

As a retiree, you have the chance to fulfill the dreams you long cherished of becoming an author. You have lots of advantages over younger authors: more free time, greater security, knowledge gathered over years of life and career experiences. Move beyond the starting gate and put those advantages to use.

Retirement Is The Perfect Time to Fulfill Your Dream of Writing

The Gallup Survey Organization says 81% of mature adults long to write a book.

In a poll sponsored by the Eons.com web site. 14,000 Seniors and Boomers chose writing is one of their most cherished life dreams.

What's your choice? The novel you've always dreamed of writing? A memoir for loved ones? Maybe you'd prefer to turn out interesting magazine articles on the favorite hobby you've pursued for so many years. Like many others, you may want to maintain contact with your former career by writing articles for trade magazines or possibly a how-to book.

What's holding you back? Are you reluctant because writing seems to be so challenging? An activity reserved for just the chosen few? That's nonsense. Don't let those myths keep you from trying what you've always dreamed of.

Retirement Writing

As a retiree you have great advantages to help you fulfill your dream of becoming a published author. You have time...free time at last to pursue the activities you love. You bring years of life experience and professional knowledge to the task.

Can you use those advantages to become a published author? Certainly you can. You probably will never reach best seller status, although there are late starters who have accomplished that feat. But with some effort and dedication, you can see your words in print or on the Internet for millions to enjoy.

It's time to move beyond the starting gate. Set aside those fears of failure. No task can be completed if it isn't begun. No challenge overcome until it is tackled. So it is with writing. Once you start, you'll see your confidence build. Lawrence Block, a prolific novelist and writing instructor, says, "Writing has this in common with most other skills; we develop it best by practicing it. Whatever writing we do helps us to become better writers."

Before You Face the Computer

The process begins well before you sit down at your computer to write the opening lines of your new gem. A bit of self-searching will put you on track. Think through your answers to several key questions:

- Why do I want to write? Is my goal self-fulfillment? Do I have a message I want to deliver to others? Do I want the thrill of seeing my words in print? Am I trying to supplement my income?
- What category of writing can best help me attain my goal? What category is most comfortable for me?
- Do I want to write a single piece (a memoir, for example)? Or do I hope to make writing a new career?
- How much time am I willing to devote to the task?
- Will I be happier writing articles or a book?

Whatever your answers, be absolutely certain you are comfortable with them. This is particularly important if you plan to write a full-length book, for you will be married to that task for a substantial length of time.

Planning Your Approach

Beginning writers regularly ask, “Where do you get your ideas?” The answer, in short, is the world around you. There are no limits to the ideas that astute observers can develop for fiction or nonfiction.

Writers must be alert spectators. Ideas abound right in your own home. Coping with a dear one’s terminal illness. Issues that caused a divorce. Secrets of a relationship that grows stronger with every year of marriage. An unusual family heritage. Cooking or decorating ideas. Unique holiday celebrations. The list is endless.

Beyond your four walls there is a still greater storehouse of ideas. You find them every day in the newspaper. You can choose to follow up a factual report and expand it far beyond what a rushed reporter can do on a tight deadline. Or you can choose to take the idea and fictionalize it, adding your own twists and turns.

A book like *Writer’s Market*, updated annually by *Writer’s Digest Books* is a treasure trove of ideas. It offers hundreds of pages of periodical listings categorized by subject. Freelancers use it as a bible to locate publications that might use their stories. You can use it as a trigger for ideas for articles or books as you flip through the 50 categories of consumer magazines and 60 categories of trade journals.

Getting Ready

Whether you’re about to embark on a novel or nonfiction, an article or a full length book, you’re not ready to face that blank computer monitor until you’ve completed all of your initial homework.

Most fiction writers begin by drafting an outline of the plot. As each main character is fully developed—and you as the author must know those key players as well as you know yourself—changes will be necessitated in the outline. You must research the locale(s) and the time period of the book, for nothing can cause a reader to lose interest faster than discovering factual mistakes made by a careless writer.

Content Rules

The essence of nonfiction is fact, and you better know your facts intimately and accurately if you are to achieve success. Whether you are writing an historical piece or a how-to, do your research. Know your subject. Those of you who choose to write on your work specialty must be certain you are up to date on all the latest developments. Always remember that progress didn't end on the day you retired. Change has occurred, and you better be aware of it.

The key word here is research. Getting up to speed. Knowing your subject intimately. Without this, you run the serious risk of suffering from the author's dread disease, Writer's Block. It usually results from facing a stark white computer screen that seems to leer at you, challenging you to make the leap from brain to computer, from thought to the reality of converting those thoughts into words and placing them on the screen. Writers who have done their research well and know their subject thoroughly seldom, if ever, face this problem.

The one last component that you must agree to is discipline. Whether you choose to devote only two or three hours a day to your writing or anticipate making it a full-time job, it cannot be hit-or-miss. You must set a rigid schedule, and follow it. A few hours at the writing table each morning leaves lots of time for other activities, yet adds a hugely enriching complement to your retirement years.