

ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING, EXPLAINED

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What is an e-book? Why would I want to read one? Where would I get one? How would I read it?

Electronic publishing is a new medium to many readers, but electronic books are gaining in popularity and gradually coming into their own. Schools, universities, libraries, and businesses are leading the way by offering users e-published educational and reference materials. A growing number of people are ordering e-books over the Internet as an inexpensive, convenient alternative to paperback or hardcover books.

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In some schools, students do their homework on laptops, and when heavy hardcover textbooks are replaced with e-formats, back strain from shouldering heavy backpacks can be alleviated. Can you imagine a student going into a college bookstore and downloading all his or her textbooks into one handheld reader? This can be done, *now*. Electronic publishing isn't futuristic or science fiction or fantasy.

With over half of all of the homes in the United States having at least one computer, most schools and a growing number of public libraries containing many computers, access is not a major problem.

Electronic publishing is not to be confused with vanity or subsidy publishing where the author pays to have his or her book published. Although there are some such companies, just as there are in traditional print, the majority of e-books are produced by reputable companies that pay royalties, but seldom offer an advance. These are small publishers that don't have the capital upfront to pay in advance, but the royalties based on sales are much higher. Some major New York publishers offer some of their big-name releases in electronic form, but these are priced nearly as high as the print format.

Since e-books haven't achieved wide recognition yet, due partly to the public's unfamiliarity with this new media, a number of these publishing companies are now offering their books in paperback. Printed in short runs, they're referred to as POD or "print on demand," and are generally quality books, often in trade paperback size (larger than mass paperback books).

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