

CHECKLIST FOR WRITING YOUR MANUSCRIPT




- ◆ **#1. Identify a clear target audience for your book.** A niche audience is almost always better than an audience that is too broad.
- ◆ **#2. Evaluate your competition.** It's important to determine how your your book will be different from others in your genre.
- ◆ **#3. Set a goal to write _____ number of words per day/week.** Keep in mind that if you write 1,000 words per day—about three typed pages—you'll have a 60,000 word manuscript in 60 days!
- ◆ **#4. Set a goal for completion.** Many authors find it helpful to set a realistic target date for publishing the book, and a target date for completing the manuscript (several months before the book is published). If you need help with accountability, enlist a friend or coach to help you reach your goals.
- ◆ **#5. Give the book a working title.** Titles are tough and often change several times before going to press.
- ◆ **#6. Write a description of your book and its benefits for readers.** Treat this like the back cover copy for your book. Writing a compelling description first can help you know what to focus on when developing the manuscript. Read descriptions for similar books to get an idea about how you will position yours and set it apart.
- ◆ **#7. Make a list of any research tasks that need to be completed** (if applicable).
- ◆ **#8. Develop an outline.** You may want to use the storyboard method, which means that you write each and every topic idea on a notecard or sticky note until you've emptied all ideas out of your head! Then begin to put them into a logical order. These will naturally help you develop an outline for your chapters, and you can see where you may need to expand content or split a chapter into multiple sections.
- ◆ **#9. Outline the table of contents.** Once you've utilized the storyboard method above, transfer all those notes into your outline—which will ultimately get pared down into your table of contents.



- ◆ **#10. Compile Notes and Content.** If you have notes and references for your chapters, keep them handy as you write. Many writers also compile content from other projects. For example, if you've written a blog or a column and want to repurpose some of that content for your book, then begin compiling what you will use and place it in the appropriate places within your manuscript document.
- ◆ **#11. Start writing.** When you have a solid outline, you may find that you don't want to write your book from beginning to end. You can instead work on different chapters at different times, or jump around topics—whatever works best for you. Once you begin to exercise your writing muscle, the process should get easier with time. Stick to your planned schedule! Also, writers are taught to “just write.” That means that you aren't editing as you go or stopping to do research. Get all of your content out of your head and on to paper, and then return later for edits and research.
- ◆ **#12. Begin the rewrite process.** Go back through your manuscript from beginning to end and fix errors, fill in places that need clarification, and cut out anything that doesn't add to the mission of the book. Most writers re-read and modify their manuscripts several times before enlisting the help of an editor.
- ◆ **#13. Update end notes.** If your manuscript includes reference material, these are usually noted within the text and the references are compiled into End Notes featured either at the end of each chapter, or the end of the book.
- ◆ **#14. Write a dedication (if applicable).** An acknowledgements section is also optional.
- ◆ **#15. Write your author bio.** You'll likely need a short bio for the back cover or dust jacket flap, and possibly a longer bio on the last page of the book (optional).
- ◆ **#16. Finalize the book title.** Often times the title comes directly from some text within the book—and it can be something you weren't expecting! A keyword-rich subtitle can also help your book get found when potential readers search for similar content.
- ◆ **#17. Get feedback.** Send sample chapters to a few trusted readers for review and feedback. Then make any final changes.





◆ **#18. Decide when you've achieved your "Last Draft."** There is a saying in publishing: "There is no such thing as a final draft, only a last draft." You could keep editing and adjusting your manuscript for years, or you could get to a point where you simply decide you've had enough and it's ready to go!

◆ **#19. Proceed with next steps.** If self-publishing, you'll want to hire an editor and then a proofreader to ensure the text is as clean as possible. If working with a traditional publisher, they will assign an editor to work with you.

This is also the point when you should begin to seek testimonials and/or a foreword for your book, if applicable.

