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SP 550 The Ministry of Writing

Roger C. Palms

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Roger C. Palms
SP550: The Ministry of Writing
Asbury Theological Seminary/Orlando
January 28-February 1, 2002

Contact Roger C. Palms: (763) 421-7565 or RCPalms@AOL.com

Course description

Men and women in ministry understand the culture, are biblically skilled and are already communicators of the Good News. Editors and publishers are looking for you. They want what you have. This course will take you step by step from idea to publication. You will learn how to expand your ministry through writing magazine articles, newspaper articles and columns, and non-fiction books.

Purpose

To help students expand their ministry through writing. In this course students will learn how to write magazine and newspaper articles that will take their message to a larger audience. The principles learned will apply as well to books, curriculum, newsletters, etc. Men and women who are well grounded biblically and are already good verbal communicators have what editors and publishers want. There are many opportunities for pastors, Christian educators, missionaries and other church professionals in the print medium. In this course we will learn step by step what it takes to get into print.

Objectives

After completing this course the student should:

- Know how to write for magazines, newspapers and also write non-fiction books.
- Understand the marketing, legal and business side of writing.
- Know how to adjust to cultural changes to be relevant in writing.
- Have a magazine and a newspaper article ready for submission to editors.

Required Textbooks

Effective Magazine Writing, Roger C. Palms, Harold Shaw Publishers, 2000.

On Writing Well, William Zinsser. Harper Perennial, Sixth Edition, 1998.

Pre-Course Assignments

- Besides reading required texts, spend time in the library periodical section examining Christian magazines. Choose four different types of magazines and examine six to eight issues of each. Determine their style. Outline the articles. How do they lead? Do they use first person, third person? Is a magazine scholarly, familiar, and chatty? Are there quotes from others? How do they use anecdotes? Is the Scripture woven in naturally? Why is that article in that magazine? What does the inclusion of that article tell you about the "wants" of that publication? Could you write for that magazine?
- Get to know each magazine's "voice." Determine, "Do any of these magazines sound like me?" Study Writer's Market and/or Christian Writer's Market Guide. Begin to list magazines that publish the types of articles you would like to write. This will prepare you for the article you will write in class and then submit for publication. Don't get too locked into the idea of writing the article ahead of time. It is easier to write as you learn magazine writing than to try to rewrite or undo something already started.
- Subscribe to your local community newspaper (not a big-city daily) and study each issue. Examine news stories, feature stories and columns. Can you write for the newspaper in your community? What opportunities might you have? Do you see differences between newspaper writing and magazine writing? You will write a news story for this community paper and prepare to become a regular columnist.
- Look at the non-fiction book markets. What authors are these publishing houses using? What types of books do they seem to want?
- On the first day, bring to class a list of article ideas from which you will choose one for your in-class article project. Be prepared to explain the target publication and why that article idea should appeal to an editor.
- Also on the first day of class bring a list of personal qualifications that you think make you eligible to write magazine articles, newspaper columns and books. In other words, what is unique about you, your background and your life experiences?

Grading

During class week:

Magazine article ready for submission	30%
Newspaper column ready for submission	20%
In-class discussion, editing and query letter	10%

After class writing:

Second magazine article (and correspondence with editor) due February 18 20%

Set of newspaper columns (and correspondence with editor) due February 18 20%

SYLLABUS

Monday, January 28

Introduction: The goals before us; developing your creativity.

- 1) How to start writing
 - a. Opportunities before you: What you have going for you as a writer.
 - b. Think "reader": Takeaway and crossing points.
 - c. The difference between preaching and writing.
 - d. A first look at marketing: Theme lists, want lists, writer's guidelines, market guides.
 - e. Focusing on editor/reader not on "me the writer."
 - 2) "Writing with our senses in-class exercise.
 - 3) Generating article ideas and research.
 - a. Library
 - b. Internet
 - c. Your notebook
 - 4) The need to outline.
 - 5) The value of your lead:
 - a. Tone
 - b. Story line
 - c. Types of leads
 - 6) Your article lead: In-class writing.
 - 7) Learning to edit as you write; working with your "editor" on your lead.
 - 8) Plain writing: The value of your words.
 - 9) First drafts: Don't let writer's block get you.
 - 10) Ingredients of powerful non-fiction.
- Tonight: Work on your article lead. Make changes as you feel you should based on your "editor's" suggestions.

Tuesday, January 29

- 1) Your next draft:
 - a. Tight writing
 - b. Static, speed bumps
 - c. Nouns and verbs
 - d. Those "barnacles": Adjectives and adverbs.
 - e. Jargon, cliches, slang.
 - f. Sentence length
 - g. Conclusion
- 2) Let others help you with your writing.
- 3) Keeping many projects going at the same time.
- 4) "Negative to Positive:" In-class exercise.
- 5) Interesting people: The value of your interviews.
 - a. First person
 - b. Third person
 - c. Your voice
 - d. In class: "What did he say? How did he say it? What did he do?"
 - e. Avoiding the tribute.
 - f. Organizing and selecting.
- 6) Transgenerational writing (seniors, builders, boomers, busters, millennials).
- 7) Writing for men and women, and knowing the difference.

Tonight:

- 1) Develop your magazine article for class editing tomorrow.
- 2) Bring a magazine to class that we can analyze for marketing.

Wednesday, January 30

Last night's assignment: working with your "editor" on your magazine article (I'll need both your name and your "editor's," as both will be graded).

- 1) Staying out of trouble:
 - a. Ethics
 - b. Libel
 - c. Malice
 - d. Truth
 - e. Privilege
 - f. Privacy
 - g. Fair comment and criticism

- 2) Rights and copyrights
- 3) The importance of careful marketing. Evaluating magazines with your interests in mind.
- 4) Query letters: do's and don'ts. In class: writing your query letter and class editing.
- 5) Rejections and how to deal with them.
- 6) The editor/gatekeepers a good friend.

Tonight:

- 1) Rework your magazine article based on the critique from your "editor." Be sure you include the name of your target publication. Be prepared to turn in your article (keep a copy to submit to your targeted magazine). Also you will turn in your earlier draft with markings by your "editor."
- 2) Rework and submit your query letter.
- 3) Tomorrow bring to class your local newspaper.

Thursday, January 31

Writing for Newspapers:

- 1) What is a newspaper? What are your opportunities?
- 2) Straight news
 - a. 5 W's and H
 - b. Inverted pyramid
 - c. How would you write a news story about an event in your church?
In-class exercise.
- 3) Features: How would you write about that same event as a feature?
In-class exercise.
- 4) Columns: How would you write a column about that event. In-class exercise.

Tonight: Be prepared to bring to class a non-fiction book idea, your target publisher, and why you feel qualified to write this book.

Friday, February 1

Book Opportunities:

- 1) What are your opportunities with non-fiction books?
- 2) Knowing the markets
- 3) Elements of a book proposal
- 4) Working with agents
- 5) Types of publishers
- 6) Promotion

Finally: We will work with time and the disciplines of writing, business information that writers need, other markets (curriculum, greeting cards, etc.)

Post-Course Application

Instructor will edit your magazine article and query letter and return both to you by mail.

Develop another idea for a magazine article. Write the article, submit it to your targeted publication. Be prepared to show the article, your correspondence with the magazine editor, and any response from the publication. Send to instructor by mail. Your work will be edited and returned to you.

Develop six columns that you will submit to the editor of your local newspaper to show what you can do. Explain your correspondence or personal meeting with the editor and the results. Send to instructor by mail. Your work will be edited and returned to you.

The post-course work counts for 40% of the class grade.

Closing Scripture: "The Lord gave the word: great was the company that published it" (Ps. 68: 11 KJV).

You are part of that great company. In the years to come, I will look forward to seeing your material in print. I know you will significantly expand your Gospel ministry through writing.