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# How To Write A Book

*by*

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## How Hard Can It Be?

*"There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed."*

Very hard, according to Hemingway.

And most writers find themselves [stuck at one part of the process or another](#).

Whether it's not knowing where to start — that mush of too many ideas.

Or whether it's getting to, what I call the 80% stage. You can't see your way to the end, and you wonder if anyone will want to read it anyway.

Both of these, and more, are common places to get stuck.

But it doesn't have to be like that.

I've worked with hundreds of authors and entrepreneurs who want to write a book. I teach writing Masterclasses and I have thousands of students in my online courses, and I know that, if you take these lessons to heart, you will write a better book and you will actually finish. And, it will be a faster, and a much more pleasurable process.

## How To Write A Book: The [AuthorUnlimited.com](https://AuthorUnlimited.com) Guide

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You want your book to be part of what you do, to [contribute to your business](#), and you want to feel joy and pride as you write.

And you can do all of this without shedding a single drop of blood. Sorry Ernest.

### How to Start

I get more questions on 'how to start' than on anything else.

How do you decide what to write and then take that leap into the dark to write those first few words, the first few pages of your new (perhaps your first?) book.

You've been thinking about it for years; telling yourself that you'll do it 'someday'. And now that itch is getting stronger and you want to turn someday into now.

Here's my best advice to get started.

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### 1. Pick one topic

It's OK to have lots of ideas; we all do. But in order to get to completion, you need to pick one. Just one.

I know that you have years, perhaps decades, of experience, and you have many things to say, but you don't have to distil all your decades of experience into a single volume, that's overwhelming for you and also for your reader.

Take one idea, one promise. Something that you can *complete*.

And the most helpful way I know to re-frame this if you can't start because you can't pin down your idea, is to simply pick one that will be your *first* book.

Important words — *your first book*. (or *your next book*.)

This won't be the only book you will ever write; it's simply the book you are going to write *now*. What that book will be is where the fun of choosing comes in.

### 2. Plan your book

You've hear this before: plan your book before you write. You need an outline.

And the reasons are two-fold: if you have a structure you're more likely to stick to it. And a clear structure is what makes the writing easy.

Your structure, or outline, is what gives shape to your idea. If you don't have clarity here, then this could be why you are stuck.

Yes, believe it or not, structure will free you.

If you're using the words,

I don't have time. Or. I'll finish my book when....

Then, chances are, you need to revisit your structure because it isn't about time at all; it's about clarity.

*How* you structure your book will depend on what exactly you are writing.

What I find works for most authors is to imagine you are taking your reader on a journey. The map is the flow of your chapters, and you create a repeating structure inside the chapters to give the book depth.

### 3. It's a conversation

This is often a breakthrough moment in my writing workshops: you are writing for a reader. There are two people in your writing relationship, not one.

For a business owner, writing a non-fiction book, you've probably worked with the idea of a customer 'avatar', or an ideal customer. It's a similar concept for a writer, although you need to go deeper and make a deep connection.

As soon as you know who you are writing to, then you can write a book that will *sell*.

Knowing your reader also makes the writing easier.

Are you ever stuck for conversation? If someone asks you a question about your topic, can you answer it? Yes, of course you can. And, if you can do this, then you already know how to write a book.

The time to identify your reader is now.

Even if you've started your book already, pause, take a breath and make sure you understand *who you are writing to*.

### How to Write

Now that you have your book in mind, you can start to write.

If you've done the work on the structure, you'll be itching to write, and the words will flow. It's as if you suddenly know how to give voice to your ideas and it almost writes itself.

But, at certain points, you'll have to work at keeping this feeling alive. Enthusiasm can wane, and your writing slows down. Grinds to a halt even.

Build these ideas into your routine and you can skip that part and stay in the zone. Because this is what gets the writing done. Confidently and skilfully.

### 4. Habits

I know that talking about habits isn't at all sexy. But I urge you to take this one seriously if you want the prize of that finished book in your hands.

Habits are the things that you do regularly, and that you do frequently and writing your book can become one of those habits.

If you have the luxury of doing it every day, that's great. Otherwise [three to four times a week is a good start](#).

Keep to a regular time, if you can, whether that's mornings, or whether that's a couple of evenings a week after dinner.

And build that habit by doing it right after you do something that's already in your routine.

Maybe you get your morning coffee, and go straight to your computer. Or, you go to your desk after your weekend run, before you take a shower.

Set a trigger activity which makes one habit flow right into another so that you are creating a writing ritual.



### 5. Do it first

The results we get are determined by the things we spend our time and energy on.

We might *think* something is a priority, but do we do what it takes to succeed? It's no good *saying* you value your health and fitness, if you sit at your desk all day, leaving work to go home and slump on the sofa in front of the TV. Your actions speak louder than your words, my friend.

It's the same with your book. Don't *say* you are going to do it. Either decide to shelve it for now, or actually make it a priority and do it.

You need to write *first*.

Whether that's first thing in the morning (which is ideal), or the first thing you do when you sit down to write. If your writing time is in the evening, then write immediately you get in, or right after dinner. Do everything else when you are done.

I know it can be a challenge to make time for what is important in the future over what seems attractive in the moment (and no-one is perfect), but this is when habit will be your friend.

Don't think about what it takes to finish the book, just keep your eye on the page you are writing now. Word by word.

### 6. Write to time not to word count

My clients are often surprised when I tell them to do it this way. Time not word count.

But it's simply about control.

You can control the amount of time you write for, but you can't control exactly how many words you write in that time. Some days are more productive than others and that's OK.

Agree with yourself a *writing time*. Decide how long you will write for, and then use that space in your day to work on your book.

I know some writers who like to set a word count, and I understand that. Words are important and you have to get the book done. But failing to reach a daily word count can set you back. It's demoralising.

Some of us have a business to manage and a family we love and want to spend time with, so it's just easier to plan a couple of hours for your writing, and then you are free to enjoy the rest of your day.

The writing is done.

### 7. Write first, edit later

These are separate activities and should be done at different times, ideally on different days.

Don't be the person who agonises over finding the right word and won't move on until it's located. You can come back and find the word later. Make a comment in the text and move on.

The writing and the editing are done in different parts of your brain and, if you flip between them all the time then you'll lose your flow and slow down your progress.

And you'll also become absorbed in what's *bad* about your writing, rather than focusing on *doing*.

To complete your book, you need to get to a half-decent (or even terrible) first draft. That first draft is becomes your second draft, and your book gets better.

And completion refuels our motivation. Getting to the milestone that is your first draft convinces your brain that you can do it.

And you can! (especially if you take these lessons to heart.)

### 8. Distraction-free space

Just as you plan your time, also plan your space. You need to be comfortable, and you need to be free of distractions. What makes comfortable is up to you. Create an environment you love by choosing a different space than your regular office can work well — to mark out a sacred sanctuary for your book. Something as simple as a quiet corner at home is fine, or a local café with a good buzz (and preferably one without wifi!).

You also need to unplug because you need to get into the flow of writing. If you switch activities, answering the phone, checking email, or browsing the web (writing time is **not** research time!), you can lose [up to 40% of your productivity](#), you [produce stress hormones](#), and your IQ drops. Yes, seriously!

You need to be in a relaxed state where words are flowing and both sides of your brain are in synch: the creativity and the language parts. And to get into that state, you have to work without distraction. And that means turning off your phone, your email, your browse, everything.

Use a [writing software](#) like Ommwriter, which plays gentle meditative music to boost your creativity. Or write on paper — this is a great way to break through any blocks or uncertainties that come up when you're writing your book.

Time and place have a role to play in writing your book so give yourself that luxury of uninterrupted time. It's good for the work and it's good for the soul.

### 9. Be accountable

You probably understand [writing accountability](#) but, I have to ask, are you doing it? Do you have someone who is checking in with you to see whether you did what you promised?

We increase our chances of achieving our goals if we are accountable to someone we respect.

It can be as simple as a friend, some kind of informal arrangement where you check in on each other's big project. Or it can be a paid writing group or a mentorship.

You can do it yourself, you don't need support; just know that high performers do this ruthlessly.

You'll get there faster, and it will be more fun, if you involve others.

### 10. Stop obsessing the word count

Here we are halfway down the page and only now I start talking about word count.

You probably thought about it at the planning stage, right?

Obsessing over:

How many words does my book need to be?

I get this question every single time I run a workshop, and yet, when I work with clients, the book always works out to be the perfect length.

Be reassured that, if you have a solid idea, and you plan your content, your book will be just as long as it needs to be, and [your chapters will be the perfect length](#).

If you insist (and in case you're using [Scrivener](#) and want to add a word count target!), your non-fiction work is likely to be somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000 words.

You can do a shorter digital-only book at the 20,000-30,000 word mark — and digital books are actually more accessible if they are short.

And, if you have a lot to say, with research and stories, you might get up to 100,000-120,000 words.

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If you're in the fiction arena, then you probably want to be anything between 80,000 and 200,000 words. Unless you're George RR Martin or John Irving and then your number begins with a 3.

But don't obsess it.

Go to the book store and look at some books. You'll find that some are long, and some are short, and it really depends on what you want to achieve.

There is no 'one size fits all' here, other than the rule that quality rules over quantity every single time.

## How to Know If It's Any Good

### 11. Take breaks

In order to write anything good, you need to get perspective.

Which is why I want you to take breaks between your writing sessions and also between the days and weeks of your writing.

Stopping is just as important as starting when you are writing to time. Yes of course, finish your sentence first, but then take a break.

Breath, stretch, and refresh before you go back to it.

You need it for clarity, and for inspiration.

Which takes me nicely to the next lesson...



### 12. Make inspiration intentional

Whatever you are writing, you need inspiration. And I want you to make it intentional.

Of course, you can't *force* inspiration; she comes when she feels like it. But you can set up the right conditions to encourage her to show up.

Whether that's [taking a break in nature](#), visiting museums and galleries, doing something that involves movement, like dancing or playing with the children. Or keep it simple, and reading more good books.

If you plan the time off and you plan to do activities that you enjoy and that absorb you, the inspiration will come.

The idea is to let your brain and body rest and [creativity will come to you](#) when you least expect it.

It's the way your brain works.

### 13. Get feedback (from the right person)

Writers come to my workshop and say variations of:

My boyfriend said....

And it usually ends in something that leaves them feeling a little despondent.

It's inevitable that we want to consult our loved ones, and that they want to support us in return.

But I urge just a little caution.

Share, yes. Share the fact of the work; the dream, the vision.

But don't ask for feedback *on the work*.

What you want is encouragement, support and space. You want someone to understand the energy and time needed for you to complete your book, and to be generous about giving them to you.

Your boyfriend / partner / friend may not be your ideal reader; they *want* to connect with what you are writing, but they are not quite connected and their reaction is not the same as one you would get from your perfect reader.

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And, chances are, he or she isn't a writing coach.

They don't know what a first draft should look like, or whether you have the right elements in place.

They are judging an incomplete work against their expectations of what the *finished* work should look like. And your work won't measure up, because you're not at that stage yet.

It will, but they don't know that.

It can be disheartening for you, and also for them because they want to be there with the right support, and they want you to do good work.

Getting the right feedback will improve your book, its direction and your writing.

Just mind who you ask.

### 14. Be kind

Be kind, always, and especially to yourself.

We can be our own worst critics.

You haven't written enough today.

What you've done is awful.

Who are you to...

Kindness in all things will keep you sane and happy.

Don't set crazy targets, and don't be harsh if you skip a few days, or you don't like what you've written.

Writing a book is a process, and you go through ups and downs. You have to write a first draft to be able to make it better.

That's part of the process. And it won't get any better or easier if you are self-critical. It doesn't have to take long, and it doesn't have to be hard.

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And we can also snap at other who want to support us. The partner who is asking you out because they want you to take a break from the writing. Don't get annoyed even though all you want to do is finish your chapter. The writing is never done, you know that, but he or she may not.

It really is OK if it doesn't go to plan, if your editor doesn't like your first draft, or if you just had a bad week.

Breath and move on.

## How to Finish

### 15. Stay focused

Books get bigger as you write and I urge you to stick to your outline, be clear about your boundaries, and deliver on your promise.

And no more.

There will be other books and plenty of time to write later. After you've finished this one. If you allow the book you are working on now to become too big, it will take forever, and you lose sight of the finish line.

Am I done?

I see this a lot and you can't answer that question because you've allowed your book project to become too big. You have none of that perspective which is so important. Your book will be the worse for this 'scope creep'; unfocused and rambling.

Get back to your strategic focus, revise the outline if you want to, but then be ruthless and strip out what doesn't fit the plan.

Remember what I said about this being just your first (or next) book?

### 16. Targets to laugh at

Make your targets so small they're laughable. But don't laugh yet, because I want you to take this seriously.

If I asked you to write for five minutes, it would be easy. Much easier than writing for five hours.

If I ask you to write 50 words you'll probably laugh. It's a couple of sentences, about the length of this paragraph. If I ask you to write 50,000 words, you'd likely balk, and then procrastinate. But 50 words, after 50 words will soon add up to 500, and 1,000, and then 10,000.

Don't obsess your word count, and, if you do want to set targets, keep them small.

Each journey begins with a single step, and each book begins with a single paragraph.

It's how you will get to completion.

### 17. Write in chunks

Because you have an outline, you can select sections, sub-sections, and chapters to write in any order, as you feel like, and when you have time. You are never facing '*the blank page*' because there is always a question to answer or a box to complete.

Having this structure helps you finish fast.

You don't have to go beginning to end, you can start anywhere and come back to the parts that might need more work, or some research, later.

You will write quickly, and you get the reward of completion.

You see the progress with each section completed, and the cycle of positive feedback motivates you to write more.

And it's manageable to do it this way, especially if you have a 'day job'.

Setting a regular writing time, small targets, and writing in chunks like this, is what will get you to the finish.



### 18. Monitor your word count

I know I said write to time and not to word count, but you also need the reward of *seeing* your progress.

Take a spreadsheet, a wall calendar, or use the tools in the [writing software](#) you choose to keep a track of how much you write every day and every week.

If you can make it visual, even better.

How would it feel to complete 10,000 words, or 20,000, words in a week? If you can see your progress, you are driven to write more.

And you easily get to your goal by setting small daily targets and then monitoring them.

### 19. Go public

You must go public with your work.

You are not Emily Dickinson, leaving notes in a dresser, to be found by a surviving relative.

You want to get your work out, that's how you grow, how you improve your writing and grow your business. The special things that happen when you become an author come as a result of you stepping up.

You can do it in stages if you want.

Any sign of nerves about putting the whole book out? Then why not publish sections on your blog and see how people respond.

Create a short pdf book to give away on your website.

Test your ideas when you speak or in small group seminars, ask for, and listen to the feedback.

There are many ways to get your words into the world. A book is just one medium to communicate your ideas and your expertise.

But please, please publish, however you do that.

### 20. Get to completion

Completion is your goal.

This may not be the longest book you will ever write; it may not be the most perfectly written. But, as you complete, that first work, then you become an author.

You can write more books, you can improve your style and technique, you can learn to market better.

Even if you are not a 'writer', having a book is a wonderful way to connect with people and to spread the word about what you do and what you have to say.

Completion is more important than you know. For the success of your book, and for everything.

### 21. Celebrate

Celebrate like crazy, all the time!

Celebrate deciding to write, celebrate your outline, celebrate your first chapter.

Certainly celebrate a first draft, a final draft, the proof of a cover, those first emails you get from readers who love your work...

I think we celebrate too little, we want to be quiet and modest (or maybe that's just the Brit in me?). We want to downplay our achievement:

Oh it was nothing.

It certainly wasn't nothing! Writing a book is a big undertaking, and you deserve to celebrate every step of the way.

And, if you want to let me know, I'd love to celebrate with you.

## Where you are is perfect

You may be part way through your book, you may be on your fourth, or you may be still thinking about it. (just don't think too long, please!)

Writing a book will change you, it will grow you as a person, and it will grow your business and expand your reach.

Even if you think you're not ready yet, there must be something in you that is calling you to write. Otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this. And certainly not this far down.

We all start where we are; the trick to finishing is to take action. Just one small step after another.

If all you do today is decide the topic or your book, or you make a commitment to do it this year, then you are already further ahead than you were yesterday.

You can write that book. I believe in you.

**This was book written by, [Cathy Presland](http://authorunlimited.com). Cathy is an author strategist helping non-fiction authors and entrepreneurs to write a book that helps them stand out and be recognised for their expertise. She also edits the blog at <http://authorunlimited.com/>**