

# **FINDING TOPICS FOR GENERAL AND TRAVEL ARTICLES**

by Gordon Burgett

The sales success of an article you want to write, even the kind of publication you want to sell it to—magazine or newspaper—depends primarily upon one thing: what it is about. You must start with an idea that readers, and thus editors, want to know (more) about.

In other words, sought ideas equal selling articles.

My idea in this report is to help you find salable topics. Oddly, the process differs little between "regular" or "general" articles and "travel" articles. So let's begin this report by showing how one might find a topic for any article, then conclude by concentrating on the field of travel.

Let's consider eight ways to find topics for articles that sell—an idea in itself that makes most professional writers smile and nod their heads because they have so many salable ideas and topics they don't know with which to begin.

Yet it wasn't always that way for them. Finding article topics is a necessary skill that writers eager to sell must acquire. I want to help you get to where the professionals are.

Ideas abound and we're going to help you see them.

## **Everyday Things**

Let's begin with a heretical thought: almost any idea or topic will sell—if you are willing to hunt hard enough for an editor eager to use it and willing enough to accept whatever he or she will pay, if anything.

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Not what you had in mind? You're right, you don't want to sell just any idea for any or no income. You want to find ideas for articles eagerly sought by many editors who will pay you enough to make your effort worthwhile.

Good news! Those ideas are the easiest to find. They're right in front of you: they're the common, everyday things you see and think and talk about and feel and fear.

Beginners think they need something unique or bizarre or special to write about to get into print. In fact, it's just the reverse, if they are to sell an idea often and well. What editors want are the things that people—their readers—think and talk about all the time.

The best article ideas are related to comfort, survival, fear, anxiety, hope, love, joy, security, curiosity, even death. And what do all of these have in common? The reader. Consciously or unconsciously, they are the threads of our everyday fiber; they are what any reader most wants to know about.

People want to read about themselves, as they are and as they hope to be.

So if you want to sell what you write, focus on ideas in which readers see themselves. Even if they see themselves vicariously or as fantasy figures in your article, you have the key element that will make your writing sell.

Don't write an article about your spouse who snores. Write an article about snoring spouses, with enough examples that a reader will thank God that his spouse doesn't—or nod tiredly at every word, in instant recognition.

Don't talk about divorce in Bali; write about "How To Mend Your Marital Fence." Don't write about Freud and dreams; show how your readers' dreams can be paths to a better tomorrow.

Use frequency of thought as a gauge. If you think of the same thing every week, write about it: you've probably got a money maker. And if you think of that topic every day, you've got a gold mine. (Of course, if you think of it five times a day, you probably have an obsession!)

At the cost of redundancy: readers want to read about themselves. Most people, by their perception, lead plain, straightforward lives. So write about the com-

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ponents of such lives: jobs, family, school, playtime, dreams, mental and physical concerns, physical and emotional drives.

You're thinking to yourself, "That's been done to death; that's all I read about!" Of course. Find a new angle, an update, apply it in a different way. That's all you read about because that is precisely what any reader (or editor) wants to read. So join the club. Don't dig up the wildest, most bizarre topics so you can change public tastes!

Let's focus on a topic that seems to be permanent copy in the everyday publications: divorce. There are always new items to add to the reader's basic stock of information here: new laws, new property allocations, new ways of handling custody, new studies showing different effects upon each person or both parties, new attitudes, new views by church and state, new reasons for divorcing, new legal means of filing and separating. On and on. All you have to do is add the angle or research or revelation or study results to the old base and you have a different, "new" article about divorce. That holds true for virtually any subject that is part of a reader's life.

The last thought in that vein: there are writers who spend lifetimes on one subject. They do just what I said. First they read everything written; then they track the ways to capture new information quickly, much before it sees print. Finally, as their name becomes identified with that topic, participants in the field turn to that writer when they have something for print. The key word always: new.

What's even better, the common ideas, those that are most sought by the highest paying publications, are also the ones that will earn you the most.

An example, in reverse. In Ecuador I found pockets of animated Indians engaged in an exciting but largely unknown sport called *pelota de guante*, literally "glove ball," that was brought to that part of the world by the Spaniards in the 1500's. It is a precursor of volleyball and is played near Quito on 60' grass courts with a three-pound rubber ball and huge, 20-pound leather gloves with giant nail heads in them. I queried virtually every known magazine at all interested in sports or travel about *pelota de guante*, adding that I also had excellent color slides. Still,

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using successful selling techniques that have worked 1,600+ times, the subject appeared in print but twice—earning a total of \$130. It's a perfect example of the fact that the odd, off-center pieces are one-shot sales, or at most two or three, and seldom make their authors much money.

Common topics—children, second careers, pets, cures, and loneliness—are the things of which many sales and big money come. Really.

So your job is less one of finding ideas (look around you!) than in finding new and different ways to rework everyday themes.

There are two basic approaches to idea finding: one would have you out hunting for the ideas, and later searching for publications that might use them, while the other would have you study specific publications to see the kinds of ideas used to meet their readers' needs, then match article concepts to those publications' style, length, and format. The more you write the more you will find yourself doing some of both, with the emphasis shifting to the latter as you develop a cadre of magazines for which you write most.

Let me zero in on three publications to illustrate both points: (1) that their contents are full of everyday things, and (2) it is far easier to study a magazine first, guess what its readers want to read, and then match an article idea to the way that magazine's articles are written.

The three are the September, 1994, issues of *Good Housekeeping*, *Travel Holiday*, and *Seventeen*, a wide selection of general magazines directed at clearly different readerships: women, travelers, and teenagers (overwhelmingly female—most teenage boys aren't avid readers anyway, particularly of *Seventeen*!)

I know, 1994? It wouldn't change if it were 2024, if we still have magazines! The concept is solid. You must simply apply it to contemporary targets.

What would you expect women readers of *Good Housekeeping* then to want on that magazine's pages? Subjects about or affecting women, family, home, women's housekeeping-related activities. Those are what I call everyday—expected—things. And what does this issue talk about?

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The 38 articles or sections include six discussing food; a book excerpt from Barbara Bush's *A Memoir*; another novel excerpt, and a short story. The remainder falls into three categories: departments (9 entries, apparently all staff or contract written, and thus outside the reach of freelancers), "The Better Way" (an 11-item tear-out section that ranges from a discussion of baby-sitter basics to "how to dry summer flowers" to disorders nobody likes to talk about, all written by the magazine's own staff, thus, again, out of range of freelancers), and a 10-item section called "Articles & Features."

That last section concerns us most since it is freelance written. What does it contain? Other than three self-serving pieces—the *Good Housekeeping*/Sew America \$60,000 Contest and mail-back ballots about America's most admired man and woman—the rest are fairly predictable for these pages: a couple is accused by their daughter of sexual abuse and Satanism; the travails and joy of marrying a man with cerebral palsy; "The Jackie I Knew"; the life of a for-real female private eye; more facts than one needs know about cats, and "The Silent Epidemic: Crime in Hospitals."

Not a surprise in the lot: children, health, etiquette, money, jobs, recreation, pets—all within the expected range of a woman's publication. Everyday items given special treatment, highlighted and sharpened so the reader can relate.

So if *Good Housekeeping* is where you'd like to see your byline, separate the staff-written copy from that bought from freelancers, focus on the latter, study the magazine's content index for the past year (or check the topic in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or *Magazine Index* to see if *Good Housekeeping* ran an article about the subject you have in mind), and ask yourself specifically what the largest number of its readers want to know about. That's how you give ideas a nest to roost.

*Travel Holiday* is about—yep, you guessed it, travel and where to go on the holiday! Sixteen items in the 9/94 edition were lumped into three categories: Fea-

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tures (5 articles), Resources (three fact-packed sections), and Departments (8 articles, three written by a freelancer).

The geographic range of the contents was quite wide, from Jackson Hole to the heartland of Europe, the Bahamas to Kenya, New England to Dublin.

If you wanted to write for those pages you would have had to focus on the new wildlife keeper in Kenya, American crabs, New Hampshire's fall splash, Wyoming's Tetons, the myth and romance of the Rhine River, Exuma Island, and "Museums, American Style." They saved the research and writing about Dublin's pub life for their own senior editor!

*Seventeen* is precisely what you'd expect: lots of girl talk. What would a 17-year-old lass read in September? Seven articles about fashion and beauty; three on health, fitness, and food; two that were simply called "articles"—one about 16 girls visiting the *Seventeen* office on "Take Our Daughter to Work Day," the other, about a girl who fought sexual abuse; one piece each about entertainment and guys, plus a hodgepodge page called "The Spin," and a long short story. Nine columns completed the contents: Notes, Inside/Outside, Mail, Drive, Sex and Body, Relationships, College, Stars, and À la Mode.

Where do you look for something to write about for *Seventeen*? Inside the head, heart, glands, and muscles of a 17-year-old reader. Take inventory of her fears, hopes, embarrassments, joys, needs, wants, frustrations. And see what hasn't been written about recently. Better yet, what has that you can do better, or to which you can add new information or provide new insight. Focus on the reader, study the pages, and what needs to be said is what you write about.

For those pages forget "Teenage Puberty in Paraguay." Don't talk about Babe Ruth, the man or the candy bar. Forget exquisite, goofy, remote, unrelated items. Talk skin, eyes, college, dating, "How to Talk to a Boy."

Seeing article ideas from the perspective of the magazine's needs makes sense—and cents.

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### Five Angles

Let me add five more points of view to consider for each of your ideas. Note a subject you'd like to write an article about, then ask yourself how that idea would differ for infants, children, teenagers, honeymooners, and retirees—in addition, of course, to your average reader in the age range from 20-50.

I first read of this approach in Louise Zobel's excellent *Travel Writer's Handbook*, so let's use a travel topic as an example to show how it might be applied to your idea seeking.

Say you want to visit Iceland. Is it wise to take infants with you? Is there proper food for them? Medical care should they take ill? Baby-sitting if you want to spend an evening, or days, touring alone? Similar questions are asked by every mother eager to visit any part of the world. So editors are interested too.

Much the same for youngsters. Beyond food and health concerns, and baby-sitting too, would they find other children to play with? Are there activities geared specifically to kids that they could enjoy? Must they attend school if it is in session? Are they safe on the streets alone? Plus 100 more questions parents thinking of traveling have. When zeroing in on toddlers and kids, you are writing to the parents, of course.

Teens are a different market. More and more they are traveling alone or in small groups, and the later teens, in college, thrive on seeing new places and people. So, what is there for them to do in Iceland? How well can they thrive with English as their only language? Are there restrictions because of their age? Must they be chaperoned? What are the local customs regarding alcohol, drugs, and other temptations? In short, write to the teens about what's up for them in Iceland.

Honeymooners might not have Iceland at the top of their list, but what is there for them to enjoy on those special days of their lives? Ideal stuff for honeymooning and marriage magazines. And retirees? Great travelers, but sticklers on

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detail (cost, season, transportation) and alternative ways to see the sights without having to scale the peaks or swim the bay.

The point of all five: put the target group—from tots to ancients—in the center and build articles around them. Add travel and you have an easy selling combination.

### **A Different Setting or Sex**

While we are talking of travel, almost any "regular" story can gain a second life by changing its setting, by putting it in a different culture or locale. Christmas in London. Surfing in South Africa, stamp collecting in Chad, watching a baseball game in Japan, driving across the United States—of Brazil. There's hardly a magazine that won't accept a story with a legitimate foreign angle. If you don't believe me, look for these creatures in the tables of contents. Then moan that somebody else did it first and took the trip, probably paid for and tax-deductible!

Another easy mental switch is to take a fresh look at what were "male" or "female" articles, then generalize them or write them to include the opposite sex. The pieces about car maintenance for the housewife or baking for the breadwinner.

### **The Newspaper**

The best on-hand source for article ideas is surely the newspaper. It may seem paradoxical that you would take items from one medium and sell them to another, but that is precisely what is done by professionals and novices in the know.

First, there are no "rights" problems. News is public domain, and you will be using the facts in a different order anyhow; that is, you won't simply send a clip-

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ping of a newspaper piece to a magazine. Rather, you'll extract the most interesting elements, add more facts, and form a new article.

News in the paper is an hour or a day old. Magazine articles seldom reach the stands in less than two months. They are news pieces converted into feature stories, with the particular news peg generally placed in a broader context, reslanted to stress that magazine's particular orientation, and often combined with other facts, quotes, and anecdotes to give the subject new life and enduring interest.

If you want to see this in action, check magazines and newspapers since the collapse of communism in the former U.S.S.R. That appeared on television first, then the newspapers, then the news weeklies (like *Time* and *Newsweek*), then the "regular" magazines with longer lead times. The difference was subtle: the television talked about the immediate impact on life in Russia or Georgia; the weeklies used the same facts as openers for pieces of greater depth; and the monthly magazines, seeing light many months after the "news" value had faded, offered an even broader perspective, deeper analysis, plus more and better photographs.

The best stories, though, are seldom as important as the collapse of communism or that obvious. They are frequently the one- or two-paragraph items on page two or even page ten that suggest that something bigger is afoot that deserves closer attention.

Another example. In southern California, where a lack of rain and the scorching Santana winds create fire hazards, wood shake roofs are a menace. This is fairly well known. But if you see a couple of short pieces indicating that homes of about the same vintage, say 20 years old, each caught fire in separate locations, starting on the same kinds of roofs, you might ask yourself if these roofs haven't reached a particularly dangerous level after "x" number of years of drying out. If you research further and discover that this was the most common style of roofing two decades ago, you might have the kind of article that would catch many an editor's eye—and reader's wallet. The obvious articles, through possible titles:

"Time To Replace That Flammable Roof?"

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"Fire-hazard Roofs Reaching Their Danger Peak?"

"Shake Roofs Putting Neighborhoods in Peril?"

"Time To Require Fire-Retardant on Shake Roofs?"

Who knows, with enough press exposure you might help prevent a fire or much of its disastrous aftermath, like the inferno near Disneyland that left 2,000 people homeless from just that combination of physical causes.

Expanding on news shorts is a time-honored art of professional article writers. Once I read the same theme again and again, each time in a filler one or two paragraphs long. These items were about animals finding their way home over long distances. I wondered to myself, "just how do animals do that?," and while researching, I uncovered so much interesting information that I wrote it up and sold it some 33 times.

### Dates or Years

Dates or years are obvious ideas for future articles, thought the date should be from six months to a year away to give yourself time for querying, for the research after you get a "go-ahead," and for sufficient lead time for the publication.

Let's use a date about a decade past to show how you might have written about it. Say, 1985. In early 1984, you should have begun querying about articles for the next year, using the date as the reason for their being printed at that time.

How do you use a date or year to find both stories and markets? In 1985 you may have wished to sell articles with "100th anniversary" tie-ins, so you would begin by researching the year 1895. Lo and behold, that was the maiden year for *Good Housekeeping*, which might in fact be a super target for a general, fun but fact-filled piece about the year during which the first issue emerged.

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Medical or health magazines might be interested in recognizing the 100th anniversary of America's first successful appendectomy, or the world's administration of antirabies vaccine. Johnson and Johnson also opened in 1895.

Gun fans will be interested in the centenary of the Browning single-shot rifle; any one of five colleges may want a general piece on 1885 for their alumni or general publications because in that year Stanford, Georgia Tech, Bryn Mawr, McAlester, and the University of Arizona began.

How has music changed since the first presentation of "The Mikado" or even "The Gypsy Baron"? England first adopted an identification system that year, using fingerprints, and America made the big time with the appearance of both Morton's salt and evaporated milk. And so on.... Historical items of interest to be used alone, magnified by research, or joined in a "did you know?" piece in which the key items lead.

Incidentally, for the sources to such ideas simply go to the library and ask for the "date" books. James Trager's *The People's Chronology* is excellent, but there is also *The Almanac of Dates*, *The Timetables of History*, and many more....

Or you may wish to use 1985 as a pivotal year, with the '85 the unifying factor, and put together a historical collage of unique, interesting, sometimes comical, occasionally tragic events that took place in the centuries ending in '85, like, say 1085, 1485, 1785, 1885, ...

Let me share a final thought on this source of ideas. It is based on history, and history is death to magazine sales unless you can offset the readers' aversion to names and dates with other factors, like humor, irony, or new ways of seeing old facts. Historical material must be full-fleshed, bigger than life almost—and the query in which you attempt to sell this idea must be extremely sharp and as lively as the article to follow. So dates, years, etc. are a mine of good material waiting to be unearthed—then revitalized.

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### Holidays

Related to dates are holidays, which are a true bane to editors. I wouldn't worry about articles celebrating Arbor Day, Loyalty Day, or Ground Hog Day, but if you can find new angles or slants to the perennial evergreens—Christmas, New Years, Easter, Thanksgiving, Halloween, Valentine's, and the Fourth of July—you'll probably have a sale. There's one catch, though: most publications want holiday material at least six months in advance, and often Christmas material a year before. The *Writer's Market* will clue you in.

Two ways to go. One, review the earlier holiday issues and see what's already been done, and if it's more than 3-5 years old, try a similar approach again, updated.

Or you might approach the holiday from one of these slants:

- (1) anecdotal approach—tie in well-known names, of the present or past, with the event: Teddy Roosevelt's Christmas, Don Rickle's Halloween, etc...
- (2) historical—usually overworked, but you might try it again: the origin of Valentine's Day, the many New Years...
- (3) universality—how do others celebrate Easter or their own equivalent of the Fourth of July?
- (4) changes—compare today's Halloween with the past, etc./nostalgia
- (5) new ways to celebrate
- (6) new gifts appropriate to the holiday
- (7) new locale at which to celebrate the holiday; precisely why I took travel writers to London one Christmas, to see how the English celebrate—and write about it!

If you want to find ideas in the library, other than by looking at the tables of contents in magazines, you can see what topics were written about, and where, by

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consulting the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* or *Magazine Index*. For the more specialized or academic magazines and journals, see the other indexes for almost every academic field: business, foreign languages, psychology, nursing, etc. Your reference librarian will point the way.

Writer's Digest Books published a book called *1001 Article Ideas* that you can sometimes find in libraries. Their monthly magazine, called *Writer's Digest* and also available at most libraries, runs an occasional list of new article ideas, though I do wonder the despair editors must feel when pounds of query letters arrive on their desks containing those ideas! If you think up your own, you are your only competition!

Perhaps the most provocative source is the *Writer's Market*, which, while not listing ideas, makes clear suggestions for almost every magazine cited.

Finally, for fun browsing go to *The New York Times* or *Los Angeles Times* index and just see the kinds of things others have written about for those newspapers. Often you can combine some of those topics to create an idea uniquely your own, which you can then share, lucratively, with an editor and his readers.

### Starter Lines

Sometimes super ideas occur when you provide starter lines, the answer to which is the heart of the article. Let me suggest six that work well for me:

- (1) What if... (to which I might add) we paid people for good ideas? or we used birth control as a criterion for foreign aid?
- (2) What about... developing a computer that will convert tape cassettes into printouts?
- (3) What happened to... Billy Carter, Sugar Ray Robinson, Harry Chiti?
- (4) Why can't we... convert water to gas?

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- (5) What would happen if... we ran out of fossil fuels tomorrow?
- (6) How did... Lassie find her way home 1000 untrammelled miles? I think up so many goofy examples?

Begin with the opening question, complete it in an interrogatory way, and by providing the answer you have written the heart of the article.

This process isn't quite as odd as it may appear since most professionals quickly convert subjects into questions and use the reply, in its developmental stages, as the outline for their articles. We are simply starting with the question here, shortcutting the process.

You can apply these—or similar, leading questions—to almost any topic and at least emerge with stimulating ideas that can then be tested for article applicability.

### Look at your day...

Another excellent source of ideas is your average day. If, for one day, you could keep a list of all your thoughts, worries, dreams, suspicions, fears, even activities, you'd have a list ripe for a year's worth of sales.

You wake up at 7 but lay there until 7:30. The article is called "The Early Morning Blues, or How Do You Kick Yourself Out of Bed?"

You run every morning, or most mornings. Others have their own life-extending peculiarities. A score of stories could be written about that activity, sport, hobby....

Do you ever wonder why there are so many razors and blades? Are they really any different? Which are best? Why do they change so often? "The Great Blade Rip-Off" I'd call it.

Many schools across the country serve lunch to any senior citizen who shows up at the right time at any of their lunch rooms. How is it working? How common

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is the practice? How did it start? Here is a story that seniors across the country would like to read.

You work. Every job is a hotbed of articles.

After work, you go to a movie, then buy pizza. Both scandalously overpriced. Popcorn is the worst example: 26 cents of value sold for \$2.50 or more. "The Great Popcorn Robbery," or "The Pizza Purloinment." Consumer-related stories sell well.

On your way home, you notice an all-night hot dog stand. You stop and talk to the Cuban couple who run it. Never robbed. They love the work. Came to America to set up their own business and work together. Readers love success stories.

Climbing into bed, you wonder, for the tenth time, if you really could learn Spanish while listening to a tape while you slept. Sleeping is a subject that never tires the reader. And doing something positive while sawing "z's" is a natural.

What have I done? Skipped through a hypothetical day and pointed at everyday activities and occurrences that others might want to know about. I didn't have to travel or dip into history books or read the horoscope to find ideas: I just opened my eyes, looked at what I've been seeing for days or years, and asked which of those things others would also like to know about.

Yet a footnote is necessary. When I actually write these ideas into articles I disappear. The "early morning blues" aren't mine, but everybody's. I read about "depression at dawn," check psychology articles about the topic, investigate procrastination, ask how much of my slow start is due to deep sleep or its lingering after-effects, and so on. My observations are universalized. Remember, people want to read about themselves, as they are, might be, or would be but for the grace of God, etc.... As with most articles, while the curiosity is mine, the tale is told third person.

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### Travel topics

The easiest way to find 365 travel titles, or ready-to-use topics, is to go to the appendix of *The Travel Writer's Guide*! Take a close look at the locale you will visit, see which of those particularly apply, then match them to magazines eager to use material about that theme in that setting! That's why I created the list, to give you a jump-start.

Yet much of the fun is to create your own topics, to invent your own wheel.

That too is fairly straightforward. One way is to take any human-based subject and tell how it is in a different setting—the greater the difference, usually the greater the interest.

Some years back I recall being surprised when I first entered a two-story "department store" in Salvador (locally called Bahia), Brazil, that it had an escalator. Still, an article about an escalator in a less developed section of Brazil probably wouldn't have found much U.S. publishing interest. But one plunk in the jungle certainly would have!

When I entered that same store weeks later, I found at least 500 people clustered around the "rolling stairs," gaping. It seems that two aborigines, young men, had been brought to the city as part of a linguistic study. They had never been out of the jungle before. Dressed in loin clothes, wearing brightly feathered headgear, barefoot, and firmly gripping tufted spears, the teenage lads took turns jabbing at the stairs and letting out excited shouts, then running up a few feet and leaping back to the ground. Every time they landed safely, the crowd cheered and clapped! I have no idea how this ended. They were still poking, shouting, and leaping 20 minutes later. It only occurred to me a decade hence that I should have stayed and spoken to the guides who were accompanying the bewildered, animated natives, to

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write a full account of how they had found and confronted civilization, topping it off with an interview, through a translator, with the Indians themselves.

The point is that almost anything is fair game for a selling article if its distance in mileage or time is sufficient to provoke readership curiosity.

Even minute differences can lead to selling copy. Quilting magazines want to know about patterns, materiel, and marketing be it from Idaho, Ireland, or the Isle of Mu. Local cures of Bali flatulence, why one doesn't wink at maidens in rural Burma, and how ceremonial pots are fired in Ecuador are the stuff of selling articles.

So an important thing that any topic-seeking travel writer might do would be to reread and apply any of the eight topic-provoking steps earlier cited in this report from the vantage point of each new locale or culture.

Look closely at everyday life at the new site and report about it in an appropriate U.S. publication. Consider infants, youngsters, teens, honeymooners, and retirees—from that culture or as it applies to visiting Americans—as the core of enlightening, exciting, probably amusing pieces. Tie in newspaper accounts of what is happening in other places with a greater explanation of why that is occurring and what that portends for the future. Relate travel pieces to significant dates, anniversaries, or seasons there or in the United States. Explain holidays celebrated elsewhere, or how American holidays are observed, viewed, or avoided in other places. Apply the "starting questions" to foreign cultures. Trace an "average day" for other folks at different social levels.

Then add to that bottomless pot of potential topics those subjects that are directly related to travel itself.

What immediately confronts the would-be traveler?

(1) Where should you go? (How do you select "perfect" travel destinations? How do you determine the best blend of activities when you

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- arrive? How do you create a trip to favorite old places and exciting new sites?)
- (2) How do you get there? (Is the "getting there" as important as the arriving, so a sea cruise would make more sense than the fastest jet? Do you want to go there directly or should stops to and fro be included? Should you seek out the airlines with non-smoking flights?)
  - (3) How can you keep the travel costs down? (What is the best deal your travel agent can offer? Should you buy a ticket from a "bucket shop"? Could you be an air courier? Are there budget hotels or low-cost tours?)
  - (4) Should you go alone or team up with others? (Again, are group tours an option? Could you meet others at the destination, leaving you with greater single-travel flexibility coming and going? Should you seek a companion among your friends before making travel commitments?)

You get the idea. You make a list of every concern you face, or could, in setting up a trip, frame each concern as a question, then create articles from potential responses. If you are facing that problem, so are other travelers. Voilà, an article in print—and money to feed your other travel vices!

Let your mind wander to see the many fields where such questions/answers/articles lie: at every phase of trip conceptualization and planning, ticket purchase, supply and equipment provision, comfort and amusement during the trip itself, logistics at every step of the journey, money needed and how it can be obtained at the destination, caution and security, what foods to try and which to avoid, proper attire en route and there, what there is to do at the key sites, how to avoid or overcome loneliness, how to infuse more joy or love or awe at every step, how to return refreshed from an exacting vacation... Those are the things that travel editors need, readers read, and too few writers even consider. If written with humor and enthusiasm, plus fresh insights and practical tips, how can you be denied copy space?

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Start with one broad premise: travelers are just you and me going somewhere else for a variety of reasons who want to reap everything positive immediately and in abundance: fun, excitement, rest, awe, love, relaxation, and unforgettable memories. Without hassles, inexpensively, and with a minimum of lifting.

Tell them how to do that. And also paint true yet heart-stopping visions of the places they want to visit. "All-you-ever-wanted-to know," definitive destination articles that leap off the page but remain accurate when seen in person.

One way to know what travel readers want to read, and how it must be written, is to read what they are reading now. Spend a week studying what's on the pages where you want to appear. Pull the work apart using my 12-step process called "How to Study a Printed Magazine Article" in *The Travel Writer's Guide*—see the book listing on Fatbrain. (Incidentally, it works just as well for newspaper articles.) Then either give them more of the same, but better, or see what hasn't been said, then write it at that same high level.

"*Finding Topics For General and Travel Articles*"? Finding them is easy, as I've tried to suggest in this report. Selling them is harder, but you can do it, as I show in *Sell and Resell Your Magazine Articles* or *The Travel Writer's Guide*.

Ideas are like leaves in a New Hampshire fall. You are knee-deep in them most of the time. You simply must match what others want to know to the magazines they most likely read, then focus on the heart of that idea, restate it as a question, and propose, in a lively query letter to that magazine's editor, that you can provide the answer.

Ideas are everywhere. Profitable raking!

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### GORDON BURGETT'S BIOGRAPHY

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Gordon Burgett currently speaks nationwide about three topics, "How to Publish Your Own Book in 30 Days or Less," "Niche Publishing," and "How to Plan a Great Second Life," offering keynotes, break-out sessions, and workshops at conventions, retreats, and colleges or universities.

In 2010, Gordon published [\*How to Get Your Book Published Free in Minutes and Marketed Worldwide in Days.\*](#)

Two years earlier Burgett's [\*Niche Publishing: Publishing Profitably Every Time!\*](#) was updated and republished. In 2007, three of Gordon's books were also revised, updated, and reprinted. These were [\*How to Plan a Great Second Life\*](#), the [\*Travel Writer's Guide\*](#), and [\*Sell and Resell Your Magazine Articles\*](#).

Burgett has published 1,700+ articles and 39 books, plus offered over 2,000 professional paid presentations. During that time he has appeared exten-

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## Finding Topics for General and Travel Articles/ 21

sively on radio and TV, as a guest author and a publishing specialist. Burgett is a long-standing member of the National Speakers Association, the American Society of Authors and Journalists, and the Independent Book Publishers Association. His books include *Niche Marketing for Writers, Speakers, and Entrepreneurs*, *Self-Publishing to Tightly-Targeted Markets*, *Empire-Building by Writing and Speaking*, *Speaking for Money* (with Mike Frank), *Sell and Resell Your Magazine Articles*, *Treasure and Scavenger Hunts*, *Life After Dentistry* (with Dr. Jay Hislop), *Standard Marketing Procedures for Dentists*, *The Travel Writer's Guide*, *How to Sell More Than 75% of Your Freelance Writing*, *The Writer's Guide to Query and Cover Letters*, *Standard Marketing Procedures for All Dentists* (with Reece Franklin), *Ten Sales from One Article Idea*, and *The Query Book*.

Four of Burgett's books have been Writer's Digest Book Club top choices: *Sell and Resell Your Magazine Articles*, *Travel Writer's Guide*, *Writer's Guide to Query and Cover Letters*, and *How to Sell More Than 75% of Your Freelance Writing*.

Gordon has owned and directed a publishing company, Communication Unlimited, since 1982. It originally specialized in (and continues to offer) books, reports, and audio CDs about writing, empire-building, and niche publishing. For five years C.U. published dental and medical books. For the past five years its education imprint has published key education books for superintendents, principals, and K-12 teachers, including *What Every Superintendent and Principal Needs to Know*, *Teachers Change Lives 24/7*, *The Perfect School*, and *Finding Middle Ground in K-12 Education: Balancing Best Practices and the Law*.

Burgett earned four academic degrees: B.A., University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana (Latin American Studies), M.A., University of Wisconsin, Madison (Luso-Brazilian Studies), M.F.T., Thunderbird Graduate School (Foreign Trade), and an M.A., Northern Illinois University (History). He was twice a university dean, taught history, created a city recreation program in Illinois, directed CARE (and Peace Corps) programs in Colombia and Ecuador (includ-

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ing the Land Directorship of the HOPE ship medical/dental program in Guayaquil), twice studied in Brazil, played professional baseball, and led a gold hunt up the Paushi Yaco (Upper Amazon) River in Ecuador.

He survived to write [newsletters](#), articles, and books.

Communication Unlimited  
P.O. Box 845  
Novato, CA 94948  
(800) 563-1454  
[www.gordonburgett.com](http://www.gordonburgett.com)  
[glburgett@aol.com](mailto:glburgett@aol.com)