

100+

FREELANCE WRITING QUESTIONS

ANSWERED

BY CAROL TICE



EDITED BY ANGIE MANSFIELD

100 Freelance Writing Questions Answered

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Introduction

Here's the big thing I've learned, in 7 years of helping freelance writers build their careers through my [Make a Living Writing](#) blog: Freelance writers have a lot of questions.

And no wonder. There's a lot to know, to be a successful freelance writer today, when you can get paid to do everything from tweeting 140 characters to ghostwriting a 200-page, self-published e-book.

The questions still arrive daily in my email inbox, on my voicemail, in blog comments, on Twitter and Facebook.

When writers subscribe to my blog, I ask them to tell me their single biggest obstacle—and often, I get a novel in return. The challenges my readers face, and their drive to learn how to leave the day-job world behind for freelance independence, inspire me to keep on helping them find answers.

In 2011, I created a forum-based community, [Freelance Writers Den](#), to provide an easier way to track all the questions and answers, resources, tips, and advice, to spread the knowledge around faster. It's since grown to over 1,000 members.

But not everyone is a Den member, and the questions kept coming.

Finally, in 2012, I created a blog post where writers could leave questions: [Answers to 100 Freelance Writing Questions—including Yours](#). It received over 270 comments, and became one of my most popular posts ever.

While the post became a useful resource that was even cited by *Writer's Digest*, it soon became a major chore to wade through, looking for the topic you wanted to know about. Meanwhile, I also had dozens of other “mailbag” blog posts I'd written over the years, where I'd answered a single writer question with an entire post.

Recently, I turned to Freelance Writers Den moderator-in-chief and B2B copywriter [Angie Mansfield](#)—who wrangles a lot of questions herself—and asked her to organize years' worth of questions into chapters that would make it easy to find answers to specific common freelance questions. We reviewed, revised, checked links, and made sure answers were still current. This e-book is the result.

The questions each carry the first name of the writer who originally asked me the question, and their last name initial, if it was provided. Some questions were asked in blog comments, anonymously.

If you're wondering, these are all real questions that writers asked me, that you can find somewhere among the 700+ posts on my blog. But we're hoping this book is a lot more convenient way to get the answer you need!

Why 100+ questions? As you'll see, many of these reader questions contain many questions, or are a question with several parts to it. Eventually, we gave up on coming up with an exact count, and stopped at 100.

To avoid repetition, we've sometimes grouped similar questions together, and then answered them in one section.

These questions cover a wide range of freelance writing challenges, from paid blogging and avoiding scams, to newbie marketing best practices and negotiating to earn more.

I hope the answer you're looking for is in here, and that this e-book helps you earn more from your writing.

If you can't find the answer or resources you need here, email me at carol@caroltice.com.

Enjoy,

—Carol Tice

NOTE: Some links in this e-book are affiliate links. That means we earn commissions if you buy products through those links. It won't cost you more, and we appreciate your giving us credit for referring you to these useful resources.

About the Author

Carol Tice



I'm a longtime freelance writer and, since 2008, a passionate advocate for fair writer pay. I've authored or co-authored [two print books and six e-books](#) for entrepreneurs and freelance writers, including *The Pocket Small Business Owner's Guide to Starting Your Business on a Shoestring* (Allworth Press 2013) and *Freelance Business Bootcamp*.

I've earned a full-time living from writing since the mid-90s. I write the award-winning [Make a Living Writing](#) blog, which appears on the 2014 and 2015 Writer's Digest Top 101 Best Websites for Writers, and is a three-time winner of Write to Done's [Top 10 Blogs for Writers](#) contest. My freelance writing clients have included *Alaska Airlines Magazine*, *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur*, Dun & Bradstreet, Lending Tree, Costco, *Nation's Restaurant News*, and many more.

In 2011, I founded [Freelance Writers Den](#), the community where writers learn how to grow their freelance income—fast. It now has over 1,000 members. My new coaching program for mid-career writers, [Den 2X Income Accelerator](#), launched in spring 2015. Along with Linda Formichelli of The Renegade Writer blog, I teach writing and marketing for freelancers at [Useful Writing Courses](#).

About the Editor

Angie Mansfield



I've been freelancing for about seven years. I started out in the dreaded content mills when I got laid off from work. I've since worked my way into real clients, with no small amount of help from Carol and her Freelance Writers Den.

I now focus on writing [case studies and white papers](#) for my B2B clients. I joined the Den moderating staff in 2013, and now act as Moderator-in-Chief and weekend troubleshooter. In my spare time (ha!) you can find me on [Twitter](#) or revamping my [TranquiliGeek](#) blog.

Chapter 1: Building Confidence



1. How can I build editor relationships?



Q: “I’m a career journalist who went freelance in 2009. I’m confident about my skills as a writer and communicator. However, I’m not a good editor.

“I miss being challenged by a good editor. I miss the encouragement. I miss the teamwork. I miss someone saving my butt when there’s a big mistake. What would you do to overcome this handicap?” —Linda B.

A: I’ve got six ideas for how Linda—and all freelance writers—can build editor relationships:

- 1. Seek out scenarios with editors.** I’m going to bet Linda is doing a lot of blogging work, which often seems to consist of writing posts a company slaps straight up on their site, without so much as a cursory glance. If you know you’re a writer who really needs an editor, avoid these gigs and find ones where an editor is involved. It may also be a question of moving up from pitching small businesses and looking at medium-to-large ones instead. Check their staff bios—if there’s a marketing coordinator or a marketing department, the gig will likely come with an editor.
- 2. Get more assignments from the editors you’ve got.** If you have some clients where you do work with an editor, try to deepen that relationship—pitch them more ideas, maybe try to land a column. More assignments from editors means you can drop more clients that don’t have an editorial environment.
- 3. Get referrals from existing editors.** Ask current editors to refer you business. They probably know other editors. I’ve got plenty of business clients where I work with an editor, so you can find editor relationships outside the print-magazine world, too.

4. **Do in-person networking where editors roam.** I've met editors aplenty at [MediaBistro](#) events, and I hear great things about the Journalism & Women Symposium ([JAWS](#)) camp as a place to meet magazine editors.
5. **Take an editing class.** If you know this is an area where you're weak, aim to ratchet up your own editing skills. A community college or extension course might give you some new tools for improving your own work.
6. **Do an editing swap with another writer.** Maybe you know another writer in the same boat, and could arrange to read each other's drafts, gratis? Or perhaps a college journalism class could use some raw material to edit? Could be a no-cost way to get some feedback and catch those embarrassing typos before they hit the Internet.

2. How much expertise is enough?

Q: "I used to be a medical student. I'm thinking medical writing would be my topic area, specifically human communication in medicine, because I've studied human communication for 15 years. My problem is, I only had two years in medical school. How would I get my start in medical writing?"—Rahul

A: Rahul, you have two years of medical school? You've got waaay more experience in healthcare than the vast majority of freelance healthcare writers working today. Your knowledge puts you in a great position to pitch medical stories to magazines! All you need to do is learn how to write a query letter, so you can get an article assigned, and then learn how to write a magazine article.

You seem to have a very specific niche within healthcare you'd like to focus on. When you first start out, it'll be smart to think more broadly within your niche. As you build your portfolio and stable of clients, it'll be easier to narrow in on your favorite subtopic within healthcare and write more on that—and yes, starting with nonprofits and/or organizations that might know you from your med-school or social-work days would be a good place to start.

3. How can I stop spinning my wheels and get started freelancing?



Q: “I’ve been reading your blog for more than two years. I’m not taking [the current Freelance Writers Den bootcamp] because I never finished the last class I bought. But I refuse to give up hope that the day will come when I can make a living wage from writing, or that the day will come when I actually make a plan and follow it, so that my puny dream can come true.”—Lois

A: These kinds of question make me really sad. This is not what I want to hear from writers who’re years into learning about freelance writing!

Did you spot the three problems here? Let me call them out.

1. No plan

When you have access to materials that could help you create a plan for launching your business, but you never use them, you’re not serious about this.

Action plans are what make dreams come true. Not pie-in-the-sky musings, not trying a bit of this and that. You need a concrete list of proven, doable steps that will bring you closer to your goal.

Many freelance writers I’ve met need help developing an action plan, because the freelance world is complex and multifaceted. Without a plan, it’s easy to gravitate to the [Underworld of Freelance Writing](#) and waste a lot of time writing quickie work for little pay.

One of the reasons many wannabe freelance writers lack an action plan is that this is not a one-size-fits-all sort of career. There isn’t one universally workable, best, fastest way to become a freelance writer. Your best moves will depend a lot on you—who you are, what you know, how much writing you’ve done, the sort of clients you want.

The freelance writers who launch successfully take the time to learn enough about this industry that they can create a business plan. It maps out where they want to go, and

includes a marketing plan for how they'll get there.

The freelance writers who don't make progress are simply faking it along, trying this and that, and hoping to strike gold.

2. Stop the negative self-talk

I'm sure you picked up on the smack-talk attitude that permeates this writer's message. "When I actually follow a plan..."

So here's the thing: Sitting around beating yourself up about what you don't know or haven't taken action on yet is not going to help you take the plunge into the uncertain world of freelancing.

Negative self-talk is an epidemic among freelance writers. No matter how much we've accomplished, our focus seems to be on what we haven't achieved.

This past week, I coached a successful freelance writer with years of experience writing for newspapers, regional magazines, and trade publications. She's looking to move up to higher-paying national magazines, but confessed she "feels like a failure" because she's only billing \$2,000 a month.

I know hundreds of writers who'd kill to be in her shoes—to have a portfolio of legitimate clips and steady clients with good assignments, as opposed to content-mill junk. But all she could see was where she hadn't made it to yet.

If you're running yourself down about your shortcomings, it's time to pop that tape out of your brain, and install a new one. Create a 'brag sheet' of accomplishments you can refer to. Make a list of your strengths.

Whatever action you take to reprogram the negativity, know that there's only one of you in this whole wide world. Appreciate that nobody else can write it like you—and that out there are clients who would probably love your help.

Instead of being your own worst critic, become your own biggest champion. Then, you're ready to get out there and freelance.

3. Take your dreams seriously

What really smacked me in the face in this writer's missive was the phrase "my puny dream."

Honestly, that statement shocked me.

If you could only take one thing away from the more than 700 posts on my blog, I want it to be this: Your dreams are not puny.

They are huge.

What could possibly be more important than envisioning your ideal life and then striving to live it, in the precious few days you have on this planet?

Nothing.

It's sad and cruel to belittle what you want most out of life.

It's also a dodge to make it feel somehow OK that you're not going after what you really want.

No matter how many sarcastic cracks you make, you know that deep down, your freelance writing dream is still there. That tug you feel in your gut is your soul, trying to pull you onto the road where you belong.

There's really nothing you can do except either bear that pain, or get started.

4. How can I feel confident enough to start?

Q: "I'm still in those early stages of writing, where I have nothing published. I fall short of good content (great is something far, far away, I feel) whenever I sit to write.

"Could you please suggest something just so that I can feel confident enough to publish my first blog post?"—Bunny

A: Given the insecurities I'm sensing in what you've written above, Bunny, writing for your own blog is a good place to start.

When you first start a blog, very few people are reading it, so it's a great opportunity to publish a little. Imagine that no one is looking—you won't be far wrong.

Play around with your posts and experiment! Be creative. The only way to develop your voice and discover what you really enjoy writing about is to write a lot.

A couple ideas for overcoming your fear of publishing that first blog post:

- Find a writer's group, or let friends preview your post. You need some feedback, girl! This will help get you ready for the comments and feedback you'll get on the blog, and later from editors, as you start looking for freelance writing gigs. You'll also probably get some support and encouragement as well, once you find a peer group.
- Look in the mirror and say, "Damn, I'm good." Seriously. My dad taught me to do

that every morning, and if yours didn't, you should start now. I honestly believe you can't survive as a freelance writer unless you feel, at base, that you are talented and have something to offer the world through your writing. Take a moment each day to ponder the fact that you are the one and only, unique, special you in the whole world. No one else can write like you!

In the end, at some point, you have to start. You have to say an article is good enough, and let it out into the world. If you can't do that, you likely can't be a freelance writer.

You have to get over your fear that your content isn't "good" and give it a whirl. We all had these fears when we started, but we just did it anyway.

Get started, and the more you write, the more quickly you'll improve. Know that most writers look back and cringe when they read work from years back. All you can do is keep striving to get better.

5. How do I get started when I don't feel qualified?

Q: "Much of my research has led to the fact that a lot of freelance writers had different careers before freelance writing, so they're experts in whichever field they were in and, in turn, write about those topics.

"However, I've just graduated college a couple of months ago, so I really can't say that I'm an expert at anything. How do I get started?"—Kelsey

A: Kelsey, I want to share that I was a starving songwriter before getting into freelance writing myself. Also, I'm a college dropout.

I can guarantee you don't need a past career as a nuclear scientist or anything to get started. You really don't need to be an expert in anything—as an article writer, you will find and interview experts and quote them. You need to be a strong writer. That's the main skill you bring to the table.

6. What if no one takes me seriously?



Q: “Who will take me seriously? Who is going to actually pay me good money to write some words?”

“If someone actually does need my services, will I be able to come through and get the job done? Or will they say, ‘I could have done this myself?’

“Even though I’ve done copywriting, grant writing, and websites in the past, most of that work has been for relatives and friends. How do I feel less like a novice?”

A: I have heard from so many writers with this problem. They’ve written for clients, they know they have writing talent...and yet the little devil sits on their shoulder and whispers, “You’re not good enough to make it.”

You feel like a joke, and you think no one will take you seriously.

But the problem is not how other people may react to you.

You’re worried that no one is going to take you seriously for one simple reason: because *you* aren’t taking your own freelance writing aspirations seriously.

Then you project that out into the world, and deduce that others won’t take you seriously, either.

How to not be a joke

Luckily, there is a proven way out of this. You can start taking yourself seriously.

You can take concrete actions that demonstrate that you are serious about your freelance writing career. As you do them, your confidence will build—and you’ll be able to

put yourself out there in a more professional way.

Here are a few specific ways you can change your self-concept as a freelance writer and begin taking yourself seriously:

- **Dress up and go network.** That's right—put on a power suit and go meet people. In person. Say, “I have a freelance writing business,” when they ask what you do. Have business cards. Go home realizing that everyone who met you at that event now perceives that you are a professional freelance writer. Bet it changes the way you view yourself, too.
- **Write a lot.** I meet a lot of wannabe freelance writers who hang around my blog, take my classes, and years later finally confess to me that in fact, they have not yet **started** writing. If you're serious about this, then bulletin: Writers write. Nearly every day. Get going.
- **Make time to learn.** If you feel like a fraud because you don't know how to write better-paying types of assignments, then make it your business to learn. Investing in your career shows you take it seriously.
- **Write the heck out of your writer website.** Stop bemoaning that you don't have much of a portfolio, and create a powerful writing sample with the copy you write on your website. You can audition for gigs with that.
- **Get your clips.** Like many writers, Adeline seems to have decided much of her past work doesn't qualify as legitimate. Oh, but it does. Claim whatever you have, even if you wrote it for the student newspaper. You'll improve your portfolio from here.
- **Stop acting desperate.** Know what professional writers do that wannabe writers who feel like frauds don't do? They qualify their own prospects and do proactive marketing, instead of sending resumes to Craigslist ads. They negotiate. They say “no” to gigs that are priced too low. If you need a side job to make this fly for now, so be it. But stay out of the cesspit of cruddy jobs that sap your self-esteem.
- **Treat it like a business.** When you take this seriously, you are not a creative type following your muse. Have you registered your business name? Got a tax ID for it? Take steps that legitimize your business in the eyes of authorities. Then, run a business. Think about your branding. Do a lot of marketing. Keep track of what's happening—how much did you earn last month? What's owed you right now? What are your expenses? Track your trends to grow your business. The figures may be tiny now, but tracking them will motivate you to make them grow.

- **Record a new tape.** If you're just starting out, then you're exactly where every super-successful freelancer you admire once was. We all started with no experience and no clips. Do you think Bob Bly is a joke? Of course you don't. But it's only an accident of time that he is not you, a brand-new writer with no portfolio. So stop running yourself down, and write some positive statements you're going to tell yourself. Say, "I'm a beginning freelance writer, I know I have talent, and I'm going to make this my career."

It may seem impossible that changing your attitude could make a big difference, but it will.

If you take your writing seriously, the world really will respond to that. I know because it responded to me, a college dropout songwriter with no legitimate claim to earn a dime writing an article. And look what happened.

Chapter 2: Making the Leap to Freelancing



7. How do I know I'm ready for full-time freelancing?

Q: “Should I wait to get some good-paying freelance jobs before I dive into the freelance writing field, or should I quit my job as soon as I have the funds to do so without starving to death, so that I can focus completely on writing? How long should I be writing, and what kind of jobs should I have set up, before I can consider myself “ready” to do this as my lone source of income? Can I do both until I’m comfortable, or is that not realistic?”—John P.

A: John, I never got to mull over those questions—I started freelancing because I got fired. Many others in 2008-9 or so found themselves laid off.

But for deciding on the right moment to go full-time freelance, I recommend Linda Formichelli’s book *[Write Your Way Out of the Rat Race, and into a Career You’ll Love](#)*. It’s all about making that transition.

The short answer is that when you might make the jump into full-time freelancing depends a lot on your expenses, obligations, and appetite for risk. And certainly, writing on the side is a viable way to ease into it.

8. How do I transition to freelancing when I’m under a non-compete agreement at work?

Q: “I would really like to move into freelancing, but I’m currently under a non-compete agreement with my job at a tech marketing firm. I’m woefully underpaid for the kinds of documents I’m pumping out daily, but I can’t slowly ramp up freelance work without violating the agreement. How do I get started?”—Miranda

A: Miranda, read your non-compete carefully. Then, start freelancing for industries and niches where you’re free to do so.

It may preclude you from working for other clients in your city, your country, one industry, or may just name a few specific competitors you can’t write for.

If your non-compete is onerous (namely, forbids you from writing for anyone anywhere), you might consider trying to renegotiate it to be more limited—ideally, naming just a few archenemies you can’t write for and leaving the rest of the field open. But look through it for loopholes—could you target tech marketing firms in the UK or Canada, for instance, if you’re in the US?

Sometimes, you can write for other niches within tech, or you could write for other industries entirely, such as healthcare or education. Depends on your non-compete's exact language.

It sounds like you've put together a portfolio of work pro bono, and should be ready to go after paying clients. Those pro bono samples don't usually magically "wash over" into paying gigs—that happens when you ask those clients for testimonials and referrals. Then, you use those to target bigger prospects in those niches and get paying clients through proactive marketing.

Also look at your contract to see if you can use any of your work for this employer as writing samples in your portfolio, or if you're banned from doing so.

Time to go?

Ultimately, you may need to just take the plunge and leave, so that you can start earning what you're worth. Try to save up cash to tide you over. Also, beware of your non-compete—it may say you can't write for competitors for a time period AFTER you leave.

You really want to get that removed, if there's a clause like that in there. My understanding is those clauses don't really stand up in court—they can't make you do anything after you're not being paid by them. But you might want to consult a contract lawyer to see what your wiggle room is in this one.

9. How do I start with no samples?

Q: "I want to start a freelance writing career part-time for now, and I don't have a clue where I should start. I don't have any writing samples and generating ideas is harder than I thought. Do you have any recommendations on how I can get my wheels turning and start writing?"—Lisa M.

A: These posts might help you with learning to develop ideas:

- [5 Unusual Places to Find Great Story Ideas](#)
- [The Easy Story Idea Sale That Few Writers Think to Pitch](#)
- [2 Simple Ways to Become That Writer With a Million Story Ideas](#)

If generating ideas is tough, you might consider writing for businesses or for trade publications, which might assign you stories or other writing work, based on your knowl-

edge of their industry. I lay out exactly how to start from zero, quickly build a portfolio, and start getting paying gigs in my e-book *The Step by Step Guide to Freelance Writing Success*.

Chapter 3: Content Mills



10. How can I attract “real” clients and escape the mills?

Q: “I’ve been working for content mills for 4.5 years, and am finally ready to get out. What’s the best possible way to market my website to gain more inbound clients?”—Nida S.

A: Four and a half years writing for content mills! My condolences. And glad you’ve realized you don’t want to keep doing that forever. What a grind!

I don’t know the best way to market YOUR website, since I’ve never seen it, and don’t know how well-written it is, or what’s on there, in terms of portfolio. But...I’ve had a lot of success with a strong LinkedIn profile as an accompaniment to my writer site.

I’ve had multiple Fortune 500 clients hire me from finding me first on LinkedIn (stuff that profile with keywords!), and then clicking over to my site and checking me out. Being active in social media and having strong profiles on busy sites can help draw prospects your way.

11. Can I transition to full-time freelance while writing for content mills?

Q: “For over 2 years I’ve been writing on a content mill, and doing pretty well at it. A lot of my work is assigned directly by clients, and most months I can make 50%-75% of what I make from my day job, just with the time I have evenings and weekends. My plan is to continue on this mill and start on some of the other ones for the next several months, to cover my bills while I transition to finding private clients and submitting articles to publications. I’m also going to move in with roommates to cut down on my living expenses.

“Are there any words of wisdom you can provide, based on the situation I’m in now? The prospect of making such a big life transition is a little scary, but I really want to take a shot at doing something I love and being able to control my own fate.”—Jacob

A: My big tip would be: Don’t spend more time signing up for more content mills! The problem is that what you write for them usually can’t help your portfolio. The reputation of those sites is poor, and many editors will trash your query if they see you’re writing for one in your bio.

You're spinning your wheels, as far as developing a pro career. And the income you're seeing from mills now will likely shrink over time, because [their business model is failing](#) thanks to Google, which is tanking their traffic by spiking them off its search results.

Instead, try to find a few better clients on your own—small businesses, nonprofits where you volunteer...something like that. Do a few pro bono projects where you can get good clips, as well as referrals and testimonials. That'll allow you to leave your day job ready to earn a much better income.

12. Is there anything I need to unlearn after writing for content mills?

Q: "After spending nearly two years writing for content mills, I've decided to take the plunge into a real freelancing career. Is there anything I need to unlearn after writing for content mills?"—Ashley

A: I'd say there is, Ashley. Mills breed passivity. You don't think up ideas, you don't choose your clients. Instead, you choose from possible assignment titles on a dashboard, that someone else has thought up, or bid against hundreds of other writers in a race to the bottom on pricing.

Well-paid freelance writers are actively building their business. They're developing dozens and dozens of story ideas on their own, writing query letters to editors, or sending creative [letters of introduction](#) out to marketing managers at businesses. They're going out and networking in-person to build their contacts. They build a writer website that showcases their work.

It's a major mindset shift, from passive mode to active.

The other aspect is that when you move off the mills, you'll mostly be writing materials intended for people to read. Most mill assignments are SEO-focused, and really intended to be read mostly by search-engine robots. Writing style matters much more, as does in-depth research and fresh interview quotes. A few minutes of quick Internet research is not going to be adequate for most well paid writing work. It's time to up your game—and if you feel shaky on your writing and reporting skills, consider [taking a class](#) to learn more.

13. Have you heard of this website? Should I write for them?

Q: “I was sent a note on LinkedIn about blurGroup. It’s set up similar to sites like Elance and oDesk, but the price ranges are higher—\$1,000 and up. I was wondering if you’ve heard of this site, and if you think it’d be a good move professionally?”—Cherese

A: I’ve been recruited by blur many times, Cherese, and have declined to join up. At base, it’s just another Elance, which is a bid site.

Yes, blur does seem to promise some better clients and wages (who knows if they really deliver?), but in the end, it’s a bid site, where you compete against hundreds—or thousands—of others, to try to get the same set of gigs. This isn’t a winning scenario for most freelancers.

Remember that there is no “good” site like this, due to the business model. The key is to stop going from website to website, wondering where the “right” one is. Instead, do your own, proactive marketing. These sites all suck more or less equally, because they all have the same business model—getting dirt-cheap services for the businesses that have work they want to freelance out, without caring that this setup impoverishes freelancers.

I’ll tell you this: They’ve been around for 4 years, and I have never once heard a writer success story, from someone who’s thrilled to be getting gigs through blur. I probably have over 20,000 writers in my network (counting blog subscribers, Freelance Writers Den and its waitlist, and social media), so that tells me all I need to know.

Chapter 4: Finding Your Niche



14. How do I break into the tech niche?

Q: “I’m an IT consultant with over 20 years in tech support. I’ve read that writers who know tech (and can explain it in plain English) are in high demand, for tech writing, user manuals, white papers, and that kind of stuff. I’m just not sure how exactly to get started. How would I go about finding clients?”—JR

A: JR, why not start by letting all the companies you’ve been doing IT consulting for know that you also do technical writing? If they hear of anyone who’s looking for a writer, you’d appreciate their referral.

Change your business card so it says IT consultant *and tech writer*. Change your email tagline.

Connect with every marketing manager you’ve previously worked with (LinkedIn works great for this) and let them know you’re looking for more on the writing side—would they refer you?

I call this “low-hanging fruit” marketing—telling everyone who already knows you have tech knowledge that you’re looking. You may be surprised at how well this works! Sometimes it’s all you need to do to line up some clients and get your writing business going.

15. Am I overlooking markets in my areas of interest?

Q: “I’m interested in writing about tech, particle physics, brain science, local science events, and basically anything non-medical but scientific.

“I’ve looked into traditional and online publishers, making money blogging, technical writing, and e-books. Are there other potential writing markets I’m overlooking?”—Heather B.

A: There are plenty more opportunities out there to earn money, and your interest/knowledge in the sciences gives you a great specialty and competitive edge!

Science museums and organizations spring to mind—they’ve got newsletters and annual reports, appeal letters and other marketing to write. Maybe even a blog, if they’re hip.

Also, there’s writing for science colleges and university departments. One of my biggest early mentors ended up writing for USC’s scientific researchers, and found it fun and

fascinating. And another writer friend did PR writing for one of the supercolliders—science-dork heaven!

On that side, of course, there's also textbook supplement writing, too—John Soares at [Productive Writers](#) is the expert there.

You could scan for tech-startup funding news at science-related companies creating products that need marketing, too.

And don't forget government organizations that touch on science, from NASA on down. Also science-focused nonprofits, such as philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen's Allen Institute for Brain Research in Seattle.

Anywhere an organization needs science explained in plain English to the public, there's a need for you.

16. Does a language or linguistics niche exist for writers?

Q: "Do you think there is a language learning / linguistics niche for freelance writers? I see lots of tech, health, business writers so I wonder if that niche is viable."—Dan

A: I've never written for that niche, and don't know any writers in that niche. So the short answer is, "I don't know."

And the real question isn't whether that's a viable, profitable niche, but whether it could be profitable FOR YOU. You could always be that one exception. Which might depend on your ability to market yourself, and your willingness to target the publications and businesses within that niche that might have good money to spend for writing.

It also depends on how broadly you define that niche. I'm sure all the language-course companies write marketing copy. There must be *some* opportunity. The question is whether you have the drive and talent and qualifications to get those gigs.

17. Can I just write about my specific hobby or interest?

Q: "I have a huge desire to transition into freelancing, but a very specific subject—wine journalism. I've poured all my free time over the past few

years into learning about and experiencing wine, and feel confident I could do it.

“My question is, should I go for wine writing full force? Or be open to other subjects as I start out?”—Carol

A: Carol, definitely pursue your interest in wine writing, but I’d doubt that’s going to be a full-time living, especially right off the bat. You’ll need some other topics as well.

Also, think about wine writing more broadly. Could you write PR for a local wine region, for instance? Or for restaurants that carry a lot of great wines? There are many more earning opportunities than writing wine reviews. And as you’ve suspected, that’s a tough niche to earn in—most of the people with columns on that topic are professional sommeliers or chefs.

Chapter 5: Marketing for Newbies



18 & 19. How do I market with minimal experience, or when my clips aren't great?

Q: "I am unqualified, but I studied professional writing and editing in school. I have a strong command of the English language and the ability to develop and maintain a career in freelance writing. I write my own blog, and have contributed gig and album reviews to a multitude of online publications (most of which are unpaid, besides event tickets and albums).

"How do I get started and hit the ground running, with minimal experience?"—Graham F.

Q: "I've been freelancing for a year. I have low-paying clients, mostly work by the hour, and have clips I'm not really proud of. How do I show potential better clients that I'm capable?"—Cori

A: Cori, as you've discovered, billing by the hour is a losing strategy. You want to bid by the project. That way, as you become more efficient, your hourly rate will go UP instead of your pay per project going down, like you're seeing now. You'll be rewarded for being efficient, instead of penalized.

I'm going to take a flier that the problem is that you're looking for clients in all the wrong places—on Craigslist, from a content mill like Demand Media Studios, or maybe somewhere like Elance? These places are the home of mediocre, low-paying clients, and the work you do doesn't give you good clips. When you say you're not proud of your clips, that sounds to me like they're content-mill clips.

To end all this, you need to put together the best portfolio you can out of the work you've done, get it on a nice writer website (you too, Graham!) and then start proactively looking for clients you prospect for and target. Look for clients that sell a real product or service in the real world, have revenue and profits, and a marketing budget. Companies over \$1 million in revenue are good, to start.

Remember, you could write great copy for your own writer site and use THAT as a great sample to get gigs writing Web content. So don't worry too much about your clips, and simply get started. As you get better clips, replace the older ones, and your portfolio will steadily improve.

Those prospects need never know the work you've done so far was unpaid. That can be your little secret.

If you want to be walked through those initial marketing steps in huge detail, the [Step](#)

[by Step Guide to Freelance Writing Success](#) e-book covers that.

But more importantly, let's go back to Graham's first statement: "I am unqualified." If you want to succeed as a freelance writer, you're going to need to get that idea out of your head.

Instead, realize that there are plenty of mediocre copywriters earning a living at this, and that you are not less capable than they are. If you write well, you're qualified to be a freelance writer. No particular schooling or credentials are required.

20. Why can't I ever land online writing gigs?



Q: "What am I doing wrong? I've applied and applied for online writing jobs, but I don't get any response, ever."—Hannah

A: I can remember when it was tough to figure out how to get a freelance writing gig. You typed and physically mailed query letters to editors, mostly. Or went to a lot of Chamber of Commerce meetings, hoping to meet marketing managers.

Now, of course, if you have an Internet connection, job listings are hard to avoid. On-line job ads are everywhere! But finding one that pays anything substantial—and getting hired—isn't always easy.

As it happens, there is an art to getting a response from an online writing job-ad poster. I know because when I started freelancing in 2005, I started reading those Craigslist ads, just like everybody else.

After a few years, I realized spending hours each week combing through mass job ads was not the best way to find good-paying clients. But along the way to that insight, I got my job-ad process down to an art form.

I started getting replies, and found several decent-paying clients via online job ads.

If you'd like to start getting positive responses to those applications you send in, here are my five tips:

Only respond to ads you are perfect for

You know all those ads that say "Write about whatever you want—pets, health, food, etc."? All scams.

I've been at this for nearly a decade now, and have yet to hear of a living wage happening at a site like that. Because there is no business where they'd want to pay people to write about "whatever" that's making a profit. Successful businesses sell a specific thing, and they're going to want you to write about that, and only that.

Instead of applying to anything and everything, or to websites where there is no apparent business model, think about your life experience and work experience. What do you know something about? Only apply to those gigs.

For instance, I was once a legal secretary, so one of the categories I trolled for was legal writing. That paid off in about \$10,000 worth of blogging for lawyers through one company I found off Craigslist. They were thrilled to get me, and I'm sure my experience made me stand out.

Realize this is a writing audition

Before you apply, research the prospect's website. If it's a blind ad, know that most of those are scams, and you should probably move on. Good, legitimate companies want you to be able to check them out before you apply, because it saves them time wading through inappropriate applicants.

If you can, take a look around and note the writing style this company uses. Then, use that style in your cover letter or email. Write it just like it's something that's going to get posted on their website.

If you do this, you will immediately stand out from the pack. Most writers are applying with a note like this:

Hello, I saw your job ad on Craigslist. Please consider me for the writing gig. I'm a really good writer.

Sincerely, Writer

Boring, boring, boring. Also, your prospect can't tell whether you could write the stuff they need done. Show them you 'get' their style right in your application.

Just because they're making you apply in one of those super-annoying automated online forms doesn't mean you should be lazy in showing what you've got. This is your

chance to impress them, so take it.

Explain why you're unique

Instead of letting your application just lie there, have some personality. Really let them get to know you.

While you're at it, be sure to call out any scrap of knowledge you might have about the type of writing assignment they're offering, or their industry sector.

Did you horseback ride regularly years ago, and this is for a riding school? Clue them in. You nursed a friend through cancer and this is for a healthcare portal? Be sure to share that.

You might think all prospects want to hear is that you're a long-established writer with a big portfolio, but you'll be surprised how far you can get by calling out your relevant life experience.

Watch out for this red flag

Here's something I noticed scanning through thousands of online freelance writing job ads: If you're required to submit a resume, it's unlikely there's going to be good pay involved.

Why? Because successful, profitable companies that hire freelance writers a lot don't read freelancers' resumes. They review portfolios.

I know, because it's been many years since I was asked to provide a resume to a prospective client. At the higher pay levels, clients just don't go this route.

I believe you see requests for resumes when a low-paying startup is expecting to get hundreds of responses, and they need to use the resumes to skim through and narrow the field. The resume request is yet another "tell," like blind ads, that this is probably not worth your time—they'll be choosing from hundreds of writers and your odds are extremely long of ever hearing back.

Avoid mass platforms

If you're tired of never getting a response and ready to up your game—but can't get out of the house and really need to prospect online—then stop looking at Craigslist and all other widely read job boards. Instead, find niche boards that don't have a bajillion freelance writers scanning them.

Yes, these boards do exist, and they usually have positions advertised that pay a lot better than what you find on Craigslist. Once I got a great ongoing blogging gig for a website run by a major TV network off the listings on media company [Gorkana's jour-](#)

[nalist alerts](#) (Thanks to writer [Sharon Baker](#) for turning me onto them initially!) They've even expanded since I used them, and now have alerts for healthcare, finance, media, technology, B2B, and more.

If you write about a particular industry, check out their industry association website—they may have members posting about needs they have for marketing help. Yes, you might have to pay a fee and join in some cases. Consider doing it.

Do I know which niche job board is best for you? No. You'll have to do your own research to find it, based on your interests and level of experience. But it's worth it, I promise.

Of course, the very best way to earn more as a writer is to [stop looking at online job ads altogether](#), and begin proactively prospecting to find your own clients.

While you're growing your income to where you can make that leap, these tips should help drastically cut back your time wasted flipping through online freelance writing jobs that will likely never lead to a gig.

21. How can I make money FAST from freelancing?

Q: "I need to make \$1500 in the next two weeks. How do I expedite finding qualified clients?"—Leslie B.

A: I get this sort of question a lot. My favorite was the time a writer asked me how she could make some money "on the hurry-up."

Here's the thing: Building a freelance business isn't something that happens in an instant. It does take time—usually at LEAST a few months—to ramp up your marketing and find new clients.

My first instinct was to tell you to get a night job stocking grocery shelves or working as a bar-back to bring in the quick extra cash you need. Honestly, if you need the money guaranteed, I'm not confident writing can save you, unless you can get existing clients to throw you more work.

But if neither of those work:

Start with the low-hanging fruit of marketing. Does everyone in your personal network know you're looking for new clients? If not, start spreading the word. I just heard from one writer who found a client after her mom posted to her Facebook about her writer-daughter.

Are you connected to everyone on LinkedIn who knows and likes your writing? Do they

all know you need referrals right now?

Those are the first two steps I have everyone take, and you may be surprised what leads can come out of that. Marketing will never get easier than asking people who already know and like your writing to refer you. I also know writers who've gotten more work from their connections, just by asking for a referral!

Best of luck with this one—and thanks for providing the reminder that writers need an emergency cash fund, to avoid these gun-to-the-head type scenarios.

22. I want to avoid content mills. How do I pitch my services to companies?

Q: “I have a journalism degree, 7 years’ experience as a writer for two major newspapers, and 2 years as a copy editor/proofreader/page designer. For years, I’ve wanted to write freelance, but content mills’ low pay turned me off.

“Your site is the first I’ve seen that recommends targeting companies. What is the best approach to get started pitching my services?”—DD

A: First up, you’re going to need a writer website where prospects can come read your work.

You need to decide on an area of focus, and writing a niche topic blog focused on serving an audience might help. You don’t have to post on it daily, either, to provide a sample for prospective blogging clients.

Start building a list of prospective companies in your industry—maybe ones that provide products or services to your industry? Or look at professional association magazines.

The best approach to pitch those depends on you, and on the type of prospects you decide on. I always say the best sort of marketing is the kind you’re willing to do. If you’ll write query letters, do that. I know one writer who gets all his article assignments on the phone, shmoozing editors.

23. How do I get skeptical clients to hire me as a newbie?



Q: “I’m getting responses from prospects, but this is what they say: ‘Great—you talked us into it. We need a freelance writer! But you’re not the right writer. You don’t have enough experience.’ How do I get them to hire me?”—Tina

A: When you’re a newbie freelance writer, it can be hard to see how to take the first step. How will you talk that first client into hiring you?

At first, many prospective clients you pitch will turn you down. Which can be discouraging.

And yet, somewhere in the back of your mind, you know it must be possible to break in and get hired—because every writer once had no clients.

If you’re a new freelance writer who’s getting this response, there are three basic problems you may have. Here’s what they are, and how to fix them:

Targeting the wrong clients.

When you start out, you need to pitch your writing services to clients you are a perfect fit for. But that’s not what most new freelancers do. Instead, they apply for everything and anything—and then wonder why their response rate is so poor.

The way you sell a client on hiring you as a newbie is to show your connection to their subject. Maybe it’s a magazine for veterinarians—and you used to be a veterinarian. Or it’s an article for a parenting magazine about how to talk to your child’s teacher, and you’re a teacher. It’s Web content for a shoe store, and you used to work in a shoe

store.

That's one way to focus your marketing, to clients where you've got some inside knowledge most writers don't have that makes you perfect for the gig.

One other way is to focus on likely first markets. Many new writers start out pitching major national publications, which rarely work with new writers. Then, the writer wonders why nothing's happening.

When you're a new writer, you want to go for some easy gigs you stand a good chance of getting off the bat, so you can start building your portfolio. These easy, break-in markets include:

- The newsletter of a charity or professional organization where you belong, give, or volunteer
- [Alternative papers](#)
- Small businesses you patronize
- Small-town newspapers (may be daily/weekly/biweekly)
- Business journals (especially in smaller or more rural markets)
- Businesses owned by family or friends
- Free-box publications such as employment newspapers

These places are often hard-up for writing help and would be thrilled to have you revamp their Web pages, cover the city council meeting, or write a play review. These are also all places that give you a real client you had to please, and who could give you a testimonial to impress future clients.

All of these types of first gigs are preferable to [writing junk for content mills](#) that will never impress a prospective client.

Not making your case properly.

Another problem new writers experience is that you're pitching markets you have expertise for, but you don't successfully convey that expertise. You want to flash your knowledge throughout your query letter or letter of introduction, starting right at the top.

Also, it pays to prospect locally, if you can—your nearness is another positive you can have going for you that a lot of the competition won't.

Finally, count any writing experience you have, whether it's from your blog, your day job, the college newspaper—anywhere.

Then put it all together into a pitch like this:

“As a freelance writer who had a 15-year career in financial services, I was intrigued by your new payment solution. I looked you up and saw you’re based right here in my town.

“I noticed you’ve set up a blog, but that it hasn’t been updated in a few months. As it happens, I’ve been blogging for years. Would you be interested in having a freelance writer with a banking background keep that updated for you? I’d be happy to drop by and discuss it with you.”

Simple as that. Now, you’re not just any writer—and you’ll notice I said nothing about being a new writer, either. You’re simply the best writer for them, because you understand their industry and the type of writing they want, and you’re nearby.

No portfolio.

This is the problem that plagues every new writer. You need clips! If you don’t have any luck finding paying gigs right off, the best way to break this no-clips, no-job cycle is to do a little pro-bono work.

When I say that, I don’t mean you should sign up to give free samples to some website. You’ve got to do pro bono right—and that means a small, definable project for a good company or publication with a good reputation, where a clip from them will impress prospects. The scenario also has to include their never telling anyone you weren’t paid, and they’ve got to be willing to give you a testimonial and refer you business if they’re happy.

Put these three steps together, and you should be able to overcome objections to your newbie-writer status, build your portfolio, and start getting paying gigs.

24. I’m a jack-of-all-trades. How do I market my combination of skills?

Q: “I’ve been a jack-of-all-trades at my job. In addition to writing, I’ve had almost a decade’s worth of print design experience with InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator. What’s the best way to leverage this combination of skills?”—Kyle

A: Kyle, loads of companies would love to hire someone who can do a whole brochure or website for them, both design and writing. Be sure to set up your website so you feature both sides of your expertise—for instance, using a tagline like, “Freelance writer

and designer.” Have a page of your site for writing samples, and one for design portfolio.

Then, play up your dual skills in all your marketing. When you send out pitch letters, use an email subject line like “freelance writer and designer with an idea for you.”

25. How do I create a good proposal?

Q: “Do you have tips on developing good proposals and how to provide realistic hours for billing at, say, \$30 an hour?”—Stuart

A: Stuart—you don’t want to bill at, say, \$30 an hour. Or [you won’t make a living at this](#). I recommend shooting for \$35-\$50 an hour for starter rates, and you’ll want to quickly move up to \$75-[\\$100 an hour](#).

One reason rates need to be higher is that as a new writer, it’s always very hard to estimate hours. Think per-project billing, since you may be slow as a new writer and the client shouldn’t be penalized. The most important thing is to get some work, not worry about your hourly rate at this early stage.

[The Writer’s Market](#) has a ‘what to charge’ section at the front of the book, you can ask around your writer’s network, ask the client what their budget is, or read Laurie Lewis’s book [What to Charge](#). Hopefully that gets you started!

On the proposal side, [Bidsketch](#) makes proposals look cool, and could be a useful resource for learning about writing a thorough proposal.

26. Is cold-calling the way to land freelance clients?

Q: “Is finding work as simple as making a list of businesses, and then cold-calling the whole list?”—Arthur

A: It could be, Arthur—if you have some knowledge or life experience in a lucrative niche—such as technology, financial services, or healthcare—and know how to find and pre-qualify appropriate prospects. And then you built a big list of companies most likely to hire you. Plus, you also know how to pitch successfully on the phone. (And, of course, you turn out to be at least a competent copywriter.)

If you’re shaky on any of those steps, we have a lot of resources in [Freelance Writers Den](#) that could help you, including a 4-hour Break into Business Writing bootcamp—which features a 1-hour training from Original Copywriters Coach Chris Marlow on

writing persuasive copy.

The whole trick is, cold-calling is a numbers game. You'll likely need to make hundreds of calls to find the clients you need.

My experience is that few freelance writers are willing to make cold calls, especially in the great numbers you need for this strategy to be effective. But if you're game, then it's all about learning to qualify prospects and perfecting your phone pitch. My [How to Get Great Freelance Clients](#) e-book has a ton of resources on that.

27. Who do I contact at businesses?

Q: "I'm freaked. I haven't done much except read about freelance writing, because I got stuck at: WHO IN THE HELL SHOULD I CONTACT about commercial writing?"—Bruce

A: Start with the company's marketing manager, Bruce. Ask them if they assign freelance, or if not who does at the company. If you're having trouble locating one, try looking for the company's press releases. There'll usually be a media contact on there—that's your person to pitch.

At a smaller company that doesn't have a marketing manager, you'll usually approach the business owner. If you happen to know the business owner personally—then, be sure to ask them!

28. Is it intrusive to email PR or marketing directors?

Q: "What do you think about emailing a PR/communications director of a company or organization directly, to ask if they use freelance writers and give a quick personal intro to your experience/qualifications? Is that considered intrusive, if their email address is available on their website?"—Chris

A: This is called sending a letter of introduction, Chris, and it's a great way to get gigs. It may be considered a little intrusive, but you're going to have to intrude on people's time a little if you'd like some writing assignments.

Certainly, sending an email is less intrusive than calling them on the phone, or than showing up at their office and demanding a meeting, or accosting them at a networking event. They can answer that email any time.

If you think another way of contacting them feels less intrusive, then go for it.

29. How do I approach an ESL acquaintance to offer proofreading services?

Q: “I’ve been working as a freelance writer this year, and have also had a chance to do some proofreading. Someone I know from church just started a photography business, and created a website to promote her studio. English is her second language, and the text is really bad. I’m trying to figure out how to help out an amazing photographer without insulting her.”—Polly

A: This doesn’t sound like a great-paying situation, Polly—solopreneur startups rarely have much of a marketing budget.

But if you need the work for your portfolio, or simply want to help this business launch, just approach her from that angle:

“I’m building my portfolio and would like to have more websites in my credits. I know that English isn’t your first language, and I love your photography. Would you possibly let me rewrite your site as a sample I could use? If you didn’t like the result you wouldn’t have to use it. But I’d appreciate a chance to show you what I can do, in exchange for a testimonial, if you’re pleased.”

As an alternate, you might propose a small fee if you’re beyond the free-samples stage—maybe \$200 or so.

30. How do I know which companies need a writer?

Q: “If cold-calling is the best way to land gigs, what’s the best way to determine which companies might actually need my services?”—Christopher H.

A: Christopher, I don’t have a crystal ball that can deliver that knowledge. The only way to find out if companies need a writer is to call them and ask.

But you can improve your odds in cold-calling prospects by focusing on companies that do something you have some personal knowledge or life experience in—i.e. you used to work in a bank, so you’re targeting small financial services firms in your region, maybe mortgage brokers, personal-wealth managers, regional banks, or online personal-finance sites.

But let's back up a minute, because I didn't say cold calling is your best shot—you did. It might be good for you, if you're a good talker and willing to make hundreds of calls to get the clients you need. I know other writers who get great results sending marketing emails. Everyone has their own approach.

For cold calling, it would be too time-consuming to research hundreds of companies' current marketing (so you can spotlight where they could use help). That's usually a strategy seen more with custom marketing emails, where you send fewer emails to more closely researched prospects that fit your background. It'd be hard to research 500 companies!

With cold calling, the goal is simply to find many leads and call as many companies as you can, to say, "Do you need a freelance writer?" and that's about it. If they nibble, you send them your portfolio, look at their marketing, and take it from there.

31. How can I avoid loser clients?



Q: "Do you have any suggestions, when it comes to networking, for conveying an image that says "Top-quality, top-pay work only"? I'm tired of fending off individuals who want someone to dash off a resume, edit a college paper or self-published book, or write a press release for \$50-\$100."—Katherine S.

A: I'm sorry to report that loser clients strike even experienced, high-earning writers. But there are some concrete steps you can take to cut down on the number of loser pitches you get and increase the number of solid leads. Here are my tips:

Read what your website says.

I took a look at Katherine's site, which is pretty solid, but it could be better. I'd add a picture of Katherine on the home page—remember, people hire people, not faceless

websites.

I also recommend having at least a partial bio right on that landing page, with a few of your top client names showing, as I do on [mine](#). Think about your site like a prospect—what do you want to know?

Primarily, it's "Who is this writer, do they do the type of writing I want done, and who have they written for before?" Try to get brief answers to those questions right on your landing page. Since Katherine's URL has "commercial writing" in it, that helps.

Running through her tabs, her bio just has a few association and certification links, and needs beefing up. She's got some clips (though I'd like to see markets cited with the article links), testimonials (nice!), and she does a newsletter (very nice!). A mixed bag here, and the home page needs substantial strengthening so it screams "I'm a pro, and these are the types of writing I have experience in."

Look at your website layout.

Katherine knows her bright-yellow and blue layout isn't the most professional look, but she told me she doesn't know how to update it. A designer created it, and then disappeared. This is a problem I hear about all the time. Two words: Solve it!

Either take a class to do it yourself, or hire somebody to overhaul your layout with more professional colors. The bright yellow she uses reminds me of some cheesy direct-mail ad.

Cheap Web help is readily available—for about a year, I used a teen from my high school's digital design program. They need final projects to work on!

Writer sites are not that complicated, and some appropriate colors and clean organization would help. One problem I see a lot on WordPress-based writer sites is their blog about some arcane niche topic, and the blog dominates the home page, while their resume and clips are shunted aside. Not the best strategy for getting better-paying work. Put those white papers and feature articles front and center instead.

Consider where you network.

When I first started actively networking for my freelance writing business back in '08, I went to a few local events in my small town. I was a bit startled to have experienced networkers ask me, "Who's your ideal client?"

I didn't know what to say! I hadn't really thought about it that much. When I did, I realized my ideal clients at this point in my career weren't going to be at these local events—they are medium- to major-sized corporations and \$1-a-word magazine markets.

So I changed where I network, got off my fanny and humped it into Seattle to go to big-time networking events. What do you know—I met the editor of Costco Connection, an editor of Microsoft Office Live—way better and more appropriate clients.

If you're not getting the caliber of clients you want networking where you are, hit a bigger market or explore some other events until you hit the right mix. Maybe consider sucking it up and joining one of the pro groups such as [BNI](#), where people are more serious about their business and understand marketing costs. Also, plug your authority more—maybe post some articles on [BizSugar](#) that display your expertise.

Listen to what you say when you network.

Do you have your elevator pitch nailed down, about who you are and what you do? Does it include a specific description of the type of writing work you're looking for? Hone your pitch to deflect losers. "I'm a freelance writer" leaves you wide open for anything, where "I'm a freelance writer who focuses on national women's magazines and healthcare-industry copywriting" communicates more professionalism and a sharper sense of what you want.

Look at where you're querying.

If you're pitching publications, are you taking the time to search *The Writer's Market* or other databases to find top-paying markets to query? Are you crafting well-polished queries tailored to those markets? If you don't ask \$1-a-word markets for assignments, you usually don't get them.

Chapter 6: Social Media



32. Is it possible to land lots of work through social media?

Q: “Do you think it’s possible to build your social media presence to a point where you can land lots of work through it?”—Chris

A: Since I got \$14,000 of work from just one client I got off Twitter, and have also gotten three Fortune 500 clients on LinkedIn, my answer is yes, yes, a thousand times yes! I know writers who get [most of their referrals on social media](#).

You often don’t land it passively on social media, though—you get it by reaching out on social media and approaching prospects. There’s definitely an etiquette to how you do it, too, since social media is generally supposed to be a non-salesy place, and you can piss people off if you go around asking them flat-out to hire you. This post has some of my [Twitter tips](#), and this one has my [LinkedIn tips](#).

One caveat: If you hate social media and don’t want to spend time on it, you are unlikely to find it a great source of leads. That lack of enthusiasm really shows, and you’ll probably end up not spending much time there.

33. How should I charge for live-tweeting an event?

Q: “I’m a freelance writer/editor/Web content manager. I’ve been asked to handle social media and session recaps during a major industry tradeshow. I’ve never charged for this before, and I don’t want to shortchange myself.

“What do you think would be appropriate? I’m leaning toward a daily fee, but would it make more sense to break up the fees (ie, an hourly fee for the tweeting, and a per-piece fee for recaps/write-ups)?”—Jessica

A: I’d definitely want to come up with a daily, package rate for doing it all. You don’t want to get into nickel and diming for each element of the project, or encourage them to drop parts of it and make the project smaller, which is what that breakout might do. Be sure your project rate covers the estimated meeting time with the client to set this up, too.

The bad news is that pay for things like tweets is often notoriously low, so don’t be surprised if you want to pass on the whole thing, or if they balk if you give them a bid based on a professional hourly wage.

But keep in mind that they’re asking you to spend all day at a trade show, from the

sound of it—so you should be billing an 8 hour day, each day they want you to do that—and hopefully covering all your expenses at the conference too, including meals and fees. If they aren't covered, estimate and add those to your bid as well.

34. Are there any etiquette rules for LinkedIn?

Q: “When contacting people on LinkedIn, are there any certain etiquette or rules to go by?”—Marianne

A: There definitely are. I don't know who you're planning to reach out to on LinkedIn... but personally, I tend to concentrate on people who've viewed my profile (you can find those using the [Who's Viewed Your Profile?](#) tool). Or people I've been introduced, to or can get introduced to through my network. Here's my pitch to people who've viewed my profile:

Subject line: “Were you looking for a freelance writer?”

Body: Hi there—I saw you were checking out my profile here on LinkedIn. Were you looking for writing help? As it happens, I have experience in your industry/topic (explain how/give links—ie I covered hospitality for 7 years previously, or my dad sold life insurance, or I was a legal secretary for years—whatever's relevant). Let me know if I can help!—Carol

If you're essentially cold-calling (or cold InMailing) people on LI that you have no connection to, you'll need to write a compelling letter of introduction, much like you would send on email. Analyze their website or other marketing materials or publication, talk about something you saw to show you researched them, discuss the gap you see—no case studies? Is their blog not getting updated? Write in the style of their materials.

I hear many more success stories from people working their LI connections or Who's Viewed Your Profile than from cold reach-outs on LI. One final tip: Check the person's history and see if they are active on the platform. If it's been a year since they last checked in, you may be sending an InMail that won't get a response.

Chapter 7: Portfolio Building



35. How do I build a portfolio after a gap in my writing career?



Q: “I’ve worked full-time as a writer/editor/SEO specialist in India. Then I got married, moved to the U.S., got a second MA degree, and then stayed home as a full-time mother for 18 months.

“Now, it’s time to get back on the writing wagon again. Could you please suggest a few freelance writing websites (even free ones will do for the time being) that I could use to start building my portfolio?”—Medha

A: When writers take a hiatus from writing, they sometimes get amnesia.

You forget you already have perfectly good writing samples. In your head, everything you had in your portfolio previously is no longer any good, because a little time has passed.

Like Medha, you might be ready to start over working for free or pennies, just to get a few clips.

But in many cases, you don’t have to do that. You have plenty of samples already, and should focus on pitching great-paying clients. Don’t start over again at the bottom rung of the freelance ladder!

What types of clips might you be overlooking? Here are seven types of overlooked clips I often turn up:

1. Staff writing

Many writers seem to believe only articles or copy written freelance can be counted in their freelance writing portfolio. Not true!

In fact, having been a staff writer is a huge plus—that conveys a lot of professionalism, if you’ve earned your living as a writer. It’s the same situation if you did a lot of writing

as part of your job as an analyst, administrative assistant, or anything else.

Did you write something in collaboration with a team? Use it, and simply note it was a group project you contributed to.

The one caveat here about using full-time job samples is if you had a non-disclosure agreement with your previous employer, or all their marketing materials are under virtual or real lock and key.

Note for future reference: Retain copies of everything you write, to avoid that issue.

Even if your company has a policy that they own materials you wrote during your tenure, ask them if you could link to them in your portfolio, just for purposes of seeking clients. They may well agree—after all, it's an inbound link for them that could help their rankings on search.

2. Copywriting

Most copywriting carries no byline. There's nowhere to put your name on brochures, annual reports, direct mail, or Web landing pages.

But it doesn't matter. You still wrote it, and it can still be part of your portfolio.

Remember: If you can't claim anything that lacks your byline, then no copywriters would have portfolios, ever. You can see that's wrong.

The trick with using copywriting in your portfolio is to get a testimonial from your client, to put next to your samples. That makes the connection for prospects that you are definitely the author on these pieces.

3. Ghostwriting

If you're ghosting a CEO's blog or their e-book, the same rules apply as with copywriting. If you're sworn to total secrecy with a non-disclosure agreement, maybe you can't claim it.

Otherwise, just ask if you can link to it, and get a testimonial.

One other way to note ghostwriting is to do a chart with type of client and type of project, just to anonymously note the types of clients you use. I know a prominent ghostwriter who usually writes under NDAs, who does that.

Her clincher? Be sure to write a few things under your own byline as well, so you can daylight some writing samples and prospects can see your style.

4. Part-time writing

Some writers think freelance assignments they did on the side, while they still held a full-time job, can't go into their portfolio.

"I have 10 years of experience," one writer told me sadly, "but it wasn't full time."

Good news! The only person who cares about your job status is you. Prospects just want to read your clips, like your writing, and hire you.

I have never in 15+ years of freelancing had a prospect ask me if I wrote an article while on staff, writing part-time, or writing freelance. Like Eeyore says, "Nobody cares."

5. Reprints & recaptures

Many mill writers I've mentored think they have no clips, because most of their writing appeared on a cheesy mill platform with a crummy reputation.

But sometimes, those mills resell the better pieces they get to better sites. For instance, for a while Demand Media Studios was placing some travel pieces with *USA Today*.

You may not want to put your eHow or Ezines pieces in your portfolio, because of the poor reputation of these platforms. But do a little Google searching and see if they've turned up elsewhere.

Another common complaint I hear is that writers have a ton of great clips with a now-defunct publication or business. If that's you, see if you can find a copy again on [Wayback Machine](#), which takes snapshots of the Internet constantly.

For instance, a Google search I once did for a great article I'd written for a shuttered city business magazine turned up a copy living on a local CPA association's website.

Daily newspapers are considered part of the historical record—their 'morgue' of editions probably lives on somewhere. If you've written for a daily that ceased publication, check with the buyer if they got bought, or your local history museum.

6. Volunteer writing

For some reason, many freelance writers think if they did a gig pro bono, then it's not a clip.

In fact, the issue of pay is entirely separate from the issue of whether you wrote it. And the next client need never know you weren't paid on that last gig. If it's good writing, use it. Ideally, get the client to promise they won't tell any referrals they send you that you did them a solid.

I find volunteer gigs tend to slip writers' minds—we forget we've done them. Review

your good works and see if you've got a sample in there.

7. College writing

For some of us, college-newspaper or internship clips would be going waaaay back. For others, it's not all that long ago. If you have nothing else, consider using your clips from this time period, especially if you wrote something you're proud of.

I hope this list stimulates writers' brains to think about what they might be able to include in their portfolios. I bet you've got more than you think.

36. Can I land gigs with an internship and one clip?

Q: "Is my internship and a *USA Today* article enough to start out with, or should I still do some free projects to boost my portfolio?"—Nicole G.

A: Why not try pitching and see if you can get paying gigs at this point? I know people who've gotten lucrative assignments with less up their sleeve.

If that doesn't work, then maybe line up a few more free samples to boost your portfolio. But you may be surprised how many markets—especially smaller or regional pubs—might take you on at this point. Pay won't be great, but at least you could get paid a bit while you build your portfolio instead of having to work totally for free.

Sometimes, if you have a great story idea, editors don't even ask about clips—I've had it happen.

37. How do I get started when I've only written research papers?

Q: "My main experience with writing is academic research papers. How do I create some freelance writing samples? I'm also a bit apprehensive about my skills, because I'm sure there are many talented writers out there with more formal training than I."

"For years, my family, friends, and co-workers have told me my writing is

very good, but I was wondering how I could get some feedback from people already in the industry?”—Tim A.

A: To begin, start studying the types of publications or business websites you imagine yourself writing for. See how their writing style and tone are different from what you create in a school paper.

Start publishing on your blog and practicing writing in a more conversational way. You'll be less apprehensive the more you write, and that will give you some quick samples. From there, you might ask a local small publication, organization, or small business if you could do a project for them for free in exchange for referrals and a testimonial if they like your work.

You can get feedback from a mentor in several ways. Some people pay for mentoring from a pro, or join a writer's organization where they can get feedback from peers. (We have an 'article review' forum on [Freelance Writers Den](#) where you can post work for critique from the membership.)

Or you can pitch a small paper or alternative paper and see if you could write for them. If you can get in the door, ask the editor all the questions you can.

I used to take my article draft and a copy of the paper and sit down with my editor and ask them about every change they'd made, why it was there, and why it was better than what I wrote. Learned a TON that way, and it was free.

38. Are my low-paid clips enough?

Q: “I don't exactly work for a content mill, but after reading a lot of your posts, I've come to the realization that I'm receiving content mill rates, writing entertainment stories.

“Is it possible to use the hundreds of reviews, interviews, slideshows, and op-ed articles about TV shows that I've done as a portfolio for a new phase of my career? Will a corporation hire me as a blogger about a completely different subject, based on those articles? Or should I use clips such as old Web pages I wrote for law firms, or the occasional non-entertainment article I've done recently?”—Shelby

A: You certainly can use those clips! Remember that future clients don't need to know that past work was low-paid, or even free.

My portfolio rule: Use whatever you have. As you get better clients, you'll replace your mill-type clips. There are legit, paying entertainment magazines and websites—find

your best pieces you've written. If you've done actor interviews, that's great! Most mill writing doesn't have any interviews, so that should help set you apart, and possibly open the door for you to write in other sectors.

You'll need to get up a writer website to show your work and send clients to. Use your older work as well—there's no such thing as a too-old clip. That will give you some variety to show your prospects.

That basic rule is true—look for companies that sell a real product or service in the real world, and aren't just offering you pennies off ad-clicks or a pittance per post.

The only markets you should write for where articles are the primary product are legit publications—and look for rates around \$.30-\$1 a word and up, not pennies or promises of earning if you get page views.

Chapter 8: Writer Websites



39. What should I name my writer website?

Q: “What’s the best way to come up with a name for my website – besides just going with my name?”—Donna F.

A: There are plenty of ways to go with a writer website name. (We talk a lot about this in my Build a Writer Website That Works bootcamp in [Freelance Writers Den](#).)

There’s nothing wrong with using your name—if you go with one like I did with [car-oltice.com](#), you can use the tagline to put in keywords. (Mine are “Seattle freelance writer.”)

You can go with a microsite approach, like freelancer Erin Raub did with [thetravelcopy-writer.com](#), if you know your niche. Or “Atlantahealthcarewriter.com,” if you know your niche and want to attract local clients.

Or you could go with something simple and memorable, such as DonnaTheWriter.com or FreelanceWriterDonna. Plenty of options if your exact name URL is taken (which is common, if you’ve got a popular name).

The final option I’ve seen work is to pick a memorable brand name that sticks in people’s minds. And then use the tagline to explain what you do.

Big tip: Buy several likely URLs and point them all to your site! You can always move or re-point your site later as your business evolves. URLs are cheap, and you can always switch to a new one.

40. Should my blog be my website’s landing page?

Q: “The landing page for my website is my blog.

“When editors see my blog first, does it help or hurt my chances of being published? I want to present the most polished, professional image of myself possible and I’m curious if this could be hurting my image.”—Debra

A: That depends on what sort of writing work you’re trying to get, Debra. If you’re focused on getting paid blogging work, having your blog be the home maybe works. Especially if you [have a good “hire me” tab](#) and the blog is getting some comments and social shares. Clients want to see that.

If you want a variety of writing gigs, your site will be a much stronger sales tool if you write a static landing page that talks about your client and their problems, and how you

solve them.

That way, you're not taking a chance on which blog post will be in clients' faces at the random time they choose to visit. You just want more control over your messaging.

41. Should my blog be separate from my writer website?

Q: "I'm building my writer website on WordPress. I plan to also have a blog, to establish my credibility and expertise in my chosen niches.

"I've been researching successful freelance writers' websites for months, and I haven't found a single one whose blog is on their writer website. Is there a reason for keeping them separate? Would it be bad to have a "one-stop-shop," in which potential clients can see my clips and blog in one place?"—Melina M.

A: Melina, I've reviewed hundreds of writer websites at this point, and quite a few of them DO have the blog right on it. If you have that setup, just put the blog under a tab and make sure your Home page is a sales page that talks about how you solve clients' problems.

Be sure to give it a name—a blog named "Blog" doesn't sound compelling—but you can certainly host a blog on your writer site.

As it happens, the Make a Living Writing blog began on my own writer site, caroltice.com. As it grew and took on a life of its own, I decided to move it, so it could sell products and services to writers without creating a confusing message for prospects thinking of hiring me to freelance.

If you're primarily looking for freelance blogging jobs, and your blog is popular and getting a lot of comments, some bloggers have success by simply putting a "Hire Me" tab on the blog. But for most of us, a focused Home page with your carefully crafted copy on it will convert more prospects than blog posts.

42. How long should I take to build my website?

Q: “Can you recommend two or three free or budget-friendly ways to create a writer’s website and suggest the components that make a good website? I’m getting lost in researching the details and not doing enough writing.

“Ideally, how quickly should I be able to build the site, and how much time should I spend on maintenance (doing all this myself, not hiring someone just yet)? Is it okay to continue to try to build a client base while developing the site?”—Perdita

A: What I recommend is not doing it all yourself, Perdita. It’s a ton to learn, and writers don’t need to know all the technical details of putting up a website. I talk to writers with this plan, and two years later, they’re still ripping their hair out, and don’t have a website they like yet. You do something that breaks the site, it no longer loads, and then what? You have no help desk to call.

I do have a couple of [low-cost solutions I recommend](#), where you get support and some templates that make it easy. I’m not a fan of freebie, Weebly- or Tumblr-type places, because of their limitations for making it look pro. The fact is, if you’re planning to build a business as a writer, you need to invest a little bit in a pro-looking basic site. A site with an ad for Weebly on the bottom screams, “I’m a dabbler.”

Writers tend to think of their website as something they do and then it’s “done,” but that’s not reality. These are evolving documents you will revise many times. So get your best effort up immediately, and start marketing.

You need a quick solution for NOW, so you can be marketing and have a site that impresses clients that you’re serious about freelance writing. You can always make a more pro site later. I’ve done major overhauls of mine several times!

Chapter 9: Writing for Magazines



43. How can a writer find publications?



Q: “Is there a source that lists consumer magazines and online magazines to query? I’m overwhelmed with the Internet online magazines. I write articles and submit them to Harper’s, Ms., Brain-Child, and such, but with no luck. I’ve written seven articles on motherhood and women’s empowerment, but have no idea how to begin to find sources interested enough to query them.”—Marina D.

A: OK, lotsa thoughts here about how to break into more paying publication markets:

Is there a single place to find consumer and online magazines?

No. Especially not with online magazines, which are springing up like weeds in May. But there are several places that form a good starting point. [*The Writer’s Market*](#) lists hundreds and hundreds of magazines (get it with online support for more useful ways to slice their data).

[*Wooden Horse*](#) has a magazine database and a newsletter that lists editorial changes weekly, which I find is a great way to discover new magazines and a new contact. Often, new editors seem more approachable and open to new writers, so I consider that information gold. MediaBistro’s paid level gives you access to about [300 “how to pitch” guides](#) with info on various magazines. *The Writer’s Market* online also has a daily column of updates and announcements about new magazine launches.

You can also Google search for various compendiums of magazines. Generally, it’s research, research, research. When you find an interesting publication, Google “editor [publication name],” or do that search on LinkedIn, and see what you can find. Ask your writers’ forums and groups if they know anything. Reach out on Twitter. Beat every bush.

To me, it sounds like your real problem isn't finding magazines. Your problem is overwhelming. Yes, there are a million magazines in the naked city, but which ones should you be trying? That's the real question.

You're aiming too high.

I don't know Brain-Child, but the other two publications you mention are very highly regarded national magazines. You might try a regional or smaller-circulation equivalent type magazine instead as a starting point. In general, it's difficult to crack major national magazines cold, without a track record of having written for similar local, regional, or national smaller publications of a similar type.

It's sort of a farm system out there, just like any other industry. You start at a smaller place and work your way up the ladder. There are exceptions, but that's generally how it works. Once you have a published article, these entrees will get easier, but until then think of perhaps a slightly lower target which could give you a great clip with which to query the big guns.

You're sending articles instead of queries.

You say you want to know more magazines to query, but then you go on to say you have already written seven articles and want to send them out. I strongly recommend against sending finished articles to markets that are new for you. As you're finding out, it almost never works. You just don't know enough about that editor's needs as a new freelancer to hit the home run needed to place an article cold. Send succinct, one-page queries.

You need to beef up your query skills.

If you aren't getting responses from your queries, read [a book about how to write killer queries](#). Queries are really an art form unto themselves, and taking a little time to learn the craft can pay off big. For instance, I recently got [\\$6,000 of articles assigned off a single query](#) letter I sent. Really—it's worth learning how to do this!

You're only thinking big consumer mags.

When you limit yourself to the big-circulation, known-name consumer mags, you're only looking at a small part of the overall publication pie. There are trade publications, [company magazines](#), union and professional organization magazines. Look at other types of publications. Often, building some good clips in another channel can help build your credibility for jumping to the major consumer mags.

44. How do I get started with interviewing?

Q: “I want to do interviews. For example, I’d interview experts on pet care. Who and how do I query? I also have no experience with interviewing, but I do have two blogs. Where do I begin? Do I need the expert first? How much do I charge?”—Georgia

A: There’s no magical way to get interview experience, Georgia, except to [start interviewing people](#). Practice on a friend, if you’re nervous about it.

Interviews are a conversation—you know how to have one, I’ll assume. Listen to [Terry Gross on Fresh Air](#)—she’s considered the master. Be an endless student of the art of the interview—I am. We can always do it better.

I’m not sure I understand your question “Do I need the expert first?” Before what—the real-people types in the story, or before getting an assignment?

As a new writer, it’s often helpful to do a quick mini-interview so you can quote an expert right in your query letter. You’ll be surprised how many experts will be willing to give you a few minutes on spec, in hopes of ending up in print.

As far as where to begin: Start with a subject you know well, so you know what questions to ask. Since you have blogs, you can practice by [interviewing people](#) for your blog.

On the “How much do I charge?” question, again confused—you don’t charge sources for interviews.

If you mean “How much do articles with interviews in them pay?”, that varies widely. And usually with publications, it’s not a question of your deciding how much to charge—the publication will tell you their pay rate.

45. How can I break into business magazines?

Q: “I would like to write for business magazines. What advice can you give me to get started?”—Marcie H.

A: I’d love to know more about your experience with business, to better guide you. Most business magazines do like to see journalism skills, and a demonstrated ability to tell a good business story.

If you have that, focus on industries you know well, and consider hitting trade magazines first—they have a harder time finding good writers and don’t get pitched much.

Or business weeklies—they often assign freelance, especially if you’ve found an interesting business to profile they hadn’t discovered, or a trend that would fit some theme they need in their editorial calendar.

Then, you can use those clips to pitch to the big, national business mags such as Inc. and Entrepreneur. That’s actually exactly how I got into [Entrepreneur](#)—leveraging clips from trade pubs, a business weekly, and a city business mag to go up to the national level.

46. What if an editor steals my ideas?



Q: “Recently, I read online about a freelance writer who had pitched a political exposé to his hometown paper. They passed – then proceeded to assign the story to a staffer.

“It seems that once you trust an editor, this is less likely to happen. But, if you’re pitching to an editor you don’t know, how do you help ensure that your crackerjack pitches aren’t assigned elsewhere?”—KT

A: There is absolutely no way you can ensure your “crackerjack” pitches are not assigned to other writers. I know, because I’ve had some of those assignments sent to me to write on occasion! And I’ve certainly seen publications write stories similar to ones I pitched, that carried another writer’s byline.

I believe most editors are ethical and will assign a story to the writer that brought it to them, as much as possible.

But ideas cannot be copyrighted. If you suspect your idea was stolen, there's really nothing you can do about it, except not pitch that editor again.

Before we assume an editor is a thief, though, let's examine a couple other possibilities:

- 1. The editor may have already assigned a story on your topic.** If there's a sleazy political figure on the local scene, a writer can hardly think they're the only person who will have the idea of looking into the person's background for a story. This is one reason many magazines have boilerplate in their writer's guidelines to the effect that they receive many submissions, many ideas are similar, and you can't sue them if you think you've been ripped off.
- 2. The editor thinks you don't have the experience or skills to execute the idea you pitched.** If you haven't made a strong case in your query letter or phone pitch for why you are the person to write the story, your idea may well float off to another writer. Be sure to mention any special expertise you have, technical abilities such as online database mining, or knowledge of where the experts are for your topic.

The weapon that fights idea theft

I've seen my story ideas pop up with someone else's byline. Here's how much time I spent fuming, fretting, or otherwise feeling pissed off about it:

Zero.

Why doesn't it piss me off? Because I have a lot of story ideas. When faced with a possible idea rip-off, I can simply move on to one of my dozens of other ideas. Trust me, this is the most emotionally healthy way to handle it.

Generating many potential story ideas is your most potent weapon against editor rip-offs. You move on and don't care, because you have many other query letters ready to write.

47. Can I break into international magazines?

Q: "I'm from India, and have published some articles in national magazines. One of my stories appeared in a best-selling anthology. Is my experience good enough to write for international magazines? Do they respond to new

writers with fewer clips? Will I face any kind of difficulties being an Indian writer, or it will work if my ideas and writing are good?”—Tarang S.

A: Tarang, my experience is a strong query letter with a great article idea can get you in the door with *no* clips. You might look at having your current pieces translated if they're not in English, so international editors could read them.

To start off, be sure to pitch topics that you have obvious expertise in. For instance, there might be issues or trends in India that might be spreading to the UK or the US. Or maybe a big, multinational company is coming to do business in India, and you could bring them an on-the-ground report. Be sure to make a strong case on why **you** are the right writer for this assignment.

48. How can I find the right editor to query?

Q: “If a website doesn’t indicate which of its editors is best for querying, or if it doesn’t give query-submission guidelines, is it a good idea to first send a short email asking for that info? Or would it be better to just go ahead and send a query to whatever editor or general contact email I can find?”—David

A: There are really two issues here—finding writers’ guidelines, and finding the right editor contact.

On contacts: Whatever you do, David, don’t email a query to a general email box. You don’t want to be in that virtual ‘slush pile.’

Instead, call the publication up on the phone and see if you can wrangle an editor live to ask about guidelines. Sometimes, they’ll take the time to chat, and you could end up with an assignment right then.

Barring that, try for a managing editor, articles editor, features editor—something along those lines. Editor-in-chief is too high up the scale. If I don’t know for sure if I hit the right person, I always just close with, “If you’re not the right editor for this query, please feel free to forward it on.”

If you know the publication well, I would study it and do a query that’s a strong fit. If not, you might email and ask for guidelines. Just don’t be shocked when your request is ignored. Most publications that work with freelancers have their guidelines online at this point, and editors figure if you can’t find them, you probably don’t have the drive to report a story for them, either.

49. How can I get faster at writing query letters?

Q: “My problem is that I spend too long on queries. Do you have advice on getting faster at writing query letters?”—Cheryl R.

A: Overwriting and can’t-press-‘send’ disorder, are common. You’ve got to refuse to let queries sit around for a week, Cheryl.

You may be a victim of one of my [natural laws of writing](#), which is that the writing task expands to fill all the available time. You probably have too much time available to tinker with these.

Set a higher goal for the number of queries you plan to crank out each week, and you’ll have to send more quickly.

But also: Is this process getting you results? Or are you spending all this time and not getting the gig? If it’s working for you, it might be worth it. But if not, you definitely want to learn to be more efficient!

You may be hesitant because you sense your queries aren’t going to hit it on the head. Thing to know: We have a query review forum in [Freelance Writers Den](#), and rarely get one submitted that we don’t think has some real flaws and could be improved. We’re seeing members get great results after doing the review process, so consider getting some feedback. The slowness may be about a lack of confidence that your queries have all the vital elements that will get you a ‘yes.’

We talk about how to speed up your writing process in detail in the e-book I co-wrote with Linda Formichelli, [13 Ways to Get the Writing Done Faster](#).

50. How can I turn editors into repeat customers?

Q: “Most of my assignments are one-offs. My magazine editors have been happy with my work. Can you offer some tips on staying in touch with them, so they’ll assign me more work?”—Ricki

A: Sure—the trick is to pitch them the next idea as you turn in the current one...or even better, several more ideas.

I always view an article as the start of a relationship, and I show that by having more ideas ready immediately. Story idea development is critical to turn these into ongoing relationships.

Sounds like you’re laying back and imagining that once they know you, editors will

begin to magically assign you ideas they have. But lots of editors don't have many, and they're looking to you to provide that.

51. Can I email a query to an editor who doesn't know me?

Q: "If I have a query that I feel is polished and ready to be seen by editors, is it acceptable to email it to an editor who doesn't know me and has not given me their contact info directly?"

A: "For example, I have a query letter right now that I feel really good about, and want to pitch it to *Parenting* magazine. I called the magazine and left the editor a brief voicemail, introducing myself and telling her that I have two story ideas that I think would be a great fit. I also asked if she was accepting pitches right now, and if it would be OK to email her."

Q: "I haven't heard back yet. Is it tacky to get her email from the receptionist in order to send her my query? In your opinion, what's a good protocol for the initial reach-out to an editor?"—Marianne

A: I hate to be the one to break the news, but you're not getting a response from your magazine editor because you're asking a rookie question. Editors are too busy to answer basic questions like "Do you use freelancers?" It's no surprise she's not calling you back.

This query game is for the brave. You need to just move ahead and email over your pitch. And yes, you often won't have any personal connection to the editor (though it sure helps if you do).

You can also [pitch them several brief ideas](#) in one letter or email. I love giving editors choices and showing them I'm an idea machine, not just another writer with a big *one* idea.

52. How do I find story ideas?

Q: "I'm stumped with coming up with ideas for magazine queries, I think because I don't understand the basics of finding 'my' market. Should I come

up with a list of my interests/expertise, and then seek publications that match?”—Stephanie

A: Story ideas can come from many places, including things that are going on in your life.

Think about publications you already read and are familiar with as an easy starting point, particularly local/regional pubs that might be fairly easy to get into. Then, study them. What topics have they covered? How could you present a new angle on one of their popular topics?

Certainly, work from what you know as a starting point. Some of my first assignments, for instance, grew out of the fact that I was a new homeowner. I pitched a bunch of real estate related stories and ended up writing regularly for the *Los Angeles Times*' real estate section.

When you don't have a lot of clips, it's a lot easier to get first assignments if you can make a case that you have some life experience that gives you insight into your topic.

Working from your experience and trying to match it to markets is one approach. The other way to go is to analyze a market and then develop ideas specifically intended for it. Some writers find it easier to focus that way.

53. What legal issues should I watch out for when writing for magazines?

Q: “As a freelancer, what kind of source releases do I need for an article? Are there other legal issues I should be aware of when writing for magazines?”—Robin H.

A: Robin, the most important things to know are: don't lie, and don't make stuff up.

You don't ordinarily need your interview subjects to sign a release. The fact that they're talking to you indicates they're interested in appearing in the story. If you do case studies for businesses, you will usually need subject releases, though.

You may also need releases or permissions for photos, if you're asked to provide them.

The best way to know the answer to these questions is to ask your editor what their policy is, once you have an assignment.

There are many legal issues involved with doing reported articles, and publications get sued when things go wrong. Your job is to make sure that never happens on your stories. There is a lot to know—I once took a full-day ethics training as a staff reporter!

And one of the four sessions of my [4-Week Journalism School](#) class is on ethics.

Quick tip: Avoid or disclose any conflicts of interest—writing about a company owned by a relative or that you have a connection to, using friends or former writing clients as sources...that sort of thing.

54. What if I spot a typo in my published article?

Q: “I just had an article published, and I noticed a typo. This is one of my favorite pieces. Should I say anything to my editor, or just let it slide? If I should point it out, how do I do it tactfully? (I don’t want to hurt her feelings or have her think I’m the grammar police!)”—Cherese C.

A: Cherese, there’s nothing to be done, if it’s in print. If there’s an online version, you could ask them to correct it online.

Just be straightforward and professional—“Thanks for the opportunity with the article! I did notice one small typo, and was wondering if you’d be willing to correct it online?”

Corrections are only run in print papers for factual errors, so there’s nothing the editor could do there.

Chapter 10: Freelance Blogging



55. Does my blog really need a niche?



Q: “I’m trying to start a blog. I feel like an anomaly—I’m a generalist. I’m interested in writing about health, social issues, women’s issues, holistic agriculture, and more.

“I wonder if you think a successful blog must necessarily be focused on a narrow niche. I keep thinking a blog can be general, but with many narrower tags or categories. What’s your opinion on the viability of a blog that informs, educates, and entertains on general topics?”—Gina A.

A: I’ll start by saying that whether a general blog is “viable” depends on your goal. Is your goal with your blog to set your creativity free, by having a place to instantly publish your daily musings? If so, a general blog is just fine.

But if you want your blog to help you earn money, either by showing prospective clients you understand blogging and could blog for them, or by creating a large blog audience you could sell products to, or get advertisers for—then you need a niche blog.

Why? Let’s take those two monetizing aspects one at a time and discuss.

Blogging to show skill

If you’re using your blog as a showplace for your skills, in hopes of landing a good paid blogging gig, your niche blog makes a good audition piece because virtually all paid blogging is niche-oriented. On Entrepreneur.com, for instance, I blogged about issues that concern small business owners. Over at BNET, my blogs offered pointed analysis of goings-on at large public retail and restaurant companies. For one of my small-business clients, SuretyBonds.com, I researched and wrote about new laws requiring business owners in various industries to buy surety bonds.

See what I mean? These blogs are not general. Businesses and publications are looking for bloggers who understand how to work a niche.

Blogging to monetize

If you want your blog to be a moneymaker on its own, you'll need to draw a large audience, to whom you and your advertisers can sell products and services. The problem with a general niche here is that you can't catalyze a big, loyal fan base if one week you're writing about agriculture, and the next week you're writing about women in the military.

Imagine I'm your reader. I do some Web browsing on a topic of interest, and I find your blog. I read your post and I love it! I subscribe. If the next post is about something totally different, and the next one has yet another topic, I get annoyed! And I stop visiting.

Whereas, if all your blogs are about tattoos, or Formula One racing, or geocaching, or business productivity, people who care about your topic can more easily find you, fall in love with you, and become rabid fans. Because your blogs will frequently mention similar terms (such as "freelance writing" on my own Make a Living Writing blog), your search rankings for that topic will rise as you post more.

More people will come. And then you can sell to your audience. Which all likes the same stuff. And that makes it easy to figure out what to sell them.

Multiple blogs

If there's a general blog out there succeeding in doing this, I have yet to see it. If you have multiple topics you want to blog on, Gina, the answer is: multiple blogs. They can even start off just as separate tabs on the same Web site, and then spin off to their own sites if they take off. But each topic blog needs a separate name and place to live, a place for fans of that topic to come where they can count on learning more on the subject they love.

I'd say you are *not* a generalist, Gina. You are a writer with several possible niche topics.

56. How can I monetize my niche blog?

Q: "I have tons of experience in a particular niche (parenting special needs kids), as well as a blog with a decent amount of traffic (about 7,500 a month). I'm having trouble monetizing this blog—can you help?"—Rachel

A: You're probably finding it hard to monetize your blog because your audience is still very small, Rachel. Most of the top-earning blogs have 1 million monthly views or more.

Also, the size of your email list is more important than your number of eyeballs. What's the size of your list? You can only sell things to people you can contact.

Have you asked your audience what they need to make their lives better, and tried selling that, either through existing products or ones you develop yourself? That's pretty much the secret in a nutshell.

Finally, what are you doing to promote this blog and grow your audience? Are you guest posting, promoting posts on social media? Writing posts is just the start of building your blog.

There's a lot to creating a blog that you can earn from, and most blogs don't succeed at this. One course I can recommend there is A-List Blogging's [KickStart Your Blog](#). It was hugely helpful in teaching me how to build my blog into a real business.

57. How do I find legitimate blogging gigs?

Q: "Where can I find blogging gigs that are not from content mills? Should I just guest post, in hopes that clients find me? Or should I try writing magazine articles instead?"—Rachel

A: The way that seems to work best is to position yourself so that better blogging clients find *you*, Rachel.

Do you have a "hire me" tab on your blog, that makes it clear you're willing to write for others? That's a great place to start attracting better blog clients.

Besides passive methods like the "hire me" tab, guest posting on popular blogs is a great way to get found by clients. Some top paid bloggers get all their clients that way. Also, it's important to write the heck out of your blog—have amazing headlines, great engagement, and scannable posts with incredibly useful content.

Beyond there, you can proactively research and target prospects, too. Do searches for companies in your area, or in your chosen industry. The sweet spot: abandoned business or magazine blogs. That means they "get" blogging, and tried to blog, but discovered they don't have time to do it themselves.

There is a ton of paid blogging going on, as content marketing continues to gain over traditional advertising as an effective method that reaches customers. And rates are rising. On my [Freelance Writers Den](#) job board, we don't accept any offers under \$50 a post, and some writers are [earning \\$200 a post](#) or more now, for posts on specialized topics.

58. How do I find abandoned business blogs to write for?

Q: “I’ve been running my own website/blog for well over two years now, so I’m interested in freelance blogging. However, when you mention finding ‘abandoned’ blogs as great places to start, you don’t say how to find those blogs. I don’t see how Googling ‘abandoned blogs’ is going to be very effective. Can you give more specifics?”—Anne G.

A: You’re right, Googling “abandoned blogs” isn’t going to help you locate prospects!

It’s more about identifying industries you want to write for, finding the companies in that niche that are big enough to have a marketing budget, and looking at their online marketing to discover holes you might fill.

It might be a never-updated blog, or the lack of an About page, team bios, or case studies. I like using the [Book of Lists](#) from your nearest American City Business Journals weekly for lead-finding (your library may have a copy). I know other writers who use [Manta](#) effectively for prospecting, too.

59. Should I blog on HubPages for revenue share?

Q: “How do you feel about blogging on HubPages to get at least a little pay? Is it worth it?”—Victoria

A: The answer depends on your goals as a writer right now, Victoria.

Just want to write and get some practice? Need money right away? Need great clips? HubPages might meet that first goal, but not the other two.

In general, these revenue-share places are mostly a waste of time for writers trying to build a high-earning career. I’m forever hearing from writers who ‘brag’ about how they’ve made \$1,000 from the 100 articles they wrote over the course of 3 years...while I’m thinking I would have made more like \$50,000 from 100 articles, and gotten paid right away. Not sure why revshare continues to appeal to people, when so few make anything substantial.

It takes a huge commitment to writing a ton of posts to drive any substantial traffic in this model and [earn well in revenue share](#). Also, this is mostly a shrinking opportunity, with Google’s recent crackdown on mass-content sites that excludes most platforms from its search results.

But if you need exposure, HubPages is a reputable platform to appear in. It’s not going to hurt your career to try it out.

60. Should I take any blogging gig to get clips?

Q: “Last night I went to a networking event and promoted myself as a freelance writer for the first time. One of the people I met was interested in having me blog for his company. He asked how much I charge and when I gave him a number, he sounded very enthusiastic and said he could afford me.

“In retrospect, I wondered if I should have told him a higher rate. Because I’m just starting out, I feel I should accept any work that comes my way and gather referrals and testimonials first. Do you think this is a good way to start out, or do you suggest that I research what other writers in my area charge, and match those rates?”—Jula P.

A: Jula, I don’t know what you quoted, but I like to see at least \$50 a post for blogging, and \$100 is usually more appropriate. Most of the small-business blogging I did was on contracts of \$500 a month for four posts.

Also, it’s dangerous to get into a conversation with a prospect and casually throw out a bid, without knowing what they mean by blog posts. How long are these posts? Do they require interviews?

It’s common for new writers to underbid, so don’t feel bad about it. Just do a short-term contract—60-90 days—with an eye to negotiating a raise at the end of it, if it’s more work than you expected, and you’ve learned more about what rates are appropriate.

If you have a few samples under your belt, there’s no reason to undercharge. By all means, learn about going rates for the type of blogging you’re doing, and charge what you’re worth.

The problem with jumping on any low-payer you can find is that the referrals they will give you will usually be to other low-paying clients...these sorts of business owners tend to travel in the same circles, as do better-quality clients.

61 & 62. How should I determine my blogging rates?

Q: “I recently had the opportunity to write a 1,000-word blog post for two different clients. One client provided some input, while the other required that I interview their customers or clients. The first had a budget of \$25 per

post; the second, \$35. I really didn't see any room to negotiate, so I politely declined both.

"I've since spoken to a writer friend who does a lot of blogging, and she said that was the going rate. I find that very hard to accept. Would you be willing to give me an idea or a range of what you charge?"—Lee L.

Q: "I recently read your post about how much a blogger can charge. I'm just starting off in blogging, and I was wondering about the reasoning behind your \$100 per post rate. Is it just that it's not worthwhile to do it for less? Or is it that you have so much experience? Or does it go along with the number of words per post?

"I'm trying to decide on a base rate that I will not go below. I've got copy-writing and content writing experience, but not so much on the blogging, unless we count my personal blogs."—Shakeitta

A: Let's start by talking about what a good blogging client looks like. A good client understands that your regular blog entries have the power to potentially make their business *happen*—to attract new readers, leads, and sales. As a result, they want to pay a good wage so they can get a pro to write something exceptionally compelling. And \$25 to \$35 for 1,000 words obviously is not an appropriate wage, especially for blogs that call for interviews!

Also, good business-blog clients make a long-range commitment, because they have realistic expectations and understand it'll take time for the blog to build their traffic. My minimum contract for small-business clients is one post a week for two months.

I don't want to work on scattershot projects that won't be successful, since I'm trying to build my reputation in blogging. One thing I've learned: Each business blogging client requires a huge initial learning curve where you don't earn as well on an hourly basis, so that's the amount at which I find it worth my time to get involved.

I've earned from \$65-\$300 for blog entries, depending on the situation, on the higher end of that where interviews were called for. Since I don't take assignments below \$50, I obviously do not agree that \$25-\$35 is the "going rate"! It's up to you to seek out the situations where blogs pay a living wage.

As with online articles, when you're evaluating a blogging offer, the thing to keep in mind is not the per-post price. It's your hourly rate.

If it will take you 10 minutes to write the post, and you could crank out five in an hour, maybe \$25 apiece is a great rate. I generally try to keep my per-blog rate around \$100 apiece, since I usually write blogs that take an hour or more to create. Blogs that re-

quire interviews, obviously, need to pay more. If they want longer posts—and many clients now are moving to wanting 1,000-word or longer posts—rates should be higher, too.

I got \$100 a post on one of the first blogging gigs I ever took, so I don't think that reflects blogging experience, just writing ability.

The best-paying business-blog clients are in specialized business niches not everyone can write about. I've blogged about surety bonds, insurance, business finance, public companies' SEC filings, and other dorky stuff for good pay. Identify your niche specialties, and then do in-person networking, or look at all the websites of companies in your target niche. Find the one that needs a blog, and call them.

You're looking for real-world businesses that sell a real product or service, or established news organizations that are moving online. They want strong posts that will make people hang around their site and buy from them, or their advertisers. If you want to make even more money, sell your blogging skill along with your knowledge of social media—that's a great package of services that's commanding good pay.

63. Do I need to cite experts in blog posts?

Q: "If I want to start a blog with a niche related to health or finance and I have no formal training in those fields, would I need to consult with experts in these fields in each post, in order to not get into trouble, by posting advice without the proper credentials?"—Kyle C.

A: Kyle, it really depends on what sorts of blog posts you plan to write. You obviously can't give medical advice yourself, right? But you could cite recent studies that have come out, and credit those sources.

The bigger question is, what's your motivation in starting the blog? Why is this the topic you want to write about? What unique point of view do you bring to that? That unique voice is what makes successful blogs.

For instance, my point of view on my blog is that content mills suck, and writers who're serious about earning as freelancers should stay away from them, and seek out clients that pay professional rates. And then I provide info about how you do that.

That's different from many other websites, where they give you a lot of praise and support for moving up from \$1 a post to \$3.

A lot of blog posts are written about our personal experiences—like the finance blog [My Wife Quit Her Job](#), about his personal journey to financial independence, or [Smart](#)

[Passive Income](#), which tracks Pat Flynn's online experiments. Then you ARE the expert, in your own life and experience.

64. Will I have to upload posts to my client's blog?

Q: "I have a pretty basic question: are bloggers for hire generally expected to physically upload and post the content they provide – especially when they're helping out small businesses? If you do upload, how are you usually given access to the blog? If you don't, what file format do people prefer to receive content in and why?"—Samantha

A: Samantha, there is no "usual" here.

I've had clients where I turned over Word documents for editors to edit and add photos to and post in their dashboard and publish. Then, most recently, as a paid *Forbes* blogger, I had complete access to my own WordPress dashboard within their platform, built everything including photos, slideshows, and links, and could even hit the 'publish' button myself. Clients can give you a login that allows you onto their platform as a user, which is what *Forbes* did.

Increasingly, clients are hoping to give you dashboard access and get you to do everything. The whole reason they're not blogging in-house is no one has time for all the details involved!

It's really a question of how much they want you to take on for them. I'm quite sure I could do little damage to *Forbes* from my one user access point.

The good news is that it's not hard to learn how to post. Most systems are either built in WordPress, or are custom systems built to resemble...WordPress. Learn a bit of that, and you're set.

65. What goes into writing a business blog post?



Q: “I notice that most business blogs have links. Do you do the research to find those related articles and then make sure they’re included? Do you write any of them?

“Also, do you discuss with your clients what needs to go into each post before writing? A prospect that wanted to pay \$25 a post said that sometimes, their clients had an idea what they wanted said, and other times I could just “make it up.” These were attorneys!”—Lee L.

A: Most good business blogs contain links, in my opinion. Posts are often what’s known as mashups—you take several recent pieces of news you’ve seen online and provide analysis of what they mean when viewed together. That’s your value-add, that makes viewers want to come to the client site instead of those six other places—you’re gathering up their industry news and giving it to them in a comprehensive, insightful way.

I get the links I need for business blog posts by gathering news from my own Internet browsing, and from [Google alerts](#) I set up to capture news on my business clients’ industry topics. I set up a Word doc I throw them in for future use, along with a key phrase to remind me what each link was about. Read 50 or so news stories on a topic daily, and at the end of the week you will have more ideas than you can ever use!

It’s also important to link to previous stories on the site. This internal linkage helps keep readers on the site, and shows your expertise.

To figure out what links to include, I discuss at length with clients their goal, intended audience, voice, tone, and ideal topics for their blog. Some hand me an Excel spreadsheet of approved topics and ask me to prioritize and execute them. Others expect me to develop all the ideas on my own.

When those attorneys say, “make it up,” Lee, I think they’re referring to the latter—that

they want you to develop some of the topics (not that you could fabricate the posts from your imagination!).

Chapter 11: Guest Posting



66. Is guest posting still effective?

Q: “You’ve mentioned that guest posting isn’t as effective as it used to be. So, should I be saving my best stuff just for my site, and focus on marketing in other ways? Maybe freelancing could be the marketing I need. In a nutshell, should I concentrate so much effort on trying to land a guest post, or focus marketing in other areas?”—Joe C.

A: It’s true that guest posting isn’t quite the hot ticket it was when Leo Babauta started Zen Habits in 2007. But it’s still one of the fastest routes to getting new readers to your blog.

The only thing better is getting a top blogger to mention you, interview you, or otherwise link to you in a favorable way inside a post—but that’s harder to pull off.

It takes some experimentation to see where to post that gets you the best traffic and converts the best into subscribers to your own blog. Definitely keep at it until you find what works! Also the blog-storm approach, where you have many guest posts appearing various places all in the same week, still is a great approach.

I’m not saying you shouldn’t market your blog other ways. But if you’re building a blog-based business, guest posting is probably going to be a big part of that marketing strategy.

As far as saving your best stuff for your site: if your site has no readers, then that’s not a good idea! Make your guest posts really high quality—that way you get asked back, and impress that larger audience and get them over to your blog. When you have a new blog, you don’t need to post on your own blog so much—Derek Halpern, one of my mentors, recommends you do 80% of your writing as guest posts on a new blog, and only 20% posts on your own blog, a formula that I think works well.

As far as freelancing promoting your blog, I’ve more often seen it work in reverse—your blogging helps attract freelance clients. If your main goal is to build the blog, I’d stick with guest posting, and freelance if you want the client income.

67 & 68. Should I pitch guest posts on behalf of a client?

Q: “I’ve been approached to blog for a startup company. They already have a blog, but absolutely no traffic. I suggested that they need to guest post for big blogs to generate traffic.

“I’ve already blogged for a big blog, which is a good target for them. Can I pitch a post on behalf of my client?”—Henry

Q: “I am relatively new at freelance writing, but I have a lot of training in [a potential client’s] topic. How much should I charge for managing their blog? And, what if they ask me to try to write articles promoting their business on other websites? Is that worth it?”—Alexis

A: When businesses say they are looking for writers to write and PLACE stories with publications or websites, this is half writing, half PR job. They’re usually looking for someone with relationships at publications or big websites, or a big Rolodex of editor contacts from their own writing, where you would be willing to exploit that on behalf of the company to get articles you write about them published on Gizmodo or Technorati or Copyblogger or Entrepreneur.com, or wherever their target audience reads.

Often, the companies don’t understand journalism ethics and are actually hoping you’ll do something unethical, like pretend you’ve discovered this “great” business story about them...without disclosing that they are paying you.

This kind of shady conflict-of-interest situation can end your editorial career, once editors get wind of it. And companies are increasingly interested in finding ignorant writers who’ll do it. I know, because I get asked to do it on a regular basis...and have to sign a quarterly statement at *Forbes* testifying that I’m not doing it.

Using your contacts as a writer to try to help a client muddies your intentions, your own brand, and the relationships you’ve built. I would ask careful questions to make sure you know exactly what they expect you to do.

I once had a job like this, by the way, where I had to pitch other blogs and try to place guest posts. It was all above-board, though, where I was clearly working for the client. It was agony, thought, and I ended up quitting because the hourly rate could never make sense. It’s a LOT of work.

If you do this, you have to get paid by the hour, or by the contact you reach out to and pitch, **not** by results. Because success is rare. I found I could often make 50 pitches to get one “yes,” if I was lucky.

The question of how much to charge for “managing” their blog is another complex topic.

You’d need to know how much work this will involve. Some questions:

- Are you developing all the topics, self-editing, finding photos, selecting advertisers and managing their ads, scheduling posts, responding to comments, promoting posts in social media?
- Do the posts require interviews?
- Are they long posts, or short?
- How many are there each month?
- Will you be managing a writing staff?
- Is this just for writing on their blog, or will you guest post on other blogs, with links back to their site?

Many paid blogging gigs are just the writing. My old rule of thumb on that was \$500 for four posts a month. Other gigs may be a comprehensive package of blog topic development, writing, and social-media marketing. If you’re doing more work, price accordingly.

69. Do I need to build a writer website before pitching a guest post?

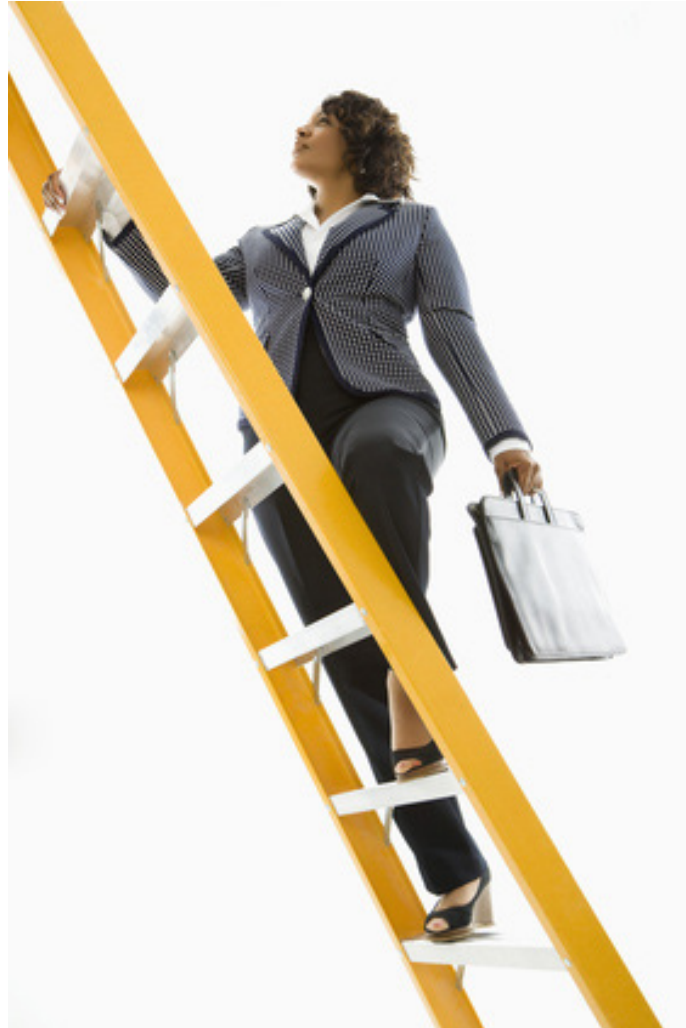
Q: “The site I want to pitch my idea to has a form and within it is a spot for your blog or link to online writing samples. I have not yet put up my writer’s site but I do have a blog, with many samples of my writing. Would this suffice for now? Or would you suggest I get my writer’s site up and link to that?”

—Toby

A: Toby, I have a motto: Be a writer, not a waiter.

If you have a blog now and can link to it, and have guest posts ready to submit, use the blog. Later on, when you’ve got a writer site, you can decide which is a more useful link for you to get. Usually, guest posting promotes an author’s blog, so you may decide to just keep using your blog.

Chapter 12: Move Up and Earn More



70. Where are the good-paying clients hiding?



Q: “How do you locate clients willing to offer acceptable pay? I don’t have as much experience as I’d like, but I’m very confident in my writing ability and know my samples are worth a second glance.

“Also, what happens when the employers don’t want decent writers? Online bid sites have been hindering rather than helping me. Any advice on how to get my name out there and get into those higher-paying markets?”—Jessica

A: If you’ve been searching and searching for good online writing gigs, and all you’re finding is freebie and \$20-an-article gigs, one thing is certain.

You’re searching in the wrong place

If you’ve been answering online job ads month after month and getting only insultingly low offers, or bidding on freelance sites and getting starvation wages, I want to ask: Why are you still doing it? You’ve proven the good jobs aren’t to be found there. You need to try other forms of marketing.

It’s really that simple. If you keep doing what you’ve always done, as the old saying goes, you’ll continue to get what you’ve always gotten.

To earn more, you’ll have to shake up your marketing. Look under some new rocks.

In a sense, good-paying writing jobs are not hiding. You are hiding from the good-paying jobs.

I can tell you [there is great pay out there](#). Rates are rising at many websites.

There’s a catch, though—you have to go out and find these gigs.

Where? Definitely not on a job ad where 1,000 writers are all going to send in their resume.

How to locate better clients

To find a great client, first you have to know who they are.

Right now, imagine your ideal client. Is it a magazine editor? An online editor? A successful company?

Close your eyes and think about it. Got them pictured in your head? Good.

Now, where does the person who hires writers at that market hang out? Who do they talk to? What do they read? What blogs might they comment on?

Most of all, what do they need? Think about how you could solve these prospects' problems.

Next, think about where they would look for writers.

To connect with better clients, all you have to do is be there.

Is that more work, figuring all that out? Yes, it is. But the pot of gold at the end of this rainbow is a great deal larger, too.

How to deal with low-pay offers

What happens when "decent" writers find employers who don't care about writing quality and want to pay squat? They move on.

If I'm quoted a laughably low rate, I'll often say, "I'm sorry you're not able to afford professional rates right now. Feel free to give me a call in the future if your budget changes."

Sometimes, they do.

Now, everybody's definition of low pay is different.

When I started freelancing in 2005, for me it was \$50 an article or post. Now, it's \$400.

But know what your floor is. Don't go below it.

Don't waste your energy trying to convince low-paying prospects that they should pay you 10 times what they're offering. It's not going to happen.

Instead, devote all your energy to marketing your writing business until you connect with the clients who'll pay you what you're worth. Become an unstoppable force, and don't give up until you find the clients you want, and have all the work you need.

71. How can I keep from being outbid?



Q: “My rates are neither high nor low. I communicate in a professional manner and my writing speaks for itself. However, every client that shows interest in my service ends up choosing some dollar-a-job wannabe who can barely string a sentence together.

“Where on Earth are all the legitimate businesses hiding?

“I’m literally down to my last penny.”—Dylan

A: This sort of letter makes me sad, because it’s too late for me to help. And it’s probably too late for this writer to stick with freelance writing.

It’s time to get a day job.

Once you’re flat broke, it’s nearly impossible to make this work. You need money to live on while you build your business.

If you didn’t get the hang of finding good-paying writing clients on your own and you have no money to invest in even a cheap e-book on freelancing, you’re out of options.

Where did this writer go wrong, and how could he have prevented this situation? I see two big missteps that led this writer to go bust:

Chasing the wrong kind of clients

When all your prospects go with the lowest-priced offer, your marketing is off-target.

You’re swimming in the wrong client pool—the one where startup websites are slapping up SEO-optimized junk content in hopes of driving clicks to their ads. And it’s not

working, so they have no money to pay writers.

Likely, this writer was getting clients off the big online freelance-writer job boards, Craigslist, content mills, or race-to-the-bottom platforms such as Elance. On this stage, you compete with hundreds of other writers from all over the world, including places where the cost of living is far lower.

This is not where you want to look for clients. You'll keep getting beat out by \$1-a-job desperados.

To find the sort of clients who pay professional rates, you have to identify successful businesses with real marketing budgets to hire freelancers. The kind of businesses who can't hire someone who's semi-literate to slap up garbage—they need sophisticated content that builds their authority in their industry and gets them customer leads.

Then, instead of waiting for them to advertise that they need a writer, you reach out to them—send an email, call them, meet them at a networking event—and pitch them your services.

If you don't know how to do that, you need to learn.

Instead, this freelancer engaged in a form of insanity: He repeatedly used the same failed marketing approaches, and expected to get a different result. Until one day, the money ran out.

No writer website

Now that he's gone broke, the writer reports he is getting up a writer website and taking his business seriously.

Putting up a writer website should be the first step in launching a freelance writing business, not an afterthought. Without a professional-looking writer website, it's difficult to impress quality clients that you're worth good rates.

The lack of a website no doubt contributed to ending up competing for lowball clients—and losing out.

Looking over the website mock-up this writer sent me, my heart sank again. There were branding, design, and usability mistakes in the site that were going to make it fail as a tool for getting him found by prospects and showing his work in the best light.

I see this all too often, in the hundreds of writer websites I've reviewed in [Freelance Writers Den](#). You don't need just any old, slapped-up writer website—you need to build a writer website that works to get you clients.

If you don't know how to create a site that gets you found by prospects who're searching online for freelance writers—and impresses them once they click over to your site—

you need to learn.

But if you're out of money, it's hard to make this important investment in your business, much less pay for hosting or design or Web support.

What to do if you go bust

If you go broke trying to be a freelance writer, is it the end of your writing dreams? Not necessarily.

I know plenty of writers who ended up going back and getting a day job for a while, to rebuild their savings.

Some freelance on the side while they work, to build their knowledge of freelancing and their client base. Maybe they got up a freelance website and started learning how to turn that into a client magnet.

The smart ones invested some of their income to learn more about how to freelance smarter and find better clients.

Then, they quit and returned to freelancing, often with better results. As long as you're breathing, there's always a chance to try again.

72. How should I handle covering a conference for a trade pub?

Q: "I've been asked to cover a 3-day conference in Seattle by a trade publication, and write something up about it. The trade pub pays on the low end of the scale. Since I don't live in Seattle, I'll have to drive back and forth (an hour or so), but the pub will get me a press pass. I haven't actually written anything for this pub yet. While I'm looking forward to covering this, how do I get my time compensated for?"—Karen

A: Great question! I recently paid to go to The New Media Expo (NMX) in Las Vegas (wanted to learn more for my own blog!), but managed to make back much of my costs in freelance pieces.

The trick is to sell what you learn at the show to more than one market. Yes, you have one assignment and someone got you in free with a press pass (a better deal than I had at NMX). That doesn't mean you can only write for them.

Start calling other markets that might want coverage out of that show, and see who else you can line up. Then, report on different keynotes, panels, or networking events

for the different markets.

I'd run this by the trade that sent you to the conference, just to be sure they don't want to expand their own coverage. Don't write for directly competing publications, and you should be fine.

There are so many ways to use convention info—a local paper, a regional magazine, an industry trade, and a national consumer pub all have different audiences.

I ended up writing five different posts out of NMX: three for Freelance Switch (now Microlancer), one for Forbes, and one for my own blog. Who knows, I may still unpack more stuff from there!

73. What are the secrets for freelance writing success?



Q: "Please help me! I know I have the talent and skill – from past REALLY successful copywriting projects and jobs. I've done assignments for Fortune 500 companies and have even won awards.

"Could you at least give me the basic secrets for freelance writing success, to get me going?"

A: I don't know how secret they are...but there are a few basic things you must have, if you're going to start earning as a freelance writer.

Here's what they are:

A can-do attitude

Are you fired up and burning with a passion to make your living from writing and be your own boss? Are you confident about your skills and willing to put yourself out there?

Most of the writers I meet who aren't earning are trapped by fears and low self-confidence. They think up excuses about why they can't move forward—they need a journalism degree, for instance, or the economy's too crummy to possibly make it as a freelancer today.

Trust me, you will not encounter any bigger challenge out in the marketplace than the negative tape you're playing in your head.

When writers tell me they're dead in the water because they can't find an editor's email address, or simply can't manage to hit "send" on that query letter, I know they're kidding themselves. They're not doing it because they're scared.

Pledge to be an unstoppable force until you have the clients you need to feed your family.

Be willing to get creative to solve the obstacles you encounter. Don't take "no" for an answer. If the rules aren't working for you, bend or break them or make up your own.

A writing habit

If you're sitting home, waiting to get an assignment in order to write something, this isn't going to work. Writing is a muscle that needs to be built up, like any other in your body. You need to be working it all the time.

Also, you ought to be writing because you love it. If you don't love it, this probably isn't the career for you.

Keep a journal, start a blog, write long letters to your grandma. Have a habit of writing. There is no substitute for writing in quantity and on a regular basis for growing your skills.

If you used to be a reporter, like the reader who asked this question, and now you want to get back into it, begin by writing again. Find pro bono clients who'll let you do sample work—anything to get the words flowing again. If you're brand new to writing, same thing—start writing. Then, keep writing.

I was a staff writer for 12 years, required to write at least three stories every single week, often more. If you looked at my writing the year I got that first job and my writing at the end of that time, it is like night and day. Huge amounts of writing will build your skills—and your confidence.

A willingness to market

This is the one that divides the women from the girls, as far as earning a living as a freelancer.

Every one-on-one mentee I have ever worked with, I start by asking them one key question. The conversation always goes like this:

Me: To begin, why don't you tell me what you're currently doing to market your freelance writing business, so we can talk about what else you might do.

Mentee: You know, I actually haven't been doing any marketing.

Writers who understand they're running a business know they will need to make marketing a regular activity in their schedule. So understand: This is a business.

Put up a writer website. Get business cards and go to networking events. Get on LinkedIn and start working it there.

Expect to be marketing aggressively for 6-18 months to get your business afloat and build up your client base to where you have a steady flow of good-paying work. It'll get a bit easier after that, but marketing never goes away.

Mentors

If you'd like this process to take ages, try to figure it all out yourself. If you'd like to move along faster, try to lasso an editor or two into critiquing your work on a regular basis.

As it happens, that second approach is how I learned all the basics. Two wonderful editors at two print publications thought my writing showed promise and were willing to be peppered with questions by me on why they changed my lede and cut the quote I loved, and all that. I'd probably still be getting \$50 an article if it weren't for these incredibly giving two men.

When I started my blog, same thing. I [connected with mentors](#) through Twitter, and through networking groups I joined, who saved me a ton of time and aggravation. You probably wouldn't be reading this now without them.

Writer friends

Finally, no writer is an island. This is lonely work, and your family and friends won't understand the particular challenges you are grappling with. You need to meet other writers and hang out with them, both online and in person.

Personally, I've benefited greatly from going to [Media Bistro's live events](#), but check around in your town. Do a Google search for the keywords you're trying to rank on and see who tops that search. Then, ask them what local writers' groups are locally.

One of those local listservs brought me a lead that turned into a \$60,000 client that ran

for more than 2 years. It's really worth asking around and knowing other writers, especially in your niche. Trust me.

74. Is freelancing all about contacts?

Q: "I periodically get ideas, but don't know where to go with them. I have a feeling it's all about developing contacts, but I've been out of writing for several years. Is my instinct correct? Should I try and resurrect some old contacts and try to get advice?"

"I feel weird writing people I didn't know that well 6 years ago, looking for advice. I have a strong background in education, and my story idea has to do with education. I just feel like I have to knock on the right door with this idea. Thoughts?"—Stephanie B.

A: I don't agree that freelancing is "all about contacts." A great idea in a well-written query can get you in the door, without any introductions. Why don't you just research the publications it would be right for, and send a query? Sounds like time is short.

I worry that it sounds like you're hyper-focused on this one idea. If you want to get back into freelancing, know that it's about having many ideas and pitching them many places, not finding a home for this one.

Should you resurrect old contacts? Absolutely! Don't feel weird about it. But don't contact them expecting that they'll mentor you.

They may refer you, though—I reconnected with one editor I hadn't written for in a decade, and he referred me a \$.50 a word global custom publishing client. Definitely reactivate whatever contacts you have.

I'll tell you a secret—reconnecting with former colleagues is fun! You never know where those past editors will be working now. They might have some great work for you themselves, too.

Chapter 13: Rates & Negotiating



75. When should I bring up the subject of payment?

Q: “One problem I have is knowing when to bring up the question of money. I like to get this out in the open as soon as possible with any new or potential clients, but I’m not sure whether this should be mentioned in a pitch, or after it’s become clear that there’s an interest in hiring me.”—Sarah

A: In the case of publications, they will ordinarily have a usual pay rate for their articles. Be sure to ask them what it is when they make an assignment, and get a contract that spells it out. Definitely don’t ask about money until you’ve got an editor interested in your article idea.

With business clients, I try not to spend more than 30 minutes discussing their project before having a ballpark fee discussion. Start by saying, “OK, sounds like you want six pages of Web copy. What’s your budget for that?” Something along those lines.

If they won’t say (or can’t, because they don’t have any idea of rates), then I throw out a ballpark figure: “Based on what you’ve said, that sounds like \$600-\$1,200 worth of work to me. That sound about right?” Now, if they wanted it all done for \$50, we can be done quickly.

76. Should I take this low-paying gig to learn different writing styles?

Q: “I recently applied for a job with an SEO marketing firm for writing guest blog posts. I really, really need the extra work right now. I’m a single mom and floundering. However, the rates are \$10 per 400+ word blog post, and \$20 per 600+ blog post. The company retains all rights to my content, and the content appears to be more like articles than blogs.

“What do you think about this? Is this a good way to learn different writing styles and how to write more quickly, or would I be making a mistake to sign on with this person? I’m afraid that if I don’t take advantage of the opportunity, that nothing better will come along in time for me to pay the bills.”—May C.

A: SEO articles don’t pay well. They never will. Those rates are pretty typical for this type of stuff. It’s because these articles are for robots to read, not people, so they don’t have to be very good or even accurate.

As to whether you want to take this gig, it really depends on your situation, goals, and finances.

At best, think of it as a stopgap way to pay a few urgent bills. But it's not building your writing career in any useful way.

My experience is that these sort of articles can't even be used in your portfolio. Often, the sites they appear on have such a bad reputation they're actually a black mark against you, if you want to write for any legitimate sites or publications in future.

I've mentored many writers who've written for mills like this for years, and still have NO portfolio. Nothing they can use as an example they write well! That's the big problem—it's not helping you move forward.

77 & 78. What should I charge for a newsletter?

Q: "What would you suggest as a fee to charge, for both a one-page and a two-page electronic newsletter? Would you charge separately if the client wants me to 'load' the piece into the email program (such as AWeber) and maintain their list? And finally, do you think this might be a feasible way to eventually make a living?"—Tiiu G.

Q: "I'm trying to figure out what I should charge a client who publishes a subscription newsletter to hedge funds and retail investors. It focuses on the stock market and on specific stocks. Is this the kind of publication that should pay top rates to a freelance writer? I quoted \$50/hr for editing. When they asked if I could occasionally pen an article as well, I said "Yes," without specifying a different rate for writing.

"I don't want to write for less than I'm worth (and I know they like my work a lot)! How do I communicate a higher rate for writing?"—G.M.

A: That depends on the newsletter, Tiiu. Are you designing it? Just writing articles for it? Do those articles require interviews? How much of the page is text, and how much graphics? How well do you know this topic? You'll need answers to figure out how much time this will take you. Then you can [plug your hourly rate in](#) to figure out an appropriate rate.

Loading and scheduling a marketing email probably doesn't take more than five minutes, once you know the program. But I'd charge separately for doing database work on their list, which could easily be hours of work a month.

This sounds like a great financial services client that has money. Tell them that first writing piece was a tryout. If they liked it, tell them you'd like to negotiate an appropriate rate for article writing, which has fees that differ from editing, and are rarely charged by the hour.

I'd think \$1 a word would be the right neighborhood for a client like this, but don't tell them that—do the math and give them a set fee. Try to switch them to flat project fees for writing—you don't want to have to explain how many hours it takes you to write something, or to sit counting words to get your exact pay.

I sell this as: "Now you'll know exactly what to budget," with a flat rate. Stress the advantages to the client of not choosing hourly, where they don't really know what the bill will be.

If it's a marketing newsletter, you might also negotiate a bit lower flat rate but ask for a conversion tracking page and a royalty as well. Might be a solution if they don't want to pay top-dollar up front. Some marketing copywriters do very well on this type of pay system.

79. What resources can help me decide what to charge?

Q: "Is there a resource freelancers can use to determine what to charge? I refer frequently to *The Writer's Market* [What to Charge guide], but some projects aren't as cut and dry as the ones they list."—Alma

A: It's hard for freelance writers to accept that there isn't a magical resource with all the answers on rates. They just vary. There are no "going rates."

Aside from *The Writer's Market*, my best bets are asking clients "What's your budget?" before you bid, to see if they'll tip their hand, and asking your writer networks what would be appropriate. Every time I do these two things, I end up earning more.

80. What should I quote for a travel guide?

Q: "I was recently looking at a well-known travel website and publication, and noticed that their online "guide" on the country/area I live in is exceptionally out of date. I'm thinking about approaching them and pitching a proposal to update it (write-ups on things like restaurants, hotels, things

to do, etc.). It's an exotic, small, popular area, and I have the advantage of living here, which gives me immediate access to all necessary information.

“What should I propose in terms of pricing? If accepted, I think it's about a six-month project, due to all the information that would need to be collected.”—Sophie

A: Sophie, when you're making your initial pitch, you don't have to worry about pricing! First, just try to get them interested in having you write it. Write them a sharp letter of introduction in the style of their site, that explains how you noticed this outdated guide, and have insider knowledge and writing experience that make you a perfect fit for the redo.

Sometimes, if they bite, they will simply offer you a rate, and you'll have to decide if it's fair. Big travel sites often have a set rate they pay for copy—and often, it's low. Be prepared for that. It's hard to earn well in this niche, because everybody thinks they can write travel.

Rewriting a single page of a website is never going to pay a ton. If it's short (300 words or so), maybe \$100 is fair? If longer, \$250-\$300 might be good. But be ready for them to try to get it for less. If it's a lengthy guide, you'll need to figure your time investigating all those restaurants and attractions.

The bigger problem here is that it's a one-off job that may not lead to any other work for them, so it may not be worth your time. If you think you could possibly update other guides, even though you don't live in those regions, then maybe this is a foot in the door, and there's enough work where it will make sense even at a lower rate.

Chapter 14: Ethics & Scams



81. Is it OK to get paid by a publication and by a company?



Q: “A marketing consultant contacted me, wanting me to publish articles on third-party blogs and online publications and mention his client’s products in each article. Does this sound ethical? Is it okay to get paid by a publication and also by a corporation that was mentioned in the piece?”—Tara

A: It’s an exciting time, when you finally start to get some traction as a freelance writer. You land a client or two, and start writing. Maybe you score a gig with a popular blog, or you’re writing for a big website.

Having highly visible bylines often leads to emails from prospective clients. They’re impressed by who you’re writing for, and they’d like to hire you.

Unfortunately, what they’d like to hire you to write is not always legit.

Ignoring the rules

Not every business owner knows the [rules of journalism](#): that the reporter needs to be impartial in what they write, and can’t ever profit from what they are saying is “news” or a good resource in a story.

Still other businesses *do* know the rules. But they prefer not to play by them.

What this client is asking is flat-out unethical, if you haven’t guessed.

They’re asking to brazenly use you, and your existing client relationships, to market their business, on the sly. If that puts your reputation in danger? Well, clearly they don’t care.

If you’re a paid writer for a blog or website, links you include should only be useful resources you decided, independently, are valuable and relevant to the story. Getting

paid to pop in links to companies that want visibility on one of your client's sites: that's a Bozo no-no.

The perils of double dipping

When you're being paid both by your client, and by the sources you include in your posts or articles, it's known in journalism circles as double-dipping. You can't get paid on both ends.

Basically, these sleazy companies are both cheap and lazy. Instead of hiring a PR firm and pitching their company as a source to reporters and hoping they will take an interest—which is what they're supposed to do—they'd like to cut to the chase and simply buy your interest.

The problem has become so widespread online that many big outlets are making writers sign a contract attesting that they are not including paid links. At Forbes, they make us re-sign a pledge not to do it every single quarter.

Let me quote from a policy update I recently got from them:

Link Schemes

When you link somewhere for perceived search or monetary benefits rather than usefulness or credit, then you are participating in a link scheme. Link schemes are against Forbes and Google guidelines. They are very simple for Google to detect, and they will adversely affect your website as well as forbes.com's ranking in Google. Examples include:

Buying or selling links that pass PageRank. This includes exchanging money for links, or posts that contain links; exchanging goods or services for links; or sending someone a "free" product in exchange for them writing about it and including a link

*Article marketing or guest posting containing links with optimized anchor text in articles – anchor text example: "There are many **wedding rings** on the market."*

Advertorials or native advertising where payment is received for articles that include links that pass PageRank

More info at: <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66356>

*Forbes has zero tolerance for link schemes. Should we or Google discover you are engaging in this practice, your publishing rights on **forbes.com** will immediately be terminated."*

If your client discovers you're double dipping, you're likely going to be done writing for

them. I know Forbes has let writers go over this, and I'm sure they're not the only site on active patrol against paid-for mentions and links, either.

Why are big websites on the warpath about this? Because if it became known that their useful posts were in fact full of cheesy paid links, their reputation as a news source would be ruined, too.

It'll be hard to [get editors interested in your query letter](#) if word is on the street that you're for sale to the highest bidder, as far as the content of your posts.

Compromise on the cheap

When the writer above asked for more details on how much pay this prospect was willing to put up to get their link slipped into posts on big sites, this was the response:

"My client is looking for editorial placements in articles that willingly came from the authors of those articles. While we are willing to pay for the collaborative time and effort, we're not looking for sponsored content, advertorials, or paid disclosures."

"My client is looking to team up with trusted authors to make them aware of some great free resources they offer and see if those resources might be a good fit for any upcoming content the author plans to write. These articles/posts would not be promotional in nature or only focused on the client. We're just looking for a link in the form of a helpful reference within the article."

And there you have it. They don't want to pay for a sponsored post or article—which might run them \$500-\$1,200, and would make clear they bought the mention.

No, they're looking to ruin your career and get you fired on the cheap. They'd like to slip you \$50 or \$100 for a link and call it good. (I've gotten similar offers to accept paid posts on my own blog from link-seekers, at similar rates. No, thanks.)

You've got to love the way this prospect spun what they're doing, too. Especially how they make clear that if you were to disclose that they paid you for the link—which is what you should ethically do—then they're not interested.

If you're desperate for money, look at taking a part-time job while you build up your finances.

No matter how tempting it might seem to take that extra cash for slipping in a link, say no. If you're thinking that big website or publication you're writing for will never know... trust me, they will find out.

82. I've been accused of plagiarism by a client —what should I do?

Q: “I just turned in a post to an editor about ways to save on wedding cakes. She accused me of plagiarism, said my article was nearly identical to one already published, and called me unprofessional and unethical. However, I ran my article through a plagiarism checker, and it says that there is 0% plagiarism.

“I did use the article the editor says it’s similar to as a source, and I included quotes from this article.

“Now, I’m afraid of being blackballed. She loved my [previous] work, but now she basically called me a thief. What should I do?”—Cherese C.

A: Bad news here: you plagiarized. You can’t copy quotes from something you read online or in another article, and insert them into your piece without proper attribution, which might be something like, “On Gawker.com, Jennifer Lopez said, ‘Blah.’”

Not sure what “plagiarism checker” you’re using, but clearly it failed to point that out to you.

Your comment that what you did was “like I learned to do in college” points up a problem I’ve seen a lot. Many writers don’t understand that writing for pay is not like writing a college paper, where you are free to cite and lift passages from books or others’ interviews, because the work is unpaid. This is why I put my [4 Week Journalism School](#) together—so writers can learn about the ethics of reporting and avoid getting fired in just this way.

Very sorry to hear this was your only client, and that you’ve blown up your relationship with them out of ignorance of professional ethics. It’s not likely something you can repair with this client. I would imagine they had a policy about this that you signed and agreed to when you started with them, so there’s really no excuse.

The good news is there are a lot of clients in the sea, and I’m sure you won’t do it again. You’ll have to start over, but it happens. You aren’t the first writer who’s blown up a relationship and had to move forward without a recommendation from one early client.

You might want to take a little time to learn about the rules of journalism, so that you avoid getting yourself into trouble in future.

The good news is that there is no Universal Editor Network your editor could hop on to notify all editors the world over about this and blackball you throughout the freelance

world. Generally, editors are too busy to make an effort to trash anyone's reputation, anyway.

83. How do I cite resources without plagiarizing?

Q: "I just had a question. I have an idea for an e-book, but I want to make sure I don't plagiarize it. My question is, do I just add a page to the back of the book to list my resources? Thanks for any help."—Todd D.

A: Todd, listing where you ripped things off from doesn't get you off the hook.

You can only use about one paragraph from somewhere else without seeking and obtaining permission from the original author. A couple sentences or so is considered fair use. More than that, and, it's plagiarism.

Consider writing an original e-book, instead of one cobbled together from other people's writing. Or use works where copyright has expired—I know people who're making a nice living recycling public-domain information. I wouldn't be caught dead doing that, but I know you can use public-domain works without legal repercussions.

Chapter 15: The Business of Freelancing



84. How should I handle extreme burnout?



Q: “How do you handle extreme burnout in freelance writing? I am going through that now and am floundering with my writing. My quality of writing has gone way down. I’ve been fighting this with a purple passion, but my work is suffering.

“To make matters worse, I lost my major client last Friday. I don’t want to leave writing, but I’m so burned out that I’m not providing quality work.”—Teresa

A: This is definitely a bad situation. Makes me wonder whether that layoff was really because of “the economy,” because we all know what happens when you’re burned out—you get fired from some of your better gigs. Suddenly, instead of burnout being the worry, it’s starvation.

It’s time to take a look at the types of writing assignments you’re taking on. If you’re burned out on one type, such as blogging, it might be time to write informational Web content, special reports, ghost an e-book, or take on some other kind of bigger project.

When writers burn out, it can also mean we’re not taking good care of ourselves. If you’re writing for super-low pay and can’t take weekends off or find time to exercise, it’s easy to get fried. Remember to strive for good work/life balance, so that you can write sustainably and keep building your career.

85. How long until I make a living wage?

Q: “How long should it take for a brand-new writer to start earning a living wage from writing?”—Erin S.

A: Wish I had a straight answer for you like “Oh, it’ll be six months,” or something. But the thing is, every writer is different.

It’ll mostly boil down to this question: **How much marketing are you willing to do?**

If you make 500 cold calls, or send 100 targeted direct mail marketing packages, or well-targeted and well-written marketing emails, you ought to be able to find enough clients to get rolling.

My experience is that few writers are willing to do that.

The other question is: **What niches you are drawn to, and do you feel qualified to write on?** If you have even a passing acquaintance with a high-paying niche such as technology or healthcare, that would help as well.

Finally: **Who will be your mentors?** If you have help launching your freelance career, this ought to go a lot faster. You’ll avoid underbidding (VERY common with new writers), sending substandard letters of introduction that don’t get a response, and falling for scams. This, in a nutshell, is why I created [Freelance Writers Den](#)—it’s an accelerator for your freelance writing career.

You could spend years and years figuring it all out on your own, the way I did. Or you could ask questions on Den forums ,and maybe take our Step by Step Guide to Freelance Writing Success bootcamp or [read the e-book](#), which outlines EXACTLY how to get a starter portfolio together and start getting good-paying gigs.

The question is: **How bad you want this?** What are you willing to do, and to give up, to make it happen? How far out of your comfort zone will you go? I find writers who go for it, and are serious about launching as a freelance writer, see things develop very quickly. I’ve seen people quit high-paying jobs because they’ve got enough freelance writing clients to do it.

86. Can I freelance under a pseudonym?

Q: “I’m apprehensive about using my real name and picture for building my platform. How should I approach my pen name and its platform?”—Sofia

A: Here’s the problem with using a pseudonym as a freelance, nonfiction writer: The Internet is all about being authentic and real. If you’re not, people think you’re a scam.

Consider just writing as yourself. If you write any nonfiction, you can’t write under a pseudonym—that’s only possible for fiction, by the way.

If you must use a pseudonym, perhaps for personal safety reasons, or because you want to write porn or something, you’ll have to think about how to be real with people from behind that fake name.

87. What should a newbie put on her business cards?

Q: “What should you put on your business cards, if you’re a newer freelancer?”—Nichole

A: Just put something simple like “Nichole X, freelance writer.” Put your email and phone and a link to your writer website.

If you don’t have a writer site, you need to get one as soon as possible. Use your LinkedIn profile in the meanwhile—you can add links to clips on there. Or use [Writer’s Residence](#) or OutstandingSETUP to help you make it happen affordably.

Get cards free from VistaPrint—they’re great! Then, as your career takes off and things change—you get a new site URL or email, you become more active in social media, you decide to specialize in healthcare writing, or whatever—you can just get new cards. I’m on my third or fourth set since starting my current freelance stint in 2005. Then I found the most current ones left off my Twitter handle, so then I needed yet another set!

The key is—just get some cards. Don’t overthink it. Have SOMETHING to hand out. Improve from there.

88. Should I start an agency?



Q: “I’m starting a writing and editing business. My business model is to outsource to trusted friends and people in my network who are willing to help. They all have advanced degrees, are amazing writers, and are also subject-matter experts.

“Can you give me your take on outsourcing?”—Evan

A: Sure, I can: [Starting a freelance business](#) from scratch with the idea that you will instantly be an agency is not going to work.

The agency model works when there is a high volume of projects, as 50 percent or more of the pay will be going to other people. The volume needs to be high enough that by taking a 30-70 percent markup on each gig, you can make a living.

Needing to charge more to cover both the writer’s fee and your own cuts the client pool down. You’ll need to find bigger companies, in general, with the budgets to pay these bigger fees.

Especially if you’re hiring your friends, it’s going to be hard to take a big markup, as you’ll want to pay them well.

To sum up this little math exercise, you might need three or four times as much work or more to make close to the living you would have if you simply wrote for a smaller stable of clients.

Why newbies can’t be an agency

When you first start out, your biggest problem is that it’s hard to find clients. *Any* clients. Much less good-paying ones.

It takes a lot of marketing hustle to get those first few clients. Then, it takes more time

to find good-paying ones that have a steady stream of work.

Give up most of the income from your writing gigs at this point, and you won't have much left.

That is not to say that writers should never switch to the agency model. Some have done so quite successfully.

How do you know it's time to consider becoming an agency? Here are five clues:

1. You have too much work

You've built your freelance business and you're working too many hours now. Or you're turning down gigs and leaving money on the table—money you might keep some of if you hired subcontractors.

You have enough client volume that you could earn a better living keeping a percent of all that than you do turning down gigs and writing only the best ones yourself.

2. You love marketing & have a great rep

When you're an agency, you have more mouths to feed. You can't ever have downtime, or your stable of writers will drift away and possibly be unavailable the next time you need them.

You want to have enough contacts that tapping them will bring you a large volume of ongoing projects. Your network will want to send you clients because you've established your credibility as a freelance writer and have a great reputation.

If you don't have an amazing writer network up your sleeve, you'll need sharp marketing skills and an eagerness to devote many hours to marketing and finding clients.

3. You know many freelance writers

While the writer above imagines his business can run off the aid of his personal writer friends, that path is fraught with problems. Are you going to be able to tell your best friend the client hates their writing and the copy all needs to be rewritten? Do you think you can even be objective about your friends' writing?

What you need as an agency head are professional contacts with lots of writers.

Remember that good writers are often fully booked. They may not be available when you need them, or at rates you can afford to pay as an agency.

4. You like managing people

This one is important. As an agency head, you won't be writing. You'll be shepherding projects.

Your job is to:

- talk to the client and find out everything needed to do the gig
- find and hire suitable writers
- train them up on your needs and the writing needs of this client
- keep them on track
- call them when they blow their deadline
- call another writer when that writer flakes out
- stay up all night editing the late work to make deadline
- explain to the client why their project is late

...and so on.

You are a manager. Do you communicate clearly? It's important, because now you're playing telephone—often, you're talking to the client and then telling the writer what they said. The writer has a question, which you relay to the client. Then, you relay back the answer.

There is more opportunity for miscommunication than when you were writing for clients, so you need stellar skills here.

5. You prefer editing to writing

Unless you hire an editor as well, you will be combing through your writers' work and getting it in shape to be turned in to clients.

You might think that'll be an easy gig, due to your awesome writers, but don't bet on it. You'd be surprised the junk even pro writers turn in on occasion.

There's also the issue of changing client needs and priorities, where they assigned 1,000 words but they've decided last-minute they want 750. Guess who's going to fix that? You.

Why I'm not an agency

As it happens, I've asked myself these questions, starting back in mid-2011. I'd built my freelance writing business so big that I had way more leads than I could handle myself.

It's great to be able to pick and choose your clients, but I'd reached a point where I was turning down some nice offers.

I scaled back on active marketing, but I was still turning away leads that came from my [writer website](#) and LinkedIn profile.

As I thought about it, I realized I'd been on the other end of this equation—I'd been a subcontractor for another writer who'd just gone to the agency model. Formerly a very successful corporate speechwriter, as an agency the man was a complete mental case, routinely screaming at and randomly firing some of his new 'team' almost every week.

Recalling how unhappy he was trying to manage my project convinced me becoming an agency was a stress nightmare I wanted to avoid.

I don't enjoy managing people and editing as much as I enjoy writing, and most of the good writers I know wouldn't want to write for lower-than-usual rates to be subcontractors.

It's harder to get and keep good subs than the writer above imagines.

Instead, I focused on raising my rates and being selective about client projects as my route to higher pay. And I send my extra leads to the [Freelance Writers Den's](#) Junk Free Job Board.

Yes, I could keep those gigs and take a cut, but I believe the headaches would not be worth it.

89. Who holds the rights to pro bono work?

Q: "I have contributed some short articles, without pay, to an acquaintance who has used it for her website and blog. Who holds the rights to pro bono work?"—Chuck

A: My thought is that you've created a big, honkin' gray area here, Chuck. Since there's no contract, there's no clarity on who owns what.

Luckily, she's your friend. So I hope if you do resell the content, she's not going to sue you. But just to be on the safe side, if you're interested in selling or republishing the same material elsewhere, I'd ask your friend to do a contract after the fact, to define that you have granted her only nonexclusive, first publication rights to the content, and retain all other rights.

If this content is really key to your business, consult a lawyer if necessary to secure your rights.

90. Can I make a living writing part-time?

Q: “I’d just be happy to have a steady, part-time writing business. Would making \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year part-time be doable, given time to build up the business?”—Chris

A: The answer to this really depends on your background and your drive to make it happen. But that’s a pretty modest income goal, and I’ve certainly seen writers earn that much as a side business.

It takes real dedication to launch and grow a writing business on top of other responsibilities. A great resource for managing a side writing business while keeping your day job is Linda Formichelli’s [Write Your Way Out of the Rat Race and Step Into a Career You’ll Love](#).

91. My low-paying client wants me to outsource research. Should I?

Q: “I’m writing for extremely discounted rates for a client, and he wants me to write more. He suggested I find someone on oDesk [now UpWork] and subcontract the research. What would you do?”—Bethanny P.

A: My advice: Stop writing at “extremely discounted” rates for clients who’re so cheap, the only way their gig makes sense is to hire an even cheaper subcontractor!

This client loves you and wants you to write more, because he’s discovered he can exploit you. He gave you a lowball pay cap, and you were willing to stay under it. Why shouldn’t he try to squeeze all he can out of this relationship?

Now, he’s talked you into giving up some of your already tiny pay to subs, too, to help him overwork and underpay you even more. What a charmer!

Definitely ask for a raise to more like your normal rates, but be ready to walk, as he’ll probably say no.

Finding a better-paying client is probably the best way out of the whole mess.

92. What should I include in my contract?

Q: “Besides deadline, portfolio rights, number of revisions, and fee, what’s the most important thing a freelance copywriter needs to include in his/her contract?”—Erica

A: I’d say the most overlooked provision that really matters is payment terms.

WHEN do they have to pay you? Is it 50 percent up front, and 20 percent more on first draft, and 30 percent on final?

Without defined payment terms, the client could pay you five years from now or never, really, and you don’t have anything firm to sue them over.

The biggest oversight I see in contracts is defining when that final payment is due. If you don’t define that right, they never have to pay it, if they don’t officially accept your changes.

It’s not uncommon for a client to get a final draft and then sort of disappear. They may just be busy, or they may be ducking you to avoid triggering a final payment.

Which is why I like the terms “final payment due on finalization OR 30 days after receipt of final draft, whichever is sooner.”

I’ve seen too many writers end up in limbo with a final payment, because a client isn’t returning their phone calls and won’t sign off on the final draft.

93. Will it take years to make a steady wage?



Q: “Do you have any reliable data that someone who is beginning at freelancing (as I am) isn’t going to have to wait 2-3 years to make \$800-\$1,000 a month?”—Kathy

A: As it happens, there are studies about how much freelance writers make. [*The Writer’s Market*](#) notes typical rate ranges for various writing gigs. Copywriter [Chris Marlow](#) also sells a survey on what copywriters make.

But here's the problem: These surveys don't tell you anything about what *you* will earn.

Why? You are not a statistical average. You are an individual. Your situation is unique. Like the auto-industry people like to say, your mileage may vary.

What will Kathy earn? In my view, that depends on the answers to a few questions:

- **Why are your earning goals so low?** A typical full-time freelancer makes quite a bit more than your stated range.
- **Could you wait three years to start making money?** I don't know many would-be freelancers who could hold out that long—most need to make it happen sooner. I'm curious why you bring up such a long timeframe. In my view, if you're two years in and not getting any paying work at all—or even six months in—it may be time to reconsider your plans.
- **How crazy-hot are you to become a freelance writer?** If you're burning up to do this, maybe you've got the drive to make it happen.
- **Why do you assume it will take a long time to get assignments?** It might not take long at all, depending on your writing background and whether you're willing to aggressively market your writing. You might cold-call and find a great business client your first week.

Assumptions are powerful in the freelance-writing game. Your mindset will often shape what comes to pass.

For instance: When I [got back into freelancing in 2005](#), I thought I could build my freelance-writing business fairly rapidly. Whaddaya know—within six months, I was earning as much as my previous salary as a staff writer.

How to tell what you'll make, and how soon

Yes, every writer is unique, and it's difficult to predict how quickly any one freelance writer will start earning, and how much they'll make.

This is the type of question my friend [Anne Wayman](#) likes to call a “How long is a piece of string” question.

How long will it take? How much will you make? In large part, that's up to you.

94. Is it worth gaining clips if I give up all rights?

Q: “For a few months, I’ve been writing 200-300 word articles for an online publication that has about one million readers annually. I can have a bio with information about myself and my blog (which I haven’t done yet). However, [the site owner] retains all rights to my articles -- and I’m not paid.

“Does the benefit of gaining clips and promoting my blog to these readers outweigh the fact that I don’t have the rights to those articles and am unpaid? Many of my articles would be considered evergreen, so sometimes I cringe that I can’t use them again.”—Stephanie

A: Let me get this right—you’re giving away all rights to articles on a busy site that doesn’t pay you...in order to promote the blog that you don’t *have* yet?

Has this exposure gotten you any client leads? Have you gotten hired for pay off this exposure? In sum, is this exposure working for you?

If not, you want to drop this. You have a few clips on a notable site now, so you’re ready to build your writer website and find paying clients. I definitely wouldn’t give up more evergreen topics for nothing.

The main thing to remember about exposure is: writers can die of exposure. You want paying gigs.

95. Where can I go for free mentoring as a newbie?



Q: “I can’t afford mentoring, or even to create a website right now. But I would like guidance, so I can be sure I’m doing well in starting my business,

and get my questions answered. How can I connect with other successful freelance writers and ask them to mentor or help me?”—Kay

A: So. This is awkward.

I have bad news for Kay. Even if there was a mythical free, awesome, professional writing coach who'd take her on as a charity case, and she got the mentoring she wants, her freelance writing business would still fail.

Why? Kay lacks an important—no, critical—thing you simply must have to launch a freelance business, of any kind.

I'm going to tell you what it is, even though I know it may make some writers hopping mad.

I don't know if I've ever seen this uncomfortable issue discussed on a freelance-oriented website before.

But it's not fair to delude writers who have no chance of making it as freelancers.

It's going to be a dream-crusher for some. I apologize in advance.

Here's the thing you need to know if you're embarking on a freelance career:

What's in your wallet?

To start a freelance business—or any kind of business, really—you need money.

But you wouldn't know it to read most websites about writing, or freelancing, or building an Internet business.

There's a disease going around about this right now that I'm going to call “no cost syndrome.”

The popular myth is that running an Internet-based business—a blog, or a freelance business—doesn't cost anything.

Chris Guillebeau's *[The \\$100 Startup](#)* book is only the most recent tome to promote this idea.

Writers keep trying to start a freelance or Internet-based business, not on a shoestring, but on flat nuthin'. Then they wonder why they failed to make it work, and had to give up and find a day job.

Here's the reality: Ramping a startup business until it pays your bills—especially, making it take off quickly—takes money.

Whether it's opening a shop on Main Street or putting out a shingle as a freelance writer, you have to invest in your business to make it succeed.

I get the sense it must be bad manners to mention this. Everyone wants to hear that freelancing is the awesome, magical business that defies all laws of ordinary commerce. And that you can start dead broke and you'll skyrocket to amazing riches.

But boil it down, and freelancing is like any other business—it takes money to make money.

And meanwhile, your rent is still coming due.

How to be a freelance success

At this point in the 21st Century, if you want to present yourself as a professional freelancer to any reputable publication, website, company, or nonprofit, you need a decent-looking website. For starters.

If you're really smart and want to stand out and get some quality clients right away, you may want to do some creative marketing, like a direct-mail campaign that costs money to produce.

You should have a professional outfit to wear in case an in-town client meeting comes up.

And of course you need a computer, an email provider, paid Internet, a Web host, a printer, paper, toner, paper, pens, business cards, and more. Each dollar you put in will hopefully be repaid many times over. You'll hopefully get great clients, because you seem so pro.

But the uncomfortable truth is, it all costs money.

The corollary: As soon as your newborn freelance business starts making money, if you really want to build a solid income, the first thing you need to do is *plow a lot of that initial money right back into your startup*.

That initial money is not for paying your light bill. It's for building your business.

You'll improve your website. Join professional organizations and networking groups. Get on a plane and attend conferences.

Meanwhile, you need some other money to live on.

Why your no-money launch will fail

Beyond the realities of needing to invest in your business to make it thrive, there's yet another harsh financial truth of freelancing.

The freelance life is often plagued with cash-flow problems:

- The computer hard drive dies and you need to buy a new one. Immediately. So

you don't miss deadlines and lose clients.

- Your client stops returning your calls and takes an extra month or two to send the check.
- Your pants rip and you need a new professional outfit to wear to meetings.
- Your car breaks down.
- You have an unexpected health issue, which your private insurance's high deductible leaves you mostly on the hook for.

And so on. You get the picture.

As a freelancer, you're responsible for a lot of costs you didn't have as an employee. Also, the first clients new freelancers tend to get are often the very types that give you the B.S. about how the check's in the mail, and leave you hanging for months.

Meanwhile, how will you eat?

I'm going to say the unspeakable: If you have no resources at all, you are too broke to make freelancing work.

You will get caught in a desperation cycle of taking any crappy client you find on Craigslist. Then, of being even more broke and desperate when that client screws you over, as lowball clients often will.

You could easily end up homeless. I know writers this has happened to.

I realize it behooves me -- as someone who earns some of their living helping writers learn how to freelance -- to tell everybody, "Hey, you can do it!"

But I won't.

You shouldn't try to freelance if you are teetering on the financial brink. I won't pretend that's going to fly.

How to freelance when you're broke

OK. That was harsh. But some truths of the freelance life need to be acknowledged.

Onward to the big question: If your bank account is empty, do you have to give up your freelance writing dream?

Not necessarily.

There are several ways you can overcome this "I'm too broke" problem and create the cash reserves you need to build a thriving freelance business:

- **Get a side gig.** I've known writers who pumped gas, worked as a bar back, sold

Avon, and more when they started out. I worked as a legal secretary for years, to support my songwriting habit. Stop buying the starving artist mystique and figure out how to put aside some money to support you as you transition into freelancing.

- **Get a full-time day job—for now.** It's also feasible to freelance on the side of a full-time gig. Takes a lot of discipline, but it can allow you to pick and choose good clients and build a quality portfolio a lot faster.
- **Find a sponsor.** Maybe your spouse's day gig will cover the bills and give you some ramp-up cash to work with.
- **Lower your expenses.** Take a look at your costs—could you live in a cheaper dwelling? Take on a roommate? Stop buying lattes? Cut out cable? Many of us have optional expenditures we make and could lower our basic monthly costs if we got creative.
- **Fill the gap with credit cards.** I once had a screenwriter friend who would calmly charge her groceries between gigs, confident she'd soon be writing for another TV show. If you have a high tolerance for risk, this might work for you, too.
- **Liquidate assets.** Got a second car you could live without? Some collectibles you could sell on eBay? You might be able to turn some possessions into cash.

If you're not willing to do any of this to get a cash cushion you could use to bankroll your freelance writing startup, then I have a question to ask you:

Do you really want to do this?

Reaching for dreams usually involves sacrifice—read any fairy tale you like.

What are you willing to give up to never have a boss again?

If you can't make any sacrifices to find some cash to get started freelancing, then it's probably not going to happen. Even with the best writing mentor in the world.

96. What are the pros and cons of working on a retainer?

Q: "What are the pros and cons of working on a retainer?"—Chris F.

A: Well, retainers rock if you can get them, Chris.

They mean you get paid even if the client doesn't have any work for you that month!

What's not to like? And if you do extra, you bill more for it.

Generally, clients ask for a retainer when they want to lock in X amount of your time, so they can be sure to get their stuff done on their deadlines, and be one of your top priorities.

Be sure to do a contract that defines the timeframe and exactly what the client gets for that retainer amount, so that you can bill that additional stuff on top of the contract. Congrats on having a happy client!

97. Do I charge by submitted words or published words?

Q: "I got a gig writing articles at \$1/word. I've never done this before—I've been copywriting and charge by the product. When you charge \$1/word, do you charge for what you submitted or what the final ends up being?"—Patty

A: First off, you should have an assigned word count, so you know what you're shooting for! Isn't it in your contract?

What, no contract? Let's start at the beginning and get us one! Then you'll know WHEN they need to pay you this nice fee. Without payment terms in writing, your client could pay 5 years from now, or never, and be within their rights. Hopefully they'll pay you shortly, but just sayin'. You're exposed there, without payment terms.

Now, back to the word count. Ordinarily, it'll be one of two ways—either based on the original assigned word count (see why you need that?) or based on final count of what they run. I've had clients that did it both ways. With one, I had to wait and ding him a few days later to ask what final count was, so I could bill. You'll find out which is the policy where you're writing by—yes—asking your editor.

98. How do I justify my fees to clients?

Q: “One of my new writing clients asked me for an explanation of my fees. I told her I charged a flat fee based on each individual project, and I’d let her know what that fee was. I also asked for her writing budget.

“She asked how I determine the flat fee for each project. They have a large number of projects, and want to know what to expect. She also evaded the writing budget question.

“She’s not a difficult client – I already did a major project for her and quoted her a fee, which she paid without question. How should I answer her question?”—Taheerah B.

A: Take the classic attitude of the British royal family here—never apologize, never explain. If you must, give some general explanation that your fees are based on your time estimate and many other factors such as level of sophistication of the work, interviews needed, rewrites you expect, etc. Bottom line: It’s the price you feel makes it worth your time to do it.

Generally, when you get these sorts of reach-outs, it means someone is looking to cut their rates. I had one website I wrote \$20K worth of content for at good rates—\$1 a word, for many of the pages. After a lull, I got a request to quote my “best price” for another package. I noted that my rates were my rates. Never heard from them again. I think their attitude toward content development had changed, and they were now looking for someone to do it for pennies.

A smart freelancer comes to the table ready to counter the client’s price objections. Think through possible responses you could have, so you’re ready when a client asks.

99. How can I boost my sagging motivation?



Q: “I have trouble staying focused. I don’t have a lot of time to write. Even when I have time, I find my thoughts wandering to everything else but writing. I end up Googling unrelated stuff, playing Candy Crush Saga, or reading Facebook posts.

“I’m normally great about staying focused, so this is really frustrating me. Any suggestions for how I can get my focus back?”—Andrea

A: Sometimes, we all get the blahs. You stare at the blank screen or page...and nothing. You’re willing to do almost anything else—if you just didn’t have to sit down and actually write anything.

It’s crazy, since supposedly this is the life you want.

But it still happens. You feel like a deflated balloon.

You’ve lost your inner drive to get the writing done.

To find out why, this writer needs to ask a few important questions to figure out how to kill the malaise and rediscover their love of writing. Here are some basic issues I’d look at:

Are you too tired?

Lack of sleep is the quickest creativity killer out there. Stop staying up late doing online chat or playing Bejeweled (talking to myself there) and map out eight or more hours for rest.

As someone who often tries to get by on six and a half and who recently slept 10 hours one vacation evening, I can tell you it will make a difference.

Got enough childcare?

I’ve discovered that many writer-moms have fantasies about how much writing they can get done while also doing all the childcare. Because really, you will get little writing

done—and the whole time you'll feel like an evil giant has a hand on either side of your brain and is trying to tear it in half.

And the amount of marketing you'll get done will probably be zero.

Whether you try a babysitting co-op, do a swap with another WAHM, hire a sitter, pay for more childcare programs, or get hubby to shoulder more kiddie time, the bottom line is the same: You will be amazed at how productivity soars once you can actually think for five minutes without someone who needs feeding/changing/reading/holding/singing/bathing/your every waking moment of attention.

Unrealistic expectations?

Whether it's imagining you'll crank out articles while tending three kids under age four, while packing moving boxes, or after you get home from a day job, writers tend to be over-ambitious in imagining what can get done.

Then, when we fall short of our high standards, we get depressed and want to write even less.

Get real about how much time you've got for writing and what you can accomplish within it. Then, start scheming about how to get yourself more writing time so that you can check off more from your list.

Overwhelmed?

The number-one thing new freelance writers tell me is that they look at all the things they should be doing and all the options in the freelancing marketplace, and feel totally overwhelmed.

If this is you, it's time to put on the blinders, screen out most of what's going on, and focus.

What do you want to do most? What resonates for you as a type of writing you would do well?

Too many writers try to write all different kinds of things and in every industry, but being a generalist is a ticket to nowhere. Think about your interests, life experience, and past jobs, and take the easy road by writing in subjects you know. You'll find good clients more easily and move up quicker.

Overworked?

Sometimes the sudden lack of writing motivation comes because you're burned out. You've just been clocking too many hours, and the creative well is dry. The fun has gone out of writing.

If so, it may be time to see if there's a low-paying client you could drop to give you a break.

Not eating right?

There's a stereotype of freelancers sitting home guzzling coffee by the gallon and munching ice cream or Doritos all day while they work, because it's easy for freelancers to get into bad eating habits, home alone all day with the fridge like we are.

And many of us get on deadlines, get stressed, and start inhaling whole candy bars instead of nibble carrots. I wonder how I know that?

Anyway. If your energy is low, try [eating to nourish your body](#). Banish the junk food, don't over-caffeinate, and take in lots of fresh fruits and veggies. You may find the ideas start perking again pretty quick.

Don't have a home office?

If you don't have a comfortable space that's set up for writing, it can hit your productivity. You never feel quite ready to do the writing. I have one writer friend who tries to write while parked on her couch in the TV room amidst eight other activities, and it's a disaster.

See what you can do to find a dedicated space that's all yours for writing—even if it's an alcove in the dining room. I know one writer with a small home and many kids who rented a room in a friend's house and headed down the street for writing time. Which brings us to:

Tired of your home office?

Sometimes working from home can become a rut. There are no coworkers. Some people find that deadly dull and unstimulating.

Consider [writing from a park](#), a coffee shop, or a co-working office. Change up the routine and see if that doesn't shake a few writing ideas loose.

Doing writing you don't enjoy?

Finally, sometimes the lack of writing energy relates to the type of writing gigs you've taken on. Maybe you've written all the blog posts about surety bonds you can reasonably do, and it's time to find new clients.

Recognize if your mix of writing assignments is wearing you down and head the problem off before a client fires you. Maybe some creative writing of your own can provide balance, or it may be time to do more marketing and switch to new, paid writing gigs.

Whatever the root cause of the motivation slump, rest assured—every writer has fallow times. And they will end.

100. How can freelance writers plan for retirement?



Q: “What’s the end game in freelance copywriting? How could I create something, so that when it’s time to ‘fade into the sunset,’ I could have something to sell from all my hard work?”—Matt

A: There are a few ways freelance writers can get themselves in a position to retire, Matt:

Create your own e-books.

If you can create e-books over the years, they could sell for you more or less on autopilot, through word of mouth from people who’ve already bought them, and continue to earn for you. I’ve got a whole list of [e-books](#) with writing-biz basics that can keep earning for me in future.

Create your own e-courses.

With Webinar and video technology today, it’s not hard to create courses that can keep on bringing in revenue, long after you’ve stopped actively teaching. All the live events I create for [Freelance Writers Den](#) fall into this category.

Create a blog you can sell.

Some blogs offer so much valuable information to readers that they eventually grow a big enough audience to attract a company that wants to buy the blog outright. Examples I know offhand include the finance blogs Mint.com (which [sold for a reported \\$170](#)

million) and [Get Rich Slowly](#). The key here is that the blog not be a cult of personality that's all about you, but about a topic of high interest to a broad audience, where a buyer could hire other experts in your industry to run it after you depart.

Create a Web-based service business you can sell.

Sometimes, in the course of pursuing your writing career, you get an idea for a related business you could start. That's what happened to Peter Shankman with *Help a Reporter Out*—and it became a smash hit. Revenue rose to a reported \$1 million a year, and the site [sold to Vocus](#) in 2010.

Write direct mail copy.

In some direct mail writing scenarios, the writer earns a royalty on sales made through the copy they wrote. I don't have any of these gigs lined up, but I gather some of the biggest copywriters have created ongoing revenue streams this way.

Write a smash-hit, evergreen business or how-to book.

I'm sure the author of perennial business bestseller [The One-Minute Manager](#) doesn't worry about whether he can retire, for instance. If you have nonpareil information that could keep selling for years, write that book proposal and start pitching it around. Or self-publish it, if you know how to build an author platform and market the heck out of it.

Sock money away and/or live on the cheap.

Any way you slice it, freelancers are really just like employees when it comes to retirement. If you save money, you can retire on it. If you don't, your options are fewer. It's just that we don't have easy 401(k) plans set up for us—though [our options are growing](#). If you're serious about retirement, master the art of living below your means. Look at your expenses and cut back. Then, start saving money, every month. If you're young, you can use the magic of compound interest to grow your small savings over time. Even if you're not, it's never too late to start saving. Money in the bank gives you the power to say "no" to assignments you don't want, and to say when you want to call it quits on working. Too many writers just wring their hands and give up on ever retiring—dooming them to poverty-stricken later years. Also, not everyone envisions retiring to a 7,000-square foot beach villa and traveling the world. You may not need \$1 million to retire on, if you're a simple-living type.

Learn More About Freelancing from the Author

Books & E-books

From Carol Tice:

Start Here: 40 Freelance Writers Share How They Find Clients, Stay Motivated and Earn Well Today, edited by Carol Tice



13 Ways to Get the Writing Done Faster: 2 Pro Writers Share Their Secrets, by Carol Tice and Linda Formichelli



How to be a Well-Paid Freelance Blogger, by Annabel Candy, Sean Platt, Carol Tice and Greg Ciotti



The Step by Step Guide to Freelance Writing Success, by Carol Tice and Laura Spencer



How to Get Great Freelance Clients, by Carol Tice, Linda Formichelli, and Chris Marlow

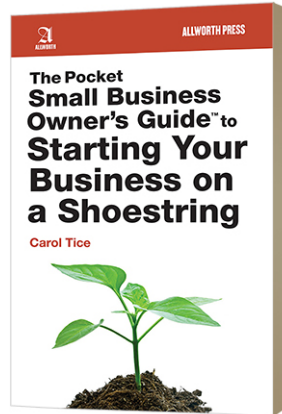


Freelance Business Bootcamp E-Book, by Carol Tice and Neil Tortorella

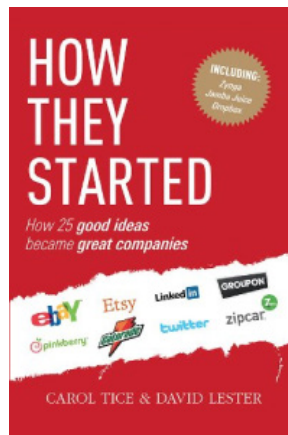


All of the above e-books are available at: <http://www.makealivingwriting.com/ebooks>

The Pocket Small Business Owner's Guide to Starting Your Business on a Shoestring, by Carol Tice (Allworth Press 2013)



How They Started: How 25 Good Ideas Became Great Companies, by Carol Tice and David Lester



Blogs & Websites



Carol Tice

Enjoy over 700 useful free posts on every aspect of freelance writing at Make a Living Writing - <http://www.makealivingwriting.com>.

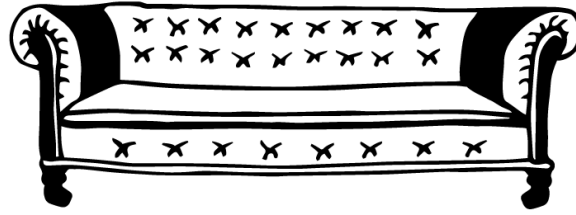
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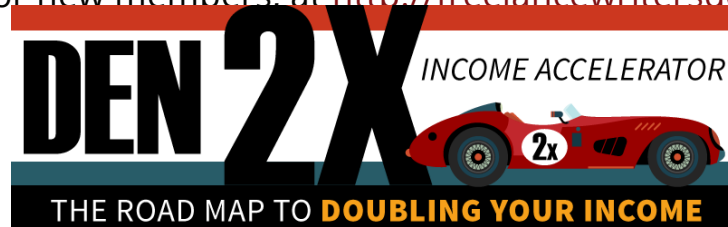
freelance writers den

Freelance Writers Den is where writers learn to grow their income—fast. en meeting calls, and more than 100 hours of



where writers learn to en meeting calls, and

Membership is \$25 a month—no obligation, leave at any time. See what some of our 1,000+ members say, view a video on the Den's benefits, and get on the waiting list for our next open date for new members. at <http://freelancewritersden.com>.



Launched in Spring 2015, Den 2X Income Accelerator is a focused mastermind and 1-on-1 coaching program for mid-career writers earning \$15,000-\$40,000, who're looking to double their income in the next year. Den 2X members enjoy all the benefits of regular Den membership, plus monthly masterminds, quarterly 1-on-1 sessions with Carol, private forums and Skype chat, and our exclusive Den 2X Road Map course for growing your income.

Useful Writing Courses

With the Renegade Writer's Linda Formichelli, Carol Tice teaches courses for freelance writers looking to improve their skills—check them out at UsefulWritingCourses.com. Our current s Week Journalism School, Freelance

