

## THE ULTIMATE BEGINNER GUIDE TO KDP FORMATTING

Created by SimpleLifeCalc.com

# KDP BLEED & TRIM EXPLAINED LIKE YOU'RE FIVE

For your first coloring book, journal, planner, workbook, or scrapbook — no jargon, no panic, and no more rejected files.

### WHAT'S INSIDE

- Bleed, trim & safe zones — in plain English
- The 8.5×11 vs 8.625×11.25 mystery, solved
- Cover & spine sizes (with the simple math)
- Why Amazon rejects files — and the fixes
- Step-by-step upload walkthrough
- Troubleshooting guide & FAQ
- Labeled diagrams of every concept
- Checklists & a quick-reference page

Written for people who read Amazon's documentation twice and felt worse afterward.

KDP specs occasionally change — confirm measurements with KDP's official cover calculator before final upload.

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# 1 Deep Breath. This Is Simpler Than It Looks.

If Amazon's help pages made you feel dumb — you're not. They're written for printers, not humans. Here's the secret: this entire topic is just THREE ideas, and you already understand all of them from real life.

## The photo-print story (this is the whole guide)

Imagine printing a photo and cutting it out with scissors. Your hand isn't laser-precise — you might cut a tiny bit inside or outside the line. Book printing machines have the same problem: every cut lands a hair off, in a random direction. Everything in this guide exists to deal with that one fact.

- **TRIM SIZE = the finished size.** Where the blade is AIMED. For a big workbook, that's  $8.5 \times 11$  inches — the size of the book in your hands when it's done.
- **BLEED = the overflow.** If you want color reaching the very EDGE of the page, you must print the color slightly PAST the cut line — so when the blade lands a hair off, there's still color there (not a white sliver).
- **SAFE ZONE = the keep-away strip.** Don't put words near the cut line, because the blade might drift inward. Keep anything important at least a quarter inch inside.

### GOOD TO KNOW · That's genuinely it

Trim = where it's cut. Bleed = printing past the cut so edges stay colorful. Safe zone = keeping words away from the cut. Every scary number in KDP ( $0.125''$ ,  $8.625 \times 11.25$ ,  $0.375''$  margins) is just one of these three ideas wearing a costume.

### TIP · How to read this guide

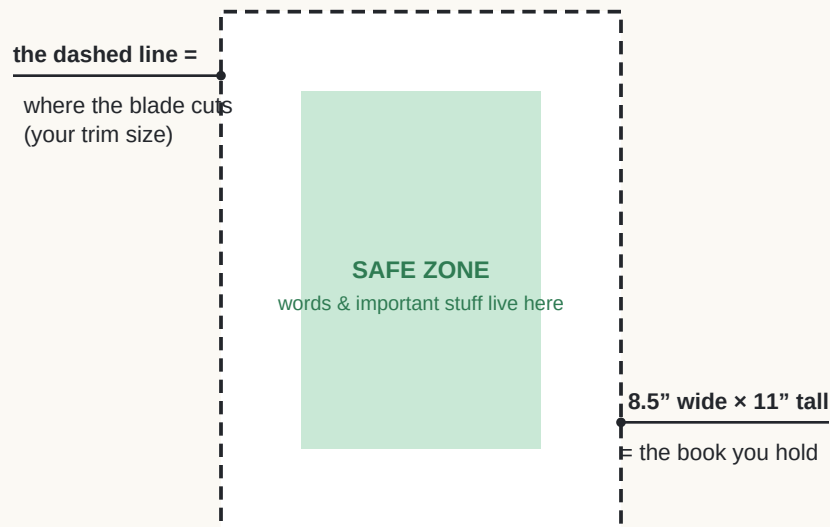
Pages 2–6 teach the three ideas with pictures. Pages 7–10 give you the exact numbers to type into Canva or your design tool. The rest is covers, uploading, and fixing problems. Skip around freely — every page stands on its own.

## 2 What Is Trim Size?

Trim size is just the finished size of your book — the measurements after the printer cuts the pages. It's called "trim" because big sheets are printed first, then TRIMMED down to your book's size. When KDP asks for your trim size, it's asking: "How big should the finished book be?"

### Popular trim sizes for low-content books

| TRIM SIZE   | BEST FOR                                                          |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8.5 × 11 in | Coloring books, workbooks, planners, scrapbooks — the big classic |
| 6 × 9 in    | Journals, notebooks, prompt books                                 |
| 8 × 10 in   | Kids' activity books, slightly-smaller coloring books             |
| 5 × 8 in    | Pocket journals, gratitude logs                                   |



#### **WATCH OUT** • The #1 trim-size confusion

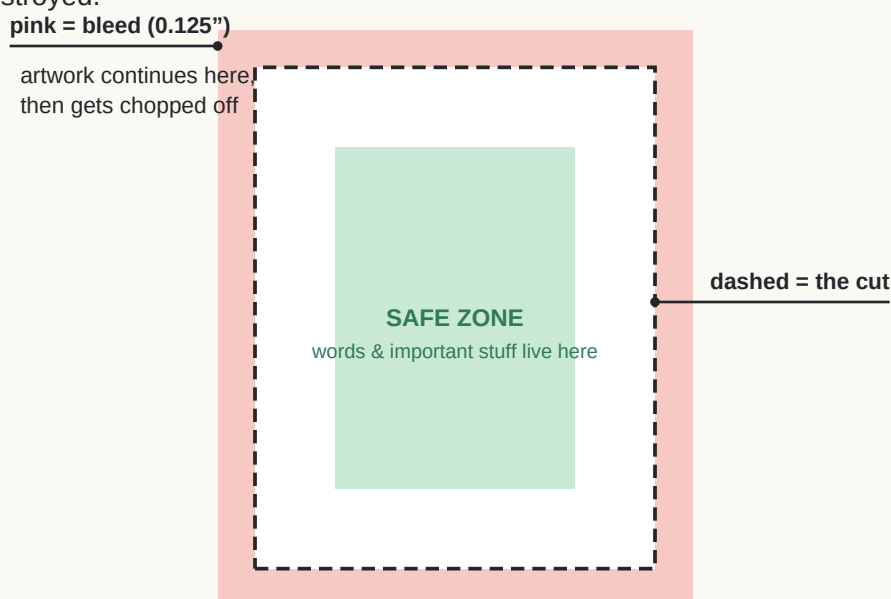
Your trim size and your design file size are NOT always the same number. If your design touches the page edges, your FILE must be slightly bigger than the trim size (that's bleed — next page). This one sentence is the source of most KDP confusion on the internet.

## 3

## What Is Bleed? (And Full Bleed?)

“Bleed” means your background color or artwork “bleeds” past the cut line — you deliberately print EXTRA picture outside the edges of the finished page. When the blade lands slightly off (it always does), it cuts through your artwork instead of revealing a white sliver of bare paper.

- **How much extra?** KDP wants 0.125 inches (one-eighth of an inch) of overflow on the outer edges. Tiny — but mandatory if anything touches the edge.
- **“Full bleed”** just means the design covers the ENTIRE page edge-to-edge — like a coloring page with a border that touches all four sides. Full-bleed pages REQUIRE that 0.125” overflow.
- **Important:** the overflow gets CUT OFF and thrown away. Never put anything you care about in it — it exists to be destroyed.



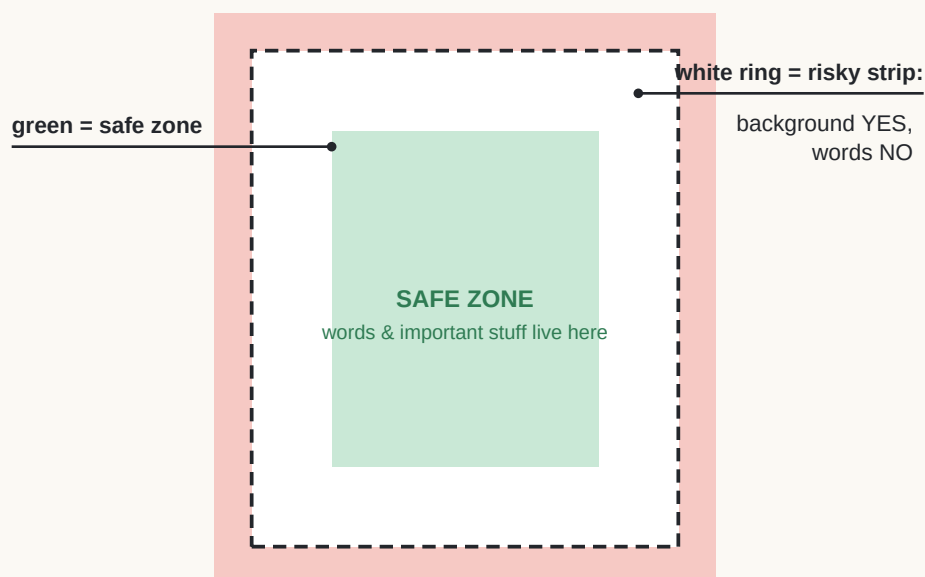
### REAL EXAMPLE · Coloring book example

Your mandala design has a patterned background touching all edges. Finished page:  $8.5 \times 11$ . Your Canva file:  $8.625 \times 11.25$  — with the pattern drawn all the way to the file's edges. After printing, the blade trims off the outer 0.125", leaving perfect edge-to-edge pattern. (Where those exact numbers come from: page 7.)

## 4 What Are Safe Margins & Safe Zones?

The blade that drifts OUTWARD (which is why bleed exists) can also drift INWARD — toward your content. The safe zone is the inner area where the blade can never reach. Anything important — words, page numbers, faces, the main drawing — must live inside it.

- **KDP's minimums:** keep content at least 0.25" from the edge on no-bleed pages, and 0.375" on pages with bleed. When in doubt, give it even more room — 0.5" looks better anyway.
- **The binding side needs extra.** Pages curve into the glue at the spine, swallowing part of the inner edge. This inner margin (the "gutter") must grow with your page count — exact numbers on page 8.



### WATCH OUT · The mistake that ruins journals

Page numbers and pretty footer quotes placed 0.1" from the bottom edge. On screen: lovely. In print: half-amputated numbers on every page that the blade kissed. If it would hurt to lose it, keep it 0.375" or more from every edge.

### GOOD TO KNOW · Three zones, one picture

From outside in: PINK (bleed — will be destroyed, background only), WHITE RING (might survive, might not — background only), GREEN (guaranteed safe — everything important). Tattoo this picture on your brain and you've mastered KDP formatting.

## 5

## Full Bleed vs. No Bleed — Which Do YOU Need?

KDP makes you choose one setting for the whole interior: “Bleed (PDF only)” or “No Bleed.” The decision is one question: does ANYTHING in your book touch the edge of ANY page?

|                      | NO BLEED (easy mode)                | FULL BLEED                      |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Your design          | Everything stays inside margins     | Art/color reaches page edges    |
| File size you design | Exactly your trim size: 8.5 × 11    | Trim + bleed: 8.625 × 11.25     |
| Typical books        | Lined journals, log books, planners | Coloring books, scrapbooks, art |
| KDP setting          | “No Bleed”                          | “Bleed (PDF only)”              |
| Difficulty           | Beginner-friendly                   | One extra step — still fine     |

### TIP · The honest beginner advice

If this is book #1 and your design doesn't NEED edge-to-edge art — choose No Bleed. White margins around lined pages or prompts look completely professional, and you remove the most common category of formatting errors in one decision.

### REAL EXAMPLE

Maya's first book: a gratitude journal, lined pages with a small leaf icon — nothing near the edges. No Bleed, file at exactly 8.5 × 11, approved first try. Her second book: a botanical coloring book with edge-to-edge flowers. Full bleed, file at 8.625 × 11.25, also approved first try — because by then the pink/green picture was tattooed on her brain.

### WATCH OUT · You cannot mix

One page touching the edge makes the WHOLE interior a bleed file. If 99 pages are safely inside margins and one border touches the edge, design all 100 pages at bleed size.

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## The 8.5 × 11 vs 8.625 × 11.25 Mystery, Solved

These two numbers confuse more KDP beginners than everything else combined. Here's the entire mystery: they are the SAME BOOK. One is the finished size; the other is the design-file size when you use bleed.

**WIDTH: 8.5" + 0.125" bleed (outer edge) = 8.625"**

**HEIGHT: 11" + 0.125" (top) + 0.125" (bottom) = 11.25"**

Width gets bleed on ONE side only — the binding edge is glued, not cut, so it needs no bleed.

### So which number do you type into Canva?

| YOUR SITUATION                        | CANVA / DESIGN FILE SIZE | KDP SETTING      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| No-bleed book (nothing touches edges) | 8.5 × 11                 | No Bleed         |
| Full-bleed book (art touches edges)   | 8.625 × 11.25            | Bleed (PDF only) |

#### **WATCH OUT** · The classic disaster (please read this one)

Designing at plain 8.5 × 11, with art touching the edges, then selecting "Bleed" at upload. KDP must now invent bleed that doesn't exist — it **ENLARGES** your pages to fit, pushing inner content into the cut zone and triggering margin errors. If you choose bleed, the file itself must be 8.625 × 11.25. No exceptions, no workarounds.

#### **GOOD TO KNOW** · Same logic, every size

This isn't an 8.5×11 special rule. Any trim size + bleed = width + 0.125", height + 0.25". A 6 × 9 journal with bleed is designed at 6.125 × 9.25. The cheat-sheet on the next page does this math for you.

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# Interior Size Cheat-Sheet (Bookmark This)

## Design-file sizes

| TRIM SIZE (finished book) | NO-BLEED FILE | FULL-BLEED FILE |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 8.5 × 11                  | 8.5 × 11      | 8.625 × 11.25   |
| 8 × 10                    | 8 × 10        | 8.125 × 10.25   |
| 7 × 10                    | 7 × 10        | 7.125 × 10.25   |
| 6 × 9                     | 6 × 9         | 6.125 × 9.25    |
| 5.5 × 8.5                 | 5.5 × 8.5     | 5.625 × 8.75    |
| 5 × 8                     | 5 × 8         | 5.125 × 8.25    |

## Minimum inside margin (the “gutter” — grows with page count)

| PAGE COUNT      | INSIDE (GUTTER) MARGIN | OUTSIDE/TOP/BOTTOM MARGIN     |
|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 24 – 150 pages  | 0.375”                 | 0.25” no-bleed / 0.375” bleed |
| 151 – 300 pages | 0.5”                   | same                          |
| 301 – 500 pages | 0.625”                 | same                          |
| 501 – 700 pages | 0.75”                  | same                          |
| 701 – 828 pages | 0.875”                 | same                          |

### TIP · Set it once, forget it forever

In Canva: create the file at the size above, then drag ruler guides 0.5” in from every edge and keep all content inside them. 0.5” beats every minimum in this table for books up to 300 pages — one habit, zero margin errors.

### GOOD TO KNOW

Always export as PDF Print (not PDF Standard) in Canva, and aim for 300 DPI images. KDP’s minimum is technically lower, but 300 DPI is the “looks crisp in print” standard.



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# What Happens If You Get It Wrong?

Good news first: nothing catastrophic. KDP checks your files BEFORE printing, and most mistakes are caught by its Print Previewer, not by a customer. Here's the actual worst case for each mistake:

| THE MISTAKE                        | WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS                                        |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Art touches edge, no bleed added   | Previewer error, or printed books show white slivers         |
| Bleed selected, file is trim-sized | KDP enlarges pages → margin errors / cropped content         |
| Text too close to the edge         | "Content in margin" error — upload blocked until fixed       |
| Wrong gutter for page count        | Same margin error, OR inner words swallowed by spine         |
| Cover file slightly wrong size     | KDP stretches it — blurry or off-center spine                |
| Low-resolution images              | Warning (sometimes just a warning — still looks bad printed) |

**GOOD TO KNOW** · Errors are speed bumps, not verdicts

A rejected file isn't a rejected BOOK and it isn't a strike against your account. Fix the file, re-upload, done. Most first-time publishers go through 2–3 upload rounds. It's normal. The Previewer is your free proofreader, not your enemy.

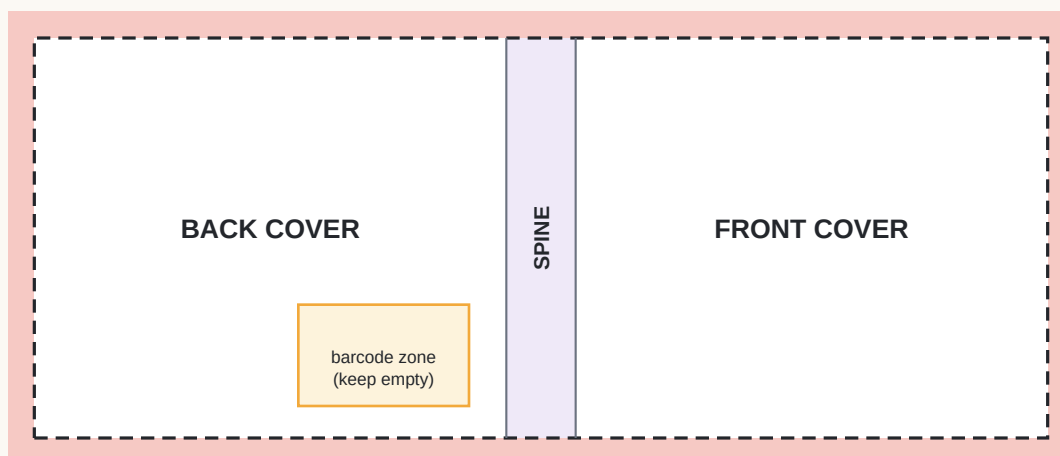
**TIP** · Always order a proof copy

Before hitting Publish, order a printed proof (KDP sells them at print cost). Screens lie about edges, margins, and color darkness. Paper doesn't. The \$5–\$8 proof copy is the cheapest insurance in publishing.

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## Cover Dimensions Explained

Here's the surprise: your cover is NOT one page. It's ONE WIDE IMAGE — back cover, spine, and front cover side by side — that wraps around the printed pages like a jacket. And covers ALWAYS need bleed; there's no no-bleed option for covers.



pink ring = 0.125" bleed, all four outer edges · front cover is on the RIGHT (yes, really)

### The cover-size formula (plain-English version)

**WIDTH = 0.125 + back (trim width) + spine + front (trim width) + 0.125**

**HEIGHT = 0.125 + trim height + 0.125**

#### REAL EXAMPLE · 8.5 × 11 coloring book, 100 pages, white paper

Spine =  $100 \times 0.002252 = 0.225$ " (spine math: next page). Width =  $0.125 + 8.5 + 0.225 + 8.5 + 0.125 = 17.475$ ". Height = 11.25". So the Canva file is  $17.475 \times 11.25$  — one wide image. KDP's free Cover Calculator generates this number AND a template with all the lines drawn; use it every time and never do this math under pressure.

## 10 Spine Width Explained

The spine is the book's edge — and its width is simply how thick your book is, which depends on how many pages it has and the paper type. More pages = thicker book = wider spine. The math is one multiplication:

$$\text{SPINE WIDTH} = \text{page count} \times \text{paper thickness}$$

| PAPER TYPE          | THICKNESS PER PAGE | 100-PAGE SPINE | 200-PAGE SPINE |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------|
| White (most common) | 0.002252"          | 0.225"         | 0.45"          |
| Cream               | 0.0025"            | 0.25"          | 0.5"           |
| Standard color      | 0.002252"          | 0.225"         | 0.45"          |

- **Use your FINAL page count.** Finish the interior first, note the exact page count from the PDF, THEN build the cover. Adding 10 pages later changes the spine — and the whole cover width.
- **Spine text needs 79+ pages.** Below that the spine is too skinny for words — KDP will reject spine text. At 100–150 pages, keep spine text small and centered with breathing room on both sides.
- **When in doubt, leave the spine blank.** A plain colored spine that matches your cover looks clean and can never trigger a spine-text error.

### Your cover worksheet

Final page count: \_\_\_\_\_ Paper type: WHITE / CREAM / COLOR \_\_\_\_\_

Spine = pages × thickness = \_\_\_\_\_ inches \_\_\_\_\_

Cover width = 0.125 + \_\_\_\_\_ + spine + \_\_\_\_\_ + 0.125 = \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_

Cover height = 0.125 + trim height + 0.125 = \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_

## 11 Why Amazon Rejects Files (& Upload Errors)

KDP's checks are strict but predictable — the same handful of errors account for nearly every rejection. Find yours below:

| ERROR YOU SEE                      | WHAT IT MEANS                  | THE FIX                             |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| "Content in the margin/bleed area" | Words too close to an edge     | Move content 0.375"+ inside         |
| "Page size doesn't match trim"     | File size $\neq$ expected size | Rebuild at cheat-sheet size (p.7)   |
| "Cover dimensions incorrect"       | Wrong spine or bleed math      | Re-run KDP's Cover Calculator       |
| "Text on spine not allowed"        | Under 79 pages w/ spine text   | Remove spine text                   |
| "Low resolution image"             | Images under ~300 DPI          | Re-export with bigger originals     |
| "Fonts not embedded"               | PDF saved without fonts        | Export as PDF Print / press-quality |
| "File too large"                   | Over 650 MB                    | Compress images, flatten layers     |

### GOOD TO KNOW · The pattern

Almost every rejection is a SIZE or a DISTANCE: the file's size, the cover's size, or how close something sits to an edge. If you designed from the cheat-sheet on page 7 and the cover formula on page 9, you've already dodged the entire table above.

### TIP · Read the error location

KDP's Previewer shows you the exact PAGE where each problem lives — click the error message and it jumps there. You never have to hunt blindly.

## 12 Common Cover Errors

- **Spine text on a thin book.** Under 79 pages = no spine text, period. Even at 80–120 pages, oversized spine text drifts onto the front/back when the fold lands slightly off. Small, centered, modest.
- **Covering the barcode zone.** KDP prints its barcode in the bottom-right of the BACK cover (about 2" × 1.2"). Art there gets stamped over. Leave that corner calm — or upload your own barcode placement.
- **Important stuff near the fold lines.** The spine folds drift just like cuts. Keep titles and faces at least 0.25" away from where spine meets covers.
- **Designing the front cover only.** KDP paperbacks need the full wrap — back + spine + front in one image. A front-only file gets stretched or rejected.
- **Front cover on the left.** The FRONT goes on the RIGHT half of the wrap. It feels backwards; it's how books physically fold. Triple-check before export.
- **White or transparent background edges.** Cover art must flood the entire canvas including all bleed. Any uncovered strip can print as a white edge.
- **Text baked into a stretched image.** Enlarging a small image to cover size makes text fuzzy. Build the canvas at full size and add text as real text.

### TIP · The 10-second cover self-check

Zoom out. Squint. Ask: is everything important comfortably inside the dashed lines of KDP's template? Is the barcode corner clear? Is the front on the right? Three yeses = upload it.

## 13 Common Interior Errors

- **Page 1 confusion.** Page 1 of your PDF = the first RIGHT-hand page of the printed book. Odd pages are right-hand pages; spreads that must face each other need even-left, odd-right.
- **One file size, mixed designs.** Remember: one edge-touching page makes the WHOLE file a bleed file at bleed size. (Page 5 has the rule.)
- **Gutter amnesia on big books.** A 250-page planner needs a 0.5" inner margin. Built with 0.375"? Every inner edge risks the "content in margin" error — on 250 pages at once.
- **Pure-black backgrounds in color books.** Heavy ink coverage can look muddy and show through. Rich darks beat pure black at 100% everywhere.
- **Coloring pages printed double-sided... by design.** KDP prints interiors double-sided, always. For coloring books where markers bleed through, many creators put art on odd pages and leave evens blank ("this page intentionally left blank" or a small pattern).
- **Forgetting the minimum page count.** Paperbacks need at least 24 pages. Pad thin concepts with intro pages, test pages, or bonus sections.
- **Exporting at "screen" quality.** Canva's PDF Standard compresses images. Always PDF Print, with crop marks OFF.

### REAL EXAMPLE

Sam's 120-page coloring book kept failing with 47 margin errors. The cause: one decorative footer, 0.2" from the bottom, repeated on every art page via a template. One template fix → 47 errors gone. Most interior "disasters" are a single repeated element.

## 14 Step-by-Step Upload Guide

- **1. Finish the interior PDF first.** Export from Canva as PDF Print. Note the exact final page count.
- **2. Build the cover using that page count.** KDP Cover Calculator → enter trim, pages, paper → download the template → design over it → export PDF Print.
- **3. Sign in at [kdp.amazon.com](https://kdp.amazon.com) → Create → Paperback.** Fill in title, author, description, keywords. None of this touches formatting — breathe.
- **4. Choose paper, trim size, and bleed setting.** Trim: your finished size (8.5 × 11). Bleed: matches how you DESIGNED (p.5). Paper: white for most low-content books.
- **5. Upload interior PDF, then cover PDF.** Processing takes a few minutes. Get tea.
- **6. Open the Print Previewer. Every page.** Check edges, margins, spine alignment. Fix any errors it lists (pages 11–13 of this guide translate them).
- **7. Set your price → order a PROOF COPY.** Approve nothing until printed paper is in your hands.
- **8. Proof looks right? Publish.** Your book goes live within about 72 hours. You're a published creator.

### ■ PRE-UPLOAD CHECKLIST

- |                                                          |                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interior exported as PDF Print  | <input type="checkbox"/> File size matches cheat-sheet (p.7)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All content 0.375"+ from edges  | <input type="checkbox"/> Gutter matches page count (p.7)      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cover built from KDP Calculator | <input type="checkbox"/> Spine math uses FINAL page count     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Barcode corner left clear       | <input type="checkbox"/> Front cover on the RIGHT of the wrap |

### FREE KDP TOOLS

Want help planning your book before publishing? Use these free tools at [SimpleLifeCalc.com](https://SimpleLifeCalc.com):

- **KDP Royalty Calculator** — Estimate royalties and profit per book before publishing.
- **KDP Break-Even Calculator** — Calculate how many books you need to sell to recover design, advertising, and publishing costs.

*These tools are designed to help KDP creators make publishing decisions with confidence.*

## 15 Troubleshooting Guide (If This, Then That)

| SYMPTOM                          | MOST LIKELY CAUSE              | DO THIS                        |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| White slivers on page edges      | Art stops AT the trim line     | Extend art 0.125" past edges   |
| Words clipped at page edge       | Content in the risky strip     | Pull everything 0.375" inward  |
| Inner words swallowed by binding | Gutter too small               | Use the p.7 gutter table       |
| Spine text leaning onto front    | Spine math off / text too wide | Recalculate; shrink spine text |
| Cover looks stretched/blurry     | Wrong canvas size, KDP resized | Rebuild at calculator size     |
| Previewer shifts all pages       | Bleed setting $\neq$ file size | Match setting to design (p.6)  |
| Colors print darker than screen  | Screens glow; paper doesn't    | Lighten 10–15%; order a proof  |
| Upload stuck processing          | Huge file / odd characters     | Compress; simplify file name   |
| "Mystery" margin errors          | One repeated template element  | Check headers/footers first    |

### TIP · The universal fix

When truly stuck: rebuild a 3-page test file at the correct size from page 7, upload it, confirm it passes, then move your content into it page by page. Ten minutes, and it isolates any problem instantly.



## 16

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Do I need bleed for a plain lined journal?**

No. If nothing touches the page edges, choose No Bleed and design at exactly your trim size. Simplest possible path.

**Q: Does the COVER need bleed even if my interior doesn't?**

Yes — always. Covers have no no-bleed option. Interior and cover settings are independent.

**Q: Canva doesn't have an 8.625 × 11.25 preset. Am I stuck?**

Not at all — use Custom Size, type the numbers, choose inches. Presets are conveniences, not requirements.

**Q: What resolution should images be?**

300 DPI at the printed size. A 1000-pixel-wide image stretched across an 8.5" page is ~118 DPI — expect fuzz.

**Q: Can I use the same file for the Kindle ebook?**

No — ebooks have no trim, bleed, or margins (screens aren't cut with blades!). This guide is for PRINT files only.

**Q: My book is 30 pages. Spine text?**

No — KDP requires 79+ pages for spine text. Leave it blank or solid-colored.

**Q: Does trim size change printing cost?**

Within the standard size list, cost is driven by page count and ink type, not trim. (Confirm current pricing on KDP — it changes.)

**Q: Is 8.5 × 11 available everywhere?**

It's supported for most markets, but Expanded Distribution has its own size list — check KDP's trim chart if bookstore distribution matters to you.

## 17

## One-Page Quick Reference (Print Me!)

|                                  |                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bleed amount</b>              | 0.125" on outer edges — background only, gets cut off              |
| <b>8.5 × 11 with bleed</b>       | design file = 8.625 × 11.25 (any size: width +0.125, height +0.25) |
| <b>Safe distance for content</b> | 0.375" from every edge (0.25" min on no-bleed pages)               |
| <b>Gutter (inner margin)</b>     | 0.375" up to 150 pages · 0.5" to 300 · 0.625" to 500               |
| <b>Spine width</b>               | pages × 0.002252" (white/color) or × 0.0025" (cream)               |
| <b>Spine text</b>                | only at 79+ pages — small and centered                             |
| <b>Cover width</b>               | 0.125 + trim width + spine + trim width + 0.125                    |
| <b>Cover height</b>              | trim height + 0.25                                                 |
| <b>Front cover position</b>      | RIGHT half of the wrap · barcode corner: back, bottom-right        |
| <b>Export settings</b>           | PDF Print · 300 DPI · fonts embedded · under 650 MB                |
| <b>Minimum pages</b>             | 24 (paperback) · always order a proof before publishing            |

**REMEMBER THE PICTURE:**

Pink gets cut off. The white ring is risky. Green is safe. That's the whole subject — you've got this.

For additional calculators, guides, worksheets, and seller resources, visit [SimpleLifeCalc.com](https://SimpleLifeCalc.com).