Writing for the Profession: Paving a Path to Publication

Part I

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Not everyone is a writer and not everyone wants to write, but most of us do write for our jobs and we write to get a job. Knowing how to write well can not only help us advance in our own careers, but it can help others when we share our knowledge and our experiences and our ideas with them, in writing.

The Idea

Inspiration starts with an idea, and ideas can come from anywhere, at any time -- from a discussion, a revelation, a question, a problem, a solution, a process, a success, or a failure. To capture ideas when and where they may arise, try writing them down in a small notebook, or in a document that you keep in a folder called “ideas,” or in an app on your phone or tablet or other device. And then revisit these ideas every so often and use them to practice your writing, use them as jumping off points, use them to do research and to discover and uncover related topics and details. And use them to write your articles, essays, chapters, or books, or to create posters or presentations or simply to start professional discussions and collaborations. While inspiration and ideas are all around us, we still need to notice them, to be aware of their potential, and to capture them in writing.

“You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.” -- Jack London
Read First, and Then Publish

Before you try to get published, and before you even start writing, you need to read. By reading professional publications, you learn about new ideas and new ways to do things. You learn what types of publications you like to read, and you learn how to formulate words and sentences and paragraphs and persuasions that will make you a better writer.

“If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.” - Stephen King

So you have the idea, and you may even have a completed piece of writing. Now what? You should try to find a home for it. You should try to get it published. I’ll admit, the publishing process can be somewhat daunting and often frustrating, but you’ve already done the hard part – the writing, and the exploratory part (the reading).

Publishing venues come in a variety of formats and flavors. Before you start submitting your work, think about where your piece might fit, style and subject-wise and think about who your audience is (or who you want it to be). Since your writing is professional in nature, you will want to find out what kinds of publishing requirements you have for your job, if any, and what your director or supervisor or colleagues may recommend, especially if your writing reflects or refers to your current role, library, or institution. And consider publishing in alternative venues, such as newsletters (e.g., for library associations or organizations), blogs, career or association web sites, trade publications, and publications outside of LIS.

There are typically three ways to kick off the publication process:
1.) Contact (or query) the editor to see if your article or idea will fit the scope of his/her publication.

2.) Submit a completed piece of writing to the editor of a publication and wait to hear back.

3.) Answer a call for a paper (CFP). For these, you will submit a brief proposal of what you intend to write (that meets the specified requirements of the CFP).

Your idea, submission, or answer to a CFP, will either get accepted, accepted with revisions, or rejected. If it does get rejected, don’t let it get you down. Just keep editing, revising, and submitting. If your completed piece gets accepted, then you are on your way to being published. If your idea or call gets accepted, then you’ve got yourself a deadline. And there’s nothing like a deadline to keep your writing on track.

Productivity and Finding Time (Just Do It)

Once you start to write, you will want to get published, and once you get published, it will be easier to do it again. You just need to keep writing and capturing and developing those ideas. If you give writing the importance and credibility that it deserves, and treat it as the practice of a professional skill that will benefit your career and perhaps help you move up or move into a more desired role, then you will begin to hone your writer within.

Not everyone needs to write, but like our libraries, our professional literature needs different voices and different viewpoints and the willingness of our members to share their experiences and expertise with others. So if you have an idea, if you have a story to tell, write it. Start small. Do a little writing each day. Use tools that can help you stay on track of your time
and help motivate you. And don’t be afraid to send your work out there, to share it, to try to publish it, because you will (yes, you will), but you first have to write.

Further Reading, Tools & Advice:

Productivity & Writing Tools:

Advice to Writers

http://www.advicetowriters.com/

Writerly wisdom of the ages. Collected by Jon Winokur.

750 Words

http://750words.com/

The site encourages you to write at least 750 words every single day. Like stream-of-consciousness writing exercise. There are different badges you can collect based on how long your writing streak goes.

Dropbox

https://www.dropbox.com/

A free service that lets you bring your photos, docs, and videos anywhere and share them easily. Never email yourself a file again!

Evernote

https://evernote.com/

The *Evernote* family of products help you remember and act upon ideas, projects and experiences across all the computers, phones and tablets you use.
Written? Kitten!

http://writtenkitten.net/

Set your target number of words and start writing in the simple text box provided. Once your goal is reached, a new picture of a cute kitten appears. Positive reinforcement, via kittens!

CFPs:

A Library Writer’s Blog

http://librarywriting.blogspot.com/

Dolores’s CFPs

http://www.personal.psu.edu/dxf19/blogs/dolores_list_of_cfps/

Library Juice

http://libraryjuicepress.com/blog/?cat=19

Articles on (Librarians) Writing:

Becoming a Writer-Librarian

by Emily Ford

http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2013/becoming-a-writer-librarian/
From practice to publication: A path for academic library professionals
by Trudi Bellardo Hahn and Paul T. Jaeger
http://crln.acrl.org/content/74/5/238.full

Learn to write (well)
by Joanna June
http://hacklibschool.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/learn-to-write-well/

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