

Writing a 'How To' book

Non-fiction books can be just as exciting to write as fiction pieces...if not more so at times! Personally I think that there is no greater pleasure than writing a book that helps and supports other people in their own personal development, skill building or knowledge. This is where 'How To' books come in!

What is a How To book?

A How To book is a book that provides practical information on a particular subject area, and allows the reader to develop their abilities within this subject area.

Examples of the types of subjects that How To books are written for include:

- Gardening
- Accountancy
- Pregnancy
- Writing
- Design
- Illustration
- Coping with different medical illnesses
- Raising children
- Owning pets
- Art
- Crafts
- Managing money

One of the great things about How To books is that they are published by a number of different publishing houses, and even if they are self published they tend to do well through online sales. This means that the possibility of writing a successful book that is published and sold is generally greater than the possibility of publishing a successful non-fiction book of a different genre.

So, if you fancy having a go at writing a How To book, here are a few handy hints to help you on your way!

1. **Choosing your subject matter.** How To guides can be produced for pretty much any skill you can think of. This includes obvious skills such as woodwork, paper craft and fiction writing. But it also includes less obvious skills such as managing stress or caring for a loved one with cancer. So when it comes to choosing your subject matter there is certainly a variety of subject matters for you to think about. Spend some time deciding upon your subject matter. Go for a topic where there is obvious reader interest, but where the market isn't already swamped with How To books in this field.
2. **Structuring your book.** Length is important in How To books – the book shouldn't be too long as the reader will not be able to keep up with the different instructions you are putting forward as part of the text. At the same time, the reader needs to feel as if they have learnt or developed a skill through the reading of your book, so there needs to be sufficient content. It

can be a tricky balance. Aim for a structure that covers 10 – 15 chapters, with each chapter being between 2,000 and 3,000 words to keep the text manageable.

3. **Tone and Style.** It is important that you don't alienate your reader – they need to like you as the narrator of the book. A How To book teaches the reader a skill, so the narrator of the book needs to have the same voice tone as a real life teacher would have. That's one of empathy, patience and clear, easy-to-follow instruction.
4. **Involving the reader.** A good How To book will entice the reader to engage with the book as they work their way through reading it. This can be achieved by including exercises for the reader to undertake throughout the book, integrating helpful summaries of the key lessons learnt throughout a chapter, and adding in checklists to the book to help the reader teach themselves.