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Nonfiction Freelancer Jessica McCann Answers a Question About Getting Assignments

As a freelancer for magazines, how do you get assignments?

Regular article assignments come from magazine editors who know and trust you as a freelance writer. It has been my experience that the sales technique used to get that first assignment isn't nearly as important as the customer service skills that translate your initial success into additional assignments over the long term.

At a bare minimum, turn in assignments on or before deadline. Immediately inform the editor of any obstacles that may cause a missed deadline, such as difficulty scheduling interviews with vital sources. The editor will appreciate the heads-up and be that much more impressed when you manage to meet the deadline despite the challenges. Also be prompt turning around any revision requests.

Articles should be the exact (or as close to as humanly possible) the word count the editor requested. If you have important information that you just can't fit in, include it in an optional sidebar for the editor to consider; this not only adds value to the service you're providing, it gives the editor an easy out if space limitations simply won't allow for those extra words.

Follow writing assignments to the letter. Editors know what they want (what their readers want), and few things frustrate them more than a freelancer who thinks she knows better. That said, if your research is taking you down an intriguing unexpected path, don't be afraid to pick up the phone and talk it through with your editor. Sometimes that new information will find a home in the original article; other times it may evolve into yet another article assignment in the future.

Fresh, creative, error-free writing is a must. Never turn in a first draft. When appropriate, include a list of sources and contact information to aid fact-checking.

Establish a reputation as a freelancer who communicates effectively with her editors and makes their jobs easier, and the assignments will come.

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