

Behind the Business Book Show

Season 1 Episode 3: Derek Lewis on His Five-Step Process for Beating Writer's Block

Why is writing a business book different from any other genre?

There's a misconception that business books are just facts. But there's still an art in how you present it and the tone and the style that you use and the focus. There's creativity in there.

Whenever it comes to pure business books, whether it's personal finance or investments or marketing or management, leadership, data analytics, economics, because the subjects are usually boring to most people, they don't see, nor believe that there's a whole lot of creativity that has to go into it. It's an art and not just a matter of figuring out how to "arrange the facts and present them".

If you're not a professional writer, can you sit down at a computer and type the book from beginning to end?

If you're not a professional writer, that's an impossible task. As a professional writer, I can't sit down and write something perfect from scratch. It goes through rounds and rounds and rounds of revision and editing.

The first thing that you have to do is realize is that you're not going to write it start to finish.

I've seen people who've spent months, even over the course of a couple of years, on chapter one, wanting it to be perfect and wanting that first line to be a knockout punch on the first sentence. It doesn't happen that way.

What should authors do first?

You need to give yourself permission to write an awful first draft.

The sooner that you accept that you're going to do something awful, the sooner you can get to the point where you can start editing it. It's the editing process that makes it wonderful and awesome. You can't get to the editing until you've gotten through the writing.

Great books have been edited several times. But before they're edited they have to be written.

How do you balance writing and editing the first draft?

I've read a number of different books on writing and creativity and art and the act of creation. This is how I visualize it. There are really two people in my head: the critic and the muse.

The muse is that spark of creativity, that something in me that says, "You have a book to write," and is the wellspring of ideas. It's that feeling of euphoria and excitement that you get.

Then there's the critic: the devil on your shoulder that as soon as you start writing, "No, that's no good. Nobody wants to read what you're writing. This is crap. It looked good in your head, but you know what? You're just not a writer. Just put the pen down, and go back to your nice comfortable life."



Both voices are equally important. I've discovered that the critic, that critical, analytical part of my mind is important. He's saved me a lot of times, from throwing flighty, dumb stuff into a manuscript. Meanwhile, the muse brings up the new or interesting, inspirational, creative. They have to have their places.

There has to be a time whenever I'm ignoring the critic and only allowing the muse to speak, and to not criticize my writing, to not stop in the act of creation until I've gotten it all out. Once I get it out, then I can let the muse go back to wherever she lives in my head, and let the critic step forward, and let the critic say, "This isn't clear," or, "This is jumbled," or, "There's some faulty logic here or a weak point there."

What is your 5-step process to writing a great business book?

1. Discovery: Interview a client or yourself. Ask questions and answer them. Instead of writing the book, you focus on getting your ideas out of your head and onto paper.

At the end of the discovery process, you'll have a mountain of raw material. It's the building blocks of your book. In a way, you're tricking yourself into writing your book, because you have gotten away from worrying about what the words will look like and gotten everything out of your head.

2. Blueprint: Organize the raw material into themes, or buckets. You drop ideas, stories and anecdotes into the different buckets. Print everything and use your floor or extra desk (I previously used our guest bed) to organize all the material into different stacks and you'll see how much information you have for each topic.

Don't get hung up trying to make it perfect: you just want some direction so you can start writing.

3. Frankendraft: Start writing. You're going to draw from your raw material that you already have defined in each bucket. Since you already have a good idea of what's going to go into each chapter, you won't be writing from scratch.

Don't copy and paste. Rewrite it. Write it from scratch, or at least rewrite what you have there so that it flows, so that it looks good, and it's all pieced together. Then, repeat the process for chapters 2 and on.

Stay in the flow and write to the end of the book. The goal is to complete the draft, so if you come across a part that you now see will fit better in a previous chapter, just keep writing and go back to it in the next phase.

This draft will look ugly. Don't worry because it's supposed to. You can't get hung up on the details in this draft; you're creating from this mountain of material and making sure there's something there in the first place that you can refine later. This is why you have to get through the Frankendraft before you can edit.

4. Edit: Go back through the manuscript and tighten things. Does that story still make sense in chapter three that you used in chapter one? Maybe you got to the end of the book, and realized that the story actually works as a great way to wrap up the whole book. Now you have to go take it out of chapter three and chapter one.

If you'd wasted time taking it out of chapter one to put it in chapter three, and then got to the end of the book, then you would have wasted all that time. That's why you don't have to get hung-up in the details when you're in Frankendraft mode.

Editing is where you start to make Frankendraft pretty. Editing is so much easier than writing, and if you've ever done it, you'll know what I mean. It is a lot easier to work with something that's there, than to try to create something from scratch.



Once you're in that editing phase, once you're in the spot where you're looking at thousands and thousands of words, there's where some of your confidence grows because you can see there's an end in sight.

5. Polish: Final edits beta readers and proofread. I don't want to discourage you, but let's be realistic about how much work it takes to write a great book.

Your book can't just be a regurgitation of something you've read. You can't just quote Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson and Robert Kiyosaki. Not that there's anything wrong quoting anybody, but you have to say something substantially new or different.

To have a great book, be prepared for rounds of editing. If you're a professional, you're going to go through a good two or three good edits of your manuscript. If you're not a professional, you'll want to go through it three or four or five times to make sure that it is a good book.

- **Next, find some beta readers to tell you the truth about your book.** First, someone personal, your spouse, a partner, a best friend, somebody who knows you and somebody who would say, "This book sounds like you," or that it speaks well to your credibility and your character. Second, a professional who can tell you what might be missing, what has changed in the industry that you didn't address, or any other feedback that should be addressed. Assess their feedback and figure out what needs to change.
- **Then, have a professional editor look at your manuscript.** Make sure your manuscript is up to professional standards. If you are in any kind of business and writing isn't your expertise, you need to have a professional vet whatever you've put together if you're going to share this with the world. Why else would you write a book, if you're just going to stick it in a desk drawer and let no one ever see it?

What else can a writer do to fight writer's block?

Remember that your mind is a creative tool. So give yourself time to rest. It's okay to take a vacation from your book for a couple of days, a couple of weeks, even a couple of months if you've been wrestling with it for a while. You need to go restock your wellspring of creativity.

Instead of trying to create something, go take in creativity. Go to a museum, watch a classic movie, spend time with your kids, nieces and nephews, buy a coloring book, or go on a nature walk. Do something that inspires you and refuels that creative well in your soul. You will be amazed that whenever you restock the pond and you go to fish, that there's actually fish there for you to catch.

Another easy tip is to let your subconscious wrestle with the problem. Our subconscious is incredibly powerful. Whenever we give our subconscious a problem, and we let our subconscious deal with that problem without pestering it, without distracting it, it can come up with the solution.

By making that conscious choice, whenever you fall asleep, your subconscious takes that problem and deals with it. I thought it was kind of hokey. I've tried it. I am amazed at how often it works. Say I have a problem with a client's chapter. I'll give myself the problem. When I wake up in the morning after my morning routine, I'll sit down at my desk, and open their document. All of a sudden, I realize I know the answer. It's not an epiphany the second I woke up; the answer was just sitting there waiting for me to access it whenever I sat down at my desk.



Lastly, set a writing schedule. William Faulkner said, "I write only when inspiration strikes. Fortunately, it strikes every morning at 9:00 sharp." You probably aren't a professional writer. But as a business author, you *can* train your mind to write, whether it's at 9am or 6pm, for at least 30 minutes. Once you create the habit, it becomes easier to keep the appointment, whether it's daily or every other day.

Recommend a book for aspiring business authors

The Wart of Art, On Writing, and The Artist's Way

Episode references

[Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion](#)

[Psycho-Cybernetics](#)

[The Dark Tower](#)

[The War of Art](#)

[On Writing](#)

[The Artist's Way](#)

