



ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH
SCIENCE WRITERS

A manifesto on freelance science writing for editors and freelancers

Freelancers are free to:

- Take their ideas elsewhere if they don't hear back quickly from editors.
- Pitch stories to more than one outlet and accept the offer that comes with the best conditions.
- Negotiate better pay for exclusive stories and for their work in general, based on quality and experience.
- Communicate their ideas freely without fear of editors stealing them, which would be unethical.
- Strike out and/or add terms and conditions to their contracts with clients: a contract between two parties should be fair and acceptable to both.
- Include late payment fees in their contract and demand those if payment is delayed.
- Ask editors to see the final copy of their work before it is published; after all, it is their name that accompanies the story and its headline.
- Retain copyright for their work.

Commissioning editors should:

- Acknowledge freelance pitches and queries and reply to them promptly.
- Offer constructive feedback on pitches.
- Commission – or decline – a story as soon as possible.
- Never steal freelancers' ideas or commission someone else to follow them up without agreeing an acceptable tip fee and terms of acknowledgement.
- Set reasonable deadlines for filing and replying to any edits.
- Pay kill fees on commissioned pieces they decide not to publish.
- Remember that freelancers have other work and personal commitments, and need reasonable time during office hours to report and deal with edits
- Offer competitive freelance rates that reflect the time and effort invested in reporting a story, including background research and travel.
- Talk to their managers about increasing freelance rates to reflect inflation and the rising cost of living.
- Push back on publishers' over-restrictive copyright agreements that limit freelancers' rights and earnings.
- Communicate changes of circumstances, such as a changeover in editorial staff and possible delays to publication or payment, as promptly and transparently as possible.

Publishers and managing editors should:

- Set fair fee structures, including reasonable kill fees, that rise each year according to inflation.
- Pay as soon as possible – ideally on receipt of the story rather than upon publication.
- Avoid passing on unnecessary and repetitive administrative burden onto freelancers (for example, asking them to fill in multiple and/or identical forms for every new commission).
- Pay any late payment fees incurred.
- Never unfairly withhold future work from freelancers who ask for their contracts to be honoured (e.g. by requesting late payment fees).
- Never request freelancers to waive copyright of their work.
- Provide insurance and legal defence for freelancers who are threatened or sued in the course of reporting a story.
- Set up systems that enable quick and efficient decision making by editors so that freelancers are not left hanging.
- Offer guidance to editors on the realities of life as a freelancer, as many editors don't have first-hand experience of freelancing.
- Inform freelancers of editorial changes in their publication

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