

Choosing Your Publishing Path

Three Main Book Publishing Paths

Publishing Path	Who owns the publishing rights?	Who pays to produce the book?	Who gets the royalties?	What are some examples of this type of company?
Traditional Publishing	Publisher	Publisher	Royalties are shared by the publishing company, retailer(s), author, and possibly a literary agent. Author's portion is usually very low.	Simon & Schuster Sourcebooks
Self-Publishing	Author	Author	Author keeps all royalties if selling the book via author website or in person. If selling from online retailers like Amazon, retailers get some of the royalties; percentages vary but authors usually get the majority.	The Cadence Group 1106 Design BookBaby
Hybrid or Partner Publishing	Publisher (usually)	Author	Royalties are shared by publishing company, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and author. Author's share varies—is usually higher than in traditional publishing but lower than in self-publishing.	Braugler Books

Traditional Publishing: Pursuing a book deal may involve years of pitching with no guarantee of an offer; a marketable manuscript and strong platform are vital. Large publishers don't take direct submissions, so it may be necessary to work with a literary agent. If a book deal is offered by the publisher and accepted by the author, the publishing company then owns the publishing rights and controls the publishing process. The publishing company pays all book production, distribution, and marketing costs. In return for that significant investment, the publisher usually takes most of the royalties while the author gets only a small percentage.

Self-Publishing: Author owns the publishing rights and copyright and makes all book decisions. Author hires service providers and pays all book production, distribution, and marketing costs. Author shares royalties with retailers like Amazon if using their platform but overall keeps a much higher percentage of royalties than other types of publishing. Author needs strong platform / adequate budget / entrepreneurial mindset.

Hybrid or Partner Publishing: Publisher owns the publishing rights but the author pays for book production. Publisher may offer expanded distribution/marketing options. Author may have input on cover/interior design, etc. Publisher keeps a percentage of the royalties. More here: ibpa-online.org/page/hybridpublisher

A Note About Author Platforms

Regardless of your publishing path, if you're planning to put your book on the market, start building your author platform **EARLY**—long before you enter the self-publishing process or begin pitching to publishers. Info here: janefriedman.com/author-platform-definition/ and here: writersdigest.com/writing-articles/by-writing-goal/build-a-platform-start-blogging/building-a-writers-platform.

Pros and Cons of Publishing Paths

Publishing Path	Pros for Author	Cons for Author
Traditional Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prestige of getting a book deal • No book production work or payment required from author • Advance on royalty (maybe) • Marketing help (maybe) and expanded distribution options (usually) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires strong author platform to attract traditional publisher • Loss of control / publishing rights • Very small share of royalties • Threat of backlist status • Marketing help usually lacking
Self-Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author decides whether, when, and how to publish (no one else's approval is needed) • Author keeps publishing rights and control of the book production process • Author keeps most royalties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight stigma against SP remains (but continues to weaken) • Author must handle or hire help managing book production, distribution, and marketing • Author assumes all financial risk
Hybrid or Partner Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publisher will vet books to ensure quality (usually) • Publisher has staff (editors, designers, proofreaders, etc.) who have worked in traditional publishing (usually) • Publisher offers expanded distribution options / marketing help (maybe) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author pays most or all book production costs • Author shares royalties with publisher (percentages vary) • Some hybrid models offer no more marketing and distribution options than self-publishing offers

How to Choose a Publishing Path

1. Traditional publishing may be a good option IF

- The prestige of a book deal is important to you and/or you don't want to invest in self-publishing
- You've written a quality, marketable manuscript AND you have a strong author platform in place
- You're willing to do the challenging work of researching and pitching your book to publishers/agents
- You're willing to relinquish publishing rights and control of your book if you get a book deal

2. Self-publishing may be a good option IF

- You have an entrepreneurial mindset and want to retain publishing rights / control over your book
- You've written a quality, marketable manuscript and you have a strong author platform in place
- You're willing to learn about self-publishing and find and work with good service providers
- You have an adequate budget to pay service providers (book editors, designers, etc.) to help you

3. Hybrid publishing may be a good option IF

- You like the idea of having a publisher but are unwilling/unable to devote time and energy pursuing a book deal from a traditional publishing company or are unable to deal with rejection notices
- You've written a quality, marketable manuscript and you have a strong author platform in place
- You're looking for a middle ground regarding publishing rights and control of the publishing process
- You have an adequate budget for book production and are ok with sharing royalties with a publisher

Publishing Resources

- Kim Bookless provides publishing consulting, editing, and proofreading services kimbookless.com
- The Cadence Group provides publishing consulting and book project management services thecadencegrp.com
- GKS Creative provides book design and other design services www.gkscreative.com
- Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) is a helpful organization for authors to join ibpa-online.org
- Jane Friedman's website and blog provide excellent writing and publishing advice janefriedman.com



Kim Bookless is a publishing consultant, copyeditor, and proofreader. She and her team help self-publishing authors create bring-to-market strategies for their books and then expertly manage the publishing process from manuscript to finished book, including editing, cover/interior design, printing, and distribution. Contact her at kimbookless.com.