

Helpful Information for New Writers:

Please print and send to your any incarcerated writers interested in sending in submissions.

Hello New Writers!

I am a former television journalist with decades of experience working for CBS News, CNN, PBS and CNBC. I developed an interest in prison reform while producing documentaries about crime for CBS's show *48 Hours*. Michael Hiestand is a former columnist for USA TODAY who has written for many national publications. And we have a handful of New York University college students helping out as well.

We started Prison Writers because we all believe a crucial voice is missing in the prison reform debate – the voice of the people who live behind bars. Our mission is twofold. One, we want to build wider awareness of what it's like to live in prison, for people on the outside. The more people know about *the realities of prison*, the more people who'll *believe in prison reform*. And two, we're giving people who live on the inside a chance to be heard, a chance to be part of the national dialogue on reforming prisons. *What happens in prison doesn't stay in prison – anymore*. We want to get the truth OUT.

But there's more to it than that. The better writer someone is, the more doors that will open up for him or her. We all have millions of ideas in our heads, but they're not worth much if we can't express them in a way that makes people listen. And writing is the best way to practice that; you learn to organize your thoughts and get them in the right order, you learn when to add colorful examples

or personal touches and, with practice, you learn how to say *more* with less words. The better you get at putting your own thoughts into words, the more confident you'll feel about yourself and your future.

And along the way, we think you will start to feel part of a bigger community – the Prison Writers Family. You'll also learn how to meet deadlines and set goals and expectations for yourself that you can meet. And that, my friends, is how we think we can help you the most. That's the real reason we started PrisonWriters.com – for you guys.

So what to write about?

We're interested in personal stories about something that happened to you in prison or that you witnessed firsthand. Let's leave the research-based reporting to the academics and the policy experts. We'd much rather you wrote about what *you know*, because only you – as an incarcerated individual living it – can offer the authentic points of view that people on the outside don't have and never will, without hearing from you.

GETTING STARTED:

If someone asked you to think of 5 things that happened to you in prison *that you'll never forget* ... what would they be? If you think it makes a good story about prison, consider writing a story about it. It could be something horrible and shameful (that sheds light on the violence in prison) or it could be something hilarious and bizarre that could only happen in prison. How about telling us one of those stories?

The best way to start is with an amazing story that really happened to you or in front of you in prison. Write a STORY that's 500-2000 words in length – preferably typed – with a beginning, middle and end. Your writing can be serious, funny or straightforward as long as it's grounded in truth.

TOPICS:

The list below should give you an idea of the *kinds of topics* we're looking for... do you have any personal stories that illustrate any of these topics?

- *Any funny stories* about something weird, bizarre or amusing that has happened in prison.
- How gangs operate in the various prisons you've been in.
- Stories about corruption, theft, abuse or smuggling involving prison staff.
- How prisons create better criminals instead of rehabilitating them.
- What you'd change about prison if you were in charge – and why?
- How a prison program, class or course has helped or changed you – and why?
- What kind of prison programs you WISH were offered – and why?
- *Extra Bonus points for this one! Anything you can write about your crime (assuming you committed one) starting with details of the crime that occurred, what led up to it, regrets, your victims, how you feel about it now – anything.*

WHAT NOT TO WRITE ABOUT:

- The intricate details of your particular case or an explanation of your innocence.
- Something someone else told you about or that you heard second-hand.
- A rant about all the reasons you hate being in prison.
- A rambling essay about a bunch of different things that don't tie together.

TIPS:

- Write about something that really happened to you or that you witnessed firsthand.
- We're not looking for "model prisoners" stories. We're looking for authentic and real. So if the truth is messy, violent or unflattering – don't bother sugar-coating it.
- Include enough visual details so the reader feels like he's almost there watching it.
- No previously published stories will be considered.
- And our apologies, but we're not accepting poetry OR FICTION at this time.
- If you handwrite your story, please please make the writing easy to read. Avoid tiny handwriting or hard to read handwriting.
- *Show vs. Tell*: Let's say you want to write about how prisons teach incarcerated people to be better criminals instead of rehabilitating them. Rather than just telling us that in a general way, think of a true story that describes one particular prisoner or situation or event or day or conversation that you think *shows us*.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- If we like your submission, we'll be back in touch with editing suggestions – or, if it's good enough to publish, we'll send you your payment (\$10) for publishing it!
- Don't forget to write your name on your story! No pen names or Anonymous authors allowed!
- Also, include the address you'd like us to send your payment, *if we accept* one of your submissions.
- Payment will be in the form of a money order, so send us the name of a friend or family member if you're not allowed to receive money orders.
- Please include a short bio and a photo with your next letter in case we accept your submission.
- Photos will not be returned unless specifically requested.

- Writing submissions will not be returned unless specifically requested and if a SASE is included.

Then have them send stories to:

| New Writer

| Prison Writers

| PO Box 1430

| New York, NY 10276

Thanks for your time and good luck!

Cheers!

Loen Kelley

The Prison Writers Team