

THE COVER DESIGNER BRIEF KIT

A practical worksheet to help you identify what your cover needs to signal before you hire a designer.

A strong cover is not just pretty.

It signals genre, tone, and reader expectation in a split second. If you can tell a designer what your book needs to communicate, you're far more likely to get a cover that works. Use this worksheet to organize your thoughts and think through the important information that will help your cover designer most.

Part I: My Book at a Glance

Provide the following information:

- Book title (working title is fine)
- Author name / pen name
- Primary genre
- Primary subgenre
- Audience (for example: sweet romance readers, dark fantasy readers, women's fiction readers)
- Is this a series? Yes / No / Planned

Part II: Market Comparison

Choose 3-5 books that reach the same kind of reader you want to reach. These are not books you love at random—they are books whose covers are doing a job similar to the one your cover needs to do.

Make a note of the following for each one:

- Book Title
- Dominant Colors
- Image Type
- Typography Style
- Overall Mood

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Part III: Patterns I Notice

What do these covers have in common?

- Colors that appear most often:
- Common imagery or visual motifs:
- Typography styles I keep seeing:
- The overall mood readers seem to expect:
- What would probably look “off” for this market:

Part IV: My Cover Direction

What are the “musts” of my cover?

- My cover should immediately signal:
- My genre is:
- My tone is:
- My reader should expect:
- Three words I want this cover to feel like:
- One thing this cover must not accidentally signal (e.g. too spicy):

Part V: Series Thinking

(Optional)

- Elements that should remain consistent across the series:
- Elements that can change from book to book:
- How readers will instantly recognize later books:
- Do I want the series branding decided now, or developed later?

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Part VI: Print Planning

For a wraparound print cover, you'll need to supply the template from Amazon and/or Draft2 Digital. You'll also need to know the total page count for the print version in order to have your spine be the right size.

- I plan to publish in print: Yes / Maybe later / Ebook only

If yes or maybe:

- Spine copy:
- Back cover copy:
- Barcode area:
- Author bio/photo/tagline if desired
- Notes or questions about print

Part VII: What I need my designer to know

Check off the following as you have them:

- genre/subgenre
- tone
- audience
- comparable covers
- series plans
- print plans

Questions to ask before hiring

- Have you designed in my genre before?
- Do you create for ebook only, or for print as well?
- What files are included?
- How many revisions are included?
- Can you design a series look if this book expands into more books?
- What do you need from me before we begin?

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Mini initial designer brief template

My book is a [genre/subgenre] aimed at readers of [comp titles]. The cover should signal [tone/reader promise]. I'd like it to feel [3 adjectives]. I want to avoid [misleading signal]. This is [standalone/series], and I [do/do not] plan to publish in print.

Three common cover-brief mistakes authors make

- **describing what they personally like instead of what the market expects**
 - **giving no comparable titles**
 - **asking one cover to signal too many things at once**
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If you want more help making smart publishing decisions—from covers to formatting to metadata—take a look at [Publishing Without Panic](#).