



Margot Starbuck  
*Author, Speaker & Editor*  
Contact: [wordmelon@gmail.com](mailto:wordmelon@gmail.com)  
Visit: [www.wordmelon.com](http://www.wordmelon.com)

Dear Writer,

This **author inventory** is the tool that I use to help clients brainstorm before writing a book proposal. More than anything, this inventory is for YOU! It's meant to help you identify your strengths and to discover the areas in which you have room for growth.

If you're looking to work with a traditional publisher, you need to convince an agent or editor of two things:

1. Your project is worth pursuing
2. You are the person best suited to write it

Toward that end, this inventory is meant to:

1. Jog your memory for any selling points you may have overlooked
2. Identify areas of potential growth and opportunity

If you begin to feel bummed out, as you work through the inventory—because you don't Tweet or because your mom is the only person who follows your blog—you're not alone. No one can do it all, but you *can* continue to build your platform in a way that both fits who you are and appeals to a publisher.

*Tip:* A great way to approach this process is to complete the inventory to the best of your ability and, when you finish, set three goals that you can reach in the next three months.

You can do this.

Cheering you on,  
*Margot*

P.S. If you've received this as a hard-copy, I'm happy to email you an electronic version! Just email [wordmelon@gmail.com](mailto:wordmelon@gmail.com), subject line: *Send Me The Inventory!*



## Wordmelon Author Inventory

### PERSON

#### I. BIO

- A. Name
- B. Residence, city & state
- C. Email
- D. Age?
- E. Right now, how do you spend your Monday-Friday? (Day job? Homemaker? Volunteer? Child-chaser? Starving writer?)

#### II. EDUCATION/TRAINING

- A. Education
  1. College? Degree? In what? From where?
  2. Post-college? Degree? In what? From where?
- B. Have you worked as a writer? Explain.
- C. Have you held any jobs related to the subject of your writing interests? Explain.
- D. Have you attended writers conferences? Which one/s and when?
- E. Are you part of a writer's group or speaking club? If so, explain.
- F. Do you follow any publishing/writing blogs? Regularly or intermittently? Which one/s?
- G. Anything else that's important to know about you as a writer, or your writing life?

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:24 PM

**Comment:** Some writers feel fraudulent if they don't have a Master's or PhD! #notnecessary

Unless you're writing for the academic market, there are plenty of other things can "qualify" you to write a book. (One being: write a book.)

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:25 PM

**Comment:** Although I'm not at all a conference junkie, I recommend writer's conferences for EVERY WRITER! They're a great opp to grow and connect.

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:25 PM

**Comment:** Find suggestions and resources at [www.wordmelon.com](http://www.wordmelon.com)

#### III. REPRESENTATION

- A. Are you currently represented by a writing agent? Who?
- B. Are you currently represented by a speakers' bureau? Which?
- C. Have you ever been represented in the past? Explain.

#### IV. MEMBERSHIPS/AWARDS

- A. Any professional memberships?
- B. Other relevant groups to which you belong?
- C. Any awards or recognition for your writing?
- D. Any awards/recognition in a related field?



# PLATFORM

## I. PUBLICATIONS

- A. Print Magazine/Journal Articles
  - 1. Articles in last 12 months? Which outlets? Links?
  - 2. Articles in previous 12 months?
  - 3. Others worth mentioning?
- B. Online Articles, Columns, Blog Guest, etc. (not your own blog)
  - 1. For which online outlets have you written in last 12 months? Links?
  - 2. Number of visitors? (if you know)
- C. Forthcoming Opportunities
  - 1. What writing opportunities (magazines, blogs, etc.)—print or online—have accepted an article which will be published soon?
  - 2. Which outlets could you target to write for in the next 6 months? (choose 3 “in reach” & 3 “out of reach”)
- D. Other Relevant Media Outlets
  - 1. Beyond what you've shared above, are there other venues that relate to the substance of your work? (i.e. Jousting blog? Eating disorder ministry? Pencil collecting site?)
  - 2. Share links
- E. Self-Publishing
  - 1. Have you self-published?
  - 2. Print or ebook? Link/s: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. How many copies did you print? Sell?
  - 4. Any comments on the experience?
- F. Traditional Publisher
  - 1. Have you ever been contracted with a traditional publisher?
  - 2. Which one?
  - 3. List published titles and copies sold.

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 9:43 AM

**Comment:** Setting goals—those you know you can meet and those you're striving for—is how to build a platform.

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 9:44 AM

**Comment:** Part of building your platform is capitalizing on platforms that are already reaching your audience.

## II. AUTHOR WEB PRESENCE

- A. Do you have a website devoted solely to your work as a writer?
- B. Do you manage it, or have you hired someone?
- C. How long has it been up and running?
- D. What is the theme of the site content? (i.e. “I write about puppies” or “The site is about my work as a writer” or “It showcases my photography.”)
- E. Does the content change? (i.e. Do you blog and post regularly? How often) Describe...
- F. Do you sell anything there?
- G. If you were forced to write a short tagline for your author website, what would it be? (If you've got one, what is it? Is it working for you?)
- H. Other comments or thoughts about your site?
- I. Web address of your site:
- J. How many page views per month?

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 9:47 AM

**Comment:** If you don't have a site, you need one. It doesn't have to be expensive, but readers/editors/publishers need to be able to find you online.



### III. **AUTHOR BLOG**

- A. Do you have a blog? Blog address:
- B. Is it hosted on your website or separately?
- C. Do you blog regularly? How often?
- D. Blog content (About what do you write in your blog?)
- E. Followers (How many followers does your blog have?)
- F. What analytic do you use to track/count followers?
- G. How many page views per month?

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:27 PM

**Comment:** Yes, many writers build their platforms by blogging. No, it's not requisite. It's probably better to have no blog than to have a stink blog or one you don't update.

### IV. **SOCIAL MEDIA**

- A. Facebook
  - 1. Do you have a Facebook profile page? (non-professional) Number of friends?
  - 2. Do you have an author page? Number of likes?
  - 3. How often do you post on Facebook?
  - 4. What do you post?
- B. Twitter
  - 1. Do you tweet?
  - 2. Number of followers?
  - 3. How often do you tweet?
  - 4. What do you tweet?
- C. Linked In
  - 1. Are you on Linked In?
  - 2. Number of connections?
- D. Do you use another social media outlet? Explain.
- E. Which social media outlet is your favorite? Why?
- F. Which does NOT work well for you? Why?
- G. Communicating with your tribe
  - 1. Do you have a mailing list?
  - 2. Snail mail or email?
  - 3. How many subscribers?
  - 4. Email lists (name/email/zip code) are gold. How might you begin to build one?

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:22 PM

**Comment:** Consider building your presence on the site that makes the most sense for you. (It might be GoodReads!)

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 9:50 AM

**Comment:** How might you begin to build an email list? (Sign-up box on your website? Sign up sheet at speaking events? Email all your friends?)

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:29 PM

**Comment:** Speaking is not requisite for every author. If you enjoy it, though, it can be a useful way to connect with audiences.

### V. **SPEAKING**

- A. Do you enjoy speaking?
- B. Are you interested in growing as a speaker?
- C. Last 12 Months
  - 1. Please list venues in which you've spoken in last 12 months?
  - 2. Estimated attendance?
- D. Future speaking gigs
  - 1. Please list venues where you're scheduled to speak in future.
  - 2. Estimated attendance?



E. Potential gigs

1. List a few potential speaking opportunities you might pursue

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 9:51 AM

**Comment:** MOPS, Mothers of Preschoolers, are often looking for speakers. (Guy speaker might be a novel treat!) What other places might you find opps? Church? School?

VI. **BRANDING**

- A. How do you identify yourself professionally? (Editor? Writer? Dabbler? Speaker? Hobbyist? Other?)
- B. Up until now, what is the area in which you have been writing? (Please be as specific as possible. i.e. "parenting triplets," "Christian foster care," "collecting mutant candy")
- C. What is the area in which you hope to publish? For what would you like to be known?
- D. What would suggest to a publisher that you're qualified to write on this? (Doctoral degree not necessary! Life experience? Passion? Be creative!)
- E. Is your subject matter suitable to both the Christian market [CBA] and the general market [ABA]? Explain...
- F. If you were forced to write a short tagline for yourself, what would it be? (If you've got one, what is it? Is it working for you?)

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 9:53 AM

**Comment:** If you want to publish with traditional publisher, it's your job to let them know why you're qualified. Be creative!

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:31 PM

**Comment:** I'm aware that this is a weird over-contrived exercise. BUT...it can help to communicate to audiences and publishers who you are and what you do.

VII. **AUDIENCE**

- A. How would you describe your "audience"? Who is reading your articles and listening to you speak?
  1. If you don't have an audience, take some time to think through what type of reader you'd like to connect with. (Don't say "everyone." #wronganswer)
  2. If you do have an audience, you might find useful info:
    - a. Via facebook analytics, describing the demographics of people who "like" your page
    - b. Other website analytics can often describe where people are clicking "from" to get to your site
    - c. Who is commenting on your online publications?
    - d. Who shows up when you speak?



## PROJECT

### I. CURRENT WRITING PROJECT

- A. Working title? [This suggests the PREMISE of your book]
- B. Subtitle? [This offers the PROMISE of your book, what reader gains from buying/reading]
- C. Give a one-sentence description of the book you are pitching that will engage a reader.
- D. Give the elevator pitch for your concept, the 30-second explanation you can share in an elevator:
- E. Write 3-4 brief paragraphs that might appear on the back of your book. Entice your reader to open the book & hook them to want to read more!
- F. When the reader has finished with the book, here's what I'd like them to
  1. Think:
  2. Feel:
  3. Do:
- G. From what you know of the market, list 3-5 publishers that might be a good fit for your book.

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 10:35 AM

**Comment:** Make sure that there is something UNIQUE and memorable about your book and pitch! What will set it apart from all the other books on the market?

Publisher won't be interested in a book that's indistinguishable from books already on the market.

### II. WHY THIS BOOK?

It's important to communicate—to a publisher—what is the “felt need” readers have that would make them buy your book.

Here are some great questions that Bret Nicholaus has provided to publishers for their authors to answer... (I really love these, and Bret graciously shares them with us.)

#### 9 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR NONFICTION BOOKS...

- 1) What makes this book DIFFERENT from other similar books out there?
- 2) What is the greatest BENEFIT of this difference?
- 3) What problem is this book the ANSWER/SOLUTION to?
- 4) WHO are the people out there that have this problem?
- 5) What is the DISASTER waiting to happen if people don't read your book?
- 6) What popularly held MYTH does your book challenge or expose as false?
- 7) What SECRETS or previously unrecognized TRUTHS does your book reveal?
- 8) What is the ONE-SENTENCE DESCRIPTION of your book? (Describe the essence of your book in a way that a second-grader would understand!)
- 9) Why are you the RIGHT person to write this particular book?

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### III. COMPETITION

- A. List at least 4-6 books on the market that are similar to yours. (Hint: "Mine is entirely unique!" isn't the right answer. This helps a publisher place your book on a shelf & estimate its potential appeal to readers.)
- B. How is your book LIKE each of these?
- C. How is your book DIFFERENT than each?

### IV. NUTS AND BOLTS

- A. Estimated length of completed book?
- B. How much is currently written?

### IV. MARKETING

#### A. Audience

Describe your target audience, those who have the "problem" your book answers:

1. Gender/s?
2. Ages?
3. Race/s?
4. Family configuration?
5. What church/es do they attend?
6. To what groups do they belong?
7. Memberships/affiliations?
8. What else do they read? Books? Magazines? Journals?
9. What conferences do they attend?
10. To what radio do they listen?
11. Anything else that characterizes this audience?

#### B. Reader Description

It's often helpful to create a single reader to whom you're writing. Maybe it's your sister-in-law. Maybe it's the women's ministry pastor at church. Do NOT try to write to everybody. It's been said, "When you write a book for everyone, you write a book for no one. But when you write a book for someone, you write a book for everyone." #MyFriendJonathanMerritt Give your reader a name and a description, similar to section "A" above.

#### C. How will you reach your audience?

1. What ideas do you have to market your book? (these are at your expense, not publishers) Blog tour? Speaking gigs? Special promotion? Others? Dream up one they've never imagined...
2. Are there organizations/clubs/etc. to whom you can sell books? (Consider civic organizations, religious affiliations, clubs, leadership positions, online

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 10:58 AM

**Comment:** Ideally, of course, this reader will look a lot like the audience demographic you're developing with your other writing and speaking.

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 12:38 PM

**Comment:** Be creative. Think of something that's uniquely suited to WHO YOU ARE and won't feel overwhelming to you.



communities, support groups, conferences you attend, other organizations...?) Get creative! But be realistic.

3. What national organizations might have an interest in your book? Are you connected in such a way that they might guarantee pre-sales

D. Endorsers

*\*These can be authors, speakers, writers, leaders of organizations, etc.*

1. Are there any influential people, to whom you have access, who might endorse this book?
  - a. Which ones are sure things? (i.e. if your brother-in-law is Francis Chan, Rick Warren or George Bush)
  - b. Which ones are *likely* possibilities? (Tip: don't include long shots on this list.)
2. Any other personal connections you have that might be useful in marketing your book?

**V. Why You?**

Why are you the right person to write this book?

Margot Starbuck 4/2/14 11:02 AM

**Comment:** If you're not sure, you'll have a hard time convincing a publisher.

**VI. FUTURE BOOKS**

Because publishers are looking for authors, not just books, please give a 1-sentence description of three future books you might write.

**OTHER**

What does a prospective agent or editor need to know about you that hasn't been communicated above? Share anything you think would be helpful for us (or, ultimately, a publisher!) to know about you. What did you want to brag about that we didn't ask?





## RESOURCES

### A. Resources

#### 1. Conferences

I always suggest that writers get their bodies to a writer's conference. It's a great place both to grow in your craft and to network. I love attend the [Calvin Festival of Faith and Writing](#), and there are a number of other great conferences around the country.

#### 2. Book

A great resource if you're preparing your first book proposal is Michael Hyatt's e-book [Writing a Winning Book Proposal](#). He's a smartie, that one.

#### 3. Proposal Template

Need a book proposal template? WordServe Literary shares their nonfiction book proposal template with us, downloadable at [www.wordmelon.com](http://www.wordmelon.com).

