

How to write your book's first draft

As quickly as possible—and do it first!

Let me share an inside secret on how you can separate the newbies from the veterans. The latter race through the first draft while the first timers belabor every word, parse thrice every phrase, and start again and again and again.

The vets know that their initial inspirations and starter lines will surely be edited and that half of what they write down will never see light—nor should it—as first captured and saved.

In fact, they will do that editing themselves later when they bring their prose up to par, and beyond.

But it's new ground for the uninitiated. They seem to be offended that gilded words don't fall each time they are commanded and that anybody, even themselves, would dare to change what they have created. Or chiseled. So they write and rewrite and delete and write again, and it's any wonder that a page a day ever gets completed—however well crafted (and later inappropriate) it is.

So let me share the process. (Yes, I'm a vet with 1700+ freelance articles and those 46 books in print, and, yes, it took me a few years to catch on.) You look at your purpose statement (taped to your monitor), you read the chapter title, you look through your notes (now in your binder), and you just start writing. It's easier if you sub-divided the chapter into logical points or secondary questions. But you don't worry much about what you put down. You can always move the words and thoughts around later. And if you draw a blank? Just type a bracketed box that says: fill me in with facts.

I walk you through all of these steps, plus the publishing, in [How to Get Your Book Published Free in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days](#).

A perfect example. This morning I was responding to an e-mail and for the life of me I couldn't think of the word "template." So I wrote "... if you create a [] you needn't continually reformat..." I put the reply in the draft file and went on with other tasks. Out of nowhere, about 20 minutes later, popped up the word "template"! So I found the draft, replaced the brackets, and sent off the message. A banal example but I don't want a memory lapse to slow down a sentence or thought in flow.

Don't edit as you write. Don't worry about spelling. Don't even worry much if you hit a dry well and have lots of empty brackets [] awaiting later inspiration. Your goal is to finish that chapter or section at that sitting.

You do your research off hours or after the first, rough draft is finished. And don't spend forever writing. I'm good from sun-up (or earlier if it's a restless night) for two or three hours, rarely until lunch (at 11). And that's it. Tomorrow, I'll pick up where I left off. The rest of the day is for the rest of my life. And, yes, sometimes I trot off to the library to read up on something I left undone that morning or to see what the sun comes up over in Inhambupe, Brazil, because I need that for my book to make sense, but not very often. After all, it's just a first draft and I may replace Inhambupe with Ouro Preto or Rio...

It's time to get your book going and done, to create a base to be tightly edited later, added to, expanded, and filled with the details that make it fun to read and valuable to own. This is the *durance vial*, the tough stuff, the bedrock that you build from to create a book that you will be beaming about and the open publishers will be chomping to produce. Usually it takes two or three months of no-nonsense writing.

A final thing. What you write stays in your head, your file, your flash drive, and your binder. It's raw stuff, the spelling probably off, verbs that don't match the nouns—so what? It's how winners write the first drafts of their books. And if you don't run like a winner, you probably won't finish the race. You sure won't win.

Which means that if you show the rough stuff to others (like secretaries, mates, or anybody who will look at it), they will see that the text is lousy and they won't believe that you're a writer. Worse, they will correct the errors and tell you how it should sound and what you should say and how it should be said.

To prevent that, you have two choices. You can finish every day with polished prose, lots of it unusable later and created at the cost of hours of useless editing, or you can just keep your words to yourself, with a promise to those who want you to succeed that they will get to see it the minute the final, polished draft is ready to print. If that doesn't satisfy them, tell them Gordon Burgett said that he would report you to the prose police if you showed raw copy before its time.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett