

THE  
**SCRIBE**  
METHOD



THE BEST WAY TO  
WRITE AND PUBLISH YOUR  
NONFICTION BOOK

# THE SCRIBE METHOD



TUCKER MAX AND ZACH OBRONT



**LIONCREST**  
PUBLISHING

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THE SCRIBE METHOD

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## WHY WRITE A BOOK?

I know why you want to write a book.

Maybe not literally, of course.

I'm going to make an educated guess about why you want to write a book.

If I'm correct in my guess—it means this is the perfect book for you.

If I'm wrong in my guess—then I just saved you a lot of time. You can skip this book; it's not right for you.

Here's my guess. See if it resonates:

You had a problem.

It was probably a difficult problem for you. You suffered because of it.

This problem might have even defined you as a person—at least for a while. You spent time, energy, and effort on it, and maybe even dedicated your career to solving it.

Finally, after a lot of struggle and work, you solved your problem. You found a solution, and you made your life better.

But you didn't just find the solution to this problem, you mastered it. You're great at implementing this solution. Yes, there are times you doubt yourself—like we all do—but part of you is even a little proud of yourself and what you've accomplished. You know some things (at least about this problem).

Although you've never written a book before, you keep coming back to the idea of writing one, for two main reasons:

1. You want to share your hard-earned knowledge to help people solve the same problem you used to have. You want to give this wisdom back to others, so it can impact them. Basically, you want to help people through your book.
2. You want some recognition for what you did. I am not implying that recognition is bad—quite the opposite. It is natural and right to want your peers and family and friends to know the real you and see what you've done. And it's normal to hope this recognition will actually help you in some way as well, probably in your career (and maybe even in your personal life, too).

I'd bet you've been thinking about writing a book for a while. You've probably had people saying, “you should write a book” to you long before now.

But you didn't acknowledge it, because the next step—writing the book—was too scary.

After all, you don't know where to start, or how to structure your book, or if your book idea is good enough, or if you have enough to say, or if anyone will care once you write it.

And there's the worst fear of all, the one you don't want to talk about, but always lingers.

What if you write a *bad* book?

You *might* have even started writing the book at some point, but you stopped. You probably had some good momentum at first, and found it really rewarding to get your ideas out of your head. You thought about how people would receive the book, maybe pictured the eventual praise in your future.

But you hit an obstacle, and it stalled you. It brought up all your self-doubt and anxiety, and without a plan to get past that obstacle (or obstacles), you lost your momentum, and then you stopped.

It's probably frustrating that you aren't writing your book. You see other people—some of them who don't even know as much as you about your subject—who did write their books, who have credibility and authority in their field, who are getting increased visibility, who have more clients and more opportunities, all from their book.

And most of all, you see the impact their books have on people. And you know you can have that same impact—if you could get your book done. Your book might not save the world, but it can change some people's lives for the better...if only you could get it to them.

Does this sound familiar?

Does it describe you?

If so, *this is the perfect book for you.*

It was written specifically for people just like you, as you embark on your journey to writing and publishing your book.

If you follow the steps, it will get you there.

If this doesn't describe you, then like I said, this book probably isn't right for you, and you can put it down and move on to another

book that is better suited for you (if this story has nothing to do with you, yet you've already paid for it, then email me directly and I will give you your money back: [tucker@scribemethod.com](mailto:tucker@scribemethod.com). I'm totally serious).

Let's say you read this book, you follow the instructions, you put in the work, you conquer your fears, you write a book you are proud of, and you get it published.

What happens when you *actually finish the book*?

As much as I'd love to tell you that you sell a million copies and hit every bestseller list and become famous...we both know that's a fantasy.

Yes, it happens for a small number of people, but so does winning the lottery. You can't plan on it or expect it.

But that's OK, because the reality of what actually happens is pretty cool. I know; I've seen it happen to literally thousands of authors. It usually works something like this:

You start to "get it" when you see the pre-order page on Amazon. Your name, your book, on Amazon, next to all the other books and authors you respect and look up to.

You start to get impatient, you begin to hope...and then finally, you get the first copy in the mail.

It's not like holding your new baby, but damn, it feels great.

You created this. It's a part of who you are. It's permanent. It's out in the world. It's a record of what you know, what value you have given to others, what you've left behind in the world, and the impact you've made. It's proof of what you did to make the world better.

First, your friends and family see it. They get excited, they praise you, they tell you how proud they are. You might hate to admit it, but even now your parents' (and family's) praise means way more than you expected that it would. And in some cases, they finally understand what it is you do, and why it matters.

Then your coworkers, peers, and professional network see it. And they get almost as excited as your friends and family. And that praise is also really cool, and you enjoy it far more than you anticipated.

Then all of a sudden...people start talking to you about the book. About your ideas. People who read the book and want to discuss it with you, because you're the author.

Then, people start to introduce you as "author." Yeah, you are one, but still...it feels weird.

Then you start to get reviews, posted online...from people you don't even know. About your book. And they really like it, and they talk about how much of an impact it made on their life.

Then, clients start coming to you...because of your book. They already know who you are, how you work, and what you believe. And you don't need to sell them anymore. They sign because they were so impressed with the book, they already know they want to work with you.

Then, you get requests to speak. Some of them even want to pay you. And you go speak, and people look at you differently. They listen when you talk, they applaud when you are done, and they want to talk to you afterward.

Then, media inquiries. You do a few podcasts. The host wants to talk to you about the ideas in your book. People talk to you about a podcast they heard you on, or a blog post they read about you in.

Then, all kinds of new opportunities come in that you honestly never would have guessed. Things that weren't even on your radar before the book are now coming to you. Requests for consulting, for proposals, job offers—all kinds of things you didn't even realize were out there.

And of course, more and more clients.

Then, when it settles down and you have reached a new level that has become normal to you, you're used to being called an author and you realize something...you see yourself differently.

You now realize that you really did have something important to contribute, and that people you don't even know have had their lives changed for the better because you put your knowledge and your story down in a book.

You know for sure that your work matters to people. You know you have left a legacy behind that can't ever be taken away.

I've seen this exact scenario play out hundreds upon hundreds of times.

Scribe's site is bursting with stories and videos of real authors telling stories just like this.

This story can be yours.

It's possible...you just have to follow the instructions in this book.

It won't be easy, it will take a lot of effort, but it's there for the taking.

You just have to do it.

## WHAT THIS BOOK WILL TEACH YOU

In this book, we teach you everything you need to know to make sure you write a great book—one that shares your story and your knowledge, impacts readers' lives, and cements your legacy:

- How to pick the perfect book topic, one that both displays your knowledge and impacts the reader's life.
- Make sure there will be an audience waiting to buy your book, before you write it.
- Write a book to build your brand.
- Ensure your book gets you an ROI.
- Set yourself up for success before you even start writing your book.
- Figure out how much of your story should be in your book.
- Exactly how to structure your book so you get it correct, but it's also easy for you to write.
- What the most common writing obstacles are, and how to beat them.
- Once you start writing, how to make sure your audience will love your book.
- Editing techniques to ensure your book sounds exactly right.
- Create the motivation and inspiration, on command, to sit down and write every day.
- Find the perfect book title.
- Price your book to maximize both sales and impact.
- Exactly who to use to help publish your book.
- The key to writing book marketing copy that sells.
- Getting to an amazing book cover.
- And of course, the most important thing you can do to make your book a success, that most authors get wrong.

## WHAT THIS BOOK WILL NOT TEACH YOU

There are a lot of books about how to write and publish a book, and to be honest, most of them aren't good. This by itself is no big deal; the problem is that those books only sell because they make

all kinds of unrealistic promises and exaggerated claims. Let me be very clear about what this book will not get you, so you don't confuse us with them:

- You won't learn an easy hack to write your book in a week, or a month. Any book you can write that fast is going to be terrible. Books are hard, and take time—that's why they're valuable.
- You aren't going to learn how to become a millionaire in the first month. A book is an important part of building your business or brand, but it's never the big moneymaker by itself.
- You won't learn how to become famous. Your book will help you be more well known in good ways to the people you care about, but TMZ won't be camped outside your house looking to get pictures (you don't want that anyway).
- You won't learn how to get a TED talk (but your book might help you get a TEDx talk).
- You won't learn the secret to being a media darling, and have Oprah and Ellen knocking down your door (but you will definitely learn how to get more media).
- You won't learn how to solve all your problems with a book. No snake oil here, sorry.

I know, you probably didn't expect any of that anyway. Just making sure I set expectations properly for this book (which I do in even more depth in the first chapter).

## WHY LISTEN TO ME?

Because I know how to write, publish, and market books.

My name is Tucker Max. I co-founded Scribe (along with the co-author of this book, Zach Obront), and I'm the primary author of this book.

I've written four *New York Times* Best Sellers, three of which hit #1. These four books have combined to spend almost ten years



on the best seller list, and have sold more than 4.5 million copies worldwide (as of 2019).

I'm one of four people, along with Malcolm Gladwell, Michael Lewis, and Brené Brown, who's had three books on the nonfiction *New York Times* Best Seller list at one time. I was named to *Time* Magazine's Most Influential People list, and a movie was made about one of my books.

Before founding my current company, I worked with authors like Tim Ferriss, Robert Greene, Peter Thiel, James Altucher, Dave Asprey, Seth Godin, and dozens of others on their books.

All told, I've been directly involved in writing, editing, publishing, or marketing over twenty-two *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* Best Sellers, that have combined to sell over 20 million copies worldwide.

Many of those books were written and published using this exact method. At Scribe—in only five years—we've worked with 1200+ authors, and the process I am about to detail for you comes directly from the experience of working with them. We've published some of the biggest hits and best-selling books of the past five years using this exact process.

Literally everything you will read in this book has been tested and proven to work, both at the highest levels of writing and publishing, and with regular people like you who are not professional writers.

I'm not saying this to brag, just to make a simple point: *you're in good hands*.

If the story I just told resonated, this is the right book for you.

Let's get started.



**PART 1**

**PREPARE  
TO WRITE  
YOUR BOOK**





# THE PROPER EXPECTATIONS FOR WRITING YOUR BOOK

*“The art of good decision-making is looking forward to and celebrating the tradeoffs, not pretending they don’t exist.”*

—SETH GODIN

Before you start writing your book, let’s talk about what can you expect during your journey.

At Scribe, we’ve helped over 1,200 authors write their books (as of summer 2019), and probably the #1 thing that separates those who finish their books from those who do not is having the proper expectations going in.

Why?

Because writing a book is hard, and if you’re not prepared for that fact, you’re far more likely to stall, and even quit. But if you know the difficulty of what’s coming, you can mentally prepare to get past those obstacles when they come (and *they will*).

These are the major expectations you should have as you write your book:

## **1. EXPECT THIS TO BE HARD**

Anyone who tells you that writing a book is easy is either trying to sell you something, has never written a book, or writes really bad books.

Books are hard to write.

And writing a good book is even harder.

To overcome this, you'll need to work hard. Yes, this should be obvious, but there are many people who seem to think, if only sub-consciously, that there is some "trick" to make writing your book easier.

There's not. There is no hack or trick or workaround.

If you want to write a good book, then expect that it will require hard work from you.

## **2. EXPECT TO GET TIRED**

Writing is tiring (especially if you do it correctly).

Expect to get tired when you write, and expect that it will drain you. Make sure to take the steps you need to be both rested and energized when you write.

I can't tell you precisely what to do for proper self-care; that all depends on you. Maybe going for a walk with your dog is fine, maybe you need to get more sleep.

The point is not the details; the point is to know it's coming and do what you need to in order to prepare—and actually do it.

### 3. EXPECT TO BE CONFUSED

Writing a book is inherently confusing. It is not easy to properly position and structure a book, not to mention the actual writing. On top of that, I will tell you to do things you've probably never heard before, or give advice that seems counterintuitive.

But what you'll find as you work the Scribe Method is that while some of the things we recommend might *seem* unusual, they actually WORK really well—which is ultimately what matters the most.

If you approach the instructions like Daniel did in *The Karate Kid*, you'll be great. If you didn't see the movie, in *The Karate Kid*, Mr. Miyagi had Daniel do a bunch of isolated tasks that seemed to have nothing to do with karate: painting fences, waxing cars, etc. Daniel got frustrated and annoyed. But then, when he started doing karate, he realized that those seemingly unconnected movements formed the basis for karate.

This book will be similar. The exercises I put you through might seem disjointed at first, but no effort is wasted. The exercises are designed to build your book efficiently from the ground up, the first time—as long as you have the discipline to walk through them and do them right, it'll work.

### 4. EXPECT TO FEEL OVERWHELMED AT TIMES

There is a lot coming. It will be like drinking from a firehose. You WILL feel overwhelmed at times.

But understand this: overwhelm is NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO NEXT—which is exactly why you are reading this book. We solve this for you.

If you follow along and do what we say, you will ALWAYS know what to do next. We've made this process so that there are no surprises.

## 5. EXPECT TO BE EMOTIONALLY UNCOMFORTABLE (AND MAYBE AFRAID)

This is a big one. Writing a book will unquestionably push you emotionally, and expose fears and anxieties.

That is never easy, and never fun, but if you want to write a book, it's almost certainly going to be a necessity (don't worry, we will tell you what fears are coming and how to deal with them).

Do not discount this or minimize it. Fear is coming, and if you don't deal with it properly, it becomes the book killer.

This fear is normal and OK to have; you need to expect it and then learn to deal with it.

In fact, fear is such a big deal, it is the whole next chapter.

*“Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty.”*

—THEODORE ROOSEVELT

**REFERENCE:** If you want to know what to expect to get from your book, read Reference piece 9.1: Realistic and Unrealistic Expectations for a Book.





# THE SIX FEARS YOU (COULD) FACE WRITING YOUR BOOK

*“Your inward conflicts express themselves in outward disasters.”*

—KRISHNAMURTI

Now that you’re going to become an author, you’ll have to deal with all the fears and anxieties that come with writing.

You’re not alone. All authors start where you are right now. We start insecure, unsure, and afraid. We start with fear, and sometimes even terror, gripping us.

And sadly, for some authors, these fears stop them from ever writing their book at all.

I’ve been writing professionally for fifteen years, and the fears I’m about to detail are the same ones I’ve had to deal with in the past (and still deal with on a day-to-day basis).

This chapter will detail the common author fears, explain how they are destructive to books, and provide insight into how you

can reframe those fears to help you. You may not have every one of the six I list below, but chances are you will deal with at least four at some point in the process.

[In the next chapter, I will show you a specific set of tactics for how to deal with the fears you face as you write, so you can finish your book.]

#### **FEAR: “I DON’T HAVE A BOOK IN ME.”**

##### **ALTERNATE EXPRESSIONS OF THIS FEAR:**

- “I’m afraid there’s no book in me.”
- “I’m afraid I don’t have anything to say.”
- “What if I’m not an author?”
- “Who am I to write a book?”

##### **HOW THIS FEAR WILL IMPACT YOUR BOOK**

It’s very common for an author to be afraid that they don’t have the knowledge in them to write a book. Or even worse, that they don’t deserve to be an author.

For most people, this is a version of what’s referred to as Imposter Syndrome.

Imposter Syndrome is when someone—even a very accomplished person with a lot of experience and credentials—believes they don’t actually know what everyone thinks they know. They believe their ideas are either wrong or invalid, or that everyone already knows what they know. People with Imposter Syndrome have this idea in their heads that everyone else has it figured out, but they are the imposter.

In the most extreme cases, Imposter Syndrome is when authors feel that their book will expose them as frauds or as fakers.

## EXAMPLE OF AN AUTHOR WITH THIS FEAR

We worked with a consultant, Jonathan Dison, on his book, *The Consulting Economy*. He's a management consultant who had his own consulting firm that was doing very well. Hundreds of people he'd worked with throughout the years had asked him to write a book, one that would detail the method he used to help them transition from corporate employee to independent consultant.

Despite all these people asking him for the book, he put it off because he didn't believe he was enough of an expert to write a book. Even though he literally made the life-changing transition himself, and had coached hundreds of people through it—at some level *he didn't believe he actually knew anything*.

I can't tell you how many times Jonathan said, "Tucker, I have no idea what I'm doing."

I would then walk him through how he helped people transition from corporate employee to independent consultant. I had him explain his process to me, and then tell me about the people he'd helped, and have him tell me what they told him about his advice (always gushing praise).

I know, it's funny to laugh at this from a distance—even Jonathan laughs at it now, but this was a real issue for him when he was beginning his book.

That's what's so great about this fear—it's usually easy to understand if it's based in reality. Just ask yourself: *are people coming to you and asking you for, or paying you for, your knowledge?*

If so, then you clearly have a book in you, as long as the book is just you sharing that knowledge with people. You can overcome your Imposter Syndrome by focusing on that fact alone.

## FEAR: “I’M AFRAID MY BOOK ISN’T ORIGINAL ENOUGH.”

ALTERNATE EXPRESSIONS OF THIS FEAR:

- “I don’t think I have anything new to say.”
- “Everything I have to say is stuff everyone already knows.”
- “I’m afraid this has already been said.”
- “My book won’t be any different from other books on this topic.”

## HOW THIS FEAR WILL IMPACT YOUR BOOK

The funny thing with Jonathan Dison (from the example above) is that once he admitted that he knew something, he’d say, “But this is obvious, no one needs to be told this!”

This is a common feeling. And it’s almost always wrong.

Many authors have the idea that a valid book must have a new insight that no one has ever considered.

That’s ridiculous. Very few books are profoundly original—and the few that are tend not to be that valuable (because true originality demands that the idea be far too esoteric to be useful for most people).

A book is valuable if *the knowledge within it is accessible and usable to the audience.*

If you can write a book on a deeply covered topic, providing a unique perspective that sheds new light on the subject and helps your audience *understand something they were missing*, that is very valuable.

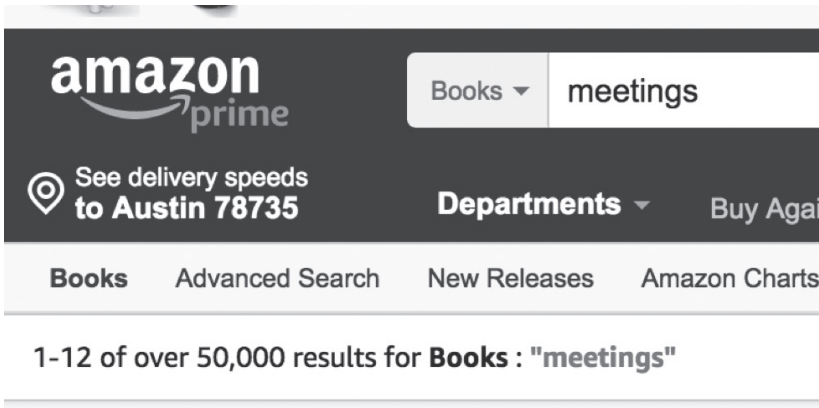
Even if you feel you don’t have a brand-new perspective on the subject, if you have a unique voice and perspective around key concepts, tailored for your audience, and can curate old ideas in a new way, you will help them see old concepts in a way that finally clicks for them.

No reader cares if the idea is new or old. They only care if it's USEFUL TO THEM.

#### EXAMPLE OF AN AUTHOR WITH THIS FEAR

My favorite example of this is *Meetings Suck* by Cameron Herold.

How many business books are there on meetings? According to Amazon, there are 50,000.



Surely if there was one book that did not need to be written, it was this one, right?

That's what Cameron thought at first.

We walked through what he knew, and helped him realize that though his methodology for meetings had no single insight that was truly original, the way that he combined all his insights and presented a complete plan for how to run a meeting was deeply useful to everyone he coached and taught.

With 105 reviews and 45,000 copies sold, it's obvious that his take is engaging with people in a way that none of the other books on meetings have.

That's why *Meetings Suck* has done so well—because it explained a lot of old ideas in a way that no one else had before.

This is a key aspect of the Scribe Method (which we'll get into in detail soon). We have our authors look deeply at who derives value from their knowledge, which helps the author define their audience. Once they know their audience, they can then think, "What did I teach those people that they found valuable to their lives?" This will force you to clearly define your audience and the value that you are providing to them, thus ensuring that your fear doesn't come true.

#### **FEAR: "I'M AFRAID MY BOOK WON'T BE GOOD ENOUGH."**

##### **ALTERNATE EXPRESSIONS OF THIS FEAR:**

- "I'm afraid my book won't be perfect."
- "I'm afraid I put too much in."
- "I'm afraid I didn't put in enough."
- "I'm afraid I'm going to forget everything I want to say."
- "I'm afraid of leaving things out."

##### **HOW THIS FEAR WILL IMPACT YOUR BOOK**

This fear is almost always perfectionism. How is perfectionism related to fear?

As the author dives into the book, they become obsessed with every detail. They fret over every word, every punctuation mark, and every phrasing.

Books can get stuck here in various ways:

1. The author will try to put everything they know into the book, and this causes the book to bloat and become unmanageable.
2. The author won't stick to a subject and will jump around to different ideas.

3. The author's perfectionism becomes an excuse to delay or avoid actually working on the book.
4. The author edits and adds content in never-ending cycles, spinning in circles and never actually finishing the book.

This is not about trying to make the book as good as possible. Excessive obsession with every detail—beyond the point of reason—is a way of masking a fear that *the book is not good enough*. Authors will get stuck in one of the perfectionism rabbit holes so they can avoid publishing the book.

#### EXAMPLE OF AN AUTHOR WITH THIS FEAR

Deb Gabor is a great example of this. Deb is a brilliant brand strategist. She's worked with companies like Dell, NBC, and Microsoft on their branding strategy, and she wrote a book called *Branding Is Sex*, about how companies can use branding in new and innovative ways.

She started the book confident in her knowledge and the value of the book to her readers. But as she moved further into the writing process, insecurity took hold. She wondered if anyone would find it valuable, and to compensate, she put more and more information into it.

As a result, the book, without any conscious intent, became far too big and unwieldy. Because she was trying to put everything she knew into the book, instead of just focusing on what her audience valued and wanted to know, she ended up with a book that was way too long. In order to compensate for her insecurity, she turned to perfectionism, and it almost ruined her book.

Thankfully, Deb is smart and self-aware, and once we walked her through what she was doing, she recognized it and was able to get her book refocused and sharply defined.

Another thing we explained to Deb is the saying that “art is never done, it's only abandoned.” The point is that being perfect is lit-

erally impossible. All you can do is the very best job you can right now, and then put it out to help your audience, and you're done.

That's the good thing about this fear: it forces you to define both your audience's needs very specifically, and how your book meets them. By using this fear productively, you force yourself to focus exclusively on the audience and what they want—and stop thinking about yourself, and how you look.

This enables you to write a better book, one that gives the audience what they are looking for, and thus gets you what you want.

#### **FEAR: "I'M AFRAID NO ONE WILL CARE ABOUT MY BOOK."**

##### ALTERNATE EXPRESSIONS OF THIS FEAR:

- "What if no one reads it?"
- "What if there is no audience?"
- "What if my book doesn't impact anyone?"
- "What if this is a waste of my time and effort?"
- "I'll be embarrassed if people criticize my book."

##### HOW THIS FEAR WILL IMPACT YOUR BOOK

This is a pretty simple fear, and it generally comes up in people who are trying to find a way to avoid other deeper fears (like the "looking stupid" fear, covered below). Usually, this fear manifests by an author convincing themselves that no one will care about their book.

**Paradoxically, this is almost always suffered by the authors who have the books that are most impactful on others** (the authors who *should* worry about this, almost never do—such is life, right?).

##### EXAMPLE OF AN AUTHOR WITH THIS FEAR

Dr. Douglas Brackmann grew up with ADHD and was told his



whole life that he has a disability. He refused to see it that way. He spent his life seeking to understand where ADHD comes from (it's actually genetic and serves an adaptive purpose) and how to utilize the energy and focus the condition creates to improve his life.

He solved this issue in his life, and then started training the highest performers—entrepreneurs, CEOs, pro athletes, inventors, and Navy SEALs—to learn how to perform even better using the techniques he had to learn to compensate for his ADHD.

But when it came time to write a book, he wasn't sure anyone would care.

Think about that for a second: he was **ALREADY** training some of the highest performers in the world, but he still wasn't sure that anyone would care about his book?

This sort of thing happens because when an author knows their subject so well, they often think it's obvious or easy, and so they discount their knowledge. They forget that the exact people they're writing for do not have this knowledge—and are often desperate for it.

In Dr. Brackmann's case, this happened. Look at the Amazon Reviews:

The tools that Dr. Brackmann gave me, all of which you will find in his book, allowed me to find inner peace and happiness and realize my true potential...I could recognize my soul again, lift myself up and design the life I had always dreamed of. Dr. Brackmann helped me understand how my mind worked and helped me harness the Driven characteristics I had so that in less than 1 year I could build a 7 figure business with no outside help, find the girl of my dreams, and pursue a life of mastery in many different areas. I highly recommend this book for anyone that has a desire to find more peace while fulfilling their potential.

This fear can turn into motivation if you use it right. If you're afraid no one will care, then find someone in real life who *does* care about what you have to say, teach them what you know, and then look at the transformation in their life.

If you can see that, see the impact it makes on them, then it should be much easier to finish your book, because it's no longer about you—it's about them and other people like them.

### **FEAR: "I'M AFRAID MY BOOK WILL UPSET PEOPLE."**

#### **ALTERNATE EXPRESSIONS OF THIS FEAR:**

- "I'm afraid this book is going to make someone mad."
- "I'm afraid of being judged."
- "I don't want my book to upset my current clients."
- "I can't say these things about people."
- "What if my friends read it and hate it?"
- "What if I sound bitchy?"

#### **HOW THIS FEAR WILL IMPACT YOUR BOOK**

This fear is a major book killer. The fear of judgment is crippling to many authors, and prevents them from either writing their book, or from writing the book that they really want to write, or telling the stories they want to tell in their book.

Here's the simple fact about books: *if no one at all disagrees with what you are saying, then you aren't saying anything worth putting in a book.*

If I wrote a book about how the sky is blue, why would anyone care? Everyone already knows that. A book should make new claims, or reframe old information, or take a position that stands in opposition to conventional wisdom, or teach something new or different or contrary.

That's the entire point of a book—to help people find a new way to think about something or do something.

Let me say it again: **It's impossible to write a good book without taking some kind of risk, and saying something that someone, somewhere, might disagree with.**

#### EXAMPLE OF AN AUTHOR WITH THIS FEAR

Shannon Miles is a great example of this. Shannon wrote *The Third Option*, a book that explains how women do not have to choose between a career and a family, that they can actually create a life that gives them both.

There are many women who will claim that a woman's career should come first, and many others who will say family must come first. Shannon took the position that neither is true, that you can have both—which is upsetting to both sides.

Because Shannon knew that she was going to be heavily criticized and attacked from both sides, she hesitated about whether to write her book at all. Once she made the decision to move forward, she still found herself censoring her views and holding back.

Eventually Shannon got past this worry. She focused not on herself, but on her reader, and realized that by withholding her views or stories, she was not serving them; she was failing them—and betraying herself.

As a result, she wrote a book that has been extraordinarily well-received. She did get some negative feedback of course, but it was overwhelmed by all the positive response and thanks from women who felt like she understood and spoke to them in a way no one else had.

It's OK to admit you feel bad when people say bad things about

you. Even if what they say is wrong and unfair, and even if they are straight up lying about you—that still hurts.

It's OK to admit it, and it's OK to feel all the terrible feelings that come with that. The human brain is designed such that it interprets social violence almost exactly the same as physical violence. It hurts when people attack you, and I will never tell you to block it out and pretend it doesn't bother you. That doesn't work.

But, if this is a fear you are facing, you have the option to see it as a gift.

If there are people who will criticize your position, that can force you to examine it from all angles and make sure your arguments are rock solid.

Also, opposition helps you find and galvanize your own audience of people, like Shannon did. If there are loud and angry people on only one side of a debate, it probably means the other side simply does not have a spokesperson. Your book puts you in that role.

Also, use this fear to make sure you are being fair to people and other arguments. It's okay to be conscious about the words you use and how they impact people. This does not mean you water down your position—in fact, your argument is strengthened when it is considerate of alternate viewpoints.

Finally, remember the iconic quote about this by Steven Pressfield:

Making a judgment, taking a stand and then acting against an injustice or acting to support excellence is the stuff of the everyman hero. If you are an aspiring artist and you wish to avoid “judgments,” you'll find that you have nothing to say.

## FEAR: “I’M AFRAID MY BOOK WILL MAKE ME LOOK STUPID.”

ALTERNATE EXPRESSIONS OF THIS FEAR:

- “I’m afraid I’m going to look stupid.”
- “What if I get all one-star reviews?”
- “What if everyone who reads it, hates it?”
- “What will people think if there’s a typo?”
- “I’m afraid something will be wrong with my book, and I’ll look stupid to everyone I know.”

## HOW THIS FEAR WILL IMPACT YOUR BOOK

The biggest unspoken fear that I believe (virtually) every author has is that they will embarrass themselves. I saved this for last because almost every fear above boils down to this one.

This fear is very rational. For many professionals, writing a bad book is actually worse than writing no book at all. This is because for someone with a certain level of status, *a bad book will hurt their career*.

For others, it goes even further. For some, the book is very attached to their identity. They see the book as an extension of themselves, and they are worried that if the book isn’t well received, then it means they will personally look bad. No one wants to look flawed to their peers, especially with something as personal as a book.

This fear can get so bad, people will literally forego the tens of thousands of dollars they pay us to help them write a book—all because they’re afraid to hit the final “publish my book” button.

I’m not exaggerating at all. We have authors who will work for months, do all the difficult editing and revisions, go through the entire publishing process, and then, when there is literally nothing left to do besides give the final approval, will completely ghost on us.

They can’t face their fear that the book isn’t good, so they avoid even talking about it.

## EXAMPLE OF AN AUTHOR WITH THIS FEAR

Every author we've ever worked with—without exception—has had some version of this fear (and I've had this fear as well).

Joey Coleman is my favorite example. He even wrote about his fear in his book, *Never Lose a Customer Again*:

But not long after that, I started to doubt myself and I began to question my decision to write a book.

*Did I really have a good enough message that could carry an entire book?*

*Would the readers find as much value in the eight-phase process as my clients had over the last twenty years?*

*Would I be able to explain all the nuances of the framework properly in three hundred pages?*

*Was I going to make myself look stupid?*

As these thoughts of fear, doubt, and uncertainty flooded my mind, I grew distant. I started rescheduling planned phone calls with the team, pushing them off for both real and fabricated reasons alike. I used any excuse I could think of that would allow me to delay the next step in the process.

This went on for several months until one night when my cell phone rang unexpectedly. The caller ID indicated it was Tucker's cell phone, and a quick mental scan of my calendar let me know this was an unexpected call. I decided to answer anyway.

Tucker got me to open up, admit that I was having feelings of remorse and regret, and assured me that the emotions I was feeling were natural for any author. He told me a story about how he felt the same way when he released his first major book, which ironically enough went

on to be a *New York Times* bestseller, selling more than a million copies worldwide since its release.

Tucker helped me see that I did indeed have a book in me and that he believed it would be valuable to many people. He persuaded me to trust the process, come back into the fold, and continue the work. That is how powerful buyer's remorse is.

Even though I deeply understood the perils of the cognitive dissonance that marks this feeling, even though *I teach this to companies*, I could not separate myself from these emotions when I was in that position.

Oops—I'm human too.

Remember how I told you that fear is not in and of itself a bad thing? If you allow the fear to focus you and become motivation to focus and work hard, then it can help you. It can be fuel. It can help ensure you do everything necessary to create the best book possible.

But what about when that fear becomes overwhelming? When it seems like your fear—any of these fears—is too much? What then?

The next chapter deals with this exact question: how can you handle your fears once they come up and won't go away?







# HOW TO BEAT YOUR FEARS (AND FINISH YOUR BOOK)

*“Life is growth. You grow or you die.”*

—PHIL KNIGHT

## ALL AUTHORS FACE FEAR

At some point and to some level, you’re going to be afraid of writing your book.

Don’t feel bad. EVERY author feels the same way (including me). I’ve written seven books (so far) but should have written ten (maybe more). I lost at least three books to fear.

I get it. I’ve been there. It’s an awful feeling to know I had these books in me and never got to them, only because I was afraid to write them.

## THE PURPOSE OF FEAR

The first thing to remember about fear is that it's not necessarily bad. Fear serves a purpose.

On a primal level, fear is an adaptive response that helps us survive by motivating us to protect ourselves from danger. It is both *natural and helpful* in many cases. You evolved to fear things that can hurt you, and fear works to help keep you safe.

The problem with fear is when you let small or irrational fears stop you from doing something you should be doing. Then fear is destructive, not protective.

Some of the fears you face will make sense, while others will seem ridiculous if you rationally analyze them. That's normal. Fears aren't always rational (nor are they intended to be).

Don't shame yourself if you feel any of the fears listed, even if you think they are irrational. Even if they are irrational, the feeling of fear is still real, and you have to address it in order to move forward with your book.

Don't beat yourself up if fear is holding you back. It's beaten me before, as it's beaten almost every author at some point or another.

## HOW TO BEAT YOUR FEARS

You can win this fight against fear. How do you do it? And, even more importantly, how do you prevent this fear in the future?

***You train your emotional brain to reframe the fear you feel and then use it as fuel to action, instead of inaction.***

I'm going to show you the specific, step-by-step method we use to help our authors overcome their fear, but first, let's actually reframe what fear is.

These are the symptoms of anxiety:

1. Heart rate raises (adrenaline increase)
2. Fight or flight response kicks in, you get jittery, break out into a cold sweat (cortisol surge)
3. You have tunnel vision, can't see or think beyond your fear (norepinephrine increase)

These are the symptoms of excitement:

1. Heart rate raises (adrenaline increase)
2. Fight or flight response kicks in, you get jittery, break out into a cold sweat (cortisol surge)
3. You have tunnel vision, can't see or think beyond your excitement (norepinephrine increase)

Fear is excitement...with a negative frame.

Excitement is fear...with a positive frame.

Think of a roller coaster. Some people will spend hundreds of dollars and hours waiting in line to ride the scariest one they can find.

Other people will have a panic attack at the thought of going on one.

Same ride. Just a different frame.

Now are you starting to see how to beat your fear?

Here are the steps to use to do it:

### **STEP 1: LIST ALL YOUR FEARS**

Ask yourself, what are you afraid might happen if you write a book? Write down the fears you are feeling. Write down every fear or anxiety.

Don't run from, deny, or minimize your fears.

Really take a moment and pause to think about ALL your fears. Recognize them, acknowledge them, and identify them.

If you are having a hard time articulating your fears, the last chapter discussed the most common fears; that should be a pretty good guide.

Don't worry if this list is long. It should have at least a few fears, and if it has a bunch, then so be it. In fact, the more you list (that are true), the better. That means you are being honest with yourself.

## **STEP 2: ASK YOURSELF, "IS THIS POSSIBLE?"**

For each fear, ask yourself: "Is this fear possible? Is there any chance it will come to pass?"

Many times people are anxious about vague and undefined fears. If that's the case, forcing yourself to name the fear and realize it's not even possible at all can make it go away.

For example, we have authors who work with us that say, "I'm afraid that I'll write this book but that I won't be able to get it published." That's not a realistic fear. They've paid us to do the publishing, we are going to do it.

This being said, most fears will be possible, even if only a small possibility. For example, continuing with the above example, you could say instead, "I'm afraid that I'll write this book and I will look bad, and it will hurt my professional reputation."

That's a real fear with real consequences—if you write a bad book, you *will* look bad. Yes, it is highly unlikely that the book will be bad, but it is *possible*.

For fears that are impossible, disregard and cross them off the list. For the ones that could possibly come to pass, keep going.

**STEP 3: ASK YOURSELF, “IF THIS FEAR CAME TO PASS, WHAT WOULD THE CONSEQUENCES BE?”**

It’s okay to think of the worst-case scenario here. In fact, it’s preferable. If you articulate the worst thing that could happen, then you at least know what it is and can now move forward with a clear understanding of what there is to lose.

There is nothing wrong with this—being realistic is a big part of defeating fear, so write down what the consequences are.

For some of the fears, the consequences will be minor. For example, if the fear is “I’m afraid I sound bitchy,” the consequences of that are probably benign.

For other fears, the consequences could be larger. For example, if the fear is, “I’m afraid that I’ll write this book and I will look bad, and it will hurt my professional reputation,” the consequences might be substantial.

And don’t shortchange the impact of the consequence. If you are afraid of something like this happening: “I will write a bad book and people will think I’m stupid and my company will fail, and I’ll be a joke and go broke. I’ll lose my house and my family, and I’ll go hungry and die cold and alone on the streets,” then write it out.

Whatever you fear the consequences might be, write them down.

**STEP 4: ASK YOURSELF, “WHEN I WRITE MY BOOK, WHAT BENEFIT WILL I GET FOR MYSELF?”**

You could say, “If I write my book, then I will increase my authority

and visibility in my field, get more speaking gigs, and be able to grow my business.”

Note: You’re going to specifically define these benefits as the very next part of the process, but put something down now, even if you come back and refine them later.

Then speak these benefits out loud, making sure to frame yourself as excited about them.

Literally say, “YOU should be excited, because this book will get YOU increased authority, additional speaking, and a bigger business.”

Do it three times.

And you **MUST** say it **OUT LOUD**. And make sure to phrase it as you, talking to yourself.

I know, this sounds hokey, but saying it out loud has a very different impact on you than just thinking it. Without going too deep into the psychological explanation, saying it out loud makes it more real to your brain.

[If you want to know why saying this out loud makes such a difference, Google “inner speech of behavioral regulation” or “Von Restorff effect.” Warning: these will take you down a serious rabbit hole.]

#### **STEP 5: ASK YOURSELF, “WHO’S HELPED BY YOUR BOOK, AND WHAT DO THEY GET?”**

Did you notice a trend with the fears you mentioned? What did they all have in common?

It’s actually pretty simple: *All fear is selfish.*

When you're afraid, you are focused only on yourself and your own needs. Fear puts you into survival mode. Fear makes it impossible to see outside of yourself. Fear traps you inside yourself.

I don't mean this to say selfishness is bad. It's not. Like fear, selfishness has its place in your life. I say this to help you refocus on a main reason you probably want to write your book: to give something back, and make an impact on other people.

Imagine the person you will be helping. Think of them very specifically. Imagine the pain they are in now. Feel the suffering they have because they haven't read your book.

How much of a difference will your knowledge make in their lives?

Your book is important to them. It matters to their lives. That's why you are writing it. They *need your book*.

Think about how much they need the knowledge you have. Imagine your audience after they've read your book. What will their lives be like then? How much better will they be because of your book?

Connect with that feeling. Can you do it—for them?

You want to write your book to help other people solve a problem that you used to have, one that's very painful to you. Helping those people is a big part of your motivation. And picturing those people in need, and you letting them down if you do not write your book, is a very powerful motivator.

Using this motivation turns out to be the ultimate fear-buster: *most people who can't be courageous for themselves can easily be courageous for other people.*

And of course, if you just think about who your book is intended to help, you can focus on them. And if you do that—if you focus on

the reader—you will actually end up looking good. [We'll talk a lot more about this later in the positioning section of the book.]

#### **STEP 6: ASK YOURSELF, “WHAT IF I JUST QUIT?”**

Ask yourself, “If I do NOT write my book, what will happen? Who will suffer, and how?” and write down everything that happens if you quit the book.

This is about using your anxiety against itself. If you ask yourself these questions, often your brain reverses itself, and begins to argue for writing the book.

This works because of the peculiar way that human brains work. Now that you have “seen” the benefits you can get from writing a book, picturing yourself quitting will trigger one of the strongest psychological reactions in humans: loss aversion.

Once you imagine yourself with all these benefits, and then you imagine yourself losing them—things shift in your brain. Your fear doesn't necessarily go away. It just takes a back seat to loss aversion.

This is one of the most replicated findings in social science; people are far more motivated by losing something than by gaining something. By already picturing yourself with benefits and gains, you now want to keep them.

#### **STEP 7: MAKE YOUR DECISION**

This step is very simple: review everything you've written so far, and then decide: are you going to move forward with your book? Is it worth it?

Make no mistake, this is a decision, and it is NOT assumed or automatic that you should write the book. In fact, there are plenty of times people look at their lists and realize that the risks of the



potential consequences outweigh the benefits, and they decide not to do the book. And that is fine.

In the Guided Author Workshops we run, I have people literally read the major parts of each step out loud, and then either commit or not, out loud in front of the entire group. It works really well as a way to take this out of your head and make it real.

I mean it, you really should say your decision out loud. When you say it and hear it, it makes it different.

#### **STEP 8: ASK YOURSELF, “WHAT’S THE PLAN TO AVOID THESE CONSEQUENCES?”**

Now that you have committed to your book, to move past your fear, you need to lay out precisely what the plan is to avoid or minimize the consequences.

This is because fears often partly originate from a subconscious reaction to a poor plan, or a lack of a plan (this is also where procrastination comes from).

For example, if the fear is: “I’m afraid that I’ll write this book and I will look bad, and it will hurt my professional reputation,” it’s highly likely that fear comes from, in part, the fact that you’re not confident in your writing skills and don’t yet have a clear idea of who will help you edit your book. The plan might be as simple as having a professional editor and two colleagues review the manuscript before you decide to publish it, to make sure you look good.

You may have to come back and fill in parts of this section later, and that’s okay. For example, if the fear is, “I’m afraid I won’t have time to write the book,” well, right now you don’t have a plan to make time to write the book (we get to that part of the plan later).

But don’t worry—by the time you finish this book, you will have a

specific, detailed, actionable plan, so you can know for certain that if you follow it, you'll get your book done.

#### **STEP 9: ASK YOURSELF, "HOW CAN I USE THIS FEAR TO HELP ME?"**

Fear can actually help you, if you take the right perspective on it.

Remember the roller coaster example. You cannot choose your physiological response to a roller coaster, but with some practice, you CAN choose how you *interpret* that physiological response. Your subjective experience can be "afraid" or "thrilled," but the body treats the physical response the same.

This means you can reframe fear into excitement, and retrain your brain to not be afraid of writing your book—and in fact to harness that energy to help you write your book.

Now look at each fear you wrote, and ask, "How can I use this fear to help me?"

For example, if the fear is "I'm afraid that I'll write this book and I will look bad, and it will hurt my professional reputation," then you can use the energy of that fear to motivate you to put in the work to do a really good book—to ensure that you do not look bad.

This is possible for each fear. Every fear has the seeds of its solution in it, if you can find them and use them.

**PART 2**

**POSITION  
YOUR BOOK**





# WHAT IS BOOK POSITIONING (AND WHY DOES IT MATTER)?

*“The task is not so much to see what no one has seen, but to think what nobody has yet thought, about that which everybody sees.”*

—SCHRÖDINGER

Positioning is the most crucial part of both writing and marketing your book. If you put in the work to properly position your book now, you will reap the benefits for years.

What is book positioning?

Simply stated, book positioning is **the place your book occupies in the mind of your reader, and how that reader perceives your book as fulfilling their needs.**

That is the technical, industry definition of positioning. But really, positioning is about answering the question readers ask about every book:

*“Why should I read this book?”*

It's important to understand that *you can't write or market yourself out of a positioning problem*. If you get it right, positioning makes both the writing and marketing of the book easy, and ensures you get what you want from your book.

If you do not take this seriously, and get your positioning wrong, then almost nothing you can do will save your book or make it successful.

### **A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY OF BOOK POSITIONING**

For a hundred years in the old traditional publishing model, every agent had to have the positioning discussion with an editor before they would buy a book.

Strictly speaking, in traditional publishing circles the positioning discussion only revolved around how the book fit into traditional sales categories. That's where the term comes from. It's literally a discussion of what *position* on the bookstore shelves the book is supposed to go, because in the twentieth century, the market for books was essentially synonymous with the needs of bookstores.

This is obviously no longer the case. Most books are now sold digitally, categories don't matter as much, and the majority of physical books are not sold in bookstores, but rather in non-book retail stores like Costco and Walmart that don't even have categorized shelves.

Furthermore, when all book publishing was done by traditional publishing companies, the only positioning decisions they cared about concerned whether books would sell, because that's how they made money.

### **MODERN BOOK POSITIONING**

None of this is true anymore. Now, most books are published out-

side of the old, traditional models, and most nonfiction books are not monetized directly.

Here is modern reality: **most nonfiction authors make the majority of their money from other things that a book gets them, and *not from sales of their books.***

You can always make money by selling copies, of course. But making money indirectly from a book means you're using your book as a marketing tool to get you something else that produces revenue.

For example, a book will help you elevate your authority, increase your visibility, and get you more clients. This strategy fundamentally changes the way books are conceived and positioned (more on this later).

At Scribe, we've adapted the old positioning process so that instead of serving the publishing company's needs, it serves your needs as the author.

## **POSITIONING DONE RIGHT ENSURES YOUR BOOK WILL WORK**

In the next three sections of this book, I will lead you through our positioning process, using the exact steps and questions we use to help authors refine and crystallize their ideas into well-positioned books that will get them results. These are the three steps to positioning your book:

### **1. DETERMINE YOUR OBJECTIVES**

*What result must the book produce for you to be a success?*

### **2. TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE**

*Who is the audience that must be reached for your goal to be achieved?*

### 3. LOCK IN YOUR BOOK IDEA

*What is your book about, and why will your audience care?*

Everything is connected.

The objectives necessitate a certain audience.

The audience has their needs that must be met by the book.

And the book idea must attract and provide value to the audience, so you'll reach the objectives you want to achieve.

It all ties together in a simple formula. If you follow it, you'll pick a book topic that provides value for both you and the audience.

That's the key thing to remember with your book: ***nobody cares about you, or your book. They only care about what your book can do for them.***

This point is so important, I am going to begin and end the piece with it:

Positioning answers the question in your reader's mind:

***"Why should I read this book?"***

If you do not know the answer to that question before you start writing, chances are you will write a book that does not serve an audience...or you.





## FIGURE OUT YOUR BOOK OBJECTIVES

*“Focus on the target, and you’ll hit it. This gets you the trophy. Focus on the trophy, and you’ll miss the target. This gets you nothing.”*

—JEREMIE RUBY-STRAUSS

At Scribe, we start book positioning with objectives. This is because once you know what you want to accomplish with your book, it allows you to focus on writing the correct book to get those objectives.

Three basic questions help our authors discern the proper objectives:

### **QUESTION #1: HOW DO YOU WANT YOUR BOOK TO SERVE YOUR READERS? WHAT WILL THEY GET OUT OF IT?**

While your book can get you myriad benefits, *the content of the book is not for you—it’s for the reader.*

Readers are the audience for the book, and they will support and share your book (which helps you) only once they’ve gotten real value from it.

We begin by having our authors identify how they see their book serving readers. Once you can pinpoint the benefit your readers will receive, you'll see how to connect their support to your goals. Here are some common ways authors want their book to serve their readers:

1. **Help Solve A Problem/Get Something They Want:** This is usually the big one, and can vary across a wide range of benefits, but the point is that every reader is buying your book because they anticipate it is going to get them something they want—so what is that thing?
2. **Gain Knowledge/Wisdom/Information:** Sometimes that thing the author wants will come from learning something, so this is often intimately tied with solving a problem, but they are not always the exact same thing.
3. **Inspired/Motivated/Empowered:** This is about how the readers will feel coming out of the book.
4. **New Perspective:** This is not as common as the above, but still fairly frequent. Many authors want to give readers an entirely new way to look at something.

## EXAMPLES

From a book about learning faster and more effectively:

- First and foremost, I want to inspire them, and convince them that they aren't stuck where they are now—that they can improve and unlock their full potential to learn anything and everything, fast.
- I'd like to give them tools and techniques (and then the confidence) to actually learn faster.
- Finally, I'd like to open their eyes to an alternative way of living, from health to lifestyle design, to their career. I want to ultimately inspire and empower them to live the lives of their dreams.

From a book that teaches women how to sell like men, but ethically and with heart:

- The women who read this book will feel empowered to ask for the sale confidently.
- The women who read this book will be able to use the sales strategies I share to increase their conversion rate without ever feeling pushy or sales-y.
- The women who read this book will feel like, “If she can do it, I can do it too!”
- The women who read this book will feel inspired to stand in the face of fear and go for their dreams in sales.

**QUESTION #2: IMAGINE IT’S A FEW YEARS AFTER YOUR BOOK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED. WHAT HAS THE BOOK HELPED YOU ACCOMPLISH THAT MADE THE EFFORT WORTHWHILE?**

There are an almost infinite array of benefits a book can get for an author, but most of them fall into one of these six popular objectives:

1. **Raise Visibility/Profile:** books can increase visibility in any number of ways, like making it easier to gain media exposure or raise your profile in your niche.
2. **Increase Authority/Credibility:** books help an author establish authority and gain credibility within their field.
3. **Get New Clients/Opportunities:** books can easily help generate new business and other opportunities across a variety of platforms and venues in multiple ways.
4. **Speaking Engagements:** a book is almost a necessity for becoming a paid speaker, or often getting booked for any public speaking at all.
5. **Leave a Legacy:** a book can help establish a legacy, and pass your story on to others.
6. **Impact Others:** This is somewhat covered by the first question, but you can put it here as well. For some authors, this is often the main benefit to them. They either do not care about what

they'll get from their book, or they care about that only as a secondary benefit. Note that for any book to be effective, it has to impact others—it's just that some authors place a much higher emphasis on this than others.

Obviously, the details of each of these depend on your specific field and profession, but any of those objectives can be very realistic objectives.

Note: The more specific you are with your objectives, the better.

## EXAMPLES

From the same book about learning faster and more effectively:

- We have built our B2C business to over \$10M a year, in large part by leveraging the free book funnel and the exposure of the book, despite the fact that I'm less involved in the business than ever.
- We are running the world's largest learning summit, with over 500 people a year paying to attend.
- We're doing over \$1M a year in corporate and enterprise subscriptions, because of the exposure and credibility of the book and the event.
- We have sparked research, conversation, and debate about education reform, and are working on a few not-for-profit pilot initiatives to improve education.

From the same book that teaches women how to sell like men, but ethically and with heart:

- I have a large following of female entrepreneurs and my brand is recognized and well-respected.
- I'm a sought-out speaker on the topic of sales and female empowerment. I have done a TEDx talk and been asked to speak at large, recognizable conferences like SXSW and Traffic & Conversion Summit. I will be asked to speak in venues

with thousands of audience members and be paid \$20K for a speaking engagement.

- I frequently get messages from people (women and men) who thank me for writing this book because it genuinely helped them.

#### WHAT ARE UNREALISTIC BOOK OBJECTIVES?

Of course everyone secretly hopes their book will sell millions of copies and be a breakout success—but if you make that your objective, you are setting yourself up for failure. Those are not realistic goals. If you set realistic goals, you give your book a chance to actually succeed.

In fact, the most important thing you can do with this question is kill your fantasies and set objectives that are achievable. These are unrealistic objectives:

- Sell a million copies the first year
- Be asked to do a TED talk
- Become a famous author
- Be a *New York Times* Best Selling author
- Get on Oprah/Ellen
- Fill an ill-defined emotional void

Here's the thing about these objectives: they are not literally impossible. People have accomplished them all. We've had a few of our authors do them.

But they are exceedingly rare, and most books have no shot at these objectives. The more you focus on realistic objectives, the better your book will be at hitting the audience you need to hit in order to succeed.

**REFERENCE:** If you want to read a deeper dive into what exactly a book can get you, both in terms of branding and tangible ROI, read Reference piece 9.2: How Writing A Book Can Build Your Brand, and 9.3: How To Make Money With Your Book.

**QUESTION #3: WHAT'S THE *SINGLE EVENT* THAT WILL HAPPEN BECAUSE OF THE BOOK THAT WILL CAUSE YOU TO SAY, "THIS WAS ALL WORTH IT!"? THE THING THAT WILL MAKE YOU "BREAK OUT THE CHAMPAGNE" AND CELEBRATE?**

We ask this question to check on alignment. If your "champagne moment" doesn't match any of your stated objectives, then you need to really ask yourself why, and examine your alignment.

**GOOD EXAMPLES:**

- "When I book my first speaking gig."
- "When I get my first client from the book."
- "When my book is finally published."
- "When I hold my book in my hand."

**BAD EXAMPLES (NOTE THESE ARE REAL THINGS AUTHORS HAVE SAID TO US):**

- "When I sell a million copies and get on every bestseller list and Malcolm Gladwell asks me to co-write his next book and Oprah wants me on her show."
- "When I keynote TED and sell my company for a billion dollars."
- "When my book has an impact on my industry."
- "When my dad tells me he loves me."



## FIGURE OUT YOUR AUDIENCE

*“The only way on earth to influence other people is to talk about what they want and show them how to get it.”*

—DALE CARNEGIE

You can absolutely write a book without caring who your audience is. But don’t expect it to do well.

In fact, there’s a name for a book that is written without an audience in mind—it’s called a *diary*.

If you want your book to be successful and reach the objectives you set out for it, you need an audience, and you need to think about and define that audience beforehand.

Let’s start with a definition of what an audience is (for the purposes of a book):

***An audience is a single group of people that share the specific problem your book solves.***

Why does this matter? Because the key to writing a good book is

actually narrowing your audience down as much as possible—down to only the people your book is intended to help.

## AUDIENCE MISTAKES

Authors make two big mistakes when thinking about their audience:

### MISTAKE #1: GOING BROAD INSTEAD OF NICHE

Some authors start by thinking their book can potentially reach everyone. They dream about the millions of people that “could possibly” find their book appealing.

Don’t do that. There is literally no book ever written with an audience of *everyone*.

Not the Bible. Not the Koran. Not the Torah. Not *50 Shades*, or *Harry Potter*, or any other book.

If you think your book is for everyone, you are flat wrong.

In fact, even thinking that your book appeals to a wide audience is probably wrong. There are very few nonfiction books published each year that have an audience of more than even a hundred thousand.

The fact is, the large majority of books are completely unappealing to most people.

And that’s perfectly okay.

### BETTER FRAME: THE RICHES ARE IN THE NICHES

Imagine you’re searching for oil. Do you want to dig down only one foot, over ten miles wide? Or do you want to go down ten miles deep into the earth?



Which approach is going to strike oil?

Of course you go ten miles deep and a foot wide with your digging.

A book gives you the same choice, and almost all authors are better off putting their book into the “foot wide, miles deep” category.

Why go niche with your audience instead of broad?

First, it's very hard to write a book with wide appeal. Even professional writers who sell books for a living don't try and write overly broad books. They define a clear audience and then go after that audience.

The second reason is that attracting a wide audience doesn't help you. If you're like most nonfiction authors (and all of our clients), your goal is to use your book to establish your legacy, impact others, increase your authority, raise your visibility, drive new leads and clients, and possibly get you speaking engagements or other opportunities.

Your book is a marketing tool of sorts, not the product or service you care about selling.

You can absolutely appeal to multiple audiences, but generally speaking, the more audiences you try to reach, the worse your book will perform.

A focused book that appeals to a small audience is much more valuable than a broad subject book that is only marginally appealing to many audiences. This is because broad subjects, like general life advice, tend to not only be well covered already, but also tend to not be very actionable for people.

Most people read nonfiction because they expect it to provide a positive impact or ROI in their lives. They know it's specifically for them, and directly actionable for their lives.

Compare this to a book about a broad, general topic, like “how to be happy.” You might think everyone cares about being happy, and that is true to some extent, but unless you are really knowledgeable and already an expert about this subject AND you have an angle that has never been explored, it will be very hard to convince people that your book about happiness—as opposed to the thousands already out there by experts—is the one to read.

#### MISTAKE #2: THE AUTHOR DOESN'T KNOW WHY THEIR AUDIENCE WILL CARE

Here's the most important thing you must remember about your book:

***Your audience doesn't care about your book; they only care what your book GETS THEM.***

Readers won't care about your book if you cannot compellingly explain why it provides value to them.

Think about yourself when you decide whether or not to buy a book. Do you ever care about the author's goals as a reason for buying the book?

Of course not. You only buy a book if you think that *buying this book will help you*.

Well, that's precisely what your audience is going to do when they see your book on a shelf or on Amazon or on their friend's Facebook page. So you had better be able to answer that question:

***Why does your book matter to them?***

#### BETTER FRAME: IMAGINE TEACHING SOMEONE THAT PAYS FOR YOUR HELP

If you aren't sure why your book matters to your audience, then chances are very high you have made your book about you, and

have not spent any time thinking about who would read it. It's a common mistake that many authors make.

So instead, get back to the roots of why this book matters to you, what we talked about in the introduction: how can your knowledge help alleviate the pain and suffering of someone else?

Picture the exact person who you can help most. What would you say to them? How would you teach them what you know? How would that help them? Where would they be after they learned what you knew and applied it?

If you can picture that, then dialing in your audience should be fairly simple.

### MISTAKE #3: MIXING UP PSYCHOGRAPHICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

One of the common mistakes that authors make in targeting their audience is they focus too much on demographics, and not enough on psychographics.

Demographics explain “who” your buyer is, while psychographics explain “why” they buy. To summarize:

*Demographics = Who People Are*

- Sex
- Age
- Race
- Marital Status
- Social Class
- Income

*Example Demographic Information:*

- Female

- Aged 45-65
- Married, with children
- Dealing with issues of weight gain, diabetes, lack of energy, or hormonal imbalance
- Household income \$100K+

*Psychographics = How People Think*

- Emotions
- Values/Beliefs
- Attitudes
- Interests
- Opinions
- Tribal/Group Affiliation

*Example Psychographic Information:*

- Concerned with health and appearance
- Wants a healthy lifestyle, but doesn't have much time
- Enjoys going online in the evenings, big fan of Pinterest
- Tends to favor quality over economy
- Finds fulfillment in her career and family
- Values time with a small group of friends

Understanding the difference is important in modern marketing. The reality is that demographic data used to be all you needed to target and understand audiences, because so much of the market fell into predictable patterns based on demographics.

Digital media has exploded consumer options, and made demographics less predictive of human behavior. Now, psychographics work better.

The differences between how people think are now more important in (most) marketing than who they appear to be.

## BETTER FRAME: USE PSYCHOGRAPHICS TO UNDERSTAND EXACTLY WHO YOU ARE TARGETING, AND WHY THEY CARE

When you focus more on psychographics, what you are doing is deeply focusing on the emotions and values and problems of the people you envision your book targeting. Psychographics force you to understand your audience, to “walk a mile in their shoes” metaphorically.

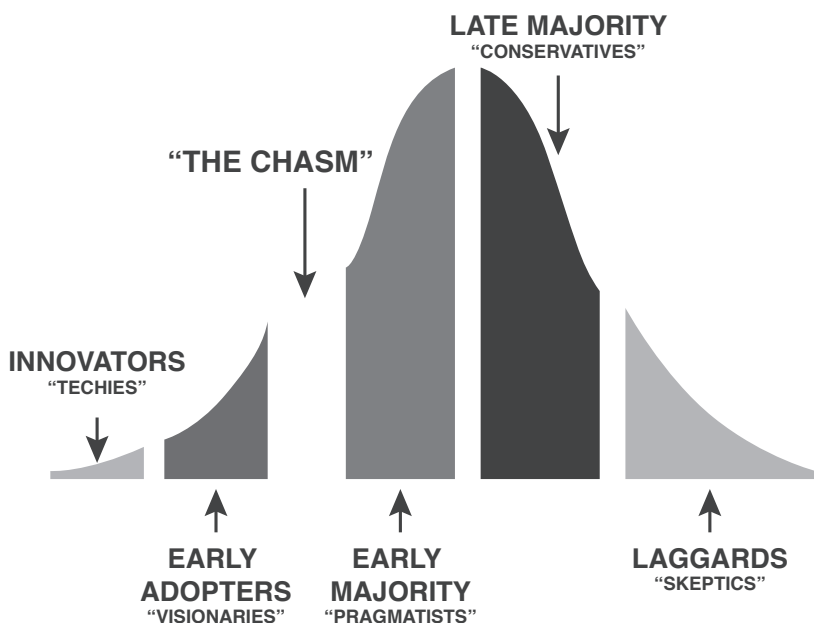
The best authors use both to deeply understand who their audience is, what they want, and why, and once they understand that, they write a book for a small group of people.

This is true even if you want to write a big book that appeals to a bunch of people. To do that, you must start with a small, specific audience. Every book that sells lots of copies starts with Kevin Kelly’s idea of the “1,000 true fans,” which is the microtribe that *believes* in the idea and champions it to others. That small group of people is the launching pad for all famous books.

This is why we always tell authors to focus on the microtribe *first*.

There’s a famous concept in innovation called “crossing the chasm.” It’s where a product tilts into the mass market. It cannot cross the chasm unless you *start* with your microtribe of “innovators” and “early adopters.”

The people who believe in your idea and spread it to others are all you should be concerned about at the beginning, because they are the ones who will push your idea into the mainstream. If you truly want to change the world and reach tons of people, this is how you do it.



I'll give you two examples:

The first one is my own #1 *New York Times* bestselling book, *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell*. That book started as emails to my nine friends from law school. The first half of that book is literally cleaned-up emails I sent to my friends. I only cared about making them laugh. It turned out that my friends represented a large group of people, and by making them laugh, I was able to make millions more laugh.

Or how about the Tim Ferriss story of how he launched 4HWW at SXSW. He didn't try to reach every white-collar worker sitting at home watching the news. He started with the tech crowd that would get super excited and actually implement his ideas—the ones who send hundreds of emails per day. They started using his email signature system he described in the book, and the book caught like wildfire. But he started with a *microtribe*.

And he did the same thing with defining his audience that we

recommended above: define your primary audience as tightly as possible.

He false-started the 4HWW twice because he couldn't get the tone and voice right (and threw away many draft chapters). He finally decided to write it as an email to two 29-year-old friends of his—exactly the kind of people he thought would benefit from it. He actually opened an email and started typing the book to really hammer home that this book was aimed directly at that very explicit audience.

He believes the discipline of creating a super-specific avatar is what made the book so powerful. It made it authentic and legitimate.

Like I said above, many authors object to this idea, saying, “But I want to write a book for a broad audience.”

Well, Tim goes on to explain that, “The target is not the market.”

It's a pithier way of explaining that you have to succeed with a core group before you have a chance at a larger audience. Before you can help them get clear on what they are doing and for whom.

This is why it's so important to not only nail your audience, but to make that audience very tight and specific.

## **DETERMINE YOUR AUDIENCE**

### **AUDIENCE QUESTION #1: WHO IS YOUR PRIMARY AUDIENCE?**

We recommend starting with the smallest possible audience you must reach to make your book successful. For most authors, the smaller the better. Your total audience is a series of concentric circles; the primary audience is the bullseye.

When I say small and niche, I mean literally ask yourself, “Who makes up the smallest group of people that my book is specifically designed to reach and influence?”

By starting small, you can ensure that your book will definitely reach **SOMEONE**. This niche focus ensures that your audience will get excited about your ideas, they will implement your ideas, and they will share your ideas with their peers. Anyone who doesn't meet those criteria is not in your microtribe.

The audience you need to reach is directly tied to the results you want, and you can reverse engineer precisely who your audience is by understanding who *needs* to know about your book to make your results happen.

This process is no more complicated than asking yourself a very basic question:

***“Who **MUST** know about my book in order for it to get the results I want?”***

This is results for the reader and for you.

For example, if your objective is to help oil and gas executives make better decisions about where to drill, and you want to speak at major oil and gas conferences and become the expert in this space, then your audience is the people who book the speakers for that specific conference (and the executives who attend).

If your objective is to help CTO's recruit engineers better, and raise your authority in the CTO space to get clients for your CTO recruiting business that caters to small-to-midsize companies, then chief technology officers from SMBs are your primary audience.

If you want to help people deal with their back pain and get visibility in your community to drive clients to your chiropractic practice, then your audience is the people in your community with the health problems that you can address.

Pretty simple.



#### GOOD EXAMPLES:

- “Chiropractors who own their own practices, looking for better ways to market their business.”
- “Accredited investors looking for how to get into wine as an investment.”
- “Women executives, aged 30-45, who want to have kids but don’t want to compromise their career.”

#### BAD EXAMPLES:

- “Women 20-70, suffering, that want to feel better.”
- “Any executive who wants to be a better leader.”
- “Young men and women looking for something more in life.”

#### HOW CAN YOU TALK TO DIFFERENT AUDIENCES WITH ONE BOOK?

You can do this, but it’s complicated. Basically, the only way you can talk to multiple audiences is if:

- They tightly overlap. For example, nurses who want to be entrepreneurs and nurses who want to start a medical practice are different audiences, but they overlap very much.
- They have the same concern or problem you are solving. For example, people with sleep problems and people with energy issues are different audiences, but if they are both caused by the same thing (a thyroid issue, for example), then they are very different audiences who have the same problem.

You can have a few different sets of primary audiences, just make sure if you do, they connect in a very obvious way.

#### AUDIENCE QUESTION #2: DESCRIBE A TYPICAL PERSON IN YOUR PRIMARY AUDIENCE (AN AVATAR). WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?

This person is literally who you’re writing the book for. They are your perfect reader.

This should be a description of a specific person in your primary audience. It can be a real person who is representative of your audience, or it can be a made-up composite of several different people.

It's essential that you describe a specific person, as it makes positioning your book more real. Don't describe a group or a type or a set of characteristics: create an individual with a name and a story.

The point of doing it this way is to set you up for the next two questions, which are about digging into your audience's pain and the benefits they will get from reading your book. Clearly understanding both serves as a yardstick against which you can measure the value of your content when you begin writing.

If possible, pick someone who energizes you—either a real person or a composite of real people. Someone you really want to help, maybe someone who reminds you of yourself before you knew everything you know now (the “younger you” can be a great ideal reader). The more you envision a real person who you can help, the more excited you will be about writing this book for them.

**AUDIENCE QUESTION #3: WHAT PAIN IS THIS PERSON EXPERIENCING BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT READ YOUR BOOK?**

This step is about expressing your reader's pain. How are they suffering, what are they missing out on, what do they not have that they want? They are depressed and suffering—how, specifically, and why?

Your answer should only be about the problems they currently have, not the solutions. Your book is the cure, but we first have to know what ails them.

Sometimes Questions 3 and 4 overlap a little, that is fine. In fact, you might have written the pain in the description of the person, if so, just cut and paste and move it here.

#### AUDIENCE QUESTION #4: WHAT BENEFIT WILL THEY GET BECAUSE THEY READ AND IMPLEMENT YOUR BOOK?

Once this person reads your book and implements your ideas, what happens? Do they only stop experiencing the pain described above, do they get more benefits, or both? What good things will happen as a result of reading your book and implementing your ideas?

Most important, what changes or transformation occurs in their life? What is their new life like?

#### EXAMPLES (ALL FROM REAL BOOKS)

##### EXAMPLE 1: JENNIFER, ADVANCE PRACTICE NURSE

**Who is your Primary Audience (the microtribe your book must reach to achieve its objectives)?**

Advanced practice nurses interested in starting a healthcare practice.

**Describe a typical person in your Primary Audience (an avatar). What are they like?**

Jennifer is an advanced practice nurse who currently works for a physician, hospital, or large practice. She doesn't make as much money as she feels that she should, and she works long hours that take her away from her family.

In order to meet volume quotas and stay on schedule, Jennifer isn't able to spend much time with her patients. This makes her feel rushed and stressed. She worries that she may be missing things or not providing the quality of care that would be possible if she had more time. Further, she's not able to practice the type of preventative, relationship-based care that fuels her soul.

She is afraid of leaving the security of her current position, but isn't sure she wants to keep practicing nursing if she doesn't make

a change. She wants to start her own practice, but doesn't know where to start or what to do. She is looking for guidance and permission, but hasn't found a book, resource, or mentor to help her.

What pain are they experiencing because they've not read your book? Jennifer feels stressed and rushed at her current job. She is unhappy, unfulfilled, and has considered leaving nursing completely.

She is afraid of starting her own practice because she doesn't know where to start or what to do. She's afraid she'll fail. She's afraid she won't make any money. She's a nurse, not an entrepreneur! She isn't sure if she's doing things right, which is scary because she likes to follow the rules. All of this uncertainty means it's taking Jennifer a lot longer than it should to start her practice, leaving her in her current job where she is unhappy.

What benefit will they get because they read and implement your book? Jennifer will get a step-by-step guide to start her own practice. The process is no longer mysterious. It now seems achievable. She now knows the applicable laws and regulations, so she has peace of mind knowing she won't be breaking any rules.

With a roadmap and examples of other APNs who have succeeded, Jennifer now has the confidence and permission to start her own practice.

Jennifer is less afraid of failure, because she has strategies to mitigate the risk of starting a business.

Jennifer is now fast-tracked to get what she really wants—a better lifestyle (more time to take care of herself, flexibility to be available for family and/or friends); the freedom and autonomy to practice the type of medicine she loves, the ability to benefit from the fruits of her hard labor, and recognition as a leader in her community.

## EXAMPLE 2: HAROLD, CMO

### **Who is your Primary Audience (the microtribe your book must reach to achieve its objectives)?**

Small to medium business owners (approx. \$2 million to \$100 million in revenue), or marketing leadership (Directors, CMOs, etc.) in large organizations who are tired of paying out too much for bad results from conventional digital marketing agencies.

### **Describe a typical person in your Primary Audience (an avatar). What are they like?**

Harold is 50 years old and the CMO of his large regional insurance company. He has always relied on outsourcing his digital marketing and advertising because, “This is how we’ve always done things.”

### **What pain are they experiencing because they’ve not read your book?**

The agencies he’s hired in the past consistently overcharged and under-delivered. Though this worked a decade ago, with competition increasing, it no longer cuts it. He has tried most of the agencies he can find, and they all do about the same. He wants to find an alternative, but has no idea where to look. He’s also heard much about AI and automation and the uncertainty about a changing agency landscape. Declining revenues are creating a significant amount of stress in his life.

### **What benefit will they get because they read and implement your book?**

After reading this book, he will know exactly how to evaluate and assess all the different digital agencies and options, and better understand and negotiate with them for their services. He will learn how to change, adapt, and innovate his marketing strategy by learning the right ways to invest in digital marketing, which will

help him grow the other areas of his business as well. He will now also know of a new option where he can take his business: political digital agencies.

#### EXAMPLE 3: VICTORIA, SENIOR EXECUTIVE

**Who is your Primary Audience (the microtribe your book must reach to achieve its objectives)?**

C-Suite and high-level executives in Fortune 500 companies that are responsible for and/or anxious about digital transformation and technology strategy for their companies, and who are seeking guidance, input, and inspiration.

**Describe a typical person in your Primary Audience (an avatar). What are they like?**

Victoria is a high-flying senior executive for a global financial services organization, and she has been tasked with leading her company's multimillion-dollar digital transformation strategy.

She cannot afford to fail. She knows the company well and has worked hard to achieve success over her 25-year career, and she is both excited and nervous by this new responsibility.

She has been a rising star throughout her career, always having great success with the roles and projects that she has been given, and she jumped at the chance to take on this new responsibility six months ago, but it now feels like a bit of a poisoned chalice.

Every day, she reads about new companies coming into the market and disrupting it, and she feels enormous pressure to make progress with her plan, but doesn't know where to start or what to do.

**What pain are they experiencing because they've not read your book?**

Victoria feels exposed and lonely because there is no one in her organization that she can turn to, but she knows that she needs to make some changes.

She is also overwhelmed by the huge volume of material in the marketplace that warns companies that they have to engage in digital transformation or risk being wiped out, but which provides very little tangible help in doing so.

She has nightmares that her company will be the next “Blockbuster,” wiped out by the Financial Services equivalent of Netflix, and that it will happen on her watch and that she will be considered a failure.

Some of her peers within the company are pushing back hard on the changes that she is proposing, and waging a political war against her to keep her off their turf. The ideas that she has developed about new products and experiences for customers are being shot down by the head of marketing and the head of retail banking, both of whom think that they should be driving the digital agenda. They are actively trying to undermine her and make her look bad, and it is starting to feel like *Game of Thrones*.

In the industry, people are not sharing knowledge, because they are all feeling under pressure, and it adds to her sense of isolation and paranoia. Some of her best people are leaving to join new companies, and she would be tempted to do the same, but these startups don’t want someone as old as her.

In her last presentation to the board, the directors didn’t seem to understand or support the approach that she proposed, and it feels to her like resistance is crystallizing. She was asked to lead the digital transformation for the organization, but now she isn’t given the resources or the support that she needs.

She is starting to feel like she is in a lose-lose situation that could

threaten her future with the company, and her career—she feels like she is working with dinosaurs.

She is starting to feel that her team are losing faith in her because they aren't getting a strong, clear strategy from her. She knows that this is a great opportunity for her, but she just cannot quite come up with a path to success.

Because she doesn't want to talk too widely about it, she is starting to withdraw from the rest of the organization, and it's exacerbating her situation.

### **What benefit will they get because they read and implement your book?**

When reading my book, she will immediately recognize her situation and feel a sense of relief that the things that she is experiencing are not specific or personal to her, but something that many executives are going through.

The case studies and examples of other organizations and executives that have been through similar journeys will highlight their successes and failures, and draw out lessons that are useful to her.

It also will provide her with some tools and techniques for handling the issues that she is facing, including a “six-point roadmap” for creating a strategy and plan that will be successful.

It will also give her confidence to talk knowledgeably about digital and technology trends by introducing her to a new model called the “eight technology forces” (e.g., quantum computing and blockchain) that covers predictions of how future technology trends will impact business and society, providing her with reference materials that will help her to make progress with her strategy.

Her anxiety will be alleviated through the tone of the book, which



will convey the sense that she is not alone and that she needs to fight the good fight for the future of her company, and also for her legacy.

It will galvanize her and give her the inspiration that she needs to reboot her program and stride into the next board meeting with clear purpose and direction.

She finally feels that she is going to win and that she can lead this initiative to success, and take her career forward, positioning herself for her next promotion or a job in a different company.

#### EXAMPLE 4: JENNY, INDEPENDENT ENTREPRENEUR

**Describe a typical person in your Primary Audience (an avatar). What are they like?**

Jenny works every single day as a consultant in her independent business. In between taking care of her children, she is taking care of her clients.

She is staying up late at night to make sure the work gets done, waking up exhausted each morning, and can't seem to increase her income no matter what she does.

When something happens in the family, she is the only one holding it all together.

She feels guilty because she loves her business and she loves her children and her husband, but two always seem to suffer when she spends time with the other. She feels like she not only can't get ahead, she can't even get balanced.

**What pain are they experiencing because they've not read your book?**

Nothing is working. She is frustrated, physically tired, she's in the

worst shape of life, and she avoids looking in the mirror and wears bigger clothes to avoid seeing this fact. Her marriage is crumbling, she hasn't had sex in months, and she feels unsupported, unseen, and unloved. Her children are acting out at school and home, which only adds to her physical toll and frustration/fear.

She's exhausted, she's frustrated, she's resentful, she's angry, and she feels guilty because she can't be present with her children and family—although that is WHY she decided to start her business to begin with.

She feels like she is completely failing everyone around her, and they are failing her.

She's afraid to try something different because she is afraid of people not understanding, judging her and abandoning her, leaving her feeling more alone than she already does now.

### **What benefit will they get because they read and implement your book?**

Jenny receives the toolkit to overcome her fears, frustration, guilt, shame, and anger.

She understands who she is on a genetic level, which gets her self-awareness, self-acceptance, and then love of self.

She will understand how crucial her happiness is to the happiness of everyone around her, and how her suffering contributes to the suffering of those around her.

She will understand how to center herself, how to make herself the priority, how to take care of herself physically, and why having amazing sex and allowing herself TO BE supported actually strengthens her relationships.

And even in the moments it does not feel like it, she can look around and recognize how everything has brought her to this moment, and she knows she can handle it and that she's never truly alone.

Most importantly she realizes suffering does not equal love.

She will also understand her children and husband on a genetic level, and help them do the same. She will love and accept them for exactly who they are, not who she thinks they can/should be, which releases the tyranny of expectation. This allows her to build a partnership with her children and husband, and release herself from the pressure of PARENTING—which is true freedom as a mother.





## FIGURE OUT YOUR BOOK IDEA

*“Explaining things that matter: Be simple. Then simpler than that. Just say what happens. The part of reality that any given person needs to know is naturally riveting to them.”*

—ANNE HERBERT

Now it’s time for the fun part: nailing down your book idea.

Book ideas often shift once the objectives and audience become clear, so we leave this task for the end of the positioning process. It’s much easier now to get your idea right, because you know exactly what you want to accomplish and what audience you must attract with your book to reach your objectives.

Before you write down your book idea, be sure to avoid the biggest mistake that authors make:

***Don’t write the book you think your audience “should” read. Instead, write the book your audience wants to read.***

This is a subtle yet very important distinction. If you can answer the next two questions well, then it should be positioned properly.

## BOOK IDEA QUESTION #1: IN 200 WORDS OR LESS, DESCRIBE YOUR BOOK

Write a one-paragraph description of exactly what the book is about. DO NOT worry about writing the perfect description. Just get something down *in less than 200 words* that answers these three questions:

1. What is the book about?
2. Who is the ideal reader for the book?
3. What will the ideal reader get?

You don't have to get it perfect at first; you just need to get something down that gets you pointed in the right direction. You will have plenty of time to get it perfect later on. For now, distill the book idea into 200 words or, better yet, less. If you can't do it in 200 words, you don't actually know what your book is about, who it's for, or why they will care.

If you are struggling with this, then think about your favorite book. Tell me in a few sentences what your favorite book is about. OK, what would that be for your book?

## EXAMPLES OF WELL-WRITTEN BOOK IDEAS

This book will be an informative, easy-to-digest guide to hand safety in construction and manufacturing workplaces. The author will share what companies can do to educate their teams on hand safety and how to reduce hand injuries amongst their employees outside of just purchasing gloves. He will explain the methodology and safety tips needed to prevent hand injuries before they happen, and what to do if they do happen to prevent them from coming up again. He will include case studies, helpful tips, and practical applications that safety managers can use to prevent the majority of hand injuries in these companies, which is a huge risk each day.

\* \* \*

This book explores a series of critical flaws that represent the most common root causes of poor performance in organizations and are the primary reasons why organizations fail to achieve peak performance. What's challenging about these flaws is that they lie underneath the surface of poor performance, so many organizations are not aware of them. Even when people may be somewhat aware, they may not realize how deep they go. And if/when they realize, they may not want or be able to treat them—especially alone. This book is for C-Suite executives who lead organizations that aren't performing as well as they need to or could. It will help them diagnose and cure these flaws in their organizations, thus positioning their organizations for optimal business results; scalable, sustainable growth; efficient and effective operations; happy and engaged employees; and satisfied customers. On a personal level, this book will help these executives become more effective, less stressed, and happier in their professional and personal lives.

After you read the examples above, you could explain to someone else what the book is about, who it is for, and what they will get out of it.

#### EXAMPLE OF A POORLY WRITTEN BOOK IDEA

Jim Smith is known as the “Deal Maker of Business.” He got his start at the age of eighteen and hasn't stopped since. Now, with seven bestsellers and a reputation for his success as a digital nomad, Jim is looking to become a big deal with entrepreneurs.

In his book, Jim will reveal his country roots and his struggle with education as a high school student to set the stage for his readers to understand that the only thing holding them back is their mindset. Though he is known as a real estate success and has written extensively about cornering that market, this book will pull back the curtain to reveal that Jim's success isn't about real estate alone—it's about the self-awareness required to do well in all areas of life, not just business.

Jim will challenge his readers to give up their throne as the King of Dipshits, to surround themselves with people who challenge them, to identify and own the things they are not great at, and to stop working like \$10/hour employees when they are running a million-dollar business. Most of all, Jim will use his experiences and his humor to bring fresh insight to entrepreneurs who want a life like his, but aren't sure how to get it.

What's this book about? Who is it for? What will they get? I couldn't say with confidence, and I doubt you can, either.

## **BOOK IDEA QUESTION #2: WHAT'S THE "COCKTAIL PARTY PITCH" FOR THE BOOK?**

This question is a check on your book idea. The goal is to make sure it works well.

Picture your ideal reader in your head, the exact person for whom you wrote your book. Now, imagine they're at a cocktail party, drinking with friends. They mention the topic that your book is about.

Another person perks up—because they've read your book. Now they are about to recommend that this person read your book as well, since it is on the exact topic they are talking about.

What do they say to recommend it?

This is the one-sentence explanation that *a real person would actually say out loud* to describe your book to their friends, not what you want them to say. That's the cocktail party pitch.

This is NOT your book description. This is NOT ad copy. This is about getting out of yourself and describing your book in the way that a real person would.



## EXAMPLES OF COCKTAIL PARTY PITCHES

### *Grain Brain*

- **Good:** “The book explains why bread is poisonous to humans and makes us fat, and then tells you what to eat instead.”
- **Bad:** “This book is a scientific, systematic, and detailed examination of the health problems caused by eating grains and grain-based foods, and a thorough, detailed plan for what foods best replace grain-based foods.”

### *How to Trade Options*

- **Good:** “It tells you exactly how to easily trade options. I can barely add, and I got it. It’s made me a bunch of money.”
- **Bad:** “The book explains why the Simple Options Trading System is the greatest trading system there is and proof the author is a genius.”

### *I Got There*

- **Good:** “This guy has an amazing story; his dad was a pimp, and now he’s a baller CEO.”
- **Bad:** “The book is a story of enlightenment and accomplishment, set against a backdrop of love and loss.”

**REFERENCE:** At this point people tend to have three main questions about what goes in their book; all are covered in these reference sections: 9.5: How Much Should You “Give Away” In Your Book? Advertorial vs. Editorial Content, 9.6: How Much of Your Story Should Be In Your Book?, 9.7: Don’t Put Everything You Know In One Book.





## THE NORTH STAR CHECK

This is what the entire book positioning has been working towards. This sentence should be able to sum up all of the book and precisely how it will work.

This is the template:

*“I will use my book to target [PRIMARY AUDIENCE], by teaching them [BOOKIDEA], which will lead to my ultimate goal of more [OBJECTIVES].”*

### EXAMPLES OF GOOD NORTH STARS

My book will attract **people who lead sales teams**, by teaching them **the neuroscience of how to effectively train and run a sales team**, which will lead to my ultimate goal of more **corporate sales consulting and training**.

My book will attract **HR managers from midsize businesses** by teaching them **how leveraging automation can revolutionize their experience with once-repetitive and tiresome HR chores**, which will lead to my ultimate goal of **getting paid speaking and consulting engagements as an expert in the HR automation space**.

My book will attract **small market advertising professionals**, by teaching them **five traits their brands can embody if they want to compete with (and beat) category giants**, which will lead to my ultimate goal of **gaining new clients for my advertising firm**.

I will use my book to target **mature startup founders**, by **shifting their mindset from chasing VCs to building a revenue-focused business**, which will lead to my ultimate goal of **expanding my entrepreneur coaching programs across Canada and the US**.

If this sentence describes the book you want to write, then your positioning is good. Move to the next section.

If this sentence does not, then go back and work on your positioning until you get it right.

**PART 3**

**OUTLINE  
YOUR BOOK**





## CREATE YOUR BOOK OUTLINE

*“The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.”*

—EDWIN SCHLOSSBERG

Your outline is the structure of your book, and thus incredibly important. If you start writing without a structure, the process will take forever, and the product will be haphazard and incomplete.

Worse, having no outline often leads to *not finishing your book at all*.

The outline is also your best defense against fear, anxiety, procrastination, and writer’s block. With good positioning and a good outline, the actual writing of the book becomes fairly easy.

What I am about to teach is not what you learned about outlining in school. It is a somewhat unconventional way to approach it. But it’s the process we developed at Scribe to give our authors the best chance of actually getting their book done.

What makes our outline different is we only intend it to ***trigger the proper ideas and concepts for each chapter, so when you sit down to write, you know what to focus on.***

## STEP 1: BRAINSTORM THE CHAPTERS FOR YOUR BOOK

The first step in creating your outline is to brainstorm and figure out what the chapters are for your book.

What is a chapter? It's basically a single cohesive idea, fully explored. Depending on how you organized your book, it can be a step in the process, or one of several principles, or anything like that.

Keep working your list of chapters—adding, subtracting, moving—until you have the major points you want to explain, in the basic order you want to explain them.

Don't worry too much about the order at this point, they will probably change in the next step. All you want to do here is figure out exactly what your chapters are.

Also, don't spend too much time worrying about chapter titles. Just put something in, you can change it later.

While there are numerous ways to brainstorm, here are the frameworks that we've found work best:

### FRAMEWORK 1: "WORKSHOP PRESENTATION"

This framework works very well for people used to formally presenting their knowledge. Just imagine that you are giving a speech, presentation, or workshop to go over your material. What would be part 1? What would be part 2? How would you break up the days? Basically the structure of the workshop or presentation becomes the chapters of the book.

### FRAMEWORK 2: "TEACH YOUR BOOK"

For this model, begin with your ideal reader, someone who is in your primary audience that you described in your positioning. Now,



imagine teaching them everything in your book. What are the major lessons? What is step one? Step two? Write it all down.

If you get stuck in this model, your avatar is your motivator. Picture your ideal client, friend, or student in your mind: how would you explain your process to them? What would they get confused about? What points do they struggle with? What lessons have you conveyed to them? What did they find particularly helpful? What questions do they ask you? The beauty of “teaching your book” is that it’s an excellent frame to articulate the knowledge you have (that you may take for granted).

### FRAMEWORK 3: “WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID?”

Write down the main ideas, concepts, arguments, and principles that you want to make in your book. Don’t get too granular—this is not about fleshing out every detail. This is about getting down the major points.

Warning on brainstorming: We’ve seen some authors start this and instead begin to write the book, producing pages and pages and getting frustrated. Don’t go down that rabbit hole. Your list of key points and arguments shouldn’t run longer than a couple of pages.

If you’re writing more than that at this stage, you’re getting in too deep too soon. Stay at the 30,000-foot level. Keep your descriptions to short phrases or single sentences so you’re forced to stick to main points. Don’t worry about capturing all the details that come to mind. You won’t forget what you know. Instead, this is about clarifying what you know, down to the basics that you want to describe to your reader.

Whichever model you choose, understand that this part of the process can take some time, but do not get too bogged down in it. The point here is to find the major ideas and themes—the chapters. You can always come back and change things later if necessary.

**Helpful Note:** When you are brainstorming your chapters, have a section of your page called the “parking lot.”

Put all of the good ideas you have that don’t seem to fit, into the parking lot. It’s a place for you to keep those ideas without having to throw them away. This also helps you free your mind from any random ideas and keeps you focused on the main idea of your book, and gives you a place to put the seeds of your future books for later harvesting.

## **STEP 2: CREATE A TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Once you have what you think are your chapters, then put it in your Table of Contents, and write the key takeaway for each chapter, which is called a thesis statement.

A thesis statement is a short summation of the main point you want to make in the chapter. DO NOT overwrite these. It should be one or two sentences, that’s it.

## EXAMPLE TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	THE MYTHS OF HUMAN RESOURCES
<b>CHAPTER 1:</b>	MYTH #1: SKILLS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING <i>Hire for skills and fire for behavior? That is completely backward.</i>
<b>CHAPTER 2:</b>	MYTH #2: LINKEDIN IS THE END-ALL- BE-ALL SOURCE FOR RECRUITING <i>In reality, it's only one sourcing tool. It holds recruiters captive, thinking they don't have choices.</i>
<b>CHAPTER 3:</b>	MYTH #3: RECRUITERS DON'T NEED TO BE MARKETERS <i>Wrong. In this day and age, anyone in sales is a marketer.</i>
<b>CHAPTER 4:</b>	MYTH #4: CANDIDATES ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN TITLES AND MONEY <i>Truth is, we all buy emotionally and justify rationally. It's the same with candidates.</i>
<b>CHAPTER 5:</b>	MYTH #5: RECRUITERS ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR QUALITY OF HIRE <i>They THINK they're not. And that's why they fail.</i>
<b>CHAPTER 6:</b>	MYTH #6: RECRUITERS WILL BE REPLACED BY TECHNOLOGY <i>Technology is a tool, not a silver bullet, and automating a broken system only speeds up failure.</i>
<b>CHAPTER 7:</b>	MYTH #7: DIVERSITY IS GOOD BECAUSE IT'S THE "RIGHT THING TO DO" <i>Diversity IS good. But not only because it's the right thing to do; because it's the right BUSINESS thing to do.</i>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	

### HOW MANY CHAPTERS SHOULD THERE BE?

How many chapters should there be? If there are at least five, and no more than fifteen, that's normal.

If you have less than five, or more than fifteen, that is not necessarily wrong, but it is very unusual. If you do that, you'd better have a good reason, one that makes a lot of sense to the reader.

### STEP 3: FILL IN THE OUTLINE STRUCTURE

Using the Table of Contents you created, now fill in the template for each chapter.

Remember: Don't write the book in the outline, *the outline is to tell you what to write*.

Below is the outline structure we recommend. It lays out the various elements you'll need for each chapter. Just fill in the information, which you will use as your guide to write the book.

Below this, we show you two chapter examples.

#### Chapter X: [INSERT WORKING TITLE]

- Chapter Hook
  - This should be a personal story, historical anecdote, question to reader, shocking statement, or anything that draws in the attention of the reader and sets up what is about to come in the chapter.
  - Do not be intimidated by this—all you really need to do here is tell a good short story or anecdote, or introduce a fact that is engaging.
  - The best chapter hooks tend to be emotionally intense, or some sort of mistake (which is usually emotionally intense).
  - The best way to start a chapter is by “coming in late.” Begin with a scene or a quote or something that jumps right into the point you are making.
  - I talk more about hooks in the chapter on Introductions.
- Thesis of chapter
  - Once you have a chapter hook, then you plainly state what will be taught/discussed in this chapter.
  - Essentially, you tell them what you're going to tell them.
  - This should be the same as the key takeaway in the Table of Contents.
- Supporting content

- List all the key points/evidence for argument/factual content.
- This is the bulk of the section. You can do this quickly and succinctly, but the outline of the chapter should be laid out fairly well.
- Don't go too in-depth by writing every detail, but do be specific and thorough. You are creating an outline, after all. If you see you've written paragraphs, you're getting ahead of yourself.
- Make sure these are ordered in a logical way so that they're building their point or argument like a pyramid, providing the basic foundational information first, then building up from there.
- Make sure you look at this section from the vantage point of your reader, rather than your own. Your reader is not the expert, you are, so this section needs to be tailored to them.
- Stories
  - This is where you list the stories you think you want to tell in this chapter. Effective stories are crucial to the success of a book. They are a great way to make the book and its specific takeaway points more memorable. Many readers forget facts after they read a book, but anecdotes and stories stay with them. They're often more "sticky."
  - Make sure your stories are specific and highly relevant. You are not looking for a generic story in these points; rather, this should be a story that fits precisely here and demonstrates the message you want to convey.
  - This does NOT mean that in your book, you write your supporting evidence, and THEN your stories. Of course you will integrate stories and supporting content.
  - We recommend separating them in the outline, simply because it's not always clear which stories you want to use and where. Listing these separately allows you to figure this out as you go.
- Reader's key takeaway
  - This should be the summary at the end of the chapter. It

clearly lays out what the reader needs to know from this chapter.

- Essentially, you tell them what you just told them.
- Callback to/wrap-up of opening chapter hook + segue to next chapter
  - This is an optional section, but most books benefit from tying the end of the chapter back to the hook, and then giving some sort of segue to the next chapter.

## CHAPTER EXAMPLES:

### CHAPTER 3: HOW CAN WE IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH?

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<b>1. CHAPTER HOOK</b>	American Public Health Association quote about public health, and how it is the biggest unaddressed issue facing America.
<b>2. THESIS OF CHAPTER</b>	No other healthcare space can benefit more from the application of anthropology and design thinking than the public health sector.
<b>3. CHAPTER CONTENT</b>	<p>The current problems within healthcare</p> <p>Why design thinking alone is not the solution (every patient requires their own individualized approach)</p> <p>What does educational assistance look like in public health?</p> <p>What we can learn from public health experts (What is their process, and what tools do they use?)</p> <p>How anthropology and design thinking come together to benefit public health</p>
<b>4. KEY TAKEAWAY</b>	While public health officials try to understand the problems patients are facing, they will always miss the mark as long as they fail to start by understanding the patient—this is why design thinking and anthropology are so important in the public health space.
<b>5. CALLBACK TO HOOK</b>	American Public Health Association quote about how public health can be addressed
<b>6. SEGUE TO NEXT CHAPTER</b>	The public health space is complicated. Understanding this, and that the space is further complicated by cultural barriers, enables them to work harder to find solutions that fill these gaps.

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## CHAPTER 6: RECRUITERS WILL BE REPLACED BY TECHNOLOGY

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<b>1. CHAPTER HOOK</b>	Google search shows over one million articles about how technology is going to replace recruiters
<b>2. THESIS OF CHAPTER</b>	AI will replace millions of jobs, but it will CREATE millions more. Technology will NOT replace recruiters. Rather, it will create more demand for recruiters with the RIGHT SKILLSETS, which is what this chapter is all about.
<b>3. CHAPTER CONTENT</b>	<p>How to draw the brakes on automating a broken system until the underlying problems are fixed</p> <p>What readers need to consider in terms of their process before they go about implementing new technology</p> <p>How to develop the kind of skills that technology will never be able to replace</p>
<b>4. KEY TAKEAWAY</b>	Technology is only a tool. In and of itself, it can't fix a broken process.
<b>5. CALLBACK TO HOOK</b>	Despite all the discourse and panic, there will be great new opportunities for readers who make themselves invaluable and invincible
<b>6. SEGUE TO NEXT CHAPTER</b>	Now that you understand how technology will help recruiters, we will look at how to use technology properly

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QUESTION: WHY NOT STRUCTURE CHAPTERS LIKE YOU'LL WRITE THEM?

If you have outlining experience, you may notice we don't structure our outline in the traditional way, something like this:

1. Major Point 1
  - Minor Point 1
    - i. Story Y
    - ii. Example Y
  - Minor Point 2
    - i. Story X
    - ii. Example X



- 2. Major Point 2
  - Minor Point 1
    - i. Story A
    - ii. Point B
  - Minor Point 2
    - i. Story A
    - ii. Point B

There are a few reasons we don't recommend this style of outline:

#### IT DOESN'T WORK WELL

We've helped thousands of authors position, structure, and write books, and by this point, we've tested everything. We've found that the traditional outline style doesn't work well with most authors. There are several reasons we think it doesn't work that well (the main one is detailed below), but why it doesn't work almost doesn't matter.

The fact is, it does NOT work. We developed our style of outlining after testing dozens of different iterations and realizing what actually produced the best books in the shortest time.

#### MOST AUTHORS CAN'T GET TO THAT LEVEL OF DETAIL UNTIL THEY START WRITING

For most authors, they have problems actually understanding ahead of time precisely how to lay their books out. This is understandable; writing and structuring books is hard and very foreign to people who haven't done it before.

We find that the traditional outline structure gets people lost in the outline, and that the best way to actually get people to writing is to chunk up the chapter into sections, have authors write down enough so they understand what they are trying to say and what they need to write, and then figure out the details as they write.

## THIS STYLE KEEPS THE AUTHOR MOVING FORWARD, INSTEAD OF GETTING STUCK

The conventional way of outlining forces the author to get very deep into their knowledge at a stage where some of the ideas may not be worked out yet. Most people do not do well with a long, detailed outline, but do better by writing their way to understanding. This process allows for either approach—you can go detailed if you really want, or you can just get the bullets down that you need, and then figure the rest out as you write.

**REFERENCE:** Everything else you may need to know about book chapters is in here, 9.8: Everything You Need to Know about Book Chapters.



## OUTLINE THE INTRODUCTION

*“Don’t try to be original. Just try to be good. That sounds sort of naïve, but it’s true.”*

—PAUL RAND

You know why most readers—probably including you—skip book introductions?

Because most authors think the purpose of the introduction is to explain everything they will talk about in the book.

That is boring and wrong.

The purpose of a good introduction is to ***engage the reader and get them to read the book.***

Just because someone is reading an introduction does not mean they are going to finish the book. The thing that scares people off from books is NOT the price—it’s the commitment of time. People don’t care about \$10. They care about spending their time on something that is interesting and engaging to them.

That is the job of the introduction: prove to the reader this book is worth reading. A well-done introduction grabs the reader and compels them to keep reading. It pulls them through, and makes them excited to start the content, because the introduction has answered the most important question the reader has:

*“Why should I read this book?”*

#### **WHAT AN INTRODUCTION SHOULD DO:**

- Get the reader immediately interested in the book
- Clearly lay out the pain the reader is facing
- Paint a picture of a better future, or a benefit the reader can get
- Outline briefly what the reader will learn in the book
- Explain why the author is the expert and authority on this subject
- Get the reader committed to reading the book

#### **WHAT AN INTRODUCTION SHOULD NOT DO:**

- Be a summary of the book
- Try to tell the whole story of something that is already in the book
- Tell the author’s whole life story
- Tediously explain exactly what is coming in the book
- Have a meandering story that the reader doesn’t care about
- Have too much background
- Be too long
- Start at the beginning of the author’s life
- Have too much autobiography
- Be entirely about the author and what they want to talk about

#### **THE BEST INTRODUCTIONS ARE FORMULAIC**

This is the thing to know about introductions: there is a formula to effective ones, and you should follow it.

Even though it may not seem like there's a formula, there is one, and if you don't stick to it, then your readers will feel it, and be upset—even if they don't know why (and yes, the introduction to this book follows the formula; you can go back and line it up exactly).

You can be very creative within the boundaries of the formula, but follow the formula and your introduction will work well.

## THE FORMULA FOR AN INTRODUCTION

A good introduction is like an interesting sales pitch, not a dry and boring informational piece. Introductions are built from these elements:

- Hook the reader
- Tell a story about the reader's current pain
- Tell a story about the reader's potential transformation
- Tell them what they'll learn
- Describe the author's background/origin of book
- Set up the book with a call to action

### PART 1: HOOK THE READER

An introduction has to hook the reader FAST. It should grab them by the lapels and force them to pay attention.

Here are examples of hooks:

- “Let's start with a question: Why do certain groups perform better than other groups?”
- “You've been told a lie. Everything you know about sugar is wrong.”
- “I thought I was going to die.”
- “We shot dogs. Not by accident. We did it on purpose, and we called it Operation Scooby. I'm a dog person, so I thought a lot about that.”

These all grab your attention. They make you sit up, take notice, and read the next line.

There is no specific formula to figuring out your hook. These are the three questions we use to help determine what the hook is:

- What is the most interesting story or claim in the book?
- What sentence or fact makes people sit up and take notice?
- What is the intended audience going to care about the most, or be most interested in or shocked by?

Some other things to think about when finding your hook:

- A great hook is counterintuitive, it violates or reverses expectations.
- It's the story people always ask you about.
- It is NEVER the story that makes you look the best.

Often the hook is an anecdote. One powerful way to write an anecdotal hook well is to use the “cinematic” technique: tell it as if you are describing a scene in a movie. At its core, the hook makes the reader sit up and take notice.

Though the first sentence must be effective, the rest of the page and initial story must do the same thing.

An attention-grabbing sentence needs to lead into something that keeps them—a short story, example, statistic, or historical context that introduces the subject in a way that is interesting and exciting—will engage the reader and compel them to read more, and lead them into the rest of the material.

## PART 2: TELL A STORY ABOUT THE READER'S CURRENT PAIN

Once you have the reader's attention with the hook, the introduction next answers the implicit reader question: “Why do I care?”

Basically, what's the reason the reader went to the bookstore? What problem were they looking to solve?

This is NOT about giving the reader simple information. It's not enough to list nothing but boring facts and figures. No one pays attention to that.

People pay attention to stories, especially stories that resonate with their problems, pain, and conflicts. Once they are in touch with those pain points, then they want to hear about solutions that provide relief and pleasure, and maybe even take them somewhere new in their life.

This ties directly into the audience section you wrote in your positioning. You should know your reader's pain precisely, because you've already told that story once, at least in the abstract. The story or stories in the introduction should dive deep and describe the massive pain the reader is suffering by not taking the advice or lessons in your book. Pain induces action.

#### PART 3: TELL A STORY ABOUT THE READER'S POTENTIAL TRANSFORMATION

Once you've appealed to the reader's pain point, then you should tell a story that describes the pleasure that comes from taking the action. Show them why the results are so amazing and that the goal is worth the pain. And most important—show them who they can become if they read and implement the ideas in your book.

Again, this ties into your audience positioning—you already have this story, you did it in your audience section. Dive deep into it and provide more specifics.

#### PART 4: TELL THEM WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

Once you've laid out the pain and pleasure stories, and the reader understands what's at stake for them by reading this book, then

you need to explain exactly how you're going to help them solve their pain and get to their benefit.

Make sure this is so clear and simple that even a seventh-grader could understand. It should be as basic as, "I'm going to show you precisely how to do this. I'll walk you through, step by step by step, until you have mastered everything necessary to get your results."

You can even frame this as a bulleted list of what they will learn in the book. Just make sure that it sounds appealing, and not boring. Remember you are still selling them on reading the book.

#### PART 5: DESCRIBE YOUR BACKGROUND/ORIGIN OF BOOK

Once you've hooked the reader, appealed to their pain, and shown them the benefit they can have if they overcome it, now it's time to explain who you are, why you wrote the book, and why the reader should trust what you have to say.

Essentially, you'll establish your authority to be their guide, and contextualize the book for them.

The best way to do this, again, is to tell a story. Why did you write this book? Why does this subject matter to you? How did you learn enough to be in a position to teach what you know to people? Why are you qualified—even uniquely qualified—to write this book? Why should the reader credit what you have to say?

This is where you can talk about your hero's journey story—what it took for you to get to this place—because this is where the reader is wondering why they should trust you. After all, if you are going to help them by teaching them so much, they need to know why they should listen to you.

But, and this is VERY important: ***remember that the reader doesn't care about you.*** They only care about you and your story insofar



as it applies to the book and to your expertise. Do not give them an autobiography. Just enough about you to know that they should listen is all it takes.

#### PART 6: WHAT THE BOOK IS AND IS NOT

This is an optional part of the intro, but many authors like to put this in. By telling the reader what the book is and is not, it sets the right expectations in the beginning. You can do this very simply, mainly by stating what you will not be, and the things they will not get out of it.

Underselling here, just a little, works great.

#### PART 7: SET UP BOOK WITH CALL TO ACTION/SEGUE TO FIRST CHAPTER

Once you have done all of this, then all that is left is a simple transition to get the reader ready to dive in and start engaging the book.

I know this all seems like a lot, so here is an example intro to help you see how it ties together:

## EXAMPLE INTRODUCTION OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

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<b>1. HOOK</b>	<p>“The doctors told me I was going to die. So did the nurses.</p> <p>In fact, everyone I talked to for the 41 days I was in that hospital told me I would die.</p> <p>They were wrong.</p> <p>But it wasn’t them or their care that saved me. It was an accident, caused when a tired janitor left his mop bucket in my room, that saved my life...and led to the breakthrough that has since saved millions of people.”</p>
<b>2. THE READER’S PROBLEM</b>	<p>When the Cures Act was signed into law in 2016, pharmaceutical companies and healthcare product manufacturers were required to be more transparent so that more research outside of clinical trials was required. Suddenly, companies <i>had</i> to increase their understanding of patients. But these were only baby steps in understanding the depth of patients and their stories, and how their stories impact their healthcare.</p> <p>Healthcare products, devices, and drugs—healthcare solutions—impact patients and their families in a much more extensive way than healthcare professionals realize. They can make a difference in the quality of care for millions, just by understanding how anthropology and design thinking work together to create patient-centricity in healthcare.</p>
<b>3. THE READER’S SOLUTION</b>	<p>Author will explain how the tenets of anthropology and design thinking work together in a healthcare marketing environment to benefit patients, their loved ones, and the healthcare product manufacturers involved.</p>
<b>4. WHAT THEY’LL LEARN</b>	<p>Readers will learn how to design marketing messages and products that are grounded in patient education—solutions that support these patients in their daily lives as they tackle their healthcare challenges. Readers will become aware of the value of patient understanding and empowerment in healthcare marketing.</p>
<b>5. AUTHOR’S BACKGROUND/ BOOK ORIGIN</b>	<p>After a horrible hospital stay riddled with bad care, the author started his company to address this human angle of healthcare that he found lacking in the product marketing side of the system. He felt that no one else was using anthropology, then design thinking, in the manufacture of healthcare solutions. He wanted to start with the patient to first understand them and their situation before creating the educational or marketing tools that would benefit the type of care they receive.</p>
<b>6. WHAT THE BOOK IS AND ISN’T</b>	<p>This book is presenting a new paradigm for healthcare marketers and product designers. However, it is not just a theoretical presentation. Readers will learn how they can improve their business and the quality of healthcare with a more ethical, successful, patient-driven (and patient-centered) approach.</p>
<b>7. SEGUE TO FIRST CHAPTER</b>	<p>Getting to know people—the humans beneath the patient—is the first step in quality healthcare.</p>

## **WHY TO WRITE YOUR INTRO LAST**

Most authors find the introduction to be the hardest part of the book to write, and that's why we recommend authors outline it LAST.

WHY is it hardest and better when it's done last? I tell authors we outline the intro last because we want it to hit hard and entice, and it's easier to be more effective in that when we already have a specific understanding of the full scope and key messaging of the book.

You can't effectively tease something if you don't fully understand how it's going to play out in practice.





## OUTLINE THE CONCLUSION

*“Think like a wise man, but communicate in the language of the people.”*

—WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Here’s the thing with book conclusions: if the reader got all the way to the conclusion, then it means they read the whole book, they liked it, and now they want to wrap this up.

So don’t ramble on and on. Give them what they want.

The goal of the conclusion is to tie everything together, neatly summarize your book, and then provide a specific call or calls to action for your reader.

Don’t overcomplicate the conclusion—just let it do its job, and it’ll work great.

### WHAT A CONCLUSION SHOULD DO

1. A conclusion should clearly summarize the book. That’s the best thing you can do, not only to deliver value to the reader, but also to make the book memorable (and recommendable).

2. A conclusion should address any lingering issues, and close any open loops. The reader should feel like everything is wrapped up in a bow.
3. A conclusion should have a call to action of some sort. In essence, tell the reader what to do.
4. A conclusion should point them to any additional resources you have for them that could help them.

### **WHAT A CONCLUSION SHOULD NOT DO**

1. A conclusion should NOT introduce any new content. This should only be a summarization of what is in the book. You can have new stories or anecdotes, of course.
2. A conclusion should not be too long. The rule of thumb is that it should be the shortest chapter in your book.
3. A conclusion should not break faith with the reader. Don't tell them "operators are standing by" or try to sell them in a preposterous way that turns them off.

### **CONCLUSION TEMPLATE**

We like to outline the conclusion with this template:

- Hook
- Restate the book's thesis
- Summarize Chapters
- Call to action: what should the reader do when they finish the book?

### **H00K**

This is similar to what you put in the introduction, but instead of getting them to read the book, now you are wrapping everything up. This can be a story that summarizes the book, or you can close a loop from earlier in the book. But the point is, the reader should feel like the end of a movie, where everything feels nicely summarized.

By this time, you've mentioned a lot of different topics. Usually the easiest and most compelling way to begin the conclusion is by referring back to one (or more) of them. Or you can add another dimension to a story you already told or tie up loose ends.

#### RESTATE THE BOOK'S MISSION/THESIS

This is pretty simple, but make sure you again restate the book's thesis. People like repetition; it reinforces and brings home points.

#### SUMMARIZE CHAPTERS

This is optional, but most good nonfiction books do this. They summarize the key points so succinctly and clearly that the reader can't help but understand your lessons the same way that you do.

You want the reader to think about and talk about your book to their friends the same way you do, and the best way to ensure they do that is to tell them precisely what to say to their friends. Put the words in their mouth.

Specifically, this is about nailing what it is you want them to remember about your book. What are the takeaways that really matter? How do you want them to talk about them?

#### CALL TO ACTION

When they finish the last word and put the book down, what is the first thing you want your reader to do? This is usually the final word, and this is what you leave them with.

#### NOTE ON THE CALL TO ACTION

A call to action (CTA) is not required in a conclusion, but most nonfiction books have them. It's usually the very last bit of the

conclusion, the final word to readers, and it ensures they know what you want them to do.

Authors generally adopt a different tone with the CTA—one that's not just more explicitly inspirational but is also framed as an imperative. The underlying message of the call to action is straight-forward and empowering: ***now that you have all the tools, go out there and use them.***

This is good, and readers tend to like it. Some authors feel uncomfortable including such a direct appeal to readers because they may feel it's unprofessional, and they can be right (sometimes). Authors often want to be too inspirational in the introduction, and not enough in the conclusion. This is when you can really tell your reader what to do, and be very direct.

What you ***do not want to do is write a glorified sales brochure.*** The last thing you want to do here is try and pitch them something of yours to buy.

Think about it—you've spent the whole book earning their trust, and now you sell them?

Don't do that. Most importantly because it doesn't work very well.

Readers are smart. They're interested in your topic because they've picked up your book, and they've already read pages of your knowledge and expertise. They can form their own conclusions when it comes to contacting you.

If you want to ask them to contact you, though, do so authentically—from a place of trying to help them, not yourself. Tell them you want to hear from them, or assist them moving forward. If your website or the name of your firm is in your bio or About the Author page, that's sufficient. Give them your email in the conclusion if you like, and if you are sincere about responding to them.



Ultimately, your goal is to provide so much value to them that they respect and admire you and your work, and choose to contact you because they have sold themselves, not because you sold them.

Some authors want a more explicit CTA, such as directing readers of the book to a specific landing page. This can work, as long as the page you are directing them to gives the reader something.

A key here is to give them something that they don't feel should have been in the book. For example, a map or chart that is additive, but not crucial, to the content is great (and it doesn't have to be in the introduction).

What you don't want to do is give them something that makes them think, "Why isn't this in the book?" That just breaks faith with the reader.



**PART 4**

**WRITE YOUR  
BOOK**





## HOW TO CREATE YOUR BOOK WRITING PLAN

*“If you want to get something done, decide when and where you’re going to do it. Otherwise, take it off your list.”*

—PETER BREGMAN

There is only one hard and fast rule in writing:

***Do what works for you.***

That’s it.

That being said, after decades of writing professionally and thousands of books published, I have seen some clear trends that hold true across lots of different people. What I do here is walk you through some of the most important things I’ve figured out.

### WHY SHOULD YOU HAVE A WRITING PLAN?

Shouldn’t you just get inspired to write? If you wait until inspiration strikes, and then use that as fuel to write, you’ll be good, right?

No.

If you rely on inspiration to write your book, **you will fail.**

There is one single thing that creates success with writing, and every single writer will tell you this:

Discipline.

It took me three years as a professional writer before I understood that I needed a writing plan for every book I wrote. Writing without a plan is like going cross-country without a map. Yeah, you might get there, but it'll take you at least twice as long.

You must sit your ass in the chair and write, just about every day, until the book is done.

That is why you need a writing plan. Because it defines exactly what you will do to finish your book.

Inspiration might be how you decide to start the book—and that's fine—but discipline is how you'll finish.

## **WHAT IS A WRITING PLAN?**

You are an author now, and what does an author do? They write their book. EVERY DAY.

A writing plan is nothing more than a specific plan that lays out exactly when and where you're going to write each day, how much you will write, when everything is due, and what your accountability is.

## **HOW TO CREATE YOUR WRITING PLAN**

### **STEP 1: SCHEDULE A TIME AND PLACE TO WRITE**

You must start by picking the exact time and place you will write each day. For example, you could write every day from 8 a.m. to 10

a.m., in your home office. Or from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., at Compass Coffee.

This is not negotiable. If you tell yourself that you'll "write when you have time" then the book won't ever get done. If you don't think about the environment where you will do your writing, you may very well not make effective use of that time you've set aside.

With both of these elements, you want to be as specific as possible. The more you plan now, the less you have to think later.

If the book matters, then you figure out precisely when and where you will write it.

#### *How Much Time Should You Write Each Day?*

We recommend writing for at least one hour per day. If you only have thirty minutes per day to write, then do that. The optimal amount of time is two hours, but very few people can set aside that much time.

Also, be realistic. Most authors cannot write (effectively) for more than three hours a day.

#### *What Time of Day Should You Write?*

The data is very clear: most people are the most creative about an hour after they wake up, until about four hours after they wake up. That means you're probably most creative in the morning.

But outliers DO exist, and so do night owls. If you are one of those, honor it.

All that matters is consistency and action. Make writing a routine that works for you, and you'll do it.

### *How Consistently Should You Write?*

If you can, write every day. Even if you only get through a half page per day, you're that much closer to a finished book.

If seven days a week is too much, then take one day off and write for six. God rested on the seventh day, so can you.

The key thing to remember with a book is that *you don't stay where you are with a book; you either move forward or you move backward.*

Momentum is a key element in seeing a book through from beginning to end. You will make that decision each and every day for the duration of the book-writing process. Your plan will help you stay accountable, so you continue moving in the right direction.

### *How Do You Pick Your Writing Location?*

It's very simple to pick where you should write: *where you get writing done.*

These are the general factors people consider when writing: ambient noise, temperature, view, comfort, and isolation. A universal "correct" place to write doesn't exist. If you write well in coffee shops, do that. If you write well at a desk in your basement, do that. Wherever you are most creative, most functional, and most confident, write there.

Don't waste time trying to find the "perfect place" to write, or a perfect tool, or the perfect desk. They don't exist.

People who get stuck on finding the perfect spot or the perfect inspiration to write are looking for a way to avoid the work. This unrecognized fear will cause them to wait for the perfect environment, but that perfect environment doesn't exist. Even when accounting for someone's personal preferences, if they think they've found the "perfect" writing place, that's just the place



where they allow themselves to look past the distractions that exist everywhere (unless they write in a sensory deprivation tank).

Focusing on the distractions is resistance, a way for people to avoid the hard work of actual writing. Every minute you spend trying to find the perfect anything is a minute you are stealing from your writing.

Find the place and setting that works for you and then recreate that each day. If your initial location stops working for you after a while, acknowledge that, figure out what you need to change, and identify a new location.

## STEP 2: SET SPECIFIC WRITING GOALS

In addition to scheduling the time and place of each writing session, also give yourself a specific writing goal for each session. We recommend a goal of 250 words per hour of writing.

Why 250 words? It's approximately the number of words per page in a printed book. So if you're writing about 250 words a day, that's about a page a day.

Yes, this is a very low goal. But a low goal is good. A low goal is not intimidating, so it will help you get started. It will also make you feel good when you surpass it, and entice you to keep writing.

This is a classic sales technique—lowering the quota to inspire action—that works wonderfully with writing.

The best part is that it adds up quickly:

***By writing just 250 words a day, you can get a 120-page (30,000-word) first draft done in about 4 months.***

That is fast, and you'll do it with what feels like very little effort. As you can see, it's all about consistency.

### STEP 3: BUILD DEADLINES

Deadlines force action and demand accountability. Below is a rough outline of how to pace yourself, which you can adjust to your schedule.

If you want to move fast, give yourself a deadline of about a chapter a week.

If you want to move at a reasonable speed, give yourself two weeks per chapter.

If you want to move slower, allow three weeks.

If you have a hectic life, do a chapter per month. And then question if you have the time to even do this.

### STEP 4: ANNOUNCE THE BOOK

To take accountability one step further: *announce that you are working on a book.*

Use whatever social media platform you prefer, but the point is to publicly claim your intention to people you care about.

You'll get a lot of positive feedback, which will help you start, and the fact that you have announced your intention will help you push through when you are wavering.

Note: If you're serious about writing this book, the platform you're most uncomfortable about putting it on is the one you should use. That means it's the one with the most people on it that you care about. If you are afraid of telling them, it's all the more reason to do it. Remember, we want to identify any and all resistance and push through it.

## STEP 5: KEEP YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

There are many ways to keep yourself accountable, but the best and most reliable method we've seen is to post your daily word count. We recommend all of our authors in the Scribe Guided Author program do this in our private Facebook Group.

By doing this, you get all the benefits of accountability:

1. The daily push to ensure you actually sit down and write your 250 words.
2. The encouragement that comes from everyone else for getting it done.
3. The habit gets built by doing the work, and then posting about it.

### NOTE: FOCUS ON WHAT WORKS

What I just laid out for you is a tested, proven method. It will work.

That doesn't make it the "right" method. *There is no "right" method.*

The only "right" method of writing is the one that works for you.

For example, we have one author who can only write by sitting in his Tesla while it is charging in his garage, putting a specific playlist on his phone, plugging in earbuds, and turning up the volume. He knows he has forty-five minutes of charge time to get his work done, and he makes the most of that window.

There is only the method that WORKS for you. ALWAYS feel free to use what works. So if any part of this feels off, substitute what makes more sense for you.

That being said—unless you KNOW you have a method that works better for you—assume what I'm telling you is the best way to do it. Our writing plan is based both on decades of experience with actual authors, and the best empirical data about how authors succeed.

## WHAT IF I MISS A DAY OF WRITING?

Forgive yourself, and move on. It's fine.

*“You can’t wait for inspiration, you have to go after it with a club.”*

—JACK LONDON



## THE SCRIBE GUIDE TO WRITING EFFECTIVE NONFICTION

*“When you’re forced to be simple, you’re forced to face the real problem. When you can’t deliver ornament, you have to deliver substance.”*

—PAUL GRAHAM

Remember writing essays in school with a minimum word count?

If you were like me, you’re guilty of turning “*they said*” into “*they then proceeded to vocally exclaim...*”

I can’t think of a worse way to learn to write.

I didn’t have five pages of thoughts about Paul Revere’s ride, but being forced to write that much forced me to write convoluted sentences packed with unnecessary words to pad my essay and hit the space requirement.

What I didn’t learn in school is how to write something *people want to read*. That is the key to nonfiction, and it’s never covered in school.

Great nonfiction is short, simple, direct, and about the reader.

## THE FOUR SCRIBE WRITING PRINCIPLES

### 1. MAKE IT SHORT

This is the most important principle. If you get this one right, the rest (usually) take care of themselves.

Keep your writing short on all levels. Short chapters (usually no more than 4k words). Short paragraphs (2-3 sentences). Short sentences (5-20 words). Even shorter words (less than 12 characters).

Brevity forces economy and effectiveness. When you put a space constraint on your writing, it compels you to focus on the essential and cut the rest.

The same applies with words. Short words force you to be clear. How many times have you seen someone use big words to mask their lack of true understanding? Hey professor, throwing in “obsequiousness” doesn’t make you sound smart—it just tunes people out.

One key point: make it as short as possible *without leaving anything out*. Short does not mean missing essential content.

### 2. MAKE IT SIMPLE

Simple is very similar to short, but not the same thing. You can write something that’s short but complex. That doesn’t work well.

Simple words and sentences force you to write in plain English. Even difficult and complex ideas can be broken down into small words and short sentences. As Richard Feynman said, if you cannot explain your idea simply, it probably means you don’t fully understand it (which is bad, if you’re writing a book).

Simple words and sentences also enable you to be understood by

far more readers. Nonfiction writing is generally about persuasion. You are writing to try to convince or persuade someone of something. The main technique to convince someone is to keep things simple. How can you persuade someone or convince them to do something if they don't fully understand what you're trying to tell them?

Simple also means getting rid of extra words. Any word not absolutely necessary to convey your point must go.

### 3. MAKE IT DIRECT

Most nonfiction writing is indirect in some way—passive voice, jargon, multiple clauses, heavy use of adjectives and adverbs.

Don't do these things. If you're doing them, stop. If you aren't sure what they are, then do this:

Make each sentence a single, clear statement. Connect it to the sentence before and the sentence after. Do not put multiple thoughts in one sentence.

Make your writing as direct as it can be.

I have to explain passive and active voice, because most people don't know what it is. Active voice means the subject of the sentence is performing the verb. Passive voice means the subject of the sentence receives the action. Even though they mean the same thing, the effect is very different. Example:

Active: Tucker wrote the book.

Passive: The book was written by Tucker.

Active voice is much easier for people to read because they can picture the sentence. You can see Tucker writing a book.

But in the passive voice, there is another cognitive step. You have to first imagine a book, then think about Tucker writing that book.

This small cognitive step makes a huge difference in how people respond to your writing.

That's not the worst part of indirect, passive voice writing. Do you hate corporate bullshit writing? All of it is in passive voice. It's used by people in power to avoid responsibility. Watch:

Active: I made a mistake.

Passive: Mistakes were made.

Be direct.

#### 4. MAKE IT ABOUT THE READER

Ask yourself this question about everything you write:

*“Why does the reader care?”*

This is the hardest principle to apply, because when you do this, you realize that most of your writing is for yourself—not the reader. You see your writing for what it probably is: selfish, indulgent, and grandiose.

If that happens, don't get down on yourself. That is common. Only *every author ever* has had that problem. All you have to do is stop writing about things the reader doesn't care about and focus on what they do.

#### CONCLUSION

Short, simple, direct, about the reader.



Those are the four keys to effective nonfiction writing.

Easy to understand.

Not always easy to do.

These principles fly in the face of decades of conventional school training about writing. I was not taught these in school. In fact, I was taught almost all the opposite.

It took me a decade of professional writing before I figured out that these work.

*“It’s the mark of a genius to explain a complex topic in a simple way.”*

—NAVAL RAVIKANT





## HOW TO WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFT (THE VOMIT METHOD)

What we've found working with thousands of authors is that almost all of them know how to write out their ideas. What they need most is what we've already gone over: defined book positioning and a clear book plan. From there, the writing itself is easy.

Where problems arise is in the *mindset around writing*. Let's talk about that.

### **GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO WRITE A MEDIOCRE FIRST DRAFT**

This is a simple thing, but one that most people skip:

*Give yourself permission to write a mediocre first draft.*

Most beginning authors have this notion that professional writers put out amazing first drafts, or that their first draft has to be really good.

That is nonsense.

I can tell you, as a professional writer who has written multiple *New York Times* Best Sellers, my first drafts are utter garbage. Worse than mediocre. They are terrible.

But that doesn't bother me, because I know I can edit them until they are not terrible. The Barbara Kingsolver quote tells it all:

1. To begin, give yourself permission to write a bad book.
2. Revise until it's not a bad book.

### THE WONDERS OF THE “VOMIT DRAFT”

Many people struggle with giving themselves permission to write a mediocre first draft, so we developed a concept called the “vomit draft.”

We literally call the first draft the “vomit draft.” This is because when you're vomiting, you don't care about looking beautiful or being elegant. When you're vomiting, you just want to get it all out, because that's the only way to get it over with. And the only way to get it all out is to keep going through the pain.

What's cool about the vomit draft is, unlike vomiting in front of people, your vomit draft is **ONLY** for you. You are the only person who will ever see it, and you will edit this before even your editor sees it.

By focusing on just getting it out, it stops you from reading and editing as you go, which inevitably slows you down and stalls you.

When you write something you think is garbage, just say, “That's a problem for Future Tucker!” and keep moving.

## **WRITE YOUR VOMIT DRAFT WITHOUT STOPPING TO EDIT**

This might be the most important advice in this book, so pay attention:

*Write your vomit draft as quickly as possible. Don't stop. Don't edit.  
Move forward without looking back until your vomit draft is done.*

Let me repeat that and break it down to be very clear and sure you got it:

Write your vomit draft as quickly as possible.

DO NOT STOP TO READ IT.

DO NOT EDIT.

MOVE FORWARD UNTIL YOUR VOMIT DRAFT IS DONE.

I cannot be more serious or literal about this.

In fact, I want you to say this out loud, right now:

“I will not edit my vomit draft until I am done writing it.”

The quickest way to derail a vomit draft is to start editing before you finish. I don't care who you are—if you start editing your vomit draft, you **WILL** get stuck.

If you edit during the vomit draft stage, the best-case scenario is you double the amount of time it takes to write the book.

## **WHY DOES THIS WORK?**

Using the Vomit Draft Method does two things:

1. It suspends your self-judgment.

2. Creates momentum through daily victories (getting 250 words per day and celebrating that adds up, and reframes how you see yourself).

If you edit as you write, it totally derails your book. The bully in your brain, the part of you that is ridiculously hard on yourself, will start to second-guess you and shame you and will, at best, slow you down—if not kill your motivation altogether.

If you think something is terrible and you hate it, that's fine. Use the “comment” function to highlight it and say, “*This is your problem, Future Tucker,*” and then move on. You'll get to it later.

I'm going to say this again: the vomit draft is for you. NO ONE but you will ever read it.

Once you start editing (which I will explain how to do next), that is when you focus on what people will think. The part of yourself that wants to edit as you go—the perfectionist, the self-critical part—that is a great editor, but a terrible writer. Put it away until the vomit draft is done.

## FINDING YOUR VOICE

For some reason, when it comes time to writing, lots of authors become obsessed with “finding their voice.”

I'll often tease authors and ask them things like, “Hey, did you look behind your sofa? Your voice might be there.”

The joke is silly, but the point is right—you don't “find” your voice outside of yourself. Your voice is already a part of who you are. Your job as an author is to get out of the way and let it out.

The second thing authors do wrong is trying to mimic a voice. You can't be Malcolm Gladwell, you can only be you, so don't try to be.

So how do you make sure it's your voice in your book? There are two frames we recommend authors take:

#### VOICE FRAME #1: CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND

This is the most common mental frame that our authors use. When they sit down to write, they envision themselves talking to a friend.

This is literally the frame I used to write this section—I pretended to explain this to a friend of mine.

Getting in that state of mind does several things:

- It relieves any anxiety, because this is just a conversation with friends.
- It helps keep my focus on the listener, because they're a friend and I want to be attentive to them.
- It helps me stay centered on providing value to the listener, because in a teaching-style conversation, I am only thinking about what the other person is learning and taking in.
- It helps me keep momentum and motivation, because I want to make sure I am always helpful to my friend.

John Steinbeck says it best:

Forget your generalized audience. In the first place, the nameless, faceless audience will scare you to death and in the second place, unlike the theater, it doesn't exist. In writing, your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person—a real person you know, or an imagined person and write to that one.

#### VOICE FRAME #2: HELP A STRANGER HEAL THE SAME PAIN YOU HAD

This is very similar to the “conversation with a friend” frame, but it is also different in a few ways. If you envision yourself helping a stranger solve a painful problem, you do these things:

- You make it much easier to be brave in your writing and get past any fear or anxiety, because you are focused on their pain.
- You focus on specific and actionable information, which will make your book better and more meaningful to your readers.
- It helps you keep momentum and motivation, because you are focused on alleviating their pain.

Uber Cool Trick: Combine the two. If you envision yourself talking to a friend AND helping them through something difficult you've already done, that might be the best of both worlds.

Both of these methods allow you to get out of your own way and let your voice come through naturally.

Why?

Because you *aren't* actually thinking about voice. You are focused on the reader. Focusing on the reader, rather than on yourself, is a superpower technique you can use at every stage to create an effective, successful book.

Don't worry about being a writer, just help people, and your voice will take care of itself.

## HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN ENERGY?

Most authors who ask about “energy” are really asking about something else. This is generally fear or anxiety taking another form. Go look at the fear chapter for reminders on how to deal with that.

That being said, the most important aspect of energy is maintaining a baseline of self-care, and then having a schedule and sticking to it. If you do those two things, you'll generate and protect most of your energy levels.



## **HOW DO YOU BEAT PROCRASTINATION?**

Like almost everything that stops you from sitting down and writing, procrastination is a symptom of fear in another form.

If you find yourself procrastinating, then ask yourself if you believe in your plan and your outline. Sometimes procrastination is your subconscious telling you that something is wrong with your plan.

Look at your plan for your book again. Examine it, and ask yourself if you believe in each section. If you don't, then fix wherever you see a problem, and you should be good.

Also, another great way to beat procrastination is to use public accountability. When you are lagging on your book, post about it, and that will help you get support and make sure you find the will to keep going.

## **SHOULD YOU WRITE SEQUENTIALLY?**

For most authors, you're better off going sequentially unless you get stuck. If you get stuck, leave it, and go to the next place you can pick up. Fill in holes later.

## **HOW LONG SHOULD YOUR BOOK BE?**

We tell our authors that their book should be as short as possible, without leaving anything out.

You should not write thinking about length, but you should remember to keep your book as short and focused as possible. Shorter books are much better. They sell better, they are more read, more engaged, and more impactful.

The data we have on this is very clear: books under 100 pages don't sell as well (lower perception of value), books between 100 and 199 pages sell the best, books between 200 and 299 pages sell almost

as well as the ones in the hundreds, and books over 300 pages sell the least (that length is a big investment of time).

As a rule of thumb, you can assume about 250 words per printed page, so 100-199 pages is 25k-50k words.

### **DON'T USE JARGON**

Make sure your voice is accessible, and not full of needless jargon.

If you find yourself wanting to use jargon, go back to your ideal reader and ask yourself, “Will they understand this? Is this necessary to effectively communicate with them?”

Now, if your audience likes jargon and wants to hear that in a book addressed to them, then use it. Just make sure it's appropriate to your audience.

### **TYPING VS. WRITING BY HAND**

This is not going to be the right choice for everyone, but it is a valid choice you can absolutely make: instead of typing your vomit draft out, you can write it out by hand.

For some people, this works really, really well. It provides these benefits:

- Stops them from going back and editing, because that process is now so difficult.
- Makes it easier for them to get in the flow and just surrender to the writing process.
- For some people, the handwriting is a cleaner cognitive connection to the ideas than typing. This is NOT true for all people, but definitely for some.

This author sums up the benefits to her well:



**Denise Gosnell**

May 6



Hand wrote drafts for chapters 3 and 4 today. I've decided that I'm not going to have any of them typed up until all 12 chapters of vomit drafts are hand written. That way, I won't be tempted to edit them first. I'm really enjoying the handwriting of the chapters. I know it's not for everyone, but I love being able to sit outside in nature or at the bookstore with just my outline and a notebook and letting it flow. #EnjoyTheProcess  
#FindYourWayToMakeItFun



Tucker Max, Hal Clifford and 9 others

2 Comments Seen by 45





## HOW TO WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFT (THE SCRIBE METHOD)

*“You must understand that there is more than one path to the top of the mountain.”*

—MIYAMOTO MUSASHI

### THE SCRIBE METHOD

The idea behind the Scribe Method is very simple: instead of facing a blank page and typing your first draft, you get your first draft down by speaking it out loud. You record yourself, then get the recording transcribed. You then edit that transcript into the first draft.

This will not get you to a final draft, but it substantially accelerates the writing process.

This method is an updated version of the old way books used to be written: they were dictated to professional scribes.

If you know you want to do it this way, skip down to “How to Use The Scribe Method.”

If you still aren't sure and need some convincing, read the next section.

### WHY DO IT THIS WAY?

Writing is challenging for most people.

Why?

It's not because they are stupid or lazy or unskilled. It's because writing requires deep, specialized skill. The writing skill is a totally different skill from having intelligence, wisdom, experience, or knowledge to share.

Think about it: How many intelligent and accomplished people do you know who have all kinds of things to say, but hate writing?

Quite a few, I am sure (you might even be one).

The inverse is true, as well. How many skilled and experienced writers have you read who use lots of beautiful words to effectively say nothing? Sadly, that might describe the majority of professional writers.

Writing is a specific cognitive skill that is totally distinct from thinking and acquiring wisdom. Just like the ability to do math in your head is a skill distinct from being a good mathematician (Richard Feynman, the brilliant quantum physicist, often used calculators), or the ability to read sheet music is not a necessary skill to be a great musician (Jimi Hendrix, the legendary guitarist and performer, couldn't read sheet music), writing has nothing to do with anything other than the ability to write.

This begs the question: *Is the skill of writing really a necessary part of sharing knowledge and ideas?*

After all, if the ultimate goal of a book is to share your knowledge and ideas with the world, is there another way to record this wisdom without having to physically write it down yourself?

Of course there's another way to share knowledge and wisdom: by talking.

**Talking is the most natural way to communicate ideas and information between humans.**

We've been talking for at least 150,000 years, but we've only been writing for about 10,000 of those.

Think about people with dyslexia. Some of the smartest, most accomplished people on earth—Richard Branson, for example—can barely write an email. Branson is not stupid, nor is anyone else just because they have dyslexia. Those with dyslexia are never able to efficiently develop writing and reading functions.

Simply put, some human brains are not optimized to read or write text, but we are all optimized to talk and listen. Richard Branson can't write, but he can absolutely talk.

In fact, most of human knowledge throughout antiquity was shared and recorded through oral history.

For most people, talking is easier than writing, but that still leaves the work of turning the talking into a book. Is there a way for a person to talk about their wisdom and ideas, instead of writing them down, and use that talking as the basis for the book?

Yes, of course there is, and people have been leveraging this method throughout history. Here's a very short list of people whose words still move the world, yet they never wrote anything down:

- Socrates never wrote anything down, Plato recorded his words.

- Jesus Christ...never wrote down a word, the Apostles (like Paul) did.
- Buddha never wrote any of his teachings, his disciples did.
- Marco Polo told his cellmate about his travels while they were in jail, and his cellmate (who was an actual scribe) wrote them down.
- Dostoyevsky dictated his novels to his wife, who wrote them down.
- Winston Churchill dictated most of his writing to his secretary.
- Malcolm X dictated his iconic autobiography to journalist Alex Haley.

For thousands of years, writing was a specific job, different from thinking. People who did the writing were called “scribes,” and they were not themselves the esteemed thinkers and influencers of their era (what we would now call a “thought leader”). They were considered artisans with particular skills, like those of lawyers or mechanics.

Take one of the most prolific authors of the Roman age, the great Julius Caesar. He used scribes to record almost every single line in all of his letters and books.

Why did he use scribes instead of writing them himself?

For the obvious reason: his time was too valuable to be spent mastering the skill of writing words so they read properly on the page.

*Julius Caesar spent his time thinking and doing things, not writing.*

Caesar had scribes record his thoughts as he spoke them out loud, and then he signed his name to them. His volumes of letters and correspondences are all rightly authored by him, yet he “wrote” none of the actual words down.

That’s why we advocate the scribe process for some people: it



works, it saves time, and it even generally makes for better writing. It is how many of history's most important figures recorded their wisdom for posterity.

In summary, the reasons you might want to use this method:

1. **Much easier:** it gets you a very rough draft to edit in about 30 percent of the time it will take you to write a first draft.
2. **Much faster:** saves you the time and anxiety of contending with a blank page.
3. **Makes a better book:** it forces you to teach your knowledge in a way that is reader centric.

#### WHO SHOULD NOT USE THE SCRIBE METHOD?

Here are the main reasons not to use the Scribe Method:

1. **You're used to writing:** You're used to writing—i.e., “thinking through your fingers”—and learning a new method would be counterproductive at this point. A number of professional writers are like this (myself included).
2. **You don't know the topic well:** You don't actually know your topic well enough to teach it out loud yet. In essence, you have to figure out your book as you write it. This is also common for writers, but less common for the authors we work with.
3. **You're afraid of a new method:** There is nothing wrong with being uncertain about a “new” method. If you feel more confident with the methods you know better, then use them.

Again, there is no “right” or “wrong” way to write a book. The right way is the way that works for you and that ultimately results in a published book.

#### HOW TO USE THE SCRIBE METHOD

The Scribe process is very simple: instead of writing down the first

draft, you take the outline and record yourself speaking through it, as if you were teaching your knowledge to someone or giving a lecture. Then you get it transcribed, and then use that transcription as the foundation of your rough draft.

#### STEP 1: PREPARE TO RECORD YOUR AUDIO

Technology makes the logistics of recording your content incredibly easy. There are an infinite number of ways to record yourself and a number of services you can use to get that recording transcribed.

Your computer or iPhone has a built-in recorder. You can use that easily.

We recommend one service specifically, simply because they make everything so simple: Rev.com. The cost is \$1 per minute, which is standard in the industry.

There is also an app called Temi that uses AI to transcribe, and it's only \$0.10 per minute. The quality is lower than human transcription, but considering it's 90 percent cheaper, that's a worthwhile option as well.

Because you are going to have your recording transcribed, be sure to create a quality audio file that will produce a clean and complete transcript. That means no background noise (like side conversations), and a good enough microphone, placed close to your mouth, to cleanly capture everything you say. You don't need anything fancy—iPhone earbud microphones are great.

This should be obvious, but only record one chapter at a time, and one chapter per audio file. This makes the transcripts easy to manage.

For a final book of 30,000 words, you'll have around 10-12 chapters, and should aim for six to eight hours of interview recording. This means about 30-45 minutes per chapter.

Obviously, you won't be able to do this all in one sitting. It is important that you divvy out the length and make sure to get enough interview material for each chapter.

## STEP 2: TIPS FOR RECORDING YOUR ROUGH DRAFT

Here are some tips and ideas to keep in mind while you are delivering your first draft—all strategies we've found to be true in the past:

### *A. Frame it as teaching*

Think about who the ideal audience is for this book, and then pretend that you are talking to them. Go back to your avatar. If you can picture a real person you know who fits that mold, that will make this even easier.

Anticipate what this reader will be most interested in, what they would want to know next, and what questions they would have.

Be as thorough as humanly possible—even if it seems ridiculous—with the details of your instructions or inquiries. Make sure not to gloss over any steps or rungs in the ladder leading up to your conclusion, even if they seem trivial or self-evident, because the reader won't fully understand unless you explain everything.

### *B. Stay with the outline*

Your outline is sequential for a reason; don't just move through it randomly from point to point. Stay with the outline, and on the point you mean to make. Remember, this is the foundation of the first draft, so the more you stay with the outline and on track, the easier it will be for you to use the transcript to write the book. You may realize you want to add or subtract information at some point down the line. That is precisely what later drafts are for. For now, stick with the outline.

### *C. Explain everything completely*

If you were lecturing simply to make your point, you could do it very quickly. But that's not the point of you speaking. You are teaching so the eventual reader will learn.

Your goal is to get a full, complete explanation out—far more than you probably need—so when you sit down to write out the book from your audio transcription, everything is there. The book needs to contain enough information to explain the concepts to uninformed, as well as informed, readers.

More is almost always better than less, so please say everything that comes to mind on the current point, especially anything you think is relevant. Don't worry about phrasing things eloquently, explaining everything perfectly on your first try, or not rambling. Substance matters more than style; you only need to worry about getting the substance right. It's much easier to cut words than to add words in places where you don't explain enough.

If you feel like you're being too obvious, always remember this quote by Nina Paley:

“Don't be original; be obvious. When you state the obvious, you actually seem original.”

## **CREATING YOUR ROUGH DRAFT FROM THE TRANSCRIPT**

Once you get the transcript of your audio recording from the transcription service, you will start the process of “translating” that audio transcript into book prose, which will be your first draft. Here's how to take the raw transcript and turn it into a rough draft:

### **STEP 1: ORGANIZE YOUR CHAPTERS**

If you recorded each chapter as its own audio file, then you will get them back from the transcriptionist in their own separate Word files.

The easiest way we've found to edit these is this method:

1. Create a new document (in Word or Google Docs)
2. Copy and paste the outline sections from each chapter at the top of the corresponding chapter transcript
3. Paste the entire audio transcript for each chapter below the chapter outline

This gets you the chapter structure up top, and the work on the audio transcript right below it.

#### STEP 2: "TRANSLATE" THE AUDIO TRANSCRIPT INTO BOOK PROSE

Once you have each chapter organized, you're going to "translate" your audio text into book prose. This is not as challenging as original writing, since the words and ideas are there.

But this is important: *this is not editing*. You will need to re-write the transcript in most cases.

There are a number of ways to do this, but there is one process that is most effective for us. It's counterintuitive, but the trick is to go slowly in order to finish more quickly. These are the exact steps we recommend going through for each chapter:

- We use a two-document process. One open document that the transcript is in. The other is the manuscript draft. You should "read, digest, write," shifting attention from transcript to manuscript.
- We recommend you go paragraph by paragraph, rewriting each one transcription passage onto the manuscript.

The point is you need to physically type your new chapters, paragraph by paragraph. DO NOT just edit the existing chunks of raw transcription.

Why not just edit the transcription directly?

Because writing this way is MUCH easier than editing your transcription into writing that reads well on the page.

There's a tendency to want to turn off your brain and use exactly what you say in the transcription, verbatim. This leads to the need for a LOT of editing, and ends up making the process pretty painful.

Once you get your transcript back, you'll see that transcribed audio is not written English. It's not even close. Attempting to edit it will drive you crazy. It's much better to read and absorb the spirit of what each paragraph of the transcript is trying to say, and then start fresh with sentences that make sense on the page.

This is essentially translating from one medium, audio, to another, writing.

Of course, there will be places where you can almost exactly use your words from the transcript. When that happens, it's great, and it makes your job easier. But for most people, this won't happen often.

Note: In some cases, this may include adding content that isn't in the transcript. Some ideas require some expansion to connect properly. You will need to add transitions or connections that aren't part of the transcript. This is totally fine, of course. They're your ideas, after all.

If this gets hard, and it will, just keep going. This is where it's easy to give up. You'll regret it if you do.

Again, don't worry about being perfect, as you're going to come back and do an edit later. This is just getting the first draft done.

You're getting something down that you can come back to and perfect later.

**PART 5**

**EDIT YOUR  
BOOK**







## HOW TO EDIT YOUR BOOK

*“When your story is ready for rewrite, cut it to the bone. Get rid of every ounce of excess fat. This is going to hurt; revising a story down to the bare essentials is always a little like murdering children, but it must be done.”*

—STEPHEN KING

Congratulations!

It feels amazing to get through the first draft. Reward yourself with some time to rest and relax. The hardest part is over. You now have a real book in your hands, even if it is rough.

When I say take some time to rest and relax, I’m very serious. Set the entire thing aside for *at least* a week, ideally two. This will give you a valuable fresh perspective when you come back and begin editing.

It’s possible to begin editing immediately, but the result won’t be as good. This is part of why we tell you to schedule two months for your editing—to give you a buffer to rest your mind and come back at your manuscript, fresh.

[By the way, if you wrote your book using the Scribe Nonfiction Writing Principles, then all of the editing instructions will dovetail perfectly.]

## HOW TO APPROACH EDITING

As you start editing, there are two frames we recommend you keep in mind:

1. The book is for your reader, not for you.
2. Edit for a 12-year-old.

They sound weird? Lemme explain.

### 1. THE BOOK IS FOR YOUR READER, NOT FOR YOU

Yes of course the book is yours. Yes, it probably has a lot of your stories in it—in fact it should. Yes, the book is going to create benefits for you.

But as we discussed in positioning, if you want the book to help you, then the book has to provide value to the reader. In essence, to get what you want, you must give them what they want.

That is much easier said than done. Here are some facts about readers. They are:

1. Impatient
2. Selfish
3. Ignorant (about your subject)

I don't mean that in a bad way. It's just how all readers are (including you and me).

The reality is that in a book, you are buying the attention of the reader, ONE PARAGRAPH AT A TIME.

You can write the book without worrying about fact, but once you start editing, it becomes very important.

The point is that, as you write, you can think of yourself, but as you edit, you need to be thinking about your reader.

How do you think about them? This leads directly to the next frame.

## 2. EDIT FOR A 12-YEAR-OLD

What's the bestselling novel of the past three decades?

*50 Shades of Grey.*

Which is written at a teenage/young adult level.

What's the bestselling novel series of the past three decades?

*Harry Potter.*

Which is written at a teenage/young adult level.

Even though those books were written at the reading level of teenage audiences, 80 percent of *50 Shades* audience was adults, and 60 percent of the *Harry Potter* audience was adults. [The Young Adult designation actually is for adults who don't want complex language, not actually for teens. Yes, people think it's for teens, but that is not the majority of book buyers for YA fiction.]

Why am I telling you this? What does fiction have to do with you?

Because when you write for a smart, interested 12-year-old, it forces you to be clear and direct—which in turn makes your book MORE appealing to older audiences.

I know this might seem far-fetched, but think about this:

On the list of the 10 bestselling business books of the past 30 years, there are three very short and simple NOVELS. I'm not kidding:

- *Who Moved My Cheese?*
- *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team*

- *The One Minute Manager*

What is the lesson for you here?

Telling simple and compelling stories to convey your point WORKS.

Writing for a smart, interested 12-year-old forces you to be clear and direct—which in turn makes your book MORE appealing to older audiences.

If you do that—without being condescending in tone—the book will probably be as clear and direct as you need it to be.

I'm not saying to be simplistic. I'm not saying to leave out any important information. I'm not even telling you to dumb anything down—far from it.

I am telling you to write your ideas in a digestible, direct way such that a smart and interested 12-year-old could understand them.

To be clear, that doesn't mean your ideas *themselves* have to be simple; it just means your presentation of them is simple and direct.

The problem is that so many people think good writing is complicated and difficult to read. That is not true. There are some fields, like academia, where writing in a needlessly complex way is given high status.

But outside of those fields, the more direct and simple the writing is, the more accessible your actual ideas will be, and the better the book will do with readers—which is how you get everything you want as well.

## THE THREE-STEP EDITING METHOD

We recommend a three-step editing process:

1. **Make-It-Right Edit:** Make sure everything is in there, in the right order, and it all makes sense.
2. **Line-by-Line Edit:** Go deep into the chapters, paragraphs, and sentences to make sure it says exactly what you want.
3. **Read-Aloud Edit:** Read the manuscript out loud—preferably to a person—and make sure it sounds right to the ear.

#### PART 1: MAKE-IT-RIGHT EDIT

This should be the easiest and most simple editing pass. There are three goals to the “make-it-right” edit. You want to ensure that:

1. All content is in the book
2. In the right order
3. The structure and positioning all make sense

This is basically just making sure the book has everything in it so you can actually begin the deep editing. All the writing and stories that need to be in, are in, and they are in the right order, and it all makes sense.

That’s pretty much it. Don’t make this more complicated than it needs to be.

#### PART 2: LINE-BY-LINE EDIT

This is the framework we use for our line-by-line editing. It’s simple to understand, but powerful if you do it right. It gives you the exact questions to ask yourself at each level of editing:

As you read every **chapter**, ask yourself these six questions:

1. What point am I making?
2. Is it necessary?
3. Is it as short as possible?
4. Is it as simple as possible?

5. Is it as direct as possible?
6. Did I leave anything out?

We mean this literally—ask yourself these questions, each time.

Yes, this is tedious. But if you do this exercise consistently, it becomes second nature. Once that happens, you'll find that you cannot only cut the fluff out of your book, you can also make your book sharper and more refined, and you'll be able to hone in on what you are trying to say, and nail it.

Do it for each paragraph, then do it for each sentence. If you do this, you'll have an excellent book.

[By the way, I adapted these instructions from George Orwell's essay *Politics and the English Language*, which contains editing instructions from arguably the greatest writer of the twentieth century.]

[As an optional tool to help you do line-by-line editing, we recommend the Hemingway Editor: <http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>]

### PART 3: READ-ALOUD EDITING

This is an editing process that's not commonly taught but is a secret trick of numerous bestselling authors. Brené Brown, Neil Strauss, myself—we all do this.

When I was first writing *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell*, I had teams of proofreaders working through the book. First I proofread it, then I had the help of professional editor friends, and finally the publishing company had their people do their copyedits. I did not think that a single mistake would sneak by, and happily locked in the manuscript.

A few months later I recorded my audiobook, and as I read through the manuscript out loud, I was horrified.

There were 100 tiny little mistakes and changes I only heard once I said them out loud. Not just spelling; there were very few of those. They were more word choice or phrasing mistakes.

It drove me NUTS.

Don't make the mistake I made. Read your manuscript out loud, and mark changes as you go.

If the words roll off your tongue, they'll also flow smoothly in readers' heads. Because I waited until so late in the process to read it out loud, it was too late to make edits to the book.

Learn from my mistake and read your manuscript out loud and make your changes before you start the publishing process.

If you find taking the time to sit and read out loud difficult (and a lot of authors do), we recommend having a friend help you out. If someone is sitting in the room with you, listening as you read through the manuscript, it'll create the social pressure you need to actually do it.

If it's something you would say out loud, then it reads clearly on the page. If it's something you would never say to another person, it won't read as clearly.

This sounds crazy, *but it works*. Paul Graham explains why:

Ok, so written and spoken language are different. Does that make written language worse?

If you want people to read and understand what you write, yes. Written language is more complex, which makes it more work to read. It's also

more formal and distant, which gives the readers' attention permission to drift.

You don't need complex sentences to express complex ideas. When specialists in some abstruse topic talk to one another about ideas in their field, they don't use sentences any more complex than they do when talking about what to have for lunch. They use different words, certainly. But even those they use no more than necessary. And in my experience, the harder the subject, the more informally experts speak. Partly, I think, because they have less to prove, and partly because the harder the ideas you're talking about, the less you can afford to let language get in the way.

If you simply manage to write in spoken language, you'll be ahead of 95 percent of writers. And it's so easy to do: just don't let a sentence through unless it's the way you'd say it to a friend.

The reason reading your manuscript out loud works so well is because you will catch dozens of things you would have otherwise missed. Like Paul says, hearing yourself speak forces you to notice bad or strange phrasings—even if you don't know *why* it's off, you know it's off.

#### STEP 1: READ IT OUT LOUD TO A PERSON

If possible, read each chapter to a person. I know, that sounds awful and tedious, but reading to actual people forces you to really hear what is and is not working. It's an incredible forcing function.

If you can't do that, then set up a microphone and record yourself as you read aloud.

You can delete the recording afterward. All that matters is that you are reading it OUT LOUD.

This is KEY to making this process work.



You have to read it to a real person though. It doesn't really work any other way.

If you can't do this, then there is another solution: use Natural Reader. It translates your text to speech, so it's like someone else reading your manuscript to you: <https://naturalreaders.com/online/>.

Then you listen to what your words are saying—you'll hear the errors.

## STEP 2: EDIT BY FEEL

As you read, you will naturally ask yourself:

“Does this sound the same way I'd say it to an actual person? Does it feel right to me?”

You (and the other person) will inevitably hear errors, phrasings you want to change, and sentences that sound off that you want corrected. As you read it out loud, correct your mistakes.

If you “feel” something is off, and aren't sure how to change it, that's fine—just mark it the first time through. The first time reading it, you want to hear the problems, so you can go back and fix them on the page later.

*“In general, what is written must be easy to read and easy to speak; which is the same.”*

—ARISTOTLE

## HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I EDIT?

We recommend that authors do each phase one time. If you do them right, one time each is enough. For some manuscripts, a second line-by-line edit makes sense.

It's important to note: we recommend three rounds, because our authors go from these three rounds of edits to sending their manuscript to us, where our scribes do a full content edit. That would be a fourth round of edits.

Just know that if you want another set of eyes on your book after you finish the first three rounds, you can do that as well, and in fact, most authors do (even the ones who don't work with us).

### **WHEN TO STOP EDITING**

You'll know you're close to being done editing when you hate your book.

I'm joking, but only a little.

I've written seven books, and I hated every single book in editing. It usually happens somewhere around the 70-80 percent mark. When I am close enough that I could see the end, but far enough that it still felt like it would be forever to get there, I hate everything and want to quit.

Now when I write a book, I know it's coming, I can prepare for it and recognize it when it comes, and in a way, I actually welcome it. When I start hating my book, I know I'm close to being done, and I just need one more final push.

Here's what's funny about this: by about the three-month mark after your book is released, you will have totally forgotten about this.

I'm not joking at all. It reminds me of my wife and our children.

Her first childbirth went well, at least as far as first births go. We had midwives and did a home birth, it took about seven hours, and everything was smooth.

But if you've had kids, you know smooth does not mean pleasant.

She was in **SERIOUS** pain. It was seven hours of agony and suffering. She hated every minute of it.

Then, when our son was like, nine months old, we were at dinner with some friends and talking about kids. She said, “I can’t wait to have our next one. The first birth was so pleasant and wonderful.”

I went slack-jawed, “What?? Were you not there? You were in screaming agony the whole time. You yelled curses at me and at God.”

She kind of looked at me funny, “Yeah...I know you’re right. I know that’s all true. But I don’t remember it that way at all.”

That is what writing a book is like. You hate it at the end, and love it once it’s out.

If you need a frame to help you decide when and if you are done editing, you can use what we call the Edit Stop Quiz. It’s two questions, and you can use it over and over again until you are done.

**EDIT STOP QUIZ, QUESTION #1: IS THIS THE BEST BOOK YOU CAN WRITE, RIGHT NOW?**

If the answer is yes, then send to publish.

If the answer is no, then go to question #2.

**EDIT STOP QUIZ, QUESTION #2: WHAT CAN YOU DO RIGHT NOW TO MAKE IT BETTER?**

If there is an answer, something you can do now, do it.

If there is nothing you can do now—if the answer is something like, “Become a better writer”—then send to publish.

The point of this is to get you out of your spiral of “Well, if I did a

little more research...” and then two years later your book is still stuck. That is bullshit, and procrastination to stop you from finishing your book.

If you want to become a better writer to eventually write a much better book, you can do that. But the path to that destination is publishing this book now.

### A FINAL NOTE ON FINISHING YOUR EDITS

Most first-time authors fall into the “editing death spiral.” This is when they keep editing the same thing over and over, and cannot stop.

We see this all the time. They will do the first three rounds of edits fine, then we finish our edits on the book, give it back to the author, and they spend six months with it.

Not because they are making substantive changes. Instead they get lost in details, fretting over small word choices, making tiny edits, and obsessing over obscure details. We almost have to pry the book out of their hands so we can finish it, even though they don’t really have anything left to change.

This can be driven by many different forces, such as perfectionism, fear of publishing, fear of success, or fear of failure. There will always be more to work on, more to change, more to improve. That thinking will kill your book. There are two aphorisms we use to help get authors past this point:

*“Perfect is the enemy of good, shipped is better than perfect.”*

—SETH GODIN

*“[Books] are never truly finished, only abandoned.”*

—LEONARDO DA VINCI

Pick your aphorism, they all mean the same thing: stop editing, get your book in print, or it doesn't do anyone any good.

If you have reached this point and are editing too much, then you need to stop. We can write a whole different book about this subject, but we're going to simply say this:

*At least one person, and probably many more, want to learn what your book will teach them. You have an obligation to yourself and to your audience to stop editing and put the book out.*

*Give your knowledge to them, even if it's not perfect. They want and need it.*

*“Those who know that they are profound strive for clarity. Those who would like to seem profound to the crowd strive for obscurity.”*

—NIETZSCHE





## SHOULD YOU ASK PEOPLE FOR FEEDBACK?

*“I try to leave out the parts that people skip.”*

—ELMORE LEONARD

If your car broke down, would you ask a chef to look at it and tell you what’s wrong?

Unless it’s the Oscar Meyer Weiner Mobile, what’s a chef going to tell you?

At best, he’ll scratch his head and say, “Yeah, looks like it’s not working.” Thanks, super helpful.

At worst, he’ll try to be helpful, and end up sending you down some nonsense rabbit hole.

No, if you want your car fixed, you take it to a mechanic because a mechanic has experience at fixing cars. It’s literally what they get paid for.

I know this example is silly. Yet, authors will do this exact thing.

I could tell you Halloween-style horror stories about authors who had a great manuscript, and then sent it to random friends for feedback.

What happens is that the friends either feel like they have to say something, so they just make random comments, or even worse, they think they know how to write because they spend all day writing emails, but they don't know anything about books, and their nonsense comments send the author into a tailspin.

If you want to get feedback, there is a right way to ask, and you should only ask specific people. Those specific people should generally be a person from one of these three groups:

1. People who are experienced writers/editors
2. People who are experts in your specific field
3. People who are in the exact audience you want your book to reach

Let's break down each category:

### **1. EXPERIENCED WRITERS OR EDITORS**

This is obvious. Someone who has a lot of experience in writing and editing can almost certainly help you with your manuscript and give useful feedback.

Keep in mind that many people *vastly overestimate* their experience and ability in these areas. Many people think because they write emails all day, it qualifies them as skilled writers or editors, when in fact they are not that at all.

This is why at Scribe we have a rigorous testing process before we even begin to work with editors, outliners, and publishing managers—even if they are employed full time as writers or editors, we don't assume they're skilled. We want to see their work, and we judge their ability by the quality of their work.



What happens as a result of these tests? We reject about 98 percent of the people who apply to work with us, all of whom have legitimate writing or editing experience. That should tell you the general quality of the “experts” out there.

We bring this up only because we’ve seen many authors give their manuscript to a friend who claimed to be a “great” writer, only to see that friend give truly awful notes that left the author confused and hurt, and ended up creating lots of problems with the book.

Here’s the hard reality of writing feedback: *most people have NO IDEA what they are talking about*, especially with regard to books and writing, and getting feedback from those people is harmful.

## **2. SOMEONE IN YOUR FIELD OR NICHE**

Asking someone who shares your field of expertise for feedback can be quite helpful. For example, if you are a financial advisor and you give your book to two of your trusted financial advisor friends to read it, they can give you a perspective on the book that could be both helpful and unique.

The key to making this fruitful is to ask them to specifically focus on what they know well. When you give them the manuscript, ask them to read it as a financial advisor, checking to make sure you haven’t made any factual errors, and that clients will understand it, and that your tone is appropriate for your profession—things like that.

Basically, you are asking them to apply their decades of expertise to your manuscript. That will work well.

## **3. SOMEONE IN YOUR AUDIENCE**

If your book is about how to build an app business, and you give it to two friends who are trying to build app businesses, that is perfect. They could tell you what helped them in the book, which parts they

wished had more content, and where they got confused or lost. That sort of feedback tends to be valuable.

Just be very careful who you select, and give them very specific instructions. If you pick someone in your primary audience, make sure to tell them what you want to know.

For example say, “I’d love you to read my manuscript, and tell me where it loses you, or doesn’t make sense, or is hard to follow.”

### **ALL FEEDBACK IS WRONG**

Be careful with this feedback. The best piece of advice I’ve ever heard about feedback on a book is this:

All feedback is wrong somehow. Your job is to figure out what’s right about it, and only pay attention to that.

What this means is that most people are giving you feedback based on how they feel, and they almost certainly don’t know how to fix the issue. This quote from author Neil Gaiman sums it up:

When people tell you something’s wrong or doesn’t work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong.

His point is that the reader may know that your book isn’t working for them in some way, and you should listen to that critique.

However, their *ideas for solutions* are probably bad, because they have no experience solving writing problems.

If someone in your audience says something isn’t working for them, listen to their comments, but use your own ideas and knowledge to fix the problem. No one knows your book and your subject matter better than you do.

## THE WORST THINGS TO DO (AND HOW TO FIX THEM)

There are a few things you should never do in terms of feedback:

**DO NOT put some pages out on Facebook/Twitter for feedback:** This is a disaster. You will deeply regret it. In my 15+ years as a writer, I have never seen this work for anyone. There are so many reasons this goes wrong it is hard to list them all. Just think of it this way:

If you wanted advice on your clothes, would you stand in the middle of an amusement park and randomly ask people who walked by?

Of course not.

Well, asking for an opinion of your writing on social media is the same thing. I cannot stress enough that you should not do this.

**Do pick specific people to ask for help:** There is nothing wrong with asking specific people for specific forms of feedback, as discussed above. The keyword there is “specific people.” Experts at writing, or experts in your field or people in your audience. That is the key.

**DO NOT give your manuscript to someone without asking for specific feedback:** Do not throw your manuscript to someone and say, “Hey take a look at this and tell me what you think.” That is a recipe for all kinds of wasted time and effort.

**DO be specific in your ask.** There are definitely situations where asking for feedback is both appropriate and helpful, but always say something like, “Hey, can you tell me if you think my voice in the book comes off as too unprofessional for an accountant?”

## SHOULD YOU LET FRIENDS AND FAMILY GIVE FEEDBACK ON YOUR MANUSCRIPT?

Be very careful with asking friends and family to give you feedback.

I've seen a lot of manuscripts ruined by friends and family trying to be nice.

What happens is they feel like they are supposed to give feedback, so they just mention things that occur to them. While they are well-intentioned, most of their advice is not only wrong, but it's also counter-productive and toxic—a dynamic that can send authors into spirals.

The bottom line? Unless your friends and family fit into the above categories, or you are okay with ignoring them, don't let them give you feedback.

## **PART 6**

# **FINISH YOUR MANUSCRIPT**





## PICKING THE PERFECT BOOK TITLE

*“All that is clever eschew. Do not do.”*

—ANNE HERBERT

Shockingly, there’s little useful guidance out there about book titling. What advice exists is usually of little help:

- Trite (“Go with your gut!”)
- Superficial (“Browse bookstores for ideas!”)
- Or worst of all, actively harmful (“Don’t spend too much time on it.”)

They’re all wrong.

Just like companies that spend millions on naming new products, and media companies that spend time testing different titles for posts, ***you should spend substantial time and energy finding the right book title.***

This is a very important decision, one you need to think about and get right to ensure your book has the best possible chance of success.

In this comprehensive guide to picking the perfect book title, I will walk you through how to think about book titles, then tell you how to pick yours, and how to test it.

## WHY DO BOOK TITLES MATTER?

Your book title is the most important marketing decision you'll make. Period.

The title is the first thing the reader sees or hears about your book—even before the cover in most cases—and getting it right is the single most important book marketing decision you'll make (even though most people don't think about it as marketing). The title forms the basis of the reader's judgment about your book.

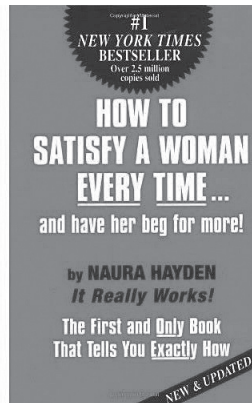
**Let's be clear:** A good title *won't* make your book do well. But a bad title will almost certainly *prevent* it from doing well.

The iconic example of the importance of a book title is the title change that led to an obscure book becoming a #1 best seller. In 1982 Naura Hayden released a book called “*Astro-Logical Love*.” It bombed.



She then took the exact same book, changed a small amount of the content, and reissued it with a different title, “*How to Satisfy a Woman Every Time...and Have Her Beg for More!*”





That book became a massive cultural phenomenon and a #1 best seller. Same book, same content, just a different title.

The takeaway for you is simple and clear: *Spend time figuring out the best possible title for your book, because it will largely determine what people think about your book, and thus, your book's success.*

## THE 5 ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD BOOK TITLE

A good title should have all of these attributes:

1. Attention Grabbing
2. Memorable and Searchable
3. Informative (gives an idea of what the book is about)
4. Easy and not embarrassing to say
5. Short

### 1. ATTENTION GRABBING

This should be pretty obvious. There are a million things pulling on people's attention, and you need a title that stands out. A bad title is boring.

There are many ways to grab attention; you can be provocative, controversial, exciting, make a promise, etc. The point is your title

should make people stop and pay attention to it. Here is what #1 best-selling author Tim Ferriss says about titles:

*The 4-Hour Workweek* also bothered some people and was ridiculed by others, which I took as a positive indicator. It's not accidental that Jay Leno parodied the book on-air—the title lends itself to it, and that was by design. You can't have strong positive responses without strong negative responses, and beware—above all—the lukewarm reception from all. “Oh, that's nice. I think it's pretty good,” is a death sentence.

## 2. MEMORABLE AND SEARCHABLE

This is not the same thing as grabbing attention (even though many people think it is). It's much easier to get a reaction out of someone and then be forgotten, than it is to get a reaction *and be memorable*.

Remember, a book title is not only the first thing a reader hears about your book, it's the one piece of information that a reader has that leads them back to the book itself.

If your book is recommended to them by a friend, and they can't remember the title, then they can't go find it in a bookstore or on Amazon. Best-selling author Scott Berkun says it well:

Often [the title] is all a potential buyer ever gets to see, and if they can draw interest, the book crosses its first of many hurdles in the improbable struggle of getting noticed. But titles only help so much. Most people hear about books the same way they hear about new bands. Or new people to meet. A friend or trusted source tells them it was good, and it was called <NAME HERE>. The title at that point serves as a moniker. It's the thing you need to remember to get the thing you want to get and little more.

This also means you want the book title to be easily searchable. In the world we live in, search is how people find things now. If your title does not lend itself to easy memorization and searchability on Google and Amazon, that is very bad.

### 3. INFORMATIVE (GIVES AN IDEA OF WHAT THE BOOK IS ABOUT)

This is the least crucial aspect for fiction books, but very important for nonfiction. The title, including the subtitle, should give the reader some sort of idea of what the book is about.

People aren't going to do your work for you; the easier you make it for them to understand the subject, the more likely you are to draw in the people who would find your book interesting.

A good test is to ask yourself this: *If you were to tell someone the title of your book at a party, would they have to ask what it's generally about?*

If so, that's probably a bad title.

Don't out-think yourself on your title. A title that is overly clever or somewhat unclear signals that the book is for people who immediately understand the word or phrase—which makes people who don't get it right away feel unintelligent, and thus less likely to buy the book.

By using a word or phrase that is either not immediately understandable by your desired audience or doesn't convey the point of the book, you are putting a huge obstacle in front of your success.

Though your book title should be informative and easily understood, it does not need to spell out the whole book idea. Take Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers* for example: this title does a great job of cuing the content of the book without describing it outright.

### 4. EASY AND NOT EMBARRASSING TO SAY

Having an easy-to-say title is a concept called cognitive fluency and to make it simple, it means that people are more likely to remember and respond favorably to words and phrases they can immediately understand and pronounce. We don't want to go too far into the

psychological literature here, but the point is this: Don't try to be too sophisticated at the risk of becoming obscure. It will only hurt your book.

It's a basic fact of human psychology—people don't like to feel stupid or socially awkward. If a book title is hard to pronounce, or more importantly, if it's a phrase that sounds stupid when said out loud, it makes them far less likely to buy it, and chances are they won't talk about it to other people.

One of the most important things to think about when picking your book title is word of mouth. Think about *how people will feel* about saying this book title out loud to their friends. Does it make them look smart or stupid?

The worst possible title is one that makes someone feel silly saying it out loud. For example, if the book title is something like “Why Racism Is Great,” no one is ever going to tell their friends about it, no matter how good the book is, because they have to then face the scrutiny of why they bought that book in the first place. Social context doesn't just matter some; it matters a lot.

Take this list of bad book titles, and imagine saying any of them out loud to your friends in a serious way—you'd never do that.

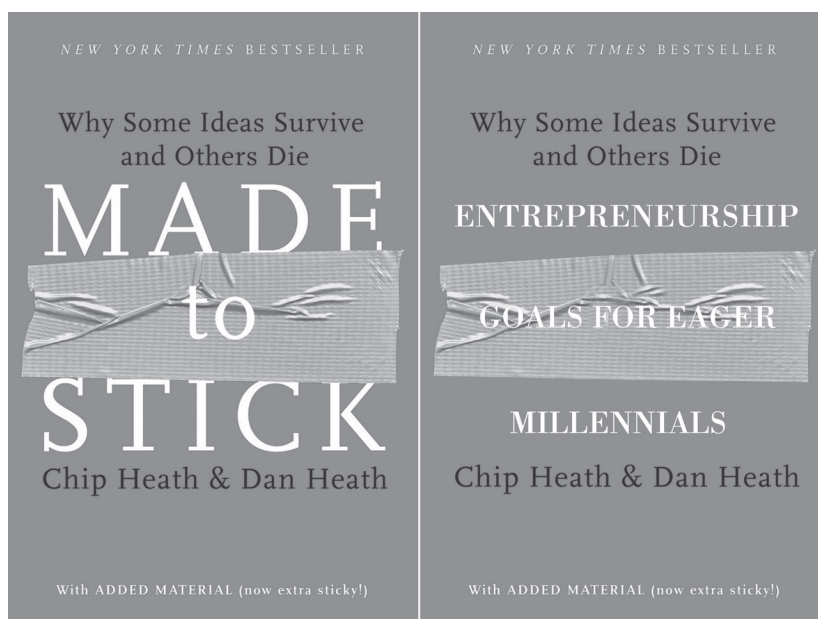
## 5. SHORT

Generally speaking, shorter titles are best. A short title is not only more memorable and easier to say, but it also gives more space and flexibility for better cover design.

People get lured into crafting titles that are exacting and long-winded in an effort to make the title signal the book idea and audience. In the title, stick to the core idea. If you want to get wordy, then leave that to the subtitle.

If you can, aim to keep the main title around five words or less. The subtitle can offer context or tell a bit more about what the reader will learn. Cameron Herold's book *Meetings Suck* has a pithy title, with a subtitle that helps the reader see why they need the book: *Turning One of the Most Loathed Elements of Business into One of the Most Valuable*.

Want to see the difference between a short title and a long title? Just look at this mock-up:



## SPECIFIC STEPS TO FIND THE PERFECT BOOK TITLE

### STEP 1: GET CLEAR ON YOUR BOOK OBJECTIVES

Your book objectives (building authority, raising your visibility, etc.) determine what type of title you pick. If you want to build a brand out of your nonfiction book, your title options are quite different than if you want to publish a memoir with a whimsical feel.

Let's examine all the functions your book title can serve, and the

places for potential use, before we walk you through the precise process of thinking up title ideas:

#### *How A Book Title Can Be Used*

- To sell the book to readers
- Establish the author's authority in a subject
- Be a hook for the author to get media visibility
- Branding for a company, author, conference, or course materials
- Advertise/market the book
- Used in speeches, slides, or other in-person activities
- Used in reviews, blog posts, articles, etc.
- Something the author has to say in all their press appearances
- Become a defining part of an author's future bio
- Decorate the cover
- Identify the Amazon/B&N listing
- Start a line of books
- Use on T-shirts, flyers, or other promotional material

The point of this whole list is simple: *Know which of these objectives apply to your book, and make sure your title can serve those objectives.*

For example, if your goal is to build a brand, make sure your book title is your brand. Dave Asprey's first diet book is called *The Bulletproof Diet*, because that's his brand: Bulletproof. The book is about selling everything around the book, not just the book itself.

If your goal is authority in your field, make sure the book title sounds authoritative to whom you are trying to speak. Whimsical doesn't work in serious academic fields, whereas serious doesn't work in comedic fields.

If your goal is to get media attention and raise your visibility, make sure the book title appeals to media and makes them want to cover you.

## STEP 2: BRAINSTORM SEVERAL POTENTIAL TITLES

You'll want to see brainstorming for titles not as a specific thing you do for an hour, but rather a long-term process. It may take you months to finalize a title.

But you start by simply brainstorming titles. Literally start a file and write down every book title you can think of for your book.

I know that telling someone to brainstorm is like telling someone to “be creative.” So what I'll do is list every possible way we know of to find a good book title, complete with examples (remember, these techniques are not just for your main title, they will be the basis for your subtitles as well). Feel free to use any of these as inspiration for your brainstorming.

Also, do not be afraid to put bad titles on your brainstorm list. Bad titles actually help you—because they will get you to a good title.

Here are some best practices:

**1. Use clever or noteworthy phrases from the book:** This is very common in fiction, and can work well with novels. It also works well with nonfiction books where the concept of the book can be summed up quickly or with one phrase.

Examples:

- *The Black Swan*
- *Lecturing Birds on Flying*
- *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell*

**2. Use both short and long phrases:** We usually start with a really long title and work our way down to much shorter phrases. The goal is to have the main title be as short as possible—no more than five words—and have the subtitle offer the context and put in important keywords.

**3. Use relevant keywords:** For nonfiction especially, search matters. You want to make sure that when someone searches for the subject or topic of your book, it will come up on Google and Amazon. But it's a balancing act, because you don't want to sacrifice the authenticity of the work for what looks and feels like a search string query.

If you are unsure of this, go look on Amazon and see how often subtitles and titles use additional keywords to attract more search engine traffic.

Examples:

- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*
- *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*
- *Predictable Revenue: Turn Your Business Into A Sales Machine With The \$100 Million Best Practices Of Salesforce.com*

**4. Make a promise of a benefit:** Some of the best titles promise to help readers achieve a desired goal or get some wanted benefit. They specifically call out an end result that people want:

Examples:

- *How to Win Friends and Influence People*
- *Getting Things Done*
- *Think and Grow Rich*

**5. Be simple and direct:** Some of the very best titles are just basic statements about what the book is. There is nothing wrong with this—it can work well, especially for strictly instructional books.

Examples:

- *Getting Past No*



- *Steve Jobs*
- *The Power of Habit*

**6. Target an audience:** As we said, people use titles to judge if the book is for them. Part of helping people understand this can be targeting them in your title. You can target specific audiences by naming them or by describing their characteristics. This works especially well if you have a series of books, and then do versions targeted to specific niches.

Examples:

- *What to Expect When You're Expecting*
- *Physics for Future Presidents*

**7. Offer a specific solution to a problem:** This is very popular in the self-help and diet spaces. You tell the reader exactly what problem your book solves in the title. This is similar to the promise of a benefit, but not the exact same thing; a benefit is something additive, like being sexy. A solution to a problem takes away something negative, like losing weight.

Examples:

- *Man's Search for Meaning*
- *6 Ways to Lose Belly Fat Without Exercise!*
- *Secrets of Closing the Sale*

**8. Use numbers to add credibility:** Specifics, like numbers, add credibility and urgency to your titles. They can provide structure for your information, or they can make hard things seem easier. Specificity enables people to engage the idea in a more concrete way, and gives bounded limits and certainty on time frames as well.

Examples:

- *The 48 Laws of Power*
- *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*
- *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*

**9. Pique the reader’s curiosity (but withhold the answer):** Using statements that seem to be impossible, unusual contrasts, or paradoxes can make readers curious about what is in the book. The idea is to make a claim or statement that seems a little far-fetched or fantastical but promises delivery. This is very popular now with headline writing on sites like Upworthy and ViralNova.

The iconic recent example of this with books is one we already mentioned, *The 4-Hour Workweek*. Everyone wants to know how to work four hours a week, except it seems impossible, so you pick up the book to see what that guy is talking about.

Examples:

- *Networking Is Not Working*
- *10% Happier*
- *Who Moved My Cheese?*

**10. Use metaphors or symbols associated with the themes in your book:** Humans think in symbol and metaphor. Using these powerful devices can help you create a title that really resonates.

The iconic metaphor-based series is “Chicken Soup for the Soul.” The title signals the warm, nurturing feeling that our culture associates with chicken soup and connects it to something else—stories that nurture your soul.

Examples:

- *Lean In*
- *The Untethered Soul*

**11. Use alliteration:** Alliteration is the use of the same letter at the beginning of all or most of the words in your title. This makes things easier for humans to remember.

Examples:

- *The Mighty Miss Malone*
- *A Storm of Swords*
- *The Pop-Up Paradigm*

**12. Alter a popular phrase:** This is common in book titles and tends to work well—taking a famous phrase and altering it in a way that makes sense for your book. This works because it's close to something people know, but not exactly the same thing.

Examples:

- *The War of Art*
- *Assholes Finish First*

**13. Use slang:** Slang can work really well, especially if it's used in a way that is nonintuitive but also novel.

Examples:

- *Ain't Too Proud to Beg*
- *No Mopes Allowed: A Small Town Police Chief Rants and Babbles about Hugs and High Fives, Meth Busts, Internet Celebrity, and Other Adventures*

**14. Try cliché formats (or reversing them):** There are a ton of book-naming tropes that can work well if used correctly:

- The Art of [TOPIC]
- The Myth of [TOPIC]
- Confessions of [TOPIC]

- How to [TOPIC]
- The Joy of [TOPIC]
- The End of [TOPIC]

Examples:

- *The Art of Racing in The Rain*
- *The Myth of Male Power*
- *Confessions of An Economic Hitman*
- *How to Train Your Dragon*
- *The Joy of Sex*
- *The End of Science*

Done poorly, these kinds of titles can seem clichéd and cloying instead of fresh. This technique is best used when it offers a twist—but isn't so far out that it confuses the reader.

**15. Consider coining a phrase or new word:** This is very helpful, especially if you want to create a brand or company or extended product line out of your book. The problem with this is that it's not an easy thing to do. Many authors try to create new words; few succeed, so try this sparingly. The most important element of this technique is that the word is easy to say and understand.

Examples:

- *Babbitt*
- *Denialism*
- *Essentialism*

**16. Use Amazon/Goodreads/Wikipedia for inspiration:** If you're feeling stuck, you can always go look at how other books are named.

**17. Use copywriting manuals for ideas:** If you are truly stuck and cannot think of anything, read books about copywriting. They are

not specifically about book titling, but copywriters have to understand sell triggers, and they will give you tons and tons of examples. These are three of the best out there:

- *POP!: Create the Perfect Pitch, Title, and Tagline for Anything*
- *The Ultimate Sales Letter: Attract New Customers. Boost your Sales.*
- *Advertising Headlines That Make You Rich: Create Winning Ads, Web Pages, Sales Letters and More*

### STEP 3: CHECK COPYRIGHT, TRADEMARK, KEYWORDS, AND POPULARITY

First off, let me be very clear about this: **you cannot copyright titles.**

Technically, you can call your book “To Kill A Mockingbird” or “Lord of The Rings” or even “The Holy Bible.”

That being said, copying a popular book makes it VERY hard for your book to stand out, and pretty much guarantees a lot of negative reviews from people who are not getting the book they expected.

That being said, you can trademark a title, if it is part of a larger brand. For example, the term “Bulletproof” is trademarked in the health and fitness space by Dave Asprey. You (probably) can’t title a book “The Bulletproof Diet,” because it infringes on a trademark (not the copyright).

If this is confusing, and you have a book title you think might be a trademark infringement, then talk to an IP attorney.

Also, make sure you check that the title and subtitle have the right keywords you want to address your market, and aligns with any domain and brand issues you have.

#### STEP 4: PICK YOUR FAVORITES

At this point, you should have a long list of title ideas. Once that's done, you can move on to the next step: picking your titles.

I cannot emphasize how important this next step is:

***Everyone has opinions on book titles. Most of those opinions are stupid and wrong.***

Even people who get PAID to come up with book titles (editors, publishers, etc.) are usually bad at it.

##### *Test #1: Imagine People Saying the Title*

Here's a great test as to whether or not you have a good book title: imagine one of your readers talking about your book at a party to other people.

If you can see them confidently saying the book title aloud, and the people listening nodding and immediately either understanding what the book is about based on that (and perhaps a sentence or two of explanation) or asking for further explanation because it sounds interesting—then you've got a good title.

If you imagine *any other reaction than this one*, you need to re-think your title, and probably change it.

Remember, so much of book marketing boils down to word of mouth, and word of mouth is all about people signaling things to other people. You want your book title to inspire and motivate the right people to talk about it, because it lets them signal the right things to their friends.

##### *Test #2: (optional) Test Actual Clicks*

Here's one of the keys to testing your titles: test both the main title

and subtitle, and test them in many different iterations. Usually what you'll find is most things test about the same, while there will be one thing that clearly tests better as a title, and another that clearly tests best as a subtitle.

- This is a great piece about the step-by-step process of using Google Adwords to test a title: [itrevolution.com/phoenix-project-google-adwords-title-subtitle-testing/](http://itrevolution.com/phoenix-project-google-adwords-title-subtitle-testing/)
- If you have a large audience already, you can also use [SurveyMonkey.com](http://SurveyMonkey.com)
- For real customer feedback, I recommend using [Pickfu.com](http://Pickfu.com)

I would also recommend Google Survey. This is real-market testing of real people, and can be done fairly cheaply.

#### HOW NOT TO TEST YOUR TITLE

Most of the things authors do to test their title are very, very bad.

For example, posting on social media is **NOT TESTING YOUR TITLE**. In fact, posting on social media is about the worst possible way to test a title.

Why is this?

Well, your Facebook/Instagram/Twitter friends are probably not your audience, so asking them about the title won't help you. And even worse, everyone on your social media has an agenda relative to the author that will often put you off-kilter.

Friends and family testing doesn't work. Generally speaking, they want to make you happy. They don't want to give you an objective answer. Or they want to make sure you look good, but they don't know what will actually make you look good.

Furthermore, oftentimes colleagues will be critical—because they

are jealous. It happens a lot, and they will give you bad advice, even if only subconsciously.

And some authors will go to their marketing teams for title advice, which can often lead you way off-kilter. You know the saying that a camel is a horse designed by committee? When you start getting opinions from lots of different sources, you get the “camel effect” hardcore.

### **DOES YOUR BOOK NEED A SUBTITLE?**

If you’re doing a nonfiction book, yes, probably so.

The way we like to frame it is that the title is the hook, and the subtitle is the explanation. The subtitle is the promise of the book.

Books need a subtitle if it’s necessary to contextualize the subject alluded to in the main title. Typically, the subtitle tells the reader some combination of what the book’s central premise is, who the book is for, and what promise the book delivers on or need it meets.

Some examples where subtitles help contextualize the title, and deliver the promise of the implied title:

*1. THE 4-HOUR WORKWEEK: ESCAPE THE 9-5, LIVE ANYWHERE, AND JOIN THE NEW RICH*

See how the title hooks you by being interesting, and the subtitle explains the premise? Very well done.

*2. DARING GREATLY: HOW THE COURAGE TO BE VULNERABLE TRANSFORMS THE WAY WE LIVE, LOVE, PARENT, AND LEAD*

It’s a bit long, but the same thing is going on here; the subtitle contextualizes and frames the title, which is clear, easy to understand, and say.



### 3. *KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL*

This originally had a subtitle, *Adventures in The Culinary Underbelly*, but it was later dropped. No subtitle was needed on this work of nonfiction, because the meaning is clear, especially when paired with a picture of a chef on the front (and because it became very famous, which helps).

### 4. *THE LOOMING TOWER: AL-QAEDA AND THE ROAD TO 9/11*

This is an example of a book where the subtitle is very important. That title could mean many things, but the subtitle quickly signals what the book is about and who it's for.





# WRITE YOUR BOOK DEDICATION

*“We are the stories we tell ourselves.”*

—JOAN DIDION

## WHAT IS A BOOK DEDICATION?

A book dedication is a device that some authors use to bestow a very high honor on a person (or small group of people) they want to praise or otherwise spotlight. It is not fundamentally different than dedicating anything else, like a ship or a monument.

This proclamation usually goes on the dedication page, which is in the very front of the book, after the Title page.

## WHO CAN AN AUTHOR DEDICATE THEIR BOOK TO?

Anyone you would like. A dedication section is short and usually focused on one person (or specific group of people). It is usually personal, rather than professional. Here are categories of people that are common focuses of a book dedication:

1. Family members (spouse, children, siblings, parents)

2. Close friends
3. People impacted by the book or featured in it
4. The readers of the book
5. Inspirational or supportive figures in one's life
6. People the author believes should be highlighted in some way

## **DO YOU NEED TO DEDICATE YOUR BOOK?**

No. Most authors dedicate their books, but it is not required or mandatory.

## **HOW TO DEDICATE YOUR BOOK**

### **1. DECIDE WHO WILL BE THE FOCUS**

Think about the people to whom you want to dedicate this work. Who was the most important person? The seminal influence? The people you care the most about?

Many people write their book dedication to a child or dedicate their book to a friend who has impacted their creative process. There's no magic formula, and you don't have to get everyone in there. This should be short and sweet, and there are no wrong answers. You are expressing a personal sentiment, so only you can decide.

The worst thing you can do is get stuck on it. Either do it or don't, and if you do decide to have one, don't fret over it. Go with your gut. Anyone you leave out can be thanked in the Acknowledgments.

### **2. REMEMBER: EVERYONE WHO READS THE BOOK WILL SEE THIS**

As the dedication is at the beginning of a book, many of the readers will read it and be influenced by it. Think not just about the person or people named in the book dedication, but also about all of the readers who will pass by this page and be impacted. Make a conscious choice about what you want that impact to be (if any).

### 3. MAKE IT SHORT (IT IS NOT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS)

In contrast to an Acknowledgments section, the dedication should be short and to the point. You should not mention everyone who contributed to the book's creation. You can thank everyone you've ever met in the Acknowledgments, if you want.

### 4. REVIEW BOOK DEDICATION EXAMPLES (IF NECESSARY)

The easiest way to get some examples of dedication is to pick up any book on your shelf and look. Almost every book has a dedication, so you can find endless examples. Most of them are very basic and simple, something like this:

*For my wife Megan and children, Ava, Jaxon, and Elle.*

George R. R. Martin, who wrote the *Game of Thrones* series, has a unique dedication in *A Song of Ice and Fire*:

*For Phyllis, who made me put the dragons in.*

This concise line holds enormous depth for both the readers and the person mentioned. If you've read the books or seen *Game of Thrones*, you'd know that dragons and the fantasy world they represent were a big part of the appeal. To imagine the book without them would be nearly impossible. Phyllis clearly played a big role in the creation of this piece (it's also an inside joke for fans).

Here's the dedication that C. S. Lewis wrote to his goddaughter in *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*:

*My dear Lucy,*

*I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But someday you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take*

*it down from some upper shelf, dust it, and tell me what you think of it. I shall probably be too deaf to hear, and too old to understand a word you say, but I shall still be*

*your affectionate Godfather,*

C. S. LEWIS

This book was listed as one of *Time* magazine's top 100 novels ever written, and yet he wrote it for his goddaughter. This dedication gives real substance to the book, and the author, before you even dive in.

This next example is a short-and-sweet dedication from a book I co-wrote with Dr. Geoffrey Miller:

*To our 17-year-old former selves, and to Bishop, Atalanta, and all the sons and daughters who deserve the great relationships we want for them.*

## 5. WRITE YOUR BOOK DEDICATION

The number one thing to keep in mind is that there is NO specific formula for this. The dedication is one of the most personal sections in the book, and it's up to you to decide how you want to use it.

What's inside of your book is more important, and getting it out into the world is the MOST important thing.



# WRITE YOUR BOOK

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*“The only two things that can satisfy the soul are a person and a story; and even a story must be about a person.”*

—G. K. CHESTERTON

### WHAT IS THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS?

The Acknowledgments section is where you recognize and thank everyone who helped you with your book. It’s a way to display your appreciation to them in a public and permanent forum.

### WHO SHOULD YOU THANK IN THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS?

This is entirely up to you. Recognize whoever you feel contributed enough to your book that you feel they deserve it. For example, common groups of people that authors thank include:

1. Family members (spouse, children, parents)
2. Friends
3. Editors/people who worked on the book production
4. Publishers
5. Coworkers/assistants

6. Agents/managers
7. Contributors/advisers/sources of information
8. Teachers/mentors/bosses
9. Inspirations

### **DO YOU NEED ONE?**

No. Most books do have them, but by no means are they required or mandatory.

### **HOW TO WRITE YOUR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS SECTION**

#### **1. REMEMBER: PEOPLE WILL READ THIS**

People will read the Acknowledgments section and it will impact them—especially the people who are in them. This section is about those people you are naming, not about you, so approach this as you should your entire book: make it good for the people you are naming, who will read it.

#### **2. START WITH A LIST OF WHO WILL GO IN (BY FULL NAME)**

This method has worked well in many situations: write out all the people you want to thank, **BEFORE** you start writing this section. Doing this allows you to see them all together in a list, and helps ensure that everyone is on the list who should be there.

**Note:** A great way to make sure you are not missing anyone is to group people by category, so that you are more likely to remember them. When you put your family members together, you are less likely to leave any out.

#### **3. BE SPECIFIC FOR THE IMPORTANT PEOPLE**

For the most important people, the more specific you can be in your thanks, the better.



For example, this is not specific:

I want to thank my wife, Veronica. Thank you.

This is specific:

I have to start by thanking my awesome wife, Veronica. From reading early drafts to giving me advice on the cover to keeping the munchkins out of my hair so I could edit, she was as important to this book getting done as I was. Thank you so much, dear.

Being specific in thanks is all about making them feel special. The more detailed you can be in your thanks, the more you're showing that you recognized and appreciated their help. It is rewarding when someone thanks you for a particular thing you did, as opposed to just thanking you overall.

As you go further into your list, you can group people. But again, be specific in your thanks, even to groups. For example, this is not specific:

Thanks to everyone on my publishing team.

This is specific:

Thanks to everyone on the Scribe team who helped me so much. Special thanks to Ellie, the ever-patient Publishing Manager; Meghan, my amazing Scribe; and Erin, the greatest cover designer I could ever imagine.

#### 4. BE SINCERE IN YOUR THANKS

The worst thing you can do in an Acknowledgments section is say things you don't believe. If you aren't willing to be sincere, then you are better off not doing one at all.

Sincerity means honestly and deeply thanking the people who helped you (mentioning the specific ways they helped, as noted above), and remembering the way that they sacrificed for you.

At the same time, don't feel the need to go overboard. You're not accepting an Oscar, so don't go on and on or say things just to make yourself look good. Make it meaningful and sincere.

## 5. DON'T WORRY ABOUT LENGTH

You might see some people recommend the Acknowledgments section be only one page. Ignore that.

This is the only section I will tell you that you can go long if you want. You may only write one book in your life, and if that is the case then take all the time and space you need to thank everyone who helped you.

At Scribe, we put the Acknowledgments section in the back, so it doesn't interfere with the average reader's experience. Readers can skip this section if they are bored, but you can never go back and re-thank the people you left out because of some arbitrary "rule."

## EXAMPLES OF ACKNOWLEDGMENTS SECTIONS

You can pull almost any book off your shelf and read the Acknowledgments section for examples. Here are some examples of different Acknowledgments sections for books we have done.

This is from *I Got There*:

Writing a book is harder than I thought and more rewarding than I could have ever imagined. None of this would have been possible without my best friend, Bishop. He was the first friend I made when I moved to San Antonio. He stood by me during every struggle and all my successes. That is true friendship.

I'm eternally grateful to my uncle Bobby, who took in an extra mouth to feed when he didn't have to. He taught me discipline, tough love, manners, respect, and so much more that has helped me succeed in life. I truly have no idea where I'd be if he hadn't given me a roof over my head or become the father figure whom I desperately needed at that age.

To Mr. Gentry, who took a chance on a twenty-three-year-old kid and let him run his offices in Portland, Oregon. He never saw my age, my race, or my lack of formal education. He just saw a kid hungry to learn, hungry to grow, and hungry to succeed in business. He never stopped me; he only encouraged me.

Although this period of my life was filled with many ups and downs, my time in the mortgage industry was worth it. My time in the industry wouldn't have been made possible without Guy Stidham who taught me the honest mortgage game.

A very special thanks to Dustin Wells who brought me on as the lowest-paid employee at Headspring and then allowed me to rise through the ranks to become president of the company. Thank you for introducing me to company culture.

Writing a book about the story of your life is a surreal process. I'm forever indebted to Tucker Max, Mark Chait, and Amanda Ibey for their editorial help, keen insight, and ongoing support in bringing my stories to life. It is because of their efforts and encouragement that I have a legacy to pass on to my family where one didn't exist before.

To everyone at the Scribe Tribe who enable me to be the CEO of a company that I'm honored to be a part of, thank you for letting me serve, for being a part of our amazing company, and for showing up every day and helping more authors turn their ideas into stories.

To my family. To Aunt Jean: for always being the person I could turn to during those dark and desperate years. She sustained me in ways

that I never knew that I needed. To my little brother, Mario, and sisters, Rachel and Kristin: thank you for letting me know that you had nothing but great memories of me. So thankful to have you back in my life.

Finally, to all those who have been a part of my getting there: Jennifer Jackson, Kay Oder, Sharon Slonaker, Julie Fisher, Kathy Chesner, and Brother Smith (RIP). To the original Headspring team: Kevin Hurwitz, Jimmy Bogard, Mahendra Mavani, Pedro Reyes, Eric Sollenberger, Glenn Burnside, Justin Pope, Sharon Cechelli, Anne Epstein.

JT McCormick names people that made his book possible in relative order, from most to least impactful. Note how he writes it directly “to” the people who made an impact, rather than to the reader “about” those people. He rounds it out with a series of names at the end to make sure people do not feel forgotten, even if he does not have the space to devote a full paragraph to each person.

Bill Hicks, in *The Leadership Manifesto*, starts his acknowledgments off with a blanket acknowledgment of leaders everywhere, before naming a handful of them by name. He then thanks his book publishing team and closes with a paragraph acknowledging his CEO. This is a good example of an acknowledgment from a business executive:

The world is a better place thanks to people who want to develop and lead others. What makes it even better are people who share the gift of their time to mentor future leaders. Thank you to everyone who strives to grow and help others grow. It is the business version of *The Lion King* song “Circle of Life.”

To all the individuals I have had the opportunity to lead, be led by, or watch their leadership from afar, I want to say thank you for being the inspiration and foundation for *The Leadership Manifesto*.

Without the experiences and support from my peers and team at

Ultimate Software, this book would not exist. You have given me the opportunity to lead a great group of individuals—to be a leader of great leaders is a blessed place to be. Thank you to Chad, Dan, Dave, Gretchen, JC, Laura, Patrick, Scott, and Susan.

Having an idea and turning it into a book is as hard as it sounds. The experience is both internally challenging and rewarding. I especially want to thank the individuals that helped make this happen. Complete thanks to Joanie, Randy Walton, Patrick O’Neill, Barbara Boyd, Carol Raphael, and Dan Bernitt.

Scott Scherr, thank you for being a leader I trust, honor, and respect. I will always welcome the chance to represent you. “Au Au Au!”

Tiffany Haddish, a well-known comedian, continues her “simple yet emotionally powerful” style from her book *The Last Black Unicorn* into the acknowledgments. She thanks her close family and then closes with a joke in line with the subject matter of the book, and a blanket acknowledgment to the untold masses who have encouraged her.

I want to thank:

My Grandma.

My Mama.

My Aunties.

My Daddy for donating the sperm that made me.

All my brothers and sisters.

My best friends Selena, Shermona, Aiko, Shana, Richea.

My old agent, my current agents and managers, and Tucker Max.

Department of Children Services and the court system for taking care of me when no one else would.

I want to thank EVERYONE who ever said anything positive to me or taught me something. I heard it all, and it meant something.

All the dudes I ever slept with, I appreciate the experiences, but I ain't naming none of you!

I want to thank God most of all, because without God I wouldn't be able to do any of this.



# WRITE YOUR BOOK FOREWORD

Before you read this, let me emphasize this point:

*Most books do not need a foreword.*

If you are unsure if your book needs a foreword, then it does not.

However, if you think it might, this guide is designed to help you think through whether it does, and if so, how to get one written.

## WHAT IS A BOOK FOREWORD?

A foreword is basically an introduction that's written by someone other than the author. The reasons for it are twofold:

### 1. CONFER STATUS AND CREDIBILITY ON THE AUTHOR

A foreword is often written by someone who is a credible authority or expert. Having this person write a foreword is a great way to show that a first-time author should be taken seriously.

For example, when James Altucher released *Choose Yourself*, he

asked Dick Costolo, CEO of Twitter at the time, to write the foreword. Many readers did not know who James Altucher was at the time, but they knew that the CEO of one of the largest tech companies in the world was willing to vouch for him and his book, which was a strong signal of credibility.

## 2. PROVIDE CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND FOR THE READER

For some nonfiction books, a foreword explains why readers need this book, and says things about the book that the author cannot.

This context could also say nice things about the author that the author cannot say about themselves. It's much more powerful when someone else calls you a "thought leader," but (like blurbs) it has to be the *right* someone.

For example, we did a book with a man who was well known in real estate, but not known outside that space. He was friends with Kevin Harrington, who wrote the foreword. Kevin is well known in many business areas, and not only conferred status on the author, but also said some great things about him that he could not say about himself, or they would have come off as bragging.

Note again that great forewords do both—they confer status and provide context. If the foreword won't accomplish one of these two things, then it shouldn't be written. As long as it's doing at least one, then the foreword is doing its job.

### WHO WRITES THE FOREWORD?

If you want a foreword for your book, the first question is "*Who do you know that could write one?*"

If you have a good relationship with someone who makes sense, great. Move down to the "how" section.



If you do not know someone that makes sense, then you have two options:

1. Reach out to people you don't know and ask them to write a foreword
2. Do not have a foreword

For many reasons, #2 is the best option.

While it may be possible to get a foreword from someone you don't know, it will be *very* hard. It's easier to **get a blurb** than a foreword, and the best people to ask are those who you have a personal connection to.

The best way to ask someone to write a foreword is to call them on the phone. If you're not comfortable picking up the phone and dialing their number, then they're probably the wrong person to ask. If you don't know them to call them, why would they ever write a foreword for you?

A foreword tends to be a “personal vouch,” and that sort of thing is much easier to get from someone with whom you already have a relationship.

It's also a lot of work. Unlike a blurb that is only a few sentences, this person has to be willing to write a substantial piece of work for you. Also, their name in your book reflects on them, either positively or negatively. If you reach out to someone you don't know, it is hard to ask for both of those things.

If you are unsure about asking someone to do a foreword, you are better off asking for a blurb instead.

A rule of thumb we like to use with our authors is that if we won't put the “Foreword by [NAME]” on the cover of the book, then you are better off asking the person for a blurb.

## HOW DO THEY WRITE THE FOREWORD?

Writing a foreword seems pretty obvious: ask someone to write a foreword, and they do it, right?

Some people do exactly that. And in a perfect world, they would all do that, but they don't, for two reasons:

1. People don't have time to sit down and write.
2. They're not a good writer, so they get intimidated.

For these reasons, we recommend that authors give their foreword writers two options if they do not have the time or desire to sit down and write it the conventional way.

## LETTER TO READER OPTION

This is a really simple framework that helps someone get started. You can send these exact instructions to your foreword author:

“Thank you so much for agreeing to do this. Here is all I need:

- A very short piece, 500 words or so.
- It can be framed as a “letter to the reader” where you tell them why they should read the book.
- If you want to say nice things about me, I won't be upset :)”

For this option, make sure that, if you need to make any edits to the foreword (aside from obvious misspellings), you get the approval of the author.

## RECORDING OPTION

You can also “record” their foreword and then have that written (we do this for our authors if they ask).

**The process works like this:**

1. The author (or someone they hire) interviews the foreword author via phone.
2. The author transcribes the interview (we use Rev.com).
3. The author (or the person they hire) writes the foreword based off that call.
4. The foreword is then sent to the author who makes any changes and then approves it.

This is the basic list of questions we use for a foreword interview:

1. Who is the author? Tell me about them.
2. What is remarkable about the author, especially as it relates to the book topic?
3. What is important about the subject matter of the book?
4. What does the reader need to know about the subject matter of the book?
5. Why should the reader care about this book's subject matter?

#### HOW LONG SHOULD THE FOREWORD BE?

Only rarely should a foreword exceed 500 words. If it's over that, it needs to be exceptionally good.

The mention of the foreword author on the cover is enough to confer status and credibility, and any more than 500 words may detract or distract from the book itself.

The foreword is like a movie trailer—tell the audience what they need to know in a short amount of time, then get out of the way for the main event.

#### DOES THE FOREWORD AUTHOR NEED TO READ THE BOOK FIRST?

Not necessarily.

The two reasons for a foreword (confer credibility or provide context) don't necessarily require any commentary on the content.

The foreword should really be focused on the author: who are they, what is their work, and what are they aiming to do with this book?

They don't always need to have read the book to understand the background and context of what's going on in the industry or space that the author is writing about. They can—but it's not crucial.

Now, of course if the foreword author wants to read it, then let them, obviously. But generally speaking, you should know them so well and have such a good relationship with them that they have plenty to say about you without knowing the specific contents of the book.

#### START THIS PROCESS EARLY

Understand that most people take forever to write their foreword, so start this process early. If you do not, if you try to do this last minute, it will cause a delay with your book.



# HOW TO GET INCREDIBLE BLURBS FOR YOUR BOOK

*“The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller.”*

—STEVE JOBS

## WHAT PURPOSE DO BLURBS SERVE?

There are more than 500,000 books published each year in the US alone. How is a potential reader supposed to know that yours is actually good? How are they supposed to know that you and your book are worth their time and money?

There are several ways to signal that your book is serious and professional. The book cover, book title, and book description are three examples.

Once you have those locked in, a way to add credibility to your book is through the use of blurbs.

A “book blurb” is a quote from someone that says something positive about you or your book. Here are some blurbs from Mona Patel’s book, *Reframe*:

*“Why not? What if? If those questions give you pause, it might be because you’ve been carrying around the wrong frame. In this personal book, Mona Patel wants to outfit you with a new way of seeing and working.”*

—SETH GODIN, MARKETING GURU AND MULTIPLE  
TIME NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

*“Part business, part personal development, Reframe is full of practical ways to jumpstart innovation.”*

—ADAM GRANT, WHARTON PROFESSOR AND NEW YORK  
TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF GIVE AND TAKE

*“This book, like its author, is innovative, clear, and able to open pathways to new ideas.”*

—NIR EYAL, AUTHOR OF HOOKED: HOW TO  
BUILD HABIT-FORMING PRODUCTS

Done properly, a good blurb will:

1. Signal that the book is important
2. Provide social proof that the author is important
3. Help readers see the book is relevant to them
4. Most importantly, convince a potential reader to *buy the book*

Blurbs are a great way to “credential” a book (and more importantly in many cases, an author as well) and help it stand out from the field.

### **ARE BLURBS NECESSARY?**

Absolutely not. Do not get obsessed with them. Again, blurbs are not a necessity. Many famous books have launched and succeeded without them.

Blurbs fall into the “nice to have” category, and not the “must have” category.

They do impact the book, but don’t move the needle anywhere near

as much as reviews. Actual reviews on Amazon or barnesandnoble.com are much more powerful in terms of selling copies.

It is generally better not to have blurbs than to have bad ones or ones from unknown sources.

For example, name your favorite three books. Who blurbed those books? You probably don't recall.

### WHERE DO BLURBS GO?

Blurbs are multipurpose, and can go several places. For example:

1. **Front of book cover:** Usually only one can go on the cover, and that would generally be from someone very high status to your audience.
2. **Back of book cover:** You can usually put up to three of them here, without crowding the back.
3. **Inside flap cover:** This is for hardcovers usually, and they can go on the inside or back, depending on various decisions.
4. **Before the title page:** If you have a lot of blurbs, you can put them on their own pages, usually right at the beginning of the book. This is usually called the "Advance Praise" section.
5. **On the Amazon/B&N book page:** Putting blurbs in the book description or the About the Book section can add a lot of social proof to the book.
6. **On your website:** Another place to put them, though only one or possibly two tend to work here.
7. **In your press materials:** This is definitely a place to put them as well, as they will help land you press.

### WHAT IS A GOOD BLURB?

A good blurb generally has these attributes:

### 1. COMES FROM A RELEVANT, HIGH STATUS, OR CREDIBLE PERSON

This is key. You want your source to be one that sends the right signals to the audience of the book, and conveys the authority you want to achieve with your book. There are a lot of subtleties to this we will explain later in this section.

### 2. HELPS THE READER UNDERSTAND WHY THE BOOK MATTERS TO THEM

It's not easy to frame or explain your book to a reader, and a blurb can help them understand why they need to buy and read your book.

### 3. IS NOT PITCHY OR OVER THE TOP

The worst thing you can do is get a great person to leave a gushing blurb that sounds paid for or ridiculous. Realistic is better than explosively optimistic. People tend to discount things that seem too good to be true.

## WHERE CAN BLURBS COME FROM?

There are three basic types of blurbs, and we'll walk through each one in detail.

1. Quotes from Credible, High-Status People
2. Press Mentions
3. Reader and Customer Testimonials

### QUOTES FROM CREDIBLE OR HIGH-STATUS PEOPLE

Most people do not pay much attention to what blurbs actually say, since almost all blurbs are uniformly positive. Instead, people pay attention to *who* gave the blurb, and judge your book based on the person endorsing it.

The more credibility and social status the endorser holds, the more



powerful the blurb. You are using some of the credibility and status of the person giving the blurb, and reflecting it back on your book.

An excellent example is *Give and Take*. When it was published, Adam Grant was a fairly obscure professor, not well known outside of academic circles. But his work had been influential on many famous authors, and he asked them to provide blurbs for his book. Look at the list of people who blurbed him:

- Susan Cain
- Dan Pink
- Tony Hsieh
- Seth Godin
- Dan Ariely
- Gretchen Rubin
- David Allen
- Dan Gilbert
- Robert Cialdini

Those people are all famous authors (at least to the type of reader to whom Adam wanted to sell). That list forces his audience to not only give it a chance, but made the media take it seriously as well.

***You're trying to borrow the credibility and authority of a person, and sometimes that can be conveyed by their position, even if they aren't famous themselves.***

Not all people know famous authors, and not all blurbs should come from famous authors. You can also get blurbs from people who have high-status positions.

For example, look at the blurbs for *Chasing Excellence* (a book about fitness and athletic training). Do you know who any of these people are?

- Javier Vazquez

- Chris Hinshaw
- Bethany Hart-Gerry

Probably not. They're not widely famous by name. Now, let's look at how they are listed on the *Chasing Excellence* Amazon Page:

- Javier Vazquez, Major League Baseball All-Star
- Chris Hinshaw, Professional Triathlete, winner of Ironman Brazil
- Bethany Hart-Gerry, US Olympic Bobsled Team

You don't know the names, but given their titles and accomplishments, you now take their comments on a book about fitness and training VERY seriously.

#### PRESS MENTIONS

Most of your blurbs will come from people that you ask. However, another good place to find blurbs is in press or media attention you may have gotten from a media source. For example:

*“Hilariously entertaining and thoroughly reprehensible.”*

—NEW YORK TIMES

The above example was a quote about my first book *I Hope They Serve Beer In Hell*. The article itself was not resoundingly positive, but this was a positive mention in it, so I took it and put it on my book. Having the *New York Times* even mention my book was significant social proof to a potential reader.

Press from anywhere can make a difference—even from a relatively unknown media source. Any third-party press adds credibility to you and your book regardless of whether the praise was directly for your book or not.

## READER AND CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS

You can also use customer reviews as testimonials. If you've written a book before, your old reviews may be a good place to search for an extra blurb or two. Early reviews can be moved up on the Amazon page, to round out the blurbs.

The book *Predictable Revenue* does this. The authors received feedback from people who read the book and used them as blurbs (and made sure to list their job titles, to gain more social proof):

*"I couldn't put it down. It's saved me so much time, and now revenue is ramping up. After reading the book, we closed major deals immediately with the strategies."*

—KURT DARADICS, CEO, FREEDOM SPEAKS/CITYSOURCED.COM

*"I just finished reading your book. Unbelievable! I now know what's wrong with our sales process..."*

—PAT SHAH, CEO, SURCHSQUAD

*"I have read Predictable Revenue and it's Entrepreneurial Crack!"*

—DAMIEN STEVENS, CEO, SERVOSITY

You can even solicit testimonials from actual clients (depending on what you do and how it relates to your book). The authors of *Predictable Revenue* did this as well:

*"Working with Aaron Ross has been nothing short of amazing! His methods applied to our sales organization helped us produce a profitable and scalable new stream of predictable revenue. We saw at least 40+% new business growth. The best part is, we had a blast while doing it!"*

—MICHAEL STONE, VP SALES AND STRATEGY, WPROMOTE  
(#1 RANKED SEARCH MARKETING FIRM ON THE INC. 500)

This works because the *Predictable Revenue* audience is entrepreneurs and CEO's, and that is who is giving the blurbs.

## WHO SHOULD YOU ASK FOR BLURBS?

Blurbs are ideal to request from people in your network who are well known, important, or have important jobs.

The key consideration here is to focus on asking people who fit two criteria:

1. They are known to the audience you're trying to reach, or have jobs or titles that sound credible to that audience.
2. You already know them enough to reach out to them.

To decide who to reach out to, start with a big list—the more names, the more likely you are to get a yes.

These should be specific people, not a list of famous people you've never met.

If you do not have some connection to them in your network, do not put them on your list. If you don't know the person or have a credible connection that is already established, then you aren't getting a blurb.

Ask someone who has a strong connection with **both** your audience and the material. It's much better to get a quote from a person that your audience knows well but is anonymous outside that niche, than someone who is very famous but has nothing to do with your book.

For example, if you write a book about pop-up retail, and you happen to be friends with a famous politician who has nothing to do with retail or any connection, a blurb from her won't resonate with your audience.

Whereas if you can get the VP of Macy's to blurb your book—even though no one outside of retail has any idea who she is—that quote will be a powerful signal to the audience for your book (people who care about retail).

## HOW SHOULD YOU ASK SOMEONE FOR A BLURB?

The process of asking for blurbs can be a bit uncomfortable for most authors. The best thing you can do when asking for a blurb is to make it as easy as possible for people to give you one.

In that vein, I'll let you in on a dirty little secret: *most people who give blurbs don't actually read the book.*

In fact, most of them *don't even write the blurb*...they just approve it.

Here is the email template we recommend using when asking someone for a blurb. Of course, you need to modify this with details relevant to the person you're asking:

[INSERT NAME],

Hey [NAME], I'm writing to ask if you'd provide a blurb for my upcoming book, [INSERT TITLE].

It would mean a great deal to me if you gave an endorsement. [INSERT SPECIFIC REASON WHY BASED ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP].

I've attached a PDF to this email with the manuscript, so you can read it if you'd like.

Obviously I'd love it if you read the full book, but I value your time highly, so I am providing 2-3 example blurbs for you. Feel free to approve any of these, or edit them in any way you'd like that reflect your feelings:

[INSERT EXAMPLE BLURB #1]

[INSERT EXAMPLE BLURB #2]

[INSERT EXAMPLE BLURB #3]

## KEY TO BLURBS: BLURB THE PERSON, NOT THE BOOK

Most people don't have the time to read your book and carefully consider a blurb, but they don't feel comfortable blurbing something they haven't read. That's okay.

There is a very simple solution: **have them blurb you as a person.**

This is more than acceptable, and a very easy give for most people.

For example, I helped Kamal Ravikant do this for his second book, *Live Your Truth*. He is friends with Tim Ferriss, but Tim was too busy to read the book (at the time, he has since read and loved the book), so I got Tim to give Kamal this blurb:

*"Kamal is one of those people whose words are as powerful as his presence. When Kamal speaks, I listen."*

—TIM FERRISS, AUTHOR OF #1 NEW YORK TIMES  
BESTSELLER, *THE 4-HOUR WORKWEEK*

That quote is now on his Amazon page and the book, and is a powerful piece of social proof for Kamal and his book.

## ANOTHER BLURB TRICK

Speaking of Tim, he uses a great trick to get blurbs, and I helped him do this on two books.

While the book is still in process, he would print the most relevant chapter to the person he was asking for the blurb, personally highlight relevant sections and passages (with a highlighter and pen) and mail THAT to the person, with the offer of sending the whole book if they want.

That's a smart, strategic, and generous move, and it worked almost every time.

## HOW TO WRITE BLURBS FOR APPROVAL

There is not a formula to write blurbs, but there are a few rules:

- They cannot be too long, or no one will read them.
- They can't be too pitchy or over the top, or they lose credibility.

The most important thing is that the blurb focuses on the benefit for the reader—why should the reader care about the book?

For this, the best advice is for you to go find the 5-10 books on Amazon that you think are good comparisons to your book (or in similar niches), read the blurbs for them, and imitate their style. Different niches have different blurb styles, and the best thing you can do with a blurb is not violate any norms the readers are expecting.

### EXAMPLE OF A GREAT, DIRECTED BLURB LIST

Remember, the more focused the blurb list is on your audience, the better it will be for you. Here is an excellent example of the appropriate use of blurbs, from the book *Common Financial Sense*, by Harris Nydick and Greg Makowski:

*“This guide delivers the most practical and straightforward tutorial I have ever read.”*

—HAZEL O’LEARY, FORMER UNITED  
STATES SECRETARY OF ENERGY

*“I wish I had access to this book earlier in my career! I promise to pay it forward by sending a copy of Common Financial Sense to each of my three twenty-something kids.”*

—SKIP SCHWEISS, PRESIDENT, TD AMERITRADE TRUST COMPANY

*“Common Financial Sense is an insightful new guide that simplifies and demystifies retirement plan investing. Read this book! It will help you make smart decisions to successfully pursue your financial goals.”*

—JOSHUA PACE, PRESIDENT AND CEO, E\*TRADE

*“Common Financial Sense is a breath of fresh air and should be required reading for everyone entering or in the workforce.”*

—DEAN DURLING, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
QUICKCHEK CORPORATION

Unless you're in the financial industry, few of these names mean anything to you.

But it's still a great list, because the people have high-status job titles, and they are extremely important *to the audience to whom this book is trying to appeal*.

This list of blurbs signals exactly who this book is for and converts those specific people at a very high rate from browsers into readers.





## LOCK IN YOUR MANUSCRIPT: COPYEDITING

*“Remember, Grammar Nazis: it’s YOU’RE going to die alone.”*

—DAMIEN FAHEY

To be perfectly clear: when we say you need “a finished manuscript” to start the publishing process, we don’t just mean a document that’s pretty close to your finished book. We don’t mean a file with only a few typos left.

We mean a *finished manuscript*.

It’s crucial that you get as much of that work out of the way as possible before starting the publishing process. Adding a paragraph now, rather than after the interior layout is finished means the difference between a few minutes and *a few hours* of work.

This is NOT hyperbole. Getting your manuscript locked prior to publishing often translates to thousands of dollars of savings. It’s worth taking the time to lock everything in thoroughly.

## STEP 1: HIRE A PROFESSIONAL COPYEDITOR

I can't be any clearer about it than this: hire at least one professional copyeditor to review your book.

Don't rely on spell-check. Don't ask your friends. Don't get your neighbor to look it over.

I don't care how confident you are that there are no mistakes. You're wrong. They are there, and if you don't hire professionals to find them, you'll miss them, and then readers will think you are stupid.

There is a lot of data on this, but average people only detect about 60 percent of errors, and even professionals usually only catch about 85 percent (that is why we have two different people review every manuscript we do for authors at Scribe).

While your read-out-loud editing will catch a lot of the small, sloppy mistakes and wording issues, there are a whole other set of issues that professional proofreaders are looking for: small grammatical rules that native English speakers often don't even realize exist.

For example:

- Do you know the difference between an en dash and an em dash?
- Do you end sentences in prepositions?
- Do you start too many sentences with conjunctions?

These kinds of mistakes are not life-threatening, but they make the difference between a professional book and one that comes across as amateur. And beyond that, if Amazon gets too many reports about typos in your book, they will pull the book down.

There are two distinct types of copyediting services: those that allow you to submit the manuscript and they manage their team internally, and marketplaces that allow you to find your own free-

lancer. The first is simpler, but the second (marketplaces) tend to be more effective.

## EDITING SERVICES

If you choose to go with editing services, you'll likely be charged a flat fee. You can ballpark that these options will cost about \$250-750 depending on various factors. You'll submit the manuscript, and within a week you'll get back a finished product. Simple.

Here are a few services we've tested and recommend:

- PostScripting (<https://postscripting.net/>)
- Kibin (<https://www.kibin.com/>)
- Scribendi (<http://www.scribendi.com/>)

## MARKETPLACES

The other alternative is to use a marketplace. Most of these options will allow you to list a job for free, and the marketplace will take a percentage of the cost. The copyeditors will usually work on a per-hour or per-word basis (\$20-30 per hour and 0.75-1 cent per word are normal), but some will be open to charging a flat fee as well. The total cost should be similar to the prices above.

Here are a few marketplaces we've tested and recommend:

- Upwork (<https://www.upwork.com/>)
- People Per Hour (<http://www.peopleperhour.com/>)
- MediaBistro (<http://mediabistro.com/>)

The real benefit of using a marketplace instead of a service is the direct engagement you get with the copyeditor. Not only will you be able to choose someone who seems best suited for your project (and who has been rated well by past clients), but you'll also be able to convey extra information to them that might be useful in their proofreading work.

## STEP 2: WORKING WITH YOUR COPYEDITOR

Once you've found the right copyeditor, you'll need to assign them the job and work with them. We spoke to our team of professionals to gather feedback on what they need out of a job assignment. Here is their advice:

**1. Define the Role:** As one of our editors said, "Copyediting is rarely just copyediting, no matter what the client calls it." There's a lot of responsibility that can be put on a copyeditor, and it's important to be clear about what that responsibility is.

Traditionally, a copyeditor's task is to find any mistakes, inconsistencies, and errors, like typos, and grammatical and spelling mistakes. However, it's not uncommon (because they're the last line of defense against a faulty manuscript being released) for them to take on more responsibility.

**2. Explain the Audience:** Not every book is written in the Queen's English. For a copyeditor to accurately distinguish between what to edit and what's an intentional style choice, it's important for them to understand the audience for the book and the message it's trying to convey.

This can be as high level as whether or not profanity is okay, or as specific as the country of origin, to make sure that the sayings and spellings are correct.

**3. Point Out What Needs Work:** You can often (although not always) anticipate issues. For example, we recently worked on a book that was written in such a way that it jumped back and forth between past and present tense. We fixed this problem in the manuscript, but it was worth explaining the situation to the proofreader so that she, too, could be on the lookout for similar mistakes.

You can apply this strategy, too. If you know you have a tendency

to make sloppy typos or misuse a certain type of punctuation, for example, tell your proofreader. The more clues you can give them as to what they might be looking for, the better your book will be.

### STEP 3: FINISH THE PROCESS

Once the copyeditor is done, they should send you back a Word document with all their changes made in Track Changes. This is the industry standard, and it's worth confirming with them **before** hiring them that they'll be tracking the changes for you.

When you receive the document, you should expect to find a lot of small tracked changes. Most of these will be obvious mistakes that you're happy to accept, but some may be phrasing recommendations, or questions about pieces that are unclear.

Some may be spelling or punctuation corrections that are *technically* accurate, but not commonly used—remember, their job is to follow rules, not make editorial choices.

Sometimes you may want to purposely break rules to stay current or create your unique tone and voice. Be sure to go through all of these changes and make your own decisions about what should be implemented and what shouldn't.

### STEP 4: READY TO PUBLISH?

At this point, you should have a manuscript that you're confident enough to lock in and publish.

We should note that you'll probably never be 100 percent confident that your manuscript is ready to go. No writer is.

But at some point—generally after all of these steps—there is nothing else left for you to do other than lock it in and put it out. Don't waste weeks or months trying to get it from 99.9 percent perfect to

100 percent. It's impossible. Recognize when diminishing marginal returns have set in, and move on.

Once your manuscript is locked, it's time to get started with the publishing process.

**PART 7**

**DESIGN  
YOUR BOOK**







# HOW TO WRITE A BOOK DESCRIPTION THAT SELLS

*“Anyone who tries to make a distinction between education and entertainment doesn’t know the first thing about either.”*

—MARSHALL MCLUHAN

After the title and the cover, the most important marketing material for your book is the description.

The book description goes multiple places, most prominently on the back cover and right below the price (on Amazon). It’s crucial that this short description be right.

In this chapter, we will walk you through how to write and create your book description, and include some examples of authors who did it well, and those who didn’t.

## WHY YOUR BOOK DESCRIPTION MATTERS

The book description is the pitch to the reader about why they should buy your book. It is sales copy to get them to see that the book is for them (or not) and then make the purchase.

There are so many examples of how book descriptions lead to huge changes in sales. One of my favorite stories is for JT McCormick's book, *I Got There*.

Despite having a nice cover and receiving good reviews, it wasn't selling as many copies as it should have. So we dove into the book description, figured out the flaws, and completely revamped it.

Sales doubled—*within an hour*.

This isn't uncommon. In many cases, the description is the factor that solidifies in the reader's mind whether the book is for them or not. If you get it right, the purchase is almost automatic. If you get it wrong, very little else can really save you (except a recommendation from the right source).

Remember, people are looking for a reason to not buy your book, so having a good book description is key to keeping them on the purchasing track.

## HOW TO WRITE YOUR BOOK DESCRIPTION

At Scribe, our copywriters use the *Hook, Pain, Pleasure, Legitimacy, Open Loop* format, which is very similar to how we write introductions.

### 1. HOOK

The first sentence should be something that will grab your desired reader and make them take notice. If that isn't right—or worse, if it's wrong—you can lose the reader immediately, and then it doesn't matter what the rest of the description says.

People are always looking for a reason to move on to the next thing. Don't give it to them. Make the first sentence something that forces them to read the rest of the description. Every good book description you see is interesting from the first sentence.

Generally speaking, this means focusing on the boldest claim in the book, or the most sensational fact, or the most compelling idea.

## 2. PAIN

Once you have their attention, then clearly describe the current pain they are in. If you can accurately and realistically describe the pain of the reader, you will have them fully engaged in the description and seriously entertaining the idea of buying the book.

You don't need to be gratuitous here, all you need to do is be accurate: what pain is in their life? What unsolved problems do they have? Or, perhaps what unachieved aspirations or grand goals do they have? Clearly and directly articulate these, in plain and simple language.

## 3. PLEASURE

Then tell them what the book does to help them solve for this pain. Done right, this creates an emotional connection by describing how the book will make the potential reader feel after reading it. Or even better, what the reader will get out of reading the book—how will their life be different because they read this book?

Will it make them happy or rich? Will it help them lose weight or have more friends? What do they get once they read this book?

Be clear about the benefits, don't insinuate them. You are selling a result to the reader, not a process (even though your book is the process). Explain exactly what the book is about, in clear, obvious terms.

## 4. LEGITIMACY

This is simply about letting the reader know why they should listen to you, why you are the authority and the expert that they need to

hear from. This can be very short and should not be a focus of the book description. You want just enough social proof to make them keep reading.

This can also go in the hook. If there is an impressive fact to mention (e.g., *New York Times* bestseller), that should be bolded in the first sentence. Or if there is one salient and amazing thing about you or the book, that can go in the book description, something like, “From the author of [INSERT WELL-KNOWN BESTSELLING BOOK.]” Or perhaps “From the world’s most highly decorated Marine sniper, this is the definitive book on shooting.”

## 5. OPEN LOOP

You state the problem or question your book addresses, you show that you solve or answer it, but you also leave a small key piece out. This piques the interest of the reader and leaves them wanting more.

You do want to be very explicit about what they will learn, but you don’t have to go deep into the “how.” This is to create an “open loop” so to speak; you are keeping back the secret sauce that is actually in the book.

This being said, do not make the reader struggle to understand what your point is, or how to get the reader there. This is especially true for prescriptive books (how-to, self-help, motivational, etc.). People like to understand the basics of the “how” (as well as the “what”), especially if it’s something new or novel. This is a balance that our examples will show you how to hit.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD BOOK DESCRIPTIONS

### CAMERON HEROLD’S *VIVID VISION*

Many corporations have slick, flashy mission statements that ultimately do little to motivate employees and less to impress customers, investors, and partners.

But there is a way to share your excitement for the future of your company in a clear, compelling, and powerful way, and entrepreneur and business growth expert Cameron Herold can show you how.

*Vivid Vision* is a revolutionary tool that will help owners, CEOs, and senior managers create inspirational, detailed, and actionable three-year mission statements for their companies. In this easy-to-follow guide, Herold walks organization leaders through the simple steps to creating their own Vivid Vision, from brainstorming to sharing the ideas to using the document to drive progress in the years to come.

By focusing on mapping out how you see your company looking and feeling in every category of business, without getting bogged down by data and numbers, *Vivid Vision* creates a holistic road map to success that will get all of your teammates passionate about the big picture.

Your company is your dream, one that you want to share with your staff, clients, and stakeholders. *Vivid Vision* is the tool you need to make that dream a reality.

## What Makes It Good?

Three things make this good:

1. **Engaging hook:** Everyone knows that mission statements are BS, but how many people say this out loud? By doing so, it takes a stand and engages the potential reader immediately.
2. **Important keywords:** We tend to advocate staying away from buzzwords in your book description, but in some cases—especially business books—the right use of them can work. This is an example of where they work. Words and phrases like “easy to follow” and “simple steps” and “drive progress” actually work.
3. **Clear pain and benefit:** This book is not appealing to everyone—but to the perfect reader, it’s very appealing because it clearly articulates a real problem (“*slick, flashy mission statements that ultimately do little*”) and then tells you the result it

delivers (“*detailed, actionable three-year mission statements for their companies*”) and basically how it gets you there (“*mapping out how you see your company looking and feeling in every category of business*”).

#### TIM FERRISS’S 4-HOUR WORKWEEK:

Forget the old concept of retirement and the rest of the deferred-life plan—there is no need to wait and every reason not to, especially in unpredictable economic times.

Whether your dream is escaping the rat race, experiencing high-end world travel, earning a monthly five-figure income with zero management, or just living more and working less, *The 4-Hour Workweek* is the blueprint.

This step-by-step guide to luxury lifestyle design teaches:

- How Tim went from \$40,000 per year and 80 hours per week to \$40,000 per month and 4 hours per week
- How to outsource your life to overseas virtual assistants for \$5 per hour and do whatever you want
- How blue-chip escape artists travel the world without quitting their jobs
- How to eliminate 50% of your work in 48 hours using the principles of a forgotten Italian economist
- How to trade a long-haul career for short work bursts and frequent “mini-retirements”

#### WHAT MAKES IT GOOD?

There are three things that make this good.

1. **It has a great hook:** Tim immediately tells you why this book matters to YOU—because you can stop waiting for retirement.

Who doesn't want to retire now? OK, I'm interested, tell me more...

2. **It has bulleted, specific info about pain and pleasure:** A vague promise is no good if it doesn't deliver. Tim then makes specific promises about the information in the book, both about things that have happened, and things it will teach you.
3. **It makes you want to read more:** After the contrast of the big, broad goal and the specific information, at the very least, any reader is going to keep going into the reviews and other information. You're hooked—you want to know HOW he teaches this.

#### TYLER COWEN'S *AVERAGE IS OVER*:

Widely acclaimed as one of the world's most influential economists, Tyler Cowen returns with his groundbreaking follow-up to the *New York Times* bestseller *The Great Stagnation*.

The widening gap between rich and poor means dealing with one big, uncomfortable truth: If you're not at the top, you're at the bottom.

The global labor market is changing radically thanks to growth at the high end—and the low. About three-quarters of the jobs created in the United States since the Great Recession pay only a bit more than minimum wage. Still, the United States has more millionaires and billionaires than any country ever, and we continue to mint them.

In this eye-opening book, renowned economist and bestselling author Tyler Cowen explains that phenomenon: High earners are taking ever more advantage of machine intelligence in data analysis and achieving ever-better results. Meanwhile, low earners who haven't committed to learning, to making the most of new technologies, have poor prospects. Nearly every business sector relies less and less on manual labor, and this fact is forever changing the world of work and wages. A steady, secure life somewhere in the middle—average—is over.

With *The Great Stagnation*, Cowen explained why median wages

stagnated over the last four decades; in *Average Is Over* he reveals the essential nature of the new economy, identifies the best path forward for workers and entrepreneurs, and provides readers with actionable advice to make the most of the new economic landscape. It is a challenging and sober must-read, but ultimately exciting, good news. In debates about our nation's economic future, it will be impossible to ignore.

#### WHAT MAKES IT GOOD?

This book description does almost everything right. It quickly establishes the author credentials, it immediately states the huge social question it addresses, and it does so in a way that creates an emotional reaction from the reader—questions of equality are highly emotionally charged.

It then spends two short paragraphs laying out the context of the debate over economic equality, and then tells you exactly what the book will tell you, without giving its thesis away. This description almost forces you to read this book.

#### EXAMPLES OF BAD BOOK DESCRIPTIONS

BEN HOROWITZ'S, *THE HARD THING ABOUT HARD THINGS*

Ben Horowitz, co-founder of Andreessen Horowitz and one of Silicon Valley's most respected and experienced entrepreneurs, offers essential advice on building and running a startup—practical wisdom for managing the toughest problems business school doesn't cover, based on his popular blog.

While many people talk about how great it is to start a business, very few are honest about how difficult it is to run one. Ben Horowitz analyzes the problems that confront leaders every day, sharing the insights he's gained developing, managing, selling, buying, investing in, and supervising technology companies. A lifelong rap fanatic, he amplifies business lessons with lyrics from his favorite songs, telling it straight



about everything from firing friends to poaching competitors, cultivating and sustaining a CEO mentality to knowing the right time to cash in.

Filled with his trademark humor and straight talk, *The Hard Thing about Hard Things* is invaluable for veteran entrepreneurs as well as those aspiring to their own new ventures, drawing from Horowitz's personal and often humbling experiences.

#### WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?

This description is bad because—based just on this description—the book seems somewhat bland and boring. If I don't know anything about Horowitz before I read that description, what in there makes me want to know more? Nor does it really tell me anything about the substance of what he says in the book, and it substantially undersells both Horowitz's prominence and the resonance and importance of the book's message. And who cares that he likes rap? What does that matter to me, the reader?

Compare this with the description for Tyler Cowen's book above; it explains who Cowen is and why I should care, it tells me what he says, applies the book to my life, and shows me exactly why I need to care about what he wrote.

The irony is that having read both books, I can tell you that Horowitz's is just as good, if not *better* than Cowen's. But you would never know this from comparing the descriptions.

#### DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF'S *COERCION: WHY WE LISTEN TO WHAT "THEY" SAY*

Noted media pundit and author of *Playing the Future* Douglas Rushkoff gives a devastating critique of the influence techniques behind our culture of rampant consumerism. With a skilled analysis of how experts in the fields of marketing, advertising, retail atmospherics, and hand-selling attempt to take away our ability to make rational

decisions, Rushkoff delivers a bracing account of media ecology today, consumerism in America, and why we buy what we buy, helping us recognize when we're being treated like consumers instead of human beings.

#### WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?

Short descriptions are great, but this is too short to even tell me what the book says. This is an example of overselling, without doing it right. Look at the descriptions, “devastating” “skilled analysis” and “bracing account”—this description sounds like he's doing what he says he's warning us about: selling without substance. In no place does this description connect the reader to the issues in the book in a way that is engaging or compelling.

#### MORE BOOK DESCRIPTION BEST PRACTICES

##### 1. MINDSET SHIFT: IT'S AN AD, NOT A SUMMARY

Don't think of the book description as a synopsis. It is not meant to summarize your book. So many authors want to put everything about their book in this section. Resist that urge.

It is an advertisement. Think of it like a trailer for your book. It is designed to make people *want to read* your book. You want them to take action and buy it.

##### 2. USE COMPELLING KEYWORDS

It's not enough to be accurate; you need to use high-traffic keywords that increase the likelihood your book will get picked up in search. For example, if *Sports Illustrated* does a book, you'd want to not only say *Sports Illustrated* magazine but also mention the names of the A-list athletes in the book. Even better, use words that evoke an emotional response on the part of the reader. Don't use “jerk” when “asshole” will work.

### 3. KEEP IT SHORT

On average, Amazon Bestsellers have descriptions that are about 200 words long. Most descriptions are broken up into two paragraphs, but some are kept at one, and some run to three.

### 4. SIMPLE WRITING

Keep the writing simple. Use short, clear sentences. You don't want anyone to struggle to comprehend what you're trying to convey, because you've strung too many ideas together in one long run-on sentence.

### 5. WRITE AS THE PUBLISHER, NOT THE AUTHOR

This will probably be obvious to you, but the book description should always be in a third-person objective voice, and never your author voice. It is always written as someone else describing your book.

### 6. NO INSECURITY

Don't compare your book to other books. I see this all the time, and all it does is make the book (and the author) immediately look inferior. Plus, a reader may hate the book you are comparing yourself to and you'll lose them.

The only place a comparison makes sense is if you are quoting a very reputable source that makes the comparison itself.

### 7. DON'T INSIST ON DOING IT YOURSELF

I can't tell you how many amazing authors I've had come to me utterly befuddled because they couldn't write their own book description. This is normal.

The reality is that the author is often the worst person to write their

own book description. They're too close to the material and too emotionally invested. If this is the case, we recommend either asking a friend to help, or going to a professional editor or even better—a professional copywriter—for assistance.



# HOW TO WRITE YOUR AUTHOR BIO (AND WHY IT MATTERS)

Unless you're one of the household name authors (Steven King, JK Rowling, Malcolm Gladwell), most people buying your book will not know who you are.

So how will they learn about you? And why is this even important?

That's what this chapter will explain: how to properly write your author bio, and why it's so important.

## **WHY YOUR AUTHOR BIO IS SO IMPORTANT**

Even though very few authors think about it, and even fewer writing or publishing guides talk about it, the “Author Bio” section will impact sales and reputation, and often determines what media you get.

It impacts sales directly. “Author reputation” is consistently cited as one of the main factors that influence book buying. If you can establish yourself as an authority on your book topic, readers will

be much more inclined to buy your book, read it, and regard you the way you want them to. People are considering spending their income and time on your book, and they are looking for a reason to do it or not do it, and a great bio helps them do it (while a bad bio will often stop them).

Furthermore, if you want your book to help create a business for you, or establish your credibility or authority in a subject, often the author bio is more important than what's actually in the book—the sad but true reality is that more people will read your author bio than your actual book. It takes a long time to read a book, but it's very easy to make a snap judgment based on a short paragraph, and most people do that.

This is doubly true for media. Most people in media work very hard under tight deadlines, and don't have time to read long books or even long, meandering pitch emails. But a good author bio cuts right to the point by saying: *this is a person who is important, and I need to pay attention to them.*

## HOW TO WRITE YOUR AUTHOR BIO

Writing about yourself is typically a task that most writers shy away from, but writing an effective author bio doesn't have to be painful. A few simple steps can get you to an effective bio that will not only impress interested readers and media, but also help sell your book:

### 1. DEMONSTRATE YOUR AUTHORITY AND CREDENTIALS ON YOUR BOOK SUBJECT (BUT DON'T OVERSTATE THEM)

Whatever your book is about, it's important to establish your credentials in that area. For example, if you're writing a diet book, mention professional degrees or training or accomplishments, or other things that clearly signal your authority and credibility in that space.

If you struggle with what to say about yourself, remember that the

idea is to make it clear why you're credible and professional (as opposed to an unknown, untrusted source), i.e., why the reader should listen to you.

For some types of books and authors, this is harder to do. If there's no clear way to signal direct authority or credentials—for example, a novel or a book about your life stories—then don't make up things or try to “invent” authority. Focus on the other parts of the author bio.

## 2. INCLUDE ACHIEVEMENTS THAT BUILD CREDIBILITY OR ARE INTERESTING TO THE READER (WITHOUT GOING OVERBOARD)

In your author bio you'll want to include some things you've accomplished in your life, especially if you don't have direct credentials and authority in the book subject matter. This will help your audience understand why they should spend their time and money reading what you've got to say.

If you have something about you or your life that is unusual, even if it's not totally relevant, you should still consider putting it in your bio.

For example, if you were a Rhodes Scholar, or you started a major national organization, or won a national championship in ping-pong—whatever. The point is to show the reader that you have done things that matter, even if they don't matter to the book.

If you are lacking on credentials or exciting things, you can always put in your passions and interests—anything that you enjoy doing, writing about, or consider a hobby, especially if they are relevant to the book topic.

That being said, do NOT ramble on and on about things that reader doesn't care about. Put yourself in your reader's shoes, and ask yourself, “Does this fact really matter to anyone but me?”

### 3. MENTION ANY BOOKS YOU'VE WRITTEN, AND YOUR WEBSITE (BUT DON'T OVERSELL THEM)

If you've written other books, especially on that subject, make sure to mention them. If they're bestsellers or won awards, even better. If you've won multiple awards and you are finding that listing them all is becoming tedious, aim for brevity instead. Simply writing "*John Smith is an award-winning author whose works include...*" is more than enough to show your readers you know what you're doing.

If you have a website, a longer bio page, or anything else that helps promote your brand, then you should make sure you include it at the bottom of your bio (assuming this meets your goals). Again, you don't want to brag here, so just be humble and simply put something like: *Find out more about John at [www.johnsmithwriter.com](http://www.johnsmithwriter.com)*. It's simple and has a clear call to action.

### 4. DROP SOME RELEVANT NAMES, IF THEY'RE APPROPRIATE (WITHOUT BEING CRASS)

Yes, name dropping can put off readers if it's done wrong. But there is a right way to do it.

For example, if you are relatively unknown, you can say something like, "The woman that Seth Godin called "the most important writer of our time" reveals to you the secrets of..." This way you are trading on Seth Godin's reputation, and establishing your credentials at the same time (assuming he said this).

Also, if you've worked for or with very well-known people, name-dropping is not seen as bad; it's seen as an effective signal to the reader of your importance and ability. What matters is that there is a reason that you are using someone else's name that makes sense, and is not just a gratuitous name drop.



## 5. KEEP IT SHORT AND INTERESTING (WITHOUT LEAVING ANYTHING IMPORTANT OUT)

While your readers are interested in finding out more about you, they don't want to get bored, or listen to arrogant braggadocio about how great you are. If your bio is too long, or too full of overstated accomplishments and awards, it will turn your readers off and actually make you look less credible.

Typically, if you keep your bio under 200 words, you're going to be OK. Anything longer than that means you've gone on too long about your accomplishments, your personal life, or both. Also, it will make your back cover look cluttered and amateurish. Cut it down to the most important things.

### TEMPLATE FOR AUTHOR BIO INFO

This is a template you can use to write your author bio. I'm not saying it's the very best way to write an author bio; in fact, many of the best ones above do NOT fit this template. But many people asked for an easy-to-follow template, and this is the template we use with our authors.

1. **First sentence:** “[Author] is [statement to establish credibility on this subject and/or authorship of previous books.]”
2. **Second sentence(s):** Statement(s) further establishing credibility or qualifications of author to write the book.
3. **Third sentence (optional):** Historical “before that” information that is at least tangentially relevant to the book, or very compelling in another way.
4. **Fourth sentence:** Endorsement of author's credibility by others, awards, or some other social proof, if available.
5. **Fifth sentence:** Tidbit of personal information.
6. **Sixth sentence:** Link to website or other resource (if relevant).

Here is how that looks in practice:

Will Leach is the founder of TriggerPoint Design, a leading behavior research and design consultancy specializing in using behavior economics and decision design to drive consumer decision-making. He is a behavior design instructor at the Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University and has more than twenty years of behavior insights experience working with Fortune 50 companies to solve their most important behavior challenges. Will is the only two-time winner of the EXPLOR Award for his work in behavior design and is known as America's foremost authority in applying behavior science to marketing. Will lives in Dallas with his wife and family.

### **IF YOU CAN'T WRITE ABOUT YOURSELF, HAVE FRIENDS HELP YOU**

People, especially writers, have a hard time writing about themselves. Often, the Author Bio is the most difficult part of the marketing process for an author to write effectively.

If you are unsure about whether your author bio seems either incomplete or too arrogant, run it by a few friends for feedback. For example, when I was doing my first bio, I made all the mistakes I outlined above. I eventually had to have my friend Nils Parker write my bio for me. It's always easier for your friends to praise you and see the amazing things you do.

### **EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT AUTHOR BIOS**

I'm going to show you a lot of different bios, to give you an idea of how many different authors did them:

#### **HIGH STATUS AND SHORT: LYNN VINCENT**

This bio is the perfect "less is more" for an author with a lot of credentials. When you have done what Lynn has done, you can just say it quickly and succinctly.

Lynn Vincent is the *New York Times* bestselling writer of *Heaven Is*

*for Real* and *Same Kind of Different As Me*. The author or coauthor of ten books, Lynn has sold 12 million copies since 2006. She worked for eleven years as a writer and editor at the national news biweekly *WORLD* magazine and is a U.S. Navy veteran.

#### HIGH STATUS BUT UNDERSELLS: MICHAEL LEWIS

Contrast this to Michael Lewis, who is a very well-known author, but still leaves quite a bit out of his bio that would help many readers understand who he is and why they should care (even Michael Lewis is not famous enough to assume people know him).

Michael Lewis, the author of *Boomerang*, *Liar's Poker*, *The New Thing*, *Moneyball*, *The Blind Side*, *Panic*, *Home Game*, and *The Big Short*, among other works, lives in Berkeley, California, with his wife, Tabitha Soren, and their three children.

#### BAD BIO: AMANDA RIPLEY

Many authors have different bios on different books (because they leave the bio writing to their publisher, which is a huge mistake). You can see the difference in the author Amanda Ripley. Her bad bio is strangely both boring and overselling:

Amanda Ripley is a literary journalist whose stories on human behavior and public policy have appeared in *Time*, *The Atlantic*, and *Slate*, and helped *Time* win two National Magazine Awards. To discuss her work, she has appeared on ABC, NBC, CNN, FOX News, and NPR. Ripley's first book, *The Unthinkable*, was published in fifteen countries and turned into a PBS documentary.

#### GOOD BIO: AMANDA RIPLEY

Contrast that to this good bio, where she comes off as much more of an authority—mainly because her other books are mentioned, as were her awards.

Amanda Ripley is an investigative journalist for *Time*, *The Atlantic*, and other magazines. She is the author, most recently, of *THE SMARTEST KIDS IN THE WORLD—and How They Got That Way*. Her first book, *THE UNTHINKABLE: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes—and Why*, was published in 15 countries and turned into a PBS documentary. Her work has helped *Time* win two National Magazine Awards.

#### BAD DOCTOR BIO: DR. DAVID PERLMUTTER

This is a long, uninterrupted string of hard-to-process things. Dr. Perlmutter is very qualified but mentions everything (including medical school awards) which detracts from the overall effect.

David Perlmutter, MD, FACN, ABIHM is a Board-Certified Neurologist and Fellow of the American College of Nutrition who received his M.D. degree from the University of Miami School of Medicine where he won the research award. Dr. Perlmutter is a frequent lecturer at symposia sponsored by such medical institutions as Columbia University, the University of Arizona, Scripps Institute, and Harvard University. He has contributed extensively to the world medical literature with publications appearing in the *Journal of Neurosurgery*, the *Southern Medical Journal*, *Journal of Applied Nutrition*, and *Archives of Neurology*. He is the author of: *The Better Brain Book* and the #1 *New York Times* Bestseller, *Grain Brain*. He is recognized internationally as a leader in the field of nutritional influences in neurological disorders. Dr. Perlmutter has been interviewed on many nationally syndicated radio and television programs including *20/20*, *Larry King Live*, CNN, Fox News, *Fox and Friends*, *The Today Show*, *Oprah*, *Dr. Oz*, and *The CBS Early Show*. In 2002 Dr. Perlmutter was the recipient of the Linus Pauling Award for his innovative approaches to neurological disorders and in addition was awarded the Denham Harmon Award for his pioneering work in the application of free radical science to clinical medicine. He is the recipient of the 2006 National Nutritional Foods Association Clinician of the Year Award. Dr. Perlmutter serves as Medical Advisor for the *Dr. Oz* show.

## GOOD DOCTOR BIO: DR. BENJAMIN CARSON

Contrast this to Dr. Carson, who focuses only on the credentials and status signifiers that the reader would care about and understand, like his specialties and companies he works for.

Dr. Benjamin Carson is a Professor of Neurosurgery, Plastic Surgery, Oncology, and Pediatrics, and the Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. He is also the author of four bestselling books—*Gifted Hands*, *Think Big*, *The Big Picture*, and *Take the Risk*. He serves on the boards of the Kellogg Company, Costco, and the Academy of Achievement, among others, and is an Emeritus Fellow of the Yale Corporation.

He and his wife, Candy, co-founded the Carson Scholars Fund ([www.carsonscholars.org](http://www.carsonscholars.org)), a 501(c)3 established to counteract America's crisis in education by identifying and rewarding academic role models in the fourth through eleventh grades, regardless of race, creed, religion, and socio-economic status, who also demonstrate humanitarian qualities. There are over 4800 scholars in forty-five states. Ben and Candy are the parents of three grown sons and reside in Baltimore County, Maryland.

## GOOD BALANCE: TIM FERRISS

Tim does lean aggressively into the idea of listing all the cool things he's done and noteworthy outlets that have talked about him, but still makes his bio interesting and relevant to the reader of his books:

Timothy Ferriss is a serial entrepreneur, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, and angel investor/advisor (Facebook, Twitter, Evernote, Uber, and 20+ more). Best known for his rapid-learning techniques, Tim's books—*The 4-Hour Workweek*, *The 4-Hour Body*, and *The 4-Hour Chef*—have been published in 30+ languages. *The 4-Hour Workweek* has spent seven years on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Tim has been featured by more than 100 media outlets including the *New York Times*, *The Economist*, *TIME*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Outside*, NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, and CNN. He has guest lectured in entrepreneurship at Princeton University since 2003. His popular blog [www.fourhourblog.com](http://www.fourhourblog.com) has 1M+ monthly readers, and his Twitter account @tferriss was selected by Mashable as one of only five “Must-Follow” accounts for entrepreneurs. Tim’s primetime TV show, *The Tim Ferriss Experiment* ([www.upwave.com/tfx](http://www.upwave.com/tfx)), teaches rapid-learning techniques for helping viewers to produce seemingly superhuman results in minimum time.

#### OUT OF BALANCE (CONFUSING AND OVERSELLING): CHERYL STRAYED

Cheryl is similar to Tim, but runs several unrelated things together in a confusing way, and mentions things that no reader would ever care about (e.g., the director of a movie based on her book). This same bio could be 25 percent shorter and much stronger.

Cheryl Strayed is the author of #1 *New York Times* bestseller *WILD*, the *New York Times* bestseller *TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS*, and the novel *TORCH*. *WILD* was chosen by Oprah Winfrey as her first selection for Oprah’s Book Club 2.0. *WILD* won a Barnes & Noble Discover Award, an Indie Choice Award, an Oregon Book Award, a Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, and a Midwest Booksellers Choice Award among others. The movie adaptation of *WILD* will be released by Fox Searchlight in December 2014. The film is directed by Jean-Marc Vallée and stars Reese Witherspoon, with a screenplay by Nick Hornby. Strayed’s writing has appeared in *THE BEST AMERICAN ESSAYS*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Washington Post Magazine*, *Vogue*, *Salon*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Sun*, *Tin House*, *The Rumpus*—where she wrote the popular “Dear Sugar” advice column—and elsewhere. Strayed was the guest editor of *BEST AMERICAN ESSAYS 2013* and has contributed to many anthologies. Her books have been translated into more than thirty languages around the world. She holds an MFA in fiction writing from Syracuse University and a bachelor’s degree from the University of Minnesota. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband and their two children.

## OVERSELLING: REBECCA SKLOOT

Below is an example of unnecessary overselling. Rebecca Skloot wrote a major bestseller (*Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*), but she mentions all sorts of nonsense in this bio that no reader will care about. You get the “doth protest too much” vibe from this. Compare this to Tim Ferriss, who also lists a lot but does so quickly and gets out of the way.

Rebecca Skloot is an award-winning science writer whose articles have appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*; *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *Discover*; and others. She has worked as a correspondent for NPR’s *Radiolab* and PBS’s *NOVA scienceNOW*, and is a contributing editor at *Popular Science* magazine and guest editor of *The Best American Science Writing 2011*. She is a former vice president of the National Book Critics Circle and has taught creative nonfiction and science journalism at the University of Memphis, the University of Pittsburgh, and New York University. Her debut book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, took more than ten years to research and write, and became an instant *New York Times* bestseller. She has been featured on numerous television shows, including *CBS Sunday Morning* and *The Colbert Report*. Her book has received widespread critical acclaim, with reviews appearing in *The New Yorker*, *Washington Post*, *Science*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *People*, and many others. It won the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Prize and the Wellcome Trust Book Prize, and was named The Best Book of 2010 by Amazon.com, and a Best Book of the Year by *Entertainment Weekly*; *O, The Oprah Magazine*; the *New York Times*; *Washington Post*; *US News & World Report*; and numerous others.

## RIDICULOUS OVERSELLING: DINESH D’SOUZA

I’ll end with one of the worst bios I’ve ever seen. This is a real bio, pulled off the Amazon page of his recent book. It is over 500 WORDS of preposterously insecure and arrogant crap. I can’t imagine reading this bio and not respecting the author LESS afterward:

Dinesh D’Souza has had a 25-year career as a writer, scholar, and

public intellectual. A former policy analyst in the Reagan White House, D'Souza also served as John M. Olin Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and the Robert and Karen Rishwain Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He served as the president of The King's College in New York City from 2010 to 2012.

Called one of the “top young public-policy makers in the country” by *Investor's Business Daily*, D'Souza quickly became known as a major influencer on public policy through his writings. His first book, *Illiberal Education* (1991), publicized the phenomenon of political correctness in America's colleges and universities and became a *New York Times* bestseller for 15 weeks. It has been listed as one of the most influential books of the 1990s.

In 1995, D'Souza published *The End of Racism*, which became one of the most controversial books of the time and another national best-seller. His 1997 book, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader*, was the first book to make the case for Reagan's intellectual and political importance. D'Souza's *The Virtue of Prosperity* (2000) explored the social and moral implications of wealth.

In 2002, D'Souza published his *New York Times* bestseller *What's So Great About America*, which was critically acclaimed for its thoughtful patriotism. His 2003 book, *Letters to a Young Conservative*, has become a handbook for a new generation of young conservatives inspired by D'Souza's style and ideas. *The Enemy at Home*, published in 2006, stirred up a furious debate both on the left and the right. It became a national bestseller and was published in paperback in 2008, with a new afterword by the author responding to his critics.

Just as in his early years D'Souza was one of the nation's most articulate spokesmen for a reasoned and thoughtful conservatism, in recent years he has been an equally brilliant and forceful defender of Christianity. *What's So Great about Christianity* not only intelligently explained the core doctrines of the Christian faith, it also explained how the freedom and prosperity associated with Western Civilization



rest upon the foundation of biblical Christianity. *Life after Death: The Evidence* shows why the atheist critique of immortality is irrational and draws the striking conclusion that it is reasonable to believe in life after death.

In 2010, D'Souza wrote *The Roots of Obama's Rage* (Regnery), which was described as the most influential political book of the year and proved to be yet another bestseller.

In 2012, D'Souza published two books, *Godforsaken* and *Obama's America: Unmaking the American Dream*, the latter climbing to #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and inspiring a documentary on the same topic. The film, called *2016: Obama's America*, has risen to the second-highest all-time political documentary, passing Michael Moore's *Sicko* and Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. In addition, *2016* has risen to #4 on the bestselling list of all documentaries.

These endeavors—not to mention a razor-sharp wit and entertaining style—have allowed D'Souza to participate in highly-publicized debates about Christianity with some of the most famous atheists and skeptics of our time.

Born in Mumbai, India, D'Souza came to the U.S. as an exchange student and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Dartmouth College in 1983.

D'Souza has been named one of America's most influential conservative thinkers by the *New York Times Magazine*. The World Affairs Council lists him as one of the nation's 500 leading authorities on international issues, and *Newsweek* cited him as one of the country's most prominent Asian-Americans.

D'Souza's articles have appeared in virtually every major magazine and newspaper, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Vanity Fair*, *New Republic*, and *National Review*. He has appeared on numerous television programs, including *The Today Show*, *Nightline*, *The News Hour* on PBS, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Money-*

*line, Hannity, Bill Maher, NPR's All Things Considered, CNBC's Kudlow Report, Lou Dobbs Tonight, and Real Time with Bill Maher.*

### **REMEMBER: YOUR BIO GROWS AS YOU GROW**

Treat your bio as a living document. Just because you've written it once does not mean it's finished. As you grow and change as a writer so too should your bio, and the best part is that they are easy to change online.

Also, remember that if you are writing for different genres or different topics that some of your accomplishments and past works will be more relevant to your readers than others. It's not a bad idea to tweak your author bio for each new work you release.

Getting your author bio right is an important task. In fact, this small section is usually the **ONLY** source of information potential readers have about you (the author), and that's why it is one of the most important pieces of marketing material you write for your book. Take it seriously, get it right, and it will help you sell books.



## HOW TO TAKE THE RIGHT AUTHOR PHOTO

This is an important and hard truth that most authors avoid:

*Readers will judge you AND your book based on your author photo.*

Is that fair? Maybe, maybe not.

Is it reality? Absolutely (and you probably do it, as well).

Why do people do this?

Because biologically, humans are visual creatures. It's mostly unconscious, but snap judgments of other humans based solely on physical characteristics and facial expressions evolved as a way for humans to quickly assess threats, opportunities, and determine relative social status of a new person to know how to interact with them. A deep discussion of this topic is far beyond the scope of this piece, but basically, it evolved because it worked (there is a ton of research and science on this, and most of it falls under what is called "signaling theory").

This might seem bad, but it is actually a good thing. Now that you

understand the importance of your author photo, it means that you can ensure you take a great one, and use this tool as a powerful advantage.

In this chapter, I'll go through some examples of author photos, both good and bad, so you can see what this looks like in practice, and then walk you through exactly how to ensure you get a great author photo for your book.

### THE AUTHOR PHOTO RULE THAT RULES THEM ALL

There are many different ways to take an effective author photo, and one overarching rule when it comes to author photos (or any profile photo):

***Know what you want to signal to which audience, and then signal it properly.***

This is the key to everything with photos. The author photo for a CEO of a Fortune 500 company should be totally different from the author photo for an up-and-coming comedian.

Why? Because they are signaling different things to different groups.

Generally speaking, the CEO's author photo should signal professionalism, effectiveness, reliability, and trust.

The comedian's photo could be wacky, goofy, or even pensively serious, all depending on the comedic style they want to signal.

To make sure you're taking the right author photo, you need to ask yourself two questions:

#### 1. WHAT AM I TRYING TO SIGNAL WITH MY PHOTO?

You say just as much with your appearance as you do with your

words. Clearly your words are the more important part of your book, but again, people are visual creatures, and they will judge your book (to some extent) by what you look like.

The good news is that, within reason, it's much easier to construct the image you want in a still photo. You can emphasize whatever traits or aspect of your appearance you want, and you can also minimize any physical limitations that would be difficult to minimize in person; height, for example.

You can signal seriousness or silliness, professionalism or pretention, positivity or pessimism; it's really up to you.

The important thing to remember is that you cannot have them all at once.

A well-calculated author photo is one of the best ways to build a connection of trust between you and the right reader.

## 2. WHO AM I TRYING TO SIGNAL IT TO?

It's not just what you are signaling, it's also who you want to signal it to that determines your author photo.

Why is that?

Because so much of signaling is about telling a specific group of people that you are one of them, or that you speak their in-group language.

For example, if you are trying to signal to corporations that you are a competent and reliable professional that they should trust and listen to, then you must understand that they see the conventional Western business suit as a key signal not just of competence, but membership in their tribe. Suits tell them that *you are one of them*.

Whereas, if you want to signal trust to the tech and startup commu-

nity, then wearing a suit sends the opposite signal; they see suits as a sign of being out of touch in their community. If you want them to see you as competent and tech-minded, you want to wear more casual clothes.

The importance of understanding this cannot be overstated. Remember, signaling is not just about what you are signaling, it's also about what other people are seeing, and what other people see depends almost entirely on what group they are part of and identify with.

Having a cutting-edge look in one field means you may be excluded in others, so knowing who you are trying to signal to and what signals they respond to is key for you.

This is all abstract. We'll show you several examples of author photos, both good and bad, and break them down for you.

## EXAMPLE AUTHOR PHOTOS

### GENERIC WRITER PHOTOS

*Joanna Penn*



This is a classic author photo. This signals warmth and openness. Joanna has a broad, authentic smile on her face; you can almost see her enthusiasm and joy.

By making the photo black and white, and with a close crop that frames her face, she narrows your focus onto the things she wants you to know about her—she's positive, optimistic, and encouraging.

This makes sense for her; Joanna writes a lot of books for authors about writing, publishing, and marketing. She is a teacher and a writer, and this photo signals both trust and warmth.

*Lisa Cartwright*



This is not a good author photo at all. First, it's tilted to the side in a weird angle that looks like an indie poster from the 90s. Second, it's a collection of technical no-nos—blurry, poorly lit, overly saturated, etc. This could have been taken by a buddy on a night out with a disposable camera. Third, her smile seems forced and less than genuine.

What is she signaling here? My first unconscious thought is something along the lines of, “Why is it not centered?” Whether intentional or not, this picture signals unprofessionalism, amateurishness, and lack of emotional connection.

#### TECH AUDIENCE AUTHOR PHOTOS

*Eric Ries*



Eric is a big author in the tech space, and wants to signal that he is in the tech space, but is very forward thinking and high status.

Look at how he does this: Eric has a simple hairstyle, his glasses are contemporary, his smile is authentic. The photographer has shot him head on, not from below. The lighting brings out the best in his face and skin tone. He's not slumping or accentuating any negative physical aspects of his appearance. His shirt is stylish without being ostentatious, and perhaps most important, look at the background. It is bottom lit and color shifting, which gives it a modern feel that is reminiscent of technology and the future.

This photo displays a very sophisticated understanding of how he is trying to position himself: a serious technical insider, but not the stereotype of the socially awkward tech nerd. He wants non-tech people to see him in a good light as well.

## *Giff Constable*



Giff is obviously sending very different signals to his audience. This photo is basically the generic “LinkedIn tech person photo.” He has a parted, flat hairstyle. The inexperienced photographer shot him from below, capturing his smile at the most awkward angle. His shirt is distracting and visually unappealing. The hyper white background makes him seem very pale, and is jarring to the eye. An overly lit background can ruin a photo.

This photo sends very clear signals—not all of which are positive. If he is writing a book for a specific tribe that approves of these signals—for example “nerdy” engineers—and he wants to signal to them that he is part of their tribe, this author photo actually does that. If that is the only audience we want to talk to, then this photo accomplishes that.

The problem is that this photo will repel most people who do not identify directly with that audience. Compare this photo with the one above; it’s the complete opposite. Eric and Giff are in the same field, tech, and physically are very similar. But the photos feel totally different, don’t they?

## BUSINESS AUTHOR PHOTOS

### *Patrick Lencioni*



This is a very traditional business professional author photo. Everything about this photo says that this man is an American business executive: he’s signaling solid, stable, trustworthy, and part of the establishment.

The suit is tailored, dark, expensive, and tasteful, and he has a conservative tie on. His wedding ring is clearly showing. His hair is graying, combed but not stiff, and his smile is there,



but not forced. He's sitting in front of a whiteboard, signaling that he is a holder of knowledge and font of ideas.

This makes sense. Patrick's entire market is traditional corporate America, and this photo speaks directly to them, telling them that even though he has some new ideas (the whiteboard), he is still one of them.

### *Jay Papasan*



Jay has a different version of the business professional author photo. He is signaling that he's a legitimate businessman, but younger and more modern and hip.

He is wearing a suit that is dark and tasteful, but he has no tie, and his top button is undone. The background is green and environmental, another code for openness and modernity.

### *Andrii Sedniev*



If the author is trying to signal to the business community, there are a lot of problems with this photo. The tie appears to be from the Salvation Army bargain bin. It has poorly matched colors, is off-center, and clearly cheap. The shirt collar is not even tucked into his jacket. The tailoring of both jacket and shirt are droopy and not tailored, and furthermore, the material for both shirt and jacket are shiny, which is generally a signal for cheap in suits.

His haircut is a slightly grown-out buzz cut, which not only signals youth and inexperience, it also signals sloppiness. He didn't even bother to get his hair cut for his professional photo.

His smile is forced, as if he is trying to hide his teeth and is unsure

of himself. Everything about this photo says “amateur.” Just by looking at the photos, you can tell that Patrick and Jay are serious, established professionals, and that Andrii is not.

*Mona Patel*

This is an example of a great business author photo. All the signals are saying the same basic things, telling a coherent story about her taste, and her warmth, and her ability:



1. She is sitting in a very design-forward chair, and this signals great aesthetic taste.
2. The shot is in an empty warehouse-style loft, which signals a specific design sensibility, one that is contemporary and minimalist.
3. The symmetry of the corridor draws the eye to her face. The off-center crop signals originality and uniqueness. It says there's going to be something special in this book you can't find elsewhere.
4. She is dressed in a classic and perfectly tailored outfit, with stylish leather boots. This signals both excellent personal style and business professionalism, all at once.
5. She's looking away from the camera and smiling warmly, as if she's casually talking to someone in the background, signaling warmth and approachability.
6. She downplays her physical attractiveness with a masculine outfit and simple hair and makeup. She dresses in a traditionally male outfit (button-down shirt and black pants), but she accentuates it by tailoring the outfit to make it feminine and leaving an extra button open.
7. The photo is black and white, which signals high design and artistic sensibilities.

If all this feels a little artsy to you, just think about how this photo makes you feel. You're attracted to her and drawn in by her warmth

and smile (but not in a sexual way). You know she's fashionable and has great taste, and you can see her design style. But the photo still makes you take her seriously as an intelligent, professional CEO.

Professional photos can be much more challenging for serious female CEOs than for men (for many reasons), and Mona walked that line perfectly.

## TWO PHOTOS OF THE SAME AUTHOR

*Patrick Vlaskovits*



Here is a perfect example of how easy it is to create an air of competence and trust with an author photo. In this case, the same author has two different photos. The left is too dark, there is no smile, and it is poorly cropped. The right is well cropped, he has a good smile, and he is dressed in professional but casual clothes.

Like I said before, part of the “bad” versus “good” decision is about what signals you are trying to send to whom. If Patrick were an essayist and social commentator, perhaps the first photo would work.

But that's not what his books are about, nor the audience he is trying to signal to. His books are about entrepreneurship, branding, and startups. To speak to that audience, you are better off being optimistic, positive, and warm—which the second picture signals.

*James Altucher*

The first photo makes James look less like a genius and more like a crazy person. His glasses are off-center, his hair is disheveled, he is wearing a ratty white T-shirt, and he doesn't even appear to be looking into the camera.



Compare this to the second photo. He's dressed in dark and fashionable clothes and is set against a pleasant background, all of which signal competence and professionalism. He's also signaling quirkiness and humor: sitting cross-legged, retaining his trademark curly fro, and with a mischievous smile. It reflects who James is, while still signaling that he's serious and professional and has taste.

Same person sending totally different signals and creating totally different emotional reactions in the viewer.

## HOW TO TAKE YOUR AUTHOR PHOTO

### STEP 1: DECIDE WHAT SIGNALS YOU WANT TO CONVEY

Before you even pick a photographer, you need to decide exactly what it is you want your author photo to signal, and to what audience. If you have already done the positioning in this book, then this should be relatively easy. There are really only two questions to answer:

- Who is my audience?
- What do I want them to think about me?

Once you have a good idea of that, then you are ready to pick out your photographer.

### STEP 2: PICK A GREAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Do not shoot your own author photo. Period. I don't care how good your Instagram account is, there is no substitute for the skills of a professional photographer.

How do you pick a great photographer? There is no substitute for looking at their portfolios. Go to their sites and look at the headshots they have done, and see who has a style that represents what you are looking for. For example, if you want a headshot out of yourself in a forest, then find the photographer that does that really well.

Once you find a photographer who has already done headshots like you want, you have your person.

Some places to hire a pro:

#### *Thumbtack*

This is a good way to find an affordable pro right in your neighborhood. Enter your zip code and some details about the job. You'll receive bids from photographers in your area with links to their portfolios.

#### *Model Mayhem*

Obviously, a database of models is a magnet for photographers, and Model Mayhem has a directory specifically for finding photographers. The best part: There's a Time-for-Print option where newer photographers will photograph you for free.

#### *GigSalad*

GigSalad is like Craigslist for booking services for events or productions. If you search "Headshot Photography," you'll get a list of dozens of photographers in your city who specialize in the exact kind of pictures you need.

#### *Yelp*

Yelp is often a very good resource to find great photographers in your area, and will have extensive reviews by people.

**Price:** Expect to pay anywhere from \$150 to \$500+ for a great photographer, depending on where you live.

### STEP 3: COMMUNICATE EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT

Don't be shy about telling your photographer the look you're trying to pull off, and point to the shots in their portfolio to help you explain what you are looking for. If you need to, bring in other photos that help explain what you are looking for. The more clear and explicit you can be, with visual examples, the better the result will be.

Also, you need to make sure to get the proper assets from your photographer. You want all of these:

- Some photographers will sell you all the shots they take for one fee, some want to charge a per photo fee. Make sure you are clear ahead of time how they are charging, and what you will get.
- You want to get color and black-and-white versions of the photo you select. Let the photographer do the conversion, it usually works better.
- You want to get the raw files from the photographer, as well as the online ready versions.
- You want to make sure you own the raw files, and do not have to pay any license fees.
- If your primary photo is going to be a full-body shot (like James or Mona), you may want to also get some headshots—rather than you trying to edit/crop them yourself.

### STEP 4: TEST YOUR AUTHOR PHOTO (OPTIONAL)

If you are unsure whether or not your author photo is conveying the signals you want, there is a way to test this: use a service called [PhotoFeeler.com](http://PhotoFeeler.com). You can upload your photo and get ratings on multiple dimensions that tell you exactly what people think about it.



# HOW TO GET A GREAT BOOK COVER

I could write an entire book just on book covers. It's a deeply interesting subject with a wealth of both art and data behind it...but I won't do that to you, because you probably don't care.

Instead, I'm going to make this as simple as possible for you to get your book cover right.

This chapter will walk you through what you need to know about book covers, why you need a book cover designer, how to find a good one, how to work with them to ensure they create the cover you want, and how to make sure you have the right cover when the process is done.

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BOOK COVERS**

There are three big principles you need to know:

### **1. YOUR BOOK WILL BE JUDGED BY ITS COVER (AND THAT'S GOOD)**

We all know the saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover." But that's not the reality of life is it?

*Everyone judges books by their covers.*

In fact, we almost cannot biologically stop ourselves. Humans are visual creatures. We see our way through the world, and vision is our defining sense. Humans can be immediately reached, engaged, and moved by color and shape, because these images enter the brain literally at light speed. This is the power of design.

Here's the thing: *it's good news that people judge your book by the cover.* Otherwise, they might not make any judgment at all, and no judgment means they aren't buying or reading it.

Can you imagine walking through a bookstore that had covers with no information on it other than the title? Or browsing Amazon and looking only at book titles? That would make the book buying decision much more difficult.

People will judge your book cover and use that judgment to evaluate whether they want to buy it. This is a chance to win a reader, and reach the exact person who needs to read your book.

## 2. YOU SHOULD NOT DESIGN YOUR OWN BOOK COVER

When you want a bottle of beer, do you brew it yourself?

When you want a new coat, do you sew it yourself?

When you need a new bar of soap, do you make it yourself?

No. You buy those things from people who are experts at making them.

Book covers are no different. You should not design your book cover yourself. You should have your book cover designed by a professional to get a professional cover.



This is for the same reason that most people don't make home-brewed beer even though it's not terribly complicated, and why no one wears homemade clothes, even though they're easy to make—they're awful when compared to the professional alternatives.

The only real difference between beer and coats, and book covers is that some people *think* they can design their own book covers, even if they really can't.

For some reason I can't understand, many authors think they are also designers. I don't know if it's that design software is fun to use, or that great design has a simplicity to it that belies its difficulty, but let me be very clear about something:

***Unless you are a multi-year publication designer with 20+ titles in your portfolio, you should not be designing your own cover.***

### 3. THERE ARE OBJECTIVELY GOOD AND BAD BOOK COVERS

Book cover design is not completely subjective. There are good and bad book covers, and a good designer can clearly tell you the difference between them.

This is because a book cover is a piece of art with a specific purpose:

***Book covers exist to give visual form to written content.***

A great cover makes someone in your intended audience say, "I need to read that," by *showing* them why the book matters to them in a way they can immediately grasp (or at least raising their interest enough to want to learn more). It should help your audience realize that they should be reading your book.

Another way to think about it is framed by Chip Kidd, a famous book cover designer, who said that "*a book cover is a distillation of the content, almost like what your book would look like as a haiku.*"

That being said, a good book cover is not just an expression of the idea behind a book, it's the way the audience first engages that idea.

It's marketing. And that is how you measure an objectively good book cover:

*A good book cover shows what's in the book, and makes the audience interested in reading it.*

## WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU HIRE A BOOK COVER DESIGNER

Now you understand what purpose a cover serves and why a professional book cover is important, you're ready to find a good book cover designer and hire them, right?

Not so fast.

The main problem book designers have with authors is poor communication. The author has no idea what they want, or has vague, ambiguous cover ideas, and the two never get on the same page.

You can avoid this problem by doing some work prior to finding a book cover designer. Not only will this result in a better cover, it can save you a lot of money.

### 1. LOOK AT LOTS OF BOOK COVERS, BOTH IN YOUR FIELD AND OUT

The first thing to do is get an idea of what other books in your field are like, and maybe get some ideas from them.

Go to Amazon books and search in the category your book falls into. Search Pinterest for artsier titles if you'd like. If you want a classic, look to [Bookcoverarchive.com](http://Bookcoverarchive.com) for the best, most avant-garde titles.

Once you spend some time looking at a lot of book covers in your genre, you'll be shocked at how repetitive they are. That's common.

Don't feel bad about using some of these tropes—they exist for a reason, and they will help you, actually. It is a good thing for people to be able to identify your book as being in the genre you want to be in.

It's also important to look at books in lots of other fields to get ideas as well. Just because your book is about psychology doesn't mean you have to use the same tropes as all psychology books; you can use some ideas from business or self-help books, or even novels.

Also, don't feel bad about taking inspiration from your favorite books. Great art and design don't magically appear in a vacuum. They have to be born of some inspiration point.

## 2. NARROW DOWN TO A FEW COVERS THAT HAVE ELEMENTS OF WHAT YOU WANT

As you look through the hundreds of covers, save a few examples of the ones you really like, or ones that have elements that you really like. The reason you're doing this should be obvious: you need to *show* your designer what you like (not just try to describe it).

Save the links or images and send them to your designer. A picture is worth a thousand words, which is worth a massive savings in your time and money. Designers see the world visually, and the best way to get a point across to them is to show them.

At Scribe, we have a document with ten very different covers that we walk authors through to get a sense for their taste; doing this is common practice.

## 3. PICK BRANDS OR OTHER PIECES OF ART THAT CAPTURE YOUR AESTHETIC

Don't just look at covers. Pull in logos, websites, art, photos, or pretty much any image you can find that's in some way similar to what you want on your book cover.

Remember that design is everywhere. Do you love the clean, light

simplicity of the Apple logo? Or are you more into the zany black and green playfulness of Android?

You are essentially creating a collage (some people call this a mood board) of visual inspiration and ideas that can help your designer understand how to best get your book's message across to your audience.

### **HOW DO YOU FIND A BOOK COVER DESIGNER?**

There are many places to hire book cover designers. We're going to break them down by price point, and as always, priciest is best. You get what you pay for. Designers who are able to charge 2k and up for the services do so because their books SELL.

#### **1. INDEPENDENT DESIGNER (\$750-\$2000+):**

The highest quality option is always to hire an independent book cover designer. Many of the best book cover designers in the world, who work regularly with major publishing houses, are available to hire on a freelance basis.

There are a few ways to find these people. One of the best options is Reedsy, a freelance marketplace designed specifically for authors. The other option is to go to more general design sites, like Behance or Dribbble, and search for book designers there. They can be a bit slow to respond and difficult to get in touch with, but the quality there is outstanding as well.

But the best method is to look inside your favorite books and see who designed the cover. Then google their name—more than half the time, you'll find their design site, and can contact them directly.

## 2. 99DESIGNS (\$300-\$600+):

99Designs (and similar sites like Crowdspring) can work sometimes, at least to get decent designs.

On 99Designs, you post a detailed brief with all the technical parameters and visual examples you pulled, and then their designers read this information and post their work. Dozens of designers take your brief, design a cover, and post it for your approval. You then have the option to choose the winning designer to take the cover from, or, if you don't like any of the designs, get a full refund with no hassle.

99Designs is great as a first option to test if a great cover would be worth the money to you. That way you can see the designs, get some ideas, and hopefully find a great cover. But, if not, no harm, and you can go back to the drawing board with the other options.

We'd recommend doing the Silver contest (which costs \$499). The lower end contests really repel the better designers on the site, and the higher end ones don't seem to garner much higher quality (and actually tend to get fewer submissions).

## 3. UPWORK (\$50-\$500+):

The next step up the quality ladder would be a freelance network like Upwork. The overall quality on Upwork is not high, but there are some quality designers hidden on there. Expect to take your time to find the right person on one of these sites, but you will be able to find them. Job ads typically get dozens if not hundreds of responses, and designers typically link a portfolio of past work.

Screen out anyone with more than a few negative reviews, and then focus 100 percent of your screening time on judging their portfolios. Do a side by side comparison of the covers you liked when you did your research on Amazon. Do they appear to be of similar quality? If you can't tell, ask a friend who understands the basics of design.

Portfolios are the only thing that gives you a real picture of the quality of their work. If you like their past work, you'll probably like their future work. Everything else is just marketing.

#### 4. FIVERR (\$5-\$50):

Fiverr is a marketplace of services available for \$5 or so. There are a ton of book cover designers on Fiverr, but almost all of them are absolute garbage.

I've never used Fiverr for cover design, but friends have been able to find a couple designers who are good.

What happens is that a new designer will do a great job, get a ton of 5-star reviews, and then disappear to another site where they can charge more than \$5 for their work. Think of it this way. If someone has any design talent, why would they work for \$5 a cover?

#### 5. DIY (\$0):

If you do this, you are a fool, and you will get precisely what you pay for.

### **HOW DO YOU WORK WITH YOUR BOOK COVER DESIGNER?**

Once you've picked a designer and negotiated price, then comes discussion of your cover idea. Here is where all that work you did before comes into play.

#### 1. SCHEDULE THE FIRST CALL FOR PHONE OR VIDEO

Schedule your first call to be phone or video. Email is very hard to effectively communicate with strangers, especially about abstract concepts like design.

## 2. SEND THEM THE COVERS AND LOGOS YOU LIKED BEFORE THE CALL

Prior to the call, send them a cover design brief. This should include all the book covers you like, all the logos and other pictures you like, and everything else you assembled. Do this at least a day ahead of time, designers like to have time to digest images and ideas.

## 3. EXPLAIN YOUR THINKING

Once on the call, walk them through your thinking:

- Start with explaining who your target reader is.
- Then, explain what you like and dislike about each cover.
- Talk about what you want your cover to feel like.
- Discuss the signals you are trying to send to your audience.
- If you can, discuss the emotions you want your reader to feel when they see the cover.

The more you explain all of your thinking to the cover designer, the better they will do.

## 4. ASK FOR AT LEAST THREE MOCK-UPS

This should be standard for good book cover designers. They will come up with an array of ideas and show you at least three different ones.

## 5. GIVE CONSTRUCTIVE NOTES ON THE MOCK-UPS

Once you get the mock-ups back, if one jumps out at you, great. Give specific notes and feedback to get it where you want, and then you're done.

If you aren't happy with any of the covers, that's OK too. Get back on the phone with the designer, and—while being polite—be as specific as possible about what you would like different.

This is not about getting angry or frustrated with the cover designer. They aren't in your head, and if their mock-ups did not fit your vision, that's OK. Just be clearer and more methodical in your description, and you'll get there.

Remember this: your cover designer is a human who has feelings, but also a professional that wants to do a great job. You are both on the same team. You can be firm, but also polite and understanding.

### **HOW CAN YOU CHECK IF YOU HAVE A GOOD BOOK COVER?**

Once you have a cover, or you think you have one, here are the questions to ask to check if it's working for you:

#### **1. DOES IT STAND OUT?**

This is crucial. Look at it from all angles; print it out and put it across the room. Think of every possible way someone will look at it—on a screen, in a bookstore, etc.—and make sure it stands out that way. Can you read the title? Is the image clear?

Check it as a thumbnail too. Does your cover look good when you shrink it down to a tiny thumbnail? That's how most of your readers will see it, as a small image on Amazon.

#### **2. DOES IT HAVE A CLEAR FOCUS?**

Establish a principal focus for the cover—nothing is more important than this one thing. Your book is about something, and the cover ought to reflect that one idea clearly. You must have one element that takes control, that commands the overwhelming majority of attention, of space, of emphasis on the cover.

Don't fall into the trap of loading up your cover with too many elements, three or four photos, illustrations, maps, or “floating” ticket



stubs. This just confuses people, and confused people become repelled.

And don't fall into the trap of believing your cover is a billboard, and every inch of space on it is real estate that needs to be filled up with the biggest possible words. Type needs to sit within the appropriate amount of emptiness in order to be readable. What is NOT on your cover is just as important as what IS on it. A quality designer will intimately know the appropriate font sizing for subtitles, blurbs, and author titles. Asking for them to be bigger is merely going to drain the impact from your design.

### 3. DOES IT INDICATE WHAT THE BOOK IS AND WHO THE BOOK IS FOR?

Not only does your book stand out, but at a glance your audience ought to know:

- The general genre of your book
- The general subject matter or focus, and
- Some idea of the tone or position of the book

A truly great book is one that captures the book inside in some fundamental and perhaps unforeseen way.

At the same time, don't fall into the trap of feeling it has to show the content of the book or show an element or scene from the book (no one will know that is correct until after reading the book anyway).

### 4. DID YOU EXPLORE TOO MANY OPTIONS?

Some authors spend far too much time trying to find the perfect cover. Usually, this is because it's a way to work their anxieties about publishing out during the cover design process.

It's the major creative part of the publishing journey, and many people are nervous about what will happen when it ends. They force

the hand of their designer through round after round of revisions, thinking they are bettering their cover.

In actuality, they are both running from their fears and ruining their cover design. Ask your cover designer when they believe your cover is done, because they are the only impartial source for this knowledge.

#### 5. DID YOU MAKE THE BRAVE CHOICE?

We see this happen all the time: we'll give an author three mock-ups, and there will almost always be a non-optimal choice, a solid choice, and a great choice.

The great choice will almost always require the author to be brave in selecting it. It will have some angle or position that is novel in your field, or make a statement that is controversial, or just be different in a way that will make you just a little uncomfortable.

I'd say that only about 25 percent of authors pick the brave choice.

You don't have to make the brave choice, but it's almost always the best one (if there is a brave choice available). Be aware if this happens to you.

The solid choice is not bad, but it means your book won't stand out or get the attention it deserves. The brave choice means it will.

If you are unsure how to define brave, here is a way to think about it:

***The brave choice says what everyone is thinking but not saying out loud. The brave cover is the one that people will remember. You've worked too hard on writing your book to cover it in mediocrity because some stranger on Facebook doesn't like blue.***

Be proud of your achievement. Be bold. Make your mark.

## 6. DO NOT POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO GET FEEDBACK

The best way to ensure you choose the mediocre (or even bad) cover is to poll people on social media.

Your average potential reader—when asked which cover they like—is going to channel their inner mob mentality and respond to the title that is most like what already saturates your market. They pick the most common design, because to them, common means fitting in. True, fitting in is better than looking a mess, but the cover game, first and foremost, is about BEING MEMORABLE.

Beyond that, a good book cover is not designed to appeal to everyone. It's designed to appeal to the target audience of the book. Your 2,500 Facebook friends include people you knew in high school and in-laws and that guy you met at a conference three years ago. They are not the target audience for your book.





## DESIGN YOUR BOOK LAYOUT

Have you ever started to read a book, and on the first page—before you’ve engaged the actual content—you immediately get a bad feeling and can’t take the book seriously? And sometimes you can’t even explain why?

This is the impact of the book’s layout (sometimes called typesetting or interior design).

Book layout is one of those things that most people never notice... unless it’s wrong.

Despite how simple it seems (or perhaps because of it), book layout is one of the major factors that separates amateurish books from professional ones.

I will describe how to design both print and eBook, because they are very different formats, and must be done differently.

Some people refer to PDFs that you download and view on a screen as “eBooks.” That is not what we’re talking about. An eBook in this case is a unique format—typically an EPUB or MOBI—that is downloaded and read with a specialized device or software, such as a Kindle.

# BAD DESIGN

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE of **bad** page design. Painful right? You probably don't even want to read it. Power through it for a moment and right off the bat you'll notice a few things:

## BAD TYPOGRAPHY

**-Poor font choices** (Cambria and Arial). Cambria (one of Word's default fonts) actually isn't that bad for the screen, but suffers in print. Arial is ubiquitous because it was a system font in Windows for so long, but is effectively just worse Helvetica.

**-Sloppy hyphenation/justification.** Professional layout software like Adobe InDesign uses powerful, customizable algorithms to help produce a natural text flow. Others, not so much.

**-The little things.** ALL CAPS, underlined text, "dumb quotes" and double dashes--there are hundreds of nuances that add up to text looking either professional, or like it came straight out of Word (and in this case it did--that's how this page was created).

## BAD USE OF SPACE

Pretty much everywhere--the margins are too small, the space between lines is too tight, and space after each sentence is too big. It's a subtle thing but makes a huge difference in readability.

## BAD STRUCTURE

Most writing apps include a defined hierarchy for organizing information--**Heading 1, Heading 2**, etc.--and most writers completely ignore it right out of the gate. Instead they opt for arbitrary or inconsistent headings that make it difficult for the reader to skim text quickly or understand how it is prioritized ("is this a new topic, or just a subsection?"). For example, although the three headings on this page all reference the same "level" of information, they are each styled differently.

• • • • • **GOOD DESIGN** • • • • •

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE of *good* page design. Right off the bat you'll notice some important differences:

**GOOD TYPOGRAPHY**

- *Professional Typefaces* (Adobe Caslon Pro and Brandon Text)  
Caslon is considered a very “safe” pick and a popular choice among book designers for good reason: it reads very comfortably and suits a wide variety of content.
- *Natural-looking Justification & Careful Hyphenation*  
There aren't any huge gaps between words or “ladders” of hyphens running down the side of a paragraph.
- *The Little Things Make a Big Difference*  
SMALL CAPS, “curly quotes,” em dashes—and no underlines. That last one is news to most people, but apart from links, underlining is mostly a relic of the manual typewriter. Today we can show **emphasis** in *better*, more PROFESSIONAL ways.

**GOOD USE OF SPACE**

The text on this page has room to breathe, is set on a baseline grid, and has single spaces after punctuation (double-spacing is wrong, forget what your English teacher said). Nice, isn't it?

**GOOD STRUCTURE**

The information is clearly and consistently organized. Much easier for the reader to follow, absorb, reference and skim.

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## INTERIOR DESIGN IS HARD

Interior layout is easy to dismiss. It's just the formatting of words on a page. Google Docs does that automatically. What's the big deal, right?

Just like covers, what seems easy is actually very difficult. In fact, working with type is considered the most difficult thing to do in design. The first thing to realize is that there's a lot more that goes into designing the interior of a book than you might expect. These are just some of the decisions that must be made:

- trim size (as explained later)
- color vs. black and white
- other physical considerations (paperback vs. hardcover, paper stock, etc.)
- font selection
- page margins
- spacing decisions
- artistic direction and design elements
- sidebars (if any)
- if/how you want to incorporate illustrations, photography or other graphics

There are also all the more nerdy publishing details that your proof-reader should have caught but likely didn't, like making sure you're using the right dashes in the right places (hyphens, em and en dashes all have distinct uses). The same goes for quotation marks (straight vs. curly vs. foot/inch marks—all different things), mathematical symbols ( $\times$  vs.  $\times$ ) and nearly every other symbol you can (but won't) think of.

For example: Did you know that certain fonts and justification styles can give your readers headaches? Your interior designer does.

Did you know that breaking a paragraph improperly, leaving just a partial line on the next page can interrupt the mental engagement



readers have with your material? These lonely fragments are called “widows” and your interior designer knows how to correct them.

But, truthfully, that’s only a small part of the problem. The main reason that it’s so complicated and expensive is that *nobody wants to do it*.

Interior layout is hard, tiring work, and requires a lot of hours from someone with at least a strong baseline of design skills. Most designers went into the field because they love working on beautiful, creative projects. Interior print layout has those elements, sure—but also demands a lot of precision and “boring” practical considerations that designers don’t always like to be constrained by (not unlike, say, industrial design).

### **SHOULD I SKIP A PRINT VERSION ENTIRELY?**

Print books are a lot of work. So why should you even do them?

The reason is actually that you should do them precisely *because* they’re a lot of work. The book market is flooded with thousands of new authors every day. As you know, it can be difficult to stand out.

Because of how challenging doing a good print book is, and how embarrassingly ugly it can be when done wrong, a lot of new authors are veering away from the challenge and publishing in eBook format only. In many circles, this has started to be a dividing line between books that should be taken seriously, and books that shouldn’t.

Many people see eBooks as “not real books” and dismiss them as less impressive than paperbacks. If you are doing a business book, then this is crucial. You can’t really hand out (or sell) an eBook at a conference or speaking engagement.

Creating a high-quality paperback or hardcover version is one of

the most powerful ways to make sure your book is taken seriously and seen as a “real” book. We wouldn’t skip this step if credibility is a key goal of yours.

## DESIGNING THE PRINT INTERIOR

### WHAT SHOULD A GOOD INTERIOR LAYOUT LOOK LIKE?

This is not an easy question to answer. Like we said earlier, very few people notice the interior layout—unless it’s wrong; then it’s a huge problem.

Earlier in the chapter we included an image comparison with major elements of interior design, and then an explanation of some of them—not because we expect you to learn them, but for two other reasons:

1. So when you hire a professional interior designer to lay out your book for you (which we highly recommend), you have a list of things you can discuss with them.
2. So you know what good versus bad looks like.

## MAJOR INTERIOR DESIGN ELEMENTS

### *Page Margins*

One of the main elements in all design is what’s called “negative space.” That is the space with nothing in it. For your book interior, that is margins between the words and the edge of the page.

Look at the Bad Design use of margins, versus the Good Design use. You see how, without even knowing why, each of these margins are important, and serve a purpose?

The outside margins give room for the reader to hold the book without covering the words.

The inside margin makes sure the text doesn't slip into the binding area and become hard to read.

The bottom margin is for the book title, page number, and current section (or author name). The top margin provides a pillow of white space that balances the rest of the page. (Note: these roles are interchangeable.)

Traditionally, the four margins are close in size and around a half inch, though the inside margin is usually 25-50 percent larger than the other three.

### *Typography*

Now, look at the typography and font choices. Fonts and type is an incredibly complex field, and very important to books. Professional books are traditionally set in fonts like Adobe Caslon Pro and Brandon Text.

The font you choose must be clearly legible, and have italics, semi bold, bold, and small caps all included and well done. A comfortable size for most books is 11pt font.

This is clearly visible in the design comparison examples. The Bad Design font hurts to read, whereas the Good Design font feels calm and relaxing.

### *Titles and Headers*

It is very important that the headers lead to an easy-to-read flow of words on the page. You can see the difference again in the Bad Design versus the Good Design page. The Bad Design headings on the page feel crowded and confused. The good design feels spaced and structured.

### *Head and Feet*

Look at the bottom of the page, where the page number is next to the chapter title. Which looks better? Very clearly the Good Design does. It's smaller, the dot looks better than a dash, and the font choices make better sense.

### *Trim Size*

There aren't any hard and fast rules around trim size, but there are general trends. Trim sizes are always measured in inches, with the horizontal measurement first, then the vertical.

The most common book size is  $6 \times 9$ . It works for books of almost any style and is generally the industry standard.

At Scribe Media, we typically use  $5.5 \times 8.5$ . This slightly smaller size tends to be more common with business books. There are a lot of books that are  $5 \times 8$  as well, but I'd consider that the lower limit before the book starts looking awkwardly small.

## **HOW TO CREATE YOUR PRINT LAYOUT**

Like most steps in this process, you have two options: you can do it yourself, or you can hire someone more talented than you who does it professionally.

### **DIY**

As we've already discussed, doing a cheap interior can completely change the perception of your book. But, if it's the only option that works for you financially, there are some ways to do it yourself. If you *really* want to go all out, you need to learn Adobe InDesign, alongside the fundamentals of professional typography and design. To be clear: *Don't* do that, if you value your time at greater than \$0.

Instead, we recommend a far more user-friendly application called

Vellum. Vellum isn't free, and it's Mac-only, but it's the best tool available for Do-It-Yourselfers, and allows you to generate both print and eBook files.

The print layout design quality is only so-so, but still better than you'd be able to do on your own or by hiring a bottom-tier designer. It's like the difference between editing a photo in Instagram vs. Photoshop. A beginner will be able to get an OK result from Instagram quickly. Photoshop is far more powerful, and a professional will be able to get a much *better* result from it, but they had to invest a lot of time (and money) to get to that level.

If you're going to hire a designer—which you should—there are basically three options:

#### CHEAP

There are people offering layout services on Fiverr. Bookalope is another. Upwork is another.

As we described earlier in the chapter, the quality of these designs is really low. It's easy to delude yourself when you're looking at a computer screen to think that the PDF looks good, but we've tested this path enough times to know better.

Only use the cheap options if you're okay with the book not looking entirely professional. We'd honestly recommend going the DIY route as a better alternative to hiring this quality of designer—that's how bad it usually turns out.

#### MIDDLE ROUTE

There are some decent layout people on Reedsy and similar websites. This bracket often contains graphic designers who are “moonlighting” with layout work and don't necessarily have a lot of specialized experience in book design, but you can find some

people who will do a solid enough job. Careful though: do not assume you'll also get a quality eBook conversion out of the deal, as many graphic designers simply lack the expertise.

## EXPENSIVE ROUTE

The other alternative is to hire a real pro. More than any other part of the book creation process, except maybe editing, there's a huge gap between good interior layout designers and mediocre ones. If you hire a bad editor, they're worse than useless. If you hire a great editor, they can completely transform your book. Same goes with interior layout.

The problem with the expensive freelancers in this space isn't their quality; the quality is good. The problem is the price and the turnaround time.

Because they're in an industry with so little competition, they're able to move slowly and charge a lot. But if you just care about someone doing a great job, the few freelancers you can find here do excellent work.

## DESIGNING THE EBOOK

Compared to the horror of designing your print interior, designing an eBook is actually pretty straightforward. Unlike the manual work and design aesthetic that need to go into a print book, creating eBooks is mostly coding work and a lot of it is automated. The cost is lower, and the results are more consistent.

## UNDERSTANDING EBOOK FILE FORMATS

There are two standard eBook file formats that you'll see. EPUB (book.epub) is the universal standard, and is used by Apple iBook, Nook, Kobo, and most other eBook retailers. These files are a little more customizable, have a little more flexibility for design, and are frankly just easier to use.

MOBI files (book.mobi) are for Amazon Kindle. Because Amazon is the big player in the space, they are able to set their own standards that are different from anyone else's. Mobi files can be a little more complicated to edit, but they're crucial, as Amazon will be where the vast majority of your books are sold.

## HOW TO CREATE YOUR EBOOK LAYOUT

Like most steps in this process, you have two options: you can do it yourself, or you can hire someone.

We're just going to be blunt about this: unless you decided to go the Vellum route described earlier, *don't do it yourself*.

Steer clear of any "automated" eBook conversions that involve uploading a PDF or Word file. Ironically, Amazon accepts these formats and will attempt to create a Kindle file from them, but the results are never good.

Unlike with print books, the cheap eBook designers do a better job than you will, so it's not worth messing with. As with some of the other design elements, there are three places we'd turn for varying qualities of eBook.

## FIVERR

As we discussed, Fiverr is a marketplace of services that are all available for \$5. Obviously, no matter what you're getting, it isn't going to be of the highest quality, but with eBooks, they're actually passable.

I wouldn't recommend them to an author doing a professional business book, or for a book with a lot of hierarchy and headers (you should go through in Word and tag the headers properly in advance, because a Fiverr designer won't get them right), but for authors with a seriously tight budget, it's an option.

## UPWORK

Upwork is a good middle option. You can find pretty cheap talent and, if you look hard enough, pretty high-quality people. Especially for something like eBook design—which isn't overly complicated—finding someone with a lot of experience, great reviews, and some good examples of past work is usually enough to ensure success.

## PROFESSIONALS

The final option is to work with a firm that's really professional. The challenge here is that a lot of the companies that look professional are really just fancy middlemen between you and cheaper, overseas labor. Don't mistake a high price tag for professionalism.

If you don't want to mess around or waste any time, and you just want it done right without the back-and-forth, this is probably your best option.





# HOW TO PROPERLY PRICE YOUR BOOK

Book pricing can be both very simple, and incredibly complex; it all depends how deep into the details you dive.

Most of the complex advice is pricing fiction books, or pricing for professional writers, and is not really that useful for authors writing business or personal development books.

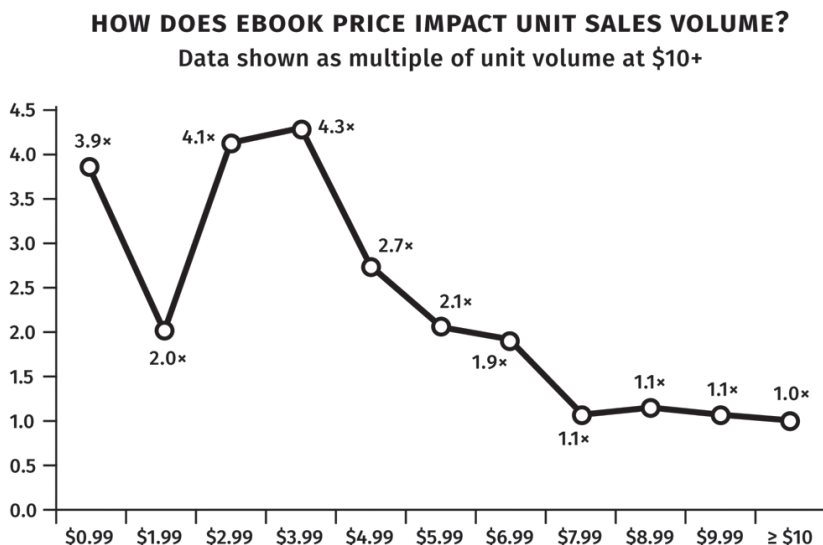
This guide is as simple as it gets (in fact, you can even skip to the “How to Price Your Book” section right now if you want), and will give only the relevant information for you, so you can confidently decide how to price your eBook, paperback, and hardcover.

## **EBOOK PRICING**

The largest eBook market—by far—is Amazon, and they set the standard for eBook pricing. They have a pretty simple set of rules for how they let authors price eBooks:

- Between \$0.99 and \$2.98, they pay the author a 35% royalty
- Between \$2.99 and \$9.99, they pay the author a 70% royalty
- \$10 and over, they pay the author a 35% royalty

Now, look at this chart that compares book sales to price. This data isn't perfect (it's gathered by Smashwords), but our experience, and our data watching hundreds of authors in business and personal development, maps very closely to this chart.



As you can see, there are basically three tiers:

- Maximize copies: \$0.99–\$3.99
- Middle ground: \$4.99–\$6.99
- Maximize perceived value: \$7.99–\$9.99

There are some shocking data points on there.

For example, there is no difference in sales between \$7.99 and \$9.99. And perhaps most shocking, books at \$0.99 sell *less* than books priced at \$3.99.

This actually brings me to my next point, which is a very important factor for pricing business and personal development books: **credibility**.

Books are, within certain ranges, Veblen goods. This means that

people will often judge the quality of your book, at least partially, on the price of your book.

You can even see the impact of the Veblen goods effect in the book pricing data. The fact that there is no sales difference between \$7.99 and \$9.99 tells you that within certain price bands, the price actually does not have an impact on demand.

The data pretty clearly show that there are four price ranges:

#### **EBOOKS**

High Price	\$7.99-\$9.99
Normal	\$4.99-\$6.99
Cheap	\$2.99-\$3.99
Dirt Cheap	\$0.99-\$1.99

Why does this matter?

**Because for many authors, *pricing a book too low will hurt your credibility with your readers.***

This is how it works with many luxury goods. People assume you are worth what you ask, so if you ask a low price, they assume that is what you are worth.

[By the way, remember that most of our authors are not primarily focusing on making money through book sales, but rather using the book to make money other ways.]

Given these two factors, for most authors, there are really three prices to choose from (at least for long-term pricing, not counting any promotions you do):

- **If you want to maximize units sold:** \$3.99 (or possibly \$0.99 in some rare cases)

- **If you want a good balance between sales and perception:**  
\$6.99
- **If you want to maximize high status perception, and don't care about sales:** \$9.99

**PAPERBACK PRICING**

At Scribe, we usually use KDP for the paperback books we publish, as they are easy to use and produce high quality books.

KDP pricing is so complicated, that they actually built a calculator to help authors figure out what their royalties will be. It includes variations based on black and white versus color, length of book, bleed, and other factors.

The good news is that you don't need to use it, because almost all of the time, the royalty rates turn out to be around 40%. For example, if you sell your paperback for \$10, then you will probably get about \$4 in profit.

Paperback pricing is similar to eBook pricing, just add around \$7-\$10 to every price. So the chart would look like this:

PAPERBACKS	
High Price	\$17.99-\$19.99
Normal	\$14.99-\$16.99
Cheap	\$11.99-\$13.99
Dirt Cheap	\$7.99-\$10.99

This rule of thumb has worked very well for our authors in pricing: whatever the eBook price is, add about \$7-\$10 for the paperback price.

## HARDCOVER PRICING

It's almost impossible to give broad advice on hardcover pricing and royalties, because so many factors impact the price. For example, color, printing price, size, niche, bleed, and many other factors impact the price.

Despite these variances, we've found a pretty solid rubric to use for hardcover book pricing that tracks pretty well with the paperback pricing: the hardcover should be \$12-\$15 more than the eBook.

And given this, you can expect a royalty rate of about 45%—but with HIGH variations depending on several factors.

There is an important exception to this: I would not price your hardcover above \$27.99 unless you have a very specific reason.

### HARDCOVERS

High Price	\$25.99-\$27.99
Normal	\$20.99-\$24.99
Cheap	\$16.99-\$19.99
Dirt Cheap	\$12.99-\$15.99

## HOW TO PRICE YOUR BOOK

So let's bring it all together, and give you the best framework for pricing:

**If you want to maximize units sold:**

- \$3.99 eBook (or \$0.99 in some promotional cases) [royalty rate: 70%]
- \$10.99-\$12.99 paperback [royalty rate: ~40%]
- \$14.99-\$16.99 hardcover [royalty rate: ~45%]

**If you want a good balance between sales and perception (two different options):**

**Option 1:**

- \$6.99 eBook [royalty rate: 70%]
- \$13.99-\$16.99 paperback [royalty rate: ~40%]
- \$18.99-\$21.99 hardcover [royalty rate: ~45%]

**Option 2 (big spread):** What this does is fix your paperback and/or hardcover as your “list price,” so it stays high for perceived value. Then eBook price is relatively low—but not too low—to maximize sales to that audience.

- \$4.99 eBook [royalty rate: 70%]
- \$16.99 paperback [royalty rate: ~40%]
- \$24.99 hardcover [royalty rate: ~45%]

**If you want to maximize high status perception:**

- \$9.99 eBook [royalty rate: 70%]
- \$17.99-\$19.99 paperback [royalty rate: ~40%]
- \$24.99-\$27.99 hardcover [royalty rate: ~45%]

**PART 8**

**PUBLISH  
YOUR BOOK**







# HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT BOOK PUBLISHING OPTION

Many people are confused by the publishing landscape (which is understandable) and want a lot more background information before starting on their book-publishing journey. This chapter is long and comprehensive, and answers questions like these:

- How does the book-publishing business work?
- What are the most important things to know?
- What is “self-publishing?”
- What is “traditional publishing?”
- What is the difference and why does it matter?
- Should I self-publish or traditionally publish my book?
- How do I get a traditional publishing deal?
- How do I evaluate traditional publishers?
- What is professional vs. amateur in publishing, and why does that matter?

## HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BOOK-PUBLISHING LANDSCAPE

The book-publishing landscape can be very confusing. This is for many reasons; the most relevant to you is that the business of book

publishing has changed dramatically over the past decade, and most of the advice people give is dated and wrong.

Furthermore, most of the guides to book publishing are geared toward professional writers, novelists, or hobbyists. Entrepreneurs, business owners, executives, and other professionals who are writing business and personal development books should look at book publishing through a completely different lens than professional writers.

This piece will examine the three book-publishing options commonly available, explain the pros and cons of each, and help you understand exactly which one you should select.

## TRADITIONAL, SELF, AND HYBRID PUBLISHING

The first thing you have to understand is that there are two major publishing models: **traditional** and **self**.

I'll dive deeper into each publishing option, what the basic facts are, and the questions you need to ask for each, so you can decide which one to use.

There is also a third option, called hybrid publishing. In my opinion, hybrid is by far the worst of the three options, and I will briefly cover it at the end.

## TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

### SUMMARY

In traditional publishing, an author must find a book agent to represent them to publishing companies. Then, along with the agent, pitch a book publishing company (which are almost all based in New York City, such as HarperCollins or Simon & Schuster) with their book idea. If the pitch is successful and the publishing company offers the author a publishing deal, the publishing company purchases the ownership of the print license from the author in

return for an advance on royalties (that the author does not have to pay back). The author is on their own to write the book, sometimes with editorial help from the publisher, sometimes not. The publisher then manages and controls the whole publishing and distribution process (the second and third steps).

#### OWNERSHIP AND RIGHTS

A publishing company always owns the print license (which includes digital), while the author always owns the copyright. All other rights (movie, excerpt, etc.) are negotiable. This means the publishing company has final say over all aspects of that book.

#### TYPICAL ROYALTY RATE

15 percent hardcover, 7.5 percent trade paperback, 5 percent mass market.

#### ADVANCE AGAINST ROYALTIES

The amount varies greatly depending on the author. There is no “average” advance, but at this point, most traditional publishers don’t give advances less than six figures, because if they don’t think the book will sell enough to justify a six-figure advance, they don’t want to publish it.

#### WRITING AND EDITING

This is typically the author’s job. They give very little help, limited to some editing and copyediting. Note that a publishing company usually has the absolute right to change your content and writing as they wish, this is part of what they are buying with their money.

#### PUBLISHING SERVICES AND DESIGN

They do (usually) everything for publishing and design, though

the quality varies greatly. You don't get to choose the paperback or hardcover or price, or most other decisions.

## DISTRIBUTION

They do everything.

## MARKETING

Usually, the publisher offers very little marketing. More often than not, they can inhibit marketing (explained below). They generally expect the author to do the majority of the marketing.

Why is this?

The economics of the industry is used to be based around distribution. Pre-internet, being in Borders and Barnes & Noble was a big part of what sold books. People used to go to bookstores to decide what to buy. When distribution was king, traditional publishers were king.

Now of course that's not true anymore. Because of the internet and all the platforms on the internet (Facebook, Instagram, email, etc.), we build relationships with authors and ideas outside of the bookstore. Then we go to the bookstore (or more likely Amazon or Audible) to buy the copy.

Long story short, big publishers never had a relationship with the end customer (the reader). They could have built this at any time, but they decided not to. And they continue to decide not to, because of legacy issues.

## PRESTIGE AND PERCEPTION

Usually the highest of the three models, but fading in prestige, and not relevant to readers.

## TIME TO PUBLISH

12-36 months.

## ADVANTAGES

1. Monetary advance before publishing
2. Highest potential for traditional media coverage
3. Social signaling
4. Highest chance of bookstore placement

## DRAWBACKS

1. Very hard to get a deal (less than 1 percent of proposals are accepted)
2. Huge time investment
3. Loss of ownership
4. Loss of marketing control
5. Loss of creative and content control
6. Limited financial upside

## TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING PROBLEM #1: CAN YOU EVEN GET A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING DEAL?

When considering traditional publishing, the first and **MOST** important question you need to ask yourself is: **can you even get a publishing deal from a traditional publisher?**

Most authors cannot, so there's no reason to waste time trying. To get a publishing deal from a traditional publisher, you must go through these steps:

1. Find a book agent willing to represent you and your book idea to a publisher (this is very hard, as most agents get thousands of inbound requests a week).
2. Write a book proposal (this is such a big task, authors often pay freelance writers \$10k-\$15k or more to do this for them).

3. Shop the book proposal around to publishers (through the agent).
4. Have a publisher make you an offer based on your proposal and pitch.
5. Negotiate and accept that offer.

That seems like a lot, but in some cases, it can be easy. A book publisher's decision hinges on one simple fact: ***do you have an existing audience that is waiting to buy a lot of copies of your book?***

If you do have a big audience—people who already follow you in some form, like an email list, or social media, or something like that—most of that will be doable, if not easy. Usually publishers will need to be able to see a clear path to 25k book sales in the first month to even consider a book deal for an author.

If you do not have an existing audience that is ready to buy your book, then it is nearly impossible to get a traditional book deal.

The reason for this is because traditional publishers are terrible at selling and marketing books, and they now rely almost exclusively on authors to do this for them. I'm not just saying this. Book agent Byrd Leavell says this (he's repped several #1 *New York Times* bestselling authors who have sold more than 10 million nonfiction books):

Publishers aren't buying anything that doesn't come with a built-in audience that will buy it. They don't take risks anymore, they don't gamble on authors, they only want sure things. I won't even take an author out unless they have an audience they can guarantee 25k pre-sales to.

If you don't have a built-in audience—people who follow you and are used to buying things from you before—then you have almost no shot at getting a deal.

## TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING PROBLEM #2: IF YOU CAN GET A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING DEAL, SHOULD YOU TAKE IT?

As recently as 20 years ago, this was a no-brainer: of course you took the deal, because you didn't really have any other options to get a book into the hands of readers.

The game has changed since then. In the modern world of book publishing, traditional publishers are no longer the gatekeepers, they provide very little prestige or access, and the other self-publishing options are better than a traditional publisher for most authors.

At this time, there are really only three reasons for an author to sign with a traditional publisher:

### *1. You need the advance they will pay you*

If you already have a big audience, then a publishing company will probably give you an advance. The advance can range from \$100,000 to \$1 million (or much more, in rare cases), but the advance is directly tied to the expected book sales.

This is not charity; they will do this because they expect to make more money than you when you sell your books to your audience. And if you do not have a big audience, your chance of getting an advance in this range is essentially zero (unless there is some other angle that makes the publisher confident you will sell many books).

The cool thing is that even if your book does not sell, you don't have to pay this advance back. It's yours.

But make no mistake—you are paying for this money in other ways. You no longer own the print license for the book, which means you cannot do anything with this content other than have it in the book. It's not yours to use anymore, and if the book is a major hit, you only get a small fraction of the profits. You are selling the potential upside to the publisher.

*2. You must have mainstream media attention for the book to be successful*

If you absolutely NEED a lot of mainstream media attention for your book to be a success, then going with a traditional publisher really helps. When I say mainstream, I mean like *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, media outlets like that.

The types of people who fall into this category tend to be celebrities, politicians, athletes, etc. They are the type of people whose time is extremely valuable, and generally tend to be rich. By the way, they have to pay for PR to get media as well. They do the whole song and dance, mainly because they are famous but do NOT have their own platform (meaning a direct channel to their audience).

Let me be very clear: doing a book with a traditional publisher does not mean it will be covered in those outlets. In fact, the odds are small, even if you do get a traditional publishing deal. Each publisher puts out tens of thousands of books a year, and bookstores and retailers do not have the shelf space for all of them.

The reason it helps is because, while no book reader cares who the publisher is, journalists who work for major media companies still look at the publisher as a signal of credibility.

*3. You want the social signal and feeling of acceptance that comes from being “picked” by a traditional publishing house*

Let’s be honest—this is the primary reason most people want a deal from a traditional publisher. They want to feel like they were “picked,” that this selection is an unassailable signal of their importance and relevance.

I have gotten publishing deals from several major publishing companies (Simon & Schuster and Little Brown), so I wish so much that this was true—that these deals meant I am now unquestionably important. It doesn’t.



Here's a great example: a Ferrari is a cool car. But what do you think of the old guy who bought it? Compensating, right?

It works the same with traditional publishers. Having a “fancy” publisher's name on the spine of your book doesn't make you important. In the modern world, no reader notices or cares who publishes your book.

In fact, in many circles (especially entrepreneurs and forward thinkers), traditional publishing is starting to be seen as a negative signal. In the modern book world, controlling the rights and usage of your book is now seen as much more important by most authors. In fact, traditional publishing is now the new “vanity” publishing—because authors with traditional deals are looking for that ego boost and external validation rather than “picking” themselves, and owning their book.

### TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING PROBLEM #3: ARE THE TRADE-OFFS OF TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING WORTH IT?

So even if you can get a traditional publishing deal, AND you fall into one of the three reasons to publish it, the trade-offs may still make it a bad choice for you. These are the major trade-offs with traditional publishing:

#### *1. No ownership of rights and profits*

You are literally selling the publisher not only the upside profits of the book, but more importantly, *you are selling them control of your intellectual property*. Once they own the book, they ONLY care about selling copies. You can no longer do anything with that book that doesn't involve paying THEM for copies of it, because that is how publishing companies make money.

## 2. Loss of creative and content control

Make no mistake about this: once you take a deal from a publisher, they own the book and all the content in it, so they get to decide everything that goes in the book. They get final say over every word, the book cover, the author bio, everything.

I can tell you from my experience, as a group, publishers tend to make terrible aesthetic decisions. This is for many reasons, but the biggest is what I call “adverse selection.” Though some people who work in publishing are deeply skilled and thoughtful editors whose work makes books much better, those people are rare, and tend to only work with the biggest authors. Most of the people working at publishing companies are doing that because they were not good enough to make a living as a writer. I don’t say that as a put-down, I say it simply so you understand that someone who didn’t make good enough decisions on their own about their writing is now in a position to hold *final decision-making power over your book*.

## 3. Loss of marketing control (and no support)

Publishers do no marketing. I cannot emphasize this enough—publishers expect YOU to do all the work of selling the book for THEM. They don’t have a plan to sell 25k copies of your book. That’s YOUR job.

This might be OK for a novelist with a big existing audience, but if you are someone like the authors my company works with, and you want your book to promote you or your business, a traditional publisher greatly restricts your options.

For example, if you want to position yourself as an expert in something, what happens if they don’t think your book topic appeals to enough people? They don’t care about your business, they only care about selling copies of books, so they’ll make you go broader with your topic, which means the book won’t be as appealing to the specific audience you are trying to reach.

Even worse, because the ONLY way they make money is to sell copies of the book, you can't give copies away for free, you can't give the PDF away for free, you can't use your content in other places as a lead generator for your company. They now are going to force you to put all your promotion efforts on selling copies, which does not always help you reach as many people as possible.

Also, they give you ZERO price control so your ability to make marketing deals with any number of people is none. This type of flexibility is critically important for so much marketing, and they won't do it.

#### *4. Huge time investment*

Even if you get a traditional book deal, it's a huge amount of effort to put it all together. You have to find an agent to represent you to a traditional publisher, you have to do a book proposal that will appeal to a publisher, and then you have to shop the book deal.

From the start of the process to publishing it's usually 24 months—often 36. That's two to three YEARS, which is an incredibly long time in the modern media world, especially for a nonfiction author.

#### *5. Bookstore placement*

A lot of people think traditional publishing is their preferred method because it's the best way to get into bookstores. This is not an accurate calculus. Traditional book publishers do not get most of their books into bookstores on any large scale. Furthermore, the ones they do get in tend to get pulled out quickly—unless they sell a lot of copies. And your book will not be on display until it has already proven it will sell a lot of copies.

## SELF-PUBLISHING

### SUMMARY

In the self-publishing model, the author retains ownership of their book and manages and controls the whole process. Self-publishing has many different forms, but at its core the author does the publishing work (or manages freelancers or publishing services companies who do the work for a fee). There is no acceptance needed, no advance, and the author retains all rights.

### OWNERSHIP AND RIGHTS

Author retains all rights.

### ROYALTY RATE

Variable, usually between 40 percent and 100 percent, depending on the sales channel.

### ADVANCE AGAINST ROYALTIES

No.

### WRITING AND EDITING

Author must manage. Many variations of help exist, but all are paid.

### PUBLISHING SERVICES

Author must manage. Many variations of help exist, but all are paid.

### DISTRIBUTION

Author must manage. Many variations of help exist, but all are paid.

## MARKETING

Author must manage. Many variations of help exist, but all are paid.

## PRESTIGE AND PERCEPTION

Variable, totally depends on the quality of the book.

## TIME TO PUBLISH

As fast as you can manage.

## ADVANTAGES INCLUDE:

- Full ownership of rights and royalties
- Completely customizable in all aspects
- Fast to market
- Total marketing control
- Total creative control
- Total freedom

## DRAWBACKS INCLUDE:

- It is a lot of work to do it right
- If it's unprofessional, will result in poor appearance and low status
- Time consuming to learn and manage the process yourself
- If you hire excellent professionals to help you, it's expensive

## SELF-PUBLISHING PROBLEM #1: CAN YOU DO A PROFESSIONAL JOB?

This is the crucial question for self-publishing, one that trumps every other.

If you can do a professional job with your book, then self-publishing is almost always the best bet for most authors.

If you cannot do a professional job, then you may either not want to self-publish, or you may not want to publish a book at all.

The saying is right: everyone judges a book by its cover. But not just the cover. The title, the book description, the author photo, the blurbs, even the author bio, all tell a story about how credible and authoritative that book and author are. A professional book makes you look professional.

It used to be that traditional publishers were the only ones who had the expertise and access to the talented people necessary to make books that looked professional. That was true 30 years ago, but not anymore.

In fact, almost all of the best talent out there is freelance and can be hired for reasonable rates. Just in my company alone, we use writers, editors, proofreaders, copywriters, and book cover designers who all either used to work for traditional publishers and left to freelance, or we use the same freelancers that the traditional publishers use.

Some people think there is still a stigma to self-publishing. The data appears to say otherwise. Hugh Howey (self-published his novel *Wool*, which has sold millions of copies and is being made into a movie directed by Ridley Scott) did a study on 200,000 titles and showed that the self-published books on Amazon had, on average, a higher star ranking than traditionally published books.

This all boils down to the fact that if you're willing to put in the work to make sure your self-published book is super professional, then you're going to be well off.

## SELF-PUBLISHING PROBLEM #2: WHAT IS THE MAJOR TRADE-OFF OF SELF-PUBLISHING?

There is really one major trade-off with self-publishing:

***Professionally self-publishing a book requires you to put in either time or money (or both).***

It's not hard to do all the steps necessary to make a professional book. This book clearly details every step. It just takes time. The way around that is to hire great people, or even better, hire a publishing services firm to manage the whole process for you. That takes money.

It's a pretty simple calculation: if you have money, spend it to save time.

If you don't have money, then your time isn't your most expensive asset, so use it to learn how to professionally publish your book, and execute it (that's what this book is about).

## **HYBRID PUBLISHING**

### **SUMMARY**

In the hybrid model, the ownership of rights varies depending on the publishing company the author works with, but the basic idea is that they try to look like a traditional publishing company, but pay little to no advance, yet still take most of the royalties, still control a lot of the process, and still do some part of the publishing work.

### **OWNERSHIP AND RIGHTS**

Variable

### **ROYALTY RATE**

Variable, usually 15-25 percent, but can be as high as 50 percent

### **ADVANCE**

Usually not, but sometimes very small

## WRITING

No help

## PUBLISHING SERVICES

Yes, usually, but varies widely

## DISTRIBUTION

Yes, usually, but varies widely

## MARKETING

Yes, usually, but varies widely

## PRESTIGE AND PERCEPTION

Varies widely

## TIME TO PUBLISH

6 to 24 months

## WHY PICK HYBRID OVER THE OTHER TWO?

In the hybrid model, the publisher will tell you that they combine the advantages of a traditional publisher, with the flexibility and upside of self-publishing. That's the theory, but it never works that way in practice.

Hybrid doesn't really exist. It's a made-up word for publishing companies that are basically just fee-for-service publishing companies, but still take a percentage of the profit.

What these companies do is pay little to no advance, still take a lot of the royalties, still control a lot of the process, and still do some



part of the publishing work. They try to give authors the illusion of status from being “picked” by a publisher, but they make the author do all of the work, and they still own the rights, and they still get the upside—all while NOT paying an advance.

***Hybrid publishing is generally a terrible deal for authors.***

The other problem is that in hybrid publishing, oftentimes the publishing company will try to retain copyright or other rights. One of the main attributes of old traditional publishing companies is that they ALWAYS reserve copyright to the author, and almost always leave all other rights to author (movies, TV, etc.). They only care about the rights involved around profiting from the printed word and related rights.

#### **SUMMARY: WHICH SHOULD YOU PICK?**

##### **WHO SHOULD GO WITH TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING:**

- Celebrities
- Athletes
- Musicians
- Actors
- Politicians
- Professional Writers (novelists, etc.)
- Anyone who can get an advance of \$500k or more

##### **WHO SHOULD GO WITH SELF-PUBLISHING:**

- Entrepreneurs
- Businesspeople
- Executives
- Financial Planners
- Lawyers
- Doctors
- Business Owners
- Consultants

- Coaches
- Just about everyone else

WHO SHOULD GO WITH HYBRID PUBLISHING:

- Pretty much no one



## HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO SELF-PUBLISH A BOOK?

Many authors are concerned with how cheaply they can publish. There is nothing wrong with wanting to save money, but here at Scribe, we cater to authors who have other careers. People like doctors, CEOs, consultants, lawyers, wealth managers, and other high-level professionals who are using their book as a credential to increase their authority, raise their visibility, and be a legacy piece for their career.

For them, they cannot afford to do their book cheaply, because if they do, it will make them look bad. They want to save money, yes, but never at the expense of putting out a poor product with their name on it.

If this is a concern, then before you can determine how much it costs to publish a book, there are two questions you must first answer:

1. What is the value of your time?
2. How professional do you want the book to be?

## THE VALUE OF YOUR TIME

This is an incredibly important factor for Scribe clients. Like I said, our authors are high-level professionals with high-paying careers. Their time is extremely valuable, so a factor that they must consider is the opportunity cost of their time.

Opportunity cost is a concept from microeconomics which says that every action has not just a direct cost to it, but also a cost in terms of the opportunity lost, and you must factor both in when calculating the total cost.

Let's stay with book publishing for an example. If you have a retail job that pays \$10 an hour, then the opportunity cost of your time is \$10 an hour.

But if you have a career that pays you \$250,000 a year, given a normal 40-hour workweek, you make \$125 an hour. That is the opportunity cost of your time.

This difference fundamentally changes the calculation for the true cost of publishing a book. For the sake of example, let's say you have two options to publish your book. You can do everything related to publishing your book yourself over the course of 100 hours of work, or you can pay someone else to do it for \$10,000, and spend no time working on it.

For the person making \$10 an hour, the choice is clear: 100 hours of work is worth \$1,000 to them, which is much cheaper than paying \$10,000 to someone else. They should do it themselves.

For the person making \$250k a year (\$125/hr), they should pay \$10k. For them, 100 hours of work is worth \$12,500, so they actually save \$2,500 by hiring someone at \$10k.

Opportunity cost can be tricky to calculate if you are looking to be precise, but fairly simple to ballpark. The point is not to have

exact numbers, but to understand the value of your time, and to understand that you should, as a rule, spend your time where you create the most value for yourself.

### THE QUALITY: PEOPLE JUDGE YOU BASED ON YOUR BOOK

Like I said earlier, most information pieces on the cost of publishing give you the cheapest way to do it. That's not a plausible path for our clients. If you have a professional reputation to uphold, then using cheap services to publish your book will actually hurt you.

The fact is, readers will judge your book. And not just the book; they will judge you as a person based on the quality of your book. This is one of those unpleasant but true facts of life. We all say “you shouldn't judge a book based on the cover,” but we all do. The more you accept this fact and then adapt to it, the better your book—and thus your career—will be.

When evaluating cost, the metric a professional should be using is quality. How can you get high quality at a low cost, NOT how can you get the lowest cost.

To help you see this, as I explain each publishing stage and the cost, I'll rank the price ranges for each tier: **Low quality, Acceptable, High Quality, Best Possible.**

It's not necessary to pay for Best Possible every time, or even for High Quality. Sometimes acceptable is good enough. The key is knowing where and when to save money, and where to spend it, to make sure you get the highest leverage for your money.

### A WORD ON WRITING COST

This is not technically part of the publishing process, but it's one of those areas that can range anywhere from free (not counting opportunity cost, of course), to well into the six figures.

The question here is do you need help, and if so, what kind of help do you want? If you want ghostwriting, that will range from \$40k to \$100k+. If you want a service more like Scribe Professional turn-key service, it's \$36k. If you want something where you do the typing, but get professional guidance, we have our Guided Author program for only \$12k.

If you want a writing coach, you can find those as well, and they range from a few hundred to tens of thousands. There are tons of books that can help you, and online courses to take, all of which vary in price from free to several thousand. And of course, you can sit down to write it yourself without any help from anyone.

Of all aspects of publishing a book, this is hardest to cost out because it's so personal. Furthermore, this is one area where price does NOT always equal quality. I am going to leave this without price reference, but know that there IS ALWAYS a cost here, even if it's just the opportunity cost of your time.

- Low Quality: n/a
- Acceptable: n/a
- High Quality: n/a
- Best Possible: n/a

## **PUBLISHING COST: EDITING**

Editing is easier to price than writing, but still not as straightforward as you might imagine. The problem is not just the difference in the quality of editors; the problem is in the wide variation in different types of editing.

For the purpose of this pricing, we will assume we're talking about a full content edit, which is what most authors need after writing the rough draft of their manuscript.

- Low Quality: Less than \$1k

- Acceptable: \$2k–\$4k
- High Quality: \$5k–\$10k
- Best Possible: \$15k+

### **PUBLISHING COST: COPY EDITING**

Copy editing is easy to find for cheap. The problem is that if you don't do this right, you will look terrible. When people find bad grammar or misspelled words in your book, they literally think that you are stupid—it's totally unfair and irrational, but true (think about it, you do it to authors as well). So make sure whoever you use, you pay enough to make sure it's done.

That's why we recommend at least TWO different copy editors review your work. The prices below reflect only one, so double whatever it is you use.

Copyediting costs are highly variable, but these totals below reflect the total for hourly pay for a 35k-word book.

- Low Quality: \$300 (\$20 hour)
- Acceptable: \$450 (\$30 hour)
- High Quality: \$600 (\$40 hour)
- Best Possible: \$750 (\$50 hour)

### **PUBLISHING COST: COPYWRITING**

This is something that authors often forget about, but it is crucially important to getting people to actually buy the book. A big part of the buying decision for readers is the book description.

- Low Quality: \$5–\$25
- Acceptable: \$25–\$75
- High Quality: \$75–\$100
- Best Possible: \$150–\$300

### **PUBLISHING COST: AUTHOR PHOTO**

Another thing that if you go cheap, it will hurt you. Our breakdown on the importance of the author photo explains this in depth, but the point is simple and easy to understand: people judge you based on your appearance, so make sure to send the right signals.

- Low Quality: \$0–\$99
- Acceptable: \$100–\$300
- High Quality: \$350–\$1,000
- Best Possible: \$1,500+

### **PUBLISHING COST: BOOK COVER**

We’ve written extensively how to get a great book cover, and this is probably going to be the biggest cost center you have for publishing. But again—people DO judge a book by its cover, and you must get this right.

- Low Quality: \$100–\$150
- Acceptable: \$200–\$500
- High Quality: \$750–\$1,500
- Best Possible: \$2,000+

### **PUBLISHING COST: BOOK INTERIOR**

Book interior really only matters when you get it wrong. No one notices when you get it right (unless it’s just an amazing design or something like that), so you don’t need to go super expensive here, you just need to get it “not wrong.”

- Low Quality: \$0–\$500 (DIY software like Vellum is in the middle of this range)
- Acceptable: \$750–1000
- High Quality: \$1,500
- Best Possible: \$2,500+



## **PUBLISHING COST: BOOK PRINTING (POD/EBOOK)**

There are two basic ways to print books: print on demand, or commercial offset printing.

In print on demand, the printing costs for orders are pulled out of the royalties, so there is no upfront publishing cost.

Thus, anything you spend depends on the format. KDP charges nothing to set up paperbacks and eBooks. IngramSpark charges \$49 for physical book (HC or paperback) setup, and \$25 for eBook setup. The quality for IngramSpark tends to be about the same as KDP.

- Low Quality: n/a
- Acceptable: \$0 and/or \$25-\$74
- High Quality: n/a
- Best Possible: n/a

## **PUBLISHING COST: BOOK PRINTING (OFFSET)**

Offset printing basically means hardcover. Offset printing is when the books are not printed on demand, but instead run in large batches, which is necessary for high-quality hardcovers. These tend to be higher quality, but they do cost much more, if for no other reason than you are paying for the printing of the book before it's done.

It's almost impossible to quote a price here without knowing the quantity of books you'll be ordering. For example, 1,000 books will usually cost you between \$5 and \$7 apiece, whereas if you print 5,000, the price goes down to around \$3, and more than 10,000, the price often drops below \$2.

Furthermore, not everyone needs a hardcover. For this reason, we cannot really include this in the cost of publishing, but know that if you want high-quality hardcovers, then you will have to spend money on printing the books.

- Low Quality: n/a
- Acceptable: n/a
- High Quality: n/a
- Best Possible: n/a

### **PUBLISHING COST: ISBN**

ISBNs are kind of a pain. For most of our authors, there are perks to having their own ISBN (which we provide as part of working with us, of course).

The ISBN is the 13-digit number above the barcode at the back of your book, which tells bookstores and libraries all the important info about your book.

If you use a free ISBN assigned to you by KDP or IngramSpark, there are downsides. First off, your book looks more self-published. Second, you'll limit your chances of a bookstore carrying your own book, as many won't take books from KDP especially.

You do not have to get your own ISBN, but doing so will make you look more legit.

- Low Quality: Free
- Acceptable: \$85-\$99
- High Quality: \$125
- Best Possible: \$125

### **TOTAL PUBLISHING COST**

- Low Quality: ~\$2,000
- Acceptable: ~\$5,000
- High Quality: ~\$13,000
- Best Possible: ~\$18,000

Again, this is not a true total cost, because writing help and hard-

cover publishing is *not* included, but I hope this at least helps you understand what ranges you're looking at when considering publishing costs.





# **EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SELF- PUBLISHING BOOK DISTRIBUTION**

In this chapter, I'm going to walk through the different book formats—eBook, paperback, hardcover, and audiobook—and help you decide if you should create them, then explore your options for printing and distributing each version.

## **HOW TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR EBOOK**

The easiest place to start is with an eBook because it doesn't need to be printed, so you're just left with distribution.

## **SHOULD YOU DO AN EBOOK?**

Yes, if at all possible. There's almost no reason not to.

When eBooks first hit the scene, people said they'd be the end for printed books.

That future did not come, and according to recent numbers, it seems to be getting further away...depending on which part of the picture you choose to look at.

One report showed unit sales of eBooks dropped from 180 million units to 162 million from 2016 to 2017.<sup>1</sup> Another report showed eBook sales decreased 4.7 percent in 2017.

Those numbers only reflect traditionally published eBooks, however. The indie eBook market is thriving, especially for genres like romance, sci-fi, and fantasy.

It's tough to know the total number of eBook sales compared to print books, but estimates put it around 485 million eBook sales to 800 million print book sales in 2017.

Whatever is happening with overall sales numbers, almost half a billion sales show that readers still love eBooks. If you have the capacity to create an eBook version of your book, it's definitely a worthwhile option.

**TL;DR: Yes, do an eBook.**

## EBOOK DISTRIBUTION FACTORS

Amazon makes up 83 percent of eBook sales in the US, so it's a must for authors looking to distribute their eBook.<sup>2</sup> The only question is whether you should distribute solely on Amazon.

For the US market, 17 percent of 485 million eBook sales is nothing

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1 "E-Book Sales Fell 10% in 2017." PublishersWeekly.com. Accessed September 17, 2019. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/76706-e-book-sales-fell-10-in-2017.html>.

2 Jentetics, Kinga. "Amazon's Ebook Market Share - Is It Big Enough?" PublishDrive, February 20, 2019. <https://publishdrive.com/amazon-ebook-market-share/>.

to sneeze at, especially if you're looking to reach as many readers as possible.

Also, if you're looking to sell your eBook internationally, keep in mind that other retailers hold significant market shares overseas. Kobo, for example, is tops in Canada and Japan.

You can get by just selling your eBook on Amazon—millions of authors do—but it shouldn't be your only outlet if you have ambitions for your book.

**TL;DR: Distribute on all eBook platforms.**

#### HOW TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR EBOOK

To sell your eBook strictly on Amazon, upload it through Kindle Direct Publishing, or KDP. (Amazon provides directions for doing that through its KDP Jumpstart program.)

It's free to set up an eBook title on KDP. You'll need final book files that meet their quality and content guidelines, but assuming you worked with professional editors and designers who understand book layout and cover design, your final files should be accepted.

To sell your eBook everywhere else—Google Play, Apple Books, Nook, Kobo, and more—you have a few options. BookBaby.com is what we use for Scribe authors, and is a one-stop-shop to distribute your book to all the major outlets. There are other options, like Smashwords and Draft2Digital, that you can use to accomplish the same goal.

For BookBaby, the cost to set up an eBook depends on how many graphics are in the book. A typical upload costs \$249. For each graphic, figure about \$2 additional cost.

**TL;DR: Use KDP and third-party platforms to distribute your book everywhere.**

## HOW TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR PAPERBACK

### SHOULD YOU DO A PAPERBACK?

Despite the proliferation of eBooks, the majority of book sales are still physical books.<sup>3</sup>

Most authors should print a paperback, given that print-on-demand has made it so easy and cheap to distribute high-quality copies of your book. Sometimes authors just produce a hardcover for exclusivity and to ensure readers only get the highest quality version of their book. But for the vast majority of authors, a paperback makes sense as an easy way to get physical copies of their book to readers.

**TL;DR: Yes.**

### FACTORS IN PAPERBACK DISTRIBUTION

If you want to sell a paperback, the big question is: how will you print your book?

Your options are print-on-demand (POD) and offset printing.

With POD, your books are printed as they are ordered, and cost about \$4 per book.

With offset printing, you print large batches of books, warehouse them, and fulfill orders as Amazon sends you purchase orders. Printers like Bang and Thomson Reuters will warehouse books for you.

With offset printing, the more books you order, the cheaper each copy becomes. For books between 150 and 350 pages, pricing often works like this:

- 1,000 copies: ~\$3.00

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<sup>3</sup> Parker, Olivia. "Print Books vs. e-Books - an Update." *Graphic Arts Magazine*, March 16, 2018. <https://graphicartsmag.com/articles/2018/03/print-books-vs-e-books-update/>.



- 2,000 copies: ~\$2.00
- 5,000 copies: ~\$1.35
- 10,000 copies: ~\$1.15

If you know you're going to sell thousands of copies of your book—maybe you're an in-demand speaker or have a huge mailing list—offset printing might be a good option for you.

For most authors, POD makes far more sense. There are no upfront costs (besides setup fees), you don't have to manage orders, and you're not caught with a garage full of books if you want to change the book after printing 5,000 copies.

**TL;DR: Most authors should do POD.**

#### HOW TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR PAPERBACK

The other half of the equation is how your printing choice affects distribution. Let's start with the two distribution options for POD since this is the route most authors go:

1. Upload your book to KDP to sell POD paperbacks across Amazon (free setup).
2. Upload your book to IngramSpark to sell POD paperbacks everywhere else (\$49 setup).

KDP does distribute paperbacks outside of Amazon (if you register for the Expanded Distribution option), but IngramSpark does a more effective job at distributing to a wider number of retailers.

[Most authors should do both, but keep in mind if you upload to IngramSpark in addition to KDP, make sure you DON'T select Amazon as a retailer during the upload process. You'll end up with a duplicate Amazon listing, both of which will get yanked down.]

Now let's talk about distributing a paperback printed using offset printing.

To sell on Amazon, you'll need to apply for an Amazon Advantage account. If you get approved, the account costs \$99 a year and pays 45 percent royalties to authors.

You will receive purchase orders from Amazon based on their estimates for upcoming sales volume, and you will fulfill those orders directly to Amazon's warehouse. From there, Amazon will fulfill individual orders to readers.

Distribution beyond Amazon will be nearly impossible as a self-published author.

IngramSpark does distribute POD paperbacks to bookstores, which means bookstores CAN buy your book, but the truth is most bookstores won't. In our opinion, that doesn't matter.

To get into most bookstores, you need a sales rep going store to store to convince them to stock your book. However, this is very difficult to do without going with a traditional publisher, which comes with its own long list of negative consequences.

**TL;DR: For limited distribution but easy paperback distribution, use KDP.**

## HOW TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR HARDCOVER

### SHOULD YOU DO A HARDCOVER?

Most authors don't need a hardcover. For those who do, it's for one or more of these reasons:

- They want special copies to give friends, family, or clients
- As a higher-quality print, a hardcover is a better fit for their brand

- They know they'll sell thousands of copies and want to maximize revenue

If you want your book to be perceived as higher quality in the eyes of readers, or to be able to charge people more for it, it makes sense to produce a hardcover.

**TL;DR: You probably don't need a hardcover (but some authors do).**

#### HARDCOVER DISTRIBUTION FACTORS

As with paperbacks, your print options for hardcovers are either POD or offset printing.

However, KDP does not offer a POD option for hardcovers. Your only option for POD hardcovers is to use IngramSpark, which comes with an occasional problem: some hardcovers can show up as “out of stock” for weeks on Amazon when set up through IngramSpark.

At more than \$10 per copy, POD hardcovers are also expensive.

Offset printing can be much cheaper per copy, once again assuming you know you'll order thousands of copies.

Here's a rough breakdown for offset printing for hardcovers between 150-350 pages:

- 1,000 copies: ~\$5.00
- 2,000 copies: ~\$3.50
- 5,000 copies: ~\$2.50
- 10,000 copies: ~\$2.00

Most authors that we work with do offset printed hardcovers. But if you want hardcovers and don't need a bunch, IngramSpark is the best bet.

**TL;DR: Depending on quantity, either option can be best.**

#### HOW TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR HARDCOVER

Set your POD hardcover up with IngramSpark to sell through Amazon.

Like paperbacks, IngramSpark will also distribute your book to other major retailers. It'll be for sale everywhere online, but again, don't expect your book to land in bookstores.

If you choose offset printing, it's the same as discussed above: you need Amazon Advantage.

**TL;DR: Depends on the printing method you choose.**



# HOW TO WRITE A NONFICTION BOOK PROPOSAL (WITH TEMPLATE)

If you are going to self-publish (as you probably should), then don't read this chapter.

If you are determined to get your book picked up by a traditional publisher, this chapter will show you the next step.

For those authors who can get a traditionally published deal, they still need to write what's called a "book proposal" before they can take their book to a traditional publisher to try for a deal.

If you're one of those authors who can still get a deal and wants to pursue it, then this chapter is for you. What I'll do here is walk you through what a book proposal is, the purpose they serve, and how to structure them.

I just want to warn you:

*Book proposals are a very unusual form of writing, unlike anything else you'll ever do in your life.*

They are counterintuitive. They are illogical. And they are, quite honestly, a pain in the ass to write.

I know this because I've written more than 20 book proposals that have sold to publishers at prices ranging from \$150k on the low end to \$2 million on the high end—and this chapter walks you exactly how to write your own (if it makes sense for you).

### WHAT IS A BOOK PROPOSAL?

Think of a book proposal as a business plan for your book. It has one purpose: to convince a traditional publisher to give you money to write the book.

When you self-publish, you don't need to write a book proposal. To work with a traditional publisher, you are in effect asking them to invest a lot of money into your book, and a book proposal is the document that will convince them to do that.

If you write a great proposal—one that convinces the publisher that your book idea, content, and marketing plan have a serious chance of commercial success—the publisher will make a monetary offer to you as an advance against royalties, and buy the rights to publish the book (and own the book and profits as well).

### WHY DO PUBLISHERS WANT BOOK PROPOSALS?

The most common question I get from new authors is something along the lines of, *"Can't I just write it first? Don't they just want to see the book?"*

That's a very logical question. In theory, it would make total sense to do that.

But in practice, it doesn't work like that. Submitting an already written nonfiction book as a proposal is a great way to almost guarantee you will **not** get a book deal.

That is absolutely how the system works. Don't try to use reason or logic to argue that it would be better a different way. Logic doesn't matter when talking about how people actually do things—though, in this case, there IS a logic to it, most people just can't see it from the outside.

Why is it this way? If you understand these two things, the book proposal format makes perfect sense:

## 1. REDUCING PUBLISHERS' RISK BY SHOWING YOU WILL SELL COPIES

This is the #1 thing that all traditional publishers want to see in a proposal—proof that you have a clear and definitive plan to move a lot of copies of your book.

Please don't fall victim to thinking that publishers can sell books. They can't. For real, traditional publishers are very bad at selling books. I know, it sounds crazy, but it's true. Traditional publishers are very good at selling books to bookstores, not to readers.

They want a proposal because they want to know that YOU can do the job they can't (I discuss this in more depth later on when we talk about marketing plans).

## 2. SIGNALING YOU UNDERSTAND TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING AND MEDIA

The irrationality of a book proposal is actually a feature, not a bug. You see, by having such an unusual process, one that requires a person understand all the intricate unspoken rules of an “irrational” system, it acts as a filtering mechanism.

Traditional publishers can look at a proposal and know—in an instant—if the “right” format was followed. If it's not, they know they can probably disregard the proposal, because the author doesn't have the right social connections to have someone “in the know” teach them the “right” way to submit.

In effect, if the author can't figure out their process—in their logic—they aren't the right person to work with a traditional publisher.

Notice what isn't in either of those headings?

***The quality of the book idea.***

I'm not saying the book idea doesn't matter. At some houses, book ideas still matter a lot. At others, not so much.

The thing that does matter to all editors at traditional houses is sales. They are under intense pressure to produce results—which for them, is book sales. This means they need to know *you and your book can sell copies* (so they don't lose their job).

The point of a proposal is to show them you can sell copies, and show them that you understand how the traditional book publishing processes work so that you are a “safe” author for them to publish.

Like I said—there's a logic to it. It's just not a logic that is apparent at first glance.

## **HOW TO STRUCTURE A BOOK PROPOSAL**

Every proposal has to have a standard set of sections, and then there are some that are optional. I'll start with the “must-haves” and then explain the “optionals.”

### **THE MUST-HAVES**

#### **1. OVERVIEW**

For most acquisition editors, this is a very important part of the proposal. This is the section where you lay out the basic idea of the book and discuss why people will want to buy it.

The biggest mistake that authors make in this section is talking a



lot about the book idea, why they want to write it, or why they think people should want to read it. Again, that seems like the logical thing to do here, but it's not the ideal approach.

The overview should only focus on the content of the book enough so that the editor understands what the book will say.

If you want to talk about the content a lot, that's fine, but you must talk about it only in relation to the needs, problems, and desires of your audience.

In short—the editor does not care about your idea, or even your book. They only care about you, your idea, or your book *in relation to the problem it solves for readers, and thus its commercial potential*.

In effect, your book needs to answer the questions in the editor's mind:

- *Why do people care what you have to say?*
- *Why will anyone care about this book?*
- *What need does it fulfill?*
- *What problem does it solve?*
- *Ultimately, why will people want to buy it?*

In effect, think of the Overview as a sales letter. You are selling the editor on the idea that there are a lot of people who have an urgent problem your book will solve, and that they will see your book as the solution to that problem.

## 2. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The mistake authors make here is bragging or talking about themselves too much. Again, it seems natural to talk about yourself in the About the Author section, but again—that is wrong.

Everything you say about yourself should be framed from the per-

spective of *why you're the perfect person to write this book for your audience*.

So yeah, you will talk a lot about yourself, but only in the context of the book. You can probably skip over the things you've done in your life that have nothing to do with the book, (unless they are really impressive, like winning an Olympic medal).

This is not a place to brag or carry on needlessly about yourself. That sends a negative signal to the editor that you aren't spending enough time worrying about the reader and their needs.

### 3. MARKETING PLAN

This is it, the section that makes or breaks almost all book proposals. Lemme explain the dirty little secret about why this section—that didn't used to be very important as recently as thirty or forty years ago—has become so utterly crucial to book proposals:

***Traditional publishing companies do not know how to sell books to readers, and they now rely on the author to do that crucial task.***

This is why the marketing plan is so important.

The problem is that traditional publishing companies spent 100 years with one customer: bookstores. But the world changed, and they did not change with it.

No traditional publisher (with a few notable exceptions, like Hay House and Rodale and a few others) has any ability to sell directly to their readers. They don't have meaningful email lists, engaged social followings, or any set group of people waiting to buy books they publish.

Because of this, the editors that work at traditional publishing houses are in a tough spot. They have to rely on the author to have an audience waiting to buy their book.

You see, the editor is putting their reputation and their job at stake every time they make an offer to an author. If they sign a lot of authors whose books sell well, they will be respected and secure in their job. If they don't, they won't.

Before the internet and Amazon, editors used to be able to invest smaller amounts of money in a lot of authors, and see who could develop an audience organically. This is because there was little competition in book publishing, so it was easy to make money.

But once anyone could self-publish and everyone had access to every book ever published, the game changed. Traditional publishers saw most of their easy profits siphoned away, and they were forced to scale down their publishing and focus only on the “big hit” books.

What this means for you is one thing:

***Your book proposal must convince the editor and publisher that you have tens of thousands of people waiting to buy your book.***

Many authors make the mistake of trying to argue that the potential market for the book is huge. That may even be true, but that's not how editors look at it. Without an established platform, without a confirmed set of readers ready to buy the book, the risk for a traditional publisher is usually too high.

I'm not just saying this. Book agent Byrd Leavell says this (he's repped several #1 *New York Times* bestselling authors who have sold tens of millions of books):

Publishers aren't buying anything that doesn't come with a built-in audience that is waiting to buy it. They don't take risks anymore, they don't gamble on authors, they only want sure things. I won't even take an author out unless they have an audience that can guarantee 20k pre-sales to them.

This is why, in my breakdown of who can get a traditional publishing deal, I am very clear they usually only go to a select group of people:

- Famous people like celebrities/athletes/musicians
- Well-known businesspeople and politicians (sometimes)
- People with built-in audiences waiting to buy their book
- Topical books that hit on a specific subject at a specific moment in time (like books about Trump during his presidency)

So what, exactly, should you put in the marketing section? Here is what the editor is looking for and what you'll see in the examples I provide later on:

- All the metrics about your audience. How big is your email list, how many social media followers do you have, how big is your YouTube channel, what other forms of owned media do you have, etc.
- Your earned media presence. Where do you write or get regular coverage, how will this interact with the book, what your plan is to use traditional media, etc.
- Public appearances and speaking, including your upcoming speaking schedule, how many copies you plan to sell through speaking or appearances, anything like that.
- Organizations and memberships you belong to, and how they intend to help.
- Your network, and how you plan to use it. Who are your friends with, how have they committed to help you, what organizations are backing you, what will they do with the book, etc.
- Optional, but huge: If you have published a book in the past and it sold well, put those numbers here. If you had a book that did not sell well, then explain why it didn't.

#### 4. CHAPTER DESCRIPTION/OUTLINE

This is pretty simple. You want to create a Table of Contents for your book, with a quick description of what will be in each chapter.

The important thing here is that you can show how your book idea flows from beginning to end.

The big mistake most authors make here is taking a deep dive into an explanation about what is in each chapter. Don't do that. Remember, this is NOT an informational document, it's a sales document.

You want each chapter description to be interesting and engaging on its own. This is not the Table of Contents that will go in your book. The chapter descriptions should be fun to read, full of open loops, engaging questions, interesting tidbits, and assertions.

## 5. SAMPLE CHAPTER

This is a pretty important part of most book proposals, but the importance varies. The better your marketing plan, the less this matters.

That being said, always give yourself the best shot by writing up the most engaging chapter. The one that you think the editor and readers will be most interested in? Put that in here.

## THE OPTIONALS

### MEDIA LINKS

Media links should also go here: a list of any significant media hits you have received. Don't include lesser hits (blog posts, unknown publications, etc.), which can actually work against you by making your platform look unimpressive—only the significant ones.

### COMPARABLE TITLES

Not all editors consider this optional, but I've sold many deals without this section. This is a section that can help a lot if your book has an unusual angle or different positioning. Editors are like sheep—

they all want to follow a leader. So if your book isn't falling into an obvious positioning slot, then give them a bunch of examples of books just like it that have succeeded.

#### ADVANCE PRAISE/INFLUENCER QUOTES

Only use this if you have some really good quotes here. This section is perfect if you're one of those people who have a ton of famous and noteworthy friends ready to go to bat for you, but no one in the general public knows who you are. Otherwise, you can skip this.

#### TARGET AUDIENCES

The best way to talk about target audiences is in the narrative of the Overview, or in the marketing plan.

That being said, I see lots of book proposals with this in there. I don't think it matters, but obviously some agents do. Put it in if you want, but I've never used it.

#### EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL BOOK PROPOSALS

If you look on the internet, you will have a very hard time finding actual book proposals. I don't know why people won't post these, but it gets back to what I was talking about with elitism in publishing.

Below are some examples of real book proposals that have actually sold to publishers. As you can see, not all of them are the same, and some even violate the rules I am giving you. Like I told you, this is a fluid thing with many "unwritten" rules, and in spaces like that, you can break those rules at times and in certain cases, but usually that doesn't work well.

To see examples and templates, go here: <https://scribewriting.com/book-proposal-template/> or Google "Book Proposal Template Scribe."



## PUBLISH YOUR BOOK

*“He who has a hundred miles to walk should reckon ninety as half the journey.”*

—AWA KENZO

My worst fear is that you read this book, and say to yourself, “*Wow, that was great, I know everything I need to get started and finish,*” and then do nothing.

Everything in this book works. It’s been tested with thousands of authors on their books, many of them big bestsellers that you’ve read.

Don’t wait.

You read this book because you have something to say to the world.

But if you don’t write it down in a book and put it out to the world, then no one can hear it, and no one can benefit from you sharing your knowledge and wisdom. There will be no impact, and no legacy.

And that’s the point.

And if you are truly lost, or just need some help that is not in the book, you can email me directly: [tucker@scribemedia.com](mailto:tucker@scribemedia.com).

I'm always happy to help anyone write their book.



**PART 9**

**REFERENCE  
MATERIAL**





# REALISTIC AND UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR A BOOK

One of the most common problems we see from authors are unrealistic expectations about what a book will get them.

So many authors have fantasies in their head surrounding their book, and those fantasies lead them to make bad decisions about their book. A book is a wonderful thing and can help both you and your readers immensely, but it doesn't work well unless you have realistic expectations for what it can get you.

I'm going to walk you through the most common unrealistic expectations authors have, then explain realistic expectations for a nonfiction book.

## **UNREALISTIC EXPECTATION #1: "MY BOOK WILL SELL MILLIONS OF COPIES!"**

The first fantasy authors usually have is about book sales. Some authors truly think that their book will sell millions of copies.

This is deeply unrealistic. Let's look at some numbers:

- According to the best estimates, the average nonfiction book is now selling less than 250 copies per year and less than 2,000 copies over its lifetime.
- The competition for sales is fierce. Bowker estimates that in 2015, there were about 1 million new books published (that is total books, not just nonfiction).
- Other estimates put the number at about 300,000 books published—just in America.<sup>4</sup>
- This is in addition to the 13 million+ that are already in print (again, all types of books).
- There is large supply, but not a big market. The total market of nonfiction book sales is only 256 million print copies sold in 2013 in America, and that includes all adult nonfiction categories combined. That's a little under one book per person sold in America.
- According to BookScan, only about 250 books per year reach 100,000 copies sold.<sup>5</sup>
- The books that sell 1 million per year is even fewer, probably around 20 (and almost all of those are fiction).
- The list of books that have sold 10 million copies in history is so small there is a Wikipedia page about them.

The facts are clear: very, very few books sell a lot of copies. The reality is, if you sell even 10,000 copies of a nonfiction book, that is very good, and you should be very happy with that.

For most nonfiction authors, the return on time invested is horrendous if you measure it only in terms of the expected value of book sales. It's basically the same thing as saying that your retirement

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4 "Books Published per Country per Year." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, September 14, 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books\\_published\\_per\\_country\\_per\\_year](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_published_per_country_per_year).

5 Kremer, John. Quora.com. John Kremer, August 24, 2015. <https://www.quora.com/Books/Books-How-many-people-each-year-write-a-book-that-gets-100-000-copies-sold>.

strategy is to “play the lottery.” In fact, your odds of winning most lotteries are better than selling a million copies of your book.

What’s even worse, even if you sell a decent number of copies, you can’t charge enough for books to generate good revenue. The highest you can charge for a book is usually about \$25, give or take. Even the greatest book ever written, if priced higher than that, won’t get picked up. People have a low limit on their perceived value of books.

There is only one group of people who must focus on how many copies they sell: professional writers (novelists, fiction writers, etc.). They need to worry about selling copies of books because ***book sales are their main source for making money!*** They don’t have anything else to sell but a copy of the book.

But this isn’t true for most authors.

#### **REALISTIC EXPECTATION: “MY BOOK CAN MAKE ME MONEY IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS.”**

The good news is that a book can make you money, if you look at it from a different perspective. This is how most of our authors look at books:

*A book is a multipurpose marketing tool with the special ability to create authority and visibility that authors can turn into profit.*

For entrepreneurs, consultants, professionals, and other businesspeople, the book itself creates credibility and authority that is the means to selling other, larger opportunities that can be very profitable.

For example, if you’re a consultant and have a skill or knowledge that is very valuable to people, the best way to get more clients and charge them more money is by writing a book about what you know. This establishes you as an authority and gives you credibility,

as well as giving you a consistent pipeline of people looking for the exact type of skill and experience you offer.

For example, you can also use a book to get clients or paid speaking gigs, promote your company, raise money for a fund, or launch a brand. There are dozens of examples of ways to use a book to make money here.

## **UNREALISTIC EXPECTATION #2: “MY BOOK WILL BE A *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER!”**

The *New York Times* Best Seller List is the most prestigious list (though for dubious reasons). Generally speaking, you need to sell about 10,000 books the first week to be certain you will hit the list.

The thing most people don’t understand is that the bestseller list is, plainly put, a racket. The only way to get on it is to have a traditionally published book, then either have a large pre-existing audience to sell to (in order to organically sell that many copies), or do what most authors do and “cheat” by buying their own books through bookstores to make it look like their book is more popular than it is.

This is not impossible. It can and does happen. We’ve even had some authors we worked with do it. However, hitting the *New York Times* Best Seller List is expensive, time-consuming, and an immense amount of hard work.

Here’s the worst part of hitting a bestseller list: it does not get you much.

Just like having the line “These pretzels are making me thirsty” in a small indie movie isn’t going to make you famous, having a book that spends a week on the *New York Times* Best Seller List does not mean you’re famous. It barely gets you any attention at all.

Here’s a fun game that shows this:

- What are your three favorite books?
- Were any of those books bestsellers?

When I ask this to people, there's usually a stunned silence, and then the inevitable answer, "Wow. Yeah...I have no idea."

**REALISTIC EXPECTATION: "A BOOK WILL GET ME AUTHORITY AND CREDIBILITY IN MY NICHE."**

A lot of people like to say that "a book is the new business card."

I disagree. You can go to Office Depot and get business cards. You can't go to Office Depot and author a book.

What I like to say instead is that "a book is the new college degree."

It used to be, about forty years ago, only about 15 percent of people had college degrees. If you had one, it was a major signal of credibility and authority. It meant something.

But now that more than 70 percent of people go to college, a college degree doesn't signal credibility much anymore, because everyone has one.

But a book is a credential that is credible and meaningful. Why?

*Because it is hard to write and publish a book—especially a good book.*

It's easy to write a bad book. You can even pay someone to write an OK book for you.

But you can't fake your way into a good book. Either you know what you're talking about or you don't, either your book is professional or it's not.

A book gives people the opportunity to see your knowledge and

evaluate it. A book shows you can commit to something and follow through. It shows you get things done—things that are hard and prestigious and require a lot of skills.

Yes, asking to be judged based on your book is risky, but that's why you get so much credit for a good book. A book puts you in a place that most people are unwilling to go—being judged—and it usually requires a lot of work to do.

That's where the credibility and authority come from: the difficulty of pulling it off well.

### **UNREALISTIC EXPECTATION #3: "A BOOK WILL MAKE ME FAMOUS."**

Lots of people want to be famous, and they think a book will accomplish that.

It won't.

First off, there are very few famous authors. Start naming famous authors, and you'll realize quickly that 80 percent or more of your list are dead (Hemingway, Twain, Lee, Tolkien, etc.).

The other people you name will be famous for something else, and you probably read their book because of their fame in another area.

Writers simply aren't celebrities in America anymore. In fact, it goes the other way around in most cases; people get famous for something else first, then they write a book that becomes a bestseller.

Being famous is usually *why their book sells*; they don't get famous from their book.

In fact, there are only about 15, maybe 20, living people who are famous only for writing (and nothing else). Malcolm Gladwell is one. J.K. Rowling is another. You can probably name a couple more.



Not 10 more. Definitely not 20.

There are a lot of famous people in America, but virtually all of them got famous in some way other than writing books.

**REALISTIC EXPECTATION: “A BOOK WILL RAISE MY VISIBILITY AND HELP ME GET MEDIA COVERAGE.”**

A book—by itself—will not make you famous. But this is not to say a book will not help you become more well known. It can and it will.

Think about it: when a media outlet wants a comment on something, who do they go to? The expert, right? And how do they know someone is an expert?

Because they wrote the book. Once you have a book, media coverage is 10x easier to get.

And it goes beyond books. “Has a new book” is a required box to tick for the gatekeepers who control access to areas of the arenas you most want to enter: lecture halls, television studios, podcasts, boardrooms, media pages, special events, people’s minds.

Larry King doesn’t say, “My next guest has just posted a cat video.”

How many people in your field have you seen get a lot of attention simply because they wrote a book? Even if you knew more than they do, they got the attention that you didn’t—only because of the book.

If you want media coverage and visibility in your field, being the authority and the expert is key. And if you want to build a big brand or platform, a book by itself won’t get you there, but it is a big part of a larger campaign that most definitely will.

#### UNREALISTIC EXPECTATION #4: “THIS BOOK WILL TRANSFORM MY LIFE.”

People have a lot of fantasies about what a book will do for them, and almost all of them are not going to happen. I think this is summed up perfectly by Hugh Macleod, the renowned cartoonist and author:

A successful book agent I know tells me that at least half the people he meets who are writing their first book, are doing so not because they have anything particularly interesting to say, but because the idea of ‘the writer’s life’ appeals to them. Tweed jackets, smoking a pipe, sitting out in the gazebo and getting sloshed on Mint Juleps, pensively typing away at an old black Remington. Bantering wittily at all the right parties. Or whatever. Anybody who wants to write books for this reason deserves to suffer. And happily, many of them do.

Doesn’t this seem like so many other things? We all say we want to be rich, lose weight, start a business, etc.

But it’s *the idea* of being rich or skinny or an entrepreneur that’s more appealing than actually putting in the work to do it. The idea sounds glamorous, and we want glamour.

Here’s the thing: we don’t get glamour by “living the writer’s life,” or by wearing the best gym clothes, or playing the “startup game.”

Glamour is the result of hard work and doing something that other people find valuable. Notice what’s missing when people say that?

Actual writing.

#### REALISTIC EXPECTATION: “THIS BOOK WILL OPEN DOORS AND CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ME.”

One of the things we’ve seen consistently is that books provide authors all kinds of opportunities—both ones they anticipated and ones they did not.

The ones they did anticipate are great, but often it's the others that take them by surprise. Here's usually how this works:

The #1 search engine is Google. #2 is YouTube. You know what #3 is?

Amazon.

And even more relevant to entrepreneurs and business people, it's the #1 search engine when looking for products and services (with 44 percent of searches for products and services starting there).<sup>6</sup> This means it is literally the *largest search engine for professionals*.

Think about it—how many times have you had a problem and tried to solve it by finding a book about it?

Well, what if you were the person who wrote the book on how to solve that problem? Then you're going to get all those people coming to you.

That's how it works—*having a book brings people to you*.

It lets them know exactly who you are and shows them how you can help them. It's the best marketing tool you could ever use, not just to build your brand, but to attract clients.

Lemme give you a personal example: when we started our company, Scribe, we realized we had a rocket ship that we didn't know how to fly. We needed to learn how to scale our company.

What did I do? I went to Amazon to read books on the subject.

Turns out, there are not a lot of great books out there about how to professionally manage and scale a fast-growing company. The

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6 "Amazon Is the Starting Point For 44 Percent Of Consumers Searching For Products. Is Google Losing, Then?" Marketing Land, October 9, 2015. <https://marketingland.com/amazon-is-the-starting-point-for-44-percent-of-consumers-searching-for-products-is-search-losing-then-145647>.

best I could find was written by Cameron Herold (it's called *Double Double*, and he has two more called *Meetings Suck* and *Vivid Vision*).

I read the book and thought, “*This is genius. But I need more. I need this guy to coach me directly.*”

I reached out to Cameron, and he now advises our company (and owns a piece of it). That's how valuable he's been.

It all came about because he had a really good book that led me to him. There are probably five hundred other people out there who could have taught me the same things, but Cameron is the only one that had a great book that I could read and use to determine that he was the guy to teach me.

I never would have listened to a sales pitch or paid attention to an ad. I had to see proof, and his book was it. It caused me to come to him.

The point is, a book is not something magical that will make you rich, famous, and important. But it can help you accomplish a lot of other goals, if you use it correctly.

This means writing a book that has knowledge that is valuable to a specific set of readers, and delivering it in a way that serves them.

In fact, if you do that, you can get a lot of benefits, and maybe even make some money and be well known—at least in your niche.

### **WHY DO UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS HURT YOUR BOOK?**

You might be wondering right now, “Well, what's wrong with dreaming about hitting it big? Some books sell millions of copies and become bestsellers. Why not hope for the best?”

There is nothing wrong with wanting your book to do well. The problem with turning an unrealistic expectation into a goal is that

it impacts your decision-making about what book to write, and it usually gets you a worse book.

For example, if you decide you want to write your book to sell millions of copies, you will try to make it as wide and accessible a topic as possible. But that trades off with reaching a niche audience, which is the key to getting authority and credibility.

Or if you want to write a book to be famous, you'll worry about how the book makes you look, instead of focusing on your audience, which is what makes a good book and gets you visibility.

Getting the most out of a book is very much like the Zen koan about the target and the prize:

Focus on the target, and you'll hit it. This gets you the trophy. Focus on the trophy, you'll miss the target. This gets you nothing.

Books work the same way. If you focus on your audience and what they need, you will write a great book, and that will get you all kinds of great results. But if you have unrealistic expectations, then you'll focus on those and get nothing.





## HOW WRITING A BOOK CAN BUILD YOUR BRAND

If you're trying to build your personal or professional brand—what's the best way to do that? Basically, how can you stand out?

There are a lot of ways to do that, but one of the very best is pretty old-school: write a book.

How does writing a good book help build your brand and elevate your career? There are six different ways a book can help you:

1. **Increase Visibility and Raise Profile:** Books can increase visibility in any number of ways, like making it easier to gain media exposure or raise your profile in your niche.
2. **Establish Authority and Credibility:** Books help you establish authority and gain credibility within your field.
3. **Get New Clients and Opportunities:** Books can easily help generate new business and other opportunities across a variety of platforms and venues in multiple ways.
4. **Speaking Invitations:** A book is almost a necessity for becoming a paid speaker, or often, for getting booked for any public speaking at all.

5. **Legacy:** A book can cement your legacy and pass your knowledge and story on to others.
6. **Create Impact:** Probably the very best long-term way to build your brand is to actually impact others, and there is no better way to scale your impact than to write a great book that really helps other people.

Let's break down each of these and see exactly how they work.

## 1. A BOOK INCREASES YOUR VISIBILITY AND RAISES YOUR PROFILE

Whenever any media want to comment on something, who do they go to? The expert, right?

And how do they know someone is an expert?

*The experts are the people who wrote the book on the subject.*

A book is the #1 signal of expertise. Media want to talk to experts, and they judge expertise by who wrote the book on the subject.

Could you use more visibility in your field and media coverage? Write a book that establishes you as an expert, and media coverage will be 10x easier to get.

This is EXACTLY how Jonathan Siegel's book got him so much coverage. He wrote a good book that detailed a lot of the fallacies of conventional wisdom in tech startups, and dozens of media outlets like *Inc.*, Business Insider, and others wanted to cover him. He was already an expert in his field—he just needed a book to get him coverage.

The same thing with Stephan Aarstol. He wrote a book about the innovative culture at his company that allowed them to work 5-hour days, and the media could not get enough of him and his book. Now he's all over the media, with articles in *Inc.*, *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur*,



*Fast Company*, CNN, CNBC, FOX News, and others. Everyone in his world knows who he is.

I know you know this. How many times have you seen someone in your field get a lot of attention simply because they wrote a book?

Even if you know more than they do, they got the attention that you didn't, *because of their book*.

## 2. A BOOK ESTABLISHES YOUR AUTHORITY AND CREDIBILITY

A book shows you can commit to something and follow through. It shows you get things done.

And most importantly, it shows the world what you know. A book sets you up to be judged by your actual knowledge and work. It's really easy to skirt by and still get a college degree. It's really hard to manipulate your way into a good book.

Yes, being judged is risky, but that's why a book is a valid credential: it is a risk.

By writing a book, you are in a place that most people are unwilling to go—being judged—and it usually requires a lot of work to get there. It requires you to prove you actually know something.

This is exactly what Bob Glazer did with his book. He wrote about a hard subject that has a lot of baggage (affiliate marketing) but wrote in a very open and vulnerable way, and shared his knowledge about his industry. He got tons of credibility and authority from both the media and clients because of how good his book was, how much of his “secrets” he shared, and how honest it was.

Same with John Ruhlin. He is a gifting expert and shared all of his best secrets in his book. As a result, the book not only took off,

but John now does 20+ keynote speeches a year and has seen his company double in size.

Most people are not willing to take that risk. They're afraid of sharing their knowledge or showing the world what they know.

This is why we are very upfront with our authors: you can't just vomit out nonsense, call it a book, and reap the benefits.

***To get credibility and authority from a book, you have to share valuable knowledge and ideas with your readers.***

If you can do that, you will rocket past all your contemporaries who do not have a book, even if they are just as smart and accomplished as you are.

### **3. A BOOK GETS YOU NEW CLIENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

When people look for a credible expert or authority, what's the first thing they think about? Same as the media—***everyone wants the person who literally “wrote the book” on the topic.***

Having a great book lets people know exactly who you are and how you can help them, and it brings them right to you. It's the best marketing tool you could ever use—not just to build your brand, but to actually attract clients.

Search creates inbound opportunities, but books also facilitate the best marketing there is: word of mouth.

When someone you trust tells you to use something, you listen and you use it. Anything that helps other people talk about you and your business is the best marketing tool possible.

***A book enables word of mouth better than almost any other marketing.***

This is because a book lets you put your story into people's mouths, so when they talk about you, they're literally just saying what you want them to say. If you have a good book, people repeat your terms, phrases, and ideas to other people.

If you can write a book that is valuable to a group of people, they will want to talk about your book at a cocktail party to someone else who shares that problem.

Why? Because it makes them look better. That's how word of mouth works.

There are so many great examples of this. Melissa Gonzalez's book created a topline sales gain of 33 percent, year over year, and Melissa estimates that 75 percent of her clients know about her book before they hire her, and over 30 percent have read it.

Because of this, Melissa has reversed her sales process. Now clients come in wanting to pitch Melissa on working with them.

Author Douglas Brackmann has had a similar experience:

Since publishing, my world has become a lot bigger really quickly. I'm reaching people who I didn't think I could reach, and that's allowed me to be much more selective about who I work with. Lately, I've actually slowed down on the speaking and media because I can't handle all the business—I don't know what to do with all the phone calls.

Same with financial planner Mark Baird, who explains the book-to-word-of-mouth referral chain very well:

You speak, you talk about the book, you sell a few copies, and they refer you to more people. It's a referral chain, and it's been very gratifying. I don't think it would have happened without the book.

#### **4. A BOOK HELPS YOU GET ON STAGES**

If you want to do any sort of public speaking, especially paid speaking, a book is a near necessity.

This is because a book is a basic credential for a speaker. A book is the way people know for sure you are qualified to speak to their group on your topic. And then once you get on stage, your brand changes.

This is what happened to Robin Farmanfarmaian. After writing her book on disruption in the medical space, she was booked to speak at over 50 conferences, including Singularity and TEDx. Not only that, but all of that speaking exploded her brand, and got her a new position at a medical startup:

The very first company, Invicta Medical, I jumped offstage and walked right into the founder. He's seen me speak and we got to talking, and I was an advisor within the first couple meetings, and a vice president within a couple of months.

For Lorenzo Gomez, his book had a profound impact on him, mainly through his speaking. His book details the struggles he went through going from a high school graduate to major tech CEO, and he was asked to speak to all kinds of audiences, including keynoting the commencement of the University of Texas-San Antonio:

If I had known someone would ask me to give a commencement speech, I would have never written a book in the first place. I was terrified, and I'm still terrified just thinking about it, but it was one of the most gratifying moments of my life.

#### **5. A BOOK HELPS CEMENT YOUR LEGACY**

All of these previous examples have something in common: by sharing the knowledge and experience of the author, they result in people seeing the author differently.

This is quite literally the definition of legacy.

Legacy is what you leave behind. It can be good, bad, or indifferent. And there is no better way for you to really cement what your legacy is—at least in business—than by writing a book.

This is what happened for Kirk Drake. Kirk is the foremost marketing and business consultant for credit unions, and his book got him all the benefits stated above. But it also did one more thing: it cemented his place in his industry.

This picture was snapped at the biggest credit union function of the year, when someone asked Kirk to sign their book and take a picture with them.



Of course, Kirk does not have the type of fame or celebrity that would get him in *People* or TMZ, but he has something that is more important to him: a legacy in the field that he dedicated his life to and wants to make better.

(BTW—this is precisely why a niche book is better than a broad book: it helps you focus. There are many “marketing experts” but no “credit union marketing experts,” so Kirk was able to differentiate and brand himself quickly by dominating that single niche.)

The same is true for Shannon Miles. She co-founded the virtual assistant company Belay Solutions with her husband because she wanted to create another option for mothers and other types of women who wanted to have careers and work but wanted the flexibility to stay at home.

Her book, *The Third Option*, laid out her vision and helped define this role and space for women who want to take this “third option.” Her legacy as a woman who has helped women work the way they want is now secure.

## 6. A BOOK CREATES A REAL IMPACT ON PEOPLE

Even though I put this last, for many authors, this is the most important thing: *how does their book actually impact the reader and change their life?*

Look at some reviews from the books I’ve mentioned. From *Driven*, by Douglas Brackmann:



Justin

☆☆☆☆☆ I highly recommend this book for anyone that has a desire to find more peace while fulfilling their potential!!!

September 12, 2017

Format: Paperback | Verified Purchase

I've worked with Doug Brackmann personally...I showed up at his doorstep broken, living in fear, estranged in most of my relationships, with self destructing habits and unsatisfied with who I was and what my place was in the world. He may recall me "convulsing" in his chair as I felt weak and alone. The tools that DB gave me, all of which you will find in his book, allowed me to find inner peace and happiness and realize my true potential...I could recognize my soul again, lift myself up and design the life I had always dreamed of. DB helped me understand how my mind worked and helped me harness the Driven characteristics I had so that in less than 1 year I could build a 7 figure business with no outside help, find the girl of my dreams, and pursue a life of mastery in many different areas. I highly recommend this book for anyone that has a desire to find more peace while fulfilling their potential.

## From *The Third Option*, by Shannon Miles:



Tandy S. Hogate

★★★★★ **If you work from home or are considering it (or if you would really like to) please do yourself a favor and read this ...**

April 27, 2018

Format: Kindle Edition

This book seriously rocked my world. As a long-time VA, I made the decision to work from home years ago. But I lacked the confidence and wisdom to be wise with my skills and my time.

Shannon spoke to my heart on several occasions in the book by building up and encouraging me as the reader to be confident in my value as a VA. If you work from home or are considering it (or if you would really like to) please do yourself a favor and read this book.

On my bookshelf of hundreds of books, this one is one of my favorites.

## From *The Cilantro Diaries*, by Lorenzo Gomez:



Amazon Customer

★★★★★ **Wonderful Book!**

October 29, 2017

Format: Kindle Edition | Verified Purchase

I wish I had this book when I was younger! Most business development books begin with, 'After I graduated from Harvard.' This is the book for the rest of us. This book has actual useful advice that you can put into practice immediately. If I had this book earlier in life there is more than one situation that I would have handled better.

## From *The Five-Hour Workday*, by Stephan Aarstol:



Wade Galt

★★★★★ **Start Living More and Working Less NOW**

August 3, 2017

Format: Kindle Edition | Verified Purchase

Already taken my daily work hours from 8 1/2 to 5 1/2 hours in 1 month... All while hosting summer play dates for my kids and their friends. Have been working a 4-day work week for a few years, but still more hours than I like. Thank you, Stephan, for reminding me how possible this is. This is why I became an entrepreneur.

## From *The San Francisco Fallacy*, by Jonathan Siegel:



Charles Johnson

★★★★★ **Learn these fallacies and avoid them or suffer the consequences**

February 21, 2018

Format: Kindle Edition | Verified Purchase

This book blew me away – I've lived and worked in San Francisco's startup culture and the fallacies Jonathan warns us about are all too common in living in the tech world of SF.

The author's personal story is inspiring and may just give you the kick in the pants needed to keep going in your own life struggles, but its the fallacies and the solutions he offers to address (or prevent) them that make this book so valuable.

I personally know people who have failed business ventures that potentially would still be alive and thriving today had they read this book.

There are literally thousands of these. Reviews from real readers who were deeply impacted by books.

Remember: *the very best books are win-win.*

When the author really works hard, puts their best knowledge and stories in their book, and commits to delivering real value to the reader, then both the reader and the author come out better off.

#### HOW A BOOK BUILDS YOUR BRAND

It all sums up to this:

*A book is a multipurpose marketing tool with unique and special abilities to create attention for you, that you can use to build your brand and career in multiple ways.*





# HOW TO MAKE MONEY WITH YOUR BOOK

One of the most common questions I get from potential authors who are about to write a book is something along the lines of:

“How do I use my book to make money? How can I make sure I get an ROI on my time and money?”

It’s a reasonable question.

The bad news is you will probably not make (substantial) money by selling copies of your book.

The good news: there are so many other ways you can make money with a book—and usually a lot more money than you’d make by focusing on selling copies.

I’ll run through the most common ways, with examples for each.

## **1. CONSULTING SERVICES**

At Scribe, our largest client base is consultants. Once they reach a certain level of success, they can’t really go much higher without a

book. A book is what establishes a consultant as authoritative and raises their visibility about the competition.

Ashley Welch and Justin Jones were in this predicament. They had taken their sales consulting firm, Somersault Innovations, to a high level, but they were not standing out until they wrote their book. This got them a speaking slot at Dreamforce, where they signed AT&T as a client.

Kirk Drake owned a successful consulting firm that helped credit unions learn to market and sell better. He was doing fine, but it wasn't until his book came out that he was able to command high six-figure fees and sign the biggest credit unions in the industry.

Joe Mechlinkski used his two bestselling books, *Grow Regardless* and *Shift the Work*, to sign major Fortune 500 clients and be named the EY Entrepreneur of the Year.

For a consultant, a book is the best marketing you can do.

## 2. PAID SPEAKING

One of the major ways to make money from a book is through speaking engagements.

It's challenging to become a professional paid speaker without a book. People have started speaking careers without books of course, but almost all professional speakers eventually write a book; and when they do, the fee they can command usually triples.

John Ruhlin is a terrific example. He was a successful corporate gifting expert but was only able to charge about \$5K for an engagement. He published *Giftology*, and now regularly books keynotes for \$30K or more.

This is because a book is a credential for a speaker. It's a basic

necessity. A book is the way people know for sure you are qualified to speak to their group on your topic.

Kevin Kruse is another great example. His blog “An Authorpreneur’s First \$100K” details how he made money in his first year as an author. While he did \$70K in book sales, he made \$170K in speaking fees.

### **3. PROFESSIONAL SERVICE (MEDICAL, FINANCIAL, ETC.)**

One of the best ways to use a book is to establish your authority in your field of service and then use that authority to generate new clients.

The fact is, most people have no idea how to pick a doctor or a financial advisor or any other related professional service practice. They don’t know anything about the skills necessary, what to look for, what to avoid, or how to think about the service. A book is a great way to establish your authority and show people what it would be like to work with you. Beyond that, it does a great job educating your clients on what they should expect, making your job easier.

Dr. Michael Lewis has a specialized practice centered around traumatic brain injury. His book, *When Brains Collide*, is a great introduction to traumatic brain injury and how to treat it, so much so that his practice has grown over 30 percent in size since the book came out.

Sam Marrella saw something very similar happen to his financial planning firm. After writing his book, he got a barrage of local media and speaking requests, and saw his assets under management double. This is fairly common for financial planners, as there is always a need for good financial advice and services.

#### 4. COACHING SERVICES

If you are a coach of any sort, chances are that people have problems differentiating between you and any other coach—what makes you the expert and why they should work with you.

A book is a great way both to display your expertise and explain what your work with them would be like.

A great example of this is Ben Bergeron. He is one of the best CrossFit coaches in the country, but was somewhat under the radar. So he wrote a book about coaching the top CrossFitters in the game, and now he has too many opportunities to keep track of.

This is not just true for athletic coaches. Take Cameron Herold for example. He's one of the most renowned CEO coaches in the world, and has clients like the CEO of Sprint—and got there by putting everything he knew about scaling and running companies into four different books.

#### 5. CLIENTS FOR YOUR AGENCY

Every agency owner knows what a pain client acquisition can be. A book doesn't magically solve this problem, but it does make it much easier to both find and close new clients.

Deb Gabor had this problem with her branding agency and used a book to not only solve that problem, but to catapult her agency to the next level. She now works with companies like Dell, NBC, and Microsoft, and she credits her book as the reason her agency stood out from other agencies.

Melissa Gonzalez did the same thing for her design and pop-up retail agency. She put most of what she knew about pop-up retail in her book, and it doubled her business in two years. Plus, it was the reason she got hired by many major retailers: Macy's, Chanel, and Marc Jacobs have all worked with Melissa since her book came out.

## **6. SELL A PHYSICAL PRODUCT**

Go search Amazon under books for “lose weight” or “eat paleo.” You’ll see thousands of books, and a lot of them are essentially buyer’s guides for physical products like supplements, food companies, or one-off products.

Mark Sisson is one of the best in this space. He started Primal Blueprint and has published nearly a dozen books about his version of the paleo diet. They’re great books. He sells them on Amazon, and even gives many of them away on his site.

Not only do they help people eat right, but Mark also has a complete line of Primal Blueprint supplements and food that people can buy. They don’t have to buy these products, but they’re there and easy to purchase, and the books and products dovetail perfectly.

Think about it—would you respond to an ad about supplements? Probably not.

What about a book that teaches you what supplements to take, when, and why? If you trust the book, you’ll trust the supplement recommendations.

Mark has great books on eating that you can trust, which automatically gives his supplement recommendations more credibility.

## **7. PAID COMMUNITY/MASTERMIND GROUPS**

There are many people who have paid mastermind groups. Many of their clients want to join because they’ve written books that show everyone how much they know and what they can gain from joining their group.

James Maskell runs the Evolution of Medicine Summit and mastermind group where tens of thousands of health professionals meet

and discuss topics. His book *The Evolution of Medicine* has been a great way for him to find and recruit new members.

Ari Meisel runs the Less Doing mastermind group. Many of his clients find out about him and his group through his books.

## 8. FREELANCE CLIENTS

If you're a freelancer, writing a book is a no-brainer. In fact, the problem is that as soon as you do a book, you get so slammed with work you can't handle it all.

This is exactly what happened to David Kadavy. He wrote a book called *Design for Hackers*. He wrote it for a very niche audience, and it ended up crushing him. He was flooded with design work. He had to create an agency and hand everything off by hiring someone to run it for him (and he created a course which does very well, too).

If you're a great freelancer, if you have a specific skill that you sell, writing a book that explains how you do it creates an almost uninterrupted supply of clients.

Think about it—if I'm looking for a freelancer, I have no idea how to pick one over the other, no idea what I'm supposed to look for or how to decide.

Why not pick the one who wrote the book?

## 9. WORKSHOPS AND GROUP TEACHING

In addition to speaking, many consultants and speakers also do “group workshops.” A business brings them in to teach their method to employees and train them over a day or a series of days. It's quite easy to get relatively larger businesses to pay you to teach their employees what you know in a one-day workshop.

Most employers know, if they pass out a book, their employees aren't going to read it. However, if they get the author to come in, give a presentation, and answer questions for a day, they can teach the stuff.

Mona Patel wrote the book *Reframe* and now holds workshops based on applying the principles in her book. They routinely sell out, and both the book and the workshops reinforce each other. The book leads people to the workshop, and she sells copies of her book to people who come to the workshop.

## 10. RAISE MONEY FROM INVESTORS

It's hard to raise money for projects from investors. They are trusting you with their assets, so they want to know you and understand who you are and what you believe. Once they do, they're much more likely to want to give you their hard-earned cash.

For Jorge Newbery, this was a revelation. He was a successful real estate investor who'd fallen on hard times, then worked his way back to success, but he couldn't get investors to understand this. So he wrote a book about his journey, *Burn Zones*.

It was so successful that Jorge now has the problem of raising TOO MUCH money. That's a problem all entrepreneurs wish they had.

## 11. RECRUIT PEOPLE TO WORK FOR YOUR COMPANY

This only applies to business owners and high-level executives, but for them, there is almost no better way to get great people to work with you than by laying your vision for your company out in a book.

Stephan Aarstol used his book, *The Five-Hour Workday* to lay out his vision of a different way for a company to work. His vision struck a chord, and as a result, he was flooded with both attention for his company and product sales. But most importantly, he received a

deluge of applications. Thousands of people rushed to apply to work with him.

Another great example of this is Jeff Kavanaugh's book, *Consulting Essentials*. Jeff is a partner at Infosys, a large consulting firm, and an adjunct professor at the University of Texas, Dallas. He wrote this book to help his students understand what consultants did and how to do it, and it's had the unintended consequence of attracting hundreds of very qualified applicants to his firm.

## **12. PROMOTE "DONE FOR YOU" SERVICES**

Bob Glazer has an amazing company that helps big brands use affiliate marketing—but this is really hard to message. So he put his ideas into a book. And in less than a year, he signed up dozens of major brands and grew his company to over 100 employees.

The same thing happened with Phillip Stutts. He runs a marketing agency that helps politicians use digital marketing. He realized that his tactics work extremely well for businesses, so he wrote a book about how most marketing companies don't serve their clients, and how a company can audit them to get better results. What happened? The corporate side of his business more than doubled in a year.

## **13. SELL A VIDEO COURSE/INFORMATION PRODUCT**

If your book teaches something for which there is a high ROI for the reader, you can create what amounts to an advanced version that is delivered as a video course, charge much more money for it, then use the book to push people to that course.

One of the main benefits is that while people will not pay more than about \$25 for a book, they will often pay \$500 or more for a video course of the EXACT SAME material.



This is rational, because many people learn more easily from video and audio materials than they do from books.

Josh Turner wrote a book called *Connect*, which hit the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller list. His book is about how to use LinkedIn to drive sales in your company, and the book, along with being very good, ends up driving many people to his advanced video course.

Jason Fladlien did the same thing. He has the very best video courses and online training in the world about webinars, and he used his book as a “top of funnel” lead gen to sell millions of dollars of his courses.

#### **14. SELL A SOFTWARE/SAAS PRODUCT**

A book is a great way for a company to sell software, especially SaaS software.

The best example is HubSpot, the company that invented inbound marketing. What did they do to promote it? Among other things, they wrote a book called *Inbound Marketing*.

The book minimally pitches HubSpot and is instead a massive advertisement for their method of marketing (inbound marketing), and guess what?

Using their software is the easiest way to actually do inbound marketing. Not only does the book provide real value to the reader, it ends up converting a lot of readers to customers.

Another example is Mark Organ. His company, Influitive, helps companies and brands harness the power of their fans to create new “advocate marketing” channels. The software they have created to facilitate this is very powerful, but it often takes a mental leap for people to understand how “advocate marketing” really works.

Mark wrote his book, *The Messenger is The Message* to explain this, and he has seen incredible growth since its release.

## 15. CHANGE CAREERS

Even if you have no business of your own or entrepreneurial aspirations, a book can help you substantially advance your career, either within your current company or by helping you switch careers entirely.

Simon Dudley did this with his book, *The End of Certainty*.

He was a big influencer in the video teleconferencing space, but because of various technological changes, he didn't believe in the field anymore. He thought they were going to be disrupted and didn't think companies there would change.

He wanted to move out of video teleconferencing, so he wrote a book about his theories on technological change and how to adapt to it, never mentioning teleconferencing. That way he could go to other businesses and pitch them, saying, "Listen, I know exactly how you're being disrupted. I can help you."

He created a firm called Excession Events, and now he's successful as a consultant on technological change. He essentially created a new career.

Here's the supreme irony: no one in the teleconferencing business listened to him before he wrote the book. Since he wrote it—and though he never mentioned teleconferencing in the book, the parallels were obvious—half of his consulting business is made up of the firms in the teleconferencing business that wouldn't hire him before.

Jeb White is doing the same thing. He was a very successful lawyer, but it no longer served him, and he wanted a new profession. So

he wrote a book about something he did in his spare time: helping poor and underprivileged kids get into top schools.

That book has led to now earning six figures a year as a college consultant and enabled him to quit his job as a lawyer.

## **16. GET INVESTING OPPORTUNITIES AND BE ASKED TO JOIN BOARDS**

Consider Cliff Lerner's book, *Explosive Growth*. Cliff was one of the original growth hackers, having turned his tiny dating company into the fastest growing public company a decade ago.

He wanted to coach startups, but it wasn't until his book released that people understood what a genius he was and how much he could help them.

So he wrote a book explaining how to do what he did. Next thing he knew, he was being asked to join the boards of companies and to angel invest in hot startups: exactly what he was interested in.

Nearly the same thing happened with Jonathan Siegel. He had started and sold almost a dozen software companies and was looking to get into investing. So he wrote a book about all the mistakes and bad information out there, designed to help new founders.

Now, he has his pick of investments and companies to help.

## **17. PROMOTE A FACILITY OR CONFERENCE**

The founders of the Kentucky Entrepreneur Hall of Fame wanted to get more attention for their cause, so they wrote *Unbridled Spirit*, a book about all the famous Kentuckians who started great companies.

It took off, and they doubled contributions and increased media attention nearly 10x, just as a result of the book.

Books are an underexploited marketing avenue for conferences. We helped a conference called the LDV Summit, which is about vision technology and pairs venture capitalists in that space with the inventors and thought leaders, to write a book about their conference.

Then, the conference host does two things:

1. The conference owner (Evan Nisselsen) sends copies of the book to LPs or potential entrepreneurs, and he gets all the benefits of writing a book without having to be the one who actually writes it.
2. He includes a copy of the book when he mails out the physical applications for each year's conference. It has tripled his re-up rate.

By spending \$5 to mail a nice book to past participants, he gets them to spend \$500+ on a conference that is more than six months away. Pretty good deal.

TED does this as well. They even have their own publishing imprint.

## **18. ATTRACT HIGH-NET-WORTH CLIENTS**

If you are in the business of selling to high-net-worth people, you know how hard they can be to attract and sell to. Having a great book makes that job much easier.

An example is Alex Andrawes, a high-end wine broker who helps people invest in fine wines. He was successful before writing a book, but after he published his book on investing in fine wines, he doubled his inbound leads and tripled his highest net worth clients—in only a year.

Nik Tarascio owns an airplane brokerage business. There are very few people who can afford to buy an airplane, and he used his book to help him both attract and close numerous buyers.

## 19. TAXES AND WRITE-OFFS

This is a counterintuitive way to make money on your book that far too few business owners use—and you can use in addition to any of the above strategies.

If you are using your book as a legitimate marketing tool to promote a business, the out-of-pocket costs of production are 100 percent deductible. That means everything you spend money on that is part of creating the book can be deducted, like:

- book cover design
- layout design
- all printing costs
- editing and proofreading
- Any professional services you use to help create it
- etc., etc., etc.

It's all 100 percent deductible as business marketing expenses. Just like you can deduct what you spend on Facebook ads and website designers, a book falls into the same category.

Note: I am talking about tax laws in America. Though this is what my CPA and many other tax lawyers have told me, you should never take legal advice from someone who does not know the laws of your specific jurisdiction. Not only that, I live in Texas—it's legal to shoot wild hogs with machine guns from helicopters here. We're different.

## 20. BOOK SALES

I said earlier that book sales are not the best way to make money. I never said you can't make ANY money from them.

Once you have a book that appeals to a specific crowd, there are lots of ways to help spur book sales:

1. Facebook ads can often convert into book sales.

2. With bundled promotions, you can give free things away to incentivize people to buy books.
3. You can sell live at events (where you are a speaker, for instance).
4. Guest posts that feature key lessons from the book can also draw book interest.

I'm not going to spend much time talking about how to directly implement these things because, quite honestly, it's not worth the time for most authors.

If you positioned your book properly, you don't need to worry about selling copies—you only need to worry about how the book converts to what really matters to you.

But hey—if people buy it, you have a marketing tool that makes you money. That is pretty great.



## WHAT'S THE (INTANGIBLE) IMPACT OF A BOOK?

When we ask authors why they want to write a book, most of them focus on their branding or business goals. Those are legitimate goals, and books help greatly with both.

But those aren't the only goals.

Many authors also want to achieve intangible goals, things like “helping people” and “personal growth.”

They often mention them as an aside, almost as if they're embarrassed about having these sorts of goals. As if it's not appropriate for a businessperson to have emotions.

But when we talk to our authors after their books are out, they're almost all impacted the most by these “intangible” benefits of their book.

The things they apologized for wanting at the beginning are what makes them happiest after it's published.

I love these stories.

Even though the business and branding aspects of books drive the economic return on investment and are thus important, I honestly think that the “intangible impacts” are what actually matter most to authors in the long run.

Why do I say that?

***Because books help people make their lives better in ways far beyond what’s measured just by money.***

That’s why I wrote this piece: to help authors understand what the intangible benefits of a book can be, and to understand that it’s not only acceptable to want them—they’re often the point of writing a book.

## **PERSONAL GROWTH**

A book helps you grow as a person in many ways, though these are not always easy to understand ahead of time:

**1. Identity Change and Level Up:** Before you write a book, you’re just a regular person like anyone else.

But after you write and publish your book, you have a new identity: you’re an author.

That’s a big deal. Being an author means you’re someone who has valuable ideas that can help people, and it means you took the time to sit down and write them out and get them published, and it means you shared them with the world. It means you’ve stepped into the arena. You’ve made your ideas real, in a format that allows others to assess, analyze, and debate them—and that opens YOU up to the next level of learning and expansion. In essence, it can be confirmation that the work you do matters to other people.

This shift in identity moves you up a level in life. You are now in a



different league, and you have a new peer group. Publishing a book means you're scaling your ideas: you're bringing them to a bigger audience than you could by yourself, and this invites new dialogue and connection with people who are grappling with the same ideas.

Joey Coleman was a great example of this. Becoming a *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author gave him a career boost and level up that has transformed his life and business.

**2. Confidence and Pride of Accomplishment:** Writing a book is hard; as a result, most people don't do it. Accomplishing this requires courage, and when done, provides an immense amount of confidence and pride.

It means you overcame an obstacle in your life. No matter how easy writing a book is for you, it's still difficult, and doing it means you did something hard and worthwhile. To write a book, you have to believe your ideas are valid and worthy of sharing, and anything that stands in the way of your sense of self-worth and wisdom will become a challenge to tackle on the way to completing and publishing your book.

Finishing your book allows you to mark this off your bucket list. It's an accomplishment that is valuable and can never be taken away from you.

Writing your book means you will have done something in your life that matters—not just to you, but to other people. You will have made the world better, and you can be proud of that.

**3. Self-Improvement and Skill Development:** Writing a book will, by its very nature, force you to get better at many things. You'll become a better writer, a better editor, and a better storyteller.

You'll also understand your ideas better. Many people who understand how to do what they do don't always know how to explain it

to other people. Writing a book forces you to be articulate—not only about what you do, but about how you communicate it to people effectively.

**4. Therapeutic Effect:** A book can also help you grow in a therapeutic way. Books often force authors to confront difficult emotional issues while writing.

Writing a book can bring up complex emotions or things you haven't thought about for years. It can also force you to confront your fears. Fear of failure, fear of success, fear of being judged, etc. For many of our authors, this is life changing.

Mary Hagerman went through this exact transformation with her book, and it helped her get over many of her fears.

**5. Creative Accomplishment:** A book, by its very definition, is a creative accomplishment. Writing a book will not only help improve your creativity, but it's also a signal of creativity and an expression of self.

If you want to be more creative and express yourself more authentically, a book is one of the best ways to do that.

Janet Newman's book got her all of these things, and more. She now sees herself in a new way, has unlocked her creativity, and has helped her readers improve their health and their lives.

## HELP PEOPLE

Many authors mention this, saying something like, "I just want my book to help people."

The only problem is that, when pressed, they often haven't thought about how their book will help. It's not that it can't, they just don't know specifically how.

Here are some common ways books can serve readers:

1. **Solve a Problem/Get Something They Want:** This is usually the big one, and can vary across a wide range of benefits, but the point is that every reader is buying your book because they anticipate it's going to get them something *they want*—so what is that thing your book will help them get?
2. **Gain Knowledge/Wisdom/Information:** Sometimes the reader wants to learn something from the book. Sometimes this is tied with solving a problem, but not always. Often, a reader will want to learn for many different reasons.
3. **Inspire/Motivate/Empower:** This is about how the readers will feel coming out of the book. You want to help them change their mindset or their emotional state.
4. **New Perspective:** This is not as common as the above, but still frequent. Many readers are looking for an entirely new way to see something.

These four are not mutually exclusive, and some books can do all of them. In fact, if you really want to help people with your book, all four of these are just different ways to answer one core question:

*What transformation will the reader get from your book?*

This is how authors and books help people—they give them the information, skills, motivation, or perspective to change something in their life for the better.

One of my favorite examples of this is Jeb White's book. Even though it added six figures in direct sales to his business, what he's most excited about is how disadvantaged kids used it to get into the colleges of their dreams.

Another great example is Robin Farmanfarmanian. She struggled with her health for years, and her book was instrumental in helping patients in the medical field take control of their health.

## SCALE YOUR IMPACT

Making a new impact on people is one of the primary drivers, but connected to that is scaling the impact you're already having.

What does it mean to scale your impact?

It's pretty much the same as scaling a company, e.g., making it bigger. Think about your life now: you may be helping a lot of people, but chances are you know all those people, or they're in some way connected to you or your direct community.

What would happen if you could help people you don't even know? Or people you'll never meet?

That's the power of a book. Books can exponentially leverage your reach and impact on people, because it allows them to find you and get help from you without you having to spend any time with them.

A great example is Nic Kusmich. Nic owns one of the best Facebook ad agencies in the world. He's directly helped hundreds of businesses grow and scale. But his services and seminars are expensive. One of the reasons he wrote a book was to help people who couldn't afford him. And one day, that paid off when a 17-year-old waiter used his book to start his own business.

Shannon Miles did something similar. Her book has had a huge impact on her brand and business, but she's most excited about how someone who never worked with her personally used her book to have the courage to try remote work, which enabled her to work from home and be with her kids.

Both of them are helping people they've never met, in places they've never gone. That is what a book can help you do at scale.

## IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS

Books are great ways to improve all sorts of different kinds of relationships.

**1. Make Business Relationships Easier:** Books make business relationships much easier on several different levels. First off, books establish you as an authority and a credentialed expert. This means when someone meets you, the relationship begins with you at a high level in their eyes. You don't have to prove yourself or spend a lot of time explaining or selling yourself.

Second, books attract people to you. Once you write a book, you've put out to the world what you do and who you can help—those people will often use your book as the path to come find you.

A great example of this is how Jesse Cole's book helped him exponentially increase the number and quality of his business relationships, in ways he could never have imagined ahead of time.

**2. Improve Team/Company Relationships:** A book can help you unify your current team and attract new people into your company or organization. It does this by establishing what you believe in, what purpose and mission your company serves, and why it matters to the world. The best way to find like-minded people is to talk about what you're doing and why, and ask them to come join you.

Mark Organ's book is a great example of this. His book literally spells out the beliefs of his company and employees, and they use it to attract all kinds of top talent.

**3. Improve Family Relationships:** Books can connect families. This one often takes authors by surprise, but it's an impact they value very highly.

The big way this happens is that a book provides clarity to the

people in your life; they finally understand what you do and why it's important.

For many of our authors, their kids and family don't actually understand what they do. It's not their fault, we just live in a world where most knowledge workers have very complicated, difficult jobs that are hard to understand from the outside. A book connects what you do with their reality; it shows them the impact that you have in the world and why your work matters.

Sam Marella's book is a great example of this. He made a lot of money from his book, but he cares the most about how it helped his daughter see him differently.

An even more amazing example of this is Doug Brackmann's book. Even though it created a 4x increase in his revenue, he is most proud of how it literally helped save lives and reconnected him with his father.

## **LEAVE A LEGACY**

How do you leave a legacy?

By doing things that make other people's lives better.

There are many ways to make other people's lives better—and a book is one of the best ways to do it.

This is because—as we've discussed many times already—a book is written to help other people. If you write it with your audience in mind, and you understand the transformation they seek, then it's inevitable that your book will help people.

Yes, you can help lots of people in your regular life, but a book scales your impact and helps you reach more people in a more profound way.

Think about it: *if you can help hundreds of people in your business, you can help thousands through your book.*

It's also a way to ensure that your mission and your legacy survive long after you are gone. If you're only helping people in your immediate sphere of influence, there's nothing wrong with that, but that help stops when you die. A legacy left in a book can carry on after you are gone, for generations.

For example, we're all influenced by the legacy of Socrates or Thomas Aquinas or Malcolm X, all because they put their knowledge into a book.

A lot of people do important work, but not a lot of people write books about it. Writing a book means that other people will look up to you and respect you and admire you. You will have made the world better, and you can be proud of that—and that is a legacy.

Lorenzo Gomez's book is a great example of this. Of course it's created all kinds of business success for him, but he is most excited about how it led to him tutoring inner-city Hispanic kids, who came from the same poor neighborhoods that he did. He knows his legacy will spread far beyond himself.

Myra Evans-Manyweather is also leaving a legacy of helping women to start their own businesses.

#### **WHEN THE INTANGIBLE BECOMES TANGIBLE**

As you can see, there are many intangible impacts of a book—on yourself, your reader, your family, and your community.

But did you notice a pattern in the author case studies? Most of the intangible goals that the authors achieved ended up leading to some very real and very tangible impacts.

Right above, I showed you the example of Lorenzo Gomez. “Helping people” may have been an abstract idea for Lorenzo at the outset, but tutoring inner-city Hispanic kids certainly isn’t intangible. Nor is attracting new talent to their company for Mark Organ, nor for Sam Marella connecting with his daughter.

A reason that these “intangible” goals are important and should be embraced is that they often result in very real, tangible outcomes.

No, not all of them can be measured on a balance sheet or in a bank account, but that’s not the only thing that matters.

What also matters is the real impact on real people your book can have.

It is possible. You’ve seen a dozen or more examples in this chapter, and those authors started in a place no different than where you are now.





## HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU “GIVE AWAY” IN YOUR BOOK? THE QUESTION OF ADVERTORIAL VS. EDITORIAL CONTENT

Do you like it when people blatantly try to sell you something? Especially when that’s not what you want to hear about?

Of course not. *Everyone hates that.*

Yet, when it’s time to write their book, so many authors will forget this universal truth and instead use their book to pitch their product or service.

This is obnoxious, annoying, and worst of all—it’s ineffective.

No matter what your book is asking readers to do next—*especially* if you’d like them to buy your products or services—it’s critical that the content of your book not only *doesn’t* sell, it educates and informs instead.

In book writing terms, this is called “editorial” rather than “adver-torial” information.

Editorial content provides readers with information about a topic or explains something to them. It educates readers and provides them with value. Editorial content, at its core, is about *providing value to the reader*.

It is through editorial information that you share your expertise with readers and give your valuable information to them. You have given readers information they can put to use, which will earn their trust, and in turn actually drive more sales to you than overt selling. It will do this by making you memorable and trustworthy.

Contrast this to advertorial content, which is an overt sales pitch. Rather than providing readers with the information they bought your book to acquire, you are telling them to buy. It’s the worst way to accomplish your goal, because readers will feel taken advantage of. They will not trust you. They will be pissed off, and you will look bad. Your readers will sniff out authenticity, just like you do when you read.

This is the key thing to remember: readers buy your book under the implicit contract that you will respect their decision and give them value for their investment of money and time. When you push something on them, they feel as though you’ve betrayed their trust.

If you do a great job in your book and provide knowledge and information that benefits the reader, you’ve accomplished your most important goal:

*They’ll respect you, and they will trust what you say. Some portion of them may come to you at some point in the future, whether it’s to book you as a speaker, hire you as a consultant, or purchase your next book. They are also likely to recommend your book to other readers who will also be interested in your ideas.*

The best way to accomplish this is by making your value clear to readers by providing information they can immediately put to use.

### HOW MUCH DO YOU “GIVE AWAY” IN YOUR BOOK?

This is simple: put as much of your knowledge as you can in your book.

I say this again, without reservation: PUT AS MUCH OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE AS YOU CAN IN YOUR BOOK.

The reasons for this are twofold:

1. If you actually care about serving your readers, this should be obvious. You are writing the book for them, and to serve them, you must actually give them the knowledge you have.
2. But even better, giving them what you have *usually helps you reach your goals*.

Just like the “advertorial vs. editorial” conversation, your book is about building trust with your reader. How can you do that if you don’t show them what you know, and how it can help them?

This book that you’re reading right now is a great example of what I’m talking about:

Scribe is a company that sells several different services to help people write books (in addition to other value-add creative services).

However, at no point in this book have I pushed those services on you, or even implied that you should buy them. In fact, I only even mention them in passing to set up stories that give example to my teachings (like I am now).

To go even further, this book gives away every “secret” we have. You can follow the instructions in this book *and accomplish everything that we do, without us*.

Why would we do that as a company? Why would we “give away” the process that we sell?

For several reasons:

1. **Authority:** If we are not willing to fully explain what we do, if we cannot show a reader what we know—why would anyone trust or hire us? This book is the best possible proof that we are good at our jobs.
2. **Credibility:** If we were to try and sell you, it would greatly diminish the credibility of the book, the information in it, and ourselves. If you believe we’re writing this only for our benefit, then you won’t pay attention and you won’t find us or the information credible—nor should you.
3. **Reputation:** If we do in fact provide great information, then readers will respect us and speak highly of us. That is the type of word-of-mouth marketing that is incredibly effective and cannot be bought—it must be earned.
4. **Client Vetting:** Our services are expensive. Most people cannot afford them. Why sell to people who can’t afford us? The type of people who hire us do so for two reasons: 1. We are experts who provide high-level book guidance (which this book helps to prove), and 2. They want to save time, and this book helps them see how time-consuming this process is, and how valuable our services can be. For the type of people who hire us, this book sells us without ever trying to.
5. **Self-Respect:** We believe that everyone with knowledge to share should write a book. The mission of our company is to “unlock the world’s wisdom.” If we actually believe that, then how could we write a book that was anything less than *everything* someone needed to write a good book? To do that would be intellectually dishonest and we could not live with ourselves if we did that.

I cannot tell you what to do with your book, but I will invite you to take a similar approach to your book. Put your best knowledge

in your book, and do not try to sell people—let them come to you because your knowledge is that useful to them.

Not only because it's the ethical thing to do, but it's also the most effective.





## HOW MUCH OF YOUR STORY SHOULD BE IN YOUR BOOK?

Every author struggles with how much of their personal story should be in their book. Some want to put a lot of their story in their book. Others don't want to put any of their story in.

So how much is correct? The basic answer:

**Your book should have enough of your story to help the reader get what they want out of the book, *but nothing more.***

Let's examine both mistakes authors make with their story independently, and that should make the balance clear.

### DON'T PUT IN TOO MUCH OF YOUR STORY

This is going to sound harsh, but it's the most important thing you'll learn from this book (and I will repeat this many times):

***Your readers don't care about you, your story, or your book.***

They're not buying or reading your book for you. They are buying it and reading it to get something they want. So yes, this means that your readers *only care about what your book will get them*. They view your book and you and your story in terms of that lens only.

We have some authors who want to make their book about themselves. They want to write all about their lives and their personal stories and go on and on about themselves, their fears, their anxieties, their accomplishments...no one cares.

Don't get me wrong, they absolutely have the right to write a book that is a monument to themselves. But no one will read it or care about it. [Yes, there are some exceptions for certain types of memoirs, but that's beyond the scope of this book.]

I say that not to judge memoirs or books that are very self-focused. Just know that if you do this, you're writing that book only for yourself. If you know that and accept it, then it's fine. Go do it.

But if you want your book to find an audience and have an impact on readers, then you must start with the intention that the focus of the book is on what's relevant to the reader.

Yes, you are the author of your book...but it's not for you. It's for the reader.

#### **PUT THE PARTS OF YOUR STORY IMPORTANT TO THE READER**

What I'm about to tell you will seem contradictory. But it's not:

*The reader absolutely does want to hear your story...but only the parts that are relevant to why they are reading your book.*

We have many authors who don't want to put any of their story in the book. They think it's arrogant, or they don't want to talk about themselves, or they're afraid to be vulnerable or to share



emotions. These authors seem to think there is a bright line distinction between memoir and business book, and that a business book can't have anything personal in it at all.

This is not true, and in fact, a book with nothing about the author rarely works well.

If it helps the reader to understand why they should read the book and how the book can relate to them by hearing about specific parts of your story, then you should absolutely put those parts of your story in the book.

This is because of a simple fact of human biology: humans learn through story and example.

Readers pick up your book because it has knowledge and information in it that can help them solve a problem they have or get something they want.

But they read it and engage it and use it because of the stories in it that teach them, inspire them, motivate them, and help them understand and apply the knowledge.

As much as possible, your book should encase your teachings and knowledge in stories. Those can be your stories, or they can be stories of other people. Either one works.

#### **WHAT PARTS OF YOUR STORY SHOULD BE IN YOUR BOOK?**

This is a pretty simple test to help you understand if a specific story should go in the book:

***Does this story add value for the reader?***

Literally just ask yourself that question. If it adds no value for the reader, then it doesn't belong in the book. If it does, then it stays in.

The exchange between you and the reader is they're giving you their attention and you're giving them a knowledge and wisdom they find valuable. So your story needs to embody that and display that, and if it does, it's in.

#### **HOW VULNERABLE SHOULD YOU BE? HOW MUCH EMOTION TO SHOW?**

The other thing authors ask is how vulnerable they should be in their stories. The answer is, again:

*Be as vulnerable as you need to be to write the most impactful story for the reader.*

For example, if you write a book about managing money, it would be great to tell a story about how you filed for bankruptcy. That's a hard thing to admit, and is a vulnerable thing to say in a book.

Telling that story in a book about managing money will greatly benefit the reader. It will make them trust you, and you will seem credible because you let them know that you've been there and can help them get over their shame and their issues of money.

But if the book is about knitting, I'm not sure how much sense it makes to talk about bankruptcy. That doesn't get the reader anything. In that case, it feels like an emotional release for the author, but irrelevant to the reader.

Your book should never be a place for you to dump your emotions on the reader. If writing the book is therapy for you, that's okay. But you should not ask the reader to be your therapist.

Think about it like any sort of sharing with a friend. If your friend has a bad day and tells you about it, you listen and empathize. Then if you had a bad day, you share that as well. You're sharing, you're empathizing with each other, that's okay, right?

But if you just talk about all of your problems, and then once they start talking, you get up and leave—that's not empathizing. That's dumping.

There is a big difference.

There is one last thing I'd recommend though: speak from your scars, not your open wounds.

Meaning, don't put stuff in your book that you haven't worked through. Your book is for sharing what you know, not working through things you haven't processed yet.

Even if you process by writing, that's OK, just make sure what goes in the book is hard-earned wisdom, not emotional release that only serves you.

Showing emotion—especially in writing—can be very hard. I can't tell you how many times we've worked with authors and they describe a horrific scene—some sort of major trauma—with total detachment.

Maybe they had a bankruptcy where they lost everything, or they had someone in their family die, or they lost a business to a cheating partner, and we'll hear them talk about this and they'll just describe the facts. They won't talk about how they felt or how it affected them.

We'll push these authors to then talk about their feelings. When that happened, what did you feel? What was it like? How did it affect you?

If you are going to tell stories like that, then you should absolutely talk about your emotions, to the extent that it is relevant.

In fact, for many authors, we have to first tell them that their story

deeply impacts us, before they give themselves permission to talk about their emotions and feelings.

And when you do that as an author, you give the reader the permission to feel that emotion and engage with that emotion. Which is what you're trying to accomplish with your book.

You are not there as an author to just give the facts. Facts are great. Facts are important, facts are the bedrock of your book—but people don't learn through facts and people don't engage through facts.

People learn through story and example. They make decisions about how to change their life with emotion. And that's what you need to do to have a great book. It's got to have both of those things in it.

If you're unsure about this, answer these questions:

1. What's your favorite book?
2. What is your favorite part about your favorite book? What was the thing that impacted you the most?

Right now you're probably thinking about a part that was profound in the book that elicited a deep emotion in you.

It wasn't a fact. It was a story or an anecdote or a scene that brought something up in you.

Do the same thing with your book. Tell stories and anecdotes that elicit emotion, because that will draw the reader in and make the facts stick to their brain.

The more you show the ugly stuff, the more you say the things that everyone thinks and no one says, the more you show your true self and true thoughts—the better your book will be.



## DON'T PUT EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IN ONE BOOK

Meatballs are delicious.

Ice cream is delicious.

But when you combine them into a “meatball sundae”...that’s disgusting.

Even though they’re great separately, they don’t go together.

This is what many authors try to do with their book: create a meatball sundae. They do this by mashing several distinct ideas into one book.

***This never works.***

First of all, it creates a bad reader experience. People read books in order to get expert knowledge that will help them solve a specific problem they have. No one reads books to get a firehose of unconnected information.

Second, having too many different angles and too much informa-

tion in the book makes it harder to position and market. In fact, most positioning issues we see come from the fact that the author is trying to combine two or three different books into one, and thus speak to multiple different audiences. This makes it almost impossible to have clear positioning.

Most authors try to combine everything they know into one book because they think they don't have enough information for one book. They're insecure about the book and try to compensate by cramming it with everything possible.

As I've said, that's the worst thing you can do. It results in a bloated, meandering mess that is hard to describe to people and has no natural audience.

#### **AN EXAMPLE OF A MEATBALL SUNDÆ**

We worked with a pair of authors, Bryan and Shannon Miles, who together had built the most successful VA company in America (Belay Solutions) by connecting great VAs with a process that works at scale for companies and busy entrepreneurs. They also had built an incredible culture at Belay, being named the #1 Company Culture in America by *Entrepreneur Magazine*, and has also provided an incredible set of opportunities to mothers who wanted to work from home.

They were rightly proud of all three things, and had a vision of a book that talked about how VA will change work, and how to build a great VA culture, and how to use that culture to attract more women. They had a broad, but very vague idea, of how their book could talk about all three things.

This was not going to work. These are three different and very distinct ideas. We went around and around with them trying to find a positioning for one book about this, until I finally told them:

I think you have at least two books here, maybe three. There is a book about how VA's will revolutionize work. There is a book about how to build an amazing company culture. And there is a book about how women can use VA work to change their lives.

They're all great books—but they are three different books, not one.

They agreed, and Bryan worked with us to write a book about how VA's will change the modern workforce, called *Virtual Culture*.

Shannon wrote her own book about women and VA work, *The Third Option*.

As an added benefit, by writing two books instead of one, they more than doubled the impact on their company.

Each book created a separate and distinct media campaign for their book. And each book served a different purpose—Bryan's book did a great job bringing them clients, and Shannon's book did an amazing job bringing them qualified VAs to serve those clients.

[Another important point that ties into positioning: they ended up deciding NOT to write the book on company culture, and instead worked many of those ideas into Shannon's book. The reason is because we helped them see that doing a book on company culture would result in them getting a lot of speaking requests and consulting requests about culture, which *they did not want*. They wanted to only focus on their business instead.]

## HOW TO FOCUS ON ONE BOOK

If you're doing this in your positioning—combining two or three books into one—don't get down on yourself. It's very common.

In fact, it can often end up being a good thing (once you fix the positioning).

It's a good thing because it will both help you focus on finding the best book for you, and then it will help you see your next book(s).

The key here is to focus on your reader and how to best help them. If you're crystal clear about what reader your book will serve, and how they will be served, then the ideal book idea to reach that audience should emerge. Once you have that, it's easy to see if other ideas fit or not, and then finalize your book idea.

The reality is, if you're an accomplished professional with deep experience in your field, you probably have multiple books in you. It's okay to have several books that are specific, focused, and that deliver different things. In fact, that's preferable.

Almost every author we've worked with has more than one book in them, if they choose to write it. You can always write another book.

Don't try to put everything you know into the first one. Focus on what book makes sense for you first, then focus on how to make that book the best possible for the reader.





# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BOOK CHAPTERS

When I started teaching people how to write their own nonfiction books, I was surprised by how many people asked me questions about book chapters.

*What length should my chapters be?*

*How many chapters should go in my book?*

*Should I have parts and chapters?*

I was kinda stumped as to why there were so many questions about chapters, and then an author made it all clear:

*I'm just confused and looking for some rules to follow.*

Ahh yes. When anxiety strikes, people just starve for certainty.

Here's the problem: there are no "rules" for book chapters.

There are some standard ways of doing things, and some conventions that most authors follow, but for any “rule” you can find, I can show you exceptions that break it, and do it well.

In this section, I will answer the common questions about chapters and try to give you some basic guidelines to help you as you write your book.

### **WHAT IS A BOOK CHAPTER?**

Seems like a silly question, but it’s actually important to establish this for the rest of the piece.

A chapter is one of the main ways to divide and separate distinct ideas within a book. Modern nonfiction books always have chapters. This was not always the case. Many ancient works were not organized by chapter, and were either one long text like *Beowulf*, or were organized with verses, like Aristotle’s *Politics*.

A modern chapter is usually:

- a single cohesive idea
- a step in the process you are describing
- a single argument or position

It can be one or all of those things.

### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PART AND A CHAPTER?**

For books with lots of chapters, these are often grouped into several “parts,” as another subdivision of the book.

A part is simply a set of chapters that go together and fall under a larger idea. For example, from the Table of Contents of a book, there are three parts here, with a few chapters in each part.

<b>Part 1:</b>	<b>Where to Start with Your Service Business</b>
Chapter 1:	Entrepreneurship
Chapter 2:	Goals
Chapter 3:	Time Management (Are We There Yet?)
<b>Part 2:</b>	<b>Taking Action in Your Service Business</b>
Chapter 4:	Marketing Your Business
Chapter 5:	Building Community
Chapter 6:	Sales
Chapter 7:	Rejection
<b>Part 3:</b>	<b>Advanced Service Business Techniques</b>
Chapter 8:	Money Mindset/Money Matters
Chapter 9:	Support is Conditional

## HOW MANY CHAPTERS SHOULD BE IN A BOOK?

Most nonfiction books have between five and twenty chapters.

Any less than five chapters, and your chapters may be running long or may contain too many ideas.

This being said, there are plenty of books with thirty or forty chapters. And some books, usually with very short chapters, can have fifty or more.

There is not a “right” answer to this question. There is the standard convention above, but that is not some unbreakable rule, written in stone. You have to make your own decision about what works for your book.

## HOW LONG SHOULD CHAPTERS BE?

It depends on two factors: how much do you need to say, and what kind of tenor and rhythm do you want in your book?

Long chapters can be informative, but they can also drag or be too crammed with information and lose the reader's attention.

You can fight that with short chapters that keep the reader's attention and maintain a fast pace, but that can also be confusing to the reader.

If you'd like some guidelines, you can assume that the average non-fiction book is 50k words, and that they have 12 chapters, so around 4k words would be an "average" chapter length. That number actually lines up pretty well with the data we have on this, but again, that number should neither be a goal, nor a constraint. It's just a convention.

Chapters can be 500 words, or even 10k. It all depends on how much you dive into an idea and how far you go with that idea.

#### **IS THERE A MAXIMUM OR MINIMUM LENGTH FOR A CHAPTER?**

No. A chapter is a single argument, idea, or step in your process. That can be as long or as short as is necessary.

The only word of caution is to consider that if the chapter is under 1,000 words, it may not be a whole idea or chapter and may be part of something else.

And if it is more than 10k words, it may be two or more chapters.

#### **IS IT OK IF CHAPTERS ARE DIFFERENT LENGTHS?**

Of course it is. If one chapter is 5,000 words, and then 1,200, and then 3,000, and then 1,000, that is all fine.

In fact, it might be beneficial. Varying the flow can make the book read better, depending on what you are saying.

I will say this again: it's far more important to worry about the flow of ideas for the reader than to worry about nonexistent "rules" for chapters. Your book is written for your reader, so make chapter decisions based on what makes the best book for them.





# HOW DO YOU BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK?

Ever sat down to write something, and nothing came up?

If you haven't, it means that you don't write much (or you have some magical power that no one else has).

Every writer I've ever talked to or worked with (including myself) has dealt with writer's block. In fact, some of the greatest writers of all time—Ralph Ellison, Harper Lee—battled with it for decades, and had it crush their careers (neither wrote a book other than their first).

After decades of writing books professionally, and working with thousands of authors to help them through these issues, I have developed an approach to writer's block that is different than most, and—if applied correctly—almost always works.

## WHAT IS WRITER'S BLOCK?

The term “writer's block” was created in the '50s by a psychiatrist named Edmund Bergler, in a paper called “Does Writer's Block Exist?” Bergler was from the Freudian school of psychoanalysis

and argued that a writer is like a psychoanalyst, saying that a writer “unconsciously tries to solve his inner problems via the sublimatory medium of writing.”

A blocked writer is actually blocked psychologically—and the way to “unblock” that writer is through therapy. Solve the personal psychological problem and you remove the blockage.

Why does this matter?

Because there has been a ton of stuff written since then about writer’s block, and most of it is wrong.

The original guy got it (basically) right.

### **WHAT CAUSES WRITER’S BLOCK?**

Even though writer’s block always boils down to a “personal psychological problem” causing it, those psychological problems fall into three main buckets.

The first one is the biggest and totally obvious one:

#### **FEAR**

Writers are human, and thus afraid. They’re afraid of taking risks, they’re afraid of being judged, they’re afraid of writing a bad book, but mostly—they are afraid of looking foolish. This is the human condition, and the best thing to do is, if it’s true—admit you are afraid. Then you can deal with it (I discuss solutions in the next section).

The second fear is not so much a direct fear, but an indirect fear. You know the “fight or flight” response? Well, in the literature it’s actually called the “fight, flight, or freeze” response, and “freeze” is a big one in writer’s block. I usually refer to this as:



## A POOR PLAN

The simplest way to describe it is that humans crave certainty, and if there is too much uncertainty about the writing task, then it freezes people. Some subconscious hesitation about the plan or topic or anything will make most people just not do it.

I see this all the time with Scribe clients; they know they have a book in them and they don't have any problem writing once they know what they're supposed to write about. But without the proper organization and structure ahead of time, they freeze.

The third problem is something that happens more than you might think:

## YOU GENUINELY DON'T WANT TO DO IT

This is mostly common in work- or school-related writing, or any place where the writing is compelled by an outside force and not coming from a desire or place within the writer.

[If you want to dive deep into the writer's block, the best single book on the topic is *Conceptual Blockbusting*. It's been out for thirty years and is in its fifth edition (it's that good).]

## THE BEST STRATEGY TO BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK

I have two different strategies that have proven very effective over time: the best, and the rest.

The best is a very simple one. When I am stuck, I ask myself the question:

***What am I afraid of?***

Hint: it's pretty much always some fear you don't want to face (here is a list of common fears: [scribewriting.com/book-writing-fears](http://scribewriting.com/book-writing-fears)).

Here's the thing though—this won't work if you aren't honest with yourself. And of course, you have to be self-aware enough to know when you're not being honest.

This works for me (most of the time), because I've spent many years in different forms of therapy, and I have gotten pretty decent at seeing my own bullshit (again, most of the time, not always).

If you're not like that—and most people are not—this strategy won't work. You'll just spin up elaborate rationalizations to convince yourself that there is a REAL reason, and it's not some fear you aren't facing.

But if you do this, if you can actually understand the fear that is driving your block, then you can solve it. I walk you through exactly how to beat your book-writing fears in this piece: [scribewriting.com/book-writing-fears](http://scribewriting.com/book-writing-fears).

## THE REST OF THE STRATEGIES TO BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK

I know I said it's almost always fear before, but I did use the modifier “almost.”

There are absolutely times when writer's block is *not* fear. Sometimes you're just having a hard time, for other reasons, and for those times, these are the strategies I've found that work (both with me, and the thousands of authors we've helped write their books).

1. **Talk it out:** Writer's block exists. There is no such thing as speaker's block. You can always talk. If you really feel stuck, get someone to interview you on the thing you're stuck about. Once you have to talk about it, the ideas and words flow.
2. **Do something else:** You know the saying about how “the phone only rings when you're in the shower?” Well...go get in the shower. Metaphorically. Going for a walk works really well. As does playing with my kids. Basically taking your mind off of

it allows your subconscious to work on the issue, and you can come back to it fresh later on.

3. **Focus on the reader:** John Steinbeck said it best: “Forget your generalized audience. In the first place, the nameless, faceless audience will scare you to death and in the second place, unlike the theater, it doesn’t exist. In writing, your audience is one single reader. I have found that sometimes it helps to pick out one person—a real person you know, or an imagined person and write to that one.”
4. **Context switching:** This has helped me before—I will change where I am writing. I’ll go to a coffee shop or a restaurant or anywhere else. It doesn’t matter, I just change the context I am in.
5. **Keep writing:** I hate this, but sometimes it works. Many times I’ve been stuck, and I would keep writing, even if it was useless, and that got me going. Lack of momentum almost always has fear underneath it, but sometimes just getting moving is enough to get to something good.

These are the strategies I’ve seen work for myself and others.

But again, do what works for you. That’s the only rule for writing.





# THE ONLY SOFTWARE YOU NEED TO WRITE A BOOK IS ALREADY ON YOUR COMPUTER

Think about your favorite authors—the ones whose books deeply affected your life. Do you know what all of them had in common?

*None of them used special book-writing software to write their book.*

Yet, this is where many beginning and amateur writers start. They spend so much time searching for the “perfect” book-writing software (among other tools) that will magically make their writing better.

Let me spare you time and money: *software is not a relevant consideration for writing a great book.*

In fact, most writing software adds complexity without any value. (Exhibit A: Scrivener.)

That’s not to say writing software will never be relevant. It could

happen. But after testing and trying all of them, I have yet to find software that *helps* write a book.

### WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

We all know this person: he decided to start golfing (or CrossFit, or MMA, or yoga, or knitting; doesn't matter), and then spent weeks researching the perfect gear. Then he spent way too much money on it, showed it off to all his friends, took a few cool Instagram pics... and then never actually used the equipment.

*People who obsess over tools are usually scared of the work.*

For most people who obsess over writing software, it's a way of hiding from the actual writing. It's understandable—writing a book can bring up a lot of fears. I say this not as a judgment, but as a person who has done this exact thing many, many times in other areas of my life. After all, it's fun to shop for equipment and to fantasize about success. And taking pictures is such an easy way to get the attention benefit of hard work without having to suffer through the actual hard work.

But the **ONLY** way to actually accomplish anything is through doing the hard work...and that is scary.

Again, I say that without judgment. I have been the author afraid to write a book and using a distraction to avoid this fear many times. And I have seen many authors afraid to write a book, for any number of reasons (that usually boils down to the fear it will make them look stupid), so they install a writing assistant but never write a page.

I wrote an in-depth blog post that details about the six book-writing fears and how to beat them. But again, knowing you are afraid, and connecting that fear to your endless search for something to distract you, is not an easy thing to do.

If you are looking for book-writing software, I would highly recommend you ask yourself that question: *is this search necessary, or am I distracting myself from my fear?* Now—all of this being said, there are very valid reasons to want to find and use good tools to help you make the writing process easier. To that end, here is my evaluation of some of the more common tools.

## WORD PROCESSORS

Every word processor is essentially the same. You should use the one you like best.

I like Google Docs because it's simple to use and makes collaboration very easy.

You might like Microsoft Word or Pages best. That's totally fine.

I can promise you though, there is no “right” choice here. The key is familiarity and comfort. Writing a book is hard work—you don't want clunky software slowing you down, so go with what you know and with what feels right to you.

## GRAMMARLY

Every word processor will check your spelling and grammar for basic mistakes. What spell check won't help you do is make your writing short, simple, and direct.

If you would like help with that, check out Grammarly.com, a free writing assistant that integrates with Google Docs and Microsoft Word. If you have a Mac, you can download the desktop app, and it will integrate to most everything you use to write.

There are paid plans available, but the free version is enough for writing a book.

I tried Grammarly for a while and found it clunky, but many excellent writers I know love it. Test it and see if you like it.

## HEMINGWAY EDITOR

An alternative writing assistant is Hemingway Editor.

You can copy/paste your writing into their online editor or download the desktop app.

Some writers love Hemingway Editor, some don't. I kinda like it, but don't use it. It's helpful for sentence structure and common problem areas: passive voice, excessive adverbs, and poor word choice.

### **Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear.**

The app highlights lengthy, complex sentences and common errors; if you see a yellow sentence, shorten or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red.

You can **utilize** a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over them for hints.

Adverbs and weakening phrases are **helpfully** shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick words with force, **perhaps**.

Phrases in green have **been marked** to show passive voice.

You can **format** your *text* with the toolbar.

Paste in something you're working on and edit away. Or, click the Write button and compose something new.

One unique feature of this software is that it assigns a readability grade level as you write.



This doesn't necessarily reflect your target audience, but the grade level needed to understand your prose. Hemingway's work, while written for adults, scored as 5th grade. Seems bad? Wrong. That's great. The more simple and direct your writing, the better it is.

If, like most people, you struggle with overwriting, this might be a tool you like.

### **DISTRACTION-FREE SOFTWARE**

Honestly, I think distraction-free programs are pretty dumb.

If you block websites on your computer while you write, you can always pick up your phone and check Instagram. Options like Freedom that sync across your devices have a monthly fee.

That said, if you know you're prone to distraction, a program like WasteNoTime or FocalFilter might be worth a try. If it helps you stay focused and write, by all means, use it!

### **NOW JUST GO WRITE**

It's what you need to do, instead of spending time worrying about what is the best writing software to use.





## HOW PEOPLE REALLY JUDGE A BOOK

I see authors spend years writing their book, finishing the manuscript—and watching it never find an audience. It's incredibly depressing.

The worst part is that this is completely avoidable. In fact, *it's possible to know with a high degree of certainty whether or not your book will find an audience.*

To do that, you first have to understand how people judge books. After all, if the goal for the book is to find an audience, you have to understand how audiences perceive books.

This section will explain the mental process that a reader goes through when making a buying decision about a book, and will set you up to understand how to position your book to give it the best chance to reach the audience you want.

### THE INFORMATION REAL PEOPLE USE TO JUDGE A BOOK

Let me lay this out for you in the starkest terms possible:

*Almost every potential reader will judge whether or not to buy and read your book before they have read one single word inside the book.*

Based on loads of empirical research and decades of experience in the book business, we have a clear picture of what happens in the mind of a potential reader when judging a book.

Even though we have a pretty good map of how people decide to buy a book (which we will outline soon), you must understand a key insight: ***this process is almost never conscious.***

These buying decisions are a series of instantaneous and mostly unconscious judgments. They are made in less than 60 seconds, and they are made together, each influencing the other, not individually. The reader often doesn't know (or believe) they're evaluating the book this way—but they are. These judgments are real and substantive; in most cases, they are the main evaluation and purchase triggers.

A potential reader will consider these pieces of information about a book, (usually) in this order:

1. The title
2. The recommending source
3. The cover
4. The book description
5. The blurbs
6. The customer reviews
7. The author bio and picture (depending on where the picture is placed)
8. The length of the book
9. The price (though this can come sooner)
10. The book text itself (the “see inside” function online)

We'll cover how to create each of these pieces in more depth later on. For now, let's walk through each step and unpack the reader's judgments around it.

## TITLE

Most people think the cover is the first thing someone judges. That's only true if they're browsing a physical bookstore, which is rarely the case anymore. Most books are now discovered either by in-person word of mouth or online, and in both cases, what is the first piece of information they receive?

The title.

From that, people instantaneously assess whether the book seems relevant, it's for them, and if it sounds interesting. This is why I recommend spending so much time making sure you get the title right.

**Let's be clear:** A good title *won't* make your book do well, but a bad title will almost certainly *prevent* it from doing so. Many potential readers stop considering a book once they have heard the title and nothing else.

## RECOMMENDING SOURCE

If Marc Andreessen or Bill Gates recommends a book, then thousands of their eager readers rush out to buy it. If a random person with no followers on Twitter recommends it, no one buys it.

This is because the *credibility of the source* is a hugely important piece of the recommendation puzzle. In most cases, people will transfer the credibility of the recommender onto the book.

It's all about *who is doing the recommending*. This applies to friends as well. If you have a friend who is very rich, successful, and intelligent, you're far more likely to listen to their book recommendation than someone who is unemployed and living with his parents.

What's great about this is that if the credibility of the referrer is great enough, almost any title will work, and you don't have to

worry about the rest of this list. But that is rarely the case, so you still want to make sure and give yourself the best chance you can.

#### BOOK COVER

If the reader is still interested after hearing the title and taking the referring source into account, they will now go to Amazon (or in rarer cases, a bookstore) and look at the book.

The potential reader makes more judgments about its relevance and their interest based on this information.

The most important thing at this point is that the reader not be repelled. Most people are looking for reasons NOT to buy the book, and you have to not give them any so far.

#### BOOK DESCRIPTION

At this point, if the cover hasn't repelled the reader, they will look next to the book description on the Amazon page (or flip over to the back of the book in a bookstore). The book description should give the reader a strong sense of what the book is about, making it interesting while not giving everything away.

#### BLURBS

If the reader still is interested, they will now look at endorsements (sometimes for a physical book, they will do this prior to reading the book description).

Note that most readers look more closely at *who* the blurbs are from rather than what they say. They assume that the blurbs will be positive, so they want to see what level of social status the blurb is, and whether it's someone they know and respect.

## READER REVIEWS

If the reader is on Amazon (or barnesandnoble.com or GoodReads, etc., but not in a bookstore), they now read the customer reviews.

They will usually first note the number of total reviews—as a gauge of popularity—and then look at the average rating. They may then browse the content of the reviews. If they do, they normally read (more likely scan) one or two of them, and, if they are like most people, they skip the positive ones and read a negative one before going back to a positive one (if they even do that).

## AUTHOR BIO AND PICTURE

Sometimes, but not always, people will look at the author bio. This is usually in situations where they have not quite made up their mind, are hesitant to buy the book, and need more information. Looking at the author page is about understanding the credibility and relative status of the author.

There are cases where this is one of the first things the reader looks at (when they've never heard of the author). Some readers immediately want to know about the author, and look at the bio first.

After collecting all this information, the vast majority of people have made their decision. Note that this is before they interact with *anything* inside the book. They have yet to read one single page, and they've already decided whether or not to buy the book.

## LENGTH

This is one of those things that seems to be generational, or divided by socioeconomic status. Some people, generally voracious readers, never even think to check length. Whereas other people always check length. Many people do not want to commit to a 300+ page book.

There's not much you can do here—your book is the length it is—but we've found in our data that, for nonfiction books, those between 100 and 200 pages sell the best and are read the most.

## PRICE

Some people will look at price. For some reason, it appears that people are far more price conscious for eBooks than they are for physical books. The reason for this is value perception. Generally speaking, we recommend keeping your goals for your book in mind when you price.

## THE BOOK TEXT

There are *some* people who actually use the “Look Inside” function on Amazon to check out the first few pages and engage the content of the book itself. If they're in a bookstore, they flip the book open and read a bit. They might even do more research to find articles online about the book.

These are the high-information buyers, but they are a distinct minority. Probably fewer than 10 percent of your buyers do the thing that everyone says they want to do: judge a book by the content inside, and not the cover.





## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**TUCKER MAX** is the co-founder of Scribe Media, a company that helps people write, publish, and market their books.

He has written four *New York Times* bestsellers, which have sold over 4.5 million copies worldwide. He's credited with being the originator of the literary genre "fratire" and is only the third writer (after Malcolm Gladwell and Michael Lewis) to ever have three books on the *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list at one time. He was nominated for the *Time* magazine 100 Most Influential list in 2009.

He received his BA from the University of Chicago in 1998, and his JD from Duke Law School in 2001. He currently lives in Austin, Texas, with his wife Veronica and three children.

**ZACH OBRONT** is the co-founder of Scribe Media, where he works to help authors write, publish, and market their books without the usual barriers.

As an expert in the changing publishing industry, he's spoken to crowds at Harvard, Yale, Google, and Adobe, and has worked with thousands of authors to professionally publish and promote their books, reaching millions of readers in the process.

