

# Author

Write books people buy. No license, no required degree, and almost no guaranteed money.

## TYPICAL PAY

**\$76,910**

a year, full time

## PAY RANGE

**\$44k to \$140k**

starting to experienced

## TIME TO QUALIFY

**up to 4 years**

after high school

## DEMAND

**Moderate**

job outlook

## LICENCE NEEDED

**No**

anyone can do it

## WHERE YOU WORK

**Home, publishers, agencies, newsrooms, freelance**

## How you get there

- 1 High school** Now  
Read constantly and write badly on purpose. Submit to the school magazine and to teen literary journals. Finishing things is the skill.
- 2 Get published somewhere small** Any time from 16  
Literary magazines, local papers, online outlets. Most pay little or nothing, and they build the record an agent will read.
- 3 A degree, or paid writing work** 0 to 4 years  
English, journalism or anything that makes you read hard books. Many working authors instead take a job that pays them to write, in marketing, journalism or technical writing.
- 4 Finish a manuscript** 1 to 5 years  
The real gate. A complete, revised novel or nonfiction proposal is what you query agents with. Most people never get here.
- 5 Agent, then publisher** Months to years  
Query literary agents. An agent sells the book to a publisher and takes a percentage. Or skip both and self-publish.

## Pros and cons

- + No gatekeeping degree, no license, start at 15
- + Work from anywhere, on your own schedule
- + The thing you make outlives you
- Income is unpredictable and often small for years
- Rejection is constant and mostly unexplained
- No benefits, no paid leave, no pension unless you build one

## Good to know

### You own the copyright the second you write it

Under United States law, copyright exists as soon as an original work is fixed in a tangible form. You do not have to register it, mail it to yourself or add a symbol. Registration matters later, because you can...

### An advance is a loan against your own sales

A publisher pays an advance up front, then keeps every royalty dollar until that advance is paid back. Plenty of books never earn out, which means the author never sees a royalty check beyond the advance. T...

## Optional boosts

Copywriting and content. Technical writing. Ghostwriting. Teaching.

### Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Writers and Authors (27-3043.00)  
The Authors Guild  
Association of Writers and Writing Programs  
United States Copyright Office: what is copyright

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/author>



Scan for the full clicker