

General Structure for a Self-Help Book

There's no great writing, only great re-writing

--- Attributed to Stephen King

Premise:

The purpose a self-help book is to provide the reader with a solution to personal problem they have. Whether it's parenting, becoming more spiritual, overcoming some kind of physical or emotional pain, or getting over their divorce, the following applies. If your own personal story is the crux of your solution, there's a good chance you're writing a memoir. If you're writing a memoir, chances are high the following DOES NOT apply to you.

A self-help book is a credible expert with experience in solving a specific problem from a strategic point of view. The solution must have been successfully applied to a large group of other people with the same core problem.

A memoir is the story of how one person overcame enormous odds to become successful at solving the core problem. This agency does not handle memoirs (except by famous individuals) because they are the most difficult nonfiction category to sell.

Structure:

The typical book is about 60K words. Divided into 12 chapters, that's about 5K words per chapter. Of those 5K words, about 2K can be anecdotes. Of those anecdotes, not more than 1 out of 3 can be about your life/experience. If your urge is to use yourself as the example in most chapters, you are probably writing a memoir.

Flow:

For myriad reasons, most self-help books are structured in the way described below. Primarily, it is unconsciously what readers expect.

Chapter 1: The sizzle of your book. Succinctly state the problem and the glorious results many people have achieved using your method. Connect with the reader by telling ONE comprehensive, short story about yourself and one great story of the biggest success someone else has had applying your brilliant solution. End Chapter One with a promise of relief.

Chapter 2: Pitch and test. This is where you want to pitch the reader on the solution but remind them they first have to begin where they are, which means they need to take a short quiz/test/assessment to figure it out for themselves.

It is mandatory that they score poorly on the test (or they have no reason to keep reading!) but not so poorly they give up all hope.

It should end with high hopes that starting in the next chapter, their problem will begin to be sequentially solved.

Chapters 3 – 11: The orderly unpacking of your solution. What has to happen first, second and third for the reader to achieve the promised solution?

Chapter 12: Strong encouragement. Positive wishes. A happy ending.

Of course you are at liberty to re-invent this process, or to refute this outline entirely. But that's only after your first book has sold 5,000 copies in 12 months or less and you're writing your second one.



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