

eBook-community FAQ

<http://fl.grp.vahoofs.com/v1/cNrYRTzuRmdpV1oj-YbZEV2RrGRuJBC87AXoTZsRsGYunBESkAMHmFu9vBtNEOrCfqumY65ZCk0eka2OYdLgHxGgV9C0AuX9uM0Ev8B/FAQ/eBookFAQ.htm>

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1. What are the characteristics of an eBook?

Despite its being in use for over twenty years, no-one has yet come up with a universally acceptable definition for the word 'eBook'. Some of the connotations associated with the term are:

The item:

- Is distributed and used as a single file – i.e. an encyclopaedia on CD is not generally considered to be an eBook.
- Is a *complete* work – i.e. not a chapter or an episode in a serial
- Is a *completed* work – i.e. a canonical and definitive work rather than a work in progress
- Contains some or all of the 'scholarly apparatus' usually associated with printed books – table of contents, preface, index, footnotes, appendices, etc.
- Is of the same length as a viable printed book – i.e. between 20,000 and 300,000 words
- Emphasises text rather than graphical content
- Has been or will be also published and distributed as a printed book
- Is not itself an application but is a 'document' file which can be opened in an application

In practice all of these have been overridden, separately and together, by material going under the name of 'eBooks'. Other terms to distinguish variant types have been suggested – 'eText', 'eNovella', 'eChapter', etc – but have not caught on in everyday use. Thus members of the public have no way of knowing what to expect when they buy an 'eBook', and this may be a factor in their relatively slow acceptance.

Current usage on the eBook-community group (June 2005) seems to have moved away from form and content and towards a normative definition: 'an eBook is anything that is distributed by an eBook distributor'. The circularity of this is not an issue as long as eBook distributors concentrate on material that matches some or all of the criteria above – and display normal integrity! – but may cause problems as their ambitions expand or

their morals decline.

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of eBooks?

Source: Wikipedia, *eBook* <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/eBook>>, with modifications

eBook advantages

- Text can be searched, except when represented in the form of images.
- Take up little space: hundreds may be carried together on one device or a single CD. One DVD can hold as many books as a small library.
- With a back-lit device eBooks may be read in low light or total darkness.
- Type size and type face may be adjusted for legibility unless DRM protection forbids it
- Can be used with text-to-speech software unless DRM protection forbids it
- eBooks without DRM protection are instantly copiable and can be backed up easily
- Distribution costs are extremely low, particularly for eBooks without DRM
- Errors in text eBooks can be corrected and amendments made while reading
- eBooks reduce environmental damage due to paper making
-

Print book advantages

- eBook devices can be expensive and fragile
- Obtaining and using eBooks may require technical skills, especially when multiple formats are involved
- Requires no reading device and hence no need for a power supply or batteries
- Print book pages usually have better contrast than existing eBook device screens making them easier to read for long periods
- Robust and durable in adverse environmental conditions
- Readable when severely damaged – ‘graceful degradation’
- It is difficult to modify a paper book without leaving traces, so print books, once issued, are fairly safe from malicious or politically-motivated modifications

3. What are the file formats in which eBooks are commonly distributed?

The history of eBooks has always been marked by strong tension among developers and distributors. This centres on six conflicting goals:

- To make eBooks universally available
- To provide eBooks with the same format and graphics options as printed books
- To prevent eBooks which have been sold from being redistributed for free
- To match the costs of providing eBooks with the public’s willingness to pay for them.
- To ‘lock’ eBook readers into a particular proprietary system that discourages

them from buying elsewhere.

- To 'improve' eBooks beyond the capabilities of paper books by adding animation, sound, text-based searching, etc.

Thus the text-based formats adopted by Project Gutenberg, for instance, admirably suit goals 1 and 4, since they are cheap to make, relatively compact and easy to copy, but they fail to address goals 2, 3 and 5. Copy-protected formats meet goal 3 at the expense of goal 1, but may increase costs (and discourage users) to the point where they no longer meet goal 4. Meeting goal 2 is surprisingly difficult; the formatting and graphics techniques used in printed books are often very subtle, and to try and make provision for all of these requires an extremely elaborate and complex markup system, which also may increase costs. Attempts to meet goal 5 have generally failed due to customer resistance, but may be revived at any time as technology changes. Goal 6, the all-singing, all-dancing eBook, was regarded as desirable by some commentators during the 90s, but generates less interest now. Some non-paper-book features, however, like automatic scrolling, text searching and the simultaneous display of text and endnotes, have been generally accepted as useful.

The diversity of eBook formats reflects a range of different distributor priorities regarding these goals, combined with technological changes and commercial competition. The format types below, with examples, are listed roughly in order of their universality, from most to least universal. Note that files of any type may go on to be packaged into, say, a ZIP or RAR file.

- Pure Text – ASCII, Unicode
- Text with markup – HTML, XML
- Compiled formats which can be fully decompiled to text – Palm database (PDB)
- Compiled formats which can be partially decompiled to text – Microsoft Reader (LIT), Adobe PDF, eReader for Palm
- Formats compiled into an executable (EXE) file
- Formats specific to a particular brand of reading device – Franklin eReader, RocketBook
- Formats that require external authorisation for ongoing use – NetLibrary books
- A more detailed description of eBook formats can be found at the Wikipedia entry for *eBook* <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/eBook>> – sighted June 2 2005.

4. Where can I find eBooks to read?

eBook distribution systems can be divided into two sorts: free and paid. These can be subdivided as follows:

Free eBooks are distributed by individuals or groups:

- who have a special connection with them: e.g. the Futrelle family website hosts a site distributing the works of their relative Jacques Futrelle <<http://www.futrelle.com>> - June 2, 2005.
- whose primary aim is free eBook distribution – e.g. Project Gutenberg <<http://www.gutenberg.org>>. This also includes pirate distributors – see ‘piracy’ below.
- who believe that free eBooks will attract paying customers to other goods and services they provide – e.g. Blackmask <<http://www.blackmask.com>>
- **Paid eBooks are distributed by individuals or groups:**
- who have a special connection with them: e.g. The Sunday Telegraph 2003 Healthy Eating Update e-Book <<http://www.newstext.com.au/db>> – June 2, 2005
- whose primary aim is paid e-book distribution – e.g. Fictionwise <<http://www.fictionwise.com>>
- Paid eBook distributors come and go, but many can be found through a Google search. More or less current lists of the major distributors can be found at:
 - Piers Anthony's web page on Internet publishing: <http://www.hipers.com/publishing.html>
 - Preditors and Editors (tm) guide to publishers: <http://www.anotherealm.com/prededitors/peba.htm>
 - Lida Quillen’s list of list of royalty-paying eBook publishers: <http://www.sff.net/people/Lida.Quillen/epub.html>
 - A good source of information on the related print-on-demand (POD) market is: <http://www.booksandtales.com/pod/podpublish.htm>

5. I have written an eBook. How can I make it available?

eBooks can be distributed by email or through the Usenet Newsgroup system, but the normal method of distribution is via the World Wide Web. Whatever your chosen method, your eBook should be in an appropriate file format (see above). If your eBook consists of more than one file you will probably want to compress it into a single file with WinZip or an equivalent program.

Distribution methods:

- Email. This involves attaching the file or files comprising your eBook to an email

- message and sending it to the recipient. Note that some ISPs and local network systems have size limits on the attachments they will transmit. This may limit your distribution options.
- Newsgroups. Several Usenet Newsgroups exist for the dissemination of eBooks. You will need to have posting access to one of these. This can normally be obtained by approaching your ISP. There is no provision for payment in the Usenet Newsgroup system.
 - Web .
 - As an individual. This will require you to have an internet account that allows you to construct a website. You can then upload the eBook files to the website directory and create a hypertext link on a webpage which links to the eBook. Users clicking on the link will be given the option to download the eBook. Arranging for payment can be done in various ways.
 - Via a distributor. Some of the paid eBook distributors described above will accept submissions from authors and pay royalties for eBooks distributed via their sites. Others publish on a 'vanity' basis – i.e. you pay them to have your book listed, perhaps with the possibility of making some returns if your sales are high enough. Each distributor has their own conditions and suggestions for format and style of your eBook. Read these carefully and consult the distributor if you have any questions. As in any commercial transaction, make sure you understand and agree to any contractual conditions before agreeing to them.

6. What is eBook 'piracy'? Under what circumstances does it occur?

Current copyright laws in most jurisdictions around the world state that under normal conditions the right to control the sale and distribution of copies of a book rests with the creator of that work – in the case of an eBook, the author or authors. This right, like any other possession, can be sold, leased or passed on through inheritance, and expires only after a considerable period of time – varying from one jurisdiction to another but usually measured in decades. With some exceptions (e.g. the production of books for the visually impaired) attempts to copy and distribute eBooks without the permission of the copyright holder is a violation of the law. Nonetheless, many eBooks have been and continue to be distributed in this way. This is known as 'piracy', though the legal term 'copyright violation' is more accurate and less emotive.

Because of its illegality facts about eBook copyright violation are difficult to come by. The following observations have been made:

- The number of works involved is vast: one partially pirated eBook collection lists over 100,000 books by over 10,000 authors. Even allowing for non-book items and extensive duplication (see below) this is far larger than any legitimate collection currently in existence.
- Most of the books have been scanned from printed works rather than copied from existing commercial eBooks.
- Distribution is largely through the IRC (Internet Relay Chat) system. The Usenet Newsgroup system, once popular, is now little-used. Unlike pirate music

distributors, eBook pirates don't make much use of file-sharing systems like Kazaa and BitTorrent.

- The collections include both pirate eBooks and legitimately copied eBooks from sources such as Project Gutenberg.
- There is massive duplication and needless obscurity in pirate 'catalogues' due to different names being used for titles, categories and authors. Sometimes this is due to careless spelling, or to various different conventions being used.
- Pirated eBooks may be available in one format or many. There is no apparent preference for any one format over another.
- The proofreading on scanned pirate eBooks varies from excellent to very poor.
- The most popular genres for pirate eBooks are science fiction and fantasy, followed at some distance by crime and mystery books and non-fiction about computers.
- eBooks appearing in pirate sources tend to be either very popular books by established authors (e.g. the Harry Potter series) or out-of-print books appealing to one particular individual who has scanned them for their own use and made them available in the hope of persuading others to read them.

Whether eBook piracy currently affects the commercial sales of eBooks, or will in the future, is impossible to say. Eloquent arguments have been made on both sides of the issue. However, at the present time (June 2005) it is probably true to say that a new writer whose works are starting to appear as commercial eBooks has little to fear from large-scale piracy.

See <http://www.stormwolf.com/essays/epirate.html> and http://www.boingboing.net/2005/05/14/why_writers_should_s.html for comments on either side of the issue.

7. What precautions are available to take against piracy?

If you believe an eBook to which you own the copyright has been distributed without your permission then you have the same recourse as the copyright holder of a printed book or a work of art: you can bring legal action against the person or persons responsible.

Because of the cost and difficulty of successfully identifying and bringing an action against an illegal distributor, however, methods have been developed by which eBooks can be 'locked' to prevent distribution. These usually involve uniquely identifying a particular user (or more often a particular device) and modifying each copy of the eBook in such a way that it can only be read by that user or on that device. Collectively these methods are known as 'Digital Rights Management' or DRM.

It is probably true to say that nobody regards DRM as a good thing. There is a prolonged and passionate debate, however, between those who regard it as a necessary evil if the commercial distribution of eBooks is to succeed and those who believe it can be avoided. After a burst of support in the late 1990s, current opinion seems to have swung away

from DRM methods.

Some disadvantages of DRM are:

For readers:

- DRM may block legitimate ‘fair use’ activities like copying small amounts of material from an eBook.
- Users modifying or upgrading their reading devices may find they can no longer read their eBooks on them.
- ‘Protected’ eBook files cannot be backed up; if they are lost or stolen or become corrupt new ones must be obtained from the distributor.
- The average lifespan for new eBook distributors is often quite short; once the distributor disappears the option to re-obtain an eBook may disappear too.
- Some distributors have attempted to link their eBooks with particular devices which have subsequently become obsolete or gone out of production.

For authors and distributors:

- The cost of implementing DRM on a file adds to the cost of the eBook, often substantially.
- The distributor must be prepared to make new copies of the eBook available when these are lost or become unavailable to the user.
- All widely-used DRM schemes are known to have been cracked, making them less attractive to authors.

It would appear that for a DRM scheme to succeed under current conditions it will need to be cheap, effective, transparent and universal. No candidates fit this profile at present, but it is possible that one may develop over time.

8. What kind of devices will display eBooks? What software is required?

A desktop, laptop or tablet computer

The most commonly used eBook reading device is a desktop or laptop computer, either IBM-compatible or Macintosh. The software required for this will depend on the format of the eBook, and can range from general-purpose readers like Notepad to specialised applications which will only display a certain kind of book.

Some of the main software types are:

- No software – i.e. the book itself is an application which will run as a program
- Any Web browser – for books in HTML or compiled HTML formats
- Microsoft Word, for HTML, Word, RTF or Palm formats (Palm requires add-on)
- Microsoft Reader – for .LIT format eBooks

- MobiPocket Reader – for text and Palm formats
- Adobe Reader – for PDF format eBooks
- Palm Reader – for Palm formats

Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs)

PDAs mostly fall into two types depending on their operating system: Pocket PC and Palm. Both are used extensively to store and display eBooks. Mobipocket and Palm Reader software are available for both, and Microsoft Reader is available for Pocket PCs.

Dedicated eBook display devices

There are also a few special-purpose dedicated eBook devices like the Franklin eBookman and the Gemstar Rocket. These may run proprietary software which is designed to tie the user in to a particular format of eBooks from a particular source. Consult the documentation provided by the supplier as to what formats of eBooks a particular device supports. See <http://www.eBookmall.com/choose-format> for a table matching eBook formats and devices.

9. Do libraries ever have eBooks in their collections?

The NetLibrary company provides non-fiction eBooks to libraries under a ‘limited borrowing’ model, and is particularly popular in East Asia. The New York Public Library is one of many hundreds of library systems now beginning to incorporate eBooks.

10. Is the eBook version of a title the same as the cloth or paper version?

Where a paper version of an eBook exists, customers have a right to expect that the eBook version will contain all the text and illustrations of the original. Because space is less of an issue with eBooks it may also include supplementary material that was not in the original work.

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