

Using the Internet for...

Writing



Using the Internet for **Writing**

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Lifesteps offers you a range of online and printed guides. Written by staff from Irish public libraries, each guide contains easy to follow, step by step explanations of how to use the Internet to achieve a specific goal or 'life step'.

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Note: words in red appear in the glossary at the end of this module.

Introduction

One of the many benefits of the **Internet** is the new forum it presents for writers, and particularly for those beginning to write. There are a large number of **online** magazines, literary journals and **websites**, available to anyone with an **Internet connection**. As a result, people with an interest in any aspect of creative writing such as poetry, short stories, genre fiction, and novels, have access to websites that cater for their interests. Whatever your literary bent there is bound to be a website (or more likely, many websites) that will be of interest to you.

Prior to the advent of the Internet, aspiring writers were constrained to submitting to print publications. Due to the costs involved in establishing and running a print publication, the number of such magazines, especially in a small country like Ireland, were, and continue to be, relatively few. It was rare, then, for new writers to have their work published and commented upon. The Internet, however, by virtue of its ubiquity, its 'borderless' nature and the relatively low costs of establishing and maintaining websites, provides a particularly apt environment for such publications. That this is the case is evident in the number of such magazines in existence. Due to the interactive potential of the Internet, many of these sites provide areas, such as **bulletin boards** for example, whereby people can comment upon your work. All of this means that people beginning to write can derive experience, useful criticism and gain in confidence, as their work is displayed and commented upon. Some print publications also have an online presence, where a selection or all of the content of the printed material is made available on the Internet. Many of these websites offer writing tips and suggestions, and some time spent browsing the Internet can be extremely rewarding.

In this guide we will examine how to submit some creative writing to a website, and we will suggest some websites that should serve as a starting point to your own browsing.

The Internet has become a great source of information about writers. There are an ever-increasing number of websites devoted to authors. Whoever your favourite writer, no matter how obscure, is bound to be the subject of any number of websites. In fact, if the author in question is living, they are likely to have their own 'official' site. The purpose of this guide is also to show how to find information about authors, to suggest a number of websites and to provide some examples of how to do this.

After completing this guide you will be able to find and submit your creative writing to websites as well as read examples of creative writing by others online. You will also know how to find information about your favourite authors and books.

Need to Know

A basic knowledge of the Internet and PC is required.

Need to Have

A PC, an Internet connection, and some creative writing. In most cases an email account is a requirement.

Related Guides

Internet Basics – This will cover the ‘need to know’ requirement above.

Research – Using the Internet for research as a research aid.

Shopping – This provides useful information and tips concerning online payment.

Quick Guide

Writing

If you have been writing and you are interested in taking the next step towards publishing this work, the Internet provides ample opportunity. The following is a quick guide to this process, which will be expanded upon in the Step-by-Step section of the guide.

1. Use Google or another **search engine** to find the sites you want. Search terms such as ‘online creative writing’ or ‘literary magazines’ will yield the best results. If you already know the address for the site, type in the **URL** in the address bar.

2. Spend some time exploring the site, find out the requirements regarding submissions, e.g. length of work, thematic requirements, etc. Read some examples of the kind of work published.
3. Most sites will require that you register with them. This is generally a free, straightforward process that involves filling in an online form.
4. Submit work, making sure that you have checked for grammatical and other errors. It will not, in almost all cases, be possible to correct published work, and indeed work containing grammatical errors, may not be published.
5. If you want to participate in **bulletin board** discussions, read a selection of previous conversations first, to familiarise yourself with the type of feedback submitted.
6. Follow instructions and participate in discussions.

Reading

The Internet is a way to access information about writers, books and all things literary. The following 'Quick Guide' provides a starting point for your Internet browsing. Detailed information and instruction is provided in the 'Worked Example' section of the guide.

1. Using a search engine (for example Google www.google.ie) enter the name of the author, book or subject you are interested in.
2. Read over the list of results and select the most relevant.
3. Time spent browsing through a number of the returned sites is usually worthwhile.
4. For a free and excellent resource try the Guardian Unlimited website, www.guardian.co.uk
5. Browse their list of authors or use their search facility in the 'Books' section.

Step-by-Step Guide

Writing

Tip: Due to the plethora of sites that publish creative writing, it can be difficult to find the most relevant sites using search engines. The best way of locating sites is using the links sections of the websites of places like the Irish Writers' Centre (www.writerscentre.ie). The links section on the site we focus on first is also extensive. We have also provided a [links](#) section at the end of this guide.

The first site we will look at is Scriobh.com



Scriobh.com (www.scriobh.com) is an Irish site that publishes online writing (short stories, poetry and novel excerpts) as well as providing discussion and bulletin board services. The site is free for first time contributors, very easy to use and regularly updated. With an extensive links section it provides a good place to begin your online writing.

Enter www.scriobh.com in your address bar.

Having arrived at Scriobh.com the first step is to browse the material already published on the site. There are a number of ways to access content here:

Select a name from the list under new authors or select the 'full listing of authors'.



Rather than only printing once-off pieces, this site gives you an area, allowing you to develop a portfolio of published online material. Other users can then read this material and comment using the bulletin board.

Before submitting your guide it is important to read the site's conditions. Click on 'Join Scriobh' for details of the site's requirements.

Having read the terms and conditions you can begin the submission process. Make sure your work is accessible to you (i.e. stored on your PC, or on a floppy disk or CD that is already in your PC) before you begin the upload process.

Click on the link 'Click here to have your work put online' or 'Become a Scriobh.com featured writer'.

Click on '**Browse**', locate the required file on your PC and double click on this to upload.

At this point you can upload another file or click on '**Continue**'.

At this stage you must fill in the form before completing the process. Once again click '**Continue**' and complete the form.

You have now submitted your work. This site is updated regularly and you should not have to wait too long to find out whether your work has been accepted.

If your work is accepted you will then become a featured Scriobh.com writer, and if you wish you will be able to receive opinions/criticism of your work from other readers/writers.

Bulletin Board



The bulletin board on Scriobh.com provides a forum for discussion, for comment and acts as a useful resource for writers. Of particular interest is the 'Writers wanted' folder, which is used by organisations and magazines calling for submissions and announcing short story competitions.

The majority of websites and online magazines that publish creative writing operate in a similar manner. There are a large number of sites available and as mentioned the best way of finding these is by using the links/resources pages of websites like Scriobh.com

Other resources

As mentioned the Internet provides access to a vast number of sites aimed at both beginners and experienced writers. For poets, Poetry Ireland's website (www.poetryireland.ie) should be the first stop. Poetry Ireland's primary publication *Poetry Ireland Review* is Ireland's poetry journal of record. While the journal does not publish its content, or accept submissions online, the Poetry Ireland website does provide essential information for Irish poets and those interested in Irish poetry. As well as giving submission information for their own publications, the site contains advice on everything from submitting your work to magazines, to writing poetry. The 'Resources' section, accessible from the **navigation bar** at the top of the home page, is particularly informative.



The Irish Writers' Centre's website, <http://www.writerscentre.ie>, is another excellent resource for Irish writers. The website provides information about their creative writing courses, upcoming events, competitions and also has a good resources and links section.



Worked Examples

Reading

While the Internet provides increased opportunities for developing writers, it also provides a host of material on, about and by existing authors. Fans in their thousands have built and maintain sites dedicated to their favourite authors, resulting in interesting browsing. As there is a large volume of material, most of which is done on an amateur, or 'hobby' basis there is a vast difference in quality. Patience therefore is needed, but perseverance is generally rewarded.

Guardian Unlimited, the Guardian newspaper's online presence is an excellent resource. Containing everything from reviews, to interviews to opinion pieces the site provides access to information concerning a wide variety of authors.

Click on www.guardian.co.uk and click on books from the navigation bar at the top of the page.



As can be seen there is an extensive range of options to choose from; from the day's articles that appear in the centre of the page, to reviews, extracts and special reports. For the purpose of this guide we will select '**Authors**' from the top of the page.

The author's are grouped alphabetically. As 2005 sees the 400th anniversary of *Don Quixote* from the 'C' group, click on '**Cervantes**'.



On the Cervantes page, we have a brief biography and links to all the articles related to Cervantes that appear on the site. These are arranged in order of the most recent.

Another useful feature on this section of the site is the search function.

Click on '**Search**' and enter the author or subject that you require in the space provided, in this case Samuel Beckett.

It is also possible to customise your search by limiting it to within a certain time period or to reviews only (by clicking on the dropdown arrow in the box that displays '**All articles**').

From the results we can see that there are 1040 articles or reviews matching our search term. The first twelve are displayed on the first page. To move onto the next page click on '**Next page**' at the foot of this page:



There is a lot of content in this section of the site, and is well suited to casual browsing. To aid you in this the navigation bar remains at the top of each page. To return to the 'Books' home page, simply click '**Home**' on the top right.

Today in Literature

<http://www.todayinliterature.com>

This is a vibrant, very informative site that provides daily features on selected authors, books or literary events of relevance to the particular date. Once you have registered with the site you will receive an email each day, informing you of the featured articles. The articles themselves form a sizeable archive, which you can search through. The site also provides autobiographical details and useful links for all authors.

You can sign up for a free service, for which you will receive daily emails and access to a limited amount of content, or a subscription service with greater levels of access.

Authors

To locate information on individual authors on the web it is advisable to use a search engine. In this case I have used Google to search for information on Paul Auster. Although there are a lot of search returns displayed, the most useful are generally among the first returns. However, browsing through the list is worthwhile, especially if you are looking for material of a more academic nature. In this case we have chosen www.paulauster.co.uk.



This is the first return from the Google search and is billed as 'the definitive Paul Auster site'. This site is updated on a regular basis. This information is given generally at the bottom of the first page of a website or, as in this case, on the front page in the form of a news banner, as is shown here.

To enter the site, simply click on the author's image.

Once inside it is evident, as can be seen above, that there is a large amount of information contained on the author and his work. There is also a news section and an interesting [FAQs](#), which includes contributions from Paul Auster's UK publishers Faber and Faber.

To find information from one of the sections simply click on the heading, in this case 'New York Trilogy' under the 'Fiction' section.

The next page presents a brief introduction and a selection of links related to the novel. To access these links click on the arrow at the left of the white box containing the words '**Select a link.**' Upon clicking the arrow a list of '**dropdown**' options appear. Select the option you require, in this case a piece about the volume "Ghosts" on 'Stillman's Maze'. You are then brought to the relevant article.

Glossary

- Address bar:** The long, narrow window at the top of the browser, which shows the web address (URL) of the site you are currently viewing. In Internet Explorer, the word 'Address' appears just to the left of the window. The address bar is automatically filled when you visit a web page. Alternatively, you can type in the address of a web page you wish to visit, and click the 'Go' button at the right-hand end of the window, to view that web page.
- Bulletin board:** An interactive section found in some websites that permits individuals to post online comments on a topic. Each bulletin board is usually based on a particular theme or topic (e.g. discussion group on a particular author, news story, sport).
- Email:** **(Electronic mail)**
Email is a service that sends messages across the Internet from one human user to another. Like a letter, email is person-to-person and it stores messages until they are read.
- FAQ:** **(Frequently Asked Questions)**
A FAQ is a list of questions and their answers, which are commonly asked. These are published on the website of a product or service, so that the same question is not asked of the supplier, over and over again. A good example of a FAQ, which focuses on web security, is at <http://www.w3.org/Security/Faq/www-security-faq.html>
- Internet:** A large collection of computers, connected together to allow them to share information with one another.
- Internet connection:** An Internet connection is the means through which you can access the Internet. For a connection, you usually require a computer or laptop, a telephone line, and often a modem.
- Link:** A link, or hyperlink, is a part of a web page that, if clicked with a mouse, opens a different web page. Links are usually shown in blue and underlined on a web page.

- Navigation bar:** The navigation bar in a website provides a list of links to the various sections of that particular website.
- Online:** A word used as shorthand for 'on the Internet' or 'connected to the Internet'.
- Register:** To register means to create an identity online. For many services, it is important that the website knows your name, address, phone number, etc. For example, if buying a book in an online bookshop, you need to provide this information. The online bookshop then records your details in a database of customers, which it later uses to post out the book to you. Registration is usually completed by filling in an online form, with fields for name, address and other information.
- Search:** Searching is the process of finding a particular word or topic within a website or on the Internet. When you search, you type in one or more words which describe what you are searching for, and a search engine program looks up a database and shows a list of links to pages that may match what you are looking for – you have to type in the words to search for. Searches vary in scope – many websites allow you to search the site and all its pages; bigger search engines such as Google allow you to search the whole Internet. Typing CTRL-F lets you search the web page you are looking at.
- Search engine:** A program running on a web server computer that creates and maintains a directory of web pages on the Internet. The engine has a web page with a form; you type in words describing what you are looking for; the engine looks up its directory and sends back a list of web pages that it thinks will fit your search criteria.
- URL:** The Uniform Resource Locator, or address, of a web page. Like the phone number of a particular person, this is unique and goes directly to the web page with which it is associated.

Web page: A web page is a computer file which typically includes text, pictures, links and perhaps forms. The web page also includes instructions to the browser about how the page should look on the screen (colours, layout, etc.).

Website: A website is a collection of web pages which displays information on a particular topic. Common types of websites include company websites (information about the company), online shops (where you buy goods and services and pay by credit card) and personal websites (where individuals share their interests). A website may consist of just one page of information, but will usually contain several pages, all linked together. All the pages in a website usually share the same 'domain' name. For example, all the pages in the large online shop 'Amazon' have an address (URL) that starts with 'www.amazon.com'.

Links

Lifesteps.ie:	www.lifesteps.ie
Scriobh.com:	www.scriobh.com
Irish Writers Centre:	www.writerscentre.ie
Today in Literature:	www.todayinliterature.com
Soundeye:	www.soundeye.org
Poetry.com:	www.poetry.com
Guardian Unlimited:	www.guardian.co.uk
Paul Auster:	www.paulauster.co.uk
Fish Publishing:	www.fishpublishing.com
Red Ink Networks:	www.redinknetworks.com
Munster Literature Centre:	www.munsterlit.ie
Mslexia:	www.mslexia.co.uk
Virtual Writer	www.virtualwriter.net

Final Notes

As we have seen, the Internet is an ever-increasing resource for writers and readers alike. Whatever your interest it is likely that you will find something of use on the web. For the best results, whether you are looking for a place to showcase your work, or looking for information on your favourite author, take some time and use the links sections of the websites you find to point you in the right direction.