

Writing Book Reviews for Fun and Profit

By John Riddle

Writing book reviews can be a great way to break into print. (My first byline was a book review!) Book reviews are found in newspapers, magazines, trade journals, Websites and newsletters.

To find potential markets for your book reviews, grab a copy of *Literary Marketplace*, a reference volume available at your local library. There are several sections that list newspapers and magazines that publish book reviews. You will find the name of the book review editor for each publication, but before you send a query letter asking if they need any additional book reviewers, visit their Website and make sure the name is still correct.

You can also look through *Writers Market* and *Sally Stuart's Christian Writers' Market Guide* to find additional publications that feature freelance book reviews. Another good way to find publications and Websites that need book reviews is to use your favorite search engine online. Also, spend time at a large bookstore, such as Borders or Barnes and Nobles, and browse through the many publications they have for sale. Before you know it, you will have compiled a rather large prospect list of book review editors to contact.

If you are just getting started as a freelance writer you should contact your local newspaper and see if they need any additional book reviewers. Some newspapers use freelance writers for book reviews, author interviews and even feature articles. If your local newspaper does not have a book review section, offer to write a weekly book review for a few weeks at no charge. This will help you build up your "clips" (what you have published) and give you the confidence to move on to paying projects.

The best place to find new books that will be in the bookstores over the next few months is by looking at a copy of *Publishers Weekly* magazine. (You can learn more by visiting www.publishersweekly.com.) That magazine has tons of information about the book world and mini reviews of forthcoming books.

When you see a review of a book you would like to obtain, jot down the name of the book and the name of the publishing company. Then visit the publishers' Website and look for an e-mail address for their publicity department.

Send an e-mail to the publicity director:

Dear Publicity Director:

I would like to obtain a review copy of (insert the name of the book). Two copies of each tearsheet will be forwarded upon publication. Please send the review book and media kit to: (add your name & mailing address).

By the way, a "tearsheet" is simply a photocopy of the book review when it is published.

Before you know it you will be receiving free review copies of new books in the mail.

Next, you'll need to send an e-mail to a book review editor. Here's what the e-mail should say:

Dear Book Review Editor:

I am a freelance book reviewer and would like to submit a review of (name of book). The publishing company will be sending a review copy to me. The book is scheduled to be released in bookstores on (insert date), and I will have the review to you before the release date.

See how easy that can be? Once you obtain the review copy of the book and find a place to sell your book review, you are on your way to a new chapter in your freelance writing life. I have reviewed books for almost 25 years for a variety of newspapers, magazines, trade journals, newsletters and Websites. Some book reviews have paid \$25 while others have paid as much as \$300 (and higher).

After you have written a few book reviews you might be interested in writing for the "book summary" companies. They hire freelance book reviewers to write "summary reviews" of books. They usually pay about \$1,000 for a summary that runs from 5 to 15 pages.