

Travel Writing in Ten Lessons

Robin LoRé for Universal Class

FOR SAMPLE PURPOSES ONLY-ALL RIGHTS RESERVED BY UNIVERSAL CLASS

Course Description

Travel writing is a fun, interesting and fulfilling career. If your goal is to become a full-time travel writer who is able to live off your income from writing alone, it is important to understand that travel writing, like any other career, requires you to develop specific skills and to have perseverance in order to succeed. There is a lot of competition in the field of travel writing. Some highly successful writers in this genre have compared their climb to success with those who aspire to become actors, songwriters or musicians. In other words, most aspiring writers work at other jobs while they build a reputation strong enough to financially support themselves with writing alone. How long it takes you to achieve that goal is dependent upon how ambitious you are and how well you write, but the average is between three and six years.

Alternatively, you may wish to earn extra money as a travel writer and continue working in the field you are already in; perhaps you travel frequently for your current job and feel you have a lot to share with others about the places you visit. You can create a great additional source of income as a travel writer this way. Whether it is a full-time or part-time profession you desire, this course will help you get started. It will give you the basic information you need to build a portfolio and the required skill set you need to succeed, the rest is up to you!

LESSON ONE

Do You Have What It Takes To Become A Travel Writer?

Introduction

Travel writing is a very specialized field. It, of course, requires you to be well traveled, but it also requires that you write well. By “writing well” we mean that your prose is technically correct, entertaining and accurate. This lesson will explain the basic and essential requirements you will need to become a good travel writer. This lesson will also point you towards tools you can use to expand your skills if you are lacking in certain areas. If you already possess the skills you need to get started as a travel writer, then take the self-test at the end of this lesson and skip to lesson two.

Learn It

Writing Skills

First and foremost you must have a better than average grasp of the rules of proper English grammar. Many people who aspire to write for a living underestimate the importance of this skill and skip it thinking they can acquire it as they go, or that they will have an editor who will “do all that for them.” This thinking is inherently wrong! You will not get your work accepted and published by any editor if you lack basic and essential grammatical skills. Travel writers most often follow *The Associated Press Stylebook* (AP) and/or the *Chicago Manual of Style* for rules and guidelines of proper grammar and punctuation. If you want to be a writer, you should own both of these guides. You should study them and refer to them when writing any article or travel piece. You can find the *AP Stylebook* online at www.apstylebook.com. *The Chicago Manual of Style* can be found at most book sellers.

In addition to having good grammatical skills, you should have the ability to edit your work properly. You should edit until your work is as near to perfect as you can get it. With large pieces (1000 words or greater) this will require several readings on your own, plus the assistance of another editor. It is advisable that you have a friend or paid editor double check your work before submitting it for publication. The reason for this is that writers become “immune” to their own errors. Sounds strange, but it’s true. If you have been working on a piece for days or weeks, sometimes you are so busy working on the content that you miss simple mistakes, or, you’ve read the work over so many times that you get bleary eyed. It’s always nice to find another aspiring writer to reciprocate editing with. The three most important things you should focus on when editing are:

1. *Punctuation*: Use your style guides to make sure your punctuation is correct. Pay special attention to the use of colons, semi-colons, exclamation points, quotation marks and commas. Commas are of particular concern for many new writers. Be sure that you have a very good understanding of the use of commas by reading your style guides carefully!

2. *Spelling*: You have spell check, so use it, but don't completely rely on it to catch every error. Read your work over carefully after you've run spell check.
3. *Typos*: Spell check will not catch typos such as this, "I wander if I should use a question mark in this sentence?" or this, "It was good advice that I reed my work oven for typographical errors." Wander, reed and oven are all spelled correctly, however, wander should have been "wonder," reed should have been "read," and oven should have been over. Spell check will not catch errors such as these, so be sure to look over your work.

All publishers have in-house copy editors who check your writing before it goes to print or digital publication. They may be kind and "suggest" changes or they may just go ahead and make the changes without your permission or knowledge. Publishers and editors usually reserve the right to do this. Although you may initially be insulted by the changes, the wisest thing to do is to accept them and realize that this is a great learning experience for you. Use their seasoned knowledge to make your future writing better. The only time you should argue is if the editor has added words or ideas that you object to morally or ethically, (this is very rare). After you have gained some footing in the field, you can push harder to keep your writing closer to the original, or request all changes are by your approval only. Luckily, most editors are very good at their jobs and they will enhance the overall tone of your writing rather than detract from it. This does not give you the luxury of being lazy. As the writer Stephen King mentions in his book "*On Writing*" do not leave errors in your work thinking that the editor will "fix" them for you. Do most of the heavy lifting yourself if you want to advance your writing career. Is all this extra work easy? No, it is not, but if you want to be a professional writer, it *is* part of the job.

Writing Style

Unfortunately, great writing style is not something that you can learn. It is something that must be developed over time (or comes naturally for a lucky few). However, there are certain tips you can employ that will increase the readability of your work and, thus, increase your chances of getting published. Below are some standard "rules" of travel writing that are timeless:

1. Don't use clichés. Phrases such as "The breeze blew gently off the cerulean sea. . ." or "The tropical sun will warm your soul and rejuvenate your mind," may sound romantic and original, but travel editors have read phrases like this all too often. To be original, you have to work hard.
2. Read, read and read! The best way to develop your own writing technique is to develop an ear for what good travel writing sounds like. To do that you should *read* travel writing. Read magazines, guides, books and newspaper articles that focus on travel. Follow the writing of one or several travel writers and notice how they have their own unique, recognizable writing style.
3. Practice, practice, practice! Although it violates the laws of rule number one, the clichéd joke, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall? *Answer*: Practice, practice, practice," applies with travel writing, or anything else in life. Write, write and write some more. Write a small travel piece every day, even if the only place you are traveling to is the grocery store! As you write, your own style will develop and shine through over time.

Perseverance

Perseverance is a topic that will come up repeatedly throughout this course. It is a quality you will need to develop if you want to break into the world of travel writing. If you truly want to make a success of yourself in this arena, then you must keep trying, even when you feel like giving up. Many successful writers will admit that they were not necessarily the most talented or creative amongst their peers, but they wanted it enough to keep working at it. So, perseverance counts for a lot when discussing what it takes to be a travel writer. If you're the type who sticks with something, even when others have given up, then you will succeed.

Ability to Travel and Share Travel Information

If you don't already travel often, whether for your job, as part of your lifestyle, or for pleasure, then you need to start doing so. If money is an issue, find a way to travel on a shoestring, and then write about how you did it. If you already travel for work, start looking at these trips as opportunities to tell a story or provide information to other travelers.

You don't need to go very far to start travel writing. Start with destinations close to your home first. Take a good look around and think about interesting attractions that others might want to know more about. No matter where you live, your home state will have something to offer travelers. You simply need to look at things through the perspective of a visitor. Do you go to a special festival, fair, event or music venue every year in your home town? These events may seem unsophisticated to you, but people traveling to your area want to know about them. Do you live near another state that has interesting attractions? A great trip worth writing about may be a short drive away. It isn't important how near or far you travel, but how you perceive the view and relay it to others.

Your Assignment

Purchase a travel dairy. It need not be expensive. It can be as humble as a \$2 dollar composition pad or as elaborate as a \$50 dollar, leather bound, refillable journal. Whichever makes you happy and whichever you can afford will work just fine. Write your name somewhere in there and be sure to always have it handy for the duration of this course along with a working pen or pencil.

Conclusion

To be a travel writer you must have a good grasp of the rules of grammar; you must develop a style that separates you from other writers and you must have or develop the quality of perseverance. You also must travel, near or far. Theoretically, you can be a travel writer from the cocoon of your home or office, writing about the places you'd like see, but that would make you a fiction writer, in which case you should take a differnt course!

Here are some resources that will assist you in getting your writing, grammar and editing skills up to or above average:

The Elements of Style by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White

Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing by Claire Cook

On Writing, by Stephen King

Review Self-Test Questions

True/False: Decide whether the given statement is true or false based on the information provided in Lesson One, please circle your answer:

1. Good writers have good writing skills? **True** or False
2. Most publishers will change your work before publishing it? **True** or False
3. Commas are often misused by new writers? **True** or False
4. The New York Manual of Style is used by travel writers? True or **False**
5. You should never edit your own work? True or **False**

Multiple Choice Questions: Please select one from those provided to answer each question.

1. The “AP” in the AP Stylebook stands for:
 - a. Associated Purse
 - b. Abysmal Press
 - c. **Associated Press**
 - d. Attentive Publishers
2. Writing Style is a skill that:
 - a. Can be learned for a small fee
 - b. **Is developed over time or is innate**
 - c. Can be purchased at www.writingstyle.com
 - d. Is a mythological concept like unicorns and mermaids
3. Perseverance is:
 - a. **The ability to keep trying despite obstacles**
 - b. A complete waste of time
 - c. Unheard of in this day and age
 - d. All of the above
4. When a publishers copyeditor changes your article you should:
 - a. Give them their money back and refuse to let them publish it
 - b. Send a nasty letter complaining about the changes
 - c. Throw a tantrum
 - d. **Try to learn from the editors seasoned knowledge**
5. To be a good travel writer you must?
 - a. Travel abroad
 - b. **Travel often, near or far**
 - c. Stay home and write about imaginary places
 - d. Take at least one flight a month

LESSON TWO

Types of Travel Writing

Introduction

This lesson will introduce you to the different types of travel writing that is done in the publishing world. Explanations of article, book, column, and opinion writing will be provided. You will be introduced to the differences between the duties of a full-time staff writer and those of a freelance “per-diem” writer. This lesson will help you figure out which type of writing your personality and lifestyle is best suited to career wise. Many writers opt to partake in several types of writing, delivering an article to one magazine while writing a column for another. Other writers prefer to only write books. You will find what works best for you as you progress in the field, but you should know what your options are so your focus and goals are clear at the start.

Learn It

Plagiarism, Grand Theft Word

Before you learn about the different types of work a travel writer can do, you should be reminded of the concept of plagiarism. You may have learned about plagiarism in high school or college, but it is worth noting because it has become a major issue in recent years. Due to the copious amounts of internet content plagiarism is a simple “copy/paste” command away. However, technology hasn’t only made things easier for the would-be word thief; technology has also fought back with software that scans documents for plagiarism and is 98% accurate. All legitimate print and digital publishers use this technology.

First, let’s get a clear idea of what plagiarism is. The Oxford English Dictionary defines plagiarism as follows: *the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own*. Thus, plagiarism is not only copy and pasting another writer’s work, but also re-writing their work, “borrowing” the bulk of their ideas or quoting from their text without giving them credit or explicitly stating that you have done so. While ideas overlap and many people can have the same or similar ideas, what we are talking about here is using all of another person’s concepts. Here is an example: your friend, let’s call him Joe, has this idea for a travel story detailing the best pubs of Ireland, you pitch his idea to your publisher and write the story yourself. That is not “healthy competition,” it is unethical and it is plagiarism.

Here is another example: Same guy, Joe, tells you he is travelling to Ireland, he wants to write a story on the best five pubs in as many counties, you are inspired by this and you ask if he minds if you write a piece on the Guinness Brewery. That is not plagiarism.

Using a small part of someone else’s idea that has inspired you is not plagiarism, using their exact idea, word for word, or nearly so, is plagiarism. Often there is a “group consciousness” wherein many people have parallel ideas at the same time, however, five different people will have a similar idea and that idea will have five totally different outcomes because each person is unique. If you’re a good writer, you won’t need to plagiarize; likewise, if you need to steal another writer’s ideas and work to get paid to be a writer, then you should consider another field. If you need to steal ideas to create; sooner or later you will run out of people to steal from and

have nothing to write about. Better to develop your own imagination and create your own unique ideas and work.

Now, about being stolen from! In most cases original written work, once it is produced by the writer, is covered by copyright law. This means that you are not only ethically obligated to avoid borrowing another writer's work and ideas, but you are violating the law and can be prosecuted for doing so. That said, if you see your work and ideas have been used by another writer, you can sue for compensation. While this type of theft happens frequently and with abandon on the internet, it will not fly with traditional publishers. Legitimate, well-respected publishers use plagiarizing checking software (on and off line) to ensure that they are not held responsible for publishing stolen work. If a word thief gets caught more than once, he or she can kiss their chances of becoming a serious writer goodbye; word gets around, no pun intended.

To protect your own work, make sure that the software you use records the date that your document was created. In the case of very long articles, books, and other works that you would like to have extra "insurance" for, send a printed copy of the piece to yourself or a trusted friend or family member in the mail and do not open it. Alternatively, email the piece to yourself as an attachment and back-up the documents to a memory stick or zip drive.

TRAVEL WRITER GENRES

Articles

Travel article writers, like all article writers, write lengthy stories for publication in magazines, newspapers and periodicals. Articles are usually over 1000 words in length and must be of a timely nature. In other words, you can't have traveled to Istanbul in 1987 and try to sell a story about it in 2009, unless you are comparing the first visit with the second. Article writing is an exciting type of writing because you are offering readers a chance to learn something useful about a place you visited. Also, because writers are usually paid by the article, this is often a good paying opportunity. Travel article assignments often require the inclusion of pictures, so be sure you have a digital camera and learn how to use it. Barring that, you can pay a photographer to snap shots for you while you are at your destination and send you digital copies, be sure to give her or him credit. The topics you may write about are endless. A good way to discover what type of articles magazines, newspapers and periodicals are looking for is to read the particular media you are interested in writing for. This gives you an idea of the type of writing they buy. If you read and love Condé Nast Traveler, then subscribe to that magazine or find someone willing to part with their old copies for free. Many magazines will gladly send you a sample copy of a past issue at your request.

Travel Books

Travel book writers are given more leeway as far as time is concerned. While articles must be current to be of interest to readers, books have more staying power and thus can be written on "long-range" travel topics. Travel books are pitched and are then written, so, the deadline can be anywhere from 6 months to a year or more. The only "catch" with book travel writing is that you usually need to have a reputation and solid experience as a travel writer to acquire a book publishing deal. Books on travel can range from state, town or country specific guides to how-to's to travelogues. If you have a topic for a book that you think is great, a good way to get

started or to see if there is any interest in your idea is to start a blog. Many book deals are being signed based on blogs and Websites.

Columnist

The early pioneers of blogging; columnists generally write about a topic on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Standard column lengths are between 400 and 800 words in length. Like any other columnist, those who write about travel generally share information, musings or advice on the subject of interest. Columnists write for magazines, newspapers, Websites and periodicals. Columnists are often paid by the word. If a column becomes syndicated, it can run in multiple newspapers all over the country. This is a pay boon to the writer. However, syndication is not common or easy; a column must have a certain amount of interest, credibility and staying power for it to reach this level of publication. This is a great job for those who like to know they will have steady work and can keep up with the deadlines and responsibility of writing a daily or weekly piece.

Opinion/Editorial

Opinion writers essentially give their personal take on any given subject. This gives the writer broader license to slant the topic to their unique perspective, whereas article writing should be as unbiased as possible. For instance, an article writer cannot say that the country of England is full of thieves because a waiter in one hotel stole his or her wallet, but an opinion writer can. Many editorial writers are humorists and satirists, so exaggeration is a part of their persona.

Full-time Staff Writer V. Freelance Writer

The choice of whether to set your sights on staff or freelance writing is up to you. There are distinct differences between these two jobs. The below table compares the features and drawbacks of both positions:

<i>Full-time Staff Writer</i>		<i>Freelance Writer</i>	
<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>	<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
Steady work/steady paycheck	Confining work hours, 9 to 5	Freedom to travel at will	Uncertainty during economic downturns
Health benefits/perks included with salary	Must write to fit one particular style	Retain ownership of your own work, second rights sales possible	Must pay own health insurance
Paid vacation, holiday and sick days	Can get restless when not on assignment	Non-contractual, you're a free agent	Not paid for sick, holiday or vacation time
Access to contacts in publishing	Exclusivity, must only write for your employer	Can work from anywhere in the world	Expenses for assignment writing not always paid for
All travel expenses are paid for when on assignment	Office bound when not on location for assignment	Can work full or part-time or "as cash needed" basis	Often have to solicit and pitch work, few freelancers are actively pursued
Work is assigned, do not have to solicit writing opportunities, (although you may pitch ideas)	All your work belongs to employer	Set your own working hours	Must out write a lot of competition

Your Assignment

Write down three article ideas in your travel journal along with brief descriptions of what each article would be about, who they would appeal to and why they should be written.

Conclusion

There are many types of jobs travel writers can hold. Your personality and skills will decide which is best for you. Generally, if you are the type of person who is more comfortable with the security of a steady paycheck, 401K plan and the assurance of daily work, then a job as a staff writer is for you. If, on the other hand, you prefer to come and go as you please, you do your best writing at 2 a.m., you like to write for diverse employers on a variety of topics and find offices confining, then freelancing should be your goal. You can also aim for something in between by being a part-time staff writer. This gives you the best of both worlds in many instances because you can negotiate benefits such as partial health coverage and paid holidays while also having the freedom of freelancing.

Review Self-Test Questions

True/False: Decide whether the given statement is true or false based on the information provided in Lesson Two, please circle your answer:

1. Travel writers work in many different positions? **True** or False
2. A travel writer can be a columnist? **True** or False
3. A pro of being a staff travel writer is having freedom? True or **False**
4. A pro of being a staff travel writer is paid travel expenses? **True** or False
5. Travel book writers write mostly opinion? True or **False**

Multiple Choice Questions: Please select one from those provided to answer each question.

1. Which of the following is a con of being a staff travel writer:
 - a. Having travel expenses paid for
 - b. Having health benefits
 - c. Must work confining hours (9-5 for instance)**
 - d. Having a steady paycheck
2. Which of the following is a con of being a freelance travel writer:
 - a. You can travel at will
 - b. You make your own working hours
 - c. You retain the rights to your work
 - d. Health benefits must be paid out of pocket**
3. A travel columnist's work may involve all but which of the following:
 - a. Daily, weekly or monthly writing about travel
 - b. Providing advice, information or musings about traveling
 - c. Deadlines of a year or more**
 - d. Being paid by the word

4. A travel article writer's work may involve all but which of the following:
- a. Being paid by the piece
 - b. Being unbiased and giving only your opinion**
 - c. Including pictures with the article
 - d. Writing original, timely pieces
5. The word plagiarism means?
- a. Using language of another author's work without giving them credit**
 - b. Using another author's ideas for which you give them credit
 - c. Use of a pen name to conceal your true identity
 - d. You're a really good writer, envied by those with lesser powers of prose

LESSON THREE

How-To Write an Informative, Sellable Travel Article

Introduction

This lesson will provide you with the “anatomy of an article.” You will learn what the important aspects of a sellable, well written article are and will be given two assignments in this lesson. You will be required to use your style guides in this lesson, so be sure that you have purchased new or used copies of them or have borrowed them from the library.

Learn It

Anatomy of an Article

Article writing will make up the bulk of your writing. Even if you decide to become a columnist, you must have a portfolio of good articles put together and published to qualify for that type of position or one as a full-time staff writer. With practice, your writing will get better and become more sellable. If you start with the basic elements and expand from there, your skills will grow and flourish.

Any well written article should have a beginning, middle and an end. Sounds easy right? Your article also needs to be original, interesting, factual, informative, entertaining, well written and grammatically correct. Now things are heating up. Below is a brief “article” about a local farmer’s market in a fictional location:

Eggland’s Fresh Food Market, A Trip Worth Taking by Robin LoRé

Whether you’re a local, or just in town for a visit, Eggland’s Fresh Summertime Market is well worth your exploration time. This relatively new enterprise is the brainchild of Franny Farmer, an organic food grower from neighboring Chickenland. In 2007 she began contacting other local farms and started organizing a monthly gathering where all could sell their wares to the public in one easily accessible area. What started out as a twelve stand produce sale in August has turned into a 100+ county wide vendor exhibit that runs every Sunday from July through September.

The Summa Maaket, as locals are fond of calling it in their pronounced Eastern Eggland drawl, boasts stands overflowing with Chicken County’s best organic fruits, vegetables and herbs along with locally made pies, cookies, cakes, jams, jellies, preserves, pickles, vinegars, locally produced honey and beeswax candles, handmade herbal beauty products and, of course, farm fresh eggs! There are also stands selling locally created art, crafts, clothing and jewelry. In addition to the take home sale items, there are plenty of “eat and drink it now” food and beverage favorites to keep your battery charged. Yummy treats such as sweet batter coated corn dogs, juicy turkey burgers, roasted vegetable wraps, gourmet pizza, freshly brewed coffee, flavored popcorn, fruit and vegetable blender

drinks, and creamy ice cream are available at reasonable prices. Add to these delicious foods a wide array of entertainment from local musicians and mini-classes on home organic gardening, pie making and bee keeping and you have a fun filled, all day event for all.

Eggland's summer market is open, rain or shine, every Sunday starting July 7th until September 12th from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. It is located at the Mount Saint Sydney Pavilion in Eggland. Admission is free. All food and wares are for cash purchase only. There's no ATM on sight, so be sure to bring cash!

The above article is not very flashy, it doesn't describe warm ocean breezes in Jamaica or craggy mountaintops in Kilimanjaro, but it does provide three important things:

1. **A beginning.** The first paragraph introduces the reader to the place of interest. It provides a brief history and sets them firmly in Eggland.
2. **A middle.** The second (and the longest) paragraph describes the place/event. It gives the reader a feel for what they will experience there and what to expect from the trip.
3. **An end.** The last paragraph, (the shortest) tells the reader what they need to know to access this place and provides any pertinent and practical information that will get the traveler there and help them better enjoy their trip.

The article is also grammatically correct and well edited. It is informative and original. It is not overrun with exclamation points or semi-colons. It would be of interest to local residents and others. Grammar is as important as style, because it helps make the article readable. No matter how great your writing style is, it will always be hampered by poor grammar and editing. Because food is a part of the destination of this article, it can be re-sold to foodie magazines and food related Web sites in addition to travel/public interest venues such as local newspapers. Try to write your articles with an eye toward multiple uses and second sales.

Remember, the Elements of any Good, Publishable Article are:

1. **Beginning**
2. **Middle**
3. **End**

And your article should also be:

- ➔ Original
- ➔ Interesting
- ➔ Factual
- ➔ Informative
- ➔ Entertaining
- ➔ Well written
- ➔ Well edited/grammatically correct

And Lastly:

- ➔ Avoid excessive use of exclamation points
- ➔ Don't misuse semi-colons
- ➔ Capitalize when required and check your rules if not sure

Your Assignments

Assignment One: Obviously, the article in this lesson describes a recurring, weekly local event that would be of interest to people living in Eggland. However, there is a broader audience here. Do you know who else might be interested in reading a piece like this? Name three other audiences for a local article such as this and write them down in your journal.

Assignment Two: Write an article on a local event in your own town or county. Provide history, details, and access information. Use your style guides to check your punctuation and grammar. Have a friend or family member with good editing skills read it over for proper grammar usage and spelling. Think about who might be interested in reading and purchasing your article and write it down.

Conclusion

Every article you write, no matter how long, elaborate or detailed, must have a beginning, a middle and an end. These are the basic elements of any good story, fiction or non-fiction. Once you have the basics down and you've written several articles, your style will develop and begin to shine through. Focus first on the technical accuracy and proper form of writing then add in your decoration.

Review Self-Test Questions

True/False: Decide whether the given statement is true or false based on the information provided in Lesson Three, please circle your answer:

1. A good article has four basic elements? True or **False**
2. Grammar is not as important as style? True or **False**
3. Articles should never mix topics? True or **False**
4. Articles can be sold more than once? **True** or False
5. Article writing will make up the bulk of your writing? **True** or False

Multiple Choice Questions: Please select one from those provided to answer each question.

1. A good, publishable article should be:
 - a. Interesting
 - b. Informative
 - c. Grammatically correct
 - d. **All of the above**
2. How many basic elements are there in a good article:

- a. Two
 - b. Three**
 - c. Five
 - d. Four
3. Which of the following should *not* be capitalized:
- a. Eggland
 - b. Chickenland
 - c. County**
 - d. Chickenegg County
4. When writing you should avoid:
- a. Proper spelling
 - b. Capitalization
 - c. Question marks
 - d. The overuse of exclamation points**
5. Localized travel articles can be sold to:
- a. Local newspapers
 - b. Local magazines
 - c. Web sites featuring events and activities
 - d. All of the above**