

How an Idea Becomes a Book

A Nine-Step Process
for Nonfiction Writers Who Want
to Make an Impact

JENNIE NASH



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By Jennie Nash

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Step 1: How An Idea Becomes A Book

When I was in grade school, I remember we watched a movie — probably multiple times in multiple grades — called *How a Bill Becomes a Law*. It was a cartoon that maybe featured an animated piece of paper and followed its path through the levels of government. This memory popped into my mind recently because I have been thinking a lot about the process by which an idea becomes a book, and the sameness of that language — *How an Idea Becomes a [insert short, punchy word that points to a large concept]* — summoned the memory.

This kind of thing happens to all of us hundreds of thousands of times a day — we have an idea. In my case, it came to me in the specific form of a six-word title that I felt immediately could be a book. Other people



Jennie Nash, author, book coach, CEO of Author Accelerator, creator of the Killer Book Proposal Method

have ideas that come to them in the form of a progression of musical chords, or a skein of yarn the color of persimmons, or an image of a house on a hill with a porch looking east, or a picture of a boy on a train hurtling towards a school in a castle where they train wizards in how to use magic.

Our brains form these ideas while we go about the regular work of the day — making oatmeal, getting dressed, driving to work, talking to our kids about the risks of holiday travel (hello 2020), talking to our spouse about when to take the car in to get the front door fixed. Most of these ideas flicker through our brain and evaporate, but some of them return. Some of them won't let us go. Some of them haunt us like a ghost in the attic.

And what happens *next* is what interests me, and has always interested me. I have written nine books in three genres, and they are all about the exact same thing: bringing creative ideas to life.



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Well, except for the first book. That one was about getting married. But maybe that really is the same thing, too — if marriage can be seen as a story you chose to live.

Some of my favorite books are about creativity, too. *The Creative Habit* is top of the list. And *Creativity, Inc.* and *The Art of Asking*. This is a thread in my reading that goes way back to *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, about Michelangelo, which I read in high school, and maybe even farther back to *Harold and the Purple Crayon*.

As a book coach, I work with writers in all phases of the creative process, including the phases where doubt and resistance get in our way, but my most impassioned intellectual interest is not in the resistance to

the execution of an idea — the times when we get stuck. There are so many amazing books about this very real pain, including my friend and client Jen Louden's recent book, *Why Bother?*, and *The War of Art*, and *Big Magic*. What I'm obsessed with is the way the idea takes *shape*, the process through which an idea turns into the thing it is going to become, which in this case is a book.

And just to be clear, I'm not talking about the *production* of a book — the mechanics of physically making it and getting it into readers' hands, or the mysterious workings of the publishing industry, although the mysterious working of the publishing industry is the sandbox I play in. I'm interested in the series of things that happen between having the idea for a book — so in my case, the idea about how an idea becomes a book — and deciding to do something about it, to make something from it, to bring it into existence.

I'm interested in the series of things that happen between having the idea for a book and deciding to bring it into existence.

The first steps in that process is what just happened to me and they look like this:

- I had an idea, which came to me in the form of six words in a very specific order...
- and which stuck in my mind long enough to ping against a memory...
- which caused me to think about the connection between those two things (this new thought, this old memory)...
- which prompted me to land on the idea of a *process*...
- which suggests some sort of order or structure or shape...
- which led me to believe I had something to say...

- which prompted me to put a title on a blank page and start writing these pages...
- which I already have a strong feeling is going to become a book.

How does that happen?? And what exactly is it all about? And how can we examine this process and understand it better so we can do a better job of writing books and a better job of coaching writers who are writing books?

A New Idea and an Old One

I think this idea has resonated so strongly with me — this little six-word flicker — because I have recently started working on *another* book idea. I firmly believe that creativity begets creativity and action begets action, so this is not a total surprise. But this other idea — an idea for a book about migraine — has been pinging through my mind for at least twenty years. I said above that ideas are like ghosts in the attic — rattling chains, making noise, not letting us sleep — and this idea about writing about migraine has been making noise for two decades.

It was originally an idea of writing a kind of migraine journal — I called it *Trigger: The Story of a Migraine*. It was going to be a journal to help people make sense of all the things that can trigger a migraine — red wine and wind and chocolate and a bad night's sleep — and all the ways to cope. So I had my idea, it had form (which we are going to see is *everything*). I wrote it. I revised it. But I never liked it. I put it away, brought it out again. It never worked. It never felt right. I didn't know why I was doing it or what my point was or who it was for and why they might care; these questions are the sunlight and water of a book idea and if you don't have them, the idea can't take root.

I recently started taking a new medicine for migraines and while it has not made my migraines go away, it has reduced their impact. Not being flattened by migraines every 6 to 10 days, and not living under the threat of them, has changed my perspective, changed my mind, changed my life, changed everything — including my idea about writing about migraines.

I went to dig up that old book — and it was gone. There is no trace of it on my computer. I searched and searched, and it is not there. For a moment I was devastated — a whole book just GONE? I searched again and finally gave up, and when I did, I realized that the loss was not a bad thing.

That old book never worked and trying to shore up a bad idea to see if you can make it viable never works. It's better to declare it dead and start anew — and so I did.

I began to ask the key beginning questions that help give an idea shape, which I will turn to in Step 2.

An Inconvenient Truth

So now I had two ideas: a book about migraine and a book about how an idea becomes a book.

I wish I thought in song or in yarn or in apple pie, because making those things seems so much easier and faster, but I think in books, so ideas for books is what I have.

And I have them on top of being a book coach who helps other people bring their ideas to life, and running a company that certifies book coaches to do the same, and being a wife and a daughter and a mother and a friend and a citizen. And there is another book close to being done that I am committed to finishing. All of which is to say that these ideas are somewhat inconvenient.

I'm not quite sure yet how I will share or present these ideas to the world — they are, after all, unformed, but that is the point. That is the entire fiery point.

Will they take shape?
And if so, how?

Step 2: Welcoming The Idea

Now I want to look at that second step: *something stuck in my mind*. This step may seem ridiculously obvious, because if you don't have an idea that sticks around, nothing can come of it — so doesn't that mean it's a given? To have the idea stick? Doesn't that mean we can assume this part of the progression just sort of... happens?

I don't think we should, because the problem most writers have is not that they have no ideas, but that they have *too many* ideas.

When people come to me for coaching on nonfiction books, they often present two or three or even more book ideas. They might say something like, "Should I write a memoir or a self-help book or something that is a combination of both?" or "Should I write this for an academic audience, or a trade audience, or a combination of both?" Or "Should I write this for college students looking to get into my industry or for first-time managers in my industries or for CEOs?" Or "I have five books I want to write around this one topic and I just need help deciding what order to write them in."

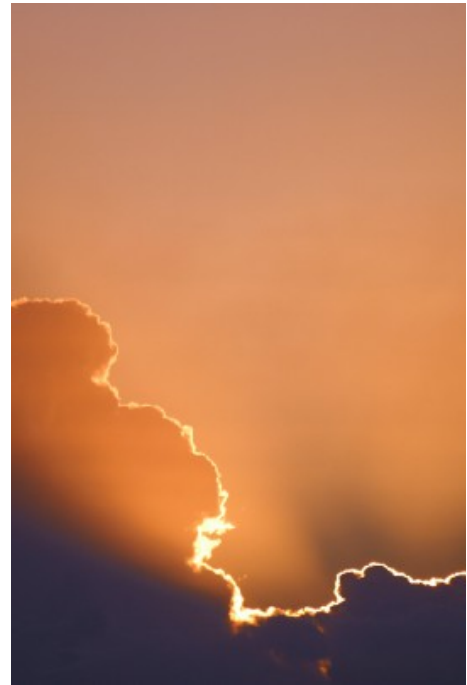


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Even if they know *what* they want to write, they may have a dozen ideas for *how* to write it — different structures, progressions, paths through the material — and the result is identical to having too many ideas: chaos, overwhelm, and creative paralysis.

All these ideas are pinging around in the writer's mind and the writer has no framework for evaluating them. The usual way forward is to try to write their way to an answer. That path almost always involves writing hundreds of pages that go nowhere, or polishing the same few chapters over and over again but never doing anything to actually turn them into a book.

In other words, that path leads to pain.

Welcome the Idea

It helps to embrace the reality that writers are not fishing around for a good idea, or hunting down a good idea. They *have* ideas — hundreds of thousands of them. So if the ideas are already there, what they are doing is selecting the idea. They need a process of pruning and honing. A process of narrowing and deciding. A process of *welcoming*.

In *Big Magic*, Elizabeth Gilbert says that the idea (which she believes has will and consciousness) chooses the writer. I still have not decided what I think about that concept, but regardless there has to be a moment when the writer allows that idea in and makes room for it. Gilbert writes about this, too:

“There comes a day when you’re open and relaxed enough to actually receive something. Your defenses might slacken and your anxieties might ease, and then magic can slip through. The idea, sensing your openness, will start to do its work on you. It will send the universal physical and emotional signals of inspiration (the chills up the arms, the hair standing up on the back of the

neck, the nervous stomach, the buzzy thoughts, that feeling of falling into love or obsession). The idea will organize coincidences and portents to tumble across your path, to keep your interest keen. You will start to notice all sorts of signs pointing you towards the idea. Everything you see and touch and do will remind you of the idea. The idea will wake you up in the middle of the night and distract you from your everyday routine. The idea will not leave you alone until it has your fullest attention.”

I’m also not sure that relaxation is important in the process, because many times ideas come to people when they are most unwelcome — when the writer is working on something else or they don’t have time to do anything with it or they have some other project demanding their focus. I often wonder if the busy mind is a more fertile place than a relaxed one, but that could just be *my* mind. But in any case, you have to welcome the idea, accept it, and hold onto it, and that means choosing that idea, or elevating it, at the exclusion of others.

That means, in other words, actively letting ideas go. This one instead of that one; this one better than that one. In order to write a book, you have to make room for and settle on just one idea.

The Idea that Matters Most to You

No one idea is inherently better than another. The decision-making has to do with desire — with knowing the idea *matters* to you in some way.

Ideas are personal. They are 100% unique to the writer who has them. No one else on the planet could possibly write the same book you are going to write. Give a prompt to ten or twenty or two thousand writers — about, say, Thanksgiving leftovers — and you will

get as many stories as there are people. It's just the nature of humans and of ideas.

As Twyla Tharp, choreographer and author of *The Creative Habit*, says, "When I walk into [the studio] I am alone, but I am alone with my *body, ambition, ideas, passions, needs, memories, goals, prejudices, distractions, fears*. These ten items are at the heart of who I am. Whatever I am going to create will be a reflection of how these have shaped my life, and how I've learned to channel my experiences into them."

It's the desire to do something with an idea that makes the idea yours. I decided to write a book about migraine because there is something in me (my body, ambition, ideas, passions, needs, memories, goals, prejudices, distractions, and fears) that causes this idea to resonate with me — not just in a random way but in a this-could-be-a-book way (which, as we will see in future steps, has to do with the shape and structure of that idea). There are probably hundreds of people reading this post who also have migraines, and perhaps are also wanting to write about it — but there is no way they are going to have the same idea I am; they couldn't possibly have the same idea I am because they haven't lived my life.

It is the unique perspective you have on the idea, the unique desire you have to pay attention to it, the unique choice you make to bring it into the light that gives that idea its power.

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We will talk in the coming steps about defining why the idea resonates with you — a critical step in how an idea becomes a book — but the first step is simply noticing *that* it matters to you.

A Story About a Commuter Van

So how do you notice such a thing? Here is a story about that.

My younger daughter is a school teacher. Last year, she lived in Oakland, CA, on the other side of the San Francisco Bay, and commuted across the Bay Bridge to her campus on the peninsula. She rode in a van pool with other teachers — taking on the responsibility of driving the van on her given days. On some days throughout that year, the van left in the dark of morning. On other days, it arrived back in the dark of night. With no traffic, that commute can be about 30 minutes. With traffic, it can be more than two hours, and most of the time, it was closer to that side of the equation.

At some point during the course of the year, Emily began to take notes on riding in the teacher van. She didn't know why or for what purpose. Something about the teacher van resonated with her. She noticed it as an idea that mattered to her. And out of all the other ideas in her mind — from what to make for dinner, to what to do about a tricky roommate situation, to lessons plans, and career plans, and everything else — she gave this idea enough space to take some notes. She let the light shine on it. She elevated it.

I asked her why she started taking notes. She said:

“Every time I would talk to someone outside my immediate circle of friends and families, I would tell them about the teacher van. I thought it was the most interesting thing about myself.”

So she recognized the idea of riding in the teacher van as being meaningful to her, and worthy of sharing with others. Part of that recognition was a sense of why it mattered. She said:

“I was also thinking about the fact that we often think we have to write about Big Ideas, but there was something about the teacher van that made me think about finding sacredness in the mundane and ritual in the routine. That commute was brutal, but it was also often the most sacred part of my day.”

Look how small that moment of connection is: a tiny pinging between a societal expectation about what makes a good story, an experience about riding in a commuter van, and a reason that experience had meaning. It's such a small spark in the brain — something with a slightly different reverberation — but for a writer, it's everything.

When I think of this resonant pinging and the power in noticing it, I can't help but think of a now-infamous moment in creative history, when Lin Manuel Miranda had the idea for the musical, *Hamilton*. As the *New York Times* reported it:

"...while reading Ron Chernow's exhaustive 2004 Hamilton biography, Mr. Miranda was struck by the parallels between Hamilton — an illegitimate immigrant from the West Indies who rose to power largely by the sheer force of his rhetoric — and such hustlers-turned-moguls as Jay Z. 'By the second chapter, I was like, 'I know this guy,' " Mr. Miranda said. *"Just*



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the hustle and ambition it took to get him off the island — this is a guy who wrote his way out of his circumstances from the get-go. That is part and parcel with the hip-hop narrative: writing your way out of your circumstances, writing the future you want to see for yourself. This is a guy who wrote at 14, 'I wish there was a war.' It doesn't get more hip-hop than that."

The immigrant founding father pinged against the idea of hip hop, and this had meaning to Miranda and

that was all it took.

Trust Comes From Naming the Ideas

Someone with too many ideas or the inability to choose among them, is probably not listening to those pings and reverberations, or trusting them. They may, in fact, be actively squashing them, in which case, they are probably saying to themselves, “A teacher van does not constitute a big idea, or a good idea” or “I’ll never have an idea worth writing about” or “Other people have already written that.”

If this is the story you are telling yourself, get *Why Bother?* by Jen Loudon (my client, friend, and colleague.) She helps people, especially women, find their path back to themselves and their creative desire.

But if you find that you *have* ideas, and you feel their reverberation, and you are trying to figure out how to welcome those ideas, and trust them enough to turn them into a book, I think naming them is how you begin.

Here’s how:

1. Recognize the pinging. When you have an idea for a book, *notice* it. Think of this as the opposite of meditation, where (as I understand it) the goal is to watch ideas float by like clouds in the sky or water in the river, without becoming attached to them. Here, we want to become attached. We want to grab the idea and welcome it. We want to say, “That’s an idea that matters to me.”
2. Name the elements that pinged in your brain to create the spark:
 - Alexander Hamilton, hip hop, immigrants, fighting with words
 - Teacher van, sacred space, power in the mundane

- How an Idea Becomes a Book = How a Law Becomes a Bill, the process of creativity
 - Migraine, the stories we tell ourselves about pain, fractured chronologies
3. Spend some time thinking about *why* that idea matters to you. In the next step, we'll dig into the why.

Step 3: Why Do You Care?

Once you know that an idea matters to you — once you notice the pinging in your mind and you welcome the idea — the next part of the process of turning that idea into a book is to figure out why you care. If you never do this work — if you start writing without knowing why — you will write in circles. You will fall into frustration and doubt. You will come to believe that writing depends on some elusive muse or a series of special habits (i.e. write 1500 words a day, write for an hour every day, write when the full moon is waning) rather than deep self-reflection, discipline, and persistence.

These beliefs set in because you were doing the work out of order. You were writing to try to find your reason for writing, rather than finding your reason and *then* writing.

It may seem like a small difference, but in my experience, it's enormous. It's often the difference between writing a book that people want to read and either a) never finishing, or b) finishing, but writing something that is so watered down and wishy-washy it fails to make an impact.

You can write your way to an answer — absolutely. I have done it, and writers I know have done it, and we have all heard of Famous

People who have done it on Famous Books, but the truth is that for most of us most of the time, it's wildly inefficient, ineffective, painful, and unnecessary.

So Why do You Care?

When I ask nonfiction writers why they care — it's the first question I ask of every writer I coach — they will often give an easy answer: "I want to share what I have learned" or "I don't want other people to suffer like I did."

These kinds of answers are part of the truth, but they often strike me as polite sentiments that work as a kind of altruistic shield to the deeper reason people want to write a book. The other parts of the truth — the ones that are harder to accept in ourselves — usually have to do with ambition and rage.

The Reality of Ambition

When I ask people why they want to write their book, I provide this checklist to help them with their thinking:

- To make money
- To make a name for myself as an expert/authority
- To influence/educate/illuminate/comfort/entertain people
- To raise my voice/speak up/claim my story
- To prove that I can do it, either to myself or others
- Because I feel called to do it/I am burning to do it/I can't rest until I do it
- To leave a legacy for my family
- To model for my kids what it means to pursue a dream (hard work, frustration, failure, perseverance, etc.)
- Other _____

Most people check off several of these answers, and every once in a while someone checks off all of them. It's all good. An honest assessment can help you begin to understand your why.

For me, for the book about *How an Idea Becomes a Book* (which I am circling around as I write these pages), I am driven by a desire to make a name for myself as someone who teaches not just the craft of writing, but the larger creative process writers engage in when they write books.

Why am I so driven?

Because a lot of writers teach craft and teach it well, but there aren't as many people who are examining the larger patterns of the creative process or thinking about how those processes fit into the business of being a writer. I'm in an ideal position to consider these ideas. At Author Accelerator, we are teaching book coaches how to coach writers, which forces us into a kind of metacognition (Wikipedia says, "Metacognition is 'cognition about cognition', 'thinking about thinking', 'knowing about knowing', becoming 'aware of one's awareness' and higher-order thinking skills. The term comes from the root word meta, meaning 'beyond', or 'on top of'.") I would like to write a book that gets at this higher-order processing and codifies what I have learned by teaching hundreds of book coaches.

And why do I want to codify what I have learned?

All the books I cited in the first part of this series — books like *The Creative Habit* and *Creativity, Inc* — examine these larger ideas about creativity, and they have inspired me over many years; they are the touchstones I return to when I am trying to solve problems on my work or find motivation. I would like to be part of this conversation and think I have something to add to it specific to writing books.

And why is adding to the conversation important to me?

Part of it is that I want to prove to the people who follow me that I am worthy of being followed, that I have something to say worth saying, that I am a "real" CEO and leader. About six years

ago, our tax guy looked at my book coaching income and said, “You’re really becoming a viable economic unit.” He was commenting upon the fact that most people who call themselves coaches or consultants don’t make that much money, and I was showing consistent and increasingly impressive results year after year. At the time, I remember feeling proud of his comment — smug.

But then I began to be furious about it — his presumption that I couldn’t somehow pull it off, his patronizing tone. I began hearing that tone around a lot of things he said and we soon left that tax guy and found someone else. There still lingers in me from that experience, and from a lifetime of other influences, the fear that I don’t really know what I’m doing, that it won’t last, that the success is not real. In other words, I have something to prove to myself and to others.

I don’t mind admitting this desire. Ambition is a necessary part of book coaching and of writing.

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You have to assume that people want to hear what you have to say before you take action to put words on the page. You have to assume that someone will want the service you are offering before you start asking people to pay you for it.

The Reality of Rage

Rage — or anger, jealousy, dissatisfaction, discontentment — also plays a role in recognizing and claiming ideas. Often people

who have something to say are saying it in opposition to something else — some other idea, or movement, or belief, or experience.

For me, this idea about *How an Idea Becomes a Book*, stems from my anger about the way writing is often taught. There is such an intensive focus on habits, inspiration, craft, and marketing and so little focus on the thing itself — the process of turning ideas into words that impact readers.

Habits and inspiration and craft and marketing are good and necessary things, but so often it seems we rip them out of context and serve them up because they are the parts of the process that are do-able. They are teachable in small bites. They can form a nice and neat business model — write every day, write a book in 30 days, learn the format of a book proposal, become an Amazon bestseller, get 5,000 people on your email newsletter list. The process of actually writing — of wrangling your idea on the page — seems, by contrast, impossible to pin down or teach or control.

What on earth can a book coach promise if we don't promise some actionable, measurable outcome?

I teach a process of self-discovery and book development that is slow and iterative and difficult and may lead to no material reward for the writer. It's not a very sexy thing. But this is the process writers need in order to turn their idea into a book. Someone can learn the elements of a book proposal — it's not rocket science — but unless they do the hard work of knowing what they are writing and why it matters to them and how best to shape their idea to impact their reader, they won't have anything worthwhile to propose.

The way writing is taught makes me mad because I see it misleading so many writers, and causing so much pain, and I know that this pain is preventable. So anger drives me.

The Migraine Book

Anger also drives me on the migraine book I have in mind, too. I am driven by a desire to do something with the 28 years of pain I have suffered — to make something from it, to turn it into something good. It's my way of making all that pain meaningful, of making it worthwhile. I can't help but want to write a book about it.

I also have rage about the way migraine has for so long been mistreated and dismissed. This kind of rage can galvanize an idea. If you know what you stand against, you know better what you stand for.

Many years ago, I took a course with Sarah Avers and I was struggling to define who I wanted to coach. "Writers" wasn't cutting it as a business plan. Sarah pushed me to define who I *wouldn't* serve, and that set loose in me a giant gush about people who were stingy of spirit, who demanded a certain ROI, who wanted me to do the writing for them, who wanted the process of writing a book to be fast and painless. It was easy to write the anti-manifesto, and in doing that, I backed into the kind of writer I am best suited to serve. Anger showed me the way.

In her book *3 Word Rebellion*, Michelle Mazur walks people through a similar process of knowing what they stand for and against. I recommend it.

Start with Why

What I have been leading up to saying is that when you have an idea — when you notice it and welcome it — you must then start with why.

Start with Why is, of course, the title of Simon Sinek's blockbuster business book that organizations ranging from small private schools to Fortune 500 multinational corporations embraced

with vigor. Sinek's contention is that people don't buy WHAT you do, they buy WHY you do it, and what is true for businesses is true for writers, too.

Writers are a business. We are developing and launching a product. It just happens to be an idea that we formed in our minds and brought to life through words on the page.

Knowing your why helps keep you focused. It gives you a box to work in — and we will be talking a lot about boxes when we talk about structure and shape. But even before we get to shape and structure, while we are still just talking about recognizing the idea as an idea and as an idea that matters to you, focus is critical.

When you know your why, you are engaged in the process of refining and pruning your idea.

You are circling around the idea, moving in from a wide target to a more narrow one.

It's THIS idea, not that one.

And in choosing it, you claim it.

Know Your Why

So how do you know why you care about this book idea that has stuck in your mind? Ask yourself the following:

- What do I like about this idea? What is buzzy about it for me? What makes it call to me? Why this idea, not some other one?
- What else does it remind me of that resonates with me? Other books, other ideas, other people, other movies, other art, other songs, other people?
- Is there something behind or around this idea I am repelled by? Jealous of? Obsessed with?
- Is there anger underneath the idea? Rage? At what??
- Why do I care?
- Why?

- Why?
- Why?

Step 4: Who Else Might Care About Your Idea?

Once you know why you care about an idea, it takes on a whole new kind of life. It's no longer one of the millions of shapeless ideas pinging around your brain, but something that has weight. This elevates it so that you notice it more than the other ideas, consider it more, circle back to it more. It rises.

The next step in turning this idea into a book is to start thinking about who *else* might care about it, too. Before I talk about this critical question, however, I want to talk about the question of *when* to ask yourself this question.

People sometimes get upset at me for suggesting that a writer think about their audience so soon. They argue that thinking about an audience can cheapen the idea or muddy it. I think this is one of the intractable myths about writing that can cause a great deal of damage — the myth that the ideas that spring fully formed from the artist's mind are somehow better or more pure or more valuable than those that are made for an audience.

Sometimes ideas spring effortlessly to life fully formed, but most of the time they are hammered out in the forge of intense and intentional effort.

Sometimes ideas spring effortlessly to life fully formed, but most of the time they are hammered out in the forge of intense and intentional effort.

And part of that effort is knowing that readers close the loop for writers, and determining exactly who those readers might be. The circuit ends when someone experiences what you wrote and without that step, the work is something different, something we do for our own awareness or understanding or pleasure.

And there is nothing wrong with that.

There are a lot of reasons to write that have nothing to do with being read or read widely. Journaling to make sense of yourself, writing poems to capture the beauty or the pain of the world, writing flash fiction because it's fun, and writing your life story so that your grandchildren might one day want to know what it is you were doing in Rome in the '60s are all excellent reasons to write. None of them, however, depend on people you don't know becoming engaged in your work. That is what publishing is all about — getting strangers to care about your work — so it stands to reason that you should think about those people.

Too many writers don't consider the reader soon enough in their process. They leap right from having the idea to writing about the idea. You would never do this in business — come up with an

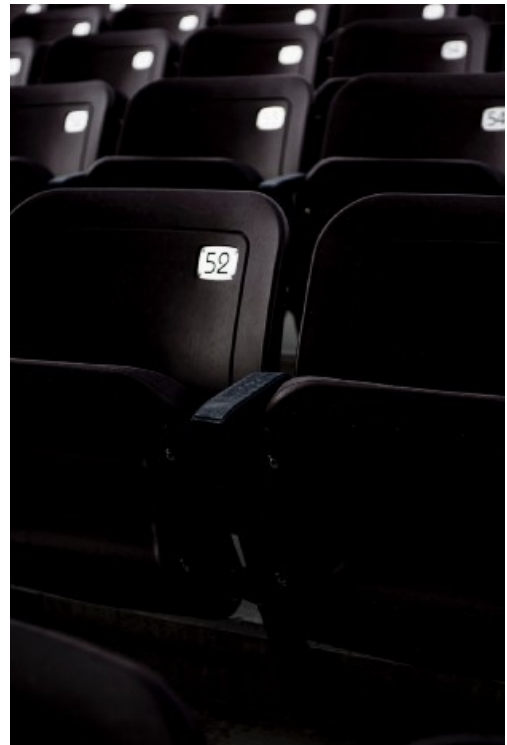


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idea and launch it without knowing if someone is going to pay money for it and why they might pay money for it — and you shouldn't do this in book writing, either.

We need to think about the eventual readers we want to delight or entertain or educate or illuminate or cause to take action, and the sooner in the process the better. Knowing who our reader is means that we can speak directly to them and give them exactly what they need.

All this being said, the time is not always right for a certain idea to come to life. Sometimes you have an idea and you're not sure *what* it will be or *if* it will be or *why* it will be. This might be because you're not sure why you care, or because you're not sure what it is, exactly, or you're not sure you have the authority or the courage or the know-how to write it.

The migraine book I have been mentioning in these steps is something I have been thinking about writing in various iterations for more than 20 years. I have not been able to figure it out — to crack the code of it. I've written pages and pages in search of answers and, until recently, was not sure I would ever find them. But this idea I am working on right now — about how a book becomes an idea — leaped into my mind and then I immediately started to put it through the steps I am outlining here. There was no discernment period, no debate, no doubt — I just did it. In between those two extremes is what happens to most ideas.

Whether it takes you a few moments or many decades to start working on an idea, this is what I know for sure: when you decide to work on an idea — to take that spark and turn it into a book — and you want other people to eventually read it, you need to think about who exactly those people are and what they might get from it.

Consider the Reader

Start by asking, who exactly is this reader?

There are a lot of business start-up methods that recommend making an avatar for your ideal customer or, in this case, ideal reader. This is good advice. If you can draw or cut images out of a magazine or pin Pinterest posts to a board, this might help you visualize your ideal reader. You might be able to picture her — see how old she is, what she's wearing, the color of her hair — but this is not where the exercise should end. You need to dig deep into why this reader needs your book, why she might care.

Readers usually come to nonfiction books for very specific reasons. You can look at your own book-buying habits for clues to what these might be. I read a lot of books on the history and current state of race in America this year, for example, because I was made aware by recent events that there was a lot I didn't know and a lot I needed to learn. Many of my friends, family, and colleagues were reading these books, as well, and I wanted to be part of the conversation. I sought these books out with a great deal of intention in order to expand my perspective.

Readers usually come to nonfiction books for very specific reasons.

I bought a book called *Burnout* because I heard a Brené Brown podcast with the authors and thought they would have something to teach me about resilience and handling powerful emotions — which are often a trigger in migraines. I did not seek this book out, but once I heard about it, it touched on a topic that is of great interest to me. I bought it because I thought it might increase my self-awareness and my overall wellness.

I bought Seth Godin's new book, *The Practice*, because I'm a Seth Godin fan and thought his last book on marketing was fabulous.

I thought it would help me do a better job of coaching my writers and teaching our book coaching students.

I bought *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* because I had a client who kept referencing it in relation to the book she was writing, and I had not read it and I wanted to be able to effectively guide her. (I bought this book to be of service to someone else but I ended up loving it. I had no idea that the concept of asking if a thing sparks joy, a concept that has entered the popular lexicon, was not just about decluttering your closet; it's a deeply profound idea about knowing yourself.)

Sometimes a book is forgettable and we move on when we're done with it and might not remember a single thing from it. But other times, books utterly change us. We become a different person after we read it. We are transformed.

This is why books and the people who write them are held in such high esteem in our society: they are instruments of powerful change. We cherish the books that help us become the people we long to be.

We cherish the books that help us become the people we long to be.

So who are you going to change with your idea?

Who are you going to transform?

Consider the idea you are noodling on, and consider your reader. Ask yourself:

- Why might they care about my idea?
- What do they need?
- What will they get out of it?
- What can I help them do?

- What can I help them learn?
- What can I help them become?

Next step, I'll talk about defining how you intend to change this reader, by asking about your point.

Step 5: What's Your Point?

You've had a brilliant idea, you know why you care about it, and you know who else might care about it. The next step in turning that idea into a book is figuring out your point.

What are you trying to say?

Your answer connects back to your rage and ambition and to the reasons you care about this idea. It also connects to why you think other people might care about this idea — to what they need that you can give them. But it's not enough to be vaguely aware of the point you want to make, or "in the ballpark" of the point you want to make. You need to really KNOW it and to be able to define it.

So, picture yourself standing on a soapbox in Times Square with a megaphone.

Picture yourself on a TedTalk stage or with Oprah on Super Soul Sunday.



Photo by [Joshua Chua](#) on Unsplash

Picture yourself on the front page of the *Harvard Business Review* or *Inc.* or *Rolling Stone* — wherever would be the pinnacle of success for your area of expertise.

Why are you there? What are you talking about? What has everyone buzzing? You no doubt have something to say about life or love or sports or crime or God or death or magic or cake. If you didn't have something to say, you would probably be spending your days knitting elaborate sweaters or canning homegrown tomatoes instead of trying to write a book.

Every book is, at heart, an argument for something — for a belief, a way of life, a vision of the future, a way to solve a problem, a way to make a friend, a way to learn something new. What are you arguing for? What's your point?

Don't be alarmed if your point sounds like a cliché. There are a vast number of books that can be written with the same point. When you can frame your idea as a cliché, it means you're getting down to something universal that everyone understands. You will make it unique through structure, shape, and voice, so there's no need to worry about it being simple or obvious.

The Point of These Steps

Here is my brainstorm for the point of these steps. I worked on the point over a few days — starting and stopping, coming back to it, refining it. This brainstorm was tied to my answer to who else might care about the idea (which I realize I didn't put in last week's post): experts struggling to write nonfiction books.

- Stop treating creators and the creative process as precious; it's a replicable process that can be tamed, taught, and mastered.
- Stop treating your ideas as precious. Ideas are worthless; it's the execution of the idea that matters.

- Making books does not depend on magic or miracles. It depends on hard work.
^ These are all negative points. They come from my anger about the way people approach writing books — about how they waste so much time and cause themselves so much pain. There's nothing wrong with a negative point, but I'd like my point to be more positive.
- Follow a method instead of waiting for a miracle.
^ I kind of like this one, but it's very vague. It could be about anything.
- Separate the work of thinking about what you want to write from the writing itself — it's more efficient and results in better books.
^ I kind of like this one, but it's a little long.
- Think before you write.
^ This feels good. I know I may revisit and revise it as I go, but this is a solid point to start with.

The Point of My Migraine Book

Here is my brainstorm for my point about the migraine book. It also came from my answer about who this book was for, which I also forgot to share last week... So who else might care about this idea? It's not primarily a book for other people who suffer from migraines. It's not a book about how to live with migraines or how to overcome them. That was what had me stuck for 20 years; I didn't want to write that book. I am not an authority on that topic. And I couldn't find my way past that idea. The book I want to write is about what it's like to live with chaos and pain — with any kind of chaos and pain. So it's a

book about being human. I am writing it for readers who seek out books about what it means to be whole and to be well. My point is:

- My relationship with pain has been a mirror of my relationship with myself
- Pain is not a separate part of myself
- I am all the parts of me
 - ^ *Reminiscent of Whitman's "I am multitudes."*
- Pain can help you heal
 - ^ *I'm not convinced about this one. I'm going to sit with it and see what happens.*

It is not unusual for a writer to change their point as they write forward and deepen the work. That's fine; these changes are often small tweaks, and it's far better to tweak your point than not to have one at all.

The next step in how an idea becomes a book is to think about how to convey your point to your reader — in other words, how to build a structure to contain and amplify it.

Step 6: How To Give Your Idea Structure

One of the most common questions I get as a book coach is some form of this: "Is my idea any good?" Sometimes it is posed slightly differently — i.e. "Do you think this book has a chance of

landing an agent?" "Can you tell me if this is worth pursuing?" "Do you think people will care?"

The best answer is a quote by Lemony Snicket, the protagonist of the children's book series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, who said, "It is never the story and always the way it is told."

In other words, ideas are cheap. It's how you handle your idea, how you present it, how you pin it to the page that matters. At a certain point, the way a story is told is about language and voice and craft, but before you get there — long before you get there — the way it is told is referring to *structure*.



How is your idea contained and constrained? What limits have you put around it? Where are the edges of the idea? Answering these questions is a key skill in book writing — one of the most underrated, in my mind. But the good thing about a skill is that it can be taught.

Seeing in Story, Seeing the Structure

I was taught how to see in story — how to know what makes a good one, how to choose a shape that serves it — when I worked at New York Woman magazine in the late '80s after graduating from college and doing a stint at Random House. We put out a magazine every four weeks. It was a slick, beautifully designed, large-format city magazine, with articles about artists and business people and fashion and food. At any given moment, there were dozens of

articles — which we called stories — being assigned, written, edited, scheduled, and laid out.

I was an editorial assistant — the lowest on the editorial staff — but I got to sit in on the meetings where stories were chosen — *yes to this one, no to that one, not one we would ever do, one we should assign at 800 words, one we should assign at 8,000, one we should put in the front of the book, one we should put on the cover.* We were constantly thinking about our audience, our mission, *what mattered to us and our readers.* We were a collective group, and a business, but just like an individual writer, we too were constantly honing our ability to see ideas and to trust them and to give them shape.

Shape comes from your why and your point and the ideal reader you are trying to serve. Shape is a container to hold the idea — to pour it into. You could pour your idea into one kind of shape or pour it into another and that will entirely change what that book will be.

Shape comes from your why and your point and the ideal reader you are trying to serve.

Think of a book like *Eat, Pray, Love* — a book that is (in a very blunt analysis) about learning things that enrich your life by going to specific places — and how that story would have been different if it had been any other number of idea/place combinations besides three. If, say, it had been 1001, it could have become *1001 Places to See Before You Die*.

At the magazine, I began to trust my instincts — to see that an idea looked at *this* way was a good story, but the same idea looked at *this other* way was not. It's the instinct I rely on now as a book coach. When someone is talking about all their ideas and plans and

visions for their book, I can *hear* it when they hit on an angle that has more heat than the others. I can see it in their eyes. Seeing the story is a way of envisioning the edges of the shape, the outlines of it, almost as if it was something you can literally see. It's akin to cropping a photograph, zooming way in or way out, to see an image in a different way, a more compelling way, a way that resonates.

I believe it was in an early version of *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published* that authors Eckstut and Sterry told the story about an editor who was out to lunch with a CEO. The CEO thought he should write a book about leadership and they were discussing it — without much enthusiasm or heat. Then the waiter came and the CEO pulled out a special card on which he ranked and scored beers on tap. The editor asked him what it was, and with great energy and excitement, the CEO explained his methodology, his research, and how he landed on the beer he ordered that day. The editor smiled and said, “That’s your book.” And the CEO wrote it and it went on to be a mega hit.

That’s what seeing in story looks like.

How to Teach Yourself This Skill

You can learn how to identify the shape of a good idea by studying the table of contents of books. You don’t even have to read the books — just read the TOCs.

Ask yourself:

- Can the arc of transformation the reader will experience be seen in this TOC?
- What is the logic of the way the material is presented?
- Why does it begin where it begins?
- Why does it end where it ends?
- If there is a list, why did the author choose that number of items?

- Does the TOC showcase the point of the book?

By studying TOCs, you can see the shape of the stories, the structure that underlies the books. You can train your eye and your ear to see the edges.

Here are some really good TOCs from a very wide range of nonfiction books that show what I mean:

- *The Five Love Languages*
- *The Secret Lives of Color*
- *Stamped from the Beginning*
- *The Artist's Way*
- *Untamed*
- *Truffle Underground*
- *Caste*
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*
- *The Faraway Nearby*
- *Steal Like an Artist*

Speaking of Stealing...

You can adopt someone's structure. Or as Chip and Dan Heath put it in *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, "Don't think outside the box. Go box shopping. Keep trying on one after another until you find the one that catalyzes your thinking. A good box is like a lane marker on the highway. It's a constraint that liberates."

What Austin Kleon (author of *Steal Like an Artist*) means by stealing like an artist and what I mean by adopting is not literal stealing. You can't pour an idea about the work of becoming an artist into a 12-step process like Julie Cameron did for *The Artist's Way* and call what she calls "morning pages" something like "first thing in the morning pages" — that would just be wrong and weird

and possibly illegal, unless you were building on her work in a very specific way or satirizing it and acknowledging your debt to her idea.

But you can do something like this:

For my migraine book, I was struggling with my point and with my ideal reader, and with the structure. I was lost, for many years, but the idea of writing about migraine wouldn't let me go. When I began to better understand my point — what I wanted to say, and why I wanted to say it — I was able to start thinking about the reader and why they might care. This set me up to think about structure.

When I began to better understand my point — what I wanted to say, and why I wanted to say it — I was able to start thinking about the reader and why they might care.

One day, I was doing some research for a client, and I read an excerpt from Glennon Doyle's *Untamed*. She has an unusual structure for her story about coming into her whole true self — three conceptual/ideological sections that tell a tale (cages, keys, free), with interior entries in those sections that are presented in a non-chronological way. This structure was like a lightning strike to my idea about migraines. I could immediately see how what I was trying to do would come alive with a structure like that — and if I numbered the migraines (which would appear out of order), that would lend another layer to the point and the structure and the experience for the reader, and the numbering also dovetails with some possible titles I am contemplating that have to do with the number of migraines I've had over nearly 30 years.

In other words, I could suddenly see the book I wanted to write, and so I adopted that structure for my own material and my own purposes.

Not all structures are as complicated as Doyle's. The one that contains this blog series is a numbered series of lessons about a process. There are a million books that use that structure — but maybe that's the one that's right for your idea, that contains it, and helps you tell it.

That's what you are looking for — the shape that brings the idea to life. In the next step, I'm going to discuss why you want to explore what other writers are doing in your space, and when might be a good time to do it.

Step 7: The Reader Transformation Journey

In the last step I said that in this step I was going to write about what other writers are writing in your space and when might be a good time to explore that, but I was jumping the gun. Before we get to that, we need to spend more time on structure. Because once you have the basic shape your idea is going to take, you need to flesh it out. The way to do that is to pay attention to the transformation journey your reader is going to go on in this book.

People come to books because they want to be changed by the experience — and that is as true of middle-grade novel about a magic tree house as it is about a book about the history of the caste system in America or a book about how to be a leader in difficult times.

In fiction, we nail down the reader transformation journey by looking at the protagonist's arc of change, because in fiction, the reader steps into the protagonist's shoes to experience the world

from their point of view as they struggle to achieve something they desire. The opening and closing scenes are bookends that contain the story, and the path from one to the other is the transformation



Photo by [Pedro Santos](#) on Unsplash

journey. I teach the process of laying out this transformation in fiction using a tool called *The Inside Outline*. (You can read a bit about it [HERE](#) and also sign up to get news about my book, *Blueprint for a Book: Building Your Novel From the Inside Out*. There is a lot about writing fiction that can be of great use to a nonfiction writer.)

The steps in this document are focused on nonfiction, and in nonfiction, the reader transformation journey is about the reader. They start out in one place: a place of being unaware or unsure or uninformed or uninspired. And they end up in another place: a place of knowing something new, understanding

something new, embracing something new, believing something new.

So the question is, how do they get there? Within the container you have selected to hold your idea (the shape, the TOC), how do they move through it?

Although writing a book demands creativity, it is creativity built on logic.

Where to Start and Where to End

The first step is to figure out where exactly the book will start. This goes back to your ideal reader and their pain, and to the point you are making in the book. What is it that your ideal reader wants or

needs? Where exactly are they in the process of acquiring the knowledge you're going to give them? Are you, for example, teaching someone the basics of how to plant a simple vegetable garden or are you teaching an advanced course on growing enough food to feed a family? Are you teaching someone how to get over their fear of public speaking or are you teaching someone how to deliver a talk on the main TED stage?

Once you know where it starts, you can determine where it ends — which will be at a place that makes the point you want to make.

Even if you are not teaching something, per se, there is a journey the reader will go on, and therefore a place that journey will begin. For my migraine book, I originally conceived of it as a kind of guided journal for a migraine sufferer to identify their triggers. That reader would have gone on a journey from having a vague awareness of what tended to give them migraines to having a crystal clear analysis — and in knowing, they could presumably control their health. But that was a reader transformation journey I never really believed in. That was a book I realized didn't want to write.


Once I reimagined it as a book about the nature of pain — what it means to be human, to be alive, and how we all face the certainty of being in physical pain — the reader transformation journey completely changed. This is a rough draft of that journey, the first time I have put it to words:

- I want my reader to go from feeling somewhat sorry for themselves about whatever pain they happen to suffer (and probably hoping for some kind of way to alleviate that pain) to feeling a kind of kinship with their pain — or a kind of welcoming openness to it — since feeling pain means you are still alive.

What About the Middle?

To track the logical progression of your idea, I use a simple tool called an Outcome Outline. It gives you a framework for asking yourself what outcome each chapter will drive to, and how that outcome is linked to the next. It prevents you from going off on tangents or putting in material that doesn't help move the reader forward. It keeps you on track.

It's a simple tool that is much harder to complete than it might at first seem. It looks like this:



THE OUTCOME OUTLINE

	POINT	OUTCOME	BECAUSE OF THAT...
CHAPTER	Why is this chapter here? What is the experience of the reader in this chapter?	What will reader know or feel or be doing by the end of the chapter? Where are they on the journey?	How is this chapter connected to the next one? What is the idea that moves the reader from this chapter to the next?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

You can download the *Outcome Outline* [HERE](#) and noodle around with it. The whole goal is to put the reader at the front and center of the reading experience.

Once you develop an Outcome Outline, you are now ready to consider other people writing in your space.

Step 8: Consider The Competition

Books are not written in a vacuum. If you are interested enough in a topic to want to write about it, chances are that you have read other books that explore the same idea — and those books have probably inspired you, taught you, angered you, helped you hone your thoughts — or all of the above. They are, in other words, in your

head even as your idea takes shape and comes to life.

At a certain point, you need to take a hard look at the entire landscape of the marketplace so that you can be clear about where your book fits. I believe the best time to consider the competition is once you know your point and the specific shape of the book and your reader's transformation journey. At this stage, your idea is strong enough to hold its own but there is still time to re-think and re-frame and re-jig it if you learn anything you didn't know about the market. I think of an idea at this point like wet clay as opposed to hardened cement.



Photo by [Clay Banks](#) on Unsplash

The Point of Market Research

Agents use competitive title information to determine if a book is marketable — in other words, to determine approximately how many books they think they can sell. It does them no good for a writer to say, “There has never been another book like mine.” They want some assurance that there is a market for your book, and other books that are like yours can give them that assurance.

If you are not planning to seek out an agent and a traditional publishing deal, you still want to consider the marketplace because you are going to be doing the work of getting that book into the reader’s hands and will want to know what else that reader is buying — and why. This will help you hone your idea to an even finer point.

A Philosophy of Competitive Title Research

I teach my book coaching students at Author Accelerator that comp title research isn’t actually about putting books in opposition to each other. It’s not really a competition. Someone who buys a book on, say, breast cancer, is likely going to buy several books on breast cancer.

Someone who buys a book on, say, breast cancer, is likely going to buy several books on breast cancer..

The same is true of learning how to invest, learning how to get into college, learning how to garden, and learning how to write. (Think of your own bookshelf. You probably have so many books on writing. I am glancing at my shelf and I probably have 50 just within sight...)

So the way to think about comp title research is to think of books as being in *conversation* with each other.

Imagine the books sitting on a bookshelf having a conversation. One is saying, "I believe X" and another is saying, "Yes, and...." and another is saying, "No, but...."

Where does your book fit in the mix?

So if, for example, you were writing a book about procrastination in writers, you would want to understand what all the big books on habits (*Tiny Habits*, *Atomic Habits*) were already saying about procrastination, and how your idea was saying something new. Because if it wasn't, why would anyone want it? You would also want to know what the classic books about creativity (*The Creative Habit*, *The War of Art*) are saying about procrastination, and the innovative new books (*Why Bother?*, *Burnout*), and to know how your book might add to the conversation.

If you were writing a book about nutrition during pregnancy, your book would probably be read after *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, because you know that almost every pregnant woman gets that book the second she finds out she's pregnant. You would be adding more depth and nuance to an idea that they perhaps spent six pages on (I'm guessing on that page count — haven't read that book in about 25 years...). That is one conversation. Another conversation might be the one your book has with a general book on nutrition for women or with a popular diet book that everyone is reading that you believe could be risky for a pregnant woman.

If you were writing about business leadership, what would your book say to *Dare to Lead*? Would it say, "No one in the bond trading business actually talks about being vulnerable — that's ridiculous. We think of daring in a totally different way." Or would it say, "Such great ideas — so how do you actually implement them if you run a business in the world of higher education?" Or would it say, "Vulnerability is only half the story. The other half is _____."

Knowing what your book is saying to the other books out there will help you hone and refine your point and your purpose so that you can serve your reader even better than you already are.

What if You Find Out Someone Has Already Written the Book You Want to Write?

You may think that someone has already written the book you want to write, but it's not possible. No one can write your book because no one is you. No one's brain is looking at things the same way or drawing on the same experiences that you are.

Figure out what you are saying that they are not, what you are offering that they are not, and how you can serve your reader in a way they are not.

How to Search

1. Go to Amazon and start with the best-selling books in your topic area. (You can search "bestsellers" in almost any category.) Read the book jackets and read at least 10 reader reviews for each book. Get a sense of how regular readers talk about the book, what they feel about it, what it means to them, and what bothers them. You can add more books to your list by using the feature entitled, "Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought..." Circle around 5 or 6 books that are the ones that have the most to say in the conversation with your book.
2. Go to Google and read the professional reviews for the five books that seem the most like yours. Is there anything in the praise or the criticism that helps you refine what you want to write — or what you don't want to write?
3. Consider books outside of the topic that speak directly to a segment of your target audience. Let's say, for example, that you

have written a book about how to launch a start-up business. You might want to look at memoirs by famous start-up founders because all the ideal readers will have read the memoir and have it on their shelf. Is there anything that helps you have a better sense of your own book?

The author of *The Coaching Habit*, Michael Bungay Stanier, said he often compares his book to artist Austin Kleon's *Steal Like an Artist*. On the surface, a book about coaching in the workplace might not have anything to do with a book about making art, but Stanier drew the line between the structure and accessibility of Kleon's book and his own, and it makes perfect sense.

Then What?

Now go back to your TOC and your jacket copy, your point, and even your title, and put it all to the test. Is your book doing what you want it to do? Is it doing it in the best possible way it can, in relation to the market? Revise it until you are confident that you have something clear and compelling to add to the conversation.

In the next step, I'll talk about writing forward.

Step 9: Writing Forward

The steps that I have gone through on how an idea becomes a book are the things that ideally happen *before you start to write*.

If they don't happen before you start to write, you will be sorting them out while you write, which is to say you will be

cramming two processes into one: the strategic thinking and the execution of the writing. It doesn't usually work very well and is, in fact, the source of frustration and overwhelm for a lot of writers.

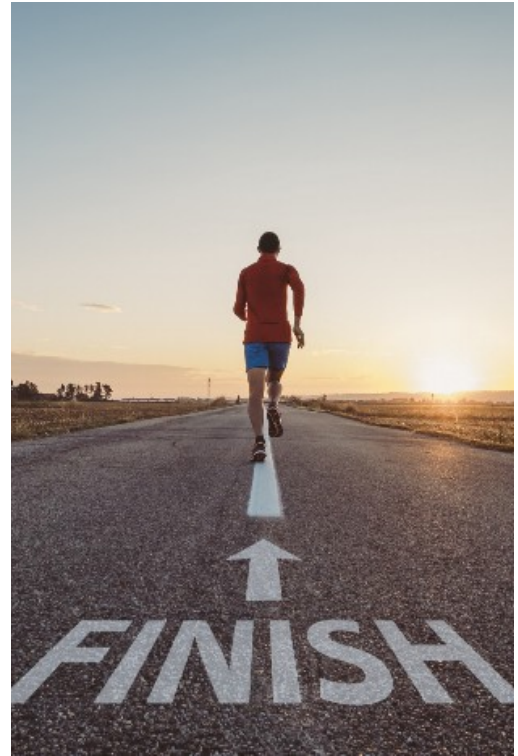
When people come to me because they are stuck or stalled out, or because they are being rejected by agents, editors, or the reading public, the first thing I do is go back to the fundamentals.

- What is your point?
- Why do you care?
- Who are you writing for?
- What do they need?
- What is the best structure to contain your idea?
- What is the reader transformation journey?
- What else is your idea reader reading?

If the writer can't answer these questions with clarity and conviction, that is where we start — even if they have written 250 pages. It is only when those answers are clear that writing forward makes any sense.

The beauty of writing forward after you've done the hard work of figuring out what you want to write and what the shape of the work is going to be is that it is usually a relatively straightforward process. It's not *effortless*, by any means, because writing is a multi-layered, complex intellectual and creative undertaking, but you won't be searching for what to say or how it connects to what comes before or after it.

Writing forward when you have a strong foundation becomes about two things:



1. The habits and practices that have little to do with writing itself. To wit:

- You have to make time to do the work, which usually means giving something up like sleep, or a pristinely clean house, or time with your family and friends, or your favorite Netflix show, or cooking — or maybe all of the above at various times. The idea of setting aside blocks of time for deep work is appealing and scientifically-proven to be the most effective, but in real life, most people don't get blocks of time like that. You have to beg, borrow, and steal the time you need to write.
- Set a goal for when the draft will be done. Pick an actual day on the calendar and work backward from that day to what you need to do. You might write like clockwork for 30 minutes every day at the same time, or you might write for an hour on Wednesday, two on Saturday, and 15 minutes on Monday when you are waiting in the carpool line. How you get there is not as important as the end-goal.
- Find someone to be accountable to. I just heard novelist Nancy Johnson, whose debut novel *The Kindest Lie* is getting all kind of crazy good attention, attribute her success to an accountability partner, whom she would call at the same time every night (after a full day at a full-time job) to declare the goal for the evening, and hold each other in check.
- I also just spoke to my niece, who does scholarly writing, who swears by an app called FocusMate. You log in and declare to a stranger what your goal is for a 50-minute

session and they declare their goal to you, and you do the work in silence. At first, I thought this was insane, but then I realized — no: this is just excellent accountability.

- As a book coach, I am in the business of accountability. I think it's a huge part of why book coaching works. People are paying me and they want to get their money's worth, which means they're not going to miss their deadlines.
- Don't make excuses. The people who publish books are the people who write them, who finish them. If you want to be in the arena, making an impact and being part of the conversation, you have to do the work. You have to persist. It is as simple and as hard as that.

2. Raising your voice. At the end of the day, this is what writing is really all about. It's about speaking your truth, claiming your authority, taking a stand for what you believe in. We can talk all day long about how to write — both the craft of it and the practice of it — but the hardest part by far is stepping into your power.

I have the great privilege of working with people who are very accomplished in their fields — entrepreneurs and executives and thought leaders — and every single one of them rubs up against the difficulty of raising their voice. Will people care? Do I have the right to tell this story? Is it good enough? Will it matter? These are not just questions the beginner asks; these are questions every writer asks. And they are questions about raising one's voice.

The way to combat these questions is to go right back to the start: why are you writing this book? Tap into your motivation, the reason you care, your rage, and your passion. That is how you find your voice and how you finish your book.

The Killer Book Proposal System

I coach writers through each step of the book proposal development process in my Killer Book Proposal System.

A book proposal is a business case for your book. It's the sales tool you use to attract an agent and then an editor at a traditional publishing house. You can watch my 15-minute video take on it [HERE](#) and read some of my client success stories [HERE](#).

A proposal is easy enough to understand — much harder to execute. In order to make an impact, you can't just fill in the blanks and you can't just copy what someone else did. If you want to work with a professional who can help you wrangle your big idea, raise your voice, and get it out into the world, fill out the form [HERE](#) and we'll set up a time to chat.

Book Coach Certification

Does book coaching sound like your dream job? I am the creator of the Book Coach Certification Program at Author Accelerator. We teach you the skills you need to become a book coach and run a sustainable book coaching business. You can learn all about it at [**bookcoaches.com/abc**](http://bookcoaches.com/abc)

