



# Plan It:

Your book, step by step

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How planning will get your word  
count from none to done

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## Creativity and Planning

First up, let me tell you just one thing. (It's an important one, so listen up!) Ready? Here it is:

**Planning will not kill your creativity.**

**Planning will enhance your creative side, giving it room and space to flourish.**

Most 'creative types' eschew planning, citing their flighty, bohemian, creative spirit that will most certainly be crushed by the draconian limits of a plan.

*It's ok. I get it. I really, really do.*

I used to think the same thing. **That creativity was a powerful enough force** that even with no plan – no container – it would just **magically manifest that thing** that I was thinking of doing/creating/writing.

I'd just follow my creative urges, and suddenly one day wake up having written a book, or painted the house, without really noticing, or doing anything consciously.

How did that go for me? Not as terrifically, cosmically well as I'd hoped, obviously.

I reached my mid-30s and **hadn't yet written** even One.Single.Word of that book that I wanted to write.

I reached my mid-30s and **hadn't travelled** to the places I'd wanted to travel to.

Add to those a whole lot of other dreams that **somehow didn't manifest** themselves into my life.

I reached my mid-30s and **felt like I had nothing to show for it.**

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Turns out that if I'd planned for these things, they'd have happened.

I know this sounds simple, but it eludes a lot of people - intelligent people - all the time.

We get busy with the everyday stuff we all have; getting up, going to work, family, friends, other needs that pull at us, and then there's always another episode to watch, and then you're tired and go to bed, to get up and do it all again tomorrow.

To get back to my story:

I'd confused **'following my bliss'** and **'letting it happen'** with **'having a plan that includes my dreams and taking action regularly to get them to happen.'**

The big Ah-ha! moment happened for me when I began to work in an online capacity. Suddenly I had to think about exactly what I wanted to say to people, how I wanted to say it, in which medium to say it, and what it was going to look like. In order to look all creative, and effortless, and quirky and, dare I say it, stick with my own brand, I needed a plan. When I tried it without one, I skipped from one project to another, never really finishing anything at all, and only had a bit of half-hearted scrappy work to show for it.

I fixed it by working with some sympathetic, creative people who took me by the hand and led me through some super-not-scary ways of planning these things. They made me realise that planning wasn't some sort of killjoy thing that dried creativity to a husk. Working with them made me realise that planning created the path for creativity to follow.

**If creativity was the molten bronze, then planning was the form that I then got to pour it into.**

If I'd poured my molten bronze out just anywhere, I'd have ended up with a puddle-shaped bit of bronze once it had cooled. With a form - or mould - I could end up with a sculpture that looked the way I wanted it to. It gave my creativity form, and function, and better still, I could change the plan at will, to better reflect changes in my thinking as I went along and learned things.



And that's the other bit about planning. It works best when it's flexible, reviewed often, and grows as you do.





## What is planning?

This might seem like an odd question, and a little simplistic. But it's a necessary one, so that you know what I'm talking about, and can understand it in your own way.

Planning can mean all sorts of things. To some, it's scheduling. To others, it's one line, an intention in one sentence, pinned up where they can see it. Still others see it as a detailed scaffolding on which to hang their creative work. It's different things to different people. But there are a few common points that are worth covering.

Firstly, Planning your book is important.

Whichever way you do it, and we'll get to that later in this book, having a plan will almost always make the difference between getting a book project off the ground and done, and having it still hanging over your head for years.

**A plan also gives you a structure, a map to work with.** It lets you know what to put in and what to leave out. It also **lets you know when you're finished**, which is an important thing to know.

More specifically than that, **planning a book is the intentional writing down** – or depiction in some way - **of the journey that you want to take your reader on.**

It's a detailed map that **provides you with a thread to follow** in the days that you work on your book, and you can't see where you're going for the forest of words you're surrounded by.

It's the document that **reminds you of where you were going when you forget.**

It's what you refer to when you realise that you've followed a tangent without noticing, and need to figure out how to get back to your point.



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The act of writing or making a plan makes concrete your intentions, not least of all to yourself. It commits you to a project. Not to the many ideas and inspirations that are floating about in your head and that wake you up in the middle of the night in flashes of brilliance, but to one specific one.

**The chosen one.**

The idea that, above all others, at this point in time speaks loudest and needs writing the most.

This is a necessary thing.



If you don't choose one idea, you won't write any.  
(I know this first hand, remember?)

By choosing an idea, and squirreling the others away for the Winter to incubate nicely until their own Spring, you let that one idea bloom.

Planning your book lays out the stringlines that will show you where to put the foundations, and how to build on it so that when your reader looks at it they know it's a solid house.

There are a number of techniques that you can use to plan your book, which is great news, because you can choose whichever suits you.

But before we go into the nitty gritty of types of plan and how to use them, we need to talk about the one person without whom you just don't have a book.

Your reader.



## Your Most Treasured Reader (MTR)

Oftentimes when people get stuck writing their book, they've lost sight of the most important person in the equation: their reader.

At it's simplest, the idea that there is one person who is going to be totally served by their book gets them back on track.

There are a few nuances about connecting with your reader that I like to talk about, and it's these nuances that lead me to calling the specific reader that they help to define your "**Most Treasured Reader,**" or **MTR.**

First up, you need to remember **why** you were going to write a book in the first place.

Sure, you might have just had that impulse to write. You might have thought, "I should follow that gut feeling that's telling me to write a book; my gut feelings are always right."

And I think that's true. If you're disciplined enough, and write regularly enough, you'll write a book.





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Unfortunately that isn't something that happens often.

Most writers get stuck or discouraged, or peter out with their book at some point. This is why there are statistics like:

“80% of people want to write a book one day, and only a tiny proportion of those do,”

and others of that ilk in common currency on the internet.

Getting back to that initial gut feeling though, usually I find that underneath that is an idea of *who* you can help by actually writing that book.

Most (if not all) books are written with someone in mind, either consciously or unconsciously.

What I'm advocating here is getting that reader-who-needs-you-most into your consciousness, so that you can write to them directly.

**Imagine them.**

Give them clothes, and a haircut.

Make them someone you can picture as they go about their daily life, with their problems, desires and thoughts in their heart – those problems, desires and thoughts that you can help them with through the writing of your book.



There are ways that you can get yourself to a more powerful vision of who your MTR is, and we're going to explore one of those now.





## Get to know your MTR

*I'm going to walk you through an exercise to visualise and get to know your MTR.*

**One:** To start, take out your favourite writing tools – be they pen and paper, laptop, voice recorder or whatever – and get comfortable, with your tools within easy reach.

**Two:** Sit still and take three deep, grounding breaths. Let yourself be fully in the moment, in the present. This is about letting go of where you've just come from, what happened yesterday, or what's for dinner, or things that happened years ago. You need to Be Here Now, as the hippies used to say.

**Three:** When you feel like you've 'arrived' in the present moment, think about your writing project; the one you've decided that you'll concentrate on above all else.

Think about how you feel about it. The inspiration you experienced when you first thought of it, and how it will feel to have it done.

It's allowing yourself to feel excited about the project – to admit that it ignites something in you – that will give you the fuel to get it done.

**Four:** Once you're feeling this, ask yourself to picture the one person who most needs to read what you're planning to write. Let them come forward out of your imagination. Greet them like an old friend, and allow them to take form in front of you. Feel exactly how much they need your words – those words you're going to write, just for them.

**Five:** Then, write down – or record in some way – exactly who your Most Treasured Reader is, and why they need your work so much.

The more detail you can muster in your description of your Most Treasured Reader, the better. This is the person you'll use to keep you on track when you waver, to guide you to better serve your reader when you doubt what you're doing.

This is the one person who truly, deeply needs what you're writing.





Now start to ask yourself some questions about your MTR.

Begin simple, with appearance, and get more complex as you go on.

Some guiding questions that I've found helpful in getting to know a Most Treasured Reader are:

- What do they look like?
- What do they wear?
- What is their hair like?
- Eye colour?
- Are they introverted or extroverted?
- More serious, or lighter?
- What would their ideal social outing be?
- What do they enjoy doing - alone, and when with others?
- What is their favourite food?
- Do they have a favourite object that they're attached to?
- What car do they drive/bike do they ride/transport do they use?
- What would they order from the menu if they went to your favourite café?

And getting a little more into the key questions:

- What is their greatest hope?
- What is their biggest challenge?
- What do they secretly wish they didn't have to deal with?
- What is their greatest strength? And
- What is their Achilles heel? (The one flaw that brings them undone again and again)

Write it all down, or record it in some way.

If you've followed this process, you'll now have a very detailed description of your **Most Treasured Reader**.



This snapshot will provide you with someone to talk to through the medium of your book.

It will give you someone to connect with through your words.



And it gives you someone who needs you.

Being needed is key to being able to write when you sit down to write.

**If you doubt your usefulness, then writing will be more difficult.** But if you are able to remind yourself that there is someone out there who needs your work, sitting down to work on your book will be easier.

And for those of you who are brilliantly analytical, and have all along been thinking,

“Yes, but this is an imaginary person! They’re not *real!*”

Remember: there are 7 billion people on the planet.

**There’s a fair chance that a good chunk of those people will need to hear what you say.**

The trick here is tuning into an individual, rather than a group. A group quickly becomes faceless, and generic, and when you’re writing, that’s unhelpful. Narrowing down to **THE** one person who needs you, and giving them a face and identity that you can relate to helps enormously.

**Fact:** If you don’t write what your Most Treasured Reader needs, then they won’t receive what they most need to hear. They will go hungry for want of your book.

THIS is what gives them the title of “Most Treasured.”

Because if you **treasure your reader**; cherish them **above your own resistance and awkwardness** about putting words on the page; then **they will be the catalyst** that helps you **to get your book written.**



## Being of service

Your MTR helps you to focus yourself on being of service to someone, rather than coming from the ego place of “I’m writing this book,” and bestowing it upon an adoring public.

If you’re setting out to help someone, then it’s a much easier ride. There is less ego involved, so automatically there’s less resistance.

If you begin with “I’m writing this book, because I’m a writer and therefore I write,” your endeavours become tied up in your ego, and before long perfectionism will rear its head, and you’ll be spending your time critiquing your work and fighting to get writing.

Being of service makes writing easier, because you’re trying to help someone. It’s much easier to make things that are less than perfect because when it’s in a helping context, anything is better than nothing.

How does this relate to your plan?

It relates to your plan because knowing your Most Treasured Reader, and wanting to help them, lets you **map out where you want to take them over the course of your book.**

Knowing their most secret problems – and knowing you have knowledge that your reader needs to get through and over those problems – helps you to figure out what they need to know from you to get past their concerns and into a better space. (Even if you’re writing fiction.)



## Types of Plan

There are so many, many different ways that you can plan a book out there that it's totally possible to spend way too much time reviewing and choosing exactly what planning process or tool you're going to use, under the guise of 'working on my book,' rather than planning that thing, and getting to the writing - which, incidentally, is the **ONLY** way your book will get written.

Before I go through the most common ways of planning here, I'd like to remind you that if you're a human being who has lived a while and presumably made it through life up until this point, then **you will have a fairly good idea of what sort of thinking will get you through a project in a streamlined way.**

I'm not saying that you have it all sorted, and your life is shiny and bright with no gunge around your bathroom taps - no, not at all.

What I'm saying here is that you will have a vague, "I like a list!" thoughts, or, "I need it all written in hieroglyphs because my creativity fades away when actual words are used," type thinking. The point here is to know yourself, and how you work.

**Really Important Note:** no one proclivity is better than any other. The super-important thing is to bring what you know of yourself and how you work best to the surface, and remember it.

Just take a moment and think about the last thing/event/day you had to plan out.

**How did you do it?** Did you write a little list down the page, with a checkbox drawn next to each item? Did you Mind Map it, with a central idea in the middle of the page, and branches for each main idea coming from there? Or was it a Post-It note collage on your wall?

**You'll find that if you use a planning method that suits your own self, you'll get further faster.** Either because you're used to that way of planning, and know how it works, or because you've found the method that suits you down to the ground, and it hooks you, keeps you honest, and gets it done. Hopefully, it'll be both.



A note about staying with it

**Make sure that you make planning your book interesting for yourself.**

If you have Bright Shiny Object Syndrome (aka rampant procrastination), then you might have to **bribe** yourself into planning. The most effective way of doing this that I've come across is through stationary. (And chocolate. But we'll stick to stationary.)

**If you're making an honest-to-goodness, hold-it-in-your-hand plan,** then using your favourite pens or markers, stickers, sticky notes, having a new notebook or even a massive roll of paper to unscroll in the manner of a herald each time you work on it can make the difference between actually getting your plan done, and suddenly finding yourself taking an old toothbrush to the bathroom tiling.



According to my friends at [mindwerx](http://mindwerx) – experts on the brain and creativity – making things colourful and fun to look at will keep you interested for longer, which makes it easier to get something done.

Being able to hold it in your hand/touch it also adds a sense to the endeavour, which helps you remember it and cements it in your head as something you're committing to doing.







**If you're using software to plan** – techno-whiz that you are – then it's paramount to make sure that your software has features that engage you. Can you change the colours of your typing? Can you highlight things, insert pictures? **Basically, make it as tactile as you can even though it's on your screen.**

You'll have to bribe yourself in a different way if you are planning on a screen, too. Make a great cup of your favourite tea or coffee. Buy good chocolate, or succulent fruit. Or whatever it is that treats your taste buds. I have friends who use essential oils in either a burner or spray bottle to make their workspace smell nice.

I aspire to be like them, but I usually just **sit down and get to it.**

**Music can also help**, as long as you're able to work through it, and not go off on your own little dance-a-thon and forget all about your planning.

Those important points again?

- Make sure you engage your brain in some way.
- Make planning colourful, and fun.
- Bribe yourself with treats and stationary if you have to.

It's the getting it done that's important here, because that moves you forward.

Most common planning methods

I'm going to go through four different kinds of plans here, because most other types are derivatives of these. The four I'm outlining also happen to cover the major 'types' of ways that people work: linear, visual, and kinaesthetic.

Let's start with a look at the one that most people start out using: **the linear plan.**







## The Linear Plan, aka The List

Essentially, this is a list of chapters, telling you one after the other what comes next.

This is for people – and I’m told that it’s a small percentage who work this way effectively – whose brains take them through a process in a logical, ordered way.



### The How

Write down your working title, and under that, write each chapter heading or broad area you’re covering.

You can make it even more detailed by writing down the sub-headings or sub-topics within each chapter or section too. Also write down what you’re going to cover, or other pertinent information under there.

**It’s important to capture random thoughts and aha moments.**

Go through from start to finish, stepping through it all, and getting it all on paper.



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Ways to make it work:

The problem with the list form of planning is that if you don't give it enough space between the lines, and just smooch it all up tight and cramped, then when you have extra ideas (and you will have extra ideas!) you've got nowhere to put them in where they should go, and have to re-do the whole thing.

**It's for this reason** that most people giving advice about planning a creative endeavour will tell you to avoid the list like the plague.

They say that it stifles your creativity, and doesn't give your brain the space to make associations.

If you read enough of their stuff, and you're a natural list maker, it can make you feel like you need to hide your natural linear talent. Don't!

**If there's anything that kills creativity fast, then it's feeling like you're somehow not doing it right.**

Your inner critic has enough to do with just trying to stop you from writing at all costs, without also giving it a job critiquing your choice of planning method. So give that critic a deckchair and a drink with an umbrella in it, and tell it to stay there while you plan.

**There is a solution to the cramped and stilted list**, and that is to make sure that if you're going to do a plan in list form, **make it big.**

Make it spacious.

Leave lots of lines or space between the ideas for chapters or sections. Make sure that you have space to add things, or to cross them out, or to draw an arrow to somewhere that an idea would fit better.

Or, get ok with the idea that you're going to be drawing up this plan again and again until you get it the way you want it. Either is fine.



The really, really important thing here, and one that I'm going to repeat over and over again before we're finished is this: **keep your eye on the prize.**

Get your book planned, somehow, somehow, then get writing.

**It's the only way to become a writer.**

And remember to use your favourite pens or markers. Try different colours, or populate it with stickers if you like.

Make it yours, not some facsimile of what you think a plan should look like.

**You're the one in charge here, remember?**



So to go over it again, the list type of plan needs a few different features:

- **Space**, and lots of it
- **Logical order** – whether that's naturally occurring, or created through numbering the items after you've written it all down, or drawn arrows about the place, putting things in their place, and
- **Fun pens or markers** to write with, or some other bribe to get yourself to do it. Because stationary is always a good thing, and making sure you get your plan done will move you forward with your book





## The Mind Map

A mind map can be drawn in many ways, but the official MindMap™ was invented by Tony Buzan, an energetic and intellectually prolific British expert on the brain and creativity.

He maintains that the form of a Mind Map™ **allows you to see the associations between ideas**, gives you space to fill in other ideas as they develop, and also **creates something that is super-easy for your brain to engage with, making it more fun, more productive**, and therefore something that you'll stick with.

It's a great grab-bag of positives, so if you're already doing something like a mind map to plan, then great!

And if you're new to them, then giving it a go may be just what you need. (For more information on Mind Maps as Tony Buzan teaches them, go to [www.mindwerx.com](http://www.mindwerx.com) )



## The How

To create a mind map, you'll either need some paper and coloured pens or markers, or the iMind Map, or Mind Manager software – a free trial is available for both.



**Turn your page so that it's landscape rather than portrait**, so that you'll have more space to play with.

The next step is to **put your central purpose in the middle of the page**, either as a colourful heading, or a pictorial representation.

If I was planning a book on how to grow seedlings, for example, I might write: "Seedling Growing Handbook" in nice loopy orange letters, or draw a book, and a sprouting seed. Or both.

The point with a mind map is to engage your play brain.

Getting creative and either drawing a picture, sticking on an appropriate sticker, or choosing an image from the software's library allows your brain to access its creative riches, and lets it also furnish you with more ideas for your book.

Then, when you've got your central idea down, you draw branches coming from it, one per concept/chapter/book section.

Make these as colourful as you like as well, with either just one word on each, or as few words as possible. It's a concept map, not a treatise with scads of text.

On the next page is an example of a MindMap plan of the book *Hidden Gold*, by Bill Jarrard and Johan Kruthof. The MindMap was created by Jennifer Goddard, co-creator of [mindwerx.com](http://mindwerx.com).

**The hand-drawn map has a central image, with branches coming from it, outlining the chapters and sub-concepts in a radial manner.**

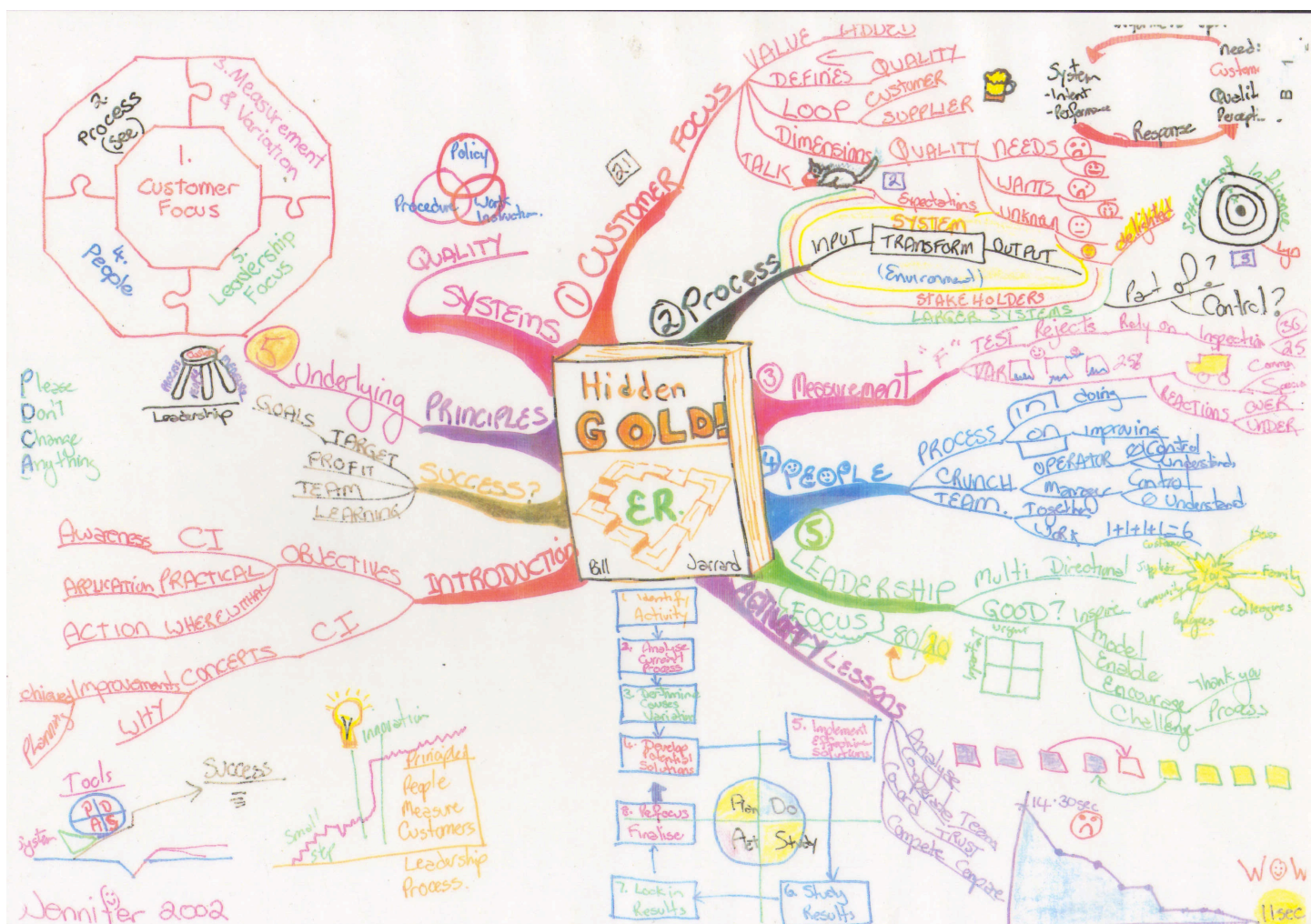
Unsurprisingly for a way of making plans that was pioneered by an expert on the brain, it actually ends up looking something like the dendrites of the brain as depicted in a psychology textbook.







Hidden Gold mindmap, by Jennifer Goddard



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Usefulness quotient:

Himself (my husband) uses MindMapping software to plan out not just his book(s), but also major projects that he's running.

When I vox-popped him to find out which software he preferred, he nominated Mind Manager, because he says that while **iMindMap is prettier, Mind Manager has better planning possibilities and tools.**

Always practical, that man.

Mind Mapping is particularly useful if you have ideas out the wazoo, and know that they're not going to come out in any coherent order.

A Mind Map allows you to decide on idea themes, and then add branches to each theme branch as and when ideas present themselves.

This way you're not going to need to re-do your linear list five times a week just because you can't fit in the next great idea that you had in the shower this morning.





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## Ways to make it work

The main consideration with Mind Mapping is to have a huge piece of paper. Planning your book using Mind Mapping and an A4 piece of paper is just not going to be practical. Your words will be so cramped that you'll just annoy yourself, and that's not going to help you at all.

Go out to the newsagent's or your local stationary store and get yourself a pad of paper in size ginormous. And if they don't have one, ask why. Strike a blow for artistic types in your area.

Once you have your super-sized pad of paper, turn it landscape (like the doggie, not the portrait, remember) and have at it with your coloured pens.

If you don't have coloured pens – and how you got this far without realizing that you need coloured pens I don't know – then you'll need to **draw little pictures or hieroglyphs** or some sort of non-wordy thing, to keep your brain engaged in the process.

Because if it's not clear enough already, Mind Mapping is about **keeping your brain as engaged as possible**, so that it furnishes you with as much inspiration as possible.

### To go over it again, to make a Mind Map:

- Get a ginormous piece of paper, and turn it landscape.
- Draw or write your central book idea in the middle of the paper.
- Create branches that stem from your central picture, one branch per new idea.
- Draw new branches off your idea branches, to develop and grow your book plan.
- Use as few words as possible, and not swathes of text.
- Keep adding to it in as colourful and non-verbal a way as possible, to keep your brain fully creatively engaged.



## The Post-It Plan



If you are like any other procrastinating writer out there, you'll most likely have a stash of stationary that contains oodles of **Post-It notes** somewhere in your house.

Put these to good use, and **use them to plan out your book.**

You'll thank me, because firstly, you'll get your book planned out and then you can get to the writing, and secondly, because you'll use up some stationary and can then justify going out and buying more.

Use whichever sticky note/Post-It note you like.

Use the traditional yellow ones that eventually curl up and drop off whatever they're stuck on.

Use heart shaped pink ones.

Rainbow ones with stars on.

Anything at all, as long as it's got a sticky bit.

There are even sticky notes available in A3 size – which is gigantic!

The beauty of the Post-It Plan is that you can populate any flat surface you like with your sticky notes.

Use a wall that you see often, or one that you don't. The desk, dining table, or floor have all been used to good effect by writers that I know.

Don't worry about using up all the space you have available and then having to pack it up, because you can take a photo of your plan before clearing the table for dinner. That way you'll have the photo to hand for when you need to lay the plan out again, or just keep the photo for easy reference.

This is also a very tactile, kinaesthetic way of planning your book. By physically moving the notes about, you're using your body as part of the planning process in a way that merely typing or writing with a pen doesn't allow. And that's great for your memory and creativity.



## The How

**Write down one idea per sticky note.** You can either use one to name the chapter/section/concept, and then group others underneath or around that main one, or just write down one idea per note and then order them.

Just **get as many ideas down on notes as you can**, to start off with. If a random idea hits, just write it on another note, and keep going.

Once you've had your storm of ideas and have a whole flotilla of sticky notes, then you can **play with grouping them**, and making sure that you have them in an order that feels good and makes sense to you.

The best thing about this plan is that it's so **easy to change**. (Keeping the plan flexible is something we'll get to later on) So if you have some new thinking bubble to the surface while you're writing, you can easily just shuffle your paper sticky notes to reflect that. You can also add new ones whenever you like, too.

## Ways to Make it Work:



If you're sticking notes all over the table or the floor, you might want to **take a photo every now and again** so that you have a record of which note was where.

That means that if your dog, cat, toddler or other disruptive force of nature comes in and messes with them, all that thinking isn't lost. **You'll be able to recreate it in a jiffy.**



If it's possible, **use a wall convenient to your working space** to stick all of your notes on. This way you have a visual record of your plan right where you can look at it as you write.

Again, make your plan as engaging to your own brain as possible:

The use of **coloured** and **differently shaped sticky notes** will do this, as well as using your **favourite coloured pens and markers** to write with. Couple this with a chocolate bribe, and you've got a planning party that you'll stick with.

To summarise the Post-It Plan:

- Use whatever sticky note-type thing you have hanging around
- Use colour to keep interested
- Take a photo of your sticky note spread if there's a chance that it'll get messed with by the other inhabitants of your house, and
- Shift notes around at will – play with the order until it works for you



## The Chaotic, Everything-In Plan

This is the plan that happens on the fly.

The plan that you usually only realise is a plan once you've been chewing at an idea for a while, and **making random notes** and **doodling** about it here and there, and suddenly you realise you've got a collection of **lists**, **mapped scrawls**, **post it notes** and **voice memos** that, taken together, showcase your idea for your book.

The trick if you find yourself in this position is to **keep track of all the notes** and **diagrams** and **café napkins** that have been scribbled on in the course of thinking about your book as you go about your day.

There are a number of ways to do this, and I'll go through them now:

### Corkboard

Get a corkboard. And tacks.

**Tack up everything you've got that has anything to do with your book.** Anything and everything: ticket stubs, scribbled notes, lists, cards, small pieces of writing and anything else at all that you've collected in your travels. Doing this is both **tactile** and **visual**.

If you do it well, you'll also have a really great looking corkboard too.

Basically, this is about making a space that can hold all of your book thinking 'stuff.'

**Note:** this works with a shoebox too, but a shoebox doesn't let you see all of your notes at once. This could be a good thing, because corkboards can be distracting to your writing. But it can also be bad, because you can't just glance at it and get an autocorrect for the direction that you're going in your writing. Getting out the shoebox can be a drag.

**What to do:** do what's best for you. If you have a butterfly mind that gets easily distracted, then you'll perhaps like the shoebox idea. If you like having something to glance at to get an immediate course correction, then get a corkboard.



**The other thing you can do with your notes and scribbles is:**

Consolidate

Consolidate. Decide on a planning method from the ones we've discussed above, and use your collected bits and pieces of notes to create a new big plan.

This way you'll have all of your notes and ideas in one place, and won't be at risk of losing any floating pieces of paper. (Let's face it: cat related corkboard disasters can and do happen.)

If you do consolidate into one big plan, then you might want to get a shoebox or other pretty stationary type box in which to keep your bits and pieces anyway. When you're a famous author, they might be worth something. Maybe. Or not.



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## What to include

**If this seems obvious to you, then go: go and plan your book, get it done, and then write.**

If you're still a little fuzzy about it, read on.

**A plan can be as detailed or as broad as you like.** This gives you a lot of scope for changing things up for yourself.

What I usually find as I go through my plan is that at the start – when I first take myself by the scruff of the neck, frog march myself to my desk and put the frighteners on myself and then actually start planning – it goes like this:

I start out very vague.

I usually have some main topics or themes that I can begin with, so I map out those. And as I go along, noting down my plan, the broad topic areas become more detailed. I make sure to faithfully write down each and every and all ideas that come my way in the planning process, because they all have the potential to be useful.

You never know when the idea that will give your book that va va voom you've been worried about it not having will turn up. It can even look a little ugly duckling like at the start, and you might not notice that it is, in fact, The One.

**So start where you are.** Write down a **working title**, if you have one. Then go through your **main ideas**, getting them down and working through them with your **secondary ideas**.

At some point, you should also **stop and look over the plan**.

It could be that some sort of imbalance becomes apparent to you when you step back: this happens to me a LOT.





A good plan will have the **beginning**, the **middle** and the **end** mapped out.

This goes against the grain of many, many book writing advice-givers out there. There are lots and lots of people who tell you to 'write what comes,' and to 'trust the process.' This is great! I can hippy it up with the best of them.

But for me, and for a large majority of the people I work with, **having the guidance of a plan gets their book finished sooner.**



**The main elements you need to include in your plan are:**

The beginning

**How are you going to start?**

Having this mapped out (and bearing in mind that you can go and change it later/during the editing process/daily if you want) will make it much easier to start writing. And that's what you plan's there to do.

There are **lots of ways to start a book**, including but not limited to:

- **A quote**; either inspirational, pertaining to your book, or some obscure thing that only links in a way that will become obvious through reading on
- **An anecdote** about yourself that pertains to the topic
- **A provocative opinion** that you then go on to explain, or
- **A straight up** tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em introduction.





## The middle

This is the **main body of your plan**, and your book. Here's where you **write down the big ideas, and the smaller ones that relate to them**.

Any ideas that relate to the topic but don't seem to fit as a branch of their own or under another branch can either just be written down anyway, wherever they seem to fit, or my preferred way, which is to put them in a 'miscellaneous' section.

**Do this until you run out of ideas.**

Any ideas that you get that don't seem to fit into this particular plan, note down separately - Evernote is one app that many, many authors use to track ideas and inspirations - and keep going with the ones that do.

## The end

When you've squeezed the ideas sponge dry, **write down that you need a conclusion** at the end, and stop.

The **conclusion**, according to every English teacher that I've ever had, is to 'tell 'em what you've told 'em.' So plan to do that, unless you've got another spiffy idea in your brain that will finish off your book - if not with a bang, then at least with a satisfying rounding off feeling.



**Hooray!** You've made a plan for your book.

**Look at it with pride, enjoy the moment.**

(Because the hard work is yet to come.)





## What now?

Now that you've decided on a planning method, and have put it into place, you (presumably) have a book plan – and book - on the go.

And if you've decided to just read this through first to see if I really know what I'm talking about, then just keep going. I'm sure to come to a stop soon, so you can go and make your plan and get writing on your book.

**The next major point I want to impress upon you is this:**

Plans should be flexible.

I know! I know. I've just made you get all concrete and **put a plan down on paper, so that you have a roadmap to writing your book.**

This is great though. **It means that you know where you're going.**

You can't get to the funfair in the obscure town down the road without a roadmap. (Bear with me here, I know we have Google Maps now and we're beyond all that map business etc, but!)

**It's the same with a book plan.**

You need to know what you're going to be telling your reader, so that you can help them the most.

You need to know where you're taking the reader so that you don't end up in a dead end alley with menacing shadows about the place.

The beauty of a plan, once you've made one, is that you get to break it. Like rules.

The way it happens is this:

You **write from your plan**. And write, and write.

Then one day as you write, **you have another idea**.

A new idea that wasn't part of the original thinking and planning for your book. This new idea is most likely a tangent, or a useful path for you to follow to see where it leads.

**Write it down**. Take some notes.

**Once you've done this, at this point, you should review your plan.**

This can happen in a number of ways:

- You can just **jot the idea down** and keep writing.
- Or you can be more formal about it and **figure out where it fits**, put it in, and re-jig the rest of the plan and your writing to fit it in now.
- Or you can **write the section that you've just thought of**, save it and make a note on your physical plan and get on with writing your book.

Whatever you do, **make sure that you make time to think about your new idea**, and whether it fits into your book in any way.

The worst possible thing to do here is to ignore the idea, and slavishly follow your plan.

This can lead to your writing petering out and your book feeling stale.

The golden nugget of information here is this: your plan and your book are live artifacts. **They live, breathe and grow.**

Keeping them static through some misplaced devotion to the idea of having your 'plan' and following it will lead to your book becoming stilted and awkward. If it has movement and wants to grow, let it. **That's what it's for.**



On the other hand, if your idea is so strong that your plan is an unchanging container for your book, then that's just fine.

What I'm emphasising here is the tendency for us writers to just follow the plan without thought, ignoring – and worse, killing off – all the possibilities that present themselves to us on the way to the finished book.





What to do now:

What I'd strongly recommend here is **to put a few dates into your calendar** or schedule to **review your plan** anyway. This way you've **built in the possibility of expansion**, and know that you have review in place.

If you've got **scheduled time** in place where you know that you're going to have a look at your plan, and also have a look at what you've written and see whether they match up, you can **relax into the writing** without worrying too much about course correcting during the process.

This also means that **you know what to do when another path for your writing reveals itself**. You know that you jot it down, and look at how it fits.

It may just open up a whole new vista for your book that you never thought possible. (In which case, you'll most likely need a new plan... sorry about that.)

The final thing that I'll say to you here is this:

Go forth. **Plan your book**. Give it some love and attention.

But!

**Then go and write the damn thing**. Don't get stuck in planning: get writing as soon as ever you can.

That's it.

Plan.

Write.

Review.

Write.

And know that I'm cheering you on all the way.

X

tamara



About me:



I'm a writer's coach and writer living in the hills outside of Melbourne, Australia with my husband, two children, dog, cat and nine chickens.

I love chocolate in all forms, and believe that thinking and logic – as in 'common sense' - are underrated. When I'm not writing articles and blog posts, I'm dreaming up new veggie patch plans and scheming to foil the local rabbits.

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