

How to Make Books Your Life

A guide to the Publishing Industry





So you want to learn more about the publishing industry?

You have come to the right place. The book publishing process has historically been complex and difficult to understand. To foster a more diverse community of authors and open more opportunities for publishing, we've created this guide to simplify the process and provide helpful resources to explain how publishing works.

Here, you will learn about the intricate process of how a story goes from an author's imagination to bookshelves around the world.

What Is a Publishing House?

Publishing houses are companies tasked with selecting, editing, producing, promoting, and marketing books for publication.

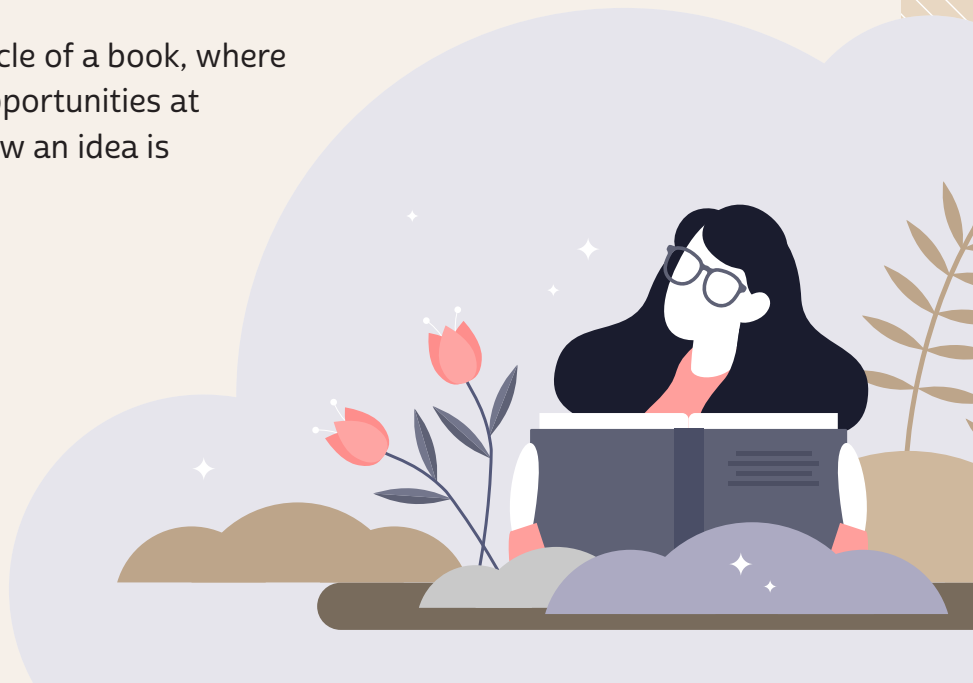
Currently, the book publishing industry has five large, commercial companies that service the majority of the market. These companies are Simon & Schuster, Penguin Random House, Macmillan, Hachette Book Group, and HarperCollins; they are known within the industry as “The Big Five.” In addition to the Big Five, there are countless independent publishers—also known as an indie press or small press, which is a publishing house that operates independently of large corporations. Indies can be general **commercial publishers** who compete with the Big Five for titles or small, specialized publishers who may focus on books in translation or poetry.

More often than not, larger publishers are divided into smaller subsidiaries, called **imprints**. For example, Simon & Schuster is made up of numerous different imprints, each of which is creatively and editorially independent and made up of its own team of publishing experts, including editors, designers, marketers, and publicists.

Many imprints specialize in a certain kind of genre—some imprints may choose to acquire titles that are geared towards literary fiction or sci-fi, while others might publish non-fiction, focusing on current events, or cookbooks, or a little of everything. Some imprints focus on producing, recording, and releasing titles in the audiobook format.

Whatever publisher you work for or will work for, the important thing to know is that you’ll be working alongside experts in their field. Through a combination of research and experience, publishers are constantly searching for books that will resonate with readers. In a fast-changing world—one that is full of distractions and competing forces for people’s time—they know how to get readers excited about new stories and ideas.

Read on for a walk through the lifecycle of a book, where we will outline the different career opportunities at each phase, and paint a picture of how an idea is transformed into a book.



Stage 1: The Beginnings

The publishing process begins with editorial. The editor is an author's primary contact, whose role is to ensure that the written material in a book is ready for publication. This involves reading, reviewing, and editing manuscripts. Editors also work with writers to improve their writing and help their ideas succeed.

But, before the editing process begins, editors receive submissions (whether that be a full manuscript or a proposal for a book with sample material and an outline) from the author's literary agent, or commission books by pursuing writers directly to discuss projects that do not yet exist. They read through many submissions to find books and ideas they love and that they know readers will love.

When they want to pursue a submission for publication, they discuss it with their colleagues, editorial director, and publisher of the imprint. This process involves evaluating the merit of the work, the editor's vision for improving it, and a cost analysis to determine an appropriate payment for the author.

If the imprint wants the editor to pursue the project, the editor may meet with the author and their agent to discuss the project and, afterwards, in conversation with the literary agent, will make an offer on the manuscript. Competing bids may result in a multi-publisher auction.

When the offer is agreed upon and the editor buys the book, a contract will be drafted and a schedule is put in place by the Managing Editor and the Publishing Office.

The completed manuscript is usually due in 12–18 months (for fiction) or 18–24 months (for nonfiction). During that time, the editor will work with the author to develop their manuscript into a final version. Along the way, they will work on both developmental edits that ensure the narrative is strong and line edits that focus on how that narrative gets told.

What jobs fall under this stage of a book's life cycle?

Editorial

Editors: The editors, with the help of editorial assistants, maintain their own list of titles and their responsibilities include finding new authors, negotiating with agents, and soliciting and acquiring manuscripts. They work directly with authors on every step of the publication process: editing the content, overseeing copyediting and production, and working intimately with marketing and publicity to promote the finished book.

Editorial Assistants: Assistants support editors by reading manuscripts; writing reader's reports; logging submissions; writing and sending rejection letters; and preparing materials such as book cover copy and online retail copy. They also help solicit back cover quotes; and communicate with authors, artists, and literary agents throughout the editorial process.

Communication, including with the author and between internal departments, is a key part of the book publishing process, and it is unique to this role.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Editorial Assistant, Assistant Editor, Associate Editor, Editor, Senior Editor, Executive Editor, Editorial Director, Editor in Chief, Publisher

Contracts

This department drafts and negotiates contracts with authors, which involves discussions between the authors' representatives (literary agents and lawyers) and the editors and publishers, who make the deals on behalf of the company. In addition, they maintain various company databases that capture information about the contracts, including what the company pays to authors; serve as a resource for the rest of the company when questions arise regarding the rights of our books; and register all books in the U.S. Copyright Office to be sure the copyrights are protected worldwide.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Contracts Associate, Contracts Manager, Paralegal, Legal Counsel

Subsidiary Rights (Sub-rights)

The sub-rights department focuses on finding revenue streams beyond retail sales for each book on the list. Their role is to sell foreign language rights to our books around the world. In addition to selling foreign rights, they also handle licensing rights in both domestic and foreign markets for book clubs, magazine excerpts, audio editions, television or movie adaptations, and more. A Sub-rights position is a mix of marketing, publicity, and sales. They also get to travel to international conferences held in places like Frankfurt, London, Bologna, and Guadalajara. They meet with publishers all over the world to discuss what books are being published abroad, as well as global market trends and business opportunities.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Subrights Assistant, Subrights Associate, Subrights Assistant Manager, Subrights Director

Publishing Office

The publishing office works closely with editorial, publicity, marketing, sales, production, and supply chain. They help schedule publication dates for each book, balancing the publishing season in terms of genres, subjects, and authors while coordinating and leading sales presentations, tracking sales and distribution, and more. Working in the publishing office works with all aspects of the publishing process from acquisition all the way through on-sale and beyond.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Publishing Assistant, Publishing Coordinator, Publishing Associate, Publishing Manager, Senior Publishing Manager, Associate Publisher, Deputy Publisher, Publisher.

Stage 2: How the Manuscript Becomes a Physical Book

When the manuscript is finalized after multiple rounds of edits and revisions between the editor and author, it is scheduled for publication. Editors will deliver the finished manuscript to the production department, where they—along with the design department—begin planning the creation of the copyedited and designed final book.

Copyediting takes approximately eight weeks, and during this time the interior design of the book is created. Furthermore, many nonfiction and some fiction manuscripts are vetted at this time for legal concerns.

Additionally, during this stage, the art department begins work on the cover or jacket design. This is a process that involves discussion between the art department, editor, publisher, and author.

What jobs fall under this stage of a book's life cycle?

Art/Design and Production

Jacket Design: With the editor and publisher, the art designers and art directors create concepts for book jackets that are appealing to the tone, audience, and character of each title. The art designer oversees artists who create original work for book covers, or the photo shoot, including hiring the photographer and stylist. Along with managing editors, production, and copyediting staff, the cover designers work simultaneously on multiple titles.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Design Assistant, Junior Designer, Designer, Senior Designer, Associate Art Director, Art Director

Managing Editorial: Managing editors work diligently to oversee the production of an imprint's complete list of upcoming books and are responsible for setting and monitoring the schedules of each individual title. A managing editor oversees every book from manuscript to finished book—while responding to the individual situations that arise with each title. They often solve problems that cross departmental bounds since Managing editorial works closely with nearly every other department to make sure the books are produced on time and with the highest quality.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Managing Editorial Assistant, Managing Editorial Coordinator, Assistant Managing Editor, Associate Managing Editor, Managing Editor, Senior Managing Editor, Associate Director, Director

Production Editorial: Production editors, along with freelance proofreaders, check for style, consistency, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Throughout the proofreading process, production editors maintain communication with the editors and authors to resolve any inconsistencies in style and information. Production editors check multiple drafts of the book, called proofs, for errors, and also proofread the jackets, covers, and promotional materials for each title.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Assistant Production Editor, Production Editor, Senior Production Editor, Associate Director, Director

Desktop Design: Desktop staff builds book interiors in Adobe InDesign; inputs corrections to those electronic files based on feedback from the author and production department; prepares final files to be printed. Desktop staff members work most closely with the interior design department, but also integrally with production, manufacturing, and digital production. Less often, they collaborate with editors, managing editors, and cover designers.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Desktop Publishing Assistant, Desktop Publishing Associate, Junior Desktop Designer, Associate Manager, Manager, Associate Director, Director

Interior Design: Unlike art designers who design book jackets, these designers oversee a book's interior from manuscript to typeset book. An interior designer will choose the fonts and type sizes used in each title, create a template for the pages in InDesign, direct and supervise illustrators, create illustrated elements, and design the book's layout. They work closely with editorial to ensure the interior is pleasing to the reader's eye while creating a design that is appropriate to the topic and tone of the book. They also work closely with production, managing editorial, and the desktop department. They also create layouts for photo inserts and illustrated books.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Design Assistant, Design Associate, Junior Designer, Designer, Senior Designer, Associate Director, Director

Production Managerial: Production managers are in charge of all of the various aspects of manufacturing a book and put together the costs for each component of the book, everything from photo inserts to covers. They are also in charge of putting together the costs and orders to produce the finished books.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Production Assistant, Production Coordinator, Production Associate, Production Supervisor, Production Manager, Senior Production Manager, Associate Director, Director

Stage 3: How to Build Buzz Prior to On-Sale Date

Now that a finished manuscript has been completed and is in the process of being produced, how do we make sure folks hear about it, so they know to buy it when it is on sale? This is where publicity, marketing, ad-promo, subsidiary rights and sales come into play!

To kickstart this process, editors give presentations about their books, emphasizing their content and what makes them special at internal meetings. From there, publicity and marketing teams will begin to build their campaign plans about a year ahead of the publication date. Publicity reaches out to media for reviews and features, and marketing reaches out to independent bookstores (indies) and online influencers to generate buzz.

Every book is also presented to the company's sales team, which includes sales representatives for bookstores across the country. The accounts they sell to include independent bookstores, chain bookstores like Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million, airport stores, and Amazon, as well as retailers who sell books like Target and Walmart.

What jobs fall under this stage of a book's life cycle?

Publicity and Marketing

Publicity: The publicity department's focus is to get media attention for the book and the author. This is to help drive sales via reviews, article coverage, radio appearances, TV interviews, and online coverage. Publicists work very closely with authors—often as closely as editors—and agents and editors to come up with winning campaigns that bring attention to books. They are experts in the media landscape who have built relationships with media outlets, and also attend events and conferences, and submit books for awards and prizes. Before publication, they create the materials to be used for the publicity campaign—press releases, pitch letters, Q&As, etc. Publicity is also responsible for organizing an author's book tour, planning author signing events, and arranging the author's travel.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Publicity Assistant, Associate Publicist, Publicist, Senior Publicist, Publicity Director

Trade Marketing: The marketing department is critical in helping to determine who the target audience of a book will be. They brainstorm and develop strategies to promote the books so that the sales team can encourage booksellers to order copies in anticipation of consumer demand. They work in conjunction with the editors and publicists to do targeted bookseller, librarian, and academic mailings, outreach to organizations and online communities, and provide the sales force with the best possible tools for selling titles. Furthermore, they work

with publicity to create custom campaigns for each book, and work very closely with authors and agents, alongside editors, to help create and sustain enthusiasm for each book.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Marketing Assistant, Marketing Coordinator, Associate Marketing Manager, Marketing Manager, Senior Marketing Manager, Marketing Director

Library Marketing: The library marketing department serves as a liaison between publishers and the library community, ensuring that titles are made available in public libraries. They connect with librarians across the country, gathering feedback on what patrons are reading and recommending relevant titles for libraries to order.

Internally, library marketers collaborate closely with trade marketing, sales, and publicity teams to develop cohesive, multi-pronged campaigns. They promote books through targeted mailings, advertising, and direct outreach to the library community—including conducting book presentations and attending nationwide conferences.

At these conferences, marketers distribute advanced materials, coordinate author appearances, and strengthen relationships with librarians. In addition to promoting individual titles, they also create and provide resources that help librarians integrate books into patron programming. The long-term goal is to ensure that both a title and its author become lasting staples in libraries.

Advertising & Promotions (Ad Promo): Ad promo is responsible for planning the book's advertising campaign, as well as researching, negotiating, and purchasing advertising space in various media outlets. They conceive, write, design, and print effective advertising and promotional materials. They produce materials you see in bookstores, such as posters and displays, as well as content for newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and transit advertising.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Promotion Coordinator, Ad/Promo Copywriter, Cover Copywriter, Advertising Coordinator, Advertising Manager, Promotion Manager, Production Manager, Associate Director of Advertising and Promotion, Director

Sales: Sales representatives are the gateway from the publishing house to bookstores. This department works to get booksellers excited about each and every book. They sell books to retail and wholesale companies and manage the company's relationship with booksellers around the country and the world. Sales reps make sure that the books are available to readers in every possible place where books are sold—supermarkets, malls, independent bookstores, warehouse clubs, catalogs, airports, and online.

➤➤**Your Possible Career Path:** Sales Assistant, Sales Associate, Sales Coordinator, Sales Manager, Sales Director



Stage 4: Publishing the Finished Book

Now that the media, retailers, and readers are eager for the book to be in the world, it is time to publish the final book!

By this stage, editors have reached out to other authors for advance praise (blurbs), which, along with the descriptive copy the editor has written, are put on the final jacket, which is routed to art and production.

The final pages are sent to the printer and about 8 weeks later, books are shipped to stores and retailers. Additionally, reviews and coverage secured by publicity will start to appear and advertising will begin.

Then comes publication day and with the efforts of everyone on the team, the book has made it onto bookshelves everywhere! Our mission is to get the stories and ideas we publish into the heads of as many readers as possible, through bookstores, retail sites and libraries, and beyond, because we believe that books change lives.

Glossary

Publishing has a lot of jargon! Definitions of key terms here:

Auction: a bidding competition between publishers to acquire the rights to publish a book.

Blurb: a short promotional description of a book that appears on the back cover. Blurbs are a marketing tool to encourage readers to buy the book.

Commercial Publishers are for-profit publishing companies, not affiliated with non-profit or academic institutions.

Chains: Large bookstore companies under one brand, such as Barnes & Noble, often featuring superstores with extensive titles and amenities like cafes.

Copy Editing: A detailed review of a manuscript to refine style, punctuation, grammar, clarity, consistency, sequencing, and content errors.

Developmental editing looks at the larger picture of a manuscript, assessing plot, character development, pacing, and overall story structure to ensure the narrative is strong and coherent.

Indie Bookstore: a bookstore that is owned and operated by an individual or group, rather than a corporation.

Layout: The arrangement of the book's pages, including text, illustrations, font, page numbers, and overall design.

Line editing focuses on the details of a piece of writing, like sentence structure, word choice, and flow within each line, aiming to improve readability and style.

Literary Agent: A professional representing authors and illustrators, assisting them with placing their work with publishers, managing payments, and other responsibilities.

Proofs: Fully typeset pages of the book reviewed for final approval before printing.

Reader's Report: a written evaluation of a submission, where a professional reader assesses the submission's quality, potential market appeal, and overall suitability for publication, usually providing feedback on aspects like plot, character development, writing style, and commercial viability, to help editors make informed decisions about acquiring a book.

Sales Call: Meetings between sales representatives and potential buyers wherein product catalogs are discussed, and Purchase Orders (POs) are placed.

Submissions: Manuscripts or proposals sent by an author or their agent to publishers for consideration.





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