



# Lesson 1 | Defining Your Why

By S. D. Howard.

Why does anyone want to write a book?

You spend countless hours slaving away, agonizing over people who don't exist (especially as a fiction author), hope you caught all the typos, had the perfect hair day for your author photo, and spending hour and hours trying to not fall into a depressive state because you can't find the right synonym for 'said'.

And that's before you publish. It gets worse after that.

Sound horrible? Well, it is if you haven't defined your 'why' and set reasonable expectations for yourself before starting. Many authors, myself included, got an inch for a story and jumped in with both feet and went Full-#YOLO, which ended in burnout, confusing stories, and an overall jumble mess. To avoid this, we need to slow down, take a breath, and ask ourselves three important questions.

1. Why do you want to write this book?
2. Do you want to publish it or is it for yourself?
3. Are you doing this to practice and hone your craft?

How you answer this will help you determine your outcome and help you set goals, which we'll talk more about in **Lesson 3 | Setting Writing Goals**.

## Why do you want to write this book?

Believe it or not, a lot of newer authors don't ask this question enough. Maybe because it seems pretty obvious: you want to publish it. The problem with that mindset is it sets you up for failure and for burnout in the long run, and then creating half a dozen side projects to avoid writing this one.

*Do I need a 'why?'*

Your 'why' is what keeps you going when you run out of gas and feel too frustrated to continue. It's an anchor to cling to when your world gets crazy (and it will) and helps to reenter yourself on why you began it in the first place. It's a time capsule. A treasured memory.

*But I don't know what to write, just that I want to!*

That's fair! So instead of your 'why' revolving around a book, make it about the stories you want to tell, or perhaps who you want to write stories for. What do you want to be known for?

Here's an example of this:

*I want to write for those who feel unseen and share stories that explore hard topics in my genre.*  
- S. D. Howard

This is my 'why' for telling stories. It's about the people I'm writing for, and when I forget I can come back to it and remind myself, "Ah, that's right. This is what is important."

Trust me when I say that money *will not* be enough of a 'why' to keep you going.

Also note, your 'why' might change. Mine changed several times through the publishing of my first book, *The City of Snow & Stars*, until I finally found what I wrote above. That was the core of why I write stories.

So, what is yours? Take 5mins to jot down some of your thoughts and begin working to find the core.

## **Do you want to publish it or is it for yourself?**

Now, you could want to write simply for the joy of writing without the expectations of publishing or doing anything with your story. This is 100% okay to do. There is something beautiful about writing something just for yourself that should not be discounted.

But if you wanted to write this story with the thought of publishing, that has a distinct set of expectations you'll need to be keeping in mind as you write. What genre will your story be in? What is the audience you want to aim for? What are the reader's expectations for that genre/audience? These are things you will need to have a general knowledge of in order to begin really building a book that will hit those points.

That doesn't mean, however, that you spend countless hours trying to figure out every little thing. It just means you need to have the basics.

Take 5mins and write your thoughts on what you want to do with this story. Will you aim to publish, or just write it for yourself?

## **Are you doing this to practice and hone your craft?**

Let's imagine for a moment that you fall into 'Wanting to publish' and 'Writing for myself' at the same time. You might think that poses a problem for you, but I am happy to tell you, it's not. That's because you can do several things to practice your writing craft, test out ideas you want to use in full novels, but want to feel out your audience a bit. How do you do this?

## Fanfiction

I know, I know, but before you throw everything out, just hear me on this. Fanfiction comes with some big advantages, such as:

- Built in fanbase, which means you can easily find readers
- Established worlds, so world-building is less intimidating
- Characters people love

Depending on the type of story you're thinking of publishing, you'll want to pick a fandom that matches closely with the genre so that way there is a better crossover between ideas. For instance, when I was practicing with my story concepts for *The City of Snow & Stars*, I used *Lord of the Rings* because my world is very similar. That being said, the concepts of abuse, human trafficking, and "Why does God let bad things happen?" could have been used in any genre. But if I wanted to have robots, suddenly the genre has changed, and I need to find a fandom where that would fit.

## Wattpad

Whether you go the Fanfiction route or just want to share some stories and gain some readers, Wattpad could be a great place to start. There have been several books from Wattpad that ended up landing publishing deals or deals with Netflix for a show, so it is possible to gain some good exposure there.

## Kindle Vella

This is still pretty new, but the concept is not. Basically, you post stories in "episodes" and reader get the first couple for free, and after that they pay for tokens to continue reading. If your story is interesting, you could start making a little cash off it. Some authors have started off here and then published the full book once they completed the story, but there is a lot more to the backend of how that works that we won't get into here.

As with anything, take a day or two to really look into each option before deciding on which one you would like to try. Each one has a different audience, set of expectations, etc. that you will need to become familiar with.

## Takeaways

Hopefully, you have the seedling idea of your 'why' growing in your mind. It's an important step every author gets to at some point, whether right at the start or later on once they've hit the wall and have to start over. Knowing your 'why' is a powerful motivation to keep you going when you run out of gas.

Continue to come back and review this over the next few months and see if your 'why' has remained the same or if it has changed. Has it evolved, or did you just get off track somewhere?

When you're ready, head to the next worksheet where we discuss creating a writing atmosphere and the importance of trying to maintain one.