



# PSA

The Professional Home  
of Communicators  
Who Help Leaders Lead

## SPEECHWRITERS SPEAK

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The State of Speechwriting 2023: An Executive Summary

*A Survey by the Professional Speechwriters Association*

## Dear Professional Speechwriter:

Ten years ago, the nascent Professional Speechwriters Association held its first World Conference. The same year, the PSA conducted its first member survey, asking speechwriters several dozen questions about the nature of their work, and how they felt about it.

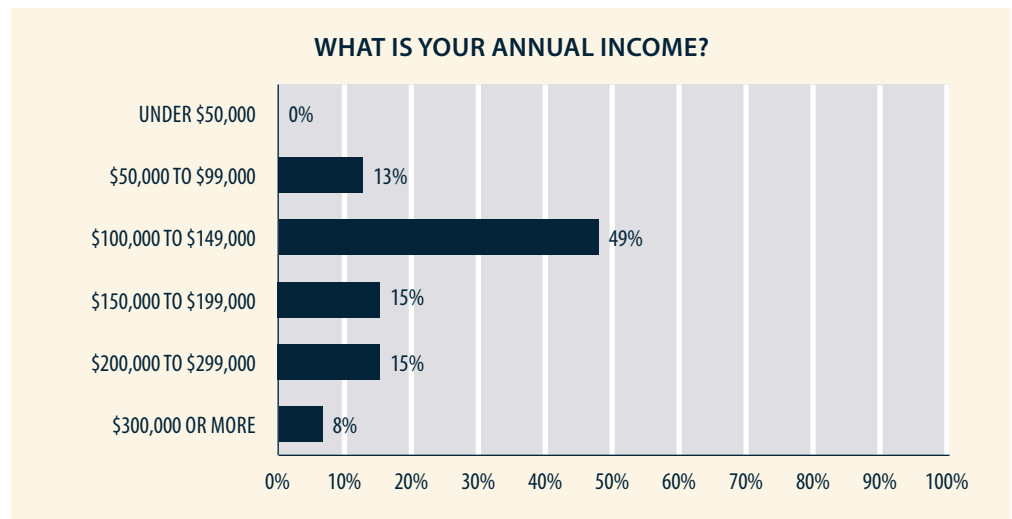
This year, in the lead-up to our 10th annual World Conference, we asked speechwriters many of those same questions again, to assess what has changed for speechwriters, what has remained the same—and where the business might be headed in the next decade.

Here are the most interesting findings, and some of the most thought-provoking comments from respondents to this anonymous survey.

First things first:

### Speechwriting salaries are higher.

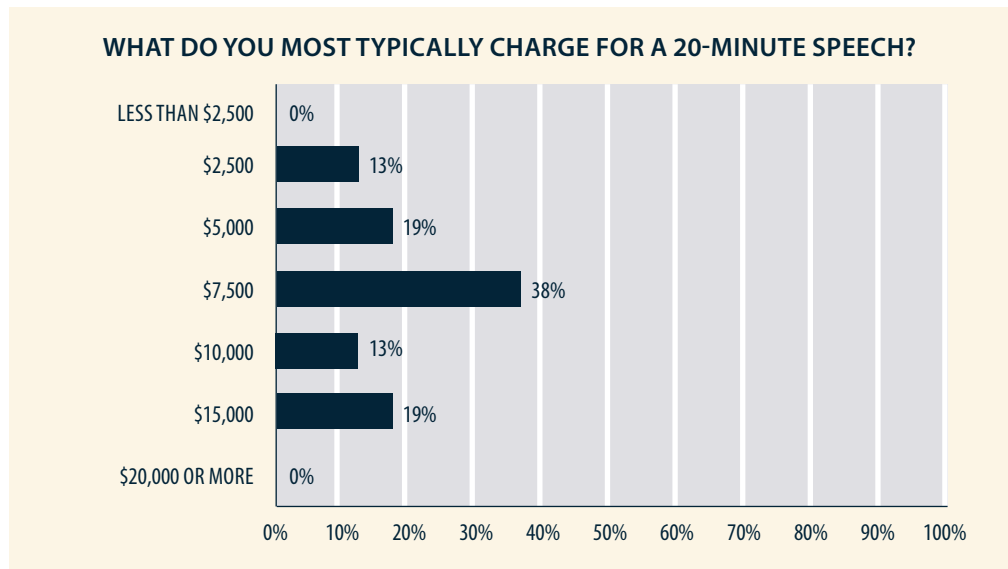
This year, only 13% of in-house speechwriters reported making under \$100K per year; that number was 37% 10 years ago. These days, 49% of speechwriters say they make between \$100K-\$150K, and 8% make more than \$300K.



## Independent speechwriters are charging more, and making more.

On the lower end: Ten years ago, 14% of independents said they charge less than \$2,500 for a speech; this year, no one gave that answer. And 10 years ago, 36% said they charged about \$2,500 a speech. Now, only 13% said that was typical.

On the higher end: Ten years ago, 14% said they charge about \$7,500. This year, 38% said they charge that amount. And 10 years ago only one of the respondents said they charged \$10K or more. This year? 32% said they charge \$10K or more—with the majority of those actually charging \$15K.



And asked what they consider a reasonable revenue goal for the year, speechwriters a decade ago answered an average of \$140K/year. This year? \$220K.

## Organizations are spending more on executive communications ...

Ten years ago 14% of speechwriters said their companies spent more than \$1 million total on salaries for speechwriting and leadership comms folks; that number was up to 30% this year—with over a third of those firms spending over \$2 million.

## ... but speechwriting may be on the wane in the corporate sector.

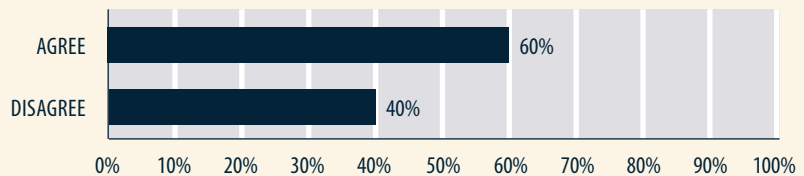
When we first surveyed PSA members a decade ago, 30% of them were in corporate speechwriting jobs. This year, when we surveyed PSA members (and recent ex-members) only 13% were corporate folks. University scribes and independent speechwriters each made up about a third of respondents, with government speechwriters at about 20%.

A corporate member remarked, "I think you have to back away from calling this the 'speechwriting' profession and instead speak to it as 'executive communications.' In fact I think this professional association hurts itself by calling it PSA, and instead should work in exec comms. Thought Leadership, OpEds, internal/external comms, social media and speechwriting are all part of the exec comms functions. I hardly ever see job postings for speechwriters on LinkedIn; they are all exec comms, of which speechwriting is a small part."

### **In-house speechwriters still struggle to get sufficient access to their clients.**

Ten years ago, 70% of respondents agreed with the statement, "You have sufficient access to your principal client to serve him or her with excellent leadership communications." After an apparently temporary documented dramatic increase in client access during the permacrisis year of COVID, George Floyd and January 6, the pendulum seems to be swinging back: This year, only 60% said they had sufficient access to their principal.

**AGREE OR DISAGREE: YOU HAVE SUFFICIENT ACCESS TO YOUR PRINCIPAL CLIENT IN ORDER TO SERVE HIM OR HER WITH EXCELLENT LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS.**



(Access is not such a problem with independent speechwriters, more than 80% of whom reported sufficient access, both 10 years ago, and now.)

### **Does gender impact a speechwriting career?**

Ten years ago, 40% of speechwriters said they thought gender had very negatively or somewhat negatively affected the careers of female speechwriters; this year, that number was 30%. The comments in response to this question were more illuminating than the statistics.

One respondent identified herself as "a woman, who needed to build up a lot of confidence to get where I am now." She wrote: "I still feel [I'm] questioning myself much more than a male speechwriter might. Do I charge too much money or too little for a speech? Would a male speechwriter get away with charging more for the same work? Would he have put in as much effort as I have? Perhaps males are more pragmatic and therefore more efficient. Having said that, I feel that my client is very happy to have a woman speechwriter."

“The majority of communications professionals in my organization are female,” another woman speechwriter wrote. “There is a tendency to view our roles as not having a strategic component—we are often treated like typewriters. Myself and other women in these roles have discussed that we feel boxed in while other more male dominated fields (finance, academic administration) make decisions without the benefit of a communications perspective.”

“The big shift happened when I had children,” wrote a third. “Corporate America is not kind to women with caring responsibilities and CEOs want you 24/7. My male predecessor who didn’t have kids was given so much latitude to work remote. The whole team was shocked to see how differently I was treated. Ultimately I became independent because it was too stressful getting yelled at on the rare occasion I needed to go to a school event/pick up the kids.”

Wrote a male speechwriter, “Been passed over in the past by female hiring managers; comms is a heavily female profession. Being a white male is not the advantage it once was; in some cases, it has been a negative.”

And another: “I think that, because I’m a confident white man with a Ph.D., I probably earn the respect of principals a little more quickly and easily.”

### **What do you consider to be the biggest threat to your livelihood as a professional speechwriter?**

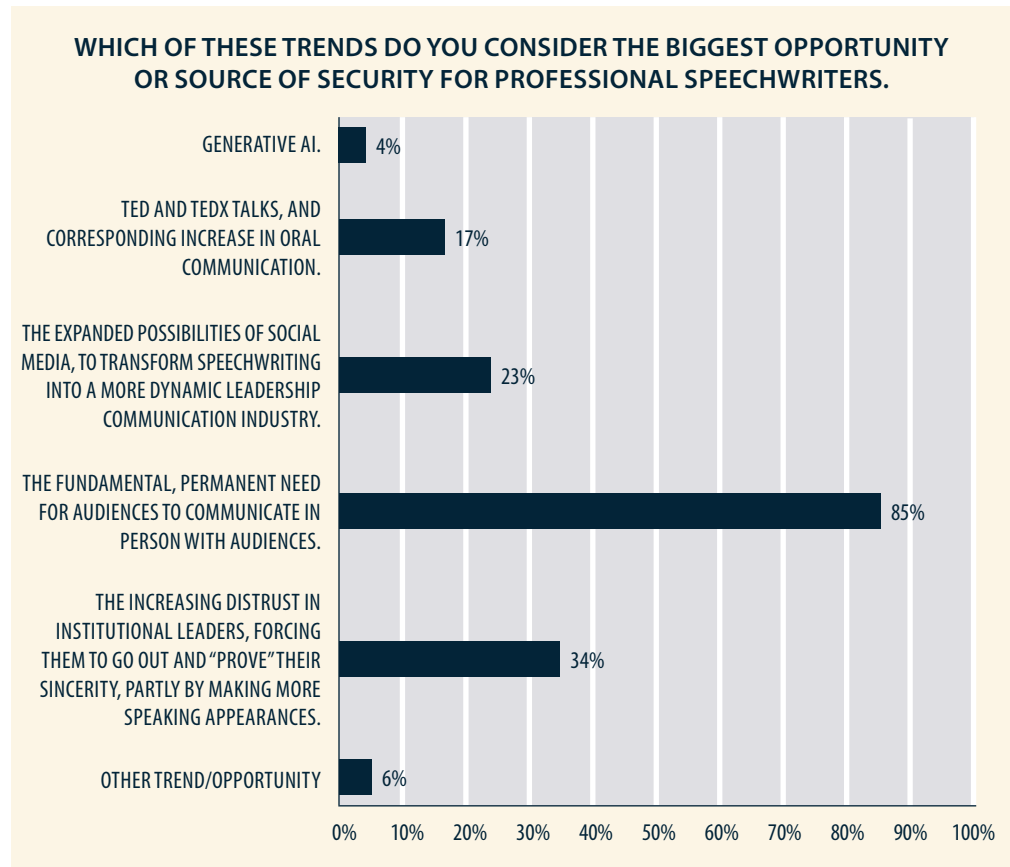
Now, just as 10 years ago, speechwriters said they worried about speeches being replaced by more informal communication forums, like fireside chats and employee all-hands meetings. Or as one speechwriter complained, “Excited utterances and spontaneous speeches being confused for actual exec comms.”

Meanwhile, oral communication is being deemphasized in general, especially in the corporate world. Once the core component of a standard executive communication operation, speeches are one of many means—LinkedIn, and other social media are taking up more space—to get a leader and his or her ideas across.

The one issue that current speechwriters said they were worried about this year that didn’t come up a decade ago, of course: Generative AI.

## What trends do you consider a source of job security for professional speechwriters?

Fully 85% of speechwriters chose, “The fundamental, permanent need for leaders to communicate in person with audiences.” A distant second place at 34% was, “The increasing distrust in institutional leaders, forcing them to go out and ‘prove’ their sincerity, primarily through speaking appearances.”



One speechwriter said the profession will remain essential due to: “Executives’ need for focus, structure, and convincing arguments in their communications ... regardless of whether they’re delivered as a speech, in writing, informally or whatever. Speechwriters (and the speechwriting process) are especially well suited to fill this need for a thought partner.”

## Would you recommend a speechwriting career to your kids or other young people?

This year as 10 years ago, the responses of PSA members to this question were overwhelmingly “yes,” and many of them enthusiastic. This year, with a common caveat, and a dissent.

The caveat is well expressed in this comment: “I would caution them that

speechwriting—by itself —most likely won't be enough to sustain a career. You would also need broader ExComm skills (developing integrated ExComm strategies, message platform development, traditional and social media skills, leadership development skills). And I would tell them to be prepared to either: 1) Change organizations or 2) Move into a broader role eventually."

And the dissent: "My concerns about AI are strong enough that I'm not sure I would recommend a career where writing is the core skillset."

But the majority of speechwriters sounded like this: "100%. It's a wonderful, intellectually enriching way to make a living for people with a passion for writing and a low-maintenance ego."

And this: "Yes. Speechwriting gives freedom, flexibility."

And this: "Yes! There's nothing like hearing someone talk passionately and realizing you wrote those words which may have an impact on others."

Lots to digest there—for you, and for the organizers of the Professional Speechwriters Association, whose logo, as you may have noted on the cover of this report, comes with a new tagline that indicates the breadth of the responsibilities of a modern speechwriter, while honoring the rhetorical and oratorical roots of what was once, but is no longer, "the silent profession."



David Murray, Executive Director

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