

And what do you do?... How to know when you're a writer!

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**And what do you do?... How to know when you're a writer!**

**By Edward B. Toupin**

**And what do you do?... How to know when you're a writer! by Edward B. Toupin**

It's the funniest thing. When someone asks me what I do for a living, I tell them, "I'm a writer." The standard response is, "No, really, what do you do?" Somehow, I always get lost in the conversation because I never expect that type of response. I end up floundering in hopes of someday finding a good response.

--- So, how do you know you're a real writer? ---

It has to be a certain look or smell that identifies you as a writer. Is it the turtleneck and mothball odor that give it away, or perhaps its the old blue jeans you wear for a week or two.

Generally, my rule of thumb is if you can sell your ideas and make money writing, you're "a writer!" If you sit and write all day long and never sell anything, then "you write." So, in summary: "you write until you become a writer!"

But, this is very true! To become a writer, you have to write every day. You should think of a dozen or so topics and write about them. This will help you learn your style and develop your skills.

If you write, but are not yet a writer, here's an objective! Write, until you sell something. Once you get the money, pay your gas bill. Now, you're a writer! But, don't stop with just one article, keep going!

--- Hey Ed! Say something funny. ---

It just doesn't happen like that. I'm not a funny guy. If I sit down and design something funny, I can be hilarious. But, I can't just say something

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funny.

On the other hand, ideas are things that just happen. But, developing and writing that idea takes work. The act of writing doesn't "just happen."

When writing about an idea, you have to research the idea to determine if it's feasible. If it looks good, then you have to research it again to become an expert—or at least knowledgeable on the topic.

The other point to writing is that, even as a Technical Writer, you have to feel the writing. This goes back to one of my previous articles, "Natural Writing." You have to learn your verbal style before you can become

comfortable with your written style. Once you understand your own style of communicating, stick with it as it's the most comfortable place to start. Let it evolve, but stay with it to ensure that the writing feels good and flows.

--- And, have I read something you've written? ---

I don't even know if they can read much less if they've ever read something I've written. If the name rings a bell, probably so! The point is that most people won't know about you unless you write!

Become a prolific writer and write for the sake of writing. The more you write, the better you become, the more you publish, and the more people will read your work.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for a writer is "fear." Don't be afraid to send your work out. People will compliment you and criticize you. In all cases, take the feedback, positive or negative, graciously!

--- I write stuff, too. ---

When I was young, I wrote on the bathroom stalls in Catholic elementary school. I created some spectacular poetry! When Sister Butch, of the Order of the Most Vicious Blood, caught me, that was the end of my career, and nearly my life. Everybody can write, but not everybody can be a writer.

Being a writer is not just putting words on the paper. It involves research, organization, thought, creative wordplay, and the ability to sit still long enough to put it all together.

This short article is a reasonable example. It started out in my head as "Why write?" and evolved based on some thought. Writing is the evolution of

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ideas into something between fact and fiction. It's the evolution of presentation into something coherent to the largest audience. It's a fantasy that turns into a reality once you figure out what it is that you're trying to say!

---- And, what made you write? ----

It wasn't some miracle or premonition. Honestly. Someone made me madder than a hornet. To make a long story short, I designed and developed an idea for a product that would save a previous employer a lot of money. I did all of the financial work, software engineering, implementation, and testing to prove the idea.

During my presentation, the senior engineers scoffed at the idea. So I took my notes, wrote a manuscript, and submitted it to various publishers. A month later, a publisher picked up the manuscript and we signed a contract to publish it. It all took off from there! That's it!

There are a million reasons to write, but I found later that you don't need a reason if you love it. It takes just one situation to get you started into the addictive world of writing! But, all you really have to do is ...

---- Just write! ----

I don't write on bathroom walls anymore because it's too hard for our housekeeper to keep up with the work. But, I do carry around a palmtop just in case I get an idea! For now ... just write everything you can as often as possible. Once you get the hang of it, writing becomes an addiction. Write because you can take an idea and tell it to the rest of the world. Write because your wife has another headache. Write because you can make money. Write so that the next time someone asks what you do, you can say, "I'm a writer!"

Edward B. Toupin is a freelance consultant, writer, and published author living in Las Vegas with his singer/actress wife. He currently handles technical writing tasks for various companies in New York, Chicago, and Denver as well as imagines and markets feature-length screenplays.

## **What Publications Should Look for in a Technology Writer**

**By David Geer**

### **What Publications Should Look for in a Technology Writer by David Geer**

What to look for in a technology writer.

And what do you do?... How to know when you're a writer!

A good technology writer has a good portfolio. The writer you want will have samples that parallel the content you're looking for. A good portfolio sample can be found at <http://www.GeerCom.com/samples.html>.

A good technology writer is a good investigator. A professional technology writer takes time to get to know you, your publication, and your goals. What do you really want to get out of this project? A great writer will ask because a disciplined professional needs to know.

A good technology writer is a team player. Professional writing requires top-notch communications skills on all levels, not just in the text of your articles and features. The writer you want should be able to carry on a dialogue with you and your team to discover your needs, and to make sure that they are met.

A good technology writer is prepared to work with you and your team until you're satisfied. Consultations, revisions and changes should be built into the fee. These are part of the process and should be foreseen by the writer.

Finally, a good technology writer instills confidence. After providing the necessary requirements and information, you should feel comfortable letting the writer drive where the story is concerned. You should be able to rely on their responsiveness to your queries. You should be assured that they will deliver all that you expect and more.

About the Author David Geer is chief technology writer, technical journalist and owner of Geer Communications, which helps print and electronic publications meet their content needs. E-mail him at [David@GeerCom.com](mailto:David@GeerCom.com), call him at 440-964-9832, or check out the Geer Communications Website at [www.GeerCom.com](http://www.GeerCom.com).

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