

Professional Writers: So Much More Than Our Degrees

Do you know what a professional or technical writer does?

Yea, I didn't either before the spring semester of 2004.

I didn't have the *slightest* idea of the answer for that question eleven years ago when I entered the Professional Writing Program at [Francis Marion](#). I thought it was a program that helped budding creative writers hone their craft to write as a profession. I quickly found out that while being a professional writer takes a tremendous amount of creativity, there was no prose allowed.

So, what is it? Very simply put, professional writing as a career (in my own words) is creating documents for specific purposes.

What kind of jobs can I get with a Professional Writing degree/certification?

I certainly had a very narrow view of professional writing as a student in English 305. Dr. Hanson had shared with us that she was a technical writer for IBM. So, I thought, "Okay, I like software and technology. I can sit and write software manuals all day."

Did I mention earlier that I didn't finish this degree my first stint at FMU? Thank goodness I didn't. I would have been miserable writing software manuals all day for a tech company.

During my decade-long break from higher education, I found out that regardless of what job title you hold or what department you work for, there are always jobs for professional writers.

Some specific jobs that seek this particular degree are grant writers, communication managers, social media managers, and publications specialists. But, believe me when I say there are so many more.

Can I make decent money as a professional writer?

I remember being a freshman thinking, "Alright, four years in here and a lifetime out there. I want to make a lot of money." How many students do you know that aren't concerned with the ability to sustain themselves financially once they graduate? Not many, right? Right.

[Salary.com](#) puts the median annual salary for an entry-level technical or professional writer at \$46,237 in Florence, SC. That number stays pretty steady around the high 40's to low 50's in the state, and even Charlotte, NC.

So, you stay in an entry-level position for a couple years, and you get a promotion to a grant writer or proposal writer. Salary.com states that the [median annual salary](#) for that job in this area is \$57,093. That isn't very far below the US average of right around \$60,000.

The bottom line here is that with a little patience and a lot of professionalism, finding a good-paying job in this area is far from impossible.

What does this all mean for me?

Francis Marion University offers more than [50 majors](#) in eighteen different fields. Choosing the Professional Writing Program in the English department can open doors in so many other fields than writing.

During my extended break from college, I worked in financial institutions and at one of the largest employers in the region, McLeod Health. In both those fields, writers are in high demand and short supply. Graduates of some of the most prestigious business and banking schools can be some of the most deficient writers. They're pushed to focus on the business aspects of their job and therefore deprived of basic, essential communication skills.

You don't want a degree in Professional Writing? That's okay. Believe me. The world needs more professional writers in every job out there.

English 305 with Dr. Lynn Hanson my freshman year was nothing short of an entire education in one class. Why? Because in one semester, I had doors opened to me that I never thought possible. I learned that professional writers are so much more than grant writers or communications specialists. They are people who take the time to communicate **effectively** and **efficiently**.

The world could use a little (okay, a lot) more of that, too.