

Question: *How do I go about writing for a newspaper?*



If you're considering submitting a freelance article to a newspaper, there are a multitude of things you should know before you type that first simple word. And one of the most important facts of which to be aware is that not all newspapers accept unsolicited submissions, and many that do will reward your efforts with little more than a brass razoo. If you're new to the game, you might be happy to accept your name in print as a reward for your work, but once you've contact an editor and found that he/she is prepared to take a look at your material, remember that the pleasure of seeing your by-line leaping from the page doesn't stock your cupboards with food or pay the bills, so don't be shy about asking about remuneration.

Newspapers provide an opportunity to write on a vast range of topics, but it's best to concentrate on producing articles that fall within only two or three categories. This will enable you to increase your knowledge of your chosen subjects, and to build up an invaluable network of contacts that can provide information for your articles.

It's imperative to study the writing style of the newspaper's journalists and other contributors, and to gain an understanding of the readers at whom the publication is aimed. An editor is looking not only for well-composed, grammatically correct material, but also for articles of relevance to the publication's specific readership base. If you submit an article about the latest trends in up-market dining to a newspaper with a readership primarily of low-income earners, you'll have wasted your time. But if your piece is entitled, 'Ten ways to prepare a feast with low cost ingredients' then you're in with a chance. Aligning content with readership requirements is a must if you are to have any chance of success.

Restrict your article to the number of words that are frequently used in the publication's features. Editors are always under the pressure of deadlines, so they'll have no time to edit your work for length. Keep the piece tightly focused around the topic, don't use repetitive facts, and do not include your own personal opinions. Allow the facts or personal comments from people who are regarded as authoritative sources to verify what you are telling readers.

A covering letter included with your submission should contain a brief synopsis of the article written in a way that will convince the editor of its relevance, and that will encourage him/her to read your material and not disinterestedly toss it onto the heap of other rejected submissions. If you can provide good quality photographs to illustrate the piece, include this information in your letter too.

Make sure you know the name of the editor of the relevant section of the newspaper so the article can be submitted directly to the appropriate person, and ensure that you submit your article using the preferred method. Most editors are happy to accept submissions via e-mail, but don't send any images with your submission, and don't include your article as an attachment unless asked to do so. Some editors still prefer to receive material on a CD and/or as hard copy, and if that's the case, include any relevant images, together with captions.

Adhere to these basic rules; provide an editor with exactly what he/she is looking for in terms of content; produce well-written, well-researched, and well-presented material that requires little or no editing; and you'll have one foot in the door that leads to success.

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