

Michael J. Dowling
Award-Winning Professional Ghostwriter & Publisher



12 Questions to Answer Before You Start Writing Your Book

by Michael J. Dowling

About the Author

Michael J. Dowling helps thought leaders and other professionals write and publish non-fiction books to accomplish their goals and advance their careers.

What a thrill it is to hold a book you've written in your hands!

There's even a bit of glamour and prestige attached to becoming an author. New opportunities open up to you. People see you in a new light.

As a freelance professional ghostwriter and editor, I've enjoyed helping lots of clients write books. It's always an exciting adventure. If you have an idea for a book, I can understand why you're eager to begin.

But before you launch into the writing process, I suggest that you answer the twelve questions below. They'll help you ensure that your book concept makes sense, so you don't waste your time and money.

In the past, a few of my potential clients scrapped their book projects because they weren't satisfied with their answers. Others reconsidered their initial ideas and came back to me with improved concepts. Regardless of the ultimate outcome, they all have thanked me for taking them through this process.

Answering these questions puts you in a win-win position. If you confirm that your book concept is sound, you can move ahead with confidence. On the other hand, if you realize that your initial idea has weaknesses, you can either make the necessary changes and proceed, or you can drop the whole idea and save yourself time, money, and frustration.



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The Twelve Questions

1. Why do you want to write a book?

List all of your reasons. Below are just a few possibilities to jumpstart your thinking:

You see, writing a book is not only the best way, it is the indisputably essential way, to establish your credibility in your field of expertise. Using authorship as a marketing strategy brings you an on-going flow of clients who are deliberately and purposefully seeking you.

Elsom Eldridge Jr. and Mark L. Eldridge, authors of How to Position Yourself as the Obvious Expert

- To establish your personal and/or organizational credibility
- To increase awareness of your products & services
- To help your target audience understand your capabilities
- To advance a cause you believe in
- To brand yourself as a thought leader
- To attract speaking opportunities
- To communicate valuable and helpful information
- To fulfill your dream of becoming an author

Clarifying your personal goals strengthens your motivation. Strong motivation increases your probability of success.

2. What will you write about?

In order to write an engaging book, you should be both *passionate* and *knowledgeable* about your subject. Here are some questions to stimulate your thinking:

- What topic is most interesting to you? What do you most enjoy talking about?
- When other people meet you, what do they seem to find most interesting?
- What are you most passionate about?
- What topic would you most like to speak to an audience about?
- Where do you think you can make the biggest positive difference in society? How can you most help others?
- What are you most upset about? What would you most like to see changed?



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3. What is the purpose of your book?

Questions #1 & #2 above focused on *your* needs. Now it's time to address your *readers'* needs.

In order to be successful, your book must have intrinsic value. It needs to give your readers something they want and need. Clarify your book's purpose by answering questions such as the following:

- What benefits will people derive from reading your book?
- What specific needs will your book satisfy?
- What price do you think people will be willing to pay for your book? (Even if you intend to give your book away, you should be able to ascribe a monetary value to it. If it's not worth buying, it's probably not worth reading.)
- If you don't write your book, who will suffer loss?

To test your answers, conduct some informal market research. Tell people about your book idea and observe how they react. Do they get genuinely excited, or do their eyes glaze over? Would they pay money for your book right now if it were available? If their reactions are ho-hum, rethink your concept. If they react positively, attempt to filter out the flattery. Keep in mind that people will tend to tell you what they think you want to hear.

4. Who is your target audience?

Develop a detailed profile of the type of people who will be most interested in reading your book. Be as specific as you can in terms of age, sex, vocation, interests, needs, station in life, income level, education, and other relevant parameters. When you can clearly picture your ideal reader, you will be better able to focus your writing and marketing efforts. If you are vague about your audience, your book's concept may need refinement.

5. Why are you the best person to write this book?

What specific knowledge, expertise, and experiences qualify you to write this book? Do you have a "platform" (i.e., a position or

Having your name on a book can be an immense boost for your business. The added prestige of being an information-product developer lends you the kind of credibility that allows you to increase your hourly rates and project fees.

Information products also let prospects sample your approach, your expertise, and your skills before they hire you. Businesses that produce and market information products regularly report that prospects not only buy those products, but also are more likely to inquire about additional products and services.

Steven Van Yoder, author, Get Slightly Famous: Become a Celebrity in Your Field and Attract More Business with Less Effort



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reputation) that will enhance your visibility and credibility as the author?

6. What competition exists for your book?

Will your book fill an identifiable niche, or will it duplicate other books already on the market? Conduct some research before you start writing. It would be a shame to invest time and effort in a book, only to discover later that an alternative resource already exists that makes it unnecessary.

Even if some other similar books exist, you may be able to cover the material in a different way. Knowing what other books are out there will help you refine your vision and improve your execution.

Don't wait until your book is written to start thinking about marketing and distribution.

7. Will you look for a publisher or self-publish?

Publishers are in business to make money. They are looking for books with large sales potential in well-defined markets. They want authors who have a platform (i.e., a high-profile name or position) and a significant marketing capability (e.g., many thousands of Twitter followers). If you meet these criteria, you might find it worthwhile to look for an agent or publisher.

On the other hand, due to recent advances in printing technology and the dramatic changes in book marketing wrought by the Internet, more and more authors are deciding to self-publish. Self-publishing allows you to maintain greater control over your book and to get it into the hands of readers more quickly. You also can make more money on every book sold.

For additional help in deciding which route to take, see "Publishing Options: How to Choose the Best Method for Publishing Your Book," posted on the white paper page of my website.

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8. When will you write your book?

Think about your weekly schedule. When are the best times during the week for you to conduct research and organize your thoughts? Be prepared to schedule these times on your calendar as appointments.

Writing a book on your own requires considerable dedication and time. A ghostwriter can greatly simplify the process and add helpful structure and accountability. We'll address this subject in question #12 below.

9. How will you promote and distribute your book?

Whether you traditionally publish or self-publish, you'll need to devote considerable effort to marketing your book. Here are a few suggestions about what you might do to boost sales:

- Give your book away to customers and potential customers as a marketing tool.
- Sell autographed copies when you give talks or conduct seminars.
- Make your book available on your website.
- Promote your book to people on your mailing list.
- Advertise your book in journals and other publications that reach your target audience.
- Sell your book on Amazon.com and other on-line stores.
- Sell your book through non-traditional channels (i.e., outlets other than bookstores).

For more ideas, I suggest reading books such as ***1001 Ways to Market Your Book*** by John Kremer. Especially if you self-publish, you might want to hire one or more book-marketing professionals to help you develop and execute a marketing plan. Be realistic when developing planning your promotion and determining your print quantities, so you don't get stuck with a basement full of books.

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10. How will you handle the production of your book?

If you self-publish, don't skimp on production. Hire an experienced professional to design your cover and the interior of your book. Use high-quality printing. Poor execution will mark you as an amateur and kill sales of your book.

I tell virtually every self-employed professional, as well as many small-business owners, to define their niche specialty, write a book about it, and get it published.

Robert W. Bly, author and copywriter

Many individuals and firms provide publishing services. You can find them by searching the Internet, referring to self-publishing reference books, such as *Dan Poynter's Self-Publishing Manual*, and by networking within the publishing industry.

11. What return on investment do you desire?

The return on investment you can expect will depend largely on the purpose of your book. For example, if you use your book as a marketing tool, it could potentially produce a large return on investment. One new customer or client gained as a result of your book could pay back your publishing investment many times over.

For some books, the payoff is primarily intangible. For example, a book about the history of your business could be a great way to celebrate an important company anniversary, enhance employee morale, promote your image in the community, and strengthen positive relationships with customers, vendors, and stockholders.

In conjunction with a book project and with a modest amount of additional effort and expense, it's often possible to create one or more related white papers or articles. The promotional value of such spin-offs can increase your return on investment substantially.

The cost of writing and self-publishing a book varies widely, depending on the number of pages, amount of research required, number of copies printed, cover design, and other factors. My proposals to potential clients include cost estimates.

Many self-published authors sell their books at seminars they conduct, at conferences they attend, and on their websites. Over time, the profits from these sales can offset a substantial portion of the original investment.



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12. What professional writing assistance will you utilize?

The book you helped me write two years ago already has been directly responsible for bringing in two consulting contracts worth approximately \$100,000. It's one of the best investments I ever made!

*Marty Harshberger
Executive Consultant
Saltillo, MS*

If you are a skilled writer and you have the time and the desire to write your own book, I encourage you to at least enlist the help of a professional editor to work with you from the beginning. Having someone on your team with an objective, detached perspective will help ensure that that you cover your topic clearly and completely. Because you know your subject matter so well, it will be difficult for you to see your book objectively.

If writing isn't your major strength, I recommend hiring a ghostwriter. An experienced professional ghostwriter will leverage your talents and free up your time. The results you achieve together will far exceed anything you could accomplish alone.

With the writing burden off your shoulders, you'll have more time to think about the content of your book, which means you'll probably be happier with the final result. And you'll enjoy the writing process more, because you won't be so distracted from your day-to-day responsibilities. A good professional ghostwriter will help you produce a publication you'll be proud of—quickly, efficiently, and with surprisingly little disruption from your normal routine.

A bi-weekly sixty- to ninety-minute phone call with your ghostwriter can keep your project moving along nicely. Your ghostwriter can record your thoughts, asking questions as necessary. Then he'll take your ideas, along with any other background information you provide, and create draft chapters for your review.

Between calls, you'll review your ghostwriter's drafts and organize content for your next phone call. If you're planning to self-publish your book, a good professional ghostwriter will help guide you through the process.

If you decide to use a ghostwriter, make sure you choose the right one. A hiring mistake could cause you considerable headaches. I recommend reading my whitepaper, "5 Key Qualities to Look for When Hiring a Professional Writer (So You Don't Make a Costly Mistake!)." It's available on my website.



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About the Author



Michael J. Dowling is an award-winning ghostwriter and editor who helps organizational CEOs, consultants, and other thought leaders write and publish books and papers that accomplish their goals and advance their careers. He offers turnkey services that make the writing and publishing process understandable, cost-effective, time-efficient, and enjoyable for his clients.

Michael earned an MBA degree from Columbia Business School, where he was a Harriman Scholar, and a Bachelor of Science degree with honors from the University of Florida. Prior to founding Wool Street Writers in 2000, he served as president of an educational publishing company, president of a national gift company, and administrator of a 1000-member church.

Learn more about Michael and his services at www.WoolStreetWriters.com.

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