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How to sell your expertise by writing books and articles

Patrick Forsyth

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PATRICK FORSYTH

BOOST YOUR PROFILE IN PRINT

HOW TO SELL YOUR EXPERTISE BY WRITING BOOKS AND ARTICLES

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Boost Your Profile In Print: How to sell your expertise by writing books and articles
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THE AUTHOR

Patrick Forsyth is a consultant, trainer and writer. He has worked with organisations large and small and in many different parts of the world. Practicing what he preaches here, he is the author of many successful books on management, business and careers and prides himself on having a clear how-to style.

One reviewer ("Professional Marketing") commented: *Patrick has a lucid and elegant style of writing which allows him to present information in a way that is organised, focused and easy to apply.*

In this series he is also the author of several titles including: "Your boss: sorted!" and "How to get a pay rise". His writing extends beyond business. He has had published humorous books (e.g. *Empty when half full*) and light-hearted travel writing including: *First class at last!*, about a journey through South East Asia, and *Smile because it happened* about Thailand. His novel, *Long Overdue,* was published recently.

He can be contacted via www.patrickforsyth.com

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1 INTRODUCTION: A PROFITABLE OPPORTUNITY

The saying that "by their deeds ye shall know them" comes from the Bible. It is a phrase that has truth in a business setting. Consider what you sell. How do people know it is any good? You may tell them, they may be able to try or test it (in the way one would take a car for a test run), but there is still an element of risk involved in buying. We think we check things out and make objective decisions (well about most things) but we are never sure that something will meet, better still exceed, our expectations.

This is especially true of services. How do you know that a trainer will teach you something new and useful, that an accountant will help reduce the tax you pay, that an architect will produce plans you really like? There is no certainty in such matters. You can check and check again, get references and read brochures and scan web sites, but at the end of the day you take a risk.

One thing that surely helps the buyer is specific evidence of expertise or excellence. This may be a review of a new car, film or book, but it could be evidence of the expertise of the people involved.

One powerful way this can be provided is in print. If you read an article or book (in paper or some form of ebook) written by someone who you are contemplating working with and it spells out good sense, if it is saying something useful, is well researched, organised and easy to read then you feel you know more about the person and will take less risk in commissioning them.

In short if a published message gives sound evidence of expertise then it can play a powerful role in influencing a decision to buy. Furthermore something like a published book can make you money and surely publicity that earns rather than costs must be worth considering.

Given these facts (and they are facts) – maybe you should write a book.

My business career has been punctuated by the regular injection of published material – books and articles, and more recently electronically produced material in various forms – and it has, I assure you, been very useful; and sometimes very directly useful. It has helped prompt purchase and shortened the sales process; indeed in training I have had people telephone me saying that they have read a book of mine on a subject and booking a similar course to be conducted in their organisation there and then without even meeting me. So when Bookboon suggested I write this particular title, I thought "good idea".

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In the following pages I aim to persuade you that writing for publication may be a good idea for you too and show how it is possible.

Note: it is beyond the brief here, but it is worth mentioning that a similar case about the projection of expertise can be made for presentations, a talk, a conference session, a whole seminar, all can have the same effect. There is an overlap here too: for example an article may give rise to an invitation to speak at a conference, or vice versa.

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2 THE RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES

Assuming you have expertise in an area important to your business, then let us also assume that you can write something about it (we will progressively look at how to do that). So, let's see what you could do with such a message to "put it out there" as it were. There are a range of different ways to proceed, indeed these are not mutually exclusive and you may put a similar (perhaps amended) message in more than one form.

1. *A (conventionally published) book:* this is perhaps the best regarded route. There is still kudos it "having something published", i.e. *selected* to be published. The main advantage is that the publisher will take the risk and invest in producing and launching the book, paying the author a royalty on each copy sold (and maybe an advance: that is paying some money up front). They will also undertake publicity, though these days they usually expect the author to help in this area.
2. *A (self-published) book:* there are many systems, via Amazon and others, of creating your own book and publishing it in paper and ebook form. This is not as complicated as it was, but it must be done right (sub-contraction is possible here) and certainly the processes involved in making an ebook correctly formatted for Kindle and other similar systems – which are all different – getting books listed (with an ISBN) in various systems used by retailers, wholesalers and others is complex. There is plenty of guidance available about self-publishing; something to check out separately perhaps.
3. *An (assisted publication) book:* this is an in-between approach. You pay a publisher something up front to do the editing and other work involved in bringing out a book and get their professional input to the process, which should, if you pick wisely, ensure a professional publication appears at the end of the process. There may be marketing assistance available too. A good "assisted publisher" will not publish just anything (their reputation is at stake too), poor ones – so called vanity publishers – should be avoided: they can be expensive, poor value for money and even make promises that are not kept.
4. *An e-book:* this can be produced with a publisher or independently and makes what you write available to download, on a free or paid basis, to read on an electronic reader, tablet or phone.
5. *An article:* in any suitable media: for example, newspapers, magazines and perhaps especially in the specialist and trade press
6. *A regular column:* you are unlikely to start with this, but with some experience it is possible. Even a short piece (I do one monthly column that is barely 300 words) can put your name usefully in front of people every week, month, quarter or whatever. What is said must be useful, but encapsulating a succinct message gets easier with practice.

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7. *A blog:* this is something you can control: certainly if it is run alongside your web site for instance. Or it may be that you can contribute to others' blogs or that a publisher has an outlet of this sort you can use (for example, you will find some short pieces of mine on the Bookboon web site).
8. *A web site:* this could be yours or other peoples' and can be designed to accommodate article sized pieces and more.

It is possible that such a list is not comprehensive, and certainly in the electronic area the possibilities change as you watch. Some checking out may be in order and a further thought is given in the note below.

Note: though I have said the methods described are not mutually exclusive, it is more complicated than that and there are links between different forms and one can aim to exploit these. For example, a conventional publisher may bring out a book in various printed formats (for example, hardback and paperback) and alongside it have an e-version that can be downloaded. The same publisher may have other outlets, perhaps a blog linked to their web site, that can also carry a version of your message and of course they will say something about it (and you) in such things as catalogues.

Now before moving on let me touch on a number of disparate topics all best considered early on:

Different lengths of text

It is clearly more work to write a book, something that might range from 15,000 words (like this text) to 40,000, 50,000 or more, than an article of say 1000 words.

You may want to start with something short, though an article has a shorter life than something like a book. But you should also recognise the way in which various lengths link together. For example:

- A book might allow you to produce extracts from it to form articles (little extra work, more exposure)
- One message might take several forms, even as simply as a 1000 word article in one magazine and a 2500 word one in another
- A longer book might allow you to produce a different version, maybe half the length
- An updated (and republished) book can have a new life too and updating may mean only altering, adding or deleting only a small proportion of the text; much less work than writing a new book

Other media may draw on all of this: for instance a blog entry might be a version, longer or shorter, of an article, in turn adapted from a chapter in a book.

Furthermore, if a book is translated (a publisher selling rights to an overseas publisher) then it may have a whole new life; producing revenue from overseas sales as well.

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Titles

At this stage, before we get into too much about topic or content, let me mention titles. You will notice that this text, as do all the titles I have written for Bookboon, has both a title and a sub-title. Always there is a necessity to both maximise the information up front, for instance on a book cover, and to make it attractive. Getting this right can increase the number of readers you get and thus affect enquiries that follow (maybe *persuasive* writing is something else to study in due course).

Sources of income

You may disregard income and feel that the promotional advantages of getting a book published are enough. But money can be had, so let's consider this for a moment.

Sources of income can vary a good deal and the first step to maximising income is to assess the possibilities and see how they benefit, or might benefit, you. What you write affects this. Not everyone has published books, but let's start with that. The income from a book will come primarily from royalties. These are normally paid with some sort of advance up front (typically split so that some comes on signing a contract, some on the manuscript being delivered and approved and some on publication) then, if the book sells in a way where the per book royalty exceeds the advance, you begin to receive further payments. It is possible that this goes on for some time and both assistance with promotion and initiatives to keep a book in print – by producing an updated version of a non-fiction book for instance – are well worthwhile.

In addition, money may come from overseas translations (the overseas publisher pays a royalty to your original publisher, which is then shared between publisher and author). Income (in the UK) can also come from central schemes paying for library use and copying. Prime here are the Public Lending Rights (PLR) and Authors' Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS); the latter you need to register for – if you have not done so and they could help you, then do so at once. Whatever country you are in look for similar schemes. Additionally of course there can be the profit on copies you buy and resell personally; something you can aim to maximise. If you self-publish there is more promotional work to do, but all the income is yours.

Different sources of income are possible once something is in print (and this does not only apply to books). One potentially important one is talks. For instance, I give talks at writing groups and the like and also, some linked to three travel books I have had published, for a variety of bodies ranging from Women's Institutes to Rotary Clubs. Such assignments can both pay a fee and constitute an opportunity to sell books to attendees. Of course a cheque for £100 – or £1000! – is better than one for £25, but for the part-time writer small sums may be useful and don't forget how they add up: £25 a month is £300 in a year, and that sum every week would be £1300. It all mounts up. Business speaking engagements, of which I have done more, like conferences, may pay significantly more.

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If articles are your thing then there should be fees from them and more fees if you republish them in a different form or overseas. There are links here also. A book being published may give you the opportunity to earn from articles about it or what it is, and several articles published on one topic may be able to be turned into further opportunities as you put yourself in a position of being regarded as an expert on something making it easier to sell more.

You may of course write and get something published which pays you nothing. While many writers do not want to do this very often, it can be useful (or you may not care about payment and just want to see your name in print for promotional reasons – and why not if you so wish?). For example, an article may plug a book, or a talk or something else that will earn you money. Or maybe you can negotiate an alternative to payment. For example, writing an article for nothing on condition that you are paid for a second one (two at half price for the editor, one fee for you) or that you get a free subscription for a year if it is a monthly magazine; this latter may be useful for you and actually costs the magazine very little.

The precise situation that prevails always needs to be borne in mind, and some things can be less than life-changing in financial terms but very useful and go beyond just a one off event. Every little helps as they say. Indeed you might well take the view that just to cover costs on such a thing is worthwhile. And…the whole thing can be fun too; and if you do not write, at least in part, to get some fun from it all, then you should! Note too that there may be financial advantages in terms of expenses and tax.

Publication does not just happen, of course, and I am not meaning to underestimate the job of securing paid commissions, there are many articles and books looking at the detail of such things as how to write a synopsis (while I thus regard this area as outside the brief for this short book an example of a typical business book synopsis appears after this section as a guide), so let's leave that on one side here. I hope however that I am persuading you that earning money from writing is possible and also that over and above the task of seeking commissions the way you view the money making potential matters. You need to wear a "business hat" sometimes in tandem with your creative one; I hope I am not mixing my metaphors too much here; the point is that the two must go together.

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Example synopsis

There is a great deal of work involved in writing a book and then trying to sell it. So, if you are aiming for the traditional publishing route, you may want to sell the idea of the book first and then write it once you have a contract. An example of a synopsis that got me one title published (by Kogan Page) follows.

SYNOPSIS:

Working title:

DISASTER-PROOF YOUR CAREER: Approaches to job security, job satisfaction and career enhancement

The first description here is a suggested **blurb** for the back cover (+ author details and quotation).

Everyone wants to succeed in their career, but success does not just happen. You need to initiate action to survive and thrive in what is a competitive workplace and a tough world; economic difficulties heighten the need to be wary, prudent and plan ahead to increase the likelihood of success.

This book is designed to help. It shows how to take a systematic view of your career and career prospects, and how to take action whether to fit yourself for promotion, greater responsibilities and rewards, new challenges or just to disaster-proof your career against hard times. It shows how to:

- Plan your approach and strategy
- Ensure your skills suit your aspirations
- Present a "success profile" to create the right image
- Use the systems and procedures of an organisation (such as job appraisal) constructively to better your lot
- Motivate yourself so that you have the confidence to make your plan work.

However good a job you do, whatever your job, gender, age or level of seniority, leaving career security and progress to chance is not an option. It risks diluting your chances of coming out on top. Succinct, accessible and practical, this book will inspire and assist you to maximise your career success.

The author (see comments about this)

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Background

A book (*not* about how to get a new job, CVs, interviews etc. – of which there are many), but rather about the positive methods you can use to ensure that you are fit for the career path ahead, however rough the road ahead and whether you seek to maximise your current position, be promoted or move on to new challenges.

Target audience: this book addresses an important (and topical) ongoing issue of increasing importance to everyone working in an organisation (commercial or not) of any size – executive to manager, man or woman, young or old. It is literally vital to peoples' job, job satisfaction and the rewards they receive for their endeavours.

The workplace gets ever more competitive – so this can be made to seem topical (and, given current economic conditions, is and is likely to remain so) and, to pick just one point, has a survival appeal. For example, who can honestly say they look forward to their next appraisal? It is also an aspect of career development that is little documented.

Contents:

Preface – why this book is necessary and how it will help you

1. **The 21st century workplace**
How it is – how it's changed – the competitive workplace – the new realities and trends for the future – the necessity of undertaking active career management

2. **The confidence to succeed**
You must believe you can succeed – creating self-confidence – acting with confidence – action to link what you want, feel and do – creating continuity.

3. **Your career plan**
Action in the face of current trends – thinking through your options – assessing your strengths and weaknesses – setting clear objectives – rewards: what do you want/need to earn? – matching your intentions to the reality of the organisational world

4. **Job performance appraisal**
The role of the "dreaded" job appraisal – the link to contracts and employment legislation – how they work (and how they should work) – planning for your appraisal meeting(s) – pitfalls and opportunities – keeping operational matters in step with the appraisal cycle

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5. **Surviving and benefiting from appraisal**
Using your plans and information to make a good appraisal more likely – communicating with your manager – making the meeting itself go well: the agenda, taking an initiative, focusing on the future, the link to action (and development)

6. **The development process**
The overall development process – the three effects of development – its evolution in light of workplace changes – what you can do and what your employer can do – making development and training practical, relevant and ultimately effective

7. **Methods to take you forward**
Horses for courses – different ways to add, enhance and develop skills: from courses to books to e-learning – the development "best buy" – making it possible (cost, time and opportunity)

8. **Making it work**
Career enhancement in action – examples of best practice, e.g. the power of mentoring – locating and utilising development aiding resources – the link to your immediate plan and long-term future

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9. **Summary: ten steps to being "career fit"**
An overview of what can be achieved and a final word stressing that the process is necessary, manageable and worthwhile.

Length/style: c. 40,000 words

Copyright: Patrick Forsyth
Contact: (email address)

No more should be necessary with regard to length. The headings deal with the main issues, including something about yourself, which is also important; such might be like the short piece at the start of this book or it might be a full page. It should suggest to a publisher that you will deliver (on spec and on time); doing so can make getting further projects agreed easier.

Note: It is good to appear flexible as you make suggestions, so you might sensibly use phrases such as "working title" and "suggested blurb" and suggest that content can be fine-tuned in collaboration with the publisher.

Getting the best deal

Many kinds of publication need a formal agreement: a contract. Certainly if you have a book conventionally published that is the case. There is an old saying that you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate. True. Publication may be welcome, but perhaps not on any terms. A publishing arrangement is, remember, a contractual one and, while this may apply primarily to book publication you do need to be clear what the exact arrangements are even for a "simple" article.

First you must regard the process of agreeing terms as negotiable. Consider something apparently simple – deadlines. Sometimes they seem fixed. A magazine may go to press on a particular day each month, miss that and your deathless prose is omitted. But maybe you can make the editor happy to have it in the following issue. A book manuscript must be delivered on time; only a date you must be sure you can hit can be agreed. Contracts usually run to many pages and deadlines are but one of their contents.

All such details are negotiable. But you need to know how to tackle what is essentially a complex process. Negotiation is bargaining to reach a mutually agreeable outcome. Both parties must end it content (what is referred to as "win-win"). So it needs some thought. Good negotiators do their homework. They also respect the other party and work at understanding their position. That said you must still be prepared to fight your corner, take time to do so and be patient; never rush negotiating or appear to be pushing for a swift conclusion – it will be seen as rushing to get your own way, and resisted. So how do you go about it?

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You need to be clear what you want (hence the need for some homework), particularly as this may relate to many different things. Everything is potentially variable: from deadlines and financial terms to the right of veto over say a book's cover design. And the process must be handled sensitively so as not to upset the prospect of agreement and change minds about whether to publish you or not.

Topics for negotiation include:

- Advances: their amount and timing
- Deadlines: for manuscript, proofs and publication (and method of delivery too – emailing a manuscript is cheapest for you)
- Royalty rates (home and overseas; and, separately these days, electronic ones)
- Subcontracting tasks (like indexing)
- Publicity: what will be done, how much will be done and by whom
- Author involvement (in, say, cover design, advance reviews and publicity)
- Overseas contract/sales arrangements
- Communication: who will liaise with who about what and when
- Particular initiatives (for example, will pre-publication reviews be sought using the manuscript, and if so, from and by whom)

You can doubtless think of more (list and prioritise what's important to you). Particular situations may add to the list (for example, in a magazine you may want your article in a special position). One detail agreed as *you* want, rather than left unaddressed, may make a project more successful.

This implies an assertive approach, yet one deployed with empathy and which avoids inappropriate confrontation. Do not get into a corner you cannot get out of. Avoid rows and showdowns, but stand firm and keep calm. Do not let perfection be the enemy of the good. An outcome that is one hundred per cent what you want is rare. Be realistic; do not waste time and effort seeking an impossible ideal.

Use openness, but do so carefully. Declaring your plans and intentions may assist the discussion, but you may want to keep your underlying motivation hidden. Stick with your objectives, be watchful and, if necessary, bide your time (Some things might best be discussed over several meetings or contacts). Always be professional: for example, always respect confidences given during negotiations. Such consideration builds relationships and may help you in future, for instance with an editor for whom you come to work regularly.

Finally, never underestimate people. And always end discussions positively; neither party will get exactly what they want, but if the deal is agreeable emphasise this at the end. If all this seems somewhat complicated, so be it. The complexities mean that the best negotiators keep a firm overview in their mind as discussions proceed. Negotiation is clearly worth some thought (and is another personal technique you may want to investigate).

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3 SELECTING TOPICS AND STRUCTURING AND PRESENTING MESSAGES

Nothing is possible unless you have a topic on which to write. A topic must fit your chosen form. By this I mean you must have a topic that can be done justice to in a 1000 word article or a 40,000 word book; or anything in between. Be practical, be realistic. A piece that fails to deliver and is thus unsatisfying will not project the kind of image you want.

The topic must fit both for you and for users. Let me take a personal example. One area of training I undertake relates to presenting. I have a book on the subject (*100 Great Presentation Ideas* Marshall Cavendish). This provides a comprehensive guide to those needing to make a presentation. But I have written numerous articles on the subject and another book (*The PowerPoint Detox,* Kogan Page), which focusses on the aspect of visual aids used to support a presentation.

So you need to consider:

- The *extent and range* of the treatment: and thus length and form of what will be written
- The *level* of treatment, i.e. whether it aims (in my example) at first time presenters or the more experienced
- *Style* of treatment: and thus style of writing; the example below adds to this thought.
- *Arrangement:* is it to be a book in many chapters, in a series of short sections (as *100 Great Presentation Ideas*), an article with many headings or few and so on?

You also need to make sure that it is interesting and useful in the sense that a publisher may see a sufficient number of potential readers wanting to read it and finding it useful. *Note:* having said that, I have books on sales and sales technique directed widely, but also one focused on a small niche (*Maximising Hospitality Sales,* aimed at those working in hotels and conference centres and published by Cassel); the latter produced much work for me.

While it is possible to write material that is essentially news or which reports the results of research, the prime form that works here is to provide information in what is essentially a how-to form. Doing this effectively needs a careful approach.

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Telling them how

There are many things people cannot just do. I certainly can't juggle with flaming torches without burning holes in the carpet, but, who knows, maybe I could learn to do so. I would doubtless have to practice, but first I would need to check out something about how to do it. It is difficult to do something if you don't know quite what it is you should be doing.

Which I hope brings us to my subject here: how to write how-to-do-it material.

The potential here is enormous, a wealth of publications and publishers – including this one, of course – publish material which might well be called "instruction".

If you are to add to this well doing so may need some planning. It needs clear structure, it needs complete clarity. There is no room for saying "you sort of attach the thingy to the whatsit and, oh by the way, before that you should…", and it needs a clear focus and sequence. So, first things first, how do you start?

Well, not with a "First you do this…" approach. The first job is to set the scene and make readers feel comfortable; hence the flaming torches above. Your first intention should be to make yourself seem a good source of advice and get people thinking "this may help". The first words need to make what's coming seem likely to be interesting and particularly to be manageable and useful as a guide.

A clear focus

But before you write anything you must decide precisely what to write about. Usually comprehensiveness is impossible. Certainly here in this section of c. 1600 words I cannot mention everything that could be said about how-to writing. I must accept that and have a focus on the key issues. This has implications for preparation and getting the words down (which we come to in a later chapter), where it is worth noting possible content first, only then selecting what to include and not include, as well as how much to say about differing aspects of your topic. Such an approach suits well as it helps separate the job of deciding *what* to write from that of deciding *how* to put it. Maybe I am a bear of very little brain, but I find this easier and certainly it allows you to concentrate on how to put matters with a clear content list already decided. More of this later.

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Context is everything

First bear in mind context: you, presumably, know a lot about whatever you are writing about, but your readers may know less. So you must not blind them with science and you must make things, even complicated things, seem understandable and manageable. If you ever get people saying to themselves "I'm not sure what this means" you have failed. Let's imagine that you are going to teach someone to drive. You sit them down in the driving seat and ask them to disengage the clutch and they, perhaps never having been in a car before, say "What's the clutch?" That's what I mean by context: you have to be sure you are starting far enough back and that wherever you do start is appropriate to your readers.

Consider another example. If you want to tell someone how to tie a bow tie, then it is going to be very difficult, if not impossible. You will need diagrams. You can *show* someone what to do, but telling them is likely to confuse. So an assessment of what is *possible* is necessary. In choosing a topic make sure you are picking something that you can make work. Write something that simply confuses the reader and no editor will ever ask you to write again.

Clarity of description

Given that you may have a good deal to explain you must be succinct: "write tight" as our American cousins say. Couple this with language that is jargon free and memorable and people will follow you and enjoy doing so. Ambiguity kills explanation stone dead, it not only fails to explain – it also removes any credibility that you *can* actually explain clearly.

We all hate the inadequacies of, say, computer manuals; all too often they are impenetrable. Remember that because people love it when what they expect to be complicated proves manageable, a jargon-free style works wonders. There are other hazards to clear explanation. A lack of precision may itself be sufficient to confuse. Luckily English is a powerful language: even a couple of words can speak volumes – witness the story of prolific writer Isaac Asimov (who wrote nearly 500 books), asked what he would do if told he had six months to live he replied in two words: "Type faster". Words must be carefully chosen. And descriptions must be in terms the reader will relate to.

For example, I once saw a guide to conducting meetings which touched on room layout (conference style, boardroom etc.); it referred to an open U-shape, which is pretty easy to imagine – a U of tables open at one end so that the person conducing the meeting can go into the U to face individuals. The description was strengthened powerfully by describing it as an arrangement that "puts everyone in the front row". True; and something anyone running meetings will envisage instantly. Comments that produce the feeling that matters are being reviewed in a way that is easy to identify with add to the strength of any piece.

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Let me add a specific example here to show how how-to points need to be made. I have already mentioned that writing and public speaking can usefully link; yet public speaking is not everyone's bag. Many sensibly seek advice about it. Space means I can only take one simple point (a useful but perhaps counterintuitive one): it concerns one aspect of how to end on a high note and is set out here (in the boxed paragraph) in a way that reflects a clear way of presenting it (This example is adapted from my book *100 Great Presentation Ideas* (Marshall Cavendish)).

No thanks

The last thing(s) you say are more likely than average to stick with people, more likely to need to link to the purpose of your talk and any action that you want to flow from it and must thus be delivered with real precision. Here is an idea, something to avoid to help make the end as powerful as you intend.

Idea: Never make your final words a *Thank you*.

It is not that a thank you is not appropriate. Indeed, it may well be essential, but it nearly always makes a poor last word. What happens is that the talk appears to tail away, a final punchy point being apt to be followed by something like: *Well perhaps I should end with a thank you, it has been a pleasure to be here. I appreciate you giving up some of your time for this…so, many thanks to you all.* When this is done it is often not delivered with any precision (guiding notes may list only the word "thanks"); indeed I have heard people ramble on for long minutes. Furthermore it distances the words that preceded it from the real end in the audiences' perception, making them less memorable and less likely to be effective.

So, in practice:

- The moral here is simple: just resolve not to end with a "thank you"
- If you start with a brief thank you in your introduction, this could sometimes negate the necessity to repeat it at – or towards – the end, or certainly mean that whatever is said later can be brief, perhaps referring to what was said earlier, *Let me repeat my thanks and conclude…*(and you can move swiftly to the real, and more powerful conclusion)
- It is much better, when a thank you is necessary, to have it *before* the final point: *Thank you for being here, I am grateful for your attention … now, a final word in conclusion….* This enables your final words to be more considered and punchy.

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Key issues

If you set about it in the right way you can write an authoritative article (and books too) that will really help people. And often such should end with a summary, a recap, allowing people to check that they have been following you and that they can now give whatever it is a try. Here we might summarise this section thus:

- Think through what you will say and not say first (remembering that you can't say it all)
- Establish your credentials, factually and in style, early on
- Take things in context and make sure that advice is matched to readers
- Make sure content is well structured and in a logical order (logical for the reader that is)
- Avoid ambiguities, indeed be particularly clear and avoid jargon
- Use language to both explain and impress, using examples, anecdotes or analogies as suits
- Make clear how what you say will help, flag that it is not everything if that is the case, and prompt self-motivation as you go.

I know I have not covered everything here, but believe the overall key issues are reviewed in a way that can act as a catalyst to action.

What you are writing may be factual but it needn't, indeed shouldn't, be dull. So, finally, finish with a flourish, with something designed to strike an appropriate note and stick in the reader's mind. If you have not written this sort of thing before, have a go. It may take a moment to get to grips with – remember the old saying *It's what you learn after you know it all that counts* – but how-to writing can satisfy your readers and make the editors who commission them want more from you. And knowing how to prompt that must in turn enhance your profile.

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Example: a different style

Just to reinforce the range of possibilities here let me give an example: the piece below, edited a little from the published version, about presenting is not strictly how-to (though there is a strong message). It is intentionally *light-hearted*; nevertheless it is intended that it appears very much to be written by someone who knows the subject (a feeling that is added to by the final checklist). The published version was followed by a brief biographical note.

Stand-up comic

Patrick Forsyth takes a humorous look at the perils of public speaking.

Presentations can be daunting. Exactly what is said and how it is put matters.

At worst, people go on too long, their explanation explains nothing and where they are going is wholly unclear. Some fidget endlessly, others remain stock still gripping the lectern in front of them until their knuckles go white, fear rising from them like a mist. Their slides can only be read from the back of the room with a telescope, something made worse by their asking brightly "*Can you see that alright?"* though there is precious little they can do if the answer is "*no*". They barely pause for breath, rushing from *Err* to *Um*, many words inappropriately chosen and many more too long. Indeed, the only long word of which some presenters appear ignorant is rehearsal.

No problem?

Of course, a lucky few believe that making presentation is second nature. They know they can excel just by winging it, and that for people to actually understand anything of their impenetrable gobbledegook, some care is needed. So, they talk v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y; use simple words, and generally proceed assuming the audience have the brains of a retarded dormouse. They spell out complicated bits in CAPITAL LETTERS, speaking **louder** as they do so. Though they are always careful not to upset people by talking down to them – being condescending (you *do know* what condescending *means* don't you?).

For such speakers, presenting is to be savoured. They need only the briefest introduction and they are away, moving blindly past the first slide – displayed upside down – with the audience hanging on their every repetitive mannerism while thinking "*If they scratch their ear whilst stood on one leg again, I'm walking out".* It makes lesser mortals feel all too sadly inadequate – even the famous: it was Mark Twain who said, "*It normally takes me three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech".* Poor man; lucky he was a good writer.

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Standing up before an important audience ignorant of how to make it go well or unprepared, or perhaps bizarrely overconfident, knowing that they would rather chew off their own fingers than sit and listen to someone who cannot make the simplest point clear, is rather like being pushed into a lion's den. Without an understanding of how to go about it, you will be in deep, deep trouble. No audience will warm to an ill-prepared speaker who flounders through in a tedious, confusing and poorly delivered way. Furthermore, such people are unlikely to magically acquire the requisite skills in the few seconds between being introduced and rising to their feet to speak.

So, if you are not in fact a natural, and few people are, you need to give presenting some thought. Once you are actually in the lion's den it's a little late to discover that salvation is not guaranteed by saying "*Nice pussycat*".

There is a real opportunity here and often a great deal hanging on it. It may be one that demands some preparation, but it can pay dividends.

Key points to boost confidence

- Always prepare thoroughly
- List fears and think through what causes them and seek solutions
- Think positive (remember you are actively dealing with fears)
- Focus on what to say and how to say it
- Understand the techniques you can use
- Check and organise the speaking environment
- Analysis your presentations and make changes to ensure you learn from experience
- Remember the audience want it to go well
- Overall, regard it as an opportunity (a good presentation can achieve so much).

There really are many different ways to project the overall message about yourself that you want.

Next we turn to how to get your message written.

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4 CREATING THE MESSAGE

Preparing and writing

We now turn to the actual process of getting the words down. Here we advocate a proven and systematic approach that is straightforward, logical and which makes the process easier and quicker to execute. There is an old saying that *planning is easy, it is just anticipating the inevitable and then taking the credit for it.* Actually it needs working at.

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A systematic approach

Even having done thorough research and having assembled the material necessary to inform the content, a good text is unlikely to spill out of you perfectly formed. It needs some thought and benefits from the adoption of a systematic approach: that is one that proceeds a step at a time, and logically moves through to the desired end result. Such an approach has several benefits, it allows you to:

- Reflect accurately the objectives you have set and organise the material and content you have assembled to assist you do so
- Organise your content to advantage so that the structure is sound and your message will flow logically when read
- Ensure that your content fits the extent; that is the word count required where this is specified
- Balance thoughts about *what* you will write with the question of language – *how* you will write it
- Work efficiently so that you complete the task in a reasonable amount of time (this being important as you balance all that needs to be done in your job)
- Hit deadlines; something that is important in its own right (especially if a publisher has set one).

So, to encompass all possibilities and degrees of complexity, the following seven-stage approach sets out a methodology that will cope with any kind of document (it is the way this book began life too). It is recommended only by its practicality. It works. It will make your writing quicker and easier to do and make it more impressive. It can install the right habits and rapidly become something you can work with, utilising its methods more or less comprehensively depending on the circumstances.

The seven stages are:

- *Listing* possible content
- *Sorting* to finalise and arrange sequence and relative import of points to be made
- *Arranging* to organise your notes
- *Reviewing:* a chance to make additional changes
- *Drafting:* getting the words down
- *Editing* to fine tune the writing

These are now reviewed in turn.

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Stage 1: **Listing**
This consists of ignoring all thoughts about sequence or structure, and simply and briefly listing every significant point which might be desirable or necessary to include (though perhaps bearing in mind the nature and length of the text and the level of detail involved).

This, a process that draws on what is sometimes called "mindmapping", gets all the elements involved down on paper, both the content and a reminder in this case of the style (Action boxes and so on). It may need more than one session to complete it; certainly you will find one thought leading to another as the picture fills out. Rather than set this out as a neat list down the page, it is better to adopt a freestyle approach.

In this way points are noted, almost at random, around a sheet. This allows you to end up able to view the totality of your notes in one glance, so if it is necessary you should use a sheet larger than standard A4 paper. It is also best done on paper not on screen (the next stages make clear why).

Stage 2: **Sorting**
Next, you can proceed to rearrange what you have noted and bring some logic and organisation to bear on it. This process may raise some questions as well as answer others, so it is still not giving you the final shape of the text. This stage is often best (and most quickly) done by annotating the original list. A second colour pen may help now as you begin to put things in order, make logical groupings and connections, as well as allowing yourself to add and subtract points and refine the total picture as you go. This takes you to an "almost plan" from which to write.

Stage 3: **Arranging**
This stage arranges your "jottings" into a final order of contents, and here you can decide upon the precise sequence and arrangements you will follow for the text itself. For the sake of neatness, and thus to give yourself a clear guideline to follow as you move on, it is often worth rewriting the sheet you were left with after stage 2 (indeed, this is the point to transfer onto computer screen if you wish).

At this stage you can also form a view and note specifically the emphasis that will be involved. For example: what is most important? Where is most detail necessary? What needs illustrating? (This may involve anything from a graph to an example.) What will take most space?

Not enough material? Usually the reverse is true. And this is the stage at which to prune, if necessary, so that what is included is well chosen, but not inappropriately long. This is true at all levels. Contain the number of points to be made and the amount to be said about each. Of course, you need to write sufficient to match your purpose, but do not risk submerging it in a plethora of irrelevant detail or subsidiary points that are actually unnecessary digressions.

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Note: the amount of detail here can vary to suit you. Something new or complex may need a more detailed plan than something with which you are familiar. As a rule of thumb: better too much than too little (for a book, of course, every chapter needs the same approach, plus time spent to ensure an appropriate overall flow and logic across the chapters).

Stage 4: **Review**

At this point have a final look over what you now plan to do – review your "arranged" guideline. It will be quicker and easier to make final amendments now than when you finally print out pages of a draft. It may help to "sleep on it", carrying out a final review having distanced yourself from what you have done so far, at least for a moment. You can easily get so close to something that you are working hard at, that you cannot see the wood for the trees. One of the things you want to be clear about is the broad picture – if this is right, then the details will slot into place much more easily.

Do not worry if you still want to make amendments at this stage. Add things, delete things, move things about (rewrite your guidelines if necessary) – but make sure that when you move on to write something you do so confident that the outline represents your considered view of the content and will act as a really useful guide.

Let us be clear: for many a text for example a short article, this whole process (i.e. stages 1–4) will only take a few minutes, and that is time well spent, as it will reduce the time taken once you start to write. As you develop your own version of this sort of preparation, you will find you can shorthand the process a little, with some documents able to be written from the first freehand style list. If real complexity is involved, of course, it may take longer.

With all that has been done to date it is now time to write; and you are now able to do so having separated deciding *what* to write (at this stage largely done) from *how* to write it. This is significant and makes matters easier and faster. So next:

Stage 5: **Write**

What else is there to say? This stage means writing it. This is the bit with the greatest element of chore in it. But it has to be done and the guidelines you have given yourself by preparing carefully will ease and speed the process. A few practical tips may also help:

Top tips for getting the words down

- **Choose the right moment**. We certainly find there are moments when we cannot seem to…when we are unable…when it is difficult…to string two coherent sentences together end to end. There are other times when things flow, when you do not dare stop in case the flow does too, and when you cannot get the words down fast enough to keep up with your thoughts

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- **Do not struggle.** If possible (although deadlines may have an effect here) do not struggle. If it is really not flowing – leave things. Stop. For a moment, overnight, or while you walk round the block or make a cup of tea. Many people confirm that when the words simply will not flow, a pause helps
- **Allow sufficient time**, once you are under way and words are flowing smoothly it may upset and slow the process to leave it. If you feel you need an uninterrupted day, or more, try to organise things that way. It may both save time in the long run and help you produce better text
- **Do not stop unnecessarily.** For example, when you get stuck over some – maybe important – detail. Say you need to decide on a heading or a phrase, one which must be clear, pithy and fit with the style of the whole thing. You just cannot think of one. Leave it, type some xxxx's and write on. You can always come back to it (and when you do, who knows, you sometimes think of just what you want in a moment). The danger is that you dither, puzzle over it, waste time, get nowhere, but get so bogged down with it that you lose everything you had in your mind about the overall shape of what you are working on. This is true of words, phrases, sentences and even whole sections. Mark clearly what you need to come back to (so that you never forget to check it again!).

That said the job here is to get the whole thing down on paper. It probably will not be perfect, but you should not feel bad about that; a vanishingly small number of people can create any document word for word exactly as they want it first time. Practice will get you closer and closer, and things you are familiar with will be easier than something that is new to you or pushes your knowledge or expertise to the limits. *Beware:* resist the temptation to skimp the fine-tuning and you will always deliver better work.

But some revision is usually necessary; hence the next stage.

Stage 6: **Edit**

The complexities of the material you are using and the message you are creating means that some editing is almost always necessary. There are a number of points here that help make this stage practical but not protracted, again the following expands on this with some practical suggestions.

Top editing tips

- If possible, leave a draft a while before re-reading it. You get very close to something and, without a pause, you start to see only what you expect (or hope) is there. It is often much quicker to finish off something in this way than trying to undertake the whole job with one stage back to back with the next.
- Print out a draft double spaced and/or in a larger typeface to allow plenty of room annotate it as you review it.

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- Read things over, out loud is best (though choose where!). You will hear how something sounds and that reflects how it will feel to read. When you do this, you will find that certain things – such as overlong sentences – jump out at you very clearly (you run out of breath).
- Get a friend or colleague to read it. A fresh look often casts light on areas you have convinced yourself are fine, for no other reason than you cannot think of a better way of expressing something (co-authorship certainly proves the worth of this idea!). Because review can be time consuming, you might ask someone for a view of one thing in return for you doing the same for them. This can work well; better if you do it regularly.
- Worry about the detail. It was Oscar Wilde who said: "I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back". Actually the small details are important. For example, you may create greater impact by breaking a sentence into two, with a short one following a longer one. It makes a more powerful point. See.
- Look at the structure. Now all your points are developed in detail does it work effectively? Would moving one particular point or paragraph elsewhere help your line of reasoning develop more logically?

Editing is an important stage. If you need to read it over three times, so be it. Of course, you could perhaps go on making changes for ever and finally you have to let something go. But more than one look will be essential.

Stage 7: **Proof-read**

Once you have a final draft it is critical that you proof read it. A publisher faced with something clearly inadequately checked tends to think the sloppiness probably applied to the background research too. Make sure you use a spell-checker, but remember they are not infallible. So never underestimate the care necessary here. If possible use a grammar checker too.

In terms of time, spending time on preparation will reduce writing time. Similarly it is usually more time efficient to crack through a draft and then make some changes, rather than labour over trying to make every line perfect as you first write. Like much that is involved here, habit plays a part. What matters is to find an approach for working through all of this that suits you; and prompts a thorough job that produces the end result you want.

Using (perhaps having fine-tuned the approach) a systematic approach really does make writing easier and quicker. It may need a small effort to get into this, but the effort is worthwhile and you will quickly feel the benefit. Tackle your next writing assignment this way and see.

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Alternative ways forward

How do you do it? Make no mistake writing anything of some length is not altogether easy and must be got right. If the end result is not easy to read, then no matter what good sense it contains and what a powerful image of your expertise it projects, it will not act to enhance your profile.

So, let me mention a couple of ways that reduce the workload for you:

i. *Get someone else to do it:* if you are senior then you might delegate the job to a member of your team (that is actually how I came to write my first book). Or you can use a ghost writer, paying someone else to write it for you. This demands empathy and time: no one can write for you unless you brief them. Sometimes an easy way is possible; I once wrote a book for someone having spent two days listening to them present a seminar.
ii. *Work collaboratively with someone else:* co-writing can work well, and the work can be divided in many ways from writing alternative chapters to writing a rough version, then smartened up and edited by someone else. Again this may save you time or improve the finished work, but may involve cost

Or you can do it yourself. This necessitates knowing sufficient about language to make it work and it to this we turn next.

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5 USING LANGUAGE/ EXAMPLES AND CREATING AN ACCEPTABLE STYLE

Next we look at how use of language contributes to creating the right reaction and earning a reading.

Here the key issues are to make what you write:

- Clear and descriptive
- Striking, even memorable
- Readable (above all)

And to avoid language that is:

- Confusing
- Incorrect
- Annoying

Looking around, you may notice that much business writing is poor. Aim to shine and stand out. Particularly you should avoid:

- *Formula:* too much business writing seems to copy a textbook style, it is written as if following a prescribed pattern, albeit one that is old fashioned and which seems designed to persuade the reader that the writer could bore for their country
- *Gobbledegook and "business-speak":* if the style is archaic, the punctuation poor and a text is full of long words, long sentences and has no recognisable structure to guide you through, it will not read well.

What you want to do is communicate with people in a way that they will like, pay attention to and compare favourably with anything else they read.

That said, let us consider what makes for writing that will have more impact and which is likely to allow you to make what you say boost your profile. A number of points are considered in turn with some examples of each.

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Understandable

This is obviously important. So I will only summarise and add a few examples. The key things to watch out for are:

- *Using the right words:* are you describing a *recommendation* or an *option?* Is your product *uncomplicated* or *easy to use?* Is something *continuous* or *continual*?
- *Using the right phrases:* particularly to ensure that they convey the full meaning you want: what exactly is *personal service* for instance? It presumably means more than that it is done by people, but the full nature of what the style of service is may need filling out
- *Wrong words and wrong arrangements:* some errors here are habits – the superfluous word *Basically* at the beginning of every (other) sentence may mean nothing but does not actually confuse. Starting a sentence with *At this stage…* on the other hand may imply a change later that you do not intend to imply. Similarly in mentioning figures you cannot say *about 10.7%;* it is either *about 10%* or precisely *10.7%* (and all figures must be correct). A wholly different impression of accuracy is given in these different ways. Another hazard is to find you are stating the obvious in an incorrect, or unintentionally amusing way: as does the old sign you still sometimes see in shops saying *Ears pierced while you wait* (how else?).

The next heading picks up a point that will act in numbers of ways to make things clear – and more readable.

Keep it simple

There can be exceptions of course, but by and large you should use:

- *Short words:* why write *presupposes* instead of *means?* Or *elucidate* when you can *explain?*
- *Short phrases:* try not to use phrases that seem to come into common usage although there is a shorter, clearer alternative: so write *now* not *at this moment in time*
- *Short sentences:* writing overlong sentences is a common fault. Look at things you write and see if any long sentences can satisfactorily be divided in two. That said, a bit of variety is necessary, as nothing but short sentences can sound awkward and repetitive. Combinations of long and short help to produce a readable flow. Like this.

A favourite quote helps me remember to favour simplicity. Mark Twain wrote: *I never write the word metropolis when I get paid the same for writing the word city.*

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Length

Busy people always say they want something brief, but the word just means short. This should not, in fact, be an end in itself, a better intention is to make things *succinct*, that is short but containing all the essentials to inform in an understandable way. Things that are not relevant should not artificially extend length, and you should remember that comprehensiveness is rarely (ever?) an option. If you wrote everything that you could about anything most of the content might be superfluous. This means selection is important, you need to decide what to write and what to omit. Writing style also affects length. A convoluted style will fill more pages, and there is an expression to the effect that you should *write tight.* Try abbreviating some of your longer sentences.

Note: there is an important balance to be struck here. If you omit salient content clarity may suffer. Make something too long and people switch off and do not read it all. The answer? If in doubt it is better to write more, provided you are sure that the extra points do, in fact, boost the case.

Style

You want it to sound as if *you* are writing and, as been said, to avoid a formulaic "business style". The best way to look at this is to think of what you would say, and then formalise it a little rather than seeing a need to put it into some separate sort of "written language". In addition, let us look at some specific dos and don'ts.

First do **not** write in a way that is**:**

- *Bland:* this is a common failing, using words that have no precise meaning. Nothing you write about should be described as *quite nice* or *rather good,* what is an *attractive offer?* (If it is money saving, say so), what is, in a phrase beloved of the airlines, a *slight delay?* (An hour or endless hours?)
- *Patronising:* you should really know better than to be patronising or condescending; sorry, suffice to say that you should be careful not to talk down to people
- *Biased:* your view may or may not be appropriate or relevant.
- *Politically incorrect:* some things here have become the norm – *Chair* rather than *Chairman*, for example – but other things need some thought. It is important to remember that although there are sillinesses in this area, it does now matter and it is important not to upset people in any minority group
- *Badly timed:* as language changes it is clear that words and phrases have a real life cycle. Use something early on and it can appear pretentious, use it too late and it can seem silly. Any example will date, so let us pick something that seems to me to be already past its best. The phrase *user friendly* was originally a neat description, now however that everything has been so described it has become essentially meaningless

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- *Annoys:* the point here is that certain kinds of grammatical and linguistic error tend to be spotted and cause particular annoyance. Too little punctuation makes something awkward to read; and the current proliferation of wrongly used apostrophes annoys many people. Too few headings and space makes it *look* as if it will be difficult to read. Everyone has some pet hates. A widely held one concerns the word *unique.* This means "unlike anything else", nothing can be *very unique, a bit unique* or any *other* kind of unique for that matter. Anything like this (another is different *from*, not *different to*) is to be avoided

Conversely, it is important that you **do** write in a way that is:

- *Respectful to the reader:* in the sense of reflecting their needs and to an extent being in "their language", certainly as has been said you can lose people by being too technical. Think about who may read what you write
- *Precise:* say exactly what you mean
- *Positive:* have the courage of your convictions; there is rarely a place for *perhaps, maybe* and *I think* in "promotional" writing

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- *Descriptive:* this is an especially important one, people like it if something is well described, not just making it clear but painting a picture. Language is a powerful tool. The fact that even a very few words, provided they are well chosen, can say so much more than the words themselves, illustrates this. For example: it is also clear that any description can make something live if it is well, or memorably, phrased. There is surely all the difference in the world between something being: *Somewhat slippery,* and it being: *As slippery as a well buttered ice rink.*

Note: following this example it is worth suggesting that sometimes one actively avoids distinctive description, perhaps regarding it as over the top. Think carefully and consider erring on the side of distinctive rather than conventional. An allied point here is that where it is appropriate your *interest* and/or *enthusiasm* for something should be evident, and should often be so unequivocally.

Grammar and syntax

This book has no room for a guide to grammar, though such things clearly matter. Punctuation has been mentioned, and you may find a guide to such details of language use useful. Here, as an example of how incorrect things can change the nature of writing, particularly if a message is riddled with inaccuracies, I would mention just two examples (selecting them unashamedly because I love the names!):

- *Oxymoron:* care is needed here as an oxymoron (a two-word paradox) may sound silly – *pretty ugly* – or be used usefully – *deafening silence*. Or are open to debate – what about *trustworthy lawyer*?
- *Tautology:* this is unnecessary repetition and should be avoided. You should not write about *foreign travel overseas,* and there is no such thing as *future planning.* Planning must, by definition, be about the future. If tautology is *unnecessary* repetition, then perhaps we need a different word for inaccurate repetition. I say this having just seen a label on an electrical appliance reading: *Lifetime, 2 year guarantee.*

Finally, because more than a small amount of advice on grammar, syntax and form is beyond our brief here, a brief (and light-hearted) checklist of rules designed to stick in the mind ends this chapter.

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Some memorably put writing rules

- Don't abbrev things inappropriately.
- Check to see if you any words out.
- Be careful to use adjectives and adverbs correct.
- About sentences fragments.
- Don't use no double negatives.
- Just between you and I, case is important.
- Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
- Don't use commas, that aren't necessary.
- Its important to use apostrophe's right.
- It's better not to unnecessarily split infinitives.
- Only Proper Nouns should be capitalised. also a sentence should begin with a capital and end with a full stop
- Use hyphens in compound-words, not just in any two-word phrase.
- In letters reports and things like that we use commas to keep a string of items apart.
- Watch out for irregular verbs that have creeped into your language.
- Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
- A writer mustn't change your point of view.
- A preposition isn't a good thing to end a sentence with.
- Avoid clichés like the plague.

Examples

One specific area that needs care is examples. Clearly if you are trying, within a message, to demonstrate your expertise then examples of good work can help; not least they boost credibility and take you beyond "just saying something is so". These can be:

- *Actual examples:* mentioning something real and perhaps the name of a real client; permission is always necessary when you do this. Do not fail to get it, you do not want a lawsuit when you are hoping for enquiries
- *Anonymous:* though they may still be descriptive: "…in a major U.S publishing company…"
- *Composite:* such are both anonymous and combine elements that in fact come from more than one situation to make a point. I do not feel this is dishonest, you are still referring to reality and if it makes a good point that seems fine.

Well-chosen examples can be an important element of your message and a major factor in encouraging people to contact you.

The most important things about language here are to:

- Use clarity as a foundation for your attempts to inspire your message
- Keep things simple (and brief, but without sacrificing the power of your message)
- Make language work for you, and avoid deficiencies in your style (or grammar, punctuation etc.) clouding the issue or actively annoying.

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6 MAXIMISING THE EXPOSURE OF THE FINISHED TEXT

Let's be positive and imagine you have successfully written something. As publication date nears your excitement may rise, but there are many things to keep you busy if publication is going to be successful. Look at any newspaper: news is primarily about things that are current. Publication is a one-off opportunity and you will only have a few months in which you can say your book (let's take a book as an example here) is *newly published.* So you want a checklist of things to do around and ahead of publication.

First announcement

PR stands for both public relations, the overall activity of creating visibility and a positive image, and press relations in the media (anything from your local paper to a specialist journal in a field that's important to you). There is a good deal involved here, but the core issue in press relations is the press release and it is worth saying something about that as it may be a prime form of your announcing what you have done. The first thing is to make sure that they get to the right people, check names and consider sending both a hard copy and an email version to key publications.

Composing a press release

There are two, perhaps conflicting, aspects of putting together a press release that will stand a good chance of publication. The first is to comply with the "form" demanded by the newspapers, magazines and journals to which you send your release; the second is to stand out as being of genuine interest from the very large number of releases received.

Consider the "form" first; this list covers most things, but every release does not need to follow every point slavishly.

- It should carry the words 'Press (or News) Release' at the top, together with the date, preferably at the top left-hand side of the first page.
- If an embargo is necessary (i.e. a request not to publish before a certain date, to ensure news appears as near as possible simultaneously – as once an item has been in print others will consider it of less interest), it should be clearly stated 'EMBARGO: not to be published before (time) on (date)'. You might use capital letters for emphasis.
- Also, at the top you need a heading, not too long but long enough to indicate clearly the content of the release or to generate interest in it.
- Space text out well with wide margins, reasonable gaps between paragraphs and so on. This allows recipients to make notes on it.

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- If it runs to more than one page make sure it says "continued" or similar at the foot of the page, even breaking a sentence at the end of the page will make it more likely people will turn over.
- Similarly, to make it absolutely clear that there is no more, many put END at the foot of the last page.
- Use newspaper style. Short paragraphs. Short sentences. Two short words rather than one long one.
- Keep it brief, long enough to put over the message and on to a second page if necessary, but no more.
- The first sentences are crucial and need to summarise as far as possible the total message.
- Avoid overt plugging (although that may well be what you are doing). Do not mention names etc. right at the beginning, for example, though write in a way that allows a lazy journalist to turn it into a news piece easily and quickly.
- Try to stick to facts rather than opinions; views may be important, but facts should lead.
- Opinions can be given, in quotes and ascribed as such to an individual. This works well and can be linked to the attachment of a photograph (which should usually be a black and white print and clearly labelled in case it gets separated from the release).
- Do not overdo the use of adjectives, which can jeopardise credibility.
- Avoid underlining things in the text (this is used as an instruction in printing to put words underlined in italics).
- Separate notes to the journal from the text as footnotes, for example, 'photographers will be welcome'; or they could get printed as part of the story.
- Never omit from a release, at the end, a clear indication of from whom further information can be sought and their contact details (even if this is on the heading of the first page).
- Make sure finally that it is neat, well typed and presentable and that it lists enclosures or attachments. It may be obvious perhaps, but important.

So, how do you make your press release stand out? There are fewer rules here, but two points are certainly worth bearing in mind.

- Do not "cry wolf". Save releases for when you really have a story (if you have written a book then you do). If you send a series of contrived releases, there is a danger that a good one among them will be ignored.
- Make sure the story sounds interesting and without overdoing things, be enthusiastic about it. If you are not, why would they be? Perhaps the only good thing in the world that is contagious is enthusiasm.

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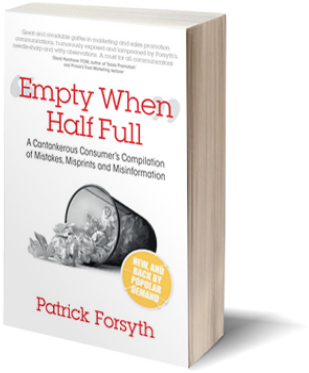
Note: remember that there may be differences involved in sending a press release by post and by email (and you may consider doing both).

So this is an area that can produce not simply awareness of your activities, but also paint a particular picture of it – creating not simply understanding, but a positive interest in your work that whets peoples' appetite for more information, prompts enquiries, re-establishes dormant contacts and reinforces your image with existing customers; you can use press releases more widely than just to the press. Doing just that, I include an example of a press release as follows:

PRESS RELEASE

Don't read this book on public transport!



If you don't want to be reduced to a sniggering mess in public, read Patrick Forsyth's new book, ***EMPTY WHEN HALF FULL – A Cantankerous Consumer's Compilation of Mistakes, Misprints and Misinformation*** in the privacy of your own home. It can't fail to make you laugh out loud, with its incredible collection of gaffes, misprints and downright deviousness found in instructions, notices, marketing and advertising messages.

No area is exempt from Patrick's forensic eye for imprecise, incorrect or dishonest writing, from multi-national companies and government bodies to prestigious publications. Examples from the book of the real life booboos range from the unfortunate: ***"This manual has been carefully to remove any errors"…*** to the idiotic ***"Blackcurrant juice comes in two flavours – orange and strawberry"; "Scandinavian slippers – buy one get one free"…*** to the infuriating**: "*The Adobe Updater must update itself before it can check for updates. Would you like to update Adobe Updater now?*"…** to the downright scary: ***"Passengers must stay with their luggage at all times or they will be taken away and destroyed."***

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Author of many business books and a specialist in communication skills, Patrick Forsyth knows a thing or two about writing. ***Empty When Half Full***, has been likened to Lynne Truss' international best seller, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, in its humorous analysis of ungrammatical, poorly punctuated, sometimes surreal writing on labels, signs, instructions and advertising. But Forsyth's extensive business and marketing background enables him to comment on the serious aspect of poor communication and highlight genuine dangers to consumers.

"Some of the mistakes quoted have potentially serious repercussions," says Patrick. "But they are chosen primarily for their nonsensical quality and tendency to make us smile; perhaps we should rejoice that they made customers chuckle as they read the material from product providers produced with less care than we – or they – might wish."

"This is a must-read for all communicators," suggests David Horchover FCIM, author of *Sales Promotion*. "Great and avoidable gaffes in marketing and sales promotion are humorously exposed and lampooned by Forsyth's needle-sharp and witty observations."

Editors' Notes: *Empty When Half Full* is published by Bookshaker and available via Amazon at £9.99. For a review copy email lucy@xxx. For further information see www.patrickforsyth.com and to arrange an interview with Patrick Forsyth, please call the author on 01621 xxx or email patrick@XXXXXXX.

Date: issued on: xxxxxx.

Other announcements

Such things need arranging in advance. Consider an example. Let's say that you are going to buy some copies of your book and sell them to clients and contacts. What will you send them? Perhaps a letter and a copy of the cover or the publisher's fact sheet about the book. It needs to be ready, in envelopes stamped and ready to go ahead of the date on which you will have the books. Even a follow up to that, perhaps in email form, can be pre-prepared. Your contract should allow you do this and make a profit on each book sold. You might be surprised at how many copies you can sell. When I did this with my first travel book I was surprised how useful it was; some people bought multiple copies to use as presents. It all helps and the publisher should be pleased if you order a significant number of copies to start things off before your book has even appeared. You may well sell them before you must pay for them. Details need thinking through: what price will you charge (will they be less on Amazon?), do you send the book post free and have suitable padded envelopes for dispatch? If you are dispatching books sold, consider what information you enclose with them (and perhaps how you follow up too).

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Similarly, with other activity – things needs setting up in advance and may be difficult to arrange instantly. For example, speaking engagements, a conference say, may need to be made a firm arrangement many months ahead.

Now is the time to keep in touch with the publisher, particularly their promotional people. The publisher may best do some things, and you may better handle others. Or the two of you working together may achieve more. A good example of the latter in the U.K. is local radio (national radio is more difficult to get on). Many BBC local radio stations give time to books and authors. A suggestion about a local author may be most favourably received from a manifestly local contact, though the publisher may have good experience of how such approaches are best made. If things like this are in the offing, make sure you check out how they can be most effectively done – radio interviews are certainly something that benefits from a bit of preparation. Another thing that needs thinking about in terms of timing is articles you might write – which might be about you, the book, writing the book, the book's subject and more. If you want articles to appear around the time of publication, then this needs setting up some time in advance, especially with monthly magazines. If you self-publish then all this sort of thing must be done solo.

Long term

You doubtless want your book go on selling for a long time. Looking ahead at the life of the book, you can identify opportunities to boost and extend any success the book may have. For example:

- If the book is published in hardback, when will the paperback follow? This will effectively give you a second launch
- Are there translations on the horizon and, if so, can you do anything to help their success?
- Is the content time sensitive? Can it be updated in due course?

Dealing with the costs

The more you do the more it costs: travel, postage and other expenses soon mount up. Sometimes the publisher will pay certain expenses and there may be balancing income from things like articles, written from your point of view to promote a book, and sales of the book. Otherwise, to foster success you must regard this sort of thing as an investment. Remember that all reasonable expenses can be offset for tax purposes. This means keeping records and receipts, but maybe something like a trip to somewhere interesting can be planned and put down against tax making the record keeping really worthwhile. In a large company this may be a minor matter; for the individual or sole trader it is a consideration.

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Two more things: first, when your books drop on your doormat do write to the publisher and say thank you – remember all the things that they have done to turn your manuscript into the book you now hold in your hand. Secondly, if you have not done so already, think about what you write next. There is no better time to make suggestions to a publisher than as your first book starts selling well. Of course, whether it does or not is, as we have seen, as much down to you as to the publisher.

So, you have a book out and maybe in the bookshops (where, if you are like most authors, you will watch for it and turn any copies you see face out). If you want it to go on selling long term and write more, then publication means that your work is just beginning!

A successful future

In the short term, everything mentioned in here may seem somewhat daunting. You have to create and finalise your book, and must manage to do so much more in parallel. With your first book published you will have experienced a sea change. If you go on writing, then the plethora of activities described here will become an inherent part of your activity from here on in. So, make sure that you:

- Stay organised, keeping a clear note of the different things that you must do and when
- Regard publishers' dates and deadlines as sacrosanct; ditto those targets you set yourself
- Work at managing the relationship with your publisher, while avoiding becoming a bore or a nuisance
- Aim to be creative, not just with your writing but also with the many things that go with it; exactly how you can support your work promotionally should certainly be regarded as a dynamic area – you need a constant flow of new ideas and the will to implement them.

Just getting words down on paper takes time (more so if they are put down in a good order!). Writing and liaising with a publisher and involving yourself in the whole process of publishing and promotion is a considerable task. Yet long-term success demands it. It is not for the faint hearted. But doing it well can produce financial reward, great satisfaction; and enhance your profile and expand your business.

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AFTERWORD

One more thing (well actually two). As well as what you can do to put your finished text in front of people, you may be able to draw benefit once removed as it were: by being quoted.

Quoted

Mention of something you have written may be very brief. Some of the maxims that appear about business for instance originate in books. For example, one of my favourites, about what prompts business success is: *Life is pretty simple. You do some stuff. Most fails. Some works. You do more of what works. If it works big, others quickly copy it. Then you do something else. The trick is the doing something else.* This was written by American management guru Tom Peters. I bet having such pithy gems quoted does no harm to the sale of his books.

This can also occur at greater length. Consider this passage:

The A.U.T.H.O.R. Model

When we coach individual authors or mentor groups through writing their business or self-help book, we use our A.U.T.H.O.R. model to help new authors focus on the most important aspects of their book. A.U.T.H.O.R. stands for:

A – Attention. How are you going to attract attention to your book, from your market, your readers and your industry? This is important when you work on defining your winning idea and creating a killer title and subtitle. Bear this in mind throughout the preparation and writing of your book, but we will be working on this particularly in this first section of the book.

U – Understanding. In order to write a business or self-help book, you must know well and empathise with the problems faced by your market, and the central questions that your potential readers are asking and demanding an answer to. If you can provide the solutions and answers in your book you have a captive audience, so getting clarity on this understanding is an essential first step. Using our checklists and processes in this section will help you analyse your understanding.

T – Trust. Your readers must believe that you have the authority and credibility to offer solutions that they can trust in. Your personal/professional story is a vital element in creating this trust, as are your credentials, qualifications, experience and proof of having delivered answers and solutions already. We provide you with methods to incorporate your trustworthiness while preparing and writing your business or self-help book

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H – Help. This refers to the main body of your book – how you are able to help your readers solve their problems and answer their questions. Your book is their Help, and its clear structure, well developed content, logical and tested process is how they will get this from you. Everything in sections two and three is focused on helping you deliver the best possible help to your readers.

O – Original. However great your material and method may be, if it's the same as many others out there, your book will not stand out or show you to be an outstanding thought leader or authority in your field. We will be helping you to evaluate and refine what constitute the original elements of your content.

R – Reaction. When you are planning your book, writing your book, building pre-publication buzz for your book; when you are getting your book published, selling your published book, getting feedback from readers and wanting them to take action as a result of your book, you are looking for a strong reaction. Following the steps we take you through in this book will ensure that you get the reaction you want from writing your business and self-help book all the way along.

xxxx

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This makes good sense in the context of our current topic and makes two points: first that being quoted can provide an additional statement about your expertise and thus may be worth encouraging, and secondly it allows me to finish with a recommendation of **further reading.** The piece above is from the excellent book: *How to write your book without the fuss* written by Lucy McCarraher and Joe Gregory (published by Rethink Press – I have dealt with this company and recommend them highly if you want assisted publication). This is specifically aimed at people wanting to write to promote themselves and is well worth a look if reading my text here makes you want to investigate further.

However you go about writing something that reflects, and thus promotes, your expertise, doing it is worth some thought – consider trying it, it could prove disproportionally useful.

Check and cheque (sic) again

Last a simple, but important, point: check what you write. If you want to write something that impresses then you cannot have it replete with errors – either factual or just the result of inaccurate typing or grammar – that dilute any expertise you might aim to project. This is especially important if you are self-publishing; indeed you may want to find colleagues who can assist the checking process.

With these two final points I will end. I believe that there is food for thought here for many people and for some getting into print could become a significant and regular part of your promotion. Once you have given the possibilities some thought, then if you decide it is something to try there is no alternative to resolving actually to do it. You may want to start small (an article, say) or pitch straight in (my first published work was a book); either way now may well be the time to…go write.

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