

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Kristen Ashley

WWW.KRISTENASHLEY.NET

KRISTEN ASHLEY'S TOP TIPS FOR PUBLISHING

Right, you've written a book and you want other people to read it.

You could email copies of chapters to people who know you and love you and bask in their glory.

You could also get it published.

Gone are the days when you have to spend hours in the library or purchase tomes that you need to go through with a fine-tooth comb to see who might be interested in your work, how they accept an approach and then send submissions—after which you bite your nails, only to get heart-wrenching disappointment before you hit the jackpot.

You can, of course, go this route and if your work is good and you persevere, know the joy of being a published writer.

Or you can just self-publish.

A note to this, I'm a self-published author. I'm also a traditionally published author. I'm known as what these days is called a "hybrid"—a published writer who has their fingers in both pots. I know the joys of both. I also know that with every worthwhile risk in life, however you decide to do it, the best course of action is to make a *very* considered decision then dive in with both feet and let the splash fall as it may.

The bottom line is, you can stand on the side of the pool and spend an age deliberating if the water is warm. But, as with everything in life, it's a whole lot better knowing.

One last, but crucial, note to this: There are a good many writers these days who have very satisfying (and lucrative careers) as independently-published or hybrid authors. The idea of a writer being independently-published (self-published) either fully or along with deals at traditionally-published houses is quickly becoming accepted, known, and for some authors, even preferred, and no longer eschewed. With that, as with everything, the opposite is also true. However, if you're holding back from publishing your book waiting for that book deal that you think will change your life or because you feel you haven't really *published* if you don't have a publishing house behind you, please don't. If you've written something you love, something you feel passion for, something you wish to share, by all means, submit it to a traditional publisher and/or attempt to find an agent. But if things don't go your way if that doesn't happen for you, don't think it's the end. It isn't. It's just could be a different kind of beginning!

Now let's get into the nitty-gritty!

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Please feel free to share this wisdom. However, if you intend to share it with a mass audience, quote it, or use it in a publication for cost or for free, I ask that you kindly contact me for permission and I will require that you source the material and attribute it to Kristen Ashley.

How to Publish Your Book

Editing and Proofing

First, after you've written "The End" and are ready to get started freeing that awesomeness to the world, get your manuscript proofread and/or edited.

This is essential. This book is reflecting on you and your work and you want to put your best foot forward.

I know that often a writer will hear the word "edit" and paralyzing anxiety will set in.

Don't panic! You don't have to get it edited line for line, you don't even have to accept every comment or change an editor/copyeditor/proofer suggests to you, but I recommend at the very least you find a good copyeditor.

A copyeditor should correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and check flow (within your writing voice). A really good one, or if you contract with a content editor, will help make certain you didn't leave any critical threads hanging in the story, that what is in your head that was transferred on the page is understandable, that you have all the scenes you need and/or don't have unnecessary scenes you don't need, that your timeline is synced, and if you wish, they may give you ideas of additional content that will enhance the story to tell a better tale.

I also recommend after copyedits to find a proofer. A proofer will find any misspellings, take another look at punctuation and grammar, be sure the names and places and other important bits aren't incorrect and will essentially polish your manuscript so it's ready to release.

These days, it isn't difficult to find very good folks who do this for a living. The editor/writer relationship is a delicate one so if you find one that doesn't quite sync with what you need or your voice, that's okay. It happens. They understand that just as you do. Just keep looking and you'll find who you need.

As for finding someone, you can do this on the Internet. But be smart about it. Anyone in this business should have other clients, have experience and training, and provide references. You should also price compare. But just to say, sometimes it's worthwhile if you have the resources to invest a little more in a pricier editor/proofer if they've got tons of experience, glowing recommendations and work well with you.

You'll find your fit...my only advice is to seek it.

I'll make a note here that give this advice (all of it!) because I learned from my mistakes and I'm offering you this wisdom. Many of my books were published edited only by me. And I missed things. *Lots of things*. This is being rectified but each error nags at me and readers notice. They may be able to ignore it or it may drive them up the wall. Save them and yourself a lot of headache and heartache and have someone assist you with it. Again, things may be missed even by a proofreader (and I've seen woeful mistakes in works published by the mainstream publishing houses) but two sets of eyes are better than one.

Now, when I say find someone to “proofread” or “edit,” as they do, be sure you stay true to your story and your voice. For instance, I have a free-flowing style and most of my books are written in the first person due to my process of storytelling. Many think that there are a grave number of “run-on” sentences and I am the Queen of the Comma. I struggle with this. I find too much breaking up with periods (or full-stops) makes the narrative seem staccato and not like the thoughts of the character. Personally, a lot of stop and go I find difficult to read. The thing is, the way I write that makes sense to me, others may find difficult to read. So there has to be a happy medium.

Language is dynamic and your story/voice is your story/voice. Be sure you stay true to that even if an editor or proofreader is making changes and recommendations. But be cautious. What you can “get into” while reading may not be palatable to readers. So stay true but be smart.

Start a Website

Nothing says, “I’m serious!” more than a website. Truth be told, there was practically no movement in my books until I launched my website. Even family members didn’t take me seriously until I launched my website. Check it out at www.kristenashley.net.

My rule number one for websites is to put your personality in your site and, if you decide to do it, your blog. When I say this, be *you* on your website even as you provide information about your work. But also put your stamp on it by being thoughtful about the brand you’re creating. This being a brand that will have your name (or the name you publish under). Think of logos, color schemes and themes, for when you start this, you’ll want to carry it through so perhaps one day, the minute anyone sees something—an ad, a Facebook banner, a quote graphic—they’ll get the familiarity of the “look” being you. You can see examples of this through my [website](#), [Facebook](#) banner, [Twitter](#) banner and the marketing graphics you’ll find in my Facebook photos and on my [Pinterest](#) page.

When you create your website, be certain to add links to subscribe to your newsletter, which would obviously mean you need to start sending newsletters. I use [MailChimp](#) that is, as of this writing, free to use to those with subscriptions under a certain number (the more popular you get, the more you pay). I cannot say it’s terribly easy to use. What I can say is that it’s the perfect place to start due to its price point but also the fact that it sends very sleek, professional newsletters (as long as you program them that way). It also gives you stats, which is important. But mostly, it’s an excellent way to communicate with readers who have gone out of their way by subscribing to say “I want to hear from you.” You want people to want to hear from you...so give them that opportunity, then let them hear from you.

I highly recommend looking at other author’s websites, but please be respectful. Don’t “steal” a look, theme or *any* wording. Create your own. However, you can find many good ideas and decide what works for you, what sends your message, what sells your books and how you want to make your *unique* brand.

Find a Publisher

(Just be open to the fact that publisher might be you!)

EBook self-publishing is easy as pie if you have a minimal amount of technical knowledge. Not only that, if you've laid the groundwork (written a book you believe in that's appropriately polished, created well-written cover copy and descriptions and have had an eye-catching (and my advice is, professionally-created) cover designed) it only takes minutes.

The beauty of this is eBook publishers provide you the opportunity to have total control of your books including uploading updated files, book cover images, the cost of your books, sales you may wish to run, descriptions, etc. All you need is a Word document, cover copy and a book cover and you're good to go.

I know many starting out don't have tons of money to invest in designers, editors, marketing and advertising. However, if I were to suggest the three most important things to invest money in, they'd be: 1) editing/proofing, 2) a good website with your own domain and 3) an excellent cover design.

Speaking to number 3, beware that you can't take any image that you want to make a book cover design—in all likelihood you'll need to purchase the appropriate rights, for if you don't, you're breaking copyright and you might find yourself needing an attorney. And if you try to fight, you'll lose. If you need an image, find one on a site that sells them and purchase the appropriate license.

You can have your books professionally formatted for digital publication. If you go this route, again, it'll be at a cost and all the advice I give on finding editors/copyeditors/proofer correspond to this. Look at examples of their work. Get them to give you references. Price compare. And not everyone is the perfect fit so find that for yourself.

I publish at Smashwords, Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) and Google Play. Smashwords is not only an eBook seller, they also distribute to Kobo and Apple (iBooks) as well as Barnes & Noble and Baker and Taylor (library orders) and others.

[Smashwords](#) has a free, downloadable guide not only to how to publish on Smashwords but also how to market your books. I highly recommend finding these guides and reading them both carefully.

I will not get into royalties and payments but all these outlets offer upfront, easy-to-understand information about these as well as providing data to help you track sales.

No platform I use charges for publishing in digital (or eBook). They are also extremely user-friendly, helpful and offer tools and advice for authors to promote their work and track their sales.

Do not publish an eBook on any platform that charges you for doing this. Yes, all platforms will take a percentage of your royalties because their back end staff and technology needs to be covered and they're in business, they wish to make a profit. But if someone wants to charge you up front for publishing a digital book instead of taking a percentage of royalties, steer clear.

As for independently published print books, this will not be free nor will all of it be in your control. Book pricing will be a delicate balance for them to get paid for producing an actual product, listing it

and distributing it so you'll have to have a mind to that as you price your books so that, as they cover their costs, you also make some money from your books.

Not to mention, changes/updates will add cost to this endeavor.

I'm not trying to talk you out of this. Oh no! EBooks are very popular but print books still have the majority readership so having your books in any format (including audio) you can publish them in to reach readers who often have very select ways they wish to experience a book is important.

I've self-published my books in print. This is not only at a cost to me, they're costlier to the reader than mass market books offered by traditional publishers (due to being print-on-demand, not mass produced) and often don't have the availability (in other words, it's tough to get them on the shelves in brick and mortar bookstores, though not impossible!). However, they're available online at practically any bookseller so it isn't impossible to find them (and I'm sure to include buy links on my website to make them easier to discover for my readers).

Most self-publishing print firms cost around the same and offer the same services. But the services you're looking for specifically are first, you must get an interior proof of your book, and second, you must get a physical proof of your bound book prior to publication (the latter may cost, FYI). Do not publish without proofing the interior or seeing the physical book and having the right to approve or make changes. Changes may cost you (this is where having it edited/proofed prior to submission fits in) but be certain to proof both. If the publisher doesn't offer this, do not choose them.

Although your book will look spiffy, heads up, in the end, you'll be doing most of the work. Independent print (or digital, for that matter) book publishers do not offer content editing, copyediting or proofing. That's on you. They can offer cover design, but it'll be an extra cost.

These vendors should also assign you an ISBN number as well as make it available on online booksellers and offer you significantly discounted author copies. Research each site's royalties, as in how much you'll make per copy, how you can track this and when and how you'll be paid.

Good self-publishing firms will also offer you dashboards to track your sales and earnings and, if you earn enough, pay you monthly.

You'll note that this document seems skewed to independent publishing. This is partly because I'm a huge advocate of that but I'll make it clear that doesn't mean I'm not also an enthusiast of traditional publishing.

That said, the journey to traditional publishing is a personal one. It's difficult to give advice on this because the decisions made for a publisher or agent to take on a writer are subjective or they fit what the agent represents or works the publisher is looking to release.

You can attempt to get pitch meeting appointments at trade conferences. You can go through websites and check what literary agencies and publishing houses are looking for and what they wish to see as they invite submissions. And if you go to a meeting or submit online, follow the instructions given to you *precisely*. Don't go your own way, certain your book will wow them even if you don't put the effort into finding out exactly how they'll want to check it out. They put time and effort into submission guidelines for a reason. I have never worked at a publishing house so I don't know for certain, but I think that my

guess that not adhering to submission guidelines is a direct route to having your manuscript bypassed instantly is in most cases entirely correct.

The only definite advice I'd give on the route to traditional publishing is not ever to take the time of these very busy people by submitting something or approaching them with something they don't represent or are not requesting. In other words, if you write Sci-Fi, don't submit to an agency that only represents romance authors. If a publishing house is requesting online submissions of thrillers set in Seattle, don't submit a manuscript about time travel and try to convince them they can't go on without you. As ever, be respectful of their time and don't waste your own by trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. Find *your* perfect fit and go for that.

Get the Word Out

You can start this process by telling family and friends through starting an email bulletin (these should also be designed carefully, professionally, with an eye to your "brand" but inject your personality—see the details on newsletters/bulletins and [MailChimp](#) above). Ask them to pass it on and tell their friends about your book.

A note on this, your family and friends aren't your marketing partners. They're just a good place to start. If they aren't interested (and if you do a MailChimp newsletter, they can opt out of future emails), don't press or push or beg or add them back in after they've unsubscribed. However, no matter how much you invest in a variety of marketing and advertising, word of mouth will always be your best (and least expensive) advertising resource. So this is as good a place to start as any.

Word of mouth includes reviews on your books' online sales pages. I've mentioned family and friends starting to help you share the word, but be careful of asking friends and family to leave reviews. It's rare this doesn't look precisely like that, a loved one leaving a not-objective review pimping your book.

However, you can courteously requests readers to do so (on online sellers as well as places like [Goodreads](#)).

Personally, I shy away from this because I want readers to be moved to spread the word themselves (and frankly, I find it awkward). But this can be, *and often is*, done in a thoughtful way, and if a reader loves your work, they'll often be very happy to shout it out and support you in your endeavors.

I recommend you continue laying the groundwork by creating a Facebook author page for yourself, a Twitter account and a Goodreads profile.

This is crucial. Social media is extremely powerful and even if you don't like it, it is an excellent way to communicate with readers. The matter of fact is, I make a living out of writing and this is *entirely down* to the Internet, bloggers reviewing my books, Goodreads friends sharing their recommendations, folks liking my Facebook page and learning more about me or going to my website. But even if you don't like it at first, once you try it and connect with readers, I promise that the experience will be so enriching, you'll wish you'd published decades ago.

I'll make a further note on this that there are many who are rather introverted or are private and it's super-important to know that you don't have to share your deepest, darkest secrets as you connect with

readers. Just be you, even if that you is introverted or private. Again, a good way to find what your presence will be like online is to look at what other authors do (not copy it, just check it out). I know *many* authors who share a great deal without sharing very much at all, drawing in their readers, making them feel taken care of and sharing their gratitude for their support with funny graphics, pictures of their pets, online articles they find interesting, images of folks who inspire the looks of their characters, and a vast number other things, all without feeling pressured to open up and let it all hang out.

Another way to get the word out about your work is through blog book reviewers. They can love or even if they not-so-love your work, but if they review your books, they're spreading the word about it.

In other words, and please read this carefully, treat blog reviewers or, indeed, any reviewer with respect. If bloggers ask for information, an interview, a takeover or a Q&A, if you have the time to do it properly to give them what they want, don't turn them down. If they're blogging about books, this means they have a passion for them. And as an author, you should honor that. But more, if they wish to feature you, it's a gift. On top of that, you'll meet many awesome people along the way.

Now, if you approach a blogger with an advanced review copy (ARC) of your book or simply a copy of your book that's already released you hope they'll review, they have the right of refusal (in other words, they are not obligated to do a review). Even if you provide them with a free copy, this does not mean they'll review it. Or that they'll review it quickly. Or give it a good review.

Always submit ARCs or books understanding that reviewers will be giving an honest review. Also do it understanding that many of them do what they do as a hobby. They have jobs, homes, families, friends, etc. and the time constraints and pressures that come with all of that. Therefore, if they refuse you, take that refusal with grace. If they give you a bad review, do not comment on that review or contact them with your thoughts about their thoughts. If they can't fit you into a blog tour, that's the way it is and it's up to you whether you'll provide them with an ARC (or not) if they can't be a part of your tour.

In other words, like you, they're human beings who, in most cases, want to help you. But if they can't or their opinion is not one you like, please behave with decency.

Onward from blogs but further to spreading the word, you can offer yourself up to talk to book clubs or groups in your area, approach your library to see if they have any programs where they feature local writers and host Q&As on your Facebook page.

One warning, I would suggest don't as in *don't* participate either as you or under a pseudonym on online discussion boards and push your work. These forums are often close-knit communities and this kind of thing is considered an intrusion by some. There are members of these boards who won't like it, as in *really* won't like it. And no matter how clever you think you are at disguising yourself, they'll figure it out.

This is not to say you can't participate on reader discussion boards about other books but don't use it as a marketing tool. There will be topics that invite you to share about your work, so my suggestion is to post only on them. I, too, did this in the very beginning and folks were nice to me. But when I read through other posts and saw the disgruntled remarks of those who didn't like this type of shilling, I stopped.

My experience was fortunate but I quit nearly before I began. I suggest you don't even begin.

Take Care of Your Readers

If you don't think you have time, make it. But once readers start to communicate with you, you'll find the time. When I started to hear from readers, my world expanded. I had so long wanted to have them I didn't even think of what it would feel like when I did. Now I do. And the feeling is unexplainable. They have my back and I have theirs. I have connected personally with many readers who communicate with me and quite often these connections have deepened into friendships. It's a beautiful thing.

Now I'll share that you need to have a mind to the time you spend with this. You want to take care of your readers. You want to communicate with them. You want to show your appreciation. You want to keep them informed about what you're doing, releasing, putting on sale, giveaways you've got going, and so on. But the goal is to get your book read and do this by more and more people. As your readership grows, the communication will grow. Therefore you should start it with a view to balance.

The bottom line will be, if they love your work, they'll want more. Yes, they'll wish to connect with you and having those connections are indescribably lovely...but they won't want you spending every waking moment on Twitter and Instagram chatting it up. Be as accessible as is comfortable to you but don't build high expectations you can't keep. Guard your personal time and your writing time. Readers will definitely respect that. They want the best for you. It's you who has to find the way to do that without burnout or creating a relationship with your readers you later can't support and then disappointing them.

Throughout your journey you will receive criticism, bad reviews and people telling you what to write. The former two are very difficult to see and absorb. But everyone has an opinion and you must try to be open to them or find ways to avoid them.

Being open to them doesn't mean you have to take them to heart and make changes in your work as pertains to every remark. But if you're open, listen (read) and process, if delivered in a considered and kind manner (for you'll find harshness and criticism that isn't constructive out there, so beware), you'll find that much of it can make you a better writer.

Now that I've said that, personally, if I get even a whiff that a review is going down a path that will be destructive for me (in other words, unnecessarily mean, thoughtless, harsh, disparaging or nasty) I avoid them. I'm very sensitive and have found this the most difficult part (by far, and that is to say the only difficult part) of having my work out there.

You may find this isn't you, that you can read any review without allowing it to sink deep and cause damage, and if that's you, that's great. If you can stand by your work, love what you wrote and your passion is still fired to keep going after happening on a non-constructive review, then awesome!

Quick advice on criticism (even constructive) and bad reviews: If one person says it, or even five, and you've sold hundreds or thousands of your books, then this is their opinion and clearly, as your work is selling and hopefully selling more and more, others feel differently and are telling their friends about it. If a goodly number of people have something to say, have a think about it. You may be able to incorporate their opinions into your work, keep your voice, tell your story your way but also make it better.

And the last note about this is, don't reply to a bad review. *Ever*. It may be difficult to read but everyone has an opinion, they're entitled to it and to express it publicly, even if you don't agree with it, or worse, find it hurtful. You'll find times where something one person doesn't like is precisely what another reader is looking for. For instance, I have, on frequent occasions, been reading one review that will say they dislike the length of my descriptions and minutes later click on another review that praises me for giving that kind of depth to my stories. You'll also find that if you open your mind to other's opinions, as I've noted, it'll improve your writing. But lastly, if someone writes a review, good or bad, they spent time with your work and that's meaningful regardless of how they felt about it. So don't engage them in by-play, defending your work or forcing them to defend their opinion. Try to find the strength to absorb it, learn from it and move on or if that doesn't work for you, simply avoid it.

Sites to Get You Started

Smashwords: www.smashwords.com – Smashwords will sell your eBooks for you, distribute them to online retailers and also have free downloadable materials that will give you information about publishing and marketing.

Kindle Direct Publishing: www.kdp.amazon.com

Barnes & Noble Nook Press: www.nookpress.com

Google Play: <https://play.google.com/books/publish>

Createspace: www.createspace.com – a self-publishing firm dealing in print books

Lulu: www.lulu.com – another self-publishing firm dealing in print and eBooks

Authonomy: www.authonomy.com – an online writing community

Goodreads: www.goodreads.com – a community much like Facebook but targeted solely at readers

This is not an exhaustive list of sites. There is much more out there to find. However, as you find them, be cautious and do your research.

To End...

Everything in this document is based on my experiences. This is not the end-all, be-all of the writing and publishing experience. Even having been publishing for years, I'm far from an expert. I do not know everything. I learn every day in this business and there is so much more to learn and to share (it'd be a book—and I'd have to charge for that!) which means there's so much more for you to discover. There are no guarantees in life and in the publishing business, there are far fewer, therefore this document isn't offering any. This is what I've learned...that's it.

Your experience will be your own. You have to find your path, take it, commit to it but know when to veer off and try something new.

Offering all I share in this document to aspiring writers is simply my way of encouraging you to find that path and make the decision to take it. The rest is up to you and your journey will be your own.

I just wish you all the best of luck, I hope you find your time to stop standing by that pool, dive in, find the water warm and to conclude, I'll offer you one last bit of advice. While writing and publishing, listen to your gut. It's rarely wrong.

Rock On!
www.KristenAshley.net