

4 STEPS

DISCOVER OR CLARIFY THE TOPIC

TO A GREAT

OF YOUR NEXT BOOK

BOOK IDEA

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INTRODUCTION

It all starts with a great idea



For nearly a decade, I've had the extreme joy of watching my clients expand their influence, increase their visibility, and refine their ideas. Some went from being relatively successful to suddenly in-demand; others went from regional recognition to having a national presence.

I've seen this in my own work, too. In 2013, I published *The Editor's Eye*. While it wasn't the first book I had written, it was the first book published under my name. In large part due to the efforts of my publisher and PR professional, my book gained national attention and gave me an important platform

in the relatively noisy space of writing and publishing. Now, nearly five years later, I still receive regular e-mails related to the expertise I shared in that book. I come up in the top five Google search results for "hire ghostwriter" and "best book editor." And probably best of all, my client calendar now books out up to eighteen months in advance. I get to work on exciting projects with top people all over the world.

I've seen similar success with colleagues and clients, too. Their books have been a launch pad from which they've been able to skyrocket their reach.

It's not simply writing a book—any old book. When you write a book that is useful, it adds value to people's lives. When you write a story that resonates, it impacts people's hearts. When you share thoughts or expertise, it influences people's actions.

The starting place for such profound impact? A great book idea.

Imagine standing on a platform bearing a single sentence: your book idea. The book you write sets the tone for your brand; it becomes a platform from which to expand

your influence. That's why it's so important to spend time brainstorming, exploring, and refining your book idea.

This resource will help you create or clarify a great book idea. Even if you're planning to hire a ghostwriter, spending time thinking deeply about your book idea is an important first step in kicking off this important endeavor.

Over the next several pages, take the time to complete each of the following exercises. I'll walk you through four steps.

1 Dream

Get all of your ideas out on paper.

2 Explore

Choose your most intriguing ideas and explore them.

3 Examine

Develop clear book concepts and audience profiles for three ideas.

4 Decide

Using the three-way test, select your winning book concept.

STEP ONE: BRAINSTORM

What you'll need:

Journal or paper

Pen

Post-its (optional)

30 minutes of focused time



Pick a place where you are most creative. This could be your home office, a coffee shop, or a park. Sit down with your journal or paper and pen, and dream.

Start your idea list by answering the question: If I could write any book, what would it be about?

Don't limit yourself to just the things you're known for. If you're a copyright attorney, for example, an obvious book would be on copyright law. Put that idea on the list, but push yourself to explore possibilities and interests. Feel free to write iterations of the same idea (copyright law for creatives, copyright law for musicians, etc.). Be sure your list includes aspirational projects that aren't connected to your career.

Your list can consist of book titles. It can be made up of single words or sentences. You can write it in a bullet list or in a continuous paragraph. The format doesn't matter. Just dream.

If you're feeling stuck, grab a pack of Post-its, write an idea on each note, and stick them to the wall or table.

Carry your journal, list, or a Post-it pad around with you for up to one week. When an idea strikes, write it down. Then, move to step two.

Of note: Don't rush the steps! A great book idea doesn't happen instantaneously. Like anything else, you've got to let it simmer.

STEP TWO: EXPLORE

What you'll need:

Book idea list

Journal or paper

Highlighter and pencil

Computer, tablet, or smartphone

60 to 90 minutes of focused time

After you've spent time collecting ideas, gather your notes together. Review each idea one at a time. Highlight the ideas that stand out to you; draw a line through the ideas that aren't as intriguing. If you are working from Post-its, you can move the ideas into two groups: interesting and

not-so-much. There's no middle category here—either it has winning potential or not.

Once you've done this initial sorting, rewrite or type your new list. Then, looking at it carefully, ask yourself the following questions.

1 Do any of these ideas overlap? If so, how?

Identify whether you might be able to combine ideas to create a more unique, niche concept for the book. Write down any new ideas you come up with while exploring overlaps in the list.

Which of these ideas fit my immediate goals?



For example, if you need to write a book as part of your platform and career growth, you might lean more toward a book idea that highlights your expertise. If your immediate goal is personal, you can evaluate the ideas differently. If an idea doesn't fit into your immediate goals, cross it off the list.

3

Which of these have been done before? Do I have a unique angle?

Spend some time researching your ideas online. Head to Amazon (www.amazon.com) or Barnes and Nobles (www.bn.com), select the Books category, and enter keywords from your concept into the search bar. Research what's out there. Your book should offer something different—a fresh approach or new information. If an idea doesn't do either of those, cross it off the list.

Answering these questions should help whittle down your list substantially. If not, go through questions two and three again. Answer them honestly.

Still struggling to narrow the list? Review the questions with a

trusted colleague, since he or she might offer a valuable perspective.

If your list is still long, go with your gut and cut out topics that don't feel like a good fit. Choose three or fewer book ideas, and move to step three.



STEP THREE: EXAMINE

What you'll need:

Book idea list


Computer, tablet, or paper

60 minutes of focused time



Fill out the following “author homework” for each concept still in the running, even if you only have one idea on your final list. This step is so important that I ask most new clients to complete author homework before we discuss their projects.

Step three pulls together the research and thinking you did about each of the book concepts. Answer the questions below specifically and concisely. Don’t blow through this activity—it sets the foundation for the entire book writing process.



Take your
time. Think.
Write.
Consider.
This is
important.



step three

AUTHOR HOMEWORK

Title (or working title):

Genre:

1 In 50 words or less, please explain why you want to write this book.

2 In 25 words or less, complete one of the following statements.

The purpose of this book is to . . .

My book is about . . .

3 In 15 words or less, complete the following statement.

The intended readers of this book are . . . (be specific!)

4 Please identify any similar books already in print, if applicable. How is your book similar but unique?

STEP FOUR: DECIDE

What you'll need:

Completed author homework
from step three

Up to 30 minutes of focused time

If you're stuck between two or three ideas, or still uncertain about one idea, apply the three-way test.

- 1. Is this book meaningful and useful for my audience?**
- 2. Am I adding something new—is my idea fresh, creative, interesting, and compelling enough to stand out?**
- 3. Will writing and publishing this book be fulfilling for me?**

If you answer no to any of the questions, consider eliminating the idea. And if you're still stuck, engage a trusted advisor, friend, or colleague to talk through your ideas. Likely, that person will give you the perspective you need to move forward.

Your next steps? Write a one- to three-sentence book statement, explore your audience in depth and write a thorough description of the readers you're targeting, and plan your book in the form of a book outline.

When in doubt, remember what Thomas Edison said: "A genius is often merely a talented person who has done all of his or her homework." You've done your homework. You have the ability. Keep at it. You've got this.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

“Why a Writing Routine Matters and
How to Start One”

<http://stacyennis.com/why-a-writing-routine-matters-and-how-to-start-one/>

The Editor’s Eye: A practical guide to
transforming your book from good
to great

<http://www.nightowlspress.com/e-book-store/the-editors-eye/>

“4 simple steps to publishing your
first book”

<http://stacyennis.com/4-simple-steps-to-publishing/>

LET'S CONNECT

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