

Industry snapshot: What do we know about the work of writing graduates?

The 2013 Australian Graduate Survey collected data from 4,360 graduates from Communication and Media Studies degrees. Data was collected between four and six months after graduation.

Population

Data was collected from graduates with the following characteristics:

| Characteristic | Number | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Male | 1,367 | 31.4 |
| Female | 2,993 | 68.6 |
| Median age | 23 | - |
| First language English | 3,445 | 79.0 |
| First language Other | 793 | 18.2 |
| Graduate from undergraduate degree | 3,576 | 82.0 |
| Graduate from postgraduate degree | 737 | 16.9 |

Overall outcomes

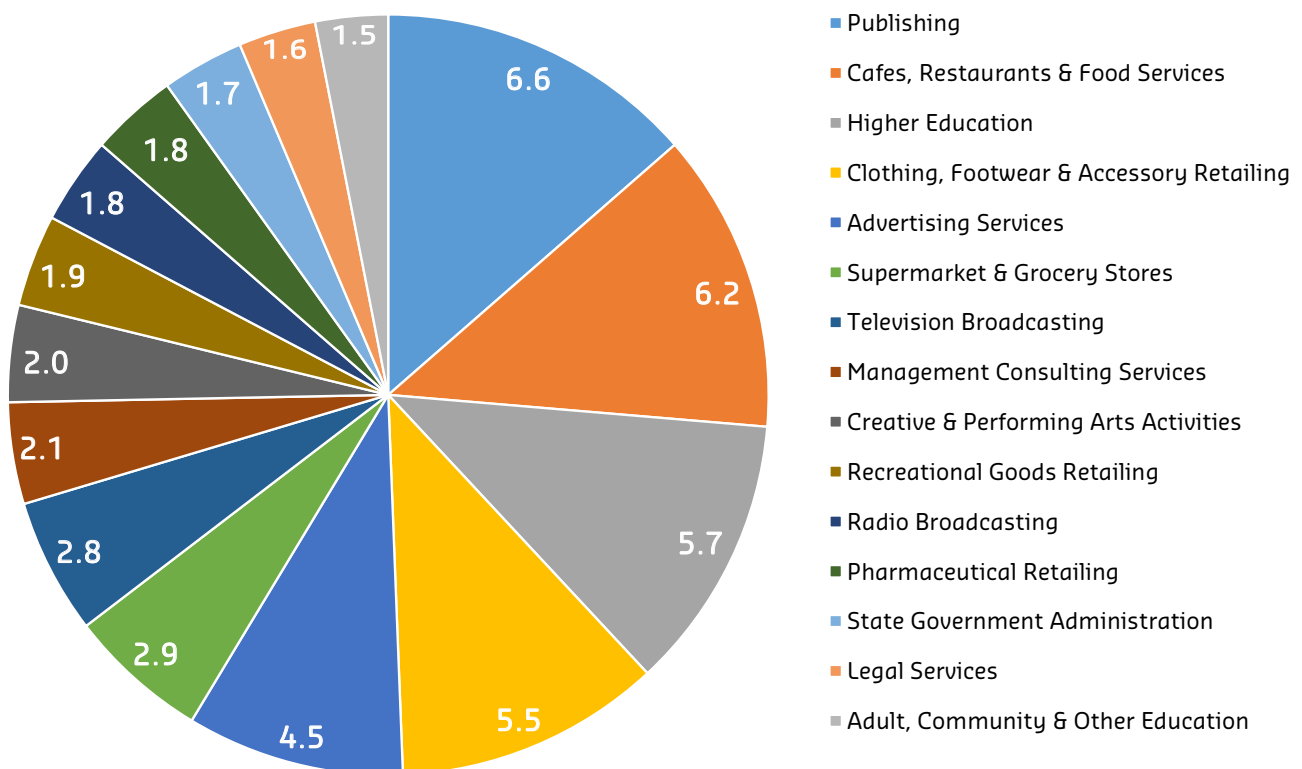
| Status | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------|------------|
| Full-time work | 1,567 | 36.4 |
| Part-time work | 1,625 | 37.8 |
| Self-employed | 261 | 8.4 |
| Studying full-time | 742 | 17.4 |
| Studying part-time | 211 | 4.8 |

Overall, 36.4 per cent of graduates were working full-time, 37.8 per cent were working part-time and 8.4 per cent were self-employed. In relation to studying, 17.4 per cent were studying full-time and 4.8 per cent were studying part-time.

Employment outcomes

Of the 3,192 graduates who were working, whether part-time, full-time, or self-employed, the largest area of employment was publishing, accounting for 6.6 per cent of graduates. Other graduates were distributed across multiple employment areas.

The chart below illustrates just those areas in which at least 1.5 per cent of graduates were employed:



Further study

Of the 910 graduates who were undertaking further study, 44.7 per cent were studying in the field of creative arts (including communication and media studies) and 22.9 per cent were in the field of society and culture.

More information

For more information on the outcomes of graduates from Writing degrees, please visit [QILT](#) and www.graduatecareers.com.au.

What is the broader employment context?

Writing programs have undergone an international expansion since the 1990s. However, there still seems to be little understanding about the reality of earning a living as a writer (Bennett & Robertson, 2015). Whilst officially we know very little about the destinations of professional writing graduates in Australia (Baverstock, 2007), we know anecdotally that graduates work across associated professions and industries including public relations, advertising, communications, government, information technology, publishing, administration and journalism.

Australian labour force data in related occupations suggest that employment levels in these sectors are fairly static (Figure 1), and yet the number of students and graduates in Australia has more than doubled since the late 1990s (Australian Government, 2013). It is likely, therefore, that a growing proportion of writing graduates need to work in multiple concurrent roles and/or both within and beyond traditional destinations.

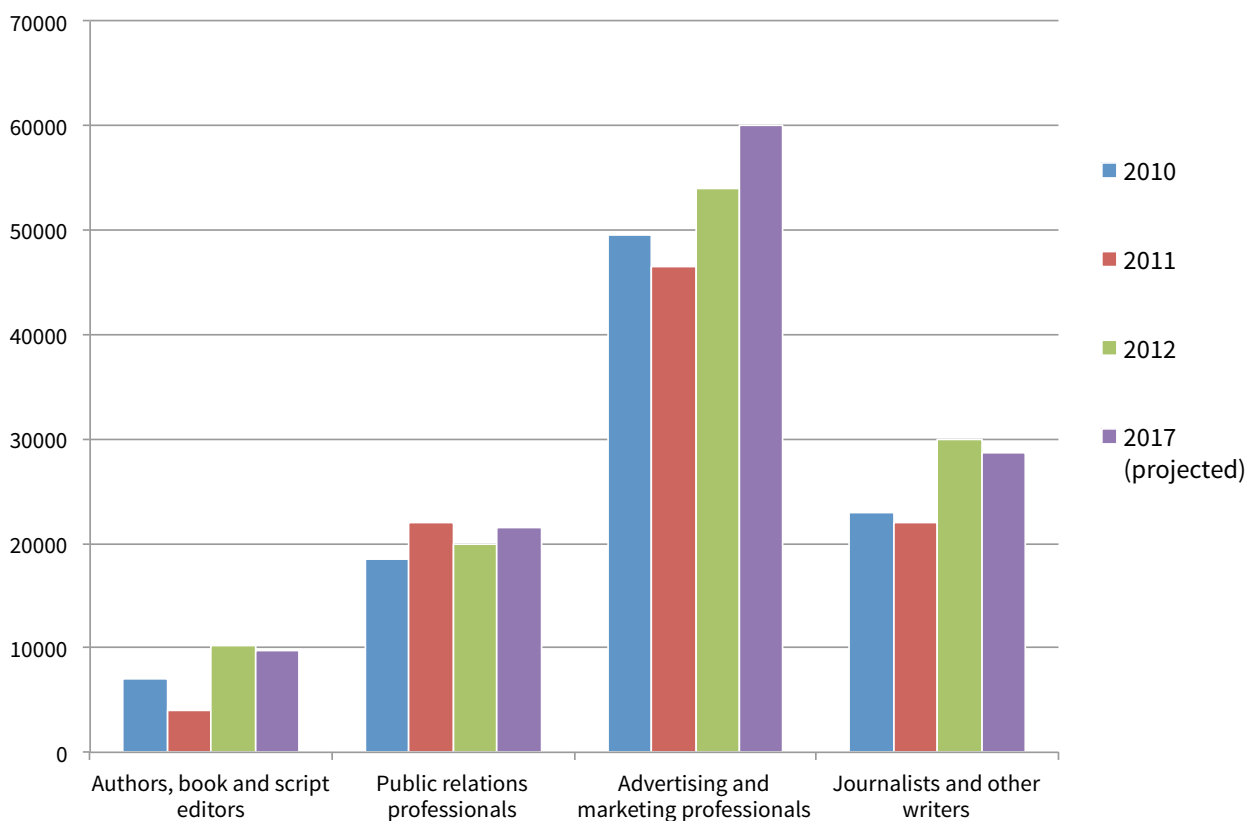


Figure 1: Historical/projected ABS Labour (1,000s) from joboutlook.gov.au

Writing graduates who hold multiple concurrent roles will also tend to self-manage their careers and to create their own work opportunities through reputation building and networking (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Bridgstock, 2009).

This often means moving across the boundaries of employers, clients and task orientations, between different employment arrangements, and between traditional, online and digital environments (Daskalaki, 2010) into roles which in some cases did not exist five years earlier (Bennett & Robinson, 2015).

Things to think about

1. Writers are likely to cross the boundaries of employment several times during their careers. This means that students need to learn the concept of life-long learning.
2. In most workplaces, writers must produce texts amidst distractions such as phones, disruptive co-workers and writing deadlines. These conditions can be vastly different than university, so students benefit from early and regular industry exposure.
3. Writing graduates often cite lack of experience with producing texts other than those that are part of academic requirements. Effective writers must quickly adapt to the style, length and content of texts required. For the successful accomplishment of writing tasks in both higher education and professional settings, situation specific types of writing knowledge need to be operationalised, and links made between general and specific knowledge (Beaufort, 1999).
4. Publications form the basis of a writer's career or reputation. Janssen (1998) goes as far as proposing that the literary "status" of writers is strongly dependent on the critical attention given to their writing in daily and weekly press. In other words, being considered a writer depends on publications rather than on academic qualifications or other formal criteria. At the student level, publications and other examples of writing can be illustrated through a digital portfolio
5. Graduates need to be able to interact with others in order to manage team-based work and professional networks. These skills can be developed in class, and in part-time work and volunteer roles, as well as during industry placements relating to writing.
6. Janssen (1998) notes that writers who are active in several areas may have a better chance of attracting the critics' attention than those who publish only in book form. A similar argument could be made for attracting the attention of potential employers and publishers.
7. Duhé and Zukowski's (1997) analysis of the broadcast curriculum found that individuals with hiring authority favour a polished résumé with journalism skills over an academic degree. Similarly, television news broadcasters looked for experience over education. However, graduates who can illustrate both will be best placed to find work.
8. Robertson (2011) reviewed employer expectations of professional writing and publishing graduates and concluded that employers of all sizes and in all industries require graduates with high-level generic skills.
9. Robertson (2011) also predicted a rise in demand for generalist communicators and writers, and for highly skilled communications graduates able to meet the demands of digital publishing, social media and other developing technologies. Specifically, "on-line writing, editing and publishing skills are key skills which will be in demand in the future in Australia and internationally" (p.2).

These studies highlight the need to ensure that students have sufficient industry experience and that they are able to evidence their work in each setting. In line with this, a [toolkit](#) has been developed containing [employABILITY resources](#) designed to help educators to address the themes of self and career literacy.

Further resources

[Capstone case study](#) from Curtin University (Professional Writing Program)

[Research report](#) on employer expectations (Rachel Robertson, 2011)

[ePortfolio summary slides](#) from the Curtin project

[Design your future](#), a Developing EmployABILITY resource

[EmployABILITY Resources](#) to engage students with thinking about identity and employability

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