

The Professional Publishing Checklist

Everything Your Book Needs
Before It Goes to Print

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This checklist covers the production steps that separate a professionally published book from a self-published one that looks like it. Whether you are managing production yourself or handing it off to a team, these are the things that need to happen — and the order matters.

Editorial

- [] Developmental editing is complete (structure, argument, pacing)
- [] Copyediting is complete (grammar, consistency, fact-checking)
- [] The manuscript file is clean — no tracked changes, comments, or revision marks
- [] Front matter is written (title page, copyright page, dedication, table of contents)
- [] Back matter is written (acknowledgments, about the author, also-by page)
- [] Proofreading is complete — after front and back matter are finalized (final pass for typos and formatting errors)

Cover Design

- [] The cover communicates genre and audience at a glance — a reader should know what kind of book this is in two seconds
- [] The front cover works as a thumbnail — legible and compelling at the size of a postage stamp (this is how most people will first see it)
- [] The spine is designed and legible (for paperback and hardcover)
- [] The back cover includes a compelling book description, author bio, barcode, and ISBN
- [] The cover meets printer specifications (bleed, resolution, color space, spine width for page count)

Interior Layout

- [] Trim size is chosen based on genre conventions and reader expectations
- [] Typography is professional — appropriate font, size, leading, and margins for the genre
- [] Running headers or footers are in place (title, author name, chapter titles)
- [] Chapter openings are consistently designed
- [] Orphans and widows are corrected (no single lines stranded at the top or bottom of a page)

- [] Front matter and back matter are properly formatted and paginated
- [] Print-ready PDF meets printer specs (embedded fonts, correct color space, proper bleed)

Ebook Production

- [] ePub file is generated and validated
- [] Formatting displays correctly across devices (Kindle, Apple Books, Kobo)
- [] Table of contents is functional and linked
- [] Cover image is formatted for ebook retailers (correct dimensions and file size)
- [] Metadata is embedded in the ePub file

Metadata and Registration

- [] ISBN is registered and assigned to the correct format (separate ISBNs for print and ebook)
- [] BISAC category codes are selected — these determine where your book appears in bookstores and online searches
- [] Book description is written for retail — compelling, keyword-aware, formatted for online display
- [] Keywords are researched and selected for discoverability
- [] Library of Congress Control Number (LCCN) is applied for, if pursuing library distribution
- [] Copyright is registered with the U.S. Copyright Office

Distribution Setup

- [] KDP account is set up and configured (for Amazon ebook and/or print)
- [] IngramSpark listing is created (for wide print distribution to bookstores, libraries, and online retailers)
- [] Pricing is set for each format and each market (domestic and international)
- [] Trade discount and returnability terms are configured for IngramSpark (this determines whether bookstores will stock your book)
- [] Author copies are ordered and reviewed — a physical proof check before the book goes live
- [] Distribution is live on all intended channels

Direct-to-Consumer (Optional but Recommended)

- Author storefront is set up on your website
- Payment processing is configured
- Author copy auto-ordering is in place (so you always have inventory to fulfill direct orders)
- The storefront is linked from your website, email signature, and social profiles

Pre-Launch Readiness

- Author website is live with book page, bio, and contact information
- Email list exists — even a small one — with a way to capture new subscribers
- Social media profiles are updated with book information
- Advance reader copies (ARCs) have been sent to reviewers, endorsers, or early readers
- Launch week plan exists — even a simple one

The Bottom Line

This list is long because professional publishing involves a lot of moving parts. That is not meant to be discouraging — it is meant to be clarifying. Every item on this list exists because skipping it creates a problem later: a book that looks amateur, a listing that cannot be found, a storefront that does not work, or a launch that fizzles.

You do not have to do all of this yourself. But you do need to make sure it all gets done.

This checklist is published by Paperbacks & Pixels — a concierge publishing agency for authors who mean business.

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