

THE FREELANCE WRITER'S STARTER GUIDE

LEARN HOW TO FIND PAID WORK, PITCH
CLIENTS, AND GET HIRED.





Decide. Commit. Succeed.

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CHAPTER ONE

How I got my start, and what it means for you

About four years ago, I reached a crossroads in my life. After spending over seven years as a stay-at-home mom, I knew it was time for me to go back to work.

Previously, my husband had worked as the COO of a fintech company. He earned a pretty high salary, so I was fortunate not to have to work.

Then in 2014, my husband told me that he wanted to leave his current job. I fully supported that decision, and he quit shortly after. In my mind, he'd find another cushy, six-figure job within a month, and our lives would continue as usual.

Only that didn't happen. It took my husband over 13 months to find a new job. Those 13 months he spent looking was some of the longest, most anxiety-producing months of my life. See, I had never graduated from college or worked in a "real" job.

The last time I had worked was 2007, and that was only for 15 hours per week in a running store. I had put myself in a position of being unable to meaningfully contribute to our family's finances.

Not only that, I had built my self-worth around having a COO husband, driving a nice car, and not needing to work. Our bank account and my self-esteem took a huge hit that year.

Thankfully, after 13 months of looking, my husband did find another job. Only this job paid about half of what his other job had paid. And we'd burned through most of our savings during the year he was out of work. At this point, it's safe to say that not working was no longer an option.

Going back to work was scary, and I had a lot of reservations about it. For that first year, I worked part-time as a Starbucks barista.

And like many stay-at-home moms, I joined an MLM. Joining that network marketing company was one of the best decisions I ever made. It proved to me that I could do scary, uncomfortable things and make money online.

I had some success with my company, but after a year, I knew I didn't want to continue with it. And I wondered, if I could make money with my MLM, was there some other way I could earn money online?



How I got my start as a freelance writer

During 2015 and 2016, I spent a lot of time in Facebook groups looking for people to join my networking marketing company. And oddly enough, that's where I found the inspiration for my next entrepreneurial venture.

One day, I stumbled upon a post from a girl named Dani. She had just started a blog about how she used a platform called Upwork.com to earn a full-time income as a freelancer.

And suddenly, I had a thought that would change the course of my life: I wonder if I could make any money as a freelance writer?

I have always had a dream of writing for a living. I've been journaling and writing stories ever since I was a kid. But none of those efforts had produced any professional writing samples.

I didn't have a blog. I didn't have any real work history. And to top it all off, I was a college dropout.

But I was desperate to change my life. So I went all in on freelance writing and made it my goal to earn \$1,000 per month.

My first client hired me to write five 750-word product reviews for \$40. No, not \$40 per review. **\$40 TOTAL.** But I am not exaggerating when I say that it was the best \$40 I have ever earned in my life.

What this means for you

My first month of freelancing, I earned \$500. My second month in, I made \$1,800. After three years, thousands of blog posts, and dozens of clients, I now earn a six-figure income as a freelance writer.

And one thing I know for sure is that if I can do it, you can do it too. I don't know if you will do it, or even if you should. Not everyone is cut out for freelance writing. But I know that if you genuinely want to and try hard, you can figure it out and be successful as a freelance writer.

Don't underestimate the power of belief. I can give you all the strategies in the world, but if you don't believe you can be successful, you will find ways to sabotage yourself and it won't work.

That's why this guide is about more than strategy alone. I don't want to just give you a bunch of actions to take -- I want to teach you how to think, feel, and act like a successful freelance writer.

To make the most of this guide, I want you to do two things. First, I want you to read through all of it. Really read it, don't just skim it.

And second, I want you to pick one action item in this guide that you're going to implement immediately. Because changing something that you do daily is the only way you're going to get different results.

CHAPTER 2

A step-by-step guide to earning \$1,000 per month

From the outside looking in, the work-from-home lifestyle seems pretty glamorous, doesn't it? People like to blame Instagram for this, but I think Hollywood is the original culprit.

I can think of no better example than Sex and the City and our beloved columnist Carrie Bradshaw. Carrie was a full-time writer, yet all she did was spend five minutes a day smoking and staring out the window with her laptop nearby.

The rest of the time was spent shopping, having brunch, and going to nightclubs. Sounds nice, huh?

These kinds of portrayals lead us to believe that being self-employed is supposed to be easy, and it's supposed to be fun. So when we get started and find that it's really confusing and difficult, we think we're doing something wrong.

When you're just getting started, the best thing you can do is to recalibrate your expectations. Don't expect to earn \$10,000 in the next six months.

In fact, the only thing I want you to focus on is figuring out how to earn \$1,000 per month. Because if you can figure out how to earn \$1,000 per month, then you can figure out how to earn \$10,000 a month.

How to earn \$1,000 per month

If you've never made money online before then the idea of making \$1,000 a month as a freelance writer can feel pretty daunting. But the truth is, it all just comes down to basic math.

If you plan to work five days a week, or 20 days per month, then you need to earn \$50 per day. If you earn \$50 a day, five days per week, then you'll bring in \$1,000 per month.

Daily income goals work for every income goal you want to reach. They are what got me to \$1,000 a month, and they're also what got me to \$10,000 a month and beyond.

I think it's important for new freelancers to see how simple this really is. Of course, you do have to figure out how to earn that \$50 per day, but that's what this chapter is going to teach you.



Step 1: Send three proposals a day, six days a week

Sending your three proposals will be the only action item I'll have you do daily, and it's the most important one. Even if you only do this step and ignore every other action item in this chapter, you'll be much better off than you were when you started.

When you're a freelance writer, the most important thing you can do is spend time every day looking for new work. But many freelancers will recommend you send 15-20 proposals per day. So why do I suggest sending only three?

My reasoning is this: I want you to build the habit of consistently looking for new work. The best way to do that is by doing a little bit every day.

In my opinion, sending 15-20 proposals per day when you're new to freelance writing is like trying to work out for two hours a day when you've never exercised before.

For most people, it will be too difficult, and they'll give up before they achieve any real progress. Plus, it's time-consuming to send that many proposals.

If you stick with your three proposals a day, it will give the momentum you need, while keeping you from getting burnt out and quitting.

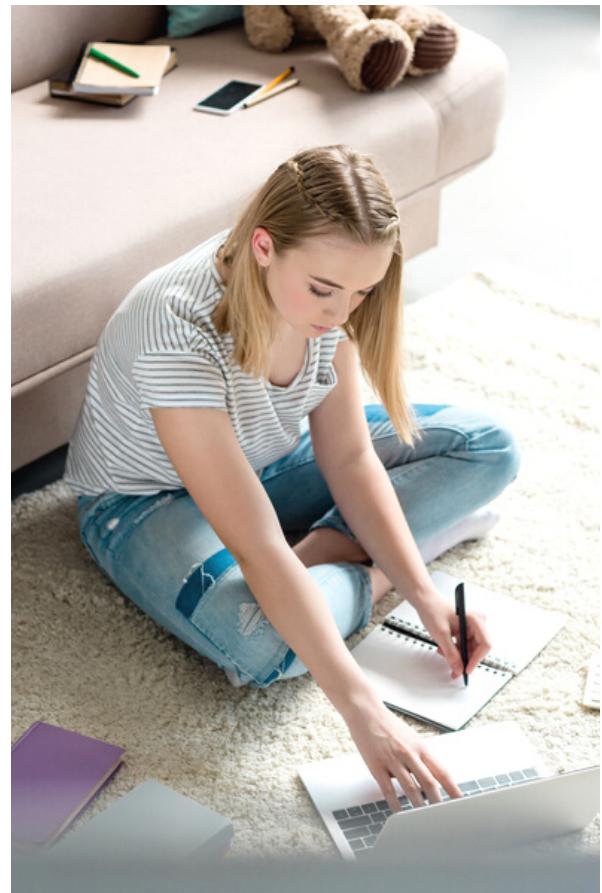
Step 2: Look for new work on job boards

Do you ever feel like there are tons of freelance writers out there looking for work? Well, let me assure you that there are even more clients out there who need freelancers.

The abundance of job boards out there is proof of this. If you're getting started as a freelance writer, job boards are the easiest way to start finding new clients. Here is a list of job boards you can try:

- **Upwork:** Upwork was my favorite place to look for new work in the beginning. You'll find that the other sites on this list won't have nearly as many available jobs as Upwork. You will have to dig through a lot of low-paying clients, but I promise you there are good jobs to be found on Upwork. We'll talk about Upwork in more detail in the next chapter.
- **ProBlogger:** If you're interested in being a freelance blogger, you should check out the ProBlogger job board every day. Clients have to pay \$70 to post a job on ProBlogger, so it tends to attract a higher caliber of clients.
- **Blogging Pro:** Blogging Pro is another job board that caters to freelance bloggers. It's smaller than ProBlogger, but you can occasionally find quality job postings on the site.

- **All Freelance Writing:** One of the things I like about All Freelance Writing is that every job has a salary range posted next to it. That way, if a job is low-paying, you don't have to waste your time applying for it.
- **Journalism Jobs:** Journalism Jobs is a site catering to journalists, but don't assume it isn't for you. I found one of my first big personal finance clients on this job board. You can customize your search by job title, location, and the type of work you're looking for.
- **Freelance Writing Gigs:** Every weekday, Freelance Writing Gigs publishes a daily blog post with new online writing jobs. And it breaks down each job into different categories, like "blogging jobs," "copywriting jobs," "editing jobs," and more.



Step 3: Create a portfolio to showcase your work

When you apply for new freelancing jobs, clients are going to want to see samples of your work. The more samples you have, the easier it is to land new paid writing work. That's why you need a portfolio to showcase your work.

I currently use Contently for my portfolio. I think it looks professional, and it's very easy to set up your account and add new articles. Plus, clients can filter your articles by skills, clients, and topics.

However, you may not have many published articles at this point, and that's okay. In that case, I recommend setting up a blog on your website.



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Personal Finance Freelance Writer

I am a personal finance writer and have been featured on Yahoo Finance, Business Insider, MSN, GOBankingRates, and InvestorPlace. I write about stock analysis, building credit, loans, and more.

FILTER BY Clients ▾ Topics ▾ Skills ▾ Formats ▾

PROJECTS [Edit or add projects](#)
156 projects for 22 clients



[View](#)

MARKETS.BUSINESSINSIDER.COM
The Holidays Are Coming —



[View](#)

BANKRATE
The 6 best personal finance



[View](#)

GOBANKINGRATES.COM
Marcus by Goldman Sachs

Step 4: Set up a no-frills website

Okay, I don't want this next point to be a major roadblock for you. But the fact is, if you're going to be a professional freelance writer, then you're going to need a website.

Clients want to see that you have some kind of online presence, and they will not take you seriously if you don't have a website.

I promise you that setting up a website doesn't have to be hard. One of the easiest ways to get started is by setting up a simple website on Squarespace. Squarespace has tons of beautiful templates to choose from and easy drag-and-drop features.

Many people will tell you that you need a WordPress website, but in my opinion, that's not necessary in the beginning. I've created websites on both WordPress and Squarespace, and I found Squarespace so much easier to use.

When you set up your website, all you really need is:

- A home page
- About me page
- Hire me page
- Contact page

That's it! Just take one weekend and knock this step up out. I promise you it's worth it.

Step 5: Do an audit of your social media profiles

Confession: I did very little on social media for the first three years of growing my freelancing business. I had a LinkedIn profile and rarely posted on it, my Twitter page was a ghost town, and I never even set up a Facebook business page.

So it is possible to largely ignore social media and be successful as a freelance writer. But...I don't recommend that you do that.

I could have grown my business much faster if I had been willing to embrace social media. There are a couple of reasons why I believe this is true.

Clients prefer freelancers who are active on social media and have social media followings. And when you start building a social media following, you will start having clients come to you, so you don't always have to look for new work.

I'll never know how many opportunities I cost myself by not having a social media following, but you don't have to make the same mistake.

So now that you know why social media matters, it's time to do a social media audit. The main thing you want to do is make sure that all of your social media profiles look professional.

Here's how to get started:

- **Choose a great profile picture:** Make sure your profile picture is a nice photo of you. If you have a headshot, that's going to be your best bet. But absolutely no using cat photos, memes, or photos of your children as your profile picture.
- **Keep it positive:** I want you to keep it positive and encouraging on all of your social media profiles. No political rants, inappropriate memes, or lengthy Facebook arguments.
- **Post regularly:** I recommend choosing two to three social media channels you like and posting regularly on them. For freelance writers, Twitter and LinkedIn are great options.



Step 6: Create a LinkedIn profile

If you want to be seen as a professional, you need to have a LinkedIn profile. Creating a LinkedIn profile is a great way to let your existing network know what you're doing and make new business connections.

Plus, LinkedIn allows you to showcase your skills and market yourself. One of the best ways to do this is by making your profile headline as specific as possible.

For instance, mine says, “Personal Finance Freelance Writer | Ghostwriter.” You want it to be very clear to potential clients what you do.

You should also add as many skills to your profile as you can. Other members can endorse you for those skills, which will give your profile a boost. If you’re friends with other freelancers, you guys can trade endorsements.

Allow people who aren’t connected with you on LinkedIn to message you for free. You’ll get some spammy messages on occasion, but it’ll be worth it if a new client finds you.

Just by having a LinkedIn profile, you open yourself up to be discovered by potential clients looking for freelancers.

I haven’t done as much with LinkedIn as I could, and I still regularly get messages from companies looking for writers.

Step 7: Join a freelance writing Facebook group

Okay, for this final step, I recommend you join a freelance writing Facebook group so you can network with other freelancers. If you keep following me and reading my blog posts, you're going to hear me talk about networking a lot.

The number one mistake I made as a new freelance writer was that I did not network. I'm an introvert, and I'm genuinely happiest when I'm at home by myself writing.

I hate small talk, and going to events makes me feel uncomfortable. So I avoided networking like the plague. But then I joined a freelance writing Facebook group, and **my entire business changed.**

I know that sounds dramatic, but I'm not exaggerating. From the advice, encouragement, and motivation I found in this group, I was able to triple my income in a relatively short period of time.

And I started working with big-name clients like Quicken Loans, Bankrate, and Credit Karma. I also got published in Business Insider and Yahoo Finance.

So get out there and make some friends. Not only will you be more successful, but you'll be happier and more fulfilled since you have writing friends.

CHAPTER 3

An introduction to Upwork

The number one question new freelancers have is, “How do I find clients?” And my best answer for you is to focus on sending at least three proposals per day on Upwork.

If you’ve heard of Upwork before then you may be surprised by my answer. Many experienced freelancers will tell you to avoid Upwork like the plague.

They’ll tell you it’s a place for bottom-feeding clients who will only pay you 1 cent per word. And in a lot of ways they’re right.

There are many low-paying clients or scammers on Upwork. But there are also many great clients, which is why I’ve earned over \$80,000 on Upwork over the past three years.

My client at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce came from a job I found on Upwork.

Just this week I had someone reach out to me about writing an email sequence for his website. This was a referral from a client I worked with on Upwork.

I have found many clients on Upwork that pay me **between \$500-\$750 per blog post**. I doubt there are many freelancers who would call that “low-paying.”

Reasons I recommend Upwork for new freelancers

Inevitably some people will say, “Oh, good for her. But the average freelancer won’t find those kinds of jobs on Upwork.”

And here’s the deal: if you have a better way to find clients then feel free to ignore my advice. But if you desperately want to earn your first \$1,000 and are struggling to find clients, then I think you should give Upwork a try.

Here are three reasons why I believe that’s true.

1. It takes minimal time

I’ve heard many people recommend sending cold emails as a way to find those initial freelance writing clients. And I don’t think this is a bad solution, but it will eat up a lot of your time, and many of the people you contact won’t be interested.

With Upwork, you’re pitching people who already want your services. You don’t have to try to convince them they need a freelance writer--they already know that, or they wouldn’t have posted the job.

And best of all, it takes minimal time to look for work on Upwork. It generally takes me about 30 minutes a day to send proposals on Upwork. Then you’re free to spend the majority of your time writing and making money.

2. You get paid quickly

Another suggestion you'll hear other freelancers recommend is guest posting. Guest posting is a great way to get some professional writing samples, but it can be time-consuming as well.

And it's easy to get discouraged with guest posting. Yes, you may land a couple of great samples, but you're not making any money so it's hard to stay motivated.

Plus, it may take a long time to even receive the byline. I submitted an article for guest posting last year, and it took four months for the site owner to publish my blog post.

I want you to start finding clients and making money immediately. With Upwork, once you've finished the work, you can submit the milestone for approval.



3. It gives you the foundation you need

Please understand that I'm not suggesting you stay on Upwork forever. Eventually, you'll need to branch out and learn other ways to find freelance writing work.

But it's easier to find freelance writing work through LinkedIn, ProBlogger, or cold emailing if you already have a solid foundation of working with clients. Upwork can give you that foundation.

During my first year of freelancing, I worked with dozens of clients on Upwork and wrote hundreds of articles. In fact, one of my very first Upwork clients is the reason I got into personal finance writing in the first place.

By now, you understand how Upwork works and why it's the perfect solution for brand-new freelancer writers.

So how do you cut through all the noise and find the great clients that are hiding on Upwork?

Here are a few ways to do this:

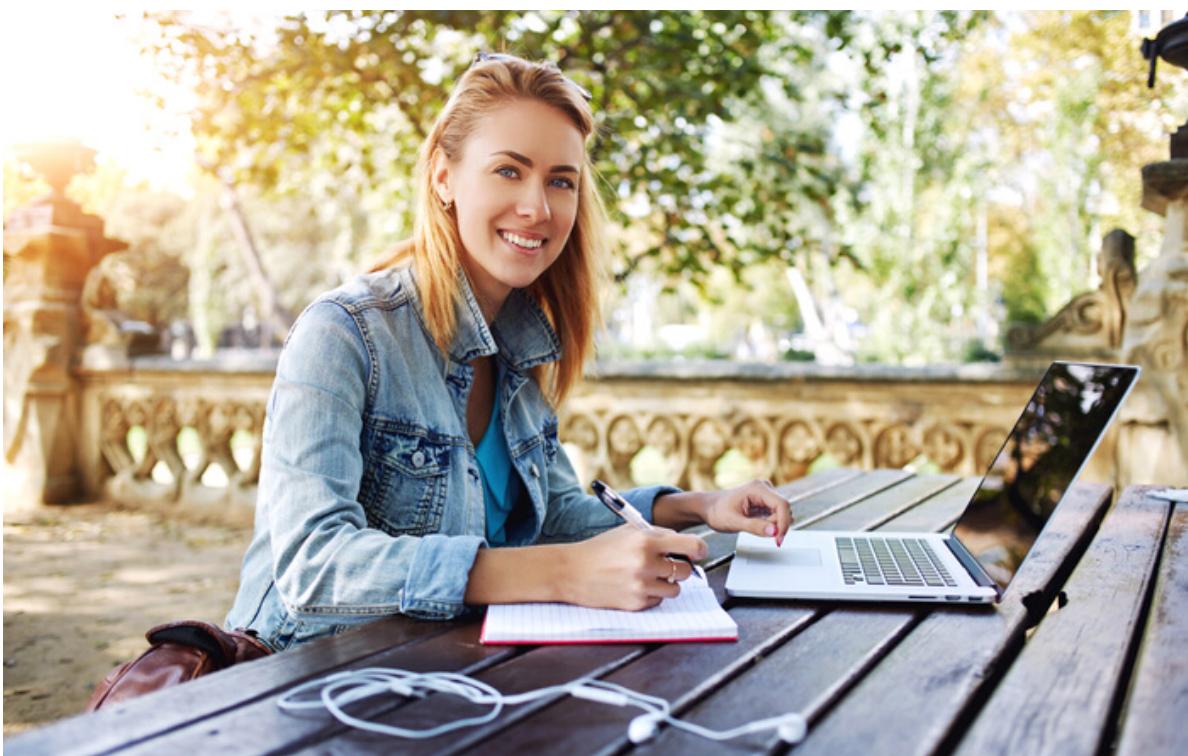
Believe you'll find great clients: If you sign up for Upwork believing you'll have to work for pennies, then that's what you're going to find. You have to approach Upwork believing that there are good clients there, and if you do the work, you'll find them.

Learn to spot client red flags: You also need to learn how to avoid difficult, demanding clients. Always watch out for clients who are obsessed with quality, ask for your most “competitive” rate, or make belittling comments about freelancers.

I am also wary of clients who consistently give freelancers poor ratings on Upwork. In my opinion, very few people deserve a one-star rating.

Don't be desperate: Slumps and setbacks are going to happen, especially in your first year of freelancing. And when they do happen, it's easy to get desperate and worry that you'll run out of money.

The problem is, desperation causes most of us to make bad choices. It causes us to choose to work with terrible clients who don't value our work. And in the long run, it will cause more cash flow problems.



CHAPTER 4

How to earn more money as a freelance writer

When you start freelancing, there are a lot of people who will tell you to “charge what you’re worth.” Know your worth and charge accordingly! This is the rallying cry of many entrepreneurs and freelancers.

But here’s the thing -- I don’t get to decide my worth, the market does. (Side note: I’m not referring to my worth as a human being, obviously.)

Deep down, I may believe that I should get paid \$2 per word for every article I write. But the market is not going to validate that assumption.

So don’t be discouraged if your early jobs pay between \$50-\$100 per article. You have to put in your time like the rest of us.

Of course, I don’t want you to stay at that level forever. But if you want to earn more money, then you don’t need another marketing gimmick.

I love marketing tips, but they ignore the most fundamental aspect of what will make you successful as a freelancer -- **you.**

The 3 qualities every freelance writer needs to have

If you want to be a high-paid writer, then you need to become the kind of freelancer that clients love to work with.

In the interest of simplicity, I've boiled this down to three qualities that every freelance writer must have:

- You must be able to deliver a certain quality of work.
- You have to be able to deliver on your promises and do what you say you'll do.
- You need to be easy to work with, likable, and able to take constructive feedback.

If you can always deliver on all three items, clients will love you, and you'll hit it out of the park. But since we're all just human beings who make mistakes, you'll probably fall short on your best efforts from time to time.

What I've learned is that you need to be able to consistently meet at least two of those three items. If you occasionally fall short on one, most clients will overlook it.

But if you fall short on two or more items?

Well, my friend, **then you've got a problem.**

How to improve your quality, consistency, and attitude

If you want to earn more money as a writer, then I want you to become laser focused on improving your quality, consistency, and attitude. If you can do that, then the money will take care of itself. I know it isn't a sexy answer. But it's the absolute truth.

How to deliver high-quality work

Improving the quality of your work is the easiest of the three things you need to work on. That's because most freelancers underestimate themselves, and massively overestimate the level of quality their clients are looking for.

If you find a potential client who is obsessed with quality, my advice is to run for the hills. These kinds of clients usually pay very low rates, but expect you to deliver written perfection.

Don't get me wrong, you need to be able to deliver a certain level of quality. If your writing chops aren't as solid as you would like, here are a few ways you can improve:

- **Take on as much work as possible:** Again, this isn't a sexy answer, but it's the best way to improve as a writer. I'm not the best writer out there, but I've improved a lot over the years. And I improved by writing thousands of articles for clients.

- **Take a writing class:** I've never done this, so I don't have any specific courses to recommend to you. And I would caution you not to let this turn into a distraction from finding freelance work. But if you're unsure of your writing skills, this could be a good option.
- **Use free or paid writing tools:** This has been such a game-changer for me. I use Grammarly, the CoSchedule headline analyzer, and the Hemingway App to tighten up my writing.

How to become a consistent freelancer

Okay, consistency is the next item on this list, and it's a big one. I know this can be very difficult for some people, but if you can master the art of being consistent, you'll bump yourself up to the 90th percentile of freelance writers.

Why? Because most freelancers are flakes. Most people struggle to follow through on what they say they're going to do, and their writing career suffers as a result. Their inconsistency usually shows up in the following ways:

- **Responding to emails:** I always respond to client emails within the same day. My clients are busy, and they don't have three days to wait until I feel like answering their email. The same goes for Slack and any other platform where your clients usually get ahold of you.
- **Meeting deadlines:** Okay, now we need to talk about turning in work on time. Being timely is an absolute must for any freelance writer. You need to meet your deadlines every single time.

How to develop a great attitude

And finally, if you want to become an in-demand freelancer, you have to have a great attitude and be easy to work with. I honestly think this is the most critical item on the list because your clients want to work with people they like.

Here are a few steps you can take to work on your attitude with clients:

1. Don't badmouth your clients

DO NOT gossip, badmouth, or complain about your clients. It's disrespectful, and you'll bring that negative energy into every interaction you have with them. Over time, it will slowly start to poison your working relationship.

2. Fire clients you don't like

I recommend letting go of clients you don't like working with. This can be tough to do, especially if you need the money. But if you don't like them or you don't like the work, you're not going to give them your best efforts. Let them move on and find someone who will.

3. Focus on your goals

When you start to become frustrated, remind yourself of your long-term goals. Staying focused on your goals will give you the perspective you need to do the right thing in an otherwise frustrating situation.

CHAPTER 5

What to do when you're struggling in your freelancing business

The other day, someone left a comment in a Facebook group I'm active in. Here is what the post said:

"I am really struggling and on the verge of packing all this in! What started out as a lovely dream has become something I don't even want to even look at or think about anymore. Has anyone else ever struggled like this? Does this ever get easier?"

The person who left it was talking about launching a course, but it relates so well to freelance writing.



Here are five steps to take if you feel discouraged and consider giving up on freelance writing:

1. Do nothing

I know, I know, this point is very counterintuitive. Most people will tell you to work harder, hustle more, create a vision board, all that stuff. But let's be honest, you can't force yourself to change the way you feel. Maybe you need to feel crappy about it for a little while.

And the absolute worst thing you can do is take action from a reactionary place. Don't get rid of your clients, apply for a full-time job, or do anything else that could potentially jeopardize everything you've worked for.

Wait until you've worked through all the negative feelings, and then take action from a place of neutrality.

2. Ask yourself, “Am I doing everything I could be doing?”

Okay, now I want you to take a good hard look at yourself and your actions. Are you doing everything you could be doing?

Are you actively looking for new work? Are you doing your best for the clients you already have? Are you networking with other freelancers? Do you follow up with previous clients?

Or are you taking limited action, and just complaining about how frustrated you feel? If you are, no judgment. I've been there! But you need to look at your actions and figure out what the problem is.

3. Talk to someone about it -- but choose wisely

Okay, I do recommend talking to someone about the way you feel. But you need to choose this person very carefully.

Don't choose your best friend who's just going to agree with everything you say. Don't pick your mom, who's going to tell you that she knew you could never make a living as a freelance writer.

And don't go complain about how you feel in a Facebook group. It brings the energy of the group down, and it doesn't help you come up with solutions.

I recommend finding a freelancer who is more experienced than you to talk this over with. Look for someone who won't coddle you or tell you what you want to hear.

4. Look for a change of scenery

Maybe you need to start looking for ways to change things up. If you keep taking the same actions over and over again, you're going to achieve the same results.

If you're bored with your freelancing business, maybe consider trying a different niche. Perhaps you could guest post for a couple of different websites to broaden your writing experience a bit.

Maybe you need to cut back on how often you've been working. Maybe you need to raise your rates. I don't know what the answer is for you. But spend some time every day focused on finding solutions, not problems.

5. Focus on what you want

It's easy to get sucked into a negative mindset and only focus on the problem. But this will never give you the results you want!

Do you want to earn your first \$1,000 as a freelance writer? Great, focus on that! Don't complain about how it's not happening quickly enough.

Instead, I want you to ask yourself every day, "How can I earn \$1,000 as a freelance writer?" This question will force your brain to come up with solutions.



BONUS

FREE Upwork Proposal Templates

I know how overwhelming it is when you first start sending proposals on Upwork. That's why I wanted to include these free Upwork proposal templates.

You'll notice that both templates are fairly short. I have never sent lengthy proposals, because I don't think that's what most clients are looking for.

When a client reads your proposal, they aren't looking for a novel about why you're the best person for the job. They want to figure out if they like you enough to send you a message or schedule a call with you.

So my goal with every proposal is to be friendly, to be helpful, and to be brief.

I hope these proposal templates give you a good starting point, and help you land some paid writing work. As the weeks and months pass, you'll learn how to modify them and make them work for you. Enjoy!

Template #1

Hey there,

I hope your day is going well!

My name is [Your Name] and I'm a [Your City]-based freelance writer. I specialize in writing [Type of content you write] for clients in the [Niche] industry.

[Insert brief paragraph addressing their job description, what they're looking for, and how you can help them. Try to hone in on the core problem they're trying to solve.]

I'm including a link to my writing portfolio so you can get a sense of my writing style. Let me know what questions you have for me. I'm looking forward to discussing this further!

Best,

[Your Name]

[Portfolio link]

Template #2

Hi [Client Name],

I'm excited to learn more about your project and what you're looking for in a freelance writer. My name is [Your Name], and I specialize in writing [Type of content you writer] about [Niche].

[Insert brief paragraph addressing their job description, what they're looking for, and how you can help them. Try to hone in on the core problem they're trying to solve.]

I've included a link to my portfolio so you can check out some of my writing samples. Let me know if you have any questions!

Best,

[Your Name]

[Portfolio link]

