

Discover the Joys of Writing When You Retire

You've dreamed about it for years. Like so many boomers who reach retirement, you have a great story to tell. It's been struggling to reach print, but family responsibilities and a full-time job never allowed it.

You're no different from the 81% of the American adult population who long to write a book. That's what Gallup pollsters found when they completed their survey.

At last, you're free to pursue your long-awaited dream, but don't rush to the computer just yet. Writing in retirement is fun and rewarding. Your family will delight in reading a memoir that recounts your best (and worst) life experiences. You might prefer to write a book that relates to the career in which you spent so many years becoming expert.

Maybe it's a life-long hobby that intrigues you. Write about what you've learned over the years. Or perhaps you're a history buff with a great idea you've researched. A delightful novel may be hatching in the back of your mind.

Unshackle your mind. Let those ideas out. With today's exciting new printing technology, it is so easy to publish what you write without breaking the retirement bank. In fact, you may even make money.

Fiction or Nonfiction?

What is it you want to write? How do you want to present your thoughts?

Among the questions you must ask yourself is whether your writing tends to be more journalistic or more fanciful in style. Can it best be presented in a strictly factual context or will a fictitious setting better serve what you choose to write?

If you are leaning toward fiction, you have probably already begun to flesh the plot. With a little effort, I am sure you have the sensitivity and the insight to fine tune characters and settings. If you spend some time carefully listening to the way people around you speak, you'll be able to create dialogue that reflects the nature of your characters. With these skills that can be readily polished, your next step is to decide among the many subgenres of fiction. Will you write a novel, a mystery, a series of short stories?

When you embark on the nonfiction route, the decisions you face differ somewhat. It is important to determine whether the topic you choose is timely and whether there is a substantial audience interested in that topic. Make sure your knowledge of the subject is fully up to date. For example, many retirees don't stop to think that the world they knew in their working years has progressed to new levels, requiring some research to bring your knowledge up to date.

Head to the library or to the Web. Do your research carefully. Make no assumptions that you are fully knowledgeable on a specific topic. Always remember that the key to writing

successful nonfiction is content. To a publisher or to a reader looking for information, your understanding of the subject and your ability to explain it is of far greater consequence than the style in which you write.

Searching for Ideas

Many people have only a general idea of what they want to write about. Some are more fortunate and are eager to tackle a specific subject or issue. Possibilities abound everywhere. Start by looking right within your own home or within your circle of friends and acquaintances.

Perhaps you have a unique sibling...or even a unique relationship with a sibling. That can be the nucleus of a fascinating book or article. You may have some special ideas about parenting, developed during your years of raising a family. Have you experienced the trauma of a serious illness in the family? How did you and the other members cope? Your home and your family can generate a number of different ideas. Look carefully, and you'll discover them.

Similarly, your former workplace can offer endless possibilities. Trade journals are hungry for informative content. From the technical side of your old job to interactions with fellow workers, from ethical workplace issues to managerial skills, all of these and more are grist for your writing mill. And the trade journals are hungry for fresh content.

Hobbies, sports and other pastimes are excellent subjects to consider if you are particularly knowledgeable about one of them. You can place articles in the many magazines that are devoted exclusively to these subjects if you choose not to write a complete book.

Those wonderful boomer years have been filled with endless numbers of interesting events and contacts that can provide excellent starting points for writing either fiction or nonfiction. You've visited unique locations, met unusual characters, attended fascinating events...all of these are there for the calling. Summon up those memories, and get your computer's keyboard chattering away.

Idea Resources

There are many helpful resources to stimulate your mind, and assist you to zero in on the best choice. Considered the freelancer's bible by many, *Writer's Digest* is an 1175-page compendium, revised annually, that lists 50 categories of consumer magazines and 60 types of trade journals. Whether you're planning an article or a book, it's an invaluable tool to trigger ideas as you range through subjects from *Animal Lovers* to *Women's Periodicals* in the consumer section and from *Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations* to *Veterinary Medicine* in the trades.

A number of other helpful directories are available in your library's reference room, and of course, browsing subjects on the Internet's major search engines offers you an

overwhelming selection of ideas. If that's not enough to get you started, personalized coaching for your writing is available. You can find some of my fellow book coaches by searching the Web.

So toss aside the excuses and roll up your sleeves for several hours of concentrated research. Be sure to file away every idea that interests you for use now or in the future. There's a very strong likelihood that after your initial exposure to the wonderful world of writing, you'll be hooked, and want to do it again and again. The majority of my former students find it impossible to stop once they publish what they write.

You may find it just as fulfilling, but it will remain that cherished dream forever, if you don't resolve right now to head to a quiet place in the house that you can call your own for a couple of hours every day. Who knows? You may surprisingly become the next John Grisham. It's happened before.