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# 21 Mistakes Most First-Time Authors Make

*by*

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Welcome to the 21 expensive mistakes that first time authors make when writing and publishing their book. I've seen these countless times when working with clients or running workshops -- or connecting with authors who are doing it differently the second time around. And I created this because I don't want you to make those same mistakes. If you have any questions at all, you are welcome to [contact us](#).

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## **Strategic Mistakes**

### **1. Not having a strategic business or life vision for your book**

If you're not clear about this, you'll write a book that doesn't fulfil you and that doesn't give you the return on investment, the wonderful lift on your journey. What a lot of wasted time and effort! Instead, think about your next step in life, or your next step in business. What book would you write from that place?

### **2. Not being clear on your idea**

If you're not clear about the idea, how are you ever going to get your book down on paper?

I see this ALL the time -- too many ideas, and therefore floundering without being able to complete. You can't even make a plan because you don't know what you're making a plan for.

### **3. Not focusing on your strengths**

There are two extremes here: firstly being wide-open to ideas and wanting to please everyone and write about everything you know. What ends up happening is that you lack focus and you flip from one style. You're not clear.

At the other end of the spectrum, there's an approach that is too rigid; too prescribed. You've been told you have to follow a template, put your material in, and out comes a very manufactured-looking book at the other end.

Either way you are not writing the book that serves you. You can do better. You can write a book that is an expression of you.

That doesn't have to take more time or be a longer book (short is often good!), but it does mean investing some time in the planning part of the process. A couple of hours -- if you do it the right way.

#### **4. Not creating the right structure**

You've been told that structure is important and that you need an outline.

Great! But what does that look like? And do you have the right one for your book?

Julie came to one of my recent workshops. She told me she'd been getting up at 6 am and writing for two hours before she went to work. It was tough but she was determined to do it and determined to finish. She had thousands of words and felt like she was wading through treacle. It felt like there was no end to the process.

And this is what happens without the right structure. In two days, we mapped out her book, her marketing strategy, and she started to write again. It was a revelation for her that it could be so easy.

You need your outline to make the writing easier for you.

And you need it to guide your reader through your material so that he or she gets the right amount of information at the right time.

Without this, you'll find the book harder to complete and it will deliver a poor reading experience because it's disjointed and unconnected. You lose any potential impact you could be making instead of writing the right book in a way that is fast, easy and enjoyable for you.

## **5. Not planning the writing time**

I'll write when....

Sound familiar?

Or maybe you went right for it and you've overdosed on writing and now you've lost interest.

Writing a book is like training for a marathon: too little and you won't be able to complete; too much and you risk an injury.

It's the same with writing -- too little the months drag on and on (very demotivating!), too much and you will feel swamped.

And neither of those benefits the quality of your writing.

Forget "as soon as..." and put your bum on the seat and write.

## **6. Making random commitments with no plan**

We all have a tendency to do that -- I'll run the marathon next April. Months come and go and the running shoes stay in the cupboard, so you pull out at the last minute.

It's the same with your book. If you're going to do it (and I really want you to!), then set a date and make a plan to get there, or work with someone who can help you get there.

And once you've got that plan you need to implement it. I love making plans; I can sketch out visions and strategies for how to get there. It's fun for me. But the less fun part is the day-in day-out work that needs to go on. If I want to run the marathon, I need to run four or five times a week. Rain or shine. If I want to lose weight, I need to eat less and move more. Every day. (or most days at least!) And there are certain things that will make this easier for you and help you get this done. [Accountability](#) is one big part of this (but not the only one). However you get that accountability, please set something in place.

## **7. Focusing on the wrong metrics**

What are you measuring?

Word count?

Book sales?

Both of those at different times?

Well, let me explain you why those are the wrong metrics.

Writing to a word count (I'll write 1,000 words this morning before breakfast) is stressful. It's not what I teach at all.

You are measuring output not input. And, what I've found from working with hundreds of authors, is that the book turns out to be as long as it needs to be.

And book sales. Of course we all want book sales but is that really your end target?

If you focus too much on the book sales and don't look beyond the book then what about everything else? More and higher quality clients, speaking engagements, media appearances? This mistake could cost you dearly financially.

## **8. Not understanding what motivates you**

I don't mean the big 'why' of what you're doing, I mean this specifically about your psychology.

The science of motivation shows us three different models and we each have a preference for one of them.

If you know your preference, you can set up systems that will support you -- again, we're not taking someone else's model, we're adapting it for you.

If you get this wrong, you're likely to not complete, or it will take you much longer than it needs to.

Working to your strengths doesn't just mean write what you know, it means understand the psychology of what drives you and what rewards you need to get the book done.

## Marketing Mistakes

### 9. You have no platform

That's OK, no-one starts out with a platform.

And your book can help you build a platform, but only if you do this in the right way.

What's a **platform** anyway?

A platform is what is brought together when you have a message that you share with an audience.

Your message is the easy part -- you just clarified that through your the writing process!

And your audience is defined by how many people you can reach through your subscriber list, social media, and other networks.

It's your platform that will lead to book sales, and it's what leads to impact -- creating that change that you want, whether in one person or many.

Whatever the size of that platform now, there are key things you can do while you are writing, so that, little by little, you expand the number of people who want to hear what you have to say, and who are willing to share it.

The key part of this of course is the size of your email list and how engaged those people are. Every small step you can make here will help you when it comes to launching your book and taking that leap in your business.

## **10. Not planning for reviews**

I know we're leaping ahead now and reviews come after the book is out, but it's an important part of the process.

What did you do the last time you bought something from Amazon? Did you look at the reviews? Or was it a word of mouth purchase (which is the same thing really and over half our buying decisions are made like this).

What people have to say about your work matters. A lot.

It's crucial to your ongoing sales, and if you don't plan for reviews, then you are leaving it up to the first random person who happens to leave a review. And this has a devastating impact because an early bad review is likely to stay at the top of the listing forever. What do you think that would do for book sales and your credibility?

You can't, obviously, tell people what to say, but you can prepare to get some early reviews from people who are likely to view your work kindly.

## **11. Not having a launch plan**

A launch nowhere near as important as it used to be in the days when publishers had to make sure books sold otherwise the shops wouldn't stock them. Your book is always in stock now.

However, there are some things you can do at launch-time that you can't do at other times.

That's your best chance to get on a bestseller list for example, because you can coordinate sales around the release date of your book. Miss that and potentially you could miss out on all the kudos that having that bestseller might bring -- media appearances, clients, speaking opportunities, not to mention the book sales themselves.

Depending on whether you are self-publishing or going the traditional route will determine what you can do to boost your sales at launch. And of course how big your budget is, and how wide your reach with that ever-growing platform.

## **12. No marketing plan for ongoing book sales**

Books are hard to sell and most authors sell less than a couple of hundred over the lifetime of the book.

You have to manage your expectations here. You think people will buy the book just because you wrote it. And maybe they will. Maybe you have a large platform and you've sold books before. Fantastic.

But not everyone starts off in this position so you need to think longer term. How are people going to find out about you? This week, next week, and in six months time. You can leverage your book for business growth and expert positioning -- but you need a plan so put the work into this.

Selling only a few hundred books is a very poor return on the investment of your creativity, the hours of writing -- the opportunity cost of what else you could have been doing, and perhaps the cost of publishing if you have paid editors, designers and even publicists.

I understand it. When you are writing you are immersed in the writing.

Even though you've heard the advice that you should start to market the book before it's written, you don't do that. You think you'll wait.

All my clients are the same, and I don't want you to lose focus on the book, but there are some important actions you can take to prepare for the launch and the months beyond.

Selling books is a marathon not a sprint. You have plenty of time after the book's out to market and sell. Do a decent launch and then have a year-long strategy that you can implement after the celebrations are over.

### **13. Not creating anticipation**

You need to keep people in touch with the process you are going through.

It's very enticing to hide away with your keyboard and coffee until the book's done. But that's a mistake.

You must keep your community involved in the process, because then they will be more likely to buy and to promote your book when it comes out. Anticipation is the key word here.

Even if your platform is still small, there are people who are around you and who will be interested in your book. Facebook groups, social media, whatever email list you do have. If you add this up it could be hundreds, if not thousands of people.

Work with them, hand-in-hand with building your platform, and strategically release nuggets of information about your content and your process so that people are ready to buy when you are ready to publish.

Makes sense, right?

#### **14. Boosting someone else's platform, not your own**

It's very attractive to be part of someone else's book -- an anthology perhaps, or a collection of essays.

You get to be a published author without the stress of publishing, and there is less to write.

And, yes, this is a good way to dip your toe in the water.

But a successful anthology is very hard to pull off in a way that benefits the contributing authors.

What usually happens is one of two things.

The book flops because it's not coherent and no-one is willing to promote it because they don't 'own' the content.

Or it is a success, and the person who gets the most benefit is the editor; the person who pulled it together. It's their name on Amazon, their business that is being promoted.

If you enter into this kind of a project think very carefully about the investment of time that you are putting in and what return you might get (and don't believe the promises that twelve authors mean twelve times the promotion. It's just not true.)

These kind of books CAN work when they are done in a particular way, but 90% of the time you're better off putting that effort into your own book.

## **Writing and Publishing Mistakes**

### **15. Not understanding your reader**

I run workshops from time to time and this is very often a breakthrough exercise for people.

You write because you have something to say, or you want to promote your business -- perhaps someone's told you it's a good idea, or you've seen other people publishing books and getting all the kudos and expert positioning.

You want that for yourself. Of course, and I want it for you too.

But a book is a conversation with someone who wants to read it.

Not a place for you to talk about your ideas or your story in isolation. You can write that kind of book if you want to, but expect to be disappointed that it doesn't do as well as you'd hoped. People are more interested in themselves than they are in us and you have to know who you are writing to.

I don't mean this simply in a marketing context -- it's not all about sales. It's also about the writing -- what kind of voice do you want to use, what level of depth do you need to go into in your explanations, what jargon is acceptable and will be understood?

For a whole host of reasons you really don't want to make this mistake.

## **16. Not knowing the Miss**

The what?

The Most Important Questions -- the burning questions that your reader wants answered.

It's not enough to know who you are writing to, you need to know what he or she wants.

Your book is a conversation with a reader, and if you have no idea what your reader wants to know, or needs to know, then you are writing a book that has no purpose.

Your book is a vehicle for communication. And communication is two-way.

I'm not suggesting you write a book just because you spot an opportunity -- not at all.

But there are two people in your writing relationship. You. And your reader.

## **17. Making the writing hard**

Maybe you know what I'm talking about here?

Some days it just feels like a struggle; you're not happy, you can't get the words out, or you hate what you've written, or you don't know where it's all going. You can write nothing or too much, and whether it's on topic is another question.

This mistake is costing you dearly, because every hour writing (or not writing!) is an hour that you could have spent doing something else.

And chances are, you're not enjoying the process either.

It could be about technique, it could be about structure -- if you don't have structure you'll find the writing difficult because you're unfocused. But whatever it is you're not finding it joyful and easy.

Or it could be your choice of book. Are you inspired? Really inspired?

I want you to be doing something that excites you, even if it is an 'easy' first book, it must still be worth doing.

If you're at this stage, I'd love you to [get in touch](#) because I have strategies that will help you.

## **18. Making the wrong publishing choice**

Maybe you waited for a traditional publisher when you could have self-published years before?

Or you did everything yourself, literally everything, when bringing in a small team would have made the process much easier and faster (and you'd probably have got a more professional outcome!).

I don't believe there is a single right way to publish and I work with my clients to identify what is the best route for them.

It comes back to objectives -- what do you want from the book?

Beverly was a business coach and her objective was clients. She was very, very clear about this. She self-published a small book that she took to business networking meetings and sold to people who were interested. Some of those people called her for coaching -- because they liked her method and wanted to work with her personally. She filled her practice very quickly, and now runs retreats and group coaching. She's probably sold fewer than a hundred books on Amazon but that book has brought her tens of thousands in coaching revenue, and more as the years go by.

If you're holding out for a traditional publishing contract, know that it's a rare publisher who will take on a new author who has doesn't have a platform big enough to sell at least 2,000 books.

Self-publishing is flexible and gives you control over your marketing but be careful where you spend your money.

Some companies will promise you miracles they can't deliver. Phrases like "potential exposure to 400,000 bookshops worldwide" means they are adding you to a catalogue; something that you could do in less than a minute by ticking a box online. Chances are very slim that you'll get orders from those bookshops.

The real value for you is in the strategy around the book, and the quality of the work. Paying an expensive self-publishing company to make your book look nice is like buying expensive plates and serving a steak dinner to a vegetarian.

No-one cares about the plates until you get the meal right.

### **19. Not getting a professional editor**

An author who skimps on an editor is usually trying to save money. I get it; it feels like a luxury and not an essential.

Maybe you have a 'friend' or a family member who has offered to 'edit' your book?

But if you miss this step, I can almost guarantee that you will publish something less than your best work.

A good editor can work with you on structure, the depth and organisation of your content. This is about more than spotting spelling mistakes and commas in the wrong place.

Maybe you've worked with a coach or mentor along the way who has guided you on this as you go. Great.

However you get it this kind of developmental support, please make sure the person has a professional, and not just a personal, interest in your work.

## **20. Skimping on proof-reading**

A related mistake, and the source of many an unnecessary poor review on Amazon.

I know, people should comment on the quality of the content not the occasional typo. They won't; and there will always be someone who criticises you for this mistake.

Do you want that in your life?

Please don't ask your partner or neighbour to do this unless they really know what they are doing.

It's not an expensive part of the process and, although maybe not the most exciting part, getting this wrong will cost you in reputation and lost book sales.

## **21. Being too hard on yourself**

You won't (and shouldn't) write every day. Your work isn't terrible. People do want to read it.

Whatever particular way you have of being hard on yourself, I want you to stop.

The joy of the writing is in the process as much as it is in the outcome.

This might be the first time you've attempted to write a book -- so be gentle with yourself.

What was it like when you first attempted something new -- when you started your business, or when you learned a new skill. Did you get help? Were you patient with yourself about your progress?

Writing is about growing as a person as much as it is about growing your business and I want you to do it in a way that gives you that personal growth. Stretches you.

Please be kind to yourself, and to your writing.

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*This guide was written by [Cathy Presland](#). Cathy is a strategist and trainer working with entrepreneurs and professionals who want to share their expertise in a book. She is founder and editor of [Author Unlimited](#)*