

FREE DOWNLOAD FROM AUTHORWINGS

The Self-Publishing Checklist and Planner Kit

Everything you need to take a finished manuscript to a published book, in the order you'll need it. Print it, or fill it in on screen.

13 pages · 9 steps · 2026 prices and royalty rules

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How to use it: start with the readiness check and the budget planner, then work through the checklist in order. The full guide at authorwings.com/how-to-self-publish-a-book explains every step.

Prices and royalty rules were checked in September 2026. Platforms change their terms, so confirm on each platform before you publish.

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PART 1

Readiness check

Answer honestly. Every "not yet" is something to fix before you pay for a cover or upload a file.

Statement	Yes	Not yet
The draft is finished, and I've revised it at least once myself	☐	☐
At least three readers in my genre have read it and given feedback	☐	☐
I've fixed the big problems they found (plot, structure or argument)	☐	☐
I know my genre and can name five recent books like mine	☐	☐
I know who my reader is and where they find books	☐	☐
The word count is normal for my genre	☐	☐
I've decided what level of edit the book needs	☐	☐
I have a budget, even a small one, for editing and the cover	☐	☐
I know which formats I want: ebook, paperback, hardcover, audio	☐	☐
I'm ready to spend time on a launch, not just the upload	☐	☐

Your score

8 to 10 yes	You're ready. Start the checklist in Part 2.
5 to 7 yes	Almost there. Fix the "not yet" items first, starting with feedback and revisions.
0 to 4 yes	Keep writing and revising. A professional critique or developmental edit can show you what to work on.

The 9-step checklist

Tick each task as you finish it. Most steps depend on the one before, so work in order.

Step 1: Edit the manuscript

☐	Revise the draft yourself Fix plot, structure or argument before paying for sentence-level edits
☐	Get feedback from beta readers Readers in your genre who read an early draft
☐	Book the right level of edit Developmental, line or copy edit, depending on what the draft needs
☐	Schedule a proofread after formatting New errors can appear when the text is laid out

Tip: Most self-published books that get bad reviews for quality skipped a professional edit.

Step 2: Design the cover

☐	Study the top 20 covers in your category
☐	Approve a front cover that reads at thumbnail size
☐	Order the full print wrap after formatting Spine width depends on the final page count

Tip: Look at your cover at the size of a phone thumbnail before you approve it.

Step 3: Format the files

☐	Choose your trim size Many novels and nonfiction books use 5.5 x 8.5 or 6 x 9 inches
☐	Build the ebook (EPUB) file
☐	Build the print PDF
☐	Check the title page, copyright page, contents and chapter openings

Tip: Your print cost, spine width and minimum price all come from the final page count.

Step 4: ISBN and rights

☐	Decide: free KDP ISBN or your own Free ISBNs work only on KDP. Your own works everywhere
☐	Buy ISBNs if needed US: Bowker, \$125 for one or \$295 for 10
☐	Choose an imprint name (optional)
☐	Request a Library of Congress Control Number (optional, US)
☐	Register copyright (optional) Check the current U.S. Copyright Office fee before filing

Tip: Each print format needs its own ISBN. Amazon doesn't require one for the ebook.

Step 5: Title, description and keywords

☐	Final title and subtitle
☐	Book description (150 to 300 words) Use the worksheet in Part 4
☐	Three specific categories
☐	Seven keyword phrases Phrases readers type, not words already in your title
☐	Author bio (two or three sentences)

Tip: Specific categories are easier to rank in than broad ones.

Step 6: Where to sell

☐	Create your KDP account
☐	Create an IngramSpark account for bookstores and libraries
☐	Decide: KDP Select or wide for the ebook Use the decision guide in Part 5

Tip: Print books are never affected by KDP Select.

Step 7: Pricing

☐	Price the ebook 70% royalty on Amazon from \$2.99 to \$12.99, and at least 20% below print
☐	Price the paperback 60% royalty at \$9.99 and up on Amazon, 50% below
☐	Work out the royalty per copy Use the pricing worksheet in Part 5

Tip: A paperback at \$9.98 instead of \$9.99 drops your Amazon royalty from 60% to 50%.

Step 8: Publish

☐	Upload files and metadata
☐	Check every page in the online previewer
☐	Order and read a printed proof
☐	Answer KDP's AI question honestly Disclose AI-generated text, images or translations
☐	Fix, then publish or set up a pre-order

Tip: On KDP, a book usually appears on Amazon within 72 hours.

Step 9: Launch and market

☐	Recruit a launch team for early reviews
☐	Set up an email sign-up and author website
☐	Claim your Amazon author page
☐	Plan a small, tested ad budget
☐	Start the next book

Tip: Use the launch plan in Part 6 and the tracker in Part 7.

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PART 3

Budget planner

For each step, decide whether you'll do it yourself or hire help, then write your own number in the last column. The middle column shows AuthorWings prices as a guide.

Step	Do it yourself	Hire help (guide)	Your budget
Editing	Self-edit and beta readers: \$0	Proofread from \$140. Line, copy and proofread at \$0.05 per word (\$1,000 minimum)	\$
Cover	Design app templates	\$199 ebook, \$399 ebook and print	\$
Formatting	Kindle Create for the ebook: \$0	From \$599 for ebook, paperback and hardcover	\$
ISBN	Free on KDP (Amazon only)	Bowker's fee (\$125 for one, \$295 for 10). Registered for you on our \$549 and \$1,299 tiers, or \$30 on the \$249 tier	\$
Copyright registration	Optional. Office fee only	\$199 filing plus the Office's fee	\$
Publishing setup	Free on KDP and IngramSpark	From \$249 for Amazon, \$549 for five stores plus paperback	\$
Proof and author copies	Printing cost plus shipping	Printing cost plus shipping	\$
Marketing and ads	Email list and launch team: \$0	Your ad budget, plus launch help if hired	\$
Other			\$
Total			\$

Where to spend and where to save

Worth paying for

- A professional edit, at the level your draft needs
- A cover designed for your genre
- A printed proof before you publish

Easy to do yourself

- Uploading to KDP and IngramSpark
- Building an ebook in Kindle Create
- Your email list and launch team

Save with a package: buying services together costs less than buying each one. AuthorWings packages start at \$529, and packages with editing start at \$2,499.

Title and keyword worksheet

This is the information stores use to show your book to readers. Draft it here, then copy it into KDP and IngramSpark.

Title	
Subtitle	
Series name and number	
Author name as it will appear	
Author bio (two or three sentences)	

Book description (150 to 300 words)

The hook One or two sentences that make a reader want more	
What happens, or what they'll learn Fiction: the setup and the stakes. Nonfiction: the problem and your promise	
Who it's for "Perfect for readers who loved..." or "For anyone who..."	
Why you One line of credibility (nonfiction) or a strong review line	
The close Invite the reader to start reading or buy now	

Categories (choose up to three)

1	
2	
3	

Seven keyword phrases

Use phrases readers type, such as "cozy mystery with a cat". Don't repeat words already in your title or subtitle.

1.	2.	3.	4.
5.	6.	7.	

Platform and pricing worksheet

Two decisions shape your income: how you sell the ebook, and how you price each format.

KDP Select or wide?

Lean toward KDP Select if...	Lean toward wide if...
☐ You write fiction in a genre that reads a lot on Kindle Unlimited	☐ You write nonfiction or a book for a specific audience
☐ You're starting a series	☐ You have readers outside the US
☐ Most of your readers buy on Amazon	☐ You want libraries to carry the ebook
☐ You want Amazon's promotion tools	☐ You want every store, not only Amazon

KDP Select runs in 90-day terms, so you can try one path and switch. Print books are never affected.

What each copy earns on Amazon

Ebook	How to work it out	Your number
A. Your ebook list price	\$2.99 to \$12.99 for 70%	\$
B. Royalty per copy	A x 0.70, minus a small delivery fee	\$
Paperback	How to work it out	Your number
C. Your paperback list price	\$9.99 or more for 60%	\$
D. Printing cost	KDP black and white: \$1.00 + (pages x \$0.012)	\$
E. Royalty per copy	C x 0.60 (or 0.50 under \$9.99), minus D	\$

Worked example: a 300-page paperback costs about \$4.60 to print. At \$14.99, you earn $14.99 \times 0.60 = \$8.99$, minus \$4.60 = about \$4.39. At \$9.98, you'd earn about \$0.39.

2026 quick reference

Ebook, 70%	\$2.99 to \$12.99 (top of the band raised from \$9.99 in July 2026), at least 20% below print
Ebook, 35%	Below \$2.99 or above \$12.99
Print on Amazon	60% at \$9.99 and up, 50% at \$9.98 and below, minus printing
Expanded distribution	40% of list price, minus printing
Apple Books	70% at any price
Kobo	70% from \$2.99 to \$9.99
Draft2Digital	Takes about 10% of the retail price

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PART 6

Launch plan

A typical plan from a finished manuscript, with professional editing and design. Write your own dates in, then work backward from your launch day.

When	Your dates	What happens	Done
Weeks 1 to 6		Editing, from the first edit to the last revision	☐
Weeks 3 to 8		Cover design, alongside editing	☐
Weeks 7 to 9		Formatting, then the proofread	☐
Week 9		Title, description, categories and keywords final	☐
Weeks 9 to 10		Uploads, previewer check and printed proof	☐
Week 10		Pre-order live, advance copies to your launch team	☐
Weeks 11 to 13		Early reviews, email list, author page	☐
Week 14		Launch week (plan below)	☐

Your launch week, day by day

Day 1	Announce the book to your email list and on social media, with the buy link	☐
Day 2	Remind your launch team that reviews are open, and thank early reviewers	☐
Day 3	Share a short excerpt or behind-the-scenes story	☐
Day 4	Start a small Amazon ad test on books like yours	☐
Day 5	Reach out to local bookstores, libraries or groups in your genre	☐
Day 6	Share your first reviews and reader photos	☐
Day 7	Thank everyone, note what worked, and plan the next 30 days	☐

Most books sell steadily over time. Track a few numbers each month so you know what's working.

What to track	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
Copies sold (all formats)			
Kindle Unlimited pages read			
Amazon reviews and rating			
Email subscribers			
Ad spend			
Ad sales			
Events or bookstores			

Ad test log

Date	What you tested	Spend	Sales	Keep or stop?

Tip: start with a small daily budget, target books like yours, and stop any ad that spends without selling.

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PART 8

Before you hire anyone

Use these questions with any editor, designer or publishing company. Good answers are specific, written down and easy to check.

Ask this	A good answer sounds like
Can I see the full price in writing before I pay?	Yes, with every item listed
Whose name are the retail accounts in?	Yours
Do you take any share of my royalties or rights?	No
Can I see samples of books like mine?	Yes, in your genre
How many revision rounds are included?	A clear number
What exactly do I receive at the end?	Named files you own, such as the print PDF, EPUB and cover files
What's the timeline for each step?	Dates or a clear range
What happens if I'm not happy?	A written policy

Walk away if a company...

×	Keeps your retail accounts in its own name
×	Takes a share of your royalties or rights
×	Won't list prices in writing
×	Promises bestseller status, film deals or bookstore placement
×	Sells marketing extras with no clear results
×	Pressures you to decide on the first call

The terms you'll meet while self-publishing, in plain English.

Beta readers	People in your genre who read an early draft and tell you what worked
Bleed	Extra margin on print files for anything that runs to the edge of the page
Developmental edit	An edit of the big picture: structure, plot, pacing or argument
Copy edit	An edit for grammar, consistency and clarity, sentence by sentence
Proofread	The last check for typos, done on the formatted pages
EPUB	The standard ebook file format, which reflows to fit any screen
Trim size	The finished page size of a print book, such as 6 x 9 inches
ISBN	The number that identifies one format of your book in stores and libraries
Imprint	The publisher name that appears on your book
Metadata	Your title, description, categories and keywords
KDP Select	Amazon's program that makes your ebook exclusive to Amazon in 90-day terms
Kindle Unlimited	Amazon's subscription, which pays authors for pages read
Going wide	Selling your ebook in every store, not only Amazon
Print on demand	Printing each copy when it's ordered, so you never pay for stock
Expanded distribution	KDP's option to offer your print book to other stores, at a lower royalty
Pre-order	Letting readers buy before release day

NEED A HAND WITH ANY STEP?

AuthorWings edits, designs, formats and publishes books under one contract.

Every account is opened in your name, every price is published, and you keep 100% of your rights and royalties.

- **Book editing:** Proofread from \$140, line, copy and proofread at \$0.05 per word
- **Cover design:** From \$199
- **Formatting:** From \$599 for ebook, paperback and hardcover
- **Publishing:** From \$249
- **Self-publishing packages:** From \$529, or from \$2,499 with editing

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