

Don't Get Ghosted by a Ghostwriter

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Five Ways to Qualify Writers to Find the One Who Will Get Your Book (or Your Client's Book) Done On Time and On Point

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It's the chicken-and-egg dilemma of hiring a ghostwriter to work with an executive or expert: should you seek someone who has deep knowledge of the subject or someone who has the writing style that best suits the project?

Finding a unicorn who has the right style *and* the right substance is a big step toward the goal of hiring the best writer for the project...but there's more. Here are five additional qualifiers to ensure that the writer you bring in will get the project done on time and on point. (*If you are thinking about writing a book, or if you work with clients who aspire to write books, you'll find all the publishing resources and experts you need Nov. 17 at [Spotlight on Ghostwriting](#), a one-day workshop in Chicago sponsored by the [American Society of Journalists & Authors](#).*)

It's not too difficult to find writers who have knowledge of the topic or industry that frames the book: trade magazine writers and bloggers abound. But writing short articles on deadline is a completely different skill from managing a complex nonfiction book of 50,000 words (or more). These five ghostwriter characteristics can spell the success or doom of your expert or executive's project.

Chemistry: Ghostwriting isn't ventriloquism. It's the blending of the author's voice with the ghostwriter's. That's why it is essential to read as much of the ghostwriter's prior work under her own name. Do sources quoted in her own articles and books come through as full-fledged people, even in short anecdotes? Does she smoothly blend statistics and explanations with peoples' experiences, or are the pieces patched together and choppy? Good writers are also good listeners and good conversationalists. They help clients articulate what is in their own thoughts and connect the dots.

Audience: Unless there's a readership, a business book is just a diary. The writer needs to be in tune with the audience and what they reasonably want and expect from

the proposed book. Fulfilling the audience's expectations is essential for marketing the book, recommendations and word-of-mouth. And, the book needs to be organized in sync with what readers expect – a personal narrative is structured much differently from a self-help book. How has the writer written for this or similar audiences? How does the writer help the author organize the book and prioritize material that is most important for the audience?

Research experience and capabilities: Much content online is first-person – that is, based on the writer's personal experiences, often with little reference to big-picture trends. Statistics and third-person sources provide context for an author's personal perspectives and confirming how the author's point of view is relevant to a wide audience. Journalism and research experience are especially relevant for business and self-help books (though less so for co-authored biographies and celebrity stories). Look into the scope and depth of the writer's nonfiction experience to understand how well he will be able to find and weave in relevant facts.

Project management: With the proliferation of publishing platforms and services, experienced ghostwriters are morphing into project managers. An experienced ghostwriter can come on board to help formulate and fine-tune the book proposal and concept; collaborate on marketing and outreach plans; source other professionals essential to the project's success, such as designers and copyeditors; and recommend a publishing platform that best fits the timeline and marketing goals. Find out how the writer you are considering has managed nonfiction book projects in the past, such as if the project came in on budget and if project hit its milestones.

Flexibility in Form: Seasoned ghostwriters are also conversant in book-marketing strategies. What is the writer's response to including social-media content in the contract and to working on the author's website content? These are value-adds that make the writing and research process more efficient and position the writer as a true partner in the author's success.

With proven expertise in client collaboration, project management, and connecting with the right audience, your unicorn is even more invaluable.

*Joanne Cleaver is a freelance writer, editor, content strategist, and editorial project manager. She has authored seven books under her own name and ghostwrote one book. See her portfolio of corporate work at www.wilson-taylorassoc.com and her personal portfolio at jycleaver.com. She chairs two November, 2017 conferences sponsored by the American Society of Journalists and Authors: *Spotlight on Ghostwriting*, for aspiring authors who need to know how to manage process of publishing and working with ghostwriters; and *Content Connections*, all about content marketing trends and opportunities for professional editorial freelancers. Contact her at jycleaver@wilson-Taylorassoc.com.*



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