

YOU KNOW YOUR STUFF, NOW WRITE THE BOOK!

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Writing a novel is like driving a car at night.
You can only see as far as your headlights,
but you can make the entire journey that way.

—*E.L. Doctorow*

How would you like your name in lights? People flocking to your door and throwing large sums of money at you. You are instantly considered the expert in your field. Your expertise is undisputed. A pretty alluring picture, right? All you need to do is write a book on a subject that you know very well. You can spell “Oracle.” You’ve successfully written system documentation, analysis or design specifications, proposals, and maybe even user group conference papers, so what’s the big deal? This should be simple. A little effort and a lot of payback!

Well, those of us who have gone through the process can attest that this is not quite the way it works. This paper sets the record straight from the experiences of two book authors who have published a total of five books. The purpose is to relate how the book process works and are what its benefits and drawbacks. If these authors had been able to read this kind of a paper before launching into the book-writing process, we would have been better prepared for the requirements and the effects of that process. We hope that this paper will help prepare you for what to expect should you decide that writing a book makes sense for you. It will also help you make that decision in the first place. We discuss our experiences in this decision process, the contract phase, the writing phase, and life after publishing. We will also give you some sound bytes from others who have been through the process and whose names you may recognize. The first thing to explore, however, is “Does this make sense for me?”

Making The Decision

Is book writing for you? To make that decision, you have to weigh the benefits and drawbacks and determine if your personal situation fits the model.

Why Say “Yes” to a Book Project?

Before discouraging you with the drawbacks and requirements, let’s start with the good part. There are many benefits and reasons for writing a book.

Industry Recognition

If you have written something useful about a popular topic, your name will automatically be associated with that topic. The word “expert” will be used to describe you. Whether this benefit pays you back, depends a bit on your situation. For an independent consultant or for work in a consulting firm, there is nothing better for selling yourself to a potential client.

You've Got It, So Flaunt It

Carry a signed copy of your book to the next sales meeting with prospective clients. While introducing yourself, you can show them the book and say, “This is my business card.” You can leave the book with them at the end of the meeting. It is guaranteed that this will make you stand out from your competition. For non-consultants, this benefit has less of an effect unless you want to pursue the lecture circuit (more on that later).

Resume Enhancement

A book credit on your resume provides you with great credibility. Use the business card tip mentioned above to break the ice with a potential employer. What employer would not want to hire someone who has established his or her expertise by dedicating the monumental effort required to write a book on the subject? You can definitely use this to enhance your current salary or to negotiate for a larger salary from a potential employer.

Learning the Subject

No matter how well you know the subject of your book, you should expect to increase that knowledge by at least five times. It is only when you have to fully explain something to a reader and ensure that what you write is accurate that you will find what you do not actually know about the subject. If you are writing on a subject that is new to you, plan on research time and be sure to line up reliable resources for the overview knowledge and best practices that you will need to write about.

Classroom Use

If your book explores an introductory or intermediate-level topic in sufficient depth, it is a likely candidate for use in a classroom situation. Often the classroom is an adult education or third-party Oracle training situation. One reason to author the book is that you have some affiliation with the class that is being given and there is a need to have a book on a particular subject. In fact, that is how both of authors this paper got started. All of our books are currently being used as textbooks. The educational arena offers little in industry recognition or monetary payback, so the reward here is mainly one of feeling that you have contributed to a good cause. In addition, if you are the instructor, you will have much class material prepared.

Contributing to the Greater Good

Writing a book contributes to the general knowledge base in Oracle technology. The strength of Oracle users' experiences combine to create a powerful source of information. This information is only available through personal networking (via email lists or news groups or conferences such as this one) and the written word (articles, white papers, and books). A book is a significant contribution to this Oracle information base. Once again, this reason will not provide you a personal tangible benefit other than the altruistic one of having contributed to the greater good. Believe it or not, this reason is primary to many authors. Regardless of this, we all like to see ego-stroking comments such as the following message that was posted on the ODTUG list serves at the end of January 2001.

A Message From the ODTUG List Serves

Paul [Dorsey], David [Wendelken], and Ken [Atkins],

I know you aren't making much writing those books, but you do get the praise and gracious thanks from people like me who read them cover to cover. We don't say "thank you" often enough, so let me say thanks for all those great pages that you've written. I could not do my work without them! I'm sure everyone on the list will agree!

Thanks ever so much! And please please keep writing!!!!

*Maggie Tompkins, Defense Finance and Accounting Service,
(and ODTUG Board of Directors)*

The Lecture Circuit

Having authored a book, you will be in the top of the list for the lecture circuit. The promoters of the event (whether it be a user group conference, master class, or internal IS meeting) can use your name and your book title to generate interest. As with many other aspects of Oracle knowledge sharing, this does not pay very well either. If you have a desire to travel and network with other Oracle users, this is a benefit to consider. It takes a bit of pavement pounding after the book is released to look for opportunities. User group conferences are a good place to start.

Why Say "No" to the Book Project? (The Resource Requirements)

The main reasons you would not want to write a book are few but important. The following discusses these reasons as well as requirements for successful completion of a book project. These categories are related because a resource requirement may actually become a reason not to launch a book project.

There is Little Money to be Made

“Is there money in book writing?” is the first question people ask and the first myth that needs to be dispelled. In case you missed the point in “Why Write a Book?” above, we shall state it clearly: authoring Oracle technical books normally does not generate anything more than miniscule revenue. If your book is very popular and has gone through many editions and printings with little or no rewriting, you may realize something that feels like profit, but this is rare.

While the additional income that book royalties offer each year helps you, the amount of time and hard work that go into the book rarely pay back in kind. (One prospective author has estimated that the payback would be between 5 and 10 dollars per hour of time invested in the book.) It is possible, depending on the arrangement with your employer, that your salary will be less while you are working on the book because you are not working on projects that directly benefit the company’s bottom line. The book income will probably not compensate for this loss. Therefore, it may be that you are not just making little money, but it may be that you are actually losing money by writing the book. You have to carefully consider this effect. (The discussion on royalties below explains some of the parameters.)

"Real Work" Demands Too Much Time

It is quite possible to hold down a full-time job and write a book at the same time. Many authors do this. However, if your job has open-ended time requirements, it is possible that your estimates before a book project will become inaccurate as job pressures grow. You may miss critical book deadlines because of job commitments. Most book contracts are written with some flexibility for the final deadline, but the longer you delay, the more out of date your book will become. This could be a factor depending on your subject matter. If your book is about a specific version of a product, this will be an important consideration.

Employer Support

After all these cautions, you may still be interested in writing a book. However, it is possible that your employer is not as enthusiastic as you are about the book project. This factor relates to factor of work pressures, but could be a deal breaker if you can not come to an understanding. Employers need to justify your salary and book writing is usually not part of their revenue stream. However, depending on the firm, your employer may realize that there is a marketing benefit to having you visible as an industry expert. There are a few other bargaining points that you can use with your employer

- **Use training hours** Some of the hours spent on the book project could be allocated from normal training hours. You will learn a lot on the subject—more than a class would ever offer. This will not make up the entire amount of time spent, but it could offset the final figure.
- **Share the time commitment** It will not be possible to justify the total number of hours that you spend, but you can offset the total with “free time” that you would normally spend after work or on the weekend. In addition, you could throw holiday and vacation hours into the mix if needed.
- **Offer visibility to the company** You can be sure that the company has visibility in your author biography, in your company affiliation on the cover, and, potentially, in an advertisement inside the book.
- **Create training materials** If the subject is one in which others in your organization would need to be trained, you can offer to create an internal class to explain the topic from your book. Depending on the interest and market, this class could also be sold to your clients or given at user group conferences to generate business for your company or extra book sales. This will require extra hours, but the knowledge that you gain from the book process will help you create these materials.
- **Use billable hours** For consultants who work on client projects, the project proposal could be written with built in support for research that you would also need to do while writing the book. If the client is open to the idea (for a reduction in fee, perhaps) and you can work out your book contract properly, the write-up you do as documentation for the client could become part of the book text.

Impacts to Social Life

Authors always joke about not having a social life. They always profusely thank their significant others and family for bearing with their time away from “normal” life. This is also an overriding theme in the thoughts offered by other authors presented at the end of this paper. You must be absolutely certain that you are realistic about the amount of time that you require and that those around you are also realistic and supportive. A book is a solo effort when you are writing, but it is a community effort when it comes to your social circle. You will definitely have to miss some of the activities in which you are accustomed to participating and this will affect those around you.

How Much Time to Budget?

There is no rule-of-thumb for how long the book project will take. The amount of time required depends on the following factors:

- **How comfortable you are with the writing process.** You also have to think about the effect on this comfort level if English is not your main language (and you are writing for an English-language publisher).
- **How well you know the topic.** If you will need to learn the topic as you write, more time will be required.
- **Whether there is research** required. Although you know the topic, you need to have more detailed knowledge so that you can explain it.
- **Whether you have a co-author.** This is discussed below.
- **How many edits the publisher requires** you to process. Each edit requires you to spend time reading and modifying the material.

As a guideline, Table 1 shows the number of hours and some general parameters for some books that the authors have written. All books were written with a co-author and required three rounds of editing. The page count indicates the number of pages for which one person was responsible. You will notice that there is not really a clear trend but you can get a rough idea for the range of hours required. As they say in car advertisements, "Your mileage may vary."

| | Hours | Pages | New subject? | Needed much research? |
|---------------|-------|-------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Book 1 | 780 | 412 | No | No |
| Book 2 | 802 | 789 | No | Yes |
| Book 3 | 908 | 478 | No | No |
| Book 4 | 1203 | 405 | Yes | Yes |

Table 1. Hours required for various books

It is useful to track the hours spent on the project in case you want to have a guideline for future book projects. You can get a sense of how long a chapter will take if you actually write one. As mentioned below, a sample chapter is often a requirement for a book proposal so this work will not be in vain. Writing one chapter will give you a rough idea of how long the first draft will take. You then need to allocate time for the edits that will need to be processed.

Great works are not performed,
 not by strength, but by perseverance.
 Yonder palace was raised by single stones
 yet you see its height and spaciousness.
 He that shall walk with vigor three hours a day
 will pass in seven years a space equal
 to the circumference of the globe.

—Johnson (1709-1784)

Should You Have a Co-author?

One of the factors that should work into your decision about a book project is whether you want to share the task with one or more people.

Benefits of a Co-author

Many Oracle technology books are written by a team of authors. Working with a co-author means that you have someone to bounce ideas off of and who can share the writing. Your co-author will probably review your chapters to verify their technical accuracy and consistency with the purpose of the book. We have found that a co-author adds greatly to the consistency, accuracy, depth, and innovation of the book. The quality of the book will be much higher with the right co-author.

A purely psychological effect occurs with a co-author that also can help towards the book's success. If you have someone who has as much dedication to the end result as you do, the deadlines become more important. You will find it harder to give up or delay when that would cause your co-author problems. In addition, there may be a bit of unrecognized and unspoken competition; that is, if your co-author finishes a chapter and you are still behind, you may work extra hard to ensure that your chapter is also completed. This works in a positive way, too, because as your co-author completes the work, you will feel that the book is that much closer to completion.

Contrary to what you might think, the time you would have to spend on the book is not lessened by half, if you have one co-author. The extra time you spend with a co-author coordinating schedules and materials, discussing ideas, performing technical edits on the book, and making decisions means that your total time spent on the book will probably be in the range of 70-100% of what it would take if you were to author the book on your own. We have no way to measure that number empirically, because we have only written with a co-author.

Drawbacks of a Co-author

While working with a co-author has clear benefits, there is a downside. The extra coordination and collaboration that is required takes time away from writing. If you are spending precious vacation or other personal time on the book, the coordination hours may sometimes seem like a waste. Our experience has been that the extra time that you spend with co-authoring overhead improves the quality of the book significantly enough to make it worthwhile.

There are serious drawbacks if you select the wrong co-author. If the person you select cannot deliver the required chapters, you will either need to find someone else to complete the work, complete the work yourself, or abandon the project. If you continue with the project, your co-author's name may be on the cover, but most of the work will be yours. If your co-author is uncooperative, not technically adept, or an inadequate writer then your name and your reputation is on the line.

Finding the Right Co-author

The main requirement of your co-author will be that they are able to complete their writing work in a timely way and with the proper level of quality. Unless you have worked with the person before, this is difficult to gauge. Your co-author must be, without question, totally committed to the successful completion of the book. If you are unfamiliar with the potential co-author's work, you will need to examine their writing for compatible style and quality. You will also need to interview them to determine if they have a compatible personality. Since you will have to work through the long book process with this person, your choice is very important. The best time to select a co-author is when you first propose the book to the publisher. A proposal from a team might be viewed as having a more solid chance of successful completion than a proposal from an individual.

Working with Your Co-author

You have to decide early in the book process how to divide up the work. Usually, the best plan is for each author to write a certain number of chapters. The other author may read, comment on, and edit all chapters but the main responsibility for each chapter will be with one person. The chapter can be addressed as an entity using this strategy. The number of chapters that each author is responsible for may vary based on the number of pages allocated to that chapter (in the book proposal process). Usually, the idea is that each author will have the same number of pages to write. Another alternative is one or more co-authors who are in charge of a chapter or two each. You will have to decide how to credit or otherwise compensate them. We would advise caution when using this strategy because it is difficult to realize most of the co-author benefits explained above.

What to Write About?

When deciding about whether to launch a book project, you need to consider the topic that you will write about.

The Good News

There is no better time than the present to become an author of a book on Oracle technology. As the Oracle technology advances, it becomes more and more complicated. People who want to learn about Oracle turn to books as one resource for this education. Publishers of technical books see this opportunity and are eager to fill that need. They welcome a chance to quickly stake a claim to a new corner of Oracle technology. In addition, books on tried and true subjects such as database and application tuning are always needed. The demand is growing for nearly any subject.

More Good News

It is not as difficult to write a book on Oracle technology as it is to write other types of books. You do not have to have the depth of knowledge that the author of a scientific or medical subject would require. Oracle technologists are looking for a

direction based on someone else's experience and successes. You do not need to have the creativity of a great novelist. Although a creative approach to your material will help readers absorb it, this is not a requirement. The main requirement is that your written material is understandable, innovative, and accurate.

Guidelines for Topics

Your topic should be current or bleeding edge. By the time the book has gone through the proposal process, two or three months may have elapsed. Even if you can write the book in four months (on an aggressive schedule), there will a month or so to print and distribute the book. Therefore, at least seven months will have elapsed between when you write the proposal and when the book is available in the bookstores. We have found this process can take up to a year with no significant delays. The Oracle product versions change so rapidly that you have to either anticipate the new features (with some help from Oracle) or write about a subject that is not dependent on versions (such as the SQL or PL/SQL languages).

Non-version specific topics have a longer shelf life and potentially larger audience. However, most of the subjects that are non-version specific have established authors who have staked a claim to the topic with an established publisher. The market for that kind of topic is more difficult (but not impossible) to break into. If your approach is innovative, the topic need not be new.

Writing About Beta Versions

One of the most important topics to write about is a new technology or new version of an existing product. You will be able to pitch a book on this easily because publishers see the benefit in having a book available as soon as a new release becomes production. Publishers can often acquire beta and pre-production versions of software because the vendors also see this benefit. It is a potential benefit to you if you are the only or first book on the market for a new product.

However, there are many risks with writing about beta software and most of the risks fall on the author. Here are some of the risks:

- **You will run into bugs** and not be able to write in depth about an important feature.
- **The help system and documentation will not be completely ready**. Since this is a new technology or new release, you need to know about the features. If you cannot rely on documentation, the only source may be the development team of the product but think how much you can rely on a team that likely has aggressive deadlines and priorities that supersede assistance on a book project.
- **Features may disappear**. We have seen major features of new products dropped a few weeks before the production release. If we had been writing about these features, we would have had to throw away that work.
- **Features may be added**. Major features that you may want to include in your book may be added at the last minute. You will have to scramble to cover these features and determine how to handle additional pages and the time it takes to write and process them.
- **Features may change**. This is the risk that is almost guaranteed to occur. The reason the product is in beta testing is that it is not ready to be released. The results of the beta test may be that a feature may have a different routine or process and different appearance. If you had based your writing on the old appearance and functionality, you would have to adjust the text.
- **The product may be delayed**. This could affect your book schedule. You do not want to release a book before the software and before you have tested the real production release with everything in your book.

In general, you will find that writing on a beta version of software means that you have to allocate more time to testing the production release against your text. There is also extra time (sometimes significant amounts of time) in wrestling with bugs or determining how a feature works. All of this must work into the schedule and you have to consider seriously if the minimum benefits of early release of the book will outweigh the significant increase in effort that is required.

Want to Write More Than One Book?

If you have more than one book that you would like to write, try to curb your desire to write both books at the same time. Here is a quote from the voice of experience:

Not For Mere Mortals

Don't try to write two books at once,
especially if it's your first time out.
It doesn't work!

—Douglas Scherer, Core Paradigm, Inc.

You Don't Feel Ready Yet?

If all of this sounds a bit daunting, you may not be ready for the commitment. A way to get your feet wet and break gently into the book writing arena is to start by writing papers for conferences and articles for technical journals. Local Oracle users groups are always looking for material for their newsletters and, if your topic is new, you may be able to sell it to publishers of technical journals such as Pinnacle Publishing or Oracle Magazine. There are also many online 'ezines (such as Revealnet) that are constantly looking for material. The IOUG-A *Select* magazine is a well-respected technical journal that will give you experience and exposure.

These outlets have benefits other than the experience you will receive. Publishers watch areas such as these for potential authors and may contact you directly after seeing your work in another medium.

Attrition Rate

It is better to stretch your entry into book writing over a period of time by authoring articles and papers. If you launch a book project without a firm background in writing skills and dedication and comfort to the process, you have a higher chance to become overwhelmed or discouraged. This is an effect that occurs to many people who propose a book to a publisher. Even if the proposal is accepted, it is only the first step and the author must have the stamina to stay with the process to the end. A half-written (or even 90% -written) book is the same as no book at all. The attrition rate for contracted books that are never completed is reportedly low (according to publishers). Publishers have mentioned that there are a large number of books that suffer serious delays and this may be due to a lack of stamina in combination with other pressures.

The Moral:

Don't get it right, just get it written.

—James Thurber (1894-1961), *Fables for Our Time*

The Book Process

The decision to start has many factors, but once you have made the decision to go forward, there are several major steps to the process. Figure 1 shows a summary of the steps you follow in writing a book.

The Proposal

You need to find an outlet for your ideas. The best place to start is with publishers who have established themselves in the Oracle technical world: Oracle Press (Osborne McGraw-Hill), O'Reilly, Prentice Hall, Addison-Wesley, SAMS, Coriolis, Wrox Press, and others that you can find using a search for Oracle books at any online book seller.

It is possible that the publisher will find you. If you are a user group conference presenter, your name will be associated as a knowledgeable person on a specific subject. Like baseball talent scouts, publishers seek out new talent for upcoming books. The smart editors visit user group conferences and even attend sessions to look for potential authors. If the publisher contacts you directly, you still need to submit a proposal but you will have a better chance that the proposal will be selected. In addition, there may be parts of the proposal that you will be able to skip (such as the sample of your writing if the publisher has already read one of your white papers or articles).

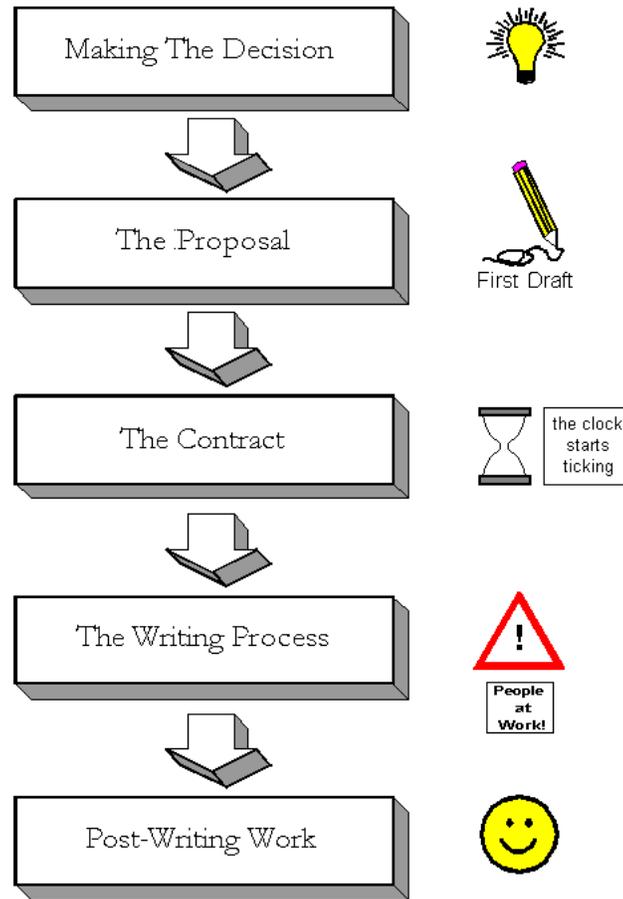


Figure 1. Book Writing Process from Start to Finish

When you are first starting out and have decided on a topic, examine what each of the publishers currently handles. You want to fit into their range but still have a singular topic that they have not yet covered. Look carefully at the publisher's marketing efforts and decide which publisher is best for the topic that you want to discuss. You will find the range of offerings different and the support for Oracle books different as well. Send the proposal to all publishers who fit your selection criteria. There is no drawback to proposing the same book to more than one publisher. In fact, if more than one publisher accepts your proposal, you will be able to compare the deals that they offer and select the best one.

For success in your proposal, you need to demonstrate that yours will be a unique (or somehow different) offering than what is currently available. You also need to think about a target audience. Part of the proposal consists of your estimate on how large the audience will be.

Elements of the Proposal

After you compile a list of publishers to whom you wish to propose your book, find the book proposal guidelines on their web site (or phone them for a hard copy). Each publisher has a slightly different format for the proposal but most require the following information:

- The book title
- An abstract with statement of scope (what the book will not cover)
- A brief biography of each author including their writing experience and expertise level on the subject
- A sample of your writing (a chapter or article that you have already written)
- Proposed completion date of the manuscript (be sure to consider the timing of user group conferences)

- Target audience (a description and total number of potential buyers)
- Key features of the book (the top three selling points)
- The list of competing book titles with a description on how your book differs
- An outline of the chapters (two or three levels) with a page count for each chapter
- The total number of pages that you expect to write for the book

When you have completed all required information and sent it to the publisher, wait a few days and make a follow-up phone call to see who is assigned to review the proposal and what the time frame might be for a decision.

The proposal should have a marketing tone. You are selling your writing skills and the unfulfilled demand that exists for the topic about which you want to write. Seek help if you are unfamiliar with this style of document. If this is your first book project, you might also want to have an established author review your proposal and give comments. You also might want to rely on other authors for their opinions on particular publishers and the methods and services that they offer.

The Contract

Once your proposal has been accepted, you will receive a “standard” author contract from the publisher that reflects the details that are in your proposal. The deal is not settled until you sign. Bargaining for a contract is important because the deal that you make will affect payments that you get through a number of years. That said, first-time authors do not have much bargaining room. The publisher has no idea of the quality that they can produce and, thus, the sales that will result from the book. Once you have established yourself as a successful author, you have a bit more bargaining room.

In the contract negotiations, remember that the person that you will bargain with, the Acquisitions Editor, negotiates book deals regularly, while you do not. You have to be clear about what you want, within reason, and know when to settle. If you are persistent, you will be able to determine what is possible on the publisher’s side.

Although it varies by publisher, the contract is made up of some standard sections. Most may be negotiated but some will not affect you greatly. The sections that you want to examine carefully and be comfortable with follow.

Manuscript Delivery and Processing

This section will state the due date for the first draft of the material. Some publishers wait until you have completed the entire manuscript before editing it. Other publishers have you submit a chapter at a time for the editing process. In the latter case, you will have chapters in different states of completion during most of the process. This process may or may not be stated in the contract. If it is not stated, ask about the process so you know what to expect.

This section will also state the size of the book in pages or words. It may also give a guideline for the number of illustrations that are required as well as other sections such as a table of contents, bibliography, and index.

There will be a description of other tasks that the author is responsible for including reviews of edits on the first draft and page proofs (pages laid out in the format of the finished work). Each edit and review round means that you are reading and checking the work again and this can add significantly to your time commitment.

The Index

In many cases, the publisher will charge the author for work on the index (a flat fee or a fee per page of manuscript). If you create the index yourself, you will not incur this fee. Although professional indexers are amazingly accurate, we have found it advantageous to create our own index because we have control over the exact contents. We have actually gotten some reviews that favorably mentioned our index. However, the index takes even more of your precious time and this is worth considering.

Copyrighted Material

Usually, the author is responsible for obtaining copyright permissions for any material that is included in the book. If you are using parts of another individual’s materials or ideas and you received their permission to include their work, the publisher requires documentation that this permission has been properly secured. The copyright on the book usually belongs to the publisher so that you may not sell or use the material that you supply for the book without written permission. The publisher is “hiring” you to create intellectual material that they will sell and they want to have control over that material. In addition, some contracts state that after a period of time, the copyright will transfer to the author. It is extremely rare, but not unprecedented, for authors to hold the copyright immediately.

Royalties

Unless you are part of a large team (more than three) of authors for a single book, your income from the book will most likely be a royalty—that is, a percentage of the net income that the book generates. It is sometimes difficult to calculate the actual figure, but a rough estimate can be that the net income for a book is 50% of its cover price. Your Acquisitions Editor may be able to give a more accurate figure based on experience. The royalty you receive on the net income is often different for sales to different sources. Royalties for starting authors often are in the 8% range. It is rare as far as we know that a royalty will go above 12%, but royalty percentages are often a closely guarded secret. The percentage will be split among the co-authors. If there are two authors for a book that lists for \$50-60, an 8% royalty will yield between \$1 and 2 per book per person. These are very rough numbers.

Technical Editor

A Technical Editor will review your first draft. Usually, the Technical Editor is an industry professional, not a publishing professional, who knows the subject matter of your book. The Technical Editor's job is to check that the technical content is technically accurate and complete. The contract will state who pays the Technical Editor—you or the publisher. If your material is bleeding edge, you may need to suggest potential technical individuals to the publisher.

The Advance

Part of your contract may specify an amount of money, the *advance on royalties* (or "advance"), that you will receive before the book is completed. The idea of this advance is that you are working on something that will generate income in the future. While you are in process, you may need to forfeit a portion of your normal non-book income. The advance is meant to provide some part of what you are forfeiting. When the book is on the market, your royalty statement shows a deduction of the Advance amount from the calculated sales. This will occur until the advance amount has been reached.

In the end, the Advance amount is not extra income, but royalty money that you receive before royalties are actually earned. You have a chance to defer royalty payments by reducing or eliminating the royalty. If this makes a difference to you, tax-wise or otherwise, you can negotiate a larger or smaller number.

If the Advance is "non-refundable," which is normal, you will not have to pay it back if the book sales do not reach that amount. When you are negotiating the book deal, you have to determine what you feel comfortable with. A higher advance might mean that you will receive a lower royalty percentage and some of the risk is shifted to the publisher. If your book does not sell well, you get to keep the advance and the publisher will not recoup that cost. This will give the publisher an incentive to market the book well. If you opt for a higher royalty percentage you are, in effect, financing part of the deal, because your royalty above the advance will not be paid until the book has been on the market and your royalty exceeds the advance. This could take six months to a year or more.

Expect the royalty amounts to be different for different sales locations. For example, domestic sales will be different from foreign sales; book club sales will be different from sales where books are bundled. Details on these types of sales and their royalties will be spelled out in the royalty section. In addition, you may receive a percentage or flat fee for sales of foreign language editions if your publisher translates books into other languages.

Payment Schedule

The contract will state how often and when royalty statements will be issued. This may be on a quarterly, biannual, or annual basis.

Complementary Copies

Often the publisher will supply the author with a number of copies of the book after it is published. This number can be negotiated. In addition, there may be a discount that is extended to the author for purchasing extra copies of the book. Compare this discount with that offered by online booksellers such as bookpool.com to see if the author discount is worthwhile.

Other Negotiation Points

You may be able to negotiate over the book cover design. The text on the cover should be subject to your approval because this is what the potential buyer first sees. Not all contracts give you this right. Often the layout and design elements are not negotiable because they are part of a standard for a series of books. If you want to be listed in a certain way that is not part of the standard, you should make that known in the contract phase. If you want to include advertising for your company or a photo of yourself, now is the time to ask for it.

Another point that you can try to negotiate is liability. Some contracts will protect the publisher by absolving it from liability for a mistake that the author made. You will want to ensure that there is a clause that protects you too.

Wait! Don't Sign Yet!

Before you sign that contract, give yourself a reality check. It is very easy to get caught up in the excitement of closing the deal and having all the benefits of being an author within your reach. The biggest one is the time commitment. However, a contract is actually the relatively easy part of the process. Be sure that you understand the schedule that you will need to follow. (See the section below on “The Schedule” for details.)

Don't Take Our Word (Please)

Whenever you are negotiating a contract such as this,
you should consider getting a professional legal opinion.
The opinions of the authors are not a substitute for legal counsel.

The Writing Process

Now that you have signed the contract and, thereby, have signed away the the next four to six months of your life, it is time to start the process of writing. The publisher will probably have a set of guidelines that they have written to explain the process. We have found it helpful to read these guidelines and to hold kickoff meeting with your editors before launching into the process. This can save headaches and rewrites later on. Figure 2 shows the steps involved with the writing phase. These steps may vary from publisher to publisher. All text is usually handled in an electronic format until the page proof phase. The section on “The Players” describes the roles mentioned here in more detail.

- **First Draft** This is when you complete writing the material. The first draft will include all figures and graphics so that the reviewers can check them.
- **Technical Review** The Technical Editor and Technical Reviewers will read the chapters and make comments on the text.
- **Technical Review Incorporation** The author will process the comments, incorporate corrections or additions, and fix unclear statements.
- **Project Editor Review** The Acquisitions Editor checks the manuscript for completeness and formatting and passes it to the Project Editor who is now in charge of the material.
- **Copy Edit** The manuscript is read line by line for grammar, spelling, and detailed formatting. If the Copy Editor has questions to the author, he or she writes them into the document.
- **Author Answers and Final Edits** The author reviews the document again and answers the Copy Editor's questions. At this point, the author can add or revise the text in minor ways. After the author sends this text to the next step, changes become more difficult. The author sends the manuscript to the Project Editor who cleans all comments and revisions from the document and prepares it for typesetting.
- **Typeset and Page Proof** The Production Department lays out the text and sets the text in its final format (page proofs). It prints a hard copy for the author's review or sends the author a PDF file of the layout.
- **Author Page Proof Review** The author checks the page proofs and marks changes on the hard copy. This is sent back to the Project Editor and is usually the last edit for the author although authors may also receive final page proofs for review.

The Schedule

One of your first deliverables will be a schedule that states when each chapter will be complete in its first draft form. You need to end this schedule at the date that the contract stated for completion of the first draft. Whether you turn in chapters as they are complete or wait until all are complete depends on the publisher's policy. Given a choice, we prefer the step-wise, chapter-at-a-time approach. The benefit is that you can keep the editors busy over a long period of time and you can be more disciplined if there is a deadline for each chapter that the publisher is managing. The drawback is that you will have less chance to make significant changes to chapters that you finished early in the process. This means that the book needs to be carefully scanned when it is completely finished to check continuity. Often, you will work on chapters out of order because the research you do for one chapter requires research from another chapter.

It is essential to stay as close as you can to the schedule that you have set. It will be the publisher's job, once you commit to a schedule, to see that it is followed with minimum delays. When you are signing up for a project, they can help you come up with a realistic schedule. The publishers have a stake in making sure that your schedule is reasonable because they have dependent services and resources that they need to schedule such layout people, editors, and publicity material. In addition, the printer needs to be scheduled relatively far in advance. If the schedule slips, the printer may not be available when the book is ready and the book may be delayed until the printer is available. The publisher also needs to generate interest in the book and tell readers when it will be available. If the schedule you set is not realistic enough, the deadlines will slip and cascade through all related areas.

Remember, too, that you are racing against a technology that will only move forward. New versions of software and new understandings may outdate your text before you finish. The longer you delay, the harder it will be to adjust your book to the new technology. Also, the longer you work on a book, the greater chance you will have of an unexpected work or life event occurring that will throw your schedule off. Furthermore, if your family and employer have expected a specific delivery date after which you will be available, delaying may inconvenience them as well.

There is the possibility that "life events" will occur in the middle of the project. This may take your time away from the book project and a deadline may slip. The key to staying on a schedule is early detection and course correction. It may be that your original author team is not sufficient and you need to look for an additional person as an author. It may be that one of the original co-authors is not capable for some reason and needs to be removed from the project. Your editor can assist in ideas that will put the project back on track if it starts to slip. Keep your editor informed of anything that could have an effect on the schedule.

Don't Even Think of It

Missing a book deadline is a bad thing.

The Players

Before going much further, it is necessary to explain the roles of the people who you will have contact with for the work on the book. The following list is not specific to any particular publisher and the titles may vary depending on the publisher. In addition, some publishers may merge roles put one person in charge of more than one logical role.

- **Acquisitions Editor** This person is in charge of accepting your book proposal and securing your contract. In addition, the "Acq Editor" will monitor your schedule and be sure that your first draft is delivered in a timely way. The Acq Editor also is your primary contact for post-publishing tasks such as book signings and other marketing events.
- **Project Editor** The Project Editor receives the manuscript from the Acq Editor and follows it through the rest of the production process including edits, page proofs (also called galley proofs), finals, and indexing. The Project Editor may also handle the reprint changes.
- **Copy Editor** This editor (also called a Line Editor) reads the first draft and makes it more readable from the standpoint of the written English language. You will see this person's work although you will interface more with the Project Editor than the Copy Editor. The copy editor works off of a *style sheet* that contains lists of words (such as "dialog," "Windows," "SELECT", etc.) that need to be formatted or spelled in a certain way. The Copy Editor uses this list as well as standard style guides and dictionaries to check the formatting, grammar, and spelling.
- **Technical Editor** This person, mentioned in the contract section above, reads the first draft from a technical standpoint and makes comments and corrections on its accuracy and consistency. The Technical Editor is an industry expert, not a publishing person. An excellent Technical Editor can assist the author greatly in ensuring the quality of the material by offering meticulous comments and useful suggestions to help the objectives of the book.
- **Technical Reader** A Technical Reader reviews selected chapters of the manuscript. The typical reader is often a colleague and or friend representative of your target audience. Other than receiving an acknowledgment in the book, a reader is not paid. The reader often provides you with very valuable feedback and comments and spots errors, inconsistencies, and other embarrassing oversights that other editors did not catch. The technical reader is your saving grace.
- **Indexer** This person, also mentioned in the contract section above, is not necessarily knowledgeable about the subject matter but is skilled in extracting concepts from the printed page. The index is an important aspect of a

technical book and we prefer writing them ourselves. The publisher can provide you with the format that is required. One way to do an index is the “old way” with index cards. A more modern way is to put tags in the electronic version of the document and the publisher's layout software then compiles the production version with the correct page numbers.

There are other people behind the scenes that you will not have direct contact with. The Project Editor interacts the the production staff that formats the text into the final page proofs; proofreaders that check those proofs for completeness; illustrators that lay out graphical diagrams and redraw art work.

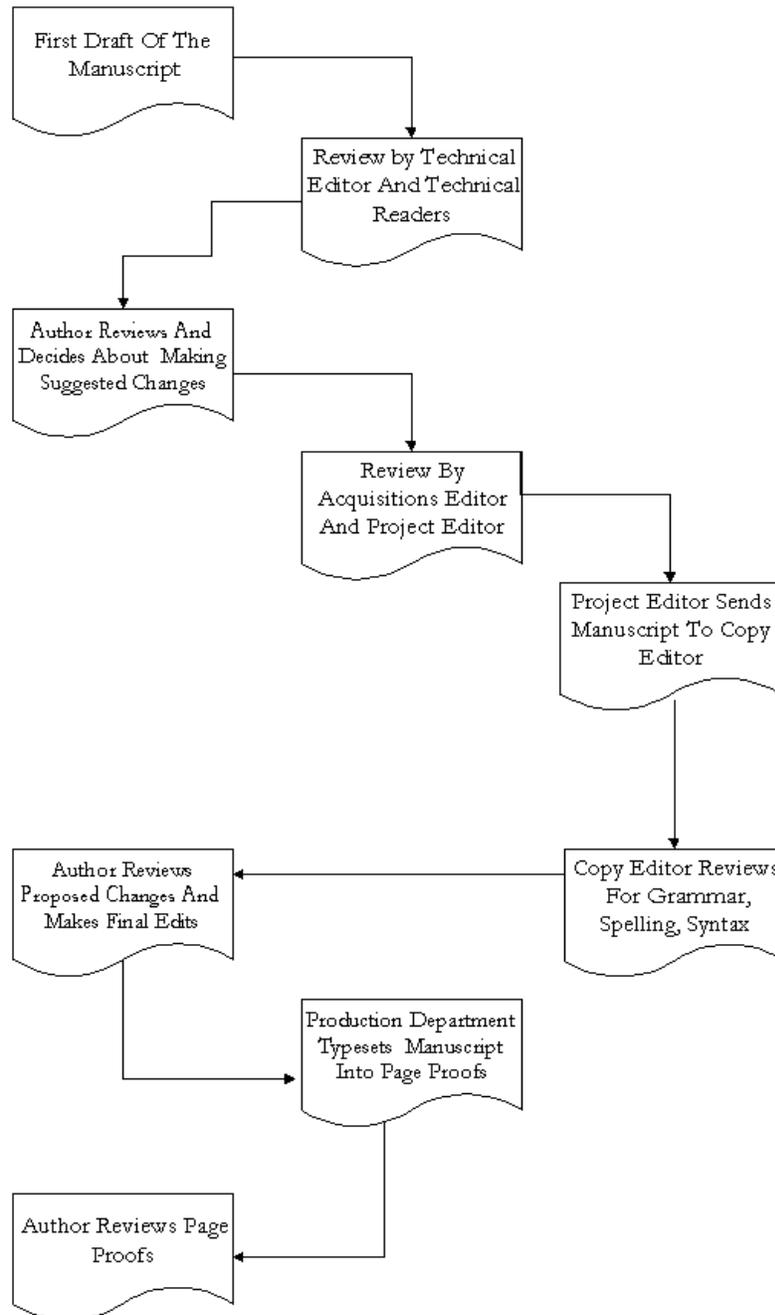


Figure 2. The Writing Process from Draft to Print

Startup Considerations

Before starting, check that your work area is ergonomically set up. You will spend long hours at the keyboard and mouse. To prevent injury, you must make sure that your tools are at the proper level and angle. You also must think about your work sessions. It is easy to become absorbed in writing and miss normal breaks, but it is essential that you take breaks frequently to give your hands and arms a rest. A child or pet can assist by reminding you to take these essential breaks.

Resources

Although much of the work of writing is a solo effort, you want to be sure that you have friends or colleagues whom you can call if you get stuck on a particular technical issue. If you are writing about an upcoming feature or version of an Oracle product, line up your Oracle contact for beta and pre-production software. Also, be sure that you can take advantage of an online resource such as the IOUG-A discussion forums (www.ioug.org) or the ODTUG list serves (www.odtug.com).

Screen Test

If your book will include screenshots that demonstrate a particular aspect or feature, it is worthwhile early in the process to send the editor a sample screenshot in the file format the publisher requests. The graphics department can verify that you have prepared the file correctly. This will save you from having to redo a number of graphics.

Template

The publisher will probably give you a word processing template into which you will type your manuscript. Be sure that you are familiar with the requirements early in the process so that you do not have to redo any material. As with the graphics test, it is worthwhile to send the editors a sample of your work formatted into their template and have them confirm that the formatting is correct.

Ready, Set, Starting Writing!

Once all of the above is lined up, you can start. We have little advice on the actual writing because your style will depend on how you work best. What we can discuss are the various stages that the book material will go through. This is the process for one chapter of material whether all chapters are in the same stage at the same time or whether the chapters are staggered throughout the time period in different stages.

- **Technical Edit** The first step is to write the draft and send the copy for review by the technical editor and technical readers. You make any suggested corrections that you agree with and send the chapter along as a first draft (or *first write*) to the Acquisitions Editor. This editor will check that the material is formatted correctly and that all accompanying graphics are complete and will send it to the Project Editor. The Project Editor will send the document to the Copy Editor.
- **Copy Edit** The Copy Editor will review the text for grammar, syntax, and spelling and send the text back to you (through the Project Editor) with edits and questions. You need to answer all questions and check all changes that the copy editor made. Sometimes an extra word or a missing word can make a sentence grammatically correct but the technical correctness may be lost. You, therefore, need to reread the entire manuscript in this phase and be certain that it is correct. Don't be afraid to add paragraphs or to move sections if there is a strong need. After this point, you will not be able to make major changes.
- **Page Proofs** The copy edited version that you review will be processed by the production department and electronically typeset into page proofs. These page proofs will contain the final layout as it will appear in the book with all graphics, fonts, and design elements. You will be given a chance to review this version as well. Extensive changes at this point may incur a charge to your account because the publisher will need to spend money on new layout.

Credit Where Credit is Due

Be sure to acknowledge those who have helped you along the way. We keep a list of people and their contributions so that when it comes time to write the Acknowledgements five months later, we are certain to include everyone.

Let's End at the Very Beginning ...

Be sure to write an introduction that explains the purpose of the book and its target audience. This also gives you a chance to explain the structure of the book as well as the topics that are in scope and out of scope. It is your best defense against bad reviews from those who did not understand your scope or structure. Of course, you can never guard against the reader who does not read the introduction or does not understand the scope and structure. Makes notes as you write the body of the book about what you want to include in the introduction. We write our introduction last so that it can incorporate all our thoughts on how the book is structured and scoped.

Don't Lose Track

Keep track of page counts as you go. The publisher should be able to tell you how many pages in your template will map to a physical book page. During the writing process, if your book is becoming too long, you will have to make a correction in scope or coverage. You may also ask if the book may exceed its contracted length. This is obviously easier to adjust earlier in the process. Usually, the publisher does not have leeway later in the process because the book's price has been published and that price depends somewhat on the size of the book.

A Note on "Notes"

You will probably not write your book in sequential order. You may find it useful, as we do, to keep a document called "Notes" that contains details that you want to discuss in each chapter but that are not part of the outline. As you write a chapter, you will think of things that should be in chapters that are to be written. If you put them in the document and refer to them as you write those chapters you will be able to capture all your thoughts.

Post-Writing Work

Once the manuscript goes to the printer, your writing work is probably complete. That is a big relief. However, depending on your contract, there may be other deliverables that you need to attend to. You may need to create sample files or tutorials for the publisher's web site or video tapes that the publisher can sell.

Public Appearances

Your name in lights? Probably not. However, you may be asked by the publisher to attend book-signing sessions for conferences in which you are participating. Conferences are a great showcase for your book and you can sign up for time at the publisher's booth in the vendor hall. This feature can be a decision point for you when you are selecting a publisher. Ask how they will market the book and how active they are at user group events.

You will probably see reviews appear on bookseller and user group web sites. You will need to battle with wrong listings and titles with the booksellers (who may or may not respond to change requests quickly). If a bookseller has an area for an author to leave a description, consider adding text from your introduction or back cover to explain the book's scope. This will help prevent people from expecting something that you did not write about.

One "fun" activity is to monitor how well your book is selling with online booksellers who provide ratings based on sales.

More Work—Reprints and New Editions

The work on the book does not end completely once the first edition and its related tasks are complete.

Once your book has sold out of its first printing, you will have a chance to make corrections that have been reported or that you have noticed in the first printing. Sometimes readers contact you with e-mails requesting clarifications or corrections in future editions to which you need to respond. You will not be able to modify large portions of text, but you will be able to correct mistakes in the second and each subsequent printing. The frequency of the reprints depends on how many copies are made for each printing and how popular your book is.

If your book is about a subject that will need to be refreshed when a new version of software appears, you will be contacted by the publisher for a new edition. Usually, a new edition is a completely new book that requires a new contract. You can do as much or as little with this new book as you want or you can skip the new edition altogether. If you choose to skip the new edition, the publisher usually has the option (written into your first contract) to allocate the new edition to another author.

You will also want to monitor the reviews of your books online and in printed book reviews. They can often give you an idea of how to improve the book for future editions or printings.

Writing a Second (Third, Fourth, ... Nth) Book

If you catch the writing bug and decide that there is so much more that you want to write about, be aware that the second book is easier from the perspective of expectations for the book process. It is not easier from the standpoint of the actual work that you have to do (although after writing 500 pages, you may be able to type faster).

If you are considering a subsequent book project, remember that the main benefits you receive from the first book will not double with the second book. The big leap (in the minds of those who think about these things) is from non-author to author. Becoming an author again does not change your status significantly in the eyes of your industry peers.

Truth

You only have to write one book to qualify for the label "Author."

Wisdom from Those Who Have Been There

Now that you are considering writing five or six books, it is time to hear from some other authors. Without showing them the contents of this paper, we asked a question to a random sampling of those who have written books on Oracle technology. The question was:

What is the most important advice that you would give to someone who is considering a book project? (25 words or less)

The responses arrived virtually instantaneously in all cases—authors are very willing to share their experiences. There are many more authors than those listed who frequent this conference and would be more than willing to give an opinion, but we thought the following sample would suffice. The authors are listed with their company affiliation (and their main current user group involvement in parentheses). The text is presented in an unedited form.

Dr. Paul Dorsey

Dulcian, Inc. (President, NY Oracle Users Group; Executive Editor, IOUG-A Select magazine)

Thoughts about writing a book:

- Writing a book requires a tremendous time and effort commitment to the project. It takes time away from family and friends and requires a great deal of dedication to complete.
- A book is not the same as a bunch of shorter conference papers. You have to think through the content carefully and carry it through hundreds of pages.
- It will (hopefully) be read by many people and will reflect on you. You need to make it a quality product, taking the time and care to make the details come out right.
- Having a co-author to share the load and bounce ideas off of is extremely valuable. The odds of finishing the project are much better with a co-author. However, you need to choose your co-author carefully. Make sure you both have the same vision for the entire project. Talk up front about how to divide up the material and tasks before plunging into the writing.
- If possible, talk to other authors who have worked with your proposed publisher. Finding out ahead of time about contract negotiation strategies and how your publisher works with authors can make the process less painful.

As for the benefits, there are several:

- It's a great way to learn a lot about the subject matter. The true test of whether or not you understand something is your ability to explain it clearly to someone else. Writing is a great way to do this.
- From a business perspective, publishing a book lends credibility to your reputation and is a great marketing tool. People are more willing to listen to what you have to say when you are a published author.
- As the head of a consulting company, my books also serve as internal training documents and reference works. When new developers are hired, I can give them the books and say "This is what I expect you to know."

Rich Niemiec

TUSC, Inc. (President, IOUG-A)

It's OK, I guess if they are young and not married.

Kent Graziano

Aris, Inc. (President, ODTUG)

- It is very rewarding to give back to the community and to see your words in print - just be sure you are prepared for the time commitment required to write a book you can be proud of and to get through the publishing process.
- And make sure to get your spouse's approval for that extra time, too!

Steven Feuerstein

Revealnet (award-winning conference speaker)

- Writing a book about a technology is the best way to learn it.
- Be prepared to lose a big chunk of your life while you write.
- Use step-wise refinement. Don't obsess with tackling the whole thing at once. Take on manageable chunks and FOCUS on that one area, doing your very best with it.

Kevin Loney

TUSC (IOUG-A)

- You should approach the book as an exercise in professional altruism. I believe that approach has the best chance of being successful for both you and your readers.

David Wendelken

CASEtech, Inc. (frequent conference speaker)

- Hemingway described writing as "sitting in front of a typewriter until blood comes out of your forehead."
- Writing is hard, lonely work and you must sacrifice something else you would rather do in order to do a good and timely job of it.

On a more upbeat tone:

- A technical book is just a very, very, very, very long set of technical articles that need to be consistent with one another and build upon one another. Ten 20-page articles are much less work than one 200 page book, even though the page count is the same.
- Technical articles are usually dry as dirt in the desert. A little humor adds a lot of spice.
- All technical articles have just one plot:
 1. Describe the symptoms of the problem you faced.
 2. Explain why the reader should care. What does it mean to them in their job?
 3. Describe the problem in detail.
 4. Describe the objectives you need to achieve.
 5. Describe the approach to solving the problem that you decided on. (Possibly include other paths not traveled.)
 6. Describe what you did to solve the problem.
 7. What worked.
 8. What did not work.
 9. What you would do differently next time.
 10. Thank you very much. You may contact me at...
- When I was working on my book, *The Oracle Designer/2000 Handbook* [Addison-Wesley], someone overheard me talking about it. They said, "I have always wanted to write a book on Designer, but just do not know it well enough to do so." My reply was simple, direct, and imminently truthful, "Neither do I, but I expect to by the time I am done."
- The differences in those two worldviews are the major difference between those who write, and those who wish to write. The majority of the 50+ articles and one book I have written over the last decade were about things I did not know enough about before I started writing. I used the process of writing about it as a way to direct my self-study and record what I learned as I did so.
- Learn the copyright laws and use them to your advantage. They are for your protection, and standard contracts from publishers give most of your rights away to the publisher. For example, I never assign my copyrights to the conferences I present at. Instead, I give them permission to publish the work, but I retain the copyright. That means I still own the work and can do what I want with it.
- If your book is worth publishing, the publisher has room to negotiate and still make a profit. Use that room to your advantage. Do not give away any other media rights to the work. Other media rights include adding your book info to an on-line knowledge base. Agree on terms if they bring another media deal to the table, but don't give them anything if you locate and close the deal.

Douglas Scherer

Core Paradigm, Inc. (IOUG-A Web Steering Committee)

- Technical book writing can be really rewarding. Just as with teaching, writing forces you to organize your thoughts so that others will understand. The process deepens your understanding of the material and allows others to learn from your knowledge and experience.
- It's also rewarding to your ego to see your name on the top ten bestseller list.
- Technical book writing is not rewarding financially, except that it can add credibility to your skills. If you're a consultant, that can be very rewarding.

Ben Rosenzweig*Oracle Consulting (user group member)*

- It deepened my knowledge of PL/SQL. There is a responsibility to make the book accurate, so by writing the book I was forced to become an expert on the subject.
- There is a clear benefit to my own career development as well as to the students I teach.
- It's very stressful!

Melanie Caffrey*Columbia University Instructor (conference attendee)*

- You never quite completely finish with a book unless you abandon or surrender it.
- The advice about writing is true. Make sure to visit the writing process every day, even for 20 minutes a day.
- The challenge of any author of technical books is the duty to be clear and instructive and yet present it in an innovative format.

Brian Laskey*Management Information Consulting, Inc. (Vice President - Finance, IOUG-A)*

- Run!

About the Authors

Peter Koletzke is a Technical Director and Principal Instructor for the Enterprise e.Commerce practice at Quovera (formerly Millennium Vision), in San Jose, California. Peter is Executive Vice President and Director of Web Initiatives for the IOUG-A and columnist for the *ODTUG Technical Journal*. He is a frequent speaker at various Oracle users group conferences where he has won awards such as Pinnacle Publishing's Technical Achievement, ODTUG Editor's Choice, and the ECO/SEOUC Oracle Designer Award. He is the coauthor, with Dr. Paul Dorsey of the Oracle Press (Osborne McGraw-Hill) books: *Oracle JDeveloper 3 Handbook*, *Oracle Developer Advanced Forms and Reports*, *Oracle Designer Handbook, 2nd Edition*, and *Oracle Designer/2000 Handbook*. http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Peter_Koletzke

Quovera provides strategy, systems integration, and outsourced application management to Fortune 500, high-growth middle market and emerging market companies. The firm specializes in delivering intelligent solutions for complex enterprises, which improve productivity within the customer's business and optimize the customer's value chain, through integration of its customers and suppliers. The company also outsources the management of "best of breed" business applications on a recurring revenue basis. Quovera refers to its business model as "Intelligent – Application Integration and Management." <http://www.quovera.com>

Alice Rischert is the chair of Columbia University's Database Application Development and Design track of the Computer Technology and Applications program, where she also teaches classes in Oracle SQL, PL/SQL, and database design. She currently consults for XWARE Inc., in New York, on data warehouse and Internet/intranet projects. Ms. Rischert has worked as a product manager, database administrator, project manager, and data architect for a number of companies in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. She has also been a presenter at Oracle conferences on SQL and PL/SQL topics. Ms. Rischert is the coauthor of *Oracle SQL Interactive Workbook* published by Prentice Hall. She holds an MBA from Pforzheim University, Germany. You can reach her at arischert@xwareinc.com or at ar280@columbia.edu.

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