

Getting Started in Column Writing

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Enter: the column.

Before you march up to an editor's office or send her unsolicited mail asking to write regularly for a publication, learn all there is to know.

A column is written weekly, monthly or bi-monthly, and must be focused on one particular topic. You have to be consistent in what you write, maintain the same tone of voice, and stay focused on the issue at hand. If you're writing a column for the writing parent, don't delve into issues of parenting in general. Your readers will probably be parents who write, and they will be more interested in learning how to find time for their writing, rather than how to take care of their children.

A column can last from three to four months to ten or maybe even twenty. I know of a writer who wrote a column in a leading daily for more than twenty years.

When you decide to write a column, make sure that the topic you choose is of interest to readers and will keep them coming back for more, week after week. If your topic is boring or uninteresting, chances are you'll have no readers, and the editor will soon wrap up your column with a short goodbye note.

Make sure that you can keep the commitment. Writing a column takes more than just a bright idea and good writing. It needs dedication, discipline and the ability to meet deadlines. If you can't meet deadlines, you'll soon be out of a job, and out of the publication—for good. A columnist has to make sure that she provides an on-topic, interesting, timely article each week (or month), interesting enough to make the reader come back to read it. If you decide to delve into the world of column writing, your best bet would be to start with a regional daily or weekly newspaper. Not only will this market be easier to break into, but will give you a lot of exposure. Columns for cooking, astrology, inspiration and living in the city run frequently in newspapers and are the best places for starting off. However, try to avoid topics that have been done to death. Put a unique and interesting spin to a topic, and you're bound to get the editor's interest.

Websites too are now beginning to open up to columns. Just like their print counterparts, Websites, e-zines and even online versions of print magazines ask for original material on a weekly or monthly basis. The biggest advantage of writing online is the short acceptance and publication period.

The best way to query an editor about writing a column is by sending clips of your work and your column topic. If the editor likes your query, you'll be asked to send in an article, and you'll soon be on your way to publishing glory. Keep in mind though, that column writing is not like writing an article—it's not **your** convenience and **your** time constraints that matter. The only thing the editor wants from you is a good quality article each week, submitted on time. Do that, and you'll have a regular income from at least one source.

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