



**DONE IS BETTER THAN PERFECT:
WHY A SPEEDY FIRST DRAFT WINS**
Emily Crookston

There are several good reasons to write a business book if you're a business owner:

- To spread the word about your company.
- To generate leads for one-on-one consulting.
- To increase credibility and authority and stand out as the go-to expert in your industry.

But did you know that as high as 97% of people who start writing a book never finish it?

Why?

Imposter feelings? Writer's block?

In actuality, the main culprit is overthinking.

As much as I'm a proponent of people doing more thinking in this age of underthinking ("the best thing about AI is that I don't have to think anymore" [Sigh.]), it is possible to go too far in the opposite direction. As a recovering overthinker, I know this better than most. Writing used to be a painful process, until it became my job, and I realized the way to make it more enjoyable was to get through that initial draft as quickly as possible.

Now I'm here to spread the good news—done is better than perfect. Make this your mantra every time you sit down to write and you'll avoid the biggest mistake I see first-time authors make: overthinking the writing process and underthinking everything else.

WRITE YOUR MESSY DRAFT FIRST

Why aim to write a messy first draft? Despite my proselytization above, I probably don't need to tell you that done is better than perfect. But, in case you suspect that I'm asking you to cut corners, let me assure you that writing a messy first draft is the furthest thing from cutting corners.

I want you to get that messy first draft finished because you are a fast thinker. If you've ever had the experience of your fingers not being able to keep up with your brain, you know what I'm talking about (by the way, another great option is to record yourself speaking and then use AI to transcribe the recording). You have so many thoughts flowing through your head that you need to get them out quickly.

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Not only does writing a speedy first draft help you shake those ideas loose, it feels so satisfying. Once you have a complete first draft, you will feel amazing. No matter what happens from here, you have enough words in a book-like structure to say that you've written a business book. That's no small thing.

GET THE MESSY DRAFT OUT OF YOUR HEAD AND ONTO THE PAGE

Here are some tips to get you going:

PLAN, BUT DON'T OVERPLAN.

You may be overthinking before you even get to the writing stage. If you're a planner—as in you've never met a problem that couldn't be solved with a to-do list or a spreadsheet—you may be tempted to spend weeks or months plotting out your book. You may find yourself luxuriating in the mind mapping process, writing and re-writing your outline, creating pages of hand-written notes, spending hours hunting down the perfect scented oil that will tell your brain it's time to write (the right answer is sweet basil), etc.

Here's the problem with overplanning: You can psych yourself out of writing the book. Planners adore security and there's a lot more security in planning than in writing your book. At the planning stage, your book is perfect. Spend too much time planning and that idealized, perfect vision becomes your worst enemy. You risk never moving out of the planning stage.

Another problem with overplanning is that at some point you'll probably be tempted to do some research and read other books on your topic. This sounds like the right thing to do; after all, you don't want to repeat what's already out there.

Here's why this is a bad idea: (a) It could cause you to second guess your idea. You might read a book that you believe is too similar to the book you want to write and it could totally derail your project; (b) it could lead to (unintentional) plagiarism. If you read too many books on your topic, it will become difficult to disentangle your own idea from those of others; and (c) it can become a procrastination crutch. Reading one book on your topic will lead you to add three more to your list and so on.

To avoid getting stuck in the planning stage, try this mind mapping process:

- **Step 1: Rapid Ideation:** Grab a stack of notecards and brainstorm every idea you can think of for your business book. Avoid editing yourself at this stage.
- **Step 2: Group Like Ideas:** Group your ideas into rough categories. This is one reason I like using notecards, because you can easily arrange and rearrange them into piles.
- **Step 3: Take Out the Trash:** Decide what really belongs in your book and what ideas might belong in a different book or something else you want to create, like a workshop or a course.
- **Step 4: Arrange Ideas into Chapters:** Put the remaining ideas into an order that makes sense, e.g., from fundamental to optional strategies or chronologically in terms of where your reader should start.

- **Step 5: Let it Simmer:** Sleep on what you've planned so far. Go for a walk. Watch a movie. Give your brain a break.
- **Step 6: Ask What's Missing:** Once you return to your mind map with a fresh head, check to see if you notice any gaps that need to be filled. Fill them in.
- **Step 7: Behold Your Minimum Viable Product (MVP):** Now you have a rough outline for your book and you can start writing.

Trust that you've been preparing to write this book from day one of your business, if not longer.

SET A WEEKLY WORD COUNT GOAL.

Once you are ready to write, you want to avoid overthinking the writing itself. The fastest route to getting your book written starts with some simple math (it's really simple; I promise).

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How long should your book be? I recommend 40,000 words for a business book. When printed, 40,000 words is between 100 to 150 pages (depending on font size, margin size, and how many visuals your book includes). I call this an “airplane book” because it can be read on a three- or four-hour flight. And it’s the ideal length for a business book, which readers want to digest quickly and put into action.

Now, take your total word count goal and divide it by the number of weeks until you’d like to have your messy first draft finished. Say you’re giving yourself six months (24 weeks) to get to a publishable manuscript. If you want to get your initial draft finished by the midpoint (another one of my recommendations), you have 12 weeks to write 40,000 words.

$40,000 / 12 = 3,333.33$ words per week (to make it easy, you can round up to 3,334). You have your goal, now your job is to hit that goal each week. Do some timed writing sessions to get an idea of how many words you write per hour and schedule the time you need to hit your weekly word count goal.

Again, avoid doing a lot of research during the drafting phase. It might feel easy to hit your weekly word count goal if you’re summarizing others’ work, but this is false progress. Your goal is to write 3,334 words each week about your unique angle. Once you know what you think, you can decide where to bring in additional research to enhance your point of view.

GET YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM IN PLACE.

So many of us think of writing as a solitary pursuit. I think this is a travesty.

We have this image in our heads of a scribe with a long beard, sitting alone in a room, hunched over his desk for hours every day, emerging only when he has no more words to write. Writing is so much more fun, however, when we seek out feedback, support, and accountability from others.

Many writers swear by writing groups where people get together to write on Zoom, share their work, and give each other feedback. This can be a great strategy. But it can also be as easy as finding one friend who is also writing a book or has another big project they want to complete around the time you'd like to have your book finished. Accountability check-ins once per week can be extremely motivating.

At the least, figure out who you can chat with when you get stuck, find a writing buddy, and share your half-baked ideas with others. Your business book will be better for it and you'll get your first draft done more quickly.

One other note: It's important to share your ideas early and often. If you wait to share your work until you have a complete manuscript draft or even the draft of a full chapter, not only will the feedback be harder for you to accept and incorporate, but also your friends will be less willing to give honest feedback. Sharing partially formed ideas early in the creative process allows for more collaboration, better identification of potential flaws or lack of clarity, and opens up opportunities for significant improvement.

Also, have a conversation if you can. Written notes on a draft are helpful, but it's too tempting not to read them (or not to read them carefully). When you sit down to chat instead, both you and the person giving you feedback can ask clarifying questions and expand on each other's ideas.

No matter what happens from here, you have enough words in a book-like structure to say that you've written a business book. That's no small thing.

YOU CAN FIX EVERYTHING IN THE EDIT

Finally, if writing a speedy first draft still feels out of reach, ask yourself some crucial questions:

- Am I being too precious with my words?
- Am I worshipping at the altar of perfectionism?
- What would happen if I decided to try writing for speed?

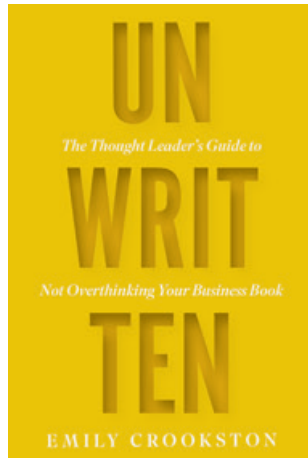
If all else fails, remember, a book is a snapshot of your brain. You aren't chained always and forever to the ideas you put in your book. You're allowed to change your mind—hell, changing your mind is expected, encouraged even. In fact, when you re-read your book six months or a year later, I'd be shocked if you didn't see something you wanted to change. And guess what? That just may spark your next book idea.

There you have it: My number one piece of advice for first-time authors. Get that messy first draft out of your head as quickly as you can. From there, you are welcome to spend as much time editing as you would like. So, if you feel like you're cutting corners to get your draft done, take comfort in knowing you can go back and square everything off during the editing process.

Will you become the next member of the 3% club—the 3% of people who actually start and finish their books? Get that speedy first draft written. It may not be perfect. **But it will be done!** 📖



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Crookston is a best-selling business book ghostwriter, author, and developmental editor. As the Owner and Decider of All Things at The Pocket PhD, she helps self-published authorpreneurs find their Big Idea, get it out into the world, and grow their businesses. Emily is also a former philosophy professor, a speaker, and a podcast guest. Her new book is *Unwritten: The Thought Leader's Guide to Not Overthinking Your Business Book*.

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