

8 February 2006  
Writing for Professional Publication  
JFKU Berkeley, CA

### Janet

She feels like a rookie, but brings an important perspective, in particular a few themes / tips she's learned.

- *Have Passion* – where your passion for your work lies, might be the best place to try writing. The focus of your passion for work may shift, that's fine. (Janet did so with her master's thesis and also wrote articles based on her experiences / observations in later work situations. One piece, an interview article for *The Exhibitionist* about improving the exhibition design process, was inspired by the clashes that can happen during production of exhibits between contracted designers / fabricators and staff.)
- *Get Out & Talk to People* – Meet and talk to lots of people in the field, share your passion and other ideas, discuss different perspectives with others. Talking to people let's people know what you do, what you are interested in, and what you can contribute; talking to people opens doors. Document what you talk about, it could be inspiration for another article, interview, or session to be recorded in a proceedings.
- *Know Your Craft* – It is important to know the nuts and bolts of writing. Take a class, use resources at schools. You need to be a good writer and persistent. (Janet started with AAM's *Aviso* as staff.)
- *Self-Publish* a.k.a. *Get It Out There* – Often the first opportunity to self-publish is a master's thesis / project or other academic work. (Janet brought to and sold at a conference session, several copies of her thesis about toddlers and the exhibit experience at BADM.)
- *Research Publications & Talk to Editors* – What publications cover your areas of interest? There's always a publication looking for contributors. Pay attention to the cycles, the themes, topics, conversation points, new theory. Make contact with the editors of these publications to find out what they need.
- *Schedule the Time* – We are all busy. We don't really have the time to write, but in order to grow the field, push the field, we must write and share and get known for interests in a topic.

### Mitch Allen, Left Coast Press

He describes himself as a professional dilettante and a museum goer but not knowledgeable about them. However, he knows publishing and the facts apply no matter the field. He feels that the museum field publications are generally more open to / needing material versus more competitive world of academic publications. Museum News (AAM) may have a 3-4 years backlog but most field journals don't. His tips for getting published are:

- *Audience Matters* - The museum field appreciates and actually reads what you put forward. The perception of the museum field audience is that there is a small cadre who know a lot and a whole lot more who are struggling, looking for solutions. Many staff wear multiple hats and need your resources, thoughts, stimulation, direction, inspiration.
- *Write for Him/Her* – take a picture of someone who represents your audience, someone real who will want to read your work, and write for that person. Literally take the photo and tape it to your monitor.
- *Broaden Research to General Principles* – Take the research, observations, and anecdotes that you have collected and extract the general principles, the truisms that will gain you more readers because the “lessons” are more applicable to their situations. The more specific, the more presented as a case study, the lower the number of readers that will perceive how they can learn from or apply your knowledge. (Mitch quoted a local business’ mantra, “Reflect the practice.”) If the practice principles ring true reviewers will support it, it will get published, and people will buy it.
  - Unsuccessful stories can be as helpful, if not more so, than successful
- *Be Open to Format* – Brochure, workbook, full book, series – don’t get stuck that one format is the best vehicle for your knowledge for your audience. Be clear, helpful, funny, list resources.
- *Know Your Priorities* – Why do you want to publish this work – career advancement, field recognition, share knowledge? What is your timeframe – immediate (i.e., article for newsletter), short term (i.e., article for magazine), long term (i.e., book)? Who is your audience? Having the answers to these questions will provide goals that will help to guide your choice of where to publish.
- *Research Publishers and Editors* – Research them for the intangibles as they relate to your priorities. Reading the publications, talk to your colleagues; call the editor and say I have this work, what are your needs. Book publishing criteria are some of the toughest because of the investment required, but just because there are 1 or 2 books out there with the same topic, that doesn’t mean there can’t be 2 or 5. If someone wants to learn something quickly, they often buy 2-3 books on the same subject assuming they wouldn’t have been published unless they offered different perspectives.

### Marjorie Schwarzer, Chair, JFKU Museums Studies Program

Marjorie started with a reminder that it’s all about *focus*. Or *zitzfleisch* as in sit down and focus for a few hours. In addition, she says to enjoy the process; writing is the joy, pulling your thoughts together is the pay off. A last thought before she shared her writing tips, “remember that when writing for publication, you are not the first or the last, rather you are entering an ongoing conversation.

#### *Your Best Friends for Getting Published*

1. Librarian/Library - for research whether online, in person, or other.

2. Editor(s) – embrace criticism, you need a critic who is not afraid to hurt your feelings during the process. Listen to your editor because they have the bigger picture in mind.
3. Professors – former or current professors often on reviewing committees for professional journals so they can network articles for you or refer you.
4. Those Who Have Come Before You – people who have written about what you want to write about should be appreciated and acknowledged. Don't claim an idea as yours alone, because others have thought it and will think it. Don't plagiarize – always acknowledge as you go along.

### *Venues for Getting Published*

1. Your Own Museums – membership newsletters are a good place to publish, and maybe you can do it on the clock!?
2. Alumni Newsletter – from any level of school
3. State Associations Newsletters – particularly summaries/reviews of sessions or conference proceedings
4. Regional Association Newsletters – all kinds of topics, sometimes for a themed issues (i.e., Western Museums Association), reviews of books or exhibitions, cast studies
5. Topical places - subject matter (i.e., children's museums, the Exhibitionist), general coverage (i.e., Museum News), more academic (i.e., Curator, Museums Management and Curatorship (canadian)), theory based (i.e., thesis, other primary research), or other venues such as Via, Chronicle, Pink Pages, Online magazines.

### *Proper Approach to Getting Published*

1. Network with professors and colleagues
2. Use all types of editors to catch typos etc.
3. **Follow submission guidelines & deadlines**

### Q & A

#### *Will guidelines let me know if I have to be exclusive?*

Check copyright agreement. Copyright is for words not ideas. Probably only after committed to publish will you have to be exclusive. Pull other submissions once you have an agreement.

#### *What about effect of electronic resources on paper?*

Totally different mechanism, bigger with less control over quality and discussion. If immediate publication is a priority, maybe electronic is for you. But doesn't allow for prior peer review. In fact, you can lose validation by not publishing with a known paper entity. Longevity is an issue, as is the delivery system for various audiences and formats.