

# the renegade writer

## OMNIBUS



Best of the Renegade Writer Blog  
2006 - 2016

Linda Formichelli & Diana Burrell

# Thanks for Trying Out the *Renegade Writer OMNIBUS!*

If you landed on our blog from a Google search or social media link, you may never have had a chance to read our posts. We're offering this free sample in the hopes that you'll see how valuable this blog was for hundreds of thousands of writers for an entire decade, and that you'll want to plunk down a little cash for the full collection (which is over 1,400 pages long, by the way, but priced the same as a regular e-book!).

In this sample you'll find the introduction to the book, as well as some of our readers' favorite posts.

Like what you read? Please [check out the \*Renegade Writer OMNIBUS\* on Amazon](#) and pick up a copy for yourself!

Happy writing,

*Linda & Diana*

# About the Renegade Writer Blog

We started the Renegade Writer blog in 2006, and over the years it became a classic go-to for aspiring and professional freelance writers all over the world.

Since 1997, we've written for hundreds of publications: trade magazines like *Pizza Today* and *Sanitary Maintenance*, custom publications like *Chevy Cruise* and *ATA World*, newsstand pubs like *Writer's Digest*, *Redbook* and *Cook's Illustrated*...and everything in between.

The 1,000+ posts on the blog (most of which are now in this book) cover everything we learned in our two decades as full-time freelance writers, from marketing tips to advice on developing the freelance mindset. We tell it like it is, and share the wonderful ups and the awful downs of the freelance life. We're not afraid to tell aspiring writers that freelancing is not a quick and easy way to fast cash—it takes resilience, persistence, great writing and marketing skills, dedication, and lots of hard work.

The Renegade Writer blog was a must-read for freelance writers for a decade, garnering over 15,000 unique views each month, winning the Top Ten Blogs for Writers prize multiple times, and being named a "Top 101 Website" by *Writer's Digest Magazine* year after year. The Renegade Writer blog has been mentioned in many top-notch publications, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Copyblogger*, and *Jon Morrow's Boost Blog Traffic*.

The posts in this book are in chronological order to give you a sense of how writing, freelancing, and blogging changed over the 10 years of the blog. We did our best to make the formatting consistent, correct any egregious mistakes, and remove most links (since many of them are dead at this point). We also removed some categories of posts, such as posts that were only marketing a book or class; posts announcing contests that are now (obviously) over; link round-ups; and guest posts where we weren't able to secure reprint permission. We also updated guest posters' bios where the writers asked for that. Otherwise, this book is a faithful rendition of the Renegade Writer Blog.

Please note that prices, classes, and products mentioned in this book are subject to change. Remember, some of these posts are over 10 years old!

# Why You're Worth More Than a Penny Per Word

Author: lindaformichelli

I was recently on a writer's forum where a writer posted that he was writing articles for a penny a word and wondering if that was wise. The other posters shared that they also write for a penny a word, and boast that they can bang out the articles quickly so it's worth it for them on a per-hour basis.

I decided to run some numbers. Keep in mind that these are all estimates and based on my own sketchy knowledge of how much my expenses are, how many weeks people work per year, etc. Also, keep in mind that freelance writers typically aren't working on paying work 40 hours per week, so the income I figured for freelancers would be even lower.

The minimum wage here in New Hampshire is \$7.25 per hour. If you work 40 hours per week at minimum wage for 49 weeks (leaving some time for vacation and sick days), that's \$14,210 per year.

If you could research and write, say, a 1,000-word article in an hour, that would earn you \$10 per hour. If you work as a writer for \$10 per hour for 49 weeks, that's \$19,600 per year. But wait...being a freelancer, I pay \$1,800 per year for my own (crappy) health insurance, and let's give a conservative guess of \$5,000 annually for expenses, including computer equipment, office supplies, mortgage and utilities just for my office space, etc. If I subtract that from the yearly freelance pay, that's \$12,800 per year—less than minimum wage!

Now, I realize that some people do freelance writing as a supplement to their full-time jobs, or they're supported by a spouse and their freelancing income is fun money. For me, though, **working at a penny a word is simply not sustainable.**

**Also, why write for a penny a word when, with some thought, you can easily earn 10 times as much:** 10 cents per word, which you would earn at some small trade magazines? Then you'd be making \$100 per hour.

Writing is undervalued by many. But if businesses that use writing value the work, skill, and knowledge that goes into a 1,000-word article at a measly \$10, it's partly because there are hordes of writers willing to write for that much!

However, I don't believe that if people weren't working for these bottom-feeders, wages for writers would rise. There's no way that someone currently paying a penny a word would raise rates to a much more reasonable \$1 per word (or even 10 cents per word!) because writers refuse to work for a penny a word—he would simply disappear.

**If you're a good writer, persistent, and professional, you can earn \$50,000, \$100,000, \$200,000 per year and more.** And yes, I do know someone who earns \$200,000 per year writing magazine articles and corporate communications.

You also don't need to start at a penny a word and "work your way up." My first assignment, back in 1996, paid \$500. No, that was not a fluke, and no, I was not just lucky. I pitched magazines that paid a reasonable amount because it never occurred to me that the effort and skill I put into an article would be worth mere pennies. I wrote a query that sold, and I deserved to be paid a decent sum for my idea, skills, time, effort, and knowledge.

Of course, I'm not at the top of the pay scale by any means, though I make a very comfortable living as the main breadwinner for our family. My minimum rate for articles is 50 cents per word, and those articles have to be fairly straightforward and easy. My top rate so far is about \$2.50 per word for national magazines. But there are probably people out there earning \$6 per word wondering why I put up with such low wages! **So the bottom line is that you need to figure out what your work is worth and what's economically sustainable for you.** Just don't sell yourself short!

# 6 Proven Tips for Getting into the "Write" Mood

Author: lindaformichelli

*By Steve Maurer*

I'm also a freelance writer who doesn't believe in writer's block.

More specifically, I don't believe in that mythical, wraithlike ogre that sucks the life and soul from a writer, rendering him impotent, unable to put words down on paper or screen. Yes, I still have challenges; I just don't believe that true writer's block exists.

The reason is simple: I can talk.

After all, writing is nothing more—and nothing less—than the written record of a conversation, whether it's a speech or a dialog, spoken or unspoken. If you can talk, you can write.

I believe that what some folks call writer's block is simply the result of a lack of confidence or a lack of motivation. Here are six proven tips I use to get into the "write" mood.

## **1. If You're a Writer, Call Yourself a Writer**

Go back right now and reread the first paragraph of this post. Go ahead, I'll wait for you.

Ah, you're back. Did you see the answer to the confidence problem? It's in the first five words of the very first sentence: I am a freelance writer. A ton of material has been written about speaking things into existence. It's powerful. The concept of visualization is often used in sports to improve athletic skills.

Writers are no different. If you're going to be a writer, then call yourself a writer. Go ahead, say it out loud: I am a freelance writer!

New writers start out excited about making a living with their words. However, doubt sets in and confidence wanes, smashing their dreams to pieces.

I know. This is one hurdle I had to clear myself.

Start calling yourself a writer at every opportunity. Get some business cards that say so. When people ask you what you do, tell them you're a writer. Hey, they won't laugh; they'll believe you. In fact, they'll probably ask what you write. If you still have job, mention it last, if at all. The more you call yourself a writer, the easier it gets.

And you'll begin believing it as well!

## **2. Start by Writing Something Fun**

Sometimes you'll get up and tell yourself that you don't feel like writing. What you probably mean is that you aren't ready to get started on your paid writing gigs. No problem; start by writing something fun!

I'd recommend that every new writer start a blog on something they enjoy. I have blogs on gardening and computers, two of my passions. I get up every Monday morning, go out to the garden, take some veggie photos and then usually write a blog post. This gets my creative juices flowing, and viola:

*I'm in the mood for words,  
simply because they're near me!  
Funny, but when they're near me,  
I'm in the mood for words.*

(Sorry about that; I'm an old song buff too.)

Sometimes, I'll get really sneaky. I pull up several documents that need written, and then I'll open up my browser in front of them. I write the blog post and when I close the browser the articles are there, waiting for me.

For new writers, there's an added benefit in having a blog. I post on one or the other of my blogs once a week. That comes out to 52 articles a year. If you don't have clips yet, use these posts. In fact, the back of my business card says this:

Take a break and visit these sites for some of Steve's writing samples.

The computer site and gardening site addresses are listed so the reader can go there and check out my writing.

## **3. Don Your Writer's Clothes**

Business coaches tell you to dress for success. This carries over into freelance writing as well. I enjoy working from home because I can work in my, uh, pajamas. That doesn't mean I should, though.

I have four nice shirts and a pair of penny loafers that constitute my writing wardrobe, along with a pair of nice jeans, of course. When I wear them, I'm magically transformed into Super Writer-Man. Try it yourself. Sounds corny, but it works.

(Cape not included.)

#### **4. Create a Place for Your Writing**

Create an office for your writing. It could be a spare room in your house, or as simple as a corner of the living room. Teach yourself, and your family, that when you're in your "office," it's writing time.

We converted our carport into offices several years ago. My office holds my computers, books and other writing paraphernalia. Mary's is a combination sewing/laundry room for her seamstress business. When I'm off to write, I let her know that I'm going to "the office."

Remember the part about visualization, speaking something into existence? Even if it's just a corner of a room, start calling it your office. Make it hallowed, sacred ground: "Creativity lives here."

Before long you'll have a real office, if you want it.

#### **5. Set a Time for Your Writing**

Having an established time (or times) for your writing helps, but keep some flexibility. In fact, you might find that you'll break up your schedule into movable blocks of writing time. You can't do that with a job, but you can with your writing.

My first block usually starts around 4:30 in the morning. I'm an early riser, so I write while the rest of the household is still asleep. Around 6:00, Mary wakes up and starts getting her child care brood. I take a break, eat a little breakfast, play with the kids, maybe take a shower and then get back to writing.

The rest of the day sometimes varies with the activities we have planned. If I'm in the zone, I might be researching and typing all day. Sometimes the evening works out better for writing. I've often taken my laptop out under the stars to our picnic table and written deep into the night. By the way, a fire-pit adds terrific ambience. I know; I'm a little weird.

That brings us to the last tip.

#### **6. Change Your Location to Change Your Mood**

Sometimes you can get out of a writing slump by changing your setting. Like I said, the picnic table in the yard is my outdoor office. However, I've traveled to other exotic locations as well: various McDonald's diners, the Village Inn restaurant across town and the Fayetteville Public Library.

All right, they all have free Internet access, but there are other reasons too.



A change of scenery often sparks creativity. Watching people going about their daily activities gives you a different perspective than sitting in your office all day. In fact, it just might give you some ideas for spec articles.

For example, we were traveling back home from Indiana last week and stopped at a diner in Missouri. I had my laptop out to check email and do some writing. A guy in the booth across from us had his computer out too. We chatted about computers, and soon I asked him if he was from around there.

It turns out that he's a professional griller, commissioned by a major food brand. He was on his way to cook for a charity event. Hmm, article idea there? Not only that, but it turned into an impromptu interview and I got the contact information for the company. People love to talk about themselves, so start asking questions!

Delicious; a burger with a side order of ideas!

Now, Get into the Write Mood!

Use these six tips to forever banish the writer's block ogre. You are a writer. You wouldn't be here if you weren't. I know you're a writer; you said so. Remember?

Now it's time for you to believe it too!

*Steve Maurer is a B2B copy and marketing content writer based in Fayetteville, Arkansas. His clients are from all over the globe: Australia, Ireland, Germany, The Netherlands, Canada and, of course, the United States. Visit him on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stevemaurercopywriting>. You can read his blog posts at <http://www.maurer-copywriting.com>.*

# Moneysaving tips you'll never read about in magazines

Author: diana

This week I bought three magazines at Borders I may be interested in pitching. Total cost? \$14.48. Ouch! To riff off Leona Helmsley, only fools pay newsstand prices, but I really needed these magazines, and I consoled myself that I'd be able to expense them on my taxes.

I don't think I've ever read any money-saving tips in articles about how to save major bucks buying magazines. We talked about it briefly in the Renegade Writer, but since then I've picked up some new tips. Let's break them into three categories: cheap, cheaper, cheapest.

## **Cheap:**

—Check your Sunday coupon supplements. Occasionally you'll find a cents-off coupon for magazines like Woman's Day and Family Circle. The coupon is usually for a certain issue, but other times, it's good for six weeks or so. If you want to buy a couple issues for market research, it may be worth raiding your mother-in-law's coupon caddy for extra coupons.

—Use cash register coupons. When I buy magazines at the grocery store, I frequently get a store coupon to use on my next purchase of a similar magazine. For example, I buy Fitness and get a coupon for 50 cents off my next Self.

—Send the magazine's SASC for a year-long subscription. You might as well get a whole year for what you'd pay for three newsstand issues.

—A bonus tip for the super thrifty: Check your subscription's start date. I've sent in subscription cards from a January issue, yet the publication will start my subscription effective with the December issue—occasionally November! Call the magazine and ask that they change your start date to the February issue—or even the March if you purchased February on the newsstand.

## **Cheaper:**

—Buy subscriptions off eBay. I've found some fantastic deals here. I got three years each of Parents, Parenting, and Child for \$9.78. A two-year sub to Reader's Digest for \$9.98. Yankee for \$8.00. You get the idea. I buy only from sellers/brokers who have excellent ratings, and I haven't run into problems yet.

—Mine your professional affiliations. I'm not a member of ASJA, but I hear they have an excellent magazine subscription program for member/writers. I get subscription offers from magazines because I teach at a local community college: for example, I just got an offer for a year's worth of The New Yorker for \$20 (or something like that).

—Use your frequent flier miles or rewards points to buy magazines. I've used American Express rewards points to buy dozens of magazines, and when some of my United Mileage Plus miles were about to expire, I traded them for subscriptions.

—Check out the following websites for cheap magazine subscriptions: MagazinePriceSearch.com, Discountmagazines.com, netmagazines.com, and amazon.com. Or Google "cheap magazine subscriptions"—you'll get thousands of hits.

### **Cheapest:**

—Read magazines online. More and more magazines are putting their content on the web. If you're simply reading these publications to figure out what kind of stories they like, or you're already familiar with their demographics (I like to look at the actual magazine when I'm doing market research), web-based reading costs you nothing but bandwidth.

—Steal them. Well, let me clarify that. Steal them from doctor's offices, your mother's coffee table, your brother's lad mag stash...that sort of stealing. Occasionally I'll see a magazine that I've never seen at the newsstand, so I turn on the charm and ask if I can borrow it. I've never been turned down.

—Read them at the library. This is what Linda does. My local library has subscriptions to at least 200 magazines. They don't even charge late fees if I'm late returning them!

—Log into a database. Back to the library—in Massachusetts, any resident with a library card has access to some amazing magazine databases, including Gale Group, InfoTrak, the Boston Globe, the New York Times, and more. While I still subscribe to dozens of magazines, I've been able to dump hundreds of back issues from my library. If I want to find out what Parenting has done on potty training recently, I can search InfoTrak.

Any other tips you have to save money on magazines?

# Clips 101: What They Are (and Aren't), How to Get Them, and How to Make The Most of Your Clips

Author: lindaformichelli

I hear it almost every day from the new writers I mentor and teach in my e-course:

- "I don't have any clips, so how can I break in?"
- "Does this article I wrote for a content mill count as a clip?"
- "My clips are old. Can I use them?"
- "Can't I just write an article and use that as a clip?"

So even though as one of the Renegade Writers I'm all about breaking rules, I wanted to help aspiring writers by explaining what a clip is—and what it is *not*—and how you should use it.

## **Use what you've got.**

While I'm about to tell you what kinds of pieces make the best clips, I want to preface that by saying you have to use what you've got. If all you have is a clip from a content mill, use it. If you haven't been published anywhere other than your blog, use that. If your only clips are 10 years old—you got it, use 'em.

I've been there. Heck, I got my first assignment—which paid \$500—using as a clip a book review I wrote for the academic journal *Language* on medieval dialectology. Anything (well, almost anything) is better than nothing.

## **Clips show more than your writing.**

While you *can* just write an article and use that as a clip, it's not as good as showing an editor something you've actually had published. Why? Because a published clip shows much more than your writing skills—it also shows an editor that you know how to write for publication, that you can write within an assigned word count, and that you can write under deadline.

Essentially, another editor has stamped a seal of approval on your work, making it easier for future editors to take a risk on you.

## **Don't bother writing for content mills just to get clips.**

Believe me, an editor will not take seriously a clip from a content mill. That's because there are no editorial gatekeepers...pretty much anyone can write for a content mill, so that fact that you've written for one doesn't indicate that you're a professional writer or that you understand the editorial process.

Again, if that's all you have, use it by all means. But don't think you need to slog through assignments at one cent per word to gain a clip. I'd rather see someone just write up an article and use that as a clip than do it for the benefit of some underpaying content mill.

### **You don't have to write for free to get a clip.**

Writing for free is a valid and time-honored way to score that first clip. But you don't *have* to. I've had students break into magazines like *SELF* and *Woman's Day* with no clips. And a multitude of other writers have landed assignments from smaller, but still paying, publications without clips.

And if you do have the hankering to write for free, just to get that first clip fast? Volunteer your writing for a cause you're passionate about. For example, though I didn't do it for the clips, I used to write newsletter articles for the SPCA gratis. I'm sure almost any non-profit will be happy to have you—and that way you won't be writing for free for a publication that will turn around and profit monetarily from your efforts.

### **Old clips are still clips.**

Your clip may be 15 years old, but it still counts as a clip. Chances are you haven't lost your writing and publishing skills in the intervening years. You can either come clean with the editor about why your clips are so old—they'll understand that people take time off for various reasons—or you can just send the clips and not mention the dates.

Heck, you can even take the dates off your clips if you're that worried about it. If you do that, though, be sure you're not writing about that new-fangled Internet thingy or making other references that date your writing.

### **You can use killed articles as clips.**

As long as the article wasn't killed because you botched it! One of the clips I use the most never saw the light of day because the magazine went under a month before my article was to run. When I send it to an editor, I let her know what happened with it and tell her that I'm sending the piece to her anyway because I'm so proud of it. I've gotten lots of nice comments about that article from editors.

### **Feel free to send your original text.**

Clips can be deceiving...I've heard horror stories from editors about writers who came to them with dozens of impressive clips—and then proved to be horrible at actually, well, writing. Turned out the clips were great because the writer's editors poured hours into fixing the writer's broken prose.

So I do something that a lot of writers wouldn't dream of: Instead of sending a PDF file of my article with its impressive layout and graphics, I often send editors the Word file of my original copy, with a line at the top letting the editor know where and when it was published.

I usually mention in the e-mail that I'm doing this so the editor can see what my writing is like *before* my editors do their magic on it. This allays any fears that my beautiful clip is more the work of an editor than my own writing skills.

**Don't attach clips to your query.**

Most editors will automatically trash any e-mail with an attachment they didn't ask for. Instead, just mention some of your publishing credits in the query and let the editor ask for clips if she wants them. *Then* you can send them as an attachment.

Agree? Disagree? Have any other clip rules you'd like to share? Please post in the Comments below! [If]

# Do You Know What to Do with an Article Idea Once You Have It?

Author: lindaformichelli

You get a press release for a company called SnackSpray that's coming out with a chocolate- flavored spray that has 1 calorie and can help dieters banish cravings. So what's your next move?

If you're like many writers, you turn around and pitch that idea to some editors of health and nutrition magazines.

But guess what? Editors got that same press release, as did scads of other writers who had the same idea you did.

Here's the trick: to come up with a salable idea, you need to put your own slant on it—something that an editor hasn't seen and that other writers haven't already thought of.

For example, here are some ideas you can spin off the SnackSpray release:

- A profile of SnackSpray's founder for her alumni magazine.
- An article on 10 surprising ways to bust cravings, for a health mag. (The SnackSpray would be one of the tips.)
- A roundup of gifts for the chocoholic in your life.
- A profile of the business for a local magazine in SnackSpray's region.
- A piece for a food industry trade magazine on hot trends in diet foods.
- An article for a food industry trade magazine on food sprays (you'd need to do some research to see if others companies are doing the same thing).
- A roundup or slideshow of the wackiest food products to come out this year, for a general interest magazine or website.

That's 7 ideas from one, and I'm sure there are many more possibilities.

How can you generate many salable ideas from a single one?

- Offer a roundup of similar products/services/people/etc.
- Localize the idea.
- Think about trade magazine possibilities for an idea that's originally aimed at the consumer market.
- Talk to the person behind the idea and dig up more information you can turn into articles.
- Ask the source where he went to college and pitch his alma mater's alumni magazine.

- Consider surprising markets—like a business magazine for a health-related idea, and vice versa.
- Do some research to figure out if this idea points to a trend you can write about.

You don't have to take ideas at face value. Spend some time brainstorming ways to make a simple idea interesting and unique, and you're more likely to land an assignment.

Do you have any insights on ideas you could spin off the SnackSpray release? Let us know in the comments below!



# 8 Ways to Land New Writing Assignments (Not Just Queries!)

Author: lindaformichelli

I get a lot of assignments—I have to, as I'm the main breadwinner for my family! Since 1997, I've written for more than 130 magazines (the vast majority of them multiple times) and close to 30 corporate clients.

Writers often write to me asking why they aren't getting assignments, and I know they expect me to say, "Oh, if you just did *this* in your query letters, the assignments would come rolling in."

Yes: Query letters are important, and you want yours to be great. But they're hardly the only marketing tactic that should be in the freelance writer's toolbox. I think that where many writers go wrong is they limit their marketing to just one or two types.

Here are the various tactics I've used to get work:

## **Direct Mail**

Guess how I landed clients ranging from Bay State Gas to Pizzeria Uno to Cheshire Medical Center? Through good old-fashioned direct mail. I send a sales letter, and interested prospects e-mail, call, or mail back my reply card. A direct mail packet is something that a potential client can keep in her files for when she needs a writer—as opposed to an e-mail, which is all too easy to delete. Recently, I got an assignment from a prospect who held on to my packet for more than two years.

***How you can do it:*** Interested in trying copywriting yourself—and in doing a direct mail campaign? I recently wrote a guest post for Copyblogger on how I do it.

## **Twitter**

A few months ago, I got a Twitter follow notice from a regional hospital. I sent a direct message saying, "Hey, I'm a freelance writer who writes on health topics. Do you need any help?" The hospital's Twitter person sent my note along to their marketing person, who asked me for clips. We then had a phone call, and I'm on line to do some web writing work for this hospital.

In the meantime, the marketing person sent my name along to the hospital system's web guru, who in turn passed it along to the marketing manager at one of their sister hospitals in Virginia. The marketing manager called me, and I landed an assignment worth \$3,000.

***How you can do it:*** Keep an eye on your follow notices so you'll know if someone in a field you write for starts following you on Twitter, and be proactive by following potential clients as well. Send prospects a quick DM letting them know who you are and asking if you can help them. And be sure to keep your Twitter stream clean and professional. I occasionally post about my toddler, but most of my tweets are business-related—no posts about bodily functions or drunken antics.

## **Referrals**

The hospital gig (which came in a roundabout way through Twitter) isn't the only work I've gotten via referrals. One editor of a custom published magazine loved my work, and shared my info with other editors in the group. I've now written for four magazines at this company. This has happened at more than one custom publication!

***How you can do it:*** Do kick-ass work for all your clients. Act like a professional, get your work in on time, and write great articles. Oh, and after you've gotten to know an editor, ask her to introduce you to other editors in the group.

## **The Blog**

This blog was voted one of the Top 10 Blogs for Writers by Write to Done. The list of the winning blogs was picked up by Copyblogger, the owner of a consulting company in Chicago saw it, he checked out the Renegade Writer blog, and he then hired me to write for his company's blog.

***How you can do it:*** A good blog shows prospective clients what you can do. If you do blog, make a commitment to update it regularly with valuable content. Pick a frequency that you're sure you can stick with, and keep it up. For example, I aim to post on this blog a minimum of twice a week, and the stats show that I actually update it an average of 2.7 times weekly. Want to learn more about blogging? Problogger is a huge site full of great information on the topic.

## **Phone Calls**

A couple of years ago, I was at a friend's house and I noticed that he had a copy of a magazine called Choice Health. I asked him about it and he said that his health insurance company sent it to him. The masthead didn't list the editor's e-mail address, but it did have her phone number. So I called and left a voicemail telling the editor what I do and asking her if she hired freelancers. The editor sent me an e-mail asking for clips, which I sent.

Five months went by, and I forgot all about the magazine. Then, suddenly, the editor e-mailed with an assignment—at \$1 per word. I ended up writing a few articles for her before the magazine ceased publication. It was a great gig.

***How you can do it:*** You may have trouble reaching an editor at a big newsstand magazine by phone, but it's not as hard with local, trade, and custom pubs. If you're shy, call after hours and leave a voicemail. Have a short elevator speech ready about who you are. For example, in my voicemail I said, "Hi, Julie. I'm a freelance writer who has written on health topics for magazines like Health, Women's Health, and Redbook. I saw your magazine and was wondering if you assign articles to freelance writers, and if so, if I might send you some clips. You can call me at X or e-mail me at Y. Thank so much, and I look forward to hearing from you!"

## **Magazines**

I wrote for Cleveland Clinic Magazine until they stopped publication recently. Last year, I got an e-mail from the editor of a medical school's magazine. She saw an article I wrote in Cleveland Clinic magazine, liked it, and was wondering if I could write an article for \$1,700. Heck yes!

***How you can do it:*** This is yet another reason to kick ass on your assignments. Editors and potential clients are probably among your readers, and this is the case even with magazines that aren't on the newsstands.

## **Letters of Introduction**

I've broken into more than two dozen trade magazines and at least 10 custom publications by sending well-crafted letters of introduction.

***How you can do it:*** Write up a basic letter of intro and tweak it for each magazine. I often read through the magazine's online archives and point out an article I especially liked. Then I ask if the editor assigns articles to freelance writers, and launch into my credentials. Finally, I ask the editor if I can send her some clips. I think this question gives the editor an easy way to say Yes without having to commit to anything big.

## **Query Letters**

And then there are queries—of course! Last June I wrote a post called Are Queries Dead? The conclusion: No, they are not. Queries are an important tool for every magazine writer.

***How you can do it:*** How to write a query is a huge topic. In short, you need to convince the editor that your idea is perfect for her magazine and that you're just the right writer to write it. Read the Query That Rocked posts on this blog, and sign up for my e-mail list to receive a free packet of 10 queries that landed assignments. And of course, I teach an 8-week e-course called Write for Magazines (next session starts on March 7) that shows writers how to write a killer query.

So as you can see, queries are only one of eight ways I've gotten new assignments. Don't rely on just one marketing tactic—keep your eyes open for new opportunities everywhere.

# Baby, Work That Clip!

Author: diana

This week one of my former students let me know that a story idea she'd generated and worked on in my story idea workshop this fall ran in last Sunday's New York Times and was generating a ton of reader response. (Woo-hoo! She's the third student of mine to land an assignment with the Times. My students ROCK. But I digress.) Anyway, we were e-mailing back and forth about dealing with polarizing reader response, and then she asked me, "Is there anything I should do with this story at this point?" Good question!

Whether you're a new writer who's staring at her first feature in a newsstand publication or a jaded professional who's finally hit a career high with a 2,500-word feature in Esquire, beyond sending the clip with new story pitches there's the question of "What else can I do with this shiny piece of paper I hold in my hands?"

I've given the question a lot of thought while wearing my jet-powered marketing/self-promotion hat; here are some of my ideas about how writers can work their clips more effectively.

## **1. Send a link to the published story to editors who rejected your idea.**

Before you jab your burning torches and sharpened pitchforks at me, hear me out. You have to be thoughtful about this. If you're sending the link to editors just to rub it in their faces—"Nah, nah, look what the NYT bought, you dumb-ass idiots—next time, be on the ball, okay?"—that's not so cool and these editors will be thrilled they rejected your idea...thrilled!

Tone is everything. If your motive is to get more work with the editors who rejected your idea, send them a new idea, then say something like, "Remember the story I pitched to you last summer about the snake hunters in Florida's Everglades? X Magazine finally bought it and it ran last month. Here's a link; I thought you'd like to see how it turned out." This can be especially effective if the editor liked the idea, but it was nixed at a story meeting.

Even if he didn't seem to love your idea, send him the link anyway. Your clip shows persistence—you believed in your idea and you continued to market it—and it gives him a little glimpse of how you turned your initial idea into a full-fledged story. It also shows you can toot your horn professionally with no hard feelings. Everyone wins.

## **2. Send the link to editors you work with regularly.**

I aim to develop collegial relationships with my editors, so I occasionally do this with clips I'm exceptionally proud of. When I wrote a piece about British cookbooks for The

Atlantic's food blog, I sent the link to a couple food editors I worked with; one had no idea I was such an Anglophile and she assigned me a piece about British food, and another editor added the clip to my resume package, which eventually landed me a lucrative short-term writing project.

I know two other writers who send out quarterly e-mails to editors that include links to recent clips. This is a brilliant idea, one that an established freelancer can steal for her marketing arsenal.

### **3. Tweet 'em/Facebook 'em. And ask your friends to retweet/repost.**

I know a lot of writers are iffy about Twitter and wonder who the heck would be interested in their 140-character blurps about their morning coffee. Forget tweeting the cuppa Joe—tweet links to your clips and add relevant #hashtags to get other people to notice your story and retweet. Same thing with Facebook; post a link, write a little about why you're happy with the story, and see what happens. The key is to get as many eyeballs reading your article—and with luck, some of those eyeballs will belong to people who hire awesome writers.

### **4. Alert the media!**

A friend of mine wrote a thinky-piece for Reason that producers at NPR happened to read, and the next thing she knew, she was on a public television news program (or the radio, I forget) to talk about her research. She wasn't paid for the NPR appearance, but it was certainly something worth crowing about in her credentials. And less impressive, but last year when I blogged about Sarah Ferguson and her latest scandal involving the British royal family, I got calls from the British media, including the BBC, to talk via satellite about Americans' perception of Ferguson.

OK, great, you're thinking—these media outlets came to you guys. But there's no law that says you can't reach out to the media. If you've written a story that's controversial, timely, and/or challenges commonly held beliefs, start by calling the story desks of local news stations.

Here's an example: you just wrote a feature for Parents about a grade-schooler who was bullied and successfully sued her school system. The week your story comes out, you notice a story about one school system's flawed anti-bullying stance. Call your local news station and tell them who you are and what you've written and offer to speak to them on air if they're doing a story on this. Even if they weren't planning on covering the story, knowing that there's an expert (that's YOU) they can call upon may make them think, "Hmm, maybe we SHOULD do a story on this."

**5. And of course, add links to the clip on your website, blog about it (if you have a blog), and make copies to send to editors who want to see hard copies.**

Because if I don't mention all this, some Sherlock will point it out.

Any other ideas about how to work a clip? Add your comments below.

# 4 Things You Should Stop Doing Right Now

Author: lindaformichelli

We writing bloggers are always telling you what to do: Study your markets. Build relationships with editors. Market, market, market.

But it can be even more important to talk about what *not* to do—and how to subtract career-damaging attitudes and practices from your life.

## **Stop doing this: Over-analyzing.**

I recently had a mentoring client who wondered why an editor had rewritten her piece. Was the article that bad? Was the tone not right? The editor asked her to interview one source, but should she have included two just in case?

From the book *Women Who Think Too Much*, I learned that women especially tend to try to think their way out of situations, which in reality just keeps them mired in the muck of their overactive minds.

Instead of getting stuck in analysis paralysis, take action: Pick up the phone and call the editor to find out why she rewrote your piece, asked you to do something in a certain way you don't understand, or made a comment you're just not getting. It's the only way to find out the truth of the situation.

## **Stop doing this: Sending LOIs to national publications.**

Yes, I extol the virtues of the Letter of Introduction (LOI). They're great for breaking into trade and custom magazines.

But sadly, they're not so great at getting your foot in the door at *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire*, *Psychology Today*, *Parenting*, or the rest of the glossy consumer magazines—unless you're über famous.

These publications have hundreds of writers contacting them each week with well thought-out pitches, so if all you have to offer is "Here I am, don't I rock?" then you're going to look shabby next to the writers who approach the editors with stellar queries.

Not sure how to write a query letter? The next session of my 8-week Write for Magazines e-course starts in September 3, 2012, and the Basic version is Pay What You Want with a minimum payment of just \$30. And...join my mailing list to get a free packet of 10 queries that rocked.



### **Stop doing this: Complaining about the writing business.**

These days, editors who aren't interested in your idea often don't respond, even to send a rejection. Content mills pay pennies per word, if that. Some magazines are using citizen (read: free) journalists and bloggers to write their articles. Magazines are going under.

Suck it up.

Smart writers are using these difficult times to their advantage, riding the wave of exciting changes to build their bank accounts.

For example, I make a lot of my living mentoring and teaching writers who are sick of the content mills how to break out of that box and make a living freelancing. I also have mostly stopped pitching newsstand magazines and make most of my writing income from trade and custom publications.

Other writers are finding ways to earn income through their blogs by selling e-books and other products, finding underserved niches for their copywriting, and offering clients new media consulting and services.

The writers I hear complaining the most about the state of writing are the ones who are stuck in the past, mourning the way things used to be.

Ditch the negative and embrace the exhilarating changes that are taking place all around you in this industry.

### **Stop doing this: Apologizing for being a writer.**

When someone asks what you do, do you tell them you're a writer and then offer a caveat like "But I've never been published," or "I'm doing it on the side while I work an unfulfilling day job"—or even no description or embellishment at all?

I just read Danielle LaPorte's great new book *The Fire Starter Sessions: A Soulful + Practical Guide to Creating Success on Your Own Terms*, and she talks about the importance of coming up with a cocktail line that stresses exactly what you do in the world.

For example, until I read this book, when people asked what I did for a living I'd say "I'm a writer," cringing, and hope that the other person asked me what kind of writing I do or who I write for so I'd have the chance to prove that I'm an actual professional writer and not what she probably thinks: I work at the 7-11 while working on the fifth novel I'll never send to publishers.

Now I say: "I write books and magazine articles, teach aspiring writers how to break into the business, and homeschool my 3-year-old son."

Loud and proud, baby. How about you?

*What else should writers all stop doing right this instant? Post your ideas in the Comments below!*

# Big Family, Big Income, Great Career: How to Have It All (An interview with Laura Vanderkam)

Author: lindaformichelli

I'm a big fan of Laura Vanderkam's books, so I was excited to get an advance copy of *I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Make the Most of Their Time* (which is now available!), and especially to get a chance to interview Laura for The Renegade Writer.

In *I Know How She Does It*, Laura interviewed and analyzed the time logs of over 140 women who have kids and earn at least 6 figures—women many consider as "having it all"—to offer advice on how we can fit a full, fun, busy life with work and kids into 168 hours per week. This is especially relevant to aspiring freelance writers who may have kids and a day job, and who are having trouble fitting writing and business-building in among all their other obligations.

By the way, if you'd like to keep your own time log, you can sign up for one free here.

## **Can you talk a bit about how you view the hours in our lives as a mosaic?**

**Laura:** Many people look at their time log and just see these cells on a grid. I said, well, let's change that. Let's view it as a mosaic—and you are the artist, you are the mosaic maker, designing what your hours are going to look like and moving things around to

I think this mosaic image is also profound because we have a tendency to tell our lives in stories and to construct memories as stories—and probably your Renegade Writer readers do that, especially because we are storytellers. And the format of a story tends to be: Here are three points of evidence that lead us to an epiphany that we must make some change.

With life it is very easy to fall into the trap of thinking: These stressful things happened—I had this horrible day at work, this bad night of sleep, this issue with my kid. Therefore, life is crazy and unsustainable and I must change.

**But what if you view life more as a mosaic and say, well, we had those three stressful moments, but we had all these other moments too?** Those moments count as well. We can choose to see those three stressful moments as this evidence leading toward our epiphany or we can say, well, life is stressful AND life is wonderful. There really is no contradiction here. We don't have to construct a story out of it. We can simply view of the whole mosaic for what it is. So that's why I like that image.

## **Can we talk about the 24-hour trap and how writers can avoid it?**

**Laura:** The 24-hour trap is that we have a tendency to think that things need to happen daily in order to count in our lives.

Obviously, it is good to have daily habits—and when we want to add something into our lives, we first ask ourselves, where can I put this into my life every day? **The problem is that if you have a busy life, often you can't put something in at the same time every day—but that does not mean it can't happen.**

I see this especially with things like exercise. Many people will say, "Laura, I'd love to exercise, but I am just not the kind of person who can leave for an hour at lunch every day" or "I want to get home and see my kids so I can't go to the gym after work every day" or "I recognize mornings might be a great time to exercise, but I just can't stomach the thought of setting my alarm for 5:30 every day."

And it's like, "Okay, well, don't set your alarm for 5:30 every day." Here's an idea: Maybe one day a week you could get up half an hour early and do something; maybe one night a week you and your partner trade off who has the kids and you can go exercise during that time; maybe you do something on weekend mornings before the family has gotten up; and maybe you run around the track by your kid's soccer game on Sunday. Then you've already fit in four exercise stints per week.

That was not daily, but four times a week is pretty good.

I think the 24 hour trap keeps us from seeing the whole picture. If you look at the whole 168 hours of the week, often things will fit. You can't hold to everything fitting into 24 hours.

**And I think writers especially fall into that trap because they think, "I need a special writing time every single day." But even if you got it in three times a week, that's better than nothing.**

**Laura:** Yeah, and the problem especially is when people don't do it because they can't do it daily. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Sometimes it's really easy to hold onto these stories we tell ourselves, like "I have a full-time job and a family, and therefore I can't write." Instead you could say, "Okay, I can't write for three hours daily, but I could wake up early twice during the week and do it then, or I could stop watching one television show and just get something down on paper, and maybe I'll be so inspired by what I'm doing that I'll keep going."

We have a tendency not to try those things because then we have to actually confront what we are doing and what we are not, and we have to look at our output and judge it—and often it is just easier not to do it and tell ourselves the story that it is impossible.

**I notice that you often recommend outsourcing so that you have more time to do the things that are more important to you—but how can writers do this, especially if they are new and aren't making a lot of money, and they can't afford to hire much help? Do you have any tips for them? Maybe they need to just relax their standards?**

**Laura:** Yes. When you don't think something is the best use of your time, you have three options: You can ignore it, you can minimize it, or you can outsource it.

And obviously the outsourcing part costs money, but it does not cost anything to lower your standards—so that is a first line of offense if you are trying to make more time in your life.

I was just reading a comment on somebody else's blog from this woman who was all excited about how she would get the kids into bed at night, and then do three hours of housework. I think she wanted everyone to think about how diligent she was or some such. I don't know what point she was trying to make, but my first thought was "Why on earth are you doing that? Why does it require three hours at night to do all this? If you really feel the need to clean, set a timer for half an hour and then be done with it—and if it did not happen, it did not happen."

So that's certainly an option for people: **Just let it go.** Borrow that theme song from Frozen and let it go. It really does not matter. You will never get that time back, so use it first for the things that are important to you and let other things fill in around the edges.

**There are a lot of writers who think, "I have kids at home, so I can do freelance writing from home and it will all work out." And then they realize it does not work out because the kid isn't napping on their schedule, or they need things while you're on an interview. So I was wondering what are some of the creative ways that women you interviewed handle childcare.**

**Laura:** Well, this is the thing: There are very few good ways to meet the needs of a client and a baby simultaneously. And, yes, there is inevitably the day you have a phone call with your biggest client at 1:30 p.m. that your child who naps religiously at 1:00 p.m. elects not to.

**The only real way around this is to have childcare when you need it.** When you're doing something that you cannot do with kids' noise or kids' distractions, then you need somebody else to be responsible so you can focus on your work.

And there are many ways you can pull that off that might not be as expensive as hiring full-time childcare. For example, you can be efficient about pushing phone calls into a certain set of hours per day and have childcare for those hours, and then maybe do some more of the writing work after the kids go to bed. Or you could do the writing work when your partner can be with the kids, for instance, if you have a partner.

That's a way you could pull it off without needing to pay for 40 hours of childcare. But it is very difficult to work without childcare. I had one woman in my study who was managing to run a small business without much childcare. But the way she was trading that off was by sleeping less, and it seemed to work for her because she did not need much sleep. But if you are not the kind of person who can function on six hours of sleep, and most of us aren't, then you're going to have to come up with something else.

**A lot of writers think they are at the mercy of the client's schedule. But what I realized is that if you actually tell people when you are available and suggest times, you can get them all into the one block of time where you have childcare.**

**Laura:** Yes. Be very strategic about that and plan to have a few hours where you really attempt to push calls. I try to save mornings for writing and then do phone calls in either the late morning or the afternoon when I'm ready to interact with the world. You can express preferences. Sometimes you're interviewing an A-list celebrity, and you're going to have to do it when she needs to do it. But in other cases, people may have a bit more flexibility.

**And people are actually happy for you to suggest a time. "Are you available at 10:00 or 10:30? If not, let me know." They like not having to think about all the options.**

**Laura:** Yes, it is actually not that helpful to send an e-mail to someone saying, "Can we do an interview in the next week?" Because then they're looking at their whole schedule, and inevitably the first thing they suggest is not going to work for you. So it helps to just throw a few free times out there. If none of those work, then you can go from there, but the odds of at least one of those three working are decent.

**You're a successful writer—what are some of the things you think new freelance writers can drop to make time for what's important? What are they doing that makes them feel productive that they don't really need to be doing?**

**Laura:** Well, the way I approach this question is that it's not so much about dropping things. It's about making sure that you first put in time in your life for the things that you need to be doing.

If you're building a business there are certain things that are important for you to do. You need to have some of your work out there, so building your web site with examples of your work is a top priority. You need to be reaching out to potential clients. That is a top priority. You have actual assignments you need to get done. Those are top priorities.

**Do those things first and then this magical thing happens where the other stuff that you don't actually need to be doing starts taking less time.** For example, generally people spend more time in their inboxes than they need to because they're checking it too frequently, and they're just working from the top down. Whatever happens to be on the

top of your inbox is not necessarily your top work priority, so probably it does not need to be the first thing you tackle when you start approaching work.

But the beautiful thing about filling your time first with the things that you need to be doing is that then you figure out for yourself the other things that can give, and they will naturally give because there are only 24 hours in a day—so try that first.

**What's the most surprising thing you learned about balancing work, family, and everything else when you were analyzing these women's time logs?**

**Laura:** I think one of the best approaches—and I'm not saying this is done consciously, I think it was more just because these people had fuller lives—is that they did not watch as much TV as the average American.

It's not that people didn't watch *any* TV. There was certainly a reasonable amount of TV on logs, but the average per week was about 4.4 hours—if you think about it that's like watching a handful of sitcoms and two or three longer shows, so it's really not nothing. Four and a half hours a week is more than a half hour a day, so TV can be in your life—but it's not 20 hours a week, it's not 30 hours a week, which are some numbers that have come out of surveys of American life.

So I think that is an instructive difference because the women in my study were working longer hours than the average American works. They were spending time with their families, they were exercising for the most part, they were getting enough sleep. What had to give? Well, it was not really anything of that much importance. That, in and of itself, is a great way to balance your life in the sense of actually making time for things that matter.

**You don't have to cut TV out of your life, but make sure that you're watching the shows that matter the most to you**, the ones that really get you excited, that you're taping, that you want to talk about with your friends. That's great, it's a fun thing to do, it's a great way to blow off steam—but don't just turn it on and leave it on. Don't automatically turn the TV on after the kids go to bed and see what's on. If you and your partner want to hang out, there are other things you can do than sit on the couch watching TV. There are other things that are *much more exciting*, for instance, than sitting on the couch watching TV that you can do together, so don't automatically think TV first.

**What's the one piece of advice you picked up from your research that you think would resonate most with freelance writers who have kids and possibly a day job?**

**Laura:** Daily rituals are great. There has been a lot written lately about the daily rituals of artists and how they make time to write or do whatever they do.

And again, that's great if it works, but it doesn't always work—and so what you need to do is look at your whole calendar and say, "Here are some blocks I have for writing. I am going to make sure those work one way or the other. If it's asking my partner to take the

kids for a certain amount of time. If it's choosing to come into work half an hour late because I have that flexibility. If it's that I just go sit in your car with my laptop during lunch once a week and write during that time."

Do whatever it takes, but make sure that those blocks are in there—look at the whole of the week because probably you will be able to find the time.

The numbers I use for people is if you are working 40 hours a week and you're sleeping eight hours a night for 56 hours a week, that leaves 72 hours for other things. 72 hours is a lot of time. **You definitely have time to hang out with your family, to exercise, and to maybe spend 15 hours a week launching your business.**

*Laura's book [I Know How She Does It : How Successful Women Make the Most of Their Time](#) was just released...here's where you can check it out!*



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