

Nurse Author & Editor

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From the Editor Writing a Book: What you need to know

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Have you always wanted to write a book but are not sure how to get started? Does such a large writing project seem daunting? It should, or you are not ready to write a book length manuscript. If you have written a manuscript for a journal, you have a sense of the time commitment, but a journal manuscript takes "no time at all" compared to a book. The goal of this editorial is to help you make an informed decision about writing a book and get started on the process if you decide to move forward.

If you are thinking about writing a book, answer these 3 questions:

1. Do you have the time? To me, the time it will take is the main consideration in deciding whether to write a book. It can easily take a year to complete a book even with contributed chapters.
2. Is there a need? Sometimes the decision to write a book is to meet a need in a course you are teaching. There may be no books available, or the current books do not meet the students' needs. You may be thinking about writing a book that is more specialized than a main course text and could be used as a resource for students, nursing faculty, and nurses. Regardless of whether the book is a comprehensive textbook or more narrow and specialized in scope, ask yourself: who will read it (and thus purchase it)?
3. Is there sufficient content for a book length manuscript? The last question that is important in making the decision to write a book is whether you have enough content. While the number of pages needs to be consistent with the focus and scope of the book, the last book we wrote, intended for use as the main course text in a nursing education course, had more 680 manuscript pages (double spaced and 12 font). Think about how many more pages would be required if you were writing a book for a clinical nursing course such as adult health or pediatric nursing.

Authored or Contributed Book

Your next consideration is whether the chapters will be authored by you alone, by you and coauthors, or by authors you ask to write specific chapters for the book. With a contributed book, the editor develops the idea for book, obtains the contract, identifies and plans the content, recruits experts to write the chapters, and is responsible for editing the final version. Problems with contributed (edited) books are the varied writing styles of chapter authors and differences in how authors develop and present their content. With authored books you can more easily develop the content across chapters and build chapters on one another. Authored books have consistency in writing style and approach, which is difficult to accomplish with a contributed book with many different authors preparing chapters. Two other concerns with contributed books are that authors may not adhere to the required format for chapters no matter how clear the editor is about preparing chapters, and authors may not submit their chapters on time. With contributed books, the editor receives the royalties based on book sales, but with some books contributors may receive a small honorarium.

Initial Contact with Publisher

You should find a publisher who might be interested in your idea for a book before you invest too much time on it. There are three types of publishers to consider: (1) commercial publishers of nursing books such as Springer Publishing Company, Wiley-Blackwell, and Elsevier, among others; (2) nursing organizations that publish books such as Sigma Theta Tau International; and (3) publishers of books for the general public if you are thinking about writing a non academic book. Next, contact the acquisitions editor with your idea. The publishers' websites provide guidelines about selecting a publisher, developing the book proposal, editing the book, and submitting the manuscript. You can search those websites for information and resources for book authors.

Book Prospectus

The prospectus is the plan for the book: it is your proposal describing the book, its contents, intended readers, and courses in which it would be used. Each publisher has its own format, but generally in the prospectus you will:

1. Describe the purpose of the book and why it is needed. This is your chance to explain to the publisher why your book meets a need in nursing.
2. Provide a list of chapters in the book with a description of the content in each chapter.
3. List features of the book, e.g., chapter objectives, key points covered in the chapter, chapter summaries, review questions, etc.
4. List contributors, if any, and the specific chapters each person will write.
5. Discuss the intended readers for whom the book is written. Is this a clinical book for an undergraduate nursing course? A book intended for a specialty nursing course? A reference book for nurses and other health professionals? If the book is envisioned as a textbook, this section of the prospectus also should specify the courses in which the book might be used.
6. Review competing books on the market and explain why your book is needed.
7. Specify the total number of manuscript pages for the book. I mentioned earlier that our last book was 680 manuscript pages: these were double-spaced manuscript pages in 12 point font, Times New Roman, with 1 inch margins. The trim (physical dimensions) of the book was 6 in. x 9 in.: for that size printed book, 1.5 manuscript pages equal 1 book page. Other typical trim sizes are 7 in. x 10 in. and 8.5 in. x 11 in. Smaller size printed books require fewer manuscript pages while a larger trim such as 7 in. x 10 in. requires about 2 manuscript pages for each book page (2:1).
8. Prepare a timetable for completion of the book and submission of the final manuscript to the publisher. This is important as the due date will be included in your contract, and you want to plan carefully the time it will take. (Oermann & Hays, 2010)

You can tell from this list that preparing the prospectus is time consuming, and for this reason, I recommend first contacting a publisher, then preparing the prospectus. Otherwise you may spend time on the plan for the book and not be able to find a publisher. In addition to the areas identified earlier that are in the prospectus, publishers often ask potential book authors and editors to submit a sample chapter, requiring more of your time. The prospectus may be sent by the publisher to external reviewers for their feedback and suggested changes; you will likely be asked to revise the prospectus based on those suggestions.

Book Contract

If the publisher is interested in your book, you will receive a contract to write it, which is a legal document outlining responsibilities of the author (or editor) and publisher. In general, the contract specifies that the author is responsible for preparing the book as planned and submitting it on time. The publisher is responsible for getting the book into production (you will have a production

manager), copyediting the manuscript, producing the book, and marketing it. The contract also includes the number of manuscript pages to be submitted and due date, information about the royalties, and copyright information. Most of these are standard contracts, but some details may be negotiated. Read your contract carefully and consult with experts if unsure about language in it.

Typical Sections in an Academic Book

The beginning pages of a book are referred to as the front matter. These include the title page, dedication, list of contributors (if an edited book), table of contents, foreword written by an expert (not the author or editor) about the importance of the book, and preface that describes the content in each chapter. The text contains the chapters, which may be grouped into sections or parts of the book. At the end of the book is the back matter, which includes supplementary materials such as appendices, a glossary, other resources for readers, and the index of the content in the book with page numbers. Often the index is prepared by a specialist rather than the author.

What Next?

The publisher provides guidelines for preparing the book including the format for each part of the book; how to label chapters and tables, figures, and artwork in each chapter; the format for submission of the final manuscript; and other details. The guidelines specify the requirements for creating figures and artwork; these need to be camera ready, in a format "ready for press."

Editors of contributed books need to ensure that authors know the format for preparing their chapters, content that should be in them, intended length of the chapters, and time frame for submission. It is critical to set firm due dates, explain to authors the importance of these dates, and send frequent reminders about when materials are due. Books have a complex timetable for editing, revisions of chapters, and production. One chapter late can have a domino effect on other chapters and the book as a whole.

The editor needs to read and edit each chapter, sometimes returning the chapter to the author for revision, and add transitions between chapters. Even with clear directions to authors, the editor frequently needs to format chapters for consistency with the guidelines. For some books the chapters may be peer reviewed, and in that situation the editor will return them to contributors for revision.

After the book manuscript is submitted to the publisher, the chapters will be copyedited. Similar to journal articles, it is important to read carefully the copyedited manuscript pages as some of the copyeditor's revisions may have inadvertently changed the meaning. The copyedited manuscript will include queries, which the book author, or editor and contributors, need to answer. The next set of materials will be the page proofs, and these too need to be read carefully. For contributed books, the chapter authors may review the copyedited versions and page proofs, or the editor may do this for all of the chapters in the book.

Managing your Time

I began this editorial with a caution about the extensive time required to write a book. Here are some strategies to be successful:

- Set deadlines for writing each chapter or if a contributed book for working with authors and editing their chapters.
- Never change a due date.
- Identify your best time for writing and block it off: do not answer emails, work on class materials, or get distracted by other tasks. Use that time only for writing the book.
- Keep a running list of other tasks essential for preparing the book, e.g., requesting permissions,

writing chapter summaries, and checking references, and plan on doing those activities when you are too fatigued to write creatively.

- Develop your own style for progressing through the book. For example, I always finish one chapter at a time including its formatting so it is "ready to submit" before starting another one.

Parting Thoughts

If you are tenure track and your guidelines for promotion and tenure emphasize peer reviewed publications (especially databased ones), do not write a book: save this editorial for a later point in your career. I have emphasized throughout this editorial the time it takes to write a book. Ask yourself if you have time, and if you do, get started now.

Reference

Oermann M H & Hays J (2010) Writing for publication in nursing (2nd ed) Springer Publishing, New York.

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