

Writing your book – getting started

You've made the big decision – you *are* going to write a book. Great stuff!

But now what? Organising your thoughts and getting started are probably the hardest moments. Here are three tried and tested ways to help you to get your book off to a flying start.

1. **Answer the Who What Why When How questions about your book**, using the form below. Jot down your thoughts and ideas.
2. **Start writing** – get yourself motivated and warmed up by writing a first key section of the book, which may well not end up being Chapter One, page one. Choosing this is important, see comments below.
3. **Keep thinking and taking notes** – build up your ideas, themes and potential contributors by looking at life through the lens of your book. See ideas below.

Why?

This is the first question, the one that will drive you through this sizeable (and right now, probably daunting) project. Why are you writing this book? To enhance and complement your business? To educate people about your area of expertise? To share your passion for your area of interest? Simply to have the prestige and fulfilment of having written a book? Whatever it is, summarise it in a sentence:

I'M WRITING THIS BOOK BECAUSE:

What?

What are you writing about? We will explore the detail of this below, but for now, undertake two tasks:

1. Think of a title and sub-title for your book – at this stage these may just be draft ideas and not the definitive ones, but this is a great way to home in on an overall theme for the book.

DRAFT TITLE:

DRAFT SUB-TITLE:

2. Imagine your book has been written and published. Someone picks it up and looks at the opening sentence of the blurb on the back, to find out why they should buy it. You need to grab them, excite them and interest them in your book – what sort of wording will achieve this?

WHAT WILL BE THE OPENING LINE OF YOUR BOOK'S BLURB?

Who?

Who is this book aimed at? Build up a picture of your ideal target reader and what you would like them to get out of the book. Create a profile of your reader, using various characteristics. Not all of these may be relevant but focus on the ones which you believe will make a difference when thinking about your ideal reader.

Age range and gender:

Current life stage:

Job/career:

Interests/hobbies:

Likes/dislikes:

Reasons you believe they will enjoy your book or gain from it:

As with the blurb, imagine your book has been published and your first reviews are coming in:

WHAT WOULD BE THE IDEAL REACTION, EXPRESSED IN A SHORT REVIEW, FROM YOUR TARGET READER?

"This book has..."

How?

How are you going to start to write your book? If you are clear in your mind about its themes, its structure, its narrative arc and its purpose, then you can start at Chapter One, page one. However, it is rare to have that all mapped out from the get-go.

Kick-start writing your book

Here is a suggested kick-start approach: think of a key moment, idea, event or anecdote you know you want to include in the book. A crossroads moment in your life perhaps; or an event which best illustrates the purpose and message of the book. Then start writing about that. It will be vivid, important and memorable to you, therefore making it easy to start writing about. Write, say, up to 2000 words on this topic; just get it down on paper. This piece of writing will help you to discover your style and your voice. Then share it with your book editor as a piece for discussion. It is the first building block in the book.

The process of writing this first section (which could end up at the beginning, the middle or the end of the finished book and may even alter along the way) will get your mind working and focusing on the themes and ideas of your book. With that first piece written, then stand back and do two things.

Mind map reaction

Use that first written piece to be the catalyst for your book structure ideas. Place its title/main theme/significant lesson in the middle of the mind map. From that create at least six and maybe up to a dozen ideas, branching out from it. These will be things which are applicable to the piece but may well also inform and run through the whole book.

Mind map the book

Just as that first piece of writing has warmed you up to the writing process, that first mind map has warmed you up to the more complex process of creating a structure, purpose and theme for the entire book.

Now create a second mind map, with the main idea/working title of your book in the centre. Let's work on the basis that this book will be somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 words, which are broadly the minimum and maximum parameters for an accessible and attractive non-fiction book.

As a starting assumption, let's work on a structure of 12 chapters, with each chapter somewhere between 2,500 and 4,100 words in length. On this second mind map, have twelve lines coming out from your central idea and write down chapter headings. You may want to attempt to create a detailed 1-12 numbering sequence for these. Better at this stage to just ascribe three sections into which these chapter headings will fall: 1: Beginning 2: Middle: 3: End. Your chapters do not need to be evenly divided, ie 4 chapters in each section, but by overlaying this broader structure onto your chapters you are beginning to create a satisfying narrative arc.

When?

Only embark on this get-started process when you know you will be in a realistic position to take advantage of the initial momentum which all this activity will create. Think of your book as anywhere between a six-month and a twelve-month project in total.

What if I can't start now?

If you know you want to write a book but aren't ready to undertake the activity above quite yet, put the time starting now to good use. Start looking at everything you do through the lens of your book. Think of every interaction, every customer, every event or anecdote related to your business or your book's purpose as potential raw material.

Create a 'Book Notebook'. Carry it with you and jot down everything which might feed into your book.

Alternatively, use the speech-to-text function on your phone and label each spoken note with the word 'Book'. Create these whenever you have spare moments in the day or when you want to capture a thought which may feed into the book in some way.

Then, when you *are* ready to move forward in detail with your book, you have a bank of raw material to help you.

Writing your book

All this advice relates just to your writing start-point. Once you have got going, there is further advice I can provide. Good luck!