



WRITING AND WRITER JOBS: WHAT IT IS LIKE BEING A WRITER

Writers may be editorial columnists, film critics, novelists, screenwriters, technical writers, or other kinds of writers. They may write for publishing houses, magazines, or production companies. Many spend the beginnings of their careers waiting for their big breaks. Writers generally work a 40-hour week except when facing a deadline, which calls for the occasional weekend at work. They collaborate with the other professionals involved in the media, such as photographers, graphic designers, and advertisers. Writers may work at home, in an office, or in a hectic newsroom.

Prose writers usually write about their own interests or about a topic they are assigned by an editor. They begin by researching the subject, which may involve interviewing people, even spending the day with them, or reading up on the subject at the library. A writer must be open to the possibility that her research will change her original slant on the piece. When she's gathered all the necessary information, she usually develops a working outline for the piece and then writes it using the outline as a guide. Some writers send their completed manuscripts to the editor all at once; others send the manuscripts in sections or chapters. The editor reviews the material, and the writer revises it in line with the editor's comments. This process continues until they both think it is complete.

Screenwriters and playwrights write original pieces or adapt existing books or stories for the stage or screen. Usually they attend readings or rehearsals to make revisions because problems may appear when the piece is performed that they had not anticipated when they wrote it. Copywriters generally work for advertising agencies, researching market trends to determine the best way to sell their clients' products. Technical writers take esoteric subjects and write about them in simpler terms so that readers can easily grasp the ideas and information.

Paying Your Dues to Become a Writer

Somerset Maugham said, "There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." The one point most employers agree on is that writers need to study and practice their craft. Most employers want candidates to have a Bachelor's degree in journalism, English, or literature, unless they are applying for a technical position. Technical writers should be well-versed in their chosen areas, and perhaps have Masters degrees in them. A writer should be able to type and use a word processor. Writing experience is very important. In high school, potential writers can write for the school newspaper or the yearbook. In college, they should continue writing for school newspapers and apply for internships at publishing houses. Writers should be ambitious, focused, good at research, and able to work under deadlines. Writers should keep samples of their work, since most employers will request them before granting an interview. A writer's first job is usually as an assistant to a writer or an editor. Beginning writers generally work hard at research and clerical tasks while awaiting recognition and opportunity from their boss.

Associated Writing Careers

Editors review and edit manuscripts and give authors guidance and direction for clarifying and otherwise improving their pieces. They usually plan the layout of the publication and need to guide the writer so that the subject and the length of his work fit their concept. Reporters go out into the field, investigate stories, follow leads and interview people, and type up their findings for the newspaper. They spend most of their time gathering the information and the remainder writing the story.

Past And Future of Working as a Writer

The earliest known writings date back to 3000 B.C. They were done on papyrus in Egypt and Greece. Eventually, books were developed, but they were available only to the wealthy because only the wealthy could read. In the fifteenth century, when Johannes Gutenberg developed the printing press, books became affordable and thus accessible, and literacy increased. Newspapers were established in the eighteenth century with the dawn of the modern publishing age. As the printing press became more sophisticated, writing flourished.

Writers are needed everywhere, but it seems that there are still more writers than assignments, which led John Steinbeck to comment, "The profession of writing makes horse racing seem like a solid, stable business." Most freelancers obtain their primary income from other sources for many years before "making it" as authors. Demand is expected to increase for writers in commercial areas though, as the number of commercial venues continues to expand. Competition remains fierce. Many people prepare themselves for an alternate career and pursue writing on the side. This way they can eat and pay the rent while they obtain the experience they need for technical writing or wait for the day they get a letter of interest from a literary agent.

Quality of Life as a Writer (Entry Level Writing Jobs)

Two Years Out

Writers just starting out generally work as assistants, receiving bit assignments here and there. Most spend a substantial amount of time perfecting these pieces because they know this work may be a step toward a bigger writing assignment or a promotion. Freelancers struggle to be heard and some create Web sites to get their work seen and to receive more feedback than a form letter.

Five Years Out

Many writers have been published by this time. They may still be working on the "Great American Novel," but they receive the occasional or frequent paycheck for their commercial or technical writing. Those with steady employment never find their workday dull, but instead enjoy its daily changes in pace and subject. They have learned to operate under strict deadlines.

Ten Years Out

After ten years of employment in the field, writers are usually able to obtain assignments with the publications they desire. Writing is often something the writer needs, rather than just wants, to do. This need to write keeps many writers in the field throughout their lives.

Professionals Read

Writer

Writer's Market

New York Review of Books

Books, Films and TV Shows Featuring the Profession

Misery

Crossing to Safety

The Names

Murder She Wrote

Major Employers

Fairchild Publications

7 West 34th Street

6th Floor

New York, NY 10001

Tel: 212-630-4000

Fax: 212-630-4295

Contact: Human Resources

Penguin USA

375 Hudson Street

New York, NY 10014

Tel: 212-366-2000

Fax: 212-366-2930

Contact: Human Resources

Saatchi & Saatchi

375 Hudson Street

New York, NY 10014

Tel: 212-463-2000

Fax: 212-463-3303

Contact: Maria Ritecha

You'll Have Contact With

Advertising Executives

Editors

Publicists

Publishers

Major Associations

National Writers Union

National Conference of Editorial Writers 873 Broadway

6223 Executive Boulevard

American Society of Journalists and Writers

Rockville, MD 20852
Tel: 301-984-3015
Fax: 301-231-0026

Suite 203
New York, NY 10003
Tel: 212-254-0279
Fax: 212-254-0673

1501 Broadway
New York, NY 10019
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