

How to Hire a Book Ghostwriter

10 VITAL QUESTIONS
FOR YOUR FIRST
MEETING



By Carol Tice

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Do you have a book idea that you've been struggling to write? If so, you're in the right place.

You're not the only one ripping your hair out wishing your book was already in your hand, either. As a longtime book ghostwriter, I can tell you that many CEOs, philanthropists, investors, founders, and other brilliant thinkers have great ideas they long to get out in the world.

Everywhere they go, people say: "You should write a book about this."

And you want to. You long to make a bigger positive impact.

But then reality hits and you remember that writing is hard and time-consuming. Most first-time authors quickly discover it's tough to wrangle their ideas into a fascinating narrative readers will devour start to finish. Especially if you're busy and playing with words isn't your full-time career.

That's why there are book ghostwriters like me. A talented book ghostwriter takes this chore off your plate and, in short order, creates the book you need—one that positions you as an authority and that reads exactly like you sat down and wrote it yourself.



Why Hire a Book Ghostwriter ?

There are two main reasons to hire a book ghostwriter: You don't feel up to writing the book you want on your own, you don't have the time to write it quickly—or both.

Why might you need a book right away? Common reasons for fast-tracking a book with a ghostwriter include a need to:

- Build authority and level-up your career or brand
- Raise your profile in your industry
- Receive invites to speak or serve on boards
- Sell a 'book in the back of the room' after talks
- Book more consulting clients
- Attract funding for your startup
- Position yourself as the go-to expert in your field
- Get more free publicity/media mentions
- Attract your next great CEO/C-Suite job offer
- Share your amazing journey to inspire and uplift others

A book is the ultimate reputation enhancer for all these marketing goals and more. No short-form content imparts the gravitas that a book does. Everybody has blog posts and social posts and articles. To stand out, you need a book!



If you're longing to see your name on the cover of a game-changing book this year but know you're unlikely to produce an instant masterpiece on your own... it's time to hire a book ghostwriter.

Otherwise, your book might get published years from now...or never. It could also become just another book that sells 6 copies, like most self-pubbed books do. Instead of becoming a hit that achieves your goals, like this author I recently worked with:



Ready to hire a ghostwriter? Let me walk you through how the process works.

Your First Meeting With a Book

Ghostwriter:

Be Ready to Answer These 10 Questions

What is your book ghostwriter going to ask you? Here are the top questions you'll likely hear at a first meet:

1. Tell me about your book. What's the proposed title or concept?

If you can't answer this one, you're simply not ready to hire a ghostwriter. You need your basic book idea crystallized in your head to move forward.

Struggling to summarize it? If so, imagine you're at a cocktail party and everyone has had a few.

A stranger asks what you're doing, and you say you're working on a book. "What's it about?" they ask. Your answer is: _____.

If you can't fill in that blank, you're not ready to work with a book ghostwriter yet.



2. Why is this the book you're writing, and why is it needed now?

As with most big projects, there is a reason you're looking for a ghostwriter right now.

Why do you feel driven to create this particular book, of all the topics you might share? What do you know that you feel others don't, that they urgently need to hear? What's happening in the culture or the world today that makes your idea or personal story 'of the moment'?

It usually takes 6-12 months for a ghostwriter to create a full-length nonfiction book. Without a strong reason why we need to get this book done, the project may sputter to a halt before the book is completed. Know your 'why' and whether there's a deadline looming when you need that book in your hand.



3. How do you plan to publish your book?

Why does your ghostwriter need to know right off how you plan to put out your book? Because the first writing project is different, depending on your publication goals.

There are three basic ways books come into the world today: You land a traditional publishing deal, you use a hybrid publisher, or you self-publish.

With a traditional publishing deal, you find an agent who agrees to represent you. They then pitch your book to print publishers in hopes of getting a book deal. If they succeed, the publisher will own the copyright to your book, while the agent will take a percentage of your book income. [You will need a book proposal to pursue this \(details below\).](#)

With self-publishing, you find and hire all the different professionals needed to turn your raw manuscript to purchasable, finished book. This may include an editor, copyeditor and/or proofreader, a cover designer, book formatter, and publishing service that will physically get your book onto all your desired platforms. You'll go ahead and write the full manuscript, and pay these pros on a fee-for-service basis.

You may also hire a book marketer to help you promote your book. Big picture: You assemble your own bespoke publishing and marketing team.



What is a Hybrid Publisher?

Hybrid publishers offer a third way to turn your completed manuscript into a published book. They incorporate some aspects of both traditional publishing and self-publishing. Sometimes also called co-publishers or collaborative publishers, each hybrid publisher has its own model and terms, so read fine print closely.

Hybrid publishers handle all the back-end tasks of getting your book done: editing, design, formatting, and publication. Many also offer marketing services. Some 'audition' books and don't take all comers, while others may crank out hundreds of titles a year.

The plusses: You retain your copyright. And hybrid publishers are a one-stop shop, so you don't have to build your own team.

The minuses: Most hybrid publishers will take a percentage of your royalties. The percentage will be much lower than that taken by traditional publishers, but if you don't want to give up any of your book-sale money, a hybrid publisher may not be for you. Hybrid publishers also don't offer advances.





The Long and Winding Road to a Traditional Book Deal

If your dream is to land a traditional book deal, here's a tip: Don't write your book. Why? Because agents and publishers don't review finished manuscripts. I've seen too many authors waste effort writing a full draft in hopes of scoring a book deal.

Instead, you need a [book proposal](#). That's what agents use to pitch your book idea to traditional publishers. A book proposal typically consists of:

- A table of contents (a/k/a the outline)
- 2-3 sample chapters
- Market research about competing titles and your points of difference
- Your bio, ideally stressing your pre-built audience that's dying to buy the book
- A marketing plan for how you will promote the book (yes, usually that task is still on you)

The book proposal is a separate project from writing the book. Professional ghostwriters typically charge \$10,000 and up for book proposals.

Remember: Getting a traditional book deal is far from assured. The process may take from today until...forever.



The Ghostwriting Journey for Self-Publishing & Hybrid Authors

If you're self-publishing or using a hybrid publisher, you don't need a book proposal. You can move straight to collaborating with your ghostwriter on your book manuscript.

The first step is to make sure the book has a well-constructed outline that will keep the reader engaged all the way through. If an author is struggling to find the right structure for their book, I often do an outline project first. This is a great way to 'date' your ghostwriter before getting married to doing a full manuscript together.

Why an outline? Because [book structure is massively important to your book's success](#).

Knowledge of the different possible book structures that might fit your material is one of the big assets a pro ghostwriter brings to the table. A good ghost will review the options with you to help you select the best one for your goals, audience, and subject matter.

Once the book is outlined, you and your ghost can move straight into writing the full manuscript. Boom! Now that you have the outline, you also have more freedom to write chapters in any order, as the mood strikes you, which makes for a more efficient writing process.

Soon, you've got a draft.

How to Decide on a Publishing Approach

Here's one important question that can help you choose your publication route: [Do you need your book out soon?](#)

If so, you're going to want to self- or hybrid publish. A traditionally published print book usually takes nearly 2 years to see the light of day, from the moment you sign a contract. The editing process alone can take a full year.

And that's a best-case timeline. Most aspiring authors who seek a traditional book deal will never get one. It's harsh to hear, but it's reality.

Maybe you have publishing-industry connections or already have interest from a traditional publisher. Or feel the cred of a traditional imprint is a must-have. If so, go for it! Otherwise, I strongly advise you to consider self-publishing if you need to build authority now.



4. What is your goal for this book?

This simple question helps your book ghostwriter understand why we're doing this, and what success looks like. It might be anything from helping you get your first (or next) CEO job to landing more consulting clients to simply leaving a legacy, making sure your ideas are preserved for posterity.

For thought leaders, I've seen goals such as getting board seats, speaking opportunities, launching or growing your consulting practice, teaching your ideas at an Ivy League university, and more. THIS is where the ROI is on business books—usually, it's not in book revenue.

5. Who is the audience?

This is important to discuss, because you want a ghostwriter with experience writing to your target audience. If your ghostwriter has been working on children's books but your book is for C-suite executives, you're not a good fit.



6. What's your deadline?

You may love a ghostwriter's work, but if your schedules don't line up it's a no-go. If you need your book in your hand at a conference that's 9 months out and a draft in 5 months, but the ghostwriter can't start for 90 days, you aren't a fit.

[A note about timeframes for ghosted books:](#) The writing usually happens either on a fairly short, defined timeline, or the timeline is open-ended.

I'm a fan of that first category. I want to drive to completion in 6-7 months. I'm results-oriented. I want your book to see the light of day!

If creating the book is a low priority for you and could be completed any old time 5 years from now, you want a ghostwriter who's willing to roll with that.

[A warning:](#) You'll tend to pay more on an open-ended timeline. Most book ghosts will charge you hourly in this scenario. The bills will keep coming, sometimes for many years. You also may see some delays, as your project won't be top priority and the ghost may need to fit you in between more pressing deadlines.

7. How will we write this book together?

Ghostwritten books are created in various ways—and the amount of time required will impact your investment.

For instance, we might talk for a single hour so I get a sense of your voice, after which I go off to research and write. I've done a book that way.

Alternatively, you might have existing materials to work from—blog posts, podcasts, speeches, trainings, research. Obviously, working from pre-existing materials is faster and often more affordable.

Most often, I've worked with authors who need their ideas pulled out of their head through interviews. For this, I've found weekly, 45-60-minute Zoom meetings create steady progress. We talk, then I write a chapter or two for your review and feedback. Lather, rinse, repeat until the book's done.

Creating a book can feel overwhelming when you know a ton about your topic—which is why I keep you on track with brief weekly homework assignments. It's usually just one thing you should prep or think about for the coming week. [A good ghostwriter serves as the project manager](#), making sure your manuscript keeps moving toward completion.

8. Are you open to an ‘as told to’ or ‘with’ co-author credit for your ghostwriter?

This isn't something I care about, because I've already got two bylined traditional print titles and about 15 self-published e-books. I don't need more credit, and am perfectly happy to stay behind the scenes.

But some ghostwriters would like recognition, possibly because they're still building their portfolio and it'll help them get more book-ghosting contracts.

One increasingly popular alternative if you don't want to share your byline is to give your ghostwriter credit in your ‘acknowledgements’ section at the end of the book.

9. Are you aware of professional rates for ghostwriting a book?

Many aspiring authors have never hired a book ghostwriter before. That means you have no idea what ghostwriters earn. So the fee conversation can get pretty awkward.

Let me help: [Professional rates to create a full-length business book \(225-250 pages\) begin around \\$35,000-\\$40,000](#) and go up from there to \$100,000 and more. Remember, your writer will devote 6-12 months of their life, nearly full-time, to creating your masterwork.

Obviously, a shorter book or one created from pre-existing materials will cost less.

What will YOU pay? It depends on book length, deadline, topic complexity, how you'll make the book together, and the level of experience you need in your ghost to ensure your book's success.

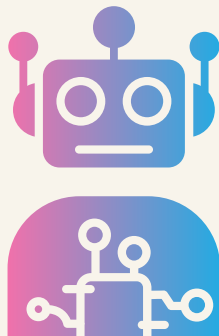
MY STORY: My authors have sold thousands of copies and have 100+ 5-star reviews on Amazon. I've also used my bylined ebooks to promote an online business I built and successfully sold. Expert niches for me include complex business and personal finance topics, legal, leadership, HR and more. Given this track record of creating successful books, I'm currently in the \$65K-\$90K range for a full-length book.

Ghostwriters at the \$100K-\$150K level usually have sold book proposals to major traditional publishers or have ghosted major-list bestsellers (USAToday, NYTimes, WSJ).

10. Can't I just use AI to write my book for pennies?

Here are the biggest problems with that:

1. YOUR BOOK CANNOT BE COPYRIGHTED. It'd be a shame to put your unique ideas out there in a form where you can be ripped off without recourse.
2. WANT IT ON AMAZON? They're cracking down on AI junk books, so watch out. You'll also have to disclose your AI use—not a move that impresses people that you've got original insights.



3. AI CAN'T PULL THE STORY OUT OF YOU. In my experience, creating a great book involves a lot of back-and-forth with your ghostwriter. AI won't ask you for more details, additional points, your feelings about anything... so the result tends to have a lot of missing pieces. That means it's unlikely to achieve your goals.

4. EVER READ A BOOK CREATED BY AI? They're a mess. I just recently did a complete rewrite of an AI-written book—there was really nothing usable as-is. What a mess. Having seen the challenges of rewriting AI slop, I now charge MORE to rewrite AI than I would for writing a book from scratch.

“But wait—I've heard I could get my book written for \$3,000. By a live human.”

Certainly, you could. There are plenty of websites online where you can find desperate people willing to write for a pittance.

But this is a serious 'you get what you pay for' situation. If you're trying to build authority or inspire others with your book, it needs to be great writing, not hackwork. This person holds your future and legacy in their hands.

You want them to care that this book is amazing, life-changing, and impressive to readers. And \$3,000 does not buy a lot of care. Don't be shocked if the resulting book isn't even grammatically correct.

If getting a brilliant book written for tiny money sounds too good to be true, that's because it is.

What I bring: I've written lead-gen e-books that earned \$60K+ while building a blog-based online business that I sold in '21. So I usually include an hour of **book-marketing tips** in my writing contracts. I can save my authors some trial-and-error on what works and doesn't, because I've been there done that.

Over the years, I've also built a **referral list** of trusted, longtime hybrid publishers and fee-for-service providers in book production: editors, book designers, and book marketing specialists. Happy to share.

Since I have a **strong track record driving traffic** with blogging and SEO for Forbes, Entrepreneur, and in my past digital biz, I'm sometimes also hired to write promotional content in book marketing campaigns.

Think about your needs—then, ask a few questions to get a full picture of what additional services your ghostwriter might be able to offer beyond writing the manuscript.



Questions Authors Should Ask a Ghostwriter

A first meeting is a two-way street. You should have questions for your ghostwriter, to help you understand what they bring to the table. A few good questions to ask:

How many titles have you ghostwritten recently?

Ideally, your ghostwriter does this full-time and has worked on multiple titles. Watch out for first-timers and dabblers who last wrote a book years ago. You want a writer whose book-writing muscles are getting regular exercise.

What genres of books have you ghostwritten?

The more similar past titles are to the book you want written, the better.

Can I see samples of your ghostwritten titles?

You may not see ghostwritten titles on a writer's website, but many ghosts (including me) have permission to share samples privately. They should also have bylined work you can review.

Can I talk with past authors you've worked with, or see recommendations?

This is a must. Successful ghosts have rave reviews to share with you, and can readily connect you privately and confidentially with past authors they've worked with who can share their collaboration experience.

I Can't Afford This. What Now?

If you're having sticker shock right now, take heart. There are a few budget ways to work with a pro ghostwriter.

One great way is to do a [book outline project](#), to make sure you have a strong narrative structure and your book gets read. With this detailed road map (including subheads within chapters) you might then try to write the book yourself.

I usually charge \$5,000 for a full-length book outline, with a substantial portion of that fee creditable towards the writing, if I also write the manuscript. It may sound like a lot, but a ton of information-gathering is needed to create a detailed outline that sets up your book for success.

You might also write a rough draft of your book and hire a ghostwriter to do a rewrite or polish. Alternatively, you could work with a developmental editor to improve your draft.



Ready to Hire a Book Ghostwriter?

If reviewing these questions made you realize your moment to hire a book ghostwriter has come, I'm excited for you! Getting your book out there is an amazing feeling – and can be transformative for your career and your life.

I hope that you find the right ghostwriter for your book, and that you're able to realize your dream of being a published author.

Wondering if I'M your ghostwriter? Let's talk. Email me at carol@caroltice.com, InMail me on [LinkedIn](#) or visit my writer website at caroltice.com. I'm happy to set up a time to chat.

I look forward to learning more about your book!
--Carol

