



Marlaina Cockcroft Freelance Writer/Editor



I write and edit for magazines, websites and other companies, and I also serve as a coach and help other writers with their careers. I write children's books on the side.

How long have you been a freelance writer/editor?

I worked full-time in newspapers for 20-plus years as a copy editor, assignment editor and reporter, then switched to freelancing five years ago.

Where do you currently work?

From my desk at home. And occasionally from the couch.

How do you spend most of your time at work?

My days vary depending on what I'm working on and when my deadlines are. I set up interviews by email, and interview people either over the phone or in person. I transcribe those interviews, do other research as needed and write up the articles. I also handle editing projects and check in on my coaching clients. I work on my novels at night.

Why did you choose this career?

I'm a good writer and a good listener, and I really enjoy helping other writers. Journalism is a great industry to get into if you like learning about other people and hearing their stories.

What did you do to prepare for this career?

I have a bachelor's degree in English/Journalism, but everything else is on-the-job training. I started covering municipal meetings for a local newspaper part-time while I was still in college, then won a journalism scholarship that placed me on a newspaper staff for a few months during one summer. I was also heavily involved with my college newspaper, which gave me a lot of good experience. I got an internship on a newspaper copydesk my senior year of college, which turned into a full-time job after I graduated. There are classes and certifications for writing and reporting, but the best way to learn is by getting out there and doing it. The most important thing is knowing how to ask good questions, and then listening to the answers.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Being a reporter is a great way to learn new things and to talk to people you might not get the chance to talk to otherwise. I've had interesting conversations with artists, musicians, medical researchers, real estate developers, chefs and accountants. I've talked to a comic book creator whose graphic novel was turned into a TV series, and a woman who's devoted her adult life to local politics because she wants to give back to her community. And I like editing because I have a knack for it, and it's satisfying to take a piece of writing and make it better.

What do you find most challenging about your job?

Journalism has never been the best-paying industry, but that's gotten worse in recent years as fewer people buy newspapers and they shut down. I wish more people would buy them! Freelancing can be difficult because you have to constantly be on the lookout for work. Some months you're very busy, and some months there's barely any work. The challenge is to find enough regular clients to keep a steady stream of work.

What is one piece of advice you would give to a young person who is interested in your profession?

If you want to do any sort of writing for a living, you need to read as much as possible, just about any kind of writing you can get your hands on, and you need to write as much as possible. The more you do it, the better you get.

MARLAINA'S FUN FACTS

I have trouble picking a favorite book, but my favorite authors are Neil Gaiman (who was also a journalist!), Ray Bradbury and Kate DiCamillo.

