

Newsletter & Substack Publishing — Workbook

This workbook gives you the exercises, worksheets, and templates to turn course concepts into a live paid newsletter. Work through each section alongside the matching module — do not skip ahead. By the time you complete Section 4, you will have a published newsletter, a configured paid tier, and a 90-day editorial calendar.

Positioning and First-Issue Architecture

Define your niche, write your About page, and build the structural template you will use for every issue.

Exercise: Niche Viability Test

Complete the JTBD niche mapping exercise before writing a single word of your newsletter. This forces specificity that vague topic-picking skips.

- Write three niche candidates in the format: [Audience] + [Specific Problem] + [Frequency of Pain]. Example: "Mid-career HR professionals who need to track compensation benchmarks quarterly without paying for Mercer reports."

- For your top candidate: list five specific subreddits, LinkedIn groups, or Twitter hashtags where this audience actively discusses the problem. What frustrated question do they ask most often?

- Name three newsletters that partially serve this niche. What gap does each leave open that your newsletter would fill?

- Apply the 500-person test: can you name or describe 500 real people who would pay \$10/month for this? What do they do for work, what do they read, and where do they spend time online?

Worksheet: Issue Architecture Template

Fill in this template once. Copy it for every future issue so your structure is consistent from day one. Subject line (under 50 characters):

Preview text (under 90 characters, continues the subject line sentence):

Opening hook — 2 sentences restating the promise:

Core insight or analysis (paste your draft body here):

Subheadings used in the body:

Primary CTA this issue (one only):

Reply-inviting closing question:

Checklist: Pre-Launch Quality Gate

- [] Niche statement written in [Audience + Problem + Frequency] format
- [] About page headline follows "For [audience] who want [outcome] without [frustration]" formula
- [] About page includes at least one specific proof-point (not just "great content")
- [] First issue follows the 3-part architecture (hook, payload, CTA)
- [] Subject line is under 50 characters and front-loads the value word
- [] Preview text continues the subject line rather than repeating it
- [] Issue ends with a reply-inviting question
- [] Publishing cadence decided and written in the About page ("every Thursday")

Building Your Subscriber List From Zero

Plan and execute your 30-day launch, set up referral mechanics, and build a repeatable cross-platform distribution workflow.

Exercise: 30-Day Launch Planner

Map out your specific actions for each of the four launch weeks. Generic plans fail — name the exact people, posts, and newsletters you will contact.

- Week 1 (Seed): List the names of 30–50 people in your personal network who match your niche audience. Write the 3-sentence email you will send them. What specific reason will you give each person for why the newsletter is relevant to them?

- Week 2 (Post): What is the single strongest insight from your first issue that you can turn into a Twitter/LinkedIn thread? Draft the opening tweet and the final CTA tweet now.

- Week 3 (Guest): Name 10 newsletters, podcasts, or creators in adjacent niches. For each, write one substantive comment or reply you could post this week that adds genuine value without pitching your newsletter.

- Week 4 (Cross-promote): List 5 newsletters with under 5,000 subscribers that serve a related but non-competing audience. Draft a 2-sentence swap pitch you will send to each.

Worksheet: Growth Channel Tracker

Log every subscriber source weekly for the first 90 days. Use UTM links on your subscribe button for platform tracking.

Week ending date:

Total free subscribers (end of week):

New subscribers this week:

Source — personal email outreach:

Source — Twitter/X (UTM tracked):

Source — LinkedIn (UTM tracked):

Source — Substack Recommendations:

Source — cross-promotion / swap:

Source — other (specify):

Open rate on issue sent this week:

Notes on what drove spikes or drops:

Checklist: Referral and Distribution Setup Checklist

- Substack Recommendations configured with 5–8 relevant newsletters
- Personal email sent to warm network (minimum 30 people) before first public post
- UTM links created for Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Reddit subscribe buttons
- Twitter/X thread drafted from first issue and scheduled for send day
- LinkedIn post drafted (200 words, native text post — no external link in body)
- Three newsletters contacted for swap mention in month 1
- SparkLoop or native referral program researched and decision made
- Typefully or Buffer account set up for social scheduling

Launching and Optimising Your Paid Tier

Configure Substack payments, write your welcome sequence, and place conversion prompts at high-intent moments in your content.

Exercise: Paid Tier Positioning Workshop

Write the exact copy for your paid subscription description before enabling payments. Vague benefits do not convert — specifics do.

- List three specific things paid subscribers get that free subscribers do not. Avoid abstractions like "more content" — name the exact format, frequency, and topic (e.g., "the full 2,000-word analysis every Thursday, including the data tables and source list").
- Write your paywall description in 80 words or fewer. It must answer: what do I get, how often, and why is it worth \$X/month? Draft it now and read it aloud — does it sound like a promise or a pitch?
- Choose your three pricing tiers (monthly, annual, founding member) and write one sentence explaining the value of each. What is the specific reason a reader should choose annual over monthly?

Worksheet: 7-Email Welcome Sequence Planner

Plan the subject line, core message, and single CTA for each of the seven emails before writing any of them. Sequence first, copy second.

Email 1 (Day 0) — Subject line:

Email 1 — Core message (1 sentence):

Email 1 — CTA:

Email 2 (Day 2) — Subject line:

Email 2 — Core message (1 sentence):

Email 2 — CTA:

Email 3 (Day 4) — Subject line:

Email 3 — Core message (1 sentence):

Email 3 — CTA:

Email 4 (Day 6) — Subject line (deep dive preview):

Email 4 — Which paid issue will you tease?:

Email 4 — Upgrade CTA copy:

Email 5 (Day 8) — Social proof quote(s) to use:

Email 6 (Day 11) — Top 3 objections to address:

Email 7 (Day 14) — Discount offer details (% off, expiry):

Platform used to automate sequence (ConvertKit / Ghost / other):

Checklist: Paid Tier Launch Checklist

- Stripe account connected to Substack and test transaction completed
- Monthly price, annual price, and founding member price set
- Paid subscription description written with 3 specific benefit bullets
- Paywall placed at a curiosity-gap moment in at least one existing issue
- Welcome sequence platform selected and first email drafted
- At least one inline upgrade prompt added to a recent free issue
- Annual plan enabled with a 15–20% discount off monthly rate
- Substack coupon code created for welcome sequence Day 14 offer
- Checkout flow tested end-to-end with a personal card

Analytics, Retention, and Scaling Revenue

Establish your metrics baseline, build a churn response workflow, and map your first diversification revenue stream.

Exercise: Revenue Diversification Planning

Design your first non-subscription revenue stream before you need it. The best time to plan sponsorships or a course offer is when subscriber growth is healthy, not when you are in a churn trough.

- At what subscriber count does sponsorship become viable for your niche? Calculate: your expected open rate \times total free subscribers \times your estimated CPM (\$20–\$80 based on niche). What is the break-even issue count?
- What is one productised offer you could build from content you have already written? Name the format (mini-course, template pack, workshop), the audience, the price, and the platform you would use to sell it.
- Map your target 12-month revenue stack: what percentage of income do you want from subscriptions, sponsorships, and productised offers? Write the monthly revenue target for each stream at month 12.

Worksheet: Monthly Newsletter Health Scorecard

Complete this scorecard on the last day of each month. Trends across three months tell you more than any single data point.

Month:

Total free subscribers:

Total paid subscribers:

New paid this month:

Churned paid this month:

Net paid change:

Gross MRR:

Net MRR:

Average open rate this month:

Average click rate this month:

Free-to-paid conversion rate (paid / free, %):

Monthly churn rate (churned / start-of-month paid, %):

Sponsorship revenue this month:

Productised offer revenue this month:

Total revenue this month:

Top-performing issue this month (subject line):

Open rate on that issue:

One hypothesis for next month (what will you test?):

Checklist: Retention and Growth Operations Checklist

- Weekly analytics review scheduled (15 minutes, same day each week)
- Monthly subscriber export to CSV for offline tracking
- Re-engagement email drafted for subscribers inactive 60+ days
- Pre-churn personal email template written for at-risk paid subscribers
- Cancellation salvage sequence: Day 0, Day 30, and Day 90 emails drafted
- Content arc planned for at least one upcoming 4-issue series
- Sponsorship rate card drafted (CPM, formats, booking process)
- First productised offer outlined (format, price, platform, launch quarter)
- Annual upgrade promotion scheduled (anniversary and January)
- Founding member tier reviewed for capacity and adjusted if needed

Your Action Plan

1. Write your niche statement in [Audience + Problem + Frequency] format and validate it against the 500-person test before writing anything else
2. Complete your Substack About page using the headline formula and at least one specific proof-point
3. Draft and schedule your first issue following the 3-part architecture (hook, payload, single CTA)
4. Send your personal network email to 30–50 warm contacts in Week 1 of launch
5. Configure UTM links for Twitter, LinkedIn, and at least one other distribution channel
6. Add 5–8 newsletters to Substack Recommendations and email each writer for a potential swap
7. Connect Stripe to Substack, set your three pricing tiers, and test the checkout end-to-end
8. Write the paywall description with three specific paid-only benefit bullets
9. Plan and draft all seven welcome sequence emails before automating them
10. Complete the Monthly Newsletter Health Scorecard at the end of your first full calendar month

