

Sixteen lessons for developing writers including assignments and writing markets.

Freelance Writing: Begin the Adventure

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Lesson Four - Finding Markets for Non-Fiction Writing

Whether you are a generalist and writing in a variety of topics, or a specialist and focusing on one area for your work, finding markets is going to be part of your daily job.

Depending on what you write you will be spending your time searching for markets with businesses, local publishers, businesses, book publishers, magazines, newsletters, online periodicals or literary journals.

Newspapers, Ezines and Magazine Markets

You've got your article topics and are narrowing down what you will write about. Now you need to narrow down the possible markets.

If you want to find a local market to write for try your newspaper. Many use freelancers for feature articles or as part-time reporters. The disadvantage of newspaper is the relatively low pay. The advantage is once you've been assigned a regular beat, or column, you will have a regularly recurring paying writing job.

Beyond your neighborhood, there is a world of markets for your work. An essential tool for writers is the *Writer's Market Annual Directory* of publishers. This book lists magazines in categories for easy reference. Each entry describes how to submit to the publication, what the editors are especially looking for, and amount of payment for submission.

Visit the *Writer's Market* website to register for the online version, updated regularly, or buy a print copy at your favorite bookstore.

Writer's Market is an extensive, but not exhaustive, collection of publications itching to get their editorial hands on your work. Smaller markets such as regional or specialty magazines may not be included and information on online markets is scarce.

Where else can you look for non-fiction writing markets?

I am giving you a list of websites to get you started. Use your favorite search engine a few hours each month to compile new sites and search out new publications.

Another way to keep abreast of changes in writing markets is to sign up for free e-newsletters that list new and hungry markets. I'll get you started with a few of my favorites.

www.writersweekly.com

www.fundsforwriters.com

www.writesuccess.com

www.absolutewrite.com

www.groups.yahoo.com/workforwriters

www.groups.yahoo.com/payingjobsforwriters

www.worldwidefreelance.com

www.food-writing.com

Research Writing Markets for Maximum Sales

This is my story of my "market day" each month when I'm planning out my next writing moves in my food writing career.

I wish you could see my living room floor right now. I have seven piles of magazines covering most of the rug. Anyone could tell you that I'm a packrat. It's the truth. But these magazine piles are more than just a reluctance to part with any of my possessions. They are my day's research into food writing markets.

It matters not what your writing niche, or specialization, may be, you need to include time for researching new and changing publications throughout your work week. As food writers, I am a regular reader of the wisdom between the shiny covers of "Bon Appetit," "Saveur," "Gourmet," "Food and Wine," and "Gastronomica" (if you are an American writer anyway).

Thumbing through past issues, I can see that aside from celebrities, bestselling authors, four- and five-star chefs, and television personalities, these magazines provide limited

opportunities for most food writers – although I am not saying these are not places to send your work to – except as incentive to hone our craft.

Stumped as to where else you can submit your food writing? Wondering how to uncover markets for your work? Aside from saving issues of magazines and building piles two years' worth high on your living room rug to occupy a Sunday afternoon, there are several practical steps to follow when looking for new writing markets.

Start with Writers Market, the annual directory of magazines and publishers. An alternate, or additional, choice could be Writer's Handbook. Both list publications by a general section, or topic. Lately writers I've talked with prefer to skip the actual book and sign up with Writer's Market online at www.writersmarket.com

Take a field trip to the largest bookstores you can find. My tendency is to be overwhelmed by the vast array of international and national cookery magazines and special issues. I overcome this fear of so many food covers by picking up a few, finding a chair and skimming through each one to see what its focus is. I also buy several, read them as continuing education and deduct them as a business expense when I do my taxes each April.

Love that google! I go to www.google.com and type in a variety of words and phrases: "guidelines + food + articles," "writer's guidelines & food," or "submissions + articles + cooking." Feel free to employ your own favorite search engine when performing an internet search for websites, magazines, newsletters and newspapers that accept articles on the topics you plan to write on.

Speaking of online searches, track down writers who have websites. Take the name of a writer who pops up in various magazines and do a search online for that person. How does this help you find markets? Take note of the author's bio at the end of articles or, if he has his own website, scan his publishing credits or resume to compile your own list of markets to research.

Once you've gathered up your list of markets, it's time to do two more things: write to the publication for writer's guidelines, and read (and study) back issues.

Writing for guidelines is a simple task. Look for the publication's website and search for submission or writer's guideline information posted online. Otherwise, type a short note requesting that writer's guidelines be sent to you in the enclosed self-addressed

stamped envelope (SASE). Make it easy on the editorial support staff by typing "re: Writer's Guidelines" on the envelope in the right bottom corner. And do include that SASE.

How can you study back issues? Go to the library. If you're not sure they'll have the issues, call first. Bring a notepad and write down notes about style (informal, cutting edge, practical), types of articles (quick cooking, food memories, profiles of celebrity cooks), and where to send your letter pitching your article idea. If you are interested in a magazine that is not in your local library or in your bookstore, call or write the publisher to find out how to purchase back issues, or look for free issue offers on the magazine's website. Of course, when I take advantage of the free trial issue promotions I just end up with another pile of magazines on my living room rug.

So what are we waiting for? Let's get researching, writing and submitting.

10 ways to get cheap (or free) magazine samples

1 - Join a reading or writing group. Ask members to bring in their already-read magazines and have an exchange. Do the same with interest groups you belong to or know about - play groups (parenting, home, cooking, family mags), business networking groups (entrepreneurs, home business, finances magazines), church (religious, devotional periodicals).

2 - Offer to take a friend to the doctor's office. Okay, that sounds goofy but I love taking my children to the orthodontist, pediatrician, and dentist offices so I can scan the table of contents and skim the articles in the parenting, children's, family, travel, and money magazines. I bring a notepad and take plenty of notes. Find an article in an old magazine that would help your research? Ask the office to make a copy of it; offer to pay.

3 - Subscribe. Remember if you subscribe to a magazine that is for business purposes, if you itemize your taxes, you can deduct the cost of the subscriptions. I am a food writer so I keep all receipts for food and writing magazines, food and writing books to deduct as business expenses.

4 - Take up publishers on their free copy offers. It used to be that all magazines would let you send in a postcard and check the "bill me" square and you'd end up with two or three issues before they cut you off for not paying. Nowadays we cannot even be

inadvertently dishonest. I get mailings from magazines offering me one free issue. I will send in the postcard and usually have a bill to pay before I've read the free issue. I then can decide to subscribe or put the bill in the postage paid envelope and decline to pay.

5 - Look for the online issues of particular magazines. It's true that many use original content online (another good market to explore) but even the different content will show you what type of material the magazine is looking for.

6 - Read newspapers online. Do you want to write travel articles? Visit the major newspapers online. Most hire freelancers to cover a great deal of their special interest articles. Contact information for, in this example, the travel section editor will likely be available on the website.

7 - Write for guidelines. Look in The Writer's Market. If you are looking for parenting magazines and find one that sounds about right to you but you've never seen, write for the writer's guidelines and request a sample issue. Doublecheck the listing of the magazine to see if there is a reduced price or you have to send a stamped envelope to receive a free copy.

8 - Go to the library. This is so obvious! Make a bi-weekly appointment to go to the library and review the magazines you want to write for. Make notes. Use the library's copier to photocopy the table of contents, or an article or two to review at home.

9 - If your public library doesn't carry the magazines you want to know about travel to a college library. They are set up for your kind of research. While most require student identification to use the reference materials, you can read the periodicals unimpeded.

10 - Bookstores! Grab a pile of magazines, buy that over-priced latte and carefully review the magazines you've found to study (remember, if you spill on it, you buy it!)

Thirty-Minute Markets

Between jobs, family and life in general, it can be difficult to both find new markets for our writing, and the time to write. As a mother of three, who works two part-time jobs, writes weekly columns and publishes her own writing newsletter, I feel your pain.

I have also worked out my own "Thirty-Minute Markets" plan to submit and earn more despite my constant time crunch.

One month when our two cars broke down, and the temperature stayed 30 degrees below zero for weeks (the heating bills, oy), I felt the pressure to bring in some cash quickly. I began brainstorming for solutions when I remembered an online newsletter that had accepted one of my food articles, published it and paid me, all within one week's time. Scanning my recipes, I found a fast, healthy meal for families, wrote up how I developed the recipe and sent it in. A friend had e-mailed me about another website that needed stories about writing. I dashed off another article about starting my newsletter. I then visited a forum on a writers site that listed calls for submissions. Back to my laptop, armed with possible markets, I wrote out an article on unusual ways to find new writing markets and one with home-made facial recipes.

In less than two hours, I uncovered the markets, and wrote and submitted four new articles. All were eventually accepted; I was quickly paid \$105 for two hours of work.

How did I do it? The markets I chose needed articles on topics that I either specialize in or know well. How did I know my work would get accepted? I didn't, but I felt confident about their acceptance based on my over ten years experience researching and writing articles. I provide clean copy and have a list of published credits that help get me noticed, especially at smaller periodicals.

Last question: where did I find these markets? I network with other writers, editors and publishers online, sharing advice and gratefully accepting tips on new paying markets.

Looking to build your writing credits and bank account, despite your other commitments? Compile your own list of markets that you can write for in thirty minutes and you'll find that within a month or two, you'll have added ten published articles to your credit.

This is one time you might want to stick to writing about what you already know. Think about your hobbies, interests, and writing niche. Toss in the things your friends and family know. After all, a five minute phone interview is still easy research for a piece. With just a little brainstorming you'll have the topics to look for in a thirty-minute market.

Other advantages to finding and selling to thirty -minute markets:

- You won't feel abused by the low pay, usually \$10 to \$50, if you are writing on a topic you know intimately, and can produce a quality piece in a half hour.
- Many are online and publish, and pay, quickly. It's fun to submit an article on healthy eating and have it appear on a website within 72 hours, or arrive in your e-mail box as part of a newsletter, within one short week.
- It's easy to find these markets by searching online, and by keeping up-to-date on messages posted to your online writing groups.
- Experienced writers often pass over the lower paying markets which gives writers with

even a little expertise a better chance at having their work accepted.

Keep updating your list of the thirty-minute markets you find. If you find a travel newsletter that pays \$30 for 500 words, only add that to your list if you can quickly write an article from your personal knowledge, or with minimal research. Add any market that might take articles from your area of expertise. For me it's writing, food, home and garden, parenting, and country living. Find your own areas of expertise and start digging for thirty minute markets to fatten your bank account and round out your writing credits.

NEWSPAPERS

You read your newspaper, but did you realize that not only columns are written by freelance writers, but also news stories. Not all bylines in a newspaper are for full time employees. Freelance journalists can work as stringers for major newspapers, covering community news when it breaks, or for wire services like Associated Press or Reuters. Do you have a hankering to do hard hitting news or upbeat people features? Newspapers might just be the place for you.

After 30 years in the newspaper business, I've seen nearly every kind of story imaginable — birth notices scrawled on cocktail napkins to electronic submissions with embedded art. As a newspaper editor with both daily and weekly newspaper experience, I can say with some authority we prefer the latter.

But there is no doubt that if you are submitting as manuscript to a newspaper for consideration, you can do a lot to give yourself at least a fighting chance at publication.

First, practice self-realization: be aware that your 35,000 hometown daily paper is far, far more likely to publish your food article than is, say, the New York Times or the St. Louis Post Dispatch. Also be aware, however, that there are in most areas more than one newspaper to submit to. In major markets, papers like New Times and like-minded alternative weeklies frequently are fertile markets for food writers.

No matter what paper you decide to submit a story to, you will increase your chances incrementally if you follow some simple practices.

— Know your newspaper: know if the paper you are submitting to prints submissions largely unedited, or if it edits aggressively. Most dailies edit aggressively. Some weeklies, on the other hand, have fewer editorial staff members and frequently edit lightly a submission that meets their writing criteria. If you are submitting to a paper that edits aggressively, be prepared to cooperate in the editing process: answer questions with enthusiasm and accuracy. Don't hint that you don't want your story edited; be aware it

will be, and work within that reality.

— Know your newspaper, Part II: know how long their average articles are, especially in the section you are writing for. If their average food section article is, for example, six column inches and their longest is 20 column inches, you are increasing your chances greatly by writing a story that falls within those parameters. If, on the other hand, you submit a 2,500 word tome, you're diminishing the chances you will be published. Some newspapers automatically reject stories based on length, so writing tightly will enhance the chances your article will be considered.

— Write the article in a fashion that will fall within the general rules of newspaper construction. While the strict inverted pyramid — most important facts to least important, no deviation allowed — is largely abandoned, some form of it is found in nearly every newspaper story. If you write a rambling, disjointed narrative, your chance of being published diminishes greatly.

— Follow Associated Press Stylebook style. Every writer who sells or tries to sell stories to a diverse market should have an AP Stylebook. Every writer who wants to be published frequently in newspapers MUST have a foundational understanding of AP style, and the resources to look up questions in the stylebook.

— Use the generally accepted form of the language you are writing in. Pay attention to word meanings. Pay attention to sentence structure and paragraphing. Do not wander off into the exciting world of experimental grammar. Newspapers publish the equivalent of a very large novel every day. They do not have time to drag your article back into the realm of understandability.

— Submit the article in the form requested by the newspaper. Many papers have become so digitally oriented that electronic submissions are the only ones considered. Be prepared to e-mail the article or provide it on a disk. For smaller papers, especially weekly, offering to submit electronically can greatly enhance your chances of having an article published because it will not have to be key-stroked a second time by newspaper staff.

— Be prepared to have your unsolicited manuscript published without being paid for it. Newspapers usually pay stringers but do NOT pay submissions. The only real way to get to be a stringer (or staffer) absent the usual job opening and application process is to get in the door by submitting interesting articles that are accepted for publication. Once you've cracked the door, many more things become possible.

Some newspapers simply do not print unsolicited articles. The only way to find out is to submit. If you are told this particular paper isn't interested, look for others in the same market. Don't get discouraged, just keep submitting.

Assignment: Take a day off to study magazines. Ask your friends and family to share back copies of magazines with you, go to a bookstore or library and study issues. Choose some magazines to aim for, then make a list of catch phrases they use and note the style of writing they publish.

Assignment: Make a list objects - fruits and vegetables, furniture in your home, flowers in your garden. Find new ways to describe them. Describe the tastes of fruits through colors and textures. Talk about the furniture in terms of personality, the flowers using musical terms. Make up your own guidelines. Play around with this. Pull out a thesaurus for added inspiration.

Writing Inspiration: Write your own inspirational quote. Add it to your email signature. "The words you write today will show someone the way tomorrow," "Each night the universe tells me a story; I write it down every morning." "I write because I breath."

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