

Authoring and Self-Publishing Your First Textbook

Moderator: Jan Lyons, PhD

email: lyons.engr@gmail.com

Background:

What a year it has been – the epitome of “beware what you wish for.” I had long lamented that there was no even marginally appropriate text for my Risk Management course geared to technical professionals, when my department chair glibly remarked, “So, write one.” I had no idea what I was getting into. My proposal to a major publisher was accepted, however, the resulting contract was not acceptable to me. So, I began the venture to become self-published. I achieved my self-imposed deadline to have a text available for Spring semester. By the time this conference rolls around, I hope to be able to answer the question, “Was it worth it?”

Things that went well:

- Was a member of a list-serve in my academic discipline where job openings, calls for papers, etc. are broadcast. Had previously canvassed members for textbooks used to teach course offerings similar to mine - others were as frustrated as I was.
- Responded to a list-serve request for book ideas for a new textbook series. Book outline was peer-reviewed and recommended to the publisher by the series editor.
- Publisher sent outline out for marketing review and comment. Results returned to me when contract was offered.
- Collected model contract suggestions from TAA website. With the help of an attorney friend, reviewed and proposed changes to each contract clause.
- Got insights into self-publishing from Lulu at TAA conference.
- Using course outline and teaching notes, wrote 180 page draft in eight weeks.
- Uploaded the completed draft to Lulu and was available to students before classes started.
- Now enhancing the content and improving the illustrations according to publishing standards before promoting beyond Lulu.

Surprises:

- Once you get started you really get lost in the writing and the hours just fly by.
- It’s like writing a dissertation, you know there will be revisions. Just capture the ideas, then go back and polish the wording.
- Inserting illustrations takes time, especially getting the size and placement right.
- Translating the document into a pdf file can change things like special characters and spacing.
- Books have a lot of rules like right-left pages, appropriate fonts, total number of pages, page layout, etc.
- You own the copyright to your work just by declaring so.
- You can get an ISBN number from Lulu and have them promote your book in the Amazon and Barnes & Noble catalogs for a small fee. The author controls not only content but the cover, the price, and format preferences.

Keys to Success:

- Know your market - need for new material, market saturation (or lack of), target audience
- Peer review – topic, content, writing style and ability to communicate ideas
- Expert input on other than subject matter – legal, layout, etc.