than with traditional publishing. The speed, of course, depends on different factors such as how quickly a manuscript can be drafted, revised, and polished, as well as how quickly any contractors can complete their tasks. For many self-published authors, however, this overall shorter timeline is appealing.

Many traditional publishers have in recent years asked their authors to take on more of the marketing workload, as well. With self-publishing, authors have more control over marketing initiatives and that can also be appealing for some.

Direct design work can also be a draw for some authors, especially for those who already have a strong vision for their book(s). With self-publishing, the author has the final say for how their book(s) will look, in terms of the interior as well as the cover.

2. What different models of self-publishing are there? What are the pros and cons of each model?

“Full Indie”—In this model, the author performs or directly oversees all tasks related to publishing their book, including:

- developmental editing
- copy-editing
- proofing
- interior design
- cover design
- file conversions (ebook, print-on-demand aka POD)
- quality control on file specifications for varying platforms
- creation of audiobook (if desired)
- uploading to distribution/selling platforms (Amazon, Kobo, etc.)
- creating and maintaining accounts on multiple distribution/selling platforms
- vetting and learning new software or systems to streamline production, marketing, etc.
- marketing and promotion
- competitive pricing
- creating and managing ISBNs
- budgeting

A given author may not be able to perform all of these tasks on their own, and may need to hire contractors. For example, it's always recommended that indie authors hire, at a minimum, an outside editor to review and edit draft manuscripts.

This model requires the time and an aptitude for multitasking and project management, as well as some financial means. Usually, a task that can be outsourced will take money. If an author doesn't have that money, then they will need to put in the time to accomplish the task(s) instead. Depending on the author's technical competence, this time can vary broadly.

The initial foray into self-publishing normally involves a steep learning curve. However, once an author has completed one cycle with their first self-published book, they will then have systems in place they can re-use and/or tweak to continue with other titles.

Publishing Services Provider—These companies offer full packages or “a la carte” services to self-publishing authors, from production to publication to promotion and even printing. Service representatives are assigned to guide author-clients through the process. Pricing varies per service provider and services purchased. Depending on the service provider, a minimum purchase of book copies may be a requirement of packages/services.

This model requires the financial means to purchase packages or services up-front. This model may benefit those authors who require or desire more guidance and/or

have less technological or technical experience with the different platforms, formats, and software needed to self-publish.

Examples: [FriesenPress](#), [BookBaby](#), [Tellwell](#).

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Subsidy or Partnership or “Hybrid” Publishing—This can be similar to the services provider model, above, except that the publisher might offer to cover some of the costs involved.

This model requires the financial means to purchase services up-front. This might benefit authors on a tighter budget, and who are able to handle more of the publishing tasks, in partnership with the hybrid publisher.

There are many noted ‘subsidy or hybrid publishing’ scams, which prey on novice self-publishers, so it’s important to carefully research any companies who advertise under this umbrella before signing on with them. [Writer Beware](#) offers up-to-date blog posts and a large database of literary scams. It may also be useful to ask for referrals to speak with authors on the publisher’s list.

Please note: “hybrid publisher” should not be confused with “hybrid author.” The latter term refers to authors who self-publish as well as publish with traditional publishers.

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Vanity Publishing—Some companies offer packages to self-publishing authors at per-service pricing. They usually do not offer editorial review, though they may offer design services, and they always require payment up-front. Vanity presses only offer small-run options; that is, in addition to all other services, the author must pay for a minimum number of books to be printed.

This model requires the financial means to pay up-front. This model might benefit authors wishing to publish books for private distribution only; ie., family memoirs or memorial editions, business books for giveaway, etc.

This model is also often referred to synonymously as “subsidy publishing.” As such, it is vulnerable to exploitation, as noted above. Attention should be paid to vet this type of publisher carefully.

3. What are the steps toward self-publishing?

Generally speaking, this is the breakdown:

1. Finish the manuscript.
2. Edit the manuscript.
3. Polish the manuscript.
4. Copy-edit the manuscript.
5. Proof the manuscript for typos, etc.
6. Finalize the manuscript.
7. Decide on formats and size (for print); ie., print, ebook, audio, hardcover, paperback, etc.
8. Decide on interior design; ie., typeface(s), font size, margins, colours, etc.
9. Convert the manuscript file to the appropriate format files.
10. Design the cover; ie., front cover, back cover and copy, spine.
11. Create author accounts on distribution platforms; ie., Amazon, Kobo, Ingram Spark, etc.
12. If using ISBNs*, create an account with [Library and Archives Canada](#) (Canadian residents only**) to obtain free ISBNs for each format of one title.
13. Check specs for interior files and cover files, to align them with each distribution platform's specifications.
14. Upload confirmed files to distribution platforms.
15. Market and promote title(s), using social media, author newsletter, live events, etc.

Of these steps, the author alone must complete 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12 . Contractors or other service providers are available to handle all other steps, with the author as final arbiter.

*If planning on distributing exclusively with Amazon, using their Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) program, one can forego ISBNs for Amazon's proprietary ASIN system, which is automatically assigned as part of the uploading process for a title. Please note that libraries will normally not carry titles that are published exclusively on Amazon. Independent booksellers are on a case-by-case basis, as some are open to supporting local indie authors. Direct correspondence with independent bookstores is the best way to ascertain their openness to stocking indie titles.

**Outside of Canada, obtaining ISBNs may require purchase. Research ISBNs by country of residence to learn which is the case, and how to obtain.

4. What does it take to be successful at self-publishing?

It's important to set your own goals when it comes to self-publishing. Success can be measured in numbers of copies sold, in revenue, in profit, in number of titles published per year, etc. "Success" varies for each author.

Some key aspects to sustaining a career as an indie author are:

- the ability to write quickly and consistently
- an aptitude for marketing
- the ability to budget
- the ability to connect with readers authentically
- maintaining strong, collaborative relationships with contractors
- connecting and maintaining supportive relationships with other indie authors
- an aptitude for project management and multitasking
- finding a workable combination of time vs. money

5. How expensive is self-publishing?

This depends on how many tasks an author can take on themselves versus how many they can contract out (ie., outsource).

In monetary terms, if an author is able to do all the tasks themselves, and avoids using distribution platforms, services, or marketing that require payment, then it could conceivably cost them nothing to self-publish. However, what doesn't get spent in money, costs in time.

For those authors using publishing service providers or the subsidy publishing model, it can cost from a few thousand to \$10,000 or more for one title, depending on the number of services purchased.

Here's [a breakdown](#) from a publishing services provider, based in the United States.

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6. Can I make money as a self-published author?

It's important to acknowledge that "making money" in publishing as a whole, whether you self-publish or publish traditionally, is not an easy question to answer. When considering average income figures, keep in mind that some authors receive seven-figure royalties annually, while others make only single-figures. An average in this case does not reflect the probability of any one author's earnings.

Here is [a piece from 2020](#), which includes figures on author incomes (self-published and traditional) from 2018. The Writers Union of Canada's [2018 income survey](#), the most recent year of data available, states: "The average net income from writing was \$9,380, while the median net income was less than \$4,000." Further, the same survey of 1499 respondents indicated that 45% of writing income came from traditional royalties, while 8% came from self-publishing.

Self-published authors' profits depend on multiple factors, including but not limited to: successful marketing plans and their execution, consistent book production, consistent high-quality engagement with readers, and consistent low overhead.

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7. How can I obtain funding for my project?

Some indie authors, and many mainstream creators, use platforms such as Patreon or Ko-Fi to create a steady income stream for themselves on an ongoing basis. These platforms are creator-specific membership communities and depend on high numbers of subscribers—or patrons—paying lower monthly amounts to create steady income. Creators are in charge of content to their patrons and often offer member-only incentives to drive renewals as well as to engage new subscribers.

Fundraising for specific one-off projects can be done via crowdsourcing on platforms such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo. Like the membership community platforms above, these sites charge fees per donation, which are taken off the top, before revenue is paid out to creators.

Alternatively, indie authors can research artistic grants for writers. Here is [a general list of writers grants](#) from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. It does not categorize by indie vs. traditional, so you would need to filter manually for your eligibility. Additionally, some municipal and provincial arts organizations may have grants open to indie authors.

Please note that currently in Canada, indie authors are ineligible to apply for grants from either the Canada Council for the Arts or the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. There are some exceptions for Inuit, Métis, and First Nation artists.

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8. What is the difference between self-publishing and vanity publishing?

Vanity publishing can be considered a type of self-publishing, though it does not have a good reputation.

As its name suggests, a vanity publication appeals mainly to its author rather than to potential readers. As such, vanity publishers require authors to pay them to publish the work, thereby also having the author assume all the risk. Sometimes, vanity publishing is used synonymously with “subsidy publishing.”

Vanity publishing usually means that there has been little to no editorial work done on the manuscript. Thus, it holds a connotation of lesser quality. As well, a vanity publication may not necessarily include best-practice considerations for overall book design. Depending on the marketing efforts, vanity publishing has a broad range in terms of ROI (Return on Investment).

See FAQ #2 above for more information on this and other models of self-publishing.

9. How can I distribute my self-published book?

All of the following distribution channels charge fees as a percentage of your cover price, but at varying rates. It’s important to understand the percentages as well as what portion of the revenue it will be calculated on, in order to know what your actual net profit will be per sale, in any format.

Ebooks—[Kobo Writing Life](#), [Kindle Direct Publishing](#) (KDP/Amazon), and [Draft2Digital](#) are the most popular.

You can upload your ebook(s) directly to Kobo and/or KDP and they include them in their respective databases and interfaces for sale direct-to-consumers.

Draft2Digital provides access to numerous ebook sales portals, such as Overdrive, Barnes & Noble, and Apple Books. You can opt in to as many or as few as you like.

Print books—Indie authors use POD (print-on-demand) platforms such as KDP (Amazon), [IngramSpark](#), and [Lulu](#). (These three also distribute ebooks.)

POD means a book isn't printed until an order is placed for it, as opposed to traditional book printing which requires large volume orders and warehousing. These platforms take care of printing and mailing from their respective facilities. KDP sells direct-to-consumer, while IngramSpark and Lulu supply to retail booksellers and libraries.

Depending on the platform, the selection of bindings and sizes— ie., hardcover, paperback, picture book, etc.—varies. Therefore, so does the pricing per unit.

Audiobooks—Audible is the largest audiobook distribution platform; it's owned by Amazon. Other platforms include Audiobooks.com, Apple (iTunes), Google Play, Kobo, and Scribd. This is [a useful article from 2020](#) on indie audiobook production as well as distribution.

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10. How can I promote my self-published book and get readers interested?

A marketing plan is a key component to any indie author's book release. Creating one involves a clear understanding of the [Ideal Reader](#) for your book(s), and where to find them. Additionally, online research using "indie author marketing tips" as your search term will yield many blogs, posts, and webinars, all freely available online.

Having an author newsletter is also a key component. Subscribers self-select for interest and become a captive audience for author and book news. Email marketing apps such as [Mailchimp](#), [Flodesk](#), or [MailerLite](#) help authors (indie and traditional) design content and email campaigns, as well as parse data regarding open rates and campaign testing. Pricing for these apps varies; however, some offer a free version if the number of subscribers is below a certain threshold, which can be an affordable way to start.

Having an author website is another investment in designing a sustainable indie author career. A website acts as a central hub for showcasing published book(s), author events, and positive reviews, as well as a place to entice subscribers to sign up to the newsletter. There are premade and DIY options for authors, depending on your experience with the technology. Here's [a summary article](#) as a starting point for what to consider.

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11. How can I get my self-published book reviewed?

Indies Today has this [list of Indie Book Reviewers](#), dated February 2022. The 300+ reviewers are listed alphabetically, after a few promoted sites, so you will have to manually curate for your genre(s) and budget, and then approach individually. The site also includes information on [best practices for how to request a review](#).

Traditional review stalwarts Kirkus and Publisher's Weekly also have paid reviews available for indies: [Kirkus Indie Reviews](#) and [BookLife](#).

This [2017 piece](#) from Publisher's Weekly lists potential places for free reviews that are open to indie authors. Given its posting date, some information in the piece may no longer be actionable.

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Further Resources for Self-Publishing

Please note that these sites may include pitches or incentives to purchase services or resources. Please do your own due diligence to decide if any serve your needs and goals. The WGA provides these links as general resources and does not endorse any third-party services or websites.

[Alliance of Independent Authors Self-Publishing Advice Center](#)

[Basics Guide to Kindle Direct Publishing](#) (aka Amazon)

[SelfPublishing.com](#), an offshoot of the for-profit Self-Publishing School

[BookBaby blog](#)

[Kobo Writing Life blog](#)

[Bookbub marketing blog](#)

[Draft2Digital blog](#)

[Your Writer Platform](#) (branding and marketing resources)

[The Creative Penn](#) (Quick start [here](#))