Praise for The Book You Were Born to Write

"One of the best ways to help people wake up is by writing a book. In The Book You Were Born to Write*, Kelly Notaras has written the exact guide you need to get your message onto the page—so it can start changing lives. From organizing your topic to finding the right coach to writing a rocking proposal, you're getting expert advice from someone who feels like your funny, wise best friend. If you want to become a published transformational author, look no further."*

— **Gabrielle Bernstein**, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Universe Has Your Back*

"If you have a book in your heart to write, you could not have a better guide than Kelly Notaras. Notaras helps you navigate the daunting and strange world of writing and publishing with the deep knowledge of an industry insider, the warmth of a dear friend, and the grace and humor of a gifted writer. If your dream is to become a published writer, then don't walk, run, to the store or your computer to get this book. Notaras gives your dream wings."

— **Doug Abrams**, founder and president, Idea Architects Agency; former senior editor, HarperCollins Publishers; and co-author of *The Book of Joy*

"I love this book. It is jam-packed with true insider advice for would-be and already writers that you won't find anywhere else. Happy warning: The Book You Were Born to Write *won't just show you how to write the book of your dreams, it will inspire you to get cracking."*

— **Will Schwalbe**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The End of Your Life Book Club* and *Books for Living*

"As a publisher of many years, it's very easy to see when aspiring authors have done their research about how the book business works—and when they haven't. Reading this informative and inspiring book will offer an invaluable edge, no matter where you are in the publishing process."

— **Robert S. Miller**, president and publisher, Flatiron Books/Macmillan USA

"Kelly offers a blueprint of the writing and publishing process that is clear, actionable, and bound to generate results. Her step-by-step guidance befriends and inspires. I have never encountered such a comprehensive, readable, and heartfelt guide to writing and publishing a transformational book."

— **Tami Simon**, CEO and founder of Sounds True

"Every author or author-to-be has a deep need: that best friend, that cheerleader, that space holder, that wordsmith, that editor, who jumps inside our vision and helps us set our most longed-for book on its feet. Kelly Notaras has written the most approachable, demystifying, and downright accessible book about writing that has ever been written, and, yes, your book will finally get written after you read hers. Case in point: she paved the way for me to write a New York Times *bestseller!"*

— **Regena Thomashauer**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Pussy: A Reclamation*

"In these pages, publishing veteran Kelly Notaras leads you through every step of the creation process, from building a rock-solid narrative structure and crafting a strong hook to pushing through writer's block and eventually partnering with a literary agent. The Book You Were Born to Write *is the consummate guidebook to getting yourself unstuck and, at last, sharing your masterpiece with the world."*

— **Michelle Burford**, #1 *New York Times* best-selling collaborative writer

"Funny, wise, and spilling over with practical advice for bringing your book baby from conception through college, The Book You Were Born to Write *is by far the best book I have encountered on the craft of writing and the mystery of publishing. It is also seeded with profound truths about the life of the soul."*

— **Mirabai Starr**, author of *God of Love* and *Caravan of No Despair*

"I wouldn't dream of writing a book without Kelly Notaras—and now, quite fortunately, you don't have to either! The Book You Were Born to Write *is a comprehensive and easy-to-follow guide for all things book-writing, publishing, and platform building so you can confidently and skillfully share your message with the world. If you've got a book brewing within you, let Kelly demystify the process with a proven plan of action for creation and success."*

— **Nancy Levin**, author of *The New Relationship Blueprint*

"The two best ways to change the world are to have a child and write a book. I can't help you with the former, but if you want to do the latter, you should start by reading master editor Kelly Notaras's amazing work, The Book You Were Born to Write. *It's the ultimate resource for everyone who wants to share their wisdom with the world in a profound and lasting way."*

— **Scott Hoffman**, founding partner, Folio Literary Management, LLC, and agent for multiple #1 *New York Times* best-selling authors

"Every writer walks into a labyrinth between the first and the last sentence, and most of us get dead lost. The Book You Were Born to Write *was my red thread. I had a sweaty grip on each of these chapters as I made my way through the maze of what I had to say in the book that I was born to write. The gratitude I have is ineffable. This is the book that Kelly Notaras was born to write. And every writer will cling to it like a sacred scripture."*

— **Meggan Watterson**, author of *Reveal*

The BOOK You Were BORN to Write

The BOOK You Were BORN to Write

Everything You Need to (Finally) Get Your Wisdom onto the Page and into the World

KELLY NOTARAS

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For my Dad,
who would have read this book cover to cover
just because I wrote it

CONTENTS

Foreword by Reid Tracy

Introduction: Welcome to Your Book Journey

PART I: BEFORE YOU START WRITING

Chapter 1: Understand What You're Getting Yourself Into

Chapter 2: Get Clear on Your Motivation

Chapter 3: Craft Your Hook

Chapter 4: Build Your Outline

PART II: THE WRITING PROCESS

Chapter 5: Just Start Writing

Chapter 6: Handle Your Resistance

Chapter 7: Work with an Editor

PART III: THE PATH TO PUBLICATION

Chapter 8: Build Your Platform

Chapter 9: Find an Agent and Write a Proposal

Chapter 10: Publish Traditionally

Chapter 11: Publish Yourself

Epilogue: Your Book Will Change the World

Appendix A: Sample Book Outline

Appendix B: Outline Templates for Teaching Memoir and Narrative Memoir

Resources

Index

Acknowledgments

About the Author

The Prisoners Literature Project

About kn literary arts

FOREWORD

Several years ago *The New York Times* did a survey asking people if they wanted to write a book, and 85 percent of those who responded said yes. If you're reading this book, there is a good chance that you are one of those people who have something to write and share with the world. I can assure you that this book will help you accomplish that goal better than any other book you might read on the subject.

I have been working at Hay House for the past 30+ years and have been teaching an online and live writer's workshop for the past 10 years. Through these programs, I've helped tens of thousands of people get their books written and published. Having helped Hay House grow from three books in 1988 to one of the largest publishers of transformational books in the world today, with over 2,000 books published and hundreds of millions of copies sold, I have been asked many times to write a book that shares my publishing knowledge.

I have always declined because writing is not my expertise and I knew one day I would find the perfect person to do it instead. I was right and that person is Kelly Notaras, the author of the book you are holding in your hands or reading on your e-reader.

I have known Kelly for many years. I first met her when she was the editorial director of Sounds True. Now she has her own literary services business. Kelly is a great editor and writer, and we have used her and her company, knliterary.com, to help us with a number of Hay House books. Recently, she has been a speaker at most of our weekend writer's workshops.

The Book You Were Born to Write contains everything you need to produce a wonderful book and share your writing with the world. Kelly has included information on building your author platform, which is what will help you actually find an audience to read your book. In many cases this is the missing ingredient for new authors.

As I was reading through Kelly's manuscript, I could hear myself giving much of the same advice to many of our Hay House authors over the years.

All three parts of the book are essential to every potential writer. But if you have already completed some parts of the process, it is fine to skip ahead. However, please be sure to take advantage of the resources in the appendix. In some books the appendix is not required reading, but in this one it is.

I do want to highlight a few bits of wisdom as you begin the journey to

becoming a published author:

1. If you think your book is for everyone, it is really for no one. Find a niche to write your book for and to promote your book to, and then expand the audience from there. Eventually your book may be helpful to everyone, but it is tough to promote a new book that way.
2. Use your name as the domain name for your website. Do not create a new website for each book you write. You can register your book name as a domain name as well as just redirect web traffic to your main website (which I recommend has your name as the URL). If you are going to write more than one book, the odds are good that your message will grow and change, so branding around your name solves that issue. Also, when you are promoting your book, people are more likely to remember your name than a book title.
3. It is never too late to get your book written. Louise Hay started Hay House Publishing when she was 60 years old and published her last book when she was 90. Take the time to get your book written.
4. If you help even one person with the message from your book, it is worth writing. One of the rewards of writing a good book is having other people's lives be affected by it. It is especially rewarding when they tell you about that impact through reviews or e-mail messages.
5. Write a great book. I know this sounds obvious, but it is truly the thing that matters most since the key to a successful book is word of mouth. People telling their friends to read your book only happens if they loved it and were helped or entertained by it.

I wish you well on your writing journey, and I look forward to seeing all your books make their way onto the market.

Reid Tracy, President and CEO of Hay House

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Your Book Journey

"I know I have a book in me."

"I've always wanted to be an author."

"People always ask me when I'm going to write my book."

"I have a story to tell, but I never seem to make time to write."

These are just a sampling of the messages I hear every day from would-be authors around the globe. In this era of rapid change and frightening world events, more and more people are feeling called to help others by sharing their transformational stories or messages in book form. Life coaches with new methodologies for living on purpose … energy workers who've discovered new ways to prevent disease and teach self-healing … everyday heroes and heroines who have made it through difficult circumstances and want to inspire others to do the same. We need these books in the marketplace, and thankfully publishing has never been more simple, accessible, or affordable than it is today.

Yet every day I meet thought leaders, healers, and change agents who are stuck at the starting line. They know they have a book inside, but they don't know how to get it onto the shelf. If this sounds like you, you're in the right place. In my experience, transformational authors like you—who want to write books that help and serve others—are highly motivated and have priceless insights to share. Yet most of your time and focus has been directed toward doing your work in the world rather than honing your capacity as an author. In other words there's a lot you don't know. No worries—that's why this book exists. My goal is to quickly get you up to speed so you can write your book and use it to educate, inspire, and uplevel your mission on behalf of us all.

Why I'm Writing This Book

I have been a book editor for more than 20 years now. I love my career, but I didn't plan it. As I was graduating from college, I was in a panic familiar to many liberal arts students: *I had literally no idea what I wanted to do with my life*. I was graduating with a prelaw degree, but I was pretty sure I didn't want to be a lawyer. I had a minor in communications, but I knew I didn't want to be a journalist. And my second minor in literature? Well, I'd just done that for

fun. I mean, you can't get a paying job in *literature*, right? So I went to see one of my favorite professors to ask him what I should do with my life.

"You're a great writer," he said, without hesitation. "An obvious path for you would be to write books."

Write books? I thought. I was flattered, but I was also pretty certain writing books entailed, um, *writing whole entire books*. Who has the patience? The stamina? The ideas?

"Not yet, of course," he continued. "You don't have anything to write about yet. Go get a job for a few years, and eventually you'll have something to say."

Later that same week, I was on a stealth setup with my sister's boyfriend's best friend's little brother. There were no romantic sparks, but what I did get was the next breadcrumb on the trail toward my future. I asked him what he did for a living, and he told me he was an editorial assistant at a book publishing company in New York. *Holy smokes*, I thought. *You can* be *that?* For a year prior, I'd been having the time of my life working in a small bookstore in Washington, D.C., where I was in school. (Shout-out to the late, great Cleveland Park Book Shop. R.I.P., independent local bookseller.) I'd unpacked hundreds of boxes with the names HarperCollins and Random House and Simon & Schuster printed on the side, but I'd never contemplated that these boxes came from publishing companies where books were being born every day. I'd certainly never made the connection that somebody, somewhere, had to *make* those books. *For a living*. If I couldn't work in a bookstore for the rest of my life, what about becoming one of *those* lucky people?

My maybe-date proceeded to tell me how little money I would get paid, how much it cost to live in New York, and his 25 favorite recipes for cooking potatoes—since that's all I would be eating for the first four years at least. But it was too late; I was *in*. Not just because it sounded both glamorous and challenging—a combo I cannot resist—but also because it would confer upon me the ancient secrets of the literati: how a book gets published. After all, I'm an overachiever. If I'm going to do something, I want to know I'm going to rock it. And I was pretty certain getting a book published was something lots of people failed at every day. *Not me*, I thought. If I was meant to be writing books, as my professor seemed to think, then working in the publishing biz was the perfect win-win. It would pay the bills (barely, as it turned out—my date was unfortunately correct on that account) while I gathered enough life experience to give Hemingway a run for his money. And at the same time, I'd be learning insider secrets that would ensure I could get my own book(s) published when the time was right. I thought I was pretty much a genius.

So I took a long, hard look at my bookshelf, jotting down the familiar names I saw: St. Martin's Press, HarperPerennial, Penguin Books. At the risk of dating myself, I will admit I went to the grocery store and purchased a hard copy of *The New York Times* so I could pore over the "Publishing" ads in the classifieds. In the end I moved to New York and took a job as an editorial assistant at Avon Books.

My breadcrumb trail of book publishing has taken a lot of turns since then: calling me from Avon to HarperCollins to Penguin to Hyperion over the course of seven years; beckoning me out of New York and into a job at spirituality publisher Sounds True in Boulder, Colorado; pointing me toward my first ghostwriting gig; leading me to set up a website and call it kn literary arts. And each of those crumbs has been the beginning of a new adventure. If only to make my communications professor proud, I am now—finally!—writing a book of my own. And it's a book about how to write a book. (How very meta.)

This book contains everything I didn't know that day in my professor's office. In the pages that follow, I will outline the ins and outs of the author's path—the what, why, and how of getting a book into the world. I went into the heart of the business and returned with the sacred elixir. And now I'm handing it to you, in a neat little package that I hope will inform you and inspire you to become the author you've always wanted to be.

The World of Transformational Nonfiction

Some people love to read fiction, to be swept away into a world of someone else's creation. Some love to read memoir; they are riveted by real-life stories with the attendant ups and downs, deaths and rebirths. But me? I prefer something more practical. The category I read—and edit—most frequently is something I like to call transformational nonfiction. I don't think I made up the term, but I use it more than anyone I know. Approximately 95 percent of the books I've worked on in the past 10 years fall into this category.

When I say "transformational nonfiction," I'm using it as an umbrella term. Underneath this heading you'll find a wide variety of books that are meant to help a reader grow, change, or learn. In the conventional book marketplace, transformational nonfiction often sits on shelves labeled "self-help," "self-improvement," "personal growth," "religion," "psychology," "esoterica," and "advice." In other words, we're talking about books that are devoted to improving readers' lives, opening their hearts, reminding them they're going to be okay, and helping them become who they are meant to be. Personally I love reading books like this because I can feel the immediate value they add

to my life. When I pick up a really good one, my world changes because of it. When you're an editor, you get super up close and personal with the books you're working on. I decided at a certain point that it just made sense to work on books that would be working on me at the same time. And voilà, a career specialization was born.

So it's only right for me to let you know that the book you're now reading is fairly obsessed with transformational nonfiction. (If you don't want to be on this train, now may be the time to find a different book.) The information you'll find in the pages that follow is often relevant to other genres, but not always. If you're writing a traditional nonfiction book, you're probably going to get what you need here. But if your compass is pointed toward being a novelist or a poet or a writer of children's picture books or heavily designed coffee table books, I would highly suggest double-checking any advice you find in these pages against that of an expert in your particular genre.

Hey Baby, What's Your Genre?

One of the first things you'll want to sort out as you begin working on your book is your *genre*. The genre is the *type* of book you're writing. You can think of it as deciding which bookshelf the book will sit on in the bookstore. Within the world of fiction, genres include suspense, romance, historical, science fiction, and literary, to name just a few. In the world of nonfiction, you'll find areas like how-to, biography, popular history, and travel. Within each of these categories there are subcategories. For example, in the world of romance there are contemporary romances and historical romances, time-travel romances and paranormal romances. (There really is such a thing as paranormal romance. Look it up!)

Within the transformational nonfiction genre, the vast majority of books I see fall into one of three common subcategories. The first is *prescriptive nonfiction*, which is a book that teaches the reader a helpful methodology the author has learned or developed. The second is *inspirational memoir*, in which the author relates her own life story—often a story of triumph over adversity—for both the entertainment and the benefit of the reader. The final subcategory combines the previous two into something I call *teaching memoir*, which uses the author's own story to illustrate lessons that will help the reader in his life.

As you venture further into this book, it may be helpful to ask yourself which of these sounds most like the book you are writing—or want to be writing. Knowing your genre helps you filter the information I'm offering you and decide whether it's relevant to you or not. It also starts the process of developing your hook and your outline, two of the most important steps I'll cover in Part I: "Before You Start Writing." So take a moment now to ask yourself this question: *Am I most likely writing prescriptive nonfiction, an inspirational memoir, or a teaching memoir?* Jot down your answer and congratulate yourself on taking one of the first steps toward having a book in your hand!

The Real Reason I'm Writing This Book

There are a lot of obvious reasons why I'm happy to devote many hours of labor to writing this book. I want to share what I've learned over two decades in books, first and foremost. I also want to spread the word about my business, and writing a book is a great way to do so. Then there's the fact that I'm mildly masochistic, as most writers are. All these reasons are true. But there's another, less obvious reason I'm writing a book about how to write a

book. And I need you to lean in a little bit here—it's a secret, so I have to whisper it:

I'm writing this book because I believe in you.

It's true. I actually, totally, completely trust and believe in you.

I may not know you personally, but I know that if you're reading this particular book, you're on a mission. Your mission may be overt or it may be behind the scenes. It may be big or small. Transformational books are mission-driven books. Each one has a purpose, and it's my belief they *want* to be in the world. Times are rough right now, my friend. The reality we see around us is one of division, war, self-protection, and pain. But here's what I've learned over the course of my training in matters of human development and spiritual unfolding: what's happening on the outside is a reflection of what's happening on the inside. Only if we are divided against ourselves, at war with ourselves, afraid and in pain on the inside—both collectively and individually—could these problems be presenting themselves in the world around us. What's helpful about adopting this belief system is that it holds that *change is possible*. We no longer have to look at the massive problems we see around us and shrug because they're too darn big for one little person to fix. Instead we start to see that the only way to make any change at all is by making that change first inside ourselves.

Enter transformational nonfiction. Reading a book is one of the most intimate experiences we've got. We take books with us on vacation. We listen to them in the car when we're alone. We daydream about having long afternoons to lounge on the couch and read. Don't tell Mom, but we even take them to bed. (Sometimes a different one every single night!) Is it any surprise, then, that books get *all the way in there*? That their messages deeply impact us, change us, heal us, and grow us? For this reason books are one of the most powerful antidotes I know to human confusion, fear, and pain. We need books that heal and transform now more than ever.

So isn't it convenient that today, for the first time in history, it's easy and economical to publish a book? Rewind a thousand years, and paper itself was so expensive that a blank journal was a rare treasure. Today you can buy a spiral notebook for a buck at any drugstore. Not to mention our easy access to computers, iPads, and even the notes app on our phones. We are free to record information every moment of every day, in a thousand different ways. It is impossible to explain just how world-rocking this is. Most of us have no idea how fortunate we are to live at a time when the ability to write down what we know is available to all.

It's also never been easier to take those recorded ideas and turn them into a

physical or electronic book so they can make their way into the world. Self-publishing is within anyone's capacity. If you have the stamina to write a book, you can easily get it published. This has not been the case *ever in human history*. Forgive me for sounding like a book geek here, but I think this is *amazing*. And I also think it's *perfectly timed*. For never before have we been in more desperate need of transformational messages and stories. Books change minds and hearts. They heal, educate, and inspire. If you're reading these words right now, chances are you have a book like that in you. What a gift that you are interested in getting what you know into book form, where it can have a positive effect on the lives of other people.

If you want to know my deepest motivation in writing the book you're reading, it's to clear the obstacles to getting *your* transformational message into the world. Whether you have an audience of a hundred or a million doesn't matter to me. Your message or story wants to be in the world, it is needed, and it will change people's lives. I am writing this book because we need you so much, and we need your work so much. Picture me as the hologram of Princess Leia at the beginning of *Star Wars*. I'm telling you—whoever you are—that you are our only hope.

How This Book Is Structured

This book is divided into three parts: Part 1: "Before You Start Writing"; Part 2: "The Writing Process"; and Part 3: "The Path to Publication." I chose this format for two reasons. First, because it segments the content I'll be offering for ease of digestion. Imagine sitting down to a gourmet meal at a fancy restaurant and having the waiter bring your appetizer, first course, second course, and dessert on one giant plate. Where would you begin? Would you enjoy the meal as much if it were all mixed up like that? The same principle applies to the experience of reading a book. I see myself as a waiter of words. I've divided up the "meal" of this book for greatest enjoyment and ease of digestion. And I want to let you know right from the beginning how and when each course will be served. That way you'll feel the details are taken care of and you can simply relax and enjoy the repast.

The second reason I've chosen this format is that it offers you some orientation so you can find the information most relevant to your situation. While there's great info for every reader all throughout the book, I recognize we live in a very busy world. I want you to be able to find targeted information if that's all the time you can commit.

Some readers will be brand-new, never having picked up a pen before—they will need to start at the beginning. Others will already have a manuscript in hand, polished and ready to submit, and will be wondering what's next for

them. These folks can start in Part III.

I will say that regardless of where you are in the book writing process, there are two chapters in Part I that I highly encourage you to read. Too many could-be-great manuscripts get rejected by agents and publishers because the authors do not understand the information herein. These chapters are “Craft Your Hook” and “Build Your Outline.” Both steps are critical to the creation of a great book, and both can be done retroactively if you’ve already started writing—or even if you’ve finished your book. I’ll explain more about what you’ll find in each of these chapters, and in the book as a whole, in the next section.

What You’ll Find Inside

The chapters that follow offer a simple, step-by-step path from setting your intentions to holding a finished book in your hands. My goal is to demystify the publishing process, giving you the tools, insider information, and inspiration you need to start strong, keep going, and get across the finish line as quickly as possible.

One thing that makes my work as an editor—and thus the information in this book—unique is the amount of time and energy I ask my clients to invest *before* the writing begins. For this reason Part I will focus on setting clear intentions for your project and developing a premise and an internal structure strong enough to support the book. Part II starts the moment you’re ready to pick up your pen and go. I will share all the tips and tricks I’ve learned in my two decades of helping writers sit down and write. Finally, Part III will take you from “writer of a manuscript” to “published author.” We’ll talk about building your platform—the audience that will be waiting to buy your book—and we’ll go over both traditional publishing and self-publishing options. My hope is that by the time you finish Part III, you’ll know precisely what steps will be required in order to get your book out of your hands and into the world!

Start a Reading—and Writing—Group

By the end of this book, you're going to be sick to death of me "making suggestions" and "offering recommendations." Mea culpa; I'm an editor, and we are paid to be bossy. (The good news for you, as well as all my authors, is that you don't technically *have to* do what I say.) (Though—let's be clear—you really *should*.) So I figure I might as well get started early with the telling-you-what-to-do thing. Here goes: I highly suggest you read this book with a friend. Better yet, assemble a small group of writers and read the book together. Sharing the process with others has many benefits, including social accountability. It's a known fact that we're more likely to reach our goals when others know what they are. If you don't know any other up-and-coming writers, it may be time to look outside your own network. A simple way to find writers in your area is to Google "writer's group [your town]." Often you'll discover that there are writing teachers offering courses in your genre, or peer-led groups that meet, say, every Saturday morning at a local coffee shop. Gather a handful of these like-minded folks with the goal of learning together. Share your big dream with them, and champion theirs in exchange.

No luck finding a writing group that's already formed? How about starting one of your own? A simple, easy way to do this is to create a group on Meetup.com. Those in your area who have listed writing as an interest will automatically get a notice that a new group is meeting nearby. You'd be surprised how many interesting writers you will meet—and how helpful and motivating it can be to have friends on the same journey as you.

I'm not going to say the process of writing a book is easy or simple. It's a big goal that requires organization, dedication, time-management skills, and perseverance. There are no guarantees that you'll find a traditional publisher to take you on, nor that you'll make back your investment if you self-publish. But if you have the echo of a book dream in your deepest heart, a book is also the journey of a lifetime. On the other side are riches unimaginable: knowing what greatness you're capable of; offering your gifts in service of others; changing lives in an exponential way. Every day writers of transformational nonfiction receive e-mails, letters, and messages on social media thanking them for the life-changing wisdom they've brought into the world. While

writing a book represents a significant investment of time and energy, and—I'm not going to lie here—can feel never-ending at times, in the end it's always worth it. Yes, I know you're busy. You also might be kinda-sorta scared. I get that it's hard to write an entire book. I understand you have other priorities: a full-time job, a kid or two, perhaps a spouse or grandchild who needs extra attention. Meanwhile you're trying to eat right and exercise, maybe squeeze in some yoga or meditation. I know how difficult it is to get into the routine of any of the above, and it may seem impossible to imagine adding writing to a day that's already too full. I get all of this. But.

You have to do it anyway. *You just have to.*

If you feel the call, there's a reason. You have to follow. This is not up to you to decide, it's up to Life. You have agreed to carry some important mantle. I know this because here you are, reading this book. The good news is that writing a book *is* all the hard things, but it's a whole lot of fun too. Writing makes you feel like a rock star a lot of the time. It's a huge boost to energy, self-esteem, and creativity. (As opposed to *thinking about writing*, which is a total resource drain.) Writing a book is a dream for so many people. And if you've read this far, I can only imagine you're one of the rare few who's ready to live that dream. So go on. Get in there. Do what you need to do. I believe in you, I'm going to show you the way, and your readers are waiting.

PART I

Before You Start Writing

Chapter 1

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE GETTING YOURSELF INTO

Being a book editor can be a liability at dinner parties. While I love my work and feel really lucky to be in the book business, sometimes I want to talk about something—*anything!*—other than books. But if you tell ten people that you edit books for a living, you'll find nine people who have been secretly wanting to write one. And why not? We all have amazing stories to share: the tragedies we've overcome, the lessons we've learned, and the processes we've developed to help others avoid the pitfalls we encountered along the way. But the thing I hear over and over at these parties—and from my clients every day—is that most simply don't know where to begin their book journey.

If that sounds like you, welcome to the club. As I said in the intro, when I myself first got a bee in my bonnet about becoming a writer of books, I had literally no idea where to begin. The process of a book being born—transforming from a glimmer in a would-be author's eye to a bound object on the bookshelf—was a total mystery to me. I felt like Dorothy trying to get to the Emerald City without a yellow brick road to follow. Moreover, I was fairly sure that once I got to Oz, the heavily guarded gates were going to require a special knock nobody had taught me.

As I said in the introduction, my brilliant idea for cracking the code of the industry was *to become part of the industry*. I moved to New York City and quickly found a cubicle to call my own at Avon Books, which was then part of the Hearst Book Group. I'd been hired as the editorial assistant to two senior editors, and I found myself on the phone with legitimate, published authors and highfalutin literary agents on my first day. In essence I was being paid—very, very little, but I *was* being paid—to learn how the book publishing business operates. While it had its ups and downs, I look back on my time in New York with great fondness. It was a grad school of sorts, teaching me everything I needed to know in order to become skilled at editing books in a variety of genres. When I stepped off the elevator on my first day of work, I knew precious little about how a book went from an idea to a finished product. But seven years and three publishing companies later, I left New York with exactly the knowledge I'd been hoping for. I knew how the industry worked, what it took to get a book published, and how to create an

offer no publisher could turn down. And now I have the privilege of sharing that knowledge with you!

This chapter is your one-stop orientation to what it means to get a book published: a brief introduction to the industry norms, insider vocabulary, and key players you'll need to know in order to understand the two primary publishing models you have to choose from—"traditional publishing" and "self-publishing." I'll give you the lay of the land regarding the time and financial commitments you've got in front of you, and I'll introduce you to some resources you may not know about that could help you bring your book dream into reality more quickly and easily than you might imagine. My hope is that by the time you finish this chapter, you will have a basic understanding of the game you're about to jump into, and some idea of which of the multiple paths to publication you would like to try first. I say "try first" because getting a book out into the world is rarely a straight line. It's a hero's journey, full of twists and turns, dead ends and unexpected doorways. Keeping an open mind and a spirit of adventure is the key!

So here you are at the starting line. You've taken the leap inside your own heart, imagining yourself shifting from "ordinary person" to "writer of books." You're committed enough to be reading this guide, building the foundation of information (and inspiration!) required to become the author you want to be. The decision to learn is a huge part of the writing journey, so congratulations are already in order. I'm so happy you've made it here!

And with that I shall now proceed to dash all your hopes.

Just kidding. (Kind of!) Truth is, there's good news and bad news for the would-be author today. Let's start with the bad news, to get it out of the way. It has to do with the state of so-called traditional publishing, and how the business has changed over the past 20 years to make it even more difficult for new authors to break in. In the next section, I'm going to give you the real skinny on the "worst of times" half of the situation, as long as you promise not to get too upset about it. Because after that I'll go into why it's quite literally *the very best time in history* for a would-be author like you to get started. In other words, there's a rainbow on the other side of the dark cloud of gloom I'm about to blow your way. Understood? Good. Let's head into the eye of the storm.

The Worst of Times: Traditional Publishing Today

Publishing, like so many old-school entertainment industries—the music biz, the film biz, the TV biz—has been rocked by the shifting media landscape of the past 20 years. By "shifting media landscape," of course, I mean all that jazz about technology and the Interwebs. When I got into the

book business almost two decades ago, e-books were not yet a thing, and audiobooks were still called “books on tape.” It would be almost two years before an author would introduce me to the newfangled concept of a “weblog”—and then proceed to blog his way to *The New York Times* bestseller list before my very surprised eyes. And of course the industry was not yet convinced that the majority of consumers would be interested in buying books online—in spite of a young upstart called Amazon that seemed to be showing early promise.

Even before the tech boom of the early 2000s, the marketplace was getting more and more competitive. The “big-box” retailers, like Barnes & Noble and Borders, were building stores almost as fast as Starbucks, and putting smaller independent booksellers out of business in the process. Soon even the midsize chain stores—the B. Daltons and Waldenbooks and Crown Books—were getting bought up or run into the ground by the big guys. With fewer retailers to sell their books, and much more competition for coveted front-of-store placement for new titles, publishers were watching more and more fantastic books wither on the vine. In response the biggest houses—which at the time included Simon & Schuster, Random House, Penguin USA, Hachette, Macmillan, and HarperCollins—were all trying to control larger portions of the market. The larger they were, the more books they could publish, and the more likely their handful would contain a share of mega-bestsellers. They began buying up profitable midsize and smaller publishing houses to fortify their ranks and limit the competition. In 1999, the year I started working at Avon Books, our parent company was purchased by HarperCollins. The merging of company cultures, book lists, and (ahem) notorious editorial personalities is an experience I will not soon forget.

What may not be obvious from an outsider’s view is the impact these mergers have had on the lives of would-be authors. In fact, the net result is that the business has become much harder to break into.

Some of the complaints authors and agents have lodged in the face of industry consolidation include:

- Risk-averse publishers are all trying to publish similar books in similar ways; there isn’t a lot of room for new and creative publishing models or out-of-the-box book concepts.
- Publishing options are more limited, with far fewer houses for agents to submit manuscripts to—and thus it’s a far less lively marketplace for selling book projects.
- As companies consolidate, editorial staff gets cut and editors become responsible for publishing more books in less time—

meaning less personal attention for each of their books and authors.

- The most important thing an author can bring to the table is no longer an amazing book but instead an amazingly large platform already in place.

Hail the Almighty Platform

That last bullet point is worth explaining. For first-time authors, perhaps the most important result of these industry-wide changes is that publishers now favor authors who come with their audiences (and thus guaranteed sales) already locked and loaded. In fact, the word "platform" has arguably become the most important, powerful, persuasive—and despised—word in book publishing. While I will talk at much greater length about the author platform in Chapter 8, I'll offer a brief definition here. An author platform can be described as the audience you *already have* for your book; the people who are definitely going to buy copies of it as soon as it becomes available. *Everyone* has an author platform, some larger and some smaller. If you're a first-time author who has never previously heard the word "platform," yours probably includes your family, friends, business clientele, and perhaps the members of any professional associations, charitable organizations, or spiritual communities to which you belong. More substantive platforms can be built deliberately, and these days most platform building happens online. When a publisher asks about your author platform, the figure they're most interested in hearing is the size of your e-mail list. They are also hoping to be "wowed" by your social media numbers, i.e., your Facebook "likes," Instagram and Twitter followers, LinkedIn connections, and so on. Why is platform such an important concept? Because these days buyers are not purchasing books in the same way we used to. To understand why, we need to take a little walk down memory lane.

The Place Where We Talk about Amazon

By the end of the 20th century, publishing companies had gotten fairly good at selling copies of books to consumers. The primary venue for wooing book buyers was the brick-and-mortar bookstore. Said consumer would hear about a book via the media or, perhaps more often, a friend's recommendation. They would then walk or drive to their local bookseller to purchase their copy. Just like any good retailer, bookstores were set up to get customers in the door—and then keep them there. Upon entering one of these stores, potential customers would find themselves in an enticing trap. Tables stacked with beautifully designed tomes gleaming under soft lighting; elaborate standing displays directing their attention toward titles they'd never

heard of. Even today a customer in a bookstore will be forced to wade through a marketing-driven wonderland stacked high with “New Hardcovers” and “Staff Picks” and “*New York Times* Bestsellers” before making her way to the book she’s actually there to buy. For those of us who love books, this front-of-store goldmine is a happy place. It’s also totally effective from a marketing perspective: I don’t think I’ve left a bookstore at any point in my adult life having purchased only the book I’d walked in intending to buy. Publishers and booksellers cooperate to put their most promising books in the pathway of bibliophiles like me, ensuring that I will make one or more impulse purchases before walking out the door.

Back when I started in the book business, designing and commissioning front-of-store displays like cardboard floor stands, four-color posters, and table display “easels” was a primary function of a publisher’s marketing team. Back then—the era of the big-box stores—all a publisher really needed to do in order to make a sale was catch a book buyer’s attention on her way into or out of the store. They learned how to do this on-site marketing very well, and they still do it well today. The problem is that sometime in the early 2000s, book buying got a massive overhaul.

A Little Co-operation

When it comes to chain bookstores, front-of-store and "end-cap" placement (the shelves that face the walkway at the end of an aisle) is anything but random. In fact, it's a boon for which a book's publisher pays dearly. Publishers love it when a bookstore "co-operates" and offers them the chance to purchase this preferred positioning for a book. These marketing expenses are often designated as "co-op placement." It means the bookstore thinks the book is a contender, so to speak, and ensures it will land in the pathway of unsuspecting buyers like you and me.

In the same way the big-box book retailers had been edging out the mom-and-pop shops in the 1990s, by the early 2000s the online behemoth Amazon—the self-proclaimed biggest bookstore on earth—was giving Barnes & Noble and Borders a run for their money. Amazon was offering brand-spanking-new, just-published books at 25 to 40 percent off the cover price, a discount that seemed insane to traditional retailers, who had far more overhead to cover. Booksellers found that consumers would browse for the book they wanted in a brick-and-mortar store, but then go home to their computers to order their copy at a steep discount from Amazon. Barnes & Noble responded with some quick forward thinking—streamlining their offerings, developing an online presence, and launching an e-reader to call their own. Borders did the opposite, betting consumers would remain loyal to the real-world shopping experience. By 2011 Borders was out of business. As of this writing, B&N is still alive, if not thriving. Their e-reader, the NOOK, didn't take off the way the company might have hoped; industry reports cite 65 to 75 percent of e-book sales now take place via Amazon instead. Profitability remains a struggle for B&N. In the meantime Amazon has exploded past its original identity as a bookseller, accounting for 43 percent of *all online revenue* in 2016. There seems to be no contest: Amazon has won this round of the fight.

So what does this mean to you, as an author-to-be? Unfortunately, a lot. As consumers spend less and less time in actual bookstores browsing through stacks of books they may not have heard about before, publishers have lost a lot of their marketing impact. The Internet has changed not only how consumers purchase their books but how they hear about them as well. Many of the books that top the bestseller list the week of publication land there because the author has a fairly massive online audience who have been methodically prepped over the course of months to preorder their copy of the book on Amazon or BN.com. Preordered books get shipped the day of

publication, meaning copies are reported as having been sold that day. If the author has a large enough platform and has done a bang-up job of preparing their audience, thousands of copies will be queued up to ship on “pub day.” This creates the volume and velocity required to propel a book into bestsellerdom.

Could a publisher do this kind of prep work *for* the author? Possibly. But few know how or have the marketing staff to make it work. A well-tuned online book launch is a time-consuming effort that must be tailored carefully to the author’s individual brand. A larger publisher may be releasing anywhere from 10 to 50 books in a single week; they could never provide the amount of time and energy that would be required to create such a campaign for each book. Plus, the truth is that nobody is going to be a better, more enthusiastic, more creative proponent of an author’s work than, well, the *author*. In the Internet age, personality has become the primary draw. Especially in the realm of transformational nonfiction, the marketing game is set up so we feel like we’re not *fans* of an author but in fact *friends with them*. Getting an e-mail every week, or sometimes every single day, from an author—reading their words, which seem to be directed straight at us and, if they’re a good match, hit us square in the middle of the heart—we feel like we *know* them. When their book is published, we not only want to own it, we also want to support our friend’s success! Few publishing companies have this same impact on us, because we don’t feel like we know them. In my time working with Hay House and Sounds True, I can say there *are* certain publishers who develop a devoted following. Folks identify as “Hay House people” and “Sounds True people,” but I’ve never heard anyone call themselves a “HarperCollins person” or a “Simon & Schuster person.” Publisher loyalty is rare, placing the responsibility for today’s hyper-personal marketing campaign directly in the lap of the author.

Perhaps it’s now easier to see why publishers have become reeaaaaallly dependent on whatever marketing firepower the *author* brings to the table. It’s not a stretch to say that author platform now means everything to a publisher—and thereby to you, as an author-to-be. The first question literary agents ask themselves when they are considering a new author is, “Do they have a big enough platform?” In the same way, the first thing that agent will mention when pitching the book to editors is that the author has a sizeable audience. In some ways a robust platform, combined with an author’s savvy and willingness to go hell-bent for leather at publication time, has become an even more important argument for acquisition than an editor’s love of the book itself.

In other words, the vision many hopeful writers have—the vision of writing

a great book, finding a great home for it, and sitting back while the royalty checks roll in—must be relegated to the realm of fairy tale. To find a home at one of the bigger publishers, you'll have to position yourself as a sure thing: someone who can write a great book and who comes preloaded with a great platform.

All of this said, developing a platform is not an impossibility! It takes time, commitment, a certain amount of education, and—perhaps most elusive—a message that is unique and timely enough that it hits a nerve for a lot of people. So it's a mountain to climb, but with the right conditioning and gear and companions, it's totally doable. If you feel a fire in your belly at the idea of this challenge, you may want to skip all the way to Chapter 8, where I give you the 411 on what it means to build an author platform—including some numbers that will help you define what it means to have a "great" one. If a big publisher is your dream, building a platform may in fact be the first step you should take—even before working on your book.

The Best of Times: The Self-Publishing Opportunity

So what happens if you really, really, really want to write your book *right now*, and you don't yet have an author platform in place (or simply don't want to build one)? This is where the good news comes in. If you are called to write a book, it is quite literally the best of times to do so. For the first time in human history, it is accessible, affordable, and efficient for just about anyone to publish a book. With the advent of self-publishing, and specifically digital print-on-demand technology, anyone with enough passion and energy to sit down and write a book has an open invitation to become a published author.

Self-publishing is not a new thing, but it's gone through quite a rebranding in the past decade or so. Prior to the turn of the last century, publishing a book on your own carried the unfortunate label of "vanity publishing." The idea, I suppose, was that if you were vain enough to think your book should be published but couldn't find a publisher to back you up, you could pay to have it be so. *Blech!* Of course, the term "vanity publishing" was coined by the traditional publishing industry itself. This insular community deemed itself the arbiter of literary taste for the rest of us. If your book wasn't their cup of tea, the doors to publication were closed to you. Unless, of course, you were *that vain*.

Well, ladies and gents, I am thrilled to say that times have changed. The term "vanity publishing" has been all but laid to rest, wholly replaced by the more accurate and respectful term "self-publishing." And there are dozens of companies that have cropped up to help you in your DIY efforts. These companies will be eager to bring you and your book on board, with no

arbitrary editorial hoops to jump through. Of course, you'll pay for the privilege of accessing their knowledge, editorial and design contacts, and printing services. More on all these details coming your way when we talk self-publishing in Chapter 11.

Some people will put this book down right here, recognizing that they've come to an impasse. "Self-publishing is not for me," they will observe. "And I don't have the author platform to get a traditional publishing deal." For some people a pause is definitely in order. Setting out on the publishing path is no small thing. Many clients I've worked with later report that they had no idea how much effort it was going to be. But it's like what you hear from a new mom who just went through a longer labor than she ever thought possible: it's the hardest, best thing she's ever done, and the result was utterly worth the pain.

If these past few pages have given you pause, that's okay. Take a breather. Let the information settle in and see where you are in a few hours or a few days. Maybe you'll discover that your energy is better channeled elsewhere, perhaps toward building your online platform or strengthening relationships with the clients you already have. There is no right or wrong step you can take. One thing I can tell you after working with hundreds of authors is that writing a book is a path of self-discovery. It clarifies your priorities, your strengths, and your challenges. Even if you never sit down and put pen to page, consciously contemplating doing so will have an impact on your life.

For those of you who are ready to go, though, it's choose-your-own-adventure time! The first question before you is whether you're going to start with a book proposal or a full-length manuscript. In the next section, I'll explain more about both and help you get clear on which one is the right starting point for you.

The Function of a Book Proposal

One of the great surprises for many first-time authors of transformational nonfiction is the fact that you don't have to write an entire book in order to get a book deal. You might think, *Huh?* But it's true. Before a publisher is going to plunk down money for your book—and grant it one of the few slots on their publishing schedule—they need to know a *lot* about you and your book. They need to know what the book is going to be about; why it's the right time for a book like this; who you are; what will be in each chapter; who the audience is; how much marketing effort you are going to expend to promote the book; and—as previously mentioned—the current size of your author platform. In order to provide the acquiring editor with exactly the info she needs, a standard format has arisen in the industry. This format is called a

book proposal.

A book proposal is a document written *about* your book, kind of like a business plan is *about* a business. A business plan is written to clarify the founder's intentions and, in many cases, to generate funding; a book proposal has a similar function. It's meant to help you get a commitment from a publisher so you know your book has a home before you write it. In the best-case scenario, you'll also get some money from the publisher up front, theoretically meant to cover expenses while you write. (More about the money bit in "A Primer on Advances and Royalties," found in Chapter 10.)

Back when I started in this business, my bosses—and later, I myself—received stacks of elegant two-pocket folders each week, sent by agents who wanted very much for us to make an offer on one of their books. Clipped to the front of the folder would be a well-crafted introductory letter from the agent. In the right inside pocket would be the sections of the book proposal that concerned the content in the book; on the left, the sections concerning the author and how he would be spreading the word. (These days most book proposals are sent electronically—much to the delight of trees everywhere.)

While at the time I was editing both fiction and nonfiction, these folders were all nonfiction proposals. When it comes to fiction, submissions are almost always full manuscripts rather than proposals. Since the reading experience is the primary determinant of a novel's value, the acquiring editor needs to read a complete manuscript in order to know that the book "hangs together" and comes to a satisfying finish. (There's nothing a fiction editor loves more than feeling compelled to stay up all night reading a manuscript submission. It's a good sign that a lot of readers will want to stay up all night too!) While excellent nonfiction will have the same cannot-put-it-down effect, in most cases it's the information being transmitted—rather than the reading experience—that reigns supreme. This info can be summarized in a page or so per chapter, and as such it doesn't require that the full manuscript be available at the time of acquisition.

But wouldn't the editor *want* to read the whole manuscript before buying it? The answer is no, for two main reasons. First, book editors at traditional publishing companies are inundated with submissions. It's their job to make sure the best ones don't get scooped by another house, so they need to review them quickly. If reading submissions were all an editor had to do, that would be a full-time job by itself. But these days editors at the big houses are also responsible for innumerable other tasks: brainstorming titles and cover ideas, drafting sales copy, wooing agents into sending more proposals, drafting "fact sheets" for next season's books, attending meeting after meeting after meeting, liaising between all the authors on their list and all the different

departments at the publishing house. Oh, and then there's the actual editing itself, with an editor responsible for 10 to 20 books a year on average. In other words the more quickly an editor can review your submission, the happier she will be.

But there's another reason why it's good for an editor—and good for you as the author—to start with a book proposal. In the publishing ecosystem, *everybody* has an opinion. Like any art form, book writing is hugely subjective. What you think is perfect may need heavy revisions in the eyes of your agent. What your agent thinks is going to fly as is may get an overhaul from the editor. When you decide to walk into the world of traditional publishing, you are relinquishing your right to call a book yours and yours alone. It takes a village to get a book just right. Wouldn't you rather get all the feedback from the villagers *before* you commit the time to actually writing your full-length masterpiece?

At the same time, starting with a proposal is not necessarily the right move. If you are planning to self-publish, you can of course dive right into the full-length manuscript. (Though in Chapter 9 I argue that writing a proposal may still be a useful exercise.) If you're writing a memoir—where the writing is meant to be literary or atmospheric in tone—it can be a good idea to submit the whole manuscript. Books like these are more novel-like in the reading experience, and you may find submitting the full manuscript will be more persuasive.

I'm talking about all of this now because as you continue to read, I hope you're also going to be writing. In the next section I'll explain how *writing* is different from *writing a book*. My hope is that after reading that section, you'll set aside some time to write every day. In other words, now is the time to contemplate your entry point. Are you going to start with a book proposal or a full-length manuscript? (If you want to know more about book proposals before you decide, you can skip ahead in Chapter 9, where I lay out all you need to know about writing a book proposal.)

Writing Like It's Your Job

In my line of work, I am privileged to be with authors at two different turning points in their writing journeys. The first turning point happens when a person claims the title "writer." What I've seen is that in today's world it takes a certain amount of moxie to call oneself a writer. Like many forms of self-expression we learn when we're young, there seems to be a moment when we decide that only those who have been deemed "the best" at writing (such assignation granted by teachers, parents, and the larger culture) are allowed to call themselves writers. But if there's one thing I've learned in my

two decades of working with those who love the sound of pen on page, it's that writers come in all shapes, sizes, and levels of "talent." I've come to believe there is only one criterion for being a writer: *you have to be writing.*

This is the first turning point I get to see in the writers I work with—the moment they adopt the term "writer" and realize they've deserved it all along. Because being a writer simply requires that you regularly take part in one or more of the following writerly behaviors:

- Working on a book
- Daily journaling
- Writing letters
- Technical writing as a career
- Jotting poems on your phone
- Any other thing that has you putting words on a page

Now, I'm as bad as anyone at scheduling my writing time for "sometime after all the *actually important* things." I've spent many long years identifying as "a writer who isn't writing much." This may be you, and that doesn't mean you're not a writer. But it *does* mean something. If you're not writing, you're going to have a pretty hard time writing a book. This is a book about writing books, so I have to be straight with you: if you are not making the time in your schedule to write, you will not be the writer of a book (or a book proposal, for that matter).

Lots of clients I work with are incredibly busy people. Entrepreneurs who are launching businesses or doing a side hustle while working a full-time job. Parents who are responsible for not only their own care and feeding but that of a brood of kiddos—one or more of whom always seems to have an emergency going on. Believe me, I get it. The adage is true: there literally are not enough hours in the day to do it all. So what do you do when you don't have time to write?

The only answer is that you *make time*. This is part of the commitment process, and it's the only way your book journey is going to have a happy ending, or an ending at all. (Not to be macabre, but people literally go to their graves with the words "I always wanted to write a book" lingering on their cold, dead lips.) Recognizing that you truly want to write a book—and that you're willing to make the sacrifices required to do so—is the second turning point I witness in my clients. They've already claimed the title "writer," and now they claim the next-level iteration, which is "author." If you have a book you need to get into the world, whether because the love of it is burning a

hole in your heart or because it's going to be really good for your business, this upleveling is not optional. And it requires that you start looking at writing like it's your job, regardless of whether it's (yet) paying your wages.

What does it mean to write like it's your job? Well, let's look at what most people's jobs entail. It's something you do every day, or at least most days of the week. Unless you're living the so-called laptop lifestyle, your job is something to which you allot specific hours of the day. And—here's where it gets real—it's something you put ahead of other perhaps more immediately rewarding activities, like bird-watching or taking a spin on your unicycle. The good news is that, if you're lucky, a job is something you enjoy and look forward to. (At least some of the time.) All these elements need to be in place—at least a little bit—if you really want to be a writer of books.

I'm telling you this now because I want you to establish a writing practice starting immediately. I define "writing practice" as a regularly scheduled time when you *practice writing*. This doesn't mean you have to write perfectly or craft something that will actually go into your book someday. The only commitment is that you sit down to do it, at your scheduled time, whether or not you feel like it. This willingness to do the thing, at the specified time, even if you don't feel like it, is the defining characteristic of a practice. It's the same diligence you apply to a yoga practice, or a meditation practice, or even an exercise regimen. If you've ever successfully had a gym membership (I mean one where you've ended up *using* the membership—something I have not yet managed to do), it's the same principle. You go when you said you were going to, even if it's the very last thing you want to do when the time comes.

If you already have a writing practice, kudos to you! You're ahead of the curve. But if you're one of the aforementioned writers who isn't writing, all that ends today. While I'm going to dig into the meat of the writing process more thoroughly in Part II, now is the time for you to begin practicing the art and craft you're committing to. You've already made the choice; you wouldn't be reading this book if you weren't ready to start the journey. And I'm going to give you a tool I think will be of great use to you in launching this next step toward your goal: my very own personalized writing plan. It's a prerequisite for starting the process outlined in this book, so I hope you won't skip it.

One final note: Writing a book takes time, energy, ideas, elbow grease, and a whole lot of love. If you don't have the energy or desire to spare, you've got options. I'll talk about them in some detail in Chapter 7. If you need to know *rightfrickingnow*, you can flip straight to Chapter 7 and get the deets on editors, collaborative writers, book doctors, and writing coaches—any one of

whom might be just the help you’re looking for as you get your book, or book proposal, underway.

Seven Steps to a Personalized Writing Plan

What's the hardest part about writing? Actually sitting down and doing it. You can have the greatest ideas in the world, but setting aside the time to tune out the noise and put pen to paper (or fingertips to keyboard) is a whole different story. So how can you skirt the deadly territory of "writer who isn't writing"? By making a personalized writing plan.

A writing plan helps you lock in—in advance—the dates and times during which you plan to be writing in a given week. If it sounds simple, that's because it is. But simple is not always easy. This exercise will help you create a chart that you can use to successfully complete your writing plan this week and beyond.

Step #1: Take out a sheet of paper and your favorite pen or marker. I suppose you could also open a new document on your computer, if you're all digital like that. But let's make this fun, shall we? Consider getting a marker into your hand, second-grade style.

Step #2: Give yourself an inspiring headline. Possible titles include "My Wonderful and Wise Weekly Writing Plan" or "How I'm Going to Be a Writer This Week" or "My Week of #Winning at #Writing." Whatever works to get your inner scribe's blood pumping.

Step #3: Take an honest look at your weekly calendar. Writing requires free time—but perhaps less than you'd think. Review the commitments you already have and see where you have openings available for writing. No time slot is too small, as long as you stick to it. Many books have been written in 15-minute increments!

Step #4: Chart your plan for the week. Draw up a visual version of your commitment. Create four columns:

1. Day of the week
2. Number of minutes you commit to writing
3. Time of day you will write
4. Blank column for your "success" checkmarks (oh yeah!)

Using your weekly calendar to choose time slots that will work for you, fill in the first three columns. (Leave the "success" column blank so you can add a checkmark when you complete your commitment each day. Note that I prefilled the "success" checkmarks in this example, because I believe in you!)

Day of the Week	Commitment	Time	Success?
Monday	15 minutes	6:00 A.M. (kids still asleep)	✓
Tuesday	45 minutes	12:15 P.M. (during lunch break)	✓
Wednesday	15 minutes	6:00 A.M. (kids still asleep)	✓
Thursday	45 minutes	12:15 P.M. (during lunch break)	✓
Friday	90 minutes	8:00 P.M. (Friday night "me time")	✓
Saturday	15 minutes	7:00 A.M. (kids still asleep)	✓
Sunday	90 minutes	2:00 P.M. (coffee shop writing session)	✓

Step #5: Place your writing chart somewhere you will see and use it. Print it out, or tear it out of your notebook if you wrote it on paper. Then post it on the fridge, next to your computer, in your car—wherever you know you won't be able to miss it. I find it's helpful to put my writing dates in my Google calendar. Others use a phone-based reminder app so they get a pop-up message when it's time to write. Whatever works for you. The key is to remember your writing commitment—and then to do everything you can to make sure you're sticking to it!

Step #6: Adjust your commitment as you go. Our lives

never turn out exactly as we'd planned. Maybe you were up all night with a sick kid, or your boss called a last-minute meeting over your lunch break. No need to panic; flexibility and self-forgiveness are key to the writing journey. (And to the human journey, but that's a different book.) That said, if you have to miss your scheduled writing period, try to squeeze in even a tiny makeup session at some other time that day. My personal mantra is this: "I can *always* write for 15 minutes." I don't care how much else I have going on—I can always squeeze in 15 minutes. As long as you write *at all*, you get your checkmark!

Step #7: Start again next week! Each week is a fresh start. Go back to Step 1 and create your week's writing plan with the wisdom you've gained from your first week.

The writing plan is all about consistency over quantity. Write every day, even just a little bit. If you complete your plan three weeks in a row—the length of time they say it takes to create a new habit—you may find yourself shocked by how much content you generated. Happy writing to you!

Chapter 2

GET CLEAR ON YOUR MOTIVATION

People write books for all kinds of reasons. Some write fiction because they want their readers to come play with them in a fantastical world of their own creation. Some write poetry because they want to convey a precise feeling or experience or moment. Others write their own personal story because they know it will help others not feel so alone as they walk the journey of life. Personally, I am writing this book for more practical reasons: I have gathered a lot of information in my career as a book editor, and I want to get it onto the page so it can be of use to my clients and friends—including the clients and friends I don't yet know! All these reasons are great motivations to write. In fact, any motivation that actually moves you to sit down on a regular basis and work on a book project counts as a "great motivation to write" in my world.

All this said, I personally believe there's another reason to be writing, one that is more mystical and whose discussion will reveal a lot about my personal worldview. (If you're a pragmatist without any particularly spiritual leanings, you may want to skip to the next section.) There's a way that every step we take in life, every choice we make, every creative endeavor we undertake—from building a business to having children to writing a book—is a movement through which Life is learning about itself. No matter how many times the topic you're writing about has been tackled before, there has never been a book *exactly like the one you're about to write*. How do I know? Because there's never been a precise version of *you* before now. And no matter how objective we might try to be, the world looks different through each person's eyes. Where you see a forest, I may see trees. We cannot help but write our stories differently. And whether your audience ends up in the hundreds or the hundreds of thousands, your essence will become interwoven with that of your readers. The complexity of the web of Life increases, and the world is enriched in new and unexpected ways. My bias is that the book you're writing is more than a whimsical fancy, more than a career move, more than a childhood dream. From my perspective it's Life pressing onward in an unstoppable drive for the evolution of human awareness and expansion.

All of this is to say that in my humble opinion, your impulse to write a book stands independent of the logical reasoning or rational arguments you

may be using to justify your dream. That said, such logical reasoning *can* be incredibly motivating. I'm not going to take it away from you; I'm going to encourage it! Go ahead and give yourself permission to write "because you have a good idea" and "because it will bring you more clients" and "because it will be helpful to other people." Awesome. In fact, this chapter is about building a really great case for writing that book, setting your intentions, and lighting the fire that will keep you warm throughout the long winter of writing. But before we jump in, I want to pull back the curtain and reveal my true belief: The decision to write a transformational book is not made solely by the human mind. It's a dance to which each of us has been invited by a force greater than ourselves. It's about something more essential than concrete; more ephemeral than practical. It's about Life and love and wonder and growth and change and—well, transformation. It's about Life having its way with you. But in our overly logical world, you can't just *say* that. (Whoops, I think I just did.) So let's make everyone a bit more comfortable and take a minute to look at some really solid, buttoned-up, appropriate justifications for why you may want to write this book.

Six Really Good Reasons to Write a Book

As you may already know—from experience or intuition—writing a book is a labor of love. Some days you get the love part, but most days the emphasis is on the labor. At the risk of stating the obvious, *it takes many, many hours to write a book*. You can expect to spend many days writing, and then polishing, 50,000 or 70,000 or (bless you, writers of genre fiction) 150,000 words. No matter how intimate you are with the content you're putting on the page—be it your own story, a methodology you use daily with clients, or a tale you've been mulling over for years—it still takes time to get the words out of your head and onto the page, in just the right order.

Moreover, even if you are able to step out of "real life" for a couple months and devote the necessary time to your craft (and kudos to you if so—it's a rare gift), there will almost always be a host of less obvious obstacles waiting in the wings. Resistance, sometimes referred to as writer's block, is a sneaky adversary. It shows up in innumerable and not always easily recognizable ways, as we'll discuss in Chapter 6. In my experience—both personal and with my clients—writing a book can be a dance with our most tenacious demons.

I'm painting this picture of doom and gloom to make a point: a compelling sense of motivation is the number-one most important ingredient in any book-writing journey. Your motivation is what you will turn back to, over and over, to sustain you through the hard times. I think of it as the fresh spring where you fill your canteen as you're hiking up a steep mountain. Over the years of

running an editorial studio, I've talked to hundreds of clients who want to write a book. But only a small fraction of those have gone on to actually publish that book. Why? In most cases the spring of motivation eventually ran dry. It had been strong enough to get them on the phone with me, and perhaps it was strong enough to allow them to begin the writing process. But in the face of obstacle after obstacle—and word after word—it did not turn out to be the renewable resource required.

So as you begin to set your intentions, I encourage you to take a deep and honest look at why you want to write your book. What is compelling you? While there are an infinite number of amazing reasons to write a book, I'll highlight six of them here. I've handpicked these for one reason: because I've seen them work with writers over and over. These are the kind of motivating factors that create results. Do you recognize yourself in one of these? Awesome. Even better if you can truly say you've got two or three. The key here is to be completely honest with yourself. Wouldn't it be better to retool your idea *now* if doing so would help you claim more of these really good motivators? I promise, the future version of you—the one who's struggling to get her butt in that chair and write—will thank you.

1. The idea of writing the book excites you. Obviously, this is the first and best reason to put pen to page. Our bodies register enthusiasm more accurately than our minds. You may think you *should* write a book. But without that upwelling of excited energy in your belly, that feeling of butterflies, that adrenaline rush, this project is destined to be unsustainable. If you're not excited, it's time to go back to the drawing board. Why? Because you're not going to endure the long writing trek if the prospect doesn't fill you with pleasure. So check in with yourself. Close your eyes and imagine holding your finished book in your hands. What do you feel in your body when you picture this? Eagerness, anticipation, maybe even dread? (We're looking for strong emotion here—for your nervous system to be keyed up in some way. I'm not saying it's always got a *positive* story attached.) Or on the other hand, do you feel … very little? If you get a "meh" where you're expecting an "oh yeah!" that's a great piece of information. It doesn't mean all hope is lost, but it *does* mean you've got some self-exploration to do. Perhaps jump to Six Bad Reasons to (Try to) Write a Book—where I lay out the notta-so-good reasons to write a book—and see if any of those bad boys are in effect.

2. You want cred. There's something magical about being able to hand your book to a potential client. Most humans cannot fathom the kind of attentive patience and sheer moxie it takes to pen an entire tome. So the minute you say "I've written a book," you are putting yourself in a category

of expertise that looks superhuman to most earthlings. Whatever you want to do from there—get clients for your coaching practice, get your foot in the door with a speaking agency, propose yourself as a guest on local TV and radio—you're going to have a leg up on 99 percent of humanity.

3. You want to plant seeds for your business. This is one of the most common motives I hear from clients, and it's one that works a lot of the time! A book can help create financial stability in your business and in your life. Books have this funny way of making it out into the world far beyond where we ourselves could imagine them going. The majority of books are sold via word of mouth, and if your book is touching, well-written, helpful, or just plain entertaining, it is likely to be recommended by your friends, clients, and acquaintances to *their* friends, clients, and acquaintances. The result is that the word of mouth spreads well outside your established circle, expanding the tribe of people who know about you and your services. (Note: This one works best when your business—be it a coaching business, legal practice, consulting firm, or Etsy shop—is something that truly lights you up. You're unlikely to find ongoing motivation to write a book to support a business you don't love.)

4. You've always felt like you were supposed to write a book. I hear from clients all the time that they've known for 10, 20, or even 40 years that they were "supposed to write a book." Many of these authors have lived through great difficulty and want to spin their stories of trauma, illness, divorce, or loss into gold for the benefit of others. "If I tell my story," they often tell me, "maybe my readers won't have to go through what I've been through." Others have been avid readers of one genre or another, perhaps romance novels or self-help or personal memoir, and they've been cooking up their own book for a long time. Whatever the reason, I've found that a deep inner knowing can effectively light your path through the dark maze of book writing.

5. You have a big audience ready and waiting for it. I throw this one in knowing it may be hard to hear. Many of the clients I work with are aware that a platform can grant them entry into the world of traditional publishing, and having a substantial one seems like an unreachable goal. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, most major publishing companies consider a well-developed (read: really, really big) audience to be the number-one most important quality in a new author. While having a platform doesn't guarantee you'll want to *write* the book, I've found that the promise of selling a bunch of copies is an effective motivator for many.

6. You're already writing it. You are sitting down, on a regular basis, writing words on a page that feel like a book. The proof is in the pudding, as they say. There are millions of competing priorities in our lives, from work to

caring for elderly parents to our beloved pastimes. For writing to rise above the fray and present itself, over and over, every single day, as one of your top priorities, is a very good indicator that you're an author in the making. In case I haven't yet made the point, the process of writing can be arduous at worst and a pleasurable time-suck at best. If you're demonstrating the drive to actually write the book, you are the 1 percent. Keep going!

Six Bad Reasons to (Try to) Write a Book

There's a flip side to every story, and at the risk of sounding like a downer, we're about to go there. As a counterpoint to the previous six good reasons for writing a book, here you'll find six really *bad* reasons. This list is not meant to dash your hopes, but instead to help you shine a light on the shadow motivations—the unconscious ambitions you might not even be aware of—that may secretly be fueling your book dream.

1. You've been told you should. As any veteran of personal development already knows, the word "should" is a red flag on its own. If we think we "should" do something, it probably means we have the ghost of a parent, authority figure, or third-grade teacher whispering in our ear. But when it comes to writing a transformational book, the "shoulds" get extra tricky. Many of my clients are successful, life-changing coaches, therapists, consultants, healers, and teachers. Folks in these categories hear it all the time: "Where's your book? You really should write one." In fact, I would wager over half the authors that come through my book studio are there because they've heard over and over that they *really should* write a book. But I've found that the expectations of others turn out to be feeble motivators when it comes to sitting down and completing the task at hand. The yearning to produce a book must come from inside; otherwise it will never sustain you through the ups and downs of the writing/publishing/marketing journey. If the only reason you're considering the author game is to do what you've been told you *should* do—even if the message is coming from well-meaning clients, peers, and mentors—you'll be better off spending your time doing something you truly love.

2. So you can quit your day job. Time for a reality check. Very few authors earn enough income from book sales to support themselves without serious supplemental income. Unless you have a large audience awaiting the publication of your book, you're likely to receive a small advance—if any at all. Moreover, that unnewsworthy advance is most likely going to be divided into three parts, with a portion paid upon the signing of the contract, a portion paid upon the delivery and acceptance of the manuscript, and a portion paid upon first publication. After that you'll have to sell thousands of copies of the book in order to earn out that advance and start receiving additional royalties.

Now, if it's your destiny to become a major best-selling author with books earning royalties for decades to come—think Dr. Wayne Dyer, Toni Morrison, Suze Orman, or Brené Brown—you could indeed end up earning a nice living as a writer. But for most of us (including me), book royalties are likely to play a very small role in our income matrix. In other words, if you're writing for the money, you may want to rethink your strategy.

3. Because your dad or mom should have written a book but never did. Oh, the sneaky world of hidden family loyalties! As a longtime student of psycho-spiritual studies, especially neurolinguistic programming (NLP), I have become increasingly aware of the ways in which we unconsciously sacrifice our own lives and happiness in honor of our parents. A classic maneuver would be to try to right the wrongs of your parents' lives by "doing better" (or conversely "never, ever doing better") than they themselves did. So if you had a parent who was a writer, or who was a failed writer, or who wrote a book that never went anywhere … I suggest taking a deep look at your motivations for writing this book. Make sure any draw to write is coming from your own core. Do a deep dive with yourself before you commit hundreds of hours to writing a book on behalf of anyone else. Perhaps you'd be genuinely happier planting a garden or raising baby goats.

4. For the praise. As someone who deeply, deeply loves applause (no shame), I have nothing against doing things to get praise. But there are two reasons to be really careful if what you're most looking forward to is the sound of hands clapping at your book signings. The first is that those of us who love praise seem to be very sensitive to criticism as well. It's like the two are a package deal. Unfortunately, if your book succeeds in making its way out into the world, you *will* receive negative feedback. Someone will write a scathing commentary on Amazon; you will hear through the grapevine that a friend of a friend has been bashing the book at dinner parties. As your sample size of readers gets larger, it will include more and more tastes and personality types, some of which will not jibe with your work. The second issue is that, from what I can see, the desire for praise is often coming from a deeper and more basic need to feel loved—a need so deep, formed when we were so young, that it can never truly be met by external validation. Even if your book becomes a number-one *New York Times* bestseller, it won't be enough to heal the part of you that feels like *you* aren't enough. So while everybody likes to be liked, it's probably a good idea to suss out just how much of your writerly motivation is to get applause and find some better incentives to supplement it.

5. To get famous. This one rides tandem with the previous. It's not that getting famous from writing a book is an impossibility, it's just that it's very

much not the norm. Fame essentially equals the number of people who know who you are. Statistically speaking only a teeny tiny fraction of transformational books published each year launch their authors to a level of notoriety significant enough to be considered "fame." Genuine fame is still most frequently attained via traditional broadcast media—TV and the movies. These are the most common ways "the folks at home" get introduced to new people and personalities. You need to be on a popular TV series, get cast in a major motion picture, or do something so notorious the news media picks up on you. (Unfortunately, writing transformational books hasn't *yet* been considered a newsworthy endeavor. We can hope it will get there someday!) Another way is to … drumroll, please … grow your platform online. These days you're far more likely to hit the big time through social media, blogging, creating a YouTube channel, etc., than you are writing books.

6. To feel like you've been chosen. When I'm consulting with new authors, I often suggest self-publishing as part of a strategy to build expertise and a public persona. (Yes, I'm talking about a platform again.) Over the course of these conversations, it frequently becomes clear the client isn't as interested in writing the book as they are in getting it published. This stance is often invisible to the author, but it stems from a desire to feel *worthy*, *special*, and *chosen*. I deeply empathize. And yet it's not a good (enough) reason to write a book, because it is so unstable. You may get the experience of feeling special on the day the publisher makes an offer on your book, only to crash when you realize your editor doesn't return your phone calls. (As an aside, please forgive him—he's busier than you can imagine.) You may be walking on clouds at your first book signing, then feel shattered when you discover you sold only 14 copies. The publishing journey is one of ups and downs, and your core motivation needs to be solid enough to keep you strapped in for the duration. If what you want more than anything is to feel worthy, the effort of writing a book is unlikely to equal the reward.

Especially when you're working on transformational nonfiction—whose content is designed to foster change—writing a book is a deeply psychological event. It pays to turn on the lights and look directly at your inner landscape, making sure there are no surprises lurking in there. As you read through the above list, did you really "try on" each of the possible motivations before dismissing them? If not, I would go back through. Ask yourself, *In what ways might these—or other—hidden motivations be operating in me?* The more honest you are with yourself about your "shadow motivations," the more likely you are to develop the kind of *sustainable* intentions that can carry you across the finish line.

The exercise that follows is a very important one. I know it can be easy to

skip over the exercises and think, “I’ll do this one later!” and never come back to it. So I encourage you to really drop in and work with your motivations for writing this book before moving on. Doing so will set you up well for the rest of this chapter, and the book as a whole.

Four Questions to Access Your Deeper Motivations for Writing

This is a deceptively simple exercise that can be extremely revealing. It is best done with a trusted partner, either in person or over the phone. Have your partner ask you the questions below. Answer them out loud. Ask your partner to reply "Thank you for your honesty" as neutrally as possible after receiving each of your answers before moving on to the next question.

Please note that you'll run through these questions four times. Be sure to approach each round with a fresh mind; you'll likely find some of your answers differ each time you reply.

1. What would you like from writing this book?
2. What will having that do for you?
3. When, where, and with whom would you like it?
4. How will you know when you have it?

Repeat questions and answers three more times.

So now you've turned over every rock and swept the cobwebs from every corner in search of any hidden motivations that may be lurking in the shadows. I hope you've come through this feeling more clarity around why you're writing your book—and that you still want to write it! Assuming that's the case, I'm going to give you two concrete ways to anchor your motivation for the long haul. The first is to choose an ideal reader, and the second is to draw up a "starter" cover design. Each can be a support in manifesting the required *oomph* to get the book underway and act as a jetpack if you feel your energy flag along the way.

Identifying an "Ideal Reader"

Not too long ago, a friend of mine hired my team to help her pull together a book proposal. This woman (I'll call her Maggie) is a relationship coach working primarily with women who want to understand the black box that is the mind of the modern man. Over the past half-dozen years or so, I've watched her help scores of women find their way back to their own power and authority. (Spoiler alert: the way to understand the mind of the modern man is to do your own internal work first.) Maggie is a deep force for good in

the lives of many; she has a step-by-step online program that produces results; and her motivation is clear: to change the cultural dialogue around relationships. And guess what? She wants to write a book. But until she came to us, she didn't know where to start.

Maggie is what I think of as my "ideal reader" for the book you're holding in your hands. As I work my way through the writing process, I keep her in the back of my mind. As I make decisions about what content to include and what to leave on the cutting room floor, I ask myself, *Does Maggie need to know this? Is it critical to her understanding of the book-writing journey?* I use these questions—and my answers—as my guiding light when I write. I kept Maggie in mind as I honed my "hook" (a.k.a. the elevator pitch for the book, which will be the subject of the next chapter); as I generated the book's outline; and as I made moment-by-moment choices each time I sat down to write. While I certainly hope there will be many different types of readers who will benefit from reading it, this book is directly aimed at Maggie.

Why would I focus only on one specific individual? Doesn't that limit the scope of the material? Shouldn't I try to reach as many readers as possible? If you're asking any of these questions, you're in good company. Picking an ideal reader seems to go against what most of us consider common sense. If you want a large audience, you need to make sure your book will appeal to *everyone*, right? And most of us can make an argument that whatever transformational topic we've chosen would provide *some* benefit to anyone who decided to read about it. So why narrow the audience by focusing your writing process on a specific individual?

There are three good reasons, as I see it. First, as the saying goes, when we try to be everything to everyone, we end up being nothing to anyone. The book market is a crowded place, and there are more good books out there than any single individual could ever hope to read. Every year, truly excellent books wither on the vine because they fail to distinguish themselves from all the others on the shelf. Choosing an ideal reader ensures your book is *for* someone; it's been designed with a specific individual's needs in mind. Even if the book blends into the woodwork for every other type of reader, the Maggies of this world will know it's for them.

Second, choosing this reader will focus your writing and narrow the field of content from which you have to choose. While some writers run into the issue of not enough content, most of the clients I've worked with are suffering from the opposite problem: waaaaay too much to say for the length of book they want to write. Nobody likes a doorstop, so it's in your favor to stay on target as you write. Asking yourself "Does my ideal reader need to know this to truly thrive?" becomes a useful filter question moment by moment.

While the third reason is perhaps the least quantifiable, I believe it's the most important—especially when you're just getting started. Choosing an ideal reader, especially someone you know and love, engages your most persuasive emotions to fuel your writing process. We all long for a sense of purpose to inspire us to service in our lives, including our writing lives. Imagining our book being of service to someone we care about gives us access to bravery, perseverance, and a willingness we may not find on our own. I know Maggie; she is my friend, my client, and someone whose work I believe in deeply. She's someone I actually care about. I have a personal interest in seeing her succeed at her book dream. So I am emotionally invested in making sure this book contains all the information she needs in order to do that. If she succeeds, I'm going to rejoice with her. If I forget to include a critical step in the process and the omission impacts her book prospects, I will feel terrible. Putting her at the center of my audience has done an incredibly important thing: it's given me more skin in the game.

My ideal reader also motivates me to keep going. It's not always easy to sit down and start writing, but when I think of Maggie, it's a little easier. Sometimes I imagine I'm just having a conversation with her, telling her what I know that will help her succeed at birthing her book. This switches me out of the quest for perfection and into a service mind-set. Rather than laboring over every word, I feel my desire to help Maggie, and the ideas flow. Without having any idea of her influence—and at the risk of misquoting the great Bette Midler—Maggie is the wind beneath my writerly wings.

Choose Your Ideal Reader

It's time to choose your own ideal reader and flesh out his or her image by answering the following questions. Think of this as a dating profile for the gal or guy who's exactly your book's "type." Once you do this, you'll have a big head start on marketing your book. For how are you going to find your core readership until you know where they hang out, what they do for a living, and what they like to read?

- **Name:** Who is your ideal reader? For maximum impact I suggest choosing someone you know and care about.
- **Demographics**: What is the age range, gender, and location of your ideal reader? Include whatever other demographics fit.
- **Profession and education**: Where does she work? Where did she go to school and for how long? What degrees is she likely to hold, if any?
- **Mind-set**: Is he conservative? Liberal? Intuitive? A risk-taker? Planner? Spiritual seeker? Rationalist?
- **Life situation**: Is she married, single, divorced? Does she have children? Does she have disposable income? Is she settled? Is she seeking security or adventure?
- **Reading habits**: Favorite authors? Favorite genres? Fiction? Nonfiction? Science fiction? Romance? Oprah's Book Club?
- **Hobbies and interests**: Does he play tennis? Does he enjoy NASCAR? Is he a foodie? Does he ski? Where does he shop? Does he like live music?
- **Places you would find them**: Does she spend time at Nordstrom? Walmart? Starbucks? Church? Hiking trails?
- **Where he gets information**: CNN? The Daily Show? Facebook? Office gossip around the water cooler? *The Wall Street Journal*? *HuffPost*?
- **Miscellaneous**: What other information feels relevant and identifying?

Extra Credit: Already have a nice e-mail list or following on social media? Why not create a short, fun survey and ask your audience *who they are*? They'll feel like you care about them, and you may find yourself surprised by what you learn about the fans you already have! (For a thorough guide to developing a survey for your audience, check out the book *Ask* by Ryan Levesque.)

Create an Inspiring "Starter" Cover Design

This suggestion is going to inspire a cringe from every editor who's ever worked at a major publisher. In truth, I can hardly believe I'm saying it. Advising authors to create their own book covers is about as acceptable within big publishing as hiring a construction worker to give you a mani-pedi. Not. Their. Job. Sending in a book proposal with an author-designed cover is a quick way to get a roll of the eyes and a chuckle around the table at editorial meeting. (Not the kind of chuckle you as the author might be hoping for.) I can probably count on one hand the number of times I've known an author to design, or even *commission* for design, their own book cover and have it make it to the jacket of their traditionally published book. "Stick to what you know best," publishers normally say. "Write an awesome book and leave the cover design to the pros."

So why am I about to suggest that you—who most likely are *not* a professional book cover designer—create a starter design for your book jacket? And what do I mean by "starter design," anyway?

I originally heard about this technique from the big kahuna of the transformational nonfiction universe, Dr. Wayne Dyer. (If you've somehow been living under a rock for the past 40 years, Dr. Dyer is the author of dozens of best-selling personal development classics, including *The Power of Intention* and *Your Erroneous Zones*.) At a workshop I attended called Writing from Your Soul, Dr. Dyer opened up about his book-writing process—nearly 100 percent of which runs counter to traditional publishing wisdom.

First, he told us, he always wrote his title before he wrote the book. Having an inspiring title in mind gave him his "north star" as he worked his way through the manuscript. Second, he said, he always wrote longhand. Yes, you heard that right: the entire manuscript—hundreds of pages—written *by hand*. (As a screen junkie myself, this continues to blow my mind. I don't know *how* you would put your ideas together so flawlessly in your head that you wouldn't need to go back and rework a sentence a couple times before getting it "just right." All honor and glory is yours, Dr. Dyer!) In addition, he always wrote using a purple pen. And upon completing his first draft, he would hand

the sheaf of papers to his longtime editor, who would type it up and work her editorial magic before he ever sent it to the publisher. This is a good time to state what should be obvious in today's world: Whatever you do, do *not* send a handwritten manuscript to *anyone* except someone you're paying to type it for you!

And finally, one of Dr. Dyer's best techniques was to design a cover for each book he wrote—*before he wrote the book*. He would get a designer he knew to generate a beautiful jacket, complete with front cover, spine, and author photo on the back. He'd print this out and wrap it around another hardcover book on his shelf. Voilà, it was like the book had already been written, edited, and printed. Similar to knowing his title in advance, having a "finished book" to look at while he wrote ushered him through the writing process more easily. It was a concrete way for this master of the manifestation process to visualize himself at his end goal, which was holding a beautiful book in his hands.

This process is perhaps not surprising for a man who wrote a book called *You'll See It When You Believe It.* But what about for you? Is it really a good use of your time and budget to have a cover designed for your book before you've even started to write it? Of course, the final say is up to you. But if you find you are having difficulty generating the motivation to write, it *could* be in part because somewhere deep inside, you can't quite imagine yourself taking the project all the way through to completion. Having a visual aid can create the inner experience of success even before you've gotten there in the external world. This puts the experience of completing your book on your internal map. You can think of it as creating an outward and visual representation of your internal motivation to write.

And guess what? It's not that hard to do, and it doesn't have to be terribly expensive. While I would encourage you to work with a seasoned designer of book covers if and when you decide to self-publish your book, you should feel free to do this starter design on the skinny. On freelance sites like Fiverr.com, 99designs.com, and Upwork.com, you get to set the fee. When it comes to your starter jacket—which only you will see—you don't necessarily need the Cadillac of design services. You could likely find an up-and-coming graphic designer to create a simple cover for a couple hundred bucks.

Once you have the design, print it out, wrap it around a book, and set it on your desk or coffee table—wherever you'll be able to see it while you write. Then feel the experience of being a published author. What do you notice when you look at the book lying there? Do you feel emotions like joy, anticipation, and pride? Are the good feelings tempered by feelings of fear or disbelief? Either way—or if you can't quite tell one way or the other—the

exercise that follows will help you visualize the end state you're hoping for: a book in your hands that you'll feel excited to share with the world.

A Photo Album of Your Future

A 2014 study at Ohio University found that simply thinking about exercise builds muscle strength in the body—no physical movement required! In this exercise you're going to put that same mental power toward visualizing your desired outcome: a beautifully written book in your hand. This exercise is most effective if you repeat the fourth step every day for three to four weeks, or until your desired outcome arrives. It takes almost no time at all; it's just a matter of remembering to do it. So consider adding this step to your daily calendar, penciling it into your to-do list, setting an ongoing reminder on your phone, or creating another support system to turn it into a habit.

Step #1: Choose your desired outcome and write it down as if you already have it. The outcome should give you a zing of excitement (fear is an okay substitute!) and should be stated in the present tense. A simple example would be "I am a published author." If you can tolerate a little more grandiosity, you might say, "I am a successful published author." Feel free to dress up your desire with any bells and whistles that are appropriate to your particular book, and consider including a secondary desire if there is one. For example, "I've published my childhood memoir"—primary desire—"and all of my family members are still speaking to me"—secondary desire. Your job is *not* to figure out the "how"; that's up to Life.

Step #2: Imagine three different snapshots showing aspects of your desired outcome. In the first picture, you might see yourself sitting at your desk and signing a book contract. The second could be a snapshot of copies of your book stacked in the new arrivals section at your favorite bookstore. The third shot could show you at the front of a crowd, reading from your book at a signing event. The pictures can be of any part of the experience, so let your mind run wild: opening your first check from a publishing company … getting an e-mail alerting you that your book has hit a bestseller list … looking at your phone and seeing you have a dozen calls from prospective new clients who heard about you through your book. The sky's the limit—with one exception. You may *not* include specific other people in your photos. (Sorry, no pics of you sitting across from Oprah in her garden. *Womp, womp*.)

The message we're sending to Life is all about *you*, and it's considered somewhat unethical to use your creative authority to make others behave per your expectations. Free will, people—the only life we're changing right now is your own. Once you have your three snapshots in mind, write down a one-sentence description of each so you don't forget them.

Step #3: Contemplate how each snapshot makes you feel—and write the feelings down. Feelings carry an intensity that mental pictures do not; they are far more memorable. You may not remember the face of the bully who used to terrorize you on the playground, but you won't soon forget the feelings of humiliation and fear she inspired. On the happier end of the spectrum, you may not recall the name of the guy who sat in the cubicle next to you at your first job, but you remember how funny he was and how he always made you laugh. So take a moment to tease out the emotions that arise when you consider each of the snapshots you chose. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and step into the version of yourself who is having the experience in the picture. What will you be feeling when you have the outcome you desire? Pride, joy, satisfaction, a surge of adrenaline? Will your heart be bursting? Will you feel the muscles of your cheeks drawing back into a huge grin? Will you feel the good kind of butterflies in your belly? Take a moment to jot down two or three feelings you notice when you step into each of the images you chose.

Step #4: Flip through the photo album once a day for at least a month. Or at least as many times as you can remember to do so. This part of the exercise is like going to the gym for your desired outcome. You're building the "mind muscle" to be able to say yes to your desired state when it becomes available. In other words … practice, practice, practice. So sit quietly, take a deep breath, and then clearly state the desired outcome that you wrote down for Step #1. Remember to state it in the present, as if it is already here. For example, "I am holding a book in my hand with my own name on the cover." It can help to repeat the desired outcome a few times, imagining it anchoring itself into your body at the cellular level. Then flip through your photo album of three pictures, lingering on each one long enough to feel what the future version of you is feeling in each snapshot. When you have made it through all three photos, the exercise is complete for

the day.

Step #5: Remember to do Step #4 every day for a month! As bizarre as it seems, this exercise can bring about fairly dramatic shifts when you stick to it over a period of time. Why would repeating a desire as if you already have it and looking at imaginary photos make any difference at all? I must admit I don't know the mechanics of it. But neither did the researchers at Ohio University when they ran the study on exercise. There is still much we don't know about our brains. The good news is that you don't have to leave your skepticism behind to try this exercise. Simply think of it as a research project you're doing on yourself: "Could this possibly work? Let me see." Follow the instructions and keep an open mind, and you may just surprise yourself.

Chapter 3

CRAFT YOUR HOOK

When I was in college, I started off as a journalism major. But sometime in the first month of my sophomore year, I had a freak-out. It was during a reporting class, and I clearly remember the exercise. We were writing "leads"—the first sentence in any article, the one that acts as the tippy-top of the pyramid of information that will be covered in the story. The lead, our professor was explaining, should reveal everything about the story in a single sentence. That way a casual reader need only scan the first sentence in order to understand what the whole article would be about. I found this exercise morally offensive. *She wanted us to give away the whole thing in the first sentence??* It was the direct opposite of the subtle-to-the-point-of-incomprehensible literary writing I was passionate about at the time. I left the classroom and headed straight to the registrar to drop the class and pick up a graduate-level seminar on D. H. Lawrence.

Now that I'm an editor, however, my thoughts on the journalistic lead have changed. I realize that to write anything—whether we're talking about a news article, our own version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, or a work of transformational nonfiction—it is helpful and also entirely necessary to craft a one- or two-sentence encapsulation of the topic. In the parlance of traditional publishing, that encapsulation is called a *hook*. And true to its name, the point of this little nugget of information is to catch the reader's attention—to hook them, like an unsuspecting mackerel—so they can't walk out of the bookstore without your book under their arm.

If you read only one chapter in this book, let it be this one. Developing, honing, and tailoring your hook may in fact be the most important maneuver you will undertake in the process of writing your entire book. I cannot emphasize this point enough: If you don't know your hook, or don't have a hook that is going to make a reader say either "I want to read that!" or "I *need* to read that!" then you are about to waste a whole lot of blood, sweat, and tears in the book-writing process. If you put in all that effort, you may as well do it for a book that other people are going to be super excited to read. The hook is the spark that leads to such a conflagration of interest. If you have no spark, you have no fire.

The hook for a book might also be called its "concept," "premise," or "conceit." In the film industry, it's sometimes referred to as an elevator pitch—because ideally you can transmit the "big idea" of your film in the time it

would take you and an influential producer to travel in an elevator from one floor to the next. As you can imagine, the hook needs to be powerful, well-crafted, and clear enough to successfully communicate the defining qualities of the project you're hoping a producer will want to fund. Back in the world of books, a "high-concept hook" is what a prospective agent is looking for when he's scanning your query letter. It's what a prospective editor is listening for when said agent pitches your book for consideration. It's what that editor will lead with when she's sitting in editorial meeting, trying to get the rest of the team on board with making an offer on your book. And it's what readers are scanning for, albeit unconsciously, when they pick up your book in the bookstore or read the description online to see if they want to purchase it.

What Is a Hook, Anyway?

What exactly is a hook, and what qualities define a good one? When it comes to transformational nonfiction, the primary reason readers pick up a book is to answer a need. If they have a relationship problem, they'll go to the relationship shelf. If they want a new job, they'll go to the career shelf. They're looking for something we've all sought at one time or another: the feeling of relief. Relief from the psychological and sometimes physical pain they've been carrying around for too long. We call this experience "addressing the reader's pain point." In a category as abundant as transformational nonfiction, there will be a *lot* of books vying for a particular reader's attention. The function of the hook is to point directly toward what is unique about *your* book in particular. The result we're looking for is your book ringing through the noise, like the clear peal of a bell: *This book is the book you want! It will provide precisely the relief you need!*

A book's hook shows up in a few ways. First, through the title and subtitle. A successful title will not only draw the reader with a clever turn of phrase but also summarize the hook for the reader. In certain cases the cover will also include a *reading line* or a bulleted list of benefits a reader can expect to get from the book. On the back of a paperback book—or inside the front flap of the dust jacket if the book is a hardcover—there is often a headline at the very top of the descriptive copy. This is also a good place to go looking for the book's hook, or for some additional refinement to the information that's already been broadcast on the front cover. This multilocation approach is deliberate: the publisher is trying to attract the reader's attention—and target their particular pain point—in as many places as possible, in hopes of making the sale. (Keep in mind that the only reason agents and publishers are obsessed with hooks is because *hooks sell books*!)

But as I mentioned above, the role of the hook begins well before there is a

printed book to look at. If you want to go the traditional publishing route of finding an agent and then finding a publisher, it is not an exaggeration to say that your hook can make or break your chances. (An amazing concept is second only to a huge platform in terms of what publishers are looking for in a dream project.) At the extreme, if you have a hook that fits all the criteria an agent or editor is looking for, *you may not even need to know how to write.* If the publisher believes the concept you've developed is *that good*, you can always hire a ghostwriter to undertake the writing part for you—and the publisher might even help pay for it. That's how influential an excellent hook can be: it can get you a book deal even if you're not a great writer! At the other end of the spectrum, a hook that is underwhelming or feels like it's been done a dozen times can be the death knell of your traditional publishing dreams.

So what is the secret formula for crafting the kind of hook that can wow the publishing world and readers alike? There are five basic qualities to try to bake into your book's hook even before you start writing. What you should aim for is a hook that is *high-concept*, *narrowly tailored*, *unique*, *magnetic*, and *salable*.

Sample Hooks from Books You May Know

Hooks are summaries and are therefore subjective. They could be written a hundred different ways. Here are some of my own personal takes on books you may have heard of. Pay special attention to the way each title reflects the book's hook.

The Hook	The Book
With four simple questions, you can turn any negative experience into a positive one	*Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life* by Byron Katie
Wild in her youth, the author learns the importance of sobriety, family, love, and forgiveness in this relatable story.	*Love Warrior: A Memoir* by Glennon Doyle Melton
A simple introduction to the known universe, written in plain English by a rocket scientist	*Astrophysics for People in a Hurry* by Neil deGrasse Tyson
A 12-week workbook to reconnect with your creativity, rooted in a simple but healing daily writing practice	*The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron
A riveting memoir by a transgender woman of color who went from poverty and neglect to success as a motivational speaker	*Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love, and So Much More* by Janet Mock

One final tip: An accessible place to research hooks is *The New York Times* bestseller list. Each book that hits the list is summarized in one sentence by the editors at the newspaper. While these one-liners don't always hit the mark from the author's perspective, they make for a very useful study when you're just getting started in the world of hook design. You can

find current lists at nytimes.com/books/best-sellers.

An excellent hook conveys the "big idea" behind your book simply and powerfully. In order to have a powerful hook, your book needs to *have* a big idea! So that's what I want you to start thinking about as you contemplate crafting your hook. Each of us has the potential to write many different books. And any given book could be written from an infinite number of angles. Choosing the topic of your book carefully, based on a desire to generate as much firepower as possible, is the way to put your best foot forward. To do so, make sure your hook represents each of the following qualities.

High-Concept

"While I appreciate the author's writing style and ability to communicate his ideas, I'm afraid I didn't feel like the hook was high-concept enough for me to believe it would stand out on the crowded bookshelf."

Back when I was an acquisitions editor, this sentence (or some variation thereof) was a workhorse in my rejection letter repertoire. Between the lines, I was saying that I had tried to pitch the book at our weekly editorial meeting and the concept didn't have enough firepower to make an impression on the rest of the team.

Welcome to the tyranny of the high-concept hook. "High-concept" is industry jargon for a book pitch that is powerful, memorable, and easy to communicate. The dream for any editor is to be able to utter a single sentence about a book's concept and have jaws drop around the table. When there are a dozen editors in a department, all vying for a limited number of spots on the pub list, you've got a tough audience to impress. The bar is high, so your pitch needs to pack a punch. The more powerfully and specifically the hook conveys a big idea, the more likely it is to generate oohs and aahs at that table—and gain clearance for a generous offer.

The four qualities I'm going to mention next—narrowly tailored, unique, magnetic, and salable—play into the overall effect of a hook being deemed high-concept. A favorite example of a high-concept hook comes from the novel *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, whose hook could be, "A novel narrated by a dead teenage girl who watches as her family tries to solve the mystery of her disappearance." I was living and working in New York when this book was published, and I remember how impactful the hook was when I first heard it. The fact that the narrator is dead is original and interesting. The fact that she was a teenager tugs at the heartstrings—we already feel the weight of the tragedy of losing someone so young. We are also intrigued, as we know there's a mystery involved and that she has "disappeared"—an indication that the family may not yet know she's dead. And all this

information is communicated in one simple sentence! When this book came out, it went straight to the top of bestseller lists, because the concept was so easy to talk about in the media. And—this is key—the big idea was easily spread from person to person. People could talk about it easily, so they did. Those who heard about it were struck with the desire to read it. You can think about a high-concept hook as an idea that is poised to go viral. It is easy to talk about and carries enough emotional *oomph* that you *want* to tell people about it.

Narrowly Tailored

A proverb to keep in mind as you craft your hook—one that is oft-repeated in the world of books—is, "If you cast your net too wide, you won't catch anything." This can sometimes run in opposition to our instinct, which is to try to make our book concept broad enough that everyone we know will be interested. But as I mentioned in the previous chapter, a successful book is tailored to an ideal reader. Why? Because on a bookshelf with two dozen tomes on your topic, you want yours to stand out. It does this by answering a *specific need*. If it appears too general, your reader is more likely to skip over it and pick up the most popular book by the best-known author, leaving yours behind to gather dust.

This is why editors are always looking for a topic that is *narrowly tailored*. A topic that is narrowly tailored is sharp, clear, precise, and specific. Here's an example, from my friend Kristen Wheeler. Kristen has created a process she calls the Native Genius® method, which helps people clarify what actions and behaviors they naturally enjoy—and thus the kinds of work they would find most satisfying. Enjoyment of work is a broad category filled with many different types of books. Editors see proposals on these topics every day; Kristen will need to make sure hers stands out as fresh. The first step in doing so is to have a book whose topic is narrowly focused on a big idea editors haven't heard before.

If she didn't know better, it might be tempting for Kristen to create a broad, sweeping hook that she thinks would appeal to the widest number of readers. In that case, her hook might look something like this:

"This book will help people be happier at work by encouraging them to do more of what they love."

While this would be a positive outcome for anyone, that sentence could describe any number of books on the work, purpose, and job satisfaction bookshelf—many of which have been written by already famous authors. If you as a reader got a sense that Kristen's book was just like a book you'd been hearing about for years, you might be inclined to purchase the more

well-known tome instead. What you'd be missing is how Kristen's book is original and entirely new—because the summary, title, and cover copy are not narrowly tailored to Kristen's unique process.

So what would be the *right hook* for Kristen? How about something like this?

"I have created a four-step process called the Native Genius method that helps you uncover your hidden zones of genius by visualizing movie scenes from your own life. The result is that you can fill your days with more of your natural joys and talents without having to change your life or your career."

Several elements stand out in this hook, and taken together they illustrate very clearly how Kristen's book is different from other books in this category. First, it gives us a four-step process. Not just a philosophical overview of Native Genius, this book is going to help us put these teachings into practice in our own lives. Second, Kristen names the body of work she's developed: the Native Genius method. This handle makes her work easier to talk about; it transforms the concept from a mass of tangled ideas into a cohesive *thing*. Kristen could have cooked up the process sitting at her kitchen table just last night, but because she gave it a name, it suddenly has a different type of credibility. It's *become* something. The hook goes on to make a promise: it will help you uncover the genius you did not know you had and fill your days with things you love—without having to make a huge life change to do so. Who wouldn't want that? Finally, it gives a glimpse of her unique process, which includes visualizing "movie scenes" from your life. Together, these elements present a hook that is narrowly tailored enough to light up the desire receptors in its ideal reader: someone who may not be ready to make a huge leap toward change in his life, but who would like to enjoy his day-to-day work much more than he currently does. By tailoring her hook—and later, her descriptive copy, title and subtitle, and marketing materials—to this audience, Kristen is making abundantly clear who the book is for and how she expects to reach them.

One more thing: A narrowly tailored hook isn't only good for catching an audience. It also provides a useful and necessary filtering mechanism for you as you write the book. There are about a bajillion data points you could include when writing; how do you decide what to include and what to leave out? You go back to your hook and you ask, *Does my hook* require *that I include this piece of information?* In this way your hook becomes a useful decision-making tool.

Hook Elements to Consider

- If you'll be teaching a set of numbered steps, lessons, stages, or ideas, be sure to mention that.
- Give your set of ideas a memorable and relevant name or title that turns them into a *thing*.
- Come up with a useful and relevant X-meets-Y concept—for example, if you're writing a book of prayers for specific equine ailments, you might say your book is "Louise Hay meets *The Horse Whisperer*."
- Speak to a unique pain point in the reader, or a unique corner of the market. Narrow it down … and then narrow it again.

Unique

Uniqueness is highly valued when it comes to book ideas, because it narrows the field of competition and increases the likelihood that your book will get noticed. Let's say you specialize in teaching people how to meditate. You want to write a book on meditation as a path to more peace, joy, and love in your life. Thank you—you're doing a great service! But you've also got your work cut out for you. There are hundreds if not thousands of books in the marketplace about meditation, many written by famous teachers like Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Pema Chödrön. Your book may be just as good as any of theirs, but their name recognition is going to be working against you. I talk to authors all the time for whom this is the primary issue. They have walked a deep and important journey in their own lives, and they've learned a lot about how to be happier and more free. They want to transmit that information to the wider world. Yet they don't have the platform to compete on the shelf. My go-to solution? *Tailor your topic so narrowly that yours is one of the only books on your particular bookshelf.*

Taking the meditation example, let's say you teach meditation in the evenings but in your day job you're a florist. Over the years you've stopped thinking about how to put together the flower arrangements; you've started using the open mind of meditation to allow your hands to be guided by something beyond you. The resulting arrangements have been more original and remarkable than you ever could have made when you were thinking hard about the rules of floral design. Suddenly you have a narrowly tailored book concept: meditative flower arranging. With that shift you go from competing

with dozens of books to just a handful.

The vast majority of writers I work with believe that they have a unique hook when they come to me. But in only about 10 percent of cases are they right. The reason is partly that we all love our own ideas—rightly so!—and there's a sort of bias that sets in. If it's an idea *we've* never thought of before, we assume that nobody else has thought of it either! Alas, as they say, there is nothing new under the sun. As unique as your idea may sound to you, it's very likely that a book industry professional has seen it before, in some form, more than once. For this reason I encourage humility. Do not approach an agent or an editor and say, "My idea is totally unique and has never been done before." It speaks to a lack of understanding of how the book market works. Instead, *go looking for your book idea on Amazon*. Search for it like your life depends on it. Walk through bookstores and mine the shelves. Educate yourself thoroughly on the different angles authors have already taken on your topic. Then and only then can you craft a uniquely nuanced hook of your own.

Speaking of which—one thing most first-time authors don't realize is that *it's not always a great sign if you can't find a similar book in the marketplace*. As the book pros know, zero competition most often means that the concept has been tried, failed to find an audience, and has gone on to book publishing heaven. So do what I think of as a *concentric circle search*. Look for books on your exact topic and note what's there (or what isn't). Then research a circle outward; that is, more general. To use the meditative flower-arranging example, first you'd look for books on that topic directly. Then look at what's out there on flower arranging in general. Do the same for general meditation books. You may want to look at other "meditative arts," including calligraphy, crafting, and coloring, which promise greater peace and calm. Educate yourself as thoroughly as you can.

If the thought of going on a deep dive with the competition gives you the heebie-jeebies, you're not alone. Most of us don't want to look directly at our competition. Perhaps we want to keep our vision "fresh" and not be influenced by others' work. Perhaps we fear we'll discover that someone has already written "our" book, and we'll be too discouraged to go on. Perhaps we've heard that we should simply write and not care about what else is out there, focusing solely on getting our own book into the world. This last idea is sage advice in some ways; I would rather you be writing than not writing. But if you want your book to be picked up by a publisher or to sell well in a self-published edition, you need to hold both the creative spirit *and* the marketing mind-set. Checking out competing titles is truly the only way to determine whether your hook is unique enough to stand out. The agents and editors

reading your proposal are paid, all day long, to know which books are out there, what makes them unique, and whether they are selling. Presenting these agents and editors with your book idea and declaring it unique without checking the market is a risky strategy at best. You need to know your category—what's selling and not selling, what's already been tried and hasn't worked—as well as they do, if not better.

Magnetic

Powerful. Charismatic. Alluring. Dazzling. These words are all I can give you to describe this facet of a successful hook. It's difficult to discuss magnetism, because it's both elusive and subjective. One woman's trash is another woman's treasure, as they say. It has that "know-it-when-I-see-it" quality; there is no formula to produce a magnetic idea, yet we're all at its mercy when it appears. Indeed, magnetism can be the make-or-break element in your book idea, for obvious reasons. If you hear the concept of a book and it hits you between the eyes, you are far more likely to purchase and read it. The more likely you are to read it, the more likely you are to recommend it to friends. From there the snowball effect can drive the book right onto bestseller lists.

A couple years ago, a little book called *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* had this kind of magnetism. When I first heard the title of the book—which neatly encapsulates the book's hook, a powerful choice we will discuss later in this chapter—I knew I needed my copy *right now*. Apparently other people felt the same way; as of this writing, it's sold over five million copies around the globe. What was it about that book that magnetized so many of us? It clearly pointed toward a need that touches the lives of many readers: we just have too much stuff. All that stuff doesn't make us feel good, but we don't know how to fix the situation. Voilà! In comes Marie Kondo with an alluring promise that we can change our lives with the simple queston "Does it spark joy?"

So how do you know if your concept is powerful, alluring, and charismatic? You can start by running it by people who, based on their interests and personalities, *should* be your ideal readers. When possible it's best to run it by people who don't depend on you for friendship, support, or livelihood. (Such friend and family types are known to be biased toward anything we do, because they love us and need us.) A good way to test your hook is via social media, and I will give specific instructions to do that in the exercise at the end of this chapter. When you run your hook by your test audience, notice their responses. Attempt to be as neutral as possible in your observations. In no uncertain terms, the response you are looking for is, "Wow! I need that book! When will it be available?" or some variation

thereof.

Finally, I will throw out a counterintuitive gem of wisdom I learned while working at Hyperion Books in New York. My boss there, the wonderful and remarkably talented Will Schwalbe, had a theory. He said he knew a book was a good bet if, when the proposal was under discussion by the editorial team, half the table *loved* it and the other half *hated* it. Something about the passion and sense of division told him that the book concept had power. This goes against the training many of us receive—especially the women among us—that we should try to make everyone happy. Where book sales are concerned, if you can enchant half the room and enrage the other half, you might just have the recipe for a bestseller.

Salable

A book launch is a lot like the launch of a space shuttle. There needs to be a certain amount of power applied at the beginning to propel the spacecraft out of the earth's atmosphere. But once it's in orbit, it becomes self-sustaining. Lucky for the International Space Station and all the nice astronauts who live there, inertia keeps the craft moving around the earth smoothly and without stopping. When it comes to your book, that inertia is *sales*. The steadier the stream of sales your book generates, the longer it can stay "in orbit"—in print, selling, changing lives, and making money for you and the publisher.

To blatantly mix my metaphors, within the publishing industry this process is called "growing legs." If you've done your work to prepare for publication (see Chapter 8 for a sample launch timeline), the book will take off with a certain amount of power behind it. But the real test comes about 6 to 8 weeks post-publication. If book sales are growing rather than tapering off, it's a good sign that your book "has legs." As the metaphor suggests, this means the book is able to walk on its own. Something has taken over; a force that's beyond you has begun powering sales. Usually this force is word-of-mouth endorsement. Your initial audience has read your book and begun recommending it to friends. Those friends have started reading it, and they're recommending it to *their* friends. Soon the book has been passed hand to hand, reaching readers well beyond the confines of your own network.

I leave this characteristic for the end of the list for a couple reasons. First, it's so practical it can feel like kind of a downer. Regardless of how perfectly well crafted and charismatic your hook may be, if it doesn't sell books, it doesn't really work—and that's kind of a bummer. But it's also hard to talk about because it's hard to know whether a book is going to sell or not. We can have an intuition about it, but there's really no guarantee. Publishers are uncharacteristically humble on this account, often admitting that there is no

formula and in the end sales success is a bit of a mystery. Agents and editors are surprised all the time by what works and what doesn't. Just know that when a publisher is reviewing your proposal, salability is the thing they're looking for. The closest they can get to knowing a book concept is going to sell is by ticking off the qualities already discussed: high-concept, narrowly tailored, unique, and magnetic. A book idea that has all of that going for it has a better chance of growing legs than one that doesn't. If you understand this—and that even *with* all these qualities in place, there is no guarantee your book will find its way into the world on its own legs—you understand the game of publishing.

The Why-What-Wow of Titling Your Book

Even though a book's sales potential is ultimately up to the Dark Lords (or the Light Beings, depending on which side you're rooting for), there *are* a few steps you can take to make commercial success more likely. With that in mind, here's a pop quiz for you: What do you think is the single most important element you can put in place in order to maximize your sales potential? Is it …

A. Writing original, never-seen-before content?

B. Perfecting your gorgeous or hysterically funny or deeply moving writing style?

C. Crafting the best version of the message you've been charged with disseminating to the world?

Well, darn it if I didn't trick ya—because it's none of these things. While any of the above is likely to contribute to your book's success, there's a far more obvious answer to this question. *If you want your book to be actually read, by actual human beings, in a wide and ongoing way, the most important thing you can do is title it well.*

When it comes to transformational nonfiction, the purpose of the title is to inform and entice—in that order. Too often new authors switch the order, opting for a clever or poetic turn of phrase over straight-up naming the benefits a reader can expect from reading the book. While this may be the right strategy if you're writing a book of poetry or even the Great American Novel, when it comes to transformational nonfiction, conveying the benefits of reading the book should be your number-one priority. Back when I was working at the spirituality publisher Sounds True, we spent many long hours in "titleage meetings" hashing out title ideas. (Excuse me while I fall asleep a little bit just thinking about it.) More often than not, we'd land on a simple title that conveyed the promise of the book over a beautiful but enigmatic title

that didn't tell the reader anything. Why would this be so? Because unlike fiction, literary nonfiction, or conventional memoir—where the reader is looking primarily to have an emotional experience—readers of transformational nonfiction come to a book *to get something*. As unselfish as most of us spiritual types aim to be, humans are egocentric creatures at heart. When we are hurting, we want to fix the pain. If we are readers, one of the places we go for relief is the bookshelf. Thus as authors of books intended to help people, we need to make sure we are clearly conveying the message that *help is available here*! If you haven't conveyed the benefits a reader can expect from your book, said reader is unlikely to feel a driving urge to own a copy.

Truth be told, most of the clients I work with are terrible at titling their books. No matter how many books they've read over the years, they don't know what separates a good title from a great one. And why should they? I work with many first-time authors who have a whole lot of expertise in a whole lot of areas, none of which is book marketing. As a result of this unfamiliarity, I see a lot of subpar titles come through the door. Among the top missteps I see every day:

- Picking a title that's vague and conveys no benefit to the reader.

  Example: *The Absolute Truth: All Is One Forever*

- Relying on clichéd words and phrases that are already heavily in circulation, especially within their particular genre. (In our corner of the market, we're talking "love," "joy," "oneness," "heart," "awakening," "happiness," and so on.)

  Example: *The Joy of Oneness: Awaken Your Heart, Awaken the Love*

- Going heavy-handed on the wordplay—i.e., choosing a title that is so clever or "punny" that it starts to sound corny.

  Example: *The Puzzle Peace: What's Missing Is Love*

Getting a title just right can be one of the most difficult aspects of publishing transformational books. It's critical to strike a balance between "boring" and "so interesting the meaning is impossible to detect." The latter works just fine for certain types of books—like novels, conventional memoir, and poetry. But when it comes to books that are meant to help, the bestseller list is full of very obvious titles. To illustrate this phenomenon, see if you can pick out the transformational nonfiction in the following list of best-selling titles:

1. *All the Light We Cannot See*
2. *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*
3. *How to Win Friends and Influence People: The Only Book You Need to Lead You to Success*
4. *Between the World and Me*
5. *The Glass Castle*
6. *Sonata Mulattica*
7. *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*
8. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*
9. *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life*
10. *You Can Heal Your Life*

If you guessed 2 (by Brené Brown), 3 (by Dale Carnegie), 7 (by Gary Chapman), 9 (by Mark Manson), and 10 (by Louise Hay), you'd be right. What makes these such great titles for our genre? I call it the what-why-wow. The "what" answers the question, "What is this book about?" The "why" answers the question, "Why should I read it?" and the "wow" is that extra added something that catches our attention and conveys the book's uniqueness. Let's take the Brené Brown example: *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*.

What-Why-Wow	**Answer**	**Reader Response**
What is this book about?	How to let go of trying to be perfect.	Oh, thank God.
Why would I want that?	Because it's a "gift" and it will let me embrace who I really am.	Boy, that sounds nice!
What's the	There's something counterintuitive about calling imperfection a gift; it turns what	Those two things don't usually go

wow?	we thought we knew on its head.	together. I'm intrigued….

So how do you get from wherever you are now to a title that has the what-why-wow dialed in? Here are my best suggestions:

Know your benefits. You want a title that conveys the promise or benefit your reader can expect to receive from your book. In other words, the title must be specific and relevant to the reader's life—you must convince her that the book is going to ease her pain, improve her life, and guide her path. For this reason I suggest you list the top five benefits your book will provide before you even start brainstorming title ideas. This way you can ensure from the start that these benefits are front and center as you get creative.

Brainstorm … a lot. Your first idea for your title is probably not your best idea. Even if you're attached to your title concept—and many first-time authors are—I recommend coming up with a minimum of 10 good title-subtitle combinations and test-driving them with your audience. Keep in mind that if you're being published by a traditional house, your contract is very likely to give final title authority to the publisher. The more options you offer, the more likely they'll end up choosing one of your own creations.

Don't be afraid to be obvious. Often the best title is a simple one that cuts right to the heart of the matter. A great example of this is Dan Harris's book *Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics*. There's no question what this book is about, and it speaks to the reader in several ways. First, it communicates what you're going to get—instructions in meditation. Second, it speaks directly to its audience—not just the skeptics, but the *fidgety* ones! If I'm the ideal reader for the book, I will see myself in the title immediately. There's also an embedded humor in it, because it calls the reader out on being fidgety and skeptical, neither of which is traditionally considered a compliment. So there's an immediate chuckle and a sense of being "gotten." This is a great example of a title that's helping the book find its audience.

Think fresh. It's not easy to say something that's never been said before, but it's possible. Start by ridding your title ideas of clichéd words and phrases—anything you've heard a hundred times before. Write out a list of words and phrases that relate to your book, and then mix and match them to create something unexpected. If you can't steer clear of the tried-and-true, consider taking a phrase your reader will recognize and giving it a new twist. Jesuit priest Gregory Boyle is the founder of Homeboy Industries, a gang intervention program in Los Angeles, and he titled his recent book *Barking to the Choir*. He spun the adage "preaching to the choir" so it reflected the content of his book and the tone of his work. As a result we get that this is no

ordinary priest and that he has a story that may be a bit rough around the edges.

Be as specific as you can. Just like a great hook, a great title is tailored and unique. As I've already mentioned, many first-time authors make the mistake of aiming to attract every possible reader. When it comes to titling your book, it's better to be a big fish in a niche market than a tiny fish in open water. We often hear vague titles from clients who are hoping to hit an audience of "everyone." Perhaps a client is writing on the topic of forgiveness after divorce but has titled the book *Love Is the Answer: Forgive and Let Live*. While this may be an accurate description of the solution the author is offering, it offers nothing about who the book is for or what it's about. (It also combines two clichés—a no-no times two.) If I'm scouring the bookshelf for relief from my own painful divorce, this book is not likely to plug into my must-have receptor. The content might be exactly what I'm looking for, but I'd never know it by the title.

Be clever … but not *too* clever. This is where many first-time authors get thrown off. They've all heard they should find a title that's "catchy." And it's true—you want to choose a title that will stand out; one the reader will have a hard time forgetting. But you want these things in the *right* way. The best use of "clever" is a subtle one—as the spice but not the main event. Best-selling author Gabrielle Bernstein's book *May Cause Miracles: A 40-Day Guidebook of Subtle Shifts for Radical Change and Unlimited Happiness* is a good example. She took a phrase that ordinarily conveys something negative ("may cause side effects") and gave it a fresh, positive twist. She also incorporated a smidge of alliteration, which makes it all the more spunky. It's just enough to make the reader do a double-take and for the title to get stuck in her memory.

Titles are obviously a very subjective art form. But if you make sure to incorporate the what-why-wow, you'll be closer than most first-time authors to crafting a title that sells. My wish for you is a title that makes your ideal reader say, "I need this book!"—quickly and effectively. With this in mind, I'm going to leave you with a few of my favorite titles and notes on why I love them.

- *Why People Don't Heal and How They Can* by Caroline Myss. Myss starts with the problem the reader is facing—and makes the promise of a solution. The title is so clear there's no need for a subtitle!
- *The Afterlife of Billy Fingers: How My Bad-Boy Brother Proved to Me There's Life after Death* by Annie Kagan. This title piques my interest, plain and simple—why the heck is this guy named Billy

Fingers, and what would a “bad boy” have to say about the afterlife? (By the way, this is an amazing book, so you should really read it.)

- *How to Love Yourself (and Sometimes Other People): Spiritual Advice for Modern Relationships* by Lodro Rinzler and Meggan Watterson. This title has a hip, tongue-in-cheek vibe that transmits the voice of the authors. It’s also just plain funny—while making the point that the first step in any relationship is love for oneself.
- *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* by Pema Chödrön. This title is a subtle spin on the well-known phrase “things fall apart” (first coined by W. B. Yeats in his poem “The Second Coming” and more recently referenced as the title of a novel by Chinua Achebe), yet it doesn’t feel clichéd. In the subtitle we can feel the author’s trademark gentleness in the face of pain, which softens the heavy vibe of the literary reference.

Draft a Hook and Take It Out for a Spin

While crafting the perfect hook can seem like a difficult process, I assure you there's nothing to fear. Just follow these steps and then iterate as needed until you get the "wow" response you're looking for. Once you have your hook in hand, you can do a similar process for your title-subtitle combination.

Step #1: Write a list of at least five benefits your book will offer a reader. Examples might include:

- Improved communication
- More easeful relationships
- Better health
- The courage to make a big change
- A new understanding of love, creativity, or life itself
- The inspiration she needs to do something she's always wanted to do (like write a book!)

Step #2: Jot down 3 to 5 ways the book will provide these benefits. For example:

- With a simple series of steps
- Through a new technique or methodology you've developed
- By relating your personal story as an illustration of what's possible for others
- Through an ancient teaching you've rediscovered
- Through stories from dozens of clients you've worked with over the past 30 years

Step #3: Now put these together into an easy-to-digest sentence. Highlight the most high-concept, unique, and narrowly tailored aspect of your book. What makes your book uniquely yours? Here are some examples:

- "I use six core teachings from the Gnostic Gospels to show modern women the spiritual path to finding

purposeful work—and the prosperity that comes with it—effortlessly."

- "I use what I've learned as a successful music producer to help blocked creatives find their voices and make time in their busy lives for their art. This book covers the content in my flagship workshop."
- "I teach entrepreneurs to use my three-step Positive Energy Clear-All system to drop self-defeating patterns, heal past wounds, and set a course for the future—resulting in new levels of self-confidence, productivity, and financial success."

Step #4: Repeat Step 3 two more times, taking different angles on your concept. The idea is to tailor the concept to different niches. Do this until you have *three different versions* of your hook. Each might highlight slightly different aspects of your book. The idea is to generate three options, which you will then present to your audience for their feedback. For example, let's look at the first hook above. The most unique thing that hook has going for it is the Gnostic Gospel angle, so you'll see I've kept that across all three hooks. That said, I've shifted the focus of the book in each hook to see which one will resonate the most. The first hook focuses on work satisfaction, the second on manifestation, and the third on practices for increasing energy.

- *Original:* I use six core teachings from the Gnostic Gospels to show modern women the spiritual path to finding purposeful work—and the prosperity that comes with it—effortlessly.
- *Version #2:* I guide readers through my six-step Secrets of the Gnostics Self Re-creation Process. By the end of the book, my reader will have released her past, envisioned her future, and taken a critical first step toward becoming the woman she really wants to be.
- *Version #3:* Using the life story of Mary Magdalene, I teach six ancient practices for increasing feminine energy in the body. By following my instructions, readers will get a direct and sustainable experience of

more joy, more energy, and more love in their lives.

Step #5: Now take your three versions to your online community. Using your Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn account, ask your friends, fans, and family to tell you which book they would be more incentivized to buy. Giving them options is critical; you will get no substantive information if you present only one hook and ask if they like it. Instead give options and ask, “Which book would you be most inclined to buy?” Then listen to what they have to say. These are the people who will be the early adopters of your book. Make sure you’re giving them what they want!

Chapter 4

BUILD YOUR OUTLINE

Sometimes as an editor, I hit the jackpot and get to work on a book with someone who's already a friend. Such was the case with coach and speaker Nancy Levin, who also happens to be my bestie. When it came time for her to write her first book, I leapt at the chance to give her feedback on her draft. Nancy is an accomplished poet with a master's degree in creative writing, and she is an every-single-day journal writer. Neither she nor I had any doubts that she'd succeed at writing an amazing book, and I was waiting for it on the edge of my seat.

Even though I knew she was a poet, I was still surprised when I received her 150-page document and discovered the book was structured … ahem, *poetically*. (That's code for "had no discernible structure whatsoever.") The writing was evocative, atmospheric, and beautifully raw. But as I read, the phrase that kept coming to my mind was, *Where is the book?*

What I was really asking was, "Where is the *structure*?" Behind every good piece of writing is a solid structure. A book's structure is like the blueprint an architect draws up for your dream home. You can have all the throw pillows and dining sets in the world, but until you've followed the blueprint to pour the foundation and build the frame, you don't have a *house*. The same goes for a book: without a well-defined structure, all you have is a bunch of words on a page.

Such was the case for my dear Nancy. At the time we were living in adjacent buildings right on the creek in downtown Boulder. So I walked over to her place, sat her down on her deck overlooking the water, and in the most gentle language I could muster, told her she didn't yet have a book. What she had, I explained, was a gorgeous stream of stories, anecdotes, lessons, and truths. Each of which would, I was sure, find its perfect place in a book. But at the moment it was a primordial soup, and we needed to go back to the drawing board. Simply put, we needed to create a structure for the book. Only then would we be able to see where each of these gems fit into the overall picture.

Which brings me to the subject of this chapter: building your outline. Because once you've dialed in your hook, and perhaps even your title, it may be tempting to want to dive in and write the heck out of that book. But in most cases, that's not the right next step. There is one more piece of

preparation required—one that is critical both to generating a book you can be proud of and to supporting your writing process. That step is building an outline.

Yes, I know. The last time you thought about outlines was in 10th-grade English class, and nobody wants to be reminded of high school. But alas, your teacher was right: things like topic sentences, symmetrical structure, and subheadings are critical to conveying your very important message clearly and effectively. In the editorial world, we call this "having good bones"—and it's the first thing an editor looks for when reading a manuscript. A book that has good bones contains a clear narrative or prescriptive arc, is easy for the reader to navigate, has content that is symmetrical—each chapter is organized in a similar manner—and hangs together well from beginning to end. Your best bet for getting high marks in each of these areas is to start with an outline.

Wait, What's an Outline Again?

For those of you who have long since trashed your files from the aforementioned English class (and who could blame you?), let me give you a tutorial. An outline is essentially a written plan for your book, listing each piece of information you want to include, point by point, in its proper order. When it comes to fiction or memoir, this outline tells an overt story. When we're working with transformational nonfiction, the outline highlights each idea you will be including and in what chapter it will appear. Outlines come in different shapes and sizes, some skinnier (just bullet points) and some more fleshed out (with topic sentences already written). When I turned in my proposal for the book you're reading now, the outline for this chapter read as follows:

Chapter 4: Build Your Outline

This chapter is where the good work of building the book's structure begins. I will offer templates, sample outlines, and instructions for creating your first outline. I will also tell tales from the editing archives that reveal why you need to take this step before the book gets written!

- *Nancy's story of delivering her "book," which had no structure*
- *The importance of giving your book "good bones"*
- *What exactly is an outline?*
- *Choosing your structure*
- *Examples of classic transformational nonfiction structures (memoir, teaching memoir, X steps, X lessons, three-part structure,*

etc.)

- *Qualities of good structure (symmetry, flow, etc.)*
- *Three outline templates*
- *How to use your outline as you write*
- *Retroactive outlines*
- *Exercise: Pick a template and create an outline*

Since I knew I would be writing the book myself, I went with a bare-bones outline. The content was going to be fairly straightforward, and I already had all the data stored on my internal hard drive—that is, in my own head—so I didn't need to include it all on the page. But minimalism isn't always the right move when it comes to writing your outline.

Back on the deck of her apartment, Nancy was recovering from the heart attack I'd given her when I told her she didn't have a book yet. I tried to explain the concept of structure. I told her that there's a sort of formula to transformational nonfiction: you want chapters that introduce major topics, and each should be symmetrically filled with two to five subsections supporting the primary topic. I assured her I believed she *could* learn that formula and could write this book herself. But, I intuited, she probably had better things to do. At that time Nancy was making the transition out of her "day job," and most of her attention was absorbed in launching her coaching and speaking practice. The last thing she needed was to spend four to six months writing this book—especially when there are professionals out there who can do such things for us.

Nancy agreed to this idea, and I ended up connecting her with a collaborative writer to help get her content onto the page. (Collaborative writing, a.k.a. ghostwriting, is far more common than you may suppose. If you start to feel relief at hearing that, please know I'll go into your options more deeply in Chapter 7.) To make sure she and her writer got off to a good start, I suggested Nancy and I cook up a detailed outline for the book and pass it along. By this time Nance had caught her breath and could see the big picture again. She enthusiastically accepted my offer, and we dove into creating the outline for what would become her first book, *Jump … and Your Life Will Appear: An Inch-by-Inch Guide to Making a Major Change*.

Creating outlines is my *jam*. I love it. It's one of my zones of genius and one of my favorite things to do. Like many good editors, I see the world structurally. I can listen to a new author talk about his work and message and it's almost as if an outline starts writing itself inside my head. That day on the

deck, I helped Nancy formulate what had been a jumble of stories and lessons into a 10-part teaching program that not only became the outline for her book but is also the foundation for her popular 10-week Jump Coaching program. It was a highly detailed outline—it came in at over 12 pages—because I knew we'd be handing it off to a writer who had not had the benefit of sitting with us during our conversation on the deck. (See Appendix A for the outline to the intro and first chapter. During the writing process, some of the content shifted and changed, but most of what you see there made it into Nancy's book exactly as we'd designed.)

Whether you go with a short and sweet outline like mine for this chapter, or a really meaty one like Nancy's, your outline will prove to be your best friend. It not only ensures that you'll include all the content you intend to—and in the right order—it will hold your hand (metaphorically speaking) as you write. Even for the most prolific and professional writers, sitting down to work on a book can be a death battle. I myself strive to write every single day, and every time I succeed it's because I've been willing and able to push through a heavy curtain of my own resistance. On the hardest days, the last thing I need is one more barrier between me and my book. The question "What topic should I write about today?" can be enough to send me straight to Instagram. In such moments it's my outline that saves me. I don't have to think about where I'm going to start; if I can just get to my computer, the battle is already won. Once there I simply open my writing document and my outline. I can see exactly where I left off and what I need to write next. From there the writing process becomes easy.

Choosing the Right Structure

Like blueprints for a house, the organizational structure of a book could go in an infinite number of directions. That said, most houses are variations on the same theme. There are kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms, and living areas. Originality is not necessarily an advantage when it comes to building a house. You can design the most cutting-edge and unique-looking home, but if it doesn't have a bathroom and a kitchen sink, it's not going to be in high demand. Same goes for a book. Readers have come to expect certain norms: chapters that flow in a linear progression; subheadings peppered through each chapter acting as mile markers; and writing that is easy to navigate and clear enough to understand without a lot of effort. The first step in creating such a blueprint is to choose a guiding structure for the book. This is such an important quality that the first round of editing is often called a structural edit—focusing primarily on shaping and polishing the structure until it shines.

Solid structure comes in a wide variety of shapes and forms. The key is to have it, and for it to be coherent and easily digestible for your reader. This is

sometimes referred to as having a “structural conceit.” Some examples of coherent structural conceits include:

A step-by-step program. You will guide the reader through a transformational process in a particular order. Often each chapter will highlight a step or stage in the journey, each of which builds on the one before.

Examples:

Judgment Detox: Release the Beliefs That Hold You Back from Living a Better Life by Gabrielle Bernstein

The Tapping Solution for Manifesting Your Greatest Self: 21 Days to Releasing Self-Doubt, Cultivating Inner Peace, and Creating a Life You Love by Nick Ortner

A chronological account of a transformational experience. You are going to tell the reader the story of your own transformation. This process informs them and allows them to know they are not alone on their own journey.

Examples:

Love Warrior: A Memoir by Glennon Doyle

Spiritual Graffiti: Finding My True Path by MC Yogi

A set of lessons or teachings. This structure allows you to isolate particular threads of wisdom you’ve accumulated so they are digestible for your reader. Perhaps it’s the lessons you learned from your granddad, the principles you’ve developed for helping your therapy clients work through divorce, or six helpful tips you can offer for making it through chemotherapy.

Examples:

The Top Five Regrets of the Dying: A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing by Bronnie Ware

Girl, Wash Your Face: Stop Believing the Lies About Who You Are So You Can Become Who You Were Meant to Be by Rachel Hollis

A set of rules, guidelines, or “laws.” If you have significant expertise in a particular area, you may feel confident asserting your authority by naming a set of laws or rules to live by. It might be ten rules for effective communication or a dozen guidelines for healthy eating. Or maybe you’ve channeled six cosmic laws from a group of disembodied masters living in the Sirius star system. (No judgment! I’ve heard those Sirians are really helpful.)

Examples:

The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom by Don Miguel Ruiz

Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life … And Maybe the World by Admiral William H. McRaven

A three-part format. This is a classic structure for transformational nonfiction, separating the content of the book into distinct parts for easier absorption. An example would be a book in which Part I covers the problem the reader is facing, Part II names the solution, and Part III offers a practical program for implementation—perhaps a diet with recipes, an exercise plan, or the like. Another example would show how to apply particular principles to oneself, to one's relationships, and to work.

Examples:

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business by Charles Duhigg

The Book You Were Born to Write: Everything You Need to (Finally) Get Your Wisdom onto the Page and into the World by … me!

This list is by no means complete, but it represents several of the more common structures I see from authors of transformational nonfiction. A simple way to get to know different book structures is to pick up any three nonfiction books on your shelf and look at the table of contents. Books with good bones are typically orderly, symmetrical, and comprehensive. You'll see very quickly that there is no single formula for generating a solid structure—but that most great books have one. (As an editor I have created a checklist I look over during my structural edit, which you can see in Chapter 7.)

One of the documents I give potential clients when they come to kn literary arts is a set of templates for book outlines that have stood the test of time. This document contains three different outlines that cover the three most popular structures we work with: prescriptive nonfiction, teaching memoir, and traditional narrative memoir. Often just seeing a sample outline—with all those delicious little blanks, waiting to be filled in by you!—can relieve you of the fear of not knowing how to write a book. The plain fact is that if you can write an outline, you can write a book. (And we're just about to hit Part II of this book, which is all about the writing process.) I'm including the first and perhaps most popular of these three outline templates, for prescriptive nonfiction, below. (You'll find the other two, for teaching memoir and narrative memoir, in Appendix B. One of them may be a closer fit for your own book in progress, so be sure to check them out.)

My hope, if it's not obvious, is that you'll pick one of these outlines and

start filling it in. Even if you don't think you're ready to write the book, I would encourage you to open up a document on your computer and play around with creating your first outline. Doing so can give you a sense of confidence that only comes when you start to feel like you're making progress. The prospect of diving into a big, scary book doesn't seem so daunting once you have the bullet points of your great ideas down on paper. So give it a try! And if you need some guidance to start the process, I'll happily offer it via the exercise.

Outline Template for Prescriptive Nonfiction

A book of prescriptive nonfiction speaks directly to the reader about her life. It might offer a new technique for overcoming chronic pain, a new method for working through relationship difficulties, or a series of practices intended to cultivate more spiritual awareness. Your outline may take any one of many different forms, depending on your topic. The outline included here is suitable for a book structured around a set of principles or steps toward solving a problem the reader has in her life, but it can be adapted for just about any topic. Note that the number of chapters and number of subtopics within each chapter is entirely dependent on the topic you've chosen. This outline is meant as an example—feel free to break it up or move things around. Better yet, create your own outline that's perfect for *your* book!

Working Title:

Working Subtitle:

By:

Chapter One: [The Problem]

- Opening story to introduce the concept of this book, illustrating the pain point that had the reader pick up the book in the first place
- Inspiring vision of what's possible on the other side of that pain
- Author background—why should we trust that you know what you're talking about?
- Benefits the reader can expect if he uses the info in this book
- How this book is organized (brief chapter-by-chapter overview)
- How to use this book or the exercises in it
- What you hope for the reader as she dives into the book

Chapter Two: [Introducing Your Solution]

- Opening story—what your or a client's life was like before you or they did what you are suggesting
- Topic 1: Why should the reader do what you suggest?
- Topic 2: Overview of how to do it, the details of which will be explained in the chapters that follow
- Topic 3: What they need to know to get started
- Exercises or practices
- Conclusion and transition to next chapter

Chapter Three: [The First Step Toward the Solution]

- Opening story—choose one that represents what it looks like when your reader does what you are suggesting
- Overview of chapter theme—the first step in your "prescription"
- Topic 1:
- Topic 2:
- Topic 3:
- Exercises or practices
- Conclusion and transition to next chapter

Chapter Four: [The Second Step Toward the Solution]

- Opening story
- Overview of chapter theme—the second step in your "prescription"
- Topic 1:
- Topic 2:
- Topic 3:
- Exercises or practices
- Conclusion and transition to next chapter

Continue with the same outline for as many chapters as you want to include.

Final Chapter: [How to Take the Book's Lessons into the World]

- Overview of chapter theme (Note: In the last chapter of your book, you can go deeper or speak at a higher level of abstraction)
- Topic 1:
- Topic 2:
- Topic 3:
- Benediction and vision for the reader

The Case for Retroactive Outlines

What if you've already written the lion's share of your book's content without a specific structure in mind? No problem. I recommend two steps, in this order: First, draw up a *retroactive outline*. This simply means rereading your manuscript and taking notes as you go. You'll want to jot down what you've included in each chapter, and in what order. This is a simple process if you already have subheadings throughout your manuscript, but if not just note the different topics or scenes as they arise. (You can use the templates included in this book as a guide for what your outline should look like when you're finished.)

In my experience you'll know fairly quickly if your book has a coherent structure already baked in—or if it doesn't. If it's easy to write the retroactive outline, the book probably has a structure in place. If it's difficult, it probably doesn't. Either way, once you've made it through your whole book, look over the retroactive outline and ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the content feel evenly distributed?
- Are the chapters roughly the same length?
- Is the topic of each chapter clear? Does all the content in each chapter relate directly back to that topic?
- Does each chapter have roughly the same number of subtopics?
- Have you included subheadings to help the reader know where they are in the book?
- Is the content comprehensive? Does it answer all the questions your reader is likely to have?
- Could you leave anything out to streamline the reading experience?

If your retroactive outline is well-organized, symmetrical, and complete, congratulations! You're good to go. If not, the second step is to create a

coherent outline from scratch. Set aside the document you just created and start crafting an outline that includes all the information you want to cover—in a symmetrical and structured manner. I would suggest picking a structure or choosing one of the outlines or in Appendix A. Give each chapter a topic sentence, a similar number of subheadings, and a word count goal. Then start playing around with how the content in your manuscript might be reorganized so it flows in a more predictable way. What can be trimmed down? Where might a story or exercise help the reader integrate the content? Pay attention to balance, symmetry, and even chapter lengths. Keep in mind that the manuscript you've already written is not a lost cause; more than likely it simply needs to be reworked so it is more navigable for the reader. Once you have your new outline in hand, you can start retooling the manuscript so it aligns with the structure you've created.

One great way to do this is to use the software system Scrivener, which was created just for drafting lengthy documents like books. I am a huge fan of this program; it's how I drafted the book you're reading right now, and I will never write another book without it. Scrivener allows you to easily create a series of folders along the left-hand side of your writing screen, each filled with individual text documents corresponding to the bullet points in your outline. If you're reorganizing a disorganized manuscript, you can cut and paste content from your manuscript into individual text pages, and then file them in the appropriate chapter folder. Arranging and rearranging these subdocuments is simple and much less labor-intensive than constantly cutting and pasting from one Microsoft Word document to the next. Once you're finished you can export the Scrivener file back into Word for editing and delivery. (See the Resources section for more information.)

Write a Quick and Dirty Outline

The time has come to begin creating the backbone of your book. The point of this exercise is simply to get an outline underway. There is no expectation that you will be generating a final version here, so no paralysis is required. Think of this as a slapdash version of your book plan; one where "done" is good enough. Note that this outline may be brand-spanking-new, or you may use this exercise to retroactively outline a manuscript you've already begun writing. Regardless, the point here is to set a timer and get an outline underway in less than 30 minutes.

1. Set a timer for 30 minutes and make sure you're in a quiet space where you won't be interrupted. Feel free to refer to one of the outline templates found in Appendix B, but try not to let them overwhelm you. This exercise is called quick and dirty for a reason! The only goal is to get started.
2. Open a new document on your computer or a new page in your notebook. At the top of the page, inscribe a working title. This title can be as simple as "Untitled on Herbal Remedies" if you don't yet know what your book wants to be called. (1 minute)
3. Below the title, write your hook—one or two sentences headlining what your book is going to be about. Don't worry if this hook is not yet totally dialed in; for this exercise a hook-in-progress will do. (1 minute)
4. Working fairly quickly, make a list of *possible* major topics or story points you want to cover in your book. Again, you are working against the clock to get a rough version of a possible outline, so do not get caught up in details. Go stream of consciousness if you need to; just get down 8 to 10 topics or story points. (10 minutes)
5. Once you've got 8 to 10 possible chapter topics down, go through and draft three *subtopics* (if you're writing prescriptive nonfiction or a teaching memoir) or *scenes* (if you're writing a straightforward memoir)

that will naturally fall under each of the chapter topics listed. Feel free to note any stories, exercises, or other elements you think would be helpful or interesting to include inside each chapter. (16 minutes)

Congratulations! You've just written a bare-bones, quick and dirty outline you can use as the foundation for building a more in-depth and polished structure for your book. Now that this is in the can, you're ready for Part II: The Writing Process.

PART II

The Writing Process

Chapter 5

JUST START WRITING

I remember the fist time I ghostwrote a full-length book. It took five months in “clock time,” but it felt like it had been many lifetimes in the making. (Perhaps it was, if you believe in such things as karma and past lives.) Around the time the book went to the publisher, I attended the annual Art Market show in San Francisco. This massive event showcased hundreds of works of fine art: paintings and sculptures, jewelry and photographs, ceramics and installation pieces. As I wandered from stall to stall, I could feel the thousands of hours of love and attention that the artists had collectively invested to create that much art. While mine was an entirely different medium, in that moment I understood deeply that writing, too, is an art form. The book I’d just finished had required as much of me as these works of physical art had required of their creators. Pouring over every word, every turn of phrase, to ensure the meaning would be simply and easily conveyed. Crafting, discarding, and rewriting tens of thousands of words along the way. Opening my heart, speaking from my soul, and feeling a lot of uncomfortable feelings I would otherwise have left buried deep inside. Where a visual artist creates art that is a feast for the eyes, a writer of books weaves worlds that unfold in the imagination. Every word has an impact; every phrase either ushers the reader closer to the author’s meaning or holds him at arm’s length. In this way the act of sitting down to write is the act of crafting, like an artisan, the seed of a new world.

If you are reading this book, you, too, are such an artisan. I often hear newer authors protest this truth, claiming they’re “not a *real* writer.” But there are two kinds of people in this world: the ones who want to write and the ones who don’t. If you are in the first set, then you are meant to be a writer. The only thing standing between you and the title is whether or not you’re, well, *writing*.

That’s where this chapter begins and ends. The writing process is sometimes magical, otherworldly, and easy. More often, I’ve found, it’s a labor of love. One of my favorite authors, Anne Lamott, explains: “How to write: Butt in chair. Start each day anywhere. Let yourself do it badly. Just take one passage at a time. Get butt back in chair.” Writing a whole book requires said “butt-in-chair time” by the truckload. But the fruits of that labor are so worth it. How do I know? Because I watch would-be writers turn into authors every single day. I see the pride that flushes their cheeks as they show

me their harvest: a finished book with their very own name on the front cover. With all the publishing options available today, such an experience is within reach for anyone who hears the call.

So in this chapter I'm going to download my very best tips and tricks for actually, really, truly writing that book. While I hope—and expect—that what I have to say will be helpful to you, I could also sum the entire chapter up in one sentence: sit down and write. That's how books get written; it's how wannabes become writers. For if you are writing, *then you are a writer*. All the protestations are really just excuses. Writers who write most days *know* that they are writers. Writing itself is the only requirement for membership in the writer's club. In other words, put down this book and start writing. If you're not ready to do that, keep reading this chapter. If after reading it, you still can't write, then read the next chapter—it's about peeling back the layers of resistance that can stand between us and the page. But please understand that there is no external validation required; there is no key that will open the door for you except sitting down, picking up your pen, and writing.

On Sh*tty First Drafts and Writing Most Days

Now that I've said everything I really need to say in this chapter, I will proceed to give you total permission to be a terrible writer, as long as you are writing most days. By "terrible" I mean any combination of the following self-critical descriptors I hear authors lob at themselves every day: amateur, unpublishable, unreadable, boring, navel-gazing, vain, uninspired, hackneyed, unoriginal, flat, blah, meh, self-indulgent, potentially libelous. At this stage of the writing journey, the truth is that I don't care if you're a bad writer—*as long as you are writing*. There are innumerable ways to turn bad writing into better writing farther down the line. (See Chapter 7.) Right now the only job you have is to actually be writing. So go crazy! Load the page with clichés, forget the difference between adjectives and adverbs, mix your metaphors until the cows come home to roost. Just promise me you're sitting down, most days, for 15 minutes or 30 minutes or an hour, and you're accumulating words on the page. Writing anything—good or bad, brilliant or sh*tty—is better than not writing at all. For a writer, a day when pen touches page is a successful day. Writing comes before all other pleasures—if only because very little else is pleasurable until one has done one's daily writing.

Once again I can thank the amazing Anne Lamott for coining a term I use daily: the "sh*tty first draft." (For that phrase alone she has my lifelong devotion.) A sh*tty first draft is exactly as it sounds: a terrible book, but a book that's actually been written. It doesn't matter whether this book has to be rewritten, from the bottom up, multiple times. At least there is a book there, and that book is a beginning. All great works of literature or

transformational nonfiction started with first drafts—many of them fairly bad. “Done is good enough” is one of my favorite phrases at this stage of the writing process. I just want you to be writing.

When would-be writers think of writing, we often think of the sexy parts. The inspiration of the muse! The poetic prose flowing on the page! The readers whose lives are about to change! While all that is well and good, the truth is there’s nothing sexy about the elbow grease that’s required to actually sit down and write. But it’s like any sort of practice, whether going to the gym, sitting on a meditation cushion, or learning a new skill. You have to *do it*, and in the doing of it, a sort of alchemy takes place. So without further ado, I present to you the Transformational Writer’s Pledge. And like your bossy older sister, I’m telling you to fill it out—and then keep the promises you’re making yourself.

The Transformational Writer’s Pledge

I pledge allegiance to the writer within and agree to the following:

1. I have a longing to be a writer or to write a book, and as such, I commit to a regular writing practice.
2. I will write most days, or at least five days a week.
3. I will write for at least _____ minutes per day, or I’ll write at least _____ words per day.
4. If I miss a writing day, I will _____ _____ in order to make it up.
5. I will expect nothing more of myself than a sh*tty first draft.
6. I will declare any day where I do the above a success, regardless of the quality of the writing I produce.
7. If and when I find I have trouble fulfilling the above agreements, I will read Chapter 6 on handling my resistance and come back to my writing practice again.

_____

Signature

_____

Date

Now, doesn’t that feel better? If not, perhaps you simply need a little plan for the execution. No problem. In the next sections, I am going to offer you five simple instructions to help you get your writing practice dialed in. Put

these suggestions into action, and that sh*tty first draft will be well within reach.

Writing Instruction #1: Schedule Your Daily Write

With stars in my eyes and a temporary work visa in my hand, I moved to Paris, France, right after college. While I was technically there to get some experience working at an international law firm, I spent the whole flight over the Atlantic making pictures in my mind of sitting in the window of a classic French café on the Seine, pouring my heart out onto the page. A friend had given me a journal with the Eiffel Tower on the front as a graduation present, and I was planning to fill it with all the important, deep, wise thoughts and feelings I had been keeping under wraps for—I determined—far too long. So while my official reason for being in the City of Lights was to intern as a legal translator, my secret raison d'être was to become the writer I deeply wanted to be.

Enter, well, *Paris*. With all its delights. Chief among them (for the 22-year-old version of myself) being *les Camels ooltra light* and bad table wine. Not to mention the fact that I was working 10-hour days at the law firm and trying to survive the hottest summer on record in a city with no A/C in the subway system. In other words: I wrote nothing. When my internship at the law firm petered out and I could not find another gig to replace it, I had to hop a plane back to the U.S. with my writerly tail between my legs.

While your excuses are likely far more virtuous than my own, I imagine you have a personal version of this dilemma. I call it a case of the "buts." The refrain goes something like this: "I want to write every day, but _____." (Insert any number of really good excuses: the kids, the job, taking care of your elderly parents, cleaning up after the cat who threw up on the floor in the night. Go crazy here.) I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the "buts" are here to stay. They don't go *anywhere*. There is *always* a really impressive reason why sitting down at your computer—or with your little Parisian journal—will have to wait while you finish doing everything else. Which is why you are hereby instructed to insert your writing appointments into your calendar. Yes, *that* calendar. The one that contains all the *important* things that you *have* to do.

No longer a ciggy-smoking wine-drinker (the mere thought causes me intestinal discomfort), I'm just as good at the "buts" today as I was when I was 22. Only now I'm a busy business owner, with people counting on me to return their e-mails, make it to Zoom meetings, and pay the bills. It would be super easy for me to avoid writing altogether, citing a list of to-dos whose primacy over writing would easily stand up in a court of law. The good news

for me, and probably for you, is that there's one "but" that's actually in service of our craft. This is the small, quiet voice that whispers her heartfelt plea: "*But … I want to be a writer*." It's with this voice in my ears that I approach my calendar, blocking out 90 minutes, six mornings a week, for writing.

Putting my writing time in my calendar is truly the only way I get any writing done these days. It's how the book you're now reading got written. I keep the first 90 minutes of my workday meeting-free; before 10:30 or 11:00 A.M., I am to be writing. Other things come up all the time. I see an e-mail in my inbox that would "only take a minute to reply to." Or I get a voicemail from someone on my team who needs my input before she can move forward with helping a client. It is one of the hardest things in the world to keep my writing boundary, and I'm better at it on some days than on others. But even if I keep the full 90 minutes sacred only four days a week (out of the six I have it scheduled), that still adds up to a whole lot more writing than none.

Contrary to authorial folklore, most books don't get written during monthlong writing retreats in the woods. Take it from someone who has tried that approach: there's nothing that makes me want to *please God do anything but write* more than having several full days in a row set aside to write. I'm not alone in this. I remember one day when my friend Nancy and I were co-working at my kitchen table. We'd booked out the whole day to work side by side: me building kn literary arts, and Nancy drafting that book I told you about in the last chapter. At some point I looked up to see Nancy standing at the kitchen sink doing the dishes. *My dishes.* The dishes that had (knowing me) been luxuriating in the sink for a day or two by then. "Nance, why are you doing my dishes?" I asked. She looked up at me as if I'd snapped her out of a trance. "I don't know!" she exclaimed. "I guess nothing makes you want to do dishes like writing a book!" You may be familiar with this experience. If you want a really clean house, tell yourself that you're working on your book today.

The truth is that most books don't get written in heroic hours-long sessions by the sea. Most books get written in small appointments, consistently kept, sprinkled throughout the week. So go to your calendar now. Look at your to-dos and add "writing" to the list. Ask yourself the following clarifying questions:

1. What time of day am I most likely to sit down and write?
2. What do I usually do in that time period instead of writing?
3. What is most likely to keep me from prioritizing writing in that slot?

4. How might I head off such objections before they happen?

Your vision thus clarified, you can fast forward to Writing Instruction #5: Celebrate in Advance and complete the exercise for this chapter: creating a simple writing plan you can stick to. I promise you won't regret it.

Writing Instruction #2: Set a Word Count Goal

Now I shall proceed to contradict something I said in the previous section. It sometimes actually *does* work to head to a tropical location with the goal of doing a whole lot of writing while you're there. Twice I've had the honor of working with a group of writers on a month-long writing retreat in Bali, where each participant wrote a whole sh*tty first draft of his or her masterwork in 30 days. Prior to the retreat, we writing coaches had each student go find a book that was roughly the length they wanted their own book to be. We helped them determine the word count of this model book so they had a rough idea how many words to aim for in their own manuscript. We then had them divide the full-length word count by 23, which was the number of days we thought they would likely be writing during the 30-day retreat. Most were writing self-help and personal growth books, including inspirational memoirs and teaching memoirs. The word counts they came up with were between 50,000 and 60,000 words per book, which averaged out to between 2,200 and 2,600 words per day. The first time I coached this retreat, I was skeptical; that's a fairly high daily goal, even for practiced authors. But these committed students went for it, and each one ended up with a completed first draft at the end of the month.

I wouldn't recommend such a high goal if you're writing in the middle of your everyday life. But I've found that setting a smaller, more reachable word count goal is a great way to keep yourself from spending your daily writing time mopping the kitchen floor. Word count is something that serious authors have their eye on *all the time*. It's a simple measure of what one has accomplished during a given writing period and over the course of the entire project. For the overly wordy among us (who, me?) it also acts as a reminder when we're going off the rails and writing more than any reader needs to know about a subject. In other words I want you to start paying real attention to your word count. If you're using a word-processing program like Microsoft Word or Scrivener, it will be very easy to watch your word count. Both of these programs keep an eye on your verbosity via a convenient counter at the bottom of the screen. If you're a longhand kind of person, keeping tabs on your word count will be a bit less precise but still doable. Take three typical pages of your writing and count how many words are on each page. (Note that the humblest articles, conjunctions, and prepositions—little words like "a,"

“and,” and “of”—count just as much as big words like “pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis” and “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.”) Then take an average of the number of words on each of these pages and call that your per-page word count.

Once you know how you’ll monitor your word count, go ahead and set a very easy-to-reach daily writing goal. By easy to reach, I’m talking a couple hundred words. A typical double-spaced page written in 12-point Times New Roman font will yield 350 to 400 words. For many, such a page will be an excellent daily goal. Why? Because it’s the kind of goal you can squeak out between your morning run and doing the breakfast dishes. And also because such a goal, successfully undertaken five days a week, will yield a full-length draft manuscript in just about six months. Not too shabby for writing in the middle of a busy life.

Should you always stop as soon as you hit your word count goal? Not if you’re on a roll! I consider my daily word count to be a minimum—a bar I can easily clear—that will allow me to call the day a success. But personally I’ve found that when I give myself a tiny little goal, I often end up writing that and quite a bit more. Why? Because once I’m writing, it just feels so freaking good. I will write until I come to a natural stopping point, which some days is one word past my goal and other days is double what I’d asked of myself. Just remember that the transformational writer’s pledge you signed does not require perfection—only progress. So let go of whether the output is “good.” Focus on the fact that you’re finally getting words on a page. You’re writing!

What's in a Word Count?

How do you determine what word count to aim for with your book? The answer lies in its genre. While every book is different, most comply with rough word count ranges depending on the category the book falls into. Length is one of the ways a reader identifies a particular book as the kind of book they enjoy. So while I always think it's best to let the content determine the form and format of the book, on length it may behoove you to aim for what works in your genre—especially on your first book. With that in mind, here are some word counts for popular books in a variety of genres:

How-to, Self-Help, and Spirituality: 40,000–70,000 words

- *Get Over It!: Thought Therapy for Healing the Hard Stuff* by Iyanla Vanzant: 73,600
- *Crazy Sexy Cancer Tips* by Kris Carr: 64,480
- *The Wisdom of Sundays: Life-Changing Insights and Inspirational Conversations* by Oprah Winfrey: 74,400

Memoir: 70,000–100,000 words

- *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* by Immaculée Ilibagiza: 73,600
- *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls: 89,000 words
- *The End of Your Life Book Club* by Will Schwalbe: 92,000 words

Literary and Historical Fiction: 90,000–120,000 words

- *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd: 104,000
- *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini: 107,000
- *Little Fires Everywhere* by Celeste Ng: 109,000

Genre Fiction (Romance, Science Fiction, Crime): 100,000–300,000 words

- *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn: 145,000

- *A Game of Thrones* by George R. R. Martin: 298,000
- *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon: 302,000

New Adult or Young Adult Fiction: 80,000–120,000 words

- *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein: 90,000
- *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green: 92,000
- *The Scorpio Races* by Maggie Stiefvater: 110,000

I often recommend that first-time authors—especially those who are planning to self-publish—aim for the shorter side of average in each of these ranges. Most of us contemporary humans have a lot competing for our precious time and attention. Show us a skinny little 40,000-word book and we'll see time in our schedule to fit it in. You're more likely to sell a book—and have that book be *read*—if you can get a reader to think, *Hey! I could read that on a plane ride or while the kids are napping or on my lunch break.*

Writing Instruction #3: Know Where to Start

As the well-worn cliché says, every journey begins with a single step. This is nowhere more true than the daily uphill journey of opening your laptop and commencing to write. As any adventurer knows well, it's helpful to have some idea of where you're going before you head out. When it comes to your book, the good news is that you've written your own map already. You guessed it: it's time to pull out that beauty of an outline you created at the end of the previous chapter and put it to use.

Back in the early days of my writing journey, I would frequently sit down, look at that blank page, and … freeze. *What on earth am I supposed to write about today?* I'd think. I knew I wanted to be writing, but I didn't have a clue *what* I wanted to be writing. Then I started kn literary arts and began helping first-time authors overcome their blocks to daily writing. (We teach what we need to learn, apparently!) I quickly discovered the key to writing every day is to have a predetermined starting block. Enter the outline. Nowadays I wouldn't dream of writing a book without this external reference point. Always an overachieving student, I like to think of my outline as a list of tidy little homework assignments. Each day I sit down and choose the topic that feels most alive to me. It may not be the section I was working on yesterday, or even the same chapter. Some days I close my eyes and point to a

subheading, pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey style. With my trusty outline by my side, I have my work cut out for me. No thinking—or panicking—required.

Writing Instruction #4: Set a Moratorium on Editing

If I had a quarter for every time I've heard the next writing no-no, I'd be able to buy a whole lot of gumballs. The client says something like, "I can't help it; I keep editing as I write and I'm not getting anywhere!" Self-editing is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, rereading one's own work can be addictive. *I really wrote this elegant turn of phrase? I'm pretty impressed with myself. What other gems will I find if I keep reading?* Alternatively, we might think, *I wrote THAT? What a piece of horse manure. What if everything I've written is this bad? I'd better find out.* Alas, both habits—loving to hear ourselves talk and caustic self-criticism—are pastimes that get in the way of the one thing we're *really* here for: to write a book.

Editing your own work, as it turns out, can be used for good or for evil. Since it's a game of Russian roulette to determine which outcome you'll get, my fourth instruction is to set a moratorium on editing until you have finished your first draft.

Yes, you heard me right: absolutely zero massaging, reworking, or rewriting until you have made your way through your outline and written actual words for each section you intend to include in the book. A limited amount of rereading may be necessary at the start of each writing session to orient yourself; I always go back and read the last paragraph I wrote the day before so I remember where I left off. But I beseech you not to indulge your desire to clean up a little of this and a little of that. Such dabbling opens the door to multiple issues, including but not limited to:

- Time-sucking peregrination that leaves you with fewer words on the page at the end of your writing session than at the beginning
- An over-attachment to your precious phrases, which you have now spent hours polishing and repolishing
- Sharp-tongued self-criticism that will leave your creative self gasping for air in a pool of its own blood (if this sounds dramatic, you've obviously never been inside my head)
- Or, if you like what you see, a self-pride that has a funny way of letting you off the hook for the writing you were *supposed* to be doing today

Successful working writers know that writing and editing are two very different phases of the book journey. You will never get through the writing

phase if you start to overlap the two. A sh*tty first draft is meant to be exactly that: sh*tty. The more time you spend trying to get that one phrase right, the less likely you are to finish your book.

"But Kelly, how will I know if my writing is good enough if I don't read it right away?" The answer is that right now is not the time to worry about whether your writing is good enough. Now is the time to *create*. It's the time to let your imagination run wild and let your intuition take the lead. This is one place where your trusty outline will be worth its weight in gold. With this blueprint in place, your left brain can safely go offline and leave your right brain to do what it does best: build a palace of words. As long as it stays somewhat true to the outline, you can trust it to freely create without left-brain supervision.

Now, this is not to say that editing in and of itself is evil. Your own editing—and that of a trusted professional—will soon appear center stage. *But not yet.* Personally I try to set deadlines for myself that leave a luxurious amount of time to do my own editing before the book, proposal, article, or blog is due to the editor. Once I have a draft in hand, I can relax and relish the process of polishing it into tip-top shape. But the only way you'll end up with a full manuscript in hand is if you stay committed to the act of *writing it*. This means minimizing distractions, especially super juicy ones like editing your draft before it's complete.

Writing Instruction #5: Celebrate in Advance

This final piece of advice comes directly from that inimitable mouthpiece of the Universe, author Mike Dooley. (If you're not familiar with Mike, check out tut.com—this man writes a letter from Source and sends it directly to your inbox five days a week. Talk about a committed, working writer.) In explaining how he is able to produce so much excellent content with such enviable regularity, Mike admits a funny strategy. Before he starts writing, he takes a moment to feel the feelings he will have *after* he finishes writing his daily discourse. Right there by his writing desk, he conjures up all the good feels he knows he'll get from writing—and enjoys them in advance. A celebratory dance might be involved; perhaps a whoop and a holler. Whatever will transmit the experience of *having already written*. To what end? Mike claims that stepping into the good feelings gives him a jolt of juice, puts a fire under his tush, and makes the day's writing assignment *fun*.

After test-driving his theory in the privacy of my own home, I'm here to tell you that this weird little exercise actually *works*. Personally I write for a sense of accomplishment, success, and forward motion. On days when I really don't want to sit down, I call in the feelings to come as motivation. I have

been known to dance, to announce that “Today’s writing was a total success!” and do other funny-looking and funny-sounding things to set my fingers flying across the keyboard. Whether your happy dance is full-out or quietly internal is no matter. All we’re interested in is that you’re feeling the experience of completion at a cellular level. Focus on the physical sensations you’ll be experiencing. Imagine the bubbly, fizzy, warm, light-hearted feels … whatever will be going on in that bod of yours after you’ve met your goal. Then sit down and do the writing—for real.

Kick-Start Your Writing Process

Sometimes all we need to get writing is a little homework. Below you'll find 10 days' worth of simple to-do items designed to get your creativity flowing. Some you've probably heard before; others will be a study in my own peculiar writing process. Your assignment is to do one of these each day, five days per week, for the next two weeks. You may be surprised how effectively some of these set your creativity in motion. At the end of the two-week period, go back and review which of these was most fun and effective—and start using your faves to keep the momentum going beyond the scope of this exercise.

Day 1: Set a timer. Sometimes knowing you only have to write for 15 minutes makes it less daunting to begin.

Day 2: As you go to sleep, think about what you want to write tomorrow. You'll be programming your subconscious mind to recognize that you're a writer and that tomorrow is a writing day. Bonus: You may get some good ideas in your dreams!

Day 3: Find a friend who is also writing and do bookend texting. Text him when you sit down and text him when you get up. Social accountability works miracles, my friend.

Day 4: Focus your writing on one small detail. A small goal turns even a short writing period into a win. Describe a character's outfit in a critical scene; the smell of your grandma's chicken soup; the benefits your readers will gain from a particular yoga posture. Start small and watch the will to write snowball from there.

Day 5: Instead of writing, try dictating some text—and then editing the transcript. Talk to Siri and let her take notes for you. Then download the transcript to your computer and edit away. The creative juices will be flowing even before you sit down!

Day 6: Make a writing altar. This one is good for the spiritual folks among us. Choose a spot in your home or office to set up candles and photos of writers who inspire you. Keep your favorite pen there, along with precious objects that have meaning for your book. Compose your own writing prayer or

mantra and recite it before you put pen to page.

Day 7: Listen to a podcast on writing. I enjoy *Beautiful Writers Podcast* and *First Draft*, but there are hundreds out there to choose from.

Day 8: Spark your creativity with writing prompts. A prompt is an open-ended sentence stem that nudges your writerly mind into action. “What I can’t write about is … ” “I wish I could remember … ” “What my heart wants to say is … ” Choose one and write for seven minutes, repeating the prompt whenever you get stuck.

Day 9: Take your writing outside. Take your laptop to the patio, pack a journal and go on a hike, or take a notebook to the local park. Let your writing be fueled by your connection to the natural world.

Day 10: Write a love letter to your future self—the one who has already finished the book. Let yourself know how grateful you are that you followed your heart and kept going, even when it was hard. Then … become that future version of you: sit down and write!

Chapter 6

HANDLE YOUR RESISTANCE

So there I am, sitting in a quiet booth in the back of a nice restaurant, listening to a friend of mine say one of the craziest things I've ever heard. This friend is a highly successful entrepreneur with a gripping personal history. She's also—and I don't say this lightly—a gorgeous writer. Lyrical and poetic yet crisp and clear. Not a combination you see every day. And precisely what insanity is she uttering from across the table? One I hear from prospective authors every day, either explicitly or implicitly: "Who am *I* to write a book?" This self-defeating sentence is hard for me to hear from anyone. But the woman we're talking about, a born writer with a story and a message that already changes lives every single day? It was truly painful.

Here's what I wish I had said: "I hear you, my friend. We all have insecurities."

Here's what I actually said: "Don't be stupid. You need to write the damn book."

Lucky for me, she's forgiving—and she was open to my not-entirely-diplomatic approach. I proceeded to walk her through a vision of her own future, explaining what having a book in the world would do for her business—and for the artist within. By the end of the meal, we'd both come to the conclusion that writing the book was the right next step in her journey.

My friend, like so many would-be authors, was rocking a serious case of writer's resistance. For the purposes of this book, I'm going to define "resistance" as *any* ***false*** *obstacle, known or unknown, that is standing between you and writing your book*. I emphasize "false" because there are some actual, real, true obstacles that can legitimately delay the book-writing process. (Think illness … natural disasters … alien abduction … you know, actual *problems*. Though for the record, perseverant authors have been known to write through all three.)

As anyone who's studied depth psychology and shadow work can tell you, there is a reason for every counterproductive behavior we have—including resisting doing the exact thing we most want to do. Usually it's a very *good* reason. Often it's our attempt to avoid a replay of painful feelings we experienced in childhood. When it comes to writing, we might be trying to avoid feelings like shame or humiliation or the fear of being seen. Pretty rotten emotions that no sane person would sign up for.

In other words, if you're not writing, it's likely because some part of you—often a much younger part—is trying to protect you from reliving a terrible memory from long ago. Yelling at, coaching, or berating this hardworking little one inside is not going to get you anywhere. Understanding this, we see that resistance is an intelligent adaptation. It knows what it's doing, and believe it or not, it has your best interests at heart. In this chapter we're going to dive into the how and why of writing avoidance (and avoidance of anything we really, really want to do) and help rewire the patterns that have been standing in our way. To begin, let's wander down the lane and look at some of the more common varieties of resistance I encounter in my work with authors.

A Field Guide to Resistance

There are a few really common techniques our clever brains use to explain why we're not writing. With a little bit of information, the frustrating experience of not writing can melt like ice in spring. What's needed is the understanding that what looks like a really good reason for not writing is often just resistance in disguise. If you've encountered any of the following, you're in very good company.

Perhaps the most common species of resistance goes by the name "*not enough time*." Time—we never have enough of it, and we think we need a *lot* of it. Moreover, when it comes to writing, we think it must be precious and sacred and that candles and essential oils and a full moon need to be involved. Poppycock. The book you're reading right now was written in fits and starts, 15 minutes here and 45 minutes there. When our writing is flowing, we can't wait to get back to the computer or journal. We'll write in waiting rooms, in the queue to pick up our kids from school, and in the last 15 minutes of our lunch break. Writing can happen anywhere, in any amount of time. Unless your world has been completely rocked by an unforeseen disaster—and that happens—"not enough time" is most often a really good 21st-century-approved excuse.

Next is the excuse "*I need more preparation*." This may be a real thing if you want to write a book about a spiritual approach to dog training and you've always been a cat person. But most often it's an excuse disguised as a reason. We think we need to get this or that certification before we'll be taken seriously. I once met an author who already had a very popular book but thought she needed to become a licensed therapist before she would "be taken seriously." So she dropped out of her writing career for five years to get her master's degree. Meanwhile her first book continued to sell and sell, with no consideration for the credentials she didn't have.

Sometimes would-be authors think they need training in writing itself.

Writing classes are populated in large part by innocent folks who don't realize they are just biding time. They think they need the class in order to write the book, but often they are using the class as an excuse to *not* write the book. *Not yet*, they think. *I'm not ready. I need to learn how to be a writer first*. While studying the craft of writing is a useful endeavor, it will do you no good unless you're writing. If you think you need to learn something before you can start writing, take a second look. Could this be resistance in disguise?

Another common roadblock I hear about is *the paradox of choice*. You know you want to write a book; the problem is, you have *too many* ideas. "Which one should I write first?" I've found that in most cases, you know exactly which one you should write. The issue is that the right book is the scary one, the exposing one, the vulnerable one. There's often a cover story that a different book would be better received in the world, but in truth it's just too vulnerable to write the book that's calling most strongly.

The final excuse I'll list here—though by no means the last one I *could* list—is what I call *"I have to do this other thing."* The "other thing" might be as macro as "raise my kids" or "get divorced" or as micro as "do the dishes" or "check my e-mail." Anytime the thought of writing pops up, it is immediately wrangled to the ground by the insistence that there's something more important that has to happen first. Here's the thing: the to-do list *never* gets finished. And by the way, while you're procrastinating, other writers are tap-tap-tapping away at their books. Don't you want to join them?

~~Excuses~~ Thought Patterns Common to Those Who Are Not Writing

Unless you're secretly a cyborg—and if so … um, good for you?—you've probably come up against something we like to call *human insecurity*. Super sciencey studies have proven that human insecurity leads to crazy thought patterns, or as I like to call them, rabbit holes of doom. Just in case you've been thinking it's just you, here's a sampling of writers-block-inducing rabbit holes not unlike those my clients cough up every day:

- "Is my idea good enough? Is my writing good enough? I'm probably not good enough. I'm probably a terrible writer with a godawful idea and I don't even know it. I shouldn't even start. Aren't there dishes that need washing somewhere?"
- "Who would want to read this book? It's self-involved navel gazing. Everyone will want to read so-and-so's book instead of mine, and who can blame them? So-and-so is famous. I'm not famous, and that must mean I'm not good enough to be famous. Why even try? (Excuse me while I go eat a dozen cupcakes in one sitting.)"
- "OMG, people might actually read this book! Then what? What if they read it and don't like it? What if they don't like it so much they tweet their disdain Trump-style all over the social-media-verse? SAD!"
- "What if so-and-so *reads* my book? What if she thinks it's about *her?* I could get sued! I could go to prison! Who will take care of my kids if I go to prison? Maybe I should have gone into corporate finance after all. At least then I'd have enough savings to support my kids while I'm doing hard time. *Why didn't I listen to Dad??*"
- "I think Michelle Obama would *love* my book. Seriously—it's right up her alley. Oh God, please let Michelle read my book and post about it on Instagram! But wait, what if Michelle reads my book and *hates it*? What if she tells people how bad it is?

Michelle and Oprah are totally friends. What if she tells Oprah she hates my book? What if I don't get on *SuperSoul Sunday* because of that two-faced vixen Michelle? I hate her!"

(Iterate ad infinitum.)

Quick Quiz: Bad Timing ... or Resistance in Disguise?

Regardless of the flavor of your particular writing crazy, the ~~excuses~~ reasons most writers have for not writing fall under two different categories. The first one is your basic case of writing resistance. The second is an actual problem we call bad timing. Many writing teachers will tell you there's no such thing as bad timing. They'll say that if you want to be writing and you're not, it's the evil machinations of resistance at work—always. As well-intended as such blanket statements may be, I don't think they're true. In my experience books get birthed on a schedule. If your due date is long past, you know it. But it's also possible that your due date is just not here yet, that your literary baby is gestating for good reason. The key, then, is to know the difference.

This quiz will help you discern whether the delay is bad timing or garden-variety resistance. Just answer "true" or "false" to each of the following questions and then check the key to see if your deferral is legit—or not.

Resistance vs. Bad Timing Smackdown Quiz

1. True or False: I know what kind of book I want to write, I just can't seem to find the time to write it.

2. True or False: Whenever I *do* make it to my computer or notebook and write something, I feel like the writing flows.

3a. True or False (answer only if writing *straightforward memoir* or *fiction*): The story I want to write is complete; it already has a clear beginning, middle, and end.

3b. True or False (answer only if writing *prescriptive nonfiction* or *teaching memoir*): I feel really solid about how I'm going to structure the process, lessons, or guidelines in the book.

4. True or False: I feel like I could write this book with my hands tied behind my back, if only I would sit down and do it.

5. True or False: I worry that some people in my life aren't going to like what I'm saying—or what I'm saying *about them*—in the book.

6. True or False: I'm clear on the genre of the book I'm writing

(prescriptive nonfiction, memoir, fiction, poetry, children's book, etc.). And, if I have multiple book ideas, I know which one I'm writing first.

7. True or False: There's a firm deadline by which I want to have a book or book proposal completed in order to take advantage of a particular opportunity (a writing contest, important holiday, major speaking gig, etc.).

8. True or False: I've always had this hunch that I'm supposed to write a book someday.

9. True or False: I definitely spend a chunk of my free time scrolling through Facebook or watching Netflix when I could be writing.

10. True or False: I've written part of my book, but every time I go back to it, I read, edit, or criticize what I already wrote instead of writing the next section.

11. True or False: If my kid, partner, or boss needed my help for an extra half hour a day, I would find the time, no matter what my day was like.

Now, add up how many times you answered "true" and find yourself below:

0–2: Looks like timing may not, in fact, be on your side. Your book is probably still cookin' in there! Give yourself a break, wait for the right moment, and relax. If you really want to start your book now, consider working with a writing coach or editor who can help you launch the process and stay focused. (More on these editorial angels in Chapter 7.)

3–5: Sounds like you're almost ready to kick the writing into gear—but the timing may not be *quite* right. Still, it's never too soon to strategize how you're going to get this book written. Did you create that personalized writing plan in Chapter 1? If not, now may be a good time to get your intentions down on paper.

6–8: Hmmm … the pieces are definitely falling into place. You know what you want to write about, so the roadblocks standing in your way are probably more about fear than anything else. Sounds like resistance may in fact have her claws in you. The good news is that you're in the right place: this chapter is going to give you everything you need to know to see, love, and release the resistance that's standing in your way.

9–11: All your little writing ducklings seem to be in a row, so I hate to break it to you: it sounds like you've got a serious case of resistance. No shame, my friend. What's standing in the way of your book dream is probably a really important but unconscious fear that came online when you were super young. Read on to learn much more about how resistance works and how you

can unwind the hold it has on you, starting today.

The Secret Life of the Little Writer Inside

You may be wondering what on earth I meant when I said earlier that your resistance is protecting you. “Protecting me from *what*? From becoming *The New York Times* best-selling author I so desperately want to be?” I would have wondered the same thing before I encountered a set of teachings that broadened my understanding of how the human mind works. A few years back, I went through a deep course of study at NLP Marin, a brilliant organization in Northern California whose founder, Carl Buchheit, has been teaching neurolinguistic programming (NLP) for over 30 years. NLP is a set of psychological tools that can be used to uncover the secret positive intention behind just about any problem we have in our lives. (Yes, all our annoying and self-defeating behaviors, patterns, and recurring experiences have positive intentions somewhere in the background.) By getting familiar with these hidden intentions, we can learn to love them, thank them, and let them go. Knotty issues like relationship pain, financial strain, family drama, chronic health issues, and low self-esteem can all be loosened and in many cases reversed through NLP Marin’s techniques.

These processes weren’t developed out of thin air. The founders of NLP took a good, long look at the leading psychologists of their day—the late ’60s and early ’70s—and observed the way they used language to help their clients create positive, sustainable change. Central to their many discoveries was the fact that our understanding of the world is in many ways fully formed by the time we turn four years old. That’s not a misprint! The brain of a child is developing at breakneck speed, and our understanding of how the world works is a reflection of what we see around us from the moment of our birth until age four. We watch the way our parents treat one another, for example, and we code that in as “the way a relationship is supposed to work.” We observe their struggles with finances, and we code that in as “how things are supposed to be when it comes to purpose and money.” The decisions the younger version of ourselves made back then continue to run the show into adulthood, even though they’re many decades out of date.

Now c’mon, you may be thinking. *I’m a personal growth aficionado. I know myself better than the average human. If my writing resistance were about limiting beliefs from childhood, wouldn’t I have released them a long time ago?* Not so fast. Little ones don’t just code their parents’ experiences as “how the world works.” They go one step further: locking those beliefs into place with a deep-seated and often invisible sense of family loyalty. To ensure we’ll continue to belong in our family, we subconsciously track our own lives to the expectations our parents set for us. Have you ever looked at your bank

account and thought, *I swore I wouldn't be living paycheck to paycheck like Mom. How did I get here?* Have you ever looked back at a relationship and thought, *How did I end up with a man just like Dad?* Precisely *how* we managed to choose that particular man—who didn't appear anything like Dad *before* we got married—is a mystery that has not yet been solved. But after sitting through scores of NLP sessions, I can tell you it doesn't really matter *how* things happen. What matters is that once we become aware of the patterns, *change becomes possible*.

I've also discovered that conventional wisdom—which recommends willpower for just about any accomplishment-related ailment—fails when it comes to these deep-rooted childhood patterns. Willpower is utterly powerless in the face of family loyalty. The little one inside is still dutifully making sure we are going to be okay by following the rules set forth by our parents, be they express or implied. To this younger version of ourselves, "okay" equals:

- We are loved
- We are safe
- We belong

Your little one's understanding of the world developed when you were a toddler, and the fact that you've since made 30 or 50 or 75 trips around the sun has not yet been recorded in his ledger. This younger version of you continues to believe that your survival depends on fitting in with your family of origin. When it comes to writing, the little one really doesn't care that you have a great story or a game-changing message or a collection of heartbreaking poetry to share with the world. This inner kiddo isn't aware that creative expression has you bursting at the seams and that sitting down to write every day is the very thing that will bring you alive once more. The only agenda for the younger version of you is making sure that Mom still loves you, that you're still breathing, and that you fit in with your "pack." Unless writing this book is guaranteed to get you more love, safety, and belonging with the fam, it's not going to be on the little one's priority list. And if your little one is holding priorities that compete with your adult self's priorities, what you're going to get is a whole lotta dissonance. For example:

- On the one hand, you know that writing a book would uplevel your business success. On the other hand, the little one knows that financial success does not fit with the family dynamic.
- On the one hand, you want to be a best-selling author. On the other hand, the little one knows it would require you to drop the cloak of

invisibility you've been wearing your whole life in order to stay safe.

- On the one hand, you know your story of childhood trauma will help ease others' pain and make them feel less alone. On the other hand, little you is aware that your mother is still alive and that by airing the family's dirty laundry you might risk losing her love.

Perhaps you can see why willpower is not working. As a non-writing writer, promising yourself you're going to do better tomorrow is not enough. Your internal resistance system was built Ford tough. The good news here is that you can stop beating yourself up *this very minute*. Self-flagellation is doing you no good, and in fact it may be doing harm. What's needed is self-understanding, not more aggression. The only antidote is more love for your younger self.

Love in this case means two things. First, it means acknowledging that some part of you has placed a well-intended obstacle in the way of your writing dream; simply noting this, without judgment; and being neutral about it. Second, it means starting to pay attention—getting curious about the mechanics of this obstacle. How is it that you've been wanting to write for many years but haven't yet created the time in your life to do so? What have been the "very important distractions" you've placed on the to-do list, ahead of writing? From this perspective can you find softness in your heart for how hard your little one has been working to protect you? Perhaps you can even find a bit of humor in it. Simply opening your mind to the possibility that your resistance may be the work of a smart little kid can change the whole process.

The invitation here is to simply test-drive this worldview. I'm inviting you to play with a different assumption than the one most of us operate with—the latter being the assumption that we're 100 percent adult and if we're not doing everything perfectly, then there must be something terribly wrong with us. For the remainder of this book, I would invite you to test-drive a different strategy: being kind to the little child inside you. Note that it doesn't matter if anything I'm saying about resistance is "true," it only matters if it *works*. For this reason it's entirely okay if the worldview I'm discussing seems outlandish or implausible to your logical brain. No problem! All parts of you are welcome on this journey. I'm only making space for an alternate possibility and inviting you to see if it improves your experience of yourself, your life, and your writing process.

When the Inner Child Turns into the Inner Critic

A word of warning: The willingness to observe oneself without judgment can feel like a dangerous thing to the little protector inside. We will quickly encounter a toddler version of the Great and Powerful Oz: *Pay no attention to the kid behind the curtain!* Worried you will see and dismantle its protective machinery, this little one will literally do anything to keep you from noticing it. One of the most effective avoidance techniques this inner cutie-pie knows is to hand off the mic to your inner critic. This defensive part of you has one weapon: scathing self-criticism. While your intention had been to observe your little one's patterns neutrally, suddenly you're getting bombed by guilt and negative self-talk. *I'm not disciplined enough … My life isn't turning out as I planned … I never do anything I say I want to do.* (Insert your favorite mean, victim-y, or self-hating trope here.) It's a painfully effective last resort. Lucky for all of us, self-hatred dissolves in the light of awareness. All it takes is a willingness to believe in our own worth for a moment.

As soon as you notice that the inner critic has taken the wheel, try to address this aspect of yourself directly. Give it a name. I like to call mine Hank. Thank your Hank—after all, he's a self-protective function that has been dutifully on the job for a long time. Let him know he will always be valued and respected and will never, ever get fired. But also let him know he's being reassigned to a different department. In his new role, he'll be test-driving a new approach to staying safe. Instead of self-annihilation, he's going to try *writing*. Talk to Hank about all the really good, safety-assuring, love-getting, belonging-supportive outcomes that are associated with finishing your book. Then ask Hank if, as the most powerful and effective voice in your inner landscape, he would be willing to turn his attention toward a different target: supporting your book dream. His tenacity, focus, and resolve are *just what you need* to get to the computer each day. See if he'd be willing to give this new set of duties a try for a month, with the option to return to his previous protective methodology if the new one doesn't work out. It's hard to explain how radical this simple visualization process turns out to be. What for a very long time seemed an impossible barrier between you and your dreams comes down like a well-oiled drawbridge gate.

For a guided conversation with your inner Hank, see the exercise at the end of this chapter. (And if you would rather not undertake this process alone, see the Resources section for some of my favorite NLP Marin–trained changework practitioners. Consider them little-one whisperers for your writer's heart.)

Two Cover Stories to Watch Out For

There are certain questions that are guaranteed to arise when I'm working with new-to-the-book-business authors. After years of poking and prodding,

I've discovered that two of these questions are often simply cover stories for resistance. They're decoys of a persuasive variety, because there *is* a grain of truth in each of them. So to finish out this chapter, allow me to differentiate truth from trickery in each of these very legitimate-looking reasons to keep your writing light under a bushel.

Cover Story #1: The Plagiarism Thing

Many new authors come to us very concerned about protecting their intellectual property along the road to publication. How do you know that your ideas are safe during the process of editing, sending queries to agents, and self-publishing? Putting our work out into the world can be nerve-wracking for many reasons. Most of them boil down to the unknown. After pouring our hearts into a manuscript, handing it off to strangers can feel incredibly risky. It's like sending our baby off to school: what problems might befall her when she's out of our line of sight?

But often I find the fear of plagiarism is serving one and only one purpose. It gives you a good excuse not to take action on your book dream. In service of helping you get unstuck, here are two things I say to clients who are worried their ideas will be stolen: The first is that in my two decades in the book business, I've never heard of any author I've worked with running into the issue of stolen ideas or plagiarism. That's hundreds of authors, and not a single issue.

I'm not suggesting that it *never* happens, but I want you to understand how incredibly rare it is. You're far more likely to have your Facebook identity stolen than your book idea. Moreover, book publishing professionals—those of us who make our living editing, selling, and publishing books—have no interest in ruining our careers by stealing your ideas or your words. Our reputations are too important for that.

The second response I offer is that no matter how original *you* think your ideas are, there's nothing new under the sun. If you find an author writing about the same thing you are—even if they've worked with the same team as you—it's much more likely that you both got the same hit of inspiration than that they stole your idea.

Finally, I'll say that in the unlikely circumstance that someone gets, ahem, *inspired* by your work, I suggest you take it as both a compliment and a sign that you're doing a great job. As a new writer, putting your work out into the world successfully enough that it gets pilfered is a pretty good indicator that your idea and writing have real promise. If someone has literally stolen your words, you have every right to alert the proper authorities to get your work back. But even if someone "borrows" your main idea, you can relax. Your

book will never be exactly like anyone else's. It's not possible: your book is written by you, full of your own stories, and it will be greeted in the world differently than someone else's even if the topic seems similar. Different audiences respond to different voices; the audience meant to find *your book* will not be satisfied by someone else's words.

That said, if you want to make sure you're able to defend your copyright in the unlikely event you find yourself in a dispute, make sure you keep copies of your working drafts saved on your hard drive and on at least one cloud-based backup service like Dropbox or Carbonite. (Personally, I use both.) In the United States at least, there is an assumption of copyright on whatever work you're conceiving and writing. You don't need to file for copyright in order to be legally protected—you simply need to be the obvious author of the work. If you can produce earlier versions, especially versions that include a time-date stamp, you'll have no problem proving that the work was yours to begin with.

Cover Story #2: Uh-oh … Mom's Not Gonna Like This

From time to time, I talk with an author whose trepidation about publishing is of the legal variety. They're worried there will be some sort of dispute about the author's version of past events with a third party, be it a parent, an ex-husband, an extended family member, or a former employer. In this case I enthusiastically encourage you to keep going. Why? Because once you've written the manuscript, it's very easy to find a publishing lawyer to consult on possible legal issues. A typical consult will find said lawyer reading your finished manuscript and making suggestions for changing any language that might be considered a liability.

Say, for example, you're convinced an adult in your life was dealing drugs when you were a child. To accuse them of a crime like that could indeed land you in hot water. To avoid a lawsuit, your lawyer might ask you what you actually *saw* as a child—and tell you to keep your description to what you observed. So instead of saying, "Uncle Tim was a drug dealer," your lawyer might counsel you to say, "Strangers came through the house day and night. They followed Uncle Tim into a bedroom for a minute before hurrying back out the front door." Shifting toward what you observed—rather than your interpretation of those events—can keep you out of trouble.

While publishing lawyers charge a steep hourly rate for conversation or contracts work, many will give you a reduced flat rate for reviewing your manuscript. If you have fear that a friend, acquaintance, or family member may read your book and not be happy with how they've been described, it's a very good idea to speak with a lawyer. Just search online for "publishing

lawyers” or “literary lawyers” and then do your research—what is their background? How long have they been in the business?—before choosing the one you’d like to work with.

And speaking of hiring someone to offer expert guidance while you’re on your book journey, there are so many ways in which this path is better, easier, and more fun when you’re not walking it alone. That’s what the next chapter is all about: the editors, ghostwriters, book doctors, and writing coaches who can hold your hand, polish your prose, and kick-start your writing—all in service of getting your world-changing book onto the shelf. So get ready for a how-to guide to gathering your book posse, coming up next!

A Guided Chat with Your Inner Critic

It's time to have a good, solid sit-down chat with your inner critic. As I mentioned earlier, I call mine Hank. But in truth Hank is just a front—he's a cover-up for the toddler version of Kelly, who has been secretly running the show. So keep in mind throughout this exercise that the character you're speaking to is actually a version of yourself, one who's younger than four years old.

Try addressing this cutie-pie part of you as "the little one inside." Picture in your head a sweet, innocent version of you at three or four. Then step into that picture as the adult you are today and talk to this little one the way you'd lovingly talk to a child. Thank the little one for his invaluable service, letting him know he is seen and appreciated. Then gently begin to educate this younger version of you about your writing dream. Explain the good things that will come from writing this book, whatever they may be: a sense of accomplishment, a boost in credibility for your business, a dream fulfilled. Ask the little one what fears are coming up and then talk them through.

Making contact between the adult version of yourself and the little one within is by itself a huge step in the direction of positive change. Simply becoming aware that there are different parts of you—and that these parts have been secretly making decisions about your life all this time—can open the door for more choice.

Take the 20 minutes or hour when you're, ahem, not doing the writing you said you wanted to do. Sit down, breathe, and introduce yourself to the best friend you never knew you had.

"Hi, resistance. First, I just want to say thank you.

"I see that you have been protecting me for many years. I'm here to tell you that your work is working! You've kept the gates locked up tight, and I can confirm that *I am still alive*! You've been doing a great job.

"That said, we need to have a talk. See, there's this book I'm supposed to be writing.

"I mean, I'm not really the one who's writing it. It's kind of—well, it's kind of Life. Or whatever. God? The Universe? Anyway, it needs to get through the gate.

“So in exchange for you letting me write this book, I’m going to offer you some high-octane TLC. I’m going to attend to *you* for a change. I’m going to ask you to tell me what kind of attention you would like. And then I promise to listen for your answer.

“Maybe you like prayer. If so, I will say a little prayer for you every day.

“Maybe you like gestures of appreciation. In that case I will [light a candle for you, sing you a song, take you on a walk] every day.

“Perhaps you’d like me to put a little card with the word ‘resistance’ on my altar, so you feel seen. If so, I will gladly adorn the card with several pink hearts in your honor.

“And of course I would love to add you to my daily gratitude list. You know, for keeping me so safe, lo these many years.

“Because you’re amazing at what you do.

“But now I need to write, and I need your help.”

Then listen.

Listen with your heart, your mind, your body. Ask your resistance to let you know what it needs. Let it inspire you with its unwavering dedication to its mission. (We could all learn a thing or two.)

Then one morning, just as the birds are starting to sing outside your window and dawn is opening into day, listen for the sound of a rusty gate swinging open. And soon after that, for the tiptoe of your writing inspiration, announcing its return. For once your resistance knows that it’s loved, it’s safe, and it will always belong, it will melt into the warm embrace of your deepest desire.

Resistance is not the enemy; it’s deeply a part of you. Trust it, honor it, and learn to love it. Good writing can’t help but follow.

Chapter 7

WORK WITH AN EDITOR

There's a reason the incomparable Stephen King (yes, *that* Stephen King) remarks in his book *On Writing* that "to write is human, to edit is divine." Editing, as I like to think of it, is the process by which we hire a second set of eyes to help us see our work the way our readers will see it—from a distance. No matter how good a writer you are, you're going to be far too close to your book to be able to see it clearly on your own. Simply put, editorial support is critical to producing a successful book.

At first glance it may seem like this chapter is out of place in the writing process section of this book. It's my experience that most people, even authors-to-be, think editing is something that only happens once a book is written and ready to go—and not a moment before. Not for nothing; certain types of editing really get going once a final manuscript is ready. But if there's only one message you take away from this chapter, it's that editors are much more than "finishers." In fact, one of the most valuable times to use an editor is at the *beginning* of your book journey. You may be an expert in your occupation, in raising a family, in managing different types of illnesses, in supporting entrepreneurs to take their businesses to the next level—whatever good work it is that you do. But unless you've been working on books day in and day out over the course of many years, you are unlikely to be an expert on how to put a book or even a book proposal together. You're unlikely to have spent hundreds of hours crafting saleable hooks, building outlines, developing story lines, and watching books in which you are heavily invested succeed—and fail. Professional book people have done all these things many times over. It's our job to know what you don't know about books, book ideas, book proposals, and book development. And—bonus—we also know a heck of a lot about polishing your prose until it shines like a beacon in the darkness. In the pages that follow, I'm going to explain all the different hats an editor wears; what types of editorial and writing support are available to you; how working with a pro can benefit you at any stage of your writing process—especially at the beginning; and how to find just the right collaborator for you and your book.

Traditional Editing 101

A persistent archetype of the editorial world is that of the tight-lipped, punishing grammarian wielding her red pen with ferocious delight. Slashing mercilessly at the page, she eviscerates all instances of bad punctuation,

misspellings, and sentences that end with prepositions. But here's a secret: that's not the kind of editor I am. I might lose some cred by saying this, but I've never edited with a red pen (plain old graphite pencil is far easier to erase) and I don't even care that much about grammar.

Wha?? I know—it's surprising but true. I, who have made my living for nearly two decades editing books, am not obsessive about grammar. My Editor's Club membership may be revoked if I admit this, but I don't even own a copy of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. (Pause while copy editors everywhere recoil in horror.) So if I'm not spending my days taking clients to task over their misuse of the Oxford comma, what on earth *am* I spending my time doing? To answer this question, I must proceed to educate you on the two wildly different categories of editorial work: *content editing* and *technical editing*. Both of these categories are hugely important to a book's success; both are baked into the publishing process when you work with a traditional house; and both need your attention if you are planning to self-publish your book.

Content Editing

When it comes to finding a traditional publisher, content nearly always trumps grammar. Acquisitions aren't made or broken by a forgotten apostrophe or a misplaced comma; what an editor is looking for—beyond an impressive platform, as previously discussed—is a book that has something new to say and says it in a beautiful, unique, and accessible way. In other words, a book whose content is artfully crafted, comprehensive, easily digestible, and page-turning. Helping an author further these qualities is the work of a content editor—which is the kind of editor I happen to be. When you hear an author talk about "my editor," they are most likely talking about their content editor. (Note that in most of the bigger houses, the editor who acquires your book is often the editor who will do the content editing. At smaller houses these roles may be held by different people.) This editor is generally responsible for two different types of editorial work: *developmental editing* and *line editing*.

Developmental Editing

Think about buying a new home. Before you close on the house you hire an inspector to come and check that the structure is sound. You want to make sure that there's a firm foundation; that the plumbing works correctly; that any retaining walls or support beams are in good condition. If any weak points are discovered, the inspector will suggest fixes to shore up the issues and make sure the house will remain in good condition for years to come. This process is similar to the work your content editor will do at the

developmental phase. She will look at what you have and offer global suggestions for how you might make it even better. Generally at this phase you'll receive a detailed editorial letter as well as notes in the margins of the manuscript.

So what specifically is a developmental editor focused on? Here's what we look for, in broad categories. (See the sidebar for the actual editorial checklist I use during this round.)

- **Organizational structure.** This is the most common area of feedback during the developmental editing phase. Is the structure working? Does the content hang together well from start to finish? Are the chapters roughly consistent with one another, in both length and content? Has anything been left out? What suggestions could we make to improve the structure? Sometimes we will go so far as to suggest the author restructure the whole book based on a different "conceit" or organizational mechanism. (An example of a conceit would be "the 8 steps to XYZ" or "the 10 most important principles I've learned through my work"—often the conceit is highlighted in the book's hook.) Good editors aren't afraid to give big suggestions if we know they're going to make the book or proposal more readable and successful.
- **Effectiveness.** Does the book answer the question(s) it seeks to address? Is the content digestible? Will the reader truly walk away with the promised benefits? In other words, does the book "work"?
- **Voice, tone, readability, comprehensibility.** Is the voice or tone of the writing working for the content (is it inviting to the reader, engaging, not too dry, not too casual for the content, etc.)? As a reader am I drawn in by the author's voice and personality? Do I want to learn from him? And does the meaning of the content register easily with me, at both an emotional and a cognitive level?
- **Practicality.** Will the content easily translate into the reader's everyday life? Are there exercises or practices she can use to help with this integration process? Are there stories of others who have learned these lessons and succeeded? If not, should we add them?

As you can see, this editorial round is about the big picture—the forest, rather than the trees. It's during this editorial phase that books can get taken apart, rearranged, and put back together. While a book that's in fairly good shape may need only one round of developmental editing, in other cases two or three developmental rounds will be in order as you find your way toward

what exactly you want to say—and how you can say it most effectively for the reader's understanding. Only once the book's "bones" are in great shape is it time for the content editor to aim his laser-beam intellect toward the individual words and sentences themselves. This next phase is called the line edit. A line edit is an every-word, every-sentence kind of edit, and it's one of my favorite parts of the editorial process.

Developmental Editing Checklist

This is an actual checklist I use to help myself remember what I'm looking for during the developmental editing phase. Keep an eye on these questions as you write and edit your own work and you'll be way ahead of the game when you start working with an editor!

Hook or Concept

- Is the hook high-concept, sharp, appropriate, and clearly articulated up front?
- Is it well developed enough to support a whole book?
- Does it fit within the context of the marketplace and the author's oeuvre?
- Does the material return to the main concept over and over?

Title and Subtitle

- Does the title represent the hook well?
- Does it convey the promise and benefits of the book?
- Is it both artistic and explicit?
- Does it avoid clichéd words and phrases?

Organization and Structure

- Is there a table of contents included? (If not, create one.)
- Is the structural conceit strong enough to support the book?
- Does the book hang together well?
- Is the content roughly symmetrical, from chapter to chapter?
- Does the reader know where she is in the material at all times? If not, add subheadings.
- Are the chapter titles and subheadings meaningful, appropriate, and parallel?

- Are the connections among different ideas, concepts, and topics explicit?

Content

- Is the content balanced and well thought out? Is the reading experience consistent? Is there an easy flow from one idea to the next?
- Is the author's logic sound throughout? If not, which passages are faulty and how might they be fixed?
- Are there redundancies that can be eliminated?
- Are the transitions between paragraphs, ideas, and chapters smooth and intuitive?
- Are all relevant topics covered?
- Is there tangential material that could be deleted for an improved reading experience?
- If appropriate, is there compelling storytelling to balance teaching material? If there are stories, do they appear consistently throughout the book?
- Do the sidebars, tables, illustrations, and other design elements improve the reader's understanding of the material? Would the reader's experience be improved by adding more of these elements?
- Is there anything else that might make the book more reader-friendly, engaging, and complete?

Voice or Tone

- Is the language and word choice appropriate for the intended audience?
- Is the tone approachable, inviting, and relatable? Might the voice alienate readers in any way?
- Should the point of view change? The tense?

Pacing

- Is the read consistently engaging, page-turning, even gripping?

- Are some sections too long? Are others too short?
- Does the book build to a crescendo?
- Does the reader's investment of time pay off by the end? Did we receive the promised benefits?
- Does the pacing work between chapters and also within chapters?

Practicality (for Nonfiction)

- Is it clear how the reader will apply this content and learning in his own life?
- Are there exercises or practices?
- Are there real-life examples?

Introduction

- Does the introduction set up the problem the reader faces and make a solid case for this book being the solution?
- Does it articulate the benefits and takeaways the reader can expect?
- Is it clear why this author is the right person to be writing this book?
- Does it help the reader understand how best to use the book?

Conclusion, Epilogue, or Final Chapter

- Does the conclusion support the chapters that preceded it?
- Does it tie the teachings together in a way that's understandable?
- Does it offer a big-picture view of what's possible from here?

Miscellaneous

- Is the formatting consistent throughout? (For example,

is the author consistent with capitalization? With using italics versus boldface?)

- Are there any global spelling or grammatical errors the author can fix before the line edit?
- Will the author need to secure permission for use of quotations, song lyrics, poetry, etc.? What about releases for interviews and images?

Line Editing

Nerd alert: line editing is one of my favorite things to do. It's the kind of work that puts me into a flow state, where hours can pass without me so much as looking up from my computer. To return to our metaphor of building a house, line editing would be the book equivalent of interior decorating. You know—throw pillows, area rugs, making it look super pretty inside. Here's where your editor gets to do all the fun cosmetic fixes: refining the sentences, suggesting more effective word choices, clearing up any possible misunderstandings, and working on clarity, flow, and grammar.

By *clarity* I mean the comprehensibility of the ideas. Does each sentence telegraph its meaning simply and effortlessly or do I have to go back and reread it in order to really understand what the author is saying? If it's the latter, what small tweaks or changes might I suggest in order to increase the transparency of the ideas? Are too many words getting in the way? Or is the author assuming an understanding the reader may not yet have?

By *flow* I mean I want the reading experience to roll along easily and simply from one sentence or idea to the next. Ideally the reader does not have to work at all as he's reading; the words carry him smoothly along. I often say I would like the reader to be so immersed in the reading experience that he forgets he's reading at all. Questions I ask myself to increase flow include: *Might this sentence work just as well (or even better) if I removed an unnecessary word or two? Might the cadence or rhythm of the sentence be improved by a tweak at the beginning or end? Does the final phrase in the paragraph offer a satisfying* thunk *of finality? What word choice suggestions might I offer to increase the reader's sense of motion as she reads?*

The final quality I'm looking for as I line edit is *grammar*. I put it in last position because that's where it falls in priority to the other two. This is not because I don't mind bad grammar—a poorly wrought sentence is like nails on a chalkboard to me—but because I know all the grammatical issues will be put to bed during the technical editing phase that follows. That said, I will always offer corrections at this phase when I stumble upon an obvious error

of spelling or punctuation.

It's useful to note that there are other issues that may get cleaned up in the line edit phase. For example, sometimes editors will work with an author's voice or tone. When it comes to transformational nonfiction, a question that frequently arises is whether to address the audience as "you" or as "we." There is no hard-and-fast rule about this, but it does seem that audiences respond better to the more inclusive "we" wording than the imperial and teacher-y "you," especially if the author is not already very well known as a person of great wisdom in the world. If I get a sense that such a global adjustment is required, I'll make those suggestions at this phase and discuss them with the author as needed.

Technical Editing

If content editing concerns itself with the *art* of writing, then technical editing is focused on the *craft*. These editorial phases take place after the art has been decided upon, once the book is as close to final as the author and content editor can get it. At a traditional publisher, this is where the book is handed from the person you think of as "your editor"—i.e., the content editor—to the "managing editorial" or "production" team. This process, called transmittal, signals that the manuscript is considered delivered and accepted by the publisher. It's now on its way to becoming a fully-fledged book. During this phase the book will go through two different types of editing: one round of *copyediting*, followed by up to three rounds of *proofreading*.

Copyediting

I humbly bow to those with the skill and detail orientation to be great copy editors. (I am not one of these people.) This phase of editing requires both eagle-eyed precision and an ability to look at the big picture—at the same time. In other words, the copy editor's job is to watch for both the forest *and* the trees. His role is to make sure all the details of the book are in order, including that you've followed the rules of grammar, that you're consistent with dates and spelling (did you spell your sister's name "Stacy" in Chapter 2, but "Stacey" in Chapter 8?), and that the sometimes quirky requirements of a publisher's "house style" have been incorporated. It's also usually the copy editor's job to "code" the manuscript, inserting reference marks that instruct the typesetter how to format the words on the page—what level subheading to use, where to insert illustrations, when to use bulleted lists, etc. Copyediting happens when the book is still in manuscript form; it is the last phase of editing before the book is set into type. Done well, its impact is invisible to the end reader. Done poorly—or left out altogether—its absence is felt by everyone. Copyediting is an extremely important phase in the life cycle of a

traditionally published book, and I highly recommend any self-publishing author budget for it as well. If you want your book to compete for quality with the traditionally published books on the same shelf, copyediting is not optional.

Proofreading

Another quiet hero of the publishing process is the proofreader. Proofreading (or "proofing," for short) takes place once the book has been set into type. Typeset pages are referred to as *proofs*, and they are *read* for errors. (The term "proofreading" is thus a refreshing example of truth in advertising.) Proofing is also invisible to the reader—unless it hasn't happened. Then it becomes the difference between a seamless reading experience and a rocky one that leaves the reader feeling irritation toward the author, the editor, and the book itself.

In defense of authors (and editors) everywhere, I am going to let you in on a secret: not all typos are introduced by human error. You know that mysterious force that removes one of your socks from the dryer—every time? Well, it has a devilish cousin whose only job is to insert typos into your book during the transition from manuscript to typeset pages. I literally do not know how it happens, since these days the fully edited manuscript is essentially cut and pasted into the design program—no retyping required. So at what point, I often marvel, was the correctly spelled word "mystified" reenvisioned by the universe as "msytified"? Perhaps we will never know. But what I can say with great authority is that typos *will* sneak into your book during typesetting, and thus proofing is required. In fact, the bigger traditional houses do not one, not two, but very often *three* rounds of proofreading before a book goes to press! This is an important piece of information, which is often conveniently overlooked by self-publishing authors—to their own detriment. It's easy to want to skip over the expense of proofing, but I promise your readers will not skip over the errors in the finished book. Like copyediting, proofing is a must if you are self-publishing.

Collaborative Writers and Book Doctors

Some readers are about to be horrified and others are about to breathe a huge sigh of relief. For I am on the cusp of explaining what to do if your soul (or your audience) is crying out for you to have a book in the world, but you don't have the time, the inclination, or—let's get honest here—the writing skill to create such a book yourself. If this sounds like you, *there is hope*. More specifically, there is *help*. Some of the MVPs of the book world are also the most secret: *collaborative writers* and *book doctors*.

Collaborative Writers, a.k.a. Ghostwriters

A collaborative writer—also known as a ghostwriter—is someone who writes a book on behalf of an author. She brings the writing skill and the time commitment while the author brings the content. It's your story, your message, your experience, and your wisdom; you transmit it to the writer and she crafts it into a beautiful book with your name on the cover. The transmission most often happens via transcribed phone calls, recordings from talks or workshops, or content you may already have written, such as blogs, newsletters, or journals. The process begins with the two of you dialing in the hook; then the writer prepares a very detailed outline with your input. Once the writer has enough content to begin, she will write a chapter, and the two of you will work on it together to make sure she's captured your voice. Whereas most editors I know prefer to edit the entire book before sending it to the client, ghostwriting generally happens chapter by chapter. This ensures that the author is happy with each aspect of the book before the writing continues.

Many ghostwriters can claim a rare honor: they are "working writers." In other words, they make a living doing what they love: writing books. What they don't generally get is credit. For marketing purposes, or in deference to ego (hey, we all have one), the author would rather not broadcast that he required help writing the book. Oftentimes an agreement is made that the writer will never reveal that she helped write the book or that she will only reveal it on her résumé. For a ghostwriter this is just fine. It's her job to operate behind the scenes, taking your ideas and weaving them into a book—and getting paid for the privilege.

When we first mention ghostwriting to new clients, we have to do it very carefully. Perhaps the term itself is part of the problem, making the process appear somewhat shady and untruthful. (We frequently use the term *collaborative writer* instead of *ghostwriter* for this very reason.) But our clients tend to get on board when I explain that well over a third—possibly more—of the nonfiction books published today have been ghostwritten. These days there are even companies that offer to take transcripts from phone calls or workshops and turn them into a book with almost zero effort required from you. While in my experience the best ghostwritten books need quite a bit of author input and editing, having your book ghostwritten can be both a viable option and a time-saver for many would-be authors today.

Co-writers and Co-authors

Sometimes it makes sense to give your writing partner some sort of credit for his work on your book. In this case we call your writer a *co-writer* instead of a ghostwriter. But the difference is in title only: a co-writer receives credit on the cover of the book or on the title page, while a ghostwriter remains behind the scenes. We've all seen celebrity autobiographies sporting bylines like this one: "Jane Doe (with Sally Smith)." Sally Smith, ladies and gentlemen, is a co-writer. She likely did the same thing as the ghostwriter mentioned above, she just had the desire, résumé, and skill to negotiate a byline mention.

To make things more confusing, there's also such a thing as a *co-author*. If you are writing your book in overt partnership with another person, and this other person brings value beyond writing skill, she is generally considered a co-author. For example, I once worked on a diet book by a famous cookbook writer. Since she had no background in food science, we signed on a nutritionist as a co-author to offer expertise and credibility to the project. The two collaborated on the content, and the byline on the cover of the book was "Famous Cookbook Author *and* Not-So-Famous Nutritionist."

Book Doctors

Somewhere between a content editor and a ghostwriter is a book doctor. Whereas a content editor gives you an editorial letter telling you how to fix your book—and sends you off to execute the revision yourself—a book doctor does the editorial work *for* you. He will tell you what he thinks needs to be done, and you'll green-light the changes (or not). Once the scope of the work is clear, he takes the book apart and puts it back together himself—i.e., "doctors" it for you. When you see it again, it's more readable, has a stronger structure, and just generally works better. How much work the doctor does on your book depends on what kind of condition it's in when it arrives. Sometimes it just needs a few stitches here and there, and other times it needs to be reworked top to bottom. Often our kn literary clients *think* they have a book written, but upon reading it we find little discernible structure, a confusing progression of ideas, and lots of holes. After so many years of editing, we can generally tell right away whether the author is going to be capable of undertaking the revisions on her own. If so, we steer her toward developmental editing. If not, we suggest working with a book doctor.

Book Coaches

I don't know about you, but I'm one of those people who always *thinks* about going to the gym but never *goes*. Except that one time, many years ago, when I hired a personal trainer for a few weeks. It was a super stretch of my editorial assistant budget, but I'll tell you: I haven't been so diligent with weight training before or since.

You might see where I'm going with this. If you're a strong writer with a great book idea, but you just can't seem to make a book happen … or if you *really honestly do* want to write a book, but you aren't a great self-starter … the answer may be to hire a personal trainer—for writing. The official title of such a helpful human is a *writing coach* or a *book coach*. Coaches are just what they sound like: enthusiastic motivators, guides, givers of advice, quasi-therapists, and editorial cheerleaders. They can enter your life at any stage of your writing process: from helping you develop your hook and outline, to being an accountability partner while you write, to brainstorming when you get stuck, to giving basic feedback on your manuscript, to guiding you through revisions. Some do all of the above!

Different coaches will structure their work in different ways. At kn literary we've found that many of our clients need a kick-start while others just need hand-holding—and a nudge here and there—as they write. So we've created coaching packages to fit these needs and more. Most independent writing coaches will have similar offerings.

If what you *truly* want to do is to write a book, hiring a writing coach you really love—who loves and gets you in return—may be one of the best investments you can make.

On Receiving Feedback

Writers and editors are the Hatfields and McCoys of the publishing world—totally dependent on one another, yet often at one another's throats. Finger-pointing between these camps is not unheard of. ("My writer always misses deadlines!" "My editor is always trying to put my work in a box!") But often the weak point in this alliance has to do with giving and receiving feedback. Why might that be? Because the writer-editor relationship is just that—a relationship. And like any relationship, communication is its most important and often most problematic aspect.

Over the course of my career, I've had to learn how to navigate this tricky territory. Giving feedback to a writer—even a writer who thinks they really, really want it—requires a steady hand. We're not just talking about someone's "work," we're talking about their heart, poured out on the page. And I'm

often the first one to set eyes on it.

When I'm training editors, I talk a lot about how to give feedback. For example, I teach about the "compliment sandwich": First, praise what's working—what you love about the book. Next, offer suggestions for fixing what's not working. Finally, talk even more about what you really, really like. I use this technique not because writers are, ahem, overly sensitive—though I'm sure I wouldn't be the first editor to suggest such a thing. In truth I use it because as a culture we're not taught the vital skill of receiving feedback gracefully. In our competitive, must-be-the-best world, even the most constructive feedback can land as criticism.

Alas, if there's one thing to know about the life of a writer, it's that you can expect to get feedback. A lot of it. If you're going the route of traditional publishing, you will first get feedback from agents. Then from your publisher. Then (if you're lucky) from book reviewers. But it's the digital age, so even if you self-publish, get ready to accept a bunch of feedback from your readers. For better or worse, there's nearly unlimited opportunity for your readers to let you know what they think—via Amazon reviews, Goodreads, and a thousand other online venues. Not to mention e-mailing you directly with a few choice words.

Over many years I've learned what it takes to receive feedback gracefully. The process I'll share with you is informed not only by my career as a book editor but also by my training as an NLP practitioner. So while this process is great at helping you sail the editorial waters with ease, it's also applicable to every relationship in your life. Without further ado, here are the four steps I recommend when receiving feedback from your editor (and anybody else who cares to dish it out).

Step #1: Take the feedback in. One of the main problems I see with writers and feedback is the failure to actually take in, digest, and really understand their editor's thoughts—*before* making any decisions about whether to apply the suggestions or not. It's easy to skip over this phase, because reading through a marked-up manuscript or an editorial letter can be a nerve-wracking experience. You never know what feedback you'll find around the next bend, so it can be tempting to skim rather than really dropping in. My suggestion is to go slowly. Really try to understand what your editor is pointing toward before deciding whether you agree or disagree.

Step #2: Feel any emotions that come up. Who likes to feel the disappointment, frustration, and hurt that sometimes accompany receiving feedback on our work? Nobody. But skipping over them isn't really an option. Just like in any relationship, there will be emotions that need to be processed. But acting quickly—without really processing your emotional response—can

have some negative consequences.

Twice in my career I've gotten angry voicemails from authors (well-known authors, in both cases) the minute they saw my edits. Each said something along the lines of, "How dare you give me so many edits? Don't you know who I am?!" In one of those cases, we ended up printing the piece just as the author had written and delivered it—complete with sentence fragments and radical overuse of ellipses. But in the other case, I got a second voice mail a few hours later. After having gone back to digest my editorial suggestions, the author was calling to apologize.

"You were right," he said. "Your edits are making my book much better."

Looking back, I feel nothing but respect for the second author. Both for his fiery defense of his art and for his willingness and humility to come back after considering the edits more thoroughly. So take some time to feel your feelings. Have a little cry if you need to. Call a friend. Do what it takes to clear your mind before you decide whether to apply the edits or not. I promise that you—and your editor—will be happy you did.

Step #3: Humor your editor—and test-drive her suggestions. Assuming your editor has come referred by a trusted source and is a working, professional book editor, she probably knows what she's talking about. So I always ask my authors to at least try out my suggestions. If they don't fit, fine. But humor me first.

If after a little due diligence, you still don't like your editor's suggestion, that's okay. But I always ask my authors to pay attention to *why* I might have made the suggestion I did. If you don't like my proposed solution, no problem. But please address the problem it was pointing toward. Consider the edit a red flag that there's something that needs attention; once you've understood the issue, you may want to handle it a different way. Personally I love it when my authors one-up my editorial suggestions. But don't throw the baby out with the bathwater; don't ignore the problem simply because you don't like your editor's suggested fix.

In the case of one prominent author I worked with early in my career, this kind of refusal to address editorial issues resulted in many Amazon reviews that said, "This book really needed an editor." Well, it had one—the author just didn't listen to her!

Step #4: Make the final decision—and then let go. Contrary to the expectations many of us hold for ourselves, no book is ever going to be perfect. Once you've digested your editor's feedback, had the feels, and done your best to address the issues he's brought up, it's time to trust your judgment and consider yourself done.

Editing should not be an endless process. Some reader somewhere will always have a bright idea you hadn't thought of or a criticism that will make you cringe. That's okay. You did your best. We all have to send our baby off to college at some point, whether or not we think she's ready. The same goes for your book. The whole point is to get it out into the world where it can change lives. It doesn't need to be perfect, it just needs to be *done*!

A Practical Guide to Choosing an Editor

By now I hope you agree that working with an editor (or more than one) is an important part of the book-writing process. But how do you go about finding one—and what is it going to cost you? These days finding an editor is as easy as typing a query into everybody's favorite online oracle. Yes, I'm talking about Google. You'll get thousands of options with the press of a button. The question is how to find the right one for *you*. The primary considerations for most authors are twofold: (1) experience and (2) price. From an experience perspective, I suggest starting off with one basic question: does this editor *edit books for a living*? I realize this may sound simplistic, but it's the difference between having your book edited by a professional and—not. For the sake of clarity, here are some people who are *not* professional book editors:

1. Your sister, who loves to read.
2. Your best friend's son, who just graduated with a B.A. in English.
3. The retired elementary school teacher you met in line at Starbucks.

Now, I'm not saying that the above helpful humans wouldn't improve your book. They certainly might—it's always good to get a second set of eyes on your work. (Especially if those eyes belong to people who are not your close friends and family members. Such beloveds are known to wear rose-colored glasses—or alternatively, sh*t-colored glasses—and not even realize it.) But I would entreat you to ask yourself if the editor you're choosing really knows, from experience, how to put a book together. The professional editing business is apprenticeship based; we learn what it takes to improve a book by watching other editors do it and then modeling our work on theirs. So make sure your editor has been earning a living editing books for a good period of time and has had solid mentorship. When possible, use someone who comes referred by a reputable source—another happy author, positive reviews on a freelance site like Upwork.com, or an editorial studio like mine, where your satisfaction with your editor will be guaranteed.

So what will working with said professional-level editor set you back? There is no single answer. Like any unregulated industry, pricing for editors is

a question of supply and demand. If an editor is in demand, she can (and most often will) charge more. If she's trying to gain a foothold in the business, or doesn't have a steady stream of referrals or client leads, she can (and most often will) charge less. What this means is that more often than not you're going to get what you pay for in terms of background experience. While one's résumé doesn't always tell the whole story—your chemistry with the individual editor, writer, or coach will play a huge role in your satisfaction—it's the best way to know whether this person has the depth of knowledge you're looking for.

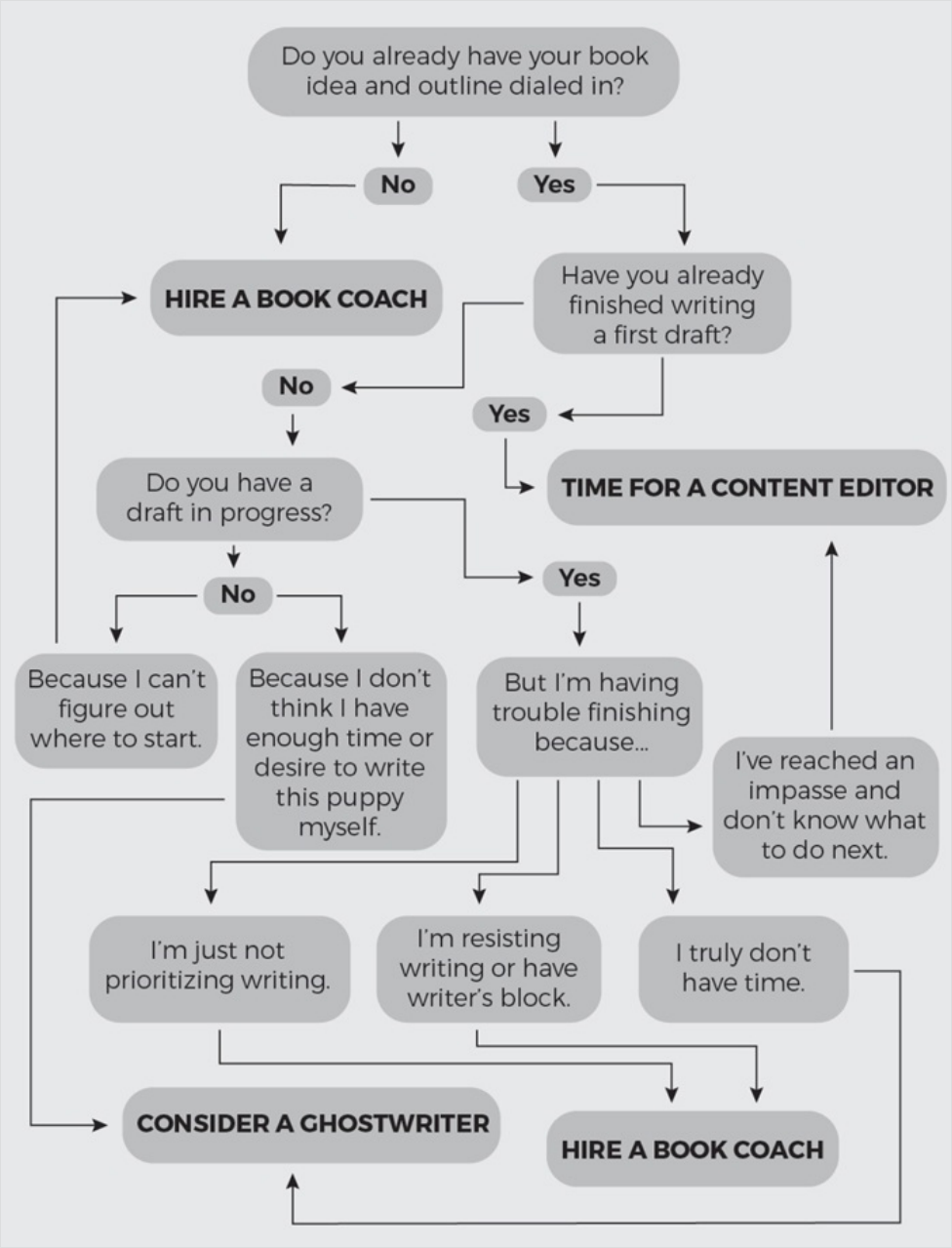
Some editors charge an hourly rate, while others (including myself) prefer flat fees. When it comes to content editing, I've found that flat fees are the norm. Why? Because different editors work at different paces, and book professionals understand that the scope of an editorial project can grow exponentially and unexpectedly. Those who have worked in the traditional business are ready to be flexible. We know that some projects are going to go super smoothly and require less time and energy from us. Others will have serious sprawl, requiring more of us than we could have imagined at the beginning. Books are works of art, and the artistic process is unpredictable. In my experience those who are deeply familiar with the industry understand this, and as a result they don't charge by the hour. They do the work required to get the job done, understanding that some projects will average out to a higher hourly rate and others a lower one. Less well-established editors are more likely to charge hourly, but they often charge a lower rate per hour than someone with more experience.

You may be wondering, *How much are we actually talking?* As of this writing, an average range for content editing is anywhere between $0.04 and $0.07 per word, per round of editorial work completed. I've seen good editing come at the cost of $25 per hour, and I've seen good editing come at $20,000 for three rounds of work on the manuscript. So ultimately it's a matter of your budget, your relationship with your editor, and your gut instinct. What do you want to pay—and what can you afford? What do you want the editorial relationship to feel like? What's your intuition about this editor in particular—is he the right match for you, and thus worth stretching your budget a bit? Asking yourself these questions throughout the process of searching for your editor gives you the best chance at finding the right partnership. Just like creating a book, choosing an editor is an art, not a science.

Choose Your Editorial Adventure

In my experience there's no better way to kick-start your book project than to hire someone to walk the journey by your side. I'm biased, of course—I make my living helping people get their game-changing books into the world, and I want you to be one of those people, because we need you. I know how much more progress my clients make once they're paired with the right collaborator. So here's a choose-your-own-adventure-style flow chart to help guide you toward the kind of editor, writer, or coach that might be a good fit for you.

Step #1: Choose Your Editorial Adventure



Step #2: Take One Exploratory Step

Now that you know what kind of help you need, take one exploratory step toward finding a collaborator. All you'll need is your computer. Choose one of the following websites and do some research!

google.com (search for "Book Editors in [your town]")

publishersmarketplace.com

knliterary.com

upwork.com

reedsy.com

PART III

The Path to Publication

Chapter 8

BUILD YOUR PLATFORM

Writing a book is a daunting proposition for many authors-to-be. So it's often a bit shocking when I relay the news that writing the book is only half the battle. The other half, of course, is building the platform from which to sell it. If you're like many of my clients, the word "platform" itself is enough to generate a queasy feeling in the pit of your stomach. *How am I going to build a platform? I'm a writer, not a marketing expert! I don't even* want *a platform—I prefer anonymity. Is everything about* selling *these days?* If any of these thoughts have run through your head, you're most definitely not alone. For many of the authors I work with, this part of the process sounds like very bad news. But it doesn't have to be! Platform building can happen at your own pace, maximize your particular interests and talents, and even be … dare I say it? … fun! For in essence, generating a platform is the equivalent of picking up your virtual megaphone and communicating the enthusiasm you have for your book to the wider world. You've taken all this time and energy to write the book—now you get to start talking about it!

While platform building is definitely more work than sitting around twiddling your thumbs, it's actually just a simple series of steps that can easily be tackled by anyone with the inclination to do so. What sort of steps, you may be asking? That's what this chapter's going to tell you. It's time for a deep dive into the waters of platform building. (If you're a little fuzzy on the definition of a platform—and the industry changes that have made it a requirement for every author publishing today—now may be a good time to pop back in Chapter 1 and reread the platform history lesson I included there. Then come back and learn how to set one up for yourself!)

Anatomy of a Platform

Platforms are like fingerprints; each one is unique. The defining elements vary depending on who you are, what kind of book you're writing, and—this is important—the kind of word-spreading activities you personally enjoy. Love social media? Great, you can start there. More into face-to-face, real-world connection? Start a club, do speaking engagements, or begin attending networking events that are probably already happening in your hometown. Any activities that find you engaging with other people can be turned into opportunities for spreading the word about your book.

That said, there are some key elements of a platform that you should

understand, as they tend to be the markers agents and editors look for as they consider your book for publication. It's important to note that these metrics matter to agents and publishers for one reason: they reliably sell books. So even if your plan is to self-publish, you'll want to get up close and personal with this list.

Key Elements of a Platform

1. An e-mail list. This means that over time you've been collecting (or are about to start collecting) e-mail addresses of fans and potential book buyers. There are numerous ways to build your list, both online and in the real world. I give the e-mail list top billing, because it's the first question a book industry insider is going to ask as they assess your reach. E-mail addresses offer the most intimate access to a potential book buyer; unlike social media, where you're speaking to a large group at once, an e-mail address gains you access to a reader's intimate space—their inbox. If you're self-publishing, a few hundred names will get your book sales off to a strong start. If your heart is set on traditional publication, a list in the thousands—from 10,000 to 100,000, depending on the topic of your book and the niche you're writing in—may be required.

2. Your social media reach. The size and engagement of your social media following is the next most important indicator of your platform. Publishers want to see tens of thousands of people following, commenting, and reposting your content on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The more your "friends" are engaging with you online, the more likely they are to click through and purchase a book when it becomes available.

That said, most savvy platform builders will go farther than simply speaking to their social media audience. Instead, they will be doing their best to convert their followers, friends, and connections into e-mail subscribers—using social media as a way to continue building the almighty e-mail list.

3. Your conventional media presence. Have an ongoing column in a newspaper or popular magazine? Appear regularly on a local TV or radio show? If so, you're that much more in the public spotlight. Before the advent of the Internet, conventional media reach was the tip-top of the platform pyramid. But these days, unless you're a columnist for a national newspaper or a media celebrity, you're better off focusing on having online conversations than chasing appearances on TV or radio. As your digital platform grows, mainstream media may even come to *you*!

4. Your speaking schedule. Speaking, on the other hand, continues to be a great way to generate a following, build your e-mail list, and later sell copies

of your book. It's also one of the best ways to create true fans. Think about a compelling speaker you've heard at some point in the last five years. Did they have a book to sell? If so, would you recommend that book to a friend? Often we feel like we have a personal relationship with a speaker who has impressed us, brought us to tears, or made us laugh till our sides hurt. If you're speaking frequently (say 20-plus engagements per year) or speaking to impressively large audiences (in the hundreds per talk), a publisher is going to take note.

5. Audience stats for your podcast, YouTube channel, or online radio show. Who needs conventional media when you can speak directly to your audience via one of these newfangled web outlets? Anyone with the drive to produce and maintain a regular online show can do so on a growing number of platforms. Undertaking a weekly broadcast automatically imparts an air of expertise. If you're a good host, speaker, or broadcaster, it can also generate lifelong fans—and ready book buyers when the time is right.

6. Your relationships with big organizations. Whether your religious institution, business association, corporate client, or volunteer group, large organizations are often well poised (read: have the moola required) to make a bulk purchase of your book. Most publishers will offer a deal for a larger buy, making it possible for these groups to purchase copies for their members at a steep discount. So get creative! Think about the organizations you're a part of and how you might be able to serve their members or clientele today—even before you have your book in hand. Make a proposal to give a talk or teach a workshop. Getting your foot in the door now will help your platform look more robust to an agent or publisher, as well as setting you up to do a repeat performance when your book becomes available. (And don't forget to put an e-mail sign-up sheet at the back of the room!)

If you just read through that list and thought, *I don't have any of this!*, please don't despair. In this chapter I'm going to give you four critical starting points. (Plus a list of my personal favorite platform experts in the sidebar.) If you follow these four basic suggestions consistently for a year or more, you *will* start to see your numbers climb.

I recently heard someone put the platform situation very succinctly: these days authors have fans, not readers. How do you generate fans? By contacting them regularly, building trust, helping or entertaining them for free, and making them *want* to follow you. We all know the feeling of getting a dozen newsletters in our inbox that we have no interest in reading. But if you're anything like me, there's one or two that you actually *look forward* to reading. My personal favorites are Deborah Byrd's *EarthSky News* from Earthsky.org, which I read literally every day, and Hay House president Reid Tracy's

Present Moments newsletter, which I look forward to on Sundays. I am fans of these two humans, and I would immediately buy a book if either of them were to publish one. Maybe you have the same feeling about a particular writer or website. Now ask yourself, *Who feels that way about* me*?* Maybe it's your kids. Maybe it's your employees. Perhaps it's a religious or spiritual fellowship you're a part of. Ladies and gentlemen, that right there is the start of your platform. And the rest of this chapter is going to walk you through the basics of how to grow the fire of this fan base and get it burning bright.

For a Deeper Dive on Platform

If your stats aren't going to impress anybody anytime soon, don't get discouraged! We all start somewhere. Here are some of my personal favorite resources for accessible, helpful platform-building advice that you can get started with today:

The Hay House Writer's Workshop (hayhouse.com/writers-workshop-online-course-hhu). This inspiring online course includes a huge amount of information on platform building from Hay House president Reid Tracy. He's my personal go-to for platform help, and his specialty is providing great information for authors of transformational nonfiction.

***Online Marketing for Busy Authors: A Step-by-Step Guide* by Fauzia Burke.** Fauzia is the founder of the first-ever marketing company geared specifically to online book promotion. All she does, all the day long, is help authors build their platforms online. This is a great place to start, since it's a short book with a host of easy-to-implement to-dos.

***Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World* by Michael Hyatt.** This jam-packed book, by the former C.E.O. of a major religious publisher, is chock-full of platform-launching ideas. Follow his advice and you'll be well on your way.

***Online Marketing Made Easy Podcast* with Amy Porterfield (amyporterfield.com).** This woman gives away so much free information, I feel like I'm going to combust every time I listen. Want to know all the things about building a fan base online? Amy's got you covered.

ProBlogger from Darren Rowse (problogger.com). Learn how to write winning online content—and navigate the always-changing world of online marketing—by following Darren Rowse's info-packed site.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to great platform-building information. Just run an online search for "how to build a book platform" and you'll be astounded by how much useful info is right at your fingertips.

With all the different platform-building opportunities that exist in the world, any one of us could spend 60 hours a week just creating content and getting it out the door. But who has 60 hours a week? I certainly don't, and

I'm guessing you don't either. Here's the good news. Every single platform out there is built in the same way: slowly, over time. The adage that it takes 10 years to become an overnight success totally applies when it comes to platform building. And what happens during that 10-year period? A lot of small actions, taken regularly. The only thing you need to do today is get started. That's what you'll get in the rest of this chapter—a laundry list of first steps. I'm going to lay out the four foundations of an online platform: website, social media, blogs, and positioning yourself as a local expert on your topic. I recommend approaching these steps in that order and taking small actions every day toward your goal. I promise, if you make these foundations a part of your everyday life and work, you will soon see your audience begin to grow.

Foundation #1: Build a Website

Another way to define a platform is as your "online presence." The cornerstone of any online presence is—can you guess?—a website. The website is your home base, the place your readers can find you when they want to connect, and perhaps most important, the mothership where you'll start gathering your fans' e-mail addresses. The good news is that these days it's easy and inexpensive to design a simple website that does everything you need it to do. Everything I'm suggesting here is possible to execute by yourself, even if you're not a web expert. But if you have the budget to get help—or you consider yourself all thumbs when it comes to technology—you can find a reasonably priced web designer or builder to help you. Check out the Resources section at the back of the book for some of my favorites.

Note that if you already have a website, consider retrofitting it so it has all of the following elements in place.

Claim—and Name—Your Domain

No matter where you are in your book-writing process, the time is now to claim the web address you want to use. Do not pass go, do not dillydally. I'm talking *today*. Commonly known as a URL or domain name, your web address is just what it sounds like—the location within the virtual universe where your audience can find you. Each domain name is unique, which is why I'm putting a fire under your tush here: if there's a particular domain name you want, you need to buy it ASAP, lest someone else snap it up before you get there.

Your domain name will need to be registered and purchased from an online retailer, and there are dozens to choose from. Make it easy on yourself and use one of the big guns: godaddy.com, domains.google, or domain.com. You can always keep your URL on ice until you're ready to build your site, and

most domains cost less than $20 a year to hold.

Okay, you may be thinking, *but what domain should I choose?* The key to picking a domain name is to choose one that's unique and relevant. After much research, and on the advice of experts, I am going to get a little authoritarian here. If you're like 95 percent of authors, your website should be *your own name* or some variation thereof. It should *not* be the title of your book, your workshop, or your podcast. (You can feel free to purchase URLs for those titles if you like and have them redirect to your main URL, but your main site should be your name.) Why am I so adamant about this? Several reasons. First, it goes back to the fans versus readers shiftaroo. People become *readers* of books, but they become *fans* of other people. When it comes to transformational nonfiction, your fan base wants to know *you*.

I know the word "brand" makes some folks shiver with repulsion these days—*ugh, marketing!*—but consider a different angle on the term. Giving your website your own name begins to brand *you* in the minds and hearts of your readers. When we are indelibly imprinted in someone's inner world, they are much more likely to remember us. If you are a relationship expert, your readers will remember you the next time they feel heartbroken. If you are a dance teacher, they will remember you the next time their body is crying out for movement. Your website is where they will come find you and partake of your wisdom.

A second reason for using your own name is that we are human beings living in an impermanent world. In other words: things change. There are bajillions of websites out there gathering dust because the author or podcaster or erstwhile coach has moved on to the next thing in their life and career. Suddenly the domain name they chose four years ago is no longer relevant. When you move on from your web address, you leave your mailing list and a lot of hard work behind. I want your e-mail list to travel with you from book to book, old career to new, latter-day podcast to present-day YouTube channel, and beyond. The safest way to make sure your audience travels with you from one era to the next is to make sure they are connecting with *you* rather than with your book or podcast or blog title.

The only exception to this rule is if you have a viable online business that is "bigger" than you. For example, when I started my company, kn literary arts, I chose the URL knliterary.com instead of kellynotaras.com. Why? Because kn literary is bigger than just Kelly Notaras. We are a tribe of editors, writers, and coaches, and we offer services that span a wide spectrum. When a curious writer comes to kn literary arts, her first point of contact is with one of my editorial matchmakers, not with me. I have my own website, kellynotaras.com, where my audience can engage with me directly.

But My Name Is Already Taken or Too Hard to Spell!

What if your name is so common it's already been used? There are many ways to get around this issue. Some common workarounds include:

- Adding a middle initial, such as swapping jimsmith.com for jim**w**smith.com
- Adding credentials after your name, such as exchanging annjohnson.com for annjohnson**phd**.com
- Getting a bit clever with your career title, such as **dr**sophie.com or **coach**georgia.com
- Choosing one of the less common web extensions, which are more likely to be available. Examples of some groovy new extensions include **.me**, **.joy**, **.new**, **.guru**, and **.fun**.

If your name is unusual and you're worried it will be difficult for your primary audience to spell, there are many ways to get creative. Let's use my own dear grandmother as an example. Were she alive today, I would no doubt be encouraging her to pen a cookbook revealing the secrets behind her sumptuous Greek cooking. Grandma's given name was Kyparisoula Notaras, which would have meant a mouthful of a URL: kyparisoulanotaras.com. Difficult to pronounce and even more of a nightmare to spell! Luckily she had two nicknames: her friends called her Kay and the family called her Nonnie. So she could have chosen either of those names for her URL, resulting in simpler options, including kaynotaras.com, nonnienotaras.com, or if she wanted to be a little more playful, chefnonnie.com.

Build It, Baby

Building a website can be a confusing venture if you have no idea where to begin, so let me make it easy for you and give you three places to start. Pub-site.com is a ridiculously simple solution designed "by book people, for book people." Specifically, it's meant to help first-time authors create a simple website to support their book. It requires zero tech know-how to use, with zero upfront costs. With a few clicks of a button you can create a super basic

website yourself (you can do this, I promise) and then pay $20 per month to have Pub Site host it.

If you want something a bit more sophisticated—but still workable for a technophobe—Squarespace.com has a very simple user interface designed for non-techies. I created kn literary's first website in just a couple days using Squarespace, and it did everything I needed it to do for the first few years we were in business.

Subsequently I moved over to the more popular Wordpress.com, which is probably the go-to for most authors these days. It's a bit more complex than Squarespace, but it offers more functionality and is better known by most web developers, one or more of whom you may need to hire along the way.

Speaking of which. There was a point in the evolution of knliterary.com where I started to need more functionality than I could figure out on my own. That's when I sought out solid, helpful, reasonably priced web design and building help. If the idea of learning about web functionality makes your eyes cross, I suggest you go easy on yourself and seek out a one-stop-shop solution for web design and development right from the start. This person or company should be able to help you choose a great look for your website, work with you on your branding (colors, logo, etc.), and then put it all together quickly. Ideally they also offer follow-up service to troubleshoot and update the site as needed—assuming you are not savvy enough to undertake back end updates or simply don't want to invest the time. For some of my faves, see the Resources section.

Give Away the Goods

When it comes to actively building your platform, the most important function of your website is to collect e-mail addresses from site visitors. As I've already said, an e-mail address is the key to a fan's personal kingdom. It's likely the most intimate form of communication you will have with them, and thus the most effective way to drive book sales when publication time comes around. So growing your list is priority #1 in platform building, and you should have several different "e-mail capture" opportunities on your site. All the cool offerings you give away on your site—a weekly blog, a free chapter from your book, videos in which you expound about your topic in entertaining and informative ways—should be positioned to entice your visitor to sign up for your newsletter.

That said, *nobody wants to sign up for another newsletter.* Not consciously, anyway. So the last thing you want to say is, "Hey friends, sign up for my newsletter here!" That's like asking your reader to pay you for something they don't want. How do you turn their newsletter frown upside down? You offer

them something they *do* want in exchange for allowing you to add them to your list. In web marketing speak, this exchange is referred to as capturing a sales lead, and you should have a couple different lead capture locations on your website—at least one on every page fans might be visiting.

The first and arguably most important lead capture location is on your homepage. This box, column, or bar asking for a sign-up should appear "above the fold" on whatever page a fan lands on when he types in your web address—no scrolling required. The text should explain very quickly what valuable offer you're making, and there should be a field for your visitor to input his name and e-mail address in exchange. Successful giveaways include a free e-book, a short video course, or a starter kit for whatever service you provide. As of this writing, here are some cool giveaways friends of mine are providing on their websites:

- Free recipes from Kris Carr: "Your wellness journey starts here: A (FREE) starter kit with recipes" at www.kriscarr.com
- Free e-book from Kate Northrup: "Have More by Doing Less: A Free Guide (3 Simple Steps to Create Space for What Matters Most)" at www.katenorthrup.com
- Free chapters from Nick Ortner: "Subscribe and get the first two chapters of *The Tapping Solution* for FREE" at www.nickortner.com
- Free PDF from Kristen Noel: "Get your free *Accountability Cleanse* PDF" at www.kristennoel.com

As you can see, the idea is to create an offer so enticing your reader feels genuinely stoked to give you their e-mail address. This is not a place to be stingy; give them something so good they might otherwise pay you for it. Why? Because their e-mail address is literally worth money to you. Make it a fair exchange and give them something that will help them take the next step on their journey.

These days folks are also using something called a pop-up box to capture visitors' e-mail addresses. You may have seen this before. You're visiting a site, and either the minute you get there or as you are moving your cursor to navigate away, a box pops up unexpectedly in the middle of your screen. The box usually offers a different free giveaway than what was offered on the homepage, but one that is equally enticing. What works and doesn't work for the lead generation changes over time, so all of us may get sick of these pop-up boxes at some point and stop agreeing to plug in our addresses. But as of this writing, they're still a big hit and therefore worth using on your site.

Finally, many website design templates include a navigation bar at the top, or a column to the right or left of the page, that remains a constant part of the design no matter where you are on the site. This is a great place to tuck in a third lead capture giveaway because it's visible no matter which page your reader has navigated to.

Now I want you to take a field trip of sorts. Think of a transformative author you know and love. Put down this book and open a browser on your favorite device. Search for that author's website and go on a hunt for e-mail captures. Are they giving away valuable content above the fold on their homepage? Is there a pop-up box with an enticing offer? Snooping around others' websites will help you get a feel for what kind of exchange might be right for you.

Foundation #2: Get Social

Love it or hate it, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram appear to be here to stay. But even if you're a social media hater, there's reason to be grateful for this new world order: These outlets have made it *far easier* for everyday folks like you and me to start generating interest in our work beyond those who already know and love us. These sites are each a soapbox from which we can easily share the information we know—and get immediate feedback and engagement from our audience.

The rule of thumb with social media is to share valuable content at regular intervals. You can think of your social media accounts as a 24-hour live news channel about you and the topic that's nearest and dearest to your heart. (Hopefully that's your book.) This is where others will start to see what you're offering, note its value, and become part of your online tribe. Every time you share something they find valuable, you gain a little more trust and expertise in their mind. Eventually they'll be willing to follow you wherever you lead them. In your case, that's right over to an online book retailer where they will gladly hand over some of their hard-earned dollars to find out what you have to say.

Now hold on a second, Kelly, you may be thinking. *Not all my Facebook friends are sharing useful, valuable content. Most of it is just junk.* Exactly! This is why it's quite easy to make yourself stand out from the crowd. If you commit to putting time, energy, and creativity into producing and sharing content that's actually helpful and interesting, you'll immediately rise in your readers' rankings.

What to Post

Value is, of course, in the eye of the beholder, but that's exactly the idea.

Your intention should be to draw toward you the tribe that responds well to *your* content. Those who like hearing your take on things, who share your sense of humor and values, and who have a need that matches the offering you're making. This content might be any of the following:

- A short anecdote about your main topic, your day, or your life
- A brief article or blog post displaying your expertise
- A useful and relevant story from one of your clients (make sure you disguise their identity well!)
- A "meme" (a pretty and compelling image with a useful, inspiring, or entertaining quote on it)
- An "infographic," such as a fun flow chart, layout, or diagram that helps readers understand your message
- Select words of wisdom
- Anything that is entertaining, inspiring, informative, or educational—or all of the above!

Field trip #2 coming right up: I want you to go visit the social media site you frequent most often. For most of you, this will be Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. But some of you avant-garde folks might also be into Pinterest, LinkedIn, Reddit, or Google+. Whichever site you choose, scroll through the posts that are there right now. Which people or organizations post things that you *always* take time to read or watch? Which ones do you skip right over? What's the difference between the two? This will give you a baseline understanding of your social media values. Perhaps you like newsworthy content, or perhaps you're more enticed by personal stories. Maybe photos (especially cute dogs, cats, or babies) catch your attention more than text-only posts. Take note of your likes and dislikes—and let them guide you as you make decisions about what content you yourself will share. If you skip over text-only content but linger on pretty pictures with inspiring quotes, you'll probably have more fun creating content in the latter format than the former (which is simple and easy to do; check out the Resources section for some of my favorite social media tools).

How to Post Often and Easily

The more frequently your audience hears from you, the more likely they are to engage with your content. Engagement—in addition to followers or friends—is a key metric for how much social media power you're packing. How frequently you post is ultimately up to how much time and energy you

have for the effort. But conventional wisdom suggests crafting an advance line-up of at least one post per day, and more if the urge strikes you. Said wisdom also suggests “batching” your posts—meaning that rather than remembering to post something every day and taking the time to write it on the spot, you create content in large batches and set it up for auto-publication via one of several post manager sites. My favorite is Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com), though I’ve also had good luck with Buffer (www.bufferapp.com).

Facebook Is Your Friend

When you're just getting started, it may seem daunting to consider posting on multiple social outlets every day. If this is the case for you, consider focusing on Facebook as your first stop. The audience for transformational nonfiction is generally 35- to 65-year-old women, and the place they hang out most often on the web is Facebook. Once you're starting to get into a posting flow, consider branching out to sites like Instagram and Twitter, each of which has its own specific rules for posting that you'll need to learn.

A word on LinkedIn: If your book is business related, LinkedIn is a great place to focus your posting efforts. But many of our clients at kn literary are well-established in careers that have little to do with personal growth or inspiration. If your book topic strays too far from your career focus, it's important to consider whether your business contacts are going to respond well to your transformational book. For folks whose LinkedIn communities are full of work friends and contacts, Facebook may feel like a safer starting point, even if your audience there is smaller.

Foundation #3: Blog Your Heart Out

Sharing your writing on the web has truly never been easier—or more critical, for those of us trying to get our work out to a wide audience. The starting block is a blog. Short for "weblog," a blog is a piece of writing that gives potential readers and fans a chance to learn from you in a short burst. A blog entry is generally longer than a Facebook post but shorter than an article. It can be on absolutely any topic, from a real-life story you want to share to a set of tips or tricks for achieving a goal.

Try sharing your blog in several places. First, post it on your own website. Over time you will begin to develop a rich archive of content on your site in this way. This is good for several reasons. First, it will entice new visitors to hang out on your website to read. Google and other search engines will rank your website higher if people stay for a bit upon arrival. Blogging also naturally begins to accumulate the "keywords" on your site that search engines are looking for when they provide search results. If your website contains an archive of keywords relating to yoga, you'll pop up higher in the rankings when people search for "yoga" online.

You can also try sharing pieces of your blogs on social media sites with

links to the blog if readers want to read more. The website Medium.com is a "social journalism" hub where anyone can share their writing; it's considered a good place for folks who like to read longer pieces than are normally shared on Facebook. Finally, once you've got an established blogging practice, you can start to approach some of the larger aggregate sites for publication. In the transformational world, we're talking sites like mindbodygreen.com and ElephantJournal.com.

Foundation #4: Become a Local Expert

If your skin is starting to crawl from all this online marketing talk, you may feel relieved to hear that the fourth foundation is all about the real world. Once you've got your online world set up and ready for visitors, it's time to step away from the computer and start engaging people IRL. (That's "in real life," for those of you who didn't do a lot of Internet remote chat in the 1990s.) Chances are, if you're really into your topic, other people will be as well. Starting to gather an audience of human beings who are willing to come out of their own homes and tear their eyes away from their screens is the next right step. My favorite way to do this simply and easily is to start a group on Meetup.com. Meetup is a social networking site that allows individual users to offer real-life meetings on specific topics. A quick search of Meetup in most larger towns will turn up groups dedicated to outdoor activities, meditation, culinary adventures, and—wink, wink—writing! You can easily set up a group to discuss the topic of your book and give a short talk that establishes your position as an expert in your community. Say your topic is prenatal yoga. You'd set up a Meetup group on the topic and plan live events every couple weeks. At the event you might give a short talk, teach a few yoga postures, and allow time for mingling. Soon you'll be considered one of the prenatal yoga experts in your hometown—and book sales are just a hop, a skip, and a downward dog away.

As you near your book's publication date, you can start to position yourself as an expert in your own neighborhood. About six months prior to publication, make an appointment to meet with the manager at your favorite local bookstore. (Most bookstores plan their signings and readings quite far in advance, so it's important to get on their roster early.) Around the same time, begin to pull together your press kit. These days a press kit typically comes as a PDF packed with information about you, your background, your book, your website, and the topics you can speak on with authority. A quick search on the web will turn up instructions for penning a fantastic kit and media query letter. A few weeks before publication, you can start sending your query to radio, television, and online media outlets, letting them know you're a local author with a book coming out and that you'd love to send them your press kit

if they are interested in hearing more.

One thing to note: transformational books are not always at the top of the list of topics media outlets are looking for. As we all know, murder and mayhem make headlines more often than meditation. But oftentimes local early morning shows (both radio and TV) are looking for folks to interview and will pay attention if you have a meaningful story or message to share. Your book acts as a "legitimizing factor," giving you more credibility than the average person. So by all means send out queries and see what comes back!

The idea here is to use your book to become the go-to person for your topic in your hometown. Many new authors hope to jump directly into a chair across from Ellen or Dr. Oz, and why not? What they don't know is that the majority of transformational authors who end up chatting with these celebs have been doing their thing in a more local way for a decade or more before they hit the national media. It's easier to gather fans in your own backyard because people identify with other people who are "like them." Once you've got a raving fan base nearby, you can leverage their love for you to catapult yourself onto a regional and possibly national scene.

With a Little Help from Your Friends

Like any endeavor in this world, platform building is easier if you're not doing it alone. This is why one of the first things to do is to start making a list of the friends and organizations who may be eager to help you spread the word about your book. As discussed, organizations with whom you have a relationship may be willing to purchase a number of books to give away or sell to their members. Consider asking your place of spiritual practice, a company you've worked for (if your topic would be relevant to their employees), business associations like Rotary or Kiwanis, or local volunteer organizations. You might ask whether your favorite yoga studio or meditation center has a store where they could sell copies of your book on consignment.

Of course, it's a total bonus if you happen to know someone who is already an established personality with a platform of her own. This could include an online platform or local celebrity status. Help you might consider asking for includes:

- Reading your book and writing an endorsement for the cover (or, if she's a nationally recognized personality, a foreword for the book)
- Mailing an announcement to her e-mail list at the time of your book's publication
- Having a video conversation with you about your topic, which

both of you would promote online

- Participating in a live launch event, such as a public talk, book signing, or party
- Posting about your book on social media sites
- Featuring you in her newsletter

It can be difficult to ask for this kind of support. If you find yourself avoiding writing the e-mail request or picking up the phone, you are not alone! I find that asking for help is a challenge even for “celebrity-level” authors. One piece of advice I give my writers is to draft the e-mail request without any expectation of sending it. How would you make the request for support if you had all the confidence in the world? Then let the e-mail sit for a day or two before revisiting it and deciding whether to send it, and to whom. Often seeing it as an exercise relieves the pressure. (And P.S., once the request is written, the biggest hurdle is behind you.)

Fauzia Burke's Book Promotion Timeline

Your book is your ultimate platform-building tool. Gathering an audience before you publish is critical to spark interest in the book, but once it's out the book itself becomes your foot in the door to a world of opportunity. How do you take advantage of this? Make sure to plan your publication well.

Enter my friend Fauzia Burke, the forward-thinking marketing genius who created the very first book promotion website back in 1995. Since then Fauzia has helped hundreds of authors launch their books online through her company, FSB Associates (fsbassociates.com), and her book, *Online Marketing for Busy Authors*. Below, she gives a brief timeline to guide us as we start launching our own book.

I say "we" because I used this timeline in planning my own book launch! I do what Fauzia tells me to do, full stop. And if I may say so, you should too. If you follow the plan below, you will be more thoroughly set up for your book launch than even some of the most well-known authors on the shelves. So this is your assignment: create a to-do list out of the timeline below, and get it all into your calendar today!

Six months before publication. Six months before publication is the right time to make sure you have all your book essentials covered. You should have a book jacket designed and ready by this point. Make sure it's showing on retailer sites (Amazon.com, BN.com) and create social media graphics that match your jacket design. Build out your Amazon Author Central page and your Goodreads author page.

This is also the time to start banking favors you can cash in on once you get to your publication date. Everyone needs help, so start offering to help others before you need to ask for their help. Sometimes retweets on Twitter, preordering a friend's book, or writing a LinkedIn recommendation can go a long way.

Five months before publication. Even though publication feels ages away, five months out is when you really need to start thinking about marketing and publicity, especially if you're hoping to get coverage in long-lead publications (like

magazines that plan editorial features months in advance) or a spot in certain event venues (like New York City's 92nd Street Y, Washington D.C.'s Politics & Prose bookstore, or annual book festivals). These spots can book at least five months in advance, so it's crucial you reach out with enough time to secure a spot.

Media will want to review your book before committing to coverage or an event, so make sure you have created galleys (early, uncorrected copies of your book). Printed galleys can be expensive to produce; electronic galleys are a cheaper option. I like using NetGalley for this service.

Two to three months before publication. You need to start thinking about short-lead media at least eight weeks prior to publication. This includes online media, as well as daily print publications (places that don't plan their coverage as far in advance). It typically takes six to eight weeks to confirm coverage and see placement; ideally you want as much media as possible to hit in the weeks surrounding your official publication date in order to maximize sales momentum.

If you are planning a preorder campaign, this is the time to get going. Just remember, strangers don't tend to order our books unless we are already a well-known, best-selling author. Focus your attention on your family, friends, network, and fans. Let's call them your launch team.

One week before publication. Remind your tribe and launch team to make sure they have preordered your book and to review it the week it comes out. If possible, provide tweets and graphics to make spreading the news about your book easier. If you are doing your own publicity, do a final follow-up to make sure everyone has what they need. As much as possible, ask for reviews, interviews, and features to go live during publication week.

Publication day. On your publication date, you'll notice the ability to post reader reviews on Amazon and Goodreads. Ask your friends and family, as well as dedicated readers of your blog or newsletter, to post honest reviews about your work. This will help sway any undecided buyers.

Chapter 9

FIND AN AGENT AND WRITE A PROPOSAL

If you've been reading this book from the beginning, it's a safe bet that by now you know what book you're writing. You likely have a plan for how you'll sit down and compose said masterpiece. Your audience is growing as we speak. The only question that remains is, how does this manuscript actually become a *book*?

To answer that question, you must first make a big decision. Will you try for a traditional publisher, with all the attendant hoop jumping that requires, or will you DIY and self-publish? These final three chapters are intended to help you make that choice if you haven't already. For those of you who already know you want to self-publish, feel free to fast-forward to Chapter 11, where I give you all the DIY deets. But most would-be authors I meet—at least at the beginning—want to take a shot at the traditional publishing experience before they commit to self-publishing. So that's where we're going to start.

To be published traditionally, once again, means you hand over your publication rights to a company who specializes in publishing books like yours. They will often hand you back some money, which will indicate what kind of bet they're placing on the book. From there you will collaborate—but they will usually have the final say—on editorial work, revised title and subtitle, descriptive copy, and cover design. You can see why this is such an exciting route for so many: not only do you get the good feels of being chosen and paid for your writing, but you also don't have to front the costs of publishing out of your own pocketbook. While there are some downsides to this avenue—you lose a certain amount of creative control; it takes 12 to 24 months to get your book out; you make less money per copy sold than if you self-published—there's no doubt a certain amount of cachet to saying you're being published by a company people have heard of. So let's take a walk on the traditional side and you can assess whether this is indeed the place you want to start as you wend your way to publication. And what's the first step on the path of traditional publishing? Romancing an agent into representing you.

The Role of the Literary Agent

One thing I learned early on in my publishing career was that it pays to have a great literary agent. Agents are the liaisons between authors and the companies who want to publish their books. Part salesperson, part editor, part legal consultant, and (ahem) part therapist, agents help you hone your work, submit it to publishers, negotiate contracts, and stay sane throughout the publishing process. Finding an agent you resonate with—ideally someone you'd like to be friends with in addition to working together—is often the difference between a great publishing experience and a difficult and disappointing one. These invaluable allies know the publishing business inside and out, including which house publishes what kind of books; the likes and dislikes of the editors who work there; industry standards when it comes to payments and book contracts; and how to negotiate effectively at each stage of the process.

But first and foremost, agents are your gateway into the world of traditional publishing. Most traditional book publishers accept only "solicited"—a fancy term for "agented"—book submissions. They will not even review your book proposal unless it comes to them via a trusted agent. There are two main reasons why publishers insist on this gatekeeper model. First, it helps them avoid litigation by frustrated authors. Back when unsolicited submissions were still welcome, piles of manuscripts sat around the office awaiting review—often for months. Too many times an author would claim a publisher had stolen their idea and turned it into their most recent bestseller. The publisher would deny ever having read the author's submission, and the author would not believe them. (Cue the lawsuit.) Agents help avoid such expensive misunderstandings by documenting the process of manuscript submission. They keep notes on which publishers they've spoken to about which books, keeping relations between authors and publishers friendly.

The second reason publishers prefer agented submissions is because they're usually a much higher quality than what comes in "over the transom"—publishing speak for submissions sent in directly by authors. If a trusted agent has vetted your work and attests that it's good, that increases the chances that it actually *is* good. Agents are in the thick of the publishing world. They know what publishers are acquiring, which books are selling, and how to retool a book idea so it's more likely to clear both those bars.

But an agent is so much more than a safeguard for the publisher. Your agent is your advocate. He helps you choose the right home for your work and make the right choices to take your writing career to the next level. A great agent is there for you in whatever way you need him to be.

So—how do you get one of these fantastic people to mother you all the way to the *New York Times* list? Rumor has it that it's a long, hard slog … but

that's only because it's often a long, hard slog. I hate to say it, but finding an agent can sometimes be harder than finding a publisher. Many successful authors have had to try, try again—over and over and over—until they finally found an agent to ride off into the sunset with.

Hunting for an Agent

The good news is that there are lots of agents out there—which may also be the bad news. There are hundreds of agents in the world, and they all have their own specialty. Some work only on novels, so you would be wasting your time in sending them your self-help book. Others do only children's books, or history, or cookbooks. All this means you gotta do your research. You need to find out which agents are right for your particular book, and what they require in a submission.

Preparation is the key to success when it comes to finding an agent. First up is creating a spreadsheet or chart where you can log information about each agent as you do your research. Include their names, the names of their agencies, their contact information, what genres of books they represent, one or two of the books they've successfully placed, their particular requests regarding how to submit your work, and a column for the date you reached out to them.

The website Publishers Marketplace (publishersmarketplace.com) is an excellent resource to discover agents who work on your kind of book. You have to pay a membership fee, but it's low and, in my humble opinion, worth it. The website allows you to search through all the recent deals within your category (fiction, self-help, memoir, etc.) and see who has agented projects similar to yours. It also provides the agents' contact information and websites, where you will be able to find their particular submission guidelines. (You can also sign up for their daily "Publisher's Lunch" e-mail, which is probably the most widely read e-mail in the publishing biz. Want to be a book industry insider? Read it on the daily.)

If you don't want to spend the money for Publishers Marketplace, Agent Query (agentquery.com) is another excellent resource. It's a free, searchable database of agents, and it provides a bit of social networking so you can see what experiences other writers have had with various agents.

Finally, there's the tried-and-true "field trip method," in which you head over to your local bookstore and pull books off the shelves that are similar to yours in some way. Any author who had a good experience with their agent will thank that person in the acknowledgments section. Voilà! You not only have a great agent recommendation, but you have a nice opening line for your query letter. "I noticed that you agented Jane Doe's book *Enlightenment in*

Three Easy Steps, which I loved… .”

How to Wow a Potential Agent

In addition to having their own specialties, agents all have their own ways of doing things. And guess what? They expect you to follow their rules. Agents receive dozens, if not hundreds, of queries each week. One easy way to cull the herd is to filter out anyone who neglected to follow their specific submission requests. So once you’ve made a list of agents you think would be right for you—and it should be a long list, with 20 or 30 or even 50 names—carefully research each and every one. Find their websites and look for their submission guidelines. These days most agents want to receive query letters via e-mail, often with some specific wording in the subject line. Some agents want to see 10 sample pages, some want 50. Others want none at all. Remember: the submission process is a process of elimination. Make sure you follow their guidelines to the letter so the agent actually reads what you send them.

Start by working carefully on your pitch or “query” letter. Your query should be a clear, one-page letter that can be tailored to fit the specific requests of each agent you’ve researched. The query letter is not a place to get fancy or cute! Gimmicky or hyperbolically self-promotional letters will get an immediate eye roll and a click of the DELETE button. Think classic, simple, and elegant: three well-crafted paragraphs and a closing.

Paragraph #1: A one- to three-sentence “pitch” describing your book. You guessed it, this pitch is your hook. For practical nonfiction the pitch should focus on what the book is about, who it’s written for, why you’re the right person to write it, and what benefits readers will get out of reading it. If you’re writing fiction or memoir, it’s a description of the most tantalizing plot points, leaving the readers on the edge of their seats. Your job in this paragraph is to “hook” the agent into reading on. Make sure it has all the elements of a great hook described in Chapter 3!

Paragraph #2: A 150-word synopsis of the content of the book. This paragraph is a deeper look at the book’s content. If you’re writing practical nonfiction, this paragraph should explain what you’ll teach in the book, listing some (or all) of the lessons, steps, or processes to be included. If you’re writing fiction or memoir, this paragraph should explain the beginning, middle, and end of the book. (Yep—you’re giving away the farm here.)

Paragraph #3: A 75(ish)-word bio that explains who you are. Focus on why you’re the right person to write this book, including any *book-relevant* credentials or life experiences. Do not include details of your career, family, or hobbies unless they directly show why you’re qualified to be writing this

particular book.

Closing: Two or three sentences to close. Let them know that either a full manuscript (for fiction) or a book proposal (for nonfiction) is available at their request. Then thank them for their time and let them know you are looking forward to hearing their reply.

Note that there are many examples of excellent queries available for free on the web. Just search for “literary agent query examples” and get your read on. Whatever you do, keep your letter to 400–500 words. A longer letter will not serve you! If you have some money to throw at this process, getting help from an editor or professional copywriter familiar with the book business may be a good use of funds. As the saying goes, you only get one chance to make a first impression.

How to Decide Which Agent to Sign With

If you’ve followed the advice above, the hoped-for outcome is that you’ll have multiple agents serious about representing you. When that happens, how will you choose? Here are some questions to ask yourself:

What percentage of your publishing income are they asking for? The standard is 15 percent of all the deals an agent makes for you. If they’re charging more or less than that, something unusual is going on. Be sure to investigate further.

What do they have to say about your manuscript? A good agent should also be a good editor, and they will have ideas about how to make your manuscript more saleable. Do you think their ideas are good ones? Do they make sense to you?

Do you feel resonance with their book list? If yours would be the first book of transformational nonfiction they’ve ever agented, they may not have the editorial contacts you’re looking for. It’s also a red flag if they haven’t successfully sold a number of books to publishers in your category. The only exception here is if you’re talking to an assistant at a literary agency. Assistants of well-known agents are a *great* place to start. They are often hungry for clients and eager to please in ways more established agents may not be. If they work for reputable agencies, you know they’ve got solid backup, even if they’re new to the biz. Give them a try!

Do you get along? In the ideal scenario, you meet your agent on your first book and the two of you ride side by side for your entire writing career. While this is not always the case, it’s something to shoot for. In other words, make sure you like them—both as a person and as a colleague.

Are they making you any promises? This may seem counterintuitive, but

don't believe an agent who is "guaranteeing" you anything. The book business is like the weather—both predictable and unpredictable at the same time. Any agent who says differently—assures you of a large advance, a specific publisher, etc.—is either inexperienced or untrustworthy.

Like so many good things in life, finding an agent gets vastly easier if you have a personal connection. The most straightforward path to getting an agent to read your submission is to have it sent in by a friend who is already represented by that agent. Think about your professional and personal networks. You're probably just a few degrees of separation from someone who has published a book. Ask around and see who you know who knows someone. Then take that person out to lunch and pick her brain, pitch your idea, and ask for an introduction. (And of course, be gracious if she says no. An agent relationship is precious and sometimes delicate; you don't know what may be going on behind the scenes.)

Once you have the "in," you're going to need the right materials to wow that agent and make him fall in love with you and your work. For authors of transformational nonfiction, this means crafting an awesome book proposal. Thus, it's a great idea to have a proposal underway, if not completed, before you begin to query agents. So that's where we're going to go next.

Wait, Do I Really Need a Book Proposal?

As I discussed in Chapter 2, you can think of a book proposal as a business plan for your book. It's a 40- to 60-page document that explains who you are, what your book is about, how you're going to help promote it, and whether you have the writing chops to pull it off. If you're writing transformational nonfiction and want to be traditionally published, you're going to need a really good one. But what if you're not aiming at the big houses? What if you already know you're taking matters into your own hands? If you're self-publishing, do you need to write a book proposal?

The short answer is no. If you aren't trying to sell your book to a publisher, technically you don't need the dog and pony show that is a book proposal. But might you want to write one anyway? Oddly enough, you might. Writing a book proposal can be a very helpful and clarifying exercise that gets you primed to write—and then sell—your book. First, it teaches you how to *talk about* your book. Writing the overview section of a proposal forces you to get really clear about what your book is, why people need it, and why you're the right person to write it. Second, it requires you to create a powerful and thorough outline for your book. For those writers who could use a little structural kick in the pants, creating chapter abstracts forces you to figure out how you're going to organize your content. It also sets you up to hit the

ground running when you're ready to start writing the book. Finally, it gets you thinking about who your audience is and how you're going to reach them. By now you understand that it's a good thing to know how you'll market your book long before you finish writing it. Publishing your book without building an audience first is like getting all dressed up for a party, only to discover you forgot to send out the invites. Writing a book proposal will help you get clear on the demographics of your tribe as well as a slew of different ways you can help pique their interest.

A Template for a Perfect Proposal

While different agents prefer slightly different variations on the standard template, most agree that a complete proposal contains five parts: overview, author bio, marketing plans, chapter summaries, and two sample chapters. The rest of this chapter is a detailed how-to template for writing an amazing book proposal. I'll walk you through what to include in each of these sections, what not to include, how to format it, and even paragraph by paragraph suggestions for what to write. If you follow this template in crafting your proposal, you'll end up with a document that will be recognizable throughout the book industry.

Standard Book Proposal Template

Note: I recommend using 1.5 spacing for the whole proposal except the sample chapter(s), which should be double spaced. Times New Roman 12-point font is the industry standard and is highly recommended. Headings should be boldfaced, while main content should be roman. Underlining is not recommended.

Title Page

Title

Subtitle

Author Name

Author E-mail Address

Author Phone Number

Author Website URL

Table of Contents

Include a page that lists the contents of your proposal. Make sure it includes each of the sections listed here. Replace "000" with the correct page numbers.

Contents

Overview

About the Author

Market Analysis

Promotion

Competitive Analysis

Book Table of Contents

Chapter Abstracts

Sample Chapters

Overview Section

The overview is your chance to explain why your book is a winner—in as catchy and attention-grabbing a way as possible. If an agent or publisher gets bored in this section, they won't read any further! Be sure to highlight the most unique and interesting content you have to offer. The overview can be written in many different ways. Here I give you a couple sample organizational structures for your overview. The entire overview should be a maximum of two or three pages, with 1.5 line spacing.

Overview

Option #1: Prescriptive Nonfiction or Teaching Memoir

Paragraph #1: Introduce the problem your book will solve; you may start with statistics illustrating the issue or a personal story of someone struggling with this problem. If your book promotes a certain technique, system, or methodology, the "problem" would be whatever issue your technique resolves. In the case of a teaching memoir, the "problem" is often the difficult experience you went through—and overcame—that this book will help readers navigate in their own lives.

Paragraph #2: Make the claim that your book solves that problem, in a succinct and inspiring way, perhaps "for the first time ever"—if that's true; this paragraph should include the "hook" or elevator pitch for your book.

Paragraphs #3–5: Explain *how* your book solves that problem and why you are the right person to write the book; if you have a notable platform, be sure to emphasize that here.

Paragraph #6: Explain how the book will be organized, giving a brief chapter by chapter overview of the content (one to two sentences per chapter).

There should be no cliffhangers or teasers. If your chapter titles are teasers, explain what happens in each chapter instead of using the titles. If the book is divided into several parts or sections, note that here.

Paragraph #7: Name the problem one more time—and why your book is the solution.

Option #2: Inspirational Memoir

Paragraph #1: Lead with a strong narrative paragraph that describes a pivotal moment in your story.

Paragraph #2: Zoom out from that story to give context on where you were, why you were there, what you were challenged by, and what you were learning.

Paragraph #3: Make the case that many readers struggle with similar issues or difficulties; include statistics if you can.

Paragraph #4: Explain how your book will reach that audience, perhaps in a way they've not been reached by other books; this paragraph should include the "hook" or elevator pitch for your book.

Paragraph #5: Explain *how* your book will speak to them, and why they will need to hear this message from you specifically. If you have professional experience to back up your personal experience or if you have a notable platform, be sure to emphasize that here.

Paragraph #6: Explain how the book will be organized, giving a brief chapter by chapter overview of the content (one to two sentences per chapter). There should be no cliffhangers or teasers. If your chapter titles are teasers, explain what happens in each chapter instead of using the titles. If the book is divided into several parts or sections, note that here.

Paragraph #7: Refer back to the scene of your narrative intro. Name the problem one more time—and why your book is the solution.

About the Author Page

On this page write the author bio you want to see on the back of your book. This section should be written in third person; that is, "Jane Smith began her career as a psychologist in 1992 …" Try to keep this section to a single page if possible.

About the Author

(Insert professional-quality photo of yourself here)

Start with whichever credentials explain most clearly why you are qualified

to teach about your topic. Include relevant pieces of your personal story, but only if they relate to the content of your book. If you want to include unrelated professional credentials, position them near the bottom of this section. (Better yet, leave them out altogether.)

Include bios for any other confirmed contributors (author of the foreword, co-writer, ghostwriter, or collaborator). Unless you're co-writing the book, you do not need to include photos of these contributors.

Market Analysis Page

In this section, make the case that there is a large and hungry audience just waiting for your book. Use statistics found in articles, journals, or on relevant websites to estimate the size of the market. Give demographics of the readership most likely to pick up the book. Be as honest as you can be, while making the case that your book will appeal to a significant audience. Remember: a book that is written for everyone is actually written for no one. The narrower your audience, the better! The entire section should be 1–1.5 pages.

Market Analysis

Paragraph #1: Who is the main audience for your book, and why will your book appeal to them? (Consider gender, age, professional status, etc.) How big is this market? Check statistics by Googling "size of [your demographic]" to find any studies that may have been done on your market. I find that genre-specific articles in industry magazines like *Publishers Weekly* can be good sources.

Paragraph #2: Name any secondary audiences who might be interested (no more than two). Include any census data here as well.

Paragraph #3: What angles on your topic might you see the media picking up on? Which outlets do you imagine will be the most interested?

Paragraph #4: Write a concluding paragraph that sums up the evidence that there is an untapped market for your book, and state why you can deliver what they want in a unique, highly effective way.

Promotion Section

In this section you are going to explain to the publisher what platform you already have and how you will leverage it to sell books. If you do not have a platform yet, use this section to explain what you are doing to build one. You do not need to describe all the ways you are willing to help the publisher promote the book (e.g., "I will make myself available for media appearances arranged by the publisher."). The publisher is only interested in the marketing

and promotion power you will be contributing. List what you have to offer, starting with the biggest, most impressive statistics and connections first. Be sure to use present-tense language to discuss how you're actively building your platform—that's far more impressive than listing a bunch of plans you have for the future. This entire section should be approximately 1–1.5 pages.

Promotion

- List any previous books you've published and their sales figures.
- Detail your relevant promotional experience, including public speaking, interviews, professional affiliations, and the size of your social networks.
- Explain how your professional experience may contribute to the promotion of this book, if relevant.
- Describe any media, celebrity, or other influential connections (such as an organization that has agreed to buy copies of your book) that might help you and your publisher promote and sell your book.
- Describe your online media platform, including number of visitors to your website, how frequently you blog or send out an e-mail newsletter, the size of your e-mail list, number of followers on Facebook and Twitter, and any other data you have to reflect the size of your online reach.
- Have you ever written for magazines, newspapers, or popular blogging sites? If so, list those here.
- Describe your speaking schedule over the past two years, including which organizations you spoke for, the size of the audience, and on what topics; if you command an impressive speaking fee, feel free to list it.
- List any influential personalities with "above-the-marquee" names who have already agreed to write a foreword or an endorsement for your book (authors, celebrities, professionals who are highly regarded in your field, etc.).
- If you are planning to contribute financially to your P.R. campaign by hiring a publicist yourself, give details—including how much you are willing to spend and how long you will be retaining her. (We generally don't recommend this for first-time authors, as it tends not to be worth the money unless you already have a platform for your publicist to work from.)

- Finally, run an Internet search on your name and take a moment to explain any odd, unexpected, or problematic parts of your "online footprint." Your publisher will Google you, and it's best to defuse any issues right up front.

Competitive Analysis Section

In this section you will choose three to five books that are similar to your book—"comp titles," in book publishing lingo—yet leave room in the marketplace for a new angle (yours!). You want to choose books that have done well and have been published recently. That said, it's important to steer clear of mega-bestsellers. Publishers know a mega-bestseller requires a rare alignment of a dozen different stars. There's no way to know in advance whether or not your book will benefit from such kismet. So do some research and show a depth of knowledge of your category by including solidly selling books that may not be household names. Don't know what's selling? Visit online bestseller lists or head on over to a local bookstore. The bookseller responsible for your particular section knows a lot about what's selling and should be happy to talk to you about it. This section should be a total of 1–2 pages long.

Competitive Analysis

Paragraph #1: Explain which shelf your book belongs on in the bookstore. It is not a good idea to say that it will fit into several categories; you want booksellers to easily know where to shelve it. Visit a local bookstore to see your options and ask a bookseller where they think your book would fit best.

Paragraphs #2–6: List three to five popular and recent books in your niche. The books should fit on the same bookshelf as your own and should have been published in the past 2 to 3 years. (Publishers are looking for relevant comparisons, and books that were published 5 or 10 or 25 years ago will not be considered relevant.) Good resources for recent and popular books are the *New York Times* bestseller list, Amazon bestseller lists, and the *USA Today* bestseller list.

A word about Amazon sales rankings. These rankings are notoriously misleading when it comes to representing a book's success. For this reason publishers do not pay much attention to them … and neither should you. That said, if you find a book that ranks below 20,000 in overall Amazon sales (not just within its own category), it's a safe bet that the book is doing fairly well and is worth including in your list. But do not be misled: just because a book is number one in its subcategory does not mean it's selling well! The subcategories on Amazon are so specialized that in many cases there are only

a handful of recent books in each one. A book could be number one and only have sold a couple hundred copies—not a success by a publisher's standards.

Once you've chosen your comp titles, explain the appeal and success of each book, as well as the areas the book does not cover that yours will. Make an argument that your book is similar (i.e., that it will enjoy similar success) and also different (i.e., that there is still room on the bookshelf for your book). Here is an example of how to format your comp title descriptions:

Title by Author (Publisher, year of publication)

Provide a one- or two-sentence description of what this book is and why you're including it. Then add a brief, three- or four-sentence explanation of how your book complements this book; how it adds to this already successful category. Continue on to the next title, formatted in the same way. Conclude this section by again naming the "hole in the market" that your book will fill in one to four sentences.

Table of Contents Page

In this section include the table of contents of your book.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:

Chapter Two:

Chapter Three:

Chapter Four:

Chapter Five:

Chapter Six:

Chapter Seven:

Chapter Eight:

Chapter Nine:

Chapter Ten:

Chapter Abstracts

In this section you will summarize the contents of each chapter in your book. Do not include actual content from the book! You are giving a summary, not a sample. Consider starting each chapter abstract with sentence stems like: "In this chapter I will show the reader …" or "This chapter will reveal …" or "Here the reader will discover …" The only chapter you don't need to

summarize is the one you're including as your sample chapter. (In that case you can just list the title and then say, "See sample content.") Each chapter abstract should be no more than three-quarters of a page, with 1.5 spacing; if your chapters will be very short and you plan to have a lot of them, cut this down to half a page.

Chapter Abstracts

Foreword by … (if applicable—include only if you have already secured agreement to supply a foreword from this person in writing)

Introduction

In the book's introduction, I will explain …

Summarize the contents of your introduction. Include a clear statement of the problem your book will solve, why you are in a position to solve it, a basic description of how you will solve it, and what the results will look like.

Indicate that you will include a brief instructional section to walk readers through the chapters of the book, explaining what the reader can expect.

Chapter One: Chapter Title (Follow a similar formula for all chapters in the book.)

This chapter will cover …

Paragraph #1: Describe the theme or thesis of the chapter.

Paragraph #2: Explain how you're going to get the reader to this new understanding.

Paragraph #3: Mention any exercises, meditations, quizzes, recipes, and the like (if applicable).

Paragraph #4: Finish by telling the publisher what the reader will "get" or "take home" from the chapter, then provide a short (one- to two-sentence) transition to next chapter.

Continue with a summary for each chapter.

Back matter: Charts, references, and bibliography

If applicable, describe any reference or supplemental material you plan to include and how it will help the reader implement your teachings.

Sample Chapter

Include at least one full chapter, if chapters are on the longer side (4,000–5,500 words), or two if chapters are on the shorter side (2,000–3,000 words). Ideally, choose a chapter that is a compelling part of the body of the book—

rather than your introduction, which is likely to cover similar information to that which is already covered in the proposal's overview. If your book will contain recipes, exercises, charts, poems, or any other unusual content, make sure to include samples here. Remember, this is your opportunity to showcase your most exciting information and your writing voice—so make sure it's as compelling as it can be!

Sample Chapters

Chapter X: Title of Chapter

Include full text of first sample chapter here.

Chapter X: Title of Chapter

Include full text of second sample chapter here.

Chapter 10

PUBLISH TRADITIONALLY

So you've now written a book proposal and your dream agent has agreed to take you on. Yeahhh! Time to break out the champagne, do a happy dance, and yell "I found an agent!" from the rooftops. But even if you're not into public displays of joy, do take a minute to savor this success; it's a rare and hard-won honor to get literary representation. But once the celebration is complete, what comes next? That's what this chapter will cover. First, what happens after your agent sends your book proposal out on submission? What kinds of hoops will your little proposal have to jump through in order to get an enthusiastic yes—and an offer—from a publisher? And once you have your book deal in hand, what can you expect? These questions—and many others you didn't know to ask will be answered in the next few pages.

On Cinderella and the Book Industry Today

Many of us imagine the traditional publishing journey a bit like a Cinderella story. You, a hardworking author, get noticed in a crowd by a Fairy Godmother–type—in this case the literary agent. The agent helps charioteer you to the NYC publishing ball, where the house you've always wanted goes all Prince Charming and falls in love with you. Your book is considered for acquisition and if the slipper fits, you get a book deal. After that your work is done. You ride off into the sunset with the promise of fame, glory, and very large royalty checks.

Alas, like all fairy tales, this one rarely tracks with reality. You'll find many contemporary authors complaining that the traditional houses—the Prince Charmings—have turned out to be couch potatoes who sit around doing very little while Cindy (that's you) pays the rent. And in today's world the real glass slipper is your own marketing platform. And if fame, glory, and royalty checks are in your future, it's going to be the result of very hard work on your part.

Having sat behind desks at traditional houses for many years, I understand both sides of this story. I can tell you from personal experience that the big publishing companies are filled with generous, genuinely helpful human beings who want the best for you, your book, and the industry at large. They have literally given their careers—some might say their *lives*—to championing the written word. But the truth is that over the past 25 years, book people have been staring down the barrel of technology, a force that has

completely reshaped the industry. At times tech seems hell-bent on rendering traditional publishers, and even books themselves, a thing of the past. The result? Industry norms that are changing so quickly it's hard to keep up.

That said, all hope is not lost. While 21st-century technology *has* hit the book industry hard, U.S. publishing companies still launched over 330,000 books in 2015, according to Statista.com. If you think yours ought to be part of that crowd, keep reading. This chapter will explain the ins and outs of traditional publishing: acquisitions, royalties, and a step-by-step accounting of the publishing process, from delivery to pub day. If your heart is set on the traditional game, you'll want to pay close attention.

A Lesson in Publishing Speak

About a week into my publishing career, I got my first lesson in the norms of book biz lingo. I'd dared to use the word "hardback"—a word we'd tossed around regularly at the bookstore where I'd first been bitten by the publishing bug. My boss sat me down and impressed upon me that nobody in the New York book world used the word "hardback." I am happy to pass that vocab lesson—and a few others—on to you.

Hardcover. The industry term of choice is "hardcover," not "hardback." I don't know why, given that its little sister continues to be called a paperback, but it's worth memorizing this one. Every so often you might hear someone call a hardcover edition a "cloth" or "trade cloth" edition, which refers to the fact that hardcover books used to be bound with fabric. (Some still are, but these days most are bound with thick textured paper instead.) But while you may still see the term "hardback" on signage in a bookstore, know that within the hallowed walls of the industry, use of that term will make you stick out like a sore, amateur thumb.

Manuscript. So … is that thing you're writing a book or a manuscript? It's a nuanced distinction for sure, but it's one you'll want to master. If you're talking about the document you've been working on, you're probably talking about a manuscript. Inside the editorial department, almost all discussion is happening at the level of the manuscript. A "book" is either the finished product ("My books arrived today from the printer!") or the *idea* of that finished product ("My wife is working on a book and I barely see her anymore!"). But when it comes to the working document itself—the one that your editor is waiting for you to deliver—it's a manuscript, baby.

Front matter and back matter. Front matter is all the material that comes before page one of your book's content. This includes things like the title page, copyright page, table of contents, and foreword. Back matter, as you can likely deduce, is everything that comes after the last page of the book's main content. Appendixes, indexes, reading group guides, acknowledgments, author bio, and sometimes (especially in genre fiction) advertisements for other books. Casually toss out

one of these terms when talking to your editor and you'll sound like the pro you've always wanted to be.

TK. This may be the strangest term on the list, but it's one publishing professionals use every single day. As far as I know, it is used in no other industry. Moreover, it's a deliberately misspelled abbreviation. (Which is ironic, since it's mostly used by editorial types.) But within the world of U.S. book publishing, "TK" stands for "to come." The abbreviation is used when there is information that is not yet present or available—but is on its way. For example, if you don't yet have the dedication page ready for a manuscript, there may be a page reserved for the dedication that has nothing but "TK" written in the middle of it. I've found this to be an incredibly useful term in many areas of life and would use it all the time—except that only my publishing buddies know what it means!

Stet. Once more, a publishing term that could—and dare I say, *should*—be adopted by the world at large. It's so very useful! The term "stet" means "return to the original." It's used primarily by an author while reviewing his edited manuscript to indicate that he does not like a change his editor has made. Since the advent of electronic editing, authors can simply delete suggestions they don't want to take. But back when I entered the book business—and over the many decades prior—manuscripts were edited and reviewed by pencil or pen. If you didn't like a suggestion your editor made, you'd simply write "STET" next to it (with greater or lesser aggravation indicated by the size of the letters). This told the typesetter to ignore the editor's handiwork and return the sentence to its previous state. Now, wouldn't it be useful to tell your teenager to stet her bedroom? Or to be able to stet the kitchen after Thanksgiving dinner? I don't know about you, but I think it's time to bring this term into everyday use.

The Acquisitions Process Demystified

One of the main complaints you'll hear from authors in the process of submitting their work is how long it takes before they receive any sort of reply from the publishing house. While some book folks are quick responders, more often it takes weeks or even months to hear back. Why on earth would it take so long? To answer that question, it helps to understand the process that goes on between the time you submit your work and the time you receive an

offer (or a rejection, but let's not go there).

The first step in the process is for your literary agent to pitch your project to editors. This pitch may happen by phone or e-mail, and it happens before your work is submitted. If the editor responds favorably, your agent will send over your materials: a full manuscript if you're writing fiction, children's, or in some cases, memoir; a book proposal if you're writing anything else. These materials taken collectively are considered the "submission."

Depending on the publishing company, the editor's preferences, and the editor's schedule, submissions may be given a first look by one of several people. It may be the editor to whom the agent sent the submission. At bigger houses this editor may be the person who will do the editorial work on the book. At smaller houses this may be the editorial director or someone called an acquisitions editor, whose only role is to bring in submissions and negotiate deals—at which point he passes the project over to content editors to do the actual developmental and line-editing work. Often the first set of eyes on the manuscript belongs to an editorial assistant. Reading new submissions—and offering a first-look impression—is one of the more dignified tasks an editorial assistant gets to do. Any obvious no's (those submissions that don't have the qualities I'll discuss below, and thus feel like an unlikely match for the house) are sent back right away, while any proposals deemed promising will be passed to an editor for review.

It's helpful to understand the questions a prospective editor is asking herself when she gives your work a first look. Will the topic stand out on a crowded bookshelf? Does it have a built-in audience just waiting for the book to be published? Is the writing sophisticated, professional, and a joy to read? Does the book educate or delight its reader? Is the topic one the house has recently published with great success? On the other hand, is it *too* similar to a book the house already has on its list?

If the editor starts to feel like the book is a good prospect, the next step is to present it at the editorial meeting. Most companies hold "ed meeting" on Monday mornings, sometimes Tuesdays. This gives editors the chance to read the week's incoming submissions over the weekend and present them while they are still top of mind. (The reading of submissions rarely happens at one's desk during the workday; this and other editorial tasks tend to happen on evenings and weekends.) If the editor likes what she's reading, she'll make some notes about how to communicate the selling points of the book in just a couple of sentences. If that sounds familiar, you've been paying attention! What a prospective editor is looking for when she reads your manuscript is *a well-formed hook*, encapsulating the best of the book in the smallest number of words. Ideally her pitch will be so engaging that the rest of the editorial

team will respond with enthusiasm and even offer to give second reads. If the submission seems like it's going to be "hot," these reads will happen that day or overnight. If it's *really* hot, and the editor-in-chief is behind the idea of acquiring it, the editor will start putting together an offer right away.

Clearing the "Acqs" Bar

Publishers choose books by putting them through an acquisition process, often referred to simply as acqs (pronounced "acks"). Acqs requires multiple readers across multiple departments to read and get behind a manuscript or proposal. What all these readers have in common is having made their careers in the book business. Because of their experience publishing, marketing, promoting, and selling books, these folks have a refined understanding of what makes a book work in the marketplace. Their single-minded priority is to choose books that are going to sell well for the company. For a book to make it through this rigorous process, it must rise above the crowd in a major way. We're not talking *pretty good*, we're not talking *very interesting*, we're talking *the best of the best*. Which is, of course, an entirely subjective assessment. For this reason it's very hard to predict whether a book will clear this bar, even for someone who's sat in acqs meetings over many years. So it's no wonder new authors see the publishing process as a black box!

Within the walls of a publishing company, it takes a village to put your offer together. There needs to be input from the editorial director, the sales director, the marketing director, and even the publisher. A side-eye from any one of these bigwigs can scrap the whole deal. For even if the editorial director is in love with your book, it does nobody any good unless the sales director believes they'll be able to sell a lot of copies. In fact, the sales department is often the deciding vote in acqs decisions. They provide projected first-, second-, and sometimes third-year sales figures that get plugged into a spreadsheet—the profit and loss statement, or P&L. While I imagine the rare deal goes through here or there without it, a P&L gets run for the vast majority of books that are published traditionally. And once it's run, it's there forever. In fact, many companies later hold what are called postmortem meetings, often somber assemblies where the acqs team reviews the original P&Ls for a season next to the actual sales figures. This allows them to compare how well they *thought* the book was going to do with how well it *actually* did.

Once the decision has been made to "offer" on the book, the next step is to decide *how much* to offer. The financial side of a book offer consists of two parts: the royalty rate and the advance. The *royalty rate* is the percentage of the cover price (or at smaller houses, the percentage of net proceeds) that the publisher will pay you for each copy sold. The *advance* is kind of like a loan

the publishing company makes against expected future sales. They give you money up front, and then it's your job to earn that much money back in royalties. While these days big books can generate seriously overinflated advances, the idea is that a publisher pays you an advance equal to the royalties they expect you to earn in the first year. If everything works out as it's supposed to, you get money up front and then you start seeing royalty checks at the beginning of the second year of sales.

A Primer on Advances and Royalties

At bigger companies the royalty rate is based on the cover price of the book—often 10 to 15 percent of the price that's printed on the inside flap of a hardcover. Smaller companies tend to base royalties on net proceeds, meaning you'll receive 10 to 15 percent of whatever the publisher received for the book—i.e., 10 to 15 percent of the wholesale price, which is roughly half the price printed on the cover. For example, say your publisher lists your book at $20 and you have a 15 percent royalty. At a bigger house, you'll get $3 per book sold, irrespective of any discount the publisher gave to the bookseller. At a smaller house, your royalty will be tied to the actual return the publisher gets on each copy sold. If they sell copies to Amazon at a 45-percent discount, you'll only see $1.35 per copy. The smaller houses publish fewer books, so their margins are generally smaller on each book—meaning yours are too.

So what kind of royalties should you expect to see? Say a publisher offered you a $10,000 advance with a cover price royalty of 10 percent, and they were pricing your book at $20. That means for each copy of the book sold, you would earn $2. As the book made its way into the hands of readers everywhere, the publisher would keep track of how many copies were selling. On the first 5,000 copies, you would not receive any additional royalties, because that $10,000 advance is equivalent to $2 per copy for the first 5,000 sold. But once the 5,001st book is sold, you'd start receiving $2 per book. These royalties would come to you as a either a quarterly or a semiannual payment, depending on the publisher.

These days the big publishers have shifted to more of a gambling model. They pay a *lot* of money for a few books, betting that a couple of them will "make it big" and pay for the ones that did not. Sadly for the authors (and the editors who put their hearts and souls into the creation of the books), the majority of books published on this model will garner disappointing sales, never reaching the point of earning out their too-optimistic advances. So receiving substantive royalties is generally an indication that you either (a) got paid a modest advance or (b) your book won the publishing lottery (i.e., became a genuine success).

The Real Deal with "Bestsellers"

The label "best-selling author" is among the highest honors to which new authors aspire. But these days, with all the self-promotion and personal branding going on, the meaning of this term has become unclear at best—and completely lost, at worst. Within the traditional U.S. publishing biz, the term "bestseller" is used only sparingly. It is a true honor conferred upon a rare few, as it means something very specific. Take a look at the books published by the big five houses and you'll see that the word "bestseller" almost never appears on its own; it's always accompanied by the *type* of bestseller it is. Ultimately there are only two circumstances where traditional U.S. publishers will print "bestseller" on the cover of a book:

#1: The book hit a major national bestseller list. In this case it will be denoted as a "*New York Times* bestseller," a "*Wall Street Journal* bestseller," or a "*USA Today* bestseller." This means the book appeared on the online or hard copy version of one of these lists. It only needs to hit the list for one week, and it could hit *anywhere* on that list and still be considered a legit bestseller. While there is much (irritated) discussion among publishing folks about the mysterious and subjective methodology that grants a book access to these lists, they remain a goal for most traditionally published authors.

#2: The book hit a bestseller list in more than one regional newspaper. For example, if a book were to hit the *Washington Post* bestseller list and the *San Francisco Chronicle* bestseller list, it may be branded a "national bestseller." Other newspapers that still print regional lists include the *Denver Post* and *Los Angeles Times*. Any two or more of these combined would earn a book the "national bestseller" credential.

Outside the mainstream industry, it's a different story. The term "bestseller" gets thrown around with no foundation or standards applied. It's not uncommon to see authors label their book a "bestseller" in their sales copy before the book has even been published! Others consider themselves to have legit "bestseller" status because one day last June, someone sent them a screenshot of their Amazon rankings and they were at #3 in a subcategory of a subcategory of a subcategory (e.g.,

> "Self-Help > Relationships > Co-dependency" or "Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Happiness"). Thing is, all you have to do is sell a handful of copies on the same day in one of these subcategories in order to pop up in the top 10. Unless you're number one in an upper-level Amazon category for weeks at a time, Amazon rankings are in no way an indication of impressive sales.
>
> While I am all for tooting one's own horn when horn tooting is justified, I personally trend more old-school when it comes to the use of this term. My strong suggestion is to avoid the term "bestseller" or "best-selling author" unless one of the above industry-level standards has been met. Alternatively, *qualify* the term with actual facts about what kind of bestseller it is. For example, calling it an "Amazon category bestseller" would be perfectly appropriate for someone who's hit number one in the "Self-Help > Relationships > Co-dependency" category on Amazon. Labeling the book an "Ingram Spark bestseller" or "Balboa Press bestseller" is absolutely kosher if you've landed among the top 10 most popular books from your self-publisher in a given week.

The Traditional Publishing Timeline

Most first-time writers assume that once they finish their draft manuscript, they'll have a beautiful book in their hands within a matter of weeks—maybe a month or two. But if you're aiming for publication with a traditional house, you can expect to wait a good 9 to 18 months from the time you deliver until your book hits shelves. Why on earth should it take so long? If you ask a publishing pro, their answer will likely be something like, "Because it takes that long to set up the book well for publication." But what does it mean to get a book "set up well"? Allow me to explain. Here's a detailed timeline outlining what you can expect in the publication process. While this timeline won't fit every single publishing company, you can think of it as a good snapshot of a typical publication process.

12 to 18 months prior to publication: Editorial team is "filling the list." This means the editors are buying books and slotting them into the publication schedule. Most houses publish on a three-season cycle: winter (January–April), summer (May–August), and fall (September–December). All the books for a given season are launched by the in-house sales team at the same time. You may deliver in what seems like plenty of time for publication next summer, but if the summer list is already full—or if you missed the summer sales launch (even just by a few days)—you'll be slotted for the fall.

9 to 12 months prior to publication: Book is "launched" to marketing, sales, and publicity. Even if the book isn't yet written, a launch meeting will be scheduled where all the books for a given season are presented to the marketing, sales, and publicity teams for the first time. Before this meeting the title and subtitle will be finalized; the cover will be designed; and descriptive copy will be written. All of this will be summarized by the editor in a document called a fact sheet. This one-page document contains all the information the sales team will need to know in order to begin pitching your book to booksellers far and wide.

9 months prior to publication: Manuscript delivery! You send your baby to your editor. You hope you'll hear back from him right-freaking-away. Alas, it's far more likely that you'll end up waiting for him to reply. And waiting … and waiting. Take it from someone who's been there: your editor is feeling *terrible* that he hasn't replied. But he is also up to his ears in manuscripts needing editing—and it's a triage situation. It's first come, first served around here! He will truly get to it the minute he can.

8 months prior to publication: Editorial feedback arrives. We'll give your editor the benefit of the doubt, and say she's going to take just four weeks to deliver feedback. (Results may vary.) You receive a developmental editorial letter, covering global issues and requesting revisions. Or perhaps she has done a combo dev edit and line edit, covering both the big picture and the line-by-line work she would like to see. Either way, she'll now give you a far too short period of time—relative to how long it took her to deliver her editorial feedback—to complete your revisions. Once you turn the manuscript around to her, she will read it again and may offer a second round of content editing. (Her turnaround will be faster this time, because the managing editor is breathing down her neck to get the book into production.) You'll get about three and a half seconds to complete your revisions on this round. But you'll do it, and your editor will approve it, and your baby will move on to production!

6 to 7 months prior to publication: The book goes into production. Huzzah! For the author the hard work is now complete. In this stage the book will be "transmitted"—handed over from the editorial team to the managing editorial and production team—and it will enter the technical editing stages. The first thing you'll get from production will be a strangely marked-up manuscript: the copyedit. You'll be responsible for reviewing this manuscript, accepting or rejecting the copy editor's changes, and making any final additions or deletions in the text. Once you send it back, you will no longer be allowed to make significant changes to your book. Around this time you'll also receive sample page layouts so you can approve the interior design.

6 months prior to publication: Catalogs arrive and the sales team "sells the book in"! The term "selling a book in" refers to the sales team taking the seasonal catalog, along with additional materials like cover design and sample content, to the booksellers. Contrary to what many new authors think, getting your book into bookstores everywhere doesn't happen automatically. The salesperson for each account—including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and the major book distributors, Ingram and Baker & Taylor—meets with the buyers each season and does his best to sell them on the merits of your work. The goal is to get the bookseller to take a "big position" on your book. This might mean ordering 1,000 copies or it might mean ordering 20,000 copies—it depends on the size of the bookseller, the size of the publisher, and the sales expectations everyone has for the book. When a publisher says no to "crashing" your book onto a particular season's list in a shorter time frame than usual, it's because the book will not be cataloged and sold into the booksellers on schedule. In 99 percent of cases, it's in the book's best interest—and thus, the best interest of the author—to publish on a schedule that will have the book set up well with the booksellers.

Around this time your P.R. team may also start pitching you to long-lead magazines (like *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Tricycle*, *Marie Claire*, *Good Housekeeping*, etc.) and TV shows (*Good Morning America*, *Today*, *CBS This Morning*, and of course, *SuperSoul Sunday*).

4 to 6 months prior to publication: The book is designed and proofread. Now that substantive edits are complete, your book is ready for typesetting! In days past this meant a human being would arrange the letters for each page on a printing press. In these days of desktop publishing, typesetting is as simple as cutting and pasting your words into the page layout format you've approved and then going over the book carefully to make sure the text looks beautiful on each page. Once the interior is designed, the typeset pages—a.k.a. proof pages or galley pages—will be sent to you and the proofreader simultaneously. As the proofer goes over your words with a fine-tooth comb, correcting typos and other errors, you will have your final chance to read the book before it goes to press. No major changes are allowed at this point, as they may cause the text to "reflow"—requiring the designer to make adjustments to each and every page that comes after the changes. (A big no-no for obvious reasons!) Many houses will continue to proofread for another two rounds before considering the book ready for printing. At this point you and your editor may begin sending the typeset pages to more well-known writers for cover endorsements. Cover proofs—the designed front, back, and spine of your book—will also be sent to you for approval during this period. The uncorrected proof pages may be turned into paperback-style "bound galleys," which are sent to reviewers in hopes of generating buzz for the book

even before it’s published.

3 months prior to publication: Files are sent to the printer! And there is much rejoicing at the publishing house. Your book is on its way!

2 to 4 weeks prior to publication: Early copies arrive. Early copies of the book arrive at the publishing house, and sometimes the “author copies” promised in your book contract will be sent directly to your house as well. Friends may start reporting seeing your book in bookstores or online, and you’ll hold your book in your very own hands for the first time. Ahhh!

Publication day: You made it! It took a long time, and a lot of hard work and nail-biting, but the day is finally here. Congratulations! I wish I could say that there will be fireworks and champagne, but generally pub day is a bit anticlimactic. In most cases books have been slowly creeping out onto bookshelves for weeks by now, and you’ve probably already started to hear good things from friends and followers who have started reading. Sadly enough, your publisher has moved on to new priorities by now, and it’s quite rare for even your editor to call you on your official pub day. (You’ve probably talked to her several times in the previous days and weeks, anyway.) But don’t let any of this get you down; remind yourself that the angels are singing your praises in heaven, and also that you’ve got work to do. Because now that the book is officially published, it’s time to sell it!

Chapter 11

PUBLISH YOURSELF

Today is truly one of the most amazing times in history to be alive. Cars run on electricity, international airplanes have Wi-Fi, and anybody—I mean anybody—can easily publish a quality book without needing anyone else's permission to do so. Especially for those of us who are working on transformational nonfiction, the vast array of self-publishing options means there's literally no excuse not to put your ever so helpful book out into the world. While you may decide to start by looking for a traditional publisher, you can enter that search with a measure of peace. For even if you don't receive an offer, there are still viable options for bringing your book to life on your own.

In a nutshell, self-publishing is the do-it-yourself version of getting a book out into the world. Everything a traditional house would do for you, you do for yourself. In exchange, there are a lot of benefits: You skip the often protracted experience of looking for an agent and then a publisher; you retain full creative control over your publication; you get a book into your hands in a fraction of the time it would take for a big house to publish you; and you earn 100 percent of the profits from each book sold. You also get to call yourself an indie author, which is so very chic. Sounds great, right? It is! And there's also a certain amount of fine print that it's important to understand. Along with total control, you assume total responsibility—including all the financial risk. You will be fronting significant costs, including editing (multiple rounds—remember Chapter 7?), cover design, interior design, copyediting, proofreading, purchasing your ISBN, and printing copies, all of which a traditional house would ordinarily take care of.

What you *don't* have to cover—not anymore, anyway—is the cost of printing thousands of books up front. In days gone by, the self-publishing author would need to order a significant number of books in order to bring the unit price down to something reasonable—resulting in a garage full of books she'd have to figure out how to sell. This is where digital print on demand (P.O.D.) publishing has changed the game. Whereas in the past your book had to be typeset and physically loaded onto a printing press—a laborious process that necessitated large print quantities—today a single book can be printed with the press of a button. Rather than ordering a pallet of several thousand books and figuring out how to warehouse and ship them, you can order 100 copies to start with and still have a reasonable per-copy cost.

Not only has self-publishing a book become easier and far more affordable, it's no longer seen as the death knell for an author's traditional publishing aspirations. On the contrary, when I was an editor at the big houses in New York, I went hunting for self-published books that were selling well. I would watch the Amazon top 100 and the regional bestseller lists. When a book by a publisher I'd never heard of popped up—even just for a day—I would investigate. Often these books were self-published by go-getter authors who had developed a raging fan base that had launched them onto whatever list I'd seen them on. In one case where I ended up acquiring the book, the author's platform consisted of regular appearances on a friend's popular radio show. Whenever my author-to-be went on the show, his self-published book zoomed to the top of the Amazon bestseller list. The day I saw it there, I went hunting for the book's author. It turned out he was living in London. He'd self-published the book through a small U.K. company and was shipping copies to the U.S. at great expense. He was thrilled that we wanted to "pick the book up"—i.e., buy the rights to publish our own version. Six months later our book hit the shelves. Thanks to the platform he'd developed and some timely P.R., the book landed on the *New York Times* bestseller list the week it published and stayed there for two months.

Many authors use a self-published book as the starting point for platform building. Having a book in hand offers a certain type of credibility. *You've written a whole* book *about the subject*, people think. *You must be an expert!* It gives you something to talk about with bloggers, podcast hosts, radio hosts, and other media outlets, and something to present to potential fans as a way for them to get to know you better. It also helps spread the word about who you are and the services you provide: great books get passed from friend to friend, and your reputation grows along the way. As long as you have the time and budget to edit and publish the book well, self-publishing can be a very promising launchpad for your services and your platform.

A Sampling of Famous Books That Were Originally Self-Published

Self-publishing your book doesn't mean tabling your dream of being published traditionally. If you write an outstanding book and generate great sales for it on your own, a traditional publisher will very likely be interested in picking it up at a later date. Check out these examples of books that were originally self-published and went on to be published by traditional presses. Note that these are just the bestsellers you've likely already heard about—there are thousands of more modest success stories out there.

The Celestine Prophecy by James Redfield

Embraced by the Light by Betty J. Eadie

50 Shades of Grey by E. L. James

Joy of Cooking by Irma S. Rombauer

Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman

Poor Richard's Almanack by Benjamin Franklin

A Time to Kill by John Grisham

You Can Heal Your Life by Louise Hay

When I Am an Old Woman, I Shall Wear Purple by Sandra Haldeman Martz

Two DIY Reality Checks

All this said, as you launch your self-publishing journey, there are two realities you should take into account. First among them is that self-publishing hasn't always had a stellar reputation. When I first entered the book business two decades ago, the term "self-publishing" hadn't yet come into vogue. As I mentioned earlier in the book, DIY publishers were unflatteringly referred to as "vanity presses." Hello, judgment! As if publishing through a traditional house were somehow an act of altruism. (After many years working with both traditionally and self-publishing authors, I can assure you that vanity flourishes in the former group just as much as, if not more than, the latter.) Although many within the traditional book business still turn their noses up at books that haven't made it through the eye of the industry needle, I'm here to tell you that consumers couldn't care less. If you write an awesome book, edit it well, use a professional

interior and cover designer, and have a platform from which to sell it, most readers won't have a clue you did it all yourself.

The second reality I need to convey is this: for most transformational nonfiction authors, publishing a book is going to be an expense rather than a moneymaker. For some authors, simply having their baby in print is worth the financial investment. If that's you, awesome. The inner transformation, personal growth, and sense of deep satisfaction that come with putting a book into the world can be worth every penny. That said, many of us want—and even *need*—to justify the expense of the publishing process with a financial return on investment. If this is you, I recommend you map out a revenue plan prior to jumping into self-publishing. In working with indie authors, I see two common book revenue models. The first is to use the book to generate customer leads for your main business—whether you're a coach, speaker, therapist, or healer. When you're running this model, your book becomes the ultimate business card; a thorough advertisement for the services you offer. In this way you can plan to give it to current or potential clients, use it to get in the media spotlight, and present it to potential speaking outlets as a symbol of your expertise. Word of mouth about your primary business is the end goal, with any book sale revenue as the icing on the cake. I've worked with many authors for whom this model has worked extremely well, with their book upleveling their business revenue immediately.

The second revenue model is for your book to become a cash generator itself. I'm not going to lie; this is a harder row to hoe. The issue is simple: books are a low-priced item, so you have to sell a whole-fricking-lot of them to make enough money to put food in your belly and a roof over your head. The key to rocking this route? You guessed it, ye olde author platform. The more people you've engaged in a meaningful conversation, whether online, via the media, or in your own hometown, the more books will get sold. If your book is truly page turning and game changing, word of mouth will spread and book sales will rise. Next thing you know, you may have a traditional publisher knocking on your door with a nice advance to discuss.

On Self-Publishing Well

Unfortunately this hard truth may go without saying: self-published books tend to be of overall lower quality than traditionally published books. This reality is the genesis of the bad reputation I mentioned above. Why should this be? Because in the interest of minimizing financial risk, many self-publishing authors cut corners traditional houses would never dream of cutting. For example, a typical price a traditional house might expect to spend to get a cover designed by a professional freelancer is somewhere around $2,500. This gets the house several design ideas and multiple iterations on the

chosen design so the cover comes out just right. This is the price range that industry-experienced designers charge. If you want your cover designed for a couple hundred bucks, you're going to get a cover of a *very* different quality. While perhaps not apparent to the author in the midst of the publishing process, this quality differential will be painfully obvious once the book is sitting on the shelf next to books with more professional designs.

Another way self-published books tend to suffer by comparison to traditionally published books is in the quality and amount of editing the book receives. Indie authors often don't want to foot the bill for the professional content editing (two rounds) and technical editing (three to five rounds) I discussed in Chapter 7. Some believe they don't need it; others believe that "a friend who loves to read" has sufficient expertise. Again, anyone who is used to reading traditionally published books will notice the difference. Here the differential shows up anywhere from distracting typos to an overall unsatisfying reading experience.

Content editing, cover design, interior design, technical editing, and professional copywriting are a significant investment. But if you're publishing your book with the hope of impressing potential clients, increasing your credibility, and promoting your business—and certainly if you want book sales to take off to such a degree that you can live off the residuals or catch the attention of a traditional publisher—these expenses are not only justified but should be considered mandatory. A failure to make a significant financial investment in your book before it publishes often means the book doesn't end up serving its intended purpose.

Have I scared you away? I sure hope not. Self-publishing can be personally empowering and professionally significant. So if you're ready and able to invest in your book—and if you understand the concept of platform building and are ready to dive in—then keep reading. There are multiple options for getting your book out there on your own, and I'll say a bit about each one in the next section.

Three Good Self-Publishing Options

As self-publishing grows more popular, many different services have popped up to help you get your book into print—both as a paper book and as an e-book. These services can be divided into three groups: do-it-yourself publishing; "assisted" or "hybrid" self-publishing; and one-on-one coaching or "shepherding" services. Each of these options has its opportunities and drawbacks, so allow me to share my thoughts on them in turn.

Do-It-Yourself Publishing

This is probably the most popular route today's independent authors take on the self-publishing journey. Why? Because it's easy (relatively speaking), inexpensive (relatively speaking), and fast (relatively speaking). Online services provide simple interfaces for uploading your book, book cover, identifying details, and descriptive copy. Next thing you know, your book is available for purchase as an e-book or a print-on-demand paper book. The upside of this approach includes low overhead costs and total author control, not to mention lightning-fast speed. Oddly enough, the downside to this process is that it's almost *too* easy. Because it's so simple to upload your book to these websites, many authors are tempted to do so immediately upon finishing writing the book. Absent the rigorous, multistep editorial process outlined in Chapter 7 and the engagement of a professional designer for both the interior and the cover, these books too often feel distinctly … *self-publishy*. Some authors don't care about this, and entire (financially robust) online businesses have been built upon the promise of helping you get your book up on Amazon in a matter of days or weeks, no editing or professional design needed. But as an editor myself, as well as a reader who expects and desires quality, such quick and dirty self-publishing models are an obvious *no*. If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing well. The upshot: DIY is an amazing option as long as the "it" you're doing yourself includes professional editing and design.

Key Points

- You get to choose the name of your publishing company, to be printed on the spine, title page, and copyright page.
- You'll need to purchase a unique 13-digit International Standard Book Number (ISBN) for each edition of your book (isbn.org).
- You are responsible for submitting your book for copyright registration (copyright.gov).
- The company you work with subtracts printing and distribution costs from the sales price of each book, but you get all the profits after that.

Examples: Amazon CreateSpace (www.createspace.com), IngramSpark (ingramspark.com)

"Assisted" or "Hybrid" Self-Publishing

This is the route to take if you want to DIY with a little help from the professionals. In this case you pay a company to undertake the technical aspects of the self-publishing process on your behalf. These are called hybrid

publishers because they are *kind of* like self-publishing but also *kind of* like traditional publishing. Like a self-publisher, most will accept any book you want to publish, with no curation process. Since you're the one paying all the up-front costs, they'll do what you want them to do. Depending on what level of service you purchase, they may offer some or all of the following: content editing, technical editing, cover design, interior design, copywriting help, printing, shipping, distribution—often only to digital retailers like Amazon and BN.com, but in some cases to brick-and-mortar stores as well—and even marketing and publicity services. (Note: As a rule I do not recommend buying marketing or publicity services from self-publishing companies, as they are expensive and rarely worth the cost. Better to spend your marketing dollars to build your author platform, as outlined in Chapter 8.) Here comes the hybrid part: Like traditional publishers, these publishers have all the above services in-house and will take some percentage of the selling price for each copy sold. That last bit is effectively the downside of assisted self-publishing. First you pay the up-front costs of getting your book into the world, and then you pay the publisher a little bit for each copy you sell. But the upside may be worth the financial sacrifice. For authors who are not looking to make a living off their book and who are unlikely to follow through on the publishing process without a lot of help, the ease of working with a hybrid publisher may be just what the book doctor ordered.

Key Points

- The hybrid publisher becomes the official publisher of the book, with their name listed on the copyright page and with online retailers, and in some cases printing their colophon (logo) on the spine and title page.
- The publisher will provide ISBNs for each edition.
- The publisher will often submit the book for copyright on your behalf.
- You earn a set royalty from the company on each copy sold, and they keep some of the profits above and beyond the costs of printing and distribution.

Examples: Book Baby (bookbaby.com), Balboa Press (balboapress.com)

Self-Publishing Coaches or "Shepherds"

I've always liked the term "self-publishing shepherd," maybe because it sounds so … loving. And it is: you're hiring an independent consultant to love you—and guide you—all the way through the self-publishing process.

This helpful human has (hopefully) been around the block more than a few times and has developed relationships with certain service providers. These service providers may include content editors, interior designers, cover designers, technical editors, and of course printers. Your coach will present you with his favorite publication pathway and then walk you through it for a flat fee or an hourly rate.

Key Points

- You are still your own publisher and get to choose the name of your publishing company.
- The process is the same as the DIY model above, only you have guidance each step of the way.
- Your coach or shepherd will guide you through everything you need to do to self-publish your book, including the technical details like registering for copyright, applying for ISBNs, and including a UPC (bar code) on the back cover.

Examples: Sheridan McCarthy (larkonline.net), kn literary arts (knliterary.com)

Regardless of which direction you choose for your self-publishing adventure, there are a few important components you'll need to take into consideration. These are your jacket design, cover copy, and interior design—each of which deserves deep thought and, in my opinion, professional assistance.

You Can Judge a Book by Its Cover

When I was in college, I took a basic economics seminar. On the first day of class, our professor asked who in the class was from the smallest town. A young man from a (very) small town in Idaho raised his hand. The professor then asked him how many restaurants there were in his hometown, and the student said two. After confirming that both restaurants were on Main Street, she went around the table and asked each of us to blindly guess *where* the restaurants were located in relationship to one another. Some students said they were probably two or four or six blocks apart; others ventured that they were on opposite ends of town. Then the professor threw her own guess into the mix. "My guess," she said, "is that they are right next door to each other." The young man's eyes opened wide. "How did you know that?" he asked. The professor went on to explain that if one restaurant thrives in a particular location in town, it's statistically likely that a second one will thrive there as well. The farther apart the restaurants get, the less likely that both of them

will be in business very long. So if the first restaurant was thriving, it would be smart for the second restaurateur to choose a spot right next door.

What does freshman economics have to do with book cover design? Everything, as it turns out. Many authors I encounter believe the key to a good book cover is to stand out from the crowd. The more different and original their cover, they reason, the more likely it is to catch readers' attention. But just like a restaurant on the opposite end of town is a bad idea, so too is making your cover super original. The more closely your cover fits in with covers that are already working in the marketplace, the more likely your book is to land among those successful tomes. When you publish with a traditional house, you can assume your art team already understands this principle. They are not going to venture too far afield with the designs they offer. Self-publishing is a different story. Most self-published authors are first-time authors, and few if any have spent years studying book cover design. These authors are not informed by dozens and dozens of failures and successes; they haven't watched a really wonderful book wither on the vine from a too-original cover design that didn't land with readers. So as counterintuitive as it may sound, a top goal of a self-publishing author ought to be selecting a cover design that is indistinguishable from its traditionally published shelf-mates.

In other words, when designing your cover, it's best to march to the beat of traditional publishing's drum. As I mentioned earlier, make sure your cover is designed by a *professional book designer*. Hiring a pro is going to cost you more than getting the design done by a college student posting on Craigslist, but what you'll get in exchange is a cover by someone who creates book covers for a living. This means the designer has a deep understanding of what makes book design different from, say, billboard design. She's also likely to be familiar with trends that are working in today's market. She will be able to hear what genre you're writing in and a summary of your book's content and know immediately what norms tend to work best for your type of book. She will know whether the book should have a photograph or illustration on the cover, or whether it should be more of a bold, all-type treatment. (She'll also push back if you request your own photo be on the front cover of the book—which all industry folks know is a bad idea unless you're already famous.) Moreover, a professional designer will have a deep understanding of the elements required on a book jacket, how to put the spine together and add the publisher's colophon (logo), and what sales-related information to include on the back (category listing, price, UPC, ISBN, etc.).

Whether you're going with a real pro or risking a cheaper option, here are a few key qualities I would encourage you to keep in mind:

Make sure it works online. Your cover design needs to look good both at book size and also at the thumbnail size that will be posted with online booksellers like Amazon.com and BN.com. Title fonts need to be large enough to be legible when shrunk down to the size of a postage stamp, and it's best not to have an all-white cover that will blend into the surrounding page. (If your design sensibilities do lean toward the postmodern all white, make sure your designer includes a small, dark border around the online file to distinguish the edge of the cover from the background on the webpage.)

Choose modern fonts. One of the dead giveaways of a self-designed cover is the use of wacky fonts from the 90s. Even if you don't take my advice about hiring a book design pro, please, at the very least, ask a working graphic designer for some modern font choices. No designer worth his salt would be caught dead putting Comic Sans, Curlz, or Chalkboard on the cover of a book (to name only the bad fonts that start with "C"). If I see these fonts on your self-published cover, I *will* come find you.

Follow Chip Kidd's first rule of design. There is perhaps only one truly famous book designer in the world today. His name is Chip Kidd, and he's been a designer at Alfred A. Knopf for over 30 years. In his funny and highly educational TED Talk, "Designing Books Is No Laughing Matter. OK, It Is," Kidd tells the story of his first day of graphic design school at Princeton. One of his professors drew a picture of an apple on the chalkboard and then wrote the word "apple" underneath it. The professor went on to explain that good design permits using *either* the picture of the apple *or* the word "apple," but never both. So when you talk to your designer about the cover for your book *A Spiritual Guide to Training Circus Animals*, please do not ask her to include a cartoon version of yourself wearing yoga pants in a circus tent with lions and tigers meditating all around you. Trust your readers to use their imaginations at least a little bit, and opt for subtlety, nuance, and (in many, if not most cases), an all-type cover.

For some of my favorite resources for finding a cover designer—including one great suggestion if you're working on a budget—check out the Resources section in the back of the book.

The Quest for Endorsements

Perhaps because these words of praise are displayed on the outside of the book itself, many new authors get—in my opinion—a bit overly focused on who is going to say nice things on their book jacket. From the perspective of a book editor, cover blurbs are good to have but not an absolute necessity. Endorsements and forewords that really cause a stir—i.e., noticeably improve book sales—are those that come from authors who have much bigger platforms and wider name recognition than lil old you. The idea is that you might be able to ride on their coattails and woo readers from their tribe into buying your book.

Thanks to the above, the tippy-top most-bestest endorsements you can get come from authors in your genre (for you, that's most likely transformational nonfiction) who've had very recent bestsellers. We're talking authors with household, "above-the-marquee" names who have been on the *New York Times* or other national bestseller lists in the last two to four years. As of this writing, we're talking authors like Brené Brown, Max Lucado, Gabrielle Bernstein, Marie Kondo, Iyanla Vanzant, Jen Hatmaker, Tim Ferriss, Elizabeth Gilbert, Michael A. Singer, H.H. the Dalai Lama, Glennon Doyle, and Jen Sincero. This is obviously a very high bar to clear. These authors have more endorsement requests coming at them than planes landing at JFK. For this reason high-level blurbs are mostly available to those who have strong personal connections to the authors. What makes these endorsements most valuable is the weight they carry for the sales team at your publisher. When the publisher's sales rep is sitting across from the buyer at B&N, he's looking for any piece of information that will have said buyer sit up and take notice. If your sales rep can say, "Oh, and by the way, we've got a quote from Tony Robbins for this book," it can mean the difference between the bookstore ordering 1,000 copies and ordering 2,500 copies. (A big difference in the world of bookselling.)

What if you don't have gold-star access to best-selling authors? The next best group to target with endorsement requests is people with obvious expertise in your category. The idea is that their demonstrated expertise in the area you're writing about will transfer—in the minds of booksellers and,

later, book buyers—over to you. If you're writing about your body-focused psychotherapy practice, you might aim for a well-respected author like Peter Levine, who is a groundbreaking leader in that field. If you are writing about energy healing, you might solicit some words from Donna Eden or Judith Orloff. While possibly still overwhelmed by endorsement requests, folks who have devoted their lives to the same work you're doing may be so excited by your contribution to the field that they agree to give you a blurb without knowing you personally.

What about the people you *do* know, who have some level of relevant notoriety—if not national fame? There is absolutely no harm in including such blurbs. That said, they rarely result in higher book sales, so it's not necessary to chase them down unless they are easily acquired. Also, I highly recommend you focus on people who have relevant, easily understood credentials next to their names. If you're writing about medical intuition, aim for quotes from M.D.s who love your work. If you're writing about psychology, see if you can entice a few Ph.D.s to give you some words of praise. If your book is about improving performance in the workplace, it won't hurt to have a couple C.E.O.s cheering you on. Readers may not recognize their names, but thanks to those credentials, they will recognize that these folks have relevant expertise.

A few more rules of thumb as you begin your endorsement journey:

Research the target author's own connections—and use them. Most literary agents and publishers will forward endorsement requests over to their authors on your behalf. Send a request and an electronic version of your book via e-mail if you can find an address on the agent's website. If you're sending to a publisher, direct your request to the publicity or P.R. department. If you are rocking it old-school and using snail mail, include a one-page letter and a printed copy of your book—and nothing else. (I speak from experience when I say that throwing a bunch of glitter in the envelope will not endear you to anyone in this process.)

Make use of the author's website or social media. These days you may have more luck sending a brief query letter (a pared-down version of the letter outlined on How to Wow a

Potential Agent) via the contact form on the author's website. You can be fairly sure this will be seen by someone who is in everyday contact with the author, if not the author herself. Same goes for sending a direct message (DM) to her Twitter account or Facebook fan page.

Start as early as you can. As soon as you have a reasonably readable manuscript, start drawing up a list of endorsement requests you'd like to make. Your book's jacket should be coming together as early as six months prior to publication; you'll want any really outstanding quotes to be front and center!

Keep your endorsements to people whose work or fame is relevant to your particular book topic. If you happen to have a connection to the vice president of a major corporation—but your book is about parenting and has nothing to do with said V.P.'s area of expertise—it's best not to solicit that particular blurb. It won't help sales, and it may end up confusing readers.

The Art of Interior Design

Book design doesn't end with the front cover of the book. Open up three different books on your bookshelf and you'll see that none of them looks exactly alike on the inside. Each book will likely have a unique font for the chapter titles, which may tie in with the fonts that were chosen for the book's cover. A second font is most likely used for the body text—most often a *serif* font (one that has small, decorative lines attached to the end of a stroke on each letter, such as Times New Roman or Book Antiqua). Headings, on the other hand, often come in *sans serif* fonts (those with clean lines and none of the serif bells and whistles, such as Helvetica or Century Gothic). Each interior design will have different *kerning* (relative tightness or looseness of the letter spacing) and you may notice slight differences in *leading* (amount of space between the lines). Some interior designs will have gutters (the margin between the text and the spine edge of each page) that are wider or narrower. The location of the page numbers and running heads (the chapter title, or title of the book, printed on each page) may also vary. You may even see small design elements—a.k.a. dingbats—marking the start of a chapter or new section of text.

Given how much time your reader is going to spend looking at these pages, you can imagine that each of these elements will have quite a bit of impact on his experience. As you look through books on your shelf, notice whether a

given design leans toward the spacious and airy or if it's denser and more academic in feel. Which interior designs are you drawn toward and what do you notice about them? Do any design choices interfere with your ability to lose yourself in the reading? As important as a book cover is, the truth is that your readers are going to be even more up close and personal with the interior design. What this means is that it's important to choose a design with the reader in mind. Just in case you weren't sick of me saying it, I recommend working with a professional book designer to develop the right interior design for your book. Either way, make sure whoever is typesetting your book understands the following rules of good interior design:

Do use classic fonts. Choose common, nondistracting, easily readable typefaces—and not too many of them. Two is most common—one for the body text, and another for headings. Three max, if you want a different font for subheadings. But no more than three!

Do use normal margins. Go with standard margins lest the book look like your little brother designed it for you.

Do use indented paragraphs. Want to know a major self-publishing pet peeve of mine? Leaving a blank line between paragraphs instead of simply indenting. (Insert Kelly doing a silent scream.) This is a mistake newbie authors are making more and more often, I suspect because full line breaks are the norm on the web. But printed books are a different medium, and if you ever want your book to appear in paper form, make sure you use indented paragraphs that commence on the line immediately following the previous paragraph—no blank space in between. (Anything else is a neon sign for AMATEUR.)

Do use conventional leading. Too much—or too little—space between the lines is not a good thing.

Do start chapters on new rights. Always start a chapter on a "new right," meaning the right-hand page.

Do correct widows and orphans. These are industry terms for similar issues: when a single word is left hanging on a line all by itself. While not technically a problem when it comes to reading comprehension, leaving a word (or worse, the latter half of a hyphenated word) all by itself on the last line of a paragraph or the first line of the next page is just … not … purty.

Do eliminate stacked words. You'd be surprised how often *the same* word or phrase will appear twice in *the same* sentence. When the evil design stars align, such phrases end up on two different lines, stacked exactly on top of one another. *Then the sun goes dark and the world ends.* So ask your designer to make that unhappen, k?

Do choose one form of emphasis and go with it. Sometimes we *really*, **really**, *REALLY*, REALLY want a word or phrase to stand out on the page. Choose one way to make this happen and then stick to it. As you may have noticed, throughout this book I've chosen to use *italics* for emphasis and **boldface** for headings. I have never used more than one at the same time. ***You're welcome.***

A Few Words about Cover Copy

There is a moment in every book publishing season when cover copy is due. Back in my editorial days, the inevitable reminder e-mail would be enough to send me into a four-stage process of denial, panic, resentment, and finally (often several days after the deadline) acceptance. It's not that I didn't like writing, and it's not that I didn't love the books on my list. It was just so much *pressure*. Cover copy is something that needs to be *really good*. You can't just phone it in; you gotta bring the firepower to each and every word. So there was always a subconscious fear that I would flub the task, consigning my beloved books to a shortened shelf life.

It's no exaggeration to say that cover copy is often the difference between someone buying a book and, well, not. It needs to capture the essence of the book as well as the reader's attention. For a primer on how to accomplish this, may I suggest rereading Chapter 3. For we've come to another place where that hook you so carefully crafted may see the light of day. In fact, you can think of cover copy as a 150- to 200-word version of your hook. When it comes to transformational nonfiction, this is the place where you're going to gently remind your readers of the problem they're struggling with, assure them that solutions exist, and give an overview of the benefits they can expect to find between the covers of the book in front of them. If you're writing memoir, this is where you introduce your protagonist (you), give a taste of the moment or experience that launched you onto your heroine's journey, and strategically position the reader at the entrance to a cave of wonders whose secrets can only be discovered by reading the book itself.

The key is to keep the copy tight and focused, giving only high-level hints about what the reader will find in the pages that follow. A strategically chosen "dire statistic" is a common way to begin prescriptive nonfiction copy; memoir copy often starts with a compelling line or two from the early pages of the book. There is also often a bulleted list involved, sometimes starting with "This book is required reading if you … " or "Readers will discover how to … " Or the list may be a set of strategically chosen questions aimed at the reader's pain point: "Is there something missing from your love life?" "Are you ready to turn your career around?" The implication is that if you say yes to these questions, then you've come to the right place.

Once again, if you have the budget to hire a marketing copywriter to help you with your descriptive copy, by all means take that route. (Just make sure you're hiring someone who has written book cover copy many times before.) But regardless of whether you draft your copy alone or with help, the best advice I can give you is to take another field trip to your local bookstore. Pull books like yours off the shelf and read their copy. Take notes on what works for you—and what doesn't. Which descriptions grab you, and why? Which leave you cold? What elements are included—a gripping headline at the top? An enticing endorsement from an early reader? A list of benefits? Direct quotes from the book? Educating yourself on what's out there will provide you with a firm foundation when you pick up your own pen and start writing.

It's the Little Things

When it comes to the nuts and bolts of DIY publishing, there are many details to consider—far more than I can cover in this chapter. Just to give you an idea, here are a few of the things you'll need to handle:

- Choosing a trim size for your book
- Selecting the appropriate front cover, spine, and back cover design specifications
- Gathering copyright information and creating a copyright page
- Including medical or mental health disclaimers as needed
- Obtaining permission for excerpts (you'll need written permission to reprint more than two lines of poetry, more than 400 words of prose, and any amount of song lyrics—even a single line!)
- Purchasing ISBNs for each edition
- Creating an ASIN if you plan to publish on Amazon Kindle
- Naming your publishing company and selecting a colophon (logo) for the spine
- Choosing the appropriate BISAC subject headings and printing them on the back cover or inside flap of the book jacket
- Formatting endnotes and creating an index, if desired

One of my favorite books to walk you through the DIY self-publishing process is *The Fine Print of Self-Publishing* by Mark Levine. Check it out for a full rundown on all the things you'll need to know and do.

Talking about self-publishing is helpful on more than one level. In addition to presenting useful information, I find that contemplating the DIY journey separates the committed authors from the dabblers, so to speak. Perhaps because it's no small feat—and no simple process—to create your own book

from scratch, the thought of self-publishing presents a clarifying filter for the author-to-be: *Is my commitment to having this book in the world sufficient to carry me through the hard work and expense of doing it myself?* If after reading this chapter, the answer is no, fabulous! What a good piece of information to have before you get any farther down the road. Time to press PAUSE on the book process, at least for now, and reassess where you're putting your precious resources of time and attention.

But if, on the other hand, the answer is yes, please know that speaks to more than just your interest in publishing this book. It means you are truly, deeply, bravely ready to become an author. If this is you, bless you. I hope that after reading this book, you have everything you need to set sail. May the wind be at your back, may the muse be by your side, and may inspiration flow through your fingertips into a book that will change your readers' lives—and our world—for the better.

EPILOGUE: YOUR BOOK WILL CHANGE THE WORLD

I thought about writing this book for years. I'm not sure why I started writing it when I did; it was as if a lightbulb went off and I just knew, *Now is the time*. But there were many rivers and bridges to cross in the writing, and many dragons to slay (mostly in my own mind). I tell you this because I want you to understand that if you're having a hard time getting started, you are not alone. If you are stalled somewhere in the middle of the writing process, you are not alone. If you have written an entire draft and can't seem to get it into the publishing pipeline, you are not alone.

I also want to tell you a secret. As important as your book is, the journey of writing is where the treasure lies. It's no coincidence that birthing metaphors abound in the book business; writing a book is in many ways a similar creative process to having a child. Your book will take time to gestate. There may be some scares along the way. And labor pains are to be expected as the book emerges from your heart, mind, and spirit and makes its way into the world. *Each of these stages is meant to teach you something.* Something about yourself, about your readers, and about your purpose in this lifetime.

Not everybody wants to write a book. And even among those who *do* hear the call, *very few follow it.* If you're reading these words—if you've made it through this entire book—you are one of the chosen few.

So listen. Pay attention. Ask questions. What is Life teaching you through the process of writing this book? Where does this creative impulse come from anyway? What groundbreaking ideas will be crystallized on the page and, through your hard work, be unleashed for the benefit of all beings?

If there is nothing else I leave you with, let it be this: If you are reading this, you *are* a writer. Your story or message *is* important. It's yours to carry for all of us; you're the chosen one. When you breathe life into it, word after word, page after page, day after day, you *are* changing the world.

And if there's anything at all that you need, there's a whole world of book people out here ready to help you. You know where we are.

Love + Books,
Kelly

APPENDIX A

Sample Book Outline:

Excerpt from the Original Outline for Nancy Levin's book

Jump ... and Your Life Will Appear

Book Outline for
Jump … and Your Life Will Appear:
An Inch-by-Inch Guide to Making a Major Change
by Nancy Levin
7/25/2013

Introduction [draft underway]

1. Story: Coming home to now-ex-husband having read my journals
2. "What I had to do was *jump*"

    a. What does it mean to jump?
    b. Why is it so hard?

3. What this book will offer/provide (hoped-for benefits to reader)

    a. The first time I went through this process was when I was leaving my marriage. But it applies to leaving anything—in hopes of something better.

4. How to use this book

    a. Outline of step-by-step process

5. Benediction to reader

Chapter One: Admitting What You Already Know

1. Opening Story: Marriage/Affair

    a. Fairy tale/outward story of Nancy and ex (1 paragraph)
    b. Real story, behind closed doors (1 paragraph)

        i. Couldn’t be who I was—he was always trying to get me to be who he wanted me to be
        ii. I felt like I had to live up to his ideal of who I should be

    c. I didn’t admit what I already knew

        i. My marriage was not a good fit for me
        ii. It had taken so much to convince everyone around me that he was the man for me—I was unwilling to be wrong
            1. Dad saying I could still get out of the marriage at the wedding and me going through with it
        iii. As a result, that truth came out sideways in the form of an affair
        iv. I had an affair with someone who loved me for who I was
        v. I didn’t have to manage my actions/reactions around him
        vi. I wanted to be loved for who I was and not for who my husband was always trying to get me to be
        vii. I didn’t want to abandon my husband
        viii. I didn’t want to deal with judgment from others

2. Clearly name the chapter step: Admitting What You Already Know

    a. This is the first step in the process toward making sustainable change

3. Explain the step

    a. Getting clear on what we want to change is the first step—so we must admit to ourselves what we already know
    b. What does it mean to “admit” something? Are you admitting this to another person or just yourself?
    c. Do you need to articulate it in some way—write it down? Or can you just admit it in your mind? Do you have to go searching for it, or does such an admission just “come to you”?
    d. Telling the truth to yourself—why is this so hard?
    e. How do you know what you already know? How do you discover what you’re not willing to look at?

        i. What's the thing you wouldn't tell your best friend?
        ii. What would you hide on a reality TV show?

4. Subpoint #1: Stories We Tell Ourselves

    a. What is a story?

        i. A string of thoughts put together
        ii. Are all stories true? Any?

    b. Internal stories vs. external stories—why do we have both of these?

        i. How we can become aware of the differences between them?

    c. Weave in my external story of "I'm perfect" vs. internal story of "I'm not good enough"

5. Subpoint #2: Keeping Secrets from Ourselves

    a. Why do we keep secrets from ourselves? Give an example from my own world
    b. "The secrets we keep from ourselves are the keys to freedom"— explain!
    c. Link between secrets and shame; shame dissipates with revealing
    d. A Note on Forgiveness—include a sidebar about the fact that I thought I'd make forgiveness a "step" but it's actually a process, so will be throughout the book

        i. All forgiveness is self-forgiveness
        ii. You can't forgive yourself until you are willing to look at what you know

6. Subpoint #3: Getting Your Life into Alignment

    a. Getting right with what you already know is the first step to a life of alignment
    b. What do I think of as the definition of alignment here?
    c. What does it mean to be "in alignment," from my perspective?

    d. When we're out of alignment, things are coming out sideways—why? Give example(s)

7. Writing Exercises
8. Action Steps

    a. Explain why we need action steps—integration into life, moving us forward, making sustainable change requires action
    b. This week:

        i. Make a collage about what your "problem area" *feels like*.
        ii. Mirror work: Set a timer and sit in front of the mirror for three minutes and admit to yourself out loud where in your life you're held back, dissatisfied, unhappy, or blocked

9. Conclusion & Transition to next chapter

    a. What do I want the reader to take away from this chapter?

APPENDIX B

Outline Templates for Teaching Memoir and Narrative Memoir

Outline Template: Teaching Memoir

As far as I know, I coined the term "teaching memoir." I needed a phrase to describe a type of book many of my clients want to write: a combo event, where they tell their own transformational story while also offering the reader wisdom and how-to teachings along the way. A teaching memoir may be organized chronologically, with a different life lesson or set of lessons being revealed to the reader in the same order they were revealed to you, as you lived through them. It might also be organized by theme, where you tell different stories from your life based around a set of lessons or principles you want to impart. Note that the number of chapters and number of teaching points is entirely up to you. *Also, the topics suggested below are examples—they are meant to explain what a subtopic might look like.* You are likely to choose entirely different subtopics! Exercises or practices are included here at the end of each chapter, but you may or may not need or want them.

Title:

Subtitle:

By:

Introduction: ["Who I am and why I have something to say"]

- Opening story to introduce the theme of the book
- Inspiring vision of what became possible for you once you lived this story and learned these lessons
- Overview of your story—gives the high-level view of your narrative and why we should listen to you
- How the book is organized (brief chapter by chapter overview)
- How you recommend reading the book and undertaking the exercises (if any)
- What you hope for the reader as she dives into your story

Chapter 1: [“First step on my journey” or “First lesson I learned”]

- Opening story—what your life was like before you set out on the journey, and the “call to adventure” that changed everything
- Topic #1: Example: How you didn’t heed the call, and what that cost you
- Topic #2: Example: What you had to overcome in order to take the first step
- Topic #3: Example: What you learned—and how the reader can avoid the mistake you made
- Exercises or practices
- Wrap up this lesson; transition to next chapter

Chapter 2: [“Next step on my journey” or “Lesson or principle #2”]

- Opening story—the moment you discovered the second principle and how it operates
- Overview of chapter’s theme, lesson, or principle
- Topic #1: Example: Sub-story of how this lesson first came into your life
- Topic #2: Example: What happens when you don’t apply this principle
- Topic #3: Example: Three ways to identify this lesson in your own life
- Exercises or practices
- Wrap up; transition to next chapter

Chapter 3: [“Third Step, principle, or lesson”]

- Opening story
- Overview of chapter theme
- Topic #1:
- Topic #2:
- Topic #3:
- Exercises or practices

- Conclusion; transition to next chapter

Continue with additional chapters until the stories, principles, or lessons you want to share have all been included.

Final Chapter: [“How to take what I’ve taught you into the world”]

- Review of what the reader has learned
- Topic #1: Example: How to take these principles into the world—and examples of others who have
- Topic #2: Example: Practical next steps for the reader now that the book is over
- Topic #3: Example: What to expect now that the reader has your tools for transformation
- Benediction and vision for the reader, based on where you are in your life today

Outline Template: Narrative Memoir

Every memoir is different, so there’s no step-by-step formula that will work for everyone. That said, there *are* archetypal elements to the human journey that—if included in your story—will make it accessible and identifiable to readers around the globe. The template that follows is based on the hero’s journey, as originally conceived by mythologist Joseph Campbell. (The idea of using this format as a book outline was first introduced to me by the very talented screenwriter, book editor, and story coach Patricia Verducci, patverducci.com.) Each of the chapter topics listed below is found in the major mythologies of almost every culture in human history. While they are listed here in the classic order, they’re offered as guidelines only; feel free to shuffle them around as needed to reflect your individual story.

For a deeper dive with the classic hero’s journey structure, I recommend *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell and *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* by Christopher Vogler.

Title:

Subtitle:

By:

Chapter 1: [We meet you in your “native” environment]

The reader is introduced to the protagonist—that’s you, the memoirist—in your native environment. It is likely that at this stage of your journey, you

were unaware of the conflict that was about to upset your stable everyday reality. Depending on the scope of your story, this may mean we see you blissfully ignorant in your childhood, in the early years of your marriage, just on the verge of receiving a difficult diagnosis, or something similar. By visiting you in this native environment, we should be able to see the ways in which you have yet to grow emotionally, psychologically, or spiritually—ways in which you have not yet achieved the full maturation required in order to claim what you most want in life. (You may not yet be consciously aware of what you want most!) By the end of this stage, we as the readers need to start to understand the "prize" your soul is seeking, which will ultimately be "won" at the end of your story, even if you yourself could not see it at the time.

Chapter 2: [You're forced out of your normal, everyday world]

Here we see your circumstances begin to change. Perhaps this is where we see your father die, or your spouse announce she wants a divorce, or your house burn down. Whatever the inciting event, we must see major change dawning in your life. Sometimes this shift will happen on the inside—recognizing and admitting to yourself that you're not as happy as you've been pretending to be, for example. Either way, you've now seen too much. You can no longer hide out in your normal life; something has to change.

Chapter 3: [You're faced with a difficult choice]

We see you torn between staying in your ordinary world, which has become unsatisfying or is no longer hospitable, and setting forth on a journey into the unknown. At first you may decide not to go—the degree of change and growth required by the journey seems too scary, destabilizing, or dangerous. But soon you realize the promise of attaining the "prize" is worth whatever danger may lie beyond. Eventually you decide to set forth, come what may.

Chapter 4: [You receive helpful information and guidance from wisdom holders]

This stage of the journey may show up in a single chapter, or we may see multiple instances of "wisdom holders" crossing your path throughout the journey. However they show up, we see you receiving resources from guides or mentors. Most likely these wise people know more than you do about the journey you're about to go on. You may receive wisdom in the form of words, teachings, practices, or tools that will help you along your way. We may also see how, in receiving guidance from the outside, you also gain deeper access to the wisdom within yourself.

Chapter 5: [You fully exit your native environment and enter the unknown]

Here we see you enter a new world, full of different norms, values, and expectations than you're used to. Often you'll encounter one or more "threshold guardians"—people, beings, or events that challenge your decision to set forth on the journey. Once you are in this stage, however, the decision has been made. As anticipated, we see complications looming in the distance as you continue your journey forward.

Chapter 6: [You get to know the people, forces, and obstacles in your new world]

Here we see you start developing relationships with the inhabitants of the new, heretofore unknown world you've entered. Some will be helpful, while others may try to thwart your mission. The journey looks promising but still daunting. You may experience a setback (an "early death"), but we see you continue on. Complications continue to grow over the course of this section, until you are brought to your next choice point.

Chapter 7: [Danger approaches]

Here we see you led to the edge of the greatest trial you will encounter along the journey. You want to turn back, but you've come too far. We may see you call upon alliances you built in the previous chapters to support you during this difficult time. The complications increase to the point of crisis.

Chapter 8: [Your greatest fear becomes reality]

Here at the midpoint of your tale, you find yourself in the thick of the unknown world—where, as you had feared, you will have to face the thing you're most afraid of. Whatever your heart is seeking suddenly feels very far away; it looks like all may be lost. You hit rock bottom, and some part of you truly does have to die. There's not a lot of hope that you will have a rebirth. At the very least, it's clear that a rebirth would require you to make a brave new choice in the face of very difficult odds.

Chapter 9: [Transformation happens]

It is at this very moment that everything changes. Simply by facing your worst fear, you receive the transformative gifts you've been seeking. Unfortunately you are still fully immersed in the darkness—so you are not yet ready to enjoy, or even recognize, that your greatest dream has been fulfilled. There are miles to go before you sleep, as they say. Danger still lurks, but there is a renewed sense of purpose in realizing you have nothing left to lose.

Chapter 10: [You complete the journey]

The crazy world you're inhabiting is not where the story ends. You must return to a state of equilibrium—one that looks like "going home," even

though you will experience “home” very differently than before. The promise of returning to the stable world you love is a strong motivator; you start to feel a sense of urgency and resolve. Small setbacks continue to arise, but there is undeniable forward motion. You are on the return journey.

Chapter 11: [The final test]

As you stand on the threshold, about to reenter the native land you left at the start of your memoir, you must undertake one more devastatingly difficult trial. Here you surrender completely. You die and are reborn one last time. The willingness to enter this final death is an act of purification, proving that you’ve received the teaching your soul was calling for at the start of the story. Through your sacrifice, some greater conflict in the world is reconciled. The journey is complete, and you are brought back to life.

Chapter 12: [Coming home]

Having transcended your greatest fear—and death itself—you’ve been transformed internally and often externally as well. We see evidence of change when you reenter the normal world and find you behave very differently than before. (Think about Dorothy’s return to Kansas, when she greets her family and friends with the love, gratitude, and humility that were completely missing before she visited Oz.) You’ve triumphed over the greatest challenge you could ever face; you’ve won the prize you sought. You’ve become a better version of yourself in the process. You may be ready for new adventures, or you may be perfectly happy to settle back into your old life, seeing it as if for the first time.

RESOURCES

Books to Inspire Your Writing

Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott

On Writing by Stephen King

The War of Art by Steven Pressfield

Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg

Still Writing by Dani Shapiro

The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron

Big Magic by Elizabeth Gilbert

Writing Software

Microsoft Word. Microsoft (MS) Word is the standard word processing program throughout the book industry. Most publishers will require you to submit your manuscript as a Word doc and will not accept delivery in programs such as WordPerfect, Google Docs, or Pages. If you plan to become a serious writer of books, you will need Microsoft Word—so it's probably a good idea to bite the bullet and purchase it now (products.office.com/en-us/word).

Scrivener. If I were Oprah and could give one gift to a studio full of writers, Scrivener is what would be hiding under each of your chairs. I cannot recommend this system highly enough. Created specifically for authors of books and other long-format documents, Scrivener's built-in organizational tools and easy mix- and-match system is a vast improvement over MS Word when it comes to drafting and revising your book. While it may seem complicated at first, the company has plenty of video tutorials to walk you through the system's impressive functionality. Trust me on this one: it's completely worth the learning curve, and with a licensing fee of only $45, it's a screaming deal for such a vastly improved writing experience (literatureandlatte.com/scrivener).

NLP Marin–trained Changework Practitioners

kn literary, Break Through Resistance coaching, knliterary.com

Carl Buchheit, co-founder of NLP Marin, carlbuchheit.fullslate.com

Michelle Masters, michellemastersnlp.com

Cheryl Breault, cherylbreault.com

Crystallin Dillon, crystallindillon.com

Or better yet … take an NLP Marin course yourself! www.nlpmarin.com

For Help with Self-Publishing

The Fine Print of Self-Publishing by Mark Levine

Meadowlark Publishing Services, Sheridan McCarthy, self-publishing expert, larkonline.net

kn literary arts, knliterary.com

Platform Building

Hay House Writer's Workshop with Reid Tracy, hayhouse.com/ writers-workshop-online-course-hhu

Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World by Michael Hyatt

Online Marketing for Busy Authors by Fauzia Burke

Online Marketing Made Easy Podcast with Amy Porterfield, amyporterfield.com

ProBlogger from Darren Rowse, problogger.com

Website Building

Pub Site, pub-site.com

Charlie Griffin, webexpertcharlie.com

PowerUp Productions, powerupproductions.tv

Tools for Creating and Managing Online Content

Canva, canva.com

Hootsuite, hootsuite.com

Buffer, bufferapp.com

MailChimp, mailchimp.com

Book Cover Design

Chip Kidd's TED Talk, "Designing Books Is No Laughing Matter. OK, It Is," ted.com/speakers/chip_kidd

For your starter cover design (read "low-budget option"): 99designs.com

For your final cover: Amy Hayes, amyhayes.co

In Case You Need a Cathartic Cry (a.k.a. a shameless plug for my friend's amazing memoir)

Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir by Mirabai Starr

INDEX

A

About the Author page, in book proposal, 178

Acquisitions process, 193–196, 204–205

Advances and royalties, 195–197

Agent

acquisitions (acqs) process and, 193–196, 204–205

advocating for you, 167

benefits of, 166–167

compatibility with, 171

deciding who to sigh with, 170–172

fees, 170–171

“guarantees,” 171–172

hunting for, 167–168

pitch/query letter to, 169–170

preparing for finding, 168

questions to ask, 170–172

role of, 166–167

self-publishing and, 165–166

where to find, 168

wowing, 169–170, 172. *See also* Book proposal

Altar, writing, 97–98

Art, writing as, 83–84

ASIN, creating, 222

“Assisted” or “hybrid” publishing, 210–211. *See also* Self-publishing

Audience, as reason to write book, 28

Author, about, page in book proposal, 178

Author platform, 143–164. *See also* Fan base, building
about: overview of building, 143–144, 146–149
additional resources on, 147–148, 240
anatomy of, 144
defined, 7
e-mail list for, 144–145, 153–155
endorsements and, 215–217
generating fans, 146–147
importance of, 7, 10–11
key elements of, 144–149
media (conventional) presence for, 145
overcoming trepidations about, 143, 146–147
publishers and, 7, 10–11, 204–205
relationships with big organizations, 146
social media reach for, 145
speaking schedule for, 145–146

B

Back matter, about, 191–192
Barnes & Noble (B&N, BN.com), 9, 10
Bestsellers, about, 197–198
Blocks to writing. *See* Resistance
Blogging, 158–159
Book coaches, 131–132
Book doctors, 130–131
Bookend texting with friend, 97
Book proposal
about: overview of, 13–14, 172
benefits of, 14–15, 172–173
need for, 172–173

publisher review process, 14
self-publishing and, 15, 172
submitting full manuscript vs., 14–15
template, 173–187
Bookstores. *See also* Sales of books
Amazon's impact, 9–10
Barnes & Noble (B&N, BN.com), 9, 10
Borders' demise, 9
brick-and-mortar, 8–9
marketing/display impact, 8–9
online transformation, 8–10
Borders, 9
Buchheit, Carl, 106, 240
Budget, editorial fees and, 136–137
Burke, Fauzia, 147, 162–164
Business, writing book to plant seeds for, 27

C

Celebrating in advance, 96
Chapter abstracts and samples, in book proposal, 185–187
Charismatic (magnetic) hooks, 54–55
"Chosen," feeling of being, 31–32
Coaches, book, 131–132
Coaches, self-publishing, 211–212
Co-authors and co-writers, 130
Commitment to writing a book, 4–5, 16–21, 223. *See also* Reasons for writing a book
Competition, researching hook ideas and, 47, 52–53
Competitive analysis section of book proposal, 182–183
Concentric circle search, 53

Concepts. *See* Hook
Conclusion of book, 124
Content editing, 119–126
about: functions of editor, 119
checklist (developmental editing), 121–125
developmental editing, 119–125
Copy, cover, 220–221
Copyediting, 226, 227
Cover copy, 220–221
Cover design, 37–42, 199, 212–215, 241
Credibility, from writing book, 26–27

D

Day job, quitting as motivation to write, 29–30
Design of book
cover copy, 220–221
cover design, 37–42, 199, 212–215, 241
first rule of cover design, 214–215
font selection, 174, 214, 218–219
important little things, 222
interior design, 201–202, 218–220
online functionality and, 214
timeline for, 199, 201–202
using professional designers, 206, 207, 209, 213–215, 218
Destiny, writing book to fulfill, 27–28
Detail, focusing on, to kick-start writing, 97
Developmental editing, 119–125
Dictating text, to kick-start writing, 97
Doctors, book, 130–131
Do-it-yourself publishing, 209–210. *See also* Self-publishing

Domain name, choosing and claiming, 149–152
Dooley, Mike, 96
Dyer, Dr. Wayne, 37–38

E

Editing. *See also* Editor(s)
about: content vs. technical, 118, 126
checklist (developmental editing), 121–125
clarity of text, 125
content, 119–126
copyediting, 226, 227
developmental, 119–125
“divinity” of, 117
downsides of self-editing, 94–95
flow of text, 125
grammar and spelling, 118, 119, 125, 126, 127
line, 125–126
proofreading, 201, 219–220, 226, 227–228
as separate phase from writing, 95
setting moratorium on, 94–95
Stephen King on, 117
structural edits, 72
technical, 118, 126–128
terms to know, 190–192
traditional archetype, 118
traditional publishing timeline and, 198–202
types of, 118
Editor(s)
acquisitions, and acquisitions (acqs) process, 193–196, 204–205
assistance beyond. *See* Writing, help with

author's style/approach, 118, 119
choosing, 135–139
editorial adventure flow chart, 137–139
feedback from, 132–135, 200
fee structures, 136–137
importance and value of, 117–118
transmittal process, 126
useful words to know when talking to, 190–192
using early in process, 117
"your editor" and "managing editorial/production" team, 126
Effectiveness of book, 120
E-mail list, 144–145, 153–155
Emphasis, forms of, 220
Endnotes, 222
Endorsements, 215–217
Epilogue of book, 124
Excuses for not writing. *See* Resistance
Expert (local), becoming, 159–160

F

Facebook, using, 158. *See also* Social media
Fame, as reason to write book, 31
Fan base, building
about: overview of platform-building opportunities, 146–149
asking friends for help, 161–162
book promotion timeline, 162–164
foundation #1: Building a website. *See* Website
foundation #2: Getting social (media), 155–158
foundation #3: Blogging your heart out, 158–159
foundation #4: Becoming local expert, 159–160

Feedback, receiving, 132–135, 200
Fees. *See* Finances
Final chapter of book, 124
Finances. *See also* Sales of books
agent fees, 170–171
book offer, advances, and royalties, 195–197
editor fees, 136–137
self-publishing costs and revenues, 203–204, 206–208
First drafts
editing. *See* Editing; Editor(s)
editing moratorium while writing, 94–95
“sh*tty,” 85, 86, 87, 95
Flow chart, editorial adventure, 137–139
Flow of text, editing, 125–126
Font selection, 174, 214, 218–219
Formatting consistency, 124
Front matter, about, 191–192

G

Genres of books, about, xviii–xx. *See also* Transformational nonfiction
Getting started. *See also* Writing, instructions for
all that’s needed to be a writer and, 84
author’s background and, xvi–xviii, 3–4
editorial adventure flow chart, 137–139
kick-starting tips, 96–98
knowing where to start, 93–94
“sh*tty first drafts” and, 85, 86, 87, 95
writer’s pledge and, 86
Ghostwriters, 129–130
Grammar, 118, 119, 125, 126

Group (reading and writing), starting, xxiv

H

Hardcover vs. “Hardback,” 191
Hay House Writer’s Workshop, 147
Help with your writing. *See* Writing, help with
High-concept hooks, 47–48
Hook, 43–65. *See also* Title of book
about: overview of qualities to target, 46–47
checklist (developmental editing), 121
concentric circle search, 53
conveying “big idea,” 47
defined, 43, 44–47
drafting and testing, step-by-step plan, 63–65
elements to consider, 51
high-concept, 47–48
how/where it shows up, 45
importance of, 44, 45–46
journalism “lead” and, 43
magnetic, 54–55
narrowly tailored, 48–51
researching ideas, 47, 52–53
salable, 55–56
samples from known books, 46
searching marketplace for similar/existing, 52–53
synonyms for, 44
unique, 51–53
Hyatt, Michael, 148
“Hybrid” or “assisted” publishing, 210–211. *See also* Self-publishing

I

Ideal reader, 33–37
choosing, factors to consider, 36–37
example of, 33–35
motivation from, 35
Inner child
becoming inner critic, 110–111
guided chat with inner critic, 114–116
resistance and, 106–110
uncovering secret positive intentions of, 106–107, 240
Inspirational memoir, xix–xx, 177
Introduction of book, 124
ISBN numbers, 209, 211, 222

J

Job, writing as, 16–21
Jump … and Your Life Will Appear (Levin), 70–71, 227–230

K

"Keywords," 159
Kick-starting your writing (tips), 96–98
bookend texting with friend, 97
dictating some text, 97
focusing on one small detail, 97
listening to podcast on writing, 98
making writing altar, 97–98
pre-sleep tip, 97
setting timer, 97
writing love letter to your future self, 98
writing outdoors, 98

writing prompts, 98
Kidd, Chip, 214–215

L

Lamott, Anne, 84, 85
Leading, to use, 219
Legal dispute, resistance cover story, 113–114
Levin, Nancy, 67–68, 69, 70–71, 88–89, 227–230
Line editing, 125–126
Lines, space between (leading), 219
LinkedIn, using, 158. *See also* Social media
Literary agent. *See* Agent
Love letter, to future self, 98

M

Maggie, ideal reader example, 33–35
Magnetic hooks, 54–55
Managing editorial/production team, 126
Manuscript. *See also* First drafts; *Writing references*
defined, 191
editing. *See* Editing
handwritten, 38
publishing industry use of term, 191
traditional publishing timeline and, 198–202
writing. *See Writing references*
Margins, suggested, 219
Market analysis, in book proposal, 179
Marketing. *See also* Author platform; Bookstores; Media; Sales of books; Social media
analysis section of book proposal, 182–183

book promotion timeline, 162–164
building fans. *See* Fan base, building
competition and, 52–53
endorsements and, 215–217
“launch” of book, 10–11, 199
online, for book launch, 10–11
promotion section of book proposal, 180–189
traditional publishing timeline and, 198–202
Media. *See also* Fan base, building; Social media
audience stats, 146
blogging, 158–159
book promotion timeline, 162–164
conventional, your presence on, 145
domain name for, 149–152
on writing, listening to, 98
Meetup.com, xxiv, 159–160
Microsoft Word, 79, 90, 239–240
Motivation, 23–42. *See also* Reasons for writing a book
about: overview of, 23–24
commitment considerations and, 4–5, 16–21, 223
deeper, questions to access, 32–33
“ideal reader” for, 33–37
importance of, 25–26
resistance, obstacles and, 25. *See also* Resistance
self-publishing and, 12–13
“starter” cover design for, 37–42
visualizing future (photo album exercise) and, 39–42

N

Narrative memoir, 234–238

Narrowly tailored hooks, 48–51
Native Genius® method, 49, 50
Neurolinguistic programming (NLP), 30, 106–107, 240

O

Obstacles to writing. *See* Resistance
Online Marketing for Busy Authors (Burke), 147
Online Marketing Made Easy Podcast (Porterfield), 148
Organization and structure of book, 120, 122. *See also* Outlines
Outdoors, writing, 98
Outlines, 67–80
  choosing right structure, 71–77
  chronological account structure, 72
  definition and types, 68–69
  example from this book, 69
  exercise for writing, 79–80
  importance of "good bones," 68
  for *Jump … and Your Life Will Appear* (Levin), 70–71, 227–230
  lack of, anecdote, 67–68, 70–71, 227–230
  retroactive, 77–79
  set of lessons/teachings for structure, 72–73
  set of rules/guidelines/"laws" for structure, 73
  step-by-step structure, 72
  structural edits, 72
  structure types (structural conceits), 72–74
  templates. *See* Outlines (templates)
  three-part format structure, 73
  types of structures, 71–73
  using as you write, 71
Outlines (templates)

narrative memoir, 234–238
prescriptive nonfiction, 74–77
teaching memoir, 231–234
writing quick and dirty outline using, 79–80
Overview section, of book proposal, 176–178

P

Pacing of book, 123
“Paradox of choice” roadblock, 102
Parents, influence of, 29, 30, 107–108
Permissions for quotes and excerpts, 125, 222
Photo album of your future, exercise, 39–42
Pitch to agent, 169–170
Plagiarism cover story, 111–113
Platform. *See* Author platform; Fan base, building
Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World (Hyatt), 148
Pledge, transformational writer’s, 86
Porterfield, Amy, 148
Practicality of book, 120, 124
Practicing writing. *See* Writing practice/plan
Praise, as reason to write book, 30–31
Premises. *See* Hook
Prescriptive nonfiction
book proposal template option, 176–177
defined, xix
outline template, 74–77
as transformational nonfiction subcategory, xix–xx
ProBlogger from Darren Rowse, 148
Production of book, timeline, 198–202
Production team, 127

Promoting book. *See* Fan base, building; Marketing; Media; Social media
Prompts, writing, 98
Proofreading, 201, 219–220, 226, 227–228
Publishers Marketplace, 168
Publishing, DIY. *See* Self-publishing
Publishing, traditional, 189–202
acquisitions (acqs) process, 193–196, 204–205
after self-publishing, 204–205
agents needed for, 166–167
bestsellers and, 197–198
book offer, advances, and royalties, 195–197
choosing between self-publishing and, 165–166
creative control and, 166
handing over publication rights, 165–166
“managing editorial/production” team, 126
reality today, 189–190
timeline, 198–202
transmittal process, 126
words/definitions to know, 190–192
Publishing industry. *See also*
Self-publishing
author’s background in, xvi–xviii, 3–4
brand devotion, 10–11
consolidation impact, 6–7
editorial staff demands, 7
evolution and consolidation, 5–7
importance of understanding, 3–5
limited options, 6
marketing challenges, 10

media landscape shift, 5
picking up self-published books, 204–205
platform importance, 7, 10–11, 204–205. *See also* Author platform
risk-averse publishers, 6
technological pressures, 190
today, 189–190
“worst of times” understanding, 5–11

Q

Query letter to agent, 169–170
Quotes, using, 125, 157, 216, 217

R

Reader, ideal. *See* Ideal reader
Reading (and writing) group, starting, xxiv
Reality checks, self-publishing, 206–207
Reasons for writing a book. *See also* Motivation
about: overview of, 23–24
accessing deeper motivations, 32–33
already writing your book, 28
bad reasons for, 28–33
been told you should, 29
business growth, 27
credibility, 26–27
fame, 31
feeling of destiny, 27–28
feeling of specialness, being chosen, 31–32
fulfilling audience desires, 28
good reasons for, 25–28

idea of writing book excites you, 26
to overcome obstacles/resistance, 25–26
parents should have written book but didn't, 28
praise, 30–31
questions to answer, 32–33
so you can quit day job, 29–30
Researching hooks, 47, 52–53
Resistance, 99–116
about: overview of, 99–101
anecdote about, 99–100
childhood patterns and, 106–110
common brain-devised techniques of, 100–103
cover stories to watch for, 111–114
defined, 100
false nature of, 100
guided chat with your inner critic, 114–116
"I'm not ready, and need to learn writing" excuse, 101
"I need more preparation" excuse, 101
inner child and, 106–110
inner critic and, 110–111, 114–116
"Is my idea good enough?" excuse, 102
"I think Michelle Obama would *love* my book, but, but, but …" excuse, 103
legal-dispute-potential cover story, 113–114
love, self-understanding to undo, 109–110
motivation to overcome, 25–26. *See also* Motivation; Reasons for writing a book
NLP uncovering secret positive intentions, 106–107, 240
"not enough time" excuse, 101
"OMG, people might read this book!" excuse, 103

"paradox of choice" roadblock, 102
plagiarism cover story, 111–113
protecting you, 106, 109, 110–111, 115
quiz (bad timing vs. resistance in disguise), 103–106
"What if so-and-so reads my book? excuse, 103
"Who would want to read this book?" excuse, 102–103
willpower and, 108–109
Resources, additional, 239–241
Retroactive outlines, 77–79
Rights, handing over to publisher, 165–166. *See also* Publishing, traditional
Rowse, Darren, 148
Royalties and advances, 195–197

S

Sales of books. *See also* Bookstores
book launch marketing, 10–11
Internet changing, 10
most important element in, 56–57
preordered books, 10
salable hooks and, 55–56
traditional publishing timeline and, 198–202
Scrivener software, 78–79, 90, 239–240
Self
guided chat with inner critic, 114–116
inner child and, 106–110
inner critic and, 110–111, 114–116
observing without judgment, 110
Self-publishing, 203–223. *See also*
Design of book
about: overview of, 12–13, 203–205

additional resources on, 222
“assisted” or “hybrid,” 210–211
book proposals and, 15, 172
to build expertise/public persona, 31
choosing between traditional publishing and, 165–166
coaches or “shepherds,” 211–212
commitment to book and, 223
considerations, 12–13, 203–205, 223
costs and revenues, 203–204, 206–208
creative control and, 166
do-it-yourself publishing, 209–210
editing needs, 118, 127, 128
endorsements for book and, 215–217
evolution and state of, 12
feeling special/chosen and, 31–32
good options for, 208–212
hiring agent and, 165–166
important little things, 222
naming your company, 222
platform importance, 7, 10–11, 144–145
printing efficiencies, 204
proofing importance, 128
publishing houses picking up self-published authors, 204–205
quality considerations, 207–208
reality checks, 206–207
reputation of, 206
“vanity publishing” and, 12
word count target, 93
“Sh*tty first drafts,” 85, 86, 87, 95

Shepherds, self-publishing, 211–212
Social media, 155–158
batching posts to save time, 157
building platform on, 145
Facebook facts, 158
frequency of posting, 157
LinkedIn focus, 158
rule of thumb for using, 155–156
value of, 155
what to post, 156–157
Speaking schedule, 145–146
Spelling, 118, 125, 126, 127
Stacked words, eliminating, 219–220
“Starter” cover design, 37–42
Starting out. *See* Getting started; Writing, instructions for
Stet, defined, 192
Structure. *See* Organization and structure of book; Outlines

T

Tables of Contents, of/in book proposal, 175, 184
Teaching memoir
book proposal template option, 178–179
outline template, 231–234
as transformational nonfiction subcategory, xix–xx
Technical editing, 118, 126–128
Template, book proposal, 173–187
Templates, outline. *See* Outlines (templates)
Terms to know, publishing industry, 190–192
Texting, as writing prompt, 97
Time

book promotion timeline, 162–164
scheduling your daily write, 87–89
traditional publishing timeline, 198–202
to write a book, 25
for writing, making. *See* Writing practice/plan
Timer, kick-starting your writing with, 97
Title of book
being obvious is OK, 60
brainstorming, 60
checklist (developmental editing), 121
cleverness of, 61–62
difficulty of getting right, 58
freshness of, 61
importance of, 57
informing and enticing, 57
knowing your benefits and, 60
missteps to avoid, 58
purpose of, 57, 62
samples of known books, 58–59, 62–63
selection process, 58–62
specificity of, 61
why-what-wow of, 56–63
writing before book, 38
TK, defined, 192
Tone or voice, 120, 123
Topic. *See* Hook
Transformational nonfiction
concepts, premises. *See* Hook
defined, xviii

desire to write, xv–xvi

genres of books and, xviii–xx

media outlet note, 160. *See also* Author platform; Fan base, building; Marketing

motivation for writing, 24, 32. *See also* Motivation; Reasons for writing a book

outlining book. *See* Outlines

platform importance, 10–11. *See also* Author platform

reason for this book and, xx–xxii

reasons for. *See* Reasons for writing a book

subcategories of, xix–xx. *See also specific subcategories*

this book and, xix–xx, xxii–xxv

title importance, 57. *See also* Title of book

writer's pledge, 86

Transmittal process, 126

Turning points of writers, 16–17

U

Unique hooks, 51–53

V

"Vanity publishing." *See* Self-publishing

Visualization

photo album of future (exercise), 39–42

"starter" cover design and, 37–42

Voice or tone, 120, 123

W

Website

about: overview of, 149

additional resources for, 241

blogging and, 158–159
building/designing, 152–153
domain name for, 149–152
e-mail (lead) capture opportunities, 153–155
giveaways to get contacts, 153–155
importance of, 149
“keywords,” 159
primary function of, 153
Wheeler, Kristen, 49–50
Widows, eliminating, 219
Willpower, 108–109
Word, Microsoft, 79, 90, 239–240
Word count
counting, tracking, 90–91
examples by book type and title, 92–93
ranges by book type, 91–93
setting goals for, 89–93
on typical double-spaced page, 91
Writer(s)
all that’s needed to become one, 84
behaviors defining, 16–17
being a “writer,” 16–17
pledge, 86
turning points of, 16–17
Writer’s block. *See* Resistance
Writing. *See also* Writing a book
as art form, 83–84
assistance with. *See* Writing, help with
being a “writer” and, 16–17

feedback on, 132–135, 200. *See also* Editing; Editor(s)
group, starting, xxiv
instructions. *See* Writing, instructions for
like it's your job, 16–21
making time for, 17–21
outline for. *See* Outlines
plan for. *See* Writing practice/plan
Writing, help with
about: needing help, 128
book doctors, 130–131
book/writing coaches, 131–132
co-writers and co-authors, 130
ghostwriters, 129–130
self-publishing coaches or "shepherds" and, 211–212
Writing, instructions for
about: overview of, 84
all that's needed to be a writer and, 84
basic instructions, 84
getting your "buts" out of the way, 87–88
instruction #1: Scheduling daily write, 87–89
instruction #2: Setting word count goal, 89–93
instruction #3: Knowing where to start, 93–94
instruction #4: Setting moratorium on editing, 94–95
instruction #5: Celebrating in advance, 96
kick-starting your writing (tips), 96–98
picking back up where you left off, 94
pledge to write and, 86
reality of writing and, 85–86
"sh*tty first drafts" and, 85, 86, 87, 95

Writing a book. *See also* Getting started; Reasons for writing a book
assistance with. *See* Editor(s); Writing, help with
author's path to writing this book, xvi–xviii, 3–4
belief in you and, xx–xxi
as common desire, xi, xv–xvi
with co-writers and co-authors, 130
ease of, in today's world, xxi–xxii
feeling the calling for, xxv
genres of books and, xviii–xx
instructions. *See* Writing, instructions for
publishing considerations. *See* Agent; Book proposal; Publishing, traditional; Self-publishing
reality of, 85–86
reasons for. *See* Reasons for writing a book
requirements summary, 19
structure and content of this book and, xxii–xxv
this book and, xi–xiii, xix–xxv
time required for, 25
using outline for, 71. *See also* Outlines
writing practice and. *See* Writing practice/plan
Writing practice/plan
adjusting commitment to, 21
charting weekly plan, 20
committing to, 21, 86–87
consistency over quantity, 21
establishing and committing to, 18–21
honest look at calendar for, 19–20
inspiring headline for, 19
motivation importance, 25–26. *See also* Motivation; Reasons for writing a book

posting and using writing chart, 20–21
resistance, obstacles and, 25. *See also* Resistance
step-by-step guidelines, 19–21
taking out paper and pen, 19
weekly creation of, 21
Writing prompts, 98

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For free guidance on your book journey, visit knliterary.com/book.

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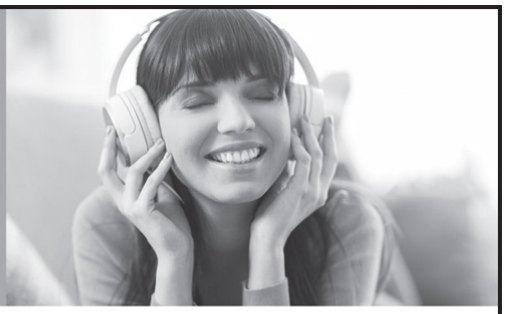

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