



# The End... Now What?

A Quick Start Guide to  
The Cover Art Process  
For Self-Publishing

Heidi Sutherlin

Graphic Designer for the Publishing Industry

# Congratulations!

You've finished writing your book

## ...Now What?

You've spent countless hours, days, months, maybe even years crafting your book. Now it's finally complete and ready to publish. But what happens next?

Publishing can be stressful. This guide was created to give you a quick overview of what the next steps are to publish your book and what you can do to be as prepared for them as possible.

### Editing

The first and most important thing that every author must do is to make sure that their books are properly edited. Nothing pulls a reader out of the experience quicker and more decisively than errors in a book. Making absolutely sure that your book is its best possible self, if the biggest gift you can give to yourself and every person who will read your book. It will also keep your readers coming back to you and passing your work on to others.

### Cover Art Design

The cover art process can begin at any time. I have authors who order cover art for an entire series before they've even started writing. This allows them to use the cover art for inspiration while they write. Others come to me at the end

of the editing or formatting process. When we start is not important, only that we enjoy the process as we go. To do that, it helps to know what to expect.

### 1. Ask Questions

You should never be afraid to ask questions. All publishing professionals are happy to answer your questions because that is a part of our function. If we don't know the answer, we usually know how to find it or who to direct you to. If you find yourself dealing with someone who doesn't want to answer your questions, or worse, makes you feel bad for asking them...run, don't walk to the nearest exit. Remember, stress comes from the unknown. Asking questions is the simplest way to combat it and a great way to start.

### 2. Payments and Contracts

Before beginning any project, most cover art designers will provide you with a contract or project agreement. This agreement should list the price, the return/cancellation policy, an NDA policy, use of the cover art by the designer (generally in their portfolios and for marketing purposes), what is to be delivered, and a copyright release to you (meaning the designer releases ownership of the design to you after payment). These agreements are important because it protects both you and the designer. It also helps you to know exactly what you are getting.

Payment may vary. Some designers require the entire fee up front, and others, like myself, prefer a deposit (50%) to begin and the rest of the payment after delivery of final files.

### 3. Inspiration

For me, the cover art journey begins with the Cover Art Inspiration Questionnaire, which you'll find at the end of this guide. This is a quick and somewhat abstract series of

questions that gives me a lot of information about what your book is about and the details for the cover, but also a glimpse into your personal aesthetic. Custom cover art is tailor made for you and your book. It's meant to be a visual representation of what you've written and you as the author. Ideally, it is either an extension of your brand or the beginning of that brand as you move forward as an author and build a reader base.

The questionnaire is just one tool that I use to create initial concepts. I also encourage all of my authors to send me inspiration. For some this is in the form of other books they've seen that they like, art, movies, even pictures of napkin sketches. Whatever inspires you, whatever you can send me, even long descriptive emails, will help me to create the initial concepts for your cover art. If you don't have any of that, no problem. I will still be able to put some concepts together for you and we'll discover together what shape the cover art design will take. Design is a conversation, and the best part of that is discovering where it takes us.

#### 4. Initial Concepts

From your answers to the questionnaire and any other thoughts or inspiration you share with me, I will put together the first draft(s) for your review. Your reaction to the draft(s) is the defining moment in the creation of your cover. You may find you like the initial direction and it's simply a matter of refining. Other times you might not like it at all and the final product may end up looking nothing like the first draft. Often after viewing the first draft, an author who may not have been able to clearly communicate what they wanted, or even had any idea of that themselves, has something to react to and from that point what they REALLY wanted comes to light.

## 5. Revisions

The revision policy for cover art design varies from designer to designer. Some limit the rounds of revisions, adding a fee for any that go over the predetermined amount. I do not. I provide unlimited revisions, because the goal is to create cover art that is EXACTLY what it needs to be. By removing the stress of “OH, NO! I need to decide right now. I only have one more round of changes,” we can focus on creating the right image for your book and your brand. On average, cover art design takes 2-4 rounds of revisions, and generally we start with 1-3 concepts. The cover art process takes approximately 1-2 weeks to complete.

## 6. Final Files

Every designer is a bit different when it comes to the final files that they deliver. Some deal with packages and add-ons, others do large bundles. Most packages start with the ebook cover (the front cover only) and go up from there.

I have one flat fee package that is \$300, and it includes:

- Ebook Cover Art (front)
- Unlimited concepts and revisions
- 3D rendering
- Facebook cover image
- Audible cover image (optional)

You have the option of adding the full print cover (front, back, and spine), for an additional \$50. This is where questions are also important: if you need something else, just ask! This is your opportunity to brand yourself and your writing. If you have an idea for a web banner or ad, or

bookmark, talk to your designer and see how they handle that. If nothing else, you can always add it to your list.

## Quick Recap

- ✓ Choose a designer
- ✓ Ask Questions!
- ✓ Contract/Project Agreement
- ✓ Pay the deposit (if applicable)
- ✓ Cover Art Inspiration Questionnaire & supporting inspiration materials
- ✓ Review initial concepts – react, revise, repeat
- ✓ Final approval
- ✓ Final files delivered – Your book isn't naked anymore! And don't forget to ask more questions!

Remember, this is supposed to be the fun part! Stress comes from the unknown. That's why I have created a Resources page on my website that has a listing of great editors, self-publishing tutorials, and even author services companies if you decide you need a bit more help.

[www.mycreativepursuits.com/resources](http://www.mycreativepursuits.com/resources)

It never hurts to ask questions and I am always happy to help, like all of the people on my resources list. Books are magic and you are *this* close to experiencing the best part of creating your own. I can't wait to see your book out in the wild!

# Cover Art Inspiration Questionnaire

Please answer these questions to the best of your ability. Whatever information you provide will help begin the cover art process.

1. What do you have in mind for your cover? Also, please list all text you would like included on the cover.

2. Is there any particular point of view, object or concept that stands out or that you feel defines your book.

3. What do you like (in general)?

4. What do you dislike (in general)?

## Some things to keep in mind...

For 3 and 4, these questions are vague and apply to anything you like or that annoys you - color, music, people on the subway standing too closely, etc. It gives me a clear picture of your particular tastes and style. Trust me, I often get more information from your answers here than through any other part of the process.

From the answers to these questions I will put together the first draft(s) for your review. Your reaction to the drafts is the defining moment in the creation of your cover. You may find you like the initial direction and it's simply a matter of refining, other times the final product may look nothing like the first draft. Often after viewing the first draft, an author who may not have been able to clearly communicate what they wanted, or even had any idea of that themselves, has something to react to and from that point what they REALLY wanted comes to light.