



Finding Your Book's Shape

Before you write chapters, it helps to have a sense of the *shape* your book might take. Not a detailed outline, not a strict plan, just a rough idea of how the story or subject might unfold. Think of this as sketching the silhouette before filling in the details, like an artist drawing in pencil.

Start With the Spine

Every book has a central thread running through it. For fiction, it might be a character's journey or a problem that needs solving. For non-fiction, it might be a question you're answering or a story you're uncovering.

If you can describe the spine of your book in one or two sentences, you've already found its basic shape. Just imagine your friend asks you what the book is about.

Identify the Major Beats

Most books have a handful of key moments that define the journey. These might include:

- the opening situation
- a turning point
- a moment of crisis or discovery
- the resolution

You don't need to know everything in between, just the landmarks you're heading toward.

Choose a Natural Flow

Books tend to fall into a few broad shapes:

- **Chronological** - events unfolding in time
- **Thematic** - grouped by ideas or topics
- **Journey-based** - physical or emotional movement
- **Problem-solution** - especially common in non-fiction
- **Braided** - two or more threads woven together

You're not committing to a structure forever. You're simply choosing the path that feels most natural for now.

Allow for Side Paths

Most books grow in unexpected directions. Characters deepen. Themes emerge. New research appears. Leave space for these diversions, they often become the most memorable parts of the book.

Think in Chapters, Not Details

A chapter doesn't need to be fully planned. It just needs a purpose. Try sketching a list of possible chapters with a single line under each:

- "Introduces the main character"
- "Explains how the conflict began"
- "Shows the turning point"
- "Explores the key theme"

This keeps your structure flexible but focused. As ideas appear it's easy to slot in new chapters.

Start Anywhere

Once you have a rough shape, begin writing the part that feels most alive. The opening chapter doesn't have to be written first. Momentum is more important than order.