

Creating and Formatting e-books

Lesson 4

E-book Fundamentals

As we start to get down to some of the details of preparing an e-book, we need some understanding of a few technicalities. This doesn't mean being a programming or design expert, only 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. Learning how to program won't be necessary; only an understanding that some of what we generally think of as standard formatting won't work. Lulu's *Complete E-book Creator Guide* states, for example, "If it's not on your keyboard then it may not convert properly." However, for those of us who have some basic knowledge of HTML programming we might be able to tweak the document a little more.

Elements of an E-book

An e-book has some basic elements. Those elements are:

- Font
- File name
- Cover
- Content
- Photos, graphic, sidebars, pull quotes.

Most of us probably, "Well, of course, a book will have least a cover and content." Because an e-book is fundamentally different than a print book, font and file names become important considerations.

Font

(I understand typeface is the technical term for what I'm discussing. However, in 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 is a serif font. Sans serif fonts don't have the decorations. Arial is a common sans serif font.)

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 other specific uses. Stick to basics for an e-book.

Times New Roman for the body text is generally accepted and converts well to all formats. Arial is a standard for headlines and sub-heads, and also converts well.

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 the serifs, or the little decorative lines, on the body text allow the eye to naturally flow from one letter to the next, and from one word to the next.

Remember, an important criterion for a good e-book is for the reader to have a good experience, and that experience begins with ease of reading.

File Name

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

We never really know how our reader is going to download an e-book. If it’s only offered on Amazon, iBooks, or stores for specific e-readers, the file name may not be an issue. But if the e-book is available through other outlets, including our websites, the file name can mean the difference between the book being read and ending up in the electronic trash bin.

I have an e-book titled “BPTRBW.” After opening it a number of times to see what it is, I now remember what book this is. But that file name tells me nothing.

Quite simply, name the file the same as the title. I recommend not including any subtitles to make it easy for the reader to find on a computer or e-reader. It also isn’t necessary to add the words “e-book” to the file name.

I also recommend using 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.

Begin at the Beginning

Now, let’s start some essential steps. A word or two before we begin:

1. Don’t make these changes for a PDF formatted e-book (we will cover formatting for a PDF document in another lesson), and
2. Be sure to make a back up of your file.

Content

For most e-books, the basic elements listed above are handled separately. No matter how you plan to distribute your book, there are some formatting steps needed to prepare the manuscript.

We will start with the content because it is the heart of an e-book.

1. *Let’s Begin*

While each of us may have a favorite word processor, Microsoft Word has become a standard that is used for many applications. For example, Smashword uses a Word DOC as the basis for their conversion process. With that in mind, the instructions will be given for a Word document. The same formatting changes may be made in Open Office or Pages, but the resulting document may not convert as expected. For those using another word processor, be sure to save the file as a Word DOC file. (Some programs use “export” to make this conversion.)

The first step recommended is saving the manuscript in DOC format, not DOCX. Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) will accept a DOCX file. However, as of July 2017, some KDP users report they have problems with the actual conversion. I’ve not had good luck using DOCX files. When using Open Office, use the Save As command and select Microsoft Word 97/2000/XP (.doc). In Word, use Save As and select Word 97-2004 (.doc). With Pages from Apple, you use Export command in the File menu. Select Word then Save.

If the manuscript is in PDF format, there a few options. The first is to use Adobe Reader. The most recent version has an option to convert the PDF file to a Word DOCX file. This can be done free one time, after that a premium membership will need to be purchased. The DOCX file then needs to be saved as a DOC file as described above.

Second is using Adobe Acrobat. Acrobat has an export function that converts a PDF file to a DOC file. Select the Export command from the File menu and choose Word. It is very straightforward. Be aware that the formatting may not convert very well. But it’s all going to be changed anyway, so it shouldn’t be a problem.

A third option is an Internet service PDF to Word, www.pdfword.com. This website converts a file and sends it to an e-mail account. It is free and is quick. However, the free service will not convert the entire manuscript at one time. It will need to be uploaded one chapter at a time. There is also a limit to the number of file conversions per e-mail address.*

2. Cleaning Up

Once the document is in a Word format, clean-up for the conversion process gets started. Let’s start with the hardest first.

3. Throw Away (Not Really)

If the manuscript has graphics, photos, pull quotes, or sidebars, they all need to be removed. We’ll discuss graphics and photos in a later lesson. For now, remove all graphics and photos. When the images are removed, note the location in upper case letters with the photo file name. I recommend saving the images to a separate folder. They will be easier to find when needed to add back into the document.

Because of the flowing nature of an e-book, pull quotes, and sidebars don’t convert well. We never know where they will actually appear in the e-document or how they will look.

Pull quotes are usually added to long areas of text in a print book for the visual enhancement. This isn't needed in an e-book. If the quote is something the writer wants to emphasize, bold type can be used in the text.

Sidebars are a different animal. They usually contain additional information, which enhances understanding of the content or has additional details to add clarity for the reader. It isn't necessary to jettison the sidebars completely, though.

One option is to incorporate the information in the text. Another is to consider whether all of that detail is necessary for the reader to understand the content and possibly remove it. Putting the information in an appendix at the end of the document is another possibility. A fourth way to include the sidebar is to make it a graphic textbox. This is something we'll look at in the lesson on graphics.

4. Page Extras

I've already mentioned that page numbers aren't necessary, so remove them. This can take some time. If the document is divided into formatting sections, the page numbers will need to be removed from each section.

1. Open Headers/Footers in the View menu.
2. Click on the page number and a box will appear around it.
3. Delete the number.
4. All the page numbers in that formatting section will be deleted.
(If you view the non-printing characters, the backward P in the toolbar, you will see each formatting section.)
5. Go through the document following steps 2 and 3 until all of the page numbers are removed.

Now it's time to work with the footnotes. If the footnotes are at the bottom of the pages, they will need to be moved. Footnotes can be put at the end of each chapter (my preference) or at the end of the book. At this point, it's a matter of copying and pasting them to another page in the document. Don't change the reference numbers in the document, yet.

After the footnotes have been moved, remove all other details that may be in the headers or footers. These should be empty throughout the document. Like page numbers, it may be necessary to go through the various formatting sections to remove all the header/footer text.

Finally remove the cover image, if it's in the document, and any blank pages.

* The website [pdftoword.com](http://www.pdftoword.com) is a free version of Nitro Pro, a file conversion service. Here's a link to review <https://www.gonitro.com/> (This is not an affiliate link.)

Assignment:

Practice these steps and let me know how you did. Note any areas of particular concern or confusion.

By following these step, your manuscript will be ready for the next lesson.

Read the “Simplified Formatting Guide” at the KDP website.

(<https://kdp.amazon.com/help?topicId=A17W8UM0MMSQX6>) We will be covering these steps in detail. Share your thoughts about the process.

Resources

[Smashwords Style Guide](#)

This free download is specific to formatting and publishing through Smashwords. But it does have some helpful information and tips.

[Building Your Book for Kindle](#)

Amazon’s instructions for formatting and using KDP. This also has good information about e-book development. There is a separate version for each computer platform, PC and MAC.

[Lulu’s Complete E-book Creator Guide](#)

This is a free guide for EPUB conversion. The guide is available as a PDF or DOC file. You are required to give an e-mail address to receive the e-book.

[Formatting e-Books for Writers](#)

This is the book I wrote based on this class. It details the steps covered in these lessons.