Writers and Authors

Summary

Writers and authors develop written content.

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<th>Quick Facts: Writers and Authors</th>
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<td><strong>2012 Median Pay</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Entry-Level Education</strong></td>
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What Writers and Authors Do

Writers and authors develop written content for advertisements, books, magazines, movie and television scripts, songs, and online publications.

Work Environment

Writers and authors work in an office, at home, or wherever else they have access to a computer. Most work full time. However, self-employed and freelance writers usually work part time or have variable schedules. About two-thirds were self-employed in 2012.

How to Become a Writer or Author

A college degree is generally required for a full-time position as a writer or author. Proficiency with computers is necessary for staying in touch with sources, editors, and other writers while working on assignments. Excellent writing skills are essential.

Pay

The median annual wage for writers and authors was $55,940 in May 2012.

Job Outlook

Employment of writers and authors is projected to grow 3 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations. Strong competition is expected for full-time jobs because many people are attracted to this occupation.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of writers and authors with similar occupations.
What Writers and Authors Do

Writers and authors perform research in order to give their stories authentic detail.

Writers and authors develop written content for advertisements, books, magazines, movie and television scripts, songs, and online publications.

Duties

Writers and authors typically do the following:

- Choose subject matter that interests readers
- Write fiction or nonfiction through scripts, novels, and biographies
- Conduct research to obtain factual information and authentic detail
- Write advertising copy for use by newspapers, magazines, broadcasts, and the Internet
- Present drafts to editors and clients for feedback
- Work with editors and clients to shape the material so it can be published

Writers and authors develop written material, namely, stories and advertisements, for books, magazines, and online publications.

Writers must establish their credibility with editors and readers through strong research and the use of appropriate sources and citations. Writers and authors select the material they want to use and then convey the information to readers. With help from editors, they may revise or rewrite sections, searching for the best organization and the most appropriate phrasing.

An increasing number of writers are freelance writers—that is, they are self-employed and earn their living by selling their written content to book and magazine publishers; news organizations; advertising agencies; and movie, theater, and television producers. Many freelance writers are hired to complete specific short-term or recurring assignments, such as writing a newspaper column, contributing to a series of articles in a magazine, or producing an organization’s newsletter.

An increasing number of writers are producing material that is published directly online in videos and on blogs.

The following are examples of types of writers and authors:
Copywriters prepare advertisements to promote the sale of a good or service. They often work with a client to produce advertising themes, jingles, and slogans.

Biographers write a thorough account of a person’s life. They gather information from interviews and research about the person to accurately portray important events in that person’s life.

Generalists write about any topic of interest, unlike writers who usually specialize in a given field.

Novelists write books of fiction, creating characters and plots that may be imaginary or based on real events.

Songwriters compose music and lyrics for songs. They may write and perform their own songs or sell their work to a music publisher. They sometimes work with a client to produce advertising themes, jingles, and slogans, and they may be involved in marketing the product or service.

Playwrights write scripts for theatrical productions. They produce lines for actors to say, stage direction for actors to follow, and ideas for theatrical set design.

Screenwriters create scripts for movies and television. They may produce original stories, characters, and dialogue, or turn a book into a movie or television script. Some may produce content for radio broadcasts and other types of performance.

Journalists write reports on current events. For more information, see the profile on reporters, correspondents, and broadcast news analysts.

Work Environment

Freelance writers may work in an office or wherever they have a computer.

Writers and authors held about 129,100 jobs in 2012. About two-thirds were self-employed.

The industries that employed the most writers and authors in 2012 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific, and technical services</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services (except public administration)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, entertainment, and recreation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational services; state, local, and private</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writers and authors work in an office, at home, or wherever else they have access to a computer.

Jobs are somewhat concentrated in major media and entertainment markets—Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC—but improved communications and Internet capabilities allow writers and authors to work from almost anywhere. Many prefer to work outside these cities and travel regularly to meet with publishers and clients and to perform research or conduct in-person interviews.

Work Schedules
About 1 in 4 writers and authors worked part time in 2012. Some writers keep regular office hours, either to stay in contact with sources and editors or to set up a writing routine, but many writers set their own hours.

Freelance writers are paid per assignment; therefore, they work any number of hours necessary to meet a deadline. As a result, they must be willing to work evenings and weekends to produce something acceptable to an editor or client. Although many freelance writers enjoy running their own business and working flexible hours, most routinely face the pressures of juggling multiple projects or continually looking for new work.

How to Become a Writer or Author

A college degree is generally required for a salaried position as a writer or author. Proficiency with computers is necessary for staying in touch with sources, editors, and other writers while working on assignments. Excellent writing skills are essential.

Education

A bachelor’s degree is typically needed for a full-time job as a writer. Because writing skills are essential in this occupation, many employers prefer candidates with a degree in English, journalism, or communications.

Other Work Experience

Writers can obtain job experience by working for high school and college newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, advertising and publishing companies, or not-for-profit organizations. College theater and music programs offer playwrights and songwriters an opportunity to have their work performed. Many magazines and newspapers also have internships for students. Interns may write stories, conduct research and interviews, and gain general publishing experience.

In addition, Internet blogs can provide writing experience to anyone with online access. Some of this writing may lead to paid assignments regardless of education, because the quality of writing, the unique perspective, and the size of the potential audience are the greatest determinants of success for a piece of writing. Online publications require knowledge of computer software and editing tools that are used to combine text with graphics, audio, video, and animation.

Those with other backgrounds who demonstrate strong writing skills also may find jobs as writers.

Training

Writers and authors often need years of writing experience through on-the-job training before their work is ready for publication.

Writers who want to write about a particular topic may need formal training or experience related to that topic.

Because many writers today prepare material directly for the Internet, knowing graphic design, page layout, and multimedia software can be advantageous.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

Some associations offer certifications for writers and authors. Certification can demonstrate competence and professionalism, making candidates more attractive to employers. For example, the American Grant Writers’ Association (AGWA) offers the Certified Grant Writer® credential.

Certification can also increase opportunities for advancement.

**Advancement**

Writers and authors generally advance by building a reputation, taking on more complex writing assignments, and getting published in more prestigious markets and publications. Having published work that has been well received and maintaining a track record of meeting deadlines are important for advancement. Writing for smaller businesses, local newspapers, advertising agencies, and not-for-profit organizations allows beginning writers and authors to start taking credit for their work immediately.

However, opportunities for advancement within these organizations may be limited because they usually do not have enough regular work.

Many editors begin work as writers. Those who are particularly skilled at identifying stories, correcting writing style, and interacting with writers may be interested in editing jobs.

**Important Qualities**

*Adaptability.* Writers and authors need to be able to adapt to newer software platforms and programs, including various Content Management Systems (CMS).

*Creativity.* Writers and authors must be able to develop new and interesting plots, characters, or ideas so they can come up with new stories.

*Critical-thinking skills.* Writers and authors must have dual expertise in thinking through or understanding new concepts, and conveying it through written word.

*Determination.* Writers and authors sometimes work on projects that take years to complete. Freelance writers who are paid per assignment must demonstrate perseverance and personal drive.

*Persuasion.* Writers, especially those in advertising, must be able to persuade others to feel a certain way about a good or service.

*Social perceptiveness.* Writers and authors must understand how readers react to certain ideas in order to connect with their audience.

*Writing skills.* Writers and authors must be able to write effectively in order to convey feeling and emotion and communicate with readers.

**Pay**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers and Authors</th>
<th>Median annual wages, May 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writers and authors</td>
<td>$55,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and communication workers</td>
<td>$50,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total, all occupations</td>
<td>$34,750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

The median annual wage for writers and authors was $55,940 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $27,770, and the top 10 percent earned more than $117,860.
In May 2012, the median annual wages in the top five industries in which writers and authors worked were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Median Wage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific, and technical services</td>
<td>$61,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, entertainment, and recreation</td>
<td>$59,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services (except public administration)</td>
<td>$54,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational services; state, local, and private</td>
<td>$52,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>$51,940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Freelance writers earn income from their articles, books, and, less commonly, television and movie scripts. Although most freelance writers work on an individual project basis for multiple publishers, many support themselves with income derived from other sources. Freelancers generally have to provide for their own health insurance and pension, unless they receive coverage from another job.

About two-thirds of writers and authors are self-employed.

About 1 in 4 worked part time in 2012. Some writers keep regular office hours, either to stay in contact with sources and editors or to set up a writing routine, but many writers set their own hours. Freelance writers are paid per assignment; therefore, they work any number of hours necessary to meet a deadline. As a result, writers must be willing to work evenings and weekends to produce something that is acceptable to an editor or client. Although many freelance writers enjoy running their own business and working flexible hours, most routinely face the pressures of juggling multiple projects or continually looking for new work.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of writers and authors is projected to grow 3 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations.

Despite slower-than-average employment growth, online publications and services are growing in number and sophistication, spurring demand for writers and authors with Web and multimedia experience.

Some experienced writers should find work in the public relations departments of corporations and not-for-profit organizations. Others will likely find freelance work for newspaper, magazine, or journal publishers, and some will write books.

**Job Prospects**

Strong competition is expected for most job openings, given that many people are attracted to this occupation. Competition for jobs with established newspapers and magazines will be particularly strong because employment in the publishing industry is projected to decline.

Writers and authors who have adapted to online media and are comfortable writing for and working with a variety of electronic and digital tools should have an advantage in finding work. The declining costs of self-publishing, the growing popularity of electronic
books, and the increasing number of readers of electronic books will allow many freelance writers to have their work published.

### Employment projections data for Writers and Authors, 2012-22

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writers and authors</td>
<td>27-3043</td>
<td>129,100</td>
<td>132,900</td>
<td>3 3,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

### Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of writers and authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Announcers</strong></td>
<td>Announcers present music, news, and sports and may provide commentary or interview guests about these topics or other important events. Some act as masters of ceremonies (emcees) or disc jockeys (DJs) at weddings, parties, or clubs.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$27,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Editors</strong></td>
<td>Editors plan, review, and revise content for publication.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$53,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Relations and Fundraising Managers</strong></td>
<td>Public relations managers plan and direct the creation of material that will maintain or enhance the public image of their employer or client. Fundraising managers coordinate campaigns that bring in donations for their organization.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$95,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Relations Specialists</strong></td>
<td>Public relations specialists create and maintain a favorable public image for the organization they represent. They design media releases to shape public perception of their organization and to increase awareness of its work and goals.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$54,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporters, Correspondents, and Broadcast News Analysts</strong></td>
<td>Reporters, correspondents, and broadcast news analysts inform the public about news and events happening internationally, nationally, and locally. They report the news for newspapers, magazines, websites, television, and radio.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$37,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical Writers</strong></td>
<td>Technical writers, also called technical communicators, prepare instruction manuals, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex and technical information more easily. They also develop, gather, and disseminate technical information among customers, designers, and manufacturers.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$65,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contacts for More Information**
For more information about writers and authors, visit

American Grant Writers' Association
American Society of Journalists and Authors
Association of Writers & Writing Programs
National Association of Science Writers
Society of Professional Journalists
Writers Guild of America, East

O*NET

Writers and Authors
Copy Writers
Poets, Lyricists and Creative Writers

Suggested citation:


Publish Date: Wednesday, January 8, 2014