

## Models of Publishing Information

(summarized and evaluated by Ginjer L. Clarke)

### *Traditional Publishing*

- These companies are the large, conglomerate, mostly NYC-based publishing houses, including the Big Five: Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins, Hachette, and Macmillan. Many other publishing imprints still exist, but they are housed within one of these larger companies. [This article](#) includes a current good explanation of the Big Five and their many imprints.
- In the traditional model, being accepted for publication is highly competitive. Editors in each house receive thousands of “unsolicited submissions” – query letters from authors who want to sell their proposals or manuscripts – as well as many offers from agents who represent their authors. Although these companies collectively publish up to 1 million books per year, about 99% of manuscripts submitted to editors are rejected! They may be too poorly written, have an unoriginal or poor premise, or are irrelevant in today’s market.
- This model is so competitive because the publisher assumes all of the risk. Upon acceptance of a proposal or manuscript, the publisher pays the author an advance (generally between \$5,000-10,000) and offers royalties between 5–15%. They then have creative control and pay for the design, cover, editing, illustrations or photography permissions, marketing, sales, and publicity. The author earns royalties once the book has sold enough copies to “earn out” the advance. These royalties are generally sent to the author quarterly or biannually, and the amount is not usually known until the royalty statements arrive.
- A first printing of a traditionally published book generally ranges from 10,000–30,000 copies and is based on presales to booksellers, distributors, customers, and other markets. Most books are printed in hardcover editions first and then in paperback if they are successful, although some imprints do simultaneous release in both hardcover and paperback for educational markets. Read a bit more [here](#) from PRH about industry insider terms if interested.
- **Bottom line: A traditional publisher pays all costs and sells many more copies with a wide international distribution network, but the author earns less per book and typically has less creative control.**
- *Choose this model if you are looking for a career as an author, believe you have a very solid premise with wide appeal, and are willing to work – possibly for many years – to submit, revise, and persevere to achieve the reward of publication with professionals who will help guide you and want to make your book a success.*

## *Independent “Indie” Publishing*

- A legitimate indie publisher can be a good alternative for an author who doesn't want to relinquish control or wait and work to achieve potential publication with one of the Big Five. These companies usually offer free editing and design services upon acceptance of a manuscript after their submissions review process. They believe the book meets their standards and will sell well to a specific audience (e.g., an interest group, geographic region, age bracket, etc.) but probably not to a mass-market audience.
- Most indies don't offer the author an advance on acceptance, but they offer a higher royalty rate, often up to 50%. Therefore, they don't guarantee any upfront income from the book, but a successful book can earn well for the author. Indies have less prestige, but they can make up for that with hustle, social media presence, and more individual attention to their authors. Here's a good [article](#) with more info on indies and the steps to take to pursue this path.
- Note that if a publisher offers to create your book for a fee that you pay to them, that's *vanity publishing*. They will publish anything submitted to them, and the author will be responsible for all costs. This works for some people who simply want a few hundred copies of a book to sell to friends, family, and their network. But scam publishers also exist that promise much more than they can deliver and significantly overcharge for what they provide.
- **Bottom line: Indies offer the perks of traditional publishing with free editing, design, and marketing services, and typically have a decent platform and plan for selling their books, but most of the publicity and actual sales will depend on the author's reach and effort.**
- *Choose this model if you're looking for professional assistance, greater creative input and larger potential royalties, but are not looking for mass-market reach and prepared to assume all of the costs and work of marketing and publicity on your own.*

## *Self-Publishing or On-Demand Publishing*

- The name self-publishing says it all: you will do most of the work by yourself. Some people see this as investing your own money upfront to get what you want—to be a published author—on a faster and more flexible timeline without putting a ton of time and effort into finding an agent, writing proposals, waiting for months to get replies, tracking submissions, multiple revisions, etc.
- Certainly, some self-published authors do pay for and employ editors and designers to polish their books, but many don't, so the overall quality can be low.

There are definitely benefits though, and many are described in this [article](#) from a self-publishing company.

- The downside is that self-published books are often not eligible for award consideration and booklists, not stocked in bookstores, and not considered as truly legitimate by many people in the industry. In addition, finding mainstream exposure is exceedingly difficult. Most books published in this way are sold to the author's network, or potentially to a limited online audience.
- Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) is the largest example of on-demand publishing. This means the book exists only in electronic form until it is ordered by a customer, and then it is delivered either electronically via Kindle or sometimes printed on demand (POD) and shipped to the customer. There is no barrier to entry or quality control here – anyone can choose to publish.
- **Bottom line: An author who self-publishes or does so with an on-demand printer assumes all cost and risk, usually without the benefit of professional input. However, these authors also have total creative control, and if their book is successful at finding an audience, they retain up to 75% of the profits.**
- *Choose this model if you want to basically print rather than truly publish your work, with fewer copies sold to a smaller audience, or if you're prepared to hire all design and marketing services to assist you, and you want to take a chance on success on your own.*

#### Resources in Links and Additional Sources:

"What Are the 'Big Five' Publishing Houses?" by Julianne Nova, July 17, 2022.

<https://bookscouter.com/blog/big-five-publishing-houses/>

"What Is Indie Publishing? And How to Get Started in 2025" by Reedsy Editorial Team.

<https://blog.reedsy.com/indie-publishing/>

"Traditional Publishing vs. Self-Publishing: Pros, Cons, and Tips for Success" by Tom Corson-Knowles,

<https://www.tckpublishing.com/traditional-publishing-vs-self-publishing/>

*Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market 33rd Edition: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published* by Amy Jones (Ed.), January 11, 2022, Writer's Digest Books.

*Children's Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2025: The Best Advice on Writing and Publishing for Children* by Bloomsbury Publishing, October 8, 2024, Bloomsbury Yearbooks.

*Guide to Literary Agents 30th Edition: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published* by Robert Lee Brewer (Ed.), December 14, 2021, Writer's Digest Books.

*Writer's Market 100th Edition: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published* by Robert Lee Brewer (Ed.), November 9, 2021, Writer's Digest Books.