

Nine tips for successful book self-publishing



From Ruth Lunn, Lead Editor at ukbookpublishing.com

Books have been published for centuries, so why not learn from the mistakes that have been made by others, rather than make them all over again?

You've got a great story, idea, theme or knowledge that you want to impart. Let your creative juices flow, and engage your readers rather than distracting them with annoying mistakes, inappropriate choices or poor quality materials.

1. Spelling errors

Spelling isn't a problem these days, what with spellcheckers, right? Wrong! Whilst spellcheckers might pick up a good number of spelling mistakes, they don't recognise subtlety, particularly if there is more than one way to spell a word with several meanings. **Computers can be helpful of course, but they don't replace human beings.**

Some common howlers include: your instead of you're [tip: think can I substitute 'you are']; its and it's [tip: can you substitute 'it is?']; compliment instead of complement [tip: complement means to supplement, or go well with, enhance, rather than paying someone a compliment, saying something nice]; and could of instead of could've [tip: could've is a contraction of 'could have'; whilst it sounds like could of, it is not!].

2. Grammatical errors

If grammar is not your strong point then you need to get some help. Whilst some grammatical rules can be broken – particularly if you want your writing to sound natural ('To whom am I speaking' might be correct but 'Who am I speaking to' is the more likely proffering, certainly in dialogue) – frequent changes of tense, dangling modifiers ('I saw a log cabin walking through the forest') and mixing up the subject and object in a sentence don't look good.

3. Repetition

Repetition is boring. And you don't want your book to be boring. So don't repeat yourself. Some writers starting out think the more words they put in the better; further, the greater number of long, flowery words, the better the book will read. Nope: tautology, padding out, and trying to write the same thing in a number of different ways will just make it obvious you've run out of things to say.

Instead, think of different ways you can present the information. Take dialogue as an example. He said this, then she said that, then he said such and such, and so on. Challenge yourself to find other ways of describing the dialogue – beginning with reply, concur, agree, urge, insist. What others can you substitute for said?

4. Structure and rhythm

All books need a structure. Even if you intend your novel to dot about between different characters or periods, or if your non-fiction book is a collection of essays, you still need to consider the structure of the book.

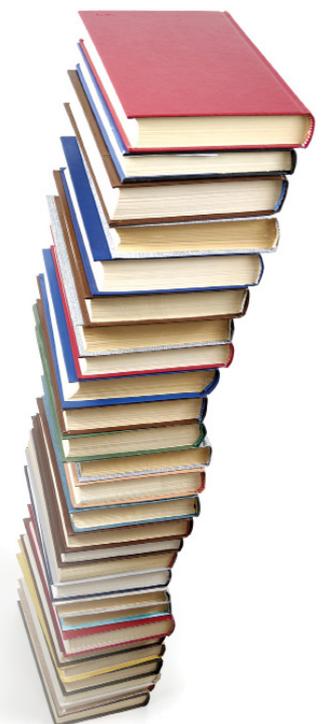
The readers' response is key here – are you drawing them in from the first page? If it's a novel have you built in enough anticipation (so the reader wants to turn the page)? If it's a non-fiction book, does the order make sense, is the information collected together in a logical way? If it's an autobiography, the best place to start may not be your birth; instead pick out a key event and focus on that, before arranging the rest of the book in chronological order.

Consider too the rhythm and pace of your book. If you're telling a story, do you want the reader to be turning the pages at breakneck speed, or do you intend your book to be read in a more reflective, considered way?

5. Factual consistency

There are television programmes dedicated to pointing out film continuity howlers – you know the ones, like someone having a different hair style or colour in the middle of a scene; or a 'prop' suddenly makes an appearance, only to disappear again; or historical inaccuracies that make you want to cry – what's all that 21st century street furniture doing in 1950s London? Surely mobile phones weren't around in the 1970s? Make sure your book doesn't end up the literary equivalent's laughing stock.

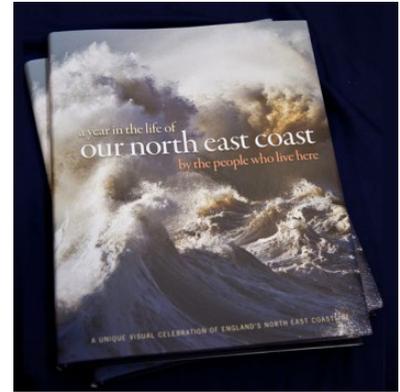
Check thoroughly, including consistency of names, locations and any facts you are using, even in a novel. Eagle-eyed readers will spot them, you can guarantee that. Reference sheets are a



great way to keep a check – Joe Bloggs has blue eyes, dark hair and is 6ft tall, he’s an electrician and he likes cycling (so don’t refer to his sandy coloured hair or his work as a plumber!) – particularly if you are writing your book over a long period of time.

6. Printing

You need to be realistic about quantity. Whilst some small print runs are not cost-effective (though you could alternatively go for the ‘print on demand’ option), having a huge pile of unsold books is not inspiring. Remember, you can always go for a second print run – and how good does that sound: ‘first edition sold out’? By all means get prices for a number of different print runs, and consider the unit cost per book, but a higher margin may be preferable with realistic sales figures.



7. Hardback vs paperback

Naturally it depends on what type of book you are publishing as to whether hardback or softback (paperback) is the better option. Hardback is more expensive, but the book will be more durable.

If it’s a reference book, an academic book, a coffee-table style book, that’s going to be picked up many times, hardback is preferable; for a novel that may just be read once cover to cover, paperback tends to be the better option – and in fact, **many readers prefer their books to be lightweight** (one of the reasons for the growing popularity of e-readers is their portability and weight – you try holding up a thousand pages of printed text!).

And speaking of e-books, might this be a better option for you initially? It is a cheaper alternative (to printing) and can make distribution easier. If you do go down this route, it’s important not to skip the proofing/editing and cover design stages – you still need to sell the book and for your readers to review you favourably.

8. Book cover

Unfortunately many self-published books are obvious to spot – by their poor covers. Having a professionally designed cover can really make a difference to how your book is perceived – does it look cheap and nasty and amateurish, or does it communicate a quality product? Consider your own reaction to a book – does the cover catch your eye; do you want to pick it up and explore further; does it convey what the book is about? If none of these things, the sale is already lost. Getting a book cover designed isn’t expensive – and it may well be one of the best investments you can make in your book.

9. Marketing

Once published, **don't forget to market your book**. You need to let people know it's out there and how they can get hold of it. Whilst traditional channels are great – and nothing beats seeing your book in your nearest bookshop – even better, on display – don't forget how useful social networks can be for creating a buzz around your book.

Many authors have their own websites that they can use for promoting their book, selling it, downloading a sample chapter. Remember though, that you still need to let people know that your website exists. This means making sure that Google is indexing it so readers find it in searches. You could consider an Adwords campaign or SEO (search engine optimisation) campaign, which is essentially e-marketing. Traditional marketing is also worth pursuing – local press ('local author publishes book'), leaflets, talks at meetings/events, even a book launch – it all just depends on your budget and how much time you want to invest.

Established authors rely on **reviewers and favourable reviews** – who could you give your book to, for review? There are some websites dedicated to this, though some will charge a fee to review your book (and there's no guarantee it will be a positive review!).

And finally

All too often readers are abandoning books, particularly self-published books, because of spelling mistakes and poor design. Just because something is free, or cheap, doesn't make it worth investing precious time on – readers will be selective.

Make sure you don't get a reputation for sloppy writing – it will be hard to throw this off if you want to go on to publish more books. Work with professionals to give your book a professional feel.



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