**BLUEPRINT FOR A NONFICTION BOOK:**

**PLAN AND PITCH YOUR BIG IDEA**

**by Jennie Nash**

**Workbook Answers**

**Part 1: Story Fundamentals**

# 1. Why write this book?

Write one page on why you must write this book. What is your external why? What do you hope to get from it?

* To make money
* To make a name for myself as an expert/authority
* To influence/educate/illuminate/comfort/entertain people
* 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 leave a legacy for my family
* To model for my kids what it means to pursue a dream (hard work, frustration, failure, perseverance, etc.)
* Other:

What is your internal why for writing this book? What does it mean to you on a deeply personal level?

# 2. Why are you the best person to write this book?

Write no more than a page about why you are the best person to write this book.

# 3. 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.

# 4. Where will your book sit on the shelf?

Describe where you will find your book in the bookstore.

5. Choose a working title

* Brainstorm a list of at least 10 title + subtitle ideas.
* Play around with different combinations to see what feels resonant and powerful.
* Bring in trusted friends or followers to get outside perspective.
* Choose a working title and as you work on other elements of the *Blueprint*, keep

returning to it to see if you can improve upon it.

**Part 2: Get to know your Ideal Reader**

6. Who is your ideal reader?

* If you thought of a particular person for your ideal reader, write down their name.
* Write half a page about who this person is 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?
* Write half a page about the problem your book will 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?

# 7. What transformation are you promising?

* Describe the problem or challenge your ideal reader has when they come to their book?
* What will they know or feel or believe when they are finished? What will they be ready to do?

8. What other books speak to your ideal reader?

* Make a list of 10 comparable titles for your book.
* If you learn anything that helps you clarify your idea, take good notes. This is a great time to go back and hone your point and refine your ideal reader’s pain.
* Pare your list down to the five titles that best put your book in context.

9. How will you connect with your ideal reader?

Write a few paragraphs about how you will connect with readers in the real world.

**Part 3: Design a Structure**

10. Choose a Structural Prototype

* Which structure do you think you’d like to adopt? Just write it down, and in the next step we’ll dig deeper to see how, exactly, the structure will serve your story.

11. Breaking down each structure

If you are writing a Single Narrative, answer these cornerstone questions:

* What is the main spine of your story? What’s the big idea?
* What hurdles stand in the way as you try to achieve this goal or as you struggle toward what

you are after?

* What period of time will your story cover?
* Where will the story start – specifically?
* Where will it end – specifically?
* Where are you standing in time when you narrate it?

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#### If you are writing a Collective Narrative, answer these cornerstone questions:

* What is the main idea of your story? What’s the big idea?
* What are each of the entries going to be about on a very big-picture level? What, in other words, connects them?
* How many pieces will be arranged?
* What are the limits of the scope of this big idea? Are there things you will NOT cover in the book?
* How many pieces will you include?
* How will your voice play into the story?

#### If you are writing a Conceptual Designs structure, answer these cornerstone questions:

* What is the organizing principle?
* Is there a specific order to the way you present the material, or some kind of logic to the way

the material flows? Are there timelines or steps? Describe the flow of material.

* What does your table of contents look like?
* What are the elements of each chapter?
* Is your own story part of the mix? How much of your own story? How much of the mix?

12. Design a Table of Contents

* Write out a simple Table of Contents. Use no more than one page.
* Name your chapters.
* Write one sentence to describe the contents and the point of that chapter.

13. Create an Outcome Outline

* Turn your Table of Contents into an Outcome Outline.
* Use the Seven Point Outcome Outline Checklist to identify holes in the “because of that”

logic that connects one chapter to the next. Be brutally honest about what works and what

doesn’t. You want your Outcome Outline to show a clear transformation journey from

beginning to end. You want to feel and see the narrative drive.

* Fix any holes in logic. Sometime reading the third column out loud allows you to hear the

elements that don’t make sense.

* If you change something in the Outcome Outline so that it makes more sense, go back and

revise any elements in the *Blueprint* that are impacted. If, for example, you combine two chapters, make sure your TOC reflects that change. If you land on a more nuanced way of describing your point, make the change in your answer to *Blueprint Step #2*. You want your *Blueprint* to contain your most up-to-date thinking.

14. Write book jacket copy

* Write jacket copy for your book. Aim for 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: Developing a Book Proposal**

Element 1. Overview

* Review your answers to the entire *Blueprint* and soak it all in.
* Draft an Overview making sure you answer these key questions:
* What’s the big picture problem your book is solving?
* Who is y our ideal reader and why do they need the solution you are offering?
* Why are you the best person to write the book?
* What transformation are you promising?
* What is the structure of the book?

Element 2. Manuscript Specifications

Write out your manuscript specifications.

Element 3. Author Bio + Photo

* Write your author bio.
* Have a photo taken that reflects your professional brand.

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

* Select no more than five books for your comp titles.
* Include the author, publisher, and publication date.
* Put them in reverse chronological order by publication date.
* Craft a paragraph that shows 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 Outcome Outline and expand each chapter so that the purpose and the contents is clear.
* Make sure the narrative drive remains solid and that the reader transformation journey is clear.

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: Hot 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.

Step 3. Make a pitch strategy

* Rank the agents on your list.
* Arrange your spreadsheet to reflect the three tiers.
* Continue to pay attention to agent news on Twitter and elsewhere and add or subtract agents to your list based on what you learn.

Step 4. Write a query letter

* Write a query letter template following the key steps. Make sure it includes the key components:
* Opening hook
* Explanation of reader pain and reader transformation journey
* Short author bio
* Word count
* Comp titles if appropriate
* Why you chose the agent
* Revise and polish the letter.
* Personalize each query for each agent.

Step 5. Pitch

* Send queries to the agents in the first tier of your agent spreadsheet.
* Track the requests to send more material, and note the rejections.
* If an agent asks for a partial or full proposal, send the items they request within 24 hours.
* If you get form letter rejections, evaluate them. If you get personal notes, determine if there is any information in the letters you can use to strengthen your pitch.
* After two or three weeks have passed, if you haven’t heard from any agents, send out another batch. Continue sending out batches of queries. Research additional agents and add to your list.
* If an agent offers to represent your book and you feel that they would be a good business partner, celebrate your achievement! It’s a big deal and you’ve worked hard for it?
* After the celebration, let any other agent who has requested material know so that they can make an offer if they wish.
* Interview each agent and make a decision. Let the other agents know that you have decided to sign with someone else.

Step 6. Pitching small publishers, academic presses, or hybrid publishers

* Research small publishers, academic presses, or hybrid publishers that represent books similar to yours.
* Identify those accepting submissions.
* Create a spreadsheet to track their requirements and rank them according to best fit – again, this is more art than science; listen to your instincts.
* Writer a query template, and then personalize it for each publisher.
* Send your queries to the first five or so on your list. Follow the batch method as responses come in.
* Respond to request for more information within 24 hours.
* If they offer to publish your book, ask the same questions you would ask an agent; what appeals to them, what support will they provide, how do they see your book in the world as part of their universe, what is their contract and submission process?