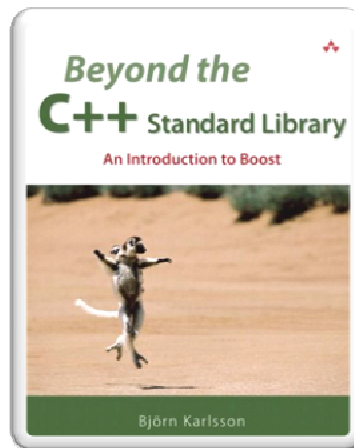


2 Pages on Writing a Book



Introduction

*A lot of people dream about writing a book. Others would never even think of pursuing such a crazy idea. And some actually go ahead and write one, and since I belong to that lucky category I wanted to share a few things that might be of interest to you – whichever category you belong to. Yes, even if you **don't** want to write a book you could learn something valuable about writing. If that's what this text is really about.*

How It All Started

Some years ago, I was quite active in the [Boost](#) community. It is a highly technical group of software engineers that have created a set of C++ class libraries that are simply outstanding. The community's superb technical skills ensure that the class libraries that make it into Boost are top notch; but how do other people than these C++ luminaries learn about using the libraries, or even find out that they exist?

Because I care about teaching, and love writing, I started writing a few articles about Boost in [C++ Users Journal](#) and in [Overload](#). It was then and there (in 2001) that I got a severe case of hubris and decided to write a book about the Boost libraries. I wrote a book proposal (you can get a template from any of the publishing houses) and signed a contract with Addison Wesley. The schedule promised that the book would be written 12 months. The book would be called [Beyond the C++ Standard Library: An Introduction to Boost](#). Not the shortest name in history, but I think it's got a very nice ring to it. It was to be almost four years until I finished the book.

Starting Out

When the book project started, I was so happy about getting started. Having already decided on the libraries to include, a group of professional reviewers lined up, and an idea of how to organize the chapters, it seemed that nothing could possibly get in the way of success. I was ready for *anything*.

And the first few chapters just flew by on the warm winds of inspiration. I was smack in the middle of *the zone*; the words were flowing freely, and I was learning **a lot** about the Boost libraries. Feeling unstoppable is a really powerful feeling, and the first month of writing was probably worth the hell that waited for me around the corner.

Burning Out

If you are an author, you probably know that those winds of inspiration can fade really fast. They sure did for me. During a time where my “normal” life was filled with regular (paying) work, working on our house, raising a newborn son, and commuting 2 hours a day, writing (and *learning*, which required a big effort throughout the writing journey) was becoming too hard to fit into my daily life. That left only the nights to optimize, and I found the missing time for writing and reading by sacrificing sleep, and for more than a year I only slept 2-3 hours per night. I also stopped eating lunch to save another hour. **This was not the mark of an intelligent author.**

More than a year into working with the book, my world finally started falling apart. I won't go into details here, but one of the effects was that my writing came to a grinding halt. Worse, I couldn't bring myself to start writing again. I blamed the writing for feeling bad, since that was the thing that sort of pushed me over the edge.

Almost two years went by before I finally mustered the strength and courage to start writing again. Two thirds of the book was already done, and now I did what I could to finish the remaining third. It was scary. It was hard.

The Work Is Done

When I managed to write those last chapters and sent everything out for review, I thought the book was finally done. And it was, until those damned reviews came back, and it turned out that I had a ton of work left. Of course, when you write non-fiction, your professional reviewers will find your technical errors and your confused writing. My reviewers sure did. I am very grateful to them. Most annoying was Rob Stewart, who nit-picked like a, well, nit-picker. For that, I owe him big time. Well, I took it like a woman and spent countless hours correcting errors and clarifying unclear writing. Finally, there were no more changes to be done.

I had finished the book, but it had cost me more than I could ever imagine.

The Book Is Out There

The personal price I paid for writing my book was very high, but when I held the book in my hands it still felt like a bargain. Even when you write a book that's not a best-seller (mine certainly isn't), you've left a mark on the world. You've made an accomplishment that many only dream of. (Even if the book's as dry as a dead twig in the forest.)

In spite of the pain – and trust me, it's painful to most people – I heartily recommend writing a book to anyone who wants to push their limits. By trying to teach others, you teach yourself even more. You will learn things that you *never* dreamed of. Like the fact that clear writing can only come from clear thinking.

Oh, here's some final and **very** good advice – read [On Writing Well](#) **before** you start writing a book. I didn't.

Thank you for reading,

Bjorn Karlsson