

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a thatched umbrella, and lounge chairs. The background shows a clear blue sky, a turquoise ocean, and a sandy beach. In the foreground, there are purple lounge chairs and a small round table. A large thatched umbrella is on the right side. The text is overlaid on the image in two main sections: a dark blue box for the first part and a red box for the second part.

**HOW TO
EARN A
LIVING**

AS A

**CONTENT
WRITER**

RACHEL PRESSER

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How to Earn a Living as a Content Writer

Rachel Presser

Freedom With Writing

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Introduction: What is Content Writing and Why Should I Pursue It?

Thanks for getting a copy of *How to Earn a Living as a Content Writer*! If you've been hitting walls with earning good money from writing online, you've certainly come to the right place. Content marketing is an enormous field with a lot of money-making potential, whether your goal is to build a nice side hustle to fill in the gaps or you're dreaming of the day you hand in your two weeks' notice. However, a lot of people give up on building online writing careers because they get discouraged by content platforms offering shoddy pay. Many also fold after ending up wasting days on those job-bidding platforms doing back and forth with someone who thinks you owe them your labor for pennies because they're designing "The Next Greatest App" but have a website that looks like a Tripod relic from 1998.

Well, not anymore. You're going to see why content is king. Not just for brands, but for *you*.

I'd like to take a minute to thank Jacob and Caitlin Jans for all the wonderful things they've provided for the internet writing community. I was initially introduced to Freedom with Writing by a friend I made in the content writing sphere and figured I'd give the mailing list a try. I ended up learning so much from the other writers' testimonials and contributed a few of my own, which I will link to when appropriate. To date, I've also had [one published essay](#) and one pending pitch with publications I discovered through the mailing list!

What makes Freedom with Writing amazing is that the team finds opportunities for writers from all walks of life, professional specialties, and levels of their writing careers, and I felt the need to give back to the community and share my knowledge and experience.

So without further ado, let's deep dive into content writing!

What is Content Writing?

"Content writing" has a couple different contexts in the outside world, but we're talking about the digital marketing world now. **This is the hat you're going to need to wear for most of this book.**

There are all different kinds of writing. If you always wanted to write fiction, there are different forms like novels and short fiction. Mediums like TV, film, and video games can straddle fiction and non-fiction while there are also scholarly, journalistic, opinion and editorial, and technical writing among other types.

Content writing is the art and science of writing for the internet, and it's a branch of digital marketing.



It's essentially copywriting that's meant for the internet. Sometimes it can straddle journalistic and technical types of writing. But essentially, you're writing-for-hire for clients whose main intent is to publish on the web. There may be some cases where your content will be intended for print, but these will often be marketing materials.

Content writing is both an art and a science because it contains many interesting moving parts: you need to be able to write well, but also write with the intended audience in mind. Most of the time, you'll be informing the audience while compelling them to do something like sign up for a mailing list or contact a representative. Some content also has elements of storytelling to it: one of my recent pieces had to make my old profession collide with my current one by framing a doctor's need for professional financial analysis in his son playing *Fortnite* and not meeting his squad goals, in order to help sell business valuation packages. If you just said "What?!", don't worry, we're going to discuss why niches are riches in Chapter 6.

Content is also highly technical. It's thanks to falling into content writing that I accidentally ended up learning all about SEO and digital marketing! But don't freak out if your tech skills are lacking. You don't

need to do any coding as a content writer or even as a content strategist. But once you start learning the ropes of *how* your clients are using the content you're creating for them? **Say hello to more money.** Relax though, this book isn't an SEO lesson or an intro to digital marketing (but [definitely let Jacob know](#) if you'd like to see a book or article like that from me!). Nevertheless, I wanted to make you aware that compared to other types of writing, there is an unavoidable technical aspect of content writing you must be aware of: it's intended for the internet and, in most cases, intended to be searched.

Now, it's important that all these distinctions are made because people come into content writing from literally all types of backgrounds. Many professional screenwriters and game narrative designers might dislike the idea of doing copywriting, and I've also seen many people who come from newsroom and magazine backgrounds experience a bit of a culture shock. So, relax. Breathe deeply. I'm a game developer, speaker, and business consultant who now has "experienced content writer and strategist" under my belt, and I did taxes professionally for a decade before pursuing a games career. I'm also a narrative designer and games commentator before I'm a coder. I had zero marketing knowledge until I started co-running a game studio where I learned a little about email and social media, but the floodgates opened once I stumbled upon WriterAccess one day and, as they say, the rest is history.

With that said, copywriters who are "web content native" and journalists with their fact-checking finesse [tend to be viewed more favorably by talent scouts in content writing](#) per the Content Marketing Institute. Don't let this scare you though: content writing is an awesome way to subsidize essay and novel writing, pitching articles and stories, and other types of more artistic writing. It's just a matter of knowing what to expect from content writing and how to deliver value for clients, including knowing how these brands use content from a technical standpoint. You'll learn all about how to sell yourself as a content writer here!

What Do Content Writers Typically Get Asked to Write?

Referred to in the digital marketing world as "asset types," the common assets you're most likely to be tasked with creating are the following:

- Blog posts
- Web page/landing page copy
- Product descriptions
- Individual social media posts and entire social calendars
- Datasheets
- Sales brochures and other marketing materials
- E-books/Whitepapers*
- Case studies and testimonials
- Newsletters and email campaigns

You may also be asked to work on other types of content like presentations, infographics, and other projects that could involve design skills or simply doing the writing and research for these items. Specialty writing for hire, like grant and proposal writing, video scripts, and press releases, can also be found on some content sites.

Ghostwriting is also a cousin of content writing, and it's not just for books. Ghost blogging is the most common form seen in the content marketing sphere, but many influencer types and professionals lack the time and/or writing skills to write the actual articles for magazines they have clout to get published in.

I put an asterisk next to e-books and whitepapers because these terms can be confusing depending on your background. E-books can encompass anything from short books meant to be mailing list incentives that are about 3,000 to 5,000 words to books the client wants to sell on Kindle that are about 30,000 to 70,000 words. Whitepapers are more for the B2B world and used similarly to e-books, where you'll need lots of statistics and examples but your secondary research isn't as extensive as doing primary research. You write about the topic in an informative manner and this asset has a 2,000- to 7,000-word range.

E-books and whitepapers are most likely to be in those short ranges, whether you write from scratch or perhaps repurpose the client's existing blog posts and/or past whitepapers. Just wanted to clear that up so you're not confused with academic-type whitepapers that are at least 30 to 50 pages where you should charge a minimum of \$1,000 because there are tons of primary research involved. Then you have the whitepaper's kissing cousin, the case study or testimonial, where you're writing about trials or experiments the client ran or describing how they solved a problem for their happy clients.

The most important thing to remember, and a concept we'll revisit later, is that the client owns the end product. There may be times when you'll get a byline on that blog post or other pieces for the client, but most of the time the content is going to be white-labeled for the client to present as their own.

What Kind of Opportunities Are There in Content Writing?

The possibilities are VAST in the content writing sphere. And there's only so much you can take my word for, so I'm going to back up this claim with facts from reputable marketing websites.

- **60% of marketers create at least one piece of content per day.** ([eMarketer](#)) "Marketers" is loosely defined here in that this can mean free agent marketers, like yours truly. It can also mean marketing agencies or people in key marketing roles at organizations of all sizes. But, well, that's a hell a lot of marketers. There's lots of competition for those vaunted bylined columns and it takes a while to query publishers or build up a robust fan base for your fiction or other personal writing, but you can easily find some opportunities here that provide more flexibility than a job so you can have more time to pursue your personal and creative goals.
- **Content marketing will be a \$300 billion industry by 2019.** ([Marketing Mag](#)) Traditional outbound marketing has become gauche, and content is the new black. You can easily catch a minute fraction of a percent of that \$300 billion, trust me.
- **1,440 WordPress posts were uploaded per minute in 2017.** ([MarTech](#)) Further elaboration wasn't given on this figure, but let's say that 35% of those WordPress posts were brands that pay for content, so that's 504 paid posts per *minute*. That's 30,240 in an hour, 725,760 in a day, almost 265 million in one year. And that's just ONE content management system. It doesn't

count the tons of other solutions out there! And oh yes, you can absolutely grab a couple of those per day and start making a nice living off of it.

So, yes. There is a biiiiiig world of content. Now it's time to break into it, then figure out how to use it to help you build the life and career that you want by your design. There is a HUGE demand for skilled writers in the wonderful world of web writing, and you can make it all or just part of your income.

Why Content Writing?

The punctuated version:

- There is an enormous demand for content writers of all calibers.
- It can serve as a foot in the door for a digital marketing career, if you're interested in that.
- Content writing can also serve as a foot in the door for other kinds of writing.
- It's portable and flexible. You can do this work from anywhere with internet and don't even need the most robust connection like you do for video conferencing. I have made well into six figures' worth of content at home, IKEA, friends' houses, colleges I've lectured at, fancy resorts in California and Vegas, and budget hotel rooms in Asia and Europe, just to name a few. All with a \$200 Chromebook.
- The types of experiences and traits that might work against you when looking for a regular job can come in handy as a content writer. I've used everything from my professional experience in the taxation and games fields to playing in hardcore bands, traveling frequently, and my favorite foods to find plenty of content orders.
- Scalable. You can work with a few clients or many and make a full-time career out of it or just enough to pay your bills while you focus on a greater goal like building your own business or projects.



People sometimes have an incredibly narrow and dimorphous view of working as a writer. They tend to see it as this glamorous undertaking, where you're interviewing famous people over cappuccinos at chic cafes as you get paid in the thousands per piece for *The Atlantic* before you get to that \$4 per word *Vogue* column we all saw in *Sex and the City*. Or, that you're the quintessential screenwriter living off

ramen or perhaps a broke-ass college grad dumping out your personal trauma for the entire internet to see for \$50 a pop.

So, we're not getting into those types of writing work here—at least as far as context is concerned—because you can certainly achieve glamorous *pay* if you play your cards right. Let me tell you from experience with over 1,000 pieces in my various content creation accounts at the time of writing that the act of content writing is often not very glamorous. You can get some amazing learning experiences out of it and sometimes essentially get paid to learn about specific topics you wanted to research. Sometimes, you'll also get to write about topics you're passionate about. It's not always dull!

But overall, content writing isn't as sexy as being in the writers' room for that hit TV show or having a regular column with a byline in that magazine you've read since high school. You're not writing the Great American Novel here. You're probably going to write blog posts and web copy for IT services and dentists' offices among other types of clients who need the work done. Interviews are more likely to be Skype calls with the brand's clients to get testimonial type of content rather than replicating a scene out of Woody Allen's early work.

But hold on, I'm not slamming a door in your face. Think of content writing as your gateway to those lofty writer galas you're envisioning or simply your meal ticket while you build the portfolio and make the connections needed for that dream column. Hell, I've actually gone to more nice work-related parties at cafes and bars in my city than I did when I had regular office jobs. Then I threw the actual writing jobs in my backpack or suitcase to make it as down-to-earth or as glam as I please as I hit the road for game dev conventions, speaking gigs, or just jumping on a plane because a friend across the country was having a party.

My content writing ventures have lead to some more interesting assignments more relevant to my field though, and have definitely enabled me to live a lifestyle that has lots of flexibility to travel, and to get to write some pretty awesome things off my taxes. Taking a page from fellow game dev Jeff Vogel of Spiderweb Software, he dubbed his blog [The Bottom Feeder](#): he didn't set out to make the next *Minecraft* or whatever. He started as a shareware developer in the 90s and attracted a die-hard fan base that enabled him to make the games he wanted to make and the ability to support a family and take a vacation.

And honestly, that's the same ethos I adhere to as a writer, consultant, and game dev. I'm a happy bottom feeder in that content writing doesn't always equate to fame and glamour, but I've gotten it to pay for a pretty sweet lifestyle. It's paid my bills so I could attain my little fiefdom (Lady Gaga has Monsters, Emilie Autumn has Muffins, so I have Toadlets) without having to sacrifice my time and health on a day job. The content writing world gave me both flexibility and funding for my own projects, then I ended up making more money with it than I initially thought was possible!

Content writing is VERY scalable. You can make content work your sole focus, occasional income, or just something flexible and portable while you work on that greater goal, like a novel, game, or business idea. You can truly build a life and career by your design this way, no BS.

Got that big dream of traveling the world without having your income interrupted, or the equally respectable dream of just never having to put pants on ever again?

Looking for a stable and portable source of income if you've got a spouse that moves for work a lot, or you got kids at home?

Hate how much regular day jobs cramp your style and leave you too exhausted or agitated to work on the things that give you a reason to wake up every day? Just want to have the ability to not have to automatically say "no" to things like long weekends or that convention a few states away?

Whether your ethos is "happy bottom feeder" or "I want to be a content rockstar," content writing is a gravy train you just need to learn how to ride.

Chapter 1: What Can Content Writers Expect to Earn?

This is always the million dollar question with that answer everyone hates: “It depends.”

There is no universal answer because it ultimately depends on the following factors:

- The sum of your writing history, education level, lifestyle, and overall professional experience
- Your positioning and how you present and market the above things (which we’ll discuss!)
- Other skills and professional licenses and/or industrial expertise that you bring to the table
- If you’re working with a private client or a content platform
- If you are working with the client directly or with their marketing manager or agency
- The size and type of client and their experience with ordering content

I wrote a testimonial for Freedom with Writing in 2017 about [how to get paid more as a content writer](#), which you should definitely check out. It delves into the topics in that bullet list a little more, like working with agencies versus working with the end clients directly to better understand the nuances of how people order content.

Like other types of writing, content writing can have wildly varying pay that ranges from pennies to thousands of dollars per order. But let’s talk statistics from reputable sources: Payscale says the average content writer in the US [earns about \\$42,000 annually](#), although that honestly doesn’t tell us much because this guide isn’t really geared towards people looking for salaried jobs in content writing or marketing. Even if you aggregated your freelance content writing pay in an annual fashion, that could indicate mixing in short \$35 blog posts with \$2,000 website rewrites, where one month you made bank and then next month you had to scrape the couch cushions to buy food. Salaries also don’t take deductible business expenses into account, which for a writer are often on the low side unless you have heavy home office and marketing conference expenses (the tax accountant in me didn’t completely die).

The content service ClearVoice, one of the companies I profiled in the next chapter, [published a helpful group of infographics](#) that give prospective content clients an idea of what to expect freelance writers to charge based on their experience level and other factors, and even reported on interesting disparities among writers’ gender and education levels. If you want lots of constructive stats provided by people who do freelance content writing for a living, these infographics contain a lot of useful information on various pay rates like per hour and per word, adjusting for experience levels.

Speaking just for myself, a vast majority of my writing work pays by the word with a couple flat rate jobs thrown in or a combination of by-the-word and flat rate. This is because there are some content jobs that are better suited to hourly or milestone-based pay, particularly projects that entail a lot of research or interviews where the knowledge required or effort exerted may not equate to the total number of

words (such as making presentations or writing press releases). Other assets aren't appropriate for word count-based pay, like product descriptions and social media posts, which are usually best done flat rate.

Ergo, most of the ensuing text that discusses pay will be expressed in CPW (cents per word, in US dollars). For our Canadian friends, 15 CPW is 20 CPW in CAD at the time of writing.

So if you want to get at least 15 cents per word USD for your work, you can express this as 15 CPW, \$0.15 pw or \$0.15/word.



Use “CPW” whenever possible because it shows the client you are a serious professional writer. Clients who have a lot of experience ordering content will know you're the real deal, and clients who never worked with content writers before will have to look up that term or ask you. They'll realize they're dealing with an experienced pen for hire who's less likely to take crap pay or their cajoling to “audition” for less then get your real rate if they like the results. That's not to say that you can't get paid what you're worth for hourly or flat rate jobs, but at least throwing the term CPW around demonstrates that you've done your homework and they can't use newbie hazing tactics on you.

So, a beginner writer with little or no experience or post-secondary education can expect to see 1–3 CPW. Not very illustrious, but if you just need to get some experience before you move up to the higher-paying gigs then you'll likely need to begin at this level as this is what most content platforms will pay you.

Content platforms like WriterAccess have systems where you're assigned a level that has a default pay rate:

Heroic Writers

Writers are star-rated based on online tests, portfolio review, performance, and customer reviews.

6 Star ▾

250 word ▾

GO →

\$ 17.5

STAR RATING	PER WORD
6 Star	\$0.07 Word
5 Star	\$0.056 Word
4 Star	\$0.042 Word
3 Star	\$0.028 Word
2 Star	\$0.014 Word

Speaking from personal experience, I started as a 5-star writer on the site. I got 5.6 CPW and also did some 4-star jobs at 4.2 CPW, but would occasionally get assigned 6-star jobs and other work that paid a lot more than 7 CPW before I really learned how to work the platform. It also took about a year to get 6-star status, as 5-star was the highest rating they'd start new writers with, though I believe writers with certain experience levels and types can start at 6-star now.

You'll hear more about WriterAccess in the next chapter. But 5–7 CPW is a common rate on that platform and other content sites if you're an intermediate writer or creating content that doesn't require a lot of research and specialized knowledge.

8–10 CPW is what you can expect when you're more experienced and have more familiarity with the technical aspects of content writing. 11–25 CPW ranges are excellent rates to strive for when it comes

to content writing. I average this range for most of my platform clients, while private clients are in the 25–30 CPW range.

Getting 30 CPW and beyond to the vaunted \$1–2 pw can be achieved if you have the right mix of the following:

- Professional positioning
- Contacts in the content marketing sphere
- Specialized knowledge/experience
- A vast content portfolio, but also bylined work
- Strong writing skills, obviously
- Working knowledge of the technical aspects of content optimization and *how* content writing is used
- Pitching skills

You might be able to start at these rates out of the gate if you have advanced degrees or expertise in fields with high demand, like finance or technology, but I have found that even with decent positioning, a master's degree, professional license, and a little prior writing experience I was grinding out those 5–7 CPW pieces for a while until I figured out where all the power-ups in this game were hiding.

Chapter 2: The Unpublished Yelp Reviews of Major Content Sites and Some Small Ones

Now's the time to get journalistic as I'm going to give you honest, objective reporting of my personal experience with the following major content writing sites.

We'll get into the semantics of why you'd work with a content platform instead of private clients and vice versa in Chapter 4, but the following are all content platforms I have personally worked with. Some of them even comprise significant parts of my income. If you're just getting started with content writing or are looking for new sites to have another egg in the basket (which all writers and hustlers need to do!), you'll definitely want to check out all of them. You might have different results than I did depending on your experience, skills, and approach. Without further ado, here's my write-up on what it's like to work with these major content sites and a few minor ones.

WriterAccess



WriterAccess is one of the best places to be if you're a content writer, and has been my bread and butter several points of my career after my dashing escape from the financial industry.

You need to pass a writing test and submit an application to get in, then you are assigned a star rating, which I explained in the last chapter. You also have the ability to set your own rates, though there's no way to formally do this at the time of writing. I simply have a statement in my profile that lists 22 CPW as the minimum so I get 15.4 CPW after the house's cut, and I have clients there who pay this or higher when the default rate for a Level 6 writer is 7 CPW since the client pays 10 CPW and the house takes 30%. Whatever you see on an order is what you get: so if you see an order that pays \$30, that's exactly what you'll get assuming you finish the order at the prescribed word count.

There is definitely a learning curve to using the platform, but in essence you have three different order queues: crowd, love list, and solo. Solo orders are orders assigned directly to you by the client, and you can have an infinite number of them in your queue. Crowd orders mean anyone with the corresponding star level or higher can pick up the order if the client wants to put it out there for literally anyone to take. So if they drop a 5-star order, then only 6-star and 5-star writers can see it. Whereas if they drop a 3-star crowd order, anyone who's 3-star or higher can claim the order. If you didn't previously work with this client before, you can only take one order and the others in the pool have to go to other people.

You can put multiple crowd orders in your queue once you've had at least one approved order from that client.

Queue limits aren't based on skill level; they're based on the number of orders you've completed, which can make starting out difficult if you don't see lots of crowd orders. Your queue tops out at five orders each in the crowd and love list queues.

Love lists can be trickier. Clients can add you to their love list because they found you from searching for writers (whether they contacted you after the search or not) or you applied to casting calls. You'll get an email when they drop love list orders and there's a 10-minute delay on them, which means furiously refreshing your screen after nine minutes elapsed and hoping that someone else didn't claim the order before you did. If the love list doesn't have many people on it or most of the other writers on the list are only responsive at a certain time of day, you might be able to snag orders quickly while other love lists may feel futile to hover over because the orders are gone in milliseconds. If you get lots of love list orders though, you could feel pressured to finish those orders before another love list drop takes place so you can free up those queue slots to make more money.

Ergo, solos are the way to make bank on WriterAccess—not just from naming your own rates and consistently communicating with and pitching your regular clients there, but you also don't have the stress from the crapshoot that comes from subsisting on love lists alone. ***The website architecture is also designed to have both managed and self-serve content ordering plus casting calls so you can pitch clients who post them, thus the money-making potential is a lot higher at WriterAccess than other websites.*** You also get all kinds of clients ranging from solopreneurs and new site owners to small and large marketing agencies plus marketing departments and content managers in companies of all sizes.

The order default is the per-word model. You can go by the default rates for your star level or when you make it to 6-star, give a custom word count model, which is easier to sell when you have a strong track record on the site and some kind of niche to sell. You can arrange for hourly and flat-rate jobs with some help from the staff but the default is CPW.

Now let's talk money. I got into the money-making potential but to get down to brass tacks, you get paid twice a month via PayPal (no fees incurred). Your payments function a little like biweekly paychecks in that payroll closes on the 15th and the last day of every month at midnight Eastern Standard Time and your payment comes about a week later. So if you completed \$1,000 of writing jobs between January 1st and January 15th that were also approved by the client by then, you have until 11:59PM EST on the 15th to make it count for the current pay period, which would pay out around January 22nd.

What sucks about this is if you get a revision request right after payroll closes. So let's say you get a revision request on a \$200 order, your paycheck is now \$800. If the client approves the new version before your bulk payment goes out, the admins will try to pay you that \$200 on a separate payment without making you wait two more weeks for the next pay period to close. If it misses the window though, you have to wait until the next one. The somewhat secure feeling of that biweekly pay aside,

there are definitely times this has been incredibly annoying. A friend who used the site a lot said her rent was always late because of having to wait, especially if a large order was pending like that.

Revision requests aside, you can see how long approval windows are. Sometimes clients get forgetful and then the piece goes to auto-approve after that window closes. So if you see “48 out of 336” in the “Time Left” column, that means the client had two weeks to approve the piece (14 days, but the default is 5 to 7 days, or 120 to 168 hours) and has two days left to manually approve the order and rate it. If the window closes, they need to contact the help desk to get it placed back into your queue if they want revisions. Otherwise, your work is done and that money is yours.

I have personally met and spoken with WriterAccess staff at their Content Marketing Conference in Boston and can vouch for them as good people. WriterAccess has the most money-making potential short of working with private clients and agencies directly because its infrastructure enables you to pitch new clients in casting calls, clients can search for you so you really need an excellent profile, and the staff will sometimes recommend you to pitch a client or they’ll set up orders with them directly so make sure you build up your samples and presence so they’ll notice you! There is a mix of managed content writer matchmaking services, and both you and the clients doing their own thing, hence the possibilities are greater than most other writing platforms out there in my opinion and experience.

The Best: Staff is incredibly responsive during business hours and will genuinely do their best not to throw writers under the bus if a client is being unfair or unreasonable while also striving to deliver what the clients paid for. If you’re worried about not being paid for work, they’ll make sure you get paid! You can also get paid opportunities directly from the staff to write for their blog and their sister site, Content Marketing Conference, and you might also get a paid feature in their monthly newsletter that goes out to thousands of potential clients. Overall though, staff is very good about making sure you get paid for work being done, keeping clients in line with what they paid for, and solving related disputes. It’s not like other sites I’ve been on that really put the clients first and throw talent under the bus. Also? Sometimes clients will randomly give you bonuses with an order, or just for the hell of it! The writers there also have a forum clients don’t have access to, and it’s a pretty strong community. I’ve made some awesome friends there who I’ve hung out with in real life or moved to staying in touch with via email or social media, and legit formed closer bonds than coworkers I had at brick-and-mortar jobs. Most of the other content sites covered in this section I found out through other WriterAccess writers!

As for the actual place where you get your writing work done, their text editor is one of the best I’ve ever used and I’ve totally wept when using other sites’ text editors to submit work after getting used to it. The dynamic real-time word count is great as is the tool that lets you know when you’ve hit the client’s focus keywords.

The Worst: Client communications are limited by both the site architecture and terms of service. Sending contact information is verboten. This is a sign of mistrust as if we’d take every client private—trust me, you don’t WANT to do that with every client you meet and you’ll see why in Chapter 4. This isn’t a big deal for the vast majority of work I do on WriterAccess, but every so often there’s a client who needs content strategy work (which is on a separate portal) and perhaps more direction they need to give me for the project, but lacks the right grade account to open up a conference line through the

company and there's only so much you can accomplish doing back and forth via messaging. Which brings me to the next worst point: MESSAGE THREADS EXPIRE. You've been warned. I don't know what kind of UI/UX decision this was but hey guys, it was a *bad* one. Thread expiration is a bad thing because messaging is a one-way portal on WriterAccess in that current and potential clients can message you, but you can't write a new message to them. This honestly limits our potential because that's several pitches we could be making to existing clients. Clients have also complained that the interface on their side is clunky and may need help setting the correct pay rates and other aspects of placing orders, which, honey, that's not your job. But if it's a weekend, holiday, or after hours and you want to get off on the right foot, you might need to do some unpaid tech support work and even go so far as to open a client account just to see how it all works. I addressed all these concerns when the staff asked writers for feature suggestions and improvements in a site-wide survey recently. Hopefully, they'll pay heed.

Overall though, WriterAccess is still highly recommended as the very first content site you should apply to once you've got something to show. It's a veritable bill-payer, and I made a couple grand per month at my peak. In addition to content strategy work, they also have separate portals for editing, graphic design, and translation if you have these talents.

Content Writers



CONTENT WRITERS.COM

Content Writers is a small company that operates entirely on a managed service model. The staff sends out emails to the writer database gauging interest in certain assignments, so you don't communicate with clients upfront. The emails will describe the client and what they need, the pay, then ask you to send relevant samples and a summary of your experience in the topic area. Other times, the staff will personally ask individual writers if you're interested in a particular client or assignment. Often, you'll have to pitch multiple topics—I've usually had to pitch 10 at a time for a tax website—and it can be a crapshoot how many get accepted. 10 accepted pitches for \$50 articles can equal a tidy sum pretty quickly, but then it sucks to only get \$100 after putting a lot of effort into coming up with pitches.

To get accepted to the platform, you'll need to show a portfolio and do a writing sample, which you can keep. Similar to WriterAccess, Content Writers also has a blog about digital marketing topics and they're always taking pitches from the writers in the database for the blog, which at the time of writing, pays \$39 per post in the 500 to 700 word count range.

Unlike WriterAccess though, virtually all of the jobs are flat rate. You don't have the ability to set your own rates, per word or flat rate. Depending on where you are in your content writing endeavors and

overall professional positioning, this can be a good or bad thing. The lowest-paying assignments I've had on Content Writers were in the 5-7 CPW range, while the highest I've gotten was around 10-12 CPW, and there's more room for variation with this depending on the type of client. Because the infrastructure is 100% managed service, the only client you can really actively pitch is Content Writers themselves for their blog, which if you're pretty knowledgeable in digital marketing, it's a pretty simple \$39 a pop that adds up quickly enough if they like lots of your pitches.

Payments are sent through PayPal with no fees on your end, and whatever you see on a job is what you'll get: if a job pays \$50, you get \$50 as the house's cut is already calculated. However, the payroll process is a little opaque because of how long it could take the end client to approve the work. I've usually gotten paid once in the following month after work was approved for most of the writing jobs I've finished, though once in a while I'd get paid twice a month or it would take FOREVER. Every order is also edited by a Content Writers editor, which can also add to the time lag between when you submit the work and when you get paid. Depending on the editor you get, this can either be a pretty quick and seamless process or you're suddenly doing more revisions than an essay for *Time* magazine. Don't worry, the latter isn't super common on the site but once in a while I'd get one that would make things so much more time-consuming than it had to be.

Since I'm in New York and so is the company, I've also met the Content Writers staff in person, and they specifically put together a writer event at a local coffee shop to show appreciation for us and also took the time to give a presentation on the technical aspects of web content and how search engines use it so writers could be better prepared. That's important to know if you want to command better rates! They're pretty humorous and affable people, and being able to make it to an event also helps get you first dibs on certain clients.

The Best: It's pretty plug-and-play. You don't have to look for clients, and speaking as someone mostly trained on WriterAccess it's like you get nothing but solos. Deadlines are pretty reasonable, and because you must go through the staff first before working with any client, you'll get a heads-up if the client expects incredibly quick turnaround. Staff is friendly and usually pretty responsive if you're having problems, and every order has its own message board where you can flag an admin. The message boards are pretty nice and efficient in that you can have internal chats with admins and editors then an external chat with the client if you need additional direction.

The Worst: My criticism is mostly with Content Writers' text editor than anything else: the text editor you have to use is *horrendous*. I do all of my work in a Google Doc then import it or else I'd never get it done efficiently on this platform. Pasting anything in that editor always creates extra work of having to remove boldface from everything and correctly format headers as the proofreaders definitely don't fix this for you if you missed this step. So, I just find it easier to import a Google Doc. You can also upload your work as a Word doc, which I've had to do when copying, pasting, and reformatting wasn't feasible. Other than that, being unsure when you get paid is also a downside to working on Content Writers, though you *will* eventually get paid; you won't have clients running off with the work. If an order's been waiting for approval for a while, you also might need to nudge an admin so you can get your money. Lastly, not being able to name your price is a downside if you're used to getting paid well into 15 CPW and beyond.

Overall, Content Writers can be a feast or famine. There are times I will have tons of work from them or intermittent bits of cash from writing for their blog, then I'll go months without anything from them just to randomly get a huge order. Though you can't actively pitch clients and the pay periods can be wonky, I'd definitely add this platform to the basket as the pay is pretty good relative to other content platforms I've written for but wouldn't rely on it as your bread and butter.

ClearVoice



ClearVoice is a content platform that has lots of potential. Going by both my own experience and that of the writers who introduced me to it, you can either make a killing on this site on a regular basis or only occasionally log in for work. To be totally transparent, it took me about a year of having an active profile on the site before I ever got any paying work!

Using WriterAccess and Content Writers as frames of reference, ClearVoice has an odd approach in that you don't really get to actively pitch clients but rather respond to opportunities. The staff isn't as heavily involved in managing content for clients, but there appears to be a mix of managed service and self-service like you see with WriterAccess. Speaking just from my experience, this is mostly what you get with a ClearVoice account:



Hi Rachel,

You have a new writing opportunity!

Act fast - this opportunity will close in 48 hours. You will be immediately notified if the client selects you. Click below to apply.

Project: *Blog Post - Enterprise Data Protection Solution*

Client: *Security First Corp.*

Scope: *1500 words (\$112.50)*

Due date: *Saturday, Sep 22, 2:59am EDT*

View Opportunity

Not receiving relevant opportunities? Try adjusting your [marketplace settings](#).

No longer interested in using ClearVoice? Click [here](#) to deactivate your account.

Opportunities are algorithmically generated based on what you put in your profile, and you can set a minimum per-word rate. I set my minimum to 7 CPW to cast a wider net on this particular platform. But I've mostly been sent many 15–25 CPW opportunities, some that even go into 30–50 CPW territory and beyond. Jobs are predominantly flat rate but calculated based on a singular word count. For this example, \$112.50 for 1,500 words equates to 7.5 CPW but in most cases, if you get the job done in 1,400 words or so and the client's happy then you'll still get the full \$112.50 (unlike WriterAccess, where you'd only get paid by the word unless the client elects otherwise).

When you click that "View Opportunity" button though, you just get taken to a page that describes the editorial guidelines in more detail and what the client wants. You then indicate either an interest or a pass. Going through the tiny amount of articles I've done for ClearVoice, I've only gotten two assignments this way out of easily hundreds I applied to. There was a "Pitches" section in beta that functioned sort of like the casting calls section of WriterAccess except it would algorithmically match

you with clients interested in taking pitches. I got a few blog posts this way when I found a client who I communicated with directly. It looks like this part of the site is still visible from my profile but hasn't been active for some time. Hopefully, ClearVoice will bring this feature back.

Since the platform appears to be mostly self-service with this "opportunities" mechanic, you have the ability to deck out your profile with several writing samples and other types of content you may provide (like podcasts or graphic design work). Recently, they expanded your CV feature so that you can add content types and roles that help their machines accurately match writers to clients, so hopefully there's room for improvement as far as talent being able to find you. They also do a little bit of managed service in that every so often, similarly to Content Writers, I'll get an email from them asking for writers with experience in a certain area and if they'd like to be considered. I also use those emails as a chance to have dialog with the staff and ask them to consider me for gaming and financial orders.

The house gets 25% of every job but don't worry, whatever your minimum rate is—that's what you'll get after their cut. So if you want to get at least 10 CPW, that's all you need to enter in your profile. Using the screenshot above as an example, \$112.50 is exactly what you'd get. Payment with ClearVoice is THE BEST of any platform I've ever worked on. You get paid via PayPal, no fees on your end, and there's no payroll periods. They use an escrow system where the client must fund the orders first then the funds are released once they approve the work. Approval timeframes are a little opaque but for the few orders I did with ClearVoice to date, I never had to wait more than a week for approval. You get paid minutes after approval, and life would be easier if everyone did this.

The Best: There is VERY well-paying work in all kinds of topic areas to be found here. The escrow pay model makes my heart sing as there's no waiting for payroll cycles to close, you get your money within minutes of client approval, and dear god I wish every writing site did this. Deadlines are pretty generous in most cases. Communication on ClearVoice is also amazing! Message threads don't expire, you can chat with the staff in real time, and you get email notifications for updates to message threads. Their text editor is also very simple to use though I still prefer to work in an external Google Doc and then transfer it. Staff is pleasant to interact with and generally responsive if you're having trouble. They hooked me up with 20 CPW orders from a major tax prep brand after I filled out their survey explaining why I was having trouble getting work there when I had no trouble getting it elsewhere.

The Worst: The amazing pay is virtually all for naught when there's no clear process for getting work there. ClearVoice has superior architecture compared to many content platforms out there, but I've gently nudged them that algorithms can't do *everything*. Machine learning is great for some things, but there needs to be a little more push from all of the humans involved, such as the ability to talk about yourself a little when you apply for an opportunity. Simple "yes or no" buttons don't help, and it looks like most of the orders just go to the first person who applies.

All in all, I'd definitely add ClearVoice to your basket because you can find some really high-paying work there and that escrow system is a dream. Depending on how you set up your CV there and the minimum word count you'll accept, you can either find lots of work or only get a sporadic order from

them. You might have better luck than I did, but I hope to get more going on there by improving my CV and chatting with the staff more.

nDash



nDash is a little more specialized as far as content writing services go. If you write about tech, information security, digital marketing, and the areas where these fields overlap, you will definitely want to create a portfolio at nDash. I've only done one order with them because I don't think I was a good fit for most of their clientele: mostly huge digital marketing brands and tech companies who comb through tons of candidates looking for the right experience combination, while most of my experience is with smaller organizations who want someone whose experience is in a couple isolated areas important to new site owners. It's mostly very large companies and marketing agencies with a few other industries like healthcare and insurance thrown in, but tech and marketing dominate on nDash. Ergo, I wanted to give them their own section because this can be a massive moneymaker to the right writers, though I didn't have much luck with them.

If you've got the right kind of experience and enough high-quality writing samples, you can find a lot of high-paying work there. Most of the jobs are flat rate but the one I did was 15 CPW relative to the total word count, and most I've seen are in the 20–30 CPW range. You can name your own price when you send pitches, and what you name is what you get. Payments are made with Stripe, so you need to create a Stripe account where your pay goes directly to the bank account you link to it. I got paid the day after the order was approved.

nDash is the Wild West as far as finding clients is concerned. You don't get the hand-holding managed service you find on Content Writers and WriterAccess. It's all on you to pitch brands and then also respond to both open assignments everyone can apply to and direct requests, which are when brands approach you with offers or asking you for pitches. You can pitch entire industries or one company at a time. I only had one pitch get accepted, so I don't know if my pitches just weren't of interest to the brands in question, or what. There was only one other brand I was in touch with who sent me a direct request I responded to, but they never followed through. nDash's staff has resources posted for how to get gigs, but I found I still kept hitting a wall.

The Best: High-paying work abounds from top brands with very deep pockets. You never have to fuss about payment, and you can use a bank account directly if you don't like to use PayPal. You can name your own price with every pitch, and the sky's the limit. They save all your old pitches so if you're unsuccessful, you can try sending them again to different companies. They also have a very generous affiliate program (you get 20% of any referred company's lifetime spend). It's possible to make more from the affiliate program than actually writing there.

The Worst: To speak in my native language, navigating nDash is like a dungeon crawler with a ton of grinding and you never find the damn exit. This is because there's lots and lots of pitching involved. SO MUCH PITCHING. Which, if you've read [my flagship piece](#) for Freedom with Writing, that's something I'm not terribly fond of doing repetitively and with a drawn-out process. But depending on the experience you bring to the table, you could end up getting some really high-paying clients that consistently give you work on nDash. Communication is also a little spotty on the platform. Overall, I found the whole system confusing to navigate, so I haven't focused a lot of effort there after my last round of pitches got rejected.

In summary, nDash is the place to be if you have plenty of digital marketing expertise in a large company setting or are a tech writer. I didn't have that much success there, but I've seen forum posts from writers with tech backgrounds who got pretty handsome payouts there.

Textbroker



I'm going to save you a click: Textbroker means low pay. It has a reputation among seasoned content writers. There are only two reasons I mention them in this guide to the point there's a special section for them.

First, if you have absolutely ZERO content experience, it's a place to start and they always have work available. Alllllways. I'm very against devaluing your labor as a writer, but sometimes desperate times call for desperate measure. If that \$8 article means the difference between your child getting to eat or not, do what you have to do. I definitely did not find well-paying work there despite getting in at the highest level they'd accept new writers at. The highest I'd see was about \$15 for 500-word articles. It has a structure similar to WriterAccess' model, except you have a very vast crowd pool that's always teeming with work to be picked up. There are lists that act similarly to love lists, then direct orders (solos).

The second reason I bring up Textbroker is that apparently there is a specialty portal hidden somewhere within the site for finance, legal, and healthcare professionals that pays around 23 CPW. An insurance broker on WriterAccess showed it to me and since I'm still licensed as a tax accountant, I figured I'd give it a shot. I did just one \$5 tax article on the main portal because I could get it done quickly enough just to get into the system, then the staff gave me the runaround when I inquired further. I never found this mystical portal with nicely paying tax writing jobs. My profile there is now dead from inactivity, and I don't feel like resurrecting it when all the other platforms plus private clients present far more money to me now.

The Best: There's always, always work, where the fee you see is the fee you get. There is a very large pool of crowd orders, which is good for inexperienced writers who just need something to cut their teeth on. You get paid weekly via PayPal, with no additional fees. Their text editor is also pretty easy to use.

The Worst: The most you can expect to make is 3 CPW, and you can still end up with snippy clients expecting the world for that horrendous pay. Staff is also virtually nonexistent, so they take a while to respond to emails. I never had trouble with the three articles I did there, but I'd heard from other people who did work there that the staff is more likely to take the client's side than the writer's in the event of a problem.

I let my account lapse because I never found the Textbroker finance portal, and haven't needed it. But if you have zero experience and need a place to get started, Textbroker's the place to go if you got turned down from some of the above content sites.

Constant Content



Constant Content was saved for last for a reason. I would not treat it the same as the others on this list, because it definitely doesn't function the same way.

Most experienced content writers use it as a dumping ground for pieces that other clients didn't want rather than look for work there. For instance, I had a communication mishap with a WriterAccess client who wanted a piece about IT and enterprise risk management and I ended up writing a different one about technology risk management. I took the original piece and spun it onto Constant Content where, fortunately, it sold pretty quickly. I've also sold those sample pieces that were admission for other content sites.

You can use Constant Content to sell content you've written and also find writing work, though the latter is harder to do. There are open casting calls you can apply to that are like WriterAccess casting calls or the gone-and-missed ClearVoice pitches where you send a small blurb describing your experience, skills, and rates. Then there are assignment requests ("Requested Content") where you can write the actual assignment then submit it without having to stake a claim on the order—sort of like a crowd order on WriterAccess or Textbroker, but other people can still write and submit one while you're working on it. The idea is to get other topics and perspectives, but there's a serious risk of the client only picking one then leaving you at the mercy of trying to sell it on their open market. I only did on-spec work for Constant Content twice, where the pay was high enough to take the risk.

...Which IS an option you have! If you have a good feel for Constant Content's client base and hot topics they're looking for, or you can use tools like Answer the Public and Keywordtool.io to scrape popular search strings, you can just write articles then post them for sale. You can also browse the articles that just sold in the "Writing Ideas" tab to get an idea of what people there have bought, though you don't see much beyond the sale price.

Now, onto pricing. This is where Constant Content can be contentious (pun unintended).



Quality Content to Fuel Your Business

Hello,
Here is the latest activity on your account:

Congratulations on the sale of "[Chic and Sustainable Coffee Cups Are the Future in Food Service](#)".

Your work has been purchased for a Full Rights License.

The price for the Full Rights License is set to \$135.00, therefore we have credited your account \$87.75.

You can check your account balance [here](#)

Thanks,
Constant Content
www.constant-content.com

You can view all your notifications on the Constant Content site - <https://www.constant-content.com/mail/notification/>

Constant Content takes 35%. Yikes. AND you have to do the math every time you go on the website: whatever you see you need to multiply by 65% because that's what you're getting. So if you see requested content with a budget of \$100 and you pitch \$100, you'd net \$65. If you have an original piece to sell, keep that rate in mind. If you want no less than \$50, you'd have to price your work at least \$76.92 (but people like nice clean numbers on this platform, so you'd have to step it up to \$80 or settle for \$75).

The order in the screenshot above was a rare gem on Constant Content. I find that there are lots of clients on there who just want to pay the absolute cheapest price, but you find some great clients here and there. This was an on-spec piece in the Requested Content tab for an owner of a sustainable packaging company in Australia with some nice asking prices, like \$150 for 600 words, which even after Constant Content's outrageous cut is pretty good. So I wrote a 500-ish word piece about coffee cups and asked for \$135. After it got accepted (whether you write on-spec or on your own accord to put

on the market, it needs to go through their editors first), it sold three weeks later for the same client. So even after that monstrous cut, I got about 17 CPW, which isn't bad at all.

You get paid by PayPal, no fees on your end, on a monthly payroll cycle. You get paid on the first of the following month for whatever you sold in the prior month. So yes, if you sell an article January 2nd, you're stuck waiting until February 1st to get paid.

You can also get invited to projects by clients on the platform, and they function similarly to WriterAccess love lists where you can claim orders rather than the free-for-all with the requested content sections. You might also be the only writer on the project, which makes it like a solo. There's very little managed service. It's basically an autonomous nation-state as far as the staff is concerned in that it's very rare I've ever communicated with a staff member. I think there was a total of two times I got an email about being potentially matched with a well-paying client. I once saw a technical writing email from them that paid \$20,000 to write a series of employee manuals for a major fast food chain, which is a far cry from these writing test pieces I've listed for \$25 just to get pizza money after that horrendous cut.

The Best: The sky's the limit as far as your creativity is concerned. If you can pump out articles to be sold and they sell, then they sell. Ditto for any unwanted pieces other content clients decided not to take. If the license didn't transfer, then it's yours to dump onto Constant Content. If you have ready-made content you'd like to sell, they also provide a free widget so you can promote it on your website, writer forums, etc.

The Worst: This is the one place with a text editor worse than that of Content Writers and the most horrifying UI/UX you'll ever see. Really, it's a web designer's worst nightmare. If anyone from Constant Content is reading this, IT'S TOUGH LOVE, OKAY? On that note, you'll get some editors tougher than the frigging *New York Times* for these \$35 clickbait-type articles that just make you wonder why you're still there sometimes. Then with that said, you just take much more risk on this platform than others with both requested content and selling your own pieces. I have pieces that sat and sat forever, and others that sold within a week or month of posting. And based on my experience with other platforms, that 35% cut is so not merited given the poor infrastructure and lack of staff involvement that doesn't give indication they want writers to get good rates and succeed (after all, these cut-based models mean that the more money you make, the more they make).

You should still apply for Constant Content to have it as an egg in the basket. It's a decent dumping ground for pieces clients on other platforms don't want, and if you want to take a risk on latching onto a hot topic and seeing if you get some sales. But between the risky and largely autonomous nature of the platform and only being paid once a month, I'd use this one for occasional fun money rather than relying on it consistently to pay your bills.

Other Content Sites That Didn't Get Their Own Section

These sites get an honorable mention because I didn't do enough work there to merit their own sections.

WritingBunny: I literally just got accepted onto the platform at the time of writing, so I can't provide an in-depth review of actually working on the site. Per WritingBunny's application process, they say upfront that they don't want beginner writers. If you're just getting started, bookmark then return when you have more experience. But if you get accepted, you can name your own price. The agreement I signed says, "We will pay you for the work you submit that we approve, even if our clients decide not to. We'll even pay you for contest entries. You decide how much you want to get paid. We will add our markup on top of those rates to calculate the final cost to the client." This is definitely more generous than I've seen on most content sites. They also have sister sites for voiceover and translating work. They're friendly to non-US freelancers and offer Payoneer and bank wire transfer in addition to PayPal (it sounds like you have to shoulder the fee, unlike most sites I've worked on).

Contently: I have [my byline portfolio](#) set up with Contently, and you should make one too! The actual site also offers freelance work sporadically, but that's Contently.NET, not dot com. [Bookmark this link](#) if you'd like to check on gigs at Contently and their sister site, The Freelancer. I haven't qualified for any of their postings yet since I found them, but a colleague from the WriterAccess forum said she was paid well for their legal expertise job a while back. Having a portfolio with Contently puts you on the company's radar for work in addition to giving you a public portfolio you can use for other purposes. It's prudent to make one.

Prose Media: Prose is a small company I did a couple pieces for but haven't gotten any work there in over a year at the time of writing. It's partly a managed service and partly like those love list drops from WriterAccess, except there's no 10-minute delay albeit with a much smaller number of writers. If you apply, be prepared to spend a ton of time filling out your profile and rounding up samples. Pay was around 6–10 CPW for the assignments I did, and they were very nice people but seemed a little overwhelmed. Could be worth checking out.

Skyword: I made a profile there but never got any work with them. I logged back in for the first time in forever and saw my writing samples were lacking, so I added more. Despite a decked-out profile, I never got anything. The dashboard says it's 100% managed service so similarly to Content Writers, someone from Skyword will reach out if they have projects you're a match for. Can't hurt to make a profile there just in case.

Crowd Content: I heard of them on the WriterAccess forums then saw them mentioned by Freedom with Writing. I deleted my account right after getting accepted because the pay was too low for my liking and I'm not fond of "do X orders until we unlock the better pay" models when I'm experienced, got a brand, and already clear good pay elsewhere. But if you're fine with 3–5 CPW and need something to fill in the gaps or just get started, Crowd Content's a reliable content site.

Express Writers: I never worked there, but a lot of people on writers' forums I frequent have. Pay is on the low side but could be worth checking out if you really need experience.

Presto Media: I came across them on a job board and got 7–10 CPW for blockchain and cryptocurrency pieces. The manager/owner was really nice and open to different ideas I suggested, but my account was eventually deactivated because they hadn't had any work in my pay range for a while. Text editor was easy to work with too, and they could be worth looking into again.

IZEA/Zen Content: I did a quick clickbait job for \$13 a pop when I literally started freelancing and saw the name pop up on writer forums before. Pay was reliable and they always had projects open, but I eventually moved onto greener pastures.

And there's got to be more! But this section should be enough to get you started on your journey to becoming a well-fed content writer.

Chapter 3: Job Bidding and Job Search Sites

I'm just going to be blunt and upfront with you: job bidding sites such as Elance/Upwork, Freelancer, and so on are horrifying dens of savagery. Fiverr? Don't even THINK about that one if you value your skills and labor.

It's possible to find some decent clients on these job bidding platforms, but there are several reasons I wouldn't recommend making these sites your main focal point. There's a newer site called [Freelance My Way](#), which is kind of in the same vein, but doesn't have the same volume as the major freelancing sites. I've actually seen some decent writing jobs there amidst some low-paying ones, and the site has an escrow system, which is a feature you should always look for if you're going to consider this realm.

In short, here are some of the major pros and cons:

PROS	CONS
Can potentially reach many new clients at once	Many clients, who really don't value the labor, are inexperienced and/or expecting world-class quality for pennies
Most job bidding sites don't really care if you take the client private	Can be hard to vet clients
There's often a dispute process for payments	You NEED a dispute process for many of the clients these platforms tend to attract, and it might not always work in your favor
Simple enough for flat-rate writing jobs	Harder for per-word jobs
Some platforms let you send more detailed proposals and pitches than many writing platforms do	You could spend forever doing back and forth in Word documents or Google Docs if the client is revision-happy
Can have several hundred writing jobs up at any given time	Searching, proposals, and back and forth with clients can end up sapping so much billable time away from you

In essence, job bidding sites aren't expressly designed for writing work. While just using Word documents and Google Docs can be an easy workaround for this relative to other deliverables, this makes web content native people like me cringe. It's not just for the work itself, but also in the way you

get paid. It's virtually no different than a private client if you're doing word count-based pay in that you'll have to do manual counts, which can be a pain for billing sometimes. For flat-rate jobs, it's simple enough though.

But it's not just the infrastructure and worrying about getting paid, or an unsavory type who's going to run off with the article and not pay for it. It's the time suckers. The "I'm going to be the next Elon Musk, and you're going to help me build this empire for almost no money" types. Run, far, FAR away from them. Guess what? Upwork and Freelancer are *utterly swamped* with them. There's nothing wrong with having multiple skills a client can make use of—but not if the client A) doesn't value them and B) can't pay but will totally waste your time with unpaid calls or Skype chats discussing their vision just for you to find out they're going to try giving you their startup sob story to get you to do the work for very little with this very vague promise of revenue share.

I'm an indie game developer. Believe me when I say you should never, ever do a revenue or profit share offer unless you already know and trust this person and had a real lawyer review the profit share agreement prior to signing.

I've signed on for revenue share deals when it's someone I've known in the game development or startup community for at least a year or two and have gotten my peers to vouch for them, or it's a client I've worked with before who has consistently paid me and valued my labor. That SO does not apply to these people on job-bidding sites who more often than not, are still building their websites and trying to guilt you into lowering your rates because they figure you must be desperate if you're there. If I sound harsh, it's coming from experience with these job-bidding sites, which is why I avoid them and stick to my personal network, my own website, and sites designated for content marketing.

Entrepreneurship is great! I've had a couple clients in the startup space who were working out of their apartments or garages and wonderful to work with. One even prefaced all that you're reading by telling me that I wasn't charging enough for the service at the time. What's not great are the types who think they're godly geniuses and the world owes them free or cheap labor because they're starting a website. And well, job-bidding sites are absolutely crawling with more of this type than that gem client who treated my time and rates as sacrosanct. So, good positioning can scare off these types of clients, but I found that leaving the job-bidding sites was the best way to just sidestep them completely.

According to the writers I've spoken with who had some degree of success with Upwork and the like, look for indicators that the client has placed lots of orders, especially ones with higher dollar sign amounts next to them. Get right to the punch with your proposal and include a relevant sample. It can't hurt to try this. I got some sporadic writing work on Elance by browsing the writing jobs and looking specifically for tax articles. Ironically, one of them found me on LinkedIn two years later and turned into a high-paying private client that lasted a couple months!

Still, I prefer to avoid the job-bidding sites nowadays and listed the pros and cons. Writing platforms are often superior for content work because even if the infrastructure isn't the best, you're more likely to be working with people experienced with ordering content (and for clients who aren't, these platforms have a dedicated staff to help them with it).

But the chief reason to avoid job-bidding sites is the massive time suck. Just like with pitching editors of publications and content clients, you can't expect every pitch to get accepted or every client to magically send you orders out of the blue (even though good positioning helps with this a LOT and it's something you need to do to make your life easier). But I've seen people on writing forums say, "Oh, I find that checking Upwork is like going to a thrift store: there are lots of awful things asking for \$2, but then you see some serious treasures after digging hard enough!"

I cringe really hard every time I see this.



Save that for a fun trip going to an actual thrift store. Don't do this as a means to pay your rent or mortgage. Do you want to be in places where you'll get nothing but good clients who value your labor and bend over backwards to give you money? Or do you want to constantly sift through trash in the vain hope you find an original Star Wars toy to hock on eBay? Didn't think you wanted the latter! If you look in a dumpster, you're mostly going to find garbage.

Job Search Sites

Job *search* sites are a different dynamic than freelance job-bidding platforms. They can be that time suck that I really hate, but there are some hidden gems in there too. You're also more than likely applying to media companies, marketing agencies, and columnist gigs that are serious about hiring writers, whereas the job-bidding types are often undecided on if they need a writer, a web developer, or administrative assistant and will try to make you do all of these things at the lowest pay rate possible. Of course...not that employers wouldn't also try to do this. But writing gigs often show up on traditional job search sites that aren't necessarily full-time writing jobs like reporters or copywriters.

One job search site I like to use is [ProBlogger](#). Their job board is fantastic and has a mix of writing employment and freelance work, and you can find some serious gems there. Subscribing to their RSS feed is a must.

Then there's more traditional means like Indeed and LinkedIn. I'm going to let the Freedom with Writing community speak for those ones since I haven't used them to actively look for work. I've only used Indeed when a publication or marketing agency put their application on the site, and people come to me on LinkedIn instead of the other way around for the most part. Check out Jon's testimonial for [how he found \\$1,400 in writing work on Indeed](#). He's got some great actionable tips if you want to give it a whirl. Even if you don't plan on using Indeed, that cover letter template he provides is a good boilerplate to tailor if you're looking for writing work elsewhere. Rebecca then posted [a nice comprehensive testimonial on how to use LinkedIn ProFinder](#). You technically can't use the service unless you upgrade your LinkedIn account, but she cleverly worked around that and got it to work in her favor with a \$250/month bump to her income.

Well, whether you're going to try your luck on Upwork, Indeed, or ProFinder or the numerous content sites and the wonderful publications of Freedom with Writing recommendations, one thing's for sure: you're going to need some top-notch positioning. You've heard me go on about that the entire book so far and Chapter 5 isn't far off now, where you'll learn all about positioning. Now, it's time to get into private clients.

Chapter 4: Working with Private Clients

Depending on the context of your professional relationship, private clients can be an incredible boon or a serious thorn in your side. There are also clients you won't *want* to be private for various reasons.

Private clients are going bareback, so to speak. You're not relying on a content platform to provide you with infrastructure for things like payment, billing, contact, and getting the work done. You're managing that relationship all by yourself. This can be scary and exciting at the same time. Private clients have the potential to make you a lot of money and remove unnecessary bottlenecks you might face on content platforms, but also come with a risk of major time sinks and even work that goes unpaid. It ultimately comes down to the individual client and what they need.

Hence, this chapter is here to help you make as informed a decision as possible to decide if private clients are right for you.

Why Would or Wouldn't You Want a Private Client vs. a Content Platform?

You might work with a private client for a quick one-off job that's less than \$100, or they could be consistently hiring you for thousands of dollars at a time. In Chapter 9, we'll get into why you need a service contract regardless of the amount and frequency. But as for whether you should direct them to the content platform of your choice or set up a private client contract, that ultimately depends on what the client needs, how much money we're talking, how much administrative burden you're willing to take on, and other factors.

After all, it's impossible to know upfront if a client will have consistent work for you that lasts a long time or if they'll be sporadic or a one-time deal. But there's always risk in business. Hey, I'd rather spend the time on a contract for a client who's itching to buy and shows they got the money than relive my 20s where I spent god knows how much time and money going to job interviews that yielded nothing.

Here are the factors you need to look at in order to decide whether it's worth it.

- **Invoicing and payments.** Depending on what kind of jobs you're doing, you'll need to put more legwork into billing and, for larger jobs, chasing payments. If you're doing mostly smaller jobs, it might not be a big deal to ask the client for upfront payment. You could be at risk for not getting paid or not being paid in full if it's a bigger job. For work with little variation, like flat-rate jobs, there are many automated invoicing and payment tools but if you work predominantly by word count like I do, billing can become a pain if you're managing tons of private clients. It will make you really appreciate staff at content platforms where it's their job to ensure clients have fully funded accounts where you don't have to individually bill by word count constantly, and then you'll also appreciate platforms like ClearVoice that use escrow.

- **Communications.** If you don't need to communicate with the client much beyond messaging and maybe just one or two calls, a writing platform should suit your needs fine. If you're going to perform other services for this client or work on projects that require a lot more input and more detailed communication from the client, you'll want to see about keeping or taking this client private.
- **The tools used.** Google Docs and Word should work fine for the majority of content writing work, and Medium is a *godsend* if you're bylined and you like to write from your phone. But if you're being hired for specialty writing, like video scripts, educational content, presentations, and other content where your basic text editor might not be best for the job, then that can make a huge difference between taking the client private or working with a platform.
- **Frequency.** You never know how some professional relationships will go. Clients can come and go and it's possible for seasoned content writers to have literally hundreds or even thousands of different clients, but it's really about 10 to 15 who are your meal ticket. Case in point, I'm on over 130 love lists at WriterAccess but it's maybe 30 clients who consistently provide work and probably just four or five who I can count on in a given month. The rest are pretty sporadic. One really good client I have will suddenly drop several thousand dollars worth of work then disappear for eight months. And honestly, it's only maybe two or three clients of that mix I'd entertain taking private because of the nature of the projects and other duties beyond the scope of writing work. The rest assign work too infrequently for me, a one-woman operation, to want to spend that much time on billing and chasing after them.
- **Payout.** Coupled with the frequency, is the pay they're willing to give you worth the potential hassle? The downsides to working on a writing platform can be easily nullified because you don't want to do a ton of legwork for just a few \$30 blog posts, but if you're talking several blog posts that are \$300 and up per piece, then you'll want to think about the benefits of going or keeping private. This is especially the case if waiting for content platforms to do payroll cycles causes rent or credit card payments to be late.
- **Affiliate programs.** Affiliate programs are a nice way to get some passive income. If you have a lead with money but they're of the "sporadic blog posts" nature? You can still get a little cash without having to do anything else. WriterAccess has an affiliate program and so does nDash. The latter's is quite generous. Using the industry standard of a 70-30 split, if I get \$50 for a blog post, the client pays \$70 and the house gets \$20 (rounding down here to show you nice pretty numbers). I don't see much incentive just for *me* to get that full \$70 for let's say five posts, which comes out to \$350. Not when I could get 20% of whatever that client orders for life. I'd get \$70 in affiliate commission plus the \$250 for writing five blog posts on the platform for \$320 total and without having to do billing and legal contract legwork. Let's say that this client decides to stop working with me because they need a new industry specialty and I introduced them to nDash. They proceed to spend \$5,000 on content in the next year. That's \$1,000 I get for doing absolutely nothing other than writing an email with that link! Even if you never write for the site or work for that particular client, don't underestimate the power of using affiliate links!

How you manage your content writing income sources is entirely up to you. I use a mix of content platforms and private clients in addition to websites I write articles for where I have to go by their processes rather than the one my company, Sonic Toad Media LLC, uses. Some writers rely 100% on content platforms because they don't want to deal with the stress of doing billing, contract preparation,

and having to heavily market themselves. Others don't want content platforms to dictate what they can and can't do, and they get good enough rates and consistent work from private clients alone. It's totally up to you.

Ultimately, it's about what you stand to earn and your potential relationship with that client, coupled with understanding the risks and benefits. Namely, is the payout and frequency going to be worth the extra time some private clients merit? Or does a content platform's communication hobbling make things more time-consuming? Or, can you just focus on more writing and less business management with a content platform? That's what it boils down to.



Chapter 5: Building Your Professional Positioning as a Content Writer

You've heard me go on about professional positioning the entire book so far. Now's the time to finally deep dive into this topic!

[I wrote about professional positioning](#) for Freedom with Writing in summer 2017. If you want good gigs to land in your lap whether they're private clients or a content platform, you need to build up your positioning.

Positioning is the sum of many parts. It's how you brand and differentiate yourself.



Positioning is equal parts gloss and substance. It's the magic potion that helps ward off those crappy clients who demand the world for pennies on the dollar or flounder about their million-dollar startup idea

while mumbling that they can't pay you. Simultaneously, that magic elixir attracts the kind of clients who are not just willing to pay what you're asking, but in some cases even more. And they show up flush with cash to do so.

In short, positioning is the sum of these parts:

- Glossy image
- An air of professionalism
- Demonstrable and searchable accomplishments
- An impression that your product/service is coveted by others

Image and Professionalism

So, I started you off with some simple ones in that Freedom with Writing piece. If you didn't read it, you need to start with a professional website and headshots. Even if you have a pretty good picture of yourself taken with a phone (and phone cameras have certainly gone up in quality in recent years), it's still got nothing on having a professional shoot done with a real live photographer who knows what they're doing. Good headshots are an important investment. They're part of your branding and will set you apart as a professional writer who's not just doing this as a hobby or side hustle. (Not that there's anything wrong with that. But if you want NICE rates, this is a step you need to take.)

Ditto for your website. You don't need a huge website or a network of them that's incredibly complex. There are many professional-looking sites that can be done for not too much money that should at least have your own domain name, showcase your portfolio or link to an external one like Contently, and have a place to contact you like a contact form. Even if your website is just two or three web pages, so long as it has your headshot and the above items, you'll be just fine.

But for the love of Toad, whether you operate under an LLC like I do and use a domain like sonictoad.com or whether it's just your name like johnsmith.net, ashleythompson.nyc, or danabrownwriter.com, buy the domain and commit to the cheapest hosting plan possible. It's tempting to use free sites like johnsmith.blogspot.com or ashleythompson.wix.com or whatever the website equivalent of Vistaprint du jour is. If you're short on cash and using one of these freebies is a life-or-death difference between having a site or not, then use the freebie until you have sufficient funds for your own domain. Once again, your own domain gives the impression that you're a professional and not a hobbyist.

Next up, you want to work on some kind of branding art for your site and marketing materials. Your glossy professional shots factor into this as do any other images you might want to use on your site. You can buy licenses for individual images on Fotolia, Shutterstock, and other image sites if you don't want to spend hours trawling through public domain images and then needing to add attribution for whatever you find on Pixabay (heads up, their results aren't always truly royalty-free or public domain). Check out this piece I did for the WriterAccess blog on [image marketing](#) explaining why this is so important. Some site-building tools will have some professional stock images you can use, but any images you don't create yourself will need to be licensed. If you have a good eye for design, you can

probably work with prebuilt templates to create a nice-looking site or hire a professional designer to do all that for you in addition to creating logos and anything else you need.

On that note, business cards are the baseline marketing material you should have if you're looking for work in meatspace. Like with your web domain, don't opt for something free with the printing company's name on the back unless your finances are dire enough that it's better than nothing. It also doesn't hurt to have something with a lot of utility made, like pens or power clips (I had mine made at [4imprint](#) and got amazing feedback on them), because no one will ever throw those out while a business card can get lost. If you have a fantastic-looking logo and pleasing colors and design, that shows you're serious business and not someone who's going to take 3 CPW.

Accomplishments

Depending on where you are in your career, this part can be harder and it also varies so widely with each individual. But let me preface it with this: Back when I still used to fill out job applications and send out resumes in droves, I would have debilitating anxiety attacks and broiling fits of rage when poring over resume writing guides where they said to list accomplishments. "But I haven't really accomplished anything at my past jobs except somehow managing to not lose my will to live," I'd mutter.

We're playing with different dynamics now. Freelancing itself is a whole other animal compared to looking for a job, and oh dear lord is it better in my opinion and experience. This "accomplishments" bit is partly what you've actually done and partly how you're going to frame it.

And if you want the *5 Second Movie* version: the more content and publicized feats you have out in the internet for the world to see, and condensed in a single place like your website, the better you can position your expertise and accomplishments.

Prospective content clients or other freelancing sites aren't going to waste your time on total BS like, "where do you see yourself in five years?" and grilling you on every single thing you've done with your life since *The Golden Girls* went off the air among other corporate wastes of imagination. Even the utterly awful grade of Upwork clients I described earlier don't do this. Even if the client may waffle on what they actually want and are expecting, you're not going to get shoved under a microscope with respect to your past, present, and every single thing you ever did at a job. Rarely will you see "We want someone with X years of experience" unless it's an ad for an actual day job doing copywriting or content marketing. No, you're dealing with people who mostly want to get down to brass tacks on how your knowledge, skills, and experience will benefit them. They need stuff done and will likely take what you say at face value without combing through your resume and analyzing "work gaps" and other dehumanizing crap.

This often means thinking outside the box with respect to jobs you held or other freelancing work you've done. Maybe you didn't win any awards, but did you do something really freaking difficult? I wrote a book! Two of them, actually! They're not extremely long, but the first two got solid 5-star ratings on the Kindle store and one of them continues to bring me a lot of work and opportunities because I had a first-mover advantage in that topic area. Even if your books have zero stars and reviews, writing a

Kindle book is an accomplishment that demonstrates you can follow through on large projects. Since I do a lot of ghost blogging for marketing agencies and tech services, some of them have hired me for influencer ghostwriting type of work and ended up needing help with using Kindle books to grow their brand. This led to both consulting work, since I learned a lot from the experiences and have things I would and wouldn't do again, and ghostwriting the actual e-books they wanted to sell. And now I have this third book to add to my accomplishments list, which has the prestige of a successful digital publisher in addition to my self-published books.

This was after I was told that my own writing wouldn't count for anything, like my blog and these books. If those are your only samples, you'll have to get a little creative. But you can flip the script and use your self-publishing experience as a means to help content clients. They're not monolithic, some of them really want to branch into all types of digital publishing while others just want you to write web pages, emails, and blog posts. You're not looking for a day job where you do the same thing every day. **A big part of why people often fail at freelancing, especially freelance writing, is because they're still in that employment mentality.** That's just not going to do, dear. I remember how demoralizing it was trying to come up with things I accomplished at my day jobs. Well, here I have tractable proof with a quick link to my book and Amazon author page. I don't get asked a million dumb questions about what I did every single day while writing it; I get asked how I got people to review it, how I handled the whole process of getting a cool book cover, and what marketing tactics I used.



Haven't written a book yet? Don't worry, we'll find something. Scraping the depths of my memories of hellish jobs past, I remembered that I had to teach my boss how to transport thousands of contacts into an email marketing platform and then I ended up managing that mailing list for my duration...as I also had to teach him how to copy and paste text into an email. It had nothing to do with my job as a tax law associate. "Email marketing" and "adult education," there we go.

Months after I lost that job, I ended up doing actual adult education on contract with a state job training program because my sister worked there. **(Networking is important. [Check out my Gamasutra](#)**

[feature on that](#). **It holds up regardless of your profession.**) Suddenly, I was teaching at a game development collective and still do occasionally. Unlike with the Kindle books though, what I did at my old job isn't searchable on the internet and the same was true of the job training program. The collective, however, has old Eventbrite links and social posts where I was promoting the classes. But it's okay because most of the time, clients don't check. I just have a few sentences in my bio or in casting calls about my adult education experience and citing the good feedback I've gotten from students.

Of course, don't take this as carte blanche to completely fabricate experience and knowledge you don't have. There might be times when you see a casting call you know you'd be a great fit for and you may have to fudge your numbers a little to get higher pay or just the gig itself. *That* you shouldn't feel bad about because it's just capitalism, it's just survival, and sometimes you need to say you spent six months instead of three when your credentials and knowledge are totally sufficient for the gig in question. The client will see the truth and quality in your samples and in the piece they just ordered.

As for other things that could help your positioning, any bylined articles you have is a plus. Most content will not be bylined work, but being published is definitely an accomplishment. I've written tons of pieces for the WriterAccess and Content Writers blogs because while they pay around 5–7 CPW, which is lower than what most of my clients give me, it's a form of marketing that helps position me as an expert in content strategy so I can get both writing and strategy work from the clients on those platforms. Always link to them in your casting calls if they're relevant! My Gamasutra pieces? Those are unpaid, but in addition to bonding with my peers in the games industry, they've cemented my status as a business and marketing expert in the field and subsequently send both clients and peers in the biz my way. The fact that most of my pieces made the front page is an accomplishment I've used to get paid more and also ghostwrite for people trying to get published on the site as I know what their editors look for.

College or grad school research papers that are published with your name on them? **If it's relevant to the gig post, use it!** I've brought up my master's thesis in appropriate situations. Then one day, I found a casting call for a music gear reseller and talked about the time I spent working retail almost 15 years prior, which was a pretty short-lived job but I still had the experience cataloguing gear and helping customers find the right guitar specs. Throwing in my more substantive experience being semi-retired from hardcore bands landed me a gig, where I asked for 20 CPW and got 30. I retired pre-Bandcamp and pre-YouTube being ubiquitous for bands to show jam and performance videos as proof, but I just threw enough shop talk in the casting call to land me the gig, so that didn't need to be searchable.

As for other tractable, searchable accomplishments, maybe you have a blog with lots of visitors or a sizable social media following. Or you take gorgeous photos that have a small but devoted following on Instagram; that's even a service you could potentially provide a client. I had fun making all the cool images you see in this book. While the chief purpose was to make it more interesting, I'm also going to be blunt and tell you I am absolutely upselling my design skills here along with the fact that I'm a Canva and Fotolia pro member. I figured there'd be both writers and content publishers browsing this!

Use your skills, accomplishments, and other experiences to position yourself both overall and per gig when needed. You've done so much more than employers have brainwashed you to think. Content work is a way you can let that shine and get some nice pay for it.

Being Coveted By Others

This is an area where you're freer to embellish, and in many cases will have to do for your survival if you're just starting out. A common kiss of death in networking is just talking about how badly you need a job instead of what you can bring to the organization. This is where freelancing clients have an overlap in that the last thing you want to do is appear desperate and at their mercy.

You need to do the opposite and demonstrate that you're coveted.



Let's just get down to brass tacks on how you're going to do that:

- Name-drop prestigious clients and/or past employers
- Throw out impressive accomplishments or stats, such as your Exceed rating on WriterAccess, number of featured articles on an authoritative website, etc.
- Giving an impression that you're incredibly busy

It's that last one we're going to have a lot of fun with. While I'm aware that some readers have day jobs, the majority of both my and Freedom with Writing's base are freelancers and solopreneurs. And that's the thing, *we own our time*. A lot of my coaching clients and students I've taught at the collective haven't quite grasped the awesomeness of this yet, and it's my job to get them out of that shell because you really come into your power when you own your time.

Forget everything you know about day jobs and what your boss didn't consider work. Reading this book? That's work. Updating your profiles, posting writing samples, and sending pitches? That's also work and it keeps you busy. Having to take your car to the shop or take four hours to get downtown because your local transit authority is criminally underfunded? You're busy. That movie you've been

excited about is playing at 2PM and you want to go then so you can starfish across a whole row of seats instead of the 7PM show when the theater will be full of clock-watchers? You own your time now!

No client is your boss unless you let them treat you that way. You still have to respect their time and deadlines, but just because your only plans for the day might be catching an off-peak movie and updating profiles doesn't mean you simply must take low pay or hop to that job immediately. Whether you *actually* have a full queue or not doesn't mean that you can't say you're busy. It's also one thing to keep a client informed as to why response time could be slow, such as travel or illness, but you don't need to overshare with them the way you do with a boss who's watching you like a hawk strapped into a *Clockwork Orange*-type device.

You have to take care of family members, go to that event, see a friend? You own your time, and no client can dictate what you do with it. So long as you deliver the results promised in the prescribed timeframe, you're good to go! The last thing you want to do is give an impression that you're not busy. Your busyness keeps your pay rates high and the client respecting your time. It means they'll ask you if you're up for doing more work, and you can also use that as an invitation to say things like, "I can do this blog post today, and it'd be great if you could assign two more next week," and ask about their future plans as an opportunity to secure more work.

Got a day job? Schlepping to and from that job is work. The emotional labor of dealing with your boss is work. Whether this is a side hustle to you or you'd like content writing to be your ticket out of there, you don't want to sound so overloaded that the client won't give you the gig but you also don't want to give the impression that you're desperate for work.

Whether a client comes to you or gets placed with you via a content platform talent management, you have more bargaining power. I covered this in [another Freedom with Writing piece](#) explaining situations when you have more bargaining power and when you don't. Generally speaking, the clients who come to you give you more power to ask for more compared to you responding to a casting call, though there are always exceptions. The example I gave in that piece also got into working with the client directly compared to a marketing agency, as many agencies use content platforms to simplify finding writers. Unless you're in a highly specialized niche, these covetous strategies are less likely to work their magic on agencies.

So, good positioning is like baking a nice loaf of sourdough. Your experience is the starter, and your writing skills are the flour that lays the foundation for the bread. The water turns it into dough, so that's your portfolios, profiles, and website. Then you need yeast to activate it and make that dough come alive, which would represent your conscious effort to put yourself out there and make money. Then lastly, you put that dough in the oven where it takes a while to go from dough to delicious bread, but it smells incredible and piques the interest of passersby who can't wait to bite into it. So you feed the starter and it keeps getting more complex and yielding tastier bread over time!

Think of your positioning as the whole baking process. Your skills, experience, and other aspects of building up your career are like adding to that sourdough starter throughout time, then giving the bread time to bake. It only gets better once you're established.



Positioning is
like baking bread!

Chapter 6: Powering Up Your Client Referral Infrastructure (Because Looking For Work Sucks)

So, a lot of the stuff we've already covered in the chapters about content platforms and positioning will factor into your client referral infrastructure. Seeking out clients and pitching them is still an important part of the process, but I'm of the school of thought that lead generation is the best way to go whenever possible.

Lead generation is how you get the clients to come to you. This can be something as simple as having well-crafted content platform profiles and LinkedIn accounts, or you can get more complex with your branding and positioning efforts. Having a highly decked-out online presence is practically mandatory if you want this to work; if you'd rather not be that visible online, then it's going to require you to really hone your networking skills.

Here are some lead generation mechanisms to consider:

- Bylined work
- Digital products you've created
- Email marketing list with helpful content, as a magnet
- Social media
- Content platform profiles
- Your professional network you've formed through colleagues, events, etc.
- A beautiful website with strong SEO
- Anything that positions you as a problem-solver

Forget about the first seven items on that list for now. Let's talk about that last one.

When you're pitching magazines and the fine publications Freedom with Writing recommends, you're essentially selling them a story and explaining why this topic is important or appropriate and interesting for their audience, why your perspective matters. Making good money with content for very little continuous effort requires you to think like a marketer, so you have to put on your entrepreneurial hat here. We could debate the semantics of "freelancer" versus "entrepreneur" all day long, but in order to make a shift to an enterprising freelancer, you need to find a problem you're a genius at fixing.



This heavily overlaps with niches, which comes in the next chapter. But what's a problem that your current or ideal clients have with content creation that you're keen on helping them solve? You don't need to pursue a content strategist career to do this part, though I ended up doing so by accident. For instance, I get a lot of well-paying CPA and tax attorney blog work partly because of my credentials and partly because I point out common vulnerabilities in my pitches and lead generation efforts. It's pretty much been thought forever that most accountants are terrible writers; I'd say this is true of a small number. Rather, it's less about writing skills and more that many accountants don't want to do copywriting or write those influencer articles for *Forbes* and professional journals. The real money for them is providing financial services for their clients, so they want content that generates quality leads for new prospects and builds engagement for existing clients. Tax attorneys want to be in Tax Court or on the phone with the IRS billing \$500/hour for it, not writing blogs, but they still need good content to get opportunities from their peers and to attract new clients.

The problem is two-fold though. When they try content marketing, it often falls flat because their own writing is more comprehensible to other accountants than the client base they're trying to reach. They also need informative writing that solves a client's problem but leaves just enough unsaid so they'll book a consultation. Then there's the added challenge of citing authoritative sources, which your average content writer with no financial background may be unfamiliar with using correctly. So they need a content writer they can talk shop with who knows accountant lingo but can make it digestible for the average person. I positioned myself as a problem-solver, and it resulted in small CPAs and tax lawyers coming straight to me because they were dying to get billable hours back. Instead of doing back-and-forth with content writers who may not know tax law, they got the assurance of working with an [Enrolled Agent](#).

You need more than just saying "I'm a good writer." Do you know the working parts of web content? What kind of problems are your target clients *most likely* to face? What problems do your

clients want to solve for their customers and end users? How will your writing aptitude and unique blend of skills and experience solve these problems?

Human resources expert Liz Ryan has a fantastic concept called [the pain letter](#). While that article is geared primarily toward traditional job seekers, I've found it equally and incredibly useful for freelance work. You may not always know what a specific client is having trouble with. Sometimes they will tell you outright, "My brand needs a blog but I'm not sure how to really build it." That's an opportunity for you to get a stable monthly gig! Having some additional content strategy knowledge helps you sell here, but it's okay if you're not well-versed in it. You can still upsell the client on other types of content: the pain letter article offers tons of great suggestions, like if you're really good with social media and you see the client has little or no social traction, then that's an invitation to offer writing and perhaps social media management work. The sky's the limit and once you start thinking in terms of PAIN, that's how you never run out of prospects.

What are common pains found in the clients you're targeting? Don't think just in terms of industry, think in terms of company size, the actual writing itself, the kind of solutions the organization might use, how many decision-makers would be involved, and other problems present! Keep an ear to the ground because there's abundance planted there; you just need to see which seeds grow. That pain can be anything from "Why aren't my blog posts performing well in search engines at all?" to "We thought our blogger would be great at writing product descriptions for us, but they didn't do a good job!"

Now that we've established how important pain is to building a client referral infrastructure, it's time to revisit the other items on that bullet point list!

Let's say that you're a brilliant home and garden writer. You can put that on your LinkedIn page and content profiles. It's a start but what's a common pain you've run into?

Jane Smith is an experienced content writer specializing in home and garden content. She has written hundreds of pieces for clients like West Elm, Home Depot, and local real estate agents.

This introduction establishes Jane's credibility and name-drops nice clients, which can also come in handy for search purposes. Let's reposition Jane as a problem-solver, a home and garden superhero:

Jane Smith is a home and garden guru who has been published in Better Homes and Gardens, Refinery29, and Issuu, where she is a featured guide author. She loves to help new homeowners overcome move-in and redecorating anxiety, and her work has been praised by readers and editors for her fun and casual yet serious business approach to arranging a room. Jane has been writing home and garden content for years and her product descriptions and blog posts can turn even the simplest terra cotta tile descriptions into page-turners that remain informative. This has led to house and garden retailers like Home Depot and West Elm to trust Jane with their content needs, and she is frequently called on by real estate agents in and near Raleigh, NC to transform dull copy into captivating stories that speaks to prospects and new homeowners eager to learn about gardening.

That simple first sample will do fine if you have a very strict character limit on an application or perhaps your Contently portfolio. But you have freedom to be wordier with your lead generation efforts. It's a balancing act because you don't want to get *too* wordy, but the point is that you're trying to sell to people more willing to buy. The second sample is ideal for LinkedIn, your website, author descriptions on other websites, and content profiles like WriterAccess. It's not just more words for the hell of it, here's why this text positions Jane Smith as a problem-solver:

- Specifically names a problem she writes about that clients might not have considered
- Names asset types she is good at writing
- Contains keyword variations: home and garden, house and garden, gardening
- Pinpoints two distinct home and garden content problems she is experienced at solving: she can make product descriptions interesting while still serving their intended purpose, and she can make boring copy into something exciting for this particular client base
- Identifies diverse variety of clients: prestigious print publication, well-known websites, large publicly-traded companies, and local real estate agents likely to be small offices or independent agents. This mix should be whatever kinds of clients you're trying to target.
- The local aspect is often overlooked. The description mentions where she is and that she works with clients locally. This is totally optional, but sometimes a problem that needs to be solved is a local one and a prospect near you needs someone familiar with the area to write about it.

You have to do more than showcase your talents because you're competing with hundreds of thousands of other writers out there. The problems you can solve with your writing and other skills are what will lay the groundwork for your client referral infrastructure.

So before I get into that list of suggestions for infrastructure-building, I need to tell you something very important. You're probably only going to focus on two to four of them at the most. **AND IT'S TOTALLY OKAY.**

This is like an RPG where we create the characters in advance and hope that we didn't screw up four hours into playing a particular map. My battle mage is a mediocre fighter and spellcaster, your archdruid crushes it at spellcasting but falls like a stone in combat, and the fighter is unstoppable on the battlefield but totally helpless against magic attacks due to lack of magical ability. To translate that into infrastructure-building, it's like this: some content writers live and die by social media like Twitter and LinkedIn while others rely on external targeted content and SEO-friendly websites that they maintain with mailing lists. Other writers have strongly developed niches that land them consistent clients who constantly refer them to other clients in the same space, or have professional networks always yielding something.

I'm a battle mage. I dabble in everything on that list. But if I really had to pinpoint the infrastructure that gets me the most work without having to look for it, it's my incredibly strong network, bylined content on other websites, and decking the bejesus out of my content platform profiles. WriterAccess is where I've had the most success with that particular tactic, but having strong networking and people skills got me work from the other platforms I described earlier in addition to numerous other opportunities.

I personally don't use LinkedIn that much, but there are writers who live and die by it. I have a strong Twitter presence with a couple thousand followers but never bothered to separate business from personal. Let's just say that while this flies in the indie game development world, it does far less so in the marketing world, so I tend to keep marketing talk limited to my LinkedIn, website, and other sites where I'm a contributor. As for why I didn't make a separate Sonic Toad Twitter? Not wanting to create more work with another Twitter account as it was, I'd also personally rather not work with clients who may have conflicting values, so I also consider it a smokescreen in that regard. I HAVE gotten game-related and marketing work off of Twitter, but this is a tactic that I don't expect to work for everyone. But if the thought of starting a Twitter account makes you want to immolate yourself, it's okay. There are other ways!

Being located in a major world hub with freedom of movement has enabled me to have a steady presence on the convention circuit and doing speaking gigs at colleges and other places. This has afforded me a massive network to draw from. If you're not that extroverted or unable to travel often, don't worry. You can build a network online if you have the right cyber haunts. You need to talk to your fellow content writers, and Freedom with Writing is a great place to start. If you're up for it, maybe start a Meetup group for content writers where you live or see if there's an existing one. There are group chats on the Meetup page, which you can scope out prior to going in person and start some discussion there. You can inform each other of opportunities and get to know the problems you're all good at solving!

I already delved deeply into content profiles earlier, and it could take days on end to describe how to build a social following alone, using email marketing, and building out your website and making search engines adore it. Those are all things I could write entire separate articles and books about, and while I've had varied success with these techniques, there are people far more knowledgeable than I in these things.

Rather, I pinpointed problem-solving because that's how you're going to build your presence on any combination of these things. Every writer has a portfolio and a list of skills. You have to think beyond a client needing a content writer: what kind of problems do they need solved? It's how you position yourself, which I described in the last chapter, then how you can specifically leverage your writing knowledge. Tweet about the problems you're a rockstar at solving. Write blog posts and content posted elsewhere, try your hand at Kindle books, take Udemy and Lynda courses. Even if these attempts fail, you're still putting yourself out there, and they can serve as a form of marketing where once you create them, you're pretty much done.

External content is also the big one. Going beyond your own website to publish on LinkedIn, Pulse, and Medium, and using the relevant tags are good ways to start from scratch so you'll be sure at least a few other people will see them. Gamasutra is the chief lead generator for me as a gaming industry consultant who primarily markets to other game developers and the people who want to do business with them. While you work on building your way up with private clients, content platforms, or a mix of them, check out websites that take contributors and get a decent amount of traffic to help you with your positioning. Even more awesomely, maybe you can even parlay it into a bylined piece you get paid for!

Having all this stuff out there doesn't necessarily mean you have to completely stop doing work to put yourself out there. It all requires maintenance: fresh content, figuring out a frequency and style for social posting that works for you, going to enough events, keeping your site looking current, the list goes on depending on which mix you've chosen for your infrastructure. And we sometimes lapse in these things because we're only human. But essentially, the more content you have out there and the more activity and initiative you demonstrate, the more likely you are to get clients coming to you instead of the other way around. It's an incredibly awesome feeling and your bank account feels awesome, too. Then you can save that "looking for work" time and energy for the opportunities that are really worth it.

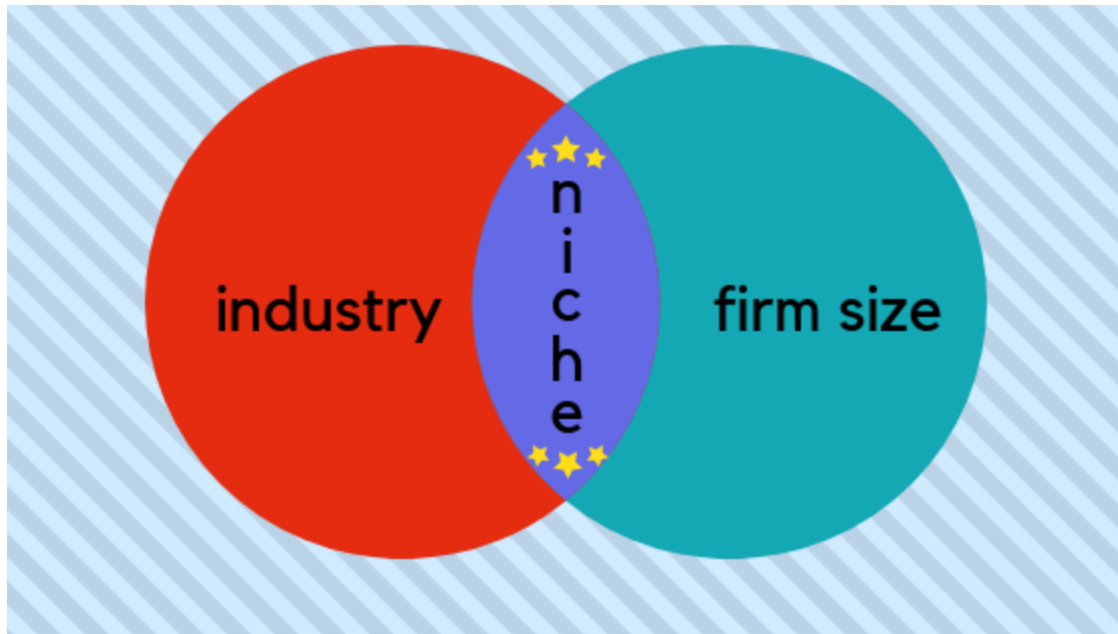
Niches = Riches: Taking Your Niche All the Way to the Bank

How do you define a niche?

Your positioning and branding are part of it. They're what you use to attract your niche and communicate what it is. But niches are your specialty. They are your industry or group of industries and subfields that you can then incorporate into your branding.

The type of organization or function you're best-suited for is also important to consider when marketing your niche. Based on your experience and skills, do you want to market yourself more to marketing departments at Fortune 100 companies or are you more comfortable with other freelancers and solopreneurs? You can work with any variety of clients you wish, but marketing to specific sizes or stages can completely hone and change your career trajectory in ways that focusing on industry alone can't.

This was one of those things I totally overlooked in the beginning until I noticed WriterAccess had a section for the company size you're used to working with. Filling out this section of my profile ended up making a much bigger difference than I thought, even though I was used to working mostly with small firms with 10 employees or fewer or solopreneurs.



The WriterAccess blog [has a good post](#) about finding your niche and also knowing if you've tried to go TOO niche. The last paragraph honestly says it the best that you can't go too broad but you also can't be too refined. Of course, it also depends on the context and the timing. If you're applying to a casting call on a place like WriterAccess, depending on how much information the client puts in the casting call is how you should structure your response. Sometimes I've seen casting calls there or in other places where the client wants something incredibly specific that I might not have put in my profile, but I include appropriate links and paragraphs showing my expertise in the topics they mention.

While that blog post totally applies to your general marketing materials and what's on your website, there are times when you go super-niche like the shar-pei shampoo example. You want to extend your reach further than an incredibly broad category but not hone too much or else it's like when you hit the sharpen button in Photoshop too much on a picture.

This section was initially going to be another chapter, but I decided to just make it a section. This is because we already delved so deeply into positioning, which has a very circular relationship with building your niche. That problem you help solve? That's your niche! Take Liz Ryan's "pain letter" approach where you're focusing on the following crucial factors:

- Industry
- Firm size
- Your specific experience and knowledge
- Problems the firm IS experiencing or likely to experience

Take my example of helping tax offices with the specific pitfalls they have with both writing and executing content. This is absolutely focusing on small firms and solo practices, because they're more likely to be time-strapped and not have dedicated marketing people. Those giant publicly traded franchises either have huge marketing departments while smaller national franchises use an agency or

a mix of freelance writers and strategists. Because this work pays incredibly well, I can do less of it to pay my bills, which is the entire point.

Ultimately, that niche boils down to **what can you provide that other writers can't?**

I got that esoteric piece about using *Fortnite* to market financial analysis services because some clients really want my odd mix of financial and gaming industry skills. Some writers hit their targets by focusing on just one niche while others do work for other clients aside from the niche. It's entirely up to you then, depending on your positioning and goals.

Chapter 7: How to Make Pitches Content Clients Love (And Present Upselling Opportunities)

So we've climbed the highest mountains of building up our positioning, finding a niche, and coming up with all this spiffy imaging and published content that demonstrate we kick monumental ass at what we do. But then we reach the summit and it's "Oh crap, now what?" You've hit this plateau where you've built up your positioning and the work's coming to you at a steady rate, but your earnings aren't budging once again. You don't want to backslide down the mountain in terms of still being unable to find work!

This is the part where you do have to look for work. But unlike looking for work before, you still have an advantage here if you have proof of your aptitude, accomplishments, and positioning. Not to mention that this is where you may need to break out of your writer shell and step into your hustler one. Before looking elsewhere for new clients, we're going inbound first and hitting up clients you already have.



It's a lot easier to sell to an existing client than pick up a new one. Maintaining your client relationships is going to be the key to your success, which is why I delved into private clients versus content platforms earlier. You can try communicating with the people behind the platforms, and I've had varied degrees of success here, but being able to tear down communication barriers is really what gets the best results. That's why it's intensely annoying that message threads expire on WriterAccess because that's over 100 clients I could try actively pitching, but the fact that we can communicate with them at all is why the site is a goldmine for the motivated self-starter.

Still, whether you work with the client on a platform or privately, pitching them is a different process than pitching op-eds, essays, or other journalistic or artistic writing. Submission guidelines run the gamut from simple to incredibly onerous depending on the publication and the volume of pitches they receive. I kept hitting walls with sending pitches for bylined work, then I did a pitch consultation with a journalist whose formula really worked for me: you introduce yourself and your writing, the topic and why you're a good fit for writing it, why this topic is important or of pressing urgency, why the audience would be interested, then propose a tight word count with a margin no higher than 100 words (i.e., "I can communicate this point in approximately 900-1,000 words"). Making references to the submission guidelines if you can is also helpful, as that's how I've gotten pitches accepted.

Pitching content orders is a little different whether they're for new clients or ones you've already worked with. Depending on how knowledgeable they are in content strategy and how much they've invested in it as a result, they may already have an array of topics they want their writers to cover. Other times, they want you to take some initiative. Some may even need 101-level guidance as to how long the post should be and other aspects of ordering content. You could be pitching anyone from new site owners to experienced marketing managers at agencies and large corporations. Hence, the pitch process isn't always clear-cut like it is when submitting to publications.

There's a little similarity with journalistic pitching in that you need to establish why you're a good fit and why this topic is timely and important for their audience. Once the first part is done and you've been working with the client for a while, you need to develop the right frequency of reaching out to them to pitch topics.

Simply doing editorial planning is a money-maker lots of writers miss because they don't know how to do it or just didn't think of it, and it's a lucrative door you shouldn't leave closed. I've turned several \$50 article pitches into \$250 jobs on WriterAccess this way with their Pitch Order function. Sometimes I just message the client with an idea, other times I'll get an assignment that has a pitch request and I pitch several topics that then get turned into new orders. Answer the Public and Keywordtool.io are good places to start. Take a look at what other websites are doing, and use your experience if it's applicable. You can end up with a lot of orders on your hands if you play your cards right.

Why? These are businesses who need to market and, in some cases, marketing departments who actively need content to load into systems. You have someone *much* more willing to buy than a publication inundated with pitches but can only accept so many stories. Not saying you shouldn't pitch your fiction and op-eds, but it's a very different dynamic here and learning how to pitch content well can get you past the hurdles you might've had trying to make a living at it. There's a reason I do content strategy, writing, and consulting to subsidize my game dev efforts instead of working a day job! I'm just saying that you have VERY willing buyers here.

For example, writing about the 2018 tax reform was a huge one with my accounting clients this past year. Here's how I turned one client's panic into earning more in two days than I did in a whole week when I still worked in an actual tax office:

Hi Bill,

I've been getting lots of emails about the 2018 tax reform, and I honestly think we're going to need to split your idea into a couple posts because it's so overwhelming. Given that your client base is mostly affluent individuals with lots of doctors, dentists, and small business owners, here's the direction I think we should take:

Overview of Individual Tax Changes

Overview of Business Tax Changes

Will I Qualify for QBI?

Is My Mortgage No Longer Deductible?

The Death of the Business Entertainment Deduction

Let's keep these posts around 1,200 words while the business ones need more like 1,500. This way, the readers can get enough in-depth information so they know what to call you with. Coming up with a few topics for this isn't a big deal, but tax season will be here before we know it, so if you'd like me to get a whole year's content calendar planned I'll do it for \$150. Let me know, thanks!

Kind Regards,

Rachel

Let's break down the anatomy of this pitch email.

- First sentence establishes I'm in high demand, keeps my rates up.
- Establishes understanding of Bill's audience in one sentence.
- Establishes purpose of the content. The purpose is to answer burning questions for Bill's clients but leave enough unsaid that they'll generate some billable hours before two very busy times of a given year for this client.
- Gives good reason for why we need five blog posts instead of one, and topics that fit both the audience's and Bill's needs.
- Upsells editorial service but frames it in a way that shows I'm respecting Bill's time while driving the message home that he's too busy to be bothered with this with his two peak times being so close together.
- By naming my price upfront, I'm saving back-and-forth on the above, which is a win for both parties.

Bill actually reached out to me with just the individual tax change one, but because he's a busy solo CPA, editorial planning was an upselling opportunity I saw. You can easily take this approach with a client who hasn't hit you up yet, though. If there's something taking place as huge as the tax reform in your niche, you have a golden opportunity to strike.

What's great about pitching content orders to previous clients—or even new ones—is that you only need to do this in two to five sentences as opposed to putting a lot of time into pitching other types of

work. In some cases, the pitch isn't even a whole sentence but just the topics. This makes it an easy way to free up time otherwise spent looking for immediately paying work.

The Follow-Up Process

Clients can come and go. Sometimes they temporarily run out of money or completely go out of business, management changes and they decide to pay Textbroker rates instead of your powerful niche rate, or they get distracted by something shiny. I've had clients vary in consistency for as long as I've been using content work to subsidize my games career since 2015. Some of them will consistently pay you month after month for years while others sporadically come and go. Others try you just once or twice then switch writers, platforms, strategies, you name it. It's the nature of the beast.

If you've had a client who was great to work with and paid well but hasn't sent you work in a while, it doesn't hurt to reach out. Play up timeliness if you can: content leading up to an important industry-wide conference like GDC for game developers, the end of the year and beginning of tax season for tax professionals, summertime for travel professionals—the list goes on. Something like:

Hi Ellen,

Hope all is well with you and you've gotten some rest post-PAX. Just wanted to touch base to see if you needed anything written for Casual Connect since this event's going to get a lot of search traffic down to the last day, plus you're bound to get a lot of questions about the game right now. Thanks!

*Sincerely,
Rachel*

In one of the testimonial books *Freedom with Writing* published, a major factor in those writers' success stories was that they offered services other than writing. If you've picked up other related skills along the way, like graphic design, content strategy, and web development, these follow-up emails only take a few seconds to draft but they can result in instant or near-future money in the bank instead of having to be on the hunt. Get them done while you're waiting for the bus, waiting for your kids to get out of school, hell, they're fast enough to do on the toilet.

You have a much higher chance of getting a pre-existing content writing client to hire you again than finding an entirely new client. Pursuing and being pursued by old and new clients are equally important to making a stable living this way, but that kind of follow-up is key. Private clients make it a little easier than platforms where you could have hobbled communications with strict terms of service or where it's 100% managed service so you can't directly follow up. But it still helps to develop a rapport with people at content platforms because if they see you take the initiative to follow up, that could put you on the radar to assign a new client to you before they consider anyone else. This has happened to me on numerous content platforms.

If you read my *Gamasutra* piece about networking I linked earlier, the *last* thing you want to do is sound desperate. Sounding like a motivated, confident writer with valuable skills and passions is hot. Begging

for work is not. But famines can hit even seasoned pros. Even if you ARE desperate for work, the last thing you want to do is communicate that, as it leads to exploitation. Asking for that nice high rate you deserve then taking a much lower one sends a confusing message! Even if you have a rock-bottom rate you'll take if work is slow and you're super broke, don't say it out loud.

If you don't feel like reading the Gamasutra piece, I'll sum it up with some Drakeposting.



Speaking of networking, also follow up with your network. It was some overly perky annoying life coach who said, "Your network is your net worth," but this phrase rings totally true. You never know when they might have heard of a new platform or a client they weren't right reached out to them but you'd be a much better fit. Pay it forward, too. When the same thing happens to you, spread that good karma. Talking to other content writers is incredibly important for this reason!

Chapter 8: Content Writing is Still a Business! Protecting Yourself 101

So, we've covered a plethora of totally sexy topics that will lead to happier bank accounts. Now it's time for a pretty unsexy but direly important topic: keeping yourself covered. **This still applies to you even if you don't want to work with private clients.**

I'd recommend taking a look at [Chron's small business guide to principal-agent relationships](#). This knowledge is going to come in handy as far as work with both private clients and content platforms goes, with respect to who owns the product and who's responsible for assigning the work and making sure you get paid.

In addition to each content platform having their own terms of service, you're going to have to create your own if you plan on working with private clients. This is something you want to get done BEFORE you take any private clients on, or else you risk never seeing a dime. Nonetheless, it's a good idea to gain an understanding of principal-agent relationships as it's something every freelancer should know. This is especially important if you want to grow your presence and start doing business with larger companies or take on any number of other media hustles.

This isn't going to dive incredibly deeply into contract law, but these are the following things you need to be aware of when it comes to the business end of content creation.

You Need a Service Agreement From a Real Lawyer

I know you just looked up Rocket Lawyer, LegalZoom, or Phil's Law Hut and Doomsday Prepper Supply right this second. DON'T CLICK THAT ORDER BUTTON, DON'T—

So, I'm not a lawyer. Business law was required in college to get licensed as an accountant in New York, but tax law is my main area of expertise. The first thing I did when I decided to start selling consulting services with my own website was have a real lawyer draft a boilerplate I could use with each client then tweak as needed.

For a frame of reference, I paid \$400 for this service. Depending on where you live and whether you ask the lawyer to start from scratch, work a boilerplate out for you, or fix something you got from Phil's Law Hut, your legal fees may vary. If you are completely broke but don't want to tread the waters unprotected, I'm going to recommend two sources for free or very low-cost legal services: See if your state has a bar referral service and tell them you're a broke freelancer who needs help with a boilerplate. You can also try an organization called SCORE (Society of Retired Executives), which has hundreds of chapters across America offering free business help. There are often lawyers who volunteer their services to new local business owners and free agents, so you can even do some networking and find potential clients here.

Your boilerplate should have all the basics, including state and local laws that you may fall under, such as your state's commercial code or New York's Freelance Isn't Free Act and detail rights and remedies for both sides. Any further questions you have should be addressed to a real lawyer before drawing up your agreement!

Copyright Assignment

Something that makes content writing a challenge compared to bylined work is copyright assignment, as far as your portfolio is concerned. Once content is paid for and accepted, the copyright transfers from you to the client. They can do what they want with the end product once they own the copyright, and it's all theirs. If you try linking to it in your portfolio or profiles, there could be some serious consequences if you don't have express written permission to use that piece or excerpt in your portfolio. Getting permission is easier to do with private clients, as most content platforms generally only allow you to link to work that has your byline or that you expressly own, such as your own site's blog. Even if you're just putting these pieces up on LinkedIn and Contently and nowhere else, this could spell disaster because of the copyright assignment. These clients track where links are coming in from and could find this activity suspect.

So, there are two things I do to get around this. First, I always save my best work from content platforms, as I never know when I might need to reference it for a topic I have to write about again. I also send them as samples to clients in private communications. You can't *publicly* post links or PDFs on your profiles or else you could end up in hot water with the content platform or the clients themselves. But there's nothing wrong with messaging or emailing the prospect with "Here's a PDF of blog content I wrote for ABC Company last month about change management. This should give you an idea of my style." This step is incredibly important because you don't lose out on the opportunity, and in some cases name-dropping specific clients helps you land work.

The second thing is taking a sample of the work you're trying to highlight—be it by asset type, for a specific topic or industry, or by the end client's firm size—and then rewriting the entire thing or just a paragraph or two depending on the sample specs the platform requests. This is going to be necessary for writers who don't have any bylined work or owned media but still need a portfolio and samples to show.

Got it? The end client owns the copyright, so unless you have a byline or explicit permission in writing to share what you wrote in your portfolio, you're not allowed to make these links publicly available. If you don't have bylined work, rehash some of your best work so it's totally original and you can put these samples on any profile since you own them.

Copyright Purchase

Who owns the copyright to what you've written? Generally, the end client does once they've paid and have expressed satisfaction with the final version. But there are times when this won't be the case

because the client changed their mind or there was a miscommunication so you end up with a piece they're not using.

If you're using a content platform, this honestly varies. Like I described in how to use Constant Content, the way WriterAccess works is that if the client doesn't want the original piece and only pays for just one and not both, you own the original. Depending on how experienced the client is in ordering content, you may need to explicitly explain that the copyright to that original piece they didn't want now belongs to you so they don't snatch it from the approval window and publish it elsewhere. You're free to use that piece on your own blog, as a sample for your portfolio and profiles, or try selling it on a content spinning site like Constant Content.

Which is exactly what I did. After I wrote the client a new piece on enterprise risk management that they were happy with, I listed it for sale on Constant Content. A week later, it sold and once the sale was completed, that meant the copyright got assigned to the new owner. I've had other pieces on Constant Content sit there forever, so I eventually took some down and just used them as portfolio samples since the copyrights still belong to me.

It's a different story if you're using a content platform like WriterBunny or others that will pay you for your time even if the end client didn't take the piece. I had one of the honorable mention companies, Presto, do just that. Because they take a loss on refunding or comping the client, in a majority of cases the copyright now belongs to that platform to try publishing or selling on their own.

When you're working with private clients, you need to have a real live lawyer draft a section for copyright assignment and purchase in your service agreement. What will your remedy be if a private client doesn't like the work they paid for and need something materially different than a couple of revisions? My approach is that I ask them if they'd still like to hold onto the piece for the future and just pay for a new one. If they don't want to use the current piece, I can refund their money or get started on a new piece. In either case, I'll own the original, which I can use in my portfolio or try to sell elsewhere.

Money Management and Preventing Non-Payment Before It Happens

You don't have to do a whole lot of formalities when it comes to freelance writing. It's good for your positioning to start an LLC (limited liability company) or corporation if you plan on this being your primary source of income or a significant one. This entails creating bank and PayPal accounts separate from your personal ones.

Everyone has different methods that they deploy when it comes to getting paid on time, or getting paid at all. But like it or not, private clients open up a ton of risk in this department. First, you need to sort out *how* you're going to get paid. I rely on PayPal for virtually all of my writing and consulting work. For very large orders, I've accepted checks or done wire transfers with a few clients because the bank fees worked out to be cheaper than PayPal's. I only do this though if it's a client who's established themselves as trustworthy. But even then, I usually end up sticking with PayPal.

Here's the big reason why I insist on PayPal, though: I insist on upfront payment for orders under \$1,000. My logic is that if you want a blender on Amazon, you have to pay before they ship it. I've

usually bitten the bullet on those fees because they give me and the client peace of mind. I get my money instantly, and they have the dispute process in the unlikely event I don't deliver. For jobs exceeding \$1,000, I still insist on a deposit before work begins and have explicit terms in the contract that the copyright still belongs to me if full payment hasn't been rendered.

If it's a recurring client, there may be times I have to bill again because a job was word count-based and I ended up significantly going over. But if it's a client I've never worked with before who turned out to be flaky, then I'd rather risk losing out on \$30 in word count overage than doing the work and waiting months before I get paid, if ever.

Does it suck having these companies take a bite out of your earnings? Yeah, it does. But don't spend your time hemming and hawing about how much the fees take. Save your mental energy and time for how you can make more dollars in the first place.



Chapter 9: Ending on a Positive Note with Tips, Tricks, and Tools; About the Author

That was an epic journey. Thanks for sticking around to the end! I hope you've gotten a lot out of how to make a handsome income with content writing. So, we're going to end on a positive note with these fairly to-the-point tips.

Even if content writing's a side hustle rather than your meal ticket, you can't treat this like a job.

There are times you'll be able to sell a client in a few sentences, and times you need to give them the long version of your life story. But your track record, results, writing samples, and positioning will sell you more than your resume.

Be open-minded. Establish your niche but sometimes you'll work outside of it and grow what you're capable of. I initially stumbled into hire writing when I was looking for a more flexible way to support my games career, and ended up *merging* the two.

Writing for hire was initially something I viewed as a means to an end, like the stuff I did on Elance and working at the tax office: just a paycheck. You'll have gigs that are just a paycheck, others that end up introducing you to people who could change your career trajectory and teaching you new things. Some of my writing gigs are literally ways to get paid well to learn, while others just pay for my freedom to spend the rest of the day working on my own stuff and enjoy life.

If you're an artistic writer, like a screenwriter, game designer, or novelist, you might have to prove that you're indeed content-native and can write for SEO and web purposes. I scared you with that CMI article at the beginning of the book for a reason.

Stay consistent with taking high rates. Unless that lower-priced order makes a difference between you paying rent or not, hold off on those low-paying gigs and use that time to polish up your profiles, create new writing samples, hit up old clients, or work on that manuscript or game design document. There are much more profitable and enjoyable ways you can spend your downtime, but if you really, really need cash I get having to take a lower-priced order. I've done it when I got hit with surprise bills. Still, whenever possible, use your downtime to work on your own projects or spruce up writing and consulting platform profiles as those can sit unchanged for months. Uploading new samples and changing your wording can be just what you need to get work coming in again.

If you use Google Docs to create and submit work, the Better Word Count add-on is your best friend.

Talk to other writers. Don't view them as competition who got some gig instead of you. Show solidarity. You want to build each other up and help each other get paid more! Always keep each other in mind when communicating with clients and tell one another about opportunities you come across. That's how I found out about Freedom with Writing, along with some of the content sites in Chapter 2.

Really, talk to other freelancers *period*. As a business educator in the games industry, one of my favorite parts of my signature business 101 workshop is discussing the non-business aspects of starting a game studio. The dynamic honestly isn't that different for freelance writers. Except that instead of being asked, "So do you make games like Mario or Call of Duty?" every person on earth will think you only write novels or poetry, that you're either a millionaire or complete broke-ass discussing Marshall McLuhan over espresso with foreign dignitaries for *The New Yorker*.

And holy crap, does it get emotionally draining. This means you need to find other people your speed.

Whether you do make platformer games like Mario or write novels, you need to find other writers. Find other content writers and people who make a living on the internet. Web designers and developers, videographers, graphic artists—you need each other and cannot only refer clients to one another, but you need people you can talk shop with. You need to find your tribe: your friends who worked 9-5 jobs all their adult lives won't get it if you try talking rates or making a big idea into a new business. You need to talk to other entrepreneurially minded freelancers who *get it* and want to build each other up.

I have a friend I love dearly who said, "This all sounds so stressful, having to constantly pitch and apply for gigs. Doing marketing. I'm glad I just get a stable paycheck." We still love and respect each other, but I found this statement funny because I can't imagine anything worse than the words "You're fired" dismantling my entire income and having my future ride on a job interview. Whereas I expect that not every introduction email will produce results, not every client will want to work with me, some will work with me and decide they don't like the way I do things and whatnot, so we move onto the next thing. Starting out as a freelancer can definitely be stressful, especially if you don't have a roadmap and are relying on people with traditional jobs or "I'm only freelancing because I can't find a job" types for feedback on your work and profiles. But once you're established, it gets easy. It's like grinding in an RPG: you only keep going up once your weapons upgrade and you start battling tougher monsters, then those orcs that once scared you are like flies now. Unlike when I went from a six-figure financial job to begging for \$20/hour bookkeeping work and competing with people my parents' age.

So, yes. You need to find your tribe because your personal and professional lives will see an enormous difference. This is going to equate to a happier and more confident you who is also going to be far more engaging and easy to sell to clients.

Save all your work from content platforms, private clients, anything. Plagiarizing yourself isn't prudent, but the ability to see past orders I've completed has been a major timesaver for me on numerous occasions. Writing content makes you good at rehashing things.

It's a good idea to invest in something like Copyscape, just in case you fear plagiarizing yourself or others. WriterAccess automatically runs it through, but most other clients and platforms don't.

Last but certainly not least:

People often get it in their heads that they have to do things a certain way and limit themselves.



I hear so many people say, “Freelancing sucks!” or “I’m at home all day and it’s driving me crazy!” and I shake my head every time. Treating freelancing like it’s employment you do at home is why a lot of people fail at it when they need to adopt more entrepreneurial mindsets, something most schools and workplaces certainly don’t encourage. My social life and overall quality of life *improved* so much once I could choose how to live my life and how much work to take on, where to work, when and how to do it. But I believe those statements I hear often honestly stem from a society that encourages isolation and making your job and home the sole focal points of your life.

Travel is another thing people get weird ideas about, like it’s this all or nothing thing. You can do as many or as few conventions as you want, ditto for travel. You don’t need to commit to being a full-time digital nomad to see the world, but the option’s there. Travel doesn’t need to be a fancy vacation or needing to set aside several months of your life to get up and go. One of the happiest months of my life was September 2017, when I ventured out west traveling to multiple cities for game dev cons and speaking gigs with a stop in San Diego for the IRS conference. I used the trip to visit friends I made through writing and game dev work! It was also one of my most lucrative months even with travel and conference days causing minor snags. The change of scene was fantastic and my off days with no work or social stuff planned were super productive in these quiet hotel rooms. I got several thousand dollars worth of content done on that sojourn, and even got a few vacay days in each city.

I'm assuming you're at Freedom with Writing and picked up this book because you desire freedom. I can't imagine life without this degree of autonomy. Coming up on five years being job-free, things that would've blown my mind back then are part of my routine now. All of the ways I can be so much more in tune with my hobbies and interests, the career I always wanted, and the outside world itself have made me a better writer, speaker, and game developer. I never would've gotten that if I just got another tax office job that didn't allow the level of freedom and flexibility that content writing does.

Best of all? My content, consulting, op-ed writing, and marketing clients all actually value my work and skills. I get so much more respect from both individual clients and even content platforms like WriterAccess than I ever got from a boss or manager. There are good jobs and garbage clients out there, but building up a content writing career has a totally different dynamic I only wish I knew was an option several years ago.

Content writing can be whatever you want to make of it based on your goals, values, lifestyle, constraints, and so on. You can build on it and explore other opportunities in digital marketing or stick to writing only. It can be your sole focus or something you do to subsidize other creative work. Recognize limits you may have, like family obligations, mental and physical health issues, and unavoidable living expenses, but don't get swept up in the limits most people place on themselves like, "I can only do X type of writing" or "I have to wait for this client to reach out first." Letting go of limits is how you'll find freedom with writing.

About the Author



Rachel Presser is a content strategist, writer, business educator, business of games consultant, and indie game developer from the Bronx. As the founder of [Sonic Toad Media and Consulting](#), Rachel became a content writer then strategist by accident when she was seeking more flexible work to support her game development endeavors after 10 years in the financial industry. She then merged content marketing and indie games together with Sonic Toad's operations.

Rachel has contributed to Freedom with Writing and Gamasutra among other publications. She is a feature columnist, podcast host, producer of Game with Your Brain. When she's not hustling, she can be found at game jams and toad ponds around the country and world.

Need help with the business of writing or indie games, or got tax questions? [Consult with Rachel on Clarity](#) or the main Sonic Toad site! Check out her [writing on Contently](#) and [visual content at Canva](#).