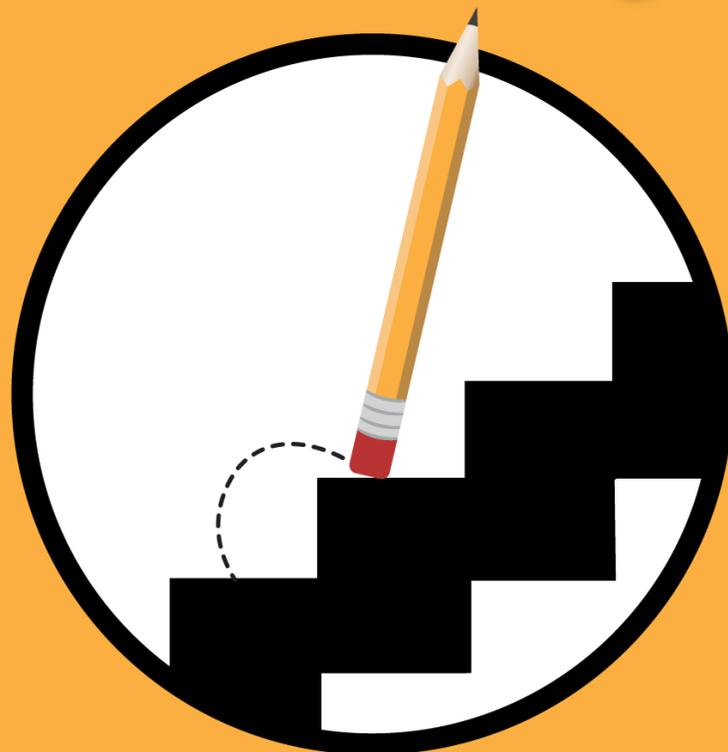




The
Step-by-Step Guide
to
Freelance Writing
SUCCESS

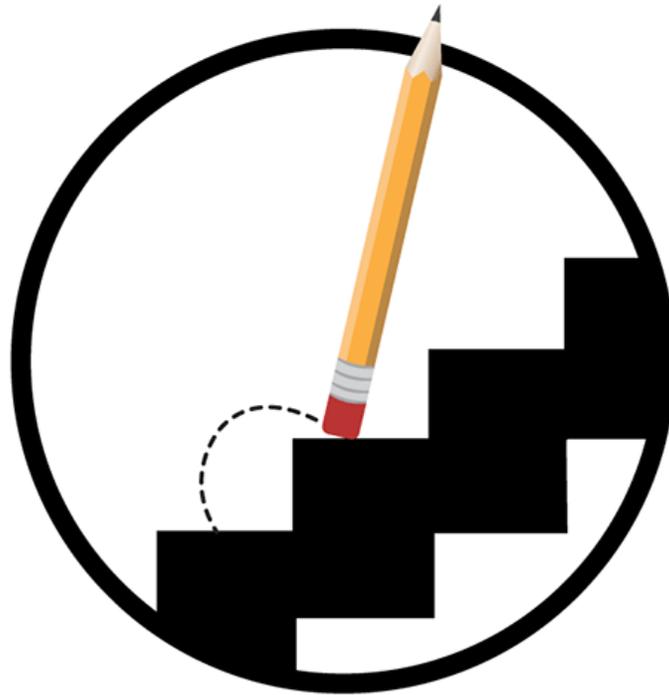
How to break in
and start earning fast



By Carol Tice & Laura Spencer

The Step-by-Step Guide to Freelance Writing Success

**How to Break In and Start Earning
– Fast!**



By Carol Tice and Laura Spencer

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Why Did We Create This E-Book?

I see a lot of questions about how to get started as a new freelance writer from members of my [Freelance Writer's Den](#) community.

“I can't get a writing gig without experience, and can't get experience without clips — so I can't see how to get started!”

“I'm stuck earning peanuts. How can I find legit writing assignments that pay real money? Do they even exist?”

“I just wish I could find a pro who'll walk me through how to break in and start building my portfolio!”

To answer these questions, I got together with pro freelance writer Laura Spencer for a series of five one-hour presentations about what it takes to land great-paying freelance writing gigs — not the \$5 kind, but the ones that pay \$1 a word, \$100 an hour, and more.

In this e-book, you get to “listen in” on those conversations. Members of my [Freelance Writers Den](#) writers' support community got to hear these chats live. They asked some great follow-up questions, so we've included those Q&A sessions at the end of most chapters.

We hope this guide helps you grow your writing income!

—Carol Tice

Meet the Authors

Carol Tice



I'm Carol Tice. I've been a full-time freelance writer since 2005. I was a staff writer for 12 years before that, and freelanced for several years at the beginning of my career, too. I've earned more every year since I returned to freelancing in '05, straight through the downturn, hitting six figures in 2011.

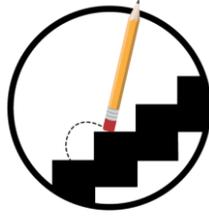
I write the award-winning [Make a Living Writing](#) blog, and founded the writer support community [Freelance Writer's Den](#). Besides my own blog, I've guest-posted for Copyblogger, Problogger, LifeHack, Write to Done, and many more. Paid writing clients include *Entrepreneur*, *Forbes*, *Alaska Airlines* magazine, American Express, Dun & Bradstreet, Lending Tree, and many small businesses.

Laura Spencer



I'm Laura Spencer. I've been a professional writer for over 20 years. I've managed my own freelance writing business since 2002. Before becoming a freelancer I was a corporate technical writer for over 12 years. My current writing specialties include: blogging, business writing, copywriting, and web content.

You'll find my blog at WritingThoughts.com. In addition to the ghostwriting and copywriting I do for my business clients, my writing has been published on blogs such as DesignM.ag, Everything PR, Freelance Folder, LifeHacker, MenwithPens, Vandelay Design Blog, and many more.



Chapter 6: How to Avoid the 12 Biggest Mistakes of New Freelance Writers – and Earn Big

CAROL: There are a lot of common mistakes we see new freelance writers make. We're going to explain how you can avoid them, so you can move forward faster and start earning more sooner.

Laura and I spent years making mistakes and figuring things out the slow way. We're hoping to spare you some of that with these tips.

1. Getting stuck in self-doubt

Do you think you can't ever measure up to the big, successful, established writers already out there? I hear this kind of negativity all the time:

"Oh, there's no point in starting a blog now. It's too late."

"What's the point of trying to write an article when there are so many writers who are better than me?"

But the fact is, there are tons of small businesses and smaller magazines and newspapers that have no hope of hiring someone like me. They cannot afford me, and they need you. There are so many opportunities!

What's more, you bring something completely unique to the writing marketplace — your own, one-of-a-kind self and your life experiences. Somewhere out there are markets that are a perfect fit for both who you are and where you are in your career, no matter how many other writers are out there, or how advanced their careers are.

Instead of measuring yourself by others' careers, focus on your own self-improvement. This has been my whole philosophy, all the way through my writing career. Don't worry

about what other people are doing. Just keep getting better at what you're doing, and this is going to work out for you.

2. Allowing rejection to crush you

LAURA: There's nothing more potentially devastating to a new writer than rejection. We've all had this happen. You work hard on a query, or craft a response to an ad, or answer an email, and you know beyond a doubt that you're a great fit for this gig. You know you can do it. Then you get that rejection letter. What a disappointment. You crumble.

For many would-be writers, this is exactly where their writing career ends. They let that rejection crush them. They get a few of those rejection letters, and they figure those rejections mean they don't have what it takes to be a professional writer.

What those writers don't know is that the writers who succeed receive rejection letters also. The difference is, writers who succeed don't let rejections keep them from writing.

Even after years and years of being paid for my writing work, there are still times when I don't get the gig. Yes, it still bothers me. I mean, who wouldn't be bothered by that?

How do you overcome this? Instead of letting rejection crush you, be strengthened by rejection.

Rejection is a normal part of the writing process. Remind yourself of this fact every single time you receive a rejection. It's normal to feel disappointed.

But you can totally change your attitude about rejection and turn it into a learning opportunity. One of the things I like to do is read some positivity blogs to help me keep the right perspective, such as Gretchen Rubin's [The Happiness Project](#), and Henrik Edberg's [The Positivity Blog](#).

Of course, you probably have your own resources to help you fight negativity. But I find myself visiting these blogs, either or both of them, about every week. Not every single week but almost once a week.

CAROL: I have [holistic coach Linda Gabriel](#) on my Facebook. She does a micro-gratitude day once a week. I find that uplifting.

Just one final thing on dealing with rejection. I wrote a blog post about what to do after [you get fired from a freelance writing gig](#) when you totally blow it. I had a couple of experiences with that. Like Laura said, it happens to good writers. You screw up, the

editor is crazy, or whatever. Something goes wrong, but you can't let that derail you in any way.

Remember Stephen King and his big spike that held all his rejection letters. He wasn't disheartened by them. Instead, he looked for those little crumbs of encouragement, where sometimes the editor would say, "Good but not for us. Try us again." Those kinds of things. And then he would cling to those for dear life, instead of dwelling on the rejections. That's a good philosophy.

3. Not creating a writer website

I hear from new writers: "I don't have any clips. What's the point of having a website?"

The thing is, without one, it's like you're invisible. You don't come off in a professional way when you have no Internet home to send people, where they can get to know you as a writer. There are quite a few [low-cost ways to get a site up](#). I'd like to challenge everybody to get something up this week. You can see several suggestions on free or low-cost ways to get a site up quickly in Chapter 3.

Obviously, in the ideal, we'd like you to buy a URL that's either your name or some snappy branding about writing like the [Word Chef](#), Tea Silvestre's site, or something cool like that. Get it self-hosted for \$40 a year. But learning to create your own site can take time.

In general, create it now, add clips later, and make it better as you go. Writers get way too obsessed on how perfect it is. New writers often ask me, "When did you consider your writer's site done?"

To which I always reply, "What makes you think I'm happy with it now?" Because I'm not. Having a website is always a constant improvement process. So, just get it up and improve from there, is the philosophy you want to have.

4. Wasting time deciding on a niche

I'm always getting questions about this.

"How do I figure out what my niche is?"

"How can I find out what is the best-earning niche?"

The process where you sit around in a vacuum trying to figure this out is the biggest waste of time that freelance writers can indulge in, in my opinion. The fact is, the marketplace is going to tell you what your writing niche is.

You can sit in your ivory tower and think, “I like food. I want to write about food.” Then you might go into the marketplace and find no one will pay you to write about food.

Don’t have this academic conversation with yourself after researching niches: “Oh, I think business writing is good-paying,” or, “I want to write about healthcare.”

Instead, get a lot of different types of gigs, of every type you think you’re interested in.

Then, when you’ve done those gigs, you’ll see whether or not you like that type of work, whether you say, “Wow, that was really fun!”

At some point, you’ll go, “Gee, I have several types of writing I like... and some of these are paying better than others.” If you want more money, you’ll go in that better-paying direction. That’ll be your priority. And you’ll do more of that kind of thinking.

I started out covering communities and protests for alternative papers. Then I got this funny staff-writing job writing about retailing that paid really well. At first, I thought, “This is crazy. How am I going to find this interesting? This is business. That’ll be so boring.”

But I was fascinated. I loved it. And I never looked back.

I kept developing more subspecialties within business, covering different industries. The marketplace told me where the opportunity was. That will happen to you, as well.

You might have a good theory on what will be good niches for you, based on your life experiences and your interests. But you need to do a lot of writing. Everyone’s writing journey is different and unique, because it’s tied to who you are. Technology might be a great niche, but you might be that one person who can’t get anybody to pay you decently to write about it.

So, you have to market-test it, find where the universe responds to you with better pay and with work you enjoy. It’s more “get out there and do it,” rather than figuring out in a vacuum which niche is right for you.

5. Failing to use contacts you already have

LAURA: When I started out, I was so unsure of myself that I didn’t tell anybody what I was doing for a living. I’m not alone. If you ask a lot of freelance writers the question, “Do your friends and family know what you do for a living,” they would say no.

I can remember at a family gathering asking one of my younger relatives what I did. She said, “Oh, you do something on the computer.” Well, folks, that’s not really good enough.

Most new freelancers are uncomfortable with their new role, so they don’t tell anybody. They don’t tell their friends and their family what they’re doing. They might think they’re unimportant, that these contacts won’t help them. But the truth is, they will.

It’s true they might not understand at first that you’re really working when you’re at home. But it’s still important to let them know about your freelance writing business.

There are a number of ways they can help you. Some of your friends and family might actually own a business that could use your skills. You might eventually get the opportunity to demonstrate how you can help them. But even if you don’t, you never know who people know.

Your Aunt Sally, your Uncle Bill — they may know someone who owns a business that could use your skills. They may get to talking one day, and they might talk about you. It’s a good idea to let people know what you do. They may meet someone who could use a writer.

You might be able to use their friend as a source in an article you’re writing.

Also, you want to get in touch with former teachers. Teachers work hard to make sure their students are successful. And yet, in return, they receive little feedback about what actually happens to their students once they graduate.

Most teachers I know, they’re in a helping profession. They’re thrilled to hear from past students. Many of them are willing to help you out if they can. So, teachers are another contact.

Former colleagues also – people you worked for in the past who know you do a good job, and know how hard you work. All of these should be the start of your network.

CAROL: I’ll give everybody a tip. One of the first questions I ask people in [my one-on-one coaching](#) is, “Are you connected on LinkedIn with every editor, teacher, marketing manager, and writer that you know, whom you’ve written for in the past, or met in the past?” And the answer is always “no.”

I consider it the number one, low-hanging fruit, easy way to get freelance writing gigs. Go look all those people up and connect with them, and say:

“I see you’re at X place now. Me? I’m freelance writing. I’d love to have a Skype call with you sometime, and catch up. Just let me know if you know anyone who’s looking for a writer who does [white papers, blog posts, etc]. I’m looking for a couple new clients right now.”

I did that with one editor I had written for. Actually, he was the editor at my first full-time gig covering business. Hadn't written for him in about a decade – and he referred me to a \$.50-a-word, global custom publisher that produces special sections in newspapers all over the world.

It's so worth checking in with those people and letting them know you write. It will never get easier to market your business than telling people who already know and like you that you would appreciate writing referrals from them. If you do nothing else, do this. Such an easy way to move forward.

6. Thinking low-paying gigs are all that's out there

You have formed the impression in your mind that \$20 a post is all the money there is in freelance writing. I get this a lot. I've spoken to a lot of writers who've concluded the content mill rates they got at the first website they ever found are the totality of all the freelance writing opportunities out there. I have been flat-out called a liar when I talk about getting \$1-a-word assignments, \$100-an-hour gigs.

Crack a [*Writer's Market*](#) if you don't believe me. Or get it online and sort their database to the highest pay level, and look at all of the markets that pay really well.

Big companies pay freelancers well, too. Trust us, you can make a comfortable living as a freelance writer. It's not all working 100 hours a week for some mill and having to get up at 6:00 a.m. to download their dashboard opportunities. I call that The Underworld of Freelance Writing that's grown up since the Internet was created. There's a whole other world of freelance writing out there.

Remember that people like Laura and me broke in when there was no Internet and there was lots of freelance writing opportunity. It hasn't gone away. Opportunities are still out there.

7. Forgetting to study your market

LAURA: One of the best ways to find a good gig is to do homework. By homework, I mean you need to study your prospective clients. One of the biggest complaints you'll see on the Internet and that I hear from freelance writers is about their awful clients. It seems like a lot of freelancers have problems because they find awful clients who don't treat them right, who don't pay enough.

CAROL: Definitely an epidemic.

LAURA: One of the best ways to avoid working for a bad client is to find out everything you can about that client before accepting the project from them. Over the years, I've put together a list of places I check, starting out with Google, but it's not the only place you want to look. But first, I start by Googling their name.

You could also do a social media search through a tool like [Social Mention](#), which is really cool. Just type in their name, and it'll bring up all the tweets and everything that's been said about them recently in social media. You'll want to look through that. If you find out the company that's looking to hire you just dumped a bunch of acid in the river, you may not want to associate with this company. Or, if people are complaining they're about to go out of business...beware.

Then you want to look at their company website. Take a good look at it.

Then I look in writer forums to make sure your prospective client isn't being ranted about by other writers. [Glass Door](#) is a great place that looks at companies from the perspective of their employees. If they're not treating their employees right, if their employees are miserable, there's a good chance they're not going to treat the freelancer right, either.

Then, of course, there's your local Chamber of Commerce, whether or not they're a member. And you can check the [Better Business Bureau](#) and see if there are complaints. Of course, you'll get some organizations and clients that are too small. But most of the bigger ones will be in some of those places. It's a good way to get an idea of what they do.

Take your time and be thorough. Don't let yourself be rushed by a client. You want to do your due diligence. Learn about your client. If they have a bad online reputation, for me, that's a red flag – that client's not for me.

If they've treated their own clients badly, what makes you think they're going to treat you any better?

CAROL: I like to Google “[company name] sucks” and see what comes up. That can be a real shortcut to some interesting blog posts about how people have been treated by companies. You can quickly see this isn't a place you want to get involved with.

LAURA: “Problems with [company name]” will pull up some things, too.

8. Writing weak query letters

It's important to learn to write strong query letters. If you're going to write for a magazine or a newspaper, querying is an important part of looking for writing work. Even some online publications now require queries.

CAROL: I just wanted to interject a little something. Linda Formichelli and I did a survey of several hundred writers before we did our [4 Week Journalism School](#) class. One of our questions was, "Do you get good responses to your query letters?" Sixty percent of my blog readers told me they had never sent a single query letter. So, that's kind of incredible.

LAURA: That's pretty astonishing. But if you're planning to query a publication, you need to study the publication. There's nothing more annoying to an editor than getting a query from a writer who has no clue, has never seen their publication, knows nothing about it.

Whatever you do, don't send a canned query, a one-size-fits-all kind of query. That's just a big no-no. You need to tailor your query to the publication. Most queries are weak. So, if you send in a good one, you're going to stand out. You're going to get a response.

9. Avoiding direct contact with clients and sources

CAROL: I get this question a lot: "Is it okay if I just do my interviews on email?" Many writers seem to have a phobia about direct contact.

LAURA: Freelance writers do have the reputation of working alone, being isolated, maybe even being introverts, and preferring to communicate with clients only through email. But isolation is usually not the best way to find new writing jobs.

Face-to-face client meetings, phone calls – these things can bolster your credibility. Clients are still more comfortable working with a writer they know. Most of them like to hear from you by phone. Let the client take the lead on that.

Obviously, you don't want to be calling all the time, and you don't want to spend all your days in meetings. But if they're going to be investing a significant amount of money in hiring you to do a project, I've found, a lot of times they want to talk to you.

You may not live locally, but you can still pick up the phone. I use a Skype phone for my business calls. You will also be more comfortable if you've met your client in person. Plus, you'll have the advantage of putting a face to the name, which is always nice when

you can picture someone you're working for. If you're lucky enough to find a local client, that can give you an edge over a long-distance freelancer, if you're in competition for a particular gig.

CAROL: I've actually gone through a period of time where almost all of my clients were in my own city.

LAURA: The other point, and this is a little bit different. But if you're going to sell a feature interview to a publication, the interview is not just an email with a question.

If it's a feature interview, you're going to miss a lot of insight into the subject, a lot of material you would have gotten if you'd met face-to-face, or even if you'd talked with the subject over the phone. A lot of times, if you go meet with the person face-to-face, you can see how they're dressed. They might have a picture of themselves with a basketball trophy on their desk. You can ask them about that. You're going to miss an awful lot of information you couldn't find online.

But if you can't meet face-to-face because they're not in the same city, at least try to schedule a phone call with them, especially if you're going to sell it as a feature interview to a publication.

CAROL: You miss so much great stuff. When people read my features, they say, "Wow. How did you do this?" And the answer is, I went and hung out with them for an hour-and-a-half or two hours, or a half day. That's how I did it. That's the secret. Soaking up the ambiance of that person's life.

10. Thinking you can't negotiate

The first thing to know is, if you have the kind of client where you really can't negotiate because it's \$10 a post and "That's what we pay, honey," that's the wrong kind of client.

You want the kind of clients where you get a contract and you negotiate that contract. And ask if there's wiggle room in their offer. That's what professionals do. The key thing to know is: everything's negotiable.

I have just done a couple of book contracts where I struck clauses out. They said, "Here's our contract." I read it and said, "I'm not signing that."

One of them wanted to pay me half of my advance when the book comes out a year from now. I said, "I'm not waiting that long! How about when you finalize the draft?" They said, "Oh, okay."

Speak up if you feel uncomfortable. You're never going to lose a gig by raising the issue. I just don't know anyone who says, "I asked if I could get more money and they said, 'In that case, we're not hiring you.'" That doesn't happen.

11. Not reviewing your own work

LAURA: Typos online are not fatal. Typos in your samples are not fatal, but they make you look bad. It's up to you to review your work.

One of the things I do is, I don't try to proofread something I've just written. I usually let it sit at least overnight or a couple of hours, and then go back and read it again. Double-check things like names and references. There's nothing worse than getting somebody's name wrong. People don't like to see their name in print, misspelled.

Another proofreading tip is to read from the back of the material to the front. That takes it out of the context you wrote it in and makes it look fresh to you. Then, read it more than once.

I try to read all of my pieces at least three times to look for errors. The first time, it might be too fresh in your mind. Your mind tends to put in the things that are missing. So, it's really important. Another resource you can use is a tool like [Grammarly](#). Of course, use your spell-checker, but don't rely on it – because it's not always right.

12. Failing to market

If you don't walk away with anything else from this e-book, learn the importance of marketing your freelance writing business.

CAROL: Anytime I sit down with a writer who's coming to me for mentoring, I always ask, "Tell me what you're doing to market your business now, so I can see what other things you might do."

The answer is always the same: "I'm doing nothing. I'm not marketing my business." And then they're shocked that they don't have clients.

LAURA: In a traditional job, you probably had a boss who brought new projects to you. As long as you continued to work for that employer, you didn't have to worry about marketing yourself. That's one of the biggest differences between freelancing and being employed in a traditional job. In freelancing, you have to market your work in order to earn a living as a writer. You have to continually market yourself and your skills and abilities.

A lot of writers will stop marketing when they get busy, and that's a big mistake. There is a lot to consider when it comes to marketing. Most writers just simply aren't prepared to market.

Fortunately, you can learn to market your writing skills and be effective as a writer. It will make a real difference in your writing business.

So, if you don't walk away with anything else from this e-book, remember that we told you to market your writing business.

CAROL: Market your business. It's a business! And you need to market it.

Q&A

If you're setting up your writer's site and you don't know your niche yet, how do you do that?

For example, just write, "Joe Schmo, freelance writer." Put freelance writer in your tagline. Don't put it in your URL, do your name URL. And then, if you develop a niche over time that you want to spotlight, add it in your tagline. Some people never do. Some people have so many different topics that they never want to go that direction. But if you find it's all in healthcare and you really want to call that out, then change your tagline to "healthcare writer." It takes but a moment to add or change.

You never want to let thinking about your niche distract you from getting your website up. That's Job One. You need a website.

LAURA: A lot of people get hung up on their niche. That's something to worry about as you get more advanced. Like Carol was saying earlier, you start to see that all your jobs are falling in this one area. But when you're just starting out, you want to try a lot of different types of writing to find out, first of all, what you like and what's out there.

You mean use Joeblow.com as your address?

CAROL: Every header of a website has a headline and a tagline. The tagline is good for SEO, as well. In your tagline, you put "freelance writer." Then later, maybe you change your tagline. But you can stick with that same URL. That's what I was talking about.

Is reaching out to editors on LinkedIn bad form?

I don't think so. I use InMail like crazy.

I reach out to all kinds of people. It's fine. You might get a response and you might not. The thing I look for on LinkedIn is whether they're active on LinkedIn. If they've got three connections and they last posted a status update six months ago, I'm not going to try them on LinkedIn, because they may not have the email notice hooked up, and then they may never see it. So, there's that to consider. But it's certainly worth a try, and often can be a lot easier than finding someone's email. And it's unusual, still. There's a novelty factor.

I don't live in the U.S. Is there any hope of me finding gigs in U.S. markets?

Certainly, particularly in travel. If you have knowledge of your area, I just think that's an easy way in.

LAURA: If you're trying to break into the U.S. market, in most cases it's really important that you have good English language skills. So, if English is not your first language, make sure your skills are strong.

I live in Texas, where there's a huge Hispanic market. That's growing in a lot of parts of the United States. So, if you're fluent in Spanish, you still may be able to target a U.S. job.

I'm in contact with an editor who keeps telling me she appreciates my writing. I submitted a story, but, each month, it's pushed back to the next month. Am I being strung along, or is it really just a space issue?

CAROL: The error is that the piece you wrote doesn't have a strong enough news hook. A news hook means there's something in the story that *needs* to come out *now*.

Anytime you write a nonpareil piece like "How to choose a cantaloupe at the market," it can always fall victim to getting put off and put off, because there is no compelling reason to run it right now. You always want to build that news hook in, where the editor would have trouble holding it. Also, if it gets held and held, you might ask if you can shop it somewhere else, if you think it's really never going to come out.

If you have a personal website, is it worthwhile to have a NAIWE site, as well?

I actually do have both, so I guess I do think so. I don't know that it's required, but there are some definite advantages to hooking up with a big platform like that.

Should I say I'm a freelance writer, or an aspiring freelance writer?

LAURA: I would say you're a freelance writer. I don't see any value in pointing out how green or new you are. I would say you're a freelance writer. The "aspiring" makes you sound amateur, and like maybe you're not serious about it.

CAROL: There's a basic rule in freelance writing: Don't tell editors or business owners what you haven't done yet, what you can't do, what you don't know about. It's all about your strengths. That's what you present to them.

It reminds me of when I was adopting my kids. What they told us is, tell birth parents whose child you're thinking of adopting what they want to know. What they ask, you answer. Don't provide them with any additional information.

That's a self-sabotaging strategy, when you start saying, "I'm really new at this," or, "I'm going to be on vacation in the next few weeks. I hope that won't be a problem." This is information they don't need, and you don't want to share.

LAURA: You wouldn't go on an interview for a full-time job that way. You wouldn't go in and say, "This is my first job ever." I mean, they can look at your resume, they can look at your clips and get an idea of your experience. But you don't need to add any doubts in their minds as to whether or not you could do the job.

Can we use keyword research to determine the best niche for us?

CAROL: There's no online algorithm that can tell you the best niche for you. The best niche for you might be a small niche. I know people who write about veterinary medicine. There's a [Freelance Writer's Den](#) member right now who is an astrophysicist. What a terrific niche! He can write for every space museum.

But Google is not going to tell you the answer. The answer lies in your life – and what you want to write about, and have an interest in, and know a little bit about. When you get started, it's all about starting from what you know, or at least have a basic grounding in.

What if you're just beginning and you don't have contacts?

LAURA: Everybody has some contacts. You have friends, you have family, you have businesses you frequent. Even if you've never worked, you're right out of school, you have teachers.

Your job now is to start making more contacts. And you're going to do that face-to-face, by going to maybe local Chamber of Commerce meetings, handing out your business card to the people you meet.

You're going to do it online, by building a Web presence and a social-media presence. There's no such thing as somebody who has no contacts. But you want to start with the easy contacts – the people who already know you, like you, and think highly of you. Branch out from there.

CAROL: Let's bust the myth that you need to know editors personally to get a freelance writing gig. That's baloney. What you need to know is how to write a query letter that will knock an editor's eyes out and get them dying to hire you. You can go in the door cold to any publication and get a gig with the strength of your ideas and how you write them up and present them.

I call this syndrome of being paralyzed because you don't have contacts, "waiting for the luck fairy to bring you a job."

You're waiting for the magical day when you somehow meet an editor at your dream publication, and then they'll give you an assignment. That's not how it works. It's all about proactively marketing and cold-calling the markets you want to write for.

LAURA: You can't sit there and do nothing and wait to be discovered. It's not going to happen.

Should new writers fork over for a LinkedIn Premium membership?

CAROL: If you join the LinkedIn Group [LinkedIn for Journalists](#) and take their free training, you can get the premium level for free. Join that group. LinkedIn wants journalists to use their platform. They're very hot on that. You can get free premium access if you can make a case to them that you're the kind of writer they should have in the group.

Is it negative if you have more than one field of expertise listed on your writer website?

Certainly not. Many of us have several different areas of expertise. You might just set up different pages on your site for them. That's no problem at all.

LAURA: That's a strength.

CAROL: Sometimes, an industry goes down, like real estate during the downturn. If you're only in real estate, then you're hosed. Ideally, you want to have more than one specialty area, so you can roll with the punches better. Personally, at this point, I have expertise in legal, insurance, retailing, restaurant, franchising, startups, and on and on. So, if the insurance industry goes down the tubes, my career isn't over. That's how you want it.

What if you have specialties in areas that seem too crowded, like holistic health, pets, gardening?

My take is that there is no niche that's really too crowded, because there are always different markets within that niche than most writers think of. What everyone is thinking is, they want to write for some big gardening magazine that's a national glossy.

But they might not be thinking of reaching out to nurseries and helping them with their marketing. There's always a way to flip your area of interest to places that other people aren't pitching. Maybe you're going to write for a trade magazine for professional gardeners or professional landscapers. There are so many ways to cut those areas of expertise and find good markets.

LAURA: Look for different angles. Don't go for the obvious publications in a niche. If you're trying to select a niche, look for a different angle that maybe the average person doesn't think of.

Should we as writers rant about bad clients? Is it our duty to warn other writers?

CAROL: Trashing clients is generally not good business.

LAURA: If you do that, your prospective clients are probably going to find that online, and they're going to think, "Look at how she trashed XYZ Company. I wonder if she's going to do that to me."

If you really feel fraud has been committed, or something like that, you might need to get authorities involved. Otherwise, don't trash anybody online.

How crucial is following up on a query, or is that annoying?

It's okay to follow up. It actually can set you apart. You want to do it politely. I would do it fairly quickly. Of course, you don't want to be following up every day. But I would follow up at least once, maybe twice on a query.

CAROL: Keep it down, or you're going to reveal that you're new at this.

My personal philosophy is that I don't follow up. I move on and send more queries. I assume that if they love my query, I'll be hearing from them.

Occasionally, I hear tales of people who followed up and then the editor went, "Wow, it was in my spam folder, and I love it." Personally, I feel that the energy I am spending wondering whether they liked my query and following up is just better spent writing more queries. So, that's how I do it.

LAURA: If you follow up constantly, it does make you look desperate. One follow up, two at the most, is not terribly harmful, but I wouldn't go beyond that.

If they didn't like my query, is it time to confess that I'm really green and try to get their advice?

CAROL: If they didn't like it and they didn't respond to you, they're not going to help you improve your queries. You need to find pro writers and read books, and go out and improve.

The norm now is you're not going to hear back unless they're interested. No one is able to send, "Sorry, not for us" responses to every writer anymore. They're just completely overwhelmed. Don't take it personally.

That's the other thing. Getting back to the rejection thing, you need to realize it's not about you. They just don't have the time. They'd love to mentor every writer on Earth, but they can't. They've got to put out a magazine.

Is it okay to set up interviews on email, and then do them live?

Absolutely. We all set up interviews on email all the time.

If you want to interview a particular expert who prefers to answer questions over email, would you consent as an exception?

Only if I've got to have them. There are a lot of experts in the sea. In general, if someone is being weird about not wanting to talk to me live, I tend to move on.

What about pitching an idea accompanied by a video clip?

I don't think most editors are looking for that. You might mention you have a relevant video clip to go with the story. People dig multimedia in the story. But it's a little early to bring it up before you know if they like your idea.

Should we connect with other writers to become their backups for their clients?

Heck yeah! Networking rocks. Know other writers, particularly if you have a niche. I know nearly every other high-profile business writer in my town. We do refer each other. I have a friend who was referred a book contract by a writer in his niche, who didn't have time to write it. She knew him from his networking efforts. So yes -- a thousand times, yes.

LAURA: Definitely. Writers give other writers work. There's a myth out there that other writers are your competition. That's only partly true. They're also your colleagues. Definitely connect with other writers. Connect with other freelancers, too. For more on this, here's a useful post: [Why I Connect with Other Freelancers and Why You Should, Too.](#)

What about making multiple submissions?

If it's the same piece, if they didn't like it the first time, they're probably not going to like it the second time you submit it. Now, of course, if it's the same publication, but you've got something new, I don't see any problem with submitting new material to it.

But I wouldn't submit the same piece over and over again to the same editor. That could get annoying. That's like following up on queries. You follow up on the query maybe once or twice, but not more often.

Is it okay to send a query for the same article to more than one magazine?

CAROL: Totally. Do it. Don't wait to hear back from the first one, either, even though they may say they don't want simultaneous submissions. You've got to make a living.

Should you write your article before you submit the query?

In general, no.

When you write an article without having an assignment from an editor, you're writing in a vacuum. You don't really know what they want. You want to find out, get an assignment, then write it. Otherwise, you're often wasting a lot of time.

Example: You're writing and sending off a piece called 12 Bed and Breakfasts in Pennsylvania. The editor gets back to you and says, "Could you write the 12 most disabled-accessible bed and breakfasts in Philadelphia, instead?" Then you're going to have to write a whole new article.

The exception is if it's what we call a Front of the Book or FOB piece that's 200-250 words, or so. Then the query pitching the idea would be longer than the article! So it may make sense to study the publication well, and then simply write it up, send it in, and hope it's a fit.

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