

DSDT

Self-Publishing

Welcome to the World of Self-Publishing!

Hey, student writers! 🙌

So you did it. Maybe it's a novel you stayed up late writing, a poetry collection gathering digital dust in your Google Docs, a spicy romance, an inspiring memoir, or even a how-to guide on something you love. Whatever it is, **congrats!** 🎉 That's huge. Finishing a manuscript is something a lot of people dream about but never actually do. You're already ahead of the game.

Now comes the big question:

👉 *"Okay... I wrote it. Now what? How do I actually get this thing out into the world?"*

Welcome to the world of publishing! There are two main ways to do it: **self-publishing** and **traditional publishing**. Both have their perks, their challenges, and different ways of making you money. Let's break it down.

1. Self-Publishing: The DIY Route

Self-publishing is basically being your own boss. You skip the agents, the gatekeeping editors, and the giant publishing houses. Instead, **you control everything**: editing, design, formatting, publishing, and yes... marketing.

Think of it like running a tiny business where your book is the product. Scary? Maybe a little. Exciting? Absolutely.

1.1 Why Self-Publishing Rocks

- **Creative control** 🎨 – Want a neon-pink dragon on your cover? Go for it. Prefer weird chapter layouts? You decide.

- **Speed** 🚀 – Traditional publishing can take **years**. Self-publishing? You can go from finished manuscript to a book on Amazon in **weeks**, sometimes even days.
- **Money** 💰 – On Amazon KDP, you can earn **up to 70% royalties** for eBooks. Traditional publishers? Usually only 10–15%. That’s a huge difference.
- **Audience connection** 👥 – You interact directly with your readers, build your own community, and get instant feedback.

1.2 The “But” of Self-Publishing

You wear all the hats: writer, editor, designer, marketer, and tech support. If it flops, it’s on you—but if it succeeds, **you keep all the wins**.

2. Traditional Publishing: The Classic Route

Traditional publishing is when a publishing house takes on the heavy lifting for you: editing, design, printing, and distribution. They also pay for all this upfront, so you don’t have to.

2.1 Money Talk

- **Advances** – This is a prepayment. Sometimes it’s \$500, sometimes \$50,000, depending on your book and publisher.
- **Royalties** – Once the book “earns out” your advance, you usually make:
 - 10–15% for hardcovers
 - 5–8% for paperbacks
 - 25% of net receipts for eBooks

2.2 Pros and Cons

Pros:

- No upfront costs
- Credibility and easier access to bookstores
- Professional support

Cons:

- Lower royalties
 - Less creative control (they decide cover, marketing strategy, maybe even edits)
 - Long wait time (often 12–24 months)
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3. The Real Costs of Self-Publishing

If you go DIY, here's what you might spend:

- Editing: \$200–\$2,000+ (developmental, line, or copy editing)
- Cover Design: \$50–\$600
- Formatting: \$50–\$500
- ISBN: \$0–\$125
- Marketing: \$0–\$5,000+ (optional, but recommended if you want sales)
- Printing (paperbacks/hardcovers): Depends on page count and color

It's an investment, but you keep **most of the revenue**.

4. Step-by-Step Self-Publishing Process

Here's how to go from “manuscript in Word” to “book on Amazon”:

Finish & Polish Your Manuscript

Rule #1: **Never publish a first draft.**

Even if you think it's “good enough,” it's not.

- **Read it aloud** – Helps catch weird sentences.
 - **Use editing tools** – Grammarly, ProWritingAid, Hemingway App.
 - **Beta readers** – Ask friends, join Facebook groups or Reddit (r/DestructiveReaders, r/WritingCritique).
 - **Hire an editor** – Developmental editors for plot, line editors for flow, copy editors for grammar. Reedsy, Upwork, and Fiverr are great resources.
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What is an ISBN?

An **ISBN** (International Standard Book Number) is a unique identifier for your book. Think of it as your book's fingerprint—it tells bookstores, libraries, and online retailers exactly which edition of your book they're selling.

- Every format (ebook, paperback, hardcover, audiobook) usually needs a **separate ISBN**.
 - In the U.S., ISBNs are purchased from **Bowker**.
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2. Getting an ISBN Through Amazon KDP

When you publish via Amazon, they offer a **free ISBN** for your paperback or hardcover.

Pros

- **Free** – No cost to you.
- **Quick and easy** – Amazon handles the setup.
- **Works for selling on Amazon** – You can get your book listed immediately.

Cons

- **Amazon is listed as the publisher** – Your ISBN will show “Independently published” or Amazon as the publisher, not your own imprint.
 - **Limited control** – You cannot use this ISBN outside Amazon for other retailers (like IngramSpark, Barnes & Noble, or Kobo).
 - **Branding** – If you want your own publishing imprint, this ISBN won’t reflect it.
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3. Buying Your Own ISBN

You can buy an ISBN from **Bowker (in the U.S.)** or the equivalent agency in your country.

Pros

- **Full ownership** – You’re listed as the publisher, even if it’s your own imprint (e.g., “Moonlight Press”).
- **Reusable for multiple retailers** – You can use the same ISBN for Amazon, IngramSpark, Barnes & Noble, and anywhere else you distribute your book.
- **Professional credibility** – Having your own ISBN gives your book a more professional appearance, especially if you plan to sell in bookstores or libraries.

Cons

- **Cost** – One ISBN costs around \$125; bulk packages (10, 100, 1,000) reduce the per-unit price.
 - **Setup time** – You’ll need to register your ISBN and associate it with your book details.
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4. Key Considerations

- **If you only plan to sell on Amazon and don’t care about bookstore distribution**, the **free Amazon ISBN** is fine.
 - **If you want full control, multiple formats, or plan to sell widely**, buying your own ISBN is better.
 - **Branding matters**: If you want your own publishing imprint, you’ll need your own ISBN.
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Example Scenarios

1. Student Writer / Hobbyist

- Only selling a paperback and ebook on Amazon.
- Free Amazon ISBN is simple and cost-effective.

2. Indie Author / Small Publisher

- Wants paperback, hardcover, and ebook sold across Amazon, Kobo, and local bookstores.
 - Buying your own ISBN allows flexibility and shows your own imprint.
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✅ Rule of Thumb:

- **One-off Amazon-only book?** Use Amazon's free ISBN.
- **Multiple formats or wider distribution?** Buy your own ISBN.

Design Your Book 🎨

- **Cover:** Canva, BookBrush, Fiverr, Reedsy.
- **Formatting:** Atticus, Vellum, Scrivener, Reedsy Book Editor.
- **Final formats:** EPUB for most platforms, PDF for print, and MOBI (kindle legacy).

Example: For a cozy mystery, you might use warm colors, handwritten fonts, and a little cat illustration.
Horror? Dark tones, bold fonts, creepy vibes.

Pick Where to Publish 💻

- **Amazon KDP:** Best for eBooks and print-on-demand. Royalties: 35–70%.
 - **Draft2Digital:** Wide distribution (Apple Books, Kobo, B&N). 60–70% royalties.
 - **IngramSpark:** Physical bookstore and library distribution. Setup ~\$49.
 - **Wattpad:** Episodic publishing, fanfiction, YA, romance.
 - **Medium:** Essays or thought leadership; you can earn through their Partner Program.
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Market Your Book 📣

- Build a website (Wix, WordPress, Carrd)
- Start a newsletter (MailerLite, Substack)

- Social media: TikTok (#BookTok), Instagram, Twitter/X, Facebook groups
- Promotions: Giveaways, book bloggers, Amazon ads, ARCs (advance reader copies)

Example: Let’s say you wrote a sci-fi novella about Martians eating breakfast. You post quirky “Did you know Martians eat fried rocks?” content on #BookTok, share it on Reddit, and your mini-site offers a free short prequel. Boom—your book hits Top 100 in Kindle Sci-Fi.

Track, Improve, Repeat

- Monitor KDP Reports, BookReport dashboards, or Publisher Rocket.
 - Encourage reviews (even a few 1-stars can make your book look more credible).
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5. Comparison: Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing

Feature	Self-Publishing	Traditional Publishing
Upfront Cost	You pay (\$300–\$5,000)	None
Royalties	40–70%	5–25%
Advance	None	Possible
Creative Control	100%	Limited
Speed	Weeks	12–24 months
Marketing	Mostly you	Some support, still mostly you
Distribution	Online + print-on-demand	Online + bookstores
Rights	You keep them	Publisher may own/license

Final Thoughts: Your Story, Your Terms

Self-publishing isn’t a shortcut. It’s **taking the wheel**. You decide your creative vision, connect directly with readers, and keep most of the rewards. Traditional publishing reduces risk, offers professional polish, and can open doors, but with less control.

Whether you wrote a cozy mystery, a quirky sci-fi story, or a poetry collection, the steps are the same:

1. Finish your manuscript.
2. Polish it.
3. Format and design.

4. Publish.

5. Share it with the world.

💡 Your story is ready. Are you? 💡