



# ESCAPE

## the Content Mills

By Linda Formichelli and Carol Tice

**LESSON FIVE: Overcome Fear**

**& Take Action**

*~~DRAFT~~*

We've been coaching freelance writers for a long time. And we've learned that we can teach you a lot of great writing skills—but that doesn't mean you'll actually go out and use them.

Often, there's something big standing in the way.

It just all keeps coming back to this: Writers tell us, "I don't feel confident. I'm scared."

In fact, here are some of the fears our first Escape the Content Mills students shared with us:

## Writer Fears

"My biggest fear is probably that no one will take me seriously."

"When I get a response from a client, I am afraid of actually doing a job!"

"I am scared that my ideas are not good enough for articles. I worry that they are not trendy, relevant, cool, or edgy enough."

"I am afraid that no matter how well I write, and no matter how good my pitch may be, I will face race-based rejection."

"I'm afraid because I have no experience freelance writing (even for a mill) so no one is going to take me seriously or they will think I am an idiot/crappy writer."

"I'm afraid of pissing off one editor and that editor blackballing me to other magazines."

"I'm scared of really not being good enough. Not feeling adequate as a writer, especially since you did time as a mill writer, is a huge concern. "

"I don't know what it is that I'm afraid of. I know it has to do with marketing, but I can't pin down what is causing my anxiety."

We feel you. And we're here to help! This lesson is designed to give you practical exercises for overcoming fears and moving forward. This isn't going to be some touchy-feely talk where we say, "Just buck up your courage already!"

We're sure you've tried that.

By the way, if you think we always walk around bursting with self-confidence, let us bust that myth right now! Carol spent years feeling inadequate because she's a college dropout who bootstrapped her way into big-time journalism gigs, and she still gets a massive complex anytime she writes a first assignment for a new client. And Linda gets anxious about interviewing sources, which is a big problem for a magazine writer.

### Big Tip

Many new writers get bogged down worrying about small things, like whether they'll need to turn in photos with their articles and blog posts, or even what font size to use. Many worry that if they got a gig, they wouldn't be able to pull it off! But don't freak out. You can do this. The answer to most of the worries and questions you have about freelance writing gigs can be solved one simple way: [Ask your client](#). That's what the pros do.

As we wrestled with our own fears, we developed some concrete strategies for moving past them and getting the writing and marketing done. We don't expect you to find every single one of these tips useful—but somewhere in here, we hope you'll find at least a few ideas to help you shake off the fears and move forward.

By the way, you'll notice that we don't tackle each of the fears you saw above individually—the fear that your ideas stink, or that clients won't take you seriously—because they all come from the same place. They're all (mostly) unfounded fears, and most of these fear-busting tactics will work with all of them.

Some of these may seem like small steps to take, but trust us, they can make a big difference over time.

Ready to ditch your fears and move forward? Here are 18 practical strategies for overcoming fears, with a homework assignment at the end:

## 1. Look at your past work.

Carol used to do this all the time—and we mean compulsively—when she first started out.

Just a few months after writing her first nonfiction essay she was writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, and pretty freaked out about it! At the time, she had a physical portfolio of her articles that she'd cut out, mostly of little 300-word writeups she'd gotten published in a now-defunct alternative paper, the *L.A. Reader*. She cut out every single, tiny clip, and before she'd start writing one of those *Times* articles, she'd get out the portfolio and read through her clips. They were tiny and inconsequential, but just flipping through them gave her courage.

She'd think, "I wrote about this, and I wrote about that—so I can probably find a way to write up this pile of notes I'm looking at right now." It really helps.

It's not a crutch. Or maybe it is, but who cares? *It works*. Just seeing the physical evidence that you've written things is extremely confidence-boosting.

And it doesn't have to be a huge feature in a glossy magazine or a blog post for a major corporation—it could be an essay you wrote in the college newspaper, or a piece you wrote for a content mill.

Whatever writing you've done, pull it together into a physical file, or a folder on your computer desktop, and look at it. Give yourself

some credit for what you've already produced, because it matters—and it reminds you that *you can do this*.

Don't have any past work yet? Get busy creating some! Start a blog. Write the heck out of your writer website. Do a pro bono project for a friend's business. Each small piece you write gives you something to point to with pride.

## 2. Start small.

A lot of writers think, "I really want to write white papers/ghost books for bigwigs/write 5,000-word feature articles. Then, they're overwhelmed by the idea of those big projects—and they don't do anything at all.

There's a lot of power to starting small. Find intermediary steps you can take to get to your goal gradually. (Linda likes a book called [\*Mini Habits: Smaller Habits, Bigger Results\*](#) by Stephen Guise, which offers advice on how to reach big goals through baby steps.)

If your dream is to write a 10-page white paper for a client, maybe you can write a one-page case study for somebody to start getting into that mode. With magazines, often the first thing you write for a new-to-you market is a 300-word FOB (Front of the Book piece).

Many of Linda's first pieces for magazines were short (or were big articles, but for small markets like *Sign Builders Illustrated Magazine*), and she eventually moved up to writing features for magazines like *Family Circle* and *Redbook*.

And that alternative paper Carol wrote a ton of 300-words shorts for? The editor finally gave her a chance to write a 3,000-word feature, which ended up being optioned for a movie. It was a

huge exposé on a right-wing group that had recently become active in Los Angeles, and Carol had no idea how to write a feature that length! But because she'd spent so much time delivering for this editor, he took her 5,000-word mess of a first draft and helped her turn it into that compelling, 3,000-word story.

Get in with something small first—something you feel confident you can execute—and use it to build a relationship with a client. Then you might say to that client, “I’m writing short blog posts for you, but how about a \$1,000 special report that could be a free gift for your subscribers?” The client might go for it, because they know you’ll do a great job—and you won’t freak out, because you’ve built confidence writing smaller pieces.

### 3. Remember, it’s not all about you.

This can be a hard one, because we tend to think the world revolves around us. (Wait, it doesn’t?) But once you understand this idea, it can help you stay positive.

When writers get a rejection, or a negative response from an editor or a client, we tend to translate that automatically into “I suck.” We think every interaction we have with people, and every reaction they have, is about something we’ve done and about us as a person. But the truth is that often, it’s not about you.

In reality, almost everyone is thinking about themselves all the time. (Just like you are!) And it’s good to remember that. So if an editor sounds snippy in an email, it’s probably not something you did. It’s more likely she had a fight with her kid, or didn’t get her coffee that morning, or didn’t get enough sleep.

If you get a rejection, it’s usually not because your pitch, your writing, or your idea reek. In fact, the editor of the *New York*

*Times'* Modern Love column said that only 15% of the essays he receives are rejected due to bad writing—the rest are pretty darn good, but just didn't resonate with him for some reason.

Rejection frequently means something like:

- The magazine or blog is going through a revamp and it's chaos.
- The prospect you pitched has just been fired.
- The section you pitched for is being phased out.
- They don't have any room in the issue it would be good for.
- The blog owner just assigned something similar to another writer.
- The prospect is on the way out to a vacation and just want to clear their inbox.
- They're too overwhelmed to really 'get' your ideas or consider your proposal right now.
- [Just for practice, think of more reasons here!]

The next time you're too afraid to send your ideas out there because you're worried about what the prospect will think of you, try to remember: She's not thinking about you. She's thinking about herself, just like everybody else. And when it comes to rejection, remember there are a lot of reasons you could get a rejection that have nothing to do with you at all.

Carol worked with editors at one publication who literally slept in sleeping bags underneath their desks half the time. Prospects are busy and overwhelmed (who isn't?), and they have tons going on besides you and that one pitch you just sent.

Writers also tend to think, "I sent this query/LOI and it got rejected. I'm going to wait six months before sending anything else, because otherwise I'm afraid they're going to remember the

idea that bombed.” Reality check: They probably won’t remember it five minutes later! You can pitch them again tomorrow.

#### 4. Keep a brag file (and read it).

When we’re feeling under-confident, or even simply down and depressed, we tend to remember all the negative things that have happened to us. We forget all the positive experiences, and this causes a downward spiral that keeps us stuck.

This reaction is completely natural: We’re hardwired to be on the lookout for threats at all times, from prehistoric days. We’re wired to make sure there are no saber-toothed tigers around, so we miss the flowers.

Defeating this inborn negative spiral takes a bit of work—but it’s worth building the habit of accentuating the positive, especially when it comes to our writing careers.

Here’s an idea: Linda keeps a folder in her Gmail called “Nice Stuff” where she puts every complimentary email she receives. It goes back to August of 2008, and contains 420 emails (and counting!) from editors, clients, and fans of her books and blog—and also from friends and even her husband!

When she needs a shot of confidence, Linda can look through a few of those emails and remember: “Hey, you know what? Many people love my writing.”

Don’t think you have to wait for someone else to compliment you—you can also create a file of all your successes. This is similar to what Carol did with her clip file, except you would be writing about your successes and not keeping the physical piece of writing. For example, you could write about a content mill article



you wrote that was complimented by the editorial director or the end client, or a post on your blog that went viral.

When these great things are happening, it might seem like you'll never forget them—but when you're feeling fearful or down, or something negative has happened in your career, you're going to forget even the biggest positive events. That's why it's so important to keep track of them and remind yourself of all you've done—so you can get that boost when you need it.

To create this file, you can send a quick email to yourself, or keep notes in a special section of your journal, or create a Word file just for this purpose. The important thing is to document your successes where you'll have access to them whenever you need a shot of confidence.

Carol has a brag file too, of every positive reader letter she got or editor comment.

## 5. Play "Match Game."

Carol gets really heartbreaking emails from writers who say, "I sent this query/LOI/sales letter and I really loved it, and then I never heard anything. I'm wondering how you carry on after that, because I'm completely crushed."

This is not the mentality to have if you want to earn a good living as a freelance writer. If you're personally devastated by every little "no" that you get, we've got a great acronym for you:

*QTIP: Quit Taking It Personally.*

As we mentioned earlier, there are a million reasons ideas and pitches get rejected. However, Carol never thinks of these

responses as “rejection,” and this is one of the big keys to her self-confidence.

Instead, she reframes what’s happening as if she’s playing *Match Game*. When she’s about to send out a pitch, she thinks, “I have an idea, and now I am looking for a match with a client.”

So if client A says no, Carol thinks, “Oh, not a match. Next!”  
Amount of stress experienced: Zero.

Instead of thinking, “Waaah, I got rejected! I must not have what it takes,” think about looking for where you fit in the writing universe. Play Match Game with your pitches.

It’s important to know that established writers get rejected all the time, too—and what separates them from writers who don’t make it is that the pro writers didn’t take rejection personally. Carol has written for *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur* and the *Wall Street Journal*, but *Parade* recently passed on an idea she pitched them.

People will tell you “no” throughout your writing career. If you think of this not as rejection but as simply “I haven’t found a match for this idea yet,” you’ll stay positive and motivated—and avoid a downward mental spiral.

## 6. Send out a typo. (Yes!)

One of Linda’s tips for beating the fear of making a mistake, or the fear of looking foolish to a prospect, is to purposely send out an email with a typo in it. Yes, you read that right.

Many writers are afraid to get their work out there because they’re worried they’ll make a mistake. It’s freeing to realize that you *will* make mistakes—but they won’t be career killers.

If you're so afraid of making mistakes that you don't send anything out, you're never going to come to that realization naturally. (It's logic: If you never send anything out, you never make mistakes—so you never learn how inconsequential it really is.) So in Linda's e-book *Get Unstuck* (which is no longer in print), one of the assignments to help beat perfectionism was to send out a query letter or letter of introduction with a typo in it—on purpose.

One reader told Linda, "No way am I doing that." But later in the day, she wrote a query and then noticed, right before the email zapped off the screen, that there was a huge typo in the first sentence! Naturally, she freaked out.

Do you think the editor shot back a scathing reply? Do you think anything bad happened at all? No. The editor replied an hour later—to say he liked the idea. The magazine already had a similar one underway, so he asked the writer to send more ideas.

This writer made a mistake inadvertently, and ended up proving to herself that she doesn't need to be afraid of committing minor snafus. Try it for yourself, and you'll start to realize how insignificant your small mistakes are.

And you know what? Even BIG mistakes usually aren't career killers. Here you're worrying about sending something out because your idea might be dumb, your tweet to a prospect might fall flat, or your LOI might have a typo—but it's small potatoes compared to some of the things we've seen writers do that still didn't kill their careers.

If you've ever watched the TV series *Homeland*, you know that when people in the Secret Service make mistakes, people die.

And then the Secret Service agents have to shake it off and move forward. When surgeons or soldiers make mistakes, people die.

We're betting your writing mistakes have caused zero deaths. No lives have been lost! We writers have to keep that perspective. This is not a life-or-death scenario. It's just you pitching an idea to somebody, or calling a business to ask if they need a writer, or sending an InMail to a prospect. If you make a mistake, you'll pitch a different magazine or a different business. The big thrill of freelance writing is that there are always more clients out there.

There is no Universal Client Network that will alert every business or publication in the world that you did one thing wrong, so they can blackball you. It doesn't exist.

For instance, once Carol had a client who drove her insane. She finally told them off—and got banned from writing for them. It happened, and life continued.

Another time, Carol made such a bad error in an article that she felt like she was going to vomit. It was bad: It involved a company whose CEO was personal friends with the publisher of the weekly she worked for! There was confusion about whether this company could comment on a story or not—so the article ran without their input, based on what was in their public documents. The company felt the article didn't tell a balanced story, and Carol thought she was getting fired for sure.

Her editor's reaction: "My calculation is that you've written 500 articles for us so far, and just one had a major mistake. So I think your average is pretty good."

Everyone you interact with as a freelance writer realizes you are human, and that humans make mistakes. It's okay.

One of Linda's most popular blog posts is one where she talks about her [four biggest screw-ups as a freelance writer](#). She made some doozies, and it did not affect her income potential at all.

We all love to hear that other people are flawed and human, and yet somehow, we can't apply that to ourselves and realize, "Oh, yeah. I'm human too, and might make mistakes, and it'll be okay."

So: Start with a typo and you'll see for yourself!

## 7. Realize your uniqueness.

If you could boil down all of Carol's 700+ blog posts to one single idea, this would be it. Time and time again, aspiring writers tell us, "I think I'm too young/too old/too inexperienced/too overqualified/too far away from a major city/too [your excuse here] to be a freelance writer."

But the fact is, somewhere in the marketplace, there's a fit for you. Because you are unique, and there is no one else who can write like you.

Many writers undervalue their uniqueness, but recognizing it can be a major confidence builder. Try to think about your uniqueness every day. Carol's dad taught her to look in the mirror each morning and say, "Damn, I'm good." And if your dad didn't, she recommends you try it for yourself.

Just take a moment to think of all the people that had to come together—all the ancestors that had to meet and marry—in order for you to be created and become the writer you are, and how improbable all that was. You're a miracle!

You could search the entire world, person by person, and never find another you. That is what you bring to the party. There are prospects out there who want a young writer, an older writer, a gay writer, a new writer, an experienced writer, a small-town writer, a born-again Christian writer. You've got a light to shine—so shine it on markets that appreciate you for your uniqueness!

## 8. Experience your fear.

This is a technique Carol learned back when she was a going to workshops as a songwriter. Sometimes, writers would say they were afraid to play their song. Why? "I'm afraid people will laugh at me."

"OK," the teacher would say. "We can do that."

Then the teacher would have the songwriter play their song, while the other participants laughed. By the end, the songwriter would be laughing, too, because they'd realize this is a fairly irrational fear. How likely is this to really happen?

More importantly, if you can cook up a scenario where you experience the very thing you're afraid of, you find out something else: You survive. You live through your worst fear, and it doesn't kill you. You're OK.

If you're afraid an editor will hate your idea, get a friend to play the "editor" and send you a mean email response. Then you can move forward, freed of the irrational idea that what you fear would be devastating.

## 9. Fake it 'til you make it.

Think about what you would do if you weren't scared—then do it. We know “fake it 'til you make it” sounds like a cliché, but people say it so much because it works.

When Linda interviewed a self-help guru for an article, she learned that you don't act the way you feel, *you feel the way you act*. We tend to stare at our navels and try to mentally motivate ourselves into confidence, but the real fact is, the way you act turns into the way you feel.

Imagine you're not afraid of anything. Then, think of what you would do differently in your writing career.

You might send more queries, or call more prospects, or renegotiate crappy contracts. You're going to feel afraid, but you need to suck it up and do the thing anyway. Your confidence will naturally rise—as opposed to when you're sitting there trying to think your way into it.

If you have trouble imagining how you would act without fear, ask yourself what a confident pro writer would do. Would they shrink from writing a query, or would they hit 'Send' and move on to the next project? What would a pro writer do when they're about to call a prospect, or negotiate a contract?

As you start acting confident and your mind starts to realize—from experience—that most of these scenarios end in a positive way, you'll naturally lose your fear. Act as if you're confident, and you will become confident.

Our thoughts can be toxic things. In Buddhism, the whole point of meditation is to stop attaching to your thoughts and just *be*. There

are so many negative constructs we come up with in our minds, where we imagine ourselves having problems and failing. Instead, act on the supposition that things are going to turn out fine. (Because that's usually the case!)

In Judaism there's a joke: In America, when people fail to do something they should have done, they like to say, "Oh well, it's the thought that counts." But for Jews, it *isn't* the thought that counts. It's the *action*.

Often, we give our internal thoughts too much power over our lives. We keep thinking, thinking, thinking about things, instead of *doing* things. Be aware that your thoughts may be your enemy when you're trying to get a freelance writing career going. Think less, and just start faking it. You'll be surprised how well this can work!

## 10. Seek out rejection.

Carol had a chance to hear [Jia Jiang](#), author of *Rejection Proof*, speak on the power of seeking out rejection. He was starting a business and had a lot of fears about how it would turn out, so to help toughen himself up, he decided to actively seek out 100 different situations where he was highly likely to get rejected.

This turned into a life-changing journey for Jiang. Videos of some of the things he asked people for, in hopes of getting rejected, went viral on YouTube. It created a whole new career for him, because people were so inspired by the courage he showed.

A lot of writers think, "I'm afraid to approach that big blog/major business/dream publication." Why don't you just pitch them—and then keep pitching them?



Just do it as an exercise in learning to deal with rejection—and you might just get a “yes”! That’s what happened to Jiang: He’d make crazy requests—like asking a Krispy Kreme worker to make him a half-dozen doughnuts that look like the Olympic rings—and often, to his surprise, they’d agree!

But even if you’re rejected, you’ll start to realize it’s OK. You’ll see that you survived, and life went on. It’s a radical strategy—but it can be a really powerful one. Jiang says rejection is a muscle. Exercise yours and build it up, so fears can’t paralyze you into inaction, and devastation over rejection can’t derail your writing career.

## 11. Practice with a friend.

We all know in-person networking events are a good way to meet new prospects for your writing business. But we writers tend to be introverts, and the idea of actually talking in person to someone who has the power to hire us can be pretty scary.

A great way to get over your jitters—of in-person networking, of cold calling—is to practice with a friend. When you first start talking with people and giving your “elevator speech” about what you do, it’s going to sound fake to you. You want to work through that until talking about yourself and asking questions of prospects feels natural.

So before you go to a writer’s conference or a local networking event, or make a cold call, find a friend—preferably a business person or another writer—and ask if she’ll spend some time with you in person to do some run-throughs. Prepare an elevator speech and get a few icebreakers ready. A handful of questions is also always good, too, because people like to talk about themselves—so when all else fails, you can start asking questions!

Practice your speech, your handshake, and your body language with your friend, until you feel confident that you can meet and talk to new people without wanting to melt into the woodwork. After a while, this will become second nature to you...you won't have to do a run-through for every networking event, conference, or call.

For example, Linda used to have a hard time speaking in public, and she wouldn't do it unless her writer husband or *Renegade Writer* co-author was with her. But after doing it so many times, she can now get up in front of an audience and just talk, jitter-free.

## 12. Be a superhero.

One writer recently shared with us that a writer friend of hers does five minutes of the Wonder Woman pose before heading out to a networking event. We love it!

Everyone should come up with their own fear-busting tip. What action could you take that would pump you up and send you out to meet prospects, send pitches, and make calls in a confident, positive frame of mind?

Think up a ritual—maybe pounding your chest Tony Robbins-style?— and then do it!

## 13. Realize the pros are scared, too

Many writers who've been writing for low-paid markets operate on the assumption that they're the only ones who are terrified. Successful people in the field are always 100% self-confident, right? Those pros have made it, and they're kicking back right now, knowing they will be on top forever. When they pitch ideas,

they just know prospects will be banging down their doors with fistfuls of cash.

This is a myth. It's pure fantasy!

There is no writer who isn't scared in some way, some of the time. Unless you're not pushing yourself to achieve anything, sometimes you'll be afraid—no matter who you are.

For instance, even though Carol had been a staff journalist for 12 years, she was completely petrified when she did her first post for Copyblogger. She had a massive complex, even though it was unpaid! She kept thinking, "This site gets 1 million views a month!" How's that for psyching yourself out?

Same with the first *Forbes* magazine feature Carol got. She'd been blogging for them and wanted to crack the print side for so long! Then, she ended up with a rush assignment, and just nine days flat to write her first feature story for the magazine. It usually takes Carol an eight-hour day just to write a first draft in this kind of situation, because she gets a complex about how awesome it needs to be.

Linda still gets nervous before interviews, and she's written for 150 magazines! You'd think she would have gotten over it after close to 20 years—but no. She just pushes through the fear, recognizing that these interviews are part of the job she loves—the job that lets her work from home and set her own hours.

So stop thinking there's something wrong with you because you feel fear—and believing you're the only one who feels that way. Everyone feels fear. The successful writers just push ahead anyway.

## 14. Know what procrastination really is.

Writers often tell us, “I need to do my marketing, but I’m just procrastinating right now.”

Saying you’re “procrastinating” makes it sound like you’re not in control. But in reality, you are *deciding* what to do with your time—whether you’re deciding to write an LOI or you’re deciding to surf Facebook.

When you put off writing that first draft, or researching a query, or sending a letter of introduction, or making a cold call—or whatever it is that you don’t feel like doing—you think you’re simply delaying a decision. But you’re not delaying the decision to do these business-building things. *You’re making a decision—right now—to not take action to build your writing career.* Procrastination is actually a decision, and it’s a decision that’s not going to get you any writing work.

To make a different choice, become conscious of what’s happening. Ask yourself frequently, “What decision am I making right now?”

When you feel the urge to put off an important writing task, ask yourself this question. You might find you decided to call a friend to shoot the bull instead of pursue freelance writing. Or you’re making the decision to get a snack, instead of landing work.

What decision would you rather be making? You have the power to decide how your business goes, and procrastinating gives up that power to less important things. Do you really want to be a freelance writer? Then bust your “procrastinating” excuses, and you’ll be able to prioritize more writing activities.

## 15. Remember that fear is not real.

When Carol created the [Freelancer's Fear Buster](#) recording she's been giving out free to her email subscribers, she asked writers to give their best tips for busting fear.

One tip that really stuck with her was from Swedish writer Henri Juntilla of [Wake Up Cloud](#). He discovered, as he pursued his freelance writing goals, that fear isn't real. It doesn't exist in the world as any physical object—it's not a spider, it's not a lamp, it's not a hurricane, it's not a bagel. It is not a real thing that exists anywhere in the universe.

Fear is a construct of your brainwaves. That's all. That's the only place it lives. And your mind actually affects your body, so when you have a fearful thought, you experience a racing heart and sweaty palms.

If you feel physical symptoms of fear when you're thinking about writing, remember they were created by your mind. You are not in actual, physical danger.

Fear is toxic thinking that you can turn off. You don't have to share it with anybody else, and you don't have to let it affect your actions. Realize that your fears are not real to anyone else. It's something you mentally imagined—and you can refuse to let it keep you from working towards your writing goals.

## 16. Write (or rewrite!) your own script.

Too many writers give outsiders the power to devastate their self-confidence. One writer in this class wrote us that a rude client "destroyed my self-esteem."

**Key point:** Your self-confidence as a writer needs to come from within. And it needs to be unshakable. Give no one the power to derail your dreams. As long as you believe in your talent, you can keep moving forward. Remember, every great writer has been ridiculed and rejected at some point. [You're in good company!](#)

For some writers, the problem isn't other people, but their own negative self-talk. One writer once told Carol she hoped one day her "puny dreams" would come true, for instance.

Become aware of negative messages you send yourself, or that you take in from others. Make an effort to rewrite these little put-downs and turn them into a positive statement instead. If necessary, write a new script of affirmations and post it somewhere handy—bathroom mirror, computer table—or even make a recording of yourself to play at bedtime. This may sound goofy, but it's a proven way to rewire your subconscious and improve your self-confidence.

## 17. Avoid analysis paralysis and second-guessing.

There's a lot to know about freelance writing—so some aspiring writers just keep taking classes and studying. Or keep rewriting that one query letter they never send. There's no progress. And it's all a cover for the fact that they feel too scared to take action.

Realize that you'll never know it all. There's always more. We both continue learning new things about how the writing game is evolving, every day!

All you need to know to get started is a little bit. Instead of thinking, "I'll learn-learn-learn until I feel confident," adopt a

different approach. Because sitting alone studying endlessly does not build confidence.

Instead, when you've learned something, go out and implement it. See how it works. You got a tip on how to write a query? Go write one! The more you take action, the faster you'll discover what really works for you, and your confidence will grow. Once you've tried out that one idea, you can come back and learn some more.

Try learn-do-learn instead. This is also often called "ready, fire, aim." The more you fire, the more possibilities you have of moving your career forward. So don't spend all your time making sure you're aiming right.

If you're worried that your writing is not "good enough," just know that in our experience, only competent writers ever ask that question! Truly bad writers don't even know enough to realize they need to improve. So stop looking over your query 20 extra times, and send it. Every writer gets better as they go, so the faster you send that out, the quicker you'll have a chance to write the heck out of the next piece.

## 18. Give up on "getting it right."

We see too many writers stalling because they think they have to do everything the "right way." Then (of course!) they're afraid to do it at all. So they don't do anything—which guarantees they're not going to succeed.

Realize there's no right way to do anything, in writing or in anything else! It's all subjective.

For example, there's no one, right way to write a query letter. Linda learned this the hard way when she used to offer a query

critiquing service. One writer would send her these off-the-wall queries, and Linda would tell her, “You can’t write a query this way!”

And the next day, the writer would reply, “I got impatient and sent the query out before I got your feedback—and someone already bought it.” So obviously, there is no one query writing technique that fits every market!

If you are somewhere in the range of normal, you’ll be fine. If you're not writing your pitches in crayon, and you're not calling a prospect 20 times a day to follow up on an email, and you don’t call your editor “Boss Man,” you’re doing great.

You can be successful even though you do things your own way instead of trying to follow some “correct” process. Linda knows successful writers who pitch editors over the phone (which is considered a no-no), end LOIs with a joke, swear in their queries, ignore writer’s guidelines, and more.

If the fear of not doing everything the “right” way is keeping you from putting your work out there—you need to banish the idea that there is such a thing as perfection. Every prospect is different, and you never know what will resonate with each one.

### Resources for You!

Still afraid to take action? Read one of these fear-busting, confidence-building posts each day:

- [7 Inspiring Posts for Fearful Freelance Writers](#) by Carol Tice
- [The Freelancer’s Fear Buster - Tips from 17 Writers, Freelancers, and Entrepreneurs](#) on Make a Living Writing
- [I’ve Been Rejected Close to 500 Times](#) by Linda Formichelli



- [Six Self-Confidence Tips for Writers](#) by Carol Tice
- [10 Ways Freelance Writers Can Banish Fear](#) by Carol Tice
- [The Easy Way to Get More of Your Work Out There — Even If You’re Not Feeling Confident](#) by Linda Formichelli
- [What Freelance Writers Should Really Fear](#) by Carol Tice
- [7 Ways Out of Writer’s Block](#) by Carol Tice
- [The First Hurdle: Why Writers Should Stop Being Scared and Take a Leap of Faith](#) by Aubre Andrus (On the Renegade Writer blog)
- [30 Ways to Bust Out of Writer’s Block](#) by Carol Tice
- [The Special List That Will Boost Your Confidence and Productivity](#) by Linda Formichelli
- [The Definitive Guide to Overcoming Your Writing Fears](#) by Ollin Morales (on Make a Living Writing)
- [Does Rejection Get You Down? Here’s How to Develop Resilience as a Freelance Writer](#) by Linda Formichelli
- [Afraid No One Will Take You Seriously as a Freelance Writer?](#) by Carol Tice
- [7 Inspiring Thoughts to Cure Your Newbie Writer Jitters](#) by Carol Tice
- [The Depressed Writer: An Interview with Julie Fast, Author of \*Get It Done When You’re Depressed\*](#) by Linda Formichelli

## HOMEWORK

Pick a few of the fear-busting tactics from our list of 16 that speak to you, and put them into practice! For example:

- Send out an email with a typo in it.
- Make a habit of asking yourself, “What am I deciding to do right now?”
- Practice for a cold call or networking event with a friend.

- Seek out rejection: Start asking people for things you have no chance in hell of getting. (You may be surprised!)
- Take a look at your past writing work, whether it's on your own blog or on a content mill. See how much you've accomplished!
- Create a Brag File and start filling it with everything you've done as a writer you're proud of—every compliment from a client, every nice comment on a blog post—everything.
- Create a "Nice Stuff" folder in your email. Whenever you get a complimentary email, drop it in there. Check back to read the content often.
- Keep it small until you gain confidence. Pitch a 150-word piece to a magazine's Front of the Book section. Approach a local small business. Send a query to a regional tabloid.
- Ask yourself, "What would a confident writer do?" Write down your insights, then do those things.
- Read one of the posts in the Resources list above.
- In the section "Remember, it's not all about you," we list a load of reasons a prospect may reject your pitch that have nothing to do with you as a person or the quality of your writing. Add five more reasons to the list.
- Before tackling a scary task—like calling a prospect or hitting Send on an LOI—do a Wonder Woman pose (or the confident pose of your choice) for five minutes.

Keep at it—building confidence takes time. And most important, remember that *you don't act the way you think, you think the way you act*—so start taking action and get your work out there!