

**Ep #175: Becoming a Writer:
What Aspiring Authors Need to Know**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 175, and today I am taking a trip down memory lane. I'm answering all your amazing questions about getting a book deal, the book writing process. It's going to be a juicy one. Let's go for it.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

My loves, this is a big week for me. It's a big week for you too, because my third book is being published tomorrow on the 9th of May. And I had a Facebook memory pop up this last week because it's been five years since my first book, *Period Power* came out. So I thought it would be fun and interesting and helpful for me to reflect on my experience of writing books, because I've had plenty of you ask over the years to talk more about my writing process and how it all works. So this is a bit of the behind the scenes for you.

And it's been really fun reflecting on it because Paul and I also went out for dinner last night. And the person we were sat next to at this supper club, they were asking me about how I ended up writing books. And it made me think back to not just writing the book, but writing the book proposal because my memory of it is of frantically writing the book proposal over a fairly short period of time in the winter of 2017, but I wanted to check the timeline.

So this morning I've been reading through the emails that I had way back in the beginning with my agent Julia, the wonderful Julia Silk. And I was cracking up because we were originally introduced to each other via email at the start of September. And I didn't actually reply to Julia's initial email where she expressed interest in talking to me. And then she sent a very nice follow-up email towards the end of October, which I didn't reply to until the start of November.

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And at the time Nelson was 18 months old, he wasn't in nursery. We didn't have any childcare. And I think although this was something I really wanted, and I was tremendously excited about the prospect of writing a book, I was a bit overwhelmed about how I would do that practically. And I know that many of my clients and many of you feel the same way about your goals. You have this dream; you want to make it happen. You may even have people ready and willing to support you in that, as I did with an agent. But there's a load of thoughts and feelings that can get in the way of doing it, so I get it.

So the first question that I had from you all over on Instagram was, where do you start with getting a book contract? Did you just start with an idea before you had a publisher? So when Nelson was about nine months old, I really wanted to write. So we'd just moved to Margate, I had been doing some blog posts and things before Nelson was born. Nothing particularly consistent, but I did enjoy it. And at the start of 2017 we'd moved to Margate, and I set the goal of being ready to get a book deal by the end of that year.

And my thinking was that if I wrote a blog post every week, then I would not only build my writing skills, but I would also develop a body of work that I could show to publishers with the hope of getting a deal. And it was just so hard for me to actually do that. So Nelson was very young, he would be napping, and I'd start writing, but then he'd wake up or I'd want lunch, just simple things or Paul would come home and want to chat and hang out.

And I was just really in that challenge of having a baby and trying to figure out what your relationship is like now that you have a baby. And this burning desire to write and have something that was for me to be doing my work somehow. And that is really something to contend with. That's a very real thing because whatever or whomever you choose to prioritise either in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment, over a longer period of time, someone is going to be upset because you can't prioritise everyone.

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And I really had to learn how to prioritise my own need and desire to write. It was tricky, but this is what all couples with babies go through. And let's be honest, men are used to being prioritised. So there's all sorts of things that we come up against in these situations, even when I have a great partner who gets it, there's still things that go on.

So for all sorts of reasons, I didn't write a blog post every week as I had intended. But in that summer, I think it was, it must have been towards the end of summer, I heard from someone at a publishing house who had been on a yoga retreat that I was working on as a practitioner years before. And after that retreat, she told a family member about me, and my work and I had ended up treating them right up until I went into labour.

So this person was very aware of my work, and she had contacted me to say, "Hey, can I come down and talk to you about writing a book about hormones for the publishing house that I work for?" And I was like, "Oh my God, this is amazing. What do I do though?" Because I had no idea about this world but thankfully, my friend Rebecca Schiller was a published author by that point, so I just contacted her. And she was like, "Don't talk to anyone until you have an agent. I'll speak to mine and see if she's willing to talk to you." So she put me in touch with Julia.

So I finally replied to Julia two months after she first messaged me, and we met up at the end of November. And we were both very excited about the prospect of working together. And we both had this opinion that it needed to be out in the world as soon as possible. And the types of books that I write are typically published in the spring.

So she was basically, "If you want this to come out in 2019, you need to get your proposal done yesterday. So that we can send it out to publishers pronto and get you a deal and you get the book done and get it out there. Otherwise it would end up being a 2020 publication." So that just lit a fire up underneath me. And many of you asked me, "How do you actually write a book proposal?" And Julia sent me a two-page document about what a

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book proposal should include. And you can find this kind of stuff readily on the internet. So take a look for these things if you want them.

And when I look back, I don't know how I did it. So a non-fiction book proposal contains one or two chapters as examples of your writing and what the book is going to be. It also contains numerous other elements. And I didn't have a bank of writing to just use. I had a couple of blog posts that I'd used as a basis for one chapter, the rest was just furious typing. But I had also been writing the book in my head. And so when I was up at night breastfeeding Nelson in all those one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock feeds, I was writing in my head. I was teaching things.

I was integrating all the stuff I'd learnt in all the work that I'd done and bringing it all together. So a lot was already in my head. And of course I'd been treating and teaching this stuff for decades. But my two key memories of writing the proposal was, first of all, trying to get Nelson settled into nursery because he'd started and then he was only doing two mornings a week for three hours. So that's six hours a week of childcare.

The nursery, though, was one and a half miles away and we didn't have a car. So by the time I got him there and walked back or waited for a bus to get back, I had bugger all time left to write. And I was writing when Nelson napped, when Paul was doing bedtimes and just using any and all opportunities that I could find.

The other memory was in the run up to Christmas and I think Paul looked at me a couple of days before Christmas and was like, "You are going to stop writing for Christmas, aren't you?" And my honest internal answer at that point was no but I did stop for Christmas Day. And then I was straight back onto it on Boxing Day and just making use of the time that Paul was off over the holidays. And then Julia edited the proposal, and this is the beautiful thing about having an agent.

Agents are just so amazing. I just, I love having an agent. I wouldn't be without Julia. And she shaped up the proposal, made suggestions,

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corrected my grammar, etc. And then by the time it was ready to be sent out to publishers to shop it around, it was the end of January, and it was ready. But then we waited an extra couple of days to send it because we had both independently noticed that there was a lunar eclipse about to happen, and it was a super blue blood moon, I think.

And even though I don't think she or I had any clue about astrology, we just thought, yeah, why not, let's wait. And I've actually just looked it up and one of the themes of that eclipse was about the rights and freedoms of women. And the moon represents your emotions, your subconscious, your habits, your moods, all of these things. And then there's this minor planet that rules female reproductive issues that was involved in this particular eclipse. And I think it's Ceres, she also rules the growing of plants and food crops, the harvest, natural resources and the environment.

So how's that for sending out a book proposal that's about menstrual health, the seasons of the cycle, etc, etc? I think we picked a perfect day to initiate that and send it out into the world. So we ended up meeting with publishers in February. We received several offers, which was amazing. And when there's interest in a book, just remember, when I'm talking about the world of publishing, I really pretty much only know it through my experience and what some author mates have told me so I could be wrong here.

But I'm pretty sure that when there's interest in a book it usually goes to auction and the highest bidder gets the deal, but I didn't want that to happen. It was really important to me to find a publisher that would publish the book that I wanted to write. So there was one publisher who wanted to turn it into a fertility book. And even if they had offered me more than the others, I didn't want to write that book. That's not what *Period Power* was ever going to be about.

And I remember saying to Julia on the phone, I can picture where I was walking down the road when I was talking to my agent. And I was just like, "I would rather self-publish than accept that deal." So I had already

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decided, I had quite strong opinions about the book I wanted it to be. I was determined to write it. I was willing to self-publish if that's what it was going to take. So it didn't go to auction because I wanted to be able to choose. And I really liked Green Tree, which is the Bloomsbury imprint that have published all of my books.

And I could tell that Charlotte, who's the head of the imprint, really understood what the book was about and that she was excited about it, and I trusted her. And I felt that she would make it a better book. And that has been the case, not just with Charlotte, the whole team at Bloomsbury, they're just the best. I don't know another author who has had the experience that I've had with their publishers. They're amazing. They have made my books better.

And on the rare occasion where I've said, "I don't know about that, I don't think that's necessary or that's a no for me" They trust me. They've just been so lovely and supportive. And I think that's quite rare in the world of publishing, to have just such a great team and an amazing partnership. So thank you to all of them.

So then at the start of April, I signed the contracts for the book, but the deadline for the first draft was the end of July. So I think I'd already been doing some writing in between when the contracts were being kind of figured out, but I was also recovering from writing the proposal. So I think I did give myself a bit of a break at that point.

Now, lots of you wanted to know about how does it work in terms of the book deal and advances and royalties, that kind of thing? And so again, I think this can vary, but I got an advance when you sign a contract. And I got what I would say is or what I've been told is a decent amount for a first book deal. And it was split up into three payments. So you get the first when you sign the contract, the second when your first draft is sent in and accepted, and then the third instalment when the book comes out.

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And the advance on the book, it was great for me to get it but then later on down the line, I was like, “Yeah, it paid for the childcare to write it and to edit it.” So I always say to people, “Never try and get a book deal with the aim being you’ll make money from it.” And I’m not saying that you won’t, but I don’t recommend banking on it because most authors I know lose money in order to write their books because they go down to less hours at work or they stop working in order to write. So there’s often financial sacrifices that are made in order to write a book.

And then when publishers in other countries buy the rights to translate your book so often I get messages from people going, “Why isn’t it in Spanish? Can the book be translated into this?” And I don’t actually have any say over that. It just depends on which foreign rights publishers end up buying your book. So you do get money from those deals as well. I took all of that money and invested it straight into my business because that was back when the membership had just started.

It wasn’t profitable by any means, and I was using the money from the book being sold in other countries to pay for the membership and prop it up whilst it was getting going. So that’s how book deals and advances tend to work. And then you don’t get royalties until you’ve basically paid off your advance. So then you’re just waiting until you’ve sold enough books to pay off your advance, and then you start getting royalties. So I think it was a year or so, maybe more, I think it was about a year before I got any royalties.

A lot of you wanted to know about my writing routine. So my writing process starts in my head way before it ever ends up in a book or in a webinar or here on the podcast. And it actually starts when I’m working with my clients, because whether it was back when I was a practitioner and a birth doula, in the 15 years before I wrote *Period Power* or as a life coach now. It’s the coaching conversations I have, it’s the situations, the challenges my clients bring to our calls as well as all the shit I’ve figured out for myself in my life. That’s the starting point.

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And then there's a tipping point where I just have to get it down somewhere and sometimes that's a document. Sometimes it's a note on my phone or in a notebook. I have stuff in all kinds of places. Some of it is buried away in documents, that wasn't the plan for that document, it's actually about something else, but then I just add on a paragraph somewhere because it's in my head. So some of it, I'm never going to find again, but it's around somewhere. It'll show up when it's ready to be revealed again.

And my starting point is usually spotting a significant or a common issue that comes up for my clients and then looking at all the ways that it shows up for them as individuals. And the great thing about having a membership is there's so many people and you get to see the common trends that come up. And then I'll really think about why this thing happens, why they are struggling with it and what are the gaps that need to be filled. And by that I mean, what is it they're struggling with? What information don't they have?

What are the skills that they're just not practised in yet and that maybe hasn't been modelled to them at all? What can I teach them? Where are they lacking in belief? What mindset issues are blocking them? So I just figure it out. What's the issue? Why is it happening? How can I help them? And I build from there, that's the process.

Alright, next question. What are your favourite parts about writing and the most challenging parts? When I first started writing *Period Power*, I would write a paragraph or a section and then go over it and think about all the ways that that could be interpreted by different people with different viewpoints. And I would have these just constant debates in my head because I was just thinking about what other people would think, how they could misinterpret things, or if they had a different perspective or a different situation then what would that mean for what I was writing.

And I was basically trying to manage other people's thoughts through my writing. If I write this way, then I can prevent people from thinking these things about me because I feared criticism. And because of that it was taking so much longer to write anything, way longer than it needed to. And I

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just wasn't getting anywhere because in trying to write for everyone I was writing for no one.

And it's not like I had a lot of time to be writing in the first place, but I could see what I was doing. I could notice that. I understood why I was doing it. So I coached myself on it. And then I just decided to pick three people that I knew and write the book for them, two of them were clients, one was a friend. These were real people from my world. And I wrote it as if they would be reading it.

So when you create something, whatever it is, whether you're writing or it's something else. You have to accept that what you do and what you create isn't for everyone. And that can be really uncomfortable at first. But gradually you just get used to it and then it's no big deal at all. You just do your thing. Do I write every day? Yes, I do, but not necessarily writing on paper or in a document. I'm always writing in my head, whether it's for a podcast, a workshop, just figuring out how to explain something for the podcast, I'm always writing in my head one way or another.

How do I stay motivated? How do I stay motivated? I just sell myself on why it's important. I keep talking about this on the podcast and I keep saying that I need to do an episode about it because it really is the secret sauce for keeping going and staying motivated. So I'll save the details for that future episode. I promise it will happen soon.

What do you do when you feel stuck in the process? I never get stuck. Seriously, there's no way I would allow myself to indulge in the thought that I am stuck. Working through something, yes. Taking my time in order to be accurate and explain things simply and effectively, yes. But stuck, absolutely not. That is a thought that is optional.

How do you handle the feeling that you're writing something that has already been written by someone else? I don't get that feeling. I don't have that thought. When I talk about the importance of being able to manage your mind, in other words, to notice your thoughts, to interrupt them. This is

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what I'm talking about. Imagine trying to write a book whilst also telling yourself that someone else has already said it, talk about a thought that doesn't serve you. I also do not believe that someone else has said it simply because they aren't me.

Only I can write like me, so it's not even true that someone else has said it. And there's plenty of great books out there, it's not like mine, though. So I never think that way, it's just so un-useful. Do you have a habitual practice or ritual, something to get you in the right space to write? Black coffee, I love a black filtered coffee. I can usually be found at a particular cafe in Margate. Some of you have bumped into me there. That's my zone to write. I wrote all of *Powerful* in there.

And also, I think a big part of it, though, it's so automatic for me, is mindset and how I'm approaching things. How am I thinking about things? How am I feeling? And most of the time, I just can't wait to get going. I'm desperate, when I'm writing, I'm like, "Okay, guys, Paul, are you up for doing the school run? Nelson, see you later." Everyone's sorted, give everyone a kiss. I'm out of the door. I want to be at the cafe at eight in the morning when they open and just get going with a coffee. So that's my only practice I would say.

Do you do all the research yourself or did you have helpers to work with you? All three books have been all me. I certainly wouldn't have been able to pay someone else to help me and most of it was stuff I already knew with the books. But I also taught myself how to speed read when I was younger. So I have a huge capacity for being able to read research papers.

And to be honest with you, the idea of someone helping me, I don't think would actually be helpful. It's just not a way of doing things that would suit me. I'm sure it works for a lot of people out there, but I don't think it would work for me. I think it would create more work.

Next question. How do you collate it all together? This person has lots of notes written and typed but wondering how to get it all together. Yeah, you

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just have to get on with it. There isn't a particular way. You just decide you're going to do it and you do it. And it's easy or easier to do it when you already have an outline for the book. So when you do the book proposal, part of that is writing your outline of what the chapters are going to be, what's going to be in them and once you have that, it's simple to write it.

Thinking back to *Perimenopause Power*, I wrote a lot of that book in 10 to 20 minute windows of time because I started writing it during the first lockdown in the pandemic. And in order to do that, this is a great writing tip for all of you. I wrote a list of topics that I would need to write a paragraph or a section about. And then whenever I had an opportunity to write, I would just pick something from the list and write until it was lunchtime or Nelson wanted me to play with him or Paul needed to do some work.

So that meant I could just get going and use those moments of time to actually write the book, but it did take a lot longer to stitch it together. And I'm glad I gave myself some extra time there because it was a bit trickier just because of just writing in these short windows.

Do you ever write by hand? Yes, but not that much, especially now. I think I used to write by hand, I did that more with *Period Power* and *Perimenopause Power*, but not this time round. And usually I would do it just because it's more practical to do if I'm just out and about and I don't have my laptop, but I've got a notebook. But I think even now I'm probably more likely to use the notes app on my phone rather than a notebook, but I do love writing. I like using my notebooks for other things.

When did you start to identify as a writer? Juicy question. Well, shout out to all of my teachers because those seeds were sown long ago back when I was in school. My junior school teacher told me I could be a journalist or a librarian or something to do with books. I think, yeah, when I went to FIT in New York, so when I was doing my associates degree there, my English teacher said that the first draft of the story I'd submitted was more like a second draft. So I think I just got feedback from people around me, teachers, probably my parents as well, that I could write.

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And so I think I started to identify as a writer long before I got a book deal. But I think also my identity as someone that wrote happened before I got a book deal. That's why I always talk about doing that identity piece before you have proof that you are something, building that belief in yourself.

Do I write for me, for others or a mixture? Another great question. It's a mixture. I love making sense of things. That brings me a lot of delight. I love explaining them. I enjoy writing, but I'm always thinking about all of you on the other side of the page. I don't need to write for me because it's already in my head. So it's very much for all of you.

Someone said, "I enjoy writing, but it takes so long to convey my point succinctly. Any tips?" You've just got to keep going. There are no shortcuts here. You have to go through the process of writing it again and again in order to get to that point where you're actually being succinct and saying things effectively simply, there are no shortcuts. And a lot of what I've written in all of the books are things that I've said to multiple clients multiple times in multiple ways.

So by the time I'm writing something in a book, it's already been very well honed. And I have great editors as well who are like, "This doesn't quite make sense to me, could you?" And they ask me amazing questions to help me figure it out. So shout out to them.

Okay, final question. How do you handle getting away to write when you have obligations outside of it? I had a compelling and overwhelming need to write all of my books. And Nelson was a toddler when I started writing, so he would often be ill and if he was ill, I would need to stay at home with him, especially because he used to have fevers every time he was ill, and he'd have a seizure. And I'm quite good in situations like that. I'm good at handling those things.

But I can distinctly remember editing *Period Power* whilst Nelson was ill, and he was just on the sofa all red and sweaty and hot and lying on top of me with fireman Sam on. And he was just really unwell, and I was just there

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with all the printouts of the book going through and doing it. So you find ways to make it happen. I think the other thing to understand here is that I'm very obligated to my work. So when I think about obligations outside of my work, I actually have to think about what that could be.

So I think the point here is whether you're someone who has something, a goal you want to work on, whether you want to write a book, whether you want to get a deal, some endeavour that matters in your life. You have to decide if you will do it no matter what, or if you won't. If you are decided and determined, even if you have no idea how you'll manage it and how you'll make it work, you will find a way.

And I have always felt a deep need in me to write all of these books. And it's been really fun to share that journey with you today. *Powerful* comes out tomorrow, Thursday the 9th of May. It would mean a great deal to me if you ordered it, if you left a review in the place that you bought it. And I would love to hear from you personally as well. So it's really something to be here having written and published three books. And I have to say that *Powerful* is my personal favourite and I can't wait for you to read it. I can't wait to hear what you think of it.

Thank you all for joining me today. I'll be back next week.

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