MODULE #6: FINDING WRITING JOBS AND PITCHING EDITORS

IN THIS MODULE: This week, we'll be looking at websites that can help you find freelance writing jobs ... plus websites you should avoid! We'll cover how to pitch an editor (with real-life examples), and we'll look at warning signs that a writing gig might be a scam.

Once you've got a little bit of experience, it's time to start pitching for paid work. I know this can seem like a very big step – and even figuring out where to look for freelance writing jobs can be tricky.

In this module, we're going to cover all the basics of finding paid writing work. We'll start by looking at useful websites that can help you (online job boards and lists of paying markets), and we'll also cover websites that I strongly recommend you steer clear of – "content mills" where rates are rock-bottom.

Though this is the final week of the course, our Facebook group will remain active for the next four weeks beyond that and I'll be around to help: if you've got any questions about this week's materials, or anything else freelancing-related, just ask.

facebook.com/groups/startfreelancing2019

Before we dig into the module materials, I want to clarify a couple of words I'll be using a lot:

Jobs – although I've decided to use "job" not "gig" throughout most of this module, we aren't talking about full time roles here. These are freelance positions, with the work generally being done from your own home (or wherever you want).

Client – the person advertising the job. They'll likely be paying you to do a few hours of work each week, or maybe just a few hours each month – so you'll probably have several clients at any given time.

Where to Find Writing Jobs Online

Some good places to find writing jobs, when you're starting out, are:

- **Through online jobs boards**: these are listings of freelancing jobs that are specifically advertising for applicants. This can often seem like the easiest route into a freelancing job, but you may find you need to apply to a lot of jobs before you get one: a *lot* of other freelancers will be looking at the same boards and applying too.
- **Through lists of websites and publications accepting freelance work**: I've actually found this a better route than jobs boards, as there doesn't tend to be so much competition. Some websites/magazines never advertise for writers – they don't need to, because the writers come to them. They tend to be in a position to pay better rates than the ones that need to advertise, too.
- **Through your social networks**: freelancers often get positions based on a referral – after all, wouldn't *you* rather work with someone who your friend or colleague has recommended, versus a total stranger? (Every time I've hired a designer, for instance, it's been on the recommendation of a trusted friend.)

We'll go through each of these in turn, but before we do that, I want to talk a little more about content mills.

A Quick Warning About Content Mills

"Content mills" are large websites that operate by bringing together freelance writers and the clients wanting to hire them. There are a lot of them under different names, but essentially, any site where you create a profile, log in and "bid" on jobs is probably a content mill.

A couple of well known ones are Textbroker and CopyPress. Demand Studios used to be huge ... but went bust.

Normally, content mills work by charging the clients, not the freelancers. So you don't have to pay to join – but you will find that pay rates are abysmal. (I've regularly heard as little as $5 for a 1,000 word post, which depending on the research and edits required, could easily be a couple of hours' work.)

With content mills, you won't necessarily know where your work will eventually be published – it might well be on a website that you don't particularly want your name associated with. You may not get your name on your work at all, making it hard for you to use it in your portfolio.

Some freelancers end up trapped by content mills: they're making such low rates that they can't afford to take time to pitch for better jobs or to build up their portfolio and social networks, so they're stuck on the treadmill of writing an awful lot of words for very little money.

Does it Ever Make Sense to Write for a Content Mill?

There are a few sites that work a bit like content mills but focus on higher-paying gigs: ClearVoice is one of them. I joined it a while ago, and they've sent me occasional jobs that match the low end of what I'd want to be paid (though that aren't within my areas of expertise).

Unless you use a site like ClearVoice that lists jobs paying a professional rate, though, I would strongly advise you avoid writing for content mills.

If you want to gain experience and confidence, it's far better to do so by writing a small number of pieces for free (but for publications / organizations that you're happy to be associated with) so that you can get some great testimonials. We covered this in detail in Module 4.

Let's move on, then, to the places you *can* find freelance writing jobs online:

Using Online Jobs Boards

There are quite a few reasonably large jobs boards out there that list open jobs from clients looking for freelance writers.

You'll find with most jobs boards that pay rates vary a lot, so don't assume that just because a job is listed there, it'll pay well. (Some job boards do have minimum requirements on pay.)

Here's my go-to list of jobs boards:

ProBlogger's Jobs Board

problogger.com/jobs

This is a very long-running (13 years and counting) jobs board, on one of the best known blogs on blogging. It's been recently updated so you can create a profile showcasing your expertise, meaning potential clients can find you … though I'd still recommend applying directly for jobs that interest you.

Be a Freelance Blogger's Jobs Board

beafreelanceblogger.com/forum *(scroll down a bit for the jobs)*

This board doesn't include the dates of the original postings (though it links to them, so you can find that out fairly easily), meaning that some opportunities may well be a bit outdated. All the jobs listed here pay at least $50 per post or $0.10 per word.

Freelance Writing Jobs

freelancewritinggigs.com

This isn't exactly a jobs board, more like a compilation of lots of jobs from other boards! It covers both blogging and other types of freelance writing. If you don't want to check lots of different places every day, this is an easy one-stop-shop. A *lot* of freelancers use this one, though, so competition could be fierce.

Freelance Writing Jobs – Journalism, Content, Copywriting & Blogging

freelancewriting.com/jobs

Like freelancewritinggigs.com, this jobs board collages postings from elsewhere online (many of them from Indeed). A lot of the jobs listed are full-time employed ones, rather than freelance positions, so you may need to pick through carefully.

Blogging Pro Jobs Board

bloggingpro.com/jobs

This jobs board works in a similar way to ProBlogger's – though without the functionality that lets you create your own profile – and you may find there's some overlap in the jobs listed. You can search (e.g. by keyword or by category) to sift through the jobs to find the most relevant ones for you.

Applying Through a Jobs Board

Some boards will have their own special form you can fill in to contact the client; many will just have an email address for the client.

Job listings will generally tell you exactly how to apply. Here's an example:

> ### DESCRIPTION
>
> Our growing writing business requires a new writer who has a technology base/experience, but can also research and write on other topics like healthcare, finance, law, paranormal/fringe and more.
>
> This writer will sometimes receive a byline, and other times perform research and/or ghost-writing. Workload will be 4-5 articles (1200 to 2000 word) a week so please only apply if you have the bandwidth to take on the workload.
>
> Pay is $0.05/word, with growth potential into an editor role as the company grows.
>
> Please include your published online writing samples as links when you apply, include your availability, and speciality topic areas if you have them.
>
> Thank you and I look forward to working with you!

(From Versatile Multi-Topic Writer and Assistant on the ProBlogger jobs board)

I know this sounds really obvious, but it's important to include everything that you're asked for in your application. If the employer asks for links to previously published work, for instance, and you don't include any, it makes it look like you can't follow instructions.

You'll normally need to write some a message or emailing introducing yourself and setting out how you meet the qualifications for the job. Here's a template you can use – but do make sure you modify it to include the things specified in the job ad. I've annotated it so you can see how it works:

Dear [name],[1]

I'm writing to apply for the [name of position] role, as advertised here [link to the place where you saw the ad].[2]

I'd really enjoy the opportunity to write for you, because [explain how your subject matter knowledge or style particularly fits well with their blog/publication]. [3]

You can find some of my previously published work at these links:

- [Title of piece and link]
- [Title of piece and link]
- [Title of piece and link] [4]

I'm very familiar with WordPress and happy to source images and upload posts. (My own blog, [name and link], runs on WordPress.) [5]

Looking forward to hearing from you,

[your name] [6]

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1. Always try to use the editor's name (you may need to look on the blog/website or in the magazine in question). Avoid "Dear editor" or "Dear Sir/Madam" unless it *really* isn't clear.
2. This sentence may seem a little clunky or obvious, but if the editor is advertising for multiple different roles, it really helps to be clear about exactly which one you're applying for!

3. It's always good to sound interested in the job, and this is a simple way to work in your experience/skills that make you a particularly good fit for the role. You may want to write several sentences here.

4. Most employers will ask for links/samples, but even if they don't, I'd suggest giving three. If they tell you to give "five samples" or "two samples" etc, obviously stick to that! If no number is specified, I think three is about right. Choose pieces that relate as closely as possible to the job – e.g. ones that are on the same topics or written in the same style.

5. Some employers just want a writer, but if the ad specifies that they want you to take on extra duties (sourcing images and uploading posts into WordPress are very common ones), then do make it clear that you are able and willing to do these.

6. Don't forget to sign off at the end. When I started out freelancing, I used to write "thanks for your time and consideration" though now I feel that's a bit subservient! It's up to you exactly what you put, but I think "Looking forward to hearing from you" is a very standard closing that does the job fine.

In my own experience using jobs boards – and I hope this doesn't put you off! – most applications don't even get a response. There are often a *lot* of writers competing for the same role. I'd still encourage you to apply for jobs that interest you, but do keep in mind that you might have to apply to quite a lot before you get one acceptance.

However, most employers advertising on jobs boards want writers who'll produce regular, ongoing content – so once you've landed a few jobs, you may not need to pitch for any others.

Using "Accepting Submissions" Lists

A different approach from using jobs boards is to contact potential clients directly: instead of waiting for them to advertise a job, which many of them never do, you go to them with a pitch for a specific article or piece.

There are thousands of online publications (websites, blogs, email newsletters, etc) and print publications (magazines, journals, etc) that accept freelance submissions.

One place to start is with any you already happen to read: magazines, for instance, will normally list the editor's contact details in small print at the bottom of the first page or two. (You could also check their website.)

If none of the publications you read are ones you want to write for, or if they use in-house staff rather than freelancers, then **you could turn to one of the many online lists of publications that are accepting submissions.**

Here are some handy lists to try:

Earn Money Online: Monster List of 161 Markets for Freelance Writers

This is a great, reputable, regularly-updated list from Carol Tice's excellent site Make a Living Writing. Most of the websites/publications featured pay at least $50 per article. They're divided into categories, each with a brief description, which makes it easy to find good possibilities for you.

100+ Websites that Pay You to Write

This list from Freelance Writing Gigs gives detailed descriptions of a wide range of websites that pay for articles. The list isn't in any particular order, though, so you may need to do quite a bit of scrolling to find sites that interest you.

The Write Life's Lists

Writing blog The Write Life publishes regular lists of markets for specific types of writing, such as:

[19 Websites That Want to Publish Your Personal Essays](#)

[28 Parenting Blogs and Magazines That Pay Freelance Writers](#)

[Get Paid to Write Articles: 10 Magazines That Pay $500 or More](#)

You can find their lists in the ["Get Published" category](#) on the blog. Note that older ones may be a little out of date, so do double-check that the markets still exist and are still taking freelance submissions.

Approaching an Editor With an Article Pitch

When you're using any list like this, you'll want to do your own research too: check out the publication's website (even magazines tend to have a strong online presence) and see if they're somewhere you'd like to write for. Check their contact page and look for any submission guidelines – or any notes saying that they're currently closed for submissions.

When you approach an editor who's *not* advertising for writers, you need to pitch a specific idea.

Don't email to say "I'm available to write, have you got any topics you'd like articles on?" – if they do have specific ideas they want written, they'll send those out to the writers they already have.

Here's a template for your pitch, which I've annotated to explain why each different part is included:

> Dear [name],
>
> Would you be interested in [an article / a post] titled [name of piece]? [1]
>
> This would cover:
>
> [list of bullet points – this is a short, brief outline of your proposed article]. [2]
>
> If that sounds like a good fit for you, I'd be very happy to send a full draft.
>
> Alternatively, a couple of other ideas that I had are:
>
> - [title]
> - [title] [3]
>
> I look forward to hearing what you think and best wishes, [4]
>
> [name]

1. Get straight to the point – unless you have an existing relationship with them (e.g. you've already commented on their blog, exchanged emails, met at a conference), in which case you might want to open with a sentence or two about how much you enjoyed a recent post of theirs, or something reminding them how you met.
2. Just a title doesn't give them enough to go on, so add a short outline too. Keep it fairly brief as they may want to suggest a change of direction.
3. You don't have to pitch extra ideas, but I think it never hurts! If your first idea is a pass, they might be intrigued by one of the others.
4. I'd always use something like "best wishes" or "all the best" or "thanks" here, as you're inevitably imposing on them a little (whereas when

> applying for an advertised job, the client is actively asking people to contact them)!

5. Note that I haven't mentioned pay in this email – I think that's usually best discussed once the article has been provisionally agreed. Many large blogs will have a standard rate they pay, so it could come across a bit oddly if you open the exchange of emails by telling them what you charge.

Sometimes, instead of sending an email pitch, you'll be asked to fill in a form. This makes your life easier in many ways, as the form will normally have separate sections for everything you need to include.

Here's a real life pitch I sent to Craft Your Content back in January 2018, using their submission form – I went on to write the post for them (you can find it here), plus quite a few more.

Name
Ali Luke

Company/Website Name
Aliventures

URL/Website
http://www.aliventures.com

What is the best email address to reach you at?
ali@aliventures.com

How frequently would you like to contribute to Craft Your Content?
I could do a post a month

What is the title of your proposed post?
How to Build for the Future When You Need Money RIGHT NOW

Do you certify this is an original post that has never been published (even in a re-purposed form) on any other site?
Yes

Tell us a little bit about your submission?

"How to Build for the Future When You Need Money RIGHT NOW" tackles the dilemma that most freelance writers face all too frequently: how can you strike a balance between short-term and longer-term income?

Readers may have an ebook, ecourse, software app, or other entrepreneurial project that they've been trying to find time for ... but it's easy to end up prioritizing client work instead.

This post will break down, step by step, what readers can do in order to make their project a reality. Along the way, it'll also take in WHY it's important to build for the future.

Link to your most recent draft (if available)

[redacted]

What experience/background do you have?

I've been freelancing for 10 years now and I've definitely spent a fair bit of time trying to balance between short-term income and longer-term projects. During those 10 years, I've freelanced around a full-time day job, then around a part-time Masters degree, then (after a couple of years of blissful full-time freelancing) around small children ... so I always try to offer advice that will work for freelancers regardless of their circumstances.

I've written for The Write Life, The Creative Penn, Copyblogger, ProBlogger, Smart Blogger, and a bunch of other writing/blogging-related blogs. I've been on The Write Life's list of "Top 100 Websites for Writers" for several years.

Using Your Social Networks

One possibility that freelance writers and editors sometimes overlook when seeking work is using their social media networks. (We looked at setting these up back in Module 2.)

While it may well be the case that none of your family/friends/online acquaintances are in a position where they want to hire you themselves, they may well know someone else who could really use a writer or editor.

An easy and natural way to ask for referrals is when you're sharing something new to do with your business. For instance:

> I've finally got my freelance writing website set up – it's still a work in progress but I'm really proud of it so far. Check it out here: [add the link] Oh, and if you happen to know anyone who's looking for a freelance [writer/editor/blogger], do point me their way. Thanks!

You can use social media, though, to search directly for clients. Sometimes, people will tweet or put something on Facebook rather than writing a formal job ad. One of my early speaking gigs, for instance, came about when I replied to a tweet from a local organization looking for speakers. (Later, this led on to me doing some training work for an SEO agency, then being referred on to another long-term client. Never underestimate the power of referrals.)

Twitter is a particularly good place to look for potential work, because most people's tweets are public. (On Facebook, you usually need to be "friends" with someone, or in a group with them, to see what they post.)

For instance, you might search for key phrases like:

- "submission guidelines"
- "need a writer"
- "book editor"

You could also "follow" people in local businesses or organizations, and keep an eye on their tweets.

On Facebook, you can join local groups for your area (our small town is particularly active on Facebook, with a thriving "Gossip" group plus a "News and Events" group – and separate ones for selling, recommendations, advertising, and so on).

While some Facebook groups frown on self-promotion, you can still look out for people who could potentially use your skills – e.g. if a new local restaurant is starting up, you might ask if they want someone to proofread their menu.

Approaching Potential Clients on Social Media

When you're approaching people through social media, avoid coming across as a spammer. Don't use your social media accounts solely to ask people "do you need a writer?" – if someone looks at your own page and it's a string of tweets like this, it doesn't create the best impression:

> @daviejones I could write for you – shall I email you some details?

> @jo_the_great I could write for you – shall I email you some details?

> @tommyrocks I could write for you – shall I email you some details?

… etc.

Instead, break things up a bit with updates, links to useful resources/blog posts, more conversational tweets, and so on.

When you do approach someone, try to be personable and engaging, and give them the relevant details they'll need if they do want to hire you. For instance, you might write something like:

> @daviejones Looks like you've had some great recommendations already, but if you're still looking for an editor for your novel, do let me know (I love dystopian SF). My rates are very reasonable, and you can see what the previous clients have said here: [add a link to your website]

Is This Freelancing Gig a Scam?

Some freelancing gigs on jobs boards and advertised on social media are scams of one sort or another.

Key things to watch out for are:

- **Anything that asks you to pay money in order to apply,** for any reason. I can't think of a single legitimate freelancing job that would do this. (This is different from jobs boards that require a monthly membership, which you may or may not feel is good value – it often means access to better jobs, for instance.)
- **A job that asks for a custom-written sample that you're not paid for.** This *can* be legitimate, but it can also be a sign that your sample will be taken and used, unpaid – along with the samples of everyone else applying. The person advertising the "job" may have no intention of paying anyone.
- **Jobs asking for "academic writing".** These are almost certainly for sites that sell essays (which students purchase to hand in as their own work). While writing for these sites isn't illegal, and may pay decently, you may well feel it's immoral and best avoided.
- **Jobs that pay you based on page views (and offering you figures of what you *could* make writing for them).** While these aren't necessarily scams, it's well worth contacting other people who write for those sites to see how much they *actually* make.

Ultimately, if something seems dodgy and unprofessional – it probably is! If you've come across an opportunity and you're unsure if it's legitimate or not, do post in our Facebook group so that others can take a look and weigh in.

MODULE #6: FINDING WRITING JOBS AND PITCHING EDITORS

Your Module #6 Assignment

ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is in three parts. You can tackle as many of them as you want:

#1: Take a look at one or more of the jobs boards, and find at least one job to apply for. Send in an application.

#2: Go through one or more of the lists of websites/publications that pay writers. Choose one, and send them a pitch.

#3: Use social media to search for someone who might be interested in your services. Reply to their post/tweet/etc to introduce yourself and to express your interest in working together.

Once you've completed as many of these as you want, come and "check in" on Facebook and you'll get your reward stamp for Week 6. If you're willing to, please tell us what you did and how you got on.

facebook.com/groups/startfreelancing2019/learning_content/?filter=392973664914262

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can email me (ali@aliventures.com) with "Module #6 check in" or similar in the subject line.

Module #6: Further Reading

All of the further reading is optional, but if you want to find out more about something we've covered, it's highly recommended! If you find other useful resources, you're very welcome to share them in our Facebook group.

Escape Content Mills: 12 Practical Posts for Moving Up, Carol Tice, Make a Living Writing

Even if you've not worked for (or contemplated working for) a content mill, there's plenty of good advice for new freelancers in the linked posts.

8 Red Flags to Avoid When Finding a Freelance Writing Job, Elna Cain, ElnaCain.com

This is a great, detailed list of what to look out for and why – save yourself a lot of time applying to jobs that are going to be poorly paid (or outright scams).

I worked with a content mill: here's what I learned, André Spiteri, ProCopywriters

This is a very honest, behind-the-scenes look at working for a content mill, debunking some myths and common assumptions (e.g. that the work will be quick – content mill gigs are notorious for demanding picky revisions).

What's Happening Next:

We've finished the course! Congratulations on making it through. ☺

I'll be around in the Facebook group for the next four weeks, until Sunday 12th January, to answer questions and to celebrate your successful pitches and published pieces (or commiserate when it isn't going quite so well).

Each Wednesday during those weeks, I'll send out a quick email to remind you about our group and to encourage you to come and share your progress with us. Of course, you can email me at any time as usual at ali@aliventures.com.