

Writing for Personal and Professional Expression ©copyright by Robert (Bob) W. Lucas

In the Beginning

When someone now asks, “How do you write a book?” I tell them start small and write from the heart. I suggest that they share information or ideas that they believe in or that they know (like this article, which I sat down and wrote shortly after breakfast because the idea came to me). It does not matter whether you want to write non-fiction or fiction; just do it. So many people that I have met throughout my life say, “One day I’m going to write a book about....” My reply is typically, “Today is one day.” As the famous Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu (Confucius) is reported to have said, “The journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step.”

When my first article was printed in a *real* publication (Police and Security News) in the mid-1980s, I was so excited. Although I had not been paid for the piece, my words were right there in a newspaper-type publication for the world to read. That shot of adrenaline encouraged me to continue my literary efforts. I wrote other short articles for the publication and then decided to test the waters elsewhere. I created a monthly column of training tips for the Metro DC chapter of ASTD’s member newsletter. From there, other small pieces followed in local publications and in The National Rifleman for the National Rifle Association, where I worked at the time. In all these instances, I did nothing more than share my experience and knowledge on training and development related topics. Ultimately, the articles that I had written led me to my first book contract where the publisher asked for samples of my writing in order to gauge my writing style and to see if I could effectively put two sentences together to make a thought.

Technology Has Changed the Profession

With the advent of technology, many people can now become a published author with relative ease. You can begin your writing experience today. Write a tweet, a blog article or a short tip column that you share in a professional publication. Start a file to collect all these bits and compile them at some point. Think about it; you could gather information for fifty days and create an eBook titled *50 tips for _____*. With the proliferation of eBook publishers and software, you could convert your content to a PDF file and share or sell it online. Imagine that if you did this and sold 500 eBooks for ninety-nine cents, you would make almost \$500.00! Create two, three or more and you have a solid residual income stream. Even if you are happily employed, wouldn’t that be a nice reserve of cash in these uncertain economic times. Those eBooks could ultimately form the basis for modified content that you sell to a publisher or self-publish in a printed book.

Write to Your Level of Comfort

An important point to remember is that if you are going to write, it should not be a task that you dread. Too many people have jobs like that already. Instead, put your thoughts

on paper and worry about editing later (I'll come back to that concept later). By realizing that if you write one page of text a day for a year, you would have over three hundred pages done. Edited, that is a book which is over 150 pages once you create front and end material (e.g. preface or introduction and references and an index). If you are more energetic and want to plunge ahead, simply set a goal for yourself and write a specific number of hours a day. Just build in time to take breaks during the writing. Allow time to give your legs and brain a break so that it does not feel like you are forcing the words out.

Generally, before I start writing a book, I create a loose outline that I modify occasionally as new thoughts develop while writing. I use a numbered chapter format where each chapter contains a couple paragraphs of what will be in that area of the book. This helps guide my thinking and keeps me on track as I progress with content in the manuscript. However, I do not let this initial outline restrict what I include and where I ultimately put it. As I write, if something feels like it belongs in another chapter, I simply move it to that area. I use this free-flowing approach to capturing ideas. Even though I am a very linear thinker, which explains why I write business and self-help books rather than fantasy or fiction, I do not force myself into a rigid cycle of creating information and working on it until I feel that the topic is covered sufficiently. Often, when I am writing about a topic or researching it, another thought comes to me that might cause me to leap to a different chapter and capture thoughts about it before returning to the original chapter topic. Some people would say that my hyperactive mind causes this bouncing around. Whatever the reason, it seems to work for me. You will have to find your own style. Whatever you do; just stick to it. As you write more, I suspect that you will become accustomed to a way of doing things and stay with that in the future.

Capture Your Thoughts

A final thought for those *One day I'm going to write* people --- at least start an *idea file* in a manila folder or on your computer today. Each time you get an idea for an article or something to include in a book from something you read, see or otherwise experience somewhere, jot down the title, thought and a description long enough to refresh your memory when you next visit the file. That way, whenever you do have time or get inspired to actually start writing, you have a starting point already established.

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