

FREELANCE WRITING: A CAREER FROM ANYWHERE

An island in the Mediterranean. A beach in Africa. The east coast of New Zealand. What do these locations have in common? A recent call for assistance from freelance writers elicited replies from every one of these locations. In each of these and in many other remote places, I know of writers who are freelancing with a fair degree of success. Indeed it is possible for freelance writers to work from anywhere. Consider my own recent experience. As the editor of the Worldwide Freelance Writer web site, I publish a newsletter that goes out to thousands of freelance writers around the world. I can recall one particular issue in the middle of 2002. I started planning the newsletter in the heat and humidity of Hong Kong. When the first draft came together I was in Indianapolis, in the United States. And by the time I completed the final copy and pushed the send button I was at a lakeside cottage in Ontario, Canada, with snow lightly falling outside. Maybe you are interested in a freelance writing career but you worry about whether you live in a suitable location. Well, think again. Freelance writing is a job you can do from anywhere. It is true that if your home is near New York's editorial offices you may be able to use your proximity to some advantage. But many, many freelance writers are working successfully from more distant locations, and in many cases enjoying a better lifestyle in the places where they live. Take Ron Irwin, for example. An American, Ron freelances from a small house on the beach in Cape Town, South Africa. The majority of his work is still for North American markets. Consider Vella Corinne, a native of Malta in the center of the Mediterranean Sea. From this island steeped in history - the Order of St John was based here and the temples are thought to be older than the pyramids - she writes travel and lifestyle features. Writers in locations such as these, far from being at a serious disadvantage, can actually enjoy a number of benefits. For a start, these writers are in an excellent position to write about their own locations, the people and the culture. Also, the living costs are often less expensive than for writers in major cities. And if that is not enough, how about fresh, clean air? Writers working from remote locations usually live in a cleaner, more peaceful environment, and may live closer to outdoor and recreational activities. Vella reveals how she enjoys the warmer days: "Once I pack up my computer, I just head to the beach. Distances are short and, the island being small, I'm always close to the center of whatever's happening here. I can control my own time in a way that I could not if I lived in a busy city." Twenty years ago writers in remote locations were often frustrated by the slowness of communicating with editors on the other side of the world. It would always take months to receive a reply from an editor. Waiting for a response to a query was about as exciting as watching grass grow! In recent years the availability of the Internet has made it easier than ever before for freelancers to communicate almost instantly with anyone, anywhere in the world. In my own example above I traveled through a few countries over a three-week period and managed to conduct my freelance work at the same time. Many of my clients didn't even know I was 'on the move'. Little did they know that between receiving and replying to their messages, I was fishing in the lake and hiking through the woods. I could easily keep in touch with important contacts, as well as write and send out my newsletter. But do you know what was even more exciting? While I was traveling my web site was hard at work, the entire time, 'day and night'. Even while I was flying at thirty thousand feet, taking a nap, I was effectively selling a bunch of writing-related books and products. Now if that isn't a freelancer's dream becoming reality, I don't know what is! Such accomplishments were definitely not so attainable before the advent of email and the World Wide Web. Kathy Crockett freelances from Gisborne, New Zealand, on the east coast of the North Island. She commented to me on the difference technology makes when working from such a location. "It's a city of 35,000", she explains, "the closest to the international dateline, and the first city in the world to see the sun each day. Its closest city-size neighbors are three hours drive on windy roads...the internet, mobile phones...technology lets me be wherever I want to be... and fool others into thinking I'm where they'd like me to be!" Of course working remotely is not always easy and there are a number of challenges that writers typically face. Isolation is a common issue. Vella explained to me she has a way of dealing with it. "At times it feels like I have a totally atomized existence. I balance that by scheduling some 'face time' each day", she explains. I agree with her. Sometimes you must make a conscious effort to spend time with family, friends, or other writers. Another challenge may be difficulties with technology. Finding a PC repair shop may be next to impossible. Internet access may be unavailable or unreliable. There are many, many places in the world that don't even have telephone lines yet, not to mention email access. You can still work as a freelance writer from these locations, but it will not be as convenient. If you have any choice where you live, always try to choose a town that has telephone lines with reliable Internet access. And that goes for working while you are on holiday too. Check the available technology in advance. In the example of my trip above, I received a surprise. There was no telephone line or email access in the cottage. My initial panic subsided when I discovered a telephone not too far away. In freezing temperatures, I trudged up the road. When I pushed the button to send out my newsletter my notebook computer was plugged into a payphone. Are writers in remote locations at a serious disadvantage? No way! I am sold on the concept that you can work as a freelance writer from anywhere. And while you will face some challenges, none of them will be insurmountable. So if you're looking for a career you can do from anywhere, look no further. The writers I referred to and many others are working successfully right where they are. And so can you. Open up your notebook. Start writing. You can begin to build a rewarding career as a freelance writer today.