

So, You Want to Be an Author? What I Learned Publishing My First Book

By Nina Neefe

Napa Children's Book Author, Nina Neefe, shares her experiences as a new author for anyone who dreams of writing or publishing a book.

What books have you written? I wrote and self-published three children's books in 2020 and 2021.

What inspired your first book? It was unplanned — I was telling a bedtime story to my grandchildren about our cat getting lost. I called it "Mulan's Big Adventure." They were captivated by the tale, so I decided to memorialize it in a photo book. Friends and family loved the book and suggested I publish it.

How can an author get published? There are generally three ways: Traditional, self-publishing, and hybrid/vanity publishing.

What are the pros and cons of each?
TRADITIONAL Pros: Handles much of the upfront work and costs; provides prestige and bookstore connections.
Cons: Challenging to get signed; they control the content, design, timeline, and payment structure; you still have to do the marketing.

SELF-PUBLISHING Pros: You control all aspects and can publish faster; there are no fees or high royalties to the publisher.
Cons: It's hard work, time-consuming, and can be expensive upfront.

HYBRID/VANITY: They will do some of the work for you, but you pay a substantial fee for work most authors can do for themselves.

How long does it take? That depends on you. If contracted with a traditional publisher, it can take months or years as they control the design and timeline. Self-publishing, you can get it done in weeks or months, depending on the time and resources you put into it.

How much does it cost to publish? This depends on what you outsource vs. do-it-yourself. Authors can spend \$1500-\$4000+ to self-publish, which includes software, editing, cover design, formatting, illustrations, and marketing. Some authors do pre-sale campaigns because of these costs. If you're writing a paperback with no illustrations, your costs can be less.

What advice do you recommend to get started? Do a lot of research and networking first. Study the basics, read articles, take courses, set a budget, and, if possible, hire a consultant. Identify your niche (your target audience), and then build your brand identity and social media presence before putting yourself out there. Write at least three manuscripts before you approach an agent or publisher. Have a plan!

What resources did you find helpful? The internet is amazing. Search "self-publishing platforms," and you'll find several options. Amazon's KDP is very popular, offering education and tools for free. Facebook has networking groups for just about any genre out there. Join organizations such as the Authors Guild or SCBWI. Research your genre to find the best ones.

What did you find most challenging? Finding a traditional publisher can seem daunting unless you're a celebrity or "influencer" with thousands of followers or you know someone! You can hire an agent to find

a publisher or send query letters, sometimes facing repeated rejection before landing a publisher. If you want to self-publish in a quality hardcover, the up-front printing costs are high.

What's on the horizon for Nina's Cat Tales? I am currently working on my 4th book, which will speak to children about "What Can I Be When I Grow Up?" I should have it ready before the Fall 2022 school year begins.

