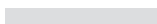


The Art & Business of Ghostwriting



The Art & Business of Ghostwriting

How To Make \$10,000+ Per Month
Writing For Other People Online



NICOLAS COLE

DiFf
PUBLISHING

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“Nobody knows more about ghostwriting than Cole.”
—Anonymous Client

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The Art & Business of Online Writing

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Every writer should master the art of ghostwriting.

*When you practice the definitive attributes of other people's
voices, you can more consciously create your own.*

Introduction

How I Fell Into The World Of Ghostwriting

It was a warm day in sunny California.

I was sitting at a makeshift desk in the living room of a former Victoria's Secret model's house. I'd just quit my job of four years working at a small advertising agency in Chicago. 3 days later, I flew west to join three other twenty-somethings to work on their e-Sports startup. They had raised \$100,000, and everyone knows priority number one when you're in your twenties flush with seed capital is to rent a mansion (I wasn't complaining). And as a teenage professional teenage gamer turned twenty-something viral writer on the Internet, they gave me a small bit of equity to help them with the PR strategy for their launch.

To be honest, I didn't even know what that meant.

I was just excited to get out of cold, slushy Chicago.

For two weeks, I worked on this gaming startup by day and slept on an air mattress in their unfurnished living room at night. The house was nestled up in the Hollywood Hills, and overlooked the entire city of Los Angeles. Because of the time difference, I would wake up early and watch the sunrise from the second floor balcony. And at night, I'd

sit by the fire pit in the backyard and look up at the stars.

As a 26-year-old, I felt like I was living a dream.

Until ten days later, when the universe slapped me back to reality.

It was the 15th of October, the time of the month most salaried employees know to be “payday.” Well, I’d been living it up in California, eating into my savings, having the time of my life, when I woke up and was shocked to find no money had been deposited into my account. All of a sudden, the reality of the situation hit me: I had quit my job to go “all-in” on being a freelance writer. But I’d yet to find any clients. Which meant I had no income. Which meant if I didn’t find a way to put some food on the table, I wasn’t going to be able to buy groceries. I wasn’t going to be able to pay my rent. And right back I’d go to the job I had worked so hard to get out of.

I was determined not to let that happen.

Out of desperation, and not knowing how I was going to find clients as a freelance writer, I did the only thing I knew how to do: I wrote about my “services” online. Over the past few years, I had been writing daily and building an audience on Quora. And at the beginning of 2016, I had landed a column with *Inc Magazine*. So I started subtly mentioning in my Quora answers and *Inc Magazine* columns that I frequently worked with “industry leaders” to help them share their perspectives, stories, and insights online as well. (Full transparency: I’d never done this before. *Fake it till you make it, right?*)

A few days later, I got an email from a guy. He said he was an avid reader of mine on Quora, really enjoyed my conversational writing voice, and was wondering if I could help him write thought leadership pieces in a similar tone. In his email he even said, “I saw you mention that you do this type of work with other industry leaders—I trust your work as a ghostwriter is confidential?”

That email was the first time I’d ever heard the term *ghostwriting*.

My First 5 Ghostwriting Clients

My last day as a 9-5 employee was September 30th, 2016.

My full-time salary that year was \$48,000, which meant I made around \$3,000 per month after taxes. I was living in a small studio apartment on the north side of Chicago, and even though it was a total dump, my rent was still 50% of my monthly income. I had a bed, a \$15 wooden desk from Goodwill, and a small 2-person table in my “kitchen”—which consisted of four small white ceramic floor tiles next to the refrigerator. Directly above the table was a giant water bubble in the ceiling. Dozens of dark spots in the center made it look like it was ready to burst, and every morning when I sat and ate my oatmeal, I looked up and wondered, “Is this it? Is today the day it explodes all over me?” The apartment didn’t have air conditioning. My heater was an old-fashioned radiator that made gunshot noises when the open flame ignited. And the bathroom shower screamed a piercing howl every second it was on. Like a true writer, I lived in squalor.

But as soon as I started ghostwriting, that very first month after quitting my full-time job, I made over \$10,000—more than doubling my salary.

The next month, November, I doubled my monthly earnings again—making \$20,000 in 30 days.

And by the end of 2016, December, I had made more money in the last three months of the year than I had the entire 9 months prior working 8+ hours per day as a copywriter.

Ghostwriting changed my life.

My first client was a veteran entrepreneur who had spent 20 years building a company with his father, and ended up selling it for north of a billion dollars. He was publishing a book about his lessons learned as an entrepreneur and wanted to write thought leadership articles online to build an audience before the launch. I charged him \$100 per 800-word article.

My second client was the owner of an Instagram marketing agency. One of the services he sold was Instagram verification, and he wanted a ghostwriter to work with his PR team to help clients author byline articles—which he would get placed in major publications for credibility. I charged him \$150 per 800-word article.

My third client was an international public speaker and author. She said she was friends with a handful of other industry leaders who said they were getting a lot of inbound speaking gigs from their written content online, and was looking for a ghostwriter to help her do the same. I charged her \$200 per 800-word article.

My fourth client was a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who had recently sold his company to Google. He had a new business idea, and wanted to start writing articles online to begin educating potential venture capitalists on opportunities in the industry he planned to disrupt. I charged him \$250 per 800-word article.

My fifth client was a senior marketing manager at a giant software enterprise company. She realized all the higher-ups in the organization getting promotions were actively creating content & building audiences for themselves online. “If I want to remain competitive,” she said, “I need to start positioning myself as a thought leader too.” I charged her \$300 per 800-word article.

This progression went on and on.

The more I wrote online about how I “helped industry leaders create high-quality written content,” the more ghostwriting clients I attracted. The more clients I attracted, the more referrals I started getting (happy clients connecting me with other successful people in their networks). The more clients I attracted, the more I continued to raise my prices—\$400 per article, \$500 per article, \$600 per article. And I started to realize the niche I’d accidentally created for myself: ghostwriting for busy, intelligent entrepreneurs, executives, and investors who had decades of valuable information to share but didn’t have the time, or the digital expertise, to sit down, write, and publish 800-word, opinion-based thought leadership articles.

You know the saying, “Nobody makes a living as a writer?”

It’s wrong.

There are tons of ways to make a living as a writer.

And I quickly learned you could make a fortune as a ghostwriter.

Scaling Myself Into A Ghostwriting Agency

By the start of 2017, just six months after leaving my 9-5 job, I was single-handedly writing on behalf of more than 25 different startup founders, C-level executives, and Silicon Valley investors.

I was working 10-hour days, 7 days per week, churning out articles on everything from entrepreneurship advice to productivity hacks to CPG industry trends to AI research analysis. It was not uncommon for me to write in four or five different voices in a single day. And because I was still working with that e-Sports startup in Los Angeles, and had started dating a girl (who is now my fiancé) in Arizona, *and* for the first time had an abundance of disposable income, I was constantly traveling. I was ghostwriting the majority of these articles in airports. In cabs. In hotel rooms. Everywhere, all the time—throwing the excuse out the window that I “*need the perfect writing environment to produce high-quality work.*” (Funny how that excuse doesn’t fly when a paying client is emailing you asking when they can expect the next draft.)

“And how much are you charging?” my friend Drew asked. “\$50 per article?”

Drew was one of my closest friends. And one week, I flew to visit him in Atlanta because we hadn’t seen each other in years. He was working full-time as a sales rep for a startup that sold fractional ownership in private jets to high-net-worth individuals. As a hobbyist pilot, he enjoyed having a job that allowed him to spend so much time around airplanes. But he clearly wanted to work for himself.

“More,” I said.

“\$100 per article?” he asked.

“More,” I said again.

He paused. Like most people, he had a hard time believing anyone could make a decent living as a writer.

“How? Can’t these people just hire a freelance writer on Upwork for like \$15 per blog post?”

I didn’t have a clear answer to that question back in 2017. But I do now. How I was able to charge upwards of \$600, \$700, \$800, even \$1,000 per 800-word article was because I wasn’t calling myself a “freelance writer.” I was a *ghostwriter*. And the term *ghostwriter* implies a heightened level of expertise, of attention, of a specific skill set—which is precisely what I was offering.

When I explained the niche I’d discovered, and the specific problems I was helping clients solve, Drew was the one who suggested we scale “me.” He was getting his MBA at the time, and had just gotten back from night class. He started pacing around his apartment saying, “Right now, you’re doing both—you’re talking to the clients, and you’re doing the writing. But what if I talk to the clients? You keep doing the writing. And then we’ll hire writers & editors to replace ourselves. I’ll train the editors. You’ll train the writers. And we’ll scale this into an agency.”

So, for the next three years, that’s what we did.

The agency was called Digital Press—and we built the first ghostwriting agency that specialized in Thought Leadership Marketing (via ghostwriting) for founders, executives, and investors.

Our pitch was simple: if you are someone with true expertise, you probably don’t have time to share your insights, stories, and perspectives online.

Why?

Because you’re too busy building companies, leading teams, creating systems, and developing products. And even if you have the writing skills, you don’t have the desire—because you know there are better ways to spend your time than edit and re-work the same paragraph for

forty-five minutes.

This simple idea that “you have tons of value to share, but don’t have the time to share it” is how we closed over 300 clients in industries ranging from biotech to cryptocurrency platforms to women’s lingerie.

And built a multimillion-dollar ghostwriting agency as a result.

Ghostwriting Changed My Life—And It Can Change Yours Too

To date, I have ghostwritten for hundreds of startup founders, executives, and senior leaders at publicly traded companies all over the world. I have also ghostwritten for Silicon Valley venture capitalists, private equity firms, international speakers, *New York Times* best-selling authors, and even Grammy-winning musicians, Olympic athletes, and Bitcoin billionaires.

In fact, I have ghostwritten so many thought leadership articles online (literally thousands) that between 2017 and 2020 it was not uncommon for a friend or even a client to send me a link to an article saying, “I think you’ll like this” or “I like the way this piece is structured,” not realizing I had ghostwritten the article. Someone else’s name was just at the top.

When I say ghostwriting changed my life, I mean it. Ghostwriting allowed me to successfully quit my 9-5 job. Ghostwriting helped me move out of my rathole studio apartment, buy my first car, and disavow my former life as the cliché “poor and struggling writer.” Ghostwriting paid me to learn. Ghostwriting is how I’ve built a multibillion-dollar network for myself. But maybe most of all, ghostwriting has taught me so much about the craft of writing, and improved my skills in ways I’m not sure I could have achieved had I not spent thousands of hours practicing with other people’s voices.

Which is why I love writing about ghostwriting, and helping other writers enter the world of Premium Ghostwriting.

In 2023, with my co-founder Dickie Bush, we created the first Premium Ghostwriting Academy training ghostwriters on how to find, pitch, and land high-ticket clients; how to use ghostwriting as a vehicle to accelerate your own writing talents; how to scale your earnings to \$10,000 or \$20,000 per month working for yourself; and how to avoid the mistakes I made so that if you decide to build a ghostwriting agency of your own, you have a clear path forward to \$50,000 or \$100,000 per month (or more).

So consider this book the first step on your journey to becoming a Premium Ghostwriter.

If you've never heard the term "ghostwriting," or maybe you've heard it but kept your distance because people discouraged you from "that type of work," I'm here to tell you: swan dive in, my friend. Ghostwriting is a goldmine. You'll be hard-pressed to find another career path as a writer as profitable, as fun & entertaining (as you'll gather from some of the stories I'm going to share in this book), as mentally stimulating, and as beneficial to your craft and your career as a writer.

It's your fastest path out of poverty.

It's an "unfair advantage" skill in your toolkit. It's your golden ticket into rooms you would never otherwise be invited to enter.

And I couldn't be more excited to be your guide.

So, let's dive in—to the magical underworld of "ghostwriting."

Part 1

GHOSTWRITING AS A CAREER

CHAPTER 1

Ghostwriting Myths

A FEW YEARS AGO, A reporter emailed me asking if I could comment on a piece he was working on.

It was about the ethical problems with ghostwriting.

We got on the phone, and he started asking me things like, “As a ghostwriter, do you feel a moral obligation to tell readers what you are doing? Do clients pay you to lie? How do you feel knowing you are deceiving people?” He made it sound like I was engaging in treason.

The unfortunate reality is this is how most people perceive the craft of “ghostwriting.” But I’m going to tell you the same thing I told that reporter: “You’ve got it all wrong.”

So, let’s quickly demystify the craft of ghostwriting.

Myth #1: “Ghostwriting is deceptive.”

Every speech the President of the United States gives to the country is written, edited, re-written, and edited some more by an entire team of speechwriters.

Which is just another word for “ghostwriters.”

Is this deceptive? Of course not. It would be ridiculous to assume that amidst the president’s busy schedule, he or she has the time to sit

down and write every single word of every single speech. Their highest-leverage contribution is to suggest talking points, review talking points, and clarify talking points—not sit there and debate adjectives and verbs.

Myth #2: “Ghostwriting is inauthentic.”

As a ghostwriter who has worked with hundreds of industry leaders, let me be explicit about something:

If I was unable to make the client feel I’d captured the authenticity of their voice, they would not publish the piece.

I’d also be out of a job.

I always find it ironic when people say that ghostwriting is inauthentic, as if the client who hired the ghostwriter had no say in the matter. If the client reads the words on the page and says, “Yes! That accurately represents what I think and feel and am trying to say,” then it’s authentic—because it’s authentic to *them*. No different than a pop star working with a team of songwriters, collaborating and refining the message until the song is something he or she or they feel comfortable and confident standing behind.

It’s the client who decides whether or not the words they publish under their own name and reputation are authentic.

Not me, and not the reader.

Myth #3: “Ghostwriting is cheating.”

If ghostwriting is cheating, then so is hiring a social media intern when you no longer have time to manage your own Facebook or Instagram page.

And so is hiring a graphic designer to design your company logo—
“Why don’t you just do it yourself? Huh?”

It’s a bit of a rabbit hole to call ghostwriting “deceptive” or

“inauthentic” or “cheating” considering every other industry relies on a wide variety of skill sets in order to produce high-quality products. For example, say an enterprise software company wants to film a 60-second commercial. Who do they need? They need a videographer. An editor. A lighting designer. A casting director. A project manager. Seven interns, running around getting everyone coffee. The ad might have been the CEOs idea, but it takes a village to bring it to life.

Ghostwriting is no different—and this is what so many people on the outside, looking in, fail to understand. The art of ghostwriting isn’t really “writing.” Great ghostwriters aren’t in the business of putting words in people’s mouths.

A great ghostwriter is a sculptor, and the client’s ideas are blocks of marble.

As Michelangelo put it: “The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there. I just have to chisel away the superfluous material.”

It’s still the client’s ideas.

The reader is just consuming them in their most polished form.

Myth #4: “Ghostwriting means lower-quality work.”

This might be the biggest myth of all.

Oftentimes when people find out someone they admire has been working with a ghostwriter, they jump to the conclusion the work must be “low quality.” Well, if that’s the case, then every editor at every publishing house should be fired.

THIS JUST IN: EDITORS MAKE BOOKS WORSE, NOT BETTER.

The best ghostwriters don’t actually get paid to write. *They get paid to stress-test the client’s thinking.* They get paid to ask thoughtful questions, present different perspectives, and sharpen ideas down

to something easily digestible. This is what's "valuable" to the client. What's not valuable is hiring a freelance writer whose job is to transcribe everything you say, verbatim, with no input or suggestions of their own.

A client doesn't need to pay a human being to do that.
They can just use AI.

Myth #5: "Ghostwriting means you can't build a portfolio and get your name out there, you can't collect testimonials, and clients can't refer you to more clients."

Wrong, wrong, and wrong.

First of all, just because it's discouraged for you to talk about your clients doesn't mean you can't write about ghostwriting or the services you provide. I am a prime example of this. I write about the topic of ghostwriting all the time, and share my ghostwriting processes in public. As a result, I constantly receive email inquiries from people asking if I'm available to ghostwrite. And so will you.

Second, testimonials aren't as important as people think. Whenever a prospective client would ask who I've worked with, I would just say, "Because of the nature of ghostwriting, I can't share specific names with you—however I can tell you that I've ghostwritten for some of the largest enterprise technology companies in the world," and they're satisfied. (And for what it's worth: once you've worked with a client for 6+ months, and have proven your ability to produce high-quality work, many are more than happy to give you a testimonial if you really want one. Contrary to popular belief, most clients want to help you succeed!)

Third, I can't tell you how many referrals I've gotten from former clients. I *still* get referrals from clients I worked with years ago. Why?

Because finding high-quality people to work with is hard—and industry leaders love making introductions to “all stars” who can help their friends.

Selling Your Pen vs Renting Your Pen

Now, all of the above said, I will say there is 1 specific use case where I would agree that ghostwriting can cross the line.

And the way I like to think about this is by asking the question:

- “Are you selling your pen?”
- “Or are you renting your pen?”

What most people believe happens when someone hires a ghostwriter is that the client wires the ghostwriter a big bag of money, the ghostwriter goes off and “writes something brilliant,” and then they take this perfect thing they’ve written (made from their own independent thoughts, ideas, perspectives, stories, and insights), and give it to the client. The client then slaps their name on it, publishes it out into the world, and takes all the credit.

I would call this “selling your pen.”

And I’m here to tell you: this happens way, way less often than you think.

Of the hundreds of people I’ve ghostwritten for, I’ve never had this happen. Not once. The client has never asked this of me, and I’ve never offered.

As a result, ghostwriting has never been a moral dilemma for me. From day one, I thought about ghostwriting like a dividend I was being paid on my own writing talents. Clients recognized my voice, my formatting, my flow, etc., and wanted similar attributes for themselves. So, I rented them my pen.

Their ideas. Their stories. Their insights. Their perspectives.

Just channeled through my pen.

And in exchange, they paid me a premium.

CHAPTER 2

Freelance Writing vs Ghostwriting

MOST SMART PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY have something valuable to say, don't have the time to write.

And most people who have the time to write, don't have something valuable to say.

I experienced this first-hand when I started writing for *Inc Magazine*. At 26 years old, I was the most-read entrepreneurship writer for the entire publication—bringing in millions and millions of page views each month. The irony? I had never started a business before. Said differently: I had plenty of time to write (and was quite good at it), but was hardly the most knowledgeable person on the subject of entrepreneurship.

This summarizes the extreme value in ghostwriting.

All of the world's smartest people spend 20, 30, 40+ years working in their respective industries acquiring obscene amounts of highly valuable knowledge: problem-solving frameworks, strategies, pattern recognition, trend analysis, etc. And the vast majority of them retire without ever passing along that knowledge to others in a scalable way. Maybe they share their nuggets of wisdom with a few employees or

business partners. But eventually, those people retire too—and the cycle continues.

All of this knowledge just disappears from the world.

This is the value of ghostwriting to the client: **the client has an abundance of knowledge, but a scarcity of time.** And without help, their stories, insights, frameworks, and perspectives are never going to get outside their brain.

The value of ghostwriting to the writer is the opposite:

For the vast majority of young writers (10 years of experience or less), building proficiency in the craft of “writing” is significantly easier than amassing a highly valuable knowledge base on a specific topic or industry. It takes years, even decades to “know things” most other people don’t, and then build unique and different frameworks and mental models around that knowledge. Whereas anyone can quickly learn the basics of clear and concise writing, formatting, rhythm, cadence, tone, and flow—and start writing.

Which means you have the opportunity as a ghostwriter to get paid to “write” much, much sooner.

It’s the client’s wealth of wisdom, channeled through your pen.

“But I don’t feel comfortable letting someone else take credit for my work.”

Whenever I present the opportunity to earn a (lucrative) living as a ghostwriter to fellow writers, even after I demystify the craft, this is always the first response I hear back.

And, while I understand it (because we’re all human and want to be recognized and “seen” in some way), I’d like to present a few helpful reframes:

- **You aren’t selling your pen. You are renting it.** First of all, you aren’t selling your soul. You’re taking a skill set you’ve built for yourself and lending it out in exchange for money.

That's the trade. Nobody is forcing you to do this. My goal here is to just let you know that it's an option—and point out that you are leaving a lot of money on the table by thinking you are “above” helping other people improve the quality of their writing too.

- **You couldn't write what you wrote without the client.**

Second, this is the nuance I notice the vast majority of writers who despise the idea of ghostwriting conveniently “forget.” They get frustrated when they see their work out in the world with someone else's name at the top, but fail to recognize that it was a co-construction. Sure, you were the one who shuffled the sentences around and chose a few of the adverbs, but you pulled the majority of the “ideas” from someone else. So it's a bit unfair to think you're the one who deserves all the credit.

- **If you can earn a lucrative living writing under your own name, then you should.** Finally, if you think you really do deserve all the credit, then you *should* write your own Tweets and Twitter Threads and LinkedIn posts and articles and books. You *should* pursue your own career as a writer. But there's a reason why so many writers struggle to earn a living writing for themselves: because again, most people who have the time to write, don't have something valuable to say—and most people who have something valuable to say, don't have the time to write. Ghostwriting is just a way to climb out of the “struggling artist” cliché, shop at Whole Foods, and treat yourself to a few nice vacations per year while you keep building your own talents as a writer.

But let me take this one step further, because I believe radical candor is important:

The vast majority of the writers who hate the idea of ghostwriting because they “want the credit” are, from my observation, underpaid freelance writers who think they are more talented than they are. They

conflate word count with value—and think just because they wrote “800 words” means it’s valuable.

And it’s not.

From the very beginning, I always viewed ghostwriting as a way for me to practice. Because what good is “getting credit for your work” if the work you’re producing is mediocre? It’s all ego, and a short-sighted view on your career as a writer.

And besides: status and recognition doesn’t pay the bills (lots of famous people are broke).

Money does.

Freelance Writing vs Ghostwriting

Which leads us to an important question...

What is ghostwriting? And how is it different from freelance writing?

The way I delineate between these two career paths is that freelance writers get paid to write for *brands*, whereas ghostwriters get paid to write for *people*.

I first noticed this small but powerful nuance at the advertising agency I worked at downtown Chicago. As an entry-level copywriter, I would spend hours each day writing social media captions, blog posts, and newsletters for all sorts of brands—ranging from iconic Chicago restaurants to liposuction clinics. I cared a lot about my career, and poured my heart and soul into these posts, only for them to get a couple hundred views online.

And then, after work, in an effort to keep up my personal writing habit, I’d write a quick answer on Quora. Something short, nothing fancy. And within just a few months of writing consistently online, I noticed my Quora answers starting to go massively viral. Hundreds of thousands, even millions of views on a single post. And the only difference I could tell (since I was writing both—for clients, and for myself) was that during the day, I was publishing under a brand.

But at night, I was publishing under my own name.

This is what made me start to realize that people don't want to hear from brands. Especially on the Internet. People want to hear from *other people*. When an airplane crashes, they don't want to read a press release from the airline—they want to hear directly from the CEO. When the stock market tanks, they don't want to know what a bank thinks—they want to know what a veteran trader like Michael Burry (who called the Great Financial Crisis of 2008) thinks. As readers, we're looking for this human-to-human connection.

That's my definition of freelance writing versus ghostwriting.

More subjectively, and why I believe writers should avoid calling themselves “freelance writers” is because... when you hear the term “freelance writer,” who comes to mind? An overworked, underpaid, burned-out twenty-something, sitting at a coffee shop with their MacBook, 67 browser tabs open, compulsively checking Instagram between paragraphs?

When you call yourself a “freelance writer,” this is the image you are conjuring in people's heads. Everybody knows “freelance writing” is a career path for the lost and confused. You stumble into it. Someone randomly asks you one day, “Can you help me write a blog post about bacteria in the gut?” You say sure, and accept whatever amount of money they're willing to give you—because you've never been paid “to write” before. And then six years later, there you are, still writing blog posts about bacteria in the gut for slightly above minimum wage—along with newsletters about dating in your 50s, or how to buy life insurance. (Not that there's anything wrong with being paid to write about these topics.)

But words matter.

And when you call yourself something different, the way people perceive your value changes.

(Don't believe me? What's the perception difference between a “cashier” and a “concierge?” Exactly.)

When you call yourself a “ghostwriter,” the image that comes to mind is not a scatter-brained twenty-something struggling to pay rent. No, a “ghostwriter” sounds like a highly valuable, highly skilled specialist—which is what allows you to charge a premium. In my case, I specialized in ghostwriting 800-word thought leadership articles specifically for startup founders, CEOs, and investors. That was it. One service, for one particular type of client, and nothing else. When a client would ask if I could also help them write website copy, I said no. When a client asked if I could help them also write landing pages, newsletters, or even speeches, I said no. Why? Because then I wouldn’t have been a premium ghostwriter with a specialized skill set.

I would have been a premium ghostwriter who, when asked, quickly and without hesitation transformed back into a commodity freelance writer.

(And later, we’re going to get into why specializing in one type of ghostwriting is what allows you to charge more and work less.)

The People Who Need Ghostwriters

So, who needs a ghostwriter?

Anyone with expertise!

- Founders
- CEOs
- VPs
- Sales people
- Yoga instructors
- Coaches
- Consultants
- Therapists
- Personal trainers
- Course creators
- YouTubers

- Podcasters
- Professional athletes
- Professional musicians
- NYT best-selling authors
- Public speakers
- Venture capitalists
- Music teachers
- Film directors
- Etc.

Anyone who “knows something” and would benefit from other people learning from them needs a ghostwriter. (And if they don’t need one right now, they will as soon as they begin to scale.) Because a ghostwriter’s job isn’t to think for them. A ghostwriter’s job is to help them clarify their “thinking,” and then help them amplify and share that “thinking” in the most scalable way possible.

The Top 8 Most Popular Ghostwriting Gigs

So, what can you ghostwrite?

All sorts of things!

Ghostwriting opportunities are everywhere. When I was a little kid, my mom and I were driving to the grocery store when all of a sudden, the signs on the road started to spring to life. “Mom!” I shouted. “What!” she mirrored back. “That says STOP!” I said, pointing to the red STOP sign across the street. “It does!” she said in celebration, realizing what was happening.

“And, and, AND, and THAT says ‘55th Street!’ Which means we’re on 55th Street!” I said. My brain was exploding. The whole world was starting to make sense.

“You’re reading!” she exclaimed.

“AND, and THAT says RENTAL, and THAT says CHEVY, and THAT says REPUB, REPUBUB, REPUBLICAN!”

In an instant, the whole world opened up to me. Everything conveyed a message. And now, my blindfold was off. I saw how words gave human beings direction, told them where to go and what was what. To read was to understand—which meant to write was to hold power.

Anywhere you see words, remember: someone, somewhere, got paid to write them.

That said, not all writing opportunities are created equal. And some are much more lucrative than others.

These are the 8 ghostwriting gigs that are most in-demand (in no particular order), and where I would encourage you to start:

- Ghostwriting Social Media Accounts (Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Ghostwriting Landing Pages & Sales Scripts
- Ghostwriting Startup Pitches & Pitch Decks
- Ghostwriting Thought Leadership Articles
- Ghostwriting Educational Email Courses
- Ghostwriting Keynote Speeches
- Ghostwriting Books & eBooks
- Ghostwriting Video Scripts

The 3 Different Types Of Ghostwriting Relationships

We are going to get into how you can “niche down” and specialize as a ghostwriter here soon, but first I want to give you a lay of the land.

Broadly speaking, there are 3 different types of relationships (and engagements) you can have with clients:

- **(Beginner) Autopilot:** This is where someone already has tons of existing content, and your job as a ghostwriter is to repurpose existing content into net-new content. For example, maybe the client has written a book, or has a YouTube channel with dozens of recorded keynote speeches. Your job as a ghostwriter would be to go through all this content

and essentially “rewrite” it into new and different formats: turning excerpts of their book into Tweets, turning Tweets into LinkedIn posts, turning LinkedIn posts into blog posts, turning blog posts into newsletters, etc. This is the easiest type of ghostwriting to do (since you’re playing with pre-existing material), which also makes it the easiest type of ghostwriting to sell (the client knows you’re “rewriting” more than you’re “creating”).

- **(Advanced) Conversational:** This is what my agency did. We had weekly calls with clients and brought topics to the table we thought would resonate well with their target readers. Sometimes those topics would be news related—something relevant happening in their industry. Sometimes those topics were more “timeless,” like tips for managing a team, or mistakes they made early on in their careers. Either way, the method was to have these weekly or bi-weekly conversations, give the client questions as prompts, let them riff, record the conversations, and then refine their ideas into high-quality written content. It’s worth noting this type of ghostwriting is harder than working from pre-existing material, and also requires the writer to learn & build the skill of “interviewing” clients—which we’ll get into later.
- **(Expert) Life’s Work:** This type of ghostwriting is almost exclusively reserved for books, and maybe speeches. Instead of having lots of little clients, you only have one or maybe two big clients at a time—and you spend all of your time with them. Hours and hours of recorded conversations; transcribing and combing through those transcripts; organizing the content; rewriting the content. They are hiring you to write their “life’s work,” which means you literally need to dedicate a meaningful chunk of your own life to helping them express theirs. This type of ghostwriting is the hardest, and these

opportunities usually require the ghostwriter to be a successful writer on their own. (For example: Mark Manson, the author of *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fck**, ghostwriting Will Smith's memoir, *Will*.)

Think of these three tiers as your career trajectory as a ghostwriter.

You will most likely start by autopiloting someone else's content. This is your opportunity to read, listen, consume, learn, and synthesize—and get paid for it.

But as you build relationships with clients, as you internalize their ways of thinking and prove you are capable of keeping up with them mentally, they will trust you more and more. They will want to get your opinion on “something they've been thinking about.” And you will naturally ascend to the next tier—where part of your value isn't just in the writing, but in the conversation and the stress-testing of the “thinking.”

Until eventually, usually after several years of working with a client, they may come to you and say: “I'm ready to write my book.”

And it will feel natural for them to ask for your help, first.

CHAPTER 3

The 7 Benefits Of Ghostwriting

WHY IS GHOSTWRITING SUCH A tremendous career path for writers?

Because you get paid so much more than just money.

Benefit #1: You get paid to learn.

Ghostwriting is a life hack for getting paid to learn from experts in their fields.

Our very first client at my ghostwriting agency was the founder of a company that brokered multimillion-dollar deals between celebrities and big brands. (He put us on hold halfway through our first content call because “Warren” was on the other line—as in Warren Buffet.)

For 30 minutes, we got to ask this guy any and every question we could think of: “How did you first start your company? What advice would you give to other entrepreneurs who want to get into branded partnerships? What makes an effective branded partnership? What do you do when a branded partnership goes wrong? How do you find the right celebrity for each brand campaign? What was it like working

with Jay-Z?” We learned so much. This is a guy who would routinely charge brands upwards of \$50,000 for an hour of consulting. And instead, at the end of the call, we sent *him* an invoice.

“I’ll have my accounting team process this right away. Thanks for the call guys,” he said, and then hung up.

My co-founder and I looked at each other like we’d just robbed a bank and gotten away with it.

Benefit #2: You get paid to practice.

Part of what makes mastering the craft of writing so difficult is that it’s a lonely endeavor.

It’s just you, at your desk, shuffling around sentences, swapping adjectives and adverbs, and subjectively trying to decide whether you think it’s better to say, “It wasn’t until I decided” or “Finally, I decided.” Which is why the purpose of the cohort-based course I co-run today, Ship 30 for 30, is to help writers stop “practicing in private” and start Practicing In Public. It’s a whole lot easier to learn what works and what doesn’t when you’re actively hitting publish online, putting your work in front of prospective readers, and gathering objective data around which topics, stories, perspectives, insights, and frameworks are resonating.

Ghostwriting takes this a step further.

Ghostwriting inherently comes with an audience—and that audience is the client (or the client’s marketing department, or sometimes even the client’s agent, book publisher, or significant other). Everything you write, you aren’t just writing for yourself, by yourself. You are writing for a specific person (the client). And, more times than not, that person is a smart, sophisticated, highly intelligent individual with strong opinions about “the writing”: how they want to sound, which topics they want to cover, who they want their target reader to be, and so on.

When I first started ghostwriting, I found this to be incredibly uncomfortable. It was nerve-racking for me to spend 1-2 hours writing an article and send it to the client, only for them to return back with a long email articulating everything that was “wrong” with it. I wasn’t used to having this external source of feedback on my writing (much easier to hide in your studio apartment and never hit publish). But, very quickly, I started to realize these were just “growing pains”—and my writing skills were accelerating at a pace I’d never achieved on my own.

And unlike a college writing program or MFA, I didn’t have to put myself into six figures of debt to unlock this new growth curve.

Ghostwriting is how you can get paid six figures to rack up thousands of hours of practice.

Benefit #3: You get paid to build a network.

I am not exaggerating when I say ghostwriting has allowed me to build a multibillion-dollar network.

If I lost everything and needed a job tomorrow, I know I could make five phone calls and one of the founders or executives or investors on the other end of the line would hire me. That’s because I have connected with so many decision-makers, so many higher-ups at global companies, that I have built enough “relationship equity” to protect my career for decades.

Here’s a little story to show you what I’m talking about:

In 2020, my co-founder and I decided to scale our ghostwriting agency down. We had grown too quickly, and worked ourselves way past burnout. We made the right decision (luckily) because four months later, the COVID-19 pandemic started—and had we not scaled things back, the business probably wouldn’t have survived.

As the economy came to a screeching halt, I was terrified that I was about to lose everything. In a matter of weeks, I watched my

net worth plummet nearly 90%. My girlfriend had lost her job. I had minimal savings. We'd just adopted a dog. And, for a minute there, I thought we were going to end up right back in that dumpster fire of a studio apartment, back in Chicago.

Well, pressure makes diamonds, and one morning while my girlfriend and I were doing yoga in our living room (trying to not think about how the world seemed to be ending), she set up her phone on the coffee table so we could tune-in to a yoga class on Instagram Live. And all of a sudden, I started thinking about how the pandemic was going to change the way people interacted in the world—and came up with an idea for a tech startup. I could barely focus for the rest of the hour, and as soon as we were done, I jolted up and ran to my office.

I started by calling up a few close friends, seeing who would be interested in building this new venture. Which escalated to me calling up former clients with whom I'd built close relationships, seeing if they'd be interested in investing. I figured, if the economy was crumbling, one way of preserving "job security" for me and my friends would be to raise some money and swing for the fences.

30 days later, I had a team of seven people and a dozen investors onboard with over \$1 million committed—based on nothing but an idea.

Even though we ultimately decided not to take the money and pursue the venture (the economy cooled off, and after some careful thinking I realized this idea was born out of fear, not true inspiration), the whole experience made me realize how much relationship equity I'd built over the years—and how many people were willing to bet on me, work with me, or write me a check simply because of the relationships I'd built being their ghostwriter.

This is the power of ghostwriting (and being great at your craft) for industry leaders.

They are the ones who pull all the strings.

Benefit #4: You get paid to know about trends early.

Here's a wild story for you:

In late 2016, just two months after quitting my full-time job, I started ghostwriting for a serial entrepreneur who was very early to the crypto scene. For those who remember, 2017 was the year crypto currencies & platforms started to go mainstream—but in 2016, it was still a relatively “underground” industry.

One day, we hopped on a call and he was all fired up about this platform called Ethereum (which had been released just a little over a year prior). He wanted to write about the impact Ethereum was going to have on all sorts of different industries, and he asked if I felt comfortable writing about this new thing called “blockchain technology.” My mentor in Chicago had always told me the key to entrepreneurship is to say “Yes” and figure out how to do it later.

So I said yes.

I proceeded to spend the next two weeks doing nothing but reading about Ethereum: how it worked, what vernacular like “tokenization” and “zero-knowledge proof protocols” meant, and how to buy “Ether”—the digital cryptocurrency native to the Ethereum platform. Anything I was confused about, I would just email the client, ask to hop on another call (“...to make the writing better”) and he would explain it to me like I was an 8-year-old.

At the end of one of our calls, he said, “I don’t want to tell you what to do, because it depends on your financial situation, but I would buy some Ether.” My financial situation, to be clear, was I’d just started working for myself and still living in my tiny studio apartment, but my monthly burn rate was significantly lower than my now-skyrocketing income. I had quickly stacked almost \$20,000 in savings.

I got off that call and sunk almost all of it into Ethereum. I didn’t know whether I was being stupid or experiencing the benefit of “inner circle” knowledge—but I figured, as a 26-year-old on a whole new

career trajectory, this was the perfect time in my life to take risks.

And a year later, in 2017, when crypto went mainstream, my Ether had ballooned to over \$250,000.

Now, obviously this was a very rare and unique situation. But this was the first time I experienced the power of being surrounded by smart, successful people who knew more about emerging industries than I did. And in my years as a ghostwriter since, I've seen first-hand how these "inner circles" operate. This is how angel investors in startup ecosystems get involved in companies long before the general public finds out about them, and how company executives find out about high-powered positions long before any sort of formal announcement is made.

Not a bad tangential benefit when you're the ghostwriter for these in-the-know types of people.

Benefit #5: You get paid to experience different lives.

If the art of ghostwriting is learning how to write as-if you are someone else, then one of the biggest benefits of ghostwriting is getting to feel the feeling of living life in someone else's shoes.

One of my favorite ghostwriting experiences was in 2018, when I got introduced to a Grammy-winning musician who was working on a new tech venture (the crypto client referenced earlier is the one who introduced me). They were looking for a ghostwriter to work with their founding team to author thought leadership articles, and since I'd made that "my niche," I was first in line.

I had grown up listening to this artist's music, and found it a bit surreal when I flew out to meet him. He picked me up from the airport and we drove to his ranch in the mountains. On the way, I asked him all sorts of questions about the music industry—and whenever he looked at me curiously, I just reiterated: "This might make for great writing!"

When we got to his house, he gave me a quick tour of the sprawling estate and then took me to his multimillion-dollar in-home studio. There was a giant room with sky-high ceilings to record a full orchestra, multiple production spaces, and an entire wall dedicated to vintage keyboards. I played classical piano for 20 years, so I gravitated there first and let my fingers graze over the keys.

In awe, I said, “Your creative process must be so different today. You have so many sounds to choose from!”

That’s when he let out a deep sigh and said, “Actually, it’s killing me”—and took a seat on the velvet couch nearby.

We sat and talked for what felt like 30 minutes, but was probably six hours. He told me about how he used to make music in a small garage in the city. How he’d mix right on his laptop with a pair of shitty headphones—not in a giant studio like this. How, all growing up, he thought he would be so much more creative once he had millions of dollars worth of equipment and a handful of Grammys validating his talents—and how, instead, the awards and the money had only made his creative process harder.

“Can I tell you something I’ve never told anyone else?” he said.

These are the words every ghostwriter yearns to hear.

“I don’t even like creating here,” he said. “I think I’m going to rent a small studio apartment in the city to make my next album. And not tell anyone. Just me and my laptop.” Then he got up and reached for a pair of clearly worn headphones on a nearby shelf—a memento from his former life.

All of a sudden, my studio apartment came to mind. By this point, I had moved from Chicago to Los Angeles and was living in a nice 1-bedroom apartment. But not a day went by where I didn’t tell myself how different things were going to be “once I made it.” And here, one of the most famous musicians in the world was telling me: newsflash, it doesn’t get easier. *It gets harder.*

I have reflected on this experience quite a bit. And how fortunate

I was to get to learn such a timeless life lesson from someone further down the path.

As a ghostwriter, pay close attention for when these types of moments present themselves.

Because they're worth way more than whatever you're being paid for the project.

Benefit #6: You get paid to learn how to write in different voices.

I have ghostwritten for egomaniac founders of Silicon Valley tech startups.

I have ghostwritten for prophetic venture capitalists.

I have ghostwritten for nerdy, socially awkward technologists.

And I have ghostwritten for female gynecologists, sex experts, and founders of literotica companies.

One of the biggest things I've learned from ghostwriting for so many different types of people is that the cliché advice “you have to find your voice” is wrong. For years, I thought I needed to “find my voice” as a writer. And what ghostwriting taught me is that you don't “find” your voice.

You create it.

A voice is just a combination of identifiable attributes. These attributes can include, but are not limited to: word choice, cadence and rhythm, structure and format, even the decision to use (or not use) data to back up an opinion.

For example: how do you know you're reading Hemingway and not Faulkner?

Because Hemingway's sentences are short and terse, whereas Faulkner's are long and winding. So, if you wanted to write like Hemingway, what would you do? You'd write short, terse sentences. And if you wanted to write like Faulkner, what would you do? You'd

write long, winding sentences. It's easy to see how you can "create" a voice when you are imitating someone else. But when it comes to creating your own, it's hard not to immediately feel like you're facing an existential crisis.

As a result, most writers spend their entire lives trying to "find" their voice—which, in my opinion, is a sneaky way of deferring responsibility. Writing seems more magical if you sit down, close your eyes, and pray something prolific comes out of your fingertips. It's less magical when you realize a voice is just a combination of identifiable attributes, and you can create any voice you'd like by mixing and matching different identifiable attributes together—no different than the way a painter mixes colors on a palette.

But this puts the power of "voice creation" in the hands of the writer.

And that level of responsibility can be terrifying.

It's worth admitting how much I struggled with this too. After I graduated from college with a degree in Fiction Writing, all I could think about was how I needed to "find" my voice—and I wasted a lot of time as a result. It wasn't until I started ghostwriting that I realized voices aren't "found," they are created. And it's a whole lot easier to learn how to create a voice from scratch when it isn't your own.

Because when it's someone else's, you're less emotionally attached.

Benefit #7: You get paid to write about subjects you're passionate about, but don't have the credibility or experience to write for yourself (yet).

Lastly, whenever I talk to aspiring writers and encourage them to start writing online, one of the most common "excuses" I hear (as to why they can't) is: "I'm not an expert."

First of all, nobody is an expert. Even the most successful, most educated people in any industry are still learning and making things up as they go. The crypto boom in 2017 showed me this first-hand. I met all sorts of entrepreneurs who were raising tens of millions of dollars for their crypto platforms calling themselves “experts.” In reality, they were reading the same articles as everyone else, trying their best to make sense of where the future was headed. (And if you’re thinking, “Yea but that’s crypto,” I promise, it’s not just crypto. This is happening everywhere, all the time.)

Second of all, if you really don’t feel comfortable writing about a topic until you become “an expert” (good luck defining that imaginary line for yourself), ghostwriting is a marvelous playground in the meantime. For example, even though I failed math in high school, I love reading about finance—specifically day trading. I love learning about how economies work, and how to build wealth. It’s unlikely I’ll write seriously about any of these topics for quite a while (because I recognize I’m hardly the most knowledgeable person on these topics), but I’ve gotten to “get my fix” by ghostwriting for dozens of people in the financial sector.

I lend them my pen, and they lend me their unique and differentiated insights.

Voila.

CHAPTER 4

The Big Ghostwriting Mistakes

The best ghostwriters are writers themselves.

I firmly believe the reason I found so much success with ghostwriting, so quickly, was because I racked up thousands of hours practicing on myself, first. By the time I landed my first ghostwriting client, I had already written over 1,000 Quora answers, accumulated millions of views on my writing, created multiple email courses for my own website, and sold tens of thousands of dollars worth of eBooks. As a result, ghostwriting didn't feel like an entirely new skill. It felt like getting paid to do what I was already doing for myself, for someone else.

And this is where so many aspiring ghostwriters go wrong.

The reason freelance writers struggle to increase their rates, and never break into the world of Premium Ghostwriting, is because they don't practice on themselves. They don't nurture their own daily writing habit. They don't build their own audience, try to grow their own newsletter, or sell their own books or products. They don't learn "what works" by enduring the growing pains themselves—and instead, sell services based on what they think people want, not based on what they have mastered themselves.

As a result, they make the mistake of thinking their value is in

their *effort* ("I'm working so hard! I deserve to get paid more!") and not in their undeniable skill, validated in public.

If this is you, don't feel bad about it.

Because I'm going to tell you how to fix it.

Turn what you love to create for yourself into your ghostwriting service.

Think of ghostwriting as your opportunity to earn a (premium) dividend on your talents as a writer:

- If you love writing viral Twitter Threads, you should also ghostwrite viral Twitter Threads.
- If you love optimizing your own LinkedIn profile, you should also optimize and ghostwrite other people's LinkedIn profiles.
- If you love creating social media strategy decks, you should also create and ghostwrite social media strategy decks for agencies.
- If you love writing essays, you should also ghostwrite essays.
- If you love writing sci-fi novels, you should also ghostwrite sci-fi novels.

And so on.

Why? First, because ghostwriting will pay you much more in the short term than your own writing probably will. Second, because ghostwriting will make your own writing better—and vice versa (you are getting paid to practice and accelerate your own talents). And third, it's much, much easier to get paid a premium to ghostwrite things you already know how to create for yourself versus trying to ghostwrite assets you've never created before.

Said in reverse...

Here's the golden rule: Whatever "type" of ghostwriting you're selling (whatever service you're providing), you should be actively

practicing and creating those same assets for yourself:

- If you're selling "ghostwriting someone's Twitter account," you should be actively writing & proving YOU can build an audience on Twitter.
- If you're selling "ghostwriting someone's LinkedIn account," you should be actively writing & proving YOU can build an audience on LinkedIn.
- If you're selling "ghostwritten educational email courses," you should be creating YOUR OWN educational email courses and actively building your own email list.
- If you're selling "weekly newsletters," you should have YOUR OWN weekly newsletter.
- If you're selling "ghostwritten eBooks," you should have YOUR OWN eBook (or eBooks) for sale.
- Etc.

This goes back to first-principles thinking: so many writers just want to skip to "making money," not realizing that the bottleneck to increasing their earnings isn't "effort." *It's skill.* And what's the fastest way to improve your skills as a writer? Either work for free (removing the friction of needing to "get paid" in order to practice) or practice on yourself (or both). Because if you can't write things that make clients happy *for free*, and if you can't get people to read your own writing *for free*, then you have no business asking people for money—regardless of how "hard" you work.

Now, once you've established baseline proficiency in a specific type of writing, here are the most-common mistakes freelance writers and aspiring ghostwriters make that cause their earnings to hit a ceiling:

Mistake #1: Trying to write “anything” for “anyone.”

Ask any freelance writer or beginner ghostwriter what they do, and what you’ll hear is this:

“I do a little bit of everything! I write social media posts for a few fitness brands, landing pages for an e-commerce company, marketing emails for a nail salon, and I run the Instagram pages for a few fashion influencers.”

The logic here is that by providing “anything” to “anyone,” these writers are increasing their chances of landing as many clients as possible.

And it’s actually the opposite.

Writing “anything” for “anyone” makes it harder to land clients—not easier.

For two reasons:

- **Reason #1: When you say “I do a little bit of everything,” what you’re really saying is, “I have no idea what my value is, what I’m good at, or how I can help you the most.”** As a result, clients don’t view you as a specialist or someone who possesses valuable expertise. Instead, they view you as a “do-er.” You don’t know your value, which means the client now has to figure out what makes you valuable. And guess what? When it’s the client deciding what makes you valuable, they aren’t going to err on the side of “premium.” They’re going to err on the side of “cheap commodity”—which is why so many freelance writers have no pricing power.
- **Reason #2: When you write “anything” for “anyone,” you make it impossible to create any efficiencies for yourself and your 1-person business.** Writing a Tweet is different from writing a newsletter. Writing a newsletter is different from writing website copy. And writing website copy

is different from writing a landing page, or a speech, or an opinion article. Which means the more “different” services you provide as a freelance writer and/or ghostwriter, the higher the switching cost every time you shift your brain from creating one type of asset to another, the harder it is for you to master the creation of one specific asset, and the harder it is for you to create efficiencies for yourself. If you want to know why most freelance writers and beginner ghostwriters are burned out and always complaining about being “over-worked and underpaid,” this is why.

And I am sensitive to these problems because I experienced them for years.

Whenever a client would offer me money to help them with something outside my wheelhouse, it was hard to rationalize saying “No” (especially when I was afraid of not being able to pay rent). When a client I’d built a great relationship with wanted me to take on more, it was hard for me to set a boundary and insist that wasn’t my specialty. And when my earnings started to ramp up, and suddenly “everyone” wanted my help with “everything,” it was hard for me to not chase the money.

But these decisions are what landed me in the hospital.

In 2018, our ghostwriting agency was growing like crazy. For almost an entire year straight, we were hiring 2 full-time employees each month, every month, just to keep up with demand. We were landing upwards of 10 new clients per month (over \$30,000 in new, recurring revenue), over and over and over again. And at the same time, the crypto world was booming, and any event I attended, any “industry” dinner I found myself at, people literally threw money at me to help them with their messaging. I was overwhelmed with opportunity, and for a period of time I said “Yes” to almost every offer that came my way: ghostwriting fundraising decks, ghostwriting whitepapers, ghostwriting top-tier thought leadership articles for our biggest-name

clients, and even taking stock options in some of these startups as a “messaging consultant.”

I did “everything” for “everyone”—and it didn’t take very long for it to severely impact my health.

One afternoon, I was driving to a meeting when my dad, a surgeon, called me back. I had left him a message saying I had a weird rash on my stomach and was starting to experience some pain in my ribs. “Go to the hospital right now,” he said, as I was pulling into the parking lot for my noon lunch. “You have shingles.”

What causes shingles? Usually an immense amount of stress.

A few hours later, the pain hit. My entire rib cage felt like it was being squeezed by an industrial car crusher, with a thin, bubbly red rash wrapped around my torso. I spent a month on antibiotics and painkillers. And I came to the uncomfortable realization that if my strategy for “making more money” was to work myself to death, then my strategy was flawed.

Mistake #2: Treating every client as a blank canvas.

Ghostwriting is *mysterious*.

Ghostwriting is *sexy*.

As a result, a lot of writers who enter the world of ghostwriting think they need to treat each and every client the same way Michelangelo treated each block of marble. They think they’re producing “art.” And you’re not. Sure, you might be creating important work, but you are not writing *The Next Great American Novel*. The goal, and how you increase your earnings and decrease your time investment/effort as a Premium Ghostwriter, is by providing a specialized service, to solve a specific problem, for a very specific type of person.

This is what allows you to create efficiencies for your 1-person business.

Every client “thinks” they are radically different. And the reality is, most of them share more similarities than differences. In fact, the same “article template” or “Twitter Thread template” or “LinkedIn story template” that works for a startup founder can also work for a therapist, can also work for a nutritionist, can also work for a plumber. And you should view this as a good thing for you and your ghostwriting business—not a bad thing.

Templates, frameworks, and reliable processes are how you repeat success over and over again.

(And the easiest way for you to create these “proven templates” is to practice relentlessly on yourself—find the ones that work, and then get paid a dividend on your “proven templates” by lending them out to clients.)

Quick story to show you how this plays out:

Two years ago, after winding down my ghostwriting agency and starting to only take on top-tier, premium ghostwriting clients, I had the opportunity to ghostwrite for an incredibly well-known founder in the Silicon Valley startup world. This guy wasn’t mainstream famous like Mark Zuckerberg or Jeff Bezos, but he’d had a multibillion-dollar exit—and everyone in “that world” knew who he was. He’d been working on a new venture for a couple years now, and was getting ready to launch—and wanted to make an announcement that would send shockwaves through the ecosystem.

“I don’t want to hire a PR firm. I don’t want to do any of the conventional stuff,” he said, a week before launch and the first time I’d ever talked to him on the phone. “I want to drop one Twitter Thread, and make it go viral.”

That’s a lot of pressure for a ghostwriter!

But I took it as a challenge.

A younger me would have treated this client like a blank canvas—and whatever we wrote together like a work of art. But the older, wiser me knew better than to try to reinvent the wheel during crunch time.

I had one chance to make an impact on him and prove my skills as a ghostwriter were worth the premium he was paying. So, instead of treating him like a blank canvas, I went digging through my entire library of content—*my* content. I looked for Twitter Threads, LinkedIn posts, and even articles I'd written that had gone massively viral, and tried to find one I could use as a “skeleton” for the message he was trying to communicate.

And to date, that Twitter Thread we wrote together is one of the most viral things I've ever written on the Internet.

The moment we hit publish, it ripped. Other Silicon Valley founders shared it. News publications picked it up. Journalists started writing about it. Podcasts and even television shows flooded into his DMs, asking him to come on their shows for an interview. When all was said and done, that one Twitter Thread led to hundreds of millions of impressions, millions of dollars of earned media, and even a book deal—a traditional publisher wanting to buy the rights to the content we'd published in Twitter Thread form.

Now, did I know all of that was going to happen?

Of course not.

But I knew that using the skeleton of “something else” that had also gone viral would dramatically increase our chances of achieving a similar outcome.

Mistake #3: Being afraid to do “Free Work” to get your foot in the door.

This might be the biggest mistake of all.

In 2017, a few months into ghostwriting, I went back to my alma mater: Columbia College Chicago.

I was visiting an old teacher of mine, and he asked if I'd be willing to speak to one of his classes. He had been following the success of my writing online, and wanted me to share some of my “lessons learned” since graduating.

I walked in and took a seat next to him in front of about fifteen students, all positioned in a half-moon semicircle facing the front of the classroom. Just a few years beforehand, I had been sitting exactly where they were now—wondering how on earth I was going to earn a living as a writer.

My teacher opened the discussion by asking, “Cole, if there is one piece of advice you would give the students here on how to find a job as a writer out of college, what would you tell them?” At this point, I was earning \$20,000 per month as a ghostwriter, and in a very short amount of time had learned *a lot* about what people with money—the ones who run companies and create jobs in our society—value in the people they hire.

“Work for free,” I said.

I let the words hang—and the silence in the room was deafening.

A few awkward seconds later, my teacher cleared his throat and stumbled back into the conversation: “I think what Cole is trying to say is... don’t be afraid to take on new projects and charge a reasonable rate.”

I shook my head.

“Nope. I’m saying work for free.”

And, almost all at once, all the students started speaking over each other: *“Then how are we supposed to earn a living? How are we supposed to pay rent? How are we supposed to get paid for our time?”*

Whenever I present this “Work For Free” perspective to writers, this is always the response I hear back.

And it reveals The Great Career Lie that exists in our society.

The vast majority of people spend their entire lives thinking they are owed a paycheck. They think, by attending college and getting a degree, they are owed a job. They think that when they “spend time working,” someone owes them compensation. They think that success, and getting all the things they want and desire in life, is a direct reflection of how “hard they work.”

And this is false—all of it.

Paychecks don't just magically get deposited into your bank account once you become an adult. Paychecks come from people. And those people need to perform some sort of role in society—they need to sell services or products or information—to *someone else* in order to provide for themselves. Which means “your paycheck” isn't really about you. It has nothing to do with how “hard” you work, or how much “effort” you put forth. Your paycheck, and how much you earn, is a direct reflection of the value you provide *someone else*—*who is providing value to someone else, who is providing value to someone else*, and so on.

It's not about effort. It's about outcomes.

The reason I preach “Working For Free” isn't really because I believe you should work hard and get paid nothing for it. It's because “Working For Free” reveals the bottleneck on your earning potential. College professors (like mine) think they are preparing students for the real world by encouraging them to “charge a fair wage” and “get paid for their efforts.” But what happens instead is a whole bunch of writers graduate from school thinking their value is in their “effort,” their “time,” and how many words they write—which causes them to have zero awareness over which outcome they are being paid to generate, or the value of that outcome to *someone else*. And then they wonder why “nobody makes a living as a writer.”

But here are the benefits of “Working For Free,” to start:

- **“Working For Free” reduces your risk and accelerates your skills.** The bottleneck on your earning potential isn't your effort. It's your skill, and your ability to produce valuable outcomes for whoever is hiring you. And the bottleneck to improving your skill is “hours of practice” and feedback. When you charge someone, even if you're charging \$7 per hour, you are setting a financial expectation—and if you are objectively unskilled at the service you are providing, you are going to fail and they are going to fire you. Whereas

if you DON'T charge anything, and you make the trade clear from the beginning—"I want to improve my skills, so I won't charge you unless you absolutely love what we create together"—then you are removing your single greatest barrier to *skill acquisition*. You give up your \$7 per hour in the short-term for massive upside in the long-term (because again: your earning potential isn't about your ability to "work harder," it's about your ability to generate valuable outcomes over and over again).

- **"Working For Free" makes it easy for people who aren't interested to give you a chance.** I am not exaggerating when I say that "Free Work" has led to millions of dollars of opportunities for me. "Free Work" is how I have become friends with some of the most well-connected entrepreneurs, executives, and investors in the world. And "Free Work" is how I have landed *hundreds* of paying clients. When you put a price on something, people have to think extra hard about whether or not they want to buy what you're selling. But if you say, "Look, I believe this is going to help you so much, I'll do the first one for free—just so you can see what I'm talking about," and you over-deliver, you just traded a few "free" hours for limitless upside. I've had clients that were so skeptical of working together, people who insisted ghostwriting would never work for them because "nobody could capture their voice," who I knew I could deliver for—if they would just give me the chance. So, I did the first piece for free. I proved I was the right person for the job. And, almost immediately, they went from being hesitant to work together to asking me to help them with everything (and paying me whatever I asked for).
- **"Working For Free" is really just a marketing cost—except with more upside potential.** This is what solopreneurs and

writers who work for themselves don't understand. Every form of marketing takes time. It takes time to create content for yourself. It takes time to build an audience. It takes time to do cold outreach. It takes time to respond to inbound inquiries. It takes time to run ads. Etc. What is "Free Work?" It's just a little bit of time. Except the difference is that "Free Work" for someone you know is semi-interested in what you have to offer has a much, much higher likelihood of converting into a paid client than running a random Facebook ad or sending out a dozen cold outreach emails.

So many writers underestimate the ROI of working for free.

Let me be clear:

- I am NOT advocating for you to work for free *forever*.
- I am NOT saying you shouldn't care about earning money.
- I am NOT saying you should run your business like a non-profit.
- I am NOT saying you should let people take advantage of you.

I use the term "Free Work" to make the point that you cannot, and should not, expect your earnings to increase if you are incapable of making a client happy *for free*.

If you can't make them happy *for free*, you now know what you need to improve in order to be able to start charging people (and more "Free Work" will get you there faster).

And, trust me, if you CAN make them happy *for free*, they will throw money at you.

Because talented writers are hard to find.

CHAPTER 5

How To Niche Down As A Ghostwriter

IF YOU HAVEN'T GATHERED BY now, this book isn't just about ghostwriting.

It's about solopreneurship. It's about breaking beliefs. And it's about positioning yourself as a premium specialist (ghostwriter) and not an easily replaceable commodity (freelance writer).

Unfortunately, what I am about to share with you is the hardest belief to break of all. But it's required in order for you to consistently earn \$10,000 or \$20,000 per month without working yourself to death.

Here it is:

Clients are not buying your ability to “write words.”

They are buying your ability to write the RIGHT words—which means they are buying your knowledge within a niche, and your expertise creating a specific asset.

When a client hires a ghostwriter, they are not looking for someone to transcribe what comes out of their mouth. Technology, AI, or a virtual assistant in the Philippines can do that (for way less than whatever you're charging). They are also not looking for someone to “write 800 words” (which is what most freelance writers and beginner

ghostwriters think they are being paid to do). Word count is a terrible measure of value—and just because you “took the time to write it” doesn’t mean anyone owes you their time to read it.

Put yourself in the shoes of the client for a second:

Let’s say you are the founder of a video marketing agency that works with fitness influencers. Your agency has 8 employees, 20 clients, and does around \$3 million in revenue each year. That might sound like a lot, but after employee salaries, contractor expenses, marketing costs, and a wide range of SaaS tools to run your business, you (the founder) take home \$300,000 per year. Not bad, but hardly *Living La Vida Loca* territory. You work 10 hours per day. You have three client dinners per week. And even though you have the luxury of working from home, you and your significant other are juggling two screaming kids (4 and 2 years old), terrorizing the house.

One day, you decide you could use some extra help—and come up with the idea to hire a ghostwriter. This ghostwriter can write the video marketing scripts for clients (something you have been doing for years), which will free up your bandwidth to focus on other things, grow the business, scale other departments, etc.

For two weeks, you hold a handful of interviews. You narrow it down to two candidates.

Now, here’s how the client is going to decide who to hire:

- **Decision #1: “Who knows more about this niche?”** When a client is thinking of hiring a ghostwriter, the first thing they look for isn’t whether or not you’re a “good writer.” The first thing they look for is *whether you can speak the language of their industry*. So, if you are the founder of a video marketing agency representing a roster of fitness influencers, and one ghostwriter says, “I can write anything for anyone!” and the other says, “All I do is ghostwrite for fitness influencers, all day, every day,” which ghostwriter are you going to hire? The second one, obviously.

- **Decision #2: “Who is the specialist?”** If the decision isn’t obvious based on niche expertise, the follow-up question is, “Which candidate specializes in the asset I need help creating?” Remember: you are the founder of a video marketing agency, and you need a ghostwriter to write video marketing scripts for fitness influencers. One ghostwriter says, “I can write anything for anyone!” and the other says, “All I do is write video marketing scripts. That’s my specialty.” Which ghostwriter are you going to hire? The second one, obviously.

Again:

Clients are not buying your ability to “write words.”

They are buying your ability to write the RIGHT words—which means they are buying your knowledge within a niche, and your expertise creating a specific asset.

The Formula For Niching Down

I have written several books on Category Creation and the concept of Niching Down (with my pirate brothers, Christopher Lochhead & Eddie Yoon with Category Pirates), but there’s a framework I’ve learned from Cole Gordon (legendary sales trainer & entrepreneur) that I think is helpful when first thinking about how to differentiate yourself. And I’m going to show you how to apply it to yourself as a writer & ghostwriter.

All of your differentiation...

All of your pricing power...

And all of your efficiency...

All of it comes from solving 1 Specific Problem, for 1 Specific Person, in 1 Specific Way.

If you don’t believe me, just ask yourself how you find solutions to the everyday problems in your life. For example, let’s say you have a stained-glass window above your garage, and one day, your neighbor’s

idiot teenager “accidentally” throws a rock through it and it breaks. So you go on Taskrabbit to find someone to help you fix it. Hundreds of people call themselves “window repair specialists,” but one person calls themselves a “stained-glass window repair specialist.”

Who are you going to call to help you fix your stained-glass window?

Exactly.

It’s a scarcity mindset to think you need to be “everything” to “everyone.” And really, it’s much easier to differentiate yourself, charge more, and scale your 1-person business by creating efficiencies by offering less—not more.

Here’s how:

- **1 Specific Problem:** You can’t solve all problems for all people. Instead, you are much better off picking 1 Specific Problem and saying, “This is the only thing I do.” Why? Because when you specialize in solving 1 Specific Problem, you get to know how to solve that problem better than anyone else—which allows you to charge more (you’re the best, so you have the pricing power), and which allows you to create efficiencies for yourself (meaning you can do more work in less time). You get to be so good at solving this 1 Specific Problem that you can do it in your sleep.
- **1 Specific Person:** When you get ultra-specific about who you help, and in what industry, three things happen. First, it’s exponentially easier for clients to find you (you aren’t a “window repair specialist,” you’re a “stained-glass window repair specialist”). Second, they immediately trust you (because you are saying, “I specialize in helping people exactly like YOU”). And third, because you only work with 1 Type Of Person, in 1 Specific Industry, you are going to know way more about the problems these people face, and the outcomes they value most—far more than all the other “I can write

anything for anyone!” generalists.

- **1 Specific Way:** Saying you specialize in solving 1 Specific Problem for 1 Specific Person is 90% of the game. But what pushes your offer as a ghostwriter over the edge (and makes people want to throw money at you) is by solving that 1 Specific Problem for that 1 Specific Person in a new, unique, and different way. I wrote about this in my book, *Snow Leopard*, explaining how the key to differentiating yourself is to solve Obvious problems in Non-Obvious ways, or to solve Non-Obvious problems in Obvious ways.

For example: let’s say you decide the 1 Specific Problem you’re going to solve is helping Creators build their audience on LinkedIn. But “Creators” is vague (that’s millions of people!). What kind of Creators, specifically? Next, you decide the 1 Specific Type of Creators you want to work with are Agile Consultants who want to build their audience on LinkedIn. Perfect.

Now, *if you really want to stand out*, the thing you need to decide (and this may take some experimentation) is the 1 Specific Way you can help these Agile Consultants who want to build their audience on LinkedIn.

Here’s an easy exercise:

Start by listing out all the most-common “ways” people currently solve this 1 Specific Problem for this 1 Specific Type Of Person. (So, how do most ghostwriters already help Agile Consultants build their audience on LinkedIn?)

- By publishing short-form LinkedIn content.
- By publishing long-form LinkedIn articles.
- By publishing a weekly LinkedIn newsletter.
- By growth-hacking LinkedIn by adding relevant contacts.
- By commenting & engaging on other big LinkedIn Creators’ content.

- By getting added to large LinkedIn groups discussing relevant topics.
- By running LinkedIn ads to their profile.
- By optimizing their LinkedIn profile, rewriting their bio, and cleaning up their work history.

And so on.

The first big mental unlock is realizing that you could build a profitable business around any one of these “ways”—and simultaneously, how difficult it would be to specialize in all of them. This is the misunderstanding so many solopreneurs, specifically freelance writers, have when it comes to providing scalable services: you can’t be an expert in everything, and to be an expert in even one thing is a lot harder than you think.

The second big mental unlock is that when you are first starting out, your natural instinct is to “do what you see other people doing.” This is a trap. When you do the above exercise, what you’ll discover is your natural inclination to gravitate to the “ways” that are most popular. But when you do what everyone else does, you end up solving Obvious problems (“I need to build an audience on LinkedIn”) in already Obvious ways (“You and every other ghostwriter is pitching me on publishing short-form LinkedIn content”). And while that might be an OK place to start, it’s not where you want to end up.

The most differentiated ghostwriters (and solopreneurs in any industry) solve Obvious problems in Non-Obvious ways. Meaning you need to ask yourself: “If I can’t use anything on the list above—how else can I help this type of person?” The more unique, different, and Non-Obvious the “way,” the more the service you provide as a ghostwriter is going to stand out.

For example, in our Premium Ghostwriting Academy, we train ghostwriters to create 5-Day Educational Email Courses for clients. This “way” is a new, unique, and differentiated offer—and as a result, prospective clients can’t help but ask, “What’s that?” This is what

opens the door for the client to be educated, and for you (the Premium Ghostwriter) to set the price.

To recap, this is the level of specificity you should aim for when positioning yourself as a Premium Ghostwriter:

- “I specialize in ghostwriting Twitter Threads for fitness YouTubers who want to turn their vlogs into text-based content, on autopilot.”
- “I specialize in ghostwriting research-based weekly newsletters for private equity firms that want to increase their deal flow of CPG companies in the \$10M to \$100M revenue range.”
- “I specialize in ghostwriting viral LinkedIn posts for early-stage SaaS startup founders to build buzz around their first big product launch.”
- “I specialize in ghostwriting free eBooks for life coaches who want to move their social audiences over to their email list and create a reliable client-acquisition funnel.”

1 Specific Problem, for 1 Specific Person, In 1 Specific Way.

Again, if this level of specificity makes you feel uncomfortable, or your internal narrative is screaming: “BUT IF I GET THIS SPECIFIC, I’M NEVER GOING TO LAND ANY CLIENTS,” good. That’s growth. And the old mindset of doing “anything” for “anyone” is what’s keeping you from differentiating yourself (and becoming known for a niche you own), being “the best” at your specialty (and unlocking pricing power), and being able to create efficiencies for your 1-person business (allowing you to get more work done in less time).

How To Become Known For A Niche You Own

The 1 Specific Problem you want to solve, for 1 Specific Person, in 1 Specific Way, is your niche.

Don't overcomplicate it.

If you decide you want to specialize in “ghostwriting Twitter Threads for fitness YouTubers who want to turn their vlogs into text-based content, on autopilot,” then that should also be the niche of your own content.

And under your own name, you should...

- Tweet about how fitness YouTubers can turn their vlogs into text-based content.
- Write Threads about the biggest fitness YouTubers, how they built their audiences, and the best “lines” from their vlogs that could easily become text-based content.
- And you should make it clear that you help “fitness YouTubers who want to turn their vlogs into text-based content.”
- Where writers get into trouble is they make the mistake of thinking “their niche” is different from the niche they want to provide services to—and it shouldn't be. The greater the disconnect between the content you create for yourself, and the industry you want to serve as a ghostwriter, the harder it will be to attract clients. Millions of creators make this mistake every single day.

The reason your niche should be the same as the niche you want to serve as a ghostwriter is because the two feed off each other:

- The more you write about this niche yourself, the better you will understand it.
- The better you understand this niche, the more of an “expert” you will become.

- The more expertise you gain, the more readers (and potential clients) you will attract.
- The more readers and clients you attract, the more demand you will have for your services.
- The more demand you have for your services, the more pricing power you can command.
- The more pricing power you can command, the more time you will have to create efficiencies for yourself and your 1-person business.
- The more efficiencies you create for your 1-person business, the more selective you can be about who you work with.
- The more selective you are about who you work with, the fewer “toxic” clients you’ll have to endure, the happier you will be.

Unfortunately, a lot of writers & aspiring ghostwriters struggle here. They are afraid to even start writing about the niche they want to serve because they feel like they aren’t an expert yet—and can’t (or “aren’t allowed to”) start writing about this niche until they become one. And this is a faulty belief. The example I love to use here is Ryan Holiday, the best-selling author of *The Obstacle Is The Way* and a handful of other books on Stoicism. Today, he is the Category King of the “Stoicism” category—but in 2014, he was just another digital marketer reading Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations* for the first time.

He *started* writing about Stoicism, and became an expert as a result. Not the other way around.

Are You Building A Personal Category? Or A Personal Brand?

The other big mistake writers make when it comes to creating content (in an attempt to attract clients) is they think the key is to build “themselves”—not their niche.

And the two are not the same.

A personal brand is a personality. It's a flavor. It's a style. Just like how a company's "brand" is a logo, a font type, a color palette, a specific voice, etc. A "brand" is made up of the symbols you use to represent who you are and what you do (the word comes from a cow literally being "branded" to mark who owns it). But let's be clear: your "brand" or your "personal brand" is not your value, and it's certainly not your niche.

To be blunt: most people who aspire to build personal brands aren't really interested in being known for any meaningful contribution they make to the world, or their industry. They're just interested in being known, period. (Sort of like a reality TV star—*famous for being famous*.) The logic people use to rationalize this decision is: "But once I have an audience, THEN I can launch whatever product or service I want."

The problem is that "any" audience is not the same as "the right" audience. If you have 1 million people following you because they love your funny celebrity memes, and then you try to launch a copywriting education product, it's not going to sell.

Why?

Because the problem your product solves and the interests of the audience you've attracted do not align.

Building a Personal Category (a niche for yourself) is something completely different.

A personal category isn't about you—whereas a "personal brand" is *all about you*.

A personal category is a topic, an idea, bigger than yourself. And you are "creating" that personal category not with the goal of becoming "known for being known," but instead with the goal of creating and evangelizing something you believe matters in the world—and, more importantly, *hope to see others join you in building as well*.

Category first. Brand second.

This is a crucial nuance. And you are successful in creating a niche

when you see other people show immense interest in your personal category—not an immense interest in “you.” For example, Ryan Holiday is successful because other people want to read and write about *Stoicism*. Ryan Holiday is not successful because people are interested in “him.” And the more people who read and write about Stoicism, and evangelize the category alongside him, the more successful Ryan Holiday becomes—*because he was the one who built the category, and continues to dominate it.*

So, ask yourself:

Do you want to be known for the sake of being known? *Then you might want to consider being a YouTuber who eats Tide Pods.*

Or do you want to become known for a niche you own? And if so, then put your ego in the backseat and give the “niche” the spotlight. Evangelize it. Educate people on it. Don’t market “yourself.” Market, write about, and bring attention to *the niche*.

Who Is Your Content & Service NOT For?

If you’re struggling to narrow down your niche, try thinking in the opposite direction and asking yourself: “Who is my content NOT for? Who do I NOT want to serve as a ghostwriter?”

When most people try to create their niche, they ask themselves, “How can I make something for everyone?” They try to think of ALL the different types of people they can attract. And as a result, they keep making their niche broader and broader and broader—until eventually, it’s no longer a niche. It’s just... *a blob of white noise.*

Here’s something they don’t teach you in creative writing school: when you try to write something for everyone, you end up writing something for no one.

Instead, an easier way of thinking about what makes your niche “different” is to consider who your niche is NOT for.

- Who would see your niche and think, “Nope, that’s definitely

not what I'm looking for?"

- Who would see your niche and be repulsed? ("Oh my gosh, someone writes about that? Seriously?")
- Who would see your niche and share it with other people, mocking it, condemning it, or (best case scenario) calling it "too small?"

Contrary to popular belief, these are all great outcomes.

When your niche is undeniably NOT for everyone, that means it is definitely for *someone*.

Your Niche Content Strategy

With the above in mind, your content strategy as a ghostwriter should have very little to do with "you"—and everything to do with how you can most effectively educate the right people on the benefits of your niche (and the industry you want to serve).

This is a hard gap for ghostwriters to bridge in their minds, so I want to make it explicit: **clients hire ghostwriters who demonstrate proficiency in their same industry or niche.** Yes, it really is that simple. It's highly unlikely a founder of an enterprise software company is going to think to hire you as a ghostwriter if all you do is write about fitness, just like it's highly unlikely a fitness influencer is going to hire you as a ghostwriter if all you do is write about enterprise software. What clients are looking for, and what will make it easy for clients to find you, is *proof that you speak their language*.

Which means your own content strategy isn't really you writing about how you're a ghostwriter.

It's you writing about the niche or industry you want to serve, demonstrating your proficiency & knowledge of that industry in public.

For example:

- **If you want to ghostwrite for people in Politics,** you should

be actively Tweeting about Politics. You should have a newsletter on Politics. You should be demonstrating, in public, that you know a lot about Politics.

- **If you want to ghostwrite for founders of wearable tech companies,** you should be actively writing about wearables, the future of wearables, how to optimize your wearables, wearable trends, wearable reviews, and so on.
- **If you want to ghostwrite for venture capitalists,** you should be actively writing about venture capital, recently funded deals, the best venture capital investments of all time, the differences between early-stage and late-stage investing, and so on.

Again: clients hire ghostwriters who demonstrate proficiency in their same industry or niche.

To generate ideas for what sort of content you could create, under your own name, to become known for a niche you own and attract the right niche clients, use this list of 30 Proven Approaches.

You can apply this list of Proven Approaches to literally any niche on earth, but let's use the niche of "salespeople at enterprise software companies who want to increase their lead flow specifically through LinkedIn," so you can see how a seemingly small niche holds a wealth of opportunity:

- **Tips:** Tips for salespeople at enterprise software companies who want to increase their lead flow on LinkedIn.
- **Skills:** Skills salespeople at enterprise software companies who want to increase their lead flow on LinkedIn need to build (and how to build them).
- **Tools:** Tools salespeople at enterprise software companies can

use to increase their lead flow on LinkedIn.

- **Traits:** Traits of the most effective salespeople at enterprise software companies who consistently generate lead flow on LinkedIn.
- **Steps:** Steps to increase your lead flow on LinkedIn as a salesperson at an enterprise software company.
- **Goals:** Goals you should set for yourself as a salesperson at an enterprise software company who wants to increase lead flow on LinkedIn.
- **Books:** Books you should read as a salesperson at an enterprise software company if you want to learn how to increase lead flow on LinkedIn.
- **Habits:** Habits you should build if you are a salesperson at an enterprise software company struggling to increase lead flow on LinkedIn.
- **Stories:** Stories of highly successful salespeople at enterprise software companies who have used LinkedIn to exponentially increase their lead flow.
- **Quotes:** Quotes from the most legendary salespeople of all time that will inspire you to build an audience on LinkedIn and increase your lead flow.
- **Secrets:** Secrets only salespeople at enterprise software companies who leverage LinkedIn to increase their lead flow know—and how you can steal them.
- **Insights:** Insights into how salespeople at enterprise software companies leverage LinkedIn to increase their lead flow.
- **Benefits:** The benefits of building an audience on LinkedIn as a salesperson at an enterprise software company who wants to increase their lead flow.
- **Lessons:** Lessons you will learn as a salesperson at an enterprise software company once you start to build an audience on LinkedIn to increase your own lead flow.

- **Reasons:** Reasons you should build an audience on LinkedIn if you work at an enterprise software company and want to increase your own lead flow.
- **Creators:** Creators you should follow if you are a salesperson at an enterprise software company and want to learn the right way to build an audience on LinkedIn to increase your lead flow.
- **Routines:** Routines of the most successful LinkedIn creators who are also salespeople at enterprise software companies, leveraging the platform to increase their lead flow.
- **Mistakes:** Mistakes you should avoid if you work as a salesperson at an enterprise software company and want to use LinkedIn to build an audience and increase your lead flow.
- **Podcasts:** Podcasts every salesperson working at an enterprise software company should listen to when learning how to build an audience on LinkedIn to increase customer lead flow.
- **Examples:** Examples of salespeople at enterprise software companies who have successfully built LinkedIn audiences and increased their lead flow.
- **Questions:** Questions you should ask yourself when trying to figure out how to build a niche audience for yourself on LinkedIn and increase your lead flow as a salesperson at an enterprise software company.
- **Inventions:** Inventions that have made it easy for salespeople at enterprise software companies to start creating content, build an audience on LinkedIn, and increase their lead flow.
- **Templates:** Templates any salesperson at any enterprise software company can use to start publishing content, building an audience on LinkedIn, and increasing their lead flow.
- **Resources:** Resources every salesperson working at an enterprise software company should study to learn how to best use LinkedIn to increase lead flow.

- **Challenges:** Challenges all salespeople working at enterprise software companies run into when first starting out on LinkedIn, trying to build an audience and increase lead flow.
- **Companies:** Enterprise software companies that have done a great job training their salespeople on how to use LinkedIn to build an audience and increase lead flow.
- **Data Points:** Data points you should pay attention to as a salesperson starting to build an audience on LinkedIn and increase lead flow to your enterprise software business.
- **Realizations:** Realizations you will come to as a salesperson after creating content, building an audience, and increasing your lead flow on LinkedIn for a full year.
- **Frameworks:** Frameworks to help you as a salesperson working at an enterprise software company overcome the fear of publishing content on LinkedIn, building an audience, and increasing your lead flow.
- **Presentations:** Presentations that will inspire you as an enterprise software salesperson to leverage LinkedIn, start creating content, build an audience, and increase your lead flow.

Phew, that's a lot.

But do you see how a seemingly teeny-tiny niche (1 Specific Problem, for 1 Specific Person, in 1 Specific Way) can be mined so deeply it's almost overwhelming?

The takeaway here should be that you could spend an entire year doing nothing but writing about how “salespeople at enterprise software companies can increase their lead flow through LinkedIn,” and at the end of that year you would realize you have *even more* to write about—not less.

Then, in your social bio, and after every piece of content you write (or as many as you deem appropriate), all you have to do is say: “Oh and by the way, this is what I help people do. So if you are {1 Specific

Person} and need help {Solving 1 Specific Problem}, I can help you by {1 Specific Way}.”

Remember: you aren’t selling “ghostwriting services.”

You are selling the solution to 1 Specific Problem, for 1 Specific Type Of Person, in 1 Specific Way.

And if you want a full crash course on how to use AI & ChatGPT to speed up your entire niche content strategy, check out our Lean Writing ChatGPT Workshop: startwritingwithchatgpt.com

Create Your Opportunity Flywheel

If you want to make serious money as a ghostwriter, the secret is to avoid being a generalist at all costs.

A good rule of thumb here is to never say you do “both.” The moment you hear yourself say the words, “I do this AND that,” stop. Choose one. This is what being “mentally disciplined” feels like. And if you want to accelerate your career as a writer & Premium Ghostwriter, then you need to internalize that you are a mental athlete—and mental discipline is key.

Of course, everyone’s fear is that by solving 1 Specific Problem, for 1 Specific Person, in 1 Specific Way, they are going to severely limit the number of people they can work with. Which is true. But this constraint actually leads to more opportunities, more efficiencies, and more money.

Not less.

Once you have your niche as a ghostwriter clarified, and you’ve begun to create content to educate people on the benefits of your niche, it’s time to put your client acquisition system on autopilot.

In Ship 30 for 30, our cohort-based writing course that helps people start writing online, we call this your Opportunity Flywheel:

- Your niche
- Your niche content strategy

- A free niche opt-in (eBook download, educational email course, etc.)
- A weekly niche newsletter
- Your niche digital product or service

These 5 pieces are the foundation of any Digital Business, and all you need to sell *anything* online.

Here's how:

- **Naming & Claiming your niche** makes it easy for people to immediately understand what value you provide, and makes it easy for people to talk about you and your niche (because you're literally giving them the words you'd like them to use).
- **Executing a niche content strategy** ensures that you don't just build an audience for the sake of "building an audience," but you consistently attract the right readers and potential clients into your ecosystem.
- **Offering some sort of free eBook, educational email course, or valuable asset** positions you as the leader and authority of this niche, and creates a bridge to move your followers (your "rented audience") over to your email list (building an "owned audience").
- **Nurturing that "owned" audience, week after week, with an evergreen newsletter** is what builds trust and educates readers on how else you can help them—eventually converting them into customers and/or clients.
- **And selling a digital product or service directly related to your niche** is how you connect writing online to "making money."

This is your path forward to becoming a Premium Ghostwriter.

Unfortunately, this is not what most writers do—primarily because they think that once they pick a niche, they can never change it and they're stuck forever. This is false. Your niche is not a marriage decision.

It's simply wherever you choose to plant your flag based on where you are today. And if you decide you want to move your flag somewhere else, later, go for it. But in order for readers and potential clients to understand what value you are trying to provide *right now*, you need to give them something to grab onto.

So, wherever you are today, pick something. Plant your flag. And know you can always move it later.

Your goal should then be to create a through-line for yourself so that everything you do is aligned—and your Opportunity Flywheel can spin in a very clear, unambiguous direction.

For example:

- **Your niche** = “I build 5-Day Educational Email Courses for FinTech founders who want to build email lists prior to product launches.”
- **Your content strategy** = “I talk about FinTech trends & product launch strategies.”
- **Your free opt-in** = “The FinTech Product Launch Blueprint: 5 Ways Founders (And Product Managers) Can Build Hype Months Before Rolling Out New Platforms And Features”
- **Your weekly newsletter** = “FinTech Product Launch Secrets: Weekly Tips On How To Build Organic Buzz Around Your Startup—And Attract A Waitlist Of Users”
- **Your service** = “I help FinTech founders create 5-Day Educational Email Courses to build a waitlist of users months before a new product launch.”

See how everything is connected?

Simplicity is velocity.

Using Social Media Personally vs Professionally

Now, here's why the above is so challenging for people.

No matter how many times I try to explain that simplicity is velocity, and that being *more specific* and *more niche* will make your business grow faster, everyone always nods their head and says, "I understand," but then they go right back to doing the opposite.

This is because people struggle with the idea of their "whole self" not being represented on social media. I see it whenever I workshop bios with writers. As soon as we start to get really specific, they stop me and say, "But I'm also a marathon runner. But I'm also a yoga instructor. But I've also worked in advertising for 6 years. But I also love writing about Bitcoin." They can't wrap their heads around presenting only one part of themselves to the world—when they know they are so much more than just that "one niche."

Which is true. You are not a one-dimensional human being.

But here's the question: are you using social media to express yourself personally?

Or are you using it to build your 1-person business professionally?

"I use it for both!" is what everyone says.

Remember our golden rule: whenever you hear yourself saying "both," stop.

Be honest with yourself. One of them takes priority, and you know which one it is. And if you want to be a successful solopreneur, if you want to grow your 1-person business, and if you want to become a Premium Ghostwriter, then social media cannot be a public mural of your personality—because the "more things" you say you are, the more challenging it is for readers and prospective clients to understand what you can do for *them*.

Can you incorporate your personality into the things you create? Sure.

Can you write about other topics? Of course you can.

Can you still post pictures of your dog every once in a while? Why not.

But it's your niche that needs to be "in focus." It's your niche that needs to be the thing you write about most often. And it's your niche that needs to be stated, clearly and explicitly in your bio.

Not "you."

Part 2

THE ART OF GHOSTWRITING

CHAPTER 6

Thinking About Thinking About Ghostwriting

IN 2020, I WROTE A book called *The Art & Business of Online Writing*.

The book covers the fundamentals of writing online—almost all of which are directly applicable to the art of ghostwriting. To avoid writing “the same book twice,” I’m going to skip over these “digital writing fundamentals” and dive right into the nuances of ghostwriting. (So if you are brand new to writing online, I encourage you to go read *The Art & Business of Online Writing* first, and then continue reading the rest of this book.)

Let’s begin:

You Aren’t Ghostwriting. You’re Writing For Yourself, For Someone Else

The best ghostwriters are writers themselves.

There is a reason why Will Smith hired Mark Manson, the best-selling author of *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fck**, to write his memoir. There is a reason why Rick Rubin, Mötley Crüe, Kevin

Hart, and a handful of other notable public figures hired Neil Strauss, author of the best-selling “pickup artist” memoir, *The Game*, to write their books. There is a reason why venture capitalists don’t hire big fancy New York City PR firms, but twenty-year-olds on Twitter with a knack for going viral, to help them write their Threads. And there is a reason why so many Silicon Valley founders and C-level executives hired me, at 26 years old, to write opinion articles on their behalf.

And the reason is: pattern recognition.

When a client hires a ghostwriter, they aren’t looking for someone to manage or “tell them what to do.” They don’t want to buy your “time” or your “effort.” What they want is your specialized knowledge—and its ability to **accelerate upside** (helping them succeed faster) and **mitigate downside** (making sure they don’t present themselves poorly). Which means the key to unlocking bigger and bigger opportunities for yourself as a ghostwriter is to specialize and build highly valuable pattern recognition—as quickly as possible.

How?

By practicing on yourself.

I’ve always found it interesting how many people in the world want to get paid to do things for others that they aren’t willing to do for themselves. Imagine a carpenter pitching you on building your house, but doesn’t take care of their own home. Or imagine a hair stylist offering to cut your hair, but has the worst hair you’ve ever seen. These might seem like ridiculous examples, but there are millions of marketing agencies that sell “social media management” and yet can’t build an audience of their own, and millions of freelance writers that sell services like “sales copywriting” but have never sold a product in their life.

And this decision (out of laziness, or fear, or both) severely hinders your ability to build highly valuable pattern recognition—which severely limits the amount of opportunities you can unlock in your career.

Ghostwriting is no different.

A lot of writers think of ghostwriting as a completely new skill set. Like it's a different kind of "writing"—and it's not. Ghostwriting is just a new word for "writing for yourself, for someone else." If you want to ghostwrite opinion articles, you should know how to write a really compelling opinion article for yourself. If you want to ghostwrite educational email courses, you should know how to create educational email courses for yourself. If you want to ghostwrite Tweets, Threads, or LinkedIn posts, you should know how to create these assets for yourself—testing, experimenting, and mastering these mediums.

The most valuable opportunities don't flow to "ghostwriters."

They flow to writers who also *ghostwrite*.

This is an extremely important nuance.

For a few reasons:

- **[Energy] There is a giant energetic difference between working with someone who treats writing as their "day job" vs someone who writes because they love it.** The former will almost always do the bare minimum (and only push themselves when they realize their "job" is at risk). And the latter will almost always go above and beyond—not because they are an overachiever, but because they can't help but rack up more hours of practice (and improve at an exponentially faster rate). I experienced this firsthand building my ghostwriting agency. All (100%) of the writers I hired who treated ghostwriting as their "day job" were nowhere near as effective as the employees who also wrote for themselves, on their own time.
- **[Trust] Clients will trust your opinion more when you speak from personal experience.** Again, the highest-paying clients do not want to buy your "time" or your "effort." What they want to buy is your pattern recognition—and part of that pattern recognition is *assurance*. When you make a recommendation to a client and are able to say, "Trust me, I have

done this a thousand times for myself and I know it works,” there is no discussion. There is no debate. And they can rest easy knowing they are in good hands.

- **[Opportunities] The biggest-name, highest-paying clients would rather seek out a well-known writer and try to convince them to be their ghostwriter than interview “a bunch of ghostwriters” and pick the best one.** Which means, if you want to accelerate your career as a ghostwriter quickly, one of the best (and easiest) things you can do is build yourself as a writer, too. The fact that Mark Manson doesn’t say anywhere that he is hireable as a ghostwriter, and yet he was the one who got the opportunity to ghostwrite Will Smith’s memoir, should tell you something.
- **[Money] The result of all the above, of course, is that you can charge more.** I am just now (8+ years of ghostwriting later) starting to experience this. When someone reaches out, asking if I am available to be their ghostwriter, the primary reason they are reaching out to me is because they’ve read one of my books. Or they’ve taken one of my courses. Or they are subscribed to one of my newsletters—*and they want me to do what I do for myself, for them*. The discussion isn’t, “We need a ghostwriter—how much do you charge?” The discussion is, “What you’re doing is what we want to do—how much money will it take?” Having your own career as a writer gives you all of the leverage and all of the pricing power.

So, before we even get into the art of “ghostwriting,” it’s important for you to internalize this mental reframe:

You are not ghostwriting.

You are writing for yourself, for someone else.

CHAPTER 7

How To Ghostwrite Anything Part I (5 Steps)

THE ONLY REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN writing for yourself, and writing for yourself “for someone else” (ghostwriting) is voice.

And writing in your voice versus the voice of a client is a lot easier than you think.

“Voice” isn’t some magical output. It’s not something only brilliant wordsmiths know how to create. In fact, “voice” usually comes down to just 1 or 2 clearly identifiable attributes.

Think about your favorite music artist. Even though most pop songs sound the same, and most country songs sound the same, and most rap songs sound the same, how do you know it’s “them” on the radio? Well, you know it’s Miley Cyrus because of her raspy tone; you know it’s Drake because of his nasal tone; you know it’s Justin Bieber because of his airy tone, and so on.

Which means, if you want to recreate (or mimic) any of these voices, you don’t really need to recreate “the whole person.” You just need to mimic these 1-2 identifiable attributes to “create” a similar tone of voice.

And whether it’s voice through a speaker, or voice on a page, the same rules apply.

After ghostwriting for hundreds of different people in hundreds of different industries and niches, I can tell you that 99% of clients think their voice is unique and different, when in reality, it's not.

When you get on the phone with them, they'll say, "I've always struggled to work with a ghostwriter because they can't seem to nail my voice." But the truth is, *they don't even know what makes their voice "their voice,"* and if you asked them, they wouldn't be able to tell you. They just know when they write, it sounds one way, and when someone else writes, it "sounds" a different way.

Well, let me tell you exactly how to solve this problem—and how to show the client they have finally found a ghostwriter (you) who can "nail their voice."

Step 1: Audit The Client's Existing Material

When starting to ghostwrite for a new client, the very first thing you should do, even before you begin writing, is audit everything you have to work with:

- Do they have a podcast?
- Do they have a newsletter?
- Have they written a book?
- Do they regularly write on social media?
- Have they appeared on other people's podcasts?
- Have they been quoted in any major publications?

And so on.

The reason this is so important is because ghostwriting is unbelievably subjective. I can't tell you how many times I would spend hours and hours creating what I thought was a mini-masterpiece, only for the client to say it was all wrong—and conversely, how many times I would write something in a hurry and send it off to the client, only for them

to call me minutes later, thrilled.

Trying to “read the client’s mind” is very hard.

Which is why you are much better off removing this subjectivity and, as much as possible, leveraging previously created content—to start.

Think of anything and everything a client has created or said in the past as “already approved.” If a client said something on a podcast a certain way, it’s fair to assume they’d be alright saying it that same way again. If a client wrote about this topic and summarized their perspective really well in a newsletter they wrote a year ago, it would make sense to use that same summary again.

Don’t reinvent the wheel.

Instead, see if you can find previously created content by the client on this same topic and look for opportunities to “say the same thing, again.” (And if the client literally has zero content to pull from, move on to Step 2.)

Step 2: Prep The Page

Next, before you even begin writing, you should create the scaffolding for the type of thing you are ghostwriting.

I call this technique “Prepping The Page.”

- If you are ghostwriting a Tweet, what is the ideal format of a viral-worthy Tweet?
- If you are ghostwriting a Thread, what is the ideal format of a bookmark-worthy Thread?
- If you are ghostwriting a newsletter, what is the ideal format of an engaging newsletter?
- If you are ghostwriting a sales letter, what is the ideal format of a high-converting sales letter?
- If you are ghostwriting a book, what is the ideal format of a best-selling book?

And so on.

If you have been writing yourself for a long time, chances are you'll be pulling this "ideal format" from your own content library (because you've learned "what works" for you). But if you are brand new to both writing online and ghostwriting, you should scour other people's content libraries to find "ideal formats" you can steal.

To be clear: I am not advocating for you to steal someone else's *content*. (That's plagiarism.) I'm advocating for you to steal the *structure* of their content (the layout of the house) and write within that structure.

For example: if you are ghostwriting viral Twitter threads for venture capitalists, you should be constantly bookmarking other viral Twitter threads from other creators, studying them, and trying to recreate those proven formats.

These are the types of questions you should be asking yourself:

- What was the hook they used? How could you use the same hook but applied to a different industry/topic?
- How many sentences were in their lead-in Tweet? Were the sentences long or short? Were they full sentences or were they in a bulleted list? How many bullets? Is every word capitalized? Is there a period at the end of every bullet? What's the promise of the closing sentence? Do they use any emojis?
- How many Tweets are in the thread? Does each Tweet have a number or no? Does it have a number and a period, or a number and a dash? Does each Tweet have a sentence that reads like its own "headline?" Is every word capitalized? How many lines of text are in the Tweet?

And so on.

For example, here's a viral Twitter Thread opener of mine (that got over 1M views):

*It took me 4 years to write my 1st book.
And it took me 4 months to write my 2nd book.
Now, I can write a 60,000 word book in 30 days.
Here's the framework:*

And, if I were ghostwriting for the founder of a FinTech startup, here's how I would “steal” my proven opener and rewrite it for the client:

*It took us 3 years to ship our first product.
And it took us 6 months to ship our second product, an AI accounting tool for startup founders.
Now, we can ideate, design, code, bug test, and publish new product upgrades in 60 days or less
Here's the framework:*

See how this works?

Side by side, the average reader would never see these two Twitter Thread openers and think they are “the same.” But they are.

Same structure, different content.

This is one of the secrets of ghostwriting: don't start from a blank slate.

Either pull from “proven structures” you've discovered or created in your own content library (which is ideal, because practicing on yourself is the best way to internalize what works, what doesn't, and why), and/or create swipe files and study other people's highest-performing content—and then use those “structures” whenever you're ghostwriting that same sort of asset.

Every time a viral Twitter Thread hooks my attention, I bookmark it. Every time I come across a company website with amazing web copy, I bookmark it. Every time a sales page actually gets me to convert and buy something, I bookmark it. Every time a newsletter hits my inbox

and I actually read the entire thing, I bookmark it. I am constantly saving things that “work” so that whenever I am writing that same sort of “thing” (either for myself, or for a client), I can pull it up, stare at it, and steal the same structure (or parts of it) so I have a proven container to write within.

This is so much better than starting with a blank page.

Step 3: Clarify The Headline, First

If you’ve been following the AI revolution at all, then you have probably heard clips of your favorite songs being performed by a completely different artist—like a Beatles song being sung by Kanye West.

Same content—same lyrics, same melodies, same rhythms—but in a different voice.

This is how I like to think about the art of ghostwriting, in these two separate components:

- **The Content:** What is being said?
- **The Voice:** How is it being said?

The trick, I’ve learned, is to not try to do both at the same time.

When ghostwriting, the easiest place to start is by getting the promise of the piece and the content right, first. (Especially when you begin ghostwriting for people who have Ferrari engines for brains and are sharing extremely thoughtful, complicated insights.) Said differently: there’s zero point in fiddling with the voice of a piece if the content isn’t right. As much as clients might obsess over it “being in their voice,” trust me, when push comes to shove they care more about the WHAT than the HOW.

The easiest way to resolve this is by clarifying the headline (or hook), first.

Most writers treat headlines like a bow they tie on their writing at the very end. And this is a mistake. Your headline is, quite literally,

your “compass.” It’s the promise you’re making to the reader, telling them which direction you’re going to take them... *before they click and read*. It’s also the promise you’re agreeing to execute with the client. (And you both need to be on the same page about what, *exactly*, you’re promising the reader.)

For example, let’s say you are ghostwriting a newsletter for the founder of project management SaaS platform. And in this newsletter, the founder wants to share some of the mistakes they made building their first SaaS company. Voice aside, if you come back and hand them a newsletter that gives the reader *tips* on how to start a SaaS company, the client is going to say, “No, no, no, you’ve got it all wrong.” Or, if you come back and hand them a newsletter that tells the reader all the *reasons* why SaaS is such a profitable business model, the client is going to tell you to go back and try again.

Why?

Because the promise they want to make to the reader is “mistakes” and you handed back “tips” or “reasons.”

Golden Rule: The content has to deliver on the promise in the headline:

- If the client wants to share Mistakes, your headline needs to say “Mistakes” and whatever you’re ghostwriting needs to be organized by “Mistake #1, Mistake #2, Mistake #3,” etc.
- If the client wants to share Tips, your headline needs to say “Tips” and whatever you’re ghostwriting needs to be organized by “Tip #1, Tip #2, Tip #3,” etc.
- If the client wants to share Reasons, your headline needs to say “Reasons” and whatever you’re ghostwriting needs to be organized by “Reason #1, Reason #2, Reason #3,” etc.
- If the client wants to share Examples, your headline needs to say “Examples” and whatever you’re ghostwriting needs to be

organized by “Example #1, Example #2, Example #3,” etc.

Yes, it really is this simple. The promise of the headline needs to match up with the subheads of the piece, which needs to match up with the content.

Step 4: Take Your “Prepped Page” And Fill In The Headers

We’re still not into the writing yet!

(Notice how much “thinking” needs to be done before you should even start fiddling with adjectives.)

If you are ghostwriting for someone “on autopilot,” pulling from their content library and not doing calls, I would still recommend nailing down the headline first and getting their approval via email.

But especially if you are holding regular content calls with clients, clarifying the headline and the promise of the thing you’re writing before you hop off the phone is crucial. You want to make sure you are both on the same page as far as what you’re writing, and why the reader should care. (Are they sharing mistakes? Lessons? Tips? Reasons? Resources? Examples? Case Studies? What’s “the thing” they want to share, and why is it relevant to the wants and needs of the reader?)

Once you train your brain to think this way, you’ll start to notice how many clients actually struggle with this level of clarity in their thinking.

You’ll get on the phone with them, and they’ll say, “I want to write about some of the mistakes I made building my first SaaS company,” and they’ll give you two mistakes. And then they’ll tell you a story about their first mentor, who was also a SaaS entrepreneur. And then they’ll tell you a few reasons why SaaS is such a hot business model right now. And then they’ll tell you another mistake they made building their first SaaS company. And then they’ll pivot and start talking

about the stock market. And then they'll ask if you completed edits on that other piece you were working on last week, about SaaS growth metrics. And then they'll tell you two more SaaS growth metrics to add to that piece. And then they'll throw out a new idea: SaaS AI tools. And then your time will be up, and they'll say, "Chat next week," and you'll feel like you have no idea how you're supposed to cram all this information into one Twitter Thread, or newsletter, or article.

Stop.

Don't get lost in the sauce.

90% of your work as a ghostwriter isn't really about writing. It's about *removing*. Most clients don't need "more" ideas. They need less. They need help taking their disorganized brain and making sense of everything they've just word vomited to you.

Here's an easy solution:

When you're talking to a client, you need to do two opposing things at the same time:

- Get ideas out
- Reel ideas in

The more ideas a client gives you, the easier your job becomes over time (because you have an abundance of material to work with). However, if all you do is let the client rant and don't ever reel them in, they're going to feel lost and you're going to feel overwhelmed.

So, what I like to do when I'm talking to a client, is imagine I am building stacks of notecards in front of me (and if it's helpful to do this with actual notecards on your desk, go for it!).

- Every time I hear a client share a "mistake," I put that mistake in the "mistakes" pile.
- When I hear the client share a "lesson learned," I put that lesson learned in a new "lessons learned" pile.

- When I hear the client share a “tip,” I put that tip in a new “tips” pile.
- And when I hear the client rapid-fire a bunch of separate ideas, I put those separate ideas in an “ideas for later” pile.

By the end of the call, one of these piles should be bigger than the rest (and if one isn't, you need to pick one and steer the client's thinking so that you can walk away with at least one organized pile of ideas for you to execute on). Then, you need to make sure you and the client are on the same page: “Great, it looks like we have five mistakes here we can share with readers.” And after you've reeled in their thinking, do a final stress test: “Are there any other mistakes you want to share?”

What you don't want to do is try to take everything they've just shared with you on a 30 or 60-minute call and try to cram it into one piece.

Any “different” idea should be a different piece.

And as a reminder, here are 30 Proven Approaches you can use to help clients organize their thinking:

- Are they sharing Tips?
- Are they sharing Skills?
- Are they sharing Tools?
- Are they sharing Traits?
- Are they sharing Steps?
- Are they sharing Goals?
- Are they sharing Books?
- Are they sharing Habits?
- Are they sharing Stories?
- Are they sharing Quotes?
- Are they sharing Secrets?
- Are they sharing Insights?
- Are they sharing Benefits?

- Are they sharing Lessons?
- Are they sharing Reasons?
- Are they sharing Creators?
- Are they sharing Routines?
- Are they sharing Mistakes?
- Are they sharing Podcasts?
- Are they sharing Examples?
- Are they sharing Questions?
- Are they sharing Inventions?
- Are they sharing Templates?
- Are they sharing Resources?
- Are they sharing Challenges?
- Are they sharing Companies?
- Are they sharing Data Points?
- Are they sharing Realizations?
- Are they sharing Frameworks?
- Are they sharing Presentations?

Whatever it is they're sharing, that needs to be front and center as the promise of the headline—and that promise needs to get “delivered on” in the headers of whatever you're writing. Again: if they're sharing “Mistakes,” then each header should be “Mistake #1, Mistake #2, Mistake #3,” and so on. If they're sharing “Challenges,” each header should be “Challenge #1, Challenge #2, Challenge #3,” and so on.

The promise of the headline has to align with the headers—which has to align with the content.

Step 5: Get The Content Right (Using A Declarative Voice)

Ah, now we can start getting into the writing!

Here's what you've done up to this point:

- You’ve done a quick audit of the client’s content library (seeing if there’s anything you can reuse & build on).
- You’ve “Prepped The Page” with a proven structure/format (creating a container for you to write within).
- You’ve clarified the promise of the headline, first (and confirmed you and the client are on the same page).
- And you’ve filled in the headers of your “Prepped” piece based on the promise in the headline (and have enough content to deliver on it).

Now here’s a little pro tip: the vast majority of the time, if you write the content in a straightforward, clear, concise, declarative way, most clients will say, “Hey! That’s my voice!”

That’s because most people don’t actually know what makes their voice sound different—but everyone (especially founders, C-level executives, investors, business owners, and industry leaders) wants to sound “confident.”

Here’s how I would describe this voice:

- To the point
- No harsh language
- No flowery language
- Minimal industry jargon
- Simple and easy to understand
- Formal tone without being verbose

Think “elevated Medium article”—or *The Economist* without any of the big words.

I have used this tone to ghostwrite for hundreds of different people, and the vast majority of them said, “It sounds just like me!” And that makes sense. Because all these people want is to present themselves clearly, confidently, and without giving off the impression like they’re

“trying too hard.”

So, my suggestion to you is:

Don’t “try” to ghostwrite for someone’s specific voice.

Just write it, simply and clearly.

CHAPTER 8

How To Ghostwrite Anything Part II (The 5 Archetypes Of Client Voices)

SURPRISE!

“Voice” is actually the very last step of ghostwriting anything—and it’s not even a step you need to execute for every client.

I’d say 80% of the time, you can write in a straightforward, clear, concise, declarative way and the client will be happy. It’s only ~20% of the time that you’ll run into clients that actually want to “sound different.” Even still, I would strongly encourage you NOT to think of these clients as “separate.” You don’t need to reinvent the wheel. You should be able to tailor the clear and concise content you’ve written to the client’s voice by making just a few small changes.

How?

Let me introduce you to...

The 5 Archetypes Of Client Voices

Over the years, I have learned there are really only five “voices” clients fall into:

- The Storyteller
- The Opinionator
- The Fact Presenter
- The Frameworker
- The F-Bomber

Let’s go through each one, and walk through some writing examples that clearly show how to “create” this type of voice with just a few small tweaks.

Voice #1: The Storyteller

The storyteller is the client who, *you guessed it*, loves telling stories.

When they speak, they are always giving you dates, times, locations, descriptions, and “story arcs” to drive home whatever point they’re making. These are usually highly creative people with eccentric personalities. Natural speakers.

Some trigger words/sentences to listen for:

- “I remember...”
- “Back when I was...”
- “A few years ago...”
- “When I was first getting started...”
- “The first time I...”

And so on.

Now, here’s the ghostwriting secret I want you to internalize. Notice how, when you read the above five bullets, you can “hear” yourself start to imagine a story coming after each of these opening statements. “I remember...” *What do you remember?* “Back when

I was..." *When you were doing what?*

When you are ghostwriting for a Storyteller, these are the sorts of "triggers" the client is looking for in the writing—because this is the most recognizable attribute they associate with their voice. They (whether they are conscious of it or not) think of themselves as a Storyteller, which means they want their writing to reflect this aspect of their nature.

However...

Stories, in and of themselves, are rarely interesting (let alone valuable) to the reader. What makes a story interesting is when the story is *used as an example to drive home the point you are making*. This is something most clients, let alone writers, don't really understand, so it's important for you to internalize how this works and then educate clients on how and why the piece should be framed in a certain way.

Here's the thought process:

- **Headline makes a promise.** "5 Timeless Leadership Lessons I Learned From My First Mentor—That I Tell Every New Project Manager I Hire"
- **The piece is organized to deliver on that promise.** Headline promises "5 Timeless Leadership Lessons," so the first section/header should be "Leadership Lesson #1," the second section/header should be "Leadership Lesson #2," and so on.
- **Inside each section/header, the first half is a story and the second half is the lesson.** Since we know the client is a Storyteller archetype, and we know they are going to "look" for that in the writing, we are going to prioritize this element of their voice but inside the context of the value they are sharing to the reader.

This structure is what allows the client to share their stories, but

without “making it all about them.”

So, let’s take a look at how this gets executed in the writing.

But before we do that, I want to briefly touch on the use of my 1/3/1 Writing Rhythm Framework.

This is a technique we teach in Ship 30 for 30, and is also in my book *The Art & Business of Online Writing*. If you’re unfamiliar, it means you open with a strong, declarative sentence (1), you expand on that opener and provide description in the middle paragraph (3), and then you close the section with a final, declarative sentence (1). This makes it easy for readers to fall into new sections and keep their eyes moving down the page.

As a good rule of thumb, when you are telling a story (for yourself, or a Storyteller client) in a piece, you want to try to “summarize” that story in one full 1/3/1 block. You do not want to tell a winding story that goes on for three and a half pages. Again, the purpose of whatever story you’re sharing (or summarizing) is to give context to the point you are about to make—not take the reader on a Magic School Bus Mystery Tour where they are left to interpret the meaning on their own.

Here’s a writing example below:

In the first 1/3/1 sequence I am going to (very quickly) summarize a story, and in the second 1/3/1 sequence I am going to bring it back to the reader and explain to them the “takeaway.”

(Fun fact: what I’m explaining here is essentially the short-form version of how tons of best-selling non-fiction books are now structured. Almost every chapter in Ryan Holiday’s *The Obstacle Is The Way* is organized like this: story in the first half, takeaway/interpretation in the second half. Same with Mark Manson’s *The Subtle Art Of Not Giving A Fck**: story in the first half of the chapter, takeaway/interpretation in the second half.)

Example Section: Leadership Lesson #1

(1) I will never forget my very first day as a new Senior Project Manager.

(3) In our 9 a.m. meeting, my boss and mentor at the time stood up and said, “Tony, don’t get comfortable, because this will be your first job and your last job. By the time you’re done working here, you’ll never work for someone else again in your life.” As a 23-year-old who had no idea how I was ever going to start a business of my own one day, I thought he was crazy—but four short years later, I was putting in my two weeks getting ready to start a business of my own.

(1) That’s the sort of impact a really great mentor can have on your life.

(1) Which is why I tell all the Project Managers I hire today the same thing.

(3) The key to being a great leader is to train your team members and employees with the assumption they will one day leave you and go on to do new and different things. Your job isn’t to hold them down and try to keep them around forever. Your job is to help them maximize their talents while they’re in your life, but also build the confidence to unlock new career opportunities for themselves and help the next generation.

(1) Otherwise, you are not a leader—you’re just like every other middle-manager.

Voice #2: The Opinionator

The Opinionator is someone who has very strong opinions on a topic.

Sometimes, this person is a bit of a Storyteller. But the difference is they’re less interested in “telling stories” and more interested in using stories and experiences to prove their point. They want to explain why they’re “right” more than they want to ground the reader in any specific moment.

Some trigger words/sentences to listen for:

- “There’s a reason why...”
- “It’s unbelievable how...”

- “Something most people don’t understand is...”
- “To be perfectly honest, the real reason that happens is because...”

The overarching theme here is conviction.

Opinionators are very sure of themselves, and tend to talk in extremes. “Never” and “always” are foundational to their vocabulary. And notice how after each of the above openers you can “hear” yourself start to fill in the opinion. “There’s a reason why...” *Why what?* “It’s unbelievable how...” *How come what happens?*

These are opinion alley-oops.

Now, there’s a secret to writing for Opinionators—and it all comes down to adverbs:

- Really
- Rarely
- Honestly
- Seriously
- Obviously
- Extremely
- Unfortunately

And so on.

Adverbs equal “emphasis,” which is the core attribute of the Opinionator voice. Because what is an “opinion?” It’s a thought *with emphasis*. And so you can immediately make your clear, concise, straightforward content sound more “opinionated” simply by adding in these types of adverbs (or similar variations).

Example Section: Written In A Clear, Concise, Straightforward Tone

Let me show you how easy it is to tailor a piece of writing to a specific voice.

First, here is an example of the sort of content that would appear in an “Opinion” style article or newsletter, but written in a clear, concise, straightforward tone.

To get started as a manager, it's important to understand three things: First, who you are managing. Second, the tasks owned by the people you are managing. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). Through this lens, the core function of “management” is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information. It's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.

Rewrite Example: Tweaked For An “Opinionator” Voice

Now here's the exact same paragraph, just with a handful of adverbs sprinkled in.

*To **really** get started as a manager, it's important to understand three things: First, who you are managing (**obviously**). Second, the tasks owned by the people you are managing. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). **Honestly**, through this lens, the core function of “management” is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information. **Really**, it's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.*

Same content, plus four adverbs.

And you should be able to “hear” the tone difference.

Voice #3: The Fact Presenter

If The Opinionator voice is created by adding adverbs, then The Fact

Presenter is created by:

- Removing adverbs
- Adding data

That's it.

Fact Presenters tend to be academics (either formally, or aspirationally). These are people who avoid “fluff,” and go to great lengths to make sure they aren’t sharing “naked opinions.” Translation: they want data to back up their claims. Studies, surveys, trend analyses, medical journals, or even a relevant article in a major publication is usually enough.

When you're ghostwriting for a Fact Presenter, here's the golden rule you need to follow: at least one “source” per section. If you do that, the Fact Presenter is going to “see themselves” in the writing (because this is what they would do) and require minimal edits.

The key is knowing what *kind of data* to pull for each Fact Presenter client.

There are 3 sub-archetypes here:

- **The “Forbes” Fact Presenter:** This is the client who wants to back up their opinions with data, but isn't a stickler about how “credible” the data is—they just want *something*. For example, if the client makes a statement like, “Influencer marketing is more popular than ever” they are going to want to follow that up with something like: “According to *Forbes*, brands can earn around \$5.78 for every dollar they spend on influencer marketing,” with a link to the article. How do you find stats like this? Just Google “influencer marketing increasing stats” with the year and the major publication you think might have something on this topic. For example: “influencer marketing increasing stats Forbes 2023.” If that doesn't work,

try: “influencer marketing increasing stats Business Insider 2023.” And so on.

- **The “Medical Journal Junkie” Fact Presenter:** This is the client who snubs their nose at *Forbes*, *Inc Magazine*, *Business Insider*, or any of the major (Internet) publications. Instead, they only want to reference peer-reviewed studies found in places like *The New England Journal Of Medicine*, *The American Journal Of Medicine*, *PubMed*, etc. How do you find stats and studies here? Again, Google (or soon, ChatGPT). Alternatively, go to any of these journals and search based on the topic you’re writing about, skim until you find a source that backs up what the client is saying, and reference it in the piece (with a link).
- **The “Marshmallow Test” Fact Presenter:** Lastly, this is the client who is less interested in “hard data” and more interested in “data that tells a story.” If you’re not familiar, the “marshmallow test” was a study on delayed gratification by a psychologist and professor at Stanford University. Children were given the option between eating one marshmallow immediately—or two marshmallows if they could restrain themselves and wait until they were given permission. Follow-up studies then concluded that children who could postpone gratification were more likely to succeed across a variety of areas in life. A book was even written about it, called *The Marshmallow Test*. These types of data-backed story-studies are perfect for Fact Presenter clients—because they straddle the line between entertainment and science (and usually work for any Fact Presenter archetype).

I want to stress how easy the above is to do. (I was ghostwriting for CEOs of publicly traded biotech companies and linking to studies in medical journals as a 26-year-old ghostwriter—and I failed Biology in high school!) Please do not feel like you need to become an “expert” in

order to ghostwrite for these types of people. You don't. You just need to get good at Googling, skimming, and linking to the types of sources the client wants to associate with their client (and they will tell you).

I also want to stress how much you can re-use the same data and story-studies. There is nothing proprietary about linking to someone else's data—and just because you referenced one study in one client's work, doesn't mean you can't link to the exact same data set in another client's work.

For example: in 2018, influencer marketing was booming. I mean *booming*. I probably ghostwrote over 250 different articles on the topic of “influencer marketing” that year. And because I was writing about “influencer marketing” so much, I became very familiar with the 5-8 “studies” on the topic *Forbes*, *Business Insider*, *Inc Magazine*, etc., had published.

So, what did I do? I linked to those same studies over, and over, and over again.

This is the whole secret to increasing your efficiency as a ghostwriter.

The “belief break” is realizing that your familiarity with a topic, or an industry, or even a specific data set, isn't a negative for your clients. It's a giant positive. Every single Fact Presenter client I had was *thrilled* that I took it upon myself to add this data into their pieces. And because I knew where this data was, and how to use it to support the topic I was writing about, the amount of time I had to spend researching went down, and down, and down.

To the point where I could write a data-backed article on “influencer marketing” for a Fact Presenter client in 20 minutes flat.

And with these frameworks, you will get to the point where you can, too.

Now let's put this into practice.

Example Section: Written In A Clear, Concise, Straightforward Tone

Here is the same content section we used for the Opinionator archetype, written in a clear, concise, straightforward tone.

To get started as a manager, it's important to understand three things: First, who you are managing. Second, the tasks owned by the people you are managing. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). Through this lens, the core function of "management" is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information. It's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.

Rewrite Example: Plus A Source

And now, here's (almost) the exact same paragraph, just with "a source."

To get started as a manager, it's important to understand three things: First, who you are managing. Second, the tasks owned by the people you are managing. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). Unfortunately, according to a study run by consulting firm McKinsey & Co., "70% of organizational change efforts fail due to lack of management support." This means, despite knowing what to do, most managers still fail. Through this lens, the core function of "management" is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information. It's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.

Same content, plus one small nuance: "According to..." with a source.

Yes, it's that easy—and you should be able to "hear" the difference in the voice, just by adding this one small piece.

This is all you have to do to ghostwrite for a Fact Presenter.

For example, if you're writing about startup fundraising, you could cite Crunchbase (the largest repository of public and private companies)

or even a high-profile venture capital firm that may have conducted its own research, like Sequoia or Benchmark. Or, if you're writing about digital marketing, you could cite a large digital marketing website (like Neil Patel's website) or a high-profile company with an extensive blog (like HubSpot, SproutSocial, or Buffer).

A couple final pro tips here:

- **Pro Tip #1:** You can put the “According to...” at the beginning of a section, at the end of a section, or smack-dab right in the middle of a section. You can also start the sentence with “According to,” cite your source, and then continue. Or, you can present the data and end with, “According to...” and cite them at the end. All of these variations work.
- **Pro Tip #2:** When you are linking to the piece of data, hyperlink the “According to {Name}” part of the sentence—not the entire sentence. It just looks more visually pleasing. SEO experts will argue with me here, and if you run into a situation where your links (for some reason) need to be “SEO optimized,” you can cross that bridge on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, just link the “According to {Name}” part of the sentence and get on with it.
- **Pro Tip #3:** Try to avoid citing multiple data points/sources back to back in the same section of the piece—but especially in the same paragraph. As soon as the reader feels like they need to slog through multiple sentences of data in a row, their eyes are going to start to glaze over.
- **Pro Tip #4:** If you do need to cite multiple pieces of data back to back, try to keep it relevant to one overarching topic and do it in a rapid-fire sort of way. For example, “According to *Harvard Business Review*, 76% of early stage startups struggle to raise funding, 58% struggle to talk to even 10 investors, and 98% struggle to even get their first investor on board.” (I’m making this data up, but you get the point.) When data

is presented quickly like this, all together, on one specific topic, the reader can get through it.

- **Pro Tip #5:** When in doubt, you're better off finding one really great stat or study and building an entire section (or sometimes, even an entire piece) around it—rather than trying to throw as much data as you possibly can at the reader. Less is more.

Voice #4: The Frameworker

Do you know what most best-selling “How To” non-fiction books have in common?

It's a secret, and it took me about a decade to figure out.

Their subtitles almost always have some variation of the following:

- *A Proven Process*
- *A Mental Model*
- *A Simple Checklist*
- *A Timeless Framework*
- *An Unbreakable System*

And so on.

Why?

Because, as readers, the last thing we want from the writing we consume is “a bunch of ideas.” No, we want those ideas organized. We want to know that when we spend our money, or our attention, or both, that the writer is doing us the favor of cutting away the fluff and only giving us what's most important. Furthermore, we want to know that the ideas we are consuming are *proven*. That they *work*.

For example, notice your perception difference between these two headlines:

- Here's How I Improved Our Company's Website Conversion To Make Us More Money

- Website Conversion Mastery: Our 3-Step Framework For Converting Website Visitors Into High-Ticket Clients

Which one are you more likely to click on? Read? Buy?

The answer is: the second one.

But there are three very specific reasons why:

- **It isn't "a bunch of ideas."** It's a framework. A proven process. An unbreakable system. It's the mental equivalent of being handed a vacuum-sealed Apple box that slurps when you open it. And the same way Apple products "feel" more valuable because of the box they come in, your ideas will feel more valuable depending on the box you ship them in.
- **The framework has a name.** "Website Conversion Mastery." When something has a name, it automatically seems like "a real thing." And when something is "a real thing," we value it more. Want proof? What's the difference between a farm animal you eat and a farm animal you live with? Usually, the animal you live with has a name—and the one you eat, doesn't.
- **X Steps.** If you can crystallize your ideas into a "framework," that's great. If you can name your framework, even better. But what really pushes it over the edge is telling the reader, "And I'm going to show you how to execute this framework in just 3 steps." The number is arbitrary: 3 steps, 11 steps, doesn't matter. The point is, when you tell the reader how many steps it's going to take, they are more likely to follow your instruction. A good counter-example would be: imagine you hired a personal trainer who said, "Meet me at the gym tomorrow at 8am," but didn't tell you what workout you were going to do or how long it would take. Chances of you showing up are roughly 0%. But if you hired a personal trainer who said, "Meet me here tomorrow at 8am for 15 minutes

of stretching, followed by a light 20 minute jog,” now you’re much more likely to show up and buy into the process.

This is what The Frameworker archetype is looking for—even if they don’t know how to ask you for it.

You can usually tell someone is a Frameworker because they talk in “steps.” *First, we did this. Then, we did this. Finally, we finished with this.* When you hear these steps, your immediate takeaway should be: “This is a 3-step framework. Let’s give it a name.”

Again, yes, it really is that simple. And yes, anyone can do this. (I am giving you my **5 Archetypes Of Client Voices** framework right now! And because I gave it a name, guess what? There’s a very, very good chance you’re going to tell someone else about my framework, and use the language I came up with at my kitchen table to talk about it! Pretty cool, right?)

Let’s use our same example section from above, but this time, execute our little 3-step checklist above (Framework, Name, Steps).

Example Section: Written In A Clear, Concise, Straightforward Tone

Here is the same content section we used for the Opinionator and Fact Presenter archetypes, written in a clear, concise, straightforward tone.

To get started as a manager, it’s important to understand three things: First, who you are managing. Second, the tasks owned by the people you are managing. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). Through this lens, the core function of “management” is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information. It’s the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.

Rewrite Example: Framework, Name, Steps

And now, here's (almost) the exact same paragraph, just framing it as a "framework."

*To get started as a manager, I recommend using **this easy 3-step framework** we use inside my company, **called the Accountable Manager Checklist**: First, who you are managing. Second, the tasks owned by the people you are managing. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). Using this framework, the core function of "management" is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information. It's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.*

How much more "official" does this seem, just by framing the perspective as a "framework" with a name?

It's not even close. Huge difference.

A few more pro tips here:

- **Pro Tip #1:** Do not name your framework something "clever." Nobody is going to know what Shmoogle Dig-Doogle means. Instead, think about the goal of the thing you are trying to explain (in the example above: "How to hold people accountable as a manager"). Then put that goal in the name: The Accountable Manager Checklist. The name has to reflect the purpose of the framework. Clever is your enemy.
- **Pro Tip #2:** Try to avoid introducing readers to multiple new frameworks, with multiple names, in the same piece. 1 named framework per article, Twitter Thread, newsletter, LinkedIn post, etc. The last thing you want is for the reader to get lost in a Framework Soup.
- **Pro Tip #3:** Also avoid "named frameworks within named frameworks." For example, "I recommend using this easy 3-step framework we use inside my company, called the Accountable Manager Checklist. The first step is called the

Manager’s Managing Lightbulb.” Too much. Now the reader thinks you’re off your rocker. Just name the overarching framework, and then walk through the steps.

Voice #5: The F-Bomber

And, of course, The F-Bomber.

This is the client who thinks the key to “standing out” is to use abrasive language (and this trend only became more popular on the heels of books like *The Subtle Art Of Not Giving A Fck** and *You Are A Badass*).

The truth is, these clients are few and far between. However, you will run into them—and when you do, it’s best to stay as close as you can to their natural speaking voice. Let them “hear” it and decide if and how they want to censor themselves. For example, if you are talking to a client and they literally say, “Silicon Valley is a fucking Ponzi scheme disguised as a technological beauty pageant,” you should say that in the piece verbatim. (There’s something poetic about it, don’t you think?) That’s their voice. And it’s best to give them the opportunity to see and hear their voice, back to themselves, so they can decide what they want to do with it.

More times than not, they will come around and say, “I know I said that—and I can’t believe I’m reeling myself back in here—but let’s tone it down a little bit.”

The key is: you can’t be the one to tell them that.

They have to come to that conclusion on their own.

The are 2 archetypes of F-Bombers:

- **Uncensored:** If you find yourself ghostwriting for someone who flagrantly uses abrasive language, and wants to keep it in the writing, a good rule of thumb is to just insert some

variation of “damn” or “fuck” in every section. For example: “There’s just no way Wall Street is being honest with consumers right now about the true rate of inflation.” To rewrite this sentence for an Uncensored F-Bomber, you would just say (turning the volume up a little bit): “There’s no way **in hell** Wall Street is being honest with consumers right now about the true rate of inflation.” Or (turning the volume up a bit more): “there’s **no fucking way** Wall Street is being honest with consumers right now about the true rate of inflation.”

- **Censored:** The counterexample is if you find yourself ghost-writing for an F-Bomber, but he or she wants to censor themselves a bit in the writing. (They may talk in expletives, but want to appear a bit more “buttoned up” in the text.) Instead of using curse words, you can accomplish a similar tone by inserting words that imply an air of sarcasm and annoyance. For example: “I don’t think consumers are going to be happy when the Fed hikes interests rates again.” To rewrite this sentence for a Censored F-Bomber(turning the volume up a little bit), you might insert a few tiny words like: “I **just** don’t think consumers are going to be **very** happy when the Fed hikes interest rates again.” Or (turning the volume up a bit more), “I just **seriously** have **a hard time believing** consumers are going to be very happy when the Fed hikes interest rates again.” Tiny words like “just, really, seriously, etc.,” followed by “ranting” phrases like “I have a hard time believing” are sometimes all you need to make a clear, concise voice sound a little bit more perturbed.

The F-Bomber is the only voice archetype where “more” on the tone side tends to work well.

(With the other archetypes, “more” very quickly sounds like you’re trying too hard.)

Example Section: Written In A Clear, Concise, Straightforward Tone

Here is the same content section we used for the Opinionator and Fact Presenter archetypes, written in a clear, concise, straightforward tone.

To get started as a manager, it's important to understand three things: First, who you are managing. Second, the tasks owned by the people you are managing. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). Through this lens, the core function of "management" is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information. It's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.

Rewrite Example: Uncensored F-Bomber.

And now, here's (almost) the exact same paragraph, rewritten for an Uncensored F-Bomber.

***Listen**, to get started as a manager, it's important to understand three things: First, who **the hell** are you managing. Second, what tasks are the people you are managing responsible for. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). **If I'm really being honest here**, the core function of "management" is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information (**and aren't completely fucking incompetent**). It's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.*

Rewrite Example: Censored F-Bomber.

And here's the exact same paragraph, rewritten for a Censored F-Bomber.

***Listen**, to get started as a manager, it's important to understand three things: First, who you're managing. Second, what tasks are the people you*

are managing responsible for. And third, the desired outcomes of completing those tasks (and the negative consequences that happen when those tasks are not completed). If I'm really being honest here, the core function of "management" is not that difficult—assuming you are trained and given this information (and aren't an idiot). It's the soft-skills—navigating conflict, delivering negative feedback, managing toxic personalities, and so on—that are much more challenging.

A few things to notice here:

- **Takeaway #1: All it takes is 1 single crude word to completely change the entire tone of a section.** Why? Because crude language is typically reserved for a specific type of person, and once you play that card, the reader immediately associates your language with “that type of person.” No need to overthink this archetype of voice.
- **Takeaway #2: Crude language sits on a spectrum.** If a client asks for you to “tone it down,” it’s actually not the “tone” they want you to get rid of. They want you to keep the same tone—just use more mild language. This is the difference between saying “assuming you aren’t completely fucking incompetent” and “assuming you aren’t an idiot.” Same tone, but the first one is turned way up and the second one is turned down slightly.
- **Takeaway #3: When in doubt, write like you’re ranting.** This is the easiest way to think about it. Instead of relying on crude language to do the job (most of which a client will come back around and want you to censor out anyways), let “ranting” phrases do most of the work. Again, little words and phrases like “I just seriously can’t believe” are very effective in creating this sarcastic, annoyed, I’m-smarter-than-everybody-else tone.
- **Takeaway #4: A good rule of thumb is to only have one crude word per section.** There’s a great *Seinfeld* episode

where George Costanza learns that after you tell one good joke, it's best to leave on a high note and not try to out-do yourself. Crude language in writing follows a similar rule. One well-executed “crude” phrase is all you need to shift the entire tone of a section, sometimes an entire piece. But if you do it back, to back, to back, always trying to out-do yourself, it very quickly becomes annoying and obvious to the reader.

(Bonus) The Ultimate Ghostwriting Voice

I'm saving the best for last.

After ghostwriting for so many different types of people, I've come to the conclusion that the single best way to approach ghostwriting is to simply deliver a voice ANYONE would love to put their name on. And the way to do that is to combine the best pieces of all the above 5 archetypes into one.

Here are the 5 archetypes again, with a 1-sentence summary of their “superpower”:

- **The Storyteller:** Tells a story to give the reader real-life examples of what they're about to learn.
- **The Opinionator:** Shares a “controversial” opinion that gets the reader's attention.
- **The Fact Presenter:** Backs up their opinion with a memorable stat or research-backed story-study
- **The Frameworker:** Gives the reader something actionable they can go and execute on to achieve a similar outcome.
- **(Optional) The F-Bomber:** Pushes the boundary ever-so-slightly with 1-2 sentences in the piece that inject a bit of an abrasive tone.

The reason I say this is the Ultimate Ghostwriting Voice is because each of these components are the key variables *everyone* wants in their writing—regardless of industry. You will very rarely run into a client

who says, “No, I don’t want you to reference a relevant study to back up what I’m saying.” Or a client who says, “No, I don’t want you to share a story that makes it easier for the reader to relate to what I’m sharing.” Or a client who says, “No, I don’t want you to take my steps and organize them into a memorable framework.”

These are the pieces EVERYONE wants!

So, if you really want to impress clients (and start accelerating your income as a ghostwriter), don’t wait for them to ask you to do any of the above.

In their very first draft, give them:

- A Story
- An Opinion
- A Relevant Study
- A Named & Claimed Framework

Then, see which pieces they like, don’t like, or want changed—and adjust from there.

But your goal should be to deliver a 95/100 first draft, every time.

CHAPTER 9

The 3 Phases Of Nailing A Client's Natural Speaking Voice

KNOWING THE 5 ARCHETYPES OF Client Voices is important.

But I want to share a secret with you for nailing the nuances of a client's natural speaking voice:

Record the call and work from the transcription.

Quick story: Back in 2016 before I quit my 9-5 job and started ghostwriting, I used to “ghostwrite” for my boss and mentor all the time. I just didn’t know that what I was doing was “ghostwriting.” He was a brilliant creative director, but was also dyslexic. So instead of hacking away on emails by himself, he used to call me into his office for two, three, sometimes four hours and dictate what he wanted to say to me—while I typed it all in real time.

Each email consisted of the same three phases:

- **Phase I:** Transcription
- **Phase II:** Editing Down
- **Phase III:** Read Aloud (Approval)

Little did I know this boring, “intern-level” work would end up giving me the skeleton for my ghostwriting process (which I repeated over and over again with hundreds of executives).

Let’s walk through each phase—because this is what you’re going to be doing with clients!

Phase I: Transcription

Ghostwriting from a blank page is hard. And I mean *hard*.

When you’re staring at a blank page, you are tasking yourself with “inventing the client’s voice” out of thin air—like magic. And as much as we would all love to believe we are capable of such wizardry on command, the truth is, you don’t have to. A much easier approach is to hop on the phone with a client, record the call, and then get the call transcribed (using a software service like Rev.com or any of the emerging AI tools that can do this in seconds). And if the client doesn’t want to hop on calls, or wants you to work from their library of content, then do the same thing for their podcast, YouTube videos, or keynote speeches. Take the recording and get it transcribed. (And if the transcription tool you’re using has a cost, trust me, it’s worth it.)

The reason you want to work from a transcription is for a few reasons:

- **Reason #1: The transcription is 90% “approved language.”**
When you start with a blank page, you run the risk of sending something to a client and having them snap back and say, “I wouldn’t say it like that.” But when you work from a transcription, you are working from things the client said out of their own mouth. Sure, every once in a while they might backtrack and decide, “I actually don’t want to say that,” but 90% of the time, you’re working with already approved language. This makes your job much easier.
- **Reason #2: When a client says something perfectly, you**

don't want to have to try to recreate it. I can't tell you how many times this has happened to me as a ghostwriter. I'll be talking to a client on the phone, and then all of a sudden they'll go on a rant, channeling the universe. And even though I'm typing quickly and taking notes, sometimes that perfect turn of phrase will fly past me—and when I try to “recreate it” on my own, I can't. The way they said it was perfect. These are the moments you are going to thank yourself for recording the call. It's much easier to “go find that thing they said” than it is to recreate their genius.

- **Reason #3: Working from a transcription puts more emphasis on the client's insights, and less emphasis on your talents as a “ghostwriter.”** The honest truth is most clients don't like the idea of hiring a ghostwriter—because the term “ghostwriter” implies they didn't create the thing all by themselves. It's not logical, it's emotional. Which is why a huge part of my pitch as a ghostwriter (and our pitch as a ghostwriting agency) was that we recorded the calls and worked off transcriptions. “That way, your voice stays intact.” This was the golden phrase of reassurance.

When you approach ghostwriting this way, what you end up learning is that your job isn't really to “write.”

It's to remove. Edit. Chop down. Organize.

A transcription is like a giant, messy, wet lump of clay. It's full of ‘ummm's and ‘ahhhh's, full of tangents and side stories, and a collection of little words like “but I think and that's really why so many do to be honest” that sound reasonable in conversation but look ugly on paper. Which means your job isn't to add more. It's to hack away at the clay, get rid of everything that isn't relevant, and then organize and polish up what's left.

Mastering this skill as a ghostwriter is crucial.

And, eventually, you'll find yourself doing it intuitively in

conversations with clients—your brain deciding, in real time, what’s worth keeping and what’s worth throwing away.

A couple final notes on this topic:

- **Yes, you should tell clients you are recording the call.** Some will even ask you to record it for their own benefit. But it’s important to make it clear what you’re doing (“Alright I’m going to hit record now”) so they are at least aware of the red blinking light. Every once in a while a client will tell you a story and then say, “I know we’re recording but don’t use this.” And in some cases, a client might even ask you to pause recording while they explain the context or backstory of something to you that may contain sensitive information. All part of being a ghostwriter!
- **You can/should record video calls (Zoom), phone calls, and even in-person meetings.** Zoom is the easiest because you can also store all the files in the cloud. If the client wants to chat on the phone you have two options: either send them a recorded line number, or get scrappy and put your cell on speakerphone and record the audio on your laptop (in GarageBand, for example—and yes, I’ve done this hundreds of times). Even for in-person meetings, I recommend pulling out your phone and asking if you can record the conversation. Open a voice note, hit record, and place your phone face down in the middle of the table like a reporter (not face up, otherwise the client will stare at the “recording in progress” the whole time and overly censor themselves—you want them to forget about the phone after 5 or 10 minutes).
- **Best practice is to send the client the recording and transcript after each call as well.** As you build relationships with your clients, most will just trust you and not really care about this. But especially for new clients, and as you are building new relationships, you want to start things off on the right

foot and send them each call recording & transcription—if for no other reason than just for transparency's sake.

- **And this goes without saying, but you cannot and should not share the recording or transcript with anyone, anywhere else, without their written permission.** Privacy is a core principle in the world of ghostwriting, but it's also just a good rule of thumb for working with clients in general. Default to asking their permission before you do something that involves their language (this also goes for testimonials, using their company logo, referencing your work together, etc.).

Phase II: Edit Down

When you get a call transcribed, what comes back is anywhere from five to upwards of 50 pages (depending on the length of the call) of borderline incoherent text.

It makes you realize how we speak isn't how we write—and vice versa.

What took me a while to realize, however, is that a lot of the transcript can be deleted right away. Said differently: keeping all the “filler” text (the random stuff surrounding the actual content) is what makes the transcript feel heavy. But if you start by cutting a few big sections off the bat, you trick your mind into feeling like you're making “significant progress”—and suddenly, the whole thing feels a lot more actionable.

This is the step-by-step process I use to edit down transcripts into workable content:

- **Step 1: Cut the intro and the outro.** When you hop on a call with a client, the first five or ten minutes are rarely productive. It's a lot of, “Hey, how's your week going? What's been top of mind for you?” The same goes for the last five or

ten minutes. It's a lot of, "Alright, well, that about does it," and maybe a few notes on other pieces you have in the works together. Cut the intro and outro—none of that is going into the piece anyways.

- **Step 2: Skim for rambling sections.** Usually there will be a few big parts of the transcript where the client is all over the place. They're telling a story or they've gotten lost on a tangent and are giving you insights and details you know are never going to see the light of day. Don't think twice about it. Cut these too.
- **Step 3: Start cutting strings of tiny words that are cluttering up the transcript.** This is the linguistic equivalent of picking clothes up from the floor and putting them in the hamper. As you skim the transcript, you will inevitably start to see entire sentences (or even paragraphs) that are borderline incoherent: *"And so really I mean the real reason why and I think a lot of people don't think about this because to be honest they just haven't really, well, what I should say is,"* etc. All those words aren't actually saying anything. Cut them—and trust that you aren't affecting the content of the transcript by doing so.
- **Step 4: Start skimming for a "theme."** Once you get through Steps 1, 2, and 3, take a few minutes and start skimming the transcript. Start back at the top. You'll notice how much easier it is to skim the content of the transcript once you've gotten rid of 70% of the clutter. As you start reading, pay attention to the trigger words we talked about in the previous chapters. If a client says, "You know something I don't hear a lot of people talk about," there's a good chance this is going to be an Opinion piece. Or if a client says, "So, there are a few steps you can take to solve this problem," you're most likely looking at a Framework piece. And so on. Skim

until it becomes clear the best way to organize the transcript into a coherent piece of content.

- **Step 5: Open a word document and put the transcript and word doc side by side.** Once you know what kind of piece you're going to write (aka: the best way to organize the information), Prep The Page. Put a working title at the top. And then skeleton the piece by dividing the page into sections using subheads. Then, go back to the transcript and start by extracting the 3-5 Main Points. What are the "steps" or the "opinions" or the key ideas the client has shared? Make those Main Points your subheads. And then inside each section (the blank space in your word doc between each subhead), start copy/pasting over entire sections from the transcript relevant to that individual section. For example: If your first subhead is, "Step 1: Hire Fast, Fire Slow," then look for content in the transcription where they explain that idea/step and copy/paste it right there in the doc.
- **Step 6: Whittle down the content in each section.** See? The best ghostwriters don't even do very much ghostwriting! It's more about listening, editing, and removing content—and then polishing up what's left. Inside each section, you should have at least a paragraph or two of content from the transcript. Whittle that content down, remove all the excess words, and reformat it based on the best practices of whatever it is you're writing (a newsletter, a blog post, a Twitter Thread, etc.).

If you execute all of the above steps, the amount of "writing" you will have to do should be fairly minimal.

Phase III: Read Aloud

Whenever I tell people I studied creative writing in college, they

assume that's where I learned to "write."

But that's not true.

Studying creative writing in college taught me how to *read my writing out loud*—which taught me how to iterate and improve my writing on my own.

The single greatest stress-test you can do, for anything you write (whether it's for yourself or for someone else) is to read your work out loud. You have probably heard this advice before, but the question is: do you do it? Probably not. And I don't blame you. Reading your work out loud is taxing. Not just because it's difficult or time consuming, but because it's *revealing*. As soon as you have to say the words out loud, your inner critic usually comes vaulting out of your mouth, *splat*, right onto your desk beside you. And it starts pointing out everything that's wrong with whatever it is you've just written.

Which is what makes the exercise so valuable.

When you read what you've written out loud, and a sentence feels "wordy," it is. When a phrase sounds "off," it is. When a word seems "out of character," it is. When a story feels "forced," it is. Trust your intuition. Reading your work aloud is the easiest way to see what's not working—giving you the opportunity to fix it.

I give writers this advice all the time, but I stress its importance for ghostwriters even more. Because if a phrase sounds "off" or a word sounds "out of character" to you, trust me, it's going to sound "off" or "out of character" to the client, too.

Here are the two big questions I ask myself whenever I'm reading my work out loud:

- **Question #1: "Can I say this in fewer words?"** Brevity is king, especially in our fast-paced, digital-first world where readers have the attention spans of goldfish. Whenever possible you want to look for opportunities to say the same thing, faster. Pro tip here: remove as many "little" words as you can. For example, here's a sentence that might sound like rambling

when you read it out loud: *“It’s for this reason that most people who first get started as managers at SaaS companies tend to have a hard time deciding where it is they want to move next in their careers.”* Can you hear all the little words the reader has to dance through just to get to the end of the sentence? We can trim this down just by removing them: *“This is why most first-time managers at SaaS companies have a hard time deciding where they want to move next in their careers.”* Same content, same idea, fewer words. Sounds way better.

- **Question #2: “Would this voice say this word, phrase, or story?”** This is where knowing the 5 Archetypes of Client Voices is supremely helpful. For example, if you are ghostwriting for a Fact Presenter, and you randomly drop an F-Bomb in the middle of the section, the moment you read that out loud, an alarm should go off in your brain. That voice (the Fact Presenter) would never say that. Remove it. Or, if you are ghostwriting for an Opinionator, and you read a section out loud where you are hedging the opinion with a lot of words like “maybe, sometimes, not always,” etc., an alarm should go off. Opinionators don’t hedge their opinions. Get rid of it. The whole art of ghostwriting is keeping the magic of the voice alive—from the first word to the very last.

Reading your work out loud, and asking yourself these two questions throughout the process, will increase the quality of your writing 10x.

And you might as well embrace the exercise, because anything you miss, trust me, the client won’t be shy about pointing out to you.

Ghostwriting “Correctly Incorrect” Voices

Now, it’s worth taking a moment to address an outlier archetype in the

world of ghostwriting.

And that's ghostwriting for someone who has (and wants) a "Correctly Incorrect" voice.

For example, have you ever read any of Gary Vaynerchuk's books? If you're unfamiliar, Gary is a serial entrepreneur & investor, but is better known for being a Social Media Motivator.

If you have consumed any of his content, then you know a few things about Gary's voice:

- It is abrasive (F-Bomber)
- It is very accessible (3rd-grade reading level)
- He rarely uses big words & complicated language
- And he speaks quickly, loosely, and in a way that is not always "grammatically correct"

As a result, if you were to transcribe any of his videos, podcasts, or keynote speeches, what the transcript would likely reveal is a "Correctly Incorrect" voice. Instead of saying "going to," Gary uses contractions like "gonna." Or, instead of completing one sentence and starting a new one, Gary frequently stops mid-thought and starts a new line of thinking somewhere completely different. Something like: "That's why so many people... and honestly, I did too."

All these little nuances are what make his voice "his." And when you are listening to him speak, these nuances and attributes sound familiar and normal. Which means the biggest mistake you could make as his ghostwriter would be to edit these out—in the spirit of making his text-based content "grammatically correct."

Which again, is why reading the work out loud at the very end is so important.

You might not catch this quality about your client's voice in the transcription, or even during the "editing down" and writing phase. But if you skip the final stress-test of reading the work out loud, what will happen is you'll send the piece to the client and they'll come back

saying, “This doesn’t sound like me.” If you had read the work out loud, you would have heard that too—and (using the frameworks you’re learning here in this book) you would know how to fix it.

Sometimes, “Correctly Incorrect” is exactly what the client is looking for.

Because it sounds like them.

CHAPTER 10

Mastering The Skill Of “Close Listening” (The Key To Interviewing Clients)

AS A GHOSTWRITER, YOU ARE actually playing three very different roles at the same time:

- The Interviewer
- The Writer
- The Editor

These are all different skill sets. But proficiency in one area will become an unfair advantage for you in the others.

Your goal shouldn't just be to become a great “ghostwriter.” You also want to become a great interviewer—because then you will know how to ask very specific questions that give you the exact puzzle pieces you need in order to produce a high-quality piece for the client. And you also want to become a great editor—because then you will know

how to organize and “edit” as you write, reducing the amount of time you need to do this work at the very end.

So, we’ve talked quite a bit about the ghostwriting process.

Now, let’s dig into interviewing.

But first, a quick story:

How I Learned The Skill Of “Close Listening”

In high school, I had terrible social anxiety.

I don’t remember being this way in elementary school or even middle school. But at the end of 8th grade, I had a falling out with my seven best friends (I showed up to our lunch table in the cafeteria one day, my seat filled with someone else) and I was never the same again. I spent the whole summer alone. Once or twice, they even prank called me and pretended to apologize, saying sorry for kicking me out of the group. I would get my hopes up, thinking everything was about to return to normal, and then I would hear laughing in the background. I’d hang up the phone and bury my face in the couch and just cry for hours. Not because it hurt my feelings, but because high school was around the corner and without my group of friends, that meant I had to enter this whole new world alone.

For the next four years, I didn’t have any friends in my neighborhood. I didn’t go to anyone’s house after school to play video games. I didn’t go to any school dances or sporting events. The only school event I went to was senior prom, and I took my first and only teenage girlfriend—who went to another school, 40 minutes away. My high school experience was one giant exercise in distancing myself from all of my peers, terrified any new friends I made would betray me like my old ones did. And even though I made a few new friends in college, it took me a very long time to train this behavior out of me.

My boss and mentor at that advertising agency I used to work at

was the one who taught me how.

His name was Ron, and the most valuable thing he gave me was the opportunity to sit in on meetings with him that were way above my pay grade. He would take me to lunches with prospective clients, campaign pitches in fancy boardrooms, and events like fashion shows on hotel rooftops and restaurant openings in River North. Whenever he would sit with a client (or sometimes, a beautiful woman), he barely talked. He would take his phone out of his pocket and place it face-down on top of his wallet on the table in front of him—almost signaling this conversation had his full attention. And he would just ask questions. And it didn’t take very long for a client to start spilling their wants and needs, right into his lap. Or for a woman to start telling him exactly what her ex-boyfriend had done wrong, and what she wished her future boyfriend could do right.

It was like watching a magician at work.

After each one of these interactions, when Ron and I would leave and head back to the office, we would get in a cab and he’d turn to me and ask, “What did you notice?” He didn’t tell me the answer right away—he made me think about it. And I’d recall the conversation to him, moment by moment, and then he’d point out little things I missed: questions he’d asked that had triggered certain responses, things he’d said to make the other person feel comfortable, and so on. Every meeting or event I went to with him was an exercise in human psychology.

As someone struggling with social anxiety, silly as it may sound, having this framework for how to consciously orchestrate conversations was tremendously helpful for me.

Until eventually, a few years later, I was going to meetings by myself—placing my phone face-down on my wallet, listening closely, just like Ron had shown me.

What Is “Close Listening?”

Here’s a brutal life truth:

Most people don’t listen.

When you are talking, the other person isn’t really hearing you. What they’re hearing is their own thoughts interpreting what you’re saying and trying to decide what they should say as soon as your mouth stops moving. And some people don’t even wait for a break in the conversation—they just bulldoze right over you, their inner monologue too loud for them to bear.

“Close Listening,” on the other hand, is an almost meditative practice. You have no inner monologue fighting for your attention. You are completely tuned-in to the other person: what they’re saying, how they’re saying it, but most importantly, *what they’re not saying*. It’s the verbal equivalent of the famous Mozart quote: “The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between.”

If you have ever met someone who is a “close listener,” then you know the feeling you get when you talk to them. You feel seen. You feel safe. You feel like they actually care—and because you feel like they’re “listening,” you are far more willing to divulge information you probably wouldn’t feel comfortable sharing with most other people. I’m not talking about deep, dark secrets. Just less-polished thoughts, like ideas you’re still workshopping inside yourself, or the real-time processing of your feelings on a certain subject.

Being a “close listener” for people in your life is a gift. It brings depth to relationships. It opens spontaneous doors of opportunity. And, as I would quickly learn, makes it easier to make friends.

But as a ghostwriter, it’s one of the most valuable skills you can master—because it allows clients to feel comfortable being open and honest with you, which allows you to capture gold.

10 Topics Most Clients Want To Talk About

When interviewing clients for content, it's best to bring a topic or a working headline to the table to start the discussion.

The reason is because you are the director, and the client is the star. And “the star” needs some direction in order to know what you're looking for—otherwise they're going to feel forced to take matters into their own hands. (And over time, this will make them see you less as a “Premium Ghostwriter” who they can trust for guidance, and more of a “freelance writer” who they have to manage—lowering your value.)

What kind of topics should you suggest? It depends on what sort of piece you are writing, and what sort of piece you believe would be most valuable to readers based on the client's expertise. Feel free to leverage the 30 Proven Approaches we talked about earlier here to come up with some ideas.

But these 10 pretty much work every time:

- **Tips: Ask the client what tips they have for someone who wants to do something they've done.** For example, if the client is the CFO of a tech company, ask them what tips they have for someone who wants to become the CFO of a tech company. Or if the client has sold various businesses, ask them what tips they have for someone who wants to sell their first business.
- **Stats: Bring an industry related stat to the client and ask them what they think about it.** For example, if the client works in retail, bring them the stat that “retail sales during 2023 will grow between 4% and 6% over 2022 to between \$5.13 trillion and \$5.23 trillion,” and ask them where they see the industry going, if they think this growth is short-lived, etc.
- **Steps: Ask the client the steps they've taken in order to**

achieve some sort of outcome. For example, if the client has achieved financial freedom, ask them what steps they would recommend a beginner take in order to achieve financial freedom (or at least start heading in the right direction).

- **Habits: Ask the client what habits have contributed the most to their success.** For example, if the client runs marathons, ask the client what daily habits are non-negotiable for themselves and their goals.
- **Lessons: Ask the client what lessons they've learned related to whatever it is they've done.** For example, if the client's company recently executed a huge product launch, ask them what lessons they learned along the way that they plan on implementing next time around.
- **Mistakes: Ask the client what mistakes they made on their road to success.** For example, if the client has run multiple companies, ask them what mistakes they made that caused their early companies to fail.
- **Examples: Ask the client for examples of products, stories, experiences, or companies that taught them important lessons.** For example, if the client says "Leadership is all about asking the right questions of your team," ask them for examples of what kinds of questions to ask and moments where they asked that question and what the result was.
- **Questions: Ask the client what questions they ask themselves when making important decisions.** For example, if the client is in charge of hiring and firing team members, ask them what questions they ask themselves when trying to decide whether to hire or fire someone.
- **Resources: Ask the client what resources contributed the most to their growth.** For example, if the client talks about human psychology, ask them what books or podcasts have taught them the most about human psychology. Or, ask them

what resources they would recommend to a beginner who wants to learn more about human psychology.

- **Trending Topics: Ask the client what they think of something happening in the news.** For example, if a major acquisition happens in their industry, ask them what they think about it.

These 10 topics are things the vast majority of clients feel comfortable talking about, but are also interesting and helpful to readers.

The Art Of Interviewing Clients: 5 Questions To Easily Get Clients Talking

Remember “The Ultimate Ghostwriting Voice” from earlier? (The amalgamation of The 5 Archetypes of Client Voices.)

This is ultimately the goal of your client interview. You aren’t just asking questions for the sake of “asking questions.” What you’re trying to do is get them to give you the pieces you need in order to create a valuable piece of content.

And what are those pieces?

- A personal story
- A strong opinion
- A relevant study, trend, or data point
- A Named & Claimed framework

Sometimes, a piece might have all four of these. Otherwise, a piece might only have two. Either way, the more you can get from the client (in their own words), the easier the writing process will be. The piece will feel “done” before you even get off the call.

Now, if “interviewing” feels intimidating to you, let me remove the pressure: everyone loves talking about themselves (even if they say they don’t).

I can't tell you how many times clients have insisted, over and over again, that they don't want to create content to be the center of attention, they don't need any flattery for their ego, they don't care what people think, they don't like talking about themselves... *only to spend 48 straight, uninterrupted minutes talking exclusively about themselves in response to just one or two questions*. It's human nature. The moment we feel like someone is listening, really listening to what we have to say, we can't help ourselves. We want to let that person into our inner world!

With this in mind, even if you find yourself talking to a brick wall (like a buttoned-up CFO, or a robotic software engineer), here are the four questions you can ask that will make sure you get the pieces you need to ghostwrite a great piece (along with a handful of follow-up questions to keep nudging them in the right direction):

Question #1: “What was it like the first time you...?”

- “What was it like the first time you started working as a software engineer?”
- “What was it like being the youngest lawyer at your law firm?”
- “What was it like taking over your father's company?”

If you want to extract a personal story from a client, this question works wonders.

There is something nostalgic about reflecting on “the first time” we've done anything: our first job, our first time traveling abroad, our first kiss. But asking someone, “Hey, tell me something personal about yourself” feels very invasive—and usually makes them clench up and give you the opposite of a personal story. But if you simply ask, “What was it like the first time you...?” and provide a clear moment in time (first promotion, first startup, first investor pitch, etc.), all of a sudden

the memories flood back—and the client will start replaying the events for you, as if narrating a movie.

Some great follow-up questions:

- “What would you do differently if you could go back in time?”
- “Did you know what you were doing?”
- “What did it feel like at the time?”
- “Were you hesitant at all?”

Question #2: “What’s your interpretation of...?”

- “Is this something you think a lot of other people would agree with?”
- “How come this perspective isn’t a very popular opinion?”
- “Why do you think this happened?”

If you want to extract an opinion from a client, bring them a trending topic or ask them to respond to “conventional wisdom” in their industry.

In some cases, the client may ask you to clarify your question. But the key thing to note here is, if they ask for clarification, it’s not because they don’t like the question or want to answer it (they’ll tell you verbatim if that’s the case). What they’re looking for is more direction: “What would you like me to interpret about it?” And sometimes it takes one or two follow-up questions to get them going.

Again, the goal here is not to get them to say something outlandish or “be controversial for controversy’s sake.” The goal is to figure out where the client has strong opinions—because those strong opinions will always be the things readers find most interesting.

For example: one of the “controversial opinions” I write about all the time is: if you want to write on the Internet, don’t start a blog.

Write on social platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, Medium, Quora, etc. Now, is this a “controversial opinion?” Compared to a controversial political or societal opinion, hardly. But what makes it controversial is that it goes against conventional wisdom in the industry of “writing.” Everyone in the writing, publishing, and marketing world thinks blogging is a good idea—and if you search, “How to start writing online,” most of the resources will tell you how to start a blog. But I’ve been writing on the Internet for 15+ years, and one of my core personal beliefs is that blogging is a complete waste of time for people who want to share their thoughts, stories, perspectives, and opinions online.

As a result, whenever I write something that says, “Don’t start a blog,” it gets outsized attention. Because it goes against the grain of conventional wisdom in my industry.

This is the sort of thing you’re trying to extract from your clients.

What do they feel strongly about? What perspectives do they have that go against the grain of their industry? What are their strongest opinions?

Find those, pull them out, and then put a spotlight on them.

Some great follow-up questions:

- “What’s the counterpoint? If you had to take the opposite stance, what would be the counter-argument?”
- “Do you know of anyone else in your industry who shares this opinion?”
- “Why do you think this is so hard for people to understand?”
- “Why do you think so many people believe the opposite?”

Question #3: “Which way do you see this going in the future...?”

- “Do you think things will continue heading in this direction?”
- “What’s your interpretation of this trend?”
- “What would turn this around?”

If you want to extract data-related insights from a client, bring them a data point, a recent trend, or an industry study and ask them what they think about it.

This is client specific, and not every client is going to be a wizard at interpreting data. But even non-scientific clients tend to be pretty good at being able to take a data point or trend and project its repercussions into the future.

For example, if you are ghostwriting for the CEO of a mobile gaming startup, bring them a stat about the rise of “freemium” business models dependent upon in-app purchases and ask them, “Do you think things will continue heading in this direction? How come?” The reason these types of questions work so well (and why starting with a data point is an easy jump-off point) is because most people who you’ll be ghostwriting for spend all day, every day, thinking about their industry. They’re constantly reading, listening, and talking to others, trying to interpret which way the wind is blowing and where things are headed next. So when you give them the opportunity to share what they think, the conversation becomes an opportunity for them to crystallize all the different perspectives they’ve been considering quietly in their own mind.

Some great follow-up questions:

- “Have you seen any data that might suggest there’s a ceiling here, and things will eventually plateau?”
- “For people still stuck in the past, what do you think is taking them so long to make the transition?”
- “What do you think is the biggest risk here? What would cause things to slow down?”

Question #4: “If you were to walk someone through how to do this, what would the steps be...?”

- “What would be the very first thing you’d recommend they do? What would be step one?”
- “After that, what’s the next thing you would tell them to do?”
- “Do you think there’s a step between those two?”
- “What would be the very last step?”

If you want to extract a framework from a client, give them the hypothetical situation of how they would explain to someone else how to do something—step-by-step.

Some clients will do this automatically. Other clients, once you do this exercise a few times and they start to see how the questions you ask create the structure of the piece, will “get it” and begin speaking in steps from the very beginning.

But for the majority of clients, you will need to hold their hand through the process.

It took me a while to figure out why, but after hundreds of hours struggling to get clients to give me even a simple 3-step framework for something I knew they knew how to do, I finally realized: clients (especially CEOs, founders, investors, even public speakers) are like professional athletes. They spend the vast majority of their time *doing*—not thinking about how they do what they do, let alone practicing the skill of articulating it.

There are 2 situations that usually occur here.

The first is, when you ask the client to break something down into steps, they will give you Step 1, and then they’ll go on and on just about Step 1: they’ll tell you a story about a time that happened to them, they’ll start telling you their opinion on why it’s a good idea, and then they’ll get excited about having the space to share their opinion

and keep drilling it home. And when they’re finally done, and you ask them, “Great, what’s Step 2?” the process will repeat itself all over again and you’ll realize it’s going to take forever just to get them to give you “the steps.”

The second situation is, when you ask the client to break something down into steps, they can’t. They literally can’t. They’ve never had to “think” about how they do what they do before, and so they just sort of shut down. They start talking about something else. Or, they circle back and repeat what they’ve already told you. They don’t have the “brain muscle” built to create frameworks.

In both these cases, the best approach is patience and compassion. It can be easy as a ghostwriter, when interviewing a client who isn’t giving you what you need (or looking for), to get frustrated and blame them. But it’s not their fault—they’ve never done this sort of work before. And more importantly, their weaknesses are your opportunities. Because if you can give clients new ways of thinking, and help them achieve new levels of clarity of thought, your value as a ghostwriter ascends to a completely different level.

You are no longer seen as a “hired contractor.”

You’re seen as a valuable consultant.

Some great follow-up questions:

- “Let’s slow this down: if you were to mentor a total beginner, what’s the first thing you’d tell them to do?”
- “That’s a great suggestion! What’s the next thing you think they would struggle with, and how would you tell them to solve that problem?”
- “What’s the best piece of advice you received as a beginner?”
- “If you were faced with this problem today, what are 3 things you would do to solve it?”

Open-Ended Questions vs Leading Questions

As a rule of thumb, specific questions give you better answers than vague answers when interviewing clients.

For example, “What’s 1 thing your mentor taught you about how to manage employees?” is a better question than, “What’s 1 thing your mentor taught you?” which is a better question than “What did your mentor teach you?” The more vague the question, the more the client has to interpret which direction you want them to go—which increases the variability of the answer. Whereas the more specific the question, the more clarity the client has and the more likely they are to give you a quality, usable answer.

If you find yourself asking vague questions, that’s (almost always) a signal you don’t know which direction you want the client to go either. Which also means you don’t know what idea you’re trying to write. Which also means you don’t know what “pieces” you need from the client in order to have enough content to bring that idea to life.

Let me give you an easy way of solving this problem.

Earlier I said that when talking to a client, you need to do two opposing things at the same time:

- Get ideas out
- Reel ideas in

Said differently, the way you “get ideas out” is by asking Open-Ended Questions, and the way you “reel ideas in” is by asking Leading Questions

Let’s start with a simple example:

- **Open-Ended Question:** “How are you feeling?”
- **Leading Question:** “How are you feeling? Ready to tackle the day?”

A Leading Question is when you subtly signal to the other person not just which direction you want them to take the question, but also how

you want them to consider thinking and feeling about the question. When you do this, it's very hard for the other person to not “reactively” respond to your Leading Question: “How are you feeling? Ready to tackle the day?” / “I'm feeling great! Yes, feeling ready to tackle the day.” Because it's human nature to want to “mirror” the other person.

But it's important to understand the different results Open-Ended Questions yield opposed to Leading Questions.

When you are still trying to figure out which idea has the most potential, and you just need the client to talk, Open-Ended Questions yield better results. Why? Because they can take the question wherever they want. You're essentially giving them the compass and letting them decide where the gold is.

However, once you know where the gold is (especially when you're constrained with a 30 or 60-minute call), it quickly becomes unproductive to keep exploring.”You need to reel their ideas in, and get them talking in a specific direction—so that you have all the content you need in order to produce a high-quality piece. How you do that is by switching from Open-Ended Questions to Leading Questions.

Here's a quick example of what a dialogue might look like between a ghostwriter and a client—making the transition from Open-Ended Questions to Leading Questions:

[Ghostwriter, Open-Ended Question]: “What's something you learned building your first SaaS company?”

[Client]: “Something I learned? Geez. A million things. We could talk about that for days! But something I've been reflecting on a lot lately is how we were able to attract so many customers so quickly. Around year two, or maybe it was year three, we created this really interesting lead generation system that led to enormous growth for us as a platform.”

[Ghostwriter, Leading Question]: “That's really interesting. How

did the system work? It sounds like there's a framework there that was scalable?"

[Client]: "Oh it was massively scalable! So the framework we came up with was..."

And you're off to the races.

(Notice how the question: "It sounds like there's a framework there that was scalable?" is LEADING the client to think in that direction—giving you the "puzzle piece" you need in order to bring that idea to life in the writing.)

Managing Feedback

(5 Steps To Making Edits & Keeping Clients Happy)

WHAT HAPPENS IF A CLIENT hates what you've written?

There is an art to managing client feedback. If you respond too reactively, it trains clients to believe they know what's best, *you don't*, and they need to "manage" you (which erodes your perceived value). But, on the other hand, if you are too stubborn and don't meet clients halfway, they will find you difficult to work with—and fire you as a result.

Both are negative outcomes.

My overarching rule when it comes to managing client feedback is: it's my responsibility to tell the client what I recommend, but ultimately it's their decision.

Because if I don't tell them what I think is best, I'd be doing them a disservice. But if I insist on them doing what I think they should do, I would also be doing them a disservice (because at the end of the day it's their name, and their content—not mine). And over the years, I've found this to be the happy medium: "I'll tell you what I think you should do, but it's your call."

You will run into this push-and-pull at every stage of the writing process:

- The topic you know will perform best might not be a topic the client wants to talk about (or be associated with).
- The story you know will resonate most with readers might not be a story the client feels comfortable sharing.
- The headline you know will get the most clicks might not be the headline the client thinks is best.
- The structure you know will most engage readers might not be the structure the client wants to use.

And so on.

I can't tell you how many clients I've had who said they wanted very specific, lofty external results ("I want 100,000 followers; I want this piece to go viral; I want major publications to pick this story up"), but then when push came to shove, they were unwilling to do any of the best practices required in order to achieve those results. Despite my 10+ years of pattern recognition knowing what works and what doesn't, they insisted on doing things "their way."

In these situations, again, the best thing you can do is: give them your recommendations, but ultimately let them choose. And if they get upset, it's your responsibility to educate them on why the choices they made led to the outcomes they generated—and give them the option to grow with you.

That said, there are 5 steps I would encourage you to walk through when managing client feedback—so that you can give them a fair shot at trusting you, and so you can give yourself a fair shot at keeping them happy.

But first...

Have A “As Long As It Takes To Get It Right” Policy

One of the biggest concerns clients have when hiring ghostwriters

(or contractors of any kind) is worrying they will have to pay for something they don't like.

So I turned this concern into a way for me to differentiate myself as a ghostwriter.

When I would take a sales call with a client, I would tell them, "And don't worry: unlike most freelance writers who set limits on revisions, my measure for success isn't word count or number of edits. My measure for success is that we get it right." This was extremely effective at disarming clients during the sales process, but it was even more effective during the first month or two of working together—because they didn't feel like they only had one or two opportunities to get the piece to "sound like them."

This policy was also a forcing function for me to learn how to effectively ghostwrite for different types of people. "Unlimited revisions" meant more work up-front, but also meant increased proficiency and less revisions down the road. Once I knew what the client wanted, I could replicate it over and over again.

I would strongly encourage you to do the same.

Step #1: Don't Get Emotional (And Don't Respond Right Away)

I cannot stress this enough.

Where I notice a lot of freelance writers and ghostwriters struggle isn't in the writing or the first draft, but in receiving "negative" client feedback and getting emotional about it. When a client comes back and says, "This is wrong" or "this doesn't sound like me," they aren't saying you're a terrible writer. You also aren't in trouble. They're simply telling you that something is wrong so that you can fix it.

Writers react emotionally for one of two reasons.

Either, first, they are so afraid of losing the client that their fear manifests as frustration (which leads to self-sabotage). Or, second, they

have too little pattern recognition (from their own writing or working with too few clients) to feel confident in their abilities, and so they unconsciously seek validation and approval from their existing clients for reassurance they're "doing a good job."

In both cases, the worst thing you can do is react emotionally.

Instead, when you (inevitably) receive an email from a client who says you didn't get it right, just let it sit. Do not reply right away, especially if you can tell that you feel anxious or heated. Read the feedback, then close your email and step away from your desk. Go for a walk. Remind yourself this isn't about you. As a ghostwriter, you are providing a service. Pretend you are running a hamburger stand and one of your customers just walked back and said, "This burger is undercooked—I'd like another one." Very objective. It happens. Nothing to get upset about.

So, whenever you receive difficult feedback from a client, don't get emotional.

And don't respond until you've simmered down.

Step #2: Isolate The Feedback (And Don't Start Rewriting Until You Do)

When a client does come back to you with edits or feedback (especially if it's a brand new client), chances are, the feedback is going to be very vague.

- "This doesn't sound like me."
- "I'm not sure this is the right angle"
- "I think we need to clean this up a bit."
- Etc.

When this happens, the worst thing you could possibly do is pretend you understand what they're asking for—"Got it, let me take another pass..."—without getting clarity on what, exactly, "Doesn't sound

like them” or what “needs to get cleaned up.” Because you’re going to make edits or execute a rewrite based on what you *think* needs to be changed—not based on what the client has explicitly told you needs to be changed.

Instead of pretending like you can read their mind (rationalizing to yourself that you don’t want to “look stupid” asking them to clarify what they mean), get them on the phone or video call.

Your job is to ask questions and isolate their feedback down to specific, actionable points:

- **If a client says, “This doesn’t sound like me,”** share your screen and go paragraph by paragraph. Ask them to please point out to you what about that paragraph, or a sentence within that paragraph, doesn’t sound like them. A lot of freelance writers and ghostwriters shy away from doing this because they think it comes off as them being “mean” or “critical,” and that couldn’t be further from the truth. Clients want you to push them to be better—and your commitment to “getting in the trenches” only makes them trust you more. And so the best way you can help your clients is give them the opportunity to sit, reflect, and try to articulate what makes “their voice” their voice.
- **If a client says, “I’m not sure this is the right angle,”** don’t even bother digging into the writing. Talk about the headline. The headline is the “compass” for the entire piece. So if they say the “angle” is wrong, it has nothing to do with the writing and everything to do with the direction the headline is pointing. So, go back to the drawing board and re-confirm the purpose of the piece. Are they sharing lessons? Mistakes? Examples? Case studies? Get them to clarify what it is they’re really trying to say, and then don’t get off the phone until you have a new working headline, approved by them, giving you their approved new and different direction.

- **If a client says, “I think we need to clean this up a bit,”** this can mean one of two things—and you need to figure out which one it is. Either the client doesn’t like the way the piece is structured (as in the order of the ideas, or the way you’ve divided the ideas up into sections, etc.), or the client doesn’t like the content or examples inside each section. This can be a hard nuance to decipher, which again is why it’s so important to get the client on the phone (or a video call) and not be afraid to get specific. Go section by section and ask them, “Would it help if we framed this idea first? Would you like me to pull a different example here?” And so on.

Net-net, the most important thing to internalize is that spending time on edits or rewrites is a complete waste of time until you can isolate, specifically, what the client wants changed.

Otherwise you’ll just be trying to read their mind.

Step #3: Pinpoint The 5 Archetypes Of Client Voices

90% of the time, when a client comes back with significant edits or harsh but unspecific feedback, it’s a 5 Archetypes Of Client Voices problem.

And even calling it a “voice” problem is misleading.

What’s really happening is an expectation mismatch:

- **The Storyteller:** They were expecting more storytelling, and you sent them too many “opinions” or “data points.”
- **The Opinionator:** They were expecting a strong opinion (or a handful of opinions), and you sent them too much “fact and research.”
- **The Fact Presenter:** They were expecting lots of data, studies, and examples to make their point, and you sent them too

much “opinion.”

- **The Frameworker:** They were expecting a step-by-step ultimate guide, and you sent them too many “stories” or “opinion monologues.”
- **The F-Bomber:** They were expecting a strong, loud, conversational, jump-off-the-page opinion, and you sent them something watered down and “professional.”

Once you internalize this framework of 5 Archetypes Of Client Voices, it becomes very easy to pinpoint where you went wrong.

Step #4: Adjust As Few Variables As Possible

Quick story:

In 2018, right in the middle of our biggest growth spurt as a ghostwriting agency, we landed a very high-profile client.

He was a bit of a celebrity in the energy sector (wasn't Elon Musk) and had a huge following of both high-profile executives and investors, as well as everyday engineers who looked up to him and his work. As a result, he had high expectations for our agency—and before officially signing on as a client, I had to hop on the phone with him and give reassurance we were as talented as we said we were. Thirty minutes later, he signed the contract and wired us a prepayment for the full six-month term of the contract: \$30,000.

Since he was such a high-profile client, I wanted to make sure he had an incredible experience. So, I made the decision not to assign him to a team (a writer & editor) and instead work with him myself—at least for the first month or two. In hindsight, this was a terrible decision to make as the founder of a fast-growing agency (my job was to hire and scale, not further entrench myself inside the business), but I really wanted to make him happy.

Well, after I sent him the first draft of his first piece, he wasn't happy.

He sent me a scathing email—not just giving feedback, but essentially accusing me of “scamming” him, saying I had lied about our quality of work and how he couldn't believe he would put me with such a junior writer “incapable of writing in his voice.” Except I hadn't put him with a junior writer. I was the one who had written the piece. (My ego felt like it had just taken a baseball bat to the face.)

I went through a roller-coaster of emotions reading that email. As a first-time founder, I was scared of what might happen (would he sue us?). And as a relatively new ghostwriter, I was insecure about my inability to write something that made him happy—all of which manifested as anger and frustration.

But, I trusted my process. The same steps I'm sharing with you here.

- **Step #1:** I didn't respond until I had cooled off.
- **Step #2:** I got him on the phone, listened to him yell my ear off for 15 minutes, and then got to work isolating the feedback.
- **Step #3:** I pinpointed exactly where expectations were off—and which one of the 5 Archetypes Of Client Voices he was.
- **Step #4:** I got to work on the rewrite, and changed as few variables as possible.

When I got him on the phone, I realized despite being an extremely opinionated person, I'd gotten the archetype wrong. I thought he was an Opinionator, and even though he “sounded” like one, the way he wanted to present himself via text was as a Fact Presenter. In his mind, his natural voice and his written voice were two completely different personas.

Once that clicked for me, I knew exactly what to do.

Instead of rewriting the entire piece, thinking the entire thing

was wrong, I only changed one variable. In each section, I added, “According to...” and referenced a stat. I didn’t change the idea of the piece. I didn’t change the headline. I didn’t change the introduction. I didn’t change any of the subheads, or any of the content inside each section. Literally the only thing I did was add a stat to the introduction, a stat to the first section, a stat to the second section, and a stat to the third section (the most important variable for a Fact Presenter Archetype).

I sent the second draft to him an hour later.

And within minutes, he sent me back a 1-sentence email:

“YOU NAILED IT!!!!!!!!!!”

A couple weeks (and a couple more pieces) later, I passed him off to one of our writer & editor teams—and he ended up being a happy, paying client for almost two years.

Even though this was an extreme example, I’ve run into this same situation time and time again: the client says they’re unhappy and “it’s all wrong,” I isolate the feedback, realize I had the Archetype wrong, change one variable, keep everything the same, and suddenly they’re overjoyed.

So, when you’re doing a rewrite for a client, I encourage you to think of this story.

Adjust as few variables as possible.

This is the whole point of isolating the client’s feedback—so that you can reduce the number of variables in the equation. You want to find out, specifically, what isn’t working. And then change just that one thing.

Step #5: Leave Comments Explaining Why You Did What You Did

Lastly, here’s a little pro tip:

When you are working with a new client, one of the best things

you can do (especially in your first rewrite) is leave comments inside the document explaining why you did what you did.

For example, let's say you realize you had the Archetype wrong, and the client is actually a Storyteller, not an Opinionator. And let's say you change one of the subheads from an opinion sentence to the first sentence of a story. Instead of leaving it up to the client to discern why you made the change you did, highlight the changed section (in Google Docs, Notion, wherever you are writing) and leave a comment: *"The reason I changed this subhead is because on our call you said you wanted to tell more stories, and making this subhead the first sentence of the story in this section will be an effective way of hooking readers."*

Leaving these types of comments accomplishes a multitude of things:

- **First, it shows the client you are thinking deeply about the writing—which makes them trust you.** At the end of the day, great clients don't want to hire "doers." They want to hire "thinkers" who are effective at "doing the doing." When you leave comments that share your thought process, it signals to the client you have reasons for why you are making the choices you are—which allows them to trust your expertise more and more.
- **Second, it handles any objections a client has ahead of time—before they have a chance to make an edit.** A big reason why clients are so harsh with edits, especially early on, is because they feel like they have to be. Remember: anyone you are ghostwriting for is a "boss" in some way or another in their life. Whether they are a solopreneur or run a global enterprise technology company, they are used to being the "quality control" for their business. As a result, many will edit things just to feel like they participated. But when you leave comments inside the document and explain your thinking every step of the way, you're preemptively handling any

objections they might have. As a result, the number of edits they leave goes down significantly.

- **Third, it opens the door for dialogue—opposed to binary “I like this” or “I don’t like this” responses.** When a client opens a piece of writing with no commentary, they unconsciously believe they either need to accept 100% of it or 0% of it. Which is what causes feedback emails like, “This doesn’t sound like me” or “I’m not sure this is the right angle.” But when a client opens a piece of writing with a bunch of commentary in the margins, it trains their brain to see this as a collaborative work-in-progress. And as a result, their feedback becomes more “thinking out loud.”

This is the opposite approach to “The Grand Reveal.”

Deep down, every creative person wants to execute a flawless Grand Reveal (I did too). They want to hide away in their apartment or a nearby coffee shop, do their rain dance, and then emerge with a work of art the client takes one look at and says, “Brilliant! Masterful! Otherworldly!” No edits. No feedback. Just perfection.

Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but not only is this highly unlikely, but it’s also highly unproductive.

You are far better off sharing a draft with a client littered with comments in the margins: asking questions, making suggestions, stress-testing ideas, explaining decisions, showing them you are open to collaboration and they should be too.

Don’t be afraid to let them into your writing process.

It will only make your life easier.

Too Much Client Feedback Is A Signal Of 2 Things

The above rules should get you through just about any and every kind of client feedback.

But what happens if a client is giving you *too much feedback, too often?*

One of two things is usually going on:

- **Problem #1: The client doesn't know what they want and is over-correcting.** Their feedback isn't really "feedback." It's them thinking out loud. But their obsessive "thinking out loud" is actually the symptom of a deeper problem, and that problem is almost always a doubt or insecurity in themselves. This usually happens with clients who feel they have an image to uphold (externally), or have never shared any of their thoughts, opinions, insights, stories, etc., on the Internet before. Either way, you will find your job here to be less of a "ghostwriter" and more of a life coach. And it will be your job to coach them through it, and give them infinite vocal support, acknowledgement, and validation.
- **Problem #2: The client is a perfectionist and has unreasonable expectations.** There's a fine line between someone who doesn't know what they want but can be coached to a point of confidence, and someone who is a perfectionist and will never be satisfied. In the case of the former, I've found if you can get past the first month or two with the client, they usually come around and end up being great to work with. But in the case of the latter, perfectionists rarely change. And, if anything, their perfectionism only gets worse the more content they publish and the bigger their audience grows.

Which leads us to...

Don't Be Afraid To Fire A Client

A few years ago, after I scaled down my agency and started taking on high-profile clients myself again, I connected with a hot-shot 28-year-old startup founder on Twitter.

His company had recently raised another monster round of funding, valuing their startup at over \$1.5 billion. He was younger than me, but had the demeanor and confidence of a forty-five year old. And he was sharp. After several years of building this startup, he'd decided to hand the reins over to his co-founders, move to a Chairman position, and raise a \$500 million venture capital fund (classic career trajectory of massively successful Silicon Valley founders).

This sort of person was my sweet spot—and I'd worked with hundreds of founders just like him.

We didn't even hop on the phone. I got a DM from him at 10:00 p.m., right as I was crawling into bed. He asked if I had any availability for new clients. I told him my monthly retainer was \$10,000. He asked me to send him a contract. And fifteen minutes later, he signed it and said he'd wire the money in the morning. (This is the sort of thing you can expect to happen once you get 5+ years into ghostwriting and nail your niche.)

Well, not every client turns out to be a great client.

I really liked the guy, and thought he was brilliant. But when I sent over the first handful of pieces, his feedback was all over the place. It wasn't specific, and feedback on one piece directly contradicted his feedback on another piece. And when I got him on the phone, it was clear he really didn't know what he wanted. I spent probably 20 or 30 hours rewriting just in our first week of working together—making him one of my least efficient clients of all time.

But here's a golden signal I've learned to watch out for: **tweaking adjectives**.

When a client's edits aren't really edits, but a never-ending exercise in swapping adjectives and adverbs ("honestly" for "seriously," or

“curious” for “thoughtful,” etc.), that’s a sign you are dealing with an over-thinker and a perfectionist.

After just two weeks of working together, I’d seen enough to know where this train was headed. This wasn’t my first rodeo, and I’d encountered clients like him before in the past. We didn’t have a content problem. We had a perfectionism problem. And no matter how many hours I spent writing and rewriting pieces, he couldn’t let go.

So, I fired him.

I asked him to hop on a quick call and said,

“I respect you and what you’ve accomplished—which is why I think you will find more success writing for yourself. It’s very clear you have specific expectations for how you want your content to sound, and I really encourage you to trust your own voice and just write your content yourself. Because it will be far more efficient for you than me ghostwriting and us going back and forth fifty times on every single piece. I know you have a lot going on, and I don’t want this to be a time-suck for you. So, I’m going to refund your money and bow out.”

I thought he was going to be furious (powerful people don’t usually like when they get “rejected”). But the opposite happened: he thanked me for my honest feedback, said he was sort of feeling the same thing, and then offered to make me an advisor for his fund. (And my policy is: if I can’t deliver, then I shouldn’t keep your money, which is why I refunded all of it despite putting in 60 hours of work in two weeks. I’m a free-work maximalist, and believe results matter over everything.)

So, if you find yourself working overtime for a client that doesn’t seem to be “improving,” don’t be afraid to fire them.

Refund their most recent invoice.

Wish them well. And go find a more efficient, more enjoyable client.

There are plenty of fish in the sea.

CHAPTER 12

Intellectual Property (How To Dominate A Niche Without Sharing Client Secrets)

HERE'S WHERE THINGS GET HAIRY as a ghostwriter.

How you build efficiencies and generate pricing power for yourself is when you write for 1 Specific Person, in 1 Specific Industry, ideally in 1 Specific way. (Simplicity is velocity.)

But at the same time, writing for 1 Specific Person, in 1 Specific Industry, in 1 Specific Way means writing for a lot of people *who are all saying different versions of the same thing*.

For example: if you are ghostwriting for “entrepreneurs in the health and wellness space,” and they all share with you similar variations of how to build an effective morning routine, whose intellectual property is it? What do you do if they all say “the most important thing you can do is stretch and drink a gallon of water, first thing in the morning?” Can you only say that for one client, and then do you have

to tell the rest of your clients, “Sorry, someone else already said that?”

Of course not.

But there are a few rules I would encourage you to follow when it comes to ghostwriting for similar types of clients in a similar industry.

Rule #1: Don’t (Ever) Make A Client Sound Smarter Than They Are

One of the biggest mistakes you can make as a ghostwriter is using Client A’s thoughts to make Client B sound smarter than he or she actually is.

An easy way of solving this problem, though, is to treat ghostwriting like a puzzle.

Imagine you go to the store and buy a 1000 piece puzzle. You take it home, open the box, and dump all the puzzle pieces out onto the kitchen table. These are the puzzle pieces you have to play with, and you would then proceed to solve the puzzle using only the pieces in front of you. What you wouldn’t do, however, is get frustrated that you can’t quite figure out how the corner pieces fit together and then go to the store to buy a *different* puzzle and start combining the pieces.

And yet freelance writers and ghostwriters make this mistake all the time.

Only play with the puzzle pieces each client gives you, individually.

Rule #2: If You’re Stuck, Don’t “Create.” Curate.

With the above in mind, you will undoubtedly run into situations where one client gives you an abundance of material to work with and another client struggles to give you “intellectual breadcrumbs.”

The lazy solution here would be to borrow some of Client A’s

insights to make Client B sound a bit smarter—but we’ve already established that’s a mistake. (And, I promise, eventually someone is going to notice and it’s going to be very awkward for you.)

An easier and more reliable solution is to not try to fill in the gaps with more “original thinking.”

Instead, go curate other people’s already-published insights and give them credit. Do some research. Tell other people’s published stories. Quote other people’s studies. Summarize other people’s books or articles. “According to...” will become your new favorite phrase.

The beauty of curation is that as long as you say, “According to...” and it’s a live, published piece of work, it’s fair game. There are no rules against you referencing other people’s ideas that live in the open world.

Where you start to get into trouble is when you attempt to pass off someone else’s ideas, perspectives, or insights as the client’s own.

Rule #3: Don’t Steal Language Or Frameworks

Which leads us to the final rule.

For the most part, there is only one thing that people get upset about when it comes to intellectual property, and that’s the stealing of specific Languageing or Frameworks.

Here’s a quick example of both:

Recently (in the middle of writing this book), I saw a founder on Twitter put together a very impressive “How To Get Started Writing Online” Notion document. He’d assembled a free template—a mix of education and plug-and-play templates—and said that he’d DM it to anyone who commented on his post (classic viral Twitter giveaway strategy).

Well, obviously it went viral. And obviously, because that’s my domain, it appeared in my feed.

But when I clicked on it, I didn’t find original thinking. What

I found were our exact frameworks from Ship 30 for 30, “renamed” and “re-explained.” For example, we have one framework called The 2-Year Test where you reflect on all the things you’ve done over the past two years, and then write for yourself two years ago. Well, this guy renamed it to “The 2-Year Equation,” and then literally just copy/pasted our exact explanation of the framework but swapped out the adjectives so it “sounded different.”

But it was clear as day.

When I confronted the founder about it, his ghostwriter DM’d me separately and started panicking, apologizing over and over again saying how he’d taken Ship 30 for 30 and used us as “inspiration.” Well, stealing someone’s Languaging (the unique language they use to describe an idea) and the thinking behind their framework isn’t “inspiration.”

That’s plagiarism.

And as a ghostwriter, this rule is your single most valuable North Star.

Under no circumstances should you ever, ever, steal someone’s Languaging or the infrastructure of their framework. Why? Because it’s so incredibly easy to spot. It’s like trying to rob a bank in broad daylight.

Instead, you either want to “curate” someone else’s Languaging or Framework (again, “According to...” should be a go-to phrase in your ghostwriting toolkit), or help clients come up with their own.

And remember: only play with the puzzle pieces from their box.

Part 3

THE BUSINESS OF GHOSTWRITING

The Root Fear Of Pricing (Why So Few Writers Charge Premium Rates)

IN 2018, I GOT INTRODUCED to the founder of a blockchain startup raising \$50 million.

Living in Los Angeles during the height of the crypto boom, I couldn't go anywhere without hearing the word "Bitcoin." But this particular blockchain startup had all sorts of celebrity entrepreneurs on its board of advisors (people whose names you would immediately recognize), and despite having no product and barely any team, finding money was clearly not the problem.

Their problem? Writing a whitepaper their potential customers could understand.

Which was my speciality.

When I asked my buddy, the one who had introduced me to the founder, how much I should charge for the whitepaper (the document that would allow them to raise the \$50 million), he said, "You could probably get away with \$10k. I hear that's the going rate for whitepapers these days." Up to that point, the most I'd ever charged was

\$5,000—and that was for our highest tier package at my ghostwriting agency (consisting of multiple articles, a dedicated account manager, editing, posting, all sorts of things).

The thought of charging \$10,000 for a 10-page document was unfathomable to me.

A few days later, I met the founder in Venice at one of my favorite restaurants (The Butcher's Daughter) for lunch.

He was in his mid-40s, former Wall Street guy turned serial entrepreneur, with slicked back hair and drove a brand new Porsche Macan. We ordered lunch. He told me about the project and explained what he needed. I demonstrated I “spoke crypto” and was fluent in the lingo of this emerging industry. And then he said, “Great. So, how much for the whitepaper? What’s the damage?”

I took a deep breath.

I had been ghostwriting for almost three years at this point, and had sat in a hundred rooms with 8 and 9-figure founders, CEOs of publicly traded companies, even a couple celebrities, and still, the thought of asking for “more money” felt scary for me. I was only 28 years old. And for a moment, I almost talked myself out of it—because I was afraid of losing the deal.

But, I stuck with my guns and said, “For a fundraising whitepaper, I usually charge \$10,000.”

(Pro tip here: In sales, you always say, “For this type of thing, I *usually*...” because it signals you have done this sort of thing many times in the past. Even if you haven’t.)

As soon as I said the number, his eyebrows went up.

I thought I’d lost it.

And then he took a sip of his cocktail and said, “You know I was expecting to pay triple that.”

Then my eyebrows went up.

“But you already said the price,” he said.

And held out his hand to shake on it, smiling.

3 Fears All Freelance Writers & Aspiring Premium Ghostwriters Have When It Comes To Pricing

To this day, I still think about that moment all the time.

It taught me a timeless lesson about pricing—and how much the “business of pricing” isn’t really about the price itself.

It’s about the underlying fears and false beliefs we have within ourselves that hold us back from charging more than we think we’re worth.

Since launching our Premium Ghostwriting Academy (PGA), and speaking with hundreds of people brand new to the world of ghostwriting, sales, and working with clients—*but are ready to acquire new skills, position themselves as a Premium Ghostwriter with a Premium Offer, and move in a new and different direction*—I have seen first-hand how the biggest obstacle to “making more” isn’t actually knowing what to do or what to charge. The biggest obstacle is getting out of your own way, breaking beliefs, and realizing what is possible for yourself. Because unless you believe you are worth \$5,000 or \$10,000 or \$20,000, you will never feel comfortable asking for it.

To be clear: this has nothing to do with inflating your ego or acquiring a sense of false confidence. Pricing, and how you communicate your “value” (in a business context) has everything to do with how you feel about yourself.

Which means I can tell you how much you should charge, how you should frame the value and package your service, and even give you a script for how you can overcome any logical objection the potential client might have.

But unless you believe you deserve it, you’ll never do it.

Which is why, before we can even get into the “business” of ghostwriting, we need to get to the root of the issue first.

Fear #1: “I’m afraid the client is going to say, ‘No.’”

The fundamental question lingering beneath the surface for every freelance writer & aspiring Premium Ghostwriter (or any kind of solopreneur) is: “What’s the risk/reward?”

If you are a freelance writer struggling to pay rent, and you get introduced to a new client, it’s going to be very hard for you to take the risk of charging more than you’ve charged to date—because a scarcity mentality doesn’t want to optimize for potential upside. A scarcity mentality wants to optimize for *mitigating downside*. Meaning it’s more comfortable to increase your chances of getting the client, even if the pay isn’t great, than to pitch Premium Pricing and potentially decrease your chances of getting the client—but if they say “Yes,” it’s a home run.

Risk/reward.

And trust me, I get it: when I was that beginner freelance writer struggling to pay rent in my dumpy studio apartment downtown Chicago, I wasn’t charging \$2,000 per article. I was charging \$50 or \$100. And I was working 14 hour days cranking out five, six, sometimes seven different articles for seven different clients.

But eventually, something snaps.

You realize what you’re doing is unsustainable. There aren’t any more hours in the day, and you can’t work any harder than you’re already working.

So, how do you overcome this fear?

Solution: The 80/20 Time Law

When you’re first starting out, you are going to “take what you can get.” (Even if I tell you not to, you’re still going to do it. It’s just part of the journey, and something you need to experience in order to really “get it.”)

However, the way to keep yourself from staying stuck here is to reserve at least 20% of your time for placing bigger and bigger bets.

Translation: charge more.

For example, if you know the maximum number of clients you

can work with at any given time is 5, then when a project finishes with 1 of them you should not immediately “take what you can get” and say “Yes” to the next person who reaches out to you. You should leave that last slot open (20%) and try pitching higher and higher prices. Why? Because your downside is mitigated (you still have 4 other clients paying your bills), and your upside is unknown (you have no idea where your true ceiling is).

And yes, this might mean a bunch of clients say “No” in the process (or can’t afford to work with you). **But that’s the point.** Because you can’t ascend to the next tier of clients who CAN until you let go (and stop burning the candle at both ends) doing work for the ones who can’t.

This is a risk-free way of notching your prices up over time.

Fear #2: “I’m afraid the client is going to get upset.”

Traditional education teaches us, from a very young age, that you don’t determine your value.

Someone else does.

Your teachers. Your employers. Authority figures.

These are the people who decide how quickly you can ascend, when you can get promoted, how much your raise should be, what your responsibilities are—not you. And worse, if you challenge those decisions, then you are “uncooperative” or even “disrespectful.” You are “out of line.”

If you haven’t addressed these faulty beliefs in yourself, then it makes complete sense why you (and millions of other people) would shy away from pushing that boundary. Because, historically, pushing that boundary has meant “getting in trouble.”

But let me tell you something about the business world and working for yourself:

The people you want to work with—the good clients, the fun ones, the smart ones, the ultra-connected ones—all respect people who push

that boundary. Because they've pushed that boundary themselves.

Whereas anyone who “gets upset” at you raising your prices is, 100% of the time, the sort of person you shouldn't have been working with in the first place (and shouldn't want to work with moving forward). I've only had a small handful of people “get upset” at me for raising my prices, and shortly after, I realized what a giant pain in the ass they were to work with. Whereas everyone else, whenever I've raised my prices or had to tell long-time clients, “I'm sorry, I can't do the work we've been doing at that rate anymore,” has understood and even celebrated me for “moving on up.”

Traditional education. 9-5 jobs. These environments are inaccurate reflections of how the real world operates.

Nobody is going to get upset at you for raising your prices or asking for more.

And if they do, that's a signal you're in the wrong environment working with the wrong people—which is a different problem.

So, how do you overcome this fear?

Solution: Once per year, raise your prices and trim long-standing (low-paying) clients.

New clients aren't a problem because they'll be hearing your prices for the first time.

It's the long-standing clients who will have the hardest time adjusting. Because chances are, the clients you attracted at your initial price point won't be the clients you attract at your new pricing tier (or the pricing tier after that).

The trap is thinking, “But I've worked with this client forever! I don't want to price them out!” But eventually, this will become one of your biggest bottlenecks to growth. Since you can't manufacture more hours in the day, the only other lever to grow your business is to raise your prices.

Instead, once per year (October is the best, because then you can give them 3 months notice and say, “Starting next year...”), raise your prices and trim long-standing, low-paying clients. Your message is very simple:

“As I continue to improve the services I offer, and due to increased demand, I’ve decided to raise my prices to {\$X} starting next year. I’ve loved working with you, and wanted to give you plenty of heads up that these new rates will take effect January 1.”

Some clients (usually the ones you least suspect) will say, “Sure, no problem.” Others will ask to get on a call with you and try to get you to leave them at their current rate (no). And once in a blue moon, some overly entitled client will try to tell you that what you’re doing is “unfair” (clear signal they aren’t the sort of client you want to work with long-term anyways).

But this “trimming” is what’s required in order to keep increasing the profitability of your 1-person writing business.

Fear #3: “I’m afraid I won’t be able to deliver.”

Lastly is Imposter Syndrome.

It doesn’t matter if you’re brand new to the world of ghostwriting, or if you’ve been working for yourself as a freelancer for years, people tend to struggle with some form of Imposter Syndrome at every level.

From my experience (and through helping thousands of writers work through some version of Imposter Syndrome in our flagship program, *Ship 30 for 30*), this fear is really just a lack of pattern recognition. The more you do something, the less intimidating it becomes—and the less you do something, the more intimidating it becomes.

The nuance here is that “doing work” and “charging more” are two different skills.

For example, a lot of freelance writers will spend years working for peanuts and then complain about how they are “underpaid.” What these writers have failed to realize, however, is that “doing work” is not

what gets you to the next pricing level—or the level after that.

Charging more (and getting comfortable charging more) is what gets you to the next level!

They are different skills.

Which means, unless you are practicing the skill of “charging more,” and getting comfortable notching your rates up over time, you won’t ever do it. And anything you’re “not doing” only gets more and more intimidating.

Solution: Charge more!

It’s pretty simple.

If you want to build the skill of charging more... *you have to charge more.*

Even if it makes you uncomfortable. Even if you think, “This client is never going to say ‘Yes’ to this.” Remember the 80/20 Time Law and leave 20% of your time open to place bigger and bigger bets, and pitch rates that are slightly above what you feel is appropriate to ask for. Then do it again. And again. And again.

Anytime you catch your inner critic saying, “That’s too much!” I want you to remember the story I told at the beginning of this chapter.

And the look the client gave me when he said, “I was expecting to pay triple that.”

The Only 3 Ways To Grow Your 1-Person Writing Business

AS A PREMIUM GHOSTWRITER, YOU are a 1-person business.

Most freelancers do not think about themselves this way. They just think, “I work for myself! Laptop lifestyle!” And as a result, never quite figure out which levers they can push and pull to increase their income or reduce the number of hours they have to work.

So, let me crystallize this for you.

Your 3 Business Growth Levers

As a Premium Ghostwriter, these are the only 3 levers you have to grow your business:

- **[Time]** You can only work so many hours in the day (anything above 12 hours is when burnout becomes inevitable).
- **[Units]** You can only work with so many clients at any given time (because past a certain number of clients you either run

out of time, or your quality of work falls off a cliff).

- **[Cost]** And you can only charge “so much” before the number of clients who say “No” exceeds the number of clients who say “Yes.”

That’s it.

Which means the entire game of growing your 1-person business is about:

- (Efficiency) Working with the maximum number of clients, for the same price, *in less time*.
- (Profitability) Working with the maximum number of clients, in the same amount of time, *for more money*.
- (Efficiency + Profitability) Working with the fewest number of clients, *for the most money, in the least amount of time*.

It’s so simple that it’s complicated.

The “complications” here (and I was guilty of this, too) stem from a lack of clarity around these 3 levers. Instead of thinking of themselves as a 1-person business, and instead of being objective and honest about the breaking points of each of these 3 levers, the vast majority of freelancers fly blind and adopt a “hope it works out” strategy.

A client says, “Can you take on more work?” and they say, “Sure,” without really being honest about whether they have the time for that in their calendar. Then another client asks, “Can you take on more work?” and they say, “Sure” again. Then another. And another. Until all of a sudden, they’re burned out working harder than ever—and their income has barely gone up.

Which is why you can’t think of yourself as some random contractor who has infinite hours just because you “work for yourself.”

You have to think of yourself as a 1-person business, and be brutally honest with yourself about how much time you have, how many clients you can work with at one time, and how much each client is willing to pay you.

With this in mind, let's talk about how to improve each of these 3 levers.

Lever #1: Time (How To Do More With Less)

As my mentor in Chicago used to say to me all the time, “You’re either working *in* the business—or working *on* the business.”

If you’ve never heard this phrase before, here’s what it means:

- **When you’re working “in” the business**, you are performing the work.
- **When you’re working “on” the business**, you are improving how the work gets performed.

The vast majority of freelancers and solopreneurs operate at maximum capacity. They spend 100% of their time working “in” the business—executing the work they are getting paid to do by clients.

Which is great!

However, unless you reserve some time for yourself to work “on” the business, you never give yourself the chance to create efficiencies that maximize your time going forward.

- You never have time to build systems.
- You never have time to create templates.
- You never have time to learn new skills or technologies.
- You never have time to consider new ways of doing things.

In the short-term, this doesn’t seem very painful. Until you realize, 3 years later, that you could have been doing something 25% or 50% faster the entire time—which usually either amounts to hundreds of wasted hours, or tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands (or even millions!) of dollars of missed opportunities.

Ouch.

Solution: The 10% Time Tax

An easy solution here is to place a 10% Time Tax on your 1-person business.

This means holding yourself accountable and never operating at 100% maximum capacity. And instead, having the discipline to leave a few hours per week open with the sole purpose of working “on” your business (not “in” it).

This time should be spent:

- Taking courses and investing in your own knowledge/skills.
- Experimenting with new software tools to streamline your work.
- Building new processes that reduce as many monotonous tasks as possible.
- Creating templates and other reusable resources for yourself so that every single new project doesn’t have to start from a blank slate.

If you want a painful example of how important operating with this 10% Time Tax is (and what happens if you don’t), imagine all the freelance writers in the world right now who are so maxed out that they don’t even have a few hours each week to experiment with ChatGPT. Learning how to use this tool could likely save them dozens of hours of work each week!

As the world continues to move more and more digital, and as AI continues to infiltrate every crevice of our working lives, leaving time to work “on” your business (and keep up with innovation) is only going to become more and more important.

And those who don’t make the time will quickly get left behind.

Lever #2: Units (How To Work With The Maximum Number Of Clients)

If you want to maximize the number of clients you can work with at

any given time (which means generating more revenue for yourself), then “switching cost” is your greatest enemy.

- (WHO) Every time you have to change the context of WHO you are creating for, your efficiency goes down.
- (WHAT) Every time you have to change the context of WHAT you are creating, your efficiency goes down.
- (WHY) Every time you have to change the context of WHY you are creating what you’re creating (the problem you’re solving), your efficiency goes down.

For example, let’s say it takes you 1 hour to write an article for a founder of a FinTech SaaS startup.

And it also takes you 1 hour to write a Twitter Thread for a fitness brand.

Can you get both of these tasks done in 2 hours?

On paper, yes. But in reality, probably not.

The reason is because the context of the first one is different from the context of the second one. Writing an article has different rules than writing a Twitter Thread. And writing for the founder of a FinTech SaaS startup requires a different information set than writing for a fitness brand.

Which means completing these two tasks, when you factor in “switching cost,” probably takes you closer to two and a half or even 3 hours.

Now multiply this same scenario by all the different clients you have, and all the different things you’ve signed yourself up to create.

Burnout.

Solution: Simplicity is velocity.

- 1 Specific Problem
- 1 Specific Person
- 1 Specific Way

The way you maximize Units in your 1-person business is by reducing the number of “different” things you have for sale, and the different types of people you help.

Less is more.

The sole reason this works is because when you only solve 1 Specific Problem for 1 Specific Person in 1 Specific Way, your brain never has to switch contexts. Ever. It solves the same problem, for the same person, the same way, over and over again—and as a result, you enter “autopilot mode.”

What might take someone else 1 or 2 hours to do, you can now do in 20 minutes, over and over again—because that’s the *only* thing you do.

Lever #3: Cost (How To Charge The Most You Can Possibly Charge)

The highest-paid service providers, in any industry, don’t sell “services.” They sell outcomes.

For example, which one of these do you value more?

- “I write articles.”
- “I help you position yourself as an authority in your industry.”

The second one.

The reason is because the first one is a “thing,” whereas the second one is an “outcome.” And it’s important to understand that nobody wants to buy a “thing.” What we all want to buy as consumers are specific and desirable outcomes.

- I don’t want a gym membership (thing). **I want to build muscle and lose weight (outcome).**
- I don’t want to learn photography (thing). **I want to take stunning pictures and impress my friends (outcome).**
- I don’t want a vacuum (thing). **I want a clean house.**
- Etc.

This is the first big thing you need to understand when it comes to maximizing your pricing: you should never be in the business of selling “things,” and you should always be in the business of selling “outcomes”—and then explaining how the “thing you do” *easily and quickly unlocks that outcome for the client or customer.*

My ghostwriting agency was a prime example of how real this principle is.

We were selling 800-word blog posts for upwards of \$1,000 a pop.

How did we get away with that? Especially considering there were hundreds of thousands of freelance writers on Upwork who were perfectly capable of creating the same “thing?”

The difference was, we didn’t call them blog posts and we didn’t sell “things.” We called them Thought Leadership Articles and we sold “Position yourself as a thought leader in your industry.” (We were the first agency to do this—way before “thought leadership” went mainstream.)

As a result, clients who hired our agency weren’t really buying the articles themselves.

They were buying the outcome of “being seen as thought leaders in their industry.”

Articles were just the vehicle through which we accomplished that outcome.

Solution: The Big 5 Desirable Outcomes

So, what can promise clients so you aren’t selling a “thing?”

All desirable outcomes speak to deeply human wants and needs:

- **[Money]** People want to make more money.
- **[Status]** People want to be seen as “special” relative to others.
- **[Safety]** People want to know they are doing something “right” the first time.
- **[Connection]** People want to feel connected to other

“valuable” people.

- **[Self-Esteem]** People want to feel supported, understood, and validated on their journey to overcoming an obstacle.

It doesn’t matter what industry you’re in, what your niche is, or what service you’re providing, you can (and should) always frame your offer as an outcome—not a “thing.”

In addition, you can frame whatever service you’re offering as the vehicle to unlock any of these Big 5 Desirable Outcomes. The game is figuring out which one of these Big 5 Desirable Outcomes people want *the most*—and leading with that.

Here’s how this works:

Say you’re selling Ghostwriting Weekly Newsletters For VPs Of Marketing At Food Companies.

- **[Money]** “Did you just get promoted to VP of Marketing at a food company, but feel like you are completely behind on navigating the world of email marketing today? Are you afraid, if you don’t get up to speed quickly, you might even be fired and lose your job? *I will give you a full crash course on everything you need to know about email marketing in the digital age, and I will ghostwrite your weekly newsletter for you—so you not only keep your job, but probably get a promotion and a raise.*”
- **[Status]** “Do you want to position yourself as an authority in the food space, make a name for yourself as a VP of Marketing, and attract speaking opportunities that allow you to share your expertise in public? *I will ghostwrite your weekly newsletter—which will help you do that.*”
- **[Safety]** “Have you been thinking of starting a newsletter for yourself, or your company, to attract customers on autopilot? But are afraid of launching it yourself because you’ve never launched a newsletter before? *I will take care of everything, and ghostwrite your weekly newsletter for you.*”

- **[Connection]** “Are you brand new to the world of email marketing? Do you want to surround yourself with other email marketers, shortcut your learning curve, and stay on the cutting-edge of email marketing in the digital age? *Not only will you get access to my private community of elite email marketers, but I will ghostwrite your weekly newsletter for you—and be your personal email marketing mentor.*”
- **[Self-Esteem]** “Does launching a newsletter of your own give you anxiety? Do you want to build an audience, but just need someone to hold you accountable along the way? *I will be your personal Accountability Coach and help you finally launch your weekly newsletter—and, I will either create templates for you to use to streamline your own writing process OR I will be your personal ghostwriter.*”

Notice how depending on the Big 5 Desirable Outcome, the “offer” has to change slightly.

If you are selling “connection,” you’re most likely providing a coaching program or community of some sort. Whereas if you are selling “safety” you are likely providing some sort of Done-For-You service.

The key is to always start with the question, “Which of the Big 5 Desirable Outcomes am I really selling?” And then reverse-engineer an Irresistible Offer and service to successfully generate that outcome.

Pricing Mistakes (The 5 Levels Of Charging More)

THE HIGHEST-PAID GHOSTWRITERS AREN'T JUST writers.

They are more like “business consultants”—who just happen to know how to write.

Said differently: writers (and solopreneurs of any kind) who react to the client's wants and needs always make less money than the writers (and solopreneurs) who educate the client on what they need.

The reason is because when you are reacting to the client, it's the client's responsibility to figure out what your responsibilities are and how you should perform them. For example: *“I need a landing page, and I need it to be 1,500 words, and it should cover these 3 topics, and I want you to organize it by framing the problem first, then explaining the solution, and then end with a pitch about our product.”* When this is the client's burden, they are the “boss.” And you are the lowly contractor.

The only way to flip this power dynamic is to NOT react to the client's wants and needs, and to instead educate the client on what they should want and need—and explain why.

Let me give you an example:

Back in 2019, I did some work ghostwriting sales emails for

a client. At the time, our agency was hurting for money (clients were churning and with a staff of 20+ full-time employees, our overhead was over \$100,000 per month). So, I made the same mistake I'm telling you in this book not to make and said "Yes" to a handful of deals that were a tad outside our wheelhouse. And since none of the writers on our staff knew how to ghostwrite sales emails (since our specialty was Thought Leadership Articles), that meant I had to do the work myself.

Huge mistake.

Anyways...

By this point, I had plenty of credibility as a writer & ghostwriter: I was an author. I had ghostwritten for hundreds of executives. I was the founder of a 7-figure business. I had accumulated over 100 million views on my own digital writing. And still, I was finding it hard to charge more than a few thousand dollars per month.

Even writing these sales emails, where I knew the end result was going to generate hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars in revenue for the client, it seemed like I could only squeeze \$3,000 out of them to take on the project.

The reason?

They already knew what they wanted—and I was "reacting" to their existing wants and needs.

Fast-forward to 2021—a few years later, right as Ship 30 for 30 was starting to accelerate—I had a different company reach out to me. They said they wanted help writing Thought Leadership articles (which was my specialty), but when I got on the phone with them, it was clear they didn't have a "marketing" problem. What they actually had was a sales problem. Over the years, this company had acquired over 5,000,000 emails of potential customers through their website—and had almost no email marketing infrastructure set up.

If I had said "Yes" to their request to write Thought Leadership articles, I probably would have gotten paid my normal rate (at the time): \$1,500 per article. Not bad! But I have learned over the years

that anytime you are the one “reacting” to what the client is asking for, they’re the ones who hold the pricing power—because they’ve already decided what they want and, more importantly, how much they value the solution.

So, I told them, “You don’t need my help writing Thought Leadership articles.”

“We don’t?” their CEO said.

“No. What you need is an email marketing strategy that is going to leverage those 5 million emails—along with a handful of proven templates your marketing team can use to sell those potential customers on autopilot.”

By educating the client on the problem they didn’t know they had, I created the context and frame for the conversation (not them). And by telling them how to solve the problem they didn’t know they had (until talking to me), they immediately concluded I was the right person (maybe the *only* person) who could help them do it.

That client ended up being one of my most lucrative deals of all time.

Same exact work I had done for pennies on the dollar back in 2019, writing those sales emails for a client. But this time, because I was the one setting the frame, and I was the one educating them on what they needed (versus “reacting” to what they were requesting), I held the power.

This is what pricing is all about.

He or she who frames the problem owns the solution.

As I will explain to you in a moment, the whole game of increasing your profitability and earning potential as a writer (or solopreneur) is about exiting business models where you “react” to a client’s requests—and leveraging business models where you educate the client on what

they need and why.

I saw how powerful this was first-hand when I worked in advertising.

When a big client (like Walgreens or Burger King or BMW) is looking to hire an ad agency, they share what is called an RFP: “Request For Proposal.” In this RFP, they articulate the things *they think they need*:

- A website redesign
- A social media strategy
- A Facebook advertising strategy
- The management of a \$1M/month ad budget
- And so on.

The brand then sends this RFP to the 5 or 10 ad agencies they are considering, and gives them a set period of time (30 days, 60 days, etc.) to respond to their “request” and explain why they are the best agency to do their website redesign, social media strategy, Facebook advertising strategy, and so on.

Translation: “React.”

Well, the ad agency I worked at right out of college was very small (12 people), and my boss and mentor was very smart. He knew that “reacting” to the brand’s request was a losing game (especially because that’s what all the other agencies would be doing, too).

So, what did he do?

He called up the brand, whoever had sent over the RFP, and explained to them *why the things they were requesting in their RFP were wrong*.

“You don’t need a website redesign. At least not yet,” he would say.

“We don’t?”

“No. And you don’t need a social media strategy either.”

By the end of the call, the client was completely convinced everything in their RFP was incorrect. And then they would say, (on

speakerphone, me in the room, fastidiously taking notes), “Thank you for educating us. The truth is, we don’t really know what we need. Could we hire your agency to help us figure out what we should be doing, and rewrite our RFP?”

He would say, “Of course we can. Happy to help.”

I, the copywriter, would then work with Ron to rewrite their RFP—based on what *we* knew they needed.

And then a few weeks later, the brand would come back and say: “This RFP makes so much more sense! Now, we just need to find an agency that specializes in these things you’ve outlined. Are these things your agency does?”

And my mentor would say, “Of course. We’re happy to help.”

And while the other 9 agencies spent 4 weeks reacting to the client’s proposal, working long hours trying to “win the competition,” our agency quietly reframed the problem, educated the client on what they should be doing instead, and ultimately won the deal.

It was like watching a magic trick—and it worked every time.

You don’t want to get paid to write. You want to get paid to think.

Now, let’s tie all this together.

The highest-paid ghostwriters aren’t just writers.

They are more like “business consultants”—who just happen to know how to write.

A great business consultant does not react to what the client says they want or need. A great business consultant educates the client on what they know they need—and then helps them solve the problem they didn’t know they had until talking to them.

If you want to make boatloads of money as a writer, you don’t actually want to get paid to “write.” (Because if you’re just getting paid to write, chances are, you’re “reacting” to what the client thinks they

want.) What you want is to get paid to *think*. You want to be the one framing the discussion, educating the client on what they didn't know they needed—and then solving the problem you just educated them on—through writing.

Small nuance. Big difference.

So, let's make this nice and actionable.

Here are the 5 levels of charging more as a ghostwriter (and where you ultimately want to end up):

Level 1: Charging Per Word

This is the bottom of the totem pole.

Charging “per word” is the epitome of “reacting” to the client's wants and needs. The client says, “I need you to write 850 words on the topic of how to travel to Bali on a budget, and I'll pay you \$0.25 per word.” You (the hired writer) says, “Okay.” And that's the end of the discussion.

Client makes a request. You react.

As a result, writers who charge per word tend to be broke, unhappy, burned out, and annoyingly pessimistic. “Nobody makes a living as a writer!” they shout. Which isn't true.

Somebody is making money...

It just isn't you.

Level 2: Charging Per Hour

Charging per hour is the next step up—but the truth is, it's not much better (or different) from charging per word.

I believe the reason why charging “per hour” is the default business model for so many writers is because it's the most visible and talked-about pricing model. What's the default question most people ask: “What do you charge per hour?” Plumbers charge per hour. Therapists charge per hour. Personal trainers charge per hour. Even entrepreneurs

and celebrities charge per hour on platforms like Cameo, Intro, etc.

As a result, whenever someone thinks about starting their own business, working for themselves, or taking up a side hustle, the very first thing they think they have to decide is, “What do I charge per hour?”

Which is fine. But again, it’s the wrong question to ask.

Because if you’re “reacting” to the client’s wants and needs, what you’re going to be able to get away with “per hour” isn’t going to be very much.

Level 3: Charging Per Month

When you’re first starting out, the thought of charging per month sounds like a dream.

“What? Somebody is going to pay me \$3,000 per month, every month? I’ve made it!”

But this is where most writers get stuck.

Why?

Because your earning potential is still tied to “time” and “effort,” opposed to the creation of an outcome.

It’s worth keeping in mind that any sort of recurring revenue never recurs forever. A \$3,000 monthly retainer doesn’t mean you get \$3,000 per month, every month, for the rest of your life no matter what. A monthly retainer just means, if you continue to prove your value each month, you will continue to get paid each month. (Just like how, as long as Netflix keeps putting out shows you like watching, you pay your subscription. But the moment two or three months goes by without them holding up their end of the bargain, you start to think about canceling.)

Which means the real question is: what are you signing up for in exchange for, say, \$3,000 per month?

Because if the answer is, “I’ll do whatever you need, whenever you need it!” then that \$3,000 divided by the number of hours and

effort usually ends up being the same (or sometimes worse) than if you had just gotten paid per hour. So the fact you're getting paid a larger number up-front, per month, doesn't actually make your life better (or your writing business more profitable). Sometimes, it makes it worse. Which is why, instead of trying to land a monthly retainer, what you really want to aim for is...

Level 4: Charging Per Asset (And Outcome)

Let's walk through the 3 levels so far and show how the same exact task can be priced (and perceived) differently at each level, and then I'll explain why charging per asset is better than charging per month, hour, or word.

- **Level 1, Per Word:** "I'll write 4 newsletters for you each month. 800 words each. And I charge \$1 per word." = \$800 (Which opens the door for the client to say: "\$1 per word? Why don't I just go find another writer who charges \$0.50 per word?")
- **Level 2, Per Hour:** "I'll write 4 newsletters for you each month. 800 words each. Each newsletter takes me approximately 2 hours to write, and I charge \$100 per hour." = \$800 (Which opens the door for the client to either say, "\$100 per hour? Why don't I just go find another writer who charges \$75 per hour?" or "2 hours per newsletter? Why can't you do it in an hour?")
- **Level 3, Per Month:** "I'll write 4 newsletters for you each month. 800 words each. And I charge \$3,000 per month." = \$3,000 (But that comes out to be \$750 per newsletter, meaning your earnings per newsletter went down, not up!)

These 3 levels are entirely based around "time" and "effort."

Both of which are the wrong measures of success.

This reminds me of the Picasso story where a woman approaches

the artist in a restaurant and asks him to scribble a quick drawing on a napkin. She says, “I’m happy to pay whatever you think it’s worth.” So Picasso finishes the quick drawing then says, “That will be \$10,000.” The woman shouts: “But it only took you 30 seconds!” To which Picasso responds, “Yes, but it has taken me forty years to learn how to do that.” The woman was trying to frame Picasso’s value in terms of “time” and “effort.” And Picasso was framing his value in terms of the asset he’d created and the outcome he was providing.

Which is why you do not want to be in the “time” or “effort” business.

You want to be in the assets & outcomes business.

This can work in two ways:

- Charging per asset (once or recurring) that generates an outcome.
- Charging for a bundle of assets (once or recurring) that generates an outcome.

This goes back to the point of not selling a “thing.”

When you get paid to “ghostwrite Tweets” or “ghostwrite newsletters” or even “ghostwrite books,” you are getting paid to write “a thing”—and usually “a thing” the client has already decided they want or need, and as a result, already decided how much they value the creation of that “thing.” When this happens, you are inevitably stuck at Levels 1, 2, or 3. Either the client pays you per word, per hour, or if that “thing” is recurring (like say 1 newsletter per week), per month.

And until you really internalize “He or she who frames the problem owns the solution,” it will be very hard for you to get above Level 3. (And if you do, it’ll happen by accident—and you won’t know how to repeat it.)

The way you get out of charging per word, hour, or month (or “time” of any sort) is to charge per asset.

And the way you increase the value of that asset, and this is

important... ***WITHOUT INCREASING TIME OR EFFORT...*** is by increasing the value of the outcome that asset generates for the client.

For example:

- **(Asset First)** “I will ghostwrite 2 Twitter Threads per week for you, each week, so 8 per month. For this, I charge \$3,000 per month.”
- **(Outcome First, Asset Second)** “I will help you position yourself as a Thought Leader in your industry. I’ll do this by ghostwriting 2 Twitter Threads for you, each week, so 8 per month. For Thought Leadership Positioning & Marketing, I charge \$5,000 per month.”
- **(More Valuable Outcome First, Asset Second)** “I will help you attract an extra 3 clients per month by writing 2 viral Twitter Threads, each week, so 8 per month, that educate readers on your coaching program & drive them to a sign-up form on your website. For this sort of Autopilot Lead Generation, I charge \$10,000 per month.”

The more valuable the outcome, the more valuable the asset, the more you can charge.

And notice: you’re not actually changing “what you’re offering,” itself. The “thing” is the same. But its perceived value (to the client), and its monetary value changes depending on the value of the outcome it generates.

Level 5: Charging Per Outcome

Which means the ultimate goal, the pinnacle of monetization as a writer, is to actually be rewarded in proportion to the outcomes you generate.

Most writers don’t know this, but there are copywriters and ghostwriters who make millions of dollars each year—working way less than

40 hours per week. How? By structuring their projects in this Level 5 territory, where how much they get paid is the result of the outcomes they generate for a client. For a sales copywriter, this usually means getting paid a percentage of the sales they drive with their copy (on a landing page, in an email campaign, or in a sales script & video). And for a ghostwriter, this usually means getting paid a percentage of book sales, or even social performance (getting paid per lead, or per tier of views, engagement, or virality).

A few things I want to say about Level 5 here:

First, especially in the beginning of your career as a writer & ghostwriter, Level 4 is a better place to be than Level 5. Getting paid exclusively (or the majority) on the outcome is higher reward, but also higher risk. You eat what you kill. And when you're first starting out (and if you're still trying to quit your 9-5, get your baseline of clients, and scale your income), this is unnecessary. You're better off just taking cash up front. (And if you really want to add risk/reward, take the cash and buy Bitcoin. Not joking. Also not investment advice.)

Second, charging per outcome exclusively sounds like a fast-track to becoming a millionaire, but it's way harder than people realize. I have done dozens of different "outcome" deals over the course of my ghostwriting career, all with ultra-accomplished, respectable, successful founders, executives, and investors. On paper, all of these deals could have made me a millionaire several times over (and I fantasized about it often). And to date, none of them have worked out. Why? Because every "outcome" deal has lots of different variables—many of which you won't have control over. Their team won't execute. Something will break. It won't get prioritized internally. Etc.

Third, charging per outcome opens the door for extreme negatives. The reason is because even though "incentives are aligned" (when the client succeeds, you succeed), the numbers can get pretty out of control in either direction. For example: let's say you ghostwrite a book and tell the client, "I'll forgo my cash up-front, and instead

I want a 10% royalty on every book sold.” If the book sells 5,000 copies, that’s not a big deal (and you would have made more just taking cash up front). But if the book turns out to be the next *Atomic Habits* and sells 10 million copies, best believe you’re going to get a call from the author or the author’s publisher saying, “We’re not paying you 10% of sales. That’s ridiculous.” Revenue sharing opportunities always seem great in the beginning, but the moment one actually enters the realm of “wildly successful,” best believe people will go to great lengths to protect their pot of gold.

As a good rule of thumb: the kinds of “outcome” deals you want, and have true upside, people won’t give you. And the kinds of “outcome” deals you don’t want, and will probably be a giant waste of time (and make you very little money) are the ones people will happily offer.

Ascending To Co-Founder and/or Co-Author As A Ghostwriter

Where you ultimately want to get to is a blend of Level 4 and Level 5, but with a few guardrails maximizing your upside and protecting your downside.

Cash up-front is best. And every now and then, you’ll want to take a big swing on an “outcome” project (where you only get paid if you nail it out of the park). Which is fine.

But the real goal is to find ways to get a bit of both: cash AND some sort of long-term incentive.

For example, a few years ago I was ghostwriting Twitter content for a serial entrepreneur, and the deal we structured was actually a modest monthly retainer AND a handful of stock options. If the company took off, then the stock options would pay me 10x more than I would have made just taking cash. But if the company didn’t take off, and the stock options were worthless, then at least I got paid something along the way. (If you want to know: the stock options

became worthless and I made very little money on that client. Win some, lose some.)

If I could go back and do it all over again, I wouldn't say "Yes" to any "outcome" deals until I had at least \$250,000 in net worth (minimum) and had proven to myself I could consistently maintain a stable of clients paying me \$20,000 - \$30,000 per month (minimum). Again, the reason is because "outcome" deals are so risk-heavy. And until you've got your financial footing, you are already living in a perpetual state of risk. And the last thing you need is "more" risk.

Just take the cash.

Then, once you get to \$250,000 net worth and have gotten your ghostwriting business humming at \$20,000 per month (minimum), I would start taking some bigger swings.

These are now the 3 rules I have for myself whenever taking on a new ghostwriting project, ensuring that, no matter what, I have exposure to increased credibility, upside, and long-term efficiency:

- **(Credibility) My name has to be on it.** Almost all of the top-tier ghostwriters, once they have enough credibility and leverage (meaning they bring something else to the table, like an audience or status, that adds exponential value to the project), make the transition to Co-Author—and their name is made public on the project. The first time I experienced this was in 2018, with one of my ghostwriting clients. His name was Bibop Gresta—a very successful Italian entrepreneur and Co-Founder of Hyperloop Transportation Technologies (Elon Musk's underground tunnel idea, which Bibop and his team were granted permission to build). At the time, this was a "bet" for me. Instead of taking cash, I took stock options. But to mitigate my risk, I told him I needed to be listed as a Co-Author (since we weren't getting any cash). And the exponential value I brought to the table was that my digital audience was way bigger than his. And he said "Yes." The

stock options never materialized (noticing a theme?), but at least I can point to the articles we wrote together and leverage them to attract future clients.

- **(Upside) I have to own a piece of it.** I don't do revenue share or royalty deals anymore. Unless you are an employee of their company (or they are an employee of your company), these rarely work. They're also incredibly difficult to get visibility on (depending on who controls the money), and very easy for the other person to decide, "You know what? We're done." Instead, I now structure rev-share ghostwriting projects as new and separate companies. For example, this is what we did with Category Pirates. Christopher and Eddie wanted to write books on Category Design, and instead of hiring me as a ghostwriter, I decided to take on the risk of getting paid exclusively on the outcomes we generated (they didn't pay me anything directly). I also brought exponential value to them because of the size of my digital audience. So, we started a new company together where each of us owned 33%, all 3 of our names were listed as Co-Authors, and we shared profits three ways. (And in 2023, after we had written several books and become a Top 5 paid business newsletter on Substack, and I decided I wanted to focus more on Ship 30 for 30, they bought me out of the company—and I got paid on the outcomes I had helped them generate up to that point.)
- **(Efficiency) It has to be scalable & repeatable.** In the beginning, you should experiment with all different sorts of ghostwriting projects (Twitter Threads, articles, newsletters, books, etc.) and figure out which you enjoy the most. But the moment you conclude you hate writing articles, stop. Or the moment you realize ghostwriting books isn't your jam, stop. Focus on the kind of ghostwriting that makes you happy AND makes you the most money (the one you know you

will want to repeat over and over again). Double-down on it. Master it. Obsess over it. Because the more you specialize, the faster you will get (efficiency). And the more you specialize, the more you will become known for that thing—which means you will attract outsized opportunities, have the most credibility, the most pricing power, and the most potential to “scale yourself.” (For example: I don’t think there’s anyone else on planet earth who has ghostwritten as many Thought Leadership articles, for as many different founders, executives, and investors as I have. As a result, my pricing power and ability to attract clients for this type of work, if I wanted it, is very high.)

It’s unlikely you will be able to get all 3 of these things in every single one of your client engagements in the beginning.

However, now that you know what to aim for, my hope is that you will unlock them much faster than I did.

Crafting Your Irresistible Ghostwriting Offer (3 Key Components)

BY NOW, YOU SHOULD BE seeing how these business frameworks stack on top of each other—and are what separate Premium Ghostwriters from burned-out, underpaid freelance writers:

- 3 business growth levers: Time, Units, Cost
- Clients value “outcomes” more than “things.”
- The highest-paid ghostwriters are more like “business consultants.”
- Your goal is to (eventually) get paid in Credibility, Upside, and Efficiency.
- He or she who frames the problem owns the solution—and you must be the one who sets the frame for the conversation.

With these in mind, the golden question becomes, “OK... so what do I offer the client that accomplishes all of the above?”

Smart of you to ask!

In order to charge more, work less, unlock valuable outcomes for

clients, share in some form of the upside, and position yourself as the authority—educating the client on what they need versus “reacting” to their requests—you need to craft an Irresistible Offer.

What is an Irresistible Offer?

A better place to start is what an Irresistible Offer is NOT.

- It's NOT: “Buy now for 50% off!”
- It's NOT: “You'll love it—I promise.”
- It's NOT: “And here's more, and more, and more!”

Just because you give the client a discount, tell them it's great, or add in a bottomless bag of bonuses doesn't make the thing you're selling “irresistible.”

In many cases, these tactics actually do the opposite: instead of making your offer seem more valuable, “more” on top makes it seem less valuable—because now it's confusing, annoyingly complex, or clear you are trying to “persuade” them to buy something.

Remember: simplicity is velocity.

The reason I like to use the term “Irresistible” is because, when the right combination of variables align, that's genuinely what happens. Your offer becomes *impossible to resist*, meaning the prospective client (very quickly) moves from a headspace of, “I don't know if I want this” to “I will find a way to get the money—because I absolutely have to have this.”

Many other marketing-minded creators like Russell Brunson and Alex Hormozi have written about this idea (as far as I know, Russell was the one who coined the phrase “Irresistible Offer,” so props to him). But I have never heard them articulate the idea of an “Irresistible Offer” in the way I am about to for you—or apply it specifically to the world of writing & ghostwriting.

So, strap in.

You're about to get a crash course in Category Creation.

How To Move The Client FROM “What They Want” TO “What YOU Know They Need”

There is a big difference between persuasion and Category Creation.

“Persuasion” almost always implies some form of comparison: you want to buy a car, and the used car salesman is trying to *persuade* you to buy a car from them. When you say, “But the guy down the street has a better deal,” the salesman tries to *persuade* you that their service is better. And when you say, “But they said they have great service too,” the salesman tries to *persuade* you that their service is faster and more reliable. And so on.

Signals of persuasion are words that end in -er:

- Better
- Faster
- Smarter
- Stronger
- Cheaper
- Etc.

I find most marketers, and even entrepreneurs and executives, get lost in the sauce when it comes to persuasion. They think the world “is” a certain way, and their job is to *persuade* people to buy their product or service instead of “the competition’s.” But you should never have to convince someone of your Irresistible Offer. Because if you educate them properly, and successfully move their thinking FROM “What They Want” TO “What YOU Know They Need,” they will persuade themselves.

Let me show you:

If you wanted to start ghostwriting today, what might you do first?

Following conventional wisdom, you'd probably poke around on the Internet and look for people who appeared to be successful ghostwriters already. You'd look at what they were **offering**, and then start selling that same offer yourself.

Why?

Because "If it works for them... it'll probably work for me!"

But what happens when you talk to a prospective client, and you tell them your offer (let's say "ghostwriting LinkedIn content"), and they reference the ghostwriter you looked to for inspiration and say, "That's what she offers, too. In fact, I just had a call with her last week."

Uh-oh!

Now you are caught in The Comparison Trap.

And your only way out is to "persuade" the client why you are *better* than the competition.

This is not the game you want to be in.

The goal isn't to be "better."

The goal is to be DIFFERENT.

Category Creation 101

I have written books extensively on the topic of Category Creation with Christopher Lochhead and Eddie Yoon (Category Pirates), including:

- *The Category Design Toolkit*
- *A Marketer's Guide To Category Design*
- *Snow Leopard: How Legendary Writers Create A Category Of One*

Read them if you'd like, but to summarize:

Your goal is NOT to offer the same things you see other (successful) people offering.

Your goal is to CREATE a new and different thing to offer, such that you have no competition. (And then give your niche a name, or

recognizable language—called *Languaging*.)

This is a very challenging idea for people to wrap their heads around. Even some of the smartest entrepreneurs, executives, and investors I know can't seem to let go of the business school mentality that says: find a hot, existing market and build a better mousetrap. (I believe the reason why is because even though everyone claims they want to “stand out,” deep down, most people just want to fit in.)

But unless you create something new, and categorize it (and its benefits) differently, it's nearly impossible to avoid ending up in a persuasion conversation.

All roads lead to The Comparison Trap.

Creating Your Irresistible Ghostwriting Offer: 3 Key Components

I didn't go to business school (I have a degree in fiction writing, remember?).

I failed math in high school. And I am way more right brain than left.

Which is why I don't like thinking of “offer creation” as a business concept, per se. Because how I arrived at this sort of thinking was actually through studying and mastering three different types of writing:

- *Languaging* (Category Creation)
- Ghostwriting
- Sales Copywriting

And I believe all Irresistible Offers (intentionally or unintentionally) are actually built from these combined skill sets, consisting of the following 3 components:

- A new, named & claimed category
- An articulate, specific list of problems, solutions, benefits,

and outcomes

- And a no-brainer exchange of either value for money, problem for effort, or outcome for time

Let's break down each one, and then at the end I'll show you how to tie them all together.

Step 1: A new, named & claimed category

Remember our 1 Specific Problem, for 1 Specific Person, in 1 Specific Way framework?

This is the easiest way to think about creating a new category and how to “niche down.”

For example, if you see someone ghostwriting Thought Leadership (1 Problem) Twitter Threads (1 Way) for Fitness SaaS Founders (1 Person), then you should NOT think to yourself, “That’s it! I’ll ghostwrite Thought Leadership Twitter Threads for Fitness SaaS Founders *too*!”

Instead, what you want to do is change at least one of these variables to something different.

- **Solve A Different Problem:** Instead of Twitter Threads that help someone position themselves as a Thought Leader, how about Twitter Threads that drive email subscribers? Or Twitter Threads that book sales calls? Or Twitter Threads that go viral and drive PR?
- **For A Different Person:** Instead of ghostwriting for Fitness SaaS Founders, how about ghostwriting for Fitness Influencers? Or Personal Trainers? Or Personal Trainers specifically in Miami?
- **In A Different Way:** Instead of ghostwriting Twitter Threads, how about ghostwriting newsletters? Or Instagram Captions? Or Educational Email Courses?

The more variables you change, the more “different” you are—until you become one of the only (if not THE only) person solving that 1 Specific Problem, for that 1 Specific Person, in that 1 Specific Way—which makes it easier and easier to educate clients on why you are the right person to help them. (Because you’re “the only one!”)

If you do the above, you will stand out. You just will. It’s impossible not to.

Now here’s the cherry on top...

How you become known for a niche you own is by giving your niche a name.

No, I don’t mean a “clever” name.

I mean coming up with 1-3 words that summarize what you do, who it’s for, and/or why it matters (to the target client/reader).

Here’s a great example of a woman in our Premium Ghostwriting Academy, Alex Gilliland: she was trying to figure out how to summarize her niche (in the health and wellness space), and I asked her what she wanted to help clients do, specifically. She said, “I want to help brands educate customers on the health benefits of their food products, and make sure those health benefits get leveraged in their marketing materials as key differentiators.”

So, how might we “name” this—in such a way that she could build an entire niche around this idea? (Because “I want to help brands educate customers on the health benefits of their food products” doesn’t exactly *roll off the tongue*.)

Health Benefit Marketing

Three simple words—the same words she said aloud to me. But when extracted and capitalized, standing on their own, become the “name” of a niche she could own.

When you find the right 1-3 words, an entire universe of possibilities should spring to mind:

- **Bio:** “I specialize in Health Benefit Marketing.”
- **Newsletter:** “Health Benefit Marketing: Weekly actionable tips for health and wellness brands to turn food facts into paying customers.”
- **Email Course:** “Health Benefit Marketing: A 5-Day Crash Course On How Legacy Health & Wellness Companies Can Reignite Old Customers With New Digital Campaigns”
- **Book:** *Health Benefit Marketing 101: How Health & Wellness Brands Can Create Profitable Campaigns Around Little-Known Nutrition Facts*
- **TedTalk:** “Health Benefit Marketing: Why The Future Of Food Marketing Is Hidden In Our Nutrition Facts”

The more she uses the words “Health Benefit Marketing,” the more that languaging will begin to stick—until eventually, readers and customers and potential clients will begin to say it back to her. “We were just talking at our last board meeting about how we really need to improve our Health Benefit Marketing.” When this happens, the game is won. And the client will assume she is the right person for the job... BECAUSE THEY ARE USING HER LANGUAGE.

He or she who frames the problem owns the solution.

Now, you might be wondering, “Cole, this is all super interesting... *but what does this have to do with ghostwriting?*”

Because (let’s sing the chorus, all together now): “The highest-paid ghostwriters don’t get paid to write. They get paid to think, like business consultants—who just so happen to know how to write.”

If you can create a new category for yourself, and avoid all comparison conversations, your ability to attract clients (and set the price) is going to explode through the roof.

But if you can help *your clients* create new categories for themselves, and use writing (and languaging) as the vehicle to do that, you’ll be able to buy yourself a five bedroom house with a pool.

Step 2: An articulate, specific list of problems, solutions, benefits, and outcomes

Once you've created—and ideally named & claimed—a new category for yourself (1 Specific Problem, 1 Specific Person, 1 Specific Way), the next step is to create a highly specific list of problems, solutions, benefits, and outcomes.

The real art of ghostwriting is having such deep domain expertise that you know how to articulate the problems, solutions, benefits, and outcomes of a particular industry or niche better than anyone else in it—even better than the clients hiring you.

Now, that's not to say the people you're ghostwriting for aren't smart, or don't contribute to the material. They are smart, and they will contribute. However, your ability to *articulate* what they share with you should exceed their own abilities. Otherwise, they wouldn't hire you!

And what makes someone “more articulate?”

Specificity.

Creating a new and differentiated category for yourself as a writer & ghostwriter is great, but unless you are able to articulate the target client's problems, the consequences of those problems, and benefits of solving those problems, they won't be able to “get it.”

Which is why clarity of language is extremely important.

And, again, why I don't like thinking about Irresistible Offers as a “business” concept, but more of a writing exercise.

Problems & Solutions

There are two “narratives” the client needs to understand (and be able to clearly & viscerally imagine) in order to believe your Irresistible Offer works:

- Specific Problem » Reason Why » Consequence of Problem »

- Ultimate Negative Outcome
 • Specific Solution » Reason Why » Benefit of Solution »
 Ultimate Positive Outcome

In plain English:

First, the client needs to be educated on which problem they need to solve, why that problem specifically, what the consequences of NOT solving that problem are, and what ultimate negative outcome they will have to live with if they don't. Here's an easy example why: if I offered you a roll of toilet paper right now, and told you it was \$10, would you buy it? Probably not. You'd probably shout at me and say, "What are you crazy?! I can buy 12 rolls of toilet paper at Costco for \$10!" But if you were stranded on the side of the road, and had rampaging diarrhea, and I offered you a roll of toilet paper for \$10, would you buy it? Yes, you would. You might even buy it for \$50 or \$100 (depending on the viscosity of the diarrhea). The context of the problem is what determines the value of the solution.

Second, once the client understands the problem (and the consequences of NOT solving it), the client then needs to be educated on the new & different way you are suggesting to solve that problem, why that solution specifically, the benefits of using that solution, and the ultimate positive outcome that solution unlocks for them (remember The Big 5: Money, Status, Safety, Connection, Self-Esteem). Which is why the Category Creation component is so important. *The more new, unique, and different the solution (relative to the problem), the more likely the client is to want it.*

Now, this might all make sense in theory.

But the key is to be able to articulate the Problem(s) and Solution(s) so clearly that the client feels "seen" in the process.

For example: "I ghostwrite articles for startup founders to help them position themselves as Thought Leaders in their industry."

Let's say this was your 1 Specific Way (articles), 1 Specific Person (Startup Founders), and 1 Specific Problem (Thought Leadership).

And imagine you got on the phone with a potential client, and were trying to sell them on hiring you to be their ghostwriter.

Let's walk through the different versions of being able to speak to this service, starting with the most beginner version and iterating from there:

- **V1: “I ghostwrite articles that help you position yourself as a Thought Leader in your industry.”** No framing of the problem first. And only mildly articulating the ultimate outcome. (When someone becomes a Thought Leader in their industry... what happens?)
- **V2: “Most startup founders struggle to raise money. I ghostwrite articles that position you as a Thought Leader in your industry so that it’s easier for you to raise your next round of funding.”** Woah! Huge improvement! Why? Because now the client understands the specific problem “writing articles” solves (struggling to raise money) AND has a bit more clarity over the ultimate outcome (becoming a Thought Leader makes raising money easier).
- **V3: “Most startup founders struggle to raise money. The reason is because they have no scalable way to reach investors. I ghostwrite articles that position you as a Thought Leader in your industry online, so that you can scale your startup’s mission and message online, reach exponentially more investors, and make it easier for you to raise your next round of funding.”** WOWZA! Now we’re rocking & rolling. See how these pieces are starting to stack up? Now we have educated the client on a specific problem (startup founders struggle to raise money), the reason why that problem occurs (because they aren’t a thought leader online, and can’t attract investors at scale), the solution (thought leadership articles), and the benefits of solving that problem (scale your startup’s mission and message, reach exponentially more

investors, and make it easier to raise your next round of funding). But we can take this even further. Next, let's just finish speaking to the problem.

- **V4: “Most startup founders struggle to raise money. The reason is because they have no scalable way to reach investors. When this happens, it gets harder and harder to stay focused on the business because you’re always running to in-person investor meetings, which creates this vicious cycle where the company’s growth slows because you’re always spending time raising money, but because growth has slowed it’s harder to raise money, which means you need to raise more money, and so on, until all of a sudden the company is out of cash and you have to call it quits.”**

Wow. OK. If you were an early-stage startup founder, and you were constantly hopping in and out of Ubers running to investor meetings, and a ghostwriter got on the phone and said this to you, what would your reaction be? It would probably be: “Holy cow. You literally just articulated my daily life.” And that’s the point. The specificity of the language is what builds trust. Which means now, the only step left is to add this specificity of language to the solution & outcome side of the equation.

- **V5: “Most startup founders struggle to raise money. The reason is because they have no scalable way to reach investors. When this happens, it gets harder and harder to stay focused on the business because you’re always running to in-person investor meetings, which creates this vicious cycle where the company’s growth slows because you’re always spending time raising money, but because growth has slowed it’s harder to raise money, which means you need to raise more money, and so on, until all of a sudden the company is out of cash and you have to call it quits.**

What I do is ghostwrite articles for you that position you as a Thought Leader in your industry online. The reason why I recommend 800-word articles is because they are the easiest way to communicate the same things you probably repeat over and over again at in-person meetings. The benefit of writing these types of Thought Leadership articles is they will scale your startup's mission and message online, so you can reach exponentially more investors, and make it easier for you to raise your next round of funding—all of which secures the safety of your company, and allows you to focus on what matters: building legendary products."

NOW THAT IS IRRESISTIBLE!

But why? What makes it irresistible?

Because you—the “business consultant, who just so happens to be a talented ghostwriter”—has just articulated, clear as day, a painful struggle your target client is experiencing AND you’ve made them aware of the burden they are going to have to carry around if they don’t solve it. Which means, even if the client decides not to hire you on that first call, they are going to find themselves getting in and out of an Uber later that afternoon, on their way to an investor meeting, thinking about what you’ve just educated them on: a daily challenge that, for a modest fee, could be easily solved (all they have to do is hire you!).

No persuasion. No comparison conversation. No having to convince the client that you’re better or faster or cheaper than the next person.

Just a helpful articulation of the problem and the benefits of solving it.

Now, compare V5 to the original V1:

V1: “I ghostwrite articles that help you position yourself as a Thought Leader in your industry.”

Lame.

Weak.

But most importantly, non-specific.

Step 3: A no-brainer exchange of either value for money, problem for effort, or outcome for time

If you have successfully executed Steps 1 & 2, then all that should be left is to make the value of the “trade” explicit for the client.

Most writers think “copywriting” and “sales” is about using persuasive language like “The little-known secret...” or shocking language like “The CRAZY formula NO ONE wants you to know!” or even going so far as to psychologically manipulate readers by triggering deeply human fears like “If you don’t take this vitamin, you might die!”

This is a laughable misunderstanding of the craft.

The true art of copywriting and sales is making clear which “trade” you are proposing to the target audience.

Think of this as the Logistical CTA at the end of your Irresistible Offer.

You’ve created a niche for yourself. You’ve clearly articulated the problem the client has, the reason why it’s important to solve, the consequences of NOT solving it, and the ultimate negative reality they will continue to live in if they never solve it. And you’ve clearly articulated how to solve this specific problem, the reason why solving it is important (and how), the benefits of solving it, and the ultimate positive reality they will live in once they do.

Which means all that’s left is to tell the client, “I give you this—you give me that.”

There are 3 “trades” all customers and clients on planet earth want:

- Insane value for a minimal relative cost

- Urgent & painful problem solved for minimal effort
- Highly desirable outcome, generated instantly

If your offer does not fulfill one of these 3 “trades,” it might be a good offer but it certainly isn’t “irresistible.”

Here are some quick examples of each:

- **Trade #1: Insane value for a minimal relative cost.** “I will ghostwrite a series of marketing emails that will sell your products on autopilot anytime someone subscribes to your email list or enters your funnels. Based on how many emails you’re capturing per month, I estimate this will increase your monthly revenue by \$100,000 or more. And to ghostwrite these 7 marketing emails, all I charge is a one-time fee of \$10,000.”
- **Trade #2: Urgent & painful problem solved for minimal effort.** “Having trouble raising money? I’ll ghostwrite articles for you specifically with the goal of getting in front of investors digitally—and I’ll do it without taking up any of your time, by just repurposing your fundraising deck, blog posts from your website, and my own research, I’ll do it all for you.”
- **Trade #3: Highly desirable outcome, generated instantly.** “You want to grow your following on Twitter? I will ghostwrite 2 viral Twitter Threads on your account each week, leveraging the same formats that have made my own threads go viral, power-leveling your audience growth months or even years faster than if you were to try to do it on your own.”

This-for-that.

The more you become aware of your target client’s specific wants, needs, and desires, the more clarity you will have over how you need to improve your offer such that it becomes “Irresistible” to them—because it solves a problem they have and unlocks an outcome they desire, making the trade a no-brainer.

Your Irresistible Ghostwriting Offer Checklist

Phew! I know I threw a lot at you in this chapter.

It's OK if all these pieces don't click right away. (To be fair, it has taken me a decade to learn and understand all these pieces myself.) But my goal is to plant these seeds in your brain, and show you the "entire path" so that one day, probably at the grocery store or somewhere you least expect it, they start to click.

So, let's recap how to craft an Irresistible Ghostwriting Offer:

- Niche down, name & claim it:
- Solve A Different Problem
- For A Different Person
- In A Different Way
- Articulate the Problems & Solutions:
- Specific Problem » Reason Why » Consequence of Problem » Ultimate Negative Outcome
- Specific Solution » Reason Why » Benefit of Solution » Ultimate Positive Outcome
- Make the trade explicit:
- Trade #1: Insane value for a minimal relative cost.
- Trade #2: Urgent & painful problem solved for minimal effort.
- Trade #3: Highly desirable outcome, generated instantly.

Advanced Pricing Frameworks (3 Simple Questions That Easily Reveal How Much You Should Charge)

NOW, HERE'S HOW TO THINK about pricing your Irresistible Offer...

No “price,” in and of itself, is cheap or expensive.

The price of anything is cheap or expensive *relative to something else*.

For example, is a \$15,000 Rolex watch “cheap” or “expensive?” Well, relative to a Casio F91W-1 (\$12 on Amazon), it's very expensive. But relative to an Audemars Piguet Royal Oak (\$100,000+), it's actually quite affordable.

The entire game of pricing isn't actually about the price itself. It's about the context of the price, and helping customers understand whether something is “cheap” or “expensive” *relative to something else*.

This is why, when you go on most websites to buy a product, service, or subscription of any kind, there are usually two or three options. And guess what? The middle option is usually the one the company wants you to buy—and the “cheaper” option is there to make the middle option seem premium, while the “expensive” option is there to make the middle option also seem like an affordable purchase.

Unfortunately, this is not how most writers (or solopreneurs in general) think about pricing.

Instead, most writers just throw a number in the air—and that number is almost always based on what they heard someone else is charging. Then, in an effort to “stand out,” they price themselves a little below the competition. So, if another ghostwriter charges \$100 per hour, they think, “I should charge \$80.” Or if another ghostwriter charges \$2,500 per month, they think, “I should charge \$2,000.”

By now, the alarm should be going off in your brain—and it should be clear to you why this is a mistake.

(And if it’s not, please re-read the previous chapters to get your head screwed on straight.)

Here’s a more reliable way of figuring out how much you should charge:

Question 1: “What’s this worth to the client?”

This isn’t a perfect science. The goal is to just be “directionally correct.”

Instead of figuring out how much you should charge by brainstorming “a price,” start with the end in mind:

- How painful is this problem for the client?
- What could you guesstimate the cost of that unsolved problem is for the client?
- What could you guesstimate is the potential upside of solving

this problem for the client?

- How much could you charge such that the cost of hiring you is negligible relative to the money you are either helping the client save or make?

For example, let's say you are trying to figure out how much to charge a client to ghostwrite their weekly newsletter. Again, what most writers do here is start with the question, "Well, how much does everyone else charge?" And then whatever number they find on someone else's website, undercut them slightly.

Horrible strategy.

A better place to start is by asking the question, "Well, what problem am I actually solving by writing their weekly newsletter? And/or what outcome am I unlocking by writing their weekly newsletter? And what is that solved problem, or unlocked outcome worth to the client?"

Pro tip: figuring this out by sitting at your desk, head in your hands, scrunching your eyebrows and overdosing on cold brew usually isn't the answer. The answer always reveals itself by talking to people (your potential clients), getting to know them, and intimately understanding their most urgent, painful problems and most highly desired outcomes. As we say over and over again in Ship 30 for 30, "You can't steer a stationary ship!" So get out there and talk to people. And if nobody seems to want to talk to you, then you know what to do: offer to work for free! (Remove the bottleneck.)

For example, here are some potential problems you could solve for a client by writing their weekly newsletter:

- Problem #1: "I have a newsletter, but I don't have time to write it."
- Problem #2: "I want a newsletter, but I don't know what it should be about."

- Problem #3: “I have a newsletter, but I don’t know how to attract new readers.”
- Problem #4: “I want a newsletter, and have plenty to say, but don’t have the writing skills to turn my thoughts into something easy and fun to read.”
- Problem #5: “I have a free newsletter, but I don’t know how to monetize it.”

And so on.

This should be an exercise you do over and over again throughout your ghostwriting career, continuously reflecting on which problems your target client has and always keeping an eye out for new, urgent problems that might arise in the future. (For example: in 2018, during the cryptocurrency boom, tons of FinTech clients had a problem called, “We want to start a crypto newsletter but don’t know how to articulate these complicated concepts in a simple, easily digestible way.” That was a new, urgent problem—and if you said you could solve it, companies threw money at you.)

So, start here:

Make a list of all the potential problems your target client might be experiencing. Once you have 5 or 10 listed out, you should be able to see how each of these problems is different—and as a result, would require a different framing of the service you provide in order to solve any one of these particular problems. (For example: helping someone solve for “time” is different than helping someone solve for “money,” is different than helping someone solve for “traffic.”)

Potential Problems & Monetary Guesstimates

Next, an easy trick to figure out which problem is **MOST VALUABLE** to the client (and would be the most lucrative one for you to solve) is to try to attach monetary figures to each of the problems—either in terms of money you would save the client, or money you would make

the client. Like I said, this will not be a perfect science. But being “directionally right” will give you more than enough insight into which problem is most likely to get the client to open their wallet.

For example:

- **Problem #1: “I have a newsletter, but I don’t have time to write it.”** Monetary value? If the client doesn’t have time, then what is their time worth to them? Take a guess (based on their job role, status, public accomplishments, etc.). Would they value their time at \$100 per hour? Or \$1,000 per hour? Or \$10,000 per hour? And how long do you think it would take them to write a newsletter on their own, right now? 2 hours? 5 hours? 2 hours x \$1,000 per hour = \$2,000 per newsletter (if they were to do it on their own). Which means you could charge \$1,000 per newsletter and it would seem like a no-brainer.
- **Problem #2: “I want a newsletter, but I don’t know what it should be about.”** Monetary value? How much time would the client waste if they were to try to figure out what their newsletter should be about, by themselves? How much money might they waste if they were to hire an agency to help them name and brand their newsletter, only to get it wrong?
- **Problem #3: “I have a newsletter, but I don’t know how to attract new readers.”** Monetary value? How much money would they have to spend on ads to attract 100 new subscribers each month? How much money could you save them by attracting double or triple that amount of subscribers organically? Or how much money would they have to spend hiring and training a full-time content writer opposed to hiring you, the pro, who knows how to shortcut their growth curve?
- **Problem #4: “I want a newsletter, and have plenty to say, but don’t have the writing skills to turn my thoughts into something easy and fun to read.”** Monetary value? How

long would it take the client to become a proficient newsletter writer? How many courses would they have to take? How much money might they have to spend? How many hours, months, years would it take them?

- **Problem #5: “I have a free newsletter, but I don’t know how to monetize it.”** Monetary value? How much money could you help the client generate by helping them turn their free newsletter into a paid one? How much money could you help them generate by creating other digital products to upsell inside their newsletter funnel?

The ultimate goal here is to figure out which problems you are best suited to help people solve (which ones do you know the most about?) AND which problems would either save clients the most money or make them the most money.

Wherever there is overlap (what you know x what is most valuable), there is gold.

And what you charge should be “cheap” relative to the money saved or money made for the client.

Question 2: “How long will this take?”

Here’s where everything starts coming together.

Remember how I said there are only 3 ways to grow your 1-person ghostwriting business:

- **[Time]** You can only work so many hours in the day (anything above 12 hours per day is when burnout becomes inevitable).
- **[Units]** You can only work with so many clients at any given time (because past a certain number of clients you either run out of time, or your quality of work falls off a cliff).
- **[Cost]** And you can only charge “so much” before the number of clients who say “No” exceeds the number of clients

who say “Yes.”

Well, coming up with a price for your services, outside the context of these 3 levers, is where you start to get into big trouble.

Let me give you an example:

Say you are talking to a prospective client, and you are talking to them about ghostwriting their weekly newsletter, but what they really need help with is creating a Twitter strategy, first, so they can successfully drive newsletter subscribers later. This is slightly outside your wheelhouse, but you think, “Hey, this might be a great opportunity—and would allow me to get my foot in the door,” so you say, “Sure, I can help with that.”

But when the client asks you how much you charge, you get nervous and spit out the first number that pops into your head:

“For creating a Twitter Strategy, I charge \$10,000.”

And before you can even finish the sentence, the client says, “Sold!”

Your heart is racing. This is the most you’ve ever charged, ever! You think you’ve just hit the jackpot!

There’s just one problem.

What you haven’t specified is the time horizon:

- If it takes you 1 month to create their Twitter Strategy, \$10,000 for 1 month seems pretty great.
- If it takes you “1 month” to create their Twitter Strategy, but requires you to work 60 hours per week for 4 weeks in a row, \$10,000 will very quickly feel like a bad deal (and won’t be something you’ll ever want to do again).
- If it takes you just a few hours per week, but the project drags out for 3 months, that’s only \$3,333 per month. Not bad. Not great.
- And if it takes you just a few hours per week, but the project drags out for 10 months, that’s only \$1,000 per month and likely a huge time suck and switching cost relative to

everything else you have going on.

The “number” of what you charge is not nearly as important as the number divided by the time horizon.

And it’s your responsibility to figure out how long something is going to take you (ideally before you get the client to say “Yes,” although sometimes you have to step into the fire to find the answer), and then communicate that to the client so the project doesn’t drag on (and crush your efficiencies) for months into the future.

Step 3: “What’s this worth to me?”

The last question, and maybe the most important one, is what each project, monthly retainer, or opportunity is worth to *you*.

When you’re first starting out, you’re in “Yes” mode. You just want to pay your bills, maybe quit your full-time job, work for yourself, scale your earnings, save a little extra money, and get some reps under your belt. I did this for a long time. I just wanted to learn, get better, and expose myself to as many different types of projects as possible—so that I could find my strengths.

But eventually, your 1-person ghostwriting business will begin to solidify. You’ll find your footing. You’ll have a steady roster of clients. And the number of opportunities that come your way will exceed the number of hours you have in a day.

Great problem to have.

From here, you essentially have 2 paths:

- Unlock more “workable” hours by hiring people—and scale yourself into an agency.
- Charge more per hour—and work with higher status clients.

The moment you start to live in this constant state of abundance, the whole game of “pricing” starts to change. It becomes a lot less about what your service is worth to the client (that’s easy), and a lot more

about what the client's project is worth to YOU (either monetarily, or in terms of learning opportunities).

That said, until you hit \$250,000 in net worth, or maybe even \$1,000,000, it makes sense to optimize for money. I get it. I did, too. But, eventually, you will hit a point where “more money” isn't as worth it to you as, say, finishing a personal project or investing time in building something more scalable.

If you want to know how some industry leaders get away with insane hourly rates or project fees, this is why: because they've reached a point in their careers where “how they price” has less to do with what it's worth to the client, and more to do with what it's worth to them.

This is a reward you unlock usually after a decade or two (and almost always when you successfully create a category for yourself—where substituting you and your unique knowledge is very difficult, if not impossible).

But stick with it, and you'll get there.

3 Simple Questions That Easily Reveal How Much You Should Charge (Checklist)

Let's recap.

When evaluating opportunities and trying to figure out how much you should charge, ask yourself these questions:

- “What's this worth to the client?”
- “What's the time horizon (how long will this take)?”
- “What's this worth to me?”

If you don't have specific answers to each of these questions, chances are, you're just “spraying and praying.”

Not a terrible strategy when you're first starting out, but not what you want to be doing forever.

How To Get Clients As A Ghostwriter (3 Steps To Find, Pitch, And Land Deals)

I'VE SAVED THE BEST FOR last:

How to get clients!

When it comes to increasing your income as a writer & ghostwriter, most people think increased income is a byproduct of two things:

- Increased skill
- Increased credibility

And yes, that's true—but it's not the whole truth.

In fact, you could be a fairly mediocre writer with almost no “credibility,” but if you understand sales and cold outreach, you will make more money than 99% of other writers & ghostwriters. Because most freelance writers and solopreneurs just sit around and wait for opportunities to land in their inbox. What they don't do is go out there and

pound the pavement.

Remember: as a ghostwriter, you are running a 1-person business.

And the “lever” for making that business grow is sales.

The 3 most common ways to get clients:

1. **Word-Of-Mouth:** Every client you work with, and make happy, has a chance of referring you to someone else. Why? Because it makes them look good. When their friend (another successful entrepreneur or creator) comes to them with a problem that you can solve, your client is going to look good introducing them to you. So keep that in mind for every person you work with. (And even though nobody likes admitting they’ve hired a ghostwriter, trust me, behind closed doors your happy clients are telling their friends, “I hired this ghostwriter and they’re amazing.” Referrals might not happen publicly, but they definitely happen privately.)
2. **Warm Lead Attraction:** The second way to get clients is to build an audience of your own. The more you build yourself as a writer, and write about the industry you also ghostwrite within, the more likely you are to attract people saying, “Hey! I need a ghostwriter who can write about all these same topics, for me!” This is hard for people to wrap their heads around, but it’s very simple: write online about the industry you want to also ghostwrite in, point clients to your own content as an example, and voila. You will be shocked at how many people want to pay you to do what you’re doing for yourself, for them.
3. **Cold Lead Outreach:** The third, and most lucrative way to grow your 1-person ghostwriting business, is to literally just DM and email prospective clients and pitch them directly. There’s no other way around it. The more people you reach out

to (who would benefit from your service), the more likely you are to land clients. Period. Everyone wants to avoid this step, but it's the key to growth (and how I built my multimillion-dollar ghostwriting agency). Eventually, you'll start to learn exactly how many messages you need to send in order to land 1 new client. Which means, in any given month, if you want to land 3 clients, then you'll know you need to reach out to 3x as many people. This becomes the most reliable lever you have for sustaining the level of income you desire for yourself as a ghostwriter.

Now, it's worth noting that, yes, there are other ways to attract clients—like running paid ads, creating affiliate partnerships, and so on. But these are more expensive and complicated than people realize. Which is why, aside from creating content and building yourself as a writer, the best thing you can do to grow your business is reach out to potential clients directly.

You have to get comfortable with sales.

Step 1: Value-First Cold Outreach

Is your inner monologue screaming: “BUT I HATE SALES! I DON'T WANT TO BE SALES-Y! I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO ‘SELL’ ANYONE!”

Let me tell you something: this is a great big lie in our society.

And I'm sorry someone, somewhere, told you that “sales” means being a money-grubbing sleezeball.

(Not your fault.)

Anyone proficient in sales will tell you the key to selling anything isn't actually to “sell.” **It's to educate.** Again, going back to the idea of *persuasion*: if you approach sales as “selling,” you have to do a lot of *persuading* to get the other person to take action. Whereas if you approach sales as education, and the person becomes aware of a problem they

now feel is important to solve, they will persuade themselves.

Which is why I encourage you not to think of cold outreach as “sales.”

And instead, think of it as making friends, at scale.

(No different than the way you would educate a friend who you saw doing something incorrect—wanting to give them information and help them succeed.)

- **What problem do you know your ideal client is experiencing?** Are they aware of it? If so, do they know how to solve it? (Probably not—otherwise it wouldn’t be a glaring problem!) And if they aren’t aware of it, how can you make them aware of it? What do they need to know?
- **What solution would help your ideal client solve this problem AND unlock a desirable outcome?** It’s not enough to say, “I can solve this problem.” You must also paint the future, and help them feel what it’s going to feel like once this problem is solved. What ultimate outcome (The Big 5) do you think they care about most?

If you can successfully accomplish these 2 things in your outreach, landing clients will be very easy.

The question is: how do you get in front of the right clients?

It’s not rocket science!

Regardless of your niche, follow this checklist to find paying clients:

- **Is this person “reachable?”** Don’t target celebrities, creators with millions of followers, or Jeff Bezos. These people aren’t reachable. Instead, focus on people who have smaller audiences, medium-sized businesses, and who probably aren’t drowning in DMs.

- **Does this person have a business?** In order to hire you, the person needs to have money. But more importantly, the person needs to be able to rationalize spending money in order to make more money—which means they need to have some sort of revenue-generating vehicle. Again, focus on entrepreneurs that have cash-flowing businesses (looking at their company website, it should be obvious how they make money) and/or entrepreneurs who have recently raised a bunch of money (you can find this in the news). And if you want to target “creators,” make sure the creator has a paid product, course, or community—otherwise they won’t be able to rationalize hiring you.
- **Is this person, and their business, “failing in public?”**
Here’s the key: Who is most likely to need a Twitter ghostwriter? *Somebody trying to write on Twitter and failing at it.* Who is most likely to need a book ghostwriter? *Somebody who is churning out articles on Medium, and clearly has a book in them, but doesn’t seem to be writing it.* Who is most likely to need a ghostwriter for their newsletter? *Somebody writing on Twitter or LinkedIn, but failing to capture any email addresses.* Look for people who are either TRYING to do the thing you want to help them do, and failing—or people who SHOULD be doing the thing you want to help them do, but aren’t.

That’s it.

And when you reach out to them, keep in mind everything we’ve covered in this book:

- **Don’t say, “Hey, I’m a ghostwriter. Want to hire me?”**
Instead, say, “Hey, I see you are trying to do X. But I think I know why you aren’t achieving the result I think you’re going for—can I help you?”
- **Don’t say, “I ghostwrite Twitter Threads” or “I ghostwrite**

newsletters.” Instead, educate them on the problem they’re experiencing, and THEN educate them on why your solution helps them solve that problem. (And make the trade explicit: insane value for minimal relative cost, urgent & painful problem solved for minimal effort, or highly desirable outcome generated instantly.)

- **Don’t say, “Hey, here’s what I do and here’s how much it costs.”** Instead of talking like a “salesperson,” talk like a friend. Pretend you are reaching out to a peer, and you keep watching them make the same mistake over and over again in public and just want to help them fix it. Pretend like you’ve known each other for years.

These small nuances are what separate all-star cold outreach that (very quickly) can lead to high-ticket clients from the mass of “annoying” messages we all receive, day after day.

The ROI of Free Work

There are 2 strategies that exist in cold outreach:

The first way is the most common. In fact, you probably deleted a handful of these messages this morning. These are Twitter DMs, LinkedIn Messages, and emails that are sales pitches—usually something like this:

“Hey! Are you struggling with website hosting? I’d love to chat to help you find the right website hosting platform for you!”

Very few people respond to these types of messages—and it should be obvious why. Because nobody wakes up in the morning, stretches their arms, lets out a big yawn and says to themselves, “I can’t wait to buy something from someone I’ve never met before on the Internet today.”

And yet, this is the approach the vast majority of people (from solopreneurs and freelancers to thousand-person enterprise sales teams)

choose to deploy.

The second way, which is significantly less common (and why it's exponentially more effective) is to take a value-first approach to cold outreach.

Instead of trying to blast as many people as possible with your sales pitch, what I like to do (and the strategy I train Premium Ghostwriters in our academy on) is find a way to help each individual person for free. It doesn't have to be some big project or anything. But I like to reach out to people I feel like I can help—and then demonstrate the ways I can help in some way.

For example:

- **If I wanted to land Twitter ghostwriting clients, I would look for people who were trying to write on Twitter but weren't doing a very good job.** To get the conversation started, I would send them one of their recent Tweets or Threads and give them feedback on it. I might even re-write a section (or all of it) to show them how they could improve next time.
- **If I wanted to land YouTube ghostwriting clients, I would look for people investing a lot in their YouTube channel (signals like: graphically-designed thumbnails, improved camera quality, lots of marketing on other platforms, ads, etc.) but whose videos weren't quite hitting the mark.** To get the conversation started, I would send them one of their recent videos that didn't get a lot of views along with a script rewrite. Then I'd record a Loom of myself talking over the script I wrote, explaining all my recommendations and how they could execute this same sort of video better next time.
- **If I wanted to land newsletter clients, I would look for people with businesses who either didn't have a newsletter OR had started a newsletter but were clearly failing at it.** To get the conversation started, I might even go so far as

to write an entire newsletter for them—for free. Just so they could see the difference between what they were currently doing and what they **COULD** be doing.

And what happens when you help this person, for free?

The likelihood of them hiring you (and wanting “more of what you just did for them”) goes through the roof.

Here’s why:

Especially when you’re first starting out, and you’re reaching out to potential clients (people you’ve never met or talked to before in your life), the biggest obstacle isn’t actually the cost of your services.

The biggest obstacle is that the client doesn’t believe the outcome you are promising is possible.

It’s a belief problem.

Because if it was 100% guaranteed that hiring you would make them more money, why wouldn’t they take that trade? Imagine walking into Las Vegas and seeing a machine with a sign that said: “Insert \$5,000, get back \$50,000.” There isn’t a person on planet earth who wouldn’t immediately call up their friends and family to get their hands on \$5,000—assuming the machine worked every single time.

So, how do you overcome this belief obstacle?

You work for free.

You remove the obstacle entirely, and prove your ability to generate the outcome—trusting that once they see it happen the first time, they are going to want to pay you to unlock more outcomes for them after that.

Now, whenever I share this POV, I (almost) always get met with significant backlash:

- “I shouldn’t have to work for free!”
- “I know my worth—and I’m not going to let people take advantage of me!”
- “Working for free is illegal! No one should have to submit themselves to that!”

- “I’m already struggling to pay rent. Now you want me to work for free? You’re an idiot!”

And so on.

OK, let’s do some napkin math.

Let’s say it takes you 1 hour to send out 100 salesy cold outreach messages.

And this approach has a 1% success rate. (So for every 100 messages you send, 1 person replies.)

Or, it takes you 1 hour to send out 5 value-first cold outreach messages.

With this approach, you “reach” less people—but the people you reach, you help. And of the people you help, 60% respond. (So for every 5 people you help, 3 of them say “Thank You” and are interested in learning more about what you do.)

Which approach is better?

The whole reframe here is to not think of free work as “free work,” and instead to think of it as “highly effective marketing.” You’re going to spend time reaching out to potential clients anyways. So, instead of trying to “spam” as many people as possible, get a bit more targeted. Take your time. And anyone you talk to, see if you can find a way to help them.

From there, your goal is to get them on the phone (or Zoom).

Which leads us to...

Step 2: Free Consulting

Over the course of my ghostwriting career—both working for myself, and while scaling my ghostwriting agency—I have probably taken over 1,000 sales calls.

Some were easy, the client hearing my Irresistible Offer and

closing within 7 minutes. Others were grueling, the client kicking up a flurry of objections. Every sales call teaches you something new, and the most important lesson I've learned taking 1,000+ sales calls and generating millions of dollars in business is that the best sales calls aren't really about "selling."

The best sales calls are actually Free Consulting.

Imagine for a moment the prospective client you're about to hop on the phone with just paid you \$1,000 for the hour. How would you approach the call? Would you introduce yourself and then immediately start shilling your service?

Of course not!

If the client had paid you \$1,000 for the hour, your *LAST* priority would be to talk about yourself or the services you offer. All of your focus would be on helping the client:

- "What problems are you experiencing?"
- "What have you tried in the past?"
- "How much money is this problem costing you?"
- "What would make your life easier?"
- "What outcomes do you want to generate?"
- "Where do you see your business going?"

And then maybe, *maybe*, at the very end, you might ask, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

I'm skipping all the 101 stuff and just going straight to the end here for you:

The whole key to sales—how you remove the pressure from the client, and how you remove any pressure you might put on yourself—is to get *OUT* of a "sales" conversation and into a Free Consulting conversation.

Every sales call, pretend they are paying you \$1,000 for the hour.

Through this lens, these would be your goals for the conversation:

- **Goal #1: Intimately understand their problems and desired outcomes.** This means doing your due diligence before hopping on the call (poking around their website, looking them up on LinkedIn, signing up for their newsletter, etc.), and then asking them questions at the beginning of the call to make sure you understand what's most urgent and top-of-mind for them right now.
- **Goal #2: Educate them on what you know they need—even if it means they need something different than what you have to offer, and hire someone else.** After 10-15 minutes of asking questions and clarifying which problem is the highest priority, you may come to the conclusion that what they need isn't actually what you have to offer. That's OK. You will create long-lasting good will by helping them understand who they should be talking to and hiring instead (and in many cases, the client may even want to hire YOU to help them make this decision and "advise them" while they work with someone else).
- **Goal #3: Give them so much free value, information, and insight, that by the time the call ends, they say, "Wow. Thank you so much for all your help."** Because even if they don't buy from you right then, best believe they will either come back around a few months or years later (I've had this happen dozens of times) OR they will introduce you to someone else who could use your services (I've also had this happen dozens of times).

And guess what?

If you accomplish these 3 goals, the likelihood the client buys from you increases exponentially.

Why?

Because you've already demonstrated how valuable you are!

You've already taught them so many things they didn't know prior to getting on the phone. **You've essentially, for free, already given them a glimpse into what it would be like to pay you**—which is every client's biggest fear spending money and hiring someone new ("What if they don't turn out to be worth it?").

Now, you might be saying to yourself, *"Cole, again, sounds great in theory. But if I give away all this free information and insight on a sales call, what happens if they don't end up becoming a client? All that wasted time and effort!"*

Over the years, I've taken so many sales calls where I realized, halfway through, the client was never going to hire me or simply didn't have the means. But instead of seeing it as a waste of time, I used these as opportunities to create good will and continue practicing thinking on my feet and helping people solve problems in their business, for free. I've walked out of my office and told my fiancé, Alyssa, about so many of these calls that one day she even gave it a name: "The Cole Gives Back Program."

I love that.

Even today, before every single sales call, I remind myself:

- Best-case scenario, they hire me.
- Worst-case scenario, I help someone, and continue building The Cole Gives Back Program.

And guess what?

When you give, and give, and give away so much knowledge for free, people can't help but find ways to pay you back.

Step 3: Ask For The Money

If you are successful with a value-first approach to cold outreach, and you successfully educate the client on what problem they are faced

with, how to solve it, and how hiring you will help them solve it easily and inexpensively relative to the outcome you are generating, you win.

They are going to hire you.

And if you've framed the problem correctly (educating them vs "reacting" to what they think they want), you will be able to command premium rates—even if you are brand new to ghostwriting.

Pretty cool, right?

Which means the only step left is to ask for the money.

How To Make Sure You Get Paid

Back when I worked at the agency downtown Chicago, my boss and mentor had a rule in the office:

"Work does not begin until payment is received."

The vast majority of the time, this is the key to making sure you don't find yourself in a situation where you do a bunch of work only to get screwed in the end. (Yes, this happens. And no, it doesn't happen nearly as often as people think it does.)

Let's recap:

- **(Step 1) Value-First Cold Outreach:** Target people with businesses who are either *trying to do* the thing you can help them with (but are failing), or *should be doing* (but aren't). Reach out, offer to help them fix a simple problem for free. Then, nudge them to get on a call so you can "help them more."
- **(Step 2) Free Consulting:** Once you get them on a call, pretend as if they've just paid you \$500 for 30 minutes or \$1,000 for 60 minutes. Give away as much value as you can. Make your goal for them to end the call in shock, saying, "Thank you so much." Chances are, sometime during the call it will be apparent (to the both of you) how else you can help—and when that moment arises, you should be very direct about

how you can help, and how much it will cost.

- **(Step 3) Follow Up:** Once you pinpoint the problem/opportunity and pitch yourself as the solution, one of two things will happen. Either the client will say, “Great, let’s do it.” Or they will say something like, “Let me think about it” or “That’s expensive, I’m not sure I’m ready for this yet.” If this happens, don’t chalk it up as a loss or feel like your work was for nothing. **THEY DIDN’T SAY NO.** They said, “I’m not sure.” Which means it’s your responsibility to follow up with them until they **ARE** ready, or very explicitly tell you, “No—and please stop emailing me” (A good rule of thumb is 1x per week, over and over again, forever.)
- **(Step 4) Payment Received, Work Begins:** With anything less than \$5,000 flat, it’s completely reasonable to just charge for the project in full at the beginning. But with anything above \$5,000 flat, you can also suggest to split the payment up in two: 50% up-front, 50% when the project is completed. But you should always “start” with the client paying in full (because most will, and you’d rather get all the money at the beginning—not the end). And for anything on a monthly basis, that monthly retainer should be paid in full at the beginning of each month (or billing cycle).

Now, here’s an important nuance:

The only time “work does not begin until payment is received” doesn’t end up being true is when you find yourself working with businesses that have large accounting teams: heavily-funded startups, medium to large-sized companies, etc.

In these cases, paying a contractor (like yourself) or vendors (such as agencies, distributors, etc.) isn’t as easy as just “wiring the money.” When a business has an accounting team, what they typically do is pay out contractors and vendors the same days they pay their own employees (usually every two weeks, or once per month). The reason is because

this helps the business owners anticipate and manage cash flow.

Remember: in order for the business to pay you, they need their clients/customers to pay them. And those clients/customers are waiting for their own clients, customers, or bosses to pay them. And so on. This is how money makes the world go ‘round.

When you kick off a project with a client like this, what they will do is introduce you to someone on their finance team (either one person, or one person responsible for dozens of people). This person will give you instructions of how to submit your invoice(s), and how they handle paying contractors. “Net-30” is considered industry standard here—which means the client has 30 days to pay you.

For freelance writers and aspiring ghostwriters, this can seem unnerving. But you don’t have anything to worry about. In fact, it’s very important for you to NOT “freak out” when you hear this (as in sending an angry email back about how you “refuse to let yourself be taken advantage of,” which yes, I have seen many writers do). Instead, in order to maintain your Premium Positioning, it’s important for your response to be something to the effect of: “Got it, no problem at all.”

Why?

Because if you are truly a Premium Ghostwriter, then you should be used to working with Premium Clients.

And if you are used to working with Premium Clients, then “Net-30” should be part of your regular vocabulary.

How To Hedge (To Make Sure You Don’t Get Screwed)

Here’s the key to protecting your downside:

If you kick off a project with a client, and you’ve talked to their finance team, and they’ve communicated they will pay you in two weeks, or “Net-30,” then it’s perfectly fine to begin work right away. You should. (Premium Ghostwriters are used to this type of client-relationship dynamic, and if you want to command Premium Prices, you

need to be flexible here.)

But the way you hedge is that you *purposefully elongate* the project until you get paid.

Start the work. Schedule calls. Submit first drafts. Push the ball forward.

But before submitting any final versions or deliverables, make sure payment has hit your account.

If it hasn't, and if for some reason the company still hasn't paid you by the date they promised, **DO NOT FREAK OUT**. Seriously. Do not catastrophize the situation and jump to conclusions. 99% of the time, it's a mistake or oversight (as a founder myself, trust me when I say that paying contractors is a juggling act). It's not malicious.

Instead, send their finance team a quick email (and CC the client).

Your go-to phrase is: "I'm so excited about what we're working on together! Just a quick heads up, I still haven't received payment for this project. Would you mind giving me an updated time frame for when I can expect it?"

The vast majority of the time, the response you'll get back will be something like: "Payments went out last week but sometimes it takes a few days to hit your account. If you do not receive it in the next 2-3 days, let me know and I'll check on it for you."

And then five hours later, the payment will hit your account.

(I've had this happen at least 100 times. Hence why throwing a temper tantrum is a terrible idea—because it signals to the client, "Hey, guess what? I'm not as Premium as you thought.")

Signing Contracts

One of the most common questions I get asked about getting started as a Premium Ghostwriter and landing high-ticket clients is around contracts:

- "Do I need to have the client sign something?"

- “What sort of contract will protect me?”
- “Do I need to hire a lawyer?”

Here’s the brutal reality: it doesn’t really matter what agreement you have a client sign. If the client doesn’t want to pay you, they aren’t going to pay you and you aren’t going to sue them. Why? Because it is going to cost you and the client more money to go to court than it would for them to just pay you, or for you to just cut your losses and move on.

For context, out of 300+ clients at my ghostwriting agency, we only had 1 or 2 clients who ended up screwing us out of a final invoice.

It rarely, rarely happens.

For anything under \$5,000, you usually don’t even need a contract—especially when you are working with creators, solopreneurs, or small business owners. But if it makes you and them feel more comfortable, just write up your responsibilities and deliverables in a Google Doc and send it over, just to make sure you’re both on the same page.

However, as you begin to charge more (anything above \$5,000), as you work with larger companies and heavily-funded startups, and anytime you are asking for thousands of dollars on retainer (where the client owes you money every single month for a set period of time), having a contract is considered standard. Again, this doesn’t need to be anything super complicated or filled with legal jargon.

Here are the 5 things you need to spell out in your contract:

1. **Time:** How long will this project go for?
2. **Cost:** How much does this project cost?
3. **Payment Terms:** When is the payment due (or in what installments)?
4. **Responsibilities:** What are you responsible for, and what is the client responsible for? (As in, do you need them to show

up to a certain number of calls each month? Will you need their approval on anything? Will you need them to give you access to their Twitter account? Etc.)

5. **Deliverables:** What are you promising the client? At the end of the project, what assets will they have? (Get as specific as possible here to avoid confusion later.)

It's also worth noting that, in some cases, the client or company will want you to sign a contractor agreement, NDA, etc. This is all very standard, and you do not need a lawyer to review this for you. The only sections you should skim are the ones that talk about non-competes (a super aggressive contractor agreement would say you aren't allowed to work with anyone else in their industry, which isn't fair to you—but again, this is rare and almost never included) and payment terms. Again, Net-30 is totally acceptable. Net-60 is annoying but doable. Net-90 is unreasonable, and you should go back to them and ask for it to be changed to Net-30.

And just so you know: the only time I've ever run into Net-90 (meaning the client has 90 days to pay their invoice) was when my ghostwriting agency landed a multibillion-dollar enterprise software company with hundreds of thousands of employees working with over 10,000 different vendors. When I asked their finance team to change it to Net-30, they literally laughed at me and said: "This company is bigger than most cities in the United States. Net-90 is the best we can do."

Understandable.

How To Defend Against Discounts

Now, what happens if you get the potential client to the finish line—but at the last minute, they ask for a discount?

Before I tell you what to do, it's important to understand why clients do this (and the psychology behind asking for a discount).

If you are a creator, a solopreneur, a small business owner, a startup founder, or an executive at a large company, you are a decision-maker. Who are decision-makers? Well, they typically are opinionated, self-motivated, confident people who got to where they are in the world by pushing boundaries. They like to see what they can get away with—not because they are malicious, but because what the world often calls “impossible,” they have learned usually ends up being completely doable. And their life experience validates this because every time they don’t take “No” for an answer, they are rewarded.

Now, let me tell you a quick story:

Back when we were first starting our ghostwriting agency, we had this client on the line. She was a former Google executive turned startup founder, and her startup had raised over \$13 million. When we saw her company get featured in TechCrunch (after closing their most recent round), we reached out and gave her some ideas (for free), and then pitched her on our services. She took two weeks to think about it and talk to other agencies, but none of them offered what we did (benefits of creating a unique & differentiated category for yourself!). And eventually, she came back around.

One morning, she sent us an email and said, “I’d really like to work with you, but this is more than what we’ve budgeted for this year. Would you be willing to do this at a discount?”

Just to paint the picture for you: when this email came through, I was sitting on my co-founder’s couch in his 1 bedroom apartment. He was sitting at his tiny kitchen island on a stool that wasn’t quite the right height (the seat was way too close to the countertop). He had quit his job to go all-in on building this agency with me, and I was essentially “floating” his living expenses with my own ghostwriting income until we got our agency off the ground.

We were desperate.

But we reminded ourselves of a few truths:

- Nobody was offering what we were offering (at the time).

- Our monthly ghostwriting retainer (\$3,500 for 4 articles per month) was hardly “expensive,” and totally reasonable for the amount of work we were doing.
- We believed strongly in the quality of our work, and knew we would hit it out of the park for her.
- They had just raised \$13 million. Slightly out of budget? Sure. But “short on cash?” Hardly.

After an hour of deliberation, we emailed her back saying: “We’d love to work with you, but need to stick to our normal cost. We believe strongly in our quality of work.”

Literally 10 minutes later, she replied and said, “Got it. When can we start?”

We held our ground. She signed on and started a week later. And her company ended up being one of our longest-standing clients—paying us hundreds of thousands of dollars over the next three years.

Imagine if we had given her a discount!

3 Times You Should Consider Offering A Discount (And How To Get Something In Return)

I think about that story often because it was a defining moment for our agency.

Landing her and a few other clients shortly thereafter gave us financial stability, which gave us a sense of confidence in the direction we were headed. And that confidence bled into everything we did—every cold outreach message, every sales call. Until all of a sudden, a month later, we had more clients than we knew what to do with—and needed to start interviewing for our first employee.

It was an exciting time (and something I hope you will soon experience for yourself!).

However, even though I am a “stand your ground” kind of person, there were many times throughout the course of our agency (and even still today) when we offered discounts.

The nuance is this:

- If you are discounting because a client asks you to (and you just want to make them happy), or you are discounting because you feel like otherwise “no one will hire you,” *you’re making a mistake.*
- But if you are discounting because you want to trade “money now” for something more valuable later, *then you’re being strategic.*

So, what are some things potentially more valuable than money?

- **Future Opportunities:** Something we ran into all the time with my ghostwriting agency was an early-stage startup really wanting our services, but being unable to afford them because of their limited seed money. We didn’t do this for every company (because the vast majority of early-stage startups don’t survive), but the ones we thought had real potential (and were backed by serious investors) we offered to work with at a discount—IF, when they raised their next round, they paid us a premium. Some of these didn’t work out, and we lost money. But some of these worked out in big ways, and not only made us money but the founders were so appreciative that they recommended us to tons more potential clients.
- **Testimonials:** Another reason you might want to offer a discount is if you want to stack testimonials. Especially with something as “anonymous” as ghostwriting, getting clients to give you a testimonial can be difficult. But some (especially the ones who need your services but are having trouble affording you) would be more than happy to sing your praises in exchange for a discount. This is something you only have

to do a few times, and then you can leverage those testimonials for years into the future.

- **Referrals:** If you want to build some referral engines for yourself, you can incentivize clients to “earn” their discount by sending you more potential clients. For example, we did this with one woman who ran a PR firm and had tons of clients herself (who would benefit from our services). For every client she sent us and successfully closed, we knocked off her own cost to use our services by \$250. A few months later, she had sent us so much business that we worked with her for free for almost a year thereafter.

The point is, discounting can be a great mechanism for you to get things you need but might not be able to “pay for” directly. (For example: you can’t really go to a client and say, “Hey, I know we don’t know each other, but can I pay you to give me a testimonial talking about how great I am?” But you CAN go to a client and say, “I’m happy to discount this service for you—if, assuming you’re happy with the end result, you give me a testimonial.”)

The 1st Year Is The Hardest

The last thing I want to share with you, in regards to “getting clients,” is that the first year is the hardest.

Why?

- Because it takes a while for people to learn “what you do.”
- And then it takes a while longer for people who learn what you do to consider doing it with you.
- And then it takes a while longer for the people who work with you to consider referring you to someone else.
- And so on.

Something I notice often is how many freelancers, solopreneurs, and

aspiring Premium Ghostwriters get discouraged in the first month or two and then give up. This is painfully short-sighted. What they haven't experienced is the other end of the barbell—where three years later, not only are new clients coming through the door, but old ones are deciding to come back, and failed sales calls from “way back when” all of a sudden show up in their inbox, ready to buy.

The compounding is very, very real.

Which is why, going back to everything we've covered in this chapter, I strongly encourage you to take a value-first approach with every person you talk to. Don't assume just because someone can't afford your services, or doesn't want to work with you *right now*, that they won't want to hire you in the future. And don't treat potential clients like “sales.” Treat each and every DM, email, and phone call like the beginning of what very well may become a lifelong friendship.

Some of my earliest ghostwriting clients were startup founders who are now worth hundreds of millions of dollars. (Not bad people to have in my network!)

And some of our longest-standing clients I now consider friends and even mentors. (People I can call anytime for advice.)

Sage wisdom in Silicon Valley, and something I hear repeated often by the founders and investors in that world, is the Naval Ravikant quote: “Play long-term games with long-term people.”

That's the goal.

You aren't making “sales.”

You are getting yourself in the game, and you are building relationships with people you end up working with (or “near”) for a very, very long time.

BONUS!

CHAPTER 19

Where You Go From Here (The 5 Career Paths To Become A 7-Figure Ghostwriter)

THAT'S IT!

Everything I've shared with you in this book is how you make \$10,000+ per month as a ghostwriter.

If I could go back and do it all over again, and if I had access to this sort of book at the beginning of my writing journey, I'm confident I would have found success a lot sooner. Unfortunately, I had to spend four years working as a copywriter (for slightly above minimum wage), and then another six years as a ghostwriter, to learn everything I've shared with you here.

My goal is to save you that decade of hard lessons learned.

I hope I delivered—and more importantly, I hope you do something with the information.

Now, where do you go from here?

2 Ways To “Scale Yourself” As A Ghostwriter

Everyone always wants to know how to “scale,” so I figured I’d end by answering this question.

There are 2 very specific ways to “scale yourself” as a ghostwriter.

Horizontal: 1 specific asset for lots of different clients.

This means you do 1 thing (and 1 thing only), but you sell that same service over and over again to a long list of different clients in your niche & surrounding niches.

This is what I did.

I “scaled myself” by ghostwriting 800-word thought leadership articles for all sorts of different types of founders, executives, and investors. I very rarely wrote emails or landing pages or website copy. I just hammered out article after article after article.

“Scale” in this sense is just your ability to push & pull these 3 levers:

- Sell more clients
- At higher & higher price points
- While getting the work done in less & less time

I recommend tackling these levers one at a time (first, focus on getting more clients, second raise your prices, and third work on creating efficiencies so you don’t have to work as hard).

This is how you “scale” horizontally.

Vertical: Lots of different services for 1 client.

Here’s the other path:

What will inevitably happen when you start ghostwriting is a client will love your work and then ask you to do “other things.”

- They need website copy.
- And they need a weekly newsletter.
- And they need a Twitter & LinkedIn ghostwriter.
- Etc.

If you try to do this for 10 different clients, it becomes an absolute nightmare. But if you do this for 1-2 clients (ideally in the same industry or niche), the “scale” is the fact that you become so familiar with these 1-2 clients that you can write *anything* for them without having to switch contexts. The content on the website is pretty similar to the content in the weekly newsletter, which is really just the long-form version of the Twitter Threads and LinkedIn posts they want written, and so on. You become fluent in “their language.”

More work means more money.

And more “of the same” content means more efficiency.

(The risk here, of course, is that one client could become 50% or even 100% of your earnings. The simplicity of this is great, but if and when that client leaves, all of a sudden your entire livelihood is in question. For this reason alone, I’ve always preferred scaling horizontally opposed to vertically—but I know plenty of people who do the opposite and are just as successful.)

Now, just for your own context: the ceiling on “scaling yourself” horizontally or vertically is usually around \$30,000 per month. The reason is because, as a 1-person business, you only have so many hours per day, you can only create so many efficiencies for yourself, and eventually, you’ll learn you can only charge “so much” before clients start saying, “I was willing to pay a premium... but that’s outrageous.”

Which means, in order to get above \$30,000 per month, you need to change your business model (how you operate) in order to reach the next level of scale.

Here are the 5 career paths you can take to become a 7-Figure Ghostwriter:

- **The High-End Ghostwriter:** This is usually reserved for novelists & NYT best-selling writers who then start unlocking high-end ghostwriting deals. These are projects that pay anywhere from \$100k to \$500k+ to ghostwrite a book. This “seems” the sexiest, but it’s actually one of the least lucrative, most time-intensive, and most difficult to “scale” of the 5 models. (The only way to hit 7 figures is by either churning out tons of \$50k and \$100k books, or becoming one of a small handful of ghostwriters who charge \$500k to \$2 million per ghostwritten book.)
- **The Guru Model:** This is the hardest career path of them all because it requires the hardest thing to replicate: highly differentiated thinking. But is where people pay you \$50k-\$100k/month just for access to your expertise. This “tier” rarely gets unlocked in the first decade of your career. (And chances are, if you are in “Guru” territory then you are already making 7 figures elsewhere, and this is just gravy on top.)
- **The Lifestyle Boutique Model:** If you’re going to go the agency route, this should be your goal: \$500,000 - \$1.5 million in revenue, 5 employees or less. Once you get above 5 employees and over \$1.5 million in revenue, things start to get shaky—and you basically need to decide whether to “stay small” or risk it all and try to hit \$10 million in revenue. Almost all agencies between \$2M and \$10M “go to die.” So instead, I recommend staying small and obsessing over creating efficiencies and increasing your prices to make your agency as streamlined & lucrative as possible. (The ideal scenario is to have a \$1.5M agency where you take home \$1M/year and all your costs and salaries are covered by the other \$500k. A boutique agency operating at a 60-70% margin is

an incredible achievement.)

- **The Mass Market Agency Model:** If you don't want to stay small, then you need to swing for the fences. There's very little in-between. If you go this route, you need to get to \$8-10M+ in revenue per year for it to be "worth it" for you. Otherwise, you're going to be working insanely hard for the same or less money you could make just keeping your agency small. (With this model, you make very little in the beginning because you're constantly reinvesting in the business—but if you're successful, you become one of the few agency owners pulling in \$2-5M per year. High risk, high reward.)
- **The Education Model:** Finally, you can take all your own learnings as a writer or agency owner and pivot to a totally different sort of business: online education. You can create a course, a suite of digital products, or a community teaching other people everything you just figured out for yourself. Jack Butcher did this for design with Visualize Value. We did this with Ship 30 for 30 and our Premium Ghostwriting Academy. Etc. (The most realistic way you achieve the 7-figure marker here is actually a combination of both services and digital products. Your digital products become the lead-gen for your services, which you can continue to provide to high-end clients at a premium.)

I wish so badly someone had laid all this out for me at the start of my journey. It would have given me so much more clarity.

Where You Go From Here: TIME vs MONEY

Now, there are 2 ways you can implement everything I've shared with you here.

The first is, you can do it yourself—and pay to acquire these skills with your TIME. You can use this book as your roadmap, and you can get to work. You can reposition yourself as a ghostwriter on your own. You can attempt to do the value-first cold outreach on your own. You can hop on “free consulting calls” and improve on your own. And you can start landing clients, and learning “what works” and “what doesn’t” on your own.

If you’re a self-starter, and you believe this is the right path for you, then by all means, go for it—and I’m excited to see you unlock life-changing outcomes, and join the ranks of Premium Ghostwriters in the world.

Or, the second option, is you can pay to acquire these skills in a fraction of the time—by INVESTING IN YOURSELF. You can skip all the trial and error, and accomplish what would take most people years to figure out on their own *in a matter of weeks*. You can enlist the help of a mentor, you can have someone hold you accountable, and you can join a community of people all doing the same thing, increasing your growth curve and reinforcing your belief in yourself that, yes, all of this is possible.

If you want direct training on Positioning, Outreach, Pricing, Sales, and the art and business of Ghostwriting, and if you know you are the type of person who thrives with mentorship, accountability, and community, then we would love to have you join our Premium Ghostwriting Academy.

And I would love to be your mentor.

Ghostwriting changed my life, and it can change yours too.

<https://premiumghostwritingacademy.com>

About The Author

NICOLAS COLE is a writer, teacher, and entrepreneur.

He is the co-founder of Ship 30 for 30, the largest cohort-based writing course on the Internet; Typeshare, the leading platform for Digital Writing templates; and Premium Ghostwriting Academy, an 8-week training program teaching writers how to enter the world of ghostwriting & land high-ticket clients.

Want to stay master your craft & earn a (lucrative) living doing it?

Stay on the cutting-edge and subscribe to The Art & Business of Digital Writing: artandbiz.substack.com

