

SUE SHADE FREELANCE FICTION EDITOR NOTES ON SELF-PUBLISHING

WHAT IS SELF-PUBLISHING?

To answer this question, I need to explain traditional publishing.

A traditional publishing company only publishes material that they consider commercially viable. (After all, they are a business.) Usually, manuscripts are submitted to publishers by literary agents, and the decision to accept or reject a story depends on its potential, market trends, and production costs.

For those writers fortunate enough to have their novels accepted by a traditional publisher, all of the hard work required for its production is carried out in-house: the *editing, cover design and typesetting, proofreading, printing, marketing and distribution*. The author may receive a payment in the form of an advance. This is paid back over a period of time out of the royalties earned from book sales.

With self-publishing, an author publishes their work independently and at their own expense. However, the amount of work that the author can realistically undertake depends on their IT skills, available time, knowledge of – and skills to carry out – the processes involved.

If you just want to see your work in print and don't mind about quality control, you could complete the whole process at little or no cost. That's an achievement in itself. But if you want your novel to be produced to the professional standard of a traditional publisher, you will have to pay.

The ability to self-publish became available in the early 2000s, with the arrival of Internet companies such as CreateSpace, Lulu, and Smashwords. Prior to this, the only way to publish outside of the traditional route was to use a *vanity publisher* – where an author pays a lot of money up front to have their book 'professionally' produced. This was often carried out with little or no editorial service, marketing and distribution. As a result, vanity publishing earned a bad name.

In recent years, many 'independent publishers' have sprung up on the Internet. Generally, these are no different from vanity publishers in that the author still has to pay in advance. As I write this, the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* lists over 100 such companies. Some are even offshoots of traditional publishing houses (where 'rejected' manuscripts are passed to a 'self-publishing' department). Prices vary greatly, depending on the service offered. You could pay anything from £300 to £3000 to see your book in print. If you decide to take this route, shop around; find out what is offered for the money.

Regardless of the route taken, there is a lot of work involved in publishing a novel, whether it is produced as a printed copy or an e-book. It is not a quick process either, taking months rather than weeks. As enthusiastic as a new author might be to self-publish, it pays to be patient.

Whatever your resources, try not to skimp on the production of your novel. If you do, you are unlikely to sell many copies beyond your circle of friends and family, however good the story. After all your hard work in writing it, this would be a shame.

SELF-PUBLISHING SERVICE

Mostly, I use Amazon's self-publishing platforms [CreateSpace](#) and [Kindle Direct Publishing \(KDP\)](#). If you wish to use a different platform, please let me know so I can familiarise myself with their procedure.

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Amazon offers a free and straightforward means of self-publishing a printed paperback book and/or e-book. However, bear in mind that this is a US website and therefore geared towards the US market.

If you want your book to be sold online via Amazon, and their associated outlets, and if you are happy to hold a stock of your books (that you buy at a discount) to sell or distribute privately, then Amazon works well enough. If, however, you want your book to be available to major UK bookshops (it is unlikely to be stocked), it may be better to self-publish with a company who offers UK book distribution, such as [Ingram Spark](#). Amazon does not offer UK distribution; if your novel is requested by a UK book wholesaler, you will have to supply copies at your own expense.

Unless you specify that you only require an e-book, I always work on the paperback version first.

Please note: I do not offer a book cover design service, but should be able to put you in touch with someone who does.

SELF-PUBLISHING PROCEDURE

My procedure for self-publishing your novel is as follows:

STAGE 1: 'EDITING'

For all typescripts, I begin with a structural edit. This involves one complete read-through of your work. Provided there are no serious developmental issues, this is then followed with copy-editing. If I find major issues during the structural edit, you will need to rectify these before copy-editing commences.

STAGE 2: 'TYPESETTING'

After editing is complete, I format your typescript so that the text is displayed in an industry-standard layout ready for publication as a printed book and/or e-book. I create the following source files:

- a Word, or compatible, formatted file for the paperback
- a PDF copy of the above
- a Web Page, filtered HTML file for the e-book

Please note that two separate formatting processes are required for the printed book and e-book.

When this stage is complete, I upload the paperback source files (text and book cover) to the chosen platform (CreateSpace or KDP). Once this has been approved, I order a proof copy of the printed book.

STAGE 3: 'PROOFREADING'

I check through the proof copy of the printed book for last-minute errors and omissions. Where corrections need to be made, I update the source file(s), thus replacing the earlier versions.

STAGE 4: 'PUBLISHING'

What happens at this stage will depend on client requirements. There are three options:

1. You are familiar with this part of the process, and can complete the setup procedure and manage the publishing stage yourself. (In which case, the £20 charge for setting up an Amazon

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account and associated email will not be applicable, as presumably you will be using your own.)

2. You wish to use your existing Amazon account, but are not sure about the publishing process and wish me to assist. (As above, I do not charge for setting up accounts, but I have an hourly fee of £10 to cover tuition, emails, etc.)
3. You have no idea about the publishing procedure and wish me to publish using my own imprint, Shadenet Publishing (see section below).

Whichever method is chosen, the client always retains ultimate control over their work. I do not manage royalties or take a commission. Any money you make from the sale of your book is yours.

SHADENET PUBLISHING

If you are not familiar with the self-publishing process, I can manage the whole project from start to finish using my own publishing imprint (Shadenet Publishing) for which I provide a UK ISBN. (There is some important information about ISBNs below.) However, I am not a publishing company; I do not offer marketing and distribution options other than what Amazon – or your chosen platform – provides.

I need to set up an account with the self-publishing platform, and an associated email address. This means that we have shared access. I recommend that you learn how to manage your own account so you can at least carry out some routine admin and order copies of your paperback book – I can provide instructions on how to do this.

As any royalty payments will be paid directly to you electronically, Amazon will require your bank details, and these are stored on the account. After publication is complete, I remain on hand to offer support, free of charge, for six months. After this time, if you wish to make any updates to your publication, or if you require additional support that may require a reasonable use of my time, there will be an hourly charge (currently £10).

ISBNs AND AMAZON

An ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is a product identification code that enables distribution of a book to outlets such as major bookselling chains, independent Internet booksellers, and libraries. As a self-publisher, you may wish to take advantage of this method of distribution. (You'll find the ISBN on the back cover of a published book alongside the bar code.)

There is no legal requirement in the UK for an ISBN, but if you decide to self-publish with Amazon you have to provide one. You can either choose from an Amazon-assigned ISBN or you can provide your own UK ISBN (initially obtained from the [Nielsen UK ISBN Agency](https://nielsen.co.uk/)). You need to consider which ISBN you choose, as it will affect how your book is distributed.

If you are carrying out the self-publish yourself, and are happy to sell your book via Amazon's range of websites and outlets, then choose an Amazon-assigned ISBN. If you wish to take advantage of UK distribution, as mentioned earlier, then you need to provide a UK ISBN.

To explain the differences between the two, I have provided some insight below.

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Amazon-assigned ISBN. This option is free, but designates CreateSpace or KDP as the publisher and distributor of your work. As publisher, they use the imprint 'CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform', or 'Kindle'. This will appear on the Amazon website, and any US bibliographical references.

Although you always retain the copyright to your work, with this option you have little control over publishing and distribution rights. Your book will be sold on Amazon.com, Amazon Europe and their eStore channels, but physical distribution is only available to US bookstores, libraries, and academic institutions – worth bearing in mind if you want to distribute your book, physically, in the UK.

Providing your own UK ISBN. There is no charge by CreateSpace or KDP for this, but you will have to pay a fee to whoever provides the UK ISBN. This could be direct to the Nielsen UK ISBN Agency, or to whoever self-publishes your book. (I currently charge £15.00 for an ISBN using Shadenet Publishing.)

If you buy your UK ISBN direct from Nielsen, you create your own publishing name (known as an *imprint*). This makes it more personal to you, but more importantly, you hold all the publishing and distribution rights, and your imprint will appear on any bibliographical references. Your book will still be available via all the Amazon outlets, but will not be eligible for distribution to US libraries and academic institutions. It will also be available to US bookstores and other online retailers if your book's ISBN has not been submitted for distribution through another platform, but you must use an industry-standard trim size for your book (5" x 8", 5.25" x 8", 5.5" x 8.5", or 6" x 9").

Any self-publisher can purchase an ISBN. Until recently, they were only available in blocks of ten, but the Nielsen UK ISBN Agency have realized that many self-publishers only want to publish one book, so they have cashed in on this: they offer one ISBN, currently for £89 (which is expensive when you realize that ten can be bought for £159.00).

E-books do not necessarily require an ISBN number, but if you want to distribute e-books through channels other than Amazon, and in the UK, then you will need to assign a different ISBN number for each different self-publishing platform used.

CONCLUSION

When considering self-publication, there is a lot to take into account. Amazon offers the opportunity for writers to self-publish for free, marketing and distribute using the Internet and US outlets. They also offer editing and cover design services for a fee. But my own personal thoughts are that Amazon is better suited for the US customer. There are UK companies who take responsibility for the whole process: editing, cover design, formatting (typesetting), publishing, marketing, and distribution, but not all, so it is worth shopping around if you would prefer this type of service. Their prices will vary too.

Whichever route you decide to take, I hope that this information has gone some way to explaining the self-publishing process, but if there is anything else you need to know, or wish to comment on, please feel free to [contact me](#).

Sue Shade