

# Introduction

*NOTE: The following is based pretty darn closely to an actual week I had some years back (and many similar).*

**Picture This** On a Friday morning client phone call, you pick up a job writing a marketing brochure. Several hours later, the client emails background material. In a follow-up call, the client answers some questions. After a few hours reviewing the material, you get to work—on your deck, under that great shady tree, phone nearby, tunes playing in the background, tall glass of iced tea within reach.

By Wednesday morning, between the client call, background reading and crafting a first draft, you have 16 hours in the project ( $16 \times \$75 = \$1,200$ ). You email them your draft Wednesday morning, and you won't get it back until Friday.

**The Phone Keeps Ringing...** In the meantime, you put in seven hours on a few sales sheets for a telecommunications firm ( $7 \times \$75 = \$525$ ). Then, an ad for a company in Canada (you've never met them) that takes four hours (another \$300). You send it on and bill them immediately.

Later that afternoon, a now-regular client calls and snags you for a brochure project the next week: 12–15 hours worth of work. That same day, one of your regulars calls, needing a few quick headlines for a store display. You've done 30+ similar projects like this. You charge your two-hour minimum, \$150, grab your mini-recorder, head to the gym, knocking out half of it on the way over.

That night, sitting outside at your favorite neighborhood eatery with a clipboard, you get the rest done. You get home, type them up, and send them on, having spent just over an hour total.

That's over \$2,000 by Thursday, for under 30 hours of work, no running around and completely by phone and email. Plus, \$1,000 worth of work lined up for next week.

And that's at \$75 an hour, which, once established in this business, is low. What'll it be like at \$100 or \$125?

**Reality Check** No, it's not always this easy or rosy, and you'll have your share of \$500 weeks. It's no get-rich-quick thing. In the beginning, you'll be working a lot harder for a lot less, and doing a lot of prospecting. But, stick to it, develop the right work habits, and weeks like the above will come often, and at likely higher rates.

Good money, flexible hours, stimulating work. You control your day, your time off, your life. Do you have outside interests? *Would you* if you had more time of your own?

Want a raise? Simple. Work harder, make more phone calls, put in more hours.

This is freelance *commercial* writing: writing for businesses and creative agencies large and small, and for hourly rates of \$50 to \$125, and often far more—depending on your experience, and where you focus your efforts. In the first chapter, we'll explore why this field makes so much sense—both for writers and the clients who hire them.

Have you dreamed of becoming a writer but never took it too seriously because after all, the words “starving” and “writer” are pretty much joined at the hip? Or are you already a writer but either working for someone else or struggling financially? This might just be your ticket.

### “Is This Still a Good Opportunity?”

If you get through this book, and you're all jazzed up about the possibilities, one of the first questions you'll likely have is: “Is this commercial-writing thing still a good possibility?”

No offense, but you'd be amazed at how irrelevant that question is. This blog post from a few years back (“There IS No ‘Copywriting Industry’”) should put that question to rest once and for all, but, of course, it won't. <http://bit.ly/1W9uMnt>

**My Story** One journalism course in both high school and college. Oh, and at 15, I wrote a column covering little league baseball for three local papers on the North Shore of Massachusetts. That's it. Impressive, huh?

I'd never been a writer before I started in this business. Never written anything for money. No writing training. No industry background. No ad agency experience. No

contacts. No client list. Nada. Zippo. Zilch. Heck, I was a Russian Studies major in college. Given all that, while my success certainly says something about me, it says just as much about the accessibility of the opportunity.

I found that in any job I'd held over the years, I gravitated to the few writing tasks that did crop up—an occasional letter or little brochure—and typically got good feedback from those around me. Sound familiar?

I always wanted to be a writer, but wasn't willing to starve. In the early 90's, I stumbled across Bob Bly's great book, *Secrets of a Freelance Writer*, about commercial writing. Who knew that many companies, for some darn good reasons (stay tuned), actually hired freelancers to handle their writing tasks? Lightbulb on. This is how I'd do it.

Finally, in January of 1994, after talking myself in and out of the idea about 100 times, and alternately experiencing anxiety attacks and delusions of grandeur, I took the plunge. Cold turkey. No moonlighting.

In under four months, following the strategies outlined in this book, I literally had more business than I could handle, and had indeed achieved “financial self-sufficiency” (i.e., paying all my bills). That first year's tally?

19 brochures, four video scripts, two radio spots, two 40-page technical manuals, a half dozen ad campaigns and sales promotion projects, a 44-part educational CD-ROM, and a ghostwritten book for a local businessman. Oh, and 45 columns published in five local papers (just fun, “grocery-money” writing).

**Your Story?** Cubicle slave? Former/current journalist seeking better pay and FAR better working conditions? Company staff writer who yearns to fly free? Career-changer? At-home-Mom (or soon to be; see <https://bit.ly/attn-moms>)?

55+? (see <https://bit.ly/attn55plus>). Recent college grad **un**-enamored with the idea of working for **The Man** for 40 years? Whatever your situation, people just like you have carved out cool lives in this field.

What's more, I'm living proof you don't have to be Type A to have all this. *And*, I'm neither super-disciplined, aggressive or technically savvy, and yet, I've done quite well.

Remember the \$2,000 week described earlier? What if it were only \$1,200 weekly: \$60K. Not all the money in the world, but if it gave you the time to truly enjoy your life and your own terms—*however* you define that—would it be enough?

100K? Absolutely possible, and likely working a lot less than in other businesses. Most importantly, are you doing something you like? Try it and watch your outlook on life do a 180. One caveat...

**“Find Your Passion”?** That’s NOT what I’m talking about here. That’s an overrated trap that keeps people stuck in jobs they hate, waiting for **THE Thing** that’ll make them blissful and rapturous. For 95% of people out there, finding something they *pretty* much like to do *most* of the time, would be a 100% improvement. Shoot for that, and from there, fine-tune toward the ideal.

Am I passionate about writing marketing copy? Uh, no. Do I enjoy it? Yes. Am I good at it? Definitely. Am I paid well to do it? No question. And all that is a LOT. What I *am* passionate about is living my life my way, and this business lets me do that.

Rather than chasing passion or the terminally vague ideas of *happiness* or *success*, focus instead on becoming *valuable*—which, once you’ve chosen your path, is a far more quantifiable goal. And it gets better: Become valuable, and success and happiness are far more likely by-products.

This book is *not* about eking out a living as a writer. You can find that anywhere. And because it’s not about starving writing, we’ll be talking about very different kinds of work (i.e., *marketing writing*, not just generic articles/blog posts), and very different ways of looking for that work (i.e., not bidding on jobs online).

Want to make top dollar as a writer?

- Don’t hang out with low-priced folk, or you’ll start believing that’s as good as it gets.
- Don’t hang out where the writing’s become “commoditized” (i.e., articles and blog posts—project types that countless writers with interchangeable skills can deliver). When that happens, rates will plummet.
- Go where you can bring special skills (i.e., marketing savvy, industry-specific knowledge, project expertise, etc.) that aren’t easily duplicated by others.
- Go where the barriers to entry are higher (how hard is it to bid on a project online?), as that will discourage the writing “hobbyists.” Bottom line: *Easy Access = Low Rates*.
- Choose *marketing writing*: brochures, direct mail, web messaging/content, case studies, newsletters, white papers and a bunch of other *business*-related projects. Not articles—except perhaps, high-paying *trade* articles.

For a pretty well-received article I wrote a few years back on not being a writing victim, check out <https://bit.ly/novics>.

**“Well-Fed World”** Here, you won’t find lists of new markets paying five cents a word. Or the latest overcrowded online job site, where successive bids shrink writing

fees before your very eyes. Or strategies for convincing that client to pay you \$15 an hour instead of \$10 (“cuz you’re worth it!”).

Rather, we’ll be talking about when and how to bump hourly rates from \$65 to \$75, \$90 to \$100 or \$125 to \$150. Oh, and here, you get paid in 30 days (usually less), 95% of the time—with rarely the need for repeated reminder emails. How novel.

My goal has always been to give you the tools and ideas you need to make a handsome full-time living as a freelance commercial writer (FLCW)—with the emphasis on *commercial*. This is a business, and you’d be wise to consider yourself a businessperson first, writer second.

**A “Real-People” Approach** I’ve written a *realistic* guide to building this business, given the lazy, slug-like streak in all of us. No question, this field takes plenty of work, but as businesses go, it’s a *lot* easier and less expensive than most to get off the ground.

With an emphasis on *simple, repeatable systems*, I’ve created a “best-of-both-worlds” business strategy: potential for healthy financial success without killing yourself to get there. Rest assured, whether you want to work the business like a *Type A* would, or prefer to have a life *and* make a solid living, this book will show you how.

**What Will We Cover?** I’ve made only two assumptions in writing *TWWF*: 1) You already know you’re a decent writer, and 2) You want to turn that skill into a handsome income. As such, I’ll spend just one chapter near the end on how to actually write certain kinds of projects (check out [www.wellfedcraft.com](http://www.wellfedcraft.com) for much more on that); the main focus of the book will be on how to build the business.

I’ll be sharing what’s worked for me. Not the *right*, *best* or *only* answers, but a solid, proven blueprint for building your own practice. Do I consistently do everything I suggest? No. If I did, would I earn more? Absolutely. If you did, would you earn more than I do? I’d bet on it.

By definition, my experience is limited: big city, sales background, full-time startup *and* mainly by cold calling, a generalist, etc. Over the years, however, I’ve heard from thousands of people with vastly different stories, circumstances, strategies, niches, backgrounds and geographic settings. I’ve incorporated their stories here.

**Different Situations, Different Answers** In the pages that follow, in addition to general “how-to” detail for anyone anywhere, we’ll cover:

- Building the business in a small town or rural area
- Doing it part-time while working at a full-time job
- Leveraging different backgrounds into profitable writing practices

- Building it with cold calling, email marketing, networking and/or direct mail
- Carving out niches in non-profit work, case studies, white papers, direct response copywriting, associations, content writing, PR writing and many others
- Building a web site to promote your business
- What to charge and how to get paid
- Powerful networking strategies that go beyond the “meet ‘n greet”
- Starting and maximizing the potential of a writers’ group
- What it takes to earn \$125 an hour—and beyond...

All the folks in the stories you’ll read here have this in common: They’re quietly exploding the stereotype of the “starving writer” and making handsome livings in the vast and profitable zone between poverty and seven-figure novel advances.

Their accounts (especially those building the business part-time or in small towns) are filled with great ideas for *anyone, anywhere, in any* situation. And don’t miss the *Well-Fed Writer* Success Profiles (both general success stories as well as ones showcasing at-home Moms and Dads) at <https://bit.ly/sides2021>. More on the *Side Dishes* link shortly...

**You’ll Love This...** Because I know most writers are creative types with a predictably primal aversion to “sales” and “marketing,” I’ve devoted an entire chapter to painlessly developing that crucial sales and marketing mindset (heck, with a chapter heading of “Learning to Love S & M,” you just *know* we’re going to have some fun...).

Grasping these cornerstone concepts will enable you to confidently build your own business while admirably meeting the writing needs of your clients. And do it all with far less effort and angst than you might imagine.

### **The More Things Change...**

If you read the 2010 edition, a good chunk of this edition will be familiar:

- Sales/marketing fundamentals
- Where the business is
- How to prospect for it
- Whom to approach and how to approach them
- What to charge and how to collect your money
- How to keep clients coming back
- What kinds of projects you’ll be writing, etc.

That said, this is definitely an updated edition, given the changes in technology, new tools, new project types, etc. Not to mention countless updates throughout, and added sections on PR writing, content writing, social media, email marketing and more. All reflecting 10 more years of my (and others') personal experiences in the trenches.

It's also a much *tighter* version of the book. I've occasionally been (justifiably) accused of being a bit verbose. I've labored long and hard to streamline this edition, while preserving the fun tone. The result? More concentrated good stuff.

But, again, on many levels, the business hasn't changed. No, cold calling is not obsolete. No, direct-mail postcards aren't passé. And—the most laughable of all—no, social media marketing hasn't replaced all other forms of marketing (sure, some have built the business largely through social media, but that's a different thing).

There are lots and lots of things that worked 40 years ago, 25 years ago, 10 years ago, and—surprise, surprise—they still work today.

**How Has COVID Changed Things?** The short answer? Very little. Sure, as I write this, it's hard to know what “normal” is going to look like, though up-and-down economic cycles have been a fixture of our world forever. What I *do* know *won't* change is that businesses will continue to need copywriting as long as they're *in* business.

Also, while more and more employees in bricks-and-mortar workplaces will increasingly be working remotely, that trend's been accelerating for years, and especially for folks like us. While I note, in the pages ahead, the value, when possible, of meeting prospects and clients face-to-face, to deepen relationships and customer loyalty, fact is, most of us weren't meeting clients personally before COVID rocked our world.

## Tip of the Iceberg

This book is, at best, a few chapters in the big juicy story of “well-fed writing.” As you read it, I want you to keep asking, “What other writing opportunities might be right under my nose?” *TWFW* doesn't have all the answers, but I think it's got a lot of good ideas. We writers like good ideas—especially ones that can make us a lot of money.

*TWFW* is just the beginning of the conversation in many ways, not the end. Check out a few pretty killer resources available at [www.wellfedwriter.com](http://www.wellfedwriter.com) that won't cost

you a dime. In May 2002, I launched *The Well-Fed E-PUB*, my monthly ezine, chock-full of strategies, success stories and tips from FLCW's around the globe. The "Free Ezine Signup" link will lead you to archived issues and a budget-priced past-ezine compilation to get you up to speed in a hurry.

In March 2008—in typical late-adopter fashion—I started *The Well-Fed Writer Blog*, which has spawned wonderful dialogues that serve as mini-knowledgebases on a variety of subjects (though I've gotten a bit inconsistent of late!). Speaking of knowledgebases, check out the *WF KnowledgeBase*. Between these three always-evolving resources, I make sure that I'm right beside you as you move ahead with your business.

## The Sequence

When I start working with a "new-to-our-world" coaching client in my extended "Sidecar" program (<https://bit.ly/mysidecar>), we'll start by discussing the sequence below, to give them the 30,000-foot view of our upcoming work. Logical to discuss it here.

### "Where do I start?...What are my first steps?"

This business, while certainly not easy, is pretty simple, and entails a logical sequence of actions to be successful. In very broad strokes, it looks like this:

1. **Take a Skills Inventory:** What's your career experience? Your writing experience? What do you know a lot about? It's always easier to "write what you know"—at least until you get established. Is there a logical industry niche or project type you could declare as your writing focus (though not to the exclusion of everything else)?  
Once you determine your strengths, what you have to offer and the general direction for your practice...
2. **Determine Your Target Audience:** Who will you be prospecting for? What roles in which industries? FYI, if you've decided, say, that the widget industry makes sense, don't limit yourself just to the industry, unless it offers endless prospects. Go after related industries as well; the prospects in those industries will no doubt value your skills as well.
3. **Determine Your Prospecting Method:** Cold calling. Postcard direct mail. Email marketing. Networking (in person, "grapevine"-style, LinkedIn, etc.). And ideally, some combination of the above. We'll discuss all these in detail. No need to decide yet.



4. **Build a Web site/Online Portfolio:** Non-negotiable. Clients willing to hire you and pay handsome fees need to know you're capable. If you don't have many samples, you'll have to get some. We'll talk about all this in the coming pages.
5. **Take Action:** Knowing what you can offer, who you're looking for, the different ways you'll identify them and with a solid web site/portfolio in place to demonstrate your chops, you're ready to start hunting.

The pages that follow will address all the topics and questions above (and countless others you haven't even thought of yet), though not necessarily in rigid, self-contained blocks matching the sequence above. But, the steps above will help "frame" your reading of the book, giving you an understanding of the ground to be covered.


## And There's More...

The book you're holding in your hands is just one big chunk of the total *Well-Fed Writer* resources you have at your disposal as you set sail. Others?

### *Side Dishes*

Throughout the book, you'll see references to <https://bit.ly/sides2021>. It's my *Side Dishes* link, a "side-door" link, not advertised on the site (and for buyers only), where you'll find a cornucopia of goodies all referenced in the book, and that complement the book—at no extra charge. But, alas, my charitable spirit only goes so far...

### *The Deluxe Well-Fed Tool Box*

Whenever you see this icon——throughout the book, it means the item just discussed appears in my separate ebook, *The Deluxe Well-Fed Tool Box*, a 220+-page, cut 'n pastable compilation of templates, tools, tips and reports designed to dramatically streamline and simplify your path to financial self-sufficiency.

In some cases, you'll see the icon when the item in question actually appears in the book (e.g., a simple contract, expanded cold-calling script, etc.). That way, you can cut and paste/print out your own copy from the *Tool Box*. Or its hot-linked versions of resources that appear in the book. See Appendix B for the full contents. Yes, it's a separate purchase, but laughably reasonable, given all it covers.

Check out the full details on my site at: <https://bitly.com/wftoolbox>.

Finally, throughout the book, you'll see several abbreviated references:

**TWFW:** The Well-Fed Writer

**FLCW:** Freelance Commercial Writer (how I refer to those in our field)

**E-PUB:** The WELL-FED E-PUB (my monthly ezine)

Subscribe for free at [www.wellfedwriter.com](http://www.wellfedwriter.com), then *Free Ezine Signup*

While I've done my best throughout the pages that follow to provide up-to-date links to resources, needless to say, companies come and go. Google is your friend.



So, why even be a FLCW? Why is this a good career direction for decent writers? There are *so* many good reasons. Let's go take a look...