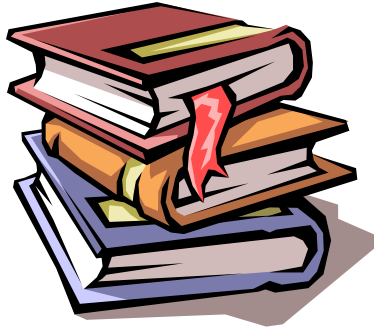


THE EXCLUSIVE FORMULA

(Writing Your Own Manuals and Folios)

by
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Introduction

In the publishing world, the most envied of individuals must surely be that one in possession of some exclusive best-selling product; an item only he or she can, or ever will offer for sale to an eager, ever-demanding public.

Competitors' envy might quite justifiably be directed towards that manual in which the publisher has sole rights; perhaps a copyright purchased straight from its author; maybe commissioned from the writer - sometimes written by the publisher himself.

In the publisher's eyes, 'Copyright' confers exclusive rights - to ownership, reprint rights, marketing, and ultimately to profits. For a title much in demand, the benefits of ownership are obvious. With no market to share, the copyright holder attracts all enquiries in respect of the title or titles concerned; pricing too is a matter for the publisher to decide, without regard to the pricing policy of his 'competitors' - no need to worry that 'so-and-so's' price-cutting exercise will affect the volume of his own sales, and no need for concern that others will saturate the market before his own marketing strategy is planned.

Quite simply, copyright in a manual, guide or folio, cuts out almost all competition, except perhaps for those titles of an almost identical nature.

Problems as may exist in respect of competition, can be alleviated by seeking out the more elusive titles, as opposed to following a seemingly 'safe' practice of offering titles which in fact are merely variations upon a theme, available from almost all of one's fellow publishers.

In sole possession, the publisher may use his product as a special inducement, to all buying copies of those guides and packages not exclusive to his business. The most common of manuals and business packages can assume interest renewed, when offered as part of that package for which ' The Exclusive Formula's the free gift to all purchasers. The publisher concerned is not actually ' selling' anything different to his competitors, nor is he sharing that hungry market with them.

It' s not though, just for reasons of financial incentive that many publishers seek to obtain manuals and folios exclusive to themselves. Setting oneself above the crowd allows the entrepreneur more than a modicum of pride and prestige; even more so if the titles responsible for such elevation are those he has written himself.

Sadly, there' s an aura of mystery attached to the process of writing, that frightens off all but the most ambitious and adventurous of individuals. ' Sadly' , because until they put pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, there' s no way of knowing how very easy and intensely satisfying the task of writing your own material can actually be.

Quite simply, once your objectives are planned, the road to writing becomes a downhill task, the so-called mystery is dispelled, and even the most sceptical of would-be authors finds him or herself the owner of a new and exclusive manuscript of which he or she is the writer.

But let us not kid ourselves that no-one finds the process of writing arduous; even extremely boring; perhaps even restrictive. I' m not trying to convince you that it will be easy in terms of the time and energy you must devote to the creative task you have set yourself, as much as assure you that no magic enters into the proceedings.

So as not to infuriate fellow writers, let me clarify my reasons for what I have said. In writing business manuals, we present no opposition to the likes of the Archers or Cartlands of the world; their undisputed talents will not be threatened by a sudden influx of new names arriving on the scene.

Home publishers sell 'Information', the quality of which is assessed by the value of 'what' is imparted; actual literary techniques and choice of words assuming far less importance. That's not to say we mustn't be clear and precise in what we say or write; it simply means that anyone with a normal 'working' vocabulary can create manuals destined to be held in high esteem by one's competitors.

If still not convinced, arm yourself with half a dozen or so titles picked at random from amongst those you consider to comprise the best of your stock, and take refuge in a quiet corner for an hour or two. Now read a few paragraphs from each volume, again selected entirely at random. From those which impress you most, consider what factors may have been responsible. Was it the flowery language? Perhaps the author's love of words; the extent of his or her vocabulary perhaps? Was it the writers' ability to get specific points across to the reader, easily, succinctly and clearly? Might those points have registered more easily in the mind of the reader if they had been more cleverly presented? Indeed, in terms of the information conveyed, did you really need to stray from the point to admire vocabulary and technique of the writer? If this was the case, were you really interested in the hard facts of what you were reading in the first place? And finally, did it really matter how well a point was made, as long as you understood what the writer was actually saying?

If you were to select those manuals from which you actually learned something, the chances are you would make your choice without regard to styles of writing - in other words it isn't the quality of the writing that makes a title a best seller; it's purely and simply the nature and value of the information itself. Expert writing will never compensate for poor quality information, though let us not deny that it will greatly enhance a manual already blessed with quality of content.

The first thing to convince yourself is that if you are already in possession, or can avail yourself, of information people want to be made aware of, you are already half way to producing your book. All that really remains is to determine the most appropriate format for the presentation of that material; this planning process being the most important factor in determining the ultimate value of your work, and not something you should ever consider lightly.



The Importance of Planning

There are some who commence the process of creation without any pre-conceived idea or formula to guide them, yet still they continue in the certain knowledge that no subsequent amendments will be necessary to the words they batter out onto the keyboard. They know too that their work will be much in demand, and will reward them well.

Such individuals are indeed highly skilled in the art of writing, and to the great relief of the rest of us they are also very few and far between. For the vast majority of writers, be they involved in creating novels, articles, stories - or business manuals, not one word can be committed to paper without first making a carefully detailed plan of our prospective manuscript, paying attention to its content, layout, title, sub-divisions and many other essential components before we give even a thought to writing styles, techniques, or actual choice of words.

Without that planning process, essential information committed trustingly to memory might be lost forever, or else it will re-emerge at a point long after its most appropriate point of inclusion in the overall manuscript. At this juncture the inexperienced writer may choose to dismiss the point, in order to avoid the extra workload involved in assigning the piece to its rightful position - a sad decision, since what might have ended up a highly informative, best selling manual will now show up for what it is - an incomplete and hasty creation!

The moral then is: **BEFORE YOU WRITE - PLAN WITH CARE.**

The Basic Planning Process

The procedure for writing manuals and folios owes much to the generally accepted principles of article writing; which to state the obvious involves producing a beginning, middle and an end. Not too obvious a point to be disregarded though, since these three components of all articles have a different part to play, basically to: Introduce, Expand and Clarify, and to Sum up what has gone before.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a great deal can be learnt from studying the work of those accomplished writers of magazine articles, who also divulge their techniques in the writers' press for the benefit for aspiring writers. Generally accepted as the gurus in the teaching of article trends and techniques are Gordon Wells and John Hines. If writing your own manuals and folios appeals to you, you can do no better than read books written by these gentlemen. The two I tend to favour are:

Gordon Wells. ' The Craft of Writing Articles' . Published by Allison & Busby.

John Hines. ' The Way to Write Magazine Articles' . Published by Elm Tree Books.

The advice contained in these two excellent books will guide you through the methods of article creation, and also offer pearls of wisdom to add a touch of professionalism to your work.



First Steps - Planning our Objective

First and foremost we must plan the bare bones of that which we intend to create; rather as the dressmaker creates her pattern, or the architect his plans. Without our objective, our work is doomed from the beginning. Often, for our purposes, our objective will be almost identical to the title or working title of our manuscript. In the manual I am now writing, though I will eventually call it ' The Exclusive Formula' , my working title and my subsequent sub-title is ' Writing your Own Manuals and Folios' . That working title sums up the intended objective of my work, namely to offer the publisher advice as to how to write his or her own manuals and formulas, something which will hopefully provide ' The Exclusive Formula' .

You needn' t choose its ultimate title until your document is complete, but simply giving it a working title, and one which sums up your objective, will keep you on the correct lines and stop you straying into the realms of irrelevance. Your working title may though lack the ' OOMPH' you wish your manual' s ultimate title to strike in the mind of the potential reader.



Creating the Skeleton Outline

Those who intend to go into this whole process of writing their own titles would now do well to read John Hines on the subject of ' NonLinear Thought Patterns' detailed in the book mentioned earlier. An ominous title admittedly, this is simply a diagrammatical method by which Hines and his writer wife create the skeletons of the many articles they write. The objective being specified in the centre of the diagram, then has lines radiating from it, each line leading to a particular point the writer wishes to make relating to that central objective or topic. Each of these secondary points may then lead to other points relevant to the sub-topic.

By putting their thoughts to paper in this manner the writers are able to be absolutely certain they have included all that they wish to have included, as well as having some means of identifying ideal breaks for new chapters or sections, by means of the fact that often the sub-sections radiating from the objective form an ideal basis for such a chapter or section. I wholeheartedly recommend that you read John Hines' book and this subject in particular.

Now, knowing I have taken you briefly through an awesome-sounding process, which is in fact extremely easy once you try it out for yourself, I can in all honesty say ' If you don' t like it, forget' it It is after all, merely an alternative method, albeit an efficient one, of listing the points you wish to make.

Whichever method we choose for deciding what will form the basis of our skeleton, we really are doing nothing more difficult than identifying and expanding upon those components we consider our manual or folio needs. So all we do is jot down, independently of one another, all of the relevant points that spring to mind, however mundane they may seem - irrelevant and duplicated material will show itself later, at which point it can be easily deleted. Much like John Hines' diagrammatical methods, if two points seem to have a close bearing or relationship to one another then enter them in close proximity in your jottings.

Putting Meat on the Bones

Your task is made easier if each point or combination of related points is made on a separate sheet of paper, or else on small pieces of card, for we now take each in complete isolation and expand the point into words that will explain and clarify what that point is all about, and what bearing it has on our overall objective. Do the same for all of your individual sheets or cards, not over concerning yourself with the actual wording if suitable words seem reluctant to spring to mind. Write it down in plain English, if possible imagining that you were expanding the point concerned for the benefit of a friend or relative who has enquired as to your meaning. This is actually how your finished document should be perceived by the reader - as friendly, clear, on an equal footing, and not as something which tends to talk down to the reader, or impress him or her with any potentially fatal sense of superiority.



Forming the Body of your Work

The meat is now on the bones of your skeleton, ready to be placed in that order which will form the body of our manuscript. Take each card or sheet of developmental points and consider which order is best suited to carrying out your objective. Remember as we said earlier, each piece of written work has a beginning, middle and an end, and allocating your pieces with this in mind will be of great assistance particularly in your early days as a writer.

If your points include no beginning, which I prefer to have worded as an introduction, then simply write the word ' Introduction' on another sheet ready for placing at the head of your juggling of development points. Your ending may simply consist of a brief resume of what your objective was and how you hope it has been accomplished.

Between your Introduction and final summary, must be allocated all of the other points you wish to make and which you have now expanded upon and clarified for the benefit of your readers. Juggle them around a little until you are satisfied with their positions within the overall body of your manual or folio.

The next procedure is to physically tape or paste together, the individual sheets in that order you have chosen for their inclusion in your work. Now you have, admittedly, a crude idea of what your finished work will look like. Now, type or re - type the complete thing in its present order, making any amendments to wording or grammar as spring to mind. Paragraphs will most often occur as a logical progression from that point where the earlier, separated, points were joined.

Time to Create the Body Beautiful

Nothing of outstanding literary talent is needed to make your work more professional. It may indeed be that your work is now complete with just a spell-check and proof reading necessary to complete the entire manuscript - oh, yes, and a decision as to what the title will be. If you can however think of a better, perhaps more concise way of saying something, then by all means do. If not don' t worry - remember it WHAT YOU SAY that counts, not necessarily HOW YOU SAY IT. Ambiguities and irrelevances will be established by means of another check, either by yourself or someone else you trust to give a constructive criticism of your work.

Read your work in its entirety, then put it away, preferably for at least a week. Now read it again; you' ll be amazed at how differently you view your own work with the benefit of eyes and mind refreshed. You will no doubt notice things you wish to change, delete, sometimes things you wish to add. Use the ' Cut and Paste' technique again, cutting at those points where you wish to remove or add material, make the amendment, then paste or tape the work together again. Any changes of wording may be made quite easily onto the actual document if you have wide margins or type in double spacing, even if you write on alternative lines in a notepad.

If time allows, I often put my work away for another period of at least a week, then review it again. Of course if you have the courage to do so, with good friends and relatives to boot, you could have them carry out your final proof reading with of course comments made throughout. They must understand though that you are not seeking solely their approval of your work; constructive criticism is what you require, and if they aren' t prepared to criticize any faults or inaccuracies in your work as they perceive them, then don' t ask for their assistance.

Personally I' d rather proof read myself to the point of complete boredom, than have a well-meaning friend or relative tell me my work is perfect whilst knowing full well that the spelling, grammar or whole thing is atrocious. Such problems I want brought to my attention, not that of the world outside!

Finally, your work once you are satisfied with it, must be typed either by yourself or someone recruited to undertake the task on your behalf. Use a good typewriter, preferably a word processor, with a carbon ribbon for extra clarity. If you can afford to have it typeset so much the better, but with word processors and the better typewriters now on the market, there' s no desperate need for the added beauty of professional typesetting.

My next step is always to prepare a contents page, with details of chapters included and the page on which they commence. Your copyright notice should also be included, on the contents page if you wish. After my list of chapters and page numbers I simply add such as:

Copyright: Avril Harper

No-one now can now get away with lifting your work and claiming as his own.

I turn now to choosing a title for your document, preferably one which will attract browsers. Look at some of the great titles we find on manuals these days; there' s little alternative but to buy and discover what it' s all about, as with:

' Make œ150 in Ten Minutes' , which was retitled by the purchaser of the copyright, from what I had originally titled rather unceremoniously ' How to Write Readers' Letters and Fillers' .

Take as long as required to think up a good title, it really acts as that first impression, which as they say, lasts longest, and certainly in the field of publishing accounts for the entire difference between your manual selling, or being passed over in favour of something more exciting.

You can remember, choose to include a sub-title which will elucidate upon your ' Hype' title. I have chosen to include one in the title for this manual; without it would you have known what ' The Exclusive Formula' had to offer you?

Now I turn to creating the cover for my manuscript. Usually I simply apply rub-down lettering transfers that spell out the title I have chosen. Sometimes an illustration will be appropriate, but that chosen must be extremely clear or else it will detract from the look of the cover, and may even cause an unfavourable reaction as to the quality of what' s inside the covers. Well I know you can' t judge a book by its cover but?

And that really is it! With the exception of producing a sales leaflet for your new title, you have now provided yourself with something exclusive to your business; something to make you the envy of your competitors if indeed you have any now; and perhaps most importantly something you have written yourself - it' s a great feeling, isn' t it, holding that final product in your hands?

GOOD LUCK!

