

CHAPTER FIVE

The Foundation

As we start to get down to some of the details of preparing an e-book for publication, there are some technicalities you need to understand. Don't worry, you don't need to be a programming or design expert. You just need an understanding of what an e-book really is.

Unlike print books, e-books aren't based on pages. They are actually one long flowing document. The reading device and user preferences determine the "pages" as the book is viewed. For this reason, page numbers and headers/footers aren't used in an e-book. There's no way for the e-reader to know where to place them.

E-books are also based on HTML programming code. This is the basic code used for web pages. Again, you don't have to learn programming. Only understand that some of what we generally think of as standard formatting won't work. Lulu's *Complete E-book Creator Guide* states, "If it's not on your keyboard then it may not convert properly." However, if you have some basic knowledge of HTML programming you might be able to tweak your document a little more.

We are going to look at some of the basic elements in an e-book. Some you will find are the same as a print book, others aren't.

Elements of an E-book

In addition to the details discussed in the previous chapter, there are two other elements that aren't really thought of as important elements of an e-book: font and file name.

Font

(I understand typeface is the technical term for what I'm discussing. However common usage in the electronic world the terms have become interchangeable. I will use the term *font*, which means a computer program that represents a typeface, for all references here.)

Generally for ease of reading, whether in print or electronically, serif fonts are used for the body and sans serif is used for headlines and sub-heads. (Serif fonts have the small decorative lines on the letters. Times Roman, the font used for the body text of this book, is a serif font. Sans serif fonts don't have the decorations. Arial is a common sans serif font, as shown here.)

I would guess there are thousands of serif and sans serif fonts now available. That's not to mention the decorative fonts like Old English and Script. Save the decorative fonts for specific uses. Because e-books don't handle these fonts well, don't plan on the decorative fonts anywhere -- even the cover. Stick to basics for your e-book. Times New Roman for the body text is generally accepted and converts well to all formats. Arial or Helvetica is a standard for headlines and sub-heads and also converts well.

Practical Guide: Formatting e-Books for Writers

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Children's books follow the same idea. While a font that looks like a crayon mark or felt marking pen may be cute, it is harder for young eyes to read. Take a look at reading textbooks. They use the same serif and sans serif combination. One reason for this is that the serifs on the body text allow the eye to naturally flow from one letter to the next, and from one word to the next.

Remember, you want your reader to have a good experience. That experience begins with the ease of reading.

File Name

File name? How could that be important? Aren't people going to just see just my book title?

You never really know how your reader is going to download your e-book. If you offer it only on Amazon, iBooks, or other online stores, the file name may not be an issue. But if you are going to offer your e-book through other outlets, including your website, the file name can mean the difference between your book being read and ending up in the electronic trash bin. This is especially true of PDF files. If a PDF file is being read on a computer, the user may not see the cover, only the file name.

I own an e-book that is titled "BPTRBW" as the file name. After opening it a number of times to see what it is, I now remember what book it is. But that file name tells me nothing.

Quite simply, name your file the same as your title. I recommend not including any subtitles to make it easy for your reader to find on a computer or e-reader. It also isn't necessary to add the words "e-book" to your file name. You may want that for your personal use, but not for your published e-book.

Use a "clean" file name. We often label our files by version or date. Many of us will label the final document as "FINAL" in the file name. While this is good for us to keep track of the many versions, it's unnecessary for our readers. Have a file simply named with the title of your book for public consumption.

One final caution: Don't leave spaces in the file name, such as "Create an e-Book." Some distribution centers or web servers can't read a file with spaces. It can be confusing to have one long word, "createane-book." Using upper case letters may help in your file folder, "CreateAne-Book," but sometimes another system may convert it all to lower case letters. And, as is the case for the name of this book, the unusual capitalization that I use creates an unusual word, Ane. The best course of action is add hyphens or underscores to, "Create_an_e-Book."

Covers

We've already talked about the importance of a good cover. Your cover may be more important than the opening paragraph. If the reader isn't attracted to your book by the cover, the first paragraph will never be read. How do you determine whether a cover is good for you e-book? Let's stop here for a little exercise.

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By Susan K. Stewart

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For questions, contact susan@practicalinspirations.com

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Go to Amazon or other e-book seller. Search for a topic of interest. You may want to search for a book on the subject of your book. Now glance, only glance, at the screen: Which book does your eye gravitate to immediately? Now compare that cover to the others on the screen. What was it that attracted you? The color? The graphic? The title? This little exercise should give you sense of the importance of your e-book cover. It's important enough that in most cases you shouldn't leave it until you are ready to publish.

Try to avoid stock images, such as you will find in the Kindle Cover Creator. You don't want your cover to look like any other cover. Plus, unless you are good with graphics, you should hire a graphic artist to do it for you. For my book, *Preschool: At What Cost?*, I had a vision of the message I wanted my cover to send. I found a photo, purchased the license, then hired a graphic artist to manipulate it and add the text. It cost less than \$100.

Content

I recently asked for a refund on a 99-cent Kindle book. Why? Because it had no useable content. It was merely an advertisement for an upcoming book. I won't buy the upcoming book either. I don't trust the writer. While I don't want to belabor the point of good, well-edited content, the truth is your e-book won't be successful if it doesn't have good writing.

Don't shortchange your reader, or yourself, by rushing through or trying questionable marketing techniques. A well-written manuscript builds trust with your reader and your credibility for future projects.

Photos, graphic, sidebars, pull quotes

Generally, fiction doesn't have any of these elements. You may have glyphs at the beginning of a chapter or between scenes. But you probably won't have photos, graphics, sidebars, or pull quotes. Recently I did read a historical fiction that included photos of the real people in the book, a rare exception. Photos and graphics require specific formatting for e-books.

Non-fiction books may not only have photos and graphics, but sidebars and pull quotes as well. One of the dangers with an e-book is thinking that it is a print book on a screen. Remember, it is more like a long web page. The elements of a sidebar and pull quotes are handled completely differently. In general, you will not be using sidebars or pull quotes. Not only is the formatting tricky, they can also interfere with the reading experience. We will discuss the how-to in a later chapter.

I find this to be another reason to prepare your e-book before the print book. You will have less format clean-up.

Table of Contents and Index

The table of contents (TOC) can become more than a way to navigate through a document; it can actually become a marketing tool. The table of contents is often viewable in previews of the book. This is one of the first places I look when making a book- buying decision, whether online or in a brick and mortar store. You want to give careful thought to your TOC. Unlike holding a physical copy of the book in your hand, you can't really skim an e-book. The TOC tells the reader what to expect.

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If you have a print edition formatted, the table of contents will be changed in the process of e-book formatting. You can either remove it and start over, or change it when the time comes. If you have a lot of subheads, you might want to scrap it and start over.

Often an index isn't included in an e-book. Search features tend to take the place of an index. It is time consuming to create all of the links. An academic or reference may need an index, but generally readers will use the search feature.

Front Matter

Other than the title page and copyright page, most of what we generally put in the front of the book needs to be moved or removed. Amazon and Barnes & Noble provide previews of e-books. They use the first few pages of the book, generally 10 percent, including title and copyright page. You want that sample to be as much of your content as possible. If you fill up those few pages with extraneous material, you may lose sales.

What do you do with those glowing reviews and endorsements, the acknowledgement page, and about the author? Put them in the back of the book. Think for a moment, how often do you really begin reading with these pages? I rarely even look at endorsements when considering purchasing a book. I may scan to see who has endorsed, but I don't read them. You want those comments in the review section of your sales page and on your website. We will discuss reviews and endorsements in the marketing chapter. One author has told me that placing a few comments at the beginning of the e-book is helpful, but she prefers the longer ones in the back.

Some e-book designers are recommending putting the table of contents in the back of the book as well. I asked members of my Creating and Formatting e-Books class for editors, what they thought of putting the table of contents in the back. The consensus was for non-fiction, the table of contents is definitely needed in the preview. A couple of people suggested a condensed TOC in the front, chapter titles only, with the complete TOC with subheads in the back. Most agreed that a TOC is unimportant for fiction.

Bridgette Powers, a fantasy writer, commented "[In} many YA [Young Adult] and speculative fiction novels (fantasy in particular), chapters do have titles, and I always like to browse those before purchasing. As a fantasy author who uses chapter titles to create another "hook" for the reader, I would include the TOC up front in hopes of further enticing readers."

Move Forward

- Save your manuscript file with the title of your book.
- Narrow cover image options to three. Ask followers on social media for comments.
- Prepare the front matter material.

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