

Creative Fix

How to Self-Publish a Book

**(WITHOUT NEEDING TO SPEND
ANY MONEY)**

HELLO



My name's Allegra Chapman. I'm an author, columnist and ghostwriter.

I've also been a publishing editor, and a marketing strategist. So there's not much of the business of writing, publishing and selling books that I haven't been involved with!

I love supporting writers to share their words – especially those from groups more usually silenced in our society. You can find more about my work here:



Website:
CreativeFix.net



Facebook:
facebook.com/creativefix



Instagram:
[allegra_chapman](https://instagram.com/allegra_chapman)



Substack:
@allegrachapman
YourCreativeFix.substack.com



Threads:
@allegra_chapman

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE?

This is a guide purely to self-publishing your book – if you want help with the actual writing, email allegra@creativefix.net and I can share other resources.

Here you'll find step-by-step instructions to make your book available for sale.

If you follow this guide, it is possible to self-publish your book without spending any money. You may need to purchase an ISBN (**if** you want your book to be available beyond just Amazon), and you might want to buy proof copies / copies for you to sell or distribute yourself.

Everything else it is possible to do for free, but I am also available to help you! Email **allegra@creativefix.net** with any questions.

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SHOULD YOU SELF-PUBLISH?

OR GO THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE?

You've written a book!! Congratulations, that's huge!

It feels like that should have been the hardest bit, but now you have to get it out into the world for people to read. Gaahhh!

It's OK, I can help you. I've done this a bunch of times, it's not as scary as it seems to begin with.

First things first, though, do you self-publish, or go after a traditional publisher?

There's no easy answer to that, it largely comes down to personal preference. I've been published traditionally, and I've self-published. I've been an editor for a traditional publisher, and I've edited manuscripts for people who were self-publishing. I've ghostwritten for people on both sides. Based on all of that experience, I've put together a list of pros and cons (see next page).

At the end of the day, though, they both have their positives and negatives, and it largely comes down to what feels best to you.

If I had to summarise it all in a nutshell, I would say:

- **Self-publishing** gives you **more control** and a **larger share of the profits**
- **Traditional publishing** gives you **more support** and **better distribution**

PUBLISHING PROS AND CONS

Self-publishing

Pros

- You keep all the profits
- You get paid MUCH quicker (first payment 30 - 90 days from publication)
- You're in full control of everything
- You don't have to wait on someone else's timeline - you can move fast
- You don't have to spend ages on submission, waiting to be chosen, dealing with rejection

Cons

- You're responsible for *everything*
- If you want any support (editing, typesetting, marketing, design, etc.), you'll have to pay for it yourself
- If you want to see your book displayed in stores in real life, you'll need to take on the financial risks yourself
- You have to do all the promotion yourself

Traditional publishing

Pros

- You get free editing, typesetting and design
- The publisher will take on the financial risk of getting your book into stores
- You will get some marketing support (although if it's your first book, it will be very limited)
- They can handle translation, international distribution, and additional rights

Cons

- You only get a small percentage of the profits (usually 10%)
- You won't get paid until *at least* 3 - 6 months after publication, and then at 6 or 12-monthly intervals
- Traditional publishing moves very slowly - expect the process of getting the book out to take *at least* a year
- You have to go on submission and wait to be chosen

ARE YOU READY TO GO?

If you've decided to self-publish, it's worth taking a moment to make sure your manuscript is publication ready.

Once your book is out there, it's building your reputation. And you want it to be saying good things about you!

- ☐ My manuscript is complete
- ☐ Every chapter / section serves a clear purpose
- ☐ The main message, story or purpose of the book is clear
- ☐ The manuscript has been professionally edited (or I have thoroughly edited it myself)
- ☐ The spelling and grammar have been thoroughly checked
- ☐ Formatting is consistent
- ☐ I have had (and actioned) feedback from beta readers
- ☐ I can clearly, and in detail, summarise who this book is for
- ☐ I have a succinct summary of the plot or purpose of the book
- ☐ I have a front cover design

**Need editing, proofreading or cover design? I can do that for you.
Email allegra@creativefix.net.**

Congratulations!

You did it! You wrote a book!

It's ready to be published – you are
AMAZING!!

Take a moment to acknowledge
and celebrate that.

PREPARATION

Ok, let's get your manuscript ready.

FRONT AND BACK MATTER

Do you need any of the following...?

- Dedication
- Table of Contents
- Preface
- Afterword
- Acknowledgements
- References
- Index
- Appendices
- Glossary
- Call(s) to action
- Teasers of future books
- Details of previous books

If so, get those ready now.

AUTHOR BIO

Write an author bio that can be used on the back cover of your book, and on online store pages.

Keep it to around 100 words (no more than 200) and write it in the third person.

PREPARATION

TYPESETTING

Typesetting is the process of arranging the layout, format and spacing of the text to be clearly visible and readable on the page (whether that page is physical or digital).

You can typeset your book for **free** using [Reedsy](#). The options for fonts and layouts are limited with the free version, but it does everything you need for no money.

How to use Reedsy

1. Go to Reedsy.com, click "sign up" and create an account.
2. Go to Books → Create Book.
3. Give your book a title (and subtitle, if applicable).
4. Use the menu on the left-hand side to add all your material, chapter by chapter.
5. Fill out the copyright details, and Reedsy will create the copyright page for you.
6. Click the blue plus icon to add a new chapter or part.
7. Copy and paste your writing directly into the Reedsy document.
8. When you're ready, go back to the Books page you were on in Step 2.
9. Click "Manage" and then go to Exports.
10. Choose whether you want to export a print-ready PDF (for your print version) or an EPUB (for your ebook).
11. Choose options on chapter numbers, drop caps, end notes, trim sizes (unless you have reason not to, stick with standard) and font.
12. Hit "Export book" and your file will download. This is your publication-ready file.

ESSENTIALS

ISBN

Every format of every book needs its own unique identification number, called an ISBN (International Standard Book Number).

Each country has its own ISBN agency, for example:

- UK & Ireland - NielsenIQ BookData
- USA - R.R. Bowker
- Canada - Library and Archives Canada (English) and BAnQ (French)
- Australia - Thorpe-Bowker
- India - Raja Rammohun Roy

Find your country's ISBN agency in the international ISBN directory: <https://www.isbn-international.org/agencies>

You can buy ISBNs direct from those agencies, but they are expensive - Nielsen, for example, charges £93 per ISBN, or £174 for 10. Bear in mind that if you want to publish both a paperback and an ebook, you'll need two ISBNs, one for each format (if you want to publish a hardback, you'll need another one for that).

Luckily, there are cheaper ways to do it!

IngramSpark

If you live in the USA, IngramSpark (see Publishing Platforms below) will provide you with a free ISBN. That does mean that you can only distribute your book through IngramSpark, but they deal with most stores, so that's not a huge issue. They do not provide free ISBNs for authors outside the USA (although you can still use them for distribution).

ESSENTIALS

ISBN

KDP

If you choose to publish exclusively through the Amazon KDP network (see Publishing Platforms below), then Amazon will provide you with a free ISBN, no matter where you are.

That ISBN will only be for use on the KDP network though, so you'll only be able to sell through Amazon. Book stores don't buy from Amazon, so your book won't be available in stores.

You can still buy author copies to sell via your own website or stalls at events, though.

Independent Publishing Network

If you live in the UK, you can purchase an ISBN through the Independent Publishing Network – they charge just £30, and for that fee they will also register your book with the Nielsen database so that your book is available for order by stores and libraries. Visit <https://bookisbn.org.uk/>.

You will need to list “Independent Publishing Network” as the publisher of your book if you use their ISBN services.

Other similar agencies for independent authors exist in other countries – look for one in your territory to see if they offer a similar deal.

A note on ebooks

Most ebooks (somewhere around 70% or more) are sold via Amazon. Unless you are desperate to have your ebook stocked in places like Apple Books and Kobo, you could just buy an ISBN for your paperback format and use KDP's free ISBN to sell your ebook exclusively through Amazon.

Want someone to handle all this for you?
Email allegra@creativefix.net.

ESSENTIALS

BARCODES

If you are going to publish through KDP or IngramSpark, you don't need a barcode as they'll provide it for you.

If you're using your own printing and distribution service, check with them whether they need you to provide a barcode.

You will need to leave space on the back cover for a barcode, but KDP and IngramSpark both help you with that.

METADATA

Metadata tells search systems and retailers what your book is, what search terms it should be shown for, and how it should be shown.

Good metadata gets your book shown and recommended to the right people, and helps potential readers understand in seconds whether your book is right for them.

Metadata includes:

- Title and subtitle
- Author name
- Book description (blurb)
- Categories
- Keywords

We'll look at blurb, keywords and categories next.

First, make sure your title and subtitle are compelling, and make it clear what your book is about.

ESSENTIALS

METADATA

Blurb

The blurb is the summary of what your book is about.

This should be around 150 words (ish), and the first sentence or two should instantly clarify what the book's about to grab attention and make readers think, "I need to read this!" You can always add more detail further into the description.

Bear in mind on KDP, your first **250 characters** (characters, not words) are crucial, as these appear in the preview window above the "read more" button - these need to make people *want* to read more!

Categories

Categories are how digital and physical retailers know what "bookshelf" to put your book on.

They also determine bestseller lists - it's worth choosing more obscure and niche categories as you're more likely to rank well on those lists.

You choose categories from pre-defined lists - both KDP and IngramSpark will ask you to choose from their dropdown menus. They have search functions, so you can look for particular terms, but I suggest having a play around and seeing what comes up. Look at books that are similar to yours and what sections they are listed under to give you a steer.

Want someone to handle all this for you?
Email allegra@creativefix.net.

ESSENTIALS

METADATA

Keywords

These are how search engines choose what books to show for which queries, and they influence “also bought” and recommendation algorithms.

Keep your keywords simple, and stick to the words and phrases people are likely to put into search bars. Your keywords won’t be visible to readers, you don’t have to sound clever, you just want to get found.

Simple rules for choosing keywords:

- Think like a reader, not an author
 - ✓ “healing from burnout”
 - ✗ “workplace wellbeing reflective practice”
- Use phrases, not single words
 - ✓ “self publishing guide for beginners”
 - ✗ “publishing”
- Mix broad and specific:
 - Broad: “memoir writing”
 - Specific: “memoir writing for trauma recovery”
- Include intent-based phrases:
 - “how to...”
 - “guide to...”
 - “for beginners”
 - “step by step”
- Avoid repeating your categories (waste of space)

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Email allegra@creativefix.net.

PUBLISHING PLATFORMS

Your main options for self-publishing are:

- Amazon KDP
- IngramSpark

There are pros and cons to both, but they're free to use so there's nothing to stop you using both!

Although Amazon is ethically dubious, it gives the best royalty rates, the quickest payments, and the lowest print costs. It's also where most people buy books, sadly.

The big plus to IngramSpark is getting your books into stores, as retailers order direct from them.

KDP now offers Expanded Distribution, which is available to retailers, but book stores hate it because they don't offer the same industry discount as other platforms, and they don't do returns. So technically stores *can* order from Amazon Expanded Distribution, but, in practice, they won't.

I personally use KDP to sell through Amazon and to order my own copies, and IngramSpark to sell everywhere else.

Other platforms are available.

You can use specialist printers and distributors, and there are lots of them around. However, their costs are likely to be higher and they usually have fees to pay upfront. I recommend KDP and IngramSpark because there's nothing for you to pay to start with, they simply take a cut of each sale.

Want someone to handle all this for you?
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PLATFORM PROS AND CONS

Amazon KDP

Pros

- Better royalties
- Cheaper printing costs
- Free ISBN included
- Easy cover design template
- First royalties paid after 30 days

Cons

- Only makes your book available via Amazon

IngramSpark

Pros

- Distributes to all major retailers

Cons

- Printing costs are higher, so ordering your own copies is more expensive, and your royalties are lower
- First royalties paid after 90 days
- You need to buy your own ISBN if you're outside USA

RETURNS

If you want to make your book available to retailers through IngramSpark, you need to decide whether to offer returns.

If you allow retailers to return unsold copies, **you will have to cover the costs of those books**. Basically, you buy them back from the retailer, and you don't get the printing costs back. IngramSpark can send them to you (at your expense) or destroy them. It can get quite expensive. However, retailers are unlikely to order books that aren't returnable.

UPLOADING

Both KDP and IngramSpark make the uploading process quite simple, and they take you through it step by step.

Below are the things you need to know before you start, then you can follow the instructions on each platform.

If you get stuck, give me a shout at allegra@creativefix.net and I'll try to help! (I answer small questions without any charge - or you can pay me to do the whole thing for you!)

TO GET STARTED

KDP

- Go to <https://kdp.amazon.com>
- Click "Join KDP"
- If you have an Amazon account, you can sign in with that, or you can create a new account

IngramSpark

- Go to <https://www.ingramspark.com>
- Click "Create Account" in the top right menu
- Register your details

GET PREPARED

You will need the following information to upload your book:

Book details

- Title
- Subtitle (if you're using one)
- Author name (your own name or a pen name)
- Any contributors' names (co-authors, illustrators, etc.)
- Book blurb
- Publisher name (if using)

UPLOADING

ISBN

If you purchased an ISBN, make sure you input that when you upload your book, and don't take the free ISBN offered by the platform, otherwise you'll create duplicate listings.

If you have purchased an ISBN for the paperback but you're using KDP's ISBN for the ebook, make sure you use the right ISBN for the right format.

Specifications

- What formats do you want to publish (hardback, paperback, ebook...)?
- Trim size (if you used Reedsy to typeset and you went with the standard option, go for 5" x 8" – that's a standard paperback size).
- Do you want to print in black and white or colour? (Black and white is cheaper to print, but if you have a lot of pictures or illustrations then you may want to choose colour – just be aware it will increase your printing costs and therefore lower your profits.)
- Do you want white or cream paper? (White paper is usually used for non-fiction as it is clean and professional, especially if there are diagrams or illustrations as it keeps these sharper. Cream paper is commonly used for novels as it's softer and gentler on the eyes; it gives a more literary feel, but it's not great for illustrations or diagrams. KDP also now offers an eco-friendly groundwood paper, which is similar to cream.)

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UPLOADING

Pricing

- What price do you want to sell your book for? (Have a look at other books in your category to get an idea of what readers expect to pay.)
 - Bear in mind different formats are priced differently - ebooks are usually cheaper than paperbacks, for example.
- What royalty rate will you choose? Seems obvious - pick the higher one, surely? Usually, yes. But there are some circumstances in which the lower royalty rate is preferable...
 - For ebooks: if there are a lot of illustrations, which would impact your delivery fees and eat into your royalties (there are no delivery fees on the lower 35% royalty rate), or if you want to sell it at a very low cost, which makes you ineligible for the higher 70% rate.
 - For print books: if you want to choose Expanded Distribution. As I said, though, book stores hate it, so I'd recommend **not** using Expanded Distribution and using IngramSpark for store distribution. If you use Amazon Expanded Distribution **and** IngramSpark, it will create a system conflict if you're using the same ISBN, so best to pick one.
- What territories will you make your book available in? (Generally, all of them, unless you have a good reason not to, such as you've sold the rights to this book in certain territories, or there are local laws or regulations that might cause an issue for your content.)
 - KDP and IngramSpark convert the price into different currencies for you, so you don't need to worry about that!

UPLOADING

Discoverability

- Keywords
- Categories

(Like we talked about earlier...)

Cover design

For ebooks, you just need a front cover design that you can knock up in Canva or similar – for a standard ebook, use 625 x 1000 px. This will also be your thumbnail in digital stores – make sure it's readable when small!

For print books, you'll need a wraparound cover that includes front cover, spine and back cover.

KDP has a cover design tool, which is really helpful for making sure everything is in the right place. You can create your front cover in Canva or similar, and then use that to guide everything else.

IngramSpark is a bit more complicated. They give you a template that you have to put into Canva (or InDesign, or your platform of choice) and then use to work out the placement. Start with a design sized 576 x 410 px and overlay the template on that.

Rights information

- Do you own the rights to all the content in your book?
- Have you used any copyrighted material?
- Have you used AI tools to write any part of the book?

MAKE SURE YOUR BOOK HAS BEEN PROPERLY TYPESET with page numbers, chapter headings, front and back matter, and correct formatting before you upload.

Want someone to handle all this for you?
Email allegra@creativefix.net.

QUALITY CHECKS

Check the digital preview first – this will give you a good idea if everything is where it should be.

If you're publishing a print format, you'll want to check a physical copy as well.

KDP

You can order "proof copies", but these will come stamped with a grey "proof / not for resale" band, which makes them useless apart from for quality checking.

However, this is my cheeky workaround!

- When you upload your book, schedule publication for a few weeks in advance.
- Then order an author copy to be sent to you – this will be printed and sent straight away (delivery times vary, but you should get it within two weeks).
- Once you receive your copy, check it thoroughly. This will be a normal copy, not a proof copy, so you can use it, gift it or resell it afterwards.
- If you're happy with the quality, you can change the publication date on KDP to make your book live straight away, or just wait for the release date you initially set.

Want someone to handle all this for you?
Email allegra@creativefix.net.

QUALITY CHECKS

IngramSpark

Ingram's two-stage approval process makes things a lot simpler!

1. Upload your book.
2. Check the e-proofs and wait for IngramSpark to quality check.
3. When ready, approve the book for printing (not distribution yet).
4. Order a copy for yourself.
5. Review that copy and check everything is in order.
6. When you're happy, approve the book for distribution.

If you're publishing on both platforms, it's worth checking copies from each, as the printing may not be exactly the same, even though you used the same files.

It can take a few days for your book to be checked and listed on each platform, so don't expect it to be on sale immediately!

MARKETING

That's it, your book's on sale!

You are now a published author!! Woohoo!

Now the hard part begins - promoting it.

Don't panic, I know very few authors love marketing - that's why I created the **Marketing Fix Club**. It's a gentle space where I offer marketing tips and resources from my years of experience as a marketing strategist (I've helped brands like Holland & Barrett, The Famous Grouse, Tapi, VELUX, Bio-Oil and even The Commonwealth Games reach and engage their audiences, as well as lots of solo entrepreneurs). But, unlike other marketers, all of my guidance rejects the evil tactics of generating panic and scarcity, and rebels against hustle culture. We focus on creating **meaningful visibility** in a way that is **soft on our nervous systems** and **kind to people and planet**.

Get 20% off your first year's membership here:
marketingfixclub.substack.com/guide

For now, though, here are five top tips to get you started.

1) Don't wait for publication day

Start hyping your book as soon as possible.

Talk about the writing process, share what your book's about, document behind-the-scenes moments, start connecting with reviewers and podcasters who might be interested, have a countdown to release day on socials...

Encourage pre-orders (if enabled on the publishing platforms) as this helps your bestseller ranks.

You can also offer pre-orders through your own website with discounts and/or added extras to generate early revenue.

MARKETING

2) Get reviews

Reviews are so important for encouraging sales, particularly if you're not yet well known.

Recruit some early readers (engaged members of your existing community, if you have one, are ideal) to whom you can send a free copy in exchange for a review on Amazon or Goodreads (or both!).

You can incentivise reviews – put a note at the back of the book telling people that if they review, and send you a link or a screenshot of their review, then you'll send them a freebie (make it something simple for you to create and send, like a pdf download, and make it relevant to your book – bonus content, character artwork, additional resources...).

3) Carry a copy everywhere

You never know when you'll bump into someone useful. Always have a copy of your book with you so that if you get the opportunity to say, "I've written a book" and the person is interested, you can whip it out and tell them all about it!

4) Make friends with your local book stores

Go into your local stores and introduce yourself. Tell them you're a local author and that you have a book coming out. Ask them if they'd be interested in hosting a launch event or a book signing, or if they want you to sign a few copies for them to sell.

5) Invite readers into your world

You want to build a long-term connection with your readers.

Include a QR code at the back of your book that links to a newsletter sign-up page. Or, better yet, a page where they can download further content or resources in exchange for their email address.

HELP ME!

If you've looked through this guide and you're thinking, *this is all too much!* **Allegra, help!!!** Don't worry, I've got you.

Get Published Package

I'll take care of everything you need to get your book self-published. All of this, done for you:

- Typesetting ready for publication
- Paperback formatting
- Ebook formatting
- ISBN purchase and set-up
- Uploading to KDP and IngramSpark
- Meta data optimisation
- Proof copy review
- Necessary amends following proof review (one round of amends)
- Handover of publication platform so you have ongoing control

The package normally costs just £350.

BUT, I'll take the cost of this guide off (since you didn't use it), so **you'll pay just £335**.

Further services

- Cover design - from £150
- Marketing strategy - £250
- Proofreading - £0.03 per word

(If you want multiple services, I'll do you a deal on the combined price.)

For more info or other help, email **allegra@creativefix.net**.

Don't forget to tag me on socials when your book's out and I'll hype you like an embarrassing parent on Sports Day!

Creative Fix

CreativeFix.net



Instagram:
[allegra_chapman](https://www.instagram.com/allegra_chapman)



Threads:
[@allegra_chapman](https://www.threads.net/@allegra_chapman)



Substack:
[@allegrachapman](https://www.substack.com/@allegrachapman)
YourCreativeFix.substack.com



Facebook:
facebook.com/creativefix