

A Guide to Writing Self-Help Books

Self-help is a great genre with a built-in audience. You name the problem and there is sure to be someone struggling with it. You've zoned into one particular problem, and you have the passion to help. Now, you need to know how to start.

So, how do you write a self-help book?

1. Choose Your Topic Wisely

- a. From goal setting to dealing with anger, there are hundreds of self-help topics you can choose to write about.
- b. Don't choose a broad topic. Zoom in further. It's important to narrow your audience down to a smaller group.
- c. For your self-help book to be most effective, it needs to be entirely focused on one type of person and/or one type of problem. So, ask yourself, can my topic be more specific?
- d. If you can't imagine the one type of person who would benefit from reading your self-help book, you're likely not specific enough.

2. Understand Your Audience

- a. Knowing who your readers are is important when writing a book, but with self-help it's essential. You need to know who's reading your book so you can help them overcome their problem.
- b. Start with the demographics of your target reader. What is their age range? Location? Gender? Then think about what motivates your target readers. What would make them want to pick up your book? Frustration, curiosity, desperation?
- c. Overall, understanding your audience will aid in writing content that's tailored to their needs. Think of your self-help book as a conversation between you and the reader. When you know who's listening, it's easier to speak directly.

3. Start With Research

- a. After asking yourself about your target audience, think about what questions they'll have about the subject matter. Make a list of these questions. Your list will be the basis of your research
- b. Do you need to be an expert to write a self-help book? While having a doctorate from a prestigious university certainly won't hurt, some of the best self-help books are written by those with a Ph.D. To write a self-help book, you need to have experience, whether it's professional or personal. While anyone can write a self-help book on any subject, if you want yours to be successful, you need to back it with life experience at the very least. **And a LOT of research!**
- c. Even if you know the subject inside and out, it's always a best practice to research anyway. You'll be able to uncover statistics that back up your opinion or, in some cases, contradict it. You'll find case studies, medical data, and interesting stories. You can use these to enhance your book. Readers like stats and they LOVE personal stories. Interweave both into your book.

4. See What Else Is Out There

- a. Every author should be conducting research, not only for the content they intent to include in their works but by also checking out other books that are already printed within the realm of your subject choice.
 - i. Ask yourself:
 1. What did the author do well in the book?
 2. What could the author improve upon in the book?
 3. How will my book be any different than what's already out there?
- b. Maybe it's your unique backstory that makes your self-help book different than others. Have you overcome an uncommon challenge that sets your book apart? Find that unique angle after having sampled what's currently out there.

5. How to Structure your Self-Help Book

- a. Start with an outline
 - i. Outlines help keep you focused on what needs to be addressed in each chapter of the book. Outlines also provide a more organized, thoughtful, and helpful presentation for the reader. Please see the outline below:

Outline Example

1. Write an introduction to your self-help book. Explain who you are and how you're qualified to write the book. Also, discuss why you decided to write this book. Did someone ask you to write it? Did frustration drive you? Life lessons?
2. Outline each chapter of your book. Start with ten chapters as minimum and expand if necessary.
 - a. Chapter 1 – Explain the problem or the pain. Use this as your chance to connect with the reader through empathy.
 - b. Chapter 2 – Introduce the solution. Explain how you came to this solution and give reasons why it's effective. Here's the time to include powerful real-life examples, although you'll also sprinkle these examples throughout the following chapters. While you should also include yourself as an example, don't just focus on you. Show how others were able to use your advice to accomplish their desired goal.
 - c. Chapter 3 and Beyond – Give a step-by-step solution. Each chapter should build on itself.
 - d. Last Chapter – Tie everything together and end on a positive note. Encourage the reader to start implementing these actions immediately. Ideally, at the end of each chapter, you'll give the reader an assignment to complete.

Remember: Go in chronological order from beginning to end. What would be the first step towards completing the goal? What's the next step? Assume the reader has no background knowledge on the subject at hand, other than recognizing they have a problem. Take your readers from recognizing their problem to understanding the solution offered. Your book should start out as a 101 introductory course.

6. Give The Reader Something To Do

- a. Feel-good platitudes can only take you so far. Keep your self-help book in the realm of practical advice. Don't get too inspirational and fluffy. Readers are desperate to get unstuck, not to feel good about being stuck
 - b. Include exercises at the end of each chapter or section. Exercises add an interactive component and create an opportunity for the reader to gain small wins throughout the book. Plus, exercises put the "self" in self-help
- 7. Be Sure to Include Real Life Examples**
- a. Be sure to include real life examples of people who've implemented your advice and accomplished their goal. Real life examples add credibility to your theories. It's not a fluke if others (besides you) can do it, too
- 8. Connect the Dots**
- a. Don't just assume the reader is going to connect the dots. Help your reader understand how everything fits together. Explicitly explain how one thing leads to another.

Coming Up With the Perfect Title for Your Self-Help Book

Coming up with the right title for a self-help book can be challenging. If your title is too esoteric, no one understands what your book is about. On the other hand, you don't want it to be so on-the-nose that it comes across as boring and, dare I say, generic.

Below are some common formulas to creating self-help titles. If you're stumped, considering using the following:

- Make a Promise
 - Show your reader what they'll gain from your book
 - *I Can Make You Thin*
- Teach How To
 - "How-Tos" are popular for self-help because it immediately implies that the reader will learn a lesson
 - *How to Win Friends and Influence People*
- Make A List
 - Everyone loves a good list!
 - *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lesson in Personal Change*
- Be Descriptive
 - Quickly describe what the book is about
 - *The Purpose-Driven Life*
- Motivate
 - Inspire your reader to action
 - *You Can Heal Your Life*
- Instruct
 - Take a declarative stance
 - *Awaken the Giant Within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical, and Financial Destiny*