

# 12 Essential Books for Book Coaches

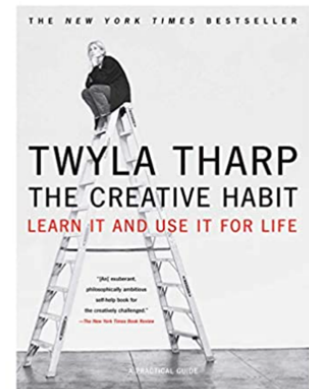
Compiled by Jennie Nash, founder and CEO of Author Accelerator

This is not a list of great books about writing. There are no books here about the craft of writing or the practice of writing or how to structure your novel or develop a book proposal. That's because I bet you already have all of those writing books, and book coaching is a different skill than writing. This is a list of the books that have most helped me to understand the art and business of coaching a writer through the process of writing a book.

## 1. *The Creative Habit* by Twyla Tharp

Many people believe that creativity is something that comes from outside the creator—the bolt of lightning, the spark of genius, the muse—and I believed that for many years as well, until I read *The Creative Habit* by choreographer Twyla Tharp.

Tharp persuasively argues that creativity comes from intention and hard work. She teaches, in other words, that the creative process is not random or chaotic, and that someone can, therefore, get better at it. This belief is at the heart of book coaching.



We help writers build a container—a routine, a feedback loop, a series of deadlines—for doing creative work and getting better at it. A big part of the thrill is helping the writer discover what they are capable of.

Tharp offers tangible ways of understanding and managing the creative process—exercises like “Your Creative DNA” and “Before You Can Think Outside of the Box, You Have to Start with a Box”—that show us what it looks like for a creator to actually create. In doing so, she outlines a philosophy for the coaching process that has informed much of what I do and teach as a book coach.

Here are three powerful ideas from *The Creative Habit*:

“There’s a process that generates creativity—and you can learn it.”

“Mozart was hardly some naïve prodigy who sat down at the keyboard and, with God whispering in his ears, let music flow from his fingertips. It’s a nice image for selling tickets to movies, but whether or not God has kissed your brow, you still have to work. Without learning and preparation, you won’t know how to harness the power of that kiss.”

“Confidence is a trait that has to be earned honestly and refreshed constantly; you have to work as hard to protect your skills as you did to develop them. This means vigilant practice and excellent practice habits. You’ve heard the phrase, ‘Practice makes perfect’? Not true. Perfect practice makes perfect.”

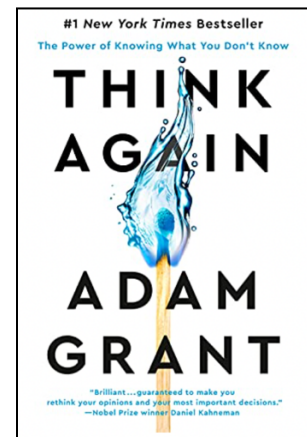
## 2. *Think Again* by Adam Grant

A book coach brings the power of an outside perspective to a writer’s work. Our job is to see what is on the page and what is not yet on the page, and then to ask questions about the writer’s goal, their intention, their ideal reader, and the marketplace they wish to enter.

After all, we are part of a creative process, and in a creative process, things get thrown away: ideas, assumptions, biases, visions, pages, and words. The very nature of an iterative process is to think again.

We are not there to be “right” about what the writer should do to write the best book they can, but to listen deeply and to challenge them to determine for themselves what “best” means. The ability to think again is a cornerstone of this work.

In *Think Again*, Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist, provides a framework for how to keep your mind open and nimble enough to do creative work. He also teaches us how to create the kind of environment where we can inspire others to do it too.



Here are three powerful ideas from *Think Again*:

“An informed audience is going to spot the holes in our case anyway. We might as well get credit for having the humility to look for them, the foresight to spot them, and the integrity to acknowledge them.”

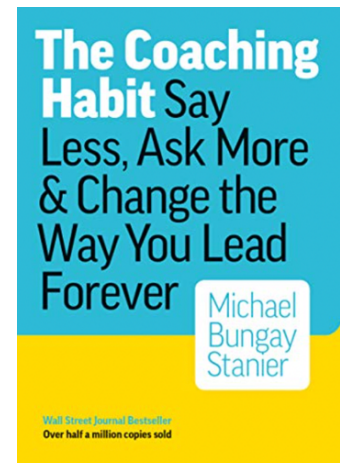
“Learning cultures thrive under a particular combination of psychological safety and accountability.”

“Good teachers introduce new thoughts, but great teachers introduce new ways of thinking.”

### 3. *The Coaching Habit* by Michael Bungay Stanier

Although a book coach provides editorial feedback, we do more than edit the pages. We coach the *writer* too. We pay attention to the writer's mindset so that they improve their skills, habits, and confidence; to their output so that the project stays on track; and to the marketplace so that the book has a chance of making an impact.

I said above and will say again that coaching is a different skill from editing or writing—and it can be learned. *The Coaching Habit* is an excellent place to begin the process. Michael Bungay Stanier teaches that coaching is not about giving advice but providing a framework for growth and asking good questions that inspire improvement.



He suggests seven essential coaching questions:

- The Kickstart Question: What's on your mind?
- The AWE Question: And what else?
- The Focus Question: What's the real challenge here for you?
- The Foundation Question: What do you want?
- The Lazy Question: How can I help?
- The Strategic Question: If you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?
- The Learning Question: What was most useful for you?

Book coaches ask versions of these questions in every session:

“What's on your mind?” might be “How are you feeling about the work you did this week?”

“What's the real challenge here for you?” might be, “Why do you really think you're avoiding writing this chapter?”

Consistently meeting with a book coach who cares about their work and is curious about their efforts gives writers the support they need to thrive, and it makes the creative process far less lonely and far more enjoyable.

Here are three powerful ideas from *The Coaching Habit*:

“When someone’s nudging a new idea to the fore, exploring new boundaries of courage and possibility, hold the space and deepen the potential by asking, ‘And what else might be possible?’”

“Less, rather than more, is often better when you’re giving feedback. If you list twelve things that could be improved, everyone moves into overwhelm mode. More effective is finding the OBT—the One Big Thing—that’s worth remembering.”

“Questions work just as well typed as they do spoken.”

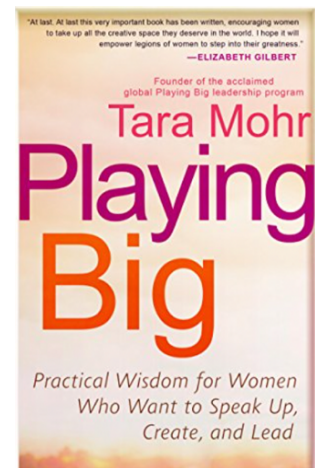
#### 4. *Playing Big* by Tara Mohr

Writing a book is not just about shaping the structure and the story, and it’s not just about the words and ideas: It’s about raising your voice and taking up space—and that’s why it’s so hard, especially for women, as Tara Mohr focuses on in this book.

Women have often been praised for getting along and going along. We have been taught not to be too loud or demand too much. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to write a book? Who am I to seek publication? Who am I to want to be paid for my ideas and my stories?”

Book coaches give writers a safe space for raising their voice and claiming the space they need to tell their stories and spread their messages, and *Playing Big* is a field guide for doing that work.

It reminds us where the ideas about playing small came from. It gives us exercises for how to move past those barriers. It’s practical and inspiring, and I read it once a year to help me and to help my clients.



Here are three powerful ideas from *Playing Big*:

“Playing big doesn’t come from working more, pushing harder, or finding confidence. It comes from listening to the most powerful and secure part of you, not the voice of self-doubt.”

“Many women find their inner critic speaks up most loudly around their most deeply felt dreams for their lives and work, because we feel particularly vulnerable about them. They experience the most panicky, overwhelming self-doubt when they are moving toward what they truly long to do . The inner critic is like a guard at the edge of your comfort zone.”

“I’ve come to know, in my own life, and in the lives of the women I work with that where we think we need more self-discipline, we usually need more self-love—not just self-love as an attitude, but self-love manifested through the routines and rituals that we set up to enable the changes we desire to happen naturally and with ease.”

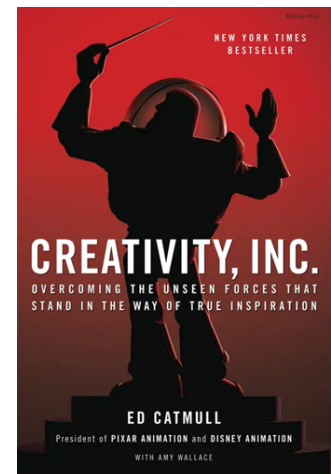
## 5. *Creativity, Inc.* by Ed Catmull

There is an art to giving good feedback in a creative process and there are very few places where we can learn how to do that well.

Most writing teachers don’t have time to give thorough feedback on a writer’s pages; writing workshops in the academic setting have traditions and power dynamics that can crush a writer’s voice; and writing groups that aren’t run with intention can turn into echo chambers or popularity contests.

Ed Catmull’s book takes us inside Pixar, a company that was built with the very purpose of fostering creativity in storytelling, and the heart of their effort is feedback.

Catmull gives a roadmap for the way the Braintrust helps move an idea from fuzzy to clear, which is guided by this philosophy: “While problems in a film are fairly easy to identify, the sources of those problems are often extraordinarily difficult to assess. . . . The Braintrust’s notes, then, are intended to bring the true cause of problems to the surface—not to demand a specific remedy.”



Here are three powerful ideas from *Creativity, Inc.*:

“Pixar films are not good at first, and our job is to make them so—to go, as I say, ‘from suck to not-suck.’ This idea—that all movies we now think of as brilliant were, at one time, terrible—is a hard concept for many to grasp. ... Creativity has to start somewhere, and we are true believers in the power of bracing, candid feedback and the iterative process—reworking, reworking, and reworking again, until a flawed story finds its throughline or a hollow character finds its soul.”

“We try to create an environment where people want to hear each other’s notes, even when those notes are challenging, and where everyone has a vested interest in one another’s success.”

“Good notes say what is wrong, what is missing, what isn’t clear and what makes sense. They do not make demands or necessarily propose a fix. But if it does that, the fix is offered only to illustrate a potential solution, not to prescribe an answer. Most of all, though, a good note is specific.”

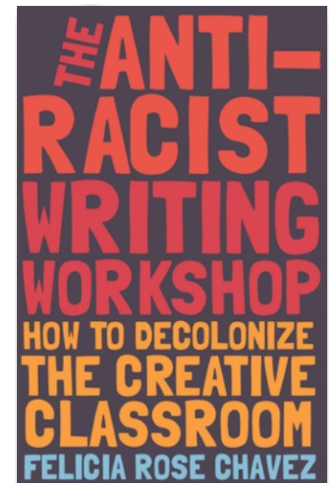
## 6. *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop* by Felicia Rose Chavez

The workshop traditions I mentioned above have been particularly damaging to writers who are not the chosen few (usually white, American, male) and a book coach needs to understand these traditions so they can adopt new methods and lift up *every* writer they serve.

*The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop* is a wake-up call and a call to action. Reading it made me realize how much I had to learn.

Chavez teaches us how to decolonize the creative classroom, which our own book coaching practices certainly are, by shining a light on the realities of history and power dynamics and by offering new rituals, new language, and new perspectives.

Chavez reminds us that being anti-racist must be an ongoing practice comprised of self-reflection, listening, reading books like this, and a deep commitment to serve all writers.



Here are four powerful ideas from *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop*:

“Silencing writers is central to the traditional workshop model.... I’m not just referring to the traditional workshop ritual of silencing the author when critiquing their work...but a profound, ubiquitous silence: the nearly complete omission of writes of color in person and print. It is though we do not exist.”

“I define ‘safe’ as a student’s right to retain their own authority, integrity, and personal artistic preferences throughout the creative writing process without fear of free-reining bigotry.”

“Creativity is a commitment, a habit, a lifestyle. When we tap into our full creative selves, we are authentic and real, without having to expand or contract on demand: more Chicana, less Oreo, more feminine, less feminist. What a relief to turn inward and reassure ourselves that we’re enough exactly as we are! When we trust that we can do no wrong, the words come easier.”

“Mentor your students in how to command their own voices.”

## 7. *Atlas of the Heart* by Brené Brown

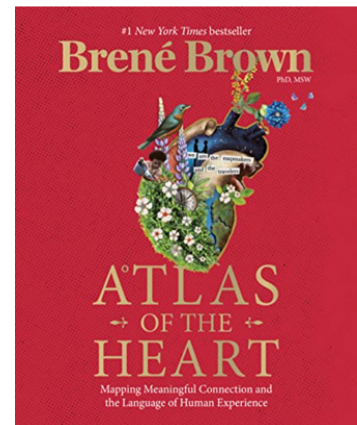
A book coach is not a therapist who is trained to diagnose or treat mental, emotional, or nervous disorders. What we do is coach the writer within the context of their writing.

We help writers raise their voice and find their story or their message. We help them commit to habits that allow them to get good work done. We edit their words and help them find clarity. We help them position their work in the marketplace and overcome feelings of envy. And we celebrate their successes and help them navigate disappointments on the path to publishing.

Brené Brown’s *Atlas of the Heart* is a powerful text for a book coach because it gives us accurate language for all of this work. Did you see how I used the word “envy” instead of “jealous” in the paragraph above? Brown teaches that there is a difference.

Do you think that perfectionism is an internal desire to want to write a great book, and an effective motivator? She teaches that it’s the opposite.

By paying such careful attention to the language of emotion, Brown shows us how to pay careful attention to the experience our writers are having and to the language they themselves are using as they create a transformational journey for their readers.



Here are three powerful ideas from *Atlas of the Heart*:

“Language matters. It’s the raw material of story, it changes how we feel about ourselves and others, and it’s a portal to connection.”

“Having access to the right words can open up entire universes. When we don’t have the language to talk about what we’re experiencing, our ability to make sense of what’s happening and share it with others is severely limited. Without accurate language, we struggle to get the help we need, we don’t always regulate or manage our emotions and experiences in a way that allows us to move through them productively, and our self-awareness is diminished.”

“When someone shares their hopes and dreams with us, we are witnessing deep courage and vulnerability. Celebrating their successes is easy, but when disappointment happens, it’s an incredible opportunity for meaningful connection.”

## 8. *The Art of Asking* by Amanda Palmer

There is a pervasive myth that writers work alone—a kind of romantic notion of the artist in the garret toiling away in solitude and obscurity until they are discovered.

This is a dangerous myth, though, because it makes us scared to ask for help. We’re scared to ask for help because we’re afraid that it will somehow diminish our work or invalidate it.

But the myth is wrong! Just open the last book you loved and look at the acknowledgements page: Look at how many people the author thanks, how many times in the process they asked for and accepted help.

A book coach is one of the people a writer might invite into their creative process. We need to understand how difficult it is for the writer to ask us, to trust us.

We need to make sure that we are worthy of their trust and we do that by studying our craft, by doing it with integrity and intention, and by asking for help ourselves so that we can run the kind of business we want to run and be the kind of coach we want to be.



Here are three powerful ideas from *The Art of Asking*:

“The Fraud Police are the imaginary, terrifying force of ‘real’ grown-ups who you believe—at some subconscious level—are going to come knocking on your door in the middle of the night, saying: ‘We’ve been watching you, and we have evidence that you have NO IDEA WHAT YOU’RE DOING. You stand accused of the crime of completely winging it, you are guilty of making shit up as you go along, you do not actually deserve your job, we are taking everything away and we are TELLING EVERYBODY.’”

“There’s no ‘correct path’ to becoming a real artist. You might think you’ll gain legitimacy by going to art school, getting published, getting signed to a record label. But it’s all bullshit, and it’s all in your head. You’re an artist when you say you are. And you’re a good artist when you make somebody else experience or feel something deep or unexpected.”

“From what I’ve seen, it isn’t so much the act of asking that paralyzes us—it’s what lies beneath: the fear of being vulnerable, the fear of rejection, the fear of looking needy or weak. The fear of being seen as a burdensome member of the community instead of a productive one. It points, fundamentally, to our separation from one another.”

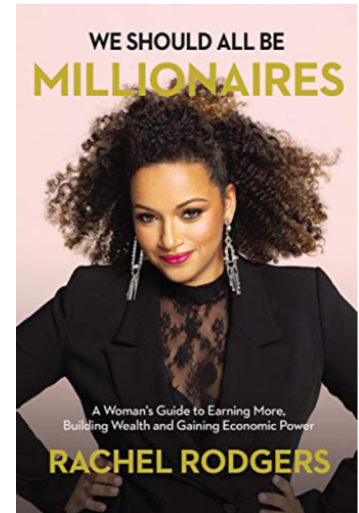
## 9. *We Should All Be Millionaires* by Rachel Rodgers

Being a book coach means being a small business owner, which means you're going to have to talk about the price and value of what you offer. You're going to have to master the art of asking for money.

This is uncomfortable for a lot of people who love words and ideas and stories. We often believe that we're not good with money or that making money is antithetical to making art.

Rachel Rodgers says, "BS." And then she will tell you to shake off that narrative and start making "money moves," which starts with valuing your talents so that you can think like a millionaire.

I love the fiery passion of this book, its grab-you-by-the-shoulders approach. Rodgers inspires readers to think big about money and to believe that they are more than capable of running a business that pays well.



Here are three powerful ideas from *We Should All Be Millionaires*:

"We are participating in our own oppression. We allow others to fritter away our time, to make their priorities more important than our priorities, to access our unending labor without proper remuneration or respect."

"And here's the thing that's really sad: Imposter syndrome doesn't just make you feel shitty about yourself, it also keeps you broke."

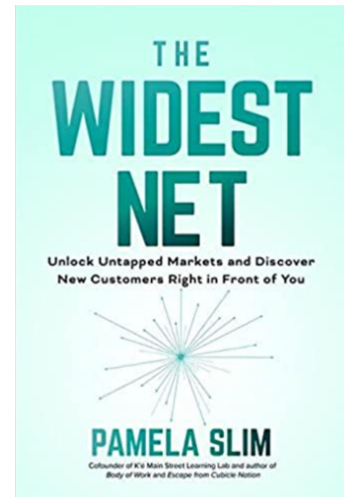
"Consider, 'If someone hires me, and we work together, what is the highest possible outcome? What is the best that could happen?'"

## 10. *The Widest Net* by Pamela Slim

If you are going to start a business as a book coach, you are going to have to market it. This idea stops a lot of people who would be great book coaches because they think of marketing in very narrow terms: social media influencers, high-pressure sales tactics, or slick campaigns.

It doesn't have to be that way. Marketing can simply be seen as connecting in an authentic way with people who want what you are offering.

In *The Widest Net*, Pamela Slim gives us a roadmap for how to do this with ease and integrity. She talks about building an ecosystem of support around you and your business, and inspires you to believe you can do it.



Here are three powerful ideas from *The Widest Net*:

“I define TMAs [tiny marketing actions] as: Small daily marketing actions, delivered consistently over a long period of time, to build your brand your business, and your bank account.”

“Your Beacon is the primary, but not the only, place where you share your point of view and centralize your body of work. It should answer the question your ideal customers ask you, ‘Where is the best place for me to get to know you and your work?’”

“Your customers, and their ecosystem partners, await your gifts, your talents, your tools, and your energy. They need the solution that only you can provide, in the unique way you choose to prove it. When you show your offers and share your thought leaders hope, they will utter words that will be music to your ears: ‘Where have you been? I have been waiting for a solution just like this.’”

## 11. *This Is Not a Book About Benedict Cumberbatch* by Tabitha Carvan

This is my latest favorite book for book coaches.

I have long believed that writing well is not only about mastering narrative structure, chapter organization, and getting emotion on the page. It's also about raising your voice. It's about claiming space.

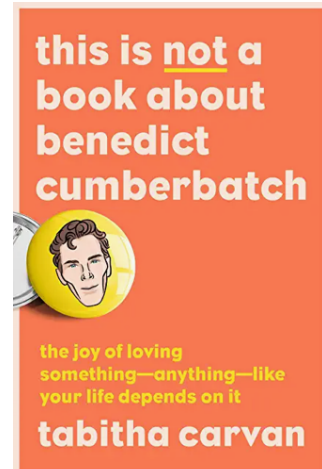
Writing is about giving yourself permission to write when no one is waiting for your pages, when you have no assurance that your book will make an impact, when there are people in your life who believe your writing is a waste of time and energy and money—and when one of those people may well be yourself.

*This Is Not a Book About Benedict Cumberbatch* takes you inside the transformation from having the desire to write to giving yourself the permission to write to taking action and actually doing the work.

A good book coach pays as much attention to this transformation in their writer as they do to the words on the page.

Carvan shows us exactly what it feels like to put a stake in the ground for a particular book idea, and how complex and courageous an undertaking it is to write it.

If you are in the business of helping other people write books, her story will instruct and inspire you—and remind you that the work you are doing is sacred.



Here are three powerful ideas from *This Is Not a Book About Benedict Cumberbatch*:

“Benedict Cumberbatch took me where I needed to go: the spare room.... It's what I needed most: a space free from the demands of others, and some time all to myself. I needed to be able to peel back the corner of the motherness, just enough to remind myself what was underneath—what I wanted. And it turned out to be the same thing I always wanted: to write about the things I love.”

“I need to recast myself in this story as someone who is doing what she wants, because she's just as entitled to it as anyone else. And who should have started a lot sooner.”

“You just have to live something—anything—like your life depends on it. Maybe it does?”

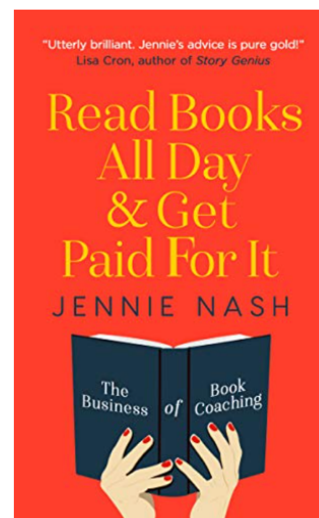
## 12. *Read Books All Day and Get Paid for It* by Jennie Nash

I wrote the book on the business of book coaching and this is it.

It's a nuts and bolts guide to launching and running a business helping writers do their best work, and includes everything that I have learned from doing this work since 2010 and from training more than 140 book coaches.

I address pricing and processes, marketing and mindset, scheduling and systems, and the importance of understanding—and *selling*—the transformation you want your writers to make.

We can't guarantee that anyone will write a bestseller, land an agent, or sign a big book deal, but we can help our writers write better books, build their skills and confidence, and feel the enormous satisfaction of finishing a book that makes them proud.



Here are three powerful ideas from *Read Books All Day and Get Paid for It*:

“Book coaching is a profession that has emerged as a result of the changing forces in book publishing over the last decade.... What a book coach offers a writer is far more than editorial support. We help them achieve a lifelong dream.”

“As an entrepreneur, you are in charge of your fate. You get to decide how much you want to make, and then figure out a way to make it. You get to put a number down and make a plan for achieving it.”

“Once you know the category of writer you wish to serve and the type of writer you will and will not serve, you need to do some work to figure out how you will serve them. This means first thinking about the ways writers tend to experience pain.”

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**To learn more about book coaching and  
Author Accelerator's Book Coach Certification program,  
visit us at [bookcoaches.com/abc](http://bookcoaches.com/abc).**