



Want to get your Book stocked in a High Street Bookshop?

TIPS & ADVICE FROM HIGH STREET BOOKSELLERS

Primarily aimed at independent authors, this document from The Booksellers Association also offers ideas and tips for authors published by a mainstream publisher.

" This new guide from The Booksellers Association is an excellent resource for any author who has ever wondered what more they could do to encourage bookshops to stock their work.

Although written primarily for authors whose works are self or independently published – writers who have long debated the best approach to get their work into bricks and mortar shops – it should be every bit as useful for traditionally published authors too.

At a time when authors of all types are playing an increasingly prominent role in promoting their books, it is reassuring that booksellers are looking at this in the most common sense way, as a 'team effort between an author, a publisher and a bookseller'."

Nicola Solomon, Society of Authors





Getting your book stocked in a High Street Bookshop

A Quick Guide

So you've written your book. After weeks, months, years, of writing it's finally finished, you have it printed and you're ready to share with readers. But how do you get your independently published novel onto the shelves of a high-street bookshop? Will the bookshop stock it?


Well, to make this process easier we have created a Quick Guide to help you on your way.

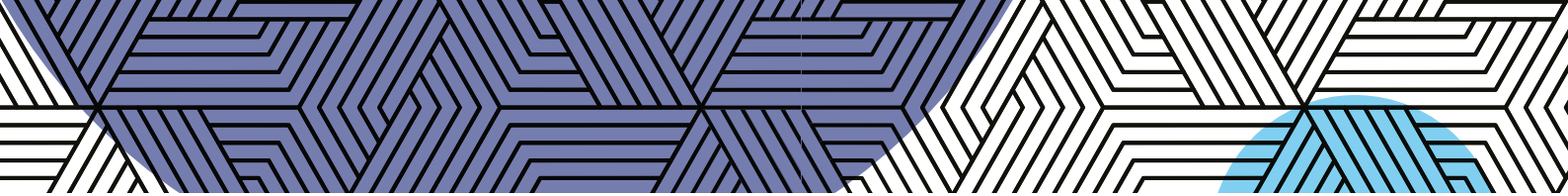
How to contact Booksellers

- Ideally booksellers would like to be emailed. It gives us time to think about your proposal; it gives us time to chat to our colleagues, and it gives the opportunity to deal with the request within our normal day.
- If you do decide to show us the book in person, please don't visit unannounced. It's beneficial instead to email ahead so we can arrange a quick appointment for you with the appropriate buyer at a time that works with the shop diary.

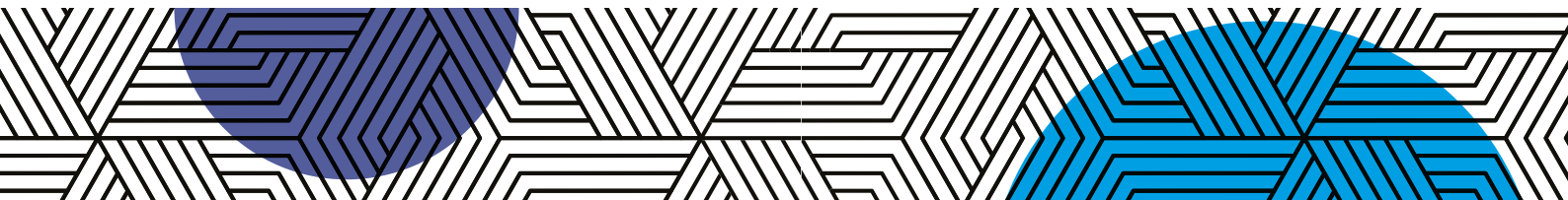
What Booksellers need to know

To help us make our decision, you should include the following information on your proposal:

- A quick synopsis of the book – two or three sentences is perfect.
 - A couple of lines about who you are.
 - **The sales details:**
 - How much your book retails for?
 - Include a professional invoice outlining your terms of business. A sample invoice is attached.
 - How much you are selling it to bookshops for. [Trade terms vary between publishers.] The market research agency, Nielsen, reports that the average discount bookshops receive from publishers is just over 40% off the recommended retail price. In the UK, the publisher almost always pays for the carriage charge in getting the books to the bookshop.
 - The format (Paperback/ Hardback). We would always recommend that the book has a spine; that the title is printed on the spine; and that there is a 13 digit EAN bar code (based on the ISBN) printed on the book.
 - Returns' information. The most usual trade practice for independently published titles would be for the books to be supplied on "consignment terms" (which means that the bookshop will pay for the stock once it has sold and can return unsold stock when it chooses). An alternative is "sale or return" where the bookshop pays for the stock according to the payment terms of your invoice, but has the right to return unsold stock for a full refund.
 - Think about payment terms and the length of time the bookshop should have the stock for sale. If after this agreed length of time the book(s) has not sold it is your responsibility to collect unsold stock. If the book(s) is not collected after 3 months, the bookseller can dispose of the stock as they deem fit.
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- A few sample pages for us to read.
 - Why you think the book will sell in our bookshop?
 - Who the competitor - or comparable authors - are in your eyes?
 - In which section should we display the book.
 - Do not call the bookshop on a regular basis to check on sales. Tempting as that might be.
 - A jpg image of the jacket.
 - If the book has any local ties, is it set in our area? Did you go to school around the corner?
 - Do you have any local publicity lined up, or in the pipeline (e.g. features, interviews or extracts in local news media)? This can have real value in improving local sales.

Tips

- Be competitive regarding the pricing of your book. A standard paperback is around £8.99.
 - Look at the production quality; a well presented finished-product speaks volumes. Look at books in similar genres to your own on bookshop shelves and note the current design styles/finishes/fonts being used.
 - Give important consideration to the jacket design. Review the competition, check out the award-winning designs from the latest British Book Design Awards www.britishbookawards.org. If you want your book to take up space on a shelf face out (the most popular display method) the jacket must be of stunning design and quality. Book cover design is a specialist discipline, so commissioning an experienced designer is often the best way to give your book an edge alongside other publications.
 - Pick your time of year carefully. The majority of new writers are launched in the beginning of the year. If you release too close to Christmas your book will get lost on the shelves. If you come in February or March, we often have the space to display your book where it has a better chance of selling.
 - Booksellers would not welcome being sent an Amazon link in your proposal. Whilst, of course, Amazon is likely to be another outlet for your book, most high street bookshops choose to have no commercial dealings with Amazon because of the perceived negative impact they have had on Britain's high streets and physical bookshops.
 - Think about how you might promote your book and direct people to the bookshop for sales. We send our sales information to Nielsen/Book Scan, so if we sell a lot of copies your book will get noticed around the book industry.
 - Outline what will be your marketing & publicity plan for the book if we take stock to generate interest.
 - Supply: make sure your book can be distributed via the national trade trade wholesalers Gardners (www.gardners.com) or Bertrams (www.bertrams.com), at a standard trade discount, with returns. If in the Republic of Ireland use either Easons (www.easons.com) or Argosy (www.argosybooks.ie).
 - Ask your printer how they can help to distribute your book via the wholesalers mentioned above. Many will take care of this on your behalf. For instance, a traditional book printer like Clays will warehouse copies of your books then distribute them when wholesale orders come in; while Ingram Sparks / Lightning Source will print each copy to order and distribute them to retailers via the main wholesale routes.
- 



- Fix a realistic *wholesale discount* when you set up your book for distribution, whether you do this directly via the wholesalers, or via your printer. It might be tempting to keep the discount as low as possible to increase your royalties, but the lower you make it the less realistic it will be for a bookshop to stock it. Do your research – find out how much of a cut the wholesaler will take (as a very general guide, it could be in the area of 15%), and remember that the average discount bookshops receive is in the region of 40% of the cover price.
- Thinking through and planning for these elements of distribution will simplify our ordering/reordering of your book and increases your chance of being stocked by us tenfold. Whilst bookshops might from time to time agree to being supplied directly by an author, each time a separate supplier is set up for an individual book adds greatly to the bookshop's paperwork and accounting burden and, more importantly, means that it takes longer to reorder the book once it sells. Most bookshops order every day from Gardners, Bertrams, Easons or Agrosy at the click of a button, and so ensuring those wholesalers have stock of your book is the best way to make it easily accessible to every bookshop in the country.
- Months before the book is due to be published, begin the social media campaign and include your local bookshops.
- Gather the email contact details of friends and contacts and once the book is published tell them that they can order it through such and such a bookshop. This will show the local bookshop that there is interest and they, in turn, are more likely to say 'yes' to stocking your book.
- If you sell copies direct to all your friends and family, it is unlikely that the local bookshop will have a market to sell to. If you persist in taking this step, don't be surprised if after a month or so you get an email from them announcing they have sold none and want to return the book(s).
- If you have a website, please direct potential customers to any bookshops that have agreed to stock your book.
- If a bookshop does order copies of your book and agrees to be supplied by you directly, then don't forget to deliver the books along with an invoice. It is very important the latter has your contact details (for future orders) and bank details (for payment).

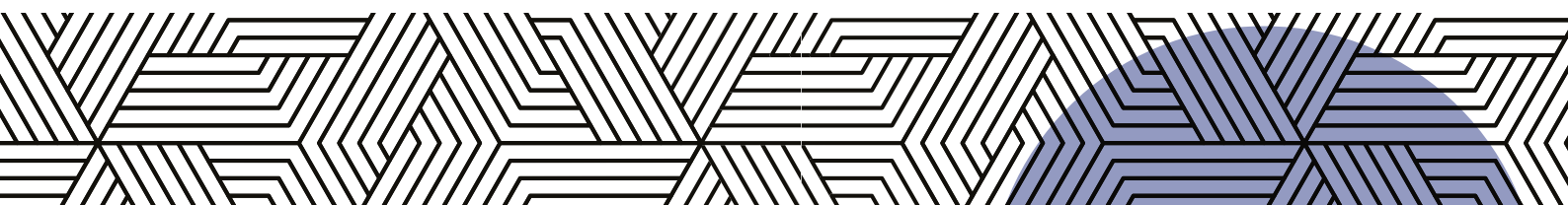
How a typical high street bookshop decides on the books to stock

Every bookshop has a finite amount of space and budget to spend each month. The book buyers will go through a series of decisions before saying 'yes' or 'no' to any particular book.

For many bookshops, the decision is helped by the representatives from publishers who will brief them on the new books, why they believe it will sell in the bookshop, and what promotion the publisher is putting behind the book.

Here we outline some of the decisions taken by a bookseller before deciding to stock a book:

- **Our market:** we understand what our customers like to read and what genres sell well. We tailor our stock around that (we also try and find the books they didn't know they liked).
- **Our tastes:** if we read and love a book, you can be sure we're going to be telling our customers about it.
- **The subject:** if a book is on a topic that we feel will be of interest to our customers, then that is a huge swaying factor for us.



- **The author:** if we know their work and their track record, we can make a judgement on how well we think the book will sell for us. Also, if the author is local and is likely to have a local following and/or supportive friends and family, then this will influence us.
- **Marketing:** we look at what sort of promotion the book will be getting locally, further afield and on social media (is there already a buzz around it?).
- **Format and price:** this is a major selling point for us; it's not unusual to wait for a paperback to come out before taking a chance on a title.
- **Design:** as with the format, we look at the jacket. Sometimes a stunning cover can be the swaying point between us taking a book or not.
- After all this, the bookseller may decline to stock your book. Don't take that personally nor expect an explanation. Time does not allow an explanation for every book we decline to stock.

One thing to remember is please don't be disheartened if we say 'no' to your book. What works for some bookshops doesn't work for others. What sells huge numbers in, say, the Edinburgh Bookshop might not sell in Bath and what sells in Bath may not sell in Oswestry. That's the beauty of high street bookshops – they are all different. You can find lists of Britain's bookshops at www.booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch.aspx.

What can you expect from a bookshop?

Despite the many one-way tips above, getting a book into a reader's hands is very much a team effort between an author, a publisher and a bookseller. Here's what you can expect from a bookshop when you approach them with your book:

- In all circumstances, to be treated with the respect and consideration you'd expect any business to give to a potential business partner.
- Once the bookseller has had a chance to consider the book properly, a clear and prompt answer as to whether or not the bookshop is willing to accept the book into its stock.
- If the bookshop is not willing to take the book, then a considered reason should be given for not doing so.
- If the bookshop does take the book and the book sells, to be paid promptly in accordance with the payment terms you have specified and to give quick consideration to reordering more stock.
- If the bookshop is included in any social media campaign around a book it has agreed to stock, to participate actively in that campaign.



*This Quick Guide
has been written
by Sheila O'Reilly*

Experienced independent bookseller,
from Village Books, Dulwich, London

A Sample Invoice

Invoice Template

This invoice gives you some ideas as to the sort of things you might consider including in the invoice you give to the bookseller. These suggestions are for guidance only. Any special *Conditions of Sale* can be mentioned on the invoice. However, you should ensure that you and the bookseller jointly agree them before the invoice is submitted.

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