



Publishing Nonfiction Books on Spirituality
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MODULE 5

COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING

THEORETICAL EARNINGS COMPARISON TABLE

Traditional vs. Self-Published

	Traditional (Small Press)		Self-Published	
Book Advance	\$	3,000.00	\$	None
Print Royalties	12%		30% †	
E-Book Royalties	15%		40% †	
Book Retail Sale Price				
Print Sales Price	\$	20.00	\$	20.00
E-book Sales Price	\$	10.00	\$	10.00
Total 10,000 Copies Sold				
5,000 Copies Print	\$	12,000.00 *	\$	30,000.00
5,000 Copies E-Book	\$	7,500.00 *	\$	20,000.00
TOTAL ROYALTIES	\$	19,500.00	\$	50,000.00
Deduction of Advance	\$	— 3,000.00	\$	None
TOTAL EARNINGS	\$	16,500.00	\$	50,000.00

* Assuming royalties percentage of retail price. This is not reality. The reality is that the royalties will be based on net revenue, which is what the publisher earns per actual sale.

† Royalties percentage for self-publishing is fixed by the author, and therefore flexible. It is also directly proportional to the book's page count.

IMPORTANT NOTES

By and large the traditional publishers you are likely to submit your manuscript to, e.g., Llewellyn Worldwide, Schiffer, Findhorn Press, Hay House, Namaste, North Atlantic Books, Destiny Books, Shambhala, etc. will be under the category of “Small Press.”

The table notes 12% for the baseline common royalties standard among small presses. Note that the Big Six in publishing often begin with the baseline of 10% for royalties. Also, what is that a percentage of? Gross sales, net sales, net profit? We will cover those terms in Module 3 on Traditional Publishing, specifically the sections on negotiating your publishing contract. Also, just as a reminder, do open negotiations with a counter-offer of a much higher percentage rate, such as 20% and let the publisher return with a counter to your counter.

For easier calculation, the numbers in the table presume no returns. Be mindful that book returns are almost always deducted against the author’s royalties.

To be honest, the table is a false comparison because it ignores many critical factors, such as marketing power, distribution power, etc. While selling 5,000 copies in one year for your self-published book is considered an extraordinary feat, that number is more common and expected if you’re traditionally published. Also, the table examines gross earnings before costs. What a traditionally published author might have to pay out of pocket for promotions is nothing compared to what a self-published author would pay out of pocket just to get the book noticed. Nonetheless, it’s pretty much a closed case—unit to unit, self-published books will earn you more gross dollars.



Sources:

- Nielsen Books for average small press publishers in traditional publishing
- Lulu.com for self-publishing
- Amazon Digital Services for self-publishing