

How to Write How-To

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HOW-TO BOOKS: An Overview

1) What's a How-To Book?

- a) **How-To Books Provide Information:** Specialized knowledge to a specific audience eager for guidance on:
 - i) How to learn something
 - ii) How to do something better, faster, more efficiently
 - iii) Where to go to eat, play, get outdoors, vacation, shop
- b) The benefit of a How-To book is that readers will learn something new or become better at what they do.
- c) **How-To Books Package Information.**
 - i) Well-organized & useful
 - ii) Factual & up-to-date
 - iii) Well-written (straightforward) but not florid. (Faulkner we're not!)

2) The Market

- a) Overall Trade Category is "**Reference**" — More than **\$1.2 billion** in sales in 2006 (US Census Bureau)
- b) "These fiction books make up the bulk of total book sales in the United States." (Ed Southern)
- c) Book Industry Systems Advisory Committee lists **46 major categories**, broken into subcategories for more than **2,000 total categories** recognized by the trade publishing industry. (BISAC) At least 21 major categories include How-To categories. (See below.)
 - i) Cookbooks: *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*
 - ii) Diet & Fitness books: *The South Beach Diet*
 - iii) Self-Help books: *How to Win Friends & Influence People*
 - iv) Business/Career books: *Who Moved My Cheese?* / *What Color is Your Parachute?*
 - v) Finance/Investing: *The Warren Buffett Way*
 - vi) Travel & Outdoor guidebooks: *Play Hard Rest Easy: Carolinas & Georgia* & *Hiking the Carolina Mountains*
 - vii) Parenting books *Dr. Spock's Baby & Child Care* / *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*
 - viii) Religion/Spirituality – *Your Best Life Now*
 - ix) Relationships: *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*
 - x) DIY Guides: *Do It Yourself Home Improvement*

Antiques/Collectibles	Games	Pets & Pet Care
Architecture	Gardening & Horticulture	Photography
Business/Economics/Finance	Health & Fitness	Reference
Computer Technology & Software	Home Improvement & Construction	Religion/Bibles
Cookbooks & Cookery	Law	Self-Actualization/Self-Help
Crafts & Hobbies	Mathematics	Sports & Recreation
Education & Teaching	Medical/Nursing/Home Care	Study Aids
Family/Child Care/Relationships	Music	Technology & Industrial Arts
Foreign Language Instruction & Reference	Occultism/Parapsychology	Travel & Travel Guides

d) **For Dummies** book series – 18 categories – 1,300 titles – 150 million copies in print.

THE PROCESS: How to Write a How-To Book

1) Select your topic

- a) From your area of expertise **and** from what's of interest to you
 - i) Passion (sees you thru the longest hours of the darkest nights)
 - ii) "Write what you know" BUT ... curiosity can kill the competition.
- b) Salable — must have a quantifiable audience. (More information follows.)
- c) Let your topic select you: Co-authoring/Ghostwriting/Editing

2) Outline & draft your material

- a) Critical importance of precise step-by-step instructions. (Don't assume the reader will fill in any blanks.)
 - i) Drive before you putt: the rocky road to *Rock Solid Golf*.
 - ii) Turn left, no right, no left. How to avoid turning a Carolinas guidebook into a Tennessee guidebook.

3) Start what you know...then learn a heckuva lot more

- a) Compare your material to competitive books/sources. Are you missing material?
- b) Can you dig deeper to offer your reader more?
- c) Travel writing: 1/5th of the time "writing" the book is spent traveling.
- d) Research, research, research.

4) Write simply so that others may simply read

- a) Is your writing clear? Concise? Logical?
- b) Do you make use of lists, numbered steps, diagrams, photographs?

- c) Can a 12-year-old read and follow your material?
- 5) **Edit, revise, fact check, copyedit, proofread...rinse and repeat.**

THE MARKET: Is There a Need for Your Book? How to Find It.

- 1) **Ideas are like opinions...everyone has one. (So is yours any good?)**
 - a) Bookstores & booksellers: for category **and** specific book information
 - i) Tour with a knowledgeable bookseller
 - ii) Shelve space & merchandizing
 - b) Magazines: What trade or consumer publications exist? *Gale Directory of Print Publications & Broadcast Media*
 - c) Online Research
 - i) I Google, You Google, We all Google. Don't stop until you have Googled.
 - ii) Amazon & Barnes & Noble (bn.com): At least 20 categories encompassing "How To" titles
 - iii) RR Bowker's *Books in Print*. (www.booksinprint.com)
 - iv) Best Seller Lists
 - v) Specialty retail stores; industry associations; public discussion/listserves (Yahoo/Google/Newsgroups)
- 2) **The fine line between opportunity and over-published**
- 3) **Watching & waiting for inspiration: Sometimes ideas come from rocks.**
 - a) National trends frequently launch How-To opportunities. *How to Care for your Pet Rock*.
- 4) **The competition: Back to the bookstore**
 - a) Go see, smell, touch, and taste your competition. General observations:
 - i) Title, Back cover copy: What promises does the book make to the reader?
 - ii) Quality of manufacturing? (Color vs. BW; price points; page counts; quality of paper; design/photographs)
 - iii) Copyright page: publisher and date of publication: how-to information should be up to date
 - iv) Copyright page: number of printings
 - b) Sort out the classics versus the carousel of in-and-out's

MARKETING: How to Create & Execute a Marketing Plan

- 1) **Authors: Get thee from the cave...and into the mall**
 - a) Publishers expect a "partner" in all marketing efforts. (But it ain't 50-50.)

b) Don't be intimidated: Marketing is just another opportunity for creativity.

2) The Marketing Plan

a) Audience: Quantifying and qualifying your audience. (Handout)

b) Positioning: What does your book promise your readers?

c) A marketing plan is an extensive undertaking that addresses defining your audience(s) through demographics and psychographics, qualifying the sales opportunities, outlining objectives & strategies, creating a budget and timeline.

d) E-mail me for sample marketing plans: malcolm@walkaboutpress.com

SELF PUBLISHING: How to Decide if This Is the Best Choice for You.

1) Self-publisher isn't a dirty word anymore...they even have a more respectable name: independent authors.

a) Consider these How-To's: *What Color is Your Parachute? In Search of Excellence; The One-Minute Manager; The Elements of Style; The Joy of Cooking; How to Keep your Volkswagen Alive*

2) Reasons to self-publish

a) Creative control of your book, its sales, distribution and promotion

b) Time to market

c) Money, including tax advantages (write-offs)

d) An idea for a market too small/risky/specialized for the larger presses

e) Failure to sell your book to a publisher.

f) To test an idea with the idea of selling to a larger press.

3) Challenges

a) Writing versus selling = two different competencies

b) Oversee (but not necessarily do) all aspects of editorial / production / marketing, sales, promotion / returns

c) Access to distribution/sales channels

d) Learning curve is steep

4) Do you have?

a) A book proposal? (E-mail me for sample: malcolm@walkaboutpress.com)

b) A book for a specific market niche or group of people. *A book for everyone is a book for nobody.*

c) Means of selling your books direct to your target audience?

d) The persistence of a river, the patience of a rock?

e) The willingness to go out and promote your book? (A book stops selling when the author does.)