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How to Start and Sustain a Career as a Freelance Writer

By Abdallah Khamis Abdallah

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by: **Abdallah Khamis Abdallah**

Have you wondered how you can make a career writing books or articles for various publications? Or are you seeking a viable second income opportunity but do not know where to start? Well, freelance writing may be the right career for you and it can open a world of lucrative opportunities for you.

You do not need to have special qualifications to be a freelance writer and make money. What you need is the ambition, diligence in your craft and willingness to learn the necessary skills. Of course you need to be literate in a popular language especially English in order to communicate with a large readership and sell your work widely.

Getting Started

Getting started as a freelance writer is easy compared to what it takes to enter other careers .You need to assess your skills to enable you to choose what to write about. What knowledge or training do you have? Are there issues or facts you are more familiar with? What are your hobbies/interests? These and other questions if well answered will have set you on the path to being a writer.

However, it may be necessary to learn the art of writing from experts and this is why you should take a writing course. There are many writing courses available and an appropriate search on the Internet will reveal some, which may be suitable for you. While some courses are full-time and may require minimum entry qualifications you may find a host of others which are part-time and do not require any special qualifications.

A good option is to take a distance learning course and you will find several in this category. These give you an opportunity to study at home at your own pace. Notable among them are those offered by two UK based colleges and which are available to prospective writers worldwide. One is offered by the Writers Bureau of Manchester United Kingdom. The college offers a freelance writing distance learning course which leads to the issue of a certificate on completion and gives you an opportunity to earn

from writing while you learn.

The other college is the London School of Journalism which offers diplomas and post graduate diplomas in writing. Many areas of writing are covered by both colleges and it is advisable that you enroll in one of these courses to sharpen your talents and take advantage of the opportunities that go with studying them.

In case you do not feel like enrolling in writing courses for any reason then all is not lost. There are vast resources on the internet and elsewhere which you can resort to for learning about writing. You may read various essays on writing on the internet written by experienced writers. There are many of these and its only a matter of knowing how and where to find them. There are also books about freelance writing which you may order from book stores or direct from publishers. A visit to your local library may also prove useful in unearthing useful information on writing.

Once you have embarked on writing you need to keep a notebook or journal to record wild ideas as they come to your mind or while reading various publications. To discover ideas for your writing you need to read widely magazines, newspapers, books, watch television and so on. Give the news and features a second thought, study them critically and ask yourself questions about what is contained in them. Imagine what would have been the situation if the events cited had not happened. Since they have happened how can the situation be made better? What are the effects of those events? Think more about them. Dream and take notes.

WRITING YOUR PIECE

Now comes the hard part putting your ideas in black and white. This part may be difficult depending on your circumstances. You could be having so many ideas that you are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information you have collected. You are stuck with stacks of sheets of information you have jotted down that you do not know where to begin. Alternatively you could be having only a few ideas to fit only one page and do not know where to find information to write the rest of your book or article.

These are dilemmas that face writers at various points in time perhaps they reflect lack of tact in handling their work. As a writer you need to do proper planning to avoid any of those two scenarios you need to have researched your market first before even researching the subject.

This brings us to the issue of markets study. You need to study the audience to know what their requirements are. In the case of articles, you should study the writers/submission guidelines and a few issues of the publications to know your markets well. Many publications have writers/submission guidelines on their web pages. Next you need to be familiar with the style guidelines. These are more or less the same as the writers guidelines but may include issues such as spelling, punctuation and other aspects of grammar.

It is important that you read their style guides to avoid your articles being rejected. In case you do not know where to find them then it is advisable to write to the editors for copies. Alternatively you may find some in libraries and bookstores.

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As important as the study of the market is the research on the topic you want to write about. Write down all ideas you have on the topic as they come to mind without editing them. Turn them upside down to come up with fresh ideas. Then decide on the angle and slant of your article.

The above exercise would have generated a lot of material, which may be used as a basis for your story. Then depending on the type of article you are writing you can do extensive research, taking notes as you carry on. The research could be on the internet, which is a good place to start from or in publications found at the library. You may have to buy some books, which are not locally available or pay for photos from media agencies. Alternatively you may use the services of hired researchers or research agencies. A good source of research documents is the British Library, which can for a small fee send you photocopies of requested material anywhere in the world. The US Library of congress has a similar service. You may also search for experts in your local directory who may provide you with useful information. In sum there is limitless scope for research and only you may decide on the limit based on the requirements of the article.

Next, you should organize the ideas and information from the research into a concise and coherent order. This is the planning phase where you decide the structure and format of your article, choose what is relevant and would advance the goal and spirit of your article. Select ideas from the research

information and not word for word copying. Be careful lest you be accused of plagiarism of other peoples work or infringing on their copyrights. Write several drafts until the complete article has taken the shape and tone you want, check on the spelling, punctuation and other aspects of grammar and style in each draft to achieve a well polished article. It is not a bad idea if you seek a second opinion from your peers before preparing the final draft. There are thousand of writing communities on the internet which may assist you in that regard.

After writing the final draft type it and send it to the responsible editor of the publication.

The Contents

What goes into making a successful article? Well the answers could be varied depending on the scope and nature of the article. I believe there can be no standard way of writing an article. However, we can at least agree on some universal principles of what constitutes a good article.

First, any article must be captivating to its intended readership or audience. Readers must be glued to it and have the thirst to read it on until the end. They will read it twice, thrice and even more or keep it as a souvenir for days and years to come. This is the ideal article and if yours can reach that level then the better.

Your article must offer useful information, which the reader may use to his benefit or at least enlighten him on important issues. If it is a story it will give the reader temporary relief or inspiration on a particular issue. It will make him dream or be filled with imagination, which will give him a sense of relaxation. In brief it will entertain him.

How will you achieve all that? By organizing the article in a logical and structured order. You will use

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words to convey ideas precisely; you will say what you mean and mean what you say. Choose the right words to convey the intended message. You swear not to use incomprehensible metaphors and jargon and if you do then you are certain that they are at the level that your audience is readily familiar with. Use the right similes and aphorisms. Be concise in your use of language, make the sentences and paragraphs flow smoothly with similar ideas aptly grouped and flowing in a logical and pleasant order. Paragraphs are short and measured.

All that is not easy to achieve with the stroke of a pen and you will have to do much learning and imagination to attain that level. Hopefully there is an easy path to that objective. This is through constant reading especially of fiction books since they are a great resource of imaginative ideas and are models of language use.

Read them regularly and take a few notes down. Do not stop with fiction books but do also read magazines, newspapers and other non-fiction works. See what other successful writers have done and follows the principles behind their writing success.

Lets now look at the how part of writing. An article contains three main parts that is introduction, the body and the conclusion. The introduction may be said to be the most important part of the article. This is not to underrate the other two parts or to say that we can have an article without the other parts.

We wish rather to show its significance in interesting your readers to want to read the article. This is exemplified with the first opening paragraph popularly known as the leader or lead paragraph. It is a strong paragraph which aptly summarized the theme of the article. It will mostly likely be one sentence

but no harm if it is split into two or three sentences.

The body of the article follows next after the introduction and is divided into many paragraphs depending on the length of the article. The main theme of the article is developed here. Arguments and counter-arguments are made. Facts are spilled. Comments are made. Analysis is done. Without the body you have no successful article or no article at all. Your credibility as a writer will be judged on how you successfully handled the writing of the body. You readers will have no regrets of having gone past the introduction and entering the body. If they find it satisfactorily written, suspense overcomes them until they reach the conclusion.

To conclude the article, the writer ingeniously in a few sentences summarizes the theme of the article. He does not recapitulate the facts cited in the body but gives the reader the sequel of the story. It all requires creativity to write a good conclusion that leaves the readers with good memories of your article. The conclusion does not leave questions lingering the minds of your readers but gives a final word on the theme. In matters which are full of uncertainty the writer speculates on the most likely outcome.

Marketing Your Work

Here comes the most important part. You have taken days or weeks collecting information, gathering ideas, writing and polishing your article and it is high time you gained from your sweat.

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There are several approaches to selling your article. Each has its own advantages but most experts are unanimous that querying is the better option. This is simply because it is inexpensive and you get value for what you work for even if after a long time. It is hassle-free and while not without its disappointments, it is relatively less painful if you receive a rejection.

Querying is the first thing you should do after you have formed a strong idea on the theme of your article. Check publications directories and on the internet for addresses of editors responsible for accepting freelance writers' work and then write to them addressing them by their names and titles.

A query is a one page or so letter to a named editor of a publication asking for an opportunity to contribute an article for publication. It contains a brief summary of the main theme of the article, its suggested length, when you are likely to deliver it if you are commissioned to write it, the likely benefits the readers will derive from the article and why you are the right person to write the article.

You should put a lot of imagination in writing the query letter as this is your best opportunity to convince the editor of your ability to deliver on your promises. If you have a good resume attach it or mention briefly relevant contents which makes you stand out as the most suitable to write the article. Editors prefer experienced writers to novices and if you have what it takes then say so. Otherwise if you are a beginner avoid saying so but include a few samples tailored to the publications readers taste. If you will use special or exclusive sources of information then don't forget to mention that in your query.

How many times should one query per article? As many times as is practicable, just so long as you are able to deliver on your promises taking into consideration time constraints. In fact for your writing business to be viable you need to send many queries to ensure that your potential earnings will be able to sustain you in your career. However you should be wary of a situation where you receive several acceptances on the same theme and you send exact replicas of the article. Try to give a different spin

and change the wording to suit different publications. Take work according to your ability and capacity.

The other alternative to marketing your work is to write articles for mass audiences imagining their needs and tastes and submitting to various publications. You target several publications in one category which you feel will be most suitable to accept the theme of your article. You may also copy your article from your disk or computer and paste on virtual publishing communities websites or email your article to various editors. This is a quick and cheap way of making multiple submissions of your articles.

We have mentioned virtual publishing communities websites and I feel we should explain briefly what they are. These are websites which accept articles or work from writers and sell to various publications and pay you a modest fee. They are a good starting point for the beginner as they provide quick results of seeing your work published. To be frank it is difficult to win writing assignments without some writing experience or proof that you are a published writer. Such websites give you an easy way of proving yourself and also earning something from your work.

However, these type of websites may have their own pitfalls such as going out of business before you

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get paid or profiting from your work and giving you little in return. A consoling fact is that you still retain your copyright and you can sell your articles to other publications. Please regard these websites as sources of additional income and not the ultimate markets for your writing work.

How do you know which publications accept work from freelance writers or even the names and addresses of magazines and newspapers editors? There are several ways to do that and we shall mention a few here. A good reference for finding freelance writing markets is the annual Writers Markets. This contains names and addresses publications which accept freelance work. You may order it from

or you can check if there is a copy at your local library. On the web, you can

use search engines such as

to search for markets by using keywords such as

newspapers and magazines. You will be surprised by the sheer volume of links that are available which you can browse slowly to look for the categories you want. You will find thousands of publications whether classified by country, subject or readership.

Dealing With Rejections

While doing your marketing you will experience some difficulties such as some publications which have gone out of circulation or editors who do not respond but more often you will receive many polite rejections. Some editors may give you suggestions they wish you to consider before accepting your proposal.

All in all we have to accept that rejections are a fact of life and we will have to live with them but you will be a lot wiser if you study the reasons for your rejections to enable you improve your future queries and submissions thus increasing your chances of getting acceptances. While some editors may not be interested in the theme you are proposing others would have been dissatisfied with your level of experience to handle the articles you are proposing to write. It could also be that the publication has received a similar query from another writer or has plans to write a similar piece using their staff writers. Probably they have published an article on the same theme recently and they feel they have exhaustively covered the subject and unless you have something new or refreshing they are not accepting any proposals for now.

Read what they write to you and learn from their reasons. Do not be discouraged but send more

queries to other publications. Choose popular themes for articles and add more value in them such as statistics, photographs, expert comments and an objective assessment of the issues. With time and patience you will ultimately succeed.

Organizing Yourself

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As you carry on with your writing you need to organize yourself to successfully take advantage of opportunities as they come along and to ensure that you do not fail to beat deadlines. There are basic necessities such as stationery including files for clippings manuscripts and photographs. You need to keep track of your articles to know where they were published, when and follow up payments. You may need to draw up contracts, type up your articles, post or email them.

Prepare and follow a work plan to enable you succeed in researching and writing articles. Deal with one assignment first before you go to the next. Dedicate as much time as possible to writing since this is the core function of your career. If you write less then the less you will earn and the less motivated you will be to continue with writing.

You also need to spend much time querying on multiple article ideas. This is important since you will be looking for future sales. Though specializing on one genre is good, you should occasionally look for other branches of writing and markets to maximize your chances of making sales.

Manage your financial affairs well so that you do not cripple your career, budget your income and invest in books and other publications o keep your ideas train moving on and on. Dont forget to invest in savings and other lucrative opportunities for the occasional rainy day.

Once you have a stable income you may open a small office and employ staff to assist you in research, typing and other important tasks. This will enable you churn out more articles every month than if you handle everything yourself. Keep expenses to a minimum and go for high paying markets.

You can build a career out of writing and earn yourself extra income part–time or regular income full time from freelance writing. However you need to study the art of writing, organize yourself and constantly search for markets to stay afloat.

Dont fear to take the plunge, the time is now!

Abdallah Khamis Abdallah is a freelance copywriter and ghostwriter. To learn more about how you and your business can benefit from viral and credibility marketing solutions visit his website at:

Thoughts On A Challenging Custom Car Audio Job

By Sebastian Schneider

Could a car owner have custom car audio added to a vehicle with "lambo doors"? That question has popped into the head of a freelance writer in California. The writer has previously witnessed all of the operations involved in the process of adding custom car audio to a Jeep Cherokee. Now she has learned that car owners are being encouraged to get Lamborghini–like doors.

That freelance writer hesitates to imagine what she may next find in her driveway. In November of 2005 the writer found two young adult males using her driveway as the site for the addition of custom

car audio. One of those two lads had taken a course on auto mechanics with the former instructor at Culver City High School, a school close to Sony studios. He had agreed to share his knowledge with the writer's son. Hence, the two of them had commenced the long process required to complete a custom car audio job.

At one point the writer's son called to his mother and invited her to come outside and to see for herself what her son and his friend were doing. What that writer saw was two car doors with the "stuffing" pulled out of them. The quest for a custom car audio system had led those two young men to place speakers in the doors of the Jeep Cherokee.

The two "stereo specialists" did not show the writer how they had wired the speakers to the power source and to the amplifier. Their failure to grant the writer a look at their wiring operations has caused that writer to now ponder on a particular question: Could a vehicle with car speakers in the doors also have "lambo doors"? In other words, could a car owner who enjoyed the sound delivered by custom car audio logically expect to add "lambo doors" to that same car?

The writer has seen pictures that show how the "lambo doors" swing upward, instead of swinging out. Wiring speakers into such doors would seem to present a real challenge. Could one have custom car audio in a car with such doors? One writer in California wants to know.

If you want to know more about anything related to car audio, visit

. If you

have a blog and want to promote it, go to

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