
Self-Publishing With Burning Slug

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First Edition

Contraterrene eLearning Group LLC

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Part I

Quick Start

Overview of Part I

The Burning Slug book engine Burning Slug² is quite possibly the fastest way to get your text into book form. From the same manuscript file you can produce:

- EPUB format (iBooks, the Barnes & Noble Nook, and many other readers)
- MOBI format (Kindle)
- Print-ready PDF
- Stand-alone website

This manual was itself compiled with Burning Slug. The EPUB, Kindle, and print versions were all generated from the same manuscript without any text changes for the different versions.

Part I covers all the essential steps involved in formatting a basic book and setting up a cover image. If you follow the steps given there, you should be able to produce a formatted ebook within minutes (assuming you've already written the text, of course — Burning Slug can't help you with that.☺). Part II is a formatting reference that covers notes, custom styling, internal illustrations, tables, and more. Part III covers advanced styling techniques.

The best way to use this manual is probably to read completely through Part I (it's short), then refer to Parts II and III as needed. It's definitely not necessary to read all of Parts II and III before you start.

Let's make a book!

² <http://burningslug.com/>

1

Basic Book Formatting

1.1 Typographic conventions

In this book, example manuscript text (the stuff that you type) is displayed in a monospace (typewriter-like) typeface:

Like this.

Output resulting from running the manuscript text through Burning Slug is displayed in a proportional typeface:

Like this.

1.2 Choosing a text editor

Burning Slug expects your text to be in Markdown format. Markdown is a simple formatting convention based on ordinary text.

To write Markdown text, you need a plain text editor. Word processors (such as Microsoft Word) are *not* plain text editors, and their formatting conventions don't usually translate well to ebook form. Some word processors may even insert hidden code in the text that will cause your formatting to look ugly (or possibly make your book not work at all).

If your text is already in word processor format, no worries. You can just copy the text and paste it into a plain text editor for formatting. Copying formatted text from a word processor and pasting it directly into Burning Slug is unlikely to produce the result you expect (particularly if you're using Microsoft Word).

There are many good plain text editors. You may even have one already on your system.

Here are a few free or low-cost options. See the resources page (below) for up-to-date links.

- Sublime Text — free trial version (Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux)
- TextWrangler — free (Mac)
- TextMate — free trial (Mac)
- Windows Notepad (not Wordpad) — should already be installed on Windows machines
- NotePad++ — free (Windows)
- vi/vim or emacs (Linux) — likely already installed on anything other than the most rudimentary system

These are just suggestions; if you have a favorite text editor already, by all means use it — just make sure that what you have really is a plain text editor and not a word processor in disguise (for example, Apple's TextEdit is not actually a plain text editor at all). If the software has formatting buttons for bold, italic, font selection, etc. chances are that it isn't a plain text editor.

1.3 A very simple book

Listing 1 shows the Burning Slug manuscript text for a minimal book. Take a moment and look it over before proceeding.

1.4 Manuscript for a minimal book

Listing 1: A minimal book

```
%%title My Cool Book
%%author J. Random Writer

# Chapter One

It was a *dark* and **stormy** night.

Suddenly, in the second paragraph, a shot rang
  out.

# Chapter Two

This is the last line in my book.
```

That's really all there is to a basic book. You could paste or type that manuscript text into Burning Slug and get a fully-functional (if short) ebook (or web site, or printed book).

Now, let's look at each part in detail.

The first two lines are information *about* your book ("meta-data", in the jargon). Metadata doesn't show up in your book in human-readable form; it's used by cataloging systems, distributors, on-line retailers, and the like. Your ebook reader may also use the metadata to (e.g.) display the book's title in your library. There are many other metadata tags (see the *Metadata Tags* chapter), but at a minimum these two tags should appear in every book. As you'd guess, the `%%title` tag is used to set your book's title and the `%%author` tag is used to set the author. You can have more than one `%%author` tag if the book has more than one author, but there should be only one `%%title` tag (if you inadvertently put in more than one `%%title` tag, the last one will take precedence). Again, these tags affect the machine-readable portion of your book. You will probably also want to make a human-readable title page within the book that contains this information (see the *Special Chapters* section).

The next line:

```
# Chapter One
```

demonstrates how to begin a new chapter — a blank line, a # character followed by the chapter's title, and another blank line.

The next line:

```
It was a *dark* and **stormy** night.
```

begins the actual text of the chapter. This line uses a couple of Markdown formatting conventions. Any word or sequence of words surrounded by single asterisks will be *emphasized* in your book (in the default style, this is represented by *italic* text). A word or sequence of words surrounded by two asterisks will be given the **strong** style

(by default, the same as **bold** text)¹. If you prefer, you can use the underscore character instead of asterisks. Burning Slug understands either². Some people like to use underscores for emphasized and asterisks for strong, but this is purely a matter of taste.

All of these lines will produce the same output:

```
This is _italic_. This is __bold__.
This is *italic*. This is **bold**.
This is *italic*. This is __bold__.
This is _italic_. This is **bold**.
```

Result:

This is *italic*. This is **bold**. This is *italic*. This is **bold**.
This is *italic*. This is **bold**. This is *italic*. This is **bold**.

Note that all four lines have the same formatting (as you'd expect), but they've both been joined into one paragraph (which you might not have expected). Paragraphs in Markdown are separated by blank lines³. You should only use line breaks at the beginning of a paragraph. Otherwise, you

¹You may be wondering why there are two different names for the same thing. This is a subtle point. *Semantic markup*, such as emphasized and strong, addresses the *meaning* or intended *function* of the text. Bold and italic, on the other hand, refer to specific textual *appearances*. In other words, “emphasized” means “This is important. Display this so it attracts the reader’s attention.”, while “italic” means “use a slanted font”. Maybe you want emphasized instructions to be printed in a larger font (rather than italic), and strong warnings to be printed in an extremely large bright red font (rather than bold). With semantic markup you can redefine emphasized and strong to look any way you want. Another example might be screen-reading software. Emphasized text might be read in a slow and distinct manner, while strong text might be read in in a very loud voice.

²If you need a real asterisk or underscore in your text, precede it with a backslash character. See *Escape Sequences*, below.

³There are also several ways of inserting line breaks *without* starting a new paragraph — those are useful for things like po-

should let your text run wild and free (most plain text editors will either word-wrap long lines by default, or can be set to do so).

This is especially important for ebooks. Since your reader might be reading the book on anything from a tiny phone to a giant wall screen, the text needs to be *reflowable* to accommodate different screen sizes and user font choices. Hard line breaks prevent this and can make your text ugly and hard to read if the reader's screen is a different size from the writer's screen.

Paragraph indentation (if any) is controlled by the style sheet for the book, so you should not indent paragraphs in your manuscript — just set them off with a blank line as described above.

1.5 Quotes and Dashes

Burning Slug automatically converts “straight” quotes (" and ') into the entities for typographic (“curly” or “smart”) quotes (“ and ’). It also converts three minus signs (or hyphens) in a row --- into an em dash (—), and two minus signs (or hyphens) in a row -- to an en dash (–). For this reason, you shouldn't use “smart” quotes in your manuscript (if you must use a word processor somewhere in your writing process, turn the smart quotes feature off).

1.6 Escape sequences

Certain characters have special meanings in Burning Slug. We've already seen that * and _ are used for text formatting. There are several others. If you need to use one of these characters in your text, you should ‘escape’ the character

etry, computer source code, and other text that requires special formatting. See *Preformatted text* for details.

by preceding it with a backslash character `\`. The following characters should be escaped: `{}``[]``*``_`.

1.7 Compiling the book

Once you have your Markdown text you just need a JPEG cover image (recommended minimum size 2500 pixels high and 1536 pixels wide⁴) and you're ready to compile the book. Paste your Markdown text into the Burning Slug text panel (or use the file upload button), upload your cover image in the Burning Slug image panel, and keep clicking Next.

That's it!

Unless your Markdown text has errors you should have a functioning EPUB ebook, a web site, and the LaTeX code to produce a high-quality PDF in one minute or less. Producing MOBI files for Kindle and PDF from LaTeX output is done on your own machine. This process is described in brief below and in detail later in the book (see *Generating PDF files with LaTeX*, below).

1.8 Kindle (MOBI, KF8) conversion

Most ebook readers (including Apple iBooks, the Barnes & Noble Nook, and many others) can use EPUB format directly. The big exception is the Amazon Kindle family. To use your ebook on your Kindle, you'll need to convert it first. This is pretty easy to do; any of the options listed below should work fine.

- Use Amazon's free Kindle Previewer, available for Mac and Windows. This is the recommended option for most users because it lets you preview your book in simulations of several different Kindle models.

⁴See *Cover Images* for more on this.

- Use KindleGen, another free tool from Amazon. KindleGen is available for Linux as well Mac and Windows. It is a command-line program. Recommended if you're on Linux, or if you're comfortable working with the command line on Windows or Mac.

See the resources page (below) for links to these tools.

1.9 Using the web site

Burning Slug creates a very basic web site using your book's table of contents as the starting page (the standard `index.html`). To use the site, unzip the files and put them on your web server as you would any other web resources⁵. The default styling isn't particularly fancy (by intent). You can set your own styles either by uploading your stylesheets to Burning Slug or by changing them on your server after uploading the rest of the web resources⁶.

1.10 PDF for print

Burning Slug converts your Markdown manuscript text into code for the free TeX/LaTeX⁷ typesetting system. This is an extremely powerful (and extremely complicated) package. Fortunately you don't need to learn the whole thing before you can use it. You will need to install TeX/LaTeX on your own machine (see *Generating PDF files with LaTeX.*, below). The recommended distributions are MacTeX for Mac OS X

⁵How you do this varies depending on your hosting service.

⁶See the *Advanced Styling* section.

⁷pronounced "Tekh" and "Lah-tekh" – the "X" is pronounced in the manner of the Greek χ , similar to the way "ch" is pronounced in German.

and TeX Live for Windows or Linux. Both of these are linked from the resources page (below).

The PDF settings for paper size, margins, etc. can be found on the Settings & Styling panel (accessible from the Text panel). The recommended procedure is to set your trim size and then click the Autaset margins button. This will set your margins to values that will be visually appealing when the PDF is printed and bound (though you are, of course, free to set the margins to any values you wish).

PDF Settings

Font size: 11pt Font face: Bonum (similar to Bookman) [See font sam](#)

Chapter style: Burning Slug default [See chapter samples](#)

Book Trim Size:

Width:	6
Height:	9
Gutter:	0

Margins:

Spine edge:	0.667
Outside edge:	1.333
Top:	1
Bottom:	2

[Autaset margins \(recommended\)](#)

Units: Inches Include cover image in PDF

Imposition: Two-sided Chapters begin on: Right-hand page

Figure 1: PDF Settings

To build a PDF, unzip the LaTeX bundle produced by Burning Slug⁸ and open the (your book's name).tex file

⁸If you are on Windows, make sure that you actually extract all

using the TeXWorks program included with your distribution. Choose LuaLaTeX (not LuaTeX) from the drop-down menu, and click the Typeset (run) button.

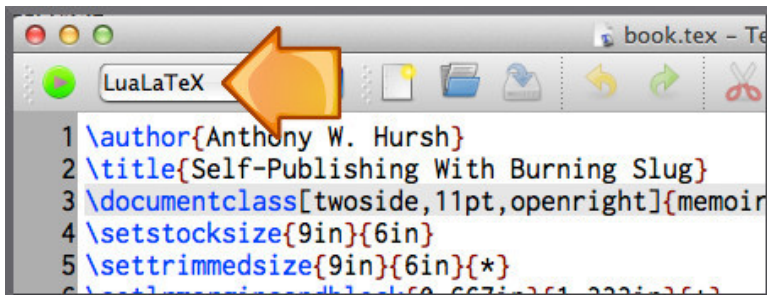


Figure 2: Selecting LuaLaTeX

When the compilation completes, click the Typeset button a second time⁹.

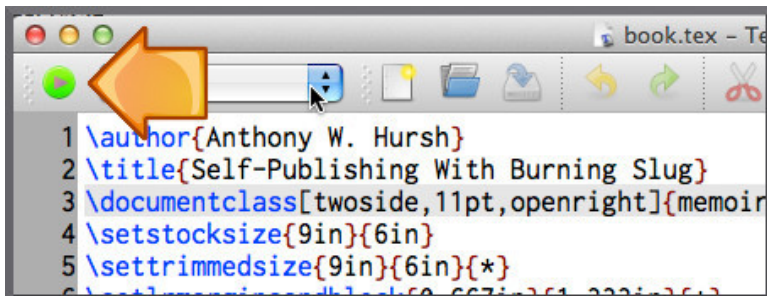


Figure 3: The Typeset Button

the files. Trying to run LaTeX on files that are still inside the ZIP archive will not work.

⁹LaTeX locates the entries for the Table of Contents on the first pass, and generates the actual Table of Contents on the second pass, so you need to run it twice.

Of course, if you're only producing ebooks and/or websites, you don't need the TeX system.

1.11 Distributing your book

There are many ways to distribute your book. If the book is free, you can just put the EPUB, MOBI (Kindle), and PDF files on a website for your readers to download.

If you want to sell your ebook, there are numerous options, some of which are given below. All of these are linked from the resources page (below).

- Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing, available in many countries. Free to set up.
- Apple's iBooks Store, also available in many countries. Free to set up (but you need a Mac).
- Nook Press from Barnes & Noble, currently only available to residents of the United States and Canada, though their site suggests that expanded coverage will be available soon. Free to set up.
- Smashwords can put your book in multiple online bookstores (including Apple, Barnes & Noble, Sony, Kobo, and many others). The downside is that they pay slightly lower royalties than dealing with the bookstores directly (e.g. 60%, compared to 70% for some retailers). The upside is that you don't have the hassle of setting up separate accounts at every retailer (another advantage is that you can distribute through Apple's iBookstore without having a Mac). Smashwords does not allow embedded tables, and also has some other specific formatting requirements (check their site for details).
- BookBaby offers services similar to Smashwords (e.g., they can put your book in the Apple iBooks Store), but

is more flexible with formatting (they allow tables, for instance). The basic service is free to start, though (as with Smashwords and CreateSpace) they do charge a percentage of your sales. They also offer paid services (cover design, e.g.). One drawback of BookBaby is that they require that you purchase an ISBN if you don't have one (\$19). Most of the other services will give you an ISBN for free.

There are also multiple options for selling printed books made from your PDF. The most commonly used service is probably Amazon's CreateSpace (linked from the resources page), which is free to set up. There are other reputable Print on Demand (POD) services. Some of them may provide services not offered by CreateSpace (e.g., hardcovers), but you should **beware** of companies that:

- Pressure you to buy “extra services” for hundreds or thousands of dollars.
- Make you print (and pay for) hundreds or even thousands of copies.
- Try to grab the intellectual property rights for your book. Be very careful here!

Companies that do those things should be avoided. Unfortunately being associated with a well-known publisher appears to be no guarantee against abusive behavior. Be warned.

1.12 Third-party resources

All of the resources described above are linked from the Burning Slug resources page¹⁰, along with other third-party tools, tutorials, and generally useful material.

¹⁰ <http://burningslug.com/resources.html>

