



## Quick Start Guide

### Your First 5 Minutes with The Open Sidewalk Project

Welcome to The Open Sidewalk Project! This guide will walk you through everything you need to know to set your first book free. In just 5 minutes, you'll be ready to step beyond the edge and send a story into the world.

#### ✨ THE 4-STEP RITUAL

**Discover. Reflect. Set Free. Mark the Moment.** This is the rhythm of every book's journey. Here's how you make it happen:



## STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR BOOK

Pick a book from your shelf—one you've finished, one you loved, one that meant something to you. It can be fiction, non-fiction, poetry, memoir, anything. The book doesn't need to be in perfect condition. Well-loved books with dog-eared pages often travel farthest.

### Ask yourself:

- Which book changed how you see something?
- Which book do you wish you could give to a stranger?
- Which book has been sitting on your shelf waiting for "someday"?
- Which book helped you through a difficult time?

## **STEP 2: GET YOUR BOOKCROSSING ID**

Every book needs a unique BookCrossing ID (BCID) so people can track its journey and log Sidewalk Reflections. Getting your number is simple:

### **How to Register:**

- **A.** Go to [opensidewalkproject.org/register](http://opensidewalkproject.org/register)
- **B.** Request your BookCrossing ID numbers
- **C.** You'll receive your unique BCID number(s) from OSP
- **D.** Each number is unique to one book



**TIP:** Already have a BookCrossing account? You can use your existing BookCrossing numbers! Just register them with OSP so we can track them as part of The Open Sidewalk Project.

**IMPORTANT:** Save your BookCrossing ID numbers! You'll need them to track your books' journeys. Write them down or keep the email from OSP.



## STEP 3: LABEL YOUR BOOK

Your book needs a label with its BookCrossing ID so finders can log reflections and track the journey.

### Option A: Print Labels

Download our label release kit from [opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp](http://opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp), print on light weight card stock, cut out bookplate and affix to inside back cover.

### Option B: Handwrite

Write directly in the book:

"Part of The Open Sidewalk Project BookCrossing ID: [your BCID number]

Log your reflection at [opensidewalkproject.org](http://opensidewalkproject.org)"

 **WHERE TO PLACE LABEL:** Inside back cover is best. The first person who picks up the book will see it on the included bookmark immediately.



## STEP 4: WRITE YOUR SIDEWALK REFLECTION

Before you set your book free, write a Sidewalk Reflection—a note about what this book meant to you, why you're setting it free, and what you hope happens next. [opensidewalkproject.org/initial-release-form/](https://opensidewalkproject.org/initial-release-form/)

### Consider these questions:

- Why are you setting this book free?
- What did this book teach you or change in you?
- Where are you leaving it and why?
- What do you hope for the person who finds it?

**Note:** You'll log this reflection online when you set free your release. Keep it brief—2-5 sentences is perfect.

### Example Reflection:

*"I'm setting *The Alchemist* free on the Blue Line train in Chicago. This book found me during a career change when I needed to trust the journey. I hope whoever picks this up is brave enough to follow their personal legend. Set free: November 6, 2025."*

For help, download our "Writing Sidewalk Reflections" guide from [opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp](https://opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp).



## STEP 5: SET IT FREE & MARK THE MOMENT

Now comes the moment of courage: letting go. Choose your location thoughtfully, leave the book, take a photo, and log your release.

### The Process:

- 1. Choose your release location (see Wild Release Ideas section)
- 2. Place the book where someone will find it
- 3. Take a photo (required—this captures the moment)
- 4. Log your release at [opensidewalkproject.org/release](http://opensidewalkproject.org/release)
- 5. Enter: BookCrossing ID, location, date, your Sidewalk Reflection
- 6. Upload your photo
- 7. Let it go. Trust the journey.



**CONGRATULATIONS! You've just set your first book free. Check back in a few days to see if anyone has found it and logged a reflection. Welcome to the movement.**



## WILD RELEASE IDEAS

### Where to Set Books Free

The best release locations are places where people pause, wait, or gather—where someone might have time to pick up a book and be curious. Here are tried-and-true ideas:

#### ✓ **GREAT PLACES TO RELEASE:**

- **Coffee Shops & Cafés** — Leave on a table, bookshelf, or counter. Natural reading spots.
- **Park Benches** — Classic! People sit, see a book, pick it up. Very visible.
- **Public Transit** — Buses, trains, subway seats. Books travel with travelers.
- **Little Free Libraries** — Perfect! Already set up for book exchange.
- **Laundromats** — People waiting have time to browse and read.
- **Waiting Rooms** — Doctor's offices, salons, mechanics, DMV.
- **Community Centers** — Libraries, recreation centers, senior centers.
- **University Campuses** — Study lounges, dining halls, outdoor seating.
- **Airport Terminals** — Travelers love finding books. Leave in departure gates.
- **Hotel Lobbies** — Guests waiting for rides, meetings, check-in.
- **Gym Locker Rooms** — Benches in changing areas (not wet areas).
- **Hiking Trailheads** — Rest areas where hikers pause.
- **Bookstores (Carefully)** — Reading areas or café sections, NOT shelves (see cautions).

 **CREATIVE RELEASE IDEAS:**

- **Time Capsule Release** — Leave a book with a note: "Don't open until [future date]"
- **Seasonal Release** — Beach books at the shore in summer, cozy mysteries in winter
- **Themed Location** — Cookbook at a farmers market, travel book at airport
- **Scavenger Hunt** — Leave clues on social media for your followers to find
- **Birthday Tradition** — Set a book free on your birthday every year
- **Group Release** — Book club releases multiple copies of same book across city
- **Commute Route** — Leave books along your regular commute path
- **Event Release** — Set books free at festivals, conferences, community gatherings

## DIRECT RELEASE

### Give It Directly to Someone

Not ready to leave a book in the wild? You can also practice direct release—handing a book directly to another person and asking them to continue the journey.

#### How Direct Release Works:

Instead of leaving your book in a public place, you give it directly to someone—a friend, coworker, stranger at a coffee shop, someone you meet—and ask them to read it, log a reflection, and pass it forward when they're done.

#### When to Choose Direct Release:

- Want to ensure someone actually gets the book (less risk of weather, loss)
- Know someone who'd love this specific book
- Want to start a conversation about the project
- Are building momentum in your community
- Want to see the first leg of the journey happen in person
- Are nervous about wild releasing and want to start small

## Great Direct Release Scenarios:

### At Work:

"Hey Sarah, I heard you're interested in [topic]. I just finished this and I'm passing it forward as part of The Open Sidewalk Project. Read it, log your thoughts, then send it to the next person."

### To a Stranger:

At a coffee shop: "I noticed you're reading. I'm part of a project where we set books free to travel. This one's ready for its next reader—interested?"

### To Family/Friends:

"I want you to be part of this book's journey. Read it, tell the next reader why it mattered, then pass it forward to someone outside our circle."

### Service Workers:

Your barista, mail carrier, regular waiter: "You always ask what I'm reading—this one's for you. Pass it on when you're done."

## Important: Direct Release Rules

- ✓ **Still requires logging:** You log your direct release reflection when you hand it off. The recipient logs their own reflection when they set it free again.
- ✓ **Explain the mission:** Make sure they understand they're part of a journey, not just getting a gift
- ✓ **Pass-it-forward requirement:** They must agree to pass it on (not keep it on their shelf forever)
- ✓ **Still needs a photo:** Take a photo of the handoff moment or ask them to take one
- ✓ **Ask, don't pressure:** If they don't want to participate, that's okay—find someone else

### The conversation might sound like:

"I'm part of The Open Sidewalk Project—we set books free to travel from reader to reader. This book meant something to me, and I think you might enjoy it. When you're done, log your reflection at [opensidewalkproject.org](http://opensidewalkproject.org) with this BookCrossing ID, then pass it to someone else who needs it. Will you keep it moving?"

## Hybrid Approach: Direct Then Wild

You can also use a hybrid approach: Give it to your book club friend → They read and pass to their coworker → Coworker reads and sets it free on the subway. The journey starts directly, then goes wild.

## Direct Release Reflection Tips:

When logging your release, note that it's a direct release:

**Example:** *"Direct release: I gave this book to my coworker James, who mentioned he's been wanting to read more science fiction. I asked him to log his reflection and pass it forward when he's done. Setting it free by putting it directly in the hands of someone who'll appreciate it. Released: November 7, 2025."*

## Why Direct Release Matters:

Some people are nervous about "abandoning" a book in public. Direct release allows you to:

- **Build confidence** — Start direct, then try wild releases later
- **Create accountability** — Clear instructions
- **Start local** — Build a network in your community
- **Tell the story** — Have conversations about the project
- **Ensure the first leg** — Know it reached at least one reader

## The Key Difference:

**Wild Release:** Book → Public place → Unknown finder

**Direct Release:** Book → Specific person → They find the next reader

Both end the same way: Book traveling through the world, reader to reader, creating connections and logging reflections.

**Remember:** Whether you release wild or direct, the goal is the same—set stories free and trust the journey.



## BEST PRACTICES & IMPORTANT CAUTIONS

We encourage you to use common sense when releasing books. The goal is to spark joy and connection—not to create problems or misunderstandings. Please follow these guidelines:

■ **SAFETY & SECURITY:**

■ **Don't leave near:**

- Government buildings, airports (secure areas), train stations (security zones)
- Police stations, military bases, embassies

■ **Don't leave in:**

- Abandoned buildings, dark alleys, isolated areas at night

✓ **Do leave in:**

- Well-lit public spaces where people gather
- Businesses that are open
- Community spaces with foot traffic



**DO NOT leave books where they might be considered a security risk. In our current world, unattended items can cause concern or trigger security responses. Use good judgment.**

■ **AGE-APPROPRIATE CONTENT:**

■ **Don't leave adult/mature books:**

- At playgrounds, elementary schools
- Children's sections of libraries
- Pediatrician waiting rooms

✓ **Do release adult books:**

- At coffee shops, bars, adult education centers
- Workplace break rooms, college campuses

**Tip:** Match book content to location audience. Children's books near families, business books in office buildings, etc.

## ■ BOOKSTORES - SPECIAL CAUTION:

### ■ Never place books:

- On bookstore shelves (looks like theft or inventory error)
- Near checkout/registers
- In new book displays

### ✓ Okay to place in:

- Bookstore café seating areas (clearly separate from merchandise)
- Reading chairs/lounges
- Community bulletin board areas



**Be very careful about releasing books where books are sold. We don't want anyone to find one of our books and be accused of shoplifting, and we don't want to confuse bookstore inventory.**

**Best practice:** Ask bookstore permission first, or choose a different location entirely.

## ■ WEATHER & BOOK CONDITION:

### ■ Don't leave books:

- In rain or snow (use indoor locations if weather is bad)
- In direct sun for long periods (pages fade)
- Near sprinklers or water features, always prepare kit in a clear plastic bag

### ✓ Do consider:

- Covered outdoor seating
- Indoor public spaces
- Waterproof bags, always, and extra if you must leave outside

**Book condition:** Well-loved is fine. Damaged/moldy is not. Don't release books that are falling apart.

## ✓ RESPECT PROPERTY & ASK PERMISSION:

- ✓ **Public spaces:** Parks, benches, transit - generally okay
- ✓ **Businesses:** Cafés, waiting rooms - if it's a public-facing area with seating, usually fine
- ? Private businesses: When in doubt, ask! Most businesses appreciate the gesture
- ■ **Private property:** Don't trespass. Don't leave books on someone's porch uninvited

**Best approach:** "Is it okay if I leave a book for your customers to discover?"  
Most say yes!

## ■ LIBRARY RELEASES - SPECIAL NOTE:

- ✓ **Best practice:** Ask the librarian first! Many are enthusiastic partners
- ✓ **Okay:** Library café or community room (if separate from stacks)
- ■ **Not okay:** On library shelves (they'll think it's a mis-shelved book)
- **Alternative:** Little Free Libraries are perfect substitutes

**Note:** Libraries have mixed policies. Some welcome book releases in their public spaces. Others prefer you don't, as it can confuse their cataloging system.

## 🎯 THE GOLDEN RULE:

**Ask yourself: Would I be confused or concerned if I found an unattended book here? If the answer is yes, choose a different location. We want book releases to be delightful surprises, not causes for concern.**

### When in Doubt:

If you're unsure about a location, err on the side of caution. Choose one of these always-safe options instead:

- Little Free Libraries (always welcome books)
- Coffee shop tables during business hours
- Park benches in well-trafficked areas
- Community center reading areas
- Your workplace break room (with permission)



## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

After you set your book free, the journey begins. Here's what to expect:

### The Typical Journey:

- **Day 1:** You set the book free and log your release
- **Days 2-7:** Someone discovers your book (or not yet—be patient!)
- **Week 2-4:** The finder logs a Sidewalk Reflection about discovering it
- **Weeks 4-12:** They read it, then pass it forward with their own reflection
- **Months later:** More readers find it, each adding to the story
- **Years later:** You check back and see it's traveled to cities you've never visited

**Note:** Not every book gets logged by every reader. Some books sit for months before being found. Some are read but never logged. That's okay—the journey still matters.

### How to Track Your Book:

- **1.** Visit [opensidewalkproject.org/books-in-motion/](http://opensidewalkproject.org/books-in-motion/)
- **2.** Enter your BookCrossing ID
- **3.** See all logged reflections and locations
- **4.** View photos from the journey

## ?

## COMMON QUESTIONS

### **Q: What if no one ever finds my book?**

A: Some books travel fast, some slow. Give it time. And remember: even if it's not logged, someone may have picked it up and enjoyed it without knowing to log a reflection. The act of setting it free still matters.

### **Q: Can I release a book I haven't read?**

A: Yes! Sometimes letting go of a book you've been saving is its own act of courage.

### **Q: What if I want to keep tracking the book but don't want my name public?**

A: Use a username instead of your real name when you register. Stay anonymous.

### **Q: Can I release library books or borrowed books?**

A: No. Only release books you own. Borrowed books need to be returned to their owner.

### **Q: What if someone takes my book and doesn't log it?**

A: That's okay. Maybe they needed it and didn't know about logging. Maybe they'll pass it on anyway. Trust the journey. Some books find their forever home, because you set it free.

### **Q: Can I release ebooks or audiobooks?**

A: Not yet—we're exploring digital releases. For now, physical books only.



## READY TO BEGIN?

You now have everything you need to set your first book free. Choose your book, register it, write your reflection, pick a safe and thoughtful location, and let it go.

**Remember: The book on your shelf—the one still echoing—somebody needs it. Have the courage to carry it forward.**

**When the sidewalk ends, the story begins.**

**Discover. Reflect. Set Free. Mark the Moment.**

## NEED MORE HELP?

Have questions or need assistance? We're here to help!

**Common Questions:** [opensidewalkproject.org/about/faqs/](https://opensidewalkproject.org/about/faqs/)

**Email:** [team@opensidewalkproject.org](mailto:team@opensidewalkproject.org)

Whether you need help with registration, have questions about where to release, or want to share your book's journey—reach out anytime.

**Open Sidewalk Project**  
Making books travel farther  
[opensidewalkproject.org](https://opensidewalkproject.org)

### **Share your journey:**

#OpenSidewalkProject #SidewalkReflections #BooksInMotion #ISetABookFree

*This guide is part of Basecamp resources at [opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp](https://opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp)*

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