

# KDP Publishing Specification: Technical Requirements for Kindle eBooks and Print on Demand

**Version 1.0** | Rondanini Publishing Ltd

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**Audience:** Publishers, production managers, typesetters, cover designers

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## Executive Summary

Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) serves two distinct distribution channels with materially different technical requirements:

1. **Kindle eBook** — Reflowable digital format (device-agnostic rendering)
2. **KDP Print** — Fixed-layout print-on-demand service (press-ready PDF)

This specification defines the technical constraints, non-negotiable requirements, and failure modes for each channel. Deviation from these requirements results in either production failure or quality degradation visible to end consumers.

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## Part 1: Architecture & Channel Definitions

### 1.1 Kindle eBook (Digital Distribution)

**What it is:** Reflowable content distributed across Kindle devices, tablets, and reading apps.

**Critical constraint:** Text, images, and formatting adapt to reader device, screen size, and font selection. You do not control layout.

**Implication:** Pixel-perfect design is impossible. Specification focuses on content integrity, rendering consistency, and accessibility.

**File format:** EPUB 3 (Amazon converts internally to proprietary format; EPUB is the input standard).

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### 1.2 KDP Print (Print-on-Demand)

**What it is:** Fixed-layout PDF sent to press for single-copy or mass printing.

**Critical constraint:** What you submit is what prints. No conversion, no adaptation, no second chances.

**Implication:** PDF specification is absolute. Margin errors, image resolution issues, and colour space mismatches become physical defects.

**File format:** PDF (300 DPI minimum, trimmed size with bleed).

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## Part 2: Pre-Production Manuscript Specifications

### 2.1 File Source

**Requirement:** All manuscripts must originate in either: - Microsoft Word (.docx) - Professional typesetting environment (InDesign, Affinity Publisher) - Never directly from: PDF, web pages, email, or clipboard pastes

**Why:** Source clarity ensures clean metadata, style consistency, and conversion reliability.

**Failure mode:** Pasted content carries hidden formatting (font overrides, spacing anomalies, embedded graphics at incorrect resolution). This cascades through both eBook and print.

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### 2.2 Typeface Selection

**Requirement — eBook:** Typeface selection has minimal practical impact on Kindle rendering. Devices override author font choices unless fonts are embedded (not standard practice).

**Specification:** Choose one body typeface. Embed if critical to design (rare). Otherwise, specify serif (for legibility on reflowable text) and accept device default.

**Requirement — Print:** Must specify a typeface with complete character coverage for your language + content.

**Specification for print:** - Serif fonts (Garamond, Times New Roman, Minion Pro) for body text — standard in publishing - One display font for chapter heads (optional; can be same as body) - Ensure typeface is legally licensed for embedding in PDFs

**Failure mode:** Incomplete character sets result in missing glyphs or font substitution on render.

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### 2.3 Leading (Line Spacing)

**Requirement — eBook:** Ignore Word’s “1.5 spacing” setting. Kindle overrides line spacing entirely.

**Specification:** Set line spacing to single. Kindle determines actual leading based on font size and device.

**Requirement** — **Print:** Leading must follow professional typesetting standards, not Word formatting.

**Specification:** - Body text: 11–12pt font with 14–15pt leading (written as 11/14 or 12/15) - Do NOT use Word’s “1.5 spacing” — this creates excessive whitespace and signals amateur typesetting - Adjust leading for readability and page count (tighter leading = more pages, higher printing cost)

**Failure mode:** 1.5 spacing makes typeset books appear amateurish and increases page count, raising production costs.

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## 2.4 Paragraph & Page Formatting

**Requirement** — **eBook:** Remove all manual formatting.

**Specification:** - No extra paragraph breaks to simulate spacing - No tabs for indentation - No manual line breaks - No hard page breaks except chapter breaks

Use paragraph styles instead: - Style: Body Text (with first-line indent if desired) - Style: Chapter Heading - Style: Subheading

**Requirement** — **Print:** Widow/orphan control is non-negotiable.

**Specification:** - Enable widow/orphan control (minimum 2 lines on page edge) - Ensure headings have “keep with next paragraph” enabled - Ensure subheadings do not appear alone at page bottom

**Failure mode:** Orphaned headings or single-word widows appear unprofessional and waste page real estate.

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## 2.5 Heading Hierarchy

**Requirement:** All headings must use proper semantic styles, not manual formatting.

**Specification:** - Use Heading 1 for chapter titles - Use Heading 2 for major subheadings - Use Heading 3 for sub-sections - Never bold and enlarge text manually

**Why:** Proper heading hierarchy enables: - Automatic table of contents generation (eBook requirement) - Search engine accessibility (SEO) - Kindle navigation consistency - Proper PDF structure (print accessibility)

**Failure mode:** Manual formatting breaks TOC generation and navigation on devices.

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## Part 3: Kindle eBook Specifications

### 3.1 File Format Requirement

**Input format:** EPUB 3

**Why not MOBI?** Deprecated. Amazon no longer recommends.

**Why not PDF?** Non-reflowable. Unreadable on small devices.

**Upload path:** EPUB → Amazon KDP (direct upload)

Do NOT convert EPUB → Calibre → Kindle. This adds unnecessary conversion steps and introduces errors.

**Amazon’s conversion:** Amazon internally converts EPUB to proprietary KPF format. This is transparent to the author.

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### 3.2 Content Structure Requirements

**Table of Contents:** - Required: Functional, navigable TOC - Method: Auto-generated from Heading 1 styles in source document - Placement: After front matter, before first chapter - Kindle requirement: TOC must link to actual chapter content

**Front matter (in order):** 1. Title page 2. Copyright page (ISBN/ASIN, publication date, publisher, copyright statement) 3. Dedication (optional) 4. Table of Contents 5. Introduction or Foreword (if applicable) 6. Author’s Note (if applicable)

**Back matter:** 1. Afterword or conclusion (if applicable) 2. Acknowledgments 3. About the Author (100–150 words, photo optional) 4. Call to action (e.g., “Read more at [URL]” or “Join mailing list”)

**Failure mode:** Missing or misplaced TOC breaks device navigation.

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### 3.3 Image Specifications — Kindle eBook

**Resolution:** 300–600 DPI

Specification: 300 DPI is sufficient. Higher resolution adds file size without visible benefit.

**Format:** JPEG (photographs, complex images) or PNG (graphics, screenshots)

**File size:** Maximum 5 MB per image. Total manuscript under 100 MB.

**Embedding:** Inline images render on Kindle. Avoid full-page images (creates awkward scaling on small screens).

**Captions:** Include descriptive captions. Ensures context if image fails to render.

**Failure mode:** Low-resolution images (72 DPI) pixelate on Kindle. Over-sized images break layout on small devices.

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### 3.4 Font Embedding — Kindle eBook

**Specification:** Do not embed fonts unless critical to design intent.

**Why:** Font embedding adds file size and can cause rendering issues on legacy devices.

**Exception:** If book contains critical typographic design (poetry, visual design), embedding is permitted but not recommended.

**Failure mode:** Embedded fonts may not render on older Kindles. Stick with device defaults (safe).

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### 3.5 Metadata — Kindle eBook

**Title:** Must exactly match cover title. No variations.

**Author name:** Must be consistent across all books in an author/series.

**Description (3,000 characters max):** - Benefit-focused, not feature description - Include 2–3 keywords naturally - First 125 characters must be compelling (appears in search results)

**Keywords (up to 7 phrases):** - Examples: “literary fiction,” “contemporary romance,” “business strategy” - Accuracy matters more than volume

**Categories (2 required):** - Choose categories where your book authentically fits - Do not force fit into high-traffic categories

**Content Rating:** Select accurately. Misrepresentation triggers removal.

**Failure mode:** Generic or keyword-stuffed descriptions reduce discoverability and signal low professionalism.

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## Part 4: KDP Print Specifications

### 4.1 PDF Requirements — Absolute

**Format:** PDF (only accepted format)

**Resolution:** Minimum 300 DPI at final printed size

**Specification:** All images must be sourced at 300+ DPI. Do not upscale low-resolution images.

**Color space:** RGB acceptable. CMYK recommended for colour-critical work.

**Transparency:** Flatten all layers before submission. No transparency or special effects.

**Fonts:** All fonts must be embedded in PDF.

**Failure mode:** Non-embedded fonts trigger substitution (wrong typeface on print). Low-resolution images pixelate. RGB-to-print conversion can shift colours unexpectedly.

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## 4.2 Trim Size & Margins

**Trim size specification:** Standard options: 6×9 inches (most common), 8.5×11 inches (reference, business), 5×8 inches (poetry, specialty).

**Margin requirement:** Depends on page count.

**Constraint:** KDP Print enforces minimum margins based on page count to ensure printability.

**Non-negotiable:** Use KDP's margin calculator for your specific trim size and page count. Do not estimate or guess.

**How to use calculator:** 1. Determine trim size 2. Determine page count 3. Enter into KDP margin calculator 4. KDP returns exact margin and gutter requirements 5. Use returned values in PDF template

**Gutter specification:** Inside margin (binding edge) increases with page count and paper thickness. A 200-page book requires 0.5–0.75 inch gutter minimum; a 400-page book may require 1+ inch.

**Failure mode:** Insufficient gutter causes text/images to disappear into binding. Insufficient outer margins cause content too close to trim edge.

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## 4.3 Bleed Requirement

**What is bleed:** Extended artwork beyond trim edges to ensure full-color printing to the edge without white borders.

**Requirement:** 0.125 inches (1/8 inch) on all edges where full-color extends to edge.

**Specification:** - If full-color background or images extend to edge: include 0.125" bleed - If white space to edge: no bleed required - Bleed area is not visible in final book; it is trimmed away

**How to apply:** - Source images 0.125" larger than trim on all sides - PDF canvas should be trim size + bleed (e.g., 6.125" × 9.125" for a 6×9 trim)

**Failure mode:** Missing bleed results in white border at edge. Content that should extend edge-to-edge appears cropped.

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#### 4.4 Cover Specifications

**Cover format:** PDF (not image file)

**Cover structure:** - Back cover + spine + front cover (one continuous PDF) - Spine width determined by KDP calculator (based on page count + paper type) - Use KDP's cover template generator for exact dimensions

**Design requirements:** - All text minimum 0.125" from edge (safety zone) - Spine text must be readable (minimum 8pt font, high contrast) - All graphics embedded, fonts embedded

**Color space:** RGB or CMYK (CMYK preferred)

**Resolution:** 300 DPI minimum

**Use KDP cover calculator:** 1. Enter trim size, page count, paper stock 2. Download template with exact dimensions 3. Do not modify template dimensions

**Failure mode:** Incorrect spine width causes misalignment. Text too close to edges gets trimmed. Low resolution appears blurry on printed cover.

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#### 4.5 Paper Stock & Colour Space

**Paper options available:** - Cream (standard, warm tone, reduces eye strain) - White (standard, bright white) - Premium color paper (specialty)

**Colour space consideration:** - Cream paper: blacks appear slightly warmer, colours are muted - White paper: colours appear more saturated, blacks are true black

**Specification:** Match colour space to paper stock: - For cream paper: test CMYK conversion with cream profile - For white paper: standard CMYK or RGB

**Failure mode:** RGB-sourced images on cream paper may appear washed out. Colour shifts are not Amazon's responsibility; specify accurately in advance.

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## 4.6 Image Resolution — Print

**Requirement:** Minimum 300 DPI at final printed size.

**Specification:** - Photograph of 4×6 inches? Source at 1200×1800 pixels minimum (300 DPI) - Infographic at 6×4 inches? Source at 1800×1200 pixels minimum

**Critical:** Resolution is calculated at print size, not original file size.

**Non-negotiable:** Do not upscale images from 150 DPI to 300 DPI. This creates pixelation. Source at 300+ DPI from acquisition.

**Acceptable sources:** - Professional photography (typically 3000+ DPI equivalent) - Stock photo sites (often 300 DPI downloadable) - Designed graphics at native resolution - Infographics rendered at high resolution

**Failure mode:** 72-DPI web images enlarged to print size appear pixelated, blurry, and unprofessional.

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## Part 5: Failure Modes & Production Risk

This section documents common production failures and their consequences.

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### 5.1 Formatting Disasters

#### **Disaster: Pasted formatting from web/email**

Source: Copy-paste from PDF, website, or email carries invisible formatting codes.

Consequence: Font overrides, spacing anomalies, broken character encoding on render.

Prevention: Paste into plain text editor (Notepad) first to strip formatting. Then paste clean into Word.

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#### **Disaster: Manual line breaks used for spacing**

Source: Author presses Enter multiple times to create vertical space.

Consequence: eBook reflowable text breaks unexpectedly when reader changes font size. Print appears over-spaced.

Prevention: Use paragraph styles with “space after” setting instead.

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**Disaster: Inconsistent heading styles**

Source: Chapter titles bolded and enlarged manually instead of using Heading 1 style.

Consequence: Table of contents fails to generate. Kindle navigation broken. Search engines cannot identify structure.

Prevention: Use semantic heading styles only. Never manual formatting.

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**Disaster: Images embedded at screen resolution (72 DPI)**

Source: Images sourced from web or screen capture without DPI consideration.

Consequence: Pixelated, blurry appearance on print. Unacceptable quality.

Prevention: Source images at minimum 300 DPI for print; 300–600 DPI for eBook.

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**Disaster: Wrong colour space (RGB to print)**

Source: PDF created with RGB images without conversion to CMYK.

Consequence: Colour shifts on print (reds appear darker, blues appear greenish, etc.). No recourse.

Prevention: Convert RGB to CMYK before final PDF. Test on actual paper stock if colour-critical.

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**Disaster: Fonts not embedded in print PDF**

Source: PDF created with fonts assumed to be available on KDP servers.

Consequence: Font substitution occurs; wrong typeface prints. Typesetting intent lost.

Prevention: Verify all fonts embedded in PDF before upload. Use PDF viewer to confirm.

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**Disaster: Insufficient gutter margin**

Source: Author uses generic 0.5” margins on all sides without accounting for binding.

Consequence: Text disappears into binding on inner margin. Content unreadable on left pages.

Prevention: Use KDP margin calculator. Inside margin 0.75” on most books.

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### **Disaster: Missing bleed on full-color edges**

Source: Designer creates cover/full-color background without extending beyond trim.

Consequence: White border appears at edge instead of full-color. Looks unfinished.

Prevention: Extend all edge-to-edge artwork 0.125" beyond trim on all sides.

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### **Disaster: Spine width miscalculation**

Source: Designer estimates spine width instead of using KDP calculator.

Consequence: Spine text misaligned, back cover offset from spine, unprofessional appearance.

Prevention: Use KDP's automated spine calculator for every project.

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### **Disaster: TOC doesn't link to chapters (Kindle)**

Source: TOC created manually instead of generated from heading styles.

Consequence: TOC appears but doesn't navigate on Kindle devices. Reader cannot jump to chapters.

Prevention: Auto-generate TOC from Heading 1 styles. Verify links in Kindle Previewer.

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## **5.2 Production Acceptance Criteria**

**Before submission to KDP — eBook:** - [ ] EPUB file opens without errors in Kindle Previewer - [ ] TOC links are functional and navigate to correct chapters - [ ] Images render correctly on all preview device sizes (phone, tablet, e-reader) - [ ] No font rendering issues or character encoding errors - [ ] Metadata is complete and accurate

**Before submission to KDP — Print:** - [ ] PDF renders correctly in Adobe Reader and PDF viewer - [ ] All fonts embedded (verify via PDF properties) - [ ] Margins are correct per KDP calculator - [ ] Bleed extended on all full-color edges - [ ] Cover spine width matches KDP specification - [ ] Image resolution verified at 300+ DPI - [ ] Colour profile tested (if using CMYK or colour-critical content) - [ ] Order a physical proof and inspect before full print run

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## Part 6: File Submission & Update Protocol

### 6.1 Initial Submission

**File preparation:** 1. eBook: Export EPUB from source document (Word → EPUB via Calibre, Scrivener, or professional workflow) 2. Print: Export PDF from source document (Word/InDesign → PDF with specifications in 4.1–4.6) 3. Cover: Prepare using KDP cover template

**Upload to KDP:** - Create or sign in to KDP account - Create new title - Upload EPUB for eBook channel - Upload PDF + cover PDF for Print channel - Complete metadata (title, author, description, keywords, categories) - Set pricing and distribution rights

**Review period:** 12–48 hours. Amazon reviews for compliance.

**Goes live:** Upon approval, book is available in Kindle store and print-on-demand.

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### 6.2 Post-Publication Updates

**Requirement:** You can update content after publication without re-registering.

**Procedure to update:** 1. Correct source file (Word/InDesign manuscript) 2. Re-export EPUB or PDF with corrections 3. Upload new file to KDP dashboard under existing title 4. Amazon re-reviews (typically 24 hours) 5. New version live; existing readers can re-download

**Important:** You cannot download HTML source from KDP. Maintain your source file for all updates.

**Failure mode:** If source file is lost, future corrections require manual editing of EPUB/PDF (error-prone).

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### 6.3 ISBN & Legal Deposit

**ISBN — eBook:** Not required. Amazon provides ASIN (Amazon Standard Identification Number).

**ISBN — Print:** Optional. - Use Amazon's free ISBN: Identifies Amazon as publisher. Not transferable to other retailers. - Buy your own ISBN: ~\$100 for 10; you retain publishing rights. Transferable to other retailers (IngramSpark, bookstores).

**If pursuing bookstore distribution:** Buy your own ISBN.

**Legal deposit — eBook:** Not typically required; Amazon handles.

**Legal deposit** — **Print:** Depends on country. In UK, legal deposit libraries may request a copy. Specify on copyright page if applicable.

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## Part 7: Specification Compliance Checklist

Use this checklist before final submission:

### eBook (Kindle)

- Source file uses semantic heading styles (Heading 1, 2, 3)
- TOC is auto-generated from Heading 1 styles
- No manual line breaks or artificial spacing
- All images are 300+ DPI
- Images are JPEG or PNG only
- No transparency or embedded PDFs within EPUB
- EPUB exports cleanly without errors
- EPUB previews correctly in Kindle Previewer (test phone, tablet, e-reader views)
- Metadata: Title, author, description, keywords complete
- Copyright page includes ISBN or ASIN
- No font embedding (unless design-critical)
- Character encoding is UTF-8

### Print (KDP Print)

- Trim size selected (6×9, 8.5×11, etc.)
  - Page count finalized
  - Margins calculated via KDP calculator
  - Gutter margin applied to inside edge
  - All fonts embedded in PDF
  - Image resolution verified at 300+ DPI at print size
  - Bleed extended 0.125" on all full-color edges
  - PDF colour space tested (CMYK recommended; RGB acceptable)
  - Cover created using KDP cover template
  - Cover spine width matches KDP specification
  - All text minimum 0.125" from edge (safety zone)
  - PDF opens without errors in Adobe Reader
  - Physical proof ordered and inspected
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## Part 8: When to Seek Professional Help

This specification assumes in-house capability. Outsource if:

- **Typesetting:** Complex layouts, multiple columns, poetry, or design-forward books
  - **Cover design:** Professional covers significantly impact sales; invest accordingly
  - **Conversion:** EPUB conversion from complex Word documents with unusual formatting
  - **Printing:** Large print runs benefit from professional print broker rather than KDP Print
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## Conclusion

KDP Publishing requires precision, not luck. This specification eliminates guesswork. Deviation results in either production failure or visible quality degradation—both unacceptable for professional publishing.

Treat this specification as non-negotiable. Each requirement has a failure mode. Each failure mode has a consequence visible to your reader.

Your formatting is invisible when correct. It becomes a problem when broken. Prevent the problem upfront.

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## Document Control

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**Questions or updates?** [contact@rondanini.com](mailto:contact@rondanini.com)

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*This specification reflects 35+ years of publishing systems experience and incorporates current KDP requirements as of March 2026. Check Amazon KDP documentation quarterly for policy updates.*