

BOOK *Craft*



HOW TO WRITE
NONFICTION

& Memoir

A 12-Step Guide to Finishing Your Book

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INTRODUCTION

After spending a decade getting a PhD in Literature and working as a developmental editor for hundreds of successful book projects, and receiving over three million views for my online writing resources, I decided it was time to publish a book about writing. I spent six months developing the manuscript, and leaned into a “magical” theme that made the book unique, while adding enough biographical details to establish a brand and humanize me as an author. However, just before publishing, I realized nonfiction authors especially would be put off by all the extra historical trivia and wordplay, so I decided to cut all the nonfiction materials. You could argue that *this* guide (the leftover stuff that wouldn’t fit) is actually better. It’s definitely more concise.

Let me first welcome you, whether you’re an established writer or someone who’s thinking about writing their very first book, and let you know what you can expect from me. In my experience, nonfiction authors struggle much less with *what* to write: if you’re preparing to write a book, you probably already know what you want to say.

But maybe you’re struggling with organizing your ideas, finding your main theme, or making sure it’s engaging and well-written. Maybe you have piles of chaotic notes or a perfect

vision in your head that you can never seem to get down in writing. No matter why you're here or what kind of book you want to write, I will be sharing some powerful writing tactics that will help you write a better book, faster.

Here's the good news: out of the thousands of nonfiction authors who publish their books every month, very few of them are using any kind of skill, craft or reference point to put it together, which means most of them will sink as soon as they're launched. You can absolutely do *so much better* simply by learning and putting to use the secrets I'm going to share with you in the next several sections. I've kept things short, so you can steal all my methods without getting lost in the weeds. This will save you months, if not years, of valuable time and insufferable frustration and procrastination. It will also guarantee your book makes a powerful impact and a lasting impression.

Here's the bad news: Some of what I'm about to say may challenge you. You're probably used to a certain degree of control in your creative projects. Maybe you run a brand or a business. You're smart, motivated and independent. You're used to doing things *your way*. You have a grand vision and are absolutely positive that if you just write it, they will come.

This is a guide to writing commercial nonfiction. Whether you're writing a how-to guide or a personal memoir, our number one goal will be to make sure it satisfies readers: this is not just about the quality of the writing, in fact, the writing quality can be a hindrance at worst, and at best a sideshow or garnish. It's not the main event. Your content is everything. You may feel you know what you want to say, but have you

considered what your potential audience wants, or needs, to hear?

I'm not going to cajole or coddle you from this point forward, but I will spend some time stressing this point: that *what you want to write about* only has value if *it matters to other people*.

You may hate me already. That's fine, think of me like a tough, curmudgeonly writing coach, only instead of paying me thousands of dollars to help make sure your book is marketable, I'm helping you avoid the critical pitfalls most authors make and saving you thousands of dollars. You're giving me a few bucks, I'm giving you back a month's rent. If that's not a good deal, I don't know what is.

Outline

In this book, I'm not going to talk much about the style of writing, because the truth is you already have your own unique voice, and your book is going to sound like you. A great editor can help polish and smoothen your sentences or improve your word choice, but they won't actually make the book more satisfying: nonfiction readers rarely read to admire beautiful writing, they just want to learn and assimilate information quickly, to get on with their lives. It's true that some literary nonfiction, memoir or biography for example, is often told in narrative voice. But there are other things that are even more crucial, like getting readers invested; getting them to pay attention and take action; building trust and rapport and credibility—so they listen and trust what you're saying.

With that in mind, I've set up a simple 12-step process that will help you outline, draft, write, polish and edit a book that's

well organized and impactful. We'll go through these first, before ending with a whole bunch of powerful nonfiction book writing strategies to make sure your book doesn't miss the mark. I'll conclude with some tips on boosting revenue, developing a back-end funnel, building a platform or email list, and some other stuff that will be super useful once you're ready to launch.

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1

DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE

Before we begin with the process of organizing our ideas, we need to spend a few minutes talking about your purpose. Why do you even want to write a book, anyway? Take a moment and jot down a list, in a notebook, before reading further (it's important).

Be careful to list things you actually care about, not just things that sound good. If you *really want it*, you should feel the flicker of genuine enthusiasm. If you don't really want it, you might feel hesitant, tendrils of fear or dread. For example, if I wrote that I wanted to write a book so I could get lucrative speaking gigs, that might sound good on paper, but secretly I know I'd hate it. That's now what I like to do, at all. Even, or especially, if it pays well. It's true, I love to speak and network, and I like people. But I also get sweaty and nervous speaking in public. That's not where I thrive.

This step is important for two reasons: first, you need a clear idea of why this matters to you, and the motivations need

to be energizing, so that you'll actually do the work and get the book finished. Secondly, depending on which goals you set, you may need to write a different kind of book entirely.

What are you trying to achieve, what's your goal, what's the point? Did you make your list? If not, do it now. If you've finished, let's go through it together. You might have written goals like *I want to help people*. Great, now be more specific. Help whom, to do what? Do they recognize the problem? Are they aware of it? Do they *want* your help? Helping people is a noble goal, but it's also very common. Most nonfiction authors want to help people. Does *your* experience and knowledge allow you to write the best new guide to your subject, in a fresh and interesting way, that makes solving the problem much easier, in a way that no other books have done before?

You may have also written something like, I want to be recognized and applauded. I want to win awards. I want to be respected and acknowledged. I want *proof* that I'm a great writer, external validation, so my friends and parents will be proud of me; so I can be proud of myself. That's fine too, on a personal level. Most writers have goals like this. Keep in mind, and we'll talk more about this later, that focusing on being a great writer is not the same as helping others. They can coexist, but they can also split your focus and weaken the results of both.

Finally, you may have financial goals, such as earning an extra \$1000 a month in book sales, or quitting your job, or buying a house. I actually recommend creating specific goals like this, as long as they aren't completely devoid of reality. But how do you know whether you're overshooting, or setting your sights too low?

You do research. Are there other, similar books that sell well? How many books did that author write before one became successful? Are they traditionally published or self-published? Did they have a big marketing budget, a family background in the publishing industry? Were they published several decades ago when there was much less competition? Do they have an established platform? Just because you want to write a similar book, doesn't mean it will be successful; but you should still do the research, and get a sense of *how many people* might benefit from your book.

You don't have to think about the market, or the audience, if you don't want to. I know a lot of other guides to writing even tell you explicitly not to—that you should only write the first draft for yourself. In my opinion, this is bad advice. It *does* help remove the creative blocks or insecurities that are inevitable, when you're creating a product without a guaranteed market. But it doesn't do anything to transcend them. Eventually, once you publish, market demands are going to be absolutely critical.

If your goal is to help people, *if* your goal is to make money, or get external validation, *then* other people have to want to read your book, and enjoy it, for you to feel successful. But maybe those aren't your goals at all. Maybe you just want to express yourself. Maybe this is a family memoir or personal project that you care about on a deep level. Maybe you want to finish a book just to prove that you can do it, and why not? It's a very challenging, difficult, long-term exercise of creative writing abilities. It's hard work, and the rewards may be laughable for the amount of time and effort you sank into it,

but it's worth it for the feelings of personal satisfaction and accomplishment you'll receive.

My point is, your post-publishing aura of good feelings will depend on your target goals, and whether or not they've been met, so get clear on what exactly you want, and why you're doing this.

According to HP Lovecraft (and dozens of others, but we'll start with him), "amateurs write purely for the love of their art, without the stultifying influence of commercialism." This quote might give you pleasant feelings, while also making you a bit uncomfortable. Modern society has unfortunately made desperate, poor authors the punchline of a running joke. Writers feel they deserve to get paid, to be recognized, instead of needing to constantly beg for help and support. "Amateur" may feel like a dirty word, even though it literally means *one who does for love*. But if this is your first book, or even if you've written several, you may still be early on your path towards book-writing greatness. There's no shame in being a novice; nor in writing for the love of your craft.

At the same time, weirdly, people who get paid to write, who write books on a schedule, and make good money, are often demonized. They aren't *artists*. They don't *love it*. There should be a new, better word, for people who are professionally competent and adequately compensated, and yet still love what they do. I assure you, they're out there. And you can become one of them.

I have writer friends who make well over six-figures a year, and when people ask them what they do, and they introduce themselves as an author, they get asked "have you published

anything?” Inwardly they roll their eyes, because the profession of authorship implies getting paid for published books. But there are many, many writers who introduce themselves as authors who are not making any money; who are in fact constantly losing money.

Don't let all that bother you, I just wanted you to keep in mind that these definitions are fluid. Roald Dahl writes, “a person is a fool to become a writer. His only compensation is absolute freedom. He has no master except his own soul, and that, I am sure, is why he does it.” One of the *greatest things* about writing, is wrestling with the absolute void of the blank page, and summoning something into being. Not to mention waking up past noon, wearing a bathrobe all day, taking weeks off whenever you feel like it. It is profoundly challenging work, but there are worse ways to make a living.

Even if you're squeezing the work in around your day job or personal responsibilities, it's gratifying to see something grow from nothing, and develop into a book over hundreds of hours of continuous effort (of course, you can also write a short nonfiction book over the course of a few weekends, if you prefer – spending *more time* on it will not necessarily increase the value, but for your first book, you'll probably spend much more time than you think you need.)

If your only goal is to write and publish a book for yourself, and you honestly, deeply don't care if anybody reads it, or whether you recoup your publishing costs, that's absolutely fine. As long as it aligns with the goals you wrote down earlier. *Most* authors, as I'm sure you're aware, say they aren't in it for the money, but only for the passion... and then they expect free support or help. We'll talk more about that later, but let me

plant this seed in your mind: you may want to consider the real reasons you want to write a book, and make sure you write a book that has a chance at fulfilling those ambitions.

Agatha Christie wrote, “there was a moment when I changed from an amateur to a professional. I assumed the burden of a profession, which is to write even when you don’t want to, don’t much like what you’re writing, and aren’t writing particularly well.”

You see, if your main goal is for it to be fun and easy, for writing to be pleasurable and enjoyable, a feel-good hobby to mark the passage of time, while leaving your mark on the world, then it may be too easy to give up or quit when it gets hard or isn’t fun.

And writing a book *can be hard*. Don’t let anyone convince you otherwise. That said, it’s often hard because there are so few resources for how to draft, organize, outline, write and edit a successful book project that readers actually love. Which, in turn, means most authors are ecstatic to have finally “finished” their books, and then immediately traumatized when they learn nobody else wants to read it, or even worse, those who did read it, didn’t like it or couldn’t even finish.

But writing a book can also be pretty easy! Given the choice, wouldn’t you rather avoid the difficulties and challenges, while also producing books readers actively love to support and champion? I hope you think so, and I hope this guide will help you get there.

2

FIND YOUR VALUE

Let's say you've figured out why *you* want to write a book, and what *you* hope to get from it. That's a great start. But now imagine, your book is finished and on a bookshelf somewhere. Someone walks in and asks the clerk for a recommendation. What do they ask for, that leads the clerk to recommend your book? How do they summarize it into just a simple sentence or two? When they pick it up, how does the title and subtitle let them know quickly that this is the book they need?

If they need a basic how-to guide to crocheting kitten sweaters, then the title would focus on that subject. If it's a literary nonfiction, they'll probably be reading to absorb quirky interesting facts or historical anecdotes that let them see deeper into how the world fits together. If it's a biographical memoir, they'll be expecting dramatic stories, most likely about a famous person or a fascinating time period.

Who should read this, and why? What are the benefits that readers will get from your book? What audience, specifically, needs to read it most, and what value will they get from it? Do some keyword research and see which topics or subjects people are actively discussing or searching for online. What other resources are there for them? What other books do they rave about?

Here's the thing, whether you want to pitch a literary agent, or self-publish, nobody is going to be interested in your book unless *you* can communicate the value it has to a specific audience. That's not something that happens later, during marketing. It's not something a publisher or PR agent will help you figure out. Sure, they can, if you pay them a lot... and it does need to happen. But nobody is going to take a risk and help you do the work of figuring out why people should read your book, if *you* haven't already made a solid effort.

It's very, very common, for new authors to feel resistance at this point. They say, "but I don't *want* to write what's popular. I don't want to give in to the demands of the market and write what sells. Can't I just do it my way and be successful anyway?" They are asking permission to do it their way. But nobody else can give you an answer to this question, because it depends on the goals you set for yourself in chapter one. The real question is, will *you* be happy if the book doesn't sell? Conversely, how much unhappiness will it take, before you're willing to reevaluate your insistence that market research isn't necessary?

Of course you can take whichever creative risks you want, for as long as you want. Maybe you'll prove everybody wrong!

Maybe nobody else “gets” your book but it’ll be a smash success. Of course it’s possible, even if unlikely.

But here’s what’s much more common: writers complaining that nobody appreciates real art and literature. Authors begging for favors and support, frustrated that their friends and family or college roommate they haven’t spoken to in over a decade will spend \$3.99 on a coffee, but not on the book they spent months writing.

Artists are starting to stand up for themselves. There’s even a Facebook profile badge that reads *art is work*. The sentiment, is that (all) creative work has value. Even if nobody wants to buy it. Even when it’s free. Or something. I’m not exactly clear on what the purpose is, because of course, it’s confusing. Yes art is real work; yes it’s hard. Someone famous said, a writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than anyone else. Someone else famous said, don’t expect it to be easy; if it’s easy you’re doing it wrong.

Art is work. But then there’s this other messy thing: art has *value*... even if nobody wants it enough to pay for it. It has value, even if it doesn’t earn; even if it robs its creator of both time and money. What value, to whom? Why should it? Who should *pay* for it, when nobody wants it? Why should that be *their* responsibility? Wouldn’t we all love to live on vast estates, in a chateau, sponsored by wealthy patrons, free to do as we please?

That was Confucius’ wish, and he complained about it often. “If any of the Princes would employ me, in the course of twelve months I should have done something considerable.” At another time he said, “Am I a bitter gourd? Am I to be hung up out of the way of being eaten?”

Then we also have the example of William Blake; he was offered patronage and a place to live, and he *hated* it. He hated earning his keep, doing the work his patron wanted, until he eventually picked a fight and got thrown out.

“I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s. I will not reason and compare. My business is to create.” Blake refused to play the game, and resented getting paid to cater to the whims of his wealthy patrons. But he wanted to be successful. He believed in himself and his work. Spurned by bad business dealings, he refused to entertain logical, rational concerns like *who is actually going to buy this*. Modern-day authors may sympathize, especially the ones who say things “I don’t care about the money” or “I’m a writer, not a marketer.”

In 1809, Blake held an exhibition of paintings in his brother’s drapery shop, but nobody came; nothing sold. A critique called him “an unfortunate lunatic” suffering from “egregious vanity.” Most of his lasting works were paid for by rich sponsors or commercial publishers.

Artists don’t want to get paid for things other people want. They want to get paid for doing the things that nobody wants but they themselves enjoy. This also lets them off the hook. It doesn’t need to be successful, it doesn’t matter if it makes any money. That relief of writing for yourself alone can feel liberating. It may even be necessary to get through the first draft, as we’ll discuss later. But you can’t hit a target you’re not aiming for. It’s like learning to hunt with a blindfold on.

At this point, we could get into a big argument about how genius creatives are required to push boundaries with their selfish vision; making new things that the world doesn’t yet need, want or appreciate. But seriously, let’s not. If you’re

writing nonfiction, there's a good chance you're already open to the idea that you must provide value. Let's also assume you'd prefer some people to read and enjoy your book now, instead of decades after your death. But how do you plan or choose, how do you know the book you're writing will be good, how do you find an audience, and ultimately become successful? It's not that hard actually: most creative insecurity can be reduced to two questions:

- Is this good enough? (quality)
- Will anybody want it? (value)

The solution to these issues, is to focus on *craft* and *research*. Craft takes time, skill and effort. It's silly to think, just because you know how to string sentences together, you'll instantly be capable of producing a masterpiece the first time you attempt to write a book. But luckily, most nonfiction readers don't really care about pretty writing anyway. All they care about is clarity of communication: how *quickly* they can benefit from your book. With the tips I share in this guide, you'll already have a huge advantage in the quality department, precisely because too many writers focus on stylistic elements like sentence structure or word choice, rather than the much bigger issues of making sure your content is organized in a way that stirs, empowers and forces commitment from readers.

In certain genres, the quality (tone and style of the writing) matters more than in others. But it is rarely the *main* thing. The quality only really matters, after you've already effectively solved the *value* proposition, and even then, it's mostly a pass/fail proposition. It only can't be so bad that readers stop

reading. The more value you're providing, the less quality matters. However, the quality needs to be inherent, and immediate. Readers aren't going to read the book to figure out whether it has any value for them, what the point is, what they'll get from it. You need to communicate that to them directly, by making promises about who exactly will benefit from the reading experience you're providing.

You'll rarely get the chance to do this in person, so your book cover, the title and subtitle, and a short blurb are going to be essential in convincing readers that your book is worth their time.

Ok, so, brass tacks. First, you'll need a very broad understanding of the most popular genres, so you can figure out where your book belongs on the shelf. Here's a big list, ranked roughly in order (most popular to least popular). Each of these will have dozens of smaller sub-categories. It can be tricky to find all of them, and different online book retailers will have different ones, but you can start by searching books on Amazon and clicking on the category lists at the bottom, then using the menu on the left side to dig into deeper subcategories. Pick at least 3 that fit best. Later, if you publish through KDP, you can ask them to add up to 10 categories altogether – but make sure your book actually belongs there.

Popular Nonfiction Genres

Top Five:

- Religion and Spirituality
- Biographies and Memoirs
- Business and Money

- Self-Help
- Cookbooks, food, and wine

Everything Else:

- Memoir & Autobiography
- Biography
- Cooking
- Art & Photography
- Self-Help/Personal Development
- Motivational/Inspirational
- Health & Fitness
- History
- Crafts, Hobbies & Home
- Families & Relationships
- Humor & Entertainment
- Business & Money
- Law & Criminology
- Politics & Social Sciences
- Religion & Spirituality
- Education & Teaching
- Travel
- True Crime

What Who Why? (Audience First)

Most people read fiction to be entertained, and read nonfiction to learn. This is not universally true, and it's important to entertain while educating (a nonfiction book can't be only information; nor can it be only stories).

There needs to be a main purpose or benefit readers can easily grasp; some desire or itch they can scratch through the reading of a book. So while fiction can simply pass the time, nonfiction must provide real value.

To be successful, you can begin by answering these three questions.

1. *What* your book is actually about (a main topic or premise)
2. *Who* your book is for (who will get the most value out of it)
3. *Why* they need to read it (how it will help them)

You can answer this in three sentences, or one big sentence:

Examples:

My book is a travel memoir about Italy filled with romance and recipes. It's for people who love travel and Italian culture, love to cook and fans of *MamaMia!*

My book is a guide to computer programming for software engineers who want to build smart phone apps.

My book is a history of creative genius and unique strategies for out-of-the-box thinking, for artists and authors who believe they have something to share but are stuck getting it done.

Now see if you can create your own quick introduction, using the following formulas.

Formulas:

My book is about ____ and helps ____ to ____

My book helps ____ who want to ____ finally ____

My book is for ____ who want to ____ without ____

This is your short elevator pitch: it should already clearly state the subject, the intended audience and the main benefits. For a how-to book, you can focus on the result your audience wants to achieve, or the limiting fear or pain point. Ideally, you'll also hit some genre or category keywords, some similar books for context, and the main benefit. If it's a narrative nonfiction book, without a specific result, you could include something like "stunning, lyrical essays that entrance the reader into a new state of perception on trauma."

However, as I mentioned earlier, "great writing" is rarely the real reason people read books. It's a nice extra perk, but it's parsley, not the main course. Also, it's rarely a good idea to use superlative praise for your own writing. If your blurb uses a bunch of adjectives like "brilliant, genius, life-changing!" readers will see that you're effectively just patting yourself on the back. Instead, these type of comments should come in the form of external praise and reviews. In the meantime, forget adjectives and focus specifically on the contents and topics.

Once you have a basic understanding of your book's category and genre, you also want to take a moment and think about your book's unique value. This means, not just the basic benefits or keywords, but also how this book is new, different, and necessary, in a fresh way. You need to show a gap in the marketplace, that isn't currently being addressed... that is *only*

resolved by your book. This will be your USP (unique selling proposition). Why *this* book, and not all the others?

Write something down for each of these:

1. Subject / topic (with inherent conflict)
2. Main fear, challenge or obstacle (why haven't readers been able to solve this already themselves?)
3. What's new or different about your book?
4. "A meets B + C" (what other books is it similar to, and what fresh element is introduced?)
5. Who is it for (people who want X, or struggle with Y, or need help Z).

Spend some time making notes, because it's much better to do this as early as possible, so you can structure your book effectively, as opposed to trying to figure out the value proposition after the book is written.

3

CLAIM YOUR STORY

There's one more piece of the puzzle, and it's something I avoided for years. When I was painting surrealist fine art in Italy and Taiwan, and people asked me what it *meant*, I'd avoid the question. I didn't want to talk about myself, or why I created this, or what it meant. I wanted people to interact with my art and form their own opinions. I wanted the art to stand for itself.

When I started writing books, I didn't talk much about myself. After all, I was a nobody. People didn't care about me. But that didn't mean they couldn't learn from my insights and experience. I shared a *ton* of value. And even though I didn't feel any personal pride or satisfaction from those books, they were *useful*.

It wasn't until more recently that I made a few powerful realizations. First of all, people want to know who the author is, so they can evaluate the source of the information. You may not have fancy degrees or credentials, but you do need to be

trustworthy. There are a *lot* of ways to achieve this, and we'll talk about them later.

Secondly, however, is that readers will be more impacted by your material if they can get a sense of the person behind it. It's true, they may not *want* to know anything about you at first, and they can even get annoyed when you overshare your personal experiences. But a book is an opportunity to build a relationship with readers, through vulnerability. So don't think of it as injecting too much of yourself into the content; think of it as creating a personal depth that allows readers to be more easily persuaded by your material.

Specifically, you should include some version of your own hero's journey or origin story. You need to show them that you have personal, intimate experiences with their fears and struggles. That you understand them, and know what they're going through. Then, you need to show that you've effectively resolved the exact problems and challenges they're facing, through personal discovery, and that you can help them achieve the same results.

Earn it, don't learn it

You don't need to include your entire backstory, unless this is a personal memoir. But you should pick one, specific moment or scene, where you had a profound insight or epiphany. You need to show that you worked to attain the information you're about to provide. This essentially qualifies the material in your book. It's not just random internet research you cobbled together, at no personal cost.

Valuable information needs to be *earned* through personal trial and triumph. The author needs to show the work of

discovering it through experience. If it's simply heard, learned, or researched and doesn't have a personal, emotional link to the author or protagonist, it won't be as meaningful or impactful. The author should be more than a collector of information; an author has to have a story, they have to discover something new to share.

Before you begin writing, consider: where did you get this information? Where did you hear about it? How do we know it's true? Did you cherry-pick a few studies, out of context? Did you *read* those studies or did you hear them summarized in a YouTube video? Did you find a perfect quote in a rare book, or did you just Google "inspirational quotes" and grab a few of the most common? When you present new findings, are you explaining and expanding in a way that strengthens your core argument? Or are you simply repeating things that have already been said to support your own argument, which is in turn just a summary of what anybody can easily find online?

- Is this information new?
- Where did it come from?
- Did you learn it or earn it?

Why this, why you?

I've read too many self-help manuals that were just a summary of feel-good quotes from Goodreads and a mix of platitudes from *The Secret* movie or a Tony Robbins seminar. I've seen too many health or diet guides that were badly consolidated and reckless copies of unqualified Reddit or Facebook posts.

First, you need to do more than summarize the information that's already out there. You have to have a point, that's not

obvious: a unique insight, which others can't discover because it's been personally won through authentic experience.

Second, you need a compelling, emotional story that justifies your role as author. The perfect, the only, person capable of telling this particular story. This could simply be because you were obsessed with the subject, and you *noticed* that everyone else was wrong, and the world deserved a better, more comprehensive, fresh approach. Even if you're just writing a book to make a quick buck, even if you aren't an expert, readers need to feel like there's a real person behind every page.

1. Why this book?
2. Why you?

In middle school, I used to hate showing my work. I knew I could just do the thing. It was more work for me to go back and also show the process. I didn't need 3 rough drafts and a final paper. My final papers were perfect, no errors, strong writing. But people want to see that you've done the work. If it was *easy* for you, if this information didn't *cost* anything, it just shows that you don't fully understand the pain and frustration they're feeling.

You've consumed countless books, articles, movies – but so has everyone else. The ideas and awareness and understanding you've arrived at may not be as astonishing as you think they are. Make sure you have arrived at different conclusions and unique insights, so that what you're sharing has real value. Show that you've done enough research to be aware of what's already common knowledge. In my PhD

research, we'd call this peer review; you needed to show you'd read widely in your field or topic, to make sure that what you want to say hasn't been said before. If other people have said it, you don't have a thesis, or a book. It has to be new information that expands awareness in a new and interesting way.

But make sure it's *real* research, not a just collection of internet posts and misattributed quotes, taken out of context. How much research do you need? I'd suggest reading 20 recent bestsellers in your genre. 100 is probably too much, but you need to be at least as informed as casual readers who are familiar with your subject. You have to read what they're reading, to make sure you're not just covering the same ground. Then you need to frame it all within a new theme or context. And you need to present that information in a logical arrangement, that has momentum and purpose. Finally you want to show a personal transformation story, that proves you've been there, that you've experienced this – that communicates why you did the research, why it matters to you, why you're passionate about it, and why you wrote this book. Recently, I saw this question on YouTube:

- Who are you committed to being?

This is a powerful prompt, so spend a few minutes reflecting on it. You may create one “origin story” for a particular book, and others for other books. But ideally, each book will push your social persona a step closer to the idealized reputation you want to achieve as an author. How do your

books build public awareness towards issues and causes that you care about? How do you want people to see you?

It's tempting to let the words on the page do the work, and hide behind your writing. But the author is always present, even in their absence. Make sure you're showing up and taking responsibility. Allow yourself to be present on purpose. But customize your story so that it aligns with the message.

4

CLARIFY YOUR YOUR PROCESS

If you've done the work, by this point you should have a good idea of the kind of book you want to write, and why the message is important. We'll get to the nitty-gritty, how to put it together stuff soon. But first, let's talk a bit about the actual writing process.

You'll probably need to spend at least a few dozen hours, if not several hundred, writing your book. That's consistent, long-term progress. And it won't all be easy. It never is. Which means, the most valuable thing I can do for you right now, is focus on *motivation* and *productivity*. Otherwise, when you get stuck, when life gets in the way, it's easy to let months or years slip by without actively putting down more words. This can lead to frustration and even a sense of guilt, that slowly eats away at your peace of mind.

So in this chapter, I'll break down what the writing process looks like, what you can expect along the journey, and some tips and tricks to keep going until you get the book finished.

We'll need a clear theme and a strong outline, but we'll talk more about that later.

Even if you kind of know what you want to say, it's very easy to get lost in the weeds. I know countless authors who have spent years "writing a book" without ever actually getting it done. Writing a book slowly is rarely a good idea. The truth is, you need to make as much progress, as fast as you can, or else it will grow uneven and random, out of your control.

The best thing you can do is set a clear, hard, external deadline for getting your book finished. Not someday, or when you have time. It should almost never take more than a year to write a book. Six months is entirely possible. Three months is stressful but doable.

However, the more experience and practice you have, the faster and easier it should go. So while it's normal for a first book to take years, it's also normal for competent authors to finish a book (or at least a rough draft) in a few months. Here's a brief overview of the process:

1. Choose a theme and title
2. Make an outline
3. Research and generate story ideas
4. Put down the words
5. Get stuck, get inspired

You'll get stuck often... but you can't *plan* out the problems you're going to face. You won't see them until you actually encounter them. Book writing is a dance of frequent problem-solving. You'll write until you realize you're missing something, then you'll need to brainstorm a solution. This is

why it's difficult to predict how long a book will take. It could be weeks until the solution to a specific problem magically appears: but it won't appear until you're actively looking for it.

Writing strategies can be developed and improved with time and practice, but the biggest motivator at this point will be a firm deadline. Assume you'll need to spend 100 hours just to become barely proficient, and put in the work as quickly as possible. Of course, you can move the goalposts, but a specific, short-term goal is better than a long-term one. If you're like me, and you give yourself a year to write a book, you'll do all the work in the eleventh month.

Figure out how to commit a fixed amount of time to your book. You can get a lot done in twenty minutes a day, or six hours on the weekends. I find setting a publishing date, or even getting a cover designed, can keep me motivated. As an expert procrastinator, I have trouble self-motivating unless I actually put the book up for preorder sales, but that's a risky strategy. Whether you are self-publishing or going traditional, your process might look like this:

6. Finish a rough draft
7. Spend a month editing
8. Get the cover designed, hire a proofreader
9. Get the book formatted
10. Upload your files

Then there's all the book launch stuff: building an email list, sending out advanced copies (ARC's) to potential reviews. That's important too, and I'll give you some practical marketing tips at the end of this book. I'm mentioning them

here, because it's easy to put everything else off, and think "I'll figure out the publishing stuff once the book is finished." But then there's the impulse to keep fiddling around with your manuscript forever, because all the next-step publishing process stuff is overwhelming and daunting, and you're "safe" as long as the book doesn't get finished. It can feel rewarding and gratifying to be making progress on your book, but if you really want to become a successful author, you need more actual, practical experience at finishing and publishing books.

You can't learn until you're challenging yourself with new things. Your first book might not be the best; most authors spend way too much time writing and researching and revising. Or, they waste too much time on marketing hacks or tactics that won't actually sell books.

Get a calendar and set yourself a date. Then work backward and figure out what needs to get done before you publish. You can set word-count based goals, or time-based goals. It might look something like this:

- 30 minutes of writing, 5 days a week
- 2000 words a week
- Research agents or publishers in my genre
- Get a cover made
- Find an accountability partner/writing coach
- 50K completed
- Build an email list of 100 potential reviewers

Some days won't be fun and easy. Some days you might just sit around feeling stuck, and that's totally fine. In fact, it's essential. It's only after those days of feeling stuck that your

breakthrough moment happens. But you have to spend those 30 minutes in front of your open manuscript feeling stuck, before the solution can pop into your head at dinner or in the shower or feeding the cat later.

You need to try and get stuck as frequently as possible. Yes, writing takes a great deal of time and effort. You may even feel slower than usual; creatively burned out and running on empty. You might want to research nootropics or brain-boosting supplements (I'll post some resources at the end of this book). Don't assume you can just power through this process. Writing a book will probably be the most challenging thing you've ever asked your brain to do. Resting and recuperation will probably need to be a scheduled part of your process: so don't feel bad if you need to sleep more or binge more Netflix. Don't berate yourself for feeling lazy and useless when you should be writing. The bigger the resistance you feel towards the page or section you're working on, the more draining it will feel.

Everybody wants to write a book, but most people, unfamiliar with the process, will get frustrated and give up. Acknowledge it. Make peace with it. But don't let the resistance win—become aware of your self-sabotaging tendencies. Know that they are universally felt and shared by every experienced author. You may have to find some self-motivating habits of your own, but here are a few of mine:

- Schedule time to work on your book, at least a few times a week
- Write first thing in the morning, or before you allow yourself R&R

- Attach writing to a daily task, like “before dinner” or “before I turn on the TV”
- Get a cover and tell people about your book
- Schedule reflective downtime, a walk in the park, playing with puppies
- Get a calendar and mark an X every day that you do *some* work
- Keep a daily spreadsheet or mark up the calendar with your wordcounts
- Set firm dates for your rough draft, or having a clean revised manuscript
- Set a publishing date
- Pre-pay for an editor or cover design or book launch promo
- Invest in some courses

You may need to give some things up to make progress. I’ve found, saying “yes” to new opportunities is one way for me to avoid doing the work I should be doing. You may have to learn to say “no” more. For the first month, you’ll simply be attempting to establish a writing habit or pattern, so expect things to get messy. Also, be wary of making *rational* decisions. When you’re choosing what tasks to keep or quit, pay attention to the responsibilities that seem easy and simple, that you *could/should* do because they don’t seem all that intimidating. I’ve wasted months avoiding simple tasks that I just can’t make myself want to do; and that avoidance will become a black hole to your creative energies. Instead, pay attention to how you feel, and refuse anything that you aren’t excited about.

5

CHOOSE YOUR VISION

Now that you've cleared some space in your life, bought a new journal or calendar, and set some time aside to commit to your writing, we need to focus a little more on your book's unique theme. As I mentioned, you need more than just a summary of interesting information. You need more than just evocative stories. You also need to be making some kind of point.

Sometimes, the perfect theme or title doesn't emerge until the rough draft is finished, and that's fine. It's normal for you to discover what you're trying to say after you've actually tried to put the thing together. You may find that your initial plans didn't quite fit, or stumble into a novel concept or metaphor that encompasses the main idea of your book better than what you had intended.

But it is very important to find the unique hook or angle. This theme or idea will be conveyed in the title, but there are some pitfalls to watch out for. A subject, is basically the informational topic. A theme, is more about how people will

feel about a deeper, more complex, emotional aspect of that topic.

A perfect title will hit the evocative notes, capture the essence of the book, while also communicating the subject clearly. It's tricky to get right. Generally, the title can be a little more creative, as long as the subtitle or tagline is very specific and clear about what the book actually is.

Clear vs Clever

The first mistake most authors make (and I've certainly done this often) is choosing something clever for the title. Something interesting, distinctive and creative. But if people don't know what the title means until they finish the book, it's not a good title. If the title is confusing or hard to say, people won't talk about it. A title is usually one or two words.

In the design world, there's a saying: "be clear before you're clever." This works for titles as well. If you have to explain what the title means or refers to, or if the title will "make sense" when they finish reading, it's going to hurt your sales and impede traction.

For a how-to book, keep the title focused on the keywords or benefits. For something more literary, like a memoir, a title might be something more artistic. I would choose something visual, like an object from a particular story, that people can picture, and whose meaning will deepen as it ties several major themes or stories together. For example, "tangerine summer" as a title for a memoir, which starts out with a new friend sharing fruit in childhood, and ends by placing a tangerine seed in their coffin at their funeral. One object, spanning time, ripe

with personal meaning. I would also consider how it's going to look on the cover and fit without crowding the art.

Brand vs Benefits

Years ago, when talking about nonfiction, I started separating between the “brand” book versus the “benefits” book. Most of my early nonfiction books were very clear, focused on a particular subject people needed help with, and delivered practical value. It wasn't about *me* or my story. I still think a benefits book – focusing on the reader – is a safer choice for most new authors. Figure out what your audience wants and give it to them.

If you're thinking of building a platform, you can start with one specific sub-category. For example, I work mostly with authors. There's a lot of things they need help with. I started with guides to book design, which was my main service. It helped me become an “expert” and drove new business. But a book like that has a very limited audience: authors who want to self-publish *and* design their own covers. And of course, those authors aren't looking to hire help, so it's kind of a dead-end.

The majority of writers, however, are still working on their first book, or yet to publish. So while my books on marketing or publishing were popular, I knew there was much bigger demand – and also much more competition – in a more general guide to writing.

Most authors who want to publish a book, are looking to tell *their* story: but if you don't already have a big platform, it may be a tough sell. It's much easier to make a benefits book that solves a particular problem.

Here's where things get complicated: a benefits book (simple, practical, straightforward) may perform better, and even earn more. But it probably won't become one of those huge bestsellers by famous authors. Those are the generally *brand* books: a very unique pitch or viewpoint, which merges the author's personal backstory into a new and vivid understanding of a complex subject.

You can start working on your brand book whenever you want, but I would recommend starting with a much simpler, more pragmatic, limited sub-section or genre category that fits neatly with an in-demand pain point (something people are desperate to resolve quickly). In general, readers might buy a dozen books like that trying to solve a certain problem, and skim through all of them. But they'll ignore a much bigger, broader book with a more vague or comprehensive premise, unless and until they've heard so much about it that it becomes irresistible.

Here's the other interesting thing: the brand books are more powerful, *because of* the personal stories and the depth of the author's presence. They aren't as easy to sell, without a ton of reviews and a large platform (which is why, you'll mainly find these from traditionally published authors rather than indie or self-published). But they can sell tremendously well, because they have much broader appeal, *if* you manage to get over the initial resistance.

Specific Theme

Most likely, your book should be a blend of benefits and branding: but focus *more* on the reader experience, and sneak in personal stories whenever they make sense, so that you as

the author aren't wholly absent from the work. Beautiful writing, scene description, cadence and flow, lyrical structure, can all enhance a book *if* readers are getting value. Captivating personal stories can suck them in and make them pay attention.

No matter what point you are trying to get across, it won't work if readers stop reading. It's not enough to dump valuable information, because they won't respect it or act on it. For most nonfiction authors, the point and purpose of your book will be to create a lasting change. To actually help readers see or feel differently. To heal, take action or make progress. So it's not enough to give them the tools; you are also responsible for their emotional responses, the lasting halo effect of your book, the motivation they feel and the productive action that results.

I know, that's a lot to put on your shoulders. Don't worry, we'll address some specific ways to accomplish this soon. But for now it's enough to consider that your book needs a specific theme, holding everything together, in a unique and emotional way. For a practical nonfiction book, the emotions will be centered around the pain and frustration your readers are feeling, and the shift towards the new positive state of being they might hope to reach, with your help. For a memoir or historical nonfiction, they need to feel a connection to your characters, so they care what happens next. This depends almost entirely on effective information management: raising intrigue through unresolved tension and conflict.

Don't preach to the choir

One more thing I see pop up frequently in nonfiction authorship, is a blogger or someone who already has an audience and is used to calling the shots. So they create a title

around a subject that is meaningful for their audience, or those familiar with their brand... but won't make sense or attract a cold audience (those who don't already know, like or trust you).

Even though you shouldn't assume your fans or email list or social media followers will automatically support you by buying your book (they won't), you should aim for a wider audience than those who you feel will instinctively "get" your message. That said, you also don't want to go *too* general and try to appeal to everyone.

After you've mapped out all your content, and done some research on what your audience really needs to hear, or is tired of feeling, figure out a title or subtitle to speaks directly to them and promises relief. It's probably a mistake to write one big, all-encompassing book that tries to cover absolutely everything. Be selective. A theme is useful because it *sets limits*. It's like a bowl, a container. You put in everything that fits, but you remove everything that doesn't.

Don't Be Good, Be Great

One time I was on an online business summit talking about how to write books. I read a *lot* of books about creativity so I mentioned some good ones, and then one I'd read recently that I didn't like.

I talked about all the common problems that this popular, moderately successful book had, and how people with a platform think they can just collect random thoughts or disjointed blog posts and call it a book.

The host shifted uncomfortably, trying to change the subject, but I named the book and criticized it live... only to

find out the author of that book was also speaking at the same summit. Oops.

Embarrassment aside (I should have been more careful and done my research) the reason I was so critical is because I *care* about you and your audience. Why be good, when you can be great? Why write a not-bad book that your supporters will love, when you could write a great book that even your enemies can't ignore? This is what I want for you. Luckily, the bar is pretty low, because there are few good guides to writing nonfiction. But that doesn't mean it'll be easy.

If you're already struggling to fit your book neatly into one genre category, pay attention. Readers are much more likely to buy a book if it covers everything they're looking for, without trying to do too much. Figure out who your audience is. If you're writing a medical guide that's useful for "doctors, nurses, patients and their loved ones" that's *four* different audiences, who may not want or need the same things. You can combine useful sections for one particular audience (patients might be interested in both healing mindfulness techniques and cutting-edge medical research) but if you're presenting information to different audiences, that's going to make it more difficult to market the book later.

If you try compromising your approach to meet a larger or wider audience, it's likely to feel incomplete and dissatisfying to everyone. So pick one clear audience, and one clear theme, that works like an umbrella to give your book purpose and structure. Figure out who will appreciate your book the most, and make sure to satisfy them. Identify the *main* benefit or result your book will provide, then organize all the content in the best way to achieve that result, realization or feeling in

readers. Every smaller subcategory or chapter should support that main point or purpose.

6

RESEARCH YOUR MARKET

I could give you dozens of quotes about the importance of authors to read widely in their genre, but I won't. Let's start with the counter-arguments instead. Most authors say things like, "I don't want to read in my genre because nobody has ever attempted anything like this before," which probably isn't true. Or that "I don't want to unconsciously assimilate another author's voice or style."

And I get that impulse, if your first book is an experience in self-discovery. It can be therapeutic, writing for nobody but yourself, purging your emotions and figuring out what you have to say. The danger here is that if the process of writing a book feels particularly magical *for you*, you'll assume the magic translates to the reader's experience as well: that they'll taste your blood and tears, your effort, and it will enhance the value. This is rarely the case.

More likely, if you don't do any research, you'll find out after you publish that your book doesn't align with what

readers want, doesn't speak to them in a relevant voice, or even feels like a bad clone or copy of more popular books. Researching your market will help you figure out what your audience wants, the style and content they respond best to, and allow you to *conscientiously* avoid what's been done before.

This is your responsibility. Luckily, it's not that difficult. An hour or two of research may be enough to help make sure your book is well-received. Here are a few practical tips.

First, search on Amazon, Google and Goodreads for your keyword or subject-based topics. This may be something like "best self-help books for women's confidence" or "best WWII narrative nonfiction set in Italy." See what shows up. Pay attention to any blog posts or listicles (roundups of best books).

Try to find at least 10 books. I assure you, they are out there. If you can't find *any*, that doesn't mean there's a market for your books... it means there *isn't* one. Try to find a few that are still selling or have been published recently; try to find a few with lots of reviews. Maybe see if you can figure out whether they're self or traditionally-published (read the copyright page and check the publisher or website).

You don't have to read each book in full, but you probably should. But you can also click on the "look inside" feature and skim the first chapter and introduction. It's not only about seeing what they have to say, to make sure you aren't saying the same thing; it's also about seeing how the books are put together and the style of writing. Popular books are usually constructed in the same way. Take note of their titles, subtitles, book covers, and blurbs. Got your list of 10 books?

Great, now read the reviews. Book reviews are a goldmine of information: readers will tell you exactly what they liked and

didn't like; things they wished had been included, things they loved or hated. 1-star reviews can be very helpful in making sure you avoid similar mistakes.

If you want, you can use a tool like [Publisher Rocket](#) for keyword research, but there are more basic keyword tools. You can also try something like [K-Lytics](#) which makes genre-based summaries of book and publishing information.

Another source I recommend is poking around relevant Facebook groups or Reddit boards, or even starting a new thread yourself by asking for book recommendations around your topic. Quora.com can be useful as well, especially for figuring out the types of questions or challenges your audience needs help with. This part will probably take a little more time; as you should join relevant groups and lurk in the darkness for a while, listening to people and following the trends and conversation. What hot or popular or controversial threads provoke the most comments? What laments promote the most sympathy?

Being aware of not only other popular books in your category, but also the actual discussions taking place among your core audience, will allow you to communicate to your readers more directly and show that you truly understand them. Doing the research proves that you care enough to take the time, and allows you to present your book as a unique and necessary solution.

7

COLLECT YOUR CONTENT

Finally, we'll start collecting the snippets, scenes, and research that you'll want to fit into your book. This can start off messy. Just find a rough system of collecting everything together. Here are a few things that will help you become a credible source.

Stories. Stories give readers something visual and concrete, and make excellent introductions to more complex topics. These can be your own vulnerable shares, or historical anecdotes. Choose stories with an emotional resonance, or humor when appropriate.

Data. Support your arguments with proof, in the form of statistics, research or studies. This shows you've done the work. People have a tendency to believe numbers even if they are misleading or untrue. Be careful to verify your sources and look for the original studies or citations, rather than accepting someone else's summary or conclusion at face value.

Mentors. Marketers have done studies on brand transference, or spontaneous trait transference (STT). Basically, this means if you mention or quote from famous figures that your audience *already* likes and trusts, they'll be more likely to like and trust you as well. You may be aware, for example, that before writing *Think And Grow Rich*, Napoleon Hill did not actually interview all of the famous people he refers to (even though he presents his information as if he is an intimate pupil with insider access.) Be cautious about quoting things without proper citation or permissions: and do your own due diligence on the legal stuff. But in general, it's usually OK to quote from public works or other books, as long as the quote is less than 1% of your manuscript, and doesn't paint the original author in a negative light, or pervert their original intent. If *possible*, reaching out to influencers in order to get permission to use a quote may be a smart beginning of a potential relationship. In preparing this book, I spent a lot of time looking for nonfiction outline templates so that I could develop my own; and also included two strong ones from other writers, which I had to ask for permission to reprint.

The idea here, is to know who your audience respects and values, and find a handful of very powerful statements or stories from them to include in your book.

Quotes. Same idea here, but this can be more general. Be careful not to grab quotes from the internet, which are often misattributed. Also don't select a bunch of pretty but vague aphorisms or drop them in randomly without context or comment (such as, at the beginning of each chapter, which is a

common practice). I could quote E. L. Doctorow, “There is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there’s only narrative.” That’s an interesting statement, with room for interpretation. But as a novelist, he isn’t exactly the type of role model or mentor my audience for this book (nonfiction authors) would appreciate. I’d do better quoting from Brené Brown, Mark Manson, Eckhart Tolle or Malcolm Gladwell – who each have very distinct styles and audiences.

Questions. The secret to creating suspense and urgency, is to first lead a discussion that generates a particular question, before divulging the answer. Focus on the why this subject is so opaque or challenging; why the solutions aren’t instant or easy; ask leading questions that help readers to fully appreciate the need for the answers you’re going to provide.

It’s very likely that you’ll compile more research than you actually use, and that’s fine. You just want to have a “swipe-file” of interesting content that *may* fit in just the right spot as you’re writing. You can also map out and draft your manuscript first, and then go through the research phase later, looking for interesting tidbits to spice things up.

Be careful not to have *too* much research, or it may get so overwhelming that the point gets lost. I’d keep it to less than about 10% of the core content, so each page of 300 words might have one or two quotes or statistics, as long as they fit into the flow of the story you’re trying to tell. There’s also a place for them: you may need to establish authority or trust during one portion of your manuscript, which wouldn’t fit when you’re in the middle of a particularly gripping vulnerable share or anecdote. Figure out what you’re trying to do in each

section, and make sure all the relevant information in those few pages helps develop towards your singular point or purpose.

If you're not sure exactly how to get started, I'd begin with a list of personal stories: incidents or episodes that have had a profound impact on you. I keep a list of nearly 100 powerful moments from my life, that I share when they'll help hit readers on an emotional level, and only when I can use them to lead towards a major point. It's also good writing practice, to explore what you have to say and your unique author journey that's helped form your opinions and beliefs.

8

MAP THE JOURNEY

I'm very proud of my [24-chapter plot outline](#) template for writing fiction, and I *wish* I had something as useful or helpful for nonfiction as well. But I don't, at least, not exactly. While almost all commercial novels, and well-told narrative stories, follow a similar structure, nonfiction genres can be surprisingly diverse.

However, while I don't have a handy "one-size-fits-all" nonfiction cheatsheet or template, I can tell you what to avoid. The main thing you want your book to do is lead readers on a satisfying journey. You can't just dump them in the woods and assume they'll fight it out. If they get bored, if they're inundated or lose the thread of the conversation, if they keep rereading the same page trying to figure out what you're trying to say... in other words if it's *too much work*, they'll tire of your book and give up.

The bigger your platform, the better your reviews or marketing materials, the more work readers may be willing to

invest, but they'll have to really trust the effort will pay off. In most cases, if they aren't familiar with you or your writing, they won't be eager to give you any more of your time or attention than they absolutely must. Also, the *bigger* their pain or frustration, the greater lengths they will go to find solutions.

Consider that the route you take will depend on where you're trying to go, and the destination you're hoping to achieve. Do you take the slow, scenic route, or the busy highway? Is the destination the point, or is the journey the real value? What do your readers actually want from you?

Regardless of what type of book you're writing, readers need to feel comfortable following along; which means, any system of organizing your content is better than none. It may be a bit arbitrary, and not exactly necessary, but that's all fine. You're the author, it's up to you. It should, however, feel cohesive, with a beginning, middle and end. It should be building *towards* something, and those building blocks should lead to what feels like an inevitable resolution (the final point or purpose or episode or chapter of your book should depend on everything that came before it.)

Working Backwards

So figure out the main goal first. This is the transformative, end result. If it's a simple how-to or process-based book, list all of the tasks necessary and help readers complete them step-by-step, leading to their one main objection or goal. You want to communicate that you understand their main struggles, and provide a foolproof path to success.

You need to create a roadmap that seems to make sense, because you'll need to get readers to follow you on the

journey. We'll talk more about establishing trust and authority later, but imagine your readers are already skeptical and skittish. They have to trust you enough to pay attention, and also want the results (motivation) enough to take action. If you can't get them to take action, the methods or information you present may be worthless (without external value). So recreate your personal journey and see if you can come up with some kind of a numbered process or system to achieving your book's main premise or promise. Break it down into easy, manageable steps.

If it's a deeper journey or a historical narrative or personal memoir, it's probably going to *read* a lot like a novel, which means you'll need to have some kind of central character growth, presenting the events that eventually lead to a profound shift in awareness. There may not be a simple, achievable outcome. For travelogues or personal memoirs, you'll want a bunch of entertaining or heartwrenching stories, but you'll also want some kind of character arc (the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story). The narrator, or main character, needs to change or be changed: so you need to have a clear idea of your book's theme.

If it's a narrative nonfiction that shines light on an interesting subsection of life or business, it may seem like a loose collection of information, which is why having a proper theme can help corral things together. You don't just want it to be an infodump, or a random collection of short blog posts or tips.

Quick Wins (Hook)

There should also be a balance of information, starting with the lighter, fun stuff and leading to the deeper, powerful stuff. The most dramatic, impactful scenes should be saved until later. Until readers are invested and actually paying attention, they aren't going to care about the things that happen. First, you need to get them involved; you need to get them to care about your characters or protagonist.

A backstory dump rarely works well until you've properly built up the motivation and readers have gotten to know and root for the players. At the same time, however, you need to give them enough juicy bits early on so that they don't feel like they're wasting their time. This can be done, for example, with a partial scene and a cliffhanger: start in the middle of the most dramatic conflict, but don't show the ending or resolution, until much later.

You can also give them some "quick wins" early on, so they don't need to endure several boring chapters as you're building up to the good stuff. You can hit them with powerful strategies or tactics they can use immediately to see results early on. *As long as* you also make sure to let them know how far they still have to go. This is where transitions become so important: at the end of each chapter you can quickly review what you've learned and point out the new problems or challenges that arise. Start with the things they know about and are hungry for; shift into all the things that aren't even on their radar yet but are just as important.

Finally, make sure you're raising questions: you want to force the questions (show the need or lack) before suggesting answers or solutions. The depth of the challenge or problem, is

what makes the resolution or insight satisfying. Dig the hole, before you fill it in.

Now that we've established some base rules, I'll share some *potential* nonfiction book outlines for the most popular genres.

Creative Nonfiction

Creative nonfiction books are the hardest to organize. You'll be presenting a bunch of useful or entertaining information, but there may not be any character growth. You'll still be trying to communicate a main premise or theme. All the stories and pieces of information are ingredients. Add them together in the right order, follow the recipe steps, and you'll get a great-tasting pie. Dump and blend everything, and you'll only make a mess.

You want things to click into place. This is often done in the editing stages, when you go back and fix your transitions, but try to structure it like a piece of investigative journalism: you're trying to solve the equation X. This should be centered around an unexplored topic that feels mysterious. Why aren't young people having kids in Japan? What's the real cause of the opioid epidemic? Is there water on Mars? Is Bitcoin a bubble? Why do all creatures eventually evolve into crabs? Are ravens as smart as humans?

Or, if you're trying to accomplish something much broader, like "how cognitive bias leads to risky behavior" you might use *all* of the above examples to illustrate your main point, by exploring interesting cases. In which case, each topic or "mystery" could be its own chapter. You could organize them from simplest to grasp, to most complex: each example helps to illustrate a particular idea or concept.

But otherwise, you'd just start from the most accessible clue: data that points to the problem. Public considerations and opinions. Most likely, a good mystery has a number of causes and effects, so you tackle one for answers, which leads down the rabbit hole of new things that must be explored. The point being, it should feel a little bit like a row of dominoes, or a treasure hunt, where each clue needs to be solved in order to progress towards the next reveal.

Even if you already have a clear picture of everything, you need to give readers one piece at a time, based on the questions they will be asking at each step. Why does this matter? Who cares? What's the issue? What's the first question to solve or answer? Dig deeper, focus on the questions, then reveal one new twist or piece of the puzzle in each chapter.

Research books will also need strong organization, which usually starts like this:

- Personal motivation (why you, why now, who cares?)
- Review of the literature (show why all the research and work other people have done on this subject is flawed or deficient, and why your book is needed to fill a key gap)
- Detailed outline of the main questions and topics you'll need to cover
- Final summary bringing it all together, consolidating knowledge and revisiting the main theme or premise

Sometimes it can also be useful to have bullet points or short summaries at the end of each chapter.

Spirituality & Religion

These books will probably be a mix of personal stories, deep reflections, quotes from scripture and recommended activities or practices. They can either be chronologically organized temporal autobiographies, practical guides organized by subject, or a step-by-step process for deepening spiritual awareness. What's going to set these apart, however, like most nonfiction books, are the author's personal journey and the novelty of the unique system or insight. A "seven-step process" is better than a weak soup of general reflections.

Something that promises to solve a particular problem or challenge from a faith-based community is better than a self-absorbed personal memoir. The main point or purpose of these kinds of books, will probably include the practical benefits experienced by the author, in terms of health, wealth or happiness. You'll be speaking, most likely, to people who already believe, so you won't need to convince them of core dogma. Instead, you'll need to assume shared ideology and focus on presenting them new, surprising, interesting scenes, information or experiences that are uplifting or faith-affirming.

Self-Help & How-To

Depending on whether this is a "benefits" book or a "brand" book, it may read more like "12-steps to success" or a narrative creative nonfiction with less of an obvious structure. But at the very least, these books will probably have a very targeted audience who need help solving a problem.

So when talking to your audience, you'll need to be warming them up first, just as you would in a sales letter. You

can use the preface and introduction, or even the first chapter, to overcome common objections. You'll begin by showing you understand the depth of the challenge, the lack of effective solutions, and position your unique methodology or insight as the best remedy. To make this effective, you'll need case studies and proof, while establishing trust and rapport.

But first, you'll need to get and keep their attention. A common tool for copywriters is AIDA: *attention, interest, desire, and action*. This is similar to the framework I'll be suggesting in the next chapter. You can use it to structure your introduction, or split it up as a basis for your book's outline, in which case the point of the book would be slowly removing their resistance, getting them to pay attention and be interested, to actively want to participate, and finally to take action on their own.

It's not enough to just show them the what or the how. You also need to incite their belief that this is possible for them; or help them remove limiting mindsets that are preventing them from taking action.

A simpler framework is "pain + agitate + solve." Before you present the effective solutions, you have to make them aware of what the problem is already costing them, as well as the potential costs they might accrue by *not* using your system or turning to other less effective methods.

Memoirs

Writing good memoirs is hard. There's not a big audience for it, and there's less plot structure or anything to guide you. It'll basically be a collection of short, funny or dramatic/traumatic

stories; hopefully involving a good metaphor, that will build up to a powerful transformative event. All the little things matter in context of the big thing. Make sure your story is building with increasing conflict or suspense—not just dumping all the info together or starting with the most dramatic things. Memoirs should unfold like petals of a flower... then you get stung by the bee hidden inside, just out of sight.

Ideally, a memoir will be about one specific type of life event, culture, challenge or experience; something that other people in similar circumstances can relate to. Your transformative process can help guide them towards their own self-awareness, healing or spiritual understanding. It may also be full of interesting travel narratives, with exotic details to show them a very foreign life experience they haven't previously encountered. But few readers will do that just for fun, if it doesn't also have an engaging story.

Normally, I'd say memoirs rarely find commercial success, unless the author is already famous, or it connects with more popular people, events or movements. I read something recently about a guy's grandpa's life experiences on a small farm, and it was so vivid and well-written, I enjoyed it despite not having an obvious need, want or interest in the subject. However this book *also* included random cameos by famous people, and those "quick vignettes" deepening the historical characterization of beloved figures were like precious jewels, and went a long way towards establishing the credibility of the author, even if the meetings were accidental. Another project I worked on recently, was a 1970's surf trip to Mexico. I was unsure of the audience, despite a run-in with notorious cartel kingpin "El Chapo," but I underestimated the potential: it's

been sitting at #1 in travel memoirs for several months, with nearly 2,000 reviews.

But keep your audience in mind: why are they reading this, what value are they getting from it, who are they? Make sure to hook attention and intrigue by withholding information and increasing dramatic conflict; focus on storytelling in vivid description and active scene.

General Outlines

Despite the pointers above, most authors get stuck figuring out the pacing and organization. What do you actually do, how do you put it together, where does everything go? I wanted to offer more than just useless and common nonfiction writing advice, so I've collected a few detailed nonfiction chapter outlines, and then created some of my own.

Anna David made an excellent outline in her book, [*Make a Mess of Your Memoir*](#), so I'm including it here. An outline like this is a great *starting* guide, that removes some of the indecision or overwhelm. Try it out to get started, and adapt as necessary once your story grows past the restraints.

Chapter 1: Intro/Inciting incident/Flashback/Turning point

Chapter 2: Childhood/Adolescence

Chapter 3: The path (whatever it is... career/personal story)

Chapter 4: Escalation

Chapter 5: More escalation

Chapter 6: Hurdles or problems

Chapter 7: Turning point

Chapter 8: Path toward resolution

Chapter 9: Resolution

Chapter 10: Life after resolution

Based on Anna's sample, I made a more general outline that could work for most self-help or how-to books:

Chapter 1: Author motivation (why must you tackle this subject?)

Chapter 2: Roadblocks (why this subject needs exploration)

Chapter 3: The cost of the problem (experiences of people struggling)

Chapter 4: Rock-Bottom (how much it has cost you personally)

Chapter 5: Determination to reach the truth/solve the problem

Chapter 6: Unexpected detours

Chapter 7: Real Rock Bottom / Surprising Revelation

Chapter 8: Unraveling the True Solution

Chapter 9: Proof of Lasting Effects

Chapter 10: Final Conclusion / Summary

Notice, the incidents that led to the beginning of the story (seeking change) also revealed an unexpected depth, and a greater challenge. The struggle can't be easy to resolve, or everyone would do it. So the *apparent* rock-bottom gives way to an *actual* rock-bottom. Real knowledge has a cost, and you need to show the depths you've gone through, the struggle to make it back up again, after descending to that rare and lonely ruin of full awareness.

Alternatively, these 10 steps could all be summed up in the first chapter (your origin story), and the rest of the book could focus on the individual steps of the discovered process. For the

sake of variety, here's another I found by writing coach [Melinda Crow](#). I've rephrased it for simplicity.

Intro: A big bold visual image to hook the reader, that focuses on the enormous problem your book will solve.

PART 1:

Chapter 1: Show the reader what your book is about in more detail (theme).

Chapter 2: Establish your hero and who or what stands in their way (set-up the challenge).

Chapter 3: Reader motivation and call to action (why this is worth it).

Chapter 4: Proof and results + overcome objections (this really works!)

Chapter 5: Prepare and recap before getting into the meat.

If you ended your intro with a dramatic cliffhanger, these first five chapters could be the *backstory* that led you to the edge of that cliff. It could, for example, be the rock-bottom 1 or rock-bottom 2 of my earlier outline. It would be your *most* dramatic story, with vivid imagery that represents the core theme, conflict or subject. Either the turning point when you began to recognize you needed to turn your life around and find new answers, *or* the darkest night of the soul, where everything you've tried has already failed, but at your lowest low, you get a brilliant insight.

So here, you could wrap up that intro story and use it to increase the forward momentum. Then, in Part Two, you'd

begin the work of putting your insight or newfound determination into practice, and seeing results.

PART 2:

Chapter 6: Begin to keep the promise of the premise (valuebomb/infodump of useful or practical information). This is what they bought the book for.

Chapter 7: A breather from the intensity of Chapter 6. A side story or something light.

Chapter 8: Next-level stuff that may be hard to swallow. You've solved their main burning desire, but you know they need to consider more advanced stuff (overdeliver with value).

Chapter 9: The hero is vulnerable, with human struggles. Get personal, and show them hidden concerns or the extra amount of work or information they're still going to need (open the can of worms).

Chapter 10: Scare them a little more, and show them how dangerous or how hard or how much money these extra steps would normally cost.

Chapter 11: Dig them back out of the hole you buried them in, with a tiny little light at the end of the tunnel, that lets them glimpse the heroic change that's possible, after following your advice.

PART 3:

Chapter 12: How it all fits together, despite the danger or the cost or the struggle (taking action on these things is ultimately cheaper or easier than the price for not acting).

Chapter 13: Encourage them to go forth in the world with the newfound knowledge you gave them (motivate them to take action).

I particularly like this one, for coaches, course-creators or service professionals. Basically, lure them in and help them solve one big problem, but then, once you've proven value and gotten them to like and trust you, introduce how much further they have to go, new problems they aren't aware of yet, and how challenging, painful or costly those challenges will be... unless they get help (from you, of course!).

If this is a memoir or historical narrative, you'd do better to focus on a more classic "hero's journey" structure. I recommend my 9-point Plot Dot version, which is this:

- 1: Ordinary World (start with lack)
- 2: Inciting Incident (call to adventure)
- 3: 1st Plot Point (point of no return)
- 4: 1st Pinch Point (first battle)
- 5: Midpoint (shift from victim to warrior)
- 6: 2nd Pinch Point (second battle)
- 7: 2nd Plot Point (dark night of the soul)
- 8: Final Battle (triumph-knowledge)
- 9: Return to Ordinary (completion of journey)

You can find a basic overview [on my blog](#), or go much, *much* deeper in my more exhaustive treatise on writing, *Book Craft* (for fiction).

If you get stuck, you can also focus on generating questions:

- What's the main point of your book (what do you want readers to feel, understand, or be able to do?)
- What are the major steps, insights or important events that make up the framework to support that feeling, understanding, awareness or ability?
- For each of those individual things, what are the big questions, challenges or obstacles they will need to have addressed or be overcome?

Make a mindmap and brainstorm it out until you get to the smaller and smaller branches. Figure out how the “tree” fits together, where the trunk will be your singular main point, premise, thesis or transformative journey. Then imagine they need to climb the tree: which branch do they reach for first?

9

ENGAGE THE SENSES

Now that we have a general outline, we can focus on a tighter, chapter-based structure. I'll also use this chapter to explore some actual writing techniques and practices. To begin with, each chapter should have one main theme, subject, idea or goal. Unless it's *all* story, in which case, you build the narrative to the point of change. We'll talk more about that later.

Once you've got your major subject in mind, you can divide the content into the best structure that develops the reader's awareness; building towards the realization, emotion or action you hope to get across.

If it's useful, I recommend breaking chapters into the following four sections:

- Why
- What
- How
- Now

The *why* will hook interest and develop the emotional triggers that cement the purpose and necessity of the topic. This could be a short incident or story; a compelling statistic; or an introduction to the reason this topic must be discussed. It's probably a good idea to start with a vivid, immediate, first-person narrative prose.

This is because, readers can't picture information. You want to give them something real they can visualize. Ideally, a good story can make them *feel* things in a way that raw data can't. It's also great for capturing attention and getting reader investment.

The *what* section comes next. Here you'll go deeper into the details. Excavate and reveal the information or the research findings. This could be anecdotes or investigative details from books or studies. You'll share whatever relevant information they need to get a good baseline of the topic, the challenges, and the potential benefits.

In a self-help or how-to book, once you've explained the what, you'd shift to the *how*: how can readers actually DO this stuff for themselves? How is it relevant? How does it work? Give them simple processes.

In a biography, memoir or creative nonfiction, after you show the what, you can explain *how* it fits in with the bigger theme or story (why we started this chapter, what we found out, how it matters in relation to the larger theme of the book).

Finally, it's nice to end a chapter with a specific summary, task or signpost. This can be a practical exercise or something for them to do. It could be a call to action (grab my bonus worksheet by signing up on my site), an activity or challenge,

or a summary of bullet points or action steps (key takeaways). This is the stuff they'll remember.

You could also just use this to transition to the next chapter (we figured out A, but this raises new questions, and now we need to figure out B). Or, if it's narrative nonfiction, you can include a bit of foreboding about the next scene or chapter.

“After discussing Q with Mr. R, I knew I needed to track down Professor Y in the lost city of Z... I couldn't wait to hear his version of events. But first, I'd have to travel for 30 hours on a camel through the desert...”

Why, What, How, Now can also work for more typical stories, as found in memoirs or biographies. First, the story or hook that introduces this next section and the importance of this incident. Then, the full backstory of what exactly happened, followed by a deeper reflection on *how* it happened (hidden motivating factors you should have seen coming) or *how* it impacted you in a significant way, leading to the change, propellant or thread that connects it with the next significant event in your story.

Summarizing a different way, it's a lot like writing a research paper. Hook, thesis, supporting content, stories and examples, a recap or summary, the #1 takeaway or main point for emphasis, and a segue into the next chapter.

Vivid Description

It's smart to start – or end – a chapter with a vivid, immediate scene, in the form of a story. You want to leave readers with an image they can see in their minds, hopefully connected to the feeling you aim to evoke. If you open a chapter with a story, you can close a chapter with a reference back to that motif or

image, with a deeper or more reflective interpretation; applying *meaning* to the metaphor. This is a powerful memory technique, and will help readers feel engaged, be moved, and leave a lasting impact.

Vivid scenes are mostly a matter of detailed description, so add the specifics about the story environment. Be precise, not vague. Instead of “she put a plate of tea and snacks on the table” you can write “she gently placed an antique porcelain teapot on the table. I could smell it was Earl Grey from the scent of bergamot. The half-sleeve of Oreos and can of onion-flavored Pringles seemed incongruous with the fancy dishes, but I knew she was making an effort to welcome me.”

Focus on the sensations and feelings; but also zero-in on any potential sources of conflict or internal emotions or state of mind. In my example above, the host might be nervous or ashamed of her spread; or perhaps she has a degenerative brain disease and doesn’t notice the absurdity. Tensions are unspoken, potential sources of negative feelings. They hover in the background of your description.

Sidenote: drama is unresolved conflict. Melodrama is over-the-top emphasis, when you’re trying too hard to show emotion by repeating things or showing unrealistic responses; characters who blubber or shout or smash things. Big dramatic outbursts should be saved until the end of a book; the book itself is the *resistance* of the insight or awareness or fear, that the protagonist is not yet ready or capable to face.

Good stories are based on unresolved conclusions—this is what gives a story power as it unfolds or unravels. It’s the suspense or intrigue. Something bad *might* happen. Questions like *why is this happening* or *what will happen next* drive the

reader experience. But to raise them, you need to present uncommon, unexpected scenes with intrinsic intrigue: something about them is just a little off. Something isn't normal or regular. This subtle weirdness generates story questions. Once the questions are raised, you can eventually reveal the answers to the question you've made readers want to know.

A great story often has a twist or surprise: the secret of a shocking reveal is that it must be unexpected, without seeming absurd. All the right pieces should be there, but the outcome is not the obvious one. So you can't give it away too early with big hints. You can't be heavy-handed and force them to feel the scene with unrealistic melodrama. In a longer-form narrative, each scene will be building towards the point of change. Figure what *needs* to happen in the scene: the new information, the event or incident, the realization or emotional shift. Figure out the general mood or feeling. A light, fun scene can end on a sudden, harsh point of conflict (that's unexpected and sudden). It cuts deeper because of the severity of the change.

As soon as the thing happens, you can cut away with a hard scene break and pick up from the next section. These minor cliff-hangers will generate momentum and urgency. Your character or protagonist reacts to the new thing, reflects and plans a new course of action, and is thwarted or confronted by a new challenge. When possible, end your scenes on an emotional twist, reveal, unexpected surprise, and also wrap it in vivid imagery so the scene will linger as they turn the page.

10

CREDIBILITY BOOSTERS

It's a mistake to assume, just because someone buys your book and starts reading it, that they'll actually finish it. There are many reasons for putting down a nonfiction book, but there are also solutions for making sure readers don't give up too early. The truth is, most readers are already vaguely disinterested, and the burden is on you to convince them that your book is worth their time. This should be the focus of the preface, introduction and first chapter. Basically, before you can begin presenting the main content, you need to help them establish two things:

- Belief that **THEY** can do this
- Belief that **YOU** can help them

And by “this” I just mean, achieve the positive benefits that the book promises: even if those benefits are simply a pleasant

afternoon deepening their appreciation for great writing; learning about a new subject or topic in a fresh approach; or feeling inspired and motivated.

The Three Things

The “front matter” of your book, is generally everything before *Chapter 1*—although I think you could still be addressing skepticism throughout the first chapter. There are three things you need your front matter to do, before readers are ready and comfortable enough to let them lead you on a journey.

1. Build Trust and Rapport
2. Prove Credibility with Case Studies and Testimonials
3. Motivate them to Take Action

But this is difficult, because if you start off with a formal biography or list of accomplishments, it won’t always convince people to trust you. And if you spend too long talking about yourself, they’ll get frustrated and skip ahead to the content.

What I’d actually recommend is a quick, short bio close to the front, with just a handful of your biggest credentials, accomplishments, case-studies or name dropping (brand transference). But then focus mostly on the book itself: reaffirming the motivations that brought them here, and confirming that they’ll get the benefits they’re looking for. They won’t care about you or your story until after you’ve hooked their interest by focusing on what they’re personally interested in).

After you have their psychological buy-in, you can go deeper into your personal transformation story (usually your

single epiphany or wake-up moment when you decided you had to explore/master/discover a new thing, the quest you undertook, the setbacks and eventual triumphs.)

This could be *Chapter 1* of the book: introducing yourself and how you came to discover the One Thing. Then the rest of the book would be actually breaking down and exploring that one thing, split up into smaller categories or steps.

Pleasure to Pain

It's a little confusing to decide exactly what goes in each step of the front matter, but I would focus on the transition between pleasure and pain, or vice-versa. The Preface is generally a short warning or excuse, so you could use it to screen your readers, with stuff like who this book is actually for, or a promise of the benefits, despite the setbacks or challenges, or a brief personal welcome. Focus on meeting them where they are, and show them that you understand where they want to be... and can help them get there.

I say “pleasure to pain” because your introduction is probably going to be a deeper overview of the current issues or challenges with your subject—the rationale or purpose of this book—its main theme or premise, and the organizational structure. It will outline the problem, and provide an intended solution or response. So your *Preface* could simply let readers know that you're just like them; that you've suffered, but are now here to help. It could quickly establish your current perfect state before showing how far you've come. You're trying to get their attention quickly and motivate them by dangling a carrot.

For example, I might say something like “today after sleeping twelve hours, I went out for a leisurely brunch, came

home for a nap, watched four hours of Netflix, bought some new PS4 games, had a spicy rice bowl my wife cooked, died my hair green and did an hour of writing. I'm not saying my life is perfect, but it's pretty liberating not to have to wake up to an alarm clock, defer to a boss or seek approval, or know what day of the week it is. But it wasn't always like this. Only a few years ago, I was a burned out PhD candidate, my wife and I both working jobs we hated, up to our eyeballs in debt, with no hope for a better future. But then something crazy happened. I wrote a book, and then another, and suddenly I was making more from book sales than I'd ever made from a full-time salary. I quit my job and the rest is history..."

That's actually not a great example, and kind of embarrassing, but I might leave it because:

- It's good to be a little humorous or self-deprecating
- It mentions the PhD without making it a big deal
- It has a few interesting specific details to humanize me

For my "real" bio, I'd probably sneak in the stuff about being featured on CNN for renting castles, that I've hit the USA Today or Wall Street Journal bestselling lists. Readers who are skimming may be more impressed by the fancy credentials. However, if they're like me, they might also be *more skeptical* if it seems like the author is trying too hard. The trick is to tell it in the form of a story that lays out the process and results, while also introducing yourself in a likable way, to a specific audience. Depending on who I imagine my readers to be, I'll customize a story or bio that feels relatable.

This doesn't mean I'm lying or being manipulative; I've had a rich and sordid array of adventures spanning the globe for the

last two decades. I have plenty of interesting stories to share. But just like I'd wear a suit and tie to a business conference, and a full-body pirate costume to a den of fantasy novelists, you need to choose which aspects will immediately let your ideal readers recognize you as one of their own, or at least, someone they aspire to be.

My fiction bio says something about chasing kittens down dark alleys: it's enough to evoke the *persona* I'm shooting for, rather than the *factual* history – which readers rarely care about. For nonfiction, however, readers will care more about your credentials, if they sound impressive, and more judgmental if they don't. I'm not trying to be a fake influencer with an Instagram-washed perfect life filter. And I'm not entirely comfortable with my meager book sale earnings, which average around \$1000 a month.

Recently I also shared a post about hitting six-figures, but I was quick to point out that I'd spent about \$80K on the business, promotion or advertising, turning the boast into more of a lament. I like being honest with authors about the realities of publishing, without stoking unrealistic ambitions, so they don't over-invest in a book that's going to lose money.

But there are plenty of other folks out there who will call themselves a “six-figure author” so that they can sell you their \$5000 book marketing course or package. It's a delicate balance, as my “tough love” approach isn't particularly inspiring or motivating. Some people think I should just give all the useful tips and focus more on making writers feel pleasant and good about the books they are writing, even if I know they're in for a rude awakening after they publish. But there is some value in being a *straight-shooter* and *telling it how it is*

(people say those things about me a lot, even though I'm actually a mild-mannered introvert). While a fiery sword of zealous, unearned optimism can be crucial for some authors to actually finish their first book, it cools quickly when plunged into the harsh realities of the market. I'd rather help authors take it slow, learn the ropes and succeed long-term than becoming a statistic – the majority of authors never sell more than 100 copies.

Foreword, Preface & Introduction

There are three optional sections that may come before the first chapter of your nonfiction book. The *Foreword* is written by someone else to introduce you and the topic. It's usually meant for brand transference or credibility boosting. Try to find an author your audience likes, knows and trusts. Getting them to introduce you would be a big win. If you're starting from a cold outreach, you should first follow them, share their content, and interact a little so they recognize your name. Then they're more likely to open an introductory email. I sometimes find it easier to reach people with a direct Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn message.

You'd need to introduce your subject, why they would be perfect to write the foreword, your publishing and marketing plans, and how you can help them with *their* agenda or projects. This will be easier if you've established your own platform.

I would actually do a full content marketing campaign and strategy to start building up resources around your book, and use that to include some quotes or stories you found within the book (more on being inclusive later.) That way you could have

already established a few touchpoints with your ideal foreword writers, already communicated a few times, for example to ask if you can feature a blog post or quote from them in your book. (This is something you don't *need* to do, as long as your use is not defamatory and is less than 1% the entire work, and as long as you cite the source, it should fall under fair use... but asking them anyway helps start the relationship.)

I'd even build up a gallery of image quotes first, and feature their quote and their book on social media and tag them, so they see the work you've done promoting their content and have a chance to warm up to you, before receiving your email.

It doesn't hurt to ask, so dream big, but if you *don't* get someone famous or trustworthy, a foreword may not be particularly useful anyway. You don't want one from your neighbor or dentist, if it isn't directly increasing your credibility or visibility to your target audience.

In *some* resources, you'll find the preface and the foreword converging as one piece of front matter, for example in a graduate academic study. But when we talk books, the foreword is usually written by someone else. That said, I wouldn't put a ton of time or effort into getting a good foreword. If you have a small audience, and no PR team, it will be a huge effort and won't actually make that big a difference in book sales. It's a big favor to ask, whether from a best friend or a total stranger, and most likely readers will skip over it to get to the content.

The preface comes next. It's by the author, and is kind of a disclaimer or warning label. It's all the stuff the author wants to communicate before actually getting to the real content of the book. It could be the author's story, who they are and why

they are an expert at this. It could be a simple declaration of intent – what the author’s purpose or mission is.

You can use the preface to build intrigue and drama, to demonstrate why this topic is necessary and important, how you as the author came to be fascinated with solving this problem or exploring this subject.

The *Introduction* follows. Some people confuse the preface with the introduction: there doesn’t seem to be a universal standard, so different authors approach these differently. I would suggest the following division:

- The Preface explains the *why*: why this book is needed and necessary.
- The Introduction explains the *what*: how this book is organized, the main topics and subjects, the benefits of continued reading.

Alternatively, as I mentioned earlier, the preface could center on the pain and the desire for something better. The introduction could focus on the results and positive benefits. Remember what I said about raising questions before answering them? You can show the *need* for this book, the lack, and call attention to the unpleasant state readers are hoping to escape from, so that they’ll be eager and hungry to get started seeing results.

In addition, there are some extra things you should do in the front matter of your book, that can be very powerful if used well. Besides the basic structure—credibility, the why, the what)—you also need to focus on inciting motivation and commitment to finish reading your

book. Your front matter is still *sales* copy, because some people will just be skimming through it. Even if they've bought it already, its job is not to educate, it's to arrest.

Don't get boring and nerdy.

Tease and defer.

Toss out big numbers and case studies. Drop names, list benefits and subjects, share the sexiest anecdotes. Convince the readers that *you* have the solution to their problems, or at least some fascinating content that will make this learning experience engaging and enjoyable.

A few years ago I broke down the front matter of Napoleon Hill's classic *Think and Grow Rich*. While it's a bit reductive, it's worth pointing out how framing the content led to such a successful book project. Over and over, Hill claims that *all* readers can change their lives if they discover the secret that is "hidden" in every page of his book. It will be different for everyone, but they will discover it if they read his book slowly and carefully. This makes readers lean in and pay attention, searching for their own personal insight.

There are (at least) 11 smart things Hill does in the front matter of his book. See if you can make a list, including at least one example of each for *your* book.

- **Hook** - promise big results your audience wants
- **Story** - keep it immediate and vivid
- **Focus** - give them a task for active reading
- **Difference** - unlike everything else, this is new and different
- **Credibility** - case studies and concrete examples of success

- **Ability** - anybody can do this, without any special skills or knowledge
- **Visualization** - picture yourself getting value and seeing results
- **Objections** - voice their questions and dismantle them “believe me”
- **Screening** - SOME people won’t do the work, but a FEW will.
- **Value anchors** - the best, most useful, most fascinating information
- **Third party proof** - Foreword, case study, short intro (can also be a list of 5-star book reviews, stuck to the front matter of your book).

All of this stuff comes in the beginning, just to get them to take the time to actually finish reading your book! I’ve seen the same strategies work well in online sales funnels. Basically, before you can ever get anyone to *buy* anything from you, first you have to get them to *listen*. You can get permission to email them if you have an optin offer – the reason it works is that you’ll have multiple chances to prove your worth with valuable content, whereas if you were pushing them towards a paid product, you’d only have one chance for them to say yes or no.

With a funnel, you can slowly communicate value, while building trust and rapport, and stoking their desire, so that *when* you present your offer, they’re educated about why it’s needed and primed to purchase. Luckily, you can do all the same things you’d do in a webinar or email sales funnel, at the beginning of your nonfiction book. Obviously, this will change depending on the content, genre or subject, as well as the

intended audience... but it's worth deeply considering these suggestions, because the point of everything is to fill them with enough enthusiasm to carry them through to the last page.

Recently I was watching a very polished video funnel, and focused on just the words they were using. I made notes of some of the language you can and should include in your preface and introduction. A lot of these will fit neatly into the 11 categories I set up above, see how many you can match!

Many versus few: “ever wonder why *some* people succeed easily, while most struggle and never accomplish what they want? *Most* people will never figure out. But a *few* individuals have discovered the secret and are doing something totally new that's revolutionizing the industry.”

Tired of X: “are you tired of X, doing the same things over and over, not seeing results, frustrated, need something new to finally help you achieve the results you want?”

Promise Results: “By the time you finish reading this entire book, you'll not only have answers to all these questions, but you'll have the (tools/resources/abilities) to (easily/quickly) achieve the results you want, faster than you ever thought possible.”

You're here for a reason: “If you're reading this right now, it's because you (have this problem) and are ready to (find a solution). You're in the right place, at the right time, committed to forever solving your problem.”

Cross the bridge: “Are you ready to stop (all the unpleasant pain points) and finally (do all the big positive benefits, without all the pain points)?”

Something different: “as you read this, you’ll discover a totally new, revolutionary strategy/process/trick, a total shift that’s happening, and allowing some people to get ahead.”

Surprisingly simple: “even though it’s amazing, it’s also easy and simple, and won’t take much time.”

Three case studies: “detailed stories of how people just like you had a common problem and overcame it, to great results.” Add specific details that overcome common objections.

Visualization: “What do you need or want? How would it feel to get results like this? Imagine what your life will look like after you use this strategy to achieve similar or better results.”

Motivation: “You can do this, if you want to. I’m going to show you exactly how. If you use the information in this book and apply it, you will be one of the new group of successful people, and finally experience all the amazing benefits.”

Contrast: “Or you can keep doing what you’ve been doing... frustration, pain points, feeling stuck.”

Choice: “You have a choice: the good, successful future, or the limited, frustrating past. If you do nothing, where will you be a year from now, still facing the same problem. Or you can finish this book, take action, and transform your life.”

Does this sound like an infomercial or a used mattress salesman? Yes! If it’s too cheesy to work with your audience, of course you should modify it. But you can use more relatable, less salesy marketing-speak and still achieve more reader engagement by focusing on what’s in it for them. The point of all of this, is to figure out *why* anybody should actually read your book. So practice using the formulas above, even if you

have to find a unique way of rephrasing them for your audience.

On that point, make sure you actually know what your audience's real goal is... for example, I can't just talk about selling books, because most authors don't actually write for money. Telling them they can earn a living isn't motivating enough, because most of them want to be recognized, they want to write full-time, or build a platform or business, or win literary awards and become cultural icons. They also have insecurities and limiting beliefs around money, for example that being a bestseller in popular genres is the same as selling out.

You'll also need to predict and resolve potential objections that your audience might have. If you know your audience well enough, you can voice and dissolve skepticism as soon as it's raised. Common objections include:

- You don't understand my problem (I'm a unique snowflake/you're an outsider)
- How do I know you're qualified? (why should I trust your opinion?)
- I don't believe you (I doubt your motives or experience)
- I don't need it right now (the pain currently doesn't seem urgent enough to take action)
- It won't work for me (I'm in a unique situation/I've tried other things before that didn't work)
- What if I don't like it? (why should I bother reading this?)

- I can't afford it (this isn't worth my time or money, which I'd rather spend on something else)

Can you see already how you can try to respond to those fears and doubts in your front matter? Great. And we *still* haven't really dived into the main content, though we may have outlined the structure and roadmap we are going to follow. The idea here, is that most readers will begin a book luke-warm and marginally skeptical. You *could* just press straight in and allow readers to judge the value of your content immediately, but:

A: even if it's great, they won't *value* it unless it makes them feel.

B: even if it's useful, they won't necessarily give a damn about the author.

C: if some parts lose their interest, they'll quit and move on to something else.

This is why, even though all they think they want is to get straight to the main content and see results, you'd be doing them a disservice if you let them engage half-heartedly with your work. You know the closer they pay attention, the deeper their commitment, the more value they are going to get out of the book itself. Therefore, a more effective, more powerful book not only tells visual stories to provoke emotion, but also has a present author so the book creates an invisible, timeless relationship and bond. They need to feel like you *see* them, like you *believe* in them... and then they'll believe in you.

11

PAVE THE ROAD

Finally, we're ready to fill in the blanks and put all the pieces together. I've already shared a lot of tips about the *type* of content you might want to have, as well as the best strategies for organizing your content. But you still need to do the work of filling the pages, as well as smoothing out the rough transitions, so we'll tackle that in this chapter.

In my experience, the best “software” for writing books is still Microsoft Word. Alternatives like Scrivener offer a more creative, free-flowing space to organize ideas, but my guess is, most authors don't have much trouble generating content. They have trouble fitting it together. So the linear, limiting features of Word are handy. Make sure you turn your navigation pane to “on” and use heading styles for chapters and subheadings – that way you can see your menu on the left and even drag and drop sections around as needed. I'd use a new subheading for every scene, section, story or topic. You

can delete these later so the TOC (table of contents) doesn't get cluttered, but it's great while you're still in production mode to see at a glance where everything is.

When you have a new content idea, mark it with a subheading, then use that prompt to do a writing session and fill it in. That said, it can quickly become overwhelming to be faced with that minefield of topics, so during the *actual* production time, I recommend timed wordsprints, using a smaller screen and a bluetooth keyboard. I prefer my iPhone, with the *iAwriter* app, and a physical countdown timer or hourglass set at twenty or thirty minutes. I sometimes find it easier to lounge on the couch or go out for coffee, than trying to write from my main desktop. During these sprints, you'd basically brain-dump or stream your ideas, so you want to be in a more relaxed state. You can also test whether dictation works better for you, even with something as simple as a smartphone's built-in notepad or microphone app.

What I've found, is that my *best* writing comes easily, when I'm in the flow. But sometimes it's an effort to get started, which is where a writing routine comes in handy. Focus on word count goals, and write down your daily progress so you can see significant movement over the long haul: this is motivating even when it seems like you're just digging a deeper hole for yourself.

I'll take those rough, messy drafts and paste them into my larger Word file, in roughly the place they need to be. Once you've mostly filled in your outline, focus on the transitions linking each section together; the intros and outros that create forward momentum and explain why each element is in the perfect place. This can often be as simple as looking back and

forward: “now that we’ve covered X, there’s one more missing piece to unlocking Y before we move on to Z, and that’s ___” Or it could be more vague, with just a little hook for intrigue. “After completing X, I thought I was at the end of my journey, but nothing could be farther from the truth, and I was about to have a rude awakening.” Good hooks, both for intros and outros, have inherent conflict or tension; bonus points if they can also include a vivid snippet of imagery so readers are left with something to picture.

That’s the simple stuff: do the work, until it’s done. So let’s skip to the harder stuff. When you’re writing a rough draft like this, it’s entirely normal to be dissatisfied with the level of writing quality. You may feel like you’re just shoveling sand around. This is the *excavation* process. You’re digging to discover precious stones, but there will be a lot of dirt. You’re also making holes, to allow space. Only after you start digging, will your subconscious intuitively reveal new connections and secrets. The best work isn’t always done during your writing sprints, but those are necessary to get your brain noodling on the problems. They may not fit or make sense. You may feel that what you’re trying to say isn’t clear or logical. But writing badly is a crucial step, and expecting or demanding that everything you write down instantly turns into gold, with little effort or experience, will only create negative moods that stifle creativity.

Knowing this, make sure you schedule time to rest, allow yourself small rewards or luxuries when you’ve had a good day of writing, and by “good” I just mean making *any* attempt to work on your book, or getting *any* new words down on the page. Some days, I’ll write 3000 new words. Some days, I’ll

simply unlock a clue or solution to a particularly stubborn passage that's been holding me up for weeks. Some days I'll take a week off and fall into a pit of demotivation and apathy.

Your emotions might play tricks on you, but you only fail if you quit. Remind yourself of the personal motivations and goals you started with; have they shifted or are they the same? Think of this time as paying your dues—it's hard because you're still learning. *Of course it's hard!* If you're freaking out about whether anybody will like your book, whether it's worth all this time and effort, consider posting some of it online for feedback. You should by now have at least a pretty clear statement of purpose, or a summary to use as your preface or introduction to the process. Find your audience, share an excerpt, and be vulnerable: let them know you're working on something, but afraid it's missing the mark or not what people are looking for.

Practicing in public shortens the feedback loop, so you can gain confidence while avoiding any unexpected blindspots. But it's also a sneaky way of pre-marketing. Posting spam in an online forum or group (“buy my book!!!”) is unlikely to work, and might get you banned. But genuine requests for feedback that prompt dialogue, can create core engagement.

That said, don't expect everyone to rush to help you for free; and also take their advice with a pinch of salt. They probably aren't experts, and they might not even be real readers in your genre or subject. Always strive to get feedback from actual readers who buy similar books; not your neighbors or other would-be authors. At the same time, don't immediately discount any opinions you don't agree with, especially if you keep hearing the same feedback from more than one place.

A very easy and smart thing to do at this point, would be to take your preface, introduction and first chapter, or even the first few chapters, and put them up on your website as an optin bribe or call-to-action, “sign up to my email list and get the first 3 chapters free.” Or if you aren’t ready to share that much, you can say, “sign up to my list and I’ll send you an advanced reader copy as soon as it’s ready!”

If you just set up a website with no content, you’d still need to drive traffic, and conversion will be low on an offer like that. Depending on the subject however, you *could* turn all your content into a great landing page. Websites don’t convert well; a landing page is optimized for conversion. So you’d be doing a lot of the things I mentioned earlier, but with nice design, style, compelling copy, and some reviews or testimonials. Typically, these don’t work well for nonfiction books, because you’d have to drive traffic with ads to get free signups, and only a small fraction of those would ever buy your book... which means, you’d be losing money.

However, if you’re using it as an opportunity to test your messaging or book cover with a precise, targeted audience, just to see whether it’s strong enough to get them to click; and engaging enough to get their email, that can be very useful. And building a small list of potential readers will make it much easier to launch later. Don’t worry about giving away free books; you probably won’t be able to sell any book without some reviews, and many authors get stuck in a chicken/egg situation, with no ability to generate feedback.

If you’re having an “off” day, you can also just go back through your notes or content and pick out some crafty, compelling sentences to share on social media, in the form of

an image quote, which you can make with Canva or Wordswag. Pick a style that matches your brand or subject, that is attractive to your audience. If you do start sharing these, hopefully you'll have the book up on preorder, or at least a landing page with an email optin form, so you can drive interested viewers somewhere.

How long will this take?

Longer than you think. Especially if this is your first book. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't pick a hard deadline and intend to get it done quickly. There are few benefits to dragging this process out. It's going to take as much time as it takes, but momentum is critical, so it's *easier* to make progress with consistent action, in a fury of productivity, than in slow, measured appointments. I'd actually schedule a full day, or weekend, to focus on *each* chapter in this book and really flesh out your ideas, to give your book a firm foundation.

On the other hand, maybe you've already written everything you think you want to say and consider the book "done," but you feel like it's still inadequate, or are nervous to publish it. Keep in mind, this chapter is only about the *drafting* stage, which is why I've so far said very little about actual writing tactics like word choice or sentence structure. There's a few reasons for this, but generally, the creative idea-producing brain is *open*, while the pedantic editing brain is *closed*. It's difficult to try and wear both hats at once, which is why we have infamous adages like "write drunk, edit sober."

Also, it's a tempting distraction to shift gears and focus on editing too early; rephrasing or moving things around, cutting or trimming, sharpening and cleaning. This *could* signify

trimming weeds, as opposed to planting a garden. But it's also true that:

A: every author is going to have their own unique voice, and that's fine

B: the writing matters much less than you think it does

Don't allow your cautious, over-protective editor to spoil the fun too early, or you may lose focus on the big-picture stuff that's way more important.

Troubleshooting

Despite your best intentions, you'll probably discover that the process of writing your book isn't as easy or as smooth as you'd hoped. That initial enthusiasm and optimism fades, as the gap between your creative aspirations and technical proficiency becomes revealed. Every day I get emails, or see posts on Facebook or Reddit, which are tied to two crucial frustrations. The first is, how do I organize all of this messy material and clean it up into a real book? The second is, how can I maintain my energy or optimism?

Mindset and motivation is always a challenge, even for experienced authors. The simplest solution is to *expect* to feel crappy about your writing sometimes. It's part of the process. But that's a little too flippant, so let me say something more profound that might help. "Hopium" is the rational disconnect most authors require, to enforce a false belief in extraordinary results, despite all limiting evidence. The bigger the disconnect between solid, realistic advice and feedback, and their outlandish pursuit of literary greatness, creates a sharp, threatening rift, like an everpresent blade hanging over their

necks. The bigger this disconnect, the more brutal and urgent the maintenance required to keep up this level of optimism, until it becomes a constant battle of motivation and belief.

But the truth is, your feelings or goals or expectations have very little to do with writing a good book or making it successful. It's mostly about the level of your craft, knowledge and ability—which can only be forged through experience. It's never easy, but professional authors do not require the same kind of constant defense against this horrible existential dread: will I ever be good enough, will anybody like this?

I saw a post recently from an author who had written *just one page* after spending months on backstory, plotting, worldbuilding and research, and they were already asking whether it was too early to give up or call it quits, because they were already experiencing previously foreign frustration or doubts. Only when you do the work consistency, will you begin to recognize your own limitations. But the only way to progress, is to sit with the discomfort and embrace the unfamiliar, and *expect* this to feel traumatic and difficult. Do it anyway, and keep doing it, until you've gained enough experience to make informed decisions. If you know you can do it better, then do it better. Until then, do it badly.

This applies to revisions and edits as well: the elation of finishing a book quickly can turn to dread and exhaustion as you begin to recognize just how *bad* your first draft is, and how much work still needs to be done. The more you practice, the faster you will become acutely aware of your own limitations, mechanical problems, and weak writing. This is painful. The *more* you learn, the *less* confident you will feel in your own abilities, and this is a good thing.

So stop asking how you can make this *easier*. If it comes without effort, it probably has little value. In the meantime, here are some extra resources that might get you through the rough patches.

- [Mindset & Motivation](#)
- [Procrastination & Productivity](#)

12

EDITING STRATEGIES

Once you think you've finished a decent first rough draft (congratulations!) you can begin the work of cleaning it up and preparing to publish. Every author will have their own system for this, but let me present you with a few common scenarios.

The first, is that you simply hand the book over to a copy editor or proofreader. While most professionals consider this a *necessary* step, I don't always recommend it. The roles can be a bit murky, and the costs are significant. A developmental edit or manuscript critique will probably be mostly passive, and focus on structural comments to help you improve the book. This is high-value work, but few editors have the expertise necessary, and they're notoriously hard to vet. However, if you can afford it, this kind of service might be the most useful (although, they'll probably suggest fixing or adding all the stuff I recommended earlier in this book).

After that would come a copy edit or line edit. Traditionally, a copy edit focuses more on typos and mistakes,

punctuation and grammatical errors, as well as light formatting. A line edit focuses more on style, flow and cadence. Most editors offer a service that's somewhat of a blend between these.

Finally, you'd have a proofread, which is meant to *only* fix or address typos or errors and make sure your manuscript is clean; it should often be done *after* formatting, but this doesn't always make sense depending on your publishing process.

Since the really valuable bits are the deeper, comprehensive critiques, and most authors skip those in favor of more basic proofing and editing, I'm wary of new authors spending thousands of dollars to edit their book, because it will rarely fix the real, critical issues with the content, or resolve big gaps like *who is this book even for* or *what's the point?*

Of course you do want a very clean, nearly perfect manuscript, but using Grammarly and ProWritingAid can help weed out most of your typos, and even help you spot or fix some weak writing or bad writing habits. The cleaner your manuscript is pre-editing, the deeper your editor can go and address real the problems, rather than the simple typos or errors. I've worked on books that were so full of typos (dozens per page), it took all my time and attention to fix them, leaving no energy left to consider big picture issues.

So here's the thing: you need to find a way to make your writing clean, but having a clean manuscript is a base-level expectation; it won't sell more books or increase reader satisfaction to a significant degree, which is why it's not always a sound investment, if you have a manuscript that fails to engage readers. There's really no harm in spending more time self-editing, or running it through a few cheap editing

programs, in addition to also working with an editor. Yes, it's more work, but rarely will an editor have the authority or competency to rewrite or make significant changes. At that level, you'd be looking more for a ghostwriter. It's true, as a developmental editor, I do quite a bit of revisions, but it's nothing compared to the surgery I perform on co-written or ghosted projects (not to mention my own books) where I have complete freedom to make it better. It's also a ton of work, which is why I rarely work with clients this way.

What, how, why, now

For my own writing, I use a four-step revision process. After the first rough draft, I'll go through making notes in the comments, and focusing on the *what*. Content only, where it fits together, what I want to say. Then I'll focus on the *why*. Why is this piece here, why does it matter, why is it important or necessary? So, it would start with the infodumps, and later I'd go back and make sure I've fixed the intros and outros, the transitions, and added clarity and signposts so readers don't get lost, confused or annoyed. It's not enough to share a lot of great info, you need to also keep in mind the purpose of any given section or chapter, and how that section relates to the main theme or premise of your book. It's your job to synthesize and guide, to help readers assimilate, apply and appreciate the content in the larger context.

Finally, I'd look deeper at the *how*. Specifically, how does this look, or how does this make me feel? These are the decorative touches that make the deepest impact. They are what people will remember, and they're often the final touches.

After all that, I'd focus on editing and proofreading, which is the *now*, or getting the book ready to share. At this stage, in addition to fixing typos, misspellings, punctuation or grammar issues, I'd cut weak writing, avoid repetition, simplify confusing passages, or flag places where I got carried away. For example, in nonfiction an overwrought, confusing argument is usually a sign that you're struggling to get the point across; trying too hard to convince or explain.

1. **What:** what actually happens?
2. **Why:** why does it matter?
3. **How:** how does it look?
4. **Now:** is it ready?

Each of these stages will also have its own unique challenges. During the *what*, I may be asking questions like:

- Is it interesting?
- Is it plausible?
- Does it make sense?
- Is it necessary?

In the *why* stage, I may be looking for plot holes or blindspots.

- Why is the author even sharing this?
- Why does any of this matter?
- What's the point?
- Why didn't they just...?

The last point above, occurs when readers get frustrated with the author's inability to do something simple or easy. Especially in a memoir or biography. If your character gets into unbelievable situations, they will become unlikable if they don't have the will or intelligence to extricate themselves easily.

And yet, you *want* dramatic scenes full of conflict. You just need to preempt reader annoyance, with proper character motivation: showing how their internal emotional responses, fears or doubts, reckless behaviors or wild risks are actually credible.

To fix plot holes and gaps in logic or continuity, you can add urgency, fix the mood of the scene (bigger stakes require bigger justifications), show characters in a weak mental state, or raise concerns but have them dismissed. You need show *why* they don't do something easier, or nothing at all, or *why* they face clear challenges and what they expect and prepare for.

Your protagonist (which in nonfiction will usually be you, the author) needs to have a strong, consistent internal compass, and it needs to be revealed through incidents that establish their character. This is *who they are*. Without it this reliable core identity, we won't be able to tell a story that forces them to change.

- ✓ Plot holes are unfixable story questions that tear readers out of their suspended disbelief, and make them question and doubt the entire enterprise. If they're big enough, they'll throw the book across the room in frustration.
- ✓ Plot holes can be skipped over by entertaining plausible motivations or justifications for the characters' actions, and

showing your work: what do they need to do next, what's their plan, what do they hope to achieve?

- ✓ Decisions are what creates our unique identities; stories are about character. Show the struggle to decide; that's who your character is, and what your story is about.
- ✓ Nobody is perfect, but their actions will be determined by their experiences, by who they are and what they've been through. They can be an irrational *mess*, but they will be consistent. Eventually you need to show how they got that way, and if it's your protagonist, find a way to improve.
- ✓ Conflict and stress can create turmoil that allows careful consideration to devolve into irrational, reckless behavior. *Provoke* them into making mistakes.

In the *how* section, we'll focus more on worldbuilding and scene description. We'll use vivid details to support the story, without being distracting or irrelevant. We can start by asking, *how does this look?* Some of the following ideas started with my simple writing guide, "The Plot Dot" which I later fleshed out in great deal in *Book Craft*. But I do think they're important, so I'll summarize the main ideas quickly here, and you can dive deeper if you have a plot or narrative-based story, and you feel it would benefit from more powerful and vivid scene description.

Flash of color/totem: something in the scene that stands out brightly, through color contrast. This thing could be symbolic of the mood or tone of the story. I like to think of this as an anchor.

Break up dialogue with movement: avoid dialogue dumps by breaking up conversations with facial expressions, postures or manual actions that hint at internal emotional responses.

What's she/he wearing? A very easy one to help ground the scene and make it easier to picture. It doesn't have to be *literally* true; you can choose outfits that represent the characters' background or lifestyle, or simply whatever leaves the most evocative image in readers' minds.

Mood and ambiance: Each scene, anecdote, memory will probably be attached to one general feeling. This can shift, when you get to the twist or point of change. But it shouldn't be random or spiral back and forth. Be deliberate with your description, to underline the feeling you're trying to express. Consider, for example, using the following two settings for a hostile breakup scene:

The bright yellow balloons peppered the wide, blue sky. A van with a painted face sold hotdogs, as I walked with Mr. X through the park. I reached for his hand, but he pulled away.

Rain dripped down the windows. It was cold, but I couldn't be bothered to start a fire, so I wrapped myself in blankets, staring at the gray walls. Mr. X sat on the couch next to me, an empty space between us. I reached for his hand, but he pulled away.

The scene description usually communicates what the narrator is aware of, and this awareness will shift with their mood or goals. In the first example, there's more natural contrast

between the change or surprise. She was feeling good, and wasn't *expecting* him to pull away. So it hits harder. There's more emotional contrast between the bad feelings, and the happy environment, that makes the scene more memorable and compelling.

In the second example, the depressing description hints that she's *already* feeling miserable. She was expecting him to pull away, and he does, but it feels more final: a confirmation, not a surprise.

Spotlight what's important: Likewise, a character will notice what's important to them at that moment. If they've been here before, they will probably only notice anything new or different, from how it was before. These could be great conversation starters that show backstory or characterization.

"I noticed one of your garden gnomes fell over," I said, nodding through the window.

"Oh that's just Gary, he gets up to all sorts of trouble over the weekends."

I bit my lip, wondering if she was teasing me, or positively mad. The twinkle in her eyes, and the slight smirk, didn't confirm either hypothesis. She went to the counter to retrieve a bowl of candy, and the light bouncing off the rack of knives behind her, glinted menacingly.

With that final sentence, the scene changes from charming to terrifying very quickly. However it's also a bit heavy-handed. Generally, you want to avoid saying the same thing twice. If

you're familiar with the common writing advice "show don't tell" you can see above that I'm doing both: showing the light on the knives (description) and telling readers that they should feel menaced (narration). It's *fine*, but often descriptive adverbs like "glinted menacingly" are a way for amateur writers to communicate the mood of the scene, without doing the work of actually putting it into the scene.

Highlight pivotal scenes: while you do want some stories, scenes and vivid pictures in your book, to entice readers' imagination, be aware that too many distracting images can be overwhelming. This is why you should be careful with metaphors, analogies and similes: a few offhand comparisons on the same page can become a surrealistic mess as our brains struggle to "see" them all at once. Choose your *best* scenes, the big ones, to describe in much greater detail, with significant props or flashes of color. Picture your book like a movie: it would manipulate readers' emotions by starting with light and happy scenes, or shocking conflicts that set the mood (getting viewers to pay attention); then deepen the potential threats or raise questions (getting viewers to care); before finally allowing the conflict to erupt and destroy (getting viewers to hurt).

The point of nearly all good books, is the point of change. But the more satisfying the resolution, the bigger the danger or struggle to achieve the change needs to be. Greater *resistance*, so that the eventual shift or payoff matters. Most of your book will be focused on generating this resistance. Showing how difficult or hard this transition was (because if it was easy or inconsequential, or unremarkable, why are you writing a book about it?)

The book is the context around a particular crisis. The crisis shows that the context matters. If the crisis was easily solved, it wouldn't have enough depth to be a compelling story. In a biography or memoir, or something like a historical nonfiction, it may be tempting to simply string together random incidents. I would recommend looking for a potential "moment" which works as a significant turning point for your protagonist. It is often tied to an internal limitation; a core belief, need or desire which has so far been motivating their actions. This point, only in conjunction with all the other included scenes (which were necessary to establish her resistance, why *this* is so hard for her to accept, realize or let go of) creates a boiling point. All the ingredients were required, and complementary, to deepen the flavor of a soup.

At the risk of continuing this metaphor, highlighting pivotal scenes would be like how a fine restaurant would present the bowl to their customer, in a pleasing aesthetic mixture. Flag your most important scenes with more detailed description, and readers will bind their emotional memories with the pictures you've provided.

Spotlighting: at the risk of being obvious, you can focus readers' attentions on a specific object in a scene by calling it out. Your readers are in a pitch-black room. Give them a few objects to work with, and they'll fill in the rest. But the objects you choose will give them an impression; and if they hold the wrong impression for too long, they'll be disappointed when later descriptions clash with what they've already conceived. If possible, use objects that interact with the environment in a noticeable way. Talk about how they're used, not just how they

look. Talk about how characters feel or interact with those objects, and why.

Description in action: try to avoid a passive state of being-there. At the very least, imply character flourishes that hint at personality. And whenever possible, introduce contrasts, which are powerful for establishing unique individual character traits.

There was a red cup on the counter and a gray shag rug. A cat had recently clawed up the leather couch. The windows hadn't been washed in weeks, but the mirror on the wall was freshly polished.

That's probably a heavy-handed metaphor, about a particular character that's more self-absorbed and doesn't care what others think of her (mirror/windows). But you can get a lot done, with just a sentence or two of description, and you should. Because long paragraphs of description are boring, without action. Because readers read to find out what happens next, which requires unresolved conflict, and tension can only be generated with forward momentum. So don't get stuck on *being-there*, paused in the room with your characters sitting quietly while you name and describe objects in the room like an infant. Be the director, who shouts "action!" then watches silently as the story plays out.

- ✓ Readers will remember the pictures they see, not the words you use.
- ✓ Description should serve and be bound to the story, not distract from it.

- ✓ It should be squeezed into and around the scene action, as the protagonist is using, considering or exploring.
- ✓ Show what's *different*, not what's the same.
- ✓ Leave space for readers to fill in the gaps, but get them started in the right direction so they aren't surprised later.

Common Mistakes

Finally, it's useful to call out specific examples of weak or amateur writing: these are the things an editor will fix, flag or revise, including word choice, readability, mistakes, punctuation and typos. Anything that lessens or detracts from the reading experience.

- Repetition, consistency, details
 - First paragraphs, ending hooks, conclusion
 - Typos, spelling errors, punctuation
 - Intros and outros
 - Italics and bold for emphasis
 - Never resort to ALL CAPS or ?!
 - Consistent punctuation
 - Repetitive gestures
 - Anything other than "said"
 - Preparing the book for consumption
 - Meeting the requirements
 - Surrendering the work to fulfill its purpose
- ✓ Read my big list of [25 First Chapter Mistakes](#).

Repetition & Cliches

Because it's important, let me quickly explain what a cliché is and why it's weak writing. A cliché is what's common, what's expected. So instead of communicating a fresh, novel scene or story, you're casually asking readers to reflect on their own internal memory bank of shared ideas. Like when you say "his goons" or she was exactly a stereotypical picture of an average hospital nurse. You're not actually telling me what's in the scene (and remember, engaging description should focus on what's different). This doesn't mean you need to avoid all cliches, but they should be *broken*, not repeated.

Likewise, many nonfiction books become repetitive drivel, where they are just repeating their main thesis, theme or argument, over and over again, in each chapter. Say it once, and if you have to say it again, think of a fresh approach or a different way of restating it, in the context of the new evidence you've provided: show how your theme or thesis has changed and what this new, deeper understanding means. Otherwise, you're just agreeing with yourself, and the more times you say it, the less likely readers will believe you.

The five major problems with most nonfiction

If you follow the guides above and do your research, you'll have already avoided most of the critical mistakes I notice in most nonfiction books, but I'm sharing this additional list here in case it jolts you out of complacent overconfidence (a lot of nonfiction authors are Really Excited about their book and

expect it to sell a Million Copies, even when they haven't actually figured out the core benefits or unique angle).

The nonfiction books I read often make the following errors. You'll notice that most of them are actually pretty similar, and relate to making sure your book has a unique purpose and clear audience.

1. Pretentiousness

Especially when the stories are really autobiographical and the author is reveling in the awesomeness of their own experience, filtered through educated pandering reflection and elevated, flowery word choice. Always a turn off.

Pretentiousness is obvious when the words themselves are more important than the content or the story; when otherwise boring material is being dressed-up to show off how clever the author is.

This is also the danger of any personal memoir or autobiography, including travel memoir. You may think your stories are unique and interesting (and they might be!) but why should other people care? You need to make sure you're giving readers something more meaty than fun anecdotes (unless you're *really* funny). It needs at least a plausible theme or positive conclusion that makes an effort at parsing the stories into some kind of life lesson or general point.

If you're writing dark and tragic stuff about personal traumas, in my experience those won't sell unless you've really turned things around and become rich and famous, or met a lot of rich and famous people. People read to be distracted away from the brutality of real life, and want stories of hope and redemption. The darker the story, the brighter your happy

ending needs to be. Often, these experiences should actually be used to write a gripping novel or crime thriller, but aren't by themselves enough to hold interest. If you are writing one of these, be willing to "invent" a little, to fix the plot and story structure to make it satisfying. You can still say "based on a true story" or "based on real-life experiences."

2. No guide or organization

A lot of nonfiction these days are actually a collection of short articles or blog posts; research writing without a common theme. AKA a brain dump, as in "here's all this stuff. Now deal with it." What's the point of this book? What's your main argument or claim? I feel like a lot of people have grown an audience and now say to themselves, I better write something, so people can buy it. So they clobber together 80,000 words and send it to an editor or ghostwriter.

Sometimes the main theme or premise of the book is interesting, but the actual book doesn't relate or goes off in weird directions, filled with fluff on inconsequential opinionated rants or tangents. I've read books where I disagreed with the premise, but found value in the content: but a *good* book will introduce evidence to support the main claim or premise, or explain why/how that premise is true.

It will also lead readers through some kind of voyage of discovery, so they don't have to flail around for support or feel off-balance. Keep reminding them *why* you're talking about this stuff, why it matters, what it means, how it's related to your chapter topic, and how it fits in with your book premise.

3. No research (lack of education)

I abhor books that consist only of one person's point of view based on their extremely limited experiences. They've had a couple of adventures, read a few blog posts, and they think that merits a book. They think they understand the universe. They may throw in some quotes by famous people at the beginning of chapters, but they haven't actually read the original works. In the old days, people would read thousands of books (and not just any – the greatest books in history) and then let those books leak out through soft references in their writing.

When I started my Master's program, the professor told me I needed to start papers with a literature review. I said something like, "well, I'm an original thinker, and nobody has ever thought like me before, so my take will be 100% original." Which is brazenly misguided. Even if it's true, you need to do enough research to show *you* are saying something new, different and necessary – solving some critical flaw, lack or need in the existing literature.

You don't need a graduate degree or years of research, but there's no excuse for not spending a few hours on Amazon or Google and seeing what other people have said about your subject; pulling short quotes and excerpts from books, videos and blog posts will not only make your book more interesting, it can be used in marketing later, and also proves to your readers that you've done your research.

4. Nothing new

I find a lot of nonfiction books dumbing down much more eloquently and intelligently made arguments from far better writers. Perhaps this is necessary. Perhaps – in the same way they remake the Batman or Spiderman story every few years –

successful content can be remarketed and targeted to a new generation of readers. Perhaps contemporary readers don't have any patience for intellectual, complex writing and they need the Zig Ziglar or cliff notes version. I can't say it's *wrong*, especially if it sells, but it is disappointing.

It's fine to clarify a message in a way that readers can absorb; and refusing to write books in a way your audience can appreciate is the Key Mistake most authors make. My point though, is you can't string together some light research and a few personal anecdotes and call it a book. How is your information different/new/necessary? How will it help readers who have already tried everything else? What's your unique twist or unexpected insight?

5. No message

What does it matter? Who cares? Why should it matter to the reader? What should they DO about it? Every book should impact the reader enough that it *alters the reader's life*. It should be remembered years later. It should change behavior. Otherwise, you're no better than a sitcom, designed to kill a few hours with banal distraction. And again, if banal distraction is the USP of your book, great – as long as you're aware of that and present and market it as such. Whether or not readers agree with your assessment of its inherent entertainment value, remains to be seen.

Immediate turn offs

You really should go through my big list of common writing mistakes, but here are a few big things that most nonfiction

authors get wrong, that are immediately annoying or exasperating, and scream amateur or unprofessional.

- Too many exclamation points (!!!) Or melodrama (?!?)
- Too many “clever” metaphors distracting from the content
- Too many personal anecdotes that reveal bias (if you’re telling a story about how stupid or mean somebody else was, it belongs in your diary, not in a book).
- Unjustified certainty, “obviously, of course, it’s simply a fact that...”
- “Show and Tell” (just talking about that cool trip you went on once and how everyone loved you, or the fancy car or house you bought, or humble brags about your success and brilliance). Stories thrive on conflict, not contentment.
- Using all caps, or bold/italics for every other word. If you stress everything, then nothing is important. Be frugal and let readers decide what to focus on.

One more thing...

Finally, there’s one more thing I’ll stress here. If your nonfiction book is more memoir/biography, it should probably focus on a main character’s change or transformation. There’s an inner war, the character’s emotional healing, and an outer war: the conflict that forced the reckoning. If it’s a purely symbolic internal realization, you can mirror that with actual conflict in the real scene. The breaking of a dish, a fit of rage, a sudden ray of sunlight (or a storm... this should not be pleasant, it should be traumatic. It’s a breaking point and spiritual

death/rebirth). You can clarify the moment of change, by setting up an illustrative contrast, a before and after, that shows how those internal changes have resulted in real-world consequences or benefits.

If you're writing a simple how-to or self-help book, make sure your author persona or protagonist has gone through a transformative struggle to arrive at deep insights, knowledge or awareness. If you're writing a travelogue, memoir or historical narrative, find a way to deepen the incidental scenes so that they become instrumental to a deeper purpose, leading towards an identity-shifting event. I talked a lot about this in *Book Craft*, but for brevity, check out this list [of 5 ways to write a satisfying book](#) I wrote for the Nanowrimo blog. The first and most important one, is about creating a satisfying resolution – recently I fleshed that idea out a bit more, with a deep-dive into some popular movies and TV series, including the Snyder Cut of Justice League, Rim of the World, Mr. Nobody and the Irregulars.

It's too long to include here, but might be worth skimming through to see how you could try and use those *principles* to beef up your satisfying character arc.

- [Satisfying Resolution Case Study: Media Examples](#)

To simplify, you need to demonstrate that the internal shift or change is meaningful by first showing how difficult or impossible the feat is, on a personal level, to your main protagonist or narrator. The final action necessary for the story resolution should mirror exactly the character's worst fear, fatal flaw or personal limitation. You might say that these

similarities are cliché, trope, or a caricature. You're not wrong, and I'm not suggesting you make your story this obvious. But they are repeated in movies and TV shows because they represent the most emotionally satisfying form of storytelling.

13

PUBLISH & LAUNCH

Congrats! You made it through this book. I hope the simple framework makes the process seem more achievable (it is!) without becoming overwhelming. I decided to wrap this book up with a “baker’s dozen” and add a bonus chapter 13. It’ll include a few extra things you’ll need to consider, in regards to publishing and marketing your book; beginning with some of my personal failures. In this final chapter, I’ll touch on a few of the important things to be aware of when you’re done with the manuscript and looking into publishing your book; I’ll also talk

about how to design and upload your files, build an email list of potential reviewers, and launch your book to #1.

Book Marketing

Most authors assume marketing is the same as visibility, but it really isn't. Conversion is just as important, which means focusing on the *product* will make the biggest long-term difference in book sales. Most authors, however, refuse to compromise and write or design their book to appeal to a target audience, because they want to do everything their way.

And I get it. I used to think exactly the same way. What I eventually learned, is that it's so much harder to sell things people don't want. Are you aligning, or distracting? Are you offering value, or interrupting? It's the difference between a nicely packaged product in the right shelf of the supermarket, and a weird new combination of candy people aren't sure what to do with. One product you already needed, and were actively looking for. You make a purchasing decision based on comparing costs and benefits. The other you *don't need*, but life is boring so why not check out crispy Snickers or matcha Kit-Kat. It's OK if you don't like it, the value is in the impulse purchase and the novel experience. But you probably won't buy it again. It'll be something you tried once because you were bored and it was cheap.

Do you want to be the man in the rabbit costume shouting on street corners to any random passerby about your book; or do you want the bookstore clerks to handle that while you relax at home and work on your next manuscript? These are not small decisions, but they have a big impact on the writing career you're pursuing.

Likewise, you may be inspired to write what you want, but *craft* is essential to keep readers reading (if they quit after the first chapter, your message can't reach them). It's not about money, it's about attention – there's a way of writing that holds their attention, which is important.

However – all that aside – the blurb and cover are crucial to get anyone reading. You can save a lot of time and money, by instead of trying to market a book nobody wants, to positioning and packaging it as something that appeals to them. This can be an easy fix, without changing any of the interior content or message of the book.

6 things every book needs

- **Story:** a unifying narrative with an end and beginning.
- **Purpose:** a goal worth pursuing, and achieved.
- **Drama:** conflict, suspense and intrigue on every page.
- **Structure:** a comfortable reading experience with clear signposts.
- **Resolution:** a concluding event or call to action, with positive emotion.
- **Credibility:** author's bio, vulnerable share, professional design, no typos.

How to begin (brainstorming ideas)

To start with, you can do a lot of the things I talked about earlier - brainstorm relevant topics around one central theme or premise or promise, then add all those keyword strings

(short phrases) into Google and Amazon to see what other people are searching for.

That's a great start, but it's not enough.

It's not enough to just present the information, you also need to hit emotional triggers. Recently a friend of mine, who teaches about web design and sales copy, said "you need to stab them in the heart."

In other words, you need to quickly hit their most immediate pain point.

"Words achieve an outcome: desire for pleasure, or to avoid pain."

The story or information or knowledge is probably not WHY people read nonfiction. They do it because it reinforces their self-identity, or because they're aspiring towards elevated status or lifestyle. In other words, it's *personal*. You have to make your book matter, to them, by understanding their drives and being relevant.

So how do you do that?

According to my friend, you need to "optimize for motivation first."

You need to get them to lean in and pay attention: with the book cover, with the book description, with the introduction and chapter one... if you can hold their attention, you can get away with dazzling and distracting a little, but make sure you understand the root cause of their interest (why do people need to read YOUR book? What will they get, that will either reduce pain or increase pleasure?)

So before we start, you need to research not just what keywords people are searching for, or what topics/problems they want to learn about, but also WHY they are interested in

those things. Ideally, you'll write a book with an established, passionate audience.

Find the other books in your genre or topic, the other bestsellers, which will be important later to increase your “also boughts” and read the reviews. Search for:

- Why they bought
- What they liked
- What they hated

Then find Facebook groups where your readers hang out (you can put the keywords in Facebook and search for groups). Listen to the conversation. You can even search the group for “I want, I love, I need, I like, I hate...”

Make a list of the MAIN things people talk about. Then make sure to use their language, especially in the sales copy or introduction and first chapter to get them emotionally invested and show that you understand their struggles.

At this point, you should have a messy mindmap of all the related topics your book might cover, and a deeper understanding of your audience's real motivation.

Case Study

The ideas in this book were learned slowly over several years, and I wanted to test them out with my first general, nonfiction guide to writing, the original *Book Craft*. I added a lot more stories, quotes, research and personal backstory, as well as a very unique theme and structure. However, my obsessive, ADHD tendencies got the best of me and I went too far down the rabbit hole, leading to some very harsh, negative reviews.

Against my own advice above, I had too many “clever” metaphors distracting from the content; too many anecdotes and stories that got in the way of the writing tips, and failed to understand at least some of my audience. While these tactics may work well for some genres, writers reading books on craft expected something short, pithy and actionable... *unless* it was an introspective reflection and memoir on writing, by a famous author. I attempted, deliberately, to bridge that gap, and I didn’t fail completely: some of the reviews are pretty great.

One of the biggest issues, was I focused long and hard at the beginning attempting to overcome objections or mindset limitations, that I knew would get in the way of reader engagement. This is a tricky space, as authors (uniquely, it seems) have very strong opinions about whether or not it’s OK to focus on the reader experience, rather than the creative impulse.

I saw a quote on Twitter that I think is useful here: “If you want to convince people, don’t belittle their choices. Just show them what is cool about your topic.” I’m not offering this as an excuse or explanation, only as a potential example of how these suggestions could go too far in the wrong direction. If you’re curious, you can see how I attempted to create a *brand* book and alienated readers who felt my lengthy introduction was condescending. This is too bad, as there are some genuinely unique strategies and insights that are both new and advanced, but many authors didn’t have the patience to parse through all of the extra padding.

Publishing

Publishing a book, is almost entirely about book design. After editing, you need to get the book formatted, and a cover made, for print and ebook. Then you can upload the files directly to KDP and have your book live in a couple of days. Cover design is super important to get right, which is why I don't recommend any self-publishing package that includes a whole bunch of stuff and promises to streamline everything. It may seem easier, but you're basically paying for an admin, and they will almost always outsource the cover (the most critical part) to a cheap overseas designer.

If you're on a budget, I recommend searching for premade book covers, which can be quite cheap and look very professional. Find something that's close enough, and use it to get started. If you want something custom, make sure at the very least you look through all my book design resources and tutorials, so you don't overpay for something that doesn't work. You can also design your own book cover, but getting it wrong will destroy the book marketing, so be sure you don't save costs on the cover, thinking you'll have a bigger marketing or advertising budget.

I have a free guide to self-publishing on a budget, you can download here:

[Publish on a budget \(free guide\).](#)

Launching

To launch successfully, you'll need to be able to get some reviews up quick, and this is the hurdle most authors never clear. If you don't have a clear audience, or a clear

genre/subject/benefit, you won't even be able to give the book away for free by attracting the right readers. I recommend building a small email list of potential reviewers, that you can offer an ARC to. There are rules about doing this right, so Amazon won't delete your reviews or ban your account, so it's worth doing your research.

After you have about 10 reviews up, you can begin a wider marketing campaign, which will probably consist of a reduced price deal + adstacking on the big book promo sites, or advertising a full-priced book with AMS (Amazon ads) or Facebook ads. This is the most effective strategy with the best results.

I also have a free guide to book marketing for authors:
[Book Marketing is Dead \(free guide\)](#)

Recently someone reached out on LinkedIn to see whether I had a publishing or marketing package, to help them launch their book. This is something I avoid, while also refusing to recommend any services, because I don't believe they work, nor do I trust anyone else enough to do an adequate job of what matters most. Here's the response I sent:

Basically, you just need a cover and formatting, then you can self-publish on Amazon. *Unless* you want to pitch agents, but that's very tricky unless you already have a large platform. I don't do a launch package or anything like that because I can't sell a book that doesn't convert well, and great design + a clear hook and audience + ads work better than anything, and platform is personal (depends on repeat

engagements) so it's not something another person can do for you, well, at a profit. It's pretty easy to force it to #1 for a week, even if it's losing money, but after sales stop, that metric is less satisfying.

In other words, most publishing packages that promise some marketing benefits will do the bare minimum and offer zero results. A *really good one* might get you to #1 with aggressive marketing, before losing money (keep in mind, the majority of all traditionally published books also lose money! So you haven't *failed* if this happens to you). A PR firm or publicist will try to book you media spots... but this kind of visibility doesn't guarantee long-term book sales.

What about social media? Social media is about making relationship through engagement, marketing rarely works. Any kind of social media “blast” that spams everyone's feeds will fail. Instead, create the kind of valuable content that gets shared.

What about reaching out to influencers? Rarely worth it, but see if you can start by sharing *their* content and providing value; following them on social and reacting or commenting. This is more likely to get you noticed. A few clever emails might get a minute of their time, but they are unlikely to support, respond or commit to helping share your book launch. *Even if* you offer an enticement, like a profit share. Influencers won't promote or share anything that might not be great, even for cash. They have a responsibility to their audience. And they

aren't going to read your book to see whether or not it's good enough to recommend.

If you really want to supercharge your book, ask influencers to provide content you can include; that way you'll "feature" their tips, suggestions or stories, and they'll have a much easier time sharing or promoting. If you do your research, you'll find out which blogs/books keep popping up. Reach out to those people. The easy way is to set up a simple Google form, or send a simple email. Make it easy. Here's a short example:

"Hi (first name), I'm writing a book about X and I love your book/resources here (link). I wanted to make sure it's OK to use a small quote from your material; I'll credit you of course, and the book will be shared with my 20K followers. Thanks!"

"Hi, I'm writing a book about X and I love your book/resources here (link). I wanted to reach out and see if you could grab a short quote so I can feature you in the book. These are the three questions I think my audience would love to have you answer. Can you pick one and write a few short sentences on it? You can just reply to this email."

- Question One?
- Question Two?
- Question Three?

If this isn't for you or you don't have time right now, I totally understand! Just wanted to include you if possible, since

you've been such a huge influencer on this subject and role model to me personally.

I would also add a deadline, something like:

PS. I'd love to get the first draft finished in two weeks, so before December 22nd if possible.

You should generally follow up 3 times, maybe every 5 days. Yes, it's annoying and might piss people off. I rarely request more than once. *But*, I also usually ignore the first couple emails, and might respond if I see a third.

If you really want to organize reviews, guest posts, or a larger book launch, you should be reaching out to influencers about six months in advance, after you've built a relationship with them; and after you've build enough of a platform, or garnered enough support or 3rd party verification, to get them to be open to the idea. You'll want a killer cover, a clear statement of purpose, and a bunch of initial reviews.

And it still probably won't be worth all that effort, because readers don't really care about influencers, they want to see real reviews from readers like them. Or, maybe your book doesn't have the broad general appeal you think it does.

Image quotes

A simpler thing to do is take all the quotes, stories and tips you added into your manuscript, and turn them into image quotes. They may need to be blended into your narrative or outline,

though you can also make a short “tips from readers” or “expert roundup” at the end of each section.

If the quotes are good, I’d feature them with a larger font and design, like a call out box. But the really powerful thing is to make image quotes (with Canva or Wordswag). Then you can share the graphic, and part of the quote, on social media, and tag the original author. They’ll usually enjoy seeing their words made pretty, and they’re likely to retweet or share.

You want to post a blog post first probably and add the image there, then link back to that blog post when you share the image. You can be putting out content like that a couple times a week, while researching, and making image quotes from your own writing to share as well. It’ll all help build your platform before your book is done (you can also pay someone to do the research for you, or at least to make the image quotes for you).

Most effective would be doing short interviews or asking real questions from influencers, and you can also do that, but if you’re just starting out they may not respond, unless you do a little credibility boosting (name dropping, platform size, amazing book cover and premise, previous success or professional history, etc).

Find Your Audience

You could also try to be inclusive by finding real stories from groups or communities. You can join Facebook groups and start discussions. It’s a great way to build some visibility building up to launch, and also hear from real people who might like your book (which will help you figure out how to position it to be more attractive).

You can post in other people's Facebook groups, and generally the group owners won't mind as long as it's a real, interesting question (more engagement for the group). What you don't want to do is post a thinly veiled promotion; you may not even want to mention that you're writing a book, though I think you can (maybe not in your first post). Join a group, like and comment on other people's stuff for a while, provide value.

Get a sense of people's needs and problems and how you can help. But then, for example, you can ask a really specific question:

"I've seen a lot of people struggling with X – wondering what are the best ways you've found to deal with X?" People may tell you their stories, recommend books, websites or resources, and more. You can't ask Q's for every chapter or section of your book, so make it count with your main things (the premise or promise of your book).

Example: yesterday I asked my group about their best productivity and motivation tips; I'll turn that into a blog post and then use the material to tweak my own resources. If someone gives great/specific/unique tips, I'll include them in the blog post and link to them. This is ideal for blogging, because it's better content, and those people might share.

I could also follow up with a few of them and say "hey I loved that idea you posted, could I send you a couple extra questions about it?" You're looking for great, interesting stories or content, so your book isn't just about you: you want case studies or stories that your readers will sympathize with, or at least find entertaining.

It's *easier* to feature other people in blog posts, which includes sharing. It's *easier* to get someone to link to a blog post (free content), than to recommend your book (paid content). But if you have a lot of blog posts that people are sharing, it will boost your traffic, and you can sell your books from your website (linking to Amazon or other book retailers.) I don't recommend trying to sell your actual book straight from your website, because you'd have to figure out payment, distribution, and you wouldn't get the sales rank boost you'd see on a book platform.

If you're ready for more advanced book marketing tactics, a chance to get some help and feedback, and a 3-hour tutorial walking you through my exact book launch strategies, you can sign up for my Guerrilla Publishing resources here:

[Guerrilla Publishing: \(free guide and video tutorials\)](#)

Should I make an online course?

Yes, if you want to. I struggled to make video content, as an introvert, but forced myself to publish 100 crappy YouTube videos. Now I have nearly 3 million views, and YouTube drives most of my traffic. My books are meant as a simple, cheap, written introduction to my resources, but some things are better shown or taught by tutorial videos. Also, courses allow you to form a more personal author/reader relationship. But mainly, it can be difficult to break even with a single nonfiction title; a backend funnel with a course or digital product could boost

overall revenue, meaning you can bid more per click or keyword and keep the book selling profitably. While it won't work for every genre, many nonfiction books would benefit from a simple video course, where the author talks through and explains each section. There's also added value if you can include feedback, coaching, or challenges and activities. The big benefit of a video course is urgency and commitment: readers who invest are more likely pressured by larger forces and a desire for real change, meaning they will be more likely to take action and see results, if given the right support.

Making an online course is really simple: map out all the topics, sections, subheaders or your book, and talk it out (not reading, just from your head, rough notes). I actually recommend talking it through first, then turning into a book afterwards. But I do that and my courses are a bit rough and unorganized, as I stumble my way forward. I'd start by putting up free videos, to get comfortable on camera, then redo it in more detail as a paid course. I use the Teachable system, which is pretty good, but a lot of my friends are moving to Thinkific, which has better landing page design.

Also, I would have a free course as an optin offer (just three simple videos, which would actually be part of your sales funnel: each video would overcome an objection and prove the need for the solution.) Or, you can use a very a simple cheatsheet or checklist: a specific, useful part of your book that makes its own good content. All of that would lead into a paid course. The cheaper the offer (under \$100), the less time you need to warm people up and prove trust and credibility.

I think ads to a nonfiction book, with a backend funnel like this, can work really well. But you're counting on people to

read your book and take action, so it has to be structured the right way and be impressive enough to get them to trust you; as opposed to a much shorter sales letter or sales copy, which could actually boost conversion more without all that extra work.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the main tactics and strategies I think will be most useful for nonfiction authors; hopefully I've said a few things that will make your writing easier, your book better, and help you finish a manuscript you're proud of. But I also know that *writing* the first draft is just the beginning, and unfortunately it's a hurdle that many authors never clear. If this guide was useful but you're ready to dig a little deeper and make sure your book is as good as it can be, you can check out my [nonfiction writing course](#).

But let me end with a final metaphor. The most important thing by far, is making sure your front matter and first chapter are compelling. Picture them like the wheels on a car. They've got to hold air and be smooth enough to get momentum and keep moving forward. People need to feel safe in your vehicle. Everything else, including basics like the color and shape (genre), or perks like a GPS or espresso machine (writing style), are useless if the car doesn't go anywhere.

If it doesn't have wheels, then you'll just have a heavy lump of metal and never generate enough force to get it moving. Don't spend hundreds of hours crafting a thing that sits on your front lawn and slowly rusts away, having no real purpose. *If* you're ready to get some professional help, I've set up a special

offer where I'll help review your first 5000 words, edit your blurb, straighten your rough outline, and even help you choose a title and subtitle. Spots are limited but you [can apply here](#).

PS. If anything I've said in this book helped you to make progress on your manuscript, have an insight or gave you some extra motivation, I'd really appreciate a quick review.

Sincerely,

Derek Murphy

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