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7 Top Tips to plan your book

You may ask, why even start with a plan? Here are 5 good reasons.

Planning helps you

- to get clarity on your ideas, deciding what you're writing and who you are writing for.
- find a starting point for the writing, making it easier to break it down into smaller chunks to work on.
- identify any gaps in your knowledge, giving you pointers for further research.
- to get organised, laying out the chapters as part of the plan.
- get ideas sorted out at the beginning of your writing journey, so that you don't have to stop mid-writing to research or rummage through old notes for something you forgot.

Planning doesn't stop you being creative. In fact, it helps you review all of the many options available to you.

There are no right or wrong answers to most of the questions below, but thinking about them will help keep you focussed.

1. Why are you writing this book?

Some authors struggle to articulate why they're writing their book. Having the reason clear in your mind will help you on the days when writing gets tricky. You can go back to your purpose and revitalise your thinking by re-reading this plan though. Are you writing simply for the accomplishment of finishing your book? Are you writing to bring a particular theme alive in fiction? Are you writing to share your non-fiction knowledge? Are you writing because you have to get your story out there to share and possibly help others in their lives? Or, are you writing a family story for future generations?

2. What are you writing?

Are you writing a memoir, a novel or a non-fiction book? And why have you chosen this particular genre? Some authors take the material of a memoir and then turn it into a novel rather than keeping it as a traditional memoir. Other authors set out to write a non-fiction guide to their topic, but then find it's more practical to turn the book into a workbook with exercises. These can engage the reader and encourage them to return regularly to the book. Whatever you want to write, be clear upfront so that you don't cause yourself extra re-working at a later stage.

3. Which audience are you writing for?

You need to decide who you're writing for and why the book will appeal to them or how it will help them. Being aware of this, ensures you keep the language appropriate for the readers age (especially important if you're writing for children and teens), and to use a style that they'll enjoy. Is your audience keen on a particular genre? Are you going to help your audience, because you are sharing expert knowledge or skills they want to learn? Or are they interested in hearing your story to help them to make a specific change in their life?

4. When do you want to publish your book?

If you have a specific date in mind, such as a business anniversary, you need to make time to write and schedule in the publishing process. A writing routine doesn't work for some creative writers. So, as an author, you need to decide whether you'll write when the mood takes you or whether you'll fix a time every day or every week to write. Preparing yourself to write can also involve choosing some mood-lifting activities which will inspire you to write. Choose from: a walk outside; singing; reading other people's books; drawing and colouring in; watching an inspiring TV show - anything to help your brain relax and be creatively ready to write. Everyone works differently, so don't try to emulate famous authors by working to their schedule – create your own.

5. How many chapters are you aiming for, and what's in them?

Designing a chapter plan gives you a framework for writing your book. At this stage, the ideas are certainly not set in stone, and if you think of other sections to add, they can always go in later. Each chapter needs a rough title, but you can adapt the headline when it comes to the writing stage. For some people creating a physical folder, such as a ring-binder divided into sections for each chapter, where you can drop in ideas, and stick post-it notes as you think of things, works well. Others prefer to have everything online, and having a folder on your computer for each chapter, where you can drop in ideas, works equally well.

6. Who are your characters?

In fiction, you'll need to plan out who your key characters are, how they behave and interact with each other. Think about their characteristics – not necessarily just how they look, unless it is very important to their personality – but how they move, and their physical presence. Think about what they've experienced and the events which will happen to them. Make sure how they speak matches their age and social standing.

Creating a story arc for their life gives you an opportunity to hold back some of the events for future books, perhaps developing them into a series.

7. How are you going to publish?

Start to consider how you want to publish your book – if at all. You may decide to write a family story which you will print for family members alone, so that the story can be passed down through generations

There are three main types of publishing:

1. You may decide to completely self-publish, where you manage the entire process yourself, through to organising the printed copies.
2. You may choose Assisted self-publishing, which is where you pay upfront to work with a publisher who then supports you through the whole process of getting your book published.
3. Traditional publishing is where large, traditional publishing houses offer cash advances to commission new works. This however is happening less and less, and it is very hard to find a publishing house who will publish authors who have not previously published, or who are not famous!

Making the decision beforehand helps you to know how much time, and or money you need to put aside for your book to be launched onto the world of you readers.

One last tip: once you start writing, always have either a notebook, or a dedicated place in your phone notes where you can jot down ideas when they pop into your head – because they don't always arrive on time, i.e. at a time that is convenient to you!

Enjoy your writing!