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ANALLYJOYDISCOVERYGUIDE

The Indie Author’s Amazon Visibility Audit

A step-by-step framework for finding out exactly why your book isn’t ranking, and what to fix first.

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FILE 01 · WELCOME

Before we start

If you're reading this, chances are your book is good. Maybe it's very good. And it still isn't selling the way you hoped.

That's rarely a writing problem. In almost every case I've worked on, it's a findability problem: the book is sitting on the right shelf, in the right store, wearing the wrong label. Amazon doesn't know who to show it to, so it shows it to no one in particular, and no one in particular buys it.

This guide is the same audit process I walk clients through before we ever talk about strategy or pricing. It's designed to be done in an afternoon, with your book's Amazon listing open in another tab.

By the end, you'll have a clear, written answer to the question every author eventually asks: "Why isn't this working?" — and a ranked list of what to fix first.

> **What you'll need:** the live Amazon listing for your book (ebook and paperback, if you have both), your KDP dashboard login, and about 60–90 minutes of uninterrupted time.

FILE 02 · CONTENTS

What's inside

01	Why Good Books Go Unfound	3
02	The Four-Part Audit Framework	4
03	Part One — Category Audit	5
04	Part Two — Keyword Audit	6
05	Part Three — Metadata Audit	7
06	Part Four — Description Audit	8
07	Scoring Your Results	9
08	Five Mistakes I See Most Often	9
09	What To Do With What You Found	10

SECTION 01

Why Good Books Go Unfound

Amazon’s search and recommendation engine is, at its core, a matching system. It’s trying to connect a reader typing a search or browsing a category with the book most likely to satisfy them. It does this using signals: the words in your title and subtitle, the categories you’ve chosen, the seven backend keyword slots in your KDP dashboard, and the language in your description.

If those signals are vague, generic, or mismatched to how real readers actually search, Amazon has nothing solid to match you against. It doesn’t know your psychological thriller is a psychological thriller if the word never appears anywhere in your metadata. It doesn’t know you belong in “Historical Fiction > Biographical” if you’re sitting in “Fiction > General.”

This isn’t about tricking the algorithm. It’s about giving it accurate, specific information so it can do the one job it’s built to do: put your book in front of the readers already looking for it.

> **The core idea behind this whole guide:** visibility problems are diagnosable. You don’t need to guess. You need to check four specific things, in order, and each one will tell you something concrete to fix.

The three most common patterns

1. The Invisible Genre. The book is filed only in broad categories (“Fiction,” “Nonfiction”) instead of the specific subcategories where its actual readers browse.

2. The Vague Pitch. The description reads like a back-cover blurb written for browsing in a bookstore, not for a reader scrolling search results who decides in about four seconds whether to tap in.

3. The Empty Backend. The seven keyword fields in KDP are unused, duplicated from the title, or filled with words no reader has ever actually searched.

Each of these is fixable in an afternoon once you know it’s the problem. The audit that follows will tell you which of these, if any, applies to your book, and in what order to address them.

SECTION 02

The Four-Part Audit Framework

This guide walks through the same four checkpoints, in the same order, every time I audit a book for a client. Each part ends with a short scoring exercise so you can track where the real gaps are.

PART ONE

Category Audit

Are you in the categories where your actual readers browse, and have you claimed every category slot available to you?

PART TWO

Keyword Audit

Do your seven backend keyword slots reflect real reader search behavior, or are they empty, duplicated, or guessed at?

PART THREE

Metadata Audit

Do your title, subtitle, and author fields carry searchable information, or just branding?

PART FOUR

Description Audit

Does your description convert a browsing reader into a buyer within the first two lines?

How to use the checklists

Each of the next four sections gives you a short explanation followed by a checklist. Work through each checklist with your live Amazon listing open. Be honest rather than generous. If you're not sure whether something counts as a "yes," it's a "no."

Keep a simple tally as you go. You'll use it in Section 07 to see, at a glance, which of the four areas needs attention first.

> **A note on ebook vs. paperback:** if your book has more than one edition, audit each one separately. Amazon treats them as separate listings with separate category and keyword settings, and it's common for one edition to be well optimized while the other was left on autopilot when it was published.

Part One — Category Audit

Amazon allows up to 10 category placements per book through KDP, but most authors only ever see the two chosen at publishing and never revisit them. Categories are one of the fastest, lowest-effort fixes available, because changing them doesn't touch your cover, your text, or your price. It just tells Amazon where to file you.

The goal isn't to pick the biggest categories. It's to pick the categories where a bestseller rank actually means something to a browsing reader, and where your book is a genuine, credible fit.

Checklist

- ☐ Your book is filed in at least one category three or more levels deep (e.g. Fiction > Mystery > Cozy > Culinary), not just a top-level genre.
- ☐ You've checked the current bestsellers in each category you're in and can name three comparable titles.
- ☐ You've requested additional categories directly through KDP's category support (most authors don't know this option exists — the two shown at setup aren't the limit).
- ☐ Your paperback and ebook editions are filed in matching or complementary categories, not left to diverge by accident.
- ☐ None of your categories are so broad that your rank number, even in the top 100, would mean nothing to a shopper.

How to actually find better categories

Step one. Open your book's Amazon listing and scroll to "Product details." Note every category currently listed.

Step two. Search Amazon for two or three books you'd consider close comps: similar genre, similar length, similar voice. Open each one and note their categories under "Product details."

Step three. Look for categories your comps are in that you aren't. These are candidates worth requesting.

Step four. In your KDP Bookshelf, find the "Contact Us" option for category updates (search "add categories" in KDP help if the link isn't visible). You can typically request up to 10 categories per book, across both fiction/nonfiction browse categories and Kindle-specific categories.

> **Realistic timeline:** category requests through KDP support are usually processed within a few business days, sometimes longer. This is a "set it and check back" fix, not an instant one.

Tally your score

Count how many boxes you checked above.

> **0–1 checked:** Category placement is very likely costing you visibility right now. This should be your first fix.

> **2–3 checked:** You have a partial foundation. Tightening this further is worthwhile but not urgent.

> **4–5 checked:** Categories are in reasonably good shape. Move on to Part Two.

SECTION 04

Part Two — Keyword Audit

Every KDP listing has seven backend keyword fields. These are invisible to shoppers but read directly by Amazon's search engine. They're one of the most under-used tools available to indie authors, largely because KDP gives almost no guidance on how to fill them well.

A strong keyword field describes what a real reader would type, not what the author would call the book. "Enemies to lovers" and "found family fantasy" are searchable phrases. "A sweeping tale of love and loss" is not.

Checklist

- ☐ All seven keyword fields in your KDP dashboard are filled in (not left blank or partially filled).
- ☐ None of your keywords simply repeat words already in your title or subtitle (repetition wastes a slot).
- ☐ Your keywords include phrases a reader would actually type into Amazon's search bar, not marketing language.
- ☐ You've included at least one comparable author or "read-alike" style phrase where appropriate (e.g. "for fans of slow burn romantasy").
- ☐ You've checked Amazon's autocomplete suggestions for your genre's core terms and incorporated relevant ones.

A simple way to find real keywords

Use Amazon's own autocomplete. Go to Amazon, click into the search bar, and type the first few words a reader might use to describe your book or genre (e.g. "cozy mystery baking"). Amazon will suggest completions based on real search volume. These suggestions are one of the most reliable free sources of real reader language available.

Read your own reviews. Reviewers often describe a book in exactly the language other potential readers use to search. Phrases that show up more than once across reviews are worth testing as keywords.

Check comp titles' "customers also bought" language. Look at how similar, successful books describe themselves in their own subtitles and descriptions.

> **Common mistake:** using your own name, series name, or publisher name as a keyword. Amazon already indexes these automatically elsewhere. Every keyword slot used this way is a slot that isn't doing new work for you.

Tally your score

Count how many boxes you checked above.

> **0–1 checked:** Your keyword fields are very likely doing little to no work for you right now.

> **2–3 checked:** There's a foundation, but real search language is probably missing.

> **4–5 checked:** Keywords are in solid shape. Continue to Part Three.

SECTION 05

Part Three — Metadata Audit

Metadata is everything Amazon reads about your book outside the description: title, subtitle, series name and number, and author field. Small, easily overlooked details here can meaningfully change how findable a book is.

Checklist

- ☐ Your subtitle (if you have one) includes a genre or search term, not just a stylistic flourish.
- ☐ If your book is part of a series, the series name and number are correctly set in KDP (this powers Amazon's "also in this series" carousel).
- ☐ Your author name is spelled identically across every edition and every book, so Amazon and readers can reliably find your full catalog.
- ☐ Your book's format details (page count, publication date) are accurate and complete.
- ☐ You've checked whether your book qualifies for any relevant Amazon programs (Kindle Unlimited, Prime Reading eligibility, etc.) that affect discoverability.

Tally your score

Count how many boxes you checked above.

> **0–1 checked:** Foundational metadata needs attention before anything else here will fully pay off.

> **2–3 checked:** Reasonable, with room to tighten.

> **4–5 checked:** Solid. Continue to Part Four.

SECTION 06

Part Four — Description Audit

Your book description has one job: convert a browsing reader into a buyer in the few seconds before they decide to tap “Read more” or scroll past. On mobile, only the first two or three lines show before the description is truncated, so those opening lines carry almost all the weight.

Checklist

- ☐ The first line raises a question or stakes a reader would want answered, rather than opening with your name, awards, or a generic setting description.
- ☐ The description is written in a voice and pace that matches the book itself (a thriller description reads differently than a cozy romance description).
- ☐ The description uses HTML formatting available in KDP (bold, italics, line breaks) rather than one dense unbroken paragraph.
- ☐ There is no plot-summary drift into spoiler territory beyond the natural setup.
- ☐ The description ends with a clear hook or line that prompts a decision, not a trailing-off summary.

Tally your score

Count how many boxes you checked above.

> **0–1 checked:** Your description is very likely losing readers in the first few seconds.

> **2–3 checked:** Workable, but the opening lines probably need the most attention.

> **4–5 checked:** Strong. This is likely not your biggest opportunity area.

SECTION 07

Scoring Your Results

Write your four scores below. Whichever section scored lowest is where visibility is being lost fastest, and that's where to start.

Section	Your Score (out of 5)
Part One — Categories	_____
Part Two — Keywords	_____
Part Three — Metadata	_____
Part Four — Description	_____

> **Your lowest-scoring section is your starting point.** Fix that one area first, fully, before moving to the next. Trying to fix all four at once tends to produce shallow changes across the board rather than a real shift in any one of them.

SECTION 08

Five Mistakes I See Most Often

1. Setting metadata once at launch and never returning to it. Categories, keywords, and descriptions aren't a one-time setup step. They're worth revisiting every few months, especially after a new release in the same series.

2. Choosing categories for prestige rather than fit. A top-level category with heavy competition often does less for visibility than a well-matched subcategory with a real, reachable readership.

3. Writing the description for the author's ego, not the reader's decision. Awards, blurbs from other authors, and personal backstory belong further down the page, not in the first two lines.

4. Leaving keyword slots blank "for now" and forgetting them. An empty keyword field does nothing. It's one of the lowest-effort, highest-leverage fixes available and is very commonly skipped.

5. Treating each edition as identical when Amazon treats them as separate listings. Ebook and paperback editions can and often do have different category and keyword settings. Both need auditing.

SECTION 09 · NEXT STEP

What To Do With What You Found

If you worked through all four sections, you now have something most authors never get: a specific, written diagnosis of where your book's visibility is breaking down, in order of priority.

Some of what you found, you can fix yourself this week. Category requests, keyword rewrites, and description edits are all things you can do directly in your KDP dashboard using the steps above.

If you'd rather have a second, experienced set of eyes on your results, or want the deeper strategy work that goes beyond this audit, that's exactly what I help authors with.

Ally Joy

Book Discovery Strategist

> **Reply to this guide's email,** or reach out directly, and share what your audit turned up. I'll tell you honestly whether it's a quick fix or something worth deeper work together.