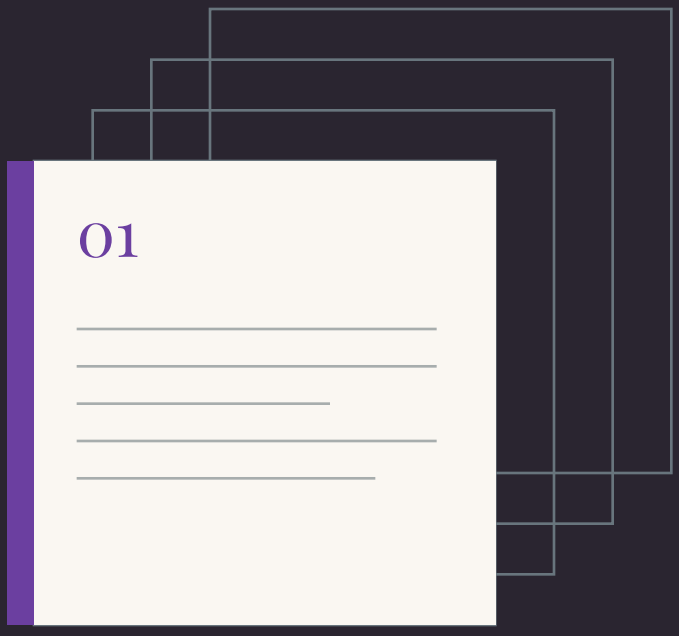
AUTHOR DESIGN STUDIOS

Your Book. Your Brand. Your Platform.

A PRACTICAL WORKBOOK FOR BEGINNING AUTHORS

YOUR FIRST BOOK PLAYBOOK

Find your message. Build your outline.
Finish a manuscript you can be proud of.



FRANK DEARDURFF III

From idea to writing, revision,
professional design and launch.

AuthorDesignStudios.com

START HERE

Your book starts with a plan.

You do not need a perfect idea or a publisher's permission to begin. You need a clear reader, a useful direction, and a writing process you can repeat. This playbook helps you make those decisions and put them to work.

> **HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE**
>
> This is a working companion to From Rejection to Revenue. You can use it on its own, then return to the book when you want more guidance.

YOUR ROUTE	PAGES	WHAT YOU WILL BUILD
Define your book	4-8	Your purpose, reader, promise and source material.
Build and write	10-17	Your outline, writing routine and first-draft tools.
Revise with purpose	19-22	A clearer manuscript and a clean handoff.
Prepare to publish	23-27	Design direction, reader connection and readiness checks.
Keep moving	28-30	Your next-book plan, next 30 days and design support.

Print this playbook or type in the response boxes using a PDF reader that supports forms. Save a copy with your book title. Duplicate the chapter, tracker and revision pages as often as you need.

Most examples lean toward nonfiction and books that support a business. For fiction, use reader experience in place of a practical result, and use scenes, stakes and character change in place of lessons.

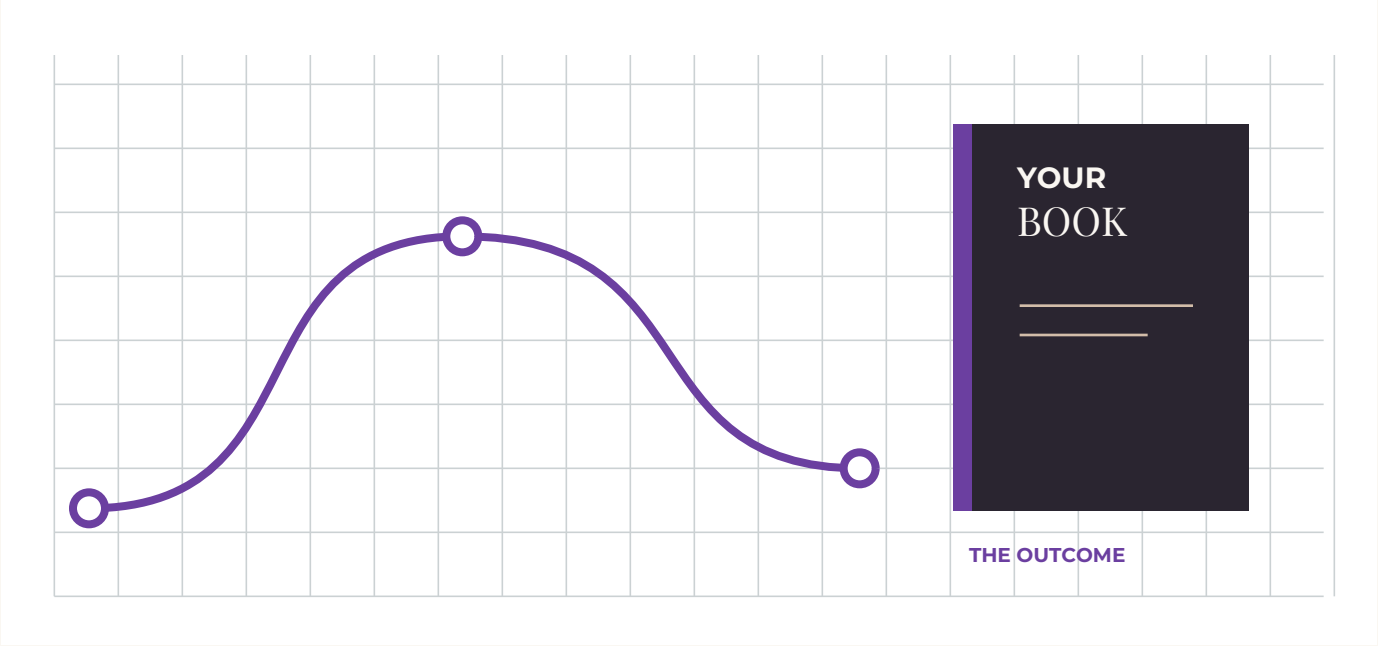
Created by Frank Deardurff III for Author Design Studios. Adapted from From Rejection to Revenue, especially Chapters 4-7 and the Self-Publishing Success Checklist. Original worksheet exercises. © 2026 Author Design Studios.

01 / ENVISION THE FINISHED BOOK

“Begin with the end in mind.”

STEPHEN R. COVEY | The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Picture the reader closing your book. What should they understand, feel or be able to do? Let that answer guide the work ahead.



YOUR NEXT MOVE

Describe the result your book should create before you build the outline.

01 / DEFINE YOUR BOOK

Decide why this book matters.

Start with a reason strong enough to bring you back to the page. Your definition of success can include impact, credibility, creative satisfaction, reader relationships or sales.

My working book title and author name

Why I want to write this book, and why now

What success would look like in the first year

Choose one main outcome. How will you recognize progress?

My next writing appointment

Date, time, place and the one task I will complete.

01 / DEFINE YOUR BOOK

Write for one clear reader.

A book becomes easier to write when you can picture the person opening it. Describe a real situation rather than a broad label such as "everyone who wants a better life."

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Example: A first-time consultant who knows their subject but cannot explain their offer clearly. That is more useful than "business owners."

My reader and the situation they are in

What do they already know? What is happening in their life or work?

What they struggle with or want most

Use words your reader would actually say.

What they should gain from this book

For fiction: what kind of experience, emotion or escape will they expect?

01 / DEFINE YOUR BOOK

Make one clear promise.

Your promise keeps the manuscript focused. It explains who the book is for and what the reader can expect. Make a promise the book can actually deliver.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Example: This book helps new consultants turn scattered expertise into a clear service offer. For fiction: name the genre, central conflict and reading experience.

My book promise in one sentence

This book helps [reader] move from [starting point] to [result] through [approach].

Three things the book must deliver

What belongs outside this book

Save unrelated ideas for another book, bonus or article.

01 / DEFINE YOUR BOOK

Find your place on the shelf.

Study three books your reader might choose. Notice their promises, structures and reader feedback. Record what readers value and what they still need. Use that insight to sharpen your own direction.

Book 1: title / reader appeal / unmet need

Book 2: title / reader appeal / unmet need

Book 3: title / reader appeal / unmet need

My useful difference

What perspective, method, experience or story makes this book worth reading?

01 / DEFINE YOUR BOOK

Gather what you already have.

Your starting material may be closer than you think: questions people ask, presentations, journal entries, interviews, stories and lessons learned. Capture the useful pieces before you organize them.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Keep a source log as you write: source, link or location, relevant passage and the chapter it supports. Do not rely on memory when revising.

Questions my book should answer

Stories, examples and material I can build from

List the item and where to find it. For fiction: characters, conflicts, settings and scene ideas.

Research or permission I still need

Mark claims to verify, sources to record, and material that needs permission.

02 / BUILD MOMENTUM

“Consistency builds momentum.”

FRANK DEARDURFF III | From Rejection to Revenue, Chapter 5

A finished book grows through ordinary writing sessions. Make the next step small enough to take, then keep returning to it.



ONE SESSION AT A TIME



A MANUSCRIPT TAKES SHAPE

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Give the next writing session a time, a place and one clear task.

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Map the reader's journey.

A strong outline gives each part a job. Start with the reader's starting point, move through the changes they need, and end where your promise is fulfilled. The chapter count should serve the book.

Beginning: what must the reader understand first?

For fiction: establish the character, world and central disruption.

Middle: what steps, challenges or discoveries follow?

Arrange key chapter ideas in a useful order. For fiction: escalation, choices and consequences.

Ending: what is resolved, achieved or made possible?

My chapter sequence

Write working chapter titles. Continue in your manuscript document if needed.

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Give every chapter a job.

Use this repeatable blueprint for one chapter at a time. If a chapter does not support the promise, rethink it before spending days drafting it.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> DUPLICATE THIS PAGE for each chapter. A focused chapter does not have to say everything. It has to do its job.

Chapter number / working title / purpose

The key points or scene beats, in order

Choose a few essential points. For fiction: goal, obstacle, turning point and consequence.

Example, story, evidence or detail to include

How this chapter ends and leads to the next

A takeaway, action, discovery or unresolved question can create momentum.

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Write in a voice that sounds like you.

Write as though you are speaking to the reader you described. Clear language and a natural rhythm will carry your message further than trying to sound impressive.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Read your paragraph aloud. If you stumble over it or would never say it that way, rewrite it in simpler language.

Three words that describe my voice

Examples: warm, direct, thoughtful. For fiction: include narrator voice and point of view.

Explain a key idea in a short, natural paragraph

Imagine one reader asked you about it. What would you actually say?

My voice rules

Words I use, jargon I will explain, habits I will avoid, and the tone I want to keep.

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Build a writing routine that fits.

Protect a repeatable writing appointment. Pick a target small enough for an ordinary week. A realistic routine beats a burst of enthusiasm that disappears after three days.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Planning example only: 30,000 words at 2,000 words per week is 15 writing weeks. Add separate time for research, revision, design and proofs.

My weekly writing appointments

Choose days, start times, session lengths and a place to work.

My draft target and estimated timeline

Target words or scenes, weekly pace and a draft completion date.

How I will protect the time

What will I turn off, postpone or arrange in advance?

My backup plan for a difficult week

Choose the smallest session that keeps the project moving.

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Track the work, not the mood.

Use a two-week tracker to learn what you can sustain. Count new words, scenes or completed sections. An honest record helps you adjust your plan without guessing.

DATE	PLANNED TASK	MINUTES	PROGRESS / NEXT STEP

What helped me show up? What needs to change?

My next week's realistic target

Print or duplicate this page for each two-week writing block. Leave one line about the next task at the end of every session so restarting is easier.

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Get past the stuck point.

A stuck session often means the task is too big, the chapter needs a clearer job, or a question is unanswered. Name the obstacle and choose one small action that restores movement.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Draft first, improve later. A rough paragraph gives you something to work with. A paragraph you keep avoiding gives you nothing to revise.

Where I am stuck and what is causing it

The smallest useful task I can finish next

Examples: outline one section, draft one scene, list three examples or write a rough opening.

Questions or research I can park until later

Use a marker such as [VERIFY SOURCE] in the draft. Resolve it before final handoff.

My next session: time and task

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Make the idea come alive.

A useful story or example gives readers something concrete to follow. Choose details that serve the point. This page also works as a scene planner for fiction.

The moment, situation or scene

Where are we, who is involved, and what matters?

The problem, tension or choice

What makes this moment worth reading?

What changes and why

Show the action, consequence, result or discovery.

What the reader takes from it

Connect the example to the chapter. For fiction: what changes for the character or plot?

02 / BUILD AND WRITE

Open with purpose. End with direction.

The opening gives readers a reason to trust the journey. The ending should fulfill the promise and leave them with a clear result, satisfying resolution or useful next step.

My opening: why this book, why this reader, why now

Try a specific situation, question or moment. Avoid a long introduction before the book begins.

My ending: what the reader now understands or feels

Return to the promise. For fiction: resolve the central conflict in a way the story has earned.

A natural next step for the reader

An exercise, another book, a resource or a relevant service. Keep it useful and connected.

03 / MAKE THE BOOK STRONGER

“Independence does not mean isolation.”

FRANK DEARDURFF III | From Rejection to Revenue, Chapter 6

The draft is yours. Fresh eyes can help you see what the reader needs. Give your manuscript the care, perspective and refinement it deserves.



YOUR NEXT MOVE

Invite a fresh perspective, then decide which changes serve your reader.

03 / REVISE WITH PURPOSE

Revise the big picture first.

Finish a complete draft, then read it for structure before polishing individual sentences. A beautiful paragraph still needs to belong in the book.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Revision order: structure and substance, then voice and clarity, then details and proofreading. Finish with another proof check after the interior is laid out.

Does the manuscript deliver the promise?

Where does it succeed? Where does the reader still need help?

What I need to add, move, shorten or remove

Look for gaps, repeated ideas, weak transitions and chapters that wander.

My three most important revisions

Make each task specific enough to complete in a writing session.

03 / REVISE WITH PURPOSE

Ask for feedback you can use.

Share a coherent draft with a few readers who fit your audience. Give them focused questions and a return date. Their response is information you can use to improve the book.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Thank readers for honest feedback. You choose the revisions. Make the book clearer without giving away its purpose or your voice.

My readers and feedback deadline

Questions I will ask

Where did you lose interest? What confused you? What felt missing? What should stay? For fiction: where did character choices or pacing feel unconvincing?

Patterns I notice in the feedback

Separate repeated concerns from individual preferences. Record where readers agree.

03 / REVISE WITH PURPOSE

Turn feedback into a revision plan.

Make a decision about each major issue. Give it a location, a concrete task and a priority. Work through the important changes before doing another full read.

LOCATION	ISSUE / FEEDBACK	CHANGE I WILL MAKE

My highest-priority change and its deadline

My final read-through plan

Choose a date, format and method, such as reading aloud or reviewing a printed draft.

Keep versions clearly named. Example: BookTitle_Manuscript_v03_2026-10-05. Save a backup before major changes so you can recover earlier material.

03 / REVISE WITH PURPOSE

Prepare a clean manuscript handoff.

Decide which help you need and what each person will deliver. Editing improves the manuscript. Cover design and interior layout give the finished work its visual presentation.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> For layout, supply consistent chapter headings and a stable, approved manuscript. Confirm image quality and permissions. Changes after layout can affect page count and cover dimensions.

My team: role / person / scope / deadline

Consider an editor, proofreader, cover designer and interior formatter. Ask for relevant examples and a written scope.

My handoff file and supporting material

Record the final version, images, captions, source notes and front/back matter.

My budget and timeline

List estimates, revision rounds, proof time and a buffer for corrections.

04 / PREPARE TO PUBLISH

Create your book design brief.

A designer needs to understand your reader and the book's promise before selecting type, color and imagery. Use this page to make your direction clear and your collaboration easier.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Bring this completed brief to Author Design Studios for cover design, interior layout, marketing graphics or an author website. AuthorDesignStudios.com

Final title / subtitle / author name

Reader, genre and the feeling the design should convey

List 2-3 comparable covers, what you like about them, and what you want to avoid.

Formats and production details to confirm

Print or ebook, trim size, images, tables and any special interior needs.

Back cover message and supporting details

Draft a hook, reader benefit, short description and brief author bio.

04 / PREPARE TO PUBLISH

Give readers a place to go.

Your author website connects the book to you. Help visitors understand the book, find where to buy it, and take a useful next step. Keep the message clear and the path simple.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Start with the basics: a book page, author bio, purchase links, contact route and a clear email signup. Author Design Studios can help build that home base.

My book page headline and short description

Explain who the book is for and why it matters.

The useful resource readers can request

A sample chapter, checklist or companion tool. What does it help them do?

My reader's next step and destination

Write the call to action, website address and how the next step will work.

04 / PREPARE TO PUBLISH

Plan a manageable launch.

Choose a few ways to reach the readers you described. Build a launch you can follow through on, then plan what happens after the first week.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Invite honest reviews without requiring praise or offering rewards tied to reviews. Check current retailer rules and publishing requirements before release.

Before launch: people, tasks and dates

Prepare your website, early-reader copies, emails, posts and proof checks.

Launch week: message, channels and dates

Choose a clear book announcement and links that work. Assign each task a day.

After launch: my repeatable promotion plan

Choose useful articles, videos, interviews or events connected to the book.

04 / PREPARE TO PUBLISH

Readiness check: manuscript

Use this practical checkpoint before moving into final design and production. These actions build on the checklist in From Rejection to Revenue.

FOUNDATION

- ☐ I can name my reader and the book's main promise.
- ☐ I have studied comparable books and defined my useful difference.
- ☐ My working title and outline support that promise.

DRAFT & REVISION

- ☐ The complete first draft has a clear beginning, middle and ending.
- ☐ Every chapter has a purpose and a logical place in the sequence.
- ☐ I have revised for structure, clarity, voice and readability.
- ☐ I have reviewed reader feedback and resolved the main concerns.
- ☐ Facts, quotations, permissions and source details are checked.

HANDOFF

- ☐ The approved manuscript, front matter and back matter are ready.
- ☐ Images, captions and supporting files are organized.
- ☐ The right people, scope, budget and deadlines are agreed.

Mark complete only when the work is done. Circle any open item and give it an owner and a date on your action-plan page.

04 / PREPARE TO PUBLISH

Readiness check: publication

Use this page after the manuscript is stable. Choose your publishing options intentionally and verify the current requirements of your selected platforms.

DESIGN & SETUP

- ☐ The title, cover and description clearly fit the intended reader.
- ☐ The print interior and ebook have been reviewed in their own formats.
- ☐ Publishing route, formats, pricing and distribution are decided.
- ☐ ISBN needs, metadata and required publishing files are confirmed.
- ☐ Digital previews and a physical proof, if printing, have been checked.
- ☐ Final layout corrections have been reviewed before release.

LAUNCH & LONGER TERM

- ☐ My website, purchase links and contact route work.
- ☐ My launch emails, posts and early-reader plan are ready.
- ☐ Review requests are honest and follow the retailer's current rules.
- ☐ My promotion plan continues beyond launch week.
- ☐ I have a place to collect reader questions for future books.

Mark complete only when the work is done. Circle any open item and give it an owner and a date on your action-plan page.

05 / KEEP MOVING

Let this book teach you the next one.

You do not have to start from scratch every time. Save the questions readers ask, the ideas you set aside and the parts of your process that worked. Keep the next book focused on a real need.

> **AUTHOR NOTE**
>
> Your next book can grow from reader feedback. Finish and support this book before committing to a schedule that stretches you too thin.

Ideas and questions worth saving

What belongs in a sequel, another title, a companion resource or a different format?

What I will repeat, improve or delegate next time

My next-book concept and its connection to this one

Name the reader and promise. Explain how it builds on your author identity.

05 / KEEP MOVING

Choose your next 30 days.

Do not try to complete every stage at once. Use your current stage to choose a realistic monthly outcome, then give each week a concrete task and a date.

My current stage and one outcome for this month

WEEK	ONE PRIORITY	DONE WHEN / DATE
01		
02		
03		
04		

The support I need to keep this moving

Put the first appointment on your calendar today. Revisit this page each week and adjust the plan to match what you learned.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Give your book the presentation it deserves.

You are putting real work into the words. Let's bring that same care to the cover, the pages and the place readers find you.

BOOK COVER DESIGN

A professional cover shaped around your reader, genre and message.

INTERIOR LAYOUT & FORMATTING

Clear, readable pages for print and ebook editions.

MARKETING GRAPHICS

Consistent visuals for your website, social posts and book launch.

AUTHOR WEBSITES

A home base for your books, your readers and your next offer.

EXPLORE SERVICES & START YOUR BOOK PROJECT

AuthorDesignStudios.com

Bring your design brief from page 23. Share your book's topic, manuscript stage, planned formats and the help you need.