



Six Key Aspects of Being an Author

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If you're immersed in writing, and could use a few quick author coaching pointers, here are six considerations for you as you imagine your creative — and commercial — future.

1. First Things First

Why are you committing to this writing project? What makes this choice worth your while?

In one sentence, explain to an imaginary stranger what your book is about. One sentence. Not too long.

List your reasons for taking on this project. Do you have enough in your life already? Why is this project worth making your priority? Here are some possible reasons:

- To advocate for a cause you believe in

- To create something meaningful
- To reinforce your expert status
- To earn money
- To conduct more research in your field
- To make something beautiful
- To educate others

What are your reasons? Be specific.

2. Habit Training

Do your habits support
your creative life?

Writing a book is a huge, sometimes overwhelming process. It can knock you off-track and throw the rest of your life into an uproar. How are you maintaining your own balance? Consider your relationship with the following areas of your life. Do your habits in the following important areas of your life support you?

- Time – remember to include time for doing absolutely nothing.
- Self-care – food, rest, exercise, downtime, tidying, keeping up with the bills and laundry.
- Centering – making the time for the activities and settings that give you back yourself; wrapping up demands on you that no longer make sense in your life.
- Creativity – routinely putting yourself in touch with your sources, your wellspring.

- Connection – identifying and cultivating the social, spiritual, religious, family, and friends connections that nurture you and permit you to nurture others.

Conventional wisdom has it that it takes three to four weeks to establish a new habit. It may be worth delaying your book project a little, if one or more of these areas need your attention. Look at it as training for a marathon. Runners don't just stroll up to the starting line without long preparations, right? Same principle here. You'll thank yourself later if you take the time in advance to get these things right.

3. Market Research

Find books that are like
- and not like - the one
you're writing

What books already out there resemble yours? In what ways are they similar and in what ways is your different? Hint: You'll probably be able to build more interest in your completed book if there are *both* similarities and differences. People want a frame of reference, so they want your new book to be enough like something else that they feel comfortable approaching it.

As [Sonya Huber](#) puts it,

“Find 20 books that are like the one you envision (but of course not as good). Read them, and then write notes for each to describe how your book is different. This is your process of getting educated in the market that you are writing for.”

- What's special about your book, the way you will write it?

- What's your unique package of traits and interests and experience that makes you the best person to do this book?

Write down the answers to these questions and keep them handy. They can cheer you up when you need a little boost.

4. Target Audience or Ideal Reader

Describe your ideal reader

Besides yourself, who are you writing the book for? Be as specific as possible with this answer. Profile your target audience. Even if you gain success beyond your target audience, aiming for a specific niche will have helped you get there.

What is the age range of your ideal reader? Gender? Education? Social class? Hobbies and interests? Marital status? What movies does this person watch? Where do they live?

5. Author Platform

Writing for an ideal reader paradoxically makes it more likely your work will find a larger audience

Now that you have profiled your ideal reader, you need to make plans to make contact with that audience. There once was a time, long ago, they say, when authors did not need to be bothered with promoting and marketing the books they wrote. Well, not any more. These days, even a major publisher expects every author to get out there and promote. And, especially with nonfiction books and articles, each author is responsible for having developed – yes, it's coming – their Platform.

A Platform. A following. The sum total of all the work you have done, leading up to the release of your book, that connects you to your target audience. This includes all the ways you have

built recognition for yourself and your area of expertise: committees you've served on, articles you've written, tweets you've re-tweeted, the social media accounts you engage with regularly, the content on your public Page on Facebook or LinkedIn, your professional website and/or blog (of course), the mailing list for your newsletter, the classes and workshops you have conducted, and your public speaking gigs.

It may seem a little disconnected, but your reasons for developing your platform are not the same as your frame of mind while you're doing the work.

Darcy Pattison puts it this way:

“Keep that in mind: the purpose of a platform is to jump start sales—from a publisher’s point of view. Yet, when you work to develop a platform, you can’t think that way. Instead, you need to consider your strengths and interests.”

List the elements of your platform, to date. Come back to your list in a day or two and examine it critically. How does it look? Do you spot any gaps? Does your website and social media presence engage visitors? Do you get comments when you put up a new blog post? If not, figure out how to liven things up so that a community grows up around the words you put out online. Do you need to get some more articles published? Can you arrange for a podcast, radio, or TV interview, or suggest a story idea involving your work to an editor or reporter?

If you are feeling swamped and inadequate right about now, especially if this is your first book, you may get some good ideas from checking out the step-by-step method for building an author platform from Jane Friedman [here](#).

6. Persona and Branding

Decide how much of yourself to share with the public - form your author persona

Are you cranky? Cantankerous? Chatty? Telegraphic? Do you love kittens and puppies? Do you hate to cook? Do you bake bread every week? Do you share stories about your family or keep your private life private? Are you indifferent to fashion? A clotheshorse on a tight budget? A gym rat? A couch potato? Do your blog followers know to expect a new post from you every Friday morning? Do they know your favorite snack or your weakness for cappuccino? Can they picture you at work?

What is your author persona? [I wrote about this question](#) on Jane Friedman's blog. What's your persona's personality? The sum total of who you are is too big for an author's persona. (Besides, a good portion of it you probably want to keep private.) So think strategically and select aspects of your self that a) you are comfortable sharing and b) will help you get your book – and your author “brand” – out into the world, for this and future projects.

One useful exercise is to list three words or short phrases that describe and distinguish you as a writer in your field. Then ask a few people who know you and your work well to critique your list and give you detailed feedback. Oftentimes, you'll get more accurate material from your friends than you are capable of generating, yourself. When you get the “zing” of recognition, you'll know you're close to discovering the three words or phrases to use as aspects of your public author persona. Do you have a memorable author photo that you use all over? Once you have those three words or phrases and a great photo, work them! Use them in all of your public efforts:

your point of view as you blog, do podcast or other interviews, and post on social media.

Platform and Branding – The Long Game

All this starts to happen well before you complete your book. In fact, keeping your audience informed about your progress on the book is a great way to develop and maintain a following. It's a synergistic process: growing your platform while you are building interest in your book.

Time to Go for It?

Let's make this happen. Contact me for a [Welcome Call](#) to discuss your project.

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