

**Objective:** Learn how to make additional income by writing how-to and informational articles for various magazines.

The information explosion means that there are thousands of publications, both printed and online, that are hungry for content. The article form most in demand at magazines is the service piece or “how-to” article.

Technical writers possess all of the qualifications necessary to be good how-to article writers:

- We know how to analyze our audience and select information to meet their needs.
- We know how to interview subject matter experts to acquire correct information.
- We know how to explain things clearly and logically.
- We know how to chunk information and organize it into procedural steps so that the reader can accomplish a task or solve a problem.

## ***What to Write About?***

Good ideas are everywhere. Write about your own interests, or research topic areas to discover information that is useful to various magazines you might want to write for. Identify topic areas by studying the magazines and determining the needs of the readers. Once you establish an idea-seeking mental attitude, your subconscious will deliver ideas to you by the dozens! Be sure to write your ideas down, then develop them further into article topics by asking yourself “What about...?” this subject. Make a compelling article by adding two ideas together, for example dogs + old age: “Caring for the Older Dog”.

## ***Magazines Continually Need Information***

From Today’s Parent magazine (how to teach children to safely use the Internet) to birding magazines (how to buy the right binoculars) and health publications (exercising while pregnant), there are thousands of magazines that are continually hungry for good content. Magazines use seasonal material (Holiday, Mother’s Day, Back to School) as well as cyclical material which needs to be updated from time to time as industries and habits change (how to buy a personal digital assistant).

## ***Write a Compelling Query***

A short, lively presentation of your article idea will grab the editor’s attention and convince her that you are the best person to write the article. Your first paragraphs hooks the reader; subsequent paragraphs explain how you will slant your article to the publication’s audience. Mention any experts you might quote. In closing, describe your qualifications or writing experience, and ask for the assignment. The editor will reply with a deadline date and an offer of payment.

## ***Articles for e-zines***

The rapidly-changing market for electronic publications provides some opportunities for breaking into the article writing field. However, the glut of commercial marketing e-zines has made this area a morass of legitimate publishing obscured by borderline spam. Pay rates are much lower than print magazines, and often you are expected to write for free. Still, careful research and due diligence can turn up opportunities for you to develop a portfolio and get your name known.

## ***Resources***

- (1) Daugherty, Greg “You Can Write for Magazines”, Writer’s Digest Books, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1999.
- (2) McKinney, Don “Writing Magazine Articles That Sell”, Writer’s Digest Books, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1994.
- (3) <http://www.writersdigest.com>
- (4) <http://www.marketsforwriters.com>
- (5) <http://www.writethinking.net>

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Beth Agnew has over 30 years' experience in technical communication. She is a Corporate Coach University- and Coachville-trained coach. She teaches in the Technical Communication program at Seneca College, and is the STC Marketing Communication SIG Manager.