

Author 2.0 Blueprint:
Writing, Publishing, Book Marketing and
Making a Living with your Writing

January 2022 Edition

Joanna Penn

TheCreativePenn.com: Voted one of the Top 10 Sites For Writers

*** Although this book can be read as pure text, it is best read on a tablet or computer
in order to click through the links for extra material ***

Any questions?

Tweet me: @thecreativepenn
www.TheCreativePenn.com/contact

Table of Contents

About you	3
About me	4
How to use this blueprint	8
Who is Author 2.0 anyway?	10
For the love of writing	15
7 steps to write your novel	16
How to write non-fiction	16
How to write first draft material	16
What happens after the first draft?	20
How to balance your time	23
Your publishing options and your goals	27
It's not just one book. Your rights and how to exploit them	30
Pros and cons of traditional publishing	33
Self-publishing vs being an indie (independent) author	34
Pros and cons of being an indie author	38
Your book fundamentals	40
How to self-publish a print book	43
How to self-publish an audio book	44
How does the money work?	46
Marketing introduction	51
Marketing myths you need to forget	52
Discoverability and how people find your book	56
10 questions you need to answer honestly if you want to sell more books	59
How to sell books with social media	65
The arc of the indie author journey. From first book to CEO of your global media empire	70
Your next steps	75

ABOUT YOU



You're a writer.

You have a book, or books, already or you want to write one (or several). You'd love to have people all over the world reading your words.

You want to improve your craft and learn from people who are more experienced than you. You want to experiment with your creativity. It's your dream to be a successful author.

You want to be published.

It would be great to have your book on the shelves of your local bookstore, selling globally and a big publishing deal. But you don't know how to achieve this or even what the publishing options are these days. You've heard that it's hard to get published, or maybe you've been rejected before, and you don't know much about how publishing works in general. Perhaps you've been traditionally published before, and now want to explore this new world of digital publishing.

You may have heard about self-publishing or even tried it yourself. You'd like to publish a print book, maybe even an audiobook, but you don't want to get ripped off in the process.

You've heard success stories of people who have made a lot of money through self-publishing and you wonder whether you can do this too.

You want to sell your books and make a good income from them.

Maybe your book is available for sale but not performing as well as you would like. Or you're coming up to a book launch and don't know where to start.

You know that you need to learn about marketing. You've heard that you need to do paid ads, or blog or tweet or Instagram/TikTok but you don't want to waste your time. You'd rather be creative — but you know that writers have to pay the bills, so you want to find the most effective ways to market your book. Perhaps you'd like to leave your day job and make a living from your writing.

You've been reading lots of books and blogs, and listened to a ton of podcasts, but **you're still overwhelmed by the amount of information online**. You don't know what you should do but you're keen to learn more. You want to cut through the noise and move forward with your dreams and goals of writing, publishing and marketing.

You're ready to learn.

Is this you? If any of this applies, you'll find this ebook useful.

ABOUT ME

Hi! I'm Joanna Penn.

Like you, I'm on the writer's journey and since I started back in 2006, I've learned a lot about writing, publishing, book marketing and making a living with my writing. I want to share my lessons in order to save you time, money and heartache along the way.

Firstly, here's a bit about me so you know where I'm coming from.

Writing as [J.F.Penn](#), I'm an Award-nominated, New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of thrillers, dark fantasy, crime, and action adventure.



I write non-fiction under Joanna Penn, aimed at inspiring and educating authors and creatives. You can find links to all my books in ebook, print, audiobook as well as some in Large Print and Workbook editions at: www.TheCreativePenn.com/books

My site, [The Creative Penn](#), offers articles and an award-winning podcast on writing, publishing, marketing and making a living with your writing, and its been voted one of the Top 10 Sites for Writers on Writer's Digest several years running.

I'm also an international professional speaker, podcaster, and award-winning creative entrepreneur. I left my day job in 2011 and I run a multi-six-figure business based around my writing.

But it wasn't always like this! Let's wind back the clock a little.

I have always wanted to write a book. I'm sure we have that in common!



Since I was a little girl, I just wanted to be a writer and see my name in print!

Here's me at a young age, lost in thought while writing (I try to avoid the biscuits these days!).

But somehow, as the years went by and life got serious, I moved away from creative pursuits and into the corporate world.

I worked all over Europe, Australia and New Zealand as an international IT consultant with large companies, specializing in implementing financial systems. It was a great life in many ways but there was always a nagging sense that I was missing the real point of my life. Over time, I felt my creative spark dwindle and die. I wasn't happy but I didn't know what to do about it.

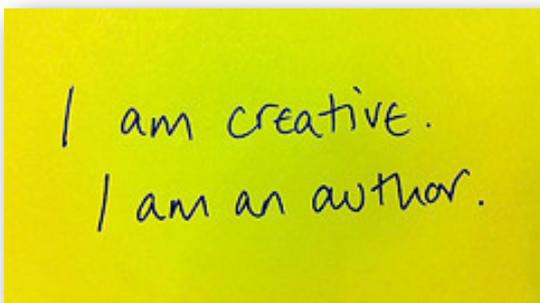
Back in 2000, I resigned, left London for the Australian outback and swore never to go back to consulting. My adventures were fantastic (yes, that's me in the red jumpsuit) but eventually I ran out of money and went back to IT.

This cycle repeated itself a number of times, and I tried starting several businesses that didn't work out either...

Finally, in 2007, I was really, seriously, over it.

I began investigating what else I could do with my life that would be helpful to other people and also enable me to escape my day job. I wanted to love what I did every day, but how could I achieve that?

At the time, I read two books that made a huge impact on me: *The Success Principles* by Jack Canfield and *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch. They talked about following your dreams and using affirmations to set your intentions, as well as taking 100% responsibility for your life.



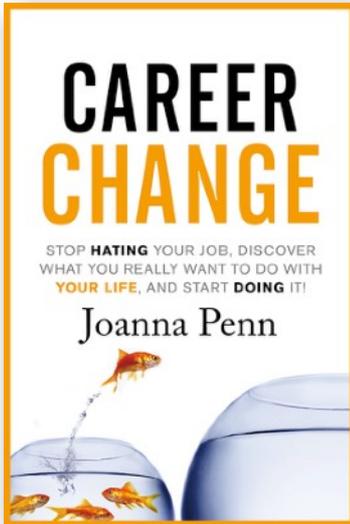
But the problem with changing your life is that you need to know what you want instead of the status quo. And when I looked at what I had always wanted, it was only ever to be a writer.

So I came up with my affirmation:



“I am creative. I am an author.”

I carried those words with me on a card in my wallet, because at the time, I was *not* creative and I was *not* an author. Sure, I wrote diaries and letters, but I couldn't associate the word creative with myself. I couldn't even say the phrase out loud at first, but then I started whispering it on the commute home (when no one was around!)



I moved to four days a week at the day job to give myself head-space to write my first book. I sacrificed money for time. This is now my #1 tip for changing your life. **You need to clear a space for the new you to emerge.**

I spent the extra day every week as well as the weekends and evenings researching why I was so unhappy and how I could change my life. This turned into the subject for my first book, now rewritten and republished as [Career Change: Stop hating your job, discover what you really want to do with your life, and start doing it!](#)

After writing it, I initially thought I would go down the traditional publishing route — but after researching the amount of time it would take, I decided to self-publish.

In April 2008, I self-published my first book.

I was so happy and proud of myself! I thought that I was going to change the world and free millions of corporate slaves from their miserable lives! I spent money on printing physical books and did press releases, featuring on radio and national TV. That's me, right, at Channel 9 in Australia, recording for *A Current Affair*, a national TV show.



But I only sold a few books.

Literally, a few. Even with national TV, print and radio.

I was devastated, but I didn't intend to give up (the affirmations were really kicking in now!). I discovered that the first book you write will change *your* life. It really did change mine, as I learned the process of writing and publishing a book. I had found my purpose.

But in order to make this into a career, I needed to actually sell books as well as write them.

At that point, I didn't have a clue about marketing online. I had focused on learning traditional PR, but surely the internet was the way to reach more readers?

So I started researching and buying books and online programs to learn about blogging and podcasting and other methods of internet marketing.

After a couple of other attempts at blogging, I started [The Creative Penn](#) in



December 2008 to share what I had learned with the 'failure' of my first book.

For example, I spent thousands of dollars on printing books which didn't sell (left), and only later discovered print-on-demand and selling on Amazon. I'd also been sucked into a scam on compilation books which made me angry and disillusioned.

I was determined that no one else would pay the price I did, and I wanted to save people time, money and emotional energy on their own journey.

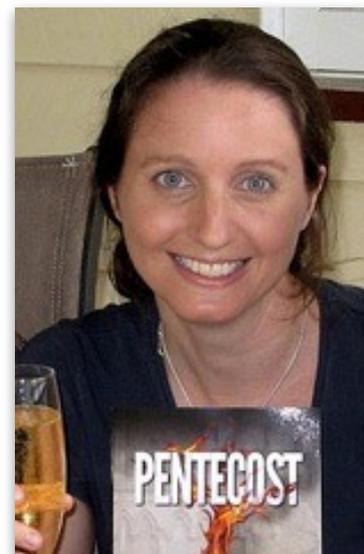
I also started feeling more creative, and the business name 'The Creative Penn' came to me on the commute one day. I claimed the word 'creative' for myself and have grown into it over time!

Since then, The Creative Penn has expanded as I have personally grown as a writer. I continue to invest in my education as an author and entrepreneur and I absolutely love the online author community.

In 2009, I decided that **it was time to try fiction as my next expression of creativity.** I participated in [NaNoWriMo](#), National Novel Writing Month, which sparked the ideas for my first novel.

After learning a whole new set of skills, I self-published *Pentecost*, my first novel in February 2011. I re-titled and rebranded it as [Stone of Fire](#) in 2015. (Yes, you can do that when you self-publish!)

The sequel, [Crypt of Bone](#), was published a year later and I have continued to add to my number of books - fiction and non-fiction. In March 2014, my book, [One Day In Budapest](#), was included in a thriller box-set which [hit the New York Times and USA Today bestseller lists](#). Quite a journey! I now have 30+ books available in ebook, print and many in audiobook format as well as Large Print and workbook editions.



In October 2011, I decided that my affirmation had been fulfilled and [resigned my day job as an IT consultant](#) in order to focus on my fiction writing and also on The Creative Penn community of writers and authors. My income now comes from the sale of my fiction and non-fiction books, online courses for authors, affiliate sales, and podcast sponsorship. This is now my business as well as my passion! I cover all the details in my book, [How to Make a Living with your Writing](#), if that is something you want to achieve as well.



In 2015, my income as an author entrepreneur hit six figures and then multi-six-figures in the following year, where it has stayed every year since. I continue to write fiction and non-fiction books, and share my author journey along the way in my weekly [Creative Penn Podcast](#).

I share my journey with you as encouragement, because I understand the fears that come with writing and the doubts that plague us all. I'm an introvert, so a lot of things continue to challenge my comfort zone, and I've been crushed and hurt along the way, as I'm sure you have too.

But I'm also truly excited about the years to

come, as we are part of an incredible shift in the industry. I hope that this book inspires and educates you, because being an author right now is a fantastic adventure!

I hope you'll join me on the journey. For more of my articles marking key points in my journey, check out: www.TheCreativePenn.com/timeline

HOW TO USE THIS BLUEPRINT

This ebook aims to empower you as an author, and help you understand your choices around writing, publishing and marketing, as well as creative business.

It's intended to help you through the massive amount of information on the internet because in this fast-moving publishing world, things change all the time.

I get emails every day from people who are unsure of their options or who have been ripped off by companies who take their money and their rights. I hear from authors who have signed all their rights away to publishers who don't utilize those rights, and authors whose book has come out and then they have been left alone to market it without any education.

I want you to know what's possible for authors these days.



I've tried to be succinct and draw together disparate sources of information from the various areas so you can read it through from start to finish, or just dip in and out of the chapters if there is something you're particularly interested in.

There are **lots of hyperlinks to more information**, indicated by underlined text, so it's best to read online in order to click through.

Most of my information is free, but I'm also running a business, so throughout the Blueprint, you will find links to my own books, courses and products as well as affiliate links to those that I use myself. **I only recommend people I trust and/or products and books I've used personally**, so I hope you will find them useful if you want to delve in further.

Of course, there is no guarantee of success for any of us, but the information in this Blueprint should help you with new ideas for what you can do.

Part 1 is on **writing and editing**. Even though many people's questions are around publishing and marketing, the creation part of the process is still the most important. Writers write and edit — then they publish and market.

Part 2 is about your **publishing options** and outlines your choices, so that you can make the right decision for your book.

Part 3 is an overview of **book marketing principles** and some tactics.

Part 4 is about **making a living from your writing** and becoming a creative entrepreneur.

You should know that I'm not (yet) a famous multi-millionaire writer!

I'm just an author trying to make an impact and share what I learn along the way. I am always experimenting and there is an amazing network of authors online who are sharing what they do and their results. Together we will work our way through this new publishing world. So let's get started!



WHO IS AUTHOR 2.0 ANYWAY?

In the olden days, Author 1.0 would toil away for years writing their book.



Finally, they would finish it and send it to an agent or publisher in a big envelope. They would write lots of query letters and proposals, attend pitch-fests at conferences and send a lot of submission emails.

Then they would wait for the response ... and wait ... and wait ... and hope.

Meanwhile, agents and publishers sat amongst piles of these great works and despaired at their overworked lives. There were some gems, but it was hard to find them in the cluttered inbox or slush pile of paper.

They tried to do their best but they secretly wondered if there could be a better way.

Some of the manuscripts made it out of the pile and onto international bookshelves, but most did not.

The writer continued to wait ... and slowly, the rejection slips piled up.

Publishers gave huge advances to big name authors and famous people, and agents told new authors to:

“Go build your author platform and then we might be interested.”



Author 1.0 suffered many rejections before finally getting an agent, then more rejections before getting published. This all took a lot of time – but finally their book made it out into the world. They held physical book signings and saw meagre sales in local bookstores. They relied on the assigned book publicist to make the press. Review copies were sent out and Author 1.0 hoped for some media attention.

They sat at home and waited for royalty checks, working a day job to make ends meet, hoping to win the lottery that is literary success.

The publicist moved onto the next book in the queue. The bookstore returned the extra copies that didn't sell. The publisher turned to the next book on the list. The

author had no way to reach the readers who loved their book to tell them about the next one. So much was out of their control.

But the good news is that Author 2.0 has arrived!

The publishing world has changed and Author 2.0 has choices and opportunities to write, publish, sell and promote online, direct to the book-buying public.

Author 2.0 can build their own platform and attract agents and publishers, or they can publish, sell and promote their own books, and even make a living with their writing.

Author 2.0 is empowered to write, publish and promote their own books or use the tools they learn about to leverage a publishing contract.

Writing your book has changed.

You can write online, build an audience and get feedback on your work through sites like Wattpad, Radish or blogging. You can collaborate, co-write, or crowdsource as you create. You can experiment with online experiences, transmedia stories, apps and serialized books, and play with subscription models like Patreon or Substack.

You can use tools like [Scrivener](#) to help organize your work and optimize your output. You can educate yourself on the craft of writing by listening to free [podcasts](#) or buying [online courses](#), because authors are now sharing their experience online through blogs and books.

Publishing your book has changed.

You can hire a [professional freelance editor](#), as well as a [cover designer](#), a proofreader and any other specialists you might need if you want to self-publish.

You can use **Print-on-Demand technology** to get your book directly onto the biggest bookstores in the world, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, as well as independent



online bookstores globally. You don't need to hold stock, and there are no hassles with storage or postage, you just get paid royalties monthly. And it's environmentally friendly, because no excess books are pulped.



You can **publish your ebook on Kindle, Kobo, Nook and Apple Books**, as well as other global ebook retailers through sites like Draft2Digital, PublishDrive, Smashwords, or Streetlib. You can reach a global audience with your words within 24 hours as well as receiving up to 70% royalty. Readers can consume your books on e-readers, tablets and cellphones, as well as in print anywhere in the world.

You can **distribute your book as an audio book or as a podcast** through services like ACX and Findaway Voices. You can even consider other language markets through pitching publishers or doing joint venture deals with translators.

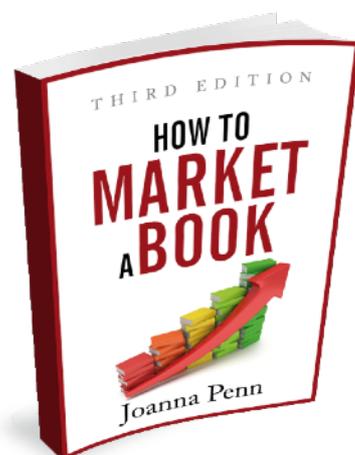
Author 2.0 is empowered and understands their choices around publishing, pro-actively deciding per project.

They may choose to go with a traditional publisher, and they understand the contractual clauses that can be detrimental to their career. They may choose to self-publish and reach readers on their own terms. They may choose to be a hybrid author, using selective rights licensing for one book, or doing some books with traditional publishers and self-publishing others.

Marketing your book has changed.

Author 2.0 reaches readers directly through online tools to market their books. They own their website and [email list](#), building a core group of readers who love their work and who are ready to buy when the next book launches.

They use **paid advertising** to reach readers on specific platforms like Amazon, Facebook and BookBub, **content marketing** to attract people through blogging, podcasting, video, images, or other useful, interesting or entertaining media. They use **social media** to network with other authors and build their brand in a crowded market, using authenticity to draw people in.



They give away books, seek reviews from book bloggers and focus on **forms of marketing that have a clickable link to buy**. They say 'yes' to traditional PR



opportunities but understand that this is more about long-term brand building than immediate sales.

They know that marketing is about **long-term investment and growing an audience**, as well as spike sales and short-term promotions to hit the bestseller lists.

They do some marketing themselves, but also work with professional freelancers to help through author

marketplaces like [Reedsy](#).

They understand that traditional publishers generally want authors who can market and promote themselves online and off. So regardless of publishing direction, marketing is a necessary skill for authors these days.

Author 2.0 makes money through multiple streams of income, receiving royalties from online retailers from multiple, global markets. They may also have income from product sales, speaking fees, sponsorship and affiliate sales.

Above all, Author 2.0 is empowered.

I hope that you will feel like an Author 2.0 by the end of this blueprint!

PART 1:

Writing and Editing

FOR THE LOVE OF WRITING

I'm passionate about writing. I believe that it can help us express our imaginations and heal our deepest wounds. We can connect with people across time and distance through our words. We can entertain, make people think — or even change their lives.



Writing for the sake of writing is absolutely fantastic!

I've been writing journals for many years. I have piles of them next to my desk, mostly plain-paged Moleskine and Leuchtturm in shades of red and blue, with a few other types thrown in. Some of those thoughts appear in [The Successful Author Mindset](#).

But I journal for the sake of writing, for the need to work through what's in my head.

My friend and creative mentor, [Orna Ross](#), uses free writing every day as a way to connect with her unconscious, uncover new understandings and center

herself creatively for the day. Many creative people have a similar practice, in the same way a musician might play scales or warm up for the main creative process.

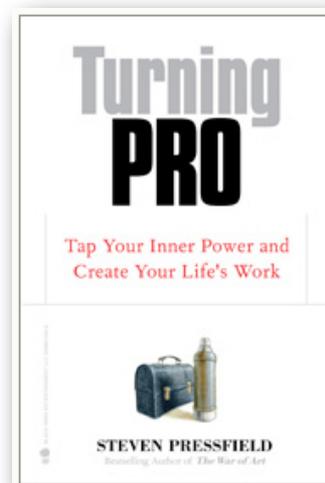
So indulge your need to write and express whatever you want to, but I presume you are reading this because you want to take your words further than your own private life.

You want to be read, you want to connect with readers.

This section includes a few things that might help you with the process of turning your writing into something worth publishing. But the words are still the most important thing. After all, you can't publish and market a book that hasn't been written.

People always ask for book recommendations, so here are some of mine for writing:

- [Bird by Bird - Anne Lamott](#)
- [Writing down the bones - Natalie Goldberg](#)
- [On Writing - Stephen King](#)
- [War of Art: Break through the blocks and win your inner creative battles - Steven Pressfield](#)
- [Turning Pro: Tap your inner power and create your life's work - Steven Pressfield](#)



You can see a whole load more book recommendations on my [Books for Writers list](#).

7 STEPS TO WRITE YOUR NOVEL

If you'd like help with writing your novel, I did a free live webinar where I went through 7 steps that will get you from idea to edited first draft, plus a bonus segment where I go through how to get the book written in a year.



[Click here to watch the video of the presentation,](#)
[or read the notes that go along with it.](#)

I also have a multimedia course on *How to Write a Novel*. [Click here to find out more about it.](#)

HOW TO WRITE NON-FICTION

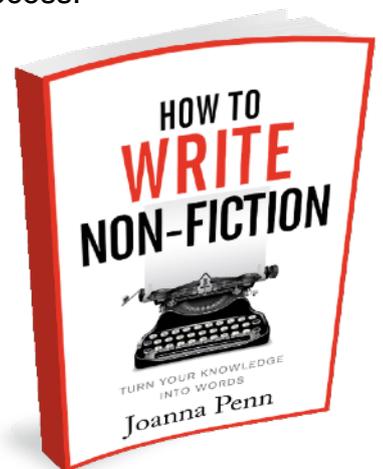
I write both fiction and non-fiction and the two require a different process.

If you need help with writing non-fiction, everything I know is in my book and course on the topic.

[Click here for a free step-by-step guide through the process](#)

[Click here to check out the book](#)

[Click here to check out the course](#)



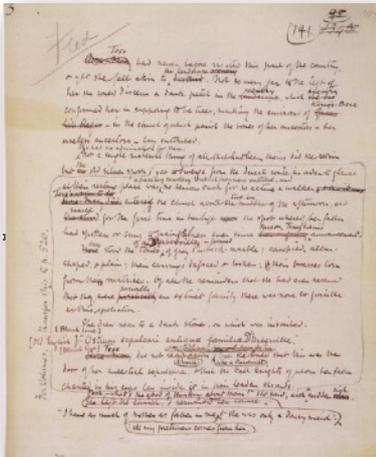
HOW TO WRITE FIRST DRAFT MATERIAL

To write any kind of book, you have to get words on a page. That is simple, but not easy, and remains the constant challenge of any writer.

But one realization changed my own writing life and freed me from the myths of creative genius: Your first draft material is allowed to suck — and often does — and that's okay.

Don't worry about it, just write.

As evidence, if you visit the British Library in London, you can see a draft of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. His handwritten scrawl and crossing-out marks litter the page, and he is considered one of England's finest literary writers.



“Write shitty first drafts” Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

A perfect sentence does not appear fully formed on the page, and it is not followed by another one, and another, to create a perfect story in one go. That's not how writing works for most authors — but it is the myth of writing which we must dispel in order to move forward.

“Writing is rewriting” Michael Crichton

Remember that, and then go write a ton of first draft material that you can shape into something marvelous later. I don't recommend sharing it with anyone until it has been [edited](#), and there's more on this later.

So how do you get your first draft material from your head onto the page? Here are some of my tips.

(1) Set a word count goal

Many pro-authors, like Stephen King, have a goal of 2000 words per day, even birthdays and Christmas.

If you don't have some kind of goal, you won't achieve anything. I really believe that. It also breaks the work down into manageable chunks.

For a full length novel, say 80,000 words
@2000 words per day = 40 days of consistent writing.

For a novella, say 30,000 words @2000 words per day = 15 days of consistent writing

Of course, you have the editing process after that, but **you can't edit a blank page**. So set your word count goal, and get writing.

I always use a word count goal for my first draft phases and log them on a physical calendar on my wall. I relax that during the editing phase. That's just my way of working, and you must find what works for you.





(2) Use Write Or Die

This awesome software at WriteOrDie.com is a way to burst through the internal editor that snipes at you as you write a load of words in your first draft phase.

The software allows you to set a goal in time or word count, and then you have to keep typing or it will play some psycho violin music, or the screen will start turning red, or, in kamikaze mode, your words start disappearing. At the end of the session, when you reach your goal, trumpets sound and you can save the text.

I highly recommend this if you are struggling. It's how I wrote 20,000 words in my first [NaNoWriMo \(National Novel Writing Month\)](#) and created the core of what eventually became my first novel. Maybe 5000 words survived the culling/editing, but you have to write a lot of crap to shape it into something good (at least when you're starting out!)

(3) Use Scrivener

Scrivener is amazing writing software, and it also has some cool productivity tools. I have now written over 35 books with it — fiction and non-fiction.

I like to put as many one-line scene descriptions in as possible as placeholders before I start writing, so I have somewhere to start each day. This is basic plotting or outlining, one of the tips to writing more and faster. I will likely change them, add to them, but it means that whenever I sit down for a writing session, I can start filling in the blanks if I don't know what else to do.



There's also a **Compose mode** where you can fill the whole screen with a blank piece of paper, which keeps you focused.

Check out the software at TheCreativePenn.com/scrivenersoftware

(4) Set a timer for focus sessions, and use Freedom or other software to turn the internet off



As part of my daily productivity tools, I set my iPhone timer for 90 minutes and then I write, or edit, or work on a specific project for that long. You can start with 10 mins or 15 or whatever you can manage.

The important thing is not to get distracted in that time, and DO NOT check the internet or Twitter or your email or make a cup of tea or anything. You can use software like Freedom or Anti-social to stop you accessing the net if you really can't resist without help.

[More tips in my book, [Productivity for Authors](#)]

(5) Get up early and work while your brain is still half asleep

I wrote my first four books, as well as building my blog, while working full time as an IT consultant. I used to get up at 5am and write for an hour before work.

I think the early morning helps because your brain isn't polluted by everything that has happened in the day, and your internal editor is still asleep. However, this totally depends on whether you're a night-owl and also your family situation. So find your own groove, but the point is, you need to schedule some time that you don't have normally to get stuff done.

Trust the process of emergence

I heard this in an interview with [Brene Brown on Jonathan Fields' Goodlife Project](#), and it's totally true.

Even if you plot your books, sometimes you won't know what is coming until the words appear on the page. Something happens when you commit to writing regularly, and you write through the frustration, annoyance and self-criticism.

Creativity and ideas emerge. Original thought emerges.

Something happens – but only if you trust emergence and get on with it. Again, it's simple, but it's not easy (but it's worth it!)

If you don't force yourself to get the first draft material down, you will never have anything to work with. So fight resistance and get it done.



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE FIRST DRAFT?

So now you have a load of words on the page — but I get emails all the time from writers who are confused about what happens next.

Here's my editing process, and I believe it's relevant whether you are writing fiction or non-fiction.

[You can also click here to watch my video or read the article on how to find and work with a professional editor.](#)



(1) Rewriting and redrafting. Repeat until satisfied.

For many writers, the first draft is just the bare bones of the finished work and often no one will ever see that version of the manuscript. You can't edit a blank page, but once those words are down, you can improve on them.



I love the rewriting and redrafting process.

Once I have a first draft, I print the whole thing out and do the first pass by hand. I write all kinds of notes in the margins and scribble and cross things out. For fiction, I note down new scenes that need writing, continuity issues, problems with characters and much more. For non-fiction, it's often more structural issues, chapter order or material to be added or removed. That first pass usually takes a while. Then I go back and rewrite based on those notes.

After that's done, I will print again and repeat the process, but that usually results in fewer changes. After that next edit, I add all the changes back into [Scrivener](#) which is my #1 writing tool.

Before I hand the manuscript to an external editor, I self-edit using [ProWritingAid](#), a fantastic tool for improving your writing by picking up grammar issues, typos, passive writing and other issues. This will save you time and money when you move to the next stage of professional editing.

[Click here for my ProWritingAid tutorial](#)

Editors specialize in different kinds of editing as well as different genres, so choose one that works for your project.



You can find my list of recommended editors at: www.TheCreativePenn.com/editors

(2) Structural edit/ Editorial review

A structural edit is really useful if this is your first book, or the first book in a series. A structural edit is more like a manuscript assessment with feedback provided as a separate document, broken down into sections based on what is being evaluated.

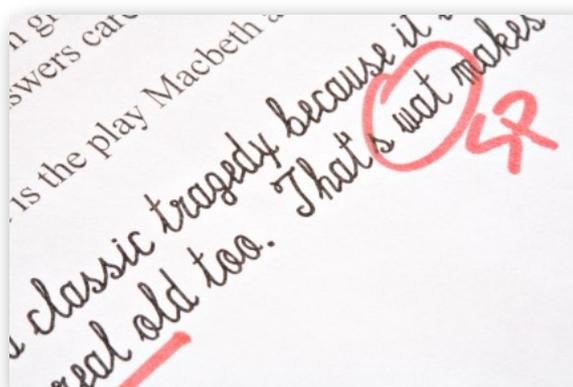
(3) Revisions

When you get a structural edit back, there are usually lots of revisions to do, possibly even a complete rewrite. This may take a while ...

(4) Line edits

The result of line editing is the classic manuscript covered in red ink as an editor slashes your work to pieces! This particular kind of editing also seems to be called different things in various countries so be sure to verify your expectations against your editors when you query.

Line edits are more about word choice, grammar and sentence structure. There may also be comments about the narrative itself but this is more about the reading experience by someone who is skilled at being critical around words.



The first time you receive a line edit, it will hurt.

You think you're a writer and then someone changes practically every sentence. Ouch. But it will improve your book!

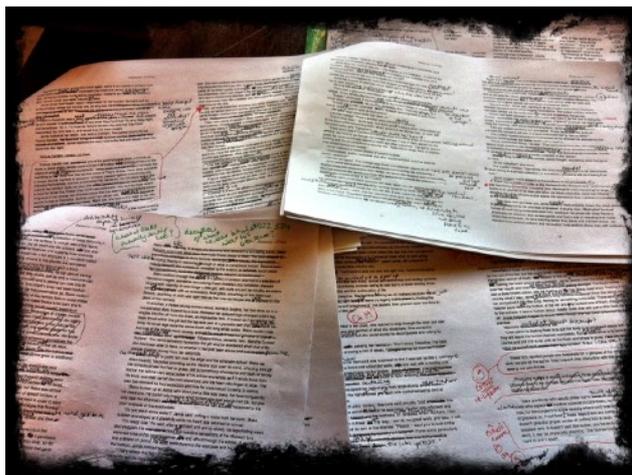
Editing makes your book stronger, and the reader will thank you for it.

Editors make us better writers and I learn something new every time I go through the process. That's why I think that professional editing is non-negotiable for serious career writers.

(6) Revisions

You'll need to make more changes after this feedback. This can sometimes feel like a complete rewrite and takes a lot of detailed time as you have to check every sentence.

I usually make around 80% of the changes suggested by the line editor, as they are usually sensible, even though I am still resistant at first. It is important to remember that you don't have to change what they ask for, so evaluate each suggestion but with a critical eye.



After this last rewrite, you cannot even see any mistakes you might have made. You are likely to be fed up with your manuscript entirely! At this point, I suggest resting your manuscript for a couple of weeks, or longer if you can bear. You can then go back to it with fresher eyes and make any final changes.

At some point, you have to stop editing. There will always be more to change, but when it is just the last 2% every time, then stop and move to the next phase.

(7) Proofreading

Inevitably, your corrections for line editing will have exposed more issues, albeit minor ones.

As part of the final stages of my process, I run the whole book through [ProWritingAid](https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2020/04/17/writing-software-prowritingaid/) again, which you can use with your Scrivener project. You can see my tutorial at: <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2020/04/17/writing-software-prowritingaid/>

Just before publication, I get a final read-through from a proofreader. After *Crypt of Bone* was published, I even got an email from a reader saying congratulations because they had failed to find a single typo. Some readers really do care, for which I am grateful and that extra investment at the end can definitely pay off in terms of polishing the final product.

(8) Publication

Once I have finished my corrections, I Compile the manuscript to MS Word. Then I use [Vellum](#) to format the files for publication - more on that in Part 2.

(9) Post-publication

The beauty of digital publishing is that you can update your files later. If someone finds a typo, no problem. If you want to update the back matter with your author website and mailing list details, no worries. If you want to rewrite the whole book, you can do that too (although some sites have stricter rules than Amazon around what is considered a new version.)

Budget: Time and money

Every writer is different, every editor is different and there are no rules.

But in terms of time, **your revision process may take at least as long as the first draft** and probably longer (unless you're Lee Child, who just writes one draft!).

For one of my books, [Desecration](#), the first draft took about four months and the rewriting process took about six months. There are people much faster than me, and much slower - so don't compete, just find your own process.

In terms of money, I would budget between \$500 – \$3000, depending on what level of editing you're looking for, and how many rounds.

[You can find a list of editors and their prices here.](#)

I believe that editing at all these different stages is important, because it is our responsibility to make sure our books are the best they can be. If you can't afford professional editing, then consider using a critique group locally or online, or barter with other writers in the genre.

The more eyes on the book before it goes out

into the world, the better.



HOW TO BALANCE YOUR TIME

One of the most common questions I get asked is, "how do I balance my time between writing and marketing, as well as the rest of life?"

[Click here for the video I recorded on this topic.](#)

Marketing doesn't have to cannibalize your writing, because there are two kinds of time:

(1) Creative time

This is when you have the energy to be at your creative best. This may take you some effort to work out, but for me, it's always the morning. When I had a full-time job, I would get up at 5am to write before work, because after work, I had nothing left. I was exhausted. But everyone has different approaches, so pick whatever time



is right for you.

This doesn't mean that you can magically stream gorgeousness onto the page at that time every day, because **creativity is hard work, with occasional moments of flow**. But mostly, it's about getting your butt in that chair and writing words that you can later edit into something fantastic.

So decide on a time and then make sure that you actually use that time to create something new in the world.

(2) Downtime

Then there is the other time that is not taken up by your family, or work commitments, but it is time when you're mentally tired. When I worked full time, this was generally any time after work, or during any breaks I managed to snatch, plus evenings.



This is where you have to make some decisions.

How much do you want this?

We all have the same number of hours in the day, so you have to decide what you will do with yours. Here's how I changed my life to make room to do the other stuff, the marketing stuff, the business-building, the platform ...

*** I cut down my TV hours.** Yes, there are some awesome shows on TV but actively choosing your entertainment rather than passively watching whatever comes on helps open up time slots. This may free up several hours per night, or even just an extra 30 mins that you can use. Or if you're a night owl, use this time to write and your early morning slot for a marketing session.

*** I gave up 20% of my income.** This is pretty hardcore, but I decided to move to four days a week at work, meaning I could spend an extra day on writing and building my business. This was a serious career change for me, but I was willing to invest in it. I had already spent eight years on other failed business ideas (see my book [Career Change](#) for more detail!) so I was committed.

I realize that these steps might not be for everyone, but you have to decide what you want to achieve, and by when, and then consider what you will give up for that. How will you make room in your life?

It's not easy, but then nothing worthwhile is. Luckily for us, writing is a lifelong career and so is building your personal brand and platform online. Where do you want to be in five or ten years' time?

How do I manage my time now?

Now I'm a full-time author-entrepreneur, I still have to balance my time carefully. My best tool is Google Calendar. I plan months ahead and schedule time for first draft writing and editing in the morning and separate time for marketing and business in the afternoon, as well as interviews, meetings and events.



During first draft writing, I track word count in my journal. More tips in [Productivity for Authors](#).

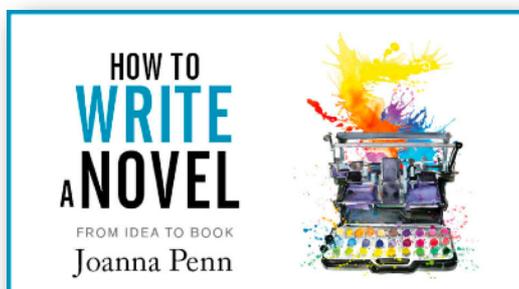
You have to decide on your goals and take control of your life and your time. That's it. **It's simple — but like so many things, it's not easy.**

Consider some of the following questions:

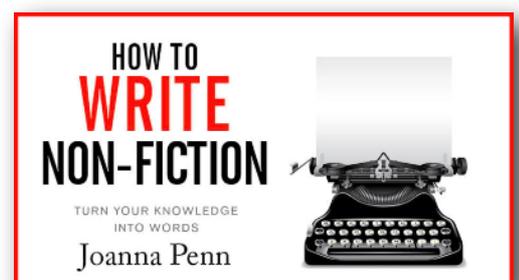
- * How do you spend your time now?
- * Where do you want to be in five years' time in terms of your book sales?
- * What can you potentially give up to make some room for writing and marketing activities?

[Click here for more articles and podcasts on How to Write a Novel](#)

[Click here for more articles and podcasts on How to Write Non-Fiction](#)



If you want to write a novel and need more help, check out my course, [How to Write a Novel: From First Draft to Finished Manuscript](#)



If you want to write non-fiction, I also have a [book](#) and a [multimedia course](#).

PART 2: Publishing

YOUR PUBLISHING OPTIONS AND YOUR GOALS



There's a lot of confusion about publishing options in an increasingly digital world. The industry is in a state of flux, with things changing every week, so even those of us who monitor publishing news are trying to keep up.

The global pandemic accelerated change in the industry, pushing more of publishing into the digital space and encouraging readers to try ebooks and digital audio, as well as buying more print books

online. All these things mean there are more options than ever for publishing *your* book.

In this section, I'll outline your broad options, as well as trying to give some direction on how you can make decisions about your future.

My aim is to empower you with knowledge so that you can make the best decisions for you and your creative work. Your decisions might be different to mine, or other authors, so assess the information and then work out your own journey. There are no rules, and that is both exciting and intimidating, but armed with this knowledge, you will hopefully be better off. I'll go through some of the options here, but I also recommend [Jane Friedman's Key Book Publishing Paths](#) which compares them in more detail.

Traditional publishing

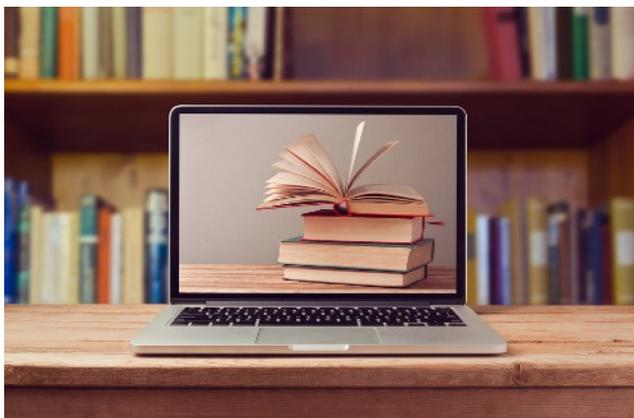
This is the established route of querying agents and submitting to publishers, which can take a long time. Agents and publishers always want to hear from new authors, but they may also be interested in working with successful self-publishers or authors with existing platforms, and they may even pitch the author directly based on successful sales.

There are also digital-only imprints which don't do print editions or use print on demand only, so going the traditional publishing route may no longer mean your book is in physical bookstores. All publishers are not equal, and all contracts are not equal, so make



sure you do your due diligence. If possible, check with other authors published by that imprint for their experiences.

Importantly, a traditional publisher will not ask for any money to publish with them. They will pay you royalties, perhaps even an advance against those royalties. If you are asked for money in order to publish, then the company fits into the partnership model as below.



Partnership publishing

In this model, the author pays upfront for services and the publisher handles all design and production tasks, as well as offering marketing services. The author has no ongoing control over the distribution, pricing etc and all payments go through the publisher.

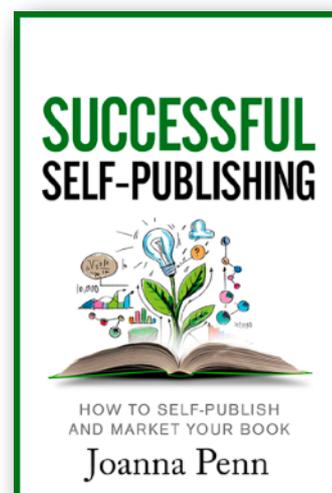
There are some fantastic companies who operate under this model, and it's especially common with non-fiction for speakers/bloggers/business-people who want to turn their knowledge into words — as well as fiction authors with a budget. [Check out my interview with John Bond from White Fox as an example.](#)

But there are also sharks in the water, companies who operate with shady terms and conditions and rip off authors along the way. I recommend checking the [Watchdog listing by the Alliance of Independent Authors](#) which ranks publishers and adds a warning if they are not acceptable. It's compiled for authors, by authors, so please check that first. You can also check [Writer Beware](#) for scams.

Professional self-publishing — or being an indie author

In this model, the author treats the creative production of their book as a business, investing in professional services upfront like [editing](#) and [book cover design](#).

The author distributes directly if possible, e.g. through Amazon KDP, Kobo Writing Life, and/or Apple Books, and then uses indie distributors like Draft2Digital for other platforms. The author receives income directly from the sale of books and the only middleman is the distributor.



This is the model I choose and I go through everything in detail in [Successful Self-Publishing](#) available as a free ebook on all platforms, and in print and audiobook formats (narrated by me!).

It's not either/or. You can choose publishing options per project.

You don't have to choose either traditional OR the indie route nowadays. You can be a hybrid author and have some books with traditional publishers, and write other books as an indie. You can even split your rights on one book, licensing foreign language rights while independently publishing in English, or licensing in one territory (e.g. US/Canada) while self-publishing elsewhere (e.g. UK and the rest of the world.)

What is your definition of success? For this book and also your career as a writer?

Here are some questions for you to consider:

- Do you just want to write one book or do you want a long term career as an author (in which case you will need to write many more)?
- Do you want to make money from it, or is your book the fulfilment of a life goal?
- Do you want your book to be in your local, physical bookstore or are you happy to sell through online distributors like Amazon?
- Do you want to sell to readers all over the world?
- Do you want to win literary prizes?
- Do you want to be accepted at literary festivals?
- Do you want to make a full-time living with your writing?
- Where does a book fit into your business?
- Do you want control over your creative output?
- What is your definition of success? Selling 1000 copies? New York Times bestseller? 6-figure book deal? Netflix adaptation?
- Are you willing to experiment and try new things?
- How much are you willing to learn in order to become successful?
- Do you just want someone else to do it all for you?



Many more questions will arise along your creative journey, but it is so important for you to think about what YOU want before you sign any contracts.

IT'S NOT JUST ONE BOOK. YOUR RIGHTS AND HOW TO EXPLOIT THEM

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of how to publish, you need to understand how valuable your work is.

Warning: this may blow your mind! It blew mine when the penny finally dropped on what this truly means for a lifetime of creative opportunities.



You may not care about the financial side of the business, perhaps money isn't a driver for you, but whether you want a traditional deal or to go indie, **you need to know how your manuscript can turn into multiple streams of income.**

The publishing business is not a charity. Publishing companies are interested in making money, and your manuscript enables them to do that.

I'm passionate about educating authors around contracts because a friend of mine signed a deal for "all rights, in all languages, in all formats existing now and to be invented, in all territories, for the life of copyright" (70 years after the death of the author) for just a few thousand dollars. She was so excited about being published by a big brand publisher, but she didn't understand the ramifications of signing away everything for so little.

[Click here for my overview on rights.](#)

For more details, check out [Closing The Deal On Your Terms: Agents, Contracts and Other Considerations](#) by Kristine Kathryn Rusch.

If you want to sign with a publisher, go ahead, but empower yourself first with the knowledge you need to sign a deal that works for your author career.

At a basic level, **your book is an intellectual property asset** and you license various rights for a certain return. Your book is not just one book — it is actually all kinds of products that can be sold in different ways.

Disclaimer: I am not a lawyer and this is not legal, contractual or financial advice. It is just my opinion and I can't answer any legal or financial questions.

Your manuscript starts as one document so authors generally think that one book equals one product, but multiple streams of income can flow from this small beginning.

For starters, you can turn that one book into multiple formats:

(1) Ebook edition - available for sale on multiple devices: Kindle, Kobo, Apple devices as well as borrowed through subscription services and libraries.

(2) Print edition - available for sale on Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and many other online bookstores, as well as being available to bookstores, libraries and universities through IngramSpark. Print can also include workbooks, Large Print editions, and hardbacks as well as paperbacks in various sizes.

(3) Audio edition - available for sale through Audible, Apple Books and other services, as well as borrowed through subscription services like Storytel and libraries.

(4) Multiply these editions by country markets, which come under 'territory' in publishing contracts.



Through Amazon, Kobo, Apple Books and NOOK as well as aggregators like Draft2Digital or PublishDrive, you can reach multiple territories. As of Jan 2022, I have sold books in 169 countries including such diverse places as Burkina Faso, Nepal and Colombia, as well as the bigger markets of US, UK, Canada, Germany and Australia. This is my map of sales from [Kobo Writing Life](#), which is only a small percentage of my overall sales. Now that's exciting!

The online book sales markets are just beginning in most markets but with the expansion of streaming internet through mobile devices, and the acceleration of digital due to the global pandemic, these international sales will only grow over time.

(5) Multiply these editions by language

If you want your books in other languages, you can hire professional freelance translators through the [Reedsy marketplace](#), in the same way that you can hire

editors. Indie authors have also started to do joint venture deals with freelancers, giving them a chance to build a reputation for themselves, as well as longer-term income.

You can also negotiate directly with publishers or with a foreign rights agent to sell on your behalf. For more help, check out [Selective Rights Licensing: Sell Your Book Rights at Home and Abroad](#) by the Alliance of Independent Authors.



These language rights can expand your market in a completely different way.

Other subsidiary rights

There are also opportunities for subsidiary rights. For example, I licensed some short stories to Kobo, which they used for the launch of Dan Brown's *Inferno*, and then for an exclusive period. After six months, the rights reverted to me and I published the collection as [A Thousand Fiendish Angels](#), in ebook, audio, and print.

You can also turn your non-fiction book into a multimedia product with video and audio that sells for more money than a book.

When do you want to license your rights?

It's completely up to you, but the position of many professional indie authors these days is more about partnership with publishers on rights deals that are good for both parties. Some indie authors take print only deals in English, retaining their ebook and audiobook rights. I've done an audiobook deal with a small press in the US, as well as French language deals for my non-fiction.

Bottom line. Your work is valuable.

Remember that in your contract negotiations.

PROS AND CONS OF TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

Let's talk about traditional publishing first, because I know that many people still dream of the book deal. This information is gleaned from my extensive network of author friends who have had book deals, because I haven't signed a big one myself (yet!).

[Click here for a video where I go through the pros and cons.](#)



Benefits of traditional publishing

- **Kudos, prestige**, validation by the industry, authority, social proof, and let's face it — ego. And there's nothing wrong with that! Many writers dream of having a big name publisher on the spine of their book, and dreams are good. Just weigh them up against your definition of success.
- **Top quality print production and distribution** to physical bookstores. Publishers specialize in this and have been doing it successfully for many years, although you use the same printers and distributors as an indie now.
- **Help from a professional team** who know the business. If you are traditionally published, you will have an editor to help you to hone the book, as well as a production team to work on getting it out to the world, and some marketing support — without paying for it upfront.
- **Reach a different audience.** Independent authors make most of their income from online sales in multiple formats, but traditional publishers can still reach an audience of people who shop for physical books in stores, airports and other physical retail outlets.
- **Acceptance into literary festivals and literary prizes.** While some prizes and festivals are opening up to indie authors, most are still the bastion of traditional publishing.
- **Potential exploitation of other rights** e.g. film. Some literary agencies have partnerships for other rights. The film deal is a lightning strike type of luck, but some authors make it, and I have always had stretch goals and dreams!

Drawbacks of traditional publishing

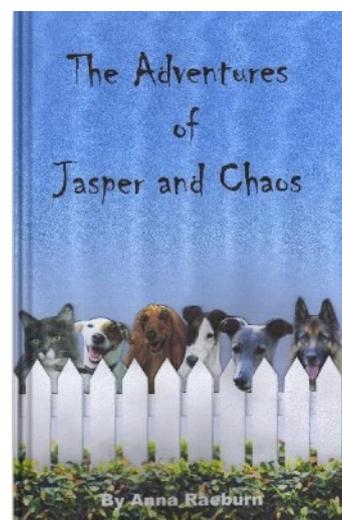
- **Lack of control** over anything except the words. You may have input but you don't have the final say around cover design, blurb, timing of publication, price or promotional activities. This is the main reason cited by authors going indie *after* traditional publishing.
- **Amount of time everything takes.** It may take a couple of years to get from your first manuscript to signed contract, but then it will likely take at least another year or 18 months until your book is on the shelves. If you have a time-critical book, or you're just ready to move onto the next project, this can be a long time to wait.
- **Lower royalty rate.** Many authors dream of a six-figure book deal but that is increasingly rare. Yes, there is a slim chance that you will hit it big, but advances are often reported as below \$10,000. Royalty rates are usually 7-25% with some digital-first publishers offering more.
- **Marketing is not a given anymore.** Publishers should market your book to bookstore buyers, but nowadays, authors are expected to participate in marketing direct to readers.
- **If you don't make it big, you can be dropped by your publisher/agent and left alone to manage anyway.** There are a lot of disillusioned authors out there, many of whom are now happily self-publishing. They thought that their dream had come true on publication and then found out that reality is not quite as dreamy. Not every author becomes a brand name like Stephen King or JK Rowling. Again, it can happen but it's more of a lightning strike or lottery win.

If you want to be traditionally published, then there are lots of books, blogs, and literary events to help you. I'll focus on being an independent author here as that is my chosen route for most of my books.

SELF-PUBLISHING VS BEING AN INDIE (INDEPENDENT) AUTHOR

The terminology and language are still evolving in this space, but there is a difference between self-publishing and being a professional independent (or indie) author.

Self-publishing for a personal project is brilliant. For example, I helped my 9 year old niece self-publish her first book, *The*



Adventures of Jasper and Chaos. It was a creative project to be proud of, put onto the family bookshelves and into the school library.

But it was not a commercial prospect and wasn't intended to be.

Your grandfather's war journal, or your own diaries, could be a similar project. Self-publishing doesn't have to be a commercial proposition, it just means that you publish by yourself, without the need for a publisher.

Although the stigma continues to diminish, self-publishing still means 'bad quality books with no editing' to many people. The main concern is that readers can't find quality in the mass of rubbish.

These kinds of books do exist, but I hope you agree that we, as authors, can do a lot better than that these days. I also believe that **readers are the new gatekeepers**, so sales online, reviews and rankings will ensure that the cream rises and the 'bad' stuff drops out of the picture. Readers are not stupid. They know what they like!

The term 'indie author' (or independent author) is increasingly claimed by authors who want a new label, one that does justice to creative quality and a professional level of production.

The term 'professional self-publishing' is also being used, as well as 'author-publisher' but I like the term 'indie author,' as it resonates with the legacy of indie musicians and indie film, two industries that have already experienced the upheaval that publishing now faces.



Consumers want to buy from the independent artists and creators they care about.

Do you shop at farmer's markets, preferring home grown veg to the supermarket? Do you buy from craftspeople on sites like Etsy, preferring individual gifts over mass market high street homogeneity? Do you enjoy local micro-brewed beer or artisan bakeries, trusting that the individual creators are

aiming for excellence and originality? That's the spirit of indie I believe in!

Indie author means truly independent

In its most basic sense, indie means that there is no separate publisher involved. Some indies set up their own micro-press, so their books have a publisher name that is not the author's (like my own [Curl Up Press](#)) but the publisher is not one of the

'author services' companies. The indie author pays the bills for production and is paid by the distributors, e.g. Amazon/Kobo, Apple Books etc, directly. The only middleman is the distributor.

Indie authors are entrepreneurs and business people

An entrepreneur is someone who creates value in the world from an idea in their mind. Authors create value in the world by turning their ideas into words and books, so by nature, we are entrepreneurial!

But entrepreneurs also take their ideas into the real world and turn them into income – and successful indie authors have to learn business skills in order to do the same.

The Creative Penn is a UK-based limited company. My books and my website, as well as my professional speaking, are part of the business. I have an accountant and I do monthly accounts. I monitor cash flow, income and expenses. I invest in creating good quality assets (books) for my long term income.

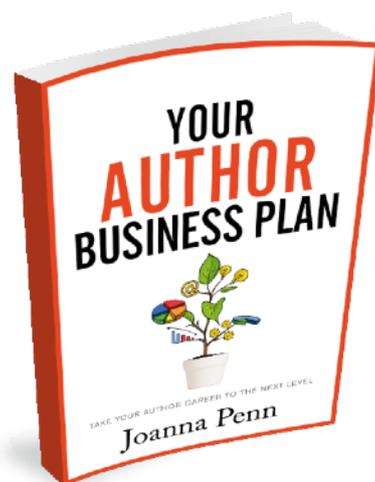
Indie authors may not all have such a developed business, but **they treat their writing and publishing in a professional, business-like manner**. That means they have to think about financials but also sales and marketing, as well as production, on top of the creative side.

Business is inherently creative, so if you are excited about the thought of taking control of your author career, then you might like to try the indie way!

Indies employ professionals as publishing involves teamwork

We all need editors. We all need help with book cover design.

The term self-publishing is a misnomer because **we don't do it all ourselves**. We have a team in the same way big publishers do. One of the biggest criticisms of self-publishing is the poor quality of the finished product, which is why it's important to take these extra steps.



As indies, we budget for and employ [professional editors](#), [professional book cover designers](#) and sometimes [formatters](#) and audiobook narrators for our books. We know that the value of our work includes the way it is perceived on the page as well as the work itself.

The charge of bad quality is one we can avoid by investing in professional services.

[Click here for a video and article on how to find and work with a professional book cover designer.](#)

Indie authors are Creative Directors

Here's the definition of 'independent author' from the [Alliance of Independent Authors](#), of which I am a proud member and advisor. It focuses on the idea of being a creative director as well as a writer.

At ALLi, 'independent' is an inclusive description and always relative (everyone needs help to write and publish well). Some of our members are fiercely indie-spirited, as DIY as it's possible to be. Others are happy to collaborate with a publisher where that seems advantageous, some working with paid publishing services, others with trade publishers.



So what marks out an indie from other authors? The Alliance allows that you are an independent author if:

- You have author-published at least one book.
- **You see yourself as the creative director** of your book, from conception to completion through publishing and beyond.
- You expect that status as creative director to be acknowledged in any partnership you negotiate, whether a paid author-service or in a deal with a trade publisher or agent.
- In any trade-publishing deal, you expect your status as an author-publisher to be appropriately acknowledged, in contracts and terms, not just lip service. If you have an established author platform, you should receive a higher royalty rate and advance than an author who does not.
- **You recognize that you are central to a revolutionary shift in publishing** which is moving from seeing the author as resource (in the new parlance 'content provider') to respecting the author as creative director.
- You are **proud of your indie status**, which you carry into all your ventures, negotiations and collaborations for your own benefit and to the benefit of all writers.

PROS AND CONS OF BEING AN INDIE AUTHOR

Here's my opinion of the benefits and drawbacks of being an independent author.

Benefits of self-publishing/ being an indie author:

Please note that these may NOT apply if you go with one of the assisted publishing options.

- **Total creative freedom and control.** You make all the final decisions over content and design, as well as pricing and timing of publication. The book doesn't even have to be a commercial prospect, so you can express your own creativity, publishing the words that you want the world to hear. There are many books that traditional publishing wouldn't consider a big enough seller that you might want to self-publish. You might also want to have a commercial bestseller, but to do it on your own terms.



- **Faster time to market.** Your ebook can be for sale less than 24 hours after clicking publish. Your print book can be for sale within a few days. If your book is time-critical, this can be a real market advantage.

- **Sell by any means, in any global market.** There's no need to wait for anyone's permission. I have sold books in 169 countries worldwide, and I don't need anyone's permission to move into new

markets.

- **Higher royalty share.** Although self-publishing is definitely not a get-rich-quick scheme, Amazon, Kobo, Apple, and other distributors offer up to 70% royalty for the author, compared to 7-25% from traditional publishing (plus another 15% of the author's share to an agent). You can make more by [selling direct](#).
- **Low risk way to test the market and get into the game.** Agents and publishers are increasingly looking for successful independent authors to work with, so by self-publishing you could attract an agent or publisher faster than going through the slush pile.
- **Positive energy** of creation, production, entrepreneurship and seizing the day, rather than the negative energy of rejection, waiting to be picked, or given permission to speak. **Indies are empowered!**

Some of the challenges of self-publishing:

- **There's less prestige in self-publishing** and some consider that there is still a 'stigma.' There is no validation by the publishing industry, unless of course, you hit the bestseller lists, at which point you're likely to be pursued by agents. But readers don't shop by publisher, so this stigma is more about your own perception, rather than reality.
- **Print distribution into physical bookshops can be difficult** for independent authors although Ingram Spark is your best bet for distribution. The best book to read about this is [Your Book In Bookstores: Guide to Print Distribution for Authors](#) by the Alliance of Independent Authors.
- **You have to find professionals to help you and you might not have the connections.** Utilizing author networks can help with this. For example, check out my lists of [editors](#) and [cover designers](#), and organizations like the [Alliance of Independent Authors](#) for more help. You can also use the [Reedsy Marketplace](#) for professionals of every kind.
- You need to **treat your writing as a business** if you want to be successful i.e. you want to make money. You will need a budget up front, and you need to have a project management mindset to get everything done. You can learn these skills, of course.
- **Exploiting other rights can be a challenge.** Selling foreign language rights as well as subsidiary rights like film/media can be difficult without a specialist agent. But increasingly this is changing, as successful indie authors are approached by professionals looking to work with new, emerging talent.

If you want to read a **book on self-publishing** to get more detail, I have included a whole load more information in **Successful Self-Publishing: How to self-publish an ebook, print book and audiobook.**



It's free on all ebook stores, and also available in print and audiobook editions (narrated by me!): www.TheCreativePenn.com/successfulselfpublishing/

If you want to join a community of active self-publishers who help each other out with information and advice, [check out the Alliance of Independent Authors](#). (I'm an active member and advisor). There's also a great blog: [How to successfully self-publish](#).

YOUR BOOK FUNDAMENTALS

Before you can self-publish your book, you need the following things in place:



- **Full edited, completed manuscript.** [Click here for a list of editors.](#) The manuscript must then be formatted into the correct version for the publishing platform. I've included some options for formatting in the next chapters on publishing.
- **Book cover** for the ebook and print book. The ebook is just the front panel and a print cover has a back and spine. [Click here for a list of book cover designers](#) or check out [canva.com](https://www.canva.com) for free ebook cover options and other graphic design templates.
- **Book title and sub-title.** If your book is non-fiction, I suggest that you research keywords for your title and sub-title. When I changed my book title from 'How to Enjoy Your Job' to 'Career Change,' the number of sales went up tenfold as more people search for the latter.
- **Book sales description/back blurb.** This is printed on the back of your book, and also acts as the sales description for your book page on the retailer's site. Make sure that you research other books in your genre to get an idea of what a good sales description is. Check out [this interview with Michaelbrent Collings on writing a great fiction sales description.](#)
- **Categories for your book.** However original your book may be, readers still need to find it, so it needs to be published in a category. You choose 2 - 5 depending on the platform, so aim for categories that make sense for your book but also that you can more easily rank in.

If you're struggling with categories, or you want to know the best sub-categories to publish in, check out the [genre reports at K-lytics](#). These reasonably priced reports crunch the Amazon data for you, and are regularly updated, so you can pick the best place for your book & the most likely place you'll get noticed by readers. [Click here to check out K-lytics reports.](#)



- **Keywords.** You can add 5-7 keywords that will help readers find your book, so learn how to research them before you choose them. The keywords can also be used for browse category rankings e.g. I used the keyword 'conspiracy' for 'One Day In Budapest' and it became a bestseller in Conspiracy Thriller. The best tool for finding effective keywords for publishing and book marketing is Publisher Rocket: www.TheCreativePenn.com/rocket and the keywords can also be used in Amazon Ads.



- **Pricing.** This is one of the most difficult things for indies, and opinions continue to change in this space. Brand new authors often try to entice readers with low prices e.g. 99c or free.

More established authors with multiple books will often have books at multiple price points, from free to premium, in order to cater for all types of reader. You can do short-term free promos, or set your book as permanently free. You can do limited time sales, and you can change your price at any point, so don't obsess too much over this at the beginning, as you can always tweak later if you self-publish.

- **ISBN.** This is a number that identifies the specific edition of your book. You need separate ISBNs for ebooks, print and audio. There are two schools of thought around ISBNs these days. Some indie authors buy packs of ISBNs and use them to identify their own company as the publisher. Others use free ISBNs from the retailers. You don't need an ISBN to publish on most platforms and I didn't use them for years. These days, I use ISBNs through my imprint, [Curl Up Press](http://CurlUpPress.com). You get to choose.

The most fundamental thing is to **write great books and continue writing them.**

The more books you have, the more readers you will please, the more sales you will make.

How to self-publish an ebook

The following sections are just an overview. There is much more detail in *Successful Self-Publishing*: <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/successfulselfpublishing/>

If you have existing contracts for your books, and /or have been published in the past, **check that you have the rights before you self-publish**. If you're a new author, you have the rights and you can do what you like. You can publish in any or all of the following ways. **There are no rules and you can sell globally!** (woohoo!)

How to publish an ebook. The fully DIY option

(1) Format your book yourself.

I realize that this idea is scary at first, but here's why you should do it yourself.

You WILL want to change your books in the future.

I can almost guarantee that you'll want to change something. It might be that one crazy typo that annoys you, that you'd otherwise have to pay someone \$50 to fix. But more likely, it will be that you want to update the back matter of your books with new links over time.

(Yes, it's likely that you will have more than one book if you get into this seriously!)

Every time you publish a new book, you will want to return to the others and link to it at the back. You might also want to update your bio with website details, or ask people to sign up for your email list. If you can't make the change yourself, you're always at the mercy of others.

I now format my [ebooks with Vellum software](#), which is absolutely amazing for creating quality, beautiful ebooks.



VELLUM
EASILY CREATE BEAUTIFUL EBOOKS



It is Mac only (although you can use MacInCloud), and I think it's the best product on the market if you want to format yourself. You can download it for free to have a play around and then purchase when you're ready to output books for publishing.

[Click here for my tutorial on how to format your ebook and print book with Vellum](#)

Vellum is Mac only and is a premium too, but there are also other options, like Atticus, or you can pay a formatter. [Click here for other formatting options](#)

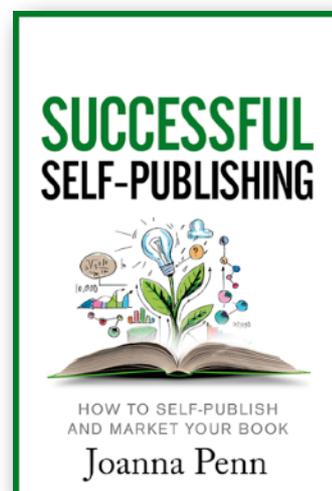
(2) Publish on the ebook stores

For the best royalty rates, **go direct to the retailers**. The process is pretty easy for each one. There's plenty of help on each of these sites and the screens are easy to use, so you don't have to know any programming to use them.

However, many authors find that publishing on every site individually can be a pain to maintain over the long term. Personally, I choose to go direct to Amazon, Kobo, and Apple and then use aggregators for the other stores. More detail in [Successful Self-Publishing](#).

You can also use paid services who will publish for you but as per the earlier chapters, make sure you vet the service by checking the [Watchdog service on the Alliance of Independent Author's site](#).

HOW TO SELF-PUBLISH A PRINT BOOK



Some indie authors publish ebook only, but publishing a print book is always a great idea, especially if it's your first book.

You can hold it in your hand and say, "I made this!" which is just the best feeling! Print books also sell well, particularly for non-fiction and in the holiday season, plus they are great for marketing and giveaways. These days, indie authors can create all kinds of sizes e.g. mass market paperback, Large Print editions and even hardbacks as well as 'normal' paperbacks.

You can also still do small print runs as an indie author, which might be worthwhile if you are a speaker or have established distribution methods, but **print-on-demand (POD)** has really transformed the possibilities.

POD means that the book is ordered from the online store by a customer or another online or physical bookstore. The order goes to the printer, one copy is printed and sent directly to the customer. You can also set up discounts so that bookstores, libraries and universities/schools can order for retail.

Books are printed to order.

No waste, no pulping. No massive financial outlay for a print run.

No need to bother with shipping to customers. No trekking down to the post office or worrying about packaging. It's not just indies who are embracing this. Many traditional publishers are now using POD for backlist or niche books and this model really took off during the global pandemic when readers increasingly ordered books online.

You can be adventurous with your creative projects with print these days, and the beauty of POD is that the costs are low, so you can play around with ideas. For example, I do [workbooks](#) and [Large Print](#) editions, as well as hardbacks and paperbacks.

There are a number of companies who can help you do this but the most recommended are:

- **KDP Print** - Amazon has added print services to the main KDP platform, so you can produce ebook and print books together. Just go into kdp.amazon.com to get started. It's free to publish. They take a percentage of sale.
- **Ingram Spark** - Ingram Spark's services offers wider extended distribution and discounting for bookstores, libraries and academic institutions as well as more printing options. There are some setup costs, but they have a lot of deals and also cheaper bulk-buy options. You can also get discount coupons if you're a member of the [Alliance of Independent Authors](#), so if you have a number of books, it's cheaper to join and use the monthly code.



I use both KDP Print and Ingram Spark for my print distribution. KDP Print gives me the best option for Amazon sales, but Ingram Spark allows me to sell with discounts which means bookstores, libraries, universities and other stores can still make their margin. You can get cheaper bulk orders if you're a speaker, or if you want to [work with schools, as Dave Hendrickson talks about in this interview](#).

- **Blurb** - I recommend Blurb for photo-books and they also have a charity option, so it's great for not-for-profits. They also have a specific store for children's projects, popular with schools and families.

HOW TO SELF-PUBLISH AN AUDIO BOOK

Audiobooks are the fastest growing segment of the publishing market and more opportunities arise every month for authors who want to get their books into audio format.



Streaming audio in smartphone apps means that it's easier than ever to buy and consume audiobooks and podcasts. Google Auto and Apple Carplay brought streaming audio to **cars** boosting commuter listening.

The **Amazon Echo** and **Google Home** brought audio into living rooms, syncing with mobile

devices. Whispersync technology means that you can read on your phone or device at breakfast, then get in your car and continue listening where you stopped, and when you get home, cook dinner while listening on your Echo, all without losing your place. Amazon also **bundles audiobooks with ebooks**, and if a customer owns an ebook version, the audiobook is cheaper.

Listeners can get great value audio subscriptions with Audible and Kobo Audio, and both are heavily investing in advertising to increase listenership.

In addition, the number of audiobooks available right now is considerably smaller than print or ebooks, so you have more of a chance of standing out.

Many traditionally published authors have signed away audiobook rights and a lot of those will never be turned into audio, so indies have the advantage of a faster response to this growing market.

My audiobooks are available on Audible, Apple Books, Google Play and on subscription services like Storytel and Scribd, as well as in libraries, and many are available to purchase direct at payhip.com/thecreativepenn, delivered by Bookfunnel, or on [Authors-Direct](#).

[Click here for links to all my audiobooks, some of which I have narrated myself.](#)

License your audiobook rights or go indie

If you're traditionally published, your publisher may have licensed your audiobook rights, or you can license them separately.

You can also self-publish audiobooks using ACX.com, the Audiobook Creation Exchange, where authors and rights holders can collaborate with narrators and producers to essentially self-publish audiobooks. It's an Amazon company and your book will be for sale on Amazon, Audible and iTunes.

At the time of writing, ACX is only available to authors in the US, UK, Canada and Ireland, but hopefully, they will be expanding to other territories over time. If you use ACX, you

have a choice to be exclusive to Amazon & Audible, or you can be non-exclusive, which means you can publish your audiobook on other sites as well.

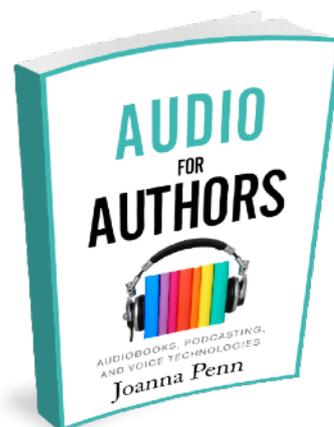
This is my preferred option and I use [Findaway Voices](#) to distribute my audiobooks to a much wider audience, including libraries, which you won't be able to distribute to if you are exclusive to Amazon.

You can hire professional narrators to read your books, or you can work a studio to record them yourself.



[Click here for more on how to self-publish an audiobook](#)

For more on audiobooks, check out my book, [Audio for Authors: Audiobooks, Podcasting, and Voice Technologies](#)



HOW DOES THE MONEY WORK?

If you want to reach readers, then I presume you want to sell books. If you're going to sell books, you're (hopefully) going to make some money. Woohoo!

Maybe money isn't your only goal, but you wouldn't take a job without knowing how you were going to be paid, would you? Yet I find that many writers don't seem to know how the money works for traditional and self-publishing.

Here are some worked examples. Of course, **every author situation is different**, some better and some worse than this, but at least it will give you a better idea of how the money flow works.

[Disclaimer: this is not financial or legal advice. It just my opinion and only an example.]

Traditional publishing example

Your income will depend on the terms of your contract. Re-read the earlier chapter on rights before signing anything, and definitely check out Kris Rusch's book, [Closing the Deal on your Terms: Agents, Contracts, and Other Considerations](#).



Your contract will include royalty rates, for example, you might be paid 15% of the net price of your book in ebook format, and 7% for paperback editions. Your contract will also include details of your advance (if there is one), dates for payment and any other rights included.

You (might) receive an advance. Authors tend to forget that this isn't an upfront payment in return for nothing. It is an advance against the royalties that the publisher expects your book to earn based on the rates in the contract. This varies per contract, although advances have fallen in the last few years, especially for first-time authors.

For the purpose of this example, let's assume a generous \$20,000 in total, which you will need to split with your agent (15% = \$3000). You're left with \$17,000 which you'll also need to pay tax on. Assuming tax of 20% = \$3400. You're left with \$13,600 after agent and tax.

The advance will likely be split into payments: a percentage on signing, a percentage when you produce the final manuscript and a percentage on publication. So let's assume 3 payments of ~\$4500 each over 18 months.

Assuming that the price of the ebook is \$4.99 and the print book is \$9.99, you would get 75c per ebook and 70c per print book based on the royalty percentages I have used. **The publisher would need to sell over ~26,000 books (without returns or discounts) before your advance 'earned out' and you received further royalty payments.**

Many authors find that the advance is all the money they ever receive from a publisher, and royalty statements are confusing and hard to read. These statements may only come every six months and are hard to reconcile, so marketing activities are difficult to track. Some publishers are moving to portal-style reporting, in the same way as Amazon and Kobo use, but many still use older systems.



If you're interested in a publishing deal, make sure you discuss how the money works, when you're paid and how you will find out about sales volume/reporting from your agent or publisher.

Indie author example (going direct, not using a paid publishing service)

- **Pay professionals upfront** — editing and cover design. Budget approx. \$1500
- **Publish ebook and print book.** The main self-publishing sites are all free to publish on. As above example, ebook is set at \$4.99 at 70% royalty rate = \$3.49 per sale for the author. For print-on-demand, you set your profit margin, which I normally set at \$2 per book, but most indies make substantially more money through ebook sales than print. I'd recommend waiting until you make some more with these formats before moving into audio as the production costs are higher.

- **You would only need to sell ~430 ebooks to make back your initial investment and break even.** Everything else after that is profit, although you need to factor in the tax on that income after your expenses have been recouped. You can keep selling that book for the rest of your life and your estate can continue selling for 50-70 years after you die. You would need to sell ~4900 ebooks to equal your advance from the traditional publisher above (before tax). And if you go on to sell 26,000 copies of that ebook at \$3.49 each ... well, you do the math. It's pretty exciting!

The risk, of course, is that you won't sell 430 copies and you won't make your money back.

Of course, that can happen, but if you follow the best practices of successful indie authors and keep writing books, you can have some confidence in making sales over time. There's no rush! The author career is a long-term marathon, not a sprint.

Amazon KDP and KDP Print, Ingram Spark, Kobo, Apple Books and NOOK all pay by **direct deposit into your bank account or by check every month**, ~60 days after the end of the month of sale. (Make sure that you check the terms of service for whichever service you use). Most of the other distributors pay monthly by PayPal.

You can also check your sales daily through various **online reporting portals** like [Scribcount](#) and **download monthly reports**. These reconcile with the payments you receive, so the process is completely transparent.

You can see how very different the financials are between the traditional and independent models, and there is risk either way.

For traditional publishing, the risk is that you give too much control and creative freedom away and it takes a long time to reach publication without income to show for it.

For self-publishing, the risk is that you end up out of pocket for upfront costs which you never make back in sales — and you have to do more of your own marketing.



You have to decide which route you want to pursue, per project, based on your goals.

Some authors use crowd-funding sites like Kickstarter to pay upfront costs for self-publishing. That can work well if you have an established audience, but it can be difficult for a new author. Personally, I invested my savings in the first book, and then invested sales income into the next book, which is how most start-up businesses run.

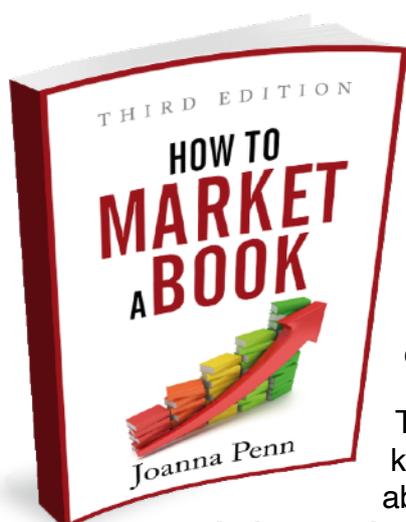
PART 3: Marketing

MARKETING INTRODUCTION

The first job of an author is, of course, to write great books, but these days, the second job is to market them.

Marketing isn't a skill that most authors have naturally, but when your book hits the shelves, and the sales *don't* start rolling in, there are only two things an author can do. Keep writing more books and ... Get to grips with marketing.

There's lots of advice in the next few chapters on aspects of marketing, as well as [free articles and audio interviews here](#).



I also have a book with everything I've learned about marketing, (un)surprisingly called '[How To Market A Book](#)', available in ebook, print, and audiobook editions.

***How To Market A Book* is for authors who want to sell more books**, but it's also for those writers who want to think more like an entrepreneur. It's for traditionally published authors who want to take control of their future, and for self-published authors who want to jumpstart a career.

There are some **short-term tactics** for those who want to kick up immediate sales, but the focus of the book is more about **instilling values and marketing principles that will help your long-term career** as a writer.

It's also about going beyond just the book, because the methods in this guide can take you from being an author into professional speaking, making money from other products and creating opportunities that you can't even imagine yet.

There are no rules in this game, but learning this kind of authentic marketing has certainly changed my life, so I want to share everything I know with you.

***How To Market A Book* covers an extensive range of marketing principles, strategies and tactics:**

- Part 1: Marketing Principles** – including myths, how to balance your time, co-opetition and generosity
- Part 2: Prerequisites for Success** – including an understanding of yourself and your target market, professional editing and cover design, your book page on the retailer websites, pricing and the use of free
- Part 3: No Platform Needed** – Short-term marketing – including how to get book reviews, paid advertising, using traditional media and tips for TV, radio and press releases

- Part 4: Your Author Platform** - Long-term marketing – including the reasons why a platform is a good thing, author branding, your author website, list-building and email marketing, content marketing and blogging, audio and podcasting, video and book trailers, social networking, professional speaking, and becoming an author-entrepreneur.
- Part 5: Launching Your Book** – including how launching has changed, soft launch, launch spikes, post launch and relaunches as well as lessons learned from some major book launches.
- Plus tips for when you get overwhelmed and plenty more links to further resources.



*“Joanna Penn’s How to Market a Book is the **most up to date, personable guide to modern book marketing I know.** Packed with tips from the charming and well-informed Penn, it’s an essential guide for indie authors who want to keep up with the ever-shifting world of book marketing.”*

~ Joel Friedlander, TheBookDesigner.com, A Self-Publisher’s Companion ~

[You can find How to Market a Book in ebook, print, and audiobook formats here.](#)

MARKETING MYTHS YOU NEED TO FORGET

There are a number of marketing myths around publishing that we need to explode at the outset. Sure, there are some lightning strikes where an author can buck the trend, but in general, these are myths. I also get emails every week from people who have paid for a marketing package from a company and feel let down by what has happened, e.g. no results from a press release, so I want to prevent that happening to you.

MYTH 1: If I get a traditional book deal, I won't have to do any marketing

Authors have always had to do some kind of marketing, but it generally involved physical appearances at bookstore signings, literary festivals or conventions, as well as media appearances and answering fan-mail.

Some authors have publicists provided by the publishing house or hire an external marketing firm to organize things, but usually this is only for the launch period — and that won’t pay the bills for very long.

From authors sharing their experience right now, it seems that:

a) Publishers are interested in authors who already have a platform, those who have built an email list and a way to sell books to readers who know them.

You will have to include your platform in your pitch to agents and they will include it in their pitch to the publisher, so marketing comes into the equation before you even get a deal.

Publishing is a business, so of course they are looking for ways to mitigate risk.

b) Publishers will do some marketing for you, but that will generally involve distribution and working with bookstore buyers,

as well as potentially advising on what you can do to help them market the book.



Even though you might have a team to advise over the launch period, you will still need to do a lot yourself. After the initial launch phase, you will likely be left alone as the publicist moves onto the next author on the publishing schedule.

MYTH 2: Marketing is scammy, sucky and awful and I'm not the type of person who can possibly do it

It's time to reframe marketing. Think of it this way instead. **Marketing is sharing what you love with people who will appreciate hearing about it.**

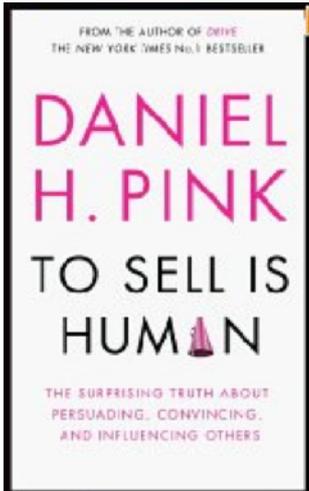
You've written a book about how you changed your lifestyle after a diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes. Don't you think people want to hear about that?

Or you've written a kick-ass action-adventure thriller that will blow the socks off those miserable commuters you share a train carriage with and help them escape the grind for a few hours. Don't you think they want to know about it?

You have to find ways to connect with the people who might want your book — that's marketing.

It's not scammy or sucky or awful (if you don't want it to be). In my world, marketing is about [integrity, authenticity, generosity, social karma and co-opetition](#).

You need to reframe marketing because we are ALL salespeople these days. In Daniel Pink's book *To Sell Is Human* he explains how the world has changed and the job of 'salesman' really doesn't exist anymore, but we're all involved in selling every day. It might be 'selling' healthy food to your kids, or 'selling' yourself to get a



career advancement, or as authors, it's pitching our ideas to agents and publishers or trying to get people to be interested in us and our books.

MYTH 3: A book publicist will be able to get me on <insert famous show here>

Let's face it, authors are often introverts and one of the worst possible things for us is cold-calling. I don't take phone calls in general and I have to psych myself up for any that I HAVE to make. I really prefer writing ...

So when it comes to things like media and press releases and getting onto TV, the process is generally about pitching and being repeatedly rejected, until someone says yes, generally when your book hooks nicely into a hot newsworthy topic.

A publicist can do these pitches for you but they can only work with what you provide, so you'll still need to think about the 'hooks' that your book can be pitched around. The most important thing to remember about a publicist is that you generally pay them a specific amount as a retainer but they can't guarantee you any media attention. Most successful indie authors don't use a publicist and focus instead on online sales and marketing.

MYTH 4: Getting on national TV or national newspapers or radio will sell millions of books

Too many authors assume that paying a few thousand dollars for a publicist will pay off in terms of sales. But **traditional media is more about brand awareness** and social proof than actual sales because of the non-targeted, scattergun approach, and the disconnect between where people are when they consume that media and the jump to actually buying a book.

I made it onto national TV, radio and into the papers, and it made negligible difference to my sales. In my experience, only forms of marketing with clickable Buy Links sell significant numbers of books for indie authors, which is why I focus online.



MYTH 5: The launch is everything OR one big marketing push will rocket my book up the charts and I'll be a millionaire (yippee!)

The launch approach is something that comes from traditional publishing. Because of their business cycles, each book only gets a small window of opportunity to make an impact before everyone moves on to the next book.

But the world of book buying has changed and it's increasingly about the 'long tail,' where there are very few blockbusters but lots of us making a decent living in the margins from people looking for different books over time.

So, the launch doesn't have to be everything for us.

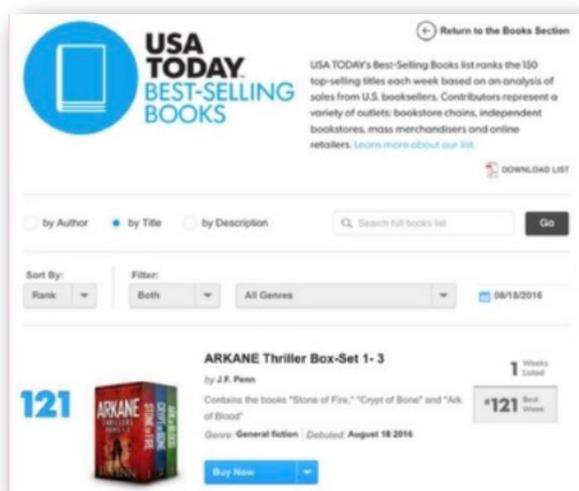
In fact, launch sales are generally disappointing compared to what happens once the Amazon algorithms kick in and you get some

traction around reviews and reputation. In my experience, sales can be better a few months after the book is initially available. A book is always new to the reader who has just found it, even many years later.

One of my fiction boxsets hit the USA Today list 5 years after publication, and it was new to all those readers who found it that week.

In terms of making a lot of money, the authors who are financially successful usually have a number of books (fiction) or make their money from the 'back end' of products, services and speaking (non-fiction).

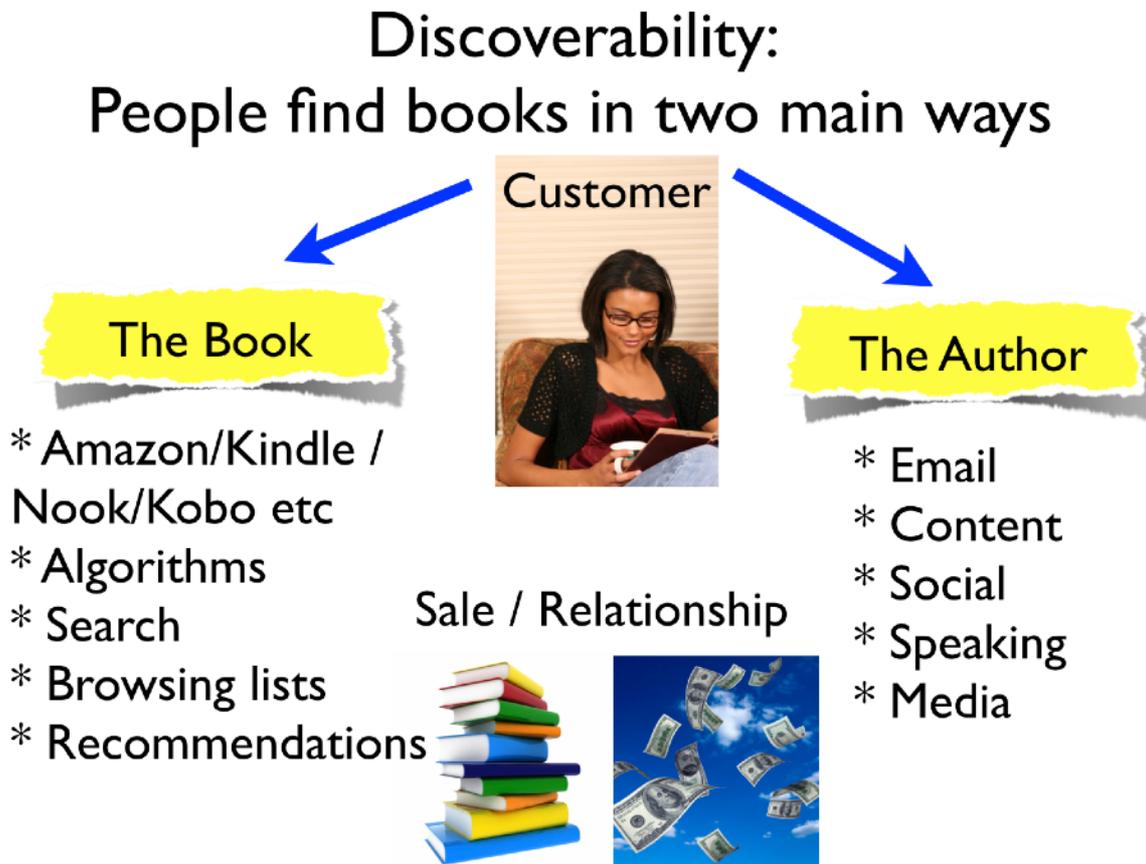
Once you understand some of the myths, you can become empowered as an author to get into marketing yourself and your books with knowledge on your side.



DISCOVERABILITY AND HOW PEOPLE FIND YOUR BOOK

Discoverability is a publishing buzzword encompassing everything that will help your book to be found amongst the hundreds of thousands that come out every year.

People will discover your book in two main ways.



(1) Through your book

As an author, you will also be a reader, so think for a moment about how you find new books to read.

- **You're at a physical bookstore and a cover catches your eye.** You pick it up and read the back and maybe check a few pages.
- **You go to Amazon or Apple Books or Kobo or whatever online store you shop at** and you browse the category you're interested in. I tend to browse in Thrillers and Non-Fiction Business and search books published in the last 30 days for anything I like the look of.

- **You go to one of the online stores and search** for something in particular because you have a question, e.g. “business plan”, and see what comes up. You browse and choose the book that jumps out.
- **Someone you trust recommends a specific book**, either on social media or in person, and you decide to buy it.
- **You get an email from Amazon, Apple, or Kobo or your favorite online site.** Maybe it's a daily deal on BookBub, or a recommendation from your reading history, and you like the look of it so you click to buy.
- **You're on Goodreads** or another reading social network and you see some book reviews that look great, so you click through to the book.



You can see that this doesn't require you to have a website or a Facebook page or an email list. **People who find books this way don't care about the author** and, to be honest, they may not care about the author after they've read the book either.

Given that indie authors generally sell books online and not in physical bookstores, most of these sales are driven by your book's metadata and the algorithms of the distributor.

This is based on your book fundamentals: keywords, book title, description, people's browsing history, the sales of your book, reviews and rankings in particular categories and everything else that exists within the online bookstore ecosystem.



You can also **drive traffic to your book through paid advertising** e.g. email lists like BookBub, as well as Amazon Ads, Facebook Ads or anywhere else where the book is the primary marketing.

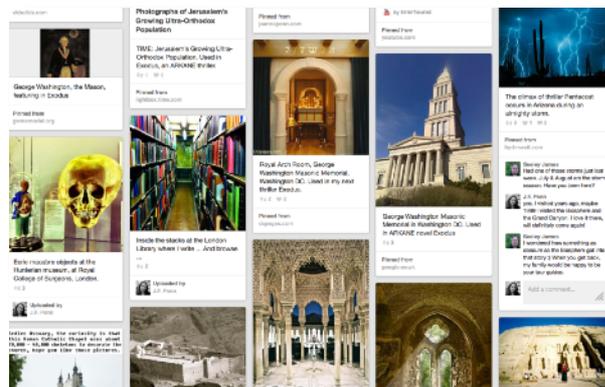
Check out [Mark Dawson's Ads for Authors course](#) for more detail on paid advertising.

(2) Through you and your platform

The other way that readers discover books is through the author and every piece of marketing you do which leads people to you and your books.

Your 'platform' is however you choose to connect with readers, and the methods by which you reach them. For example:

- **An interview** on a horror podcast on how you incorporated ancient mythology into your last book
- A gorgeous set of **photos you posted on Pinterest** (like [my Boards for my fiction books](#))
- A **Twitter chat** about parenting, where you comment, someone clicks through to your profile and then sees your book
- A **video** on YouTube about effective business communication, or perhaps a shorter snippet on TikTok, or other social media
- An **article** on how to be mindful in a fast-paced world. They liked your philosophy, so they clicked through to check out your blog.
- **A talk at a conference.** Some of the people present resonated with your speech and bought your book and joined your email list.
- A **networking event** where you connected personally and swapped business cards and gave away your books
- An **email blast** to people who have already signed up for your email list — **which is an effective and fast way to reach readers on launch.**



“FREE WEBINAR WORKSHOP: THE THREE-STEP PROCESS TO AUTOMATE YOUR AUTHOR MARKETING AND FIND YOUR FIRST 10,000 READERS”



If you want to build your email list faster, [click here to check out this free webinar replay with Nick Stephenson on finding your first 10,000 readers.](#)

Platform is all about attraction marketing — putting things out in the world for free that attract readers to you.

Generally, this is useful, inspirational or entertaining content, the main reasons why people search for books. They want the answer to a question or a problem or to learn something new, or they want entertainment, to be moved, to have an adventure, or to laugh.

My marketing strategy for non-fiction is to be useful and share as much as possible to help others on the author journey.

I do this through [The Creative Penn podcast](#), articles on my website, and on [Twitter @thecreativepenn](#).

Being helpful makes me intrinsically happy anyway, but it also serves the purpose of **content marketing** through my free podcasts and videos and articles. Some of the people who find my free information may be interested in buying my books or products — maybe you're one of them!

Content marketing is an indirect way of reaching people, with less focus on data and direct clicks like paid ads. It's **sustainable and grows over time**, and it's mostly free, so it can be a good way to start and grow your platform.

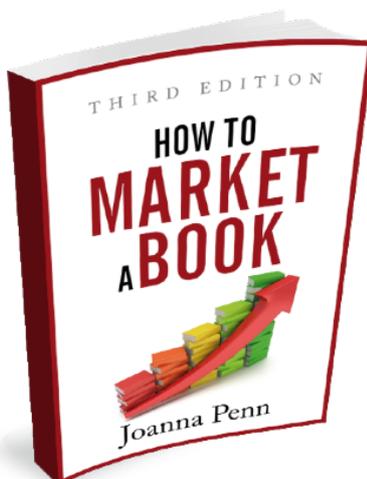
Podcasting is also a separate income stream for my author business and helps me feel part of a community, so it's far more than just marketing these days!

[If you want to start a podcast, or pitch podcasters more effectively, check out [Audio for Authors: Audiobooks, Podcasting, and Voice Technologies](#).]

I use some content marketing for my fiction, using my [Books and Travel Podcast](#) to attract people who might also enjoy my novels, since they all feature international locations. However, for fiction, paid advertising and free stories as lead magnets are often more effective than content marketing.



10 QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ANSWER HONESTLY IF YOU WANT TO SELL MORE BOOKS



You can find a lot more detail in [How to Market a Book](#), but this list might help diagnose issues if you aren't selling enough books.

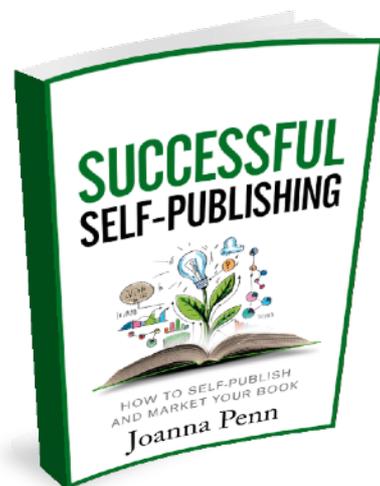
[As always, these are not rules, because there are no rules in this crazy, fast-moving self-publishing world. There will also always be outliers who get away with not doing any of the following, but these will at least help with some guidelines!]

1. Is your book available as an ebook as well as a print book?

Readers want to read in whichever format they love the most, for example, I only read fiction in ebook format, but my non-fiction reading is spread across audiobook and ebook, as well as print. My husband only listens to fantasy audiobooks, but prefers non-fiction as an ebook.

If you don't have your book available in common formats, you're missing out on sales. It's easy to produce an ebook and a print-on-demand paperback, and since many print sales have gone online over the last five years — and the trend accelerated during the pandemic — you will still reach readers across all formats.

For everything you need on self-publishing, check out my free ebook, [Successful Self-Publishing](#), also available in print and audiobook editions.



2. Has your cover been professionally designed?

Think about your behavior as a reader. How do you find books you like? You might go to a category or an area in a store, then look for covers that catch your eye, then check out the title, then read the blurb, then open and maybe read the first page.

Your cover is critical at signalling what type of book the reader is going to get. It's one of your most important marketing assets. Don't make it yourself unless you have graphic design skills.

[Click here for a list of professional book cover designers](#), many of whom also have cheaper pre-made options.

[Click here for my tutorial on how to find and work with professional book cover designers.](#)



3. Has your book been professionally edited?

I'm passionate about the value of editing and editors, especially for new writers, or books in a new genre.

You should edit your books until you can't stand them any longer, and then you should consider [hiring a professional editor](#) to help you take it further.

[Click here for my tutorial on how to find and work with a professional editor.](#)

If you can't afford a pro editor, then you can work with a critique group of readers within your genre, or join a group like the [Alliance of Independent Authors](#) to network with other like-minded authors and potentially barter your skills.

4. Have you submitted your book to the right categories?

Sorry, but not everyone will like your book.

You may think that everyone will, but they won't. You might not want to put it in a box or a genre or a category, but you have to, because that's how readers will find it.



The category/genre reader has expectations and if you don't 'fit' they will be disappointed.

That's not to say that you need to follow specific rules in your writing, but **when you publish, you have to choose which three categories to use**, and they

need to be meaningful and appropriate for your work.

It's important to match reader expectations to your book.

There is no point having a book with a swirly pink chic-lit cover in the horror category. It won't sell, however good it is.

Choose categories that fit your book, for example, I use Action Adventure and Supernatural Thriller for my ARKANE series, occasionally swapping over to International Mystery and Crime.

If you're struggling, choose 3-5 modern authors, or books, that your book is similar to — not what you want it to be like, but what it is really like. That will help you find the right category to load your book into, as well as marketing approaches and book covers to model.

For more on categories, check out [Publisher Rocket](#) and the [specific genre reports at K-lytics](#).

5. Have you optimized your Amazon sales page with a hook, quotes from reviews and other material?

I have seen some Amazon sales pages with typos and terrible grammar, and some with just a one-line description. Some of them make no sense at all. Some are just the back blurb with no review quotes or other things that might draw a customer in.



Basically, you need to treat the product description like a sales page. People will not buy your book if your description is badly written or hard to understand because it's an indication of the quality of your book.

For more help, check out [this interview with Michaelbrent Collings on how to write hooks and improve your fiction book description](#).

You can also check out [How to Write a Sizzling Synopsis](#) by Bryan Cohen.

6. Have you priced your book realistically, or at least tried different price points?

Authors can have success selling at many different price points across multiple formats, as well as having books available to borrow through subscription services and libraries. But expectations differ by genre and reader expectations.

One author asked me why his debut novel wasn't selling at all, and when I checked his sales page, the ebook was priced \$11.99. It was his first novel and he had nothing else for sale. **However good your book, however amazing the cover, your first novel is unlikely to sell at that price**, because no one knows who you are.

Many authors use a free first-in-series ebook to entice readers — for example, my thriller, [Stone of Fire](#), and non-fiction book, [Successful Self-Publishing](#). Authors also use temporary sales and discounting as well as books at full price, as well as box-sets and premium editions.

As an indie author, you can set your own prices and change them over time, so it's worth trying different things to see what works for you.

7. Have you written, or are you writing, another book?

Sure, there are some breakout successes, but most fiction authors making decent money have five or more books, often within a series. Non-fiction authors can price higher but they also make money on back-end products and services.

The more books you have available, the more virtual shelf space you have, the easier it is for people to discover you. Plus, if a reader finds one of your books they like, they may buy them all, so you make more income per customer.



Yes, this takes time, but hey, you're a writer, what else would you rather be doing?!

I was as guilty as anyone of trying to hype my first novel, because it took so long and I thought it was a precious snowflake.

I still believe you have to hustle those first thousand sales with everything you have, but my sales and income jumped when I released the second novel with very little fanfare. I already had an established presence on the book sales stores and more of an audience through my various platforms. Now I have 30+ books, it's much easier to market and sell.

8. Have you done some kind of promotion or marketing to let people know your book is available?



There are many millions of books in the world already and tens of thousands more published every year. Readers are unlikely to just stumble upon your book — so how can you help them discover your work?

Remember: **Marketing is sharing what you love with people who want to hear about it.** You don't have to give it the hard-sell. Just be authentic and share your passion.



It definitely gets easier over time if you build your own email list from your website and also from a signup at the back of your book.

[Check out my tutorial on how to build your own email list.](#)

If you build your email list with book one, you will have some people to notify with book two. It's a start, and it grows over time.

Building an email list is **my only non-negotiable marketing recommendation for authors**, because you never know what will happen with all the distribution sites we depend upon for sales. If they

disappear, or the terms we publish under change, then your email list of fans and buyers is all you have.

Content marketing and social media *can* sell books, but it takes time to build, and you have to want to create such material for other reasons, for example, to entertain, build a community, or make income in other ways.

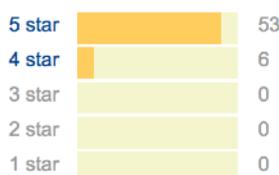
If you have the budget (and you've optimized your book) it can be worth using paid ads, but be targeted and track results.

For example, you can use Amazon Ads, Facebook Ads, BookBub, and other email list blast services, but all these are much more effective if you have the fundamentals in place i.e. well-written book, great cover, appropriate pricing, targeted category.

[For a good course on paid advertising, [check out Mark Dawson's Ads for Authors.](#)]

Customer Reviews

★★★★★ (59)
4.9 out of 5 stars



[See all 59 customer reviews](#)

"This is book is easy to read and packe
Leeza Baric | 23 reviewers made a similar

"If, like me, you do understand blogs, s
your marketing goals."
Anthony StClair | 12 reviewers made a simi

"Even if you're a marketing pro, you're
Derek Murphy | 7 reviewers made a simila

9. Have you asked for reviews, or submitted to review sites?

Reviews are important because **they provide social proof** and help readers make a decision about the book.

I give away free books to people who might like my genre and ask that they

leave a review if they like it. No hard sell, no pressure, no expectation.

Remember that not everyone will like your book and not everyone will leave a review, or a good review, but it is a start. *[Remember, don't respond to bad reviews!]*

[Click here for 10 ways you can get book reviews in an ethical manner.](#)

10. Are you working your butt off? Have you given it enough time?

I absolutely believe that you can be a great writer *and* make an income from writing.

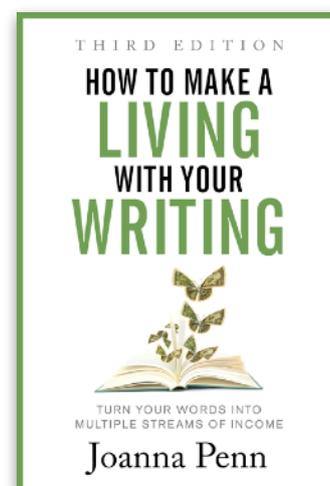
But it takes time.

I started writing in 2006 and left my job in 2011, but it was only in 2015 when I started to make six figures by which time I had a number of books and multiple streams of income.

[Click here for my timeline.](#)

Writing books is not a get rich quick scheme.

You need to love the writing —but you also need see your author career as a business for the long-term.



So please, if your book is not selling much, go through this checklist and **honestly evaluate what you have already done** and how much effort you have put in. What else could you do to improve sales?

HOW TO SELL BOOKS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

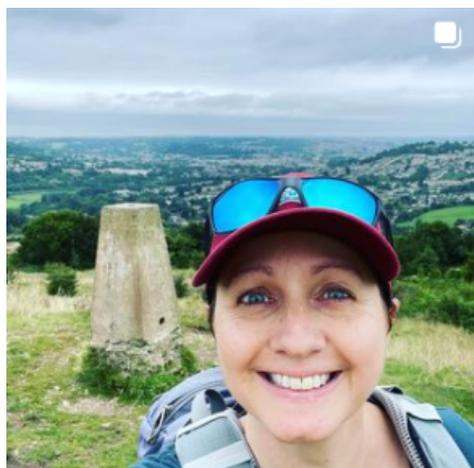
Social media is still about selling to individual people, but potentially on a global scale. It's about connection and relationships — all essential human activities.

Remember that behind that profile is a person. It's not about traffic or about hard selling. It's about connection, and the best way to use any of the sites is to be authentic and real. Don't broadcast spammy 'buy my book' messages, just be yourself.



Do you really need social media?

No. It's not mandatory — but it can be great way to connect with a group of like-minded people as well as your fans. It makes you and your work more easily shareable and you might be surprised how far your work can reach, especially if you put in time on a specific platform that suits you.



I started using [Twitter @thecreativepenn](#) in 2009 and it's still my favourite social media site, although I also enjoy posting pictures on [Instagram @jfpennauthor](#). I have profiles on other sites (Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn etc) but I don't use them as much. I've met some of my best friends on Twitter and made business connections that have grown my sales and income.

It's impossible to keep up with every new social network and even harder to be active on too many. Choose what you enjoy and focus on that and leave the others alone!

How does social media sell books?

There are new tools all the time but the principles are the same regardless. The old adage goes: "50% of marketing works. We just don't know which 50%". It is indeed an inexact science, but here's how the marketing principle AIDA works.



(1) Attention

It's hard to attract attention in this crowded online world — but we have to try somehow. Social networks are a way to grab attention for a moment in order to draw people into your sales funnel as above.

You could share your articles and other useful information, post pictures that resonate with your fans, make funny or useful videos. Be interesting, entertaining or inspirational and be sure to use an enticing headline so people want to click and share.

(2) Interest

Social networking is pointless on its own as a marketing mechanism (although, of course, it can be enjoyed for its own sake). The aim is to get people to notice you and be interested enough to follow you or click through to your website.

You need a call to action. Include links to your website/books/other work in your bio.

Remember, **social networks rise and fall.** You don't own that online real estate, you only borrow it for a while, so be sure to capture interest through your

email list. This means that you need a website and an [email list signup](#) so people can sign up for your newsletter.

I can't emphasize this list gathering enough, because if Facebook (or any other site) falls out of favor as MySpace did, anyone who built their empire entirely on that platform will be out of business. It's happened before, it will happen again.

(3) Desire

Sometimes people will buy a book based on one contact but generally it takes time for people to make a buying decision.

Once people have found you and are interested in what you're doing, they might follow your blog, maybe listen to an interview, and continue to follow you on social media. Hopefully, they sign up for your email list — and over time, they want to hear more from you.

Social networking is about people knowing you, liking you and trusting you enough to let you have a slice of their time and attention. **Authenticity over the long term** is important, so that you can sustain this. Marketing, like writing, is a long-term activity.

(4) Action

Once people know you, like you and trust you, they are far more likely to try your books, or recommend you to others. No hard sell necessary. Once you tell them your book is out, they should buy it because they're already engaged with your work.



The 80:20 rule with social media

The 80:20 rule in this context is about the percentage you spend on providing value and promoting others (80%) vs. directly promoting your work (20%).

The focus should be on being useful, inspiring or entertaining, with occasional posts that promote your books/products/services.

Social means social

Social networking doesn't work if you don't enjoy it or if you are unrelentingly negative.

Networks represent collective energy. If you exude negativity or hype or spam, then that's what you will experience in return. It is about enjoying yourself,

joining a conversation, learning from people, sharing something interesting and making connections. **Yes, it's actually fun!**

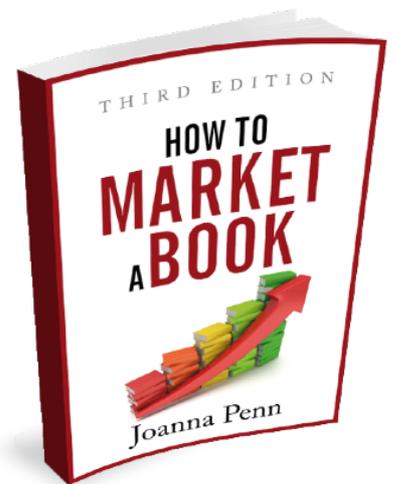
Some people think that online relationships are somehow shallow or unreal, but for introvert authors, the online social world is often far preferable to in-person networking events or parties. Friendships formed on Twitter can spill into Skype conversations, meeting up in person and support networks, as well as mutual promotion. Some of my best friends these days are people I originally met on Twitter years ago.

Of course social networking isn't a magic bullet to sell millions of books.

It's just one tool in the arsenal of marketing activities that some people enjoy. But from my personal experience, it can definitely result in book sales, and it's a lot of fun!

If you want more on marketing, check out the following resources:

- [More articles, interviews, and videos on marketing](#)
- ['How To Market A Book'](#) - in ebook, print, and audiobook formats
- [Free author training: \\$0 to \\$10K per month with Nick Stephenson](#)
- [Premium course on paid advertising: Ads for Authors with Mark Dawson](#)



PART 4: How to make a living with your writing

THE ARC OF THE INDIE AUTHOR JOURNEY. FROM FIRST BOOK TO CEO OF YOUR GLOBAL MEDIA EMPIRE

When you first have a yearning to write a book, you're not usually thinking of running a global media empire!

So don't worry if you're not ready to assume the mantle of CEO of your own business just yet — but there is a proven step-by-step journey from first book to making a living with your writing (if that is your goal and it's certainly not for everyone).

You don't have to know everything now. You can learn on the job. We all have to.

None of us are born with the knowledge of how to do these things — we just learn along the way.



This is the story arc of the author's writing and business life as I have experienced it (so far) and the main challenges at each stage, as well as how to overcome them.

Stage 1: "I want to write a book"

You've always been a reader and now you're reading all the 'how to' books on writing. You're listening to podcasts, watching videos, and attending seminars and conferences. Perhaps you're writing lots already — or perhaps you're learning about writing without doing it yet.

Maybe you're scared that what you write will be terrible. Maybe what you write *is* terrible! (Don't worry, editing will help!) But you know you want to be a writer, and you're going to put in the effort to write that first book. You have a huge learning curve ahead but you know you will persist.

Challenge:

- Actually writing and finishing a book. You can read all the books on writing you like but until you actually sit down and write, you won't get black on white and you'll never finish a book.

How to overcome it:

- **The realization that 'it's OK to suck'** in your first draft. This is also the theme of [Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott](#), where she advocates writing "shitty first drafts." My metaphor for this is Michelangelo's statue of David. Michelangelo said that he 'saw David within the marble' and he just had to cut away the excess stone and then

polish it until it was perfect. Authors have to create the block of marble with that first draft and then editing and rewriting will shape the statue. Creating that block is a lot of work!

- **Do timed writing exercises**, in a class if you don't have the discipline to do this alone. Set word count goals. Do [NaNoWriMo](#), National Novel Writing Month. Use Write or Die software. Do anything to get a first draft done. Writing a book is not easy, otherwise everyone who says they want to write one would actually do it. More tips in [Productivity for Authors](#).
- **Go through the learning curve while writing**. Don't read a book on self-editing until you're actually editing so you can apply the lessons learned. Invest in a [professional editor](#) to help you. I learned far more from paying an editor to work on my manuscript than sitting in classes talking about other people's work. You also need to write a lot. You won't improve unless you write more.
- **Learn about editing and your publishing options** — but don't obsess too much about the latter until you have at least a first draft. I often get questions about publishing from people who haven't even starting writing yet!
- **Read self-help books**. Listen to podcasts/motivational audios. Focus on shifting your mindset to that of an author. You can read the [journey of my first novel here](#).

Stage 2: "I am a new author"

You've learned the process to get from words to first draft to finished product, and you've worked with an editor to improve your book. You've learned how to self-publish, or you've made it through the lottery process of agent and publisher. You've got the book out into the world ...

There are many people who say they want to write a book, but never actually get around to it. So **congratulations if you have your first book!**



Champagne to celebrate the launch of my first novel!



[You can also change things later! *Pentecost* was my first novel, published in 2011. I [re-titled it and rebranded the series](#) in 2015, and it's now *Stone of Fire*. So don't worry, you're not locked in forever!]

Challenge:

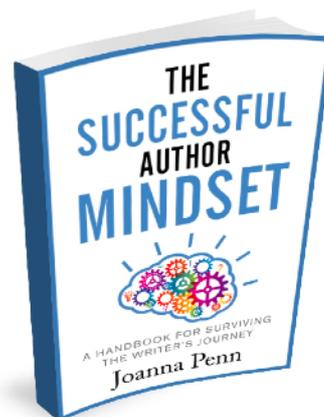
- Realizing that **very few people care** that you wrote a book, and you have to learn

about marketing or no one will ever read it.

- Realizing that you're not an instant millionaire and that the income from one book is not significant. Realizing that this is just the beginning of the next step.

How to overcome it:

- **Make a decision** on whether there will even be any more books. Was the process of writing a book worthwhile? Are you brimming with ideas for a new one? Are you excited about being able to reach people with your words? Are you enthusiastic about learning more?
- **Start writing the next book.** If you have the bug, the ideas will be plentiful and you'll be ready to tackle the next book. You might need a bit of a break, but after a while, you'll get that itch again. So, get writing!
- **Get to grips with the rollercoaster of the creative journey.** There will be ups and downs, but they are all part of the process. Read [The Successful Author Mindset](#) if you need some support.
- **Learn about marketing.** Unless you are one of the very few authors whose publisher will do ALL the marketing for the rest of your life, as well as for the first month, you need to learn about marketing. I started to learn when I had two thousand copies of my first book sitting in my house. I thought they would miraculously sell themselves, but of course, they didn't! Most of them went into a landfill six painful months later.



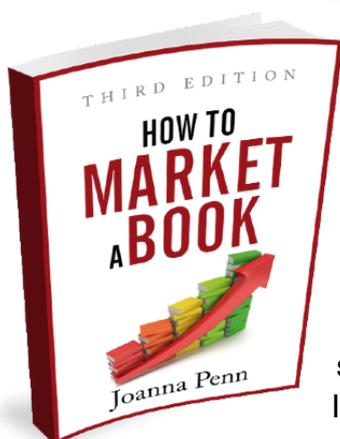
Don't make my mistake! That initial failure kickstarted my journey into learning marketing and over time, I've discovered marketing activities I enjoy. After all, it's about connecting with readers who enjoy the same things you do — your tribe.

Check out '[How To Market a Book.](#)'

Stage 3: "I am an established author"

Once you've written a few books, especially if they are within the same genre or category, you know approximately what you're doing. It's still hard work, but you understand the process.

If you self-publish, you know the ropes and publishing takes very little time. If you have a publisher, the procedure is established and takes longer. You've got to grips with at least some aspects of marketing. You have a website and an email list. You get fan mail from readers.



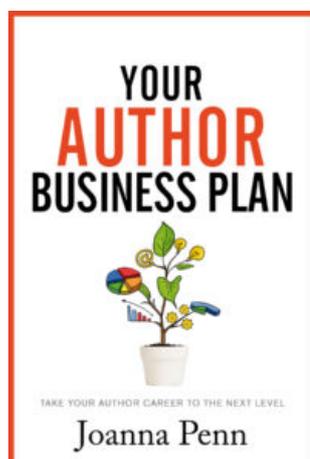
Perhaps you still work a day job, and you're wondering how to take it to the next level and become a full-time writer, or perhaps you want a side business that brings in extra money.

Challenge:

- **Balancing your time** between writing more, marketing what you already have, real life and probably another job as well as family. Trying to decide whether to give up your day job for the full-time writer's life, and potentially conflicting with family around this. You're making some money but perhaps not quite enough to pay all the bills and have some comfort margin.

How to overcome it:

- **Use a diary/schedule** to plan your writing time and focus on becoming more organized.



- **Get clear on your brand** and what you are delivering to what customers. This will help focus what you write and produce.
- **Establish criteria for going full-time** e.g. Income level of \$2000 a month from books before quitting the day job. Reduce your risk e.g. Downsize, save six months income, go part-time at work.
- Read [*Your Author Business Plan: Take Your Author Career to the Next Level*](#)

Stage 4: “I am the CEO of my creative company”

There is a tipping point where you go from being an author to running a business as an author.

You can now write for a living and you need to take the business side seriously, instead of writing being just a hobby. The penny drops around [intellectual property rights](#) and you realize how far your work can go through the licensing opportunities available.

Whatever the catalyst, you decide to take control of your financial destiny and career as an author.

This may mean you go full-time as an author-entrepreneur, or you allocate a proper chunk of time to the business. To step into this phase means you are serious about being an author-entrepreneur. You assume the role of CEO role – you're in charge of your creative career.

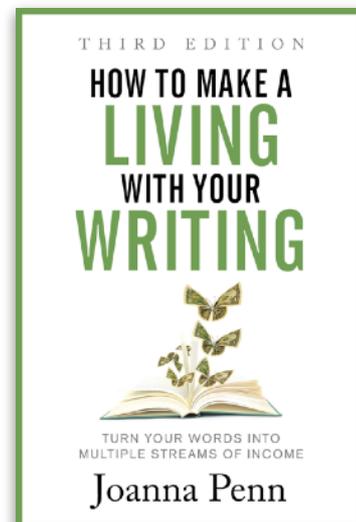
Challenge:

- **Juggling the writing, the marketing and the production side**, as well as trying to think about strategy, release schedules and more. Trying to keep track of all your

products, the rights you want to exploit, the multiple projects you have going at once and keeping an eye on other opportunities as well as managing the contractors who work for you on various things.

How to overcome it:

- **Get clear on exactly what you want for this business and your life.** Look after your physical and mental health as well as your business. Say 'no' more so you can focus on your core target market and what enlivens you.
- **Establish your professional team.** You need a team in place at this stage, and preferably an assistant, or someone else full time in the business as well as contractors. One of the first people I hired was a book-keeper to help me with the (dreaded) accounts!
- **Streamline your processes.** If you have a production plan and you know what books are coming, you can book editors and cover designers in advance and tell fans what to expect. If you know where all your revenue streams are coming from, you can make sure all are reconciled to sales. If you manage your time, you can juggle being creative and being an entrepreneur.
- **Learn business skills** so you can work on your business, not just in your business. Check out [The Business Rusch posts by Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#) and my books, [How To Make a Living with your Writing: Turn Your Words Into Multiple Streams of Income](#), and [Business For Authors: How To Be An Author Entrepreneur](#), available in ebook, print and audiobook formats.



YOUR NEXT STEPS

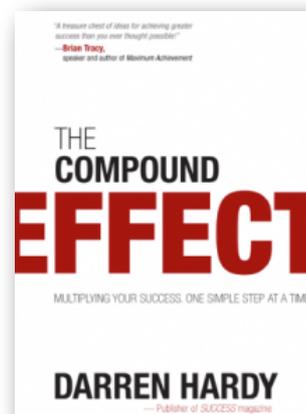
I hope you're buzzing with ideas and excited about the opportunities ahead!

You may also feel a little overwhelmed. That's totally normal!

I recommend reading [The Compound Effect by Darren Hardy](#) which will help you to get everything in perspective. Essentially, he says that:

**Small, smart choices + Consistency + Time
= RADICAL DIFFERENCE**

You can apply this to financial independence or fitness — but also to being a successful author-entrepreneur.



STEP 1: Choose your small, smart choices

For example, start writing 500 words a day on your book, write one blog post a week, or commit to one hour on social media a week. Read a book on marketing and decide on a curriculum for self-education.

STEP 2: Do something towards your goals every day

Being an author is not just my job. It is my life, my passion, as well as my hobby and my business. Some might say I am a workaholic, but I spent too long in a job I hated, and I am determined to make this a success. So, every week day I work on my writing craft and my writing business. Every part of life can become fodder for the page, so life itself becomes a facet of creativity. The key is working on it habitually.



STEP 3: Give it time

Patience is possibly the hardest thing as an author, but time in the market is absolutely critical.

My life is radically different to how it was fifteen years ago.

Back then, I hadn't started writing fiction, I had no website, no blog, no social media, no podcast, no YouTube channel, no professional speaking

business, no income from my words. I pretty much had nothing but a day job I hated and a lot of dreams.

I now have over 30 books published. I'm an Award-nominated, New York Times and USA Today bestselling author as well as an award-winning creative entrepreneur

with a multi-six-figure business based around my books. None of this could have happened without small actions every day, consistently over time, for years.

You can do it too ... Go write!

I hope you've enjoyed this Blueprint. My hope is that it will save you time, money and heartache on the writer's journey and empower you to make decisions that will lead you and your books into success — however you define it.

Want more help?

If you need continued encouragement and the latest info in writing, publishing and book marketing ...

- Subscribe to The Creative Penn Podcast on your favorite podcast app for inspiration and education every Monday. You can find the backlist episodes at www.TheCreativePenn.com/podcast. There are over 590 episodes with interviews, inspiration and information on writing, publishing, book marketing and creative entrepreneurship.

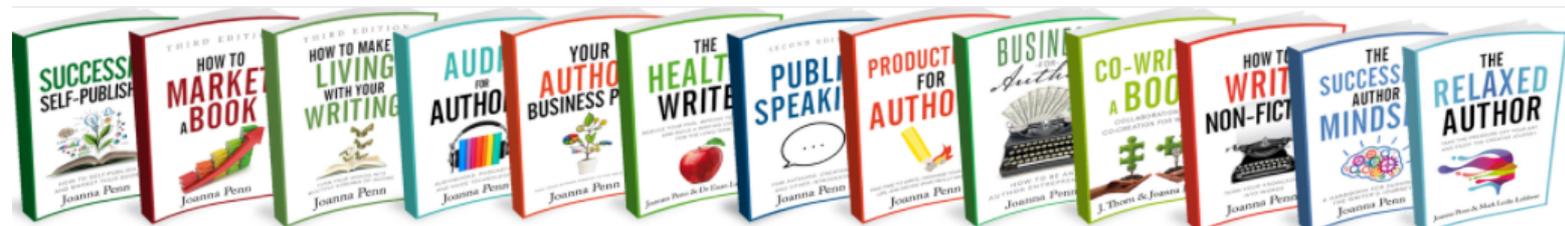


- Check out my Books for Authors: www.TheCreativePenn.com/books
- Check out my Courses for Authors: www.TheCreativePenn.com/courses
- Check out my Tools and Tutorials: www.TheCreativePenn.com/tools
- Follow me on social: [Twitter @thecreativepenn](https://twitter.com/thecreativepenn) [Instagram @jfpennauthor](https://www.instagram.com/jfpennauthor) [facebook.com/TheCreativePenn](https://www.facebook.com/TheCreativePenn)

If you'd like to ask a question or just comment, please tweet me [@thecreativepenn](https://twitter.com/thecreativepenn) or connect on [the Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/TheCreativePenn). You can also [contact me here](#).

Happy writing, and all the best with your books,

Joanna.

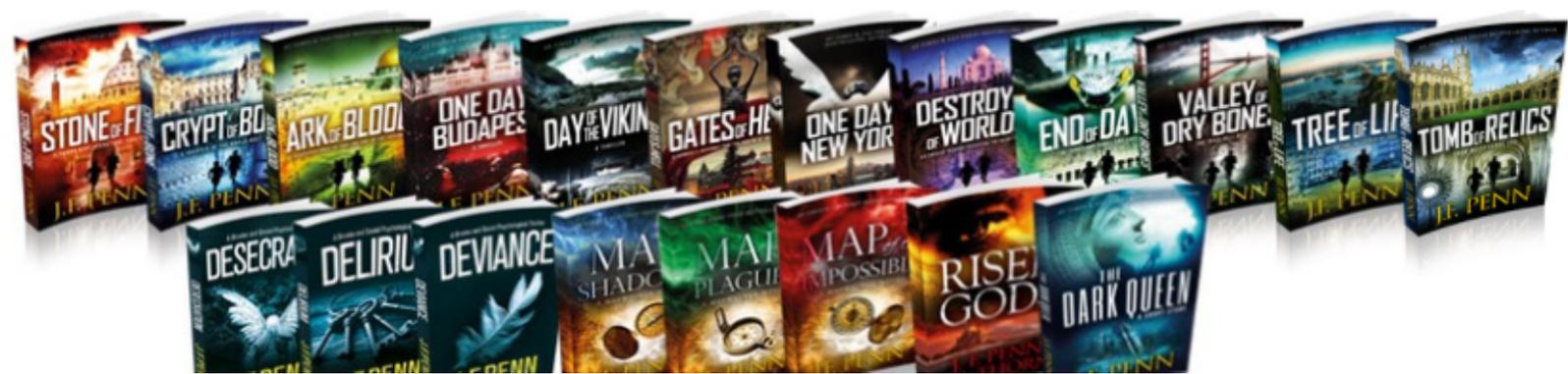


Love Thrillers or Dark Fantasy?

Yes, I write non-fiction but I'm also an Award-nominated, New York Times and USA Today bestselling thriller and dark fantasy author as J.F.Penn. My books are available in all the usual places online, or you can try a thriller for free, links below.

[Click here for links to all my fiction](#)

Get Day of the Vikings for free at www.JFPenn.com/free



I also have another website and podcast, www.BooksAndTravel.page where I write about and interview authors around the places that inspire their books and share my own personal travel experiences.

Search 'Books and Travel Podcast' on your favorite podcast app, or find the backlist at www.BooksAndTravel.page/listen

