



# The Write Time

By Cathie E. West

If you've got ideas and experiences that can help others, writing a book is a great way to share what you know. You just have to get started.

Illustrations by David Vogin

**Y**ou're a successful principal. School improvement initiatives have been smoothly implemented, teachers and students thrive under your leadership, and problems, everything from pesky roof leaks to catastrophic financial shortfalls, are effectively managed. Isn't it time you wrote a book that shares what you have learned?

If you are reluctant to put yourself in the limelight, keep in mind that sharing leadership knowledge is a professional responsibility. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015, the updated version of the Inter-State School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) policy standards, includes powerful language directing school leaders to implement, communicate, and promote the "mission,

and core values of a high-quality education." What better way to do this than by writing a valuable education book?

## Why You Should Write

Although authoring a book takes considerable time and effort, for a principal there are immeasurable benefits:

**Contributing.** Do you know fresh-from-the-box principals who need guidance, veteran administrators who are looking to be revitalized, or career-minded teachers who are exploring leadership opportunities? These educators, along with many others, need books that help them broaden their vision and grow professionally. Strengthening the performance of other educators will always be your best literary reward.



She had eyes the color of a  
summer sky and long blonde  
that fell in ringlets past her  
ears. Her petite nose was the  
perfectly heart-shaped,

One  
eyes the  
and  
inglet

One  
no eyes the  
r sky and  
ll in ringlet  
er petite no

re her heart-sh  
e dress—with  
h long, tight s  
iny pearl but  
e and ivory lac



**Learning.** Unlike posts on blogs, Facebook, or Twitter, writing a book is an ambitious literary undertaking. A solid book requires substantive topics, credible research, authentic examples, and skilled writing. Yes, this can be hard work, but for an author there are immense payoffs, including a broader knowledge base, a richer vocabulary, stronger composition skills, and heightened creativity. These improved competencies power up a principal's performance both as a writer and in the workplace. For example, after authoring a book you will be able to approach demanding writing assignments, such as grant applications, project proposals, and program evaluations with greater finesse and confidence.

**Collaborating.** Does your book title have audience appeal? Should the narrative include graphics, text boxes, and data tables? How about an index? These are just a few of the questions that arise as authors work with editors to produce a top-tier book. And once your editor turns your completed manuscript over to a production editor, you will be collaborating with a variety of publishing specialists, including cover designers, copy editors, proofreaders, typesetters, and marketing directors. Novice authors soon learn that a praiseworthy book emerges not solely from their imaginations, but from the disparate views and unique talents of their editorial and production team members. Like leading a successful school, producing a book is an eye-opening, energizing team effort.

**Reflecting.** While drafting a book, principals get multiple opportunities to reflect on their accomplishments, such as student achievement setbacks that were successfully addressed, personnel problems that were artfully prevented, and school renewal changes that were thoughtfully engineered. What steps were taken to produce these positive outcomes? Which strategy was high-leverage; which failed to get results? Leadership reflection strengthens the authenticity of a book about education and the principal's on-the-job performance.

### How to Get Started

If crafting a book of your own seems intimidating, there are numerous resources that can help. Just enter "education book writing" in your favorite internet search engine, and you will quickly see

how many resources are out there. Besides myriad lists of articles and books offering advice, you will come across organizations such as Writer's Digest ([writersdigest.com](http://writersdigest.com)) and The Authors Guild ([authorsguild.org](http://authorsguild.org)) that offer helpful articles, seminars, and consultation.

So, you've decided to take the plunge. You've got a compelling topic, a lively interest, and the capacity to explore, experiment, and expand your literary horizons. It's time to write. Here are six tips to get you started:

**1 Successful writers write—a lot.** When Bob Busk was the elementary principal at the International School at Kuala Lumpur, he taught writing classes in addition to performing his administrative duties. To keep his writing skills up to speed, Busk maintained a lively blog featuring colorful essays about life in Malaysia. To become a better writer, he enthusiastically advises authors to "write; write some more; write even more." Writing is a lot like public speaking; it gets better with practice.

Leadership award-winner Cheryl Larsen also believes in the power of practice. In addition to her principal duties at a large Washington elementary school, Larsen prepares vital documents for her school district, such as parent-student handbooks, curriculum guides, student progress reports, and attendance communications. This technical work has spurred her on to other types of writing, such as contributing commentary to professional articles written by other educators and writing manuscript reviews for a publishing company. Larsen has a book in mind, and this ambitious step will be well supported by the writing practice she is getting now.

**2 Write professional articles.** Writing for a professional magazine, such as *Principal*, is an ideal way to gain the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to write a book. You will learn how to craft an appealing narrative, how to collaborate with an editor, and whether there are readers interested in your ideas—an appreciative audience is a powerful motivator. Education publications typically post article submission guidelines that can help show you what they want from a writer.

If you are reluctant to put yourself in the limelight, keep in mind that sharing leadership knowledge is a professional responsibility.

**3 Picture your favorite education books.** What type of book do you want to write? A highly researched textbook for teachers, an inspiring guide for school leaders, or a breezy “how to” for new principals? Collect published books that are similar to the one you visualize, then review each one thoughtfully. Take note of the narrative styles and any special features, including sidebars, illustrations, and data tables. Do you have the skills to prepare such a book? Identify what you would need to learn to make your dream book become a reality.

**4 Research publishers.** There are traditional education publishers to investigate, like Corwin Press, Heinemann, Routledge, and Solution Tree, as well as self-publishing companies, such as AuthorsHouse, XLibris, and Kindle Direct Publishing. Whichever avenue you choose, reputable publishers will provide writers with editorial support and detailed manuscript and submission guidelines. Check out a variety of publishers’ websites to learn more; knowing what is expected will build your book-writing confidence.

**5 Select a high-interest topic.** Popular education writer Elaine McEwan-Adkins, who has more than two dozen books on the market, advises new authors to write about their passion. Pennsylvanian educator Jacie Maslyk did just that. She was a principal when she initiated the STEAM program in her school and drafted *STEAM Makers: Fostering Creativity and Innovation in the Elementary Classroom* (2016). STEAM combines science, technology, engineering,

and math curriculum (STEM) with the arts, design, and humanities. “Maker” refers to a growing movement to make hands-on, project-based learning a vital part of instruction. Maslyk, who has merited prestigious leadership awards, is now an assistant superintendent, and in this capacity will use *STEAM Makers* to support the professional development of teachers and principals.

**6 Schedule time to write.** If you ask school leaders about their biggest barrier to writing, you can bet that “lack of time” will come up first. But like everything else in life, time can be found for high-priority activities. Creating a reliable block of writing time is essential. If you are an early bird, for example, write in the quiet morning hours before your family rises. Or you can put fingers to the keyboard at night when other household members are occupied with their own pursuits. You can build writing time into weekends, holidays, and vacations. If you create a writing schedule and stick to it, your book will slowly but steadily emerge.

### Don't Give Up

Connecting with other writers can be a big help, both for getting started and for seeing your project through. Join a local writers’ group to share ideas and get feedback on completed projects. Finding an author to serve as a mentor is another smart idea. This is not as hard as it might seem, since most articles and books include author contact information, such as email and website addresses. Most published writers are eager to help guide new writers.

So, does the idea of writing a book tug at you? If you would like to join the principals who are revitalizing their careers—and the careers of others—by writing books, make a commitment to investigate the possibilities. ■

**Cathie E. West**, a former principal, is an education writer and consultant.



### RESOURCES

Crafting a book requires a few “must-have” resources:

- An up-to-date dictionary;
- A substantial thesaurus; and
- Current versions of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

In addition, Amy Einsohn’s *Copyeditor’s Handbook: A Guide for Book Publishing and Corporate Communications* will take the mystery out of grammar and punctuation usage, as well as provide an insider’s look at publishing.