

All About Ghostwriting

Introduction

This electronic “book” is dedicated to all people with ideas and information to share. Feel free to print this book and to share it with others--as long as you aren't selling the book for profit. (In that case, call me at 800 359-9503.)

This book contains more information than the pages posted on the web because we are not constrained by the one-screen rule that says people are in too big a hurry to linger longer than it takes to see the first screen that pops up. We will continue to expand and update this book as additional information becomes available to us. Share your thoughts and perspectives by calling us at Griffith Publishing, 800 359-9503, or send a note by email to hodi@mindspring.com. You can also reach us by mail at PO Box 247, Caldwell, ID 83606.

Ghosts of the past

Shakespeare's works may have been ghostwritten by Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. At least that is the contention of some scholars who say there is very little evidence that the person pictured in all portraits of Shakespeare could even sign his name, much less write anything of any literary merit. The earl, these scholars say, had every reason not to identify himself as a poet and playwright since his writings could be seen as casting a critical light on the activities of the court—not a healthy position for a man of noble birth.

Another underhanded use of ghostwriting has been reported in the pharmaceutical industry, where scientists reportedly ghost articles for busy medical doctors to endorse specific medications. Cardiology and psychiatry are the branches of medicine where this type of phony endorsement is most likely to occur, according to a report in the *Guardian* (UK) in February of 2002.

In government the people who write speeches for the President and other high-ranking officials used to be called “ghostwriters” because it was hoped that they would be invisible and that the politicians would be credited with the ideas and expressions in the speech. Today people with this function are called “speechwriters,” and their names and careers are public.

Legality of Ghostwriting

There is something automatically suspect about ghostwriting. The person whose name is given as the author isn't really the author of the work. To some this is an egregious breach of all that is honest and right. To others, it

is of no consequence as long as the “author of record” takes full responsibility for all words attributed to him or her.

In legal matters it is often difficult to know who wrote the briefs, testimonies, and other documents submitted as evidence, summaries, or pleadings. Attorneys routinely ghostwrite pleadings that are filed in a court of law with no acknowledgement that the papers were written by the attorney and not the litigant. Only recently has this practice been condemned or investigated, and the jury is still out concerning what should be done about non-attributed writings in legal proceedings.

What is the difference between plagiarism and ghostwriting?

You can make a very successful career for yourself as a ghostwriter. You can be expelled from school or given a failing grade for plagiarizing. In both cases the “author of record” and the “real” author are two different people. Why is one a serious offense and not the other?

The difference is one of knowledge and permission.

If you sign up for a college-level class, your grade is supposed to be based on your work in that class. That is one of the assumptions of earning academic credit. When a college student lifts a paper from the web and turns it in as his own work, he has violated this rule by falsely declaring that he is the author of a work that he has borrowed or purchased from another source.

When you hire a ghost to write a book for you, you are openly admitting that you need help putting your book together. You recognize that as the author of record, you are responsible for every word, every fact, every innuendo in your book.

I am willing to handle the writing of a book for an author without taking credit on the cover provided that the author has something significant to say and gives me sufficient information to write the book to support his or her key points. If I am supposed to come up with original ideas, support my ideas with facts and interviews, and put the whole sequence together in a book manuscript, then I am the author. I won't take on such a project unless the book clearly acknowledges my contribution to the book as the author, chief writer, lead editor or some other term. I know of authors who will not admit that they have used a ghostwriter, and in my book, they are crossing the line into plagiarism.

A ghostwritten book, in my opinion, should be clearly declared to be so—if not on the cover of the book, then at least in the acknowledgements printed

with the book. In any case, the author of record should never deny in public that a ghost was employed to write the book.

Is Using a Ghost a Good Idea for You?

Authors choose a ghost because—

(1) They don't have enough time to write the book themselves or

(2) they don't feel they have the skills needed for a first-class book.

In both categories are celebrities and ordinary people with unusual stories to tell, but without substantial help in putting the book together, the story will never be told, and the information will never be available in a book.

What is a ghost?

Simply put, a ghost is a writer who writes for you. You are the author of record and bear full responsibility for the contents of your book, but your ghost writes the book, from the first chapter to the last. You may contribute paragraphs, pages, even full chapters, but you expect the ghost to do most of the writing for your book.

A good ghost writes as you would write if you had the time or the skills to do so. You will want to spend a lot of time with your ghost in person or on the telephone so that your personality and interests will show through. When you notice expressions that the ghost places in your book that are not customary to your way of speaking, you will point these out and work with the ghost to be sure that your special way of using the English language comes through.

What does the ghost do for the author?

Ghostwritten or not, it is your book if your name is given as the author of the book.

A ghost can zero in on your subject matter and organize and write it to reach your audience. The ghost is skilled in sensing trends, salient points and “big issues” to highlight in your book.

During the course of writing your book, you and your ghost will probably become good friends. But when the book is done, it's your book. If there

are radio or TV or newspaper interviews, you are the one who gets the spotlight. If you self-publish, you also get the financial rewards for producing your book.

Selecting a Ghost

Thousands of would-be authors would like to write your book for you. If you don't believe that, go to your favorite search engine and enter "ghostwriting." Many of the people who want to write your book have solid ghosting experience and skills. Some of them do not.

We have heard sad stories from people who hired a ghost, paid thousands of dollars and never saw the completed manuscript. We have also heard from authors who paid a ghost for a book riddled with mistakes that had to be corrected. And, from the ghost's perspective, we have heard of authors who were so recalcitrant that the ghost was happy to escape without completing the job or collecting a single payment.

Some tips to help you choose a good ghost:

1. Ask for a sample book that the ghost has written. Show the book to a good judge of writing and have this person point out to you any problems in writing style or sentence structure in a 20-page section of the book. Check the book out yourself as well.
2. Ask for references and check them out. When you call an author who has hired the ghost you are considering, ask factual questions such as—
 - “How many months did it take for your ghost to complete the book?”
 - “How much time did you spend on the phone or in person with the ghost?”
 - “Would you recommend this ghost for a book on [your topic]?”
 - “What did the project cost?” (Be sure you know the number of words, pages and other elements in order to make an accurate comparison.)
3. Ask questions until you clearly understand what the ghost expects of you and what you can expect from your ghost.

4. Try to negotiate a price that covers the project in stages and avoid any agreement to pay for the whole book whether or not you are satisfied with it.
5. Ask for a sample contract and have your attorney review it. Make suggestions if it seems lopsided.
6. Your ghost should be willing to spend time on the phone or in person talking with you about your book until he or she thoroughly understands its purpose and has a good idea of its content.
7. Be sure to ask for a written proposal including pricing and scheduling information.

When I ghostwrite a book, I like to have three times as much information as will be included in the book. A ghost likes to pull together sections and illustrations from a wide variety of sources that you provide.

It works best if you as the author select the source material for your book. Except for rare cases involving additional payment, don't expect your ghost to do library research and interviews for you. On the other hand, your ghost will be checking your facts, supplementing information and sharing ideas for ways to bolster your key points. Welcome all constructive input.

The agreement

The first step in getting your book written is for you and the ghost to agree on the scope, purpose and sufficiency of information for your book. The ghost should be able to provide a written proposal if there is adequate information and a single overriding purpose for the book.

The written proposal should indicate how long each phase of the book is expected to take, when payment is required, and circumstances under which either party can cancel the agreement.

An outline, an introduction, and one chapter should be acceptable to both of you before you move into the main part of the book.

The remaining material should come to you at a prearranged pace. Some authors and ghosts like to complete one chapter at a time. Others prefer to write the entire book based on the outline, introduction and opening chapter before reviewing it.

Your rights--and your Ghost's

The ghost you finally select may require front-cover billing in connection with your name, as in—

Samuel Oster with Marjorie Evans

or

Samuel Oster as told to Marjorie Evans

Some ghosts spell out the font size for their name as well as the exact placement on the cover. If the ghost is well known and has an impressive roster of clients whose book has been catapulted to world success because of the ghost's contribution as the lead writer, then you may be glad to pay a premium fee. You can, however, find competent writers who will ghost your book without requiring any front-cover billing whatsoever. The most expensive ghosts are not necessarily the best ones.

Do NOT agree to “as told to” or “with” credit lines unless you believe that the reputation of your ghost will help market the book. If that is the case, then the ghost's name on the cover is the only fame the ghost gets for doing your book for you, so our advice is to give them this small place in the sun.

Be sure that the written agreement offered by the ghost clearly states that the book and the words therein are YOUR property, not the ghost's. The ghost cannot republish, rewrite or remarket the book in any form. On the other hand, YOU are responsible for any liability due to plagiarism, copyright infringement or any other legal shortfall with your book.

What does it cost to hire a Ghost?

Fees for ghostwriting services can range from under half a cent to 60 cents or more per word. Many ghosts use guidelines provided by national organizations such as Writers Market to help them set their fees for writing and related services. According to Writers Market, you should consider a ghostwriting fee of \$5,000 as “very low,” \$15,000 low, \$25,000 mid-range, \$50,000 or more high. These estimates are for a book of about 75,000 words, or about 240 pages when the book is printed.

If your book is the story of a person, business, or organization, expect to pay travel expenses so that the ghost can meet the key persons involved and do a better job of reflecting their personalities. Expect to pay at least \$25,000 for a competent ghostwriting job for a comprehensive

autobiography or corporate history. However, a growing number of publishing services, including Griffith Publishing, are providing “family life” stories of about 50,000 words for \$5,000, including typesetting, cover design and printing several hundred copies.

Book packagers and publishing houses sometimes retain ghosts on salary or contract to write books by famous individuals or experts in highly specialized fields of information. The ghostwriting fee may be hidden in a package price of many services, or if you are a celebrity that promises to bring sufficient revenues to a publishing house, you won't have to pay anything for a ghost to write your story!

Griffith Publishing and Ghosts

When you choose Griffith Publishing for ghostwriting a book you plan to publish and market yourself, you can save hundreds of dollars and months of time. This is because we continually check for spelling and grammatical problems while we're writing the book, so when it's ready to print there is no fee needed for editing and checking for accuracy. We can also format the pages for printing while we're writing the book.

We do NOT accept every ghostwriting project that comes our way. We consider only nonfiction works and give highest priority to books by reputable experts in the fields of medicine, health, business, history, education, psychology, and almost any self-help topic. We can edit and produce books with a much broader subject base, but we feel we cannot give the energy and commitment needed to deliver a manuscript with the value it deserves unless the topic matches our experience and interest.

Here are the essential points you need to know about ghostwriting services at Griffith Publishing.

HIGHEST PRIORITY: Non-fiction books with a single and well-defined purpose by an author who is an expert in the subject matter of the book but either lacks sufficient time to write a book or is experiencing a language barrier to written English.

FAST: 50,000 to 100,000 words in 8 to 20 weeks

GOOD: Specialties are health, medicine, business, construction, history and biography

REASONABLE: Combine ghostwriting with typesetting, page and cover design and printing and save thousands of dollars.

RATES: Standard rate for ghostwriting a 75,000 word book is \$5,000.

PROFESSIONAL: Over 20 years experience, sample books available.

TOTAL COSTS: A 240-page book including research, ghostwriting, editing, page and full-color cover design, printing and binding will cost you approximately \$6.20 per book for 2,000 books and \$2.95 per book for 5,000 books.

Marketing and order fulfillment services are also available for selected books. Call us at 800 359-9503. Send email. Let's talk.

New service: family history, biography

As of January 2003 Griffith Publishing is offering a \$5,000 package that includes interviews and research, organizing materials, writing, editing, full-color cover design, page design, and production of up to 200 books with 240 book pages and full rights going to the author of record, and additional copies available for no more than \$6.00 each in quantities of 50 or more books.