

Are You Ready to be a Writer?

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Like any other career, professional writing requires a certain level of skill and expertise related directly to a person's writing ability and personal attributes. In addition to actual knowledge and writing capability, a professional writer must have certain characteristics and positive habits that build up their writing career. That being said, there are several things that will halt a writer from obtaining complete success! Becoming a professional writer is both an educational process and a personal process. A potential professional writer should know whether or not they are ready to become a writer, if they have what it takes to be a professional writer, and what types of habits they should kick in order to be successful in their career. It isn't enough to know just what to do to become a professional writer; it takes knowing what also *not* to do.

First and foremost, if you are planning a career in professional writing, you just can't be a poor communicator. Human communication is the key to all things holy, the glue that binds society together, how we understand people, and how we describe ourselves indirectly to others. If you know your verbal communication skills are lacking, try picking up the telephone and calling your friends instead of texting them all the time. Any chance you get to engage in face-to-face communication, take it!! Be aware of the "ums," "likes," and "I means" that you use unnecessarily in conversation. The reason you can't be a poor communicator and a good writer is simple: writing *is* communication. Your personality and your communication skills shine through your writing...so expand your vocabulary, speak clearly and directly, respond to non-verbal communication, and think before you open your mouth. Being a good writer means being a good communicator (plus good communication will help you in job interviews, at work, and with clients).

Being an efficient multitasker is as important as being a good communicator. You might be a fantastic writer, but if you can't balance several responsibil-



Many Professional Writing students regularly work in the Digital Media Commons, located on the third floor of the Heritage Hall building at UAB. Here, students and collaborators have access to various programs needed to develop digital documents. The DMC is home to approximately fifteen computers.

ities while working on a strict deadline, you might not be ready to further your career in professional writing yet. In most writing jobs, you will be faced with numerous projects and timeframes all at once. Sometimes you'll have to bring your work home with you, and this becomes a huge stressor for people who are unable to multitask. The mind of a professional writer runs nonstop, scrambling with insanely creative new ideas, planning the next day's agenda, scheduling appointments and meetings, and thinking ahead to the next big project. It never stops. This is because successful professional writers are "doers." They are the people who get things done (while also getting a hundred other things done). To be a uni-tasker will do you a great disservice as a writer. If this is something you struggle with, try different ways to manage your time. See what works for you! Get a planner, schedule your days out in advance, plan ahead. Try to figure out why you have trouble giving your attention to multiple tasks. But be prepared to shake things up because as a writer, your schedule will constantly change!

While extreme multitasking might seem intimidating, just know that the deeper you become immersed in your career, the easier it will become. The best writers are the ones who are passionate about what they do. Professional writing of any kind is a career that

doesn't pay much (at least at the beginning). It's a field in which you truly have to work your way up...and work super hard at a nonstop pace. Professional writing might not be the career for you if you want to make tons of money. While you can certainly score big as a professional writer (look at all the famous authors, journalists, and creative media personnel who are rolling in that cash!), don't expect the career itself to fill your pockets. In order to be a true success as a writer, you have to love what you do. Don't be money-hungry...it never really gets you far in life anyway.

So now let's get to the worst habit you could ever possess if you want to be a writer. The difference between good writers and bad writers has very little to do with skill; it has to do with perseverance. Bad writers quit and good writers keep going. If you get bored easily, if you have a history of giving up, if you usually quit when you can't figure out the answer, you might want to reconsider professional writing. But better yet, reconsider your habits. Are they really worth missing out on a dream career? Being a good writer is difficult and it takes time (lots of time). If you take away anything from this little list of "do-nots," know this: if you refuse to give up and you motivate yourself to keep going even when work seems unbearable, you'll make it. You just can't quit. ■