**BLUEPRINT FOR A MEMOIR:**

**HOW TO WRITE A MEMOIR FOR THE MARKETPLACE**

**by Jennie Nash**

Answer Sheet

**Part 1: Book Fundamentals**

# 1. Why write this book?

* Write one to three pages on why you must write this book. What is your internal why for writing this book? What does it mean to you on a deeply personal level?
* To raise my voice/speak up/claim my story
* To prove that I can do it, either to myself or others
* Because I feel called to do it/I am burning to do it/ I can’t rest until I do it
* To model for my kids what it means to pursue a dream (hard work, frustration, failure, perseverance, etc.)
* Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What is your external why? What do you hope to achieve?
* To make money
* To make a name for myself as an expert/authority
* To influence/educate/illuminate/comfort/entertain
* To leave a legacy for my family
* Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# 2. What’s your point?

* What’s the point of your book? Just write it out – there’s no need to make it sound snazzy at this stage.

# 3. Write a Super Simple Version of Your Story

* Write a super simple version of your story. Make sure it captures the transformation journey that your story will be tracking.

# 4. Are You *Only* Telling Your Story (and Is That Story True)?

* Check off which of the following is true:
* I am only telling a story and it is true.
* I am only telling a story and it is true—and it will have additional elements.
* If you make this choice, what additional elements are you considering? Scientific or academic research? Interviews? Criticism? Statistical analysis? How will those elements be woven into your own story?
* If you make this choice, you might later decide that you are not writing memoir. You might decide that your book is better classified in a nonfiction category like self-help or how-to. But don’t worry about that now—just be aware that it’s a possibility as you move forward.
* I am only telling my story and it is not all true.
  + If you make this choice, understand that your book will not be a memoir and start doing the Blueprint work for a novel instead.

5. Choose a working title

* Brainstorm a list of potential titles. Aim for 15, but don’t spend longer than an hour brainstorming because you will make yourself crazy.
* Once you have your list, close your eyes. Imagine your story wherever you hope to see it in the world: on a bookshelf, in a bookstore, on a bestseller list, in the hands of a particular reader. What title do you see? That’s the title to go with.

6. Where Will Your Book Sit on the Shelf?

* Describe where your book will sit on the bookstore shelf.

**Part 2: Get to Know Your Ideal Reader**

7. Who is your ideal reader and what do they want?

* Who is your ideal reader? First think in terms of demographics:
* How old are they?
* Where do they live?
* What is their income level?
* What is their education level?
* Do they have a specific race or ethnic origin or gender?
* Now think in terms of what they are feeling and what they are wanting:
* What problem will your book help this person solve?
* What keeps them up at night?
* What do they want more than anything in the world?
* What can your book do to help them get it?

# 8. What other books speak to your ideal reader?

* Make a list of approximately 10 comparable titles for your book.

9. How will you connect with your ideal reader?

Considering your topic and your talents (e.g., if you enjoy being on camera, being on podcasts, teaching in small groups, or writing blog posts), select at least three ways you intend to connect with your ideal reader when your memoir is published.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 3: Design a Structure**

10. Decide on a time frame and where you are standing in time as you tell your tale?

Answer the following questions about time.

* What is the time frame of your story?
* Where are you standing in time when you tell your story?
* What is the nature of the chronology of your story? Will it be a chronological narrative or a fractured narrative?

If your story will be fractured, answer these two questions:

* What purpose does the fractured chronology serve in your story?
* How will you fracture the chronology?

11. Think conceptually about your content

* Will your story be organized by any kind of concept?
* If yes, what is that concept and how does it serve the point you want to make?

12. Map the arc of change

Map out your arc of change in five key scenes.

* Transformation statement:
* Opening scene:
  + First scene where the force of opposition is present and threatening:
  + Second scene where the force of opposition is present and even more threatening:
  + Third scene where the force of opposition is present and the most threatening:

Closing scene:

13. Create an Impact Outline

Develop a three-page Impact Outline. Follow the rules and don’t cheat yourself!

Impact Outline Rules

1. Use standard manuscript formatting: 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, single line spacing, and one full line space between the bullet point pairings. **Cheating means making the margins half an inch, making the font 9-point and/or choosing some teeny tiny, funky font, or single-spacing the entire thing.**

2. Write no more than three pages for your first draft. You want to see the bare bones of your story to make sure it holds together. In order to do that, you have to keep it simple and, in order to do that, you have to keep it short. A three-page Impact Outline typically contains between 13 and 22 scene-point-impact pairings. This means you can only include the major scenes of the story. **Cheating means writing anything more than three pages.**

3. Each bullet point must have no more than three lines. **Cheating means anything more than three lines per bullet point.**

4. Each scene must connect to the next one through the meaning you have made of the experience, so that your story has narrative drive. **Cheating means ignoring this rule and including random, “dramatic” things that happened in your life. You have to be able to emotionally link every action with the action that follows it, even if you are presenting those actions out of order. This is the whole point of this exercise, and the reason that the Impact Outline is different from other outlines that only trace the external plot.**

14. Write book jacket copy

* Write book jacket copy for your memoir. Keep it to about 250 words.
* You want to *love* the book you are describing and feel excited to write it and to bring it out to the world. If you don’t, keep working on the *Blueprint* until you do.

**Part 4: Develop a Book Proposal**

There are eight main elements that agents, acquisition editors, and publishers expect to see in a proposal, and this order is typical:

1. Overview

2. Manuscript Specifications

3. Author Bio and Photo

4. Audience Analysis

5. Comparable Titles

6. Marketing Plan

7. Annotated Table of Contents

8. Sample Chapters

Element 1. Overview

* Review your answers to the entire *Blueprint* and soak it all in.
* Draft an overview.

Element 2. Manuscript Specifications

* Write out your manuscript specifications.

Element 3. Author Bio + Photo

* Write your author bio.
* Have an author photo taken.

Element 4. Audience Analysis

* Research your primary target audience. Describe the audience and use statistics to back it up.
* Repeat for any secondary audiences.

Element 5. Comparable Titles

* Write an introduction to the section that provides an overview of the landscape your book will be born into.
* Select five to six books for your comp titles.
* List the author, publisher, and publication date.
* Put the titles in reverse chronological order by publication date.
* Craft a paragraph for each title that explains why you are selecting this title, how your book is the same, and how it is different.

Element 6. Annotated Table of Contents

* Start with your Impact Outline and revise each entry so that you present a seamless whole.

Element 7. Create a Marketing Plan

* Select at least three marketing channels you will focus on in your marketing plan. Explain how using this channel will help you reach your readers – why it’s a good fit for your audience and for you.
* For each channel, develop specific examples that show how your content will function in that space.

Element 8. Create Sample Chapters

* Write one or two sample chapters.
* Edit and revise each chapter. Repeat until they are polished to a high shine.

**Part 5: How to Pitch Your Proposal**

Step 1. What kind of agent do you want?

Check off all the characteristics that are important to you in an agent:

* Nurturing
* No nonsense
* Represents big-name authors
* Part of a big agency
* Works for themselves
* Hands-on editorial
* Years of experience
* Works in New York City
* Hungry for new clients
* Actively seeking diversity
* Represents multiple genres you are interested in writing
* Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Step 2. Research Agents

* Find agents in online agent databases. Use keywords to hunt for additional agents who would be suitable to pitch.
* The databases I suggest include:
* Query Tracker—[querytracker.com](https://querytracker.net/)
* Manuscript Wish List— [manuscriptwishlist.com](https://www.manuscriptwishlist.com/)
* Publisher’s Marketplace— [publishersmarketplace.com](https://www.publishersmarketplace.com/)
* Reedsy—[reedsy.com](https://reedsy.com/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwqZSlBhBwEiwAfoZUIO5T2tJzdAqRCygZxfK7pJwGPmjfLfGl6UzjCv0paDk7ed4CkvwDBRoChGcQAvD_BwE)

Step 3. Write a query letter

* Write a query letter template.
* Revise and polish the letter.
* Personalize each query for each agent.

Step 4. Make a pitch strategy

* Rank the agents on your list.
* Arrange your spreadsheet to reflect the three tiers.

Step 5. Pitch!