UNIT 4 FREELANCE AND MAGAZINE WRITING

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4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish between a freelance journalist and a regular/staff journalist;
- describe the qualities of a successful freelance journalist;
- discuss the characteristics of newspaper and magazine writing and the types of magazines;
- distinguish between fiction writing and freelance journalism; and
- describe ethical considerations in freelancing and magazine writing.
4.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last Unit in this Block. We shall discuss the various aspects of Freelance and Magazine writing.

In the previous Unit, we discussed various aspects of opinion and editorial writing. You must have noticed by now that publication requires various types of writers with specialisation in distinct fields.

In the next block, we shall shift our attention to electronic media. We shall discuss what qualities are required for a journalist to write for television and radio. We shall start with 'Radio News' in the first unit.

4.3 OVERVIEW AND SCOPE OF FREELANCE WRITERS

If you have been regularly reading newspapers and magazines, you must have noticed that several persons write articles, reviews, features, on all kinds of topics. Some of them write in several newspapers, and periodicals, day in and day out, though they are not on the regular payrolls of these newspapers and magazines. They are known as 'Freelance Writers'. They practice freelance journalism. Generally speaking, freelance journalists are not attached to any newspaper or magazines. Most magazines and periodicals depend a lot on these freelancers, for making these publications interesting and for meeting the reading needs of all kinds of readers.

Newspapers have to employ reporters and sub-editors because they have to bring out their issue every day. As periodicals and magazines come out according to their respective periodicity — daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly — many of them do not need many full time journalists. Therefore, they depend upon freelancers to a very large measure.

Freelancers quite frequently keep in touch with these magazines, and do assignments as per their needs. With a view of meeting their needs, freelancers have to complete these assignments as per the schedules of the publication. The origin of freelancing is believed to go back to the 16th century when freelancers were associated with military life. A lancer or the person who wielded swords was free and his allegiance was limited to a particular assignment for which he was hired. From the 16th to 18th centuries several such freelancers came to India from Europe to train the armies of Tipu Sultan, the Marathas and the Nawabs of Bengal. They even fought for their armies but never went to the camps of the opponent or betrayed the temporary masters. Their masters kept a watchful eye on them but never found them lacking. They were found thoroughly dependable. That is what a freelance writer has to be.

Increased Scope for Freelancers

Magazine journalism now-a-day is not much different from newspaper journalism. Both delve in facts. The television is also making a difference to it. Television news is forcing newspapers into a new culture of dealing with the items more thoroughly. Newspapers closely resemble magazines.

The onslaught of television has also spurred in the scope for freelance writing. The magazines and newspapers are now keener on giving more graphic details. They are in need of more absorbing contents. This also enlarges opportunities for any freelancer. A real good writer can even get a chance to write scripts for various television programmes. For a freelance writer the scope is vast, provided he/she is able to cash in on it.

However, before you try to jump into writing you would have to know what to write and how to present it. For a cook, it is not enough to put the ingredients together and boil them. He also has to plan as to what to cook and how to cater to different tastes and how to make the dishes palatable. Accordingly, he chooses the ingredients, spices, fragrance, and finally, elements that give the dish an attractive topping making it have a mouth-watering look. For this, he has to keenly watch the people who visit the restaurant. Similarly, to develop into a good writer. that is, an acceptable contributor to periodicals, you will have to read various magazines and newspapers and understand what kind of stuff they use. You just cannot churn out anything that you like but you should know what your readers like. Occasionally, perhaps what you have written without giving a thought may be accepted by an editor, but more often that is not the
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case. You may have more rejection slips than acceptances.

To avoid rejection, a proper planning, research and a list of users — name and addresses of magazines and newspapers — is a must. As an unattached writer or a freelancer you cannot depend only on one user. There must be alternatives. You have to gradually build up contacts with magazines and newspapers to be accepted as a freelancer.

**Activity 1**

At this point of the Unit, involve yourself in an activity. We hope, this activity will help you to find out in concrete terms what we have been saying in the previous paragraphs.

- Take an issue of a magazine you subscribe to, or go to a nearby library and take a copy of a magazine which you are familiar.
- Scan through the articles / writings of the magazine, see what topics /themes have been dealt with in the magazine.
- Try to list what type of knowledge, skill, etc. were required for a writer to complete the articles. Try to feel the effort which was needed from each of these writers. Check also whether they were mostly freelancers or not.

The following format may help you to complete the assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Magazine</th>
<th>Issue Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article Name</td>
<td>Type of Article (Politics/Environ/Econ. etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4 HOW FREELANCE WRITING WORKS?

We have found that a freelance writer is not attached to any newspaper, organisation; Nor is he on the payroll. But how does a freelancer function? How is he considered credible by a newspaper or a magazine editor? This is what you will have to develop. The confidence in the editor has to be instilled. Indeed, to develop into a credible and dependable freelance writer needs not only skill but also some conviction. He cannot promise a write-up to one magazine or newspaper and then sell it to the other higher bidder. Nor is he normally supposed to give his articles or features for publication simultaneously to more than one publication. Only a syndicated writer, (we shall explain to you what he is), can do this.

**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:**

i) Answer the following questions.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the Unit.

1) State whether the following statements are true or false.

   a) Freelancers are on the regular payroll of a newspaper.

   True [ ] False [ ]

   b) A Freelance Writer writes for more than one publication but he/she never sends the same article to more than one publication.

   True [ ] False [ ]
c) A Freelancer would be able to do a good job if he/she knows his/her readers.

True [ ] False [ ]

d) A Freelance Writer must gain confidence of the editor of various magazines for which he/she writes frequently.

True [ ] False [ ]

2) Why does a magazine employ relatively few journalists than a newspaper?

4.5 WHO CAN BE A FREELANCE WRITER?

Virtually anybody can be a freelance writer. Most freelance writers, as a matter of fact, have other jobs. A typical freelancer gives only a part of his energy and writing talent to this type of writing. Many leading novelists and short story or article writers who contribute to magazines, or editorial pages of newspapers, are university teachers, housewives, staff members of publications houses or book companies, lawyers, doctors etc. who are largely engaged in some other occupations or profession other than writing.

Thus, you see in whatever profession you are, you can develop yourself into an acceptable freelance writer. Only you must have the grit. determination and willingness to work hard besides possessing a good, but not necessarily high profile language.

You must be thinking that if Khushwant Singh, Arun Shourie, S.Nihal Singh, Nikhil Chakravarthy, Kuldeep Nayar and others who write so prolifically can reach high pedestals of fame and can live on the earnings from writing, why not others? These writers have not reached that stage overnight. All of them were associated with one or the other newspaper as a regular staff for decades. Almost all of them were editors of national dailies and had opportunities to sharpen their wills and earn fame while on the job. The job also provided them opportunities to develop wide contacts in the print world. As they leave the service, they found that a market was ready to accept all that they produced. And this led them to cash on freelance writing. But, perhaps you do not know that occasionally even such writers have to keep the editors in good humour so that their columns are not scrapped.

Does this tell on your nerves? It may. But there is nothing to worry about. All freelancers have gone through it at some point of time. If you want to see your name in print, you must not loose heart. All writers, be they on the staff, or freelancers, have seen their pieces being rejected at one time or the other for various reasons. All this does not mean that a writer who wishes to contribute to publications cannot hope some day to reach the point where he has to do no other work. But it is difficult to make writing a full-time occupation, especially in the realm of fiction. For, the market for the short poctry, story, novelette and novel is not as great among magazines as it was some three decades ago. Today, there is more chance for the non-fiction writer — the author of articles on current subjects, humorous essays, and other factual rather than imagined material.

4.5.1 Freelancers Receive Rejections

A national magazine, be it an independent one, or the Sunday section of a daily, receives hundreds of unsolicited articles, features or other write-ups every day. The percentage of accepted material is very small. At the same time any magazine editors' common complaint is that they do not receive enough good stuff. So where do these writers fail?

It is a painful job for the editor to reject a piece. He just does not reject something because he
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does not like the name of a person or the subject on which he has written. The reasons for over 90 per cent of rejections is just one — it has not been “cooked” well: Mere language does not make a piece good. There has to be some originality, specificity and exclusiveness, in the piece that a writer sends for acceptance.

Quite often, people write on topics on which the writer does not know enough. They lift one para from here and the other from there, to churn out a piece. Else, they try to rewrite a piece they have read somewhere and try to pass it as original. In yet another case, they choose good topics, neither do they study it, not do appropriate research which is so necessary to make a piece readable or absorbing.

There are some others who would write on any subject. Today, they may be writing on rural economy, tomorrow on science and technology, and the day after on cinema or arts. Such writers are not liked by the editors. Chances are, that occasionally one or two of their pieces will get published because possibly the editor has a pressing deadline to meet or he had nothing better on hand. Generally, pieces by such writers are kept aside, but they are not liked by editors. You cannot be jack of all trades.

Sometimes manuscript readers, that is, junior editors or sub-editors, reject a good piece too. In some cases, if the senior editor is taken into confidence, it helps. But remember, it annoys the junior who generally evaluates a copy. Later, it may pose problems for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It would be a good idea if you could visit an office of a newspaper which publishes Sunday Supplement or a magazine publishing house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Talk with the editor on how he/she gets the articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Find out what procedure (criteria) he follows to accept or reject an article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Find out how many articles are rejected and determine why such articles are rejected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2 Freelancing as a Side Business

An ambitious freelance writer should consider his work as part-time or side business, i.e., in addition to his other full-time jobs or profession. It has to remain an extra-curricular activity while he devotes years to becoming an expert in a specialised area. Even after gaining a reputation, he will find it necessary to retain permanent connections with institutions in the special field, to provide a support for his creativity. Most freelancers depend upon their principal vacation not only for their regular income, but also as a source of facts and ideas. No freelancer can function in a vacuum. Anything he sees and does has possibilities for an article.

Ideas can be found very casually. You have to have an eye to identify it. In Lucknow, one day, a visitor to the zoo came out with a novel piece to a local newspaper. Two deers had fought a battle in their cage the previous night. The ostensible cause, according to zoo authorities, was over the possession of a female of their species. He talked to the zoo officials, its doctors, quickly read about the behaviour of deers and weaved the episode into an interesting piece. The newspaper though rarely accepted stories from Freelancers liked the copy and published it under the heading “Murder in zoo”.

Yet another writer churned out a very readable piece on the cricket match that was played between two groups of doctors and lawyers. He did not describe how it was played. He dwelt on the aspects of the novice players and how they were more interested in activities other than cricket, how the paraphernalia was complete with all the requirements of a test cricket including the naming of the team down to the level of coaches and distribution of dressing rooms. He also narrated how the players were interested in bowling dishes more than the ball and how one of the coaches was “so keen a player that he had to seek the help of a local school boy to be guided to the stadium”. This was again an off-beat freelance writing and was accepted for publication. In fact, there are stories all over. You only have to have an eye and a keen sense of observation and the ability to write. But, remember these kind of articles have a limited market. So have all other write-ups. As we told you earlier, the best thing to write is in a subject that you can competently deal with. As publications are conscious for catering to a variety of readers, they need different kind of articles and features. This requires a different kind of specialisation. It is not normally available among the members of the staff of a newspaper /
magazine. Moreover, staff writers remain so preoccupied with routine beats that they do not get much time to specialise in each and every field. It is here that specialist writers of the field are required to tackle the subjects. So, the best way to develop into a writer is to write on subjects that are associated with your main business or profession.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Answer the following questions.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this Unit.

1) Mention four qualities which a freelance journalist must have to be successful.

2) Mention at least four reasons why an article written by a freelancer may be rejected by an editor.

4.6 WHAT TO WRITE?

So far, you have been told that ideas for freelance writing can emanate from anywhere. Yet, you must be wondering what exactly a freelancer can write about. Broadly, acceptable freelance contributions can be divided into the following categories:

- articles;
- features; and
- reviews/ analyses.

We will tell you how you can write on each of the genres of writing if you want to do freelancing.

4.6.1 Article

An article is like an essay. But, it is not an essay as it is less personal and less limited in scope. It is a written composition of variable length, intended to convey ideas and facts for the purpose of informing, educating, enlightening, convincing, instructing or entertaining.

Do not get confused by what is meant by variable length. Every publication has limitation of space. At the same time, it has certain ideas about display. An article, and for that matter any write-up, has to fit into this slot. You may again wonder about the ideal length. In fact, there is nothing like an ideal length. However, periodicals prefer a piece written within 1,000 to 1,200 - 1,500 words depending on the subject. In exceptional cases, where some periodicals want the issue to be dealt with in detail, the length may exceed 5,000 words or more. However, in such cases you must take the prior approval of the editor and discuss his exact requirements, else, in all probability, your piece will be rejected.

There is no exact set of rule for how to begin an article. Generally, it can begin with a catchy introduction to attract the reader, and then ideas and facts may be interestingly interwined. Articles can be written on umpteen subjects - plain facts that may be unknown, new ideas to mould a project or schemes like the Narmada Sagar Project, economy, science and technol-
4.6.2 Features

Features are often linked to current events. And, a writer assigned to do a news feature may be just reporting an event. Feature writers are often captivated by their own graceful writing, letting their skill overshadow the fact that they are linked closely to the news. As a feature writer, you have to learn to recognise that your proper positioning is halfway between news story and the feature.

Good feature stories are always in great demand. Unusual hobbies like having a lion as a pet, success stories, as it was in the case of Geet Sethi, who was brought into the limelight by a sports feature writer, who was able to not only point out his victory but also how it almost went unnoticed in the Indian media and how he returned to the Bombay airport almost unsung. Inventions — recently one newspaper carried the breakthrough by Indian Institute of Technology scientists in the sphere of developing cryogenic rocket technology: interviews, personality stories and human interest stories — all can be turned into good features.

4.6.3 Reviews/Analyses

There are many events which can neither be a feature nor an article. Does not such stuff find a place in the print media? Obviously, it does. Suppose there is an art exhibition. You go to see it. Incidentally, you have also studied about that particular form. It is an ideal opportunity for you to write a critical piece evaluating the works on display. This is what an art review can be. To make it more readable, you can compare it with the contemporary or any previous forms. You can inform the reader about the school or group to which the artist belongs.

Similar evaluating or even descriptive pieces can be written about music, drama, ballet or such other cultural performances. Such writing, can be termed review pieces.

There is yet another kind of review. This is associated with books. A large number of books are published day in any day out. If you are a keen reader, you can get in touch with some of the book section editors of magazines or newspapers and can get the books in which you have comparative specialisation. This is a real bonus for you. A book reviewer is not only paid a good sum, but is also allowed to retain the book he has reviewed. While reviewing, you need not summarise the books contents. It needs an expert evaluation and the reader has to be told what kind of a book it is. You must avoid writing whether it is good or bad. You should write in a way that the reader gets to know what kind of the product it is.

An analysis, as the word suggests, examines in detail an issue. This can be an evaluation of a scientific work or of a building project. But remember, whatever it is, it must have something novel in it. It can be even a controversy. Any newspaper or magazine is unlikely to accept any analysis. It will accept only if there is something new to add to what the newspaper / magazine has already published about it. Stale matters do not sell and such stuff makes a periodical all the more unreadable. An analysis should be argumentative and deal with the pros and cons of an issue.

Activity 3

It would be a good idea if you try writing a feature. Think about an exhibition or a mela you have visited recently. Or a film or a drama you have watched recently. It may not be possible for you to write a full fledged article on the topic. But this unit and this exercise, you may just write the points and build a structure for your article. Your structure may resemble the structure we present at the beginning of each unit. Try it.

4.7 FREELANCING OF ANOTHER KIND

There is yet another kind of freelancer. He is called "stringer", because he is attached to one or more newspapers by the string of a fixed payment. Stringers are appointed by newspapers at small places or townships. The cost of keeping a staff correspondent at such places is not economical. So, a teacher, lawyer or any other professional with a good knowledge of the town / city is appointed as a stringer. He files regular reports almost like a staff correspondent. These are sent either by telex, fax or depending on the date and value of the story, by
Working as a stringer not only ensures you a regular income, but also helps you develop contacts, which may be useful even for your profession.

Occasionally, the stringer can also file features, articles, interviews, etc. The more the stringer can file, the higher is his income. A stringer is normally paid on the basis of the length of the copy printed in addition to the "retainership". Some publications, however, pay it on piece-meal at fixed rates.

If you prove to be a good stringer, in the course of time the news organisation can even take you on the staff and you can become a full-time journalist. There are many journalists who started as stringers, or part-time journalists as they are called and today have senior positions in the news organizations.

4.8 HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL FREELANCER: SOME TIPS

Though most periodicals and newspapers accept manuscripts by mail, it has been observed that those writers who establish a personal rapport with editors are more successful in seeing their work in print. A good public relation is always helpful. Human behaviour changes the moment you present something in person. There is yet another reason for this. Often, freelancers leave many queries in their copy. A face to face encounter helps editors solve these. In the course of time, if an editor likes your pieces, he may also ask you to write on topics or issue in which he is interested. So many kind of information pour in the newspaper offices and editor gets new ideas out of these. Once the editor is assured of competence he may start depending on you.

I know of a teacher who in his leisure, studied films. He saw all new movies. Being a member of the film society, he got many new ideas and stories, about movies. In the beginning, he used to rush with his reviews to newspapers and magazines. In the course of time, his work was linked by some editors. Now, his column appears almost every week. Recently, he was given the best film journalist's awards.

So, you must have realised that besides being a good writer, you should have a good rapport with your editors. This is all the more possible if you are living in a metropolis or large centres of publication. But if you are living in a far off place, you need not lose heart. You can send your copy by mail. If it has been written in the style of a magazine or newspaper, there is a fair chance that your copy will be accepted.

It is also prudent to send self-addressed stamped envelopes with your manuscript. The rejected manuscript will come back to you. You can send it to some other publication who may use it. To be successful freelancer, you ought to have patience.

If you are writing in English, always send typewritten manuscripts. Editors are averse in accepting handwritten articles. It involves a lot of additional work, like getting the copy typed and then editing it. It means loss of time. An editor, who has to work against deadlines, cannot afford to lose time. For him, the easiest way out is to reject a handwritten copy. In case, you are writing in a regional language, again, the same rule holds good. But as there are fewer language typewriters, and editors are in need of good stuff, handwritten copy is also accepted. However, write neatly and legibly and only on one side of the paper.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Answer the following questions.

ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the Unit.

1) Who is a Stringer?
For many years, the newspaper was the sole member of the journalistic family. As the printing presses developed, books began to be published. In the early days, magazines in India started in different languages to provide opportunities to creative talents. The Modern Review was one such publication. The concept of a news magazine was developed in India. The Illustrated Weekly of India, not only gave literary inputs, but also published articles and features about varied experiences and gave detailed coverages of news events. The Time magazine of the USA, which the Link magazine in India tried to follow, gave a new dimension to magazine journalism. These magazines not only gave features, analysis, culture and book reviews, but also comments on the political and economic developments and many other areas. The magazine attempted to provide a complete picture with comments on the events of the week that had gone by.

India Today, one of the most popular news magazines in the country at present imitated the pattern of Time magazine again. This has evolved into a news capsule. Of late, more feature and a varied fare are being offered in two other publications — The Sunday Observer and The Sunday Mail. All these magazines largely use contributions of their staff writers. But on some subjects, they hire outside writers. The Frontline, a fortnightly and news magazine published by the Hindu group of Madras and The Week by the Malayala Manorama are also good magazines. Sunday brought out by the Ananda Bazar Patrika group in the 1970s gave a new dimension to magazine journalism in the country. Though the exact number of magazines published are difficult to ascertain, the few at the top can be counted on the fingertips. In addition, there are also several specialised magazines such as Filmfare, Screen, TV and Video world on television. Journalism, Sportsworld and Sportstar on sports activities, India Auto on automobiles, Business India, Business Today and Business World on economic and financial affairs. Besides there are other magazines for women, children, computers etc. Also, almost all newspapers have turned their Sunday section into beautiful colour magazines.

The term “magazine” was used as part of the name of a publication in 1731, when it went into the title of the Gentleman’s Magazines of London. The application was suitable, for the word comes from the French “magazine”, which means storehouse. The early magazines in England were storage places for sketches, verse, essays and miscellaneous writings on variety of subjects.

In earlier years, the term had to do with contents and not with the format. Thus a publication with a newspaper format with a wide variety of content was considered a magazine. The magazine, as opposed to the newspaper, made no effort to print up the minute news, but tried to present fiction, travel articles and other materials for entertainment — almost what today’s Sunday sections of newspapers contain. In those days, these were printed in tabloid size. As the pages used to go astray, binding and stitching came to be used.

There are general appeal magazines such as the Reader’s Digest and its multi-language multiple-million editions with worldwide circulation. These are, however, becoming exceptions in India. The mortality rate of magazines in India has been rather high though new ones are also coming up with dexterous regularity. The decline in circulation is attributed to the boom in television programmes, lack of time to read and, the Sunday multi-colour supplement of...
the daily newspaper. So, the trend is to bring out more and more specialised periodicals. Still, the variety is not as wide as it is found in the US and Europe.

4.10 MAGAZINE TYPES

1) Consumer or general interest: India Today, Frontline, The Week and Sunday in India, Reader’s Digest, Newsweek and Time in the US.

2) Specialised: Business journals mentioned above, Technical journals, Indian Historical Quarterly, Indian Archaeology, Science Reporter, Farm Review, Indian Architecture, Marg (on arts).

3) There are also magazines for elites — Gentleman, Debonair, Society, Women, Femina, Women’s Era, Savvy, body & beauty Care, Fashion, Dress Designing; and also on behavioral aspects — wildlife and exploration like National Geographic of the US.

4.11 FREELANCING FOR MAGAZINES

If you want to do freelancing for magazines, the following tips can be helpful:

1) Choose a subject, and do a lot of reading on it from a variety of sources — journals, magazines, reference books.

2) Draw outlines from your notes after your readings from several sources.

3) Write a lead, build around reorganised ideas and decide whether an anecdote would be fitting to precede the lead.

4) In one sitting, try to write 1,000 to 1,500 words non-stop. Your writing must have depth and background. Try to develop only one idea at a time. Other ideas can emerge into another article or a separate feature.

5) Be selective. Don’t try to put in all the knowledge you have acquired into one piece. Don’t make it a dumping ground. Spice it selectively. Omit less important or not so relevant details. Too many facts or figures make it an uninteresting reading, and a loaded write-up.

6) After completing the article forget about it for a day or two. Then, again re-read it like a dispassionate and critical reader. In all likelihood, you would be able to make out where your piece is jarring, disjointed and has other flaws. Now re-do it. This retouched and rewritten piece is likely to be flawless product. Now, send it to the publication for which you have written. Always type your manuscript in double space on one side of the paper.

4.12 IDEAS FOR MAGAZINE ARTICLES

It is not easy to develop ideas for magazine writing though we have told you earlier that ideas can be had anywhere. Only the most imaginative and probably the experienced person can generate ideas simply by setting his mind to the task. A newcomer to the field certainly finds it difficult to do that. Then, what would you do? Should you wait for the situations to develop so that ideas can crop up? If you do that, possibly you will never come up with an idea. While it is true that if you develop a knack for generating article-ideas, it would help you, there is also a way to consider how many different methods can be used to generate it. Here are some for beginners.

4.12.1 Ideas for College Campus

The college or the university campus can be an excellent source of ideas and information for articles. College or university students union or teachers’ association elections or senate meetings always generate heat and interest in the local community. If you are alert, you will be able to spot so many interesting or intriguing episodes. A systematic and simple description can make an enjoyable piece. Groupism among teachers in favour of or against the head
of the institution, or a tip off about some new appointments can also make a good story. Even as simple a thing as announcement or shifting of examination dates spiced with the reason behind it can be of interest to your local paper. An Allahabad paper specialised in giving this sort of news and became very popular with the students community. There were some students of the university who used to feed it with various developments that look place on the campus. Gradually, they learnt how to get into making news. A few of them were later absorbed by the newspaper. Where is such a paper? It may just around you. Move out and find it.

4.12.2 Search Ideas from Newspaper Columns

Anyone who wants to become a freelancer should read his daily newspaper carefully. There are a number of small news events which can be developed into articles of features. Some ten years ago, a small item appeared in a small town paper. It was about the discovery of a grave in Faizabad on which an image of a key was inscribed. A local freelancer followed it, researched upon it and came out with a 1,000 word feature giving a background of the graveyard, linking its history to the Nawabs of Oudh and to a missing bunch of keys of the famous Bahau Begum, which according to legend, had been thrown into the well inside the Bara Imambara in Lucknow. The Sunday magazine of The Times of India liked the piece so much that it frontpaged it with a beautiful calligraphic headline and photographs.

If the journalist had not had the knack, that innocuous piece of news would have, just been lost into oblivion. The writer must read and analyse magazines to get a feel what kind of articles it published. Read as many newspapers as possible for ideas. You must see more than the facts. You should also be able to see their implications.

Company journals or house magazines are sometimes heavy with facts that can be used profitably by freelancers. University magazines and research journals which are also rich sources of material, are usually available free to a writer and can be obtained regularly through the mail.

Similarly, annual official reports also provide a storehouse of ideas. You have to take the cue. Research it, meet the concerned people for facts and you can come out with a brilliant piece.

4.13 CULTIVATE KEEN OBSERVATION FACULTY

The Writer who is truly observant looks into his own experiences and surroundings with clear eyes. If you are travelling by a long-distance train and are a keen observer, you will notice the change in complexion of its passengers as it traverses different regions. At the end of the journey, if you can narrate your experience, spicing it with the behaviour of some of your fellow passengers, it will be a readable piece. Most travel and tour stories are the result of such observation. Even attending to some one who is sick in a hospital, can be a rewarding or pathetic experience. Jot down the points and see how beautifully the points may be developed.

4.13.1 Article Ideas from PR Persons

Public Relations persons are generally passive journalists. They move in a wide circle and come to know so many things. If you develop a friendship with such persons, they can suggest story topics to you that are not self-serving. For a journalist to ignore all such Public Relations persons or treat their suggestions cynically is unfair. A good article remains a good product even if it benefits the person who gives such ideas. You need only to guard against being used for unworthy purposes.

4.13.2 Article Ideas from Editors

As you establish yourself and begin to write regularly for a magazine or a periodical, you can expect your editor to begin suggesting topics to you to develop. In due course of time, half of your ideas can come from editors.

4.14 HOW TO BUILD AN ARTICLE ?

The beginners often get puzzled as how to build up an article or a feature. Some of the guide lines given here will be of help to you. This will make your writing clear and readable.
Story Structure: The beginners are told that a lead must catch and hold their readers. The lead is the introduction or intro, in journalistic parlance. If possible, the intro should be startling, witty or a pithy statement. Do not try to devote the beginning to summing up a story, much as straight news story often does.

Sentence Structure: Beginners generally like to twist their sentences. You should do this rarely, for effect. The normal rule is that nearly all sentences should be as simple and direct as possible.

Sentence Length: As a rule, you must keep your sentences short. Generally, the shorter the sentence, the more readable it will be. Have you read My Experiments with Truth by Mahatma Gandhi? Do it. You will notice how simple and effective the Mahatma’s sentences are.

Concreteness: As far as possible, you should use concrete words instead of abstract ones. Abstract words confuse a reader and that is considered bad for an article and a feature story.

Verb: Making the verb do the work of an adjective is preferable. The verb expresses action. If it is carefully chosen, it can even describe personality. “The magazine gives description” can be written: “The magazine described”. This not only economises on words, but also makes the expression accurate.

Transitions: Learning to link paragraphs in a way that pulls that reader on is a skill that distinguishes the professional from the amateur. After the first paragraph, what comes next — you have to learn. This you can do by reading special pages of India Today, Reader’s Digest, Time, Newsweek or Sunday. The literary pages of The Statesman are also a good guide.

4.15 STYLE FOR MAGAZINE ARTICLES

A writer is known by his style. Every writer writes is his own way. Some are humorous and light like that of Khushwant Singh, some serious and observant like Nikhil Chakravarthy, some analytical such as S. Nihal Singh. A beginner cannot be expected to develop such a style overnight. But when we consider style and content, the focus sharpens.

Magazine writing is a distinct body of prose; usually made up of words the readers can understand and information he can absorb. Vivid writing should be spicy but you must restrain yourself as dictated by taste and common sense. The general style followed by most magazines consists of crisp, original phrases made up of familiar words. Pointed quotations are sprinkled through most articles to change the pace to enliven the reading and to present facts distinctively.

Although long articles are broken into sub-sections as this lesson would show, the rule is that the writing flows from the beginning to the end through smooth transition. If you are writing a profile, do not start with a bland statement on such and such day, Mr. X was born. Start with some of his qualities or starting deed and then gradually you can mention these points.

Sticking to the theme: There should be only one main theme. Do not deviate from it.

One story at a time: As you have been told earlier, do not try to juxtapose too many ideas into one story. This makes your piece disjointed and the reader (read editor) becomes disinterested.

Make it vivid: Give a detailed and interesting description. If the subject is like that you can and should spice it with names and other anecdotes. But these should be so short that it should not deviate from the main theme. Too much spice spoils a dish. You have to remember this.

Fiction is not Journalism

Most beginners must be wondering why we did not say anything about fiction. You must be remembering many names who made their living by writing fiction. They, you would say, are also freelancers, as Ruskington Bond is. There is, however, a difference. Though magazines sometimes publish fiction, it is not journalism. A fiction is an imaginary piece which may or may not have drawn its inspiration from a real life event. The fiction writer mixes a product of the imagination with facts. Fiction is fabrication.

Journalism is concerned with facts. It is commonly regarded as a record of contemporary
Writing for the Press

Over the years, market for fiction in magazine writing has gradually been reduced. Some magazines sometimes publish fiction but most do not. If you want to be a fiction writer, you have to develop yourself in a different way.

4.16 THE FUTURE FOR FREELANCING

The onslaught of television as we said earlier has made a dent in the circulation magazines. At the same time, it has expected magazine publishers to be more conscious about quality. The production has become more attractive than a decade or so ago. With growing education, the yearning to know more about a specific field is rising. The competition is also comparatively less for a specialised magazine. These factors are destined to grow in the years to come. As a freelancer, you have a better chance to grow as a specialised writer. In fact, specialised writers are even now in great demand and it is bound to go up in the future. Politics tempts, but remember this is one area on which many people write and publications accept articles only from the veterans in the field.

Ethical Questions in Magazine Writing

The relationship between the writer and editor is based on trust. An editor expects the writer to remain loyal to him in a limited sense. He does not expect you to send your piece to other. If you do even once, you lose his trust and you lose the market.

But you could question how some writers’ pieces are simultaneously published in several magazines. They are writing for feature or article syndicates. The syndicates multiply the copy and send it to different publications. The writer is paid by the syndicate a percentage of the total sum it receives from the publication. The syndicates and publications have some sort of arrangement about supplying material. Publications, however, are under no compulsion to use these. They can, if they need it or like it. As a freelancer, syndicates also offer you enough opportunities.

Some common ethical points that you should follow are given below for your guidance.

Truthfulness and Accuracy: As a writer, the primary responsibility or the truth and accuracy rests on you. The editor has the right to make changes but without affecting facts.

Rewriting: A beginner’s copy is often rewritten. But an experienced writer frowns at this practice. If some copy is very badly written, the editor may ask him to rewrite it or would do so with the permission of the writer. If the publication of a piece has been delayed, the editor can ask the writer to update it.

By-lines: A by-line is the author’s unquestioned right.

Payment: Normally, once an article is accepted, it is the obligation of the publication to make the payment. But, there are many publications which do not. As you grow, you must ensure beforehand that the publication would make payments.

These are only some of the conventions. As you know, will come across many other practices. These change with time and also with assignments. If you have been given an arduous assignment, in such a case, normally, the publication’s responsibility towards the writer increases. The publication is not only expected to pay for it, but also for any damages which you suffer during the assignment. However, Indian magazines very rarely hire freelancers for such tasks.

4.17 LET US SUM UP

Freelance journalists are part and parcel of the mainstream journalism. With the increase in literacy and the readership more and more newspapers and magazines are being launched. Each of these need a huge team of writers to fill in the pages of each edition. Hence, there is an increase in the demand for freelance writers. But, the supply of good writers is less.

It has been found that a lot of articles get rejected by the editors of magazines and newspapers. The main reason is that the article is not ‘cooked’ well. A writer in addition to paying
attention to the language should also take care of the style, facts, subjects matter and lucidity of presentation. The articles should be logically presented in a comprehensive manner.

A freelancer is never in the payroll of a newspaper or magazine. He/she creates a network with a good number of publications and serve the editors with their articles as per the needs of each. Freelancers are well equated and have a good grasp on the subjects they write on. They are very experienced. The article should be original, specific, focussed on a particular theme and exclusive. There are freelancers who write on almost all the subjects under the Sun. But generally they do not last long.

A freelancer can write an article, a feature or a review. These are the formats. The topics or the subject matter of these formats would depend upon the area of interest of the writer, the demand of the readers, the nature of the magazine etc.

If you want to be a freelance writer you must follow the sequences of: i) choose a topic; ii) study a lot on your topic subject chosen; iii) Write a structure for your article; iv) develop your structure; v) revise your manuscript; vi) after a gap of a few days revise your article and submit the same to the editor.

While writing an article you must be honest and truthful to your readers. Never provide the readers with wrong information and never lie to your readers.

4.18 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) a) False
   b) True
   c) True
   d) True

2) A newspaper brings out its edition everyday. Therefore, it needs a lot of writers daily and for a long period of time to meet the deadlines. Whereas, a magazine may have edition weekly, fortnightly or monthly. It may need very specialised people for an issue and may not need that specialised journalist / writer for a long period time. Therefore, instead of hiring the writers on a full time basis, the magazine generally hires a relatively small group of writers (mainly to do editing jobs).

Check Your Progress 2

1) A successful freelance journalist must have:
   • a strong writing skill
   • love for writing
   • identified an area or a few areas / subjects of interest
   • developed a good link between the various newspapers or magazines.

2) The following may be some of the reason for which an article may be rejected by an editor.
   • the language may not be good.
   • the article may not have a focus.
   • the information given may not have facts to make the arguments credible.
   • the style may not attract attention.
Writing for the Press

Check Your Progress 3

1) A stringer is a person who resides in a far off and remote place and attached to newspaper or news agency. A stringer is paid a fixed amount monthly and sends his/her report from the locality he/she resides. The cost of posting a full-time journalist proves very uneconomical, hence, generally all the major newspapers and news agencies fall back on stringers for their coverages.

2) • He/she must find out what type of articles are required by the editor.
• He/she must have a personal rapport with the editor and personally submit his/her article to him/her.
• Promptly answer the queries of the editor regarding the article submitted.
• He/she must type his/her manuscript.
• Always enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. In case, the article is not accepted, it may thus be sent back to you.