WIFY

I Read 200 Self-Published Books. Here's Why 95% Never Sell More Than 10 Copies

Video: "I Read 200 Self-Published Books. Here's Why 95% Never Sell More Than 10 Copies"
Creator: Patrick Walsh, YouTube (Patrick Walsh | Writing), published 5 August 2025, about 8 minutes
Link: youtube.com/watch?v=p0komg6L2Vw
Watched for the Casover community by Steve Castledine, 10 November 2026

The learning points

1. **A home-made cover loses readers** before they read a word. Match the bestsellers in your genre.
2. **Write the blurb like a film trailer:** a problem, high stakes, a little mystery. Not a summary.
3. **Pick one genre and keep its promise.** Mixing genres loses every kind of reader.
4. **Start in small Amazon categories** you can actually rank in, then build momentum.
5. **Price to signal value:** around £2.99 to £4.99 for an ebook. 99p says "not worth reading".
6. **Launch with 10 to 15 real reviews,** from readers you lined up months before. Never fake ones.

That is the video in two minutes. The rest of this guide is the detail, with timestamps if you want to hear a point in the creator's own words.

Who this is for

Novelists about to publish, and anyone whose book is out but barely selling. Patrick Walsh read 200 self-published novels in a year to find out why good books go unnoticed. His answer is seven avoidable mistakes, none of them about the writing. It is a checklist video, quick and practical, aimed at fiction. You will come away with seven things to check on your own book, most of which cost nothing to fix.

The guide

1. Good books, no readers 00:00

He set himself the challenge of reading 200 self-published novels in one year. Many were good: emotional, smart, page turners. Yet they had no audience, and in his view the reason was not the writing but seven mistakes that put readers off before they reach page one.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> If your book is not selling, do not start by rewriting it. Check the seven things below first. They are cheaper to fix and more likely to be the problem.

2. The cover catastrophe 00:48

He says about 80% of the non-selling books he read had amateur-looking covers: pixelated images, crooked titles, Comic Sans. One of the best books he read, a sci-fi novel, had a generic stock robot on the front, and he would never have picked it up outside the challenge. A cover is the first impression and sets the reader's expectations of tone and quality. His fix: hire a professional designer, or if you cannot afford one, study the bestsellers in your genre closely and learn the design tools yourself.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> Look at your cover at thumbnail size next to the top ten in your category. If it does not look like it belongs on that shelf, readers will scroll past.

3. The blurb that buries you 01:46

Most blurbs he read recited facts ("Sarah's a 28-year-old accountant with a cat") instead of selling the story. Compare "Some family secrets are worth killing for." Treat the blurb as the film trailer: a compelling problem, high emotional stakes, and just enough mystery to make readers curious. A blurb that summarises the plot spoils it rather than sells it.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> Your first line matters most. One sentence with the problem and the stakes, before any names or backstory.

4. Genre confusion 02:27

He saw authors mix romance, mystery, sci-fi and literary fiction in one book, perhaps hoping more genres would mean more readers. Instead nobody feels the book is for them. He read a "cosy mystery" that was really dark psychological horror: a good book, marketed wrongly. Genre is not a box that limits your writing, he says, but a promise to the reader about what they will get. Break it and readers punish you.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> Write what you like, but market it as the one genre whose readers will be happiest with it. Cover, blurb and category should all make the same promise.

5. Bad category placement 03:39

Amazon has thousands of categories and most authors pick the wrong ones, often launching a debut into the same big category as Stephen King. Smart authors start in small, specific categories they can actually rank in, build reviews and traction, then move up. Retail algorithms reward momentum, and momentum comes from winning in your niche first.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> Before you choose, look at the sales rank of the books at the top of a category. If they are far beyond your reach, find a narrower one.

6. The broken sample 04:40

Amazon's Look Inside is often the deciding moment, and most authors waste it with a copyright page, a dedication and a prologue that adds nothing. By chapter one the reader has gone. One author he read opened with a fast action scene taken from chapter three, followed by a note inviting the reader back to the start. The sample should show tone, tension and a reason to keep reading. And proofread it: typos on page one kill trust.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> Open your own Look Inside and count the pages before the story starts. Move what you can to the back of the book.

7. The price trap 05:29

He argues 99p or 99 cents does not help: it says the book probably is not worth reading. The authors doing well price around £2.99 to £4.99 (or the same in dollars), high enough to signal value but low enough to be a risk readers will take. A debut with no reviews should not charge £10 and try to compete with the big names. Start modest and raise the price as sales and reviews build.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> His figures are for ebooks. Print prices are set by your page count and print cost, so check those separately.

8. The review desert 06:13

Zero reviews means zero trust: readers will not gamble on an unproven book and Amazon will not promote it. Fake reviews are not the answer and will get the book banned. The authors who succeed build relationships months before launch with book bloggers, ARC readers and bookstagrammers, and launch with 10 to 15 real reviews.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> Start your list of early readers now, even if launch is months away. Ten committed readers are worth more than a hundred vague promises.

9. The final thought 07:17

Writing the book is hard, he says, but getting people to read it is just as hard. If the cover, blurb, genre or positioning are off, a masterpiece goes unfound. All of it can be fixed: covers changed, blurbs rewritten, categories adjusted. The authors who succeeded were not always the most talented, but they treated publishing like a business.

> **FOR AUTHORS**
> Already published? Every one of these can be changed after launch. Pick the weakest and fix that first.

Key quotes

> *"Your cover isn't decoration. It's the first impression."* 01:19

> *"Think of your blurb as the movie trailer."* 02:06

> *"It's really just a promise to the reader."* 03:13

> *"Stop trying to win the Olympics on day one."* 04:18

> *"Reviews, they're not optional. They are the oxygen for your book."* 06:59

Do it this week

1. Do the shelf test.
Put your cover at thumbnail size next to the top ten in your Amazon category. *Done when: you can say honestly whether it looks like it belongs.*

2. Rewrite your blurb's first line.
One sentence with the problem and the stakes, before any names or backstory. *Done when: someone who has not read the book asks "what happens?"*

3. Check your Look Inside.
Count the pages before the story starts and move what you can to the back. *Done when: chapter one starts within a page or two.*

4. Find two smaller categories.
Look at the sales ranks of the top books and note two categories you could realistically rank in. *Done when: you have two categories written down with their top ranks.*

5. Start your early-reader list.
ARC readers, book bloggers, bookstagrammers, readers who have written to you. *Done when: you have ten names.*

Where it falls short for authors

This section is Casover's view, not the creator's. The checklist is sound and well ordered, but the video is also an advert: he points to his own cover, consultation and review-finding services three times, so watch it knowing that. The 80% and 95% figures come from his own reading of 200 books, not from sales data. His pricing advice is for ebooks only, and he does not mention that on KDP ebooks priced between £2.99 and £9.99 can earn the 70% royalty, while 99p earns 35%, which strengthens his point. He does not mention that KDP now lets you choose up to three categories when you publish, so each choice counts. On reviews, Amazon's rules bar paid reviews and reviews from people with a personal or financial interest, so ARC copies must come with no strings. And opening the sample with a scene from chapter three is a tactic, not a rule: if readers feel tricked when the real chapter one starts, it can backfire.

Go deeper

Named in the video: Amazon's Look Inside feature; Photoshop for cover design; ARC readers, book bloggers and bookstagrammers for early reviews; Stephen King and Colleen Hoover as examples of big names not to compete with on day one; and the creator's own services (cover design, pre-publication consultation, finding reviewers), linked from his video description.

Credit: Patrick Walsh, "I Read 200 Self-Published Books. Here's Why 95% Never Sell More Than 10 Copies", YouTube (Patrick Walsh | Writing), 5 August 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0komg6L2Vw. This guide is a summary with commentary. Watch the original; the creator deserves the view.