

5 Key Qualities to Look for When Hiring a Professional Writer (So You Don't Make a Costly Mistake!)

By Michael J. Dowling

About the Author

Michael J. Dowling is a ghostwriter and editor who helps consultants, coaches, and other professionals create books and white papers to promote their cause and advance their careers.

When you hire a freelance writer, an element of risk is involved. If you hire wisely, you'll accomplish your goals and save valuable time. But if you choose the wrong writer, you could end up wasting time, missing deadlines, falling short of your goals, and suffering diminished credibility in the marketplace.

How can you avoid a costly mistake? What qualities should you look for when hiring a writer?

I believe that outstanding professional writers are characterized by five key qualities: *proficiency*, *efficiency*, *creativity*, *productivity*, and *reliability*. This article tells you what to look for, so you'll get good results instead of bad headaches.

The Five Key Qualities to Look For

- **Quality #1 – Proficiency**

Every time you put something in writing, your image is on the line. A proficient writer will craft clear, concise, creative, and convincing writing that produces positive results and enhances your credibility. A mediocre writer can tarnish your image and undermine your efforts to achieve your goals.

While visiting a university's website, I noticed the following sentence:

Our walking campus tour does not include a residence hall, however the Department of University Housing is proud to offer a special tour of one of our newest residential complex, Eagle Village.

Did you spot the errors? This is what high school English teachers disdainfully call a “run-on sentence.” The word *however* is an adverb, not a conjunction. It should be preceded by a semicolon (or a period) and followed by a comma. Furthermore, the word *complex* should be plural.

The errors on this website actually diminish the university’s reputation and undermine its marketing efforts. Maybe the copy was written by a student earning \$10 per hour, but that doesn’t excuse the poor quality. The website represents the university, no matter who wrote it.

Good writing creates a positive impression and gets the desired results. Poor writing can damage your image, waste your money, and undermine your success.

To assess a writer’s proficiency, review writing samples.

- **Quality #2 – Efficiency**

A good freelance writer must be more than a wordsmith. He also should be a skilled manager with a servant’s heart.

Your time is valuable. An inexperienced, disorganized writer will suck up your time and energy. A competent professional writer will free you up so you can concentrate on your primary responsibilities.

Choose a writer who has the skills and experience to work independently, so you don’t have to waste time looking over his shoulder. You should be able to trust your writer to do his job, just as you trust your doctor, lawyer, and accountant to do theirs.

An efficient ghostwriter will organize your project so as to minimize disruptions from your normal routine. He’ll schedule phone interviews to suit your availability. As you talk, he’ll listen, ask questions, and record your thoughts. Then, working from your dictation and any additional materials you supply, he’ll efficiently produce drafts for you to review, until you’re completely satisfied with the final product.

With the writing burden off your shoulders, you’ll have more time to think about the content of your communication, which means you’ll probably be happier with the final result. And you’ll enjoy the writing process more, because you won’t be so distracted from your day-to-day responsibilities.

Writing projects are often complex and have tight time constraints. A missed deadline can be very costly...and embarrassing. Choose a writer who routinely finishes assignments on or ahead of schedule. The faster you get the final product in front of your audience, the sooner it will start producing positive results for you.

To assess efficiency, learn about the writer's project-management skills by asking questions and checking references.

- **Quality #3 – Creativity**

A creative writer can turn your good idea into an outstanding one. He'll craft your book, white paper, or other communication piece so it stands out from the crowd. People will be more likely to read it, remember it, and respond to it.

Style can dramatically affect impact. A good writer will use dialog, suspense, humor, and other techniques to enhance readability. An unimaginative writer may get the basic information down, but content will be mundane, even boring.

Structure is also vitally important. A creative writer will organize content so it creates maximum impact. Average writers often fail to conceptualize the presentation from the reader's perspective.

Lots of writers do a fair job of putting pen to paper, but far fewer bring a strong creative element into the writing process. Look for more than just a wordsmith.

To assess creativity, review some of the writer's completed projects and inquire about the conceptual thinking behind them.

- **Quality #4 – Productivity**

A productive writer will help you generate a healthy return on your investment. Before he even accepts the assignment, he will want to be sure your project makes economic sense.

Some writing projects produce revenues that are relatively easy to identify and quantify. Others produce primarily intangible benefits, such as greater goodwill, improved communications, enhanced prestige, and stronger branding. Although intangible

A creative writer will make your writing communication project stand out from the crowd, so your message gets noticed and gets results.

Don't simply try to minimize your writing fees; aim to maximize your return on investment. Focus on value, not price.

benefits are more difficult to measure, they are no less real. What's more, they can continue hour after hour, day after day.

When projecting return on investment, remember to consider hidden costs, such as the cost of your time. If you have to closely supervise an inexperienced writer, or if you waste time repeating instructions and correcting mistakes, the true costs of the project can soar. And what if you miss your deadline? How much will that cost you?

There's more to the writing process than writing. A writer who gives you honest feedback based on his knowledge and experience will add significant value to your project. The results you achieve together will far exceed anything you could have accomplished alone.

A good writer possesses a measure of humility. His desire is to serve you and make you look good.

An experienced writer who can guide you through the entire writing and publishing process can save you valuable time and help protect you from costly mistakes. Don't simply try to minimize your writing fees; aim to maximize your return on investment. Focus on value, not price.

To assess productivity, find out what return on investment the writer has achieved on previous projects and check references.

- **Quality #5 – Reliability**

Look for a professional writer you can rely on to deliver top-quality communication products on time and on budget. When your deadlines are at stake and your image is on the line, reliability is critical.

A reliable writer will provide you with helpful accountability. When you are working with someone who is conscientious and prompt, you will be inspired to give your project the attention it deserves.

A reliable writer communicates honestly, relates cooperatively, responds promptly, and serves cheerfully. He makes it *his* goal to help you accomplish *your* goals.

To assess reliability, evaluate attitudes and check references.

© 2011 Michael J. Dowling. All rights reserved.

This article may be reproduced and distributed for personal use with the following bio attached.

About the Author

Michael J. Dowling produces clear, concise, creative, and convincing books, white papers, and other print communications for individuals and organizations. He specializes in ghostwriting, editing, book shepherding, and self-publishing.



Mike's clients include successful business leaders, executive coaches, professional consultants, entrepreneurs, and other professionals. By offering turn-key services from idea conceptualization to book publication and distribution, he makes the writing and self-publishing process understandable, enjoyable, cost-effective, and time-efficient for his clients,

Mike has an MBA from Columbia Business School, where he was one of three Harriman Scholars. He is the author or ghostwriter of numerous books and articles.

Learn more about Mike's services and read samples of his writing and testimonials from his clients at <http://www.michaeljdowling.com>.

Sign up for *The Write Stuff*, Mike's monthly e-newsletter of profitable advice about writing, at <http://michaeljdowling.com/newsletter.html>.