

Hate to Write? Hire a Ghost! It's Not Cheating, Honest!

We are funny about writing. We think everyone can write -- after all, we learned how in first grade! Reading and writing are a big part of what makes us "civilized." One of the correlating lessons that we learned, at the tender age of four or five, was that we must do our own work. Never, ever, copy someone else.

A first grader can write a simple story. A fourth grader can write a book report. By the time you got to high school, you had learned to research and do reports on complex subjects. You had learned grammar and spelling and sentence construction. You had read some great works of Literature.

So now you are an adult and you should be able to write a book of your own. Right? Not necessarily. Writing is a difficult skill. It takes time to perform it well. It takes effort and dedication and persistence. It helps to have talent, or skill. It really, really helps if you love to write. Not everyone has this knowledge, skill, talent, or time. Not everyone loves to write.

Maybe your skills and talents lie elsewhere. Maybe you don't have the time to devote to a project as big as writing a book. Maybe you would rather clean the toilet than put pen to paper or fingers on a keyboard. But does that mean that your great ideas, your new methods, your inspirational stories, are not worthy of a book? Of course not!

Regardless of what your second grade teacher told you, you don't have to do it all by yourself. Many people are available to help you author your book – writers, editors, proofreaders, illustrators, designers, printers, publicists. They can do much of the work, including writing, while you oversee the process and ensure that your idea or story is presented in a way that is true to your own vision.

You can hire a ghostwriter, an editor, or a writing coach to help you put your ideas and stories into words that will excite, inspire, inform or delight your readers. Ghostwriters will do all the writing work for you, from organization and structure to color and characterization – basically from your head and out the ghostwriter's fingers. Editors will take what you have already written and make it better. Writing coaches will guide you with suggestions while you write.

But wait – isn't that cheating? Some people think so. This goes back to school days, when having someone else write your term paper was cheating. (It still is.) But that was because having someone else write for you meant you were not learning, which was then your primary job. It was also cheating to use a calculator while taking a math test, because you were supposed to be learning how to do mathematics, not punch buttons.

This is no longer true. You can use a calculator now without guilt. You can also hire a writer to help you put your ideas on paper. (Of course they must be your ideas – it's still wrong to steal others' ideas and pass them off as your own.)

Hiring a writer is a little like hiring an architect. Say you are finally able to build your dream house. You have lots of ideas for this house. You know how many bedrooms you want; you know you want it on a wooded lot where the deer feed in the mornings; you know your kitchen must have a central island and space for at least two people to cook; you know you want natural gas heat; and you even know that your Jacuzzi bathtub must overlook a private patio with a great view of the mountains. You know you like blues and tans and that your taste runs to impressionist art like Monet and Morisot, and you hate the pop-art of Andy Warhol. Your style is elegant and cool instead of funky and casual, and you admire the work of I.M. Pei.

Wow, you know a lot, don't you? But can you draw up the plans to build this house? Do you know which materials to buy and which carpenters to hire? Do you know how to wire the house, and how the plumbing works, and where to apply for all the permits? Probably not. Can you learn? Sure – if you've got a few spare years.

So instead you hire an architect or a construction firm, and you tell them everything you want and what matters to you, and they translate your ideas into a living reality. But it's still your house. It reflects who you are, not who the architect is. When someone admires the beauty of your house, they are admiring you – your taste, your plans, your ideas.

It's the same with your writing. Your original ideas and stories belong to you, therefore so does your book, even though you may not have written it all by yourself. This is why the copyright of your book belongs to you, not your ghostwriter, editor or coach. And be sure to get it in writing!

© 2009 - Kim Pearson is the author of five books, including Dog Park Diary, and a ghostwriter of more than thirty non-fiction books. Dog Park Diary is the first she has ghostwritten for a dog. For more about Dog Park Diary, visit www.dogparkdiary.net, and for more about Kim' ghostwriting services, visit www.primary-sources.com.