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WRITING
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with Pat Iyer



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How to Write 101 Tips and All About Books

Two types of books are very good for people who like to do research. I'm not talking here about exhaustive, years-long research, especially for the first category, which I'm generally calling the "101 Tips" kind of book.

You've seen them in the form of books about folk remedies, home repair guides, and many more. If you choose a subject that's right both for you as a writer and for an identifiable target audience, you can have success.

The "All About" books set out a defined area and include in-depth information on that subject. You could write "All About Customer Service".

The "All About" books require more care in structuring. A detailed outline is essential. It also requires greater writing skill and should include interesting anecdotes and little-known facts.

I'm Pat Iyer, the host of this podcast, and the author or editor of 49 books.

Here's what I cover in this podcast:

- Why is a "101 Tips" book easy to write?
- How can you make it interesting and valuable?
- How can you focus an "All About" book?
- How can you write it in a way that generates free publicity?
- What makes an "All About" book memorable?

For anyone who is daunted by the idea of gathering 101 of anything, let me reassure you. You can cut that number in roughly half and write a 52 tips book. For example, I wrote a book called *52 Writing Tips*. It was a short book; however, each tip has detailed information. You can get your copy at this link: LNC.tips/52WritingTips.

Decide whether you want to do moderately in-depth writing or put together many short "information bites." Such a book can be written either way.

Overall, this can be a very easy book to write. You glean tips from multiple sources, all of which focus on a single topic.

Examples could include *101 Tips for Starting A Small Business*, *101 Hobbies that Can Turn into a Business*, or *101 Diet Tips*. I'm not recommending these titles. How to write a catchy title (and subtitle) is a different—and important—topic.

This is Not a Cut-and-Paste Operation

The reader will be able to tell if you've casually slapped some content together. If you want readers for future books, take care in producing *this* one.

An efficient and effective method to organize your material is to put them into categories. You can choose how many categories are needed.

Here is one way to organize the material. The categories should include:

1. **Basic tips** on the subject that everyone needs to know. Many people probably will know these tips, but your inclusion of them will assure the knowledgeable that you, too, know what you're talking about.

An example from a book about hobbies, "What do you love doing? What kind of hobbies are hot? How do people make money from hobbies?"

2. **You might also include lesser-known tips** that are potentially highly valuable. Just a few of these can make a reader glad he or she got your book. Many people, for example, don't know that some hobbies can be highly lucrative.
3. **Add "Insider" tips** that the reader would never have found out through regular channels. To provide these, you either need to be very familiar with the subject or interview experts and/or people who have pursued this area. In the hobbies area, for example, you might get in touch with someone who is a frequent seller on eBay and offer to cite them as authorities. Many people like the idea of free advertising.

When should you organize material into sections? You could do it before, during or after you write it. Let me explain.

If you think of sections before you write or assemble material from content you've written, you will see how to structure the book. When you create your sections as

you write the book, you will determine if some areas are light and not well represented by content. That guides you in creating new material. Sort the content after you write it. You'll see how to organize the material from simple to more complex material. Or maybe you won't see it and here's an example.

A woman who hired me to edit her 101 tips book did not have the material in sections. She was too close to the material and could not see how to organize it. As I edited it, I could see how to group the material into sections. I spotted redundancy and sections that did not have enough chapters. This kind of work comes easy to me from years of writing and editing.

Let's return to writing tips. Writing these tips isn't an opportunity to show off mastery of flowery prose. You're presenting *information*, and you should use strong, short sentences that cleanly communicate the information. Here's an example:

"A calorie counter is your friend. Consult it when you plan meals."

Never quote other sources without attribution. Credit every source where it appears in the text, in an acknowledgments section, or an appendix. Use whatever format works best for your book.

If you can, get authorities in the field about which you're writing to read your book and, if possible, write up a review. I'll cover that topic more in future podcasts.

Are you tempted to write an "all about" book?

The "101 Tips" book consists of brief, informative paragraphs connected by the nature of their subject matter. The "All About" and "What You Need to Know" books, in contrast, need a greater sense of continuity and flow.

Don't be deceived by the sweeping sound of "All About." The reader isn't looking for a broad overview. For example, don't write a book about famous scientists. It's too broad a topic, and you will probably be covering ground that's familiar to many people.

You might, instead, write a book about "Women Inventors You Never Heard About." Hedy Lamar, a well-known actress during the 1940s and 1950s, is much less well-known for having developed a radio guidance system for Allied torpedoes. Although it wasn't adopted by the U.S. Navy until the 1960s (in part

because no one would take the invention seriously), elements of her invention are incorporated into Bluetooth technology.

Other inventions by women, especially African-American women, have been disregarded or appropriated without acknowledging their inventor. A book about this topic could have a title like “Why Weren’t Women Inventors Taken Seriously?”

I describe this potential book to give you an idea of the boundaries of “All About” books. Limit your scope so the material you present is cohesive and engaging.

For this subject, you might make the material even more compelling by contrasting it with ways in which young female inventors, some still in high school, are inventing valuable tools or processes. One chapter might describe ways to encourage a scientifically-oriented young girl to follow her dreams.

If you can write a book that informs, entertains, and enriches the reader, you will create not one fan but possibly many. When a reader tells her friends about the great book she read and reviews, you get priceless publicity.

Here’s how to structure your “all about” book:

You can begin with either an anecdote that illustrates something important **and** interesting about the topic or a series of startling facts, i.e., “Did you know that . . .?”

Give a brief historical overview, emphasizing the highlights and especially little-known facts.

Summarize, in a few paragraphs, what you will share about the subject.

Write a detailed outline, breaking the book first into chapters and into subtopics within each chapter. The more work you put into the outline, the easier the book will be to write.

Consider the Reader. Age and level of knowledge are important. The women inventors’ book could be geared to either an adult or teenaged level of interest. This would affect both the level of sophistication you use in your style and language and how you orient it. For a teenager, you might want to use a “you can do it” tone.

If you're not writing the book for specialists in a field (and you shouldn't unless you, too, are a specialist), you want to keep the technical aspects to a minimum.

Above all, you want to give entertainment value and include many quotable facts. People love to be able to say, "I learned the most incredible thing the other day."

When they do that, the chances are good that they'll mention your book. **That's success.**

Here's my summary of the key points.

1. **Include basic tips** so that the reader is assured you know what you're talking about.
2. **Lesser-known tips** greatly enhance the value of your book.
3. If the first two categories of the book are the basic meal, **insider tips** are the gourmet treats. Make them as exclusive as you can.
4. In writing an "All About" book, have **a closely focused subject**.
5. You want your material to be **cohesive and engaging**.
6. Consider the age groups for which you're writing and write accordingly.
7. A **detailed outline** makes the "All About" book much easier to write.
8. **Quotable facts** both enliven your book and make people talk about it.
9. **Organize your book into sections** and if you lack the objectivity to do that, hand the manuscript to an experienced editor to create structure. I'm happy to help you with this. Connect with me through my website at patiyer.com.

We're switching the focus in the next series of 4 podcasts to blogging – a powerful way to be visible, build content, and win over prospects. And I've got plans to start introducing you to some authors who will share their secrets about writing. Stay tuned.