

Write ideas

Words for Writers Who Want to Write

Want to write?

Ever since Barbara Winter shared my story in her popular book, *Making A Living Without A Job*, I've been swamped with letters requesting information about being a writer. When the letters first began arriving, I responded by sending out a brochure about my business or by writing a personal letter. Lately, I've held on to letters, waiting until I had the time to write a personal reply or create an informational sheet that would answer a multitude of questions. Now, with the help of a friend, I believe I've come up with a better way to be helpful to those interested in being a writer.

My friend, Shane Groth, who has co-authored many books with me, suggested we do a newsletter that would not only provide information to writers, but also give ideas and support. After much discussion and planning, we arrived at an unusual format for delivering



information about all aspects of writing. It's called *Write Ideas*.

We've produced a series of special issues on specific aspects of writing. Options will include reports on starting out as a writer, writing a book, writing for magazines, marketing your writing, creativity, writing for a newspaper, the business of being a writer, and others as detailed in this issue. You buy only those reports that meet your needs. Buy one, two, five, seven or all of them.

In our planning, we realized that newsletters deliver a broad range of information, much of which the subscriber may not want, need, or have the time to read, but pays for anyway. Our belief is that you should receive only the information you want and need without any strings or commitments.

This is our **Getting Started** edition. It is designed to get you started thinking about what you want to write and how our publications can meet your needs. This issue also introduces the format of our other reports. Future issues include a "Write Idea" on the front page, some helpful "Basics" inside, a page of "Ideas & Strategies," and some "Parting Words." Each issue will focus on a specific topic or market.

Shane and I hope you will invite our publications into your home and businesses. Our goal is to give you the specific details and encouragement to write. And remember—keep writing!



The secret to becoming a great writer

A well-known writer walked to the podium to begin his seminar on writing. The aspiring writers in the packed auditorium waited anxiously for his wisdom. "How many of you really want to be writers?" he asked. Enthusiastic hands jumped in response. The writer peered over the crowd until the hands went down. "If you really want to be a writer, go home and write. Writers must write." With those words, the writer walked away and the seminar ended.

No one becomes a writer by good intentions. Writers become writers by writing. They write because they need to express themselves. They write because that is their trade and medium, to give life to pages and solitary words. So write, and keep on writing!



Be Specific

Carol Bly, an accomplished writer, author and teacher who lived in Minnesota, reviewed a manuscript of mine several years ago. She was kind enough to send a reply with an insightful criticism. “Always be specific,” she wrote. “The audience is always more interested in specifics than in generalities.”

Wouldn't the “Write Idea” on the front page of this issue have been more interesting if I had included the name of the writer, the exact number of people attending, the individual responses when the author walked out, and the place of the seminar? Yes, a hundred times, yes! I could not do so, however, because I did not follow a new rule of mine, Rule #47: Always write down the location of your favorite stories or quotes, along with important information (e.g. publisher, copyright, date, page number). This will help you be specific, and more interesting, in the future.

A Matter of Timing

As an editor I once reviewed a nice manuscript that was well-written, thoughtful, and a good fit for our audience. I rejected it, however, because we had just published a very similar piece on the same topic a month before. Had I received the same manuscript six months earlier, chances are

I could have sent the writer a check rather than a rejection letter.

Format to Fit

Use the following format for getting words down on paper. Make sure your work is neat, clean and typed. Double space between lines and leave 1-1/2 inch margins on both sides of the page. Place a header at the top of each page with your name, title of work, and page number. Shoot for 25 lines per page with 50 characters (10 words) per line. This will give you about 250 words per page and is useful if you need a quick word count. Check out our **Computers & Technology** edition for setting up your manuscript quickly and professionally on a computer.



Under a Cover

Many writing books and articles make it sound like writing a cover letter can be a terrifying experience where one misplaced word can be the difference between life and death, acceptance or rejection.

It is true that the cover letter is most likely the first glimpse an editor will have of your writing. For this reason, it should be neat, professional and well written. But there are no secrets to a good cover

letter. The person reading your letter will be asking:

- Can this person write?
- Will my audience be interested in this material?
- How does this fit with the other material we publish?

A good cover letter should include reasons why the editor would be interested in your manuscript, ideas about appropriate markets, competition, and facts about your writing experience.

Editors Are People, too!

Though it may be hard to believe, editors are people. They wake up in the morning, get stressed out, and deal with family problems. They may seem larger than life or even intimidating because they decide if your work will be published. In the final analysis, however, editors merely want a piece of work that speaks to their audience. And yes, they are constantly looking for and hoping for such a piece. Give them that piece. Don't try to impress them. Don't be intimidated by them. Just write from the heart. Good writing speaks for itself.

Procrastination Stopper

One of the hardest things to do as a writer is to actually start writing. Here's a cure that works: Tell yourself you will only write for ten minutes. This makes the task less overwhelming, gives you a realistic target to shoot for, and best of all, gets you writing.





Sell & Re-Sell

Once you sell an article to a magazine, you can usually sell it again to another publication with few or no changes. For example, I sold an article on Ben Franklin to a motivational magazine, a general interest magazine and a religious magazine. My checks ranged from \$50 to \$400 on the sales for one-time rights to the article.

Write a Leader Guide

Books that lend themselves to a good group discussion are excellent opportunities for you to write leader's guides. A leader's guide usually accompanies another printed piece, such as a book, and contains discussion questions for each chapter. It may also include suggested group activities for each chapter. Look at some guides in your local bookstore for style and format, then solicit publishers. The pay rate can range from \$300 to \$500 or more, depending on the publication.

Sell Your Opinion

A fairly easy way to become a published writer and to make yourself known to the world is to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Granted, the pay isn't much (nothing), but it is a starting point. When published, your letter will be seen by friends, family and total strangers who may contact you to praise or criticize your work.

Many large daily metro newspapers will also purchase opinion pieces/essays for their editorial page. You can get \$100 and more

for your essay and then sell it again to another newspaper in another state or region.

Quick Outline

The next time you have to write a talk or presentation in a hurry, create a thorough outline in these five easy steps: 1) State the topic; 2) Write down the main points or conclusion; 3) Create an attention getting opening; 4) Name your major points; 5) Support each major point with two to three short sentences. This strategy is also great for planning a magazine article.

Questions & Answers

Q: What is an SASE?

A: An SASE is a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope. It is always advisable to include a SASE when you send out a manuscript. It is still correct writer's etiquette to do so and it's cheap insurance for getting your material back. Make sure that the envelope is addressed to you and includes enough postage for whatever will be returned.

Q: What are Writer's Guidelines?

A: Writer's guidelines are the details about a publication for would-be contributors. They tell what a publisher wants and is looking for in an article. They generally include something about the publisher, the audience of the publication, material the publisher will accept, length of material (number of words), payment information and an address for submitting your material. These can be obtained from the publisher and will save you time and energy in knowing who are the best prospects for your work.

Q: What is an unsolicited manuscript?

A: It is a manuscript submitted to a publisher who hasn't specifically asked for the piece. "Over-the-transom" is another phrase used for an unsolicited manuscript. Some publishers do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.



Writer's Gold

Writer's Market is a book that comes out every year and should be available at your local bookstore (retail outlet or online) or library. It is a comprehensive reference to "where and how to sell what you write." It contains thousands of places to sell your articles, short stories, novels, plays, greeting cards and fillers. This book is also excellent for getting ideas on what to write and for opening your eyes to the many possibilities you have for selling your writing, along with many valuable writing tips.

You can also get similar, more specialized companion volumes such as **2008 Novel & Short Story Writer's Market**, **2008 Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market**, **Christian Writers' Market Guide 2008**, and **Writer's Market Companion**.



Try This

As soon as you finish reading this issue, try the "Procrastination Stopper" idea from page two. Write for a minimum of ten minutes. Chances are that once you start writing, you'll keep writing beyond your ten minute deadline.

Final Tips

As we said in our "Write Idea" on the first page, the best advice there is for a writer is simple—to write. Always have a project you

are working on and set aside 10-30 minutes a day to write. A little progress each day will work wonders in accomplishing a final manuscript.

Write Ideas is written by Shane Groth and John Schroeder, authors of many books and articles for the business and nonprofit markets. It provides ideas and information on specific markets and areas of interest for aspiring and working writers. Past editions have included these writing topics: Computers & Technology, Creativity, Newsletters, the Business of Being a Writer, Book Writing, Magazine Articles, Selling Your Writing, Newspapers, Corporate Writing, and the Religious Market. Some of these, or additional editions, may become available online in the future. **Copyright © 2008.**



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