

THE MUDDY MYSTIC



Emma Pruen, author of *Wild Self*, offers advice on writing for the modern Mind, Body, Spirit market

and *New York Times* bestseller, about making meaning from co-incidences or messages from nature, is written by a neuroscientist, Dr. Tara Swart. If your book is going into unexplained territory, readers and publishers like some academic rigour, (and 791,000 followers on Instagram).

In the age of AI, authenticity isn't just a buzzword; it's your legal tender. A bot can synthesise every book ever written on mindfulness, but it has never felt the sting of a nettle or the hollow ache of grief. Your unique selling point is your humanity. Readers don't want a saint. They want someone who tried to meditate, got distracted by the sound of the neighbour's lawnmower, and ended up eating a biscuit instead. If your spiritual practice is messy, say so. We love a bit of self-deprecation. Humour is the best way to prove you aren't a cult leader.

As Alice Miller demonstrated in her foundational, best-selling text *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, people become therapists because of their childhood wounding. This very wounding often creates a lack of self-worth, which can manifest in MBS writing as trying to prove (to ourselves) we are worthy, clever, or allowed to tell other people how to handle their emotional or physical ills. Give yourself a little talking to if you have a tendency not to trust yourself, humility is great but self justification is tedious. The flip side is setting yourself up as a guru. None of us want to see videos of our books being torn up on social media when our readers discover our friends were not the gods we pretended to commune with. There is only one direction gurus can fall.

Keep it real

In the 90s and 00s I published a very niche free regional MBS publication distributed through natural health outlets. Because I knew the market, sought out the new, the interesting the unexplored, I had a loyal and devoted readership. One article could add £80,000 to a practitioner's

There was a time, not so long ago (but I am 61 so it's all relative), when writing for the Mind, Body, Spirit (MBS) market involved sitting in a velvet-draped room, lighting an Oman Royal Green Hojari stick of frankincense, and waiting for the universe to dictate a chapter on 'finding your inner sparkle.'

If you tried that in the UK market of 2026, your editor would probably ask if you've had your carbon monoxide alarm tested lately. As we navigate an era of AI-generated platitudes and digital burnout, we have developed a very refined bullshit detector. We don't want a guru on a pedestal; we want a guide with muddy boots.

If you're looking to break into this resilient sector – perhaps with a project as rooted as my new book, *Wild Self* – you need to trade the velvet curtains for a waterproof mac. Here is how to write for a market that is looking for the divine in the dirt.

Ditch the 'duvet quotes'

We've all seen them on Instagram: sunset backgrounds with cursive text telling us to 'Just Breathe'. If we're being very kind we call this 'filler', it serves no purpose whatsoever: if you are suffering from involuntary apnea you definitely aren't scrolling. To write an article, let alone a compelling 80,000-word manuscript, you cannot rely on vibes. The British reader is famously cynical. If you tell them that walking barefoot in a forest will realign their chakras, they'll want to know what happens if they step on a rogue piece of LEGO or a damp slug.

Readers need the 'why' behind the 'woah'. Ground your spirituality in the physical. Instead of writing about 'universal energy', write about the 'mycelial networks beneath the conifers'. Just like any writing, lean into facts. Science isn't the enemy of spirituality; it's the scaffolding. When I wrote *Wild Self*, I spent as much time reading geology books as reading runes. *The Signs*, a *Sunday Times*