



## HOW TO CREATE A SELF-HELP BOOK OUTLINE

I know that creating an outline for your book can feel daunting, so I've created this process that my clients have liked a lot. Hopefully, you will, too. As you work on your outline, don't sweat it too much! Nothing is engraved in stone. I have never worked on an outline that wasn't altered at least slightly during the course of writing the book. It's meant to be a general guide.

That said, don't rush through this. You really do need to give it some time. In this process, you will create the outline for your Introduction LAST.

**Step 1:** Once you have the overall concept for your book, ask yourself this question: What are the key things that I want readers to learn from my book? Then, just start writing down what comes to mind. I suggest that you do this on the computer because you will need to move them around. Number each item, and try to keep each to one sentence (two maximum). Keep going until you feel you have truly emptied out. I suggest coming back to your list the next day to see if you want to add to it. The more you have on your list, the better. Here are some examples:

- a. I want readers to learn that meditation is easier than they thought.
- b. I want readers to learn that they can overcome their fears.
- c. I want readers to learn that they can manifest what they want.

**Step 2:** Review your list, and ask yourself for each: Does this topic truly make sense for my book? For the topics that don't get an absolute "yes," put them in a separate list called "Strays." After you have completed a few chapters, you will probably find places to include these, or you can look for places to incorporate them when you go back through and read your full manuscript draft.

**Step 3:** After any strays have been removed, review your remaining list, and ask yourself for each item: Is this a "big" topic? Could I write a lot on this subject? Do I have a lot to say about it? If so, place a "B" for big next to each. When you have finished, put all of the items with a "B" together in their own list.

**Step 4:** Review the remaining items on your list that did not make the "big topic" list. We'll call these "sub-topics." Reread each one, and check your list of big topics. Is this sub-topic related to any of the big topics so that it could fall within that chapter? If so, place it under the appropriate big topic, and indent it. Continue with this process until you have finished going through all of the items on your list. If you have any items that don't seem to fit under any of your big topics, place them in your list of Strays.

**Step 5:** Once again, review your lists of big topics and subtopics. Begin to move them around until you have an order of big topics with their corresponding subtopics that makes sense to you. Which topics need to come before each other? For example, let's say you want to have a chapter about courage and a chapter on negative beliefs. Depending on how you want to frame these subjects, your readers might need to explore negative beliefs before they can begin to work on their courage. While you don't have to put your book into a system of steps, it might help to think of it that way at least for this outline process. Which step would come before the next? There may be times when you aren't sure of the order of the chapters. This happens to me, too! So don't worry about it. Just order them as best you can. Each big topic with its subtopics constitutes a potential chapter. If some of your big topics don't have any subtopics, see if that big topic might fit better under one of the other big topics. If not, go back to this big topic later to see what subtopics come to mind.

**Step 6:** Review each potential chapter outline with its big topic and subtopics, and ask yourself: What story or stories could I tell on this topic that would illustrate the lessons I want my readers to learn? Then, make notes about the stories that come to mind. If you can't think of a story for every instance, that's OK. You may think of one later.

**Step 7:** Using the chapter outline below from Nancy Levin's book, *The New Relationship Blueprint*, review each of your preliminary chapter outlines and begin to flesh them out as best you can. Add any new subtopics that come to mind as you work. Follow this format for each chapter.

## *CHAPTER 2: Revisit Your Relationship History*

- Opening Story: Author's childhood origin story, and what she's learned about how it shaped her relationship outlook going forward.
  
- Explain chapter topic: This chapter is about looking clearly at your past and taking inventory of what has come before. It is divided into two phases: first, the relationships you had in your family of origin, and then the "chosen" relationships you've had since that time. Ultimately, the goal is to connect the dots in between them (which will happen more specifically in Step 5).
  
- Subheading 1: Your Origin Story
  - What you grew up with in childhood creates your relationship reality.
  - Your origin story has been directing your entire relationship history.
  - What are the earliest messages you remember about love and relationships? What did you see around you in your home and community?
  - Introduce the concept of "making unconscious decisions" in these moments.
  
- Exercise: Write Your Origin Story
  
- Subheading 2: Relationship Timeline
  - Story of a relationship from author's past that was painful and obviously came about as a result of her origin story.

- Before we can have what we want, we must learn to accept what has been. This is the step where you tell yourself the truth.
- How to begin to accept the past and present, including past pains and difficulties in relationships.
- Give yourself permission to look at what brought you where you are today.
- Look at which choices you made:
  - Every choice, action, and decision we made up until now brought us to this point.
  - If we don't look, the future will show up like the past.
  
- Exercise: Draw a Relationship Timeline of all major relationships in your past, how you felt during the relationship, how the relationship ended, and how you felt when it ended.
  
- Transition into next chapter.

**Step 8:** If you find it difficult to put your topics in a viable order, try printing out your list and cutting out each topic. Then, on a big table, lay them out like a puzzle and try different orders until you come up with the order that feels best.

**Step 9:** Review your list of strays, and see if any of them might now fit into the book as a subtopic. If so, add them in the appropriate spots. If not, hold onto them to find spots for them later (or discard them, as necessary).

**Step 10:** Go back to the beginning and create an outline for the Introduction of your book based on the guidelines in the handout about Introductions. Now that you have more of an overview of your entire book, it will be easier to outline your Intro.