



STEWARDSHIP OF TRUTH WITH EDITORIAL EXCELLENCE

A First-Time Author's Guide to Publishing

Many first-time authors are surprised by how many people it takes to publish a book well. Publishing is a coordinated process that begins when you, the author, deliver the manuscript to editors who strengthen and refine your content. Designers then develop the cover and interior layout. A proofreader reviews the designed pages to catch any remaining errors before the files are finalized and delivered to production for print and e-book preparation.

The sequence and schedule matter as much as the work itself. At a steady, professional pace, plan on twelve to eighteen weeks from a final manuscript to a confident launch. A faster timeline—six to nine weeks—is possible, but only when the manuscript is already clean and key decisions are made quickly.

This guide helps you match the right task to the right person, in the right order, so you don't lose time or quality between steps. Most first-time frustration comes from mixing up three separate things:

- Content: what the book says
- Editing: how the book reads
- Design and Production: how the book looks and prints

This guide keeps those lanes clear so you can move through the process efficiently and with confidence.

THE CORE PLAYERS

The Author

Primary role: Decision-maker and content owner

Responsible for:

- Writing and revising the manuscript (including front and back matter unless otherwise contracted)
- Providing accurate facts, names, timelines, and source material
- Supplying assets (photos, captions, credits, permissions, endorsements, bios, headshots)
- Reviewing edits and proofs on schedule and approving final files
- Participating in marketing to some degree (almost always, regardless of publishing model)

The Editors

Editor is an umbrella term for people who help refine your manuscript. Each type solves a different problem.

Developmental Editor

- Focus: Big-picture argument or story, organization, pacing, audience fit, content gaps, redundancy
- Delivers: Editorial letter, chapter notes, revision plan

Line Editor

- Focus: Clarity, tone, rhythm, transitions, readability at the paragraph and sentence level
- Delivers: Heavily marked manuscript with rewrites and suggestions

Copyeditor

- Focus: Grammar, usage, consistency, light fact-check flags, style-guide alignment
- Delivers: Edited manuscript and a custom style sheet (names, terms, spellings, formatting rules)

The Proofreader

- Focus: Typos, missing words, formatting glitches, layout errors
- Delivers: Marked proof pages (PDF) for production correction

The Designers

Cover Designer

- Focus: Market-appropriate cover that signals genre, tone, and quality
- Delivers: Front, spine, and back cover files; e-book cover; typography specs

Interior Designer and Typesetter

- Focus: Page layout, typography, chapter openers, headers/footers, image rules
- Delivers: Print-ready interior PDF and sometimes an EPUB-ready file, or the files go to an e-book formatter

The Publisher

Publishing is a system. Depending on the model (traditional, hybrid, or self-publishing), a publisher may do all or only some of these.

Core Publisher Functions:

- Acquisitions: Decides to publish; negotiates contract
- Project Management: Sets schedule; routes files; coordinates editing, layout, and proofs
- Production: Manages specifications and quality control
- Distribution: Makes the book available (retailers, wholesalers, online channels)
- Metadata: ISBNs (sometimes), categories, keywords, pricing, imprint info
- Marketing and publicity: Varies widely—sometimes minimal, sometimes robust.
Not all publishers provide substantial support for marketing campaigns. Always ask what's included.

Other Players You May Encounter

- Literary Agent: Pitches publishers, negotiates contracts, guides proposal strategy (often essential for major traditional houses; optional otherwise)
- Beta Readers and Critique Partners: Early reactions—confusion, pacing, credibility, continuity, emotional impact
- Sensitivity Reader: Helps avoid harmful stereotypes or inaccuracies when portraying experiences outside your own
- Indexer: Creates the index after layout is final (indexing before layout doesn't work)
- E-book Formatter: Converts to EPUB/Kindle formats; ensures device compatibility and clean styling
- Audiobook Team: Narrator, producer, audio editor, mastering; sometimes rights/licensing support

- Permissions and Legal Review: Confirms rights for quotes, lyrics, images; flags defamation/privacy risk (not the same as editing)
- Marketing Specialists: Publicist, ads manager, launch strategist, newsletter coordinator, social media manager

Publishing Models

- Traditional Publishing: Publisher funds editing, design, production, and distribution. The author receives royalties (sometimes an advance). The author still participates in marketing.
- Hybrid and Assisted Publishing: The author funds some or all production. Services vary by provider; read the scope carefully. Marketing support may be limited.
- Self-Publishing: The author is the publisher. You hire and manage every role (editor, designer, formatter, printer, distribution).

The Publishing Workflow

Phase 1: Manuscript development (author, developmental editor, and line editor)

- Goal: Content is strong, complete, and audience-ready
- Output: Revised manuscript

Phase 2: Copyediting (copyeditor and author review)

- Goal: Correctness and consistency
- Output: Clean manuscript and style sheet

Phase 3: Design and Layout (interior designer/typesetter)

- Goal: Print-ready interior
- Output: First proof (PDF)

Phase 4: Proofreading (proofreader and author)

- Goal: Final cleanup of laid-out pages
- Output: Corrections for production

Phase 5: Final production (publisher/printer/distributor)

- Goal: Final print and e-book files; metadata locked; distribution set

Phase 6: Launch and ongoing marketing (author and marketing support as applicable)

- Goal: Discoverability and momentum over time
- Editing vs. Formatting vs. Design

A quick sanity-check filter:

- If it's about what it says, it's content. The author is responsible.
- If it's about how it reads, it's editing. The editor is responsible.
- If it's about how it appears on the page, it's design. The formatter, designer, and typesetter are responsible.
- If it's about how it looks and signals quality, it's design. The designer is responsible.

What to Ask Up Front

Scope Questions:

- What kind of edit is included (developmental, line, copyedit, proofread)?
- Who creates the front and back matter (author or provider)?
- Is the interior layout custom or template-based?
- How many proof rounds are included?

Process Questions:

- Do authors review edits before layout, after layout, or both?
- What changes are allowed at the proof stage?
- What are the deadlines, and what happens if they shift?

Marketing Questions:

- What, if any, marketing deliverables are included?
- What does the publisher/provider expect the author to do?

What a Professional Handoff Package Looks Like

When preparing to hand off to editing or layout, aim to provide:

- A stable manuscript with all major content decisions made
- A brief style sheet or do-not-change list (names, terms, spellings, scripture styling)
- Front and back matter text (bio, acknowledgments, dedication, etc.)
- A folder of high-resolution images, captions, credits, and permission status
- Endorsements and testimonials (if used)
- Metadata basics (subtitle, categories, keywords, back-cover copy)

Clean handoffs reduce costs, reduce errors, and keep the schedule sane.

General Self-Publishing Timeline

Standard Pace: 12–18 weeks

- Weeks 1–4: Developmental and line editing (including author revision time)
- Weeks 5–6: Copyedit
- Weeks 7–8: Author review and cleanup pass (manuscript locked)
- Weeks 9–10: Cover design and interior layout (in parallel where possible)
- Weeks 11–12: Proofreading and corrections
- Weeks 13–14: Final files, upload, platform review/approvals, and proof copy checks
- Weeks 15–18: Launch prep (ARC/reviews, email list, back-of-book links, promo assets)

Accelerated Pace: 6–9 weeks

- Weeks 1–2: Combined edit pass and fast author revision
- Weeks 3–4: Copyedit and immediate author review
- Weeks 5–6: Design/layout and proofing (one round)
- Weeks 7–9: Upload, approvals, final checks, launch prep

© 2025. All rights reserved. Debra Stankovich 2025. debrastankovich.com

Additional Considerations

What *Ready for Layout* Means

A manuscript is ready for layout when the text is stable. That means the structure is set (no new paragraphs, no rearranging sections, no adding or cutting pages), and all major content decisions have been made. Once layout begins, changes should be correction-level only—typos, small punctuation fixes, and minor wording tweaks that don't affect page flow. Anything larger slows the schedule and increases the chance of introducing new errors.

Permissions Mini-Checklist

Before production, confirm you have the rights to use anything you didn't create yourself—especially in devotionals and faith-based books.

- Scripture translations: Choose the translation up front and confirm the publisher's usage limits and required credit line.
- Song lyrics: Nearly always require permission (and are often expensive or denied).
- Poems, prayers, liturgies: If not public domain or explicitly licensed, assume permission is required.
- Photos and artwork: Confirm licenses for every image, including stock sites and “free” downloads.
- Quotations: Short quotes may be permissible, but longer excerpts—and anything substantial—may require permission and proper attribution.

Metadata That Matters More Than You Think

Metadata is the information retailers and search engines use to categorize, display, and surface your book. Solid metadata improves discoverability and reduces last-minute scrambling.

Include, at minimum: title and subtitle, author name, series name (if any), trim size, BISAC categories, keywords, and both a short and long description.

Print and E-book Are Two Different Lanes

Print layout is not the same as e-book formatting. A print interior is designed for fixed pages; e-books flow text for different devices and user settings. Planning for both formats from the beginning—particularly your headings, images, callouts, and front and back matter—minimizes surprises, prevents unnecessary revisions, and keeps your timeline on track.

Wrap Up

Publishing doesn't have to feel mysterious or overwhelming. When you understand the roles, the sequence, and what *ready* looks like at each stage, you can make better decisions, keep your schedule realistic, and protect the quality of your book.

Use this guide as your roadmap: clarify what you need, assemble the right team, and move step by step with confidence. A professional launch is not the result of rushing—it results from doing the right work, in the right order, with the right support.