

FREELANCE WRITING

FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Jim Busch Sunday September 15, 2024—Ligonier Valley Writers



freelance

or **free-lance**

[**free-lans**, **-lans**]

Phonetic (Standard)IPA

adjective

1. of or relating to work conducted by a person who sells their services by the hour, day, job, etc., rather than working on a regular salary basis for one employer: Compare.

a freelance writer;

freelance copyediting.

Why I feel qualified to teach this class:

During my life I:

- Was a professional copy writer “an ad guy” for over 3 decades
- In one year I wrote over 100 stories and features for newspapers
- I have written for the Pgh Post Gazette, Tribune Review, Mon Valley Independent, several smaller newspapers, Fine Gardening Magazine, and numerous other publications
- I have completed numerous commercial writing assignments
- Since retirement, I have supplemented my income with my writing (It pays for my vacations and museum memberships!)

First The Fun Part!

Freelance Writers:

- Get to spend their time writing
- Don't have to justify their writing "hobby!"
- Can say, "Why yes, I AM a professional writer!"
- Get to show off their work
- Get to challenge themselves and their creativity
- Earn money to spend on fancy writing supplies and writer's conferences and retreats
- Get the opportunity to learn new things and meet interesting people

First The Fun Part!

Freelancing helps you grow as a writer:

- The more you write, the better you get
- Feedback helps you to identify areas of needed improvement
- Writing on different subjects stretches the imagination
- Working with others improves your understanding of your audience
- Helps you to write concisely.

Now the Profit \$\$\$\$ Part

Legal Disclaimer:

Writing is a sweepstakes career—only a few individuals ever get rich from their writing.

Freelance writing is a good way to supplement your income and build your skills.

The Bottom Line: KEEP YOUR DAY JOB!!!

Now the Profit \$\$\$\$ Part

Freelancing helps you grow your “Writing Business”:

- Being in print gives you “street cred.”
- Builds your resume and generates a “clip file.”
- Offers experience in selling your work and your abilities
- Builds confidence in being a writer
- Provides cash flow while you finish “the Great American Novel”

Now the Profit \$\$\$\$ Part

You're in good company:

- Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Joan Didion, Carl Hiaasen, Susan Sontag, Anna Quinlen and many more successful authors started their careers as freelance journalists
- Salman Rushdie, Faye Weldon, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dorothy L. Sayers, Don Delillo, Helen Gurley Brown, Augusten Burrows, Joseph Heller, Elmore Leonard and James Patterson all started their careers as commercial copywriters.

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Your creativity and writing skills are in demand:

- *Local newspapers have cut back on staff and rely more and more on freelancers*
- *The same is true of magazines and online publications*
- *Commercial businesses need writers to generate copy for brochures, long form advertising and other materials*
- *Businesses and organizations need “content creators” for websites and blogs*

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism:

- Western PA is home to a number of small local newspapers and magazines
- These publications are hungry for content
- The secret to success in publishing these days is “hyper-local!” Your knowledge of your community and your neighbors is very marketable
- The best way to break in to local journalism is through feature writing
- If a story is interesting to you it is likely to be interesting to your neighbors (the paper’s/website’s readers)
- The goal is to gradually build a relationship with the editor.

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

About Us

Tube City Community Media Inc. is a non-profit corporation, chartered in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

We encourage McKeesport-area residents, both past and future, both young and old, to become not just consumers, but also community activists and creators of content about the McKeesport area in text, audio, and video form.

West Hills Gazette

**Quality news, where you want it,
when you want it.**

Who Are We?

West Hills Gazette is a locally owned and operated news source providing community service through the delivery of quality journalism. It is produced...

By Local People
For Local People
About Local People
In Support of Local People

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism--Doing your home work:

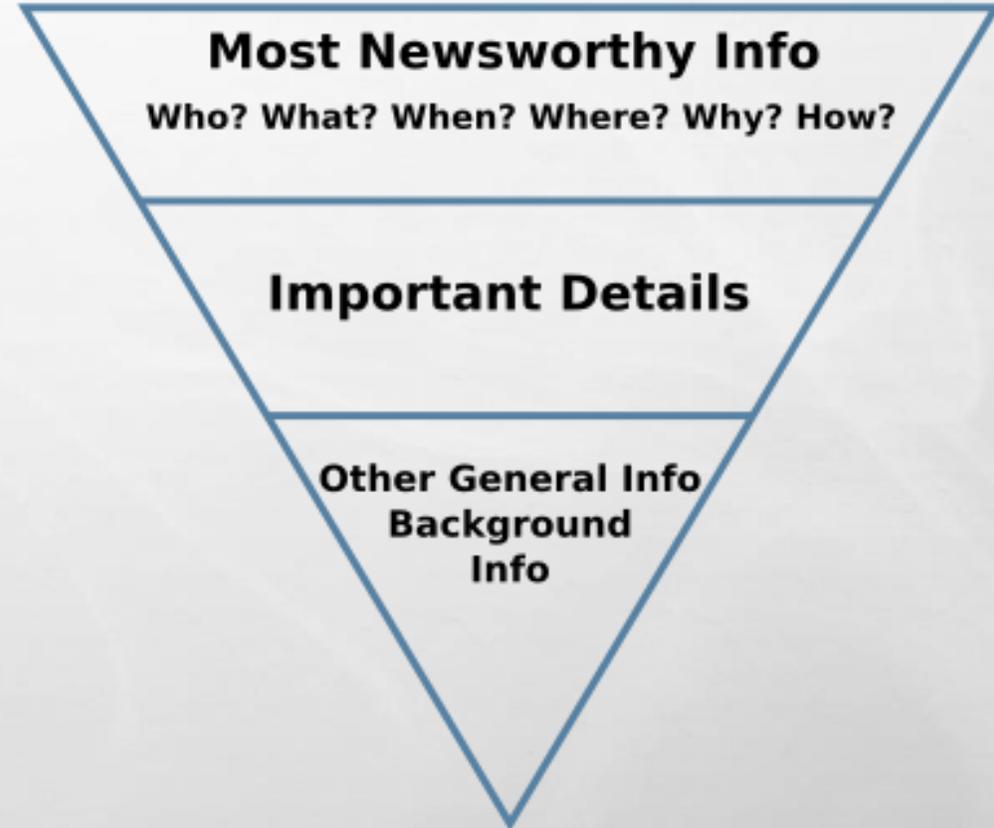
- Study the publication/website you wish to write for
- Pay attention to the writing style
- Pay attention to the average length of the pieces
- Think about who their readers are
- Consider purchasing a copy of the AP style manual
- Think about the “inverted pyramid” and “nut graf”
- Listen to your editor, they are usually happy to work with novice journalists

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism—the inverted pyramid:

Just the Facts ma'am

- Newspaper readers are in a hurry
- They want information in a hurry
- They want to know “What’s in it for Them.”
- Grab the reader in your opening



Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism—the nut graf:

In article structure for journalism, the nut graph or nut graf (short for “nutshell paragraph”) is a paragraph that explains the context of the story “in a nutshell”.

In many news stories, the essential facts of a story are included in the lede, the first sentence or two of a story. Good ledes try to answer who, what, when, where, why, and how as quickly as possible

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism—approaching an editor

- **Prepare a brief resume of your writing history**
- **Collect samples of your writing (or mock them up)**
- **Reach out and request a meeting**
- **Be prepared to answer the question, “What do you have to offer our publication?”**
- **Request a trial assignment or suggest a story idea**

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism—What editors want

- Reliability—someone who does what they promise when they promise to do it. Respect their deadlines!!!
- Local angle—interviews with local people, how the story impacts local people (Magic word: “Hyper-Local!”)
- Flexibility—willingness to do different kind of stories
- Ideas—someone who “pitches” good story ideas
- Good writing skills—tight readable copy

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism—Working with an editor

- Accept the fact you will be edited
- Use the edits as a tool for improving your writing (They know their business)
- Ask for feedback
- A good writer/editor relationship takes time to evolve and mature
- Be easy to work with

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Freelance journalism—exercise

Let's come up with ideas for
local features

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation

Copywriter

[**kop-ee-rah-y-ter**]

Phonetic (Standard)IPA

noun

1. a writer of copy, especially for advertisements or publicity releases.

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation

Copywriters help businesses and organizations tell their story to the public in a way that presents them in the best possible light

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation

The **curse of knowledge** is a **cognitive bias** that occurs when an individual, who is communicating with others, assumes that others have information that is only available to themselves, assuming they all share a background and understanding. This bias is also called by some authors the **curse of expertise**.

The curse of knowledge is why businesses/organizations need professional wordsmiths. Our communications skills + their subject knowledge is a winning combination.

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—potential clients

- Any local business that has brochures or leave behinds
- Local organizations that wish to communicate with the public
- Companies that do direct mail
- Anyone who has a web site
- Any business that does social media.

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—approaching potential clients

- **Study their current materials**
- **Think about how you could improve them**
- **Approach the client**
- **Emphasis how you can save them time and help them bring in business**
- **Suggest a trial job**

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—
staying FB/Google prominent

Websites and Social Media Pages are
like babies

They are always hungry and always need
to be changed.



Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—staying FB/Google prominent

SEO—Search Engine Optimization

noun

COMPUTING

1.the process of maximizing the number of visitors to a particular website by ensuring that the site appears high on the list of results returned by a search engine.

"the key to getting more traffic lies in integrating content with search engine optimization and social media marketing"

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—staying FB/Google prominent

To get the most views online

- **Update copy frequently**
- **Use “key words”—words that match the words people use when looking for goods or services**
- **A well-written first line is key to converting page views to sales**
- **This requires a good deal of a business owner’s time**

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation

The copywriter's job is to look at what the client offers through the eyes of the consumer of that product to tell them how that product will make their life better.

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—process

- Study current materials used by client
- Interview client
- Determine their marketing goals (as specifically as possible)
- Ask who their ideal customer is?
- Try to uncover their “USP” (Unique Selling Proposition)
- Try to talk to their customers
- Think about their business from a consumer’s point of view

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—techniques

- Consider the medium
- Consider short form or long form
- For every copy point ask “So What?” or “Why should I care?”
- Think about a concise headline or subject line
- Think about creative approaches “Creative Non-fiction”
- Always be truthful
- Try to make it fun for the reader

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—Exercise

Big Jim's Doggy Daycare

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Copywriting or Content Creation—Let's talk \$\$\$\$\$

- How much is your time worth
- Think about the time involved
- What is the project worth to the client
- What will the market bear
- You have to build your resume, your portfolio
- Do not work for free
- Keep ownership of all “spec” work

Making \$\$\$\$\$ As a Writer

Questions?

Freelance writing for Fun & Profit!



THANK YOU!

THANK YOU VERRRY MUCH!