

S A M P L E

Introduction

Lesson Aim

Describe the scope and nature of freelance writing.

Freelance writing can be a highly satisfying and rewarding way to earn money, either as a part time or full time career. Some of the qualities you need for success in freelance writing are good writing skills, saleable ideas, and an ability to meet obligations and deadlines.

CATEGORIES OF FREELANCE WRITING

There are a range of categories of freelance writing that you could choose to work with, including:

- Fiction, including adult and children's books, short stories for magazines and newspapers
- Non-fiction such as newspapers, technical (specialist) books and magazines, government publications, trade journals, general interest magazines
- Copy writing, including advertisements, press releases
- Script writing, covering TV, movie, video and radio scripts
- Web writing, such as e-zines, eBooks, blogs, website content, online advertising

These types of writing will be discussed in more detail throughout the course.

GETTING STARTED

The following steps are a broad guide to getting started as a freelance writer:

1. Identify the areas of writing that interest you.
2. Research the marketplace to get a feel for what other successful writers are doing. Visit bookshops, and buy newspapers and magazines to see what is currently being published. Get a feel for what publishers want and look for gaps in the market.
3. Develop your writing skills. Start off small and hone your skills by contributing to newsletters published by your school, work or social club. You could enter short story competitions or even try writing short articles for local newspapers or hobby or trade magazines. Don't be disappointed if your articles are rejected. At this stage, the aim is to practise your writing and to get a feel for what is acceptable in the marketplace.
4. Develop a personal reference library. Collect examples of other writers' work in the areas that interest you. Books, newspaper articles and magazines are not only a useful information resource; they also help you to develop an awareness of how other successful writers write.
5. Develop your selling skills. Build up contacts with publishers and organisations in your chosen area of writing. Develop a reputation by making yourself known – an unknown writer is less likely to be published. Social media, blogs and a website can also help you to develop what is commonly referred to in the publishing industry as 'an author's platform'.

Resources that you will need

A Computer and Printer

The minimum standard accepted by publishers is a manuscript or article typed using a word processing program and either sent as a printed hard copy, saved on disk, or emailed direct to the publisher. If you do not have access to these resources at home, you will find that most public libraries provide computers and printers available for use by their members. Find out the services that are available at your local library.

Access to the Internet

This was not essential in the past but with fast moving changes today in the publishing world a computer is virtually a must. It is useful for researching information to use in articles or to find current information on potential sources of work and their contact details (including magazines, newspapers, book publishers and other industry contacts). It can also be helpful to have access to email to be able to quickly send articles to publishers, especially when deadlines are tight. It can help you develop a profile.

A Resource File

We have already mentioned this above, but a resource file is essential for any writer. So develop a resource file, consisting of a range of contacts that will be helpful to you in your writing career. This is discussed in more detail further on in this lesson. You will work on your resource file as you move through the course, building up a valuable resource that you can refer to later on. This file will provide you with a good basis for building a writing career.

Examples of other writers' work

This includes books, magazines and newspaper articles, blogs, e-zines, website content, even social media pages in the areas that interest you. This will help you to get a feel for what is happening in the marketplace and is a useful indication of the standard of writing that publishers expect.

Researching the Marketplace

If you want to be successful as a freelance writer, you need to be able to not only write well, but to be prepared to write what is in demand. You need to develop and maintain an understanding of the writing marketplace. You need to know who will buy your work, as well as the conditions under which they will buy your work.

Spend some time researching the marketplace. You should not only research while studying this lesson, but you should also continue this as an ongoing practice throughout the course and even after you have finished.

Bookshops and Newsagents

Unless you have a very clear idea of what you want to write, it is a good idea to do some market research before you start writing. The easiest way to do this is to visit your local bookshop or newsagent to see what successful writers are working on. Have a look at the range of books, magazines and newspapers available to get an idea about the level at which writers have pitched their writing. When looking at books, also look at their publishers, so that you get an idea of where to send your final manuscript. There are many different publishers, with some specialising in specific fields. For example, some publishers specialise in fiction, others non-fiction. Make note of the publishers that are relevant to the area of writing that is of interest to you. If you are looking at non-fiction or children's books, do not be intimidated by the gloss and the colourful pictures. Unless you are planning to illustrate your own book, the publishers will organise the artwork after they have accepted the manuscript. At this stage, you are just trying to get an idea about the different categories and writing styles that exist. If the salesperson is not too busy, they may be willing to chat to you about their books; if so; you could ask about current bestsellers and find out which books have remained popular over the years.

The Internet

The internet, as a publishing medium, is fast replacing printed books, magazines and newspapers as a way for writers to gain exposure for their work. The traditional publishing industry is shrinking, as new technology takes over. Fewer and fewer textbooks (for example) are being printed on paper as publishers replace these with EBooks (which purchasers download from the web). Newspapers too are moving towards online publication.

Many writers also contribute to, or set up, blogs - a contraction of weblog. Blogs are used for a range of purposes from personal daily diaries through to academic comment. Blogs are regularly updated so new comments will appear at the top of the page. Blogs are used by industry, by academic institutions, small business and ordinary people they are a good way to research what is current, what other writers are publishing and also to gain exposure for your work.

When you setup your blog or website (or both) include a short author biography, examples of your work, and links to where your readers can purchase your work. Also include your name on community author sites to gain maximum exposure.

You can set up a blog free – however it is far more beneficial to set up your own blog and website with your own domain name and hosting service. The cost is relatively cheap and also looks far more professional.

Networking through Social Media

Social media pages are now more than just a way to connect with ‘friends’ – more and more businesses are gaining exposure through the use of social media and social networking sites. They are another important way of gaining media exposure for your writing and for researching other writers’ work. FaceBook and Twitter for example are a great platform for getting your name into the public domain, you can gain leverage by using these mediums to build-up your author platform. Post and tweet lots of messages, helpful comments or academic comment, as this will help to build your reputation and enhance visibility to potential readers. Publishers also search the web for writers with selling potential; a well-exposed writer has a far better chance of being published. So don’t underestimate the power of social media – your followers will most probably also be the first to buy your work!

Reviews

Book reviews are an excellent way of finding out about what critics think of current book releases. Major newspapers regularly publish reviews, as do specialist literary magazines/newsletters (available by subscription, or possibly available at your local library). You will also find book review websites on the internet. Many bookstores will also encourage customers to put reviews on their website about the books they have purchased as well. You can also encourage reviews of your own work – this is easier once you have your website and blog up and running.

Writers’ Festivals/Book Signings/Visiting Writers

Other opportunities for researching the marketplace are writers’ festivals, book signings and writers’ talks at bookshops. Writers’ festivals are held annually in some of the major cities. The public are welcome to attend, and while it is unlikely that you would be able to speak personally to the more successful writers, you can listen to their talks, which may give you an insight into their writing and their success.

On a local scale, authors often attend book signings at bookshops to promote their latest publications. Some bookshops and libraries also host talks by visiting authors. At these smaller scale events, you may even get a chance to ask questions of the author or talk to them face to face.

Book Awards

Find out which books have made it to the finalist lists for book awards in recent years. These lists are published in the literary section of major newspapers each year. Have a look at some of these books, looking at both the writing styles used and the genres that are popular.

Sources of Information

No matter what you write, it is vital that you develop your ability to identify good sources of information. Keep a list of any resources you find in your resource file, including useful websites, contacts and books. Sources of information may be classified as follows:

Books/Magazines/Newspapers

These can be borrowed from libraries, or purchased from bookshops or news-agencies.

Publishing Houses

Different publishers have their own areas of special interest, often divided by book type (fiction, non-fiction), genre (romance, science-fiction), or by topic (gardening).

Publishers should be selected carefully by the author based on their type of writing. Publishers can teach you a lot about writing, including such aspects as: what is required and the terms they operate under.

The Internet

This is an invaluable resource for researching your stories and articles. It is also useful for finding information on publishing houses, and for finding out about other freelance writers and their work.

Clubs, Societies and Professional Associations

You can find the details of these kinds of groups though looking in directories such as the yellow pages under "Organisations" or online through website searches or through online directories.

Shows and Exhibitions

Trade shows, displays in exhibition centres, show grounds and shopping centres

Commercial Organisations

Businesses supplying goods or services.

Government Departments

Government departments can be helpful in providing information that is accurate and relevant to your writing. For example, if you are writing about Planning, try the Town Planning Department; if writing about tourism, contact the Department of Tourism.

People

- Make friends and develop professional relationships with others in this field; build up a variety of contacts. Use the social media pages on the web and also blogs to help you achieve this.
- Join a book club or a writing circle. Writing can be an isolating experience and you may find it easier to get started by sharing your ideas and experiences and by writing with other budding and experienced writers.
- Writers can be approached, and will often help new writers, but be careful that you do not intrude upon their time and space. If contacting an author, make sure that you have first read their work and write to them via mail or email rather than by phone. Remember that writers are just like any other professional, they are busy and cannot afford to waste time. They also often have deadlines that they have to meet. If they do help you in any way, try to do something to help them in exchange, such as helping them with research or typing for them.

How to Develop Yourself as a Freelance Writer

There are four steps involved in developing yourself as a freelance writer:

- Get to know what is in demand;
- Develop sufficient knowledge of a subject so that you can successfully write about it;
- Develop the technical and artistic writing skills required to produce marketable work.
- Develop a 'writer's platform'. This is a well-known term in the publishing industry and publishers use this to determine how well a writer's work is likely to sell (e.g. books or eBooks) or to create interest in their publications (e.g. magazines, newspapers or e-zines etc.). Well known writers for magazines for example are far more likely to increase sales than an unknown writer. In the past publishers developed a writer's profile through advertising, media appearances, book signings and so on. Now that the internet has taken over in the world of book, magazine and newspaper sales, a writer is far more likely to succeed if they have a strong web presence. Readers get to know and like certain writers and will tend to seek them out - this is becoming increasingly simple through the use of the internet.

It also helps to remember the following points:

- Some people simply do not have the inherent capacity to produce some types of writing.
- Being an expert at a particular subject does not necessarily mean you are able to write good non-fiction on that subject.
- Being skilled at grammar and communication does not necessarily mean that you can write a good fantasy novel, which may require imagination and other qualities, beyond your ability to write.

- Many people are simply not suited to being a freelance writer. Unfortunately, there is no sure test that can predict whether you are or are not suited to this vocation. Completing a course such as this will help you toward that goal; but if you lack the inherent capacity to write commercially viable material, and sell it; you will always struggle as a freelance writer. Hopefully by the end of this course, you will not only develop your writing skills, but also, have a greater awareness of your own strengths and weaknesses, and a better understanding of the industry.

PUBLISHING ALTERNATIVES

Vanity Publishing

Standard, well-recognised publishers are always looking for good books to publish, and are generally open to new writers with good ideas and quality work. Vanity publishers are another group altogether. Where a mainstream publisher bears the risk of production and publication costs, selects work to be published, edits and prints the text and organises for marketing and distribution, Vanity Publishers will publish work at the author's expense. They work on the basis of making money from the author, irrespective of whether money is made from book sales. They will most likely not contribute to the marketing of the book. If you wish to, you can spend money with a vanity publisher to satisfy a desire to see your writing in print. This however, does not guarantee that your book will sell.

Vanity publishers frequently advertise for manuscripts, asking authors to send manuscripts for publishing. They will publish almost any book if the author is willing to pay, which is why vanity publishing is often looked down upon by the literary community. It may however, be a valid route of publication for those people with a specialised niche or subject area. For example, this is often a means of publishing for family histories.

Self-Publishing

Self-publishing involves publishing by the authors of their work, rather than by established publishers. It is an alternative that authors may choose to take and is often considered to be a better than vanity publishing, as the rights to the book remain with the author; the published books are the author's property and the author receives any proceeds of their book sales.

In self-publishing, the author is responsible for not only the printing costs, but for also ensuring the editing is correct, arranging the printing and for any marketing, distribution and storage involved with the publication of their book. This is a complex process that does require some knowledge and expertise in layout and editing; because writers are close to their work it is easy to overlook grammatical errors or badly written work.

The role of the internet in self-publishing is rapidly increasing, many writers self-publish on the web because it is an inexpensive way to gain exposure for a (computer savvy) writer. It does have the same pitfalls as self-publishing in print though, so it is best to ask a competent friend or other writer to edit your work, before publication on the web, and to double check it afterwards (small mistakes are easily overlooked). Sometimes publishers discover new and promising writers that are using the web to self-publish too – this can also lead to new opportunities for a talented writer.

The advent of eBooks has obviously changed publishing as well. It is possible to publish and sell your book online as an eBook. You can get expert help on how to publish an eBook or you can work on this yourself. Whichever route you choose, you must ensure that you are clear on any costs, what you are required to do and what the publisher will do. The same rules apply for eBooks as for book publishing, make sure your work is of a high standard, grammatically and factually correct.

TERMINOLOGY

Freelance writing has a language all of its own. You must learn this language if you are to communicate in this field. Each lesson will contain a number of terms that you will need to define.

SET TASK

Set Task 1 - Create a Resource File

Any contacts that you find should be filed in your Resource File and used as a reference for your research and writing. Many of the contacts and details you will have found through searching and looking through information sources can be entered into your resource file. You never know when you might need to refer to a book, magazine article, or a person you came across a few years earlier. You may also find competitions that run regularly that you might wish to include.

You can use a computer file or folder, or a cardboard file system, depending upon your preference. Card files can be purchased from a news agency. Use one card or file for each category of information you have found to order the references that you have discovered. For example, in a card system, you would have cards with information on publishers filed under "P" for publisher, with each publisher arranged in alphabetical order. Each card or file should provide the publisher's name, address, phone, the type of material they publish, a list of some examples of publications you might be familiar with, names of any contact persons, and any other information of interest (e.g. how much a publisher currently pays for an article of 1000 words in a particular magazine).

When you submit each of your first nine assignments for this course, submit four resource file cards, or computer files. You will have completed and submitted 36 resource file cards/computer files by the end of this course.

Set Task 2 - Writing Associations

There are many current information sources available on the internet for finding information on associations and writing. Some associations exist on a national level and others operate on a local scale. A search through hard copy directories will also work if you do not have access to the internet e.g. Yellow Pages, White Pages.

An internet search can often display a number of results for different writing associations and groups. If you are having difficulty finding relevant associations, please contact your tutor.

Some examples of writing associations and groups from Australia include: The Australia Council, Australian Association of Writing Programs, Australian Booksellers Association, Australian Copyright Council, Australian Journalists Association, Australian Press Council, Australian Society of Authors, Australian Storytelling Guild and the Australian Writer's Guild.

This list may give you an idea of different words to use when searching for writing groups and associations via internet searches. Do an internet/directory search for writing associations and groups in your own country.

Set Task 3 - Literary Prizes and Awards

A wide range of prizes and awards are offered annually to authors via competitions. These can be based at a local, regional or national level. Some may relate to a particular type of writing, or type of writer (e.g. children's books, new published work).

Information on such prizes and awards is published frequently in literary magazines, literary pages of newspapers, and newsletters from groups such as the Society of Authors or the Horticultural Media Association. Prize details and contact addresses will change from time to time, so before you write away, do some research and make sure the award is still current.

Again, do a search for Literary Prizes and Awards that are offered in your own country.