What do you most need to know about the self-publishing process, and what sorts of questions should you ask of yourself, your work, and your publishing company? Like any other system, self-publishing can seem daunting and complicated to newcomers, and sometimes it can help to hear from those who have gone through the exact same experience. As you dive into the self-publishing process, consider asking the following six questions, each of which may serve as a platform for successfully orienting yourself in the world of self-publishing.

1. How much does self-publishing cost?

Authors first setting out to self-publish often want and need to know how much it will cost them to publish their books. This is a loaded question; there are as many answers as there are authors entering the market, and each answer depends on the individual author’s goals and budget. However, while there is no one-size-fits-all price for self-publishing, there are a few factors that all authors should keep in mind while weighing the costs.

A book is an investment

The money authors spend on self-publishing isn’t simply an expense; it’s an investment. By dedicating money to publication, an author creates a book that has value and will earn a profit. Some authors have goals other than earning a profit, but most publishing ventures are business ventures. Remember the line “You have to spend money to make money”? It applies to the world of self-publishing as much as it does to investment banking.

A book is a product

A book is more than numbers on a cost-benefit analysis. Whether published digitally or in print, a book is a product, a physical artifact weighed by human hands and eyes. Research shows that readers decide within eight seconds whether or not to invest energy into a book, and this means that a customized cover design and a clean, professionally edited manuscript may be key factors in a reader’s decision to purchase that book. Paying for a beautiful cover and perfect lines means more readers will stop browsing and pull your book out of the hundreds on the same shelf or webpage—and it means they will keep reading once they do.

Plan on making a profit

It’s easy to focus on how much a book is going to cost now, rather than how it can make money in the future. Profitable books require solid marketing plans, just as a new business requires advertising. Just as television advertisements remind customers that a restaurant exists and sells a dish that they want or need, authors’ platforms or marketing plans help spread the word that their books are out there and desirable.

The average up-front cost range for self-publication falls somewhere between $2,500 and $3,500. This allows roughly $1,500 for a publishing package with a custom cover design, and $500 to $1,000 for professional copyediting, as well as $500 to $1,500 for marketing services. Some authors spend more money than others. The key to successful self-publishing is for authors to consider the value of their investments carefully, in light of their goals, needs, and plans when setting up a budget.

1 The Telegraph, 19 Feb. 2014 “Engaging reluctant readers in the iPad age.”]
Many authors are anxious to self-publish their books, and these authors may choose self-publishing over traditional publishing options because they can see their books in print much more quickly. And while speed is one of the many perks of self-publishing, a little caution is always wise. If you are one of those anxious authors and you wish to publish a book of high quality and professional caliber, it is important that you do not feel rushed. Instead, consider these five recommendations for a relaxed, enjoyable self-publishing experience:

Be realistic about deadlines

Rushing can prove toxic to an author’s ability to meet a deadline. Authors produce their best work when they are focused on the writing process itself, and allow themselves the time and energy to generate quality content and elegant sentences. When authors are forced to write under the pressure of unrealistic deadlines, they are more prone to errors of grammar, spelling, and style—and often, readers struggle to take books rife with such errors seriously. Take the time to produce the best, most polished manuscript you can.

Proofreading and copyediting

To earn a reader’s respect, you must take the time to proofread your own work several times, and you should always consider paying to hire a professional copyeditor. A fresh pair of eyes and the knowledge, skill, and objectivity that a professional copyeditor brings to the table can make all the difference to your book’s success and appeal.

Research your publishing options

Choosing which self-publishing company to hire is an enormous decision. Every company offers multiple packages, features, prices, and varieties of support—and every company offers these unique options to distinguish itself from its competitors. Before you make your final decision, you must first evaluate which company will best complement your own needs and goals as a writer. Spend time researching all of the options available, and pick the one that will best set you up for success.

One thing at a time

Thinking through the details of promotion, building your platform, and creating a marketing plan before your book is published are all good ideas, but don’t get too far ahead of yourself and risk losing sight of what needs to be done in the present. Consider putting your desire to schedule marketing events on hold until after you have a book in hand and ready to take with you to those events. Readings, signings, and other marketing events are most effective, and successful, when authors come prepared with products that are available for immediate perusal and purchase.

Enjoy yourself

Self-publishing a book is an exciting adventure, and marks a major milestone in your career as an author. Rather than rush through the process, take the time to enjoy it! As previously mentioned, rushing the publishing process will result in more stress than success, and may result in errors that you would otherwise avoid. Make sure that every aspect of the book is executed and realized exactly the way you desire, and leave time for professional editors and designers to deliver their best work as well.

You have invested a great deal of time and energy into creating a masterpiece, and you deserve to enjoy every step of that process.
What do I need to know about copyright laws?

One of the most confusing topics for new authors is how to handle copyright laws. As you pursue self-publication, it is important that you master some of the basics of copyright laws. Here are six key questions to get you started.

Is my manuscript copyrighted if I self-publish?

Yes. The copyright for written material is secured as soon as it is created, or when it becomes fixed in a manuscript for the first time. No publication, registration, or any other official act is required to secure the copyright for a book.

If copyright is automatic, why then should I register for it?

Filing with the U.S. Copyright Office creates a public record of the basic information in a book, which gives authors the right and ability to sue for infringement and statutory damages. Registration creates a legal presumption that a book’s copyright is valid and allows authors to recoup up to several thousand dollars, and possibly even attorney fees, without having to prove actual monetary harm.

How do I know if something in my book is copyright protected?

In most cases, any picture, material, text, information, quote, map, data set, song, image, or illustration that was not specifically created by the author is copyright protected by the person or persons who did create or publish the material. Any text or pictures found in a book, magazine, or newspaper is copyright protected by the publisher, artist, photographer, or some other entity. Most information found on the internet is also copyright protected. Even Wikipedia is an unsafe source; most of its information is copyrighted because it is sourced from elsewhere.

What is “Fair Use”?

Under fair use, some copyright protected material can be used without permission; however, there are no clear-cut rules under fair use, only guidelines and factors to be considered. The following four factors are used to determine fair use:

1. the purpose and character of the use, including potential commercial gains,
2. the nature of the original copyrighted work,
3. the proportion or percentage of the copyrighted material in relation to the work as a whole, and
4. the potential effect on the value of the copyrighted material.

Fair use is not a right, only a defense. If unsure whether certain material falls under fair use, consult a legal advisor or copyright researcher.

Will citing my sources free me from copyright infringement?

No. Citing the source will not avoid possible court litigation. Permission must be obtained. Plagiarism—not citing a source—and copyright infringement share some characteristics, but they are not the same thing.

How can I avoid being accused of libel?

Stating an opinion is not libelous, but authors must exercise care not to make accusatory statements about anyone when using real names. Do not make statements like the following, as they are clear grounds for a successful libel case:

- falsely accusing someone of a crime, or of having been charged, indicted, or convicted of a crime;
- falsely identifying someone with an infectious disease
- falsely charging a person or an organization with a claim that discredits a business or office and lowers their profitability, and
- falsely accusing someone of being impotent.

If you are publishing true stories or nonfiction, you may choose to change the names of your characters or the places you describe to sidestep some of these issues. You may also choose to use a pen name.

While every self-publishing company may have its own customized requirements, most follow the same basic pattern of page size, margin measurements, line spacing, paragraph indents, hard returns, and so on. Here is an overview of the most commonly suggested format for when you are preparing to submit your manuscript for publication.

**Page size**

A typical manuscript page will have an outer margin that measures 8.5 by 11 inches, contiguous with the outside edge of a standard letter-size piece of paper. If you want a fair idea of how long your pages will appear in reality, consider setting your page size to match the trim size you plan to select. Using the correct trim size will help you see how your text shifts and moves from line to line and page to page. Consult with your publisher on what trim size options are available to you, and compare the different sizes to determine which will suit your manuscript best.

**Margins**

The default text margins in Microsoft Word—which fall between 1 and 1.25 inches from the outer edge, depending on what version you have installed—are usually acceptable. (The same applies if you use Apple’s Pages.) If you want to shape your pages to more closely resemble the standard margins used by many self-publishing companies during the final production process, consider setting your top and bottom margins to .95 of an inch and your left and right margins to 0.75 of an inch.

**Line spacing**

Most authors prefer to double-space their lines when creating their manuscripts because the extra white space allows for easier editing and proofreading. While most self-publishing companies will accept double-spaced manuscripts, you may want to single-space your lines before submitting your book to a publisher. Doing so will give you a more accurate picture of how long your book will be when printed, as single-spaced lines more closely approximate the printed page.

**Paragraph indents**

Setting your word processor to automatically indent the first line of each paragraph to 0.25 of an inch will save many reformatting headaches later, as most publishing companies prefer the first line hanging indent to spaces or tabs. Most word processors come with tutorials that will show you how to create these indents.

**Hard returns**

When you hit the Return or Enter key at the end of a line in order to move on to the beginning of a new paragraph, this is called a “hard return.” The term is a legacy from the days of typewriter keyboards, which required users to hit the Return/Enter key when they reached the right page margin on every single line. These days, word processors like Microsoft Word or Apple’s Pages for Mac will automatically “wrap” your text for you, taking you to a new line whenever you hit the right edge of the page. Assuming that you are using a computer and not a typewriter to generate your manuscript, hit the Return/Enter key only when you want to start that new paragraph—including hard returns in your manuscript will complicate the formatting process.

**Spell check**

Before you submit your manuscript, run the spell check and grammar check functions supported by your word processor, and have a third party proofread your manuscript for you. These spell and grammar check functions don’t always catch every error, and not every suggestion they make will be correct, so it is important you do not skip the human element. Early readers and professional copyeditors are vitally important to eliminate errors from your manuscript.
Hundreds of thousands of books are published each year. As a self-published author, you must find ways to make your book stand out on bookshelves crowded with products from both traditional publishers and other self-published authors. But how? Here are six ways you can stop new readers in their tracks, and compel them to pick up—and then purchase—your book.

Hire a copy editor

Self-publishing authors are occasionally perceived as amateurs because many choose not to have their manuscripts professionally edited. Copyediting is a vital step in the publishing process at traditional publishing companies, and if you want your book to compete with those books that traditional publishers put out there on the market, it is essential that you complete this same step. In order for your book to be perceived as a professional product, it must be edited by a professional.

Splurge on a custom cover

A custom cover will enhance your book’s appeal to the average reader browsing the shelves of his or her neighborhood bookstore or the virtual shelves provided by Amazon and other retailers. The components that make for successful graphic design—the visual relationship between the art and words on your book cover—represent both your book as a product and you as an author, so take the time to create or pay a professional graphic designer to generate a unique cover that appropriately represents your book.

Consider cover scribing

Just as product design is a vital component of commercial advertising, the design and wording of your book’s cover material—including the biography and synopsis—is one of the most important factors in determining whether or not a reader decides to purchase your book or return it to the bookseller’s shelf. If you want your book to stand out from its competition, consider paying for a professional copywriter to infuse your cover materials with vim, vigor, and language that will improve its marketability.

Consider an enhanced interior

The interior layout and design of your book is just as important as its cover, especially if it includes nonstandard typographic elements like pictures or tables. Readers are instinctually drawn to books that are formatted professionally, so it pays to hire a professional to perfect the look and feel of your book.

Price your book appropriately

A book’s price can prevent readers from purchasing it, especially in the day and age of inexpensive e-books. Take special care to price your book competitively—it should cost enough for you to make a profit and exude a sense of credibility, it should also be priced inexpensively enough to attract readers on a modest budget. Your book will sell if it meets these criteria.

Market and promote your book

In order for readers to discover your book, they must be informed of its existence. There are many ways to market and promote a book, and it is important to consider the avenues through which most readers learn about new publications—that is, whether they make their discoveries through social networking, public advertisements, scheduled events, or some other means. Many self-publishing companies offer marketing and promotion services. To learn about the options available, contact your self-publishing company and research what you can do to participate.
How do I pick a self-publishing company?

Authors used to have only one path towards publication, and that path in some ways shaped or even simplified the decisions they had to make. Now, with self-publishing taking an increasing percentage of the market share for book sales all across the world, the available paths to publication have multiplied. Determining which company to use and which of that company’s packages to purchase is an increasingly complicated task, and as a result many authors find themselves suffering from analysis paralysis. If you find yourself unable to move forward with choosing a self-publishing company because of all of the different companies, packages, options, and promotions on offer, know this: You are not alone. Analysis paralysis, or the inability to choose a path and make progress along it, is the inevitable byproduct of numerous options and over-thinking.

While it is vitally important that you research self-publishing companies and the various options available before choosing a package and company, it is also essential that you find the courage to make a decision and begin the publication process. Logic, analysis, and an informed understanding of the self-publishing world are all important factors in choosing a company, but so too is the rapport an author establishes with a particular publishing company. This dynamic between author and publisher, when both parties match values and share a vision, is perhaps the most fundamental element to a successful partnership. How do you pick a self-publishing company? You pick the one that believes in you and your book.

Choosing a self-publishing company poses the same challenges as every other important life decision. Analysis can get you only so far before you have to make a final decision, and sometimes that decision is based on something other than pure logic.

Do you have questions, or are you ready to get started? At Outskirts Press, we’re here to help!

Outskirts Press, Inc. offers full-service, custom self-publishing and book marketing services for authors seeking a cost-effective, fast, and flexible way to publish and distribute their books worldwide while retaining all their rights and full creative control. Available for authors globally at www.outskirtspress.com and located on the outskirts of Denver, Colorado, Outskirts Press represents the future of book publishing, today.