



THE
WRITER WITHIN YOU



A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing and
Publishing In Your Retirement Years

BY CHARLES JACOBS

The Writer Within You
A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing and
Publishing In your Retirement Years

by Charles Jacobs

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CHAPTER 1



CAN I REALLY BECOME A WRITER?

Yogi Berra, as famous for his quips as he was for his expertise on the baseball diamond, counseled, “If you don’t know which road you’re on, you’ll likely end up somewhere else.”

When you opted to read this book, you apparently chose the *WRITE* road, and that certainly is the right road for anyone who has a yen to memorialize his/her thoughts in print. Only by traveling the write road will you discover the thrill of seeing your name on the cover of a book or above an article in a favorite magazine. You’ll discover how significant your pen can be as more and more readers, many of them total strangers, respond to your thoughts or how your loved ones react when you pass on treasured memories.

You ask, “Can I really become a writer?” Of course you can. At this stage of your life, you at last have the opportunity to realize your dream. Thanks to retirement plans and social security payments, you are probably assured of a basic income. Your schedule is flexible and free. You no longer must rush off to spend the day at the office or the plant. You have the time to write. Most important of all, you have the unique ability to call upon years of rich experiences and a great deal of acquired knowledge to jump start this exciting, new venture. That places you far in front of the starting gate where less experienced, younger would-be writers must begin. Once you start, you will be amazed at the ease with which you can place your thoughts on paper. When you discover how favorably readers respond, your confidence will expand exponentially, as will your pride in yourself and in your accomplishment.



But—and it’s a very big but—there is a quid pro quo. To be successful or at the very least to see your project through to completion, you must be willing to seal yourself off from the world for at least two or three hours a day while you place those brilliant thoughts and clever phrases on paper. That’s really not a pact with the devil, nor is it terribly demanding of your time. It leaves lots of hours for golf, reading, socializing and all of the other privileges of retirement. But it is vital that your writing is done on a regular, structured schedule. Continuity is the key to success in our field.

BUILDING YOUR CONFIDENCE

Having picked your path, your next task is to erase any doubt about your ability to write. No, you’ll probably never be as renowned as Hemingway.

But remember, he started much earlier in life, and still required endless revisions to his copy before he produced the books that have made him a household name world-wide. Seventy years ago, Dorothea Brande, one of the all-time great writing instructors, agreed that “Genius cannot be taught.” But, this highly respected figure added, “I think there is a magic (to writing), and that it is teachable.” I would go

a step further and add, as Lawrence Block indicated in his WORDS OF WISDOM, your writing skills will flourish with practice and steady effort. If you take the time to look at much of what is being published today, I think you’ll be reassured that you too will soon be able to write as effectively as many of the authors who are fortunate enough to be in print.

When you actually sit down to write, shake off those inhibitions. Let the words flow. In the first days of becoming comfortable with this new



WORDS OF WISDOM

In his book *Writing the Novel*, Lawrence Block, author of more than 25 books, states: “Writing has this in common with most other skills; we develop it best by practicing it. Whatever writing we do helps us to become better writers.”



endeavor, don't worry at all about the quality of what you're producing. If the thoughts make sense, but the words need massaging, you are experiencing what even the best writers frequently find. That's why revision and rewriting are so much a part of our craft. They do take effort, but it is effort well rewarded. The pride of a project completed. The gratification of having others read and enjoy your thoughts and your words. The thrill of seeing your byline in a periodical or on the cover of a book.

I choose to think Ms. Parker, known for her satirical wit, was having a bit of fun when she wrote the WORDS OF WISDOM above.

Perhaps, as some have indicated, writers and writing do at times endure a love/hate relationship, but one in which love always wins out for the dedicated author. I am certain Ms. Parker believed that writers succeed best when they love what they are doing. You too can succeed and enjoy just as she did with proper guidance and a bit of determination. The chapters ahead are designed to provide you with that guidance, with an overview of the at-times confusing world of publishing you are now about to enter and a variety of tips to help you master the specific category of writing you have chosen to pursue.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Once you have the confidence to believe that you too can become a published author, it is important to start thinking about what it is you really want to write. In *Book Marketing from A – Z*, author and marketing expert Robin Fisher Roffer (www.bigfishmarketing.com) offers this advice to writers: "Find a point-of-view and then extend from there." Ms. Roffer uses Gore Vidal's concentration on history as an example of what she means. You must



WORDS OF WISDOM

Dorothy Parker, one of the wittiest and most famous writers of her day, once stated: "I hate writing, but I love having written."



decide which category of writing best suits your interests and abilities. Is it fiction or nonfiction? Short stories or a novel? An article or a full-length book? History or true crime? How-to or some other nonfiction category?

Perhaps the warmth that you, like so many others who have passed the mid-century mark, feel when you recall the past—those “silver” years and even earlier—impels you to write a lasting memoir for family members and those still to arrive.

Most of you are familiar with the word *genre*, as it is used to depict distinct types of literature. Although the fundamentals of creation are essentially the same for every category, you will learn in succeeding chapters the approach does vary somewhat. So it is up to you to determine what it is you want to say, the genre in which you want to present it and how best to frame your work. Should you tackle a full length nonfiction book or begin with an article on the subject? Can the message you want to deliver be more effectively presented as a parable or a longer fictional story? Would you be better served by writing an essay? These questions aren’t difficult to answer once you have carefully thought through your project. Often the choice is inherent in the subject matter you choose to write about. Be sure it is something with which you are completely comfortable, for you and your project will be intimately wedded for a substantial period of time.



WORDS OF WISDOM

Robin Fisher Roffer in *Book Marketing from A-Z*: “Being known for something is what builds buzz and a following. The trick is not to pigeonhole yourself! So choose wisely the subject matter or genre that you’ll work in. Make sure it resounds with your soul.”

CHOOSING YOUR NICHE

You may decide to change the genre you select as you proceed through this book. Therefore it is important to understand fully the many avenues you



can pursue. To my surprise, I have met students in my writing classes who did not understand the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. So let me begin at the very beginning, even at the risk of offending you, by presenting such rudimentary information. Novels, short stories and most plays and movie scripts are fictional. They are imaginary with characters and circumstances born in the writer's mind. They do not represent true reality, although they may have been inspired by a real person, event or circumstance. Fictional genres include romance, historical, adventure, risqué and science fiction books, as well as mysteries and books for children and teens.

Nonfiction categories are very different. They are all reality-oriented. Some are event-based, such as true crime or history. Others deal with subjects such as current events, economics or politics. The nonfiction grouping also includes books on how-to, scientific and technical subjects, business, travel and even memoirs. In later chapters, we will look at each of these areas more closely.

Opportunities are almost limitless for nonfiction writers. The majority of articles published in magazines and newspapers are nonfiction. Trade journals that serve a wide variety of occupations and specialties represent a very hungry market always looking for solidly based articles in their field. They offer an excellent outlet for retirees whose years of service in a particular field gives them great insight and expertise. In addition to articles on business written for trades and for general magazines, the corporate world offers opportunities to write for house organs, magazines or newsletters published by a company to pass information to its own staff or to use as promotional tools. Companies often seek part-time freelance writers to assist in writing copy for their public relations or advertising departments. As a highly experienced veteran, you may find this a rewarding way to stay in touch with the line of work to which you devoted so many years.



It is imperative that you heed Connie Emerson's advice if you decide to build your writing career on your past vocational experience. Make certain that you are current, fully updated in your thinking on the subject. Has technology or progress of some other sort passed you by? If so, there is research to do, most of which should be relatively easy based on your familiarity with the subject and the contacts you left behind when you retired.

If you have kept up with advances and changes in your field, you may qualify to *ghost write* (although you write the piece, the person who paid you to write it is listed as the author) a book or article for an executive who will give you the general guidelines of the piece he/she seeks, but cannot take the time or doesn't have the writing skills to turn it out. In addition to accepting articles and op-ed essays from the public, newspapers often seek regional *stringers* (part-time reporters) for either their news or sports departments. These part-timers work on a regular basis covering a specific town's council meetings or the competitive sports played by a local high school.

So you see, opportunities for success in the world of words are endless. *Writer's Market*, the 1178-page bible for freelance nonfiction writers, lists 50 different categories of general magazines for the consumer and 60 categories of trade journals. The 392 pages cataloguing consumer publications range across the alphabet from magazines serving **A**nimal lovers to **W**omen's periodicals. The 138 pages of alphabetical trade listings begin with **A**dvertising, marketing and public relations and end with **V**eterinary medicine. The directory is updated annually to maintain currency. This description of the book is based on the 2007 edition.



WORDS OF WISDOM

In *The Writer's Guide to Conquering the Magazine Market*, author Connie Emerson counsels: "You don't have to be a Harvard biz school grad to write business pieces. But you must be accurate and willing to do your research thoroughly....The successful writer is one who keeps abreast of articles and subject matter currently in demand."



Writer's Market contains an enormous amount of additional information, including directories of book publishers, small presses, literary agents and articles on various aspects of writing. It is a valuable tool for anyone who chooses to write with any degree of frequency. While I strongly recommend purchasing your own copy, *Writer's Market* can be found in most library reference rooms.

CAN I REALLY MAKE A BUCK?

While pursuing a steady routine in front of your computer may never make you wealthy (although first timers have been known to reach best seller lists and the resulting big bucks), supplementing your fixed income is a welcome addition to the joy of seeing your name and ideas in print, especially in these days of economic uncertainty.

It is exciting to read of huge—sometimes seven-figure—advances for both fiction and nonfiction books. Forget them. In today's bottom line-driven publishing industry, only celebrities, well established authors and politicians ever see checks that large. The average *advance* (monies a publisher advances to you against your future royalties to help defray some expenses while you are still completing or fine-tuning your book) is limited to the four or at most five-figure bracket, and for unknowns it is usually at the bottom of that scale.



WORDS OF WISDOM

In their book *Give 'Em What They Want*, authors Blythe Camenson and Marshall Cook, counsel: "What about that \$17 million Stephen King got just for signing his contract? Your advance will have considerably fewer zeroes to the left of the decimal point... (But) if you fulfill the terms of your contract and submit an acceptable manuscript, the advance is yours to keep, even if your book goes directly to remainder-table oblivion."



In the periodicals universe, compensation for articles varies widely. Much like the cost of advertising, pay scales are generally based upon circulation. The high-paying majors (from \$500 to \$2,500) are generally off limits to beginners. Start-up authors can anticipate receiving anywhere from \$50 from a small publication to perhaps \$100 to \$200 if their article is accepted by a larger newspaper or a mid-sized magazine. However, that's not as glum as it sounds. Most freelancers are clever enough to multiply the earnings of a single article by selling it to several publications, as long as they are sure the areas of circulation don't overlap. This is especially true of newspapers, where articles can be sold to prestigious regional papers from coast to coast, and in many cases even multiple papers in the same state where the circulation boundaries don't clash. It takes very little additional effort to send out these multiple submissions, and the return can aggregate to a figure that is comparable to what a single major pays or even more.

EVEN DISCIPLINE CAN BE FUN

If the challenge of what it means to become a writer has excited you and reinforced your resolve to join this glorious fraternity, it's now time to get down to specifics. But before we move on to the next chapter, I want to return to a theme I stressed at the beginning of this chapter: discipline. It is the downfall of many a would-be writer. Like any other artistic creation, a work of literature will never come to life unless the author is willing to stay the course.



WORDS OF WISDOM

University of Mississippi Professor David Galef states in *Poets & Writers Magazine*: "I once took an informal poll at an artists colony and found that most of the people there believed persistence to be almost as important as talent. Writers need a daily regimen—waiting for the thunderbolt is too uncertain."



In that issue of *Poets & Writers* magazine, Professor Galef who also serves as administrator of graduate level creative writing programs at the University, wrote, “A work of art is 10 percent inspiration, 90 percent perspiration.” Years before, Thomas Edison went even further. He declared that “Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” But don’t allow yourself to think of discipline as a negative. Just as you probably wouldn’t dream of going to sleep without first brushing your teeth, any function performed regularly becomes an intricate part of your lifestyle. As author Charlie Shed promises in his book *If I Can Write, You Can Write*, discipline actually can be fun. It becomes part of your regular writing routine. For many, like “yours truly,” those hours spent at the computer are a welcome escape from the hubbub of daily life. Most of us who have graduated from full-time work to full days of freedom now find more than enough hours to meet our responsibilities and enjoy the relaxation, hobbies and recreation we looked forward to for so many years. Yet we still religiously devote two, three or more hours a day to writing. Take advantage. *Carpe diem! Carpe Retirement!* Do it all.

Join me now as we get into the nuts and bolts of writing. The next chapter will show you how to trawl for ideas, determine the track you want to follow and move you from thinking to actually doing.