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The Writer's Workshop (Part 1 Of 6): Write Your First Book!

By [John Adam Wasowicz](#)



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Step by Step Guide to Writing a Book

Ready to challenge yourself to begin that novel you always dreamed of writing? [50PlusToday](#) begins a series this month designed for readers who want to write their book in 2021. The goal of this program, developed by John Adam Wasowicz, a Virginia attorney and author of the Mo Katz mystery series, is to inspire you to start to write. Don't put it off any longer!

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Ready? Let's Write a Novel!

If I can do it, so can you. Most of us seem to have a secret desire to write a book. Everyone has at least one story inside them! It might be the history of your family's origins, such as a story about your ancestors coming to America in search of a better life for themselves and future generations. Or perhaps a self-help book that assists people struggling with a particular issue, such as addiction, sexual identity, or illness. It might even be a secret desire to write a trashy romance.

Many of us think and think about writing a book without ever actually doing it. Too many things – too many excuses – get in the way.

If you truly want to write that book, let's do it together. Commit yourself to start today, one small step at a time. After all, it was Jack Kennedy who said, "Every journey begins with the first short step." Each of the six installments of this course leaves you with an assignment to complete before the next one.

Step One: Define Your Audience

As our first step, let's answer a simple question. Who's your [audience](#)? When you finish your story, you have to deliver it into the hands of others. You need to know your audience now, before you start. Do you want to publish your story only for friends and family? Or plan to share experiences with a select audience, such as advice about child rearing for parents of newborns? Do you perhaps want to reach a large audience, such as readers of cozy mysteries or romance novels?

Your defined "audience" influences how you proceed. For example, the audience plays a role in whether you write in the first, second or third person. It affects whether you self-publish your work, try to distribute it through a major publishing house, or pursue a small publisher, such as a university press.

So, take a moment now and finish this sentence: "I want to write a book for" Don't just say it out loud. Write it down. Give it serious

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consideration. If you don't identify your audience, I guarantee you won't write your book. And, even worse, if you don't write it, no one will read it. You have important thoughts to share with others...so get started today.

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

Step Two: Determine your Objective

The second important question in this process is, *Why* do you want to write a book? You might think this question is the same one I asked in step one. But it is really a very different question.

To illustrate my point, let's assume you answered the first question with the following: "I want to write a book for my extended family." If that's the case, what do you want to tell them? Do you want to provide information about the family's origins? Or share your knowledge about past medical history so future generations have 'advance warning' of possible susceptibility to certain diseases? Do you want to discuss your failures so later generations don't repeat your mistakes?

You see my point. Suffice it to say you need a theme. Without a theme, no one will "get it" when they read your book.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO WRITE A BOOK?

Five Helpful Tips

Keep these tips in mind when you define your audience and the objective of your work:

Write About Things You Know

If you're not well versed in the law, don't write a trial scene. Sure, you watched plenty of episodes of Perry Mason so you might think you're

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connoisseur of courtroom drama. I hate to burst your bubble, but you're probably fooling yourself. My advice is to limit what you write to topics with which you are familiar. You don't want people who know more about the subject than you to doubt your credibility. Once your credibility is shot, readers will abandon you.

Write With Passion

What is your passion? It might be cooking, politics, sports, sixties music, etc. Whatever it is, that's probably the subject you should write about. Readers pick up on passion. Conversely, readers sense ambivalence and won't bother to read through to the end of your book. Like an actor or public speaker, it's important to hold your audience in place. You have the best chance of success if you're passionate about your subject.

Pace Yourself

You don't have to jump into the project on a full-time basis, but you must commit to write a designated number of words each day. That advice may sound simple, but it isn't. I find it useful to create a daily goal. On the [calendar](#) in my study, I wrote "250" on each day of the month. I check it off on the calendar after I write 250 words on that day. Mission accomplished!

It is essential to write a daily goal. I don't write a lot in each sitting, but I write religiously every day. Over time, it adds up. Before you know it, you completed a chapter. Then an entire section. And finally the book itself is done. A decent length for a novel is 70,000 words. Writing 250 words each day means the draft will be complete in 280 days. Think about that! If you start today, within a year you will have a book.

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Use the Technique That's Right for You

Writing style is personal, and different for everyone. You might develop an outline before you begin, or not. If you write fiction, you might sketch-out characters in advance, or let them take shape organically. There's no cookie cutter approach to writing, just as there is no "one size fits all" for anything else in life, from your diet to your exercise regimen. Experiment. Don't impose a technique someone told you to use, only to discover it inhibits your ability to write. Just write!

I don't use an outline before I begin as I prefer to jump right into it. As was the case with this article, I compose the outline while I write. I play around with words, style, and structure. If you use a computer when you write, use the phenomenal tools at your disposal, none of which existed for Hemingway or others who wrote with an old-fashioned typewriter. These days, we can add and delete text, cut-and-paste, and move sections around to different places. Go for it.

Don't Sweat the Details

Don't fuss over the grammar and punctuation. Fortunately, a red squiggly line appears under your misspelt words, so you can deal with these issues later. And don't worry about whether the date or year of the story is accurate.

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Go with the flow. The key is to capture the idea on paper (or in the cloud). You can go back and make corrections after you get your thoughts down. Or, you may be fortunate enough to have an editor assigned by your publisher, if you have one, to assist in smoothing out your text.

That's all for now. More helpful tips next month.

The First Assignment

If you have not yet written down your “who” and “why”, do that now. Right now. This is the first in a series of six in our step by step guide to writing a book.

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

WHY DO YOU WANT TO WRITE A BOOK?

Next, set your goal – a good number is 250 words each day – and start today. Write at least four days a week so you have at least 4,000 words done when we “meet” again next month. Know your audience. Pace yourself. Bring your passion. And don't stress about the details. You will encounter challenges in “Month One” as we all do. **Email us with questions or concerns as you go that we can address in an upcoming article. And keep writing!**

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About the author:



John Adam Wasowicz is an author and practicing attorney. His first book, *Daingerfield Island*, introduced readers to Mo Katz, a defense attorney who had previously worked as a city prosecutor. The popularity of the book led to a sequel, *Jones Point*, and that book led to a series with the publication of *Slaters Lane*. The stories are set in Old Town Alexandria, VA. All of the books are available in paperback, ebook, and audiobook from major online retailers or through indie bookstores. Book Four, *Roaches Run*, is scheduled for publication in 2021. John lives in Mount Vernon, VA, with his wife, Robin.