

# What do you write about to earn steady article income?

Almost anything that a magazine's readers will pay to read.

But how do you know what that is? And who will pay you for your article(s)?

First, to find out what the readers want, see what has been on that magazine's pages for the last three years. Make a chart by categorizing the subjects in each, and list the articles (or themes) from the most recent to the oldest. Then fill in the missing gaps, update the evergreen subjects, and add information that readers don't know (but should)...

Where do you find what has been on those pages? Almost all magazines have an index accessible on the website. Go to Google, write the magazine title+index and see what pops up. If nothing, change the title to the topic+magazine, and try again. There are also publications at your library, like the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, a topic index (more likely at an academic library), or a digital compilation that the library subscribes to—ask the reference librarian), where you must trace backwards by subject, then see which magazines write about it.

Once you have some categories, look for three things: (1) what hasn't been written about that the readers want to read, (2) what has been done but there are still areas untapped or recent changes that need to be addressed, and (3) what new subjects should be covered in that magazine. Look particularly at recent case studies, research, innovations or inventions, and new means to do old things differently or better.

The person who (indirectly) pays for your words is the same one who will pass judgment on your ideas: the editor. (If it's a major magazine, approach the managing or articles editor.)

You find the editor and mailing address in the current *Writer's Market*, online or in the library reference section. (It's usually hard to get the editor's email address, so query in the beginning by snail mail, with a stamped, self-addressed envelope enclosed). While there, also list all of the other, similar magazines in that field, then list them in order by whether they pay on acceptance or publication (sell reprints to the latter), how much they pay, how often they publish, the percent of freelance material they use, and anything else that affects their order on the list. Query the editors in order, one at a time, until one says yes or all say no.

A query letter one page long is usually space enough to make a compelling or exciting idea come alive (the first three paragraphs are usually the best real estate for that). You should also tell where you've been in print before (briefly, and if you haven't been in print before, not at all), if it's a travel piece when you will be back from the site (add three weeks for the expected date to submit the item; you can query as much as six months before you travel), if you will supply photos (.jpgs are best since they are in color and b/w), and who (by name or position) you will interview for the article. When you write the article, study what the editor just bought. Include facts, quotes, and, usually, an anecdote or two.

In other words, find a topic the editor wants and needs, sell it soberly in a one-page query, do a first-rate job if you get a "go-ahead," and try another editor if the previous one isn't interested—or, heavens, if the article you sent after the "go-ahead" is rejected. It's a matching game, the editor's needs and your skills. Persistence and attention to detail usually decide the victor.

Lots of process details are in my [Travel Writer's Guide](#).

Let me expand on where you might find even more ideas to write about in my next blog, here in a couple of days.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett