

So You Say You Want to be a Writer? by Mark Matteson

A friend of mine, who is a United States senator (we met on a plane ride six months ago), told me she was writing her first book. Our conversation was one of those that lasted over three hours and felt like three minutes. Emerson said, "If we are related, we shall meet." She was brilliant, funny, kind, and had just lost her husband of 32 years. They were both attorneys and the loss was devastating to her. We talked about grief and bouncing back from adversity and life's challenges. I am happy she has stayed in touch with me. In our last conversation, I promised to offer up some tips on writing. I sent her the information below. If you are serious about finally writing that book you always promised yourself you would, read on. This information comes from 15 years of writing (six books and five e-books). I hope it helps you keep your promise.

My writing process and discipline is simple. It evolved over a ten-year period of writing daily and reading every book I could find on the topic. It's simple, but not easy. The first thing you must do is decide you are a writer! Give yourself permission. Repeat after me, "I am a writer!" There is a reason you are reading this. Commit! Decide! Okay, let's go!

Now that you have decided you are a writer, it's time to get to work. Writing is a lot like making a cake. Find a really great recipe and do what it says. Don't skimp on the sugar or only put in two eggs when it calls for four. Follow the recipe. If you do, your friends will be delighted with how great the cake looks and tastes. Here is my recipe for a 30-day writing project:

1. Read a book every day that is similar in style, tone, and subject as the one you are writing for 30-60 minutes each day. Writing is part of the creative center of the mind. As a writer you **MUST** read every day. No guilt! Reading is part of the work. Give yourself permission to just do it.
2. Mind Map the entire book. See page 24, idea #41 in my e-book, *It's About Time: HOW TO GET TWICE AS MUCH DONE IN HALF THE TIME*. Go to my Web site and sign up for my FREE monthly e-zine to receive your copy.

3. Carve out the time to write. I commit to two hours a day or three to five pages, whichever comes first until the book is done. I get up at 5 AM and write from 5:30 until 7:30. Some days five pages come in 30 minutes; others days, one page takes an hour. It's the commitment and discipline that counts. Write your way, every day.
4. Follow the advice found in Mathew 6:6: *But when you pray, go into your room and close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* Find a place where you will not be interrupted. Turn off the phone, mute your Mac, lock the door, and tell everyone, "Unless the house is on fire, do not disturb me." George Bernard Shaw had a writing hut adjacent to his house. He went there for four hours every morning. Writing requires solitude and silence.
5. Just write and forget editing. Ignore all the green and red lines that appear. Writing is a creative process and a right-side activity of the brain. Editing is a left-side activity and needs to be done AFTER you are completely done with the first draft. Simply write every day until it's done.
6. When the story is done, click save and walk away for three weeks. Resist the urge to tinker with your manuscript. Focus on your other priorities. You need distance and perspective.
7. Print the first draft and, with a red pen, begin to edit in solitude. Now you are using the left side of the brain. My first book took three edits, my second book required five revisions, and my third book took 10 edits. My newest book will probably require 12 revisions or more. You get the idea.
8. Rewrite the second draft. Stephen King says in his book *On Writing*, "Good writing is REwriting." Look for mistakes like *their* instead of *there*, sentences that don't make sense, vague descriptions, careless narrative, run-on sentences, etc. Forget grammar and punctuation. That's a copyeditor's job. Your job is to write a solid non-fiction how-to book or a terrific fictional story. When you are done, click save and walk away for a week.

9. Send your second draft to 30 of the smartest people you know—especially really smart friends who read a lot—for their input. Tell them, "Be brutally honest!" Reach out to other published authors for advice, too.
10. Create a notebook, an 8 x 11, three-ring binder with tabs, for chapters. Rewrite your third and fourth edits. Save your work as you go every couple of pages. Back it up in the Cloud or on a memory stick.
11. Find a copyeditor to pore over and clean up your manuscript. I use Julie Taylor in California. She can be reached by phone at 707.386.2001 or taylorjulianne@yahoo.com. You will be astonished to discover how bad your grammar and spelling really are. That's okay. I failed sophomore English in high school. I have a year of junior college. Writing has nothing to do with English.
12. Hire a front- and back-cover copy expert. This is important because your readers will look at the front cover for eight seconds, the back cover for fourteen seconds, and then make a buying decision. Some will also read the first chapter before making a decision, which is why Amazon will let you read it for free. I use Graham Van Dixon, who lives in Wisconsin. He is really good. Graham can be reached at grahamv@cheqnet.net.
13. Hire a professional cover design expert. My expert's name is Shiloh Schroeder in Washington State. She is brilliant and fast, and can be reached at 800.707.3988 or shiloh@fusioncw.com. Have her format the book into a PDF so you can....
14. Send out copies to fifty people for their opinion and ask them for "attributable quotes." Use your networks to find celebrities, other authors, or someone in the media to review your book and provide a quote about it. Name recognition matters here.

15. Now the real work begins. Decide if you will self-publish and find a printer, or find a traditional publisher. This phase is also when five years of marketing and public relations work begins. Read books, attend seminars (like WOTS, Writers on the Sound, an annual event in Edmonds, Washington). This topic is too long to cover here. Consider hiring someone like my friend, Patrick Snow. He is a best-selling author, book coach, and terrific speaker. He helps authors get published and provides support on a weekly basis. The first hour is free. His contact information is 206.780.1787. and patrick@patricksnow.com.
16. Believe in your book. Become a missionary in promoting it. Give copies away to “Connectors” and “Networkers” in your contacts. My late publisher and mentor, Charlie “Tremendous” Jones, gave away 200,000 copies over 20 years. He SOLD 2,000,000 copies of his books. Think of it as tithing. It’s good karma.

Other than that, I "GOT NUTHIN'!" Seriously, my first book was entitled *Effective Communication*. In 1998, I was paid \$3,000 to write it for the University of Washington. It won an award for academic excellence. It sold nine—no wait, ten—copies. My mom bought a copy! In hindsight, my goal lacked focus: “Write a book!” Well, we get what we ask for. Two years later it dawned on me, *I want to write a BEST-SELLING book!* That is how *Freedom From Fear* was born. To buy a copy, go to my Web site, <http://sparkingsuccess.net/book-store/>, to get your signed copy. I also have it on audio.

Okay, by now you might feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of work required. Here is where your Goals and Reasons come in, but that is another Special Report. You can always call or e-mail me if you get stuck or frustrated. The first hour is always free. Get it on paper. Write your feelings down in your journal. Keep a journal with you at all times. International best-selling travel writer Rick Steves carries a little 4 x 6 paper journal and a pen when he travels abroad for four months each year. If you claim to be a writer and you are not keeping a daily journal or blog, this might help.

HOW to keep a journal? It's easier than you think when you decide it's important to you. Here are some tips that will allow you to get FROM the day at odd moments:

- Carry a pen and notebook, 3 x 5 cards (or journal) with you at all times. When something strikes you, capture it.
- Write the date, time, location, and day of the week at the top right hand corner. This will provide perspective when you re-read your journal. It will teach you WHEN and WHERE your best ideas come from.
- If you are a morning person, write in the morning. If you are an evening person, write at night. Surrender to when you are most productive and creative.
- WINS. When something positive happens in your life to you, your company, your children, or your spouse, write it down.
- When you have learned a painful or expensive lesson, capture it on paper.
- When a good idea interrupts you, write it down. Chances are you will forget an hour later. We have 60,000 thoughts a day; 75 percent of them are negative. Capture the positive ones.
- Capture vital information at work: critical conversations, quotes, notes and bids. Jot them down. Ernest Hemingway's greatest gift was observation. He paid attention to how people talked (dialogue), what things looked, smelled, and tasted like (narrative). He was a sponge. You need to be one, too.
- Write down your short- and long-term goals, including TO-DO lists. Write down your six most important things to do today, along with how long you think it will take (e.g., 30 minutes) and then prioritize the list.

- Write just for yourself. Do not censor anything.
- Grammar and spelling don't count. *Mistakes* are okay.
- If you get stuck with writers block, try answering a few questions: What was the most fun you had today? What have you been avoiding? Who do you admire and why? What are five things you grateful for? What one thing would you like to improve about your work? How can you be a better spouse or parent? Why did you close that last sale?
- Record, Inform, Organize, and Reuse. When you consider these four elements, a journal takes on new meaning and value.
- Transcribe your notes the same day, if possible, each night. Store them in the Cloud or on a memory stick.

I fill up about four journals a year of all shapes and sizes. Some are lined and some are unlined. I have gigantic journals and tiny journals. The one I am using now is a 6 x 12 black leather journal. I carry it with me everywhere I go. I paste ticket stubs from movies and concerts, articles ripped from magazines and newspapers, photographs, quotes, ideas, WINS, and lessons. They all go into my journal. I also use a four-color pen. It separates thoughts and entries. When I want to TWEET and post on LinkedIn, I just open my journal and transcribe. It is fast, simple, and effective.

If you follow this recipe, you will have one fine cake! I can't wait to come to your book-signing party and buy multiple copies of your book. It's going to be delicious!

Suggested Reading List

- *On Writing* by Steven King – This is his only non-fiction book. It changed my life.
- *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser - This is the only book Rick Steves read on writing. THAT should tell you something!
- *Write It Down, Make It Happen* by Henriette Anne Klauser - Another writer from Edmonds, Washington!
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E.B. White - A classic, timeless book on the basics of writing. This is a must-read for any writer.
- *Webster's Dictionary* – You can download the app.
- A thesaurus – You can also download this app, too.

About Mark

Mark Matteson is an inspiring international speaker and the author of the international best seller, *Freedom from Fear*. For over 20 years, Mark's positive humor and peak-performance tools have impacted organizations around the globe, igniting personal and professional success for tens of thousands of people. Mark's clients include:

- 1 Microsoft
- 2 Honda
- 3 GE
- 4 Conoco Phillips
- 5 John Deere
- 6 Carrier
- 7 Honeywell
- 8 T-Mobile
- 9 York
- 10 Trane

When you schedule Mark, his high-powered, highly entertaining message will be tailored to your specific group. Your audience will enjoy the take-away message **you** want them to hear. Mark will leave your people feeling encouraged, energized, and empowered. They will feel good about your event, and they will feel great about the future. Use Mark to keynote your next corporate event, awards program or sales conference, to lead breakout sessions during your program, or moderate a panel discussion or emcee an event. Your attendees will thank you! Mark Matteson gives over 75 presentations each year. Book him now to secure the inspiring message that will spark your group's success!

To watch Mark's demo video, go to: www.sparkingsuccess.net or call 206.697.0454 or e-mail mark.enjoythejourney.matteson@gmail.com.