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# FREELANCE WRITERS

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CHEAT SHEET

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Gottabewriting  
Cheat Sheet



## So You Want To Be A Freelance Writer?

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A freelance writing career is a great way to break into the field of writing and engage in meaningful work you can do from the comfort of your own home. There's no feeling quite like being able to wake up in the morning and head to the 'office' in your slippers and pajamas.

But before you jump into this adventure headlong, make sure you have all the ingredients you need to succeed. Many writers find that, despite plenty of "expert" testimony about how easy it is to build a fulfilling freelance career in writing, the going can be tough for the unprepared.

Getting these **FOUR** pillars  
of a strong freelance career in order before you start  
will increase your chances of success!

**This cheatsheet will give you a basic outline of what  
you need to make your writing work for you!**

## Part One: Planning

You need some solid writing credentials to make it easy for you to gain more business, so start gathering your references. Remember, freelance writing covers a wide array of genres. Here are just a few:

- Technical Writing
- Essay Writing
- Content Writing
- White Papers
- Article Writing
- Ghostwriting

Do you already have experience in any of these, perhaps through another employer? It's still valid, even if you weren't a freelancer when you performed the work. New clients want to see that you've got experience providing writing services — it doesn't matter when you provided them.



If you're brand new to the industry, don't fret. Just get some credentials under your belt before you try to solicit new business. I know what you're thinking: How do I get work when you just said I need to show experience before I get work? I'm going to give you some radical advice about this, and I warn you, most writers will disagree with me. I don't care, though, **because it works. In a nutshell:**



Get a presence on places like Fiverr or Upwork and price your services low so you can attract jobs that will allow you to get your foot in the door. Alternately, provide some free services to non-profits in return for some testimonials and, of course, a great piece of writing for your portfolio.

The argument against this is that working for low or no pay reduces the value of writers in general, since there's always a pool of "cheap" workers clients call pull from. I disagree. With most of that cheap labor, you do indeed get what you pay for and discerning clients don't want to waste their time with substandard writing. Besides, you're not going to do this forever — just long enough to get examples of stellar writing pieces you can use in your portfolio. Which brings us to Part Two.

### Insight:

Don't worry if you don't have prior experience.  
Building a demonstrable skill set is easy if you plan ahead!

## Part Two: Portfolio



Now that you have some experience, it's time to show it off. You'll need an online and real-world presence across several platforms: real-world marketing tools, a website, social media, and LinkedIn.

### Real-World Marketing

I'm talking about logos, business cards, and brochures. A logo will serve double-duty by appearing on your website and other online marketing materials to help establish your brand, but a business card is a must-have when meeting and greeting potential clients in the real-world environment. For example, as a technical writer, I attended several oil-and-gas industry conferences where I scooped up various clients that needed my services. I didn't have a booth or any other presence at the conference—instead I chatted up the booth owners and found places I could add value to their business. A business card is essential for credibility when you're working the room and it makes it easy for forgetful potential clients to get back in touch with you.

A brochure isn't quite as necessary, but if you do a lot of marketing in a brick-and-mortar sense, then having one is a nice addition to your arsenal. Go to Fiverr and get one professionally designed for under \$50 and then take it to a local printer to keep your costs down. You can print a simple 3-fold brochure at home, but the extra professionalism a nicely done print job on heavy paper brings to your brand is worth the few extra dollars you'll spend.

## Website

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While there's a lot of information about SEO, keywords, and other website-visibility criteria out there, don't let it make your head spin. **The number one reason many new writers never get their careers off the ground is that they become paralyzed by technology overload and feel like they'll never have the skill or money to produce a website that will fit their needs.**

Don't overthink this

Yes, WordPress is the most popular website tool, but it's also a bear to work with if you're new to this kind of thing. There are plenty of easy drag-and-drop website makers like Weebly, Wix, Squarespace and others that can have you online in no time, and with no aggravation. They've got professionally-designed layouts that are a cinch to set up. Yes, they're more limited than WordPress and Joomla. Yes, they aren't as customizable, either. But they can give you what you need quickly and for very little money. That's key at this point.

When your career is off the ground and you're turning clients away, then you can hire someone to create and manage a WordPress or Joomla site for you.

## Social Media

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This is where a lot of advertising gets done—for free. Don't pass up your chance to stand out from the crowd with minimal effort.

**Twitter:** If I had to recommend just one social media platform for writers, Twitter would be the one. I've met more clients and fellow writers on Twitter and gotten more exposure here than on any other platform, including Facebook.

**Facebook:** Of course, Facebook is a good choice as well. Make sure you set up a business page. Save your personal page for family and friends—you don't need potential clients knowing that your dog pooped on your antique rug this morning!

**Pinterest:** Yes, Pinterest. On average, each Pinterest pin drives two site visit and produces six page views for pinners. It's repined around 10 times, so it's the marketing gift that keeps on giving.

**LinkedIn:** While this is technically a social media platform, it's also much, much more. It's a great place to park your resume, illustrate your work experience with examples, and attract the attention of corporate and individual clients. It only takes a minute to sign up, it's free at the basic level, and a presence here can help solidify your credibility.

Insight:  
Having a brand before you ask for business  
is the critical next step.

## Part Three: Promotion



Now that you have your marketing materials in order, it's time to spread the word about the awesome services you offer. Here are some inexpensive ways to get your business in front of the people who need you.

**Get Industry Active:** Join industry groups and get active. Attend their events, participate in message boards, mentor other writers and collaborate with colleagues. Don't restrict your industry participation to just writing: Go where your clients are. If you write about insurance issues, then get active in the insurance industry groups. If you also write about digital products and processes, then jump into their groups, too

**Meetups:** Another way to network is to attend various meet-ups in your area. Remember, don't restrict these to writing-based meet-ups.

**Guest Posting:** Guest post on other websites and don't forget to be reciprocal. Invite other writers to post on your site as well.

**Articles:** There are plenty of places to publish articles that will highlight your knowledge and get your business free exposure. Of course, some are more suited to one industry or another, but choices include Medium, MindBodyNetwork, Wattpad and others.

Insight:  
You don't need to spend a fortune on marketing.  
Just get involved!

## Part Four: Payment



If you're serious about your freelance writing career, **treat it like the job it is right from the beginning.** You'll need to set a few things into place to become a bona fide business. Here are the basics:

1. **Get Legal:** Form a sole proprietorship, partnership, LLC, or another type of corporation in order to protect your personal assets. If you don't know which option is best for you, pay for an hour of a tax attorney's time and find out. It's worth it. Paperwork and filing can be done on the cheap through companies like LegalZoom when you're ready to proceed.
2. **Get an EIN (for businesses in the U.S.):** This is an Employer Identification Number with the IRS. It will help establish you as a business with the federal government so you can get a business loan and get business credit.
3. **Get a Business Account:** You need to separate your business and personal bank accounts. Go to a local bank and set up a business account and only use it for business purposes. A business credit card is also great to have to keep online purchases separate as well
4. **Get Ready to Take Money:** If you're going to have an online presence, it's critical to have an account for processing credit card payments. PayPal is the largest of these, but there's also Stripe, Square, Venmo, Dwolla, Google Wallet and more. Do your research to determine which best fits your needs.

Insight:  
Protect your personal finances by treating  
your freelance business right!

## Putting It All Together

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Freelancing can open the door to working from home, give you additional financial freedom, or allow you focus on something you love while making a living. Set yourself up for success by putting these four pillars into place, then give it all you've got. Be confident; don't let yourself get mired down in the information overload of advice for new freelancers. Just choose a path and stay on it!

See you on the next page!