
Book Journey

v1.0

The Onboarding Manual

From first idea to final submission.
A companion for the whole journey.

SCREEN EDITION

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Before We Begin

Or: why another tool, and why this one

You know the feeling. You're three months into a manuscript, eighty browser tabs deep, and your "system" is a tangle of Notion boards, scattered Google Docs, a pocket notebook you keep losing, and a voice memo from 2 a.m. that just says "the grandmother knows."

Book Journey was built because of that exact moment. Not the inspired one — the panicked one. The one where you realize your character's eyes changed colour somewhere around chapter nine and you can't remember which version of the outline you're actually following.

This is a single HTML file. That's it. No servers. No accounts. No subscription that quietly charges you while your draft collects dust. You open it in your browser, and everything lives right there on your machine. Your story stays yours.

Book Journey doesn't write your book. It holds the scaffolding while you do.

This manual is your companion for the whole ride. We'll walk through every module — not as a feature list, but as a journey. Because that's what writing a book actually is: a series of phases, each with its own particular brand of confusion, and each needing a slightly different kind of support.

What This Manual Is Not

This isn't a craft book. It won't teach you three-act structure or the difference between showing and telling. Plenty of brilliant people have written those books already, and you should read them. What this manual does is show you where those ideas live inside Book Journey — and how to use the tool so that the logistics of writing don't swallow the writing itself.

How to Read This

Front to back if you're starting fresh. Jump to the chapter that matches your current panic if you're mid-draft. The chapters follow the natural lifecycle of a book — from that first hazy idea to the moment you click "submit" on an agent's portal — but nobody's lifecycle is linear. Skip around. Come back. Dog-ear the pages that matter to you right now.

A QUIET SUGGESTION

Keep Book Journey open in its own browser tab while you read this manual. Try things as we describe them. Muscle memory beats theory every time.

The Four Phases

Book Journey organizes the writing life into four phases: Conceive, Write, Refine, and Publish. This isn't a rigid sequence — you'll loop back, skip ahead, and revisit phases you thought were done. But the phases give you a language for where you are. When someone asks "how's the book going?" and you want a more

useful answer than "fine," you can say "I'm in the Refine phase" and know what that means.

Conceive is about figuring out what the book is. It's the Book Canvas, the Character Bible, the World & Setting. Write is about getting it down — chapters, sessions, structure. Refine is about making it good — revision, beta readers, query letters. Publish is about getting it out — publishing plans, launch strategies, marketing. Each phase has its own section in the sidebar, its own modules, and its own kind of difficulty.

Below those four phases sits the Tools section — modules that serve you across all phases. The Critique Arena, the Dashboard, the Guardian, the Momentum tracker, and the Submission Studio. These are the instruments you reach for when something specific needs measuring, testing, or generating.

Getting Started

Opening the file, finding your bearings

Double-click the HTML file. That's your installation process. No terminal commands, no dependency trees, no "please update your Node version." Just a browser and a file.

When it opens, you'll see a dark interface with a sidebar on the left and a large canvas on the right. Take a breath. The sidebar looks like it has a lot going on, but it's organized into four phases — Conceive, Write, Refine, Publish — plus a Tools section. Each phase holds the modules you'll need during that stage of your book's life.

The Sidebar — Your Map

Think of the sidebar as a vertical timeline. The top is the beginning — where ideas are still soft and unnamed. The bottom is the end — where you're formatting submission packages and tracking agent responses. You'll probably spend most of your early days in the top half and migrate downward as the manuscript matures.

Each phase shows a small percentage next to its name. That's not a grade — it's a progress signal. It tells you how much of that phase's fields you've filled in. Some writers find it motivating. Others ignore it entirely. Both are fine.

Creating Your First Book

You already have one. Book Journey creates an "Untitled Book" project the first time you open it. Click the project name in the sidebar header to rename it. If you're the kind of person who has four books simmering at once (no judgment — some of us just live like that), hit the "+" button next to the project dropdown to create additional projects. Each one gets its own complete set of modules.

ON NAMING

Don't agonize over the title. Working titles are allowed to be ugly. "That book about the lighthouse" is a perfectly fine project name. You can rename it any time.

Dark Mode, Light Mode

The half-moon icon in the bottom-left footer toggles between dark and light themes. Dark is the default — easier on the eyes during those late sessions when the house is quiet and the coffee has gone cold. Light mode is there for daytime writers and print-friendly screenshots. The choice saves per-project, so your thriller can brood in dark mode while your romance basks in daylight.

Your Data, Your Machine

Everything you type is saved to your browser's localStorage. That means it never leaves your computer. No cloud, no sync, no server somewhere in Virginia holding your manuscript hostage. The flip side: if you clear your browser data, it's gone. So export regularly. The Save & Export panel gives you a one-click JSON export that contains everything — every character, every chapter, every scribbled note.

THE ONE RULE

Export your JSON backup at least once a week. Store it somewhere safe — a USB drive, a cloud folder, an email to yourself. localStorage is reliable, but it's not a vault. Treat exports the way you'd treat saving a Word doc: often and without thinking about it.

Keyboard Shortcuts

Cmd+K (or Ctrl+K on Windows) opens the search overlay. It searches across all modules — characters, chapters, notes, everything. When you're deep in a manuscript and you need to remember what you wrote about a character's backstory, this is faster than clicking through panels.

Cmd+Z and Cmd+Shift+Z give you undo and redo. Book Journey keeps a 50-step undo history per session. It won't survive a page refresh, but it'll save you from accidental deletions during a session.

The Book Canvas

Where the idea takes its first real shape

Every book starts as a feeling. A scene you can't shake. A question that keeps circling back. The Book Canvas is where you pin that feeling to the wall and start asking it harder questions.

It's a nine-field grid, and the fields are chosen carefully. Not because nine is a magic number, but because these are the nine things an agent, an editor, or a thoughtful reader will eventually ask about your book. Better to have answers — even rough, honest, ugly ones — from the start.

Premise

The biggest field on the canvas, because it's the hardest. One to two sentences. What is this book about? Not the plot summary — the core idea. The "what if." The reason this story exists instead of any other story. If you can't fill this in, that's useful information. It might mean the idea needs more time to cook. It might mean you're writing the wrong book. Either way, the blank space is telling you something.

A premise isn't a summary. It's a promise — to yourself and eventually to your reader.

Genre & Category

"Literary fiction" is fine. "Upmarket thriller with elements of domestic suspense" is also fine. This isn't about limiting yourself — it's about knowing which shelf your book belongs on. Publishers think in categories. Bookstores think in categories. Your reader, standing in a shop with fifteen minutes before their train, thinks in categories. Knowing yours helps everyone, including you.

Target Reader

Be specific. "Women aged 25-45 who read book club fiction" is a start, but "readers who loved 'Where the Crawdads Sing' and are looking for another atmospheric, slow-burn mystery set in a natural landscape" is better. The more precisely you can picture your reader, the more clearly you can write for them. This doesn't mean you're excluding everyone else. It means you're writing toward someone, which is always better than writing toward no one.

Theme

The deeper current. What is your book really about, underneath the plot? Forgiveness? The price of ambition? How grief reshapes identity? You might not know this when you start. That's completely normal. Leave it blank and come back after chapter five. The theme often reveals itself once the characters start making choices you didn't plan.

Hook

The thing that makes someone pick up your book instead of the one next to it. It could be a concept ("What if your therapist turned out to be your husband's mistress?"), a voice ("A geriatric narrator with a

dark sense of humor"), or a structural conceit ("Told backward, from funeral to first meeting"). The hook is the first domino. Everything else falls from it.

Stakes

What does the protagonist stand to lose? Not just physically — emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. The best stakes are personal. "The world will end" is technically high stakes, but "she'll have to admit her mother was right about everything" hits harder because it's specific and human.

Comp Titles

Two or three books that your book sits near. The classic formula is "X meets Y" — as in, "Normal People meets Gone Girl." Choose comps that were published in the last five years and sold well enough that an agent would recognize them. This isn't about ego; it's about positioning. You're telling the industry where your book fits in the ecosystem.

Unique Angle

Why this book, why you, why now. Maybe you're a marine biologist writing a thriller set on a research vessel — that's an angle. Maybe you spent ten years working in the foster care system and your novel draws on that experience — that's an angle too. This field matters most during the query phase, but filling it early forces you to articulate what makes your book irreplaceable.

Word Count Target

Industry norms exist for a reason: 80,000-100,000 for adult fiction, 60,000-80,000 for nonfiction, 50,000-80,000 for YA. You don't have to hit them exactly, but if your literary debut comes in at 200,000 words, that's a conversation worth having with yourself before an agent has it for you.

THE CANVAS FEEDS EVERYTHING

Your Book Canvas fields flow into the Query & Pitch module, the Book Proposal generator, and the Submission Studio. Invest time here and you'll save time everywhere else.

The Canvas Progress Ring

At the top of the Canvas panel, there's a circular progress ring showing your completion percentage. It counts how many of the nine fields have meaningful content — more than ten characters, which is roughly a sentence. Don't chase 100% for its own sake. A Canvas at 60% with honest, thoughtful content is more valuable than one at 100% filled with placeholders.

The progress ring also feeds into the phase progress shown in the sidebar. The Conceive phase percentage is a weighted average of your Canvas completion, your Character Bible population, and your World & Setting fields. It's a rough signal, not a scorecard.

Revisiting the Canvas

Your Canvas will change. The premise you wrote in week one might feel wrong by chapter twelve — not

because it was bad, but because the book has become something richer than you initially imagined. That's growth, not failure. Update the Canvas when your understanding deepens. The fields aren't set in stone; they're written in pencil.

Some writers revisit the Canvas monthly. Others touch it only at major milestones — after finishing the first draft, after beta reader feedback, before starting the query process. Find a rhythm that keeps the Canvas current without turning it into a procrastination tool.

Character Bible

The people who will live in your pages

Here's what nobody tells you about characters: they don't come to life because you describe their eye colour and favourite food. They come to life because you know what they want, what they actually need, and the wound that created the gap between those two things.

The Character Bible gives you a card for each character with fields for exactly that. Click "+ Add Character" and you'll get a blank card with spaces for Name, Role, Want, Need, Wound, Arc, and a Signature Quote.

Want vs. Need

The Want is the external goal — the thing the character is consciously pursuing. Find the killer. Win the case. Get the inheritance. The Need is the internal truth they have to accept — forgive themselves, let go of control, admit they're afraid. The tension between want and need is where story lives. If a character gets everything they want without confronting what they need, the ending feels hollow. We've all read that book. We've all put it down unsatisfied.

The Wound

Every interesting character carries damage. It doesn't have to be dramatic — it doesn't have to be a dead parent or a war. It can be the quiet wound of never being chosen first, of growing up in a house where emotion was considered weakness, of being told at seventeen that your dream was impractical. The wound creates the lens through which your character sees every situation in your story.

A character without a wound is a character without a reason to change. And a character who doesn't change is furniture.

The Signature Quote

This one's optional but powerful. Write a single line of dialogue that only this character would say. Something that captures their voice, their worldview, their rhythm. It's a tuning fork — when you're writing a scene and the dialogue feels off, come back to this quote and recalibrate.

Working With Multiple Characters

You can add as many character cards as you need. Each card is collapsible, so your protagonist's detailed backstory doesn't have to crowd out the minor character who appears in three scenes but needs consistent details. A good rule of thumb: your protagonist and antagonist deserve full, detailed cards. Supporting characters can be lighter. Walk-on characters probably don't need cards at all — unless they surprise you.

World & Setting

Grounding the story in a place that breathes

Setting is never just backdrop. The rain in a noir isn't weather — it's mood. The claustrophobic apartment in a domestic thriller isn't a location — it's a trap. Your world does work even when it's sitting quietly behind the dialogue.

The World & Setting panel has five fields: Primary Setting, World Rules, Atmosphere & Tone, Research Notes, and Key Locations. Let's walk through each.

Primary Setting

Where and when. Be as specific as you can. "A small coastal town in Maine, present day" is better than "a small town." "Istanbul in 1955, the week of the pogrom" is better than "Turkey, mid-century." Specificity creates texture, and texture creates believability.

World Rules

This field does different work depending on your genre. For speculative fiction, it's where you document your magic system, your technology, your alternate history's divergence point. For contemporary realism, it's where you note the social rules — the power structures, the class dynamics, the unspoken codes of the community you're writing about. Every world has rules. The question is whether you've thought them through.

Atmosphere & Tone

Two or three adjectives and a comparison. "Humid and conspiratorial, like a Patricia Highsmith novel set in the tropics." This is your aesthetic North Star. When a scene feels off and you can't figure out why, check whether it's drifting from the atmosphere you defined here.

Research Notes

The junk drawer you need. Dump historical facts, expert interviews, field observations, links, ISBN numbers — anything your setting requires you to know. This isn't polished prose. It's the raw material. The point is to have it in one place instead of scattered across seventeen bookmarks and a napkin in your coat pocket.

Key Locations

List the places that matter. Not every room and street — just the ones that carry weight. The kitchen where the family argument always happens. The cliff path where the protagonist goes to think. The office with the locked drawer. Knowing your key locations helps you direct scenes with intention. If every important conversation happens in the same coffee shop, that's either a pattern or a problem.

Story Architecture

The skeleton underneath the skin

Some writers plot everything. Some discover the story as they write. Most fall somewhere in between — they have a rough idea of the destination but the route keeps changing. Story Architecture is designed for all three.

The panel gives you seven structural beats: Opening/Hook, Inciting Incident, First Plot Point, Midpoint, Crisis/Dark Moment, Climax, and Resolution. These aren't a formula. They're a checklist. Even the most experimental novels tend to have some version of most of these. The question is what you do with them.

Opening / Hook

How your story begins. The opening image, the first scene, the voice that greets the reader on page one. This is your handshake. Get it right and the reader trusts you. The hint text in the field says "What's the opening image or scene?" — that's deliberately cinematic. Think about what your reader sees first.

Inciting Incident

The event that breaks the status quo. Before this, your protagonist's life was one thing. After this, it's another. The letter arrives. The body is found. The test results come back. Without an inciting incident, you don't have a story — you have a portrait.

The Midpoint Shift

Something changes at the center of the book. It might be a revelation, a reversal, or a shift from reactive to proactive. The midpoint is where a lot of manuscripts sag, which is why having a clear idea of what happens here can save you weeks of revision. Even a rough note — "This is where she finds out he lied" — gives you a north star when the middle gets murky.

Crisis and Climax

The crisis is the lowest point — the moment when the protagonist's plan has failed, the stakes are highest, and the easy way out is gone. The climax is the confrontation that follows. Not every climax is a swordfight or a courtroom speech. Sometimes it's a quiet conversation where someone finally tells the truth. But it must be the moment of maximum change.

Resolution

How the world looks after the dust settles. What's different? Who's changed? Resolutions don't have to be happy. They don't have to tie up every thread. But they need to feel earned — the natural consequence of everything that came before.

Structure isn't a cage. It's a trellis. The vine still grows however it wants — it just has something to climb.

FOR THE PANTSERS

If you write by the seat of your pants, fill this in after your first draft instead of before. Use it as a diagnostic tool: does your draft have these beats? If one is missing, that might be where it stalls.

A Word About Frameworks

The seven-beat structure in *Book Journey* isn't tied to any single framework. If you're a *Save the Cat* devotee, you can map your fifteen beats onto these seven fields — the opening and inciting incident cover the first few beats, the midpoint is the midpoint, and so on. If you prefer the *Hero's Journey*, the *Call to Adventure* maps to the *Inciting Incident*, the *Ordeal* to the *Crisis*. The fields are flexible enough to hold whatever structural philosophy you subscribe to.

And if you don't subscribe to any structural philosophy — if you find these frameworks constraining rather than freeing — you can use the fields as simple bookmarks. "Something important happens around page 80" is a valid entry for the *Midpoint* field. The point is to have an awareness of your story's shape, not to follow a prescription.

When Structure Contradicts Instinct

Sometimes you'll fill in the *Story Architecture* and realize your instincts want to do something different from what the framework suggests. Your inciting incident wants to happen on page 100 instead of page 25. Your climax wants to be quiet instead of loud. Pay attention to that tension. Often your instincts are right and the framework needs bending. Structure should serve the story, not the other way around. If your book works better with the crisis at the two-thirds mark instead of the three-quarters mark, move the crisis.

Chapter Tracker

Watching the manuscript grow, one brick at a time

There's a specific kind of satisfaction in watching a word count climb. It's not about hitting a number — it's about proof that the work is real. The Chapter Tracker gives you that proof.

Click "+ Add Chapter" to create a new chapter entry. Each one has four fields: a title, a word count, a status (Draft, Revised, or Final), and a notes field. The stats bar at the top shows your total chapter count, total words, and how many chapters are finalized.

The Three Statuses

Draft means you've written it but it's still raw. Revised means you've been through it at least once and made substantive changes. Final means you're done touching it — for now. These are loose categories, not legally binding. The point is to give you a visual sense of how much of the manuscript is in each state.

Some writers keep everything in Draft until the entire manuscript is done, then move through Revised and Final in batches. Others finalize chapters as they go. There's no right way. The tracker adapts to however you work.

Word Counts — Honesty Over Precision

You're entering word counts manually, which means you're rounding. That's fine. The chapter tracker isn't an accounting ledger — it's a compass. "About 3,200 words" is useful. The exact number matters less than the trend.

ON CHAPTER LENGTH

There's no universal rule, but most published novels average 2,000-5,000 words per chapter. Thrillers tend shorter (fast pacing). Literary fiction tends longer (room to breathe). If one of your chapters is 12,000 words, it might be two chapters wearing a trench coat.

Reordering and Removing

Chapters can be removed with the × button. There's no drag-to-reorder yet — that's a future feature — but you can adjust titles and numbers manually. If you're the kind of writer who restructures constantly (hello, fellow overthinker), the notes field is a good place to track why you moved things.

Writing Sessions

The quiet discipline of showing up

Writing a book is a marathon pretending to be a series of sprints. The Writing Sessions panel is where you track the sprints — and over time, see the marathon emerge.

Click "+ Log Session" and you'll be prompted for two things: words written and minutes spent. That's it. The system logs the date automatically and calculates your running stats: total words, total sessions, average words per session, and your current day streak.

The Day Streak

Streaks are motivating for some people and anxiety-inducing for others. If seeing "Day Streak: 14" makes you want to keep going, use it. If a broken streak makes you feel like a failure, ignore it. The streak counts consecutive days with at least one logged session. It resets if you miss a day. It's a tool, not a judge.

Two hundred words on a bad day is still two hundred words more than yesterday. The only failed session is the one you pretend didn't happen.

Patterns Over Numbers

The real value of session logging isn't the total — it's the pattern. After a few weeks, you'll start to notice things. Maybe you write twice as much in the morning. Maybe your Saturday sessions are always short. Maybe you do your best work after a 30-minute warmup and your worst work in sessions longer than two hours. This data is a mirror. Look at it honestly.

WRITING MOMENTUM

The Writing Momentum panel (in the Tools section) takes your session data and surfaces these patterns for you. It shows your most productive times, your average pace, and offers a deep-focus writing mode for any chapter. More on that in Chapter 14.

Revision Checklist

The art of breaking your own work

First drafts are written with the heart. Revisions are written with a scalpel. The Revision Checklist breaks editing into four passes, because trying to fix everything at once is how manuscripts die on the operating table.

Pass One: Structural Edit

Zoom all the way out. Does the plot hold together? Are there holes, contradictions, scenes that lead nowhere? Is the pacing even — or does the middle sag while the ending rushes? This is where you kill your darlings. That gorgeous chapter that doesn't serve the story? It goes. You can mourn it later.

Pass Two: Character Edit

Now focus on the people. Is each character's arc consistent? Do their motivations make sense across the entire manuscript? Does the protagonist change — and does that change feel earned? Check your Character Bible cards against what actually happens in the story. Gaps between intention and execution are where most character problems hide.

Pass Three: Line Edit

Prose quality. Sentence variety. Dialogue that sounds like human beings actually talking. Crutch words (we all have them — "just," "really," "suddenly," "seemed to"). This is the pass where you read sentences aloud and wince at the ones that don't land. It's slow, it's tedious, and it's the difference between good and great.

Pass Four: Copyedit

Grammar, spelling, punctuation, formatting consistency. Is it "grey" or "gray" throughout? Are your em dashes consistent? Do you use the Oxford comma or not? (Both are defensible. Inconsistency is not.) This is the last pass — the polish. Don't do it until everything else is settled, because there's no point polishing sentences you're going to cut.

Revision is not failure. It's the proof that you're taking the work seriously enough to do it twice.

Beta Readers

Letting someone else hold your book

Sending your manuscript to a beta reader is like handing someone your journal and saying "be honest." It's terrifying. It's also essential. You can't see your own blind spots.

The Beta Reader Tracker lets you add individual readers with fields for their name, the date you sent the manuscript, the date they returned it, and their feedback. There's also a "Common Themes" field at the bottom for tracking patterns across readers.

Choosing Readers

You want at least three, ideally five. Mix your pool: one or two fellow writers who understand craft, one or two target readers who match your audience, and one wildcard — someone outside your genre who reads with fresh eyes. Your mother doesn't count unless she's willing to be genuinely critical, and most mothers are not.

What to Ask For

Don't say "tell me what you think." That's too vague and invites either bland praise or scattered nitpicking. Give your readers specific questions: Where did you get bored? Which characters felt real? Where were you confused? Did the ending feel earned? Did you see the twist coming? Specific questions get specific answers.

Reading the Feedback

When one reader says the middle drags, that's an opinion. When three readers say it, that's data. Use the Common Themes field to track what comes up repeatedly. Those repeating concerns are where your revision energy should go. The one-off notes? File them away but don't lose sleep.

TIMING

Send your manuscript to beta readers after your second draft — not your first. The first draft is for you. The second draft is for readers. If you send a first draft, you'll get feedback on problems you already know about, which is a waste of everyone's time.

Query & Pitch

Selling the thing you made

You've written a book. Now you have to convince a stranger — in about 250 words — that it's worth reading. The query letter is the most unnatural form of writing a novelist will ever do, and the Query & Pitch panel is designed to make it slightly less painful.

The Query Letter

A query letter has three parts: the hook (one paragraph that makes the agent want to keep reading), the book summary (two to three paragraphs of plot, ending on a note of tension), and the bio (who you are and why you're qualified to write this). The field gives you a template placeholder, but remember — agents read hundreds of these a week. Yours needs to feel like a person wrote it, not a template.

Short Synopsis

One page. Present tense. Beginning, middle, and end — including the ending. Yes, you have to reveal the ending. The synopsis is not a teaser; it's a proof of concept. It shows the agent that your story has a complete, satisfying arc. This is the hardest thing you'll write about your own book, and that's saying something.

Elevator Pitch & Logline

The elevator pitch is two to three sentences that you could say out loud at a cocktail party. The logline is one sentence — the irreducible minimum. Getting these right is like compressing a photograph: you want to keep the shape and colour even as you lose the detail. If your elevator pitch makes someone say "I'd read that," you've won.

Your Book Canvas fields — premise, hook, stakes, comps — are the raw ingredients for all of these. If you did the Canvas work early, the query practically writes itself. Almost.

Publishing Plan

Choosing your path to print

There are roughly four ways to publish a book, and none of them is inherently better than the others. The Publishing Plan panel asks you to choose one — or at least to start thinking about it.

Traditional (Agent Publisher)

The classic route. You query agents, sign with one, and they sell your book to a publisher who handles editing, cover design, printing, and (some) marketing. This is the slowest path — typically two to four years from finished manuscript to bookshelf — but it comes with distribution, advances, and the credibility of a known imprint. Most literary fiction and narrative nonfiction goes this way.

Small Press / Indie Publisher

Many small presses accept direct submissions — no agent required. The trade-offs: smaller advances (often none), fewer marketing resources, but more creative control and often a closer author-editor relationship. Some of the most interesting books published in any given year come from indie presses.

Self-Publishing

Total control, total responsibility. You're the publisher: you hire the editor, commission the cover, manage the formatting, handle the marketing, and keep all the royalties. The upside is speed and autonomy. The downside is that every dollar and every decision is yours. The Budget field in the Publishing Plan is especially important here — a professional edit alone can cost one to three thousand.

Hybrid

Some authors combine paths — self-publishing some work while pursuing traditional deals for others. Some "hybrid publishers" charge authors upfront for production services while offering distribution. Research carefully. Not all hybrids are created equal, and the line between a legitimate hybrid and a vanity press is sometimes thin.

Using the Panel

Choose your path from the dropdown. List your target agents or publishers in the next field — with notes about what they're looking for and why they might be right for your book. Set timeline milestones (draft done by June, queries sent by September). If you're self-publishing, use the Budget field to estimate your costs and keep yourself honest.

Book Launch & Marketing

The book is done. Now what?

Writing the book was the hard part — or so you thought. Then publication day approaches and you realize there's an entirely different skill set you need: selling, promoting, being visible. For many writers, this is the part that feels like wearing someone else's clothes.

The Book Launch Panel

Set your launch date. Plan your pre-order strategy — bonuses, incentives, early-bird offers. Map your ARC (Advance Reader Copy) distribution: how many copies, to whom, in what format. Plan your launch week activities: events, social media campaigns, newsletter blasts, podcast appearances. Define your success metrics — what does a good launch look like to you? Be specific. "Sell lots of copies" is not a metric. "Sell 500 copies in the first month and get 20 Amazon reviews" is.

The Marketing Panel

Marketing is a longer game than launch. The Marketing & Platform panel covers your author platform (website, newsletter, social media presence), your newsletter strategy (subscriber count, frequency, lead magnets), your social media approach, your marketing budget, and your media and PR plan.

If you're traditionally published, your publisher will handle some marketing, but most debut authors are surprised by how much falls on them. If you're self-published, all of it is you. Either way, having a plan beats improvising.

You don't have to be everywhere. Pick two platforms and be genuinely present there. That beats being a ghost on seven.

START EARLY

Begin building your platform while you're still writing. A newsletter with 500 engaged subscribers is worth more than 10,000 Instagram followers when launch day comes. Readers who gave you their email address are readers who care.

The Tools

Critique Arena, Dashboard, Guardian, Momentum, and Submission Studio

The Tools section of the sidebar holds five modules that don't fit neatly into the four-phase structure but are essential at various points in your book's journey. Think of them as the utility belt.

Critique Arena

Twenty tough questions your manuscript must survive. This is Devil's Advocate mode — a structured self-interrogation that tests your book's logic, originality, market viability, and emotional impact. For each question, you mark whether your manuscript survived, failed, or you're uncertain. The survival percentage at the bottom gives you an honest, occasionally brutal assessment of where you stand.

Use the Critique Arena after your second draft, before beta readers. It's cheaper than professional feedback and catches the issues you've been avoiding. The questions are organized into categories: concept and originality, structure and pacing, characters, prose and voice, and market readiness. Don't cheat. An honest "Failed" is more useful than a defensive "Survived."

Manuscript Dashboard

Your book's vital signs at a glance. A health ring shows your overall manuscript health as a percentage, calculated from a weighted blend of canvas completion, chapter progress, revision status, and query readiness. Below it, individual stats give you the numbers: total words, chapters drafted, characters created, sessions logged.

The Dashboard is diagnostic. It doesn't tell you what's good or bad — it tells you what exists and what's missing. A low health score doesn't mean your book is bad; it means there are empty fields and uncompleted modules. Sometimes that's fine. Sometimes it's a signal that you're avoiding something.

Manuscript Guardian

The Guardian is an automated consistency auditor. Click "Audit Manuscript" and it scans your Canvas, Characters, World, Structure, Chapters, and Sessions, looking for contradictions, gaps, and red flags. It might notice that your character's age in the Character Bible doesn't match the timeline in your Structure panel. It might flag that your word count target is 80,000 but your chapters total 45,000 with all of them marked as Final.

The Guardian doesn't read your prose — it reads your metadata. Think of it as a continuity checker that works from your notes, not your narrative.

Writing Momentum

This panel analyzes your writing session data and surfaces patterns: your most productive time of day, your average pace, your consistency trends. It also offers a Deep Focus mode — a distraction-free, full-screen writing environment with a live word count, session timer, and progress ring. You choose a chapter, enter focus mode, and write. Everything else disappears.

Deep Focus mode is built for the writers who need a clean screen and a ticking clock. If that's you, it might become your favourite feature. If you prefer writing in Scrivener or Word and just logging sessions afterward, that works too.

Submission Studio

Two modes. The first, Submission Package, generates a complete, industry-standard submission package from your existing data — query letter, one-page synopsis, first three chapters, and author bio — formatted and ready to paste into an agent's submission form. It also generates multiple blurb variants for your back cover.

The second mode, Agent Tracker, is a CRM for your submissions. Log each agent you query: the date sent, the response received, the status (waiting, requested materials, rejected, offer). Over time, you build a clear picture of your submission history — what's working, what isn't, and who still has your pages.

SUBMISSION ETIQUETTE

Most agents ask you not to submit simultaneously to other agents at the same agency. The Agent Tracker helps you keep track of which agencies you've already queried, so you don't accidentally double-submit.

How the Tools Work Together

These five tools are most powerful when used in sequence. Start with the Dashboard to see your overall status. Run the Guardian to catch inconsistencies. Take those fixes into a Momentum deep-focus session. Once the manuscript is polished, face the Critique Arena. If you survive, generate your Submission Package and start tracking agents.

That said, there's no requirement to use all five. Some writers live in the Momentum panel and never touch the Arena. Others obsess over the Dashboard and ignore the Guardian. The tools are there to serve your process, not to define it.

Book Proposal

The document that does your talking

If you're writing nonfiction, you almost certainly need a book proposal — a formal document that pitches your book to agents and publishers before it's fully written. Even for novelists, a proposal can be useful for organizing your pitch.

Book Journey's Proposal panel generates a complete book proposal by pulling data from all your other modules. Click "Generate Proposal" and it compiles your premise, target audience, comp titles, chapter outline, author credentials, and marketing plan into a single, formatted document. It's not a first draft — it's a head start.

What Goes In

The proposal pulls from your Book Canvas (premise, genre, audience, comps, angle), your Chapter Tracker (chapter titles and descriptions), your Publishing Plan (marketing strategy, author platform), and your Query & Pitch (synopsis, logline). The more complete these modules are, the richer the generated proposal.

After Generation

The generated proposal is a starting point, not a final product. Copy it, refine it, add your voice. Proposals that sound like they were generated by a machine get treated like they were generated by a machine. The best proposals have personality — a sense of the author's voice and conviction that no algorithm can replicate.

Save, Export & Templates

Keeping your work safe and starting smart

The Save & Export panel is the last item in the sidebar, and it has three tabs: Data Management, Templates, and Sample Projects.

Data Management

Your data is auto-saved to localStorage every 400 milliseconds — faster than you can type a sentence. But localStorage is local. It lives in your browser, on your machine, in your specific browser profile. If you switch browsers, use incognito mode, or clear your browsing data, it's gone.

Export JSON creates a single file containing everything — every field, every character, every session log, every note. Import JSON does the reverse. Copy Markdown gives you a plaintext version of all your data that you can paste into any document. Delete Book does what it says, permanently, after a confirmation prompt.

THIS BEARS REPEATING

Export regularly. Save the JSON file somewhere that isn't your browser. A cloud drive, a USB stick, an email attachment. Think of it as backing up your novel's brain.

Templates

Genre templates pre-populate your Book Canvas with genre-appropriate defaults. There are templates for literary fiction, thrillers, romance, science fiction, memoir, and more. Loading a template overwrites your Canvas fields — so use them at the start of a project, not in the middle of one.

The templates aren't prescriptive. They're starting points. A thriller template might suggest a higher pace and a word count of 85,000; a literary fiction template might emphasize theme and voice. You'll overwrite everything with your own details, but the templates give you a sense of what's expected in each genre.

Sample Projects

Two fully populated sample projects ship with Book Journey. One is a literary thriller, the other a memoir. They show you what a completed project looks like — every module filled in, every field populated. Load one, click through the panels, and see how a finished Book Journey project feels.

The samples are also useful as reference. If you're staring at the "Comp Titles" field wondering what to write, open a sample project and see how it's done. If your query letter feels off, compare it to the sample's query letter. They're not perfect — they're examples.

The Search

Finding things inside your own book

Here's a small thing that will save you large amounts of time: Cmd+K. Or Ctrl+K, if you're on Windows. It opens a search overlay that reaches into every module of your project — characters, chapters, canvas, world, structure, sessions, everything — and finds what you're looking for.

This matters more than you'd think. By the time your project has twenty chapters, eight characters, and a few hundred session logs, you've created a small database of your own creative decisions. And the mind — especially the mind that's been living inside a manuscript for months — is a terrible search engine. You remember that you wrote something about your antagonist's childhood, but you can't remember whether it's in the Character Bible or the World notes or a chapter note.

That's what the search is for. Type a word, and every field containing that word appears in the results. Click the result, and you're taken directly to the relevant panel. It's the kind of feature you don't notice until you need it — and then you wonder how you ever worked without it.

Search Tips

Search looks for exact text matches, so keep your queries short. "knife" will find every mention of the word knife across all modules. If you're looking for a specific character, search their name. If you're looking for a thematic thread, search the key word — "forgiveness," "money," "the river." The results appear in real time as you type, so you can refine your query on the fly.

One underrated use: search for contradictions. If you can't remember whether your character drives a truck or a sedan, search "truck" and "sedan" and see which module says what. This is a manual version of what the Manuscript Guardian does automatically, but sometimes you want to check one thing quickly without running a full audit.

CLOSING THE SEARCH

Press Escape to close the search overlay, or click outside the search box. You can also just press Cmd+K again to toggle it.

Multiple Projects

When one book isn't enough

Some writers work on one book at a time, giving it their full attention until it's done. Others have two, three, four projects in various stages — a novel in draft, a short story collection half-revised, a memoir in the idea phase, and a thriller that's just a premise and a character name scribbled on a napkin.

Book Journey supports both approaches. The project dropdown in the sidebar header lets you switch between books. Each project is completely independent — its own canvas, its own characters, its own chapters, its own theme settings. You can be in dark mode on your thriller and light mode on your romance.

Creating Projects

Click the "+" button next to the project dropdown. You'll be prompted for a title — again, working titles are fine — and a new, blank project will open. All the modules are empty, waiting for you to fill them. You can switch back to your other projects at any time; nothing is lost.

Deleting Projects

The Delete Book button in the Save & Export panel does what it says. It asks you to confirm, and then it removes the project from localStorage permanently. You can't undo this. If you think you might want the data later, export a JSON backup first. Book Journey won't let you delete your last remaining project — it always keeps at least one.

A Note on Series

If you're writing a series, create one project per book. The characters and world might overlap, but the structure, chapters, and query materials will be different for each installment. You can copy-paste character details between projects — there's no automated sync, but manual copying keeps you intentional about which details carry forward and which change.

Every book is its own country. Even in a series, each one needs its own passport.

Common Mistakes

What we've seen go wrong, and how to avoid it

After watching hundreds of writers use Book Journey, certain patterns emerge. Not bugs — human patterns. Ways that writers (all of us, really) sabotage ourselves using tools that are designed to help.

The Perfectionist Trap

Some writers spend weeks perfecting their Book Canvas before writing a single word of the manuscript. They revise their premise fourteen times. They agonize over comp titles. They treat the canvas as if it were the book itself. It's not. The canvas is a sketch. A rough map. It's supposed to be imperfect. Fill it in quickly, start writing, and revise the canvas as your understanding deepens.

The Tracker Obsession

Logging sessions can become a substitute for actual writing. If you spend more time updating your word count than adding to it, something has gone sideways. The tracker is a rearview mirror, not a steering wheel. Glance at it, note what you see, and keep your eyes on the road.

Skipping the Canvas

The opposite of the perfectionist trap: ignoring the Canvas entirely and jumping straight to writing chapters. This works for some writers — true pantsers — but most discover around chapter ten that they don't know what their book is about. The Canvas doesn't have to be complete, but it should exist. Even a half-filled Canvas is a lifeline when the middle gets murky.

Never Exporting

We said this already, and we'll say it again because it keeps happening: export your JSON backup regularly. localStorage is not permanent storage. Browsers get cleared. Computers get replaced. Hard drives fail. One JSON export, once a week, saves everything. The two seconds it takes to click that button could save you months of work.

Premature Querying

The Submission Studio is shiny and exciting. It generates professional-looking packages. It has an Agent Tracker. It makes querying feel organized and real. But querying before your manuscript is truly ready is one of the most common mistakes in publishing. Agents who reject you once rarely want to see the same book again. Run the Critique Arena first. Get beta reader feedback. Revise again. Query when the book is actually done, not when you're tired of revising.

The most dangerous thing about a well-organized system is that it can make you feel further along than you are.

Ignoring the Critique Arena

The twenty questions in the Critique Arena are uncomfortable. That's the point. Some writers skip it because they don't want to know the answers. But a manuscript that can't survive your own tough questions won't survive an agent's, a reviewer's, or a reader's either. Do the Arena. Be honest. Fix what it reveals. Your book will be stronger for it.

Workflows

Putting it all together

Modules are tools. Workflows are how you use them. Here are three workflows for three different stages of a book's life.

The Discovery Workflow

You have an idea. Maybe just a premise, maybe a character, maybe a first line. Start with the Book Canvas — fill in what you know and leave the rest blank. Move to the Character Bible and create cards for the characters who've shown up in your head. Sketch the World & Setting. Don't worry about Story Architecture yet — let the shape emerge. Come back to the Canvas every few days and see if more fields have answers.

The Drafting Workflow

The manuscript is underway. Your daily rhythm: open Book Journey, log yesterday's session (or today's, if you log in real time), check the Chapter Tracker, update word counts. Once a week, glance at the Manuscript Dashboard to see how the overall shape is developing. Use the Writing Momentum panel's Deep Focus mode when you need to shut out distractions.

The Submission Workflow

The manuscript is done and revised. Run the Critique Arena — honestly — and fix what it reveals. Generate your Submission Package from the Submission Studio. Refine your Query Letter in the Query & Pitch panel. Build your target list in the Publishing Plan. Start querying, and log every submission in the Agent Tracker. Update statuses as responses come in. Wait. Write the next book while you wait.

The waiting is its own kind of writing. You're learning patience, which is the one craft skill nobody teaches.

The Revival Workflow

You abandoned a manuscript six months ago. Maybe life got in the way. Maybe you lost confidence. Maybe you just ran out of steam. Now you want to come back. Open the project. Read your Book Canvas — slowly. Let it remind you why you started. Check the Chapter Tracker to see where you stopped. Read the last few chapter notes. Don't start writing immediately. Instead, run the Manuscript Guardian to see what's consistent and what isn't. Then open a new writing session and begin.

Coming back to a cold manuscript is like walking into a house you haven't visited in months. Everything's still there, but you need a few minutes to remember where things go. Book Journey's organized structure makes that re-entry easier than a folder full of Word documents ever could.

The Nonfiction Workflow

Nonfiction writers often need to pitch before they write. In this workflow, start with the Book Canvas and fill it in thoroughly — premise, audience, angle, comp titles. Build your chapter outline in the Chapter Tracker, using the notes field to describe what each chapter will cover. Generate a Book Proposal. Refine your Query & Pitch materials. Use the Publishing Plan to identify target agents or publishers. Then — and only then — start writing the manuscript itself.

This is the reverse of the fiction workflow, where you usually write first and pitch later. Nonfiction proposals are sold on the strength of the idea, the author's platform, and a few sample chapters. Book Journey supports both approaches, but the order you move through the panels is different.

The Long Game

Or: a few things worth remembering

You'll notice that Book Journey doesn't have a "Done" button. There's no confetti animation when your health score hits 100%. That's deliberate.

A book is never really finished — it's released. At some point you decide it's as good as you can make it right now, and you let it go into the world. Book Journey can hold all the scaffolding, all the notes, all the metadata of your creative process. But it can't write the book. It can't make the hard choices — which character to kill, which ending to choose, which truth to tell.

Those are yours.

Here are a few things that might help along the way, none of which have anything to do with software:

Write when you don't feel like it. The muse is a myth. Professionals show up whether they're inspired or not. Some of your best pages will come on days when you sat down thinking you had nothing.

Read more than you write. Read in your genre and outside it. Read the writers who make you jealous — not to imitate them, but to understand why they make you feel that way.

Be patient with the mess. Every book goes through a phase where it looks like it's falling apart. It's not. That's just what the middle looks like from the inside. Keep going.

Protect the work. Not from criticism — from neglect. A book dies when you stop showing up for it. An hour a day is enough. Ten minutes is enough. Thinking about it on the bus is enough, some days.

And when it's done — when the last revision is made and the last query is sent and the manuscript is out in the world, doing whatever manuscripts do when they leave the nest — start the next one. Open a new project in Book Journey. Fill in the Canvas. The process begins again.

The file will be here.

On Privacy

We built Book Journey as a single HTML file for a reason that goes beyond simplicity. Your creative work is intimate. Your half-formed ideas, your abandoned characters, your messy first drafts — these are the private scaffolding of your imagination. We didn't want them on our servers. We didn't want to know your word count, your writing schedule, your genre preferences. That information belongs to you, on your machine, in your browser, under your control.

In a world where every app wants your data, we wanted to build something that actively refuses it. There's no analytics. No telemetry. No "anonymous usage data." The HTML file doesn't phone home. It doesn't check for updates. It just sits on your hard drive and waits for you to open it.

That's a design choice, but it's also a value. We believe the creative process deserves a private space — a room with the door closed, where you can write badly and plan boldly and change your mind without anyone watching.

A tool that respects your privacy is a tool that respects your process. They're the same thing.

A Last Word

This manual has walked you through every module, every panel, every button in Book Journey. But the most important part of writing a book isn't in any of these panels. It's in the quiet act of sitting down, opening a blank page, and putting one sentence after another until something takes shape that wasn't there before.

No tool can do that for you. No tool should. Book Journey holds the scaffolding. You build the cathedral.

Go.

Now go write your book.

The file will be here when you need it.
