

"GRAB THIS BOOK AND DEVOUR IT. IT JUST MIGHT BE THE CATALYST THAT CHANGES YOUR LIFE." - HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS

# HOW TO WRITE & SELL SIMPLE INFORMATION FOR FUN AND PROFIT

YOUR GUIDE TO WRITING AND PUBLISHING BOOKS,  
E-BOOKS, ARTICLES, SPECIAL REPORTS, AUDIO  
PROGRAMS, DVDS AND  
OTHER HOW-TO CONTENT



*Robert W. Bly*  
WITH FRED GLEECK

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## **Praise for *How To Write & Sell Simple Information for Fun and Profit***

“If a recognized authority said to you, ‘You can write a nonfiction book on a topic even if you possess only what I call ‘thin credentials,’ would you believe you actually can?”

Believe. That’s because the authority is Bob Bly. Bob Bly has the unique ability to show us: what we may have thought is creatively impossible is not only possible but logical.

If ever you’ve had—and suppressed—the urge to write a book or an article or an ad or a mailing or an online presentation, grab this book and devour it. It just might be the catalyst that changes your life.”

—Herschell Gordon Lewis, author of *Internet Marketing: Tips, Tricks and Tactics*

“This book contains the most detailed, concise, and useful information I’ve ever found on earning a six-figure income as a writer. I anticipate that the in-depth, how-to secrets in this book will be worth well over \$100,000 to me in the next nine months alone.”

—Joshua T. Boswell, freelance copywriter

“Writers should stop wasting time and start reading and applying Bob Bly’s newest book, *How to Write and Sell Simple Information for Fun and Profit*. Bob Bly’s right on the target, as usual. This book will save every new writer a ton of time getting in print and paid. Bly got to the top by writing accurate, easy-to-use, how-to books. This one’s a dandy!”

—Gordon Burgett, author of *How to Get Your Book Published Free in Minutes and Marketed in Days*

“As I write this, I’m only on page 39... and it’s clear this book is classic Bob. From the full picture he gives of today’s evolved info—publishing opportunities to the half-dozen new product ideas he’s given me already, this thing is jammed with valuable insights. Not to mention, Bob gives rock-solid instructions on how to make it all happen. Great stuff!”

—John Forde, six-figure copywriter and founding editor, [CopywritersRoundTable.com](http://CopywritersRoundTable.com)

“What do you get when you mix incomparable information with an incomparable writing style? You get Bob Bly’s latest book. Bob lays out a path to success. All you have to do is follow it!”

—Marilyn Pincus, author of *GET THE JOB! Interview Strategies That Work*

“Bob Bly gives the step-by-step details which every aspiring writer needs. Read these pages, apply them to your writing and you will have fun and profit.”

—W. Terry Whalin, publisher and author of *Jumpstart Your Publishing Dreams*

“This is a valuable resource for not only the newbie writer but for the most experienced writer as well. Bob goes beyond theory and supplies the practical ‘how to’ of making money.”

—MaryEllen Tribby, founder/CEO, [WorkingMomsOnly.com](http://WorkingMomsOnly.com)



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**WITH FRED GLEECK**



*Fresno, California*



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*To David Kohn*

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*Special thanks go to Fred Gleeck, a pioneer in Internet information marketing. Fred got me into Internet marketing, taught me the business, and a great many of the techniques presented in this book were first perfected or pioneered by him. I have personally made hundreds of thousands of dollars selling information online following Fred's advice.*

*I urge you to visit Fred's websites—[FredInfoBootCamp.com](http://FredInfoBootCamp.com) and [FredGleeck.com](http://FredGleeck.com)—to learn about the valuable in-depth training he has to offer.*

*“If you put off your pursuit of knowledge for a suitable moment, that moment will never come. If you delay a task until conditions are favorable, favorable conditions will never arise.”*

*—Dale Salwak, Teaching Life: Letters from a Life in Literature*

## *Introduction*

**Do** you have a burning desire to educate; to explain; to communicate; to exchange information and ideas; to share your knowledge, learning, and experience with others—and to put down what you know on paper?

If so, *how-to writing* may very well be the ideal freelance writing and information packaging niche for you. And in this book, I'm going to show you how to profit handsomely by teaching others what you know through your writings.

Do you worry that the Internet has destroyed the market for books and other how-to materials, because Google now allows users to find any fact with a quick online search? Quite the opposite is true.

The Web puts a dizzying amount of information, today called “content,” at our fingertips. But that's all most of it is—raw data, facts, and information. As how-to writers, we must go far beyond presenting mere facts. Our mission is to show our readers, step-by-step, how to do something they want to do, or attain something they want to attain, or transform from the person they are now into the person they want to be; e.g., how to get out of debt, find a mate, advance in one's career, lose weight, get fit, survive bankruptcy, overcome infertility, train one's dog, become rich, or achieve other important goals, dreams, and ambitions.

And, even in a world dominated by Google's ocean of data, the wisdom, knowledge, and guidance people are seeking is in short supply. As librarian Richard Yates once observed, “We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge.” As a result, the public's appetite for how-to material is insatiable, and—despite the Internet user's mantra that “information should be free”—readers eagerly open their wallets to obtain it:

- A recent Google search turned up 1.24 billion Web pages containing the words “how to,” and a search on Amazon found 939,181 books with “how-to” in their title or subtitle. Americans spent \$693 million on self-help books alone last year—and given the current economic trouble, that number is almost certain to rise.
- The American Self-Help Clearing House lists more than 1,000 self-help groups worldwide. According to Marketdata Enterprises, sales of self-help products in the United States were \$9.6 billion in 2005—and these sales are growing 11.4 percent annually. An article in the July 2009 edition of Time magazine reports that North America's self-help industry grosses \$11 billion a year.
- Some of the best-selling books of all time are how-to and self-help titles. Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, in print since 1936, has sold 50 million copies. Since its publication in 1970, Richard Bolles' *What Color Is Your Parachute?* has spent 288 weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list and has sold more than 8 million copies.
- American businesses spend more than \$358 billion a year buying content—despite the wealth of content they can theoretically find on the Internet for free.
- In their book *How to Write Books That Sell*, L. Perry Wilbur and Jon Samsel state

that how-to books account for about 30 percent of all trade book sales.

To succeed as a how-to, do-it-yourself, or self-help author, you don't have to be the next Shakespeare or even the next Stephen King. "Anybody can write," says writing teacher Barry Sheinkopf. "All you have to do is want to enough."

Nor do you have to be the leading guru in your field to make money as a how-to writer in that topic. If you have a curious mind, enjoy learning new things, and can express your thoughts in a clear, straightforward, and organized fashion, the opportunities for you to write and publish how-to content are nearly limitless—and often, quite lucrative as well.

In *How to Write and Sell Simple Information for Fun and Profit*, you'll discover how to:

- Find your writing niche or specialty
- Come up with ideas for saleable how-to books, articles, reports, and seminars
- Research and write effective, practical how-to instructional materials
- Build your reputation and establish a loyal following in your chosen field
- Earn \$100,000 a year or more with your how-to writing through a variety of channels, including magazines and newspapers, traditional book publishing, self-publishing, video, audio, the Internet, and many more.

Whether you simply want to see your name in print in your favorite magazine, change people's lives with your unique insights and advice, pass on your hard-won wisdom to the next generation, become a published author, or build a million-dollar how-to information empire, *How to Write and Sell Simple Information for Fun and Profit* can point the way for you.

"When you sell a man a how-to book, you aren't just selling him ink and paper," wrote the late how-to author Jerry Buchanan. "You are selling him a whole new life." Whether you are a writer looking for a topic to write about or a subject-matter expert seeking to share your knowledge with others, *How to Write and Sell Simple Information for Fun and Profit* can help you enjoy a whole new life as a successful how-to writer and information packager.

I envy you the journey ahead of you, and look forward to helping you navigate the route on your way to writing success and how-to riches.

# 1

## *Welcome to the World of How-To Writing*

Popular culture sometimes makes fun of how-to writers as the hacks of the literary world. In one of his sitcoms, Bob Newhart played a New England innkeeper who was also a how-to writer, which the show lampooned as lacking glamour and excitement.

Bob's character was a nice but dull guy who wrote books on do-it-yourself home projects. I remember one of his titles was *Grouting without Pouting*, and he did most of his book signings in the local hardware store. When he autographed his book for a store customer, the man asked, "Can I get one that isn't scribbled in?"

Instead of mesmerizing millions with the next *Harry Potter* or creating heartbreaking works of staggering genius, we how-to writers deal with seemingly mundane topics: how to build a water garden; how to improve your credit rating; how to invest in real estate; how to make money with your PC or digital camera; how to research your family history; how to maintain a swimming pool.

Because it is, on the surface, so straightforward and factual, one can argue that how-to writing is the easiest writing specialty to break into. And in some ways, it is; how-to writing provides a quicker, surer entry into publication than most other writing categories for several reasons.

Although still competitive, it is less so than journalistic and literary pursuits. After all, vast hordes dream of writing the Great American Novel, so getting a novel published is incredibly competitive and difficult. If you're writing a memoir, your chances of finding a publisher, unless you happen to be a celebrity, are slim at best. Children's books are similarly competitive. And in Los Angeles, everyone—from the gardener clipping your hedges to the attendant parking your car—is working on a screenplay. But the group of writers who dream of writing the *Great American Guide to Growing a Greener Lawn* is a bit smaller, making the market for how-to nonfiction less difficult to crack.

Yet the money can be considerable. My colleague Jerry Baker, known as "America's Master Gardener," made a fortune as a how-to writer with books and booklets teaching Americans how to grow a greener lawn (in his case, the grass really is greener on his side!).

Here's another factor: To sell a novel or narrative nonfiction work requires a high level of writing skill. But the requirements are somewhat different for how-to nonfiction, where the main virtues are not style but accuracy, practicality, clarity, and organization. Can you explain something or teach a skill in a clear, organized, and entertaining fashion? If you can, then you can succeed as a how-to writer.

Are your writing credentials thin? Publishers of how-to nonfiction are more interested in your expertise than your literary flair. And being an expert doesn't mean knowing more than anybody else in the world about your subject. You don't have to

study for half a century or get a Ph.D. to be qualified to write how-to nonfiction.

You do not need to be the leading practitioner, scholar, or expert in your field to write a book about it. As noted by author and speaker Fred Gleeck, you only need know more about your subject than 90 percent of the people out there. “Don’t worry about the other 10 percent; they’re not your market anyway,” says Fred.

Someone once observed, “Experts don’t necessarily know more than others; it’s just that their information is better organized.” You don’t have to be a great scientist to write a great science book for the general public. But you do need to organize your content in a sensible, logical, easy-to-follow presentation. And when you write or speak about it, your prose must be clear, engaging, and even entertaining.

## **What if you are not an expert in any subject?**

First of all, I doubt that's really true. Every person has unique skills, training, and experiences. You certainly are an "expert" in your own life and many of the things that make up your life. For instance, in the early 1980s, I quit my management job in the corporate world to become a freelance writer. I was soon earning six figures a year. So one thing I was an expert in (or at least had experience with and knowledge of) was how to make a lot of money as a freelance writer. I put this experience into a how-to book, *Secrets of a Freelance Writer: How to Make \$100,000 a Year*, now in its third edition with Henry Holt & Co.

If you truly feel you have no expertise, go out and acquire some. Take courses. Work in a specific trade or industry you want to write about. When my colleague L. Perry Wilbur wanted to write a book on the mail order business, he started selling products by mail to gain firsthand experience and knowledge of the industry. Another writer I know was hired by an ad agency to write materials for a welding account. He promptly signed up for night classes in welding and became a certified welder.

Opportunities to learn through both reading and active participation are plentiful in most fields. The other day, I received a mailing about investing in silver. It interested me, and I thought it might make a good magazine article. What did I do? I called the company and bought a few thousand ounces of silver! Now, if I pitch the story to a magazine editor, I can truthfully say in my query letter that I am a precious metals investor who holds over \$50,000 worth of silver.

Publishers and readers prefer authors who appear to have credentials in the subject they are writing about, but, often, neither the publishers nor the readers investigate authors' credentials to any significant degree. Therefore, you can write a nonfiction book on a topic even if you possess only what I call "thin credentials." Thin credentials are qualifications that sound more impressive than they actually are. If you are going to specialize in a particular field or subject, I advise you to obtain some credentials, thin or otherwise, to establish credibility.

Years ago, I had an opportunity to earn a handsome fee writing about information technology (IT), except the client wanted to know my credentials. My degree is in engineering, not computer science. However, anticipating that computers would be a subject I'd someday want to write about, I had previously searched around for the easiest computer certification one could earn. It turned out to be a Certified Novell Administrator (CNA), which required me to take only one course and an exam to earn the certification. When the client asked me whether I had any experience in IT, and I replied that I was a trained CNA, I was hired on the spot.