

# How to Locate and Hire a Ghostwriter for Your Book

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You've got that Great American Novel in you. It's kicking and scratching to get out, and will do just about anything to get out and be seen and heard. It's right there, on the tip of your fingers, almost punching through that invisible barrier that sets you apart from other writers who have either found their voice and the means to tell their story . . . or have located and hired a ghostwriter.

Yes, sometimes we all must face this fact: that we cannot or should not engage in a particular activity. Doing so may result in abject failure on all levels. And then what? Your novel languishes in agony.

An example: I cannot cook. I don't even *like* to cook. If I were stranded on a deserted island, with a lavish fire pit and full kitchen with all the condiments and any foodstuff I could ever wish for, I'd still eat coconuts and chase crabs all day. A smart person would hire a cook.

Psychologists who specialize in learning have found that people who do not know where to start often do nothing at all to help themselves. My advice: start anywhere, ask a friend, call your librarian, type one or two key words into a search engine and see what comes up. With time, those who make an attempt to learn will find something useful, which they'll refine, little by little, until they've reach their goal.

Rather than have you "start anywhere," I'd offer the following simple steps: use a search engine to find results for *ghostwriter* or *book ghostwriter*. If you're looking for someone to write articles for magazines, then try *articles ghostwriter* or *magazine ghostwriter*. For now, let's stick with *book ghostwriter*.

As you gather the results, list of ghostwriters and ghostwriting companies appears. Now what? Pick the top one, even if it's an ad or, in Google, a *sponsored link*. Go to the website and study it. Is the site clean and professional? Does it draw you in? What about the person or persons behind it? Do you get a warm and fuzzy feeling about them? Your intuition will guide you, so please do listen to it.

If the website belongs to a single person, do they readily identify themselves and their credentials? What about fees? Do they state their services and fee structure up front? Do they have testimonials from previous happy clients? Are the names of those clients revealed?

What about a site belonging to a company that provides ghostwriting services? Do they readily identify themselves? Who's the person in charge? What are his or her credentials? Who are the people behind the scenes, the ones who run the daily operations? Do you get the feeling it's a legit business? Do they make lofty promises that seem too good to be true? For example, do they claim to have top New York trade publishing industry contacts, or bestselling authors who work with them, but then upon light investigation the company offers no proof?

Again, regardless of your level of experience, your intuition will guide you to a first impression about a prospective ghostwriter or company that provides ghostwriting services. Personally, I recommend steering clear of any company that offers ghostwriting services, as they typically make claims they cannot back up, and often treat clients and authors poorly, in some cases, spending more time suing their own authors rather than working with them. Some examples of this poor treatment can be found on various writing forums on the web.

Once you've done a little research and made a list of some ghostwriters you like—initially, at least—it's time to write some queries to these prospective ghostwriters. Please treat these electronic queries as if they were formal business letters: be professional and polite when addressing a prospective ghostwriter and when asking questions. Please be candid and accurate about your project, allowing the ghostwriter to better assess how he might help you. Don't send off the first draft of your query. Allow it to sit for a day or two, then go back and read it. Is it a polite and professional query letter? Have you described your project sufficiently and accurately? Have you stated in clear terms what assistance you'll need from the ghostwriter? Did you ask about fees? The ghostwriter-client agreement should also be a topic of discussion, so don't forget to ask about the contents of it.

Once you've interviewed 5-10 prospective ghostwriters, do some background checking, using the tools of the worldwide web. If possible, get references from your prospects. Anyone worth his salt will gladly give you, in the least, email addresses of previous happy clients you may interview. In some cases, previous clients may wish to remain anonymous and will not talk with you, much less escape the pages of a ghostwriter's address book. You'll just have to do more fact checking and researching. If you get a bad or uncomfortable feeling about a prospect, cross him off the list and move on. The really good professional ghostwriters out there will make themselves available to prospective clients.

Let's say you've done your due diligence and have now landed a hot prospect. Yaaaay! The next step is to define how you will work with him or her, and then get cracking. You're now on your way. Best of success. . . .

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