

Write Your Book in 6 Easy Steps

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Step 1: Make the Decision](#)

[Step 2: Create a Table of Contents](#)

[Step 3: Write](#)

[Step 4: Revise](#)

[Step 5: Edit](#)

[Step 6: Publish](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Introduction

If you're reading this, I already like you. Anyone thinking of writing a book has something special to share with the world. It might be an amazing life story or the kind of unique expertise it's not possible to convey in a short blog post or video.

Books have gravitas.

Books are extraordinary.

When someone sits down to read your book, they're giving you something incredible: their undivided attention for hours. Don't waste it!

It's not the time to hold anything back. Your relationship with your reader—each and every one of them—is valuable and hard-won. So, the most important thing you can do is honor that relationship by captivating that individual and sharing your knowledge with total generosity.

Let's get started!

Step 1: Make the Decision

The first step is the most important step of all. *Decide to write your book.* This is the part where you stop waffling, stop saying “I should,” and *make a plan* to do it. Write down why your book matters. Think about your ideal reader.

Decide.

Create a schedule for yourself with a publication date circled on the calendar in the not-too-distant future. I think six months is a reasonable time frame, but it is certainly possible to write, revise, edit and publish a book in less time. Take an honest look at your calendar and commit to writing for an hour a day—or better yet, two hours. You can do it!

Once you decide, anything is possible.

Here are some questions to ask yourself during this step:

- Why does the thought of writing a book keep coming up for me?
- Who would this book help?
- How would creating a book feel?
- What would change for me, my business or my organization once the book exists?

- What doors could a book open for me?

When you decide to write your book—really decide, in your soul—the rest is easy. Trust me.

Step 2: Create a Table of Contents

This step is easy. I recommend getting a big whiteboard and brainstorming the major topics, themes, or events you want to write about. Don't hold anything back. During the first part of this step, I want you to get loose (seriously, put on some tunes and dance it out to get into the right frame of mind), and throw anything and everything that comes to you up on that board.

Make a note of memorable stories you want to tell. Write down words that come up over and over again when you share your ideas with others.

Once you have a whiteboard full of options, you can begin crafting a Table of Contents for your book. Regardless of whether your book will be a memoir, a business book, or a personal development guide, having a solid TOC before you start writing is a good thing. It will keep you on track when you're feeling lost later on. You can definitely deviate from this document in the future, and even add to it. But by taking the time to think through and really plan what you want to have in your book, you'll empower yourself to actually finish this project.

The other benefit of creating a Table of Contents is it breaks a big, possibly intimidating project into smaller

parts. This is awesome. Sure, you might be a little bit freaked out at the idea of writing an entire book. But surely you can write ten extra-long blog posts, right? Use mind-tricks like this to follow through. That's all a chapter is: an extra-long blog post. You can do it!

Step 3: Write

This is where the rubber hits the road. I'm going to give you all my tips for the actual writing part—then I'm going to tell you about an easier way: namely, hiring a ghostwriter!

Okay. Let's say you'd rather not hire me at this time. You want to do the writing yourself. Good for you! Writing is the best. When you are in the flow of it, you'll lose all sense of time. You'll feel connected to God or the Universe, or whatever higher power you happen to believe in. Writing, to me, is better than prayer. Or maybe it *is* prayer. Who knows? My point is, writing is cool.

Tip one: make the time. I don't care if you're not in the mood. No one is ever in the mood to start something hard, and yes, writing can be hard. But if you commit to sitting down at your computer every day, or at least every other day, eventually you will get bored of sitting there staring at your screen, and the words will start to flow. If they don't, try:

- Writing in bullet points
- Writing a letter to a friend
- Write advice to your younger self

- Recording yourself telling the story you want to write, and then transcribe it, or pay someone else to transcribe it

Tip two: If you get tripped up on a particular chapter, look at your whiteboard of ideas and your Table of Contents, and jump to a different part of the book all together. You can always go back. I've found that jumping around as you build your manuscript is a good way to not take your book project too seriously.

Remember, writing books is fun!

Don't get hung up on what people will think when you're writing this first draft. Just get everything out there. It is so much easier to revise existing material than to create new material all together, so don't be hard on yourself during this step. Just write! Keep at it! Every day!

Wow, that was a lot of exclamation points. F. Scott Fitzgerald totally hates me right now.

But you get the idea. This is probably the part where you think to yourself, *this sounds hard. I don't know if I can commit to writing for an hour or two every day. I know myself, I'll give up by Day 5.*

Yup. The only way around the part where you actually put your butt in a chair every day for weeks or months is to hire a ghostwriter. You should! When you work with someone who has already written dozens of books, that person will keep you on track and ensure your book gets written and written well.

Your only job will be to answer the ghostwriter's questions in as much depth and detail as possible—then trust your ghost to do the heavy lifting. It's a beautiful thing. A ghostwriter will organize your ideas, ask for more information or clarification where it's needed, do necessary research to ensure your facts are straight, and in some cases, even format your manuscript. Amazing!

Step 4: Revise

Once you have an actual manuscript, you are In Business. Congratulations! You've done the thing millions of people merely talk about, but never do. You've written a book.

Now the bad news: you are not done.

Any book that deserves to see the light of day must be revised. Chances are decent your first draft is at least a little bit of a mess. You've started to tell a story you never finished. You've repeated yourself. Your chapters are in a gnarly, confusing order. The tone isn't exactly what you were going for. It's too jokey—or not jokey enough!

If you've written fiction, your main character is on the wrong side of the line between “enduringly quirky” and “super annoying.” (I'm speaking from personal experience here. *Shudder.*)

It's up to you whether you want to ask a few people to read your book and then revise your manuscript based on their feedback, or jump right in and revise yourself after you've let some time go by. If you return to your manuscript with a fresh mind after setting it aside for a week or two, you'll notice things that need fixing.

I recommend doing both. Revise it yourself *and* revise it based on feedback. Then do it all again. Revise at least three times.

I have two more things to say about revising. First, DO IT. You have to revise. Second, STOP. Don't spend the rest of your life revising your book. Once you've gotten feedback and done the thing, move along. Don't leave your book on your hard drive in revision limbo for years.

Authors all have one thing in common: they eventually release their book babies out into the world, even if they're not 100% perfect.

Step 5: Edit

You've come so far. You're so close! Next up: editing. Editing is different than revising. You've already caught and fixed the major problems with your manuscript. Someone could actually read your book before you've edited and make sense of it as long as you've revised.

But still, this step is crucial.

When you edit your book, you're giving your reader the gift of good grammar and consistent formatting. You are honoring their time and attention by giving them a product that conforms to normal publishing standards.

Don't skip this step.

It's impossible to edit your own work and catch every typo, weird spacing issue or extra word. You need help for this step, whether it's two or three smart friends doing you a favor, or a paid editing professional.

Your ghostwriter shouldn't be your editor. If your ghost has been working on your book for weeks or months, s/he is too close to it to be a great editor. Yes, we try. And we do pretty well. But a third or fourth set of

eyes is SO HELPFUL ANG IMPORTANT. (See what I did there?)

Don't expect your ghostwriter to be your editor.

Two final notes on this topic: One, don't freak out if you put your book out into the world and *then* find a typo. It happens.

I just finished reading a traditionally published book with two typos. Dozens of people work on traditionally published books, and mistakes still slip through. The good news is, if you self-publish your work, you can fix typos even after you've published. Simply upload an updated version of the manuscript. Boom.

Second note: You can run your manuscript through an AI grammar checker like Grammarly. I still recommend having an actual human (better yet, two) edit your book. But Grammarly is pretty good.

Step 6: Publish

One of the most common questions I get from people curious about producing a book is whether they should self-publish or traditionally publish. There are pros and cons associated with each, and I've done both.

The pros of traditional publishing include seeing your book in brick-and-mortar bookstores, and the chance to work with talented professionals without having to pay them. There's also the prestige of getting traditionally published.

Now, the cons:

- The waiting: Even if traditional publishers clamor for your book, it often takes 1-3 years for them to actually release it. They are now acquiring titles for 2021.
- The need for an agent: A literary agent is required to get traditionally published unless you work with a small local press, which adds another layer of waiting. An agent has to take you on as a client before they'll submit your book to publishers. Once they secure you a book deal, they'll collect 15%. Querying agents can take months or years.

- It's extremely difficult to get a traditional book deal. When it comes to non-fiction titles, publishers are very interested in working with people who already have a powerful platform for selling books (a TV show, a big following on social media, etc.).
- Loss of control: A publisher may have a slightly (or even hugely) different vision for your book than you do. Did you know they choose the cover? If you don't like it, tough cookies. Unless you happen to be Michelle Obama. If *she* doesn't like a cover, the cover gets *changed*.
- Low royalties: Publishers generally pay low royalties. Most of the profit from your book sales will go to the publisher, not to you. That said, the publisher pays the salary of your editors and publicity team, so it makes sense they'd take most of the upside.
- You'll need to write a book proposal first to sell a non-fiction book. This is a 15-20 document that convinces a publisher to invest in your project. You'll need to do research on competing/complementary titles and include 1-3 sample chapters.

I realize this looks like a long “con” list. I don't mean to be negative about trad pubs. Traditional book publishers and literary agencies are filled with amazing book-loving professionals, and they put out quality books. But often, my clients don't realize what a huge hurdle the traditional publishing route can prove to

be. They imagine that if a big house accepts their book, everything will change. Nope. You'll still have to market your book. You'll always be the most powerful sales person for your work, no matter how you publish. With the traditional route, you'll simply have a partner. And it will be 2022—ha!

Now let's talk self-publishing. First the pros: it's fast, it's easy, and you will have total control of every detail of your book from cover design to the description. The royalty rates are much, much better. You'll earn up to 85% (more commonly, 70%) of the cover price—that *you* set. It's empowering!

I recommend buying your own ISBN at Bowker, then publishing through Amazon and Smashwords.

Once you have your book, you can use it to build your credibility as a speaker or grow your business in other ways. People respect books, and with the right help, your self-published book will look and feel every bit as significant and amazing as a traditionally published title.

Now, the cons:

- Marketing your book is challenging: This is true regardless of whether you're traditionally published or self-published. It's tough to get your title discovered. It helps a lot if you already have a way to connect with a lot of people, whether that's via a podcast, YouTube channel, large following on Instagram or a prominent position in your local community.

There's a lot of free content online, so people will really need a push to buy a book—any book.

- You'll have to pay professionals if you want to release a quality book. You'll pay a ghostwriter, an editor and a cover designer. This can add up.

These “cons” aren't nothing. I hope I haven't burst any bubbles, but the most valuable thing I offer my clients is the truth.

All this said, *I believe in books*. Having a book is an incredible tool of connection and trust-building. Self-publishing has opened the door to people who want to control their own brands and build their own businesses. There is so much you can do with a book.

It's a great time to be alive, and it's an excellent time to be an author!

Conclusion

Say it with me: YAY BOOKS!

I hope this short guide has clarified some of the steps involved in the book creation process. If you have any questions, I am here for you.

Drop me a line on social or via my contact form at lauraschaeferwriter.com. I would love to help you with your book project!

Much love,

Laura