Even Better Books with LaTeX the Agile Way in 2023

Streamline Your Writing Process and Connect with Readers from Day One. Self-Publish Your Book on Amazon, Google, and Leanpub as Softcover, Hardcover, and e-book.
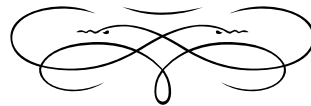
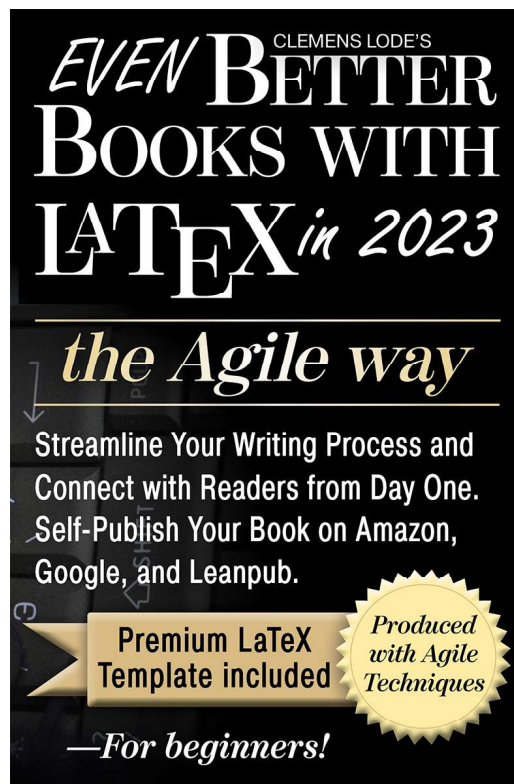# Even Better Books with LaTeX the Agile Way in 2023

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Publisher's Note

Thank you for keeping up the tradition of reading books. You and your fellow readers have created a market for this book. I hope that I can meet your expectations, and I am looking forward to feedback, no matter whether it is positive or negative. To send general feedback, mention the book title in the subject of your message and simply send it to feedback@lode.de. You can also contact us at https://www.lode.de/contact if you are having a problem with any aspect of the book, and we will do our best to address it.

Although I have taken every care to ensure the accuracy of the content, mistakes do happen. If you find an error in this book, I would be grateful if you would report it to me. By doing so, you can help me to improve subsequent versions of this book and maybe save future readers from frustration. If you find any errata, please report them by writing an informal mail to mail@lode.de.

I found it important to update the book to reflect technical updates to Overleaf, Amazon, and LaTeX. With the new template, you will be up to date with all current versions. With your feedback, I hope I can update this book again for 2024. Let me know what you think!

Best regards,

Clemens Lode
CEO, Lode Publishing
Düsseldorf, Germany, December 31st, 2022

Preface

> " To gain your own voice, you have to forget about having it heard. —Allen Ginsberg

I have created *Better Books with LaTeX the Agile Way* to help you overcome the challenges that come with writing and publishing—like formatting, indexing, reuse of texts, exporting a book into different formats, and publishing it to Amazon, Google, or Leanpub. The goal is to help you to streamline your managerial and organizational processes: outlining your ideas, working effectively with your editor, and marketing your book.

In a certain way, this is a "meta" book. It describes how it was created—both in terms of project management (see Part I) and technical aspects (see Part II). To create this very book, I used Agile methods and the template included in this book.

For the 2023 update, most changes apply to the accompanying Overleaf LaTeX template and its description in Part II. I overhauled the section on EPUB creation and added an alternative way of building the file (using the tex4ebook package). I have also listened to feedback from reviewers who wanted to see the template code within this book (as opposed to having to look at it on the computer while reading this book). In addition, each chapter now ends with a summary of the most important points from the chapter.

I wish you every success in your venture. If you need me, I am here to help! **You can do the thing.**

Clemens Lode, Düsseldorf, Germany, January 1st, 2023

Part I.

The Agile Way

" Write without pay until someone offers pay. If nobody offers within three years, the candidate may look upon this as a sign that sawing wood is what he was intended for.

—Mark Twain

Writing a book is hard. The deceptive thing about books is that they are easy to read. There is no hidden mechanism in the book; the book is exactly what you see: a series of letters. It is easy to think that if you just put the right combination of letters on a piece of paper, you end up with a bestseller. But that is like saying you could throw stones on a pile and end up with a house. Though Michelangelo said, "Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it," I would apply this more to editing than to writing something new. As a writer, you do not start with a block of stone; you first have to get that block of stone (mostly consisting of the results of your research).

Writing is a profession that takes many years to learn. If you want to earn money by writing, you have to learn not only writing but also marketing. Most people, on their first job, did not run the entire company on their own. While learning the ins and outs of their profession, their early jobs revolved around a single activity, like sales, construction, programming, etc. But as a writer (especially a self-publishing one), you have to wear many hats.

Having written ten books on topics including project management, philosophy, finance, science, and game rules, I have gained a great deal of respect for a well-written and well-designed book. It is not enough to have a stack of notes that you sort into chapters. Likewise, it is not enough to spend a lot of time organizing, editing, and publishing those notes (Part II will focus on this). It will create a book, but is a book really what you wanted? It might sound a bit strange, but *the goal of writing a book is not the book itself.* It is that your audience will find your book and read it!

For myself, the best learning experience was looking at the sales number of my first book. "0." It showed me that, not just in theory but also in practice, people will not come to you simply because you have a product. The mantra "If you build it, they will come" does not always apply. You have to study what they want, help them understand the value of the product, and find your niche accordingly.

With your first book, aim for a learning experience. This will keep you on track, even if you have not figured out the goal of your book. It will also help you to actually finish it. And the more books you write from start to finish, the faster you learn. Trying to write a perfect book on your first attempt will only open the door to procrastination.

In Part I, we will address what writing requires:

- Managing your expectations and deciding on a brand;

- Organizing your ideas;

- Identifying your target audience and their needs and wants;

- A strategy to create a page-turner;

- A process of editing;

- A "definition of done;"

- A plan for how to advertise your book; and

- A means of interacting with your audience before you actually release the book.

All of these are interwoven and should not be seen as "phases" of a book. The best approach is to think of marketing your book from the moment you start writing it. This way, you can streamline your writing process and connect with your readers from Day One. And even if you have already written your book, you can still apply the marketing techniques discussed here.

If you have a question about any topic in this book, feel free to contact me directly at mail@lode.de or follow us on Instagram https://www.instagram.com/lodepublishing/ and https://www.instagram.com/betterbookswithlatex/.

1. Great Expectations

The best advice I ever got was, "Nobody is coming." Well, at least without a reason, they will not.

Your inner voice may argue that if only every 1,000th person in the country bought your book, you would be a millionaire. It may be time to challenge your inner statistician. Imagine you spent the day in New York City. If only every 1,000th person you met on the street stopped you for a quick chat, your whole day would be busy. But that clearly does not happen. We spend more time with people with whom we have an emotional connection than on those with whom we do not. The same applies to books.

As harsh as it sounds, nobody will take an interest in your book just because it exists. If you do nothing but write and then release your book, expect exactly zero sales.

Even if you look up your favorite books, you will discover that they might rank only around #100,000—on Amazon; this translates into roughly one copy sold per day. Even at the #10,000 rank, only around 10 books per day are sold. How can your book compete with these numbers if even your favorite author sells only a few books per day?

In fact, selling 10 books per day is a very respectable achievement. Over a year, that might add up to $20,000, depending on your book price. While you might have heard of authors making millions, those are the exception. In addition, many authors are more focused on using their books to market their professional services (see *Books and Your Professional Career*, Chapter 3, p.11) than on earning money with book sales.

You might ask, "What about all those services promising to boost your sales or even make your book the next bestseller?" In that regard, it is best to think and act on evidence: learn what *exactly* those services entail and how they will impact your sales. It is better to invest in services only when you *know* that doing so will reduce your costs or increase your sales—not because you think an offer sounds attractive.

Instead of trying to *look* like a successful author, find your niche and become a successful author with *that* audience. In the end, you will enjoy your work a lot more, as you can work creatively in your own style. Ask yourself: what is the unique selling point of *your* book? Ask yourself how *you* select the books you are reading. A recommendation from a friend? A positive review on your favorite blog? A random Facebook ad with a questionable cover and unclear title? What emotional reaction will *your* readers have when seeing or reading your book?

The success of your book depends on finding that group of readers who want to read exactly what you are writing. You need to be able to explain in detail how and why a reader would take an interest in your book. If not even *you* know exactly how an ad will engage potential readers in learning about or buying your book, your audience certainly will not.

With that in mind, spend money only when you see a clear need for something. Seeing a clear need for something implies that you have empirical evidence. To get empirical evidence, you first need an initial product you can show others and gather their feedback. Start with your own network, give out free copies of your book, and hope your friends and associates will find the time to review your work within a few months. For creating and advertising your book, rely on freely available resources. For example, instead of setting up an author website (because it appears that *every* successful author has a website), focus on free alternatives like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Google Business, YouTube, TikTok, or simply your Amazon Author page. Once you get sufficient traffic on those sites, you can proceed with planning the next step based on that data, and so on. The best investment you can make early on is learning how to get those data because this information saves you time later.

It is also important to note that simply *asking* is sometimes the best course of action. Let us say you have found an infographic that would work well in your book. The person who created that infographic may be delighted to share it with you, at no cost, just for the exposure. As the saying goes, the best things in life are free; if you find a way where you both profit from the exchange, all the better. The mention of the creator and a link to his or her website or published work might be worth more than he or she could earn by selling the material.

One aspect of writing *the Agile Way* is that you focus on learning more about your target audience at the least expense and as early as possible. This allows you to change strategies while you are writing the book—as opposed to having to write a second book that deals with the *actual* needs of your potential audience. Getting better at your work (and creating more writing that aligns with your readers) in small increments is the secret and Agile project management techniques can help you to establish a process of continuous improvement.

People are not waiting for your book. They are waiting for you to ask them what they like to read.

Summary:

■ The success of your book depends on finding readers who want to read exactly what you are writing.

■ Do not expect to write the next bestseller without first understanding the market and engaging your readers.

■ "Agile" means that you focus on how you can learn more about your audience.

■ Invest only when you know that doing so will reduce costs or increase sales.

■ And remember: the best things in life are free.

So, how do you attract readers who want to read your book but have not yet heard of you? That is where branding comes in, and we will look at branding in the next chapter.

2. Branding

Branding means delivering a consistent message to your audience. As an author, by default, your name is your brand. Your audience knows your writing style and your expertise, so their risk when buying one (or another one) of your books is minimal.

Having but a single channel for marketing your books becomes problematic, though, as soon as you deviate from your usual field or genre. In this case, you should think about selling your work under two separate brands, where you post different articles and write for different genres or topics. For example, you would no longer be "Peter the Writer" but "Peter the Movie Critic" writing about movies and "Peter the Science Fiction Writer" writing science fiction stories.

While this approach means that you have to invest time into managing more than one channel, you can reach more people this way. Also, for topics where both channels overlap (in the above-mentioned example, when writing a story about movies or reviewing a science fiction movie), you can combine both audiences.

I propose the following step-by-step list to think about your brand:

1. Think about your goals.
2. Outline all the genres in which you could write and the topics you could write about.
3. Outline their audiences and the interests of each group of audiences.
4. Group your genres and topics into brands so that their audiences are only shown things they are interested in.
5. For each brand:

   ■ Define the products you want to offer (a book, consulting, images, videos, etc.).

   ■ To focus on your strengths, define what the brand is *not* instead of trying to appeal to all audiences and markets.

   ■ Make a plan for the type of content you can post to build audiences that are similar to the product you are providing. For example, one blog post per week and five social media posts or shares a week about science and technology.

■ Create advertisement material that you can share to build your brand—for example, story excerpts, cover images, guides, summaries, or free templates.

6. Once you have started gaining followers on various social media platforms, it will help advertisement algorithms to serve ads to people with similar interests.

In that regard, think of your brand as the main engine to sell your services or product. Take good care of it and people will come to you!

Summary:

■ Branding involves delivering a consistent message to your audience; as an author, your name serves as your brand.

■ Using different brands can be helpful when venturing into various fields or genres to reach more people.

■ Steps to consider for your brand:

❚ Identify your goals. List the genres and topics you can write about.

❚ Understand the audiences and their interests for each genre or topic.

❚ Group genres and topics into separate brands to cater to specific audience interests.

❚ For each brand, define the products or services offered, focus on strengths, create content plans, and develop advertisement material. Once you gain followers on social media, this helps advertisement algorithms target similar interest groups.

Have you ever considered all the ways your book can help you promote your career? That is what we will explore in the next chapter.

3. Books and Your Professional Career

Let us look at another approach to publishing books: in this case, it is not the book, but a service you provide, that is the *actual* product. Making the book itself a marketing tool can be achieved in the following ways:

■ **Referencing your book.** Having written a book about a subject means you have spent a significant amount of time studying the matter. So, be it on your CV or résumé, listing one or several books can help you to gain an edge over your competitors. I recommend taking a copy of your book to your next job interview. A printed book offers your interviewer physical proof of your abilities. Another place to "namedrop" your book is in speeches at conferences. A published book establishes you as an authority on a subject.

■ **Recommending your book.** When you are dealing with many customers, you can simply recommend that they read your book. Depending on the nature of your work, the topic of your book could revolve around extending your teaching (if you are, for example, a professor) or explaining your unique approach to a topic. Some people are more receptive to the written word than to other forms of learning, so this can help them to better learn from you. Others might want to add your book to their collection to share with friends or as a way of personally connecting with you.

■ **Using your book as a resource.** Even if only a few people buy and read your book, you can still reuse all the notes and the edited content for speeches at conferences and (properly cited) in future books. This way, you can see any book you release as a stepping stone to you becoming a master in the topic about which you are writing. Even if it is a work of fiction, the research you have invested in the book is valuable. Another option is to expand your audience by moving your content to a different medium and creating, for example, YouTube clips based on it.

■ **Making the book part of your offer.** This can be done as a free bonus on top of your services, as part of a premium offer, or as an incentive to subscribe to your newsletter. If your services are more physical with direct customer contact, you might think about giving away printed copies. If your services are primarily on the internet, you can simply give your book as a PDF e-book.

■ **Releasing your book for free.** If the goal of your book is to serve as a marketing tool, set aside the idea of making an income by selling the book and focus on having

it read by as many people as possible. Set the price on Amazon and Google to a minimum, and either use free book promotion services (KDP select) or split your book into individual blog articles to attract people to your website. In this case, you do not need to be afraid of the possibility that your book gets "stolen." Because you are already giving articles away for free, nobody wants to make the effort to assemble the blog articles into a book and release it. Still, if you are worried about people pirating (copying) your work, please check out Chapter 11 where I discuss strategies to protect your work or make the person copying it work for you.

If you want to use books to help you with your career and provide additional income, you need to focus a significant portion of your time on marketing. With that goal in mind, your book becomes the product and you have to invest (indirectly with advertisements or directly with valuable content) in engaging potential customers to spend time learning about it.

If you are serious about turning writing into a career, a great resource is https://www.facebook.com/groups/20Booksto50k/. The group has a lot of tutorials, guides, and videos on how to make it in the business. Note, though, that most of the participants in the discussion are writers of novels vs. nonfiction books—the focus of this book.

Summary:

■ Consider using your book as a marketing tool.

■ You can reference your book in interviews and speeches, recommend it to customers, use the notes for future books, make it part of an offer, or give it away for free.

■ To make money from writing, you need to invest a significant amount of time in marketing your book.

Are you ready to get started? First, think about whether you are writing for yourself or for others. That is one of the issues we will explore in the next chapter.

4. Starting a Book

“ There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. —Maya Angelou

When deciding to start a book project, you have two options. You write a book that *you* want to hold in your hands or you write a book that you want to see *others* holding in their hands.

4.1. Writing for Yourself

Writing for yourself usually means you come to the project full of ideas. Perhaps you have had these ideas for years and you want to see them finally in print. My own first book (*Philosophy for Heroes: Knowledge*) was such a work of passion. Over the years, I wrote down ideas on little note cards. After I moved to Düsseldorf, my journey of minimizing my household started. I began by scanning and digitizing all those cards. Together with articles and forum entries I wrote, the resulting file was a 1,000-page "book" of unconnected thoughts. This was followed by years of editing.

In the end, I divided my book project into four parts and then approached them one by one. It still took me many months to finish the first part. This approach was extremely inefficient as I had so much text and only a fraction of it published.

The lesson of this story is: Do not wait until the end of the book to look at the big picture. Writing a book is not like producing a movie, where you first try to get as much footage as possible and then focus on editing at the end of the process.

In a way, it is the curse of the first book you will write. You have not been writing books for long, so all your ideas have piled up in your mind, in notebooks, or on your computer. But the higher your ambitions, the lower the chance the book sees the light of day. The saying "Aim for the stars to reach the moon" holds true, but it is not done in a single step!

A general rule of thumb is to change only one element with each new book. If you have written novels set in Scandinavia in the past and now want to write a nonfiction book, write about Scandinavia.

If it is your first book, the easiest way to start is to take a similar book and learn from its basic structure in terms of plot and suspense curve or sequence of chapters. Relying on an existing blueprint helps you to focus on learning the tools that allow you to write and publish *your* unique book.

Ultimately, in this case, my advice is to write your first book based on your notes. By converting your ideas into a book, you are organizing them in a coherent way. And no matter how your book does in the marketplace, it is the foundation of your future publications. You can always come back to it and reuse elements directly or indirectly, based on the things you have learned while writing it.

4.2. Writing for Others

If you are writing for others, you are starting with a blank page. Sure, you have the background knowledge in your field (and books you have written in the past, see above), but because you are writing for others, the first step is to start asking people what they want to read.

If your goal for the book is to supplement your career, you are technically still writing for others, but the content of your book is clear from the start: you want to use your book as an alternative medium to promote the unique selling point of your career. *What makes your approach special in your field?*

How do you acquire the information necessary to decide what to write about? To research the existing market, you have several options:

■ Examine the top-selling books in different categories in online bookshops or use tools like PublisherRocket to search for different keywords and their rankings on Amazon.

■ Identify niches by examining genres and topics few other authors have written about but which have an above-average number of sales. You can do this by looking at sales rankings on Amazon or using tools like PublisherRocket.

■ Talk to people in your professional field about what they are missing or start a video channel where you share your knowledge and welcome questions.

■ Use your existing social media networks to post articles (maybe parts or whole chapters of your previously written books). You can guess what topic most interests your visitors by analyzing the amount of feedback, comments, and even click rates. We will discuss how to integrate such a blog into your overall book strategy in Chapter 11.

■ Use online advertising based on keywords (like Amazon Marketing Services or Google Adwords—paid services for your book to show up when people search for specific topics). Depending on how you have set up your keywords, they can act as a net and give you valuable information about what people are searching for. We will discuss keyword advertisement in Chapter 11.

If you are unsure which option to use, the best way is to connect to groups in whatever medium they exist and engage with the people there. This way, you will quickly get to know their problems and what they already know. Alternatively, start writing on topics that you like and share parts of your text on various platforms to connect with people.

Summary:

■ When deciding to start a book project, you have two options. You write a book that *you* want to hold in your hands, or you write a book that you want to see *others* holding in their hands.

■ If writing for yourself, it is best to start by organizing your thoughts into a coherent structure.

■ If writing for others, it is best to first research the market to ascertain what potential readers are looking for.

■ You can gain market information by checking existing top-seller lists, examining categories in bookshops, talking to people in your professional field, using social media, running ads, or starting to write and share your work.

Now that you have decided for whom you are writing your book, you will be brainstorming, writing, interviewing, and more. But you do not have to do these all at once! Instead, focus on one aspect at a time while you wear different "hats." Learn all about this in the following chapter.