

THE WRITING LIFE

by Bobbi Linkemer

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Q&A for Writers

I asked a potential client recently if he had any idea how much it cost to hire a ghost-writer. He replied, "Not a clue," and I knew I was in trouble. I tried to be gentle, starting at the very bottom of the range, but the look on his face told me he was unprepared for the number of zeroes.

That wasn't the first question I had asked a client or a student, only to find I might as well have been speaking in Egyptian. Let me cite a few examples:

- **Does everybody know the difference between fiction and nonfiction?** (This, to a class in how to write a nonfiction book. Everyone nods yes, but four out of ten people are actually planning to write novels.)

- **Can you tell me in one sentence what your book is about?** (This is called an "elevator speech." If you can't explain it, you can't write it; yet, very few people can do it.)

- **Have you ever actually written anything?** (It's amazing how few people who want to write a book have ever written, let alone published, a word.)

- **Who is your target audience, and why would they want to buy this book?** (The first answer is often "the general public"; the second is more difficult, especially if it's someone's life story.)

- **What are your qualifications for writing this book?** (My favorite answer was from a person who wanted to tackle how to achieve world peace. It was, "because *someone* should write it. Why not me?")

These are the questions I ask anyone who wants to hire me or who takes one of my classes, along with **why do you want to write a book? Do you know what you want to write about? Why are you taking this class?** Most honest answer: "Because it's on Wednesday night, and I didn't have anything better to do." ■