

# Some of my hand-edits for the Second Edition of *How to Write Non-Fiction*, Nov 2024

## 1.2 Types of non-fiction books

It's important to consider up front what type of book you're writing, <sup>ad</sup> there are ~~some~~ <sup>var</sup> broad types of books that ~~will~~ <sup>can</sup> help you shape your ~~own~~ <sup>own</sup>. These sit above genre or sub-category in the bookstore and, of course, some will span multiple types.

The important thing is to identify where your book might fit into the ecosystem and find ~~some~~ <sup>some</sup> examples for you to model with your book.

Go through your bookshelf. What are the books you like and why? Where do they fit <sup>in the primary ecosystem (advertising)?</sup>

Here are some of the main types of non-fiction book.

**(Clear transformation for the reader.)** How To / Instructional books <sup>wma ↓ (leave)</sup>

This includes the broad categories of Self-Help, Art and Photography, Business & Investing, Cooking & Food, Crafts & Hobbies, Health & Fitness & Dieting, Sports and Travel.

It's easy to identify a target market and the reader may not even care ~~who~~ <sup>who</sup> much about who wrote the book. For example, *How to Cook Simple Healthy Meals for Kids with a Slow Cooker*. Do you care who wrote this? If you ~~just~~ <sup>just</sup> bought a slow cooker and you want <sup>ed</sup> some help with ideas for <sup>kids</sup> meals for your kids, you'd buy it.

Motivational books like *The Success Principles: How to Get From Where You Are To Where You Want To Be* by Jack Canfield, or *How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life* by the Dalai Lama also fit into this niche. My books fit here, too, <sup>as they have a clear transformation. I am trying to help you.</sup>

Books in these niches can be evergreen so although it can be easy to write for them, older works may dominate the category, and it's hard to stand out. For example, under Job Hunting, you will still find *What Color is your Parachute?* By Richard N Bolles, first published in 1972 and still updated every year. However, if you search for *Career Change*, you will find my book there, ten years after publication.

This is likely to be the type of book that you're writing and the type I'll be focusing on the most as it lends itself most easily to a creative business model.

## 1.7 Who is your reader? Identify your target market

"Niche is the new mainstream."  
James Watt, *Business for Punks*

Most authors writing their first book think that it's for everyone. But it's not.

The good news is that there is likely to be a perfect group of people who really want your book. You just have to identify who they are and where they might hear about it.

**Put yourself in the mind of the reader.**

Ultimately, the reader doesn't care about you so much as what's in it for them?

People read non-fiction for education, inspiration or entertainment, and the promise of transformation from where they are to where they want to be. The reader wants to understand something about themselves or their current situation, and they're reading a book to learn from your experience as well as gather specific steps for how to deal with their own.

**Why will someone want to read your book?**

Here are some different reasons. <sup>may not apply.</sup>

**It helps with a specific problem.** This explains the popularity of weight loss and self-help books every January!

You're reading this because you want to write a non-fiction book and you will take what's relevant and (hopefully) go on to do exactly that. That's the transformation I want to make in your life. It's about what's most useful to help you reach that goal. What problems does your book help people with?

It's on a **specific topic**, and the reader buys lots of books in the niche. I buy lots of books on topics around death culture and memento mori, as well as the deep ocean, deep time, writing, and psychology. What topic is your book on, or does it intersect with different topics?

**The reader knows and likes the author.** This is why those with a large platform get book deals. <sup>as check out books by</sup> YouTubers, TikTokers, celebrities, and anyone with a big enough **platform**. If you have an audience, reach.

repetition

you have to switch your head from author to reader artist to business partner. It's not about you. It's about them.

from these pages

another reason is that you have

write are yourself.

Mining my journals has been a massive challenge

knowing that later I might share those words in public. Of course, <sup>later</sup> selective in what <sup>you</sup> share, but that kind of vulnerability can bring a topic alive, and help the reader hear <sup>your</sup> authentic voice.

You need to be ~~careful~~

The problem for me was how many journals I have since I've been keeping them sporadically from aged fifteen, and then pretty consistently for <sup>the last</sup> few decades. <sup>I have a lot of noise</sup> It was hard to find specific moments in many years' worth of writing.

I started by allocating specific time to <sup>re process</sup> mine my past, and paged through the journals, marking useful pages. Not just for a specific project, but those that perhaps might be useful <sup>to others</sup>. <sup>it's fun to</sup>

For *The Healthy Writer*, I remembered a poem I'd written years ago <sup>paper</sup> about my migraines, so I hunted <sup>for that specifically</sup>. I finally found it in a folder in a box I hadn't opened for <sup>many</sup> years. It was worth digging out because those lines of <sup>poem</sup> pain helped me remember what life used to be like when I suffered from migraines and then how I solved that problem. Sharing your personal transformation is one of the most powerful aspects of writing, so spend some time digging out the perspective of your previous self if you can.

have some beautiful fountain pens

This is also where AI tools can be useful. You can take a picture of a page of handwriting, upload it to ChatGPT (or another AI tool) and ask it to transcribe into plain text. It does a pretty good job, even with my terrible handwriting! <sup>As a pro tip</sup> <sup>we did that, covered for in chapter 2-7.</sup>

You could also dictate notes on your phone. There are plenty of apps for that, or I just dictate into my Gmail on my phone and then email myself the transcription which it does in-app.

### Capture your experience as you go through it

Sometimes you decide to write a book on a topic and then you go through an experience that shapes the material, so you can write notes while you're doing it. This was the case for my travel memoir, *Pilgrimage: Lessons Learned From Solo Walking Three Ancient Ways*.

Although I didn't know exactly what I was <sup>going to</sup> write, I was definitely going to write something, so I captured the experience along the way with photos and also by writing a journal.

as I walked.

I prepared in advance by making a list of questions to consider <sup>along the way</sup>. If you don't help yourself with some prompts, it's hard to pay attention to

specific details, especially if you're tired and not in the mood to write. My questions included, What am I escaping from? What is ancient, and what is modern? What can I be curious about today? What is the shadow or the darkness here? <sup>[you can find the full list at - link]</sup>

I printed the questions and stuck them into my journal as a reminder of what I wanted to think about <sup>during my pilgrimages</sup>. <sup>walks</sup> <sup>journey</sup> <sup>pilgrimage</sup>

I walked in the northern hemisphere autumn (Sept, Oct) for all three of my solo walking pilgrimages, <sup>and</sup> <sup>so</sup> <sup>as</sup> I woke before dawn most days. I <sup>also</sup> went to bed early, so I wrote every morning. I was usually too exhausted <sup>in</sup> the evenings, and ~~the morning was better for writing my thoughts.~~

For journal geeks, I mainly use Leuchtturm A5 hardbacks with plain paper and a teal or blue cover. They are not cheap, but my words are worth it! I usually write with a plain black biro.

As a backup, I took pictures of my journal pages every night and synced them to my Apple Photos, so even if I lost the physical journal, I'd still have my <sup>notes</sup>. <sup>writing</sup>

there are lots of note-taking apps and

While walking during the day, I added notes into the Things app on my phone as a reminder of what I wanted to write about later. <sup>you</sup> You can find some of my daily notes as an example at [www.TheCreativePenn.com/dailynotes](http://www.TheCreativePenn.com/dailynotes)

I also took a lot of pictures of different kinds on my phone and shared some of them every day on Instagram @jfpennauthor. These included beautiful or interesting pictures of the route, architecture, nature, landscapes, as well as selfies for social media usage <sup>later</sup>. <sup>I also took</sup> Specific photos of details to write about like plants or signs, <sup>like</sup> food, my blisters and rashes and minor injuries so I knew what day I got them, my gear, receipts from places I visited, screenshots of the map so I could pinpoint where I was when things happened, and many more.

It's better to capture more than you <sup>might</sup> <sup>will</sup> <sup>ever</sup> need. Minor things like the brand of beer, or <sup>the</sup> <sup>strange</sup> <sup>stile</sup>, or the person you met one morning may end up more important than you think in the finished book.

I took hundreds of photos per trip, most of which I never shared, as they were more for memory aids than beautiful. I was very glad of them later when it came to write about the trips.

I ~~also~~ had <sup>my</sup> maps and guidebooks, which I referred to before, during, and after each trip.

You could also use audio recording for voice dictation or to record sounds