

# *Becoming a Published Writing Professional*

**A**re you, or do you wish to be, a published writing professional? Published writing professionals are professionals who write frequently about their professional knowledge and experience—and who publish what they have written.

## **THE REASONS FOR WRITING AND PUBLISHING**

Why might you want to be a published writing professional?

- *To discover what you know.* Many writers attest to the importance of writing as a way of discovering and knowing. “I didn’t know what I knew about ability grouping until I agreed to write an article about it.”
- *To advance your career.* College professors know the reality of “publish or perish.” Roman Catholic priests teaching at Catholic colleges give the adage their own twist: “publish or parish.” Principals aspiring to the superintendency know that a list of publications in the resumé gives them an edge over unpublished colleagues. Published writing also calls attention to your abilities and increases your visibility.
- *To know the satisfaction that comes from making a difference in the lives of children and youth.* If children learn more by using a learning strategy that you have developed and published, you should

## 4 Getting Started

feel a sense of gratification. The best educators are engaged in a life-long pursuit of meaning, and writing and publishing play a significant role in that quest.

- *To become more effective in your present role.* By researching, writing, and publishing, you will gain skills and knowledge that should improve your performance.

Writing that is not published is like a tree that falls in the forest with no one there to hear.

### **THE DRAWBACKS OF WRITING**

However, there are some crucial drawbacks. Writing takes time. You might spend as much as 20 full days writing and revising a brief article. You need to develop a tough skin. Your readers and editors will criticize your work. After writing some 30 books, I still wince when I get negative feedback. You put yourself on the line when you write for publication. Finally, writing is hard work, taking both a physical and an emotional toll. Such tasks as focusing on a topic, retrieving and evaluating information, and writing and revising a draft all create pressure and tension.

### **LEARNING TO WRITE**

Published writing professionals strive to improve their writing throughout their careers. There is no magic formula that will transform your writing overnight; however, there are some simple steps you can take that will result in some gradual improvement.

#### **Read Widely and Carefully**

First, read as much as you can in professional journals. The reading process helps you internalize such skills as organizing the article and using research appropriately. The questions listed in Box 1.1 can help you focus your reading so that it results more directly in better writing.

### **Box 1.1 Reading to Write Better**

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The following questions can guide your reading when you read to write better.

1. *Audience.* Who seems to be the intended audience? What accommodations does the writer make for the audience?
2. *Organization.* What organizational pattern is used? Is the organization clear?
3. *Beginning.* How does the article begin? Is the beginning effective?
4. *Paragraph Length.* How many sentences in a typical paragraph? Is paragraph length appropriate for the audience?
5. *Word Choice.* Are technical terms explained clearly? Does the article avoid clichés and slogans? Is word choice appropriate for the audience?
6. *Documentation.* Are statements and arguments sufficiently documented? Are references current?
7. *Ending.* How does the article end? Is the ending effective?
8. *Article Length.* How long is the article in number of pages? Does the length seem appropriate for the audience?

### **OVERALL ASSESSMENT**

By reading this article, what did you learn about writing that gets published? What suggestions would you make to the author to improve the article?

## Write Frequently

Next, write as often as you can. Just the act of writing seems to make the writing go easier. Some writing professionals find it helpful to do some “free writing” when they hit writer’s block. Free writing is simply writing whatever comes into your mind, without worrying about form, just to get the juices running. For example, here is some free writing by a writing professional who was trying to warm up for an article on accountability.

Who’s accountable. In any good school there should be accountability on all sides. A balanced approach, emphasizing mutual accountability is needed, a circle of accountability. Students should not be left off the hook. They need to be held accountable.

## Get Feedback

You will need to get two kinds of feedback. First, you will need a colleague who can give your article a close reading before you send it off. He or she should know how to find typos, such as misspelled words, misplaced commas, and sentence fragments; he or she also should be able to give you feedback about content. This person needs to be careful about details and have a good knowledge of English usage and sentence structure. Skilled proofreaders use a standardized set of symbols. Figure 1.1 shows the most commonly used proofreader’s marks that you are expected to use in revising an article being prepared for publication. Keep the proofreader’s marks near your word processor.

All writers (including me) also need feedback from the publisher’s editors; Chapter 9 provides you with more details about the several publisher editors with whom you might work once your writing has been accepted. These editors will give you feedback about such matters as writing style, audience sensitivity, and content accuracy. These are the kinds of comments a good editor might make:

- Seems out of place here
- Needs fuller development
- Add documentation

**Figure 1.1.** Proofreader's Marks

INSTRUCTION	EXAMPLE	MARK IN MARGIN
delete	the <del>shy</del> boy	9
insert	The President	^ u.s.
let it stand	<del>subway</del> writers	stet
make capital	president	(cap)
make lower case	Autumn	(lc)
close up space	The chair man	c!u
start paragraph	Too many educators	-P

These are the marks most commonly used by writers.

As is apparent from these examples, an editor deals with more substantive matters than a proofreader does.

### **Publish, Publish, Publish**

As noted above, the ultimate goal is to publish. You get no points for manuscripts that lie on the shelf gathering dust. You make no impact on the profession when your good ideas have not seen the light of day. And you should not list on your resumé unpublished works, unless you include articles or books to be published in the near future, labeled as “in press.”

The other major benefit is the contact with the professionals who serve the publisher on the editorial staff. I have learned a great deal from the experienced editors who have helped me improve my writing and deepen my knowledge of the publishing process.

### **Use This Book**

The final process for improving your writing is to use this book intelligently. Although this book cannot, by itself, make you a good writer, it does present some experience-tested advice that should

make improvement easier. The next section of this chapter explains how best to use the book.

## **THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS WORK**

This book is written so that it might be used in a variety of ways. To help you use it effectively, you should know how the book is conceptualized and organized. As indicated in the table of contents, the book is organized into six main sections. Part I, “Getting Started,” deals with preliminary matters in the opening chapters. This first chapter explains how to become a published writing professional, and Chapter 2 presents a process for finding a focus for your writing and making long-term plans. Chapter 3 explains how to use the tools of the trade.

Part II, “Mastering the Writing Processes,” explains the essential skills involved in effective use of the writing processes, with one chapter for each process: finding a topic, building the knowledge base, organizing your writing, drafting with style, editing and revising, and working with editors and publishers.

Parts III, IV, and V explain several types of writing for three different audiences and settings. Part III is concerned with professional venues: professional writing for practitioners, articles for research journals, editorials and other opinion pieces, and writing your first book. The section concludes with a special chapter on publishing on the Internet. Part IV emphasizes three types of graduate academic writing. Part V will help you write effectively in the organization—publishing in the local paper and writing funding proposals. The book concludes with Part VI, which looks behind to summarize and ahead to anticipate.

The book is organized and written to give you maximum flexibility. You do not have to read the chapters in order. One approach would be to read the first nine chapters as a foundation and then select the type of writing most important to you, reading the appropriate chapter.