

The Publishing Timeline Guide

From Finished Manuscript to
Published Book



The Rural Publishing Company

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Introduction

From Finished Manuscript to Published Book

What happens, in what order – and how long should you allow?

You've finished your manuscript.

Congratulations!

Now, when can you publish it?

Next month?

Three months?

Six months?

The slightly frustrating answer is:

It depends.

Every book is different. A 20,000-word memoir has very

different production requirements from a 100,000-word fantasy novel or a fully illustrated children's picture book.

But one thing is fairly universal:

Professional publishing takes time.

There are editors to book, revisions to make, covers to design, pages to typeset, proofs to check, files to prepare, distribution to establish and a launch to plan.

If you're hoping to publish your book in 2027 (or beyond), understanding the timeline now can save you a lot of stress later.

Here's what the journey generally looks like.

The Big Picture

A typical professionally produced book moves through seven main stages:

1. Finish the manuscript



2. Edit and revise



3. Proofread



4. Design and typeset



5. Set up publishing and distribution



6. Review and approve proofs



7. Launch and market

Some of these stages can overlap.

Others really shouldn't.

For example, there's little point professionally typesetting a manuscript if you're about to make substantial editorial changes to it.

Getting the order right can save time, money and a considerable amount of frustration.

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STAGE 1: Finish Your Manuscript

Allow: As long as it takes!

Before you start worrying about ISBNs, Amazon listings and book launches, concentrate on the book itself.

Your manuscript doesn't necessarily need to be *perfect* before you seek professional help.

That's what editors are for.

But if you're moving into the production stage, it should generally be complete.

For fiction and memoir, that usually means having a full manuscript rather than sending chapters through as they're written.

For non-fiction, make sure the structure and major content are in place.

For children's picture books, the text may be relatively short, but you'll also need to think about page structure and illustrations.

Before moving on, ask:

- Is the manuscript complete?
- Have I read it through from beginning to end?
- Have I removed obvious repetitions or unfinished sections?
- Have I had some distance from the manuscript before reviewing it?
- Am I ready for someone else to read and critique it?

If yes, you're ready for the next stage.

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STAGE 2: Professional Editing and Author Revisions

Allow: approximately 1 – 3+ months

This is often one of the longest stages of professional publishing.

Depending on the manuscript, you might need:

Structural/developmental editing

Looking at the big picture – structure, pacing, plot, character development, organisation and overall effectiveness.

Line or copy editing

Working more closely with language, clarity,

consistency, grammar, sentence structure and style.

Some manuscripts require both.

And remember:

The editor's work is only part of the timeline.

Once the edited manuscript comes back, you'll usually need time to review the suggestions and make revisions.

That might take a few days.

Or it might take several weeks.

For substantial structural work, it could take longer.

Don't forget booking time

Good editors often book ahead.

If you want your manuscript edited in October, don't assume you can contact an editor on 1 October and have them start the following morning.

This is one reason it's worth planning your publication date well in advance.

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STAGE 3: Proofreading

Allow: approximately 2 – 4 weeks

Once the major editing and revisions are complete, the manuscript should receive a final proofread.

Proofreading looks for the smaller errors that remain after editing, including:

- spelling
- punctuation
- grammar
- missing or repeated words
- inconsistencies

- formatting issues
- typographical errors.

This is your final quality-control stage before the book moves fully into production.

And yes:

Even professionally edited books still need proofreading.

Editing and proofreading are different jobs.

Skipping this step because the manuscript has already been edited can result in frustrating errors making it into the finished book.

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STAGE 4: Cover Design and Internal Book Design

Allow: approximately 3 – 6 weeks

Now your manuscript starts looking like an actual book.

There are two major areas of design.

Cover Design

Your cover isn't simply decoration.

It's one of your book's most important marketing tools.

Your designer may need:

- final title

- subtitle, if applicable
- author name
- book dimensions
- approximate final page count
- back-cover blurb
- author bio
- publisher logo, if applicable
- ISBN/barcode details
- comparable titles or examples of styles you like.

Cover development usually involves concepts, feedback, revisions and final print-ready artwork.

Internal Design and Typesetting

Typesetting takes your edited manuscript and transforms it into professionally designed book pages.

This includes decisions around:

- fonts

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- margins
- chapter headings
- paragraph styles
- page numbers
- headers and footers
- scene breaks
- images
- tables
- front matter
- back matter.

For straightforward novels, this may be relatively simple.

For non-fiction books with photographs, tables, illustrations, breakout boxes or complex formatting, it can take considerably longer.

Important:

Once your manuscript has been typeset, avoid making large editorial changes.

Changes at this stage can create additional design work and introduce new errors.

That's why editing should happen **before** typesetting.

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STAGE 5: Publishing Setup and Distribution

Allow: approximately 2 – 4 weeks

While your book is being prepared, the publishing administration can also begin.

This may include:

- allocating ISBNs
- creating the copyright page
- determining book specifications
- setting retail pricing

- preparing metadata
- creating retailer descriptions
- selecting categories and keywords
- setting up print-on-demand
- setting up eBook distribution
- preparing files for publishing platforms
- establishing wholesale and distribution settings.

This is the less glamorous side of publishing.

But it's important.

A beautiful book isn't much use commercially if readers and retailers can't find or order it.

STAGE 6: Proof Copies and Final Approval

Allow: approximately 2 – 4 weeks

This is one of the most exciting moments in the whole process.

Your first physical copy arrives.

And you'll probably want to stare at it for a while.

Then you need to actually check it.

A physical proof allows you to review things that can be difficult to judge accurately on a computer screen.

Look at:

- cover colour and image quality
- spine placement
- margins
- font size
- image reproduction
- page numbering
- headers and footers
- chapter openings
- blank pages
- page breaks
- overall print quality.

You may identify corrections.

If so, the files need to be updated, uploaded again and – depending on the changes – another proof may be worthwhile.

Don't skip the proof-copy stage simply because you're impatient to launch.

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Finding an error after you've ordered 100 copies is much less fun.

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STAGE 7: Pre-Launch and Marketing

Start: ideally 2 – 3+ months BEFORE publication

Here's the mistake we see all the time:

An author publishes their book.

Then they say:

'Right. How do I market it?'

Marketing should start before publication.

Ideally, you'll begin building interest while your book is still being produced.

That might include:

- announcing the book

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- revealing the cover
- growing your email list
- creating an author website
- setting up social media
- organising advance readers
- gathering early reviews
- preparing media materials
- contacting local media
- approaching relevant organisations
- planning a launch event
- preparing promotional graphics
- building relationships with bookstores and libraries.

You don't need to do everything.

But you should know **how you plan to reach readers before the book becomes available.**

How Long Does The Whole Process Take?

For many professionally produced books, we'd suggest allowing approximately **6 – 9 months** from a completed manuscript to publication.

Some books can be produced faster.

Others need considerably longer.

A complex manuscript requiring substantial editing, illustrations or specialist design may take 9 – 12 months or more.

The important thing isn't the exact number.

It's recognising that: **Publishing properly takes longer than uploading a file to Amazon.**

Your 2027 Publishing Plan

Want your book published in 2027?

Here's a rough guide to when you should start.

JANUARY – MARCH 2027 RELEASE

Ideally begin the publishing process: **Mid to late 2026**

APRIL – JUNE 2027 RELEASE

Ideally begin: **August – December 2026**

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2027 RELEASE

Ideally begin: **Late 2026 – early 2027**

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2027 RELEASE

Ideally begin: **January – April 2027**

These aren't hard deadlines.

But the earlier you start, the more breathing room you'll have for editing, revisions, design, proofs and marketing.

WORK BACKWARDS FROM YOUR LAUNCH

If you have a particular publication date in mind, don't start at today and work forwards.

Start at launch day and work backwards.

For example:

Target publication: September 2027

SEPTEMBER

Book officially launches

JULY – AUGUST

Advance marketing, publicity, reviews, retailer outreach and launch preparation

JUNE – JULY

Final proofs, corrections and distribution setup

MAY – JUNE

Cover design and typesetting

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APRIL – MAY

Proofreading and final manuscript corrections

JANUARY – APRIL

Editing and author revisions

BY JANUARY

Completed manuscript ready for professional production

Suddenly September doesn't seem quite so far away.

That's why planning early matters.

Children's Books Need A Little More Time

If you're publishing an illustrated children's book, your timeline may look different.

Illustration can be one of the longest stages of production.

Depending on the number and complexity of illustrations, the illustrator's availability and the revision process, illustration alone can take several months.

A typical process may include:

Manuscript → Editing → Page planning → Illustration brief → Illustration → Internal design → Proofreading →

Proof copy → Publication

If you need to find and commission an illustrator, build additional time into your schedule.

Don't book your launch venue before you know when the illustrations will actually be finished!

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Build In A Buffer

Something will probably take longer than expected.

An editor gets booked out.

You decide Chapter 7 isn't working.

The cover needs another revision.

The proof copy takes longer to arrive.

You notice something that absolutely has to be corrected.

Life gets busy.

Build some breathing room into your publishing schedule.

If your book absolutely must be available for a particular event, anniversary, conference, Christmas campaign or

other fixed date, **don't make that date your production deadline.**

Aim to have the finished book available well beforehand.

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Your Publishing Timeline

Fill this out before you start.

My ideal publication date:

My book needs to be completely ready by:

Final proof approval:

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Design/typesetting completed:

Proofreading completed:

Editing and revisions completed:

Manuscript ready for editing:

Marketing starts:

My next action is:

The Most Important Date?

It probably isn't your publication date.

It's the date you **start**.

Authors often contact publishing professionals with a finished manuscript and say:

'I'd love to have it published in a couple of months.'

Sometimes that's possible.

Often it isn't – particularly if you want the book professionally edited, designed, proofed and prepared for distribution.

So if there's a book sitting on your computer that you'd love to see published in 2027:

Don't wait until 2027 to start thinking about publishing it.

Give your book the time it deserves.

What's Next?

You know which publishing pathways are available.

And now you know roughly how long the publishing process can take.

Next, let's look at the question almost every first-time author eventually asks:

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO PUBLISH A BOOK?

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

THE PUBLISHING BUDGET PLANNER

Understand what you may need to pay for, where you can save money and what to budget for before you begin.

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*The Regional Author Starter Kit is brought to you by
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