

# Make a Living Writing:

THE 21ST CENTURY GUIDE

By Carol Tice



# Table of Contents:

<b>Introduction</b> .....	9
<b>Let's Get Started</b> .....	11
Who am I to give advice?.....	13
Freelance writing today .....	15
Six myths about getting published .....	17
Three ways to make good money from writing .....	18
What's your goal? .....	19
Watch for unexpected opportunities .....	20
The 7 Habits of Successful New Freelance Writers .....	21
<b>PART I: Writing for Publications</b> .....	23
<b>Get Ready to Write</b>	
LOOK IN:	
What do you know? .....	24
Choose a focus .....	25
Finding the time .....	27

LOOK OUT:

7 Steps to Your First Paid Writing Assignments .....	30
1. Identify your writing type .....	30
2. Find your rung on the ladder .....	32
3. Start marketing your writing .....	34
A baker's dozen ways to look for writing work .....	35
Research and <i>The Writer's Market</i> .....	38
4. Use social media to build your writing career .....	42
Social media do's and don'ts.....	43
5. Find places to get your first few clips.....	47
All about writing for Internet content sites.....	50
Six problems with content-mill writing.....	52
6. Create your pitching toolkit .....	55
Your resume .....	55
Your bio .....	56
Your Web site .....	57
What if I don't have a Web site? .....	60
Your portfolio .....	61
Three reasons to put your portfolio on your Web site...	62
Your blog .....	63
Your in-person pitch .....	66
7. Find editors to pitch .....	68

<b>Get Set to Pitch</b> .....	71
Finding and developing story ideas .....	72
Evergreen article ideas .....	73
Submitting unsolicited, completed articles .....	76
Preparing your query letter in three easy steps .....	77
1. Know your publication / Writer's guidelines and editorial calendars / A look at an editor's life .....	78
2. Define an angle .....	86
3. Match your pitch to the right publication / Online articles vs print / In the back door: Online articles for print magazines .....	88
Crafting your pitch .....	92
Two foolproof approaches to writing queries .....	94
Query don'ts .....	96
Case study: Pitching Kiwanis .....	98
Send the most queries in the shortest time .....	102
Three ways to pitch editors .....	104
1. Pitching via email .....	106
Don't help your editor rip you off! .....	109
2. Pitching on the phone .....	110
Sample script for a phone pitch .....	111
How to leave a voicemail for an editor .....	114

3. Pitching via snail mail .....	116
Should you nag that editor about your query.....	117
<b>Go: Writing your first assignments .....</b>	<b>119</b>
What to know before you start writing .....	119
What determines writer pay? .....	123
Determining your target hourly rate .....	125
Finding sources and interviewing .....	126
Twelve interview tips .....	128
How to find facts for your article—fast .....	132
Timesaving tips for fast article writing .....	133
Seven tips to beat writer's block .....	136
Making your article great .....	139
Getting paid .....	143
Final thoughts on writing for publications .....	145

<b>PART II: The Copywriting Crash Course</b> .....	146
<b>An Introduction to Copywriting</b> .....	147
Choosing a niche .....	150
Use your life experience .....	151
My breaking-in story .....	152
Is copywriting “selling out”? .....	153
<b>Getting Copywriting Assignments</b> .....	155
Seven ways to find your first clients .....	157
A sample opening pitch .....	159
Two more strategies for getting those first samples .....	160
Blogging for business—a great new break-in opportunity .....	161
Five signs of a good business-blogging prospect .....	163
How to create a great business blog .....	165
The mechanics of business blogging .....	166
Break in with crowdsourcing contests .....	167
<b>What to Charge</b> .....	168
Why I don’t have a rate sheet .....	170
What to do if a prospect requires a quote .....	171
Sample copywriting client questionnaire .....	173
Negotiation tips for getting the best rate .....	177
Listen in on a client negotiation .....	179

<b>Completing Your First Copywriting Assignment</b> .....	182
Client meeting 101 .....	182
Write your assignment .....	185
Submit your work and deal with edits .....	187
Turn one assignment into a regular gig .....	188
<b>How to Gain Confidence and Move Up</b> .....	189
Social media + copywriting = good pay .....	191
Team with a graphic designer to earn more .....	193
Copywriting for nonprofits .....	194
<b>Learn more about copywriting</b> .....	196

**PART III: MAKE A LIVING WITH YOUR BLOG** ..... 197

<b>Blog vs. Article: What's the Difference?</b> .....	201
<b>Why Your Blog Needs a Niche</b> .....	204
<b>Best Traits of Successful Niche Bloggers</b> .....	206
<b>10 Ways to Monetize Your Blog</b> .....	209
<b>Advice from Successful Niche Blogger Nathan Hangen</b> .....	213

<b>CONCLUSION: MAKING IT HAPPEN</b> .....	216
<b>You Gotta Believe</b> .....	219
<b>Mentoring Services</b> .....	221
<b>Final Note</b> .....	222
<b>Make a Living Writing: The Sequel</b> .....	223





Image by Larry Tice

## INTRODUCTION

Many books have been written about how to earn money as a writer. So why write another one? Because the freelance writing world has changed dramatically in the past few years.

Getting published used to be the big challenge. Now, anyone can do it in minutes, online. But I've found few books that talk about how to earn a really good living from writing today.

In the past two years, I've met and mentored many wonderful writers. Some were brand-new to writing, but others were seasoned writers who weren't earning much despite years of work and many published articles.

Both the new and established writers had lots of questions about how to navigate today's fast-changing freelance world: How to evaluate emerging online markets, how to find and apply for good-paying freelance jobs, how to market their writing. I started my *Make a Living Writing* blog to answer their questions. Eventually, the blog grew into this comprehensive guide.

Whole books have been written about many of the topics I cover below, such as copywriting or using social media to market your writing. My goal here is to give you an introduction to all the basic building blocks you need to move your writing career forward.

The traditional publishing world is undergoing wrenching changes, but as old options die out, many new writing opportunities are springing up. It's never been easier to get published, but it's possibly never been more difficult to build a freelance writing career that pays well.

This e-book describes my system for breaking into paid writing and rapidly building a solid income. It outlines steps to take for success in today's markets, both print and virtual.

I hope *Make a Living Writing* helps you find your way to writing that's both lucrative and enjoyable. If you do, please write! I'd love to hear about your success.

—Carol Tice

[www.makealivingwriting.com](http://www.makealivingwriting.com)

[www.caroltice.com](http://www.caroltice.com)

<http://Twitter.com/TiceWrites>

[carol@caroltice.com](mailto:carol@caroltice.com)

# LET'S GET STARTED



*Image by Flickr user Mrs.Minifig*

Have you wished you could make a good living as a freelance writer? You might long for the flexibility and work/life balance freelance writing can provide. Maybe you walk by newsstands and imagine seeing your name in print. Or perhaps you'd enjoy working behind the scenes as a well-paid copywriter for businesses.

This book is for:

- Anyone considering a freelance writing career
- New writers
- Experienced writers who are new to freelancing
- Writers looking to move up to better-paying print and online markets

If any of these describe you, you've come to the right place. *I'm going to show you, step-by-step, exactly how to succeed in paid freelance writing today.* No matter your age, hometown, education level, interests, life experience or background, if you write well and have the self-confidence to market your work, this book can help you find good-paying markets that will hire you.

Below, I will give you a close-up view of the fast-changing media world of the 21st century, and offer a road map to lucrative writing work that suits your talents and interests.

What do I mean by "paid writing"? I teach new writers how to get a few initial writing samples, and then quickly move up to markets that pay at least \$50 per blog or article. Experienced writers will discover how to move up to markets that pay \$1 a word, \$100 an hour or more.

There are plenty of markets on the Internet that pay far less than \$50—more about them later—but I'm going to advise you to steer clear of them and show you how to go straight to better-paying assignments.

## Who Am I to Give Advice?

If anybody can tell you how to start from scratch and build a lucrative career as a freelance writer, I can. I worked my way up using just my wits and my trusty pen (or computer keyboard).

I was one of those kids who always got an “A” in creative writing class, but I am a college dropout. I got bored with college and quit after two years to be a starving songwriter. Which I later got tired of, and when an alternative weekly paid me \$200 for a personal essay I entered in a contest, I never looked back.

So, no journalism degree for me, and I began with no connections in the world of publishing. Within a year of starting out, I was a regular freelancer for the *Los Angeles Times*. After several years of freelancing part-time, I spent 12 years as a staff writer for two different publications, one an industry trade publication, the other a weekly business journal. Over the years, I’ve won many **national and regional writing awards**.

I say this not to brag, but to let you in on a little industry secret I discovered: A lot of editors (and award-contest judges, and corporations) don’t

care if you learned to write in a pricey college or sitting under a freeway overpass. *If you can write well, you can get good-paying assignments.*

Since 2005, I am back to freelancing full time. I am continuously pitching new editors and landing new publication and business clients, so my knowledge of what it takes to succeed today is current. You can see what I've been writing recently at [www.caroltice.com](http://www.caroltice.com).

My recent byline clients include national and regional publications such as *Entrepreneur* magazine, *Seattle Magazine* and the *Seattle Times*. I also have written Web pages, white papers, articles, blogs and press releases for major corporations including Dell, Yahoo!, Microsoft, SunTrust Bank, American Express, Renaissance Hotels, and Dun & Bradstreet.

I can personally testify that it's possible to rapidly build a lucrative freelance writing business. Just 18 months after getting back into freelancing, I was able to take my family of five on an Alaska cruise because I was making so much more as a freelance writer than I had been as a staff writer. I took six weeks of vacation that year.

If you're interested in this type of lifestyle, read on to discover how you can build a successful freelance-writing career.

## Freelance Writing Today

As I write this in 2010, the economy is in the tank. Daily newspapers are folding around the country. Many people question whether there will even be journalists or professional copywriters in the future. But I don't.

While our industry is clearly in flux, there's plenty of opportunity in the chaos. Layoffs mean more freelance work.

There is still great-paying work out there, and as the economy recovers, there will be even more. My prediction is that the current flood of low-paying writing jobs will likely dry up in the next few years. Many companies that have used dirt-cheap content will find it doesn't bring them clients, and will seek out professional writers.

The rise of low-paying content sites has changed the landscape of freelance writing. Would-be writers are flooding into the marketplace. This has created an interesting paradox—there's never been so much competition, but at the same time it's never been easier to stand out from the crowd. This e-book will give you the tools to do just that.

There's a lot of talk out there that pay rates for writers have collapsed and will never rise again. That's simply not true. While there is a whole new world of low-paying online writing work, there are also plenty of good-paying markets, too.

Writers who are committed to finding good-paying work have continued to earn straight through this downturn. I actually had my best-earning year ever in 2008—and then I topped it in 2009.

Is it hard to get started as a freelance writer now? Yes. You will need to be relentlessly optimistic, tireless, focused and aggressive in your search for good assignments. You will need to work hard on your craft and deliver highly polished, well-written work. But if you write well and are willing to market yourself, it's definitely doable.



## **Six Myths About Getting Published**

Don't be held back by these common misconceptions about writing professionally:

1. You need a journalism degree.
2. You need inside connections.
3. You need to be writing full time.
4. You need to be an expert in the field you want to write about.
5. You need advanced degrees, such as an MBA to write about business or a real-estate agent's license to write about real estate.
6. You can't succeed any more with traditional methods of getting assignments such as querying, cold-calling, and in-person networking.

## Three Ways to Make Good Money From Writing

There are many types of writing that still pay well, despite all the changes in the media marketplace and the recession. New forms of well-paid writing are also emerging as the Internet evolves and social networking grows.

In this e-book, I'm going to concentrate on describing three proven ways to make a good income from your writing:

- 1. Pitching print and online publications to get article and blog assignments*
- 2. Copywriting, or writing for businesses*
- 3. Making money from your own blog*

You may be wondering why I haven't included a section on writing for content sites such as Demand Studios, Helium, Suite101, and Associated Content. Having mentored many writers who got started at these sites, I'm of the opinion that they're usually not a good place to earn well. There also isn't much to say about how to break into them—sign up and you'll

likely be working shortly, either for a hoped-for future royalty or per-article payments of perhaps \$20. See my section below, "**All About Writing for Internet Content Sites**," to learn why I believe new writers should avoid these sites.

### **What's Your Goal?**

As you review the three main sections of this book, you'll probably find yourself drawn to particular types of writing. As you identify writing niches that might be good for you, try to distill a list of goals.

Ask yourself: What would I most like to accomplish in writing in the short term—getting my own blog up? Querying several new markets? Finding copywriting clients? Then determine your long-term goals: Where would I like to see my writing career five years from now?

Once you have a list, break your goals down into a to-do list for the current month. What are some first steps you could take, this month, to start moving your writing career forward?

Without a list of concrete actions you plan to take, it'll be hard to make much

progress. Review and update your list frequently to see if you're getting things done. As you check off items, move up additional goals and add them to your list for the next month.

*There are so many possibilities in the world of paid writing, it's easy to be overwhelmed and end up doing nothing.* Try to find a doable starting point and take action. If you're writing in addition to a full-time job or busy family life, be realistic about how much you can accomplish each month. Don't be discouraged if at first your progress seems slow.

### **Watch for unexpected opportunities**

While you're working on your goals, stay open to good-paying writing opportunities that arise that may not be on your list. Once you start letting people know you're a writer, you may be surprised at the offers you get. Don't be married to your agenda if a lucrative assignment comes your way...your plan is just one path through the woods. As you go along, you may find another.

## The 7 Habits of Successful New Freelance Writers

Successful writers:

1. *Write regularly*—They develop a writing routine and try to write every day. That's the only way they'll be ready when a paying assignment comes.
2. *Believe in themselves*—Rejection letters do no phase them. If they send 20 queries and get no responses, they don't take it personally. They don't dwell on it—they move right on to the next step in their plan to find paid writing.
3. *Are willing to market their business*—Their methods may vary—they may favor in-person networking, cold-calling, social networking or sending query letters. But successful new writers are always looking for a new, better-paying client. They have a plan to market their writing and stick with it.
4. *Seek out mentors*—Writers who want to earn a good living attend workshops, hire mentors or coaches, and ask editors for advice.

They know mentors can help them develop their craft and land better-paying assignments.

5. *Are open to criticism*—Well-paid writers are usually not prima donnas who moan over ever tiny change an editor wants to make to their story. They join writer’s groups to seek feedback on their work. They are self-confident enough to listen with an open mind to suggestions that could improve their writing.
6. *Keep learning*—Whether it’s books, e-books, college classes, e-courses, or a writer’s group, successful writers look for opportunities to increase their knowledge.
7. *Have goals*—Vague dreams of earning a living from writing will not put money in the bank. Writers who want to earn well set goals. They break their goals down into concrete to-do lists, focus on accomplishing their tasks, and track their progress. Periodically, they analyze their results and adjust their goals based on what’s working best for them.

# PART I: WRITING FOR PUBLICATIONS



*Image by Flickr user dcJohn*

## Get Ready to Write

Before you land that first paid writing assignment—either in a print or online publication—you’ll need to do three things:

- Look inside and discover what type of writing you want to do.
- Look out in the marketplace to learn who will pay for that type of writing.
- Start writing. Write an article every week, start a blog, keep a journal. If you aren't doing so already, start writing regularly, so that you can build up your writing muscles.

If you don't have a computer, email and Internet access, get them—it'll be hard to work as a from home-based freelance writer without these tools.

## **LOOK IN:**

### **What do you know?**

You've probably heard that old expression, "Write what you know." That's never truer than when you're first starting out. The easiest way to get published is usually to tackle a topic you already know something about.

Think about all of the aspects of who you are, and how your experiences might help you develop article pitches. For example, I'm actively involved in my Jewish faith; I like to quilt, garden, do pressed-flower crafts, and play Mah Jongg; I've owned a dog; I'm a former songwriter and legal secretary; I'm interested in politics, and sometimes I teach Israeli dance. I'm married and have three kids, two of them adopted and with special needs. Growing up, my dad sold insurance.

When I got back into freelancing, I used these interests to help me find new markets and get assignments. Early on, I placed several first-person essays about my adopted kids on the Jewish spirituality site [Aish.com](http://Aish.com).



They paid \$200 each for easy articles writing about my own experience, no research or interviewing required. That helped tide me over as my freelance business was getting off the ground, and built my confidence that I could find new paying markets for my work.

Another question to ask yourself is what you read for pleasure. Car magazines? Your profession's newsletter? The daily paper? Novels? Take a clue from your reading interests for where to focus your writing.

### **Choose a focus**

Make a list of all of your interests, experiences and passions that might be easy starting points for you to land writing assignments.

Look at your list and think about which of those subjects you'd like to write about most. One important rule of building your freelance career is that *work of one kind tends to lead to more work of the same kind*. So whether your main passion is to write articles about healthcare issues, or to blog about television shows, try to break in there first. The clips you amass will help you get more assignments in the same vein.

It will be tougher to jump from writing about new medical procedures to, say, writing about horse breeding. Editors are looking for clips on topics similar to what they want you to write. Hiring someone off similar clips seems less risky than hiring someone who can't prove they know how to cover a particular topic.

Below, you'll learn how to research markets and discover what they pay. Next to each of your interests, write a pay range based on what you find as you check local and national publications. You'll generally find topics that a lot of people know about—say, parenting—will not pay as well as topics fewer people know about—say, exchange-traded funds. *To earn more, identify your interest areas that will likely pay best.* Those are the niches you should spend the most time pursuing.

It will be easier to get your writing career going if you focus on one area or two, rather than going in all directions at once. If you put a lot of effort into your top couple of picks and aren't getting anywhere, try the next subject you like.

Whatever you do, don't get stymied! Be confident that you will find a fit between your skills and what's needed in the marketplace.

## Finding the time

Whole books have been written on the topic of finding the time to start a side business while you work full time, raise three kids, or whatever else occupies most of your waking hours. Personally, I think these books are mostly a waste of time.

I'll keep this short: *If you are passionate about writing and driven to earn your living from it, you will find the time.* If you can't discipline yourself to sit down and work on your plan to freelance, it's probably not for you. People who talk about how much they want to write as a career—if only they could find the time—are kidding themselves.

Freelance writing is entirely driven by you. There's no "boss" giving you orders. YOU will be making your career happen. You will need to be relentless in making time to network, think about story ideas, and prospect for new clients.

If this is what you want, sit down with your schedule and figure out what you have to do to get the blocks of time you need. Let your family know you're serious about it and get their support. Then get up earlier, stay up later, stop watching TV, take a leave of absence, hire a sitter, let your house get messy. Do whatever it takes to carve out the time you need.

Here are some of my personal strategies for making room for productive writing time:

1. *Outsource.* I have housecleaners come twice a month to take care of all heavy cleaning. I send my teen to the mini-mart for a gallon of milk. I pay a Webmaster because tech stuff makes me cry. If it isn't time-effective for me to do it, I find someone else to do it.
2. *Let go.* I do not have a pristine, utterly clutter-free house that looks like a design magazine is about to come take a photo. The pile of shoes and toys on my porch is atrocious. If we can walk about the house without tripping on anything, I'm pretty much satisfied.

3. *Ruthlessly organize and prioritize.* From my years as a legal secretary, I know to come into my office each day with an agenda. I know what the most important things are that need to get done, and the secondary objectives I'd like to get to, and I knock them out.
4. *Turn down low-paying jobs.* Focus on finding well-paid work and don't waste time on low payers. That's right, prospective clients call me and I turn them down if their rates aren't in my ballpark.
5. *Turn off the TV.* Or the online gaming, or whatever you waste time doing. I frankly find the vast majority of TV shows really boring at this point in my life—a couple hours of shows is plenty in a typical week. Mostly, I'd rather read, write, think, or plan.
6. *Say no.* The fact is, I don't really do it all. I turn down a lot of things. Will I organize the elementary school's auction? No. Will I clean out the closet? No. Don't try to conform to anybody's idea of a supermom or dad. Those people are all having quiet nervous breakdowns, I believe.

## **LOOK OUT:**

### **7 Steps to Your First Paid Writing Assignments**

#### **Find your target markets**

Now that you've identified your writing interests and committed yourself to making time to write, you're ready to find paying writing markets for your work.

#### **1. Identify your writing type**

As you read through newspapers and magazines, you've probably noticed there are a variety of article types. There are nonfiction, informational articles; there are occasionally fiction stories, and opinion or editorial pieces as well. There are long features that delve deeply into a topic and short breaking-news articles. There are "charticles," quite short articles that tell some of the story through the use of prominent charts. Some pieces are columns written by experts stating their viewpoint on a topic, while most are reported by a writer, who interviews experts and presents their opinions.

*The vast majority of the paying work is in nonfiction articles.* So if you dream of writing a novel, or publishing short stories, or being a paid curmudgeon like Charles Krauthammer or Molly Ivins, realize that earning a living from it right off is going to be difficult.

I highly recommend setting your sights on nonfiction work even if your dream is to be a novelist. If it was good enough for Mark Twain (a former daily-news reporter) and Salman Rushdie (a former copywriter for Ogilvy & Mather), it's good enough for you.

Writing nonfiction will sharpen your skills, build your confidence, increase your bank account, give you the thrill of seeing your byline, and improve your chances of getting your fiction or opinion pieces published. Keep writing those short stories and submitting them, but develop some nonfiction expertise as well, as a faster way to start the money rolling in.

## 2. Find your rung on the ladder

As you look through lists of publications, you should be able to detect a hierarchy. Generally, the publications with the smallest circulations will pay the least, the largest the most. There are exceptions—if a small-circulation publication has a particularly valuable audience advertisers want, such as highly paid CEOs, it may still be able to pay well, as its ad prices are likely high.

The online reference book the *Writer's Market* allows you to sort publications by four levels of pay, so you can use it to quickly find markets in the next pay rung for you. (More on how to use *The Writer's Market* below, in the section on marketing your business.) *Media Bistro* is a more limited resource, but offers nearly 300 detailed “How to Pitch” guides to its paid members.

Otherwise, to find out about a publication's size and audience, look for a *media kit* or *advertising guide*. This will tout the publication's circulation and audience demographics, often including average annual income. You'll get a quick sense of whether you've found an entry-level publication. Big circulation or high-earning readers will generally mean a higher-rung publication.



Your goal is to get the best-paying assignment you can. If you're a brand-new writer, that will likely be at a small-circulation publication, or perhaps a small online magazine. If you're already writing for entry-level publications, seek publications in the same niche that have bigger circulations and pay more.

If you're interested in, say, writing parenting articles, you're likely not going to get a response by querying *Parents* magazine cold, with no clips. They're tops in this niche, and work with established writers. I'm sure there's a one-in-a-million success story that happens, but for the most part I think many new writers spend time pitching big national magazines, then get discouraged and quit.

Instead, think of freelance writing like any other career—you're going to start at the bottom and work your way up the ladder as fast as you can. If you already have a few parenting clips, you should pitch bigger publications in the niche. That's your move-up strategy.

Below the *Parents* magazine level, there are smaller-circulation national magazines aimed at niche audiences—say, *Adoptive Families* or *Multiples Magazine*. Below this level will be small city-focused parenting magazines such as *Seattle's Child*...and below that even, perhaps a mom's newsletter for a large apartment complex or planned community. These lower rungs in your chosen topic areas are good places to get first clips.

### **3. Start marketing your writing**

You can find lots of writing jobs online. But that's not necessarily the best way to find good-paying writing work. Most online job listings are very low-paying, and you can easily waste the whole day looking through them and composing application emails.

Personally, I try to not spend more than a half-hour a day looking at online job ads. Try to only devote time to ads that you feel you have special subject knowledge of and therefore a strong shot at landing.

## A baker's dozen ways to look for writing work

1. *Network, both in-person and online.* In-person networking can't be beat, but building online connections on sites such as [LinkedIn](#) or [Biznik](#) can also yield good results. Making personal connections with people who could offer you writing jobs or connect you with editors is hands-down the most effective way to spend your marketing time. Experiment to find the groups where you get good job leads.
2. *Send query letters.* Now more than ever, a really well-crafted query letter can help you stand out, get noticed by editors, and land good-paying assignments. New writers may be flooding into the marketplace, but few of them know how to write a strong query.
3. *Cold call.* Just call up editors and see if you can get them on the phone, then make your pitch. It's a great, quick way to see if you've got a chance with smaller, local publications.

4. *Local job boards.* Forums and job boards that are city-specific are great, particularly when you're starting out and looking for smaller clients. I actually got one of my biggest clients through a local board. Here in Seattle, I get job emails from **Women in Digital Journalism**, **Freelance Seattle**, and **Digital Eve**. The latter has chapters in many cities. Find similar online forums in your town.
5. *National, general job boards including Monster and Craigslist.* Though scams abound, legitimate jobs are on Craigslist, too.
6. *Social media such as LinkedIn or Twitter.* Twitter is a growing spot for job listings, and many jobs listed on LinkedIn are exclusive to the site. Jobs are also increasingly popping up in social-media affinity groups such as LinkedIn Editors & Writers.
7. *Industry-specific writing job boards.* Mediabistro is the best for good-paying freelance article assignments, **Journalism Jobs** a close second.

8. *Writers' workshops and conferences* are great places to meet editors.
9. *Professional writers' organizations*. Some have exclusive job boards. Examples of national writer's groups include the [National Association of Independent Writers and Editors](#) and [Society of Professional Journalists](#).
10. *Free industry e-zines*. I like [Writer's Weekly](#) and [Morning Coffee](#), both of which offer weekly job listings.
11. *Online writing advice and job sites*. Two of the most popular writer blog sites that compile writing job listings are [About Freelance Writing](#) and [Freelance Writing Gigs](#). This makes for timesaving one-stop shopping, while also offering a chance to learn from and commune with other writers.

12. *Niche sites.* Because I have a lot of business-finance experience, I've had good luck looking at the finance-sector job alerts from **Gorkana**, which also has a healthcare alert. Look for niche-focused job boards—you'll often find quality leads and less competition.

13. *Use the Writer's Market.* More details on how to get the most from this valuable resource below.

### **Research and the *Writer's Market***

Thanks to the Internet, it's easy to do a quick Google search and turn up lots of publications, both local and national, on whatever topic you choose. But basic Internet searches won't tell you which publications are most likely to hire you, or pay best.

That's where the industry bible the ***Writer's Market*** comes in handy. Get it with online support so you can sort their data to quickly find the type of publications you're targeting. It can be an intimidating volume—my current issue weighs in at more than 1,100 pages! Working with the data online is a better way to go. Here are my tips on how to use the *Writer's Market* online:

1. *Use the search engine.* The prime advantage of online support is that rather than leafing through physical pages, you can use the Market's online search engines to slice and dice their data. You can use their advanced search to find only consumer magazines, or only publications in a certain region, at only a certain pay level. Saves a lot of squinting time.
2. *Browse the new listings.* One of my favorite features of WritersMarket.com is that they offer daily lists of newly updated listings. Why check these out? I have a theory about people who take the time to fill out listing forms: Editors fill them out when they are interested in finding new freelancers. When they're not interested, they toss the form in the trash. So the new listings are a great resource for finding publications that are good freelance markets. At the speed editors are changing jobs these days, this is also a great place to find editors who're new in their jobs and possibly more open to working with new writers.

3. *Build your market list.* No more scribbling down contacts on a sheet of paper, or copy and pasting contact info into a Word doc—on WritersMarket.com you can create your own “My Markets” database and quickly store information on any markets you find interesting.
4. *Get the free marketing newsletter.* As a perk of membership you can get a free newsletter with tips on how to market your writing. Nice!
5. *Check the news.* *Writer’s Market’s* **Debbie Ridpath Ohi** writes a great compendium of breaking news that affects writers—news of bankrupt publishers, new magazine launches, and editor changes. These are great leads that can put you ahead of the pack in spotting new opportunities.
6. *Dig the community.* WritersMarket.com has its own writers’ community, with subgroups for many genres. If you’re looking for a niche affinity group within writing, this could be a great place to connect.



*As you use the Writer's Market and other resources, don't limit your research to major newspapers and magazines.* The world of bylined writing includes online magazines, alumni publications, and trade magazines that serve every possible business sector. My experience is trade pubs are nearly always short-staffed and desperately seeking anyone willing to tackle their subject matter! They're a great place to break in.

*Don't let your location limit you, either.* Increasingly, writing is a global business. Your research might turn up a Canadian magazine that wants articles about traveling in the U.S., for instance. Many new writers query their hometown newspaper and when they can't land an assignment there, they sink into a funk. Remember, that is but one of literally thousands of potential markets for your work.

#### 4. Use social media to build your writing career

Some writers are already fluent in how to use social media. If that's you, you can skip this section.

If you're still at the stage of wondering what social media is all about, here is a brief introduction.

Broadly, social media is the term for any Web site that allows visitors to establish a presence, interact with each other and share information. A few of the best-known and most popular social media sites for business people as I write this include [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Biznik](#) and [Twitter](#). Depending on the types of writing you do, these top sites may or may not be the best places for you to market your writing services.

**Types of social media.** There are a few different types of social media sites. *Bookmarking sites* such as [Digg](#) or [Yahoo!buzz](#) simply allow you to spread awareness of your articles and others you find interesting by posting them on the site. Some writers report a good chunk of their site visitors come through bookmarking sites.

There are *mass-market sites* such as LinkedIn, as I've mentioned above. These offer the opportunity to connect with a very large audience.

There are also *industry or geography-specific niche social sites* such as [All Freelance Writing](#) for writers or, say, [PlanetF1](#) for fans of Formula One racing. Or it could be a local forum that focuses on your neighborhood or town, which might live on a platform such as [Yahoo!Groups](#), [BigTent](#), or an industry or community leader's [WordPress](#) blog. Here, the audience will be much smaller, but possibly more valuable to you if you are looking to connect with local publications or thought leaders in a particular industry.

### **Social media do's and don'ts**

There's definitely a right way and a wrong way to use social media. Some people will tell you social media is just a timewaster, but I've found new markets, sources, and great new writer-friends through social sites. Some tips:

- *DO start by listening, learning and lurking.* On any social-media site, there are rules. On Twitter, for instance, you'll see people use hashtags (#) to make it easier to find key words or topics. So begin

by hanging out a bit and learning how people use the site before you start posting. Also, follow people who are leaders in social media such as [Guy Kawasaki](#) or [Chris Brogan](#), and learn from them.

- *DO create a profile.* If the site allows you to build a profile, fill it out completely. Add a nice photo of yourself and a link to your Web site so it feels friendly and personal, and people can learn more about you.
- *DO make connections.* Whether it's followers on Twitter or Facebook friends, start building your audience. On some sites, you'll do that by following or friending others. They'll then return the favor. There are a lot of companies selling tools that will instantly get you thousands of friends or followers, but you don't need them. Instead, put in a little effort each week to add useful new connections—not just random people—and let it grow organically. Complete strangers who aren't potential editors, writer-friends or sources won't be valuable to you.
- *DO get found.* Remember that popular social media sites are ranked well on Google, and that people may also search for writers on the search engine within the site. Get found on search by men-

tioning all the types of writing you do in your bio—ghostwriter, article writer, journalist, blogger. If you're interested in local publications, be sure to include a mention of your city in your profile.

- *DO show you care.* The people who excel at using social media don't just promote themselves all day or ask for work. They spend most of their time sharing useful, free information. Most of the posts they leave will link to articles by other people. They answer questions in discussion forums or by posting on people's "walls." This may seem weird and counterintuitive to you at first, *but what you want most in social media is to build a reputation as a great source of free information.* You will attract attention and build a fan base by being useful to people. Eventually, you will leverage that to find work.
- *DO ask for help.* I find social media is a great place to look for sources for stories. Let people know what you're looking for. You could find new friends, too, as many PR people are using social media and may help you connect with sources.

- *DO discover hidden job listings.* Social media is an increasingly popular place to post writing jobs, both within discussion groups and on the sites generally. Sometimes, the listings are exclusive to that social-media site, so if you're not there, you'll never see them.
- *DON'T over-promote.* Keep your ratio of self-promotion to useful stuff at about 1:4 or so, as people tend to ignore, unfriend, unfollow or otherwise tune out people whose every post is a brag about themselves, an ad to buy their book, or a plea for work.
- *DON'T pay to participate.* Many social media sites have paid levels to them. You don't need to join them, at least at first. There's plenty you can get done for free.
- *DON'T let it eat your life.* Try not to spend more than a half-hour to an hour a week on this stuff. There will be a big ramp-up at the beginning, but once your profiles are up, remember that social media is just one of many ways to market yourself, and it shouldn't take all day. Make sure you stay focused on why you're on social media—to build your business.

## 5. Find places to get your first few clips

One of the biggest hurdles to getting big-dollar writing assignments is having a few writing samples to show prospective editors. Here are seven good places to get those first published pieces, with tips on how to land them:

**Enter writing contests.** I won two of these early on, and they led immediately to long-term editor relationships and \$500 article assignments in major publications. Contest wins offer great visibility and allow you to create an “awards won” page for your Web site that impresses prospects. *The Writer’s Market* lists hundreds of contests—look for ones that are a fit for your talents.

**Write for the alternative press.** Alt papers are a great place to develop as a writer and get paid \$50 an article or more off the bat. It can lead to a lot of other great opportunities—I got a full-time reporting job that paid more than \$40,000 a year to start from my alt-press clips, and one feature story I wrote there was optioned for a movie for \$20,000. The reputation of alt papers has grown steadily over the years, as many writers have started there and gone on to national radio, paper and TV gigs.

A great way to break in: Call up the editor and ask if they have coverage of a local event you know will be interesting. If not, they may take a flier and send you out.

**Write for daily papers.** Yes, many have disappeared, and some don't have freelance budget anymore. But many of the major papers need freelancers more than ever. The pay isn't great, but can still be several hundred dollars an article. Send a brief, well-polished email or mailed query to connect with the dailies.

**Write for small, regional papers and magazines.** When I first moved to Seattle and needed to find my first local markets, I wrote for *Today's Careers*, a free local job paper, for about \$200 a story. Easy, interesting work. Querying here is a similar process to approaching daily papers.

**Write online content.** Online magazines are springing up all over the Internet, along with portal Web sites on topics from parenting to tattoos. Many are seeking bloggers to contribute frequently in order to help their site rank well in Google searches for their topic. Initial gigs are usually found through online job ads and may not pay great. But just a few months of blogging gives you a track record in creating online content that can lead to better-paying online-writing offers.



**Write a couple free samples.** You may be surprised to hear me say this, but writing a few articles gratis for a magazine, business, or nonprofit can be a great way to get your first clips. I like it because you don't get confused and think what you're doing might be a living. Here's a great story from *Writer's Weekly* about how this strategy paid off big for one brand-new writer who wrote a few articles as a charity volunteer.

**Take a class.** I got into journalism sideways, from songwriting. When I realized I wanted to be a reporter, I took some UCLA Extension classes in journalism. While I don't believe basic writing talent can be taught, you'll never regret taking time to study this field, particularly to learn about reporting technique, article formats and ethical issues. Many writers are coming into the field now without any training, and it limits their options. Getting a bit of education can jump you ahead of the pack.

Just being in the class may help jump-start your career. You may write for a school paper or online site, getting a few clips that can lead quickly to paid assignments. Your professor might refer you if they like your work—editors do call them. The school's career center could connect you with internship opportunities. In any case, you'll leave with increased confidence in your ability to write for a variety of markets.

## All About Writing for Internet Content Sites

If you've spent any time online, you've probably noticed a lot of writing job posts on places such as Craigslist. Many of them seem like very steady gigs—they want 5 or more articles a week!

But most of these offers, sadly, are ripoffs. Welcome to the bold new world of Internet content sweatshops. Like the sweatshop factories of old, where workers toiled insane hours for little pay, this virtual sweatshop will suck you in, chain you to your keyboard, and pay you less than the price of a latte. So watch out!

You'll notice that I have not included writing for these content sites as one of my ways to make a good income from writing. That's because they rarely provide writers with a substantial income. In a recent interview, an executive from one of the better-paying sites, Demand Studios, said the typical active writer on their site makes **\$300 a month**. This is not good pay.

*Writer's Weekly* conducted a poll at one point and reported the average writer on Examiner made less than \$3 per article. Obviously, this isn't a living.

What these writing sites will never tell you is that besides having a low per-article rate or promising small future royalties, the articles you write for them don't lend you much credibility. For instance, [FundsforWriters](#) editor C. Hope Clark recently **commented**, "When someone pitches an article to FundsforWriters, if they mention they write for these outfits, I immediately read on with a jaundiced eye, assuming I read on at all."

In general, I believe writing for mills robs writers of time better spent finding more lucrative markets.

Should you ever write for any of these Internet Scrooges? Maybe. If you need a few quick clips, content sites could help you get them fast—but you certainly don't want to make a habit of it. *The #1 way to make sure you don't make a good living writing is to spend loads of your time writing for low-paying clients.*

After you get those first few clips, follow this rule for staying out of the Internet sweatpit: **don't take any assignments that pay less than \$50.** Keep reminding yourself that you want to make a living here. Since you only have so many available hours, each assignment needs to pay well, or you'll need to work around the clock, seven days a week.

If you already have clips, feel free to skip the cheap content sites. Even if your clips are a few years old, just use them as your samples.

### **Six Problems With Content-Mill Writing**

Here are some of the problems writers for content sites may encounter as they strive to move into better-paying markets:

1. *You don't learn to report.* Most of the stories on content sites are written with light Internet research or off the top of your head. They don't help you develop newsgathering abilities, which are a bedrock skill needed for most good-paying byline reporting and corporate writing work. You don't develop interviewing skills since you generally aren't

conducting interviews. If you dream of earning \$800-\$1500 or more for a single article, mill writing won't help you get there.

2. *You won't learn how to research.* A lot of good-paying writing assignments call for extensive research using databases or public filings. Writing for mills does not build these critical research skills.
3. *You won't get nurturing editor relationships.* I would be nowhere today without two or three amazing editors I worked with early in my career. Editing at mills is usually cursory at best, and not the kind of one-on-one relationship you want, where someone will really take you under their wing and show you exactly what you need to do to improve.
4. *You don't learn to market.* Some mill writers speak in ecstatic terms of how much they love never having to market their writing. But marketing is a key skill for those who want to earn big. Generally, you go out and find the really lucrative magazine connections and corporate clients

yourself...they do not fall in your lap. Every week you write for mills is a week you don't learn this important skill.

5. *You aren't building your reputation.* Content-mill writing has a lot of nicknames in the traditional publishing world, and they're not flattering. Some call it "churnalism," while others consider it outright plagiarism. While some writers say they've been able to use mill clips to get better clients, often these clients don't pay a whole lot better than the mills.
6. *It's a model that may change or disappear.* There's been much discussion online of the possibility that **Google** may soon find a way to screen out mill sites in its search results. If that happens, the entire article-aggregator industry, which sprung up to serve Google's ranking analytics, will disappear overnight.

There's already signs that even if it survives, the content-site model is changing—check out **ProVoices**, the new site that wants professionally reported articles for up to \$250. The trend is toward rates going up, and writers needing better skills as these sites seek to stand out in the marketplace.

## 6. Create your pitching toolkit

Before you start approaching editors, you should have some basic materials put together: A resume, bio, portfolio, Web site and short, in-person “elevator” pitch. If you’re interested in writing for digital markets, it can also be very useful for you to write a blog. Ideally, these elements will all live on your Web site, today’s most powerful tool for promoting your writing career. Let’s look at these elements one by one:

- **Your resume**

No matter how few writing credits you have, you should have a resume. Include every major publication you’ve written for, back to work you may have done in the course of past jobs.

It’s not necessary to list these in chronological order—in fact, I wouldn’t recommend it. List them in order of magnitude, with your best articles first. As you get more clips, be sure to add them.

Here’s a copy of [my resume](#). Because I’ve been at this a while, it does have some chronology to divide up my freelance and staff-writing periods, and to spotlight work I’ve done in radio. But personally, I think almost nobody reads it—they just look at [my short bio](#).

- **Your bio**

If you don't have much of a writing resume right now, don't write one. Write a concise, one-paragraph biography that describes your expertise. If you have written anything ever, as part of a previous job perhaps, include every scrap of your writing experience.

A brand-new writer's bio might go something like, "I am a former investment broker who has written research reports and articles for company newsletters. I have also published an article in an industry trade journal."

Or: "I am a longtime real-estate broker who has written purchase proposals and blogs for a company Web site. I am currently working on a science-fiction novel."

Keep it simple, and whatever you do, don't lie.



- **Your Web site**

In our online, real-time era, it's important for writers to have a Web site where prospective editors can come to learn about you whenever the mood strikes them. I can tell you that the number of responses I got to article queries and job applications I sent about tripled once I had my own site.

Having your own site conveys professionalism. It tells prospects you take your writing career seriously, and it makes it easier for them to see your work.

Fortunately, creating your own Web site has never been easier or cheaper. You can use free programs such as Joomla and Wordpress and get them up with little coding needed. Make your site as clear, powerfully written and uncluttered as you can.

There are some basics steps you should take in laying out your site. A few important rules:

*Make it easy for people to contact you.* Make sure visitors can see a contact—or at least a contact tab—right at the top of your Web site. On your contact page, don't just provide a fill-in form. Lots of people are skeptical that anybody reads those. At the very least, provide an email address in addition to the form.

*Provide article links.* I can't believe how many writer Web sites I've visited where they just list titles of their articles. Prospective clients are usually visiting your site because they want to read your work! If your samples aren't online, get them scanned into PDF files and load them onto your site. As you get new clips, keep adding links to your site.

I recently had one mentee tell me she didn't have clips from a big previous copywriting client on her site because they had a falling out and she couldn't use them as a reference. That doesn't matter! You don't need to provide a contact name for every client you've ever had—just the ones that will rave about you. But you should post all your clips, unless you have more than 30 or so pieces. Then start posting only your best.

*Write a strong "About me" page.* Don't put vague gobbledygook about your love of writing here. How long have you been writing? In what subject areas do you have the most experience? Where are you located? What types of writing do you do? Remember that these phrases are key words for your site—search engines will help people looking for ghostwriters find you if you mention you do ghostwriting.

*Make it legible.* A jet-black background and white letters is hard to read. So is putting your contact information in 8-point light gray type. Worry less about design and more about readability.

*Get testimonials.* Get clients to give you a few concise raves about your work. It makes a big difference in impressing prospects.

For much more on how to write your resume and set up your Web site, see this [great compendium](#) of information on the writing site PoeWar.

## What if I don't have a Web site?

If you're not ready to have your own site—or you're in the process of getting your site together—there are a few other methods for getting your work organized online. They don't convey the same level of professionalism as having your own site, but they are much better than having no Web site at all.

*Use social media.* You can create a pretty good profile on LinkedIn, putting links to a few clips. Alternatively, a Facebook fan page is an increasingly popular way to present your business online.

*Use Zoominfo.* Before I got my own Web site, I compiled a portfolio of online article links by taking control of my **Zoominfo** profile and editing it until it featured my best articles. That worked fairly well for a good long while.

*Reserve your name URL.* Check and see if your given name is available as a URL, or the name you want to use your for writing business. If so, buy it from GoDaddy, Register.com, Dreamhost or another major registrar—it'll cost \$10 or less. If it's not available, try to think of an alternative name and buy it. You don't have to pay for

hosting right now – you can activate it when you're ready. But at least no one will take your name in the meanwhile.

- **Your portfolio**

A lot of new writers feel insecure about their portfolios. Maybe you just have a couple of clips, and maybe both those clips are from content sites. Or you just have a couple articles you wrote for a school newspaper or organization newsletter. That's OK. Just worry about the quality of the writing—that's the most important thing prospects are checking.

The most important thing about your portfolio is that it's pulled together in one place, where prospects can easily look it over. As soon as you have a clip from a better market, add it. Soon, you'll be able to take out weaker clips, and your portfolio will get stronger as you go along.

You can convey professionalism just by having those clips well-organized on your own Web site. See what you can do make those

clips look as good as you can—turn them into PDFs if need be. If they're on the type of content site where they end up being picked up and used by other Web sites, you can vary the look of your portfolio by linking to these other publication points.

If you've been ghostwriting so that your byline doesn't appear on your work, that's OK too. Just note that it's ghostwriting work, and include a reference to the editor who can confirm you did the work, with their contact information. Few people will check—just the fact that you provide the contact will reassure them it's your writing.

### **Three reasons to put your portfolio on your Web site:**

1. It impresses prospective clients.
2. It makes it quick and easy for you to apply for online jobs—just zip them a link to your URL, or grab a few of your best links off the site, and press “send.” You're done.
3. It's an ego boost when you see how accomplished it makes you look!

## Your blog

There's been much discussion in the freelance-writing world of whether writing your own blog is a good idea, or a big waste of time. I think it depends on what type of writing you do—if you specialize in academic writing for an audience of university researchers, a blog is not going to show your writing to best advantage.

But if it will serve as a good sample of your writing to your target audience, it can be invaluable. The more prominent places you can blog, the better. I couldn't believe how many prospects contacted me after seeing [my blog for \*Entrepreneur\* magazine](#). Once you have your own blog going, seek out guest-blog opportunities on sites with bigger traffic to bring you new connections.

Personally, I've found blogging helps me keep the creative juices flowing, and allows me an outlet for my own opinions, which don't usually get expressed in my copywriting or reporting work. I think it's made me a better writer for my other markets and clients.

If you want to blog for pay, having your own blog is pretty much a requirement. Prospects will ask you for links to your blogs—it's almost a part of your resume.

A great strategy for getting started in blogging is to leave some well-written comments on other people's blogs. That gives you some blog links that show you understand the form, without the commitment of keeping up a whole blog on your own.

A big caveat: if you're the kind of writer who really needs an editor to better organize your thoughts and iron out all your misspellings and bad grammar, a blog may not be your best showcase, since you're usually serving as your own editor.

Other blogging tips:

- Find industry blog portals in your niche and ask if you can add your blog to their site.
- Try to blog on a regular basis, at least once or twice a week.



- Don't blog about what your cat ate. Find a niche subject that's the theme of your blog, and stick to it. This helps build your audience.
- Once you are blogging, use social media to draw more visitors to your blog. I've grown my traffic by about 50 percent a month through posting links to my blogs on Twitter.
- Once you have your own blog, when you comment on others' blogs, put your blog address in your signature as a live link. This can significantly increase traffic to your Web site.

Other than providing a showcase, your blog can be turned into its own revenue-generating source. For more on that, see the final section of this ebook, **Make a Living with Your Blog**.

## Your in-person pitch

In-person networking terrifies many new writers. A common comment I hear is, "When I get to a networking event, I never know what to say."

There's no reason to be tongue-tied when you're meeting people in person. Build your confidence by working out a 30-second pitch ahead of time about the type of writing work you're seeking. Make it simple and to the point.

One of the most effective ways to network is to make sure people you meet understand your ideal client type. They don't need to know you don't have a ton of experience.

So a new writer might say, "I'm writing for a local parenting magazine and looking to connect with more regional magazine editors and national parenting magazines."

Me? My ideal client is a medium- to large-sized business with ongoing marketing content needs including white papers, Web content,

articles or blogs. I'm also looking to connect with additional national business magazine markets.

This is a nice approach because it doesn't say, "Why don't YOU give me a writing job?" It just says, "This is what I'm looking for."

This is what networking is about—you all build up knowledge about what others in your group need, so that when you meet someone who's a match you can put them together. Hopefully, others in the group will do the same for you.

Think of it as increasing your circle of friends. The more people you know, the more likely that one of them can connect you to writing work.

Even if you don't plan to attend in-person networking events, it's a good idea to develop a pitch. You never know when you'll casually strike up a conversation—in an elevator, in the grocery line, at a church breakfast, at a family party—and find someone who's interested in hiring a writer. As one successful serial entrepreneur told me, remember your ABCs and Always Be Closing.

With a strong in-person pitch, you may be able to get a referral to an editor from someone who knows them. When you can start a query with, "Your friend Joe Smith said I should be in touch with you," the editor is more likely to give your query a careful read.

## 7. Find editors to pitch

Finding editors isn't always easy today. Many online magazines don't seem to have obvious mastheads, for instance. Mastheads at major magazines can list a dozen or more editors.

How can you identify the editor you need and find their contact information? Here are a half-dozen techniques I've used successfully:

- *Use the Internet and social media.* Do a Google search on "editor X magazine." Do the same search on LinkedIn. Search Twitter for the publication and/or tweet that you're looking for the publication's editor.
- *Use databases.* Try [Lexis-Nexis](#) or [PR Newswire](#) and search for press releases the publication has put out. Scan for editor names.

- *Network.* Ask your online writer forums if anyone's worked for the publication.
- *Let your fingers do the walking.* Use online or physical phone books to get a main phone number. Then call the publication and ask the receptionist which editor takes article queries.
- *Check online publication compendiums.* There are places online that collect information on publications, such as the [writersmarket.com](#), [Wooden Horse](#), and others. They may have the name and address you need.
- *Get a sample copy and look at the masthead.* Besides calling, this is the best way to make sure the information you're getting is current. Before you buy, check and see if your library has a subscription.

Though it's better to have an exact name, you can also just take a flier and send queries to the editor, managing editor, or articles editor—those are typical titles for editors in charge of assignments. An executive editor or editor-in-chief generally is too far up the chain of command.

Don't send the same query to everyone with "editor" in their title at a single publication! Whoever gets it will usually forward it to the right editor if they're not the best contact. Editors do compare notes, and if they've been bulk-mailed it will mark you as an amateur.

## Get Set to Pitch

If you've worked on the steps above, you've selected a few key subject areas you want to write about, found some target markets, identified key editors, and prepared your pitching toolkit. Now, it's time to land an assignment.

Some of you may be saying, "Hey! Stop right there. Pitching is so old-school, and it's difficult and time-consuming. I hate rejection. Why I can't I just skip it?"

This part of the freelance writing process scares a lot of people. *You have to be bold, aggressive, and ready to brush off rejection and keep right on going. But it's an important step to getting what you want: good-paying writing assignments.* Lots of things may have changed in the media world, but one thing hasn't: You can still get lucrative article assignments by simply writing editors a strong query letter. It's an important tool to have in your arsenal of marketing strategies that will help you earn much more than writers who don't have any querying skills.

So buck up, and let's walk through what you need to know to create a professional-sounding pitch and get a good-paying writing assignment.

One of the reasons editors like their stable of regular freelance writers is that they count on them to provide ideas. Editors work long hours behind a desk, so they count on freelancers to have their ears to the ground, knowing what's happening out there.

### **Finding and developing story ideas**

There are so many story ideas out there, it's amazing. I usually find several each day.

To be a successful freelancer, you're going to need lots of article ideas. Then you're going to hone them into pitches that demonstrate to an editor that you understand both their publication and your topic and will be able to do the research needed to write an article. *When an editor's need for content meets your well-presented idea, an assignment will be born.*



## Evergreen article ideas

Don't have any ideas? Here are 11 basic story categories and techniques for finding stories.

1. *"How to" articles*—What do you know how to do that's a bit unique? Write about it—how to breastfeed your adopted baby, how to appeal your speeding ticket, etc.
2. *Cover local events*—Small-town or alternative papers are often short-staffed to cover all the local happenings such as street fairs, protests, or town hall meetings.
3. *Issues and controversies*—Is your neighborhood up in arms about a new zoning law? Is a planned government project opposed? If you've been attending meetings and have background on the topic, ask a local or regional publication if they need coverage.
4. *Where are they now*—A local figure has been out of the spotlight but you've discovered what they're up to now.

5. *Bigwig/celebrity interview/profile*—This one is especially good if you have unusual access to the CEO of a major corporation, a local or national celebrity, or a major political figure.
6. *Business or charity profile*—The organization should be doing something unusual, little known, nationally recognized, new or highly effective.
7. *New product or fad*—These are great, easy stories if you discover an item or trend that's not widely known yet.
8. *Recycling*—Look at local papers for stories that could be done as national or regional trends—or vice versa, look in national media for stories local outlets might want to see written up with local sources. Check out what people in your online forums are talking about as well—increasingly, they're a great place to spot new trends or interesting companies.

9. *Take the one-hour news challenge*—When you're stuck for ideas, get up and go to the center of your town, get out of your car, and walk around for an hour with a goal of finding news stories. Talk to shop owners and customers and ask them what's on their minds, how's business...just shoot the breeze. I guarantee you will leave with an idea or two. News is everywhere.
10. *Collect string*—If you find a topic interests you, start saving published articles or collect links in a file. Eventually, you may detect a new trend you could turn into your own pitch.
11. *Harvest ideas from interview sources*—When you're interviewing someone, schmooze a bit at the end of the interview. Ask them what their biggest challenges are right now...or what's the hottest topic at the last industry conference they attended. You can often leave an interview with one or two additional story ideas ready to pitch.

## Submitting unsolicited, completed articles

Many new writers think the way to get around the stress of crafting pitch letters—or pitching editors on the phone—is to simply go ahead and write an article and submit the completed piece.

Unless the publication is specifically soliciting completed manuscripts, this is almost always a losing strategy. These articles rarely get published.

Why? Because *when you write without an editor's input, you're writing in a vacuum*. You have no real idea whether the publication is interested in your topic, is looking for an article that's 500 words long or 1,500, would like a reported article or a first-person opinion piece on the subject, is out of freelance budget, has a beat reporter covering your subject...you get the picture. You just don't know enough.

As a new writer, you need editorial input before you start to write. So make your pitch and get an assignment!

## Preparing your query letter in three easy steps

There are some major differences between story pitches amateurs make and story pitches pros make.

### *Pros:*

- define a "news hook" explaining why the story needs to be written *now*
- carefully match their pitch to the right publication
- creatively write their query to show their ability to match the tone and style of the publication

Use these guidelines when following the query-writing steps outlined below:

## Step One:

### Know your publication

There is one critical thing amateur writers do wrong and pros do right when they're querying editors. If you can do this one thing before you pitch, you will be able to leap ahead of the pack.

Here it is: *Research the publication you're pitching before you pitch them.*

Sounds simple, yes? But few writers take the time. Opening my mail at my old business-journal staff-writing job, I would find several pitches a week from freelancers, or business people hoping to publish opinion pieces. They'd inevitably be addressed to a long-gone reporter or editor, referencing their idea as a possibility for departments the paper had long since abolished.

Their queries went into the trash. *Nothing insults an editor faster than a pitch that contains proof you have never read their publication.*

By the same token, if you can take the time to read the publication, it can pay big dividends. Leaf through a copy or read it online. Some questions to ask:

- Who advertises in this publication?
- Who does the audience appear to be?
- What are the names of the departments?
- How long are the articles?
- What is the tone – playful, hip, funny, businesslike, scholarly?
- How many of the bylines match with names of staffers on the masthead?
- Are there few staffers or many?
- Have they recently published an article on the topic you were thinking of pitching?

Looking at multiple issues (often easily done online these days), you'll quickly get a sense what departments are being handled by freelancers, as the bylines will shift from issue to issue. You can also see whether the publication is thriving. Is the issue fat and packed with ads, or are ads scarce?

If your research shows that the publication appears to be mostly or entirely staff-written, move on to another prospect. If you see a lot of "special to the *Times*"-type bylines or changing names, those are likely freelancers.

### **Writer's guidelines and editorial calendars**

One of the easiest ways to learn about a publication is to find their **writer's guidelines**. Many publications offer guidelines that lay out what they're looking for.

For instance, *Mothering* magazine **devotes more than 1,400 words** to describing their requirements. Their tips include information on their readership and circulation, pay rates, target lengths for essays and researched articles, and insight into the thesis of each department. *Mothering* also notes how to format your article, who to email or mail it to, and what software format to use. What do you know, they also say they accept unsolicited articles! A great first-time writer's market for a mom looking to break into paid writing.



If a publication doesn't have writer's guidelines readily available online, call the magazine, ask for the managing editor, and request them. On a big masthead, you might start with the articles or features editor.

Calling for guidelines can be a great strategy—if they have guidelines, you may get to chat with someone while they take your contact information down, making a good possible editor connection. If they don't have guidelines, an editor may take pity on you and spend five minutes or so giving you an oral rundown—once again, a great way to make a personal connection.

**Editorial calendars** are designed for advertisers. They disclose what special sections and themed issues are coming through the year, so that ads can be sold against this special content. Often, you can find these online for a publication—since they want ads, tools that help publications land advertisers are usually easy to locate. If not, call and ask for a copy.

For a writer, editorial calendars provide a great way to show you have studied the publication. They can also help you think of ideas that would fit the publication. Be sure to mention the information in your query—i.e., “I saw you have a special section coming up on the best lawyers in Minneapolis, and thought this story might fit into that package.”

Keep in mind that special elements or sections in a publication are often planned out far in advance. If you’re trying to write something for one of these sections, you’ll want to pitch well ahead of the publication date. For a monthly magazine, five or six months in advance is good.

### **A look at an editor’s life**

Editors can seem mysterious to new writers, almost mythical beasts like gryphons. To understand how to pitch editors effectively, I think it’s important to understand editors—what they do all day, and the responsibilities and pressures they have. This will help you see how you can break into their busy schedules, show them you can solve their problems, and land an assignment.

*The most important thing to learn about an editor is the best time to contact them.* Editors' lives have a rhythm that's based on the frequency and timing of their publication.

A daily news editor will likely have more breathing space early in the morning or late in the afternoon, depending on whether they're a morning or evening paper. If their biggest paper of the week is Sunday, Monday is probably a slow day.

For an editor of a weekly that comes out on Thursday, on the other hand, that day will likely be your best opportunity—the paper is out and deadlines for next week's issue are as far away as they're going to get. It's similar for a monthly magazine—about a week before the issue hits the stands, production has likely finished up and they're thinking about assignments for another issue down the road.

Always remember that entertaining pitches from new writers is a low-priority activity for editors. They must get out their current edition, attend meetings, hold retreats, plan upcoming special sections, respond to their current stable of writers, deal with budget issues, and much more.

To get an idea of the volume of queries editors deal with, I asked one of my editors, Eve Gumpel of the [WomenEntrepreneur.com](http://WomenEntrepreneur.com) site for *Entrepreneur* magazine, how many pitches she gets a day. Her answer: Usually 100 or so. That's for an online-only niche publication! Think of how many queries editors at big print publications get. Imagine trying to wade through all those queries while also taking care of all your pressing deadlines.

If you've ever visited a newsroom, you know that editors' desks are frequently a scene of barely controlled chaos. The desk is often piled high with snowdrifts of paper. The message blinker on their phone is constantly flashing.

This is why editors often don't send you a response acknowledging receipt of your pitch. Many don't send rejection letters. If some editors did that for every query they got, they would never get their publications out. *If you don't hear back, don't take it personally.*

When they get to the mail, editors will quickly sort it into piles, with anything dull-looking going directly into a trash can. They might take five or ten seconds to look at each item before its fate is decided.

Piles form for assignments coming in, job applications, calendar listings—and queries from writers they don't know. These last often get stuck in a pile to be dealt with later on...and later may not come for weeks, if ever.

That's why I'm going to recommend you *stay out of that paper pile and instead pitch editors on the phone and via email*, in ways that will grab their attention, indicate you are a professional, and show you understand editors' needs and time constraints.

## Step Two:

### Define an angle

Amateurs send pitches like, "I want to write about the high cost of healthcare." And they send that to their local newspaper.

Pros send pitches like, "I think now is a timely moment to write about the rising cost of healthcare plans for small business owners in Texas. I noticed a new state program taking effect next month will help entrepreneurs buy healthcare more cheaply." And they send it to a statewide business magazine.

See the difference? Your local newspaper is never going to tackle such a huge, national subject. But the second pitch is tailored to the publication it's being sent to, and contains a "news hook" that gives it immediacy—there's a reason to write about it right now.

The secret to remember? The word "news" contains the word "new." *Editors want to know what is new about a topic.* That's what readers want to know, too.

The difference between pitch A and pitch B above is that one has no "angle"—it's too general. The pro pitch has an angle—something is being done in our state about the rising cost of health care, right now. It will impact businesses, so that's who I'll interview, to learn if business owners think this new law will help or hurt them.

Now you've narrowed down this topic to a single, newsy aspect. That's a topic that's the right size for an article, and it's tailored to a particular audience. When you can change your mindset from just wishing you could break into a great-paying market, to seeing how you can *meet editors' needs for focused stories that are right for their audience*, you've taken a big step toward getting published.

### Step Three:

#### Match your pitch to the right publication

Now that you've studied your markets and developed several story ideas, look carefully at these two lists to see where you might have an ideal match—a publication that's perfect for one of your story angles. If you have a great fit, you're ready to write a query tailored to deliver that idea to that market's particular audience.

For instance, I recently pitched *Seattle Business* magazine a story on how much money Washington State got in the 2009 federal stimulus bill, and **where the money went**. Since business owners are always interested in how they could get their hands on some federal grants, this was a perfect topic for them, delivered at a time when not much had yet been written on who the winners and losers were in stimulus funding. I had discovered a federal database that made it easy to find the state figures and track the money. I earned \$650.



## Online articles vs print articles

As you go about identifying and targeting markets for your writing, be aware that there are distinct stylistic differences between most articles written for online-only publication and those written for print publication.

Online pubs tend to have a more casual style. Their articles also usually contain live links to items you reference—related news stories, press releases, or perhaps public filings. Those links help build the online publication's rankings in search engines, so they're a critical part of online writing.

If you want to earn bonus points with an editor, ask them how they'd like their links delivered. Some would like you to use "Insert Hyperlink" in Microsoft Word to enliven the words that will carry the link. Others just want you to put the link in parentheses after the key word, and they'll enliven the link on their end. Still others might want you to do a little HTML coding for them so that the links will become live in their system.

Don't worry too much if you don't know much about how to create live links—most editors are happy to help with the technical end if they like your writing.

### **In the back door: Online articles for print magazines**

The world of print publishing is in the midst of radical change. Many very well-known national publications are commissioning more and more online content. Publishers have discovered they can sell ads against these online stories. Rates are generally lower for online-only pieces, but they're a great place to break in.

Publications may even have a separate editor who oversees the online articles, apart from the editorial staff at the magazine. They may also be operating more than one Web site online, as they segment their audience into subgroups.

I've found the online departments of established publications to be easy entry points for connecting with that publication. Online editors seem more willing to mentor new writers, more casual about deadlines (after all, they really can put it up whenever it's ready), and in general less stressed out than their magazine counterparts. If you're

having trouble breaking into a major publication, I recommend investigating their online side.

Of course, once you're published on the magazine's Web site, you've got a very strong clip for pitching the print side of the publication. And now you've got an editor-friend on the inside, who can tell you just who to approach with magazine pitches. There's also nothing stopping you from writing for both sides of the publication, increasing your earning potential. I recently had a month where I wrote five articles for *Entrepreneur* magazine, blogged for them three times a week and wrote three articles that were online exclusives.

The other reason to approach online editors is many publications are making a decision to go online-only and ceasing printing their publication. *If you've formed connections with their online editors, you're perfectly positioned to continued writing for the publication if they transition to online-only.*

## Crafting Your Pitch

OK, you've done your homework. Now, it's time to start crafting your query letter.

There are many good books about how to write strong query letters. *How to Write Irresistible Query Letters* by the very successful magazine writer Lisa Collier Cool is a classic that's still useful. A popular more recent book is *The Renegade Writer's Query Letters That Rock*. If you feel nervous about querying, I recommend you read one of these books.

But I may be able to save you some time, because in general, most successful queries have a few common elements. Good queries:

- do not exceed one page in length
- make a reference that shows you've read the publication
- are written creatively, showing the editor your craft and your understanding of the publication's tone and style

- build a strong case for assigning you the story by including information about your related experience
- mention an expert or two you would interview for the story— if not by name, at least mentioning that you know a good source
- note any inside information, unpublished data, or exclusive access you may have to sources

A query that contains these elements communicates a professional attitude. It also shows that you know how to proceed from pitch to finished story—a critical point if an editor is going to take a chance on a fairly inexperienced writer.

If you have no clips yet, simply state your pitch and don't blather on about yourself. If you have relevant life experience, mention it briefly at the end.

As you prepare your queries, keep in mind that the *most important job of a query letter is to convince the editor you are qualified to write for their publication*. Often, an editor may not want an article on the topic you're

pitched. But if you've written a compelling query that shows an understanding of their audience, they may well offer you a different assignment or invite you to pitch them again.

### **Two foolproof approaches to writing queries**

Since your query should be a single page, it must be very focused. There are two reliable ways to write queries. One is to begin with a straightforward description of your article proposal: “I’d like to pitch you a story on the new law against trans fats in local restaurants.”

The other method is to plunge right in with the opening line or paragraph for the actual story, so the editor can see you’re a strong writer who understands the publication. As in:

“Joe’s Diner owner Joe Mancetti smiled as he watched customers at his popular eatery wolf down his famous garlic-cheese French fries last Sunday night. Despite switching from hog fat to canola oil for frying the delectable spuds, the dish was as popular as ever. Though Mancetti and other restaurateurs feared they would lose patrons after the trans-fat ban was passed, it appears diners can’t taste the difference.”

After which, you launch into your proposal for the article and state why you're the one who should write it. I've heard some writers describe this second approach as too forward—like asking someone for money before you even introduce yourself. But my experience is, it works.

I've been consistently surprised over the years at how often editors don't ask to see previous clips. So don't worry if you don't have any. Briefly state any relevant experience if you have some ("I used to be a realtor, so I understand the industry"), and then wrap it up.

Whatever you do, don't invent a track record you don't really have. The truth is all in the world of journalism.

## Query don'ts

- *Don't let your query exceed one page.* Most articles commissioned these days are fairly short, so show your editor you know how to be concise.
- *Don't begin with "I want to write an article about..."* Of course you do. When you begin by stating the obvious, you tell the editor you are not a very imaginative writer. Begin with the proposed opening paragraph of your article, or with some interesting facts about your topic that draw the editor in and make them intrigued to know more.
- *Don't tell the editor how long your article should be.* Often, writers include a sentence such as, "I'd propose writing a 1,200 word feature on this topic." This is a bad strategic move. Do you want to not get an assignment because the editor only has freelance budget for 800-word stories? Or be excluded from consideration for a 3,000-word feature? Let the editor decide how much space your idea should have in their publication. The exception would be if you're proposing a piece for a department that you know has a set length.



- *Don't say, "I'm sure your readers would be interested in this."* Remember, you are writing to the person who knows the most in the world about what their readers like. Don't ever presume to know more. Instead, say something that connects the publication's readership to the idea and shows off your research: "With all the recent coverage of health insurance, I believe this update would be of interest to your small-business audience."
- *Don't make your bio too long.* A couple of sentences at the end is great. You'll mostly prove you're right for the assignment with the strength of your query, not your resume. This isn't a college paper, so don't put a long bibliography citing past articles. Instead, include a few links to recent clips online, or send a couple previous articles for a mailed query.
- *Don't throw in sources without explanation.* If you mention sources, be sure to connect them to the story—explain their expertise or how they'll be used. Are they an example

business, for instance, or an industry expert? Say, “I would interview the director of the Boys & Girls Club in Monterey about their years of experience helping the disabled,” not “Interviews would include the director of the Boys & Girls Club in Monterey.”

- *Don't fail to proofread.* A single typo spells a quick trip to the trashcan for query letters.
- *Don't forget to polish.* This little query letter is your writing showcase! So buff it to a high shine. It should be so well done you almost want to frame it instead of mailing or emailing it off.

### Case Study: Pitching Kiwanis

To illustrate the difference between successful and also-ran pitches, I'd like to use (with her permission) a query written by one of my mentees, **Janet Clark**, for *Kiwanis* magazine. Her initial draft had many of the problems I've described above, and didn't show off her strong writing skills:

*I would like to write an article for KIWANIS Magazine about the remarkable strides society has made in integrating individuals with mental challenges into the mainstream of society. I propose an article that flashes back to the not-too-distant past when most mentally disabled people were sequestered at institutions, such as the facility at Woodward, Iowa, where my friend May Stewart grew up and where it was believed she would remain for life. Flash-forward to present time, where May is a fully-integrated member of the community, employed at a nursing home and participating in many activities. I would like to profile May and other individuals with mental challenges who are especially active in the community.*

*My proposal is for a 1,200-1,500-word article. One of the resources for my article would be members and mentors of the Dodger Aktion Club, my town's third branch of the KIWANIS Club, as featured in this [article](#).*

*Prior to beginning my writing career in 2001, I taught adults with disabilities for eight years at LifeWorks Community Services, then called Iowa Central Industries. I have written more than 400 articles which have been published in print and online publications, including The Iowan, Iowa Gardening, The Des Moines Register, Today Magazine, CareerApple.com and MainlineGardening.com. You can read samples of my work at <http://www.janeteclark.com/articles.php>.*

Applying my query rules above, we rewrote the draft. Here's the final query she sent, which landed her a contract to write a series of promotional articles on behalf of a local Kiwanis club. Where the first query was uninvolving, this one draws the reader in, touches their heart, and gets across the key message: Janet understands this organization's mission in depth and is a writer they should hire.

*When May Stewart entered Woodward Resource Center at age 14 after the death of her mother, at least one professional staff member predicted she would be there for life. One note in her file at Woodward stated, "May will always need to live in an institution." But those words proved to be a false prophecy. May, like so many other mentally challenged individuals, now lives in her own apartment and recently retired from her job working in the kitchen at a local retirement center.*

*In just one generation, society has moved from segregating and institutionalizing people with mental disabilities to helping them become fully integrated into community life. KIWANIS Clubs play an important role in helping people live independent lives. May was just one of many people who attended the inaugural meeting of the Dodger Aktion Club of Kiwanis in Fort Dodge, Iowa in 2009, as featured in this [article](#).*

*I propose an article that illustrates the ever-increasing integration of adults with mental disabilities into the community and shows how this Kiwanis Club and others help make this transition possible for May and many people like her across the country. I would talk to members of the Aktion Club; Teresa Naughton, executive director of LifeWorks; as well as KIWANIS Club mentors and employers.*

*Prior to beginning my writing career in 2001, I taught adults with disabilities for eight years at LifeWorks Community Services, then called Iowa Central Industries. I have written more than 400 articles which have been published in print and online publications, including The Iowan, Iowa Gardening, The Des Moines Register, Today Magazine, CareerApple.com and MainlineGardening.com. You can read samples of my work at <http://www.janeteclark.com/articles.php>.*

Remember the most important job of any query letter you send is not to get an article assigned about the topic you're pitching. It's to *convince the editor you understand their publication and would be an exceptionally good writer for them*. You would help them by turning in pieces that are exactly what they need.

Many times, I've sent a query and gotten a response along the lines of, "We've got a story on this topic coming up, but we'd certainly like to work with you." Polish your query until it's a little masterpiece—it's a calling card that can open a lot of doors.

### **Send the most queries in the shortest time**

The more queries you send out, the better your odds of getting an assignment. This is an area where new writers often flounder. Newbies worry about sending simultaneous queries, so they wait to hear back from editors. Don't fall into this trap!

Instead, tailor each query specifically to that publication. Then you're free to move on right away, sending another angle about that same topic to another publication. Also, if your intended targets have different audiences—one is a national trade publication and one's a city-specific consumer magazine—you're in the clear to pitch both at once. You could pitch a localized version of the same idea to the daily paper in every town in America at once, for instance, since they don't compete against each other.

If you're really worried about this issue, note in your pitches that this is a nonexclusive submission. That alerts the editor you are continuing to pitch it around elsewhere. At the speed news moves these days, I think nobody's too insulted or put off by that. If you've crafted a strong pitch or article, it may well have a news angle that won't keep forever, so they'll respect that you are trying to get your article in print before your news goes stale.

Trust that if your idea fills a need for the editor, they will call. And move on.

In my experience, it's extremely rare that you'll succeed in selling an identical story to two publications at once. If it did happen, you'd just have to tell the second responder that you've sold it once already, and ask if they care. Often they won't, especially if the audiences don't overlap much, or they'll simply ask you to write a slightly different version for them. For instance, I used to regularly resell article topics I wrote for a Seattle business journal to a national restaurant-industry trade publication.

### Three Ways to Pitch Editors

The very best way to pitch an editor your story idea is in person. Any time you're physically in front of an editor—whether at their office, on a bus, or at a networking event—you should be ready to discuss at least a couple of ideas. But these opportunities tend to be rare.

There are three common ways to pitch an editor—via email, on the phone, or with a snail-mail letter. In my opinion, these days email is the best way to pitch, followed by the phone, with a letter a distant third (unless it's a publication that specifically requires mailed queries).

Why? *Email is free, fast, and most important, easily forwardable.* If you haven't hit the right editor, email allows the recipient to quickly shoot your idea over to a colleague.

My observation from my staff-writer days is that snail mail can pile up for days on an editor's desk and the phone message light can blink all day, but every time their email program goes "ding," editors look right over to see what has arrived in their inbox. They check their email compulsively, usually dozens of times a day, as important items are being forwarded via



email—most freelance stories are turned in by email now, and photos are sent via email as well.

Many editors don't relate that well to snail-mail anymore. Some even require that queries be sent via email, so watch those guidelines carefully!

*Sending email also allows you to include live links to your clips, making it super-easy to review your portfolio.*

*Another plus: Email persists*—it often stays in your editor's computer for weeks or months (who has time to clean out that archive?), allowing them more time to decide your idea has merit. With a quick search on your topic in their email program they can have your email back in their hands, where snail mail can hit the trash bin fast or rot in a desk pile forever.

Each mode of pitching has a unique flavor to it. Here's my guide to pitching in each of these formats:

## 1. Pitching via email

Email is an informal medium. Don't put a letterhead block at the top of your email the way you would on a piece of stationery you plan to mail, or write out the editor's street address. The tone of an email pitch will probably feel a bit more casual than a mailed pitch.

Other than these rules, follow my general guidelines for writing queries. State your case in 3-4 short paragraphs, mention your qualifications if you have some that are relevant to your topic, and sign off.

Be sure to restate your email address along with your Web site address and phone number in your signature. It's an annoying feature of some email programs that when the email is printed out, the header with your email address doesn't show up. So if you don't put your email below your signature, an editor may print out your email query and toss it in an idea file...only to discover months later they don't know how to contact you.

Even though email doesn't have pages, keep your query about a page long. Don't use email as an excuse to ramble on. If anything, people expect emails to be shorter than letters, so conciseness is a virtue here.

*Don't send any attachments.* A couple of links to your clips is best—and don't forget to link them to your Web site, where they can see your whole portfolio and learn more about you. If you don't have online links, consider simply copying the text of a previously published article into the body of the email, down below your signature.

Attachments are an opportunity for the editor to pass over your query. They may fear viruses, or they don't have the same programs you do...it puts up a potential barrier to the editor seeing and liking your work.

Finally, I recommend coming up with a creative email signoff that says something about your unique personality and helps you stand out. Since my ultimate goal is to experience joy in everything I do in life, including at work, I often sign mine this way:

Thanks for taking the time to consider my query.

Enjoy!

(and then my name, URL, email and phone)

One other way to approach email pitching is to *send two or even three ideas in one email*. I like this approach as it ups your odds of hitting the mark. For new writers, it also nicely fills up the one-page space, demonstrates you have lots of ideas, and leaves less room for the editor to wonder why you haven't talked about your credentials.

To pull this strategy off, you're going to have to write a single, amazingly strong paragraph for each topic. Don't get lazy on the writing if you use this method, as you still need to convey you know their tone and where to find sources.

**Don't help your editor rip you off!**

Some new writers make the mistake of mentioning all the sources they plan to use for a story in their query. Some even send their sources' contact information. This is a mistake!

While most editors are ethical, this level of disclosure makes it easy for an editor to simply rip off your idea and give it to another writer, or to write it up themselves. You might mention one of the experts you plan to use by name in your query, but keep most of your source information to yourself.

## 2. Pitching on the phone

Pitching on the phone is challenging because so many editors are in the habit of screening their calls. Some may have a secretary answer their line, blocking you from easily catching them live on the phone.

But there are editors who do answer their own phone. And few phone systems at publications seem to have caller ID, so they don't know who's calling, and you might get them on the line and sell them a story idea.

If you've got the gift of gab and enjoy talking to people about your story ideas, consider trying to pitch editors on the phone.

The big advantage here is you're on with a live editor, so your pitch can adapt depending on their response. Bear in mind that you're really doing more than pitching one story here—you're *educating an editor about what you could cover for them*, which may result in other assignments beyond the one you had in mind.

The golden rule of pitching on the phone is to catch the editor when you think they're most likely to have free time. **The first question you will always ask is, "Is this a good time?"** If it isn't, make a quick appointment to call back when it's convenient. Don't start pitching if they say they're busy...you'll only annoy them.

What you'll want to do as a novice story-pitcher is write a script or notes you can refer to as you talk that reminds you of the points you want to cover. Rehearse with a friend if you think it'll help you be calm and convincing on the phone.

### **Sample script for a phone pitch**

The conversation should be brief. In my experience, it usually goes something like this:

**Editor:** (unintelligible snarl)

**You:** Is this Joe Editor?

**Editor:** Yep.

**You:** I'm Deadline Cindy, I'm a freelance writer, and I'm wondering if now is a good time to talk, I'd like to pitch you a quick story idea. (Note the lack of deep breaths here – you want to get through this opener before the editor can cut you off. Use of the word "quick" signals that you understand editors don't have free time.)

**Editor:** (grumble) I've got five minutes now, or you can send me an email.

**You:** Five minutes should work. I write about tax issues and I was wondering if you were aware of the new cigarette tax that's taking effect next week...thought you might want some reaction from local store-owners on how that'll impact their business.

**Editor:** We already have that covered...

**You:** Great. May I ask you quickly what types of stories you're looking for from freelancers right now?



**Editor:** Ummm... We have a special section coming up on young entrepreneurs that will need some freelance...have you done any company profiles?

**You:** Sure have...I could email you one.

**Editor:** Actually, let me give you the section editor's email address...send it to her, you can let her know I sent you. I think one of the guys we need to profile is an accountant, so that might fit for you.

**You:** (scribbling down email address) Great. Appreciate your time.

###

You can see the advantage of phone pitching here—you can shift on the fly, rather than being stuck with your one idea, as you are with an email or snail-mail pitch. If your pitch is in the ballpark, the editor will often give you another at-bat with something else they need written. *One variation on this is to have several pitches ready and quickly tee up another idea if they don't like the first one.*

Don't be wedded to your idea – that's just your entry ticket. See where the conversation goes, and go with it.

The other payoff of phone pitching is it gives you a strong referral if you've been sent on to another editor. When you send that section editor an email that begins with "Joe Editor recommended I speak to you about your upcoming entrepreneur profiles..." your odds of getting hired are far better than if you'd pitched that editor cold.

### **How to leave a voicemail for an editor**

Sometimes, in an attempt to pitch an editor on the phone, you will find yourself in voicemail. If you do, you have two choices: Hang up and try them again later in hopes of getting them live, or leave a voicemail message.

If you decide to leave a message, don't leave a five-minute long retelling of the entire idea for your story. Don't read your query letter into the telephone. The editor is not going to pick up a pad and start taking notes off their message machine about your idea!

However, you may get a callback with a message that is brief and goes something like this:

"Hello, Mr. Editor, this is Deadline Cindy, I'm a freelance writer. I've noticed an interesting trend/new concept/breaking development on \_\_\_ subject, a topic I think your readers would want to be informed about. I have some exclusive information about it that would give your publication something that hasn't been seen elsewhere (if that's true). I'll be happy to give you the details if you'd like to call me back at (your phone number) or contact me at (your email address)."

That's all. Keep it short. Since most people in publishing are related to the cat that curiosity killed, they may well give you a callback to find out if you've got something hot.

### 3. Pitching via snail mail

Sending a pitch through the mail can be a good option, particularly for targeting established publications that haven't changed their tradition of accepting queries by mail. Your query content will be fairly similar to an email pitch, but should be on nice letterhead with a matching envelope. The tone is a bit more formal here.

Don't send too much stuff. Unless it's a complex technical journal or something similar, your query should fit in an ordinary letter-size envelope. A one-page query and perhaps one or two pages of enclosed clips is all you should send unsolicited. Include typed-out links to other materials if you want them to see more clips.

Snail mail can be a good option if you're thinking ahead about what this outlet publishes, and are perhaps pitching an idea for a special section months off. This will allow your query to go into a "tickler file" for projects and hopefully be re-examined when they're ready to assign the section.

## **Should you nag that editor about your query?**

New writers often ask me this question. They've called, emailed or snail-mailed an article pitch... and nothing. How long should you wait before you get in touch to ask whether the editor is interested? How long until you can send that pitch or article to the next editor?

I've got an easy answer for this.

My personal experience is that if an editor is interested, you'll likely hear from them right away. Many national magazines say allow 4-6 weeks... but I can't recall sending a pitch to an editor who called me more than a month later to say they liked it.

If you want to follow up, wait a week or two and then contact them, or wait 4-6 weeks if they've specified that. You could use the same form in which you contacted them initially—email if you sent an email pitch, for instance. Or you could follow up any kind of pitch with a phone call.

It never hurts to send a reminder once or give one follow-up call. Every once in a while you will find an editor meant to contact you, but your query had gotten lost on their desk. It's never rude to follow up once—remember to be completely courteous in doing so, not hostile that you haven't heard anything.

But once is the limit, people. More than that and you will set off the editor's warning system that you are an amateur.

*Or do what I do: Never look back on past pitches.* Move on immediately and keep pitching. Assume nothing will happen with the query. Then, if something does, it'll be a pleasant surprise!

## **GO: Writing your first assignments**

Finally, it's happened. An editor contacts you and says, "I loved your story idea." Before you do an end-zone dance, try to stay calm. Make sure you have all the information you need up front to successfully complete the assignment.

### **What to know before you start writing**

When you talk to your editor about your article, be sure to cover these points:

- *Required length*
- *Deadline*
- *Where in the publication the piece will go*
- *When it will be published*
- *The story angle*—Get a clear sense of the points you're expected to cover

- *The research needed*—Find out what statistics the editor would like to see included, and how many sources you’re expected to interview.
- *Pay rate, payment terms, and pay method*—Pay close attention as you’re arriving at a fee and pay schedule. Getting paid \$500 for your article sounds great. But if a market pays 90 days after publication, you could be waiting six months for your payment—even more if they end up bumping your article to a later issue. Also ask if the publication offers a “kill fee,” if they decide not to use your piece—if so, get that in your contract. Finally, learn if you can get reimbursed for expenses associated with reporting your story, such as mileage, meals or tolls.

Note that if a publication wants to pay you through **PayPal** or a similar online intermediary rather than writing you a check or using direct deposit, you may be charged fees of nearly 3 percent. Ideally, you should try to get the publication to cover the fee or slightly raise your price to cover the cost. Otherwise, a busy writer can lose thousands of dollars of income a year in transaction fees.



- *Byline*—In this Internet age, you should ask whether this market will let your byline be a live link to your writer Web site. I find that often if you ask for a link, an editor will agree, but they won't volunteer this perk. And you want it if you can get it, as that link offers a great, easy way to get found by other editors as well as helpful sources.
- *Your rights*—Find out exactly what rights the publication is buying. Read your contract carefully on this point. If no contract is forthcoming, nail down details in an email you can print and save as evidence. A few examples of rights a publication might buy:
  - first publication rights (after it's out, you can resell it again)
  - exclusive print rights (you can resell it online)
  - exclusive online rights (you could resell it to a book or magazine)
  - rights in their industry sector or geographic region only
  - an exclusive in all media for 90 days (after which you can resell)
  - all rights, also sometimes called “work for hire”  
(it's theirs to use any way they like, forever)

Think hard about selling all rights. What if a book like the *Chicken Soup* franchise wants to reprint your article? What if a movie production company sees your article and makes it into a movie, which goes on to be a blockbuster hit?

If you've sold all rights, you'll get nothing. As it happens, I've collected movie-option rights money in my career, so I can tell you this isn't a theoretical question. If it's an article about refrigeration units in convenience stores, you probably don't care. But think about what you're giving away, and realize publications that buy all rights should pay well.

If you have questions about what rights you retain, ask your editor.

One question to be sure to ask: *Can I reprint this or link to it on my own Web site?* This should be something a publisher will agree to for anything published under your own byline, as it helps promote their site.

One point to remember is that *story topics or ideas are not copyrighted*. You're always free to write a new article on the same topic

in another publication or medium, anytime. You can even use the same sources, as long as the quotes are not identical. I've taken business topics such as year-end tax tips and written unique articles about them for four or five different clients in the same year, and that's totally kosher.

### **What determines writer pay?**

To build your income, you'll need to develop a good sense of how much you should get paid. Some publications won't tell you their price, or may give a range. How do you know what to charge? If possible, you want to find out what the publication typically pays, so you have a starting point for negotiation.

One resource is the *Writers Market*—it lists typical price ranges for a variety of writing assignments, and also gives a sense of pay rates for many publications. Another great strategy is to ask on your social media forums if anyone has written for the publication who'd be willing to share the pay rates.

Writer pay is shaped by several factors:

*Experience.* It's true that many markets will pay more for an experienced writer. They can tell from the quality and quantity of your clips how long you've been around.

*Publication revenue.* Magazines and newspapers have subscribers and advertisers who pay them. That gives them money to pay you (and their own salaries). If the publication has a lot of subscribers, advertisers are likely paying more for the right to reach them, and in turn the publication can pay you more.

The exception to this scenario is if the market has few subscribers, but those subscribers are a very desirable audience—say, CEOs of major corporations or wealthy jet-setters. Their ads still cost plenty and they should pay well. This is why trade publications are often good-paying markets—their circulation may be small, but they give advertisers a valuable opportunity to reach a specific niche market.

Online magazines or Web sites have various income models. Some make money off advertising, while others rely on subscription fees, and others have both. Others may earn from affiliate marketing fees. If viewership is large, you should assume they can pay a living wage.

*The marketplace.* Tempering these first two factors is the publication's sense of going rates in the marketplace. We're currently in a bad patch with this, as many people are out of work and apparently willing to write articles for \$10 or \$20. An increasing number of media outlets are falling to this bottom-pay rung right now, because they can. So it's a harder task to find markets that still realize that if they want to build a reputation for quality, they need to hire a pro. But don't worry—they are out there.

### **Determining your target hourly rate**

Only you can evaluate all these factors and decide on an hourly rate you think is fair for both your career stage and a particular publication. As your career progresses, this figure should rise.

If you're doing assignments that pay by the word or pay a flat project fee, be sure to track your hours so you can determine what you're getting paid

per hour. Since time is your most precious resource, that's what ultimately matters most. Generally, your hourly rate needs to be high. Remember, you're paying your own health insurance, phone bill, and many other expenses. So while even \$18 an hour might sound good for a full-time employee of a major corporation, who's guaranteed 40 hours of work weekly, that's way too low for freelancing.

Wherever you are on the pay scale now, set a goal to earn a higher hourly rate a year from now.

### **Finding sources and interviewing**

Once you've ironed out your contract details and have a firm assignment at a rate you find fair, begin collecting the information you need to tell your story. You may do online research and find some relevant study data. Often, you will need to interview several people to get multiple points of view on a subject.

It's easy to find sources in the Internet age. Besides just doing Google searches to find experts, there are two good sites that specialize in connecting reporters with sources: [ProfNet](#) and [Help a Reporter Out \(HARO\)](#). Both are free to reporters.

You can also try posting your source needs on local forums or social media such as LinkedIn or Twitter. As more people use them, they're becoming useful for sourcing, even for something arcane. In mid-2009, I tweeted a need I had to find a small business owner who'd applied for a particular type of new federally backed loan and been turned down. It took me less than a day to find them on Twitter.

Once you've found your sources, contact them and set up a time to talk on the phone or in person. If you need to be able to describe the source or their surroundings, you'll want to see them in person if at all possible.

If you only need a quick fact or two from a source, email might work. But know that most legitimate publications take a dim view of "interviewing" sources via email. It's generally considered a less-than-ideal way to interact with sources. If you do want to quote from an email, you should disclose that in your article, as in:

"I hate Joe," Jim Smith said in an email response.

There's a real art to interviewing, so here are some tips on how to get great quotes and information from your interviews.

## Twelve interview tips

1. *Be prepared.* Write a preliminary list of questions prior to your interview time.
2. *Make a record.* Take copious notes, and consider bringing a digital tape recorder so you can go back over the interview. DON'T bring a recorder and then fail to take notes—what if it malfunctions?
3. *Break the ice.* Take a little time to make small talk and put the source at ease. Try to establish a rapport. Ideally, you're building a relationship here and could use this source again.
4. *Shut up.* People hate silence, and if you're quiet, they will likely say more. Ask concisely worded questions, and then listen.
5. *Capture the basics, then add the details.* Remember your fact basics and find out the who, what, when, where and why. Then go beyond these to capture telling details that bring the story to life. What was the weather like when this happened, for instance? What funny items does the business executive keep on his desk, and why? How did the place sound, how did it smell?



6. *Go with the flow.* Consider your written list just a starting point. As sources talk, what they say will bring up more questions. Quickly jot them down and ask them too, even if the source saw a question list ahead of the interview.
7. *Describe the scene.* If you're interviewing in person, take notes describing not just what your source says but how they look, how their office looks, and any other atmospheric details you notice. What happens while you're there? Who stops by to talk and how does your subject handle that? If you're on the phone with a source, ask them to describe their surroundings, or a typical day.
8. *Get leads.* Ask, "Who else should I talk to about this?" "Where can I learn more about this?" and/or "Who disagrees with you on this?"
9. *Open the floor.* Ask, "Is there anything else you'd like to say on this topic that I haven't asked about?"

10. *Schmooze a little.* Toward the end of the interview, ask, “What other topics are hot buttons in your field right now?” This is your chance to mine for additional story ideas, as well as build relationships. Asking about their broader knowledge makes them feel like an expert.
11. *Save the worst for last.* If you have questions that may upset your subject, ask them at the end of the interview, so that you get as much info as you can before they shut you down.
12. *Prepare to follow up.* Always conclude with, “Where can I contact you later to check facts or ask followup questions?”

How do you know when you've interviewed enough people or done enough research? In general, you're going to want people with a variety of opinions on the topic, not three people who all have the same point of view. If you've talked to a few people and collected different opinions, and now you're starting to hear the same opinions voiced over again, you're probably done.

One of the best ways to make more money writing is to not waste time over-interviewing or over-researching your topic. Bear your assigned length in mind, and realize you can't jam more than two or three sources into most 500-word articles. Don't waste sources' time or yours if you won't be able to use their information.

### **How to find facts for your article—fast**

- Ask your interview sources what they read and where they turn for research
- Call industry associations and find out if they have research or can direct you to credible researchers in their field.
- Look for universities with programs specializing in your topic and interview a professor.
- Do online searches on key words.

## Timesaving tips for fast article writing

Here are my tips for quickly writing compelling articles. While these rules are intended mainly for reported articles in which you've interviewed people or plan to include substantial research material from outside sources, they'll also work for blogs written off online research.

There are two basic ways to organize your material. Stories either begin with:

1. *An anecdotal lead* (or "lede" in journo-speak), which tells a quick story that illustrates the point of the article, followed by the "nut graf," or paragraph that sums up the main point the article will make.
2. A *"straight lede,"* which begins by stating the main point right at the top of the story.

Here's an example of an anecdotal lede from my *Seattle Magazine* [article](#) about foster youth.

### ***No Place Like Home***

*Maleka Taylor vividly recalls the first night she was homeless. The petite 20-year-old, her black hair straightened and shot through with tiny blonde streaks, was sitting at a downtown Seattle bus stop in late winter 2005 when a bus pulled up. A former foster child, Taylor had been living in cheap local motels with her boyfriend after being kicked out of a YMCA transitional housing program. But now, there was no money left.*

*She stood up as her bus creaked to a stop. Then she stood motionless as the bus doors closed and the bus rolled away. She slowly sank down on the bench and started to cry. It was nearly midnight, bitter cold.*

*"I realized I didn't have anywhere to go," she says.*

*Last year in Washington State, time ran out for 445 young people like Taylor. Though most were in foster care for many years—some all their lives—they were never adopted. In foster care lingo, these kids age out of foster care. These are young people who literally cannot go home again.*

(We've told a little story and now here we are at the nut of what this story's going to be about, in paragraph four.)

For comparison, here's a straight lede from a recent Seattle Times **article**:

***Luxury-home buyers want new, improved abodes under \$1 million***

*If you've got an existing home worth \$1 million or more you're trying to sell — good luck.*

*A new survey of luxury-home buyers shows that though these buyers are ready to purchase, most want a new home stuffed with the latest features. The vast majority of these well-heeled buyers are also looking to pay less than \$1 million for their next home. (This first full paragraph is the nut graf, right here. Just an introductory sentence and then straight into the news.)*

*The study was conducted by real-estate market-research firm New Home Trends in Bothell, which compiled feedback from surveys sent out by luxury homebuilders and sales agents in January to 6,800 prospective customers who'd toured Puget Sound luxury-home communities...etc.*

## Seven Tips to Beat Writer's Block

To earn well, you can't waste time. Here are my tips for snapping out of writer's block and cranking out your story:

1. *Use your lifeline.* That's right, phone a friend, just like on the TV game shows. Then, tell them about the article you need to write. You'll find that as you chat, your story will naturally organize itself. When you hang up, jot down a few notes and you've got your outline.
2. *Write about something else.* If this article is stumping you, write your blog entry for the week or a letter to your mom. Just something that starts you writing. You'll probably find at the end of that writing task, it's fairly easy to switch to the one that was causing you problems.
3. *Do a "dummy outline."* This is the one I use most. If the structure of your article is boggling you and keeping you from writing, just write the name of each source down. Then go through your notes and write succinctly next to their name the most important points they make. You now have a road map of all the most interesting



stuff for your story. A good starting point will likely jump right off the outline at you, and you're off and writing.

4. *Write without notes, quotes or attribution.* I learned this technique at a **Reynolds Center** seminar a few years back: Put all your notes aside and just write the story. Don't worry about name spellings, exact quotes, figures, who said what, nothing. Don't break your concentration by flipping around in your notes or online looking for factoids. Just pour it onto the page. The important stuff will naturally rise to the top of your mind. Once you have a draft, go back and clean it up by reading through your notes for accuracy and plugging in the names and quotes.
5. *Take a hike.* I believe most writers don't move around enough. Get out and oxygenate for a half-hour and then return to your task. It almost never fails me that on the walk I start writing the article in my head, and can't wait to get back to the keyboard.
6. *Read your clips.* Sometimes, when I'm intimidated by a complex article I need to organize, I crack open my clip book and leaf through it. I realize I wrote those difficult pieces, and I can write this one, too.

7. *Talk to the mirror.* Have a serious talk with yourself about this problem if it becomes a habit, because it's just unprofessional. You cannot earn a good living from writing if you're going to be a fussy writer who needs all the planets in alignment before you can write. If you need to, get therapy—it'll be worth it. Missed deadlines lead to fewer good-paying writing gigs. Take your career seriously and figure out how to write your pieces on time.

## **Making your article great**

The real point of the first articles you turn in isn't to get paid for that article—it's to impress an editor that you are a talented writer they should use regularly. Work hard on your article draft until it really shines. Some tips:

*Don't get married to your first draft.* Bad writers get lazy after the first draft. They won't rewrite their first paragraph, even if it isn't the strongest way to get into their topic.

Keep your mind flexible as you refine your draft—look for whole paragraphs that are extraneous, paragraphs that would work better higher up or lower down. Review your notes to scan for great quotes you may have neglected to include. And remember, those first paragraphs are the most important. Invest some time and buff them to a high sheen.

*Rewrite.* The difference between OK writing and writing that gets you repeat assignments is in the polishing. In particular, polish your opening paragraph and the lead-up to your "nut" graph—the one that tells what the story is about. Make sure you get to the nut fast—lots of editors want it to be paragraph one or at most graf three or four.

Look at each sentence—is it right where it belongs, or would it make more sense somewhere else? Look at each word—is it the best word to use in that spot, or would another word be more compelling, or more accurate? Finally, look at the transitions from each paragraph to the next. When it's done, your piece should be knit together like a sweater, with no holes or gaps, and each paragraph logically and smoothly following the next.

*Call if you get in trouble.* As you interview and collect information, your story may change. If your article isn't panning out the way you pitched it, let the editor know immediately. They may be fine with taking it another direction—I usually find if I've discovered something newsier or more interesting, editors will want me to shift gears and focus on it. But editors don't like surprises, so whatever you do, don't miss your deadline or turn in a story that's radically different from what you were assigned.

*Get feedback.* If possible, show your article draft to a writer friend, writing mentor, writing teacher or other trusted acquaintance. Listen with an open mind. The first time I wrote a long feature—it was 3,000 words—I had a friend who was a Hollywood scriptwriter take a look. Her advice dramatically improved my manuscript, which ran on a newsweekly's front cover, for \$300, and later was optioned for a movie. Trust me, getting input before you file a story can really pay off!

*Proofread your article thoroughly.* This step separates the pros from the amateurs. Professionals turn in clean copy without typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. Tone is appropriate to the publication. The writer re-checks the original assignment to make sure the length is as requested, sources are cited appropriately and the ideas are presented clearly. If requested, a complete source contact list is turned in with the story.

*Meet your deadline.* This should go without saying, but many writers don't respect their deadlines. I once got a memo from a major magazine to all their freelancers two weeks after our deadline for that month's issue, asking that all outstanding columns be turned in. That's just appalling! And those laggard writers were likely dropped. Deadlines really matter, and a great way to impress editors is to turn in your piece on the dot. Or early.

*Be open to changes.* This part of the process of writing for publications freaks out a lot of writers. You thought you turned in a masterpiece, but now the editor wants to alter your precious, precious words! Editors may even want additional research or interviews.

Know that some editors feel it's their job to substantially rewrite your piece. Others expect some collaborative back-and-forth as they refine the story through several drafts.

Also know that your headline may well be rewritten. You should strive to submit a strong headline possibility, but headline writing is traditionally considered the editor's job.

Successful writers understand that these editorial changes are a normal part of the publication process. The changes editors suggest will mostly likely improve your piece and help you better communicate with their audience, so toughen up and cheerfully make requested changes. If there's a point you really disagree with, feel free to calmly make your case about why. But remember, ultimately it's their publication.

Many writers hate editors and have ambivalent or even hostile reactions to their requests for story edits. Try to keep an open mind—in my experience if you've got a competent editor, their suggestions will make your article better. Better articles help you get better-paying assignments. Most writers benefit greatly from hooking up with publications that have active, hands-on editors.

*Give a pitch with your final draft.* When you turn in your article, immediately pitch more ideas, or ask if the editor has upcoming freelance needs. This is your best chance to get another assignment, while you're fresh in their minds and the editor is happily holding your promptly filed story.

What do you do when you've done all this? Start all over again—keep prospecting for promising-looking publications that fit your experience and sending them query letters.

*Don't forget to bill promptly and track payment.* Collecting on outstanding invoices is the bane of every freelance writer's existence. Don't make the situation worse by sending in invoices late. If you were asked to sign a contract or fill out a tax form, make sure that paperwork is done right away.

### **Getting paid**

Before you turn in your draft and skip on your merry way, be sure you understand your publication's billing process. Your editor may want an emailed invoice, or they might generate an invoice for you to approve. Some print publications pay off tearsheets from the published issue, and you need not submit a bill.

In any case, track when you expect the payment to arrive. If it doesn't come on time, call immediately to ask about payment status. Don't wait and wonder—if it's a lost invoice or similar paperwork problem, the clock to payment won't start until the paperwork is resubmitted. Many publications

only cut checks once or twice a month, so small delays on your end can add up to a long wait.

Slow-paying markets are a cash-flow disaster for freelance writers. If a publication promises payment in 30 days and three months later you're still waiting, think hard about whether to take any more of their assignments.

As you build your portfolio, look to improve both your pay rate and the speed with which you are paid. Most of the best markets pay in 30 days or less. Even as a new writer, try to avoid signing up for more than a 90-day wait for payment.

A few strategies I've used with slow-paying clients I wanted to keep:

- *Require half up front.* Ask if you can bill half the amount upon receiving the assignment, or upon turning in the first draft, for immediate payment. That takes some of the sting out of waiting forever for the final payment.
- *Ask for a higher rate.* If they pay slowly, they should pay more.



## Final thoughts on writing for publications

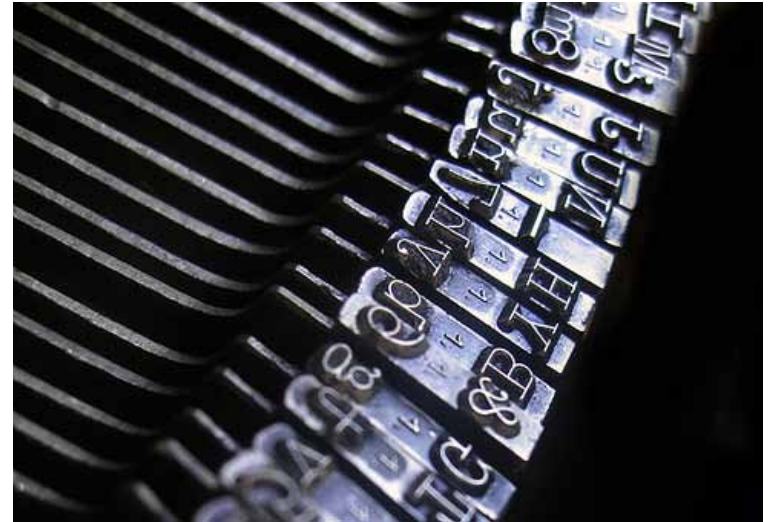
I hope this step-by-step guide has given you new tools for getting published in print and online publications. It may seem like a daunting prospect to connect with editors at good-paying publications, but if you present yourself professionally, you can land assignments.

Remember, one strong pitch can open the door. I've seen my mentees make great new relationships with editors despite the downturn, so I know it can happen.

If you're interested in exploring the world of writing for companies, that information is coming up in the **“Copywriting Crash Course”** section. Since this is generally the most lucrative place to earn money, I highly suggest giving a browse to this section and seeing if there isn't a niche in the copywriting world that fits you.

For those who'd like to learn about monetizing their personal niche blogs, proceed on to the section on **“Make a Living with Your Blog”**.

## PART II: THE COPYWRITING CRASH COURSE



*Image by Flickr user Carlos Aguilera*

## **An Introduction to Copywriting**

If you find the world of business interesting and enjoy talking to business-people, you may be able to make very good money writing for companies. This work is often referred to as "copywriting." Many writers think copywriting only means writing direct-mail pieces or sales letters—and if they're not interested in those types of writing, they avoid this whole category of work.

Boy, are they missing a big opportunity!

Really, copywriting is a catchall term for anything written for a company with the end goal of selling its products and services, rather than for a publication whose primary product is the articles themselves.

Copywriters create all the materials businesses use to communicate with their customers, employees, vendors, board members, investors and shareholders. Many writers are unaware of the huge variety of writing assignments that can be done for corporate clients. Copywriting assignments can include:

- Company web pages
- Product descriptions
- White papers
- Articles
- Blogs
- Advertorials (ads in article form)
- Brochures
- Display ads for print or online
- Management bios
- Customer success stories or case studies
- Company emails
- Print or online newsletters or magazines
- Internal reports or memos
- Press kits
- Business plans
- Annual reports
- Shareholder letters
- Social media campaigns (tweeting, posting on Facebook fan pages, etc.)
- Consumer product guides
- Technical writing/product documentation
- Training courses

- Press kits
- Press releases
- Speeches
- Webinar presentation scripts or PowerPoint slides
- Radio scripts
- Video scripts
- Sales letters
- Requests-for-proposal forms needed to bid on government jobs

As you can see, there's huge variety here. You may even have done one of these writing types as part of a former job. If so, dig out those old clips and use them to get new assignments as a freelancer!

To get started, simply begin reading the company marketing materials you receive in the mail and see online. Take a critical look at company Web sites you visit. Note the style, tone and approach that's used.

Soon, you'll develop your own innate sense of what's effective and what isn't. You'll likely also find you can more easily imagine yourself writing particular types of copy, which will tell you what types of writing services you want to promote to clients.

For instance, are you willing to write press releases and then pitch them to journalists on the phone and by email? Personally, I'd rather be shot, but many writers find this enjoyable and fairly easy money.

### **Choosing a niche**

There is so much to do in the world of copywriting that many writers end up specializing. Personally, I've done a smattering of grant work and press-release writing, but found I enjoy writing articles, blogging, white papers and other Web content most, so those assignments now make up the bulk of my corporate work.

Many writers who are new to copywriting start out writing articles or blogging for companies, just because it's a form they understand. That's a great way to break in, and once you have a relationship with a company, you can often expand the relationship from there.

As with writing for publications, the bottom-rung-first approach works for corporate writing, too. Maybe you'd like to make a six-figure income writing marketing materials or Web content for a Fortune 500 company? Start with a small-business client, ideally in your target industry, and work your way up from there.

## Use your life experience

Even a little background knowledge in a topic can help you land a copywriting assignment. For instance, my father sold life insurance for a living, a fact I used to help land a major corporate account with a global insurance consulting firm. Just the fact that I was vaguely familiar with what insurance was, and had a basic business writing background, got me a tryout!

Did you once work as a dental receptionist? Approach some dentists about whether they need Web content or brochures. Did your father own a hardware store? See if your local one needs a newsletter. At one point I used my experience as a legal secretary to land a gig writing many short articles at \$1 a word for a legal Web site.

### **My breaking-in story:**

When I left my last staff-writing job in 2005, I let all my sources know I was freelancing. I was immediately approached by the CEO of a small startup about whether I would write for his company Web site. I'd never done any corporate copywriting or Web content up to that point, but he didn't care—I'd reported on his company so he knew I understood their business, which made software for call centers.

I ghostwrote the CEO's blog for a few months and wrote a package of several advertorial articles for the company's Web site. This gave me a modest track record in copywriting.

When a global consulting company in another industry came along looking for copywriters a year or so later, I could say, "Yes, I've done copywriting." The result was an account writing Web content that sent me more than \$60,000 of assignments over several years.

**Moral of the story:** Getting a little copywriting experience can really pay off!



## Is copywriting "selling out"?

Some writers shy away from copywriting because they feel it represents "selling out." When I worked as a reporter, I'll be honest—I thought people who did copywriting were sleazy shills who had gone over to the dark side of the Force. Once I got offered some copywriting work and decided to try this field, I saw copywriting in a new light.

I now think of writing for companies as a completely legitimate niche in the world of writing—just one that's quite different from reporting. Most of the work you do will serve goals the company defines, as opposed to reporting on a topic and providing multiple points of view, or just giving your own opinion.

Companies need to tell the world what they're doing. They need to communicate clearly. As long as they're asking you to help them do that in an honest way, I don't see an ethical problem with it.

It's not widely known, but many esteemed writers for major publications supplement their income with copywriting. I once asked a writer friend I admired who else she wrote for, and was shocked to discover her bread-and-butter gig was writing for Ford Motor Co.! As long as you keep these two realms separate, it's not a conflict for a reporter to take copywriting gigs.

Note that *once you're employed to write by a company, you can't pitch publications story ideas about that company without disclosing that they are one of your copywriting clients*. You may be surprised how many outlets won't even care. But it's important to make that disclosure if you're discussing a company, even if your work for them has ended.

## Getting Copywriting Assignments

Finding good-paying copywriting work is generally more difficult than finding article markets. There's no *Writers Market*-type guide here. While there are more ads on Craigslist and other job portals from companies seeking copywriters these days, most of these posters are looking to pay very little. You can find the occasional gem through the ads, and I have, but it's a real long shot. Good-paying copywriting work is mostly found by aggressive *prospecting*: in-person and online networking, tapping affinity groups, sending out prospecting email or sales letters, and cold-calling on the phone.

I can't say enough good things about in-person networking. Don't spend too much time poking around online—get out and **meet live humans**. I've found there's better return on investment for the time, even though it does take a chunk of it.

For example, I went to two in-person networking events in the past year. At the first I got acquainted with a salary-data company that hires writers to create articles it resells to major career portals. The account paid \$350 an article—not my highest-paying gig by any means, but good fill-in work, the

stories are easy to do and the sites they're on are among the best-known and busiest on the Internet.

The other prospect I met manages content for a section of Microsoft's Web sites. In chatting him up, I learned he was friends with two former editors of mine, one of them since childhood. You usually can't make connections like this online. He has yet to assign me anything, but we're still in touch. What a powerful new connection!

Sure, it takes some time to do in-person networking and cold calling. But on the up side, a good major corporate copywriting account can pay \$50-\$100 an hour or more, and the work tends to be fairly steady. I've had more than one freelance copywriting client pay me \$20,000 in a single a year. This is why copywriting specialists encourage writers to consider adding some copywriting to their mix. It can make a very big difference in your freelance income.

## Seven ways to find your first clients

Most copywriters break in by writing for a small business. The good news: Small businesses that need marketing help are everywhere. Here are seven ways to find your first business writing assignments:

1. *Friends and family.* Tell everyone you know you're available to write for businesses. Let them know the types of copywriting that interest you.
2. *Businesses you patronize.* As you go about your daily life, you interact with many small businesses. You see a chiropractor, shop at a local organic grocer, or take your kids to a gym. These are all natural places for you to connect with business owners. Your secret weapon—you already know and like the business! You could also do a barter deal for writing work since you're already a customer.
3. *Walk your local downtown.* Walk the business district of your neighborhood or visit the local chamber of commerce and pick up their current brochures or fliers. Call the businesses that have weak marketing materials and ask if they'd like help creating more powerful messages.

4. *Business events.* Wherever large groups of business owners gather in your town—the local Chamber luncheon, weekly networking group, LinkedIn meetup or whatever—you want to be there.
5. *Social media.* Work your networks and forums online and let them know you're open for copywriting work.
6. *Target niche industries and review their Web sites.* This is an easy way to identify prospects, particularly if you're looking for work blogging or writing other online content. If you have an area of expertise, look at the Web sites of all the local businesses in that niche. Then call the companies with the worst Web sites and make a proposal.
7. *Content-site profiles.* While I don't recommend trying to bid on projects on content sites such as Elance or Guru.com, it can be worthwhile to post a profile on these heavily-trafficked sites. Small businesses looking for writers do scan these sites, and may contact you off the site and hire you privately just from seeing your profile.

## **A sample opening pitch**

A sample opening pitch to a prospective business client might go like this:

"Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a business writer. I was looking at your Web site and noticed it doesn't have \_\_\_\_\_ [an 'About us' page, case studies, a blog, etc.]. I'd appreciate a chance to talk with you about how more powerful content on your Web site would help you attract more business/sell more online ads/upsell your current customers."

The main point of your pitch is that strong writing will make them more money. In copywriting that's the point of everything you do. Your writing fee is a marketing investment the customer is hoping will pay off in increased business.

### **Two more strategies for getting those first samples:**

If you're having trouble connecting with a paying business client right off, consider one of these strategies for creating your initial portfolio:

1. *Offer one project free*, just so you can have a sample.
2. *Create a marketing piece for yourself* in the copywriting specialty you like—a white paper, a Web site, a sales letter—about how your copywriting helps companies get more business.

Use these initial samples to get some entry-level paid copywriting work. If you market your writing business aggressively, you'll soon have a nice little portfolio and you can move up rapidly.



## **Blogging for business—a great new break-in opportunity**

Business blogging is a rapidly growing niche in the world of copywriting. If you have a well-written personal niche blog, you have a powerful calling card with which to sell companies that need a blogger. Writing business blogs can be a great entry point for a new writer looking to find their first copywriting clients.

Better yet, blogging for a company can be the start of a larger relationship. Deliver killer blogs and you can go on to pitch the company better-paying copywriting projects such as white papers, sales letters, reports and longer articles.

Many small business owners are starting to realize that a blog could help draw visitors, build their site's search rankings, and bring them new customers. But most company CEOs don't have the time or inclination to learn about blogging or to keep up a regular blog—they need a writer to handle this chore for them.

Now, the woods are full of business-blogging gigs that pay way too low—say, \$10-\$25 a post. Many agencies are serving a large stable of small-

business clients and farming out their blogging work for cheap so they can take a nice cut of the fee.

One red flag is ads that promise you can blog about a wide variety of general topics. Few of these will pay well. Once you have a little experience, you're going to want to look for blogging gigs that pay a more appropriate rate—say, \$50 or more for a 300-400-word post.

Because this type of copywriting is so new, rates are all over the place, but you can find business blogging gigs that pay \$50-\$100 an hour or more. Most business blogs are done off a little Internet research or very brief interviews, so they don't usually take very long to create, which is why it can pencil out to get \$50 or \$100 per blog even though that would be too low for a fully reported article.

I've earned anywhere from \$65 to **as much as \$300** for blog entries, depending on the situation. Realize that different companies will have different ideas of how sophisticated they want their blog to be. Some want to post fully fleshed-out, reported articles as their blog entries, so rates should be higher in that case.

## Five signs of a good business-blogging prospect

1. *Their company sells a real product or service in a specialized niche.* Internet companies where blogs essentially are their main product don't usually pay well. On the other hand, I've been well paid to blog about **surety bonds**, business finance, and legal issues.
2. *The company has hired a copywriter before.* If you're the first copywriter a company has ever worked with, know that the level of handholding required will be high. You want a company where managers already understand how to work with freelancers.
3. *Managers "get" blogging.* Company managers understand blog format—which is not 1,000 words long. Short posts of about 300-400 words are considered ideal, because studies have shown most Web readers won't scroll down. Shorter posts also mean less research and writing time and a better hourly rate for you. If you have to start by explaining what a blog is, beware.

4. *Managers understand the marketing value.* A good prospect knows a strong blog builds their reputation and helps them make more sales, pure and simple. Blogging is a marketing cost for them, like placing a radio ad or putting up a billboard. Managers are looking to stand out with professionally written blogs that deliver high-quality information.
  
5. *Managers are willing to make a long-term commitment.* Good business-blog clients understand it'll take time for a blog to build their traffic. Also, each new business blogging client will require an initial learning curve where you won't earn as well. Personally, I've set a minimum of eight blogs—usually one a week for two months—as the smallest project at which it's worth my time to take on a small-business blogging project.

## How to create a great business blog

Most well-read, successful business blogs contain links to other Web sites. These blog posts often take several recent pieces of news on a topic and bring them together. That's what makes viewers want to come to the client's Web site instead of those six other places the writer linked to—the blog is gathering up industry news and delivering it in a comprehensive way. Each post adds new insight to the news being discussed.

Before you start blogging for a business, be sure to learn about the owner's goals for the blog, the intended audience, and the voice or tone desired. Will you be ghosting for an executive, or under your own byline? Having clear answers to these questions will help ensure the blog you create gets across exactly the information your client wants, in the style they feel best represents their company.

Be sure to find out what topics they'd like to see. Some clients will generate their own topics, while others will ask you to come up with the topic list.

If you need to develop topics, you can easily find relevant links with a little Internet browsing or by setting up **Google alerts** on key words related to a client's industry. Scan 50 or so news headlines on a topic daily, and you will have more ideas than you can ever use!

### **The mechanics of business blogging**

Physically creating blog posts and getting them up on a client's Web site may be as simple as submitting a Word document, or may require a good deal of technical expertise. Some companies will want to give you access to a dashboard in their blog program via the Internet so you can post blogs directly within their system.

In this case, you'll compose your blogs right in the program (cutting and pasting text from other word-processing programs usually creates problems) and do the work of enlivening links to other sites, so that a click on their blog will jump readers to the relevant site. You may also be asked to find free or low-cost images or videos to embed in your blog posts from sites such as **Flickr Creative Commons** or **YouTube**.

An editor may review your post, or as you gain a client's trust, you may be asked to publish directly to their site without review. If you earn this privilege...be responsible and proofread carefully!

Common blogging programs include [WordPress](#), [Blogger](#) and [Movable Type](#). Ideally, you've already used one of these for your own blog, but if not, it's easy to learn the basics you'll need. The programs are highly similar to each other, so once you've used one, you won't have trouble using another.

### **Break in with crowdsourcing contests**

In my article-writing section, I discussed breaking in and meeting editors by entering contests. In the Internet era, there are contests for copywriters too, and more are popping up all the time.

Did you notice that Doritos held a contest for the Superbowl in '09, asking customers to create their TV ads? This is known as crowdsourcing—instead of hiring a big ad agency, the company tapped the power of their large customer base, generated excitement, and ended up with some fun ads. And you can bet the winners got some additional work off that calling card!

If you're having trouble breaking in other ways, look for writing contests. You might find a client by submitting a jingle, naming a new product, or coming up with a slogan. There are Web sites where you can find compendiums of current copywriting contests, such as [GeniusRocket](#).

## What to Charge

Setting rates is tricky when you're just starting out, but bear in mind the amount you realistically want to earn per year. Divide it by 40 hours a week for 50 weeks (you want vacation, right?), and you'll get a rate. For instance, if you were booked solid at \$30 an hour, you'd make \$60,000 a year under this formula. Of course, it's rare to be booked that solid in freelance writing, so you have to earn a better hourly rate than that to end up with that income level.

The Writers Market has some guidelines on ranges for various types of copywriting projects. Copywriter Chris Marlow also sells a [Freelance Copywriter Fee & Compensation Survey](#). These tools will help you get a sense of what seasoned copywriters charge their clients.

You'll see requests online for writing multi-page Web sites for \$100 and other crazy prices. Once you have a few samples, just ignore these. You're looking for clients who understand the value of what you do and have the resources to pay a living wage.



Ask a lot of questions before you deliver a quote. In general, once you have a few clips, you'll want to look for situations that pay \$75-\$100 an hour, if calculated on an hourly rate, or \$.50-\$1 a word or so on a per-word basis.

I ask prospects a lot of questions because I've found it difficult to pin them down on exactly what they want. Often, they're not sure. Try your best to tease out all the information you can up front to avoid ending up over-worked and underpaid.

If you're working on a per-project basis, remember to track your hours anyway, especially in early projects, so you can see if your bid got you the hourly rate you need. If not, you probably underestimated the number of hours required, so next time remember to bid higher.

## Why I don't have a rate sheet

One of my mentees recently asked me if she could see a copy of my rate sheet, as she had a small-business prospect and was wondering what to charge them.

I had to tell her that I don't have a rate sheet. I know some copywriters do have a set list of charges they hand out to prospects.

I think that's a big mistake. Why? *Because every client is different.*

Some are a dream to work for, love every word you write and never ask for edits. Some are so dysfunctional you can't get rush emails returned when you're on a project deadline, and then they edit your work by committee until it's unrecognizable. One wants everything in a big rush, while the other will take it whenever you can fit them into your schedule.

Both these clients might have me writing 800-word articles, but would I want to price them the same? No way!

When people ask me to give them an off-the-cuff bid or send a rate sheet, this is my response:

"I don't have a set rate sheet, because every project is different. Once I learn more about your project, I will be able to give you an accurate rate quote for your job."

### **What to do if a prospect requires a quote**

If I'm answering a job ad that offers few project details but requires a price quote in response, I offer a big range that leaves me lots of wiggle room.

Example: "Recently, I've done work ranging from \$50-\$100 an hour, or \$.30-\$1 a word." I include the lowest figure at which I could possibly imagine doing the work under the best circumstances.

This means if the client is looking to pay \$10 an article, they will not call me, which suits me just fine. Set your range low enough that you won't be sorry if they don't call you.

If the prospect is looking for a professional writer and has any understanding of professional rates, I've hopefully stayed in the running without committing myself to a set price for a project where I don't really know the details.

When you're landing your first small-business clients, you'll find it tough to get a firm description of what they really want. That's because they often don't know themselves! They just know their business needs help communicating. That's why I send out my questionnaire.

Getting project specs in writing is a useful exercise for both sides. It helps clients describe what they want, and it gives you documentation you can use to raise your prices if the client asks for more work later. My questionnaire is always evolving, but here's a recent sample:

## Sample copywriting client questionnaire

Hello and thanks for your interest in my writing business! Please answer the questions below to help me in pricing your project:

Please define your project:

1. I want \_\_\_\_\_ (number of) blogs/articles/ \_\_\_\_\_ (other writing type) that run \_\_\_\_\_ words each.
2. Is this a one-off project or will it be ongoing, month after month? If the latter, how long is the initial contract for? \_\_\_\_\_ months.
3. Why is this content being written? What business goal do you have for it?
4. How many weeks will I have to complete the project from when I receive the needed materials and information?

5. Will interviews with sources be required? If so will I be expected to find my own sources or will you provide them?
6. Will I be expected to come up with my own topics, or will you developed them?
7. Where will the work appear? What is circulation or site viewership?
8. Will I have a byline, will it run no-byline, or will I be ghostwriting for someone else?
9. If I have a byline, can it be a live link to my Web site?
10. Will I retain rights to resell or republish the work, or will you own all rights?
11. Please describe the intended audience for this content in as much detail as possible—ie age, profession, level of expertise in their field, income level.

12. How does the audience use your content? Do they pay for it or is it free?
13. Is there a site in your industry that is doing something similar that you think does a good job? What is their URL? How would you expect your content to be different and/or better?
14. Who do you consider to be your major competitors in this sector, and what are their Web sites?
15. What are the major sources of news in this sector?
16. Give me an idea of the type of "voice" you envision for your content—is it first-person, third person, formal, casual, snarky, neutral, authoritative, journalistic? If possible provide examples of similar content to what you'd like.
17. How did you hear about me?

18. What questions do you have for me?

19. My normal terms are 50% up front for a first project, 50% on satisfaction of all terms, payable on net 15 days. If the project runs beyond a month, I will bill at the conclusion of each subsequent month.

\_\_\_\_\_ Those terms work for me

I need the following other terms: \_\_\_\_\_



## Negotiation tips for getting the best rate

Now that you have gathered a lot of details about the proposed project, you're ready to quote your prospect a price. Here are some tips for successful bidding:

- *Bid per-project instead of by the hour.* This is always a better way to go for both sides. You know exactly what you'll be paid, the client knows exactly what they'll have to pay, and if you're new and it takes you a bit longer to do the project, the client doesn't suffer for it. Clients also seem more satisfied with per-project rates than when they're thinking, "Sheesh, this guy is making \$95 an hour!"
- *Bid by the word instead of by the hour.* One quick, easy way to come up with a rough project bid is to simply add up the proposed wordcount and bid somewhere between \$.30 and \$1 a word, depending on degree of difficulty and client size.
- *Bill for all the hours involved.* Remember that projects take a bit of time to get set up and rolling, especially with new clients—files need to be created, initial emails exchanged, contracts negotiated, meetings taken. Bill every hour of this time, or figure those hours into your per-project bid.

- *Know industry rates.* If you have an opportunity to bid on a legitimate job, try to find out as much as you can to help you determine the rate. You should belong to some copywriters' forums online where you could describe your project and prospective client, and ask members to comment on your rate proposal. The *Writer's Market* also has a rate list.
- *Ask, 'What's your budget?'* If at all possible, get the client to tell you what they can pay. Put the onus back on them to quote a price.
- *Offer options.* Say, "If I can have three weeks to get these done, it'll be \$1,200, but it'll be \$1,800 if they're all due in a week." Or "If you make a commitment to a three-month contract instead of a single month, I'll discount this quote \$200 per month or \$600 total for the contract." Give them a menu of choices so you can find an option that works for their deadlines and their budget.

## Listen in on a client negotiation

One of the biggest problems many new copywriters have is they're afraid to discuss a client proposal and negotiate. Instead, the writer gets a prospect and is so excited, they jump at the first offer that's made. Often, this means they could have secured a higher rate if they'd explored the client's needs and budget a bit.

This process should have some give-and-take to it as you hammer out what you're going to do and how much you'll be paid. It's also an opportunity to display your knowledge of what will best help the client meet their goals for growing their business. A recent conversation I had with a prospective small-business client went like this:

**Prospect:** I looked at your site and I love your writing! I have a new Web site I'm launching that will have an audience of private-equity investors and small companies looking for funding. I was thinking about having you blog for me once a month for a couple months. I also need a press release written.

**Me:** I could certainly do that for you, but I have to tell you I don't think it's going to be effective in drawing enough traffic to help your business get rolling. You need more frequent posts—at least one blog a week. I have a minimum contract for startups that's four blogs a month for \$500 that I think would start getting you meaningful traffic.

**Prospect:** That's a little high for my budget...

**Me:** What if I throw in the press release? I'd do that if you signed on to a two-month contract.

**Prospect:** That sounds good.

So what happened here? I took what was likely just \$200 or so of blogging work and maybe a \$250 press release and turned it into a \$1,000 minimum contract. Because what I proposed is more likely to succeed in building this client's business by drawing more prospects, I also upped the likelihood this will turn into a long-term gig.

Throwing in the press release made the client feel he was getting a freebie, and sealed the deal. In reality, his blogs were easy to put together, and he was willing to let me write them ahead of time all at once, which was very time-efficient for me. Even with the press release, my hourly rate for the project stayed in the neighborhood of my target \$75-\$100 an hour, so it wasn't much of a sacrifice on my part.

As with all truly successful negotiations, it was win-win.

Of course, if you make a suggestion and the client doesn't like it and wants to stick to their original idea, you can always agree to it and take the work that's offered. But remember, it never hurts to negotiate a little and see if the client might commission a bigger, better project.

## **Completing your first copywriting assignment**

If you've successfully prospected for clients and negotiated a fair rate, you're ready to start the process of doing your copywriting assignment. Here's a guide to navigating this process and making sure you turn in top-notch work.

### **Client meeting 101**

If the project sounds like something that's a fit for you and they're discussing a fee that seems reasonable, you're ready to nail down the details, sign a contract and officially start your assignment.

It's time to take a meeting with the client, ideally in-person or at least over the phone. This is when you flesh out all the details about the project so that you leave ready to work. You've gotten some basic information from the questionnaire on which to base your price quote. Now, it's time to ask more sophisticated questions about your assignment.

Among the questions you may want to ask in a client meeting:

- What tone or style of writing does the client desire?
- How will what I'm writing fit with existing marketing materials?
- What are the biggest problems facing this audience? What key emotions come into play in thinking about those problems? How will the proposed copywriting address those issues?
- What is the key point of differentiation that needs to be emphasized? (This is known to marketing pros as the "unique selling proposition.")
- What obstacles to making a sale are being encountered, and how can they be overcome in this piece?
- Are there any key pieces of industry jargon that should be used, or industry taboo words that must be avoided?
- What are the key features and benefits of the product or service that your writing piece must describe?

- Does the company have a style guide I need to follow?
- Do they have samples of the style and format they want, either from their own or perhaps a competitor's materials?

When you leave your client meeting, you should have a concrete idea of what you should be writing. Frequently, the best road map can be found in the client's existing marketing materials. If they love them, they will teach you how to write for the company. If they hate them, find out why. Ask if there's a competitor whose materials they admire. *Try to leave the meeting with an example of marketing the client thinks is well done.* This will serve as a critical reference tool as you write their new materials.

If you find you still have questions, follow up immediately so you can start work promptly.



## Write your assignment

Communication is key as you begin your copywriting assignment. If you run into any roadblocks—unavailable interview sources, missing materials, nonworking company intranets, conflicting instructions from various company executives—report it to your main contact immediately.

Companies hate surprises. They're counting on having these materials in hand by a particular date, perhaps to take to an industry event or present to employees at an annual meeting. Be professional and keep them constantly in the loop of the progress you're making.

If you're discovering their deadlines are unrealistic, speak up. Offer them options if possible, i.e. "Your product expert hasn't been available for two weeks, which is putting my work behind schedule. Do you have another person I could speak with to get this done by next week? Let me know how you'd like me to proceed."

Before you turn in your assignment:

- Proof meticulously
- Get a copywriting mentor or peer to review your work, especially at first
- Review all the instructions you were given originally about the purpose of the assignment and the company's specifications for the project
- Read the piece again just for tone and style. Are all your word choices ideal?

## **Submit your work and deal with edits**

If you've gathered enough information about how to proceed, completing your work should be fairly straightforward. Once you turn in your copywriting work, however, know the path to final approval—and your final payment—may be long.

Often, marketing materials will be reviewed by more than one person, or by multiple teams of people. A content editor might review it, followed by a subject-matter expert, who then asks his whole team for feedback. Each new reader may have their own questions, comments or requested edits.

You may well have many masters. Some will love your first draft, but others will want major changes. Make sure you stay out of the way of any office politics that surround who has decision-making power over your work. Stick with your primary point of contact—the person who hired you—as the final word.

Don't be put off by these repeated rounds of feedback. They're part of life as a copywriter. But there's a reason many copywriters contractually limit the number of rewrites the client can request to two rounds, and charge more for additional rewrites.

### **Turn one assignment into a regular gig**

As with writing for publications, you have a great opportunity to land more work when you turn in your assignment. You'll probably have an opportunity to get to know the company intimately in the course of doing your first assignment.

While you're at it, try to identify a few other areas where new marketing materials would help the company more effectively reach its clients. Does its Web site lack clear explanations of its products, or a strong "about us" or media-room page? Would a white paper on an industry trend help establish their thought leadership and build their brand's reputation? Would a regular blog drive quality prospects to the site?

When you turn in your assignment, use it as an opportunity to provide some feedback about other parts of the company's marketing. Aside from what you've noticed, inquire about what other marketing projects they might be planning. You may walk away with another assignment, or be able to turn the connection into an ongoing gig.

## How to Gain Confidence and Move Up

I think the biggest stumbling block many writers face in breaking into copywriting is a simple lack of confidence that they can do this type of work. It's not as familiar as the article format, which you read in your newspaper every day.

Overcome this by studying the marketplace and creating samples. As you learn and accumulate samples, you'll gain confidence. If you luck into a situation where a company asks you to do some writing for them, just be honest about your lack of experience, and then give it a whirl.

Small businesses can have big writing needs—many owners know they don't write well, but don't know how to go about finding and hiring a copywriter to help them. They also don't understand how much business a well-written article, redone Web site, case study or white paper might bring them. It's up to you to educate them. For instance, here's a recent study on the effectiveness of **white papers**.

Business owners are often relieved to discover they know someone who could handle their writing chores and help them market their business. So realize that they need you as much as you need them.

Once you have a few copywriting samples, it's time to start moving up to medium- or large-sized companies, which will offer steadier work and generally better hourly rates. Most of these great clients are found through networking and referrals, or through cold-calling, direct-mailing or emailing prospects.

A lot of writers are intimidated by this process, but prospecting skills can be learned. Remember, the worst thing that can happen is they'll say "no.

In the following few pages, I outline several different approaches copywriters can use to move up and increase their rates. They may not all be for you, but hopefully they provide some food for thought on move-up strategies.

## **Social media + copywriting = good pay**

Once you break into copywriting and have a few samples, you can combine your writing skills with social media knowledge to earn really good money.

A recent survey by copywriting coach **Chris Marlow** showed the most commonly quoted rate for this combined service package when offered by established copywriting pros was \$300 an hour. The lowest price quoted was \$150 an hour!

So if you have been exploring social media on your own and are using popular sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook or Digg, consider pitching companies not just your copywriting abilities, but your skill at circulating your content on social sites.

Among the niches in this arena:

- Helping companies set up profiles on social media such as FaceBook and LinkedIn
- Helping companies defend their reputation online from rude comments or complaints about their products or services
- Ghost blogging on behalf of companies or individual executives
- Helping companies promote their blogs by finding forums on related industry sites where you could comment and post a link back to their company Web site or blog
- Soliciting guest-post opportunities where you can sign off with the company URL
- Managing a company's overall social-media presence, including devising an event schedule to make sure they post regularly on social media sites



If you're someone who enjoys using social media, this could be a lucrative copywriting niche to explore. Start by checking out the social-media presence of every company you contact. If they have a poor grasp of Twitter or aren't on LinkedIn or Facebook, propose including a social-media component in your copywriting package.

### **Team with a graphic designer to earn more**

When you're talking with prospects, ask if they have the graphic design side of the materials handled, or if they need a designer. Sometimes there's an opportunity to make a bigger fee by offering yourself as a copywriter who can provide a designer and manage the whole project for the client.

If you have design skills yourself, all the better. If not, network and find several designers in your area who are interested in partnering with writers—you probably won't have to look farther than your city's chamber of commerce business directory.

Getting to know designers can have many benefits for your copywriting career. Designers may hear about and refer you projects where a writer is needed. By the same token, if you get offered a chance to manage a copywriting job including design, you should be ready to hire a designer as a subcontractor to provide the client with one-stop shopping. Quote a higher, package fee for providing the customer with the convenience of having you as a single point of contact for both writing and design.

### **Copywriting for nonprofits**

Many writers don't realize that nonprofits have copywriting needs, too. Larger nonprofits pay well to have their materials written.

Their writing needs may include annual reports, emails to donors, newsletters, case studies, white papers and much more. The primary difference here is copywriting for companies focuses on landing clients or building loyalty with existing customers and employees. By contrast, nonprofits need help explaining to current and prospective donors how their organization fulfills its mission, or may want to keep employees informed about the group's accomplishments.

The range and number of nonprofit organizations is staggering. There are mission-based charities, grantmaking foundations, advocacy groups, universities and hospitals with nonprofit status. This niche is huge:

**The Foundation Center** estimates there are 1.5 million nonprofits in the United States.

You can identify the largest nonprofits in your market area by obtaining a ranking list in your market. One good source is **American City Business Journals**—they publish a Book of Lists in more than 40 major metropolitan markets.

## Learn more about copywriting

To build your knowledge of how to run a successful copywriting business, I recommend reading industry experts for tips and inspiration. Two newsletters I get are from the authors of two good books on copywriting:

[The Well-Fed Writer](#) and [The Wealthy Freelancer](#). I find them informative and inspiring. You can sign up for the Well-Fed E-Newsletter [here](#) or The Wealthy Freelancer e-news [here](#).

Top-earning copywriter Pete Savage wrote a case study on how a direct-mail marketing letter he created to prospect for clients earned him \$64,000 in new business. Details on how he did that are available [here](#).

I hope this introduction to copywriting has provided you with the basic tools you need to get started in this lucrative field. If you have questions, send me an email at [carol@caroltice.com](mailto:carol@caroltice.com), and I may answer your question on my blog, or in my upcoming book, *Make a Living Writing II: Your Move-Up Strategy Guide*.

## PART III: MAKE A LIVING WITH YOUR BLOG



*Image by Flickr user [Dramatic](#)*

Writing for publications and writing for companies are both tried-and-true methods of earning a living from writing. There is another, emerging way to earn money from writing: Create your own blog.

Can you really earn good money from your own blog? It's a definite possibility. Let's take a realistic look at what it takes to succeed in this writing niche.

There are a few big success stories in blogging—people who have been able to turn their personal blog into their full-time living. Prominent examples include:

*Leo Babauta* of **Zen Habits** started his blog while working a civil-service job on Guam, and parlayed it into book deals for several tomes including *Zen Habits: Handbook for Life*.

*Gary Vaynerchuk* took his family's wine business, turned it into video blog **Wine Library TV**, saw company sales explode, created a monthly subscription wine club, sold ads on his sites, and ended up getting a book deal to write **Crush It! Why NOW is the Time to Cash in on Your Passion**.

*Darren Rowse* of blogging-advice site **ProBlogger** makes **money from his sites** by selling ads and e-books, and from subscriber fees, among other methods. He also parlayed his blogging expertise into the book *ProBlogger: Secrets to Blogging Your Way to a Six-Figure Income*.

Successes like these have many would-be bloggers thinking this is their ticket to instant riches. There are scores of advice programs online that promise to teach you the secret of getting a huge, instant audience for your blog. But, sadly, most of these offers are scams.

All of the truly successful, lucrative blogs I know were created a step at a time, by slowly building a passionate fan community through social media and word of mouth. Using automated shortcuts—email lists you buy, or software that adds thousands of Twitter followers overnight—will probably not make it happen.

Yes, there are people out there earning \$100,000 a year or more from their blogs. But know that *these people are few and far between*. Problogger's Rowse took a poll in 2008 and **found** only *9 percent of bloggers make even \$20,000 a year from their blog*, with only a tiny fraction of those making what could be described as a six-figure income. Another 4 percent reported they made between \$5,000 and \$19,999 from their blog...nothing to sneeze at, but not exactly a fortune.

*So the first thing to know about turning your blog into a full-time career is: It's a long shot.*

At first, you will spend a lot of time blogging and marketing your blog while making little, if anything. Only you can evaluate whether you have the time, and whether that's the best use of your time.

The type of writing you do best may also factor into whether blogging is for you. If you're a technical or academic writer, having a blog may not be the best way to present your skills. If on the other hand you're trying to land other blogging or online-article gigs, writing your own blog may open doors.

Some savvy writers are building a substantial side income with their personal blog sites. I have interviewed several writers who report they are bringing in \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year from their niche blogs. Some have several different niche blogs that together add up to a decent living.

For instance, *Writer's Weekly* recently reported that author and successful online entrepreneur Morris Rosenthal of Foner Books earns most of his money through print book sales, but he also posts plenty of free content online, and runs [Google AdSense](#) ads on those pages. He told WW he's earned an average of \$25,000 per year over the past four years through Google AdSense.

*Here's what's great about earning from your own niche blog:*

Income from your own blog gives you the freedom to write and make money from a topic you're passionate about. It allows you to turn down other assignments you might not enjoy as much. And it can be a great marketing platform to help you land other paying assignments.



## Blog vs Article: What's the Difference?

As blogs emerged over the past decade, a new writing form took shape—and it was short, sassy, and link-y.

What exactly is the difference between an article and a blog? Based on my several years' experience blogging for publications, corporations and my writing sites, here's my take on what makes a good blog:

Blogs:

1. *Are short.* Great blogs are often 250-300 words. If you've got more than 500 words of material, split it into multiple blog posts.
2. *Have links.* They're usually focused on building traffic, so they should link to related information elsewhere. Those links serve two purposes: They help your site's search rankings, and build credibility by showing readers where you got your facts.

3. *Are informal.* The writing style in blogs is usually pretty casual. The need to follow Associated Press Style rules goes out the window. Bloggers use slang such as "LOL," or say "frak," or write in incomplete sentences if the mood hits them.
4. *Usually publish online and not in print publications.* I'm sure somewhere there's a publication running a page of blog entries in its magazine, but the vast majority of blogs are designed to be read on a computer.

#### Articles:

1. *Can be longer.* Many online articles are 500-800 words long, and magazines publish pieces that are 3,000 words or more. Those lengths just don't work for a blog entry.
2. *May contain multiple interviews.* It's rare to see a blog entry that has multiple experts quoted with their points of view. Most blogs express the author's point of view.

3. *Use a more formal writing style.* This is a generalization, but more article clients want assurance that you can write to AP or Chicago Style. Articles in general tend to follow traditional journalism conventions to a greater extent than does your average blog.
4. *Appear in print or online.* Often, a print article will also be reprinted online by the publication. But you rarely see a blog turning up in a print magazine.

## Why Your Blog Needs a Niche

Can a successful blog be general? More than once, I've heard from writers who feel they are generalists, and want to blog about many different topics in their blog. They wonder whether they can create a viable blog this way.

Two reasons why a general blog isn't a good choice:

1. *Not a good audition piece*—If part of your reason for writing a personal blog is to use it to get paid blogging jobs for publications or companies, a general blog doesn't help you. Virtually all publications and company blogs are about a very specific topic, so you want your blog to demonstrate you know how to stick to a niche.
2. *Too hard to build an audience*—If you want your blog to be a moneymaker, you need to draw a large audience, to whom you and your advertisers can sell products and services. The problem with a general blog is that you can't easily build a big, loyal audience 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.

But the next post is about something totally different, and the next one has yet another topic. Now I'm 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 **Make a Living Writing blog**), your search rankings for that topic will rise as you post more.

More people will come. 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.

If there's a general blog out there that's making real money, I have yet to see it. So if you have multiple topics you want to blog on, the answer is: multiple blogs. They can even start off 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 place to live—a place for fans of that topic to come where they can count on learning more about the subject they love.

## Best Traits of Successful Niche Bloggers

In interviewing some of the most successful niche bloggers out there, including **Nathan Hangen**—author of *Twitter Rockstar* and co-author of *Beyond Blogging*—and audience-building expert **Michelle MacPhearson**, I've discovered there are some basic traits successful niche bloggers have that make them earn well. Here's what they are:

1. *A tightly focused niche that is broadly popular.* Think of *Zen Habits*—what businessperson does not want to become more effective and efficient at work? Leo Babauta never writes about anything else, so if you want to work smarter, you can count on him to give you great tips in each post. On the other hand, it's very difficult to turn blogging about whatever random thoughts flit through your mind each day into a lucrative business.

2. *Regular posts.* Having a blog you want to monetize means making a serious commitment to posting frequently—at least twice a week. Most highly successful blogs have fresh content daily, often more than one post per day. You need a lot of posts because each new piece of content helps drive more traffic, and you usually need a lot of traffic to earn well.
3. *Relentless promotion.* High-earning bloggers are masters of social media. Whether they have huge Twitter followings, a big email list, Facebook fan pages, thousands of LinkedIn connections, or a Yahoo! group, they are constantly reaching out to connect with their audience. They ask questions, take polls – anything to keep the conversation going and interest in their site high.
4. *A keen understanding of monetization strategy.* Great bloggers don't just draw a crowd and then let them sit around talking about their niche topic—they know how to turn their fan base into buyers through a variety of promotional strategies. They get their audience to buy their related products by holding contests, offering free Webinars, discount offers and much more.

5. *Exceptionally well-written, useful content.* Top-earning bloggers deliver amazing expertise that's compelling and helpful to their audience.
6. *Committed to community-building.* Great bloggers encourage comments, explore controversies, create chat forums, guest-post on others' sites, and invite guest bloggers to post on their site. They take steps each week to involve their fan base. In other words, their blog is not a one-way street, but an engaging conversation with their site visitors.
7. *A visually inviting site.* Successful blog sites are not overly cluttered and they're easy to navigate. These sites make it easy for visitors to help promote the blog by sharing content on social-media portals such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, and bookmark sites such as Digg and Reddit.
8. *Savvy advertisers.* Authors of popular blog sites may place paid search ads to boost their visibility in key searches, or advertise on other Web sites in their niche.

If reading through these points made you think, “Hey – that could be me!” it's possible that you could create a meaningful income from your personal blog.



## 10 Ways to Monetize Your Blog

There are only a few basic ways in which bloggers make money off their sites. Here's a look at the options:

1. *Sell products and services.* Many bloggers use their blog site as a platform to sell e-books or physical books. Business owners may use their blog to increase interest in their products, sell online courses, software, a DVD training series, in-person classes, or one-on-one consulting services.
2. *Monthly subscriptions.* Some of the top-ranked bloggers create training "boot camps" or learning communities that require a monthly subscription fee for access to the course materials. I've interviewed more than one blogger clearing over \$1 million a year on this model. This model allows you to teach hundreds of paying clients at once, rather than coaching them one at a time, greatly increasing your hourly rate.

3. *Ads.* If you end up with substantial traffic on your site—say, 100,000 visitors a month or more—you could approach companies that make products related to your niche about placing display ads on your site. Some niche bloggers are able to sell several ads a week, while others allow just one big ad at a time and charge a premium for the exclusive opportunity. The latter method has the advantage of being less work in terms of finding advertisers.

4. *Affiliate deals.* Many retailers and ecommerce sites offer other Web site owners the opportunity to send them customers and receive a cut of the sale price in exchange. These are known as affiliate marketing deals. Other affiliate deals may pay you just for getting your site visitors to click on an ad.

Many bloggers drive traffic to their site by using Google AdSense to get automatically delivered ads relating to their niche, rather than trying to solicit advertisers one at a time. If visitors click on the ads, the blogger gets a cut of anything visitors buy on that retail site. Here's an AdSense [success story](#) on HomeTips.com, describing how they built a million-viewer-a-month audience and monetized their home-advice Web site.

5. *Partnership or reciprocal deals.* Many bloggers co-promote their products and services on each others' sites, offering discounts if you buy both bloggers' ebook at the same time, for instance. This can work well, as your sales offer appears on more sites without the cost of advertising.
6. *Sponsorship deals.* Some sites sign up one or two high-paying sponsors whose brand they may actively promote on their site. Alternatively, they may create a page or area on their site that has a particular sponsor.
7. *Email ad programs.* If your blog is also available as an email subscription, you can also get paid sponsors or sell ads within these emails.
8. *Selling your blog site.* It's rare, but sometimes a great niche blog is simply bought up by a larger blog. An example is the one-man blog Bankaholic, which was bought for \$15 million by major on-line-banking site BankRate in 2008.

9. *Speaking fees.* If your blog helps you become a known expert in a topic, you might be paid to speak about your topic at conferences, trade shows or corporate meetings. ProBlogger's Darren Rowse is one of the bloggers who counts speaking fees as one of his blog-related income streams.
  
10. *Blog as audition piece.* Many bloggers use their personal niche blog as a promotional tool to land paid blogging work for publications and corporations. A good blog is basically one big clip you can easily send to prospective clients.

## Advice from Successful Niche Blogger Nathan Hangen

For a few more details on the reality of blogging your way to a full-time living, I turned to Nathan Hangen. I was impressed with Nathan because he started his social-media consulting business while deployed in Afghanistan. So he's a master multitasker! And now he makes his full-time living from his blogs and the related products he sells on his blog sites.

He experimented with blogging until he found niches that worked for him, then stuck to them. He started out with a niche blog about running and now has four different sites, including niche sites on Buddhism, social media and running. As he learned about social media, he created his initial **Twitter Rockstar** program, and has rolled from there.

Here's his frank, front-line report on the major ramp-up to earning with a blog.

*"It takes insane amounts of work just to create a respectable blog, let alone build upon one. Although I started earning money within my first six months as a blogger, most of what I did initially was less about income and more about just taking action...trial and error...falling and then getting back up. Although my blog is nearly two years old, the truth is that it still acts like an infant, because of the workload."*

Nathan's success tips:

1. Get started and "just do it."
2. Fail early and fail often.
3. Try new things and don't be afraid to change course.
4. Study, learn and experiment.
5. When you find a gap in the market, start refining your message to fill it.
6. Drill that message into your audience.
7. Follow up with questions so you can test your message's effectiveness.
8. From there, it's simply a matter of giving people what they want, whether it's interaction, valuable products, or a place to hang out.
9. Don't give up before it pays off.

Here's Nathan's advice about affiliate marketing programs beyond the popular Google AdSense option:

*“Choosing an affiliate program is kind of like choosing décor for your house. What works well has a lot more to do with what matches than the brand name.”*

*“Find products that add value to your readers. If you have a niche blog for running or gardening, for instance, consider joining something like **Commission-Junction** or **Linkshare** and apply to relevant company programs inside.”*

*“The programs that convert best for me on niche blogs are those that allow me to sell what people are already buying—at one of my niche running sites, that's running shoes, DVDs, and supplements.”*

*“The key is to choose relevant offers and ads. I've had the most success with ads that look like content. In other words, they don't take away from the décor, they add to it.”*

## CONCLUSION: MAKING IT HAPPEN



*Image by Flickr user Valeriana Solaris*

In my mentoring work, I talk one-on-one with writers and learn about their background. We outline specific writing niches for them to target, and identify their best marketing strategies. They invariably leave their initial consultation session excited about all the potential they have to make great money from writing. Then, often, nothing happens. Why?



They don't follow through. Some would-be writers have poor time-management skills and have difficulty organizing their time to get their marketing and writing done.

Many writers seem to have a crisis of confidence. Deep down, they don't believe they can do it. You'll need to conquer this and move forward aggressively to put yourself out there.

One writer recently said to me, "*I don't see how I can compete with the millions and millions of writers out there!*"

This comment really surprised me, because I've never thought of myself as competing with millions of writers. Mostly, *I think of myself as competing with me.*

I want to make each article I write better than the one before—snappier, more concise, funnier, better organized, with more engaging quotes. If you focus on your own improvement, you will move up in the writing world.

Each of us is unique. Each of our talents are perfectly suited to particular kinds of writing. If you focus on where you're exceptional and constantly push yourself to learn and improve, you will earn more.

For instance, few writers can think up four business story ideas and execute them in a week flat, week after week. When I did it as a staffer—for twelve years—I never worried that millions of writers were about to take my job. Most places I worked, we had trouble staying fully staffed!

So don't get bogged down worrying about the competition. No one else out there can bring your unique viewpoint and abilities to a story.

## You Gotta Believe

In the end, all the advice and tips I've given you in the ebook won't get you far as a writer if you don't have an unshakable belief that you are talented and deserve to earn a good living from your writing.

I received a very moving email message recently from a longtime professional writer and single mom of two. She'd recently been laid off from a lucrative editing job.

Now, looking out on today's freelance world full of online \$15-an-article assignments, she doesn't know how she will support her family. She'd have to work around the clock at content-mill rates to make ends meet, and doesn't want to do that kind of work anyway.

"I am just not capable of slapping things together and calling it writing," she says. "I'm truly afraid that things will not get better."

Well, she wrote to the right person. Because I'm not afraid. She needs to be fearless too, and so do you.

In this economy and fast-changing writing landscape, *attitude is everything*. I believe people you pitch for writing jobs can smell fear and negativity from miles off, and they steer clear. And that feeds the cycle of no work, and more fear.

I think the secret of why I continued to earn well straight through the recession is that I never feared. To succeed in freelance writing today, you need to believe that you are really a talented writer and that you can find paying clients, no matter what. Somewhere in the enormous, multi-million-dollar sea that is the freelance writing market, there's enough lucrative work to provide a good living for one little old you.

You are such a small part of the whole marketplace, there doesn't have to be a recession for you. If you are working your plan for marketing your writing, you will find clients. That's my belief.

Do you believe in your writing abilities? Do you think there's a place for you in the new media order—and are you excited by that?

Then find the good-paying work that's waiting for you. I believe it's out there.

## Mentoring Services

For some people, reading a book about how to earn a good living from freelance writing just isn't enough. They need personalized guidance on how their background and writing talent fit into the marketplace. They need help breaking down their ideas into concrete, short-term goals and more immediate to-do lists.

They also need a support group—a community that will hold them accountable for getting their monthly goals accomplished.

That's why I offer one-on-one mentoring services, which include ongoing participation in my mentee community. We provide monthly “weigh-ins” to keep you on track. You can learn more about my [mentoring services](#) here.

Feel free to [email](#) me if you're interested in exploring a mentoring relationship.

## Final Note

I hope this e-book has provided you with the tools to find more lucrative writing opportunities. If this advice brings you success, please write and let me know!

If you have more questions feel free to email me at [carol@caroltice.com](mailto:carol@caroltice.com). I may answer them on my [Make a Living Writing blog](#), or in upcoming e-books.

For a constant supply of free tips on building a lucrative writing career, [subscribe](#) to my Make a Living Writing blog.

Carol Tice

<http://Twitter.com/TiceWrites>

## **Make a Living Writing: The Sequel**

If you'd like to learn more about how to take your initial writing success and build it into a high-earning writing career, watch for the sequel to this book:

*Make a Living Writing II: Your move-up strategy guide*

*Legal Notice:*

*All attempts have been made to verify the information provided in this ebook. However, the author does not assume any responsibility for errors, omissions or contrary interpretations of the material included herein.*

*This ebook is not intended for use as a source of legal, business, marketing or accounting advice and all readers are encouraged to consult the appropriate professionals. Furthermore, the information included in this ebook may be subject to varying state and local laws.*

*As the purchaser of this ebook, you assume responsibility for the use of this information — meeting all applicable laws and regulations (federal, state and local), governing professional licensing, business practices, advertising and all other aspects of doing business in the United States or any other jurisdiction is the sole responsibility of the reader.*

*The author assumes no responsibility or liability on the behalf of any purchaser or reader of this ebook. Any perceived slights of specific people or organizations are unintentional.*

*Every effort has been made to accurately represent this ebook and its potential. The author does not guarantee that you will earn money based on the information in this ebook.*

**© 2010 TiceWrites Inc.**

*No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed without express permission of the author.*