



Claim Your Authority: How to choose a structure for your book

Okay, you've followed your original impulse to write your book now. You're using my blog as a tutorial to draft your book.

Your big question right about now is this:

What is the best structure for the book?

When we set out, we grasp for a structure so we have clarity right away about how to write the book. That makes sense, but the book's ultimate structure might not be what you start with.

Still, you must start somewhere. Some possibilities include:

- Personal narrative
- How-to based on professional expertise
- Inspirational daybook
- Book of your art or photography
- Fiction, either a collection of short stories or a novel

The purpose of the book can inform the structure. These coaching inquiries can elicit clarity about the book's purpose:

1. Who is the audience?
2. What do you want them to feel, think or do after reading your book?
3. What is the nature of your material – essay or instructional?

Homework #1: Answer the above questions in writing.

Reminder: If you haven't already, devote one notebook or computer folder to this project. Gather notes, drafts, ideas and images in one place for easy reference. It doesn't matter how messy the contents are, just that you have one container for your work.

How will readers interact with your material?

When you know the answers to these questions, you'll see how people will be experiencing your material. You will know whether you'll be working mainly with text or also with images, videos or hyperlinks.

Depending on your goals, your material could exist in several forms, depending on how people prefer to interact with it.

Your book* could be:

Paperback
Electronic book
App
Vook
Webinar
Podcasts
Installation
And more...

*We'll continue calling it a book for simplicity's sake.

Homework #2: What form will best hold your material? Jot that down.

As you dig deeper into the work, your project may take its own path. With almost every client I've coached, the project morphs when the author allows the material to influence the form.

It helps to start with a specific form even knowing that the structure and content will change. Do not endlessly try to construct the ideal form in your mind. Plunge in.

Reminder: Use free writing to get your words on the page quickly and easily.

No matter what the final form, I suggest free writing as the way to get your first thoughts out on the page. With these preliminary ideas to work with, you can see where you need to add or take away to hone your message.

Organizing your material by developing a chapter template

Okay, have you gotten a sense of what form your book will take you may feel more at ease. Still, you wonder what will actually be in this non-fiction inspirational book.

Here's what really helps my clients: develop a chapter template. Brainstorm the elements you want to include in each chapter. These could include:

- Introduction
- Epitaph
- Stories
- Suggested work for the reader
- Inspirational quotations
- Illustrations or images

Homework #3: List the elements you want to see in each of your chapters.

As I write Claim Your Authority first as a blog, I identify the following elements I want in each chapter and why:

- **Introduction** – to be clear on what this post will give the reader and why they need it
- **Lists** – to help a range of readers identify themselves in the writing
- **Reminders** – I'm going to assume a certain knowledge of (if not regular practice of) basic writing strategies.
- **Coaching inquiries** – to help authors write from and about what's true for them and their work, not merely from a formula
- **Suggested homework** throughout the text and at the end in a list – for readers to do so they're writing their books along with me

Homework #4: Draft a sample chapter to see how each element builds upon and increases the impact of your work.

This is a sample chapter for me. What does it make you feel, think and do?

Your writing homework, if you choose to accept it:

1. Answer the coaching inquiries to clarify your book's purpose.
2. Choose an initial form – how-to, memoir, image-based
3. Brainstorm elements for each chapter
4. Draft a sample chapter

Still with me? Let me know in a comment below how this helps you write your book.

Because this chapter asks you to do so much work, let's take two weeks to do it.