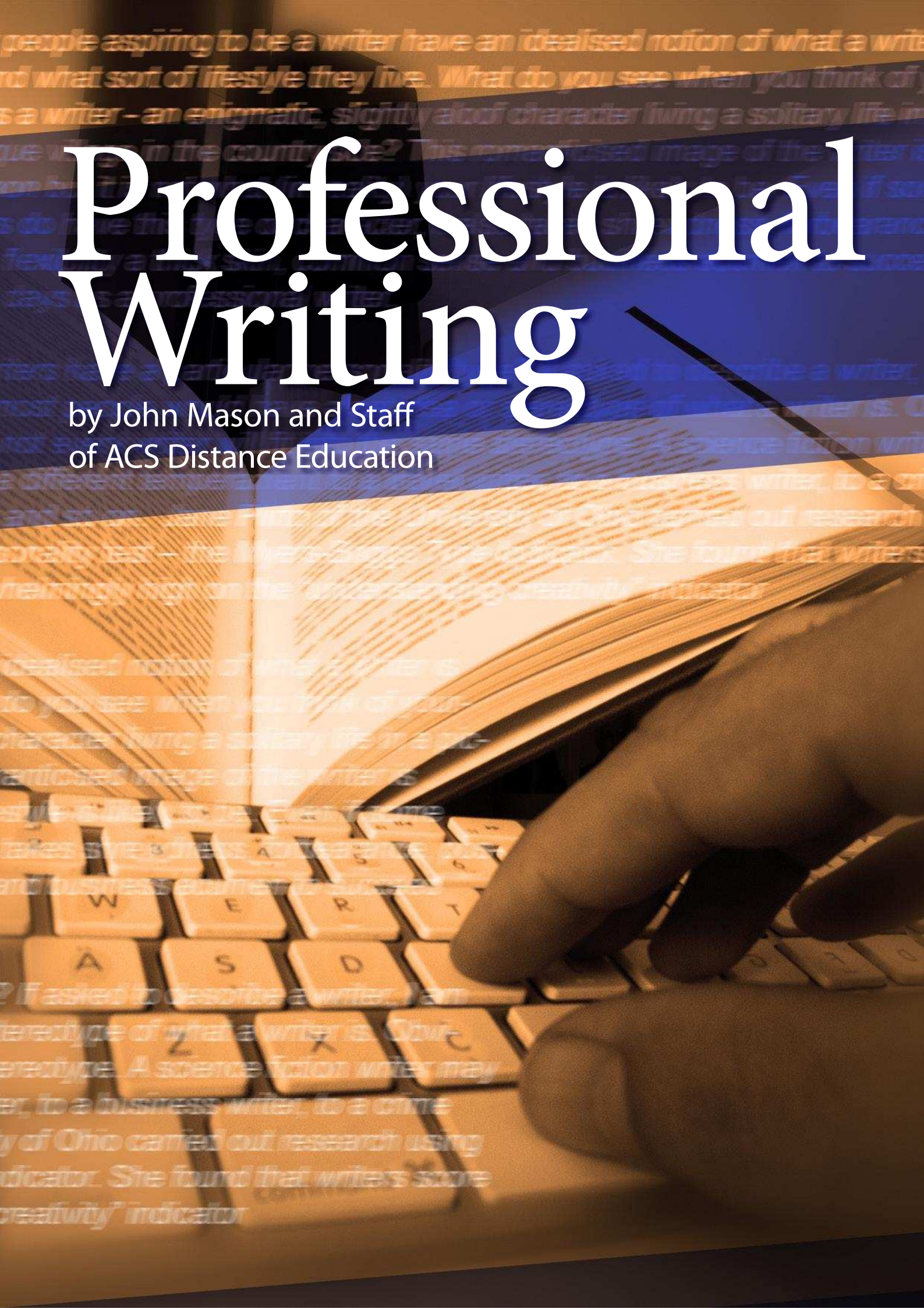


Professional Writing

by John Mason and Staff
of ACS Distance Education



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CREDITS

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First published in 2011 by John Mason as an e-book

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Queensland, Australia, 4211

ISBN: 978-0-9872647-4-9

www.acsebook.com

www.acsbookshop.com

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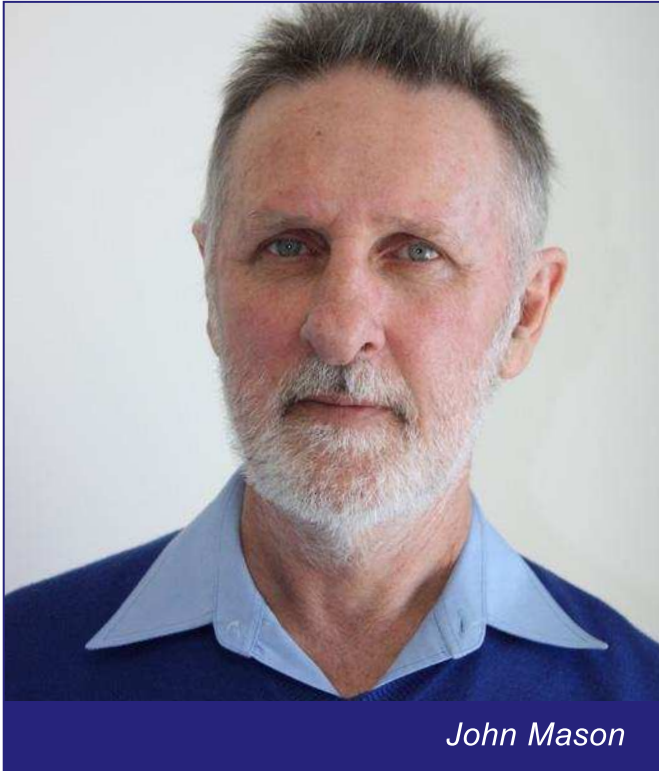
The authors fully recognise that knowledge is continually changing, and awareness in all areas of study is constantly evolving. As such, we encourage the reader to recognise that nothing they read should ever be considered to be set in stone. They should always strive to broaden their perspective and deepen their understanding of a subject, and before acting upon any information or advice, should always seek to confirm the currency of that information, and the appropriateness to the situation in which they find themselves.

As such, the publisher and author do not accept any liability for actions taken by the reader based upon their reading of this book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN L. MASON

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Mr Mason has had over 35 years experience in the fields of Horticulture, Recreation, Education and Journalism. He has extensive experience both as a public servant, and as a small business owner. John has held positions ranging from Director of Parks and Recreation (City of Essendon) to magazine editor.

John is a well respected member of many professional associations, and author of over thirty five books and of over two thousand magazine articles. Even today, John continues to write books for various publishers including Simon and Shuster, and Landlinks Press (CSIRO Publishing).

CHAPTER 1 THE PASSION

How many people dream about becoming a professional writer? Professional writing is any writing that you are being paid for. It can include fiction writing, a best-selling book, articles in a magazine, articles in a newspaper, blogs for companies, technical manuals or procedure manuals, copy for catalogues, newsletters, text books and other academic material and so on. However, many people just write for sheer pleasure.

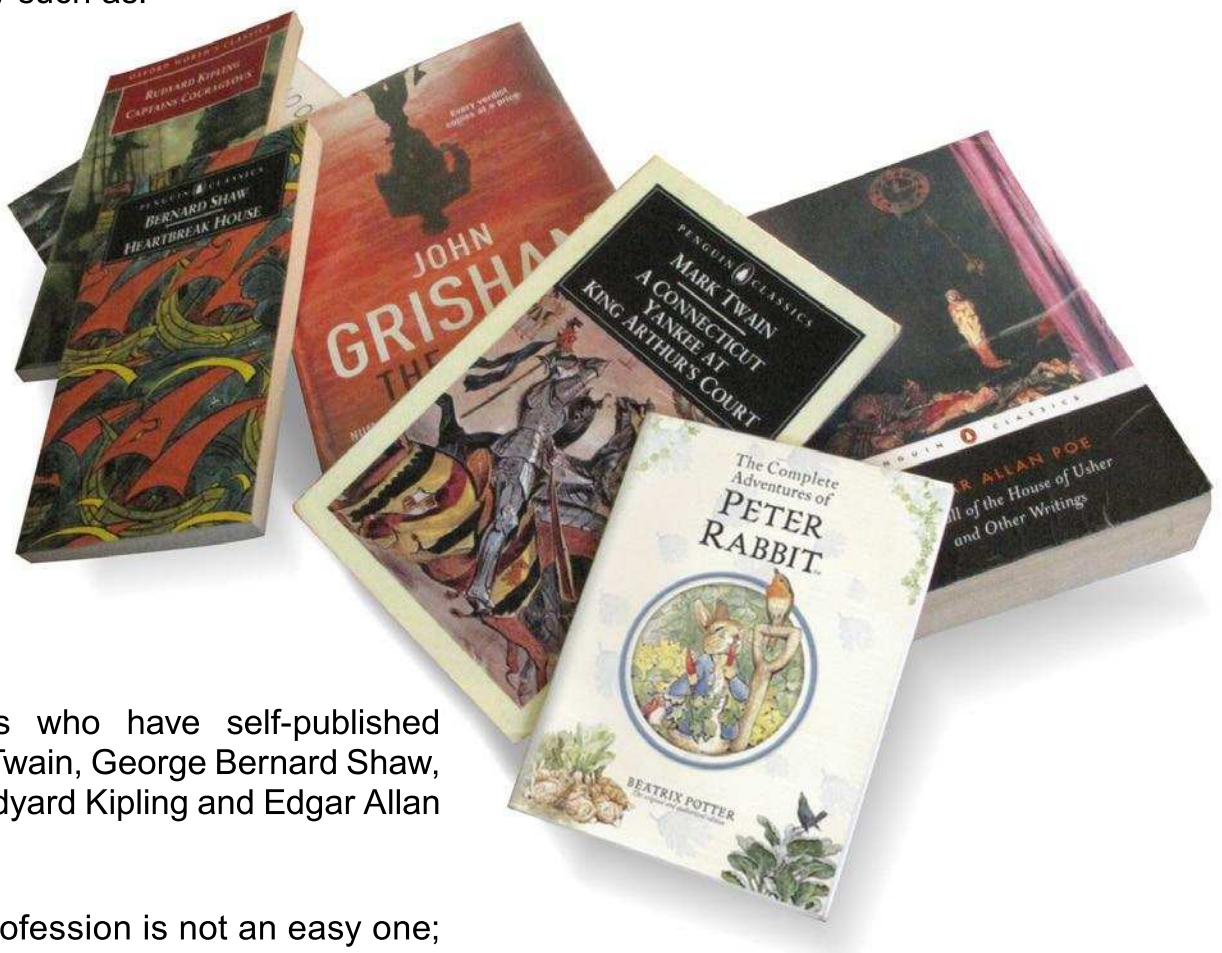
Many people have a passion for writing and dream about earning a living from it. In reality, even well known professional writers struggle to achieve this dream. Some very famous authors had to self-publish initially such as:

Beatrix Potter

– The Adventures of Peter Rabbit

John Grisham – A Time To Kill

James Joyce – Ulysses



Other authors who have self-published include Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, Anais Nin, Rudyard Kipling and Edgar Allan Poe.

The writing profession is not an easy one; the supply of good quality work generally exceeds the demand. Writers unlike many professions (other than artists) tend to have to launch a career, rather than find a job. You have to establish a profile and have lots of examples of your work readily available for your potential buyers

to view. It is definitely not as easy as a job application, and your income can be spasmodic, especially in the early stages of your career. You may need to write for free before you can even start to consider charging for your work.

If you are thinking about becoming a professional writer it takes talent, but it also takes a certain temperament. You will have many rejections but if you have the right approach you won't be discouraged and you can actually learn to improve your writing skills through rejection. Secondly you should never assume that what you have written is not worthy of publication, just because it was rejected by one editor – there are many more out there - and it only takes one to see the potential or like your article, book or whatever it is you are trying to get published.

Finding a publisher can be difficult. Alex Haley received 200 rejections for “Roots” before it was finally published. We will talk more about successful self-publishers, particularly in the area of eBook publishing, due to the boom in technology, in chapter five.

Getting published is a question of talent AND perseverance. Sometimes it is a matter of being in the right place at the right time to be offered a writing job as well as having some established knowledge and a passion for writing.

It is common for people to assume that the way to become a professional writer is to do a course, develop writing skills and offer yourself to employers. They assume the work will become available. This scenario is more the exception than the rule and over the following pages you will discover that it takes much more than that to be a success in this field.

Pathways to Writing

When you consider the people who are making a living from writing in today's world, most have come to their current position inadvertently. They didn't start out in their careers planning to be writers, but as their careers progressed, their career paths evolved and the need to write became evident.

There are many different ways that you can get from where you are now, to being a professional writer. Some people may follow a set pattern of study and career to become a writer, whilst others may become writers almost by “accident” as part of their job roles and other experiences. For example:

- Some study a course in media, writing or journalism and upon graduating, get a job with a publisher.
- Some people establish themselves as an expert. For example; they may become an expert in sport, gardening, cooking and so on, then move into writing because they are an expert – they are writing about what they know.
- Some develop skills and a reputation as an illustrator – such as photography, drawing, IT graphics, which leads to illustrating publications and in turn leads to writing - to go along with their illustrations.



Photography can lead to writing books, magazine articles or blogs using the photos.

- Some study or work in marketing or advertising, developing their ability to communicate through writing; which may lead to writing media releases, promotional materials, and eventually other things. The novelist Bryce Courtney worked in marketing for a long time, before moving into writing.
- Some people start as an educator, and move from teaching into writing text books or course materials.
- Some start as a scientist or technician; and move from working in their industry to technical writing. Such as writing reports, technical manuals, texts, etc.



Being a scientist can lead to a technical writing career.

- Some people experience things in their life that makes for interesting reading, and their experiences create the opportunity to break into professional writing. Consider a politician, sportsman, celebrity, or someone who has come through an exceptional experience such as travelling around the world.
- For some, writing may be a hobby - writing for their own pleasure or for their family to read. Perhaps writing articles for their local church newsletter, school magazine, community newsletter and so on.
- Some people may not just work only as writers. They may write as part of their job. For example, they may write textbooks or technical documents as part of their job. They may write blogs, press releases, newsletters or magazine articles as a smaller aspect of their job.

How Much of the Job is Writing?

Many professional writers do a lot more than just write. Some only earn a small proportion of their income from writing, while others can earn all of their income from writing.

- A teacher who writes text books may earn five or ten percent of their annual income as royalties on the books they write; while most of their income continues to come from wages paid by the school they teach at.
- A novelist may spend thirty or forty hours a week writing novels, but unless they sell well, they may need to work another twenty hours a week at something completely different to writing, in order to make enough money to live.



Some novelists need to work in part-time jobs to pay the bills.

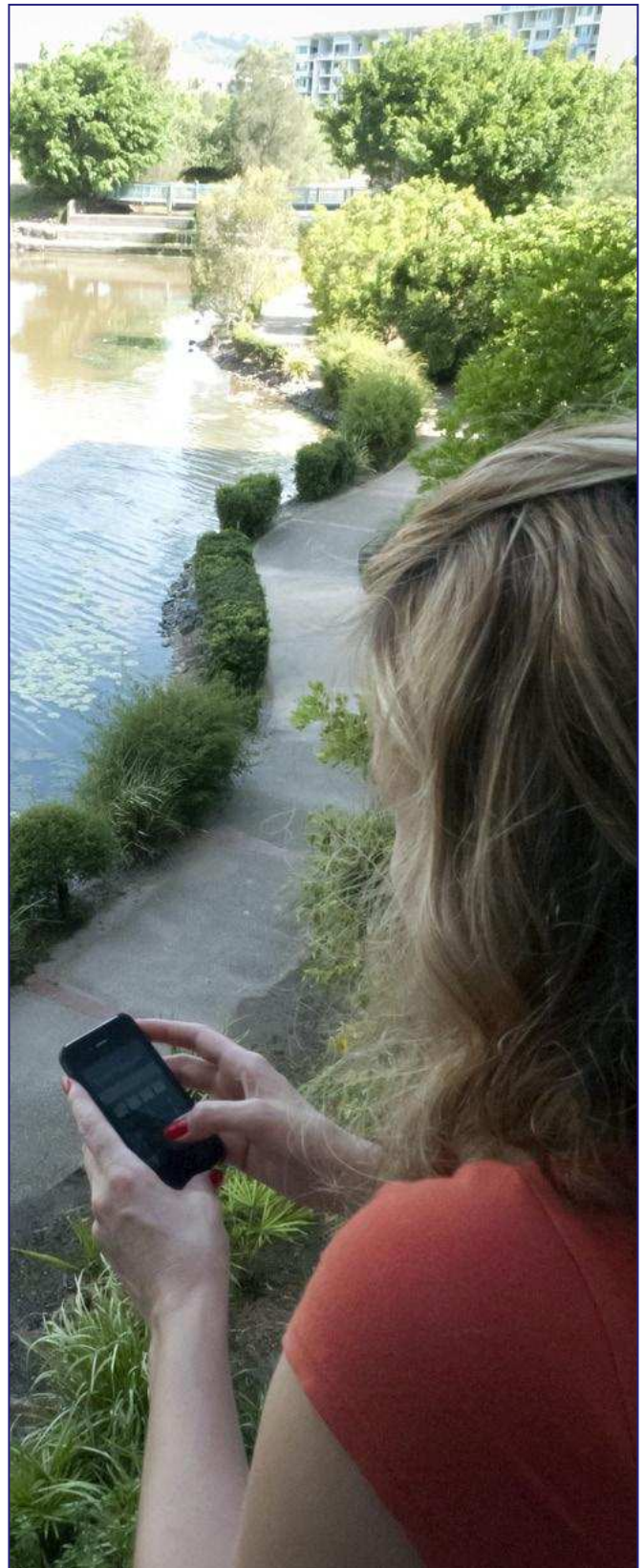
- A businessman may spend 20% of their time writing content for newsletters, online blogs and marketing materials etc, in order to maintain the visibility of their business in the market place.
- A feature writer for magazines or newspapers may spend more than half of their time doing research; and less than half writing.
- A TV or radio broadcaster may be writing things to broadcast, but also spending a lot of time delivering the broadcast.
- A teacher may be writing lesson notes, but spends more time delivering the lesson.
- More and more organizations are also getting involved in writing by presenting podcasts, online resources and so on. Many schools now present lectures online and on websites such as YouTube. This obviously requires the writing of the lecture, research and then the preparation of the podcast or video to go online. We see fitness organizations offering advice online on how to do different exercises, nutrition techniques and so on. Health care professionals may give advice on looking after your health. Animal health care professionals may show people online how to care for their dog, cat or other pets. This is often a way to advertise a product or service, but can also be an informative and educational service at the same time.

The other side to writing is research, and most writers, no matter what they are writing (fiction, non-fiction, articles and so on), spend a lot more time researching than they do writing. Without research a writer cannot produce quality work.

Where Can You Get Paid for Writing?

Writers can get paid for many different areas of writing. These might include:

- books
- magazines
- newspapers
- TV
- film
- stage plays
- newsletters
- advertising and PR
- social media
- websites
- blogs
- reports
- resumes/CVs

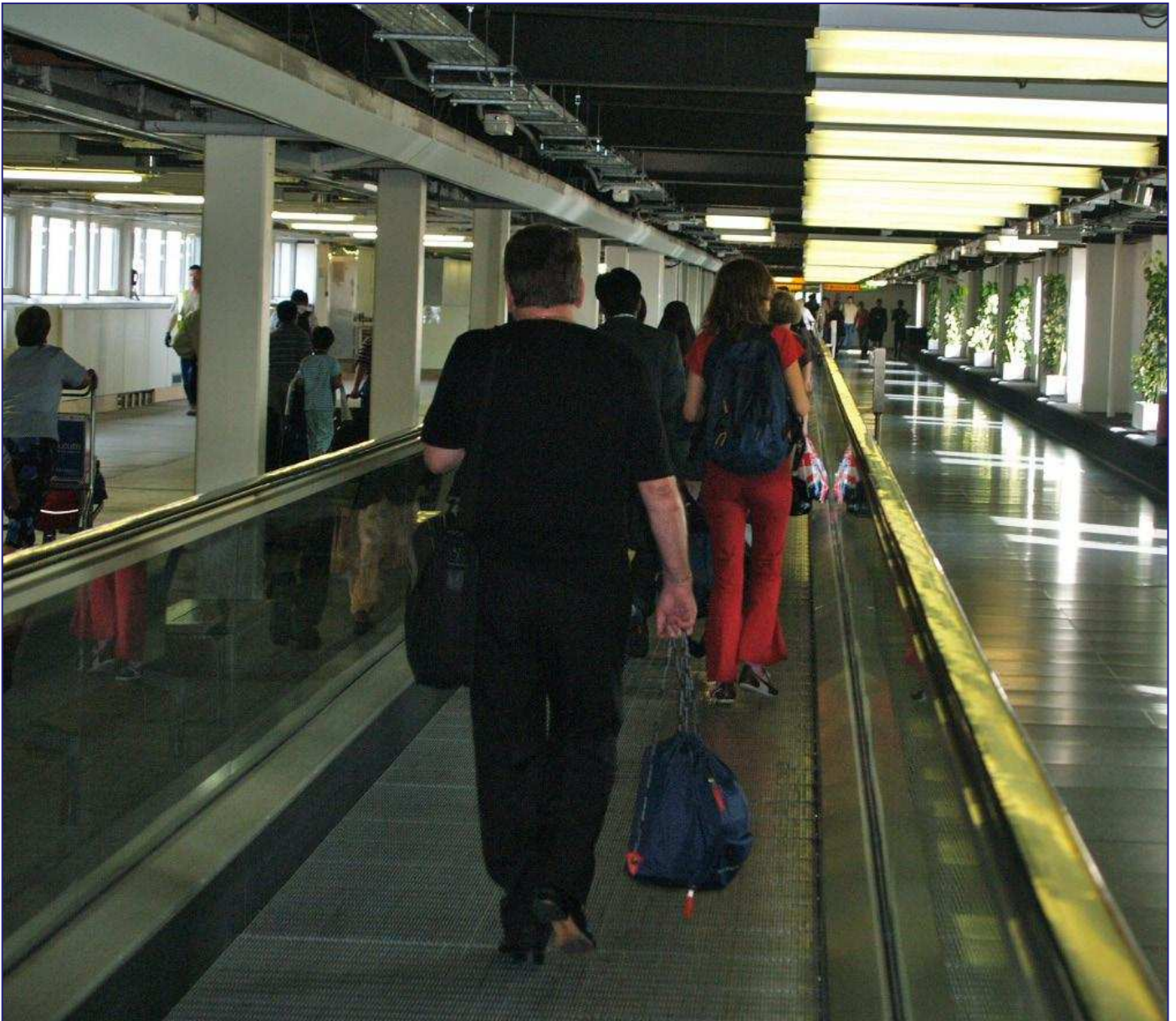


Get paid to write for social media.

Other, more unusual examples might be:

- Greeting card writers – many cards have poems or little verses or quotes in them. Someone has to write them.

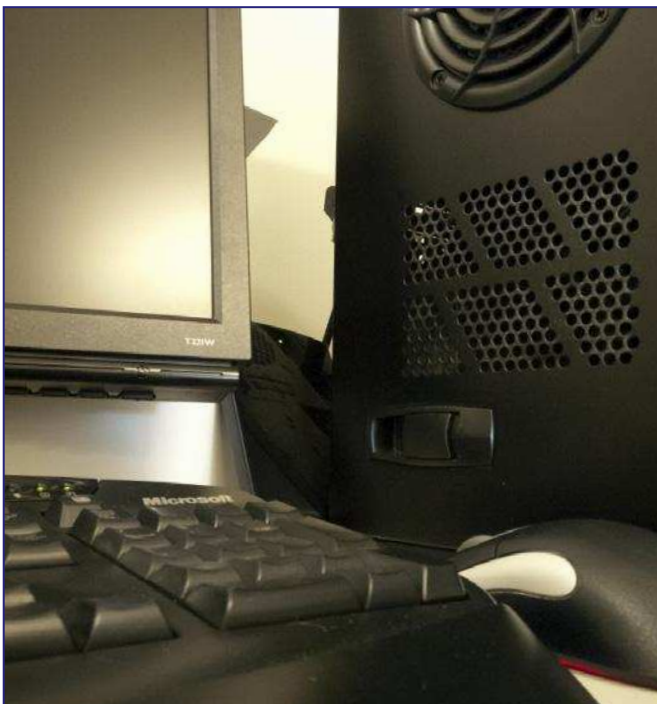
- Travel writers – travel writers will write about different locations. This can be as a way to inform others about a certain area, historically, environmentally and so on. Or they can write about the area in terms of tourism opportunities.



Travel writers can obtain a lot of information by travelling domestically or internationally.

- Ghost writers (a writer who writes for someone else. For example, a celebrity may wish to write their autobiography but lack the writing skills. So they will tell the ghost writer their story, then the ghost writer will present the story in a more suitable form)
- Creative writing teacher – creative writing teachers may be authors or writers who also have moved into the field of teaching. They may teach and still write as well.
- Song writer – many artists write their own songs, but some will use professional writers to write songs for them.

- Freelance writer – a freelance writer may seek contracts out to write about a different range of topics. They will usually only receive work for a specified topic. Some freelance writers may only get occasional work, whilst others can earn a good income as a freelance writer. Some writers may wish to retain the role of freelance writer as they can enjoy the flexibility of the job. Freelance writers may also write as part of a ‘team’ of writers. For example script writers often work in teams as do academic writers - to produce text books or other academic writings.



Game writing is a massive industry.

- Game writer – there are many complex computer games available today that may tell a “story” that the player works through until the end. Characters are developed with their own personalities, skills, powers and so on.
- Legacy writer – a person who writes family histories or biographies for other people.

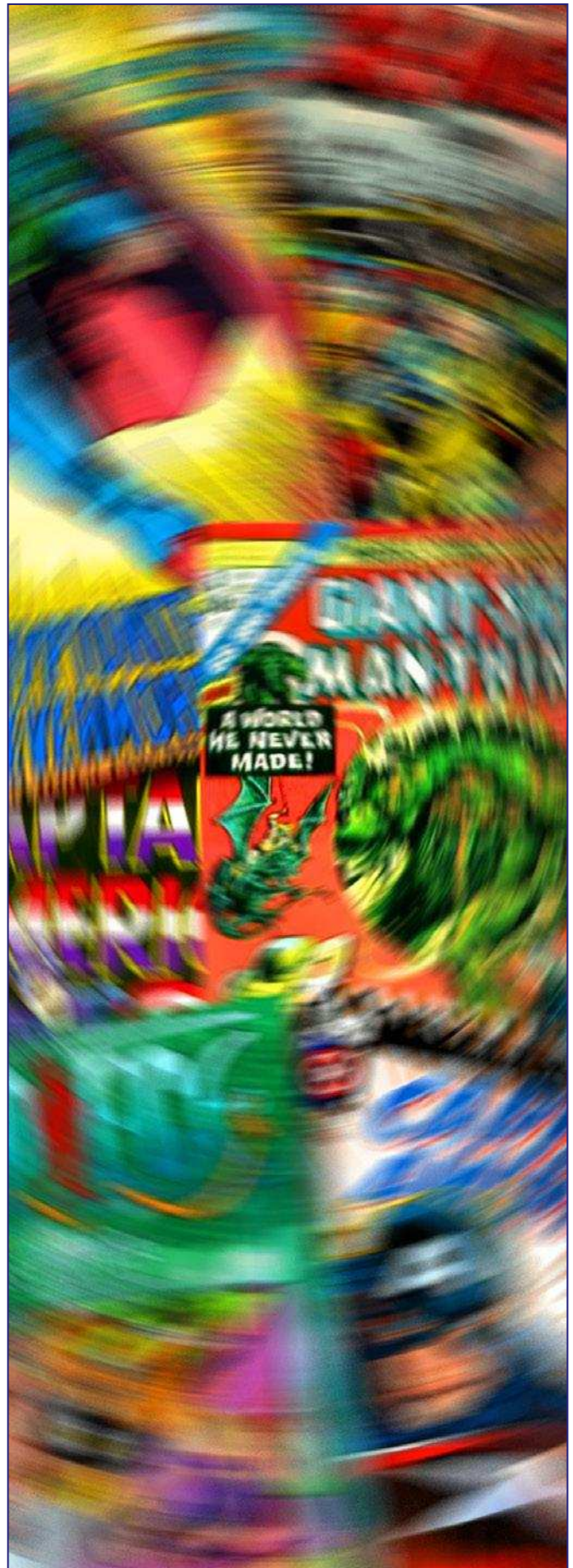
- Poet – poetry is not as popular as say a bestselling novel. Sales of poetry books do not usually reach the heights that the sale of books can. However, there are some poets who are able to work as professional poets. Over 12 countries have poet laureates. They are poets who write about special state events, for example, a coronation, a new parliament and so on. Famous Poet laureates include Lord Tennyson, Phillip Levine, William Wordsworth, John Betjeman.
- Personal poet – writing poems for special events, birthdays, people, weddings.
- Columnist – a columnist may write columns about their opinions or certain topics, perhaps once a week in a newspaper or a magazine. For example, a specialist in the economy may have a regular column in a newspaper, writing about the economy. Columnists may specialise in other areas, such as celebrity, fashion, current events.
- Blogger – many people write blogs today. A blog is a combination of web and log. It can be a log of a person’s life. Some may do this for their own personal interest. Others may do this as a way to attract attention to their business. To inform their students – for example –some teachers might write blogs about topics for their students. There are also professional bloggers. If you look on the internet, there are many bloggers who write professionally. They may produce a large number of blogs then sell advertising on their website. There are different types of blogs – photoblog, artblogs, microblogs (very short blogs).

- Creativity coach – similar to a creative writing teacher, but a creativity coach may encourage their students to open up and become more creative, in writing and perhaps other fields.
- Comic book writer – comic book writers once were considered inferior to novelists. But with the rise in popularity of superhero films, such as Superman, X-Men, Spiderman and so on, comic book author's work is now viewed in a far more positive way. The author, Jerry Siegel and artist, Joe Shuster, were responsible for the highly popular Superman comics, novels and films.

As we said earlier, writing can be the main focus of a person's job. They may be a novelist, journalist, textbook author or they may write as part of their main job: writing reports, website content writing, writing consultancy reports and so on.

Some writers may work in a variety of fields. There may not be enough money as a personal poet, but with writing greeting card rhymes, song writing, writing poems for special occasions, blogs and so on, this could actually lead them to have sufficient work. A writer may be lucky enough to be able to diversify their writing all within the same company, writing for the hard copy magazine, their web site and producing the company brochures and reports, or they may juggle a number of writing opportunities with several companies, simultaneously.

You need to be realistic, be prepared to work hard and be prepared for rejection in order to enjoy a working life as a professional writer.



Comic book writers have gained respect.