



LITERARY INSPIRED · A FREE FIELD GUIDE

The ISBN Field Guide

What an ISBN actually is, when you need your own, and how to register one without overpaying.

For authors going wide, not just wherever Amazon sends them.

literaryinspired.com

GOING WIDE AND PRINTING? SKIP TO 02.

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Going wide and printing? Skip to 02.

What an ISBN is

An ISBN is the unique number that identifies one edition of one book to every retailer, library, and distributor in the world.

Own your ISBN and you register a book once, then send it everywhere under your own publishing name. It is the difference between a book that lives only where a platform puts it and one any store, library, or reader can order by name. If you plan to sell wide, this is the first brick.

THE SHORT VERSION

Ebook only, on Amazon only? You can skip it. Going wide, or printing paperbacks? You want your own. Section 02 covers it.

Your own, or Amazon's free one

This is the fork. One is free but locked to Amazon. The other you buy once and use everywhere.

	Amazon's free ISBN	Your own (from Bowker)
Where it works	KDP only. Nowhere else.	Everywhere: KDP, IngramSpark, Book Vault, your own store, libraries.
Publisher shown	"Independently published."	Your own imprint name, which you choose.
Cost	Free.	Paid, and yours to assign across formats and every future book.
Choose it when	KDP print only, never going wide.	You go wide, print, or want your own imprint.

Wide plus print? You need your own. Every time.

Each format needs its own

An ISBN identifies one edition. Change the format and it is a new product, with a new number. A major new edition needs one too.

Format	Needs its own ISBN?
Paperback	Yes.
Hardcover	Yes, if you offer one.
Ebook	Optional. Amazon assigns a free ASIN. You only need an ISBN to sell the ebook wide under your own metadata.
Audiobook	Optional. ACX and Audible assign their own identifier. You only need an ISBN to go wider than them.

The source, and the cost

In the United States, Bowker is the only official ISBN agency. You buy through its store, MyIdentifiers.com. Buy in a pack, not one at a time.

Quantity	Price (USD)	Per ISBN
1 ISBN	\$125	\$125
10-pack (recommended)	\$295	about \$29.50
100-pack	\$575	about \$5.75

One book, several formats, more titles coming? The 10-pack pays for itself.

Buy at [MyIdentifiers.com](#), the official Bowker store.

From account to assigned

1 Create your Bowker account

At MyIdentifiers.com. This is where your ISBNs and imprint live.

3 Choose your imprint name

Your publishing name, shown as the Publisher on every listing. Pick it once.

5 Register the title metadata

Assignment is instant; registering the details so it resolves in databases is separate. Do it early.

2 Buy the 10-pack

Cheaper per book, and it covers your paperback, hardcover, and next titles.

4 Assign one to each format

Paperback, and hardcover if you make one. The number is issued instantly.

6 Handle the barcode

Print needs a scannable barcode on the back cover. Your cover artist usually places it.

The shorthand, decoded

ISBN

The 13-digit number identifying one edition of your book to the whole trade.

ASIN

Amazon's own product ID, assigned free to every Kindle ebook. Amazon-only.

Imprint

Your publishing name, set when you register. It shows as the Publisher.

Bowker

The official US ISBN agency. You buy through MyIdentifiers.com.

Wide

Selling beyond Amazon: other stores, libraries, and your own storefront.

Registration

Filling in the title metadata so the ISBN resolves in retailer databases. Separate from assignment.



Own your number, own your book.

Register once, publish everywhere, under a name that is yours. If you would rather someone set the wide-and-direct foundation up with you, that is what I do.

Ready to go wide? Let's talk.

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