Writer or Author

A writer or author creates works of fiction or non-fiction for publication and sale. Examples include novels, short stories, poems, newspaper features, biographies, computer games, popular science, popular history, travel books and children's literature.

The Work

You could be:

- selecting and working on a subject of personal choice, public interest or one chosen by a publisher or agent
- carrying out background research – in libraries, using the internet, visiting particular locations or interviewing people
- writing and revising (sometimes several times) the text and preparing the manuscript
- producing any illustrations yourself or arranging with an illustrator to produce them
- completing, within the deadline, a work which a publisher has contracted with you to produce (a commission)
- contacting publishers personally to try to sell them non-commissioned (unsolicited) manuscripts, or using a literary agent to promote them
- adapting an existing work into a different form – for example, turning a novel into a play or television script
- giving talks and readings to interested groups in schools, community centres or libraries
- running teaching workshops for creative writing groups.

Pay

Salaries for authors vary massively according to the fame of the author and the length and type of the work.

The figures below will provide a rough guide to freelance rates of pay.

- Writing for a magazine can pay from £250 up to £1200 for 1,000 words, depending on whether it's a small magazine or a well known 'glossy' with big circulation.*
- Rates for newspapers can range from £130 a day up to £800 for 1,000 words, depending on the type of article and whether it's for a regional or national newspaper.*
- A publisher might pay an advance of anything between £250 and £250,000 for a fiction or non-fiction book, and then royalties (a small percentage of the sales).

* National Union of Journalists Freelance Directory latest fees guide.

Conditions

- You are likely to be self-employed, although many writers also have to take other part time employment in order to make a living.
- You would probably work alone, from home, at hours to suit yourself.

- However, if you take commissions from a publisher, you may need to work long hours to meet your deadlines.
- You might have to go to book launches or take workshops and give talks in the evening. You might occasionally have to stay away from home overnight.

Getting In

- There is no single route into this career.
- In some cases, it can be useful to have a degree (SCQF Level 9-10) in literature or in a subject you plan to write about, such as history, politics or science. There are also courses in creative writing at HNC (SCQF Level 7), degree and postgraduate (SCQF Level 11) levels.
- Entry requirements to a degree course are 4-5 Highers and some subjects at National 5, normally including a pass in English. Entry to relevant HNC courses requires 1-2 Highers, including English, plus some subjects at National 5. However, individual courses may require further specified subjects and the minimum number of passes may not be enough.
- To improve your writing skills, it can be helpful to attend evening classes in creative writing or join a writers' club.
- Arvon provides residential courses in creative writing. See **'Training'** for more information.
- You could try sending the editors of journals short stories or articles, or entering writing competitions.
- It is very difficult to find a publisher willing to consider unsolicited longer works such as novels. If you can find a literary agent willing to approach publishers on your behalf, this can open more doors.
- You must be prepared for the possibility of many rejections before you are successful in getting work accepted.
- Publications such as The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook, published annually by Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, list publishers, magazines and agents and give helpful hints.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- excellent literary skills
- creativity and original ideas
- an interest in other written works on the market
- good observation and research skills
- patience, perseverance and self-motivation
- networking and negotiating skills
- the ability to accept criticism and rejection
- IT, typing and editing skills
- the ability to work to deadlines.

Training

- Joining a creative writing group can help you to improve your writing skills and to make contacts to market your work.
- Arvon provides residential courses in creative writing at four centres in the UK, based in Yorkshire, Shropshire and Devon, as well as online courses.

- There are full time courses in creative writing or professional writing skills at HNC level in some further education colleges.
- Degrees in creative writing are available at the University of Strathclyde, University of the Highlands and Islands and the Open University.
- There are postgraduate courses in Creative Writing at Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier, Glasgow, Stirling, St Andrews and Strathclyde Universities, Screenwriting at Edinburgh Napier University and Television Fiction Writing at Glasgow Caledonian University.

Getting On

- Most writers do not earn enough from writing, and have to take on second jobs.
- Once publishers have accepted some of your work, you can join schemes (such as the Scottish Book Trust Database of Authors) which provide extra money through writers' events.
- Success in writing depends a lot on networking and making contacts with agents, publishers, broadcasters, film producers and funding bodies.
- When you are more established you may get regular commissions which will give more security.

More Information

- **Vanity publishing:** some organisations offer to publish a few thousand copies of your book for a fee. You should research this approach carefully, as not all such organisations distribute the book or bind all the copies.
- **Self-publishing:** this is not the same as vanity publishing (see above). Here, in effect, you pay to have your book printed but market it yourself. Increasingly, many budding authors are choosing to self-publish using an e-book format.
- **Useful reading**: the Writers' and Artists' Yearbook, published by Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.
- The BBC has an online writers' forum called BBC Writers that has useful information on scriptwriting.

Contacts

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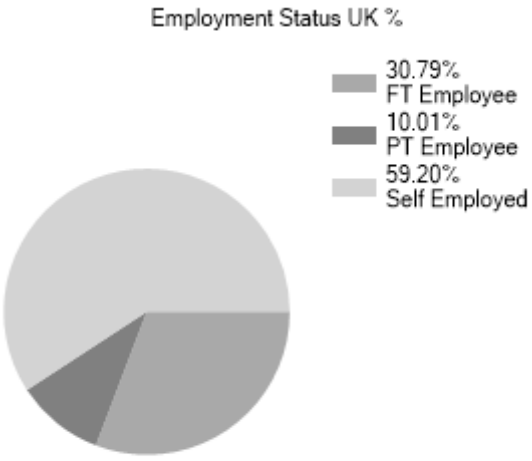
Facebook: www.facebook.com/thewritersguild

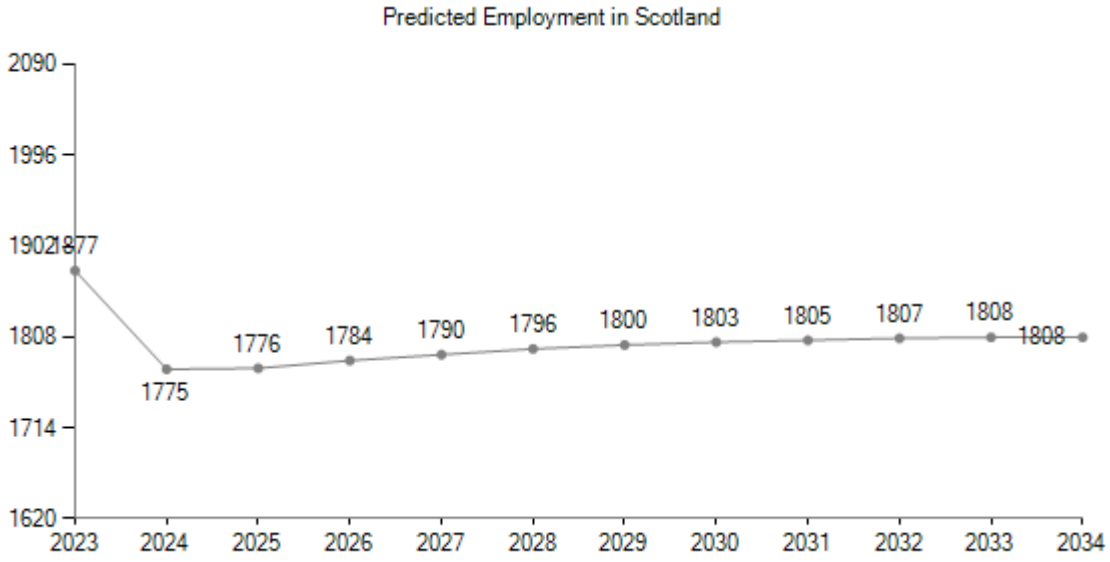
Statistics



Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by LMI for All



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