HOW [NOT?] TO WRITE A BOOK

As of today, with the publisher in possession of print and eBook versions, the work of writing my first book is complete. There is work to do – finalizing the publication, marketing, and potentially revising or extending the book. But, if completing a draft manuscript was the end of the beginning, today marks the beginning of the end of the process of becoming a published author.

Many people have asked me about the process that has taken the project to this critical point. The book's introduction includes the narrative of why I did this and describes how the book's content evolved from what you know already. You'll have to buy a copy to learn about that. But I think that some will find it interesting to hear a bit more about the process of how this a book – at least my book – came to exist in physical form.

It is important to note that the exact sort of pain you encounter writing your book will be highly dependent on the type of book that you write. Case in point: a close friend of mine recently finished his first published novel, which you should read, it's great. As a work of fiction, he spent his years crafting each individual sentence to be the finest prose possible. I didn't do this because a) my prose is just a tool that leads readers down a logical narrative to my thesis and b) I'm not as good a writer as Michael. On the other hand, his book contains approximately zero charts and tables, along with zero footnotes, and not a single note, source, suggestion for future reading, bibliography or index. This meant that, once he had his words right, he was nearly ready to make books. Once I did, I was perhaps halfway.

It was almost exactly one year ago when I looked at what I had written and realized that I had the

skeleton of a book in my hands. If I could only take what I had already done, clean up the writing, improve the charts and graphs, and slap a cover on, I'd be done. This was the first time that I said that the book would be available in "about two months." The first step in my process, which I didn't even realize would be a step, was simply to take what had been written and make it work offline. If you have ever tried to click on a hyperlink in a physical book, then you know that the result is quite unsatisfying. With my dedication to the use of source material, you can hardly fathom the number of links I had to deal with. However, if I wanted readers to be able to independently verify all the facts stated, then I couldn't just delete them. They had to be modified into a full explanation of my sources as well as how I used them. Explaining my use of source material fills 60 pages, nearly 20% of the book's total girth. This isn't unusual in non-fiction. Just getting what I had written into a single file without any hyperlinks took two months, with the help of my first editor, Brittany.

Once this was done, the charts and tables needed a complete overhaul. Most of them had been created as quickly as possible using Microsoft Office. They were nowhere near ready for a book. I even found a few errors in my graphics. Beyond charts and tables, the images were problematic. Just because an image shows up well on the internet doesn't mean that it will in a book. Some had to be replaced with images in a better resolution. Some were cut entirely - unlike on the internet, every page of a book costs money to print. This was highly tedious work, which I largely delegated to my second editor, Meng. It was another month of work.

From the beginning, I of course also knew that the book would need to contain significant new material. Approximately 25% of the book is entirely new material. The other 75% also underwent massive editing. Far beyond fixing the odd typographical error, this first editing pass involved the structural modification of every page. Several pieces were dropped in their entirety (my goal was to stay under 350 pages). I've personally lost the ability to have a neutral perspective, but I hope all the material is significantly better that anything you've seen on the web. It's definitely worth the low, low price [/pitch]. This editing pass was three months of work, although some of it happened concurrently with other steps.

Then, I brought in a group of indulgent friends as guest editors. Each of them received one or more chapters, hopefully on topics in which they had a personal interest or connection. Their comments were incredibly helpful, but perhaps more than anything else they helped to answer the ever-present writer's question: Is This Worth Publishing? Guest editing was another month of work.

After this, it was time to go through the work with a fine-tooth comb. Spelling errors, grammatical errors – places I was unclear or said what I didn't mean to say. I attempted to fact check every statement I made. This was an exceptionally painful mental exercise. I grew to hate every word I had written, embarrassed by my utter lack of knowledge of both the subject matter and the proper usage of the English language. It culminated in a marathon, twelve-hour session when the manuscript was read, cover-to-cover, for the first time. Perfect it wasn't, but further improvement wouldn't be coming from my battle-fatigued, whiskey-addled brain. It took two months to turn my edited work into a draft manuscript.

Time to bring the professionals in. While the work I've described above was ongoing, I interviewed several candidates to edit the book. There are an enormous number of people out there who are willing to edit anything you send them. They will do anything from a quick check for typos to a full restructuring of the work – for a fee of course. After talking to perhaps a dozen candidates, I chose Linda Orlando, who had a background in health care and had edited similar work. Her review came back…with 4,342 suggested revisions and a recommendation to completely re-write two Volumes. Over a span of two months, Linda completed two passes over the manuscript. The book finally read like a book, but it still didn't look like one.

We'll take a brief interlude to talk about publishing. In 2018, self-publishing means something very different from what you likely think. I didn't understand how it worked until I was well along in the process. Modern technology has greatly reduced the cost of printing single copies of books; therefore, most books today are created via "print on demand," which is just what it sounds like. There are companies that will accept your file and make a book out of it. Amazon of course does this, but I went with Lulu Press, for several reasons. Lulu provides useful service in the publishing process, and they distribute automatically to internet retailers. I also envision going around to local bookstores to see if they are interested in a taking a few copies. Most importantly, with Lulu I retain effectively full control of the process – and, for that matter, a larger percentage of the sales price as a royalty. Not that I envision getting rich off of this.

Back to the process. As you are probably aware, printing out your most recent Word document and putting it between a couple pieces of cardboard won't look like a book. The path to get to the finished product is paved by a layout editor. Mine is Philip Gessert. There are a million choices to make when laying out the book. What font will you use? What size and spacing? How will headers look? How about footnotes? Will you have an index? Will each chapter start on the right ("recto") page, or will the chips fall where they may? This is all important, especially when your book has much more than plain text. But this phase of the process is tedious and slow, because, at each revision, rather than

reading your words on a screen, Lulu Press will happily send you a proof copy of your book. Which is important, because your work will look very, very different. After a number of cycles with my editor as well as two proofs printed, layout editing has just reached its conclusion after four months of work.

The easiest part is the launch. It goes up on the publishers' website within a day and reaches Amazon and other major internet retailers in a few weeks. At this very moment, I'm in a "soft launch" – there will be a lot more to follow in a few days when I'm happy with the eBook. Once you have launched your book, and assuming you want people to read it, you will need to find ways to get it in front of your potential audience. Paid search, viral marketing, social media, and – holy grail – a book launch party. But this is a story for another day.