

Simple Booklet Self Publishing

Contributed by sally_in_wales

Shifting to a more sustainable life offers opportunities to gather knowledge or hone long-forgotten skills - and you'll probably always have an eye on how to share your knowledge with like-minded people and perhaps make a small profit for your troubles. Sally Pointer has published a number of booklets on various crafts and here she shares her valuable experience with fellow Downsizer members.

Many of us have a story to tell or information that we'd like to pass on in print, but getting published through mainstream channels can be a daunting business. From a 'downsizer ethics' point of view, maybe what you wish to say just doesn't justify an expensive print run of thousands- at least not in the short run, but you still want to make your work available in a form that will be attractive to others and, with luck, make you a small return above costs? If this sounds familiar, read on. Over the years I've self published half a dozen or so short books and have just had my first hardback published, so I've seen it from both sides of the fence. Here's my quick and easy guide to producing attractive, saleable books using standard home computer and printer equipment.

First things first, we're going to be making a book based on A4 paper, printed on a domestic printer and folded and stapled. This is commonly known as a 'chapbook', and as long as it isn't too heavy on pages can look quite professional. Its small enough to read at the allotment, and a good size to sit on a bookshelf with other books. Some self publishers work in A4 and have the edges spiral bound, this works well for longer books, but for short first projects, try a chapbook.

Start by writing the first draft of your book. Don't worry at this stage about the layout as this will get in the way of your thought processes, just concentrate on producing several pages of text on your chosen subject. We'll refine the text a little later, so don't worry about the final details, but do keep asking yourself that all important question 'So What?.' You need to assume that the reader is intelligent but knows nothing about your subject, so if you were to write , you would need to ask yourself 'so what?' and make sure the answer is reflected in your text. If it's a family cookbook, think about grouping the recipes and including short anecdotes that remind you and your readers of why these are family favourites, and if it's a book that refers to the work of others, remember to give proper credit. Its perfectly legitimate to cite other sources as long as it is very clear where your information comes from. Keep quotes from other writers short, and avoid plagiarism like the plague!

Once you have the basic outline down we can address the way the book will look in print. Some home computers have a booklet printing function as part of their printer settings already, but if not there are a number of freeware or cheap versions available. Personally, I've been using Fineprint (<http://www.fineprint.com/products/fineprint/index.html>) for a number of years, and find it completely foolproof (I also like the way it allows me to print several pages of rambling emails etc. out on one page rather than wastefully spilling over several sheets of paper.) They do a free trial which is worth playing with if you want to see how these types of program work, the full program was about £25, but for me this has been an investment repaid dozens of times over. There are a number of others so have a quick search around and find one that suits you. It is also possible to do the booklet printing manually, but it's a bit fiddly so I will assume you have access to booklet printing software for the remainder of this article.

Most booklet printing software formats shrink the page when converting it from A4 to A5 during the printing process. This means that you will need to work in a point size of about 16 when drafting your book to see how everything fits on the page.

Layout is important in a book like this, you need to use enough of the features of a commercial book to make things read professionally, but you want it to be immediate and unfussy so that your message comes across clearly. The following points reflect how I lay my booklets out.

-

Remember that books are assembled in multiples of 4 pages. You don't have to have exactly the right number of pages make this work but pretty close gives the best result.

-

The first page as you open the cover should have the title of the book, your name (and a short copyright statement) and perhaps your email or contact details in case people wish to order more. Once you have a few booklets out you may wish to list these titles here as well.

-

Leave the next page blank, it will be on the back of the title page so text here is superfluous, though it can alternatively be a good place for a brief dedication or a short quote. If you are putting a short piece of text here, position it a little way down the page so that it doesn't look lost at the top.

-

The next page is where your text will start. I also usually try to start my page numbering from this page. Paste in your draft text and do a print preview. This will show you whether you have any really funny gaps, and it will also show you whether you have lots of blank pages at the end of the text.

-

Think about the font you choose. It needs to be easy to read. I like , but many of the sans serif fonts work well for self publishing (think about the old typewritten school or local newsletters that were so hard to read, they usually used a font with serifs and were invariably a bit squashed up). Avoid fussy fonts in most instances, someone with poor eyesight may have real problems reading them. These fancy scripts may still have a place in titles or in some poems, but most text-based books don't benefit from them.

-

Look at your paragraph spacing. There are several ways of separating paragraphs but for A5 booklets I tend to use a blank line and no indent. This helps the eye focus on each paragraph in turn and helps you keep each point separate. Experiment with a few different styles though and see what works for you.

-

Add any pictures. With home printers you can often use photos quite successfully, but black and white line drawings usually work best. If preparing your own images, a good tip is to draw them on a full sheet of A4, then shrink them down after you scan them, this helps make the lines look crisp and gets all the detail in without 'blobs'.

-

Read right through the text and make any small changes or corrections. Often I find that getting to this stage of the layout makes me realise that one area needs a bit more content whilst another may look too 'heavy' for the size of book. Now is the easiest time to make those adjustments. Also run your spellcheck again, it's very easy to miss small errors at the early draft stages.

-

Now, go back through and look at where the text falls on the page, do you have any sentences that start right at the bottom of a page and look a bit lost? Adding an extra line space often easily cures these, it won't notice but means that the next page will read more easily.

-

Look also at where you start new sections or chapters. You get the most impact if they start on the right hand page. Sometimes this just won't be possible but look at whether just a minor tweak elsewhere will give that effect.

-

Now run the print preview again. Things should be looking quite good. If you only have one blank page at the end, ignore it, if you have two or three, consider adding an image somewhere in the text, or perhaps you could split up the sections a little or add a glossary? If all else fails, a quick dodge which is of practical benefit to the reader is to put 'Notes' at the top of one of the blank pages, inviting the reader to scribble down their own thoughts.

-

At this point I would print a draft copy. Normally I don't advise printing more often than you need to but you really do need to see it 'in the flesh' to get an idea of how it reads in real life. Try to get someone else to proof-read it for silly errors or questions that hadn't occurred to you.

-

When you are ready to print the real thing I advise using a heavy paper for the inside. Most domestic printing paper is 80gsm and is a bit thin for use in booklets. 100gsm will look professional, take images well and last through repeated readings. Choose 160gsm copier/printer card for the cover, this comes in lovely colours and works on a home printer well.

-

We haven't discussed the cover yet but the principle is the same. Make sure the title is clear and your name is easy to read. A coloured picture can work wonders on the front cover. You may need to run a couple of text prints of the cover to get it aligned properly- those page margins can mean the title won't sit centrally on the page, but a few adjustments will pay off.

-

Print off just one copy to start with. Use a long arm stapler to fix the pages to the cover, alternatively fold the booklet carefully and use strong thread and a stout needle to stitch the book together. Keep it simple if you do this, and put the knot inside the book. It can look nice to leave fairly long thread ends as a decorative touch, especially if you used an attractive colour of thread. If you are working with a booklet of more than about 12 or 16 pages, you will notice 'shingling' where the pages overlap a little. Up to about 28 pages I would suggest that you ignore this and consider it a feature of the book. It is possible to clamp the book firmly and slice these overlapping parts off with a blade, but it's quite an art. Much larger books may be more economically printed by a local printer, so you may have to reassess very large books and consider other formatting options.

-

Read the whole thing carefully again. It never ceases to amaze me how often I will find an error only after I've printed a 'proper' copy. The nice thing about this sort of self publishing is that you can continue to make adjustments, and you only need print as many as you require. This has obvious benefits in terms of waste but also means your booklets are always fresh when you come to give them away or sell them.

-

Now all you need to do is launch your masterpiece on the world. If you intend selling them, look at your pricing carefully and aim for a figure that properly covers your outlay but which remains within the 'impulse buy' bracket. Most booklet of the size we are talking about here would sell for between £1 and £5 depending on size and 'glossiness'. Consider giving a copy to your local library or community centre, sometimes local libraries will even hold a few books for sale by truly local authors. If you think you will be selling or giving away more than a few of these books, you may wish to explore the mechanisms for depositing copies for posterity with the British Library- now there's a kind of immortality for you!

This guide was necessarily brief and reflects only the way in which I approach my booklets. However, I often find that the best way to improve my own knowledge of something is to try and write it down for someone else, and making booklets is a great way to compile and store your information. Have fun!

Sally Pointer specialises in the research of plant use, especially pigmented, medicinal or aromatic plants, and writes, teaches and researches a wide range of historical topics including soapmaking, early perfumery, cosmetics and textiles. She has just published *The Artifice of Beauty*, which traces cosmetics and perfumes from prehistory to the twentieth century and provides details on traditional cosmetic ingredients with many recipes suitable for modern use. You can find out more about Sally's work - and her own self-published booklets including *Feltmaking*, *Spinning*, *Weaving & Dyeing*, *Seasonal Scents*, *A History of the Smell of Christmas*, and *Making Medieval Underwear-a practical guide* - on <http://www.sallypointer.com>