

The Publishing Budget Planner

How Much Does It Really Cost to
Publish a Book?



The Rural Publishing Company

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Introduction

One of the first questions almost every author asks is:

‘How much does it cost to publish a book?’

And unfortunately, there’s no single answer.

You can technically upload a book to some self-publishing platforms for very little.

You can also spend tens of thousands of dollars producing and marketing one.

Neither figure tells you what **your** book should cost to publish.

The real cost depends on:

- what you’ve written
- the length of your manuscript

- how much editing it needs
- whether you need illustrations
- the complexity of the design
- what you can genuinely do yourself
- what professional support you want
- how you plan to print and distribute it
- what you want the finished book to achieve.

This planner will help you understand the major costs you may encounter so you can build a realistic publishing budget before you start spending.

What Are You Actually Paying For?

Publishing isn't one job.

It's a collection of specialist jobs that turn a manuscript into a professional book.

Depending on your project, you may need to budget for:

- Manuscript development
- Editing
- Proofreading
- Cover design
- Internal design/typesetting

- Illustration
- ISBNs and publishing administration
- Print setup and proof copies
- Distribution
- eBook production
- Author website
- Marketing and publicity
- Book launch
- Printed stock

You may not need every item on that list.

But understanding them before you begin makes it much easier to compare quotes and avoid unexpected costs later.

1. Manuscript Assessment or Development

Is it essential?

Sometimes.

If you're unsure whether your manuscript is structurally ready for editing, a professional manuscript assessment can be a very worthwhile first step.

An assessor may look at areas such as:

- structure
- plot
- pacing
- character development
- clarity
- audience
- genre expectations
- strengths and weaknesses
- areas requiring further development.

For non-fiction, this might include the organisation of ideas, repetition, gaps in information and whether the book delivers what it promises the reader.

Budget for:

\$_____

Ask yourself:

Do I need professional feedback before investing in a full edit?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

2. Professional Editing

Is it essential?

For most commercially published books, yes.

Editing is often one of the largest expenses in professional book production.

And for good reason.

An editor may spend dozens of hours working through your manuscript.

The cost can vary significantly depending on:

- word count
- manuscript condition
- genre

- complexity
- type of editing required
- number of editing passes.

A 30,000-word straightforward manuscript and a 120,000-word fantasy novel are very different editing projects.

You may encounter:

Structural/developmental editing

Big-picture work on the manuscript.

Line editing

Sentence-level work on clarity, flow, tone and style.

Copy editing

Grammar, spelling, punctuation, consistency and correctness.

Some editing services combine elements of these.

Budget for:

\$ _____

Before accepting an editing quote, ask:

☐ What type of editing is included?

- ☐ How many rounds are included?
- ☐ Is the price based on word count or project scope?
- ☐ Will I receive tracked changes/comments?
- ☐ What happens after I make my revisions?

3. Proofreading

Is it essential?

Highly recommended.

Proofreading is the final quality check after the major editing has been completed.

It catches those frustrating little errors that can survive multiple manuscript revisions.

And there are almost always some.

Proofreading is generally less intensive than developmental or line editing, but the cost will still depend largely on manuscript length and complexity.

Budget for:

\$_____

Remember:

Editing and proofreading aren't the same thing.

If a quote says ‘editing included’, find out whether a separate final proofread is also part of the service.

4. Cover Design

Is it essential?

You need a cover.

Whether you need to pay a professional to design it depends on your skills and goals.

But if you’re hoping to sell your book commercially, this is one area where professional design can make an enormous difference.

Readers absolutely judge books by their covers.

Your cover needs to work:

- as a physical book
- as a tiny online thumbnail
- for your genre
- for your target audience
- technically as a print-ready file.

A print cover isn't just the front image.

It generally includes:

Front cover + spine + back cover

The spine width depends on the final page count, paper type and print specifications.

Budget for:

\$_____

Check whether your quote includes:

- ☐ Front cover design
- ☐ Spine and back cover
- ☐ Barcode placement
- ☐ Print-ready files
- ☐ Ebook cover
- ☐ Revisions
- ☐ Final files you can retain

5. Internal Design & Typesetting

Is it essential?

Your manuscript needs to be formatted appropriately for publication.

For a simple novel, the internal layout may be relatively straightforward.

For a non-fiction book containing photographs, tables, illustrations, headings, breakout boxes or other design elements, it can become much more complex.

Professional typesetting considers:

- trim size
- margins
- fonts
- line spacing
- paragraph styles
- chapter openings
- headers
- footers
- page numbering
- image placement
- front matter

- back matter.

Budget for:

\$_____

Ask:

- ☐ Is print typesetting included?
- ☐ Is eBook formatting included?
- ☐ How many correction rounds are included?
- ☐ Will I receive the final files?

6. Illustration

Is it essential?

For most books, no.

For many children's books, absolutely.

Illustration can be one of the largest costs involved in producing an illustrated book.

Pricing can vary enormously depending on:

- number of illustrations
- complexity
- style

- illustrator experience
- full-page versus spot illustrations
- revisions
- licensing and usage rights.

Don't simply ask:

‘How much does an illustrator charge per picture?’

You also need to understand what rights you're purchasing.

Before commissioning an illustrator, clarify:

- ☐ How many illustrations are included?
- ☐ How many revision rounds?
- ☐ Who owns the original artwork?
- ☐ What usage rights do I receive?
- ☐ Can the illustrations be used for marketing?
- ☐ Can they be used on merchandise?
- ☐ Are print-ready files supplied?

Budget for:

\$_____

7. ISBNs & Barcodes

An ISBN – International Standard Book Number – identifies a particular edition and format of a book.

In Australia, ISBNs are available through the official Australian ISBN agency – Thorpe-Bowker Australia.

Different formats or editions generally require separate ISBNs.

For example, your paperback and eBook will each need their own ISBN.

You may also require a barcode for the printed book.

Budget for:

\$_____

Check:

- ☐ Paperback ISBN
- ☐ Hardcover ISBN, if applicable
- ☐ eBook ISBN, if applicable
- ☐ Barcode
- ☐ ISBN registration details

8. Print Setup, Proofs & Distribution

Modern independent publishing doesn't necessarily require you to print hundreds of books upfront.

Print-on-demand allows copies to be produced as they're ordered.

Services such as Amazon KDP and IngramSpark are commonly used by independent authors to make books available for printing and distribution.

There may still be costs associated with:

- account or title setup
- file preparation
- proof copies
- revisions
- shipping
- distribution arrangements.

Budget for:

\$_____

Don't confuse:

Being listed online

with

being actively stocked in bookstores.

A book may be available for a bookstore to order without physically sitting on the shelves.

Understanding that distinction can prevent a lot of disappointment later.

9. eBook Production

If you're releasing an eBook as well as a printed book, your manuscript may need to be converted into an appropriate eBook format.

eBooks aren't simply PDFs of the printed version.

The content needs to be reflowable, which means it adapts to different screen sizes and reader settings.

Budget for:

\$_____

Do I want:

- ☐ Paperback
- ☐ Hardcover
- ☐ eBook

☐ More than one format

10. Author Website

Essential?

No.

Useful?

Often.

An author website gives readers, media, bookstores and event organisers somewhere to find you.

A simple site might include:

- author bio
- book information
- purchase links
- media information
- events
- contact details
- mailing-list signup.

You don't necessarily need an enormous website.

A professional, simple website can be more useful than an expensive one nobody visits.

Budget for:

\$_____

Don't forget possible ongoing costs such as:

- ☐ Domain registration
- ☐ Website hosting
- ☐ Maintenance
- ☐ Email marketing software

11. Marketing & Publicity

Here's where publishing budgets can get out of control very quickly.

There is almost no upper limit to what you *could* spend marketing a book.

But spending more doesn't automatically mean selling more.

Possible expenses include:

- social media advertising

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- Amazon advertising
- professional photography
- book trailers
- promotional graphics
- media outreach
- publicity
- review copies
- competitions
- events
- printed promotional materials
- bookstore outreach.

Start with a strategy.

Then decide what is actually worth paying for.

Budget for:

\$_____

My three priority marketing activities are:

12. Your Book Launch

A book launch can cost almost nothing.

Or it can cost thousands.

Possible expenses include:

- venue hire
- catering
- drinks
- signage
- decorations
- photography
- AV equipment
- printed books
- payment facilities
- promotional materials.

Remember:

A book launch doesn't need to be extravagant to be successful.

A well-attended event at a local library, bookstore, community venue or other suitable location can be incredibly effective.

Budget for:

\$_____

13. Printed Books

This is one of the easiest expenses to underestimate.

If you're planning events, direct sales, markets or bookstore approaches, you'll probably want some physical stock.

Your cost per book will depend on:

- trim size
- page count
- paper
- colour versus black and white
- binding

- print quantity
- printer
- shipping.

Before ordering 500 copies because the unit price looks fantastic, ask yourself:

Where am I actually going to sell 500 books?

Print-on-demand and smaller print runs can reduce your financial risk and save you from turning the spare bedroom into a warehouse.

Initial stock budget:

\$_____

Number of copies:

Estimated cost per copy:

\$_____

2

Your Publishing Budget

Now put it all together.

Manuscript assessment/development:

\$ _____

Editing: \$ _____

Proofreading: \$ _____

Cover design: \$ _____

Internal design/typesetting: \$ _____

Illustration: \$ _____

ISBNs/barcodes: \$ _____

Publishing setup/distribution: \$ _____

eBook production: \$ _____

Author website \$ _____

Marketing/publicity: \$ _____

Book launch: \$ _____

Initial printed stock: \$ _____

Other: \$ _____

ESTIMATED TOTAL

\$ _____

3

Essential, Important Or Nice To Have?

If your budget is limited, divide your expenses into three categories.

Essential

Things your book genuinely needs before publication.

For many books, this might include:

- editing
- proofreading
- cover
- internal formatting

- publishing setup.

Important

Things that will significantly support your goals but could potentially be scaled according to budget.

For example:

- marketing support
- author website
- printed stock
- launch activities.

Nice To Have

Things you'd love if the budget allows.

Perhaps:

- elaborate launch event
- book trailer
- premium promotional products
- large print run

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- extensive advertising campaign.

This exercise can stop a limited budget being spent on exciting extras while essential production work is neglected.

4

Where Can You Save Money?

There are absolutely parts of publishing you can DIY.

Depending on your skills, you might:

- build your own simple author website
- manage your own social media
- organise your own launch
- handle your own media outreach
- create basic promotional graphics
- manage your own advertising
- learn how publishing platforms work.

But be realistic about your abilities.

Doing something yourself only saves money if you can do it to an appropriate standard – and if the hours required are worth the saving.

5

Where Shouldn't You Cut Corners?

For a book you're hoping to sell professionally, we'd be particularly cautious about cutting costs on:

Editing

Readers notice poor writing and errors.

Proofreading

Typos have an incredible ability to become visible approximately three seconds after you've printed 200 copies.

Cover design

An amateur-looking cover can make a professionally written book look amateur.

Internal book design

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Microsoft Word can write a book. That doesn't mean it should necessarily design one.

The Cheapest Quote Isn't Always The Cheapest Option

Suppose Provider A quotes \$2,500.

Provider B quotes \$5,000.

At first glance, Provider A is clearly cheaper.

But what if the first quote doesn't include:

- editing
- proofreading
- custom cover design
- eBook production

- distribution setup
- revisions
- marketing support?

Suddenly you're not comparing the same thing.

When reviewing publishing packages, don't compare the **bottom-line price** first.

Compare:

What exactly am I receiving for that price?

Then look at the total.

Watch For Ongoing Costs

Before signing with a publishing provider, find out whether there are costs beyond the initial package.

Ask about:

- ongoing annual fees
- account fees
- distribution fees
- royalties retained by the provider
- commissions
- future file changes

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- re-upload fees
- printing mark-ups
- website hosting
- ongoing marketing subscriptions.

A lower upfront price isn't necessarily cheaper if you're tied to ongoing fees.

8

Don't Forget Your Book's Retail Price

Your publishing budget isn't only about what it costs to produce the book.

You also need to think about what happens afterwards.

If your printed book costs:

\$8 per copy

and retails for:

\$29.95

that doesn't mean you make \$21.95 every time someone buys it.

Depending on where and how it's sold, there may be:

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- retailer discounts
- wholesale discounts
- distribution costs
- printing costs
- platform fees
- shipping
- taxes.

Your profit per book can vary significantly depending on the sales channel.

That's why pricing should be considered before publication – not after the book has already been printed.

One Important Reality Check

Publishing a book is an investment.

That doesn't necessarily mean you'll earn every dollar back through book sales.

For some authors, commercial return is the primary goal.

For others, the return might be:

- establishing professional credibility
- sharing an important story
- creating opportunities
- preserving family history

- supporting a business
- educating others
- building a speaking career
- leaving a legacy.

Before deciding how much you're prepared to spend, ask yourself:

What does success look like for this book?

That answer should influence your budget.

10

Your Budget Plan

The maximum I'm comfortable investing is:

\$ _____

The three areas I most want professional help with are:

The areas I'm comfortable managing myself are:

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The expenses I still need quotes for are:

My next financial decision is:

Before You Spend a Cent

Remember these five things:

- 1. Get clear on what your book actually needs.**
- 2. Get itemised information about what's included in any publishing package.**
- 3. Don't assume the cheapest option represents the best value.**
- 4. Be realistic about what you can successfully DIY.**
- 5. Never be afraid to ask where your money is going.**

A professional publishing provider should be able to explain what you're paying for and why.

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You worked hard to write your book.

Spend just as carefully when it comes to publishing it.

What's Next?

You've looked at the different publishing pathways.

You've mapped out your publishing timeline.

And now you've started building a realistic budget.

Before you hand your manuscript – or your money – to anyone, there's one more important step.

Continue to the next resource in your **Regional Author Starter Kit**:

THE MANUSCRIPT READINESS CHECKLIST

Find out whether your manuscript is ready to publish.

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*The Regional Author Starter Kit is brought to you
by The Rural Publishing Company – helping regional
voices shine, one book at a time.*