

Writing as a Ministry for God's Glory

Chapter 5 Write a Non-fiction Book

by Kathy Collard Miller

Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.—Jeremiah 30:2

I'll never forget attending my first writer's conference. I was terrified and believed I didn't deserve to be there. I'd only had two articles published and it seemed like everyone else was a pro.

By the end of the conference, I found out there were others there who were as new in writing as I was. Yet the staff and other more accomplished writers were there to help me and the other attendees become a success. It was there I knew what God wanted me to write for my first book. That was a thrill and the beginning of many books. I hope you have similar positive experiences as you work on your book.

Evaluate Your Book Idea

Ask yourself:

1. What is out there already?
2. How is my book going to be different?
3. Who will benefit from my book?
4. What style do I want the book to be?
Content: what you write
Style: how you write it
5. What do I want my reader to know, feel, do, be?

As you begin and continue working on your book, look for and seek out opportunities to speak on your topic. You'll be working on your material and you can also receive the feedback from your audience.

Be able to describe your book idea in one sentence. If you have an opportunity at a writer's conference to talk with an editor, you'll want to share your idea as concisely as possible.

Research

Apply the information on researching from the chapter on writing articles, but here are some reminders.

1. *Create physical and virtual files on your topics of interest.* Use the list from the first chapter on writing articles to find out which topics are important to you.
2. *Clip! Clip! Clip!* Look for information you'll use later and file each piece.
3. *Subscribe to magazines and online sources that cover your topics of interest.*
4. *We also need to know our library.* Although the library may seem antiquated by now, it is still a

source for every writer. Finding books on your topic will save you from buying books.

Interviewing

Interviewing can also supply much of the information we need for each writing project. How can you find experts for these interviews?

- Contact the author of the article you've clipped
- Ask your pastor for leads
- Interview your pastor
- Ask experts for recommendations of other experts
- Check at local colleges or universities for professors

When your research and interviewing keep turning up the same information, it is time to start writing.

Nine Steps for Organizing Your Material

Here is a step by step method for organizing your material for a non-fiction book.

1. Most of the time we start out with a single folder or virtual file for our book idea. All along we have been entering information into that one file. We don't know yet what our chapter titles will be or even the direction of the book. We just know this is a topic we are interested in.

Right now I am gathering information on the topic of abiding. For the last two years I have been deeply stirred by the Holy Spirit to meditate and apply Jesus' command of abiding. I haven't been completely clear what that looks like nor how exactly to do it, so I've been alert to information about it.

As a result, I have a computer folder labeled "Abiding" and only a few files within that folder, one of which is labeled "abiding research." I put everything I find in there. I also have a physical file in my desk files labeled "Abiding." When I come across something from another source or I think of ideas the Holy Spirit seems to pop into my mind, I put those notes in there, in no particular order.

2. When I'm ready to work on a book topic, I pull out the file folder or open the computer file containing research for the subject, like abiding. As I go through each piece of information, I ask the Holy Spirit to begin to organize the material for possible chapter themes.

If it's a physical piece like an article from a magazine, I'll put it on a part of my desk. As I pull out each bit of research, I look for similarities with the other information and any of the piles of information.

As I go through the virtual file, I begin to create and label computer files within the main folder for possible chapter themes. Maybe I'm beginning to see ideas for how abiding involves awareness of the Holy Spirit. That can become a possible chapter.

As I go through any of the research, whether a physical piece or virtual, I often will make a copy and put it in several places, not knowing exactly where I might end up using it. After I've placed every piece into one or more files, I'm ready for the next step.

3. Begin working on one of the chapters. Have a piece of paper available and as you go through each piece of information from that one chapter's research, write down one or two key words on the sheet trying to group ideas together.

4. Yellow highlight the important information on each piece of research, when it is a piece of paper. You can also highlight in a color on your electronic device. The purpose of this is so that you can go back and find the information easily. If you have a full article from a magazine, without marking it, you may have to re-read the whole article.

5. Review the key words on your sheet and write out a broad outline from it.

6. Put any quotes from others on 3X5 cards. Place these cards on a bulletin board in front of you (or in a file in your computer) as you write. After including a quote in your manuscript, pull the quote down and file it. That way you'll know which quotes you have available left to use.

7. Put the research into piles that correspond to main points listed on your broad chapter outline.

8. List synonyms for words you'll use a lot by using a Thesaurus or Synonym Finder. For instance, I wrote a book about having an eternal perspective. Of course, I'm using the word "perspective" a lot along

with "eternal" and "earthly." I looked those words up in the *Synonym Finder* and wrote down in list of synonyms for those words. I have that list posted in front of me as I write so that I don't have to constantly flip through the *Synonym Finder* or even look things up on the internet.

9. Use "P.I.E.R." If you read the chapter on writing an article, you learned about this acrostic which was developed by Marita Littauer Tedder. It stands for:

- Point: the key principle(s) you want to communicate. There will be more than one in each chapter.
- Instruction: practical ideas for putting your principles into action
- Examples: anecdotes and stories (preferably your own personal ones) that make your point come alive.
- References: the validations that make your point credible: quotes, statistics, Bible verses, etc.

To use the PIER, take as many sheets of paper for as many main topics you'll cover in the chapter. Put the letters P...I...E...R... down the side of each sheet, underneath each other.

Again go through each piece of research and put a notation of only one word or phrase by one of those letters (PIER) depending upon whether it refers to the main point you want to make, or its instruction, or an example, or a reference.

For instance, if you have a quote, write "quote" by the "R". If you have an anecdote, write your name or the other person's name by the "E." If you have a practical idea, write one word referring to it by the "I."

Then you can begin writing from that sheet because you have all your information listed by a brief word in front of you. As you write, you'll want to mix up the P ... I ... E ... R in different order so that you have a variety. And of course, you won't write, "So my point is ..." and "the instruction is ..." and "example is ..." You want to help it flow smoothly with transitions.

Write Each Chapter

Think of the ingredients of your chapter from the metaphor of the train (cow catcher, engine, passenger cars, caboose). Also use Marita Littauer's idea of PIER (point, instruction, example and reference). If you need refreshing about those concepts, check again in the first chapter on writing articles.

Some of the choices you have for beginning your chapter are:

- riveting anecdote
- quote
- statistic
- shocking statement

Use headings throughout the chapter. This format is quite popular these days because people want a chapter broken up by headings. Then reading it doesn't seem so intimidating.

Use "circle endings" for a finished feeling to your chapter. A circle ending is when you finish the chapter by referring to what you wrote about at the beginning of the chapter.

Editing

Rewriting can be fun! When I first began to write, I didn't think rewriting was fun at all. In fact, I dreaded it. I much preferred the original composition.

But now, I think editing is like being a detective, trying to find the best possible words and also working with concepts to make them clear and powerful. Now the original composition seems the most difficult part of writing.

As you edit, evaluate each word, phrase, paragraph:

- is it essential?
- is it redundant?
- is it repetitious?
- is it clear?
- Is it vague?

Rewrite anything that is unclear and delete anything not needed.

Read your chapter to yourself out loud. You'll be surprised what faulty writing you find that way.

Use the Synonym Finder to polish your words and make them even more powerful.

If we wait until everything is written perfectly, we'll never get anything marketed. Write it as well as you can and then send it out. If the idea is good and the publisher takes it, you'll receive the help of an editor to make it even better.

Critique Groups

A way to help you get your manuscript ready for your publisher or editor is to attend a critique group.

The advantages are:

- You will learn immeasurably from the suggestions of other people.
- You may have to develop a tough hide to have your work critiqued which you will need throughout your writing career.
- Each group has a different personality. Some read the manuscripts out loud, some read them silently and then write down comments on copies of the manuscript
- You don't have to be a "pro" or published to contribute value to a critique group. The fact that you are an objective reader gives your opinion value.
- You are important to the success of others and they have a stake in your success.

I have fond memories of my many years in a critique group which started from the very first of my ministry. That small group of women became best friends and they are a part of the success I have today. In fact, I dedicated one of my books to them.

Working with Editors

It may sound scary, but eventually you should get an opportunity to work with editors. When you do, remember:

- An editor is not your adversary, he or she is your friend.
- An editor is objective, something writers have a hard time being with regard to their own work.
- An editor has an opinion, and most often the best one, but you don't have to agree with everything. You really do have the final say.

I remember receiving a ten page single spaced letter from my publisher's editor regarding a book manuscript I'd turned in. Those ten pages pointed out all the ways my manuscript needed to be corrected. I thought my manuscript was ready to be published. Obviously, she felt otherwise.

I was initially totally overwhelmed with the idea of rewriting with so many things wrong, but the Lord assured me of the necessity of it. I rewrote that book, taking one of her suggestions at a time. It took me two weeks, but as a result, that book was much improved.

Another challenge was after I turned in a completed manuscript and within a few weeks received a phone call from the main editor for my publisher. She explained that my final manuscript was not what they wanted nor had expected from the book proposal. I could either completely re-write it or withdraw it from them. When I said I would rewrite it according to their desires, she was surprised, yet pleased. I did totally rewrite the book and I then was pleased with the result and could see it was a better book.

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If you write about someone, quote someone else over 250 words, or use their story, send a copy of the material that refers to them. Also send a release form for them to sign and send back to you. Give them an opportunity of having their name(s) or details changed. The quotes I'm referring to are not the

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Sincerely,

Kathy Collard Miller

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Are you ready to tackle writing a book? I hope so. Just remember, especially if it seems overwhelming, you aren't writing a book, you are writing one word at a time. I know the Lord can strengthen you to complete the work He's given you to do.

Kathy Collard Miller is the author of over 50 books and can be reached through www.KathyCollardMiller.com. Her books are available on amazon.com. She is also a speaker who has spoken in over 30 US States and 8 foreign countries. As a lay counselor, she meets frequently with those looking for greater sanctification.

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