

Tech Tips from Mr G

So You Want to be a Digital Writer



The Internet has changed our lives in so many ways; in ways we couldn't possibly have imagined even 10 years ago. One of those ways is how various types of creative works get from the creator to the intended audience. One of the easiest and best examples of this is the brave new world of digital publishing. This handout will talk about how to work through publishing something digitally.

Dear Sir or Madam, Will You Read My Book?

Why do you want to publish digitally? Maybe you heard the story of **Amanda Hocking**, the young woman from Minnesota who made almost \$2 million selling her eBooks before she was picked up by a "traditional publisher," and decided to take a shot at it for yourself. Maybe you're a teacher who wants to create digital texts for your students to be able to read on their **Kindles** and **Nooks**, or with those apps on **iOS** and **Android** devices. Maybe you simply want to write some fan fiction and put it out there for all the other fans to read on their devices. You could even be writing your memoirs to give to other family members. Whatever your reasons, here are some suggestions for you.

PDF vs eBook

There are two ways to get your work out there to the public. One is to use the **PDF** format, and the other is to create an **eBook** file. They each have their advantages and disadvantages.

PDF stands for **Portable Document Format**. It's a file format that can be read on any machine, and maintains the formatting that the creator intended the document to have when it was written. Columns, fonts, placement of pictures...everything. Even if you don't have the font that was originally used when it was created, a PDF file will look just the way it did on the author's machine. The downside to this is that the reader can't change the font size at all without zooming in or out of the displayed page. PDF files are all about the author controlling what the document looks like. If you're looking at this handout on a computer, you're looking at the PDF version that I created to look exactly like the printed one. This works great on an iPad screen, but not so well on the screen of an iPhone.

eBook formatted files aren't about the author's control of the formatting. Instead, the main thing is the ability to be read on any device at any font size. An eBook-formatted file is just as easy to read on an iPhone as it is on an iPad. eBook formatted files also allow the readers to annotate what they're reading.

Your choice of format will depend largely on how you want the readers to be able to access what you've written.

PDF PDQ

If you simply want to create PDFs of your work and then have people access them, then it's pretty simple on a Mac, since Apple has built the ability to create PDF files right into the **Print** command. Just go to **File/Print**, and at the bottom left-hand corner of the Print Dialog Box will be a button that says **PDF**. Click on that, and you'll get a number of options to choose from. Chances are that you want to select **Save as PDF**. From here, follow the instructions on how to name and save the file, and you're all set.

Unfortunately, the ability to print directly to a PDF file isn't built into the Windows operating system, but there are still ways to get this to work with 3rd-party software and websites. One piece of software I've played around with is called **CutePDF**, and it's available as freeware from www.cutepdf.com. There are two files you'll need to download in order to get it to work for you, but once you get that all set up, it works like a charm.

Formatting for eBooks

If your goal is to write for eBooks, then there is one very important thing you need to know right now: you need to be up on your word processing skills. It's not just a simple matter of type it and convert it. You have to do things in very precise ways for your word processing document to convert into an eBook that's readable by either Kindles or Nooks, and the two most important rules have to do with how you deal with paragraphs and chapters.

Don't Use Tabs, Use Indentations

Yes, all your life you've probably been taught to start paragraphs with a tab. This is one of those situations where it doesn't apply...or at least, it doesn't apply in quite the way you think it does. For reasons unknown to me, eBook conversion software doesn't like tabs, and prefers paragraphs that are set with **first line indentations**. These look the same as tabs, but behave differently. Each word processing program out there sets these a little differently, so it would serve you well to check how your program does it.

In fact, you might have more than one set of indentations you use for different paragraphs. I use a first line indent of 0 for the first paragraph in a group, but a first line indent of 0.25 for the rest of the paragraphs (take a look at how this document is formatted, and you'll see what I mean). Sometimes I even need to inset a paragraph by having it indented by 0.5 on both sides. That gives me three different sets of paragraph settings.

If you're using a program like **Microsoft Word** that lets you create **styles** for different paragraphs, then you're in luck. I've created three different styles called **first**, **second**, and **inset** to use for easily formatting my paragraphs so that they'll work right when they get converted into eBook files.

Learn About TOCs and Headings

I don't know about how other word processing programs handle it, but if you're using **Microsoft Word** to write a story that you want to have chapter breaks, you need to learn how to create an automatic **Table of Contents**, and how to get it to leave off the page numbers. That's not something I'm going to tell you how to do here, I'm just giving you a heads up so you can look it up yourself.

Inserting Graphics

When you're creating a document to be converted into an eBook, you can't just copy and paste a graphic in, as you would with a regular word processing document. For some reason eBooks require that you **Insert** the photo, drawing, or map using whatever special command your word processing program has for that. In **Word** it's **Insert Picture**.

Your Book Gets Judged By Its Cover

Yes, I know that's not the way it's supposed to be, but that's the way it is. You could have the most exciting book in the world, but a boring cover won't make people want to download it. Use a graphics program to create one yourself, or have an artistic friend create one for you on paper that you can scan in.

Time to Convert

So now that you've done all the hard work formatting your literary treasure so that it's just right, it's time to convert it to be read by one or both of the two dominant players in the eBook field: the **Amazon Kindle** and the **Nook by Barnes & Noble**. They each use different formats, so the processes will be a little different, but before we attack that, there's one very important question we have to deal with...

Are You Planning to Make Any Money From This?

This, as they say, is the \$64,000 question, and will determine how to proceed. If your hope is to make money from your digital work, then you want to do the conversion through Amazon and Barnes & Nobles own websites. However, let me warn you right now, not everyone is going to be an Amanda Hocking or a PL James. I've been publishing a short story every month for about a year now, and so far I've made a whopping \$30 from it. Some people do hit it really big, but most don't. The great thing about digital publishing is that you never have to see a rejection slip. And who knows...maybe you'll develop a small following. But keep your goals realistic.

So if you want to make some money off of your writing, you need to sign up with Amazon's **Kindle Direct** or Barnes & Noble's **PubIt** program. Once you create an account with either, or both, of these publishers, they'll explain to you how to properly upload your word processing files to be converted to an eBook to be sold on their site.

It's All About the Washingtons

If you want people to take a chance on downloading your book, you need to keep the price low. I've been putting out my short stories for 99¢ each. I figure that's the same amount that people are willing to risk on an iPhone app. Other authors have put out longer works for as little as \$2.99 and \$3.99. When you consider how much more of a royalty you're getting from Amazon and Barnes & Noble than you would from a

traditional print publisher, these prices actually make a lot of sense, and may actually entice more people to read your work.

eBooks for Free

Ah...if you want to give away your work for free, or if you simply want to format the memoirs of Great-Aunt Sue, which you've edited, so that all of your cousins can read them on their Kindles and Nooks, there's another way to go.

The website **www.2epub.com** will let you upload your word processing file, and convert it to the **epub** format used by **Nooks**, **Nook apps**, Apple's **iBooks app**, the **Sony** reader, and many other eBook readers. It will also convert to the **mobi** format used by Amazon's **Kindle**. Once you've converted your word processing file to the format or formats you want, you can either email it directly to your friends or post it on your website or blog for people to download.



www.2epub.com website for free eBook conversion

Getting the Word Out

Once you've created your digital book, you want to get the word out about it. On the small scale, you could simply just tell your friends and hope for the best. On a slightly larger scale, you might want to consider creating a webpage or blog about your writing. And of course, in this era of social media, having a **Facebook** page devoted to your work as an author couldn't hurt. I have a blog about my writing, but I haven't gotten around to creating a Facebook page. Maybe it's about time I got around to it.

Don't Forget Print

That's right. There are still millions of people out there who still read good old-fashioned. "hold 'em in your hands," hardcopy books. Using online services like **Lulu** and **Create Space**, you can make your work available to these people, **on-demand**, at no cost to yourself.

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