

How To Break Into Freelance Writing

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How To Break Into Freelance Writing

A noble vocation, "freelance" writing takes its name from the days (rather, "knights") of yore! Those not in the service of a monarch sometimes hired out their services. Some were said to carry business cards inscribed: "have Lance - Will Travel."

Seriously, for those who feel the calling freelance writing can be both enjoyable and rewarding - to say nothing of what it can do for "ye old ego."

Freelance writing encompasses an endless variety of both subjects and approaches to writing: stories for local newspapers, magazines, children's publications, technical journals, romance novels, resume's advertising copy - even crossword puzzles (now they have computer programs for these).

Everyone is qualified to write something! About the only absolute prerequisite is the ability to explain yourself.

The brightest technician who cannot adequately explain his techniques or the potential of his experimentation is of questionable value to the profession, his employer or even society.

Of course, to break into the higher income potential, experience, talent and a good knowledge of the language are essential.

From there, style, consumer demand, marketing, education and plain, old fashioned luck are factors that usually, but certainly not always govern how far one can go. Even so,, there is still, plenty of room for all types and levels of writing -- because there are all levels and interests of readers.

Writing even short articles or instructions requires, as the saying goes, one percent inspiration; 99 percent perspiration. Work on your item every single day -- preferably for regular hours. Research, rephrase and rewrite until you are satisfied.

Do not ask the opinions of others -- especially during the writing stage. You don't need to know how 15 other people would put it -- you simply want to YOUR ideas from YOUR perspective on paper in the best way you can.

Other opinions can be needless distractions and disheartening; they can prevent you from following through on your idea and becoming entwined with someone else's. If you want advice, get it before starting your project --or after it is finished.

A few of the more obvious outlets for freelance writers are

magazines, newsletters, advertisers, newspapers, children's publications, and trade journal.

Getting into this field may be more difficult than asking your home town newspaper if they will accept (and possibly pay for) a short article you have written - and hopefully, to write others on assigned or your choice topics.

When trying this technique, look around for subjects that would be of interest to the readership of the publication in question. This approach may not be the most rewarding financially, but it can get you started and help build your confidence and reputation.

If you have an area of expertise that you would like to concentrate on, write to publishers of applicable trade journals and magazines in the field.

Ask them for information on items they buy from freelance writers. Always include a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) to expedite a reply. Most will tell what they pay, how long they like their articles and some will include a writer's guide that spells out their terms and exactly what they like.

For an up-to-date, annual listing of publishers, look for the WRITER'S MARKET in your public library.

Probably the most useful tool for a freelance (or any other, for that matter) writer is a word processor. If you don't have one, GET ONE and learn to use it. Get a standard word processing program, output can be input to publisher programs!

Without a word processor, you will have to work at least twice as long and hard.. Make sure your computer is IBM compatible (it can be most any off-brand or clone, so long as it is 100% IBM compatible.

You can probably get a complete used setup for \$500 or so that will do nicely. An IBM XT (8026) compatible is about the smallest (and oldest) equipment that will allow you to use a good, universally accepted word processing program like Word Star or Word Perfect.

Many publishers will accept manuscripts on disk, so long as they are in a "standard" program and system. The publishers can then "import" your data copy directly into typeset or desktop publishing with his specialized computer program!

If you are a poor typist, get a touch typing program -- some of them are really fantastic: you can learn or improve your typing while playing a game!

Most people can get 30 words per minute in a week; more with extra time and effort. When using a typewriter or trying to write in longhand, the pages get messy and often out of order as they are edited and re-edited, and have to be done over frequently.

Unfortunately, when you do one page over, the page lengths never come out right, so the whole thing has to be retyped. A word processor takes care of all that, plus spelling, looking up words in the Thesaurus, margins, page numbering, uniform formatting, etc., as a matter of routine.

As soon as you decide to get a computer and word processor, join a local IBM compatible USERS CLUB. The members will be happy to advise you. You will be able to ask all the questions you want to get unbiased answers and assistance.

Although it would be nice to have an expensive, up-to-date model with a fancy color monitor (video display) and a jet laser printer, there are plenty of used PC's on the market starting around \$500 that would do fine for your efforts.

Look under Computers and Software in the classified want-ads for 100% IBM compatible models. Also, check on close-outs and "clones" (computer magazines usually have many advertisements for these).

As a minimum you will need an IBM compatible computer (minimum 512 is needed for a standard word processing program), a disk drive (360K) and a printer. A 9-pin dot matrix will do, but of course a 24 pin is much better (and more expensive). A daisy wheel printer will produce letter quality print but will not handle graphics (logos, illustrations or fancy print) and is not recommended.

The top of the line is the jet laser, which can cost several thousand dollars with the associated equipment and programs. A hard disk (20 to 40 MB would be very good -- and is required for the newer word processing programs), or at least a second disk drive.

Although the 3 1/2" disks are becoming popular, they are not yet totally standard, so better get a 5 1/4 floppy drive (preferably with 1.2 megabyte drive -- only about \$20 more on a new computer). If you can afford it, get a 640K memory computer -- this will let you process more information at a time. All of these suggestions can be fully explained at the by members of a users club.

While the final copy of your manuscript should be either typed or letter quality print (usually 24 pin dot matrix, daisy wheel or jet laser) for the best possible impression, many editors will now accept a clearly printed, double spaced 9 pin dot matrix, or

a disk version in Word Start or Word Perfect program.

If you have a 9 pin dot matrix printer, be sure and ask the editor if they will accept it first. Otherwise, have a friend with a better printer run the manuscript off for you!

The WRITERS DIGEST is THE trade magazine for journalistic writers, the AMERICAN BOOKDEALERS EXCHANGE serves more self-publishers and perhaps those interested in the mail order market.

Several books on writing are offered by various discount book suppliers (see Business Sources). One (BOOKDEALER) Has one called "Writing for Non-Professionals" (#70867) that sells for \$2.95. The WRITERS HANDBOOK (THE WRITER, Inc.) Lists over 2,000 buyers of written material - complete with publisher names, addresses, editors, size and type of material desired, plus other valuable information of interest to freelance writer.

A potential problem area for creative writers is how to protect your material. The old tale about mailing it to yourself is a good story, but not adequate! Some experts suggest that one good reason for copyrighting is to keep from being sued for publishing your own material!

At any rate, copyright protection is uncomplicated, cheap and technically automatic for material created after March 1st, 1989. It is strongly recommended, however, that you at least display the fact that it is copyright protected, so any infringements will not be "innocent." Just include the word Copyright (or Copr.) or a little c in a circle the first year of publication, and the name of the copyright owner.

There is no fee for this protection (which lasts for the lifetime plus 50 years) for works created after Jan. 1st, 1978).

The only "catch" is that while you can prosecute a pirate, you cannot sue for damages unless the copyright is registered with the copyright office.

Therefore, to obtain true copyright protection, it is necessary to register your material. This can be done either before or after it has been published. If it is unpublished at the moment you sign the copyright application send in the application and one copy of your manuscript.

If it has already been published, send two copies. In both cases, the registration fee is \$10.

For more information, see Copyrights in the next section. If it has already been published, send in two copies. This \$10 not only protects your material here in the U.S.A.: it also extends to

about 80 countries who are signatories to the March 1, 1989 Berne Convention treaty. Not bad for a \$10 investment.

BUSINESS SOURCES

REGISTER OF COPYRIGHTS, Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20559. To register an UNPUBLISHED manuscript, send one copy of it, a check or money order for \$10 and a completed application Form TX, all in the same envelope or package.

For additional information, write Copyright Office, Information Section LM-401, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20559, or call their hotline: 202/479-0700.

COPYRIGHT OFFICE, Publications Section, LM-455, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20559. This is where you write to get the forms to apply for copyright - or call their hotline: 202/298-9100.

THE WRITERS DIGEST, 205 W Center St., Marion, OH 43305. Trade magazine for writers.

THE WRITER, INC., Box 892, Boston, MA 02117. Publishes THE WRITERS HANDBOOK.

AMERICAN BOOKDEALERS EXCHANGE, Box 2325, La Mesa, CA 92401. Offers publication support for writers.

AMERICAN AMATEUR PRESS ASSOCIATION, 5009 Dickens Ave., Tampa, FL 33629. Publishes AMERICAN AMATEUR JOURNALIST for aspiring writers.

F W PUBLISHING CO., 9933 Alliance Rd., Cincinnati, OH 452442. Publishes WRITERS MARKET, an annual listing of 4,000 buyers of the written word.. Available at most libraries.

PUBLISHERS CENTRAL BUREAU, Box 1187, Newark, NY 07102. Discount books (reference, novels, history, etc.)

PERSONAL PUBLISHING, Box 390, Itasca, IL 60143. Trade magazine for desktop publishers - oriented to MCIntosh users.

ALDUS CORPORATION, 411 First Ave., S-200, Seattle, WA 98104. Sells Pagemaker programs for McIntosh System. *\$495).

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11501. Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelter Rd., Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700, 312/634-4800. Office and computer supplies.

NEBS, 500 Main St., Groton, MA 04171, 800/225-6380. Office and

computer supplies.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps - \$3;
business cards - \$13 per thousand.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 60048-2556. Business cards and
letterhead stationery. Will print your copy ready logo or design,
even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short
run business cards, stationery, etc. Good quality but no choice
of ink or color.
