

PHYSICS CAREERS

Science Writer

Science writers explain science to their readers in a clear and entertaining way. To learn more about science writing as a career, read the interview with Janice VanCleave, author of *Janice VanCleave's A+ Projects in Physics* and more than 50 other books about science.

What does a science writer do?

After the topic and basic format of a book are determined, I start researching. My personal library contains about 1,000 science books. For more information, I use online sources to find current printed research. But most important are science consultants in each specific field, such as a NASA astronomer, a research chemist, and physics professors.

After I write the original manuscript, it is edited five different times. I have to make sure any changes do not affect its scientific correctness and that the art represents the text. On average, I write three new books each year between doing reviews on the books written in previous years.

What sort of training do you have?

I taught science for 27 years, and this was the only training I had for my writing career.

Mine is a Cinderella story. A publisher saw an ad for an elementary science enrichment program that I designed and taught. She sent a letter asking if I was interested in writing a science book for young kids. The answer was a big YES!

It didn't take long to realize that although I had skills to write experiments for my class, I didn't have a clue



Janice VanCleave writes, on average, three new science books every year.

about how to write a book. Thankfully, the publisher really wanted the book, so I was given a great deal of personal instruction. I learned by trial and error. In fact, even after writing 50 books, I am still learning how to better write a book.

What is your favorite part of your work?

I love writing because, as in teaching, I learn so much. Now, instead of just writing for my classroom, I am able to share my ideas with students and teachers around the world. A downside is that I have less time with students than when I taught.

What advice do you have for students who are interested in science writing?

Study the market, and know what kinds of books are most wanted. Writing a book may be your smallest problem; getting it published can be a big obstacle. If you are a great writer but not a good salesperson, I suggest hiring an agent.

Write about something that you have a passion for, and don't give up if your work is not accepted. Try, try, and try again.

