

## How to Write a Book Teleseminar Notes

March 21, 2008

You have the ability, right now, to write and publish a book on a subject that is important to you. Like riding a bicycle, learning how to write a book is a skill that you can master with practice and repetition.

According to USA Today, 82% of adults dream of writing a book someday, either to express a heart-felt concern about a subject, or to earn a living, and even become successful.

Many books are written by people who are not particularly good at writing. Instead, they hire a “writer-for-hire” who interviews them, takes notes on their ideas and insights, and then works it into a book which they go on to publish under their own name.

Many of the best selling books on the *New York Times* lists were not written by the person whose name appears on the cover. They were written by other writers.

There are more than 200,000 books published each year and yours can be one of them.

The key to writing a book is to “Just Write!” Writing is one thing that you cannot get worse at by doing it.

Albert Hubbard, one of the most prolific writers in American history was once asked the key to successful writing. He replied, “The only way to learn to write is to write and write and write and write, and write and write and write.”

My own story might be instructive. I did not graduate from high school, and I failed high school English. I fantasized about writing a book for many years before I decided to “Just write!”

In 1981, I began giving talks and seminars to ever larger groups. To speak effectively, I had to do hundreds of hours of research, and read hundreds of books over the years. To keep current, I read dozens of magazines and thousands of articles. I’d read many of them several times.

When I developed my one-to-three day seminars, I would structure the materials so that the seminar started strong, in the first session, and then developed progressively, step-by-step through to the last session, where it ended on a strong, positive note.

When I began to write books, I used the same structure. I learned later that this is a powerful formula for successful books. Start with a strong chapter that gives a lot of value and benefits to the reader, develop the subject throughout the book, and end with a strong chapter that summarizes and emphasizes the main points. It is a simple formula, but it works, over and over.

Today, I write four or five books each year and am published by seven different publishers in the U.S., as well as dozens of publishers in 37 languages and 53 countries. I have sold millions of books on a wide variety of subjects.

George Bernard Shaw, who became the most famous “Man of letters” in England, winning countless awards and becoming extremely wealthy, started writing at the age of twenty. But he did not sell his first work until he was 42. For twenty-two years, he kept his job and slaved away in the evenings. When he finally began selling his works, he went on to become famous world-wide.

Harold Robbins wrote for many years before his book, “The Carpet Baggers” became a best seller, and then triggered best selling status among all his previous books.

**There are twenty steps that I have identified that anyone can follow to become an author, and then a published author.**

1. Start with a message, idea, or story that you really want to share with other people. This must be something for which you have a passion, something that you believe in.

One of the best definitions of a writer is; “A person who cannot not write.”

2. You must be an expert on your subject. You must know ten words for every word you write. Or the reader will know that you are talking off the top of your head.

If you want to write on success, you must already be successful. If you write on money, you must already be rich. If you write on relationships, you must be happily married.

3. Define your target market before you begin writing. Exactly who are you writing this book for?

What is the age range of the prospective reader?

What is the sex of your ideal reader?

What is the income and position of your reader?

What is the level of education of your reader?

What is his/her level of family formation?

What are the hopes, fears and dreams of your reader? What are the desires and motivations of your reader? What are the interests and concerns of your reader? What are the problems that your reader has that your book will solve? What are the frustrations that your book will take away?

For you to write a book proposal for a literary agent or for a publisher, you will have to be able to answer these questions. Otherwise, no one will consider publishing your book.

Make sure that your market is large enough. I only write books that I feel have at least one million potential book buyers.

When you write a book proposal, you will be asked to describe the type of person who will buy the book, and the number of those people that exist in the current market.

5. Buy, read and find out everything you can about other authors, books or articles dealing with the same subject. Make sure that your material is different and better than other people writing in your field in at least three ways.

6. Gather all the information that you will need to write your book. Do your research and homework before you start to write.

Paul Johnson, one of the best writers in the world today, describes how he gathers 1500 pieces of information and then organizes them from beginning to end, in a logical structure, before he begins writing a book on any subject.

To write an excellent non-fiction book, you will have to have a lot of information available to you.

7. Organize your material into seven, ten, twelve or twenty-one chapters, each following in a logical order, from beginning to end.

When I began writing, I converted my audio programs, each of which had twelve parts, into a series of twelve-chapter books.

Thinking in terms of a number of chapters forces you to decide what will be contained in each chapter, and how each of the chapters will be organized in relationship to each other.

8. Once you have a chapter title, get yourself a legal sized writing pad and jot down every key point that you could think of that could possibly be included in this chapter.

I call this the “down-dump.” As you begin to write the points that should be included in this chapter, more ideas will occur to you. You will often find yourself writing two, three and four pages of material, with dozens of ideas that fall under the chapter heading.

Once you have written down all the material for each of your chapters, begin with chapter one and organize your point from the first point through to the closing part of the chapter.

You may want to use a “mind map” to create a visual picture of each chapter. To do this, you take a blank sheet of paper, preferably a large sheet, and put a circle in the middle of the page. Inside this circle, you write the title of the chapter.

You then draw a line outward toward the edges of the page, and at the edge of each line draw a circle which will stand for a major subject to be covered in this page. You then draw lines out from each of these core lines upon which you write the sub-points covered under that heading.

By the time you have finished, you will have your entire chapter laid out in front of you, very much like a brain cell with ganglia connecting it to other brain cells.

10. Begin with chapter one and dictate the book in the order of the material you have chosen. Begin with your first point, a strong statement that makes a point, and arouses interest in the reader in reading further.

Dictating your book is one of the most powerful exercises I have ever discovered, and dramatically increases the speed at which you create your initial manuscript. When you dictate, you are forced to write in a conversational tone of voice. This adds warmth to your material and makes it easier and more enjoyable to read for the reader.

11. Once you have dictated the entire book, chapter by chapter, give it to a typist and have the typist type it out and give it back to you by e-mail or disk for your computer.

If for any reason you are not now using a computer for your writing, you must begin immediately. If you have not yet learned to touch-type, immediately purchase the computer program “Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing.” By following this course, perhaps the most popular in the world, for thirty minutes each day, you will be touch typing and fluent with Microsoft Word within 60-90 days.

12. Set up a work schedule and create blocks of time consisting of two, three or four hours each. Put everything aside and discipline yourself to sit at your keyboard and edit your material during this time.

Create a space in your home or apartment. Get yourself a desk and a proper set-up. You need silence in which to work and do good editing.

13. Edit the entire book from the first word to the last word the first time. As you edit, correct the grammar and typing errors, of which there will be many. Create the necessary paragraphs, each one containing a single thought.

The first edit is the longest and the hardest job of editing in the whole book.

14. In your second edit, break up the text with a heading every two, three or four paragraphs. This makes your writing “bite-sized” and easy to read.

15. Write an Introduction, a Preface and, if necessary, Acknowledgements for the book.

A preface explains why you are writing this book and why it is important. Sometimes you can get someone else to write the preface for you.

Your Introduction is where you explain to the reader the importance of this subject, and what he or she will gain from reading the following book.

You write your Acknowledgements if other people have helped you in the writing, the research or the publication of the book. People are very flattered to be acknowledged in a book and see their name in print.

16. In your third edit, place a quote at the beginning of each chapter. If it is a self-help or educational book of some kind, create two, three, five or even seven action steps at the end of each chapter.

When you write an action step, always begin with an imperative verb, a command.

For example, you could say “Write down three goals that you intend to accomplish within the next thirty days.”

17. In your fourth edit, which will take much less time than the earlier edits, you polish the sentences, delete unnecessary material, and make final corrections.

18. In your fifth and often final edit, you completely re-read the entire book, line by line, from cover to cover. You will be amazed at the number of small mistakes that you pick up even though you have already been through the book from beginning to end four separate times.

The key to editing is that you must be satisfied with your work. You must feel that there is nothing more that you can do to improve it. Sometimes, you will have to re-write the book six or seven times, or even more.

Og Mandino, who wrote, "The Greatest Salesman in the World" and sold millions of copies once told me that he re-wrote each book thirteen to fifteen times. He said that, "My books are easy to read because they are so hard to write."

19. The entire process of writing a book as described above requires 50-100 hours of intense, focused work, after you have gathered all your material for the book.

Sometimes, the idea of writing 200-300 pages and investing more than 100 hours is overwhelming to a person. This is the reason why so many books go unwritten throughout history.

But several friends of mine, facing this dilemma, have discovered that they could go to bed early, arise early, and write one page per day. If you write one page per day, you will have a book ready to go to the publisher within twelve months.

20. Always play gentle classical music, non-vocal, in the background when you are working. Best of all, get stereo headphones and listen to classical music while you work.

What I discovered is that your brain burns out when you write or edit for two or three hours. But when you wear musical headphones, you can work much longer, and when you finish you will still be alert and creative.

## **Getting Published**

Every publishing house, large or small, is bombarded all day every day with would-be authors, striving to get the publisher to look at their manuscript.

If you go on to the website of any publishers, you will see written in big letters the instruction, "Do not mail manuscripts to our offices!"

They will not acknowledge the manuscripts, keep them, or send them back. They will all be thrown in the trash upon arrival.

For this reason, to publish a book, you must find a literary agent. Only a literary agent can get in the door of the publisher and get a hearing. But getting a literary agent is very difficult. I have known authors who have worked for years to finally find a literary agent that was able to get them published.

To find a literary agent, go to Amazon.com and buy the books “Jeff Herman’s Guide to Book Publishers,” by Jeff Herman. Purchase “Guide to Literary Agents” by Chuck Sanbuchino. When you look through these books, seek a literary agent who represents the kind of book that you are writing. Literary agents usually specialize in some category whether it is romance, detective, adventure, self-help, technical, business or something else.

Another way to find a literary agent is to go to your local bookstore and open the books in the area in which you intend to write. At the front of each of these books, in the “Acknowledgements” section you will find the name of the literary agent who the author is thanking for his/her help. Write down that agent’s name, go onto the internet, and find out how to contact that person.

The key to getting a hearing with a literary agent, and then later with a publisher, is the book proposal. Each book proposal must contain the title of the book, an outline of the subject, a table of contents or chapter titles, and the first and second chapters that give the literary agent and/or the publisher a flavor for the quality of your writing.

Get the book, “Write the Perfect Book Proposal” by Jeff Herman, or “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Getting Published.” By Sheree Buykovosky. These books will save you months and years of hard work in trying to figure out what you need to do by yourself.

To write well in any subject, you should read books on how to write well. My favorite is “On Writing Well” by William Zinnser. I also like “A Writer’s Time” by Kenneth Atchity. In any case, visit your local bookstore and go to the section that is full of books on how to write books written by people who have spent decades in the trade.

Finally, before you write your first book, you should purchase, “The Elements of Style” by Strunk and White. This is the gospel of good writing. It only takes an hour to read and contains about 100 one-liners that will open your mind and dramatically improve the quality of your writing.

The most important quality that you need for success as a writer, after genuine writing ability on a subject that is of interest to a large number of people, is persistence. You must be prepared to write and write and write and write, and write and write and write.

If you persist long enough and hard enough, you will eventually become a published author, and you may become one of the great writers of your generation.

Good luck.

Brian Tracy