# FAQ about small publishing

Lockdown in 2020 seemed to start lots of people writing, and I am still being asked for advice on how to publish.

As a writer I’d like to help you, but there’s only so much I can say from my own experience, and of course writing-out the advice for you each time is time consuming when I have my own writing and editing (paid) work to do, plus a great deal of collecting material, editing, publishing, printing and planning for a charity that I work for. I’ve been writing for over 60 years, published for over 30. That’s a LOT of experience to give away for nothing, so I don’t. On the whole.

It would be nice if you bought a book or two of mine and perhaps left a review, before you ask me for advice about your own writing.

Be that as it may - here’s the quick and dirty on small publishing. Take what’s relevant to you, and good luck.

## Pay an editor

If you want to **sell** what you’ve written and **have it taken seriously**, then pay someone who knows what they are doing (possibly several), to read, critique, copy edit, tidy it up, and generally smack it around and force you to rewrite it and make it cohere. Proper copy editing will polish your work like nothing else. It is not the same thing as asking a friend who is a teacher to check your spelling, punctuation and grammar. That is proof reading.

Good copy editing and proofing take time, experience and skill, and they deserve to be paid as such.

## Pay a jacket designer

If you want to sell what you’ve written and have it taken seriously, then pay someone who knows what they are doing to create the cover, so it will complement your work and help to attract readers. This is not the same thing as asking a friend’s son or daughter to manipulate the templates available on publishing services like Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, or Lulu.com, or to play with an AI image generator (most of which, incidentally, steal their material from real people’s illustrations).

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## “I can’t afford it.”

Then you won’t sell a lot. That not may be a deal-breaker, of course, because you may only be planning to print copies for friends and family anyway. How critical are they going to be? Consider doing your own printing, as opposed to publishing. Read on.

## Print Run vs Print on Demand

Neither of these services will edit or correct your work at all, beyond an automated check to ensure your layout will fit the page size, and automated spell-checking.

If you apply an International Standard Book Number to your work, to enable distribution through bookshops, you are legally required to supply a copy of the book to the British Library, who are empowered to ask for copies for the other 5 major Deposit Libraries. You can buy ISBNs singly or in batches of 10 or 100 or more, from Neilsen, <https://www.nielsenisbnstore.com/Home/Isbn>

You could contact a local printer, get his advice on page size, paper, etc, ask him to set the layout for you, and then pay him to print XX or XXX copies in one run. He will not edit or correct your work. He’s a printer.

A more flexible approach is to print via a Print on Demand (PoD) service. That way, you are not held to a set print run, and you just pay for the number of books you want; it may work out theoretically as a higher cost per book than ordering a set print run off the local printer, but you only have to pay for the number of books you can use or sell, and you don’t have to store boxfuls that you haven’t sold.

**Ingram Spark (Lightning Source)** do PoD but they charge a fee for setup of cover and a fee for inner text, and they require an ISBN because they supply the book trade.

**Amazon Direct Publishing** doesn't require an ISBN (or it will supply you with one of theirs, which makes them the publisher, and the book trade can be resistant to carry your work when they realise that, which is not surprising). Amazon’s production quality is OK; I’m fairly sure they use Lightning Source. I've used them for small books such as poetry collections, and for the reprints (with my own ISBNs) of *Hoofprints in Eden* and *Against the Odds*.

For a friend of mine in Australia who wanted to print his poetry and autobiographical prose just for family, we used **Lulu.com**, which was also satisfactory for his purpose.

## What can I do for you?

I have done copy-editing for novice writers on their road to publication: reading their work, advising on shaping their story and kicking their writing into shape. It’s close, detailed, time consuming work and it costs. By the hour. Most beginners either don’t have the cash, or don’t want to spend it. That’s OK. You can join writing groups, take writing courses… you know, spend time and money acquiring the skills.

If you need help with layout, and with IT matters such as uploading to a printing service, I can handle that side of production as well as editing; again, that’s if you think it worthwhile to pay me for the time it would take. It is difficult to give set figures for costs because it depends on the accuracy of your word processed file - not just your spelling and grammar, but how you have handled the functions of the WP program, especially for setting-out poetry - and whether, as a result, the layout will adapt easily to print or e-book, or whether I have to wrestle with your material for long periods.

I can set up a web site and either hand it over to you to maintain, or maintain it for you.

I’ve been doing all this for over 20 years now (and I taught it on a variety of courses up to BSc level for 12 of those). To do that, I was learning and adapting to new programs and services all the time. Using those skills is close, detailed, time consuming work and it costs. By the hour.

## What I definitely don’t do

Advertising, distribution or reviewing. Typing up hand-written manuscripts.

## What I don’t advise you to do

Never be tempted by “packages” offered to new authors by “publishing houses”. I personally know novice writers who have paid thousands of pounds, yet received next to no editorial help, and ended up with a few dozen books which were barely of a good enough standard to give as gifts, let alone to sell. (To add insult to injury, some of them were printed via Amazon’s Direct Publishing, which is something you can do for yourself, see Print on Demand, above.)

## Good luck, anyway!