

Ensure Logical Order

Chapter order

The way you structure your book influences how well readers remember your material. Studies show that clear organization improves memory. When text is more logically organized, readers can recall information better.⁷

That's why a strong organizational structure matters. Organize your chapters by theme or by progression, depending on your topic. If concepts build on one another, choose a progressive order. Otherwise, group similar themes together. When organizing by theme, consider placing related chapters into sections—though that's not required.

Or combine both approaches, using themed sections with progressive chapter order inside each one.

Original chapter order for a book on launching a freelance business:

1. Finding Your First Clients
2. Setting Your Rates
3. Defining Your Services
4. Creating a Portfolio
5. Managing Client Relationships
6. Handling Difficult Clients

7 Bonnie J. F. Meyer, "Identification of the Structure of Prose and Its Implications for the Study of Reading and Memory," *Journal of Reading Behavior* 7, no. 1 (1975): 7-47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10862967509547120>.

7. Building Your Online Presence
8. Scaling Your Business
9. Setting Up Your Business Legally
10. Managing Your Finances

The chapters jump around without a clear pattern. Readers must define their services and establish their legal setup before they look for clients or set rates. Plus, the two client relationship chapters are separated as well, disrupting flow. Essentially, the order doesn't follow a progressive or thematic grouping.

Revised #1. Use a progressive structure (reorder so each chapter builds on the previous):

1. Defining Your Services
2. Setting Up Your Business Legally
3. Setting Your Rates
4. Creating a Portfolio
5. Building Your Online Presence
6. Finding Your First Clients
7. Managing Client Relationships
8. Handling Difficult Clients
9. Managing Your Finances
10. Scaling Your Business

Revised #2. Could use thematic sections with the progressive order:

- Section 1: Foundation
 - Chapter 1: Defining Your Services
 - Chapter 2: Setting Up Your Business Legally
 - Chapter 3: Setting Your Rates
- Section 2: Marketing & Getting Clients
 - Chapter 4: Creating a Portfolio

- Chapter 5: Building Your Online Presence
- Chapter 6: Finding Your First Clients
- Section 3: Working with Clients
 - Chapter 7: Managing Client Relationships
 - Chapter 8: Handling Difficult Clients
- Section 4: Business Operations
 - Chapter 9: Managing Your Finances
 - Chapter 10: Scaling Your Business

Choosing a structure

It's not always clear whether a progressive or thematic structure is better. If several structures could work, how do you know whether your original one is the best choice?

First, focus on your reader's journey, not just your content. What does your reader need to understand first, and what would confuse them if it appeared in the “wrong” spot? If you can answer that clearly, then problem solved.

When that doesn't solve the issue and both structures work equally well, choose the one that reduces cognitive overload. Is your topic easier to understand through themes or through progression? Go with the easiest to follow.

When all else fails, default to the structure most commonly used for your topic.

Choose a progressive structure when your topic involves

- steps
- processes
- timelines
- cause-and-effect
- building skills

If one concept must come before another, choose progression.

Choose to group by themes when your topic is

- conceptual
- multi-faceted
- non-linear
- principle-based
- something readers may want to skim or return to

If your reader doesn't need a strict path, themes give you more flexibility.

If both structures work, combine them: Use thematic sections with progressive chapters inside each one. This works well for some business, self-help, or productivity books.

And, honestly, sometimes chapter A could follow chapter B, but if you can create a smoother transition by having A first, go with that. Strong transitions make reading easier. So when the order doesn't matter, then look to what makes for a better transition or lead-in to the next.

Content order

All content in a given chapter should align with that chapter's main topic, and the material under each heading should clearly support that heading. If it doesn't, move it to where it fits more naturally, either somewhere else in the chapter or another chapter entirely.

Original section in a chapter titled "Creating Your Content Calendar":

Planning Your Social Media Posts

A content calendar helps you stay consistent with your social media presence without scrambling for ideas every day.

[Continued information about content pillars and batching content]

When writing your captions, keep your ideal client in mind. Use language that resonates with them and addresses their pain

points. Make sure you have clear, compelling messaging so they understand the value you offer. Strong messaging is what converts followers into clients.

Also consider what times your audience is most active. Check your analytics to see when your posts get the most engagement, then schedule your content for those peak windows.

The paragraph about captions and converting followers is off topic for this heading. This section should stay focused on the logistics of planning posts, not on messaging strategy.

Revised:

Move the messaging paragraph to a section about brand voice (ideally earlier in the chapter, before the content-planning material).

Just like your chapter order, your headings should follow either a thematic or progressive structure.

Example chapters on building your email list:

- Writing Welcome Emails
- Choosing an Email Service Provider
- Setting Up Automation
- Creating Your Lead Magnet
- Designing Your Opt-In Form
- Writing Your Landing Page Copy

The order doesn't follow a logical progression. You can't write welcome emails before choosing an email platform or creating the lead magnet that readers will sign up for. And automation only comes after you have designed the opt-in form.

New order:

- Creating Your Lead Magnet
- Choosing an Email Service Provider
- Designing Your Opt-In Form
- Writing Your Landing Page Copy
- Setting Up Automation
- Writing Welcome Emails

Complexity note

Because this topic spans the entire book, this practice section is longer than usual. Tackle the changes you would make to the chapter order and content order as best you can. Then use my example to help you further understand this topic. After the revision, I explained the overall changes I made. Because this example is already long, I didn't explain each and every change, but enough to give you an idea.

Self-editing in practice

This is the original order of a book on creating a Kickstarter that I edited. To shorten it, I removed most of the subheadings from the outline and left only the ones needed to practice the concept.

Original:

- Chapter 1: Put Together a Launch Team
 - Email
 - Private Facebook Groups
 - Public Facebook Page
 - Stay in Contact

- Make the Ask
- Chapter 2: Reaching Out to Your Network
- Chapter 3: Publicity
- Chapter 4: Reward Levels
- Chapter 5: Running the Numbers
- Phases (from idea to ready to go)
 - The Video
 - Promotions
 - Vendors
 - Calculate Your Kickstarter Goal
- Chapter 6: Campaign Descriptions
- Chapter 7: Preparing for Launch
- Chapter 8: Post Campaign
- Chapter 9: When Things Go Wrong
- Chapter 10: Stretch Goal

PAUSE HERE

Open your personalized workbook on your computer and review the practice exercise, asking

- Which chapters or sections feel like they belong earlier, later, or together in a group?
- Do any headings or subheadings seem out of place for the chapter they're in, or unrelated to the main idea?

After answering, draft a revised order and compare it to mine.

Problems with original:

The first three chapters follow a clear progression. Chapters 4–6, however, don't follow any thematic or progressive order. Chapters 7–9 return to a progressive structure, while chapter 10 is randomly thrown in.

Chapter 5 (“Running the Numbers”) ran long, and several sections drifted from the core idea of running the numbers. Many were off topic for this chapter.

One section in chapter 1 doesn’t relate to that chapter. And some subheadings appeared out of sequence.

Revised order (Again, to keep it short, I left out some of the less relevant subheadings):

Section 1: Where Are You At?

- Chapter 1: Phases

Section 2: Marketing and Promoting

- Chapter 2: Putting Together a Launch Team
 - Ask People to Join Your Launch Team
 - Choose a Platform
 - Email
 - Private Facebook Groups
 - Stay in Contact
- Chapter 3: Public Facebook Page
- Chapter 4: Reaching Out to Your Network
- Chapter 5: Publicity

Section 3: Putting Your Campaign Together

- Chapter 6: Reward Levels
- Chapter 7: Stretch Goals
- Chapter 8: The Video
- Chapter 9: Campaign Descriptions

Section 4: Calculating Costs and Working with Vendors

- Chapter 10: Vendors
- Chapter 11: Running the Numbers
 - Promotions
 - Calculate Your Kickstarter Goal
 - Price Your Rewards

Section 5: Preparing for Launch

- Chapter 12: It's Launch Time

Section 6: Post Campaign

- Chapter 13: If You Didn't Reach Your Goal
- Chapter 14: If You Reached Your Goal
- Chapter 15: When Things Go Wrong

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Moved the phases to a new chapter 1

Problem: The “phases” content was buried in chapter 5 even though it explains the basic stages every Kickstarter goes through.

Solution: Made it chapter 1 because readers need this foundation before learning marketing tactics.

Minor tweaks to the original progressive order

Problem: Chapters 1 through 3 in the original manuscript followed a logical, progressive order, but not all the subheadings fit.

Solution: I grouped them under a new section called *Marketing and Promoting the Kickstarter Campaign* to give thematic clarity. Then I added in level 2 headings to nest similar content in level 3 headings. (Choose a Platform → new heading to nest “email” and “private Facebook group” to see how they relate instead of keeping them as different topics). Pulled out the public Facebook section into its own chapter since it didn't relate to the launch team content.

Creating thematic cohesion

Problem: Related chapters were scattered (e.g., reward levels in chapter 4, stretch goals in chapter 10, campaign descriptions in chapter 6), and unrelated content was thrown together in chapter 5.

Solution: Created thematic sections and moved chapters and unrelated content in chapter 5 according to the new themed sections.

(e.g., grouped all campaign creation topics in section 3: Putting Your Campaign Together).

Rearranging unrelated content

Problem: Chapter 5 contained phases, video creation, vendor information, promotions, and budget calculations—completely unrelated topics.

Solution: Distributed content to appropriate thematic homes:

- Phases → became the foundation (Chapter 1)
- Video → became its own chapter and moved to section 3 (putting campaign together)
- Vendors and budget calculations → became their own chapters in section 4 (Calculating Costs. Working with Vendors.)

To improve flow, I reversed the order of the vendor and budgeting content—readers need to know their vendor costs before they can accurately calculate their campaign budget.

Used both thematic and progressive order

Problem: Original chapters had no clear relationship to each other.

Solution: Grouped related chapters in sections, and within each section, chapters follow a logical sequence (like moving from finding vendors to calculating costs).

EDITING STEPS

- ☐ Examine each chapter in context and ask, “Does this chapter belong in this spot? Is it thematically grouped or part of a natural sequence?” If not, and multiple aren’t, figure out whether to group them by theme or progression and reorganize them.
- ☐ Examine each chapter in context and ask, “Would the transition work better between these chapters if the order was switched?” If so, then flip the chapter order.
- ☐ Check that every paragraph aligns with the chapter’s overall topic. Flag it if it doesn’t.
- ☐ Check that all content under a given heading relates to that heading’s focus. Flag it if it doesn’t.
- ☐ Review all headings within a chapter and ask if each one is in the right spot progressively or thematically. Flag misplaced headings.
- ☐ Review all flagged items and delete anything redundant or off topic, or move it to a more fitting chapter or section.