

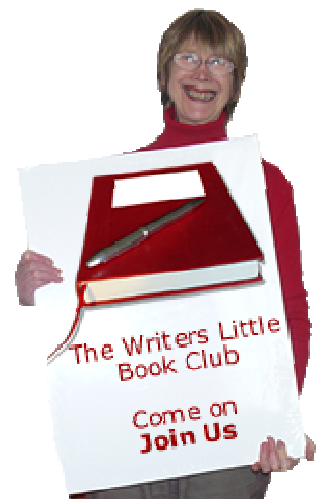


The writer's little book...

# How to Survive Writing A Book

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## The writer's little book...

# Writing a book: 5 strategies to reduce the stress

By Eileen Parr

Writing a book is a great experience isn't it? Well isn't it?

Yes of course it is. It's also a roller coaster ride of an experience that will take you from ecstasy to despair and back, all in five minutes sometimes.

Let's face it you're among the brave even to attempt it. And the funny thing is that while people get kudos for scaling unclimbed peaks, writers often don't get the applause they need for even beginning a book.

If I'd known what I know now about writing a book, and publishing it myself, then would I have attempted it? Of course, because it's been one of the most thrilling experiences of my life. But I'd have done it easier and faster if I'd known the following.

5 strategies to reduce the stress of writing a book

### 1. Look after yourself

What writers are looking out for especially at the beginning of a writing project is ideas. Those elusive, out of the ether strands that will make their fortune, create a masterpiece and silence all their critics.

What you need to understand is the sheer amount of energy it takes from you. Even if you bubble over with ideas, lucky you, then turning them into a book still demands resolution, discipline and courage.

Which means that you need to be kind to you.

#### **Nourish yourself on all levels.**

According to psychologists, we're all larks or owls. That is we're more energetic and more focused in the mornings or the evenings. I certainly fall into the larks section of humanity but that doesn't stop me working for the rest of the day if necessary.

Deadlines are no respecters of owlery or larkery theories and we have to make changes to our natural behaviour to function in this modern lifestyle.

I do believe though that working as far as possible to take advantage of your own natural rhythms makes sense and particularly if writing a book is an added rather than an integral part of your life. If you are an owl, then forcing yourself to get up early to create that 15 or 30 minutes writing space won't work.

You're working against your natural inclinations so the ideas won't flow, the words will be stilted and you'll dislike what you write and become discouraged.



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I'm also much in favour of treating yourself while you're writing. Whether that means chocolate, if it encourages you, music to lift your spirits and the warm socks. You need to maintain your energy levels so do whatever it takes – though I'd avoid too much caffeine and alcohol as a practical not a moral suggestion.

### 2. Surround yourself with positive energy

And leading on from that, you need to surround yourself with encouragement from others. You will attract negativity if you start a book.

Some people will be negative because that's the way they always are. Some will be negative because they can't bear anybody else writing the book they always meant to write and of course would... if only. Some will be negative because they're envious of your talent, your persistence and self belief.

Now I know that it may seem difficult to you if they're your nearest and dearest, but as far as writing goes, cut them out of your life. And I have to say frankly if they're like that about your writing, do you really want them around you spreading poison about anything. They're toxic people.

Recently I met a woman at a networking event who had dreamed of writing a book for years. Screwing up her courage, she began and because her opinion of her talent was low, she decided to give it to her partner to look at.

Inside 5 minutes he put her down by criticising her grammar, her turn of phrase and her ideas. Cool kind of guy I thought!

Not having seen her writing I couldn't comment on the standard. But what I do know is that if you've only just begun and you're a bit shaky then it takes a while to write yourself in to your subject whether it's a novel or a family history or a business book. I did my best to encourage her to continue and to help her find people to support her.

If you haven't got people who support your writing dreams, then look online for inspirational tapes and books that will keep up your positivity.

An idea I came across via Wim Wenger, *The Einstein Factor*, is a technique that has you creating your ideal mastermind group inside your head.

Of course our early attempts at writing need work on them but that's how we improve. By writing, then writing some more.

I like this quote from the American novelist, James Michener:



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“I have never thought of myself as a good writer. Anyone who wants reassurance of that should read one of my first drafts. But I’m one of the world’s great rewriters.”

### 3. Understand that you need help

It’s a wonderful fiction that the writer beavers away in their attic and produces the masterpiece. That’s all it is – a fiction. Even in the unlikely event that the book is good as it stands at the end of your first draft, you’ll still need people around you to take you through the other processes of producing a book.

I was lucky because behind me I had a support team who nagged me, gave me positive suggestions and kept me up to scratch when I reached the point, several times, when I couldn’t bear to look at the manuscript.

Here’s what I had help with:

- Developing the idea beyond my first instinct
- Developing the target audience for the book
- Designing the layout of the book
- Designing the book jacket
- Organising the printing
- Editing the final proof

Is it still my book? Of course, because the ideas, the thoughts, the approaches come from my brain. But you need people around you to bounce ideas off about the whole project.

I described the writing of a book as a roller coaster ride and it is.

One, because it’s impossible to maintain a straight line of energy for however long it takes to see the book from idea to launch. And the longer the project lasts the more true that is.

Two, because when the words are flowing and the ideas come it’s great. Then you get the downers when you check back at your work and think you should junk the lot!

Trust me, when you’ve worked on your book, you will hate it sometimes and almost be frightened of looking at it again. That’s when you need that energy and support from other people.

During the writing and editing of my book I can remember two occasions when I went to my designer and said “I think the whole thing is rubbish.” Fortunately for me she coaxed me back to a better perspective of the project.

Pouring your heart and soul on to the page is scary no matter how experienced you are as a writer. Each time you think, “Is this good enough?” Or “will people understand?”

If you haven’t a support system in place, then start to look out for people. They will appear, sometimes as if by magic when you need them.



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### 4. Remember that Rome wasn't built in a day

It is possible to write a book quickly. It's possible to write a book in as little as a week. Yes that's right one week. And I have seen some programmes promising you can write one in a weekend.

Do I believe it's possible?

Yes... you can feel a BUT coming can't you? Let's take a sensible look at this time thing.

When I tell people I wrote Writer's Little Book... with BIG IDEAS in two weekends, their eyes generally widen and their mouths drop in shock.

Am I lying? Absolutely not. I started the book August Bank Holiday weekend 2008. (for those of you not familiar with our British Bank Holidays that was the last weekend August 2008) and completed the first draft the following weekend.

HOWEVER:

I had been thinking about the book on and off since the end of June 2008 after I gave a workshop about writing a book.

After the first draft I left it alone for almost two months because of client deadlines and a holiday in Italy. So I really didn't go back to it till the end of October.

My designer got involved in November, we decided on a printer and a deadline for printing in December and the book was printed and launched in January 2009.

When we totted up all the time we spent on it, it would have come to about 9 working weeks between us. And that included the pre launch publicity and building a very basic website.

Short writing times are possible... when you've done some forward planning and some research. And it all depends on your starting point. Here are 3 examples:

If you're intending to write a family history you probably have already some information, photos, family tree research, letters and other documents.

That gives you a basis to begin and plan how you want to structure the book. But if you need to do that before you begin writing your time frame will lengthen.

If you're intending a novel, again planning may be necessary. Basic fact checking, on-site research, in depth knowledge about topics covered in your book. Even if it's science fiction you need to create a world.

As an aside I'd love to see the flow chart Audrey Nifenegger had for *The Time Traveler's Wife*!



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If you're writing a business book, you may already have written the base information to go in the book, in articles, blogs and other discussion papers. What you may need to decide is if it's in the correct format for the book and how you'll integrate all the material.

So writing time may be as little as a weekend, but your research and thinking time may add up to much more than that.

Also I believe that having a system to use to produce and write your book pays off. (you can find more about that in *Writer's Little Book... with Big Ideas*)

One of the things that you have to decide, especially if you're writing non-fiction is how long you want your book to be. That at least sets you a target. So depending upon your topic and persistence you can do a 60,000 word draft in 2 months.

You may not need to write so many words. I think that often would-be-authors put themselves off by assuming they need to write a 600 page tome like Harry Potter. Small can be good especially if you're appealing to a business market or an audience that wants information they can read in bite sized chunks.

To me whatever your book, planning is key. And that will affect how long it takes you to complete your book.

### 5. Accept you're a hero

That's right a hero. You will receive accolades and you should accept them. One of the things I found difficult to deal with was people telling me how fantastic I was to have written a book.

Almost I did the same as we do sometimes when our clothes are praised. What this old thing we're tempted to say. So with the book. What this little thing? Oh it was nothing.

I had to adjust my mindset to accept the praise of others... and to own my book. MY BOOK!

Over my working life in many different guises I've trained and mentored many people. The key to helping them succeed is to make it easier for them to find out what they want to do... then support them in moving towards it.

For years I had on my wall a piece of paper which I'd cut out of a magazine. It said "SUCCESSFUL PUBLISHED WRITER". At the top of the paper I added my name. Every day for years before I became a writer I looked at that piece of paper. And started to work towards it.

I'm very blessed now that I am a writer. I live my life as a writer and I appreciate what I did to bring it about. We have to believe in ourselves, our writing and our work. Without that self belief we'd never put pen to paper or hands on the keyboard again.

And I always acknowledge the help and inspiration I received on my progress.



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If you're at the beginning of your dream of being a writer then believe in yourself.  
You're a star – because you're a writer.

And most important of all.  
KEEP ON WRITING.

With all good wishes for your writing success.

*Eileen Parr*

PS. Let me know if you want extra things on the website. We're about to add some video and audio training in 2009 so if there's anything special you want us to cover then let us know at [KIRST](mailto:kirst@writerslittlebook.co.uk) WHAT'S THE EMAIL ADDRESS FOR ENQUIRIES?