

ISBN FAQs

for U.S. Authors

Why do I need an ISBN for my book?

ISBN numbers are the global standard for book identification, and they are vital for authors and publishers who want their books to be taken seriously in the retail space. Not only do they link to essential title information but they also enable efficient marketing and distribution, improve your book's discoverability, and help you collect and analyze sales data about your book. In addition, an ISBN ensures your book will be included in the Books In Print database, which retailers and libraries consult for title information about a book.

How many ISBNs do I need?

You will need a unique ISBN for each format of your book (paperback, ebook, hard-cover, audiobook, etc.).

How do I get an ISBN?

You have several options for obtaining an ISBN for your book, and the following pages break down the most popular options for US authors.

Option 1: Buy your ISBN numbers directly through Bowker Identifier Services, the US official ISBN provider. Bowker sells ISBNs at \$125 for 1, \$295 for 10, \$575 for 100, and \$1500 for 1000.

Pros:

- You own your ISBN numbers and can distribute your books on multiple platforms.
- If you will be publishing multiple titles, this is definitely the best value.

Cons:

- You will need to enter your title information in both your Bowker account and your distribution account (IngramSpark, Amazon KDP, etc.).

Option 2: Purchase your ISBN numbers through your IngramSpark

account from Bowker at a discount. IngramSpark offers the ability to purchase ISBNs from Bowker at a discounted price of \$85 each directly through your account dashboard.

Pros:

- You own your ISBN numbers and can distribute your books on multiple platforms.
- IngramSpark does the title information entry for you, so you avoid the work of entering it on both Bowker and IS.

Cons:

- If you plan to publish multiple titles, this can get pricey. In this case, the 10 QTY (\$295) or 100 QTY (\$575) pack would be a much better value.

Option 3: Use “free” ISBN numbers from Amazon KDP, IngramSpark, or Lulu.

These print-on-demand printer/distributors offer author-publishers the opportunity to have a free ISBN number assigned to their titles. This option is a good value, but it does have its limitations and drawbacks.

Pros: No upfront cost to the author.

Cons:

- You cannot choose your publisher or imprint name. Under the publisher name in a retail listing, Amazon KDP ISBN users show as “Independently Published,” IngramSpark ISBN users show as “IndyPub,” and Lulu users show as “Lulu.com.”
- The distributor owns your ISBN, and you can only use it on their platform. For example, if Amazon KDP assigns a free ISBN, it is only valid on the Amazon platform and cannot be used outside Amazon.
- A free ISBN may prevent your book from being stocked in a brick-and-mortar bookstore

Do I need a barcode on the back of my book?

You will need an ISBN barcode, and if you choose to use Option 1 (purchase your ISBN through Bowker), they offer barcode creation through their dashboard as an upsell. Your cover designer may be able to create one for you using a plugin. There are also several free options to create barcodes (see below).

- Kindlepreneur Barcode Creator
- CreativeIndieCovers Barcode
- Bookow Barcode Generator

The Bookland EAN barcode (pictured at right), the most widely used format in the industry, features an ISBN, encoded barcode and the EAN-5 on the right side, an add-on that often encodes the retail price of the publication.

Should I include the retail price?

Yes! The retail price is simply the standard, and you can offer discounts any time you like.



Do I need a Library of Congress Control Number (LCCN) to publish my book?

An LCCN number is not required to publish, but it is recommended if you'd like to market your book to libraries. It's also a mark of professionalism in publishing. Whereas a unique ISBN is needed for each format of a book, the LCCN number is applied to all formats of a book. There is no cost to request an LCCN, but it does require that you submit a physical copy of your book once it is published. See <https://www.loc.gov/publish/pcn/> for more information.

Steps to request an LCCN: 1) Go to PrePub Book Link site to create an account. 2) Once in your account, you can click the Request LCCN button to start the process. 3) From there, you will enter general information about your book, such as the projected publication date, as well as contributor details and title information. Once your information is reviewed, you will receive your LCCN by email, usually within one to two weeks, and you will enter the LCCN on the copyright information of all formats.

What if I've already published my book with another company? Can I use that ISBN?

In short, no. The ISBN from the previous company is unique to that publisher. If you choose to republish your title on your own, you will need a new ISBN for each format of the book you're republishing (paperback, hardcover, ebook, audiobook).

I've seen this a lot with authors who published first with a company like Xulon, AuthorCentral, Ourskirts, or even traditional publishers like Arcadia. They want to republish their books on their own after a not-so-stellar publishing experience. Beyond getting a new ISBN for your updated edition, you will need to read the terms of your contract with the previous publisher carefully to determine whether there are any steps needed to release your title. There is often

*Need
more
support?*

Need help deciding on your options or going through the ISBN or LCCN process? Book a publishing consult with me for one-on-one support.