



# DEBUT AUTHOR

PUBLISHING CHECKLIST

Written by

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## FOR THE DEBUT AUTHOR

Here's the nitty-gritty truth about being a debut writer: it's HARD.

But you're not alone.

### BOOK PLAN

Discovering who you're writing for, where to find them, and what your WHY is as an author.

### PLATFORM

Getting set up to successfully connect with readers and get your story into their hands.

### PUBLISHING

The nuts and bolts of how to make your manuscript a product worth selling to customers.

## FROM AUTHOR TO AUTHOR

I felt so lost as I tried to publish my first book. All the self-publishing guides were aimed at people doing rapid-release or who had a backlist. (What did they need a guide for? They'd already published!) Or they were funnels into EXPENSIVE courses I couldn't afford... because I hadn't sold any books yet.

Most advice I did find was over-complicated and just plain not helpful for a first-time author looking to get one book out into the world.

This is the guide if you, like me, want to get one book into the world before you move onto the next book. The good news is that even without a good guide, I was able to publish my book- albeit with a few fumbles. So it is totally doable for you.

Please know that you aren't alone on this road. I hope this Publishing Checklist makes the start of your author journey a little easier. Follow this guide and you'll be well on your way to your debut!



**BLESSINGS**

*Susan E. Farris*

## *GETTING STARTED*

### WHAT THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide will give you the "lay of the land." It is a broad overview of the steps that go into getting your book to market, regardless of whether you choose to publish exclusive to Amazon or go wide.

If you read through this guide and approach your journey thoughtfully, you should be able to position yourself as an author and anticipate most major expenses. Be thorough. Some expenses are one-off and some require subscriptions of varying levels. While this guide will not give you step-by-step how-tos, it will be a good starting point for finding the in-depth knowledge you need. I've provided a list of more resources at the end to help you.

### SHINY RED BALL TEST

The very first piece of advice I'm going to give you is something that has helped me reduce overwhelm in my author life by leaps and bounds. I cannot take credit for it; it comes from **Nick Stephenson**, who is linked in the resources page at the end.

This principle is called the **SHINY RED BALL TEST** because we're easily distracted by the latest, shiniest toy. It drives almost everything I do as an author and can be summed up as 3-ish questions:

1. **WILL THIS GET ME EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS?**
2. **WILL THIS GET ME SALES?**
3. **WILL THIS HELP ME SCALE UP EITHER OF THE ABOVE?**

***If the answer is "no" to all of these, is this thing fun, personally enriching, and do I reasonably have time for it?***

Setting some limits early on in your author journey will keep you from trying to do too much and getting distracted from your writing. It will also give cohesion to your author brand because as you will see in the next section, it will keep you focused on getting your story TO your readers, instead of spewing it in random directions out into the universe.



## CREATING A BOOK PLAN

Discovering who you're writing for, where to find them, and what your WHY is as an author.

### IDEAL READER

Before you do anything else, take a few minutes to imagine who your ideal reader is. Is it your best friend? Your grandma? Someone who loves the same genre you do? Now take a few minutes to translate that to demographics. In broad terms, what is their age range, gender, and interests?

### CONNECTION

Using the info you've developed on your ideal reader, research where you might connect with them. Are they more likely to hang out on Facebook or Instagram? Do they frequent certain blogs? Do they love particular brands?

### YOUR "WHY"

This is aspirational. My why as an author is to give people hope for healing and to make them feel seen. Yours can be as simple as telling a good story or as big as world peace. But knowing your why can empower your writing and how you choose your publishing options.

## YOUR GOALS AS A WRITER

Obviously, you want to write a book.

But beyond that, do you want to earn six figures? Be a best-seller? Win awards? Just earn enough money for a nice vacation every year? Sell 200 copies?

Having measurable goals makes you more likely to attain them. (And less likely to feel like you've failed when you hit... nothing. Because you aimed at nothing.)

Some other key things to consider before you start your journey: Do you want to run advertising? Do you want to rapid release or single release? If you are starting a series, do you want to make your first book perma-free, \$.99, or full price?

Each of these options has pros and cons and each takes varying amounts of budget, time, and sanity, so thinking through who YOU are and what you want for your career will save you a lot of heartburn.



## CRAFTING YOUR PLATFORM

Getting set up to successfully connect with readers and get your story into their hands.

### WHAT IS AN AUTHOR PLATFORM?

Simply put, an author platform is any place online or in the real world where you connect and engage with your readers. As soon as you begin working on your book idea, go ahead and get started setting up your platform and connecting with readers! These are the tools you will need to get started.

### WEBSITE

Your website is your central hub on the internet. It is where readers can find out more about you, buy your books, subscribe to your newsletter, and link to your social media. Listing upcoming events and hosting a blog are common options as well.

#### Website Platforms To Consider:

- **Wordpress**
- **Wix**
- **Squarespace**

Whatever platform you go with, I'd urge to make sure that you own your domain/url and to make sure that you have a reliable hosting solution. I use **Cloudways\*** but there are plenty of good options. **Budget: varies widely - free to several thousand \$**

### NEWSLETTER

Besides your website, your email newsletter is the only other marketing asset that you will own where you can directly contact readers. It's important to grow and maintain it carefully. **Budget: Easy to start for free. Plan for future expenses.**

#### Email Services To Consider:

- **Mailerlite\***
- **Mailchimp**
- **Squarespace**

Be sure that any free email service you choose has the automation and segment features you need as well as reasonably priced paid plans if you grow beyond their subscriber limits.

To help grow your email list, I recommend looking into newsletter promotion services like **Bookfunnel**, **StoryOrigin**, and **BookSprout**.



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## SOCIAL MEDIA

Getting on social media doesn't have to be this overcomplicated puzzle that a lot of "experts" turn it into. If you've created a book plan, you already know where your audience likes to hang out. Go there. I recommend starting with one platform that is a good mix of where your readers are and something that appeals to you. Get comfy with it before you add any others. If you foresee yourself expanding, go ahead and claim your profiles but don't worry about trying to be active on them.

### Social Media Apps To Consider:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- TikTok

### Consider Claiming Profiles On:

- Goodreads
- Bookbub

You'll need more than just your profile once you've gone social! To help me manage links I use **Linktree**. For graphics, many authors swear by **Canva\***, **Adobe Spark**, or **Bookbrush**. And probably the most useful: scheduling. I am most reliant on **Later\***, but I have also used **Buffer**, and **Facebook Creator Studio**. **Canva\*** now has a scheduling tool as well.

**Budget: Most services have free levels but you do have to pay to get advanced features.**

## DO I HAVE TO BE ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Of course not! Social media is actually linked to very low DIRECT sales. As a reader though, I've often added books I've seen rave reviews about on Instagram to my #tblist on Goodreads which I do buy from. I also enjoy the connections I make on social media; it allows my extroverted side to come out. However, for people who are good at email and networking, there are other methods.

## A NON-SOCIAL PLATFORM

If you choose to skip social media, start by adjusting your expectations. Many of the outlets you will want to work with will expect you to be on social, so be ready to explain. Also, not being on social doesn't mean being offline. You will still need a website and email list. So get ready to start networking locally and grow from there.

### Consider:

- Events at Bookstores & Coffee Shops
- Libraries
- Book Clubs
- Reviews- Local Papers, Magazines, Blogs

### Supplementary Materials:

- Business Cards
- Book Flyers / Bookmarks / Leave Behinds
- Giveaway Copies of Books for Events
- In-Person Email Sign-Up Method

## *MANUSCRIPT PREP*

### LITTLE THINGS YOU DON'T EXPECT

Ahhh... that last draft is done and now you can have fun designing and formatting and...

What I found out with a rude slap of reality: there is a whole other step called "production" to get that baby ready to publish and it has nothing to do with editing and design.

Fortunately, if you're prepared, getting these pieces in place isn't difficult. They just take more time.

### BLURB / BOOK DESCRIPTION

To draw reader's attention, you will need a captivating blurb to accompany your book. This will go on every platform where your book is available and besides your cover and metadata is one of your most powerful pieces of marketing.

### METADATA

Metadata are the **categories** and **keywords** that you feed each platform (or your third--party distributor) when setting up your book. They control where your book is placed as well as how well your book will show up when readers are searching for books like it. Don't skimp on this! Services like **Publisher Rocket\*** can pay for themselves if you use them well for this.

### PRICING

You have to set your own price as a self-published author. For ebooks, be sure to research other self-published authors in your genre. For paperbacks, **IngramSpark offers a free tool** that is very helpful.

### FRONT & BACK MATTER

As a self-published author, one of the biggest benefits is having full control over your interior layout. At this stage, you will need to decide on (and write the content for) your Title, Half-Title, Copyright, Dedication, Acknowledgments, Author Bio, and Back Matter pages. Except for the Title and Copyright page, all of these are optional.

If you want to direct readers to leave a review, visit your website, sign up for your email, or give them an excerpt of your next book and encourage them to purchase, your Back Matter is the perfect spot. Pick one thing to encourage them to do or your message will get muddled!



## PUBLISHING YOUR BOOK

The nuts and bolts of how to make your manuscript a product worth selling to customers.

### GETTING SET UP

Going through the publishing process the first time can be overwhelming. Some dashboards are a cinch while others are archaic and have a long delay for approval. Many of these steps can and will happen at the same time. Take a deep breath and give yourself (and your team of editors, designers and reviewers!) plenty of time. Again, you're not alone on this journey. I highly recommend [The Book Launch Planner](#)\* by Mandi Lynn to keep everything coordinated and running smoothly.

### EDITING

Every writer will need a different amount and kind of editing. You might need only one kind, or you might need several. It will largely depend on the strength of your manuscript and your expertise with grammar.

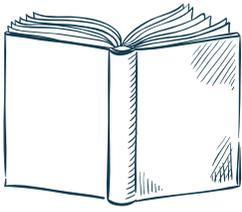
#### Kinds of Editing:

- **Beta-Readers** - not really editing, these are trusted readers who read early versions of your story and give you feedback aimed at strengthening it; **free**
- **Developmental** - aimed at strengthening story structure and big picture elements; if something is just "off" this is the edit you need. **Budget: \$1500 to \$4000 depending on manuscript length**
- **Copyediting & Proofreading** - Depending on the editor, copyediting and proofreading might be used interchangeably. Copyediting tends to be more smoothing out sentence flow, fact-checking, and grammar and spelling. Proofreading tends to be the "final check" after everything is formatted to make sure that no mistakes were introduced. Again it looks for grammar, spelling, and missed/repeated words. Some editors offer combined packages for these. **Budget \$800 to \$1500 depending on manuscript length.**

### ISBN

Regardless of whether you go KDP Select or publish wide, I suggest purchasing your own ISBNs. In the US, this is done through **Bowker**. Owning your own ISBNs allows you to change distributors at will as well as makes it easier for internet algorithms to catalogue your book correctly. You will need an ISBN for each format of the book you produce, E.g. 1 for an ebook and 1 for a paperback. Purchasing these early in the process makes several of your distribution tasks easier.

**Budget: \$125 / single; or \$250 / 10 pack**



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## DISTRIBUTORS

Distributors are how your books get to readers. If you decide to go KDP Select, you get your book into Kindle Unlimited. However, this will keep you from publishing wide, which means your book cannot be listed anywhere else like B&N, Apple, Google, Kobo, and Indigo. Ultimately, what you decide is up to you.

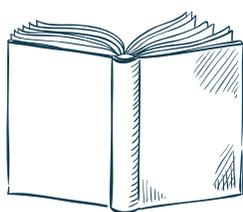
### Publishing With Amazon:

- **Kindle Direct Publishing** - upload your paperback and ebook directly here; choose whether or not to opt-in to expanded distribution (select no if also using IngramSpark); choose whether or not to opt-in to Kindle Select (select no if publishing wide)
- **Amazon Author Central** - set up your Author Page and claim your books; test out your reporting and sales rank reports; you can also access much better customer service here if you need help with your book's setup

### Publishing Wide

*Follow the instructions above for uploading to Amazon, just be sure to select "no" for both expanded distribution and KDP Select.*

- **IngramSpark** - Use IS' expanded distribution service to allow your customers to order paperbacks through B&N, Books-A-Million, Walmart, and other booksellers. It also allows indie bookstores to place wholesale orders for your books. (IS offers ebook distribution too but you can upload directly or use better services.) **Budget: \$49 set-up fee; ask around for someone's promo code to get it for free.**
- **eBooks**- You can upload your ebook directly to **B&N, Apple, and Kobo**. You **HAVE** to upload directly to **Google**. However, there are a ton of other platforms you can upload to, and only so much time in the day. There are several reputable ebook distribution services to consider like **Draft2Digital\***, **Smashwords**, and **PublishDrive** that can save you time and sanity for a small % of royalties. Several of these also offer universal book links and royalty splitting for co-authors.



## PUBLISHING YOUR BOOK

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### COVER DESIGN

Making a great cover takes more than your usual graphic design chops. While a lot of these areas can be worked around up to this point, if you're not a designer, hiring a good cover artist can MAKE your book. If you can't afford a custom cover, you might be able to find a good-quality pre-made that fits your genre.

**Semi-Custom Design Budget: \$150-500**

**Full-Custom Design Budget: \$500+**

**Pre-Made Cover: \$25-150**

Got some skills and want to take a crack at it? Okay, I see you. There are a couple of tools that can help.

#### Design Tools for Authors:

- [Canva\\*](#) - free and paid versions
- [Bookbrush](#)
- [Adobe Spark](#)

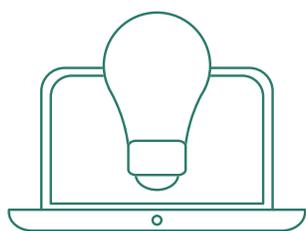
### FORMATTING

While formatting an ebook isn't the most difficult thing in the world with apps like **Calibre** and **Vellum** (**Scrivener** has an export function as well I hear), paperbacks are a whole other ballgame. Unless you know InDesign or are ready to get fiddly with Word, I suggest outsourcing this and saving yourself the headache. KDP does offer a downloadable template if you want to tackle it yourself.

**Formatting Budget: <\$500 if you are not graphics heavy; free if you're a go-getter**

### WHAT ABOUT PRINT PROOFS? AND ARC REVIEWS?

A lot of these items come up naturally during this process. As you are uploading your books to your distributor dashboards, you will be given a chance to order proof copies or author copies- TAKE THEM! You will almost always want to make some small adjustments. As for ARC reviews, decide if you want to offer physical books, ebooks, or a combination. Your budget v. the cost of ordering copies will largely determine which direction you go. Having a service like **Bookfunnel** can also help you manage ARC reviews. Use your email list and social media to get the word out about available ARC copies.



## DO I NEED AN LLC, BUSINESS BANK ACCOUNT, OR PUBLISHING IMPRINT?

### SHORT ANSWER: NO

You can publish under your own name.

### MORE COMPLICATED ANSWER: MAYBE?

It all depends on your goals as an author.

## GETTING INTO BUSINESS

Self-publishing a book is putting a product out into the world. It is a business action. But it doesn't necessarily mean you need all the business trappings that go with it, especially if publishing is more of a hobby for you than a full-time job.

Depending on your income from the book, or if you are trying to scale rapidly into being a full-time author, it might be a good idea to set up a DBA or LLC and a business checking account, just to make sure there are no headaches with taxes in the future.

Good habits now equal less worry later.

In my state, an LLC is easy and cheap to set up. With the accessibility of online banking and my writing career goals, there was no reason NOT to go ahead. Having these things in place gives me comfort knowing that my business account is separate from my personal account. It also makes it way easier for me to track expenses and income and create budgets.

However, some states have extraordinary costs for an LLC. Many authors operate for years without LLCs or business accounts by strictly logging their writing expenses and income until they are at a level to warrant separating things out.

The decision is ultimately up to you.

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## I'M NOT A LEGAL EXPERT!

I am not a lawyer or accountant. Please look into your state's guidelines or give your financial advisor a call.

## *MORE RESOURCES*

**THERE IS A LOT MORE THAT PEOPLE WILL SAY YOU "SHOULD" DO. TAKE IT A LA CARTE.**

This checklist is my absolute basics of getting your ONE book out into the world. It's definitely a resource I wish I'd had. But there is a TON more you can learn, especially about marketing so you don't launch to crickets. But for the bare-bones set-up, you can take what is in this list and figure it out from here. Below is a list of resources that I have found to be invaluable in my own journey.

*My Rule: These guys are experts, but only use what you need and what fits your style.*

- [DAVID GAUGHRAN](#)
- [JOANNA PENN](#)
- [JANE FRIEDMAN](#)
- [PAPER RAVEN BOOKS](#)
- [GOLDEN MAY BOOK EDITING & COACHING](#)
- [LEMON FRIDAY: SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS FOR AUTHORS](#)
- [REEDSY](#)
- [THE WRITE PRACTICE](#)
- [NICK STEPHENSON](#)
- [MARK DAWSON: SELF PUBLISHING FORMULA](#)
- [MIXTUS MEDIA: BOOK MARKETING SIMPLIFIED](#)
- [BOOKBUB AUTHOR NEWSLETTER](#)
- [KINDLEPRENEUR](#)

### **GOOD LUCK!**

I hope that you've found this checklist helpful in getting an overview of publishing your first book. I've tried to be thorough but not overwhelming and provide the "have-to-haves" and leave all the bells and whistles for more experienced authors.

However, if you feel that I've left out something CRUCIAL, please don't hesitate to reach out at [susan@susanfarris.me](mailto:susan@susanfarris.me) and let me know! This is, after all, always more to learn.

**-Susan E. Farris**