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Guidelines for Writing a Guilford Trade Book

Thank you for publishing with Guilford. Here is an outline of what we need to see in a book for the general public:

Define your audience sharply:

Who will buy your book? The fact that "everyone" could benefit from reading it does not mean that many will feel moved to seek it out. The audience needs to be targeted enough to signal what the book can do for readers but on a subject that will feel compelling to a large enough population to make a profit.

Do write a book for parents of children with a disorder for which there are few sources of information or resources for help at this time; a book on a complicated, problematic aspect of a disorder for which comprehensive books are available (managing homework for children with ADHD, having good relationships for people with borderline personality disorder, using mindfulness to have productive conversations in all domains of life), a book for partners/spouses of those with anxiety disorders.

Don't set out to write a book that you think could benefit everyone. Readers look for answers to their specific problem--what to do with a teen who suddenly has isolated himself, what approaches to take with a chronically irritable child, or how to deal with emotional hurt when your partner has had an affair. Identify your target audience and address their specific needs, and if the book does the job well, readers may very well recommend it to their families, friends, or colleagues.

Set a clear, realistic goal:

Don't make hyperbolic promises (a cure vs. coping methods, salvation vs. help, lifetime help for a problem that changes course vs. help at a discrete life stage, etc.).

Always put the reader first:

It's crucial that you get into your prospective readers' heads so you can organize and write the book from the vantage point of what readers need and want. You know what you can offer, but unless you can capture readers by establishing that you understand their concerns and what brings them to your book, you'll lose them before you begin. *Start* with readers' concerns; don't tell them everything you know about the subject and build up to solving their problem. Tell readers what *they* want to know, not what *you* want them to know (it's easy to make readers receptive to the latter as long as you do the former).

Help, suggest, and guide vs. teach, dictate, or prescribe:

No one likes to be lectured. Didactic approaches are for textbooks. Your book needs to substitute for a trusted, empathic expert sitting across a desk from a patient or client.

Think building blocks, not test prep:

Your book should be structured so that every chapter adds to what has come before and all contribute to solving the problem that is the goal of your book. The main theme should be woven throughout the book, and referred back to periodically so that readers feel confident they are making progress.

Do start a chapter briefly reminding readers of what they have learned and how it leads to their goal and how the addition of this new chapter will build on that.

Do end a chapter with a transition to the next chapter: "Now that you know X, you can start to think about Y [or how to apply X in your daily life, or the like]."

The goal is to keep readers engaged and motivated to read on, not to help them memorize so they can pass a test. Your book should help them feel increasingly informed and empowered and leave them feeling as if they have new tools, skills, and knowledge to solve the problem with which they came to the book.

Textbooks assume a captive audience; you present the information in a way that makes it assimilable and memorable. Trade books should also make the information assimilable and memorable, but you can't assume a captive audience--you have to engage them by continually reminding them *why* they need the material you're presenting and how it fits in with the book's (and reader's) overall goals.

Don't start a chapter with "We have talked about ... and now we will talk about...."

Don't end the chapter with "In this chapter we discussed ...."

Use conversational language:

Always speak directly *to* readers, using second person (you), instead of talking *about* them. Use contractions. Talk to them as if to a friend who has asked your advice because you happen to have expertise in their area of need. Don't be afraid to use humor. Vary the tone and rhythm of your writing to keep readers interested. You're not subject to the requirements of journal writing or textbook writing here.

Enhance knowledge and understanding:

Assume your audience is fairly well educated--that's who buys trade books. Don't tell them what these adults are already likely to know; do offer your expertise (defining terms, explaining scientific concepts in everyday language). If your subject matter requires you to talk about common knowledge in context, explicitly acknowledge that readers already know these things--but that they don't know what you're about to provide.

Identify priorities and keep it short:

No one has time to read much, and the Internet and other books are always competing for readers' attention. Try to stick to important points (minimize background information--again, assume people already know a lot of this) and avoid dense text: Use lists, boxes, and concise language to pack in a lot of information without using tons of words.

Don't ask readers to do too much:

Remember that readers of self-help books have a serious enough problem that they're willing to read a book to get help. This means they will probably feel empowered by your supplying reliable information and advice, but what you offer must be delivered in a way that doesn't feel overwhelming.

Don't try to turn them into their own diagnostician or therapist.

Do tell them how to identify a good diagnostician or therapist and arm them with enough understanding of the problem that they can evaluate any conclusions or advice from a professional.

Don't give complex explanations or mounds of facts and expect them to run with them.

Do sum up take-home points.

Do tell them how to apply facts in straightforward ways.

Don't tell them they *have* to take charge.

Do tell them they *can* take charge.

Always balance empowering readers with understanding that they have many demands on their energy and time (including the limitations imposed by dealing with the problem that brought them to this book).

Use signposts:

Make it easy for readers to refer back to the book and find what they want by using several subhead levels, bold lead-ins, boxes that summarize important points, and other type elements.

Be sensitive to readers' likely mindset and emotional state:

If you're writing for adults with a psychological problem, normalize without minimizing or cheerleading. If you're writing for the loved ones of an adult with a problem, affirm their frustration and worry and the limitations on how much they can realistically help instead of just offering explanations (which in isolation might be frightening) and advice. If you're writing for parents, these two points are even more important, as is avoiding any implication of blame.