MODULE #2: REGISTERING YOUR DOMAIN AND SOCIAL PROFILES

IN THIS MODULE: We'll go through various options for naming your freelancing website, looking at the pros and cons of each. You'll also have the opportunity to sign up for social media accounts (or use your existing ones).

In the first module, you hopefully got clear about the type of freelancing you want to do, and the topics you'd like to cover.

This module is your first big step into the freelancing world. We're going to be choosing a name for your freelancing website – which means naming your freelancing business too.

I still remember, fourteen years ago, trying to come up with a name for my own website. Even after I'd jotted options all over a sheet of paper, I wasn't sure that any were a perfect fit. I went with "Aliventures" in the end. It's worked out fine for me and I can't imagine changing it now.

So if you've already spent ages trying to name your business, or if you're worried that you're missing the perfect name … this module is all about picking something and moving forward.

If You Really Don't Want a Website Yet

Let's get this out of the way first: it's not *essential* to have a website in order to start freelancing. If setting up a website feels like too big a step for you right now, you don't need to.

The absolute minimum you need in order to start freelancing is an email address.

Now, since you've successfully purchased this course, I'm pretty sure you have an email address already. If it's a nickname or similar, I'd strongly suggest

setting up a *professional* looking address: one that is, ideally, just your name before the @ symbol.

You can either use your existing address, if you feel it looks professional enough, or create a free Gmail account.

If you're using Gmail, ideally, you want your address to be something like this:

aliluke@gmail.com

However, there's a high chance your name has already been taken on Gmail – so you might want to add in your middle name or initial. You could also add the word "writer", e.g. alilukewriter@gmail.com.

Try to avoid using a number in your email address, which can be hard for people to remember.

Even if you don't want a website right now, though, you're almost certainly going to find it handy to have one – so do come back to this in the future once you have more time.

If You Already Have a Website or Blog

What if you've already got a website or a blog set up? It might well make sense to use that as your freelancing home too, particularly if there's a lot of overlap. (E.g. you might have a blog about parenting and you want to freelance for parenting magazines and websites.)

A simple way to use your existing website is to add a "Services" page where you give details about your freelancing. You might instead want to call this "Writing", "Freelance Writing", "Editing" or similar.

You'll probably also want to:

- **Add some information on your About page** – this might be a paragraph about your freelancing plus a link to your Services page.

- **Include clear contact details,** if you don't already do so – make sure it's really easy for potential clients to get in touch. Ideally, put these on a Contact page.

When we cover websites in the next module, we'll be looking in much more detail about these different types of pages.

There's also nothing stopping you from using your existing website/blog for now, and moving to a different website in the future. If you know you'll want to change the URL (the address) of your website, then you'll probably want to register a new domain name now to secure it.

Naming Your Business

Before you choose a domain name, you need to figure out what you're calling your freelancing business. There are three main options:

1. Your name, or pen-name
2. A brand name
3. Your name incorporated into a brand

All of these have different pros and cons, which we'll be taking a look at.

Option #1: Using Your Name or Pen-Name

Plenty of freelancers operate under their own name – normally first name plus last name, though some include a middle name or initial.

Here are some examples:

AaronMondry.com

HannahWoodger.com

MalcolmPryce.com

Pros:

Using your name is simple and straightforward. You don't have to spend ages agonising about it.

If you change the direction of your freelancing, it doesn't matter: you won't need to change your domain name.

Cons:

If you're likely to change your name, this clearly isn't a great option! One of the reasons I went with "Aliventures" for my business name in 2008 is because I was anticipating getting married in the fairly near future (which I did, in 2010) – and I changed my name from "Ali Hale" to "Ali Luke".

If your name is fairly common, you might struggle to get a good domain name that uses it.

If your name is unusual or spelt in an unexpected way, it could be tricky to use as a business name. You might opt for a pseudonym, or you might choose to go with one of the other options.

Option #2: Using A Brand Name

It's also common for freelancers to operate under a brand name – which could be something that does exactly what it says on the tin or something more abstract.

Here are some real-life examples of freelancers using brand names:

Creative Copy (creativecopy.co.uk)

Fat Squirrel (fatsquirrelseo.com)

The Word Man (thewordman.co.uk)

Pros:

A brand name can be instantly intriguing or memorable in a way that a personal name rarely is.

If you want to work with other freelancers, a brand name you more scope for that. For instance, you could hire or partner with other freelancers to work under your brand.

If your work includes something other than just freelancing – e.g. running a blog of your own, or selling books – then you might feel that a brand name is a better fit for your business as a whole.

Cons:

It can be really tricky to come up with a good brand name, and it's not uncommon for freelancers to get stuck at this point, feeling unable to move on until they've got it right.

There may be some tension between you as a person and your brand – e.g. do you set up a Twitter account in your own name *and* your brand name? Or just one or the other?

Option #3: Using Your Name as Part of Your Brand

Some freelancers (and other professionals) incorporate their name into their brand. This can be done in a very straightforward way, by adding "writer" or "writing" or similar – or it can be a little more creative.

Here are a couple of examples:

Aliventures (Aliventures.com) – my own website and business, which uses my first name ("Ali").

Maurer Copywriting (maurer-copywriting.com) – Steve Maurer's site. As you might guess, he's a copywriter.

Pros:

Your business name is likely to be a bit more memorable than your personal name – it'll stand out more.

There's often quite a bit of flexibility with this type of name – similar to using your full name as your business name. E.g. the very first version of Aliventures was a simple website where I sold "writing and website creation" – now it's a huge blog with online products and courses for sale.

Cons:

Because part of your name is incorporated in the business name, it's not so easy to expand by taking on other freelancers as part of your team.

As with any brand name, it can take a long time to come up with something you like.

So what should you go with? I'd suggest spending a bit of time exploring some ideas – but don't let the process drag on too long. If you can't come up with a brand name that you like, simply use your actual name for your business. You can change your domain name in the future, if you end up thinking of something much better.

Registering Your Domain Name

This is the part of the module where things get a little technical. I'm going to keep it as straightforward as possible – but please do ask on Facebook in the Aliventures Club if you get stuck.

A domain name is the address of your website. You might also hear it called your "URL". It will be made up of two parts:

- The name of your site – e.g. "aliventures"
- The suffix – that's .com, .net, .co.uk, etc

So my domain name is *aliventures.com*.

You can buy a domain name for around $12 – $20 per year. To have a website online at that domain, you'll also need webhosting, which we'll be covering in Module 3 (both free and paid for options).

Domain names need to be registered, and there are hundreds of companies that can do that for you. Most of them also offer webhosting – which means they will store your website so it's permanently online for you.

The slightly tricky thing about this is that some webhosts – including Dreamhost, which I recommend – offer a free domain name when you sign up for webhosting. So you may not want to go through the process of purchasing a domain name instantly if you're going to buy hosting through one of these sites as soon as you get to the next module.

If you already have webhosting in place, if you want to register a domain name to secure it but you don't want to pay for a hosting plan yet, or if you know you'll want multiple domain names, then you can follow the instructions in the next section to register your domain name.
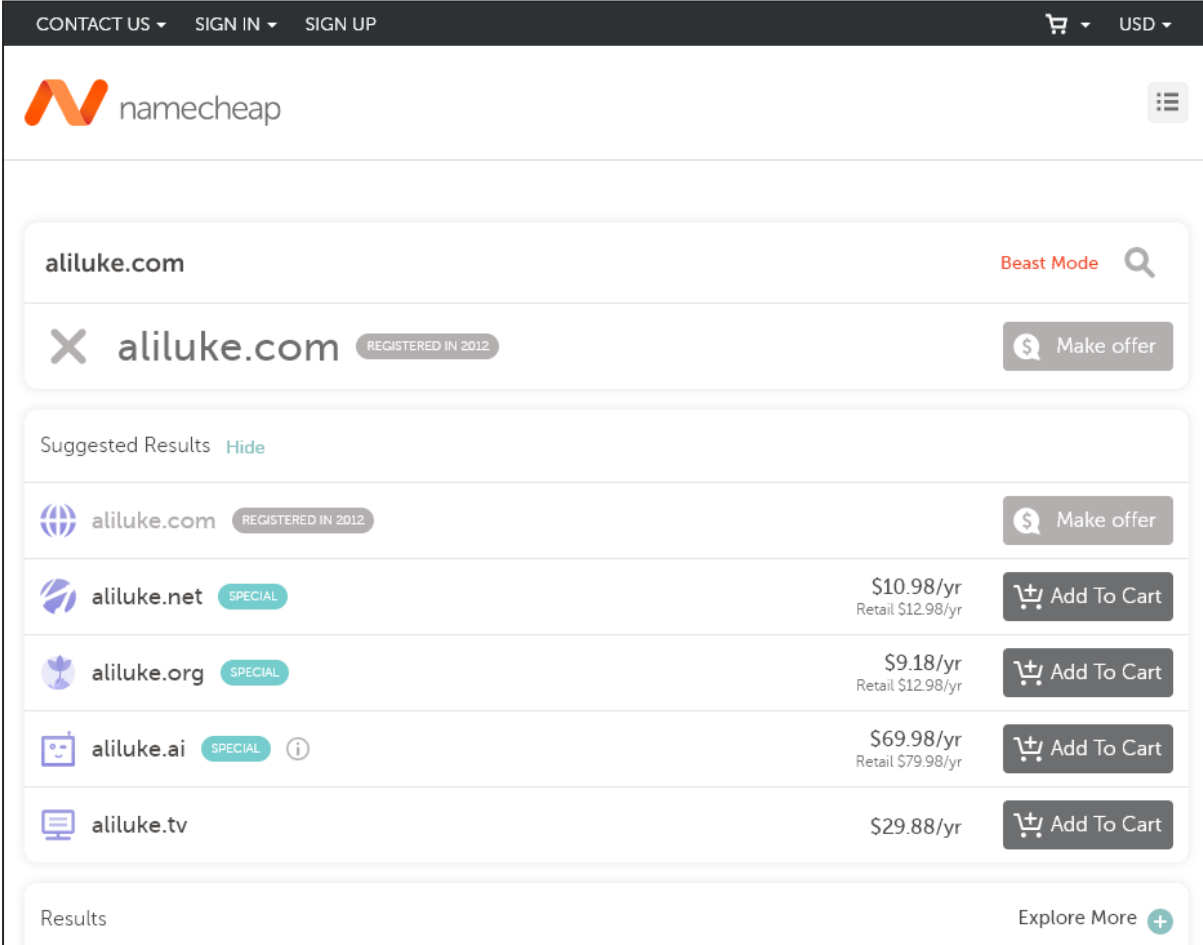
If you want to register your domain name later, when you set up your website, that's fine, too. You can always come back to this module if you change your mind about how you're doing things.

Checking Whether Your Domain Name is Available

On any domain name registrar, you can search to see if your chosen domain is available. You can use Namecheap to do this, even if you don't want to register a domain or make an account.

Here are the results of a search for "aliluke.com":

 The domain I searched for is taken (I registered it years ago) but Namecheap gives some other options. To see the full range, simply scroll down past "Selected Results" to the "Results" section.

What Extension Should You Use?

The "extension" or "suffix" in your domain name is the bit at the end – .com, .net, .co.uk, .ca, .nz, .org, etc.

In almost all cases, the best choice is a .com domain name. Even if you plan to mainly freelance within your own country, it's usually better to have the .com as you may well end up working with international clients. A .com is also easy to remember (and pronounce).

However, if your chosen business name isn't available as a .com, or if you're keen to specialise in working with local clients, you might want to pick a different extension. The key options are:

- **.net** – This is technically supposed to be used by networks, but in practice, it's used by many types of websites. If the .com is taken already, it's probably your best choice.
- **.org** – This is normally used for organisations, so can look a little odd unless for a business (unless you're a non-profit).
- **.co.uk** – If you're in the UK, you can use this. If not, use whatever your country's business suffix is (e.g. .co.nz for New Zealand).
- **.uk** – If you're in the UK, you can use this for any type of site. If not, use whatever your country's general suffix is (e.g. .nz for New Zealand, .ca for Canada, .au for Australia).

I normally wouldn't choose anything outside of these (even if it's cheap). For instance, the extension ".info" tends to be associated with low-quality websites.

Registering Your Domain Name with Namecheap

If you want to go ahead and register a domain name before moving onto the next module, I'd suggest doing so with Namecheap. Here's how:

Tip: Even if you want to wait until you set up hosting (in the next module) to register your "proper" domain, you might choose to set up a cheap test domain now just to see how the process works. You can often buy an .xyz, .website, .group, or .club domain cheaply.

Step #1: Go to www.namecheap.com and search for your chosen domain name.

Step #2: You should see whether your chosen domain is available: if it is, you can click the "Add to Cart" button next to it. If it isn't, you can pick a variation from the list of results.

Step #3: After adding your domain to your cart, you'll be shown the option to add various extra things (shown in the red box below). Ignore these and just click the "Checkout" link at the bottom of the screen:
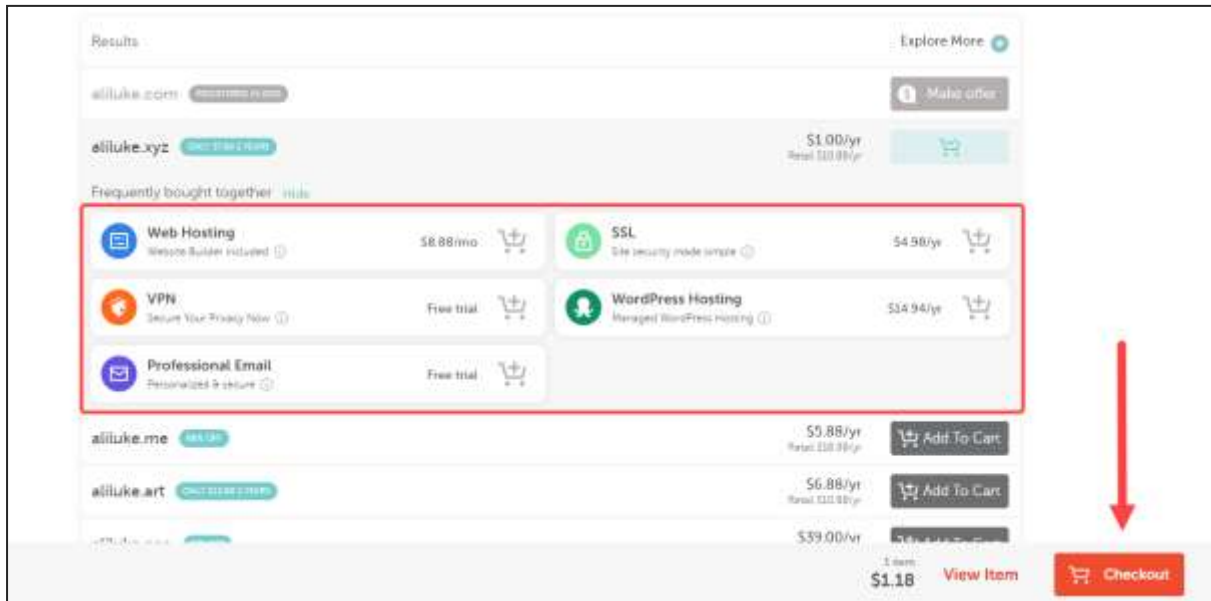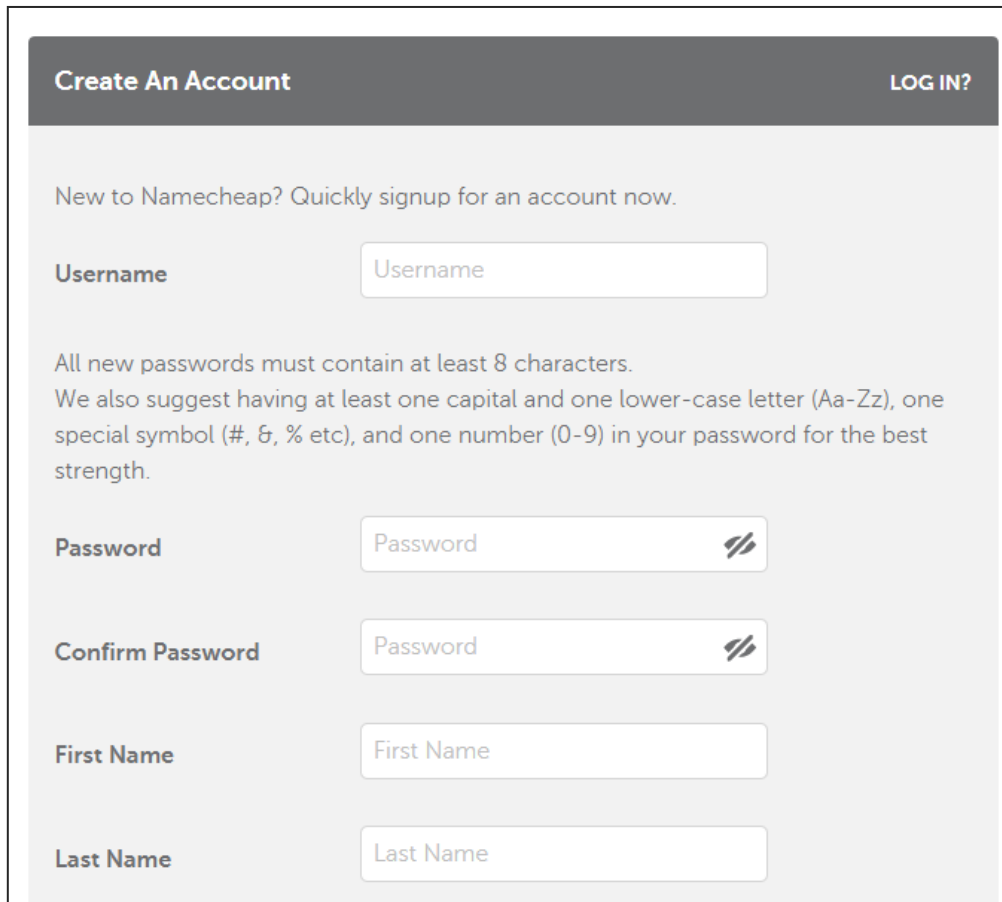
Step #4: Double-check that you typed your domain name correctly. Leave all the other settings as-is and click "Confirm Order":

Step #5: Create an account by filling in a username, password, your first name and last name. On the subsequent screens, you'll be asked for further details (your address and phone number).

Step #6: Pay either by credit/debit card or by PayPal.

Step #7: Check your email for a message titled "IMMEDIATE VERIFICATION required for [your domain name]". Open the message and click the link part-way down:
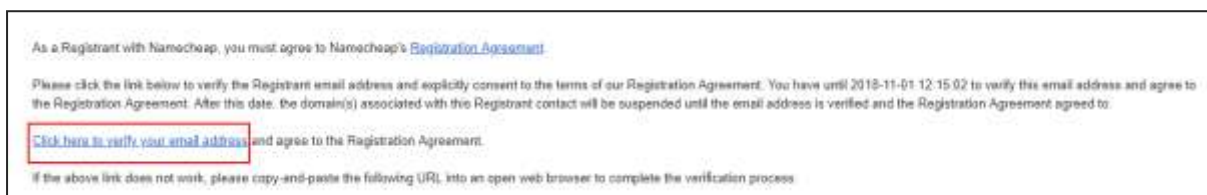
That's it – you're now the owner of a brand new domain name. ☺

Setting Up Your Social Media Accounts

You might be wondering whether you *need* to use social media as a freelancer.

No, you don't – but most freelancers do have social media accounts, and these can be a great way to connect with other freelancers as well as with potential clients.

Another big advantage is that social media accounts tend to rank highly when someone searches for your name. (E.g. if I google "Ali Luke", my Twitter account appears prominently, despite the fact I haven't used it much at all in recent years.) If you want to be easy to find on Google, having several social media profiles can really help.

At a minimum, I'd suggest setting up an account on at least one social network. During the rest of this module, I'll go through the three that I think are most important and useful. You might want to create accounts with all of them, and choose one to focus your attention on – you can still update the others occasionally.

The social networks we'll be looking at are:

- **Facebook:** the biggest, with useful business functionality through "Pages" (don't worry, we'll be covering how to set one up).
- **Twitter:** a good network for connecting to fellow writers, journalists and freelancers – as well as potentially a handy source of job leads and information.
- **LinkedIn:** the biggest business-centric social network, which acts a bit like an online resume or CV.

For each of these networks, we'll take a look at how to set up an account as a freelancer. I'll go through step by step instructions for each, with plenty of screenshots so you know what to do at each step.

Before we go any further, though, there's one thing that you'll need for every social network…

Selecting Your Profile Photo

Every social media account you use will require a profile photo. These are normally displayed as a square or as a circle, so you'll want a photo that's square shaped with your face in the middle.

In some locations, profile photos will be very small (e.g. in Facebook Messenger), so use a photo that is reasonably clear even when it's tiny.

If you don't want to use your own face as the photo, other good options are:

- A cartoon-style drawing of your face: many graphics / paint programs can create these from a photo.
- A photo of your computer, keyboard, desk or something else writing-related.
- Your business logo, if you have one (though again be aware that it may not reproduce well at a tiny size).

I'd avoid using a photo of your cat, dog, child, etc, as that can seem a bit unprofessional. It's also best to avoid photos of you plus someone else (e.g. you and your spouse) as this can create confusion – it makes it look like they might also be involved in your business.

Setting Up Your Facebook Page

I'm going to assume you already have a personal Facebook account: if not, you can sign up for one for free by going to **facebook.com** – it's quite a straightforward process.

Once you're logged into your account, the best way to create a presence for yourself as a freelancer is to set up a Page. This is a better option than using a personal Profile to connect with other freelancers and potential clients because:

- People can "like" your Page and you don't need to reciprocate; with a personal Profile, if someone wants to add you as a friend, you need to be their friend in return.

- An unlimited number of people can "like" a Page, whereas you can only have a set number of friends (up to 5,000, so it's a pretty high limit – but it does exist).
- Your "Page" will have special features, like the ability to add an About section, or to show your opening hours (not necessarily relevant for freelancers but you may want to indicate the hours you're available).
- You can have as many Pages as you like, attached to one Profile.
- You can add other people as "Admins" for your Pages – this may not be very relevant for you now, but could be useful if (e.g.) you hire an assistant in the future.

To set up a Page, go to **facebook.com/pages/creation**

Step #1: Enter a name for your page. I'd suggest using your chosen website name, or your own name plus something like "Writer" or "Freelance Writer" to help people distinguish your page from your personal profile.

For the category, I'd suggest choosing "Writing Service". (You can add up to two more, if you want.)
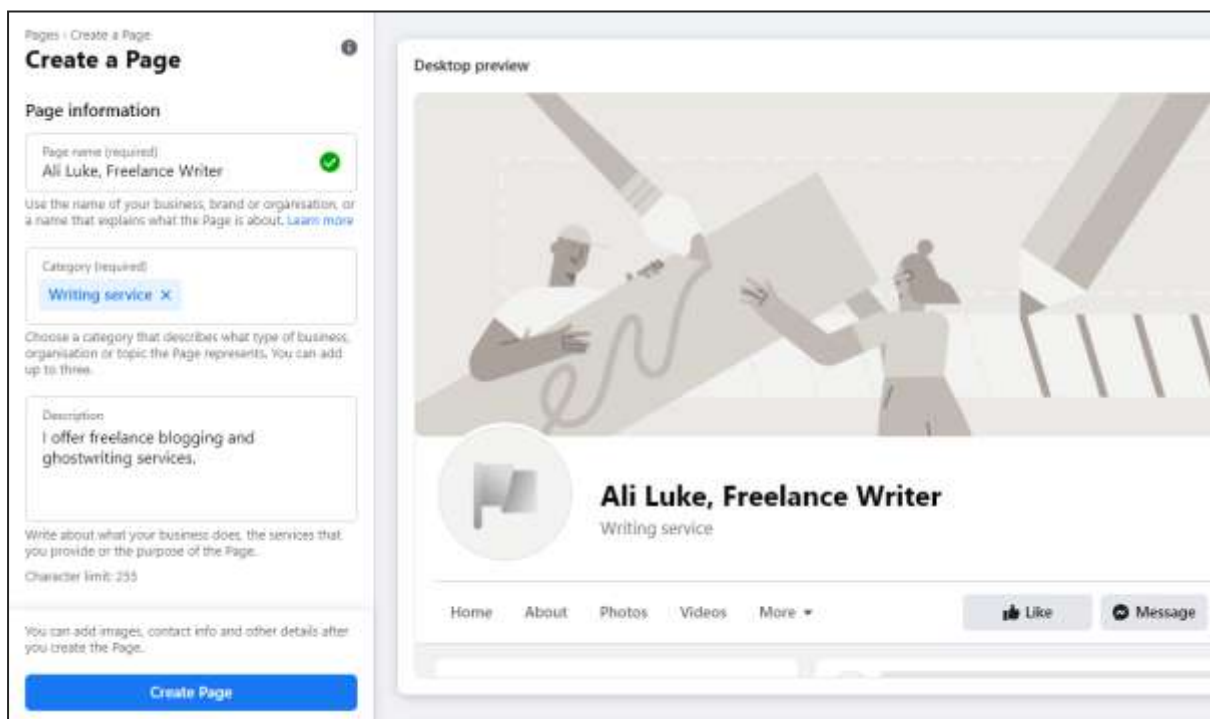
For the description, you can enter anything you want. You can change this at a later stage.

When you're ready, click the Create Page button at the bottom of the screen.

Step #3: You'll be prompted to upload your profile photo, and also a "cover photo". The cover photo will appear along the top of your page. If you aren't ready to select one yet, just skip this step.
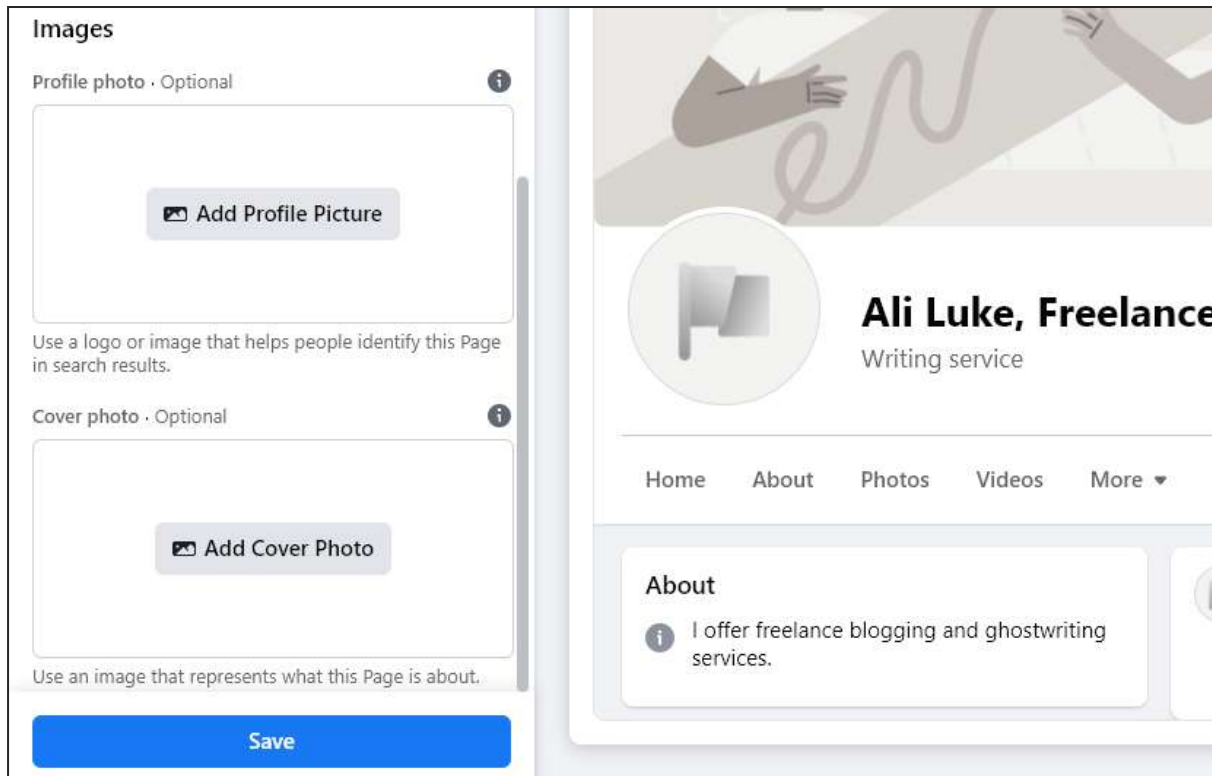
Next, just click the Save button at the bottom.

Step #4: You should now see your new page!

Tip: Your page will have a default URL with a long number in, like this:

www.facebook.com/Ali-Luke-Freelance-Writer-273560216614822

To create a nicer URL, and a username so people can easily tag you, click the "Create @username" link just below the name of your page:
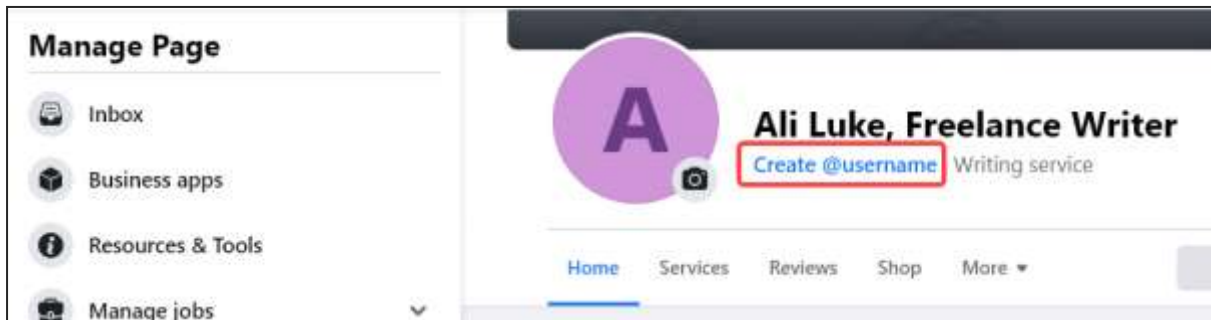
Create the @username for your page, like this:
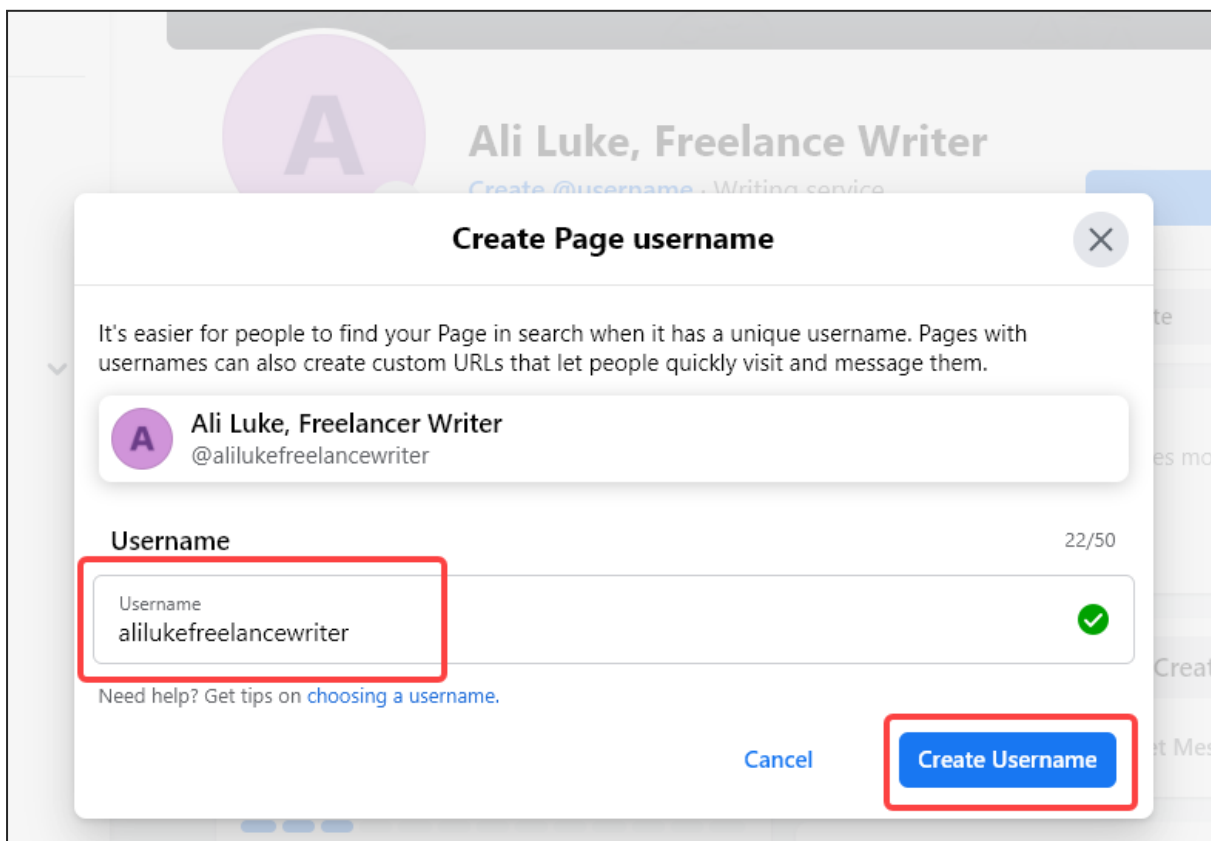
Once your page is up and running, feel free to pop into the Aliventures Club group and share it with other members.

Setting Up Your Twitter Profile
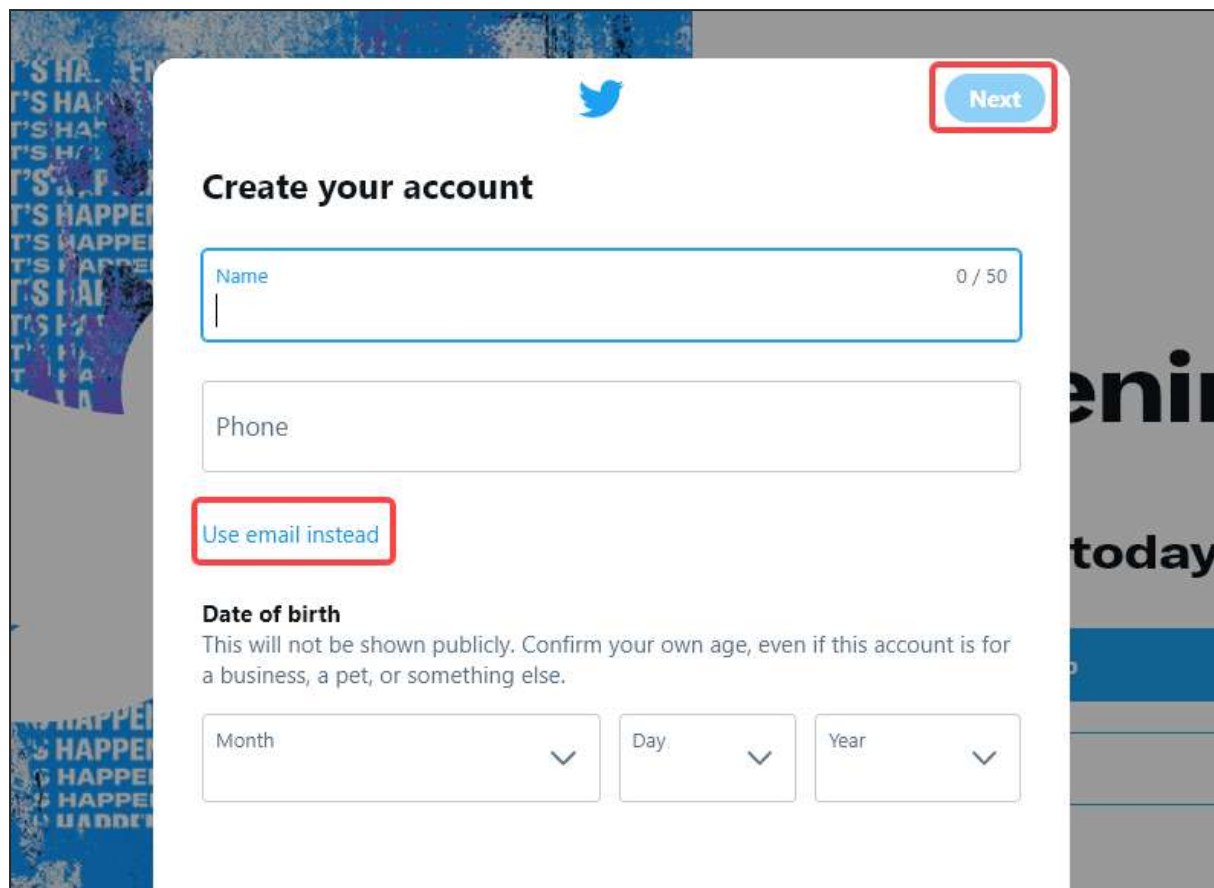
Twitter is quite different from Facebook, and many freelancers use their personal profile for their freelancing, rather than setting up a different account.

To sign up for a Twitter account:

Step #1: Go to **twitter.com** and click "Sign up with a phone number or email address." (If you have a Google or Apple account, you can sign up using that, if you prefer.)

Step #2: Enter your name and either your phone number (the default) or your email address. Click the "Use email instead" to use this option.

You'll also need to enter your date of birth.

Once you've entered these, click the "Next" button.

Step #3: You can select from various options now: I'd recommend the second one; it's up to you whether or not you want to go for the others too:
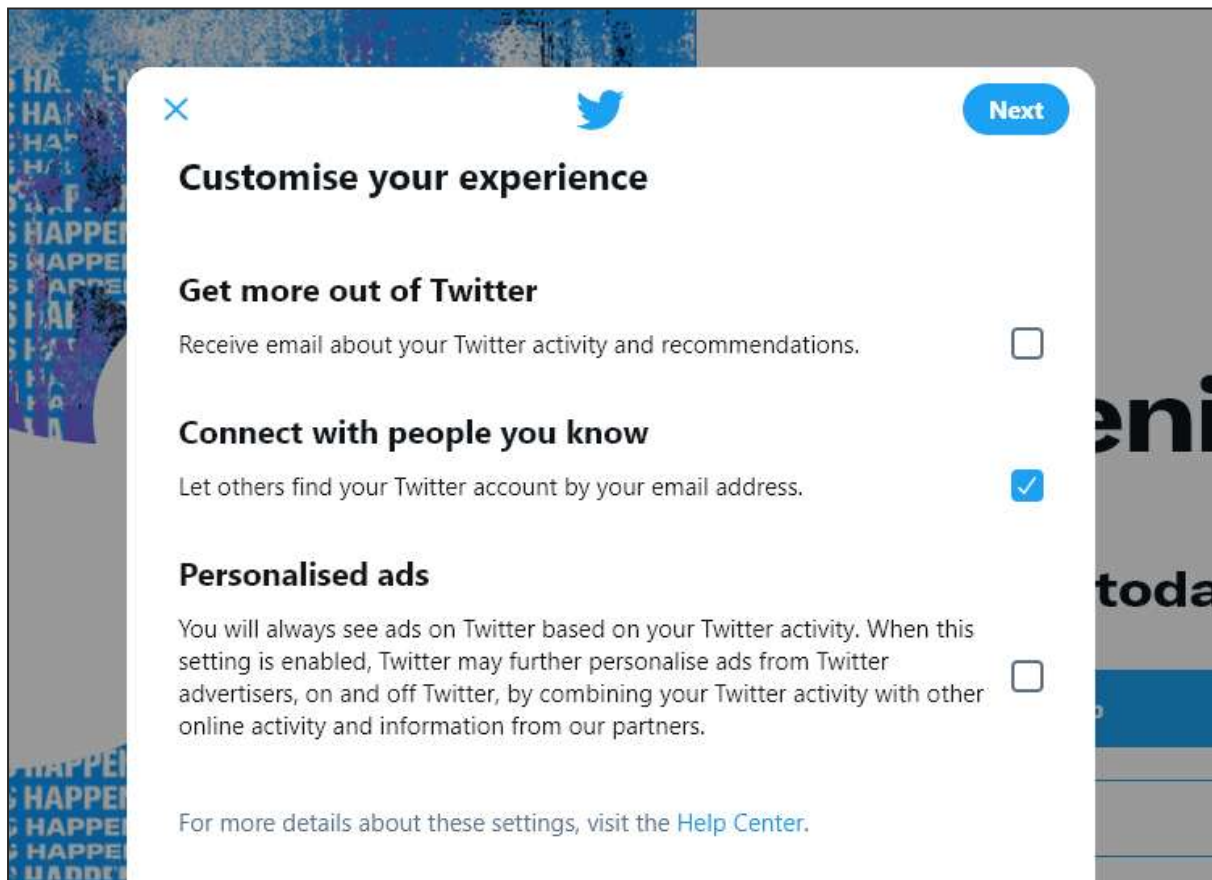
Again, click the "Next" button to move on.

Step #4: You'll now be prompted to create your account. You can change your name, email address, or birth date at this point, if you want. Otherwise, just click "Sign up":

Step #5: You'll be sent a verification code to your email address.

Step #6: Check your email for the verification code. (If you can't find it straight away, try the spam folder.)
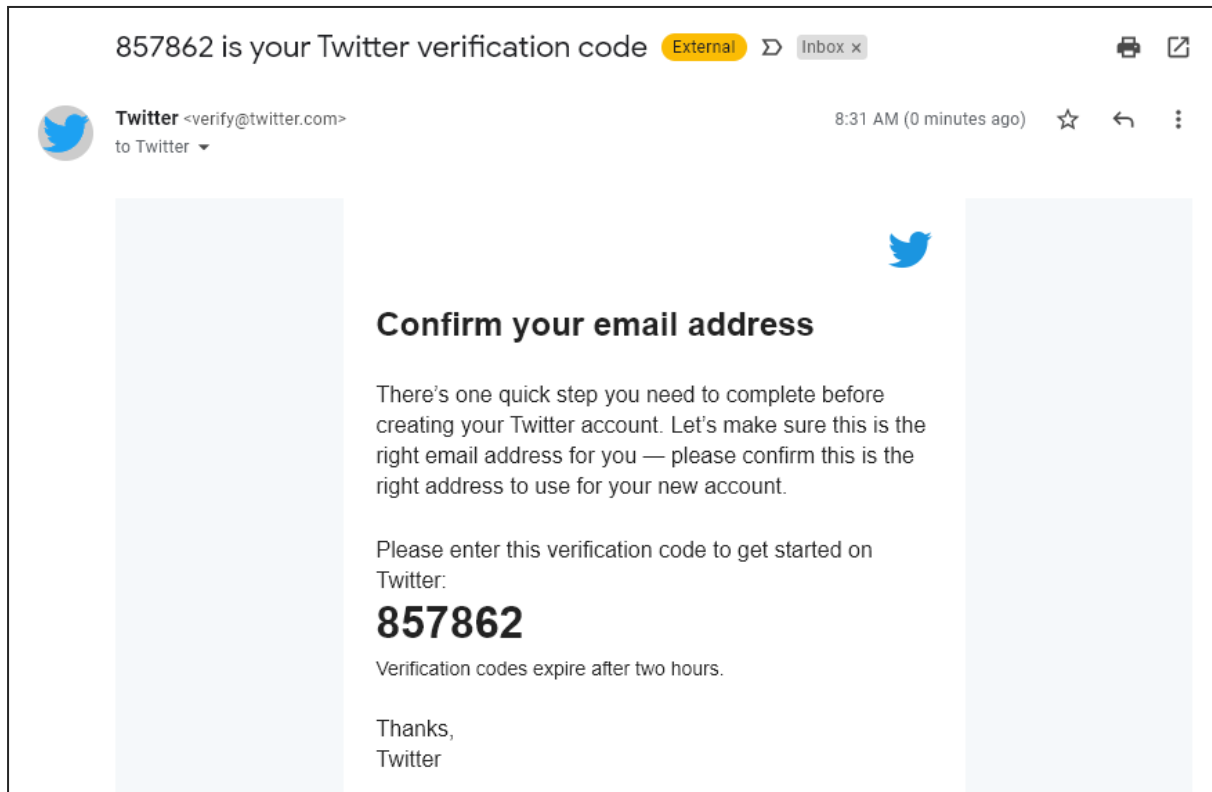
Enter the verification code on the Twitter screen.

You'll then be prompted to enter a password:
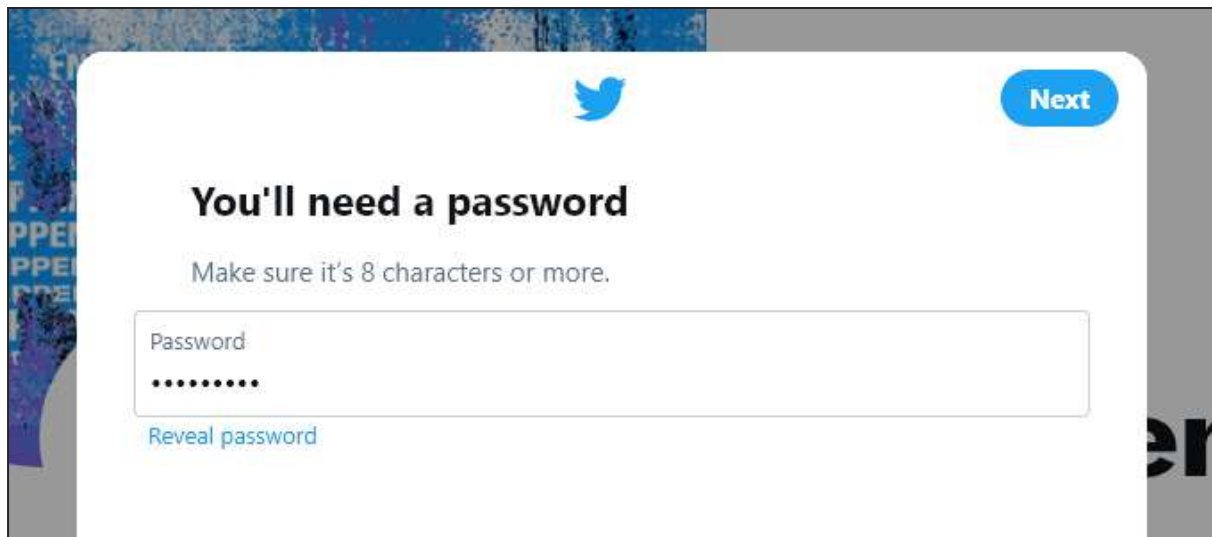
Once you've done so, click the Next button.

Setting Up Your Twitter Account

Twitter will then walk you through the process of setting up your Twitter account. First, you can upload a profile photo (or you can click the "Skip for now" link). You can change this at any time.
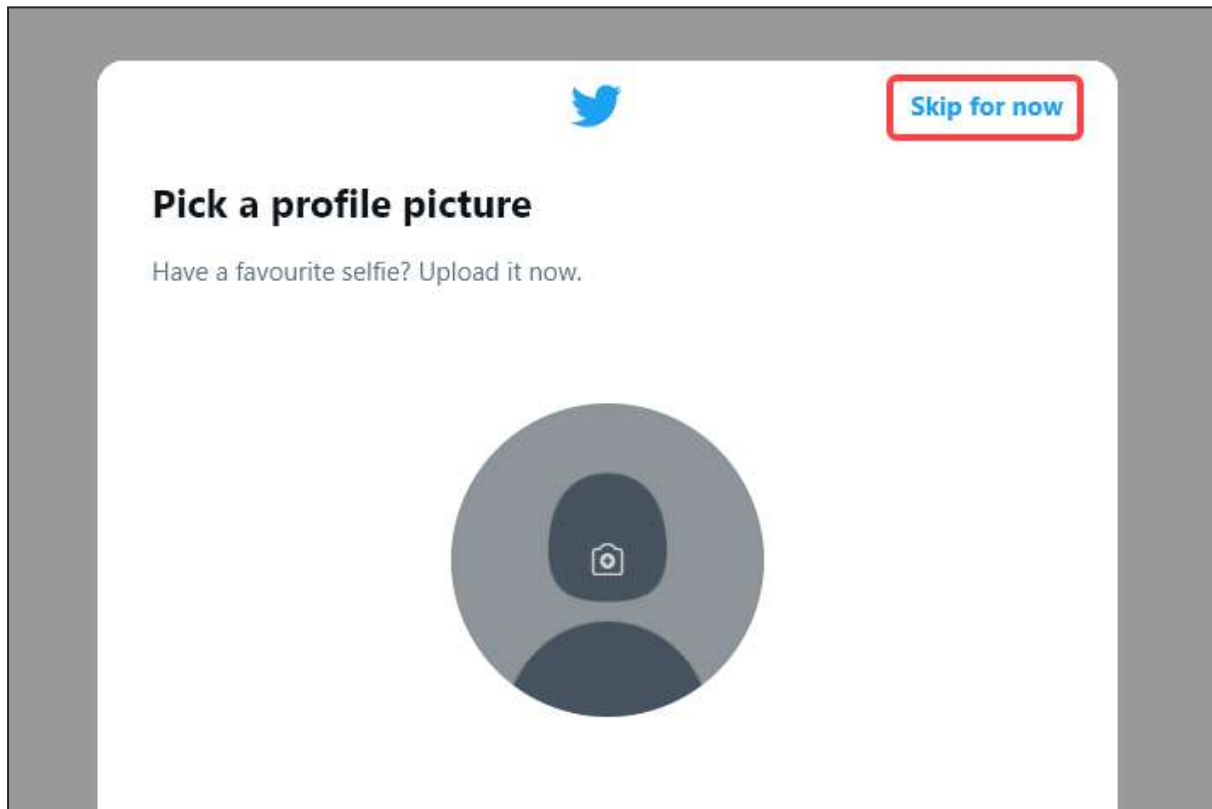
Next, you'll be asked to enter your bio. Again, you can change this to any time.
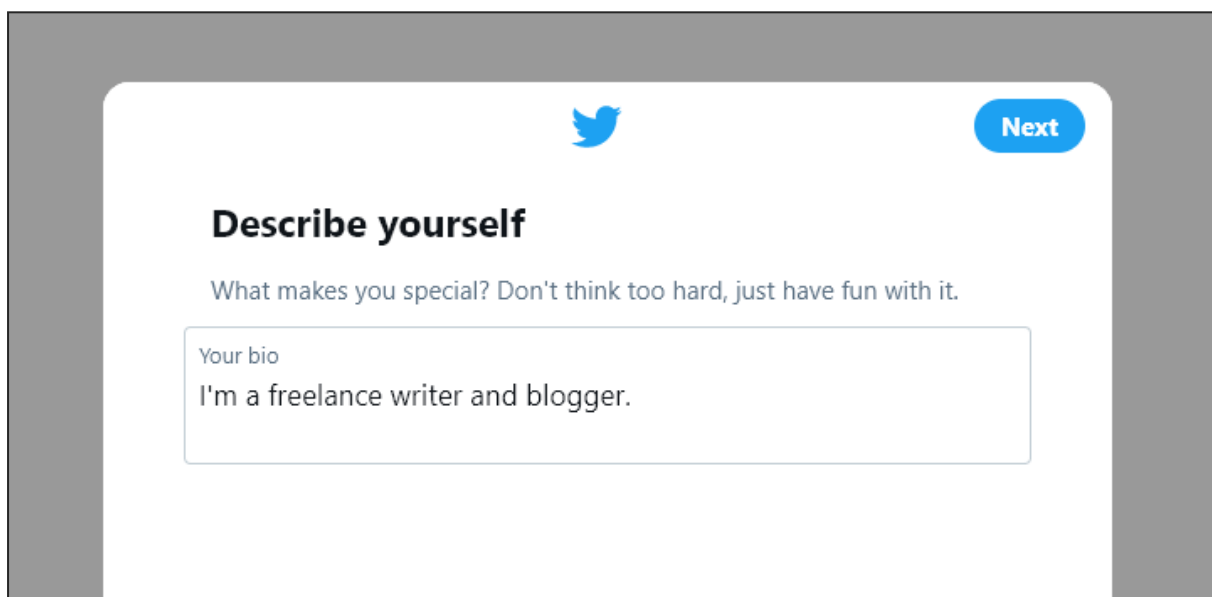
Twitter will then ask you to choose some topics you're interested in. I'd suggest simply skipping this for now.
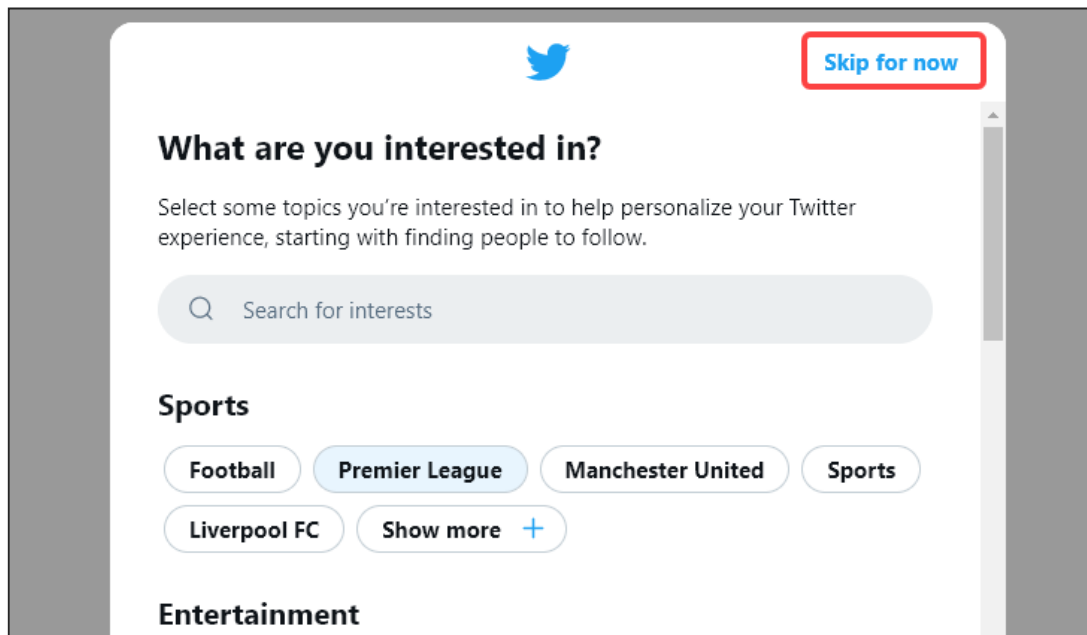
You can click the "Next" button on the next screen, too, unless you want to follow any of the suggested people. Finally, you can choose whether or not to turn on notifications.

Next, you'll see your Twitter home page. Your username is at the bottom.
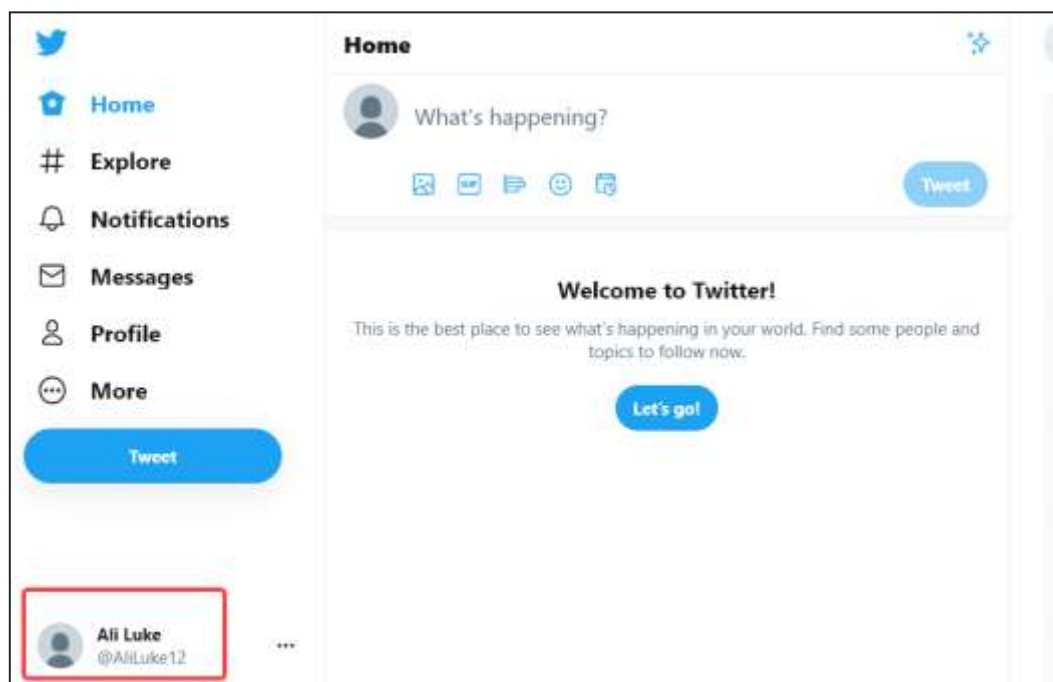
Changing Your Twitter Username

Your username will default to your name plus a number:

You can change this by going to More → Settings and Privacy → Account information and then clicking on "Username" at the top.
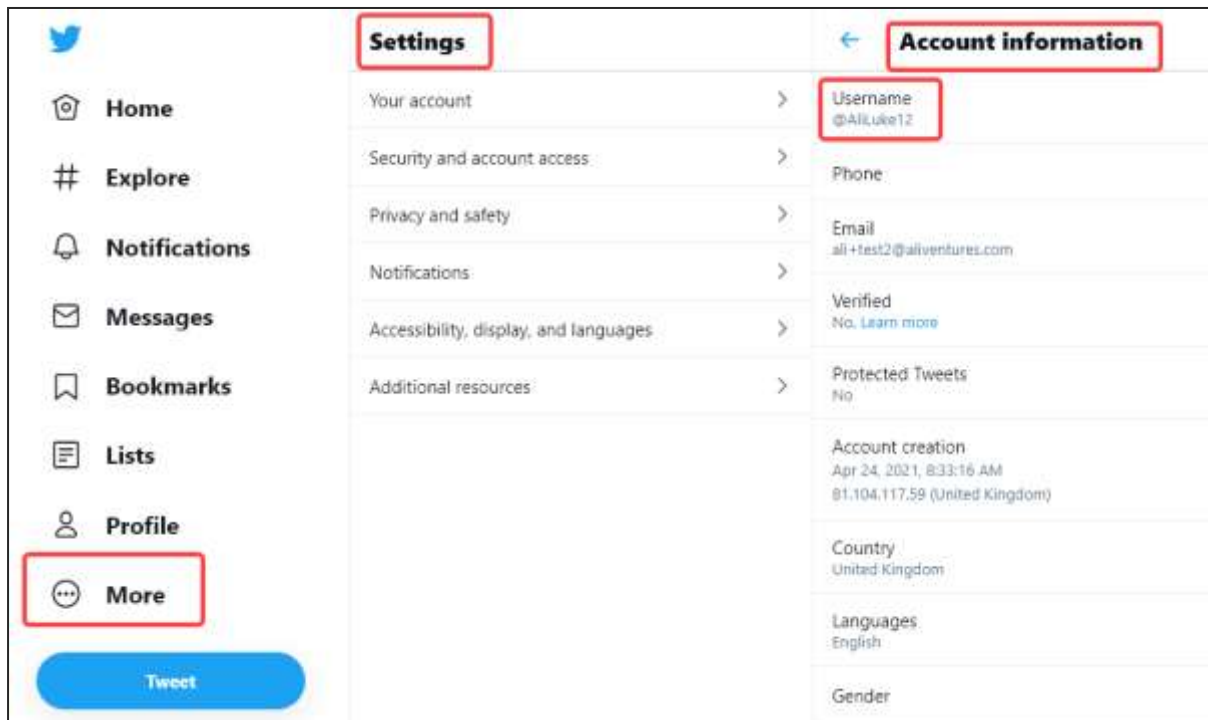
Go ahead and change your username to whatever you want. If your name isn't available, you could add something like "writer".
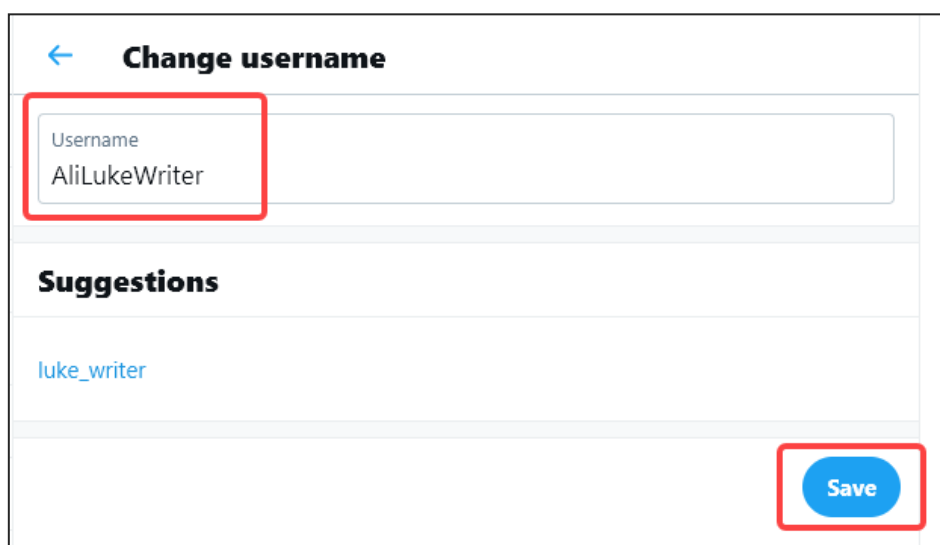
Since there are lots of people on Twitter and many name combinations have already been taken, you may have to get creative (e.g. using middle initials).

Try to avoid:

- Anything really odd or edgy … unless it fits with how you want to brand yourself as a freelancer!
- Using numbers, underscores, tildes (the wiggly line: ~) or similar. Keep it simple and plain.

Adding a Profile Photo and Header Photo

If you didn't do so before, you'll also want to add your profile photo and (optionally) a cover photo, as well as your bio. You can add or change these by clicking the "Profile" link on the left, then "Set up profile".
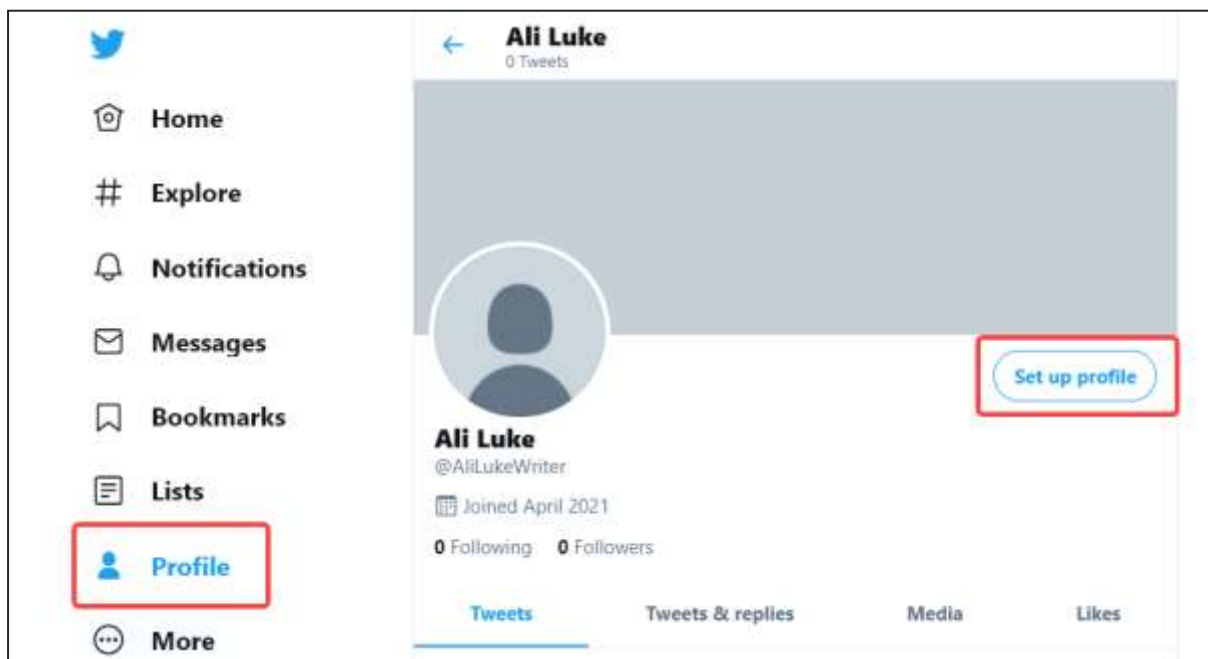
It's a good idea to write *something* in your bio, as it gives people a reason to connect with you. E.g. "I'm a freelancer writer specialising in online content for small local businesses."

Setting Up Your LinkedIn Profile

Compared with other social networks, LinkedIn is very business-focused. I've never made more than sporadic use of it ... but I know plenty of freelancers use it as a way to find work and to connect with potential clients.

As with the other networks, you'll need a profile photo. You'll also want to fill out (at some point, if not straight away) quite a bit of information about you – like listing your previous jobs.

Depending on your current employment, you may decide that you don't want to use LinkedIn at all at this stage (e.g. if you're keeping quiet about your freelancing at work).

Important: LinkedIn doesn't allow you to have more than one account, and they can delete your accounts altogether if they find you using two. If you do want to use two accounts regardless, you'll need two different phone numbers and email addresses. You may also want to use a penname, or freelance under a different name (e.g. your maiden name).
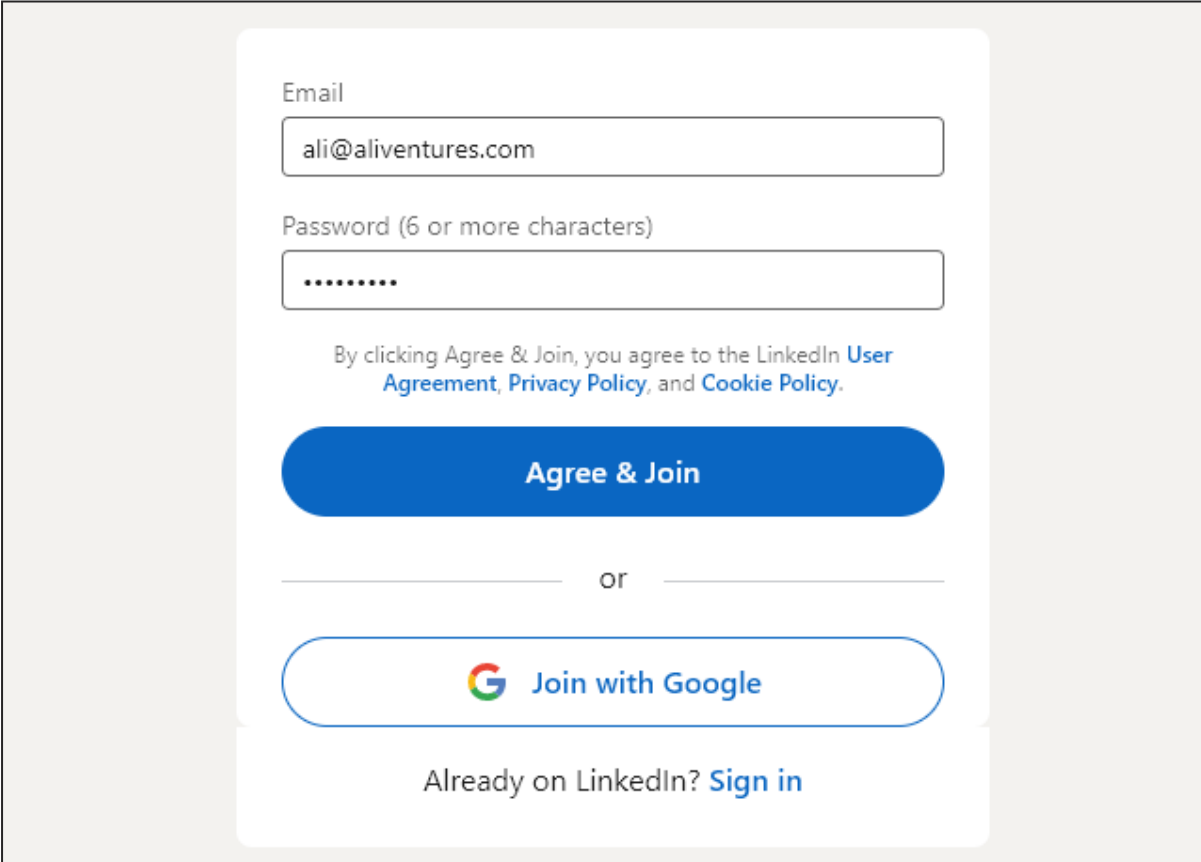
To set up your account:

Step #1: Go to **linkedin.com** and click the "Join now" link on the top right.
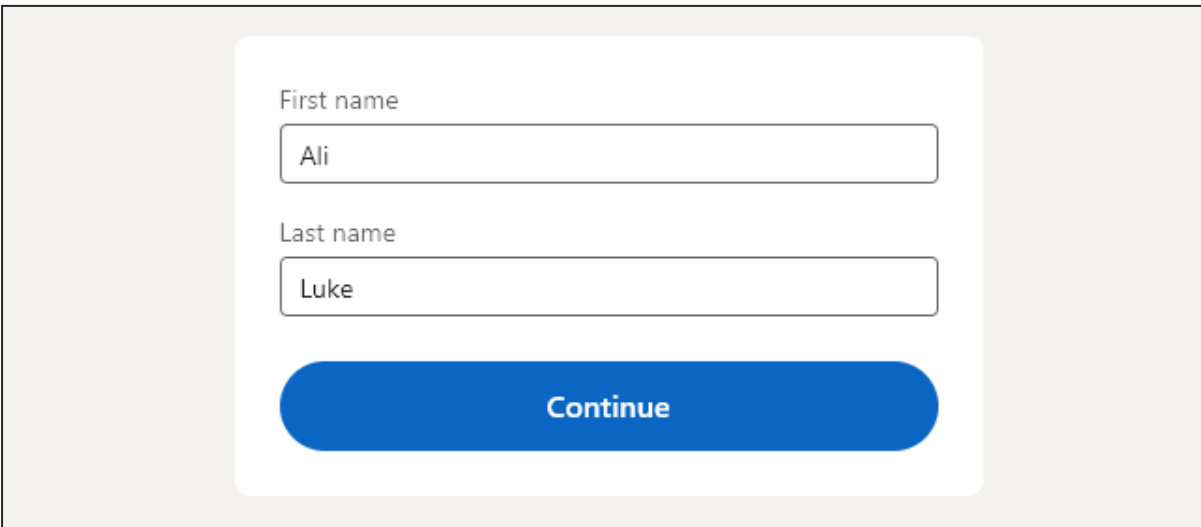
Step #2: Enter your email address and create a password, then click the "Agree & Join" button. Alternatively, you can join using your Google account.

Step #3: You'll then be prompted to enter your first and last name. Do so, then click the Continue button.

Step #3: You'll see a "Security verification" screen, where you'll need to solve a puzzle. (Don't worry, it won't be very tricky!) Just click the Verify button to do the puzzle.
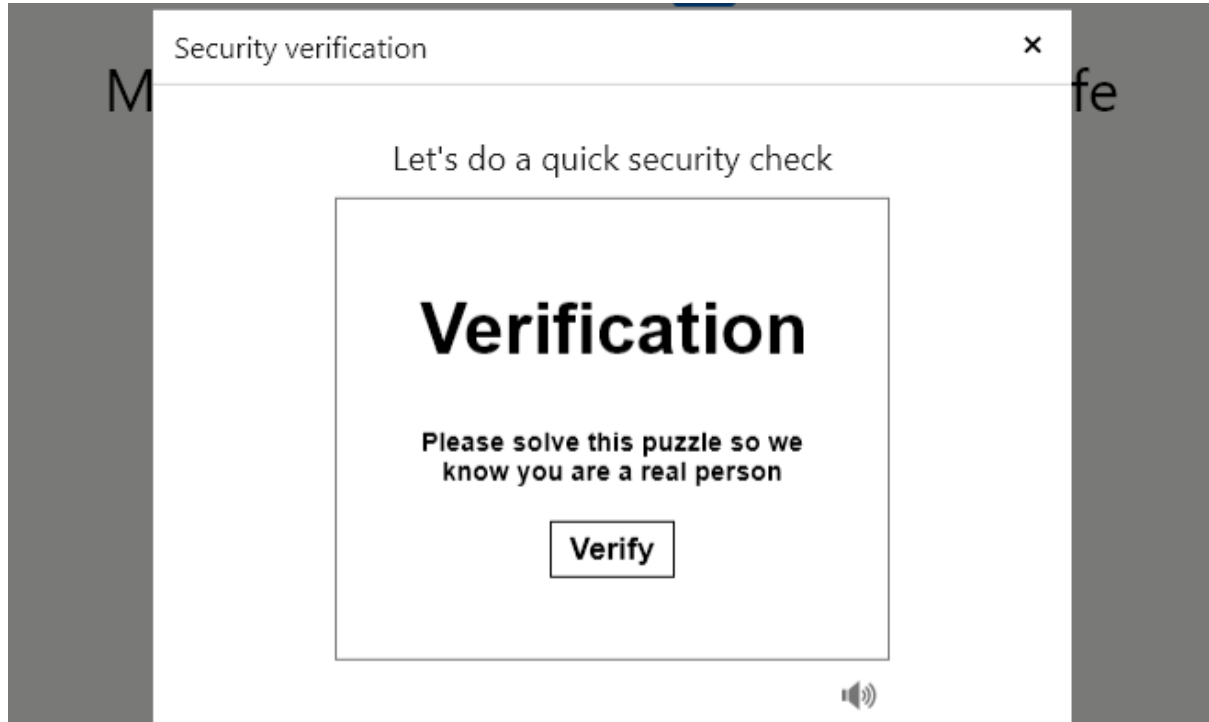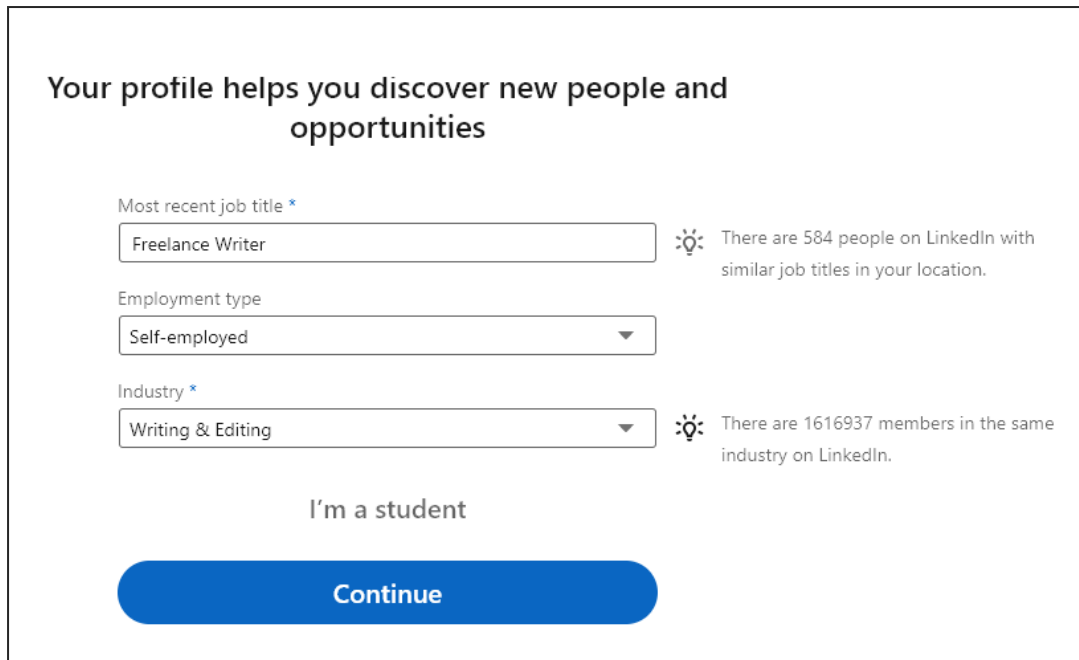

Now, you'll be prompted to enter your country, postal code, and location. LinkedIn will have a guess at these for you, based on your computer or device's location. Correct the details if needed, then click Next:

After that, LinkedIn will ask for your employment details. You can put "Freelance Writer" here if you want, and select "Self-Employed" for your employment type and "Writing & Editing" for your industry.

Once you're ready, click the Continue button.
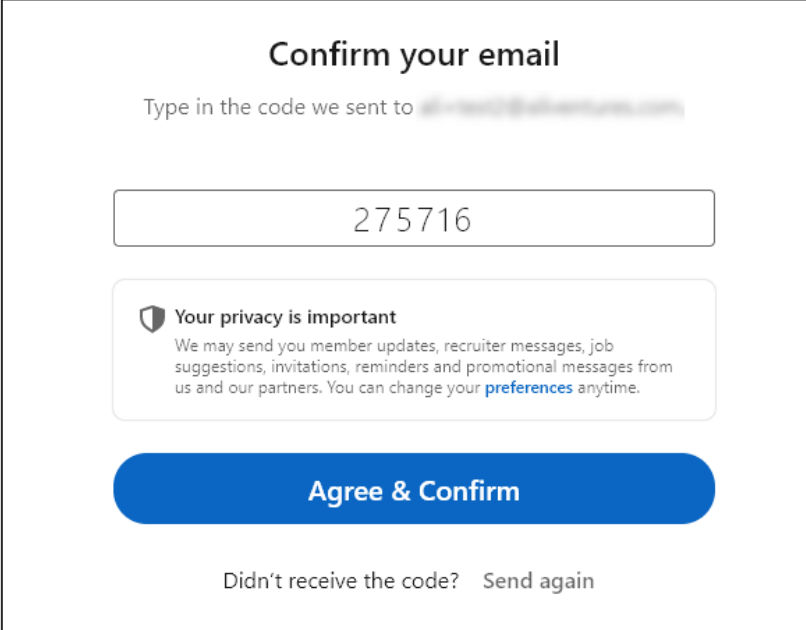
You'll need to confirm your email address. You should have an email like this:
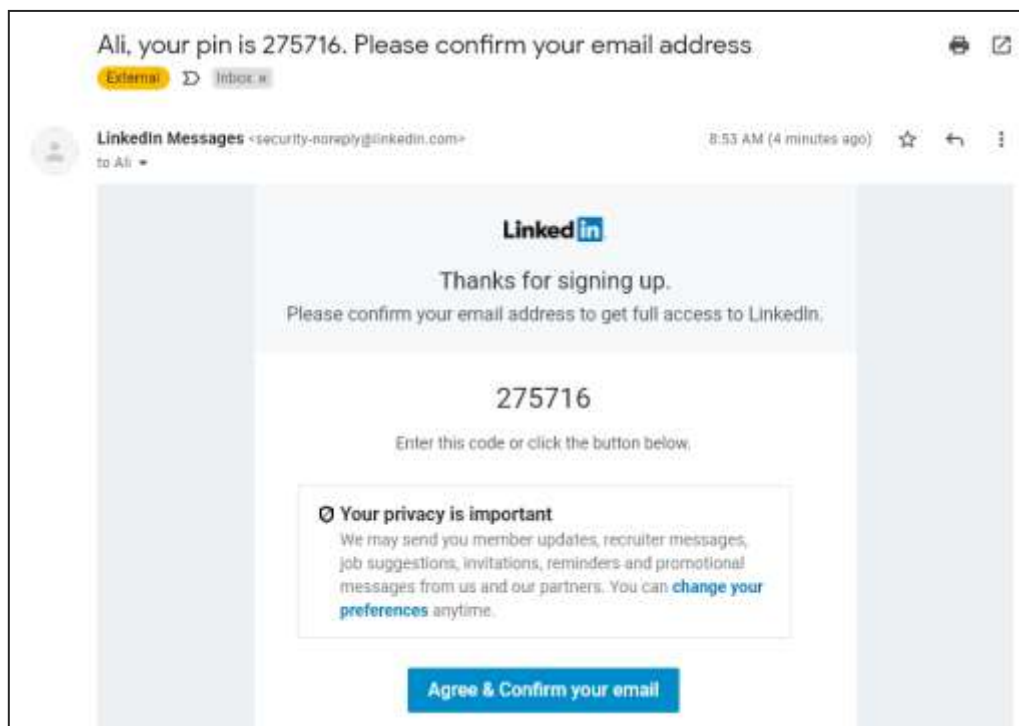
Just click the Agree & Confirm button in the email, or enter your code and confirm on LinkedIn:
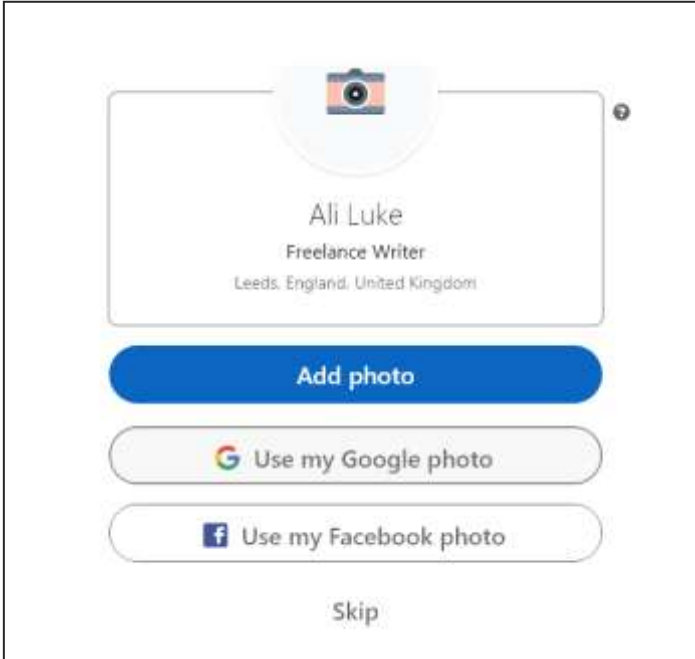
LinkedIn will ask if you're looking for a new job, prompt you to add your email contacts, encourage you to connect with other freelance writers, offer you the LinkedIn app, and prompt you to follow companies. I'd skip all these screens.

One step in this process is to add a profile photo, which I do recommend. However, you can skip this step and add it at a later stage instead if you want.

When you click the Finish button, you should see the LinkedIn site – you'll be automatically logged in:
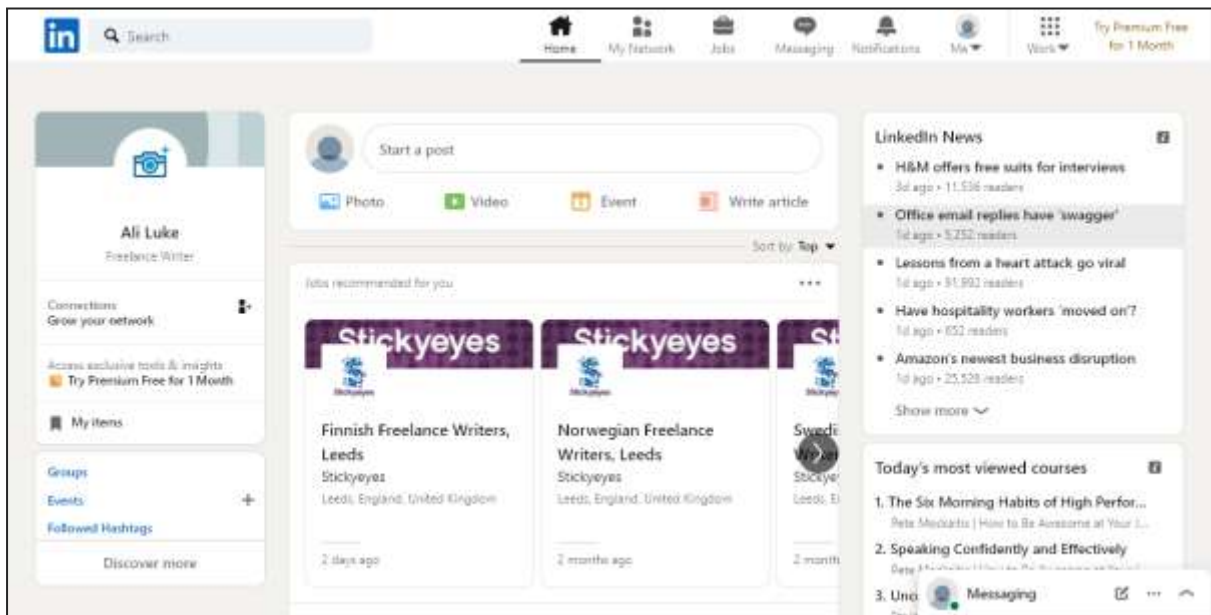
Step #5: You can add more details to your LinkedIn profile by clicking the "Me" button in the top navigation, then clicking the "View Profile" button.
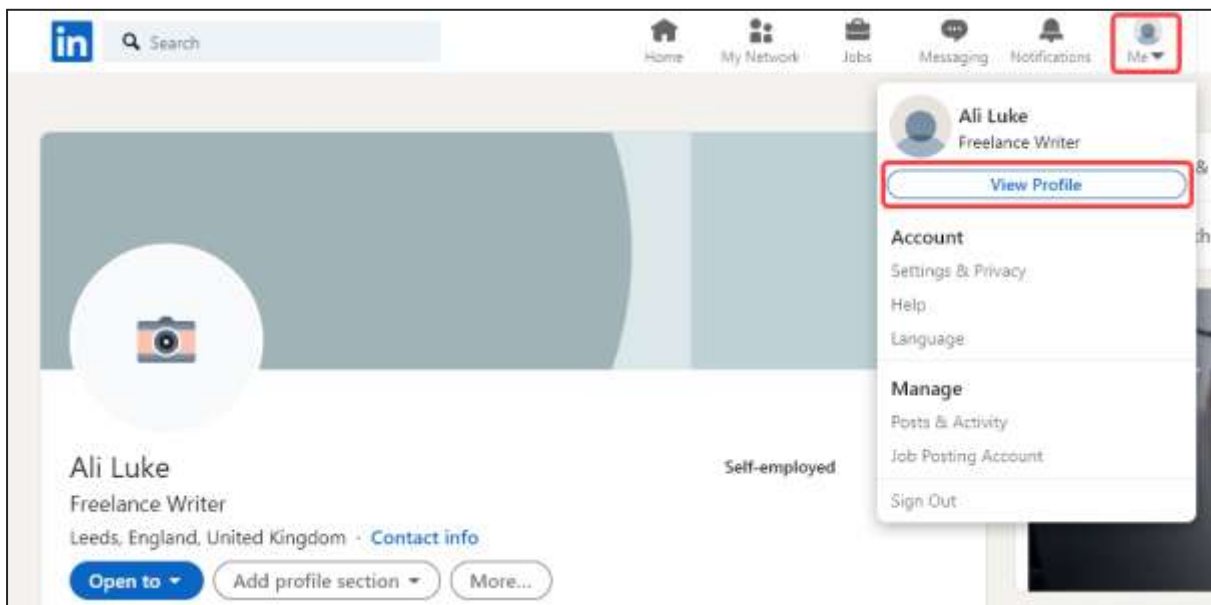
Next, you can simply click the pencil icon next to any section on your profile to edit it. You can also add new profile sections, add a profile photo, and add a background photo.
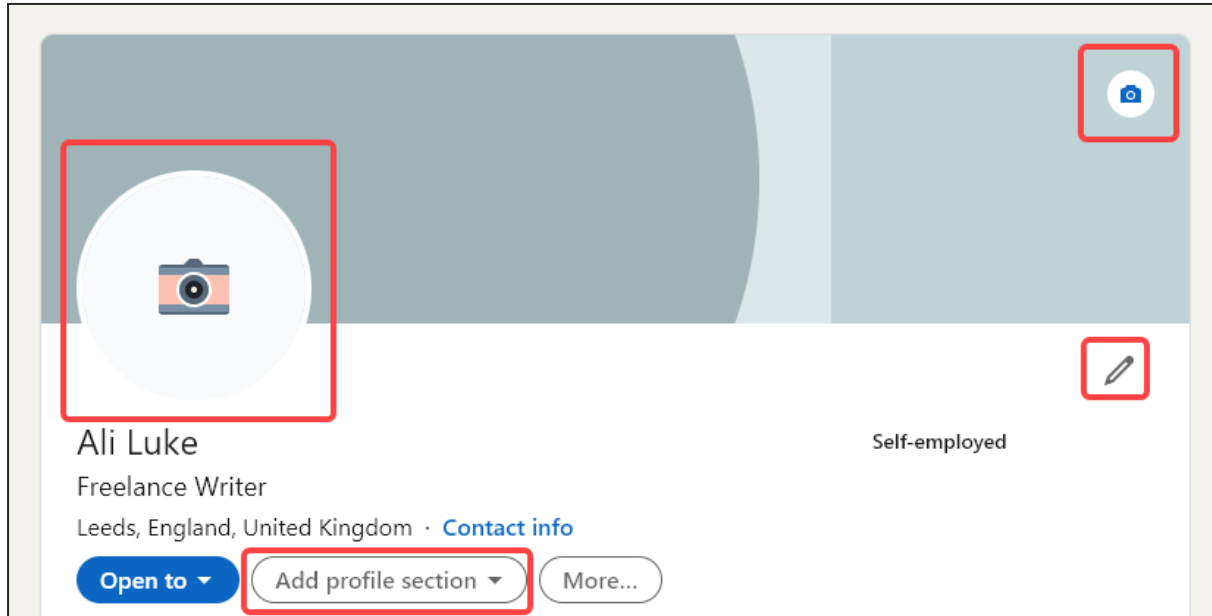
Some key things to think about on LinkedIn are:

1. The headline you use. "Freelance Writer" is a bit bland – though perfectly functional if you just want a minimal LinkedIn presence and aren't planning to use it to seek work. (Which is fine! That's what I do: I use LinkedIn to stay connected with former colleagues and friends.)

Here's a great example of a more creative headline:

2. Seeking recommendations or endorsements:

Most people I know agree that the "Skills & endorsements" feature on LinkedIn (where people click a button to say that you have a specific skill, such as "editing") is a bit pointless. Recommendations, however, are well worth having – so if you're connected to people who used to work with you, ask them to write you one!

With LinkedIn, some people prefer to only connect with people they've worked with directly. (Personally, I'll accept pretty much any connection request, but I know not everyone uses LinkedIn like that.) If someone doesn't accept a connection request from you, don't take it personally.

Your Module #2 Assignment

ASSIGNMENT:

(1 hour)

Your assignment for this module is in three parts:

#1: Come up with a name for your freelancing business, or a list of potential names. Feel free to share them with us in the Facebook group if you want help deciding.

#2: Register a domain name, either the real one you intend to use, or a cheap test/practice one. *(Optional.)*

#3: Set up at least one social media profile/account, or adjust one you already have for your freelancing.

Module #2: 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.

Marketing 101 for Freelance Writers #13: How Social Media Really Works, Carol Tice, Make a Living Writing

This post is a good introduction to the basics of how to use social media – whatever platform you're on. If you find social media frustrating, or feel that it's a waste of time, see if Carol's tips can help you get more from it.

Expert Advice on How to Name Your Freelance Business, Crystal Ponti, Paste Magazine

While it's not aimed at freelance writers specifically, this post includes some interesting thoughts on different options for naming your business – plus some good examples of different freelancers using different options.

10 ways you can use LinkedIn to find freelance clients, Hannah Martin, Talented Ladies Club

Hannah offers good advice in this post, with practical tips for using LinkedIn to seek out freelancing clients. Some of her suggestions are about reaching out and some are things you can do with your profile itself.

What's Coming Up in the Next Module

Well done on reaching the end of this module. Remember, if you have questions at any point, do head to the Aliventures Club for help and support:

facebook.com/groups/aliventuresclub

Here's what you'll find in Module 3:

MODULE 3:

In the next module, we'll be covering what to include on your website. We'll look at different options – like creating a simple one-page website, or having a more complex website with multiple pages.

We'll also cover some different ways to get your website online, focusing on WordPress.com and WordPress.org, and the pros and cons of each of those systems.

As always, we'll take everything step by step, and you're always welcome to ask questions in the Aliventures Club Facebook group if you get stuck.