

# SELF-PUBLISHING FOR SANE PEOPLE

(WHO WANT TO STAY THAT WAY)



AN OTAKU SURVIVAL GUIDE



genre you write in. While fan fiction.net may be a good ego boost with everyone saying “OMG, I LOVE YOU,” it’s probably not the best place to find a good editor. Personally, I’ve used Critters and Forward Motion, both of which you can find out more about in the resource section. I finally found a great editor who tells me both what she loves about my work and what confuses her. She’s not afraid to tell me when I’m completely missing the point, and she pushes me to make my writing clearer. Plus, she catches all my stupid grammar mistakes.

That’s what you need. Now go find your own—I’m not sharing... (‘Cause then you might pay her and she’d learn she’s good enough to charge me... let’s forget I said that.)

## TITLE

Throughout the process, think about your title. This is going to be a very important point of the book creation process. If it’s a series or even a trilogy, you probably need to think of a name for the overall book set and then the name of this specific book. There are a million theories on titling a book, and it’s not something that I’ve mastered yet. My best advice is market research. See what kind of titles are selling in the genre/gender group you write in. The same goes for comic books.

## DESIGN & LAYOUT

This is possibly the most important part of your book. And I’m not just saying that because design is my specialty. Do you want to be calling up bookstores saying, “It’s really a good book, you just have to get past the cover?”

The answer is, of course not. If you have money to spend on your book, this is where you should spend it. Slapping your brother’s

artwork on the cover is not going to cut it if you want to sell this in bookstores. Even a great artist might not understand what it takes to compose a marketable cover. And I’m not just saying this in hopes that you will hire me to design it, it’s the truth.

As far as artwork goes, you or a designer can find plenty of royalty-free pictures and artwork on pages like istock.com. If you use an artist, you can either pay them up front, or discuss if they are willing to work for royalties (a percentage of the book sales). This is also an option if you are looking for interior illustrations to a book.

Still, if you’re going to be laying out your own book, you need to concentrate on both the cover and the interior. That’s the other thing amateurs often overlook, how important the text or comic layout inside is.

## COVER

That old adage, “Don’t judge a book by its cover” is only repeated because, well, everyone \*does\* judge it by the cover.

This is the first thing a person sees in the store or at an artists’ alley. It’s your calling card and your first line of advertising. If you are intent on doing your own cover, there are some things you desperately need to keep in mind.

1. Consider your genre. Study the covers of books similar to yours and figure out why they work or don’t work for you.
2. Consider your trim size. This is going to be the size of your book. Typically, you’ve got your manga size (5”x7”), mass market paperback (4”x7”), and hardcover/ trade paperback (5 3/16”x8 1/4” to 6”x9”). Children’s books are a whole different set of sizes, so keep that in mind as well.
3. The spine and cover should flow together and will both say a lot about the book. The back cover meanwhile should continue

the design, but say in text what the cover says in pictures.

4. Target gender. Sure, we'd all like our books to be read by everyone, but chances are, your book is more likely to appeal to males or females, and you should design your cover with that in mind.

Okay, I'll let you in on some cover secrets. Stuff that will seem obvious once I explain it, but that chances are, you never really noticed before.

- Put a face on the cover if you want to make a connection with the reader. Better yet, have the person looking at the reader. Personally, I think this works better for books written in the 3rd person point of view.
- Chick lit and high school drama books tend to want the reader to put themselves in the place of the main character. Because of this, they show only the bottom half, the middle, a shoe, or any part of the person besides their face. Or else the cover might be more cartoony and less realistic, again to let the reader put themselves into the book.
- Keep the cover clutter-free. That is one of the surest marks of an amateur, that they try to shove too many things onto the cover. Even if you want to put multiple characters on the cover, there should be one or two that are definitely the initial focal point of the casual glance. The person can then pick up the cover and appreciate the details in the background. The title of the book can also serve as that initial focal point.
- Different gender focused books have different covers. Boys' and cross-gender books tend to incorporate symbols and designs. Girls' books tend to feature people, more specifically, females. Adult books tend to vary their covers more by genre than gender, but keep in mind that genres tend to have more readers in a certain gender.

- Use complimentary colors and don't drive the reader crazy with too much text or bright colors.
- If you intend this to be a series, build brand/character recognition by using the same character or theme on each book cover. Your goal in that case is to make sure that if someone sees your character on anything, they know exactly who they are. The same goes for comic books/web comics. Still, remember not to over crowd the cover. You've got plenty of interior pages to introduce all the cast.
- Study the other books on the shelves. Something that is radically different is not going to sell well. You want your book to both fit in with the other books and have elements that stand out.
- Don't try to make your book an odd shape like a circle, star, or anything other than a rectangle. The bookstores are going to hate the book because they can't shelve it easily with everything else.

## BACK COVER AND SPINE

Both of these are elements that I could go on about for pages. I think one of the most important parts of the spine is how it displays the subtype of the book. This is especially important in the children's or young adult sections, because all of the genres are grouped under one heading. Establishing at a glance what type of book yours is can go a long way toward making a person pull it off the shelf. This is also where your title comes into play.

The back cover should use text that will sell the book. Describe the set up/ first few chapters in about a paragraph. This paragraph is the last place to catch the reader. They've seen the spine and the

At just under one hundred words, it gives you an idea of what the books are about, hints at a humorist tone, but also conveys that there will be useful information within. Now, this is more of a pitch I would use for advertising the books to the reader. A pitch directed more at booksellers would include more information about why the readers will want to pick up and buy the books. Of course, since I am publishing and selling the book myself (bookstores only want something with a spine, not booklets like these are), I don't need to worry about how to sell the book to bookstores.

#### SIMPLE, AIN'T IT?

As I said previously, this is not an easy process to teach. Some of it involves a lot of tears and phone calls. One strategy is to go to Book Expo America and just start talking to distributors and wholesalers. Ask to make an appointment to talk to them for ten minutes, and then tell them why they should be carrying your book.

So, if after all of that, you're still interested in self-publishing, it's time to get reading. The resource section is essential, because I have not managed to teach you everything you need to know in the preceding pages. My resources list is in order of the most essential books to those that I think are just handy.

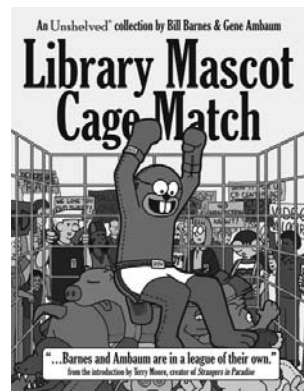
Another resource is your local small publisher association, as well as SPAN, the Small Publishers Association of North America.

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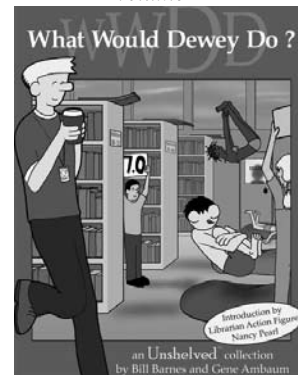
A STUDY OF COVERS

Here we have the self-published web comic Unshelved (<http://www.overduemedia.com>), written by Gene Ambaum and drawn by Bill Barnes. Now, these are some great examples of self-published books because they don't really look self-published. The covers t



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well next to other comic strip collections and they play to their audiences. From the first three covers, it is clear that this is a comic strip about libraries and books. It's also clear that the content is going to be a bit quirky and not what you would normally expect from a library.

While the third cover is more silly and the fourth is a parody of a culture icon (and a great tie into the online audience that loves to make parodies of the iPod commercials themselves), these covers can afford to move away from the library theme, as the series is somewhat established at this point. The titles are also great, because they make references to popular culture and call out to both a modern and intellectual crowd, just like the comic does.

Now, since this is a series, we also notice that the same characters are used on each cover. Dewy is the main character, so he is on every cover, but we also see the beaver and the kid with black hair, both of which are memorable characters in the books.

Another thing the covers do well is show a multitude of cast members without cluttering up the cover. There is still a place for your eye to focus, yet there are many interesting things going on in the background.

## WHAT TO DO WHEN IT ALL GOES WRONG...

YOUR RIVAL CHALLENGES YOU TO JAN-KEN TO DETERMINE ARTISTS' ALLEY SPACE

Jan-Ken-Pon is a popular game in Japan that is played the same as rock, paper, scissors. At the beginning of the game, the two people say in unison "jan, ken, pon" and on pon they put forward their hand choices. Rock is a fist, paper an open palm, and scissors the V finger shape. Rock then crushes scissors, paper engulfs rock, and scissors cuts the paper.

In case of a loss, it's not cheating if you can put your marketing skills to good use and at least get a rematch.

If you chose rock and they chose paper, explain how your rock is larger than their piece of paper (holding your fist loosely can help, so as to keep their hand from being able to engulf yours).

If you chose scissors and they chose rock, explain how your scissors are made from industrial steel and their rock is merely a piece of soft wood that they mistook for a rock.

If you chose paper and they chose scissors, help them understand that their scissor blades are dull and can't cut through your cardstock paper.

And if any of these get you a win or rematch, then you just gained marketing points.

# CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS



Cover Artist

Unshelved Covers used with permission of Bill Barnes.  
<http://www.overduemedia.com/>



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# CHECK LISTS

## GETTING READY TO GO TO PRESS

### Editing

Create a style sheet

Ask a few friends who have a good grasp of grammar to read the book over  
Do a find for words/phrases you know you use too much (like her lips quivered; his brown eyes crinkled)

Read the entire text out loud to a friend who has a copy of the text to look at and match up with what you say

Research your title to make sure it's different than other books

### Design

Check over random pages for errors and readability

Print the book out in the final type and trim size and have a friend read this to make sure it doesn't hurt their eyes or have other problems

Find out what format your printer wants

Make sure you have any and all illustrations and that they are in their proper places

### Business

Get an ISBN assigned

Complete and submit LCCN form

Obtain Bookland EAN Scanning Symbol

Complete and submit the ABI form

Get any needed permissions (photos, song lyrics, etc.)

### Marketing

Start your marketing research – find names of reviewers, magazines, associations, etc. that might be interested in your book

Create a website

Look for conventions that might be interested in having you speak and where you might sell your book

Keep in mind artists' alleys and dealers rooms. Sell up fast at big conventions