

How to become a science writer

Getting started

- Science communication courses
- Internship/work experience
- Just do it!
- Get published – even if you don't get paid (try University newspaper, charity newsletters) to build a portfolio of work (editors usually want to see a sample if they don't know you)

What to write about? Ideas are everywhere – but may take time to mature/think through. Suggestions...

- Academic organisations – eg Royal Society of Chemistry; join, go to their meetings and listen to scientists presenting their work
- Get on press release list of universities, research organisations for story ideas
- Read widely, think laterally for new angles and spin offs on topics

Niche v generalist. Decide – do you want to be known as a specialist in a certain area of science? Or do you want to write about a wide range of topics? You can always switch between these two options – or combine them.

Types of science writing

- News (stressful, tight deadlines, need to get hold of people for quotes)
- Features (lot of research)
- Books (need stamina)
- Web/blog (special skills, no clear guidelines, but huge potential)
- Corporate materials (government, organisations, universities, companies – often need help writing editing reports, brochures, leaflets)

Freelance v staff

The beauty of the freelance life

- ✓ Freedom!
- ✓ No office politics/routines
- ✓ No limit on earnings
- ✓ Can explore more opportunities

And the downside

X Financial insecurity

X Outside the publisher/editor 'loop' – working in a vacuum, at mercy of other people's poor project management

X Paperwork – tax, VAT, secretarial/admin

X Multiple deadline stress or 'no work' void – no happy medium (known as 'feast or famine')

Skills needed to be a successful freelance science writer

- Business development
- Time management
- Financial management
- Interviewing/good telephone manner/confidence
- Ability to keep up with and exploit IT – need to have website and blog and update regularly
- Networking

Most important.....

1. DEADLINES
2. NETWORKING
3. BE PROFESSIONAL, HAVE A GLOBAL OUTLOOK, FROM DAY ON
4. WRITE (SOMETHING) EVERY DAY

Resources

Events

World Conference of Science Journalists: London, 30 June-2 July – www.wcsj2009.org – massive programme, great for networking, skill building

British Science Festival Guildford 5-10 September

<http://www.britishtscienceassociation.org/web/BritishScienceFestival/> - good for ideas, meeting scientists, networking

Organisation

Association of British Science Writers – www.absw.org.uk (also on LinkedIn, Facebook) – 'must join' organisation, which offers help, support and information to new writers.

Business support

Business Link = www.businesslink.gov.uk – free support and advice to small businesses, workshops on tax, business development etc

Networking

LinkedIn – www.linkedin.com – professional networking organisation, upload a profile to supplement your website, potential for work opportunities, contacting experts for quotes

Jobs

Gorkana – www.gorkana.com – media communications site with jobs, contacts with PR companies who can give you story ideas

Journalism.co.uk – www.journalism.co.uk – essential site, jobs, news, freelance profile

Publications

Myslexia – www.myslexia.co.uk – inspiring magazine for women who write

Writing Magazine – www.writingmagazine.co.uk – covers all kinds of writing, lots of news, advice, ideas, interviews

Writers' News – www.writersnews.co.uk – companion to Writing Magazine

And finally...

David RM Software www.davidrm.com – journal writing tool - makes it easy to write every day

www.thecareercoach.co.uk – Ros Toynbee's career workshops – practical and inspirational.

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