

SELF-PUBLISHING

the truth about what you need to budget



TIME. MONEY. RESOURCES.

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INTRO



Hi, I'm Shelly! And I'm so glad you're here! The books I'm holding in this photo aren't where my fascination with love stories and time travel began, but they certainly are what brought me to where I am today. In fact, my first dabble into the world of fiction was back in the sixth grade where a lovely, inspirational teacher encouraged me to cultivate what she saw as a gift. The gift of storytelling. It's a little ironic that even that tale was time-travel based. But my published trilogy didn't come soon after my childhood days. In fact, I didn't continue that or any other story for a very long time. Somewhere along the way, I began to believe my creative instinct was impractical, abandoning it for the everyday responsibilities of adulthood.

Has that happened to you?

If so, I'd love to share a bit of what I've learned, and encourage you to trust the instinct you sense you've always had (or that you've lost touch with). Perhaps you have heard a **lot** about what it takes to publish, self-publish, or hybrid publish. And it can be confusing in today's information-saturated world. If you want to know what your investment to become a published author looks like, I'm here to give you a practical glimpse into what you can expect. Here's to your story and sharing it with the world, friend!

Love,
Shelly

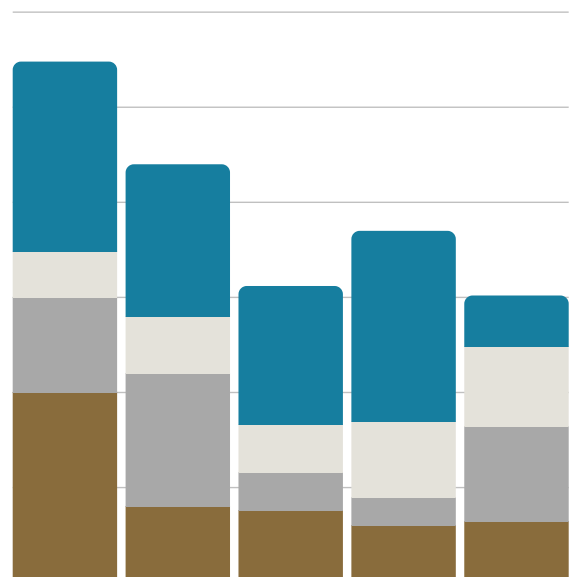
TIME MANAGEMENT

How long does this take?!

In traditional publishing, the process of writing a proposal, getting a book deal, and publishing your work can take years. So, many writers believe that self-publishing is the way to go simply because they can get something out fast. And though this is a benefit of keeping all the control in your own hands, it doesn't mean the process will be quick. Here's a few things to consider while trying to budget your time for your book project.

1. **THE PREP STAGE**—recommended timeline: 3 months

- a. Writing a proposal and doing market research for a **nonfiction** book is ideal. Crafting a proposal to hone your project is invaluable whether you're sending it to an agent, or simply pitching it to colleagues or organizations for feedback. Use the experience you have from doing this sort of thing in your field of expertise or study and estimate how long of a process this might be for you, then begin your timeline.
- b. For **fiction and children's books**, researching the market is also essential. Study the market for popular book titles, covers, and subject matters. If you have a general theme or message, research what organizations may partner with you for endorsements and begin to build an audience for your book. This process is the start of a good timeline.





2. THE WRITING STAGE—recommended timeline: 6+ months

- a. Depending on how much **nonfiction** writing you've done already this could be fast, or it may take a long time, but rarely takes less than 6 months. Research should be minimal by this phase, and writing and editing are key. Set weekly word goals, chart your progress, and revisit your goals monthly.
- b. For **fiction**, this phase may be one to take months or years. Depending on the story, the amount of time you have to dedicate to the process, and your commitment, the essential thing is to have a word goal and chart your progress. I recommend setting a word goal each month according to the capacity you have in your schedule. We all know every time of year is not equal, so don't feel like you have to have the same goal every week or even every day!
- c. **Children's books** tend to be the fastest thing to write since there are not many words, however, illustrations can be a lengthy process. Budget time for edits both in your manuscript and pictures. In my experience, once your story is written, this can be between 3-6 months.

3. THE EDITING STAGE—recommended timeline 3 months

- a. For **nonfiction**, fact checking as well as developmental editing and proofreading are part of the editing stage. Though your work should be in pretty good shape by this stage, the back and forth can be lengthy if you want to get it right.
- b. For **fiction**, this phase may be on the longer side. Developmental editing is essential to make a story flow and have a believable plot. Depending on word count, there's usually a lot more novel to get through than a shorter, nonfiction book, so don't underestimate. Take every bit of your 3 months or more!
- c. **Children's books** still need editors! Typesetting is another part of this process. Once you see your words superimposed on images, your mind can change, so don't skimp on your time with this.

4. THE PUBLISHING STAGE—recommended timeline: 3 months

This is the same for everyone. And, yes, you can create your author accounts in minutes but the details are time-consuming. If you want to get your book out into the world like the pros, give yourself the time and space to do it. If you're a go-getter, you'll likely get this done in less than 3 months, but you'll never regret budgeting that length of time!

If you've been adding it up along as we go, you'll see that a good estimated timeframe for writing and publishing is over a year. This, my friends, in my experience, is a very realistic approach if you're creating anything longer than a no or low-content book.

MONEY MATTERS

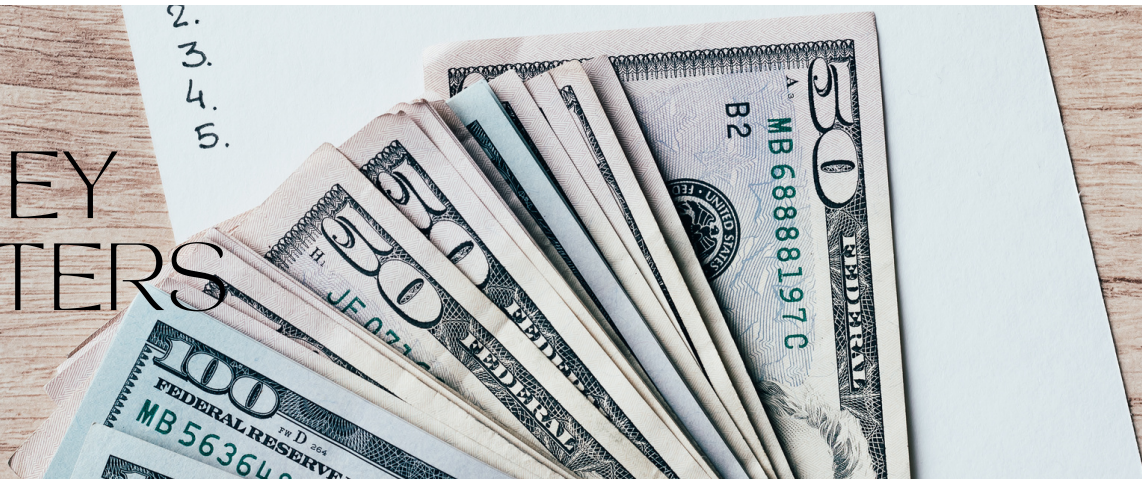
How much is this gonna cost?!

You may have seen a TikTok or Reel informing you that you can publish anything these days for absolutely free! And while that may be true, there are a lot of caveats with this! Unless you are publishing books with blank pages, or never want to venture outside of Amazon, free isn't an option. If you want to own the right to distribute your book anywhere—including on your own website—you should be aware of what it takes. Here's a quick overview.

- Register a copyright. In 2023, the cost of registering your work with the US government for full protection is \$50. Assuming that your work is copyrighted because you hit publish on Amazon is actually false. If someone tried to rip off your work, you wouldn't have full protection unless you take this step!
- Purchase ISBNs - \$125 each or 10 for \$295. I always suggest buying 10, and here's why: You must have one number per iteration of your book. Meaning that if it will be available in hardcover, ebook, and paperback, you'll need three numbers for each manuscript. Audiobooks are exempt. In the United States, the only registered distributor for book identification numbers is Bowker. Now, if you choose to go a hybrid route, this means that the company you are working with already purchased those numbers from them, and your book will be published with their imprint. But if you want to own that as well, you have to have these numbers to publish!



MONEY MATTERS



- Book cover design - \$300-\$1,200+ Yes, that's a huge margin! If you want to hire someone on [fiverr](#) or [99Designs](#), you can usually get this service for as little as \$300, but if you hire a graphic designer with a lot of clout, they may charge you upwards of a thousand dollars or more. Just search the web and your own network and get some pricing.
- Illustrators - \$1.5-10K An average newbie illustrator costs anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,000 and an experienced artist will usually charge between 6 and 10K.
- Editing - \$25-\$50 an hour is the average for general editing (think proofreading, grammar, spelling, confusing wording, etc.) and \$50-\$75 for developmental editing (think finding timeline errors or reconfiguring whole chunks of the book that may be better rearranged). An editor will be able to give you an estimate of how much time/money will be needed for your project based on your word count. On average, it costs me about \$1,200-\$1,500 to have my 80-thousand-word novels edited after I've had beta readers and thoroughly edited!
- Formatting - \$300 - \$1,500 an average book will only cost around three hundred dollars to format, but an illustrated book will be more. Budget between \$300-\$500 to get someone who has a little experience but won't charge you a ton. Illustrated books will often run into the thousands for formatting, but you can usually find a designer who's priced reasonably! Look for a person who will quote you somewhere in the \$500-\$1,000 range for your illustrated/image-based books. To check out the formatting services I offer, visit [my website!](#)
- Courses, courses, courses! I paid \$5,000 for a coaching/hybrid program to help me publish my first book. Times have changed since then, but the amount of information you have to wade through to find the truth about self-publishing on the internet can be exhausting. So I created a few courses to help writers find their way through the madness! Whether it's my course or another, I always recommend some sort of program for the first timer! My [You Can Self-Publish](#) course is a step-by-step walkthrough of the process priced at \$495, less than ten times what I originally invested in my own journey! This is not something you absolutely need, but what I recommend for someone who wants to have a thorough understanding of how to manage author accounts and get themselves published in a timely manner.

So, if you take the middle of the road on some of these numbers, you can expect to spend around \$2,745 and if you need illustrations, add at least a thousand to that number. Want to figure it all out on Google? Great, subtract the \$495 course, and save yourself a bit, but the truth is, you will be investing money into your project if you want to be able to walk into your local Barnes and Noble and ask the manager if you can have a book signing there since they carry your book! (I should tell you, though, they won't actually stock your book on their shelves, but when you're in their system, they'll let you have an event there if you commit to selling 25 books or buying them back at cost if they don't sell within an agreed upon timeframe. I mean, who gets to say they've done a book signing at Barnes and Noble? *You can!*)

THINKING ABOUT MARKETING

- 01 Have a plan! Finding your audience requires work. Think about social media, email marketing, and getting exposure via podcasts and various interviews. Start with a three month campaign **before** the book is released, then have a full three months of official book launch, then incorporate an evergreen plan to highlight your book!
- 02 Think partnership! Contact people in you industry who are doing similar or companion work to yours and start partnering. Do you have an idea for a series? Map out how your current work can break down into other niches like holiday versions or specialized areas of expertise and plan a continuation now. Is there a toy, a workbook, stickers, or other products that can spawn from your book? Marketing starts with ideation!
- 03 Outsource to experts! You may not yet be in the position to hire a social media manager or personal assistant, but think outside the box here. Perhaps your family budget can handle a once-a-month cleaning service that will free up stress and time. Do you have a friend who has a social media intern you can hire for a few extra hours and lessen your cost? Can you exchange a service in your area of expertise with someone whose services you need? Think less “beat the algorithm” and more “being practical.”

MY TOP PICKS



DAVE CHESSON

The Kindlepreneur

One of my favorite tools for strategically marketing books is from Dave Chesson, the Kindlepreneur, and if you do nothing more than follow him from all the advice I give, you'll do yourself a solid! His tool, [Publisher Rocket](#) is one of the most helpful things you can buy to keep up with keywords, best Amazon ad practices and more.

ADAZING

Amazing ad tools for authors!

[Mockup Shots](#) is probably my favorite tool from this company. Use this for making any mockup photos you need for your website, social media, and general marketing! But check out everything they offer, it's worth your time!

RECHARGING

←Yep, that's me.

And this may sound trivial, but trust me, it's not. My favorite tool to combat burnout and writer's block is making sure I'm inspired and healthy. Whatever that looks like for you, invest. You're worth it!



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