



Basic Self-Publishing Information Guide

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Copyright

In most parts of the world an author holds copyright to a work the moment they create it in fixed format. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berne_Convention for information about the Berne Convention, which sought to standardize and regulate copyright law.

Some countries, like the United States, provide for the means to officially register your copyright with a government agency. The UK does not. This document covers the copyright process in the United States.

Copyright registration is not required, but it is recommended in order to provide proof of your copyright that will hold up in a court of law. The so-called “poor man’s copyright” of mailing yourself a printed copy of the manuscript and maintaining this package unopened (or some variant of this process) is a myth and provides absolutely no legal proof of copyright whatsoever, at least in the United States.

In the US, copyright registration is performed through the US Copyright Office at <https://www.copyright.gov/> and can be done online at https://eco.copyright.gov/eService_enu if your work qualifies for the Single Application. As of this publication, the fee for a Single Application is \$45. The fee for a Standard Application is \$65. Registration should be done at the time of publication or shortly thereafter.

Part of the application process for a book that includes a print edition is to send two copies of the best edition to the Library of Congress. If your book is only published in ebook format, there is obviously no Library of Congress requirement. But if you have an ebook edition, a paperback edition, and a hardcover edition, for example, the hardcover is considered the best edition and must be submitted to the Library of Congress.

Single Application

This process is for a single author registering a single work. This is the option you’d use to register a novel, picture book, nonfiction book, or any other individual work that contains nothing from any other author, and no part of any other book (such as a preview or first chapter of your next book).

Eligible for Single Application

one article
one nonfiction monograph
one essay
one novel
one poem
one short story

Ineligible for Single Application (must use Standard)

two or more articles
two or more stories
two or more poems
dictionaries
directories
encyclopedias
serials

For more information regarding the Single Application see <https://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ11.pdf>.

Standard Application

This process is for multi-author works like anthologies, and for works by a single author that contain multiple types of content, including previews or first chapters of a subsequent book in a series. Short

story collections and poetry collections fall under the Standard Application process, even if all of the content is by a single author.

ISBNs

All print books that are distributed to retailers require an International Standard Book Number (ISBN). The ISBN identifies several details of a particular edition of a book, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Title
- Subtitle
- Author
- Publisher
- Publication date
- Trim size

The cost of ISBNs varies by country. Some countries, like Canada, offer ISBNs for free. Each country has a single authorized ISBN agency, although not all countries have an agency. You can find the ISBN agency for your country at <https://www.isbn-international.org/agencies>.

ISBNs are not transferrable. You cannot buy a block and then sell individual numbers from that block to other authors. You would still be listed as the publisher for any book using that ISBN, and you would have sole access to the ISBN record to make updates. This is also one of many reasons why you should not buy an ISBN from any entity other than the authorized agency in your country, with a couple of exceptions. Some companies, like IngramSpark, have special agreements in place with the US ISBN agency, Bowker, to offer ISBNs through their platforms. These exceptions are completely legitimate ISBNs. See the sections below on each of these printers for more information.

ISBNs can be assigned to ebook editions as well as print editions. The decision to do so is up to the publisher. Some ebook distribution platforms require an ISBN, but those platforms usually also offer free ISBNs. Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) disregards any ISBN assigned to an ebook project. KDP assigns their own internal numbering system, ASIN (Amazon standard identification number), to *all* ebook projects.

Printing

Your first decision when self-publishing should be whether you want to use a print on demand company, or whether you want to have a print run done. Both options are discussed below.

Offset or Short-Run Printing

In this model, your book is produced in large quantities (often in terms of hundreds or thousands) in one run of the printing machines. The benefits are that the machines are calibrated for your book before the run begins, so the entire print run should be consistent and of very good quality (which is also ensured by manual inspection). The drawbacks are that you must pay for the entire print run at the outset, then take delivery of pallets of books and store them somewhere. You are then responsible for marketing, selling, distributing, fulfilling orders, shipping, etc. This can be a very expensive and daunting model for those new to publishing, which is why print on demand developed.

Print on Demand (POD)

In this model, the author/publisher uploads files to the POD printer (ideally a print-ready PDF for the interior and another for the cover). When these files pass review, the publisher approves the book for sale and it goes live. From that point on, the publisher's role is limited mainly to marketing. Orders for the book are fulfilled by the POD company, which then reports those sales and the amount due to the publisher in the dashboard of their account.

In the world of POD, the current biggest names are KDP Print (owned by Amazon) and IngramSpark (owned by Ingram Content Group, the largest US book distributor). It is possible to use both printers together for the same book, and in some circumstances I recommend this. See [USING KDP PRINT AND IS TOGETHER](#) for more information.

IngramSpark

IngramSpark (IS) is a bit newer on the scene than KDP Print, but its parent company (Ingram) also has another POD company (Lightning Source) that has been around for longer than KDP Print, so IngramSpark is a solid choice.

Distribution

Since IS is owned by the largest US book distributor, their service comes with wide distribution, both within the US and to some international booksellers. This includes distribution to Amazon. However, it's not uncommon for books that are only produced through IS to have availability issues on Amazon.

Wholesale Discount

IS allows the publisher to set the wholesale discount for each geographic market the publisher selects to offer the book in. You can set this discount anywhere between 55% and 30% or 35% (depending on the market). Ingram keeps 15% of this amount, passing the remaining amount to the retailer. Most booksellers expect a 40% discount, so this means you must set the wholesale discount to 55% through IS if you wish to target brick and mortar booksellers. However, if you do not have a solid plan aimed at these booksellers, with a very strong chance of getting on their shelves, there's very little point in setting the wholesale discount there. The large majority of independent authors' sales come online or from

selling in person, so by setting the wholesale discount to the lowest amount for each market, you maximize the revenue in your pocket.

As an example, we'll use a 100-page black & white paperback with a retail list price of \$15.00 for easier math. The print charge for this book is \$2.68.

55% discount: The publisher earns \$4.07

$$15.00 \times .45 \text{ (publisher's portion)} = 6.75 - 2.68 \text{ (print cost)} = \mathbf{\$4.07 \text{ to publisher}}$$

$$15.00 \times .15 \text{ (Ingram's share)} = \mathbf{\$2.25 \text{ to Ingram}}$$

$$15.00 \times .40 \text{ (retailer's share)} = \mathbf{\$6.00 \text{ to retailer}}$$

30% discount: The publisher earns \$7.82

$$15.00 \times .7 \text{ (publisher's portion)} = 10.50 - 2.68 \text{ (print cost)} = \mathbf{\$7.82 \text{ to publisher}}$$

$$15.00 \times .15 \text{ (Ingram's share)} = \mathbf{\$2.25 \text{ to Ingram}}$$

$$15.00 \times .15 \text{ (retailer's share)} = \mathbf{\$2.25 \text{ to retailer}}$$

Returns

The publisher can opt to allow or disallow returns through IS. If you choose to allow returns, you are responsible for the printing and shipping costs for any returned copies. This can turn into a losing proposition very quickly, so put some serious consideration into your marketing plan before setting a book as returnable. See this [IS blog post](#) for more information.

Fees

IS charges a \$25/file revision fee for any changes to the book that occur more than 60 days after publication. Some professional organizations may offer discount codes to waive this fee.

ISBNs

IS can provide a free ISBN to US publishers. US publishers can also buy an ISBN through IS for \$85 (through Bowker's agreement with IS). Otherwise, the publisher can obtain an ISBN from the agency in their country: <https://www.isbn-international.org/agencies>.

Each edition of a book must have a different ISBN. So if you publish a paperback edition and a hardcover edition of the same book, you must have two ISBNs.

Links

Website: <https://www.ingramspark.com/>

Trim sizes: <https://www.ingramspark.com/plan-your-book/print/trim-sizes>

Printing specifications (PDF): <https://www.ingramspark.com/hubfs/downloads/file-creation-guide.pdf>

KDP Print

KDP Print can be a bit more user-friendly than IngramSpark for those new to the world of publishing.

Distribution

Most of the Amazon websites are available for KDP Print books. The publisher can select the territories to which they want to distribute the book. KDP Print also offers Expanded Distribution, which lists the book in the Ingram catalogue (the same distribution as through IngramSpark). However, only a subset of available trim sizes are eligible for Expanded Distribution.*

KDP Print does not allow the publisher to set the wholesale discount, and they do not allow returns.

Fees

KDP Print does not charge any fees to set up or publish a book.

ISBNs

KDP Print offers free ISBNs to publishers in any country, or the publisher can obtain their own from the agency in their country: <https://www.isbn-international.org/agencies>. The free ISBNs cannot be used with any other print service and list the publisher as “Independently published.”

Links

Website: https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G202059560

Trim sizes: https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/GQTT4W3T5AYK7L45#eligibility*

Printing specifications (website): https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G201857950

* These are the trim sizes that are eligible for Expanded Distribution – KDP Print can accommodate any trim size between 4” and 8.5” wide, and between 6” and 11” or 11.69” high (depending on interior color), but custom trim sizes would only be sold through Amazon.

Using KDP Print and IS Together

In some cases, a book that is produced only by IS can have availability message issues on Amazon, sometimes even “Ships in 1-2 months.” To avoid this problem, it’s possible to [use both KDP Print and IS](#) for the same print edition. In order to do this, you must own the ISBN yourself (you cannot use a free KDP Print ISBN) and you **must not enable** Expanded Distribution for the book on KDP Print. If you choose to go this route, set up the project on *both* platforms through entering the ISBN, then save that project as a draft on both. Once the ISBN is in both systems, you can proceed with publishing in whichever order you wish without either platform claiming that ISBN is already in use.

Ebooks

There are two paths for ebook distribution: 1) exclusive to Amazon through KDP Select, or 2) wide.

KDP Select

If you enroll your ebook in KDP Select, you have access to certain promotional opportunities through KDP, such as 5 free days per 90-day enrollment period and Kindle Countdown deals. Your book will also be available to Amazon customers with Kindle Unlimited, through which you'll be paid for pages read by such subscribers (in addition to still receiving royalties for non-Kindle Unlimited ebook purchases). The trade-off is that such an ebook can **only** be available through Amazon. You cannot offer that ebook anywhere else.

Wide

My recommendation for a wide ebook is to go direct to the platforms/retailers you can (KDP, B&N, Kobo, Apple Books, Google Play) and use Draft2Digital to reach the smaller retailers.

Links

KDP: <https://kdp.amazon.com>

B&N: <https://press.barnesandnoble.com/how-it-works>

Kobo: <https://www.kobo.com/us/en/p/writinglife>

Apple Books: <https://authors.apple.com/>

Google Play: <https://play.google.com/books/publish/>

Draft2Digital: <https://www.draft2digital.com/steps/>

Decisions to Make

- 1) If you wish to use print on demand, which service or services?
- 2) Do you want paperback, hardcover, ebook, or some combination of those three? KDP Print can do paperback ebooks, and they are in beta with hardcover (limited trim sizes, only casebound, and a minimum page count of 75). IngramSpark can do all three, but I don't recommend them for ebook distribution.
- 3) If you want to do an ebook edition, which retailers/distributors do you want to use?
- 4) If you want to do an ebook edition, do you want to be exclusive to Amazon, or do you want to go wide?
- 5) What trim size (final book size) do you want the printed book to be?
- 6) Will you obtain a single ISBN, a block of ISBNs, or use a free one (if available)?

Appendix: Terminology

Bleed: the portion of an image beyond the trim line, designed to be cut off when the bound book block is trimmed to size, to ensure that there is no white border around a full-bleed image

Gutter: definition depends on context – KDP uses it to mean the inner margin of a bound book. Book design software like Adobe InDesign uses it to refer to the space between two columns of text.

Leaf: a single piece of paper

Page: one side of a leaf of paper

Signature: the number of pages that are printed together on a single large sheet of paper – books that are printed in signatures must have a total page count that is evenly divisible by the signature