

# **Technical Writers – Working with a Contract Staffing Agency**

## **What's the Big Deal?**

Contract Technical Writing can be a wonderful and rewarding career. The opportunities for writers seem limitless since they can apply their talents in a wide variety of fields for multiple client companies. However, for many contract writers, the primary challenge of freelancing is maintaining steady employment.

The solution? Develop a relationship with a staffing agency to help secure additional contract work.

Staffing agencies are organizations that contract or employ qualified candidates to perform specific tasks or projects for their client's needs. Individuals can perform the work on-site (at the client company), off-site (remotely), or a combination of the two.

## **The Value to You**

Staffing agencies provide a valuable service to both clients and writers. Clients gain access to a large database of potential candidates along with the agencies' expert assistance in quickly locating candidates with specialized skills. It is the job of an agency to establish relationships with multiple clients and guide them through the important process of hiring the right professional writer.

By teaming up with an agency, writers benefit by gaining exposure to opportunities they might not normally encounter. Writers, who use agencies, also find they can put their time and skills to much better use because they can devote their energies to working at their vocation, rather than at sales and marketing in an often-elusive effort to locate new contracts or jobs.

## Getting the Relationship Started...

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### How to Find a Quality Agency

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Quality staffing agencies working on a writer's behalf can prove invaluable. It costs nothing to the writer, yet they reap the benefits of the services offered. When searching for a reputable agency, look for agencies that:

- Do not submit your resume to clients without your approval. Having your resume submitted to a client more than once can cost you the contract.
- Have a very active and intimate understanding of the writing business.
- Commit to you on a personal level, and stand behind you and your work as a professional.
- Maintain a recruitment process that is fair and equitable to writers.
- Pay you the market rate for contracts. It is true that rates are typically lower when working through an agency; however rates should remain within market standards for agency contracts as well. Ultimately, the final decision to accept or reject the rate is yours.
- Have a wide client base, and can provide you with multiple contracts that are full- or part-time, short- or long-term, or contract-to-hire.
- Don't waste your time with projects and job opportunities that are not a fit for your skills and goals.

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### Your Client's Benefits

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A good agency will also offer benefits to their clients. Clients should expect an agency that will:

- Find candidates specific to their needs and with industry experience.
- Have access to a large database of writers in various locations, with varied skills, industry experience, and availability.
- Save client's money by not having to search, screen, and interview multiple candidates. This is a risk free, no-cost benefit.
- Understand the writing profession and advise the client on what they need in a writer to accomplish their goals.
- Provide short-term, long-term, or contract-to-hire contracts, either local or remote.
- Conduct a thorough screening process for all candidates. Clients do not want to spend their time interviewing multiple candidates who are not a fit for their needs. That is the agency's task.



- Have competitive rates that are in-line with industry standards.
- Keep open communication with both the client and writer for the duration of the project in order to ensure a smooth, efficient process from beginning to end.

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### Winning the Interview – Step One: Creating a Top-notch Resume

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Winning a contract, with or without an agency, requires a strong, typo-free resume. The following are a few basic tips a resume must have:

- **Contact Information:** List your contact information at the top of the resume. Include your full name, mailing address (especially zip codes as they are necessary for locating candidates close to clients), phone number and e-mail address. Include a personal web site only if it shows your writing skills and samples of your work.
- **Skills Summary:** At a glance, this section gives an employer a synopsis of what you know and what you can do for them. Use descriptions to highlight your sense of initiative. Include your writing abilities (technical, marketing, training, etc.), management skills, foreign languages, technical and computer skills (especially programming languages), software programs, and operating systems you've used, as well as certifications you have.
- **Experience:** List your experience chronologically, with your most recent job first. Include the company name, location, your title, and dates of employment. Also, give a brief description of your accomplishments. Use keywords tailored to specific client's needs
- **Education:** List your most recent education first and work backward. State your degree, major, minor, dates of attendance and the school's name and location. Also, include professional organizations and volunteer work.
- **General tips:**
  - Use active voice.
  - Be as concise as possible.
  - Choose easy-to-read fonts. Most popular are Times New Roman and Arial.
  - Include keywords for searching purposes. This is imperative as most staffing firms use keywords to search through their database. Include skills, tools, industries, titles, applications, end products, etc.
  - Develop an online portfolio or examples in digital format that you can email to clients.



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## Winning the Interview – Step Two: Presentation

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Once your resume lands you an interview, it is imperative to prepare yourself for this next step--winning the interview. The following are a few suggestions to raise your confidence level, and to optimize your interview outcome:

- An interview is a sales presentation. Show excitement. Clients want to see that you're not only qualified on paper, but that you're certain **you** are the best fit for their needs.
- Wear clean, pressed, non-flashy, comfortable business attire. Be on time. If you are running late contact the client or agency to tell them ahead of time.
- Create a well thought-out portfolio. A portfolio is an important piece of evidence a potential employer wants to review. It should consist of examples portraying your writing and designing skills, awards and recognitions, and possibly a before and after piece. It is preferable to tailor your samples to that particular employer. Be prepared to go through each sample and discuss what it is and what role you had in developing it. This is key to capturing a client's attention and ultimately persuading them to hire you for their writing task.
- Spend time researching the company with whom you are about to interview. Take notes if necessary, and memorize important facts that may prove to be important.
- Practice in your mind what questions may be asked and how you will answer them. In return, you should be prepared to ask your own questions about the company and the available position.
- Be a good listener. Try to uncover the client's true hot points and assure them why you are the best writer to handle these issues. Hot points may include: ability to complete the project with little direction, timeliness in completing the work, quality, flexibility, industry knowledge, overall cost, ability to get up to speed quickly etc...
- Maintain positive body language. Make good eye contact. Give a strong handshake.
- Convey confidence, but do not be overly pushy.
- Close the deal. At the end of the interview make sure to thank the interviewer(s) for his/her time and to express your interest in helping them with their project. Top it off with expressing that you feel like a great fit for their needs and that you look forward to hearing from them soon. Clients are looking for excitement, competence, professionalism and interest. If you can nail all four qualities – you have closed the deal!



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## Understanding Agency Contracts

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Once you are offered the project, an agency will provide a contract. All companies like to use their own legal language and restrictions when developing a contract. However, a typical writing contract will likely contain the following:

- The dates of agreement and the start date.
- Pay rate to which the agency and writer have agreed.
- A non-compete. This is a signed agreement between the writer and the agency in which the writer agrees not to take on additional work with the client company for a period of six months to a year after the current contract has ended, unless the agency gives a written release.
- A confidentiality agreement. All information obtained for a contract is to be kept confidential. Sometimes an NDA, non-disclosure agreement direct from the client, needs to be signed as well.
- Property rights. All materials and documentation developed belong to the agency and/or client.
- A scope of work. Much of this information will come from both the writer and client after the interview session.

After all signatures are secured, the work can begin. Weekly updates and timesheets are typically kept to ensure a smooth working relationship between all parties for the duration of a project.

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## What to Do Once the Contract is Complete

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Upon completion of a project, both the writer and client will participate in a simple exit interview. This information is valuable for an agency to gain insight on how to improve their practices. It also provides the writer with feedback (positive and/or constructive) for their own purposes, which is helpful when moving forward with new writing opportunities.

Clearly, both the writer and client face many challenges while working on a contract writing project. Working with a competent staffing agency can help each party overcome the challenges with ease.

*Shanon McGraw is a Recruiting Manager with Writing Assistance, Inc. (WAI) and can be reached at [staffing@writingassist.com](mailto:staffing@writingassist.com). WAI is a staffing firm specializing exclusively in writers throughout the United States and internationally. Find them online at [www.writingassist.com](http://www.writingassist.com)*