

Freedom With Writing

# The Freelance Writer's Battle



How to Shatter  
the Nine Myths  
that Stop Freelance  
Writing Success

Written By Ian Chandler

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Writing Success

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*Freedom With Writing*

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Part 1: The Myths that Prevent Professional Success.....	5
You Have to Use Content Mills or Freelancing Platforms.....	8
Your Rates Have to Be Low.....	21
Your Portfolio Has to Be Huge.....	30
You Have to Be an Influencer.....	34
You Can't Be a Full-Time Freelance Writer.....	41
Part 2: The Real-World Craft of Professional Writing.....	47
Your First Draft is Always Shitty.....	50
The Formal Writing Tone is Boring and Outdated.....	58
Goodbye Sleep: You Have to Spend Hours Writing.....	64
Writer's Block and the Muse.....	71
Conclusion.....	77

# Introduction

Whether you're a completely new freelance writer or a veteran, you've heard lies about writing. You may have been told you have to charge low rates in order to get business. You may have been told you won't get anywhere unless you already have an enormous audience. Perhaps your writing itself has been criticized for not following a specific form. These myths have one singular, shared aim: to undermine you as a writer and undermine the way you write.

If you're reading this, then you've already debunked the biggest freelance writing myth. It's the myth that tells you being a freelance writer is impossible. That is the biggest lie about freelance writing, yet it continues to circulate.

Unfortunately, that's not the only myth that goes around. Whenever a writer enters the world of freelance writing, they encounter lie after lie about their chosen career. The worst part? Too many writers (especially new writers) listen to these lies, and some of them even give up on the freelancing life.

Freelance writing is one of the most rewarding careers you can pursue, but it's also one that's discouraging at times. The world isn't friendly to freelance writers. Websites such as Fiverr want you to believe that you have to charge \$5 for 200 words. But you don't have to start out at the bottom rung of the ladder. In fact, if you do, you might get trapped. This book is all about avoiding the many pitfalls and dangers that can keep writers from earning the level of success they deserve.

There are so many pitfalls that can trap the unsuspecting writer. I call them "myths" in this book, because many of them have taken root in the world of freelance writing. There are many established companies that promote these myths for their own benefit. Websites such as Fiverr, Upwork, and Demand Media have found enormous profits by leading people down the wrong path.

This book is here to keep you on the right path, help you walk right past the myths that trap many writers, and build the kind of writing career that is right for you.

These myths are everywhere you look—individuals (clients, fellow writers) and organizations (freelancing platforms,

content mills) perpetuate them. Take a website like Upwork, for instance, that focuses on quantity over quality. Many writers on Upwork staunchly believe that the only way to succeed is to churn out content like a robot. These writers are living by a deadly myth. Or consider a content mill, whose objective is to make the most money possible and pay writers the least amount possible. This mill doesn't want to encourage writers to increase their rates and stand on their own; quite the opposite, in fact.

Make no mistake, these myths are dangerous for writers of all skill levels. They make writers believe that they can't realize their potential or that there's a limit to their success. Some myths make writers believe that they must have the security of a 9-to-5 job and a steady paycheck. At their core, these lies attempt to undermine the success and freedom that a freelance writing career can bring, and too often they succeed.

Perhaps even more insidious are myths about the craft of writing itself. These myths assert that there is a right way and a wrong way to write. Often, these lies are the result of current trends in the writing industry, and while some of them do hold truth, they definitely do not show the big

picture. What's even more scary is how easy it is for an innocent writer to turn these false ideas into hardheaded dogma, which stunts their growth.

I've been a victim of these myths myself. My early career was guided by almost nothing but myths. I thought I had to use freelancing platforms to make any money, and I never thought I could write for a living. I've seen others being guided by the same exact myths. They think that they write the wrong way or that they have to be famous influencers to succeed with writing. Because these writers are trapped by myths, their careers don't flourish; they hit a wall.

In exposing these myths, I'll also provide some tips to move forward and advance your career after you've laid these myths to rest yourself. These myths are so common that it's often impossible to see past them, but if you can, a new world will open up to you.



## Part 1:

# The Myths that Prevent Professional Success

Try telling your friends or family that you want to be a professional freelance writer. Odds are, they just won't get it. Many people don't understand freelance writing, and they certainly don't think you can make a living from writing. After all, freelance writing as a full-time career is a fairly recent idea, so many people often critique it harshly. Even professional writers believe common myths; some believe that they have to settle for low rates, while others doubt that they can ever go full-time.

Some of these myths about freelance writing stem from the fact that, by and large, freelance writers live in a corporate world, and thus writers should fit into the corporate mold. Many editors you pitch your work to are hidden away in an office setting; many of your clients probably work corporate

jobs; and many of your online colleagues likely work office (or other white collar) jobs.

Freelance writers don't punch a clock, and don't fit in nicely in the corporate puzzle. Traditionalists have a hard time wrapping their heads around what freelance writing encompasses: no boss, no payroll, no office.

Many traditionalists will argue that freelance writing is too unstable. There is no paycheck every two weeks that already has taxes deducted, and there's no guarantee that you'll be able to pay rent next month. While freelancers may experience scary moments like these, being a freelancer is not simply the sum of these frightening times.

Others will say that freelance writing is a great side gig, but they argue that you'll never be able to charge professional rates without getting laughed at. These people have a more convincing argument because they're not traditionalists; they live and work in the Internet-savvy present. They know about the freelance writing industry. They might say that unless you have a huge audience and an unlimited amount of power on tap, you'll never make it as a full-time writer.

In this first section, I'll tackle these common professional myths and provide some alternative viewpoints. When a writer stops believing in these myths, they'll not only make more money, but also enhance their career for good.

## Myth #1

# You Have to Use Content Mills or Freelancing Platforms

Beginner writers are much like young children in that they are both highly impressionable. Most beginning writers don't have the luxury of having a veteran mentor to coach them; instead, they have only Google to rely upon. And unfortunately, many writers have settled for less than the best, and there are some consensus in the writing community that reflect this mindset.

One such consensus concerns content mills (also known as content farms). For some writers, mills are the bane of writing's existence; for others, they're a source of steady work that pays a pittance. Sadly, a major chunk of writers around the world makes up the second group. These writers think that content mills are necessary evils, and they use mills regularly.

You've most likely received advice to work through a content mill. At the very least, you've probably seen others recommend mills for work. The reality is that most writers who work for mills spend all day churning out low-quality content that is only one notch above gibberish. After slaving all day, they receive a meager income. The next day, they repeat the process. It's truly a vicious cycle, and it's a horrible position to be in. Mill writers have no freedom or happiness; they are slaves.

There's another group of writers who, though they share many similarities to the content mill group, consider themselves to be higher up the ladder from mill workers. This group consists of writers who use freelancing platforms (such as Upwork and Freelancer) for the bulk of their work. These freelancing platforms allow writers to create accounts and offer their services to a huge marketplace, but these platforms also take substantial fees, usually 20%.

In contrast to content mills (such as Demand Media), many platforms allow writers to choose their own rates. However, these rates often aren't too much of a step up from content mills. Furthermore, there are countless horror stories of bad

clients from freelancing platforms. (Some writers report they've even gotten death threats.)

Left on their own, many freelance writers don't know where to turn to find work. They turn to freelancing platforms, which are often heralded as a freelancer's dream because they provide an avenue to get clients. Platforms give writers an easy method of making small amounts of money, and writers can then repeat that process. The problems with platforms are the same as the problems with content mills: lack of freedom, meager income, and low-quality clients. Even though writers acknowledge these numerous issues, they continue to use these platforms because they're easy.

And indeed, they are easy. For a fledgling writer who's entering the profession without a portfolio, mills and platforms seem to be a saving grace. You often don't need a portfolio to work for a mill or offer your services on a platform. And for seasoned writers who are having a tough time finding clients, mills and platforms offer a surefire way of getting work.

But the real question is: Are they really worth it?

## Are Mills Worth It?

Deciding whether or not mills and platforms are worthwhile is difficult. No writer loves using mills or platforms, but sometimes, it's the only option. If you're struggling to pay rent or buy groceries, content mills suddenly look a lot more appealing.

At the same time, a large number of professional writers—no matter where they are in their career—want to write full-time. They want to take on writing projects that will pay them well for the skills they provide. Content mills simply don't do this. Unless you have the mental stamina of a robot and are willing to sleep for three hours a day, content mills can't provide the level of compensation you need to succeed as a writer.

On the other hand, beginner writers tend to use content mills to gain experience and build a portfolio. However, there are major problems with using mills for experience. Mills have one goal: to hire as many writers as possible and pay them as little as possible for as much content as possible. Because there's an emphasis on quantity rather than quality, writers don't receive good editorial direction, and they have a poor

experience overall. They have to write lengthy, keyword-stuffed posts on strange niche topics, and often their articles get rejected multiple times.

It's also tough (if not impossible) to assemble a respectable portfolio while working at a content mill. Since you're focussed on churning out as many articles as possible, you won't be putting out your best writing. Furthermore, if the article is published with your name in the byline, it will probably link you to the mill you write for. Many clients stay away from content mill writers because they know that such writers aren't trained well. Other times, depending on the mill, you may not even know where the article you write ends up. And many times, you won't get credit for the article whatsoever.

Several content mill writers have spoken about their experience, and they have few positive things to say. One of the most comprehensive accounts of writers discussing their mill experiences was [published on the Make A Living Writing blog](#). In this eye-opening article, fourteen authors talk about their time working for content mills. They reported what you might expect: low pay, horrible editors, and high stress levels.



[Another piece from Ars Technica](#) takes a look at a different side of content mills. This writer has even worse things to say about the mill he worked for. He spent his days writing horrible content and avoiding research to save time. He reported making about \$13 an hour, and while that's more than minimum wage, you have to take into account the amount of effort he had to give to make that rate. When writing for a mill, you can rarely take breaks to maintain your sanity. Professional writers can easily make triple that rate without breaking a sweat.

The verdict? Content mills, while they offer the steadiest supply of work for writers, also pay the worst and impose the most grueling rules on their workers. If you're serious about the profession of writing, then stay far away from content mills.

## Are Freelancing Platforms Worth It?

It's easy to shrug off content mills and pledge to never work for one. Making the decision to not use freelancing platforms is much tougher. Platforms are much more lucrative, and

they provide 100% of many writers' revenues. Some writers swear by them and will passionately uphold their worth no matter what. As a result, platforms reside in a greyer area than the black and white world of content mills.

Part of the issue is that there is a wide spectrum of freelancing platforms. There are sites where you have to place a bid and hope you get the job. Other sites simply function as a storefront for your services, where clients can find you among thousands of other writers. While bid sites are generally considered to be less worthwhile than marketplace-type sites, there's no clear consensus on this.

In this section, I'll go over a few of the major freelancing platforms and the polarizing opinions that some writers maintain. I encourage you to further research what other writers have to say about various platforms. Online writing communities and forums are good places to look.

## Upwork and Fiverr: Two Case Studies

Today, Upwork is perhaps the most popular freelance writing platform. Formerly Elance-oDesk, the site hosts

millions of freelancers and operates on a proposal structure. Clients post jobs, and freelancers submit proposals that outline why they're the best choice. This is similar to the traditional application process, though it's also similar to a bid-based structure.

In terms of rates, clients set the budget, so while writers don't have a choice in determining the rate, they can browse and apply for only the projects that pay well. As such, the rates can vary wildly—at the time of this writing, the rates go from content mill standards (\$7 for a 300 word post) to respectable (\$500 for landing page copy), although most of the jobs do fall on the lower end of the spectrum. This is a main reason why Upwork is particularly difficult to dislike: there are higher-paying projects available. And if you work quickly, you can make a tidy sum on Upwork.

However, the real issue with Upwork isn't the jobs at all; it's the lack of control and the large commission fees. Under their fee structure, [Upwork takes a 20% commission for the first \\$500 you bill to a client.](#) Generally, Upworkers don't have repeat clients; rather, writers often take on one-off jobs. For the majority of Upwork writers, this means that they'll be sacrificing 20% of their overall income. While Upwork can

provide a means of finding work, it comes at a hefty cost, and freelancers can't do anything about it.

Other sites offer different sets of pros and cons. I started out as a freelance writer on Fiverr. I was cranking out 250 word biographies for \$5 each (or .02 cents per word, on par with many content mills). I was brand new to writing and didn't know how much good writing was worth. Over time, my writing skills improved, and so did my knowledge of the industry. After I learned this, I increased my rates on Fiverr, and I continued to get work. However, I didn't like the 20% commission (as with Upwork) and the limitations on contacting clients (you can't email clients without breaching Fiverr's terms of service). After several months of working on Fiverr, I abandoned it.

While I never had any client horror stories (and many writers who use platforms don't), I despised the high commission and strict limitations. After I left Fiverr, I experienced a surge in my income. I was able to land clients on my own terms and charge what I wanted. On many platforms, the majority of writers don't charge much, so if you charge more, clients could be turned away. They might ask themselves, "Why should I spend \$100 when I can get

the same result for \$5?" These clients don't understand that as the cost goes up, so does the quality. And freelancing platforms attract these sorts of clients because of the low price points.

Some freelancing platforms can be great for making money on the side or getting started. Personally, I view platforms as training wheels. They are a means to an end, not the end itself. I was able to grow as a writer (in both the profession and the craft) once I left Fiverr. If I had stuck around, my development as a writer would have been inhibited.

Freelancing platforms aren't inherently evil, but they cause many problems for writers. If you want to become a full-time professional freelance writer, then don't use freelancing platforms any longer than you have to.

From a wider perspective, content mills and freelancing platforms are essentially the same. They present similar problems, and even though platforms offer better rates, writers are still often forced to take low-paying jobs because that's what clients will pay. Real freelance writing success does not exist within the bubble of a mill or a platform. To be truly successful, you have to be your own platform.

## Alternatives to Mills and Platforms

The biggest benefit of mills and platforms is, without a doubt, the amount of readily available work for writers to take on. Many writers don't know where to look for work, and they believe that they can only find good work through a middleman. In reality, there's tons of great writing work to be had; you just have to look in the right place.

To get you started, here are my favorite places to find work. These are sites that have gotten me several long-term clients, and I highly recommend them whether you're seeking gig-based work or a long-term position.

- **Job boards:** While job boards can sometimes be cluttered, they're still a reliable source of writing work. Even though many boards have high standards, some job postings advertise content mill rates, so you have to filter out the crap. Here are a few of my favorites:
  - **Reddit's /r/forhire and /r/hireawriter:** I've found some of my best long-term positions on these job boards. They offer a wide variety

of requests, and you can also advertise your services here.

- **ProBlogger:** This job board is of especially high quality because it costs \$50 to post.

Although there are some low-rung jobs, most postings are legitimate and lucrative.

- **Online networking:** Sites like LinkedIn are particularly useful for networking (LinkedIn also has job postings and [their ProFinder service](#)). If you write within a certain niche, you can also make connections on forums and communities within that niche.
- **Paid guest posts:** Admittedly, the number of sites that pay for guest posts has gone down in recent years, but that doesn't mean all opportunities are gone. Using tactical Google searching can help you find blogs and sites that pay for posts. Here are some search phrases I use:
  - “write for us” “\$”
  - “writer's guidelines” “\$”
  - “submission guidelines” “\$”
  - your niche + any of the above search phrases

The “\$” ensures that you receive only results for sites that explicitly display their rate for guest posts.

Finding work on your own is more of a gamble, but the rewards are much higher. By removing the training wheels of a mill or platform, you'll find writing more enjoyable, and you'll experience a newfound sense of freedom.



## Myth #2

# Your Rates Have to Be Low

Freelance writing has undergone a sea change in the past few decades. In the late 20th century, a journalist could expect to command what we could consider today to be sky-high rates. There was even a time when many magazines would pay up to \$1 a word. But those times are now (mostly) long gone, thanks to the Internet.

The Internet took the power of the written word out of the hands of experienced writers and journalists. Suddenly, anyone could set up a blog and write. Bloggers needed no qualifications, experience, or training. The Internet also created a change in the way publications paid writers. Now, it's harder than ever to break into widely read publications, and those lower down the totem pole pay less to cut their costs.

If that weren't enough, content mills and freelancing platforms have also changed the economic landscape for writers. The most painful result is the change in the social mindset. People no longer consider writing to be as valuable as it once was. Prospects will often choose lower-priced competitors instead of you, and a plethora of renowned websites and blogs don't pay for guest posts. The effects of quantity-over-quality writing are clear everywhere you look.

While freelance writers have more power than ever, they also have fewer opportunities than ever. The 21st century is a trying time for writers. However, that doesn't mean you should settle for less than your best. In this section, we'll tackle another myth that's all too believable: the myth that your rates have to be low.

## The Cost of Low Rates

When I was starting out, my rate was \$5 for 250 words, or .02 cents per word. Assuming I could turn around two articles an hour, my hourly rate was about \$10—not much more than minimum wage. And I was suffering from it. I was

making way less than I wanted to, and I was working much harder than I should have been.

Over time, I experienced a phenomenon that I thought was counterintuitive: The more I raised my rates, the better jobs and clients I found. But it turns out I'm not the only writer who has experienced this. Many writers find that once they raise their rates, they get better clients and jobs that don't stress them out as much. After I thought about this phenomenon, I realized it made complete sense: By raising my rates, I was repelling the low-paying clients and marketing myself to only higher-paying clients. It seems like a no-brainer, but I had tricked myself into thinking that I had to charge lower rates to get work.

There's no doubt that charging low rates will get you more work, but it won't be good work. It's the quantity over quality effect. If you prioritize quantity over quality, so will your clients. You'll hit more targets but only because you're aiming lower. If you raise your rates, you'll take on less work, but it will pay much better. I complete only a few handfuls of jobs each month, yet those jobs pay so well that I don't need to take on more work.

Of course, if you're starting out, you shouldn't charge \$100 an hour. You also shouldn't charge too little. Finding the right rate for you is tricky, but once you establish a rate that you deserve, your freelancing experience will be much better.

## How Much is Writing Worth?

Setting a rate is one of the more surprisingly difficult aspects of freelance writing. You have to take several factors into consideration: industry standard rates, what clients will actually pay, your level of experience, your field, and the project in question, to name a few. It doesn't help that there's often a large discrepancy between what you should rightfully charge and how much clients will pay.

There are a few trusty resources that can help you establish a rate. [The Editorial Freelancers Association's list of rates](#) is the closest you'll come to official industry standards (due to the wide range, standard rates don't really exist). For nonspecified freelance writing, the EFA reports \$40 to \$100 an hour, which is 20 cents to \$2 per word. Elsewhere, [freelance expert Brian Scott says that educated writers should charge from \\$30 to \\$75 per hour](#), which is right in the

middle of what the EFA suggests. Finally, [a small case study by Contently](#) reports averages of 71 cents per word for digital publications and \$1.20 per word for print publications.

Keep in mind that these numbers present the going rate for established writers, not new ones. If you're starting out, you'll want to set a rate at the low end of these figures (and perhaps even lower). Despite these benchmarks, there are still a few important factors to consider, namely your experience, the marketplace, your field, and your rate type.

Experience is perhaps the most influential factor when setting rates. Obviously, beginners should charge less, and experts should charge more, but there's a vast spectrum of difference between those two categories. And while the EFA rates (and the other sites) display good ballparks, there is no true minimum or maximum. The best way to set your rates is to take these general estimates and modify them to your situation.

## How to Set Your Rates

As I mentioned above, there are four important factors to consider when setting your own rates: your experience, the marketplace, your field, and your rate type.

If you're starting out, expect your rate to fall on the lower end of the spectrum. Taking the EFA rates into account, that would mean around \$40 an hour or 20 cents per word. However, you also have to figure in market demand. The shift in Internet writing has made \$40 an hour a king's ransom. Many writers offer their services for as low as 5 cents per word, or about \$15 an hour. While you shouldn't go that low, you should aim for a nice medium. About \$25 an hour or 10 cents per word is a decent starting rate.

One important note: If you don't have any writing samples whatsoever, you should create some. Without a single piece in your portfolio, you really can't expect to charge much (or anything at all). If possible, your samples should be in the niche(s) you want to pursue. Academic writing can be good in that it demonstrates your skill, but it's much better to have writing that was derived from field experience.

If you have substantial experience (say 1–3 years), then you can charge considerably more. Once you reach this level, you can start charging within the spectrum of what the EFA suggests. After about a year or more of solid, consistent experience, you can safely charge \$40 an hour (20 cents per word). After two to three years of experience, you can move up higher into the \$50–\$60 range, which is roughly 30 to 50 cents per word. Even though that's far below the EFA's maximum, you'll find that those are the going rates for highly-experienced writers.

Those with three or more years of writing experience can typically charge on the higher end of the spectrum. At this level, writers are usually taking on larger projects for larger clients or writing long, research-intensive pieces for national (if not global) publications. These clients and publications will routinely pay these high rates in exchange for the writer's extensive experience.

In addition to all of this, you have to think about your field. Certain fields (medical writing, for example) tend to pay much higher than others (such as blogging/marketing). If you get into a high-paying field, you can charge more as a novice. The best way to find out how much you should

charge for a certain field is to find other writers in that field. They will have the best knowledge to help you decide how much you should charge.

Finally, consider the type of rate you want. Many writers use an hourly rate, but per word and project rates are also popular. If you're a 9-to-5 worker who likes to keep track of time, an hourly rate is probably best for you. If your work schedule is more erratic, or if you're more unorganized, try a per word or project rate. (If you decide on a project rate, you can use a rough per word rate to help guide you. After that, figure in time for research and editing.)

## The Flexibility of Rates

Remember, rates change with you. As you get more experience and land more jobs, you should charge more. Keep in mind that dramatic rate changes don't go over too well and may cost you a few clients. For that reason, increase your rates slowly over time. Make sure you inform any clients of the rate increase well in advance—at least a month, preferably three to six months.



Also keep in mind that the marketplace can fluctuate. If you work in more than one field, you may experience a big difference in your rates for each field, since many going rates are industry-dependent. Always seek out the advice of expert writers in your field(s) to find out your peers' rates and adjust yours accordingly.

Once you've found a rate, stick to it. Jobs that offer consistent work with low pay are tempting, but they're not worth it. By standing by your rate, you'll find work that you enjoy doing, and you'll be well compensated for it.

## Myth #3

# Your Portfolio Has to Be Huge

This myth is one of the most persuasive of the bunch. That's because there's some truth to it. In order to get jobs and clients that will pay well and treat you well, you'll need to have some proof of your skill.

Assembling an appealing portfolio is an unmistakably important step of the job-seeking process for a freelance writer. Clients love to see a portfolio full of well-written content that's relevant to the industry. Few things can attest to your quality as a writer more than a good portfolio.

As with rates, portfolios suffer from the misconception that quantity should trump quality. Many writers and would-be clients alike believe that bigger is better when it comes to portfolios. They argue that large portfolios prove that the writer has vast experience writing in a wide range of situations. For some clients, this will make or break a deal.

With all of that evidence, it's difficult to not believe this myth. You should indeed assemble the best portfolio possible in order to display your strengths. The good news is that you don't have to slave for months on end in order to compile an outstanding portfolio.

### What Really Makes a Great Portfolio Great?

When potential clients, employers, and editors view your portfolio, they want to see your experience in practice. They aren't necessarily looking for size or even reputation. While every writer would love to have a byline in a nationwide magazine in their portfolio, it's not necessary whatsoever. What people do look for in your portfolio is relevance.

Often, private clients and employers will request an informal portfolio. Many job applications ask you to submit three to five samples of your best work. They're not looking for a hefty portfolio—they're looking for your best work. This is true in almost any industry. So in theory, you could get away with not having a formal portfolio; however, it's a good idea

to keep a tidy collection of your best work to show to private clients.

Most people don't really care if your portfolio has five items or fifty; they want to see samples of your work that are relevant to the niche. Say you're submitting an article to a gardening magazine, and you submit three samples. One sample is an article on gardening you wrote for a small blog. The other two samples are about phones, but they're published on a reputable tech blog. It's extremely likely that the editors of the gardening magazine will rely most heavily on the article about gardening. Even though it wasn't published on a well-known site, it demonstrates your proficiency in the field. The two articles on the famous tech blog will help your credibility and emphasize your skill, but the editors won't care about the subject matter because it's irrelevant.

It's also a good idea to continually replace old work with new work. As you improve over time, your portfolio should change to reflect your progress. If there are older pieces that you're particularly proud of, feel free to include them, but make sure that your recent work is represented as well.

How big should your portfolio really be? There is no best answer to this question, so it's up to you. I find ten to fifteen items to be a nice size. It's enough to display a variety of work, but it doesn't overwhelm the viewer with an endless list of samples. You can have a great portfolio with fewer or more items. In the end, the relevance and quality of the samples will be much more important than the size of your portfolio.

## Myth #4

# You Have to Be an Influencer

When you look at the most successful freelance writers, you'll see they all have one common thread: they're all influencers. These people are thought leaders and have a wide range of influence. When they say something, people listen and talk about it. Much like Steve Jobs or Warren Buffett, these influencers are often mavericks who challenge the status quo and bring new ideas to the table. Even influencers without Jobs-level status still have a powerful reach.

Many writers with less fame also brand themselves to be influencers. Nowadays, a writer will have a blog, a decent social media network following, and a sizeable email list. This allows them to be more than a freelance writer; they are marketing themselves. These people tend to be successful, so the myth arises that in order to be a successful writer, you must also be an influencer.

This is one of the most discouraging myths. It tries to tell you that you can't even be a successful writer because you're not important enough. Even worse, this myth does have some truth to it, so it's all the more believable. That's not to say you have to build a large followership—you simply have to influence within your circle. Anyone can do it, no matter their level of experience.

## The Influencer Trend

In the past decade, as the Internet has grown more ubiquitous, influencing as a trend has also become more ubiquitous. People pay more attention to influencers than ever before. Big names like Elon Musk and Jack Dorsey are all over the news. The influencers behind a brand often become synonymous with the brand itself.

Other fields have adopted this trend, and now there are influencers in every niche imaginable, including writing. It's easy to feel left out if you're not an influencer yourself. While influencing is important, the size of your influence doesn't

matter as much as you might think. This is yet another area where people prioritize quantity over quality.

How exactly the influencer trend has pervaded the writing industry is a bit flummoxing. Many writers have enormous success without being influencers. Ghostwriters and writers who work for private clients both fit this category. They don't need to influence anyone; they're often referred to new clients by word of mouth. They often don't feel the need to market themselves.

You can also work this way, applying for work with private clients and publications without ever setting up a blog, social media network profile, or email list. None of those elements are necessary. They can help you, especially if you're a new writer or someone who wants to scale up, but you don't need them to have a successful freelance writing career.

## Influencing (Without Being an Influencer)

Instead of buying into the idea that you need to have a wide reach with your personal brand, consider the notion of influencing within your sphere, no matter its size. You have a



certain degree of influence over a number of people: your colleagues, your clients, and anyone else you're in professional contact with. These people make up your sphere of influence.

Within your sphere of influence, you can do amazing things. Your writing career can blossom within a small, well-watered environment. Being an influencer is powerful, but having influence is just as powerful. By concentrating on the quality of your network, you can get more jobs, charge more, and be more successful overall.

There are two main types of people in your network: colleagues and clients. You can leverage both groups for different types of opportunities.

## How Colleagues and Clients Can Help You

While most of your colleagues won't hire you, they can give you referrals. Referrals are particularly powerful because someone is personally recommending you. Think of it as a testimonial in action. People trust their social circles for great recommendations, so when someone recommends you,

it goes a long way—much further than a cold email or job application would normally go. Referrals by clients are also beneficial. Your clients know the quality of your work first-hand, so their testimony will speak volumes about you. People trust people they know, so if your clients tell their network about you, you just might have some new work coming your way.

Here's a secret to getting referrals: Ask for them. Many freelancers are too bashful to ask, but they're missing out on a great opportunity. Most of the time, if you ask for a referral, you'll get one. Colleagues and clients are happy to share a wonderful resource with their network.

Colleagues in particular can also share leads that might be a good fit for you. If they know a company who's hiring writers, they can pass that information on to you. If you have colleagues who are also writers, don't be afraid that they won't share anything with you. Writers tend to be a fairly open bunch. They're willing to help one another, even if that means helping their competition.

Most of the time, any uncouth behavior is demonstrated by bad clients or low-paid freelancers who freelance only on the

side. There are countless clients who, for some reason, feel that rudeness is the key to success. These clients will demand, argue, insult, and even make fun. On the other hand, low-paid freelancers may feel the need to be rude because they want to hold on to what little they have. They're afraid of losing, so they don't help others.

If you have colleagues and clients in different fields, you can also think about trading services. Perhaps you know a web developer who can help you out with your site in exchange for some copywriting. And if your colleague likes your work, you're much more likely to be recommended as well.

If you do have social media network profiles and/or an email list, you can also ask colleagues and clients to follow/subscribe to you. Since you've already proven your value to them, they're likely to follow your future endeavors and invest in you down the road.

## Extending Your Influence

As your network expands, you'll have more influence. After a while, you may be in the position where you have a relatively

large sphere of influence. At that point, you could choose to harness your influencing power and develop your personal brand. You could also choose to not become an influencer, which is a fine choice. However, if you choose the latter, make sure you have a method of staying up to date with your network. Don't let any business relationships run dry.

Make sure you're keeping in contact with colleagues and clients from the past and present. I've had old clients refer me to their colleagues, even though it was months after I completed the initial project. You might be surprised at how powerful your network can be, whether it's small or large.

## Myth #5

# You Can't Be a Full-Time Freelance Writer

The writing industry is in a tough spot right now. High-caliber freelance writers often get passed up in favor of someone from Croatia who can beat their prices. (That actually happened to me.) Professionals, blogs, publications, and organizations are all prioritizing quantity over quality more and more.

If you've tried to find work as a freelance writer, you've probably experienced some trouble. There are countless low-paying clients and not enough high-quality work around. All of these factors contribute to this fifth myth. Like Myth #4, this lie says that you can't have true success as a freelance writer.

I won't sugarcoat this myth—it is difficult to become a successful full-time freelance writer. It takes lots of dedicated

time and hard work. You'll have to spend hours and hours applying for jobs, sending out resumes, and looking for new postings on job boards. You'll get some leads, only to have them fizzle out almost immediately.

It's a grueling process, but don't be dissuaded by these roadblocks. If you have the tenacity and motivation to put in the hard work required, you'll reap the many rewards.

## The Full-Time Freelancer

If you don't know any full-time freelance writers, you might be having a hard time believing that it's possible to go full-time with writing. In this section, we'll take a look at a couple of freelance writers who have made the jump to a full-time career.

The first freelance writer we'll look at is Jeff Goins. Jeff is a bestselling author and a full-time writer. [In a blog post about his shift to full-time writing](#), he shared information about his journey. He confirms that it takes a lot of hard work and persistence to go full-time. He set aside ample time to practice writing and worked in his free time to build up his

career. Since he had a full-time job, he kept it to stay financially secure. Now, Jeff can live off of writing alone.

Jeff's story provides many good pointers for writers aspiring to go full-time. If you have a traditional job, you may want to keep it. Working on the side and building your writing career from the ground up is a great option. It gives you financial peace of mind and also provides an avenue for you to pursue the career of your dreams.

Keep in mind that Jeff is also an influencer, so he has a large audience to market to. His career is an excellent example of how the writing life and good marketing can work hand in hand. His marketing facilitates a major part of his income: he can sell products to his massive email list. You might think of Jeff as a writer/marketer hybrid, and rightly so. His business model is worth a look if you're considering the influencer path.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, there's freelance journalist Richard Morgan. Richard has written for some of the most respected publications in America: *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Fortune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many more. But his freelance career hasn't always been a

smooth ride. [In an essay for \*The Awl\*](#), he wrote about the dramatic ups and downs of freelancing. He went from getting paid \$100 a word to eating crushed-up vitamins because he didn't have any food.

Richard's perspective is painfully real, and while it is a more extreme case, it illuminates the hard times that freelancers can go through. There may be periods of fear and trembling in your career, but if you push through, as Richard did, you can emerge successful on the other side.

It's important to note that Richard consistently aimed high, mostly for widely read national magazines. Because he aimed so high, he experienced both huge successes and huge failures. Your career probably won't look like his, but it is important to remember that being a full-time freelance writer is sometimes a bit risky. Even though there is always at least a modicum of danger involved, Richard's story (and stories from countless other writers) argue that in the end, freelance writing is worth it.

Richard talked about his experiences in depth [in an article for Nieman Storyboard](#). In that interview, he discussed how even writers at top publications have to worry about getting



paid. It's a wonderful insight into a side of the writing industry that few writers ever see, and as it turns out, the grass isn't always that much greener.

## Making the Leap

If your goal is to become a full-time freelance writer, then prepare to be in it for the long haul. Your experience probably won't be as dramatic as Jeff's or Richard's; yours will most likely fall in the middle. You may find yourself squeezing in time to write during lunch at your job, or you may find yourself being constantly turned down by editors and clients.

Taking freelance writing full-time will look different for everyone. For many writers, this will mean working a traditional job and growing a writing career on the side. Few people would risk jumping headfirst into freelancing, and rightfully so. No matter what you do, make sure that you take action to advance your career every single day. When the road gets rocky, keep the destination in mind.

If you take away only one lesson from this chapter, let it be this one: Work hard, persist, and keep writing. Being a full-time freelancer is more possible than you might think. With enough effort and continuous action, you'll find yourself picking up more work, and eventually, you'll be able to quit your day job and officially become a full-time writer.

## Part 2:

# The Real-World Craft of Professional Writing.

So far, we've tackled myths about the professional side of writing. There's myths about the craft of writing that need to be debunked as well, and the second half of this book is dedicated to that.

As you probably know, the different schools of thought within the writing industry are varied and competitive. Writers will furiously debate the Oxford comma and argue endlessly about how to write for the Internet. On top of that, there are commonly held doctrines about writing that few would question because they're so believable.

These myths are deadly in a different way than professional myths. Myths about the craft of writing make writers doubt the words they are writing. You can't be a professional writer

without studying the craft of writing, so craft myths attempt to derail you before you can start to think about success.

These myths try to tell you that there are right and wrong ways to write. Naturally, there are right and wrong ways to structure a sentence, but these myths say you have to fit a certain tone and style. If you write in a professional tone, people will try to convince you to adopt an irreverent, informal tone. These myths also lie to you about the process of writing itself, arguing that your first drafts are always shitty.

This section will address some key ideas that are particularly popular within the writing industry. I'm not going to claim that any of these are complete myths, but I do believe that following them can lead to dangerous writing habits, make you less productive, and inhibit your growth as a professional writer.

As you read this half of the book, think about how each myth applies to how you write. You've probably felt the impact of each myth at some point—most writers do. This section is meant to challenge you to rethink your boundaries as a

writer and push past these myths to become a stronger, more productive writer.

## Myth #6

# Your First Draft is Always Shitty

If you've read about writing for even a short length of time, you know that this myth springs from the book *Bird By Bird* by Anne Lamott. She argues that first drafts are often (if not always) shitty and that it's a normal part of the writing process. This idea has made its way through the entire writing community, and countless writers embrace it as part of their workflow.

The idea here is an old one: You can't do anything perfectly the first time. And that's entirely true. Many writers are at their best when they draft in a stream of consciousness style and then revisit the piece after a few days to approach it with a fresh mind. This brings to mind a popular quote: "Write drunk, edit sober."

There's nothing inherently wrong with the idea behind the shitty first draft, but many writers take it too far. They

believe that every first effort they put forth will be terrible. When they sit down to write, they may not take the task at hand as seriously as possible because they know the bulk of the work will come later in the redrafting. They write without inhibition, which is good, but they also trick themselves into believing that it's the way it has to be.

Believe it or not, first drafts can be good. Not great, not finished products, but good. You don't have to spend your writing career fixing up shitty first drafts. Instead, you can train yourself to produce first drafts that establish a sturdy foundation and work for you.

## How to Become a Writing Machine (Without Sacrificing Quality)

Think of any skill you have. Now think back to when you were developing that skill. Obviously you weren't as proficient as you are now, but you also weren't as natural. Now that skill is nearly effortless, right? You do it without thinking about it.

It's common sense that the more you practice something, the more natural it becomes. Yet this idea is rarely applied to writing. Even writers with years of experience still believe that their first drafts are shitty.

Writing is a skill like any other, and after hours and hours of concentrated practice, it will become more natural to you. You don't have to think about the little elements, like grammar, because they're second nature. This also applies to writing entire first drafts. After you've been writing day after day for so long, your first drafts become less shitty. Naturally, you'll never be able to create a perfect first draft, but you will be able to come much closer to a finished product. You'll make fewer edits, and you'll take less time to create a final draft. Because you've practiced so much, you won't have to think about the process—instead, you'll just write, and your skill will do the rest.

Many writers would reject the idea that one can write a great first draft in a short amount of time. They relegate quick writing to content mill workers and argue that fast writing produces poor results. But the truth is, once you achieve a certain level of writing expertise, you can turn around drafts



much more quickly without skimping on the quality whatsoever.

There are three important factors here: repetitive practice, repetitive study, and repetitive experience. This isn't a quick fix—you have to write every day for a long time to create great first drafts. But, like becoming a full-time freelance writer, it's a process that's well worth the time and effort.

## Practice Makes (Almost) Perfect

Repetitive practice is the first crucial component. You have to practice daily, but more importantly, your practice must be focused. If you're not giving 100%, your practice won't be as beneficial. Block out time for writing, and stick to a schedule. Make it a routine. Train yourself to be in the zone when it's time to write.

To get the most out of your writing time, set small goals for yourself. If you've been struggling with misplaced modifiers, make it a goal to complete a piece of writing without any misplaced modifiers. If you want to eliminate buzzwords from your writing, set aside time to look for and eliminate

any buzzwords. Tailor your goals to areas in which you want to grow, and create small, achievable goals that you won't obsess over.

For even better practice, create an environment that's conducive to writing. This could mean setting up a small home office or finding a quiet nook at a library to work in. It could mean playing white noise in the background or working early in the morning. The environment should not be distracting in any way. If you find yourself browsing social media networks, block those sites for the duration of your writing time. Eliminate as many distractions as you can.

## Writing As an Ongoing Apprenticeship

No writer is perfect, and every writer can learn more. Think of your career as a writer as an ongoing apprenticeship. You should be studying great writing every day, seeing what other writers are doing, and advancing yourself in the craft.

While the Internet has created problems for writers, it's also given writers endless resources. You can research ways to develop your tone with a few clicks and solve grammatical

problems with a simple Google search. The Internet is also invaluable for researching expert writing in your industry. Whether you write about flowers or finance, you can easily find articles from experts in your field, and this provides an excellent benchmark by which to measure your own writing.

Studying the actual craft of writing is also crucial. There are the basics, such as the classic writing style guide *The Elements of Style*, and then there are advanced texts that are more opinionated. It's wise to take these opinions with a grain of salt, as you may find that some won't fit in with your industry. You may also flat-out disagree with them, and that's okay. Always remember that you're an eternal student, but don't suppress your opinions and blindly trust the greats. Try to learn something from everything you read, even if you don't agree with some points.

## Experience: The True Test

Experience is what turns a writer into a professional. Even if you practice every day without stopping, you will still lack as a writer. There is simply no substitute for hands-on experience.

Experience will also put you under a bit of pressure, which is good. When you have deadlines, you'll have to meet them. You can't live in a safe bubble of study and practice; you have to go out into the world and put your skills to the test. Sometimes, you'll be rushing to get work done, and that's fine. As long as you're consciously trying to not write garbage, your work will turn out well.

After you've written in a real world setting for a while, you'll be able to do more work with less effort. The entire process will be more natural to you. You'll establish a workflow that facilitates your writing process, and as a result, you'll be able to write faster (and better) than ever. It sounds like something you'd hear on an infomercial, but it's true. Every part of your writing process, from drafting to researching, will be quicker.

## Slow and Steady...For a While

There is no magic solution that will give you the ability to write amazing content at lightning speeds. It takes lots of time and experience. It's a complicated mix of the three

factors mentioned in this chapter, and your personal learning speed will also come into play.

That said, there are some ways you can accelerate your writing speed. One of the best ways to write faster is to write slowly at first. By taking the time to write meticulously, you'll be training yourself to pick up on the smaller details, and you'll create the best writing you can. When you're writing faster later on, you'll automatically pay attention to those details without really thinking about them. You'll have internalized the important elements from your slow practice and will be able to focus on the actual writing.

One trick you can try is self-editing in real time. When you finish writing a paragraph, go back and edit it immediately. Think briefly about the form and tone, and watch out for any errors. This doesn't work for everyone, but it's a good exercise if you're looking to speed up your writing process.

Even though little tricks like these can help, you'll benefit the most from practice, study, and experience. When you find yourself at the intersection of those three factors, you'll find yourself writing more quickly, and you'll find that content to be surprisingly good.

## Myth #7

# The Formal Writing Tone is Boring and Outdated

Contemporary culture thinks that it has made a great achievement: It thinks that it's shaken off the shackles that previous generations have worn. Fun is in, and professionalism is out. Today, culture has no filter, and even reputable businesses are adopting a snarky, casual writing tone. Job applications now ask for "web design rock stars" in an attempt to appeal to the younger crowd.

As business blogs become BuzzFeed, so do writers. There's pressure on writers to be funny and sarcastic. It's not strange to see innuendos and epithets in professional articles. (When I once commented on one such article from a well-known copywriting blog, I was told by the staff that professional writing is "boring" and that it's good to be "irreverent" to relate to readers.)

Of course, there's a huge problem with this: This irreverent style of writing decreases credibility. If you can't differentiate a blog post about investments from a college student's Twitter profile, there's something wrong. I'm certainly not advocating a dry, lifeless writing style, but the myth that professional writing is boring is an outright lie.

### Casual vs. Corporate?

Sadly, the sentiment that professional writing is boring is rampant. Both writers and readers envision an ongoing battle between the stiff, pompous drivel of corporate writing and the trendy, controversial posts that many blogs feature. When you ask someone what comes to mind when you say "professional writing," they'll probably think of academic writing or legal documents. They assume that professional writing consists of vague phrases written in the passive voice: "Research has been conducted to assist in our departmental advancement."

Likewise, only the most laid-back, pop-culture-influenced writing is considered to be truly casual. Whether it's the use of smiley faces, profanity, or even (shudder) all capital

letters, this writing is most apparent on blogs targeted for young people, but it's found its way into the business world as well. Businesses don't want to be boring, so they adopt a casual writing tone in an attempt to be relevant.

The problem with the casual vs. corporate fight is that it forces you to choose between two extremes. You can either be irreverent and cool or professional and boring. Few people think of these two styles correctly: as two opposite points on a spectrum, with infinite possibilities in between.

Furthermore, this debate shames professional writing while glorifying casual writing as the be-all and end-all writing style. If professional writing is boring, then no one will write in a professional style, because no one wants to be boring. The truth is that society has simply taken two extreme styles—truly boring professional writing and completely informal writing—and made it seem like they are the only two options.

The truth isn't so black and white. There is a time and a place for a casual writing style, just as there is a time and a place for a professional writing style. There are even times when it's appropriate to blend the two. To say that casual writing is



the only enjoyable writing style is to ignore the countless benefits of good professional writing and to limit oneself.

## Bridging the Gap

Casual and professional writing styles both have their strengths. Casual writing is ideal for disarming skeptical readers and creating a relaxed mood. Professional writing excels at description and delivering information in a straightforward manner. When these two styles work in tandem, the results can be powerful.

Say you're writing an article about stock trading for beginners, which is inherently a complex subject. You may find that you're delivering the information succinctly, but it seems confusing. This is where a more casual tone can help. Instead of using industry lingo, you can break down the terms into language that lay people will understand. And perhaps using a personal anecdote to open the article would help the reader better understand a key concept of stock trading.

The reverse is also true. Say you're writing a biography for a photographer. Perhaps your writing is conveying the photographer's personality, but some of your descriptions fall flat. By using a professional tone, you can easily deliver the relevant information in a no-fuss manner, and you'll find it works rather well juxtaposed with the casual tone.

These are only two examples of how casual and professional styles complement each other. Sometimes, perhaps in a blog post for a business, you'll find yourself integrating both equally into the writing, and that's fine. What's most important is to know that casual and professional tones are not at odds; they help to balance out a piece of writing.

## The Future of Writing

Professional writing has already changed, possibly forever, and it will undoubtedly continue to change. The world will see less and less of the lifeless, passive voice-dominated legalese, and that's good. However, there's a certain point where professional writing can't get any less professional. Unless they want to completely shed any professional

identity, businesses will continue to generate professional content.

In the future, professional writing will not be defined as “boring.” Rather, it will be the successful merging of the right amounts of casual and formal tones. It will relate well to the target audience but not sink into immaturity or irreverence. What are the right amounts? That’s ultimately up to the writer and the company to decide, but it should be balanced. If a piece of writing will be going out to 25-year-olds with freelance jobs, then a more casual tone is fitting. If a piece of writing will be going out to C-level executives, a more formal tone is fitting.

The best writers with the most staying power have mastered this balancing act, and while it’s tricky, it’s an invaluable tool to have. You’ll be prepared for a wide range of situations, and as long as you take the context into consideration, you’ll produce great writing that’s not boring nor juvenile.

## Myth #8

# Goodbye Sleep: You Have to Spend Hours Writing

The stereotypical writer shares many common traits with the stereotypical college student studying for final exams: up until the wee hours of the morning, hunched over a laptop, struggling to finish. Even some writers who are early risers spend their whole day writing, and when the day ends, they find they haven't gotten much done.

Writing can be a strenuous activity at times, and it always requires careful thought and deliberation. It's not an easy job by any stretch of the imagination. Because of this, many writers find themselves working hours upon hours only to complete a little bit of work.

After a while, writers might accept staying up late or spending hours writing as part of the job. Thankfully, there are much better ways to work that don't require losing sleep,

sanity, or both. By streamlining the writing process, you can get work done more quickly and more efficiently. The methods to do so aren't difficult, but they do require dedication. If you can master them, you'll find the writing process to be much more bearable, and you may even get back those missed hours of sleep.

## Streamlining the Writing Process

Time is a valuable asset. Everyone wants more of it, and no one has enough. For a writer, saving time is particularly useful because that time can be used for other necessary tasks. The writer's day is typically chock full of to-do items, so the more time a writer can save, the better.

Most often, the writing process itself is to blame for time loss, whether it's writer's block (which we'll discuss in the next chapter) or getting stuck on a difficult assignment. Therefore, streamlining the writing process is an ideal solution. There are typically three aspects of the writing process: researching, writing/drafting, and editing. In this chapter, we'll look at some ways to become more productive and efficient in these areas.

## Streamlining Your Research

Research is one of the more grueling parts of the writing process. You may find yourself wading through the endless pages of a Google search, trying in vain to find relevant information about an extremely niche topic. With a few simple adjustments, you can make the researching process much faster and much easier.

In the first chapter of this book, I talked about targeted search phrases in the context of finding jobs. These were structured using Google's search operators. Google has a ton of them, but few people know how to use them. Lucky for you, [Google provides a handy list of all the search operators](#). If you use Google at all (and you do), these operators will dramatically cut down on your Googling time.

One tip that may be obvious is to read the meta descriptions of Google results. Meta descriptions are the short blurbs beneath each headline link that tell you more about the page. Many sites go the extra mile to create excellent meta descriptions for search engine benefits, so you can usually

trust them to be an accurate reflection of the page in question.

It's also a good idea to become experienced in skimming and scanning material to find what you're looking for. I rely heavily on the "find" function to see if a web page has the word or phrase I'm after. This also works if you're using something other than Google (or another search engine) for your research.

## Streamlining Your Writing

If you've read this far, then you already know how to streamline your writing (as discussed in Myth #6). I'll include a few additional tips in this section to help you maximize your writing time.

At times, I've found myself struggling to choose between words, asking myself if I should use "purpose" or "objective." When this happens, I take one of two actions. The first action I might take is to make an impulse decision. I quickly analyze the context and then choose one based on my intuition (and therefore my experience). The second action I take is to write

a placeholder word or phrase in all capitals. For example, “Our team is composed of the best web designers who take a WORD approach to the art.” Sometimes, I’ll even use all capitals and bolding. This helps it stick out to me when I’m editing.

This tip is another obvious one, but it’s something that many writers overlook: Take regular breaks. Don’t stress out your mind too much; let yourself take a breather in between writing sessions. I use the Pomodoro Technique to do this. You work for twenty-five minutes, take a five-minute break, and repeat. It’s one of many wonderful time management methods—do whatever works for you. Just make a schedule (that includes breaks) and stick to it. You’ll find that by having targeted writing sessions blocked out, you’ll be much more focussed during those sessions and get more done.

## Streamlining Your Editing

Since editing requires an attentive eye, it’s naturally one of the more time-consuming parts of the writing process. The trick I shared earlier (editing a paragraph or section immediately after you write it) is a good way to cut down on



editing time. You'll also find that after you've edited yourself for a while, you can pinpoint your weak areas or common areas and watch out for those.

You can also use online editing software, which usually does a pretty good job of catching basic errors (and it's much more reliable than your word processing software's spelling and grammar check). However, don't become too reliant on these tools to the point where they become a crutch. Use them to complement your own editing.

## Work-Life Balance: Does It Exist?

There is one additional factor that can cause a writer to stay up late even with the help of these techniques: Life. Life is unpredictable and will often interrupt your writing sessions. Maybe your house is noisy or you have to start working overtime at your job. Writing isn't your only responsibility, and sometimes it's hard to block out dedicated time for writing.

There is no easy solution here; what is best is what will work for you. Somehow, you have to find time to write without

sacrificing sleep or your health. Most often, you'll find that there are several things you do on a weekly basis that you can easily cut out. If you often go out to eat, you may want to consider cooking at home and using that time to write. If you're in the habit of watching several movies a week, try cutting out one or two and writing instead. Take a look at your weekly schedule, and trim the fat.

Don't worry about blocking out a certain number of hours per week. Instead, give yourself as much time as you need. Some writers only need to work four to six hours per week, while others prefer twenty or more. It all depends on your personal career. You don't have to sleep five hours a night to be a successful writer—with a bit of schedule juggling, you can get into a consistent rhythm that works best for you.

## Myth #9

# Writer's Block and the Muse

Every writer has experienced “writer’s block” at some point. It is the proverbial devil on the writer’s shoulder. It blocks your train of thought and renders you totally helpless. In contrast, there are times when it seems that you have been blessed with endless ideas. This is the angel on the writer’s shoulder that some call the muse. These two forces compete with each other, and some days you’ll be subject to one or the other. Right?

It’s hard to think about writer’s block and the muse as myths. After all, there are countless resources to help writers overcome writer’s block and summon the muse to their side. These forces have been part of the writing community’s collective brain for hundreds of years. That’s why most writers have trouble accepting that both writer’s block and the muse do not exist.

## The Lie of Convenient Work

Some days do seem better than others. On the good days, you can fly through work like it's nothing. But on the bad days, you can hardly write eight words. These are undoubtedly real feelings, but there aren't really "good" or "bad" days. Writer's block and the muse try to tell you that there are good and bad days. They argue that certain times are better than others for writing.

The truth is, no day is better than another for writing. Each time you sit down to write, you are committing yourself to writing. There are no good days or bad days for writing; there are only work days. You have to work even when you don't feel like it. You can't work when it's most convenient for you—that is the lie perpetuated by the ideas of writer's block and the muse.

[Painter Chuck Close said it best:](#) "Inspiration is for amateurs – the rest of us just show up and get to work." Even though it's a creative field of work, writing is no different from any other job. A mechanic wouldn't be able to spend all day sitting around because of mechanic's block. Writing is a job,

like any other, and if you treat it as such, you'll get the most out of it.

## Revealing the Myth

You might be wondering if writer's block and the muse are really myths. They're based on real feelings you have, so if they're myths, then what's actually happening?

As an experienced writer myself, I believe writer's block to be made up of two components: mind overload and inexperience. Most of the time, a writer suffering from writer's block will be undergoing the effects of one of these elements.

What we call writer's block can sometimes be the result of you simply taking on too much work and maxing out your mental capacity. Writers already have a lot on their plates, and when writers are stressed or discouraged, they're also feeling the effects of those negative emotions. They experience that infamous inability to move forward with their work because they're overloaded. Their minds are bogged down with too many weights. Of course, the trick

here is to not take on more than you can handle. Meditation can help deal with negative emotions, and organization can help you plan out your days to their optimum.

But sometimes, writer's block happens out of nowhere. Even on the best of days, a writer can still find it difficult to write. This is usually due to inexperience. Writers who are relatively new (and even some a few years in) tend to deliberate more during the writing process. When they experience writer's block, they're either thinking of too many options or they can't think of any at all. Experienced writers get work done no matter what. They have a deep toolbox of skills from which they can pull, and they do so subconsciously. More importantly, they know that writer's block means a delayed paycheck.

So what about the muse? There's no doubt that inspiration is real, but there's no magical beam of light that shines down from the heavens to bless you with great ideas. Inspiration is somewhat mysterious at times, but other times it's the result of a fantastic day.

The idea of the muse suggests that all writers feel this nearly divine inspiration, but truthfully, inspiration comes to people

in different ways. If you're a creative freelance writer, you might be inspired by nature or a philosophical thought. Professional freelance writers, on the other hand, are mostly inspired by good days or the thought of being paid. Either way, inspiration can happen at any time. When you're inspired, go with the flow. Write as much as you can. When you're not inspired, write as much as you can. Inspiration is wonderful, but the lack of inspiration shouldn't be a roadblock.

## Staying Inspired

Though it sounds cheesy, always keep the end goal in mind when you're writing. Do you want to get published? Do you want to get paid? Find your goal and set your eyes on it. Along the way, you'll feel inspired and you'll feel discouraged, but keeping the goal in mind will allow you to better navigate these feelings. And knowing that writer's block and the muse are myths will allow you to work through those emotions and get stuff done, even when you don't feel like it.

You might also find that by overcoming the other myths mentioned in this book, your writing process will improve. After a while, everything will come more naturally to you. The words won't magically emerge from your fingertips, but you won't have to give up sleep to write. You'll power through your writing day with the goal in mind, and you'll become more efficient, more productive, and more satisfied.



## Conclusion

Once you know a myth is false, you can let go of the fears associated with that myth. I hope this has been true for you over the course of this book. These myths all have one common goal: to hold back writers by using fear. Writers fear everything from low rates to writer's block. They wonder how they can ever win what seem to be insurmountable battles.

However, each myth in this book is grounded in reality. It is ultimately up to you to decide how true or false each one is. When you have, move forward in your writing career with this new knowledge in mind. Whenever you come across an idea that attempts to limit you, treat it with the same analytical mind and skepticism that this book uses. Don't let any topics get past you before you question them thoroughly—they could be myths in disguise.

You will experience some resistance if you choose to not believe these myths. Raising your rates may cost you a client or two. Editors may not entertain the idea of a professional writing tone. At first, it might seem like it would be better to

blindly follow these myths. If that happens, revisit this book and spend some time thinking. Come to a conclusion that you feel good about. Don't rely on this book for absolute truth; instead, use it as a tool to help you make decisions.

Ultimately, this book aims to make you a better and more successful writer. As you continue your journey in freelance writing, always aim to be better and more successful. And if you can tell the difference between a challenging concept and a myth, you'll be much better off. Freelance writing is your career, not anyone else's, so you call the shots.

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Most of what I write about in this book was material that I learned on my feet as a freelance writer. This information wasn't readily available to me at the outset; this is all derived from experience. For that reason, I think it's appropriate to acknowledge all of my clients, past and present, for giving me these learning opportunities, whether good, bad, or in between.

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