



Starting a Writing Career (or Sifting Through the Much and Finding My Way)

by Michele R. Acosta

So, the decision is final. I am a writer.

Actually, I have always been a person who writes, but I have never applied the term to myself in a professional sense. Having pushed aside my financial fears and gained the requisite self-confidence, I began to surf the net in earnest for information about how to begin a freelance writing career. The vast amount of information was daunting enough, but when I realized how much time and effort would go into an attempt to get published, I almost quit.

Several thoughts are keeping me going. A lot of it has to do with my personal history and the role that writing plays in my life. When I was 8, I left notes around the house asking my parents for an increase in my allowance. When I was in college, I was the nut who took three journalism classes and three literature classes in one semester. When I went to graduate school as an adult with two small children, my ability to write well saved my sanity.

I pushed on. My initial research told me that I first needed to learn about the business of writing because I knew nothing of queries, markets, or copyright. Once I learned what content should be included in a query, writing them was not difficult; however, researching the various markets has been incredibly time consuming. At first, I hit dead ends. I started searching the typical job sites, but most of them did not post freelance work.

Then I came across several subscription sites that claimed to connect freelancers with writing markets. I was concerned that some of these sites might be scams, but after spending several days exploring one site in particular, I had almost decided to subscribe. Before I took the leap, I came across an article which criticized the site. It did not appear to be a scam, but it was enough to validate my initial skepticism. I placed this market source on hold to explore other opportunities.

A few other market postings also begged caution. One in particular sounded like a great opportunity for new writers to get published. I started to complete their online application form until I arrived at the page that asked for my social security number. They claimed that they needed it in order to pay me, but they had not even seen my ideas or any of my writing samples. I cancelled the application and moved on.

Perhaps the biggest shock to my English teacher sensibilities was the listing for "academic writers." I thought: "Great! This I've done." I clicked the button that led to more information and realized that these "markets" were actually students trying to cheat their way through school. Again, I moved on.

Although my early attempts to find writing markets were clearly filled with concern, caution, and a certain degree of paranoia, my experiences thus far have been mainly positive. I found several sites that posted seemingly genuine paying markets. Even if the information does not lead to publication, many of these listings sparked ideas which I can pitch to other markets. Even more important, the generation of ideas has lifted my spirits by making writing for a living seem more realistic.

My biggest morale booster is no secret to most writers. Before purchasing Writer's Market, I knew that it contained market listings and informative articles. I did not know that it contained lists of contests and awards, some of which are designed to assist writers financially while they are writing. I may never win such an award, but somehow, knowing that such a thing exists makes my goals seem more attainable.

Finally, I am almost ready to start submitting queries. The queries are written and effectively target the appropriate markets, but I am still confused about copyright. I'm beginning to fear that my grasp of copyright law is going to become something like my grasp of the offside rule in soccer. My oldest son has just completed his second year playing travel soccer and each time I think I understand offside, something happens that makes me question my understanding. The same holds true for copyright. I understand the concept of first rights and I understand what it means to submit simultaneously. But when a market indicates that it buys first rights and also accepts simultaneous submissions, who gets first rights if two markets opt to purchase the same manuscript? If they both print the story, they can't both have first rights. Can they? Since I do not have the answer, I do not plan to submit queries simultaneously - yet.

The most important lesson I have learned during this journey is that the faith I have in myself and in my aspirations must rise above the confusion and chaos created by the pursuit of the dream.

About the author:

The author is a writer, a former English teacher, and the mother of three boys. She spends her time writing and teaching others to write. Visit articles.TheWritingTutor.biz for more articles or TheWritingTutor.biz for other writing and educational resources for young authors, teachers, and parents.