

The Publishing Pathways Guide

How to Choose the Right Way to
Publish Your Book



The Rural Publishing Company

First published by The Rural Publishing Company in 2026.

Copyright © Sarah Walkerden / The Rural Publishing Company 2026

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this publication can be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written consent of Sarah Walkerden or The Rural Publishing Company.

The information in this book is based on the author's experiences and opinions. The author and publisher disclaim any responsibility for any adverse consequences, which may result from the use of the information contained herein.



The Rural Publishing Company

Website: <https://theruralpublishingcompany.com.au>

Email: hello@theruralpublishingcompany.com.au

Contents

Introduction	1
1. Traditional Publishing	3
2. DIY Self-Publishing	7
3. Supported Self-Publishing	12
4. What About Vanity Publishing?	16
5. Which Path Should You Choose?	19
6. Pathways At A Glance	22
7. One Final Thing	24
What's Next?	26

Introduction

You've written a book. Or perhaps you're still writing it.

Either way, at some point you'll face the big question:

How am I actually going to get this thing published?

This is where publishing can get confusing very quickly.

Traditional publishing. Self-publishing. Hybrid publishing. Assisted publishing. Vanity publishing. Print-on-demand. Distribution. ISBNs. Royalties.

There's a lot of terminology – and unfortunately, not always a lot of transparency.

The good news is that you have more options than ever before.

There are three main pathways available to Australian authors:

1. Traditional publishing

2. DIY self-publishing

3. Supported self-publishing

None is automatically right or wrong.

The best pathway depends on your book, your goals, your budget, how much control you want and how much of the publishing process you're prepared to manage yourself.

This guide will help you understand the difference.

Traditional Publishing

This is what most people picture when they hear the word ‘publisher’.

You write a manuscript and submit it to a publishing house – sometimes directly, sometimes through a literary agent.

If the publisher decides to acquire your manuscript, they generally take responsibility for producing and publishing the book.

That may include editing, cover design, typesetting, printing, distribution and some marketing and publicity.

Most importantly:

The publisher pays the cost of publishing the book – not the author.

Depending on the contract, the author may receive an advance and/or royalties from book sales.

The advantages

Traditional publishing can provide:

- professional editing and production
- established bookstore and distribution relationships
- industry credibility
- access to experienced publishing professionals
- no upfront publishing costs for the author
- potential publicity and marketing support.

For the right author and the right manuscript, it can be an excellent pathway.

The catch?

It can be extremely difficult to secure a traditional

publishing contract.

Publishers receive enormous numbers of submissions and can only acquire a small percentage of them.

A good book isn't necessarily enough.

Publishers also consider commercial potential, current market trends, genre, audience size, timing, author profile and how the book fits their existing list. Most traditional publishers want to sign well-known people with an existing large audience, so there is a higher chance of that book selling.

The process can also take a long time.

You may spend months querying agents or publishers before receiving a response (if you receive a response at all!) – and even after signing a contract, it can take a year or considerably longer before your book reaches readers.

You'll also usually give up some control.

The publisher may have significant influence over your book's title, cover, editing, pricing, release schedule and marketing.

Traditional publishing may suit you if ...

- securing a traditional publishing deal is important to you
- you're prepared to submit and potentially face rejection
- you're happy to wait
- you don't want to fund the publishing process yourself
- you're comfortable giving the publisher significant control over the finished product.

A common misconception

Traditional publishing shouldn't require you to purchase an expensive publishing package.

If a company accepts your manuscript and then asks you to pay thousands of dollars to have it published, you aren't dealing with a conventional traditional publishing arrangement.

That doesn't automatically mean the service is bad – but you need to understand exactly what you're buying.

2

DIY Self-Publishing

At the opposite end of the spectrum is doing it yourself.

And yes – you genuinely can.

Platforms such as Amazon KDP and IngramSpark have made it possible for almost anyone to publish a book and make it available to readers around the world.

You don't need a publishing contract.

You don't need permission.

And you don't necessarily need a publishing company.

How does it work?

As a DIY self-published author, **you become the publisher.**

That means you're responsible for coordinating everything your book needs.

Depending on the project, that could include:

- manuscript development
- editing
- proofreading
- cover design
- internal book design/typesetting
- ISBNs
- copyright information
- eBook conversion or production
- print specifications
- uploading files
- metadata
- pricing
- print-on-demand setup

- distribution
- proof copies
- launch planning
- marketing.

You can learn to do some of this yourself and engage freelancers for the rest.

The advantages

DIY publishing gives you enormous control.

You decide:

- what gets published
- when it gets published
- what the cover looks like
- how the book is priced
- who you work with
- how much you spend
- how the book is marketed.

You also retain ownership and control of your work.

And there's no querying publishers for months hoping someone says yes.

The downside

There's a lot to learn.

Publishing a book is relatively easy.

Publishing a book professionally is much harder.

One of the biggest mistakes we see isn't authors choosing DIY publishing.

It's authors assuming that uploading a Word document to Amazon means the publishing process is done, dusted and finished.

Poor editing, amateur covers, incorrect formatting, unsuitable print specifications, weak metadata and limited distribution can all affect how a book is perceived and how well it sells.

DIY can also become overwhelming.

Suddenly you're not just an author.

You're a project manager, editor, designer, production

coordinator, publishing administrator, marketer and bookseller.

DIY self-publishing may suit you if ...

- you enjoy learning new technology
- you're confident managing multiple freelancers
- you want maximum control
- you have plenty of time to research the process
- you have a limited budget and can do some tasks yourself
- you don't mind troubleshooting when things go wrong.

Done well, DIY self-publishing can produce an excellent book.

The key words here are **done well**.

3

Supported Self-Publishing

Supported self-publishing sits between traditional publishing and doing absolutely everything yourself.

You remain an independent author, but instead of having to navigate the entire publishing process alone, you engage professional support to help produce and publish your book.

You may also hear this described as assisted self-publishing or publishing services.

The exact model varies between providers, which makes it particularly important to understand what you're paying for.

How does it work?

Generally, the author funds the production of their book.

In return, a publishing service provider coordinates some or all of the professional services required to take the manuscript from draft to published book.

That might include:

- manuscript assessment
- professional editing
- proofreading
- cover design
- internal book design
- ISBNs
- eBook production
- print setup
- print-on-demand
- distribution
- retailer listings

- launch preparation
- marketing support.

Instead of finding and coordinating an editor, proofreader, designer and publishing platform yourself, you have professional support through the process.

The advantages

You get much of the freedom of self-publishing without having to learn every part of the industry yourself.

For many first-time authors, that's the biggest benefit.

You can retain greater creative control while still accessing professional editing, design and publishing expertise.

It can also make the process significantly less overwhelming and a whole lot quicker.

The downside

You have to pay for it.

Professional editing, design and publishing services involve real people doing skilled work, so professionally

producing a book can represent a significant investment.

And this is an area of the publishing industry where authors need to be careful.

The quality, transparency and value offered by publishing service companies varies enormously.

Some provide genuine professional publishing support.

Others charge large amounts of money while providing very little in return.

Which brings us to an important point ...

4

What About Vanity Publishing?

The term *vanity publisher* is thrown around a lot.

Sometimes it's used to describe **any** company that charges an author to publish.

That's too simplistic.

Paying professionals to help produce your book isn't inherently a problem. Authors routinely pay editors, designers, illustrators, publicists and other specialists to help them.

The real question is:

What are you paying for – and what are you

getting in return?

Warning signs can include:

- vague packages with little explanation of what's included
- aggressive sales tactics
- unrealistic promises about book sales
- claims that your manuscript has been 'selected' followed immediately by a large fee
- unclear royalty arrangements
- long-term contracts that are difficult to exit
- unclear ownership of files or rights
- inflated printing costs
- limited distribution presented as 'worldwide publishing'
- pressure to purchase large quantities of your own book
- little transparency about who actually performs the editing or design.

Before signing anything or paying a publishing company,
read the contract and ask questions.

A reputable provider should be comfortable explaining exactly how the arrangement works.

5

Which Path Should You Choose?

Ask yourself these five questions.

1. How important is traditional publication to me?

If seeing the logo of an established publishing house on your book is a major personal or career goal, try traditional publishing first.

There's nothing stopping you from exploring self-publishing later.

2. How quickly do I want to publish?

Traditional publishing can take considerable time.

Self-publishing gives you greater control over your timeline – although producing a professional book still shouldn't be rushed.

3. How much do I want to do myself?

Be realistic.

Do you actually *want* to learn typesetting, metadata, ISBN administration, print specifications and distribution?

Some authors love it.

Others would rather poke themselves in the eye with a red pen.

Both answers are perfectly acceptable.

4. What's my budget?

Traditional publishing generally doesn't require the author to fund production.

Self-publishing does.

Your costs will depend on what you can genuinely do yourself and what you'll need professional help with.

5. What do I want my finished book to achieve?

Is this:

- a commercial novel?
- a family history?
- a memoir?
- a children's book?
- a business credibility tool?
- a book for your local community?
- something you've dreamed of publishing for twenty years?

Your definition of success matters.

Selling 10,000 copies isn't everyone's goal.

Sometimes success is producing a beautiful, professionally published book you're incredibly proud to put your name on.

Pathways At A Glance

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

Author investment: Usually low/no production costs

Creative control: Lower

Speed: Usually slow

Difficulty to access: High

Professional support: High

Author workload: Lower

Best for: Authors willing to query and wait for the opportunity to secure a publishing contract

DIY SELF-PUBLISHING

Author investment: Variable

Creative control: Very high

Speed: You control it

Difficulty to access: Low

Professional support: Whatever you arrange yourself

Author workload: High

Best for: Authors comfortable researching, learning and managing the process

SUPPORTED SELF-PUBLISHING

Author investment: Moderate to significant

Creative control: Generally high

Speed: Generally author/provider controlled

Difficulty to access: Low

Professional support: High, depending on provider

Author workload: Moderate

Best for: Authors who want independence and professional support without managing everything themselves

7

One Final Thing

You don't have to decide today.

One of the biggest mistakes authors make is rushing into publishing because they're excited to finally have a finished manuscript.

Finishing your manuscript is a huge milestone.

But **finishing your manuscript and publishing your manuscript are two different things.**

Take some time.

Research your options.

Ask questions.

Get quotes.

Read contracts.

Look at books a provider has previously produced.

And be wary of anyone promising overnight bestseller status or making publishing sound suspiciously easy.

There are many different ways to get a book into the world.

The goal isn't simply to get published.

It's to choose the publishing pathway that makes sense for you, your book and what you want to achieve with it.

What's Next?

Now that you understand your three main publishing pathways, the next step is working out whether your manuscript is actually ready to begin the publishing process.

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

THE MANUSCRIPT READINESS CHECKLIST

Is your manuscript actually ready to publish? Let's find out.

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