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**THE NONFICTION WRITER'S
10-STEP PLAN
TO GETTING PUBLISHED**

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[CN] Step 1

[CT] Interview Yourself

Let's talk about your book idea and how you relate to it as the author. That's where every book starts anyway—with an idea or a concept. But what distinguishes a commercially viable book from a pet project starts with you and where you fit into the marketplace of ideas. What does that mean? Well, the marketplace of ideas is exactly what it sounds like: It's where we buy and sell our ideas and intellectual property.

Think of it like this: Every product you see and every service you use from cars and baby wipes to oil changes and legal representation has been birthed thanks to someone having an idea and executing on it. Your book is no different. It is YOUR product (or service, depending on how you view your message). Many people have a really great idea in their head, but is it a book? Is it something that people are going to spend their hard-earned money on at the cash register? Will they say, "Yes! I want this book," whether it's being priced at \$20 or \$45 or even \$50 or \$75?

The answer lies in you. What will set you apart in this content-driven media environment is leaning into your role as a subject-matter expert. In this chapter, you will start to think of yourself in that way: as an expert in your field or topic area. And what's the best way to learn more about an expert? Interview them—which is what you're going to do with yourself in this chapter.

[H1] Are You the Right Person to Write a Book?

When you go to the nonfiction shelf, what kind of books catch your eye? Beyond looking at covers, what's one of the first things you probably look for? A qualified author. You wouldn't buy a book about investing that is written by someone who is known for being an incredible

baker, would you? Likewise, you probably wouldn't peruse the cooking section thinking, "If only there was a book about desserts by a well-known financier!" No, you would buy the investing book written by a certified financial planner or known investment broker. You would buy the dessert book written by a qualified pastry chef.

Your qualifications matter. If you are taking the journey of nonfiction authorship, you must have a personal stake in your subject matter that goes beyond pure interest. Do you remember the Rhetorical Triangle from your college composition class? (Thanks, Aristotle!) Ethos, pathos, and logos are the three kinds of arguments you can make in an essay. Ethos involves a writer or speaker's qualifications as a subject-matter expert. That's what you should analyze when thinking about why you are the right person to write your book. What qualifies you as an expert on your topic, whether that be personal or professional experience, is your ethos. It's what makes readers look at your author bio on the back cover and think, "Yes! This person knows their stuff. I'm buying their book."

This is the first time brainstorming is going to be a really big part of your process. Let's say that you have your strong idea, and you think it should be a book. That's great! Now, ask yourself if you are the right subject matter expert for this book. Think of all of the ways that you are that expert, brainstorm it, and write them all down. Think of all the ways that you already are out there in the marketplace of ideas with your content or your professional life and do a little bit of brainstorming about how you as an expert can be a part of that overall ecosystem of content.

I hate to tell you this, but you can't just write a book because something interests you and expect people to buy it. You have to be connected to your topic in some valuable way. It's non-negotiable that you need to be a subject matter expert, or you need to already write about that topic. It's vital that you have that connection. For example, I can't say, "I like hot air balloons so

I'm going to write a book about hot air balloons. I don't even own a hot air balloon, nor have I ever seen one in person. I just think they're cool, so I'll write a book about them.” Stop. Nope. You can enjoy hot air balloons all you like, but you're not the right person to write a book about hot air balloons if you don't own and operate one. Know who you are in relation to your topic and be able to intimate that to your reader.

Enthusiasm counts here, too. In other words, be excited about your topic! Editors, agents, salespeople, and book consumers can see your passion throughout the life of a book, from the pitching process to your marketing outreach. Your enthusiasm about your topic endears you to your chosen audience and stakeholders. So, ask yourself what your level of enthusiasm is about your topic. And, while that enthusiasm helps build and keep your audience, it's also an essential element here because you should actually enjoy yourself as an author! Why write about something if you're not feeling the love for your topic?

One way you can get that enthusiasm across, especially to editors and agents, is to first be clear about your concept. Have it nailed down and be able to talk about it succinctly. You're the expert, remember? So, own it. Second, know how to get someone else excited and interested in your topic. It starts with you, how you write about your topic, and how you speak about it to others. If you are pitching to agents and editors, that means you use an engaging hook and write a compelling query letter (more on that later). If you are going the custom publication route, it means you use that hook as your primary selling point to customers. But you can't create that engaging hook until you have a clear book idea origin story.

[H1] What is Your Book Idea Origin Story?

I always like to tell people that every book idea has an origin story, just like a superhero. Your idea didn't just magically pop into your head—you thought of it over time. Maybe you cultivated it in ways that you haven't even thought of yet. To really tell a relevant story to an editor or to an agent about your book, you have to think a little bit about that origin story: Where did your idea come from?

Let's talk a little bit about how you can determine your idea's origin story. First, you need to have a noticeably clear concept in mind when you are writing a nonfiction book that helps it (and you) stand out from the crowd. And that concept came from somewhere in your world. Your book idea could have come from:

- Personal lived experience
- Historical events that you have been a part of
- Your relationship with a unique or notable person, place, or thing
- Unusual life circumstances or trauma
- Your job or business
- A hobby in which you have specific expertise.
- Academia
- Travel
- A once-in-a-lifetime event
- Religious influence

Once you've pinpointed the catalytic environment that sparked your book idea, think about how you shaped that kernel of an idea into the full book concept. Ask yourself:

- What kind of research you did to determine your concept's viability as a book

- How you built the concept's structure for the book
- Who helped you along the way (other experts, researchers, colleagues, friends, family)

Don't worry if your book is not written yet. All of these questions can easily apply at the initial stages of your publishing journey. For now, you simply want to be able to expound the how and why of your book in terms of how it started in your mind.

[H1] Is Your Brand Book-Ready?

Yes, you are a brand—at least in the marketplace of ideas. As a subject-matter expert, you are (or at least you should be) deeply involved in the ecosystem surrounding your book's topic. Perhaps you've been working on your book idea for a long time, or it's an idea that has been swimming in your head for years. Even if it's been sitting in a drawer, and you just haven't quite known what to do with it, you have probably been working in your topic area for some time. For example, maybe it's a topic that you've been doing speaking engagements about, or you've been attending events and talking to people about it. Maybe it's a part of your everyday business. Maybe it's a class that you teach. Perhaps it's a hobby that you have a level of expertise in like crafting, baking, or travel. Book ideas can come from all kinds of places (remember your book's origin story). Anytime you have something that resonates with people in an area of your professional or personal life, whether it's in person or whether it's online, it might be a viable concept for a book project. Think about what your book dream looks like in relation to your personal brand. The two will ultimately be dovetailed together when you start to pitch your book to agents, editors, or readers themselves.

Marketing plays a huge role in your personal brand as it relates to your book. For example, how do you plan to market this book? Gone are the days when book publishers take over and say, "Sit

back, relax, and let us sell your book.” The publishing boom of the 1990s and early 2000s is history. That's not the world that we live in anymore. We live in a very high-touch world where authors are in constant communication with their audiences whether that's on social media, via e-mail lists or websites, or with speaking engagements, courses, and masterminds. So, you need to get in brainstorming mode to think about all the ways that you can help sell that book.

Here's how to tell if your personal brand is book-ready:

- You have the subject-matter street cred to write about your topic.
- You are actively involved in work and/or organizations that support your topic.
- You produce other content about your topic, like blog posts, articles, or interviews.
- You show others how to engage with your topic through educational outreach like courses, webinars, or workshops.
- You speak about your topic at professional events and conferences.
- You have a professional social media following.
- You have or prepared to create a professional website for yourself and your topic.
- You have a newsletter and subscriber list.

Now, not all of these branding elements may apply to you. For example, if you are a historian writing a new book about the history of NASA spouses, you may not be leading masterminds. That's okay! It's not applicable to you. But are you speaking to historical societies or writing compelling articles about your topic? Then that applies to you. Feel free to tinker with this list to fit your own branding needs.

In the next chapter, we'll talk about the viability of your book idea.

[CN] Step 2

[CT] Determine Your Book Idea's Viability

Now that you have spent some time interviewing yourself and thinking about who you are as an author, it's time to think a little more deeply about your book topic. To do that, it's important to think about how your book will perform in the marketplace of ideas. Keep in mind that, for most writers, a book is a labor of love. Many people write books about topics that not only interest them but have special personal meaning to them. After all, who would we be if we didn't have passion about our ideas?

That said, publishing is a business. And whether you plan to self-publish, use a hybrid publisher, or pursue a traditional publishing path, being able to sell your book is important. Not only do you want to make some money off your book, those who helped produce your book also have to get paid. Every book has a massive team behind it including editors, designers, production staff, marketing and PR specialists, and a host of others. Those people would not be employed if books did not sell in the marketplace. This isn't to say that capitalism is the only goal of selling a book. Sharing ideas, the freedom of speech, and helping people improve their lives with your words are all vital pursuits as well. But to do all that, you need to be able to sell your book and that starts with determining if your book idea is viable. In this chapter, we'll talk about two ways to determine if your book idea can stand out in a flooded publishing market.

[H1] What is Your Niche?

Can you pinpoint your book's niche? I assure you—there's really nothing new under the sun in the marketplace of ideas. The key is all in how you present that idea. So, think about your concept and your idea. Consider who else has written about it in both similar ways that are related to your outlook and conflicting ways that go against the grain of what your concept is. Now, where does your idea fit in here? In other words, what is your niche? Think about what your concept is and be able to affirm it in your pitch, the book itself, and how you eventually market it. Back in my grad school days, we were always encouraged to think of our essay topics as guests at a party. Everyone in the room is talking. Some people are saying things with which you agree. Some are dissenting voices to your worldview. Others are rehashing the same old conversations from the last party. Then you walk in. What can you say that is new and compelling? What is your unique contribution to the conversation? That's how you can think about your book's niche. Enter the room and say something different or new.

Let's go back to that hot air balloon idea for a minute. Say I want to write a very general book about hot air balloons, what they are, and how they work. That's too broad to be a book. But if I got very nichy and said, "Here's how I traveled the world in my hot air balloon and how you can to," that's a very clearly defined subject. Plus, you've hit the right ethos note as well, since it's all about your own experience with the hot air balloon. You want to go narrow, not wide, which almost seems counterintuitive. One might think, "OK, if I want to sell a lot of books to a lot of people, I want my topic to be as broad as possible." But that's not always the case here.

Remember: The riches are in the niches, so you want to get clear and very specific about your topic from the start.

[H1] What is Your USP?

In addition to a niche, your book idea also needs a unique selling proposition (USP). You might have heard this phrase used in the business world in regard to products and services. A USP is what makes your topic special and unique. Going back to the idea of a niche how is your niche or your idea different? Maybe you're writing something that flies in the face of convention. Maybe you're writing something that no one has talked about before. Maybe you're taking an old classic topic and putting a new spin on it for a new era or generation. You have to be able to define what it is that makes your niche and your approach special and different. As I mentioned earlier, have a narrow but deep focus. Take your niche and go deep to define what the unique benefit will be for your reader. Let's build onto the hot air balloon niche and add a layer. You can take the original niche (traveling in your hot air balloon) and add a benefit for your reader. Like this: "Here's how I traveled the world in my hot air balloon and how you can to." The "how you can too" is the USP of your book. Pretty nichy, right?

What makes it unique, perhaps, is that you can write about how much money is required to do, what that lifestyle looks like, how to be in community with other people who are also traveling in the world in hot air balloons, etc. In other words, go very deeply into your topic's USP so that your potential agent, editor, or reader comes away thinking they simply must read this book.

[H1] Is It a Book?

There are so many wonderful ideas out there, but not all of them are big enough to take up 200-300 pages of content that people will buy. You really have to be able to dive deeply into your niche, but you also have to have enough to say about it to warrant a full book-length work. Not

every idea is a book. Some make great free articles, blogs, or social posts, but there's just not enough “there” there for them to be a book. So, what should a book-length idea look like? Have that clearly defined subject in place. Your topic should not be so broad that it's hard to rein in, but not so small that you can't justify at least 35,000-40,000 words.

To determine if your book can make the stretch, let's revisit college comp class. Remember writing essays (or maybe you've blocked out the memory for sanity's sake)? In addition to a thesis statement, you had to have claims and evidence to support those claims and, thus, the thesis. Think of your book idea in a similar way. Take your primary idea and see if you can make three to five major claims about it. In other words, what are the three to five big things you want to cover about your niche topic?

Next, think about possible evidence that can support your claims. No matter what your nonfiction book is about, quantifiable research is the proof in the pudding for your ideas. That doesn't mean that you have to be an academic by trade. It simply means that you need to be able to talk and write about your topic using solid information to back up what you say. So, in my hot air balloon book, I can't just say living the hot air balloon life is the best life ever because I said so. That's not enough. You need to be able to say, “Here are some really great ways that you can make a living while enjoying the hot air balloon life,” or, “Here are some great ways that you can live this life without disrupting your finances and I'm going to prove it to you because I've interviewed people and I have citations and I have sources.” So quantifiable research really is about asking yourself whether you can back up what you say. Not every topic has to be written in a very academic way but at the very least you should be able to say:

- Here's some proof that my idea is legit.
- This is why my idea is doable.

- Here are the steps to make my idea work.
- This topic matters to a broader audience in a way that they can quantify.

Being able to say and expound on one or more of these helps you show that your book is, in fact, a unique offering for readers.

[H1] Quiz: Is It a Book?

Let's take a quick quiz to determine if your idea could be a book:

1. Is your idea based on your personal feelings about a topic or a singular experience?
2. Is your idea about a finite topic that requires some documentation or research that can reach a resolution in under 10,000 words?
3. Is your idea a new spin on an existing topic, a personal narrative about major events, or one that requires multiple claims and evidence points? Is it all three?

Starting with the first question, ask yourself if your idea really just your personal ruminations on a topic in which you have no quantifiable expertise. If so, then it's not a commercially viable book project. Consider question 2. Is your idea about a finite topic that requires a little bit of documentation that can reach a final conclusion or thesis in under 10,000 words? That my friend is an article. Finally, is your idea a new spin on a topic that already exists or perhaps a personal narrative about a series of events that lots of people know about, or maybe one that requires multiple claims and evidence points? In other words, is it going to take a lot of words to come to a resolution? Then you most likely have a book idea on your hands.

Now that you have thought a little bit more about your idea, what it's niche and USP are, and whether or not it can be a book, it's time to do your first activity, the book idea brainstorm.

[H1] Activity: Book Idea Brainstorm

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