matthiasmedia

Before you start writing: advice for potential authors

Firstly, thank you for your interest in publishing with us. We are glad you are convinced by the importance of writing as a ministry and are keen to partner with us in producing gospel-centred resources that will grow disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before you start writing, there are some things you should consider if you are hoping to publish with us. If you bear these things in mind before (and as) you write, it will most likely save a lot of time and effort in the longer term, and it will ensure that the manuscript you submit to us is in the best shape for assessment.

Talk to us early

It's usually better to approach us with an idea and a sample chapter than with a full manuscript. This gives us the opportunity to work with you as you develop your material. If there's something we'd want you to change, either in terms of the style or content of your work, it's much better for you to know at the beginning of the process rather than after you've written the whole book.

Please don't send us your first draft; leave it a week or two and come back for a second bash at it. Your writing will always benefit from this.

It's best not to spend a lot of time formatting your text in Word (or whatever program you use for writing) to make it look pretty, because we will strip most of that out before the editing process if we go ahead with publishing the material. And it will all change again once the designer imports the text into the design software. The simpler your formatting, the better.

How long should your book be?

Bear in mind that in this age of decreasing attention spans, there is more of an appetite for shorter Christian books. Very few authors can write non-fiction at length and sustain a reader's attention. We suggest that you aim to communicate what you want to say as economically as possible, while still achieving the goals of your book.

It's important to think about your intended reader and what will work best for them, both in terms of book and chapter length *and* how you get the point across. You will need to have a planned outline of what you are aiming to achieve overall, and you'll need to work out how each chapter contributes to that goal. Don't begin writing before you've thought clearly about these questions:

- What do you want the reader to have understood at the end of the whole book? What does each chapter need to convey to get them there?
- What do you want the reader to have understood at the end of each chapter? And what are the main points you need to convey to get them there?

Quoting other authors

Often, permission is required to reproduce even a small extract from the work of another author (especially when that work is a song). The requirement to obtain permission depends significantly on the amount and the nature of the material quoted and the purpose for quoting it.

Failure to obtain the necessary permission early enough can lead to considerable delays in the publication of a new book, and sometimes means having to remove the quote altogether. Overseas publishers are notoriously slow to reply to permission requests and can occasionally impose unreasonable fees or other requirements. Authors should bear this in mind when writing their book.

You can find more information about when you need permission to quote from another work in the Australian Copyright Council's information sheets:

- Quotes and Extracts:
  www.copyright.org.au/acc_prod/ACC/Information_Sheets/Quotes___Extracts
- Permission: Do I Need it?
  www.copyright.org.au/acc_prod/ACC/Information_Sheets/Permission__Do_I_Need_it_

As a rough guide, the more you would characterize your purpose in quoting someone else as being to *save yourself the work of having to express the idea in your own words*, the more likely it is that you will need permission. If, however, you are quoting for the purpose of *engaging and interacting with that person's ideas* (i.e. for criticism or review), the need for permission is diminished.

As a Christian author, it is certainly worth thinking carefully about why you are quoting someone and whether it adds anything significant to your work (and why). In particular, don't quote to show off!

Citations

Even if you don't need to get permission for quoting or paraphrasing another person's work, please *always* give a full citation in a footnote. If you've quoted material from a book, make sure you include the following information:

- author name
- book title
- book edition (if not first edition)
- publisher
- place of publication
- year of publication
- page number.

If you've quoted or referred to material that you found online, please *always* give the relevant website link in a footnote.

Hot tip: it's much easier to gather this information carefully and thoroughly as you go rather than trying to find it again once you've finished writing (or, even later, during the editing stage). Trust us: you won't have the heart for this job at that point.

Quoting the Bible

When quoting the Bible, we generally prefer that authors use the ESV, but we are also happy for you to use the NIV 2011 or the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). The exception is with Bible studies written for the Interactive Bible Study and Pathway Bible Guide series, where we want to be consistent in using the ESV across both series.

We do suggest you stick primarily to one translation within your material so that you don't come across as cherry-picking the translation that best suits your argument. If you want to use a different translation at some point, it is helpful for you to flag this for your readers and explain the reason for the change.

Use standard Bible book abbreviations without full stops (see below). When the Bible book is being referred to in the text of the sentence, spell it out in full. Use the abbreviations only within footnotes and parentheses.

Gen	2 Kgs	Isa	Nah	Rom	Titus
Exod	1 Chr	Jer	Hab	1 Cor	Phlm
Lev	2 Chr	Lam	Zeph	2 Cor	Heb
Num	Ezra	Ezek	Hag	Gal	Jas
Deut	Neh	Dan	Zech	Eph	1 Pet
Josh	Esth	Hos	Mal	Phil	2 Pet
Judg	Job	Joel	Matt	Col	1 John
Ruth	Ps (Pss)	Amos	Mark	1 Thess	2 John
1 Sam	Prov	Obad	Luke	2 Thess	3 John
2 Sam	Eccl (or Qoh)	Jonah	John	1 Tim	Jude
1 Kgs	Song (or Cant)	Mic	Acts	2 Tim	Rev

However, biblical abbreviations should only be used when citing both chapter and verse, which should be separated by a colon. For example: 'Rom 5:8'. When citing only the chapter, don't abbreviate the name of the book. For example, 'Romans 1', not 'Rom 1'.

When quoting or referring to particular verses within a passage under discussion, reference the verse/s in brackets with v. or vv. and then a space. For example:

- "Jesus wept" (v. 35).
- Paul repeats the idea several times (vv. 10-12, 17, 19, 27-31).

We don't have a set rule for whether you list the Bible reference in the main body of text or in a footnote. We tend towards including it in the main text unless there are so many references that it would really interrupt the flow of your writing and make it hard to read. The main thing, again, is that you are consistent throughout.

Other things to bear in mind as you write

Explanatory illustrations

Where possible, avoid illustrations, stories and examples that will date or won't work outside the context in which you are writing. Remember that our resources are sold in Australia, the US and the UK, and many are also available in other countries through

GoThereFor.com. Try to make your illustrations and examples as widely accessible as possible.

Discussion questions

As you write, consider whether discussion questions would be helpful for your readers and, if so, how you want to structure them. For example, should the questions specifically relate to each chapter? Or will they act as big-picture reflections that come at the end, in light of the whole book? If you're going to include discussion questions, the best time to write those questions is as you are writing the rest of the book.

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If you have questions regarding the submissions or writing process that are not covered in this document, please feel free to email us at submissions@matthiasmedia.com.au and we will direct your query to the relevant person as needed.