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# THE SELF-PUBLISHED SCHOLAR: IN SUPPORT OF DESKTOP PUBLISHING

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**T**here are bad texts — which someone else writes — good texts — which we write — and perfect texts — which we plan to write some day.” Kenneth Eble, *Craft of Teaching*.

Twenty years ago, when the quote above was first written, it was a witty comment made by a professor who knew from experience how difficult it was to get a book published. Few could expect to see their own textbook make it to print. The advent of desktop publishing technology has forever changed that situation. Now it is quite reasonable for a professor to think about self-publishing some or all of the materials for a class. With surprisingly little work, one can create a professional looking text to be duplicated for student use.

There are good reasons why one should consider self-publishing, as this brief comparison to traditional textbooks might make clear.

## Keeping Current

The publication process for a traditional textbook often takes a year or more from the time the manuscript leaves the author's hands. Even a quick distributor may not get it to an adoption committee for another six months, and an adoption decision also takes time. Whether one likes it or not, the information in even the newest textbook can easily be two years old by the time it makes it to the classroom. In our quickly changing world, that lag sometimes leaves us well behind events.

For example, I teach Introduction to Theater using a textbook that refers glancingly to Václav Havel as a minor Czech playwright whose imprisonment will probably keep his work from ever reaching a wide audience. The fact that Havel is now president of Czechoslovakia is not being brought to my students' attention, and it may be as

much as two years before they can see a written assessment of his importance. Of course, one can and does make amends for such omissions in the lecture, but I wonder if my students give such lecture additions equal weight.

Desktop publishing, in contrast, can be very fast. Students can have printed materials in their hands nearly as quickly as the professor can prepare them. Twenty-four hour turn-around is possible; it almost never takes a week.

All teachers have experienced the frustration of communicating to our students that knowledge is not a fixed body of facts to be memorized, but an active and passionate search. Giving them the latest material can convey a sense of participation in the process. Now the technology of desktop publishing makes it feasible.

## Tailoring to the Situation

Any textbook which expects to appeal to the larger market must be sufficiently general to fit many situations. It must be applicable to semester and quarter formats, organized loosely enough that instructors can pick and choose from its contents, and, ideally, broad enough to cover more than one discipline.

This scope, which proves a boon to sales, is not always good for our individual classrooms. We sometimes want to include materials specific to our situation. Local resources, the particular expertise of the instructor, class size, lecture or seminar formats, and the academic level of students enrolled for the class all influence the way we want to organize material.

All of the above can be taken into consideration when self-publishing. For once, one can have the right number of chapters and organize them in the right order. One can weave in references to local resources, events and experts. One might even be able to make specific reference to how materials in our class might relate to other classes on our campus, an interconnection much dreamed about but difficult with a traditional textbook. If the

thought of preparing a complete text is daunting, one can still consider adding supplementary materials which make specific to our students what is general in the text.

## The Dangers and Difficulties

Self-published materials can be specific and current. Those are the great advantages. Of course, like any technology, it has come disadvantages. Here are a few that one should consider:

1. Expense. The usual way of getting a self-published manuscript into students' hands is to have a master copy duplicated by a quick printing service. At about five cents a page, it will cost slightly more than a comparable standard textbook. If expense is an important consideration, the cost can be reduced by carefully screening the material for pertinence.

2. Illustration. With a laser printer it is possible to create professional-looking text, but the technology is not adequate for producing illustrations. Line drawings produced with computer graphics can be suitable, but photographs and subtle art are difficult to achieve, and colored illustration is all but out of the question. Subjects which require high-quality illustration need professional publishing. Self-published supplements may still be useful reinforcement, however.

3. Extensive Scientific Notation. As an illustration, the ability of the computer to produce scientific notation is far less developed than for normal text. Unusual figures and complex placements may have to be created and placed individually. With patience and ingenuity one can beat the problem, but the cost may outweigh the benefits if the notation is extensive.

4. The Problems of Speed. Because desktop publishing is faster and easier than traditional publishing, unfortunately, it is also easier to create and perpetuate a mistake. Extra caution is necessary to see that copyrighted materials are used properly. The convenience of shuffling and reusing materials in a variety of forms masks



the accompanying problems of seeing that all quoted materials remain properly credited.

### Some How-To's

In the summer of 1989 I received an Instructional Enhancement Grant from Kennesaw State College to prepare an extensive set of new materials for one of my classes. A major part of the task was to write and self-publish a textbook for my course. Writing the material took the kind of detailed effort that any good expository writing requires. The technology of self-publishing offered few shortcuts, though in the process of reorganizing my text I have been grateful for the computer's ability to move large passages of text with just a few simple commands. I have been pleasantly surprised, however, to find that the actual process of laying-out and printing the book has been simple.

Though it is not absolutely necessary, one can save time by doing the original composition of the text on a word processor. For anyone who already types, learning to use word processing is relatively simple. I use Microsoft Word on a Macintosh SE for most of my work, but there are many other combinations which work as well. A strategy for the uninitiated is to use whatever the departmental secretary is using, thereby having a source for instruction when it is needed.

The main difference between preparing a book and general expository writing is the need to create chapter headings and sub-headings as well as

body text. Visual variety demands more headings than we ordinarily use when subject matter alone dictates them. Most word-processing programs will allow you to print your headings and sub-headings in larger and bolder type, though not all of them will show the difference on a computer screen.

It is best to prepare a final draft of the text in the word-processing program. I began the process of page layout with my rough draft and regretted it later. Though it is exciting to see the book begin to take form, to do so prematurely makes it difficult to enter corrections. Take advantage of the capabilities of word-processing spelling checker to search for typographical errors. Computers are no replacement for careful proofreading, but they are much more efficient than humans at catching misprints and mechanical errors.

Once the writing is complete, it is time to turn to a page-layout program. A page-layout program does electronically what a typesetter and graphic

artist do in traditional publishing. By entering a few simple specifications, one can design a standard page. This standard page can be sophisticated, including headings, running chapter titles, and page numbers. It knows enough to make right and left pages face each other for double side printing, leaving room at the inside margin for binding. It will even leave space for footnotes at the bottom of the page. You need only design one set of master pages and thereafter the format can be applied to the entire book. A few more specifications will tell the program what type faces and sizes you want for headings, sub-headings, and body type. Don't be intimidated if you know nothing about these things. Such choices are fairly standard, and the instruction manual will give you advice.

The program then "pours" your text into your customized format, producing a sophisticated final product. *Reaching Through Teaching* is produced through such a process, as is *The Monday Report* and the programs for performing arts events on campus.

Such an effort can be very rewarding for you and for your students. My final words of encouragement are to note the strong positive feedback I have received from my students about my book. My classes have demonstrated an overall increase in interest in the new materials, feeling more personally connected to it by virtue of being able to talk to the "author." As well, they now understand that my teaching involves more than the contact hours I spend with them. 🍎