A FREE GUIDE FOR INDIE AUTHORS

YOUR FIRST 50 REVIEWS



Rules first. Honest readers.
A ninety-day plan with templates

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How to Get Your First 50 Honest Reviews as an Indie Author

A rules-first plan for advance reader teams, reader platforms and launch week: no tricks, no promises

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Copyright

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Free edition, 2026.

Introduction

Every indie author knows the moment. The book is live, the cover looks good, the blurb has been rewritten four times, and the review count under the title says zero. A reader who has never heard of you lands on the page, scrolls down, sees nothing, and leaves. It is not that they dislike the book. They simply have no reason to take a chance on it yet.

This short guide is about that gap. It is about how an unknown author can earn a first round of honest reader reviews, with fifty as the target to plan around, and about doing it in a way that follows the rules of the stores, keeps your reputation intact, and does not cost a fortune.

Three promises, and one refusal.

The first promise: everything in this book is rules-first. Retail stores such as Amazon have strict policies about reviews, and some popular "tips" you will find in forums put your author account at risk. You will learn where the lines are, why they exist, and how to stay clear of them. Where a rule is specific and may change, the book says so and sends you to the current official help page, because a printed guide cannot stay current and you should not trust one that claims to.

The second promise: the plan is practical. You will get a timeline, checklists and templates, not just theory. Each chapter ends with an Action Step you can finish in an afternoon.

The third promise: it is honest about numbers. Nobody can promise you fifty reviews, or ten, or any at all. Reviews are written by free people who owe you nothing. Fifty is a target, not a guarantee. If someone sells you a guaranteed number of reviews, walk away; Chapter 2 explains why.

And the refusal: this book will not teach you to trade reviews, buy them, ask friends to write glowing paragraphs, or pressure anyone to give five stars. Those methods are against the rules, they are easy to detect, and they are not what makes

a book succeed. What makes a book succeed is readers who found it, finished it, and cared enough to say what they thought.

A note on who wrote this, and what it is for

This is a free guide from the team behind GetBookReviews, a free platform built by a community of readers and indie authors, for readers and indie authors. We say that at the start so you can weigh our advice accordingly. Chapter 8 explains how the platform works and why we think it is the best free place to start. Every other method in this book also works without us.

> ***Start free today:*** *If you have a finished book and no reviews yet, you can list it on GetBookReviews at no cost and put it in front of readers who are looking for indie books. Create a free account at getbookreviews.org. No subscription, no payment, and no review is ever guaranteed or bought.*

The text was written with the help of an AI language model and edited by the team. It contains no invented anecdotes, no invented statistics and no made-up case studies. Where a number appears, it is either a rule you can verify or a deliberately rough planning figure labelled as an estimate.

How to use this book

Read the first two chapters before you do anything else. They set your expectations and keep you out of trouble. Chapters 3 to 5 prepare your book, your reader list and your launch window. Chapters 6 to 9 cover where reviewers come from. Chapter 10 explains how to handle what arrives, including the bad reviews. Chapter 11 pulls everything into a ninety-day plan with a tracking sheet. The appendix contains copy-ready templates.

If you are short on time, do Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 11. If you are not short on time, do all of it in order. One more thing: treat the Action Steps as the real book. Reading about reviews does not produce reviews.

CHAPTER 1

What “Fifty Honest Reviews” Really Means

Before you spend a single hour on this, it helps to know what you are aiming for and why.

Why reviews matter

Reviews do three jobs for an unknown book.

They reduce risk. A stranger deciding whether to read an author they have never heard of is making a small bet with money and time. Other readers’ words lower the stakes of that bet. A page with a handful of thoughtful reviews feels safer than an empty one.

They give you language. Readers describe your book in words you would never choose: what they liked, what confused them, what they expected. Those words are free market research. Some of the best blurb lines and ad hooks come straight from reviews.

They feed the store’s systems. Stores use many signals to decide which books to show, and review activity is generally believed to be one of them. Nobody outside the store knows exactly how, and any specific claim about “how many reviews trigger the algorithm” is a guess. Plan for the part you can see: reviews help human readers decide.

Why fifty

Fifty is not a magic threshold. It is a round number that is high enough to look like a real reader response, low enough to be realistic for a launch campaign, and useful as a planning target because it forces you to work backwards.

Here is the arithmetic, with deliberately rough numbers. Treat it as an estimate, not a forecast. Only a minority of people who read a book ever write a review; for ordinary readers it is often a small percentage. People who received a free advance copy and said they might review it write one more often, but still not all of them. If you want fifty reviews, you therefore need several hundred people to actually receive and read the book, or a smaller group of very engaged readers over a longer time. The exact ratio depends on genre, book quality, audience and how you ask. You will learn your own ratio from your own tracking sheet, which is why Chapter 11 includes one.

The point of the arithmetic is not precision. It is to show you that reviews are a numbers game on the reader side, and that your real job is to put the book in front of enough of the right readers, politely, and let them decide.

“Honest” is the whole point

The word honest is doing a lot of work in this book’s title. An honest review is the reader’s own opinion, written freely, with no instruction on what to say and no reward or punishment depending on the rating.

That matters for three reasons.

First, it is the rule. Stores prohibit reviews written in exchange for payment or other compensation, and reviews written under pressure to be positive. Chapter 2 covers the details.

Second, it protects you. A book whose reviews are all five stars with similar wording looks suspicious to readers, and shoppers have become good at spotting it. Mixed, specific reviews are more credible than a wall of praise.

Third, it is useful. An honest three-star review that says “the first act dragged but the ending was great” tells you what to fix and tells the next reader exactly what to expect. A fake five-star tells nobody anything.

What you control, and what you do not

You control the quality of the book, the clarity of your offer, the size and fit of the audience you reach, how easy it is for a happy reader to leave a review, and how politely you ask.

You do not control whether any individual reader reviews, what rating they give, or when. Accept that early. The authors who burn out on review hunting are the ones who treat every non-response as a personal failure or a problem to be solved with pressure.

Action Step: Write down three numbers on a card: your realistic goal for the next ninety days (for example, twenty reviews instead of fifty if you are starting from nothing and have a small list), the number of readers who would need to receive the book to reach it, and the date you will review your progress. Put the card where you will see it.

CHAPTER 2

The Rules You Must Not Break

This is the most important chapter. Read it twice.

Why platforms have review rules

Review systems only work if readers trust them. A store that allowed authors to buy five-star reviews would soon have reviews nobody believed. So the large retail stores and review sites ban the practices that make reviews untrustworthy. They run detection systems, they investigate reports from readers and competitors, and the penalties can include deleted reviews, removed books, and closed author accounts. The people who lose are authors who thought they had found a shortcut.

The principles, in plain English

The exact wording of the official policies changes and differs between stores, so always read the current text yourself. The principles, however, are stable across the industry. As of late 2026, the main store policies broadly say the following. Verify each one against the current official pages before you act.

No payment or compensation for reviews. You cannot pay for a review or give a reader something of value in exchange for one. That includes money, gift cards, entries into a prize draw, discounts on other products, and similar benefits. Stores treat "I will give you X if you review" as compensation even when you say the review can be honest.

No review swaps. “I will review your book if you review mine” is a trade. Even if both reviews are sincere, the arrangement is reciprocal, and the major stores consider it manipulation.

No reviews from people close to you. Stores generally discourage or restrict reviews by the author, family members, close friends, and people with a financial interest in the book. If you would have to explain your relationship to a stranger, it probably should not be a review on that store.

No steering toward positive-only feedback. You must not ask readers to leave only positive reviews, and you must not set up a system that routes unhappy readers privately while happy readers are sent to the public store page. That practice, sometimes called review gating, is prohibited by several platforms.

No fake accounts and no services that sell reviews. Anyone who offers a guaranteed number of Amazon reviews for a fee is selling something the store forbids. This includes services that call themselves “review clubs” or “launch teams” while quietly requiring reviews.

No tying a free book to a review. There is an important distinction here, and it is where many authors go wrong. Sending a free copy to a reader and hoping they will share an honest opinion is common practice in publishing. Making the free copy conditional on a review, or promising something extra for a review, is not. You may say that you would appreciate an honest review if they feel like writing one. You may not require it, remind them repeatedly, or reward them for it.

Advance copies and the rules

Free advance reader copies, usually called ARCs, are a long-established tradition. Publishers have sent them to reviewers, librarians and booksellers for generations. Stores generally allow authors to give out free copies without a review requirement, and they generally allow reviewers to disclose that they received a free copy. Some stores ask for a disclosure on reviews written after receiving a free copy, and some review platforms build that disclosure in.

What stores do not allow is an arrangement where the book is a payment for the review. The cleanest way to stay inside the line is to treat the free copy as a gift and the review as the reader’s separate, voluntary act. Do not put “must review” in any

message. Do not remove people from your team for giving low ratings. Do not give extra perks to people who review.

If you are unsure about a particular situation, the official policy pages are the authority, not this book and not a forum post. Search for the current review guidelines of each store you sell on, read them, and note the date you read them.

Practices that look clever and are not

A few popular tricks deserve a direct warning.

The "review for a bonus chapter" offer. A bonus chapter is something of value. Tying it to a review makes it compensation.

The giveaway entry for reviewers. Same problem. Giveaways are fine for building a mailing list; they cannot be tied to reviewing.

The group chat of authors who all review each other. This is a swap, however informal.

Asking your whole family to review on launch day. Reviews from close relatives are likely to be removed and may flag your account. They are also not what a new reader wants to see.

Buying promotion packages that promise a review count. If the number of reviews is part of what you pay for, assume it violates policy.

A simple test

When you are about to ask someone for a review, ask yourself two questions. If this reader saw exactly how I am asking, and saw how I treat other readers, would they feel respected and free to say no? Would the store be comfortable if it read this message? If the answer to either is no, change the message.

The honest disclaimer

This book is not legal advice and not an official statement of any store's policy. Store rules change, and different regions and platforms have their own versions. Your account, your responsibility: read the current policies yourself and follow them.

Action Step: Open the current review guidelines of every store where your book is sold and every review site you plan to use. Copy the three rules that apply most to your plan into a note called "My review rules" and add the date. Keep it next to your desk.

CHAPTER 3

Make the Book Ready to Be Reviewed

Reviews do not start with outreach. They start with a book that gives people something to say and a path to say it.

Fix the obvious problems first

A reader who stumbles over typos, a confusing opening or a broken table of contents will write about that. If you are about to hand a book to hundreds of strangers, do these checks first.

- Have at least one reader who is not you read the whole book and mark where they got bored or confused.
- Run a proofread or hire an editor if your budget allows; if it does not, use a careful read-aloud pass, a text-to-speech pass and a second set of eyes.
- Open the EPUB and the PDF on a phone, a tablet and an e-reader. Check the cover, the table of contents and the links.
- Read the first five pages as a stranger would. Does the book earn the sixth page?

An advance copy is not a draft. Readers who receive a rough version often write about the roughness, and that review stays with the book.

Match the book to its readers

Reviews from readers who love your genre are better than reviews from readers who were curious about a free book. A mismatch produces confused one-star reviews that are not really about quality: “not what I expected”. So spend a little time on positioning.

- Choose categories and keywords where your book genuinely belongs.
- Write a blurb that says clearly what kind of book it is. If it is a slow-burn mystery, say so; do not promise a thriller.
- Put the genre, tone and any content warnings in plain words near the top of the product page.

The goal is not to attract everyone. It is to attract the people who will enjoy the book and, among them, those who like to share an opinion.

Make leaving a review easy

Many happy readers would write a review if the step were obvious. Add a short, friendly note at the end of the book. Something like this works:

> *If you enjoyed this book, I would be grateful if you shared an honest review on the store where you bought it. It helps other readers decide. If you did not enjoy it, that is fine too, and I hope the next book suits you better.*

Two details matter. First, the note must not ask for positive reviews or offer anything in return. Second, it should include the direct link to the review page on each store where possible. The links differ per store, so create them from the product page and test them on a phone.

You may also thank readers by name inside the book in later editions if they gave permission, but never in exchange for a review.

Prepare your review page, not just your product page

Most readers who intend to review never do, because they forget or cannot find the page. A small landing page on your own site, with the book cover, a two-line thank-you, and buttons for the stores where you sell, removes friction. Keep it neutral. A page that says “leave a five-star review” breaks the rules. A page that says “here is where you can share your thoughts” does not.

Prepare files for your advance readers

For an ARC team you will need:

- an EPUB and a MOBI-compatible or PDF file, labelled clearly as an advance copy where relevant
- a one-paragraph description of the book to paste into emails
- the release date and the store links, if known
- a short note that explains the disclosure expectations of the stores you target (for example, that readers should mention they received a free copy if the site asks them to)
- a plain-text copy of your “no review required” message

Test the files by sending them to yourself and a friend on different devices before sending them to anyone else.

Protect your files

Free copies can be shared. That is not a catastrophe, but you can reduce it. Add a short line on the title page that says the copy is for personal reading. Use delivery tools that watermark or limit downloads if your budget allows, and do not obsess about piracy: advance readers are usually far more interested in being first than in sharing.

Action Step: Create the three assets every review campaign needs: the end-of-book note with direct links, a neutral thank-you page on your site, and a ready-to-send ARC package (files plus the short description). Send the package to yourself on two devices.

CHAPTER 4

Find Your First Readers (Before You Need Them)

The most reliable source of reviews is a list of people who already like what you write. The earlier you start building it, the less you will depend on strangers.

Start with a reader magnet

A reader magnet is a small free gift offered in exchange for an email address: a short story, a prequel, a checklist, a sample chapter. Offer it on your website and in the back of your books. It is permitted to offer a free gift for signing up to a mailing list. What you must not do is tie that gift to a review.

Keep the gift useful on its own. A reader who got something good from a first impression is far more likely to open your emails and, in time, to read your next book.

Build the list honestly

A good list grows slowly and has real people on it. Ways to find them without spending money:

- Add a sign-up link to the back matter of every book you publish.
- Mention your newsletter in guest posts and interviews.

- Join genre communities as a participant, not a promoter. Read what other members post, answer questions, and mention your work only where the community's rules allow it.
- Run a free-book promotion on a reader platform and invite the readers who liked it to hear about your next one.

Never buy a list. Bought addresses are not readers, they will not review, and sending to them can get your sender account blocked.

Make the invitation specific

When your list is ready, announce that you are looking for advance readers. A good invitation tells people what they would be reading, how long it is, when the book comes out, what format they would get, and what you ask: that they read it and, if they feel like it, say what they think. It also says clearly what you do not ask: no obligation, no required rating.

You can reuse the template from the appendix. Adjust it so it sounds like you.

Start small, then widen

You do not need three hundred readers on day one. A group of twenty to forty enthusiastic readers is more valuable than a long list of lukewarm ones. They will find typos, tell you what confused them, and, in a small proportion of cases, write the first reviews. You can then expand in waves, which is easier to manage.

Be a reader yourself

A habit that pays back slowly but reliably: read and review other authors' books honestly, as a reader and not as a favour. This builds a presence in the community and teaches you what a useful review looks like. It must never be a swap. Review books because you read them, not because the author agreed to review yours.

Action Step: Write the sign-up text for your reader magnet and place it at the end of your current book, on your website and in your email signature. Aim for the first ten addresses in the next two weeks.

CHAPTER 5

Plan the Launch Window

Timing matters more for reviews than most authors expect. A review that arrives in week two helps the next reader. A review that arrives in month six helps too, but the early ones shape the first impression.

The ninety-day frame

Think in three phases.

Phase one, before release (about four weeks). Finish the book, send the advance copy to your ARC readers, and ask for honest feedback by a given date, ideally a few days before release. Do not expect everyone to finish on time.

Phase two, release week. Post the store links on your list, your website and your social accounts. Remind advance readers once, politely, that the book is live and that they can share their thoughts if they like. Do not post daily reminders.

Phase three, the long tail (weeks two to twelve). Continue with other channels: reader platforms, newsletters, communities, and a second wave of advance readers if the first wave was small. Keep tracking.

Be realistic about timing

Some advance readers will finish on time, others will finish a week later, some never. Many will post on a review site first and only later on a store. Build a margin in your calendar. If your release date is firm, set the ARC deadline early. If

it is flexible, consider delaying until you have a minimum number of confirmed readers.

Avoid a single-day spike

A flood of reviews on launch day is nice but it is not the point, and a sudden burst from unrelated accounts looks suspicious to platforms. Aim for a steady flow over the first weeks. That also gives you time to respond to feedback and fix issues.

Keep other launch work going

Reviews are one part of a launch. A strong launch also needs a good cover, a precise blurb, correct categories, a fair price and a few places where your readers hang out. If reviews do not come, check those first. A book nobody sees cannot be reviewed.

When to use free promotions

Many stores let authors run limited free or discounted promotions. These can bring many readers quickly, but free readers are often less engaged and review less often. Use them with a clear goal, such as getting the book into more hands or building your list, and do not expect a stream of reviews. Check the current terms of any exclusive programme before you commit, because some require you to remove the book from other stores and others restrict how you can distribute free copies.

Action Step: Draw a three-column calendar: before release, release week, weeks two to twelve. Put each action from this book into the right column with a date. Share the plan with one friend who will ask you about it.

CHAPTER 6

Build Your Own Advance Reader Team

An advance reader team is a group of readers who agree to read your book before release and, if they feel like it, share their honest opinion. It is the oldest and cheapest method in this book.

How a healthy team works

A healthy team has four traits.

Voluntary. Joining is a free choice, leaving is easy, and nobody is chased.

Honest. The invitation says plainly that you want honest opinions, including critical ones.

Transparent. Readers know they receive a free copy and know that the stores may ask them to say so.

Respected. You thank people for reading, whether or not they review, and you do not rank them by how positive they were.

Recruiting the team

Use the invitation from Chapter 4 and send it to your list. Ask for a short reply with a name and preferred format. Do not ask for a social media profile or a review

history; you are not screening for influence. You are looking for readers who like your genre.

Cap the first team at a manageable size. A reasonable range for a first book is somewhere between twenty and fifty people. Larger teams create more feedback but also more admin.

Delivering the book

Send the file with a short message: thank you, here is the book, here is the release date, read at your own pace, and here is how to share thoughts if you like. If you use a delivery service, set the download window to match your timeline.

Do not attach the review link to the same email as the file. You do not want the first thing readers see to be a task. Mention the review idea once, in the reminder around release day, and keep it friendly.

Feedback versus reviews

It helps to separate two things. Private feedback, such as typos, plot questions and formatting problems, is for you, and you can ask for it freely. Public reviews are the readers' voice on the store. Do not use private feedback to decide who gets to publish a review, and do not steer unhappy readers away from the public page. If a reader reports a typo, thank them and fix it. If they post a three-star review, thank them for reading.

The reminder email

A single reminder on release day is fine. It should say that the book is now live, thank them for reading, and mention that they are welcome to share an honest review wherever they usually do. Include a link, but avoid repeated reminders, especially to people who have not replied. A second reminder after a week is the upper limit; after that, let it go.

What to avoid

- Do not offer rewards for reviews, including early access to later books if the offer depends on a review.
- Do not ask team members to give a minimum rating.
- Do not remove people who gave low ratings.
- Do not ask for reviews on a specific day or in a specific format. That looks coordinated.

Keep the team after the launch

The best team members become long-term readers. Keep them informed about your next book, ask for feedback, and treat them with courtesy. A team you keep is one you do not have to rebuild.

Action Step: Write the invitation email and the reminder email using the templates in the appendix. Send the invitation to the first twenty people on your list, even if that list is small.

CHAPTER 7

Reader Platforms and Where They Fit

Beyond your own list, a number of platforms connect authors with readers who want free or discounted books. They differ in cost, size and rules. The details change often, so everything below is a description of how each type works as of late 2026; check the current pricing and terms before you sign up.

Types of platforms

Curated review marketplaces. These sites match books with approved reviewers, often with editorial checks. Some are free for authors with limits, others charge a fee per listing or a monthly subscription. The reviewer base is usually larger and more experienced, but some charge too much for a small budget.

Delivery and team-management tools. These help you send files to your own readers, track downloads and run newsletter swaps or group promotions. Several offer free plans with limits and paid tiers for more.

Reader communities with giveaways. Platforms like LibraryThing and Goodreads have giveaway programmes. Rules and costs vary, and some programmes are open only to certain publishers or require a fee. They can bring attention to your book among readers who love to read and rate.

Free-reading platforms. These offer readers free books and authors a way to be found without paying for a listing. They may be funded by ads, by optional features, or by volunteers. GetBookReviews belongs to this group and adds

something most of them lack: one campaign can lead to honest reviews on several review sites at once. The next chapter describes it in detail.

Genre communities and groups. Subreddits, forums and social media groups are not platforms in the strict sense, but they are where many readers look for recommendations. Each has its own rules about self-promotion; read them first.

How to compare options

Before you commit time, answer five questions.

1. **Cost.** What does it cost to list a book, and what does it cost every month? Is there a free tier that is useful or just a teaser?
2. **Audience.** Who are the readers? Are they interested in your genre, or in everything?
3. **Rules.** Does the platform require reviews? If so, it may conflict with store policy. Does it forbid certain things? Do you have to give exclusive rights?
4. **Transparency.** Does it explain how readers are matched and how reviews are handled? Does it state its own review policy?
5. **Exit.** Can you leave easily if it does not work?

A platform that requires reviews in exchange for a free book, or that promises a number of reviews for a fee, is not the right choice if you care about your store account.

Free does not mean without cost

A free listing still costs your time and your copy. If a platform delivers your book to a hundred readers and five post a review, that may be a good result. If it delivers to three, you have learned something and can move on. Treat each platform as an experiment with a start date, an end date and a number you will measure.

Exclusivity warnings

Some retailer programmes require that your e-book is not available elsewhere in digital form. Distributing free copies through other platforms may conflict with those terms. Before using any third-party platform, check the terms of every programme you are enrolled in. When in doubt, ask the programme support, and keep the reply.

A realistic mix

A common mix for a first launch is your own team, one or two delivery or marketplace tools, and one free reading platform, with the rest of the time spent writing the next book. More is not better; consistency is.

> ***Try it while you read:*** *Listing a book on GetBookReviews takes a few minutes and costs no money. If you want a free channel running while you work through the rest of this plan, create your free account here.*

Action Step: Make a table with five columns (platform, cost, audience, rules, how to leave) and fill it in for three platforms you might use. Choose one to try first and write the date you will evaluate it.

CHAPTER 8

GetBookReviews, the Free Place to Start

We run this platform, so read this chapter knowing that. We also think it is the best free starting point for an unknown author, and this chapter explains why, including its limits.

What it is

GetBookReviews is a free platform that connects indie authors with readers who like discovering new books. It was built by a community of readers and authors, for readers and authors. Readers browse a library of indie books and pick the ones they want to read. Authors list a finished book and invite readers to read it. Readers can then share an honest review on the review site the campaign names, such as Amazon, Goodreads, StoryGraph, LibraryThing or BookBub. That is the core idea: one campaign, every review platform.

Free, and why that matters

You do not pay money to use it. An account is free for readers and for authors. Campaigns run on Bookmarks, points inside the platform that have no cash value. Authors earn Bookmarks by doing what every author should do anyway: reading other indie books from the library. So the platform runs on a simple community rule: give some reading time, receive some reading time. Paid advertising places

exist for authors who want extra visibility, but they are optional, they never include a review, and you can ignore them completely.

How it works for authors

1. Create a free account and add your book. The team checks each book before it goes live.
2. Choose a campaign type and how many reader slots you want, from one to ten. For a standard campaign you upload your EPUB, PDF or MOBI file.
3. Readers who like your genre pick your book from the library and get the file.
4. Each reader has fourteen days to read and, if they decide to, to share an honest review in their own words. You get an email when a review comes in.
5. If a reader does not finish in time, the slot opens again for someone else. Unfilled slots can be cancelled at any time.

A slot is an invitation, not a promise. Readers decide freely whether and what to write, every rating from one to five stars is equally welcome, and you may never ask for a positive review or offer anything in return for one. The platform also blocks review swaps: if you have picked an author's book, that author cannot pick yours.

How it works for readers

Readers sign up for free, browse the library by genre and pick a book. They read at their own pace within fourteen days and can share what they really think on the review site the campaign names, mentioning that they received a free copy. If they would rather not review a book, they can cancel it. Nobody asks them for a particular rating.

What you get as an author

- **Readers who chose your book.** People pick from a library of indie titles, so the readers who reach you wanted that kind of book.
- **Reviews on several sites.** Reviews can appear where readers actually look: Amazon, Goodreads, StoryGraph, LibraryThing, BookBub.
- **No subscription.** Your cost is reading time, not a monthly fee.
- **Clear rules.** No swaps, no requested ratings, no sold reviews. That protects your account and your reputation.
- **Early feedback.** Honest reactions from strangers tell you what to fix in your blurb, your opening or your next book.

What you get from reading other authors' books

Reading inside the community is not just the price of your own campaign. It is how you find good indie books, learn what makes other launches work, and get known by other writers in your genre. Reading widely in your own genre is some of the best market research an author can do.

What it is not

It is not a review-selling service. It does not guarantee reviews, ratings or sales. It is not a replacement for a good book, a good blurb or your own reader list. And it does not tell anyone what to write.

One rule to check yourself

Store policies differ, and some stores, Amazon included, have strict rules about free copies and about anything that could look like a benefit linked to a review. Readers on GetBookReviews collect Bookmarks when they pick a book, the same amount for any rating. Before you choose which review site to name in a campaign, read that site's current review guidelines, as Chapter 2 recommends, and follow them.

Honest limits

The community is still growing and is small compared with the big stores. Reach depends on how many readers are active in your genre at a given time. If you need a hundred reviews in two weeks, no honest channel can promise that, and we cannot either.

Get started

You can create a free account and list your book here. It takes a few minutes. Pick one or two books in your own genre from the library while you wait; you will earn the Bookmarks for your first campaign and see how readers write about books like yours.

Disclosure: The team that wrote this book also runs GetBookReviews.

Action Step: Apply the five-question checklist from Chapter 7 to GetBookReviews and one other platform. Then open a free account, add your book, and pick one book from the library in your own genre.

CHAPTER 9

Bloggers, Newsletters and Individual Reviewers

Some of the most valuable reviews come from individual readers and bloggers with a loyal audience. Reaching them takes patience and respect.

Find reviewers who fit

A blogger who reviews romantic comedy will not want your cosy mystery. Look for people who have recently reviewed books close to yours, and who clearly state that they accept submissions. Read their policy page. If they say they are closed to requests, respect it.

Write a short, personal pitch

A good pitch is short and specific. It names the reviewer, mentions one of their past reviews, describes your book in two sentences, says what format you can send and when, and asks whether they would like a copy. It says nothing about the rating you hope for. It makes saying no easy.

Compare these two openings.

Weak: “Dear blogger, I am an author and I would love you to review my book. It is a masterpiece.”

Better: “Hello Sam, I enjoyed your review of the lighthouse mystery last month. My novel is a cosy mystery set on a tidal island, 78,000 words, and I would be happy to send you a copy if it sounds like your kind of read. No obligation either way.”

How many to contact

Quality beats quantity. Send a dozen well-chosen pitches rather than a hundred copied ones. Track who you contacted, when, and what they replied. Do not follow up more than once, and do not take silence personally.

Respect the review process

When a reviewer accepts, send the book promptly. Do not ask for a specific rating, do not ask to see the review before it is published, and do not argue with it afterwards. If you disagree with their reading, that is information for your next book.

Paid review services

Some sites offer professional reviews for a fee. If you consider one, remember that the store policies about compensation apply to reviews posted on retail stores. A professional review published on the reviewer’s own site, clearly labelled as such, is a different thing from a review posted as a customer review. Never pay anyone to post a review on a retail store, and never buy a service whose price depends on the number or rating of reviews.

Newsletters and promo lists

Many readers subscribe to newsletters that recommend books. Some are free, some charge authors a fee. They bring readers, not reviews. Use them as part of visibility, not as a review engine.

Libraries and booksellers

Librarians and independent booksellers read books to decide what to stock. A short pitch with a clean advance copy can lead to a purchase or a mention. Reviews from these readers may appear in professional journals or local newsletters rather than on retail pages. They still build credibility.

Action Step: Find five reviewers who clearly fit your book and accept submissions. Write one personal pitch for each, send them, and record the dates in your tracker. Do not send more than five this week.

CHAPTER 10

Handling Reviews When They Arrive

Once reviews start to appear, a new set of habits matters. How you react shapes your reputation more than any single rating.

Say thank you in private, not in public pressure

You can thank advance readers by email for reading, without mentioning the review. You should not publicly thank "everyone who reviewed" in a way that implies you tracked who did and who did not. A general thank-you post to your list is fine.

Never argue with a review

A review is a reader's opinion. Replying defensively on the store page, or asking the store to remove a review simply because it is negative, rarely ends well. Stores remove reviews that break their rules: abusive language, personal attacks, spoilers in some cases, content unrelated to the book, or suspected manipulation. They do not remove reviews just because the author disagrees. If you believe a review violates the rules, report it through the store's official tool and move on.

Learn from patterns

One reader complaining about the ending is an opinion. Five readers complaining about the same thing is a pattern. Keep a short list of recurring comments, both positive and negative. Use the positive ones to sharpen your blurb and the negative ones to shape the next edition or the next book. If readers repeatedly find typos, fix the file and upload an update.

Treat low ratings as normal

A book that attracts only five-star ratings is rare and slightly suspicious. A distribution with mostly four and five stars and a few three-star reviews is normal for a well-targeted book. A cluster of one-star reviews that complain about “not what I expected” tells you the blurb or categories need adjusting.

Do not buy or ask for removal of bad reviews

Offering a reader a reward to change a rating is compensation. Asking a store to delete an honest low review without a rule violation is a misuse of the reporting tool.

Handling fake or suspicious reviews

If you suspect that someone is posting fake negative reviews to hurt your book, collect evidence and report it to the store. Do not retaliate. If you notice suspicious positive reviews you did not request, report them too; they can endanger your account.

Respect reader privacy

You may see usernames, locations or profile photos. Use this only to thank people generally. Do not contact reviewers on social media to discuss their reviews, and

do not compile lists of reviewers for any purpose other than your own aggregate tracking.

Action Step: Start a “patterns” note. After each new review, add one line: what they liked, what they did not. After ten reviews, read the whole note and choose one improvement.

CHAPTER 11

Your Ninety-Day Plan and Tracking Sheet

This chapter turns everything into a schedule you can follow.

The tracking sheet

Create a simple spreadsheet with these columns:

- Date
- Channel (own team, reader platform, blogger, newsletter, community)
- What you did (invitation sent, copy delivered, reminder, pitch)
- Number of readers reached
- Number of copies delivered
- Number of reviews that appeared (public count on the store, not named people)
- Notes

Use a separate tab for each month. Review it every Friday for ten minutes.

Weeks minus four to zero

- Week -4: Fix the book. Prepare the ARC package, the end-of-book note and the landing page.
- Week -3: Send the invitation to your list. Collect replies.
- Week -2: Deliver the book to your team. Contact five reviewers with personal pitches.
- Week -1: Answer questions. Prepare release-day messages.
- Week 0: Release. Send one friendly announcement and, on the same day, one reminder to advance readers.

Weeks one to four

- Post the book on your usual channels without begging for reviews.
- List the book on one free reading platform, such as GetBookReviews, and watch what happens for two weeks.
- Reply politely to every message.
- Send a second, small invitation to people who joined the list since the first one.

Weeks five to eight

- Look at your tracking sheet. Which channel delivered readers? Which delivered reviews?
- Stop the channel that gave nothing. Double the one that gave the most.
- Run a promotion if your retailer programme allows it and the terms fit, with a clear goal.
- Update the book if readers pointed out the same error.

Weeks nine to twelve

- Contact another group of five reviewers.
- Send a short update to your list with what readers said, without naming reviewers.
- Compare your results with the card from Chapter 1. Write three lines: what worked, what did not, what you will do differently next time.

What a realistic result looks like

There is no honest forecast. Some authors reach their target in a few weeks; others add a handful of reviews per month for a year. Your list size, genre, cover, price and the book itself all matter. Judge the plan by the readers it brings and the habits it builds, not only by the count.

When it does not work

If after ninety days you have a few reviews and many downloads, you are not failing. You are in the normal range. Keep writing, keep your list growing, and apply what you learned to the next book. The advantage of a steady plan is that each book starts with a larger list and better habits than the one before.

Action Step: Build the tracking sheet today and enter your first row: the date, “plan created”, and your target from Chapter 1.

Conclusion

Getting your first reviews is not a trick. It is a mix of a ready book, a small list of people who like what you write, a few well-chosen channels, polite invitations, and patience. The rules keep you safe, the tracking keeps you honest, and the readers decide.

If you remember only five things from this book, make them these:

1. Reviews are written by free readers. You can invite them; you cannot buy, trade or pressure them.
2. A free copy is a gift. A review is a separate, voluntary act.
3. Start your list before you need it.
4. Try a few channels, measure them, and keep what works.
5. Read the current store policies yourself, and follow them.

Your next step can be today. If you have a finished book, create a free GetBookReviews account, add your book and pick one book in your genre from the library. It costs no money, it puts your book in front of readers who choose indie books on purpose, and it follows the same rules as this guide: no swaps, no requested ratings, no promised reviews. We run the platform, so judge it by the checklist in Chapter 7 like any other.

Thank you for reading. If this guide helped, you can tell another author about it; we do not ask for anything else. And if you leave a review of this book, please make it your own honest opinion.

Appendix

A. Invitation email to your list

Subject: Would you like to read my new book before it comes out?

Hello [name],

My next book, [title], comes out on [date]. It is a [genre] of about [length]. If you would like to read it before release, I can send you a free copy in [formats].

There is no obligation. If you feel like sharing an honest opinion after reading, I would be grateful, and I will gladly accept critical thoughts too. If you would rather just read, that is perfectly fine.

Reply to this email with your preferred format and I will send the file.

Thank you, [name]

B. Reminder on release day

Subject: [Title] is out today

Hello [name],

Thank you for reading an advance copy of [title]. The book is now live at [link]. If you feel like sharing your honest thoughts, wherever you usually do, I would appreciate it. If not, no problem at all, and thank you for your time.

[name]

C. Pitch to an individual reviewer

Subject: [Title], a [genre] you might like

Hello [name],

I enjoyed your review of [book] on [date]. My [genre] novel, [title], is [one sentence]. It is [length] and I can send you an EPUB or PDF if you are interested. No obligation either way, and I will not ask for any particular rating.

Best, [name]

D. End-of-book note

If you enjoyed this book, I would be grateful if you shared an honest review on the store where you bought it. It helps other readers decide. If you did not enjoy it, that is fine too, and I hope the next book suits you better.

E. Words and actions to avoid

- “Leave a five-star review”
- “Review in exchange for a free copy” (as a condition)
- “Review swap” or “I will review yours if you review mine”
- “Positive reviews only”
- “Reward for reviewers”
- Offering bonus content, entries or discounts for reviews

F. Tracking sheet header

Date | Channel | Action | Readers reached | Copies delivered | Reviews appeared | Notes

G. Questions to ask before you join a platform

1. What does it cost me, today and every month?
2. Who are the readers, and do they like my genre?
3. Does the platform require reviews or promise a number?
4. Does it restrict where else I can distribute the book?
5. Can I leave without penalty?

H. About GetBookReviews

GetBookReviews is a free platform built by a community of readers and indie authors, for readers and indie authors. Readers pick indie books from the library and may share an honest review, at any rating, on the review site the campaign names: Amazon, Goodreads, StoryGraph, LibraryThing or BookBub. Authors list a finished book without a subscription and run campaigns with Bookmarks, points they earn by reading other authors' books. Reviews are never sold, swapped or guaranteed, and nobody may ask for a rating. The team behind this book also runs the platform. Follow the current rules of the stores where reviews are posted.

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