

The Phases of Publishing

Publishing on your own has advantages and disadvantages. You are on your own, getting your manuscript into a version you are proud of, then the obstacles facing successful publishing to an online bookstore seem daunting. Don't worry, together we'll get through this.

Let's break down the phases of publishing so that we can approach the overall task in an organized manner. I'll approach some of these tasks in their own chapter, others will be embedded with similar material.

- Gathering the tools
- Writing
- File Discipline
- Cover art
- Editing
- Formatting
- Front matter
- Back matter
- Input to Kindle Create
- Output for an eBook
- Publishing an eBook
- Output for a printed book
- Publishing a printed book
- Marketing
- Revising the book

Gathering the tools

Like a workman approaching a carpentry task, the process will be easier if all the tools are at hand. The carpenter would not attempt to cut a board without measuring and drawing a line. He will need a pencil, measuring tape, perhaps a straight edge, a square, and then the right type of saw. What are the tools you will use when authoring your book? From the first few

words you write, if you are using tools that are as close to the desired end product as possible, you are reducing do-over work and cut-and-paste tasks that lead to errors. You will hear me say over and over, trap the errors before they manifest themselves. We do this in the aviation industry, and it is a good practice for work output, home safety, and life in general. “Trap those errors before an undesired state occurs!” we say a lot in airline flying. Let’s apply that mindset from the first words we write.

Have you already done some or all of the writing tasks? Don’t worry. Read through the list and join where it makes sense.

How will you be authoring your book? Longhand on a lined paper notepad? Will you use a computer or notepad-style tablet? Perhaps you will dictate your thoughts and a device will write your words out for you. Maybe someone will transcribe what you say onto a word-processing program of some sort. Whatever medium you start with, it will need to end up in a program output file that is compatible with the two most popular eBook and print booksellers. These are Amazon and Barnes & Noble. I’ll limit the scope of discussion to those two bookselling giants. Let’s look at the file types that are needed to publish using these two.

File Types

From Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) eBook Manuscript submission instructions:

Read our KDP Content Guidelines and upload a KPF, EPUB, or docx file containing interior content for your Kindle eBook.

We recommend using Kindle Packaging Format (KPF) for the best reading experience. You can use Kindle Create to transform your manuscript with professional book themes, images, and table of contents. Download a Mac or Windows version for free.

From the above we can see that these file types are needed to submit a manuscript to KDP to be published as a Kindle book:

- KPF
- EPUB
- docx

How about submitting a manuscript to Barnes & Noble Press (BNP) for publishing a Nook eBook? What types of files are needed? From BNP interior file submission instructions:

You can use any word processing program to format your file, but we recommend using Microsoft Word for Mac or PC or Mac Pages.

For the best results, format your file according to our guidelines for doc/docx, txt, html and epub.

For BNP, our eBook file types can be:

- doc/docx
- txt
- html
- epub

The guidelines above are for eBooks. How about print versions? Here is what BNP says about the interior for a print book:

Upload your doc/docx or PDF file for your book size and type.

The BNP file types for a print book are:

- doc/docx
- PDF

Now let's check to see what KDP wants for an Amazon print book.

For best results, we recommend using a formatted PDF file to create your book. You can also upload a DOC (.doc), DOCX (.docx), HTML (.html), or RTF (.rtf).

So, the file types for an Amazon print book are:

- doc/docx
- HTML
- RTF

Back to KDP, a KPF file is recommended. How do we get a KPF file? In Kindle Create, you will need to input a .doc, .docx, or .rtf file to get a KPF output, more on that later.

I see a trend here! What file type is common across all four ways we are going to use to publish on two different booksellers and create our KDP-ready eBook input on Kindle Create? The answer is docx, or .docx depending on the file convention. The chart below allows you to visualize this.

Self Publishing Bookseller Accepted File types							
	KPF	EPUB	DOCX	HTML	RTF	PDF	TXT
Amazon Kindle eBook	X	X	X				
Amazon Print Book			X	X	X	X	
Barnes & Noble Nook eBook		X	X	X			X
Barnes & Noble Print Book			X			X	

I recommend using a program that outputs a .docx file. It can be used for all our targeted book types at the two major booksellers. This reduces copy-and-paste tasks later and is a well-known product with lots of support. What programs produce the desired file type?

Writing Programs

By far, the most popular program for producing a .docx output is Microsoft Word. PCs and Macs can use this. There are many free alternatives to Word. Some of these are:

- Google Docs
- Apache Open Office
- WPS Office
- Microsoft Word Online

Mac users can output a .docx file from the Pages program that comes with the machine. Eventually, you will be faced with opening a .docx template from KDP (more on that later) and that is where the usability of the free versions may be a challenge.

Using online programs such as Google Docs allows you to download your product at any time, but you don't use a file system like Windows Explorer. The latest version stays out on the web although you can use the 'Copy' function to make another copy of that file, then you can modify the name. You can also download a version after editing. Another great feature of Google Docs is that it can output a PDF file.

I told you all that so I can tell you this – Using Word on PC or Mac is going to be the easiest solution to get a .docx output you can manipulate easily and will trap errors in file pasting and saving. That's the first tool. Get Word or use a program that will output the .docx file and your writing and editing tasks will be easier and formatting will be easier when we get to that part. I have a lot of experience with the Word product from Microsoft 365, so that will be the basis of our discussion. Use what you are comfortable with that fits your budget. The only real factor is that .docx file output.

Grammar and Spelling Checker

What other tools are needed? Once we get our manuscript into a .docx file, we will need to perform grammar and spelling checks. I recommend using Grammarly. It's free, it's easy to use and fairly intuitive. The online version is free, and you can also download an app to your PC or Mac. I'm using it as I author this book, and it has already flagged some errors that I can correct as I go or when I come back to edit. If you don't choose Grammarly, do a search on the web for a grammar checker. There are lots of free or inexpensive choices out there.

The Writing Device and peripherals

What is your favorite way to compute? We call these wonderful machines computers, but how much real computing do we do? There are a plethora of machines and devices out there, with two main operating systems:

- Windows (PCs)
- iOS (Apple-based Mac)

This is stuff you already know. If you are a Mac or PC person, you probably have strong feelings about which one is better. That's great! Use whichever one you want, it's the program you use for composing a document that will be your manuscript that is important.

Will you be sharing the computer with anyone else? Perhaps a spouse or children? I suggest that you have a machine dedicated to your writing and be the sole user. That's the ideal situation for security and writing production. If your kids or grandkids or spouse is using the computer, you can't be writing. If they are not on the writing computer, there is no way they can delete or corrupt your files.

There are many inexpensive computers available, and sometimes the ones on sale around the various holidays will have plenty of memory and computing power for writing, uploading files to the booksellers, and doing research. Look for a model with Wi-Fi so you can connect to the net and also at least one USB receptacle to allow you to plug in that all-important backup drive. Virtually all laptop or notebook computers sold today will have those features.

Speaking of which, purchase a ‘thumb drive’ or ‘flash drive’ external storage device of modest capacity, because you will be backing up your files every time you finish a writing session. You can get a 1GB capacity drive for a few dollars, which has plenty of capacity. Memory is cheap these days, so you might as well get one of 8GB or larger. An external hard drive is also useful for entire computer routine backups, but more costly and a bit larger in physical size.

Now that you have identified a computer to use, check out the keyboard and mouse. Are they comfortable to use? If not, get a wireless keyboard and mouse to allow you to write comfortably with no strain on your wrists. Writing should be fun, not painful! There are many inexpensive keyboards on the market, but I caution you to try them out in person at an electronics or big box store. Get one big enough so that you are not trying to peck out words like it was a cell phone.

If you use a desktop computer powered by the electrical grid known as your house, bad things happen when the power goes out for whatever reason while you are in the middle of writing with several files open. Consider an inexpensive uninterruptible power supply (UPS) to allow you the precious few minutes needed to save your work and shut down your computer. If using a laptop or notebook computer, the machine is powered by a battery already and a UPS is not necessary. Save your files every time you walk away from your computer! If the power goes out while you are running an errand at the store, there is nobody there to hit save and shut down the computer.

To summarize, the tools needed to get started are:

- Word (or an equivalent to produce a .docx file)
- Grammarly (or an equivalent grammar and spelling checker)
- A computer (PC or Mac)
- External storage device (thumb drive or flash drive)
- Keyboard (as needed)
- UPS (for desktop computers)

Let’s get to the fun part! Writing!