

How to Create an eBook

Creating an ebook might seem confusing but the steps don't require much specialized knowledge or tools. Like many things, once you learn to do it, it's not that bad.

I learned to format a file for an ebook because I didn't have the money to hire someone back in 2014. I kept notes on the process and posted them on my website, and updated them a few times as the technology changed. They include a lot of extra information: My first book was nonfiction and had a gazillion images and bulleted lists, which most books don't. And I wanted to mention all the current options. That file is still on my website, but much of the information is outdated.

In 2020 I self-published a fiction novel, and I've done that three times now. The process has changed a lot since 2014. I have a much simpler set of notes I follow, and I thought they might be more approachable for self-publishing authors. So, here they are. These instructions are to create a simple ebook from a Word document. This process is not the only way to go about making an ebook, but it has worked for me so far.

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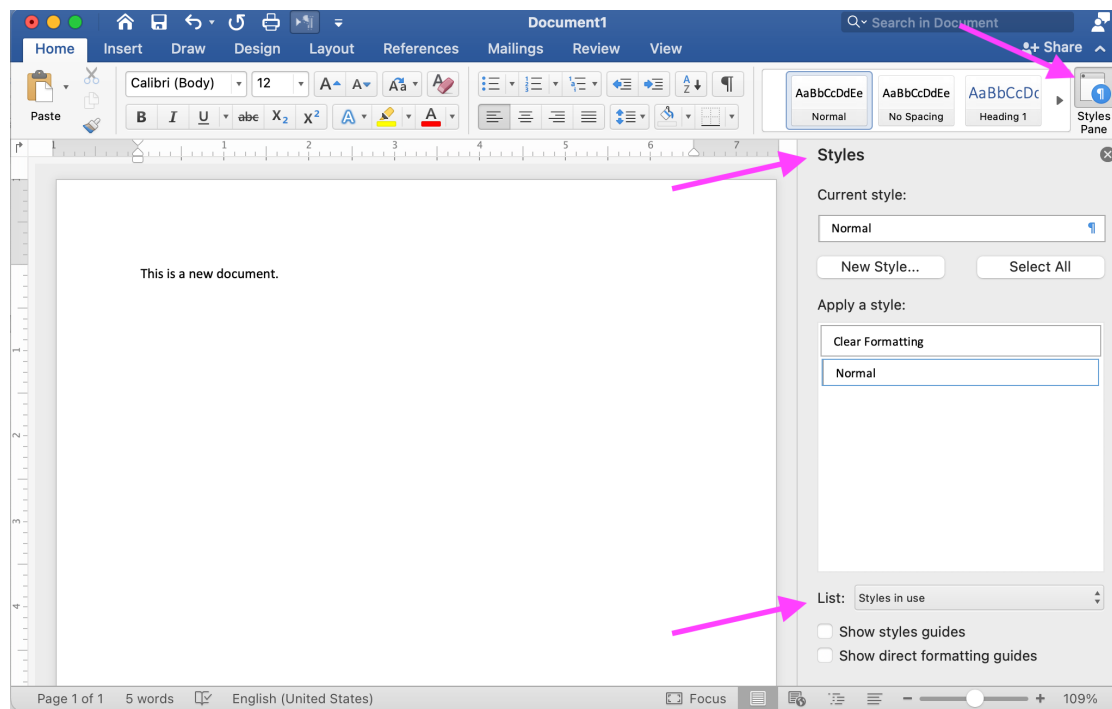
Part 1: Format your ebook

As of 2020, you can format a Word document and upload it at Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), and KDP will convert it to an ebook. The process goes easily if you keep things simple and do the formatting right. I use the same Word file at Draft2Digital (D2D) to sell at other ebook platforms, and it works. (You can access some other platforms directly, but to me, the simplicity of using D2D is worth it. If you find one typo, you need to update the files at every platform you've uploaded at. So I stick with one file, two uploads, and that's it.)

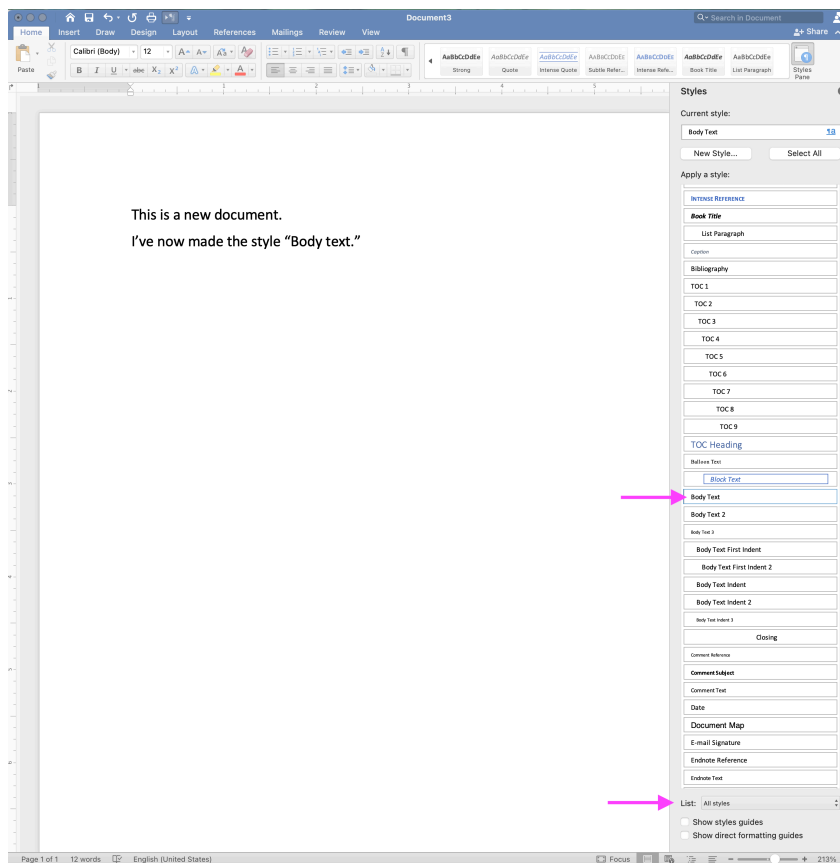
Apply Word styles

The formatting process involves applying Word's "styles" to your document. The styles are like codes that tell other devices how to read your document. Don't fret over what the Word document looks like; it's not about making it look pretty, it's about applying the right styles. (KDP can handle a lot of fancy stuff, but my focus here is simplicity. Defaults = simple.)

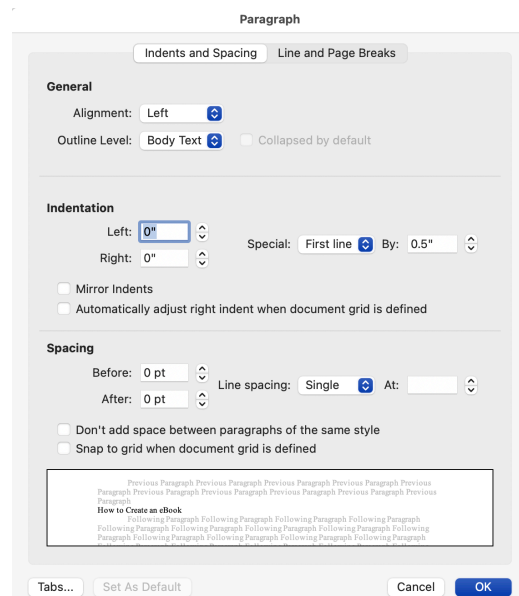
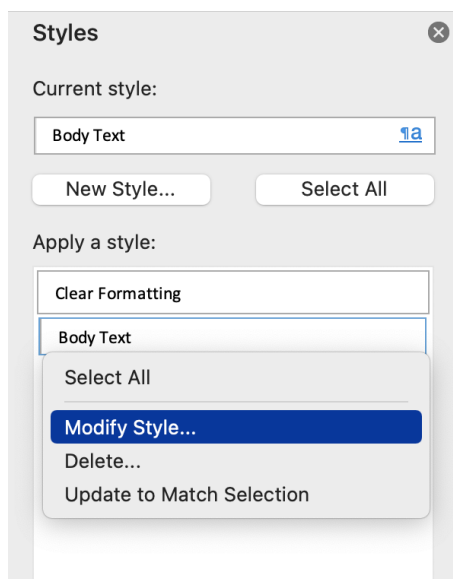
Open the Word document containing your novel. Open the styles pane so you can see all the styles in use (image shows Word for Mac):



To start, select the entire document and choose Clear Formatting. Then select it all again and choose the style Body Text. (If you can't find Body Text in the handful of styles in the top menu bar, look for it in the other "Lists" as shown by the pink arrows below.) The point of this step is to remove any stray styles that might've sneaked in while you were writing. Also, delete any headers, footers, or page numbers. If it seems easier, you can paste your text into a clean, new Word document.



In the styles pane, click on Body Text’s dropdown and select Modify Style (below, left). A window should pop open. Look for another dropdown and select Paragraph. Set the first line indent to 0.5 (below, right). This will indent each new paragraph. You don’t want indents that were inserted manually with the tab key.



Next, go through your file and highlight each chapter title (often a simple Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and so on). Select the style Heading 1.

If you have actual words in your chapter titles, put them on one line (i.e., “Chapter 1 How It Began” and not “Chapter 1 (line break) How It Began”). If your book has subheadings within a chapter, apply Heading 2 to them.

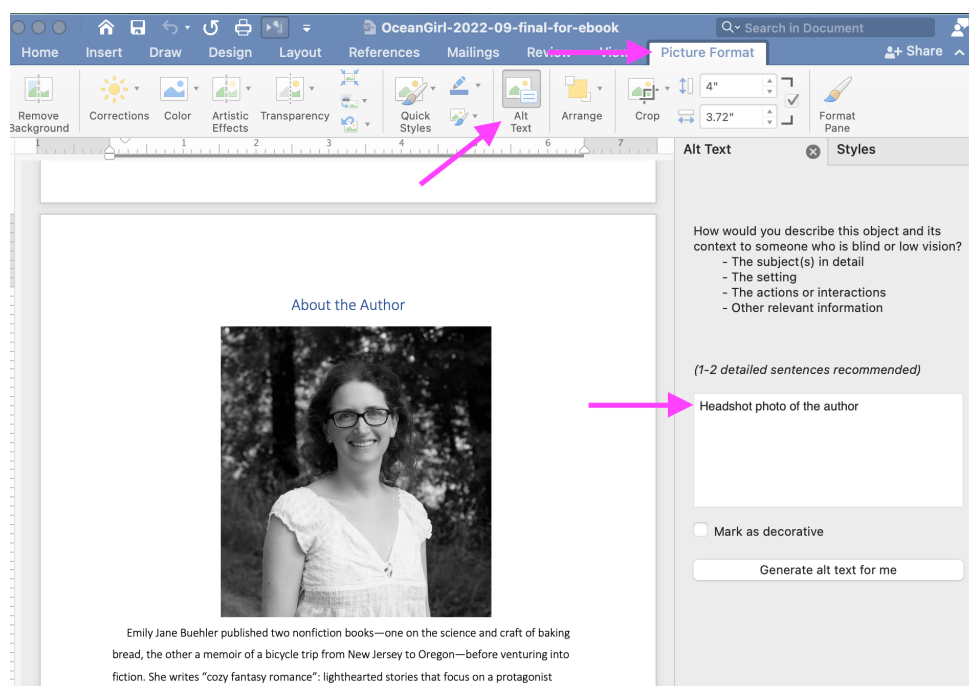
If any words in your text are italic for emphasis, select them and apply the style Emphasis. (You can also simply apply italics and the formatting should appear in the ebook, but using the style is better for accessibility because it can inform readers who are not reading visually.)

Format front and end matter

The front matter may look weird if you don’t tinker with it a little. I apply the styles Title and Subtitle to the appropriate text on my title page, and I center the dedication and the list of other books in the series. I add the heading “Map” to my map page so that it will appear in the table of contents.

As for the end matter, use Heading 1 on the titles of any pages you have (like Acknowledgments or About the Author) so that they will appear in the table of contents. Highlight any links you have (for example, to your website where people can subscribe to your e-news) and use “Insert” and “Hyperlink” to make them live. Note that Apple will reject your book if you link to any competitor sites like Amazon.

If you have any images to insert (e.g., author photo, map), hit Return to add a line break and insert the image on its own line. Format the image ahead of time to be a normal size (don’t insert it and then shrink it). I use a jpeg, RGB format, 300 ppi, and about 1200 pixels per side. Once the image is inserted, click on it and look for the picture formatting tab. Click on Alt text and type in text to describe the picture.



Add page breaks

Go through the book and add a page break in each place where it makes sense: before the copyright page, the dedication, Map, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and so on. Also, use a page break to create an extra, empty page after the dedication, where the table of contents will go.

If your novel has untitled sections within a chapter, insert a centered spacer like * * * * * but don't apply a heading style to the spacer.

Insert table of contents

The table of contents (TOC) is super important in an ebook because it links to the chapters so that readers can hop around the ebook without scrolling. You will insert a TOC in your front matter. A second TOC will also be generated when you upload the file, that the reader can access from their device's menu.

The process differs slightly if you are on a PC or Mac, and the steps are very specific. I always go directly to the KDP instructions in case the process has changed. I find the page by searching "KDP table of contents instructions"; as of 2022, the page is at https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G201605700. Note that some of the steps overlap with steps you've already done.

The basic steps are to (1) apply Heading 1 to your chapter titles; (2) place the cursor where you want the TOC (the blank page we created in the front matter), insert the TOC, and apply certain settings; and (3) insert a "bookmark" at the title of the TOC that tells devices where it is. Note that the instruction of "Set Show levels to 1" means the TOC will display text with the style Heading 1; if you have a more complicated structure that uses Heading 2 as well, you'd set this to show 2 levels instead.

Make a cover

The ebook cover is uploaded separately from the interior of the book; it should not be part of your main Word document. I use a jpeg in RGB format, 300 ppi, and 2500 pixels tall by 1562 pixels wide. (The ideal ratio listed by KDP is 1.6 to 1.)

Remember that you have to own the rights to content you use on the cover. KDP also has a Cover Creator tool, but I have not used it. I don't know if they let you download a cover created with the tool, to use on other sites.

Part 2: Upload your formatted file

Upload at KDP

You'll need a KDP account to self-publish your ebook at Amazon. Amazon has a few websites/accounts that can be confusing: (1) **Kindle Direct Publishing** is for publishing and selling a book on Amazon; (2) **Amazon Seller Central** is for re-selling print books on Amazon (the person may not be the author or publisher); and (3) **Amazon Author Central** is for managing your author profile and linking to the books and ebooks you've written (for sale on Amazon).

Amazon seems to link your usual account for buying things to these various author and seller accounts, which can be annoying if you want to use different email addresses or names. They do allow you to create pen names and separate author profiles under one Author Central account.

Once you are logged in at KDP, click on the buttons (currently a big yellow Create button) to create an ebook. A page will open with tabs for the ebook's details (title, author, and so on), content (the cover and interior files), and pricing. Most of the items to fill in are straightforward, and most of them can be updated later. Note, KDP has you move through these tabs from left to right, saving as you go. If you later need to update something, you have to go through them all again to "publish" any changes.

The **description** is what will appear on the ebook's page when it is live on Amazon. No matter what I type, I end up with odd line breaks and have to come back and edit this after the ebook is live. The **keywords** and **categories** tell Amazon how to categorize your book; there are entire workshops about how Amazon uses these details and how to make them work to your advantage.

On the content tab, cross your fingers and **upload** the formatted Word file and your cover jpeg. Regarding the **DRM option**, I don't bother with it anymore because I've read that it annoys readers and book pirates know how to remove it, but you might want to enable it. If you have your own ISBN, the publisher name you type here must match the name you used where you bought the ISBN (in the US, this is the Bowker monopoly) because Amazon will compare them.

Save a draft and launch the **previewer**. Click through the book and make sure it looks okay. Note, I have tried to download the Kindle Previewer and found it to be wonky (won't stay open, cannot find my ebook) so I usually just look with the online one.

Once you've approved the files, fill in the pricing page. If you enroll in KDP Select, you cannot sell your book outside of Amazon. If you want the larger royalty amount, you need to price your ebook in the range indicated.

Click "Publish Your Kindle eBook" and you're done. The book will go through review and appear on Amazon for preorder or sale, depending on the launch date you chose. I've had the process get "stuck" a few times where a week passes with no activity, but when I contacted KDP (from the KDP website), they got to me pretty quickly.

Upload at Draft2Digital

I use Draft2Digital (D2D) to sell my ebook on numerous non-Amazon platforms. The process is pretty similar to uploading at KDP. You need an account. Once you are logged in, click on the big button to "Add New Book" and start filling in information. The four tabs are Details, Layout, Preview, and Publish.

On the Layout page, you can add automated front and end matter. This is useful if you want to, for example, be able to update your About the Author page in the end matter and have it update in all your published ebooks. I have not used this feature yet. (I tried and found it a little confusing. I wasn't sure how to have it apply to some of my books and not others.)

On the Preview page, you can add some fancier items like drop caps and decorations. I often click through these and always end up back at the simple style, but YMMV.

On the Publish page, I select all the options except Amazon. If you publish directly through KDP, you do not want to select Amazon in D2D.

Once the ebook is published, D2D will send it to all the platforms you chose and email you as they approve it, one by one. On the book's main page in D2D, the "universal book link" has links to all the platforms. At the bottom left is a box you can use to download the files. (This is useful for things like giveaways where you want to email the winner the epub file directly.)

D2D offers author pages, but you access them through a different, linked account at the Books2Read website. Finally, I'll add that every time I have had a question and contacted D2D, I've gotten a friendly email back pretty quickly, with a clear answer.