

Brainstorming



YOUR BOOK

BRAINSTORMING YOUR BOOK



Are you ready to finally write that book you've been thinking about? Or maybe you know your next book would be better with some planning.

Now the only problem is, well, actually writing the book.

You've thought about it, maybe jotted down some notes, perhaps you've even outlined a couple of chapters.

But then, you stalled. Overwhelm set in, or you got busy, and now your book idea is stashed away on your hard drive collecting virtual dust. Or maybe you never even got that far. Maybe you found yourself so confused about the entire process that you didn't even start.

Here's what you need to know about writing a book: it's not as difficult or overwhelming as it seems, especially if you can break it down into manageable tasks.

STEP 1: WHAT'S YOUR BOOK-WRITING GOAL?

This is the step that every new author seems to skip, and it's probably the single most important decision you need to make! Without a book-writing goal, it will be extremely difficult for you to:

- Stay focused (you'll find your content wandering off-topic or you'll feel scattered)
- Stay motivated (you'll suddenly find lots and lots of things you'd rather do than write)
- Launch with authority (no great book launch starts with a fizzle)

Your goal can be personal ("because I want to be able to say, 'I wrote a book!' "), or it can be all business ("because I want to give it to my clients at my next live event").

Maybe your goal is to land on the *New York Times*' bestseller list. Or you might want to use it as a lead generating tool. You may even simply want to make sales.

Not sure what your goal is? Here's how you can find out:

Do a little reconnaissance work among your competitors. Who has written a book? Chances are most of them have at least a book or two for sale on Kindle, if not on other platforms.

A quick peek will tell you what the goal was when the book was written.

Does it have a link (or several) to opt-in for a free gift? Is the book part of a series of small (30 pages or less) books? Is it frequently offered for free on Kindle?

If so, chances are this book is a lead generator.

Does the book sell for a relatively high price compared to others? Is it offered in print form as well as digital?

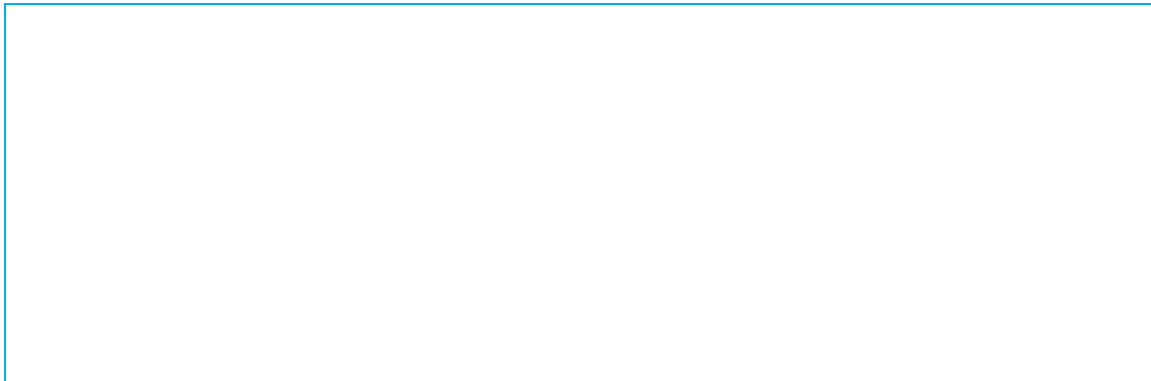
Books such as these are often used to improve market reach and brand recognition.

Finally, if the book is self-published but is available in print format, it may actually be more of a business card, designed to be given away at events.

So, what's your book-writing goal?

Exercise: Brainstorm your book-writing goal.

What is the primary purpose you have for spending the time and energy it will take to complete this project? And don't be shy. No one will see this but you, so if your goal is to make sales or land on the bestsellers' list, say so!



STEP 2: REFINE YOUR MESSAGE

Now that you know why you're writing your book, it's time to decide exactly what your book will be about.

This isn't some high-level overview where you can say something like, "I want to write a book about success." That's too general. For this step, you want to dig deep and clearly define your book's unique message.

Ask yourself:

- Who is my ideal reader? What is her life like? Why does she need this book?
- What's my area of expertise? What do I know that few others do? What unique insight can I provide?
- Is there something hot right now that ties into my message? How can I incorporate current happenings with my book?

One fantastic way to define your message and distill it down to its core elements is to write your back cover blurb. The combination of sales copy (you have to make it enticing enough to buy) with limited space forces you to include only the absolutely necessary information.

Not only that, but reading the back covers of books in your niche can give you important insight into:

- What other authors are writing about, and what their "slant" is
- What your market finds appealing
- Where the "holes" are in the available content

Your back cover blurb should include who your book is for, why she needs to read it right now, and what she's going to learn. It should be no more than three or four paragraphs, and you'll probably find that's more difficult to do than you think, so take your time and write several drafts.

And remember, once you're happy with your back cover copy, keep it handy. You'll want to refer back to it if you lose focus while writing your book.

Exercise: Write the back cover blurb for your book.

Step 3: Your Story Matters

Want to know the biggest self-imposed roadblock authors face? It's that small voice in your head that says, "Who are you to think you can write a book?"

Sound familiar? We all have that voice, so it can (and should) be ignored . . . at least when it comes to getting the words on paper.

But that voice does bring up a great question: Who are you? And why should your ideal reader pay attention?

But here's the thing you must keep in mind: You have an important message that only you can share. We all do. It's your job as the author to uncover your unique story and write your book from that point of view.

Get this right, and you'll instantly and easily attract your perfect audience—those readers who "get" you and with whom your book will resonate. They'll become raging fans who will help spread your message far and wide.

But first you have to determine what your story is and why it matters.

Some examples of author story include:

- The weight-loss coach who turned her life around by losing 75 pounds and now provides encouragement and support to women who struggle with their weight.
- The business coach who struggled for years to get her own business off the ground, and who now has a unique ability to see past the roadblocks that hold her clients back.
- The man who was bullied as a kid who chooses to write stories that inspire kids to find the magnificence inside of them.
- The woman who couldn't afford luxurious vacations so she now writes about ways to experience amazing travel experiences to foreign places on a budget.

Your story can be one of dramatic change, or an internal mindset shift, or even a very personal "why" behind your passion. Whatever it is, the experience is uniquely yours, and when you allow your light to shine through in your book, you'll instantly set yourself apart from the competition to reach your ideal audience.

Exercise: Write your story.

Step 4: Research

Ask any top-selling author and they'll tell you that the biggest part of writing is actually reading. You simply cannot hope to write a book that will appeal to your market unless you know what they're already reading—and why.

During the research phase of your book project, you're going to look specifically for the top sellers in your niche, plus the books your direct competitors have written.

You'll want to pay attention to:

- Book length—does your market prefer lengthy, in-depth books, or short reads suitable for an afternoon of study?
- Writing style—casual and fun loving, or suit-and-tie-wearing formal?
- Platform—where do your ideal readers buy their books?

Beyond the basics though, you'll also want to dig deep to determine:

- Broad topics—where does the demand meet your skill set and interest? That's the topic for your book.
- Slant—what angles have already been covered?
- The holes—this is the most important part . . . what's missing from the available books in your industry?

Exercise: Find and read/review at least 10 books in your niche.

Title	Author	Notes

STEP 5: OUTLINE AND ORGANIZE YOUR CONTENT

There are two types of writers: those who plan and outline, and those who prefer to write “from the seat of their pants.”

While the loosey-goosey approach might sound appealing, for new authors it can be a fatal mistake. Without at least a rough idea what you’ll be writing about, it is easy to either lose momentum and not write anything at all, or (maybe worse) lose focus and meander through unrelated topics without a clear point.

The easiest way to avoid both of these book-killing scenarios is to outline and organize your material before you begin writing. You can do this with a number of different tools, depending on your personal preference:

- Software such as Scrivener
- Index cards or sticky notes
- A word or text document
- A physical notebook and pen

Whichever your choice of tools, it’s important to outline your book so that it will make sense to your reader and so your writing flows naturally from one subject to the next.

You may find as you’re writing that your outline needs to be adjusted. That’s perfectly fine. It’s not carved in stone. But do resist the urge to expand your book beyond the

boundaries of your original goal. If your reason for writing the book is as a lead generation tool, then continuing to add more and more information—no matter how good it might be—is a waste of effort. Instead, save that material for the next in the series.

An outline can help you avoid “scope creep” while at the same time answering that most difficult of questions, “What am I going to write next?”

For non-fiction, here’s an easy way to start outlining: begin by noting all the “must have” sections. They may look like this:

- Introduction—if you can get a friend or colleague to write this section, do it!
- About you—why you’re the perfect person to write this book
- Chapter 1—what the book is about in broad terms
- Conclusion—recap what your reader has learned and what she should do next

The chapters in between are where the meat of your content goes, and you can organize them in the way that makes the most sense for you and your readers, but do organize them. You’ll be glad you did when procrastination and frustration strike.

For fiction, you want to note:

- What opening will hook your reader and make them want to buy the book? Pose a question the reader will want to have answered
- Put an additional hook in every chapter. This probably means incorporating sub-plots
- Outline which plot elements you’ll include in each chapter
- Wrap up with an ending that satisfies the reader without being predictable

Exercise: Outline your book.

Step 6: Goal Setting, Deadlines, & Time Management for Authors

It doesn't matter if you're writing a 20-page lead generator or a 350-page opus; the one thing you cannot afford to ignore is a writing schedule. If you think to yourself, "I'll write when I feel inspired" you will never finish your book.

Instead, take a tip from top authors and create a writing schedule. Make it goal-driven and unbreakable.

You know yourself best, so make it a point to schedule your writing time when you're feeling fresh and creative. Don't try to force yourself to write when you're tired or frustrated and all you want to do is sit down with a glass of wine and binge watch your favorite TV show. Instead, give your book the best of your creativity and energy, and you'll be much happier with the results.

Some writers find it helpful to decide ahead of time how long the book will be, then break the overall length down into daily to-dos. For example, if you're planning to write 30,000 words and want to finish in a month, then you need to write 1,000 words per day. That may take one hour or it may take four, but you have to hit that daily word-count goal if you want to finish your book on time.

Other writers prefer to set a time-based schedule, and not worry so much about exactly when the book will be finished. With this type of schedule, you would—for example—create a writing appointment with yourself every day for two hours. During those two hours all you do is write.

You may get 2,000 words on paper, or you may only get 20, it all depends on how well the words flow on any particular day. But the point is to sit down and write. Here's a secret professional writers all know: your brain will learn that when it's 10am, it's time to write, and it will naturally kick into gear at the right time. So even if it feels like a struggle at first, stick with the plan. Writing will get easier the more you do it.

Exercise: Decide on your writing schedule.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri
Word Count					
Hours					

Step 7: Dealing With Distractions, Procrastination, And Other Book Killers

Along with scheduling time to write and planning out your deadlines, prolific authors know that a plan for dealing with distractions and procrastination can really help get more books published.

The fact is, life happens. Kids want your attention; the car needs a tune-up; clients need emergency support. All of these things and more will eat into your writing time if you're not aware of them—and actively working to prevent distractions from happening.

Procrastination is even worse. When you're writing a book and feeling just a tiny bit stuck, suddenly it seems much more important that you finish your laundry, brush the dog, or redesign your website than it is to sit down and write.

And when you combine the possibility of procrastination with a few of life's little distractions . . . well, you can see how it might take you several years to finally get that book written.

Here's how to prevent this from happening to your authorpreneurial dreams: work out a plan ahead of time.

Now obviously you can't plan for the unexpected disasters that sometimes pop up, but you can (and should) plan ahead for things like your kids and pets and clients.

- Schedule play dates during writing time to keep the kids out of the house
- Close your office door to prevent the dog from distracting you with her unmanageable fur
- Post your business hours on your website and let clients know you will not be responding to email or phone calls except during office hours

- Turn off your phone, email, and Skype during writing time
- Turn off your internet access during your writing time

Procrastination is a little tougher to deal with, because it's all on you. The key is to know what's likely to trigger procrastination, and design ways to keep yourself motivated.

Some ideas include:

- Rewarding yourself with a favorite treat or trip to the spa after a week of good writing (or even a day if you're particularly prone to procrastination)
- Enlist the help of an accountability partner to keep you on track
- Make a commitment to do something unpleasant (such as making a donation to a political candidate you don't support) if you don't reach your weekly writing goals

Above all, beating procrastination takes practice. The more you do it successfully, the better you'll become.

Exercise: Brainstorm potential distractions and write a plan to deal with them.

Distraction	Plan

Exercise: Recognize when you're most likely to procrastinate and decide now how you'll resist the urge.

Step 8: Choosing a Publishing Platform

Book publishing falls into three broad categories: self-publishing, traditional publishing, and alternative publishing. For more information about the variables in each of these, plus other alternatives <https://thepublishingcircle.com/Self-PublishingRealities> for a copy of the free list that outlines your choices and the upsides, downsides, and costs involved with each.

Digital and on-demand publishing has made self-publishing a viable option for authors in recent years. Prior to that, if you could not land a contract from a traditional publisher

and chose to self-publish, you would have to spend thousands of dollars to print your own books, and distribution (getting them on the shelves of local bookstores) was all on you.

Today, you can self-publish on dozens of platforms with just a few clicks of your mouse, and even if you want to offer printed books to your buyers, print-on-demand systems make it easy.

Thinking back to step one of this planner, what was your primary goal? Even if you listed “get on the *New York Times*’ bestseller list” you may want to consider self-publishing. This option will allow you to quickly get your book launched and up for sale, and you’ll get all the brand recognition and lead generation that comes along with being a published author.

But even in self-publishing, you have many options, including:

- Digital delivery, print or both?
- Kindle, eBook Partnership, Nook, or others?
- CreateSpace, Lightning Source?

For first-time authors KDP (Amazon’s print-on-demand arm) should be an automatic choice, but you don’t want to ignore other platforms.

If your book is image-based, such as a photography book, be sure to check out Blurb, as that is their specialty, and systems like Kindle simply aren’t set up to handle image-heavy books.

If you’re publishing on Kindle (and you really should be, at a bare minimum) then pay close attention to their formatting guidelines. Because Kindle e-readers come in a variety of sizes, both with and without color, elements such as images, tables, footnotes, and others require special formatting consideration.

You may choose to hire someone knowledgeable about Kindle (send an email to Theresa@ThePublishingAuthority.com) to format your book for you, or you can use any one of a number of automated formatting services.

Depending on where you publish, you may also need an ISBN. ISBN stands for International Standard Book Number, and it’s a 13-digit (10 digits for books published before 1970) unique identifier assigned to each published book. Each version of a book requires a different ISBN.

Traditionally published books will have their ISBN assigned by the publishing house. Self-published authors can choose to purchase their own ISBN directly from [Bowker Books In Print](#), the only authorized seller of ISBNs in the U.S.

If you're publishing on Kindle, an ISBN is not required (but you may use one if you have it). Amazon will assign an ASIN (Amazon Standard Identification Number) automatically, and that is the only requirement to sell on that platform.

Other publishing platforms may offer ISBN services. For example, Amazon's KDP will provide an ISBN for you free of charge, if you choose to publish your book with their "imprint" (publisher of record). If you wish to be listed as your book's publisher, then you will need to purchase an ISBN. DO NOT USE ANY ISBN OTHER THAN YOUR OWN. I can't stress this enough.

Exercise: Research and choose your publishing platform.

STEP 9: THEY WILL JUDGE YOUR BOOK BY ITS COVER

Here's an instant sales killer for books: poorly designed covers.

Your cover has to:

- Grab a reader's attention the instant they see it
- Pique the interest of a casual browser
- Quickly give an impression of the genre it's in

That's a big job for a few words and images, isn't it?

Some additional considerations include:

- Branding—be sure to use consistent colors and fonts in your cover, so you can benefit from the added exposure
- Images—choose graphics that evoke the emotions and feelings you want your book to convey. If you want to be recognized for future books or to tie in your image to your speaking profession, etc., you may want to use an image of yourself on the cover
- Readability—when it comes to online sales, your book will likely first be seen as a tiny thumbnail, so make sure it's readable even at a small size

Exercise: Design your book cover.

Get your colored pencils out and have some fun drawing your ideal book cover. You don't have to be an artist to know what you want, and by sketching it out ahead of time, you'll be better able to explain to your book designer what you're looking for. Another way to do this is to have a sample drawn up at www.Fiverr.com. Looking at the cover of your book-to-be can be a powerful incentive to write.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, occupying the central portion of the page. It is intended for brainstorming ideas for a book.

Step 10: Launch Planning

Whew! You did it! You wrote your book!

Take time to celebrate your big win, and then you can start planning your launch.

Depending on your goal from step one, your book launch might be a simple squeeze page that you post about on Facebook from time to time, or it might be a full-blown, virtual (or live!) book tour—or anywhere in between.

No matter what your goal is, though, you do have to get the word out about your new book, and that's what any launch is ultimately about. You can create a buzz about your book in a variety of ways:

- Being a guest on podcasts or blogs in your niche
- Getting interviewed in newspapers or magazines
- Paid advertisements on social media
- Free Kindle days (I don't recommend the Kindle Select program—which allows for pricing set at zero for 5 days out of every 90 days—for most books, but you can make your eBook free elsewhere and Amazon will price match).
- Give away a free prequel prior to launch
- Start a YouTube channel or a podcast
- Blog about your book and let followers know your release date
- Share your book-writing progress on social media
- Send free review copies to colleagues/list members
- Recruit your subscribers to share about your book

Your book launch will have two distinct goals:

1. Pre-release—to let everyone know about your upcoming book and to get them excited about it
2. Post-release—to make sales

Exercise: Plan three promotional activities you'll do to build a buzz about your book prior to launch.

Promo	Notes

Exercise: Plan daily promotional activities for the first few weeks after release.

Day	Activity	Notes
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If you feel lost about how to promote, you might want to consider learning how at the Writers Prosperity Circle: <https://thepublishingcircle.com/WPC>. We pride ourselves on helping authors create bestsellers! To learn more, drop a line to Theresa@ThePublishingCircle.com and she will schedule a zero-commitment call with Linda Stirling. Chances are, you'll get some tips whether or not you use any services. There's zero pushiness or obligation, so don't hesitate to set up a time to talk.

One place to get free tips and engage with other writers is in the Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ThePublishingCircle>. Just click the link and you'll be walked through the questions to join!

I hope you've enjoyed this exercise and that you'll use it to create incredible books!

My door is always open, so send any writing questions to me at Linda@ThePublishingCircle.com.

And remember,

"In all you do, BE the blessing."

Linda Stirling

