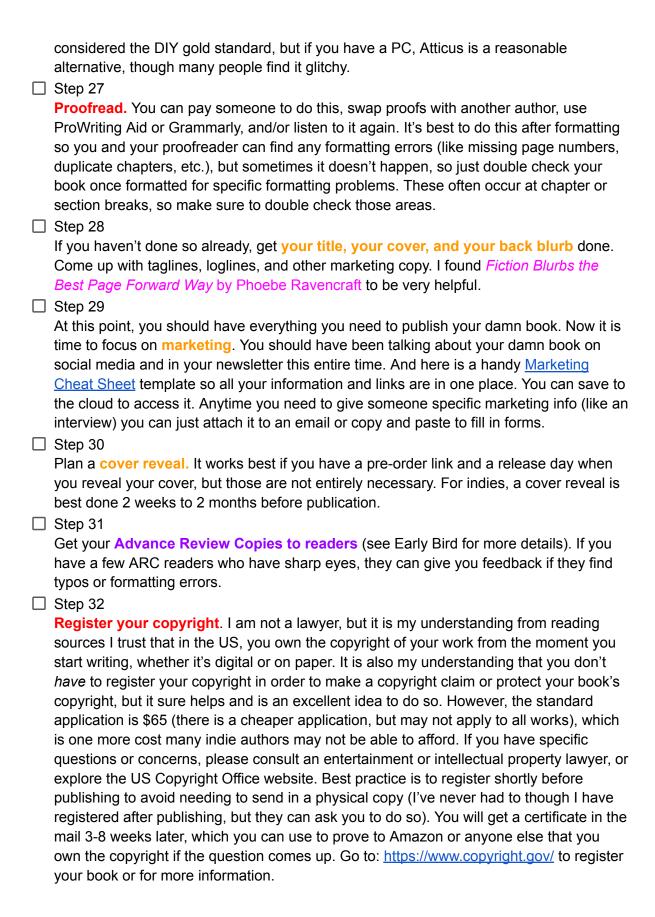# Indie Author Checklist

Key
Red: editing/publishing
Green: rest
Orange: marketing
Purple: outside help
Blue: links
Pink: books

☐ Step 1
Write the damn book!

☐ Step 2
Celebrate and rest. You did it, you finished a book. Not everyone does. Now it's time to rest, first because our society devalues the importance of rest, and second because you need some distance from your manuscript before you start to edit. Two to six weeks is probably ideal for most people, but even a few days is helpful, and sometimes it might be months or years before you revisit your work. Check out this [article on the seven types of rest](). It's not all about sleeping.

☐ Step 3
While writing the damn book, **create author accounts & post on social media**. Pick 1-2 platforms where you feel comfortable to spend most of your time & effort. Consider claiming an account with your author name/username on most platforms so you can more easily switch in the future if needed, but don't worry about them at this time (at most, post once a week to keep the account active and to make sure you're checking DMs in case anyone reaches out to you that way). See David Gaughran's free course [Starting from Zero]() about platform building and other marketing strategies. Also, check out the [Book Marketing Simplified podcast]().

☐ Step 4
Create a newsletter. Recruit a few friends & family members to join as you try it out. Get in the habit of sending one a month. MailerLite has a great free option, up to 1,000 subscribers. I highly recommend *Newsletter Ninja* by Tammi Labrecque. Not only will it keep you in touch with your readers, even if social media implodes, but a newsletter will also help you recruit alpha, beta, and ARC readers. More info on these below.

☐ Step 5
Seriously consider getting an **author website**. Like the newsletter, it will be a hub for your readers to follow you. There are decent free options (Wix, GoogleSites, and others) but as you grow, you'll likely need to upgrade for the site to do everything you want. I recommend trying a free site to see how easy/hard it is to set up and manage then scaling up as needed.

☐ Step 6
If you want **Alpha readers** (those who see a very rough draft and help guide your writing or self-editing process), this is a good time to send it to them. Not every writer gets alpha readers. If you know what's wrong with your story and how to fix it, you may not need

them. See *The Early Reader Catches the Worms* by Carol Beth Anderson for more information on how to recruit alpha, beta, and ARC readers and send them the various versions of your damn book.

- ☐ Step 7
  Self-edit the damn book. I recommend *Intuitive Editing* by Tiffany Yates Martin for a step-by-step guide to this process. At this point, focusing on "big picture" issues like characterization, pacing, plot, world building will be more valuable than fixing every little grammatical issue. You will have to address those at some point, but if you have rewrites in your future, you might have to scrap some perfectly polished words.

- ☐ Step 8 - **Celebrate and rest.** Not everyone who writes a book gets past the first draft. See if a different kind of rest than what you did in Step 2 will work for you.

- ☐ Step 9 - **Consider serialization**
  This is not for everyone, but many authors find it helps generate interest in a project and, in the case of Kindle Vella or Patreon-type subscriptions, can generate some income to offset the cost of cover design and editing. This may be best on book 2 or 3, when you have at least a small readership. Some subscription platforms you can look into: Kindle Vella, Patreon, Substack, and Ream Stories.

- ☐ Step 10
  If you choose to use a **Developmental Editor**, send your manuscript to them once a round or two of self-edits are complete (fixing major grammatical errors and filling in obvious holes), then edit based on their recommendations.

- ☐ Step 11
  Send the edited damn book to **beta readers** (either instead of a developmental editor or in addition to but after you make changes based on the developmental editor's recommendations). Most authors use beta readers in some way, shape, or form. I use CritiqueMatch.com to find my beta readers. Everyone utilizes betas a bit differently depending on many factors, such as how proficient they are at grammar, story structure, if English is a second language, any language disabilities, etc. Other places to find beta readers: your newsletter, social media (especially reader groups on Facebook), writing groups, etc.

- ☐ Step 12
  This is also a good time to find and hire (yes, pay them) a **sensitivity reader** if you cover sensitive topics that are not in your experience, such as marginalized racial and ethnic communities, LGBTQIA+, mental health, disability, etc. Critique Match has these professionals available as well, and you can find many freelancers on UpWork, Fiverr, or other freelance sites.

- ☐ Step 13
  While your manuscript is with beta readers, if not earlier, consider **designing your cover or booking your cover designer**. Once you get feedback from your beta readers, you will have an idea of how much work is left to get your book to a publishable state. You should have enough information for a title and back cover copy once you go through a couple rounds of self-editing. Yes, I coded this one marketing. Your book cover is the

one thing every potential reader will see - make it as good as possible by designing for your market and getting a **professional cover designer** if needed.

☐ Step 14

If you plan to pay for an **editor**, you should book now, if not earlier. I usually wait until I have beta feedback in case there are major issues I need to resolve. I also sometimes burn out during the post-beta revision phase, so for me, it's good to wait and see what my betas have to say before I commit to an editor. Your results may vary. Check out this great guidebook:

https://www.the-efa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Guidebook-for-new-authors-2020.pdf

☐ Step 15

Think about and research whether **Kindle Unlimited or wide release** is the best fit for you and your damn book. Kindle Unlimited is the reader side of KDP Select (Kindle Direct Publishing Select), which means your ebook is exclusive to Amazon for 90 days at a time, with auto-renewal. You may publish your paperback or audiobooks elsewhere. Wide release means your ebook is available on all (or most) major platforms, such as Apple, Barnes & Noble, and Kobo, in addition to KDP. The best and easiest way to do wide is to use an aggregator like Ingram Spark or Draft2Digital to cover everything except Amazon and Google Play. And those aggregators often get your books into libraries, which appeals to many voracious readers. Romance and mystery tend to do well on KU, so seriously consider enrolling if you write in those genres. If it's not working for you, you can always go wide later.

☐ Step 16

Research whether launching on **Kickstarter** might work for you. Again, this might be better for a second or third book, or for when you can put together an omnibus edition or book box of 2-3 books. But it doesn't hurt to think about it. A Kickstarter does best if you have it nearly ready to go with cover art and an edited manuscript. You can prefund book swag and book boxes this way, and potentially upgrade the physical editions by offering a hardcover. Fantasy and romance tend to do well on Kickstarter, but as with all things publishing, your results may vary. You can offer a special Kickstarter only edition 3-6 months before publishing on Amazon or widely. The KU exclusivity only kicks it once it's live on Amazon. An excellent resource for starting is: *Get Your Book Selling on Kickstarter* by Russell P Nohelty and Monica Leonelle.

☐ Step 17

Think about and research whether you will use the free **ISBN numbers** through Amazon or the aggregators or if you will pay for your own ISBNs. There are pluses and minuses to both. The cost to buy your own isn't cheap. A bundle of 10 costs about $300, and 100 costs $575. In the US, the only place to get them so you can be listed as the publisher is Bowker.com. The free ones from retailers or aggregators will list them as the publisher and can lead to different "editions," and thus some potential confusion on places like Goodreads and BookBub. But free is sure appealing when you have just shelled out serious money for a cover and an editor or two. Do what's best for you and your damn book.

☐ Step 18

Edit the damn book again based on the feedback you received from beta and/or sensitivity readers.

☐ Step 19 - **Celebrate and rest.** The end of the road is rapidly approaching and edits go better for most people when there's a short break in between.

☐ Step 20

Polish your damn book. Run it through ProWriting Aid or Grammarly or another editing tool of your choice. This will help detect overused words, unclear sentences, grammar issues, typos, passive voice, cliches, etc. Do an overused words check (I have a cheat sheet for this) by running commonly overused words through the find function in your word processor app of choice. Try to reduce these words at least 25% by using synonyms, restructuring sentences, or deleting.

☐ Step 21 - **Celebrate and rest**

☐ Step 22

Listen to your damn book (if possible - some disabilities will prevent this). Read it out loud or use the text to speech function in the word processor app or an app designed to read text to speech. This will help detect awkward phrasing, unintentional repeating words or phrases, awkward dialogue, and more typos. If you can't listen for whatever reason, try reading it on a different device, in a different font (change the font itself, the size, and/or the color), or in a different application (for example, if you wrote in Scrivener, read it in Word).

☐ Step 23

Send your damn book to a **line or copy editor**, if you can afford one. A line editor focuses on flow, consistency, sentence and paragraph structure, and bigger picture word choice. Copy editors focus on the mechanics, such as grammar, punctuation, and word choice if it's the wrong word (their vs there). If you can't afford this type of editing, see if you can swap with another author or find another beta reader willing to go over it with a fine-toothed comb. If you can't find that, repeat Steps 20 and 22 until you've caught as many mistakes as possible. If you want to be your own editor, I suggest *The Copyeditor's Handbook* by Amy Einsohn and Marilyn Schwartz. It has 90-95% of the issues you may find in most book manuscripts (there's always something new and conventions change, so no one resource will ever be 100%).

☐ Step 24 - **Celebrate and rest** while you wait for the editor to return your manuscript. If only self-editing, make sure you rest in between editing rounds.

☐ Step 25 - **Edit the damn book**. AGAIN.

☐ Step 26

Format the damn book. You can pay someone to do this, learn to do it yourself, use Draft2Digital's auto formatter, etc. For paperbacks, there are templates on Reedsy and KindlePreneur. Scrivener drops your damn book into a Word format that has all the page and section breaks, correct margins, page numbers and headers. All you have to do is change the fonts and insert chapter art (if you go this route). Vellum for Mac users is

considered the DIY gold standard, but if you have a PC, Atticus is a reasonable alternative, though many people find it glitchy.

☐ Step 27

Proofread. You can pay someone to do this, swap proofs with another author, use ProWriting Aid or Grammarly, and/or listen to it again. It's best to do this after formatting so you and your proofreader can find any formatting errors (like missing page numbers, duplicate chapters, etc.), but sometimes it doesn't happen, so just double check your book once formatted for specific formatting problems. These often occur at chapter or section breaks, so make sure to double check those areas.

☐ Step 28

If you haven't done so already, get **your title, your cover, and your back blurb** done. Come up with taglines, loglines, and other marketing copy. I found *Fiction Blurbs the Best Page Forward Way* by Phoebe Ravencraft to be very helpful.

☐ Step 29

At this point, you should have everything you need to publish your damn book. Now it is time to focus on **marketing**. You should have been talking about your damn book on social media and in your newsletter this entire time. And here is a handy Marketing Cheat Sheet template so all your information and links are in one place. You can save to the cloud to access it. Anytime you need to give someone specific marketing info (like an interview) you can just attach it to an email or copy and paste to fill in forms.

☐ Step 30

Plan a **cover reveal.** It works best if you have a pre-order link and a release day when you reveal your cover, but those are not entirely necessary. For indies, a cover reveal is best done 2 weeks to 2 months before publication.

☐ Step 31

Get your **Advance Review Copies to readers** (see Early Bird for more details). If you have a few ARC readers who have sharp eyes, they can give you feedback if they find typos or formatting errors.

☐ Step 32

Register your copyright. I am not a lawyer, but it is my understanding from reading sources I trust that in the US, you own the copyright of your work from the moment you start writing, whether it's digital or on paper. It is also my understanding that you don't *have* to register your copyright in order to make a copyright claim or protect your book's copyright, but it sure helps and is an excellent idea to do so. However, the standard application is $65 (there is a cheaper application, but may not apply to all works), which is one more cost many indie authors may not be able to afford. If you have specific questions or concerns, please consult an entertainment or intellectual property lawyer, or explore the US Copyright Office website. Best practice is to register shortly before publishing to avoid needing to send in a physical copy (I've never had to though I have registered after publishing, but they can ask you to do so). You will get a certificate in the mail 3-8 weeks later, which you can use to prove to Amazon or anyone else that you own the copyright if the question comes up. Go to: https://www.copyright.gov/ to register your book or for more information.

☐ Step 33

Publish your damn book. Upload your ePub to KDP and any other retailers you want to work with directly or an aggregator. Upload your paperback to KDP, any other retailers, and/or an aggregator. They have all made the process fairly easy and step by step. Follow the instructions and hold onto your butt. NOTE: You *cannot* make a pre-order paperback on Amazon. The only way to get pre-orders for paperbacks is through Ingram Spark or Draft2Digital. If you hit publish while messing around on Amazon with your paperback, it will publish. This can be a good thing, though, as ARC readers can leave a review for the paperback before the ebook is published. It will then transfer to the ebook once it's published.

☐ Step 34

Plan **release day activities.** These can include hosting an in-person event, a live event on social media, a giveaway, etc. Let your imagination run wild and reach out to other authors to see what has worked for them. Or you can schedule social media posts and kick back. Don't forget to remind your ARC readers to leave reviews.

☐ Step 35

Celebrate and rest and watch the money just roll in. Yeah, that probably won't happen, but celebrate because you're now a published author! And rest up so you can do it all again.

☐ Step 36

Advertise your damn book. Listen, until you have more than a couple books, paid ads on Amazon or Facebook or elsewhere will probably not help much, but you can try them out to learn. Just set your cost per day and your cap on the overall campaign very low so you don't throw away too much money. An excellent resource is the [5-day Amazon Ads Challenge](#) hosted by Bryan Cohen (a free course offered Jan, April, July, & Oct, but you can sign up for the next one almost any time). The Starting from Zero course mentioned above covers some Facebook ads and using paid newsletters like BookBub and The Fussy Librarian to boost your sales. You will see many people recommending setting a book to "free" to generate interest and boost sales. These promotions tend to work best if you have at least a small backlist (2-5 books), so be patient and wait until you can count on read-through of a series or your backlist to generate superfans and income.

☐ Step 37 - **Write the next damn book**. Repeat from Step 2.