

7 Tested Money-Making Methods for Writers



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There are many people who would like to make a part-time income as a writer. Many more would like to make enough money as a writer to give up their day job. This eBook is designed to point you in the right direction to achieve your writing goals whatever they may be.

I have tested all the methods I've written about here, plus many others. I got an early start as a writer. I worked on my school paper, the yearbook and I was constantly scribbling away in my notebooks.

In university, I was an editor on our student newspaper, and my work attracted the attention of the administration. They asked me to join the public relations staff where I honed my craft writing fundraising proposals, brochures, news releases, newsletters and display advertising copy.

This is a count-down from the *worst ways* of making money as a writer *to the best ways*. I hope my insights will help you live a profitable creative life.

I went on to earn my Master of Arts degree in Communications. I got one of those part-time/full-time jobs that graduate students often get. It was at a national magazine that had a book publishing division. I spent every available hour writing and editing magazine articles and books.

Over the years, I have written dozens of books, ghostwritten dozens more and written untold numbers of magazine articles and blog posts. I traveled to 31 countries as a journalist writing stories for and about nonprofit organizations. I've written everything you can imagine — everything from corporate white paper reports to documentary film scripts. I have taught media subjects on the university level both in the US and overseas. So, why am I telling you all this?

Simple. Over the years, I have learned how to make money as a writer. Importantly, I have also learned how to *not* make money as a writer. I'm sharing my experience with you to help you save time, money and frustration. I sincerely want to contribute to your success as a writer.

I strongly believe that creative people should make money from their efforts. Some people think writing is not "real work." After all, anyone can write, they say. But if you have skill as a writer you should not let anyone devalue your creativity. You should maximize the financial benefits from your intellectual powers.

Most of the methods I suggest involve freelancing. Freelancing and writing “go together like peas and carrots,” as Forrest Gump would say. In keeping with that vegetable motif, let me add that freelancing is like an onion because there are so many layers to it. I’ve have had salaried writer jobs, but I was also freelancing on the side. I found freelancing provided the greatest return on my investment of time. Today, I still do freelance writing, but my main focus is multiplying myself by teaching [online courses](#) and offering [author services](#).

#7

Writing Gigs from Craigslist

I don't want to offend anyone, but I equate getting writing gigs from Craigslist.com as being akin to dumpster diving. When you're totally broke, have no self-esteem, and want to deal with people that you'll later dream about murdering in their bed, then accept a writing gig from Craigslist.

Many of the writing gigs are scams. They'll send you to a website to register for writing jobs (often for a fee). Or they'll want a free sample blog post on a certain topic to see if you "qualify." I love that one. If 100 aspiring writers send them a sample on the topic they have specified, the scammers have enough material so they don't need to buy anything from anyone.

Most writing gig advertisers don't seem to know much about writing. They have few skills to know good writing from bad, and they're likely to put you into a seemingly endless loop of pointless rewrites.

Even the "good" listers want you to work for a penny or two per word. That's crazy. Keep in mind that before Edgar Alan Poe became famous, he was selling his work for four cents a word. Back in the 1840's four cents had the same buying

power as \$1.50 today. Those who ask you to work for one or two cents per word today are trying to exploit you.

My remarks about Craigslist deal with writing and creative “gigs.” Gigs are freelance opportunities. Craigslist also has a writing jobs section. If you want a full-time writing job, you can consult that section. Your results may be different if you go to an interview, size up an employer, and do all the other things required to get a regular 8-5 office job. In my opinion, Craigslist is always a sketchy place to do any kind of business. Be sure to heed their [personal safety advice](#).

What are sensible rates today for blog posts and other writing projects? I suggest you visit this [freelance hourly rate calculator](#). It will help you determine realistic fees. If you're new to writing, you may want to set the hourly rate it requests to something low, like double the minimum wage in your area. Later, as you gain experience and a client base you can increase that rate.

#6

Contract Jobs through Upwork, Freelancer, Fiverr or Similar Services

There are many dozens of sites that act as brokers for writers and other creative people. Generally speaking, you sign up, look at the job offerings, and bid on the ones you like.

If a client accepts your offer, then you get the job and pay the broker a fee for their service. Is this sort of arrangement as bad as Craigslist? No. It's undesirable for several reasons, but at least you have the benefit of a middleman who can sort out troubles should they occur.

The upside is that you can, over time, build relationships with clients. The various systems force you to work through their platform so they can collect their commission, but good writers can get repeat business at decent payment rates.

What is the downside of using one of the services? It's the competition. People from all over the world are competing for the jobs. If you live in the United States or Canada, you can be sure that someone from India or Pakistan will work cheaper

and live well off the money. This situation leads to a long race to the bottom of the heap. If you live in North America a penny or two per word is pointless, but it's enough to buy groceries and a Third World country. So, when you contract with one of these services, you can be sure that someone will work cheaper than you.

No, this is not a racial or ethnic issue. It's purely economic. If you'd like to get the big picture about this, [read my post](#) on offshore workers from both a writer and client perspective.

There are other downsides with broker sites too. Workers complain about high broker fees, demands for private banking information and poor communication. New workers have a hard time breaking in because those who have been on the site for years have unreachable high ratings. Those rich in ratings will only get richer and newcomers suffer.

While I don't recommend any of these types of sites, Textbroker.com might be one of the better ones for writers. Writers are categorized by skill level and the higher the skill the more money you'll be offered for a particular job.

#5

Blog

Now we move into methods where you can make serious money based on your skills and persistence. You can make money as a blogger. You would think that since there are literally millions of blogs that making money with one is a hard thing to do. It does take effort, but there are literally hundreds of thousands of people around the world who make a good living with a blog.

There are many aspects of blogging that makes it desirable. You can create one yourself with little out-of-pocket expense. You can write about a topic that interests you. Most blog posts are between 500 and 1500 words each, and so that makes a pleasant few hours of writing. To be effective, you must post on a regular schedule, but 2-3 times per week can usually meet the need.

What are the keys to financial success with a blog? Here are some in outline form:

- Pick a topic that you are passionate about, but also interests other people. Many authors have a blog based on the topic of their book, and that's a good

thing. You can blog about other things too. Your blog is a method of reaching out to people and what you say to them is up to you.

- Never use a service like Blogger.com or WordPress.com. There are too many restrictions that will hamper your success. Some people say, “I can start for free and will see what happens.” The problem with that is if you do succeed, and get traffic, you’ll lose it when you switch over to professional web hosting and a desirable platform like WordPress.org. Notice the difference between the dot com and dot org when it comes to WordPress. Dot org allows you to run WordPress on your own hosting and it’s essential that you do that.
- Get your own domain name. Don’t accept a free one — whoever offers a free domain name will always retain control of it. You want to buy your own so that you control it.
- Write quality content. Most posts start with an interesting story or statistic that grabs reader interest. Most writers are making a point, and they normally do that under three well-structured headings. Always in your posts with what is known as a “call to action.” No matter what you write about, you want to elicit a response from your readers.

Like almost all aspects of the writing game, there is a business side to it. It’s your responsibility to learn about site optimization so that you can attract readers to your site. There are many techniques including search engine optimization (SEO) so that Google and other search engines can find you, and many social media strategies.

One of the best strategies that you can have is to build readership is to offer a newsletter to your readers. You want to start a mailing list like this from day one of your blog. There are many automated newsletter systems, but you can get insight into how the whole process works at [MailChimp](#).

How do you make money? Once you have enough traffic, you'll be in a position to sell things to site visitors. If you have written a book or a series of them, you want to sell your book. Sometimes that's just a landing page with details about your book and a link to Amazon where people can buy it, but that's often good enough.

New bloggers commonly start with Google AdSense and get paid for displaying ads.

Wise blog owners learn about Affiliate programs. You run ads for Affiliates, but you don't get paid for displaying them. When someone clicks and buys, you get a percentage of the sale and that can be hugely profitable. If you want to make money as a blogger, you need to learn to essential things — how to get traffic (visitors), and how to get maximum benefit from Affiliate programs.

#4

Find a Mainline Book Publisher

Many people dream of having their book published by one of the big New York City publishing companies. They dream of getting a high dollar advance from companies like HarperCollins or Simon and Schuster. They have visions of royalty checks rolling in and year after year.

Notice however that I have only placed that grand dream as number four in my list of money making writing methods. That's because finding a mainline publisher is difficult these days. Mainline publishers don't operate like they did just 15 or 20 years ago. Yes, you can make good money if you land a contract from one, but it's easier said than done.

The first reason that it's so difficult is that you must have a completed book to offer. You sometimes hear about people selling their novel or nonfiction book from a sample chapter and an outline. However, with the number of mainline publishers shrinking and many more people writing books, that method is reserved for writers with a track record. Once you have a couple of books published, a publisher is more likely to buy your next book from a sample chapter and outline.

The next reason that finding a mainline book publisher can be tough is that few of them accept manuscripts directly. Due to legal issues and worker constraints, most publishers refuse to accept manuscripts sent directly to them. They want you to go through an agent.

The first step, then, is to find an agent who will read your completed manuscript. Good agents are looking for authors to add to their stable. They are looking for talent and for someone who can produce many books for them over the years.

Bad agents will charge you a reading fee. They don't make enough money off their percentage of author royalties, so they augment their income with a fee to read your book. You want to stay away from any agent who charges a reading fee.

A book agent is in a strategic spot in the book publishing process. He filters the wheat from the chaff for publishers and it cost them nothing. Yet, at the same time, good agents have relationships with publishers. If an agent likes your book, he'll have lunch with the acquisition editor of a mainline publisher and make a deal for you.

This transaction does not come without cost. An agent may ask 15%-25% commission of your advance check and your ongoing royalty payments as long as your book is in print. That's a stiff fee and reason enough for you to only work with agents who have a proven track record of placing books like yours with mainline publishers.

Can you make serious money using this method? Absolutely. These publishers pay advances and you can usually depend on regular royalty checks. But don't expect to get treated like royalty with press junkets and all that until you have sold your first 100,000 books. Today, big publishers will expect you to have a sizable fan base

(platform) already in place through your blog or social media pages so you can do initial promotion on your own.

Writing a book on speculation and then finding an agent is not easy. However, if you have written a book that readers respond to, then you can expect to make a sizable income.

#3

Self-Publish Your Books

Self-publishing your book or eBook is an excellent way to make money. You can write what you want at your own pace, and if you follow certain rules, it can be profitable.

The biggest problem is that an aspiring writer gets a wild idea and immediately thinks the book will be profitable. Their world comes crashing down when they invest time, effort and money into their writing project only to see it crash and burn.

The error in this is that writers tend to believe that everyone will be interested in their book. That's simply not true. Successful book topics follow a certain pattern and you must learn how to tap into that before you can expect to make serious money from self-published books.

This is such an important issue that I have created an online course on, "[How to Get Profitable Book Ideas](#)." You'll benefit from enrolling in that course, but let me give you the heart of the matter in a nutshell. You want to write a book that people

want to read. You determine that by doing some market research. Then, realize that books don't sell themselves. If you don't feel that you want to promote your book on an ongoing basis, then you probably shouldn't write one in the first place.

Remember that you want to repurpose any book you write. Many authors think only in terms of paperback books and eBooks, but using the same material to create an audiobook is a growing profit center. You want to repurpose your creative work in as many forms as possible to gain profits.

Previously, I mentioned blogs as a separate money-making opportunity. Let me say here, that I don't think you can successfully market a book without a blog. Your blog should be the center of your promotional universe. It's where you attract readers, develop a relationship with them and sell them your creative work. Not only will you be selling your books and other repurposed creations, but you are also able to sell ads and offer products you like to receive affiliate commissions.

I have a [free video](#) that illustrates why writers must wear two hats if they want financial success. In my view, it's impossible to make money as a self-publisher unless you explore all income avenues related to your book.

So, do your market research and write the best book you can, whether fiction or nonfiction. In both cases, the profits continue to roll in when you write a series that your audience appreciates and wants to buy.

#2

Get a Writing Job in the Corporate World

You can get a writing job in the corporate world. Many writers are free-spirited and sometimes clash with people in a structured corporate environment. However, there are many benefits to getting a job with a corporation. It's steady money with benefits, and they give you assignments to research and complete in a set period of time.

Some writers benefit from the structure, particularly at the beginning of their writing career. Many new freelancers don't know the ropes, and home alone, they waste time and gain weight because of the nearby refrigerator. That's never a good result. A corporate job in the early days of a writing career helps a writer learn discipline, and that's worth the other frustrations that come with a corporate 9-to-5 job.

Another benefit of a writing job in the corporate world is that you usually get a variety of writing tasks to do, and I considered that a benefit. As I mentioned in the introduction to this eBook, I learned how to write brochures, newsletters, newspaper articles, advertising copy and a host of other projects in a structured

environment and it was a great experience. For example, I learned to interview skills back then and I still use them in all aspects of my writing today.

My advice: Don't work as an intern for free. That seems like a popular thing to do these days but think twice. Your creative abilities, even if embryonic, have value. When you respect that about yourself, then others will respect it too. If you need to build your skills, there are better ways to do it than giving away your time to a for-profit business.

That brings me to a subject that is dear to my heart. I think there is an opportunity in the nonprofit sector. If you're going to work as an intern, work for a nonprofit where you'll be doing some social good. I'm not saying that you should work for free — I'm against that on principle. There are many paid writing jobs in various kinds of nonprofit organizations.

Sadly, many nonprofits, especially smaller ones, think that since they are doing something to advance the greater good that their employees should work for little or nothing. That's not true. To be a success a nonprofit must, "make a profit," even though they choose to give the money away, rather than line their own pockets. But the fact is, they still must pay rent, the power bill, buy equipment, pay for printing or web hosting services and all the rest just like any business. Thus, they should pay their employees just like anyone else. Decently paid nonprofit employees have the potential in more donations and everyone wins when that happens.

Nonprofits are far-ranging — everything from local churches, to community organizations to national groups like the Red Cross. The lifeblood of nonprofits is to communicate with their constituency through websites, brochures, special reports, news articles and so forth, so this field is ripe for you.

There are many reasons to start out in a corporate or nonprofit job. It's steady money with benefits and is normally a learning experience. And remember, you can always freelance on the side.

#1

Ghostwrite on Contract

Give me a drum roll, please. We have reached what I believe to be the best method to make money as a writer. You have the benefits of steady work without the hassles of a corporate environment. You can write books without the risk inherent in being a self-publisher. The pay is above average. You only need to sell the book to the client, and it's the client's responsibility to sell all the copies that are printed.

Your client pays you a retainer in advance to research and write their book.

I have ghostwritten literally dozens of books, mostly biographies and sometimes the histories of companies or organizations. I am not suggesting that you ghostwrite a book on nuclear physics for a university professor. Unless you have special knowledge or are paid to do extensive research, you probably want to stay within the confines of writing about people, places and things.

Let me briefly describe the process that I used for many years. I had a lot of contacts so I didn't have to beat the bushes for clients in the beginning. However, I

would have made cold calls of various kinds to find people who would benefit from a book. Once I found a potential client, I created a proposal outlining the extent of the work I would do and my fee. The client either accepted or rejected my written proposal.

My fee structure remained unchanged over the years. My minimum was between \$6,000 and \$18,000 depending on the word count and the amount of research needed. Travel related fees and hard costs, such as duplicating documents or media, are added to the final bill.

There is a big front-end load when you write a book about a person or company because of all the prep work and research that needs to be done. That's why I always got a 50% retainer to start. Then, after initial research and relevant interviews, I wrote a highly detailed annotated outline and gave it to the client for approval. That was the blueprint, and if the client wanted major changes later, there was an extra fee for that. Based upon the approved annotated outline, I wrote the first draft of the book. Upon submission of it, I received another 25% of the overall cost, according to the agreement I had reached with my client.

I gave my client plenty of time to review the first draft. Sometimes I did more interviews to, "get the story straight." At this stage, I always wanted to be generous with my client to make sure he or she got the book they wanted. Yes, it was based upon the annotated outline, but the first draft is the time to add nuance.

Once the details of the final draft were fixed, I did the second draft. When I submitted that, I got my final 25% payment. I liked to have such good communication with my client that they knew what they were getting in the final second draft. No surprises for them or for me. Yes, I was always happy to polish the manuscript one final time as part of my copy editing, but that goes with the territory.

Where do you find clients? Many people want a professionally written biography. Sometimes these are business or community leaders, but often they are ordinary people who want to be remembered by future generations. Some people want a family history, and they are always fun to write. Corporations like to have an official history of their company that they can disseminate. Many nonprofit organizations, especially churches, want a history written, and with their own constituency, they have ready buyers for the finished product.

Ghostwriting on contract is the most profitable type of writing that I know about. It's usually fun too. However, you must remain professional. Always write on retainer, never on contingency. You are writing the book for a set fee with progress payments, not on any kind of commission.

Contract ghostwriting is a business. However, you can have a steady income and work at a desirable pace.

What Will Work Best for You?

I have tested all these money making methods. As you see, I have strong opinions that some don't work at all. However, I've had great money-making experiences with other options.

A key idea is that none of them “work.” You must *make* them work. Being able to write an article, blog post, novel or nonfiction book is just part the task. You must also be able to:

- Find writing work.
- Sell your skills to others. All writers must be able to promote their work.
- Stay motivated during the entire process.

With all three in harmony, you can make money as a writer.



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