Section 1 - 3:
› Writing For Different Markets
› Broadcasting Fundamentals
› Writing Reviews and Publishing Fundamentals
Advanced Freelance Journalism

Book 2

20176A
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Writing For Different Markets

Sample Articles

Although this contribution has been written by an American writer and contains American references, the actual material is highly relevant to yourself and the business of freelance journalism. Although American examples are most commonly used, the ideas and information can be readily adapted to any geographical market.

Writing About Food

By Barbara Freda

Good food, good wine, dinner parties and restaurants make food writing an appealing topic.

Even readers who never cook need to eat and often enjoy reading about what goes in to a meal. Readers who do cook look for their next party menu or inspiration for the daily family meal in the pages of food magazines and newspaper food sections.

To write about food, you should consider yourself a foodie: every aspect of food preparation appeals to you, from ingredients to recipes to cultural connections, even to equipment.

Your background does not need to include culinary training, although it never hurts to drop restaurant names if you did spend some time in a professional kitchen. It’s the quickest way of letting an editor know you know food.

You must enjoy food, be adventurous about food and be somewhat knowledgeable about its preparation. That doesn’t mean you should have to be able to make the world’s best crème brulee, but you’d better have eaten enough to know silky smooth custard from curdled. If it means taking a few basic cooking classes, go ahead. It’s all part of the training, and readers are quick to pick up on whether or not you know that same crème brûlée from a flan.

The big, national glossy consumer food magazines are tough markets to crack. And if you plan on submitting food articles to any of the major women’s service magazines, such as Good Housekeeping, save your queries. Those magazines have staffs developing recipes and food articles full-time.

But take heart. Plenty of alternative markets exist. There are food magazines devoted exclusively to spicy food, grilled food and Italian food.
Food articles have appeared in Smithsonian and Cigar. Airline magazines often publish food articles.

Maybe one of the quickest markets to crack is the trade market. Food trade magazines are a source of regular income for many food writers and are a great place to develop clips and hone your expertise.

As well as some of the titles all food industry people read (Nation’s Restaurant News, Restaurants and Institutions), plenty of trade-specific journals reach food industry people every day.

Publications cover the pizza industry, supermarkets, fast food, baking and restaurant equipment. The topics may not be sexy (prep tables, uniforms, plates and flatware), but readers – and editors – need the information you can provide. Pay for these trade magazines is modest, often $.20 to $.50 per word compared to $1 or more per word you can get from the big names, but the work is steady, and if you prove yourself reliable, you may well have editors calling you monthly. If covering tables and chairs seems too much of a yawn, consider restaurant reviews.

If you are lucky enough to fall into this fun (to any foodie) job, know that you have to taste any number of dishes that don’t appeal to you. You owe it to your readers. Reviewing restaurants is no treat for your waistline, either, and if you give a place a negative review, you may invoke the chef’s wrath. Be ready for that kitchen heat. But reviews pay off when you get to eat out, hand over the bills to your editor and get paid for the articles. “Know your food” bears repeating here. Readers will catch you, chefs will catch you, and your credibility will suffer if you blunder.

Another caveat in review writing: avoid waxing too lyrical about the food. Use straightforward descriptive terms: the vegetables still had a crisp center; the fries were soggy as if they had been held under heat lamps too long; the cake was moist. Losing the readers in the prose means losing the focus on the food.

Landing the plum spot of restaurant reviewer for a big-city paper may be tough, but check into some of the alternative papers in your market. They may not have the budget to pay for your meal, but at least you can deduct the expense on your tax return and get some money for your copy. And of course, the clips to take you on to the next big market.

Special features for the local papers may prove easier to land. Pitch your stories to the food editor at the local. Think about food festivals, or single ingredient stories, especially around harvest time. Cover strawberry picking in June, tomatoes in August, apples, pumpkins and squash in the fall. If your area has one main crop or an out-of-the-ordinary crop (Vidalia onions, persimmons, mint, garlic), write that up. Stories about these local crops often find their way to the pages of the New York Times food section. There’s no reason not to aim high if the story is a good one.
Tying a specialty food to its culture results in good food reading and good clips. If there is a particular ethnic group in your area that always has a certain festive meal for a holiday, or one that serves up an exotic staple day in and day out at a local cafe, write about both the food and its ties to the culture.

If you can offer photographs of a restaurant or festival when you query the food editors, that’s a plus. But food photography (those yummy-looking photographs of the recipes or dishes mentioned in the article) is much more difficult, and most publications hire their own food photographers. You should, however, be prepared to photograph dishes you write about, so the magazine’s chefs can recreate the dish to look as close to the original as possible.

New product reviews can be fun to do, although you may need some connections to the food industry to be out in front of the rest of the general population. But, with some phone calls or Web research, you can contact the marketing departments of big companies and find out about new food-related releases.

You’ll often get review samples to taste or maybe a piece of equipment to try. If it’s so great you can’t wait to tell others about it, write it up; a lot of city newspapers have a ‘Best Of’ column that covers the best potato chips one week and the best can-opener the next.

If the product tastes so lousy you’d never recommend it to anyone, pitch a comparison review of similar products, ranking others against the one that you find so poor.

One of the toughest branches of food writing is recipe development. Publications have high standards when it comes to developing and testing recipes, so if you are submitting recipes with your copy, test them and then test them again in your home kitchen.

If you write one tablespoon when you should have written one teaspoon you can ruin the recipe, and you will hear from the readers (and, of course, your editors too). Check the magazine for style (do the recipes say ‘1 cup’ or ‘1 c’? Are volume or weight measurements used?), and remember the audience. You’ll develop a recipe for pizza makers differently than you’ll develop a recipe for home cooks.

If you decide you want to include recipes with your copy, but you feel recipe development requires more experience than you have, use recipes from other sources. You must cite the source with your text, though, and if you have any chance at all of talking to authors (even a well-known chef can be reached with one or two phone calls) and getting their permission, do it.
If you have a recipe of your own, one you altered from another source, it is common courtesy to cite the source and note your recipe was “inspired by Chef Lori’s Beet Salad with Oranges.” (Changing an eighth teaspoon to a quarter teaspoon of salt is not enough of a change. Make significant changes, such as using turkey instead of beef and white wine instead of red wine, thyme instead of rosemary.)

A ‘sister’ subject to food writing is beverage writing, specifically wine, beer and spirits, although evergreen topics like summertime lemonade (the real stuff, that is) or mint juleps for the Kentucky Derby always suit a food section. If you add beverage writing to your repertoire, your markets expand. You do not need to have been a sommelier somewhere, but you had better enjoy taste-testing, and you had better know how to talk about it. There are certain buzz words, especially when writing about wines, that wine drinkers use when discussing wines. You need to know those words in order to describe the wine. Take a course or just taste the wines and read about what you taste.

Some resource books are necessary to a good food writer’s library. Food by Waverly Root, On Food and Cooking, by Harold McGee, and the original Joy of Cooking by Irma Rombauer and Marion Becker are three classics gracing the bookshelves in most food writers’ kitchens and offices. These tomes provide valuable background information on ingredients, scientific facts about cooking processes, and basic ‘need to know’ information.

And, as with so many other writing genres, if you want to write ‘good food writing’, read good food writing. Read M.F.K. Fisher (How to Cook a Wolf, Consider the Oyster) and Elizabeth David (An Omelette and a Glass of Wine, Mediterranean Food). Ask foodie friends about their favourites.

Build upon each source, and aim high. Culinary magazines and newspaper food sections are fun to write for (who doesn’t like to eat? And that is your research), and if you do crack the consumer food magazines, the pay is great.

In the meantime, there are plenty of trade journals to write for, and it only adds to the clips you can eventually include in that killer query to Gourmet.

Biographical Note: Barbara Freda is a freelance writer, cooking teacher and former chef. She spent a decade in professional kitchens, including several enjoyable years at Union Square Cafe in New York City and at Jack’s Firehouse in Philadelphia. Barb has contributed to Chile Pepper, Saveur, Culinary Trends and Family Fun magazines, and she writes a monthly equipment column for Pizza Today and covers the “quick-service” (a.k.a. fast food) industry for QSR, a trade publication. Barb left the heat of restaurant kitchens in 1994 and currently enjoys the coolness of the computer keyboard at her home in Louisville, Kentucky.
Activity 1

Try writing out a recipe of your choice:

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Writing for the Pet Market

By Janine Adams

Most pet owners never make a dime off their pets. But pet owners who are also writers can actually parlay their experiences with pets into writing income-provided that they use their own pets as a springboard for ideas, not as subjects for articles.

Most pet magazines aren’t interested in first-person stories about writers’ own pets. Editors cringe when they see tributes to dead pets, articles written in the pet’s voice, or essays on why the writer loves her pet.

The savvy pet writer, however, can take a personal experience or problem (say, his dog won’t stop barking), find a good angle, pitch it to the right market, conduct some interviews with dog trainers or behaviourists and get paid for an article on (for example) How to Use Positive Reinforcement to Quiet the Most Talkative Dog.

You don’t have to own a pet to write for the pet market. If you’re a good writer, researcher and interviewer, you can write about anything. But pet-owning pet writers have the advantage of their day-to-day experiences with their pets to help them come up with ideas.
Again, don’t query an editor for an article about something that happened to you and your pet. Rather, back your experience up with expert interviews and put an interesting spin on it. When my husband and I adopted a dog to join the one we’ve had since he was a puppy, I turned the experience into an article called Upsetting the Apple Cart: Adding a Second Dog for PetLife magazine. My own dogs weren’t mentioned, but my experience, combined with interviews with trainers and experienced dog owners, formed the basis of the article.

Sometimes you can turn a challenge you’re facing with your pet into an article. Query an editor about the dilemma, then interview experts. Voila, you’ve got a good article, money in your pocket and new-found knowledge to solve your own problem. This worked for me when my husband and I were faced with moving to a new city with our two dogs. I queried and got assignments to write about moving with pets.

This gave me the chance to interview trainers and receive valuable advice that helped me create a relatively stress-free move for the dogs – and gave me a great clip.

Fresh ideas are the key to breaking into the pet market. Editors who month after month publish articles about pets are always on the look out for a new angle on topics relating to responsible pet ownership, veterinary care, training or solving problem behaviours. Come up with a novel take on flea control and you might get an editor’s attention (and gratitude).

Another way you can make your ideas attractive to editors – and get your foot in the door – is to offer something they can’t easily get elsewhere.

In 1996 I decided to attend, at my own expense, the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, where dog writers and editors from around the globe gather annually. I queried like crazy beforehand, trying to get an assignment to write about the show. At the last minute, I hit pay dirt: PetLife was willing to assign an article, even though I hadn’t written for them before. The result was not only an article (A Day in the Life of a Show Dog), but the beginning of a great relationship. Since then I’ve written more than ten articles for the bimonthly, including a cover story.

By keeping your eyes open and seizing opportunities as they present themselves you might find yourself with a story you can sell again and again. In 1996 I learned that Terri Crisp, the director of the Emergency Animal Rescue Service (EARS), an organization that rescues pets during natural disasters, was coming to my city as part of a book tour. I arranged to interview her, explaining that I didn’t have an assignment but that I hoped to be able to write about her. When she graciously gave me time it paid off for both of us. I sold a profile of her to Good Housekeeping, as well as a two-part series on EARS and disaster preparedness to Dog World and a human-interest piece on a cat rescued by EARS to PetLife.
Your interview and research skills can be as important as your writing ability when it comes to writing for the pet market. If you’re an expert in a particular area—a veterinarian, trainer or groomer, for instance—you can write an article without doing any interviews, using your own expertise as the basis for the story. But for the most part, you should expect to be interviewing and quoting experts in your articles.

As much as I enjoy getting out and meeting people and pets, most of the research I do for my pet writing takes place in my home office. I get most of what I need for a story through phone and email interviews, written information that sources send me, books and the World Wide Web.

The Web provides a great starting point for finding sources to interview. It’s also fabulous for tracking down phone numbers and email addresses and for providing background information. But it should be treated solely as a jumping-off point. Web sites can easily be out of date and it can be difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff, since literally anybody can put up a Web site.

Sometimes, though, you need to get in the trenches. For example, I’ve attended Westminster every year since 1996 and have covered the show for PetLife, Dog World, America Online’s Pet Care Forum and the St. Louis PostDispatch. This summer, I’m attending dog camp with one of my dogs and writing about it for Dog World, among, I hope, other publications.

You may have fun (as in going to dog camp and calling it work), but you’re probably not going to get rich writing for pet magazines (I know I haven’t). Rates range from 20 cents (or even less) per word to about 50 cents per word. Of course, you have to take into account how complex an assignment is and how much time you think it will take you. If you’re a fast writer and the assignment is straightforward, a 1500-word article might take only a few hours. And even if the pay’s only $300, that’s still a decent hourly rate.

You can increase your income by retaining secondary rights to your work and selling reprints. (This is true, of course, in writing for any market.)

If you are able to sell reprints of your articles, you can sometimes even double the money you were originally paid. Articles that I’ve written for PetLife, for instance, have been reprinted on a pet-food company’s Web site and on America Online, all with my permission and an additional fee paid to me.

Keep in mind that pet writing doesn’t have to be limited to pet magazines. For about a year, I wrote fairly regularly for the weekly pet page of my local daily newspaper, the St. Louis PostDispatch. That came to an end after the newspaper slashed its freelance budget. (That budget cut taught me a valuable lesson in relying on a publication for assignments!)
Newspapers are notoriously poor payers, but national, general-interest magazines are not. The big women's magazines, for instance, pay at least $1 per word. Since pets can be integral members of the family and since pet care frequently falls to the woman in the family, there's certainly a place for pets on the pages of women's magazine. The trick, of course, is finding the right idea for the right magazine at the right time. You're competing with a lot of writers for editorial space in the higher-paying glossies, but if you can land an assignment you'll usually be well-compensated.

Virtually any type of magazine could be a potential market for pet-related stories. A decorating magazine might run a story on designer dog houses. A magazine written for home-based entrepreneurs might wants tips on how to keep your dog from jumping on clients or how to keep your cat from napping on your computer. Use your imagination when you scan the newstands and see if you can come up with imaginative, but relevant, ways for pets to fit in.

Another outlet for your pet writing is books. Take a look at the pet-books section of any large bookstore and you'll see that there's no shortage of book topics relating to the care of pets. There's the traditional route, involving a book proposal, an agent, an advance and royalties. There's also work-for-hire.

Some publishers, like Rodale Press, hire a large number of writers to contribute to their reference books. A single writer may write about a couple of specific ailments for a pet medical home reference, for example. When the publisher uses a work-for-hire contract, the author is paid a set amount and transfers the copyright to the publisher. No royalties are paid, and the author is paid the agreed-upon amount without regard to how the book sells.

Part of the trick in getting started in freelance pet writing is to make connections and build relationships with editors. As in most fields, networking can really give your career a boost. If you can attend dog or cat shows or other events where fellow writers meet you can make some valuable connections. For dog writers, the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, held every February in New York City, is the place to be. The Dog Writers Association of America (DWAA) holds its annual meeting and awards banquet the day before the show. The Cat Writers of America convene annually for a writing seminar just before the Cat Fancier’s Association international cat show.
Horse writers meet at the annual convention of their professional organization, American Horse Publications. General writers’ conferences can also be very helpful for meeting people and learning about potential markets.

Networking has paid off for me: I’ve received magazine assignments, online writing assignments and have even contributed to books as a direct result of connections I’ve made in the press room at Westminster and through the Dog Writers Association of America.

It is also important to network with fellow pet owners and keep abreast of current thinking with regard to pet care. Internet newsgroups and mailing lists are great ways to keep on top of what pet owners are concerned about. They can also be a great place for story ideas and sources. Participating in a pet activity, like dog obedience or agility, is another way to be involved in your target community. Being in touch with the pet-owning community helps develop your expertise in pet care and can make you a more attractive writer in the eyes of editors.

It goes without saying that you should get to know the magazines you are interested in writing for before you query. Each of the pet magazines has its own audience and its own style. Don’t waste your time querying with an idea that is wrong for a particular publication or that’s been recently covered. Put yourself in the place of the editor at a pet magazine.

The issues surrounding pet care haven’t changed all that much through the years. The same general topics need to be covered. Editors are looking for ways to tell those stories in a new and interesting manner. Comb your experience and your imagination for novel takes on relatively commonplace topics, like training, veterinary care, and behaviour problems. Make the article not only informative, but entertaining.

If you can do this, you can get those first few assignments. And once that ball’s rolling and you prove yourself to be a reliable, accurate and skilled writer, the assignments will doubtless keep coming your way.

Biographical Note: Janine Adams has been writing about pets, particularly dogs, since she became a freelance writer in 1995. Her work appears in PetLife, Dog World, the AKC Gazette, Animal Watch, and other pet magazines. In addition, she has contributed to two pet books published by Rodale Press and written about pets for general-interest publications like Good Housekeeping, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and St. Louis Homes & Gardens.
The How-To of Dance Criticism

By William Shoubridge

The most basic requisite for a critic of any art form and indeed for any type of journalist is a knowledge of the subject or at least a keen and swift ability to research the subject.

For a critic, who is looked upon as a ‘summa’ of erudition, that knowledge has to be exhaustive and far ranging and of paramount importance … a matter of life and death in fact.

A critic for any ‘quality’ paper is under constant scrutiny, from editors, people in the profession, well informed readers, the mass of other show business press representatives, and so on. That scrutiny can sometimes be malevolent and vindictive. There may be someone out there that you have criticised in a previous review and they are out for vengeance.

If a critic trips up in even the smallest detail or worse, is found to have committed plagiarism, then the knives will come out. The reputation of the paper as a responsible journal is called into question and it can be the end of the line for that critic. The glamorous life of free tickets and drinks, dizzying opening nights and the fawning attentions of the PR people is at an end.

How to get this knowledge and be secure in your opinions? It is not necessary to have been a dancer but one must have a knowledge of the forms, the five positions and transitions, the names of steps that make up an enchainment and the history of those forms and of their practitioners.

Know your Petipas from your Martha Grahams, your Graeme Murphys from your Frederick Ashtons, read up endlessly on the subject, take out subscriptions to Australian and overseas magazines … you’ve got to be keenly aware of what’s going on in the world.

However, dance is a relative newcomer to the arts scene despite its ancient lineage and commonality throughout every culture in the world.

Modern dance especially has exploded in the 20th century and has branched out into all sorts of hybrid forms like Performance Art. These days dancers can be called on to sing, speak, perform gymnastics and so on as the art form incorporates more and more ‘unpure’ elements.

There are also the difficulties of reference. A theatre critic may have reference to an existing script (a Shakespeare play) or an opera critic will have a score (like Tristan and Isolde) and can be assured that their readers will also have reference to that source.
With the exception of the great classics like Sleeping Beauty and so on, a dance critic does not have referable material. So much in dance is new ... and so many critics of dance see more 'world premiers' than any other type of arts journalist.

Added to this is the problem that dance is right on the cutting edge of the avant-garde today, stagings can take on some bizarre forms and many is the time that, unlike a theatre critic, you won't have the props of character development or plot or thematic expansion, because they just aren't there!

It is often no help at all looking for assistance in the program notes for an explanation either because half the time there is no 'explanation'. At such a point you're really thrown on your own devices and analytical processes and this is when dance criticism really is subjective as all good criticism should be.

When it came to writing my review of Graeme Murphy's Kraanerg a few years back, my initial ideas came from reference to Iannis Xenakis' ear-splitting music of the same name.

The score is a powerful aural assault and is quite scary at times and this taken with the architectural design of the set gave me a clue and I expounded on subjects like Chaos Theory and nuclear fission in relation to the restless and frenetic movements of the dancers on stage. No one else saw it that way, but I was at least complimented on trying to 'characterise' the ballet and explain it by recourse to my basic analysis. When it comes to works like this, it pays off to try to look 'around' the work, observe the parts of the whole like the costumes, set designs, music and the body language that the choreographer has utilised.

Try to find what it is that the work is about and then set about discussing whether or not the company has been successful in communicating that view.

Look at the layout of the work, the shape of the performers and the diminution and coagulation of dance steps, a highly aware and observant eye is all important in a dance critic just as a keen and sensitive ear is necessary for a music critic.

I've always worked hard to create punchy and attention grabbing first paragraphs in my reviews, sometimes writing them before I've seen the ballet. A brief explanation of the work's history or a note on the choreographer's previous work is always a good lead in. Sometimes a description of the Company's style is a help, after all, black American dancers do move differently to say Russian, French or Australian dancers.

If you have a dramatic ballet like Romeo and Juliet or Eugene Onegin, write about the ability of the dancers to express the character through the contour and accents they give to the choreography as well as their stage 'presence' and acting ability.
When confronted with a plotless ballet like much of George Balanchine’s work, a careful and judicious use of metaphor and simile is all important. Don’t overuse this device though because you’ll just jam up the reader’s sense of an image, and watch out for split infinitives and curly overwrought descriptions of the movement.

You may be trying to explain in words the expressions of an artform where words are redundant and limited but you have to get across a sense of what you’ve seen, be poetic if you like but remember there are good and bad poets and a dance critic who overdoes it will just get him or herself tied up in knots if he or she tries too hard.

Choreography may be the main ingredient of your criticism, but you must always mention the dancers. They are the ones who bring the ideas alive and one dancer may bring a whole different sense to a ballet than another.

Always try to keep sentences short and as loaded with associations as you can. Most of the time you will be limited to 500 or 600 words and you’ve got a lot of material to get through, but don’t get too technical as this is always a big turn off to the readers.

Overall, don’t be wishy washy in a review, open with a punch and end with a counter punch. If you hated a work say so and describe why you think the reader should also hate it and be aware that what you write is always going to be edited so underline parts of the article that you think could be jettisoned without damaging the piece’s flow.

A critic is only a member of an audience with a personal opinion but that opinion should always be informed and alert to new trends and idiosyncratic differences but that critic should always have the courage of his convictions and always be ready to explain himself.

Biographical Note: At the time of writing, William Shoubridge was dance critic for The Australian. He has had extensive training in classical and modern techniques with a short performing life as a dancer, mainly in European companies. He began writing for the Adelaide Advertiser in 1974, as critic for many performing art forms, dance, theatre, opera and film. He settled in Sydney in 1975 and wrote on dance for the National Review and on opera and theatre for the National Times. He became resident dance critic for Theatre Australia from 1976 to 1982, then began writing as a critic for The Daily Telegraph in 1988 and transferred to The Australian in 1989 as Sydney dance critic. At the time of writing he was also gathering research material for a book on the evolution and development of dance in Australia from 1970 to the present.
Review of the Bolshoi Ballet

La Bayadere: choreography by Marius Petipa, music by Ludwig Minkus.

The Bolshoi Ballet: Sydney Entertainment Centre, Touring later to Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

There is no point in a ballet company performing La Bayadere unless it does it lavishly. Born in a time of the greatest Tsarist opulence, it is the earliest surviving high water mark of Romanticism in Russian ballet. Petipa's first real success, the even more elephantine La Fille du Phaeron, which set his mannerisms and design sense in stone, is now completely lost.

La Bayadere predates all the Tchaikovsky ballets, and while its visual layout is grandiose and masterly, its music is largely a flabby collection of beer-hall tunes.

It should always be remembered that it presents a jaded and warped European view of the exotic Orient, a world of dark intrigues and strange rituals, of bejewelled houris, opium smoking and splendiferous spectacles, where the dead conjoin the living and the spiritual passes through the mortal ... and largely in waltz time!

To briefly outline the story: Solor, a young prince of India is in love with a beautiful temple dancer, Nikiya, but he is desired by and betrothed to a conniving princess, Gamzatti.

The said Gamzatti, sensing a rival, kills off Nikiya by planting a cobra in Nikiya's favourite basket of flowers.

Solor, in his paroxysm of grief and guilt, takes to smoking hashish and dreams of his beloved in the realm of the Blest.

Coming down out of his hit, he takes a revenge of sorts on Gamzatti and after much to-ing and fro-ing the Temple collapses and kills everyone ... at least it is supposed to, in this production Solor expires gracefully as the curtain limps downward.

It is a silly plot all right but no sillier than Delibe's Lakme or Meyerbeer’s Vasco da Gama.

Now we have come to expect the Bolshoi to know something about lavishness of scale and while the troubles in Russia at the moment could have seen the flame waver in terms of athletic power and might (which is not altogether a bad thing) the Company now looks lighter and silkier and has a more refined sense of production values although they’re tested mightily by being stuck in a corner of the God-awful Entertainment Centre under a tyro Australian management that too often mismanages (no cast lists, over-miked orchestra, sloppy curtain calls).
Writing For Different Markets

What is exciting to behold is the fact that the newest crop of dancers are alluring and invigorating and have more awareness of musicality in phrasing although they still have some way to go.

Galina Stepanenko as Nikiya glides effortlessly through her part and manages to give this cardboard character a semblance of heart and fire while technically she always manages to clear her head in any involved port de bras and the thread of focus in her phrasing is always visible.

Maria Bylova as Gamzatti is an intriguing dancer/actress. She doesn’t overdo the nastiness in even the most melodramatic passages but the audience always feels the icy resentment of the character even in the exultant pas de deux of the betrothal scene.

Alexander Vetrov as Solor labours intensely in an admittedly diaphanous part to make his character come alive and his spatial precision and ballon in his taxing solos could give our Australian danseurs some pause for thought.

La Bayadere is nothing however without the female corps de ballet and the gradual heaping of mesmerising duplication in the world famous Kingdom of the Shades scene is breathtaking.

The entry of the Shades is in fact a huge choreographic mantra, and must come across as a suspension of time and space and the Russian women, with their enviable plastique and spines of steel, make those repeated penchee arabesques and backbends look newly created yet inevitable.

They manage to also make the sometimes ludicrous ensemble ‘ethnic’ dances look interesting and involving even while they are, to our eyes, hopelessly politically incorrect; but that’s half the fun and the Company is always aware of the ballet’s pedigree and mannerisms.

Writing for Motorcycle Magazines

By Mick Matheson

Like any lifestyle subject, motorcycling is easier to successfully write about if you live it, even if only in a small way, but it is not a prerequisite because motorcycle magazines cover an enormous range of topics under the umbrella of motorcycling.

Motorcycles are raced, toured, modified and collected. They are bought new and second hand. Riders themselves are a varied bunch. This gives freelancers great scope when wondering what to write about.

The good news is there are not a lot of good, regularly available writers out there, so many editors are happy to hear from you. The bad news is that no one can make a living out of freelance motorcycle journalism on its own, because the rates aren’t what the union would like to see.
The areas you’ll most likely get a break in are touring stories, modified bikes and more general lifestyle stories.

At Two Wheels the most popular subject for submissions is touring, whether it be a day trip or an outback adventure. The main idea is to not only give riders an idea of where to go, but to inspire them to do it.

The most common mistake the writers make is to submit what amounts to a diary of the trip: “I went here, then did this, then saw that.”

This approach is boring and harder to read. The better story introduces a concept (outback touring, perhaps) and uses carefully tied together anecdotes and observations to explain it. Invariably you’ll only have about 2000 words to get your story across, so the latter style is far more successful.

The core of the story has to be the enjoyment of the trip. ‘The wind in your face’ might be a worn cliché but it still sums up motorcycles.

Photography is also essential to travel stories. The key elements here are quality (on fine-grain slide film), variety and relevance.

Another excellent chance to make a name for yourself is through modified bikes. Good photography will further your cause in this case, too, although it is not always essential if a staff photographer can do the job.

Word length varies for magazines, from just a few hundred words to a couple of thousand. Usually the article deals as much with the bike’s owner as the bike itself, and most of the information is found by simply speaking to the owner.

Facts and relevance can be checked with the mechanics who did the work (the owner will know them). So after the interview(s) all you have to do is create a yarn.

Set the mood in the introduction: what’s special about the bike and what drove the owner to build it. Often it will be the owner’s personality which sets the mood for you, or, perhaps, the outrageousness of the modifications.

Then drift into a list of the changes wrought on the bike, but do it in conversational style because there’s nothing more tedious than a parts catalogue.

Fortunately the nature of modifying bikes means it is sometimes impossible to avoid elaborating as you go: one change might have blown the motor or ruined a previous, more expensive component. Tell it like it is, because other riders can relate to stripped threads and skinned knuckles as much as they can to the wheel-stand of success at the end.

Road testing is considered the ideal job in motorcycle journalism – at least by outsiders. There’s no doubt it is adrenalin-pumping fun to ride somebody else’s motorbikes all the time but be warned that after your expenses (which sometimes include expensive speeding fines) the returns make road testing more a hobby that pays for itself than a job. Then again, there aren’t many hobbies which pay ...
Road testing is also the most difficult job to get, although there’s almost always a demand for good testers. Of course, you need to be able to ride hard yet safely and assess a bike at the same time. Like writing, it is a skill which can be learnt by many people but not all, and it does take years to get there.

Road testers also have to be able to visualise their audience. It is no good writing a test on a cruiser if you approach it as a racer and write for a racing audience. That might seem like an obvious comment but you’d be surprised at the one-eyed nature of some testers. A good editor will pick your style and give you bikes which suit, but if you want the greatest variety of bikes you must be able to pick the different priorities in the different categories of bikes and their buyers.

Another essential thing to note about road testing is that you are not writing for motorcycle buyers. Sure, outwardly you are. However, of your 20,000-odd readers, no more than 300 are going to buy the bike – and that’s going on the figures of the half dozen top-selling bikes. What about the other 19,700 readers? Want to bore them to tears?

Write for them in the first place, and sprinkle in the points the other 300 need to know.

Remember that if someone’s going to buy a bike, they can find all the information they need from their dealer. What a road tester wants to do is tell all 20,000 readers what it is like to ride the bike and whether it is technically interesting.

Excite them with sharply written examples of the bike’s power delivery, lean angles or mile-eating ability – whatever aspects of the bike are most noteworthy. Make the reader feel like he’s riding with you, wind in the face and all.

Success in any of these areas can land you a full-time job on a bike magazine. With a journalistic background, you’d have a better than average chance of an invitation, in fact, because of the lack of skilled writing riders out there.

These are just some of the types of articles you can write for bike magazines. When you want to try something, don’t be nervous about ringing the editors as they’re all very approachable and will happily discuss an idea with you.

The financial returns of a published story may not be great but they are certainly enough to help you pay the bills. And very often you’ll get as much satisfaction from putting together the story as you do from seeing it in print.

Biographical Note: Mick Matheson was, at the time of writing, the editor of Two Wheels magazine. He had spent six years on the title and is now a freelance motoring and motorcycle journalist.
Activity 2

Make a list of 5 useful pieces of information for a freelance journalist, from each of the previous three articles:

A Revision of What You Should Know

You’ve been asked to absorb a huge amount of information about freelance journalism throughout this course.

Some of the philosophies and techniques have probably been new to you while, at other times, it may have seemed we were stating the obvious.

Anyone with a command of the English language and a willingness to learn, can write.

By definition, you become a freelance journalist with the sale of your first material. But it is up to you how far you take your professional involvement.

Of course, successful freelancing needs more than the ability to write. It needs a variety of other skills including the ability to market yourself and your work. Nobody is going to do it for you. The craft also calls for a great deal of determination.

You have the practical knowledge to become a successful freelancer. Experience will now become one of your greatest allies.

In this Section, we have attempted to condense what you should know in a series of major points. Follow these and you won’t go far wrong.

Go back to the relevant Sections if there are points that are unclear.

Write!

There is one major rule for success as a freelancer – you have to write.

There is an insatiable demand for competent freelance material. You now have the skills to provide it.
Starting Somewhere

This whole idea of breaking into journalism can sometimes be a little overwhelming.

Why me? What right do I have? How do I get started?

Like yourself, every freelancer was once a beginner. And all of us had the same questions and fears.

Remember, all of us had to start somewhere. Just so long as you start!

Even ‘filler’ writing can give you confidence, experience and your first cheques.

Keep Your Perspective

Don’t start off trying to write the ‘big’ story.

Don’t fall in love with any piece of writing. You start to lose your perspective when you become too involved in any story.

Also, when you try too hard your writing can become stilted and awkward. You also run the risk of spending too much time for the payment you’ll receive.

Whatever the article, it is only a tiny piece of your writing career.

Good stories are rejected by editors each and everyday.

You will always hear journalists complaining about ‘slogging their guts out’ on stories that aren’t used.

This is the way the industry works. If an article is rejected, file it and get on with your next piece of writing.

If the article is of a timeless nature, you can always send it off again.

Always study rejected material. Most editors are too busy to tell you why something has been rejected but sometimes you can learn from the rejection itself.

Time has elapsed since you submitted the idea or the article. Does it still look as good as when you first wrote it? Or are there ways it can be further improved?

Having said this, don’t forget that stories are rejected for many reasons that have nothing to do with the value of the story or the way it was written.
Read!

Read everything that you can get your hands on.

Newspapers and magazines keep you informed on current affairs and coming trends.

Reading also helps to develop news sense. You start to get the feel for what editors want. This is most important if you want to write for the publication you are reading.

You also learn from your peers. You can study a range of writing styles and ways in which stories have been approached.

You can spot good follow-up ideas for future articles.

Try to read one or two newspapers everyday, particularly the weekend papers. And you should read several magazines.

If you can afford to do so, subscribe to overseas publications that interest you.

Remember, you can also call into your local library and read the publications there.

Try not to read aimlessly. Always tear or cut out any article that attracts your attention.

Make your own notes on the article itself. Highlight the material that attracts your attention.

Remember that excellent stories and follow-ups are often hidden in seemingly boring technical and trade publications.

Establish a Writing Schedule

There are dozens of reasons why we don’t write.

The best way to avoid ‘not writing’ is to establish a schedule and keep to it.

Writing must become a habit. All habits, including writing, are slowly acquired. You’ll need determination.

Within the not-too-distant future, you’ll feel that something in your day is missing if you haven’t turned out a few hundred words.

Remember the best way to break a habit is to get out of the habit of doing it.

I know an amateur athlete who had jogged five mornings a week for exactly two years. He decided to reward himself with a week’s ‘holiday’ from his daily routine. He did not run again for another year.

Take care in breaking your writing routine.
Story Ideas

Some of you have reported difficulties in thinking of story ideas. But, at the same time, most of you have shown a knowledge of many subjects and an incredibly wide range of interests.

You can write about almost anything. Someone, somewhere will be interested as long as you offer a new and interesting angle or provide fresh information or insight.

Your own personal experiences, your work, health or interests can all be rich sources of inspiration.

Virtually every newspaper and magazine can give you ideas for follow-ups.

The first thing editors do each day is study other publications.

There are also seasonal story ideas, such as 'Christmas gift buying', that become relevant at certain times of each year.

There are also the new trends that everybody seems to want to read about from time to time.

And there are the print-worn topics, like cigarette smoking, that can be given new life from current news events.

Writing That Pays

Your fate is not determined by newspaper and magazine editors.

There are dozens of other freelance writing jobs, many of which are better paying.

Chances are, you will probably tend to specialise in one particular area of freelance writing. But try to develop a regular income base from somewhere, even if it is not in this field.

You need a steady income that you can count on, especially if you are planning to quit your regular job.

There are very few jobs that you should think of as 'below you', if you are being paid to do them. Don't expect to like everything you do.
Prize-Winning Example!

Australian author, Peter Carey, won the international Booker Prize for literature.

This was not his first international award. He has also received awards for a series of television commercials for frozen fish.

“I have combined writing with advertising for the past 25 years,” Carey says.

“I kept going with the advertising as an insurance while I got on with my writing career.”

The Booker Prize put Carey on the road to international fame and riches.

But he still says: “As I didn’t actually dislike it, I decided to continue in advertising for two days a week.”

A Writer’s Tools

You must learn to type. It doesn’t matter how good your material is, to an editor, handwritten means unprofessional. These are some of the other tools of the freelance writer:

- Dictionary
- Thesaurus
- Telephone
- Desk (your own)
- Notebook (carry it everywhere)
- Slasher or snap-cutter, razorblade or scissors. For quickly cutting out any interesting article.
- Tape recorder. Preferably a good quality one that won’t let you down. Use it to record answers and make notes of things that might be relevant to your story.
- Filing system. Preferably using manila folders even if you keep them in a cardboard box.
- Wastepaper basket. It is just as important to know what to throw out as to know what to keep.
- Calculator (always double check figures and statistics)
- Telephone answering machine. To protect you from the outside world while you write and as a courtesy to those contacts who call you with information or work request.
A Reference Library

Build your own reference library

Gather material on the areas that you want to write about. Think about buying books on the subject of writing. These are three books you should have:

› Fowler’s Modern English Usage second edition revised by Sir Ernest Gowers.

› The Elements of Style by Strunk and White.

› The Commonwealth Government Style Book.

You can obtain these from specialist book shops like Abbey’s Bookshop in Sydney. Abbey’s Bookshop has an excellent range of books on writing.

You can phone or write to obtain their free Writing and Publishing Catalogue. Abbey’s Bookshop, 131 York St, Sydney, 2000. Phone: (02) 9264 3111.

You can also obtain the Commonwealth Government Style Book from the Commonwealth Government Bookshop in any capital city. Your local library may also have these books.

Showbusiness and entertainment writer, Terry Bourke, has more than 140,000 press clippings catalogued and on file. He can retrieve information on almost any area of showbusiness on which he is currently writing. Terry also has more than $100,000 worth of reference books.

Dangers of Self-Expression

The greatest mistake that you can make as a writer is to introduce ‘comment’ into your work without being asked.

Everyone who has a desire to write, wants to ‘self-express’, that is to write your personal opinions and intimate feelings on subjects that affect you emotionally.

The trouble is that while you are madly interested in writing about these, almost nobody is interested in reading about them.

It might be different if you were a prime minister or movie star, but most of us aren’t.

You must get yourself out of the story as much as possible unless your personal feelings or experiences are an integral part of the article.

Readers don’t care whether you are ‘shocked’, ‘dismayed’, ‘outraged’ or ‘delighted’. Readers want to form their own opinions. Study everything you write for unnecessary comment. And then get rid of it.
Making Each Article Pay

Remember that the feature article you have written for a newspaper or magazine can often be given a fresh angle to make it acceptable to other publications.

And just because you have had an article published in one state or region does not mean you can’t sell it elsewhere.

Many of your articles are likely to lead to ‘spin-off’ ideas that are easy to produce because you have already done much of the initial research.

Research

Research is necessary for almost everything that you write.

Don’t write off the top of your head. You need to research almost any subject. The reader wants accurate background and good quotes.

Anything that you have to say, in any article, will be improved by having somebody with authority saying it.

It is easy to sit down and ‘bash out’ a piece based on your own feelings. But this is a lazy and ineffectual approach that rarely, if ever, works. In most instances you have to go outside of yourself to get the article.

The Angle

Your article must have an angle. Judge everything you write with the cold, objective eye of an editor.

› Is it news?
› If it is not news, is it a new angle?
› Are you providing new information?

To assess your article in financial terms you should also ask yourself:

› What type of reader will this story interest? This will help you submit it to the right publication.
› Is the story potentially of interest to a large group of readers? The more readers your story will interest, the more you are likely to be paid for it.

Don’t ignore these writing tests. If you don’t get the right answers to these questions, your article probably isn’t worth writing - irrespective of what you think personally or how much you would like to tackle it.
Copywriting

We have said too much about the actual techniques of copywriting to go over them all again in this tutorial.

You will be doing your professional career a great favour if you revise what’s been written previously. And then revise some more.

Make notes of the areas in which you think you are having problems.

Knowing the rules is not enough. You also have to follow them. There’s time to start experimenting with styles and techniques once the basic rules become second nature.

The Lead

Remember the lead is the most important part of your story. It must capture the reader’s attention and, like an advertising headline, persuade the reader to read on.

› The simplest and most common lead is one using indirect quotes.
› Remember to keep your leads tight and punchy.
› Try to be fresh and interesting.
› In most instances, a short lead is better than a long one.
› Remember, even a good lead will not hold your reader through the tedium of a boring article.

Keep Your Writing Tight

If you don’t think you need a word or phrase, take it out.

Always ask yourself: “Does this serve a purpose?”

Delete any word or phrase that you don’t believe contributes.

Edit

What more can be said about editing?

You can improve any story the second and often the third time around. Unless you are working to an incredibly tight deadline, edit what you write.

Here’s Truman Capote’s advice: “I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil.”
Ear Appeal

This is one of the best tests for good copywriting. If your copy sounds right, it is probably doing its job.

Listen to what you have written by reading the copy aloud. But remember the ‘padding’ devices that we use in the spoken word to give us a moment to marshal our thoughts, look sloppy and awkward in print.

Don’t hesitate to get rid of any words and phrases that jolt your ear. Make this a rule even if it means scrapping material that has come from the sweat of your brow.

Samuel Johnson once said: “Read over your compositions and, when you meet a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out.”

What Constitutes Good Writing

In the mass of advice about good writing, Ernest Hemingway had some of the best. Here it is again:

When he became a cadet reporter on the “Kansas City Star” he was handed a style sheet with four basic rules.

1. Use short sentences
2. Use short first paragraphs
3. Use vigorous English
4. Be positive, not negative

Hemingway said in an interview more than 20 years later: “Those were the best rules I ever learned in the business of writing.”

Other guidelines

- Remember that you can never write all of the story. Most topics are simply too broad. You don’t write an article about nuclear disarmament, you write about a narrow aspect of the subject. Something that’s new, informational or entertaining.
- Don’t be pompous. Never talk down to your readers. Avoid being pretentious.
- Never preach. Show, don’t tell.
- Always simplify. The simpler a piece of copy, the better.
- Don’t waste time after your first paragraph getting to the heart of your story.
Let your story flow. Don’t jump backwards and forwards between ideas and information. Set out what you want to say in logical sequence.

Let your readers experience and decide for themselves. Involve your reader in the story by using direct and indirect quotes, anecdotes and examples.

Don’t use unnecessary punctuation.

Don’t use cliches, platitudes, jargon and over-used words.

Don’t agonise over your endings. An ending is the best way you can find for bowing out of the story gracefully without leaving your reader up in the air. You might even consider Irwin Shaw’s advice: “The last paragraph in which you tell what the story is about is almost always best left out.”

Active & Passive

Many of us have problems with active and passive voice.


Every verb has a subject.

The verb acts upon the subject or the verb is acted upon by the subject.

Active voice describes the form used when the subject performs the action.

Passive voice describes the form used when the subject is the receiver of the action.

Every verb has a subject: For example:

John sees the book.

The subject (John) performs the action or the doing, in this case, ‘seeing’. Therefore, John sees the book, is active voice. In active voice the subject is the ‘do-er’ of the verb.

The book was seen by John. This is passive voice. The subject (now the book) receives the action, that is, the seeing was received by the book.

Another example:

The cow jumps over the moon.

This is active voice. The cow (the subject) performs the action.

The moon was jumped over by the cow.

This is passive voice. The moon (now the subject) receives the action.

Your copy will almost certainly improve when you write in the active voice. Apart from lacking the vigour and forcefulness of active voice, a sentence in passive voice almost always uses more words.
Other Important Points

> The essential element of any piece of writing is accuracy. Don’t distort or exaggerate to enliven an otherwise dull story. Never take anything for granted. Libel and defamation actions are very real threats in much of your work, even sometimes the most innocuous of stories.

> Always study the publication you intend writing for.

> Don’t submit a 3000-word article to a publication that traditionally runs no more than 1500 words.

> Paper is cheap. Never cram your material. Allow double spacing between paragraphs. Allow at least 3cm of space top and bottom of the page. Don’t make your left and right margins too narrow. Allow 2cm on either side. Make sure your material looks neat.

> Always put your name, address and telephone number on the article. There’s every chance it will become separated from your covering letter. Make yourself as easy as possible to contact.

> Much of your work will involve interviews. Interviews can run for one minute, one hour or one month. The object is always the same, to obtain the most information and the best quotes that you can to enrich your story.

> When you submit a story, send it to the person who makes the decisions.

> Get into the habit of using the telephone. You don’t have to travel across town to obtain basic information or short quotes. Use the phone. It is the most cost effective method of getting what you want.

> Try to make a name for yourself in a certain field. If you write enough about any subject you become acknowledged as something of an expert yourself, as indeed you often are. When publishers want you for your special knowledge, they are usually prepared to pay a lot more.

> Be open to opportunity. Your news and feature articles can lead to offers from radio and television. Once you become known as a freelance journalist, opportunities present themselves in the smallest of communities. You might be asked to co-author a book, handle a public relations account, produce a newsletter or perform any of the other dozens of tasks a freelancer is called upon to do.
Keep marketing yourself. Unless editors and others know you are in the freelance business, there’s little chance of being asked to do a job. Keep writing letters, making telephone calls and going to see people. In this business, the one trait that really pays off is perseverance. Keep your work in circulation. Apart from when you are commissioned to write, the only time you can sell your material is when it is in front of an editor.

Always establish payment. Don’t be afraid to ask. Don’t be afraid to negotiate if you have something worth selling. However, stay realistic. Many publications have ‘going rates’ and this is all they will ever pay. Some publications don’t pay at all. These are obviously not your market unless you are looking for experience or by-lines.

Your first step in selling an article is generally a query letter or submission. Sometimes you might include the article with the letter. But always write a covering letter to better increase your chance of having the article read. You can always fax a query letter. But, it is probably unacceptable to fax an unsolicited article unless you are on very good terms with the recipient.

If you don’t get an answer to an article or query letter you have mailed or faxed, telephone. Give the publication concerned an opportunity to respond before doing this. How long this should be depends upon the nature of your article, the size of the publication and its frequency. If you have to call, be professional and to-the-point. Although many people will tell you differently, you do have a right to an answer. As a freelancer, you can’t afford the luxury of waiting around for months at a time on an editor’s whim.

When you get established, give some thought to buying a computer. There are huge advantages to using a computer to type your articles, manuscripts, submissions, letters, invoices, etc. The finished product will also look better. And you can prepare your material faster. You can also edit, change, delete or add to what you have written more easily and quickly. You always have clean, easy-to-read copy on your screen as you work from first draft to finished product.

You can also play around with the look of your headings, sub-heads and page layouts. With a word-processing package, you can use an instantaneous spelling checker and thesaurus, saving you valuable time searching through your hard copy dictionary and thesaurus.

Your computer will also keep all of your written material readily available, whenever you want it, and for whatever purpose.

Stay motivated. Freelance journalism can be a lonely, difficult and frustrating profession. The only people who succeed are those with confidence and determination. Take heart in the knowledge that the early part of your writing career will probably be the most difficult.
Activity 3

> Which of the areas of ‘good writing’ are still causing you concern? List these, and make a note to go back and re-read the advice on these particular sections:

No Story is Worth Your Life

It is the job of journalists to keep people informed about what’s happening throughout the world. It is easy to forget that these stories are frequently obtained at great personal risk and, all too often, loss of life.

Journalists do not have to deliberately place themselves in situations where they face great peril. Many types of conflict can, and do, explode suddenly and without warning. For example, the peaceful African nation from where you are planning a series of travel features can plunge into an orgy of bloodletting almost overnight.

No story is worth your life.

Recent years have been the worst on record for the number of journalists killed while on duty. Some reporters died in the crossfire of social and political unrest or in the front lines of wars, others were victims of brutal censorship by governments or were murdered by gangsters, such as the notorious South American drug cartels.

The exact number of victims is unknown. However, the International Federation of Journalists’ estimates that some 58 journalists died in one year alone.
Each year’s casualty list is a cruel reminder of the price that has to be paid for freedom of the press. Each year hundreds of journalists are arrested, beaten, injured, expelled or illegally detained.

There are no precautions against snipers, stray bullets, car bombs and kidnappings. Journalists are no exception. Working in a trouble zone presents myriad potential dangers for a reporter. Staying alive, avoiding injury, jail, expulsion or other perils and still getting the story ... that’s the problem.

Some representatives from the press claim that it is impossible to provide guidelines or training for correspondents on dangerous missions. Intuitive minute-to-minute decisions can only be made using common sense and instincts. Such skills can't be taught, they say.

It is true that no two journalists will be exposed to exactly the same dangers and the ability to handle yourself and get out of trouble is an individual talent.

Through the years, however, the experiences of many journalists in the trouble spots of the world form a pattern of practical, simple advice to be followed before working in perilous conditions.

The following advice cannot cover every possible situation – judgment and common sense are always vital. However these guidelines can cut down the risks. Perhaps even save your life.

**Staying out of Trouble**

Rule one: no story is worth your life! You are more important than the story.

If you are clearly threatened, get out fast.

Be careful about reporting from both sides of a conflict. Crossing the battle zone is dangerous.

Avoid bias for one side or the other. You are a professional, not a participant.

Don't take obvious notes in public. Never pull out a microphone or notebook without permission. Get the story out of people conversationally first. If they become antagonistic, at least you have something in your head.

Do not show detailed interest in military equipment. Never draw maps of military establishments or positions in notebooks. Keep the details in your head.

Stories in remote locations far from authority and medical assistance present added risk. Remember that an irresponsible or ill-informed act may not only put you in danger, but could have repercussions on colleagues.
Going On Location

Find out all you can about the country/region/area you are travelling to - its recent history, the people in charge, the people involved in the story. Find out who hates whom and why.

Distrust what you read about your destination in other publications, however highly regarded. Everyone gets things wrong. Take nothing for granted. All over the world, what was conventional wisdom yesterday may no longer be true today. That is what news is about.

Find out about any laws that are in force restricting freedom of movement, the right to interview people and take photographs or film.

Learn the language well enough to identify yourself and talk to local residents. Time and money spent at a good language school are never wasted. If time and money are short, excellent phrase books and tapes are available to help you learn at least the basic words and phrases you need. Are you sure you know how to say clearly that you are a journalist? How to ask for help, medical assistance, the person in charge, a telephone?

Up-to-date information for journalists working in all regions of the world is published by NewsVision in London. This annual subscription service is aimed at large organisations, and if you are working for one you should ask your employer for copies.

Before Leaving Home Base

Check details of any planned events you intend to cover to confirm timings, venues, routes, accessibility. Check with event organisers what arrangements, if any, are being made for the press.

Check that you have insurance which will provide adequate cover if you are injured or killed.

Get a covering letter from the publication you are working for to identify you in particularly sensitive situations.

Leave at home all documents and clippings that might be seen as critical of the politics, religion, etc. of the places you are going to.

Get basic first-aid training before you go.
While You Are There

Let your publication know where you are at all times, where you are going and when you expect to be back. Do the same locally with people you know and trust.

Try to find out from people in authority or control when and where they expect trouble.

Check with local residents who have experience and can gauge the mood and point out possible difficulties.

Keep your head down. It is obvious, but many journalists take unnecessary risks when the gun battles start. Stick close to walls. Or lie face down. Don’t raise your head until it is safe.

Do as you are told when confronted by an armed man who gives clear instructions to clear out. Don’t argue.

Be polite. There is no substitute for courtesy when on assignments. Treating people with respect is the only way you will get respectful treatment in return. It may help you get out of a dangerous spot.

If you are forced to hand over material, try to obtain a written receipt. The situation can sometimes be resolved by speaking to a superior official.

Balance the risks against the possible benefits before plunging into a trouble spot. Often you can cover a story perfectly well from a distance. Feel around the edges of trouble before approaching officials, soldiers or direct sources. That way at least you have a ‘background colour’ story before you are told to get lost.

What to Wear and Carry

Always carry a complete set of identification papers, including when possible an up-to-date international press card. Unless it is absolutely necessary, don’t carry passes issued by organisations involved in any conflict – they could be misinterpreted.

Carry plenty of cash. It can work wonders.

Dress appropriately. Often you will want to blend into the crowd. Sometimes it is safer to be inconspicuous.

Never carry a gun or other weapon. Never wear olive green or anything that makes you look like a soldier.

Don’t carry things that might lay you open to an accusation of spying, such as binoculars or equipment with antennae.
Be careful about any objects that look like weapons.

Never keep military documents, clothing or equipment as souvenirs.

Do not masquerade as anything other than what you are. To do so creates suspicions and risks for other professionals.

Carry a short-wave radio to keep track of developments from international radio stations.

Carry a white flag.

Keep your equipment to a minimum – too much to carry can hinder you in tricky situations. Be sensible in the use of equipment. Insensitivity can provoke the seizure or loss of your films, tapes or equipment.

Always carry a basic first-aid kit.

Travelling

Travel with friends. Road-blocks and armed patrols may pop up anywhere. Don't rely on local drivers. They may panic at the first sign of trouble.

Travel in groups with other journalists where practical. Use two cars in case one breaks down. If possible, travel with journalists who know the area.

Select your car with care. Check engine and tyres.

Beware of giving lifts. Sometimes you may feel you have to take wounded soldiers or civilians in your car. Try to find an alternative. Get involved only as a last, life-saving resort.

Always ensure there are no arms in your vehicle.

Mark your car 'Press' clearly in the local language (except in cases where this would be detrimental).

Carry up-to-date maps and town plans.

Ask about mines. The road may have been cleared, but the hard shoulder or a parking space may not.

Enter volatile areas carefully and sensitively. Take note of graffiti, which is a good indicator of the politics of an area.

If you drive, avoid actions which could be dangerous, such as doing a U-turn at a security checkpoint or police station, or near a patrol.

Don't use cars that resemble models used by the police or army. Avoid travelling in jeeps or military vehicles.

Never wash your car. Tampering can be detected more easily on a dirty car.
Never wear seat belts in a war zone, you may have to jump from the car quickly to avoid bullets. Never sit in the back of a two-door car. It is impossible to get out quickly.

Take care when parking. To leave your car unattended may lead to it being stolen or destroyed. Park away from any potential riot, hijacking, burning, etc. Local residents or authorities may be able to advise you. Choose a parking place with a choice of escape routes.

Beware of empty streets. They are often empty for a reason.

At road blocks show hands empty except for your identity papers. Rest them on the dashboard. Don’t make sudden movements into pockets or bags for documents.

Present as little as possible for inspection by officials. The less you give them to read, the less interesting you will be and the less time you will waste.

If you are travelling long distances or through sparsely populated areas, make sure you have adequate supplies of water, food and fuel.

Your Human Rights

Free speech is at the heart of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

Journalists, wherever they work, are entitled to the protection of the Declaration, which is specifically relevant to those attempting to report the truth in dangerous areas.

Article 3 states: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. Article 9 says: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.”

And Article 19, which has given its name to an international press freedom organisation, reads: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”
International Committee Of The Red Cross

Should a journalist disappear, be captured, arrested or held in captivity or detention while exercising his or her professional activity, a humanitarian intervention by the ICRC ‘Hot Line’ may be requested by the following persons, organisations or authorities:

› The journalist’s family

› The journalist’s editor

› The national professional organisation concerned

› The regional or international professional organisation(s) concerned.

For contact details for the International Committee of The Red Cross, please refer to the Useful Contacts section at the end of this course.
Broadcasting Fundamentals

Writing Television and Radio News

Over the years, feedback to Tutors of this course invariably confirms many freelance writers feel their fate is determined solely by newspaper and magazine editors.

It needn’t be!

You have an exciting set of alternatives in both television and radio journalism.

Broadcasting is indeed more sophisticated these days in its gathering and presentation of news.

While television continues to be the number one choice of staying in touch with current affairs, radio has gone to extraordinary lengths to compete with the visual media.

Whether it is the more laidback ABC bulletins or news programs produced by stations more renowned for rock and pop music, news continues to be a huge drawcard for radio. As such, it creates a demand for journalists interested in broadcast news.

Radio boasts that it will get the news and deliver it faster than any other news medium. It is not an idle boast. News can be delivered as fast as the speed of sound, long before the print presses crank up or a television news presenter has time to apply his make-up.

It soon becomes apparent to the journalist entering the broadcast field that this form of writing is vastly different to writing for newspapers or magazines.

Just as there is a difference between newspaper and magazine writing, so is there a huge gap between print and broadcast journalism.

And the difference doesn't end there. The skills and requirements of radio and television news reporting are also vastly different and often demand much experience to master.

Let’s look at broadcast news and its requirements.
Getting ‘News Ready’

Being ‘news ready’ is the first priority of any news gathering organisation. If news is breaking, the onus is on management and editors to be in a position to gather it in, preferably faster than anyone else.

To be news ready, therefore, means having staff and resources capable of reporting news at the drop of a hat.

Depending on the size of your news organisation, there are multiple ways of getting material and processing it into first grade news. In broadcasting, much depends on the news team which must assemble and employ the latest technology whilst being on top of their game as journalists.

News Crews

In broadcasting, a news crew skilled and equipped to recognise and report news is a fundamental necessity.

In television, news crews usually consist of:

**Reporter**

To assess the story, interview subjects, follow up leads, research (as much as time will permit) and be prepared to act as producer and director at the scene.

**Cameraman**

Has to ensure all his or her equipment is in working order and that it is compatible with the environment into which the team is going. In liaison with the journalist and news editor, they consider what existing scenery or props are available to give the story greater impact.
Sound Recordist

Should ensure all his or her equipment is in working order and be ready to adjust sound levels to complement reportage.

The journalist’s job is to ensure that a story is worth the trouble of taking a unit on the road in the first place. The journalist must also liaise with the cameraman and his news editor on the anticipated vision.

For instance, if breaking news concerns an incident at sea or a lake, the journalist must think ahead. Will a boat be needed? Is the crew likely to get wet?

Similarly, the cameraman will decide if he needs special apparatus to protect or enhance his equipment.

Remember, a lot of decisions need to be made on the spot and may relate to concerns ranging from legal issues (is the crew allowed to enter a property, for instance) to personal safety.

Radio Crew

This is not to be confused with Sydney radio’s so-called ‘morning crew’, the team of jokesters who provide chuckles and guffaws as you drive to work in the morning.

The ‘crew’ reporting an event for radio is often just a journalist with an MP3 recorder. All that is needed is a recording unit and the ability to send the recording down the line to the studio. Often, just a telephone will do the trick.

However, in more complicated situations, such as meetings, sound recordists may accompany the radio man, ensuring conferencing levels are set correctly and will not become distorted.

The mobility of the radio journalist is obviously much swifter than that of the TV crew, hence radio’s reputation for getting the news first, over and above all other media.
OB Van

The OB van can be used either for television or radio. It is essentially a mobile unit that has been fully equipped to deal with a variety of potential news events, from concerts to sports meets to disasters.

The letters stand for Outside Broadcast and television OB vans can usually be found at sports grounds or wherever major news events are in progress. The vans vary in size from four-wheel-drive units to buses. They invariably carry dish antennae for transmitting vision and sound back to the studio for inclusion in a wider broadcast.

The radio OB can be a four-wheel drive vehicle, a car, a utility or a small truck carrying broadcast equipment that permits interviews and speeches, but more importantly it will carry technology that makes it a virtual radio studio on wheels.

The radio OB will have broadcasting equipment such as antennae, sound effects, operating console, and multiple portable and fixed microphones. The radio OB can act as a studio from almost anywhere. It can also be a news base, as in the case of a murder hunt.

Storyboarding

The storyboard is employed widely in television advertising and comes in to play in the news media when a significant presentation is scripted in advance.

Although it is not a regular part of news presentation, the storyboard, which looks a bit like the layout of a comic strip, can be elaborate or simply a few deft strokes to let the cameraman know what is required.

The news story is normally a straightforward investigative piece, although it would not hurt for the reporter to scribble some drawings in some circumstances to give the interviewer and the cameraman an idea of the impact or ‘tone’ a story may yield.

Even if you made thumbnail drawings just for yourself, it would be useful in structuring a story, say, on a union barricade or even in establishing some strong angles for a presentation. It is, after all, the ‘look’ you are trying to achieve when delivering television news, not just words.
On the Road

It is true that a television reporter will spend much of his or her time ‘on the road’ covering events and interviewing people from all walks of life.

As such, you may sometimes be required to help your cameraman lumber cameras, boom mikes and other sound and visual equipment whilst still trying to remember your lines and questions once the cameras begin to roll.

This equipment may seem like a nuisance, but in the world of television news, they are your storytelling tools of trade.

As a television reporter you may also be required to carry your own equipment, a small make-up kit for men and women.

Sky News veteran Leigh Hatcher says he now has applying make-up down to a fine art. He says he can put it on in a minute or two and be ready for a news emergency.

Other tools of your trade as a television journalist include superimposed graphics and text that can ‘lift’ a flat scene, or enhance interest in a person talking.

Think, Visualise then Write

These are the three secrets to producing television news.

The main requirements for you as the person shaping the final story for television will be the stock standard pen to note structure (as in think), imagination (as in visualise) and a computer to write (as in write and sub the story).

The radio journalist, by comparison, has an easier time getting news, but there are a variety of conventions he or she must also follow.
Think, Hear then Write

These are the three secrets to producing radio news.

Note how the word ‘hear’ replaces ‘visualise’. When writing news the radio journalist must first think of how he wants to structure the piece and then imagine 'hearing' the words. Do they 'sound' right?

Using Sound Effects

On radio and also television, sound effects have been used to great effect to ‘spice up’ news broadcast. In Orson Welles’ narration of War of the Worlds, even though it was penned by H.G. Wells and therefore a work of fiction, sound effects of aliens landing on earth sounded so real that there were reports of listeners so afraid they committed suicide.

Sound effects can be used with great effect, but they would normally be used in conjunction with a news producer and great care would be taken not to ‘overdo’ it. An obvious sound effect in the middle of news broadcast could sound comical and seriously damage the credibility of a news service.

The best sound effects on radio or television, therefore, are ones that occur naturally, such as thundering hooves at a racetrack, or the sound of rain pelting down on corrugated iron in a country town desperate for rain.
Writing For Television

Cracking television’s challenging barriers

Television is seen as a more lucrative and celebrity-dominated market for freelancers than radio, although much of the regional aspects are the same.

But television is a much more difficult nut to crack than radio.

With national advertising benefiting from the ongoing networking of stations across Australia (known in the industry as ‘aggregation’) the need for localised programming decreases year by year, but by virtue of local advertising (still a major component of suburban and regional TV station coffers). It will never disappear completely.

So openings for television freelance scripts are still there.

You’ll be competing with professionals, but they, too, had to start somewhere.

Chances are, that when you make a name for yourself in some field, you will begin to receive television offers.

Producers are always on the lookout for new and interesting people and subject matter.

You might find yourself as a guest on a current affair or women’s program, national morning or variety show.

You could be talking about:

- Boating
- Travel
- Astrology
- Health
- Finance
- Real Estate
- Entertainment
- Motoring
- Sport

... or any one of a hundred other subjects where expert comment is required from time to time or on a regular basis.

Ask what payment is being offered. Communication is your profession and you are entitled to be paid for your services.
Payment is best discussed with the producer of the program, but the matter should be raised as soon as possible – even with their searcher who first contacts you.

Almost every professional who appears on television is paid, unless the segment concerned is of direct benefit to that person.

There are times when television producers will refuse to pay or agree to the amount you are asking.

Only you can determine whether to be flexible in price or whether an unpaid appearance will further your professional career.

Television pays big money.

Here is an example: It would be unethical to be specific, but one program pays a journalist $500 a week for a five-minute appearance. Admittedly, the subject he covers involves research throughout the week and he is a specialist in his field. But, that $500 is on top of his weekly salary at a top city daily newspaper.

**Headline TV Interviews**

It is beyond the scope of this course to train you thoroughly in television presentation. But here are some general guidelines.

1. If you are being interviewed, prepare what you want to say beforehand. Don’t rely on the interviewer to ask the right questions. You can often ‘turn’ an inappropriate question in such a way as to get the interview back on to the track you feel it should be taking. It is not so much what you get asked that is important, but what you answer. Obviously, make sure you know your facts.

2. Be convincing. It doesn’t matter how big the viewing audience is, you are still only talking to one person. The intimate nature of television requires one-to-one conversation. Express yourself in the simplest way you can, and don’t overload what you say with lists of boring statistics.

3. Remember that good television is often about controversy. An interviewer is likely to be challenging and aggressive, asking questions to bring out the best in the subject. Always strive to remain calm and unruffled.

4. Never hesitate. The television camera is insatiable and cannot tolerate a vacuum. Keep talking at all costs. Try to avoid “ums” and “ahs”.

5. Smile. When you present yourself as a friendly and relaxed subject, you’ll win viewers, and producers alike. Even the ‘heaviest’ topics have their light moments. First and foremost, television is entertainment.

6. Keep still. Use your hands as little as possible. Don’t tap your feet. Try not to lean forward. Try to get yourself in as comfortable a fixed position as you possibly can and remain that way. Waving your arms about, pausing for dramatic effect and so on look dreadful on the screen.
7. Be succinct and to the point. Don't embark on long-winded explanations. They become boring.

8. Dress appropriately. Solid and pastel colours are best. Stripes are a no-no. They cause havoc with strobe lines on the screens. Avoid shiny jewellery that glitters or jingles.

9. Stay alert. Remember that the camera might be directed at you or the group while somebody else is talking.

10. With most interviews, it is best not to look for the camera. Talk to the interviewer and don't worry about the camera. Talking into the camera requires enormous practice and you can look very awkward if you don't know the technique. If you are asked to talk directly to viewers, look straight into the lens and don't let your eyes shift or stray from the camera.

Openings in the Lifestyle Market

ABC-TV is always interested in submissions for lifestyle programs, but with the market becoming cluttered, especially on the commercial networks, any new idea would have to be nothing short of sensational.

It is ironic that the proliferation of lifestyle programs among the three commercial networks in recent years followed ABC-TV's early success with similar offerings.

In a way, that abundance of commercial network lifestyle shows has thrown a dampener on ABC-TV plans in that area, but the door will never be shut to a solid new idea.

ABC-TV lifestyle and documentary staffers are reluctant to get involved in telephone conversations with potential contributors or freelancers, because they don't know who your are, and there are so many aspects involved in ascertaining what ideas can be implemented or of particular interest.

So a presentation in the mail is the name of the game.

Don't worry. If your idea is good, they'll get back to you pronto!

Address your documentary and lifestyle submissions to:

Head of TV Documentary Features,
ABC-TV,
G.P.O. Box 9994,
SYDNEY, N.S.W., 2000.

Remember to keep a copy of all your work and any submissions, and enclose a business-sized, stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of any submissions that don't make the grade with ABC-TV or any other broadcaster.

This is sound business and copyright sense!
Approaching Television Networks

This Section primarily targets the freelance journalist who is looking to pitch a news project or documentary idea.

Being forearmed is important before you try cracking the historically tough television nut if you are not to waste your time and that of others.

However, ‘reading’ what a television producer wants in the way of news and feature ideas is really no more difficult than researching articles for newspapers and magazines. It all has to do with familiarising yourself with the product.

Lifestyle programs in particular were an explosive forerunner to today’s Reality TV programs.

Where your talent may fit into today’s TV mix is something you can judge for yourself simply by watching the programs.

The good news is that lifestyle programs, documentaries and, yes, reality TV have all increased in popularity, opening doors to freelance journalists and writers in general who were previously ‘locked out’ by drama and more creative programs requiring individual expertise.

These days, television networks are ready to discuss anything that has a ‘real’ spin to it, from basic news projects to the more quirky reality programs.

In establishing yourself in this market, it is important to become familiar with Australia’s main television outlets.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Radio)

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has long been the giant of local radio and television productions with emphasis on news, sport, current affairs, music and talkback shows.

The ABC provides radio and television programs through its national and regional broadcasting services, it is a statutory authority established by, and responsible to Parliament.

ABC Features

In its traditional Notes For Scriptwriters, the ABC points out that radio writing is a specialised professional skill which can only be acquired with a great deal of radio listening.
So, to ascertain what area your talents or interests lie, check out Aunty’s programs from the various station broadcast lists available from your local ABC centre.

According to the ABC, writing for its programs has become something of an ‘expert’s market’.

It is always best to write to the particular ABC program asking if the producers require a feature script on a particular subject before doing the work of researching and writing.

Remember, your script might be excellent, but the subject may not be suitable for any number of reasons.

For example, material on a similar subject may have been broadcast shortly before.

SBS Radio

The radio arm of the multi-cultural Special Broadcasting Services provides services in an amazing 66 languages, making it one of the most unusual air services in the world.

It also offers wide avenues for freelancers, either with English-language submissions, and more particular, special language projects.

The main ethnic communities tuning into SBS Radio across the country are Greek, Italian, Arabic and Vietnamese, while vast Chinese audiences take full advantage of Mandarin and Cantonese language broadcasts.

From the mid 1990s there was also a marked increase in English-language offering.

While suitable submissions in a second language from freelancers stand a much better chance of gaining acceptance at SBS, any ideas of merit in English would be followed through by SBS staffers.

Submissions to SBS radio, whether news, community information, sport, documentary features or special interviews, go before one of many heads of departments, which have been established to supervise individual language operations.

While course members who speak or write only English are not shut out of contention, freelance contributions in a second language would stand a better chance of acceptance.
A spokeswoman for SBS said: “Submitted freelance material for SBS Radio is of a specialised nature, and quite singular to Australian broadcasting. Freelancers must dove-tail into our special requirements.”

If SBS likes your ideas, style or commitment, you are placed on a ‘trade listers’ summary, which is in effect an inventory of freelance contributors with your special skills and language capabilities duly noted.

Anyone making a freelance submission to SBS radio for the first time should spend at least two or three weeks listening to SBS transmissions to ascertain the scope and style of the multi-cultural broadcaster’s work.

“Unless you know the way we do things, obviously it would be difficult to make a submission that would attract immediate attention,” the spokeswoman said.

Prospective contributors and freelancers should write SBS an initial proposal and presentation.

It is better not to telephone to try to explain your submission over the phone.

It is not the way they operate, and it is so time-consuming.

The Federal Government-funded SBS doesn’t have the staff to process lengthy telephone enquiries, and without having something set down before their eyes, the respective program producers’ proper judgement of the merit of your submission would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Most of SBS’ casual staffers and freelancers are qualified journalists, but contributors and trade listers are not confined to this domain.

“There is always ongoing work for contributors, but as you can expect, one has to have special skills or commendable ideas,” the spokeswoman said.

Your submission to SBS radio should clearly outline:

> The subject matter, and its worth to multi-cultural listeners.
> How you propose to handle the overall presentation.
> What research or interviews are involved.
> Basically what your final script will offer.
> Support materials: newspaper or magazine clippings, letters, research notes, etc.

English-language submissions should be mailed to:

National Editor
SBS Radio,
14 Herbert Street,
ARTARMON, N.S.W., 2064.
Submissions in another language should be sent to:

Head Of Group  
(Particular Language).  
SBS Radio,  
14 Herbert Street,  
ARTARMON, N.S.W., 2064.

SBS payment rates are in line with union requirements, and although the corporation does not have anywhere near the depth and volume of big sister ABC radio's finance and facilities, it will pay extra for work of exceptional merit.

Regional Opportunities

Away from the ABC and capital city radio stations there are ample avenues for regional radio work in the freelance writing field.

You just have to be privy to what your local station wants!

And it is essential you know the basics of using a tape recorder or mini disc, because, depending on your locale and size of the station, it may not just be a matter of coming up with an idea for the radio segment.

You may have to research the segment, record the interview or comments, perhaps splice edit it, and even do the on-air presentation.

But, invariably, there will be staff to help you out.

For most beginners in this field you usually just have to come up with a script of the interview subject. The station staff does the rest.

You get paid for your idea ... or the story.

In this way, you start to prove your flair, commitment and expertise, at the same time cultivating a relationship with the radio personnel.

While it is true national networking and inter-city franchising has reduced many regional and local radio stations to relay posts for most of the day and night, their 24-hour operations dictate the need to provide local news and community activities coverage.
Local stations are not over-staffed, and therefore need servicing from freelancers, often on a daily basis.

Unlike their big time city counterparts, regional stations have to maintain that vital close-knit relationship with their respective communities.

This is the only way to attract regular local advertising.

Naturally, broader community issues can eventually rise to the national platform, when it is highly probable the city radio networks and their specially trained and hi-tech equipped staff will be chomping at the bit to handle the chores ... and take all the credit!

But freelancers can still get rewarding work from local radio stations.

Pay will vary from place to place, and in some instances, if it is a community-run FM station, you might have to do the work free-of-charge for valuable experience.

This is not something to be sniffed at. Such experience is the dream of your maverick city brothers and sisters, who pray for such opportunities.

In the bustling, highly competitive metropolis, they are squeezed out.

Regional and community radio needs embrace wide areas of subject matter: sports, politics, news, art, current affairs, historical events, personality profiles and interviews with local people making the news for whatever reason.

Check with your local radio station program director to determine what kind of material they are looking for.

At the least you will need a competent or semi-professional tape recorder or mini disc and know how to get the spoken word clearly on the tapes.

‘Fuzzy’ taping is a killer! However, if you establish a special rapport with the local radio staff, and they value your work, the station will more than likely train you to use its equipment for outside and on-air work, or even provide a recordist or technician.
Activity 4

> Take some time to familiarise yourself with existing radio stations and their output. Refer to your media markets supplement.

Special Broadcasting Services (SBS TV)

SBS TV is providing encouraging outlets for multi-cultural projects that have become major achievements on the local television scene, and also had considerable impact overseas.

Those words multi-cultural are the keystone to programs SBS gets involved in. Make sure any submission you make to the network has major multi-cultural content or theme. That is what SBS is all about, and they won’t change the rules.

SBS likes to receive initial contact by letter, so don’t telephone seeking information or advice. They’re very strict about this routine, so don’t blow your chances with a wrong step first up!

SBS will answer your letter, and then you will know whether the network is interested in looking at your presentation. Canberra funds a special department at SBS known as SBS Independent, which handles the bigger of the multi-cultural network’s series, contactable at:
SBS Independent,
Locked Bag 028,
CROWS NEST, N.S.W., 2065.

or

SBS TV,
14 Herbert Street,
ARTARMON, N.S.W., 2064.
Tel: (02) 9430-2828
Fax: (02) 9430-3700

If you’re presenting a more routine program like a documentary, special one-off idea, contact:

Head of TV,
SBS TV,
Locked Bag 028,
CROWS NEST, N.S.W., 2065.

or

SBS TV,
14 Herbert Street,
ARTARMON, N.S.W., 2064.
Tel: (02) 9430-2828
Fax: (02) 9430-3700

Seven Network

The Seven Network has given Nine a bit of scare at times with growing lifestyle ratings ... and of course they grabbed the prized telecast rights to the Atlanta 1996 and then the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

Offers of freelance projects are typically addressed to:

Director of Network Human Resources,
SEVEN Network,
ATN 7,
Television Centre,
Mobbs Lane,
EPPING, N.S.W., 2121.
Tel: (02) 9967-7777
Fax: (02) 9877-7008
Seven Network Affiliates – Not the Way to Go

You're wasting your time trying to submit major or mainstream material to subsidiary stations of the Seven Network – BTQ 7 (Brisbane), SAS 7 (Adelaide) and TVW 7 (Perth).

They're just not set up to commit to anything the size of a major show or series.

Their station managers may be interested in minor local productions (historic event recognition, sporting and community, achievers, special events) from time to time, but cannot make decisions or expect any realistic results even when giving support to projects submitted from their areas.

If there is a chance the submission is a project which could be made at one of Seven's capital city subsidiary stations, you might at least advise that station manager of your plans, in case he gets a Sydney query about availability of studio space or production facilities.

It is the big studios in Sydney that make the decisions about the way the money is spent around the network.

Melbourne’s HSV-7

However, HSV-7 gives Victorians a fair go, and has some clout at network level because of sizeable Melbourne audiences.

So, folks in the south of the continent should try their luck with:

Program Director,
HSV 7,
160 Harbour Esplanade
DOCKLANDS, VIC, 3008
Tel: (03) 9697-7777
Fax: (03) 9697-7888

Nine Network

Nine has always been to the forefront of local programming and its overall ratings triumphs from year to year are evidence of a continual drive to entertain local audiences with loads of local entertainment.

In many ways, Nine is the most approachable of the commercial networks with new submissions, often from debut players in quest of programming fame and fortune.
If a locally conceived show is a hit on Nine, it is usually a big hit!

At the time of writing, Nine has two executives in charge of keeping track of new ideas, formats and presentations for the network, and both have been attracting plenty of traffic of late.

Nine Network affiliate stations are GTV 9 (Melbourne) and QTQ 9 (Brisbane). Again, for new project submissions go through the two project bosses at Nine Network's headquarters in Sydney, although preliminary advice and some guidance for submissions can be obtained from program or production managers at the Melbourne and Brisbane stations.

Ten Network

TEN may be the perennial bridesmaid of the three commercial networks, but she's bounced back after a couple of years in the wilderness of finance problems and ownership musical chairs.

Network Ten stations also include ATV 10 (Melbourne) and TVQ 10 (Melbourne).

But, again, if necessary, only utilise the program bosses at these stations for initial guidance and advice before making presentations to the Sydney head office.

Southern Star Group Pty. Ltd

This parent group is a mecca for local producers, writers and packagers of new product.

It has come into its own particularly with reality TV (Big Brother) and is an important television outlet for a wide area of specialist television productions.
Writing Reviews and Publishing Fundamentals

How to Write About Music

Although this contribution has been written by an American writer and contains American references, the actual material is highly relevant to yourself and the business of freelance journalism. Although American examples are most commonly used, the ideas and information can be readily adapted to any geographical market.

By Susan L. Pena

If you’re thinking of becoming a music critic, you’ll be joining a lively and contentious group of writers that goes back more than 200 years.

Composers like Berlioz and Schumann, as well as professional critics like the notorious Eduard Hanslick, wrote reviews that were eagerly read by the music-loving public. The practice spread from Europe to the United States and continues today, although the number of publications specializing in reviews of the arts has dwindled, and most daily newspapers, except those in the largest cities, have cut back drastically on their coverage of classical music.

While many small and mid-size newspapers still carry music reviews, the space devoted to them has shrunk, so that full-time music critics virtually do not exist at this level. Most on-staff reviewers also do other kinds of writing; in many cases reviews are written by stringers (people who write regularly for a publication on a freelance basis).

So if you wish to be a music critic, you must realize that you probably can’t make your entire living from reviewing. The more adaptable you are, the more likely you can sustain a career through other kinds of writing. In the best-case scenario, you’ll probably be writing interviews of various artists and perhaps some theatre, dance, jazz/pop and other kinds of review; most likely you’ll have to fill in with feature stories and, if you freelance, with assignments in unrelated fields.

My own experience has consisted of writing for the daily newspaper in a mid-size East Coast city, both as part of the staff and as a freelancer.

I have written all the kinds of reviews listed above as well as interviews, columns on music-related issues, coverage of festivals and features on arts-related topics such as the arts in education. I also write regularly for a weekly business journal, a local college publication and the local hospital magazine. To supplement all this, I teach piano privately.
While reviewing is not especially lucrative, it has its advantages – aside from free concert tickets (no small consideration with the price of tickets these days). Because review writing allows you a strong voice and more creativity than most newspaper writing, readers tend to remember your by-line.

My music writing has led to more assignments and established more sources than any other writing I do.

Many of my interviews with local physicians or business people begin or end with a discussion of the last symphony concert; often they are pleased to meet me and cooperate on stories because they have read my reviews for years and feel they know me.

But I must warn you that music criticism is a specialised field requiring a broad knowledge of the subject. I can’t imagine being successful at it without a background in music – not necessarily a music degree, but at least years of studying and performing on a musical instrument (or vocal studies), and a wide knowledge of music history and some theory. You are writing about musicians with years of training, and much of your readership is well versed in music as well. It’s very easy to make a complete fool of yourself if you attempt to write a review with no musical training, and credibility, once lost, is a difficult thing to regain.

If you were to become a critic on a major newspaper, you might have the luxury of specializing in one genre, such as opera; it is much more likely you’ll have to cover a wide range.

What are some of the qualities it takes to write about music?

> The ability to listen deeply and accurately to a musical performance.
> The ability to write vividly and descriptively.
> The ability to be objective and open-minded.
> Willingness to educate yourself constantly and read widely.
> Humility. (Remember, you are only a critic.)

What Makes a Good Review?

In general, writing a music review for the general public is about finding balance.

You need to use enough technical terms to convince the knowledgeable reader you know what you’re talking about, but balance them with plenty of language that allows the untrained reader to understand the review. You must balance your own personal taste with objective criteria, and make it clear to the reader which is which. For example, the fact that I prefer Brahms to Wagner is a matter of personal taste; I shouldn’t let it colour my review of a perfectly creditable performance of ‘Tannhauser’.
You should also balance opinion—what you liked and didn't like about the performance—with information and description, giving your readers an idea of what was interesting about the program and what it was like to hear the artists. It's a mistake to give too much weight to opinion.

Go in with an open mind and wide-open ears. One of the biggest mistakes a critic can make is to attend a performance with too many expectations.

Ask yourself the following questions:

› Why did the artist choose these particular pieces?
› What unusual perspective has he or she brought to the works?
› Have I learned anything new from this performance?
› Did the program work for me? Why or why not?
› What made this performance unique?

You can use colorful, descriptive language in a review, but don’t go overboard. I try to balance good, plain English with an occasional metaphor that captures something outstanding about the concert.

Here are some additional tips to help you be a better critic:

Build a music reference library. This should include a good music dictionary, a few general music history books (Donald Jay Grout’s A History of Western Music is a classic), Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, The New Kobbe’s Complete Opera Book, and Balanchine’s Complete Stories of the Great Ballets. My shelves bulge with scores and books on music, and yours will, too, if you care about your craft.

Read good criticism. My personal favorites are former New York Times music critic Harold Schonberg, whose Facing the Music and The Lives of the Great Composers are both entertaining and informative, and the late composer, Virgil Thomson. There are many other fine critics whose writings appear in major newspapers and magazines.

Build a listening library, listen and read the liner notes; also listen to your classical radio station.

Join the Music Critics Association, a national organization that holds annual conventions and other events, if this is practical for you.

Realize you’ll have to be an advocate for the arts as well as a critic; many newspaper editors don’t believe it’s important to cover the arts and you’ll have to convince them otherwise.
Interviewing Artists for Advance Profiles

Interviewing artists, both famous and relatively unknown, has been a great pleasure for me.

While many have been classical musicians, I’ve spoken with actors, directors, comedians and popular entertainers. Most are eager to talk about their work; only a few of the super-famous are reluctant to speak with the press. I’ve found that the best interviewees are often those on their way up who haven’t been interviewed to death.

Here are a few tips on getting a good interview:

If you have a musical background, let the artist know early on. Artists usually open up more when they realize they’ve found a kindred spirit.

Do plenty of homework and try to listen to albums by the artist.

Concentrate first on the person’s profession rather than his or her personal life. Personal details often emerge later.

Be careful not to take comments out of context; be sure you listen carefully to the tone of voice (by phone) and watch body language (if face-to-face). Is the person joking or being ironic? Juicy quotes are fine, as long as they accurately represent what the person means.

Avoid preconceived ideas about what the person will be like (the public persona is often different from the private) and what he or she will say.

Be sure to get facts and spelling correct. This seems obvious, but I have encountered so many inaccuracies in newspaper accounts that I must conclude that this basic rule has never been emphasized enough. Use a tape recorder and learn to take fast, accurate notes.

Getting started

My career as a critic really started in the most unlikely way; through a letter to the editor I wrote lambasting the local newspaper’s coverage of music – particularly a review that had appeared.

The reviewer obviously had minimal background in music, and called two eminent female classical artists “cute as a button”!

You will probably need to start in a more conventional way, by approaching either the arts editor or features editor of a newspaper in your area. Ask for an appointment to discuss reviewing on a freelance basis; often newspapers are looking for people to cover events. Bring clippings and a resume; be ready to explain what qualifies you to be a critic.
If you have never published a review, even in your college paper, then you might attend a few concerts and write reviews to use only as writing samples. (I would never advocate writing on speculation or for free.) Keep these in a portfolio along with your published clips, and explain that the reviews are unpublished.

The field is fairly open for those who have talent. But beyond writing talent and musical expertise, editors are looking for people who can deliver clean, accurate, well-written copy on time. You must be able to write succinctly. Most of my reviews are in the 15-to-18-inch range, and I'm told by other critics that this is generous. (Newspapers work in column inches; simply take a ruler and measure the column or columns in a typical story in your local paper to get an idea of the average length.) Deadlines can be very tight; often you will be expected to write a review for the following day.

This means you have perhaps an hour or two to file the story. If you can't think and write fast, you may be quite unhappy with newspaper reviewing. In that case, look for magazines that publish music reviews; some of them are seeking stringers to cover regional performances. Profiles can range from 18 to 35 inches; occasionally you are given more space if the editor deems the story worthy. Photographs are often supplied by the artist’s press agent or manager.

If you truly love music, if you enjoy mingling with artists, and if your interest in writing tends toward the creative and poetic, music writing can offer a wonderful way of combining business with pleasure.

Biographical Note: Susan L. Pena is a freelance writer and piano teacher living in Berks County, Pennsylvania. She holds a bachelor’s degree in anthropology from Dickinson College. She has been the music critic for the Reading Eagle/Reading Times since 1985. Her articles have also appeared in Bluegrass Unlimited, Chamber Music and Sojourners.

In these activities you will begin to develop a dictionary of useful terms for writing different types of reviews.

This is a very important exercise so please ensure you obtain a small notebook that you can use on any ongoing basis. You may also wish to use this notebook for recording other journalism terms, references and useful information.
Activity 5

Collect a number of different music reviews from a range of newspapers and magazines. Highlight all of the specific music jargon, which has been used. Create your own dictionary of music terms using this information and try to add further examples of your own.
How to Write a Theatre Review

By John McCallum

Arts editors are like any other editors. They are working journalists who believe, as do I, that your chief responsibility is to the reader. In theatre reviewing this means that you are not primarily writing for potential audiences, nor for the theatre profession, nor for the arts establishment.

Arts editors, like any other editors, want you to have interesting things to say to the general reader and to say them well. They like provocative ideas, controversy, good tight copy, jokes and all the rest of it.

Given these basic journalistic requirements, there are special considerations when you start writing about the theatre. The most important (perhaps it shouldn’t be, but it is) is that the theatrical scene in most cities is fairly small and fairly ‘in’ – even more so in country centres.

Many of your readers will be members of one of the above groups, although you should always observe the basic rule and try to write copy that a complete outsider would be interested to read.

Arts editors, however, do move in theatre circles as well as journalist circles. They get a lot of their feedback from people in the arts and they are about saying what they think. Also, arts editors are constantly harassed by publicists. So, as a freelance arts writer, you have to juggle the claims on you as a writer for the general reader with the claims on you as a member of an in-group.

As a freelance writer it is important that you establish and nurture professional connections with both sides of this basic relationship between editors and publicists. When you are starting out most stories you will be given to write will be arranged between the editor and the publicist.

Once you have established a relationship with a good publicist they will start offering you stories directly, and when they come to trust you they will offer you exclusive stories, which you can then try to sell to your editor. Once you have established a relationship with an editor you can keep offering them stories, and when they come to trust you they will accept your word that it will be good.
Reviews

Your prime responsibility as a reviewer is, again, to your readers, not to the theatre profession. It is very easy to be seduced by the opening night syndrome and to think that you are somehow part of the theatre industry. You are not. You are a journalist, not a theatre worker.

Theatre reviews are one of the last areas of journalism, in these days of wire services and electronically syndicated news, in which you are expected to report directly on a personal experience. A good review recreates for the reader something of what it was like to be there, it describes the ambience in the theatre on the night and endeavours to evoke the theatrical experience of the show.

All reviewing is ultimately subjective and personal but you have a professional responsibility to try to enter into the spirit of the show you are reviewing – to respond to it on the terms which the show itself has established, not to bring to it an outside set of ‘objective’ criteria, of your own or anyone else’s.

A good review does not simply judge. Neither readers nor arts editors are interested in what you nor anybody else happens, on a personal level, to think. A good review, having described the experience, attempts to explain it. This explanation includes an understanding of the artistic decisions, which the performers have made, and an analysis of these decisions in terms of the ideas, which underlie the production.

You have to be able to say succinctly why the show is as it is. If you are methodical and honest in attempting this, and still cannot say, then that is the point at which negative judgment might come into your review. You have to be able to assess the difference between your own confusion and any confusion that might be inherent in the production.

Only when you have honestly and critically examined your own response to a show have you earned the right to say in a review that the performers, not you, got it wrong.

It is not your responsibility to write a comment about every actor’s performance or each individual creative input into the show you are reviewing, although if you are working in a theatrical community in which you are personally known to the performers then they will put considerable pressure on you to do this.
A good theatre review will usually include:

- a brief overall account of the feel and tone of the show, to give your readers some idea of what to expect if they go to see it, or what was there if they don’t.

- a response to and comment on the guiding idea which underlies the production. If this is hard to write, as it often is, then you are justified in asking why. It may be you that doesn’t understand but it may also be that the show itself is confused and lacks direction.

- a description and, where appropriate, an enthusiastic account of the strengths of the production – the things a potential audience might want to go and experience. No matter how unsuccessful a show might be there is usually something, which the audience can respond to and it is part of your job to report on that.

- a critique of the show, in which you weigh up its success on its own terms (rather than on some terms which may be imposed from outside.)

- some reference to those special features – a particular acting performance, a striking stage effect, etc. – which are original and different and so worthy of comment.

It is not your job as a reviewer to provide a consumer guide to the theatre, but inevitably what you write will affect your readers’ theatre-going decisions so you should be aware of this element in the effect of your review. As a general principle it is better to be descriptive and analytical rather than judgmental.

Above all it makes good copy if you let your enthusiasm show through in your writing, as long as you do not let your response itself become the subject of your review. The show is the subject, and that is what readers want to know about and arts editors want you to write about. Your response will come through if you write honestly about the show.

Biographical Note: John McCallum is a senior Sydney theatre reviewer and has been an academic and journalistic critic for many years. He has reviewed for the magazine Theatre Australia, for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and for numerous journals and magazines and newspapers. He also teaches at the University of New South Wales in the School of Theatre and Film Studies.
Activity 6

Collect a number of different theatre reviews from a range of newspapers and magazines. Highlight all of the specific theatre jargon, which has been used. Create your own dictionary of theatre terms using this information and try to add further examples of your own.
How to Write a Restaurant Review

By Janise Beaumont

Over the past 15 or so years, restaurant reviewers have helped to push food to new heights. There’s no doubt about that. There was a powerful opportunity to reflect on how far we have come when the Sebel Town House, a leading Sydney hotel, turned 30. To celebrate, they offered patrons their original menu, with Chicken in the Basket and Strawberries Romanoff as the star turns.

These days, our leading chefs are as hot as sporting luminaries, as they dazzle diners with the endless possibilities of food. There are no longer any formulas – it’s all about talent, hard work and risk-taking, and the best of our restaurant reviewers are to be thanked for their role in improving standards and encouraging our culinary artists.

No matter where you live (unless it’s a tiny town with just a handful of eateries), it’s worth exploring whether this is something that appeals to you, and whether the local media outlets are already well served in this regard. And remember: don’t just think print … radio in particular, and television, lend themselves to a regular eating-out segment.

Having written such a column for Sydney’s Daily Mirror some years back, I have definite ideas on what it takes to make a go of this kind of journalism.

Number one: keep in mind that your role is two-fold: to inform and to entertain. You’re not being paid merely to rave on about yourself and your own food passions and prejudices.

As with all journalism, you will last longer and feel better about your work, if you are honest and fair. In this situation, if some poor wretch has spent his savings opening a tapas bar, then you come along and rip it to shreds just to get readers talking about your fledging column – well, that’s a pretty low act. Not to mention the fact that you’re running a high risk of being sued.

Go into this venture as your own person; don’t simply try and copy the reviewer of the moment in a leading metropolitan paper. It’s crucial you are yourself – and that your ‘heart’ comes through.

I can recall a foodies’ excursion to Hong Kong several years ago. Amongst our small number was a restaurant reviewer from a certain capital city who says publicly that he is this country’s best.

But you know what? OK, he is technically well versed in his subject, but he’s mean-spirited and his writing lacks humanity and humour. He comes across in his column as cranky and unforgiving. How does that advance anything?

A feature with genuine charm and a pleasant, flowing style is worth more than an angry litany of complaints. People go to restaurants to have a good time, so why would they want to get indigestion reading scathing reviews?
The flip-side of that of course is that no-one wants to waste their time being
told X place to dine is fabulous on all counts, when in fact the service leaves
a lot to be desired, the ladies’ loo is two flights up and the noise from the
kitchen makes a terrible din.

It’s your job to fill them in on the full picture, but be sure of your facts. (With
that in mind, you would do well to drink only in moderation, as you don’t
want an irate proprietor coming back at you after your critique, accusing you
of having knocked back two bottles of Rosemont Chardonnay and presumably
having suffered from fuzzy powers of observation.)

It’s important too that you don’t attempt to compare apples with oranges for
example, an expensive French bistro, seating 30, has different capabilities
and limitations to an open-air venue that can serve hundreds of patrons in
one sitting.

This is the complaint from Doyle’s at Watsons Bay, Australia’s most famous
restaurant. After a bad review in the Sydney Morning Herald, Terry Durack,
who wrote it, received a lawyer’s letter, claiming the article was actionable,
and warning any further stories would result in action being taken.

That happened in 1995, and a consequence has been that none of the four
Doyles eateries received an entry in the Herald’s Good Food Guides since.
As Peter Doyle, head of the clan, explains: “We felt we weren’t treated fairly.
We are constantly compared with restaurants that served a lot fewer people
and charge higher prices. We do the best we can for our customers. We seat
everyone who comes along and we are usually filled to capacity.”

“So we weren’t going to give someone another chance to give us a serve. We
didn’t want him to use our name to make money. We don’t want open slather
for another go at us.” The review that caused all this drama was by no means
the harshest I’ve ever read ... Durack claimed that “in the past month, I’ve
had a dozen fish-based meals better (and cheaper) than this.” He also said
staff appeared “undertrained and overworked”, while “waits between courses
can be trying”.

If you think our libel laws are ridiculous, well tough. They are what they
are, and they can come back and bite you, as legendary gastronome, Leo
Schofield, found to his peril. Also in the Sydney Morning Herald, a piece
he wrote about a spot where guests chose their live lobsters from a tank,
resulted in a writ from the owner. The ensuing court case was front-page news
and Schofield and the newspaper ultimately lost.
The experience was a gruelling one for Schofield, but from our conversations, I know he is glad to have made a contribution to the extraordinary renaissance of Sydney's cuisine.

Just to keep him in the frame for a moment, it's interesting to note that in all his years of writing about restaurants, I'm convinced he never doubted the worth of his opinion. There's a valuable lesson there. So if you fear your comments won't hold up, this specialty isn't for you.

Stay away too if you don't truly love food. If you've watched TV's Pie In The Sky – about restaurateur Henry Crabbe who thinks of little else but creating better and better dishes – you will appreciate the difference between his enthusiasm and his wife's take-it-or-leave-it approach. She knows she's eaten a nice pie, for instance, but she can never guess what's in it. Basically, she doesn't care.

On a practical note – read as much as you can about food; understanding how the great dishes of the world are prepared is an asset. No sense tearing strips off a chef in your column for serving an apple tart without pastry on top – when it's a classic dessert.

A good book shop will advise you well. Locally they come no finer than food books by Stephanie Alexander. Her Cooks’ Companion was a great bestseller.

Then practise taking notes surreptitiously.

Now you're ready to convince an editor that you're the one for the job. Take along a couple of sample pieces, and in them, include some humour – such as a dig at waiters who greet you with a smarmy “Hello, I'm Craig, I'll be looking after you tonight.” Who cares what his name is!

Keep your comments to what matters: decor, food, wine, service, location and ambience.

Once the gig is yours, make sure you discuss the issue of libel with the editor. He or she will spell out your guidelines and you must work within that framework.

And if you’re still in any doubt that readers want advice on where to eat ... the SMH Good Food Guide sold 40,000 copies in 1996 alone.

Biographical Note: Janise Beaumont is regarded as one of Australia's leading feature and human-interest writers. She is widely known as a specialist in celebrity interviews. She has also worked as a television reporter and interviewer and co-written celebrity autobiographies.
Activity 7

- Take a look at a number of different restaurant reviews: you will find them in lifestyle sections of many metropolitan and regional newspapers or in magazines. Think about a restaurant where you have eaten in the past. Draft out a brief review on this restaurant.
- Consider things like the texture of the food, the quality of the service, the ambience of the restaurant, etc.
Writing Movie Reviews

By Ian Horner

Barbra Streisand to Nick Nolte: “Let us go to the movies!”

Streisand’s Prince of Tides (1991)

Seeing new movies before anyone else … it has got to be a film lover’s heaven!

Unencumbered by others’ responses and without all the hot air that will inevitably accompany the movie’s eventual release – the movie critic gets to see the unadulterated version. In comfort, in private, with drinks and nibbles, and more drinks if you want.

My greatest professional enjoyments have included sneaking away from the office to see The Electric Horseman, Kramer vs Kramer and Chariots of Fire at private screenings.

But reviewing movies opens the door to other things. You learn to express your passion and share the thrill of the darkened cinema with so many others.

And, perhaps most wonderful of all, a huge door begins to open before you, and you are granted access to the most amazing people in the world.

My most cherished interviews have been with Jerry Lewis (for Hardly Working), Jack Lemmon (for Missing and Mass Appeal), Ann-Margret (for Who Will Love My Children?) and Richard Attenborough (for Cry Freedom). I’ve been privileged to attend press receptions for Whoopi Goldberg (for Ghost), Sylvester Stallone (for Rambo III) and William Holden (for The Earthling).

A young Ricky Schroder enacted his favourite scene from The Champ for me, while falling off a chair in his hotel. Sammy Davis Jnr explained to me that jewellery and gold chains are purely costume, the real values in life come from surviving being black, one-eyed and Jewish.

I was there when Kirk Douglas made mincemeat of Aussie journalists who berated him for starring in an Australian movie – and then he was the only one in the room who could recite Paterson’s verse! And I saw how Jane Fonda deals with the press – a performance more worthy of an Oscar than Bree Daniels or Chelsea Thayer.

I’ve also met June Allyson, Vincent Price, Shirley MacLaine, John Travolta … I’ve spoken on the phone to James Stewart, Jodie Foster, Anthony Perkins, Marsha Mason, Oliver Reed …

And I’ve been told off by a cranky Richard Todd …
Banned from Bon Jovi press conferences because I asked questions they did not want to answer. Abused by Tippi Hedren’s secretary because I felt a $1,000 fee for an interview was a touch excessive. Put in my place by Leslie Caron because I suggested Gigi made her a star: “I was already a star!”

Oh, it is a wonderful life!

**Why Review Movies?**

There are many functions of movie criticism. Everyone involved in the marketing of movies – from the film producer and cast to the suburban cinema proprietor – would place a different emphasis on the value and function of movie criticism.

It is important to understand that everyone involved in the making and marketing of a movie has something to win or lose from a film review. Everyone, that is, except you, the reviewer. You are the one vital person who is expected to be unbiased and honest in the appraisal of a film.

The producer needs a good review so people will see the movie and he can pay back the investors on his film and, hopefully, make a profit if there is anything left.

The director needs a good review so people will see the movie and he will make up his salary for that film from a percentage of the profits. He also wants to be hired again.

The actors need good reviews to lift their profile that lifts their value in the marketplace. They also want to work again.

The distributors need good reviews so people will see their film and provide work for their marketers, publicists, artists and copywriters.

The exhibitors need good reviews so people will flock to their cinema and provide employment for the ushers, front-of-house personnel, candy bar attendants and projectionists.

Cinema in-house advertisers need good reviews so people will see the film ... and the ads which they have paid to be run on screen in the cinemas – and they pay high prices whether there is an audience in the cinema or not.

The film industry as a whole needs good reviews so people will switch off their TVs and videos long enough to go to the cinema.

Is it any wonder the major film distributors, like Hoyts or United International Pictures, set up special private and exclusive screenings for film reviewers to see films in the lap of luxury, plied with drinks – before anyone else has seen them?
But cinema buffs need an honest review so they can make an informed decision about where they will spend their movie dollars. They will only go to the movies spasmodically; they want to ensure they will enjoy the movie they select.

Because your review is a service to the reader, no editor will run your copy if it appears to be a service more to the distributors who invited you to their preview than to his readers/cinema-goers.

It is the editor who pays you for a review – no one else. And his job is to ensure his readers are served well.

Your job is simply to tell the readers what they need to know to make an informed choice of which movie to see.

Problem is, it is not that simple.

Language Of The Film-Maker

Filmmaking is a highly technical medium. In order to analyse a movie and write an informed review you must learn the language of the filmmaker. This does not mean you only have to develop a familiarity with the jargon.

Rather, you must learn to appreciate that the film experience is a result of a very complex and highly sophisticated combination of images and sounds (dialogue, music and effects). It is a language of its own, a unique means of communication.

The director has gone to enormous time and great expense to put images and sounds together for filmgoers. Sometimes he will get it right, other times he will get it wrong.

A reviewer’s job is not to sit in judgement on the director but to decide whether the director has got enough of it right to please, or touch, or educate, or infuriate an audience.

Remember, he may fail in several areas but if the audience is well served he has succeeded overall, hasn’t he?

A good starting point is to decide:

› What the director tried to achieve.

› How he went about achieving it.

› Whether he succeeded overall.
These things can be easy to establish. If a director sets out simply to make people laugh, it would be clear whether he succeeded or not. Usually, there are also side issues in a film. Penelope Spheeris set out to make people laugh with Wayne’s World (1992). She also went for a strong element of satire, over and above just making her audience laugh. She succeeded. That is why there was Wayne’s World 2 (1993).

But why did Mike Newell make Four Weddings and a Funeral (1993)? It made people laugh – it also made them cry. But a lot more besides …

The Tools Of The Reviewer’s Trade

Feelings

Elizabeth Taylor: “Do you know what I feel like? I feel all the time like a cat on a hot tin roof.”

Richard Brooks’ Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1958)

Never underestimate your gut response. After all, that is how most movie fans will react to a film. Few audiences bring to a film an extended experience of film appreciation and years of analysing and dissecting movies, as a reviewer does.

What film audiences do bring is a lifetime’s experience of pain, love, tears and laughter. They just trust their feelings when they respond to a film. So should you.

Good feelings: Learn to read your own heart. Deep down where you experience the most honest of emotions, decide what you feel in response to a film, a scene, an actor, a piece of music, in any combination. Not ‘why’ or ‘how’ you feel whatever but simply ‘what’. The ‘why’ and ‘how’ come later.

Good feelings are emotions of attraction, loathing, admiration, repulsion, confusion and wonder. Do not be frightened of appearing vulnerable to your readers. Admit your emotional responses. But only if you are honest. Presenting a manipulated image of yourself will not fool anyone.

Bad feelings: Bias against (or for) an actor or director, predisposition against (or for) a style of story, expectations of a movie based on publicity hype. Bill Collins taught me that there is an audience for every film.

I may not be part of that target audience but is that any reason for me to turn off others for whom the film may very well have been made? Remember, someone made the film. At the very least, there is one person who thought it was a good idea. Which means there must be a group of people who will agree.
Eyes

Omar Sharif: “That colour looks wonderful with your eyes.”

Barbra Streisand: “Just my right eye. I hate what it does to the left.”

William Wyler’s Funny Girl (1968)

Learn to look and observe with a critical eye – not to be picky, but to really soak up the images the director has created for you.

In each scene a good director will strive to do two basic things:

Firstly, he will establish the focus of the action, which will both advance the storyline a step or two and develop characterisation a nudge or so.

A scene is comprised of a self-contained piece of action, usually with dialogue, and this event or action is itself made up of several sequences, which are themselves made up of many individual shots.

If a scene gets bogged down and does not further the action and/or reveal a bit more characterisation then you could safely say the director is in danger of losing the plot. Literally.

It is quite easy to pick up things like shots which do not match – backgrounds which mysteriously feature clouds in one set of shots and clear skies in the reverses (i.e. shots of the other speaker in the scene). In Ryan’s Daughter (1970) Christopher Jones takes a cigarette out of a box; cut to close-up of the box and he is taking it out of the other end.

But every film is full of these little mistakes. There are no bonus points for picking them out. In most cases they will not diminish the impact of a scene at all and to list these sort of things is pedantic and showing off.

But if these oversights are part of an overall sloppy and amateurish approach to filmmaking there is an important point to be made about them. But not if it is David Lean’s Ryan’s Daughter.

Secondly, the good director will also create a ‘real world’ which will bleed into the background of a scene to give the feeling that what we are watching is part of a whole world. It is a great opportunity for the director to fashion a clever little comment in passing.

These sideline images are often very funny glimpses of people and events which will not recur later – serving merely to flesh out the setting of his story, sometimes involving the main players, sometimes totally separate.
In *The China Syndrome* (1979) James Bridges includes a very funny sequence with Singing Telegrams. It serves the purpose of establishing Kimberley Wells (Jane Fonda) as a functional TV reporter who is capable of doing menial assignments, recognises the lightness of her story, can switch her personality into performance mode for the camera and can hide her own misgivings about the worth of the story, as well as establish her relationship with Mac, the missing cameraman who has locked down the camera while ‘he is gone for a pee’, and the executive producer back at the studio with whom she talks and hints that she would like a better assignment. At the same time the producer reveals his patronising attitude to women and, most important of all, the Singing Telegrams themselves are funny and satirical of the whole TV industry.

There is a similarly successful scene in *Broadcast News* (1987) where James L. Brooks has a couple of songwriters relentlessly trailing a news producer so they can sing their idea of a news theme. It is very funny – and at the same time reveals a lot about the industry and the people in it. But the story holds up without it.

Woody Allen is a master at this. In *Bananas* (1971) Sylvester Stallone – five years before Rocky – makes a fascinating appearance as a thug. In the same film, Allen is happily walking along a bridge as he playfully taps someone sitting on the side. Inadvertently, this pushes him into the water and Allen keeps walking and whistling. The director is revealing the interplay between his lead character and the world – in a very funny way.

In *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979) Robert Benton cleverly bridges the world of movie-making with the world inside his movie by revealing buskers on a street corner playing the music which has been counter pointing the drama throughout the film. No further comment is made, the musicians are just there at one point as Dustin Hoffman walks down the street.

You also need to train your eyes to catch details of setting and character. In the broad sense, is there evidence of careful thought by the director and production designer in creating a certain period? Do the costumes contribute to honesty ... or are they designed for the posters?

Take Hugh Hudson’s *Chariots of Fire* (1981). He could have dressed his runners in the ‘30s equivalent of designer running shorts and Reebok footwear. He could even have picked up a few hundred thousand in exchange for product placement. (Have you ever counted the big-name soft-drink cans in Spielberg’s *Back to the Future* movies?)

But he risked alienating his designer-ready audience by putting Ian Charleson, Nigel Havers, et al, in baggy, knee-length plus-fours. Not a fashion designer’s dream – but that is why the movie got an Oscar for costume design.
Are stars chosen because of their appropriateness to the period or the look or their unique abilities? Or are they chosen for the poster? It is more than a little obvious why John Duigan cast Elle Macpherson in Sirens. Or why Tom Cruise was cast in Interview with The Vampire. Or why Whitney Houston got The Bodyguard.

Ears

Rex Harrison: “The majesty and grandeur of the English language – the noblest thoughts that ever flowed through the hearts of men are contained in its extraordinary, imaginative and musical mixtures of sounds.”

George Cukor’s My Fair Lady (1964)

The sounds of a movie are not confined to the dialogue. But the words are often more important than the pictures. Remember, words will hold up on their own – it is called radio – but pictures alone, like TV with the sound off, have very limited application. There are few Mona Lisas that would entice you to spend the price of cinema admission and 90 minutes of your undivided attention.

But dialogue has to be functional and clever. Or, at least, bright enough to grasp and inspire you. Beware the long heavy-handed sequences that are there purely as exposition.

In Norman Jewison’s ...And Justice for All (1979), Al Pacino has the boring job of explaining what is going on to Christine Lahti all because Jewison is too lazy (no)/has run out of ideas (no)/ cannot afford time for another draft of the script (yes) to present the same information to the audience in a more dramatic form.

Research

George Tobias: “I want to look somebody up. Does this office have a copy of ‘Who is Still Who’?”

Rouben Mamoulian’s Silk Stockings (1957)

See the movie. All of it. At least once.

There are reference books available that list directors, producers and actors with their career highlights, biographical backgrounds and filmographies. Use them. You are not paid to remember endless bits of information, you are paid to get them right (including the spelling of names). It is not Speilberg, nor Jack Lemon. There is no one in Hollywood called Schwartzenegger, or Schwarzeneger, or Schwarzeneneger. So check them.

Having said that, do not catalogue credits endlessly – if you can get that information straight out of a book, so can anyone else.
Standard reference books include:

**Catalogues Of Titles**

Leslie Halliwell’s Film Guide
Leonard Maltin’s Movie and Video Guide
Alvin H. Marill’s Movies Made for Television

**Filmographies**

Ephraim Katz’ The Film Encyclopedia
The Virgin International Encyclopedia of Film
Atterton & Veitch’s Australian Showbiz
John Stewart’s Australian Film

**Statistical**

Cobbett Steinberg’s Film Facts
The Guinness Book of Film Records

**Further**

Harry Haun’s The Movie Quote Book

**How to Use Press Kits**

Whereas the above books were written as tools for everybody with a professional or personal interest in movies, press kits are written to spoon-feed a certain line to journalists and reviewers. Beware of them.

Use them as a source for anecdotes about production, the correct listing of who did what on the movie and as the latest list of credits for those involved on the production. Do not believe everything in them, especially the quick out-of-context quotes from overseas critics or comments by people on the movie about how good/relevant/topical the film is.
Getting Started

The major distributors do not need any more reviewers. Or that is the impression you will get when you approach them for invitations to press screenings. They will only be interested in you if you can offer them coverage of their titles.

So you need to establish a loose agreement with an editor who will receive your copy with a view to publication. Match the media outlet with the type of movie; do not offer a film review of Free Willy to Australian Women's Forum – unless there is another Free Willy movie ...

On the other hand, do not try to place a review of Body of Evidence with Education (NSW Dept of Education newspaper). Of course, The Alliance (AJA and Media Alliance magazine) would be more than interested in a review of Sydney Pollack's Absence of Malice (1981) or Ron Howard's The Paper (1994).

You are more likely to get cooperation from the minor film distributors at first. Companies like REP Films, in Sydney, or Newvision, in Melbourne, which are small but still handle good quality titles.

And, remember … enjoy!


Ian produced Bill Collins’ twice-weekly segments on Good Morning Australia and his appearances on Clive Robertson's The World Tonight.

He also produced David Lyle’s video segments on The World Tonight and also many film segments on Don Lane's Late Night Australia.

He reviewed movies on Sydney's Radio 2GB for seven years and also 2UE Sydney, 6PR Perth, 2CA Canberra and 3KA Melbourne.

Ian was a unit publicist on the Australian movie Short Changed and has written two books on movies for Australian Consolidated Press, under The Australian Women's Weekly logo. He is a member of the Australian Film Critics Circle.

By profession Ian is a journalist, with experience as a TV producer, reporter and researcher; writer, production editor and sub-editor for magazines and newspapers; and radio producer, reporter and researcher. Most important of all, he loves movies with a passion.
Activity 8

> Take a look at a number of different movie reviews: you will find them in the entertainment sections of many metropolitan and regional newspapers or in magazines. Think about a movie you have seen quite recently. Draft out a brief review on this movie.

> Consider things like the texture of the plot, location, the characters, the direction of the movie, the production, whether it has audience appeal, what age group it would appeal to, etc.
Tips for Writing a Book

Writing for newspapers and magazines is usually the fastest way of making a dollar. It can also be immensely satisfying.

And there are many other areas of freelancing that can hold your interest.

But sooner or later, nearly everyone who writes wants to write a book.

You probably won’t get rich writing for newspapers and magazines although it can be reasonably profitable and lead to bigger things. Book writing may not make you rich either. But the chances are that you will make more writing an 80,000-word book than you would writing 80 articles of 1,000 words.

And, it is probably a lot easier.

Book writing has financial advantages that most other forms of writing don’t offer. For example:

- You keep making money from a book for however long it remains in print.
- Apart from royalties, there is always the chance that the book might be picked up by a publisher in another county. This will give you extra earnings through the sale of foreign rights without additional writing effort.
- If your book was originally published as a hardcover, there may also be an additional sale of “paperback” rights. And, this does not call for further effort on your part either.
- If you get extremely lucky, somebody might want to turn what you have written into a film or tele-movie.

Fiction or Non-Fiction?

Whether you write fiction or non-fiction works is a matter for yourself.

But remember there is a far greater reading market for non-fiction books than novels. Non-fiction works are also easier to sell.

If you are writing your first novel, a publisher will probably want to see all of it. If you are writing your first non-fiction book, you may be able to get away with an outline and two or three sample chapters.

Often writers get so fired up that they go ahead and write a book on speculation without any contract or commitment.
There is an argument to support this if you are previously unpublished and wish to illustrate the ‘full’ merits of your work. But writing a non-fiction book without having a contract or some form of commitment is a gamble.

You might find yourself with a completed manuscript that you can’t sell.

There is another advantage to having some form of contract. Most writers find it easier to concentrate when they know their material is pre-sold.

All some writers dream about is writing the novel.

Your first piece of fiction is always risky. There is no guarantee that your long slog will be rewarded with cold, hard cash.

It becomes a different story when you have had your first novel published. Your publisher will probably be asking what you intend to write next.

In fact, publishers will often consider what other novels you have in the ‘pipeline’ before accepting the first. This is because of the promotional effort that a ‘first’ book requires.

Publishers are very cautious about first novels and like to regard fiction writers as ‘future investments’.

**No Road to Riches**

Writing a book, either novel or non-fiction, is an ambitious, long-term project.

It can be immensely satisfying and sometimes highly profitable. However, writers who become wealthy from their first book are a rare breed, especially in Australia.

More likely you will need to continue other freelance writing work even after your first and second books have been published.

You will certainly need income while you are writing your book. The advances for a previously unpublished book author are very mediocre, in some instances as low as $1,000.

Long and short-term projects

Writing a book can be a welcome respite to writing articles.

It can also give you something to do while you are waiting on answers from editors.

By rights you should always have more ideas and work than you can handle. However, in the best of businesses there are always unproductive gaps.
Apart from filling these gaps, writing a book may:

- Provide another writing challenge.
- Give you a greater sense of achievement.
- Offer a reprieve from your day-to-day writing activities.
- Give you some fun.
- Provide additional income.
- Make you a fortune.

Attempt to develop a writing schedule that allows for both long and short-term projects.

There’s an old saying: “I’m too busy earning a living to get rich.”

Give yourself the time and freedom to develop major writing goals.

Writers are creative people. We like change. Writing a book can provide it.

The Attack!

Just how difficult is book writing?

This depends essentially on two things:

1. The nature of the book.
2. Your own attitude.

In many instances writing a book may be easier than writing the same number of words divided into newspaper articles.

- You don’t have to spend time scratching around for 50 or so story ideas.
- Your research will probably be easier as it concerns the one subject.
- You have the opportunity of developing a writing ‘flow’ and sense of continuity.

The idea of writing an entire book can be extremely daunting. But a lot depends on your own attitude.

If you tackle each chapter, just as you would a major article, the book builds itself chapter by chapter.

Say you set yourself a writing target of 8,000 words a month, a little more than 260 words a day. You’ll have written a 96,000-word book in a year. It would be fair to say that you could accomplish this in your spare time.
What Do I Write About?

Obviously the first thing that you need is an idea.

So what constitutes a good idea?

Stated simply, anything that people are likely to be interested in.

Fiction

> Drama
> Humour
> Thrillers
> Romance
> Science Fiction
> Historical
> Children’s
> Adventure
> Crime
> Horror

Non-Fiction

> Biography
> Autobiography
> How To
> Self Help
> Historical
> Travel
> Sport
> Scientific
> Flora and fauna
> Health

This list is endless. Let me give you a few ideas:
Anglers’ omnibus; casino gambling; how to hypnotise yourself and others; 23 steps to success and achievement; women who kill; communication between man and dolphin; teachers under stress; your body doesn’t lie; wisecracks and witty remarks; skiing in Australia; how to make your own wine cellar; Australian seashores; the creative gardener; where to go when your doctor can’t help; how to enjoy music without really trying; safety for small craft; how to reduce housework by 50 per cent; Australian native plants for indoors; the sailors’ handbook; the Irish in Australia; magical medicine; women’s health; pocket guide to baby-sitting.

One of the first questions to ask yourself when thinking about book ideas is: “What do I know that other people will pay between $9.95 and $29.95 to know?”

Having said this, you don't have to be an expert on any subject, provided that you are prepared to do the research. And, you can always look for a co-author. In this case you provide the writing skills and your partner provides the expert knowledge.

It would be fair to say that most publishers will expect you to have some previous knowledge of the subject that you are writing about. And, it will obviously help if you have been published in this area previously.

But there are no absolutes in publishing.

Your major task is convincing a book editor that you can deliver the goods. If you can do this, you’re likely to be in business.

All publishers need to be convinced that there is a potential market for the book you are proposing.

“How many copies could this sell?” is the first question any book editor will ask.

Let’s hope that you have an answer when you present your submission. Try to pinpoint the readership you hope to reach.

Don’t let your enthusiasm for any book outweigh the practical considerations of whether or not it will sell.

Before you begin the work of researching or writing your book, check to see how many similar books are on the market. Your local or state library will probably carry the current Books In Print.

If the subject area is well covered, make sure that you have a different approach.

Sometimes a subject can be over-done. But a lengthy title list also suggests a great deal of reader interest. For example, cooking or dieting.

Before you send a submission to a publisher, you should check to see that what you are proposing fits that publisher’s booklist. It is no use sending a romantic novel to a publisher who only handles scientific textbooks.
Book Publishers

Publishers, like all other companies, are sometimes closing down, amalgamating and changing policies. And, there are several important things you should know before making a submission.

For example:

> How long for a reply to submissions?
> How long for a reply to queries?
> How are submissions and queries preferred? Unsolicited manuscripts, queries only; in writing, by phone or fax?
> Will this publisher consider previously unpublished writers?
> What are the current and specific needs of this publisher? For example, the company might publish 'cookbooks'. But are they only interested in ethnic cookbooks, or illustrated cookbooks, or cholesterol-free cooking?

Perhaps your manuscript or proposal is ideally suited to a particular publishing house. Unfortunately, this still won’t guarantee your success. There are still many reasons a publisher will say “no”. For example, the company may already have a similar title to your own on its publishing schedule.

And, you also need to be sure of certain things before you entrust your sweat and blood to any publishing company.

For example:

> What is the usual royalty?
> Can you expect an advancement payment?
> How many copies will be printed in the first print run?
> How strongly will the publisher commit to publicity and promotion for this title?

You probably won’t get answers to any of the above questions until the publisher has looked at your manuscript or proposal.
Steps Towards Getting Published

There are no hard and fast rules about submitting manuscripts as each publisher has different requirements.

For initial submissions there is no point sending an entire manuscript – a sample is usually sufficient. For submission purposes, the sample need not be double-spaced and can be on both sides of paper, and there is no need to use expensive bindings.

You must retain your own copy, as submission material is not necessarily returned. For the same reason, if you wish to submit illustrations you should send colour photocopies or colour photo/slides, and not original artwork. You should expect to wait up to three months at least for a response.

In the case of poetry and short stories, if you are an unpublished author, you have a greater chance of success approaching a book publisher with a collection and an established readership of your work. For this reason it is advisable to seek publication initially in magazines and follow their specific submission guidelines.

It has been said that writing a book is easy: the real work begins when you try to get it published. It may be an exaggeration, but the writing world abounds with heroic failures – manuscripts which should have been bestsellers, but never went beyond that dusty file at the bottom of the wardrobe simply because the writer gave up on publishers and publishing.

The information, which follows, does not promise to eliminate the common frustrations inherent in the process of seeing your manuscript through to publication. It may, however, help you ease your way gently into the business of publishing by outlining standard and acceptable procedures for writers approaching publishers.

Who to Approach

Before deciding which publishing house to approach, it is advisable to familiarise yourself with the general image of each particular style of publication? Is their catalogue large and diverse or small and specialised? Would your book suit their publishing list? The Australian Publisher’s Association Directory of Members is a handy reference.

(Refer to your Media markets supplement to gain more information about contacting this organisation).
First Contact

It is usually preferable to send your complete manuscript in the first instance. Publishers are already busy with their published authors, and the time available for unpublished writers is limited. Your first step is to interest the publisher in you, and in the concept of your book. If you can do that, the publisher will invite you to submit your full manuscript. At first, what the publisher needs to know in a few typed pages is:

> Who you are
> Whether or not you are a competent writer
> What your book is about
> What form it takes
> Whether there is a commercial market for your book

For this purpose, the following will usually suffice:

> Biographical notes giving details of the author’s writing experience, published work (if any), qualifications, and any other information about the author, which may be relevant to the manuscript.
> Outline, stating the broad purpose or theme of the manuscript, its distinctive qualities, potential readership, comparable books etc.
> Synopsis, a chapter-by-chapter summary including notes on illustration if appropriate.
> Two or three sample chapters. Since it is not uncommon for publishers to take months to respond to unsolicited manuscripts (indeed some never respond!), it is a good idea to include a brief covering letter and mention that you will contact them by telephone four weeks after they have had an opportunity to look at the project. Make a note in your diary to do just that.

When you telephone, keep the conversation brief and businesslike.

You simply want to confirm that your submission has been received, and to ask whether or not the publisher is and suggest that you will contact them again after that period. Your proposal may be submitted to as many publishers as you wish. However, publishers can be sensitive about multiple submissions.

If you are submitting your proposal to more than one publisher concurrently, we advise you to submit to no more than three at a time.

You may also like to mention in your covering letter that, in order to save time, you have submitted your proposal to one (or two as the case may be) other publishers. You are under no obligation to name these publishers or to discuss how many other companies you have previously approached.
Manuscript Presentation

Once a publisher has invited you to submit your manuscript, do so with a covering letter which includes your:

- Name
- Address
- Telephone number
- E-mail address
- Copyright notice.

Your manuscript should be:

- Typed double-spaced
- Margins should be wide enough for editorial notes
- Page numbers should be on the right hand corner
- It should be sent on A4 white paper, one side only
- It should be available on computer disk.

Don’t send your only copy!

Publishers take no responsibility for manuscripts lost in transit. Many publishers will only return your manuscript if you include return postage.

What to Do If …

1. You receive a number of rejections, but no explanation

   A professional assessment may help you to point out weak spots in your manuscript. Professional assessors charge a reading fee, which varies depending on the length of the manuscript. For information about manuscript assessment services, contact the ASA, the National Book Council or your state writer’s centre.
2. You are offered a publishing contract.

If you have not already joined the Australian Society of Writers (ASA), you are strongly advised to join now. The ASA’s contract assessors will give you a clause-by-clause assessment of your contract before you sign, alerting you to unfair clauses and suggesting points for negotiation. (Refer to your Media Markets supplement for further information about how to contact this association).

3. You want to find an agent.

Since the number of reputable literary agents in Australia is very small, it is usually difficult for an unpublished writer to find an agent. Agents should be approached in the same manner as publishers.

The ASA has a list of literary agents available for a small charge. If an agent offers you a contract, seek legal advice or contact the ASA before signing.

4. You are unsuccessful in finding a suitable publisher.

You might like to consider self-publishing. This is costly, but has the advantage of returning much higher profits to you if the book is successful. There a number of very good guides on self-publishing, and the ASA also has a paper available on the subject.

5. You are concerned about protecting your copyright

In Australia, copyright protection does not depend upon registration, publication or any other procedure. Material is automatically protected by law from the time it is written down or taped. Your ownership of copyright should be indicated by a copyright notice, which is recognised internationally.

The notice consists of the symbol © (or the word ‘copyright’), the name of the copyright owner, and the year of first publication. For further information contact the Australian Copyright Council. (Refer to your Media markets supplement for details about this and other professional writing associations).
Agreements – Literary Agents and Authors

Agreements with agents are legal documents covering those areas where the author/illustrator grants rights to the agent to act on his/her behalf. The ASA recommends formal written agreements. Mainly to make the agent’s responsibilities and obligations quite clear. The agreement may be a formal contract or simply a signed letter of agreement.

The author/agent agreement usually commits the author to an exclusive arrangement with the agent – at least within the territory set out in the agreement (e.g. Australia, world-wide, Australia and New Zealand).

The agent undertakes to promote and place your work for publication, and to act professionally in representing your interests. Agents should not agree to major deals without consulting you. They should inform you fully of the terms and conditions of their agency and should declare whether or not they charge authors a readers fee.

Agents negotiate contractual terms with publishers on your behalf and check royalty statements for accuracy. They should also monitor any subsidiary licensing of your work.

Many agents also offer editorial guidance, and will advise you about current trends and conditions within the publishing industry. Some agents also agree to liaise with publishers in relation to promotion and publicity for you and your work.

For published authors, commissions paid to agents are tax deductible.

Disputes do arise between authors and agents. Causes vary from agents’ failure to return phone calls to author’s failure to produce manuscripts on time. Usually such disputes can be resolved without resorting to the intervention of a third party.

However, to cover both parties, some agents agree to the inclusion of a mediation clause in their contract. This allows agent and author to resolve disputes with a trained mediator before the dispute becomes a serious one.

What are Royalties?

Royalties are one of the best deals you can make with a publisher.

Royalties exist in almost any business situation where there is ongoing specialised work, which the employer wishes to retain exclusively.

Usually they are in the form of a percentage of the value of the ongoing work.
You will hear of royalties being offered in the music industry, for instance. Michael Jackson still receives royalty payments for his records every year, even when he is not recording or performing.

Similarly, you may receive payment for an article, short story or book that continues to be published.

Why royalties are so attractive is that you may be enjoying yourself hitting a ball around a golf course while your royalties are accumulating from work already done.

Of course, unless you are in the Bryce Courtenay stakes, or you are a fabulously popular musician, you will have to head back to work once you have finished playing the round of golf.

Your royalties can be negotiated directly with a publisher, or you may have a literary agent who organises royalties (or percentages of the money your work is earning for others).

Here is how the royalty system can work for you.

Let’s say you have researched a subject so thoroughly that you have become an expert. It might be something as ordinary as a new method for making quilts or cooking for large groups of people.

Your work becomes the basis of a one-off magazine, a book or a brochure. Every time the magazine or book is sold, you receive a percentage of profits that may range from 2.5% to 10% or more. That is called receiving royalties.

Often publishers will offer an up-front fee plus a royalty. This may or not be the best possible payment to you. Royalties are sometimes offered in addition to a smaller than usual fee. You may also have to put your trust in your purchaser’s honesty when it comes to paying the negotiated percentage.

As for the brochure, it may be that your work is in such demand that the brochure is reprinted and distributed more widely. Prudent negotiation when selling your work may see a royalty paid, even though there is no cover price on the brochure. The royalty may be in the form of a percentage of your original payment.

Royalties, that is, percentages of monies earned by your work for a third party, should not be confused with syndication fees.

The accepted definition of the term ‘royalty’ is that it is compensation to the author or owner of a copyright paid by the publisher. This is usually on the percentage of the list price of the book (or written work) on each copy sold, but sometimes paid on a percentage of the wholesale price or on the publisher’s total receipts.
Author’s Advance

Authors can often negotiate an advance on or against royalties. This is payment to an author in anticipation of royalties a book is predicted to earn.

Sometimes, if a publisher feels a writer has a ‘hot property’, or if the writer is a celebrity, famed expert or VIP, an advance will be made before a single word is written.

Similarly, an advance may be made on a synopsis and a few chapters of a book if it seems that the subject is equal to the risk being taken by the publisher.

Syndication Fees

Let’s say you were stuck in a lift for an hour or so with someone famous. You just happen to have a tape recorder in your pocket or handbag. The famous person decides to pass the time with you by recounting a story never told before and allows you to record an interview.

Your story makes it into a top women’s magazine.

This is where your powers of negotiation, or those of your agent, can make a big difference.

You or your agent might recognise the story as being exclusive and sensational. So you offer the women’s magazine Australian rights and go about selling it elsewhere.

You are syndicating the same story.

It may be that Hello! magazine has some great photos of your famous person exiting a lift on another occasion and wants to use your story. Women’s magazines in New York, London, Paris, Rome and elsewhere may see your story as topical and relevant and may all bid separately for it once it has been published locally.

Magazines like Woman’s Day and New Idea have been known to encourage writers and photographers who have exceptional access to celebrities by offering to syndicate their material overseas. This means that if the magazine were to pay you a good amount for your trouble, a sizeable amount of money may be obtained on your behalf from overseas links.

Why would a magazine go to such lengths to make more money for you? Firstly, it encourages you to offer them your next exclusive. Secondly it is ‘softer’ on their editorial budget to syndicate on your behalf. This means you do well out of the sale and the magazine has been able to maintain its editorial budget whilst obtaining a world scoop.
Numerous agents in Australia undertake syndication of articles, books and other literary works. A literary agent will be in demand by prestigious contacts if he or she continues to offer publishers world excellent material for their particular market.

This usually means homework for you. You have to research your literary agent just as fastidiously as you would if you were marketing your work directly to a publisher. The difference is that an agent will have a network of strong contacts that, individually and collectively, could provide an impressive source of income to you, notwithstanding the agent’s commission.

What is Work for Hire?

Work for hire differs from royalty agreements because it means you receive a one off payment for the writing that you do.

While it may sound simply a matter of producing work for money, in the world of fiction and non-fiction writing and reporting, there are many ways to ‘cut the cake’.

Take the case of a freelance journalist who has been asked by a magazine company to compile a ‘one-shot’ magazine.

This work may entail weeks of writing and gathering of photographs and other illustrations. It may mean working with an ‘in-house’ artist (an artist employed by the magazine) for some of the time, and working from home during the writing process. Or it may mean working the whole time from the magazine premises.

In this example of ‘working for hire’ it is reasonable for the writer to ask for an advance. This may be 25% on commission (i.e. before you start on the project), 25% on delivery of the first half of the magazine and the balance completion of the project.

Working for hire can be negotiated as simply as a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ by telephone or signing a lengthy contract with a solicitor by your side. Obviously, the former would be an uncomplicated arrangement and the money at stake would be the going fee for a routine freelance commission.

Payment or payments made by a publisher to an author before sales of the book or written work may be the entire sum an author will receive for the book, which makes it work for hire, or, more commonly, the money may be an advance on royalties.

Traditionally, the author’s advance, which is determined during negotiation of a contract between author and publisher, is paid half on signing the contract and half on delivery of the manuscript. In recent years, the advance is more likely to be paid out over a longer period of time, e.g. a third on signing, a third on delivery of manuscript, and a third on actual publication of the book.
About Publishing Agreements

Some agents offer quite formal contracts with numbered paragraphs relating to each of the basic areas covered by the agreement. Others prefer a ‘letter of agreement’ which, when signed, carries the same legal weight as a formal contract. In either case, the document will state the names (and addresses) of the parties and should cover the following areas:

- **The Work** – particulars of the work/s (books, scripts, articles, film rights, electronic rights) which the agent agrees to represent. Most agents do not take a commission on prizes, PLR payments or any payment, which has not involved their direct representation of your work.

- **The Duration** – the period of time for which the agreement remains valid. Most agency agreements continue until a formal termination, but some agents will agree to two (or more) year terms.

- **The Territory** – geographical – most agents want world rights.

- **Commissions** – agreements should clearly state details of commissions to the agents for sale/management of particular rights, including overseas rights, film rights. Australian agents currently charge between 10-20% (of gross revenue) for Australian rights. This can rise to 20-25% when overseas rights are sold and an overseas agent is involved in the negotiation. He/she will receive part of this commission.

- **Accounting** – payment less agreed commission) should be made to the author within 14 days of payment to the agent. Author’s money should be kept in a trust account.

- **Deductions** – details of charges to be made by the agent for phone calls, faxes, photocopying. These are usually only charged if ‘unusual’ expenses are incurred (e.g. Photocopying of a manuscript).

- **Termination** – terms on which either party can terminate the agreement – and arrangements for continued payments on rights already sold by the agent.

The agreements should be signed and dated by both author and agent.

If you are unsure about the agent’s credentials, ask them for a list of clients. If you are negotiating with overseas agents, they may be prepared to give you contact details for some of their clients.
Activity 9

Would you like to write a book and get your work published? Jot down some ideas for non-fiction writing that you think would interest you.
Useful References

Websites

Media contact Internet sites recommended by journalists are:

- http://www.newswise.com (USA)
- http://www.profnet.com (Aust)
- http://www.yearbooknews.com (USA)
- http://www.sydney.indymedia.org (Aust)
- http://www.walkleyawards.aust.com (Aust)
- http://www.presscouncil.org.au (Aust)

Suggested Reading


Copyright and Legal Information

THE ARTS LAW CENTRE OF AUSTRALIA
The Gunnery, 43-51 Cowper Wharf Road
Woolloomooloo NSW 2011
Tel: (02) 9356 2566
Fax: (02) 9358 6475
Toll Free: 1800 221 457
Website: www.artslaw.com.au
Email: artslaw@artslaw.com.au
E-mails should provide your full name, address and telephone number so that the Arts Law Centre can respond to your query. If appropriate you will be placed in the queue for a legal officer to call you and discuss. A call back generally takes 2-3 days and while initial telephone advice is free, ongoing assistance or document review (if appropriate) requires subscription. Click on the Publications link for a publications order form. A Photographer’s Model Release sample agreement with explanatory notes is approximately $22 at time of printing.

Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance

Alliance Inquiry Desk: For all award and other inquiries 1300 65 65 12
FEDERAL OFFICE
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Redfern NSW 2016
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fax (02) 9333 0933
Website: http://www.alliance.org.au/
Email: federal@alliance.org.au

A downloadable copy of the Australian Journalist’s Association Standard Freelance Journalist’s Contract is available at: www.alliance.org.au/freelance/

Environmental Research Sites


Market Research

Writer’s Digest Books, 1507 Dana Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45207, USA, publishes an annual guide called Writer’s Market, giving editorial details of more than 4,000 markets. To find Writer’s Digest Books at a bookseller near you, please contact one of our partners below:

Australia
Kirby Book Company
Private Bag No. 19
Alexandria NSW 2015
Tel: 02-9698-2377
Fax: 02-9698-8748
On Assignment

International Committee Of The Red Cross

Requests may be made by telephone, telex or letter (depending on urgency), indicating that it is a “Hot Line” communication to:

Press Division, “Hot Line”, 19, Avenue de la Paix, CH-1202 Geneva, Switzerland.
Tel: +41 22 734 60 01 (Switzerland)
Fax: +41 22 734 82 80 (Switzerland)

Horizon International Pty Ltd.
Level 6, 83 Mount St
North Sydney NSW 2060
Phone: (02) 9957 5412
Fax: (02) 9929 4325
Contact: Renate Hoffmann, Director.

Travelwriter Marketletter
published by Robert Scott Milne
Suite 1850, The Waldorf-Astoria
301 Park Ave, New York,
NY 10022 USA

Well done!

Congratulations on completing this course, which has intensively explored and communicated the art and skills of freelance journalism.

The purpose of this course was not just to teach journalism but also to equip you with the tools to make a living in this highly active and respected area of modern journalism.

By working through all the Assignments this course has to offer, you have taken a huge step towards all that writing for a living has to offer, which is as unfathomable as the universe itself.
Notes
When you feel confident that you have thoroughly mastered the material in this unit, attempt the following assignment.

You have received a CD with your course called HOTcopy. HOTcopy simulates a newsroom and you have to perform the tasks of a journalist as directed by the editor or sub-editor. The newsroom has the following features:

**Tour**
You can take an optional tour (before beginning a scenario) introducing the basic features in the newsroom that you will use to receive information and complete work.

**Scenario**
This is the simulated workplace. The CD contains six scenarios: ‘First Few Pars’, ‘Fire, Fire!!’, ‘Coolabah Council’, ‘Death Trap’, ‘Cleveland Street’ and ‘Fatal Crash’. For this Assignment you are going to work on Fire, Fire!! The scenario ends when final copy is saved. You also have the option of visiting the ‘Pub Scene’ when the scenario ends.

**Quit**
There are opportunities to ‘Quit’ before and after the scenario. However, once in a scenario you are committed to the ‘running-time’ of that scenario. In a panic situation you would need to force-quit HOTcopy.

**Notebook**
As a journalist you will need a physical notebook and pen to record HOTcopy events such as instructions and conversations.

**Work area**
The typing window at the bottom of the screen is referred to as the ‘work area’. You may create up to five work areas in any given scenario. These may be used for purposes such as drafting headlines, typing stories or simply taking notes.

**Pub Scene**
The ‘Pub Scene’ is a short ‘debriefing’ session available after each scenario. At this stage the pub scenes are in a simplified form where characters speak briefly about some perspectives on the scenario you may not have considered. Although optional, they are highly recommended.
When you are asked for a password, type your full name then press enter.

1) From your HOTcopy CD choose the Fire, Fire!! Scenario and complete all the
tasks associated with it. Attach all your copy to the assignment cover sheet and
submit to your tutor. You should submit the following:

› A filler article based on the media release for the Newstown branch of Ripoff
  Merchant Bank

› A breaking news article on the fire at Newstown High School.

Maximum length: Filler article—150 words, breaking news article—400 words

2) At the end of the scenario—the ‘Pub Scene’—you can get three different
opinions on how the articles could be approached. Explain the difference in
opinion between the lawyer and the two journalists.

Maximum length: 1 page
Assignment

Writing Reviews and Publishing Fundamentals

20176/02

> When you feel confident that you have thoroughly mastered the material in this unit, attempt the following assignment.

1) For this Assignment you are required to write a review for a metropolitan newspaper or popular national magazine. Your review can be based on music, a restaurant, a theatre play or cinema movie.

Circle the review choice you are planning to write about.

› music
› a restaurant
› a theatre play
› cinema movie.

Maximum length: 250-500 words.

2) Write one paragraph about what you plan to do next in your new role as a full-time or part-time freelance journalist. If you are not planning to enter this field, write about how your studies will benefit your future goals.

Maximum length: 1 paragraph.
Media Pass Application Form

Please complete the application form below.

☐ New Address (tick box if this is a new address)

Student Identification Number: .................................................................
Course: ........................................................................................................
First Name: ..............................................................................................
Last Name: ..............................................................................................
Address: ....................................................................................................
Suburb: ...................... State: ............... Postcode: ......................
Phone (Home): (     ) .................. (Mobile): (      ). ......................

Signature: ................................................................. Date: ....../....../......

Once you have completed this application form, please ensure a Passport Size Photo is enclosed, and forward it to the address below for processing:

Open Colleges
PO Box 1568
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012