

## How to write your first draft

*“You can sit there, tense and worried, freezing the creative energies, or you can start writing something. It doesn’t matter what. In five or ten minutes, the imagination will heat, the tightness will fade, and a certain spirit and rhythm will take over.” ~ Leonard Bernstein*

You’ve overcome the first hurdle of writing a book – the outline. Now it’s time to turn your hard work into a first (rough) draft. The first draft of your book will likely be far different than the finished version, but going through this process will help you weed out what doesn’t belong in your masterpiece – and more important, what does belong and importantly, what makes it flow.

This process will have you turning your outline into real sentences and paragraphs. It’s like painting a picture. In the outline you actually outlined the vision you wanted to create by sketches. Now, you’re ready to fill in the colours and more detail and make that picture come alive.

Here are 10 basic tips for turning your outline into a first draft:

- 1. Simply write!** The bare bones of your first draft will become the flesh and sinew of a real book. Most great writers begin the rough draft of their books by simply writing what first comes to mind. You can always revise and fix problems later. For now, simply write down the bare bones.
- 2. Glance at the outline for guidance.** If you become stuck while you’re writing, glance at the outline to keep you on track. You may want to keep on writing without looking at the outline – and that’s okay too. Whatever works for you! There is no right or wrong.

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3. **Before you sit down to write, follow a routine.** Routines are meant to set up our minds before doing something. Drinking a cup of tea, meditating or listening to music may be just the routine you need to get the creative juices flowing.
  
4. **It's okay to leave gaps.** The purpose of the rough draft is to get your thoughts down when you have time to write or when thoughts come into your mind. There will be words you can't think of and sentences that don't work. Leave them alone, knowing you'll revisit them later and have the answers.
  
5. **Don't stress about writing.** You'll write much better and your information will flow more smoothly if you're not stressed about the writing process. Focus on the ideas, not the grammar or structure of your sentences.
  
6. **Begin anywhere each time you write.** If you're not feeling the urge to write about the subject matter in the first chapter of your book, begin with another chapter you do feel like writing about. Your writing will be much stronger and you'll make more progress.
  
7. **Keep on writing.** Similar to the first tip, keep on writing means that you continue with the writing process without stopping to go back over what you've already written. It's so tempting to correct and revise your rough draft as you go, but that's not the purpose of the rough draft, and that can keep you from progressing.
  
8. **Don't procrastinate.** Procrastination is a bad habit that has no place in a writer's world. When you begin to put off the writing process of your book, you're

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choosing to view it as work, rather than a task to be cherished. If you don't enjoy writing your book, you may have chosen the wrong subject.

**9. Don't edit yourself.** Your first attempt at a rough draft may look like a first grader wrote it. Don't worry about it. If you make a habit of going back to read and edit or rewrite before you finish the draft, you'll never make it to the end.

**10. Leave gaps for later.** You may not have all the facts for your first draft – nor be able to think of words you want to say, but just keep writing. Later, there will be a chance to review and revise. You may want to make an “informational” note to yourself on the draft as a reminder to get the fact or to rephrase the wording.

### **Enjoy the Writing Process**

Sometimes you have to stop and remember why you wanted to write a book in the first place. You have a story to tell or you wouldn't have thought of writing a book, so keep that in mind during the entire writing process.

The rough draft should be fun, because you're not worried about semantics of how the book should look or read at this time. Write as if you're telling a story to someone who wants to hear it and keep in mind what you're trying to get across.

Most writers keep files or journals full of notes, clippings, references and other memory jogging that will help to keep the book interesting and real. When you get an idea during the time you're not at your desk writing, be sure to have a notepad and pen on hand to jot it down. (Of course, many now use the help of an iPhone or iPad for that purpose.)

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If you don't like the thought of sitting at a computer typing up your book, you always have the option of recording your thoughts and then getting your book transcribed. This is quite useful if you want your book to have your own personal voice attached to your book. Some people simply have the gift of writing the way they speak.

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