

What do I do special as a writing coach?

I just woke up to a question/discussion on LinkedIn's Promocave:

Carrie Golden, Citizen Journalist/Poetry Consultant to filmmakers at Motionpoems, Inc., asked:

Writing coach...

Not sure if this group [Promocave] is the right place to post this question but...what exactly does a writing coach do to help writers?

I wear two hats (on one head): (1) **"court-of-last-resort" editor**, providing a last-chance no-nonsense review of what the writer is about to submit (the final final draft) for book publication and (2) a **first-step writing coach** (before much writing). So here was my contribution to the discussion that defines my view of what different do I offer as a writing coach—and why.

[As a writing coach] I think of myself as a nonfiction "what" coach. I prod the souls [rather deeply] through six or so what's (?), then the "how's" make sense (and cents). I'm there if they need me later, more as an action guide and (sometimes) a silent co-planner of their future empire.

Here's a longer explanation of (2), if you are interested and it helps you (*sans me*) do your own early nonfiction book planning, writing, and publishing.

There's not much mystery about the steps a nonfiction writer can and usually takes to prep and submit a book for

publication. See a hundred books in libraries worldwide that address that, and I have two books that address it too: [How to Get Your Book Published in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days](#) and [How to Pick the Right Kind of Publisher](#).

What distresses me most is the number of smart, organized, diligent would-be book writers who wander about, with perfectly good words and spelling, looking for something to say and, mostly, a reason to say it. Bewildered souls with hundreds of pages (at least it reads that way) of “what’s that?” copy that has no clear (or any) purpose (or buyers) presented in sweet-reading, grammatically correct prose. Their command of English is strong. (It’s worse if it’s not.) What’s missing is their grasp of elementary common sense about what a book must do to become a book...

The saddest thing is how easily that could have been prevented if they hadn’t been in such a damn hurry to see themselves and their brilliance in print (everywhere), with assumedly a fat advance almost in hand and many years of fatter royalties following assuredly behind.

About six questions will create the structure and map, plus point the writer to the most likely reader, why they would read it, what they would do with it, and how they just saved themselves about 75% in misdirected (or undirected) research, “what’s that?” writing, and the one thing they can’t get back, wasted time. Of course each question leads to deeper, related sub-questions which, in turn, lead to a dozen related books written (or waiting for you to write) that, combined with speaking, consulting, focus book series, perhaps audiobooks, and so on, can rather quickly create an empire based on their acquired expertise (which began with book one and is further proven and strengthened in subsequent products.)

So I guess that really makes me a **pre-writing and empire-building coach** (if being an emperor or empress is your thing).

That's the longer overview of what my kind of writing coach does. (Most of the others start when the writing itself appears. Bless them.)

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

Leading your idea in print down its most profitable path...

So you've got an **article** or **book idea** that you want to turn into both **big money** and widely-seen **expertise presence**. That's the way to think! I'd also add that the copy needn't be completely rewritten again and again, so also think **reprint, rewrite, reprint of rewrites, and more...**

Let's say you want to write about the 2016 Chicago Cubs and their playing in the coming National League baseball playoffs—and perhaps for the pennant, of all things! But, if you can't tell, or wouldn't want to tell, a baseball from a ball of wax, your idea and copy to sell again and again could be about the Trump-Clinton presidential election, kumquat delicacies from the kitchen, or driverless autos driving nonetheless on the streets!

Alas, I've been a baseball fan from/in Chicago almost since the Great Fire and the hapless Cubs haven't won a pennant for 107 years. You know us by the fetching blue, red, and white

“C” hats that we have had to hide in our cupboard for generations. Alas, this is our year, so we dusted them off and wear them on our heads for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and almost all the hours between—until October when we will know if the hex of the billy goat is true. **So I’m picking the Cubs for this empire-building article writ long...** (But if you’re reading this in the Philippines, on the Pyrenes, or in Peru, kumquat delicacies might be easier to understand...)

Let’s start with an **article** about the “plight of the Cubs” (or any fetching topic) for an American magazine. You do the usual things: some basic research to find the most interesting angles or slants, pick the best approach, and subject that idea to a two-pronged **feasibility study**—is it feasible to write and is it feasible to sell? (Go to the search box in the upper top right corner and type in **feasibility study** to see how the magazine approach works. The blog copy comes from either [How to Sell 75% of Your Freelance Writing](#) or [The Travel Writer’s Guide](#). To read those books, used and sold for a pittance, check the [Amazon catalog](#).) The feasibility study tells how to test magazines vs newspapers, who are the most likely readers, the querying process, and (for magazines), should you get a “go-ahead,” how you best present the copy for sale. (If it fits newspaper freelance buying fields too, submit the written article in final form, without a query and sent in ready-to-go fashion.) If the idea is a “go” as feasible to write and sell, send your articles to the best markets in both categories.

If the **magazine** buys your submission, you can use much of the article’s contents again (at least slightly rewritten) two ways: as a **reprint** or a **rewrite**. Then if a rewrite is bought, you can send that off to a still-virgin magazine as a reprint. With cunning, you can have several of each of these three partially-completed masterpieces filled in (completed) and in print, all paying you! (Again, go to the Search box above and write in reprints or rewrites to see step-by-step blogs with

more details.)

With **newspapers**, there are two paths: (1) you can literally sell the first copy to as many newspapers as will buy it as long as they aren't "national" newspapers (like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or the *Wall Street Journal*—sell them one at a time, and, after it is sold, thoroughly rewrite the piece before selling it to another "national") and (2) don't simultaneously sell it two or more regional newspapers within 100 miles of each other ("distribution ranges"). Otherwise, you can sell the very same newspaper article(s) to any other newspaper (except the "nationals") as long as they don't overlap. Just tell the newspaper editor yours is a simultaneous submission and you are selling it outside of their 100-mile circulation orb.

What more can you do with reams of unused copy parts shouting to be read? Throw all the used copy into a cauldron, add the unused gems, mix them up again, and "**topic spoke**" them to find as many of the other potential eager buyers as will shriek and pay, delightfully, to use your genius and make you rich. Check the blog search for items about "topic spoking" in the 400+ blogs waiting to be used!

How many **books** can you pluck from that cauldron (adding in other sources still untouched)? You could write/publish a book for all kinds of Cubs' *aficionados*: one for kids/young adults, one for the regular folk, another for seniors (some praying for the Cubs to win, others incredulous that they are anywhere near the top), another for the Cubs fans focusing on this year and the past two, another putting all 107 years in perspective, and so on.

And because each book requires a mound of research, interviews, anecdotes, photos, and more, you can turn this into new wealth of found and reworked copy and pluck out more **articles**, and thus more **rewrites**, **reprints**, and **reprints of rewrites**. You can also sell related **photos** where you sell copy

(check photos in Search), often the same photo repeatedly since they are almost always sold on one-time rights.

Lost in this pile of print are the **directly related spin-offs**, like **audiobooks** of any or all of those books just mentioned; **focus books** about specific elements of baseball for the truly absorbed, of the past year or two or of all time, like the pitching, the records set and broken, ERAs, a projection of future years and records of new(er) players emerging in the 2016 excitement; even **videos** and **movies**, all being in print before being converted to other media. Then using the most visible of the platform builders, authors speaking about their (new) specialty from the platform: see **rallies**, **speeches**, **how-to workshops**, **seminars**, **talks**, and so on...

Every time your champion copy has your by-line attached to your super writing in a newspaper, magazine, or book, you are solidifying yourself as an **expert** in that field, building a following, and making yourself more wanted by **information and product producers**. They want to get more good items from you, a recognized “valuable and prolific source” of, in this case, baseball, Cubs, and sports ideas, information, and articulation.

The point here is that **almost any word or idea has lots of legs (and ears) and can be multiplied very profitably many times by many means**. The trick is to create interesting copy about ideas that others want to know more about that is spelled properly and has the facts, quotes, and anecdotes artfully blended into more good ideas. Most exceptional writers don't stray too far from what others want to know, and they churn a fair amount of interesting text into many articles, then books, rather than just making one sale or two before wandering off to find unrelated subjects for articles that are also sold a few times. **It's wiser and fills your coffers faster by turning your related ideas and copy over and over.**

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

[More how-to writing, publishing, and speaking stuff
at www.gordonburgett.com/order3.htm.]

How to make your friends smile gratefully all day long...

If this were addressed to you, how would you feel if it
arrived unexpectedly in your email box ?

This year (2016), I've decided to send one email each day
thanking someone who has enriched my life.

It could be someone who is close to me, like a family member
or a friend.

It could be someone I have only met once or perhaps admired
from afar.

It could be someone I have known for a long time or only
momentarily.

**TODAY YOU ARE THAT PERSON.
I APPRECIATE YOUR BEING IN MY LIFE.**

Allen

P.S. Please know that there is no hierarchy here. In the past

few days, your name and who you are in the world came to mind. When that happened I realized that I wanted to honor and thank you for enriching my life.

My reaction was delight and total surprise. So rarely is unsought, free kindness sent our way! If you want to use this model or concept, just do it. Change the names, of course. There are no copyrights or restrictions at all.

If your curiosity is stirred, here's a pinch of background. Allen Klein and I are veteran writers/speakers who have met, mostly in passing at presentations, for years. He's very funny and has written many books that I have enjoyed and shared, so I was indeed honored—and quite surprised—when it arrived. The next day it occurred to me that others may want to say the same or something similar to those they know. So I emailed Allen, thanked him for the thoughtfulness, and asked if my sharing the idea with others would be okay. His reply, almost immediate, was “Yes, please *do* share it. Imagine if we all did this! What a great world this would be.”

So now it's in your hands to use as or if you wish!

(Allen Klein's most recent book is *You Can't Ruin My Day*. See more at humor@allenklein.com.)

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

www.gordonburgett.com

Name(required)

Email(required)

Website

Comment(required)

Origin of the phrase "out in left field"

Chicagoans gave birth to the term "out of left field" about 100 years ago. The left field in the pre-Wrigley playing grounds butted up to a many-storied insane asylum, and when the crowds made too much noise the lunatics screamed out the windows and banged on pans. Their comments truly were "out of left field."

Some thoughts about interviewing...

*This is an excerpt (part of a chapter) from my coming book, **Interviewing**. I talk about tools and means used to interview:*

Interviewing is mostly you asking questions to a person or, rarely, a group, and receiving an intelligible response in return. When you record what you asked and what they replied, that is the thinnest skeleton of a completed interview.

That's a bit simplistic but most of the rest just adds bulk and hope to the process.

A huge percentage of my interviews have involved direct communication with my target person. **More than half were done eye to eye (really mouth to ear)**, and most of those were done when I was learning how, usually on the road last century gathering travel material. I asked and they responded, and I translated and wrote what they said into a notepad, in a kind of shorthand that spontaneously evolved (nouns mostly, other key words underlined.) It was give and take, staccato fashion, one question/a reply, segues... My goal was about five minutes, which was a long time for them and for me. It rarely lasted 30 minutes; an hour interview never happened.

Well, that sense of brevity may be somewhat misleading because many "interviews" became conversations, and ended when it was comfortable or necessary to do so. If the other person wanted to keep talking I was usually game to do so (unless I absolutely had to be somewhere else right then—sometimes we resumed the exchange later over lunch or coffee.) Other times they just wanted someone to talk to, or were lonely, or were proud of what they had done or seen and wanted to share more of it. That was fine. Often it gave me more, better information and a deeper interview.

Occasionally I was drawn to an interviewee. I wanted to know them better, and (hard to believe) that seemed mutual. They were interesting, often passionate about some cause, and they almost always bubbled or bristled with humor. What they said was worth sharing; it was fun; they were worth knowing. A few of those contacts became lifelong friends, particularly those still living.

But mostly interviewing is fast and focused. It's kind of a dancing duel: you extracting what you need (and hoping for more); them telling you what they want you (and your readers) to hear, hoping they didn't say too much.

In my mind, first interviews should be courteous, painless, and fairly fast, leaving open the possibility of a later

follow-up. But I don't mention that before or during the first interview other than asking them how I might later contact them should I run into a fact or a phrase that needs clarification and asking for or verifying an address where I would send them a copy of the printed article. (If you offer, do send it.)

Most of my interviews not done eye-to-eye were done by **telephone**. Those weren't as satisfactory because you couldn't tell how much of what they were saying was true, a greased lie, or something in between. Nor did you ever know if the voice you were hearing belonged to the actual person you had called. (I don't think I ever interviewed a stiff or a stand-in, but surprisingly often they grilled me to make sure I was the journalist they were supposed to be talking to and that I was writing an article for such-and-such a publication. Everyday people took me at face (or voice) value, happy to be the one being interviewed. The higher ups were more likely to have their assistant or caretaker vet or check me out first).

Another telephone problem: the tenuous connection between you and the person you are interviewing—one wire—almost invites the other person to simply hang up or disconnect when they have said what they think you should (or need to) hear. It's a true test of your interviewing (and inventive) magnetism to be able to keep the other person focused and actively responding. Some of that is created before starting the actual interview by getting the respondent's buy-in to the importance of the exchange so what they say can reach their target listeners' or readers' ears.

My restraint to interviewing by phone was personal—and, in my dotage, still is. I grew up weaving waggish humor and pun-riddled, antic wordplay into my everyday conversation. It drove my few friends crazy. But all of that tomfoolery had to be excised when phone interviewing strangers for print, particularly when they envisioned sparks or bolts of radiated global fame emanating from the article (or even book) they

would be in. It was their big moment and they didn't expect mirth or frivolity—any humor at all—then, particularly over the telephone where smiles are never seen and barely heard. So half of what I normally might have said, or how I might have said it, was verboten and probably dumbfounding. However funny, they never, ever would have laughed. They were expecting to be asked to share gems of wisdom, poignant observation, Christian guidance, and household tips. Out the telephonic window flew my witty high jinks, which left the interviewer, me (or you), nearly speechless, jocularly disarmed.

Alas, nothing is incurable when regular eating is at steak. I immediately reverted to my telephone high school date-getting scheme of imploring (or interviewing) by script. My first 100 or so interviews (it may have been 500) were very, very tightly structured, almost every word written or typed. It looked something like this, although where you see ideas below I had complete sentences, short sentences to give them time to respond:

- * wee introduction
- * reminder of why I was calling and where their words would be shown to the world
- * a question
- * a second question—these were the most important answers in case something else interrupted the call—it happens often—and there would be no chance to finish... [more on this later]
- * [if something relevant in their reply to my questions was said or hinted at I would ask more, prodding queries about it, to provoke more facts or brilliance]
- * a third question
- * [if they verbally wandered off and what they said would also interest my imaginary readers I let them wander. I only reherded them back into my imaginary readers' corral of interest when they wore out or I still had a final question to ask]

- * fourth question (or more) if needed. See above.
- * anything else, Mr./Ms. _____, that I should have asked but didn't?"
- * "is there a phone number I could use to reach you if I find something I need to verify later?"
- * "I'll gladly send you a copy of the printed article as soon as it appears—remember, printing can sometimes take months"
- * "is _____ the address where I should send the article, in your name?"
- * "thank you again, Mr./Mrs. _____, for the information and your time"
- * "it sounds like a very interesting article. I appreciate your kindness and your sharing"
- * (hang up softly, breathe deeply, wipe brow, hydrate rewardingly, and type out the whole interview then or before nightly repose)

Interviewing by **email**, or even by **social media**, is fast, sometimes too public too soon, and a whole lot less expansive. Combined with **Skype** or other computer-to-computer linking, it's fairly easy and much faster to talk with others now—if they agree to talk with you.

For example, ...

This is an unedited extraction of part of **an early chapter of a book called INTERVIEWING**. Check future blogs for more copy about the topic.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

Using humor to sell your magazine articles

Funny you should ask!

One rule always: some editors/publications don't use humor, so don't even try. At best the editor may open her lips to chuckle (or groan), then reconsider and toss the query. I can't tell you which such publications to avoid because I don't read them. But it used to be that the AARP magazines were humor dry. That getting old must be grim stuff. (So when I did write for them I kept surefire rip-roarers, even tepid jests, out of my mind lest one slide down to my pecking finger and be read by the paymaster.)

I can't remember any editor who wanted truckloads of comedy dumped on their desk. They bought humor in measured bits deftly worked into actual (or near-) truths. Except the **fillers editors** who seemed to weigh jokes by the word so they could be squeezed into advertising holes. They actually did pay a pittance, when they stopped laughing—but I don't ever recall them buying two jokes at the same time. I had a colleague who sold a joke to *Reader's Digest* and included the sale in his credits in every query. One editor wrote back, rejecting his idea, and added, "I bet that *RD* joke was the only thing you ever sold." Mean editors are rare, but they can be perceptive. It was about a third of his freelance bounty.

Puns sometimes worked, but if I used one I used two so they knew it was intentional. I've sold 1,700+ freelance articles but only once did I use a full-out joke in an article, and that was about 10 or 15 words long and the joke was the article's lead! (Alas, it must have been far below my personal humor standard because I can't remember a word of it!) On the other hand I wrote a travel short about 800 words long about eating guinea pig sandwiches that were cooked on the street in

Quito, Ecuador. (At least they looked like guinea pigs.) I found out years later, through a Peace Corps kid stationed near Cuenca, that one of his projects was to help multiply the stock of domesticated guinea pigs to increase the meat available on the local table. (Whatever it was, it sure tasted good.)

Here was my system of weaving humor into an article's otherwise deadly prose.

(1) Mostly I lifted deadly prose appreciably heavenward by keeping the tone light and the descriptions spry (good synonyms adorned with festive adjectives helped).

(2) I relied a lot on word play, but you have to spread it out and only do that now and then. For example, I might refer to Buffy, a wee, yapping dog, as a furry feral killer-companion or a drooling pet growler. Or a woman's date as her knight of the night. That's enough wit: the blog censors just told me to stop—they are thinking of your humor health.

(3) A funny, related thought to what is being said in a paragraph almost always ended that paragraph.

(4) It's hard to give isolated examples. Find an article that intentionally makes you laugh and highlight every funny item in it with yellow underliner. You'll see that the humor is discretely bundled in 93% topic-related facts.

(5) Just as the writer did in (5) above, if the subject had humor wanting to get out, I made the content worth reading, and let some of that humor escape.

(6) I always put some humor in the query letter, in the actual selling message, so the editor knew there would be humor in the copy that followed. I'm convinced that the humor helped sell the query. But you can't overdue it.

(7) As a friend who teaches journalism tells his wards: if you

can't keep your humor in control, get a talk show!

Some loose how-to's but I hope it helps. Life's a whole lot more fun when you're part of the wit and mirth. It's even better when you get paid to share it.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

Can you use a pseudonym for publishable articles?

Sure, I suppose in print you could call yourself Superperson or Cicero or anybody you want to. And if you own the publication, it might be fine.

In fact, there are times when I would indeed use a pseudonym. Like if I was a deacon writing porno, rest assured I'd change my name. Or if a fanged maniac was loose on the nearby streets and he was overdue on his serial schedule, I'd at least change a few letters in my surname—and apologize later.

But at least 99% of the time, or more, the question would be "Why?" The first person to ask you that would be the

editor—"Why do you want to do that?" (A couple of the editors I wrote for would probably have suggested, rather than a pen name, I might disguise myself by dressing up like a decent citizen—or be inconspicuous by wearing just one sideburn.)

I know that when you write novels they want you to use the same name for the whole series. Folks buy as often as not for the author's name—they expect the same high (or low) quality for all the books in that category. However, if you use your own name to write the "Manly Man Murder Mysteries," they will surely want an entirely different name for, say, a group of knitting manuals.

There's a financial issue too. If you're Betty Smith and your by-line is Jennie Jones, unless the editor knows about the name replacement, your check will be made out to Jennie Jones—and that check can be a hassle to cash!

Two more considerations: (1) the editor may question your sanity if there's no reason for the writer not to be you, and (2) he/she may wonder what you are trying to hide by not taking responsibility for the copy you want released, like is it unprovable, a flat-out lie, an exaggeration beyond the pale, out-and-out libel, or too badly written to want your own name attached.

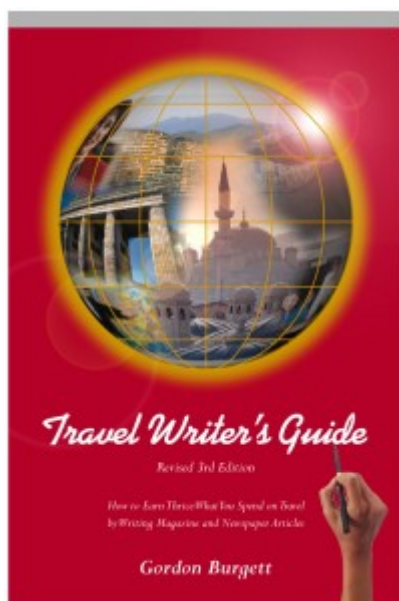
Finally, if you are trying to build up your writing reputation by increasing your volume in print, switching from Ed to Ted to Red to Betty sounds counterproductive.

So, if you want to use a pseudonym, at least clear it with the editor. They need a good laugh now and then. Tell them you saw it done on a television show.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

How you can sell your articles 150% of the time...



I know, **150% of the time?**

Yes, it could be much, much higher, but it seems imprudent to scare you in the title.

Let's focus on magazines here, where the pay is higher and acceptances are harder to get.

(Selling newspaper travel is easier and the possible sales ratio is higher too, but the pay is very modest. The process? Find a fetching location with something new, write a 1200-word "second" article, don't send to the nationals, and keep the submissions 100 miles from each other. A photo or two sometimes helps. Write it once and submit it simultaneously, and since you wrote it once and if you sell it, say, four times, that's 400%. My [Travel Writer's Guide](#), available only as an ebook now, at \$10, tells all.)

With magazines there are no grapeshot submissions, the competition is tougher, the article space rarer, and you must change hats to earn that extra 50%—but often you can stick with the same topic!

Getting on their pages depends very much on how you ask. (If you don't ask the editor in advance—you just write something and send it in—your selling percentage plummets, or you're selling wee items now and then for wee pay.) For a full article you must ask the editor if you can send your masterpiece (but don't call it a masterpiece). You need a "go-ahead," a positive response to get through the buying gate. A go-ahead isn't acceptance—yet. It says that the editor agrees to give your idea and its preparation full consideration for one of the 4-8 article slots still open for a coming issue. (The copy will probably be in print several or many months away). In other words, you write it and in the "let me see it" response the editor is saying "I'm interested enough to give it full consideration." Not an assignment but if you do it right it's almost a sale.

What is "doing it right"?

1. Probably half of your selling time is spent pre-query, the other half is sending on time what you promised in the query. (A day late, the ship probably hasn't sailed. No apologies, but scold yourself. Late a week or more, wave goodbye—and stay out of that editor's sight for 18 months or longer.)
2. Find a topic that is irresistible for that readership. Study earlier issues to 4-6 months back. What is the editor buying? Write down six topics. Find the cutting edge, new facts, new studies, trends about to break, laws changing, a look-back 100 years, celebrities or leaders the reader must know, what fits the season 4-6 months ahead? (Check to see that your choice wasn't on those pages in the past two years.)
3. Don't know much about it? Learn. You need facts, quotes,

and anecdotes. See what others are saying—and aren't. Think like a reporter. Build a fact base, list people who are leaders in the field or are current bright lights.

4. Then write a one-page query letter that asks the editor, in essence, "Would you be interested in an article about?" Make the topic jump off the page, cite the experts you will quote or interview, tell what's new or different or what excites you as a reader, include a short paragraph about your credits (if none, say nothing) and that you can have the piece in their hands 2-3 weeks after a go-ahead. (Check my blog "**Nothing sells more articles than a great query letter**" from 3/14/2011—write the date or "query letters" in the search box at the top of this blog.)

5. One precaution before querying: see if the editor ever printed humor. If so and it's your style of writing, inject something funny in the query and in the final copy. If they don't, don't.

6. Write other query letters to other editors about other things while you await a reply.

7. If/when the editor writes back an eager response, study the last two issues, pulling apart at least one article in each. (The blog "**How to study a printed magazine article**" will help here. It appeared on 3/31/2011.) Get the idea and words together and write your piece like the authors wrote to be in print in the target magazine issue you studied. Stay in the same ballpark. If the editor gives you specific instructions or suggestions, do them. Edit and edit again: make it as light and tight as a drum. Then mail it off, as clean as a Dutch stoop. (If photos are an issue, get them off too. Ask the photo/art editor if there's a submission protocol, and follow it.)

8. Then if that editor just can't or won't say yes, don't worry about it. They can have 100 legitimate or ridiculous

reasons. Find a similar magazine, remold your query to its readership, and query again. (But only one query at a time.) That's why you don't fully research and write the article until the editor gives you a go-ahead.)

But if you score a bulls eye, super. You go the gilded nod. Write and rejoice. You only write the winning manuscript once—that's your 100%. Query letters are door-knocking. Congratulations! You've done it like the pro's do. Neither you nor they have time to do the full prep without having at least the 50% chance you get with the query and go-ahead.

The other 50% (which is really 100%, 200% or 500%)?

There are two paths (and a combo) into this post-sale heaven: (1) you sell the very same article described above (after it has appeared in print) as a reprint (also called second rights), (2) you significantly redesign the just-sold article (again, after it has appeared in print), then you rewrite its query letter so you can submit your redesigned article after you get a "go-ahead." You can rewrite the subject as many times as it can be configured into a distinctly unique article. And (3), you can sell reprints of the rewrites too.

The reprinting and rewriting can actually be more profitable than selling the original article, but it's seldom as exciting!

Let me share the specifics about the **"Profits from reprints, rewrites, and reprints of rewrites"** in a blog by that title printed here a few days back, 2/7/15.

I know that all of what I'm telling you works because I put two sweet daughters through grad school, plus fed several suffering wives, by doing it. Now it's your turn!

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

How do you find interviewees for your articles?

You almost always need **at least one interview** for a magazine or newspaper article. But it makes much more sense to get three or four, and even many more if you plan to rewrite the original piece again and again. (And if ***Reprints, Rewrites, or Reprints of Rewrites*** are your plan: bravo. My \$2.99 Kindle book, just out, by that name should help.)

Most articles need more than quotes, of course. They need facts, quotes, anecdotes, and artwork (photos, drawings, charts, graphs, and so on). Sometimes no artwork, sometimes no anecdotes, but if you also leave out the facts and quotes it's hard to keep that word house from tumbling down or blowing away from skeletal inadequacy.

The people you will interview might be those who know enough about a topic to be an expert. Or a celebrity, a person with a new idea or invention, someone who was a first-hand witness. If your article addresses a two-sided argument, you either get the strongest proponent of each side, plus another person or two that each suggests. Or just one side of the issue.

Beyond what the interviewee says, **there's another solid reason for getting quotes**. Those interviewed give your facts a source of origin. Readers want to know first-hand information from a person who knows first hand, or is at least considerably closer to it than they are. If your piece begins, "Melinda Moore saw a sailor levitate for almost two minutes at Benny's Grog House last night," you must mention that Melinda is the daytime bartender at the Grog House. Then you find anybody else who can attest to the same levitation, with details about

the incident, plus where they live or work or what they do. Your questions will mostly be about the levitation, how long the sailor has been doing it, did he float anywhere as he levitated, how high did he rise, how long he was he air-bound? You might also ask about the sailor's (and the witnesses') sobriety at the time. It will sound like a fish tale if you don't also interview the sailor. Who is he, how long has he been levitating, how did he do it, what did it feel like, and on what date (and at what time) does he plan to repeat the happening?

The example of Melinda and the sailor is fairly obvious. But in truth, it's no more difficult finding the best people to interview for almost any article. Ask yourself, what would you (or the editor) want to know about the topic or incident? Who knows about that best? You're half way home!

If you interview your postman or a gas station employee, those are easy to get. But the more famous your interviewee is, the more likely they are to ask, "**Where will it appear?**" So if that's likely to be the first (and major) hurdle, query first, get a "go-ahead" from the editor of the target publication, then the article has more than a 90% chance of being used on those pages.

Is it easy to get a person to agree to be interviewed? It's never easy, but with the correct explanation of where it will be used and the benefits it will bring to the person and the editor, it's not hard to arrange.

Four tips: (1) ask the question that must be answered, but make it the second question—unless that question is a door-slammer ("Is it true that you rob the poor box in every church enter?"), then you ask it last. (2) don't talk about yourself in the interview. The editor won't buy an article about you. (3) you don't have to prearrange most of your interviews if the person featured is an everyday person. (4) I've never paid for an interview.

A few thoughts about the **scariest thing for newcomers in article writing**: the interview.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

[How to make editors vomit...](#)

I'll tell you how in a second. A more important question is, "If you're trying to put your kids through college by churning out magazine articles, and hoping to sell a couple of reprints from every original piece that you got in print, why in the world would you even put "editor" and "vomit" in the same hemisphere?

But that's exactly what I did. Worse yet, that editor used me and the heinous article idea for years to show new writers what not to do if they wanted to make a penny by appearing on his pages!

This must have been 40 years ago (surely before you were born). Even then I was the world's worst sailor because I got seasick in bathtubs.

So you can imagine my delight when I read about a new medicine about to be released that stopped motion sickness dead in its tracks—if the secondary effects didn't kill you first.

In those days I wrote about anything that interested me, then I matched it to publications likewise perversely affected. I figured there must be a zillion flatlanders with my affliction, so I smelled a windfall in sales from a zesty article about the newest motion sickness medications, fattened with anything I could find about how effective earlier

“potions” already on sale were.

Then the Internet was probably used for fishing. The first research you did was in the library, where I sniffed around for several hours, first to see who else had beaten me to the idea and was already in print. If there weren't too many of them and they had usable facts, that was a blessing. It was a time-honored tradition to build (or borrow) from your competitions' printed material.

Nothing in print! I could hear the cash register clanging. So I took to the telephone to find “experts,” some self-declared, who were on the front line of action to get the needed quotes and cutting-edge, state-of-the-art facts that editors so loved (as long as you paid the dime, yes dime, to do the phoning.)

Most of us who worked magazines, with newspaper spinoffs, took the same path: a good magazine sale, two or three magazine spin-offs with different slants, some newspaper simultaneous submissions, maybe even a book if the topic was electric. (Most weren't, and books took forever to write. Anyway, spending months wading through seasickness was a no-go for me.)

Somewhere I had gathered enough checkable truths and found several related ideas for by-product shorts or follow-up pieces. The linchpin in this big-money-making scheme was an electric one-page query letter that made the editor virtually beg me to have it to her in three days (that never happened). But if she said, “Let me see it,” that was tantamount to a sale, and usually the first firm step to several offshoot pick-ups. (I could call my daughters and tell them to buy their textbooks.)

So I wrote up a dandy, hot-in-the-hands one-page query and sent it to the first editor of the six or so on my marketing list. I spent time on that list. Who were most interested in preventing motion sickness? In-flight magazine editors. The

biggest lines paid the most. Off went the gilded query...

Usually it would take a week or two for the reply. (There was no rush because the stamps were only three cents.) But this reply had wings. He couldn't wait. I could almost feel the big bucks in my hands! He was probably holding up the next issue so he could slip it in.

I can almost remember reading his reply word for word: "Is this a joke? An article about motion sickness in an in-flight magazine? It almost makes me vomit just thinking about it. Rest assured that if any of our passengers got past the first paragraph the pilot would hear a chorus of retching clear up to the cockpit." And that was it. No thank you, no best wishes. I guess it was a no. He didn't even suggest that I send it to his competition!

There was a point there but it took several shocked days for me to start laughing!

When you draw up your marketing list you have to think: why would the editor of those publications want to share your spine-tingling prose and gripping revelations with their readers?

So if there's even the faintest whiff of nausea in the air, you'd best just save your 3-cent (or 49-cent) stamp!

P.S. But I did sell it to two general-interest magazines and one newspaper. I don't think the anti-*mareo* medicine worked either. I kept my eye out for it, for obvious reasons, but it seemed to have faded, as did my million-dollar windfall from anti-seasickness articles.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

