

How to Write for Newspapers

Freelance writing for newspapers is quite different than writing for magazines and websites. Freelance writers for newspapers are often called “stringers”. The newspaper’s editor will often keep stringers for regular, consistent assignments, or as an on-call basis to fill in when needed: when staff writers call in sick, or during work overloads.

Newspaper writing is usually considered journalistic in style, unless you are writing a column or editorials. Your articles will have to be journalistic, basically meaning that they will be newsworthy and free from any of your own opinions. The articles must contain factual information and interview quotes from relevant experts or others in connection with the story. Most newspaper articles will usually need to have the latest pertinent studies, statistics and other research information.

How to Get Started:

1. Before you start contacting newspaper editors, you will want to make sure you can show them you have what it takes. Start searching your files and notebooks for nonfiction, journalistic style articles, if you don’t already have any. If these are saved on your computer, print them up on some clean, white, standard paper. They should be at least 12 point font sized, Times New Roman and double-spaced for easy reading. Organize your articles neatly in a binder or folder of some type that is plain, solid-colored and professional looking. This is what you will take with you when you get a face-to-face interview with a newspaper’s editor. Maybe you would also like to take some business cards as well that include all of your contact information.

You don’t have any articles to show? No need to worry! Just start writing some journalistic article samples. Vary the topics a little to show that you can write on different topics. The editor might see a topic that sticks out, and he’ll ask you to write for that section of the newspaper! In your physical portfolio, you should have at least 10 to 15 articles for the editor to skim through, even if some or all are not published. It doesn’t matter. He’ll just want to see what you can write, examine your writing style, etc.

1. Get ready to start contacting editors. Create a standard query to send to each editor in your local area, but don’t forget to change the name and other information when you send them! Your proposal to become a stringer should be a professional, standard letter format with your name and contact information at the top, their business name, editor’s name and contact information below yours, and then the date. You begin with “Dear ‘Editor’” and conclude with “Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you”. You can vary the conclusion, but always say thank you.

Sell yourself and your writing skills in this, just as you would with a magazine’s query letter. If you are just starting out, take as much care with it as you do when applying for your dream job. Ask if they have any available positions for stringers or freelancers. Make sure you include your home and cell phone, as some editors like to respond via phone.

You are now armed and ready to send out those queries to your local newspapers! Give it a month or so, and if you don't have any luck with them, start sending them to others nearby – as far as you are willing to travel. The more you send, the better of a chance you have in landing at least an interview or two. Soon, you'll be writing for a newspaper!

Published in *Business Idea Factory* 2005