

Few things are as thrilling to a wanna-be published author than seeing his/her name in print either above an article in a favorite magazine or on a book cover. It may seem impossible to achieve at first, but following several basic steps, it can be done. The process starts by searching yourself for a meaningful topic. You then begin climbing the publishing ladder with small, local periodicals, and graduate to a national magazine or even to a book.

The Thrill of Seeing Your Name in Print

by Charles Jacobs

Whether you're a teenager eager to become an author or someone a bit older who chose to retire and write, there is little to compare to the thrill of seeing your byline in your favorite magazine or your name on the cover of a book.

That may sound like the impossible, but it's within the grasp of anyone who can speak the English language, spell adequately well and know at least basic grammar. And of course, you have to know what you're talking about.

Call on Your Background

Stop and think of the possibilities. Ideas for articles and books surround you, so it's often wise to begin by writing on subjects you know and understand. Write about issues you deal with every day. For example:

- **You're a housewife.** You can easily become an expert on topics like home decorating, a cooking specialty, raising children, perhaps even caring for pets. Your article can be humorous or it can be a highly informative, serious piece. Whatever you choose, first spend some time reading several of the women's magazines carefully. You'll be amazed to find that much of the writing is really mediocre. That should give you confidence that you can probably do as well.
- **You're now employed..** Spend a little time reviewing the trade publications in your field. In many of those, you'll find the writing is even worse than in the women's magazines. That's because editors of trade publications are hungry for new articles that offer worthwhile information to their readers. To these editors, your knowledge of the subject is far more important than your writing skills.
- **You're retired and want to write.** What a perfect time in your life to begin this new pastime (or career) of retirement writing. A time to reflect on your life and write a memoir. Perhaps you'd like to maintain some contact with your former career. Trade publications would love to hear from you. Better yet, now that you have the time, perhaps you'd like to

tackle an entire book, if that has been your dream. However, I recommend starting with a few articles.

They can always be expanded into books.

Building Your Portfolio

There's no question you are at a disadvantage since you have no portfolio of your work to show an editor. But that doesn't have to mean you've come up against an insurmountable barrier.

Periodicals come in many different levels. Generally they are classified by the size of their circulation base, but there are a fair number of specialty magazines that offer a small, but very targeted, readership. And there are lots of community newspapers to help you begin building your portfolio.

I strongly suggest starting at the bottom. Think of this as climbing the rungs of a ladder. Begin by offering articles to your community newspaper. After several have been accepted and published, step up to your local newspaper or small regional or town magazine. Clip and save everything you write and publish. Move up the ladder to larger regionals and even to state-wide publications before you tackle a national magazine.

A great way to open the door at larger magazines is to write short pieces for the front of the magazine. Most have these, and are often looking for content. Some nationals maintain a regional section where acceptance is somewhat easier for a relative unknown. With that background, you should have little trouble eventually landing a major feature in one of the top publications.

Taking the First Step

Once you have confidence in your ability, don't be afraid to take a major step upward. Plan your approach carefully, calling upon your experiences and your accomplishments, as I suggested above. You've raised four children, one with dyslexia. Bolstered by a little research, you are a specialist in the way to guide and encourage your child as he/she fights to overcome this disadvantage during school years. Furthermore, you're a highly experienced parent, and can select a number of different subjects on the issue of child rearing to write about.

On paper, chart out the advantages you offer an editor. Expand on each category with a short paragraphs of a few sentences. Sort through all of them, and decide which ones you feel are the most convincing. These are for your own use. Don't send them to an editor.

Head to the library or to your computer and start a search in your subject you've chosen. When you feel you have amassed enough information to write well on the subject, refine your thoughts to determine the approach you want to take to make what you write interesting and informative. This is called developing an "angle" or a "hook."

Moving On

When all of this is organized and totally clear in your mind, you're ready to write. In essence, you've planned out your entire article either in your head or on paper. I do suggest the latter, at least in your early attempts. That simplifies the writing, and keeps you on track.

You know what you want to say, so let the words flow. Don't stop and puzzle over the way you've express each thought. You can always return later and revise. For now, don't interrupt the "roll" you are on.

Since you are just beginning to write, I suggest completing the article before you consider contacting an editor. Later on, you will learn to query an editor with an idea before taking the time to write it completely. But for now, you are going to need the completed article to convince the editor that you can produce what the magazine needs.

here to Publish

Next you must decide where to send your queries and your manuscripts. There are lots of fine directories of magazines and newspapers that you can find in the reference room of your library. I recommend *Writer's Market* for start-up authors. It offers a wealth of information that will help you choose the best periodical for your piece.

The listings are filed under general categories. Review all of the magazines listed under the topic that best matches yours. *Writer's Market* will tell you the right person to contact and how to approach that editor. You will learn which subjects interest the editor, the article length preferred, the pay scale, the waiting period between acceptance and publication and a great deal of other helpful information. If you continue to write, I recommend you buy your own personal copy of *Writer's Market*.

You may find that writing articles suits your schedule and your desires perfectly. It is an ideal way to expand your knowledge as you write on a wide variety of topics. Many writers whose names are household words have never crafted a book. But they have established great reputations. There's no reason you can't join their ranks.