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HOW TO MAKE A LONG-TERM

CAREER OUT OF TEFL

9.20 MY EXPERIENCE WITH WRITING FOR ELT MAGAZINES

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My journey in the ELT world started when I completed my CertTESOL course at St Giles London in December 2009. Three months later, I moved to Prague, in the Czech Republic, for my first teaching post. A year after that, I went on to teach in Bergamo, in the north of Italy. I managed to squeeze in some teaching at summer schools for young learners in England, where I moved back permanently. I have worked in language schools in Cambridge, where I completed my DELTA course and was promoted to a senior teacher position, and in London, where I trained as a CertTESOL tutor.

Ten years later, I left classroom-based teaching behind—although I occasionally teach online—to focus on materials and item writing. Through my blog, I share [my reflections](#) of all-things ELT as well as the experiences of a range of ELT professionals, in the form of [interviews](#).

Why and how I started writing for ELT magazines

I wrote [my first article](#) almost by accident. Here's how it happened:

I've always been interested in professional development and its impact on teachers' careers. Since my first year of teaching in Prague, I have always attended as many training sessions and workshops as possible, usually unpaid and at the expense of my free time. I did so because I valued the benefits that shared knowledge can bring. I still do—but, surprisingly, not every teacher feels the same way.

When I became responsible for organising—and often delivering—the training sessions, I found my colleagues' lack of interest and their poor attendance quite frustrating and disappointing. Nevertheless, this behaviour intrigued me. I began asking questions and making notes of their answers. When I shared my concerns with the Director of Studies, she suggested that I publish my findings as part of my professional development.

So, when I came across a post about writing for the *International House Journal*, I took it as a sign and I decided to give it a try. That's when self-doubt crept in. Could I actually write something of interest to a wide audience? Could I write in the language and style suitable for ELT professionals (as opposed to writing for B1–B2 students)?

Nonetheless, the seed was planted and I was determined to have my article published. I sent off an outline of my ideas, which was approved, and then my completed article. I was lucky enough to have had a couple of ELT friends who kindly edited and proofread it for me before my final submission.

How to approach writing articles

First, let's clarify that the dreaded 'writer's block' is real! For a writer, there's hardly anything more frustrating than staring at a blank page on your computer screen because you can't come up with a topic worth writing about—or, even worse, having a great idea in mind but you can't find the right words to express yourself.

Therefore, my suggestions are:

- Choose to write about something that interests you—the chances are that plenty of other people will be interested in it too, perhaps more than you think!
- If you, for whatever reason, don't have the freedom to choose the topic, try to find a specific area of the given topic that makes writing more appealing to you.
- It may sound obvious, but it's very important to make a plan or a list of what points you want to cover, and decide in what order they should be included. This approach has helped me build my articles more cohesively and saved me a lot of time during the writing stage.
- If you're struggling to get started with writing your piece, seek the help of AI (e.g. ChatGPT). You will have to heavily modify—if not rewrite—what it has produced, but you'll overcome the hurdle of staring at a blank page.
- Personally, I love learning from others, but I find that the overuse of jargon and complex language can make your article a bit sterile and disconnect the writer from their audience. For me, an engaging article is a piece that any teacher—at any point in their career—can enjoy because of its simple and inclusive language.

Dealing with feedback

After working for a few years as an item writer, I've grown a thick skin, so it's easy for me to accept feedback now. However, I can sympathise with those who find dealing with feedback and criticism challenging, no matter how constructive.

Fortunately, the feedback I've received from the magazine editors has always been positive. However, on one occasion, my trusted friend-cum-editor suggested that I change the tone of my

third article after reviewing my first draft. It turned out that my emotional involvement with the topic—burnout—made my writing sound overly pessimistic.

Initially, I struggled to understand her point of view. I couldn't see how my words might be as negative as my friend/editor thought. After all, I was speaking candidly about a topic dear to me—surely, I was entitled to infuse some emotion into it! Nonetheless, I trusted her judgement and wasn't going to dismiss it. I waited for a few days, then re-read my draft with fresh eyes. Guess what? My friend was right, and I followed her suggestions to give my words a more positive spin.

Interestingly, this is the most popular article I've ever written. It was a [Feature Article](#) in *IATEFL Voices #264* and was referenced during a workshop for World Mental Health Day at the 7th ELT Malta Conference in October 2018.

I was once told that in writing, the goal is a polished, useful, and engaging product, and writers and editors are working together towards the same goal. Another way to look at this is that **your writing belongs to you until it's submitted. After that, it's not yours anymore, but it belongs to the collective mind—the writers, editors, and all parties involved. It's the collective mind's responsibility to change and adapt the article to achieve the best results.** Eventually, I stopped viewing feedback as a necessary evil and started appreciating what it actually is—a valuable learning tool, regardless of the manner in which it is delivered.

Who to write for

As mentioned, I wrote an article for the *International House Journal* and one for *IATEFL Voices*. My other articles appeared in *English Teaching Professional* and in *Modern English Teacher*, both published by Pavilion Publishing and Media.

Most of these publications pay for your articles, but this isn't always emphasised in the guidelines. My guess is that highlighting payment could potentially attract submissions primarily interested in compensation rather than genuine contributions to the field. Usually, the fee depends on several factors, such as the publication's budget, circulation, readership, and the type/length of the contribution. As these magazines operate on a paid subscription basis, your articles cannot be made public for at least a year. After that, you're allowed to share them for personal promotion, such as on your blog.

If you want to get involved in article writing for ELT magazines, start by reading their guidelines. These will give you a better idea of their readership and what kind of articles they prefer—some focus on publishing research-based or academic texts, others prefer tried-and-tested lesson ideas, approaches, and techniques with a more informal tone.

The guidelines will also walk you through the submission process and provide legal details, as well as information about preferred word counts and referencing styles. For more information on writing for the publications I mentioned earlier, see the following pages: [IH Journal](#), [Modern English Teacher](#), [IATEFL Voices](#) (members only).

Why you should write for magazines

Writing for an ELT magazine can benefit you in several ways, whatever your role. More specifically, your article can have a positive impact on your:

Professional development

Getting involved in writing for magazines allows you to engage deeply with their subject matter, research new teaching methodologies, and explore the latest trends and innovations in language education. This contributes to your (and others') ongoing professional development, leading to improved teaching skills.

Knowledge sharing

By sharing insights, experiences, and best practices through writing, you will contribute to the broader ELT community. This fosters collaboration and learning among peers, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

Reflective practice

Writing about teaching experiences and strategies encourages self-reflection. Teachers often gain a deeper understanding of their own teaching methods, which can lead to improvements and more effective classroom practices.

Visibility and recognition

Having your articles published in reputable magazines can elevate your profile within the ELT community. It provides a platform for recognition and establishes you as an expert in the field.

Networking

Engaging with ELT magazines gives you the opportunity to connect with fellow professionals in the field. Networking can lead to valuable collaborations, conference invitations, and—potentially—better job opportunities.

Contribution to research

Writing for magazines allows you to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field. By sharing practical insights and experiences, you can bridge the gap between academic research and classroom application.

Creativity and innovation

Writing articles challenges you to think creatively and develop new ideas for teaching and learning. This can lead to innovative approaches that benefit students and invigorate the classroom environment.

Personal fulfilment

Seeing your work published and having a positive impact on the teaching community can be personally fulfilling and motivating. It provides a sense of accomplishment and validation for the effort put into writing.

On a personal level, having my articles published has helped me showcase my ideas and my writing skills—very useful when I first ventured in the world of ELT materials and item writing. More importantly, however, it has given me confidence in my abilities as a writer and as an ELT professional in general.

Happy writing!

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Monica Ruda is a published ELT writer and a DELTA-qualified teacher trainer. She works with international and UK-based clients to create effective materials for teaching, learning, and assessment. Prior to her writing career, Monica spent almost a decade teaching English to international students in the Czech Republic, Italy and the UK, where she currently lives. In her (little) spare time, Monica enjoys cooking for family and friends, going for walks, and gardening—her new-found hobby. To find out more, visit [her website](#).