Write, Publish, Succeed

A SELF PUBLISHING CRASH COURSE

Scope

COVERED

- Editing options
- Book file formats
- Print-on-demand
- Cover Art
- Metadata
- Digital store accounts
- Author platform
  - Amazon
  - Goodreads
  - BookBub
  - Website services

NOT COVERED

- Marketing
- Ads
- Promotion strategy
- Offset printing
- Hardcover
- Audiobooks
- Writing
- Traditional publishing
- Social Media

About me

- Self-published 7 titles
- MFA in Creative Writing (2024)
  - Focus on publishing and contemporary fiction
- Novel working through morass of traditional publishing
- Creative nonfiction published in magazines and anthologies
  - If you're interested in getting your own short works published, I'm running a class on that in April
- Available to help! If you have questions or concerns, email me:
  - james@jamesteitsworth.com

Why this class

- The short answer is content marketing and scams
- There is good information, but it's buried by sophisticated marketers
    - Companies write articles for things authors need in order to promote their own services
    - Bloggers get paid a fee for referring to expensive services
    - Often there is subtle pressure and bias in the article
    - Here are quotes from articles about how to design your own book cover
        - "If you're not 100% certain of your digital design skills, look into collaborating with a professional cover designer…"
        - "If you don't have design experience, I recommend spending the money to hire a cover design artist."
    - It's actually good advice, for some people.
        - What are you trying to accomplish?
- Publishing Scams are on the Rise
    - If sounds too good to be true, check Writer Beware

Goals

- What are your goals?
  - Why do you want to publish your own book?
    - Check 'Writing a Book' off of your bucket list?
    - Earn some part of your living?
    - Lead magnet for professional service?
    - Something else entirely?
  - What outcome do you expect from your publishing?
- What is your budget?
  - How much are you willing to spend on professional services?
  - Are you going completely DIY?
  - Why?

Books Don't Go Bad

- It's easy to get overwhelmed
- Start small
  - Focus on getting the book out
  - Tweak and add more when you have the time and attention
- You can try something new:
  - Tomorrow
  - Next month
  - Next year
- All you actually need is
  - A manuscript
  - A cover
  - A description
  - A genre
  - Keywords

Editing

Types of Editing

- Developmental
  - Focused on the story
  - Big picture
    - Plot
    - Character development
    - Structure
- Copyedit
  - Focused on the manuscript
  - Word-by-word
    - Grammar and punctuation
    - Inconsistency
- Proofread
  - Final check for typos and formatting problems

When to consider

- Developmental Editing
  - First novel
  - Manuscript isn't working and you don't know why
  - Early readers are confused or lost
- Copyediting
  - Every project
    - Especially if you haven't published much
- Proofreading
  - Complex formatting
  - No early readers
  - Correctness is vital

Hiring an Editor

- If you're new, stick to the well-known providers
  - Reedsy
  - Editorial Freelancers Association
  - ACES
- Or ask another author in your genre
  - Someone doing the same kind of work
  - Same kind of scope
- Don't jump in without comparison shopping
  - Some 'services' that are 'recommended' online are affiliate marketing schemes with outrageous costs
  - Ask for testimonials and references
  - Request a sample edit if you find someone
- There are no guarantees
  - Eventually you have to trust someone, but do your due diligence

Not hiring an editor

- Don't default to not hiring an editor
  - It should be a conscious decision
  - It should be in line with goals and expectations
- Some reasons to avoid hiring an editor
  - Small niche
  - Short fiction/poetry
  - Hobby/fun project
  - No budget

DIY Editing

- Developmental Editing
  - Ask for help from friends/family
    - Especially if they read the genre
  - Join a workshopping group
  - Take a course
  - Read books

DIY Editing

- Copyediting
  - Brush up on the basics
    - Grammar Monster
    - Books
      - Eats, Shoots & Leaves
      - Elements of Style
    - Courses
      - CBIZ Grammar Refresher
  - Specialized software
    - ProWritingAid, Grammarly, Hemingway
    - LLMs (ChatGPT, Gemini, Llama)
    - Don't rely on only one of these. They often find different things
    - Not useful if you can't tell when they're wrong
  - Know a grammar stickler? Ask for help. Do them a favor: clean their garage or listen to their half hour rant about split infinitives.

DIY Editing

- Proofreading
  - Read it carefully yourself
    - Take some time away
    - Read out of order
  - Enlist early readers
  - Software
    - Do another run with whatever you're using
  - Watch for errors coming back from KDP after upload
    - Formatting issues
    - Spelling issues

Book Files

EPUB3 AND PDF

MOBI is (almost) dead

⚠ **Mobi files won't be accepted after March 18, 2025**

We recommend using Kindle Create to submit fixed-layout eBooks as Kindle Package Format (KPF) or uploading an EPUB file. Learn more about this change.

Long live EPUB 3

EPUB 3 vs PDF

EPUB 3

- EPUB 3 format is *the* ebook format now
  - Amazon discontinued MOBI
  - Kindle, Kobo, and other ebook retailers require an EPUB
  - If you upload a Word file, it's converted to EPUB for you

- Ebooks with a lot of text work better in EPUB
  - Text flows like a web page when resized
  - Users set fonts, line spacing, etc. in their reader

PDF

- PDF is *the* print book format
  - Has fixed height, width, spacing etc.
  - Fixed layout required to print book at a specific size
  - All print services will require A PDF

- Ebooks with complex formatting often work better in PDF

Creating EPUB Files

- What did you use to write your book?
- Scrivener? Google Docs? LibreOffice? Apple Pages?
  - There's a simple way to export as EPUB
- Microsoft Word
  - No direct export to EPUB
  - Doesn't matter because KDP and Draft2Digital will convert it for you
  - Make sure Word file is set up correctly
    - https://janefriedman.com/word-epub/
    - Create chapter headings
    - Add front matter
    - Add back matter

Creating Print-Ready Files

- Print files have more specific requirements than ebook files
  - Margins
  - Bleed
  - Embedded Fonts
  - Pay close attention to the requirements or Amazon will reject your paperback
- Amazon has a video series on how to do this in Word and Pages
  - Link on the resources site

Book Formatting Tools

- If you're EPUB only this is very optional
- If you're doing print, I highly recommend a formatting tool
  - Create print-ready PDFs automagically
- Themes add pzazz
- There is a growing list of tools
  - Reedsy Studio (free)
  - Atticus ($149)
  - Vellum ($199-$249) MAC ONLY

Front Matter and Back Matter

- If you're using formatting tool it probably already handles this
- If not, you'll need to create these yourself
- Front Matter
  - Copyright page
  - Title page
  - Dedication (optional)
  - Preface (optional)
- Back Matter
  - About the Author
  - Acknowledgements

About the Author

- This is the only one I'll cover in depth because you need it in multiple place
  - Back matter
  - Author pages
  - Website

Author Bio

- Written in third person
  - Other than that there are no hard and fast rules
- Short and sweet
- Some things to think of adding
  - Other publications
  - Accolades
  - Real-life expertise
  - A glimpse of normal life
  - Topics, tones, moods, genre

Author Bio Examples

ANGIE FOX

New York Times bestselling author Angie Fox writes sweet, fun, action-packed mysteries. Her characters are clever and fearless, but in real life, Angie is afraid of basements, bees, and going up stairs when it is dark behind her. Let's face it. Angie wouldn't last five minutes in one of her books.

Angie is best known for her Southern Ghost Hunter mysteries and for her Accidental Demon Slayer books. Visit her at www.angiefox.com

KWAME ALEXANDER

Kwame Alexander is the *New York Times* Bestselling author of 32 books, including *The Undefeated*; *How to Read a Book*; *Solo*; *Swing*; *Rebound*, which was shortlisted for prestigious Carnegie Medal; and his Newbery medal-winning middle grade novel, *The Crossover*. He's also the founding editor of Versify, an imprint that aims to Change the World One Word at a Time. Visit him at KwameAlexander.com

Metadata

BLURBS, KEYWORDS, CATEGORIES

Data you need to list your book

- Blurb (Jacket Copy)
- Keywords
- Genres/Categories

Blurb aka Jacket Copy

- The promo that you find
  - In description section on Amazon
  - The back cover of a print book
- Sales Device
  - Not a summary of the book
- Follows a few predictable templates most of the time

Blurb aka Jacket Copy

TEMPLATE

- Part 1
  - Something about the character or world in summary.
  - Signal the genre or mood.
  - Make it interesting
- Part 2
  - Short paragraph w/ short sentences about 1st page of plot. Introduce character and plot problem
- Part 3
  - Plot kicker line. Usually one line that emphasizes the intensity of the problem
- Part 4 (Optional)
  - Tell the reader why to buy. 'Galaxy-spanning', 'if you like puzzle mysteries'

EXAMPLE

Horrible, fantastical things loom just out of sight in the dying micropolitan of Darling, Iowa.

Dragons and psychics exist side-by-side. Bubble worlds and terrifying prisons hide in plain sight. Even the river holds a strange secret. Paranormal thrills and chills hide around every corner in these five dark genre-spanning original stories:

- Not in My Backyard
- Worse Than Chicago
- Whisper of the Wind Chimes
- Love, Death, and Mayflies
- Sleepless Nights

Some survive the dark, some don't. Others vanish, never to be seen again.

If you like your stories dark and supernatural, if you're a fan of urban fantasy, paranormal, or horror—Five Days in Darling has something for you.

Blurb aka Jacket Copy

TEMPLATE

- Part 1
  - Something about the character or world in summary.
  - Signal the genre or mood.
  - Make it interesting
- Part 2
  - Short paragraph w/ short sentences about 1st page of plot. Introduce character and plot problem
- Part 3
  - Plot kicker line. Usually one line that emphasizes the intensity of the problem
- Part 4 (Optional)
  - Tell the reader why to buy. 'Galaxy-spanning', 'if you like puzzle mysteries'

EXAMPLE

Ex-military policeman Jack Reacher is a drifter.

He's just passing through Margrave, Georgia, and in less than an hour, he's arrested for murder. Not much of a welcome. All Reacher knows is that he didn't kill anybody. At least not here. Not lately.

But he doesn't stand a chance of convincing anyone. Not in Margrave, Georgia. Not a chance in hell.

Keywords

- Optimizing keywords is a deep subject
- There are some great resources on the companion site that dive into detailsx
- You don't have to optimize right off the bat
  - Experiment and measure changes over time
- There are some general tips to get you started

Useful Keyword Starters

- Setting
  - Colonial America
- Character Type
  - Single dad
  - Veteran
- Character Role
  - Strong female lead
- Plot Theme
  - Coming of age
  - Forgiveness
- Story tone
  - Dystopian
  - Feel-good

Cover Art

FACE IT: EVERYONE JUDGES A BOOK BY ITS COVER

The Truth

- The most common reason I don't buy an indie book is because the cover art looks amateur or ugly
  - Most bad indie books I've read had a terrible cover and I value my time
- I'm not alone
  - https://www.creativindie.com/can-a-new-book-cover-double-sales-a-case-study-with-10-authors/
- People scroll through digital content faster than they think and a good cover might just make them stop
- Good covers instantly convey complex information
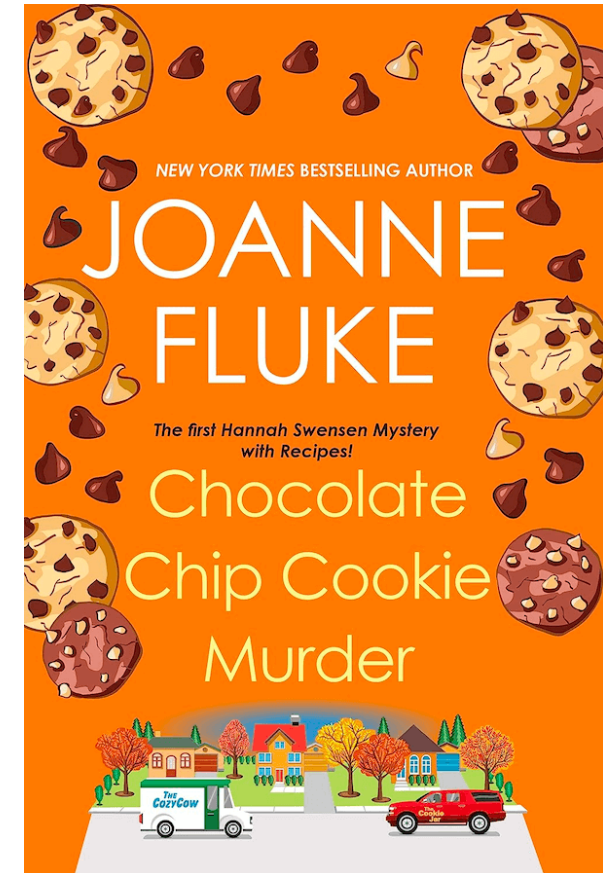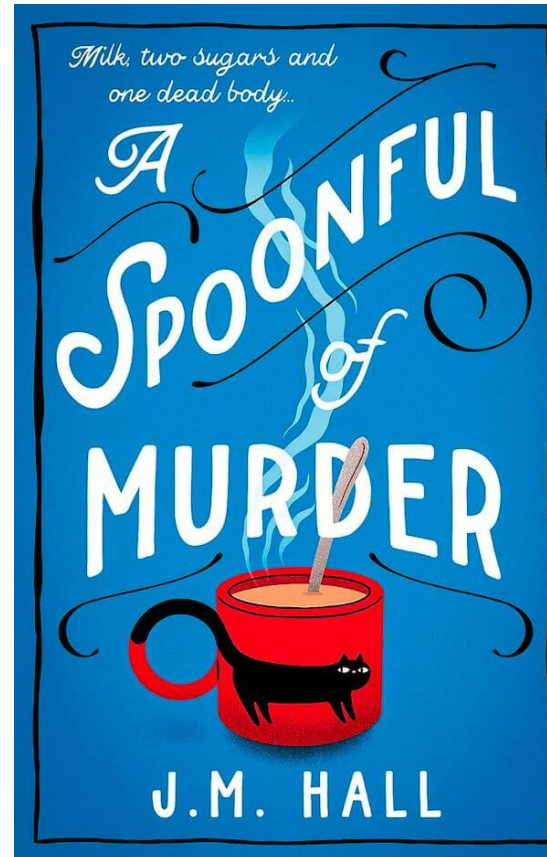 - Genre
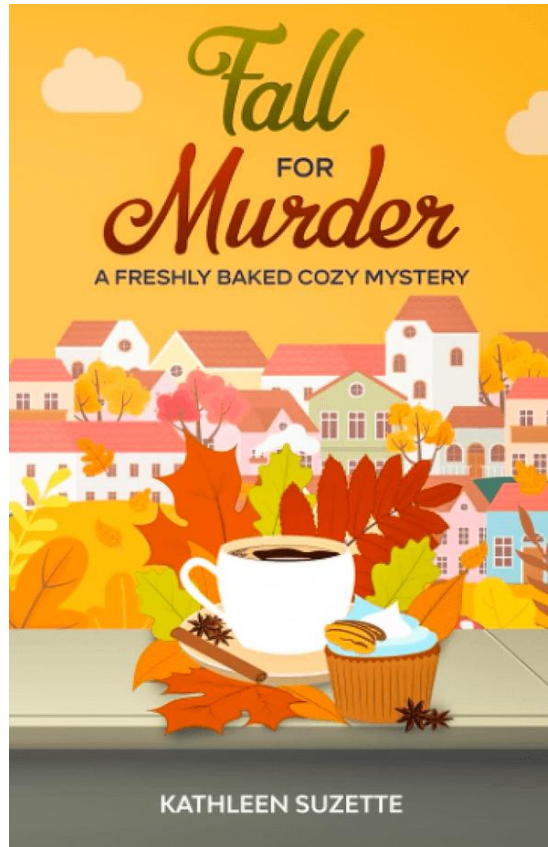 - Mood
  - Tone
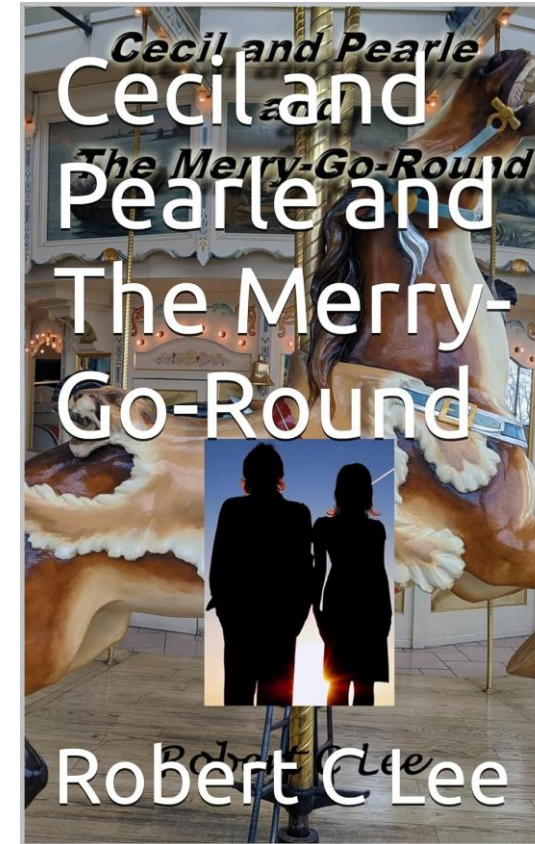
A Tale of Two Covers
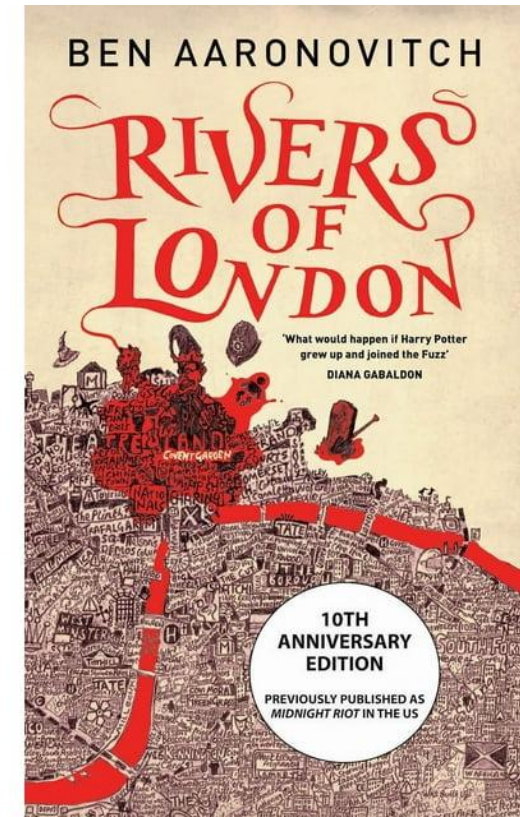
GOOD
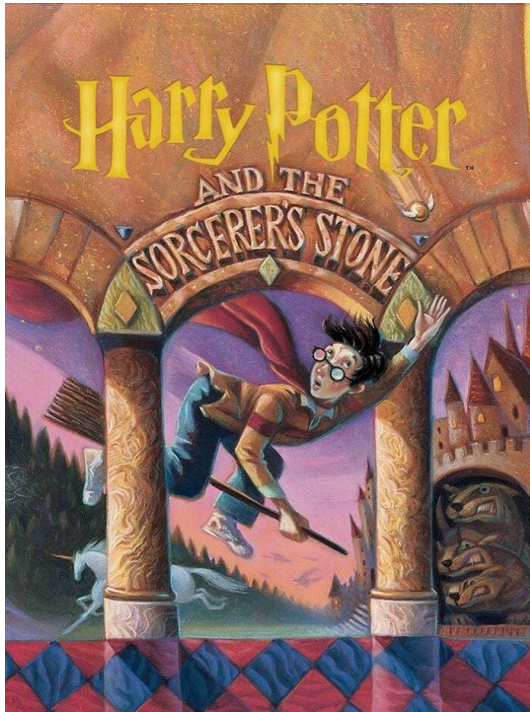
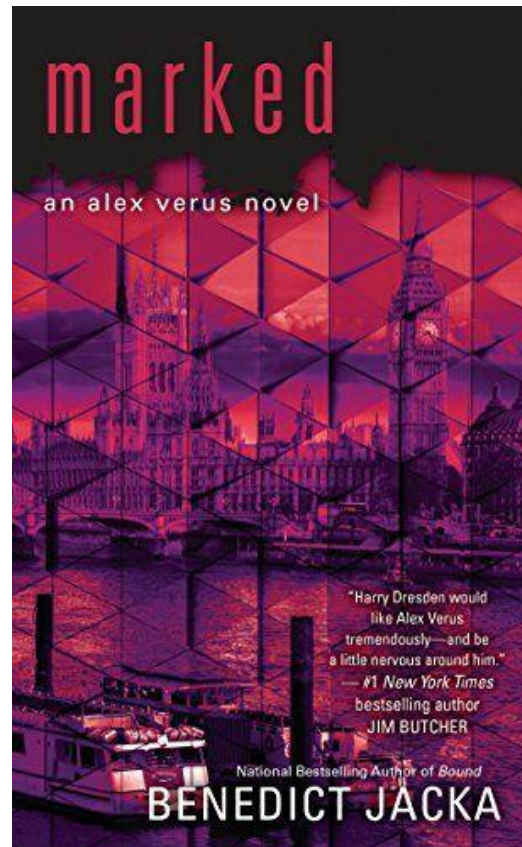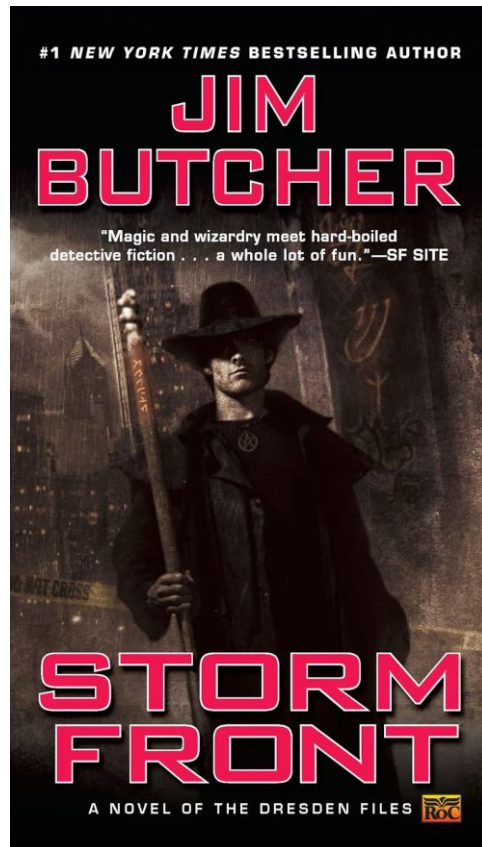BAD
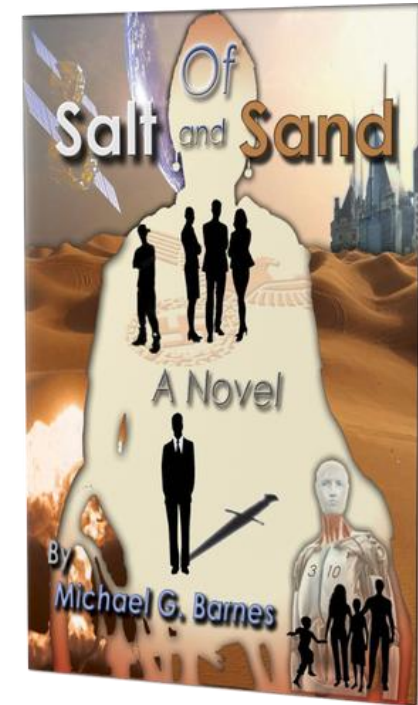
What's the:
- Genre
- Tone
- Mood

Know Your Audience and Yourself

- Genre readers often know a book is for them based on the cover
- Use that to your advantage
  - Readers are actually telling you what they like and expect in a cover
- Can you articulate the things you do and don't like about covers in a genre?

Genre Conventions

Genre Conventions Continued

Getting the Cover Right

- Get organized with a design brief
  - Document that communicates
    - Technical Information
      - Formats (ebook, print)
      - Page count
      - Dimensions
    - Descriptive Information
      - Emotional content
      - Genre
      - Description
    - Examples
      - Pick book covers you love from the genre you write in

Bottom Line

- "Books with memorable cover designs were shown to have a 50% higher chance of being purchased..." (Career Navigator)
- "Professional designers are like chefs — they know how to mix ingredients you didn't even know existed to create something … amazing" (Evans)
- Hire a professional if you can afford it
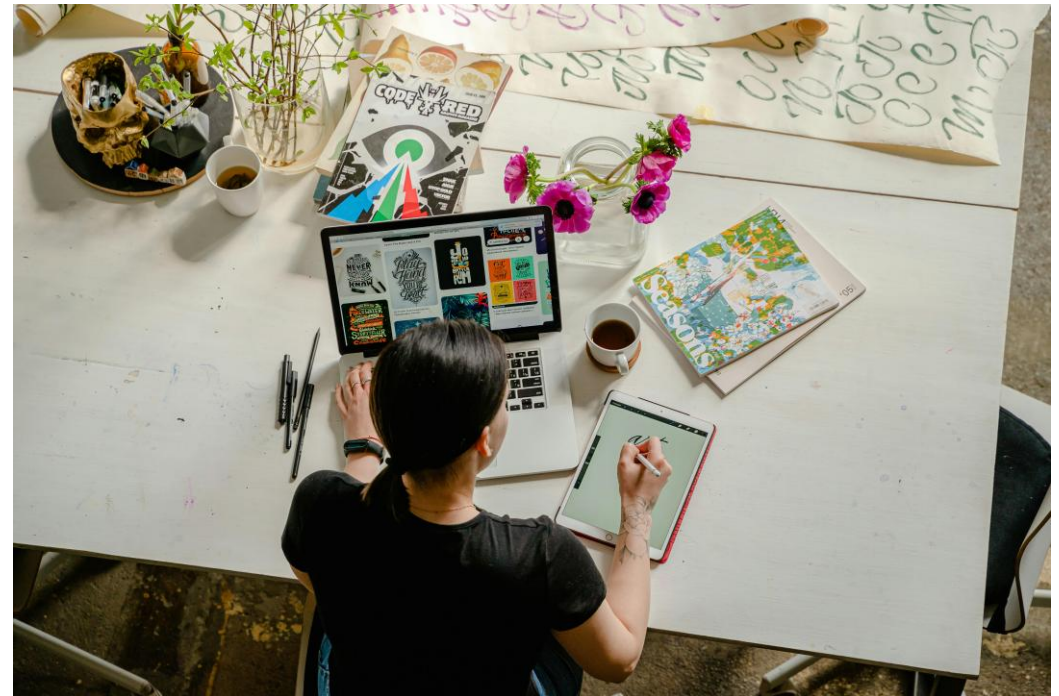
DIY Alternatives

- Sometimes it isn't worth it to pay for a cover
  - Are you expecting not to make enough to recoup cover design?
    - If you're writing poetry or short story book you probably don't want to pay for a cover upfront
  - Are you just doing it for fun or to check off that bucket list item?
- There are some options if you're not an artist
  - https://diybookcovers.com
  - https://bookbrush.com/cover-creator-software/
    - Requires a 'Plus' subscription
  - Canva
  - KDP Cover Creator
- For the artistic
  - Make sure you understand the technical requirements of the marketplace
    - However, if it works on Amazon, it usually works everywhere
    - https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G200645690

DIY Cover Tips

- Make sure the design looks good as a thumbnail
- Don't overuse decorative or splashy fonts
  - Maybe just avoid them altogether unless they're part of an existing template you're using
- Stick to one or two fonts overall
- Careful with colors
  - Use a color pallet from a pro
  - Choose as few colors as possible
    - The more you choose the harder it gets to keep everything looking good together
- Copy ideas and colors liberally from existing book covers
  - Eye dropper tool
  - Browser plugins

Publishing

AMAZON, KOBO, DRAFT2DIGITAL

ISBN

- Optional
- They're fairly expensive
- If you want to buy ONLY BUY FROM BOWKER
  - They are the only place that is authorized to sell them
- KDP and Draft2Digital both offer free ISBNs
  - Yes there are drawbacks
  - They probably don't affect you at this point
- There are reasons to buy your own ISBNs but probably not for a first self-published book

Some advice

- If you're here for simple, stick with Amazon only
  - You can change your mind later
- Everyone else should go wide (publish everywhere possible)
  - The only accounts you need are
    - Amazon
    - Draft2Digital
  - I recommend you also manage your own Kobo Writing Life account instead of letting D2D manage it

Amazon KDP

- Must have account
- Manage books and editions on Amazon store
  - Set prices
  - Enroll in programs like KDP Select
  - Add metadata
  - Upload book
  - Upload front cover
  - Upload back cover for print
- Print and EPUB are 2 separate books
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSe3mTdZdSI

Kobo Writing Life

- Ebook Market
  - No print
- Easy signup
- Easy management
- Control pricing
  - Amazon is watching though
- Kobo Plus
  - Like Kindle Unlimited but fairer payout
- https://youtu.be/PFxJRTOULP4?feature=shared&t=163

Draft2Digital

- One service that publishes your book to all major retailers
  - Even ones you've never heard of in other countries
- Offer a ton of services for indie authors
  - Recently started doing POD
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIS6cg1_ehM

Author Platform

AUTHOR PAGES & WEBSITE

Goodreads

- Make sure Goodreads has your book
  - This is a chore if you've never done it
    - Once you've done it once and claimed your profile you never have to do it again
  - Join a librarian group
  - Make a forum post asking for book to be added
- Claiming your Goodreads profile is simple once a book of yours is live
  - https://www.goodreads.com/author/program

Amazon Author Central

- Make sure book is up on Amazon first
- Fill out a simple form
  - You'll need your author bio from earlier
- https://author.amazon.com/

BookBub

- BookBub is an important platform for book marketing
- Make sure you claim your author profile and books so you can manage the content
- [Signup for an author account](#)
- Claim your books

Author Website

- This is optional
- Recommended more for those who plan to write a lot more books
- Creates some authenticity
- Gives a place to connect directly with fans via email newsletters and blog posts
- No technical skills required with most builders

Website Recommendations

- Author Websites by BookBub
  - Different from your author profile page
  - A full, easy to use and customize website made specifically for authors
  - Inexpensive
- Wix
  - Easy to use
  - Multiple plans
  - Can start free
- Squarespace
  - Lots of templates
- Wordpress
  - Can be free
  - Easy to use these days

Final Note

There is a companion website for this course. I'll post this slideshow there and links to all the resources discussed. Any correction, expansions, etc. will always be available there.

https://jamesteitsworth.com/self-publishing-resources