



Publisher's Note: The first part of Nicole's article, which discusses the first steps of developing a professional writing portfolio and career, appeared in the [Summer 2012 Issue](#) of CWO.



The Written Ripple Effect Part 2

by Nicole M. Bouchard

You've found your voice (at last!) and by sifting through the bulk of your work (familiar with what works and what doesn't), identified the bits of gold that make you unique.

Now you're looking to plan your career according to those unique skills and your personal interests.

SETTING CAREER GOALS

It's important to note that in most instances, not everything will be in your control, but there are many things you can do to better position yourself.

If, for example, someone has a strong interest in alternative health and has discovered that their voice is best-suited to the conversational tones of less formalized articles under the umbrella of non-fiction, their goal might be to establish a column where they could interact with readers and regularly use their conversational ability to engage readerships.

Depending on their experience level with alternative health and whether they are going to position themselves as the journalistic "everyman" who reports/reviews developments, trends and services or whether they are in the field and intend to position themselves as an "expert" to guide, educate and answer questions, they can decide on what kinds of articles they would submit.

If the former, personal essays, reviews of holistic treatments/centers and interviews of practitioners would be a good starting point. If the latter, write service pieces, how-tos, features and advice.

They would then think of the demographic they would be speaking to. Where do people interested in alternative health primarily live? What age groups are most receptive? Is there a gender differential? What factors are involved in the lifestyle of someone who prefers holistic methods?

Some of the answers will overlap, but by trying to identify your audience, you can find what publications (paid subscriptions or free, wide distribution) and markets will have the highest chance of interest and return on your investment of time in pitching.

The research you do will be evident in your pitch and appreciated by the publications who understand that you did your homework before sending something their way.

In fiction, if you've identified certain genres or styles that suit your work, you can narrow your search results on what publishers, agents and literary publications you will send your work to. Many writer resources are organized by genre so that you can see whether a prospective market has an interest in your type of work before you send it.

Duotrope Digest (<http://duotrope.com/>) and Writers Market are excellent resources to try.

Someone who writes contemporary mainstream literature shouldn't be searching for an experimental journal, nor should a genre writer (for example, horror) be looking for a traditional journal that solely publishes mainstream literature.

In the world of creative writing, many of the mediums are interconnected so that rivers and streams flow into the sea. In other words, if a novel is ultimately your goal, gaining publishing credentials through short fiction and/or poetry can be a way to establish your foundation.

Self-publishing and the advent of ebooks adds an entirely new dimension to the writing world and with it new factors to consider in terms of royalties, marketing, reputability and timing.

In thinking of how you'll begin your portfolio, it's worthwhile to take time out and truly mediate on exactly how far you want to go (success and money goals aren't necessarily interchangeable), what you'll have to do to get there, and how much time/effort will be required (how much you're willing to invest).

Another aspect of this is networking. It's often said that writing is a solitary business; this is perhaps true for the craft itself, yet with respect to publishing, it's probably more social than most traditional vocations. Social networking and technology have added to this aspect of a writer's career development.

Dena Harris, in her article "Making the Connection" in Novel and Short Stories Market, advises that you spend 10 minutes of each writer-work day networking. Say it's five days each week; that's less than an hour dedicated to polishing contacts, which can be worth their weight in gold.

Editors, agents, publishers, fellow writers, professors, reading groups and even artists of different mediums are great for the health of the rolodex. Victor DiGenti of Windrusher fame says, "I encourage writers to put themselves out there, meet people and keep smiling. You never know when lightning will strike."

When you actually go to networking/conference events, Harris says be prepared. She suggests that you:

- o Prepare an elevator pitch (1-2 sentences that give the essence of your book)
- o Help others make connections (scratch his back, he'll scratch yours)
- o Listen to the needs of other writers (learn from their triumphs and mistakes), and
- o Cast a wide net (don't narrow the scope of people who might be able to help and support you- you might be surprised).

SETTING STANDARDS

Just as your authentic voice should come across throughout your body of work, so should the standards you have set for your professional life.

It's a heady feeling for a beginning writer to think that there will be enough assignments to be able to turn some down, but the truth of the matter is that even if/when work is scarce, you should only do the work that feels right to you. Your work should reflect well upon you over time and you should do that work to the best of your ability so the quality of the work in your portfolio is uniform.

Sometimes, even if it means turning down a paying piece, saying "no" can be an investment. Choose the work where your skills will shine and where you feel a level of enthusiasm about the subject matter. The writer invariably comes across in their work as do their attitudes towards certain subjects. In selecting portfolio pieces, the subjects that you felt most passionate about will display your traits and skills at heightened levels.

The idea we'll revisit here is the one where you are essentially marketing the brand of "you".

Your convictions, ideas, professionalism and standards should come across in a clear, favorable way throughout your portfolio, which is a snapshot of you as a writer. The more you believe in a subject, the more focused your exploration of its various dimensions will be.

The portfolio is meant to be a poignant, powerful sampling of your work that conveys your style, voice and writer persona to the reader. It isn't the time to make a lukewarm impression through apathy or conformity with pieces that sound as though they could have been written by a thousand others just like you. You are unique and your assembly of work should demonstrate that.



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This being said, you can structure the portion of your portfolio that is required for prospective editors and publications around their general interests so that they see your most applicable experience first.

If, for instance, you are submitting a work of fiction, you aren't going to list your journalism credentials and sample clips at the top of the bio paragraph unless these are the only writing-related credentials you possess or the article topics relate to the fiction subject. For a position as a restaurant reviewer, you would choose chef profiles over performance reviews at the top of your clips even though profiles and reviews differ in format.

Though this seems self-explanatory, many writers have stumbled over this roadblock in pitches because they are often submitting high volumes of material to numerous publications and wish to streamline the process through the regular use of certain sample writings. Your portfolio is your portfolio; however, taking time out to engineer which portions of it should be sent where in what order, is a value-added exercise.

JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER

In honing your authentic voice, pairing it suitably with the mediums it thrives in, establishing career objectives, developing your body of work and finally, categorizing the fruits of your labor into a cohesive portfolio, you will put an advantageous foot forward in the writing world.

This process isn't one that occurs once in a writer's career, but rather one that is cyclical in nature, occurring over and over and again, gaining a bit more wisdom each time. Your voice, the mediums you experiment with, the goals you reach for, your portfolio and your "brand" of writing should continually grow with you, improving through experience and time.

The face of your work, the binder that you present as a representation of your overall writing career, is what you will be judged by professionally.

Each stage of the process and its preceding decisions ripple outward to form the ever-widening circles of networking, progress and influence that will shape your writing life. Start them with care and watch as they flourish.

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For her work on the literary magazine as well as her journalistic and fiction work, she was profiled on the cable television program, Creative Women Today and interviewed by Writers in Business and Book Readers Heaven.

Nicole M. Bouchard is a Letters member of the [National League of American Pen Women](#). She recently served as one of the editors on the Small Press Panel: How Online Journals and Social Media Transform Poetics at the Fourth Annual Mass. Poetry Festival.

Ms. Bouchard was also the creator and instructor of a four week online intensive creative writing course in early 2011 affiliated with The Write Place At the Write Time, entitled, "Passion, Philosophy and Prose: The Power of the Pen".

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