Your Book
PUBLISHING OPTIONS

About the Author

Dr Euan Mitchell is an author, editor, publisher and lecturer in professional writing. Originally a staff writer and commissioning editor for an independent educational publisher, Euan became a senior editor for a multinational publisher before he successfully self-published his first novel in 1998. Since then he has continued writing fiction and non-fiction books, both published and self-published, while helping other writers launch their works into orbit. The movie rights to his two novels, *Making Noises* and *Feral Tracks*, have been optioned by film producers. The worldwide upheavals in book publishing during 2011 prompted Euan to write this new book for all Australian writers, regardless of whether they are seasoned authors with out-of-print titles or students looking to publish their first short story. He welcomes your feedback and can be contacted via euanmitchell.com.au.

Your Book
PUBLISHING OPTIONS

How to Make and Market Ebooks and Print Books

EUAN MITCHELL

OverDog
PRESS

Dedication

For my fellow writers who would like to further their knowledge of the options created by the greatest revolution in literary communication since Gutenberg's printing press of the mid-15th century.

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INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of Your Book and This Guide

The purpose of your book may seem obvious to you, but what assumptions are you making? Do you intend your book for a mass or niche market? Do you expect stores to stock your book in one particular section or several? Do you have a private project with semi-commercial or commercial potential? Do you want to sell a combination of (digital) ebooks and (paper) print books? Do you aim to make a profit or just cover costs? Do you mind taking an initial loss if the book enhances your career, personal interests or business brand in the long term? Do you want your book to be a stepping stone towards becoming a professional writer?

This guide helps you answer – from an informed basis – the above questions and many others. The options presented here offer choices and alternatives you may not have considered. Clear explanations of technical terms and processes are given. Solutions to common publishing problems are suggested. The overall purpose is to streamline the publishing of your book, minimise the costs and maximise the benefits. This know-how is for:

- New and emerging writers who want to pitch to publishers and/or self-publish their first short stories and books
- Indie writers who have been published but choose to self-publish for reasons of ease and/or economics
- Authors with out-of-print books (the rights to publish have reverted from the publisher/s back to the author)
- Students in writing and publishing courses
- Small press publishers
- Companies or entrepreneurs managing publishing projects.

Publishing a book can be one of the most satisfying achievements in life. At first, such a goal may seem out of reach. But by breaking down the process into clear steps and applying the know-how from these pages, you can *make* your book happen. Rest assured, you may be pleasantly surprised as you discover your own capabilities along this path.

Overview of the Publishing Process

The word 'publishing' is associated with a myriad of media: books, magazines, newspapers, music, DVDs, multimedia, computer games, databases, blogs and websites. The principle behind publishing is to pass on knowledge, information and entertainment set in material forms – not just talk or thought – from creators to others. This principle was behind primitive paintings inside caves, hieroglyphics on pyramids and manuscripts by monks. In years to come, humans will devise ways of publishing yet to be named, but the principle will endure.

When talking about making books, it's important to distinguish between publishing and printing. Many people use the two terms interchangeably. Book publishing, however, is a multi-stage process, of which printing is only one stage (now optional), as the chart opposite summarises.

The developments in publishing from Johannes Gutenberg's printing press of the mid-15th century to today's World Wide Web have involved countless technological and social changes. The current digital revolution in publishing involves a wave of change that can seem daunting. Making sense of the new array of electronic reading devices is a long way from the relative simplicity of opening a paperback. The closure of numerous traditional bricks-and-mortar bookstores has been distressing for many.

The ongoing changes, however, are to be understood not feared. Adapting may be difficult for some, but exciting for others. Print books will continue to sell while new opportunities emerge for ebooks to entertain and inform. For instance, imagine the delight of a small child who is presented with a digital picture book read by her grandparents who live on the other side of the world.

Technology in the 21st century has provided new ways for anyone, experienced or not, to publish books. A generation ago, the following aspects of today's publishing practices were still dreams:

- Economically print a single (paper) book on demand
- Create an ebook on a home computer
- Market books globally via a personal website and social networks.

With so many new options, the long-standing constraints of a publishing budget and timeline take on fresh and critical complexity.

The four main stages of the book publishing process

STAGE 1: Preparation
- Planning and research
- Writing
- Determining publishing vehicle
- Editing

STAGE 2: Pre-Press
- Cover design and layout
- Bibliographic data
- Copyright permissions
- Text design and layout
- Formatting of ebook

STAGE 3: Ebook Conversion and/or Printing
- Conversion to ebook file types
- Print on demand (POD)
- Digital and/or offset print runs

STAGE 4: Distribution and Marketing
- Distribution: online and traditional stores
- Promotion: social, niche and mass media
- Sales: online, traditional stores, special events including signings and workshops

Your Budget

Publishing budgets can range from a few dollars to many thousands. There can be direct costs such as paying a graphic designer for a cover, the printing of a paperback, sending out media kits or hiring a freelance editor. There are indirect costs (overheads) such as a computer, internet access, software, office space and utilities bills. Time spent on your project may initially cost you opportunities in some areas while later opening doors to new career possibilities. Percentages will also be deducted from sales made through distributors and retailers.

To understand the flow of money and expertise through book publishing, consider its traditional supply chain charted below. This model was almost unrivalled until 2011 when most Angus & Robertson stores closed (formerly Australia's biggest book chain), Borders Books went broke worldwide, Kindle e-readers spilled into Australian shops, sales of tablet computers and smartphones soared, Amazon bought the UK Book Depository, digital self-publishing surged, and Australia's largest independent book distributor, Scribo, went out of business.

Traditionally published print-book supply chain
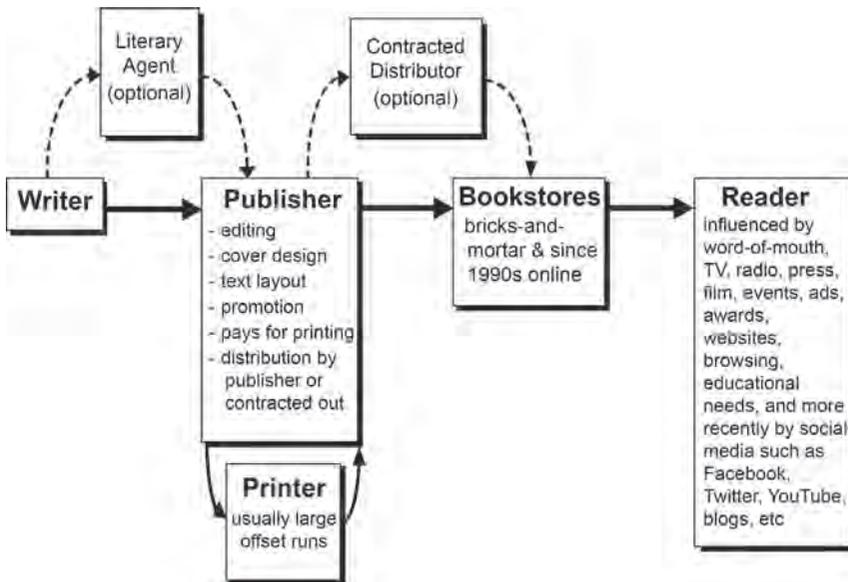
A writer typically approached a publisher directly or via a literary agent who acted as a go-between (costing about 15–20% of the writer's royalties if successful). If the writer's manuscript was accepted, the publisher would edit, design, print, promote and organise distribution of the book to bricks-and-mortar retail bookstores, topped up by online sales. Although ebooks have been around since the 1990s, these were considered by many publishers, up until about 2010, as optional extras to the main game of selling print books.

A variation on this traditional model is the self-published print-book supply chain, which became more accessible to writers during the 1990s, as shown in the chart below. This was stimulated by greater access to professional publishing software as well as improved digital printing technology that made short print runs economically viable.

Self-published print-book supply chain (older model)
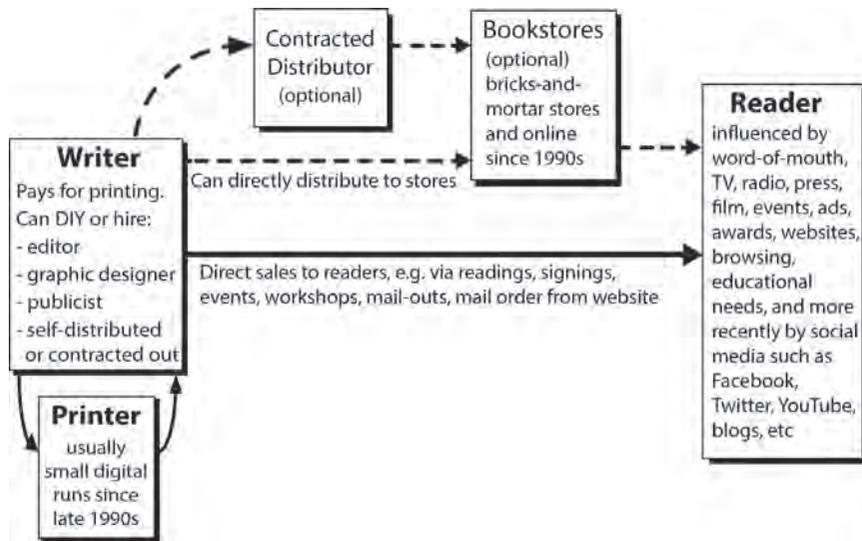
The use of the above self-publishing model has declined, particularly since 2011, but can still be utilised by a writer who believes their print book will receive healthy publicity, or who finds the online success of their ebook justifies the release of a print edition through bookstores.

The traditional and self-published print-book supply chains can both include the same basic stages of preparing a book to be printed then sold, but they have differing degrees of complexity and volume, and therefore widely varying production budgets. Yet both supply chains share the following typical divisions of revenue from print-book sales in bricks-and-mortar bookstores (via a distributor), see below.

Approximate division of revenue from a print book sold via a traditional store for $11 (to keep the figures simple) in Australia
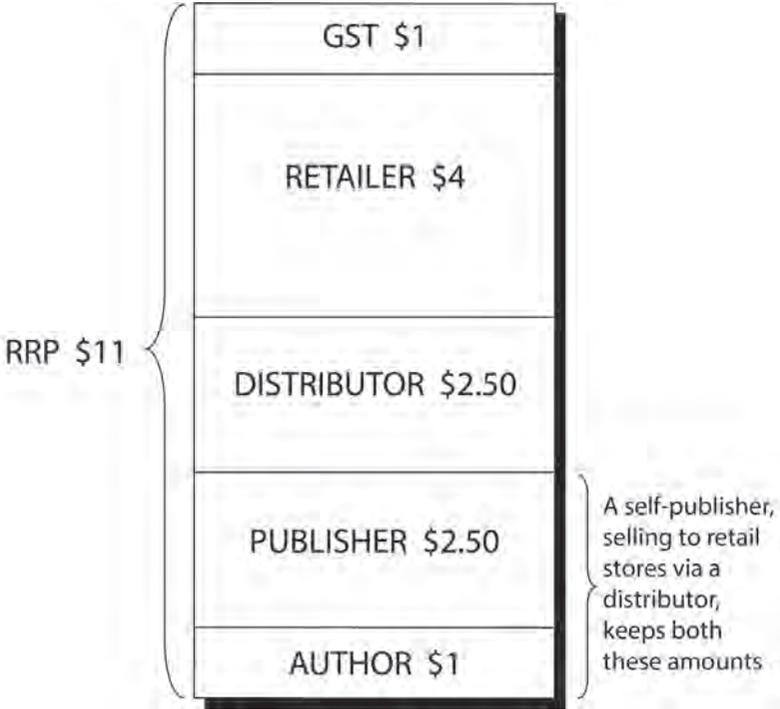
Think about the above figures for a moment. Ignoring the goods and services tax (GST), a published author typically receives 10% of RRP (recommended retail price) from the sale of books in bricks-and-mortar stores. This means if you are a self-published author who directly sells one book to a reader at full price, say after an author talk or event (not via a bookstore), then you receive the equivalent return that a published author would for selling 10 books through retail stores.

Of course the self-published author isn't supported by a major publisher's promotional clout and widespread distribution, but resourceful individuals often find ways to generate publicity via media reviews and interviews that give them a fighting chance in a crowded marketplace.

The Rise of Ebooks and Social Media

The influence of the above print-book models has been challenged by the rise of ebooks. The Australian Booksellers Association expects sales of ebooks to account for about 25% of the Australian book market by 2015. The 2010–12 boom in ebook sales made this estimate look conservative, but in 2013 the growth in ebook sales began to slow. Nevertheless, ebooks in the US accounted for about 25% of their total trade sales during 2013.

Regardless of the precise market share of ebooks in coming years, it is safe to say they have modified the way the previous supply-chain models are applied. In addition, the rise of social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc) has created extra opportunities to promote books. These developments affect publishing budgets in three important ways:

1. The costs of storing and distributing ebooks, compared to print books, are minor because ebooks can be stored on a computer (not a warehouse) and are distributed as mere data over the internet (not via trucks and vans).
2. Ebooks eliminate the major costs of paper, print and binding. By comparison, the costs of formatting and converting *most* ebooks are minor.
3. Social media networks enable writers to do more promotion from their own computers, relying less on publicists and traditional media such as radio, press and TV.

Publishers grounded in the print tradition were generally slow to adapt to the rise of ebooks and social media. Some publishers outsourced the creation and distribution of ebooks to aggregators that charged fees and/or 30–35% of sales revenue. But others developed, or are in the process of developing, their own in-house processes for digitising books, as well as managing social media.

In addition, the success of several small publishers who specialise in ebooks – treating print editions as optional extras – has encouraged some of the big publishers to create imprints (subdivisions of their main brands) dedicated solely to ebooks.

All publishers expect to sell their ebooks at a lower price than their corresponding print editions. The discounts are often about 20–50%, but some recent mainstream releases have discounted the $29.95 print edition to a mere $6.99 – almost an 80% reduction.

This leaves precious little for authors, even if a publisher is paying royalties on ebook sales at 20–25% of RRP (also known as 'list price'), rather than the 'standard' 10% of RRP from print sales.

The effect of discounting ebooks should be kept in mind when comparing the following chart with the breakdown of revenue on page 6, because the RRP of $11 is used below only to keep the figures simple. Furthermore, the royalty rates for ebooks offered by publishers are still evolving, so the following proportions should be seen as a general guide with notable variations.

Approximate division of revenue from an ebook sold via an online store for $11 (to keep the figures simple) in Australia
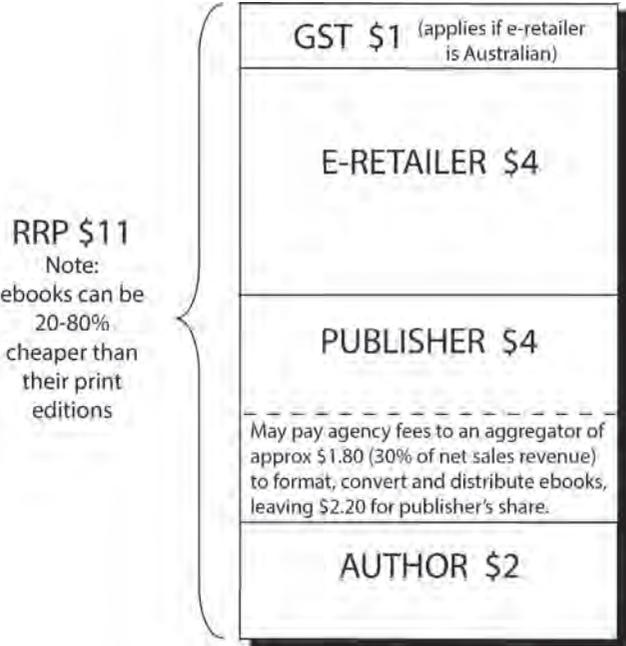
RRP $11
Note: ebooks can be 20-80% cheaper than their print editions

GST $1 (applies if e-retailer is Australian)

E-RETAILER $4

PUBLISHER $4

May pay agency fees to an aggregator of approx $1.80 (30% of net sales revenue) to format, convert and distribute ebooks, leaving $2.20 for publisher's share.

AUTHOR $2

One of the best ways to understand how ebooks have changed the supply-chain models in publishing is to study the chart below. It summarises the ways many indie writers and self-publishers are now making and marketing books.

The new indie or self-publisher ebook and POD supply chain
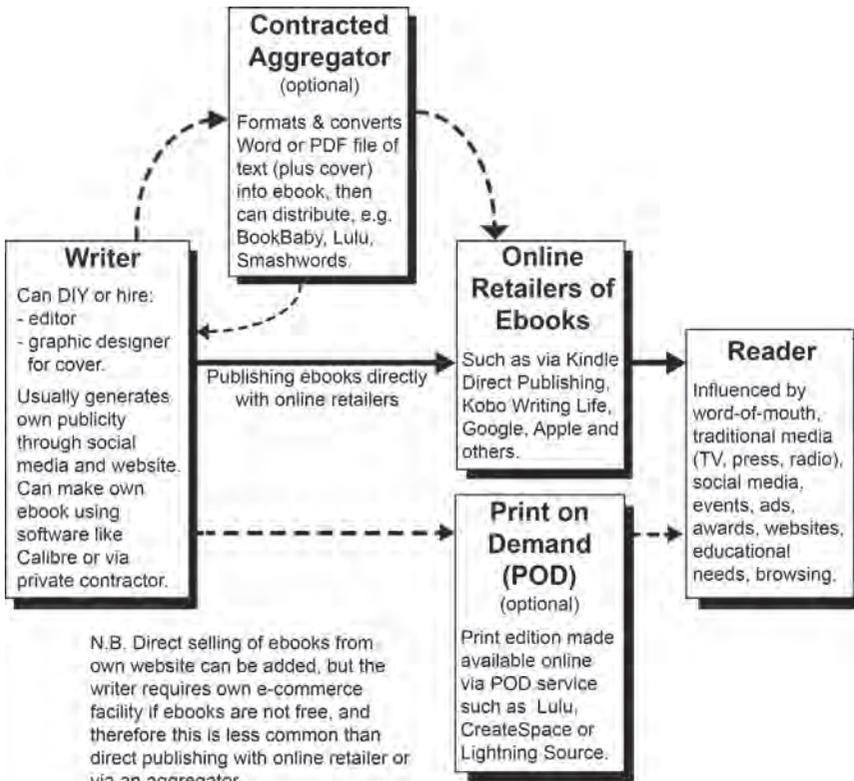
A self-publishing writer might employ the model on page 9 if established publishers reject their writing as commercially unviable. But growing numbers of published writers are choosing to self-publish ebooks, sometimes backed up by print-on-demand editions, because this approach generally provides a simpler and quicker path to readers, as well as higher royalties. These writers often call themselves 'indie writers', or even 'hybrid writers'.

Compare the chart on page 8, which shows ebook royalties from traditional publishers, with the chart below that summarises the ranges of ebook royalties available to writers directly publishing through four retailers: Kindle, Smashwords, Kobo and Google. (Smashwords enables easier access for Australian writers to Apple's iBookstore and giant US book retailer Barnes & Noble.)

Four international ebook retailers and their ranges of royalties for writers publishing directly

E-retailer	Author's Share	E-retailer's Share
Kindle Direct Publishing (world's largest ebook retailer - Amazon)	35–70%	30–65%
Smashwords (US-based aggregator and e-retailer that also distributes to Apple, Barnes & Noble and others)	40–85%	15–60%
Kobo (based in Canada)	45-80%	20-55%
Google Play (partner program)	52%	48%

Since 2007 any writer, armed with a Word doc of their text and a JPEG file of their front cover, has been able to directly publish for free with Amazon's Kindle division, which currently has about 60% of the world ebook market. The royalties earned by directly publishing with Kindle range from 35–70%. But the traditional media generally expect that a book worthy of their limited time to review will include a print edition. And without publicity in traditional media, a book will usually struggle to sell.

However, ebooks that are not supported by a print edition are increasingly breaking through onto bestseller lists due to readers discovering and talking about them online. A spike in sales caused by an online 'buzz' may attract the attention of traditional media. The resulting broader exposure can boost ebook sales into the stratosphere, prompting the release of a print edition, as happened with the books by E L James.

The three major types of ebook

1. EPUB is an open format for ebooks that is not owned by any particular company. The filenames have .epub at the end.
2. Kindle formats (which include MOBI, KF8, AZW) are owned by Amazon, Inc. Kindle has about 60% of the global ebook market.
3. PDF (Portable Document Format) was a popular early ebook format, easily and cheaply derived from the print edition, but its *fixed* page layout does not allow text to *reflow* in order to fit the screens on the new generation of electronic reading devices. In other words, you can zoom in and out of a PDF, but you cannot change the font, its size or line spacing as you can with EPUB and Kindle formats.

There are more than 20 ebook file formats, but EPUB is the most common retail format outside Kindle. Most of Apple's ebooks are in EPUB, even though many are in its proprietary iBooks format. Apple's iBookstore is the second biggest player in the Australian ebook market. Apple allows self-publication under stringent conditions, such as owning a Mac laptop or desktop and no uploading of Word files. It is generally easier for writers to submit their ebooks to Apple via aggregators that help with formatting (arranging text and images in ebooks so they display accurately) and conversion (such as from Word to Kindle, EPUB or other ebook formats). Apple also sells apps (purpose-built computer applications) like iBooks Author (which uses fixed page layout) to help writers publish exclusively through its iBookstore.

Barnes & Noble is a giant American book retailer that may not be a household name in Australia, but claims about 20% of

the US ebook market. Ebook market-share figures are notoriously inaccurate, even misleading, but, suffice to say, Barnes & Noble, with its Nook electronic reader, offers a large retail opportunity for many Australian writers. At the time of writing, however, Australians couldn't download ebooks from B&N, not even free ebooks, without entering a credit card number linked directly to an American bank account. B&N also has a self-publishing program called Nook Press (formerly Pubit!) that is expanding internationally, so it may become accessible to Australians.

Fortunately, aggregators like Smashwords, Lulu and BookTango enable Australian writers to gain free access to Barnes & Noble as well as Apple. In addition, Lulu and BookTango offer paid services to writers who need assistance formatting and converting ebooks. Paid assistance ranges from about $50 to $300, assuming the book has fewer than 20 graphics. An extra charge is added if a designer is needed to create an ebook cover.

The rest of the retail ebook market comprises Kobo, Google Play, Sony's Reader Store, and numerous other online stores. Google Play currently has a small share of the global ebook market, but is set to expand significantly by leveraging its powerful brand – not to mention the unique position the company will attain if successful in its goal of digitising all known existing books. Google's Partner Program enables writers to publish directly, as does Kobo's Writing Life. Sony is yet to offer direct publishing.

In summary, an Australian writer can globally publish an ebook for free – if the investment of their time learning the process is not counted – or with paid assistance that may cost a few hundred dollars if a modest number of graphics is involved.

Budget Scenarios for Print Books

If a writer wants a small number of copies of her or his book printed, then print-on-demand (POD) companies such as CreateSpace (Amazon) and Lulu provide services that can print a single copy of a book for less than $10 (if not too large or complex), plus postage. The advantage of POD is that copies can be printed after they are ordered so storage is not an issue. POD services are also offered by Australian companies, and can be googled for comparison.

There is no cost to set up an account with Lulu or CreateSpace, but each charges for add-on services if writers need help to create files ready for printing (print-ready files). The companies also offer packages to turn a print book into an ebook. However, be aware that selling print books into Australian or overseas bricks-and-mortar bookstores via CreateSpace or Lulu POD services is highly unlikely despite it being technically possible.

Lightning Source is another large POD company, but it is better suited for small presses and self-publishers who already know how to create press-quality PDFs and expect to regularly sell print books through bricks-and-mortar bookstores as well as online retailers. Unlike Lulu and CreateSpace, Lightning Source has set-up costs (about $150) and its contracts are more complex.

At the next level of budget, you might have a private family history that costs a few hundred dollars to photocopy and bind at Officeworks or at an instant printer like Snap or Kwik Kopy. Perhaps you'd like to compile an extended family photo album produced via the Australian websites of Apple iPhoto, Blurb, Photobook or a similar online service (google them). Family members can chip in for the bill or help host the reunion when the book is 'launched'.

Moving up a level, if you want to digitally print a 300-page novel, then expect to pay about $1500 for 250 professional quality copies. Not bad value if you sell 100 copies at your launch for around $20 each.

At a niche (retail) market level, you can print 2,000 copies of a paperback for about $7,000 with a book specialist such as McPherson's Printing Group or Griffin Press. Their printing usually takes about two to three weeks.

The cost of a good publicist starts at around $2,000. A freelance editor costs about $60–80 an hour. A graphic designer might reasonably charge $500–1,000 for a cover. These are all round figures, carrying lots of provisos, but they should give you a rough idea of how much money is involved in making a print book.

To help you further gauge the costs of competing in the commercial book market, keep in mind that small to medium publishers in Australia consider sales between 3,000 and 5,000

copies to be healthy, but major publishers will typically expect sales of at least 6,000 to 8,000 copies. These sales figures may seem modest compared to some other commodities, but the flow-on effects such as paid talks, a career boost or an increased business profile may be significant.

Now you have a general idea of the various book publishing processes and budgets, the next crucial consideration is allocation of your time.

Your Timeline

Approximately 24 hours after the infamous attacks on 11 September 2001, there was a book published on the subject. More followed within a week. By contrast, researching and writing a book can take more than a decade. The question most people have to ask themselves is how much time can they or their business afford to spend publishing a book?

The time spent writing a book needs to be demarcated from time spent on the rest of the publishing process. This is very important. A book can take years to write and rewrite. Once a book is written, mainstream publishers can comfortably have it ready for sale within six to eight months, but may take more than a year. Most established publishers focus their promotion of a book within a single month. By contrast, self-publishers and smaller presses (including the growing number of specialist digital publishers like The Writer's Coffee Shop in Sydney) can move quickly to put out a book within a few weeks if there is a compelling reason. These smaller enterprises may spread their promotion of a book over several months.

There is often a 'twilight zone' between finishing the writing of a book then confirming the next stage of publication. This is the time when a book might be pitched to one or more publishers with or without the help of a literary agent who acts as a go-between. Sometimes deals are landed that make the author a pile of money. Unfortunately, there are also instances when publishing houses sign an author, then delay or even change their minds about releasing the book.

Authors who aren't picked up by an established publisher might self-publish – sometimes competing successfully in the marketplace against similar publications from companies that rejected their writing. A few may stoop to using vanity publishers, which are marginal companies charging highly inflated prices to package a book for what turns out to be very low sales figures. There are also custom and partnership publishing services, but more about these alternatives is in Option 2: Determining Your Publishing Vehicle.

Time Management

Given the flexibility of timelines, the more critical concern for many writers is how best to manage their valuable and limited time on a daily basis. It's all very well to have an ever-expanding array of book publishing options, but many writers feel overwhelmed by a rising tide of new technology, endless new jargon and relentless change. Some may give up in frustration, while others will seek new knowledge and skills to regain a sense of control.

The dream for many writers is to spend as much time as they like writing books, then have a publisher handle all the packaging and selling of their titles in a range of formats. Ideally, this process rewards the writer with enough money to keep practising their art while living comfortably.

The reality, however, for the vast majority of writers is a time-management dilemma. All but a handful of authors have to supplement their incomes with journalism, corporate writing, editing, teaching or other occupations. Authors must manage their time well in order to write good books and still pay their bills.

Many new writers are now establishing their platform (their presence in the market) via the internet before having their first book published. Their early works may be short stories, articles or zines (self-published writing presented as mini-magazines or roughly bound books). They are likely to be active through social media but may not yet have a personal website. So the model on page 16 will be a future aim for new and emerging writers, whereas experienced writers are increasingly organising their published and self-published works along the following lines.

The Adaptable Author's Website

A range of works and price points:

• **Freebies** to download e.g. articles, short stories, samples, audio files.

• **Low Price** e.g. self-published digital books, serial e-publications, simple apps.

• **Mid Price** e.g. published digital books, self-published print books, audio books.

• **High Price** e.g. published print books, limited editions or special merchandise.

Links to online retailers' sites or incorporate own shopping cart.

Services available e.g. speaking, teaching, corporate writing, journalism, editing.

Blogging, Podcasts

Social Networks

Readers

influenced by word-of-mouth, social media, traditional media, events, ads, awards, websites, educational needs, browsing

Stores

• bricks-and-mortar bookstores
• online retailers
• ebook retailers

(desirable but optional)

Companies and Contractors

The adaptable author may engage with: traditional publishers, e-publishers, audio book publishers, customised publishers, print-on-demand services (CreateSpace, Lulu, Lightning Source), printers (offset &/or digital), freelance editors, graphic designers, publicists, web &/or app developers, aggregators, distributors.

The key to the 'Adaptable Author' model is *engagement* with the digital community. Having a static website that acts as an online brochure is no longer likely to meet the rising expectations of readers. Many authors are regularly blogging and developing relationships with readers via Facebook and Twitter as well as other social media linked to their website, not simply displaying their books on a web page with some background information (that's 'old school').

If you think the Adaptable Author model, or a variation of it, might suit your purposes, then develop it in steps. Don't try to do too much in one leap. Seek professional advice and paid assistance where necessary. Most importantly, ensure you are not distracted from your *core* creative work of writing. This is easier said than done, but it starts by having clear aims, then limiting the amount of time you spend each day on non-writing activities. In short, you need to manage your time well to stay on top of your game. As in any field.

Although the Adaptable Author model may seem complex now, come back to it later, after you progress through the following pages as the four main publishing stages are broken down into nine key options, presented as chapters. For the moment, the general concept of the Adaptable Author is more important than the specific details chosen at the author's discretion.

Let's continue over the page by considering a series of key decisions and alternatives to guide you through what is usually the most time-consuming and complex part: writing the book.
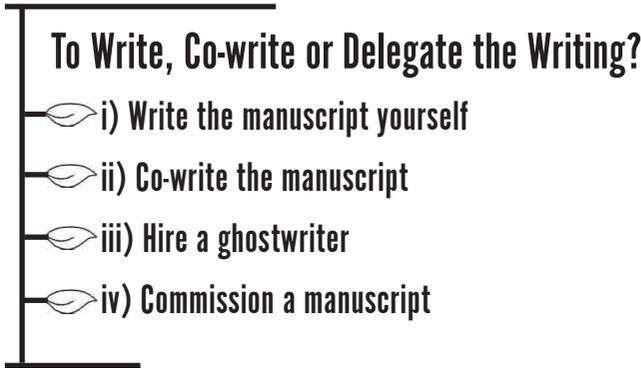
OPTION 1: WRITING A MANUSCRIPT
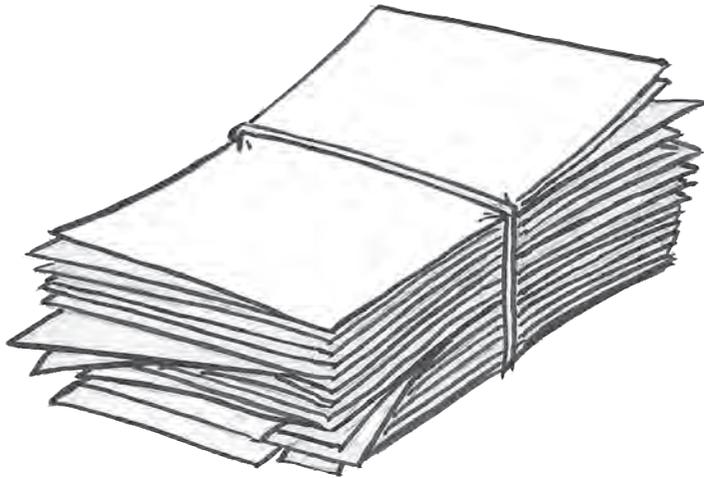
Overall Goal for Option 1

The words you write for your book are initially known as a manuscript. A manuscript can be word-processed, typed or hand-written. It can include diagrams, photos and illustrations. The overall goal for Option 1 is to write an engaging manuscript, regardless of the way you choose to put it together.

For many writers, a manuscript will end up as a wad of text-filled A4 pages printed out from their computer and bound by a rubber band. This is the unglamorous raw material that is ready to be edited and prepared for publication. These humble pages may have years of research, writing and rewriting invested in their creation, which is why back-up copies need to be made regularly.

This first stage of creating a book can set you up to achieve your purpose and reach your target readers – or fall short. So don't rush this stage or delude yourself that a first draft is good enough. Writing involves a lot more than transcribing letters onto pages.

DECISION TREE 1A

To Write, Co-write or Delegate the Writing?

- ✐ i) Write the manuscript yourself
- ✐ ii) Co-write the manuscript
- ✐ iii) Hire a ghostwriter
- ✐ iv) Commission a manuscript

> **Throughout this book you are encouraged to skip any alternatives presented in decision trees that don't fit your preferences.**

Alternative 1A i) Write the manuscript yourself

Many new and emerging writers are so passionate and determined to write their book that it would never cross their minds to involve anyone else in the creation of their manuscript. For these writers, putting words on a page or laptop screen immerses them in a demanding yet satisfying, even joyous, process. The long hours working in relative isolation – on a path strewn with obstacles to overcome – can reward them with clarity, deeper understanding and emotional catharsis.

Fortunately, a solo writer also has the option of seeking the assistance of a mentor, which can be particularly helpful after a first draft has been completed. A mentor can give valuable advice on redrafting, including specific suggestions on revising structure, refining content, rewording sentences, deleting paragraphs, providing extra ideas, adding jokes, helping expand or rewrite critical sections, and so on.

You may be lucky enough to have a friend or family member who can mentor you. If not, then look for mentorship programs run by your state or territory writers' centre (see list of Useful Contacts on page 316). The Australian Society of Authors (ASA) offers mentoring services to emerging writers and illustrators through an annual competitive process (visit asauthors.org, look

under Services > Awards > Emerging Writers' Mentorships). The ASA also offers paid mentorships (Services > Assessments and Advice > Mentorships). If a mentor likes your work enough, she or he may even introduce you to a publisher.

Other support options for solo writers include doing a writing course or joining a writing group. Writing courses are discussed in Decision Tree 1C. Options for gaining feedback from writers' groups, focus groups, individual readers and/or manuscript assessment services are discussed in Decision Tree 1F.

Many people would like to write a book but don't have the time. They may have stories or knowledge they would like to distil into a book that entertains and/or informs others. But the demands of work, family, health and paying bills mean too little time and energy are left for the many hours of quiet, intense concentration that writing usually requires. If you don't have enough time to write your book, then there are a number of alternatives to consider.

Alternative 1A ii) Co-write the manuscript

Partnering with one or more writers or illustrators not only shares the load, it can help motivate and focus your writing. You may find a suitable co-writer through a local writers' group or while studying at TAFE or university. Regular meetings can give you deadlines and moral support to keep you on track over many months until the manuscript is successfully completed.

You might, however, find your writing styles don't cohere or someone doesn't pull their weight. Even if you decide to abandon the initial project or change personnel, the experience you gain may still be more useful than you immediately realise.

To begin with, you may have a loose agreement or memorandum of understanding to share credit and proceeds from the book. If your joint work progresses well, then consider drawing up a formal contract. The Arts/Law Centre of Australia or the Australian Society of Authors can provide writers with contract advice. The ASA website has a downloadable template 'Joint Authorship Agreement', which is a useful starting point for further negotiations.

The ASA website has downloadable templates that are useful starting points for a range of creative agreements

Co-writing a book can be extended into a community process. This could be based around face-to-face meetings in which participants are delegated chapters with a common thread, but the whole process can instead be conducted online. Examples of websites that facilitate collaborative writing include: Folding Story, Protagonize, Ficly, Wattpad, WikiStory, StoryMash, Novlet and Red Lemonade. (Also see the online forums listed on page 40.)

The writers involved may be able to invest in the eventual publication of a book, but the process can also be purely for educational, recreational or research purposes. Keep in mind, however, that legal complications can arise if one or more writers decide to pitch material from a collaborative project to a private publisher.

Alternative 1A iii) Hire a ghostwriter

There are plenty of ghostwriters around, but the good ones are not cheap. Some advertise their services in publications for writers or list their services with the Australian Society of Authors (see the downloadable 'Ghostwriting Agreement and Contact List' on the ASA's website). An internet search is also worthwhile (e.g. elance.com) as long as you can find independent testimonies about a ghostwriter's style of working as well as their previous books.

A detailed legal contract is a must for any ghostwriting agreement. You do not want to end up in court due to foreseeable oversights in your well-intentioned 'handshake' arrangements. You can use the ASA's ghostwriting agreement template as a starting point because some ghostwriters may like a royalty-based approach with a modest advance, while others may prefer to charge a higher time-based fee and forgo royalties on sales.

One of the best ways to assess whether a ghostwriter is right for your job is to ask for a small sample before fully committing. Expect to pay for this sample work, perhaps a chapter or five per cent of the anticipated total. When you've read the sample, offer feedback to the ghostwriter and see what the reaction is. You should soon have an idea of whether to go ahead with a full contract or find another ghostwriter.

If you do hire a ghostwriter, a note of caution. A friend who worked for Fairfax newspapers as a journalist for twenty-five years turned his hand to ghostwriting for celebrities. Unfortunately, more than one of his clients was reluctant to give due credit and payment at the end. After all, hadn't this journalist merely transcribed each celebrity's own verbal stories into a computer file – something that speech-recognition software could have done?

This attitude completely undervalues the work of a good

ghostwriter who creates the illusion of the subject telling his or her own story. A good ghostwriter asks questions that expertly extract material which the subject may overlook or undervalue.

Then there is the style of telling. The subject may not be aware of their frequent use of clichés, tautologies, redundancies, tangents or repetitions. A good ghostwriter makes sure the subject's voice does not appear grammatically inept. The final sentences may appear straightforward, however, the path to their creation is littered with grammatical and stylistic traps for less experienced writers.

In summary, if you hire a ghostwriter then choose well. Request a sample, insist on a detailed contract, and respect the ghostwriter's art of making the words look as though they flowed spontaneously from the subject.

Alternative 1A iv) Commission a manuscript

Publishers regularly commission authors to write books that are intended to fill perceived 'gaps' in the marketplace, such as interpretations of recent world events, high-profile biographies, introductions to new technology, improved textbooks and the like.

Outside of traditional publishing, there are countless businesses discovering the marketing value of books about their products (goods and/or services). These businesses might already publish a website supplemented by paper brochures or flyers. Now many are taking the next step and publishing their brand's history or a how-to guide featuring their products. This can open up a whole new avenue for attracting and retaining clients. If your business chooses to hire a writer for this purpose, then you can download the ASA's template 'Commissioned Works Agreement' and add further clauses under the supervision of a legal advisor.

Individuals can also commission a book in which there is no suggestion of ghostwriting, but a straightforward delegation of writing duties without the need for adopting a subject's persona. This might suit a busy person who would like to commission a professional to write a family history, the story of a venture or a guide to a local area.

DECISION TREE 1B

To Write Your Passion or Gauge the Market?

- ✎ i) Write what you are passionate about
- ✎ ii) Chase a market
- ✎ iii) Target a gap in the market

Alternative 1B i) Write what you are passionate about

For many writers this alternative will seem obvious: write with your heart. If you aren't passionate about your writing, then why would you expect others to be? Writing a book is a large undertaking requiring many months or years of work. If you enjoy the process of writing, then you are much more likely to last the distance.

For example, in 1993 I landed my first full-time job as a professional writer with a small music-education publisher. The job required me to research and write over 200,000 words per year for a series of books and manuals. During my previous year at university, writing a 2,000-word assignment had seemed onerous. But the job combined two things I enjoyed: music and breaking down complex things into clear, accessible terms. In just over four years I wrote nearly a million words for that publisher, which sold into domestic and international markets. And those years flew.

You might be passionate about your book, yet struggle to understand how to make a start. You will likely try hard to just 'get the words right'. But if you can take the next step and discover your 'voice' as a writer, the whole process can suddenly become more enjoyable and something to look forward to, rather than a slog.

I wish someone had given me this guidance during the 18 months I spent grinding away at my first short stories – based on my experience as a jackaroo on a Kimberley cattle station at 16 – before the protagonist-narrator's voice suddenly took on a life of its own and became more exuberant and ironic. That's when I

knew I had the key to my first novel. Writing became a joy. I hope you have a similar 'Eureka!' moment, whether you are writing fiction or non-fiction.

Alternative 1B ii) Chase a market

When Harry Potter first took off in the 1990s, plenty of writers and publishers tried to chase the market and piggyback on the success of Joanne Rowling. Then it was Dan Brown's turn and all things 'Da Vinci' suddenly looked saleable from 2003. Until Stephenie Meyer came along a couple of years later and brought sparkling vampires into vogue. Zombies and werewolves have since tried hard to go 'blockbuster'. The success of E L James in 2012 let loose a plethora of erotic fiction. For most writers, however, it would take a minimum of two years to write, pitch and publish a book for a 'hot' genre, by which time the market will probably have moved on or been saturated.

Some book markets are perennially popular, such as romance. But people who think they can download the 'Harlequin Mills & Boon formula', to churn out a romance novel to fund their 'real' writing, are in for a shock. They are up against writers who are passionate about romance fiction.

Several years ago I gave a talk to a romance writers' group about story models, where I discovered many had started writing romance novels because they had run out of books to read in their favourite sub-genre, such as medical romance or 'super-sexy' romance. A few of these writers were earning six-figure incomes and put their success down to combining their passion for romance stories with professional writing skills.

Alternative 1B iii) Target a gap in the market

If publishers routinely pick perceived gaps in the book marketplace to target, then why not emulate their approach? Well, because publishers earn their positions through extended professional experience and have a contact list of published, often award-winning, writers to help realise their visions. Furthermore, publishers who are not passionate about the books they commission are at risk of losing their reputation and career.

Having sounded these warnings, I concede you may have a winning idea for a niche or even a mass-market book. If you are passionate about your book but don't have the time to write it, then commissioning a writer makes sense. If you need help finding a suitable writer, then contact the Australian Society of Authors, your state or territory writers' centre (see Useful Contacts, page 316), or search the internet.

If your own enthusiasm and research leads you to find a gap in the book marketplace, then you could be on to a best-selling combination.

DECISION TREE 1C

To Take a Writing Course or Not?

- i) Seminars, workshops and short writing courses
- ii) TAFE writing courses
- iii) University writing courses

Writing courses in general

Those who decide to write a book often start by brushing up on grammar, but soon discover there is a lot more to writing a book than understanding grammar. There is a *craft* to professional writing, as in most occupations. There are countless books on the craft of writing a fiction or non-fiction bestseller, but they can only be general in their advice. Specific feedback about your own written pieces from a professional – who shows you how to apply the craft, while coaxing out your creative instincts – can be of far greater value to a new writer. But courses cost money and time, so are they really worth it?

Every writer has to discover what works for himself or herself. Certainly there are writers who seem to be born with a gift for words. At the other end of the scale, there are people who forever struggle to write coherent sentences. Between these two extremes there are many competent writers who can learn to be good writers.

For more than a decade I have personally observed hundreds of students, in university and TAFE professional writing courses, improve their writing skills from competent to publishable. Some are satisfied with their short stories, scripts or articles being published in their institute's anthology or student newspaper, others move into corporate writing or journalism, a few have gone on to have their novels or non-fiction books published by mainstream publishers.

I've heard claims, however, that such courses don't work. This is probably more to do with unrealistic student expectations (there's no magic formula or quick-fix), poorly conducted workshops, or the ineffectiveness of certain teachers. Unfortunately, not all professional writers are good teachers of writing.

The effective teaching of writing requires an additional set of skills combined with supportive personal qualities. An accomplished writer-teacher like John Marsden makes his workshops look easy to deliver, but his methods have been honed through years of hard-won experience. Elizabeth Jolley was an outstanding teacher-mentor for Tim Winton at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (later reinvented as Curtin University).

If you decide to try a writing course for yourself, then research each teacher's background, try to ask previous students for evaluations of the course, and expect to work hard to achieve top results. The same could be said about almost any course you decide to undertake.

The main alternatives to consider are as follows.

Alternative 1C i) Seminars, workshops and short writing courses

Adult education centres, writers' centres, the ASA, CAL (Copyright Agency Limited), and Express Media regularly run an array of seminars, workshops and short courses in writing, editing and publishing to suit varying skill levels. Professional writer-teachers may advertise their short courses – even retreats for writers to rural or overseas destinations – in writers' publications such as writers' centre newsletters, or via the internet. The good seminars and courses tend to be more expensive but often provide excellent opportunities to workshop with local and visiting authors.

Good public libraries occasionally offer seminars for writers or extend their support to organisations such as The Wheeler Centre in Melbourne, which offers a year-round program focused on writing and ideas. Annual writers' festivals, including emerging writers' festivals, also offer worthwhile workshops and seminars for writers.

Alternative 1C ii) TAFE writing courses

Although TAFE diplomas/certificates in professional writing are officially considered to be at a lower skill level than a degree, many university graduates take TAFE courses in order to polish their writing skills. This is generally because TAFEs have longer semesters, smaller classes and therefore more time to conduct thorough workshopping of individual pieces.

Recent changes to funding have, unfortunately, made it more expensive to take a diploma after completing a degree. Some students now complete a diploma of professional writing first, then transfer into the second-year of a university arts degree in order to reduce their overall tertiary education fees.

Alternative 1C iii) University writing courses

Many universities offer a Bachelor of Arts with a major in professional writing, or similar degree. Students who learn their initial writing skills at TAFE sometimes enrich their critical perspective and develop their work by undertaking a degree at university. Honours programs are often available in which the creative writing component is typically 10,000 words.

Postgraduate courses in writing are also available at some institutions. A typical Masters program in writing requires a 40,000-word creative work; a typical creative PhD thesis requires an 80,000-word creative work. A postgraduate creative work is accompanied by a shorter academic work usually called an exegesis. In simple terms, an exegesis formally explains the theoretical engagements that shaped the creative work. The specific prerequisites, scholarship application deadlines, and contents of writing courses can be found on each university's website.