
FREE CHECKLIST FOR SELF-PUBLISHERS

The Book Formatting Checklist

The checks we run before every upload, print and ebook, in the order you're likely to approach them.

So here's the list we run before every upload. Most rejected files and disappointing proofs come down to the same handful of misses, and we've spent over a decade formatting books for KDP, IngramSpark, and every other platform authors publish on. Work through it from top to bottom, whether you're formatting the book yourself or planning to hand it off to a professional.

01 Manuscript prep

Before you format anything, spend a few minutes on this as it can save you hours later.

- ☐ **Editing is finished.** Formatting is the last step. Late edits to a formatted book mean reflowing every page that follows.
- ☐ **Chapter titles use real Heading styles.** Styles drive the table of contents and the ebook navigation. Titles formatted by hand break both.
- ☐ **No tab-key or spacebar formatting.** First-line indents come from paragraph settings, centering from alignment. Tabs and runs of spaces scramble in conversion.
- ☐ **No empty paragraphs to push text down the page.** Use a real page break. Blank lines land in different places on different page sizes and screens.
- ☐ **Scene breaks are marked consistently.** Pick one marker (like ***) and use it everywhere, so breaks survive conversion and can be styled properly.
- ☐ **One space after periods.** Double spaces read as gaps in justified type. Find & replace fixes it in seconds.
- ☐ **Image originals collected at full resolution.** Not screenshots, and not images saved from the web. Print needs the big files.

02 Print interior

For KDP, IngramSpark, or any other print-on-demand platform.

- ☐ **Trim size chosen before design begins.** 5×8 and 5.5×8.5 are common for fiction and memoir, 6×9 for nonfiction, 8.5×8.5 for square children's books. A late change means a full reflow.
- ☐ **Document page size matches the trim exactly.** Don't format at letter size and hope the platform scales it. Scaling shifts line breaks, margins, images, and page numbers.
- ☐ **Bleed only if art or color reaches the page edge.** That's 0.125" beyond trim with the bleed setting on. A plain-text novel doesn't need it, and accidental bleed is a common rejection cause.
- ☐ **The gutter grows with page count.** A 400-page book needs more inside margin than a novella, or text sinks into the spine. Match your platform's minimum-margin table.
- ☐ **Outside, top, and bottom margins clear the minimums.** Think of margins as a protective box that keeps text from being cut off. 0.25" minimum at KDP, plus room for running heads and page numbers.
- ☐ **Images are roughly 300 dpi at their printed size.** Web images are usually 72 dpi. They look fine on screen and soft on paper.
- ☐ **Front matter is numbered like a book.** Roman numerals or no visible numbers on the title and copyright pages; the main text starts at page 1, ideally on a right-hand page.
- ☐ **Running heads drop on chapter openings.** And blank pages show no header or page number. Readers notice these details without knowing why.
- ☐ **Fonts are embedded in the exported PDF.** Otherwise the printer swaps in its own fonts and the book prints differently from the file you approved.
- ☐ **The PDF exports as single pages, not printer spreads.** The platforms arrange pages themselves, and a spread file will fail their page-size checks.

RULE OF THUMB

If nothing on your pages touches the page edge, you don't need bleed. If anything does (illustrations, background color, chapter-divider art), every page of the file needs to be built for it from the start.

03 Ebook

EPUB for nearly every store, including Amazon. A reflowable ebook is not a copy of the print layout.

- ☐ **The table of contents is generated from Heading styles.** A typed contents page with page numbers can't link, and page numbers mean nothing in a reflowable ebook.
- ☐ **The file has a real navigation document.** That's what powers Kindle's "Go To" menu. It's separate from any contents page inside the book, and both should work.
- ☐ **Every link works.** Internal cross-references jump to the right spot, and external URLs open. Test a few by hand.
- ☐ **Reflowable, unless the book is built around images.** Fixed layout is for children's books and photo-heavy books. It looks closer to print, but readers lose font-size control, so only use it when the layout needs it.
- ☐ **Images are sized for screens.** Print-resolution images bloat the file, and on Amazon's 70% royalty plan the delivery fee is charged per megabyte.
- ☐ **Indents and spacing come from styles.** Tab-key indents and spacebar centering fall apart across devices and font-size settings.
- ☐ **Metadata matches your publishing dashboard.** Title, subtitle, author, and series, exactly as entered on the platform.
- ☐ **EPUB is your master file.** Amazon accepts and recommends EPUB now. MOBI is legacy, and KPF only matters if you build in Kindle Create.

A QUESTION WE HEAR A LOT

"My Kindle table of contents doesn't work" is one of the questions we hear most. There are two different things called a TOC: the contents page readers see, and the navigation document the device menu uses. Real Heading styles, plus a generated TOC, fix both at once.

04 Pre-upload quality check

One final check before you upload. Take your time here; it's where the last few problems show up.

- ☐ **Preview the print PDF at 100% zoom.** Check spine-side margins and any page-edge images at actual size, not fit-to-window. Fit-to-window hides crowding.
- ☐ **Page through the platform previewer, page by page.** Chapter openings, image pages, running heads, page numbers, tables, blank pages, and the front matter transitions.
- ☐ **Page count matches the book setup.** And every blank page is one you put there on purpose.
- ☐ **The ebook is tested on more than one reader.** Kindle Previewer, plus at least one non-Kindle app such as Apple Books or Kobo.
- ☐ **A printed proof is ordered before you publish.** Some problems only show on paper: a tight gutter, low contrast, images printing darker than they looked on screen.

THAT'S THE WHOLE LIST

**Format it yourself with this beside you,
or hand it to us.**

We format print interiors and ebooks for KDP, IngramSpark, or any other platform: fiction, nonfiction, and children's books. Send us your manuscript, or book a free intro call to discuss your book with us first. We'll love to work with you.

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