

# Why not Write an Article?

By Rod Fraser

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Don told me he found a website late last year that offered opportunities for writers of short stories and non-fiction articles. After thinking about it, he thought the odd short story (or article) written by a guest author might be a welcome addition to his blog, so he signed up.

Interested authors were directed to submit their

short-stories or articles to participating publishers (including Don) by email. If they aligned with the interests of the readership (and were well-written), they would likely be published.

Don isn't planning to pay authors for their work. His readership isn't large, as his website is pretty much a hobby. There isn't the budget for salaries or fees to writers.

What he does offer for those who love to write, is a forum in which to do so. Don edits and formats their work, offers thoughtful advice, and publishes their articles on a blog with a receptive (but small) readership. Some argue this is a fair exchange for writers who would like to get their work published.



In the last few months, two writers contacted Don about publishing their work on his website. One wrote a short story and the other a non-fiction piece. According to Don, both submissions were nicely done.

**"It's none of their business that you had to learn to write. Let them think you were born that way."**

**—Ernest Hemingway**

He read each one, in turn, to see if they would interest his readers (largely older people). This required some judgement on Don's part, but he was comfortable making these decisions.

The articles were just fine, so Don edited them to make them terse and pithy. Before publication, he sent copies back to the writers for comments. All in all, Don considered his guest publishing project a success. He was hopeful he might interest other writers in the future.



The following week, Don and I discussed this project over coffee. Here's what he had to say,

*"Some writers object to having their work edited. It's natural enough. When you have worked hard to write something that is interesting, literate and polished, who wants a stranger making changes?"*

*"If it were only that simple!"*

*"Editing ensures all articles are compatible with the formatting, punctuation, and general look of the publication."*

*"Changes are also often required when there are logical inconsistencies in the writing, or where disparate thoughts aren't skilfully connected with a timely word, phrase or sentence."*

*"Young people shouldn't fight the editing process."*

*It can be helpful. But it's also clear that to be a good writer, you must write regularly. Never miss a chance to put pen to paper. Get your thoughts down in a rough draft and then polish, clarify and rewrite. This is where your time is most wisely spent."*



I left our meeting with lots to think about. Like Don, I also published a blog that contained personal articles and book reviews. Up to now, all the postings on my blog (save one) were written by me.

I wondered if I should follow Don's lead, and encourage guest writers. Most successful blogs, offering similar reading material, have a number of contributing writers. People seem to like that.

While this works nicely for the publisher and the readers, I wondered about the contributing writers. Why do they put up with working without being paid?

Well it seems the desire to write, to express oneself using the written word is very important to many young people. They find satisfaction in making writing a part of their lives. I know I do.

In the past, there were lots of opportunities for young writers. Newspapers and magazines were everywhere, supported with oodles of advertising dollars. My current daily newspaper, while still

excellent, is getting thinner and thinner all the time. Advertising has now moved to the internet.

The market for short stories is even worse. In the distant past, major magazines such as *The Atlantic* or *Harpers* (and *Macleans* in Canada) contained at least one short story in each issue. Those days are long gone.

This is why Don's website is gaining in popularity. It's one of the few places left for aspiring writers to submit their stories and articles for publication.



I've decided to follow a slightly different path. I will pay \$50 in Canadian currency for any article published on my website. It isn't much, but my blog is just a hobby; these payments will come out of my pocket.

I plan to review and edit all submissions to ensure they are suitable for publication. As my friend, Robert Collins, once wrote,

*"Every magazine edits. Good editors do it judiciously: trimming the fat where necessary; keeping the grace and style if any. True editing is highly creative. Its practitioners play it by ear, tuning articles for what they are worth. Some need scarcely be touched. Some are touched so deftly that the writer is hard-pressed to know why it reads better."*

Collins' approach will be my guiding light. I expect some writers will appreciate the feedback. Others may chafe at any changes to their copy. If you're wary of this, my blog may not be for you.

Your articles or stories should be of interest to an older audience. If you are writing an article about the importance of '*Hip-Hop*' music to contemporary culture, you should probably send it elsewhere.

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