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Write Stories People Want to Read

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About the Author

Matt Cowell has been writing stories and articles under various names for several years.

He started writing stories as a relaxation from his high [pressure job](#) and is now a full-time writer after retiring from his full-time position.

Matt says that writing is a wonderful way to keep your [mind](#) active, express your ideas and it can also help pay the bills!

He wrote this book to help others achieve their story writing [goals](#) by improving their methods and avoiding the simple errors which can cause unnecessary [frustration](#) and stress along the way.

Matt says, "I'm not an academic but I've been fairly successful in various types of writing. Short stories have always been my favorite form and I'm glad to be able to help others make their mark in this type of writing."

Introduction

This book is based on years of writing various kinds of stories and carefully reviewing the feedback I've had from editors, friends, and readers generally.

I got the title from an [interview](#) I read about Mr. Rupert Murdoch after he acquired the Wall Street Journal. He was asked his advice for journalists at "mid-level" newspapers. He was quoted as saying that he would advise them to write "stories that people want to read rather than ones which might win Pulitzer Prizes."

That's great advice for any kind of [writing](#). Some people write to please themselves but most writers want their material to be read and appreciated, or even acted on, by their readers.

How to Write

I have covered many points which will help you improve your stories and your presentation, whatever subject or genre you are focused on.

The suggestions in this book about preparing and presenting your work are all based on personal experience, discussions I've had and advice I got from other writers.

I don't guarantee that you will make lots of [money](#) if you follow them. Anybody that gives you that sort of promise should be avoided because there are so many factors which they have no knowledge or control of.

My ebook is intended to help you save time and effort by avoiding some of the mistakes which many writers make and help you to be more productive.

I believe that we all have some natural ability to form and express our ideas and viewpoint. But, while writing is something which most of us have received some [training](#) about in our early years, it was not really focused on giving us the [skills](#) and knowledge needed to write good stories which other people will pay to read.

I have concentrated on helping you to make what you write as attractive as possible to your intended readers and publishers.

This book is focused on [writing](#) fiction, but many of the points which are discussed will probably also help you with writing and publishing non-fiction as well.

The skill for storytelling which you are developing is also very valuable for a writer that is focused on producing non-fiction. Incorporating the elements we discuss in non-fiction will help to keep those readers interested in our factual writing. That's something which I have proved with my own article writing.

I don't expect that you will follow all of my suggestions all the time. But, if you are just starting to write stories or have not been getting the results you expected from your efforts to this point, I suggest that you try these methods. They work for me and other writers that I've shared them with at seminars and workshops which I've either run or attended and club meetings.

As you start to increase your knowledge, you will probably adapt my suggestions to your own way of working. Successful [writers](#) often break the conventional rules which most of us follow, but they only do that when they are experienced enough to know that they will get the reaction they want.

I suggest that you read the whole book first because every aspect of writing is important. Even if you feel you are very good in some areas there may be a few points which I've included that will be new and helpful to you.

Then you can go back at any time to review those areas which you feel you need to improve.

Most [books](#) about writing say that the most important thing is to write as much as possible but, in my opinion, the most important step to get a story or a book out in front of a possible publisher.

I hope that my book will help you get to that point sooner and better prepared than you are at this stage. I have kept the language simple.

Some comments might seem a bit sharp at times. That's the way I would speak to you if we met at a conference and you asked for my advice.

To conclude this introduction, I'll add a couple of the most important things I've learned which have helped me improve my stories and get more sales.

Avoid the offers of people who want to help you polish or publish your stories. Just ask them for contact details of people in your area who they have helped to some level of [success](#) with their writing.

If you want an agent, wait until you have some stories published; they may start to approach you or ask other writers who they might recommend. Check if their recommendation is from personal experience or just hearsay or reading an [advertisement](#).

The best way to learn to write is to just write. When you have written a story which you are satisfied with, submit it to a suitable publication.

At that point, you are a writer and further advanced than I'd guess about 75% of the people that are attracted to writing.

All writers write, despite the heavy demands on their time from their [family](#), their [job](#) and social commitments.

Television is possibly the most destructive force to our goals to be better and more successful writers. Watching the [box](#) may cause our mood and thinking processes to deteriorate. Most people find it impossible to work effectively on anything creative in the same room as a television which is on.

Switch off the television in the room which you are using to do your writing. Some people believe that [music](#), baroque or New Age, helps them to concentrate better. I work better with a small aquarium bubbling in the background. Use what works for you.

Good Luck and Great Success,

Matt Cowell

Making and Using an Outline

Many [writers](#) understand that they need to prepare an outline and other reference material when they are planning a novel or other long work.

But, I've been told by several people that they don't see that any good could come from investing time and effort in preparing and using an outline for a short story.

It's so short and the fees I get are low, so I would probably be better off using that time to start writing another story.

My view is that the outline is usually worthwhile because it can save you time and effort on even an average length short story.

The length of a short story means that every word must have some effect on the story and the [reader](#), or it must be ruthlessly discarded.

There is also no room for unnecessary actions or events. When you set out brief details of each happening in a [story](#) on a large sheet of paper or a whiteboard, any inconsistencies or false sidetracks are likely to be immediately obvious.

The material you have written about these deleted events, conversations or whatever does not have to be thrown away; put them in your files and you may be able to get more value from them in another story where they are a better fit.

Beginning Your Story

It's very important that you grab your reader's attention right at the beginning of your story or you may lose them because of other material on that page or elsewhere having more appeal to them.

I find that I often spend more time on [writing](#) the beginning of my story than on any other part. It is really worthwhile.

I suggest that you carefully review the opening paragraphs of your story. Can you see another point in the story which you could start from which might draw the reader in better?

This is in line with the habit of many top copywriters who spend as much time on preparing their headline (which equates to the title of a short story) and the opening sentences as they do on the rest of their [advertisement](#).

They say that, if people are not hooked by the opening, they won't keep reading; so they will be lost.

If the opening [lines](#) of your story don't grab the reader, you'll lose them and all your work is wasted.

Timing

Do you start writing as soon as you load your word processing program?

Do you wait for inspiration or for the effects of that latest cup of [coffee](#) to kick in?

If you can train yourself to start writing as soon as the word processing window opens you are on track to produce more good material and be more successful than someone that needs a push to start writing.

You have probably read that the number of magazines which closed last year was some sort of record. Maybe you should wait until the market improves?

I think it's much better to start [writing](#) now. If the market improves, you'll have more experience and knowledge than those who waited until then. You will be on your way. You'll probably be able to get some coaching work for those who didn't get started when you did.

You'll probably also have more in the bank too because you will have got your share of a very large market.

We all have days when the words come slowly. The best answer I have found for that is to start writing anything that comes to your mind.

More quickly you might expect your [mind](#) will start to produce more useful material based on the writing you have been doing before that day.

You can gain an advantage by extending your usual writing session by just fifteen minutes. That extra time when your mind and your [body](#) is in the writing routine can be more productive than adding an extra hour session at a different time each week.

The [theory](#) is that you need time to get your mind attuned before you can start the actual productive part of any work session and, of course, time to ease down and put away your files and other equipment.

So, the fifteen additional minutes can have as much benefit as about an hour given to a separate session.

Description

When you write a short story, you don't have the luxury of being able to describe your main character and their surroundings in detail as you might do if you were writing a thousand page novel.

Description should be brief and only used rarely. That's because readers are likely to skip descriptive passages and may miss the important details which you include in them.

Your best tactic is to show the reader the important points about your characters, their surroundings and the situation through their actions and words rather than just giving them the facts.

You may have a great store of wonderful adjectives and adverbs but it's best to keep them to a minimum.

Use your most direct words and let your readers decorate them in their own [minds](#) according to their own experience and preferences.

Stan Freberg described radio as the theatre of the mind to make the point that, unless we are very experienced, we cannot expect to produce images and emotions as affecting as your readers can do if you give them the best material you can and let their [imagination](#)s add the details which are most interesting to them.

Plot and Outcomes

My definition of a plot is the order that things happen in a story.

The effect that the personal qualities and desires of the characters have on the outcome is an important part of any plot.

If the characters do not affect the outcome and the events do not have a lasting impact on the people, there will be little that will appeal to the reader.

The other important factor in the plot of a story is the conflict between some of the [characters](#) or between one or more characters and the natural or supernatural forces which oppose them. Sometimes, the conflict is an internal one between a character and his or her desires and the [belief](#) system which they have been living by until the present crisis.

This sort of conflict is the basis of all stories. Without conflict and the likelihood of lasting change, we have a program that's not likely to be a story which will interest your readers.

The problem which is the center of the conflict needs to be something of importance to the characters and their prospects for a happy future or even any future at all.

The resolution of the problem should never depend on coincidence, luck, information which has been concealed from the reader or the intervention of third parties that are not directly affected.

These devices will break the bond which you built between your reader with your characters and their efforts to deal with the crisis.

The reader will feel cheated and that feeling will affect their view of any future stories of yours which they see.

Of course, any stories which use these tired overworked devices will not get published. But, the editor that reads these stories will not form a good impression of any writer that uses the old tricks.

The Theme of Your Story

Many people confuse the plot and the theme of a story.

While the plot is bound up with what happens and the effects of the events in the story on the characters, the theme is the message which the writer expects their readers to take with them after reading the story.

This may be a re-affirmation of some common [belief](#) or aspect of human nature. It is usually implied rather than stated as part of the story.

Putting too much emphasis on the theme of your story will turn off many readers.

But, you can subtly display your message through the actions of the characters as they try to deal with the conflict which faces them.

Pacing Your Story

While the beginning of your story needs careful work to grab the readers in a few seconds, you also need to ensure that you provide a constantly interesting series of events through your story to make the [reader](#) feel that the time they invest in reading it is worthwhile.

One important factor in maintaining their interest is pacing. This is a combination of the pace at which you draw the reader through your story and the careful placement of the climax or climaxes which are the high points of the journey.

You might try making a recording of your reading your story aloud. Play back the recording and see if the story flows. If you notice any hesitations or other bumps in your delivery, you might want to review those points in the story before you send it to a publication.

If you are writing for children, you might maintain a fast pace through most of the story.

But, this might not work as well with some kinds of stories for adults. The exceptions might be adventure, war or some crime stories.

Most readers would expect a balance of fast pace with one or more periods of relative calm where they can mentally draw their breath.

Most short stories would not have room for more than, say, two climaxes. One could be substantial and be followed by another, possibly smaller but having a great effect because it is unexpected by the reader.

Finding the Right Ending

I'll discuss some important points about how we might set up the ending for your story first.

How we start our story is equally important but it is useful to have a clear idea about the ending of a story early in its development.

This helps to keep us on track and avoid being sidetracked which is a common problem when [writing](#) short stories.

Easy Endings

You have probably read stories where the main character has had their problem resolved by chance or the intervention of another person rather than their own efforts and ingenuity.

Although this does happen from time to time in real life, readers and editors are unlikely to accept this sort of outcome in a story. They want to read about characters that face and, in most cases, overcome the difficulties through their own efforts.

It's not necessary for a story to have a happy ending. But, it must have an ending that satisfies the reader's expectations.

A story is not always a mirror to real [life](#), of course, but your reader should feel that the outcome of your story is consistent with the abilities of your characters to deal with the problems you put in front of them.

Endings That Satisfy the Reader

The story might end with some of the issues facing the main character still unresolved. That's fine and more like real life than it would be to have everything finalized.

Happy endings are what we all desire but modern readers don't expect them every time.

The best stories engage the reader's interest in your characters so that you're ending leaves them wondering what happened to everyone after the events you wrote about.

Endings with a twist are very popular with readers. But, they will feel cheated if you have not carefully inserted logical, fair clues through the story.

The Importance of Research

Although we are writing fiction, it is essential that we get our facts right.

Through your writing [career](#), you will probably write many stories and some will be set in areas or among groups of people that you have limited knowledge or experience of.

Quite often, some of your readers will know more than you about the people or the countries and customs which you write about. If they find that you make errors in your stories, the experience you promised them is ruined.

Some will avoid your stories in the future and you will probably find that some will complain to you or the editor of the publication which published your flawed work.

This is something which you should try to avoid happening by making reasonable efforts to research the intimate details of the daily [life](#) of the sort of people that you write about.

If you are in doubt about details, leave them out. Or consider putting your characters and events in a setting among people you have a greater knowledge of.

Even if you are writing fantasy or science fiction, you need to keep the effect of the natural laws which operate in your other world consistent. If you let your heroine jump up a hundred feet without great effort, then other characters should be able to perform similar or better feats.

Be careful to do any research through only reliable sources.

There are many sites full of misinformation on the internet, for instance.

The widely used Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>) was created to provide free and accurate information. The people behind the site do their best; but the material on the site can vary greatly in accuracy because almost anyone can alter any information there and it can take some time before misinformation is reported and corrected.

Article sites also vary greatly in quality. Be careful and don't accept these sorts of sites as a final authority.

If you want information about a particular [job](#), [hobby](#) or way of [life](#), you might consider finding someone who is involved with that in your local area. You can usually locate suitable people or organizations through your local phone directory.

I do skim through internet forums which are related to subjects I need more information about. I suggest that you only make personal contact with people through organizations either in your area rather than [online](#) sites.

If you can't find a local organization, look for national offices of organizations related to the subject. They will generally be very happy to put you in contact with their members in your area.

Another source of contact information for organizations is your local library.

You can find out a lot of useful information just by [listening](#) to people you meet or when they are interviewed on television or the internet.

The information you collect and the ideas you create can be put aside for later use. The information needs to be filed in an organized way which ensures that you will be able to find and use it when you find the right time or story.

Imaginative use of Clippings

We all write descriptions, dialogue or interactions which we later discard because it doesn't fit with the flow of the story we are preparing.

I always try to put this material away so that I can have another try at getting full value from it with some other story another time.

I also collect and file small snatches of conversations which catch my ear as I [travel](#) around, such as odd stories and other interesting pieces from the local papers and magazines. Sometimes, I can use some of these as idea starters just as they are. After I've put some time into finding the right characters and location, the story is probably almost completely different to that which was detailed in the clipping I started from.

At other times, I've focused on one snippet and tried to put a different type of person or animal into the odd situation.

Another thing I have done is to try to work up a story from combining two clippings which are usually not related in any way.

I never try to rework someone else's short story because I want to be sure that the story that I end up with is something which I can claim to be entirely mine.

Selecting Your Point of View

The choice of point of view which you tell your story from will have a significant effect on the reader's experience.

Your first choice is whether you will use an emotional tone which is affected by the events in the story or stay objective like a reporter stating the facts and outcomes.

I think that the best choice for a successful short story is to display some emotion which can influence the reader's reaction and help them to more easily identify with your characters and their situations.

The objective type of delivery is better suited for longer stories where you can add more detail, characters, and sub-plots which can keep the readers involved.

But, if you believe that a particular story will work best for you with the less personal form of delivery, go for it.

You probably know that there are basically three viewpoints to choose from; first, second or third person.

Whatever choice you make, you need to be able to keep the reader in the center of the action.

First Person Viewpoint

With this choice, you could speak through the central character. This can be a good place for a new writer to start because it is easy to maintain a consistent voice and viewpoint.

You cannot reveal anything to your readers which is not known, observed or told to that character. However, you can give the reader information which they will understand better than your main character.

You can use the emotions of your hero or heroine to attract the reader to them. As those emotions drive the main character's actions and responses to events in the story and are made clear to the reader, a bond can be formed

between them for the duration of the story; unless the character's reactions are at odds with the reader's own values.

Some writers use their main character's viewpoint but don't give the readers direct access to their [thoughts](#) and feelings. If something personal has to be revealed, the author uses [conversation](#) or some other form of interaction with another character to show it instead of letting the reader inside the character's head.

This keeps the reader in the center of the action but this relatively impersonal approach can be an effective way of producing more tension into the story.

Another option is that you could tell your story from the perspective of a less prominent player in your story.

They may not have a significant impact on the course of events, but they should be someone that is able to observe and comment on all of the most important parts of the story you are telling.

This is used with many mysteries where the narrator is an assistant to the hero or heroine that has to solve the crime. This way, you can show what they see but you can keep their thought processes and possibly some of their actions [secret](#) from your readers.

You could also use this first person viewpoint, but use it as your narrator, a character who is reporting events which he or she was not personally involved with.

This could be an effective way of presenting a story about people that lived in a different time and culture. Filtering it through the perceptions of a relative who has a similar background to your readers could help to build a better connection between the different cultures.

Because of the tight limitations about length, it's usually best to have just one character's viewpoint through the whole short story; except perhaps where you might switch to another character at the end of a story to provide

a twist ending where you have to disclose information which the main character does not have access to.

Whenever you use this viewpoint, you must be careful not to expose information about anything which your viewpoint character does not take part in or have direct knowledge of.

Of course, you can have them acquire this information when interacting with other characters but don't overdo this. [Readers](#) want action and strong emotion. Description of events which the main characters do not experience directly is less likely to keep their interest and they may become bored with the whole story if there is too much of it.

Be careful to keep your use of the personal pronoun, "I", to a minimum. You probably don't like listening to someone who always talks about themselves and your readers probably don't either unless you maintain a strong emotional level and an appropriate amount of action through the story to keep their interest high.

Second Person

The second person is used to describe the actions and the emotions of the characters from outside.

Instead of using the usual "he did" or "she said", the writer puts the reader into the situation with statements like, "You wander across the rain soaked field".

This can be a very effective way to get readers to share an experience or a whole adventure, but they don't have access to the details of the characters' thoughts and emotions which the first person viewpoint would give them.

The second person viewpoint is not easy to write, especially when you need to maintain it for a whole story.

But, it would be a valuable exercise to try this form of presentation when you find a suitable theme.

Third Person

When you write about your characters in the third person, you have a great deal of freedom about what you reveal to them. You can give your readers access to everything you want them to know about the various characters' feelings, actions and [thoughts](#).

This type of presentation lets you include any relevant information about the characters, their background, and even their future; as well as the events which they are part of. You can also reasonably include details of anything which they may not be aware of, but which affect them and the developing story they are part of.

You can [focus](#) your all knowing [eye](#) on one character, so that the readers can share that person's thoughts and feelings but have only a superficial knowledge of those of the other characters, apart from anything the characters deliberately revealed in the course of the story, just as they would have in real [life](#).

This is a viewpoint that readers and writers are usually very comfortable with.

But, there is one potential problem which you must be careful about. It is very easy to put information into the story which is not available to the viewpoint character.

That has happened to me and might easily be overlooked when you are preparing the story for submission to an editor. That would probably cause automatic rejection.

Instead of limiting your readers' knowledge of the other characters in your story, you might give them selective access to everyone's thoughts, background and actions.

This can be useful where you focus on action and keep your examination of your characters' thoughts and emotions to a minimum. Large scale novels are often told this way. The sweep of the story and on going action

compensates for the lower amount of emotional involvement between the reader and the characters.

You need a high degree of emotional connection to get a strong reaction from your readers in a short story, so this point of view is not as easy to do.

Making Your Characters Real

A critical part of getting your readers to connect with your story is creating interesting and believable characters.

The first step to achieving that [goal](#) is to gain a deep knowledge of your characters inside and out. You need to know more about them than you will ever put in your stories, even if you eventually produce a series about them.

I am not suggesting that you spend a lot of time preparing and recording the details of a minor character like the person that your hero buys a newspaper from and whom we never hear about again, but you need to present each of your characters with enough detail, they will ring true to your readers.

With your significant characters, you need to know:

- Their appearance
- The sound of their voice
- Mannerisms and favorite expressions (don't overdo these!)
- Their [health](#) (perhaps better than they do themselves)
- Their [family](#) background
- Their current personal circumstances
- Major disappointments and successes in their lives
- Their dreams (and whether they are likely to attain any of them)
- [Beliefs](#), prejudices, desires and dislikes

A lot of this material will stay in your files. You need to limit how much of this information you actually put into your story but building a dossier about each major character will be a great help in keeping your description of your character and making sure that their decisions and actions are consistent.

If you get a great reaction to the characters in one of your stories and you start to write a series about them, this background information will be really useful.

Creating Characters from Strangers

I have found this technique useful and hope that you do to.

Always keep in [mind](#) that people are very sensitive now in our current state of heightened security alertness and [concerns](#) about personal privacy.

When I am sitting in a café or a passenger in a bus, [train](#) or plane, I look closely at the people around me.

I try to find someone that might be the basis of a character in a future story.

I have learned to look without staring and remember details without a need to take notes.

When I get some spare time, I try to create a history and a background for the most interesting people I observed.

You can also get some extra benefit from closely observing (without getting in their way) how people do their work.

The different ways of [working](#) with [wood](#) that were used by a weekend handyman like my late dad and the [craftsman](#) that made the small [yacht](#) which he used to sail in the lake near my [home](#) were interesting to me. I have used them both in different stories. They both produced very good work but their styles were vastly different.

I have successfully used some people this way but I expect that the characters I create are probably quite different to the people who provided the visual raw material.

Apart from the value I get by having a larger [stock](#) of possible characters, I get some valuable mental [exercise](#) and it helps me to focus better on everyone that I deal with each day.

Another way of developing fresh characters is to clip pictures of people's faces from newspapers and magazines.

Then, you can start to work up a character using just the picture. Ignore the information which accompanied it. You want your own character which you can use as you want to in a story sometime.

I start with a name. Then, I'll give them an occupation and even a [family](#).

The [picture](#) can be useful for keeping the description of the character consistent through the whole story but I usually put the picture back in the files and work with the words I first thought of when I saw the picture for the first time.

The last additions to my new character are a personality and a history. Much of this information will never appear in the story but it will help me to make the character and his or her actions interesting and important to the reader for the time they take to read my story and, if I am on target, for some time afterward.

When I am ready to use the character, I will know their desires, their [fears](#) and the probable outcome of their efforts.

Selecting Your Viewpoint Character

Selecting the right character to focus on through your story is also very important.

I use a common [technique](#) to [test](#) what character is most suitable for that vital role in a particular story: I write a short piece from the viewpoint of each of the most frequently appearing characters.

This means I sacrifice some time, but it gives me a greater understanding of the different characters.

This exercise actually saves time overall because I don't write a large part of a draft of the whole story with one character in its center and then find that the character's viewpoint is not, for whatever reason, a good choice for the viewpoint character.

I also find the practice useful because I learn what are the best factors and details to develop when I am creating new stories.

I focus on the following questions as I write and then review the short pieces about each of the characters:

- Some will seem very awkward to write for in a sympathetic way.

- Their involvement in the story does not give them access to some of the important events or enough interaction with some other characters.
- Their emotional involvement with the other characters and the theme of the story will vary greatly. I always favor the character that has the most to win or lose as the viewpoint character.

Will Your Characters Age Gracefully?

I hope that you will have stories where you create characters that prove popular enough to be spun into a series.

But, you will have to decide then if you will stay completely consistent in the details of your characters when [writing](#) new stories about them later in the series.

Not all writers do so because they feel it could reduce the characters' appeal to their loyal readers over time. They may keep their characters at the age they were when the readers met them in the first stories or only have them [age](#) at a very slow rate.

Their view is that readers like the characters as they were when they first appeared. They may not accept that the same people could handle the same sort of problems, physical or emotional demands, nor have the same interests if they were significantly older.

So, the writers ignore the clock and continue to produce stories with their ageless characters as long as there is an appreciative audience for them.

Editing Your Own Work

I am not suggesting that these few suggestions will make you a great editor but they will help you to look at your own work a bit more impartially.

They are based on my several years of hard won experience and written just to help you prepare your [work](#) for submission to the publications which you want to publish your stories.

When you have written your story, put it aside for at least 24 hours.

If you try to edit it or even just [check](#) the accuracy of details in it, you will not get good results.

You will be tired from the effort and concentration you have used to produce the draft version of your story. It's unreasonable to expect that you can focus well enough after maybe just a few minutes rest, to be able to edit your story satisfactorily.

If you try to edit it, your [mind](#) will be full of the details which you put into the story in the session which you just finished. You will almost certainly miss errors and miss steps which you would usually quickly see and correct.

The enthusiasm in the progress of your story closer to the point of sending it of to an editor could cause you to produce flawed work and waste a lot of valuable time when you probably need some rest before tackling anything with that intensity.

Another tip which I've found of great value is to read the draft out loud rather than to read it silently as you had done when you were putting it together.

This helps to make any problems or mistakes to stand out more.

My layman's theory of why this works is that you are taking in the content of the story in a different way.

If you just read through it silently, your mind would not focus as well because you had already read that same material that way and probably more than once the previous day.

Finding the Best Markets

I assume that you want to sell your stories. I like applause but feel that the time and the effort I put into my [writing](#) is worth more than just nice words.

The extra [money](#) from writing stories is handy too. You should keep a record of your expenses and declare what you get from any [sales](#) in your [tax](#) return to avoid any potential problems in the future with the authorities.

That's something you need to discuss with a qualified accountant because the requirements vary greatly between different countries. New rules and legal judgments are causing further changes on an almost daily basis.

There are plenty of people that will let you provide them with free stories to publish. The best of these publications have fairly high standards too.

No writer I know wants to send out anything over their name which is not as good as they can make it.

Market Research

You need to find what publishers are currently accepting stories, their specific requirements and what, if any, payment they offer to the authors of the stories they publish.

It's very important to ensure that you only submit your stories for publication where they are looking for the particular type of story you write.

Most publications have their own website or a section on the publisher's website if they produce more than one. That's the best place to find the specific requirements, pay rates and other relevant information you need when you are thinking about submitting a story.

Read the requirements very carefully. Some of the most important considerations include:

- Is the length of the story within the range which they specify?
- Are the subject, [treatment](#) and language appropriate to the type of reader which the publication is aimed at?

- Have they published a story which is similar to yours recently? The editor may hold your story to run after a few months. But, that's unlikely because budgets are very tight everywhere.

You also must get hold of a few recent issues of the publication. This doesn't have to be expensive; you may be able to find them at your local library.

When you buy any magazine or reference [book](#), get a receipt as you may be able to claim the cost on your next tax return if you can convince the [tax](#) department that you are a serious writer.

When you open the magazine or browse through the pages on their website, take notes about anything which might help you to match your story with the most appropriate markets.

Reading the stories in at least a couple of issues of a magazine you want to submit your material to is obviously a good move but you can get a lot more help from the magazine than that.

The [advertisements](#) are very useful because they will show you the type of [products](#) and services which appeal to the publications readers.

You can see from the price range of the items offered regularly what sort of [income](#) bracket the advertisers are pitching to in each issue.

The articles in the magazine will focus on the special interests of those regular readers which the publication would want your story to appeal to.

An important source of information and even possible ideas for incidents or even whole stories (after careful adaptation) are the letters from readers to the various sections of the publication.

This gives you a look into their lives, homes and their major interests and [concerns](#).

It's like the magazine is producing a focus [group](#) which you can mentally test your story ideas on before you write a word.

That is another reason that buying a few issues of the magazines which you are thinking about sending your stories to is a wise investment.

Overseas Markets

You should not feel limited to submitting to publications in your own country although they are certainly where I would start.

The pay may be lower but there are several good reasons for starting with magazines and other publishers in your own state and country.

Magazines in your own country will provide quicker feedback and payment than any, possibly higher paying, outlets elsewhere.

You will also probably have a better chance of making your first sales to magazines which are focused on attracting people like yourself or the people you mix with every day in your [community](#).

Your costs for submitting your stories to editors in your own country will be much less.

If the editors in your area pay less than other markets which are further away, there is likely to be less competition for you.

Be aware that many magazines can buy stories which have been previously published in other countries at very low rates. This sort of competition reduces the market for local [writers](#) but the only thing you can do about it is to produce the best stories that you can and approach your writing in the most professional way that you can.

Most sites and [books](#) that provide information about the requirements of different publications cover several countries.

It is important to use only the most up to date information when you are submitting your work.

I have listed some of the most well known market lists in the reference and resources section near the end of this [ebook](#).

Remember that publishers often have people being promoted to other [jobs](#) or leaving the company entirely.

Another point is that there is a lead time from the acceptance of information for publication in market lists; this is longer for [book](#) or magazine publication than it is for publication on web sites.

So, even the latest version of a well regarded market list is likely to have some errors.

That does not make the publications and web sites useless. They usually carry personal accounts from successful writers about their methods or general advice and other useful material.

Whenever possible, check the information you get with the details on the [web](#) site of the publisher.

Submitting Your Stories

Many would-be writers fall at this final step without ever submitting the story they have worked on, sometimes for months, to a real editor.

I meet some of these people at parties and, most often, at writers' conferences and workshops. I feel sorry for them but there is little anyone can do for them.

Perhaps there are some that like the idea of being a [writer](#) but will find all sorts of reasons or excuses to put off that last irreversible step where their work is put out for independent judgment.

They need to realize that there has probably never been a writer who has not had any of their work rejected. Some of the most famous and successful writers have collected many, "Thank you for your submission but it does not fit our requirements at this time" slips.

Dealing with Rejection

Just understand that that a rejection slip or no reply from the editor is only a temporary set back.

Use it as a spur to push yourself closer to success, instead of looking at it as some sort of final judgment.

There are many reasons for your story not being accepted by a particular editor at a particular time.

Format Your Submission

Some publications will accept submissions as attachments to an email or by FTP (transfer from your [computer](#) to a special area on the publication's [web](#) site using an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) program to send it from your computer.

They will provide specific instructions on their web site if they allow this type of transfer.

But, many other publications still require writers to send their stories through regular post.

If the publication you will submit your story to has put the method it prefers and the format it requires on its web site (look around their web [site](#) for "Guide for Contributors" or "Submission Guidelines"), be sure that your submission conforms in every respect.

If you are sending your story as an attachment to an email or by FTP, you should format it as specified by the publisher. If they don't give details, you should first check with them directly for any special instructions about the format they prefer.

Otherwise, you can use the layout which I suggest here for submission by regular mail as the basis for the document which you attach to your [email](#).

Set your margins for one inch on all sides or use the default settings of your word processing program.

Be aware that Microsoft Word® is the most commonly accepted format. You can use other word processing programs, such as the free Open Office from <http://www.openoffice.org>, but specify that your file is saved in Microsoft Word® format.

Do not send your story as an Adobe Acrobat® file (which ends in **.PDF**) as these files cannot be easily edited.

Cover Letter

Some editors do not want a cover letter because you put all the information they need for this evaluation stage on the first page of the story as specified below.

If an editor does want a cover letter, keep it brief (no more than one page), professional and upbeat.

Put each of the following paragraphs at the left of your page.

Put your name, then your address, followed by your phone number and email in the top left corner. This paragraph should be single spaced.

After a double-space gap, write the date in full (example: 20th September 2011)

After another double space gap, write the full address of the publication you are submitting your story to.

From this point, the letter is double spaced.

Put another double space gap and then the salutation for the editor. You should be able to get the person's actual name and title from their web site. If that information is not available or you think it might be out of date, make a call to the company and ask the receptionist for the name and title of the current person who is checking new manuscripts?

Check the spelling if you have any doubt at all. Names like Tracy, Brian, Tania, Phillip and many others can be spelled in a variety of ways and people notice when you make a mistake with their name. Well, you would if it was your name, wouldn't you?

The letter usually just needs to have two short paragraphs:

Please consider my original short story, "The Locksmith's Secret" for publication in your "Mystery and Mayhem" magazine. It is 2,800 words and has not been published before.

Bio: Robert Jones (your name or pen name) works for the Police Department in a large eastern city and has been writing crime stories for four years. Also put any [books](#) you have had published here. (This must be the truth).

Finish with something like:

Thanks for your consideration,

Your written signature (use a picture of it)

Your printed signature

The date (short form: 09/20/2011)

Do not try to sell the story to the editor in your cover letter. Just give them the basic facts and let them do their job.

Title Page

I always enclose a title page like the one I describe below, even if I included a cover letter. Some people believe that you don't need a cover letter if you have the essential information on your title page.

Put your name, then your address, followed by your phone number and email in the top left corner of the first page of your manuscript.

Put about three words of the title at the top right of the page. Put an approximate word count for the story under that. I repeat this information at the top right of each page of the story. I put a page number on the first line at the top right of each page except for the title page (which counts as Page 1). Use normal numbers – don't use roman numerals and don't include a hash sign (#).

About half way down the page, put the title of your story in the center of the page and then put your name, or [pen](#) name under that.

Start the full text of your story four lines below that.

You can expect to wait a couple of months before you hear from the editor. Sometimes, you will not get any sort of reply.

After six weeks or so, you might send a polite inquiry about your submission. Give full details of when you sent it and expect to wait at least a week for a reply to that query, if one comes at all.

If you have sent your story to the wrong sort of publication or to a magazine which has a notice about "No unsolicited contributions" on its site, you will probably never hear anything at all.

As soon as possible after sending your story to an editor, start writing something new. You need to get your [mind](#) and [body](#) accustomed to the physical demands and routine of writing regularly.

It's common for some people to start day dreaming about their almost certain success with that first or third story.

Focus your subconscious on a new plot and set of characters. While you wait for the verdict on your first story, you should keep [writing](#) and submitting. It might not be the first, but your thirteenth story which is your first success. There's only one way to reach that point.

Withdraw Your Story before submitting it elsewhere.

If you have not heard anything after, say, three months or more, send them a letter by mail.

Tell them [politely](#) and clearly that you are withdrawing your story ([give full details](#)) from their consideration and will submit it elsewhere.

Simultaneous and Multiple Submission

Some writers send more than one story at a time to publications which they have established a [relationship](#) by selling them some stories. That's fine as long as the editor is happy with that.

Some writers submit each story to more than one publication at the same time. Then, if an editor expresses interest in the story, they send notices to the other editors that they are withdrawing that story from them.

I do not deal with editors this way; I think the chance of a disaster with the story being accepted by two publications almost simultaneously would outweigh the convenience to me of putting that story in front of several editors at the same time.

The effects on any possible later [sales](#) to an editor who has unknowingly published a story which appeared about the same time in a rival publication are not something I want to think about.

If these points don't worry you, I suggest that you only consider this after you check that a particular publication is okay with someone sending them stories which they are also submitting to other publications at the same time.

References and Resources

This is a very small sample of the [web](#) sites on the internet which can be useful for new and experienced writers.

Most of the text in these listings is from the actual web sites.

Neither I, nor the publisher or distributors of this ebook endorse or accept any responsibility for the accuracy of any claims made for the quality or any other aspect of any of the sites which I have listed here.

All the links were working when I tested them shortly before publication of this [ebook](#).

Keep your anti-virus and other security programs active and up-to-date.

There are many sites which are set up to cause harm to you, your computer or your financial well being. Be on your guard and always remember that,

If an offer looks too good to be true, it probably is.

While some sites are focused on helping writers in a particular Country, other authors can get useful information by visiting the pages which are available to the public.

**All of these listings were selected without
any arrangement or inducement at all.**

Links

Reference Sites

The Short Story Org <http://www.theshortstory.org.uk/>

"Find on this site simply everything you could ever want to know about the short story".

"What is Story?"

Welcome to story, the campaign to celebrate the short story.

We believe that the short story is one of the most exciting and important literary



forms, and that it can and should reach the widest possible readership. We believe that the short story matters.

Story aims to increase the profile, prestige and [presence](#) of the short story in our culture; whether you are a writer or someone working with [books](#), we want you to join us in order to help it thrive.

Story is run by Booktrust and supported by the BBC and the BBC National Short Story Award.

Advocacy – we champion the short story wherever and to whomever we can.

We support initiatives to promote short stories in a variety of settings, bringing new readers, writers and publishers to the form.

The story website is a central information point for all things 'short story'.

The BBC National Short Story Award is now in its fourth year. The award is the world's largest for a single short story, with the winning author receiving £15,000.

Market Listings

Novel and Short Story.com



<http://www.novelandshortstory.com/>

"The Best-selling Market Resource for Fiction Writers.

Novel & Short Story Writer's Market is your annual resource guide to finding a home for your fiction and making professional connections in the publishing industry. For 27 years, we've researched the market to bring you current

contact information, editorial needs, schedules and guidelines that save you time and take the guesswork out of the submission process."

Market Listings at Jacqui Bennett Writers Bureau

<http://www.ibwb.co.uk/markets.html>

"We endeavour to keep this information as up to date as possible so that either on these pages, or in the News section, you should find a suitable UK publisher for whatever type of writing you're intending to submit. If you know of a good market and you feel it should be mentioned here, please e-mail us with the details and we'll be forever in your debt."

Writers Digest

<http://www.writersdigest.com/>

Possibly the best-known magazine and website for writers in the World.



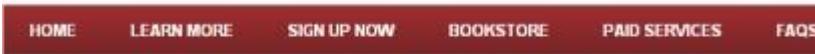
Highly recommended no matter where you are located.

"Register for the Writer's Digest e-newsletter & get a FREE 128 page e-book 70 Solutions to Common Writing Mistakes by best-selling novelist Bob Mayer"

Also has several [blogs](#), including There Are No Rules, Questions & Quandaries, Script Notes, Poetic Asides, Guide to Literary Agents and MFA Confidential.

WritersMarket.com

<http://www.writersmarket.com/>



Get published and paid for your writing.

Let WritersMarket.com help you find success:

- Find places to sell your writing, whether you've got a book, manuscript, or article idea
- Manage your submissions with our easy-to-use record keeping tools
- Stay abreast of the latest publishing industry news
- Gain advanced publishing and marketing knowledge from our Q&A's with publishing experts
- Know how much to charge for freelance gigs with our popular pay rate chart
- Use information specific to your writing needs--whether you're interested in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, children's, scriptwriting, or agents--with our niche-specific pages

"Get published and paid for your writing.

Let

WritersMarket.com help you find success:

Find places to sell your writing, whether you've got a [book](#), manuscript, or article idea

Manage your submissions with our easy-to-use record keeping tools

Stay abreast of the latest publishing industry news

Gain advanced publishing and [marketing](#) knowledge from our Q&A's with publishing experts

Know how much to charge for freelance gigs with our popular pay rate chart

Use information specific to your writing needs - whether you're interested in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, children's, scriptwriting, or agents--with our niche-specific pages"

More Helpful Sites

Duotrope

<http://duotrope.com/>



Quick Menu: [Home/Search](#) | [Browse/Find By Title](#) | [What's New?](#) | [Newsletter/RSS](#) | [Shop/](#)

Welcome to Duotrope's Digest, a free writers' resource listing over 2825 current Fiction and Poetry markets. It's a fine home for the piece you just polished. Use the menus at the top and right to explore our online submissions tracker for registered users. We usually make several updates per day (most listings) to ensure the most up-to-date database humanly possible. So far today, we've made 0 hour(s) and 1 minute(s) ago.

Search for Publishers of Fiction: [\[Switch to Poetry\]](#)

Enter the details of the piece you want to get published below. If you'd rather browse all the markets or search by title, please [go here](#) instead. Please acquaint yourself with our terms & definitions before running your first search.

Genre:	<input type="text" value="Any Genre"/>	Random Market:	
Theme:	<input type="text" value="Any Theme"/>		
Length:	<input type="text" value="Any Length"/>		
	OR <input type="text" value=""/> words		
Payscale:	<input type="text" value="-"/>		
Royalties:	<input type="text" value="-"/>		
Media:	<input type="text" value="Any Medium"/>		
Sub Type:	<input type="text" value="Any Type"/>		
Reprints?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Simsubs?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Multisubs?	<input type="checkbox"/>		

"Welcome to Duotrope's Digest, a free writers' resource listing over 2825 current Fiction and Poetry publications. Use this [page](#) to search for markets that may make a fine home for the piece you just polished. Use the menus at the top and right to explore the rest

of the free services we offer writers and editors, including a free [online](#) submissions tracker for registered users. We usually make several updates per day, and we check each of the current listings regularly (once a week for most listings) to ensure the most up-to-date database humanly possible

The Writer Magazine

<http://www.writermag.com/>

"Welcome to The Writer Web site! Here you'll find hundreds of



articles and columns on the writing [craft](#), plus information on thousands of markets, agents, contests and conferences. Be sure to check out our staff [blog](#) and improved forums. Enjoy!

Some of the popular areas on the web site include Market Listings, Q & A Columns, Writing for Children, Editor's Notes, Fiction writing, Author [Interviews](#), Web Savvy and Freelance writing."

The Science Fiction Writers of America

<http://www.sfwaworld.org/>

"SFWA is a professional organization for authors of science fiction, fantasy and related

genres. SFWA informs, supports, promotes, defends and advocates for its members. We host the prestigious Nebula Awards, assist members in legal disputes with publishers, and administer



benevolent funds for authors facing medical or legal expenses. Novice authors benefit from our Information Center and the well-known Writer Beware site."

Membership is restricted to:

Active Members: Established authors with three qualifying short story [sales](#), one qualifying novel sale, or one professionally produced full-length dramatic script.

Associate Members: Authors with at least one qualifying short story sale.

Affiliate Members: Persons who have a professional involvement in science fiction or fantasy (such as academics, editors, agents, [artists](#), [graphic novelists](#), reviewers, etc,) but are not eligible to become an active or associate member."

You have to be a published author to have an Active or Associate Membership

Fiction writing at About.com

<http://www.fictionwriting.about.com/>



The Guides at about.com are generally very good. You do get ads all over the place (I cut a large ad for washing machines out of the picture!) but the info is usually up-to-date. Check it out and decide for yourself.

Useful Books

The Writer's Handbook

<http://www.thewritershandbook.com/>

The Writer's Handbook is an indispensable companion for everyone in the writing profession. Packed with provocative articles, useful advice, key contacts, etc. Published by MacMillan



"This is the definitive website for all your publishing needs. Log in and discover a wealth of indispensable resources for the writer and publishing professional including:

professional including:

- The fully searchable and updated directory, listing publishers, [agents](#), festivals and prizes worldwide.

They also have a helpful glossary of publishing terms, articles from The Writer's Handbook archives, writer's FAQs and top tips for writers." Buyers of the book register for on-line access to updates.

Writers' & Artists' Yearbook

<http://www.writersandartists.co.uk>



For over 100 years the Writers' & Artists' Yearbook has existed to help writers make it into print and to develop their career, and give artists advice on how to exhibit or publish work.

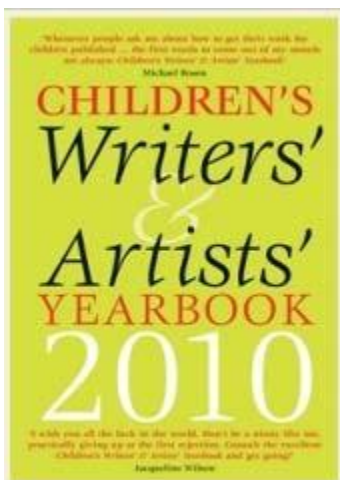
how to exhibit or publish work.

The listings are online, so you can search the full directory of publishers, literary agents, newspapers and magazines, picture libraries, commercial art studios and much more.

Writersandartists.co.uk also features [blog](#) posts, news and advice, selected articles from the yearbook and extracts from other writing books.

Children's Writers' & Artists' Yearbook

<http://www.acblack.com/Books/details.aspx?isbn=9781408112410&title=+Children%27s+Writers%27+%26+Artists%27+Yearbook+2010>



The comprehensive guide to markets in all areas of children's media, completely revised and updated, now in its 6th edition, with a foreword by **Francesca Simon**. New articles for this edition include: 'Writing a series' by **Karen McCrombie**; 'Writing thrillers for [children](#)' by **Sophie McKenzie**; 'Notes from a successful illustrator' by **David Lucas**.

Contains information on a wide range of topics with the emphasis on giving the aspiring writer and

illustrator knowledge of the children's market in all areas, to help them pursue their careers in this increasingly competitive area. No other guide to writing and illustrating for [children](#) does this.

Writers Guide to a Digital Living

<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/writersguide>

Free - Published 2008. "This guide is a professional development resource for creative writers. Its primary target audience is any writer (young or old, emerging, mid-career or established) in [Australia](#) or overseas, who aims to earn [income](#) as a professional creative writer and is interested in how the new media industry can enhance their [craft](#) skills and income [earning](#) potential.

The secondary audience is any artist or practitioner (producer, games developer, publisher, funding body) whose work may be informed by this resource.

The aim in developing this guide is to create a freely available and widely accessible repository of knowledge and information on the [theme](#) of professional creative writing in a digital context."

Quotes

"You write with ease to show your breeding, but easy writing's curst hard reading" **Richard Brinsley Sheridan**

"Description begins in the writer's imagination but should finish in the reader's" **Stephen King (Stephen King on Writing)**

Afterword

I hope that my suggestions and explanations will help you get your next story from inspiration to publication with less [stress](#) and effort.

I believe that short story writing is good fun and I know it can be profitable. Some writers take longer than others to start getting their share of success. If that happens to you, keep trying.

But, most importantly, keep writing and submitting your stories.

Even if some of them do not get published when you first submit them, they will help you develop your individual style and [voice](#).

When you reach the level I know you are capable of, dust off those early stories. Give them a quick review and polish them in line with your greater knowledge which you developed since they were written.

Then, send them out again.

You will find that they will achieve more success the second time around and the fees you will get will be much greater also.

I wish you great success than you can currently dream of.

Matt Cowell

[Another eBookWholesaler Publication](#)