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REFLECTIONS ON READING

Professor John E. Jackson of the Naval War College is the program manager for the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.

This is the twenty-fifth article in the “Reflections on Reading” series to appear in the *Naval War College Review* since the Navy Professional Reading Program (NPRP) was established in 2006. A great deal has occurred in world affairs over this period, and there have been major upheavals in the world of publishing. During the June 2006 meeting at which the initial NPRP was approved, a preproduction model of a Sony e-reader was demonstrated to the Chief of Naval Operations. The new technology was being touted at the time as “seeking to do for the written word what the iPod has done for digital music.” Little did any of us know the tremendous impact that e-readers would have on book writing, production, and distribution within a few short years. The purpose of what is now known as the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP) is to encourage sailors of all ranks to *read*—and also to *write*. Reading can help to shape ideas and mentally refine concepts, and writing can help solidify ideas and share them with others. The digital-book revolution has facilitated our sailors’ ability to perform both tasks.

To Read. In today’s world, if you want to read, you really don’t have to spend much money. This is true in society at large, and it is particularly true within the Navy. The no-cost options include borrowing hard-copy books from your CNO-PRP library on ships and stations throughout the Navy (well over a hundred thousand hard-copy books have been distributed since the program began); borrowing e-books from the Navy General Library Program, accessible through the Navy Knowledge Online (NKO) portal; and downloading them (as loans or on a permanent basis) from a number of public sites. For example, the *Digital Book Index* offers 140,000 free books, and Project Gutenberg offers over forty-six thousand titles. With high-quality, portable e-readers widely available for less than a hundred dollars you can gather an impressive personal library at minimal cost. One of the most remarkable aspects of e-books is that they can be downloaded virtually instantly wherever an Internet connection is available. That means the assembled knowledge of the centuries is available with a few

keystrokes, a situation that would have astounded even the most learned individuals only a generation ago.

To Write. No story illustrates the changing nature of the book publishing process better than that of the brilliant science-fiction writer Hugh Howey. In July 2011 he offered an e-book novella, *Wool*, for sale via Kindle Direct Publishing, for ninety-nine cents. Traditional publishers had been largely uninterested in the book, but self-publication in e-book form turned out to be a superior option. His fascinating postapocalyptic story about the remnants of human society in huge underground silos began to sell quickly, and Howey set about expanding the smaller work into a full-fledged book, which went on sale as a digital download in January 2012. By summer 2012 he was selling up to thirty thousand downloads a month, bringing in a monthly salary of \$150,000. Two subsequent titles completed the *Wool* trilogy and introduced Howey's other clever books to a huge audience. When traditional publishers ultimately came to him, offering exclusive publishing contracts, Howey negotiated deals unheard-of in the industry, whereby he sold the hard-copy rights but retained rights to the digital format, which he has continued to market directly to savvy readers.

The secret to e-publishing is the same as it is in the print world—quality sells. Howey's success is by no means typical, but it does demonstrate what is possible. If you have a manuscript, fiction or nonfiction, that you would like to publish, you can do so in a matter of hours utilizing programs such as Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing, Smashwords, or Barnes and Noble's Pubit. Authors have virtually complete control of their work, and they receive up to 70 percent of all sales revenue. The big payoff is that your book becomes available to millions of potential customers, and you can take pleasure in knowing that your ideas could change the world. You can even offer your thoughts as free downloads, potentially reaching an even larger audience.

In August 2008, Admiral Jim Stavridis (now retired from the Navy and dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University) wrote, "So, dare to read and develop your understanding. Carve out the time to think and form new ideas. Dare to speak out and challenge assumptions and accepted wisdom if your view differs from them. Have the courage to write, publish, and be heard. Launch your ideas and be an integral part of the conversation." We hope that the CNO-PRP assists our sailors in the challenge so eloquently set forth by Admiral Stavridis.

JOHN E. JACKSON