



Choosing Your Publishing Route

"Finishing a manuscript is the beginning — not the end."

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A practical guide for authors considering traditional publishing, self-publishing or assisted self-publishing.

Once your manuscript is ready to move towards publication, one of the first decisions is **how you want your book to be published**. Traditionally, authors think of two choices: finding a conventional publisher or publishing the book themselves. Today there is also a practical middle route - **assisted self-publishing through an independent publisher or publishing service**.

Traditional Publishing

With traditional publishing, an author submits a manuscript to a publishing house for consideration. If the publisher accepts the book, the publisher normally takes responsibility for activities such as editing, design, production, distribution and marketing, according to the terms of the publishing agreement.

The publisher carries much of the financial risk, but the author generally has less control over matters such as the cover, production schedule, pricing and how the book is marketed. Royalties and publishing rights are determined by the publishing contract.

Acceptance is not guaranteed, and the process from submission to publication can take considerable time.

Self-Publishing

With self-publishing, the author takes responsibility for bringing the book to market.

This does **not** mean that the author has to personally edit, design, format, print and distribute the book. The author can employ professionals to perform any or all of these tasks while retaining control of the publishing project.

A common misconception is that a self-published book is automatically of lower quality than a conventionally published book. That is not the case. The quality of the finished book depends on the quality of the work that goes into it - editing, proofreading, interior formatting, cover design, printing and final quality control. A professionally prepared self-published book can meet the same production standards expected of commercially published books.

The real difference is primarily **who controls and manages the publishing process**, rather than whether professional expertise is involved.

Assisted Self-Publishing Through an Independent Publisher

Authors do not have to choose between doing absolutely everything themselves and handing their book over to a large traditional publishing house.

An author can remain a self-publishing author while using an **independent publishing service** to manage the professional stages of producing the book.

An independent publisher can assist with:

- editing and proofreading;
- book sizing, formatting and typesetting;
- cover design;
- ISBN and publication administration;
- paperback and Kindle preparation;
- print-ready files;
- Amazon KDP preparation and upload assistance; and
- advice on pricing, distribution and marketing.

The important distinction is that **using an independent publisher to prepare and publish the book does not automatically transfer ownership of the author's work.**

Who Owns the Book?

In South Africa, copyright in an original literary work generally arises automatically when the work is created in material form. A book therefore does not ordinarily need to be formally registered for copyright protection.

An author who uses an independent publisher can still retain copyright in the work.

For example, where **MyNovel** assists an author with self-publishing, the book may identify MyNovel as the **publisher or publishing imprint** for publication and bibliographic purposes, while the copyright remains with the author, subject to the agreement between the author and MyNovel.

Using MyNovel as the named publisher is optional. If you would like MyNovel to appear as the publisher or publishing imprint of your book, you must request this. There is **no additional fee** for doing so. MyNovel does **not acquire any ownership, copyright or publishing rights** in your book merely by being named as the publisher. The author remains the copyright owner and retains all rights to the work, unless a separate written agreement expressly states otherwise.

Example copyright-page wording

**Copyright © 2026 Author Name
Published by MyNovel**

In this example, the author owns the copyright, while MyNovel is simply identified as the publisher of that edition.

Those two statements perform different functions. The first identifies the copyright owner; the second identifies the publisher of that edition.

Being named as the publisher does **not by itself** mean that the publisher owns the author's copyright. Any transfer or licensing of rights should instead be determined by the publishing agreement.

What About the ISBN?

An ISBN identifies a particular publication and edition; it does not itself determine who owns the copyright.

In South Africa, the ISBN application process allows the publication to be associated with either the author or the publisher, depending on the publishing arrangement.

Copyright	Ownership and rights in the creative work.
ISBN / publisher information	Identifies the publication and the party responsible for publishing that edition.

Who Receives the Income From Book Sales?

Another important difference between traditional publishing and independent self-publishing is **how the author is paid when books are sold**.

Traditional Publishing

With a traditional publishing arrangement, the publisher normally finances and manages the publication of the book and receives the income generated from book sales.

The author is then paid a **royalty** according to the publishing contract. A royalty is an agreed percentage or amount paid to the author for each qualifying sale.

The publisher generally retains the remainder of the income to cover publishing, production, distribution, marketing and business costs.

The exact royalty, payment terms and rights involved vary from one publishing contract to another.

Independent or Assisted Self-Publishing

With self-publishing, the commercial arrangement is fundamentally different.

The author is publishing the book for his or her own account and therefore normally retains the income generated by the book, after any applicable costs such as printing, online retailer or marketplace fees, payment-processing charges, delivery costs and any agreed sales commission.

The author is therefore **not limited to receiving a royalty from the independent publisher**. The author remains the principal beneficiary of the book's sales.

For example, if an author purchases printed copies and sells them directly to readers, the proceeds of those sales belong to the author, less the author's own printing, delivery or selling costs.

Selling Through an Independent Publisher

An author may also choose to have the book offered for sale through an independent publisher's online bookshop or other sales channel.

In that situation, the author still owns the book and remains entitled to the proceeds of the sale, but the independent publisher may charge an **agreed commission or administration fee** for processing the transaction, collecting payment, maintaining the online listing and handling the associated sales administration.

The author is also free to use **multiple sales channels or selling platforms**. Listing a book with an independent publisher does not normally require the author to sell exclusively through that publisher. The author may also sell directly, through other online stores, at events, through retailers, or on platforms such as Amazon, subject to the terms of each individual platform.

Using an independent publisher as one sales channel does not prevent the author from using others.

The balance is then payable to the author in accordance with the agreed terms.

This gives self-publishing authors a useful combination of **ownership and independence**, while still allowing them to make use of an established publishing platform for sales and distribution.

In simple terms:

With traditional publishing, the author generally earns a royalty from the publisher.

With independent self-publishing, the author is effectively the publishing business and retains the benefit of the book's sales, subject to the costs and commissions of the sales channels chosen.

Traditional Publishing vs Independent Self-Publishing

Traditional publishing	Independent self-publishing
Publisher controls the publishing arrangement.	Author controls the publishing arrangement.
Publisher receives book-sale revenue.	Author retains the economic benefit of sales, subject to selling costs.
Author receives a contractual royalty.	No publisher royalty structure is required.
Publisher normally determines distribution channels.	Author chooses where and how the book is sold.

Traditional publishing	Independent self-publishing
Rights are governed by the publishing contract.	Author can retain copyright and publishing control.
Publisher carries much of the financial risk.	Author generally carries the publishing and production costs.

A Final Word

Publishing can feel complicated when you first look at all the steps involved, but each stage has a clear purpose. Taken one step at a time, the journey from manuscript to published book becomes manageable - and achievable.

When you are ready to take the next step, MyNovel can assist with individual publishing services or guide you through the complete publishing process.

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