**3 How to Start Your First Draft**

Three of the biggest mistakes new writers make with first drafts are:

1. They forget that this is A FIRST DRAFT. You can make mistakes, ignore correct spelling. Get those words down.
2. They also slow themselves down by tormenting themselves for not spending enough hours writing.
3. They don’t create an outline before they start writing, so they repeat content and wander through the writing process, never completely sure of where they are headed.

As I explore the process of writing in podcasts 2, 3, 4 and 5, I can’t overlook one of the challenges of writing: **How to Successfully Begin a First Draft**

You’ve set aside time to write. Now is the time to tackle the first draft of your work.

A lot goes into the first draft, but it’s most important to *get started*. Imagine that blank screen or piece of paper. Can you think of a more intimidating sight? Not if you’re a new—or even an experienced—writer.

How do you break through the intimidation? Think of yourself standing at the edge of a body of water, knowing you will be shocked by the cold water. You can either slowly edge in, suffering a little at a time, or take the plunge.

I’m Pat Iyer, the hostess of Writing to Get Business.

**Here’s my advice: Take the Plunge**

All books start the same way – with a blank screen or piece of paper.

If you’re writing a non-fiction book, whether it’s a memoir or self-help book, you need some form of outline. You plan to follow it, but you realize a lot of words are required between each outline point, and the idea of filling those empty spaces makes you nervous. I’ll give you tips on creating outlines in this podcast.

Here's how to start your book: plunge in. There are some reassuring truths about writing.

As I mentioned above, experienced writers fear those first words as much as the beginner. You’re in good company.

Also, in the first draft, you don’t have to worry about grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. If your word processing program has a feature that helpfully points out your errors, turn it off.

Write, and if you falter, remind yourself that this is the first draft. If it helps, write in large letters on a blank piece of paper, “**THIS IS THE FIRST DRAFT.”** Look at this message often.

**When Social Media Beckons**

Don’t let yourself get distracted. If social media calls you, don’t answer. Better yet, turn off social media and email notifications. It is an excuse to avoid writing.

Sometimes your avoidance mechanism uses subtle messages. You’re writing away, and you realize you should check some facts. Don’t check them now. Write yourself a note.

“In 2019, the percentage of women-owned businesses was . . . FACT-CHECK THIS.”

When you’ve finished your writing for the day, go back to check all the facts you need to fill in the draft.

**Set Reasonable Time Limits**

Beginning writers often sabotage themselves by setting unrealistic time frames for their work. They may say, “I’m going to write for two hours every evening when I get home from work.”

Then they get home, have dinner, and think about those two hours. They know they’ll never last that long. Feeling discouraged, they begin to beat themselves up and end up not writing at all.

Tell yourself instead that you’ll write for whatever amount of time feels comfortable. If after that time has passed, you still want to write, do so—and congratulate yourself for having passed the limit you set.

As you gain confidence, you’ll be able to increase writing time, but don’t overdo it.

**Make Reasonable Contracts with Others**

I don’t recommend beginning writers write a book for a publisher’s deadline unless they are working with a very hands-on developmental editor and/or ghostwriter. If, however, you find yourself with a deadline, ask yourself if it is reasonable.

Don’t agree to it because you think you’ll never get another chance or because you want to please the publisher/editor. The best way to fulfill your fears is to fail to meet the deadline. You will also create unnecessary and harmful stress in your life.

You can learn to like and even love writing if you are kind to yourself while you’re learning. Always ask yourself, “Am I comfortable? Are the ideas flowing?”

If the answer is yes, continue. And continue.

Remember, at the beginning of this podcast I said there were 3 mistakes new writers make with first drafts, such as:

1. They forget that this is A FIRST DRAFT. You can make mistakes, ignore correct spelling. Get those words down.
2. They also slow themselves down by tormenting themselves for not spending enough hours writing.
3. They don’t create an outline before they start writing, so they repeat content and wander through the writing process, never completely sure of where they are headed.

I now want to tackle the last mistake in this podcast.

Does that word **outline** make you cringe?

Because many of us had teachers who saved their most boring speeches for subjects like grammar, spelling, and outlining, we hear those words and, not surprisingly, think, “boring.”

My goal in this podcast is to help you see outlining as a priceless tool. It will save you loads of time and will make your written material better. Try looking at it this way; you couldn’t stand on your own two feet without a skeleton. Think of the outline as your book’s skeleton.

If you are thinking, “But I don’t have a logical mind. I’m right-brained,” I have an approach for you, too. It’s called reverse outlining, and it’s just as effective in building the structure of your book. It’s a right-brained person’s dream come true.

While I’m focusing this on explaining reverse outlining, you might, even if you think you’re pretty good at the straightforward way of outlining, get something out of this.

Imagine, for example, that you’re stuck on where a book outline should go next. Reverse outlining might get you unstuck.

In school, I remember a lot of time being devoted to teaching the skill of outlining. Teachers recommended it as the best way to form the foundation for an essay or term paper.

The essay style I learned was highly structured. First came the Roman numerals, then the capital letters, the Arabic numbers, and finally the lowly lower-case letters.

It looked like this.

1. Outlines are important.
2. They help you organize your thoughts.
3. You list what’s important about the subject.

a. Then you break it down into smaller units.

You may listen to this and think, “This kind of work feels like dissecting a living creature.” You have lots of ideas but breaking them down in this way can chop the life out of them.

You may have this reaction if you are not a primarily left-brained thinker.

**Left vs. Right**

You are probably familiar with the differences between left-brained and right-brained thinking, but here’s a brief review.

Left-brained people tend to use logic and analysis and objectivity. They think sequentially, which is why outlining their thoughts before writing something works very well.

Right-brained people think intuitively. Ideas may follow each other without obvious logic. This can make outlining nightmarish for them.

Few people are entirely left- or right-brained, and it’s generally agreed that a balance and flow between the two parts of the brain creates the most creative thinking. However, right-brained people need to start where they’re most comfortable.

I saw a fascinating post on Facebook not long ago. It showed a pair of sneakers. If you are left brained, they are grey and green. If you are right brained, they look white and pink. When I posted this on my feed, a few people saw both color combinations!

I am solidly left brained, a tendency that got reinforced when I went to nursing school and worked as a nurse. You must be able to follow procedures to do well as a nurse. I enjoy outlining. I have a free quick tips report for you at patiyer.com. “Secrets of Writing a Book” shares my method of outlining – it was worked for me for 20 plus years.

And I am aware that *you* could be right brained, and dislike outlining, so this next part will help you.

**Let Your Ideas Flow**

Let’s say you want to write a book on affordable housing options because you are a consultant on urban development. You want to include a chapter on tiny houses because the idea of compact, affordable, and often transportable housing will appeal to your readers.

You already have three subtopics: compact, affordable, transportable.

You’ve researched the subject and have extensive information. Now you need to organize it.

Quickly write the topics that come to your mind without trying to force them into logical sequence.

* They’re ideal vacation homes.
* You can customize them.
* Tiny houses are great for people who couldn’t otherwise afford a home.
* Put in people’s personal experiences with tiny homes.
* People can visit a place that makes them comfortable.
* They make great mother-in-law dwellings as an alternative to senior housing.
* Could focus on U.S. or include examples from Europe.
* Online resources.

Keep on until you run out of ideas.

**Then Start Organizing**

Ask yourself how these ideas can fit together. Move them around until the list has both a logical and interesting flow. Yes, this is an outline, but it’s coming after you’ve brainstormed—and it’s not engraved in stone.

Ask yourself if you can include all your ideas in the chapter, based on your projected word count. Maybe you’ll leave out the European examples.

At this point, return to creative thinking. What would be the most interesting way to begin the chapter?

You might start with stories about people who live in tiny houses. Stories capture readers’ interests and allow them to identify with the subject.

You could also begin with information about the savings people can realize with tiny houses. This also attracts readers’ attention.

Once you’ve written a rough draft, you may find that you don’t like the flow of the chapter. Feel free to move paragraphs and sections around until you’re satisfied.

**Your Brain Will be Happy and Helpful**

So often, right-brained people feel blocked when they must write something because they apply left-brained standards to how they should be doing it. A more freewheeling method can slide right past writer’s block and allow you to write in a way that allows you to utilize both sides of your brain.

Here are the key points for success:

1. Get your words down first and then go back and polish.
2. Spend the amount of time writing that fits best in your life.
3. Use an outline to keep focused and be efficient with your time.

In my fourth podcast, you’ll get practical tips and strategies for finding time to write so you can bust one of the biggest objections to writing.

Be sure to go to patiyer.com to request Secrets of Writing a Book.