



NONFICTION: The Short Stuff

or

What Do I Write... and Where in the World Do I Sell It?

Melanie Rigney

Creative Word Seminar

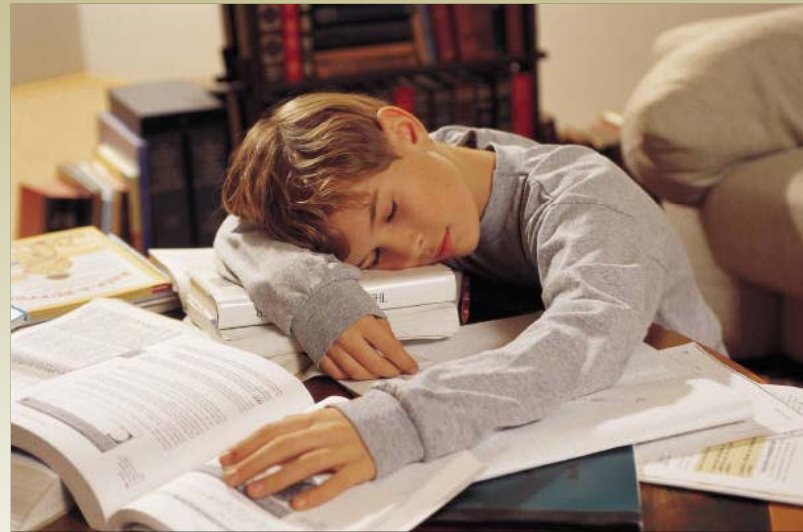
Herndon, VA

November 1, 2008



What We'll Do This Morning

- **What Do I Write?**
 - How do I come up with ideas?
 - How do I define what I do?
 - What do I want to do with my writing?
- **Where in the World Do I Sell It?**
 - How do I find markets for my work?
 - What is a query letter?
 - Which comes first, the query letter or the writing?





Where Do Ideas Come From?

- Heat
- Expertise
- Avocation
- Reading
- Training



Your turn!

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How Do I Define What I Do?

- Devotion?
- Opinion piece?
- Personal essay?
- How-to/
Self-help?
- Humor?





Definitions

- Devotion: Somewhere between 200 and 500 words; usually include some Scripture and frequently include a prayer.
- Opinion piece: Typically no more than 800 words; take a strong viewpoint on a controversial issue.
- Personal essay: Generally 800 to 2,500 words; have a beginning, middle and end.
- How-to/Self-help: 1,000 to 3,000 words; photos and illustrations often are key.
- Humor: Rarely more than 1,800 words; difficult to do well.





Your turn!

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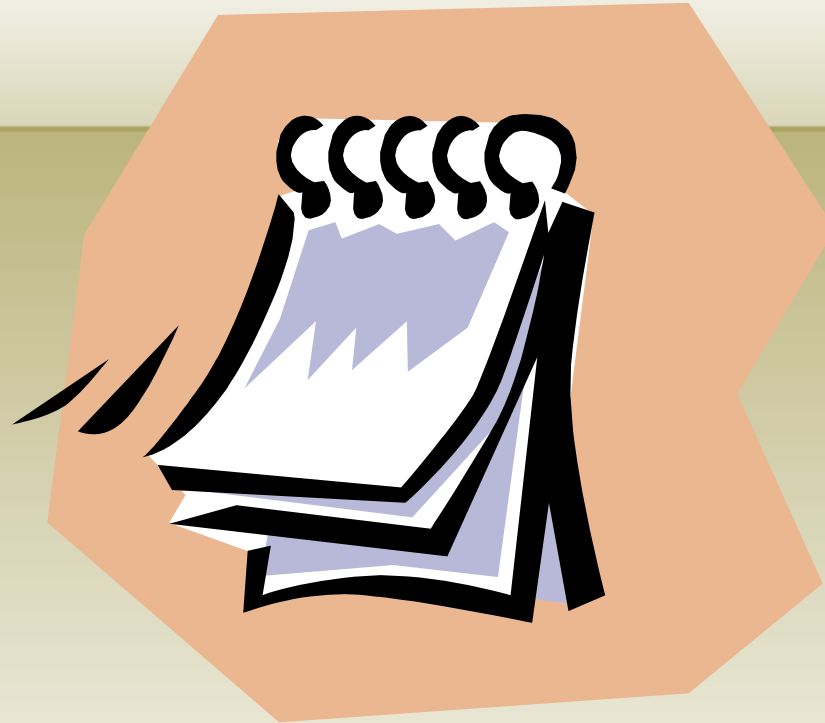
What Do I Want to Do?

- Write for myself, as release/therapy/healing
- Write for my family and friends
- Write for publication



1. What does the reader want?

2. How can I provide it?



Your turn!

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Where in the World Do I Sell It?

- Newspapers (local, regional, national; print and online)
- Magazines (local, regional, national; trade, consumer; interest area; print and online)
- Web sites/Blogs
- Newsletters (usually topic-specific)



The State of Newspapers

- The number of daily newspapers in the United States fell from 1,756 in 1975 to 1,452 in 2005, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Paid newspaper circulation fell from 60.7 million to 53.3 million during that same period.
- The number of weekly (published fewer than four times per week) newspapers on a slight upswing. In 1996, there were 6,580 weeklies with a total circulation of nearly 46 million; in 2005, the number was 6,659 with a circulation of 49.5 million, according to the National Newspaper Association.





The State of Magazines

In the past 10 years, the number of interior design and decoration titles has exploded, according to the National Directory of Magazines.

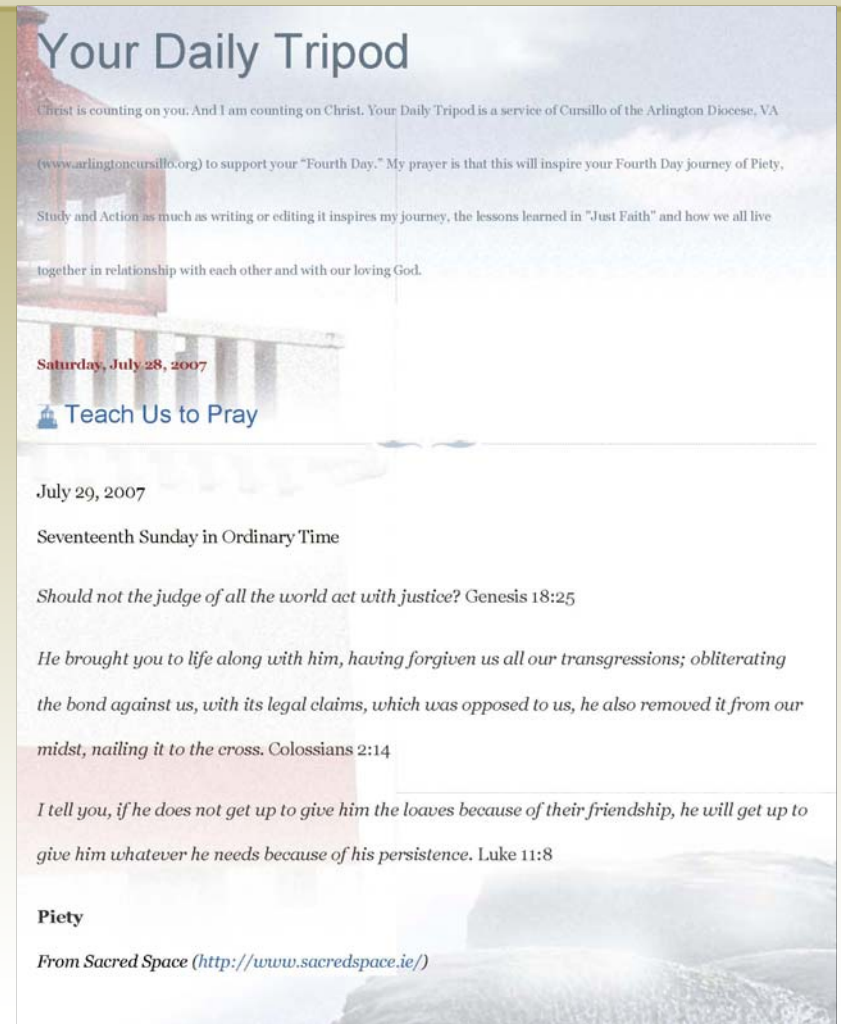
Rank	Category	1996	2006	Growth in # of Titles
1	Interior Design & Decoration	92	192	100
2	Lifestyle	273	364	91
3	Travel	525	600	75
4	Golf	72	143	71
5	Dogs	43	71	28
6	Architecture	119	145	26
7	Boats & Boating	110	133	23
8	Automotive	415	435	20
9	Construction & Building	340	357	17
10	Guns & Firearms	43	60	17

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The State of Blogs

- A blog is a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.
- Technorati tracked 50 million blogs by July 31, 2006, and estimates the blogosphere is doubling every 6.5 months.
- More than 175,000 blogs are created every day.
- Blogs aren't just for teenagers! Thousands if not millions are faith-based (such as <http://yourdailytripod.blogspot.com/>)
- It's easy and free to set up your blog (visit www.blogger.com, for example).



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The State of Newsletters

- It's impossible to even estimate how many electronic and paper trade and consumer newsletters are published daily, weekly, or monthly in the United States today, but the number is certainly in the millions.
- Newsletters can cover technical, professional, hobbyist, enthusiast, and other topics.





What's All This Mean to Me?

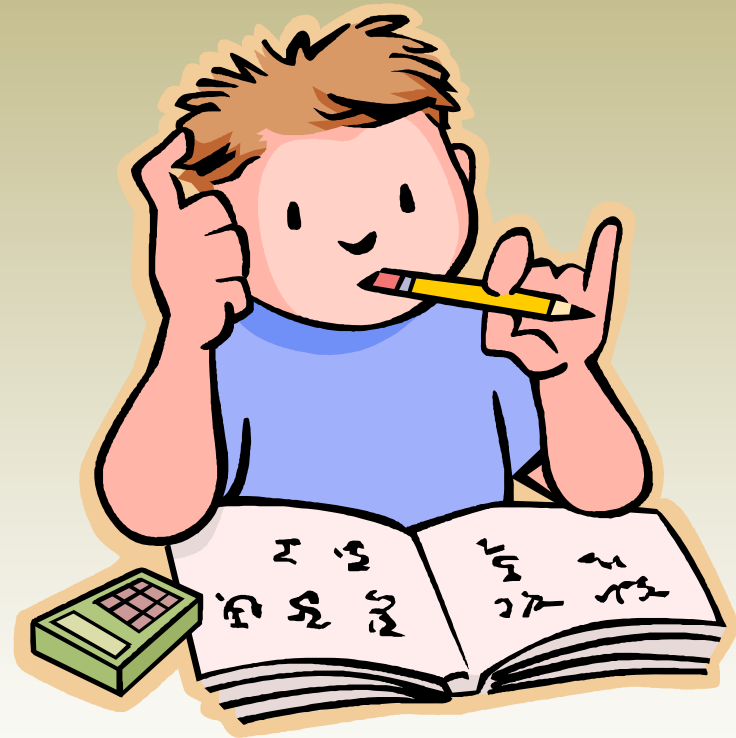
- If you've got a passion, there's a publication that wants your work.
- If you've got expertise, there's a publication that wants your work.
- If you've got an idea, there's a publication that wants your work.

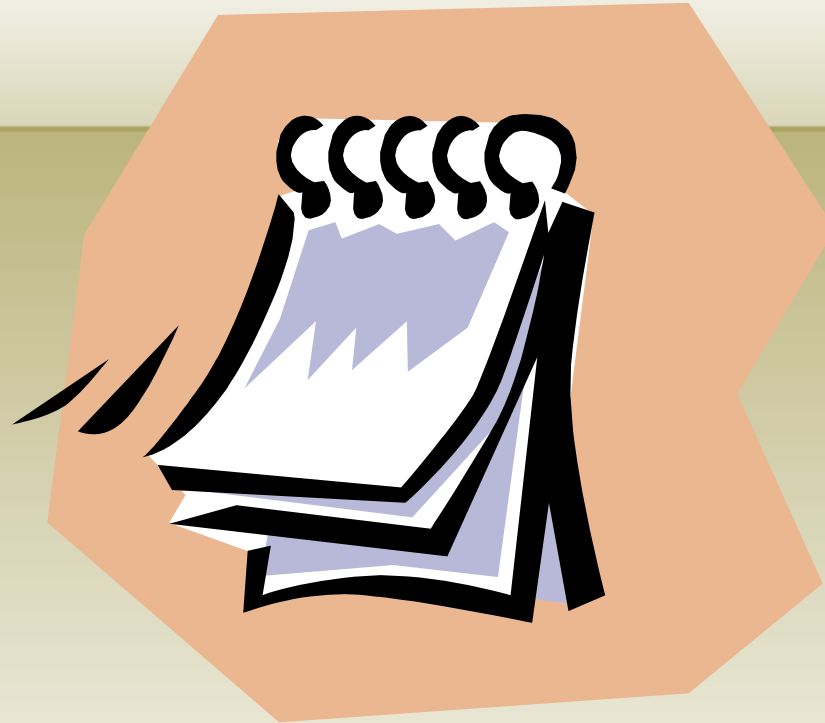




Finding Markets for Your Work

- Identify your target reader.
- Are you part of that audience? If so, what publications/sites do you turn to for information?
- If not, talk with friends or colleagues who are in your target audience to get this information.





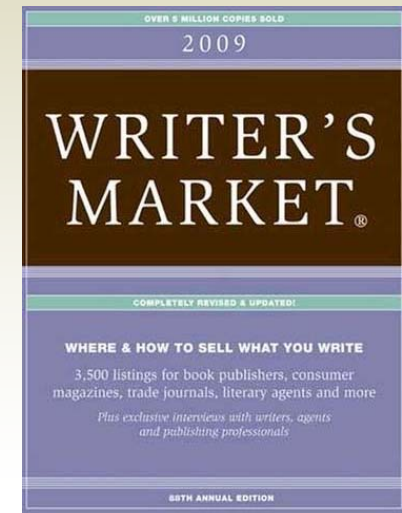
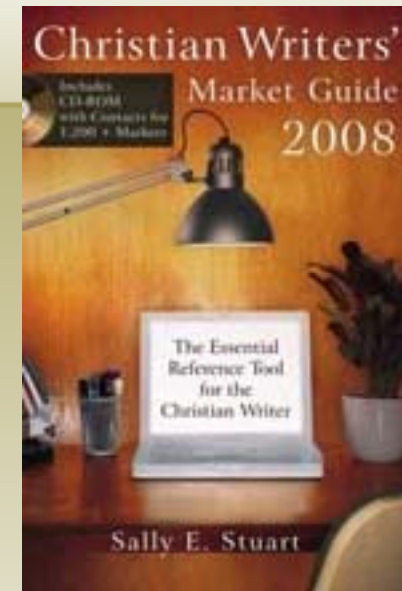
Your turn!

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Check the Guidelines

- While publications like *Christian Writers' Market Guide* and *Writer's Market* aren't always as up to date as we might like (not even WritersMarket.com), they can provide leads on publications the target market reads.
- Be sure to consult the latest version; you'll find them at your library or bookstore as well as for sale online.





Check the Guidelines

- Increasingly, you'll find the most up-to-date writers' guidelines at publication Web sites.
- If you can't readily find the guidelines on the home page, search for "guidelines" or try the "About Us" or "Contact Us pages."
- If at all possible, review a few issues of the magazine before querying.

The screenshot shows the Guideposts website. At the top, there is a banner with the text "And I wouldn't mind paying less." and the Aetna logo. Below this is the "Guideposts" logo in a blue box. The navigation menu includes "HOME", "FOOD", "FAMILY", "HEALTH", "PETS", "PERSONAL CHANGE", "SPIRIT", and "CELEB". A search bar is present with a "GO" button. The main content area is titled "Guideposts Editorial Guidelines" and includes the following text:

Written by people from all walks of life, Guideposts articles present tested methods for developing courage, strength and positive attitudes. They help readers achieve their maximum personal and spiritual potential.

A typical Guideposts story is a first-person narrative written in simple, dramatic, anecdotal style. The story may be the writer's own or one written in the first person for someone else. Even our short features use this format.

Here are some important tips when writing a story:

- Don't try to tell an entire life story. Focus on one specific happening in a person's life. The emphasis should be on one individual. Bring in as few people as possible so that the reader's interest stays with the dominant character.
- Don't leave unanswered questions. Give enough facts so that the reader will know what happened. Use description and dialogue to let the reader feel as if he were there, seeing the characters, hearing them talk. Dramatize the situation, conflicts and struggle, and then tell how the person was changed for the better or the problem was solved.
- Most important: Study the magazine and website.

Payments:

- Full-length manuscripts (750-1500 words): \$250 - \$500, occasionally higher.
- Shorter manuscripts (250- 750 words): \$100 - \$250.
- Short features and fillers (under 250 words): \$25 - \$100.

We do not use fiction, essays or sermons, and we rarely present stories about deceased or professional religious people. We do not evaluate book-length material.

To submit a manuscript online, simply email it to us at submissions@guidepostsmag.com.

On the left side of the page, there is a sidebar with links: "Videos", "Projects We Love", "Join a Discussion", "Guideposts Bloggers", "Contests", "Winners' Circle", "Tell Us Your Story", and "Writers Workshop". There is also a red promotional box for a contest: "Enter Guideposts' Make DREAMS COME TRUE Promotion for the chance to win \$10,000 to inspire, spread hope and make a difference. Enter Daily".



Publications Looking for Writers

- Free newsletters such as Writersweekly.com and AbsoluteWrite.com frequently list new publications or markets in need of material.
- Samir Husni's mrmagazine.com is acknowledged as the leading site to find out about magazine launches.





Consulting the Guidelines

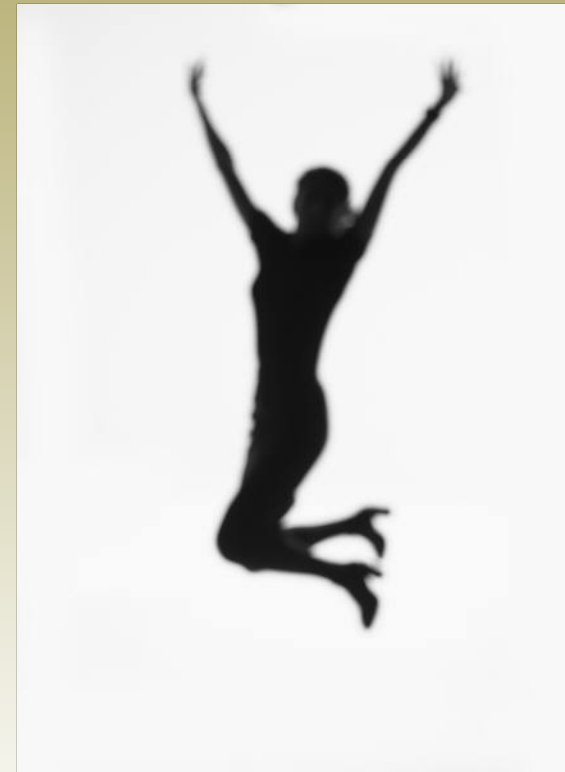
- What does the publication want?
 - Query letters vs. submitting completed articles
 - Word length
 - Ways to break in—upfront sections, fillers, shorts
 - Form—e-queries vs. snail mail or fax
 - Lead time
 - Simultaneous submission policy
 - Rights issues
 - Payment issues





No Query Letter Required

- With essays and op-ed pieces, a cover letter simply saying “Here is my essay/opinion piece, these are my credentials, thank you” frequently is sufficient. Check the guidelines.





Query Letters

- Paragraph 1: Bait your hook. Establish a need/problem the magazine's readers have.
- Paragraph 2: Explain how your feature/column addresses it, including sidebars, people to be interviewed, conclusion.
- Paragraph 3: Why you're the one to write it.





E-Queries

- E-queries follow the same rules as snail mail queries.
 - Read the guidelines
 - Send what the editors want—query in the body of the e-mail or as an attachment
 - If you're asked to send an attachment, make sure it's in the format requested (text, RTF, Word, etc.)
- Your e-query should be as formal (not casual) as a snail mail query. This is a business proposal, not a friendly chat.





Your turn!

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Questions?

Thanks for coming!
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