

Supported by Tauranga Writers

## Writers Need a CV

If you've worked in any profession at all before you start working as a writer – whether part-time or full-time – you will have a CV or resumé you can show prospective employers, and you get used to updating it regularly.

Similarly, writers need some sort of C.V. to show what they've done and what they are capable of doing. This is complementary to your writer's portfolio, used to hold and display to editors samples from the full range of your work. (Keep a copy of everything that is printed with your byline on it.)

We suggested that at the front of this you should always have a clean copy of your most up-to-date writer's CV. You don't want to make this too long – one side of A4 is good – so let earlier references fall off as you progress in your writing career, but always have 1-2 years' work to show an editor.

In passing, let's mention, too, that when you send work out editors often request a mini-bio – sometimes on the guidelines, sometimes when they accept the work. This is to construct 'Notes on Contributors' and demonstrates the range of writing talent they employ. But it's not there just for them; it's also a means by which you can present yourself to curious readers and tell them about your latest book, or newest role. Don't send more than 150 words – and some magazines will prune this further!

You want to appear capable and confident – but not madly infatuated with yourself, except for you, it's the real thing. A modest display, please, no flaunting of your no doubt inconsiderable talents. Put them down – but allow the editor to stumble across them and go, "Wow!" rather than smile politely, thinking, "What a wanker", and say, "Thank you. We'll be in touch if we need you, Mr. Bugle."

Make sure all your clippings are the originals or a photocopy that shows clearly that they were published, and when. If title and date of the publication isn't listed, add them neatly, using black biro (in case the editor wants to take a photocopy.) If you have a website, add your URL. If you mention a book, include the publisher and date of publication. Both mean the reader can follow up on you or on your writing.

Your writer's CV can follow the general pattern of a professional resumé, but without a list of qualifications and jobs you've held unless they are pertinent to your presentation of yourself as 'Betsy Blog, writer.' If you've got a good photo, add that – but keep text black on white, and photo greyscale.

Similarly if you add a JPEG of your book's cover, translate that to greyscale, too. You can always add a footnote that all photos are available as colour JPEGS. The thing with colour photos is you can't control how they reproduce at the other end. Your recipient may not use a colour printer – or if it's a small press magazine, you're using their precious funds to look good, or some unpaid editor is forking out. And, it's a pity, but we're not all as beautiful as Arundhati Roy (left) who won the Booker with her first and only novel, and since then has used her writing for beneficial social change.

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Go for simplicity – what some call ‘functional elegance’ – no fancy borders, two different fonts at most, no smaller than Pitch 11 and no more than Pitch 14. Good quality bond paper in white only.

In other words, keep it plain, plain, plain and remember ‘Less is more’. Because it is the content that is important – what you can write about, and how you do it. Let your work speak for yourself. Begin with your name, and a summary – boxed, if you wish – of your specialties and strengths as a writer.

### Example

Lance Martin is renowned for his travel writing and sports interviews, and has built up an impressive list of contacts in the celebrity world. He has published two biographies under his own name, and done many more as a ghostwriter. He writes a regular column ‘Walking the World’ for AA Directions, and is a features contributor to North & South, Next, The Listener and Wilderness. Martin teaches technical and scientific writing at Whitiangi Institute of Technology.

Add a summary of your writing history to date, and of what you’ve published generally in the last two years, with reference to any major achievements in the past. Being a Nobel Prize nominee or a Booker prize-winner is information that will never date.

This is not the place to list what you charge to write on demand or for editing or proofreading if those are other skills you employ. In fact, don’t ever DEMAND a set fee! You may think you’re worth 40c a word, but if the top rate in e.g. Takahe is \$30 for a short story up to 3000 words, that’s the going rate. Most writers do some writing for free, when they are starting out, sometimes for bylines and sometimes for prestige – a poet will get kudos, for example, for being the focus of a particular Poetry New Zealand edition – but often won’t get paid at all, or get paid a minimal wage.

If you mention payment at all, it should be as “Fee: Open to negotiation”. And that doesn’t need to go on your C.V. which is concentrating on your potential, possibilities and professional expertise as a writer.

It’s worth noting here that the Freelance Marketplace collects a yearly summary of what different newspapers and magazines pay for beginners and for ‘big names’ and all the stages in between. Saying you’re a member won’t look bad on your resumé either – and could influence how low a rate they think they can get away with! Anything that raises the bar ...

(You can contact them at [editors@freelancemarket.co.nz](mailto:editors@freelancemarket.co.nz).)

Two A4 pages is sufficient for most purposes, but keep on file an ongoing CV of everything you’ve done in terms of writing projects, and a separate file of Writing Credits. List these separately as your second page.

To end your C.V. give full contact details – name, postal address, where a courier can deliver

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stuff, phone – landline and mobile – fax, if you’ve got it, and your e-mail. When they’re desperately near a deadline and their usual freelance has run off to Hawaii with her toy boy lover, you want them to be able to easily get hold of you.

Finally, read and ‘tweak’ your C.V. every single time you send it out so that it’s up-to-date, and slanted to that particular editor for that particular magazine.