



***Publishing Paths for Today's Strategic Author:
Choices, Decisions & Priorities***

**Presented by Lisa Montanaro
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Description

The decision of how to publish your work, and who to partner with, is an important one. Fortunately, authors today have more choices than ever before. Discover the pros and cons, and similarities and differences of the various publishing paths to determine which is the best match for your definition of success, time frame, budget, skill set, and level of control. Learn how some authors are choosing one publishing path for their writing career, while others are choosing different paths for each published work. Change your mindset to one of empowerment to make a strategic decision about the publishing paths for you!

Outline

- Definition of success as an author
- Readiness of your writing project
- Today's publishing landscape
- Financial considerations
- Level of control
- Skill set
- Time frame

Goals, Definition of Success & Readiness of Your Writing Project

- What are your goals for your author career and for this writing project or book? There are no right or wrong goals, just misaligned ones.
- What is your definition of success as an author?
- Why are you publishing?
- What genre are you publishing?
- How ready is your writing project to be published?

Decisions, Decisions...

- More choices than ever before!
- Can make decision for your author career, or per writing project or book.
- Publishing paths affect outcomes.
- Great equalizer today is marketing and promotion, which is in the hands of author regardless of pub choice (unless you're one of the "chosen ones").
- Check Writers Beware and do research online before you partner with any service in the publishing industry.
- Assess the quality of the publisher's books and ask for referrals from other authors.

Today's Publishing Landscape

- **Traditional Publishing**

- **The Big 5**

- Advance based and literary agent representation.
 - The Big 5 are below but also include dozens of imprints.
 - Penguin-Random House, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, MacMillan, Hachette Book Group
 - Smallest amount of financial investment by author but may result in largest relinquishment of control.
 - Can lead to media rights (film and TV adaptations), foreign sales/translations, speaking engagements, and largest distribution.
 - Wide distribution in bookstores and libraries.
 - An exercise in persistence and dealing with rejection. For some authors, it's Big 5 or bust! They'll query 100+ agents for 1+ years, then shelve a manuscript if it doesn't get a pub deal and start a new one.
 - Who Trad Publishing works best for?
 - Commercial or high concept fiction, author patient to wait out long publishing lag time, no upfront money or hoping to get large advance, wants marketing savvy team support, willing to give up control, this is your dream, resilience to withstand rejection, want bragging rights/validation.

- **Midsize Publishers**

- Advance based and literary agent representation.
 - Examples: Kensington, Wiley, Sourcebooks, WW Norton, Amazon Publishing (Lake Union, Montlake, Thomas & Mercer)

- **Small and Indie Presses**

- Limited or no advance and doesn't require agent representation.
 - Print on demand with limited distribution, and larger focus on digital.
 - Higher royalty structure – often 25-50%
 - Print fewer books and often have regional, thematic, or genre focus.
 - Examples: Rising Action Publishing, Crooked Lane/Alcove Press, Red Adept Publishing
 - Who Small Press works best for?
 - Debut novelist or writes literary or certain genre, having a hard time getting agent/finding traditional publisher, impatient author who doesn't want long publishing lag time, have no upfront money to invest, willing to give up some control.

- **Hybrid Publishing**

- Fills a legitimate niche between trad and self/indie.
 - Author pays to publish (assisted publishing). Costs vary widely but are typically from \$2,500-25,000.
 - Royalty structure and print on demand like a small press.
 - Read fine print carefully to see what's included and excluded.
 - Ask yourself if you could and want to do all this yourself for a similar price if you contracted the work out.

- There are many good hybrid publishers but need to research and check contract terms carefully. Examples: She Writes Press, Atmosphere Press, Ten16 Press, Black Rose Writing
- Who Hybrid Publishing works best for?
 - Debut novelist or writes literary or certain genre, having hard time getting agent/finding small press, impatient author who doesn't want long publishing lag time, have upfront money to invest, willing to give up some control.
- **Indie or Self-Publishing**
 - The former stigma of self-publishing has diminished almost to the point of vanishing.
 - Author serves as publisher and controls all business and creative aspects.
 - Greatest upfront investment, but largest amount of control.
 - More difficult to get into bookstores and libraries, and sometimes ineligible for contests and awards.
 - Emerging younger authors are choosing indie publishing.
 - Who Self-Publishing works best for?
 - Genre novelist, prolific and can churn out few books a year, strong author platform and can reach readers online, have existing business and/or business and marketing savvy, have upfront money to invest, wants to retain control.

Financial Considerations

- For traditional publishing, money flows exclusively from the publisher to the author. The publisher bears the cost and risk of publishing, whether they pay an advance. Agents get 15% commission of advances and royalties. The author does not pay for editing, design, printing, etc. Authors may independently invest in marketing. Authors have pressure to earn out their advance, or risk not having the publisher take subsequent books.
- For hybrid and self/indie publishing, money flows from the author to the publisher (and for an indie, that publisher is you). The author bears the cost and risk of publishing and invests in marketing. Some indie authors crowd source (e.g., use Kickstarter or another platform) to fund book projects.
- For all publishing paths, money flows from the publisher to the author for royalties once any advance is earned out.
- Most writers don't earn a living from book sales alone. This hasn't really changed over time.
- Trad and indie authors earn similar incomes. Only veteran trad authors, those who make it big, or are hand-picked by a publisher make a significant income. Indie authors can make significant income once they have a back list, and through direct audience engagement.

Level of Control

- Traditional publishing is an exercise in relinquishing control. Granted, you're often relinquishing control to a professional/expert. But it still may not be exactly your vision at each stage of the process. Authors don't control title, cover design, packaging decisions, but are offered consultation. Some small presses are more collaborative.
- With indie publishing, you control everything and there are no gatekeepers. For some authors, that is one of the main reasons to go that route. However, you need to use quality control in every stage of the process and carefully vet the pros you work with.
- Copyright is most likely retained by author in big trad publishing and self/indie but may not be in small press or hybrid.

Skill Set

- Indie authors need to be great at being an entrepreneur and embrace that role. That includes treating their author career as a small business and embracing marketing, financials, and operations, plus the back end of publishing platforms.
- For authors who abhor these types of entrepreneurial activities and prefer that a publishing team handle them, trad publishing is a better fit.

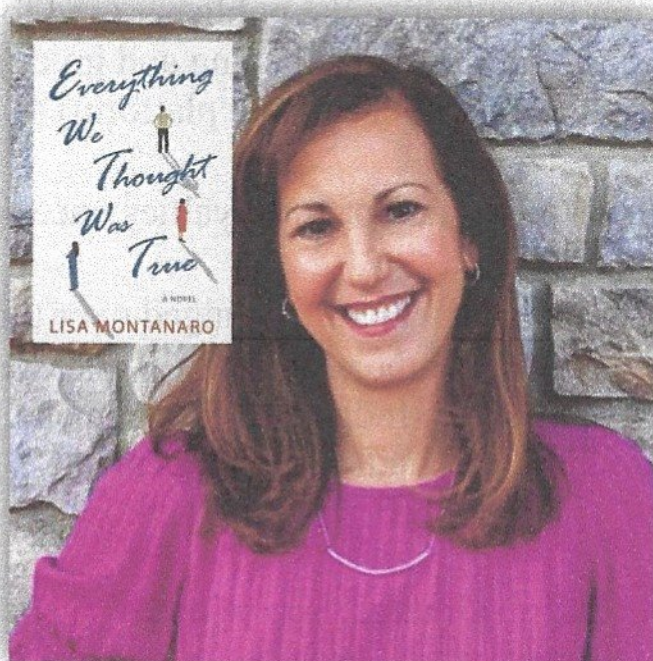
Time Frame

- All publishing takes time. Traditional publishing takes the longest.
- Indie publishing can go a lot quicker as you control all the variables and serve as project manager. So, if you're extremely impatient and don't want to wait years to publish, that is one of the main reasons to consider a self-publishing path.

Resources

- Key Book Publishing Paths with downloadable charts: <https://janefriedman.com/key-book-publishing-path/>
- Poets & Writers database of small presses: https://www.pw.org/small_presses
- *The Business of Being a Writer* by Jane Friedman
- *Before and After the Book Deal* by Courtney Maum

Presenter Bio



Lisa Montanaro is part no-nonsense Italian American New Yorker and part sunny Californian. She has a unique background as a performer, teacher of deaf students, lawyer, executive coach, productivity consultant, speaker, and author. Lisa's debut novel, *Everything We Thought Was True*, released January 2025 by Red Adept Publishing, and won first place for LGBTQ Fiction in the International Firebird Book Awards. Lisa is also the author of *The Ultimate Life Organizer*, published by Peter Pauper Press in 2011, and contributed the chapter "The Brand Called You" in the anthology *Launch Pad: The Countdown to Marketing Your Book* in 2024. As a Branding, Business, Mindset, and Productivity Coach for

writers, Lisa provides support for all stages of a writing career. Lisa serves as webinar host for the Women's Fiction Writers Association (WFWA). When not writing, Lisa enjoys cycling and hiking with her veterinarian husband, tending to her garden, and chasing after her rescue dogs. Lisa has enjoyed living snow-free since 2012 in Northern California, where she's made it her mission to sample the wines of the region. Visit her website at www.LisaMontanaroWrites.com and subscribe to her Prosecco & Prose newsletter.