

AN **AUTHOR'S GUIDE**

**BEYOND
THE
FIRST
DRAFT**

VICTORIA **GRIFFIN**



Introduction

Welcome! This guide is designed to answer some common questions about the next steps after writing a book.

The options for authors are extensive and are growing constantly, from the massive number of industry professionals available for hire online to the unique pathways to publication.

The following guide provides foundational knowledge to help you make the best decisions for your book and career.

“We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.

— Ernest Hemingway

About Me



I'm Victoria Griffin, an author and professional book editor. I have edited more than 100 books in the last ten years, providing services including developmental editing, line editing, and proofreading. I specialize in adult fiction, but I also work with select YA and memoir.

My short fiction has appeared in more than forty publications, and I am represented by Sandy Lu of Book Wyrms Literary Agency.

Based in East Tennessee, I spend my time hiking and backpacking in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I am a member of the Editorial Freelancers Association, the Knoxville Writers' Guild, the Lost State Writers Guild, and the Appalachian Studies Association.

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Types of Publishing



Authors have three major publishing options: traditional publication with an agent, traditional publication without an agent, and independent publication.

Traditional Publishing: A traditional publisher is selective in the manuscripts it publishes, pays an up-front advance, takes a percentage of the profits, and does not charge its authors.

Independent (Self-) Publishing: The author serves as their own publisher and is responsible for all aspects of the process a traditional publisher would otherwise handle.

Literary Agent: Literary agents submit your work to publishers and negotiate on your behalf. They may also help you improve your work before submission.

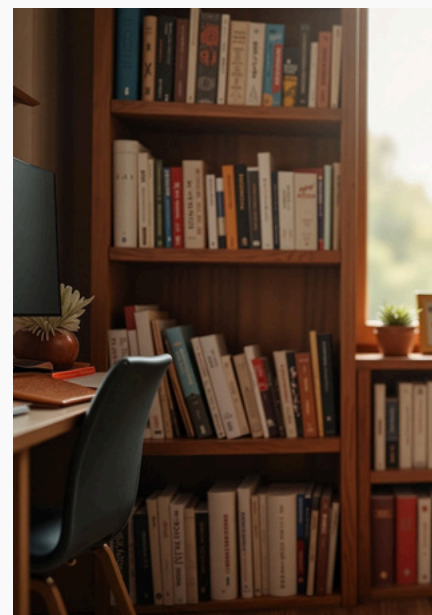
Traditional Publication (With an Agent)

PROS	CONS
Agent support	Long process
Publisher support	No guarantees
No up-front costs	Limited control
Advance	Low royalty percentage
Career opportunities	



Independent Publication

PROS	CONS
Can be faster	Less reach
Guaranteed publication	No support
Complete control	Up-front costs
High royalty percentage	No inherent prestige
	No advance



Choosing Your Publishing Path

There is no one-size-fits-all route to publishing a book. The best option depends on your specific project and career goals. Never make a publishing decision based on what someone tells you is "best." Just because it's best for them doesn't mean it will be best for you.

At its simplest, traditional publication requires more time up front, and independent publication requires an up-front financial investment.



Above: Anthea T. Piscarik with her self-published book, after pursuing traditional publication for her first book

1 Be sure you thoroughly understand the options. [Read this post for a full breakdown.](#)

2 Consider the best option for this book and how it fits in with your overall career goals.

3 Ensure you are prepared for the next steps; each path requires time and commitment.



02

Types of Editing

A strong editing process includes multiple types of book editing, working from story-level editing to prose-level editing.

Choosing Your Editing Path

Deciding which type(s) of editing your book needs is an individual process, and it's important to work with someone you trust.

Note that terminology can vary between industry professionals, so it's important to ensure you and your editor are on the same page about the scope of the editing work.

Editing Process

When structuring your editing process, always try to work “high” to “low.” That means completing story-level editing before moving on to prose-level editing.

Why? Because you wouldn't want to spend time and money perfecting every word of a chapter only to cut that chapter.

Completing story-level editing first is more efficient and will produce a stronger final manuscript.

Developmental Editing

Developmental editing focuses on the story aspects (characterization, plot, structure, etc.) rather than the prose. It should be the first step in the editing process. You don't want to spend time perfecting the prose only to cut or rewrite large sections during developmental editing.

Scope

Deliverables vary by professional. My developmental editing service includes in-text comments, a comprehensive edit letter, and a one-hour phone call.

Manuscript Critique

Also called a manuscript evaluation, a manuscript critique is a less in-depth (and therefore less expensive) form of story-level editing.

A manuscript critique is an ideal option for authors who are not ready to invest the money and time a developmental edit requires.

My manuscript critique includes a less comprehensive edit letter.

Developmental Editing Covers:

- ✓ Structure
- ✓ Plot
- ✓ Setting
- ✓ Story pacing
- ✓ Conflict
- ✓ POV
- ✓ Dialogue
- ✓ Voice consistency
- ✓ Characterization
- ✓ Stakes
- ✓ Transitions
- ✓ Overall tone



Line Editing

Line editing is a prose-level type of editing, meaning it involves changes at the sentence level. Line editors make changes for clarity, concision, consistency, and correctness.

A good line editor will tighten and strengthen your prose, while highlighting your unique voice.

Editing Plan

Indie authors should consider a full editing process: developmental editing, line editing, and proofreading. Authors who plan to publish traditionally usually focus on developmental editing before submitting.

Proofreading

Proofreading is the final pass to a manuscript, addressing objective errors, including typos and punctuation issues.

Although hiring a proofreader is an important part of the process, indie authors should plan to proofread their own work as well.

03

Choosing Professionals



Companies vs. Freelancers

There are pros and cons to working with individual freelancers (developmental editors, line editors, book designers, etc.), compared to working with a company that handles multiple aspects of the process.

Working with a company can be simpler, with shorter timelines, more support and guidance, and access to pre-vetted professionals.

There is no guarantee that any individual or company is legitimate or produces work of high quality. Let's go over some checklists and resources for choosing the right professional or team.

Checklist for Hiring a Professional

1. Look for credentials, such as membership with professional associations.
2. Ensure their rates align with industry standards. The [Editorial Freelancers Association](#) publishes standard rate ranges.
3. Make sure they are familiar with your book's genre and age category.
4. Read testimonials from other authors.
5. If you're considering working with a company, make sure they are legitimate and offer high-quality services.

Vanity Presses

A vanity press is a pay-to-play "publisher" that preys on authors.

Vanity presses take several forms and can be difficult for new authors to spot. They generally charge authors up front and take a percentage of their royalties.

Explore [this important resource from Writer Beware](#) to make sure you understand what constitutes a vanity press or other scam.



04

Querying Basics

Securing a literary agents begins with the querying process.

What Is a Query?

A query is a one-page piece of writing introducing your story and convincing a literary agent that they should want to read the whole thing.

After reading your query, a literary agent will either reject the submission or request the partial or full manuscript. If they love the manuscript, they might schedule a phone call and offer representation.

Synopsis

Agents may also request a 2-4–page synopsis that outlines the entire plot, including the ending. Don't withhold "spoilers" in the full synopsis.



Parts of a Query

- 1** **Hook:** one to two sentences enticing the agent
- 2** **Mini-Synopsis:** a few paragraphs introducing your characters and story, emphasizing the main conflict and stakes
- 3** **Specs:** your book's word count, genre, age category, and comp titles
- 4** **Bio:** a paragraph outlining your credentials



Query-Writing Tips

1. Get to the meat of the query as quickly as possible. Agents receive a lot of queries, and they're looking for a reason to pass.
2. Don't be afraid of spoilers. The query shouldn't give away the ending, but it should emphasize the main conflict and usually goes right up to the climax.
3. Agents are looking for clear stakes. What is the worst-case scenario if your protagonist fails to achieve their goal?
4. Keep it concise. Your query shouldn't be more than a page, ideally two-thirds of a page.
5. Avoid telling about your story as the author or a prospective reader. Stick to showing in the mini-synopsis.
6. Your query is not a summary of your plot. Think of it as a standalone piece of flash fiction tied to your manuscript. It should be engaging on its own.

For help with your query-writing process, check out my [query critique](#) and [query coaching](#) services.

Victoria



Query-Prep Checklist

- Complete and fully self-edit your manuscript.
- Work with a professional editor, if you plan to.
- Write the query letter, including the hook, mini-synopsis, and bio.
- Revise the query, and use a professional query service, if you plan to.
- Prepare supplemental materials, including a plot synopsis.
- Ensure your first twenty pages are solid.
- Create a list of agents who are open to queries and who represent your genre and age category.
- Note each prospective agent's unique preferences, submission guidelines, and response times.
- Set up a spreadsheet or log to keep track of submissions and responses.
- Consider querying in rounds, starting with the agents you would be most excited to work with.
- Be prepared to query 100 agents or more.

05

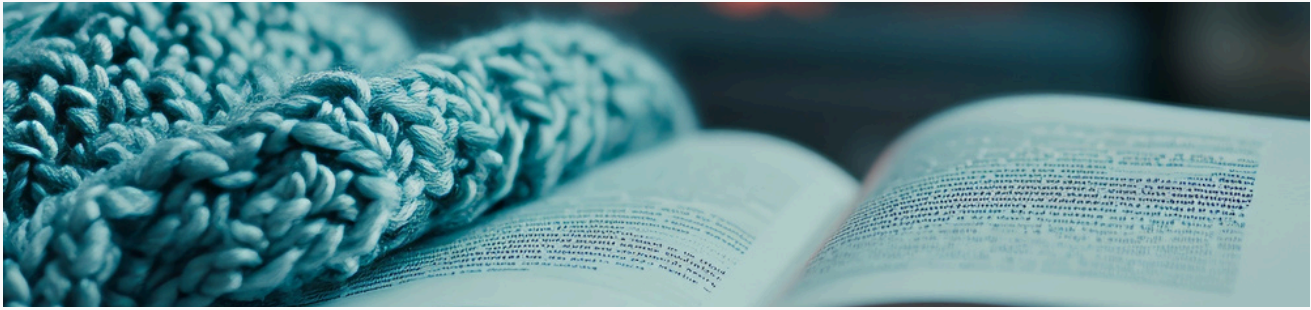
Self-Publishing Basics



Self-Publishing is a complex process. Take your time developing your publishing plan, and be sure to recruit a team you trust.

Process Outline

1. Write
2. Self-edit
3. Use beta readers
4. Professional editing
 - a. Developmental editing
 - b. Line editing
 - c. Proofreading
5. Secure ISBNs
6. Interior layout
7. Back cover blurb
8. Cover design
9. Upload and publish
10. Market and promote



Self-Publishing Platforms: Terminology

- **Self-Publishing Platform:** Platforms like Amazon KDP and IngramSpark provide printing and distribution services for independent authors. These platforms are not publishers. The independent author is the publisher.
- **Aggregator:** Aggregators like Draft2Digital populate indie authors' books to multiple platforms in exchange for a fee.
- **Print on Demand:** With POD services, books are printed when they are ordered, rather than in advance. Compared to offset printing, POD is lower quality and more expensive per book. But it means indie authors do not need to cover cover up-front printing costs.
- **Royalties:** The indie author's payment for sold books. KDP royalties are based on the list price, printing cost, and sales channel. Use the printing cost calculator.
- **Proof Copies:** Watermarked copies of the book ordered before its release.
- **Author Copies:** Regular copies of the book ordered after its release. Authors pay only the printing cost plus shipping.

KDP vs. IngramSpark

	Amazon KDP	IngramSpark
Fees	Free upload; free changes	\$49 upload fee; additional charge for change
Available Formats	Paperback and ebook	Paperback, hardcover, and ebook
Returns	No returns	Can make books returnable
Distribution	Better for Amazon and online sale	Better for bookstores and libraries
Proof and Author Copies	Proof copies only before pub	Author copies available before pub

Generally speaking, IngramSpark is best for print books and KDP is best for ebooks. A wide distribution strategy includes both platforms. You may also consider publishing your ebook through an aggregator like Draft2Digital.

ISBN Basics

An International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is an identifier distinguishing each format of an individual book.

Each version of your book needs its own ISBN. The paperback will have a different ISBN than the hardcover.

The ISBN is the same across publishing platforms (e.g. KDP, IngramSpark).

In the United States, ISBNs come from Bowker. (Free ISBNs are bought in bulk from Bowker and redistributed, which is why the publisher is listed as "independently published.")

Buy 10 ISBNs at a time to get a lower price per ISBN.

Remember to assign each ISBN to the correct title and format, ensuring the details exactly match the info on your cover.

You do not need to purchase barcodes. KDP generates your barcode automatically, and your cover designer will add a barcode to your IngramSpark cover file.

Free vs. Paid ISBN

Choose a paid ISBN if...

- You are publishing through both KDP and IngramSpark
- You are interested in getting into brick-and-mortar bookstores or libraries
- You want to choose your own publisher name

Choose a free ISBN if...

- None of the above apply

Ready to discuss professional editing?

Let's find out if we're a good fit.

CONTACT ME

Testimonials



Writing for me is extremely personal. That's a piece of my heart and soul locked in those pages. It's scary to hand it over to someone you've never actually met, knowing they're going to work with it. It requires a lot of trust, and Victoria is worth every drop.

— KL Watkins



Victoria's editorial comments not only improved my manuscript, but they also helped me open my mind up to plot and story possibilities that I had previously struggled with. Working with Victoria was one of the highlights of my writing process.

— Tanya E. Williams



It can be hard to justify splashing out on the costs of an editor and just as hard to pick one from all the different people offering services. I would say that a good editor really makes a difference, and I suspect that if I'd used Victoria's services at an earlier stage in the process, it'd have saved me a lot of self-editing trial and error.

— Georgiana Derwent