

New Author Tips to Keep Your Sanity when Converting File Formats

Preface

I'm a Newbie Author. I only have one book, now on Kindle and Google Play both, to my name. If you're like me: a lone author, a one-man shop doing everything from the first thought to the final file conversion, then you know the struggle. We are the authors, the editors, the layout artists, and the technical support.

The logo for Kevin Cann, featuring the name "Kevin Cann" in a white, sans-serif font on a dark orange rectangular background.

Platonic Surrealism: A Modern Framework for Meaning Beyond
Science and Religion: Underpinnings of Personal Transcendence

[On Kindle](#)

[On Google Play](#)

Let's be honest:

Kindle is EZ PEASEY. You almost can't fail with an Amazon eBook. You generate a Table of Contents, make it look half-decent in Word, and upload it. The Kindle uploader is so forgiving it would probably sweep up street refuse, polish it, and make it look passable on a Paperwhite. Amazon wants to sell your content, so they've made the eBook entry barrier low enough for a toddler to trip over.

But then comes the **Paperback**. That's when the "foolproof" system stops being your friend and starts demanding you actually know what you're doing.

Part 1: The Kindle-to-Paperback Pivot

You can actually use the exact same file you used for the eBook, but you can't just upload it and walk away. If you do, your book will look like a high school term paper. To make it "Amazon Ready," you have to perform a few surgical strikes on that Word doc.

1. The "Ghost" Page Numbers

In an eBook, page numbers are an illusion; the device creates them based on font size. In print, they are permanent.

- **The Rule:** If you manually typed page numbers into your text during your draft, **strip them out.** * **The Fix:** Use the **Header/Footer** tool to insert dynamic page numbers. But remember the "Front Matter" rule: the Title Page, Copyright, and Dedication should be clean. Use "Section Breaks" (not Page Breaks) and check "Different First Page" to hide the number where it doesn't belong.

2. The Table of Contents (ToC) Rebuild

Your eBook ToC is a list of blue hyperlinks. In a paperback, those links are dead pixels on a physical page.

- **Action:** Delete the eBook ToC entirely.
- **The Pro Move:** Go to **References > Table of Contents** and insert an Automatic ToC. This adds the page numbers and those "leader dots" that lead the eye from the chapter title to the page number. Without those dots, your ToC looks like a mess of floating text.

3. Mirror Margins and the "Gutter"

If you don't set this up, the first three words of every sentence will be sucked into the glue of the book's spine.

- **The Fix:** Go to **Layout > Margins > Custom Margins**. Change "Multiple Pages" to **Mirror Margins**.
- **The Math:** Set your **Inside Margin (the Gutter)** to at least **0.75" to 0.9"** depending on your page count. Keep the Outside, Top, and Bottom at 0.5". This ensures your text is centered relative to the *visible* page, not the physical paper.

4. The Trim Size

Standard Word docs are 8.5" x 11". Unless you're writing a manual, your book shouldn't be that big.

- **The Standard:** Switch your paper size to **6" x 9"** or **5.5" x 8.5"**.
- **The Warning:** Your page count will explode. This is normal. It's also why you must **Export to PDF** before uploading. Word files "shift" when uploaded; a PDF locks your hard work in place.

Part 2: Entering the "EPUB Nonsense"

Once you've conquered Amazon, you think, "I'll just put this on Google Play or Kobo!" That's when you run into the EPUB wall. Unlike Kindle's proprietary magic, EPUB is basically a website wrapped in a box. If your "code" (which Word creates invisibly) is messy, the book fails.

The Tools of the Trade

To survive the conversion, you need more than just Word.

- **WordToEPUB:** This is the gold standard for "easy" conversion. Created by the DAISY Consortium, it's a free tool that lives right in your Word ribbon. It does a much better job than Word's native "Save As" function.
 - **Get it here:** daisy.org/wordtoepub
- **Pandoc:** This is the "Universal Document Converter." It has no fancy buttons; it's a command-line tool. You tell it "Take this Word doc and make it an EPUB," and it does so with terrifying efficiency.
 - **Get it here:** pandoc.org
 - **The Contrast:** Use **WordToEPUB** if you want a guided, visual experience. Use **Pandoc** if you want the cleanest, most "mathematically" correct conversion possible and aren't afraid of a little typing.

The Essential Checkers: Thorium and Tungsten

Once you've converted your file, you need to see what the *rest of the world* sees. Don't trust the previewer on the website.

- **Thorium Reader:** This is the best EPUB reader for your computer. It's the "truth-teller." If your EPUB looks weird in Thorium, it's going to look weird on a Kobo or a Nook. Use it to check your formatting before you even think about uploading.
 - **Get it here:** edrlab.org/software/thorium-reader
- **Tungsten:** When it comes to checking your PDF for the paperback, you need a high-quality viewer that mimics professional print standards. Tungsten is a specialized PDF viewer (often used in accessibility and DAISY workflows) that helps ensure your PDF structure is solid.

****Why You Need Sigil****

No matter which tool you use, the result will have "bloat." Word is notorious for adding thousands of lines of useless code that can make your book lag or display weirdly on an iPad.

Sigil is the "go-to" editor for a reason. It allows you to open that EPUB and see the actual "guts" (the HTML). It's a WYSIWYG editor (What You See Is What You Get), meaning you can edit the text on one side and see the code on the other.

- **Get it here:** sigil-ebook.com

Part 3: The "Debloat" or Die Trying

This is the part that kills the "lone author" shop. If you've drafted in Google Docs and then moved to Word, your code is currently a nightmare of `` tags and malformed entities.

If you don't "debloat" your file, you will spend endless hours in a "fail... fail... fail" loop where your book looks perfect in the previewer but gets rejected by the store or breaks on an eReader.

How to Setup the Search for Bloat:

In Sigil, use the **Find & Replace** tool (Ctrl+F) and set the Mode to **Regex (Regular Expression)**. You are looking for "street refuse" code. Here is the master plan for the search entries I've shared with you:

1. Master_Google_Debloat: * Find:

```
(</span>|<span[^\>]*>|</?section[^\>]*>|class="\[^\\"*\\"|style="\[^\\"*\\"")
```

- **Replace:** (Leave this empty)
- **What happens:** This nukes all those invisible "span" and "style" tags that Google Docs litters everywhere. Suddenly, your file size drops, and the "real" formatting shines through.

2. Fix_Malformed_Entities:

- **Find:** and;
- **Replace:** and

- **Why:** Sometimes conversion glitches turn a simple "and" into a weird code entity. This cleans the prose.

3. **Final_Math_Fix:**

- **Find:** >
- **Replace:** to
- **Why:** If you have any "greater than" symbols that got mangled in the math, this brings them back to readable English.

The Result: After running these "Saved Searches" in Sigil, you go from a bloated, 5MB file that barely works to a sleek, 500KB EPUB that flies through validation.

Conversion isn't about hitting a button; it's about cleaning the "street refuse" out of your file until only the story remains. Keep your sanity: clean your code, mirror your margins, and never trust a Word doc to stay put.

Final Words

It took me something like 18 non-stop hours to learn these basic techniques. Google play failed to upload like 43 times.

It threw error messages upon error messages. Arcane xhtml and css stuff.

The most painful thing that happened?

I finally got things close.

But then Google Play uploader got to step 6 of 6 after like 30 minutes then said "Failed. Call support" and didn't give an error message.

Now there are many reason this can happen... just having your payment information set up wrong, or you don't set world prices.. or you forgot to active or sell your book... there seem to be a hundred reason.

But in terms of conversion?

If you have massive bloat... like span or you use the ampersand & character even once!

OMG. The Google Play uploader rendering engine in step 6 goes
“Full Tile – Game over Man!”.

That’s all she wrote.

So don’t do that!

Listen to these words, and your children and grandchildren will
thank you.

Best,

Kevin Cann