

GROUNDWERK 7.5 // ARTIST SELF-PUBLISHING  
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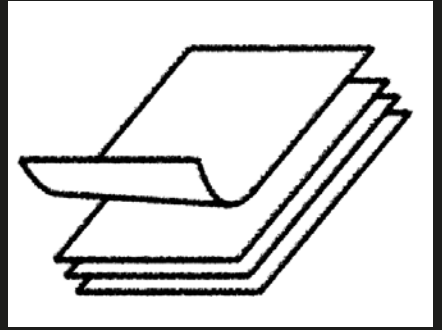
# Considering print publications for artists and self publishers

Publication is the act of making something public; this can take many forms from posters, pamphlets and books to podcasts, websites and performances.

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When making books how can decisions about different types of printing, paper, formats and binding inform the way content is read and experienced?

This resource highlights some considerations for artists and self publishers approaching a book project. Split into sections on design, production and distribution readers will find that many elements of publishing are interconnected and it is useful to cross reference these sections. A series of prompts relating to each stage are intended to help you develop your own research and identify a process for making and distributing books that is relevant to your practice.



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# Design

Use the following prompts to develop an outline of your project. This will inform the design process and enable you to think through problems prior to production. You can use the resulting project outline to engage a graphic designer to work with or if taking on the design yourself use it to help make practical and aesthetic decisions.

Why publish? What is the purpose of your publication?

Who do you want to see and read your publication? Who is your public or audience?

What similar publications exist already? How could your project relate to what is already out there?

Why a printed publication?

What is it about what you want to publish that makes print a suitable medium? Are there other ways to publish your work that would be more appropriate?

What is the budget for the project? Can you break it down into amounts for design, production, marketing and distribution? Do you intend to sell the publication—at what price?

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“Designing involves developing your own approach... as everyone has a slightly different idea of what makes a book, newspaper, magazine layout work and none is correct.”

Jonathan Zeitlyn

How can the publication extend the processes and values present in the content?

What is the content?  
Who created or is creating the content? Are there multiple authors/artists or just one? Is the content made collaboratively?

What will be the tone of the publication? How can you achieve that through the pacing of the content?

Can you break the content down into sections and how will you give certain elements priority?

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What sorts of content will you be working with? E.g. texts, images, a combination.

What does the publication need to look like? How do the content and aesthetic choices relate?

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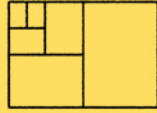
What format is suitable?

What material restrictions (e.g., what is available within your budget, what do you have on hand, are you tied to a particular printing or binding method, a page size or paper stock) do you have to work within?

How much is your budget and how much of the labour and production can you afford to outsource?

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# page size



Consider using a non-standard page size, or perhaps a B size, based on the sheet size of the paper

chosen (often comes in B1 / B2 sheets). If printing commercially, ask the printers which size is the most economical: it will have the least amount of waste and will be cheaper.

# printing

## Risograph:

- Spot colours.
- A3 maximum size.
- Any quantity, but the more prints the more cost effective it is.
- Often slight imperfections in registration / printing.

## Digital:

- CMYK.
- Large format, but often only up to A3 front and back printing.
- Any quantity.
- Quality of digital printer can vary.

## Offset Litho:

- Spot colours + CMYK.
- Large format
- Any quantity, but the more prints the more cost effective it is.
- Usually good quality reproduction.

# binding

## Opens Flat

### Pamphlet:

- Up to 32 pp, printed as spreads.
- Sewn or stitched.
- Soft or hard cover.

### Multi-section:

- Page count is a multiple of 4.
- Printed in sections (12/16 pp each)
- Sewn.
- Soft or hard cover.

### Coil or Wir-O:

- Any page count.
- Single sheets.
- Cover can be attached.

## Doesn't Open Flat:

### Perfect Bound:

- Spine should be thicker than 5 mm.
- Single sheets.
- Glued
- Soft or hard cover.

### Stab Stitch:

- Any number of pages.
- Single sheets.
- Soft or hard cover.



## content

consider:

text length and reading style

illustrations and photos display, proportions and reproduction

## audience

consider:

types of audiences

physical ways to hold / read printed matter

accessibility

## budget

consider:

budget and retail price

creative solutions can come from cost restrictions

black & white printing

economical paper sizes

choice of materials

## materials



Coated paper can be matte, semi-gloss or glossy, and are better for colour reproduction.

Uncoated stocks are better for reading text and can have a tactile feel. Colour paper stock can be expensive; printing a tinted background could be a cheaper alternative.

## colour



CMYK: offset litho & digital print. Best option for full colour, but its range doesn't include bright blue, bright green or neons. CMYK offset

is often better quality than digital printing, but it is only an option for runs of more than 300/400 copies.

Spot colour: offset litho & Risograph. 1 or 2 spot colours throughout can often be cheaper than CMYK; they offer a wider range, including metallic and neon.

Grayscale: cheapest way to print; if the book has pictures and text, it might be worth splitting these into sections so that the printers can print black text separately from full colour, cutting overall costs.

## Format

To begin working on a layout for your publication you'll need to decide on a format, including the finished page size, a rough page count, printing and binding methods

The diagram on the previous page gives some guidance on making a decision on format. It is recommended to test out formats if you have materials available, even if just to cut a few sheets of paper to the page sizes you are considering.

## Layout

Begin by mapping out your content in reference to the format of your publication. You could do this as a list broken down by pages, it is useful to break it down to page spreads to get an idea of what content will sit together.

If you have access to materials and tools you can make a mock up of the publication and sketch out some rough layouts. This will give you a good understanding of how the publication will communicate—how it will look, feel and operate in a reader's hand.

“Roughs are a way of thinking, on paper, visually. This is the only way of thinking about design, as it is a visual process that needs to be tried and tested, so that you can see the results on paper”

Jonathan Zeitlyn

It is possible to create layouts to use for printing by hand though it will have a significant effect on the final aesthetic and clarity of your publication; high quality results require an organised approach, time, and skill.

There are options for setting up your publication digitally, though professionally Adobe have a fierce monopoly on graphics software. You could instead use an online graphics platform like [Canva](#) or an open source alternative like [Scribus](#).

Each software has particular aesthetic traits or defaults, especially if using templated files. How you can utilise these limitations to suit your needs?

### Working with grids

There are many ways to approach grids, some very rigid others more intuitive, you should always be willing to break from your grid when the content requires it. These breaks in the rhythm, provide peaks and troughs in the pacing of your content.

Grids give consistency and the degree of uniformity you choose to develop in your layout will either help or hinder the reader in navigating your content.

Grids are made by making decisions regarding your content and the format of your publication:

- Page size

- Size of margins

- Width of columns of text

- Space between columns (and spaces between other content)

- Space and position of headlines

- Space for illustrations

- Position of page numbers and other page information



## Type

There are a huge number of options and in most cases there are multiple fonts that would be suitable for a project, it's unlikely there is a perfect font for the job.

What fonts do you have access to?

Here are some libre font collections as a starting point:

[www.design-research.be/by-womxn](http://www.design-research.be/by-womxn)

[www.velvetyne.fr](http://www.velvetyne.fr)

[www.fonts.google.com](http://www.fonts.google.com)

To purchase a font or font family you can purchase from an online font store such as font-shop or myfonts or go direct through the type designer. There is a lot of variation in price from £5 to £180 per font.

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Concentrate on how you use the chosen font/s within the layout, choosing practical font sizes and printing out samples at 100% scale to check how it is working on paper.

Is the type layout you've test printed easy to read?

How important is it that the type is legible?

Are there access needs that you need to consider when making typographic decisions? Such as neuro-diverse readers, vision impairment, age or level of education. You may determine this based on your audience or you can address these issues regardless.

It is difficult to separate the thinking around design and production when making a publication, this is especially true in artist and self publishing where the boundaries between roles and processes are much more fluid. Many of the considerations in these sections will overlap. Here we will offer some simple prompts, a grid for determining some basic print specs, a template for asking for initial quotes from printers and a glossary of terms. These are all intended to be a starting point and you'll learn more about the design and production as you refine the specifications for each project.

Does the format of the images affect the layout of the page, or are these to be cropped?

Does the text need to be arranged into columns? If so a wider format might be better.

Does the book need to open flat? How does the reader hold the book when reading? Is this accessible?

Which paper stock? An uncoated stock can have a more tactile feel, and it is better for reading long text. Coated stock can be better for photo reproduction but might not work well with text. Ask the printers what house stock they have.

If you are outsourcing the printing start a conversation with the printers early on to see what they recommend and what is achievable within your budget.

Get a proof made, the printers often send a digital proof, but you can also ask for a printed proof, blank dummy, or make a proof yourself.

Which type of printing?	SIZE OF PRINT	NUMBER OF COPIES	COST	PRINT QUALITY		COLOUR	REGISTRATION
				photographs	solids		
<b>DIGITAL PRINTING</b>	up to SRA3 front and back and large format one side	any	cheap set-up cost, increasingly expensive with large print-runs	fair	fair	CMYK	it may vary
<b>RISOGRAPH</b>	mostly A3	any	cheap set-up cost, cheap print-runs	possible through 4 colour layers	good	spot colours	difficult
<b>SCREEN PRINTING</b>	up to A0	20 – 100	expensive set-up cost, print-run and labour costs depend on printers	possible through 4 colour layers	good	spot colours	good
<b>OFF-SET LITHO</b>	up to B1	500 +	expensive set-up cost, increasingly cheap print-runs	good	good	CMYK and spot colours	good

## Quote requests

Here is a basic set of specifications for asking printers for a quote.

Title:

Format: Page count of cover + text pages

Size: Page size (not spread)

Printing: How many pages are colour throughout and how many are black and white? Are you using any spot colours (if so, which? Pantone?)

Materials: Cover stock name and gsm. Text pages stock name and gsm.

Binding: e.g. PUR perfect bind, coil bound, stapled pamphlet

Finishing: e.g. Foil blocking, embossing, die cut, lamination

Delivery address:

Quantity:

### 4pp

Here 'pp' stands for 'printed pages' and refers to the fold used on a sheet of paper. Something at 4pp will usually be a single sheet, folded once to give four pages.

### Blind embossing

An embossed image without any ink, foil or other finishes added. The resultant relief image retains the same colour as the paper into which it has been pressed.

### Case bound

Binding using glue to hold signatures to a case made of binder board covered with fabric, plastic or leather. Hard-backed books are case bound.

### Coated paper

When a clay, latex or other layer is applied to paper, resulting in lower absorbency, greater reflectivity and sharper images. Coatings can have dull, gloss, matte or more exotic finishes. Uncoated papers don't have the above additional layers.

### Cut sizes

The smaller sizes of paper, such as A4, derived by cutting down the 'parent' sizes used by commercial printing presses.

### Deckle edge

The feathery edge of a paper produced by traditional handmade processes. Not a guarantee of quality, as machinemade papers can emulate this quite easily.

### Dummy book

Is a usually provided by your printer and is made to the spec of your future print job — size, page count, paper stock, binding method — but is blank inside, no printing.

### Embossing

When a given shape is punched into the back of a sheet of card, causing a relief image to appear on the front. Debossing indents the image into the surface.

### Foil blocking

Gold, silver, pigmented and holographic materials applied to printed materials for decorative effect. These are often accompanied by embossing techniques.

### Folding

The process of converting a flat printed sheet into a folded section before trimming.

### GSM

The weight of paper is measured in grams per square metre, or GSM for short.

### Perfect binding

Sounds a lot more glamorous than it is: a paper block is glued into a wrap-around cover, just like in a regular paperback book. PUR binding is a variant on this that uses extra strength, temperature-resistant glue.

### Saddle stitching

The process of folding sheets in half, with staples or stitching in the middle. The page count must be divisible by four.

### Section

In bookbinding, a section, gathering, or signature is a group of sheets folded in half, to be worked into the binding as a unit.

### Trim size

The dimensions of a printed page after any excess edges have been cut away. Be careful not to confuse this with cut size.

### UV coating / varnish

An attractive, glossy coating applied to any printed surface and then dried on-press using ultraviolet (UV) light.

### Wire bound

When holes are punched down the side of the page and then held in place with wire.

# Distribution

Publication is the act of making something public.

Alongside considerations about the content, design and form of a book comes the question of how to reach an audience and build a readership. Distribution is the dissemination and circulation of books through selling, promoting, sharing, packing, posting and generally getting the books into the readers' hands.

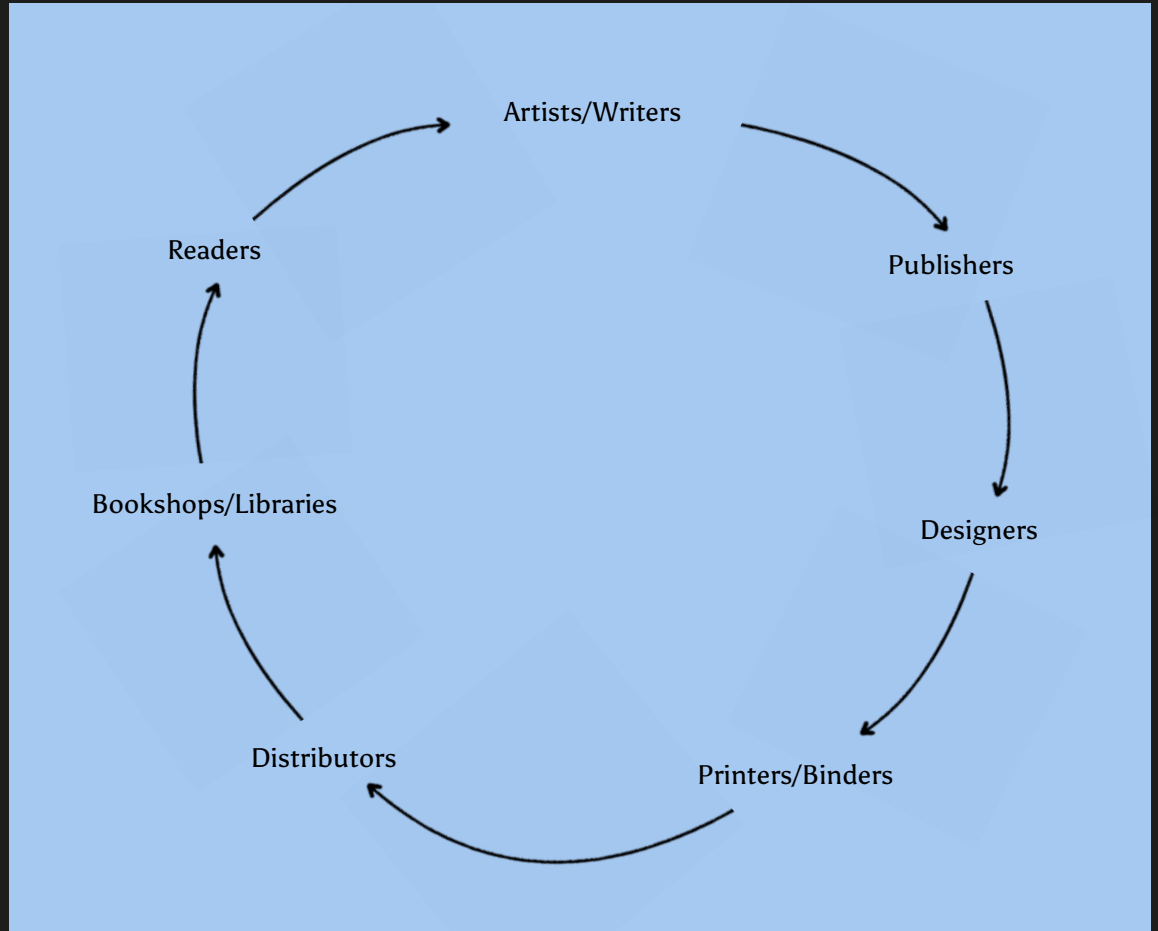
Through distribution we attend to 'the social life of the book,' how it finds its readers and how they connect to it:

“[P]ublication in its fullest sense—not just the production of books, but the production of a public. This public, which is more than a market, is created through physical production, digital circulation, and social gathering. Together these construct a space of conversation which beckons a public into being.”

Matthew Stadler, Co-founder, Publication Studio.

Distribution can be local and global, physical and digital. Independent and self-published books don't have access to the same distribution networks as mainstream publishing and so the work is often done by the publisher/artist/writer themselves. Distribution can be time consuming and requires some admin and organisation, however if considered as part of the overall process of publication, distribution becomes integral to connecting with readers and cultivating an audience long-term. The following pages attempt to highlight some key elements of distribution, practical tips and set out some prompts for you to consider in relation to your own project.

Book making and distribution are necessarily collaborative processes.





What networks do you have available to you?

How can these networks help you to share, promote and distribute your work? E.g. friends, community groups, collaborators, social media, mailing lists.

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How will you reach beyond your friends and immediate networks?

Is your project collaborative?

Do you have a co-publisher or project partner with their own network?

Can you pool contacts to reach a larger audience and share the marketing and distribution?

Can you share the workload?

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How will you engage or create your public? E.g. Make the books available, promote them, generate sales, create opportunities for conversation around the books online or in person.

In the 1970's the writer Lucy Lippard, who was involved in establishing Printed Matter, a bookstore in New York focused on the distribution of artists' books which is now a key platform and resource for artists' publishing, spoke about the artist's book as a "democratic multiple" and famously called for artists' books to appear in "supermarkets, drugstores, and airports". While the audience for artists' books today remains fairly specialised there is a lot to be learned from Lippard's aims for distribution, reaching beyond your immediate networks, considering the effect of different environments on how people interact with books and crucially making something that is affordable and therefore will reach a wider audience and be accessible to more people.

Where would you like to see your book stocked?

Make a list that includes your dream stockist and work towards it.

Research bookshops, galleries, artist-run spaces, online shops and other venues that stock independent and self published books. Is there an open submission policy or an online specification form on their website. Contact book buyers by email with brief info about the book and make appointments to show the physical copies.

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How will you process trade orders?

Standard trade discount for bookshop orders is 40% but this can vary. Do you need to recoup your costs through sales? Does your retail price include a margin for offering discount? Larger discounts can be offered to generate pre-orders or to encourage larger order quantities but again

consider how much you need to make on each sale. Think about setting your trade terms (e.g. sale or return, 30 days payment period) so that you have something to work from even if you have to compromise sometimes. Supply books with a delivery note/invoice, charge for postage unless you hand deliver, keep good records and follow up on payments and returns!

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Can you enter your books into libraries, digital archives or reading rooms?

Libraries can be a great way to make your work accessible to a wider audience and also preserve it within specialist collections e.g., artists' books collections. This longevity can be particularly important for books produced in small runs or printed on demand. Practical considerations when approaching the design and form of a book should take into consideration its distribution, will it sit well on a shelf, is it

durable, will a bookseller be able to display it easily, will it be lost if displayed spine out, does it have a bar code to be easily scanned at point of sale, does it have an ISBN so that it can be entered and searched for in bookshop and library catalogue systems?

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Should you work with a distributor or do it yourself?

It can be difficult to find a distributor for independent/self-published books for several reasons; size of print run, commercial appeal etc. Distributors can take around 60% of the retail price which is often unmanageable for small publishers. The benefits of working with a distributor is that they manage fulfillment and delivery of orders and payments and may also distribute internationally. Using a distributor also puts your book in conversation with others in the catalogue. Distributing yourself can be time

consuming but will mean you retain more of the profits and will also allow you to establish relationships with book buyers directly which can be beneficial to building an audience.

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What other sales opportunities are there?

If you are doing your own distribution, think about opportunities for direct sales where you take the full proceeds e.g., via your online shop where you pack and post orders to individual customers, at book fairs, markets etc. Look for opportunities to tie the book to an event or exhibition. What other models of distribution are there? Can you offer a paid subscription to your books to sustain your readership over time? Is there a network you can establish with other small publishers/artists to help distribute each others work?

There is an extensive network of art book fairs and zine fairs in the UK and internationally which are a great way to promote and sell your work in a sociable environment, talk to readers and book buyers directly, sell to librarians, put your books in context with other publishers, draw inspiration from their work and research designers to work with.

Can you share the cost of a table with another publisher at a book fair?

Can you ask a bookshop to take your publications to their table at a fair?

Can you programme an event, talk or signing as part of the fair?

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Physical or online events are an opportunity to generate interest and engagement with your publications, make sales and build an audience.

Do you or your authors have a relationship with any bookshops / venues that would host an event to launch or promote a book?

What would you want that event to include? A talk, a reading, drinks, food, a film screening, a display of books.

Can you offer a special launch price for the book?

Can you arrange several events in different cities, a book tour, where the author takes a stack of books with them and manages sales at the event or send copies ahead to the venue specifically as event stock?

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Physical production and digital circulation are not mutually exclusive. Many publishers use a combination of physical and digital publishing and dissemination to create a diversity of publishing and reading practices.

Is there a digital counterpart for your publication that will help to build an audience for your work? Or is there an element made specifically for digital distribution? What are the alternative forms of distribution online? E.g. free pdfs, chapters released via an app, websites, online magazines, podcasts, poster downloads, ebooks.

How does making something free at the point of use effect its accessibility and reach?

Is there certain work suited to certain platforms and channels, how does the way in which it is disseminated effect the readers' interaction with the work?

The Serving Library, for example, produces a journal in distinct online and print formats. These texts, or 'bulletins', are released first as downloadable pdfs from their website, then collected in a printed volume every autumn. Publication Studio also make books available to order via their website either as freshly made paperback or an ebook (pdf). The books can also be read via their online library.

Marketing your publication is about using your available networks and also approaching platforms online, in print or in person that have shared interests and will promote your work.

Make a list of places you would like to see your books featured, look at where other publishers work has been reviewed.

Send pdf or physical press copies to writers for review in magazines, blogs, papers.

Is there a bookshop who will offer you a window display or dedicated shelf space?

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Post extracts/images on social media to direct people to your website and online shop.

How can a sustained digital presence help to maintain and build a readership beyond the point of sale? E.g. Share updates on writers/artists new work, reviews, events, promotions, videos and podcasts/ radio.

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If you use a crowdfunding platform like Kickstarter to raise funds for the publication then the donations can act as pre-orders for the book and also help to build an audience for future projects. It might also be possible to gain some press coverage for the campaign and raise awareness about the publication. Does the book have a timely subject matter, an exhibition tie-in or is it part of a larger project with other partners? Look at where similar successful campaigns have been featured.

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## Print on demand

An example of an alternative distribution model:

Publication Studio uploads digital files of books to a shared server so that when a customer order is placed online via the PS website the order notification and funds go to the nearest studio (there are 11 worldwide) who will print and bind the book and post it to the customer. This reduces the cost of shipping and also acts as a distribution network. In opposition to storing a run of books or sending large batches to a distributor which sit in a warehouse awaiting orders from bookshops, PS only prints books as they are

ordered, one at a time, by hand and on-demand. The retail price covers the cost of production and a small profit which is split 50/50 between author and studio. Each studio works with artists and writers locally and has its own local community, audience and links to bookshops, they also act as caretakers for all the books in the shared PS catalogue by hosting launches, fulfilling orders and promoting work by artists and authors from the other studios.

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## Ecosystem

Buy books as well as producing them if you can. Support the bookshops that stock your books. Take inspiration from the design and format of other books.

Attend book launches as well as hosting them. These can be good opportunities to network, meet like-minded people and also to see what makes a successful launch, what works and what doesn't for your next event.

## Use libraries

Share book recommendations, read reviews, talk about books, start/join a reading group.

Seek feedback and advice and offer it in return. Some publishers, such as Book Works, offer Artist Surgeries that are free sessions to support artists in the development of their own book project. You could also set up an informal peer feedback group with friends and collaborators to share work.

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“..Through borrowing and lending, discussions in bars or in the tramway, texts may (will?) start a group, trigger a collective, be a shifter towards something else: a becoming. What's more to life than books is to be found in the readers.”

Benjamin Thorel



### Sale or Return / Consignment

A common agreement by which booksellers take a quantity of books with the right to return any unsold stock to the publisher and only pay for what has sold. You can either supply the books with a delivery note and then invoice for the copies sold once the returns have been made or issue an invoice with delivery (with an extended payment period for the consignment) and then issue a credit note for the returns and the balance is then due for payment.

### Delivery note

A note included with delivery of goods that states the title, ISBN, quantity and retail price, trade discount, publishers' name and contact details and the customers' name and address.

### Invoice

A request for payment of goods sold. An invoice should include the publishers' name, address and contact details and those of the bookshop/customer. A breakdown of the quantity sold of each title and the total due (price minus trade discount) + postage costs. Include your payment terms (30 days standard) and bank details for transfer.

### Credit Note

Issued after a bookshop has returned stock to the publisher to detail the quantity returned of each title and the total value after trade discount. This can then be applied to the original invoice to calculate the balance due for payment. Larger publishers apply credit to customers' accounts to be redeemed

against future orders. This is difficult to track without accounting software and it is more simple for small publishers to invoice for the amount due after returns.

### ISBN

International Standard Book Number, a thirteen digit number that identifies a book. Bookshops, libraries and online booksellers use this number in their searching, cataloguing and sales processes. Not all self published books have ISBNs but it helps with distribution to bookshops and libraries who refer to databases for info updated by the ISBN agency. ISBNs can be bought by publishers in batches from Neilsen.

# Further Reading

## Links

Rabbits Road: <https://www.rabbitsroadpress.com/>

Camp Books: <https://www.campbooks.biz/>

Digital Archive of Artists' Publishing (DAAP): <https://www.bannerrepeater.org/digital-archive-of-artists-books>

Wendy's Subway: <https://www.wendyssubway.com/>

London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA): <https://londonbookarts.org/>

Printed Matter: <https://www.printedmatter.org/>

The Serving Library: <http://www.servinglibrary.org/>

Publication Studio: <https://publicationstudio.biz/>

A6 Books: <https://londonbookarts.org/a6-books/>

Good Press: <http://goodpress.co.uk/>

Book Works: <https://www.bookworks.org.uk/>

Readers and Publishers: <http://www.readersandpublishers.org/>

## Some art book distributors

Anagram Books: <https://anagrambooks.com/>

Art Data: <https://artdata.co.uk/>

DAP: <https://www.artbook.com/>

Idea Books: <https://www.ideabooks.nl/>

*A Book About- What' More to Life Than Books*, Corinn Gerber & Benjamin Thorel (Eds.), Publication Studio, Paraguay Press, Art Metropole, 2014.

*A Study of Publishing Practices in Malaysia: KL, Penang and Ipoh*, Heiba Lamara, Sofia Niazi, Rose Nordin, OOMK, 2016

*Again, A Time Machine: from distribution to archive*, Gavin Overall & Jane Rolo (Eds.), Books Works, 2012

Book Works *Fact Sheets*: <https://www.bookworks.org.uk/resources>, last accessed: 14/09/20.

*Distributed*, David Blamey & Brad Haylock (Eds.), Open Editions, 2018

*Making Art During Fascism*, Beth Pickens, The Women's Center for Creative Work Los Angeles, 2017

*Making Books: a guide to creating hand-crafted books by the London Centre for Book Arts*, Simon Goode & Ira Yonemura, Pavilion Books 2016

*Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing Since 1894*, Alessandro Ludovico, Onomatopée, 2012

*Print: How You Can Do it Yourself*, Jonathan Zeitlyn, Inter-Action, 1975

*Publishing as Artistic Practice*, Annette Gilbert (Ed.), Sternberg Press, 2016

*Publishing in the Realm of Plant Fibers and Electrons*, Temporary Services, 2014.

*Publishing Manifestos: An International Anthology from Artists and Writers*, Michalis Pichler (Ed.), MIT Press, 2019

*Put About: A Critical Anthology on Independent Publishing*, Maria Fusco & Ian Hunt (Eds.), Book Works, 2004

*Some Notes on Books and Printing: a guide for authors and others*, Charles T Jacobi (1892) with additional texts by Esther McManus and S.S. Whetton (2018), Temporal Drag/A6 Books, 2018

*The Alternative Printing Handbook*, Jonathan Zeitlyn & Chris Treweek. Penguin, 1984

*The Form of the Book Book*, Sara De Bondt & Fraser Muggeridge (Eds.), Occasional Papers, 2009

*The Social Life of the Book*, Paraguay Press (2011-2015): <http://www.paraguaypress.com/slob>, last accessed 16/09/20

*What Is Publication Studio?* A talk for Guelph, Ontario, by Matthew Stadler: <https://musagetes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/What-is-Publication-Studio-by-Matthew-Stadler.pdf>, last accessed 14/09/20

*X-Operative*, Eleanor Vonne Brown (Ed.), X Marks the Bökship, 2014

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## GROUNDWERK 7.5 // ARTIST SELF-PUBLISHING

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