

The mechanics of self-publishing

If the thought of spending long hours on the computer trying to figure out how headers and footers work in Microsoft Word (hint: they work differently from one version to another), stop here. Get thee to a publisher. Otherwise, read on.

I will talk about lulu.com in what follows, but I assume that other printers and publishers will provide you with similar tools.

First of all, write the book so you will be able to read it, print it, and make revisions easily. I assume that you will end up with a document for each chapter (in my case, each short story), because a large document easily becomes difficult to revise. I also assume that you keep back-up copies and copies of major revisions, so you are able to retrieve any bits lost that day you went on a rampage and rewrote entire paragraphs, realizing the day after that they were pretty good before.

After you're happy with your final revision, it's time to proofread. Microsoft Word won't find many spelling errors and typos, but your readers will. Incidentally, publishers no longer do that for you, so think that you'd have to do this even after your work has been blessed by a publisher. If you can't spell, consider paying someone to proofread. A good reading by a copyeditor might help too (beware that your author's voice may be reminded of proper grammar, and that this may constitute yet another revision). Nobody is perfect, by the way. If your grammar isn't good now, just improve it in your new work.

Only once you are sure that the text is perfectly acceptable, make a back up copy and start moving to the book format. lulu.com had a template for the 6 x 9 book format, to give the pages the right dimensions. All your documents should have the exact same dimensions (which you find in Microsoft Word's Page Setup menu). I have found that it was much better to copy and paste the text into the new document so that it would lose the traces of past revisions. If you tweaked a lot with formatting, consider using the Unformatted Paste (**Paste Special** menu) instead of straight Paste which copies formatting along. That will save you from fighting strange Word behavior. Remember to use Section Breaks between sections because that will affect the Headers and Footers, as well as the page numbering.

But first you need to decide how you will set the text in your book. Look at other books for examples, and think that your role as a book designer is to enhance your reader's experience of the text. Avoid choosing funny fonts that look so cool and make you feel like

you have a high sense of aesthetics, because that will make reading more difficult. Notice that all books of literature use a serif font, a fact supported by research on readers. Don't base your decision on Marketing material (brochures, ads) or Web postings, because the reader in those cases isn't expected to pay attention and read for hours at a time. I used Garamond because some of my favorite books were set with it. You'll also want to check that the font is available at your print-on-demand printer. lulu.com lists the fonts that it will recognize in their formatting F.A.Q. Then you should choose your title fonts.

Typographers have often recommended sans serif fonts for titles, but that isn't as important. I used Garamond for my titles, in italic, which I thought worked well for short story titles. I think that is where you can improvise as a designer.

Then you will have to decide on the layout of the first pages of your stories (or chapters). I used Garamond Italic 24pt, centered, and fixed the title paragraph style with 144pt spacing above and 36pt below. Notice that everything is a multiple of 12pt, the text size, because it is important for the lines to align between pages. If the lines are aligned, some of the text from the other side of the pages will show through. Also, I centered the titles because they were going to appear on either odd or even pages. You should start them on odd pages, but I was cheap and wanted to save pennies on the printing.

Since the paragraphs will be about 4 inches wide, set the first line indent accordingly. I set them at 0.3" (ideally it would have been closer to 0.25 but again we're working with Word and that slider snapped to the one tenth mark – save yourself some grief for the other parts of the book).

It is comforting to know that Microsoft Word does have a Drop Cap feature, but it isn't linked to Paragraph Formatting. You should do that at the end, going through the pages and selecting that first letter and using the **Drop Cap** menu. It will move that first letter into a box that is no longer in the text. Drop Caps are fun. Use the Undo feature to try different options. I set mine at three lines.

The Title Pages

And now, for something completely different: the title pages, comprising the actual book title page (odd), the copyright page (even), the table of contents (odd), and maybe a dedication (odd; a citation from a favorite book works really well if you don't have parents or partners to thank).

You must use Word Sections to get the pages on the side you want them to be (odd or even), and also to start the page numbers at the first story (or chapter). If you have an introduction, that may have to be paginated using roman numerals. This will start a lot of trouble with page numbers and the setting of Headers and Footers (more on that later). Basically, Word will now be confused about page numbering, especially when you want to print just part of the document. Try selecting the text you want to print instead of indicating the page numbers, or use the section number.

You should be consistent with the rest of the book and use the same title font for the book as for the chapters. But then the book title page is special. Just remember it appears on the right, on an odd page, and should invite the reader to turn the page!

Look at any book to inspire your Copyright page. I really just needs the word “Copyright,” the little circled C, the year, and your name on a line. Then “All rights reserved,” your name, your home town. I added the web site address. If you have an ISBN, put it there (I got mine later).

I used the Table of Contents feature of Microsoft Word to build the page (it’s hidden in the **Insert** menu: select **Reference** and then **Index and Tables**). It’s another area where you’ll want to experiment, but don’t drive yourself crazy as I did (proof: I always forget how to do it between the times I need it). Just use the same fonts as you did in the other pages. “Contents” is like a chapter title.

The dedication page says something really sweet and powerful and makes ample usage of italics if it’s a citation. Your favorite author, especially if his works have inspired you, has plenty to offer.

The Nightmare of Headers and Footers

Hopefully you set each chapter and the title sections in separate sections. It is important to use sections, because then you can choose whether it starts on an odd page or not (or you’ll drive yourself crazy inserting page breaks where they don’t belong). It will also allow you to set different headers and footers for each chapter, and to determine the page numbering.

For each section, use Page Setup to determine if you want different headers and footers for odd and even pages, and if you want a different first page. Your answer should

be “yes” on all those. Pay particular attention to “Apply to” in that Page Setup dialog, as you could just wipe out (or set) all your section formatting in one click.

I used Footers exclusively, a different one for each side (left and right) containing the title of the story and the page number. In some versions of Word, there’s a mysterious “Same as Previous” phrase in the rectangle around the footer which turns out to be the magic button to separate sections. Otherwise that is to be set in Page Setup. In all cases, you may find surprising results with footers suddenly becoming the same when you wanted the reverse. Use Undo and try again. This is a bit like building a sand castle, but fortunately you can go back in time.

Print It!

Now you’re ready to print it and check it. Use **Print Preview**. Print selected pages on your printer and see if the odd pages and the blank pages that make them odd come out. On lulu.com, you can convert the document to PDF and check it. Once this is satisfactory, you are ready to follow the next steps on lulu.com to produce your book. There will be options (the most fun being the selection of a cover), and more things to think about such as the text you want on the back cover (you’ll have to think like a Marketing person again). If you are beautiful, consider having your beautiful photo there (anything to sell your book).

Now you can set the printers in motion and order your proof copy. If you checked every step, it is likely that you will be satisfied. By the way, I found a typo the other day...

To Conclude

I think writers should keep writing and not have to worry about such details like book distribution and advertising, but the conditions of the market are such that it is extremely difficult to enter it. Yet, it is a very flexible industry, compared to making electronic products. Self-publishing may just be what you need to confirm yourself as a writer, and you get that confirmation from a reader.