

How to Be a Working Writer

A Sobering Thought

Very few authors make a living from writing books.

The Starting Point

- Learn the craft of writing and hone your skills. (Would you think about leaving your day job to start a career as an auto mechanic without any training as a mechanic? Then don't leave your day job to become a writer without a comparable level of experience.)
- Become familiar with the industry and the people.
- Get connected.
- Think beyond the book.
- Know what it takes to run a business.

Advantages of Being a Working Writer

- Independence
- Flexibility – enables you to invest as few or as many hours as you wish
- You control how much money you make (rather than working for an employer at a flat rate).
- You can work in your jammies from a recliner, if you choose.
- You can create a schedule that works for you.
- No big overhead expenses
- You can work even when you're out of town. (Or is that a disadvantage?)

Disadvantages

- People who don't respect your time
- Responsible for insurance, withholding taxes, and other expenses
- Isolation
- Distractions
- Your work is always in front of you.
- Temptation to work too many hours and neglect everything else

The Value of a 3-Legged Stool

What legs can you add to your stool?

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Am I self-motivated and disciplined?
- Can I multitask?
- How do I feel about marketing myself?
- Can I meet deadlines?
- Do I relate well to people?
- Can I interact in a professional way?
- Do I have a good attitude?
- Do I have confidence in my work?
- Am I organized and good at record-keeping?
- Do I have perseverance?
- What are my personal goals?
- Do I want to work full time or part time?
- What are my financial needs?

Possible Streams of Income

Tips:

- Learn how to use the market guide. (www.christianwritersmarketguide.com for the Christian market and www.writersmarket.com for the general market)
- Familiarize yourself with the markets and the types of things they publish.
- For companies not listed in the market guide, search websites for guidelines and contact info.
- Take a trip through a Christian bookstore or a trade show such as CPE.
- Be observant. (Everything you read was written by someone. Why not you?)
- Take advantage of opportunities as they arise.



It's time to BRAINSTORM.

First, let's take an imaginary walk through a Christian bookstore.

What opportunities for writers can we find?

Writers are service providers. Think about related services you could provide.

- Speaker
- Conference director
- Conference teacher
- Workshop presenter
- Event planner

- Editor (If that looks okay to you, perhaps editing isn't a good fit.)
- Book doctor
- Ghostwriter/collaborator
- Virtual assistant
- Social media director
- Consultant
- Coach
- Mentor
- Publicist
- Transcriptionist
- Typesetter
- Researcher
- Copywriter
- Speech writer
- Other services such as writing book proposals or back cover copy, manuscript evaluations and critiques, writing grant proposals, compiling newsletters, creating résumés, writing obituaries, writing web content or ad copy, and more

A few other possible revenue streams:

- Advertising
- Affiliate marketing
- Podcasting
- Paid subscription programs (newsletters, etc. – Substack?)
- Travel writing
- Syndicated columns
- And so much more

Think about potential products you could create and opportunities for passive income.

Passive income works while you are doing something else (like sleeping). You are not limited by your available time.

Tips from Michael Hyatt (5 ways to get paid multiple times for the same work)

- Could you turn your expertise into a product?
- Could you turn a series of blog posts or podcasts into an ebook or book?
- Could you turn your coaching or consulting into products?
- Could you turn a speech into a product?
- Could you turn a live event into an online training experience?

Rob Eagar (Wildfire Marketing) said, "If you limit your message to just a book, then you limit both your income and influence. But when you focus on turning your book's content into other formats, the revenue potential can be endless. For example, a nonfiction book can be turned into speaking seminars, consulting, coaching sessions, webinars, online courses, etc. A fiction book can generate income from

associated audio book formats, movie rights, short story ebooks, sequels, prequels, etc. The options are numerous.”

Here are a few examples of products Terry Whalin created:

- Turn Your Blog into a Money-Maker: <http://bucksforblog.com/>
- Make Money Writing and Selling Small Reports: <http://bit.ly/mwassr>
- Sell Photos Online: <http://moneywithphotos.com/>
- Make Your Own Online Course: <http://bit.ly/yourmem>
- List Building Tycoon: <http://bit.ly/t2W1zy>

Think about items you could create to sell on product tables at events or even through your website.

Writers are creative people. Let yourself think way beyond the book. Imagine the things you could do.

Remember our pretend walk through a Christian bookstore? Get ideas there.

More Questions to Ask Yourself

- What are my areas of giftedness or expertise?
- What are my passions?
- What do I know that others don't?
- What can I do that others can't?
- What services could I provide?
- What kind of clients do I want to work with?
- What products could I create?
- How can I take what I know and make money with it?
- How can I repurpose my material?

Networking/Connections/Relationships

Building relationships is foundational to every writing career.

- Understand the value of a business card.
- Attend conferences.
- Join organizations.
- Connect on social media.
- Get in front of your target audience or potential clientele as much as possible.
- Get in good with editors and publishers by providing quality work. (That is the beginning of a good relationship.)
- Be nice to people.

Getting Known/Promoting Your Services

- Business cards – Always have them with you.
- Website – Represent yourself well.
- Online venues
- Email tagline
- Bio – Always provide a link to your website, online portfolio, or anywhere else you’re active. When your writing makes an impression, one of the first things a reader will ask is, “Who wrote this?”
- Promotional materials/brochures
- Social media, blog, etc.
- Create free resources.
- Occasionally offer free content for sites with significant traffic.
- Writers conferences – As you make connections with other writers and industry professionals, let them be aware of the services you provide.
- Organizations – Get involved with an organization like The Christian PEN (Christian Proofreaders and Editors Network) or others.
- Writing forums and groups
- Quality work
- Word of mouth
- Testimonials
- Ads

Money Matters

A few things to consider:

- Experience
- Skill level
- Reputation
- Areas of expertise
- Business acumen
- Expenses
- Project details
- Added benefits
- Turnaround time needed
- Your financial requirements
- Do you charge by the page, hour, word, or project?
- If you’re a coach or consultant, do you offer package deals?
- Is it okay to do some work for free?
- Do you take payment in installments?
- Invoicing
- How will you receive payment?

Tips:

- Research rates online. You'll discover they vary widely.
- Ask other writers what they charge.
- The Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA) has a rate chart on their website (<https://www.the-efa.org/rates/>). It shows median rate ranges for a variety of services based on a survey of EFA members. It's helpful to see what others are charging. It's also good if you're in a bind about what to charge. You can justify your rates by pointing clients to the chart.

A couple of helpful articles:

- "How to Price Your Writing Services" by Jennifer Xue -- <https://prowritingaid.com/art/694/How-to-Price-Your-Writing-Services.aspx>
- "How to Set your Freelance Editing Rates" (June 2, 2022) – <https://blog.reedsy.com/freelancer/how-to-set-your-freelance-editing-rates/>

Professionalism/Etiquette**A pro . . .**

- Follows guidelines.
- Honors deadlines.
- Thinks about the readers' or clients' needs.
- Accepts rejection and moves forward.
- Gives back.
- Produces quality work. (Just kidding. Quality work.)
- Never stops learning.
- Promotes.
- Communicates effectively.
- Appreciates their readers and/or clients.
- Listens to their clients' concerns.

A couple of conference etiquette tips:

- If you pitch an idea to a publisher or agent, and you're asked to send in a proposal or manuscript, do it. It's amazing how many people waste that fabulous opportunity by not following through.
- Don't stalk publishing professionals. They are at conferences to help you, but they need their private space as well. DO NOT follow them into the restroom and try pitching an idea under (or over) the bathroom stall.

Small Stuff that Makes a Difference

- Business cards
- Email signature line

- A bio
- Links
- Responding to emails and phone calls
- Thank you notes
- Warm fuzzies (the extra touch)
- Kindness

Necessities for Setting Up Shop

- A workplace of your own (preferably a distraction-free, clutter-free, work-conducive, peaceful, comfortable space)
 - A desktop, table, (or lap) for your computer
 - Good lighting
 - A flat surface to spread out materials, notes, etc.
 - A place to file documents, receipts, notes, correspondence, etc.
 - A place to store supplies
 - A shelf to hold reference books and resources
 - A good chair
- A computer
- An internet connection that works (Grrr!)
- An email account
- A phone
- Market guides
- Basic writing supplies
- Post-it-Notes, scraps of paper, envelopes, napkins, or similar items for jotting things down when thoughts hit you at inconvenient moments 🐛
- Professional letterhead
- A printer/copier along with paper and extra ink
- A method to receive payments from clients and for use at product tables
- A separate bank account
- A system for keeping records

Business-Related Matters

- Are you a hobby or a business? That determines tax write-offs.
- Licenses
- Research tax laws in your state – www.taxjar.com/states
- Business structure – Talk to your accountant about what you need to do.

Per the IRS.gov website: When beginning a business, you must decide what form of business entity to establish. Your form of business determines which income tax return form you have to file. The most common forms of business are the sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, and S corporation. A

Limited Liability Company (LLC) is a business structure allowed by state statute. Legal and tax considerations enter into selecting a business structure.

On another business-related note, it's important to protect yourself. Jane Friedman's *The Business of Being a Writer* includes information about contracts and legal issues. You can also find in-depth guidance on contracts and contract language at her website, www.businessofwriting.org. See her pdf titled "Contracts 101: The Grant of Rights Clause" (found under the supplemental resources tab).

Business and Legal Forms for Authors and Self-Publishers (by Tad Crawford, an attorney) is another helpful resource.

Recordkeeping

- If you're going to be a working writer, you need to track expenses and income. Find a system that works for you. Some use a product like Quicken Home and Business. Others create their own spreadsheets. Here are a couple types of free online bookkeeping software: www.waveapp.com and www.zipbooks.com. With a little research, you'll discover others.
- Ordinary and necessary costs you incur in running your business can be deducted from your income.
- Keep receipts.
- Create a system for tracking the status of projects, submissions, ideas, and clients.
- Track accounts receivable.

Self-Care (Physical, Spiritual, Mental)

A healthy balance is extremely important. Our physical health, spiritual health, and mental health work together and affect each other.

Watch out for these things:

- Negativity (from yourself, other people, and the media)
- The comparison game
- Imposter syndrome
- Perfectionism

Realize that our minds are creative and like to play games with us. They can take us down a dangerous, unhealthy path.

Good habits to practice:

- Rehearse truth and repeat it often. (This is important because the devil is a big fat LIAR.)
- Use positive self-talk.
- Hang out with positive, encouraging people.
- Remember God's hand in what you're doing.
- Express gratitude.

- Give yourself grace.
- Focus on what you can control rather than what you can't.

When you feel overwhelmed by your workload:

(These are suggestions Michael Hyatt shared on a 2012 blog entry.)

- Acknowledge you can't do it all.
- Accept the fact some things won't get done at all.
- Practice workload triage.
- Categorize your tasks by priority.
- Practice intentional neglect.
- Do the next most important thing next.

Tips from Cec Murphey for self-care:

- Fill the well.
- Reward yourself.
- Find ways to break the routine.
- Get into a physical exercise program.
- Watch your eating habits.
- Avoid too much isolation.
- Join professional groups.
- Join nonprofessional groups.
- Maintain structure.
- Make online friends.
- Watch for burnout.
- Others

Random Tips, Tidbits, and Profound Thoughts

- Call it a business and take it seriously.
- Have goals and a plan to accomplish those goals.
- Goals are great motivators. Maybe rather than a goal to have work accepted by a certain publisher (out of your control), have a goal of submitting work regularly (in your control).
- To be effective, goals should meet three criteria: measurable, attainable, and meaningful.
- Take advantage of resources available to you.
- Knowing people is as important as being a skilled writer.
- Start small to learn the craft and build credits.
- Writing small pieces can lead to new connections and bigger projects.
- Use your strengths and develop a strategy. Good business people develop plans.
- While working writers are focused on the work at hand, they also need to be aware of, and focused on, the long game. Examples: (1) Make sure you have product in time for upcoming events. (2) Think about book size when going to print and which size is better for mailing and carry-on luggage.

- If you're a slower writer, consider writing articles based on "evergreen" topics. You won't have to worry so much about deadlines because the article can be ready to go before submitting a query.
- The laborer is worthy of his/her hire.
- Explore new tools and consistently use older ones.
- Continue knocking on new doors and looking for opportunities in spite of past failures and rejections.
- Rejection is part of being a writer.
- Consistency and perseverance are key traits of every working writer.
- Be realistic in your expectations.
- What you do today determines where you'll be tomorrow.
- If you do nothing, expect nothing.
- Never stop learning.

See? I told you they were random. 🤖

Recommended Resources

A Variety of Helpful Online Resources for Writers

- <https://christianwritersinstitute.com>
- <https://www.writersdigest.com>
- <https://www.booksandsuch.com/blog>
- <https://stevelaube.com/blog/>
- <https://thewriteconversation.blogspot.com>
- www.jerryjenkins.com
- www.thewritinglife.ws
- www.yourbestwritinglife.buzzsprout.com
- <https://www.startawildfire.com/> (Click on the free tips tab.)
- Many others, including most agents' and writers conferences' blogs

Books

- *The Christian Writers Market Guide* (www.christianwritersmarketguide.com and *Writer's Market* (www.writersmarket.com))
- *The Chicago Manual of Style* (The 18th edition will be available in 2024.)
- *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style: 4th Edition*
- *The Associated Press Stylebook*
- *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*
- *Jumpstart Your Publishing Dreams* (Terry Whalin)
- *The Business of Being a Writer* (Jane Friedman)
- *Starting Your Career as a Freelance Writer* (Moirra Anderson Allen)
- *Business and Legal Forms for Authors and Self-Publishers* (by Tad Crawford, an attorney)
- *Ghostwriting: The Murphey Method* (Cecil Murphey)

- *The Chicago Guide for Freelance Editors: How to Take Care of Your Business, Your Clients, and Yourself from Start-Up to Sustainability* (A 2024 release from Erin Brenner)

For Those Interested in Songwriting

- www.songsteps.com (Dave Clark is a multi-award-winning songwriter with a huge list of songwriting credits. He helps songwriters take their work to the next level.)
- www.nashvillechristiansongwriters.com (You'll find lots of resources, courses, inspiration, and help here. NCS equips and supports songwriters of all levels of experience—from beginners to those seasoned in their profession. The founder, John Chisum, is a veteran songwriter, publisher, and Christian music industry professional.)
- Article: "How to Write Song Lyrics – 10 Quick Steps for Success"
www.nashvillechristiansongwriters.com/how-to-write-song-lyrics

For Those Interested in Visual Media

- www.icvm.com (International Christian Visual Media)
- www.actoneprogram.com (Per website: Act One is a Christian community of entertainment industry professionals who train and equip storytellers to create works of truth, goodness, and beauty.)
- www.finaldraft.com (screenwriting software)
- *That's Not the Way It Works* (Bob Saenz)
- *The Screenwriter's Bible* (David Trottier)
- *The Hollywood Standard* (Christopher Riley)

For Those Interested in Editing and Related Services

Jayna Baas of The Christian PEN recommended the following audio and video recordings in a recent blog post. (Go to <https://penconeditors.com/audio-video/> to find them.)

- Starting Your Freelance Editing Business, Christi McGuire, 2018 and 2019
- Grow Your Business, Rebecca Miller, 2020
- Tax Tips for Freelancers, Chris Morris, 2020
- Business of Editing, Deb Haggerty, 2022

You'll find a wide range of resources for Christian editors and proofreaders here:

<https://thechristianpen.com/resources/>

PEN Tips Blog: <https://thechristianpen.com/pen-tips/>

<https://thechristianpen.com/> (Christian Proofreaders and Editors Network)

<https://peninstitute.com/> (courses for Christian editors)

<https://penconeditors.com/> (a conference for editors and proofreaders)