

## Looking Like a Writer

by Linda Rohrbough

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Perception is everything. I'm a firm believer every job and every place has its own unwritten codes about conduct and dress. I'm fascinated by uncovering those "unwritten rules" to each new place I visit. I'm a second generation Colorado native, but I lived in Los Angeles for nine years. People there told me you can wear anything in LA. That's not true. I had a pair of navy blue, polyester slacks and when I wore them, I had a tough time getting anyone to talk to me. It turns out navy blue and polyester are social no-no's in LA.

One time, I was in my swimsuit laying on Zuma beach in Malibu and a guy walked up to me wearing a flannel shirt, jeans, a brown leather belt and hiking boots. He asked for directions and I said, "You wouldn't happen to be from Colorado?"

He said, "How did you know?"

I'm a genius. Actually, my writer friends say I don't miss much, which leads me to the point of this article. You can look like a writer.

Most writers believe there's not a set way writers dress and present themselves. They talk a lot about working in PJ's and fuzzy slippers (well, the romance writers do) or spending life in a pair of blue jeans. That's all true. But if you want to look like a writer, I'll let you in on a secret. There's a uniform. And it's pretty specific. It consists of a jacket or blazer over jeans. The shirt or blouse doesn't matter and the shoes don't matter. But the jacket matters. And the jeans matter. Another way to state the writer's uniform is "business casual," but with jeans.

Those jeans my grandmother wore when she had to, the ones with the elastic waist and no pockets that only classify as jeans because they're denim -- those are out. If you need some room, jeans that stretch at the sides or the back are fine, but you want jean pockets, like the ones on Levi's.

The look is, "I'm giving a nod to business by throwing a suit jacket over what I usually wear writing, which is something laid back and comfortable." Note I said comfort, not poverty -- no grunge look. The jeans can be faded, look lived in and that's good, but patched holes don't get it.

A friend of mine was arguing with me about this, saying I didn't know what I was talking about, until she went to hear Robin Cook speak the year before he died. And sure enough, Cook came out in exactly the wardrobe I'm describing. Ever since, my friend shows up to the writer's group wearing one of her husband's jackets, rolled up at the sleeves, over a pair of jeans.

The other thing a writer always has is a handful of business cards and a pen in the pocket of that jacket. The cards say "writer" someplace on them.

I get argument from new writers about putting "writer" on the card when someone is not yet published. I actually saw a card with "Wants to be a writer" on it. That's not more honest, it's naïve. If you write, you're a writer. You may be a pre-published writer, but you're a writer. So just state it.

Business cards are cheap and easy to come by, so there's no reason not to have them. You don't need to spend more than \$20 to get decent-looking cards. You can buy

the Avery 8871 “clean edge” business cards, 200 to a package, for under \$12. If you’re a new writer, the odds are you won’t give out 200 cards in a year.

The Avery cards print in any laser or ink jet printer. If you get a compatible store-brand, they’ll probably cost less. Whatever brand you get, make sure they’re the clean edge kind, meaning they don’t have a bunch of tiny perforations that leave a ragged edge when the cards are separated. The clean edge cards burst apart, leaving edges that appear as though they’ve been cut. And that’s what you want -- a clean look.

Avery even has Microsoft Word compatible templates for their cards you can download for free from their website. If you don’t know how to use the Avery templates, trade something you can do to another writer who does.

You don’t have to spend a lot of money to be perceived as a professional. But like any job, you want to look like you can deliver the goods. It’s all in the details, the perception, you create.

**Sidebar:**

Avery website with free, downloadable templates for use with Microsoft Word:  
[www.avery.com](http://www.avery.com).

Bio:

*Linda Rohrbough has been writing about the computer industry since 1989 and has more than 5,000 articles and five books to her credit. Her work has been honored three times by the Computer Press Association. She has an agent for a medical non-fiction book she’s writing with her doctor, has finished her first techno-thriller novel, and is working on a second novel. Visit her website [www.PCbios.com](http://www.PCbios.com).*