



Rest Stop 5: Traditional and Self-Publishing: Some Pros and Cons

Here are some considerations of publication with a traditional publisher (either a Big-5 imprint or a small indie press), as compared with self-publishing.

The *Big-5 traditional imprints*—for instance, any of the imprints under the Penguin Random House name—tend to offer the best up-front guarantees (initial payment to author), and usually have a large team of people working on each project. But as their goal is to make their investment back by selling books, they tend to be highly focused on the market, publishing only what they think they can sell. Some authors find this limiting. Big-5 imprints also have more gatekeeping layers—typically, you can only submit to them through a literary agent, in what can be a very baroque and time-consuming process (you may have to submit tens or even hundreds of times).

Small traditional indie presses—for instance, Portland’s own Forest Avenue Press—usually have open submissions, as well as a more literary, niche, or even experimental sensibility. They offer smaller guarantees (if they offer a guarantee at all) and tend to have limited staff. But what they lack in publishing muscle they make up for in passion. They are often open to the kinds of projects that larger publishers might shun for lack of commercial viability.

One of the biggest benefits of traditional publishing in general is how it grants an author access to an already-existing community. Many traditional publishers (especially on the indie side, and especially the ones with carefully developed brands) are known for producing a particular type of book. Authors who join their list can potentially reach certain readerships faster thanks to that association.

In *self-publishing*, the author either hires people to help with publishing tasks or does everything themselves. This can be great if you have a strong

vision and an intuitive understanding of the pieces of the publishing puzzle, or if you hire people who are well-suited to your project. It can also be great if you have a strong platform (that is, if you have some renown, either as a writer or in some other field) or the time and energy to devote to publicizing your work.

Unfortunately, self-publishing is sometimes stigmatized, given the unfair assumption that self-published books are not vetted, or that they lack credibility. But authors can overcome this stigma, especially when they work hard and surround themselves with a good team. The ranks of the successfully self-published have included such canonical authors as e.e. cummings, Charles Dickens, and Margaret Atwood, such important historical figures as Frederick Douglass, and such bestselling titles as *The Martian* (Andy Weir), *Fifty Shades of Grey* (E. L. James), and the *Courtlight* series (Terah Edun).

Thank you for reading. Happy writing!



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