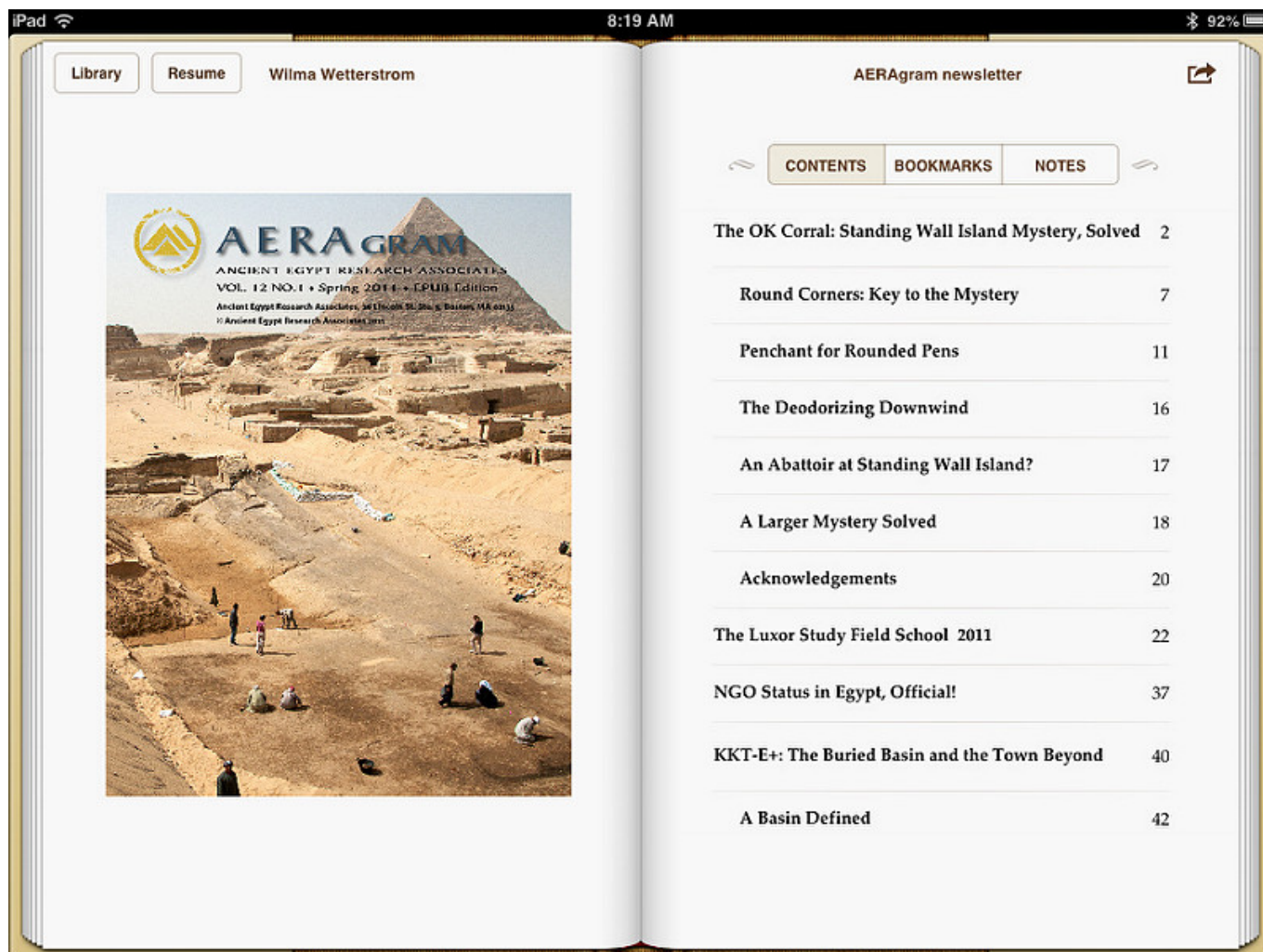


Six books and three programmes



If you want to format your own file as an eBook, you need just four books. You also need three pieces of software.

Those are the two main ways of formatting an eBook.

You can format the file yourself as an Epub or Mobi file - the two most common Ebook formats - and upload the file to Kindle Direct Publishing or Smashwords. That gives you control of the formatting and, most importantly, of the appearance of your book.

Alternatively, you can clean up your Word manuscript - or your Libre Office file, or whatever wordprocessing software you use - and let Kindle Direct Publishing or Smashwords and let them convert the file to an eBook.

This saves time and effort. You don't have to learn new software. And it doesn't cost anything extra.

If you want to use this method, and upload your wordprocessing file to Kindle Direct Publishing or Smashwords, relax. Each company makes a manual available.

This isn't really the place for a thorough discussion of the respective merits of the different approaches. What it is important to realise is that people tend to be partisan. You rarely find a fair account of both alternatives in the same book or post.

People who advocate formatting the file yourself are very deprecatory about uploading the wordprocessing file. They say the publishers often make a horrible mess. They tend not to give examples.

People who recommend uploading to Kindle Direct Publishing or Smashwords don't usually mention the possibility of doing it yourself. It's as if the other way doesn't exist.

The best-sellers sometimes dismiss the writers who format their own books as hobbyists. I think they are artisans. It's a question of personality.

I would not recommend online conversion services. You don't know what software they are using and you don't know what the results are like.

Some word processing packages enable you to output an Epub or Mobi file. Don't. Guido Henkel is emphatic on this point: '...word processors— and that includes "Scrivener"—are

not very good at what eBooks do, and are therefore the wrong tools for the job when the time comes to create an eBook from your finished manuscript.'

Scrivener is designed for drafting long documents. I don't think it's even very good at word processing. I certainly wouldn't use it to output an Epub or a Mobi file.

I would not recommend paying anyone else to turn your word-processing your file into an eBook for you. Even if you are very rich and very busy, I suggest that you find out what would be involved in the other methods first.

The books

1. EBOOKS 101: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO E-BOOK FORMATTING, *Teo Kos, 2015*

This book is exactly what it says. It takes you through the rather limited amount of HTML and CSS you need to format an eBook and shows you how to do it. You can use EBOOKS 901 as an introduction, but it is designed as a manual. I have it open when I do more formatting, and I toggle back and forth.

Ana Jevtic Kos, Teo's wife, is an artist and designer. Together they run First Ink Studios, an eBook design and formatting service. Teo Kos is also a writer. He knows the business from both sides.

Mr Kos writes science fiction as Viktor Kowalski. Apparently this means 'John Smith' in Polish.

If you can explain to me why a respectable Croatian professional calls himself 'John Smith' in Polish when he writes science fiction, I will award a small prize. A copy of my first novel as an eBook, perhaps?

It's £1.99 on Kindle. You can go directly to the product page on Amazon by clicking [here](#).

2. ZEN OF EBOOK FORMATTING, *Guido Henkel*, 2015

Mr Henkel is vastly experienced. He formats his own books and has vast hordes of customers for his formatting service. His great strength as an author is that he doesn't just know eBooks and the web. He also knows print.

Mr Henkel makes the differences between print and eBooks very clear. He is also very good at explaining why we format eBooks the way we do. He explains concepts like reflowable in simple terms.

I would recommend this very highly as an introduction. Mr Henkel does not write solely for beginners and his advice is sometimes quite sophisticated. It was from Mr Henkel's book for example that I learned how to insert a clickable link. I *love* inserting clickable links.

Mr Kos's book and Mr Henkel's complement each other very well.

ZEN OF EBOOK FORMATTING costs £3.77 on Kindle. The direct link to the Amazon product page is [here](#).

Mr Henkel's email, which I am sure he will not mind me publishing for the millions, is ghenkel@guidohenkel.com. To visit his website, click [here](#).

3. HOW TO MAKE AN E-BOOK COVER for non-designers, *Kate Harper*, 2012

The manuals of self-publishing, the how to books and the guides all agree on one thing: you can't design and create the covers for your own eBook.

Oh yes, you can. And Ms Harper is going to explain how.

If you're doing down-market genre fiction and selling large quantities, a professionally designed cover will make a measurable difference. If you haven't yet got any money coming in from sales, you need to look a cheaper options.

Creating your own cover can be one of those options. And it's fun.

Ms Harper covers finding and editing images, as well as laying out type, colour, integrating the different elements, formatting and uploading.

My only disagreement is over software. Ms Harper recommends either Word, which is limited, or Adobe Photoshop, which is expensive.

She suggests using a free thirty-day download of Photoshop, or accessing it in a public library. My hair curls.

I recommend Gimp. See below.

HOW TO MAKE AN EBOOK COVER is £2.10 on Kindle. The Amazon product page is [here](#).

4. HOW TO GIMP: The Gnu Image Manipulation Program for Complete Beginners, *Katherine Landreth, 2013*

Kat Landreth's HOW TO GIMP is the essential complement to Kate Harper's book. HOW TO GIMP is a comprehensive, step by step guide to Gimp, the powerful software package of choice if you want to create covers.

You can use Gimp (more details below, under software) to create cover images for print

layout programmes like Scribus. You can also use it to create eBook covers for upload to Kindle Direct Publishing or Smashwords.

You can contact Ms Landreth via the publishers, Three Dots Press, who are at 3126 Cary Street, Richmond, VA 23221.

£7.78 on Amazon [here](#).

Software

All the software I am recommending here is open source. It has been developed collectively, and it is free.

A. SIGIL

Sigil is a text editor like Notepad. It is designed specifically for eBooks. It allows you to toggle from a 'code view' to a 'book view', which is very useful. It will generate an automatic table of contents. It won't let you save your work unless it is a well-formed HTML file. It's very much the software of choice.

B. CALIBRE 64 BIT

Calibre can be used to organise a library of eBooks, and as a reader. Its main use in self-publishing is to convert a file from one format to another.

The industry standard for eBooks was originally a protocol called Epub. Some people still need files in this format, and this is what Sigil outputs.

Kindle uses a protocol called Mobi. Amazon can't use the industry standard.

Calibre converts your Sigil file from Epub to Mobi while you wait. Use the *Save to Disc* command to save the converted file in a folder.

The conversion is easy. Mobi is in fact based on Epub. One wonders why Amazon.... No. We know why Amazon.

You will see separate icons for each format. You can then upload the Mobi file to Kindle.

If you think the name Mobi is weird, it is. Amazon bought the software from a French firm called Mobipocket, who sold - guess what? - pocket mobile phones.

C. GIMP

Make your images, including cover images, and create eBook covers. Gimp is the open source equivalent of Photoshop.

It has powerful resources, most of which you probably won't need. It can do pretty much everything you want.

NB: I have seen very positive remarks on line from people who make their own covers using a design programme called Canva. I haven't used it myself.

The Manuals

If you upload your wordprocessing file to Kindle Direct Publishing or Smashwords you will need to clean it up or it won't format properly.

You have to strip out the page numbers and the running heads, and any tabs or carriage returns you have used to create paragraph and page breaks, and extra spaces at the end of

paragraphs. Use the formatting commands on the menu bar.

By the time you have written your first novel you will probably be able to find your way around your wordprocessing package fairly easily. If you can't, consider asking a fourteen-year-old nephew. Fourteen-year-old nephews understand about these things.

Both Kindle Direct Publishing and Smashwords have thoughtfully provided manuals. You only need one.

5. BUILDING YOUR BOOK FOR KINDLE, *Kindle Direct Publishing*

It's free and it's [here](#).

6. THE SMASHWORDS STYLE GUIDE, *Mark Coker, 2012*.

Smashwords now convert to a range of formats. They prefer you to upload a properly prepared wordprocessing file, rather than an Epub.

Mr Coker's author page on Smashwords is [here](#). His Facebook URL is [this](#).

You can of course get the STYLE GUIDE from Smashwords. For completeness - since I have given the Amazon product page link for every other book in this post - you can also get it [here](#).

Example

You can see details of the latest book I did with this software and using these books [here](#). It's not bad.

Photo credit: [pyramidtextsonline](#) via [Visual hunt](#) / CC BY