

What about self-publishing?

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I don't like un-vetted books, aka self-published books or books printed by so-called vanity presses. I'm aware that this is where much of the publishing world is headed in this digital age. There is a growth industry of firms that will be glad to publish your book, in print or in digital format. Amazon even [has such a service](#).

I laud many aspects of the digital world. But this is one development I see as a big negative.

Every writer needs vetting; every writer needs an editor or two. Read the credits in the prefaces of most published authors and you'll get the sense that publishing a good book takes a small village. Rightly so.

Some self-published authors pay for the services of copyeditors and proofreaders. But they are mere hired guns. The author is still in control of the final product. There's no filter to block bad content.

The *Century* doesn't review self-published books, though people send them to us all the time. They are often memoirs by older white men who will try to convince us of the need to review their books. "I've been a *Century* subscriber for the last 55 years," some plead, as if being a long-term reader entitles them to space in our review section.

One self-published fiction writer begged me on the phone to review his book. He pointed out that *The Shack* started out as a self-published book. It of course went on to be on the *New York Times* bestseller list for more than a year and half, and it sold more than 10 million copies.

Whatever *The Shack's* merits or lack thereof, I'd guess it's one in a million self-published books that gets [picked up by a publisher and sells well](#) (pdf). The sequence is important here: it got picked up by a traditional publisher, then it sold well. A more likely route to success is for an established big-name author to [abandon traditional publishing and go it alone](#).

There is a place for self-published books. I've told many older people they should consider writing their memoirs: for themselves, first of all, as an act of reflecting back on their lives; and also as a legacy to leave behind for their families. Most of these books should be self-published; rarely are they good enough to be published by a reputable publisher. This doesn't mean they don't have value of another kind.

But in general I'd encourage writers to take the tough but superior road to working with a reputable publisher. The result will be a better book.