

Copy-Typing

Selling Your Work · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

COPY-TYPING Here's a suggestion that most of my students ignore. Will you? Think carefully before you ignore this. As you know, I strongly recommend that freelancers must closely study their target publications. They must thoroughly read several editions of the target publication and work out what it is that the editor wants. Sometimes, students come back to me and say something like: "I read four editions each of Time, Hello!, The Bulletin, some in-flight magazines, Who Weekly and Woman's Day, and I can't tell the difference. Isn't good journalism just good journalism, and acceptable anywhere?" Well, no. If all those publications were reporting the same topic, say a recent airliner crash, they would each do it differently. Firstly, the in-flight magazines simply wouldn't publish anything on the topic (just as they don't show in-flight movies involving airliner disasters). Woman's Day would want a story centred on an ordinary Australian and her dramatic and personal story connected to the crash. And Who would prefer a story about a celebrity in the crash. And so on. And the writing style in each publication would be completely different. At the end of this letter I will ask you to send me an article and write a note starting "Dear Simon, I wish I had written this article because . . ." Also, I want you to look through your favourite target publication, and choose an article you wish you'd written in it. Then, copy-type it. That is, type up a copy of all the words. Copy every word, letter, space and punctuation mark in the correct place. Don't alter or omit anything. By the time you have copy-typed your chosen article, making sure you are 100% accurate, you will have a real feel for the right kind of article for your target publication. Most students tell me they can't see the point, and many say it's laborious and fiddly and "not creative". The few students who do this exercise tell me words like: "Wow, it's like a revelation! I now understand the kind of writing I want to do." Please consider experiencing this seemingly odd but rewarding exercise.

Reprinted from The Wonderful World of Journalism. Written in the spirit of Simon Townsend's journalism craft advice. Visit simontownsendjournalist.com for the full archive.