

# HOW TO STRUCTURE A BUSINESS BOOK

**Business books are stories.  
Your book is a narrative.**



**47%**

of authors reported that organizing content is a major challenge.\*

Second behind “getting time to write” (49%)

\*Source: Bernoff.com author survey of 172 published nonfiction authors, 2019-2022

**Settle three key elements  
of book organization:**

**SIZE, SEQUENCE, STRUCTURE**

**1**

**SIZE.** How long are chapters?  
Chapters should have a consistent size.

**Examples for a  
60,000-word book:**

**Short Chapters**

30 chapters of  
2,000 words  
(Good for how-tos)

**Medium Chapters**

15 chapters of 4,000 words  
(Good for narratives,  
self-help)

**Long Chapters**

10 chapters of  
6,000 words  
(Good for strategy, big ideas)

**Break up long chapters into sections and subsections.**

**2**

**SEQUENCE.** Chapters should form a story. **For example:**

**Chapter 1**

Create urgency by describing  
a problem. “Seare the crap  
out of you” chapter.  
Two options: FEAR or GREED.

**Chapters 2-3**

What are the elements  
of the solution?  
(e.g., 5 main  
principles, 7 steps)

**Chapters 4-8**

How does the  
solution work?  
(e.g., one chapter for  
each principle)

**Chapters 9-12**

What are the  
consequences  
of adopting this  
solution?

**Chapter 13**

How will this  
change your  
world?

**3**

**STRUCTURE.** Use parts to reveal the book’s architecture.

**Example:** Structure of *Build a Better Business Book*

**PART I. Prepare**

Chapter 1. Business Books Are Stories  
Chapter 2. Why Write a Book?  
Chapter 3. Great Ideas and Great Titles  
Chapter 4. Publishing Models  
Chapter 5. Book Proposals That Sell  
Chapter 6. Book as Narrative  
Chapter 7. The Book Plan  
Chapter 8. The Employee Author

**PART II. Research and Write**

Chapter 9. Case Studies and Stories  
Chapter 10. Research and Data  
Chapter 11. Drafting Chapters  
Chapter 12. Writing and Planning Tools  
Chapter 13. Graphics and Cartoons  
Chapter 14. Coauthors and Ghostwriters  
Chapter 15. Editing and Revising  
Chapter 16. Facts, Footnotes, and Back Matter

**PART III. Manuscript Into Book**

Chapter 17. Turning a Manuscript into a Book  
Chapter 18. Covers  
Chapter 19. Blurbs and Endorsements  
Chapter 20. Audiobooks

**PART IV. Success**

Chapter 21. Launch and Promotion  
Chapter 22. Public Speaking  
Chapter 23. Making Money  
Chapter 24. Writer to Author

**Always remember . . .**

If your book feels like a story, people will keep reading. | A well-structured table of contents helps sell the book. | A beautiful structure makes it easier for readers to talk about you.

## USE THE READER QUESTION METHOD

Each chapter must answer a significant question for your audience. **Examples:**

Why is corporate strategy important?

How does a strategy pay off?

Who is responsible for developing it?

What are the elements of a strategy?

How do you energize managers around it?

What process can you use for creating it?

How do you measure results?

How do you communicate strategy?

How should you modify strategy based on events?

“If you’re serious about writing a business book that matters, then look no further.” — Daniel H. Pink

Josh Bernoff

**BUILD A  
BETTER  
BUSINESS  
BOOK**

**A  
COMPREHENSIVE  
GUIDE FOR  
AUTHORS**

How to *Plan, Write, and  
Promote* a Book That Matters

Insights from *Build a Better Business Book:  
How to Plan, Write, and Promote a Book  
That Matters* by Josh Bernoff (Amplify, 2023)

**Bernoff.com/books**