

How long does it take to write a book?

Writing a book is easy when you know how to do it – like most things, the first time you try something it seems like a big deal and yet when you have finished, it becomes clear how easy it was. Isn't hindsight a great thing!

First decide on your time frame – if you want to get this book out by Christmas and it's already September, then you'll need to rush through these steps a lot more, but if you have more time to play with this won't necessarily mean getting your book out any faster. Once you set a time limit for yourself, break it down into three parts. First draft, Second draft and then production. Your first draft may only be half the contents that will end up being in the finished book, but it's a great way to start getting the information assembled and out of your note book or head and onto a manuscript.

From there, you can go back and fill in the gaps, flesh out the text, decide what illustrations and pictures will be needed, and check your research facts. This may take at least as long as the first draft. Allowing for approximately 2000 – 4000 words per chapter, and working on doing 1000 words per day is a reasonable way of approximating the time it will take to complete your first and second drafts.

All up this phase should take less than half of the time you need to get your book finished from your decided on starting point. From second draft phase, you'll need to have a good professional editing job done – and please don't scrimp on the cost of this part. A good editor will not only deal with word and sentence construction but also the grooming of the contents to ensure your book is going to be well read and of value to your intended readers.

Once the contents are finalised, your book can go to pre-press, where the construction of how it looks and the way the information flows visually is started. The fonts and layout are decided on and typesetting goes along with the design of your book cover and back cover layout. While this is happening, the testing of your titles should be happening and also the finalising of extra pages such as Acknowledgments, about the author section, foreword and introduction.

All up the pre-press phase (which also includes a final edit and grammar/spell check) will take about the same amount of time as your manuscript development. Final preparation for printing will also include some contacts with experts in your field who can review your book and provide endorsements and testimonial comments to be put on the front and back covers – this can also be time consuming part of prepress, but well worth doing as it can mean the difference between selling lots of books or just a few.

Printing can take a few days (if short run digital printed) or a few weeks.

If you allow between 16-30 weeks to create your book from start to finish, this is a time frame you can easily work to, that is realistic if you are focused on getting the parts you have to attend to yourself managed and responded to quickly. If you are slow to return information to your pre-press team or to arrange endorsements and even to sign off on designs, then this can add a lot of time to your book.