

Writing for a living

If you are creative, organised, disciplined, and possess excellent research and networking skills along with a passion for the written word then you could forge a successful career as a writer!

As a writer, you will be involved in the creation and development of works of fiction and non-fiction. This covers various forms of writing including:

- life writing
- magazine and newspaper articles
- non-fiction
- novels
- poetry
- screen and radio
- scripts for theatre
- short stories
- web content.

New media is also opening doors for writers in areas such as mobile phone content and computer game scripts.

Most writers work freelance and are self-employed. As income from writing may be low and erratic, most writers supplement their income with other related activities such as author visits, workshops, events and readings as well as teaching opportunities in:

- colleges
- community and adult learning centres
- therapeutic centres
- training courses
- universities and schools.

Some writers may find avenues to diversify their writing and write in different forms, such as published novelists also writing reviews and literary criticism.

In addition, many writers manage their writing work alongside full or part-time jobs, which may be related to their writing (such as lecturing on creative writing courses) or entirely unrelated.

Skills

To succeed as a writer, you will need:

- literary skills
- imagination
- a clear, entertaining style
- the ability to work to tight deadlines, while also maintaining attention to detail
- excellent research skills, both literary and business-related
- self-discipline and time management skills
- the ability to work alone for long periods of time

- networking skills and the ability to develop media contacts
- marketing skills and an understanding of new media as a tool for self-promotion
- IT, web, typing and editing skills
- the necessary financial skills to manage yourself in the employment market
- the ability to understand and accept criticism
- determination, resilience and enthusiasm.

It is critical that you also work on marketing yourself and your work. If you have an agent or a publisher, they are likely to help with publicity, but it is important that you also look for opportunities for publicity yourself, including:

- setting up your own website
- beginning a blog
- creating a presence via social media
- interviews
- readings
- workshops and signings.

Work experience

Pre-entry experience in related industries such as bookselling, publishing, film or television may be helpful but is not necessary.

It is, however, important that writers build up a portfolio of work (published or unpublished) in order to have material to showcase to potential publishers or contacts.

Securing a publishing contract can be challenging with significant levels of competition.

Students can improve their chances of entering this line of work by getting relevant experience while at university, including writing for student newspapers or magazines, or taking part in student radio or a drama club.

In addition, the [BBC Work Experience](#) scheme offers writers' opportunities to do unpaid work placements.

Some organisations offer work shadowing schemes e.g. <http://blakefriedmann.co.uk/carole-blake-open-doors-project/>

You can break into the profession by winning local or national writing competitions. These include fiction, poetry, screen and playwriting and usually can be found by a simple web search of 'creative writing competitions,' or 'screen writing competitions.'

Some publishers run competitions to find new talent, and the prize can include publication. For example, the children's fiction publishers [Chicken House](#), in conjunction with The Times, run an annual children's fiction competition.

To find out more about writing employers, vacancies and professional development go to <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/writer>

Employers

Because writing is largely a freelance occupation, very few vacancies are advertised and most opportunities are found by making speculative approaches or by answering calls for submissions.

It is very important that you make speculative approaches in the style that is appropriate to the opening.

Writers of fiction and non-fiction who want to be traditionally published will need to seek an agent before seeking a publisher as most publishers will not look at uncommissioned work unless it comes via an agent.

Approaching a literary agent usually involves submitting the first three chapters of a novel with a synopsis and a cover letter (for fiction). It is important that you do your research when you are looking for an agent. This involves looking closely at the agent and their list. Do they represent the genre of fiction that you write in? If not, submission could be pointless.

Check out the other writers on their list. Do you think you could fit in there somewhere? If not, it may be best to keep on looking. The writer/agent relationship is an important one. It's worth taking the time to find one that is right for you.

Another possibility is to self-publish or produce an e-book. These methods are increasing in popularity as e-books become more popular and technological developments are making it easier to publish work yourself.

Self-publishing can be an effective way of showcasing ability and achieving independent sales through local book shops or by using online retailers. However, taking on the role of both writer and publisher can be demanding and require you to understand issues such as permissions and rights.

[The Society of Authors](#) produce a *Quick Guide to Self-Publishing* and *Print-on-Demand*, which is a useful reference point.

Short-story writers may find their style of writing is suited to, and regularly accepted by, certain magazines or websites. Short story competitions may provide additional income and can help showcase your work.

There are several outlets for the publication or broadcast of poetry, although they are unstructured. Examples are specialist poetry magazines and occasional radio programmes. Generally speaking, little or no pay is involved.

A list of poetry magazines is published on [The National Poetry Library](#) and a visit to investigate back copies is recommended. Poetry readings and festivals can provide a forum for publicising work and competitions can be lucrative and lead to opportunities for publication.

As a script writer, you may have temporary contracts with:

- the [BBC](#)
- commercial and independent television and radio companies
- facilities houses
- large advertising companies
- film and video production companies.

Writers for theatre often work on attachment to a particular theatre or company, or may even form their own theatre company.

For submission guidelines for many agents, publishers and magazines, see the [Writers' and Artists' Yearbook](#).

Many writers supplement their income with writing-related employment and there are teaching opportunities in:

- colleges
- community and adult learning centres
- therapeutic centres
- training courses
- universities and schools.

Look for job vacancies at:

- [Arts Council England](#)
- [Arts Council of Wales](#)
- [British Council - Arts Group](#)
- [Creative Scotland](#)
- [National Association of Writers in Education](#)
- [The Stage](#)
- [4Talent](#)
- [The Writers' Guild of Great Britain](#)

A basic web search will also uncover a plethora of forums and other sites aimed at, or run by, writers where opportunities are listed and advice, support and critical feedback are available.

Other careers with words

- See our [‘Careers with Words’](#) leaflet available from firstpoint or our website.

Other options

For information on options with your degree, go to:

- <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/degree-subjects-your-options>
- www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree

To see what other graduates are doing now go to:

- <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/what-do-graduates-do>

You may also wish to pick up a copy of our [‘Quick Guide to Career Planning’](#) from firstpoint or our website for other resources and activities to help you explore your options.

If you would like to book a careers appointment, please visit:

<https://worchester.targetconnect.net>

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