

# Aurora International Publishing Mini Course

## Writing Books from the Inside

A practical writing course for incarcerated authors, emerging writers, and justice-impacted voices

Prepared by Aurora International Publishing

## Course Purpose

This mini course is designed to help incarcerated authors move from an idea to a complete, organized manuscript. It can be used alone, in a writing group, through correspondence, or with a mentor, teacher, chaplain, librarian, program facilitator, or trusted outside support person.

This course is not about writing a perfect book on the first try. It is about building a real manuscript step by step.

A book begins with one honest page. Then another. Then another.

## Who This Course Is For

This course is for writers who want to write:

- Memoir or life story
- Poetry collections
- Self-help or personal growth books
- Spiritual or reflective writing
- Legal education or rights-based guides
- Essays, letters, or social commentary
- Fiction or short stories
- Program manuals, workbooks, or study guides

You do not need a computer to begin. You do not need perfect spelling. You do not need a publishing contract before you write. You need a clear purpose, a working plan, and the discipline to keep going.

# What You Will Create

By the end of this mini course, you should have:

- A clear book idea
- A working title
- A reader statement
- A one-paragraph book summary
- A chapter outline or collection structure
- A drafting plan
- A revision checklist
- A submission-ready manuscript checklist
- A simple author bio
- A one-page book proposal draft

## **Important Note**

This course provides writing and publishing education. It is not legal advice, financial advice, or a guarantee of publication. Every author remains responsible for submitting original work, following institutional rules, and keeping personal copies whenever possible.

# Course Overview

## **Module 1: Know the Book You Are Writing**

Goal: Define the purpose, audience, and type of book.

## **Module 2: Find the Main Message**

Goal: Identify what the book is really about beneath the surface.

## **Module 3: Build the Structure**

Goal: Create a chapter plan, section plan, or collection order.

## **Module 4: Draft the Manuscript**

Goal: Build pages consistently without getting stuck on perfection.

## **Module 5: Strengthen the Writing**

Goal: Improve clarity, voice, pacing, and emotional impact.

## **Module 6: Revise the Manuscript**

Goal: Learn how to revise in stages instead of trying to fix everything at once.

## **Module 7: Prepare for Submission**

Goal: Organize the manuscript and supporting materials for review.

## **Module 8: Think Like an Author**

Goal: Understand professionalism, originality, rights, communication, and long-term author development.

## Module 1: Know the Book You Are Writing

Before writing a book, you need to know what kind of book you are building. Many writers begin with a powerful memory, a poem, a teaching, or an argument. That is a good beginning, but a book needs more than emotion. It needs direction.

Ask yourself three questions:

1. What am I writing?
2. Who am I writing for?
3. What should the reader understand, feel, or do after reading it?

A book does not have to speak to everyone. In fact, the strongest books usually speak clearly to a specific kind of reader.

For example:

- A memoir may speak to young men who grew up without guidance.
- A poetry collection may speak to people healing from grief, addiction, prison, trauma, or spiritual struggle.
- A legal guide may speak to incarcerated people trying to understand their rights.
- A workbook may speak to facilitators, fathers, recovering people, or reentry participants.
- A spiritual book may speak to people looking for meaning, grounding, and transformation.

When you know your reader, your writing becomes clearer.

### Exercise 1: The Book Sentence

Complete this sentence:

My book is about \_\_\_\_\_

but it is really about \_\_\_\_\_.

Example:

My book is about growing up without my father, but it is really about how abandonment shaped my identity and how I learned to become accountable for my own life.

## Exercise 2: The Reader

My main reader is:

---

This reader may be struggling with:

---

I want this reader to feel:

---

I want this reader to understand:

---

I want this reader to do, consider, or remember:

---

## Exercise 3: Book Type

Check the type of book you are writing:

- Memoir or autobiography
- Poetry collection
- Self-help or recovery book
- Spiritual writing
- Legal or educational guide
- Essay collection
- Fiction
- Short story collection
- Workbook or curriculum
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Module 1 Outcome**

By the end of this module, write one clean paragraph describing your book.

Working Book Description:

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## Module 2: Find the Main Message

A book needs a center. The center is the message that holds the book together.

A book can include many events, ideas, poems, lessons, and experiences, but if the reader cannot understand the main message, the book may feel scattered.

The main message does not need to be complicated. It should be honest and focused.

Examples of main messages:

- A person can take responsibility without denying the pain that shaped them.
- Fatherhood is not only biology. It is presence, discipline, protection, and emotional growth.
- Recovery is not only stopping a harmful behavior. It is rebuilding identity, purpose, and spiritual balance.
- Knowing your rights can help you protect your dignity inside prison.
- A community can heal when people choose accountability over revenge.
- Grief can become wisdom when a person is willing to face it.

Your main message is the spine of your book.

**Exercise 1: What Do I Believe?**

Answer these questions:

What do I believe people misunderstand about my topic?

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What have I learned the hard way?

---

---

What truth do I want to leave behind for someone else?

---

---

What warning, lesson, encouragement, or teaching does my book carry?

---

---

**Exercise 2: The Main Message Statement**

Complete this sentence:

The main message of my book is:

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### **Exercise 3: What Does Not Belong?**

A serious writer must know what belongs in the book and what does not.

List three things that may be interesting but do not serve the main message:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

This does not mean those ideas are bad. It means they may belong in another chapter, another book, a poem, or a separate essay.

### **Module 2 Outcome**

Write your main message in one sentence:

---

---

## Module 3: Build the Structure

A manuscript becomes easier to finish when it has a structure. Structure is the order of the book.

Different books need different structures.

A memoir may follow life stages:

1. Childhood
2. Turning points
3. Harm and consequences
4. Prison or separation
5. Awakening
6. Accountability
7. Healing
8. Future purpose

A self-help book may follow a teaching path:

1. The problem
2. Why it matters
3. The mindset shift
4. The tools
5. Practice exercises
6. Reflection questions
7. Next steps

A poetry collection may follow emotional movement:

1. Pain
2. Anger
3. Grief
4. Reflection
5. Accountability
6. Hope
7. Renewal

A legal guide may follow practical questions:

1. What right is involved?
2. What does it mean?
3. When does it apply?
4. What should the reader document?
5. What are common mistakes?
6. What are possible next steps?

A workbook may follow learning outcomes:

1. Topic introduction
2. Key terms
3. Teaching section
4. Reflection questions
5. Writing exercise
6. Group activity
7. Takeaway

**Exercise 1: Choose Your Structure**

My book will be organized mainly by:

- Time order
- Topic order
- Emotional journey
- Teaching sequence
- Legal or practical questions
- Poetry themes
- Fiction plot
- Program lessons
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Exercise 2: Create a Working Table of Contents**

Write 6 to 12 possible chapters or sections.

Working Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 6: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 7: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 8: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 9: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 10: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 11: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter or Section 12: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Exercise 3: Chapter Purpose**

For each chapter, write one sentence explaining what the chapter does.

Example:

Chapter 1 explains how father absence shaped my early understanding of love, trust, and identity.

Chapter 1 purpose:

---

Chapter 2 purpose:

---

Chapter 3 purpose:

---

Chapter 4 purpose:

---

Chapter 5 purpose:

---

### **Module 3 Outcome**

By the end of this module, you should have a working table of contents. It does not have to be final. It only has to give your manuscript a path.

## Module 4: Draft the Manuscript

Drafting means getting the book onto the page. Drafting is not editing. Drafting is not polishing. Drafting is building raw material.

Many writers fail because they try to make every sentence perfect before they finish the chapter. That slows the work down and can make the writer quit.

A better method is:

1. Draft first.
2. Revise later.
3. Edit last.

The first draft is allowed to be uneven. It may repeat itself. It may have weak sentences. It may have spelling errors. That is normal. You cannot revise a blank page.

### **Writing with Limited Tools**

If you are writing by hand:

- Number every page.
- Write your name or pen name on every section.
- Keep chapters separated if possible.
- Use one notebook per project if possible.
- Leave space between sections for later notes.
- Mark uncertain words with a circle and keep moving.
- Do not destroy earlier drafts unless you have a clean replacement.

If you are using prison messaging, tablets, JPay, Securus, CorrLinks, ViaPath, or similar systems:

- Send writing in clearly labeled parts.
- Include the book title or working title in each message.
- Include chapter number and section title.
- Keep a personal copy whenever possible.
- Do not assume messages will arrive in order.
- Avoid sending sensitive legal or personal details without thinking carefully about prison monitoring.

### **Exercise 1: The 20-Minute Draft**

Choose one chapter or section. Write for 20 minutes without stopping to edit.

Topic:

---

Start with this sentence if you are stuck:

What I need the reader to understand first is...

## Exercise 2: Chapter Building Blocks

For one chapter, list the pieces that belong inside it.

Chapter title:

---

Main point of the chapter:

---

Scene, memory, story, or example:

---

Lesson or reflection:

---

Question this chapter answers:

---

Strong ending line or takeaway:

---

## Exercise 3: Weekly Writing Plan

This week I will write:

- Number of pages: \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of poems: \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of scenes: \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of exercises or lessons: \_\_\_\_\_
- Chapter or section name: \_\_\_\_\_

My writing days will be:

---

My best writing time is:

---

## **Module 4 Outcome**

By the end of this module, you should have drafted at least one full chapter, section, poem set, story, or lesson.

## Module 5: Strengthen the Writing

Strong writing is not only about big words. Strong writing is clear, honest, organized, and alive.

The reader should not have to fight through confusion to understand the meaning.

Focus on four areas:

1. Clarity
2. Voice
3. Specific detail
4. Movement

### **Clarity**

Clear writing tells the reader what is happening, who is involved, why it matters, and what the point is.

Weak sentence:

Things were bad back then and people did not understand me.

Stronger sentence:

After my father stopped showing up, I began to believe I had to earn attention by acting older, harder, and angrier than I really was.

The stronger sentence gives a situation, an emotional effect, and a specific meaning.

## **Voice**

Voice is the sound of the writer on the page. AIP values the author's real voice. Editing should improve clarity without erasing identity.

A strong voice may be:

- Direct
- Reflective
- Poetic
- Practical
- Spiritual
- Urgent
- Calm
- Humorous
- Analytical

The goal is not to sound like someone else. The goal is to sound like your clearest self.

## **Specific Detail**

Specific detail makes writing believable.

Instead of writing:

My grandmother loved me.

Write:

Every time I came over, my grandmother made me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and let me sit with a movie while I waited for my father to come back.

The detail shows love instead of only naming it.

## **Movement**

A chapter should move. It should not stay in the same emotional place forever.

A strong chapter may move from:

- Confusion to understanding
- Anger to reflection
- Pain to responsibility
- Isolation to connection
- Mistake to lesson
- Question to answer

### **Exercise 1: Replace General Words**

Rewrite each general statement with specific detail.

General: I went through a lot.

Specific:

---

---

General: Prison changed me.

Specific:

---

---

General: I learned responsibility.

Specific:

---

---

### **Exercise 2: Show the Moment**

Choose one important moment from your book. Write it like a scene.

Where were you?

---

Who was there?

---

What did you see, hear, or feel?

---

What changed after that moment?

---

### **Exercise 3: Chapter Ending**

A chapter should not just stop. It should land.

Write a final sentence for one chapter that leaves the reader with a clear takeaway.

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### **Module 5 Outcome**

By the end of this module, revise one page by making it clearer, more specific, and more focused.

## Module 6: Revise the Manuscript

Revision is where the book becomes stronger. Do not try to fix everything at once. That creates frustration.

Revise in stages.

### **Revision Pass 1: Big Picture**

Ask:

- Does the book have a clear purpose?
- Does the order make sense?
- Are any chapters missing?
- Are any sections repeated too many times?
- Does every chapter support the main message?
- Does the reader understand why the book matters?

### **Revision Pass 2: Chapter Level**

Ask:

- Does this chapter have a clear point?
- Does the chapter begin in a way that pulls the reader in?
- Does the chapter include enough detail?
- Does the chapter stay focused?
- Does the ending give the reader something to carry forward?

### **Revision Pass 3: Paragraph Level**

Ask:

- Are the paragraphs in a logical order?
- Does each paragraph focus on one main idea?
- Are transitions clear?
- Are there places where the reader may get confused?

### **Revision Pass 4: Sentence Level**

Ask:

- Can I remove extra words?
- Are any sentences too long or unclear?
- Did I repeat the same point too many times?
- Are names, dates, and facts consistent?
- Are there spelling or grammar issues I can fix?

**Exercise 1: Cut or Keep**

Choose one chapter. Mark each paragraph as:

- Keep
- Move
- Cut
- Expand
- Clarify

Chapter title:

---

Paragraphs that should stay:

---

Paragraphs that should move:

---

Paragraphs that should be cut or shortened:

---

Paragraphs that need more detail:

---

**Exercise 2: Repetition Check**

What idea do I repeat most often?

---

Does the repetition help the book, or does it slow the book down?

---

Where can I combine repeated ideas?

---

**Exercise 3: Read-Aloud Test**

If possible, read one page aloud quietly. Mark any sentence where you stumble, run out of breath, or lose the meaning.

Page tested:

---

Sentences to revise:

---

---

**Module 6 Outcome**

By the end of this module, you should understand how to revise without becoming overwhelmed.

## Module 7: Prepare for Submission

A manuscript is easier to review when it is organized. A good submission shows respect for the work, the reader, and the publishing process.

Before submitting, prepare as many of the following items as possible.

### Manuscript Basics

Include:

- Author name or pen name
- Legal name if required for contract or payment records
- Facility name and identification number if applicable
- Mailing address or communication method
- Working title
- Genre or book type
- Page numbers
- Chapter titles or section titles
- Clear handwriting or typed pages if available
- A note stating whether the manuscript is complete or unfinished

### One-Paragraph Book Summary

A book summary should tell what the book is about, who it is for, and why it matters.

Template:

This book is about \_\_\_\_\_.

It is written for \_\_\_\_\_.

The book matters because \_\_\_\_\_.

The reader should leave with \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Author Bio**

An author bio does not need to include everything about your life. It should be short, relevant, and respectful.

Template:

[Author Name or Pen Name] is a writer whose work focuses on \_\_\_\_\_ . Through poetry, memoir, essays, fiction, or educational writing, they explore themes of \_\_\_\_\_. Their goal is to \_\_\_\_\_ .

## **Content Notes**

If the manuscript includes difficult material, it may help to include a short content note.

Examples:

- This manuscript discusses incarceration, grief, addiction, violence, trauma, and family separation.
- This manuscript includes spiritual material from a Pagan or Wiccan perspective.
- This manuscript discusses legal rights and prison conditions but is not legal advice.

Content notes help editors, readers, and publishers understand what they are receiving.

## **Originality Statement**

Every author should be prepared to affirm that the work is original.

Template:

I affirm that this manuscript is my original work. Any quoted, borrowed, or referenced material has been identified to the best of my ability.

## Permission Concerns

Be careful when including:

- Song lyrics
- Long quotes from books, articles, or websites
- Other people's letters
- Court documents with sensitive information
- Names of victims, minors, or private individuals
- Identifying medical, legal, or personal records
- Material written by another person

When in doubt, flag the issue in a note instead of hiding it.

### Exercise 1: Submission Cover Sheet

Author name:

---

Pen name, if any:

---

Facility and ID number, if applicable:

---

Mailing address or communication method:

---

Working title:

---

Book type or genre:

---

Is the manuscript complete?

- Yes
- No
- Partly complete

Approximate page count or word count:

---

Brief description:

---

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---

### **Exercise 2: Submission Checklist**

Before sending, check:

- I kept a copy if possible.
- My pages are numbered.
- My name or pen name appears on the manuscript.
- The title or working title is included.
- The chapters or sections are labeled.
- I included a short summary.
- I included an author bio if requested.
- I identified whether the manuscript is complete or unfinished.
- I noted any sensitive material, quotes, or permission concerns.
- I understand that submission does not guarantee publication.

### **Module 7 Outcome**

By the end of this module, you should have a manuscript packet that is easier for a publisher, mentor, or reviewer to understand.

## Module 8: Think Like an Author

An author is not only someone who writes. An author takes responsibility for the work.

Thinking like an author means:

- Respecting your own voice
- Respecting the reader
- Telling the truth carefully
- Avoiding plagiarism
- Accepting revision
- Communicating professionally
- Understanding that publishing is a process
- Keeping records
- Protecting your rights
- Staying patient through delays

### **Originality**

Your work must be your own. Inspiration is allowed. Copying is not.

You may learn from books, programs, teachers, scripture, spiritual traditions, legal materials, or personal conversations. But when you use someone else's exact words or ideas, you must identify them.

Do not submit someone else's work as your own.

### **Ethical Writing**

AIP values dignity, transformation, accountability, and responsible communication.

A strong manuscript can discuss violence, injustice, anger, grief, prison, trauma, addiction, and harm. But it should not promote hate, target protected groups, incite violence, or exploit vulnerable people.

Hard truth is allowed. Dehumanization is not.

## **Working with an Editor**

An editor's job is not to take your voice away. A good editor helps the writing become clearer and stronger.

An editor may ask:

- What do you mean here?
- Can you give an example?
- Should this chapter come earlier?
- Can this section be shorter?
- Is this detail necessary?
- Are you willing to revise this part?

Do not treat every edit as an insult. Also, do not accept changes blindly. The goal is respectful collaboration.

## **Communication**

When writing to a publisher, mentor, or outside support person:

- Be clear about what you are sending.
- Label chapters and versions.
- Ask specific questions.
- Avoid sending scattered pages without explanation.
- Keep your tone professional even when frustrated.
- Understand that prison mail and digital systems can delay communication.

## **Exercise 1: My Author Standards**

As an author, I want my work to be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Exercise 2: My Revision Promise**

Complete this statement:

I understand that revision does not mean my writing is bad. Revision means:

---

---

## **Exercise 3: My Long-Term Author Goal**

In one year, I want my writing to be:

---

In five years, I want my writing to be:

---

The kind of author I am becoming is:

---

## **Module 8 Outcome**

By the end of this module, you should understand that writing a book is not only a creative act. It is also a professional responsibility.

## **Final Project: Build Your Book Packet**

Use this section to gather the main pieces of your book project in one place.

### **1. Working Title**

---

### **2. Book Type or Genre**

---

### **3. Main Reader**

---

### **4. Main Message**

---

---

**5. One-Paragraph Summary**

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---

**6. Working Table of Contents**

- 1. 

---
- 2. 

---
- 3. 

---
- 4. 

---
- 5. 

---
- 6. 

---
- 7. 

---
- 8. 

---
- 9. 

---
- 10. 

---

**7. Sample Chapter or Writing Sample**

Chapter or section title:

---

Pages included:

---

**8. Author Bio**

---

---

---

## 9. Originality Statement

I affirm that this manuscript is my original work. Any quoted, borrowed, or referenced material has been identified to the best of my ability.

Signature or printed name:

---

Date:

---

## Book Planning Templates

### Chapter Planning Sheet

Chapter number:

---

Chapter title:

---

Main point:

---

What happens or what is taught in this chapter?

---

---

Why does this chapter matter?

---

What should the reader understand by the end?

---

Scene, memory, example, lesson, poem, or activity to include:

---

Possible opening line:

---

Possible closing line:

---

### **Memoir Chapter Template**

1. What happened?

---

2. How did I understand it at the time?

---

3. How do I understand it now?

---

4. What did it cost me?

---

5. What did it teach me?

---

6. How does it connect to the main message of the book?

---

## Poetry Collection Template

Collection title:

---

Main themes:

---

Section 1 theme:

---

Poems in section 1:

---

Section 2 theme:

---

Poems in section 2:

---

Section 3 theme:

---

Poems in section 3:

---

Opening poem:

---

Closing poem:

---

## Workbook or Program Manual Template

Lesson title:

---

Purpose of lesson:

---

Key idea:

---

Teaching section:

---

Reflection questions:

1. 

---

2. 

---

3. 

---

Writing exercise:

---

Group activity or discussion prompt:

---

Takeaway:

---

## **Fiction Scene Template**

Scene title or number:

---

Point-of-view character:

---

Where does the scene happen?

---

What does the character want?

---

What obstacle is in the way?

---

What changes by the end of the scene?

---

Important dialogue or image:

---

## **Self-Editing Checklist**

Use this before sending your manuscript for review.

### **Big Picture**

- The book has a clear purpose.
- The main reader is identifiable.
- The main message is clear.
- The chapters or sections are in a logical order.
- The manuscript does not wander too far from its purpose.

### **Chapter Level**

- Each chapter or section has a clear point.
- The opening gives the reader a reason to continue.
- The chapter includes enough detail or teaching.
- The chapter ending has a clear takeaway.

### **Paragraph Level**

- Paragraphs are not too long.
- Each paragraph focuses on one idea.
- Transitions are clear.
- Repeated ideas have been reduced or combined.

### **Sentence Level**

- Sentences are as clear as possible.
- Unnecessary words have been removed.
- Names, dates, and facts are consistent.
- Spelling and grammar have been checked as much as possible.

### **Submission Readiness**

- Pages are numbered.
- The author name or pen name is included.
- The working title is included.
- The manuscript is labeled as complete or incomplete.
- A short summary is included.
- An author bio is included if requested.
- Permission concerns are noted.
- A copy has been kept if possible.

## Sample One-Page Book Proposal

Working Title:

---

Author Name or Pen Name:

---

Book Type or Genre:

---

Estimated Length:

---

Is the Manuscript Complete?

---

Main Reader:

---

Book Summary:

---

---

---

Main Message:

---

Why This Book Matters:

---

---

Chapter or Section Overview:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Writing Sample Included:

\_\_\_\_\_

Author Bio:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Closing Note to the Writer**

A book is not finished because the first draft is complete. A book is finished through patience, revision, honesty, and structure.

Write the page. Label the page. Keep the page. Then write the next one.

Your voice matters, but your responsibility to the reader matters too. The strongest books do not only express pain. They shape experience into meaning.

That is the work of an author.