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KDP Cover Design Checklist

Design Covers That Get Clicks
and Avoid Costly Mistakes

Designed for:

- ✓ KDP publishers preparing to upload a new book
- ✓ Self-publishers evaluating an existing cover design
- ✓ Anyone who wants more clicks and fewer costly upload mistakes

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Free Resource · Print-Friendly · Evaluation Focused

Cover Fundamentals Checklist

Evaluate these elements on your cover before uploading — this is what buyers judge first.

■ Title Is Immediately Readable

Can you read the title clearly within 2 seconds? If you hesitate, buyers will click away.

■ Title Font Fits the Genre

Thriller fonts differ from romance fonts differ from business book fonts. Does yours match?

■ Subtitle Supports — Not Competes

Subtitle should be smaller than the title and add clarity, not visual noise.

■ Clear Visual Hierarchy

Eye should flow: Title → Image or Focal Point → Author Name. Nothing should compete equally.

■ One Strong Visual Focus

One dominant image or graphic element. Too many competing visuals dilute impact.

■ Genre Is Recognizable at a Glance

Compare to the top 10 bestsellers in your category. Does your cover belong in that group?

■ Author Name Is Present and Readable

Even for new authors: your name on the cover builds brand recognition over time.

■ No Clutter in the Margins

Leave breathing room. Overcrowded edges look unprofessional and print poorly.

■ Quick Win

- Print your cover at 3×4 inches and pin it to a wall.
- Step back 5 feet. Can you still read the title? Can you tell the genre?
- If no to either — your font size or contrast needs work before you upload.

■ Genre Fit Test

- Search your target category on Amazon.
- Screenshot the top 10 covers and paste yours next to them.
- Does it look like it belongs? Or like it came from a different genre?
- This visual comparison is the fastest way to spot a mismatch.

Thumbnail Test Checklist

Most buyers see your cover at 150×230 pixels on a phone. Pass this test — or don't publish yet.

■ Title Is Readable at Thumbnail Size

Shrink your cover to 1.5 inches tall. Still readable?
If the title blurs into the image, it fails.

■ Cover Works on a White Background

Amazon shows covers on white. A white or near-white cover edge disappears. Add a visible border or shadow.

■ No More Than Two Font Styles

Multiple fonts at small sizes create visual chaos.
Pick one primary, one accent — maximum.

■ High Contrast Between Text and Background

Light text on light image = invisible. Dark on dark = invisible. Always test your contrast.

■ Cover Is Not Overly Cluttered

Elements that look balanced at full size can look chaotic at thumbnail size. Simplify.

■ Central Image Reads Clearly When Small

A detailed illustration may be stunning at full size but unreadable at thumbnail. Zoom out and check.

■ Author Name Doesn't Crowd the Title

At thumbnail size, competing text blocks merge.
Ensure clear space between title and author name.

■ Cover Stands Out in a Grid of Competitors

Open Amazon on your phone. Search your category. Does your cover draw the eye? Be brutally honest.

■ Thumbnail Test — Real Examples

✗ FAILS THUMBNAIL TEST

Why It Fails:

- ✗ Title font is thin and decorative — unreadable at 150px
- ✗ Background image is too detailed — merges with title text
- ✗ Author name same size as title — creates visual confusion
- ✗ Low contrast: cream text on pale yellow background

✓ PASSES THUMBNAIL TEST

Why It Works:

- ✓ Bold, heavy font — title stays crisp at any thumbnail size
- ✓ Single strong image against dark background, no clutter
- ✓ Author name clearly smaller than title — hierarchy clear
- ✓ High contrast: white text on deep navy — always readable

■ How to Run This Test Yourself

Export your cover as a JPG. Open it on your phone. Pinch to shrink it until it's the size of a postage stamp. If you can read the title and identify the genre, it passes. If anything is muddy or illegible — fix it before uploading.

Back Cover & Spine Checklist

Paperback only — ebook sellers can skip to Page 5. KDP requires a full wrap for print.

■ Spine Text Is Horizontal and Readable

Title and author name should run vertically on spine. Test readability when tilting your head left.

■ Spine Font Is Large Enough for the Page Count

KDP restricts spine text for books under ~100 pages. Know your spine width before designing.

■ Spine Does Not Bleed Into Front or Back Cover

Leave at least 0.0625" clearance between spine text and cover fold lines.

■ Back Cover Has a Compelling Description

This is your sales copy. Lead with the reader's problem or a hook — not your biography.

■ Barcode Area Is Clear

Bottom-right of back cover must be white (or very light) and unobstructed. KDP places the barcode here.

■ Author Name or Bio Is Included

A short 2–3 sentence bio builds credibility. Even new authors should have something here.

■ Back Cover Has Enough Contrast to Read

Dark background with dark text fails print quality checks. Keep back cover text high contrast.

■ No Important Content in the Bleed Zone

Keep all text and logos at least 0.25" from any edge. Bleed zones get trimmed.

■ Common Back Cover Mistakes

- Placing a dark image directly behind the barcode area — KDP will reject it.
- Using the entire back cover as one giant image with no text — missed sales opportunity.
- Forgetting the ISBN or barcode placeholder — required for print distribution.
- Font too small on back cover — hard to read in-store and looks unprofessional.
- Spine text placed too close to fold — text gets cut or obscured after binding.

■ Spacing & Safety Zones

- Bleed: extend background 0.125" beyond the trim edge on all sides.
- Safety: keep all text and logos 0.25" inside the trim line.
- Spine: leave 0.0625" buffer between spine and both cover panels.
- Barcode zone: minimum 2" × 1.2" white space, bottom-right back cover.
- Use KDP's cover template calculator for exact dimensions — it's free.

Final Cover Audit

Run every cover through this before hitting Upload — catch problems before KDP does.

- Have you viewed the cover on an actual phone screen?
- Have you compared the cover to bestsellers in your category?
- Is the title readable in under 2 seconds at thumbnail size?
- Does the cover immediately signal the correct genre?
- Is there one clear visual focus — not three or four competing elements?
- Is contrast strong enough for both screen and print?
- Are all fonts limited to two styles maximum?
- Is the author name present, sized smaller than the title?
- Have you verified bleed and safety margins using KDP's template?
- Is the barcode area clear on the back cover (print books)?

■ Top 10 Cover Design Mistakes

1. Title font is decorative and unreadable at thumbnail size.
2. Cover looks nothing like other books in the same genre.
3. Too many competing focal points — no clear hierarchy.
4. Low contrast text blends into the background image.
5. Three or more different font families on one cover.
6. Author name is larger than — or same size as — the title.
7. Important text placed inside bleed or safety zones.
8. Back cover barcode area covered by a dark image.
9. Cover uploaded as low resolution — appears pixelated on Amazon.
10. Spine text present on a book with fewer than ~100 pages.

■ Final Go / No-Go Checklist

- Title is bold, readable, and matches genre conventions
- One strong focal image or graphic — not multiple competing
- High contrast between all text and its background
- Maximum two font styles used across the entire cover
- Author name present, clearly smaller than title
- Thumbnail test passed on phone screen
- Cover compared to top 10 in target category
- Bleed extended 0.125" beyond trim on all sides (print)
- All text inside 0.25" safety margin (print)
- Barcode area is white and unobstructed (print)
- File exported at 300 DPI minimum
- Cover approved — ready to upload