

SELF-PUBLISHING: YOU CAN DO THIS!

**What You Need to Know to Write,
Publish & Market Your Book**

Karen Hodges Miller



Open Door Publications

Self-Publishing: You Can Do This!
What You Need to Know
to Write Publish & Market Your Book

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Introduction

I've written several books on writing and publishing over the past decade, so why write another? Because the world of publishing is changing so fast that every time we in the publishing world think we have a handle on the newest, latest and best practices...they change.

When I look at the books I wrote in 2012 and 2014, half of what I suggested as best practices are no longer accurate. It is hard to believe how much things have changed in only a few years. In 2012 my advice on marketing still focused on paper books; I practically ignored e-books. That is no longer true. E-books are now the fastest and least expensive way to gain a following in the market—no matter your genre. I still recommend that every author has a paper book: paperback, hardback, or both. If you want the best chance to climb the ranks on Amazon, e-books are the way to go.

The competition on Amazon and other bookselling sites is enormous and getting bigger all the time. Over two million books are published in America every year. Many of them are awful. Many of them are undiscovered gems just waiting to find readers. There is no longer room in the publishing world for boring covers, bad grammar, poorly edited and proofed writing, or any of the other myriad ways in which authors allow their books to scream “unprofessional” to readers. How will you make your book stand out from the crowd? How will you let your potential readers know that yours is a book they must read?

There is no one right way to publish a book. If you read websites by self-publishing experts, you will find a lot of rules about what to do and what not to do. Some are valid. Some were valid last year, but are no longer. Some I disagree with. Some I embrace.

While there is no one right way to publish a book, ***there is one very wrong way to publish.*** That is to upload your book to Amazon

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and expect it to become an instant best seller. Readers will not buy you're your book if you don't let them know it's there. The day you aren't marketing your book is the day your book is not selling.

No matter what stage of the process you are in, this book can help you. Read on to find out how to write, publish, and market your book today.

Part 1

Write

Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do is not doing.

Thomas A. Edison

Chapter 1

Unlock Your Ideas

When I first began writing on the subject of “how to write a book” in 2009, it was with great reluctance. I’d been working as a writer for more than 20 years. I’d edited and coached authors for a number of years, helping them develop their own books. I was published weekly in various newspapers and magazines. I didn’t think I needed to write a book for credibility. I thought my credentials as a journalist, freelance reporter, editor, and publisher spoke for themselves.

I was arrogant. I’ll admit it. And I was a little afraid. What if I didn’t really have enough to say to fill a book? I didn’t understand I had a process for taking an idea and turning it into a book—a process that had worked for many authors and would work for others.

“I work with each author where I find them. Every person I work with is unique, and their books are unique. I customize what I do to each particular writer,” I protested, whenever it was suggested I write a book on my process of coaching writers.

Luckily for me my friends and business colleagues did not allow me to get away with this nonsense.

“Everyone has a process,” my business coach told me. “You just need to think about how you work with people. What advice do you routinely give to them, what steps do you lead them through? Once you do that, you will see you really do have a process that you follow.”

“Everyone needs to improve their credibility and their visibility. You are out there speaking about your work. You need a book,” said a marketing expert.

Eventually—reluctantly—I listened. I’m so glad that I did.

My first book on writing was titled, *Unlocking Your Ideas*. I

then wrote *Finish Your Book* (with Lorette Pruden) and *Sell Your Book*. I was then asked by People Tested Books to write *What's the Deal With Self-Publishing*. By the time I had finished with that book, I found that *Unlocking Your Ideas* was outdated, and I needed to go back and rewrite it. It became *Write Your Book*.

There are a lot of great books out there on the subject of writing books, a few of my favorites are *How to Write a Damn Good Novel* and *How to Write a Damn Good Novel II* by James N. Frey and *On Writing* by Stephen King.

How is this book different? It is a workbook; I want my readers to use it. Scribble in it (or highlight if you've bought the e-book). Writing is a discovery process. If you follow the steps I detail in this book, you will develop an outline to help keep you on track as you write. No matter how carefully you stick to that outline, you will also discover new ideas and develop new theories along the way. Whether you are writing fiction or nonfiction, whether you are writing a memoir or a practical how-to book, you will learn new information and formulate fresh theories and concepts. ***Writing a book is about unlocking your ideas and allowing them to grow in the light of day.*** It's exciting, it's fun, and it's hard work. It also takes time, it takes patience, and it takes belief in yourself.

Set Your Goals

How long have you been thinking about writing your book? You may have wanted to become a writer your entire life, or you may instead have recently come to the realization that you have something to say and that the best way for people to hear you is through a book. But it really doesn't matter where or when you decided to write your book. You may have written a few pages or made some notes, or you may have spent a lot of time planning your book in your head without ever actually sitting down to write it. What matters is now that you have made the decision you don't allow your dream to gather dust in a desk drawer or a long-unopened computer file.

Writing a book is difficult. If you've never written anything longer than a three- or four-page report, or even a ten-page short story, taking on a project as large as a book probably seems like a

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daunting task.

I have been writing most of my life; I've written short articles as well as long, book-length projects. I began my career as a newspaper reporter and editor, and only after several years of writing on a daily basis did I decide to strike out on my own as a freelance writer.

Over my years as a freelancer other writer friends often asked me to edit the books they were writing. After working with several authors I noticed a pattern. Many of the writers I worked with started their project with great enthusiasm, writing every day, getting up at 4 a.m. to finish a chapter, or staying up long after midnight. After a few weeks or months their fervor waned. Real life intervened; the kids got sick, the job required overtime, a vacation or illness in the family disrupted the regular routine. The excuses were many and varied, and because they were invented by writers they were all very, very creative. But no matter how creative the excuse, in the end, it was always the same story: The book never got written.

A few of the people I worked with did finish their projects and went on to publish their work. Even though I began to work as a book editor for more and more authors, I noticed the success rate for finishing projects never improved; it remained about one in five. Then one day I got a call from a person who worked as a career coach, teaching young people how to become more successful in advancing in their careers.

Bob had never written a book before, but he told me he planned to write one in three months and have it published before Christmas. It was May. I laughed; I'd known many people with years of experience in writing who couldn't finish writing a book in that kind of time, let alone deal with all the other details of book publishing such as editing, proofreading, designing a cover, and getting the book printed. But Bob was enthusiastic and insistent, and he also planned to pay me, so I agreed to work with him.

It was a great experience. We learned from each other. I taught Bob about the art of writing, and as I read his work and talked with him, I learned about planning and project management, budgeting time, and goal setting. Bob met all of his goals, completed his book, and published it by Christmas. Working with Bob was my first

experience in the techniques that good coaches—whether they are sports coaches, business coaches, life coaches, or writing coaches—use to help their protégés meet their goals. Since that time I’ve not only read and studied more on coaching, I’ve worked with other coaches who also wanted to write books. As I learned from each person I worked with, my success rate in helping my clients finish their book projects also began to increase.

Writing a book is hard work. I will remind you of that often throughout this book. Writing requires time, creative energy, a sense of purpose, and a plan. It is often this last step—a plan—that writers forget about. You would not hop in your car and start a road trip from Florida to California without making preparations such as researching places to stop along the way, arranging a tune-up for your car, and obtaining a roadmap or GPS to guide you. A book is no different. Before you begin to write, you must do the planning.

As a newspaper reporter I learned the Five Ws and H of Writing: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. These very basic questions not only work as a great start for choosing what you will write, they are also an important starting point to help you unlock and develop your ideas, plan and organize your work, and complete your book. If you follow the process outlined here, by the time you have finished reading Part 1 of this book you will be well on the way to having your own book finished.

Chapter 2

The New Rules of Publishing

Publishing your book is not the first step in the process, it is just one step out of many, but I've found over the years that clichés often have some truth in them. So “begin with the end in mind” (or at least the middle), and you will find it is easier to end up where you want to be. I have found when I speak with writers who have never published a book (as well as a few who have published several) that many of them are stuck with old ideas, outdated facts, and outright myths about the publishing industry, the process of publishing a book, and the best ways in which to reach readers. Here are a few of the old rules of publishing and some new rules to replace them.

1. **Old Rule:** Once you've written your book and found a publisher, the hard part is over.

New Rule: Writing isn't easy, but for many writers, the really tough job is marketing, because they have little or no experience with it.

Today's author is a small business owner. You must learn everything you can about accounting, distribution, royalty payments and percentages, networking, marketing—all the details that the owner of any other business must learn. You must decide what you can do for yourself and when you need to hire experts to help you. The stereotype of the solitary writer slaving away in the garret is just that: a stereotype, and an outdated one at that. You need a team to publish a book.

2. **Old Rule:** There is only one type of publisher and one method for publishing.

New Rule: There are multiple methods of publishing and hundreds of publishers to choose from; find the publisher that is right for you—or self-publish.

The traditional “big six” publishers (Hachette, Macmillan, Penguin Group, HarperCollins, Random House, and Simon & Schuster) are looking for blockbuster books and famous authors. If you don’t already have a name for yourself, a social network following, or other databases of several thousand or more people who are waiting for you to write that book so that they can purchase it, I suggest you skip the traditional publishers and find an alternate method. There are small, independent publishing houses, self-publishing companies, and publishers with various “hybrid” publishing plans. You can do the research and do as much of it yourself as possible. Look at all of your options before you decide which one is the best for you.

3. **Old Rule:** First, you write a book proposal, then you find an agent who finds a publisher and negotiates a contract with an advance.

New Rule: Unless you are set on traditional publishing, bypass the agent and do your own research to find the publisher and publishing model that is right for you.

The big advance is a thing of the past unless you are already a very well-known author whose name guarantees sales. Save yourself time and frustration. Instead of searching for an agent, do your own research on the different publishing options available to you, and the companies that are involved with each. The more informed you are, the better the decision you can make regarding the best ways for you to publish and market your book.

4. **Old Rule:** It takes two years or more to get a book to market.
New Rule: You can write and publish your book in a year or less. To really make a name for yourself as a writer you need several books. Plan to publish a minimum of one book a year for several years.

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I don't want to minimize the need for the rewriting and editing process—it's very important to have an excellent professional editor look at your work, particularly if you are going to self-publish. However, much of the time lag between acceptance by a traditional publisher and finally seeing your work in print has to do with old ideas on marketing, printing, and distribution. These days you can easily publish a professional book in a matter of months—if you work with the right professionals who can help you through the process.

5. **Old Rule:** Your publisher will handle all of the marketing for your book.

New Rule: No matter who your publisher is, to make your book a success you must be prepared to do your own marketing.

This “rule” has always been a myth. Best-selling authors take an active role in marketing their own work. They not only make appearances at book signings, they also develop seminars, attend conferences, are active on social media, and find as many ways as possible to meet their readers. You are the best person to market your book. Who else has a bigger interest in making sure it is a success?

6. **Old Rule:** Bookstores are the best way to reach your readers.
New Rule: Your readers can be found in many places. Partner with businesses that target your readers, use social media and e-book discovery websites to get your book to its target readers.

Less than half of all book sales are actually made in bookstores. Books are sold in a wide variety of retail stores, from large chain drugstores to tiny boutiques. They can be found in museums and gift shops and craft stores and sporting goods stores. They are sold on websites, at seminars and workshops and conferences and tradeshow. Where are your readers? They may not be at the bookstore. Think about where you need to go to find them.

7. **Old Rule:** An e-book isn't really a book. You aren't a "real" author unless you have a paper book.

New Rule: E-books are here to stay, and you need one!

It wasn't too many years ago that people were questioning whether e-readers and e-books would last. E-books are now the fastest-growing segment of the book market and they are here to stay. No matter what genre you are writing in or whether you are writing fiction or nonfiction, e-books should be an important part of your book marketing plan.

8. **Old Rule:** You don't need social media to market your book.

New Rule: Social media is one of the best ways to let people know you are out there.

It doesn't matter whether you love Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram or you hate them. If you are an author with a book to sell, you need to be using social networking sites. Today, social media marketing is one of the best ways to spread the news about your book.

9. **Old Rule:** I can just put my book on Amazon, and people will find it.

New Rule: If you aren't marketing, you aren't selling.

The new rules of publishing, printing, and marketing books mean there are hundreds of thousands more books available to readers each year. How will your readers find your book in such a crowded field? If you aren't telling people about your book, they won't go looking for it on their own. There is no "write it and they will come." You have to give your potential readers a roadmap to find your book.

10. **Old Rule:** I'll just sit at my desk and write.

New Rule: You need to be out there meeting people through book signings, seminars, and even good old-fashioned networking.

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Remember that solitary writer in the garret I mentioned in Rule 1? Well, the only part of the stereotype that is true is that he is probably starving. Most writers I know are rather shy and don't really enjoy large crowds of people. If you want to sell your book—I mean actually make some money on it—you must consider developing a seminar, attending a tradeshow, arranging book signings, meeting with book clubs, and anything else that will get you and your book in front of your readers.

Now that you have spent some time thinking about your end-game, let's go back to the beginning and discuss the first steps in writing your book.

Chapter 3

Why Write a Book?

Why do you want to be an author? Notice I said author, not writer. What's the difference? A writer may choose to never publish her work for others; she may leave it untouched in a desk drawer or on a computer file. There are many great reasons to write for yourself, and only yourself, but having the desire to publish your work for others to read—to influence, to teach, maybe even to preach—is the difference between being a writer and being an author.

About 30 or 40 years ago educators and pundits declared the death of the written word. Television and movies had made reading obsolete, they said. Instead of reading a novel, people would wait for the movie. Instead of reading a newspaper, they would receive all of their news from television.

Then the Internet arrived. Suddenly everyone needed—and wanted—to read again, and the arrival of a fast and easy way to publish our ideas meant that anyone with a website essentially became a publisher. However, the volume of information available these days, not only on the Internet but through books and magazines, means it is often difficult for a writer to get noticed. For readers, all of this easily available information means wading through a seemingly endless number of poorly written blogs, boring articles, and irrelevant websites to find what is needed.

The best way to stand out in this vast ocean of information is to ***make sure that your writing isn't just average, but is interesting, informative, and relevant to the reader.*** Whether you plan to publish an article in a magazine or on a blog, develop a website for your business, or write a book, excellent writing is the best way to ensure that you get noticed for the right reasons.

There Are No New Ideas

With so much competition out there you might ask yourself why you should finally go ahead and write that book you've always dreamed about. Other people have surely written something similar already. There really are very few new ideas in the world. Many people have told me they had a great idea for a book, but gave it up when they discovered someone else already wrote something similar. Don't let that discourage you.

Take a stroll through your nearest bookstore (yes, there are a few of them still out there), and you'll see entire sections of books devoted to the same topic. You don't need a totally new and unique idea. That's pretty difficult when you consider that archeologists have discovered "books" written on clay tablets from as early as 3000 BCE. Don't give up on your idea just because someone else has written something similar. You don't need a brand new idea, you just need your own unique take on the subject.

In fact, I would suggest if you go to the bookstore or do an Internet search and find *no* books that are similar to your idea, then that is the time when you should reconsider. If no one else is writing about it, it may mean there are not enough people interested in your subject to want to read about it.

The Internet has redefined the niche market. It is now much easier to find that small group of people interested in a very narrow subject. Before cable television, for instance, there were only a few networks available, all aimed at large, mass audiences. Now not only are there channels devoted just to sports, there is a golf channel, a tennis channel, a college sports channel, and even a cricket channel and a horseracing channel. The Internet narrows niches even more. Instead of just blogging about football or basketball, for example, a blogger can write about just one team. Choosing the subject matter for your book is similar. Find your niche, then narrow and target it to a very specific market.

Why Write a Book?

In Chapter 1 I mentioned the "Five Ws and an H" of journalism. Here is the first of those questions, and this one you should ask

yourself even before you sit down to begin to organize your book: ***Why do you want to write a book?*** It's a question many people have never asked themselves. There is no right or wrong answer, but knowing the answer will help you choose exactly what type of book you want to write, or choose between several ideas you have for different books.

Here are a few possible reasons for writing a book.

- ***You always wanted to write a book.*** You have had that idea in your head or that outline in your bottom drawer for years—or even decades. If you are a fiction writer, you have characters just waiting for you to breathe life into them. Now is the time to pull that manuscript out and get to work. If not now, when?
- ***You know a better way.*** You are a bookkeeper who is an expert in Quickbooks™; you are a business coach with a new method for business growth; you are a teacher with great ideas to share on education; you are a fiction writer with new worlds to explore. You have ideas, and you want to share them with the world.
- ***You want to increase your credibility.*** There is no better way to increase your credibility than by writing a book. In fact, one survey I read showed that people perceive a published author who does not have a PhD to have as much or more credibility as a person who does have a doctoral degree.
- ***You would like to become the go-to pro.*** With some marketing assistance, a book can make you the person that newspaper television commentators, radio hosts, or online bloggers call when they need to quote an expert in the field.
- ***You want to increase your business.*** I've heard many authors say they don't care if they ever sell a book. One put it this way: "Every time I give my book to a prospective client, it not only increases my chances of getting the job, it also increases the amount of money I can ask for it."

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So what's your reason for writing a book? Answering the following questions will help you clarify your objectives.

- What would you like your book to accomplish for you?
- How can your book help your business?
- How will your book help others?
- What other goals do you have for your book?

Now, when the writing and publishing process becomes difficult, just check back to these pages. They'll help you to remember why you are working so hard to complete your book.