

I Want to Write a Book - Where Do I Begin?

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You're new at this writing business. Where do you start? What do you do? You write, damn it. Seriously, there are some easy answers, but if you're prone to laziness, stop reading now. On the other hand, if you want to become an accomplished writer, then this article might provide the kick in the pants you need to get moving in the right direction.
[How to Write a Book: Steps For The Beginner](#)

Here's one of the most frequent questions I receive via email: "I'm a new writer. How do I get started?"

Maybe it's just me, but it seems like the answer this question is so obvious.

But if you're new, you may not like what I have to say.

{sidebar id=1 align=left}And, I'll add... you especially won't like this article if you want it to be easy and not cost you any money. If this is you, stop now. Go to another web site. Please don't send me an email!

Maybe I'm just different from most people, but when I've never done something before I'll go to the library, devour whatever I can online, and in some cases hire a coach or mentor to get me started. That's what I've done with my copywriting career, and it's paying off in spades.

I bought all the classic books on advertising and copy. I've paid over \$5,000 in the past 18 months alone for courses and training. I belong to several forum boards. And, I've paid as much as \$450/month for coaching from successful copywriters.

No, I'm not independently wealthy. Most of these expenses have gone on my credit card. But I'll tell you what... I'm a damned good copywriter now, and my clients are paying me handsomely. I figure that I'm well worth the investment in myself.

That's what it comes down to as a writer. Are you willing to invest in yourself? Will you invest time and money in your education and in the gradual improvement of your writing?

If not, you may as well go find another web site that will sell you a magic wand or hyped-out snake oil in the guise of "The ultimate guide to writing your book in 14 days."

So when I receive emails from this web site I'm often dumbfounded by the simplicity of the requests. For example, here's the full extent of a recent email: "I want to know more about writing books."

That's nice. I receive perhaps 3-4 emails like this every week. What's my response? After taking a few deep

breaths, calming my mind, and reminding myself that these are perfectly legitimate questions by well-meaning people who are sincerely reaching out for help, I answer their simple question with simple answers.

I almost never hear back. Why? I'm asking them to work at it.

Imagine that you'd like to learn rock climbing. What's the first thing you'd do? You wouldn't go out and start climbing rocks without the proper gear and instruction (I hope). No, you'd probably take a class, get equipped with the best gear you can afford, and you'd slowly work your way up to more difficult rocks.

Here's an even better example. If you wanted to fly a plane, would you ask your gardener to show you the ropes?

So why do people think that writing and publishing a book is going to be any different?

I don't believe there are many "natural writers" who can write a quality book from start to finish without having at least a few basic skills. Most of us need a little training to get started and a humongous amount of practice to master the craft. It's the same with any sport, hobby, or career. I won't get good at copywriting without writing and rewriting.

By now you're probably wondering what the hell I DO tell people who ask about writing or publishing a book. Here it is in a nutshell:
Take a writing class.

If you have no or little experience as a writer, then take a class. There are many excellent writing classes taught in most community or small colleges. And you can take an online writing class in just about any genre. These classes are taught by seasoned writers who know what they're doing and can help you get started. Check out www.writers.com and www.writersonlineworkshops.com for online classes.

Or, if you live in the USA, check with your local college or community college for classes. In larger metropolitan areas, you'll find writing associations (Google it) who might offer writing classes for members.

Read tons of books on how to write and on writing.

Pick up every book you can find on writing. Many of these books have excellent writing exercises that can help get you over whatever mental barriers you have to writing. There are NO excuses to learning how to write. It's a matter of determination, not talent when you get started. Also read one or more books every week in the genre in which you want to write. Immerse yourself in quality writing. Your early writing may sound a bit like some of these writers, which is fine. Just keep writing and your own style and voice will eventually emerge.

One of my favorites, and a classic is "Bird by Bird" by Anne Lamott. It's a good starter book for someone terrified of

writing. Bruce Ballenger and Barry Lane are two New Hampshire teachers who wrote *Discovering the Writer Within* to help beginners like you get started in a positive way.

The Writer's Path, by Todd Walton and Mindy Toomay, has more of an emphasis on creativity and less on structure and analysis than Ballenger and Lane's book.

Stephen Wilbers' book The Keys to Great Writing is one of the most valuable books on grammar, style and editing. Sherri Szeman's Mastering Point of View is a comprehensive and easy-to-understand treatise on the subject of point of view and perspective.

Join a writing group.

Most metropolitan areas have small writing groups. Check at your library or local book store, or even Craig's List

(www.craigslist.com). Find a group focused on similar kind of writing.

Join online forum boards for writers.

Writers are often an overly-emotional and socially immature group. I don't know why this is, but I see far too much "flaming" going on in writer's forums. If you find one that works for you, stick with it. Otherwise, get out gracefully.

Buy a good set of tools.

For many of us, this would mean purchasing a good editing tool. I'm a terrible editor, which is why I hire it out for my

bigger projects. I also use quality editing tools, such as:

StyleWriter - Perhaps the best and most comprehensive piece of software for editing

How to Write Well - An outstanding guide to the entire process of writing, taking you step-by-step through writing a book.

And for Publishing:

AWAI's Complete Publishing Plan - This is the best manuals I've seen on making money self-publishing

The Essential Book Publishing Guide - This Ebook deals more specifically with the 1-2-3 steps of self-pub

lishing. It's not as comprehensive as the AWAI manual, but it does an excellent job of giving you the tools you need to do it right.

Write, Simply Write

{sidebar id=2}This is the best advice I can give if you want to write a book. Just write. Set up a strict schedule for writing every day. Maybe start with 15 minutes and work your way up to an hour or two. Some days all you can do is try to organize your thoughts. Other days the words will fly at you like locusts on a feeding frenzy. Every day you are where

you are, but keep writing.

Here's how I put it to one aspiring author who asked how long it would take to write a book: "It will take you anywhere from two weeks to a lifetime. It all depends on your experience as a writer and how much of yourself you put into the writing."

Or, if you're the analytical type, try this. One single-spaced page on an 8.5x11 sheet is about 500 words. The typical 200 page book is between 60,000 and 90,000 words. Most books start out at 300,000 words (first draft, give or take several thousand words) and are whittled down through several edits to a more reasonable size. So, figure that you'll have to write 300,000 words in your first draft.

I know... yikes! That is, until you do the math. If you can write consistently for two hours a day, you'll quickly get to the point where you can write at least 4 pages in a day. That's 2,000 words. At that rate it will take you only 150 days to write 300,000 words. So, your first draft is completed in half a year. Not too shabby.

So what's stopping you? Start writing today. Learn what you need to learn, and practice, practice, practice.