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GUEST EDITORIAL

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Write about Things that Interest You

Barry Parker, US



So you want to write a book or magazine article. The first question you have to ask yourself is: What should I write about? If the topic has been assigned to you by an editor the problem is solved. On the other hand, you may still have a difficulty. I say this because it is important that you are interested in the topic. Perhaps I should make this a little stronger: you should, if possible, be fascinated with the topic, particularly in the case of a book. The more the topic moves you, the better the job you're likely to do on it. Indeed, if you find it is only of "moderate" interest to you - scrap it. Find something you feel a real passion for. The reason, of course, is that you should write emotionally, and if your heart isn't in it, you won't be able to.

Over the years I've written on several different topics and I think I can say in all honesty that I was passionate about all of them. As a professor of physics specializing in relativity, cosmology and black holes, it is perhaps natural that I began writing about these topics. But after a dozen or so books I began to think about other topics, and I had soon written books on cars, the James Bond movies, music, and recently, health and fitness. But how could you be passionate about so many different topics? you might ask. I am sure that in each case I was, and still am. Most people are, in fact, passionate about more than one subject, and assuming you're like most people, you'll have many things to choose from. Nevertheless, be careful, and choose wisely.

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Another thing of importance in selecting a topic is that it is sharply focused. It's not good enough to say to yourself, "I'm going to write about cars." You have to select a particular type of car, or feature of cars. In addition you have to decide on a slant or angle that you are going to give your book, or article. This is what makes it different, and interesting. Let's say that you've decided to do it on antique cars. It can be made more interesting by whittling it down further, in other words, selecting some aspect of antique cars that no one (or at least, very few) has written on. You could, for example, write on, "Why collecting antique cars is good for your health, but hard on your pocketbook."

With that, you're ready to go, and of course, this is where the real work begins. A good way to start is to ask yourself as many questions about the subject as possible. What sort of information would a typical reader want? What kind of questions would he or she ask? Then answer the questions, but do it in an interesting way. This means you have to keep your eyes open for anecdotes and stories; they're the icing on the cake - the things that keep people reading. There are, of course, many places to gather information, and one of the best today is the internet. But this doesn't mean you should ignore libraries; they're still as critical as they ever were. Also, for most nonfiction books or articles you'll have to interview some of the experts in the field. The final step is to bring everything together and produce the best and most interesting book or article that you possibly can.

-Barry Parker
US

[Barry Parker is a writer of international repute. His best known books are *Feel Great Feel Alive: Seven Steps to Superhealth and Fitness*, *Science 101: Physics (Science 101)*, *Death Rays, Jet Packs, Stunts, and Supercars: The Fantastic Physics of Film's Most Celebrated Secret Agent* and *Quantum*

Legacy: The Discovery That Changed the Universe. His bestseller *Einstein's Brainchild: Relativity Made Relatively Easy!* was reviewed in volume 1, issue 2 of this journal and can be accessed by clicking here.]

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