

Why Writing a Book is Like Making Sausage

I grew up in an Italian-German household. Many of my summers (and other times of the year) were spent visiting my grandmother in Wisconsin at her lake house on Elkhart Lake or her home in Sheboygan. People in Wisconsin love their sausage. Bratwurst, smoked meats, summer sausage, you name it. My grandmother would frequently joke about people “talking like a sausage” meaning, someone was talking a little crazy and it was all jumbled up.

For many of the writers I work with, that’s exactly what it’s like when they first come to me with an idea. It’s a mix-mash of ideas, threads and theories in their head. It’s a pile of ingredients.

Maybe they have an outline, maybe they don’t. Maybe it’s not even a recipe.

Either way, people who come to me want help crafting something out of their big pile of ideas.

That’s why writing a book is a lot like making sausage.

Every recipe is a little bit different, but done correctly it comes out in a beautiful dish that tastes delicious.

How We Cook

The process of creating a book together sometimes means I’m the cook who is following your recipe. Other times it is a partnership. Or you’ve handed me the sausage and have asked me to double check the ingredients to make sure everything make sense and it is blended in the most appealing way.

That’s because there are a variety of ways to work together.

Maybe you want someone to ghostwrite your book in its entirety. Maybe you’d prefer to partner-up as a co-authors. Or maybe you just need someone to do some manuscript editing, writing, or research to fill in all the “TKs”—writer speak for “to come.”

At the end of the day, this is your book, not mine and it needs to sound and feel like you, not me.

The Recipe

To make sure the voice and tone is authentic to you, I typically start by having an in-person meeting. I want to understand why you want to write this book, if you’ve already crafted a book proposal and if you have a publisher, if so, do you plan to self-publish, use a book packager or go the traditional route?

Here are some other questions I’ll ask:

Step 1: Determining the scope of the book.

Where are we starting? (Where in the sausage making process are we?)

- Have you consider how you'd like to work with a writer? What have you already done or not done?
 - **Do you have meat?**
 - Do you already have an outline, chapter ideas?
 - **Do you need to make the sausage?**
 - Do you already have a manuscript that needs to be edited and crafted into a cohesive book?
 - **Do you have a recipe or an idea of a recipe you want to make?**
 - Do you only have notes, points of interest, and/or links to projects and notable accomplishments?

During our first session together I'm also going to want to know:

- What makes this book unique from all the other books out there?
- What are 3-5 books you really like that that you enjoy and why?
- What kind of book do you want to write?
- What voice/tone do you want?
 - Do you want to write this book in first-person or third-person?
 - Is the book more conversational or does it take a more formal approach?
 - Will there be multiple voices (co-authors I'll be ghosting for?)
 - Typically I do record (with permission) conversations, I'm ghosting for so their voice, tone and verbiage can be used, within reason, throughout the book.
- Who is your target audience (i.e. reader) of this book? Why will they want to read it?
- How much data do you hope to use?
 - Do you have proprietary data?
 - Do you want to do a massive survey (1,000+ people, which I've done via Qualtrics and SurveyMonkey.)
 - If this is an academic book and you plan to use data, consider the importance of having someone who is certified (I am) via the Institutional Review Board's [Collaborative Institutional Initiative Training \(CITI\) program for ethical training on human subjects research](#).
- What is your background?
 - Who are you?
 - What's your bio?
 - Do you have a marketing platform? (i.e. social media, newsletters, large following via publications, etc..)

- What is your preferred communication style?
 - Do you like weekly or monthly check-in calls?
 - Do you like text messages?
 - Do you prefer emails?
 - How comfortable are you with Google Docs and track changes?
- What is your timeline for this project?
- Have you worked with a ghostwriter before? If so, has this book already been started by another ghostwriter?
- Do you prefer a ghostwriter or a co-author for your book?
- What does success look like to you?
- What else do I need to know about you and this project that I haven't asked?

Step 2: Create an Outline

Depending on the type of collaboration, the writing process can vary. The most important part is to create a detailed outline. This is our roadmap. The more detailed and specific the less questions there will be later on.

Typically my outlines are very detailed with lots of bullets and citations, usually 20-50 pages long.

This back-and-forth process can take a couple of weeks or a couple of months depending on the client. Ideally, this process lasts three to four weeks.

Step 3: Deadlines and Deliverables

I usually place the approved outline on a shared Google Drive folder and include chapters. Each chapter will summarize a to-do list for each of us.

- Who is responsible for doing what?
- Will you provide me with notes, data, research or other materials, and if so, by when?
- Will I write chapters and then send them to your client for her review?

For tracking our progress, I usually like to set up calendar reminders of important deadlines to make sure we stay on track. I'll also create a schedule based on our outline filled with deadlines for both of us. Depending on your publication date, I'll front load the work so we've got some wiggle room (not a ton) on the backend.

Sometimes, I'll also use a red-yellow-green methodology to track what is on-time (green), what is getting close to being off schedule (yellow) and what is late (red). I tend to error on the side of over communication, instead of less so there isn't any confusion on the back end.

Step 3: The Writing Process

Every person is different. Depending on our preferred communication style, I'll then set up a series of recorded interviews with you. Once I begin writing, it is my job to capture your voice. This is your book.

I'll be listening to see if there are certain words or phrases you frequently use, if you use industry jargon, speak quickly, colloquially or in long, complex sentences.

Based on the research and additional interviews that needs to be conducted, I'll go chapter by chapter through the book.

Typically, I'll send a chapter back for you to review and comment on as I begin working on the next chapter.

This process continues and is repeated for each chapter, as chapters are written, reviewed, revised and completed.

Like juggling several balls in the air, ideally one chapter is being reviewed while another is being created or revised, coupled with any additional interviewing, fact-checking or research to fill in the gaps.

Having a positive relationship is integral to the success of the project. It's important that we work in tandem.

I prefer to have you approve each chapter as I write them.

Minor changes can be added in later on via a schedule phone call, but once all the chapters are approved, they are then combined into a master document for one final review by you.

Once those changes are made, the final draft is sent on to an editor or proofreader.

The Cost of Making Sausage (Pricing)

Payment terms depend on a variety of factors. Regardless of the project, partial payment is due upfront. (I don't work solely for a "share of the royalties" or other future income.)

Some books pay a third once a contract is signed, a third on the first draft and a third on final draft. Others contracts are divided up into different increments.

The cost of the project depends on:

- How much research is going to be involved?
- How long (in days / weeks) will it take to complete?
- What type of turnaround do I have on the project?
- How many hours will it take to complete?

- How long is the project?
- What services do you need/want? (research, reporting, writing, editing, etc...)

This journey is about making the recipe that is right for you. There can be 20 great recipes out there, but the one you make needs to be the one you enjoy the most.

My job is to be your chef. Once the recipe is finalized and the meal is made, you get to host the dinner party and enjoy all the fruits of the labor.

Thanks for listening. Here's to making new recipes together.

Dawn

To learn more, set up an appointment today. Call or text or call me at 312.590.1921.

Let's start this journey together.