

ISBN

WHAT IS AN ISBN?

An International Standard Book Number, or ISBN, is a 13-digit code used as a unique identifier for books. An ISBN is assigned to each edition of a book, helping publishers, bookstores, and libraries keep track of their stock and sales. Meanwhile readers can use them to look up specific editions online.



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ISBN



ISBNs consist of five parts, appearing in the following order:

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3. A three-digit code for the publisher;
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You can also bundle your ISBN purchases and get 10 ISBNs for \$295, 100 ISBNs for \$575, or 1,000 ISBNs for \$1,500. Needless to say, unless you're a publisher, you'll only need to buy 1-10 ISBNs at a time. We've broken down these Bowker costs for US authors and publishers, as well as the Nielsen costs for those in the UK, in the table below:



ISBN

Choose between free and paid ISBNs

There are a handful of big ISBN vendors, like Bowker and Nielsen, who are a lot of authors' go-to sources for ISBNs. However, depending on your publishing aims, it's also possible to also use cheap or free ISBNs.

In the US and UK, many aggregators (companies that distribute your book to multiple retailers) will assign indie authors an ISBN for free, or at a discount. These aggregators include:



Draft2Digital - FREE

IngramSpark - FREE

BookBaby - Discounted (\$49 each)

eBookPartnership - FREE

Did you know? ISBNs were 10 digits long until January 2007, when they changed to 13. But ISBNs never expire, and even old, 10-digit numbers can be converted into 13-digit codes with Bowker's conversion tool.



ISBN

While we're talking about free ISBNs, it's worth mentioning an alternative: the ASIN. The ASIN functions similarly to the ISBN, but is only used within Amazon – and you're given one for free whenever you publish a book on Amazon.

So why would you need both? Basically, while you cannot rely on a book's ASIN to find it outside of Amazon, you can always count on an ISBN. For that reason, if you plan to “go wide” on other sites – or have distribution in brick-and-mortar stores – you'll need an ISBN in addition to an ASIN. If you plan to self-publish on Amazon exclusively, you can, by all means, forego the ISBN costs and stick to the free ASIN.

So you can get an ISBN for free or at a discounted price, or if you're only publishing digitally on Amazon, you don't need an ISBN at all. So why would anyone ever pay for an ISBN?

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