



AUTHOR PUBLISHING ROADMAP

**7 Decisions Every Author Must
Make Before Publishing Their Book**

A free guide from Zion Publishing House

YOUR BOOK DESERVES A PLAN

You have a story to tell. A message to share.
Something worth putting into the world.

Maybe you've spent years writing your manuscript. Maybe you've only recently started putting words on paper. Or maybe the idea for your book has been sitting in the back of your mind for longer than you'd like to admit.

Whatever stage you're in, one thing is certain: Writing a book and publishing a book are two very different journeys.

And for many aspiring authors, the publishing process feels overwhelming.

How do you find an editor?
What makes a great book cover?
How much should publishing cost?
How do books get onto Amazon?
And how do you know whom to trust?

Those are important questions.
You deserve clear answers.

We created this guide to help you understand seven of the most important decisions you'll make before publishing your book.

No confusing industry jargon.
No unrealistic promises.

Just practical guidance to help you move forward with confidence.

DECISION 01

“Who are you writing for?”

Before you think about covers, printing, or publishing companies, there's one question you need to answer:

Who is this book for?

It's tempting to say, "Everyone."

But books that try to reach everyone often struggle to connect deeply with anyone.

A clear audience helps shape everything from your writing style to your cover design, book description, marketing, and distribution strategy.

Start by asking yourself:

Who is the person most likely to benefit from reading my book?

What problem, question, desire, or experience connects them to my message?

What do I hope changes for someone after reading it?

COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE

I'm writing this book for _____ who want to _____.

For example:

"I'm writing this book for young leaders who want to lead with greater confidence and integrity."

You don't have to limit your book's potential reach. You simply need to know whom you're trying to reach first.

DECISION 02

“Is Your Manuscript Actually Ready?”

Finishing your first draft is an incredible accomplishment.

But a completed manuscript isn't necessarily a publication-ready manuscript.

Before investing in design and production, your book may need additional development, restructuring, or editing.

There are several different types of editing, and understanding them can save you time and money.

Developmental Editing

Focuses on the big picture: structure, organization, clarity, pacing, and whether your book accomplishes its purpose.

Copyediting

Focuses on sentence-level quality, including grammar, punctuation, consistency, clarity, and style.

Proofreading

Provides a final check for remaining errors, ideally after the book has been formatted.

These stages serve different purposes. Not every manuscript needs the same level of editorial work.

ASK YOURSELF:

Have I revised my manuscript beyond the first draft?

Have I received thoughtful feedback from readers who understand my intended audience?

Am I willing to make changes that strengthen my message?

Do I know what kind of editing my manuscript needs?

Remember: Great editing doesn't erase your voice. It helps your voice come through more clearly.

DECISION 03

“Which publishing path is right for you?”

There isn't one perfect publishing model for every author. But there is a model that may be better suited to your goals, budget, and desired level of involvement.

Here are three common paths:

1. TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

A traditional publisher typically acquires the rights needed to publish your book and assumes the agreed production expenses.

Potential advantages:

- No standard upfront publishing-service fee paid by the author
- Established editorial and distribution infrastructure
- Potential access to wider retail channels

Potential tradeoffs:

- Highly competitive selection process
- Less control over certain publishing decisions
- Contract terms, royalties, and timelines vary

2. SELF-PUBLISHING

You manage the publishing process yourself, either personally or by hiring individual professionals.

Potential advantages:

- Significant creative and business control
- Flexibility in pricing, timing, and distribution
- Ability to choose your own service providers

Potential tradeoffs:

- Responsibility for coordinating production
- Upfront expenses for professional services
- Greater responsibility for quality, marketing, and distribution

3. HYBRID PUBLISHING

A hybrid publisher combines aspects of publishing services and publisher-led production. Authors generally contribute financially to publication, while the publisher provides defined services and coordinates the process.

Potential advantages:

- Coordinated professional support
- Potentially greater author involvement in decisions
- A structured publishing process

Potential tradeoffs:

- Significant upfront investment
- Service quality and contract terms vary widely
- Not every company using the word "hybrid" follows the same standards

DECISION 04

“What should you actually invest in publishing?”

Let's address one of the biggest questions aspiring authors have.

How much does it cost to publish a book?

The answer depends on your manuscript, the services required, your production specifications, and the publishing path you choose.

A straightforward nonfiction book and a fully illustrated children's book can have dramatically different production needs.

Professional publishing expenses may include:

- Manuscript assessment and editing
- Custom cover design
- Interior formatting and typography
- Illustration or photography
- ISBNs and publishing metadata
- Proof copies and printing
- Distribution setup
- Marketing and launch preparation

But here's something important:

A higher price does not automatically mean a better book.

And a lower price does not automatically mean a better deal.

When comparing publishing options, request an itemized explanation of what's included.

Ask which services are performed by qualified professionals, how many revision rounds are included, whether printing is included, and what expenses you may encounter after publication.

Before signing an agreement, make sure you can answer:

- What is my total expected investment?
 - What deliverables am I receiving?
 - Which expenses are not included?
- What happens if my project requires additional work?
 - When are payments due?

DECISION 05

“What will make your book stand out?”

People really do judge books by their covers.

And their interior design.

And their overall presentation.

Readers may not consciously notice every design decision, but professional craftsmanship contributes to how they experience your book.

Your cover should communicate the book's genre, tone, and intended audience.

Your interior should be comfortable to read, thoughtfully organized, and consistent from beginning to end.

Your finished book should feel intentional.

What are 5 details worth paying attention to?

Action Steps

Find three professionally published books that appeal to the same audience you're trying to reach.

Study their covers, interiors, and physical construction.

What makes them effective?

What could you learn from them?

Your message deserves a presentation that helps readers take it seriously.

1. Cover Design

Does your cover communicate the right message and look appropriate for your audience?

2. Typography

Are the fonts professional, readable, and appropriate for your book?

3. Interior Layout

Are margins, spacing, headings, and page elements consistent?

4. Production Quality

Are the paper, binding, trim size, and finish appropriate for your goals and budget?

5. Final Quality Control

Has someone carefully reviewed the designed

DECISION 06

“How will readers actually buy your book?”

Publishing a book and making it available for purchase are not the same as building a successful sales strategy.

Before publication, you'll need to decide how your book will be printed, distributed, and sold.

Print-on-Demand

Books are generally printed as orders are received.

This can reduce upfront inventory costs, though the per-copy production cost may be higher.

Offset Printing

Books are printed in larger quantities, often resulting in lower per-copy costs at sufficient volume.

However, offset printing typically requires a larger upfront investment, along with storage and inventory planning.

Distribution Options

Depending on your publishing setup, your book may be available through:

- Amazon
- Your own website
- Online retailers
- Bookstores and wholesale channels
- Events, speaking engagements, and direct sales

Each channel has its own costs, requirements, and advantages.

For example, selling books directly may offer more control over the customer relationship, while major online retailers can make purchasing more convenient for readers.

Ask Yourself

- Where is my ideal reader most likely to purchase my book?
- Will I need physical inventory for events or speaking engagements?
- Do I want to sell directly through my website?
- Do I understand my printing costs and profit per copy?

DECISION 07

“Who will help bring your book to life?”

This may be the most important decision of all.

Because publishing a book involves far more than uploading a manuscript and ordering printed copies.

It requires:

- Coordination.
- Communication.
- Creative judgment.
- Technical expertise.

And countless small decisions that influence the finished product.

You can manage those decisions yourself, or you can work with professionals who help guide the process.

Neither approach is automatically right for every author.

But if you decide to work with a publishing company, pay close attention to the experience they're offering.

7 QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY PUBLISHING COMPANY

1. Who will actually work on my book?
2. Will I have a dedicated point of contact?
3. What does the publishing timeline look like?
4. How often will I receive updates?
5. How are revisions and approvals handled?
6. What quality-control process happens before printing?
7. What support will I receive after publication?

Don't settle for vague promises.
Ask for clear answers.

**A great publishing experience should give you confidence,
not leave you wondering what's happening behind the scenes.**

YOUR BOOK IS WORTH DOING RIGHT

You started this journey because you had something worth sharing.

- A story.
- An idea.
- A lesson.
- A message.

Something you believed could make a difference in another person's life.

And while publishing can feel complicated, you don't have to figure out every step on your own.

That's why we built **Zion Publishing House**.

We believe exceptional books deserve an exceptional publishing experience.

Our approach brings together professional editing, custom design, thoughtful production, and a coordinated team that helps guide authors from manuscript to finished book.

We believe authors deserve to know where their book stands, what comes next, and who is responsible for helping them get there.

Most importantly, we believe the person behind the manuscript matters just as much as the book itself.

**LET'S TALK
ABOUT YOUR BOOK**

Whether your manuscript is complete or you're still exploring the possibilities, we'd love to hear what you're creating.

During a discovery conversation, we'll learn about your vision, discuss your publishing goals, and explore whether Zion is the right partner for your project.

No obligation. Just a meaningful conversation about your book.

SCHEDULE YOUR FREE DISCOVERY CALL
at zionpublishinghouse.com



YOUR PUBLISHING READINESS CHECKLIST

“How close are you to being ready to publish?”

Check each statement that describes where you are today.

- ☐ I can clearly explain what my book is about.
- ☐ I know who my ideal reader is.
- ☐ I have started or completed my manuscript.
- ☐ I understand the different types of editing.
- ☐ I've explored my publishing options.
- ☐ I have a realistic understanding of publishing expenses.
- ☐ I know what kind of finished book I want to create.
- ☐ I've considered how readers will purchase my book.
- ☐ I know what questions to ask a potential publisher.
- ☐ I'm ready to take one concrete step toward publication.

What's Your Next Step?

0–3 boxes checked:

You're Building the Foundation.

Focus on clarifying your message, identifying your audience, and making progress on your manuscript.

4–7 boxes checked:

You're Preparing for Publication.

Start exploring your publishing options, gathering professional feedback, and developing a realistic plan.

8–10 boxes checked:

You're Ready for a Publishing Conversation.

You may be ready to speak with a publishing professional about your goals, timeline, and next steps.

This checklist is a planning tool, not a formal assessment. You don't need to check every box before reaching out for guidance.

