

How to Write for a Big Project

A Damn Fine Words Casual Conversation Interview and Worksheet Package

brought to you by James Chartrand of [Damn Fine Words](#)
and special guest [Chris Guillebeau](#), author of [The \\$100 Startup](#) and [The Art of Non-Conformity](#)

Chris Guillebeau is an expert in travelling – he’s visited nearly every single country in the world and continues to travel to roughly 25 countries each year... all while blogging, writing books and creating tons of material without a hitch.

Chris has written from some pretty strange locations at the oddest hours, and that includes his most recent book, the \$100 Startup. I devoured my review copy and loved it, both for its practical, useful information and the excellent writing Chris put forth. (If you don’t have a copy yet, you need to get one. [Click here.](#))

I sat down with Chris to have a casual conversation about how to write from anywhere and blog consistently despite a hectic schedule – oh, and what it’s like to write a book, too.

But on the call, Chris and I surprised each other, revealed secrets and shared our insider tips on all sorts of things. We knocked it out of the park. The call was jam packed with advice, writing strategies and personal stories you’ll enjoy.

You can listen to the call by [clicking here.](#)

And to help you put those writing strategies into action right away, I’ve put together a worksheet that includes a summary of the big ideas and some introspective material for you to think over.

Pretty soon, you’ll be writing your next big project... yes, from anywhere. Promise.

The Big Idea

This call’s main theme was "how to write consistently from anywhere in the world", but the biggest takeaway message is that if you want to write, you need to know your commitment.

Writing for a large project, like a book, or for a long time as with blogging, means you need to establish your personal dedication to show up and do the work – because you need to, because you have to, because you *want* to.

Chris and I talked a lot about how to work on a big writing project or blog long term. We agree you should:

- Commit to what you want to do and make it a priority
- Live life – and write well – in small bits and tiny tangible goals
- Get strategic. Decide where to spend your time and show up for the work.

Ready? Use this worksheet to get started!

Mission One: Set Goals

Chris is a habitual traveller, so he's had practice writing from anywhere in the world, no matter how impoverished or solitary the location might be. And that's a skill many writers would love to have. Most need a special place, time or mood to feel like writing.

The truth is that writing is a commitment. Chris doesn't need any of that special place, time or mood mojo, because he's trained himself to sit down and do the (damn) work.

No excuses. And if he's travelling, he just does his best to tune out the noise around him.

Chris mentioned that it helps to stay in one place and focus on the project at hand, so when it comes time to write his books, he tries to stay in one place. Big projects require deliberate intention... and that means you paying attention to what you're doing!

Paying attention is easy if you dedicate time to your project – and actually show up for the work. Plan and schedule your writing time for your project before you begin, and build a routine that incorporates that schedule.

Here's an easy way to plan the writing time you'll need to schedule in for your project:

Figure out how many words you write, on average, in an hour. For example, I write about 1,000 words. You might write only 350 in that same time – but knowing is half the battle

Write down how many words you write in an hour: _____

For the next step, break down your project. It's overwhelming to think of your project as "write a book", for example, and you'll never finish it.

Know how long your project will be in a specific, measurable way. Will it be 10 chapters? 20,000 words? 5 pages? This number isn't written in stone, but it's a good guideline for you to work with.

Write down a numeric goal for your project: _____

If you wrote your numerical goal in chapters or pages, decide now how many words goes into an average page and/or how many pages a chapter will be. Write that down:

My chapter will have _____ pages.

Each page will have _____ words.

If you aren't sure, estimate. An average page of content in Word in an Arial 11 font equals about 450 words – that's plenty!

Now you have numbers you can work with. Here's where you'll have to do a little bit of math:

Your word count per page X the number of total pages = _____

That's the total word count you're aiming for. Now divide the total by how many words you write in an average hour.

That's how many hours you need to dedicate to your project. Fantastic! Now you can look at your schedule and block out the time you need.

Let's say you decide you'll write a half-hour every day, and you need to write for 20 hours to reach your total word count. You should be finished your project in just a little over a month.

If my math is right ;)

Use Chris' strategy: He made a decision that writing his book was what he wanted to do, he made it a priority, and then he scheduled time to make it happen.

It took him 70 days just to write the first draft (he writes 1,000 words per day), and his book went through 6 or 7 drafts! Your project probably won't be as long, but it still needs your commitment.

In fact, you may find that making a serious commitment to your project helps you get the work done much faster than dabbling around at it here and there. With dedicated progress, time whizzes by, and you'll be done before you realize it.

What will your next big project be?

Mission 2: Have Some Style

What I loved most about Chris' book is that it was the perfect blend of storytelling, practical tips and just plain damn fine writing. Chris comes to that style naturally because of years of practice, but you can replicate this flow.

Decide the pattern you'd like to use to switch back and forth between storytelling and information.

For example, you might decide that every chapter begins with a bit of story that leads into the practical information. Once you've written the practical material, you lead readers back to the conclusion of the story.

Or you might decide to start with a practical tip and then jump right into a story about someone who puts this tip to good use. It's all up to you!

Try to think of it this way: Story + problem + solution + proof. Engagement comes from the story, and the story demonstrates the problem. The practical information solves the problem, and the denouement of the story demonstrates proof.

You can reorder those any way you'd like – just pick a format to follow, and you'll keep consistency throughout your entire project. Readers will always know what to expect, no matter which chapter they're reading.

Plus, it gives you a handy checklist. You can ask yourself, "Do I have my four items in this chapter? Are they in the right order?" If not, you can fix it right away.

Chris' book advice was more specific. He liked the idea of thinking of any business book as a novel with a beginning, middle and end. Your job, as the writer, is to build the story and keep readers' attention while educating them.

You don't want to force ideas down their throat, though, so use stories and examples to bring life to your information. Integrate and blend these stories into your book so that they relate to the practical information – and vice versa.

Make it a dance. A beautiful back-and-forth that neither gives nor takes. That's some sweet music!

Mission 3: Keep the Momentum

Now that you've thought about the time you need to write your big project, you'll need to think about a way to keep the momentum going.

You'll have days when you don't feel like it, days when you're busy, days when the words just gush out all over and days where you can't think of a thing to write.

Small, achievable goals are the secret – and Chris is a master at setting them. He has to! He knew that his book would be about 70,000 words and that it'd go through multiple drafts, so he had to find a way to keep moving forward to the end.

He didn't focus on the end. He focused on one itty-bitty step at a time. He figured he'd take all the little parts and make them a whole afterwards – but he had to create those little parts to begin with, one by one.

There's power in small. So try to break down your project in small goals as well.

Instead of saying, "Today, I'll write for an hour," say instead, "Today, I'll write three paragraphs for section one." That's small. That's achievable. And soon it's, "Woo-hoo! Done! Well, I might as well write the last three paragraphs for section one while I'm here – and I'll be done section one!"

It's a much better feeling than saying, "God, I wrote for an entire hour – my back is killing me!" don't you think?

Another great way to keep momentum is to write a shitty first draft. A shitty first draft means you're just writing, just getting the words out there, and you'll clean it all up later.

Most people end up bogging down their progress because they try to write the best they can right from the start, all the way through...

That's silly. And it doesn't work. Everyone's work needs a good edit – so free your writing soul and get that shitty first draft complete. Just stick to your personal word count for the day (or the hour, or the 5 minutes you have), and you can worry about editing later.

Mission 4: Write Solo or Write Empire

Writing for a big project is... well, big. It takes a long time. It takes focus and devotion. And it takes a lot of mental energy out of you.

That's why many people decide not to write their own material.

That's right: You don't have to be a great writer – or even write – to "author" a book. And that's just fine; ghostwriters are perfectly willing to help you spread your stories, information and expertise to the world.

What are ghostwriters? They're writers hired to "ghost" as the author. They take the "author's" ideas, knowledge, input, feedback and expertise and write it up on the "author's" behalf. They're well paid for their hard work and time, but they don't get author credit on the book cover.

In fact, you'd never know if the author hired a ghostwriter or not.

That's just fine. Not everyone writes well, not everyone has the time to write, and sometimes, even if someone has the time and the skills, that person just may not feel like undertaking such a big writing project.

And knowing that Chris has a busy schedule – blogging, book writing, course creating - I asked him whether he has someone help him out with his writing.

Chris doesn't. He feels a personal connection to his business and wants to keep it small, nimble and directly in his control – you could call him the advocate of the microentrepreneur.

So he writes all his material. He may partner up with other people and jointly create some products, but his book and his blog is all his work.

Then Chris turned the tables and put the question back on me. How did I feel about ghostwriters?

It's a good question. Between writing for clients, for the Men with Pens blog, for guest posts, for Damn Fine Words and for all sorts of other projects on the go, I write far more than Chris' 1,000 words a day. I write that many words in an *hour*. Today alone, I've penned about 6,000 words – and as you can see, I'm still writing.

Here's the difference between Chris and I: How small or large we want to grow our business. Chris wants a small, personally-operated business he controls; I want an empire with staff.

I'm not quite there yet (just a small overlord, really), but if I continue to grow my business and don't delegate more of my writing work, eventually writing becomes an overwhelming, impossible task I can't keep up with.

I won't be able to turn my business into an empire – having to personally write everything, always, could force me to stay small. (And tire the hell out of me too.)

So where do you want to be in five years? Do you want to grow your business? Stay small and solo? Think about your goals. They'll determine whether you should write for yourself or get help, and at which point both should happen.

Toss in time commitments, work obligations, family, skill levels, personal interests and all sorts of other factors, and the decision becomes truly personal. There's no right or wrong answer.

It's all up to you!

Mission 5: Mix It Up

Chris works on any number of different projects – he's a busy guy! He owns a major blog, he has several books (and just launched another), he partners up to create new info-products, he does book tours, he travels, he speaks, and he has business ventures like the World Domination Summit – a live event in Portland held every year.

Whew. That's a *lot* to do.

But there's good reason why Chris does so much and so many different things... he uses it as a means to keep from being bored. He mixes it up. He keeps life exciting. He varies his writing projects so he's always feeling creative and never burned out working on one project at a time.

That's a good idea, and I do that too. I have many writing projects on the go on any given day, and I'll switch from one to the other when I start to feel bored, tired or uninspired. Variety is key, in life and especially in writing.

So before you undertake a single major project, you may want to bring to mind a couple of different writing projects you can work on in tandem. Planning to write a book? Start thinking of blog posts. Blogging all the time on the same subject? Start writing an e-course.

Mix it up so that you can switch writing tasks frequently, as needed.

You'd think this means you'll just write and write and write and burn out on writing, but actually, the truth is that you'll probably give yourself more energy and have more fun. Different types of writing projects take different types of energy.

Writing a blog post isn't the same as writing a chapter. Each requires different thought process, focus, style and tone.

And the beauty is that the more you write different ways, the better your skills will improve. You'll begin naturally transferring that storytelling tone you use for blogging to your ebook, and you'll start infusing more practical information from that ebook to your blog.

Do you know how many ways you write at the moment? Think about it – what writing tasks do you have on your plate?

And here's another question: What future projects have you been thinking of undertaking? Why not start them now? Go back to the beginning of this worksheet and plan out your time, then add those blocks to your schedule.

You might soon find yourself progressing smoothly on a few writing projects, switching from project to project every hour. Fun times!

Mission 6: Think Business

Writing for pleasure is nice. But writing has distinct advantages you can leverage in business, and different types of writing achieve different sorts of opportunities.

I asked Chris what type of writing was most advantageous to his business – was it the blog? The book? The courses? Which brought him the biggest results?

He couldn't give me an answer: Each brought him *different* results, in a beautifully interlocking way.

He started his blog for himself. But when it was time to pitch his book agent and publisher, his blog helped get their attention. Because of the blog, he could sell the book.

But not everyone reads blogs, and that's where the book's advantage came in. It let him reach a new audience from store shelves, and because of the book, they found the blog.

Of course, there's more. The blog, the book... everything Chris wrote led to speaking engagements and world tours.

Each leverages the other and brings it all together, creating direct and indirect opportunity. It's a wonderful circle of business, and Chris leverages every word.

So before you undertake your writing project, think about the business advantages. What do you have now? What could you create to help leverage it? How does it fit together? What will these advantages do for your business? What else could you write to open up even more opportunities?

Go figure that out – it's worth it!

There's a lot more that Chris and I covered in the call, including how to deal with critics, how to work in isolation without feeling lonely and plenty more, but the most profound wrap to the call was this:

He wishes he'd started writing earlier. That he'd begun his writing journey sooner. Because he enjoys every day of his life... and writing created it for him.

Chris shared this quote: "The best time to start was last year. Failing that, today will do."

So how about you? Today's looking just fine for a new beginning.