

Real Life 101 Writers

A **freelance writer** may be a regular contributor to a publication but isn't on the staff, having the flexibility to work with more than one magazine or newspaper. Sometimes freelancers select subject matter for a story themselves and find an interested publisher. Other times, once they have established a relationship with a particular editor, they may receive an assignment and work under a deadline. Freelancers have flexible hours and work from home. Resource <http://www.writersdigest.com/GeneralMenu/>

In order to become a **sports writer**, intern at a local newspaper at an entry position, such as a sports clerk, who keeps track of the scores, and work your way up to a sports news reporter. This job requires knowledge of the sport, an ability to chat with the athletes and team management. A sports writer must be able to combine factual accuracy with the ability to tell the stories behind the numbers and entertain the reader. Moreover, every sport has its own industry dynamics. In football you can get to know the players and coaches and the back-stories leading up to the game, whereas the tight schedule of Basketball games might make that challenging. Reporting the Olympics is a major goal for a sports writer.

In contrast to a **news reporter**, who is responsible for giving objective factual accounts, a **columnist** expresses his or her own opinion in an allotted space, becoming an authority on a subject they cover. A columnist's distinguishing writing style needs to be consistent and interesting, and a skill in approaching people is necessary in conducting successful interviews. Sometimes it involves asking tough questions of public officials or people facing tragedy, so resilience and people skills are indispensable. Columnists, who can be either employed or hired freelancers, work alone, whereas big report stories may involve a group of reporters contributing lines. These reports are completed under a deadline given by the editor. When the editor comes up with an idea for a story, there is also a deadline. Usually, though, writers themselves estimate the timeline for completion of their self-generated stories, which comprise the majority of stories for the experienced writer.

Developing your writing skills is the most important part of your education in this field. A liberal arts background will give you a well-rounded education, while courses and workshops in journalism give you structure, research discipline and rules for presentation of factual information. Be an avid reader and grow your vocabulary. Keep a personal journal for your ideas and write about what you are passionate about. Approach the school editors with your ideas in order to build up a portfolio of published clips or offer your story to a free publication to get your name into print. Show your eagerness and build up practical experience, and once you get published, you'll be able to send in your clippings to editors and receive your first assignments.

Journalism resources:

<http://www.apstylebook.com/> - Associated Press Style Book

http://wps.ablongman.com/long_fowler_lbh_10/ - The Little, Brown Handbook