


Writer Profits:

# “How I Got the Gig”

Volume I

15 Writers Tell How  
They Get Paying  
Gigs — and How  
YOU Can, Too!



Edited by Susan M. Carter

*featuring:*

Cheryl Wright • Shara Rendell-Smock

Patrick Kennedy • Marie Pacha • Amy Krug

Michael Allen • Resmi Jaimon • Jenny Burr

Cynthia Lueck Sowden • Jacqueline Seewald

Sue-Ellen Davison • Kevin Rux

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Disclaimer: The purpose of this book is to inform readers of techniques and methods successfully used by writers to seek and secure writing assignments and contracts. The authors and Nasus Publishing shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to be caused, directly or indirectly by the information contained in this book.

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# Introduction: “So – how do I get writing assignments?”

Therein lies the question that became the catalyst for this book.

As owner of the Writer Profits web site and distributor of the weekly *Monday Muse* e-zine, I repeatedly get e-mails from subscribers asking for advice and recommendations on how to find paying writing assignments. While I am able to answer with a few ideas and suggestions, I know that my experiences alone offer a narrow view of how to successfully seek and find writing gigs. So I decided to enlist the help of talented writers to also share their experiences, each authoring a chapter for this book.

In the following pages you’ll hear from part-time writers, fulltime writers and those who write for fun more than profit — each one committed to the writing life in some way. Some of the authors share their personal journeys from struggle to triumph. Others jump in full force with detailed how-to information that gets them gig after gig after gig.

If you take a few moments to review the Contents you will notice a diverse range of chapter topics. Some may fit the kind of writing venues you’re interested in pursuing. Others may address areas that you have not previously considered. I encourage you to read every one. Each author’s story shares useful information, perspective, and approach that goes beyond the documented experience of his or her chapter topic.

When I first started this venture I thought I was giving writers an opportunity to showcase their talents and share

their stories to help you, the reader, uncover new opportunities. Yet, once the submissions started to arrive, I realized that I was embarking on a learning expedition of my own.

I hope you get out of these pages what the authors have put into them — encouragement and confidence to say, “Yes I can!” the next time a writing opportunity is within your reach.

To your success,

Susan Carter

# Networking Masterpieces

© Cheryl Wright

Networking was always (and still is) my pet hate, but it's landed more than one gig for me in the past.

My first experience came when I was looking for some occasional article work, as well as money. I'd had a little experience, but at that stage it was extremely limited.

I'd been a member of an egroup for non-fiction writers for some years, and had made some good contacts. The group owner was also the editor/owner of an ezine for writers. It was the first ezine I ever subscribed to, and I'd learned heaps from it over the years.

When she needed articles, the editor would often post her call for submissions on the egroup. Even after I'd been published, I was still rather reluctant to submit to this publication. Why?

Firstly, I was certain my work wasn't good enough. Secondly, I was concerned that because she knew me, the editor would give me preferential treatment or feel obligated to publish my work, which I absolutely did not want.

Several months and many more publications down the track, I bit the bullet and sent her my submission. That article was purchased just days after I submitted.

Not wanting to be greedy or overbearing, I waited a few months before submitting another article about writing. That article was also purchased.

This contact was proving to be extremely worthwhile, and in addition, the editor had become a good cyber friend. I'm happy to say that I sold articles to the same publication for practically every issue for over a year. Due to illness, the publication temporarily folded shortly after that time.

Apart from receiving a regular income from this publication, because it had a large subscriber base, I also received a lot of exposure. During this time I decided to start my own ezine for writers. A lot of my followers subscribed to my ezine, which at that time had about twenty subscribers. Gradually my readership grew, and expanded to over 1,000 subscribers at the time (I now have approximately 3200 subscribers). I attribute that number to a combination of both the articles, and also the writing competitions I began to run from my [Writer2Writer.com](http://Writer2Writer.com) website.

Not longer after all this happened, Jenny, another contact in this same egroup, 'introduced' me to her editor in the US. I'd been looking for some regular work, and had begun sending out query letters for a column. Since I'm based in Australia, I was (naturally) submitting to Australian magazines — with no results whatsoever; not even rejections letters.

As far as I was concerned, there was absolutely no point in submitting to overseas publications; I was here in Australia, so I assumed US publications simply wouldn't be interested. How wrong I was!

Even after Jenny sent me contact details for her magazine editor, and had already contacted the lady, I was still extremely reluctant to impose. After all, what could an Australian writer — and a not very published one at that — offer to a magazine based in regional America?

But Jenny urged me to contact her editor; after all, she'd already made the initial contact. Now it was up to me to sell myself.

But what on earth could I write about? I had no idea.

Understand that I had never seen the magazine, had no idea of the subject matter, and my cyber friend was also unable to offer any suggestions of what I could write about. I felt I was destined to never be published overseas.

But then desperation kicked in. February 2003 I had to give up my day job due to an ailing immune system, and writing was the only skill I could think of that I could do from home. So... brainstorming time.

I sat in my kitchen with paper and pen and brainstormed some ideas that I thought may peak the interest of the editor. Then, according to my plan, I chose just three ideas to use for my query. They were:

- Safety in the home
- Events affecting Australia
- Places of interest in Australia that you wouldn't necessarily find in a travel brochure.

It's no good saying you'll write a column about something if you don't know how to sustain it. After deciding on the above ideas, I then had to ensure I could write on the subjects for a reasonable length of time. To this end I brainstormed both the safety in the home and places of interest in Australia ideas until I could honestly say either column could be sustained for at least two years. The remaining idea would be based on current events, so it wasn't relevant in this instance.

In my query to the editor, I made sure it stated I was pursuing a recurring column, not a one-off article. My greatest concern was the editor may have thought I was being pushy. What I discovered was the total opposite.

Requesting a regular column alleviated some of the pressure for her, as she'd been trying unsuccessfully to source an

additional writer for some time. Making it a regular gig meant she no longer had that burden.

I should add here that it's extremely important to note in your query that you want a recurring column, otherwise you may think the editor has agreed to a column, when she's really only agreed to a single article. It's a bit like writing fiction; you completely understand your characters, but your readers don't, so it is essential that you are clear about your purpose.

When I wrote the multiple topic query, I was a total novice and had no idea how unprofessional it might sound to propose several ideas at the same time. Apparently the editor wasn't concerned – luckily for me!

What I generally do – and did with this publication - is send the query and include a list of my publications noting that clips are available on request. This is an effective practice I still follow today.

To my surprise, she was extremely interested in my travel idea, and asked me to send some sample clips. The clips had to be sent via snail-mail. Postal service from Australia to the US is extremely slow, so I had an excruciating wait to find out if I'd won the job.

As a side note, I did what many writers are afraid to do; I included clips from publications for which I received no payment. The majority were from employer-based newsletters, as well as some from the national magazine for hubby's target shooting hobby. The funniest part is that most editors tell me they are most impressed by these clips. So much for not using 'no-pay' clips in queries!

I'm dead against writing for free, as anyone who knows me well will confirm. Yet, if you have no clips to show, you usually have little chance of being awarded paid gigs. Do whatever is necessary to get a handful of good clips, then stop doing freebies!

Two cautions: Never submit clips with errors, and don't use clips from publications that are well-known as 'freebie' publications. These could harm, not help, your chances.

Approximately a month after sending my clips, I received an email from the editor confirming I had secured the column. Two years later my column was voted by readers as being their favorite column in the entire magazine. I was surprised and thrilled!

It all sounds really easy, right? But it was far from easy.

As a newbie, I had no idea how to write a professional – or even semi-professional – query, and I cringe when I look back on that query today! Here's a checklist of what to include when you write your next query:

- A quick introduction of yourself
- Brief list of published works
- Your idea for the proposed column
- Why you're qualified to write the column
- Several ideas for future editions
- An offer to send clips

If you don't have any clips, write a few mock articles to demonstrate your abilities. However, your query will have much more oomph if you can provide published clips.

This last tip is often the clincher:

- State that you can provide accompanying photographs. A lot of magazines, including larger ones, prefer not to have to source out photos. So if you have the ability to supply photographs, say so.

Of all the photos I've supplied, I would estimate that fifty percent were taken either by me or my husband. The rest were provided by the venues I wrote about – at absolutely no charge.

I'm no photographer, far from it, but with a little research I was able to find the sorts of photographs that magazines like. Typically they want photographs that related to the focus of the story, and includes some human interest – that is, a few people.

Many magazines won't pay any extra for photos. Others may pay from a low of \$50 to a high of several hundred dollars. But the bottom line is, supplying your own photos takes away the worry about copyright infringement, and also the concern of finding something suitable. Editors love it!

I own a good quality digital camera, and take hundreds of photos for each assignment using a few memory cards. The hardest part is choosing which photos to submit. A digital camera is an inexpensive option because you can view the photos on the computer rather than paying for prints. All my photos are sent to the publication by email, so there are no printing or shipping costs. However, magazines do require high resolution photos, so check the photo submission requirements of several magazines before investing in the purchase of a new camera.

Three years after I began to write my column the editor left because of illness, and another editor took her place. The new editor decided that places of interest in Australia weren't relevant (despite the reader vote), and asked me to write about wines. Since I only indulge in non-alcoholic drinks, the topic did not align with my interest or knowledge, so I declined her invitation.

The magazine column was my first paid assignment, but certainly wasn't to be my last. It led to many more publications, and I was selling at least two articles per month, as well as a number of short stories. From my experience, writing a regular column opens many doors for the freelancer and should be a serious consideration for any writer just starting their writing career.

Why? If you've already written a column, other editors will know immediately that you can write well, otherwise you wouldn't be writing a regular column. They can assume that you're easy to work with – for the same reason. And they also know you can come up with ideas because that's what you need to do for each and every issue; all this from writing a column.

Column writing builds your credibility, but it also builds your clips. And clips can be extremely important in this business. They provide the proof that you're a good writer. That column set my writing career off in a totally new direction — a good one!

Over the next few years I continued to sell my work regularly. In addition to selling non-fiction articles, I sold short stories, including one to the now defunct *Arabella Romance* magazine.

The *Arabella* query was sent just months after being accepted for the travel column, and I'm convinced it was the column that made them stand up and take notice.

I queried *Arabella* about writing a travel column, which was what I was doing for the US magazine. The editor responded and explained they'd checked out my website and saw that I also wrote a series of what I classified as comedy/crime short stories, and they wanted me to submit one in particular.

I'd never considered these stories to be romance, not even remotely, but they insisted, so who was I to decline? The editor loved the story and wanted to buy it. And buy it she did.

This latest sale sky-rocketed my self-esteem and confidence, but more than that, it led to even more sales.

Countless writers wanted to know how I'd written the short story, and what *Arabella* loved so much about it. I'd

recently begun the Writer2Writer website, so instead of answering all the email queries separately, I decided to write a three-part autoresponder course. But how do you show someone how to write short stories in just three pages? You can't.

So I sat down and wrote my first ebook *Think Outside the Square: Writing Publishable (Short) Stories*. It took me three solid months of work to write it. Along with that came a big learning curve to work out the processes for formatting, compiling, and selling ebooks.

The first copy sold just ten minutes after its launch – to say I was ecstatic is an understatement. I never expected anyone to be interested in buying a book I'd written.

At the time, I had no idea this book would be the first in a series of ebooks for fiction writers. Books that would again catapult my writing career.

I was concerned about self-publishing a book. I'd heard self-publishing attached a negative stigma to your reputation. But since I wasn't writing it for the money (although it was a nice bonus), I decided self-publishing would be okay.

What I didn't realize at the time was that these books for writers would establish me as an expert on the craft of writing, and would mean more to my writing career than just about anything else.

In the midst of all this I was slowly building the Writer2Writer website. Initially it was built simply to sell my ebooks. But as more and more writers contacted me for advice, I knew I had to expand it – a lot.

Again, I didn't realize the impact this site would have on my career. At the suggestion of a friend, I began an ezine for writers about one year after the site opened. I was extremely reluctant to begin an ezine, but I'm very glad I did.

The first issue of *Writer to Writer* had just ten subscribers. Today – just three years later – I have almost 3200 subscribers. Many of them have been with me for at least two

years. Again, this ezine sets me up as an expert. Not only that, I have a captive audience when my new books are released.

*Writer to Writer* is not simply full of my products. My editorial addresses problems I've encountered and how to fix them, I talk about marketing and networking, and guide writers in their writing careers. I also publish writing-related articles – most of them not previously published. I include book reviews and source out writing-related resources, contests, calls for submissions, etc.

All this has helped build my credibility.

With each publication came a new clip, so I was slowly building a portfolio of writing clips that would help with future sales.

Citing each of the above publications, including *Think Outside the Square*, I submitted the first three chapters of my first novel to a publisher. The book had been rejected several times before I was published in any other form.

This time, after just twenty-four hours, the publisher requested the full manuscript. A couple of weeks later I was advised they wanted to contract my novel.

Each goal achieved led to more and more opportunities in my writing career. It was getting to a stage where I waited with bated breath as to what would happen next.

By this time I'd learned that networking and marketing were becoming crucial tools in my writer's arsenal.

I've made a lot of cyber friends, many of them I've now known for many years, and we maintain regular contact. I've been published in six anthologies because of my contacts, and continue to receive requests to submit to these types publications.

Being an 'all rounder' means I can write just about anything. It's one of the reasons I've been published so much,

and I'm convinced it's why I'm often invited to submit to anthologies and similar publications. Not only have I written essays, I've also been asked for quotes, all of which I'm credited for and given a link back to my website.

I've been very careful not to pigeonhole myself as many writers do. Some of them find it difficult to get published regularly. I don't have that problem. I can write on just about any topic, and submit the work as articles, books (fiction and non-fiction), essays, sales copy, and so on.

Last year I 'met' a writer online after one of my subscribers suggested I review his non-fiction book for writers in *Writer to Writer*. I contacted him and asked if he could send me a review copy in ebook form. Instead he asked his publisher to send a print copy of both his books. They were magnificently presented, and extremely well written. I wrote to his publisher and thanked him for sending the books.

Some time later, after advising them the reviews were posted, I received an email from the same publisher. He wrote to thank me for posting the reviews on my website. In the same email he asked if I would be interested in writing a non-fiction book for him.

I had no indication that this would happen, not even remotely. Nor did I ever believe a publisher would write out of the blue and ask me to write for them.

But I needed more information. Exactly what did the publisher want me to write about, and when did he need it? I still can't believe I didn't just say "yes," but I was trying to be rational. I had no intention of jumping into the deep end without understanding the commitment.

The publisher gave me an outline, and two months to research and write two sample chapters. I was incredibly nervous – I'd never written sample chapters to win a contract before. I'd always finished the book then tried to sell it. With

careful planning and organization I managed to finish the sample chapters with plenty of time to spare.

After an anxious couple of months I was notified that my sample chapters were accepted and a contract would be issued. At the time of writing this piece, the book is almost completed except for final editing.

This publisher is the biggest I've ever had, and has huge circulation. And I still didn't understand how my name had come up for this contract. I started asking questions.

Perhaps you've guessed by now?

Yes, it was that writer whose books were sent for review. Since I'd already written three books specifically for writers, and had success with them, he believed I was the best person for the job.

I had no idea he was the publisher's editor, nor did I think anyone would recommend to their publisher that I write a book for them. But I am so grateful that he did. Again, this would not have happened without networking.

Remember that novel I sold? That happened at the beginning of my writing career, and was something I jumped into without really thinking it through. When my contract was up for renewal (mid 2006), I decided not to sign with that publisher again. I was far from happy with both the publisher and the company's performance.

I started to shop the book around hoping there was a different publisher who might be interested in re-releasing my novel. I got a nibble from the first publisher I contacted, and later received a confirmation email notifying me that they were contracting my book (coincidentally) on the same day my previous contract officially ended.

The new publisher wants some revisions, but that's a no-brainer. I fully expected to have to do some rewrites. They

had another of my novels under consideration, and recently notified they are contracting this second book as well. (Yay!)

The new publisher stated she'd seen my name all over the Internet for a long time, and said my marketing efforts and great reviews were the main reason for her decision. (Apart from the fact she loved the book!) She also told me

### Marketing Tips

*Here's a list of methods I've used to get free or near-free advertising:*

- Give away something that is relevant to either your book or website.
- Offer to be a guest writer free of charge.
- Offer yourself as an interviewee.
- Give away a copy of your book or product for a contest. Choose carefully — the aim is to find a new audience, so make sure that audience is part of your targeted market.
- Speaking of targeted markets, do you know what that is? Say for instance, you have written a book about gardening; then your targeted audience will be gardeners. If you've written a book of romance fiction, then romance readers are

your targeted audience. If your book is about writing, then writers are your target audience. Understand your niche, and you will know your targeted audience.

- Start a free ezine (electronic magazine or newsletter). Make it applicable to your target audience and issue it on a regular basis.
- Write articles and ensure your bio points readers to your product. Offer the articles for free to websites and ezines that will reach your targeted audience.
- To gain additional subscribers, offer a relevant or useful freebie for joining if possible. Or run a subscriber-only contest.
- For extra exposure for your published book, seek book reviews. The reviews themselves are free. (If they want payment — run as quickly as possible!) If your book is reviewed, the site will often offer to interview

she'd actually purchased my book from the previous publisher but had never gotten around to reading it because of time restraints.

In the early years of my writing career I totally ignored and shunned marketing and networking, but as you can see, once I began to do both, my career skyrocketed.

you as well. This provides additional exposure.

- For your published book, convert the first chapter, or first few pages, to a PDF. Include details such as the name of the publisher, and don't forget the purchase details! (Always make it easy for potential buyers to purchase your products.)
- Run a free contest. Avoid giving away YOUR book or product as a prize. In my experience, people won't buy the product in the hope they'll win it instead.
- Update your website regularly. The more often you change your 'welcome message' the higher the ranking you will get in search engines.
- Research and use relevant and related 'keywords' and 'metatags' for your website. All websites – even free ones – have a place to add keywords. Use that function to your best advantage.

- Make flyers, bookmarks and business cards. I use Publisher to make stationery. Inexpensive business cards can be purchased online at VistaPrint.
- I have a brochure that highlights all my books, another one just for my copywriting services, another for my freelance journalism, and yet another devoted entirely to my novel *Saving Emma*. The latter includes snippets from reviews – with links for the full review. Readers are also given the link to my free sample chapter.
- Enter your books into contests. Winning entries (and entrants) generally get a lot of media attention. This works equally well for ezines and websites.
- Join egroups specifically for writers promoting themselves. There are tons available, and the majority are worthwhile. It may take

a few goes before you find one that's a good fit, but you'll quickly realize it's worth the effort.

*You'll find lists of groups and websites at my website [Writer2Writer](http://Writer2Writer.com). Egroups and marketing resources are also on my other website [www.aussieauthors.com](http://www.aussieauthors.com).*

- Contact your local or community newspaper. Let them know you're a local

author. Give them a story angle if possible – this helps clinch the deal.

Always remember – where ever possible promote you the author, not a single book or service. A particular book title may be long gone while you will still be well and truly around.

It's called 'name recognition' and is extremely important to your writing business.

If you asked me what you need to do to get your writing career moving, without a doubt my answer would be, "networking and marketing."

Without networking most of the major steps in my career would never have occurred. And without marketing, I wouldn't have anyone purchasing my work.

And that's how I got the gig.



### About the Author

**Cheryl Wright** is an award-winning Australian author, freelance journalist, and editor. In addition to an array of other projects, she is the owner of the [Writer2Writer.com](http://Writer2Writer.com) website and the *Writer to Writer* monthly ezine for writers. Her publications include novels, non-fiction books, short stories, and articles. Her upcoming releases are *Winter Sabbatical* (2007) and *Saving Emma* (2007) from Black Velvet Seductions, and *The Write Resources* (2008) from Central Avenue Press. Visit Cheryl's websites [www.cheryl-wright.com](http://www.cheryl-wright.com) and [www.write-essentials.com](http://www.write-essentials.com)



**Cheryl Wright**

# Vacation Adventures Inspire Book Ideas

© Shara Rendell-Smock

One warm December afternoon in Florida at the Naples Zoo's (formerly Jungle Larry's Caribbean Gardens) outdoor arena, I am watching spell-bound as the leopards leave the stage and the tigers come on. Their trainer, David Tetzlaff, shows the natural behaviors of big cats. The leopards jumped and climbed in response to cues from David while music played off stage. As the Bengal tigers' performance ended, two of the 350-pounders lean in to their trainer for some affection before leaving the arena. I want to know how David developed this closeness with these magnificent wild creatures.

Naples Zoo is the largest tropical garden with animals in America. Even the parking area has red and purple leaved ten-foot tall crotons, delicate pink flowers of powder puff bushes and red elongated flowers of bottlebrush trees. The fragrance of the orchid trees' purple flowers and the cascading magenta bougainvillea suggest a tropical island. The blue sky is so dazzling it nearly hurts the eyes; the shady deep green foliage of the jungle provides a restful contrast.

A gem of a project starts screaming to me when I hear the cat show narrator announce that the Tetzlaff family has been in the animal business — breeding endangered species, appearing on TV, running a zoo, and so on — for thirty-five years.

For decades, the Tetzlaff family cared for animals, from anteaters to zebras. Television, newspapers, magazines (even *People*) had featured this family. I already had noticed wonderful items and books in the gift shop but was pretty sure the Tetzlaffs had no book on their life — a kind of life that many of us dream about.

Riding the tram and walking through the over-50-acre botanical garden, I had seen monkeys, caracals, servals, lions, elephants, anteaters, and other exotic creatures. Leaving the park, I noticed a group of leopards in the ring with David. A sign suggested, “Training in session. You’re welcome to watch. Take a seat and please remain quiet.” Seeing them training was even more interesting to me than the show!

David was preparing leopards to add them to the act. He was teaching one to step to a pedestal with the food reward on it from a nearby stand. Then he moved the pedestals a little farther apart, shaping the cat’s natural jumping behavior to show it in the act. It was just one small part of the training.

Prior to going to the park as a tourist on vacation from my full-time technical writing position, I had spent years writing for newspapers and magazines.

On the airplane trip home to Illinois, I wrote my proposal to the Tetzlaffs on why they needed a book and why I should be the one to write it, pitching the idea to David Tetzlaff that resulted in *Living with Big Cats*, a successful book still sold in the Naples Zoo gift shop, bookstores, pet stores, and a circus, and circulated in libraries and schools.

*Living with Big Cats* was my first fun book. I had come to the project with writing and organizational skills. Also, for this project, I needed to be a good interviewer. I had gotten some of my preparation on the job, questioning programmers so that I could document for regular people how to run custom computer software.

Visiting the park that day spawned the idea for my book, *Big Cats*. It was a case of having the right skills, seeing a need for a book, writing the proposal, researching what material existed on other trainers and big cats, communicating with the Tetzlaffs, and then getting a written agreement on how the project would proceed.

I foresaw that *Big Cats* would fill several needs for the Tetzlaffs; obviously including the need for book sales. The book would also be an advertisement for the zoo when patrons showed their friends this souvenir from their memorable day at Naples Zoo. With some people giving the book as a gift, it could bring more business to the zoo. It truly is the “must do” activity for a fun day in Naples.

And for the Tetzlaffs, this book documents their life with animals — years of experiences they can pass to their children. The Tetzlaffs’ rich history of love of all animals fuels their continuing excitement, and that helps make them the best in their field.

The project took about three years to complete. I observed David’s cat shows in person and on video. I got to know David’s mother, Nancy Jane “Safari Jane” Tetzlaff-Berens, animal trainer turned chief executive officer of Naples Zoo. I visited the Tetzlaffs at their second park location at Cedar Point in Ohio and returned to the Naples site many times.

In each park, I accompanied David on his daily routine. I taped interviews while David chopped meat to feed his cats, while he walked a tiger, while he ate his sandwich lunch in the arena as the leopards had play time and I sat outside the arena with my tape recorder. Once as David cleaned cages, I got to follow him up a ladder to go over a cage, and got peed on by Delhi, the white and gold tiger, in the process. Talk about big bladders!

## *Building a Book*

The job doesn't end when you have finished the writing. The whole project may include many letters and proposals to publishers. If you self-publish, you have many more steps. To do something in between — like what I did — having a book packager, Tabby House, handle the product and International Zoological Society fund the printing, still entails much detail. I transcribed the interview tapes and used my written notes, wrote the book, bought the ISBN number, solicited experts' participation for back cover blurbs, approved cover design, and filed the book with Library of Congress. Then the marketing began.

The transcripts from the taped interviews totaled 1200 pages, providing the basis for my 222-page book. I had spoken with the family, park employees, the tigers' veterinarian, and trainers across the nation who knew the Tetzlaffs, including Jack Hanna, Director Emeritus of Columbus Zoo and host of Jack Hanna Animal Adventures. I decided what was important to retain from the transcript, and then organized that content into what naturally could be grouped together into chapters.

I waited until I had finished writing the book to compose the preface. It becomes an easy job once you know what you said and in what order!

David Tetzlaff had guided me to James Clubb, owner of Clubb-Chipperfield Ltd., as an expert who would write a concise foreword to the book. Clubb had met David years before, when David was caring for cubs born from Clubb's own animals on tour with Ringling Bros. Clubb had also been impressed with this wild-animal trainer who, unlike the old-fashioned stereotype, presented the animals' natural behaviors in his shows.

While working on the book's content, I had many details to follow. To sell a book in any retail outlet, the book

must have an ISBN number and bar code. I contacted the U.S. Copyright Office to order the ISBN. At the time I ordered these were only sold in groups of ten ISBNs, which are not time limited and can be used for subsequent books. Then I needed to find a place that turns that number into the graphic bar code.

Each year it becomes easier to obtain the ISBN and graphic. Now many sources for it are available on the Internet. However, if you buy a number that is under the umbrella of a company, such as a publisher, you need to determine whether that company will automatically get a portion of retail sales. If that is the case and it's not what you want, you can purchase the ISBN from a place that sells full rights to the buyer (author, in my case).

Nancy Jane and I chose Tabby House packagers to handle the book's layout and printing. A few months after they began their work, Tabby House informed me of a welcome surprise. They had successfully submitted the manuscript to the Library of Congress, requesting Cataloging-In-Publication (CIP) certification. This approval is not simple to obtain, especially for a first time book author as I was at that time. CIP allows advance information about a book to get to publishers, librarians, and so on for early sales.

While Tabby House was doing its fine work on the book, I was gathering content for the blurb — positive feedback to put on the book jacket of a hardcover or the back cover of a soft cover book. The content for this can be about the specific book, other works by the author, or comments on the author or the subject of the book.

For the back cover of *Big Cats*, I wrote a short paragraph about the book. I followed this with quotes from Jack Hanna, *People Magazine*, Ted Henry of WEWS TV, and David Jamieson, editor of a circus magazine in England. A photo of Nancy Jane and me bottle-feeding Maya, a six-week-old jaguar cub, completes the back cover design.

Nancy Jane and I went through thirty-five years' worth of photos, choosing about one hundred of them for the book. Having thousands of photos to choose from, our choice was difficult. We included far more than the cover price of \$11.95 warranted. It cut into profits, but we couldn't resist sharing more pictures. Black and white photos appear throughout the book. A separate section contains thirty-two color photos on glossy paper.

For the front cover, Nancy Jane and I first followed the advice of having a professional cover designer create it. The resulting cover was not what we had in mind. Likely it would have sold books on the circus route, but a reader may have been disappointed to find that the book was not mainly about the circus. It was a wild cover with reds and yellows so bright they nearly hurt our eyes.

Nancy Jane and I went back to the photo vault. We chose a picture of the trainer, David Tetzlaff, standing nose-to-nose with the tiger Centaine. We gave it to the artist and said we'd like to see it with a blue background. The final cover was that photo with gold and white lettering. This clearly illustrates the relationship of the tiger and trainer, one of the main points of the book.

For the cover, the best quality "paper" to use has a special coating. The cover will not break down over time or curl when exposed to humidity. The book will satisfy readers and collectors for many years.

Tabby House told me I would need about fifty copies of the book cover—flat actual covers of the book, to use for promotion. They presented a gorgeous matted, framed cover to me at the end of the project.

After shopping the manuscript to publishers, I chose International Zoological Society to publish this book that I would market. In association with Tabby House, we had our book!

Tabby House arranged for the book to be printed out of state with partial shipment to Nancy Jane and part to me. I began the marketing by listing the title at Ingram wholesaler. I then completed forms necessary for Baker & Taylor and amazon.com to sell the book.

To assure copyright, I sent one book, the form, and payment of \$50 to the Library of Congress. Several months later I received the processed, officially-stamped form.

### ***Marketing***

With the ready market of visitors to Naples Zoo, it was a natural marketing idea to make a flyer with a photo of David and one of his big cats and information about the book, including the date it would be available. The flyer had a coupon on it offering a discount for advance purchase of the book that would also be autographed by both the trainer and the author. Zoo visitors could pick up a flyer in the gift shop, and complete the order then or mail it back at their convenience as long as it was before the cut off date.

Any time a writer can arrange advance sales, it's a win-win situation for everyone involved. The buyer will have the book ordered and the publisher will know the number of copies generated by this tool.

When it came time to fill those orders, David Tetzlaff and I met at Nancy Jane's house to sign cases of books. Nancy Jane kept the orders organized, stacking piles of books to be mailed to each customer.

I went to numerous book signings in Florida, both with and without Nancy Jane (and her guest — a monkey or a 100-pound snake) in the Naples Zoo Gift Shop, book stores, pet shops, and even a circus.

Prior to publication, I also had sent a one-page press release to many newspapers for them to use as filler, informing their readers about this new book. Because my book took

place in Florida, had ties to Ohio (Cedar Point) where the Tetzlaffs had an additional performance place, and ties to my then-home state in Illinois, I first concentrated on papers in those states.

Many newspapers will run an unsolicited press release, either in its entirety or edited. It's not always easy to get copies of what has run in the papers when blanketing a lot of papers. For papers that sent me "tear sheets," I wrote thank you notes, then kept the tear sheets in a portfolio of my work.

As I sent the press release to large metropolitan newspapers and magazines that covered animals, I also asked if they would review my book. I decided how many books I was willing to give away for this purpose so I could keep my costs reasonable. For some of them, I enclosed a cover of the book as Tabby House had suggested. When a reviewer responded I quickly mailed a book along with a thank you in advance and a request for a copy of the printed review. These much-appreciated pieces went to my portfolio.

I use the portfolio to send copies of selected material to potential clients. It's also just plain fun to have the memorabilia to document accomplishments.

### ***Some Ideas Lead to No Project***

Not all of my projects fell into place as easily as *Big Cats* did. Like all writers, I had far more proposals rejected than accepted. Chasing leads may result in encounters with captivating people, but sometimes can also lead to actual projects.

Which topics fascinate you? Those are the subjects that will likely appeal to readers. Some years ago when I adopted an infant, I saw a need for a resource guide on private adoption. I suggested to my adoption attorney that we write such a book. She liked the idea, so we began. That doesn't mean we completed the book.

You can have a solid project that still falls apart for any number of reasons. For the private adoption guide, timing

was the problem. That was one of my ideas that came along a year too late. A publisher was probably already approving galleys of an adoption book when I first had my bright idea about filling the need for such a book.

My attorney and I had just gotten rolling on an outline and a publisher when a private adoption handbook came out. The authors had the same team setup—a prominent attorney and a writer client who had just adopted through him. Rather than have it look like a “me too” book, and because we hadn’t invested a huge amount of time gearing up for the project, my new partner and I sadly scrapped the idea.

I have been more successful having famous actors and authors respond to my queries than catching publishers’ attention. I have corresponded with actress/animal activist/author Betty White, suggesting she might use my abilities for one of her books. She graciously told me that she uses no ghost. Some time after our contact, I began writing *Living with Big Cats*. Ms. White ordered several copies of that book saying, “It’s a wonderful book on a subject I find so enjoyable. Congratulations on your beautiful book.”

Telephoning me about my biography proposal to him, Robert Young years ago told me he had been working on an autobiography that was not for publication and distribution. It was strictly to be a gift for his family. Astonished that he spoke with me for half an hour instead of sending me a flush letter, I found him to be a refreshingly open gentleman.

The billionaire inventor, Arnold Beckman, granted me an appointment to pitch the idea of his biography. He’d always insisted on having no life story. I was the catalyst on his authorizing a bio, but he awarded the work to one of his colleagues — a writer with whom Mr. Beckman had an established association.

Had I gotten the Beckman project, it’s doubtful I would have had time to visit the Naples Zoo, much less pitch *Big*

*Cats* even if the idea had come to me. The Beckman failure led to something I was much more enthusiastic about creating.

### ***Writers Work Together***

A book I successfully self-published is *Hooking the Reader: Opening Lines that Sell*.

The first sentences in fiction novels always intrigued me. For years I jotted down opening lines that caught my notice. I wondered whether other readers would be interested in a book about the words that initially grab the reader. Eventually I got to know a lot of writers and began asking if they had the same curiosity about hooks.

I had corresponded for a year with the science fiction icon Gene Wolfe when I asked what he thought of a book of first sentences chosen by their authors. My idea was to ask writers to tell me favorite openers from their own fiction and then have them write something fresh about them, geared to writers or their fans — thoughts on the writing process, or a funny story about the opener, any direction the individual wanted to take. Gene was very encouraging and volunteered to contribute the first piece to my proposed book.

I sent my proposal along with the example of Gene's original prose to best-selling mystery, romance, science fiction, western, or mainstream fiction authors. More than one hundred of them contributed to *Hooking the Reader*. Some volunteered a paragraph; others wrote a page or more.

After receiving the material, I looked for patterns. What fit together? What themes did we have? I determined the chapters and wrote the introduction to each. I self-published the first book that contains authors' writing about their opening hooks — the many styles of hooks, their construction, humor, dialogue, or disparate elements and their relationship to the story's end.

Any hook's value can be judged by the number of questions it creates in the reader's mind. This excerpt of Jennifer Blake's thoughtful contribution to *Hooking the Reader* demonstrated a hook's importance and purpose. The same things that captivate a mystery, romance, or science fiction reader also interest its writer.

Regina Dalton snapped awake the instant the coffin lid closed.

Darkness pressed around her like a smothering blanket. Not a sliver of light penetrated. The dense air smelled of old dust and ancient velvet. The side walls seemed to contract, so she was supremely aware of her left shoulder wedged against padded wood while her right nestled beneath unyielding solid flesh and bone.

Warm flesh and bone. (Jennifer Blake, *Kane*)

Blake told me she came up with the scene by listing everything she could think of with a connection to funerals. She said, "Then it was just a matter of playing 'What if...'" She said that several things make this scenario work.

"First is the instant plunge into dramatic action: the main character is captured, alive, in a coffin. Horror is inherent here because this is an ancient fear shared by the general population. Then a puzzle is presented because it's an old coffin rather than a pristine modern casket. From a craft point of view, the ploy gets the story off on the right foot by acting as a lead-in to the story setting. But the real kicker is in the intrigue factor, since the heroine is not alone in her place of entrapment."

We all know that most leads do not come to fruition. However, if you keep expounding your varied ideas, sooner or later you will hit on something that really works. No feeling matches the one you have when you autograph your book for a smiling reader!



## About the Author

**Shara Rendell-Smock** is the award-winning author of the books *Living with Big Cats: The Story of Jungle Larry, Safari Jane, and David Tetzlaff* and *Hooking the Reader: Opening Lines that Sell*, numerous magazine and newspaper articles. Presently Rendell-Smock is the secretary of Florida Writers Association. She is working on her next books, *Scream of the Crop Jokes and Quotes* and the working title *Garbage Book* (<http://www.rendell-smock.com> and <http://www.garbagebook.com>).



**Shara  
Rendell-Smock**

# Starting My Technical Writing Career

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I became a technical writer and I don't regret it. The primary reason technical engineers and programmers write a poor technical document is because they have had no training or experience in that field. This is not unusual. They have other responsibilities and training. This is where the trained writer comes in. Here I will deal with some of the basics of how I became a technical writer with a good income by covering the most common problems encountered. Then I will describe how I avoided them or improved upon them so you too can do the same thing.

I started my writing career as a poet, novelist, copywriter and graphic artist for advertising and marketing, so I knew the basics of English grammar and design. I graduated with a degree in English Writing and that helped. And because of this knowledge and training, and a well-crafted resume, I had the opportunity to start as a contract worker, through a friend, as an editor for a large company reworking engineers' input for large government proposals. I had to take input from dozens of engineers and put them into a common voice. And I had to work with several hardcore editors who had to do the same thing, with the same voice.

Luckily in my first technical editing job I was teamed with three ex-school teachers and believe me, they never left the classroom. They practically rapped my knuckles with a

ruler to correct me when I was a little sloppy or lax in my editing. They taught me first of all to forget the feelings of the author and be true to the writing: If the technical writer or engineer has a thin skin, too bad.

The following sections are general areas to consider in developing good habits and results before undertaking the technical writing process. It's taken me a few years to develop these writing rules, and if you go into your first job and execute them with confidence, then you should succeed and impress your peers.

The following is not intended to be an instructional manual because it will only scrape the surface. But it is a rundown of some of the basics I learned and wish to pass on. It is meant to assist first-time technical writer's crack into a demanding but good income field.

### *Know the Reader or End User*

It is important to know if the reader, or end user, is an engineer or any other professional who will be fundamentally familiar with the subject of the technical document, e.g., a manager; a technician; a student or high-end user; or a layperson reading for information only. This is one of the first lessons I learned. It is something that must be determined before the writing begins in order to decide on the technical depth, word choices, and attitude of the writing. It is also necessary so the information is not written down to the professional, or over the head of the layperson.

Know the end task of the reader. Is it for:

- Information only
- Building or using a product
- Learning a process
- Testing or validating a process or application

- Examining complicated details or figures
- Using an application or process
- Maintenance or repair
- Part of an overall document set
- A government proposal

In knowing the end task of the reader, the information can be presented and detailed accordingly. I found it was acceptable to be a little less formal if the copy was addressed to a layperson. If it was for professional use then it must be tight writing and with careful use of the proper words. I found engineers to be very fussy if you describe a program or product with one word wrong that throws the whole document in the wrong direction.

### *Have a Good Attitude and Approach*

Having a good attitude and approach is required to work with the originator, not against the originator. The quicker the reader can understand what is written, the more effective it is. The originator, or engineer, or computer programmer may be upset with all the interruptions for reviews of the copy, but I've had to remind them that finally, their name was going to be on the document ahead of mine.

### *Write Specific and in a Clear Style*

I learned to write specific rather than general information, the opposite of copy writing. Technical readers are usually interested in detailed information such as, fact, figures, conclusions, recommendations, and especially how to do it, so I learned to make it to the point. Too many facts and figures within a paragraph can lose clarity, but placed in a table or a bullet list, as the one above, they become easier to read. I found that even listing them within a paragraph by, (1) numbering the separate items, (2) putting the numbers in

parentheses to separate them and make them easier to remember and, (3) putting them in a logical sequence is a common approach. Recommendations and How-To-Do-It copy can be easier to follow if they are in numbered or bulleted lists. I found that sometimes using a check-box square in place of a number or a bullet can give the impression that each step should be read and checked off, even if only mentally.

I had to learn to write in a clear style and not chatty as a personal letter or ad copy, but keep it simple, direct, express the point, and relaxed yet professional. And using the active voice rather than the passive voice is important. Action is expressed directly rather than indirectly. 'Do the act' rather than 'the act was done'. Example: 'Pat tested the program', rather than, 'The program was tested by Pat'.

### ***Word Choice, Definitions and Formatting are Important***

Word Choice is important. I learned to use jargon (the technical terminology or characteristic idiom of a special activity or group) sparingly. Technical terms and words are helpful shorthand when addressing the documentation to readers within the profession, but may confuse readers who do not have that special background. The word 'yield' can mean 'the amount or quantity produced' to an engineer, but 'slow down' to the driver of a car or truck. Use legitimate technical terms when they communicate the meaning and ideas clearly, but not because they sound impressive. Avoid big, important-sounding words that can be replaced with simple words that mean the same thing. In other words, speak plain English.

If I had to use jargons and those rare words that must be used, I'd build a footnote or glossary of terms (or even a brief definition in parentheses) to keep the reader from div-

ing for the dictionary every few minutes. This also helps the reader keep a focus on the subject.

I learned in copy writing that clarity is crucial and the same is true about technical writing. It is best to be to the point and communicate the information in as few words as possible. Do not take up too much of the reader's time; avoid redundancies (a needless form of wordiness in which a modifier repeats an idea already contained within the word being modified). In other words, say it once.

Being consistent in the use of numbers, hyphens, units of measure, punctuation, equations, grammar, symbols, capitalization, technical terms, acronyms and abbreviations is essential for clarity. This creates a comfortable zone for the reader and avoids confusion.

Defining acronyms after the first use or as soon as possible in the document (or for larger documents define it again in another section) is not only standard, but useful. Do not assume the reader will know what they mean. If the definition of a word or terminology could possibly be unclear, define it in one way or another, i.e. index, footnote, or parenthesis. Certain sections of large documents may be separated for other uses in other documentation, so the definitions should be carried with it.

Break the writing into short sections and paragraphs for an easy format to make it easier to read. Starting with an outline is a great start. The outline can directly reflect the headings and sub-headings in the order the information are being presented. If I worked with separate special material experts (SMEs) for each section, they were assigned by heading for their input and reviews.

In the same way, short sentences are easier to read and hold the readers attention rather than long, drawn-out,

wordy, overly comma separated, strings of words like this one.

### *Use Visuals and Graphics Programs*

Visuals (drawings, photographs, maps, graphs, pie charts, bar charts, tables, and schematic diagrams) reinforce the text and make technical communication more effective. I found out that technical writers are not only expected to write the copy, but many times they are expected to design and create the supporting graphics. To do this I became skilled at the use of some basic graphic design programs such as Designer, Illustrator, PhotoShop, PowerPoint, and Visio. I held my first job because I knew the basics of these programs. I spent time teaching some of the other writers, and subsequently I received a Peers Award for my efforts.

Learning to use one or more of these graphic programs is essential. It will be part of the job, and in the market these days, it is almost expected that the writer also be the provider of graphic support in the documents; as well as providing presentation and sometimes educational support for the subject matter.

### *Be Persuasive, Confident, and Thorough*

Persuasiveness is the ability to move by argument, entreaty, or reason to a belief, position, or course of action. In technical writing I discovered that persuasiveness comes mostly from the confident and knowledgeable voice of the writer, you. Be direct and do not ask questions unless there are answers. Illustrations and past examples can help persuade and assure the reader the information is correct. Two plus two equals four. See! It works every time. Assure the reader it is as easy as that.

Also, projecting an aura of confidence in what you are doing often overcomes the thin-skin attitude that many SMEs

have toward their work. If you criticize their writing through proper editing, then your confidence can overcome many of their objections.

The technical depth is directly related to the prospective readers. Knowing the reader and writing to that depth is something I learned in advertising. Everything that is available on the subject should be covered in the document, or referenced to another available source. A bibliography or index can help here. A separate section with a list of special definitions and acronyms within the document is a big help.

### *Know the Final Products and What They Involve*

I found that knowing the medium and the final products and what they involve eases the writing process. Technical writing can run across a gamut of final products that dictate the writing style. Some of the final products of technical writing I finally became involved with are: standard documentation, web content or design, computer-based training, software manuals, hardware manuals, online help systems, and marketing material for high-tech products, to name some.

- Standard documentation can involve writing a lot of detail and explanation, including graphics and references. This includes items such as user's guides, training manuals, maintenance manuals, test procedures and results, SOPs (standard operating procedures), architectural design, environmental impact statements, and many more.
- Web content must be brief, direct, to the point within a few words, and in a limited screen area. I found it is much like advertising copy, the web page must sell itself at the first glance or the readers will move to the next page as fast as a mouse click, and you have lost them.

## Starting My Technical Writing Career

- Software and hardware manuals contain a great deal of detail and the most important focus for the technical writer is that the detail must be well organized. Keeping the common chunks of information together and in the proper order will keep the reader involved and better informed.
- Online help systems are a combination of the web page and the technical manual standards. There is a great deal of detail, but it must be in brief and focused statements. Each statement or paragraph must stand on its own because the normal process of moving from link to link in a help file will force their detachment from the previous paragraph, thus, it must speak for itself.
- Writing marketing material for high-tech products must be a combination of all of the above with the over-riding characteristic of a sales pitch tying it all together. Photos and graphics are usually used in marketing materials. Write the copy so it stands on its own. Do not describe the colors because they are in the photo; do not go over the numbers because they are in the graph; but explain why the colors and numbers should be on the reader's desk or in their business.

Developing and maintaining certain standards and definitions at the beginning of a document created consistency and familiarized me with the project. Creating an outline or even a flowchart of the process I was writing about helped me get involved in the new organization I was working for, as well as quickly learning their language. Charts and tables developed before writing helped me in researching the required information and getting to know my material experts. Starting with a pre-defined document template made it easier to organize and format the information.

Being a technical writer is more than about being a good writer and editor. It is about being a good researcher, coordinator, multi-task juggler, people person, and graphic artist, with the ability to change hats between many responsibilities. Each job is new with a great deal of education involved and with a huge learning curve, even for the most experienced technical writers. This is expected and the employers knew this and were willing to patiently work with me to learn their basics. Each project I worked was as new a project to my co-workers as it was to me. Most of the time I started in the front end of the development of a project.

I experienced working with one company, The Boeing Company (I started as a contract editor then a permanent employee) for several years, and found that when I was transferred from division to division it was like going from one company to another. The learning process had to start all over again. This is true in most large companies. And this experience helped me when I decided become a contract writer.

After working my way up the ladder to being a lead writer/editor, I decided it was time for a change and an expansion of my writing career. Besides, as a lead I was hiring contract writers who were being paid almost twice as much as I was, with less than half the experience. I decided to try contract writing myself, and I had to learn the process of the online job hunt.

### *Finding the Job*

Looking for a contract job is an easy but laborious process if you have a resume, cover letter and access to the Internet. Persistence is the key here. There are several services on the Internet that provide leads, job descriptions and potential employers who have access to your resume(s) and cover letter online. Of course, networking with friends and

colleagues is another way to tap into a potential job. Also, see if there is a Society for Technical Communication, or something similar, in your area. They may be of some help in job hunting and training.

Develop your resume with what you have. If you have some technical-writing experience or training then emphasize that. If you have little or no experience, then emphasize the writing or editing training, or publishing experiences you have. Writing copy for ads, brochures, newsletters, magazines, or presentations all show you can complete a job. Having something published like short stories is a plus and must be inserted into your resume. If you were editor for the school paper, put that in. The more detail you can place in the resume to describe the jobs you have had shows you were involved in the project. Technical writing involves a great deal of detail and multi-tasking. You may be asked to write many documents at the same time.

Don't be afraid to list all the other jobs you've had besides writing and editing. Something you did in the past may relate to a particular company seeking your services, and that would give you a foot in the door. For example, if you delivered auto parts for a company, maybe someone is looking to upgrade their online parts ordering service. You have some experience in the field, and a few talking points.

Be sure to list all the computer applications you are familiar with. If you feel more comfortable with it, you can list the ones you know very well, and the ones you are only familiar with. Be sure to tell which platforms you have experience with, i.e. Windows, Mac or Linux. Listing computer programming languages you have used or are familiar with are very important; HTML, Java, XML, etc.

The cover letter is an important tool in job hunting. Each of the online job search sites has a place to insert one, or sev-

eral, resumes, and a cover letter. The cover letter should be brief and very generic because it must be addressed to human resource people from all walks of life. It must include briefly your experience and strengths, what you can do for their company, and your availability.

Another great tool for applying for technical writing positions is to develop a personal web page. On it you can place your resume, letter, writing samples, and maybe even a photo of yourself. Many interviewers will have this page open when you come in for an interview. It also shows you have enough technical knowledge to put it together.

### *In Summary*

I placed my resume on Monster.com and within a couple of weeks I received an offer to work for the Eli Lilly Pharmaceutical Company in Indianapolis, 2000 miles away, a city I had no idea of where it even was. In a phone interview they asked me what wage I wanted as an hourly contract. I doubled what I was making at Boeing and I was shocked that they quickly agreed, asked me to come back and work an 18 month contract, and start as soon as possible. And I did.

Since then I have worked as a contract writer and editor from company to company using the same method; Eli Lilly invited me back for a second long contract. I have worked as a technical writer for several years, making good, steady money, and I don't regret the decision. It can work for you.

Being a technical writing is a simple expansion of your developed writing and editing practices and skills combined with organization and research. Working with others, especially an editor or another writer is a plus for accuracy, but you will find that in most cases you will be on your own. Keeping it simple and preplanning are the keys to being a

successful technical writer. Review, review and review, by yourself and with others, are the three essential elements in writing any document. Technical Writing sometimes isn't as technical as it is just common sense put to paper.



### About the Author

**Patrick Kennedy** has been a professional writer, editor, and graphic artist for over 30 years and currently works from Boise, Idaho. In the past he has freelanced out of Seattle, Indianapolis, and most recently Las Vegas.

Kennedy has published a novel, *Toy Shadows*, magazine articles, short stories and poetry. “I am especially proud that I contribute a regular lighthearted column, *Inside Out & Round*

*About*, to the Senior Wire News Service, which I am collecting into a book, *How to Have Fun with Retirement*, and I write a regular column for the East Skagit Community News in Concrete, Washington.”

Over time Kennedy has also worked as a paperboy, professional musician, elevator operator, shipping clerk, soldier, teletype operator, bartender, bar owner, janitor, advertising agency owner, editor for several small literary publications, publisher, copywriter, art gallery owner, custom picture framer, salesman, and technical writer. “This gives me a wide-ranging list of experience to call on in my freelance writing and editing.”

Kennedy’s story, experience, writing samples and contact information can be viewed on his web page [www.abetterword.com](http://www.abetterword.com)



**Patrick M.  
Kennedy**

# Getting the Ghostwriting Gig

© Marie Pacha

I've been writing poetry for about as long as I could legally vote. Since I am 54 now that's been a few years, give or take a decade. My first book...of poetry (go figure) was published in 2004. By the time the second royalty check arrived it was apparent to me that I was going to get neither rich, nor famous writing poetry. In fact, at the rate I was going I was likely to starve to death soon.

That book was followed by a short fantasy. It took off like an overweight cow. It's been read, but for some reason I was not the overnight sensation I thought I should be. Darn!

Obviously I chose this career late in life. The reasons for that are personal and not really relevant to this essay, but starting so late I had and have little room to make another career change. I had decided that I was a writer and I had to figure out how to be successful.

I could stand on my laurels as "the published author of two books" and slowly die of hunger, or I could do something about it. I chose the latter. By this time I had come to the rather obvious conclusion that there are a LOT of writers out there, competing for the very markets I wanted to attract. A lot of those writers (sorry to say) are average, a few are pretty bad, and a few are exceptional. I wanted to be one of the exceptional ones.

I battled my ego (after all, I was perfect, wasn't I?) and I went back to college. There I was older than most of the professors, not to mention my classmates...and there I was a

## Getting the Ghostwriting Gig

*published author* trying to prove that I was good. (I mentioned my ego didn't I?) As it turned out, I was pretty good. As it also turned out, I wasn't *quite* perfect and I had a lot left to learn. And I did. I concentrated on taking every writing course available at the junior college I attended, and I checked the CV's of the Professors teaching those classes to make sure they had enough experience to not only evaluate the technical aspects of my writing, but to appreciate my creative ability as well. I learned. In fact I learned a lot.

I've kept all my textbooks from those subjects and refer to them often; especially the ones that deal with grammar and punctuation.

I took classes on Technical Writing, on Communication in the Workplace, on Literary Nonfiction Writing, and on Screenplay Writing; just to name a few. I took additional courses in communication and learned even more about writing in the process.

I went from a being a person who was actually rather sloppy in my work; to becoming one who read and reread everything I wrote looking for errors, and strove to express myself in the voice I wanted the world to hear.

About halfway through this excursion I realized that financial aid was still not enough to guarantee survival and bolstered by an A in a class decided it was time to declare my eligibility for writing projects. Fortunately for me, in one of my classes I had already created my CV in which I flaunted my artistic and literary talents and accomplishments. (I decided in that process to minimize the 20 years of clerical and office work I had plodded through, and not to list 34 years of full time motherhood as a job.) I was also extremely fortunate in that the professor who taught that class not only demanded that the students adhere to the basic format of a resume, but make it personal and creative.

It was also in that class that I learned to compose an effective query letter. And by the way, I hate those. I want

my writing to stand on its own, and that dang ego of mine insists that anyone who actually reads my manuscripts will automatically offer me the contract of a lifetime. Not true, at least not yet.

One of the assignments was to present ourselves as applying for a job in our chosen field and submit a resume and a letter of application for the position. Because my profession is writer I adapted that and turned in my CV and a query letter with a synopsis of one of my shorter manuscripts. Because the class was actually in Business Writing I felt I had to make an especially strong presentation and grab the professor's attention. So I wrote and rewrote that letter, and even attached the manuscript (which he read and enjoyed!) Technically the letter was perfect and the prof rewarded my creativity with a perfect grade.

Please note; I submit my CV with queries and NOT a resume. My resume boasts such mundane things as two years in a clerical capacity in the Parking Department of a major university and 4 years working as a bill collector. While I handled students' written complaints and got a pretty clear picture of how poorly much of the population appears to write, that's not an aspect I felt would add to my prospects. But I was fortunate in that I had a mentor who explained the difference. This same person also gave me a gift; my first business cards which were decorated with a quill and announced my profession as author. And having it announced it; I had something to live up to.

And so, CV in hand, or in Word Document as the case may be, I set out across the Internet in search of work.

There's a lot of it out there I soon discovered. Many of the websites require a membership fee which was beyond my meager budget, not to mention the fact that my ego still insisted I should be paid for work, and not pay to find it. I found free sites too, and on one of those I found a listing for a ghostwriter.

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Hmmm, I thought...reading further. The employer wanted someone with a sense of humor, familiar with teenagers, for a story centered in part in a Midwestern rural area. BINGO! They were looking for me! Just ask me! I have a sense of humor. And I have two teenage sons who seem to multiply into hordes over the summer months. And I live in a small town in Iowa; surrounded by corn fields. The pay you ask? Well the pay was actually pretty low if you look at recommended fees for ghostwriters, but I didn't know that at the time, and it really didn't matter. I needed a place to start and something to pad my resume.

I wanted this job. More importantly I needed this job. I wrapped up my CV and submitted it with a couple of writing samples (as requested), and sent it off via e-mail with a cover letter explaining why I was perfect for the position. Within a day or so I had a response. They liked my work, but in order to get the job I had to pass a test and beat out my competition. They would send me their notes for the book by regular mail and I had to write a synopsis.

My poor mailman must have felt like a vulture was lurking overhead for the next few days until the envelope arrived. I had it opened before I was back inside the house, and was reading before I sat at my desk. I was both relieved and delighted as I got further into the notes to realize that I could indeed write this story, and more importantly to me at the time that I could write a clear and humorous synopsis.

I sat down at my keyboard and the words streamed out. And then I reread them, and edited. And then I reread them again and again. Finally satisfied I sent the synopsis off via my e-mail, and held my breath. It's a good thing the response came within a day, because that's about as long as I can hold my breath.

I got the job. My dogs covered their ears at my scream of delight. At that point we discussed contract arrangements;

still by e-mail, and I waited impatiently for the contract to arrive by regular mail and then promptly returned it.

It took about three months to write and do my portion of the revisions, and to receive my final check. It took my employers another four months to do the final editing and publish (they had already decided to self-publish.) A year ago I received my copy of the hard cover manuscript.

My name isn't on that manuscript, but my name was listed as payee on the check. The story was not one I would ever have written on my own, and the ideas and outline were my employers'.

They were so satisfied with my work that we have embarked upon the sequel. My fee is higher; still not at maximum industry standards, but I have developed a good working relationship with my employers and I am already familiar with the "voice" we are writing in; as well as the characters.

I'd be lying if I said that experience did not bolster my confidence. It did. But there are not a lot of ghostwriting opportunities available; at least not in the genres I feel most comfortable in. So I have expanded my search for work, and now include freelance writing in my entries on Google.

I'm still one writer among many looking for work in this fashion. It's a very competitive field. And it takes a lot of searching to find jobs. Not to mention that I am still rejected more often than hired, or my inquiries are simply ignored.

But in the past two weeks I have sold four short articles which will be published in the coming months. I have another contract to sign for an essay in an anthology; scheduled to be published by next spring. And I am negotiating a contract with an individual who wants a book written about her life. If that pans out the way I hope, the project will commence late this fall. And the fees I charge for ghostwriting

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are gradually creeping up to be consistent with existing standards.

I still write my poetry, and someday will submit another manuscript for publication. And one of my poems has been published in a couple of military periodicals and read by the President of the United States (I know because I have his response.) Music is currently being written for that poem and it's one of my dreams to someday hear it performed. Another of my poems is scheduled to be recorded on a CD by a Canadian artist.

Looking back it seems that most of my poems were written while driving at highway speeds or in the shower. A lot of them went down the drain with the water as I couldn't find a pen that would stand up to the flow, and it's not easy...let alone safe to be writing while moving at speeds in excess of 60 mph.

I don't write poetry the way I used to which might be a good thing, especially for other travelers!

The reasons for that are more practical than I usually am. I diverted most of my time to writing things I was pretty sure would sell. And my poetry is classified as traditional because I use rhyme. Quite honestly, with the exception of a few pieces my work is not considered salable. Publishers today do not want traditional rhyming poetry.

I have decided to study poetry and attempt to alter some of my existing poems, or to write new ones and adapt them to established forms of poetry...free verse, haiku, and sonnets; just to name a very few. The words that used to come so easily; that I used to type out and share with very little thought I now analyze and critique.

Don't get me wrong. I still love my "old" poems. I wrote them at a time when my emotions were at a peak, and the very act of expressing my feelings was cathartic for me. I know they touch other people in a similar fashion, and I have

friends that ask me to call and “poem” them; in other words recite my poetry. My poetic muse is merely resting and storing up experiences and feelings that will be released when the time is right.

By now you probably think my writing career has been one great success story. *Wrong!* Unfortunately not every publisher has recognized my obvious genius; though I am quite sure they somehow managed to notice my ego. How did I handle it?

Simple...I filed the rejection letter or notice with the others. Unlike some authors I do not use revolving file 13 (the trash can), but rather I save mine. Someday when I am rich and famous and these same publishers are howling at my doorstep like hungry wolves I will reject them.

I suppose there are a few lucky writers who have never received a rejection slip. Da\*# you! Oops, sorry that slipped out. Lucky is the keyword in that previous sentence.

Writers, even very good ones, are at the whim of publishers. No matter how intriguing or entertaining your story, publishers are also dependent on the whim of the reading and purchasing public, and economics will win over talent in most cases.

There are ways around that of course. You can change your style and genre to fit with current bestsellers. Or you can remain true to yourself and continue writing as you have always done, and risk starvation. Or...you can do both. Expand the realm of your expertise, and still work on the type of work you prefer.

A really good writer can change his/her voice and his/her styles to suit the project. A really, really good writer will welcome the challenge and conquer it. And a really good writer is willing to learn more about the art of writing to become more knowledgeable and more skilled.

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One ghostwriting job, and five essays is not enough to pay my bills, and my teenage sons devour food. I spend hours and hours every week searching for positions, submitting my CV and rewriting my query letter to fit the individual listing. Often I don't receive any response at all. Often someone else is selected.

And sometimes I get discouraged. When that happens I evaluate myself. I look at my abilities, my talent, and my desires. And I know that of all possible professions writing is the one I am most suited for. I dust off my keyboard and let the words flow.

Am I unique as a writer? Perhaps in that I write in more genres than some. But I was lucky in receiving that first ghostwriting gig. It was a matter of being in the right place at the right time, and having the relative knowledge and experience to suit my employers. If I have a character trait that will hold me in good stead in this profession it is my hardheadedness. I know I can write! I just have to be patient until the rest of the world realizes it too!



### About the Author

About six years ago, during a divorce, **Marie Pacha** realized she would soon need to find a career that would hold her interest for the rest of her life. For the previous 12 years she had devoted herself as a full time mother to two sons, and she still lists Mom as her primary occupation although one son is now in college and the other a senior in high school.



**Marie Pacha**

In the time since, she went back to school and completed an Associates Degree; deciding as she did so to focus her education on every aspect of writing. Since then she's had a book of poetry published, and a book of fantasy, is currently ghostwriting her second book, and two of her poems are being used as lyrics (one will be included on a CD being recorded in Canada.)

When not writing she paints anything; from the walls of her Iowa home, to faces...to murals in New York City.

# Tips Writing for Internet Income

© Amy Krug

Someone nosy: “So what are you up to this summer? Are you teaching?”

Me: “No. I’m going to try to make some money freelancing.”

Someone nosy: “Yeah. Hah. Good luck.”

This was a common conversation I had the spring of the first year I was a full-time English teacher. Mainly, I told people I wanted to freelance during the summer because I didn’t want them to look down their noses at me if I told them what I really wanted to do, which was sleep, read a lot of trashy books, and work on my tan.

Hey, it was the first summer I’d had off in almost fifteen years; I should be able to enjoy myself, right? Free summers are one of the perks of being a full-time teacher, and it was a perk I was wholeheartedly looking forward to.

But as my carefree summer quickly approached, I started thinking freelancing was, actually, a good idea – especially since my paychecks would stop coming for over three months. After all, I was a writing teacher, and for as long as I could remember I wanted to be a full-time writer. Four months off seemed like a good opportunity. I didn’t have a lot of expectations about how much money I’d make or how much writing I’d get to do, but based on horror stories I had heard from people who had tried to freelance, I figured whatever expectations I harbored should be pretty low.

And, at first, my expectations were right on target.

### *Frustration and Rejection*

Freelancing, I discovered, was hard – it was hard to find jobs, it was hard to apply for them, and, most importantly, it was hard to get them. I subscribed to a freelance newsletter and website to find jobs, one that even cost \$30/month; I talked to everyone I knew who had freelance experience to see what resources they used; I consulted books from the library and *Writer's Market* to see what markets or publications I was possibly missing. I even researched what a professional writer's resume should look like, and continually revised and rewrote mine to try to make it as good as it possibly could be.

For a few weeks, my efforts reaped nothing but frustration. With my shiny new resume, I applied for dozens of freelance jobs but rarely got responses. At first it was disappointing; some of the freelance jobs looked like fun, and I was sure that I was qualified. And the responses I did get were not very promising. They were either for very low-paying jobs, or from shady advertisers who wanted to pay me \$0.10 per post to log on to various web forums and tout their products (regardless of whether I used, liked, or even ever heard of their product before).

But then, finally, a glimmer of hope appeared on the horizon.

### *Too Good To Be True?*

One of the websites I scoured daily for freelance jobs (one of the free ones, I may add) posted an opportunity to write web content for a website called *lifetips.com*. Since I was a web developer for several years and also taught a *Writing for the Web* class, I thought I'd probably be a pretty good candidate. But I'd applied for several other web writing po-

sitions and I hadn't heard back, so I knew I wasn't a lock for the position.

From the start, though, this opportunity looked promising. There was one major difference between the application process for this job and the process I'd followed for other jobs: I applied for the position on the [lifetips.com](http://lifetips.com) website directly, rather than via an email through a job bank website. I would suggest that anyone looking for a freelance gig try to find a direct application for the opportunity rather than using a generic e-mail or form through a freelance job bank website; that way, you know you're supplying the editors or publishers with exactly the information they want, and that the information definitely getting where it needs to go.

Once I found [lifetips.com](http://lifetips.com), I reviewed the format of the site, and saw that it provided two-to-three paragraph "tips" on various topics, ranging from data storage to car donations to green living and everything in between. To apply to be a "research guru" (what the research writers were called), the application required three sample tips authored by me, a bio, and a resume. I familiarized myself with the writing already out there and set to work writing my sample tips.

It took me maybe an hour to complete the application form (but it was raining so I couldn't work on my tan anyway). I submitted it, and then promptly moved on to applying for other freelance jobs.

It took about two days, but the editor at [lifetips.com](http://lifetips.com) wrote me back to let me know they were interested in having me write for them as a research guru. I was happy, of course, but I still wasn't ecstatic. I knew that many of the freelance jobs available paid poorly for substantial amounts of work, so I was taking an "I'll-believe-it-when-I-see-it" attitude. I accepted the editor's offer with a grain of salt and started looking over the gigs that were available for research gurus.

As I was perusing the job boards with available writing assignments, my first thought was that the whole lifetips.com setup was too good to be true. This is the way it worked: I applied for a specific writing assignment; for example, I could apply to author a brand new “tips” site on a specific topic, like adoption or nail care or pet insurance. If assigned the topic, I usually had to come up with 100 tips per topic – and, if the topic was sponsored, I could make up to \$10 per tip.

Now, I’ve never been good at math, but I could figure out that 100 tips at \$10 per tip was \$1000, pre-tax. And I would have ten days to two weeks to complete the tip site. Based on the other freelance jobs I’d been applying for (and getting responses about), which paid anywhere from \$2.50-\$5.00 per 500 word article, lifetips.com sounded like a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Which, of course, made me suspicious.

### *It Was For Real*

I decided to do a little research of my own to see if any other freelance writers out there had written for lifetips.com and if it was as good of an opportunity as it sounded. I figured if people had bad experiences, I would find something on the web about it – after all, if there’s one thing that’s for sure it’s that people like to complain.

I didn’t come up with much in my research. I found a few blogs where the authors talked about writing for lifetips.com, but they said only positive things about the experience. So I figured, what the heck? I may as well try it and see what happens.

My first gig was to write 30 tips on ecologically conscious, or “green,” living. The tips weren’t sponsored, so I could only make up to \$5/tip. I completed 20 of the tips, and lo and behold, I got a check for \$100. Even as I took the check to the bank to cash it I thought something would go wrong, and the cashier would laugh at me and tell me that it wasn’t

real legal tender. But that didn't happen. I deposited the check and there it was, \$100 in my account.

### *Writing Like Crazy about Crazy Things*

From that day, I was sold. I applied for new tips sites like crazy. My first large-scale assignment was to write 100 tips on saunas, everything from sauna accessories to steam rooms to portable saunas.

And, to answer your question, no – I knew nothing about saunas. But I was darn well ready to learn.

So I did. I scoped out sauna sites on the web and researched the heck out of them. I learned about the history of saunas, what makes a five-star sauna, what the difference between a steam room and a sauna is, and lots of other fun, useless facts. Well, useless, except that I was writing about these facts and making money at the same time.

I'll admit – writing approximately 100 pages about saunas isn't exactly what I had in mind when I thought about being a freelance writer. As most people probably do, I had romantic illusions of writing about my travels, my hobbies, my family, and other, well, interesting topics, and getting paid for it. Talking about the best kind of wood to use in an outdoor sauna (by the way, cedar is the traditional choice for five-star Finnish sauna) doesn't exactly qualify as a fascinating topic for me. But the bottom line was that I was writing, getting paid pretty good money, and adding to my list of publications. And my anxiety about not getting a paycheck for almost four months had been alleviated a little bit.

After I completed the sauna tips, I got an assignment for a new site about nursing degrees. And frankly, I knew less about nursing degrees than I did about saunas – but, again, I was ready to learn. And learn I did, and came up with approximately 100 pages about online, community college, and traditional nursing degrees and nursing programs.

And it didn't stop there. It turns out a client (saunas.com, or Sauna Warehouse) wanted helpful tips and information on saunas and their products for their website; I had done so well on the first sauna site that I got that gig, too, and I put some of my newly obtained sauna knowledge to good use.

Then the same situation arose for a client interested in nursing tips. South University Online was getting ready to offer a new nursing program and liked what I wrote for the lifetips.com nursing degree site, so I was assigned another 100 tips for the client about nursing programs. I learned so much about nursing degrees that the lifetips.com editor made me an "expert guru" on the subject, which means that they would pay me a \$100 bonus (if I filled out a form about my expertise on the subject) and would promote me as an expert to other clients.

### *Reaping the Benefits*

All told, by the end of the summer I'd earned almost \$4000 pre-tax with my lifetips.com job. I was thrilled. If I had taught one class over the summer to try to supplement my income, I would have made only about \$2000. I would have had to teach an hour and a half every day for six weeks in addition to grading papers, holding office hours, and spending travel time to and from school. In comparison, it took me anywhere from an hour to two hours to write 10 tips – and I could do it in the comfort of my own house, at any time I wanted.

In addition to the money I made with my writing gig, I also learned some valuable lessons. For one thing, the experience made me realize that I could actually earn some money while writing. I may not be able to write about exactly what I want, but I was still writing and getting paid. I also learned that landing a freelance job is a lot like throwing darts at a dart board. I have to throw a lot of darts to hit a bulls eye (I'm not a very good darts player – if you are, think about it

## Tips on tip writing

When writing “tips” for any internet site, keep these guidelines in mind:

- **One topic per tip.** Don’t jump around; if you’re talking about how to clean a sauna, stick to that topic and only that topic – don’t start talking about sauna accessories mid-way through the tip.

- **Keep it simple.** Remember your audience; the readers are probably looking for quick information on whatever the topic is, so don’t load the tip down with complex terms or big words.

- **Write in second person for clarity.** Especially for tips directly instructing the reader on how to do something, write in second person (using the “you” family of pronouns) to directly address the reader. This direct address makes the tip more obvious and user-friendly.

- **Do your research.** As tempting as it seems –

in different terms), but if I gave up that bulls eye would never happen. I probably applied for 60 different freelance jobs, and actually got four of them.

Which leads me to my next lesson-learned: I was worth more than \$2.00 an hour. One of the few freelance jobs that I actually got was to write keyword articles for websites, and the site only paid \$2.00 per 500

especially if you’re tasked with writing a large number of tips – make sure all your research is solid and your facts are supportable. Often, you will be writing a lot on a subject you know little about, which makes your research all the more important.

- **Don’t reuse tips.** Especially when writing a large number of tips on a seemingly limited subject (such as patio doors), try to make every tip uniquely helpful. Reusing tips or topics will likely be nixed by your editor and send you back to the drawing board.

words. Out of desperation, I wrote a few of these articles – but realizing that I’d spent two or three hours and only earned about \$6.00 was completely demoralizing. I hadn’t made that little money since I was in junior high and baby-sat during the summer. I cut my ties on that job and moved on, and it paid off, since I found the [lifetips.com](http://lifetips.com) job that paid more than \$2.00/hour.

Lastly, I learned about “professional writing.” With my [lifetips.com](http://lifetips.com) gigs, I had certain writing standards I had to live up to, and I had deadlines to meet. I was a professional writer, and I had to act like one; putting off writing until the last minute or missing a deadline just wasn’t acceptable. Sometimes it was hard, since I wasn’t researching and writing about the most interesting topics on the planet, but sometimes making a little money isn’t all flowers and puppies. And because I was professional, I continued to get writing assignments, and continued to make more money. And I still had time to read trashy books and work on my tan.

But perhaps one of the most satisfying outcomes of my summer of freelance writing is that next summer I can say to people that I am going to make some money writing, and I’ll have proof that it’s possible.



### About the Author

**Amy Krug** is a freelance writer from Ohio, where she teaches English at the University of Dayton. She has a Master’s Degree in English Composition and writes both creative nonfiction and fiction. She enjoys art, movies, reading, knitting, travel, and being with her husband, daughter, and kitties.



**Amy Krug**

# Writing for Television

© Michael Allen

I was a true TV kid.

When I look back on my tender childhood, I estimate that I watched 90,000 hours of TV as a kid — 50,000 hours of those were “violent” TV. If you listen to all those children’s TV advocates, I should have become an axe murderer!

Our family did not have cable until I was eleven years old. Until that glorious moment, we only had four channels, sometimes five or six, if you were good with rabbit ears. Once we did get cable, it was only 12 channels, but for me, it was heaven on earth!

I loved TV. The people on TV were funnier and smarter than any of my family or friends. I learned about morals and ethics from the *Twilight Zone*. I learned about politics and social issues on *Phil Donahue*. I learned about women from watching *Charlie’s Angels*!

However, not everyone was happy with my 80+ hours of TV viewing per week. In fact, my mother was so upset with my tube addiction that she decided to cut the cord.

She came marching in with a pair of metal scissors, prepared to slice the electrical cord while the TV was plugged in and on! Having learned about the dangers of electricity from the TV show *Mr. Wizard*, I warned her not to, but she was intent on teaching me a lesson. Mom cut the cord, sparks went flying, and so did she.

My mother fell to the ground and was seriously electrocuted, but thank God, I was able to fix the TV electrical

cable with some help from Radio Shack and knowledge from past episodes of *Mission Impossible*.

Noticing my mom had comedic talent, I informally started my writing career and came up with practical jokes to play on the dear woman. I was a huge fan of *Candid Camera* and my mother was the perfect foil for my juvenile schemes. One of my favorites was carefully inserting tiny exploding pellets into her precious cigarettes.

When she lit up, the tip of the cigarette would explode, providing me hours of unrestrained hilarity. I justified my pranks by claiming to “save her life from lung cancer,” but by doing so I raised her blood pressure. My other pranks included turning our dog loose on my hapless baby sitter who would climb the nearest bar school, scream for help and begin praying, as our ferocious poodle jumped up, clicking his teeth at toes.

In school, I was just the opposite, very shy. I never took part in anything with my peers. I despised English classes because of all the grammatical rules. However, when I reached college, I found a creative outlet on the campus radio station. Along with two friends, we created a weekly comedy series that we improvised, adding special effects.

But two weeks before graduation, I and one of my friends were expelled from college for performing a parody of the school’s illustrious founder, Jerry Falwell. Sensing I was on the right track, I headed out to Hollywood, not knowing a soul.

Starting off as a wanna-be TV writer in Hollywood is the classic *Catch-22*; you’re told that no producer will read your scripts unless they come through an agent. And agents will not read your scripts unless you have been produced. It seems like an impossible situation, much like my dating life.

When I first got to Hollywood, agents would not read my scripts. Or worse, they would promise to read my scripts, get my hopes up, but never read them. So I decided I was not going to hold back. I was going to do anything it took to

write on a show, including some crazy schemes that sound like episodes of “I Love Lucy.”

One of those schemes was sneaking on to studio lots and trying to get a job.

On one covert journey to the CBS/MTM studio, I was lucky enough to see Roseanne on the lot. At the time, she had the number one program in America, and so I approached the domestic goddess about writing on the show. “My husband does all the hiring,” she snorted with that nasal tone of hers.

Minutes later, I saw her then-hubby, Tom Arnold, driving a studio cart in a wild manner.

He was “pretending” to run over people on the lot. But people were really scared and jumping out of the way. He almost hit me as well. As I look back, I wish I had let him. Maybe I could have sued my way into a staff writing job.

As much as I liked “Roseanne,” my favorite show was “The Simpsons.” In fact, my best spec script was for “The Simpsons.” So you can imagine how excited I was when I read that Nancy Cartwright, who does the voice of Bart, was going to speak on voiceovers!

She spoke at the Church of Scientology in East Hollywood, and afterwards I approached her. I introduced myself, told her how I came out to L.A. to be a TV writer and would love to write for “The Simpsons.” She looked at me very seriously and said, “You don’t need a writing job, you need Scientology.” She went on to tell me about this religion, but all I remember thinking was: “Bart Simpson is trying to convert me!”

My next scheme to get on “The Simpsons” was to take an improv class taught at UCLA Extension by Dan Castellaneta (the voice of Homer) and his wife Deb Lacosta. I’m not an actor, but I have done stand up comedy. So how hard could this class be? All I had to do, I thought, was impress Dan, and maybe he would help me get on “The Simpsons.”

## Tips for Breaking into TV Writing

**1. Get an agent or a manager.** When I first came to Hollywood, the late Jeffrey Boam (writer of some of the Indiana Jones and Lethal Weapons movies) told me, “Get an agent or leave Hollywood.” So how do you get representation?

**2. Write spec scripts.** You must have at least two scripts of shows on the air; these specs serve as samples of your work.

**3. Don't be shy to ask friends for referrals to agents.** If you know someone who knows someone, then use those contacts. Or get a job at a literary agency as an assistant, befriend agents and ask them to read your specs.

**4. If you can't get an agent or a manager,** but do have some cash, hire a well-connected entertainment lawyer to submit your spec scripts to producers.

**5. If you can't get an agent, manager, or hire a lawyer, then call up the production offices of a TV show** (listed in weekly issues of *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*) and ask whoever answers the

phone to send you a release form. Tell them: “I'm in between agents now. Can you send me a release form?” With the release form, you can send in your script.

**6. Don't be afraid to pull stunts!** Sneak into studios, send wacky (but clever) gifts! I once went to a custom cookie-making place and had them bake up a giant cookie in the shape of the state of Texas, and sent it to a producer at King of the Hill; it worked.

**7. Befriend all assistants of agents and producers.**

Those underpaid slaves are the gate-keepers, get them on your side.

**8. Make contacts in Hollywood by volunteering** for charities. AIDS and pediatric diseases always bring out the biggest names. The best charity for making contacts? Anything with Pediatric AIDS.

**9. If anyone treats you badly, walk right out the door.** Do not accommodate cruel people on power trips. After I wrote for “Beavis and Butthead,” I got an agent and was sent out on several interviews. One interview was at the game show “Love Connection.” The guy interviewing me tore my resume in half, right in front of me.

I didn't know it, but both Dan and Deb studied for years at Second City in Chicago. And besides being very nice people, they were incredible at improvisation. I was clearly in over my head; it was much harder than stand up (where you get to rehearse). But I was able to make Dan laugh at least once every class.

I decided to wait until the very last class and ask him if he might be able to help me onto the show. But unfortunately he didn't teach the last class; on that particular night he had to record voiceovers for the show. I was foiled again!

By this time, I had taken lots of classes and snuck onto every major studio lot in Hollywood, but I was back at square one. I was very depressed, and one night while cooking some macaroni, I heard weird laughter coming from the TV in the other room.

I walked in and "Beavis and Butthead" was on MTV. I literally thought, "I went to school with guys like that. I know I can write that show!" I mailed my spec for "The Simpsons" to the story editor of "Beavis and Butthead" in New York City. In my cover letter, I said I would "stick my head in the oven and turn on the gas" if they did not hire me. Of course I was kidding... sort of.

I fully expected MTV to send my script back with the classic "we only accept scripts through agents" rejection letter. But to my great surprise, the story editor called and asked me to pitch some ideas.

**10. Don't reach outside yourself for contrived comedy inspiration.** Draw on your experiences. What may not seem funny to you is often hysterical to other people. A good example is my life. For me it's been one bitter disappointment after another, but to others, it's a never-ending comedy show... when I figured that out, I started cashing in on my misfortune.

They passed on my first set of pitches, but in my second set, they found one to produce: Beavis gets his arm caught in a mechanical blood pressure machine, which actually happened to me at a pharmacy. Amazingly, I made my first Hollywood sale in New York City; everything was done by phones and faxes and Fed Ex.

## Writing for Television

I wrote the script and made a paltry \$600 off that sale, but suddenly, agents would take my calls and read my scripts. It was like I actually existed and I quickly got signed by an agency.

When my episode aired, I watched it on the very same TV that I had heard the weird laughter from months ago. It was surreal, as if I had gone full circle. The phone rang off the hook that night.

For me it was one of the biggest moments of my life. I recalled all the adults who scolded me as a kid for watching too much TV. Well, my show was on TV, where were they? Oh, the taste of sweet revenge!

Muhahahahahaha!

But my mother was so embarrassed by my success that she actually stopped going to church for six months for fear that a fellow church-goer might watch the show all the way through and might see my name on the credits.

When I started writing for some shows on Nickelodeon, she began going back to church, thus avoiding eternal damnation.

Today, my mom watches Fox News, 24 hours a day; she even has it on while she sleeps.

I may have to cut the cord.



### About the Author

**Michael Allen's** credits include serving as a writer on 4 TV series, co-author of a "King of the Hill" book, department editor for a national magazine and managing editor for a Los Angeles publication. Currently, he edits two web sites and writes scripts about his wacky childhood on the side. For hobbies, he enjoys eavesdropping on peoples' first dates. You can reach Michael at: MichaelPAllen2007@Yahoo.com or visit his web site [www.SanVicenteMedia.com](http://www.SanVicenteMedia.com)



**Michael Allen**

# Earn More In Less Time By Writing About What You Know

© Resmi Jaimon

Early in my writing career I learned that “writing about writing” could be a lucrative way to earn income. My first work was for AbsoluteWrite, which was nonpaying, but allowed me to gain exposure. Since those were the days when I longed for exposure and more work, I wrote for free or in exchange for a free ebook or a bio. Today, I earn my living as a writer, writing about various topics including real estate, science & technology, travel, food, celebrity interviews, business, and education, to name a few. I have over 100 articles in print and online under my name in over 33 publications, and nearly 75 as a ghostwriter for corporate websites.

## *The Beginning*

The Internet was not as popular during 2002 in India as it was in several other countries. After finishing my studies and a short attempt to find a full-time job, I turned to searching for “work-from-home” jobs. Having graduated in Computer Applications and with diplomas in software engineering, I searched the Internet to find suitable work.

Somehow, I came across the words “technical writer” and “technical writing” and I discovered that this work could be done from the comfort of home. Thus began my journey using my favorite search engine, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), to find an opportunity to write as well as use my programming knowledge / computer skills.

I had never dreamt of writing a single article! Gradually, I searched the net more and understood the basics of starting a freelance writing career. My research helped me to understand that freelance writing could be for any genre including food, travel, technology, business and so on. I depended entirely on the websites for writers to understand the tricks of the trade for freelance writing and how to write a query.

I then started searching for various combination of keywords including “writer’s guidelines,” “editorial guidelines,” “freelance writers,” and “freelance opportunities.” Use any search engine you personally feel comfortable with.

Eventually I came across an online classified advertisement calling for a freelance writer to write several articles for an upcoming Kerala website. I responded to this advertisement via email and was asked to send sample published articles. I wasn’t published, but I wanted to pursue the opportunity so I wrote a couple of sample articles and sent them for consideration. I got the contract.

I should mention that I did have a better chance of getting the assignment than an outsider would because I was born and brought up in Kerala and have known the place, cuisine, language, etc. for a quarter of a century. I was sure to mention this familiarity in my query.

I was paid 50% of the agreed amount upfront and the remaining amount upon completing the work. To write more than 35 articles, I was given a popular guidebook on Kerala for reference and the rest I comprised from reading articles published on the web, and personal experience, including that of my family.

Although there was a long eight month break to gain any print or online publication, this work resulted in having more than 35 articles to my credit in a single assignment!

My next big break came with a couple of articles being

accepted by two major Indian publications – a newspaper and a magazine. I decided it wasn't just enough to write for paying publications, but for some free publications as it means more exposure, which is necessary in the initial stages of one's career.

I contacted Jenna Glatzer, who was the Editor-in-Chief of AbsoluteWrite ([www.absolutewrite.com](http://www.absolutewrite.com)). She accepted two of my articles and I was offered a free bio and a free e-book or free subscription to AbsoluteWrite's paid market newsletter. I opted for both an e-book and paid market newsletter. (Note: As of this writing, AbsoluteWrite now offers payment for articles it publishes.)

For more than two years, I received emails from across the globe from experienced or aspiring writers asking for a friendly conversation or suggestions to break into writing for publications. This was a real boost for me and I started listing the publication in my bio.

Once I received the assurance of acceptance from several quarters, and when I wrote for more than seven publications within six months of my first published article, I decided to stop writing for free. For those who are in the need for published clips, websites like Absolute Write are a good place to publish their work.

A word of caution though – if you are writing for free, please make a point not to grant “All rights” to your work to the publication. It is always better to give only “one-time rights” so that you can seek opportunities to sell the same material to other publications!

### *Paying Gigs*

Today, I write about a variety of topics like “how to break into food writing,” “markets for technical writers,” “interviewing celebrities,” etc., relying on the knowledge I have gained through writing for over 30 publications since my

first published clip in 2003. These little paying gigs proved useful for me to evaluate my writing skills and my possible future prospects in the print and online media. These paying assignments, which brought in checks for \$10-\$30, made me realize the potential of markets which could take only a few minutes of my time, but earn a decent payment.

During 2003, I was taking Shery Ma Belle Arrieta-Russ's free online writing class "Weekly Writes: 52 Weeks of Writing Bliss." Initially, I was enthused while reading the chapters. That enthusiasm soon died out and I became too lazy to practice or even read the lessons. A few months later, I received a notice that Shery Ma Belle Arrieta-Russ was looking for exercises written based on her lessons provided in the free e-course. Unfortunately, my hard disk had recently crashed and I lost almost all of its contents, including the newsletters from the free course.

I kept procrastinating until one day I decided to write the exercise and send it for consideration. So, what

## Tips for Beginners

- Never say you are new to writing unless you are specifically asked the question. But be honest if asked and tell the editor you are unpublished but willing to offer writing samples for consideration.
- Have patience. It takes time to get published. If you need regular income, make sure you have it with other kinds of work until you can establish consistency with your writing.
- Be careful when committing to or signing contracts. Check the "rights" (copy-rights) you are giving to the publication, and the amount you are agreeing to write for. When possible, seek a kill-fee. (Kill-fee is given when a publication decides not to publish your article after it has been accepted and the contract is signed.)
- Ask your editor if you are allowed to add your bio

helped me stop procrastinating? Well, it was nothing more than the need to earn more to meet some expenses! By the time I attempted these exercises in August of 2003, I was published in about seven publications. Although I anticipated that I would receive rejection of my submissions, I decided to give it a try.

Despite the hard disk crash, I still had six or seven lessons from the course. I opened MS-Word and started typing my thoughts based on each exercise given in the lesson and as per the guidelines suggested in Shery's email. In an hour's time, I wrote four exercises — one each in the category of Customs, Frames, Images and Visions.

Shery wanted unedited pieces. These exercises were meant to be read as the draft of an article I planned to write. I didn't have any research to do since three of the articles were based on my personal experiences and thoughts, and the article for the Customs category was about the custom of my homeland. The total amount of time I invested in doing this work was a mere 60 minutes. I wrote the cover letter and emailed the finished articles to Shery.

(typically they are 2-4 lines long) to suit the article and audience of the publication you are writing for.

- While you are writing personal stories, make sure it is your own story or experience. If you have been given an assignment to write about someone else's story, make sure you have the permission of the person whom you are writing about.

I had little hope. I envisioned thousands of writers getting back to her with draft articles like mine or perhaps better than mine. Two months passed. I got an e-mail from Shery in which I had to sign the contract and send it back to her, along with the offer for payment (\$10 for each article). I couldn't believe all four works were accepted. They were finally included in *Weekly Writes: 52*

*Weeks of Writing Bliss!* (under the name “Resmi Shaji”), published in March 2004.

Shery also included my bio and since then I have seen more traffic to my website. I even received opportunities and offers to write corporate brochures.

Those days of being a “newbie” to the writing life, my hands shivered at the thought of submitting to an anthology or contributing to a book. I had heard how hard it is to gain acceptance from an anthology like *Cup of Comfort* or *Chicken Soup*.

After the experience with Shery’s course, I learned that writing for anthologies and contributing to books like this, is one of the best ways to earn money without spending any. Also, it gives you immense satisfaction and happiness.

Recently, I again found the courage to submit to an anthology and sent a story for consideration for a Chicken Soup Series. I await results on that submission, but another submission proved fruitful.

I sent two short submissions (around 600 words each) for Pam White’s proposed e-book related to Food Writing. I first queried her

## Online Resources

[www.absolutewrite.com](http://www.absolutewrite.com)  
[www.writersweekly.com](http://www.writersweekly.com)  
[www.authormania.com](http://www.authormania.com)  
[www.fundsforwriters.com](http://www.fundsforwriters.com)  
[www.freelancewriting.com](http://www.freelancewriting.com)  
[www.writerfind.com](http://www.writerfind.com)  
[www.food-writing.com](http://www.food-writing.com)

### Anthology Markets:

[www.chickensoup.com](http://www.chickensoup.com)  
[www.cupofcomfort.com](http://www.cupofcomfort.com)  
[www.anthologiesonline.com](http://www.anthologiesonline.com)

*Many publications will publish personal essays. For instance, Travelers Tales ([www.travelerstaes.com](http://www.travelerstaes.com)) uses personal accounts of your travel experience. Several women’s magazines also uses personal essays.*

### Search Engines

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)  
[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)  
[www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)  
[www.metacrawler.com](http://www.metacrawler.com)  
[www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com)

with two ideas. When she gave me the “go ahead” I wrote two articles for the proposed book. Pam White paid me \$50 for the work, which took me only 1 hour to write. Both the articles give insights into how I was able to break into food writing. I gave different angles to both the articles. My hope for acceptance was at the lowest level, never expecting her to buy both of my articles. I had hoped for one, and was thrilled when she accepted both!

What I want to convey is that it isn’t always necessary to spend a lot of time or do a great amount of research every time you want to write something. There are opportunities available where your experiences count more than published clips or long hours of research. And without having to do research, you are able to earn more in less time.

Writing about the simple things isn’t always as easy as it sounds. The key is to determine what to write. Evaluate what you know about a particular aspect of a topic and decide if it would be beneficial for others to read. If so, go ahead. Chances are you will not only see your name in print, but earn a decent amount for spending only a few minutes of your time to write.

In my experience, there is no better way to earn a good income with a minimal amount of time spent than to eliminate the hours and hours of research and write about what you know.

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### About the Author

**Resmi Jaimon** is an international freelance writer with more than 120 published clips in over 35 publications in print and online media since 2003. Resmi’s forte includes writing features, reporting news & events on topics including real estate, travel, food & cuisine, trade, technology, business, celebrity interviews, human interest



**Resmi Jaimon**

## Earn More In Less Time By Writing About What You Know

issues and lifestyle articles. She has also edited newsletters for conferences and worked as a ghostwriter for preparing content for corporate websites and brochures. She is open to syndicating her published works, pitching ideas for publications and working on commissioned assignments. She has a list of ideas for books on varied topics and dreams of writing a travel book in the near future.

Resmi lives with her husband, Jaimon in Kochi (Kerala - “God’s Own Country”), India.

Spiritually inclined, she dabbles with spiritual writing for her own reading and occasionally for others to read. Her other interests include spending time with her family, traveling, cooking, web & graphic designing and trying to regain her long lost painting skills.

Contact Resmi at [resmi.writer@gmail.com](mailto:resmi.writer@gmail.com). Website: [www.resmijaimon.com](http://www.resmijaimon.com). Visit her blog at <http://resmijaimon.blogspot.com>.

Resmi Jaimon is also involved in businesses - Rat Vanisher ([www.ratvanisher.com](http://www.ratvanisher.com)) and Mohanam ([www.mohanampet.com](http://www.mohanampet.com)), run jointly by her parents and brother, Roop Shaji. Roop Shaji, also an international freelance photographer, assists Resmi in capturing photos for some of her assignments.

# Writing Course Leads to First Acceptance

© Jenny Burr

From the slim file folder, I carefully held the email that I had printed out. I read through it again, sighing happily. An acceptance! My first acceptance! I was still tingling all over. Closely on the heels of this acceptance was an additional possibility for a query that I had emailed to another magazine.

“Do you think,” questioned my husband, “That every writer does what you are doing?” eyeing me dubiously.

“Well,” I stated, “I don’t know about everyone else but this is what I’m doing.” I read through the brief email again. Reluctantly, I placed it into the slim file folder. Then I read through the query that held possibilities. I emitted another sigh.

My husband shook his head and continued on with his work. I glanced over at the other folder. It was the “rejection folder.” It was not as slim as the acceptance folder although it did contain some polite rejection letters.

Over the last couple of years I have been submitting manuscripts and collecting rejection slips from numerous publications. The rejection letters didn’t seem to matter as much now because of the excitement of an acceptance. I would have to say, that if it weren’t for my having received a few rejection letters that I probably wouldn’t have taken the

## Writing Course Leads to First Acceptance

steps that I did in January of 2006 to make some changes in my writing. Changes for the better.

I have always enjoyed writing. Finding the time to write has been a battle. At times coming up with ideas has also been a challenge. Until recently, the summer has been my primary writing time due to a busy teaching schedule. Before that my children were young and I had very little time available for writing.

For years I have gone through “spits and spurts” in my writing. At times the poetry or journaling of everyday events just rolls off onto the page and into the computer. More often than not, the breaks between writing were becoming very large. I’ve purchased countless books on writing for children, and on writing in general. Inspired from each, I would begin writing again, only to come to screeching halt. I didn’t seem to have the stamina or interest to write anything more than a very short story. Sure I had ideas but I was having difficulty keeping my interest in the story, let alone trying to keep a reader interested.

Joining a writer’s group helped. I searched on the web for a local writer’s group and I scanned the notice boards in the grocery stores and at the library. I found a group very close to where I live however I didn’t feel very comfortable at it. I searched some more and found another group that suits my needs.

That was three years ago. My writer’s group gives me a place to read out my works in progress. I also have the opportunity to be with others who love to write.

A busy work schedule and busy family life sometimes means that I cannot attend my writer’s group. Frustration was setting in again. This became the final push that made me sign up for the course that I am now taking.

I knew that I would write more often if I had assign-

ments. So I discussed the idea with my husband. He and I were both in agreement that it would help me hone my skills and likely give me ideas for writing. He just wanted to make certain that I committed to completing the course.

A few years ago I had signed up for a writing course, but had withdrawn. I had two reasons for withdrawing. The first was the fact that I was going from being a stay at home mom to full time teaching. Teaching and preparing would consume a great deal of my time. The second reason for withdrawing was that I really wanted to write for children but my course was all about writing for adults. I received a partial refund for the course.

In January of 2006 I signed up for my Writing for Children's course offered by Quality of Course. I have thoroughly enjoyed it. So much so, that I'm almost dreading its completion. Each assignment has left me with many story or article ideas to pursue. The course has stressed the importance of researching the market and pitching my idea to the correct publisher. I've learned that research for one article or story can easily become a "spring board" for many other stories or articles for other publications. My experience as a mother, teacher and a child have all worked their way into my stories.

So how did my course assist me in landing my first writing gig with an adult magazine? The Writing for Children Course offered by Quality of Course teaches fifteen aspects of writing. Ten of these aspects are essentials for writing that are also included in their Creative Writing Course for adults. I've learned the same basics that most writers would learn for success. With each assignment I need to make certain that I have a "possible" market for my story or article. This is repeated throughout the course. What publication would be interested in this idea? Carefully read up on their submission guidelines. Read examples of what they

publish. Do they like factual information or do they prefer fiction, or a bit of both? I'm often looking on the internet, library and book stores for all possible markets.

The magazine that I pitched, "Chronically Canadian" is a very new publication, as of October 2006. I located their advertisement on Craigslist. It stated that any Canadian writers that have chronic illnesses could send in stories based on their experiences. I sent off an email about some chronic illnesses that I have. I also indicated that I had a daughter recently diagnosed with colitis. She and I had spent eight days and nights together at the local children's hospital.

Of the various ideas that I pitched, the editors wrote back and asked if I'd like to contribute an article for parents highlighting several coping techniques for when their child is hospitalized. They felt that this kind of article would benefit their read-

## Tips for Choosing the Correct Writing Course

**Research:** Don't just sign up for any writing course, as I did the first time, make certain that it is a course that is at the "heart" of your writing. In other words look at what you have already been writing before you decide on a course.

Then you need to choose whether you'd like a classroom setting or a one on one set up. Rather than sitting in with a class I preferred to have a one on one student teacher relationship with an experienced writer. My entire course is through internet correspondence and this suits my needs. If you want to be a part of a class then you need to search for courses that offer a classroom setting. The internet, newspapers, school boards and recreation programs all have listings of local writing courses.

**Instructor:** My instructor is a published writer. Is the instructor a published writer, author, editor or journalist? It is best to learn from people that have been published if your goal is to eventually become published.

**Cost:** At the time, I could not afford the cost of a longer running course. It's best to choose a course that you can afford.

**Time:** Since my course is correspondence I do not waste any time driving however I do need to ensure that I put enough hours in to read through each section of my course, to write up my assignments, reread my work, revise it, etc. How much time do you have to spend on a writing course? This too will determine which course you take.

**Writing Interest:** Often what we read is a good indication of what we may write, but not always. When I go into a book store I make a beeline for the

ership. Knowing all about this first hand, I realized that I would not have a problem writing such an article based on my experience.

### **Writing about an experience.**

My experiences have been influencing my writing. Since I am in my mid forties, I have had many years of experiences of which I can write about for children and for adults. Working, volunteering, going to school, university, life in a village, city, and rural setting, taking a bus to school, crisis, etc. are only a few of the many topics that would encompass "writing what I know." Who would have thought that my daughter and I would end up spending days and nights at a children's hospital together?

### **Being flexible.**

The editors had read my query and discussed what they felt would be best for their readers. Helping parents to be more informed about a hospital stay with

children's section. Why? Because I am a teacher. I'm always on the look out for a new fiction book to read out loud or for a non fiction book that brings facts to life. If I'm not there, you'll find me in the magazine section, again skimming through children's magazines. Or you'll find me hanging around books for teachers. Naturally, I have this same bent in my writing. I know that I have signed up for the right course because after I complete one assignment I can't wait for the next one to be sent to me.

**Personal Goal:** What I want from my writing course is to hone my skills, try writing different genre for kids, ideas, ideas, ideas and market success. I have gained all this and more. Why do you want to take a writing course? What is your goal? What steps will you take to attain this goal?

their child was a "good fit" for their publication. Someone may benefit by reading my article and be a little more prepared when their child is hospitalized. I wasn't insulted that they didn't want me to write about my illnesses. I was willing to work with their suggestion.

### **Maintaining positive communication.**

In all of my communication I was always polite. I responded that I would be delighted to write the article. I asked about word count. I was given a generous amount as well as a deadline. I wrote the article, waited a few days, and read it again. I rewrote portions and then submitted it. I expressed my willingness to make any changes that they felt were necessary.

I waited a few weeks and then I emailed the editor to inquire about the article. They had been swamped,

with queries, articles etc. She apologized for not getting back to me sooner. The article had been accepted and will be published in early 2007.

I was so excited that I immediately emailed the members of my writers' group and told them my good news. I emailed my tutor from my writing course. I have told my family, friends, coworkers, etc. — you get the idea! I printed off the email and it is in that very slim file that I mentioned at the beginning. I will receive a copy of the magazine so I will have proof and recognition that I am published.

### **What I have been learning in my course.**

Follow the guidelines, stick to the word count, cut out unnecessary words, and maintain positive communication with approachable editors. I have also learned that it is courteous to send a thank you note via email or regular mail when I receive a rejection letter because someone has taken the time to read through my story or article.

Writing fact and fiction pieces, my course has provided me with more writing options. With my teaching background, I wrote a non fiction article for a children's history magazine. The editor and I have sent a few emails back and forth. Although the magazine is undergoing some changes, he invited me to maintain contact as he felt I would be a good fit for the magazine. These emails are also in my slim acceptance file.

Not only have the deadlines been helpful for my creativity but my tutor, as our instructors are called, has been phenomenal and encouraging. She has written, been published and edited many articles, stories, and plays. Her advice and suggestions will only improve my writing and make it more marketable.

I am working my way through the assignments. Many of the assignments request that I submit queries to possible markets. Now I am taking the time to carefully read through the guidelines. Something I may not have done in the past.



## About the Author

**Jenny Burr** and her family live in Ottawa, Ontario. Along with writing and teaching, she is an avid reader and loves to cook. She is a member of the Kanata Writers' Group. Jenny and her Grade 5/6 class write and edit the *Red Apple News* which is the school newspaper.



**Jenny Burr**

# Networking for \$\$\$

© Cynthia Lueck Sowden

Writing is a solitary profession. There's no argument about that! You pretty much have to work alone to transfer the thoughts from your head to the keyboard. But working solo doesn't mean you should remain locked up in your home office in your robe and fuzzy slippers. Indeed, if you want to make money, you need to get out and meet people. You need to network.

When I was in corporate communications, particularly in my early years, I didn't understand networking and how it worked. I thought I was "too busy" with my job to spend time chit-chatting with others. Oh, I went to meetings of various professional associations—International Association of Business Communicators, Public Relations Society of America, the Minnesota Advertising Federation—but I usually arrived just in time for lunch or hors d'oeuvres and spent as little time as possible getting to know people. I was there for the program, the professional development, after all.

Perhaps if I had spent more time "working the room" and developing business contacts, I would have had an easier time changing jobs. I did volunteer for committee work and got to know a few people that way, but I never took advantage of the opportunities that a network could send my way.

I began to get an inkling of how networking works some twenty years into my career. (I know, I'm a slow learner!) I was working for the twenty-fifth largest privately-held com-

pany in Minnesota. This company had seven divisions, and they scrapped and fought like children. The division general managers seemed to take great delight in jabbing at each other under the table—raising the prices of materials they supplied each other instead of passing them through at cost, passing off junk they couldn't sell to outside customers. The CEO did nothing to stop this bickering. (I think he rather enjoyed it.)

As a member of the corporate staff, I had a more overall view of the corporation. Since I wrote brochures and PR copy for all the divisions, I could see areas of synergy between them. As my tenure lengthened and their trust in me increased, I began to suggest ways in which they could work together. I found I enjoyed helping them make positive connections. Without realizing it, I was beginning to network.

A few years later, I purchased a magazine franchise. I was excited. I could write and publish anything I wanted! There was a catch, though. To finance publication, I had to sell advertising.

One of the people I contacted about advertising was a sales representative for the Minnesota Timberwolves. He was also the game announcer. Like me, he had no previous experience in sales. I could sense, as we talked, that we were both fish out of water—he more than I. Somehow, I managed to sell him six months' worth of advertising and he sold me a pair of season tickets for the Minnesota Lynx, the WNBA team. (What was really amazing was that I managed to come out ahead in the deal!)

A short while later I received a letter from him, inviting me to check out a networking group to which he belonged. I was hesitant, but he wrote that it had helped him with his business, and he recommended it. I decided to attend a meeting and see what it was all about.

I freelanced full time for six years when my daughter was small. I sometimes met other area writers for lunch. We'd talk about the mechanics of freelancing—how to set an hourly rate, what word processing software was the best—and kvetch about the lack of work. I didn't find it very helpful. I was not optimistic about this new group.

### *Types of Networking Groups*

If you're leading the insular life of a writer, you're probably just as surprised as I was to learn that networking groups even exist. I was even more surprised to learn that there are different types of networking groups.

I thought networking was primarily for employment-seeking purposes—you know, high-powered executives finding jobs for each other, mentoring each others' careers.

Dr. Ivan Misner, the founder of Business Networking International (BNI), the world's largest business networking organization (with chapters in thirty-seven countries, who's going to argue?), identifies six types of networking groups: casual contact networks, strong contact networks, community service clubs, professional associations, social/business organizations, and women's business organizations.

Casual contact networks are business groups that get together on a regular basis. They may include presentations on important business topics such as pending legislation, community affairs or local business programs. They may also have social events. Chambers of commerce are good examples of casual contact networks that can put you in contact with hundreds of other business people. They also print newsletters and flyers that can help you promote your business and become better known throughout the community.

Strong contact networks meet weekly for the primary purpose of exchanging referrals. BNI is a strong contact or-

## Networking for \$\$\$

ganization, as is Twin Cities-based Grapevine Network. These networks often restrict membership to one person per profession or specialty per chapter, allowing you to “lock out your competition,” and are focused almost exclusively on generating business through referrals. They adhere to a strict meeting agenda and meet on a more regular basis. BNI chapters meet once a week.

Community service clubs such as the Rotary, Kiwanis and the Lions Clubs provide places for business people to meet and establish long-term relationships. They also give you an opportunity to give back to the community through service programs. The Kiwanis, for example, work to eliminate childhood hunger and disease.

Professional associations are another networking opportunity. They may be associations of bankers, architects, public relations professionals, doctors or homebuilders. Their focus is on furthering the education of their members and to exchange information and ideas. John Naisbitt, author of *Megatrends*, calls them “Knowledge Networks.”

Social/business organizations such as the Jaycees combine business with pleasure. Owners or employees of local businesses, they may sponsor fishing contests, street dances, beer tents and other fun activities to raise money for local projects. They’re also good places to develop long-term relationships.

Women’s business organizations came to fore in the 1970s and ‘80s, the heyday of the feminist movement. Tired of trying to muscle their way into the “old boys’ networks,” they formed their own groups, such as the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO). Some are industry-specific, such as the Association for Women in Communications. A few allow men to join their ranks. Almost all of them are concerned with networking, education and professional development.

## *Learning to Network*

Networking did not come easily to me. As a writer, it's my natural inclination to stand back and observe. As a public relations person in a large corporation, I was content to stay in the background, cranking out press releases and making sure press conferences went smoothly. Although it didn't bother me to speak to groups, I wasn't comfortable walking up and introducing myself to people I didn't know. It seemed presumptuous—why was I so important that they had to know me?

My attitude, I've learned, was also shaped by my sex. Says Nancy Giacomuzzi, executive director of BNI Minnesota, "Women tend to be caretakers. We're good at giving help, but we're not very good at asking. We're not comfortable saying, 'Hey, this is what I'm looking for, who do you know?'" Women, she says, sometimes have trouble identifying what they need. "They're working in the forest a lot."

Networking, it turns out, is an acquired skill. And, although men may practice it more, they're more casual about it. Scott Eckman, a business broker, once told me, "Once they get the hang of it, women become networking fiends."

I was far from "fiendish" the first time I attended a networking meeting. I sat back and listened as, one by one, each of the group members gave a one-minute commercial about their businesses and asked for referrals. When they finished, it was my turn. I stood up, held up a copy of my magazine, explained what it was about, and asked them to send advertisers my way. I sat down, and the meeting continued.

I didn't receive any referrals that day, but I was impressed by the camaraderie and spirit of helpfulness within the group. I liked how supportive they seemed of each others' businesses. I visited for a second week. The membership fee wasn't any more costly than any of the professional organizations I belonged to, so I decided to try it for a year.

## Networking for \$\$\$

Getting referrals isn't easy. It takes time for people to get to know you, to understand what you do. You also have to ditch the "what's-in-it-for-me" attitude. When you begin to concentrate on helping someone else, and you bring them a good, solid referral, you start to receive good, solid referrals. It's like the old Biblical instruction, "Cast your bread upon the water, for after many days you will find it again."

As I settled into the group, I began giving and getting referrals. Not all of the referrals I received were good ones. I called on a couple of potential advertisers saying, "So-and-so said you'd be interested in advertising," and received the response, "Who's So-and-so?" That rattled me some, so I took pains to make sure that the referrals I gave were genuine. Within a couple of months, I had recovered the cost of membership.

I was completing my second year of membership when I decided I could no longer afford to publish the magazine. It was heart-wrenching, but I had to face the truth. I was happiest pounding on a keyboard and turning a good phrase. I got no thrill out of making a sale, and I was tired of having people treat me like dirt. (If you want to deal a blow to your self-esteem, try selling advertising.) I could put together a great magazine, but I couldn't sell ads to save my soul (or my business). Nor could I find someone to sell ads for me. I decided to return to freelancing.

Trouble was, I had few contacts. A number of the ad agencies I'd freelanced for when my daughter was young were no longer around. The industry fall-out from 9/11 had put them out of business. I'd been out of circulation in the corporate sector for five years. It would be hard to march up to the front door of a business and say, "Hey, I'm freelancing. Give me something to do."

As businessman and author Harvey McKay advises, "Up a creek? If you've got a network, you've always got a paddle."

I turned to my network. I told them I was going into freelance writing. I told them about the kinds of things I could write—brochures, ads, press releases, web copy. Referrals came quickly, much faster than they had for potential advertisers. One of the first referrals came from the group's computer guru. He referred me to the editor of a local magazine. A week later, the sales rep for a regional magazine for senior citizens gave me the name and phone number of her publisher. It was a good start.

At the same time that I re-launched my freelance practice, I also signed up with a temp agency that specializes in placing creative types—writers, graphic artists, web designers. The agency accounts for approximately 30 percent of my income. Some long-term clients account for perhaps 5 percent. The rest comes through networking referrals.

In the year after I once again became an independent contractor, I wrote press releases for new businesses, new products, seminars and business awards. One client, one of the owners of a real estate title company, was skeptical about press releases—until the daily paper in the town in which he had just opened a branch office called for an interview. That one-page release resulted in a front-page article about his business. He'll gladly refer me to someone else any day.

I put together a press conference for a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. I made calls to the local media while tearing down the highway to a networking meeting. Although the candidate later dropped out of the race, it was gratifying to know that little ol' me could call a press conference and get the daily paper and the public radio station out to interview the candidate.

I produced the copy for brochures. I've described the services of a mortgage company and the products made by a screw machine parts manufacturer, two completely different kinds of business.

## Networking for \$\$\$

I took the brochure copy for the parts manufacturer and turned it into web copy, complete with links from the navigation bar and between various pages on the site.

I ghost-wrote two chapters for a book on successful selling techniques. (The people I wrote for are much better at sales than I!)

I proofread human resources training manuals, brand identity manuals and real estate sales literature.

I wrote 30-second radio commercials for a gift basket company that was sponsoring a business seminar. The commercials were aired over the Internet via streaming audio.

I wrote ads for a company that sells and installs siding and roofing. Not the sexiest products to advertise, but the owner had been running the same tired ad for ten years and he needed an update—badly. I had just finished the copy for his special on vinyl windows when he called and said the local paper had given him a fantastic deal on a half-page ad. Could I write one for vinyl siding? You bet!

A former member of my networking group contacted me about writing for a builders' magazine she was starting up. She would sell, I would write. She not only referred herself to me, but introduced me to the publisher of the same magazine in a different market—another referral.

Through referrals, I've discovered that people need help writing letters. One letter I wrote announced the candidacy of a man running for president of the Seneca Indian Nation in New York. Another was placed in the front pages of an office supply catalog. The owner of the company wanted to thank his customers for their first one hundred years of patronage. Another was from a computer technician who wanted to introduce his services to members of the local chamber of commerce.

All of these writing assignments came through referrals. While none of them is making me rich (how many writers really make six-figure incomes?), they do provide a steady stream of revenue. What's more, they offer variety. One day, I'm touring a factory that makes corn-burning stoves. The next, visiting a man who has dug up deep sea fossils on his farm. I write about all of these things from the comfort of my home office.

### *How to get referrals*

In order to get referrals, you have to get out and rub elbows with the general public. Just because you work alone doesn't mean you have to be alone.

One of the best ways to get referrals is to join one of the networking groups I mentioned earlier. It doesn't matter which one. I was attracted to BNI because of its business-like attitude and its emphasis on helping others along with their businesses. You may find the Rotary more to your liking.

Don't worry about public speaking. Your networking buddies are there to support you, not judge you. In one networking group, I saw the shy wife of a sprinkler system installer change from a nervous, red-faced, shaky-handed speaker to a relaxed, confident spokesperson for the family business. If getting up in front of a group really bothers you, consider joining Toastmasters.

Decide what kind of contacts are most useful to you, but don't restrict yourself to one field or profession.

When you go to a networking event, don't just collect business cards. Try to meet one or two people with whom you can establish a relationship. You're looking for someone with whom you can, in a sense, build a business partnership. For instance, as a writer, you may want to pair up with

a graphic artist or a printer (or both). They're in compatible fields. However, you also want to get to know the guy who installs maintenance-free decking. By finding out more about his business, you can steer more potential customers his way, and he can do the same for you.

When you join a networking group, try to give a referral before you receive one. This makes you appear helpful to others. However, don't expect to give (or receive) a referral on Day One. It takes time to get to know people and understand what they do, and vice versa. Soon, you'll find yourself seeking referral opportunities for others. Recently, I met a painter who was working for a woman whose basement had been flooded. "Do you need a carpet cleaner?" I asked. "I know a great one!"

Prepare an "elevator speech" or little commercial about yourself and what you do. For instance, when I attend the meeting of a different networking group, I say something like, "Hi, I'm Cindy Sowden, Homegrown Communications. I'm a freelance writer and editor. People often ask me, 'What do you write?' I tell them, 'Anything you'll pay me to write.' Seriously, though, I write press releases, print and radio ads, web copy, brochures, newsletters and magazine articles. I can edit your copy and make you sound great. I'll help you tell your story to the people who need to hear it."

### How to Get Referrals

- Join a networking group.
- Decide what kind of contacts are most useful to you.
- Don't just collect business cards at networking events. Try to establish one or two real business relationships.
- Try to give a referral before you receive one.
- Prepare an "elevator" speech about yourself and what you do.
- When asking for referrals, be specific.

Then, tell them what kind of referral you'd like, and be as specific as possible. "A great referral for me today would be a small business that wants to tell the world about its new product via a brochure or press release." Or, "I'm looking for a company that publishes a catalog and wants someone to add some zip and zing to the copy." These are pretty good requests. An even better one would be, "Please introduce me to the administrative assistant to the CEO of \_\_\_\_\_ Corporation. I can't get an appointment without her."

In addition for referrals that will bring me money, I also use my network as a source for information. The computer guru and the banker, for example, were both people I talked to when gathering information for a story on identity theft. They were thrilled to be interviewed, and I have real-life experts I can quote.

Like everything else, networking is only as good as the effort you put into it. If you're lackadaisical about attending networking events, don't be too surprised when you don't receive any referrals. If, on the other hand, you attend faithfully, and make a sincere effort to help others, you'll receive payment in kind. Three-quarters of the way through my first year of freelancing, I had made enough money to pay my BNI membership for the next 49 years, and I was just getting started!

Businesses of all sizes need writing help. Often, they don't realize it until you tell them about it. For many of them, it's a great relief not to have to write their own ads—they just think they should, to keep costs down. A good copywriter can help them get the correct message out to the intended audience.

You can hit the streets and pound on doors to get business. Or you can make friends and get referrals through networking. I'm thinking seriously about joining my local Chamber of Commerce. It's time I got to know my neighborhood businesses a little better.



## About the Author

**Cynthia Lueck Sowden** is a native of Minneapolis and a graduate of the University of Minnesota School of Journalism. She has freelanced for more than twenty years, with stints in the corporate world between periods of full-time self-employment. She has published hundreds of magazine articles and is the author of two published books, *Wedding Occasions: 101 New Party Themes for Wedding Showers, Rehearsal Dinners, Engagement Parties, and More!*, and *An Anniversary to Remember: Celebrations for the Years One to Seventy-Five*. She and her husband, Ralph, live in Minneapolis. Their daughter, Elizabeth, is a writer in New York City.



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# Getting Published: From Novels to Young Adult Fiction & Children's Books

© Jacqueline Seewald

Like sex, you never forget your first experience as a published author. My first published novel was put out by Manor Books, New York, in 1979. When my gothic novel, *A Wind in the Pines*, was accepted, I was thrilled. I recall bursting into tears of joy. I was no longer just a housewife. I was going to be an author, a published, paid writer. I had been recognized. I had arrived!

I had stopped working as an English teacher some years before and was spending my time as a full-time house frau, mother of two toddlers, and full-time writer. My dream has always been to write a spectacular bestseller. I thought this was the start of making that dream become a reality.

I was delighted when my book came out in paperback. It had a tasteful, beautiful cover. Unfortunately, my “advance” of \$500 as promised in the contract was never paid. Worse still, I soon discovered that the publisher had gone into bankruptcy. This was something of a shock as I had found the publisher in *Writer's Market*.

My husband and I visited the publisher's office in Manhattan. The editor-in-chief met with us and offered 50 copies of my novel. We loved the cover art and he promised the original copy would be included as payment as well.

I did receive the copies of the novel, but not the painting of the cover. The experience turned out to be a somewhat disappointing one overall. But I never lost my enthusiasm for communicating the written word, never gave up on writing, or trying to get my work published. Over the years, I've enjoyed experimenting with many forms of written communications: essays, articles, novels, plays, short stories and poetry. The creation of each work is much like giving birth to a child. There is pain and also pleasure not to mention pride.

It is not possible to get everything one writes published—nor should we consider all our work worthy of publication. But there is nothing quite so exhilarating as the first time we see our words in print. Finally, others can join us in what was once a solitary expression of the psyche.

I'm still trying to write something outstanding, still attempting to produce that best-selling novel, still hoping to be “discovered”. Truthfully, it will probably be my last thought on my deathbed. But I have no regrets. I could no more stop writing than I could stop breathing. I write because I can't not write. It's simply what I do and who I am.

I've had a great deal of work published since that first experience. Every time something is accepted, published and paid for, I feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment and adulation.

My second book to be published was a young adult novel for teenage girls. It was sold to Crosswinds, which was a subsidiary of Harlequin. Unlike my first and lesser-known publisher, Harlequin promptly paid a fair advance. Unfortunately, they subsequently canceled the Crosswinds line and the book ended up being published and sold only in Germany. The good news: the book virtually sold out its printing; the bad news: it was in German, a language we could not read.

My third published novel, another young adult novel, was a mystery entitled *Where is Robert?* brought out by a small publisher, Royal Fireworks Press, in 1997 while I was teaching at the high school level. It is still in print and continues to sell steadily. I actually wrote this book in collaboration with my two sons who were teenagers. The book was based loosely on real incidents that occurred in my older son's life. I found his story so fascinating I knew it would make a great novel. *Where is Robert?* has met with enthusiastic reactions from young readers, particularly boys who read the realistic scenes about wrestling with real interest. (Both my sons wrestled in high school and so those scenes in the book are quite authentic.)

Also, teens enjoy an element of mystery. Every good teenage novel should have a plot that keeps the reader turning the pages, wanting to discover what is going to happen next. It's important to set up some sort of a question that can't be easily or immediately answered, a secret of the human heart that must be delved into.

As I did previously, I searched through *Writer's Market* for an appropriate publisher. I collected a number of rejections before I found a small publisher who was enthusiastic about the novel. I would love to have gotten a first-class reputable literary agent to represent my work since agents have excellent contacts and connections, but I have yet to succeed in interesting one, and so I have gone about selling my work on my own. This is difficult because the top publishers don't look at work unless it is agented. Even those who will look still toss your work in their slush pile initially.

I'm told one way to circumvent this is to attend conferences where agent and editor interviews are offered. It depends how outgoing you are. It is possible to impress an agent or an editor. It's certainly worth a try if there is a good writer's conference in your state.

In my writing career, I early on concentrated on writing for teens since I believed in the axiom write what you know about. Besides raising two teenagers, I taught English and later Library Science at the high school level. Actually, at one time or another, I taught at all levels: the university, high school, middle school and elementary. But most of my years were in the high school. I was accustomed to the way teenagers think, talk and behave. However, I also got input from my own children. I couldn't have written *Where is Robert?* without their help. It would, in fact, have been impossible.

If you want to write for teenagers, you need to understand them. But you can also dig into your own experiences as a teenager and remember your thoughts and feelings. That was the case with *Claire's Curse*, another young adult novel that I wrote which received excellent reviews.

I also developed realistic settings. My three published YA's (Young Adult) have each been set in Central New Jersey, in a town very much like the one in which I live. I enjoy writing for teens and hope to have more of my young adult novels published in the future. But I will be blunt and admit that I have now turned down five different offers of publication for various novels because in each case I felt the publisher was offering too little.

This is not a matter of greed on my part. I learned the hard way that if a publisher, no matter how small, only offers royalties, there's a good chance that publisher will not properly promote your book. You want to avoid print on demand publishers. There should be a guarantee of at least a small print run.

Here's an example of a good publishing experience. A fiction book I wrote came out in 1999 and has been quite successful. *A Devil in the Pines* was brought out by Afton Publishing in New Jersey. The idea for this children's picture book came to me when I was the school librarian at a K-

4 New Jersey elementary school. The fourth graders were asked to do projects on the Jersey Devil. Library materials were sparse. Being a good researcher with a strong interest in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey and the legend of the Jersey Devil, I decided to write my own book for the children on the subject. I combined fact and fiction to create an entertaining book. The children loved it and so did their parents.

When I attended the New Jersey Educational Media Specialists Conference that year, I spoke to the representatives of Afton Publishing, a small educational New Jersey publisher. I noticed that they sold posters and filmstrips on the Jersey Devil. I told the Cunninghams about the children's book I'd written and why there was a need for such a book. They were very interested and asked me to submit my book for consideration. The result was a sale that included a small advance. As Patsy Cunningham said, they were offering me "good faith money." The publisher had integrity and the book continues to sell well and has received many accolades of praise. It will not make me rich, but I felt a great sense of satisfaction and achievement. In the long run, that's what it's really all about. Writing success is about expressing oneself in a creative manner. But recognition from our peers and a certain amount of monetary compensation certainly contributes to a sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

So let me reiterate, I got a good gig by: first knowing my subject matter very well, second, identifying a publishing need, and finally, locating a publisher that was appropriate for my particular writing.

I followed the same method when I was looking for a publisher for my most recent novel, an adult romantic suspense thriller I had written, *The Inferno Collection*. I got the idea for the book when I attended a lecture by a Princeton librarian while pursuing a Masters in Library Science, my second graduate degree at Rutgers University. I thought what

the professor had to say was fascinating and decided to do further research on the subject. Eventually, I considered the concept as a perfect background for a mystery/thriller.

I still had no agent working for me so I had to do my own search for a publisher. After receiving several rejections, I e-mailed Five Star, a subsidiary of Thomson/Gale Publishing. Five Star sells genre fiction heavily to libraries and so I thought they might be interested in a novel in which the main character/amateur detective was a librarian. And yes, I got the gig! Again I used my expertise to write what is hopefully something unique and interesting, and located an appropriate publisher.

My advance was conservative but the book will be out in hardcover in June of 2007. Hopefully, it will garner good reviews and do well. Who knows? I might yet write that bestseller!

Just living and working has given me great ideas for writing. We're all surrounded constantly by people, places and ideas worth writing about.

Working as an academic librarian and an educational media specialist (school librarian) provided me with many writing ideas. I wrote reviews and articles for a number of library publications and was considered something of an expert on libraries. I even wrote an article about libraries that *The Christian Science Monitor* published. An article I wrote for a *Cup of Comfort* anthology will be coming out soon in a themed book about teaching miracles. I got these gigs because I could show my expertise in areas of teaching and librarianship. You too have expertise that you can capitalize on!

What I've learned over the years is that the real secret to success as a writer, to getting the gig, is tenacity. You just have to keep at it, hang in there. If writing is something you to want to succeed at, refuse to give up. You can't allow your-

self to get discouraged and depressed. I still hate rejections and I still get plenty of them. Probably I always will. However, I know that it's just part of the process. I haven't quit writing and I won't. I keep writing new things all the time. I get up around five a.m. in the morning surrounded by darkness and silence and I start up my computer.

I don't just write novels. I write articles, short stories, plays, poetry, book reviews and screenplays. I even enter a free writing contest here and there. I try to experience every kind of writing. I also read constantly, fiction and nonfiction. I want and need to know as much as I can about the world I live in. All of this makes me a better writer. A good writer is a good learner.

I don't have a pat formula for writing success. I'm constantly into experimenting and trying new techniques and subject matter. I'm open and receptive to new experiences. My mind just keeps clicking away. I'm not afraid to attempt to be innovative and I'm not ashamed to fail. We human beings are not perfect and neither is our writing.

## So how do you get that gig?

- **Take advantage of your area of expertise** whenever possible the way I have. And don't be afraid to do research into subjects that interest you and that you want to write about.
- **Use all reference materials** available to find appropriate publishers and publications for your work.
- **Be persuasive.** Explain why your work is something they should buy, and in fact, need to purchase.
- **Don't be afraid to promote yourself.** Believe in your own abilities.
- **Be confident.** We can all be writers. We all have something worth writing about. We **can** get the gig! So take pride in your work, and finally,
- **Never give it away for free!**

Six years ago, I quit a very demanding, tenured job to write full-time. Some people thought I was foolish. But I have no regrets. Life is too short not to do what you really want with your life. I am happy to say that my husband fully supported me in my decision.

Even if I never do succeed at writing that best seller, for me writing is still a win-win situation. I am writing what I want to write and getting paid to do it. What could be better?



## About the Author

**Jacqueline Seewald** has taught writing courses including Creative Writing at the high school, middle school and college level and has also worked as an academic librarian and educational media specialist. Six of her fiction books have previously been published.



**Jacqueline Seewald**

Seewald's short stories, poems, essays, reviews and articles have appeared in numerous

publications such as: *Sasee*, *Affaire de Coeur*, *Lost Treasure*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Pedestal*, *Surreal*, *After Dark*, *The Dana Literary Society Journal*, *Palace of Reason*, *Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly*.

A new romantic suspense/mystery thriller, *The Inferno Collection*, is forthcoming from Five Star/Thomson Gale in hardcover, June 2007.

# How to Build a Gig Trap Through Organizational Activity

© Sue-Ellen Davison

When socially pressed to proclaim my income source, I, perhaps like you, reply, "I'm a writer." I say it reluctantly, knowing that the tiresome, not to mention inane response will almost invariably be, "Oh, how exciting! What books have you written that I've read?"

The temptation to toss off a snide reply does nothing to alter the honest answer: Probably none. I am not J.K. Rowling. I am a freelance business writer. I create newsletters, brochures, booklets, feature stories, news releases, speeches, ad copy, business letters, management messages . . . You know the sort of stuff.

This is not to say my work is small or dull. Oh, it can be at times, but I've had my share of enthralling projects. I've also had a professor drill into me, "There are no boring writing jobs; only boring writers." The maxim makes me reluctant to admit that the brief bit of descriptive copy I once wrote for an embalmers' training guide was anything less than positively sparkling. But there you are: This sort of writing offers the frequently fascinating opportunity to become something of an authority on odd topics.

I enjoy my time at the word processor, striving to wield the words that propose, persuade, sell, commend, console, create, introduce, invite, inform, instruct, encourage, inspire, impress, entertain, entrance and more. Name a more pleasant way to earn a living. But I would rather eat live worms

and broken glass than venture out into the world attempting to sell my work and myself to prospective clients.

I have found the coward's way out. I wish I could claim the intelligence to have engineered this scheme intentionally, in a self-serving manner. But the truth is, I stumbled into it. That does not mean you cannot purposefully and intelligently do what I accidentally did, and enjoy similar positive results. Your experience may not be the direct result of an inebriated conversation with a cat (out loud and in public), as mine was, but the cat is expendable, as is the inebriation.

### *A life-changing moment sneaks up on little cat feet*

Beginning at the beginning, before I was a freelance writer, I was a corporate advertising and public relations manager. And before profit-conscious shareholders started frowning on such extravagances, my Houston-based company rewarded top-performing employees with a glorious five-day bash, spouses included, in a different touristy city or resort each year.

The year we went to San Francisco, we spent one day in the wine country, visiting two vineyards, two wineries and, at lunchtime, a restaurant, tasting six or eight wines at each establishment. Being relatively provincial conventioners, we were swallows, not spitters, so predictably, by 4 o'clock that hot day, we were one slow-witted, blurry-eyed bunch, ready for a nap. And unlikely as it sounds, it was our last staggering, befuddled tour stop, the second vineyard, that proved crucial to my career.

By that point I was plum out of sociable perkiness. Stumbling off by myself, down to the end of a long buffet table on the vineyard patio, I encountered the vineyard cat, with whom I struck up conversation. We were sharing cheese cubes off the buffet table when up walked a smartly dressed woman who introduced herself as Kara Trout, fellow cat lover. She then recounted the odd tale of a pet that had died

one Pennsylvania winter while her husband, Reinhold, was away on a business trip. (You will soon see why I've falsified their names. "Kara" would hunt me down and shoot me otherwise.)

The frozen ground prevented Kara from burying the dead cat and, not knowing what else to do with the little body, she shrouded it in a bath towel and stowed it in their meat freezer. When Reinhold returned Friday night, she asked him to bury the cat, but Reinhold's weekends were filled with chores and commitments since his job kept him on the road through the weekdays. Kitty's remains remained on ice.

Several spring thaws passed, the cat interment slipped farther down the priority list, and the Trouts nearly got used to having the frosty fur ball sharing space with their cutlets, although Kara emphasized that the cat was way over on the left side of the spacious freezer, while edibles huddled at the far right.

"Finally," said Kara, "we got transferred to Houston, and I just said, 'Reinie, we are not taking that stiff cat with us. You must bury it now!'" And he did.

Not only did I find this story hilarious, it gave my shy self a topic for conversation throughout the rest of our week in San Francisco. By the time Kara relocated me a day later with the request that I not repeat the dead-cat story since it was really quite embarrassing and, if it got out, no one would ever again accept an invitation to dine at the Trouts' table — it was too late. I'd already told at least ten people.

### *The world gets smaller*

Fast-forward four years. My company had just bought me membership in the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). Upon arrival at my first IABC luncheon, who was the first person I should see but Kara Trout, of all people, whom I'd not seen since San Francisco and certainly hadn't expected to bump into here. She had

just been named IABC chapter president, and this was her first meeting as such.

Several days after that surprising reconnection, Kara phoned and, based on nothing more than our dead-cat chat and wine-debauched stupor four years previous, asked me to serve IABC/Houston as hospitality director. I was so innocent, I mistook the invitation for an honor. Little did I realize that the only requirement for serving on the board was a pulse, and that, in fact, Kara was so desperate for board members, she would have gladly shanghaied anybody, although she did kindly say that the board had grown a little stodgy and she thought I might help loosen them up.

As you no doubt know, it's always a challenge filling board seats in volunteer-driven organizations. Even so, during my subsequent years on the board, we really had some sharp, talented people in that group.

### *Meeting all the right people*

Thus began my unintentional active association with IABC. I served as hospitality director for two years, secretary for two years and newsletter editor for one. Meanwhile, I joined a chapter offshoot and became active with that group, serving on various task forces, for four years.

I'm going to talk about IABC because that's the organization I know, and the one that led me into writing jobs. Its members are mostly business communicators, which you may not be. Some other organizations might facilitate your quest for writing jobs just as well or better. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), for example, is similar to IABC but attracts more writers who specialize in PR. The two groups share enough similarities that many people, agencies and corporations belong to both IABC and PRSA. The Association for Women in Communications (AWC) is another good one, as is the Society for Technical Communication (STC). Whatever your bailiwick, if you haven't already

found a professional organization, a little Internet browsing may lead you to one.

Immediately after my introduction to IABC, I became a corporate downsizing victim, but was not left entirely untethered. The company wanted to cut my benefits while continuing to use me, so – abracadabra, poof! – I was a freelance writer and editor, saved from building the courage to become one. It was the perfect time for me to acquaint myself with business communicators in the community outside of my former corporation. IABC facilitated that.

On the board I got to know about 30 delightful business communicators from about as many companies.

As hospitality director, a vainglorious title for the person who collects money and points people toward nametags at monthly luncheons, I met about 200 more members and became recognized as the person who could answer questions like, “Where is the restroom?”

The third year, as secretary, I recorded board-meeting minutes and e-mailed events calendars, memos, announcements, etc., to the membership. More than 200 business communicators, many of whom still couldn’t have picked me out of a lineup, learned to at least recognize my name, which was tacked onto all this e-mail they received.

About that time some kind soul proffered my name for the one-page “Doer” feature in the chapter newsletter. Each month an active member was featured in a blend of the personal and professional; free publicity.

By the time I became the newsletter editor, one of only two paid positions on the board, I was well established within IABC. The newsletter showcased my abilities; still more free advertising, or perhaps we could call it paid advertising since they were paying me. The monthly check was small, but hey – in our world there’s a lot to be said for any regular, dependable income interspersed with the one-time-only gigs.

### *Freelancers unite*

Meanwhile, in the endless business cycle, Houston corporate downsizing became rampant, and hundreds of corporate creative types were tossed into freelance work. One enterprising IABC member decided we should launch an offshoot organization, an Entrepreneurial Strategic Interest Group (ESIG) for the self-employed: writers, editors, graphic designers and photographers, mainly. That proved to be a brilliant idea, highly beneficial to us all. We held monthly luncheons during which speakers addressed issues such as how to manage a business, build a business, attract clientele, manage accounting and taxes, collect payment, write a contract, utilize services . . . sell ourselves . . . anything associated with freelancing. Even though some of us competed for the same clients, all remained generous about sharing knowledge, tips and even job leads.

So I became active in that group, as well. I helped plan presentations on client relations, trends, professional standards and profitability. You can't do that without learning from it. I even got to strut my stuff a bit by writing a comedy script which served as the format for one meeting.

The IABC members, and especially the ESIG, fed off of each other. Usually when a client hired me to create a written piece, they depended on me to supply a graphic designer and/or photographer. Of course I selected people whose work I now knew and respected, people from IABC. Similarly, many IABC-member graphic designers brought me into their projects. Voilà! Jobs were coming in effortlessly. And I got to work with some really inspired and inspiring talent.

This give-and-take job situation evolved to where all my work came from my former employer and through the IABC board of directors and ESIG members, without my having to seek it. All I did was become visible to the right people by participating.

Since this is not an advertisement for IABC or any other organization, I will not elaborate on the vast array of other

benefits they offer, but their purpose is to provide a continuing education resource for people like us while boosting professionalism within our ranks. I've been surprised by how many people I've met in our field who are unaware of these beneficial groups.

### ***Bring on awards, bring on more jobs!***

All these organizations have their annual writing competitions on the local, regional and national levels, which you can learn about at their websites. I've listed addresses at the end of this chapter.

I know, I know. Writing contests are controversial. Some are reputable, some are con jobs. Some people are for them, some are against. You may have heard that one way to identify the real writing contests is by the size of the entry fee. If it's only \$20 or so, it's probably on the up and up, or so I have read. That sounds logical. However, these writers' guild entry fees are relatively astronomical. (See individual websites.) But if you win, there's a nice payoff, and I don't mean cash.

Any award you garner in this fashion generates automatic publicity for your talent among people who are apt to offer you work: other organization members.

If, at the awards ceremony, you're called up on stage to receive more than one prize, design firms, PR firms, corporate communications reps and editors in the audience notice that. You may be hearing from them.

You also get to decorate your office with plaques and trophies which will glam up both your walls and your clients' image of your work. I knew a graphic design firm in Houston that had a wall covered with about 50 awards. It was the first thing you saw upon entering their offices, and you thought, "These people must be the best. I must have them."

By the way, you don't have to be a member to enter any organization's writing competitions; the entry fee is just

higher for nonmembers. Why would you enter a competition managed by an organization to which you don't belong? Many people and companies belong to multiple organizations, so now they see you winning at IABC and PRSA and AWC, and it polishes your image, bumps up your value even more.

Because entry fees are high, because I'm cheap, because I hate spending money without a return on it, because it nearly causes me physical pain to do so, here's my strategy: I never enter anything unless I think it will win. This is not to say I've won every competition I've entered. But I will never enter anything based on mere hope. I'm going to guess that as a writer, you're also an avid reader. So you know the difference between the really fine and the merely serviceable. Some writers consistently produce gold, and I wish I were one of them, but during the creative process, if I'm working at my best, if gold is flowing from my pen, as it were, there comes a moment when I know it. Unfortunately, that doesn't happen to me on every job (the embalmers' manual rears its ugly head again), and unless it does, I'm not going to enter a piece even if my client is turning hand-springs over it. What do they know?

### *All rise*

Once you've started your awards collection you will probably be asked to judge competitions, yourself. By the way, in order to avoid personal bias among judges, IABC chapters ship their entries to other chapters for judging. The Kansas City chapter, for instance, may judge a Houston competition, while the Houston chapter judges Phoenix.

Becoming a judge tells other organization members that you must be pretty good, and they'll consider you when a job comes up.

One more benefit of these contests . . . I don't know how to say this without sounding catty. Well, this story commenced with a cat, so I say meow. When you start judging

these competitions, the first thing to leap out and smack you in the face will be the number of desperately inept people employed to write annual reports, advertising pieces, newsletters, training materials, etc. They actually get paid for producing semiliterate crap which they enter in contests as their best work. First, you'll be appalled by their numbers. Then you'll realize — Good golly, Miss Molly! If these helpless ninnies are getting paid for this garbage, then all my insecurities have been relatively baseless. It gives you the confidence to stride forth and face potential clients with the knowledge that, yes, by gosh I am good. Only an idiot would refuse me work, and who wants to work for an idiot? A little attitude is not a bad thing if it helps a shy person through their debilitating fear of rejection.

(Here I should interject that I have yet to ever viciously criticize another writer without later discovering that, in the process, I misspelled some common word like “the.” I don't expect the preceding paragraph to be an exception . . . I mean exception.)

In my experience so far, winning competitions depends only 50 percent on your entry piece, which causes much grumbling among entrants, i.e., “I don't see why they can't just take my writing at face value”; “I don't know what all this other stuff has to do with it,” blah, blah, blah. Nonetheless, each entry requires a supporting document addressing the why and how of the entry's creation. Simply follow the entry instructions carefully and to the letter. Don't skip the parts you don't like unless you prefer not to win. Whether or not the supporting documentation should be considered in the judging, it is. Get over it.

The toughest demand ever attached to an entry form is to quantify the results of your written piece. In other words, they want specific, measurable proof of the success and value of your writing. By what percentage did your company or client's business increase, or how many more thingamabobs

did they sell, or by how many dollars did their profits soar as a direct result of what you wrote for them?

They want to know what?!

You heard me. Interestingly, the people who thought that one up, as well as the judges, know how nearly impossible that question usually is to answer. But the theory behind it is that everything we write should have measurable value. Otherwise, why are we doing this? Most often, trying to answer that question will really make your brain ache. Sometimes, to your own amazement, you may succeed in unearthing some result that you can point to and even measure . . . or nearly measure . . . or sort of ballpark. I once won an award for a feature story that had no measurable results by the wildest stretch. So on my entry I just said so. But I gave four or five reasons it couldn't possibly be measured, including ways in which I'd attempted to measure it that were insupportable. The judges bought that.

If you've made the effort and presented a sound argument, the judges, all writers themselves, will respect that and very likely identify with your dilemma.

If you keep entering contests with nary a win, you might consider dipping into the wealth of continuing education opportunities these organizations provide. Augmenting and polishing your wordsmith's weaponry may be in order, and contests are a fairly painless way to find out. And remember, writers are the only people who always expect their first painting to hang in the Louvre.

### *The keys to the kingdom*

The keys to getting jobs through writers' organizations are:

1. Be active.
2. Be visible.
3. Be active with and visible to the people who can give you the gigs.

You could join a guild, attend 100 of their luncheons, schmooze and hand out business cards till both your smile and your arm fell off, and never generate work. I cannot tell you how many people I've had this conversation with, the one you and I are having right now, who have responded, "I was a PRSA member for two years, and I went to two or three of their luncheons and never got any work. You're just better with people than I am."

Right. I talk out loud to cats in public. I've lived with myself long enough to notice that not too many people are instantly, helplessly drawn to me. I grow on people, so getting a gig based on a fast and sparkling self-presentation plus three writing samples is not my talent. In IABC, people had to really get to know me. I had to show them I was competent, demonstrating that they could trust me to handle assorted communicative tasks. They had to see me in action before the gigs started coming in. The great news is, writers' organizations are the perfect venue for those of us who may not stun others with our literary luminosity at first glance. Active, visible participation is the magic.

This could not be easier. Organizations like IABC, PRSA, AWC, and STC hunger for people who will roll up their sleeves and donate their time and talent. Join. Go to a meeting. Tell someone influential that you'd like to volunteer, and you're in.

### *The dreaded results quantification*

You may well ask, "So are you telling me that if I join some writers' group and become active and visible, I'll never have to go looking for jobs again?"

No. But I will say that it can bring you a substantial amount of work. I will say that in combination with what you're doing now, it will bring more work than you have now. So I suppose you want me to quantify my results. Okay, I accept your challenge.

## How to Build a Gig Trap Through Organizational Activity

I served in an active, visible roll with IABC for seven years.

The first year of being active and visible and not asking anyone within that organization for jobs, no one offered any, and I hadn't expected them to.

The second year, an IABC graphic designer brought me in on a job writing brochure copy for a maritime bank. That came to \$388 I hadn't gone looking for.

The third and fourth years of being active and visible without asking for jobs, I got no jobs. Remember, I didn't go into this necessarily expecting to get jobs. When they came to me, they came as a surprise. I was enjoying the continuing-education opportunities presented at monthly meetings and occasional seminars. I was especially enjoying taking breaks from my home office word processor to converse with living humans face to face.

The fifth year of not asking for jobs was the year I became the chapter newsletter editor, starting midyear. That year I edited eight issues and attracted the attention of a freelance editor, who hired me to write five pieces, mostly newsletter feature stories, for her clients. That year's unsought income amounted to \$5,657. Another graphic designer brought me in on a pro bono job for an AIDS hospice. I ended up serving on their public relations committee for four years and writing for them steadily.

The sixth year, seventeen jobs came my way through IABC. I edited six chapter newsletter issues, wrote ten articles for the aforementioned editor and one story for an oil company employee publication. Total income unasked for: \$6,256. A third exceptionally talented graphic designer invited me to work with her on several jobs. However, one was pro bono, and the other two fizzled.

Year seven, the last year I was active with IABC, I was privileged to write eleven pieces, nine for my editor friend, one for the oil company and one for another editor, for a

total unsought income of \$9,172. A fourth graphic designer recommended me to a venture capitalist company, but nothing came of that.

That's forty-two paying gigs and \$21,500 I never asked anyone for, plus four writing awards from that work.

You may say I put an awful lot of time and effort into getting that \$21,500. I don't think so. I attended a monthly board meeting, a monthly chapter luncheon and a monthly ESIG luncheon. That's five hours per month. The food was fantastic. The conversations and, ultimately, friendships were fabulous additions to my life. I was gaining benefits the whole time. I learned so much about how to be a freelancer. The responsibilities – manning the hospitality table at meetings, taking minutes, e-mailing information, participating in one task force meeting per year, even editing the newsletter – required surprisingly little time; an hour here, an hour there. Had I been more astute, I would have volunteered for that editorial slot with the chapter newsletter sooner. It's not like there was competition for it and, as you may have noticed, that's when my unsought jobs took off.

Meanwhile, I was still working for my former employer on a freelance basis, getting more gigs I didn't have to ask for, so the income from my IABC connections was gravy. And yes, the combination of the two comprised my fulltime occupation. I was not tending bar on the side.

### *Aftershocks*

Everything I've said up to this point has been considerably past tense. Almost six years ago I quit writing entirely to handle family responsibilities, which entailed moving to a remote rural area upon which relatively few writers have tread. It's the ideal place to find lifelong solitude in which to compose one's novels, but a preposterous place in which to find business writing opportunities. Business competition is unknown. Using the printed word to promote business has yet to catch on in a big way and makes no sense to the busi-

ness owners with whom I've spoken. Our sole "PR agency" works in graphics only, no words; the Marcel Marceau of PR. They were confused by the concept of combining words with pictures when I broached it. (I quote, "Why?" I guess they really take to heart the old saying, "A picture is worth a thousand . . . you know.") Need I add that IABC, PRSA and the like would never have a reason to operate here or anywhere near this desolate cornfield? Our sole local organization is the VFW.

So when I was freed to return to income-earning work, I decided to take what I foolishly thought was the path of least resistance and just go to work for someone else for a change; let them worry about profitability, taxes and so forth. I was overlooking the awkward truth that I had no farming, factory, fast food or road construction experience, and those are the primary types of work available here. Hirers had no interest in me or my kind. A job counselor cheerfully informed me that I, with my big-city background, terrify the work socks off the locals. (Moi? Shy little inhibited moi?)

I was rejected for more than 100 jobs. It's hard to pinpoint my lowest moment, but it may have been the day I was judged unacceptable for scrubbing stains out of people's carpeting. Or maybe that was my greatest moment; it depends on your perspective.

By the time I reached that 100-rejections mark, my ego was shattered, and I decided to take a break, temporarily ignore the wolf pawing, snarling, and salivating at my door, and just spend eight weeks painting and wallpapering the grand old house I'd bought, to get my mind off negative things like losing the grand old house and starving to death. At no time had I considered returning to writing. Nor had I contacted my old, now long-distance clients and associates, other than in a lighthearted social tone.

Five and a half weeks into my decorating, and halfway through painting a towering stairwell, I heard from an old

IABC/Houston member who wanted to know— Was I still freelancing and could I do a brochure on fencing? Not the swashbuckling kind, darn it all; the dog-confining kind. I leaped at it.

Literally the following day, another old IABC acquaintance e-mailed me to see if I'd be interested in doing a brochure for an engineer. He'd asked her to do it, but her current employer forbids freelancing on the side, so she referred him to me.

Truth being stranger than fiction, three days after that I was contacted by a travel magazine editor. An old IABC associate had given her my name and contact info.

And two or three weeks after that, yet another old IABC member called me about editing a quarterly oil company publication.

By the way, it was one of those same IABC contacts who, indirectly, alerted me to the opportunity to write this chapter.

So – my old IABC connections pay off still and

## Websites

Below are the website addresses for the organizations mentioned in this chapter. Of course, you can find numerous other writers' groups represented on the Web. Most offer valuable information and resources, including job postings, but lack chapters and events, outside of, in some cases, annual conventions. All the wonders of cyberculture still do not give us that live, activity-sharing face time, without which I wouldn't have a story to tell.

The four organizations listed here offer ways to participate in a visible manner that is beneficial to you:

*Association for Women in Communications:*  
[www.womcom.org](http://www.womcom.org)

*International Association of Business Communicators:*  
[www.iabc.com](http://www.iabc.com)

*Public Relations Society of America:* [www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org)

*Society for Technical Communication:* [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

again. I repeat, I did nothing to inspire these offers. These were all extremely delayed “aftershocks” of my departure from Houston, and I prefer not to dwell on why it took them six years to miss me. The important thing is, they did, eventually.

My rebirth as a writer happened just six months ago. I’ve now expanded into actively seeking gigs. So here I sit, back in the saddle again, clickety-clacking letters across a computer screen, talking to my cats.

My stairwell remains half painted.



### About the Author

**Sue-Ellen Davison** majored in English and liberal arts at Hanover College, where she helped edit the campus newspaper. Her advisor told her, in the nicest way possible, that while she’d never be a writer, he thought she’d do very well in the diplomatic corps.

Taking half of his advice, she tossed aside her English degree immediately upon graduation and turned to aviation. Starting as a flight attendant, she then briefly worked as an air courier and, ultimately, became a commercial pilot. That led to the opportunity to work as a neurophysiological test subject in NASA’s weightlessness studies. She’s yet to find anything more fun than somersaulting about in simulated weightlessness and actually getting paid for it.

Airline bankruptcy forced her to resurrect that musty, presumably useless old English degree and get a “real” job in corporate America, where she became an advertising and public relations manager for the world’s largest owner and operator of funeral homes and cemeteries. (“Mom! Dad! Remember when I was with the airline and we got to fly at a discount? Now we’re going to get to die at a discount!”) But before she could collect on that ultimate company benefit, corporate downsizing interceded and shoved her into freelance writing and editing.

Today she continues to write and edit part-time while simultaneously venturing into yet another new career, dealing in antique and vintage home-decorating items.

# Rhetoric in the Digital Age or the Way of Being a Good Web Content Writer

© Kevin Rux

Okay, writers, we're not in Kansas anymore. That's right. Do you know that we have left the Age of the Information Economy behind and are well into the Age of the Attention Economy? Do you know what this means for us writers?

It means that writing gigs abound! There are websites, blogs, articles, white papers, and pay-per-click ads to be written: a virtual Mecca of opportunities to get paid and collect credits.

It means that if you rely upon the Internet to conduct your business, or you work for clients who do, the age of putting up a web site and getting instant results are long gone. Now your writing must clamor for the attention of frenetic web surfers who are lured by enticing actions of the billions of pages currently indexed on the web.

To give you some perspective, Google alone indexes over 7 billion pages. This means that if you're going to survive on the web, you've got to grab people's attention. How do you that? You do it by using good digital rhetorical skills.

Now there's a scary word – rhetoric.

Ah, such memories. In my case, rhetoric was a term the nuns used to throw around in regards to the essays we wrote

in English class. You know, the reading, writing, and rhetoric thing? Go back now to first year high school English; remember the purpose of an essay? It is to grab your reader's attention and persuade her to adopt your point of view, to agree with your argument.

That is exactly what rhetoric is all about: rhetoric can be defined as the art of persuasion: of using words, either verbal or written, to catch attention and persuade readers to think, do, or believe what you want them to think, do or believe.

But the operative words here are "to catch attention." How in the world are you supposed to do that when you're up against 7 billion web pages? You see, there is this thing called search engine optimization (SEO) SEO is the compilation of actions you take, including selecting and incorporating selected keywords into your text, so that the site fares well when users input those keywords into a search engine. It's the difference between coming up in the top 10 versus 7 billionth for a given search term. SEO is, then, our Technology Age rhetoric, the rhetoric necessary to successfully engage in the Attention Economy, and a rhetoric more challenging than any we've practiced in previous times.

So, how exactly can you grab this attention?

### *The Mechanics*

As I've said, one big way you do that is by ranking high in the search engines, because then, when a user enters a relevant keyword term, the site you're working on will come up as one of the (hopefully) top 10 web sites!

Okay, so working backward, how do you write so that a site ranks high?

**First**, you fill the site with good, solid, well-written content. You offer value to visitors.

The search engines measure content and score it according to the value it offers users.

In other words, you use the skills of good rhetoric, which include the skillful, artful, and meaningful use of words.

**Second**, you select keywords that your users are most likely to use to search for what you offer on your site. The trick here is to select keywords that are likely to be used, but that won't draw a big number of web sites in a keyword search. Here's where you need to work with an SEO expert, or employ the use of special keyword software.

**Third**, you get a lot of quality sites to link to your site. These links are viewed as "votes" for your web site, and the "better" the site in the search engines' eyes, the higher the value assigned to the site. The search engines look at the quality of the content on sites linking to yours, as well as their relevance.

**Fourth**, the site needs to be designed in a search-engine friendly way. How do you do that? First, don't use Flash. You know those sites that have that introductory page where it says "Click to skip?" Well, the search engine crawler never gets beyond that page and therefore doesn't index the web site.

Also, avoid using JavaScript. Same thing there, the search engines get lost in the complex code it generates and that's the end of their crawl on the site.

Next, make sure all the internal site links are working, and make them text links that contain your keywords.

Then, if you use image maps or pull down menus for navigation, make sure you also have textual navigation on the same page.

Last, pay careful attention to the content of your Title tag, Description tag, Header tags, and body text. As for your

Keyword tag, Google doesn't even look at it, but make sure you still have it contain all the site's important keywords. Also, make sure you use your keywords in each of these in a relevant, normal way. Some webmasters make the mistake of loading these tags with keywords in a manipulative, phony way: the search engines can see right through this tactic and will penalize the site accordingly. Also, in the body text, bullets, italics, and bold are weighted more heavily, and if possible, use keywords here as well.

The items we've discussed above comprise the mechanical aspects of SEO rhetoric for your site. Now let's talk about textual rhetoric.

### *The Text*

Remember: visitors to a web site are always just a click away from moving on to some other site they find more interesting, so you have to try and keep them with you until you accomplish your rhetorical goal!

## **Find Online Writing Opportunities**

*As the Internet continues to grow as a viable marketing resource for companies and individuals, so do the writing opportunities for those who learn the nuances of writing for online publication. Here are just a few ways to find opportunities for online writing assignments:*

**Search online:** Open your favorite search engine and type in the words "writing jobs" — today alone that phrase returned 57,000,000 results using Google. Too overwhelming? Then consider some of these alternatives:

- Use online job boards to seek work or post your resume.
- Subscribe to services that do the leg work for you by compiling job ads for writers only.
- Sign up with a matching service that posts projects you can bid on.
- Subscribe to ezines for writers that send out job alerts.

Wow, there's a term of academic gobbledey gook.

Seriously, if you go back to our definition of rhetoric, it is to persuade or convince someone to accept your argument. Well, your argument is whatever the objectives are for the site.

- Are you attempting to sell something?
- Get leads?
- Deliver information?
- Deflect telephone calls away from your customer service department?

This would also be your purpose, and the first step in creating good web site rhetoric is to define your purpose as

- Visit writers communities to do some online networking and idea exchange.

**Align with a web designer:**

Clients typically want full service web development which means design AND content. Find a designer in need of your talent and collaborate on assignments.

**Tap current clients:** If you already work with a base of clients, make it known that you also specialize in writing for the Internet and would be happy to assist with their online content development. And don't forget to let them know you appreciate referrals!

**Target a niche market:**

Choose a specific industry or market segment and promote yourself as a specialist for online writing in that niche. Find an association that caters to your chosen industry and offer a member discount. Associations continually look for cost-saving benefits to offer their members.

**Contribute articles:** While it's nice to be paid for your writing, there is a benefit to contributing free articles to online article banks and print publications in exchange for a generous byline that includes contact information.

specifically as possible. Don't just sit down and start writing. The more planning and thinking you do about what you're trying to accomplish, the more likely you are to accomplish it.

Now the question becomes, who is your user? Do you have demographic data: age, schooling level, location, job, hair color? Find out as much as you can about who your web site is geared to: if you sell men's work pants, then your audience is going to be

- mostly male,
- over age 18,
- blue collar,
- located in anywhere, USA,
- middle class, etc.

Here's something else to consider about users: unless you are a Kodak or Ford, or Proctor & Gamble, don't try to be all things to all people. Being "Everyman" is the surest way to dilute your purpose, and disengage your site visitors within that 7 second capture window. It boils down to this – the Internet is about fast action, and if users can't get your scoop in a glance, forget it.

So, with these two pieces of data: your purpose (to sell workpants) and a description of your target audience, you're ready to rock and roll in crafting your web site text.

### *The Details*

Let's look at some general rules for web text that apply to all readers.

**First**, the screen carries approximately 1/3 the amount of information and text that an 8 ½ x 11 inch piece of paper holds.

**Second**, people don't like to read text in long paragraphs on the screen; they prefer short paragraphs and sentences, bullets, headers, and graphics (but don't put text in the graphics because the search engines can't read it). Also, reading speed is decreased by 30 %.

**Third**, avoid scrolling: a good rule of thumb is 250 – 300 words per screen.

**Fourth**, write in a style that is clear, concise, and easily scanned.

**Fifth**, use keywords, but use them accurately and with relevance.

Okay, so now back to your purpose: make it obvious and clear what you want the readers to do – your rhetorical point!

Here are some possibilities of what you might want them to do:

- Call
- Check order status
- Download free software
- Find information
- Give feedback
- Join
- Purchase a product or service
- Request something

Then, make it easy for them to get to:

- How they purchase by credit card
- Any forms they need
- Relevant contact information: email, phone number, address, etc.

So, there you have it, some stuff you can put in your arsenal to get started for your own web site or to get some business writing for other people's sites.

Remember: having a successful web site means doing some advance planning and following guidelines that have been proven to work.

So, get out there, work hard, and go get 'em!!



### About the Author

**Kevin Rux** is a freelance writer, copywriter and SEO content writer residing in Europe, Lithuania. He is the publisher of the daily digest of telecommute writing markets and jobs, *Justmarkets* (<http://www.justmarkets.com>), that helps writers use their time writing instead of searching for gigs. Kevin holds an M.B.A. degree. He is a copywriter of countless websites, and his publications have been published in the list of magazines, business, and literary journals in Lithuania.



**Kevin Rux**

# Magazine Writing & More

© Sharon Greenaway

My most regular writing gig is working part-time as a freelance magazine writer. While I am also the author of three books for children, I've found much more regular work by submitting articles to a variety of magazines. This work has taken me a long time to build up and stems from a combination of my love of reading magazines, the success that I had when my first book was published (*The Silkie, Not Your Average Pet*, Bellsouth, Australia, 1998, a small non-fiction book about the Silkie fowl.) and an endless desire to seek out ideas that perhaps I can use for an article or two.

***Write about your hobby and get an income from it.***

I wrote *The Silkie, Not Your Average Pet* because I was breeding and showing the fluffy fowls called Silkies and realized that there was a gap in the market for a straightforward book about keeping them.

From my own children's experiences with the Silkie I realized they made great pets, so decided the book should be written from that perspective. I got this book published rather fortuitously after phoning a poultry information company for advice about my sick birds. The owner, Jim Finger, answered my call, and after getting his advice I asked him if he knew of anyone who would be interested in publishing an introductory book on the Silkie fowl? To my surprise and delight, he said he would! So after much writing and re-writing, as well as getting advice from fellow students at the local college where I was studying writing for children, I fi-

nally sent off the manuscript along with some black and white illustrations.

It took a year before the 'dream' of my Silkie book became real, but in 1998 it was published. It was worth the wait. I'd achieved my goal of a basic introduction to the Silkie fowl selling at a reasonable price. I was so happy that I didn't worry about only getting paid a small once-off fee!

Writing for a chicken magazine (and hence earning a lot more money than the book) started when, after giving my book a great critique in Australasian Poultry magazine, the editor, Megg Miller, asked me to write down how and why I became interested in Silkies, and what made me want to write a book about them. It was this suggestion and a subsequent published article that gave me the confidence to try writing more articles for this magazine.

Additional articles included interviews with fellow people who love chickens in one way or another. For example, those who raise poultry to show, people who use poultry for organic vegetable growing, others who raise chickens to sell at local farmer's markets and people who paint and draw poultry. With the exception of one or two word find puzzles, all of my work with this magazine has been non-fiction. It has been a great way to earn an income by combining my hobby of chicken raising and writing.

What hobbies or sport do you participate in that you can write articles about (or maybe even a book)?

### ***Branching out into other topics.***

From the time our children were born my husband and I have read them stories, deriving almost as much pleasure from them as they did. So when our youngest started school I went back to school to study writing and found that I particularly loved writing for children, hence the Silkie book.

However, it wasn't until a few years later when I had developed enough confidence and experience from work-

ing for Australasian Poultry that I decided to tackle writing for children's magazines. So off to the library I went to see what magazines were publishing non-fiction.

I found two science journals geared for kids and, while I am no scientist, I asked for the writing guidelines. The first magazine was not taking on new writers at the time, but the other one was prepared to look at a short 200-word submission.

I wrote an article about the history of the old computer that was at the museum in Victoria, Australia. Imagine my delight when it was accepted. The payment was only a couple of copies of the magazine, but it gave me 'a toe in the door' and it meant the editor had seen that I could write and do the necessary research. So when I submitted more ideas, they were looked on as meriting payment.

I also wrote many short pieces for the same magazine. Again, the payment was only a couple of copies of the magazine, but it kept my name before the editor and also honed my writing skills.

A few months later I submitted to the other kids' science magazine again, (it was published out of the same office), armed this time with science writing experience. I was given work and this second magazine proved to be quite lucrative for about two years, with nearly every bi-monthly issue including a piece I had written. Article topics ranged from interviewing a clown doctor, to seeing what a horse masseur does, discovering why animals came in from the wild and investigating some weird plants.

It is important to note that, even though an article or story may be well-written, acceptance to any publication is entirely dependent on the publication's needs as determined by the editor.

Something that a writer has no control over is a change in editorship. While I survived two new editors to both maga-

zines, the third change resulted in getting little or no work from either one. I was paid for one article but it was never published. A second article assignment was available but it was not a paying piece. I felt my track record with the magazines warranted some financial return so I politely declined writing the non-paying piece.

The above experience is an example of how one writer's confidence had grown so much that she turned down work when there was no money offered.

What other magazine can I (you) write for?

In additional to the income from writing for the children's science magazines, I realized that I could try my hand at a lot of different magazine topics. The hardest thing was coming up with ideas and then being able to sell them.

Once I began exploring other opportunities, I received assignments from craft magazines, gardening magazines, children's fiction magazines, an antique and

## Ten tips to attract article assignments

*With a little writing credence and a great idea you have a good chance of getting assignments, if you pitch your idea to the right magazine.*

**1. Read**, read and read some more in the genre you want to write in.

**2. Research** magazines you would like to write for. Visit your local library, a newsagency or the web. Browse through or search for magazines of interest. If you look for and choose magazines that you would want to read yourself, you will be more enthusiastic about the style and content.

When you have selected magazines that seem like a good fit, write down contact details for each editor.

**3. If you are not confident in your writing skills, seek writing courses** that are being offered at reputable tertiary institutions.

**4. Choose a topic.** Read several issues of each of your chosen magazines thoroughly and/or look up the web sites for the table of contents for previous issues. Brainstorm fresh or related ideas not yet covered and jot them down. Do a quick search for books and web sites related to your topic to use for potential resources, even if you are planning to draw from your own expertise. Having more information than you need is better than not having enough.

**5. Story ideas** can come from anywhere — reading newspapers and magazines, watching television and listening to or observing people. You can also get on 'media release' email lists for companies, research institutes and universities.

**6. Outline your proposal.** Write a brief query and outline that includes the article topic, synopsis of content, the targeted readership and why it would suit that magazine. If you have experience/qualifica-

collectable magazine and even a magazine about books. The more you write the more you will be able to write!

### *Books may follow.*

I learned that Thomson Learning Australia was looking for new manuscripts for one of their reading schemes. I read the writer's guidelines and then wrote stories that suited those guidelines, or edited previous work to fit the requirements.

I submitted five stories and was delighted when I received feedback from the editor with some suggestions on how one of the stories I sent in may read better. I re-wrote the story and it was accepted. That story is entitled 'Bowled Over' and was published in 2002. It is still selling well after four years.

### *Be flexible, prepared to say "yes," and learn as you go.*

My third book, *The Puppet Show*, was written and subsequently published a couple of years later when an editor from that same pub-

lisher phoned me asking if I had any more work to send them. At that time the only fiction stories I had were the same ones that had been rejected the first time. However, I asked the editor if the company was looking for non-fiction work. The editor was surprised to learn that I also wrote non-fiction, as her experience had been that writers tend to specialize in one genre or another.

The editor sent me some outlines of non-fiction that they wanted work in and I accepted the commission to write a book about puppets that, as it turned out, ended up being a combination of fact and fiction. I did not know much about puppets but knew where to find information and, fortunately, I knew a puppeteer.

Be flexible in your approach to writing, and be prepared to learn as you go with any project. It may open up more possibilities for you.

### ***Manuscript reviews.***

Do you know the saying that you have to be in the

tions pertinent to the topic, mention them. Send the outline to the editor along with a request for writer's guidelines, which will cover payment details, word count, photo requirements, etc.

**7. Research and then write** the article. When granted an assignment, use your own knowledge as well as information from books, the Internet, and interviews, if necessary. Remember that facts need to be verifiable so be sure your resources are reliable. If you have a genuine interest in the topic, and do enough research to make sure you understand the topic, you will be able to convey it to the target reader.

**8. Interviewing people.** If your article requires interviews, begin with your own network of contacts then expand to find industry experts via the Internet or through associations or organizations associated with your topic. Use a tape recorder to ensure accuracy of information, and take a camera if photos are expected.

**9. Photographs.** Many editors appreciate it if you can supply images to support the article. If you enjoy photography, expand your skills so you can offer photos with your article.

**10. Edit your work.** Once you have written the article, re-read and edit your work. Reading it out loud is a good way to check how well the writing flows. Other tips:

a. Write your article, then print it out and put it away for a day. Using a hard copy can be advantageous to check for clarity and errors, and you'll be surprised how different your perspective can be that next day!

b. For extra polish and an objective opinion, ask an expert to read it and give you feedback.

c. When you're confident that the article is ready, send it to the editor. But remember — although it may seem perfect to you, be prepared to do rewrites if the editor requests it. They know their reading audience best.

right place at the right time? This can be true for your writing career. Consider any writing opportunity that may come along, even if it isn't relevant to your particular genre.

An example:

Two years ago I saw an advertisement in our local newspaper for a small publishing house that was for sale. I contacted the publisher and arranged an interview.

During the course of the interview I realized that the business was not for me, but as a result of meeting the then owner of the business I was able to get subsequent work as a manuscript reviewer. This role is not something that I ever saw myself doing, but when the opportunity came up I grabbed it.

In the last financial year I earned \$575.00 (Australian) just by reading and appraising other people's manuscripts. While this is not a huge sum, it all adds up to income and will enhance any writer's credentials when applying for other work.

### *To conclude.*

There is a lot of competition in the writing market.

My best advice to any aspiring writer is to be open to new possibilities; to continue to educate yourself as much as possible, both 'wordly' (sic) and worldly. Be prepared to 'have a go,' and at the same time try not to be too precious about your writing; be prepared to accept justifiable criticism and be ready to re-write your work. Also, take rejection as a way of learning — no writer enjoys these but the more work you get, the (slightly) easier they are to accept.

All the best with finding your own 'gig.'



### About the Author

Sharon Greenaway's credentials include:

**Books:**

*The Kangaroo*, Learning Island.org 2006

*The Puppet Show*, Thomson Learning Australia 2004

*Bowled Over*, Thomson Learning Australia 2002

*The Silkie, Not Your Average Pet*, Bellsouth 1998



Sharon  
Greenaway

**Magazines:**

NSW Schools magazine • Magpies magazine (Australia) • Children's Book Insider • Australasian Poultry • Bendigo Magazine • Australian Papercrafts magazine • Grass Roots • Comet and Explore • Helix and Scientriffic kids science magazines

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# GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

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I've made a ton of money by ignoring a ton of writing advice over the years. As an example, one gem I've heard over and over again is:

Don't Get Gimmicky!

The truth is, gimmicks sell—and they sell well. Editors love a good gimmick, *if* you take the time to develop a good one. Sure, there is a bit of planning time up front, but if you take the time early on, you will thank yourself later as the cheques start rolling in. Let's look at the process, so I can show you how to do it too!

## ***STEP ONE: GET a Good Idea***

A gimmick is a cutesy concept that you are going to use to create a massive amount of articles from, so you need to make sure it's something you can live with.

Most gimmicks work well for columns, and if you're thinking of earning a dollar or two from your writing, you need to realize that I estimate that it is roughly 1000% easier to sell good nonfiction work than it is to sell brilliant fiction. That being said, I'll show you how both are possible later.

So where does this brilliant idea come from? You might be surprised. If you're not careful, the idea might find you...

For me, it all began at about 3 a.m.—a time when I was not quite awake, but not quite asleep. Bleary-eyed, realizing

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

I had fallen asleep with the light on, I glanced over at my night table and sat there staring at the front cover of the latest *Writer's Digest* magazine (April 2003, to be exact). Three phrases on the front cover seemed to take on a neon glow: "Get started! Get Involved! Get Inspired!"

The repetition of the word 'get' inspired me. It was short. It was catchy. It implied activity and instant gratification. Better yet, it caught my attention when I was hardly even awake. If it could do that much for me in the wee hours of the morning, I realized that it could be used as a powerful hook for a wide variety of articles.

### ***STEP TWO: GET a long list of possibilities.***

With only that word, get, to go on, I ambled over to my den and pulled my copy of Bartlett's *Roget's Thesaurus* off my shelf. I wanted to see how many phrases they might have listed. Here's some of what I found:

- Get a bad name
- Get a bargain
- Get around
- Get a lucky break
- Get acquainted
- Get a dose of your own medicine
- Get a firm hold on
- Get ahead
- Get a head start
- Get a kick out of
- Get along with
- Get angry
- Get a piece of the action

- Get a move on!
- Get a share
- Get at the truth
- Get away with murder
- Get back on your feet
- Get better
- Get by
- Get caught in the act
- Get down to the nitty-gritty
- Get even
- Get healthy
- Get in on the act
- Get in on the ground floor
- Get into a habit
- Get into hot water
- Get moving!

And so on...and so on... All together, I counted well over 200 phrases using that word alone. I knew it was a good concept. Not only that, but I realized that “get” meant “understand,” so I could use it with practically any topic in the world. My list just went through the roof.

I decided to GET a move on. I was ready for the next step.

***STEP THREE: GET a focus.***

Rather than thinking about a single article or an article that one of the get phrases may lead to, I recommend thinking about a general subject area. The first one I chose was religion. I had just published an article, “Power of the Cross,”

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

in *This Christian Life*, so religion was on the brain. I started brainstorming column titles that might work:

“GET Acquainted” for a first column, explaining to readers the aims of the work,

“GET Love!” as a popular, positive one to work in early on,

“GET Informed...about HELL-O-WEEN” since October was not far away, and

“GET a Faith Lift!” to show just how cutesy I could get with titles if I wanted to.

The very first editor I approached with the concept was the owner/editor of a fairly new Christian website I’d come across recently. Denise Spiller, at Universal Personality, LOVED the idea, and was thrilled that I had four article ideas ready to go for her. She began publishing my column, “GET God!” and she received positive reader feedback, encouraging her to keep using more. By the time she and I had parted ways (she started working another job), she had purchased not only columns from me, but also some of my poetry and longer articles as well. Other get titles in this series included “GET into Debt,” “GET Juiced about Life,” “GET Blessed,” “GET Prayer,” “GET a Second Helping,” “GET the Lord’s Prayer,” and “GET Wet” (an article about baptism), to name a few.

### ***STEP FOUR: GET SOME sample articles for the column.***

Once you have a column idea, it’s important that you GET a feel for what it will be like to write that column. For this reason, I recommend writing several sample columns to have an idea of length and tone. Give yourself a word count (most columns run 600-1000 words) and a tone (informative,

argumentative, funny...) and then write at least three complete columns.

When I approached editor Spiller with the Christian column ideas, and she liked the concept, I could quickly strike while the iron was hot. I had four completed columns to show her, and she could either pick and choose, or, as it so happened—pay for all four. Having articles that are already written is a guarantee for the editor; she knows you have your column covered for four issues of the magazine, and she’s quite sure you’ll be able to come up with a few more in the time it takes all of them to run. It also guarantees that the editor won’t get too busy and forget about you while you go off researching and writing those first few pieces ( I can almost hear it now—“Oh, that column? We decided to do something different. Sorry”).

Editors are especially leery of new writers with few clips. If they can see that you can and produce, they are more likely to take a chance on you and your work. Now let’s say you’ve shopped your column around and found a home for it. What now?

***STEP FIVE: GET outside the box you’re in.***

Ok, so I had written the Christian column and it had added thousands of dollars to my income. But if I stopped there, I’d lose momentum. Not only that, but what would happen when my bread and butter column dried up?

I decided to expand to other areas. Here are a few of the ones I chose:

**Health:**

I saw an ad requesting health articles. Great. The only bad news? The pay. They were only paying \$10 per article. I might as well be writing keyword articles for that price. But

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

I took the gig anyway, and I wrote two pieces for *Healthy You*, an online mag. I wrote “GET Stressless” and “GET Involved and Give of Yourself,” and the editor bought both pieces.

What that gave me was two health clips. Editors rarely ask for more than a few clips anyway, and if they can see that you wrote for the same market more than once, it means someone trusted you at least twice). It led to a much higher paying article for a print magazine, *Healthy Living Magazine*, and was a gateway for me into an area I hadn’t written in before (but have many times since).

What this proves to me is that sometimes it IS savvy to write for little or no pay. Just don’t do that for a LONG time, or you won’t be able to feed yourself.

### Education:

I got more aggressive with the GET idea. I decided to get a few clips in the field of education and see what that might bring. I targeted *Magic City Morning Star*, an online newspaper that pays their writers—nothing! I wrote two articles for them, “GET a Journal!” and “GET Metaphoric,” and was contacted by a reader of those two columns to see if I could write an education column (paying) for another publication.

I created a GET Poetic column for them, and two articles ran, but then I found another market that paid better. By that time, I had two published Get Poetic articles and four more unpublished ones. I approached the new market, *Up With Learning*, with all six, explaining that if the column fit, two articles were reprints and four were originals (first rights available). They bought all six and paid full price for them all. Not only that, but they asked me to write a workbook to go along with the six columns and to conduct an

online workshop for them using the columns and workbook. Two free columns had again led to thousands.

When THAT company dissolved, the rights reverted back to me. I workshoped the series online and in classes in my community, and then integrated all of the material into one single book. Instead of waiting for a traditional publisher, I went with an online ebook publisher and asked for it to be sold at a fairly low selling price. Who was my market? Poets. Students. People with very little money. At least with a low price, the volume of sales increased. It has been a good strategy.

#### Detour Detour Detour:

When I saw how well the column / workbook / class flowed, I went back to the Christian markets and tried it out. I wrote several columns and then pitched a course “GET the Poetic Books of the Bible,” to Suite University. They loved the idea, and I wrote the course for them. They have since renamed it “Bible 102,” but it is still up and running on their site, and I am still being paid for everyone who takes it.

#### Business:

The next field I took on was business. I created some sample columns and finally hit upon a winner with *New York Moves* magazine. The bad news was they didn’t want columnists for their publication. The good news was that they liked several of my article ideas and wanted to publish them. The bad news was they weren’t offering any pay. A glossy magazine that didn’t pay its writers? Unfair, I yelled, in the privacy of my own home. But I submitted the articles and got some great-looking clips, clips that were illustrated by a professional (I’ll bet SHE got paid). I even filled in for another writer, a humor writer, who wasn’t going to make his deadline, and I got my first humor clip that way.

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

With my business clips in hand, I went shopping for magazines that did pay, and I am currently writing GET Busy! GET More Business articles for *SOUL* Mag. Titles I've written for them so far include

"GET Smart!"

"GET a Promotion!"

"GET Out of Control" (on delegating work)

"GET Friendly, Environmentally Friendly" (on the safe disposal of e-waste), and

"GET Control—Control Theory, That Is!"

My business clips also led to three ghostwritten books, two of which are being workshopped across the USA by motivational speakers as we speak. Again, clips are powerful tools!

Now I have to tell you, that after 100 published articles with the same concept, my excitement for it has waned a bit. I will STILL continue to search out new markets for the get concept, but as soon as I see my interest begin to wane, I knew it was time for the next step.

### ***STEP SIX: GET another gimmick!***

When I'm tired of doing one kind of writing—nonfiction articles, for example—I switch to writing poetry or fiction. A change is as good as a rest. But nonfiction articles put the bread and butter (and sometimes even jam) on the table, so I'm not so eager to stop writing them. I needed a new gimmick. Since we are now looping back to step one again, let me tell you a few different ways I've generated gimmicks to keep on keeping on.

#### **The Name Game**

I had someone I was working with in a writing workshop who had a bit of an accent (I'm not sure what it was),

but she kept chopping the “d” off the word “and,” for one thing, and her name was ANN. I found it hilarious, though I said nothing. I also had my first pseudonym. I took on the name ANN Albright (the last name came from another friend of mine), figuring that it might open up some of the women’s markets for me. I was right.

The column, “ANN Another Thing...!” has impressed many editors over a short period of time, leading to published titles like:

“ANNalyzing Your Man!”

“Don’t Be an ANNaconda!”

“How to send an ANNagram” and

“BohemiANN”

Look at the following words:

- ANNabolic
- ANNatomy
- ANNcestors
- ANNdrogynous
- ANNgry
- ANNimal

Can you think of what kinds of columns these words might suggest? So could I.

The columns practically wrote themselves!

For step two this time, I didn’t go to the thesaurus; I went to the two-volume dictionary sitting on my shelf. All I needed were piles of words beginning with the letters “AN,” so I knew that was the place to go for ideas. I found hundreds of possibilities, and many of them gave me ideas for possible topics.

Encouraged by that, I wrote some sample columns using a part of my first name—Albert. “Know-it AL” has led to a plethora of pontification, most of which begin “AL about \_\_\_\_\_.” The character I’ve created is a know-it-all, like Cliff off the old Cheers television series. His is the voice I write these columns with.

How about LEE? I came up with this idea while scanning *The Complete Rhyming Poetry Dictionary Revised*. I saw how many words ended with -ly, and the list seemed endless. “Creative LEE Speaking” was born. I don’t think I will ever run out of columns to write for this character. Let’s look at just a few from the A section:

“Absorbing LEE”

“Abusive LEE”

“Accurate LEE”

“Aimless LEE”

“Ambitious LEE”

“Amusing LEE”

“Assertive LEE”

“Awful LEE”

The cutesy name column has since become a staple in my bag of tricks. Editors love this gimmick, and they buy articles because of my titles time and time again. Readers “collect” these articles, and are upset if they miss one, because they don’t have the whole “series.” Happy editors. Happy readers. Regular paycheques. It’s downright spooky.

### **Time**

Things change. It’s unavoidable. But even though we’re told to learn history to avoid making the same mistakes again, few of us ever do. That’s why “old” seems like such a fresh

idea. For *Woman This Month*, a glossy magazine in Bahrain of all places, I used the idea to create a column, HERSTORY, which they renamed, “Women Past and Present.” In each column, I wrote about two women, one from the past and one from the present who had something in common. Some of my sample pairings were:

Louisa May Alcott (author of *Little Women*) and Kim Gandy (president of NOW, the National Organization for Women)

Anne Frank and Margaret Atwood (and their love of language!)

Sojourner Truth and Oprah Winfrey (and their ability to help others)

Since then, I’ve been brainstorming ways to expand on this idea:

MEN, past and present

Sports stars, past and present

Movies, past and present

Music, past and present

...the possibilities are endless! Again, it’s a sign that it’s a workable gimmick.

### **FICTION, because I promised**

Remember how I said that ideas may find you if you are open to them? Another example is a fictional serial that I first sold to one market that is now being picked up by another. One night, while watching television, I saw two shows back to back:

Red Green—a show about a backwoods, hillbilly kind of guy, who always carries a roll of duct tape with him.

Survivor—the reality show where a group of people are dumped on an island and try to outwit and outlast each other.

Combining those two together, I came up with *Backwoods Survivor*, a fictional series, that I instantly had a wide variety of ideas for. Basically, I could take a Red Green-like character and *any* life situation and “hillbillyize” it. I started thinking how the character would act in different television shows, in different situations.

I instantly planned out thirty “episodes,” and wrote nine of them in script form, including:

“Buck and Billybob Go Hunting”

“Buck and Billybob at Gopher Gulch Hospital”

“Buck and Billybob go on a Group Date”

“Buck and Billybob Get an Educashun”

I found an online market for them, and then I found a better paying one. I fulfilled my agreement with the first and then discovered that the second site not only paid better, but they wanted more episodes than the first as well (60-90, compared to roughly 30).

Taking characters and plugging them into different tv shows that you watch for an entire day gives you ideas and a reason to be a couch potato when you need a rest (“Really, dear, I’m doing research watching this ‘Divas of the World Wrestling Federation’ show”).

### **Speaking of Serials...**

Serialized fiction is making a comeback, and Stephen King will be the first to tell you that, but if you want to add to your paycheque, you should also consider serial nonfiction articles. For *Men’s Refuge*, I pitched a series of four articles based on stereotypes Hollywood creates for men, not women:

1. The Bad Boy—Marlon Brando
2. The Romantic—Rudolph Valentino
3. The Comedian—Groucho Marx
4. The Reality—Charlie Chaplin

By pitching a series of articles that all tied into my gimmicky column, “Man Alive,” I instantly sold four pieces of writing instead of one. Not only that, but the next series that I pitched was a seven-part series, and they took those too!

### **My Fictional Self**

I guess the final gimmick to tell you about is me. In the writing world, I’ve become “The GET Guy.” In “real life,” I’m a teacher—an English teacher. Seeing the popularity of gimmicks in my writing, I decided to make myself into a gimmick. I call myself The Writing Coach, and the results that my students get and my gimmicky name have led to success in outside writing seminars known as “tutoring.” I carry four groups of eight writers through the entire year, and I teach them how to write, write, write. At \$20 per hour per student, I’m earning \$160 an hour when a class fills—and my classes fill. How many students can say they have a real-life writer for a tutor?

My writing coach image comes complete with uniform, business cards, “equipment,” and the whole shtick, but it works! My tutees write incredibly well and usually score the highest on provincial (state) exams. It’s also led to a wide variety of book ideas that I am currently pursuing when I’m not busy writing articles or teaching, ideas like:

Word Wrestling Federation: Homophones, Homographs, and other words you battle with!

Body building! How to build up your essay’s body paragraphs!

## GET a Gimmick to GET the Work

Writing with P-O-W-E-R! (Boxing analogy used throughout)

And it makes for interesting seminars at professional development days, home school conventions, and the like.

And on, and on, and on it goes...

### *Conclusion...or is it?*

I've taken you through one path I've taken with my writing. It is not the only one, but it is quite lucrative. But I know what it's like—you read about doing it, but you don't see them doing it. Allow me to bridge that gap. I'm including a few emails to show you my back and forth talk with an editor to give you an idea of how quickly things happen in a writer's world. The Faster you can respond to people and give them something of value, the more often you will get the job. Often, I think I get assignments not because I'm the *best* writer, but because I'm first in with good writing.

So I'm going to dispel a final myth—that of the “beautiful” query letter. I don't believe in it, quite frankly. Editors are busy people. They want you to cut to the chase and deliver. That's it. They don't want pretty. They don't expect orange paper and gel pen ink. Of course, once you GET an assignment from them, you'd better follow their guidelines. But before then, it's the hook that'll get you the job. So don't worry about the form that your message comes in; just make sure it's grammatically correct.

You'll see what I mean by looking at the conversation I had with an editor recently (names deleted out of courtesy to her—wouldn't want others to think she made things happen this fast, without a proper cover letter and query. Here's the original ad I responded to:

Reply to: [gigs-183445748@craigslist.org](mailto:gigs-183445748@craigslist.org)

Date: 2006-07-18, 2:01PM CDT

Looking for unique individuals who are up for a venture into new territory in the world of women's fashion & beauty magazines. I am starting up a new magazine that seeks to encompass the complete woman-fashion, beauty, love, career, and sex. We're not scared to touch any subject. If you are interested and have skills in editing, writing, fashion, beauty, photography, or graphic design please respond.

Submissions are also welcome—columnists, short stories, and feature articles needed. For production staff inquiries Chicago area residence is preferred. You could be part of an exciting new magazine venture.

Some compensation was offered, and I like new startups because I've gotten my way in through many new publications, and sure enough, once more advertisers signed up, prices for articles did indeed improve. I decided to take a chance on it. Here was my "query":

Hello there,

I'm Chuck Baker, but don't let the male name deter you—I've been writing for women's magazines for a long while—sometimes under the moniker of my female pseudonym, Ann Albright.

I have several pitches for you—including one for a columnist position.

Want a columnist with a bit of attitude who knows her [his] stuff? How about a column by Ann Albright, called

"ANN Another Thing...!"

Many of the sample columns I've written for it hit many of the areas you speak of—fashion, beauty, love, sex, career, and business. I'll show you the leads to a few of the articles I already have waiting for you to show you what I can do. Actually, I'll give you the entire first article, and leads of others to give you an idea:

ANN another thing...! by Ann Albright

ANNalyzing your man. How to find the finest guys Chicago has to offer!

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

Chicago is filled with people—over 3 million, as of last count—and assuming that around half of those are guys, and at least 80% of those aren't gay, you still have over one million potential hookups out there, right? Still, do you have a history of always picking THE WORST man possible for a date, or allowing him to pick you for one?

You need help, girl, and Ann's here with some sisterly advice. If you want to catch yourself a keeper, here's what to watch out for:

1. Is he more interested in HIS looks than in yours? Not a good sign. Men are already egocentric enough. If he's continually fixing his hair or looking at himself in mirrors (especially the rear-view mirror while he's DRIVING), it's time to move on.

2. Does he have a guys' night three times per week or more? A definite danger signal. If he spends more time with you, his best buddies feel jilted, and they want him to ditch you. If he spends more time with them, you've lost him to football and Fritos...Between Orange Bowl this and Sugar Bowl that (ever notice how many "important" games have food in the title?), you may never see him again. Find a guy with an interest other than sports on tv, and you'll cut down on the excuses not to go out and have a good time together.

3. Does he love his car more than he loves you? All he can talk about is the Corvette he's been restoring for four years, and still hasn't finished? Guess what? There's going to be ANOTHER project after this one's done...

4. His favorite phrase is "My Mom always..." A mama's boy won't ever cut that umbilical cord, and it will tie your relationship in knots every time a semi-serious issue pops up. Those apron strings need to stay in his home kitchen, where they belong. If he brings them to you, remind him that you are a MODERN woman, unlike his MUCH OLDER mother...and see how he reacts. Tough love, ladies.

5. He spends a good chunk of his day at the gym? Unless you're a gym rat yourself, this is NOT good news. Number one, while he may look buff, he will be at the gym with other extremely fit females milling around, vying for attention. He may

even start to think that he has more in common with one of them than with you...Number two, he'll need time to clean up afterwards, unless you want the sensation of kissing a sweaty tube sock. Now if the sweat is caused by BOTH of you together, that's a whole other story, a completely different chemical reaction—just trust scientist Ann!

Overall, if he loves his appearance, his buddies, his mother, his possessions, or his body more than he loves you, it's time to move on. But if the number one item on his list is you, you've found a keeper. With all the toys and distractions out there vying for a man's attention, you know that if you've managed to keep his focus on you, you've accomplished something! Now go find the guy who can make you scream I LOVE CHICAGO!...and please—not at the gym or a car show, okay?

The huntress,  
Ann Albright

AAT—And another thing...If you find that dream guy, and HE HAS A BROTHER—well, you know where I'll be...here, in the pages of \*\*\*\*\* magazine, after my own night on the prow!

ARTICLE #2

Don't be an ANNaconda!

By Ann Albright

If you check out the dictionary for a definition of Anaconda, you'll find something like this:

n. a large South American snake that suffocates and kills its prey by constriction.

Now, in dating, especially on first dates, you don't want to be an Anaconda. First of all, Anacondas are:

**BIG!** Don't dominate conversations, talk all about yourself, the great shopping trip you had (ok, those shoes WERE a great deal, but HE doesn't want to know about it), your entire background, including pets and their names, or the history of your family. Try not to focus on your job, how successful you

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

are, or other topics that can be intimidating to the male ego. Come across too strongly, and most men will look for an escape.

Anacondas are also:

.....

ARTICLE # 3:

ANN Another Thing...!

That BohemiANN look...

By Ann Albright

Bohemian is back.

Now, first off, let me tell you that bohemian is NOT that drugged out, hippie hair, wanna-sleep-with-everyone-on-the-planet-and-dammit-to-mom-and-dad look. It's not the heroin-ad look of the eighties. We're more sophisticated than that now, ladies, so put those hair picks away and listen up...

ARTICLE # 4

Want to communicate better? Try an ANNagram!

By Ann Albright

Ladies, you find yourself arguing more and more with your significant other? You're just not seeing eye-to-eye lately, and when you see each other too often, you find that the old saying "Familiarity breeds contempt" can be all too true. A little distance could be the solution. But how can you take time for yourself, and still keep the lines of communication open? You can be elusive and in touch...all it takes is an ANNagram!

An ANNagram is a message you get TO him without seeing him. Here are a few ideas:

.....

As you can see, I already have several columns up and ready to go, meaning that you won't be waiting for my contribution—I'll stay ahead of the game. Ann is one of my alter egos that I've enjoyed creating. I write columns for several magazines, but this one is brand new and has not yet found a home...Interested? Let me know what you know when you know it...

Peace always,

Chuck Baker

(By the way, samples of some of my other published work can be found at [www.getchuckbaker.tk](http://www.getchuckbaker.tk) . Hope to hear back from you. This one could be fun!)

The next day, the editor replied...

Date: Wed, 19 Jul 2006 12:27:53 -0500

To: "Chuck Baker" <[mywritingstuff@yahoo.com](mailto:mywritingstuff@yahoo.com)>

Chuck

I love the female pseudonym..... let's set up a time to meet.

UH-OH

Because of the information I included about Chicago (population 3 million...), she assumed I was from there. Was this going to be a sticking point? I decided to find out immediately:

I'm glad you like what you see, xxxxxxxxxx, but there is a slight problem with meeting up...I don't live in Chicago. While I can understand that any magazine would prefer someone local to someone south of the border, I believe that I'm able to deal with those issues with a little bit of research (like the 3 million population of Chicago for the article I sent you). I can include just enough local flavor and still make a connection with your audience. I know, because I've done it for magazines in California (my GET Business column for SOUL Mag, for instance), New York (my New York Moves column), and even Bahrain (my Women Past and Present column).

I would love to work with you, and if you like the tone and style of what I've sent you, be assured that those other three articles are fully written too and ready to go. If you have certain topics you'd like me to address, I'm comfortable working with those as well. I am never short of ideas, and after hundreds of articles, I have NEVER missed a deadline I've agreed to. Not once.

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

Let me know if you're still interested in having "ANN Another Thing..." as part of your publication. I do return emails promptly...

Peace always,

Chuck

### Here's her reply

Thu, 20 Jul 2006 16:00:11 -0500

To: "Chuck Baker" <mywritingstuff@yahoo.com>

Chuck,

I didn't know that you didn't live in Chicago, but that is not a problem. Where do you live? I like the Ann... column, but I think my readers would rather hear advice from a man's point of view. Have you thought of doing your column as yourself?

Xxxxxxxxxx

### And my final reply back:

Ok, xxxxxxxxx, how about ...something that goes with my first name, AL...

"Know-it" AL ... [do you remember that know-it-all guy Cliff from Cheers???]

Ideas:

"AL about Women..."

"AL about what women don't know about men..."

"AL about Mr. T..." (the words you need to understand men—Tools, Toilet, ...)

"AL about what happens when SHE's the boss!" (It might be a bit over-the-top for you, but this one is complete and I think quite funny...ok, so I can add the AL to the title...)

I also have a four-part series I'm working on (another of my pet projects) about the stereotypes MEN put up with from Hollywood (The Bad Boy—Marlon Brando; The Romantic—Rudolph Valentino; The Comedian—Jim Carrey; The Reality—

Charlie Chaplin). I have it all mapped out...all I need is a word count and a home for it.

If you don't like the title "AL about...!" another has come to mind: "MAN ALIVE!"

Options—I like to give options.

As for where I'm from, I'm a west coaster north of the border. I live in Vancouver, British Columbia—mountains, ocean, skiing, cold water surfing, whale watching...love it out here! (I'm from the prairies—Saskatchewan—just north of North Dakota—originally, but that was a long time ago...).

I'll be looking for your next email,

Peace always,

"AL" Chuck Baker

And that's it—I'm officially a writer for another startup magazine, one that I hope to see grow and grow, as I grow with it.

*By the Way*

*Men's Refuge* is no longer around (they were an online mag that is now defunct) and the full rights for those articles have reverted back to me. That's why I said they're available. Notice that with the wide variety of writing that I do, and the articles that I have banked (some published, some not), I always have something to offer my editors. Make their job easy, and they'll be more likely to make your job easier too.

And now, my job has become considerably easier...

So if you're a writer reading this who also happens to be an editor, I just have one final question:

What can I GET for you?

By the way, as those bylines start rolling in, other opportunities may come your way. I wrote a short, 700-word

## GET a Gimmick, Land a Column

piece for *Writer's Digest* (September 2004 edition), got positive fan feedback, and it was picked up to run as a reprint in a sister publication of theirs—the May 2005 edition of *Writer's Guide to Creativity*.

Then, the opportunity came along to write for this publication that you're reading right now—a 5000-word piece on what I do, and what you can too, in order to earn a living as a writer.

Keep working, and maybe the next edition of this book that appears, I'll be reading all about the big writing success YOU'VE become!



### About the Author

**Chuck Baker** is an award-winning writer and poet who has penned for a plethora of publications, including *Writer's Digest*, *Writer's Guide to Creativity*, *Healthy Living Magazine*, *SOUL Mag*, *New York Moves*, *Woman This Month*, and many more. You can reach him at [mywritingstuff@yahoo.com](mailto:mywritingstuff@yahoo.com)



**Chuck Baker**

# Editors Tell Us What They Want — Believe Them

© Susan Carter

Nearly every writer I have ever met has a horror story about an editor. Book editor, magazine editor, or even a corporate client managing the writing project you're working on — these are the people who can either make your day or make you crazy.

Editors.

Love 'em or hate 'em — you usually can't get the gig without 'em.

I've been working freelance for more than fifteen years now. Yet, the lesson I learned that landed my very first published article in a trade magazine has carried me through ever since: Give editors what they want.

It sounds simple enough. But now that I often sit on the editor's side of the manuscript, I find that 90 percent of the writers answering a call for submission or applying for a freelance work assignment completely miss the mark. It doesn't make them bad writers, but it also doesn't make them good candidates. With the hope that my experience might help change your results, here's my story.

Before I became a fulltime writer, I spent eight years working in the marketing department of an automotive parts and systems manufacturing company. Admittedly, the en-

tire department consisted of the vice president of sales and marketing and me, the marketing assistant. In addition to assisting in an administrative role for the vice president and his sales force of four, I also produced the single-paged, weekly, internal company newsletter, edited and prepared reports, drafted correspondence, and pretty much reviewed, revised or wrote anything that my boss or any of the sales people wanted to send out — either internally or to customers and vendors.

The roll-up-your-sleeves, do-whatever-needs-to-be-done duties of the marketing assistant were interesting and challenging — to a point. Yet it was clear to me and to those around me that I gravitated to anything that allowed me to write.

I was fortunate to work for someone who encouraged and mentored me, presenting opportunities to expand the scope of my job into broader areas of marketing and the writing opportunities that might come with it. The company paid for me to take classes for marketing, public relations, business writing, and any other related courses that could help me to better help the department. I became the primary contact with our advertising agency and, when management decided we should also pursue publicity opportunities, I was involved in the selection of a public relations firm to handle our account.

My boss and I worked together in detailing goals and participated in multiple interviews to share with the firm information about the company's strengths, uniqueness and position in the industry.

Publicity was uncharted territory for this manufacturing company. It had a long-standing history in the industry and there was a significant amount of debate among those on the management team about whether or not this was

money well-spent. Yet, with plans to enter a new market segment of the industry, the company could benefit from any publicity highlighting current and expanding facility and production capabilities.

After a year of projections and assurances, the public relations firm got the company a three-paragraph mention in a feature story of a local publication. Not exactly a stellar performance for the many thousands of dollars dumped into this venture.

Disappointed, discouraged, and poised to pull the plug on the quest for publicity, my boss and I sat down together to decide “where we go from here.”

We deliberated for several hours, comparing notes on the past year’s events, conversations with the PR firm’s account reps, and the (pitiful) results. After determining that our account with them was probably too small to get the time and attention we thought it deserved, we decided to do three things:

1. Fire the public relations firm,
2. Capitalize on the use of the one measly published clip by reproducing it and sending copies to a carefully targeted list of potential customers,
3. Try to attract some publicity-generating article placements on our own.

The first two tasks were easy. As for item number three, I was brimming with a renewed enthusiasm and assured my boss that I was prepared to rise to the challenge.

### *Organizing the “Toolbox”*

Feeling both excited and apprehensive I sat at my desk, cocooned in my cubicle, obsessing over the promise I had just made. How was I going to pull this off? We had hired

one of the best-known, award-winning public relations firms in the nation at that time. Did I really just assure my boss I would accomplish what the PR firm could not?

To ward of the pangs of panic that were beginning to well up in my chest I immediately began to make a list of what needed to be done if I were to stand a chance of succeeding.

First on the list was research. I needed to know what had been done by the public relations firm reps, which editors were contacted, what was pitched to them, and how those idea proposals were received. Additionally, I needed to somehow determine what I could do differently that would achieve different results.

Second on the list was to define my approach. If I was going to recontact people who had already been contacted, I needed to develop an approach that would be well-received.

The third item on my list was a timeline. If I didn't set up some kind of tracking system and action schedule right now, I would surely procrastinate myself into failure.

#### *Research*

The one advantage I felt I had was that most of the initial research already existed.

I pulled out my files that held all of the correspondence and interview notes that my boss and I previously had with the public relations firm. Early in the process we met regularly to define target publications, create a list of relevant topics, and brainstorm other tactics that might help gain attention.

By reviewing the information in this file I could identify the publications we all had felt were a great fit for our company story, determine which ones had been approached

with a pitch, and review detailed notes about responses our representative had received.

I separated the information into three lists:

1) Publications that had been pitched to but rejected the proposals,

2) Publications that had been pitched to and showed interest, but never moved forward with the story idea, and

3) Publications that had not been approached at all.

It had been nearly a year and a half since the publication research had been performed so I spent some time researching any potential new publications that could be added to the third list. Being a very targeted niche, the likelihood of finding new industry publications was slim. However, there might be opportunities to expand into a second tier market through newspapers and general business magazines.

#### *Approach*

Once the publications were separated into the appropriate lists, I set up individual folders for each publication. I then reviewed all of the notes and status reports provided by the PR firm, separated the information relevant to each publication, and placed all of the research information into the related folders.

This allowed me to review each publication targeted to understand what had previously been done, and craft my own pitch differently to the same editor.

#### *Timeline*

My combined lists totaled 13 primary publications. Five national, four regional, and four association trade journals or member newsletters. Secondary publications, like metro newspapers in our target demographic and general business magazines, totaled an additional eight publications.

## Editors Tell Us What They Want – Believe Them

### Sample Timeline / Progress Report

<b>Publication Name:</b> <i>Modern Machine Magazine</i>		<b>Editor:</b> <i>Firstname Lastname</i>	
<b>Phone:</b> [ XXX]-XXX-XXXX		<b>Email:</b> <i>anyone@mmdomain.com</i>	
<b>Pitch:</b> 1) <i>Feature - The \$8M Man (robotics)</i> 2) <i>Tips - Shop Safety</i> 3) <i>Trends - robotics</i> ( <i>Copy of pitch letter in file</i> )		<b>Date Sent:</b> <i>04-03-XXXX</i>  <b>Follow Up:</b> <i>04-17-XXXX</i>	
<b>Response:</b> <i>Possible inclusion for multisource article in July issue.</i>		<b>Date Received:</b> <i>04-19-XXXX</i>	
<b>Comments:</b> <i>Features writer will call to set up interview with CEO.</i>			
<b>Pitch:</b> 1) <i>Feature - The \$8M Man (robotics)</i> 2) <i>Tips - Shop Safety</i> 3) <i>Trends - robotics</i> ( <i>Copy of pitch letter in file</i> )		<b>Date Sent:</b> <i>04-03-XXXX</i>  <b>Follow Up:</b> <i>04-17-XXXX</i>	
<b>Response:</b> <i>Shop safety focus planned for December.</i>		<b>Date Received:</b> <i>04-19-XXXX</i>	
<b>Comments:</b> <i>Resubmit detailed tips sidebar in September. Potential for profile of newly implemented innovative safety procedures developed by shop supervisor. <u>Need to gather evidence of improved results.</u></i>			
<b>Pitch:</b>		<b>Date Sent:</b>  <b>Follow Up:</b>	
<b>Response:</b>		<b>Date Received:</b>	
<b>Comments:</b>			

**Note:** Enter follow-up dates on your daily calendar for reminders to recontact each editor and/or revise and resend proposals.

Although I knew I needed some kind of timeline to document and track activity, I wasn't quite sure how much time to allocate to each specific task.

I reviewed one of the reports that the public relations firm representative had provided, and crafted a general timeline/progress report similar to the one she had used.

I allowed a few days to develop my list of topics to pitch the primary list. I anticipated another few days to craft, hone and send my pitch letters as they were completed. Allowing an additional two weeks before initiating a follow-up to each pitch, I planned to use that time to write and pitch to secondary markets. The rest of the timeline would be dictated by responses.

### *Crystal Balls and Media Kits*

My first and biggest hurdle was to develop a list of potential topics that I could pitch to the editors. At the same time I had to be careful not to resubmit ideas that our public relations rep had already attempted to place. Using our initial topic development as a springboard, surprisingly (to me, anyway), ideas began to flow quickly with each one leading to the next.

I was confident in my knowledge of our company, our strengths and our unique capabilities to the industry. However, my newly developed list of potential topics was long and varied. How was I going to match the right topic to the right editor at the right time? A crystal ball would surely come in handy right about now.

Then it suddenly hit me... I had something better than a crystal ball. I had media kits!

As I mentioned earlier, I was the advertising contact for the company. While we used an agency for creative ad de-

velopment, I typically met with the sales reps who wanted us to advertise in their publications.

I never met a sales rep who didn't come armed with his or her publication's media kit, carefully pointing out the upcoming issues that our company would do well to advertise in. Since the publications that wanted our advertising dollars were the same publications that we hoped to get publicity in, I pulled out the stack of media kits I had tucked away in the bottom drawer of my credenza and began my search

## Use Editorial Calendars to Your Advantage

**Search for content opportunities at least three issues ahead.** Print publications go to production well in advance of the publication date. If you choose the next month's topic to pitch, you will be too late.

**Suggest tips as fillers.** If your pitch DOES fit a topic that is likely nearing production, forget the time-consuming exchange for a pitch and response. Instead, prepare a tips sheet related to the topic and send it in its entirety. It may get used as filler to plug into unsold advertising space.

## Tie off-topic pitches to the “big picture” theme.

Editorial calendars are planned *at least* six months in advance so the sales team can begin to pitch well-matched topics to advertisers. This means content is developed based on the big picture. Be mindful of the specific focus but feel free to pitch stories that may be off-topic yet support the theme of the issue.

**Seek specialty opportunities.** When you request editorial calendars, be sure to ask about any special supplements (often polybagged with a specific issue) planned for the upcoming year.

for what I knew would serve as the crystal ball I so desperately wanted... the Editorial Calendar.

Every one of those media kits contained an Editorial Calendar that outlined the publication's entire year of planned editorial content!

The reps used Editorial Calendar information to entice us to spend our advertising dollars for very specific focus issues. That same information is exactly what I could use to design my pitch letters to their respective editors.

With the slightest change of perspective, I now realized that editors were telling me exactly what stories they wanted — for each and every issue of the entire year.

It doesn't get much better than that.

Or does it?

### *Guidelines Add Details*

One thing I had already learned during my freelance-writing-as-a-hobby days is that most publications have writers' guidelines.

A publication's guidelines will give potential writers valuable details such as:

- the length of articles the publication uses,
- the target audience of the publication,
- sample topics that the publication is likely to use,
- regular columns that are staff-written and not open to freelance writers,
- additional information that would help a would-be writer submit a story idea or proposal.

Needing all of the help I could get to win over an assignment or placement, I called every publication on both the primary list and the secondary list to request writers'

guidelines. And, if I didn't already have a media kit for a specific publication, I requested that as well.

### *Hit 'Em with a One-Two Punch*

One publication at a time, I reviewed the information from the Editorial Calendar, the writers' guidelines, and any notations from our ex-PR rep's status reports.

I then began to craft pitch letters that were specific to each and every publication, making sure to hit 'em with the one-two punch: a mention of the Editorial Calendar *and* the writers' guidelines.

My goal was for each editor to clearly recognize that I did my homework to learn about his or her specific publication. I wanted to 'show and tell' editors that I was interested in their goals for the issue focus and had consideration for providing valuable information for their readers, not just trying to present our company in a one-size-fits-all pitch.

## **Pitch letter content tips**

### **Address the letter to a specific editor.**

It takes less than three minutes to locate the editor's name in the magazine, or to make a phone call to get it. *And ALWAYS make sure you spell his/her name correctly!*

### **Demonstrate that you understand the publication's audience.**

Assure editors that you have done your homework about the types of information the publication provides to its audience by mentioning the research you've done about the publication itself.

### **Pitch more than one idea.**

Increase your chances for acceptance by suggesting up to three ideas and/or formats, such as a feature article, a sidebar of useful tips, or participation in a multi-resource industry focus.

## Results

I'm proud to say that I fared very well compared to the PR firm's results.

In the first six months:

- Our company was included in a multi-resource industry piece, scoring a sidebar focused on the new technology we just added to our special machine building division,
- A major metro newspaper columnist came out to profile the company for his weekly business column,

### **Extend an invitation for conversation.**

Offer to discuss alternate or future possibilities that would serve the publication's readership. Always approach an editor with their goals and benefits in mind, not yours.

### **Provide your contact information.**

Editors won't spend a lot of time tracking you down. Be accessible by providing your daytime, evening, and cell phone numbers along with your email address.

*Notes:*

- Keep the pitch under two pages in length. If you can't

clearly communicate your ideas in that amount of space, you need to review and edit your work.

- If you are pitching to write the story, remember that this pitch letter is your audition for the assignment. Be clear, concise and professional.
- If you are pitching for publicity and not just a byline, consider sending ideas to the publication's columnists and other contributing writers that already have established relationships with the publication. They need content for their stories as much as editors do.

- The company was featured in a front page article in the *Inside Line*, a regional tabloid serving the automotive industry,
- A feature story about our special machines division was accepted by *Modern Machine Shop* magazine.

I couldn't have been more thrilled that I'd accomplished what I had set out to do for the company — and my boss was pleased, too. Additionally, the *Inside Line* feature was my first regional byline and the *Modern Machine Shop* feature was my first national byline, giving me published clips with writer's credentials.

### ***Post-Glory Promotion***

Originally, getting published clips for the company was the goal. Yet any time spent "basking in the glory" of the moment is short-lived. Those clips were only the first step in building an effective publicity campaign for the company. The next step was to identify — and then capitalize on — promotional opportunities.

It would be a bit presumptuous to think that everyone who receives a magazine, trade journal or newspaper reads it cover to cover, taking note of our company's specific mention in a feature story. So, once a piece was published, we couldn't just sit and wait for offers and orders to start pouring in. We needed to devise ways to use the clips to our advantage.

One way for us to spread the word about the company's media attention was to request reprints of our published clips and send them to contact personnel for our growing list of current customers. Attached to each clip was a simple sticky note that said, "We're in the news!"

We also developed a targeted list of contact names for potential customers and sent copies of the clip to them, also

with a sticky note attached. Each attached note included contact information for one of our sales representatives.

With every new clip, we sent out another mailing. The clips reinforced credibility, to both our current customer base and to potential customers. They also helped to eventually open doors for our sales force by paving the way with name recognition.

Published clips helped open doors with other editors, too. If one publication recognized the company as newsworthy, or used our company management team members as viable industry expert resources, other editors were willing to review the ideas we pitched to them. And on more than a few occasions, editors actually approached us about participating in a potential article or profile.

By staying ever-mindful of each individual publication's audience, accommodating interview requests, and meeting deadlines, our company was privileged to build strong relationships with editors.

### *Cooperation Leads to Collaboration*

As a postscript to my own career development, I eventually left the company, moved to the “big city” and freelanced part-time for a couple of years while I had a “real” job as an account executive in an advertising agency. Eventually I transitioned into becoming a fulltime freelance writer.

After leaving the manufacturing company, I approached many of the editors I had worked with to help increase the company's visibility. Those established contacts were built on cooperation and led to long-term collaborative relationships. I received countless assignments — paying gigs — writing features, profiles, fillers, columns and series pieces.

As the clips file expanded, my writing career became more established. I began getting referrals, attracting corpo-

rate clients, and branching out into different kinds of writing. All the while I relied on media kit editorial calendars and writers' guidelines to navigate a direct path to the top of an editor's "In" box.

Lack of performance from a PR firm may have launched my opportunity, but figuring out how to get noticed by an editor with a five-inch stack of pitch letters on his/her desk helped launch my career.

Remember:

Editors tell us what they want — believe them.



### About the Author

**Susan Carter** is a writer, editor, publisher and small business consultant for operations development and marketing. An overbooked, time-intensive schedule, in tandem with a background as a freelance writer, became the catalyst for developing and authoring how-to books for the countless small and micro business owners who could not invest in one-on-one consulting, but could benefit from her methods for operations development and low-cost, high-impact marketing. Carter's business development books are available in select bookstores, on Amazon.com, and from her [SuccessIdeas.com](http://SuccessIdeas.com) web site.



**Susan Carter**

With primary interests in writing and publishing, Carter owns and operates the [WriterProfits.com](http://WriterProfits.com) web site, and is the developer and publisher of the book you currently hold in your hands, *Writer Profits: How I Got the Gig, Volume I*.

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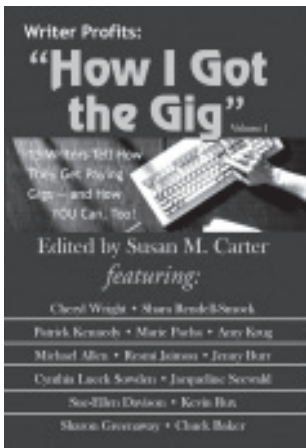
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*by submitting an entry  
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## How I Got the Gig

You can inspire others the way you may have been inspired — by sharing the details of how an assignment or contract was won. If you have a (true) story to tell about how you found, pursued, and attracted one of your writing gigs, or were inspired by one of the authors in this book to go out and get your first gig, we'd love to hear about it — and *pay* you for it if we use your chapter in a future volume.

Whether you write fiction, poetry, commercials, greeting cards, biographies, comic books, memoirs, textbooks, screenplays — the list is nearly endless — you're a perfect candidate for one of our future Gig volumes.



You don't have to be well-known and you don't have to provide previously published clips. You *do* have to be able to write a well-crafted chapter describing your personal experience in "getting a gig."

Interested?

Chapter author guidelines are available online at: [www.writerprofits.com](http://www.writerprofits.com) and the open call dates for submis-

sions are announced in the weekly *Monday Muse*. The *Monday Muse* is a free e-zine that delivers quick quotes from well-known writers and authors to help jump-start your passion for writing every week.

Prefer not to subscribe to the weekly e-zine? That's okay. Just send an e-mail to: [giglist@getresponse.com](mailto:giglist@getresponse.com) and you will be placed on the Call for Submissions list. As soon as the next Gig dates are set, you'll receive a notice with all the details and deadlines.

I look forward to seeing your name on the cover of our next *How I Got the Gig* book.

Susan Carter, Publisher & Owner  
WriterProfits.com

# Writer Profits: How I Got the Gig, *Volume I...*

... makes a **great gift** for aspiring writers and seasoned professionals alike.

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*How I Got the Gig* books are also appropriate for writing groups, supplemental reading for writing course students, and for use as a membership sign-up gift for writing associations and organizations. Discounts on quantity purchases are available. Contact: [susan@writerprofits.com](mailto:susan@writerprofits.com).



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*Thank you!*