

# ISBN

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## DO YOU NEED AN ISBN? WHY DOES IT MATTER?

If you're preparing to publish a book, you've likely heard of the ISBN – but what exactly is it, and do you really need one? An ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is a unique identifier assigned to a specific edition and format of a book. It's essential for tracking, selling, and distributing your title through bookstores, online platforms, and libraries. Essentially, it serves as a fingerprint for your book.

The ISBN is always tied to the publisher who purchased it. If you or your publishing company bought the ISBN, then you are considered the publisher of record. Literary agents do not hold publishing rights and cannot change or reassign ISBNs – only the publisher who owns the ISBN can manage its use. This is important to understand if you plan to self-publish or operate through your own company, like Novel House Publishing, because you'll maintain complete control over your titles.



There are only a few scenarios where a new ISBN would be required:

- When a new edition of the book is published that includes significant content changes.
- When the book is released in a different format, such as paperback, hardcover, or ebook.
- When a new publisher acquires the rights and re-releases the book under their own imprint.

If you are self-publishing, owning your ISBNs gives you professional credibility and flexibility. Should a traditional publisher later pick up your work, they would assign a new ISBN under their brand. If you need help navigating ISBN purchases, managing your catalog, or using services like Bowker (the primary ISBN agency in the U.S.), we can guide you through the process so your books are properly registered and discoverable.