



Ask ALLi

INITIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT
SELF-PUBLISHING

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*What is an
independent
author?*

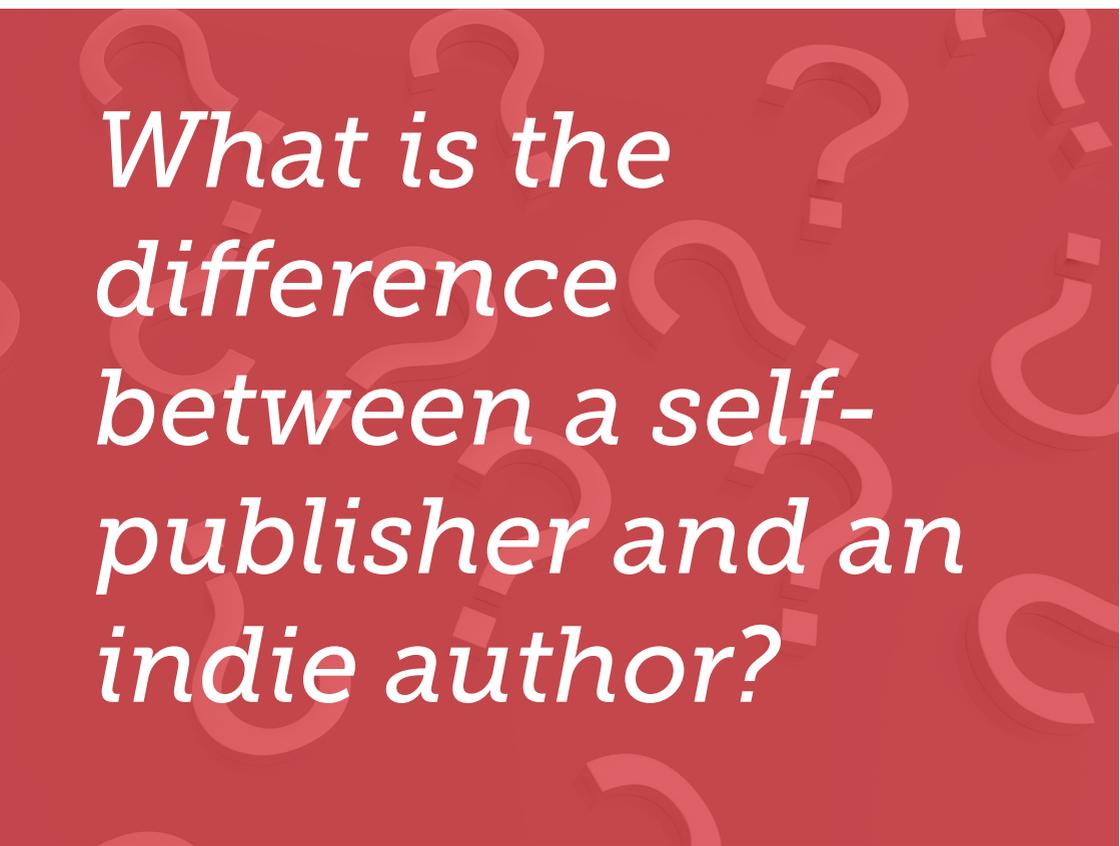
WHAT IS AN INDEPENDENT AUTHOR?

At ALLi, “independent” is an inclusive description and always relative (everyone needs support to write and publish well).

Some of our members are fiercely indie-spirited, as DIY as it’s possible to be. Others are happy to collaborate with a publisher where that seems advantageous, some working with paid publishing services, others with trade publishers.

So what marks out an indie from other authors? The Alliance allows that you are an independent author if:

- You have self-published at least one book.
- You see yourself as the creative director of your books, from conception to completion through publishing and beyond.
- You expect that status as creative director to be acknowledged in any partnership you negotiate, whether a paid author-service, or in a deal with trade-publisher or agent e.g. if you have an established author platform, you should receive a higher royalty rate and advance than an author who does not.
- You recognise that you are central to a revolutionary shift in publishing which needs to move from seeing the author purely as a resource (in the new parlance ‘content provider’) to respecting the author as a creative director, with much to offer in each step of the publishing process.
- You are proud of your indie status and carry that self-respect into all your ventures, negotiations and collaborations for your own benefit and to benefit all writers.

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*What is the
difference
between a self-
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indie author?*

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SELF-PUBLISHER AND AN INDIE AUTHOR?

As self-publishing evolves, its terms of reference are rapidly changing. Many authors who publish their own work feel uncomfortable with the term “self-published”, which gives the impression that they have done everything required to produce the book themselves, from cover design to editing. In fact, almost nobody who produces a good book does so alone. New, more accurate, terms are becoming more commonplace, but have not yet taken precedence in search engines over the catch-all term “self-publishing”.

At ALLi, we use the following (sometimes overlapping) terms of reference:

- Self-published author: any author who has published a book at personal expense. Self-publishers range the full gamut, from those publishing a one-off book for family and friends to the most entrepreneurial and productive author-publisher.
- Author-publisher: writers who make their living from publishing their own work. ALLi has a professional membership category for such author-publishers.
- Trade publishing: Businesses that licence publishing rights from authors and handle the publication of their books in return for a large percentage. (Also sometimes called “legacy” or “traditional” publishing). Most of trade publishing is handled by what are known as The Big Five: Penguin-Random House; Hachette Book Group (HBG); Harper Collins, Macmillan and Simon & Schuster.

*What is the
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(cont)*

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SELF-PUBLISHER AND AN INDIE AUTHOR? (CONT)

- Independent or “indie” press: A small publishing company which, like the big conglomerates, commissions books from authors and publishes at the company’s expense, not the author’s. If very small, they are sometimes called micro-publishers.
- Publishing or Author Services: Services that handle some or all aspects of publishing, at the expense of the author. Can be freelance one-person operations, like designers or editors, to full-scale services including editorial, design and marketing that get paid upfront. Payment to services can take three forms: 1. Upfront fee; 2. Royalty split or percentage payment; 3. Licensing in return for small royalty and, sometimes, an advance on royalties.
- Indie author: authors who see themselves as the creative directors of their own work, independent in attitude, accepting responsible for their own publishing choices and destiny, and choosing the publishing services — paid or trade — most appropriate to each book project.

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*Why are more
writers choosing
self-publishing?*

WHY ARE MORE WRITERS CHOOSING SELF-PUBLISHING?

Author-publication served only a tiny number of writers before digital technology enabled print-on-demand and the direct distribution of ebooks. This technology has revolutionised writing and publishing. It simultaneously does four things that are very good for authors:

- It gives us a global readership, instead of confining us to specific territories.
- Our books are continually available — there is no such thing as ‘out-of-print’ any more.
- It takes away the necessity for ‘middlemen’ like agents, publishers and distributors (though we still may choose to work with such partners — see above). And:
- It gives our readers a point-of-purchase just at the moment they discover they want our book.

As the creative possibilities of this revolution make themselves felt, the options provided by author-publishing are attracting more and more writers.

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*What about
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WHAT ABOUT STANDARDS AND QUALITY?

ALLi is helping to raise them. Our core mission is the fostering of excellence (and ethics) in the sector. As author-publishing goes mainstream, more and more authors are producing books that are indistinguishable in quality from those produced by trade publishing houses. In many cases, we are hiring the same freelance editors and designers. And some indies are going way beyond the standard book, experimenting technologically and artistically.

But so many self-published books are rubbish.

Some authors don't have the necessary skills or publish too soon. Writing a good book is challenging, as is publishing well. Production is easily learned but good creative skills require a long and demanding apprenticeship.

But there are two dimensions to this complaint, depending on whether your viewpoint is from the perspective of the old publishing order or the new.

The implication behind this question is that a lot of bad books is a problem. Seeing that it isn't requires a shift from the scarcity thinking of a commercial (publisher's) perspective to the abundance thinking of a creative (author's) perspective.

Traditionally, publishing has worked from a scarcity model, grounded in commercial principles. It selected a few books to be published and protected their value with copyright. Now we are working from an abundance model, grounded in creative principles. In an abundance model, excess and redundancy are no cause for concern.

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*What about
standards and
quality? (cont)*

WHAT ABOUT STANDARDS AND QUALITY? (CONT.)

This is how nature, the fundamental model for all creativity works. An oak tree throws a lot of acorns to get one baby oak. A lot of sperm miss out on the egg.

Yes, self-publishing is enabling more poor-quality books to be published than ever before but what's important in an abundance model is not how many bad books are enabled — with the sophisticated algorithms, search engines, keywords and sampling that readers enjoy today, they quickly fade into invisibility — but that many more good books are being enabled.

Creativity is never a zero sum game. More bad books doesn't mean fewer good books, but the opposite. More masterpieces emerge at the top, the expanded tip of an enlarged mountain.

The problems of book discoverability in the new publishing ecosystem is a fear put about by those who are invested in an older order. Online algorithms and book search are actually very effective — and getting better.

Which is why despite the plethora of sub-standard books, it's not at all difficult to find great writing, and great self-published writing.

It is one of ALLi's key objectives to encourage excellence and success, through example, advice and information, and our forthcoming Book of The Month Award. We encourage our members to aim high and commit to continuous creative development in writing, formatting and promotion.

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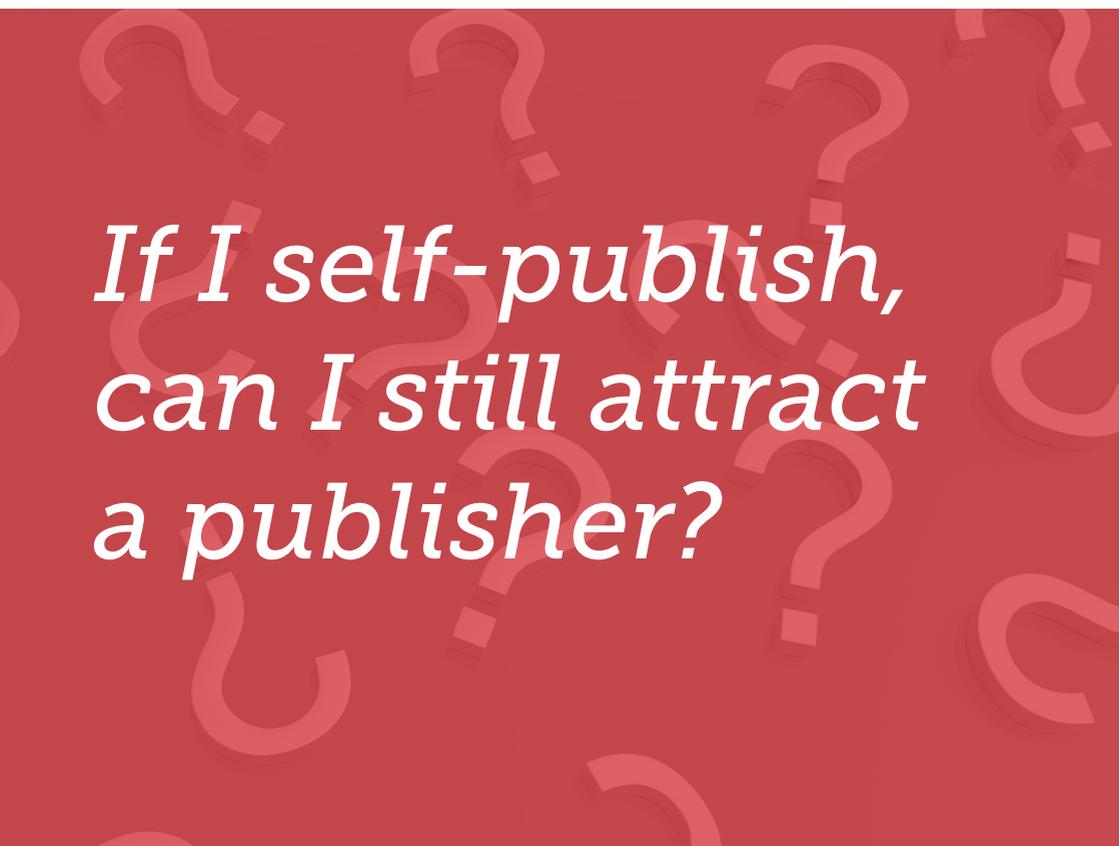
*What if I can't
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editor?*

WHAT IF I CAN'T AFFORD TO HIRE AN EDITOR?

You can't afford not to. Editing is an essential for all writers, at every stage of development. In order to author-publish a book that will sell well, you need to budget for editorial, proofreading, cover design and, if you intend to publish a book with complex design features, probably a formatter/typesetter. You will also need a good website and social media set-up to market yourself and your book. These are the expenses of being in this business (and while your writing may be art, successful author-publishing is business).

As a member of ALLi, you will connect with other writers like you who are just starting out and those who are further along the author-publishing path, who will help, support and guide you.

Discussions in our member-only groups is co-operative and collaborative and we also provide a database of reputable and reasonably-priced service providers who are vetted ALLi Partner Members.

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*If I self-publish,
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IF I SELF-PUBLISH, CAN I STILL ATTRACT A PUBLISHER?

Despite those who like to create a phoney war between author- versus trade-publishing, many of our members move happily between these options. Writers can now choose different pathways for different projects and in different phases of their writing lives.

The stigma that once surrounded author-publishing is a thing of the past, as more indies experience commercial and creative success. Agents and publishers now trawl author-publishing sites (including this one) looking for writers with proven talent and fan-bases.

It's all part of a growing movement towards author empowerment, which ALLi is proud to foster and encourage.

ABOUT ASK ALLi

Ask ALLi is an umbrella campaign in which we promise to answer any question anyone — from authors to media to other writing organisations — might have about self-publishing.

Among other initiatives, Ask ALLi embraces:

- Our monthly Member Q&A in which Joanna Penn, of TheCreativePenn.com and Orna Ross, Director of ALLi, answer our members' questions live on Google Hangout.
- Our Ask ALLi Member Forums in which our associate, author and professional members help and advise each other.
- Our Ask ALLi column which appears in our own newsletters, in newspapers, blogs, magazines and writing organisation communiques all over the world.

We pride ourselves on being able to answer any self-publishing question. Submit yours by visiting the ALLi website, on Twitter or by emailing us.

www.allianceindependentauthors.org
[@indieauthoralli](https://twitter.com/indieauthoralli)
info@allianceindependentauthors.org

