Writers and Editors

(O*NET 23-2091.00, 27-3041.00, 27-3042.00, 27-3043.00, 27-3043.04, 27-3043.05)

Significant Points

- Most jobs in this occupation require a college degree preferably in communications, journalism, or English, but a degree in a technical subject may be useful for technical writing positions.

- The outlook for most writing and editing jobs is expected to be competitive because many people are attracted to the occupation.

- Online publications and services are growing in number and sophistication, spurring the demand for writers and editors with Web or multimedia experience.

Nature of the Work

Writers and editors produce a wide variety of written materials delivered to an audience in an increasing number of ways. They develop content using any number of multimedia formats for readers, listeners, or viewers. Although many people write as part of their primary job, or on on-line chats or blogs, only writers and editors who are paid for their work are included in this occupation. (News analysts, reporters and correspondents, who gather information and prepare stories about newsworthy events, are described elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Writers fall into two main categories—writers and authors and technical writers. *Writers and authors* develop original written materials for books, magazines, trade journals, online publications, company newsletters, radio and television broadcasts, motion pictures, and advertisements. Their works are classified broadly as either fiction or nonfiction and writers often are identified by the type of writing they do—for example, novelists, playwrights, biographers, screenwriters, and textbook writers. Some freelance writers may be commissioned by a sponsor to write a script; others may be contracted to write a book on the basis of a proposal in the form of a draft or an outline. Writers may produce materials for publication or performance, such as songwriters or scriptwriters.

Writers work with editors and publishers throughout the writing process to review edits, topics, and production schedules. Editors and publishers may assign topics to staff writers or review proposals from freelance writers. All writers conduct research on their topics, which they gather through personal observation, library and Internet research, and interviews. Writers, especially of nonfiction, are expected to establish their credibility with editors and readers through strong research and the use of appropriate sources and citations. Writers and authors then select the material they want to use, organize it, and use the written word to express story lines, ideas, or to convey information. With help from editors, they may revise or rewrite sections, searching for the best organization or the right phrasing.

Copy writers are a very specialized type of writer. They prepare advertising copy for use in publications or for broadcasting and they write other materials to promote the sale of a good or service. They often must work with the client to produce advertising themes or slogans and may be involved in the marketing of the product or service.

Technical writers put technical information into easily understandable language. They prepare product documentation, such as operating and maintenance manuals, catalogs, assembly instructions, and project proposals. Technical writers primarily are found in the information technology industry, writing operating instructions for online Help and documentation for computer programs. Many technical writers work with engineers on technical subject matters to prepare written interpretations of engineering and design specifications and other information for a general readership. Technical writers also may serve as part of a team conducting usability studies to help improve the design of a product that still is in the prototype stage. They plan and edit technical materials and oversee the preparation of illustrations, photographs, diagrams, and charts.

Most writers and editors have at least a basic familiarity with technology, regularly using personal computers, desktop or electronic publishing systems, scanners, and other electronic communications equipment. Many writers prepare material directly for the Internet. For example, they may write for electronic editions of newspapers or magazines, create short fiction or poetry, or produce technical documentation that is available only online. These writers also may prepare text for Web sites. As a result, they should be knowledgeable about graphic design, page layout, and multimedia software. In addition, they should be familiar with interactive technologies of the Web so that they can blend text, graphics, and sound together. Bloggers who are paid to write may be considered writers.

Many writers are considered *freelance writers*. They are self-employed and sell their work to publishers, publication enterprises, manufacturing firms, public relations departments, or advertising agencies. Sometimes, they contract with publishers first to write a book or an article. Others may be hired to complete specific short-term or recurring assignments, such as writing about a new product or contributing to an organization's quarterly newsletter.

Editors review, rewrite, and edit the work of writers. They also may do original writing. An editor's responsibilities vary with the employer and type and level of editorial position held. Editorial duties may include planning the content of books, technical journals, trade magazines, and other general-interest publications. Editors also review story ideas proposed by staff and freelance writers then decide what material will appeal to readers. They review and edit drafts of books and articles, offer comments to improve the work, and suggest possible titles. In addition, they may oversee the production of publications. In the book-publishing industry, an editor's primary responsibility is to review proposals for books and decide whether to buy the publication rights from the author.

Major newspapers and newsmagazines usually employ several types of editors. The *executive editor* oversees *assistant editors*, and generally has the final say about what stories are published and how they are covered. Assistant editors have responsibility for particular subjects, such as local news, international news, feature stories, or sports. The *managing editor* usually is responsible for the daily operation of the news department. *Assignment editors* determine which reporters will cover a given story. *Copy editors* mostly review and edit a reporter's copy for accuracy, content, grammar, and style.

Writers and editors use reference books and other resources to research or verify information.

In smaller organizations—such as small daily or weekly newspapers—a single editor may do everything or share responsibility with only a few other people. Executive and managing editors typically hire writers, reporters, and other employees. They also plan budgets and negotiate contracts with freelance writers, sometimes called "stringers" in the news industry.

Editors often have assistants, many of whom hold entry-level jobs. These assistants, frequently called copy editors, review copy for errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling and check the copy for readability, style, and agreement with editorial policy. They suggest revisions, such as changing words and rearranging sentences and paragraphs, to improve clarity or accuracy. They also carry out research for writers and verify facts, dates, and statistics. In addition, they may arrange page layouts of articles, photographs, and advertising; compose headlines; and prepare copy for printing. *Publication assistants* who work for publishing houses may read and evaluate manuscripts submitted by freelance writers, proofread printers' galleys, and answer letters about published material. Assistants on small newspapers or in radio stations compile articles available from wire services or the Internet, answer phones, and make photocopies.

Work environment. While some writers and editors work in comfortable, private offices, others work in noisy rooms filled with the sounds of keyboards and the voices of other writers tracking down information or interviewing sources. The search for information sometimes requires that writers travel to diverse workplaces, such as factories, offices, or laboratories, but many find their material through telephone interviews, the library, and the Internet.

Advances in electronic communications have changed the work environment for many writers. Laptop computers and wireless communications technologies allow growing numbers of writers to work from home and on the road. The ability to e-mail, transmit and download stories, research, or review materials using the Internet allows writers and editors greater flexibility in where and how they complete assignments.

Some writers keep regular office hours, either to maintain contact with sources and editors or to establish a writing routine, but most writers set their own hours. Many writers—especially 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, nights, or weekends to produce a piece acceptable to an editor or client by the publication deadline. Those who prepare morning or weekend publications and broadcasts also may regularly work nights, early mornings, and weekends.

While many freelance writers enjoy running their own businesses and the advantages of working flexible hours, most routinely face the pressures of juggling multiple projects with competing demands and the continual need to find new work. Deadline pressures and long, erratic work hours—often part of the daily routine in these jobs—may cause stress, fatigue, or burnout. In addition, the use of computers for extended periods may cause some individuals to experience back pain, eyestrain, or fatigue.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A college degree generally is required for a position as a writer or editor. Good facility with computers and communications equipment is necessary in order to stay in touch with sources, editors, and other writers while working on assignments, whether from home, an office, or while traveling.

Education and training. Some employers look for a broad liberal arts background, while others prefer to hire people with degrees in communications, journalism, or English. For those who specialize in a particular area, such as fashion, business, or law, additional background in the chosen field is expected. Increasingly, technical writing requires a degree in, or some knowledge about, a specialized field—for example, engineering, business, or one of the sciences. Knowledge of a second language is helpful for some positions. A background in web design, computer graphics, or other technology field is increasingly practical, because of the growing use of graphics and representational design in developing technical documentation. In many cases, people with good writing skills may transfer from jobs as technicians, scientists, or engineers into jobs as writers or editors. Others begin as research assistants or as trainees in a technical information department, develop technical communication skills, and then assume writing duties.

Other qualifications. Writers and editors must be able to express ideas clearly and logically and should enjoy writing. Creativity, curiosity, a broad range of knowledge, self-motivation, and perseverance also are valuable. Writers and editors must demonstrate good judgment and a strong sense of ethics in deciding what material to publish. In addition, the ability to concentrate amid confusion and to work under pressure often is essential. Editors also need tact and the ability to guide and encourage others in their work.

Familiarity with electronic publishing, graphics, and video production increasingly is needed. Use of electronic and wireless communications equipment to send e-mail, transmit work,

and review copy often is necessary. Online newspapers and magazines require knowledge of computer software used to combine online text with graphics, audio, video, and animation.

High school and college newspapers, literary magazines, community newspapers, and radio and television stations all provide valuable—but sometimes unpaid—practical writing experience. Many magazines, newspapers, and broadcast stations have internships for students. Interns write short pieces, conduct research and interviews, and learn about the publishing or broadcasting business.

Advancement. In small firms, beginning writers and editors hired as assistants may actually begin writing or editing material right away. Opportunities for advancement and also full-time work can be limited, however. Many small or not-for-profit organizations either do not have enough regular work or cannot afford to employ writers on a full-time basis. However, they routinely contract out work to freelance writers.

In larger businesses, jobs usually are more formally structured. Beginners generally do research, fact check articles, or copy edit drafts. Advancement to full-scale writing or editing assignments may occur more slowly for newer writers and editors in larger organizations than for employees of smaller companies. Advancement often is more predictable, though, coming with the assignment of more important articles.

Advancement for writers, especially freelancers, often means working on larger, more complex projects for better known publications or for more money. Building a reputation and establishing a track record for meeting deadlines also makes it easier to get future assignments. Experience, credibility, and reliability often lead to long-term freelance relationships with the same publications and to contacts with editors who will seek you out for particular assignments.

The growing popularity of blogging could allow some writers to get their work read. For example, a few well-written blogs may garner some recognition for the author and may lead to a few paid pieces in other print or electronic publications. Some established staff writers contribute to blogs on the on-line versions of publications in conjunction with their routine work. However, most bloggers do not earn a considerable amount of money writing their blogs.

Employment

Writers and editors held about 306,000 jobs in 2006. More than one-third were self-employed Writers and authors held about 135,000 jobs; editors, about 122,000 jobs; and technical writers, about 49,000 jobs. About one-third of the salaried jobs for writers and editors were in the information sector, which includes newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers; radio and television broadcasting; software publishers; motion picture and sound-recording industries; Internet service providers, Web search portals and data-processing services; and Internet publishing and broadcasting. Substantial numbers also worked in professional, scientific, and technical services. Other salaried writers and editors work in computer systems design and related services, public and private educational services, and religious organizations.

Jobs with major book publishers, magazines, broadcasting companies, advertising agencies, and public relations firms are concentrated in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. However, many writers work outside these cities and travel regularly to meet with personnel at the headquarters. Jobs with newspapers, business and professional journals, and technical and trade magazines are more widely dispersed throughout the country. Technology permits writers and editors to work from distant and remote locations and still communicate with editors and publishers. As a result, geographic concentration is less of a requirement for many writing or editing positions than it once was.

Thousands of other individuals work primarily as freelance writers, earning income from their articles, books, and less commonly, television and movie scripts. Many support themselves with income derived from other sources.

Job Outlook

Employment of writers and editors is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations. Competition is expected for writing and editing jobs because many people with the appropriate training and talent are attracted to the occupation.

Employment change. Employment of writers and editors is expected to grow 10 percent, or about as fast as the average for all occupations, from 2006 to 2016. Employment of salaried writers and editors is expected to increase as demand grows for web-based publications. Technical writing, blogging, and other writing for interactive media that provide readers with nearly real-time information will provide opportunities for writers. Print magazines and other periodicals increasingly are developing market niches, appealing to readers with special interests, and making Internet-only content available on their websites. Businesses and organizations are developing newsletters and websites, and more companies are publishing materials directly for the Internet. Online publications and services are growing in number and sophistication, spurring the demand for writers and editors, especially those with Web experience. Professional, scientific, and technical services firms, including advertising

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Writers and editors..	27-3040	306,000	336,000	30,000	10
Editors	27-3041	122,000	124,000	2,800	2
Technical writers..	27-3042	49,000	59,000	9,600	20
Writers and authors..	27-3043	135,000	153,000	17,000	13

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

and public relations agencies, also are growing and should be another source of new jobs.

Job prospects. Opportunities should be best for technical writers and those with training in a specialized field. Demand for technical writers and writers with expertise in areas such as law, medicine, or economics is expected to increase because of the continuing expansion of scientific and technical information and the need to communicate it to others. Legal, scientific, and technological developments and discoveries generate demand for people to interpret technical information for a more general audience. Rapid growth and change in the high-technology and electronics industries result in a greater need for people to write users' guides, instruction manuals, and training materials. This work requires people who not only are technically skilled as writers, but also are familiar with the subject area.

In addition to job openings created by employment growth, some openings will arise as experienced workers retire, transfer to other occupations, or leave the labor force. Replacement needs are relatively high in this occupation because many free-lancers leave because they cannot earn enough money.

Earnings

Median annual earnings for salaried writers and authors were $48,640 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between $34,850 and $67,820. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $25,430, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $97,700. Median annual earnings were $50,650 in advertising and related services and $40,880 in newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers.

Median annual earnings for salaried editors were $46,990 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between $35,250 and $64,140. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $27,340, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $87,400. Median annual earnings of those working for newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers were $45,970.

Median annual earnings for salaried technical writers were $58,050 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between $45,130 and $73,750. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $35,520, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $91,720. Median annual earnings in computer systems design and related services were $59,830.

According to the Society for Technical Communication, the median annual salary for entry level technical writers was $40,400 in 2005. The median annual salary for midlevel non-supervisory technical writers was $52,140, and for senior non-supervisory technical writers, $69,000.

Related Occupations

Writers and editors communicate ideas and information. Other communications occupations include announcers; interpreters and translators; news analysts, reporters, and correspondents; and public relations specialists.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on careers in technical writing, contact:
➤ Society for Technical Communication, Inc., 901 N. Stuart St., Suite 904, Arlington, VA 22203. Internet: **http://www.stc.org**