

**IndieAuthor Guide To
Publishing With Amazon's
Digital Text Platform™
And MS Word™ 2003
Or Higher**

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE AMAZON DIGITAL TEXT PLATFORM™

Amazon's Digital Text Platform™, or DTP, is a conversion tool used to create content for the Kindle™ ebook reader device, and put that content up for sale in the Amazon Kindle™ Store. You cannot use the DTP to create Kindle™ editions of your work for your own personal use, the content creation process automatically generates an accompanying Amazon product page.

2. WHY PUBLISH WITH DTP?

Assuming you've already made the decision to self-publish, there are three very good reasons to go with Amazon DTP: it's easy, it's free, and it gets your work onto the virtual shelves at Amazon in a matter of days. While it's true that only Kindle™ owners will be able to buy your DTP book, and they are a relatively small group as compared to the book-buying general public, these are the very circumstances that offer some distinct advantages over other forms of self-publishing.

First, because Kindle™ owners are a small and specific population, it's easy to target your promotional efforts by seeking out their blogs and discussion groups. Second, because the Kindle™ book store has a much more limited inventory than the 'regular' Amazon book store, you don't have to sell many copies of your DTP book to quickly rise into the Kindle™ store bestseller ranks. Finally, because Amazon book listings combine reviews and sales figures from all available editions of a given book, you can use your DTP edition to accumulate sales and reviews to support a POD release in the 'regular' book store: the day your POD book goes on sale, it can already have sales and positive reviews associated with it from the Kindle™ book store.

3. SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE DTP

3.1. WHO CAN USE THE DTP?

As of this writing, anyone with an Amazon account can use the DTP to create and sell Kindle™ editions of anything from short fiction to doorstop-sized tomes.

3.2. IN GENERAL, HOW DOES IT WORK?

You begin by entering details about your book, such as title, category, author name(s), keywords, description, etc. Next, you upload your manuscript in HTML format (don't panic, Word can convert a .doc to .html for you automatically) and optionally upload cover art as a .jpg or .gif image. When the upload is complete, you can preview what your manuscript will look like on the Kindle™ from your web browser screen. If all looks correct, the final step is to set your price, save your changes, and then 'Publish' with one final button click.

3.3. WHAT DOES IT COST?

There is no cost to set your book up for sale as a Kindle™ edition via the DTP.

3.4. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

It takes anywhere from 20-45 minutes to fill in the necessary online forms, upload and preview your DTP edition. From the time you click the 'Publish' button, signifying your approval of your book, its details and the associated cover art, it takes approximately 3 business days for your book to show up in the Kindle™ book store.

3.5. WHAT RIGHTS DO I GIVE UP WITH DTP?

First, the usual caveat: legal advice is outside the scope of this article, and full disclosure on the matter can be found in the DTP Terms and Conditions, which can be accessed [here](#). If the document should be moved at some point in the future, rendering the above link broken, just go to <http://dtp.amazon.com>, click the Support link, and do a search on "Terms & Conditions" in the support area.

Having said that, in agreeing to the Terms & Conditions you're granting Amazon sole right to sell, distribute and promote the Kindle™ edition of your work, as created by the DTP, in whatever manner they see fit. You're agreeing to let them share free digital excerpts and images of your work taken from the Kindle™ edition (i.e., 'Search Inside the Book,' 'Read A Free Excerpt,' etc.), as well as to discount, bundle or cross-sell your Kindle™ edition work as they wish.

However, your percentage of the profit from each sale is always based on the list price you set, regardless of the price at which Amazon ultimately sells the book--more on that later. You're also granting them the right to release the work to customers who buy it, store the work on their servers or the servers of their designee(s), and store the work on behalf of purchasers in each purchaser's 'digital locker'.

You are not giving up any other rights to publish any other editions of your work, not even other ebook editions. Given that the Kindle™ file format is proprietary and specific to the Amazon DTP, it's not as if standalone DTP/Kindle™ rights could ever be sold to another entity anyway. Still, it's worth mentioning that publishers will tend to view the entire thing just as negatively as they do *any* form of self-publishing, and are therefore likely to be turned off to any manuscript you release via DTP regardless of your largely intact rights.

There are more details in the Terms & Conditions, and I urge you to read it in its entirety, and even consult with an attorney about it if you have any doubts, before you decide whether or not to use the DTP.

3.6. DOES MY BOOK NEED TO HAVE A PRE-ASSIGNED ISBN?

No, and you don't have to purchase one for your DTP book, either. Note that generally, where ISBNs are used each different edition of a book (i.e., audiobook, hardcover, trade paperback, ebook) is assigned a unique ISBN. This means that you cannot assign the ISBN used for some other edition of your book to the DTP edition. However, since the DTP does not require an ISBN you also don't have to buy a new one just for the DTP edition of your book. An internal Amazon Store Identification Number (ASIN) will automatically be assigned to your DTP book when it's released to the store.

3.7. WHAT IS MY AUTHOR ROYALTY ON MY DTP BOOK?

As of this writing, your author royalty is 35% of the list price you set when you enter the details for your DTP book. For example, if you price your book at 4.99, your royalty on each copy sold is \$1.75. Even if Amazon discounts your book and sells it for say, 20% off the list price, you still get \$1.75 for each copy sold.

3.8. HOW HARD IS IT, REALLY?

As you might expect, the more and better your computer skills, the easier it is to do a really professional-looking job of things. Even with only intermediate skills in MS Word™ and beginner skills in your chosen graphics or photo editing program (to create cover art), you will be able to manage without much difficulty.

3.9. CAN YOU ANSWER MY TEN MILLION OTHER QUESTIONS?

No, but the folks at Amazon DTP can. Go to <http://dtp.amazon.com>, click the 'Help' link, and avail yourself of the Getting Started Guide, Formatting Guide, FAQ and Additional Information links. Also feel free to peruse the Ask The Community user forums, as many specific questions, concerns, tricks and tips are also discussed there.

4. GETTING READY FOR THE DTP

First things first: as mentioned above, it's a very good idea to go to <http://dtp.amazon.com>, click the 'Help' link, and avail yourself of the Getting Started Guide, Formatting Guide, FAQ and Additional Information links. The links will take you to help pages where you can download pdf guides, tutorials, and a quick start guide. Grab a copy of everything available, and read all of it. Then come back to this document for a simpler set of instructions that also cover some tips, tricks and gotchas not included in Amazon's materials.

You will have to provide a tax ID number (i.e., social security number) and bank information in order for Amazon to pay you your author royalties. Don't get all paranoid about this, because any author must provide a tax ID number to his or her publisher, and the bank information is only needed so that Amazon can electronically transfer your royalties directly to your bank account instead of cutting and mailing a check.

5. DON'T USE ANYTHING LESS THAN A FINAL, 'LOCKED' DRAFT

Remember, once you click that 'Publish' button your work is on its way to the Kindle™ store shelves for the whole world to see. Do not publish anything via DTP that you would not feel comfortable seeing on the shelf at your local brick-and-mortar bookstore with your name on the cover. This is not the time or place for anything less than a final, completely polished draft that you've 'locked' against more revisions.

Your manuscript should be a 'proof,' containing everything you would expect to include in a file being sent to press for creation of paper books: author dedication page, 'About the Author' page at the back, 'Other Titles From [your name]' page, prologue and/or epilogue if applicable, etc. About the only page you'd typically see in a printed book that's not necessary here is the page with publication details.

6. PREPARING YOUR MANUSCRIPT FOR DTP

This article assumes you have a copy of your manuscript in MS Word™ 2003 or higher. While it is possible to upload any manuscript formatted as HTML to the DTP, the method described here is specific to using MS Word™ 2003 or higher.

6.1. 'SAVE AS' TO CREATE A COPY FOR DTP

Your manuscript is probably formatted according to publishing conventions: double-spaced, wide margins, etc. You will need to change many of these settings for your DTP edition, so create a copy of the manuscript just for DTP formatting.

6.2. MODIFY YOUR FORMATTING TO MAKE IT HTML-COMPLIANT

I'm not going to lie to you...this part of the process is not fun. But at the end you will be saving your manuscript as an HTML file in which most of your Word™ formatting options will be lost, along with any embedded graphics and special characters such as Webding symbols. Therefore, to save yourself from unwelcome formatting surprises after you upload to DTP, you want your text to be as minimally-formatted as possible before saving as HTML. When you're done, the HTML version of your manuscript should be virtually identical to the Word™ version you used to create it. Note that if your manuscript is heavily reliant on embedded graphics, DTP is probably not a good choice for that manuscript because all such graphics will be lost in conversion.

The DTP guides all talk about making changes to your HTML file to correct formatting problems, but it's much easier to make all the changes you possibly can in Word™, a program you know well, than to go trudging through lines of HTML code trying to figure out how to make it look the way you want. If you follow this checklist, you should have a pretty clean file when you're ready to save as HTML and should not have to go through multiple iterations of uploading to DTP, previewing, making changes and uploading again to resolve formatting issues. As you go through these steps, save frequently (still in Word format---you won't 'Save As' HTML until all changes and corrections have been made).

- 1) Delete the extraneous, add the necessary
 - a) Delete any blank pages that were inserted into the original manuscript for purposes of 'facing pages' formatting. Delete your headers and footers, as they'll be lost in the conversion process anyway. Don't worry about losing your page numbers, as the Kindle™ automatically regenerates digital page numbers each time it loads a file. If you haven't already done so, insert a Title Page at the front of your manuscript with your book's title, your name and any copyright information (if applicable).
- 2) If you've used Styles in your manuscript, clean them up
 - a) In the course of writing and revising, you may have inadvertently formatted various sections of your text with differently-named Styles. This can happen when you need to switch from one Style to another, say from Chapter Heading to Body Text, and instead of selecting the correct, pre-existing Style from the Styles list, you manually apply format changes to your text blocks on the fly. Make sure that all like-formatted sections of text have the same Style applied to them.
- 3) Modify your margins and line spacing
 - a) Change your margins to no more than 1" all around, and change your body text line spacing from double-spaced to 1.5 line spacing throughout. Double-spaced text takes up an annoying amount of screen real estate on an ebook reader, and all that extra white space doesn't actually improve its readability.
- 4) Ensure your text is HTML-friendly
 - a) HTML can render body text, indented text blocks, numbered or bulleted lists, and simple tables, as well as italics, boldface and enlarged text. It can render only a handful of fonts, with Arial, Tahoma and Verdana being the most commonly-used and easy to read. Font size should be set to 10-pt or 11-pt, depending on your chosen font, for easy readability. You can use a larger font size, but since the Kindle™ has an enlarge text function it's not really necessary. Make any needed changes to your manuscript so that its contents will meet these fairly limited parameters.
- 5) Omit extraneous carriage returns, page breaks and section breaks
 - a) Section breaks will not be recognized in the HTML conversion, but page breaks will. It's appropriate to use page breaks at the end of each chapter, but delete any that were used to try and fudge line spacing, widow or orphan control in printed manuscript copies. Also delete extraneous carriage returns which may have been used to offset differently-formatted sections of text, but are no longer necessary now that your formatting is being greatly simplified. HTML will interpret each carriage return as the start of a new paragraph, and may insert unwanted blank lines between those paragraphs.

- 6) Use Search and Replace to locate and delete or replace any special characters
 - a) For example, if you've used a bullet icon such as a star or snowflake as a graphic element to create dividers between sections of text, you will need to delete those bullets or replace them with a regular character, such as an asterisk or dash. HTML has its own set of supported special characters, but unless you're well-versed in HTML it's safer and easier to just fall back on standard keyboard characters.
 - b) Subscripts and superscripts are also not likely to translate properly; locate all such instances and reformat accordingly
- 7) Delete all embedded graphics
 - a) Illustrations, clipart, photos, decorative frames, dividers, fancy bullets...they've all got to go.

6.3. INSERT A HYPERLINKED TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ebook users have come to expect a hyperlinked Table of Contents, and this is a again where they tend to cut the non-professionals from the herd in judging which books are, or are not, worth their time and money. Fortunately, it's very easy to create a hyperlinked Table of Contents in Word™, and when you 'Save As' HTML the hyperlinks will be preserved.

- 1) Ensure each chapter of your manuscript has a chapter number or title on its first page, and that the number or title is formatted as "Heading 1" style (select the text, then click Format > Styles and Formatting, and select the "Heading 1" style from the list provided to make the chapter number/title a Heading). If you don't like the way "Heading 1" looks, you can right-click on "Heading 1" in the Styles list and select "Modify" to use all the usual text formatting tools (i.e., font, size, bold, paragraph spacing, indent type, etc. etc.), but remember to stick to formatting that will be HTML-friendly.
- 2) Go to the page where you want the Table of Contents. Click in the desired position on the page.
- 3) Click Insert > Reference > Index and Tables > Table of Contents tab. Click the boxes for "Show Page Numbers," "Right-Align Page Numbers," and "Use Hyperlinks Instead of Page Numbers". Also set the "Show Levels" drop-down to "1". Click "Apply" to save these changes.

6.4. 'SAVE AS' HTML

Do one last save of the manuscript in Word™ format before proceeding. Remember, if the uploaded file needs further corrections or changes, you will want to modify this Word™ file, not the HTML version.

Now 'Save As' and select "Web Page (*.htm, *.html)" as the file type. You may want to give this version a distinct name as well, but it's not really necessary since the file extension will be changed from .doc to .htm so it won't be hard to tell this file apart from the Word file later.

After you click 'Save' you'll be looking at the HTML version of the file. If you've properly corrected and simplified all your formatting, there shouldn't be any significant differences between this HTML version and the Word™ file.

7. PREPARE YOUR COVER ART

Kindle store customers judge the lack of cover art, or the presence of stock-photo cover art, to be a hallmark of the non-professional. You definitely want some nice cover art for your DTP book, and you want it to match the cover art of all other editions of your book for consistency's sake. Even if you don't have any other editions available yet, don't skimp on the time or effort here because whatever you create for DTP will have to serve for possible future POD books.

You don't need a top-of-the-line graphics program to create this cover art, however. Anything from a greeting-card program to MS Paint can get the job done, but of course a dedicated graphics or photo-editing program will generally offer more and better options. You can use any public-domain or purchased clip art in your cover image, but you may not use graphics copied off the internet. Also be aware that, apart from photos in purchased clip art and stock photo collections, if you intend to use a photo in which anyone's face is recognizable, you must have a written and signed release from every living person who is recognizable in the photo. If any of those people are celebrities, even if the person is dead you may have to obtain a written and signed release from surviving family members. It's best to avoid these hassles entirely by sticking to purchased clip art and stock photos.

There is a separate IndieAuthor guide to creating cover art, but for purposes of this article all you need to know is that your cover art must meet Amazon product image standards: TIFF (.tif/.tiff) or JPEG (.jpeg/.jpg) format, with image pixel dimensions of at least 1000 pixels on the longest side. Color mode must be "sRGB" color mode (this is the default for most graphics programs), not "CMYK", and of course you're going for a typical, rectangular shape and proportion such as you're used to seeing on any book. Refer to your graphics program documentation or help files for more information on how to create or edit your cover art to meet these requirements.

8. CRAFT YOUR BOOK DESCRIPTION

You are only given 200 words for your book description, which will appear on your Amazon product page when the book is released. Look at a few such descriptions for bestsellers in the Kindle store to get some idea of how to approach this. You're going for a synopsis that says enough about the story to lure a reader in, but doesn't give away too much. Create a separate Word™ or .txt document just for the description, so you can spend some quality time working and reworking it until it's exactly what you want.

9. MAKE A FREE EXCERPT AVAILABLE

As of this writing, individuals uploading content to the DTP do not have an option to provide a free excerpt of their work for the "Look Inside the Book" feature commonly seen on titles from major publishers. However, because the availability of a free excerpt to try-before-you-buy is of critical importance to Kindle™ owners who might not otherwise take a risk on an unknown author, it's worth the effort to make such an excerpt available outside of Amazon.

9.1. GET A PDF MAKER AND SOME WEB SPACE READY

In order to do this, you will need a program that can create a .pdf file from a Word™ file (there are many shareware and freeware options, just Google "pdf maker" to find them) and some web server space to "host" your excerpt.

The easiest way to get something online is to post it at [1 Chapter Free](http://www.1chapterfree.com) (<http://www.1chapterfree.com>). You have to sign up for an account to post your excerpts there, and the excerpts must take the form of your first chapter, but it's free and easy to do. If you have a paid email account, such as from AOL or Gmail Premium, you probably have some web server space already available through your email provider (i.e., hometown.aol.com); check your provider help pages for more information. MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, and other such services may provide you with some personal web server space. You may have a friend or family member with some web server space to share. "Groups" programs like Yahoo! Groups and Google Groups provide each group with some web server space for shared files at no charge, so you may want to get together with some other writer friends to form a group just for this purpose.

If all else fails, you can set up your own domain and web space with minimal fuss and cost by using one of the many one-stop-provider web host services. My personal favorite for simple, inexpensive but reliable hosting needs is WinSave (<http://www.winsave.com>). Remember, you don't have to set up a whole website, all you need is some designated web server space in which to "park" your excerpt file(s) so people will have access to them from the web 24-7.

9.2. CREATE YOUR EXCERPT

Open your original, pre-DTP-editing version of your Word™ manuscript. Create an excerpt by copying the title page and first 25-50pp (according to your preference) from the manuscript and pasting all of that content into a new, blank Word™ file. Add a page at the end with a blurb to the effect of, "Thank you for reading this excerpt. If you would like to continue reading [book title], you may purchase it from the Kindle™ book store at Amazon.com." Select that last part of the text ("Kindle book store at Amazon.com") and select Insert > Hyperlink to set a link to this location: http://www.amazon.com/b/ref=sv_kinc_1/002-5633869-0828824?ie=UTF8&node=154606011 . Later, after your DTP book is live, you can replace this link with a link to your actual product page.

If you copied your Table of Contents into this excerpt file, delete it entirely, as it's not really needed in an excerpt. Save the file in Word™ format. Now use your pdf maker program to save a .pdf version of the excerpt file---the hyperlink you created back to Amazon should be preserved. Upload the excerpt to your web server space and go online to look it up and verify it looks all right---remember, this is what your potential buyers will see, so you want it to be clean and professional. Fortunately, all the nice formatting and special characters from your original Word™ manuscript will be preserved in this .pdf file.

Now you must go back to you book description file, created in Step 8, and add the line, "Read a free excerpt at [URL of your .pdf excerpt]," at the end of your book description. Note that you can insert a blank line between the book description and this one-liner, and that's generally a good idea because shoppers can see at a glance there's a free excerpt available, they don't have to read the entire description to get to the excerpt notice. You may have to do some editing to make this fit into your description if you've used all 200 words, but it's important, so make it work.

10. READY, SET, DTP!

The details of how to fill out the required fields for DTP processing are already covered in the Amazon DTP guides I've mentioned previously, and I will not rehash them here. Just note that only fields marked with a red asterisk are required, so don't feel obligated to make up a Publisher Name, or a Series Name if it's really not applicable to your book. For my DTP books, I left the ISBN, Publisher Name, Series Title and Series Volume all blank. I entered "1" for Edition Number, and I entered as many search keywords (i.e., comic fiction, mystery, Midwest, womens fiction, etc.) as I could possibly think of that would fit in the space provided. The keywords will help customers find your book when they search the store, so don't be afraid to really go nuts with them. More keywords = more people finding your book. Also note that when it comes to filling in your Book Description field, all you have to do is copy the description you created previously and paste it into the field.

Follow the instructions to "Enter Product Details" and "Upload & Review Book" as outlined in the Amazon DTP guides, and meet me back here after you've uploaded your cover image and your HTML file.

11. LOOKING AT YOUR DTP PREVIEW

When the file is finished uploading, page through your DTP preview. Don't just check the first few pages, jump around throughout the file by using the "Go To Page" box at the top of the preview screen. Look at the back pages, to be sure your 'About the Author' and other back-material stuff came through okay. Do some spot-checking of the pages where new chapters begin.

Note that it will appear as if your text goes right to the edge of the screen on the right-hand side, but this is deceptive. In reality, the Kindle™ will provide a white-space margin there on its screen. Also note that your hyperlinked Table of Contents will have had its page numbers removed and may seem non-functional. Page numbers are removed because Kindle re-paginates and re-numbers the pages of each file it loads, but the hyperlinks in the Table of Contents are updated to reflect the newly-generated page numbers at the same time. The links in this new Table of Contents will seem 'broken', but that's only because hyperlink functionality is not available in the preview screen. So long as your Table of Contents entries are blue and underlined, signifying hyperlinks, you can rest assured they will work.

12. IF THERE ARE PROBLEMS...

DO NOT open the HTML version of your file to make edits or corrections, as the DTP guides suggest. Instead:

- 1) Delete the HTML version of your file; don't worry, you'll be replacing it with a new one.
- 2) Open the edited-for-DTP Word™ manuscript---the one you saved in step 6.4, right before doing the 'Save As' HTML.
- 3) Make any desired changes, and save the file, still in Word™ format.
- 4) Do a 'Save As' in HTML format, following the same directions from step 6.4 as you did previously.
- 5) Repeat steps 10 and 11.

13. IF IT LOOKS GOOD, SET YOUR PRICE AND PUBLISH!

Back at your DTP dashboard, click on that lowermost tab: Enter Price. The checkbox next to "Kindle store" should already be marked. If it isn't, place a checkmark in it by clicking on it.

Bestsellers that are only available in hardcover in the 'regular' book store tend to be priced at \$9.99 in the Kindle™ store, and those available as trade paperbacks in the 'regular' bookstore usually run between \$6.99 - \$8. I price my Kindle™-edition novels at \$4.99 and \$5.99, partly in recognition of the fact that I'm not a bestselling author and partly because I personally feel ebooks should always cost less than their paper-pulp counterparts. You will have to use your own best judgment in deciding where to set the price point for your books, but remember that your author royalty will be 35% of the price you set here, regardless of the price at which Amazon ultimately sells each copy (see section 3.7).

Click 'Save Entries' on the 'Enter Price' tab. Go back and check all the entries in the first two tabs one last time, just to be absolutely sure it's all accurate and the way you want it. When you're ready, take a deep breath and click "Publish".

Log back into your DTP dashboard in about three days to see if your book is marked "Live" yet. First it will go "Live", but not all the details will show up on the product page and it will be listed as "not yet available" while Amazon works to get your book's details added to all their various databases. By the end of 5 business days at most, your book should be live, complete and available for sale in the Kindle™ store.

14. AFTER YOUR BOOK IS PUBLISHED

You can log back into your DTP dashboard anytime you want and click on the "My Reports" tab to see how many copies of your book have sold, and what your cumulative author royalty total is to date. You can also re-upload and re-publish revised versions of your files at any time, but if you've done everything according to this guide, it should never be necessary.

Finally, send an email to everyone you know, with a link to your book's product page on Amazon. By gum, you're a published author now!

Indie Authors: buy IndieAuthor t-shirts, mugs and totes at the IndieAuthorShop
<http://www.cafepress.com/IndieAuthorShop>

And check back for more IndieAuthor Guides - <http://www.aprillhamilton.com>