

PRAISE FOR SIMON WHALEY

“One of the clearest, most informative books on creative writing and publishing that I have had the pleasure to study. It is concise, humorously written, and I gained a lot of useful tips, wrinkles and knowledge - Simon is obviously very thorough with his research. I highly recommend it to my fellow writers.”

Amazon Reviewer - Unicorn

“I would challenge anyone to find anything missing in this how to guide for article writers. Best of all, I enjoy Simon's easy to read style, lively, motivating but never patronising.”

Amazon Reviewer - Solange

“Excellent no-nonsense stuff. Good advice backed up by personal experience.”

Amazon Reviewer - MT

“Simon has written a book that covers everything involved in writing articles for magazines, from finding ideas and sending out pitches to submitting the final piece complete with photographs. There are helpful examples throughout and plenty of useful hints and tips.”

Amazon Reviewer - Scribbles

THE COMPLETE ARTICLE
WRITER

SIMON WHALEY

Copyright © 2015 by Simon Whaley

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the author, who can be contacted by email at contact@simonwhaley.co.uk

First published in 2015

Revised in 2019

This revised edition published in 2020

NEWSLETTER SIGN UP

If you'd like to stay up to date with my writing news and life from the Welsh Borders, fill out the details below and you'll receive my occasional newsletter (and it will be occasional, because I'll be too busy writing other things to bombard you with regular newsletters!). And, it goes without saying, that under GDPR regulations, you'll be able to opt out at any time.

<http://www.simonwhaley.co.uk/newsletter/>

OTHER BOOKS BY SIMON WHALEY

One Hundred Ways For A Dog To Train Its Human

One Hundred Muddy Paws For Thought

Puppytalk: 50 Ways To Make Friends With Your Puppy

Fundraising For A Community Project

Best Walks in the Welsh Borders

The Little Book of Alternative Garden Wisdom

The Bluffer's Guide to Hiking

The Bluffer's Guide to Dogs

The Positively Productive Writer

Photography for Writers

Ten Teatime Tales 1

Ten Teatime Tales 2

Running A Writers' Circle

The Bluffer's Guide to Banking

Wunderlist for Writers

The Business of Writing - Volume 1

The Business of Writing - Volume 2

INTRODUCTION

Stand in front of the magazine shelves in any large store and the chances are you'll see hundreds, if not thousands, of publications, ranging from quarterlies, monthlies, weeklies and even the daily newspapers. Although if, like me, you're over six feet tall you may have to get down onto your hands and knees to see the publications on the bottom shelf. (Why do shops do that?) But consider this as a mere ink spot in the inkwell of publishing opportunities, for there are hundreds of thousands of publications, ranging from freebie magazines given away in supermarkets, banks and other retailers to in-house publications produced to keep staff informed in companies up and down the country.

Now, take a step back (without knocking into the shelf of magazines behind you) and reconfigure what you see before you. Don't think of them as individual publications. Instead, think of them as collections of articles. Every single article was written by someone. And tomorrow the daily newspapers need another batch of articles, next week the weeklies will need filling with new material, next month the monthlies will need a

complete change of articles and in three month's time the quarterlies will need new features too.

The article market is HUGE. Don't believe me? Go to your nearest library and, in the reference section, check out *The Willings Press Guide*. You'll find it comes in a couple of volumes, covering the whole world. Its primary readership is advertising companies, but if you're looking for magazines covering a specific subject matter (such as footballing leprechauns) then this is where you'll find them. (Footballing leprechauns may be taking the point a bit too far here, but you get my drift.) In fact, just spending a couple of hours browsing through *The Willings Press Guide* could be time well spent. These volumes prove that what your nearest news-store carries on its shelves is merely a snapshot of what's available out there.

So, the article market is vast. Yes, there are some publications that are easier to break into than others, and this book will show you how to assess that. Having said that, no editor worth their salary will dismiss you if you have the perfect idea for a particular magazine's readership. Of course, you may need to work harder to get them to consider your idea, but don't let the glossiness, or the celebrity-named writers regularly published within it, put you off from approaching them.

Writing articles is one of the easiest ways to break into print. If you want to get a novel published you have to write at least 80,000 words before you can even begin approaching editors or agents. Although you can sell a non-fiction book idea to a publisher with the first 5,000 words, you may still need to write another 45,000 words before you get close to seeing the finished published product. For both of these you could be looking at a couple of years between starting to write the book and holding the printed copy in your hands.

Articles are quicker. Submit your work to a monthly publication and it may appear in print within eight weeks. Weekly

publications can use material quicker, dailies even sooner. But you need to time your submissions appropriately.

You don't need a degree in media studies to write an article. You just need to be knowledgeable in the subject matter you're writing about. And, believe it or not, we're all experts in something, even if it is the ten best things to do on a lazy Sunday in your pyjamas.

WHAT IS AN ARTICLE?

Firstly, an article is a piece of non-fiction. It's not a short story, although, confusingly, some sections of the media do refer to non-fiction pieces as a *news story*. Whilst it is possible to be creative with non-fiction, an article draws upon real life. It deals with truth and facts.

Sometimes you may come across the term *feature*. Both terms are often used interchangeably, although in some areas of the media the article is seen as the main body of text, whilst a feature includes everything else that accompanies it, such as photos and further information sections, like contact information, website addresses and useful telephone numbers.

There's no hard-and-fast rule about how long an article is. Those who've been writing articles for many years moan that they're getting shorter (the articles, that is, not the writers). A publication that may have used 1500-word pieces ten years ago may now only use 1,000-word pieces, or even 800-words. That's not to say that publications don't accept longer articles. Many do. Some history magazines, for example, use pieces of up to 5,000 words. Yet there are many other publications that only use articles of 600 words. It's not all about space either. A magazine might prefer 900 words for their one page articles, but only want 1200 words for their two-page (double-page spread) pieces. (It's because they may use more photos for a double-page spread.)

Although in this book I'm discussing writing primarily for the magazine market, newspapers use articles too. Indeed, some of my own articles have appeared in the national press. (Be warned of newspaper photographers who turn up with a wide-angle lens. Whilst it didn't distort my text, when the piece was published my eyes kept being drawn to the photo of myself and the way my forehead appeared to curve into the centre of the photo.) However, articles differ from journalistic news reporting because they have a different structure. Read a newspaper story and you'll see that the journalist tries to answer the six key journalistic questions in the first one or two sentences. Those six journalistic questions are:

Who?

What?

Why?

Where?

When?

How?

Mark Smith was triumphant yesterday when he was first to cross the finish line in London's first fancy-dress-only marathon, in a time of five hours 32 minutes and seven seconds, helping him raise over £5,000 for charity.

That one sentence tells the reader a lot of information. Essentially, it encapsulates the whole story. What might follow expands further upon that information. That's because, when space is short and a sub-editor has to cut some text, a news piece is always cut from the bottom upwards, ensuring the reader doesn't lose any of the piece's vital information. If a newspaper devotes the first five pages to news stories, and it needs to slot in

another news story onto those pages, then cuts will have to be made to the existing stories on those pages.

With an article, although an editor may tweak a piece to cut it by a few words, if something urgent crops up and the space is needed for something else, generally-speaking the whole article will be cut ... and, hopefully, postponed for use in a future issue. Because of this, an article doesn't have to begin with a journalistic opening. This gives article writers more freedom and creativity.

This is also down to how we read articles. When we read the news, we read the first two or three sentences, to grab the key information, and if the piece is of interest we'll read on. If not, we'll move onto another news story, but we still know the key facts of the event. This makes it possible to get a good snapshot of the world's events, within a matter of minutes, simply by reading the opening sentences of each news story.

An article, on the other hand, is usually designed to be read at a more leisurely pace. Readers take time out to sit down and consume articles, perhaps as part of a tea break, or to help them relax on the train or bus journey home after a strenuous day at work, or even sitting out in the garden. As a result, article readers are looking to be entertained. And that's how I look at articles. Whereas journalistic news stories are there to inform, articles have two roles to fulfil: to inform and to entertain.

WHY WRITE AN ARTICLE?

So why do I write articles? Well, for a start, it's one of the ways I earn my living. Having to generate an income is certainly a good motivator when I sit down at my desk each morning. But there are other reasons too. I think many writers enjoy sharing knowledge and experiences. An article is a great way of helping others.

Travel writers want to share the wonderful places on earth they've experienced with others. Once you've been somewhere, you've picked up lots of tips and advice, as well as made a few mistakes along the way. (Don't hire a self-catering holiday property with a spiral staircase when you have a dog that insists on sleeping in the same room as you. Highly polished wooden steps that go around in circles are a dog's worst nightmare, and an owner's too, when you see the damage a dog's claws can do to those highly polished treads.) Still, as I say, the mistakes we make are also learning opportunities for readers to draw upon, should we decide to own up to the errors of our ways.

People write articles to share other experiences too, both good and bad. Some people like to write about the bad things that have happened in their life in the hope that some good will come from their experience. Readers love human interest stories, even if it is just from the point of view of *there, but for the grace of God, go I!*

As humans we grow by sharing knowledge. If you have some information you think others may benefit from then put it down in an article. The chances are there's a magazine with a readership who will appreciate it. One of my first illustrated articles was called *Freshen Up Your Fishpond* and gave readers advice in ten easy steps about how to clean out their garden fishpond. It was one of those annual events we did as a family during the school holidays at Easter. Over the years we'd refined our process, and so the article offered other readers an opportunity to learn our successful method, rather than waste several years getting to the stage that we'd eventually arrived at.

The eagle-eyed amongst you will have spotted that I've used the word *experience* a few times in this section. That's because if you've experienced something, you have knowledge of it. If you've experienced it lots of times then you'll have gathered lots of information about it, which means you're an expert on it. If

you've raised one-horned, long-haired goats for six years on a remote Scottish island then the chances are there isn't much about raising one-horned, long-haired goats you don't know. Hooray! That makes you a one-horned, long-haired goat-raising expert.

Some people write articles because it helps raise their professional profile. When you're known as an expert on a subject editors may come to you, asking if you can write an article for them. When you've had several of your articles published, your thoughts may then turn to producing something longer, such as a non-fiction book. Publishers look more favourably upon writers who've already had some articles published on the topic they're writing about.

Then there are the people who just enjoy writing, many of whom enjoyed essay writing at school. Articles can help fulfil that need to write something relatively short, that still has some point to it.

Articles can be a quick way into print. They can help you share your knowledge with others who are eager to learn, and they can help you share your experiences. They can produce a useful income stream, if you write them regularly, and they can turn you into a mini-expert. They can also be the stepping stone to bigger projects, such as books.

So, what are you waiting for? Oh, yes! That's right. First of all, we need an idea ...