

The Art of the Interview



FALL 2020

04

*A Quarterly Publication
of the American Society of
Journalists and Authors*

ASJA MAGAZINE



ACING THE INTERVIEW

*How to Get the Best
from Your Sources*



»» ALSO INSIDE What to Do When a Source Doesn't Cooperate //
How to Find Great Sources // Should You Ever Pay Sources?

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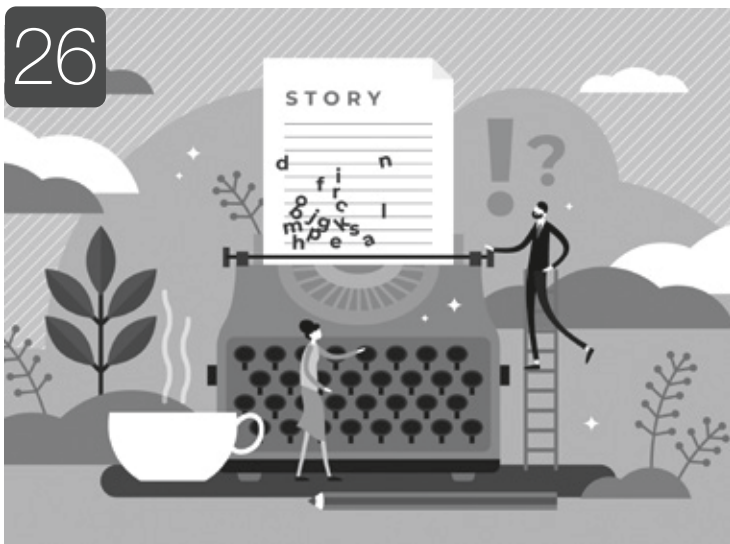
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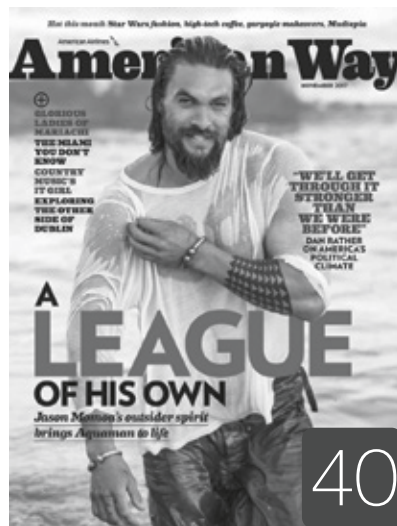
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ASJA MAGAZINE

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of the American Society of
Journalists and Authors*



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From the President's Desk



LAURA LAING

*Freelance Writer
and ASJA President*

DOING WHAT WE CAN DO

Kay Stephenson taught Algebra II in the classroom next to mine. As students changed classes, we would stand in the hall, against a short stretch of cement block wall between our doors, me on the right, and her on the left. In those three minutes, we could chat about our classes and what we did on the weekends. Kay was the perfect mentor for me. I was just out of college, only six years older than many of my geometry students. She was tiny and no-nonsense, with 20 years of teaching experience. She taught me how to lead a classroom of teenagers who weren't the least bit interested in theorems or right triangles.

Across the hall from our classrooms was a wide bulletin board that the math and science departments were responsible for refreshing once a month. This was the kind of job no one wanted, but each teacher signed up for two months of the year to share the load. We all knew that the kids barely noticed the messages and lessons we displayed. But something was better than the bare corkboard, which could become a spot for inked-on curse words scrawled by students. Kay and I had to look at the bulletin board between classes each day, so we had a vested interest.

The December of my last year of teaching, when it was my turn to refresh the hall's bulletin board, I felt resentful and frustrated. My wife was serving in Somalia, as the port security officer for the UN mission there. Even our tiny, rural school was being transformed with layers of bureaucracy. The paperwork was overwhelming. In my basic math course for eighth-graders, I had a 68% failure rate. My sense of self was diminished. I was

exhausted and scared and wondering why I had decided to go into a career that required me to perform in front of 136 teenagers for six hours a day and then do four or more hours of classroom prep and grading each evening.

Standing next to Kay's desk in her classroom one day after school, I vented a bit, hoping she'd ask someone else to do the bulletin board instead of me. Instead, she rolled her eyes and glanced up from the papers she was grading: "We all have a lot to do, Laura."

Sometimes people say difficult things that hit just at the right moment. Yes, my eyes welled up, but at the same time, I heard her comment as an opportunity to adjust my attitude. I have no idea why, but that blunt and straightforward statement has stuck with me for more than 25 years. I was being asked to step up as part of a team of overworked high school teachers. None of us was happy about the state of education; all of us were overwhelmed and tired, but that dang bulletin board still needed to be decorated. And it was my turn.

In response to the pandemic, ASJA has been able to step up with virtual programming that supported our members when needed. We offered webinars on federal economic support programs, book publishing, social media, and managing the anxiety of a pandemic. We moved our in-person conference online, with three months of Zoom sessions and a massive virtual client connections program. We rolled out a special COVID awards program that attracted a record number of entries. We began working with a web development company to redesign our website as an educational portal for freelance writers, making good on the promises

we made in our 70th anniversary fundraising campaign. We continued our regular programming with Special Interest Groups (SIGs), Virtual Client Connections (VCC), and Virtual Pitch Slams (VPS). We published a weekly newsletter, a bi-monthly blog, and a quarterly magazine. And we connected with lapsed members and planned a new- and renewing-member campaign for the fall.

The volunteers and staff of ASJA are all busy. I am struck by how each takes on small or large responsibilities—amid a global pandemic, an economic recession, political unrest, legislative attacks on the freelance business model. We're all stretched to our limits, and every day, our volunteers and staff offer our members and potential members something to help them build and sustain their freelance businesses.

"We're all busy, Laura." Kay's words run through my head when I feel overwhelmed and when I need to ask someone to help out with an ASJA task. Instead of making me feel ashamed, these words somehow help me feel like that I'm a part of something bigger. We're all busy, so we each take on a little piece of work, we each do the one thing we can offer, no matter how small.

The real work of ASJA comes from all of you, even as you're caring for aging parents, trying to meet a deadline, searching for sources that are not all white, male, cis, and straight, attempting to get the Instacart app to work, or teaching long division to your kids who can't be in school. We're all being asked to do too much. Yet, ASJA members continue to offer their time and expertise to other freelance writers.

"We're all busy." And even in these busy times, our members have been patient and kind and full of grace. While our heads spin and our hearts break, we're offering to help instead of pulling away completely. We're doing the one thing that we can do, whatever that is. This is the only way we will get through these intensely difficult times. And I am so grateful to be going through it with you.

"We're all stretched to our limits, and every day, our volunteers and staff offer our members and potential members something to help them build and sustain their freelance businesses."

*From the Editor*

THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW

STEPHANIE
VOZZA*Freelance Writer
and ASJA Editor*

The first person I interviewed was David Hacker, a writer who traveled around the small towns of Michigan's Upper Peninsula in a Chevy Astro van, chronicling his experiences for the *Detroit Free Press*. The story was for *Friends*, a magazine published by General Motors for Chevrolet owners.

It was 1988, and I was in my first job as an editorial assistant for the custom publishing department of a Detroit advertising agency. Until then, I had been tasked with answering reader mail and writing front-of-book shorts. This was my first feature, and I was nervous.

During the four-hour drive from my home to Hacker's northern Michigan log cabin, I rehearsed my questions. I had written them out in a new notepad I bought for the occasion, but I practiced nonetheless.

When I arrived, Hacker met me at the door. The bearded man wore a flannel shirt and overalls. A fire was roaring in a wood stove, taking the chill out of the January air. I admitted to him that this was my first interview. He asked me where I went to college, and then mentioned that he was a former journalism professor—a detail that made me even more nervous.

I sat down on the sofa, flipped open my list, and dove in. First question: How long have you been writing your Free Press column? Next question: What do you write about? As the interview progressed, I stuck to my script. What's been your most unique experience? How do you choose your route? Why did you become a writer? At some point, Hacker mentioned that his favorite book as a child was *Huckleberry Finn*.

"Oh, you're like a modern-day Huck Finn, and your van is your raft," I interjected, veering off script for the first time.

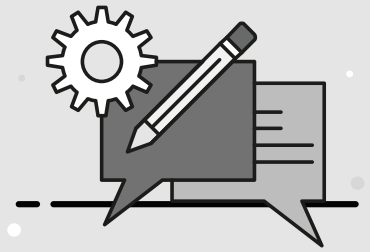
I jotted "favorite book = Huck Finn" in my notebook, and when I looked up I saw that Hacker was crying. I panicked and immediately tried to change the subject by asking the next question. But Hacker didn't answer.

After a very uncomfortable pause, he said, "I had never made the connection between what I do and Huck Finn. You made me realize that I love this job so much because it connects me to my boyhood dreams. Thank you for that."

Then he continued: "I'm putting on my professor hat now. You had a wonderful moment where you pulled raw emotion out of a source. The best thing to do is stay there and dig deeper. Don't be afraid of where a conversation can go. Don't be afraid of emotion. Let it unfold because it can lead to something that makes a story so much better."

It's been more than 30 years since I sat on Hacker's sofa and was gifted with his advice. I have to admit I haven't made another source cry, but I do approach each interview as a conversation instead of a checklist of questions to complete—a story to unfold.

This issue is all about good interviews—how to conduct them, how to find good sources, and how to leverage the conversation into more than one paycheck. Sources, after all, are at the heart of what we do. And interviews can make or break your story. I was lucky to learn that lesson early. And I was lucky enough to have a kind man teach me.



NEW ASJA MEMBERS!

OCTOBER 2020

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS

Alesandra Dubin
Los Angeles, Calif.

Charles Fishkin
Mount Kisco, N.Y.

Claire Hannum
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Robin Kavanagh
Longs, S.C.

Robert Kerbeck
Malibu, Calif.

Leila Macor
Miami Beach, Fla.

Olga Mecking Rjswijk

Dawn O'Donnell-Humme
Forest Grove, Ore.

Peggy Sue Wells,
Roanoke, Ind.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Emily Adeyanju

Rebecca (Bec) Loss
Milwaukee, Wis.

Barbara Mantel
New York

Keith Paradise,
Camp Hill, Pa.

Stephanie Trovato
Brewster, N.Y.

Sharon Waters
Bloomfield, N.J.



ASJA >>>>>> Membership Benefits

VISIT [ASJA.ORG/MEMBERS](https://www.asja.org/members)

> *ASJA Writers Emergency Assistance Fund (WEAF)*

By definition, freelance writers are independent. So unfortunately, when we're unable to work—especially when unexpected situations arise—our bottom line can take a big hit, threatening financial stability.

In 1982, ASJA set up a fund for writers who face economic crises because of sudden illnesses, injuries, or natural disasters. The Writers Emergency Assistance Fund (WEAF) has offered nearly \$670,000 to more than 250 writers in need since it was founded.

WEAF is funded through generous donations from our members and others in the writing community. Each month, a team of three ASJA members, led by the vice president of the board, reviews applications from writers who are facing hardships. Some applicants are ASJA members, others aren't. Writers who receive WEAF grants demonstrate hardship from a sudden illness, injury, or natural disaster, as well as their status as a professional writer (WEAF is not for COVID-related loss of income). Nonmembers must demonstrate that they could qualify for membership in order to be considered. WEAF receives between two and five applications each month.

All donations are tax-deductible and can be made via the ASJA website. (The WEAF information page is linked at the bottom of the pull-down menu called "For Writers.") Please consider making a one-time or on-going contribution.

HUGE THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO VOLUNTEERED FOR ASJA'S VIRTUAL CONFERENCE THIS SUMMER:

Journalism Track Chair:
Theresa Sullivan Barger

Content Marketing Track Chair:
Jennifer Goforth Gregory

Books Track Chair:
Milt Toby

Promotions:
Sophia McDonald Bennett and Karen Whiting

Snack Chats Coordinators:
Caren Chesler, Katie Navarra, Tara Haelle

Writer Organizations Promotions Chair:
Tami Kamin Meyer

Tech Support Volunteers:
Suzanne Boles, Leslie Lang, Teresa Zumwald



MEMBER NEWS



Got news to share with ASJA?

Submit your items at asja.org/members.

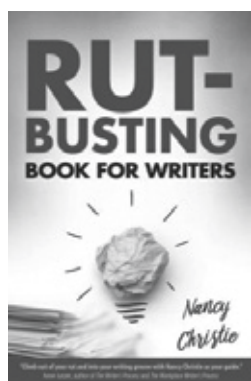
»»»» Book News

Long-time ASJA member **Bob Nesoff** has just signed a contract for his third book. The nonfiction book will be published by Arcadia Publishers, which is his second with the imprint. The true crime story is about a Federal undercover agent who infiltrated the Al Capone gang and helped bring the notorious "Scarface" down, earning him the sobriquet "Mysterious Mike." Federal agents who had worked with Mike Malone later said they had no idea who he was, which illustrates how deep and effective Malone's undercover work was. After helping to bring Capone down, Malone and his group of agents were brought in at the specific request of Charles Lindbergh to try and solve the kidnapping of his young son. Malone and Lindbergh became so close, the two men often practiced target shooting at the back of the Lindbergh estate. Malone and his squad recommended and convinced Lindbergh to copy the serial number of the bills in the ransom money, which ultimately led to the arrest of Richard Bruno Hauptmann.



Saxon Henry published the book *The Modern Salonniers*. The collection of essays that combine traveling, reading, and creative nonfiction is available in print and on Kindle.

Anne Hosansky's fifth book, *Come and Go*, has been published by BookBaby. It's a candid account of Hosansky's partner's struggle with Alzheimer's and her determined fight to keep their love alive. The book includes scenes in a caregiver's workshop.



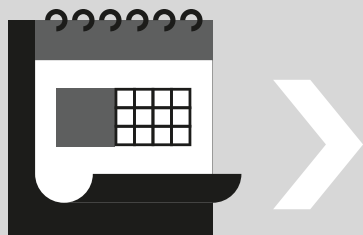
Nancy Christie recently released two books: *Rut-Busting Book for Authors* (Mill City Press 2019) and *Peripheral Visions and Other Stories* (Unsolicited Press 2020). Her first short story collection, *Traveling Left of Center and Other Stories*, has also been re-released by Unsolicited Press in 2019. *Peripheral Visions and Other Stories* won second place in the Florida Writers Association 2018 Royal Palm Literary Awards (RPLA) competition and *Rut-Busting Book for Authors* was a 2019 Best Book Awards winner.

»»»» Articles and Accolades

Charles A. Fishkin wrote a profile of Dr. Rowena Spencer, the country's first woman pediatric surgeon. "Remembering Dr. Rowena Spencer (1922-2014)" was published in the March 2020 issue of *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*.

"Beginning her surgical career in 1953, [Dr. Spencer] worked in New Orleans for over thirty years, acquiring a reputation as a talented surgeon and an expert on the separation of conjoined twins. She became a pediatric surgeon, moreover, just as the field was emerging as its own surgical specialty. She was passionate about her work and exceptionally dedicated to her patients, especially her "babies." She earned her MD degree from Johns Hopkins University, where she was the first woman intern in surgery. She completed residencies at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Louisiana State University. She subsequently served on the medical school faculties of Louisiana State University and Tulane. She died in 2014 at the age of ninety-one."

ASJA EVENTS



CALENDAR

SPECIAL EVENT

ASJA 50th Annual Conference

April 18 – 19, 2021

New York Marriott Downtown,
85 West Street at Albany Street

Virtual Client Connections and Virtual Pitch Slam

TBD (see website for details)

Boost your bottom line by participating in Virtual Pitch Slam!

Want a guaranteed audience for your perfectly crafted story idea? Join us for Virtual Pitch Slam (VPS), a one-hour interactive phone call during which a guest editor will hear up to 15 pitches from professional members. Bonus: You'll get honest feedback on why your pitch works or not, plus the chance to place your story with a new outlet.

Held every month or so, we've done great Pitch Slams with editors from *Discover*, *Sierra*, *Eating Well*, *Atlantic CityLab*, *TheKitchn.com*, *American Way*, *Boston Globe Magazine*, *Wine Enthusiast*, *PBS*, *Your Teen*, *Preservation*, *The Open Notebook* and more.

We record the event, and it's posted on our members-only website for other writers to listen to (if they didn't snag a coveted pitching slot). Many of the ideas pitched during VPS have been published, so it's a win-win for everyone.

We need your help to find more willing participants: Does one of your editors need pitches? Please send them our way! Get details from Wendy Helfenbaum (wendy@taketwoproductions.ca)

LISTEN UP!



Join us for the ASJA podcast that is curated and hosted by Estelle Erasmus, a longtime ASJA member and 2017 New York City Conference Chair.

Sage advice from the following guests is online and ready for download, free of charge to ASJA members. Nonmembers can download a select group of podcasts for \$24.99 in the ASJA Store.

ASJA.ORG/ASJADIRECT

DONNA TALERICO
Hippocampus magazine

MICHAEL ZAM
Co-Creator, Writer &
Producer on FX's *Feud*:
Bette and Joan

RICHARD EISENBERG
Managing Editor
PBS's *NextAvenue.org*

ANNA GOLDFARB
Author of *Clearly, I Didn't
Think This Through*

**DAMON BROWN
AND JEANETTE HURT**
Co-authors of *The Passive
Writer: 5 Steps to Earning
Money in Your Sleep*

LISA BONOS
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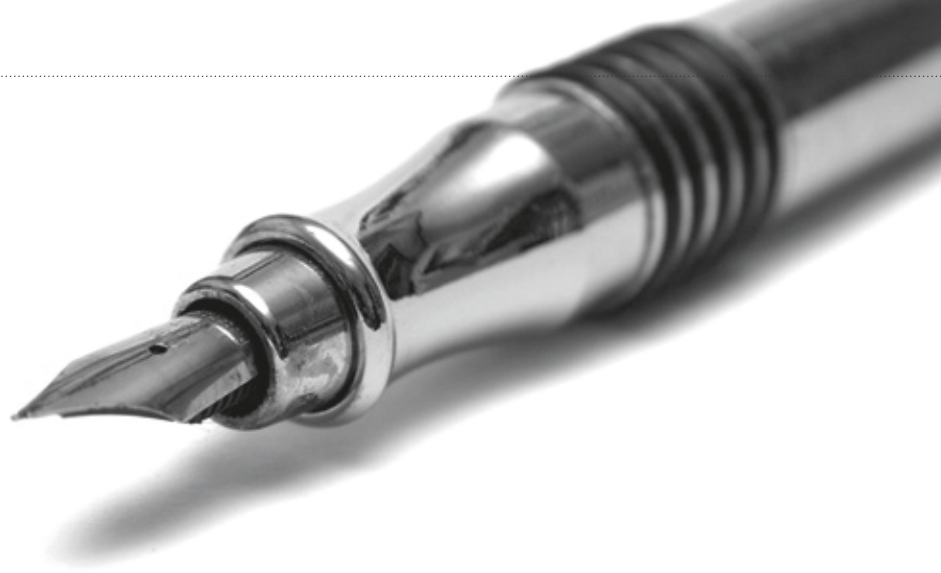
INSIDE INTEL ON GETTING PUBLISHED AND PAID WELL

HOW TO ACCESS THE PODCASTS

>>> Go to ASJA Direct (on the ASJA website, the link is under the section For Writers) and select the podcast you'd like to download.

>>> You will be redirected to the ASJA Store. Members must be logged in to the site in order to download the podcast for free. There is a fee for nonmembers. Once you order the podcast, you'll receive an email with instructions on how to download the recording.

>>> If you have any trouble accessing the recording or finding your download, please email ASJAoffice@asja.org for technical support.



>>>>>>>

PAYCHECK

MEDICAL SOCIETY MAGAZINE

Article, trade pub (online or print)

Scope of work: 1,000 words

Total fee: \$1,500.00

Article terms: Acceptance

I write a lot for this outlet. The rate varies between \$1 and \$1.50 a word, but the articles always run over the original word count. A couple of times I've pulled some of the content into a sidebar and sold that separately, and that's always a bonus. There's always at least one set of revisions, but usually manageable. Sometimes the review cycle is slow, which means payment is also slow. Once I proved myself as reliable, I asked if I could invoice on the first draft, which they were amenable to.

Feedback: 8

VISUAL MEDIA COMPANY

Scope of work: three minute script

Total fee: \$1,200.00

Article terms: Acceptance

This was my first foray into scriptwriting. The client was an acquaintance who produces CBD products and medical marijuana and wanted a video script on chronic pain and Mary Jane, so to speak. Very easy work for the money.

Feedback: 10

WEILL CORNELL MEDICAL CENTER

Corporate writing-editing

Scope of work: 500 words

Total fee: \$500.00

Article terms: Acceptance

Far too much back and forth and revision requests for a very straightforward 500-word piece. The team weighs in on everything. Also, they cut the piece to 450 words and tried to pay me \$450. Uh, no. I spoke up and they paid up.

Feedback: 4

BANKRATE.COM

Article, consumer pub (online or print)

Scope of work: 1,000 words

Total fee: \$400.00

Article terms: Acceptance

Submit invoice for all work (multiple articles) once a month. Typically paid within 3 weeks of invoice. Almost never any edits.

Feedback: 9

THE RHEUMATOLOGIST

Article, trade pub (online or print)

Scope of work: 1,800 words

Total fee: \$1,350.00

Article terms: Acceptance

Client is very particular about citations and style but otherwise easy to work with.

Feedback: 9

SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

Scope of work: 12,000 words

Total fee: \$12,000.00

Article terms: Acceptance

These pieces were not bylined and I sold all rights. I wrote six white papers for this agency with a one year contract. My payments were broken into monthly installments of \$1,000 for a total of \$12,000.

Feedback: 5

LIFEPLAN BY LEGALZOOM

Blog

Scope of work: 1 post

Total fee: \$350.00

They work through Contently, so you have to sign up there. Other than that, communicate directly with the editor, who is very nice and professional. Pay is upon submission.

Feedback: 10

TOPTAL/RECRUITING.COM

Blog

Scope of work: 1,500 words

Total fee: \$1,000.00

Article terms: Acceptance

Very easy to work with, but the contract is one that needs to be negotiated. They have things in there that shouldn't be for freelancers. Wire transfer payment, which is nice.

Feedback: 10

COSTCO CONNECTION

Article, consumer pub (online or print)

Scope of work: 400 words

Total fee: \$375.00

Article terms: Acceptance

General comments: I've written several stories for this magazine, about food and home related matters. It's a pleasure.

Feedback: 10

AARP WEBSITE

Article, consumer pub (online or print)

Scope of work: 1,100 words

Total fee: \$1,300.00

Article terms: Acceptance

Feedback: 10



To protect the confidentiality of information filed with Paycheck reports, additional details including rights and more are available at asja.org/paycheck/report-a-payment

COSTCO CONNECTION

Article, custom pub

Scope of work: 750 words

Total fee: \$950.00

Article terms: Acceptance

Feature article with sidebar.

General comments: Terrific client: responsive editor, zero editing, easy work and prompt pay.

Feedback: 10

LONGREADS

Article, consumer pub (online or print)

Scope of work, other: Personal essay

Total fee: \$500.00

Article terms: POP

General comments: Editor is a pleasure to work with. Highly recommend!

Feedback: 10

THE KEY

PUBLISHED BY

KAPPA KAPPA GAMMA

Article, custom pub

Scope of work: 3 posts

Total fee: \$500.00

Article terms: Acceptance

The editor assigned me to write short (300-500 word) profiles of three alums she'd chosen. I interviewed two of them and the third was not reachable, so the editor asked me to write the profile based on past media coverage, since she's a public figure. Interesting but relatively straightforward work, and I'd love to write for her again. Payment took a little longer than I'd hoped but given the pandemic, I wasn't surprised by a short delay and was just happy to get paid.

Feedback: 8



Got a question for the editor? Visit the ASJA Periodicals Forum and leave your question on the "taking questions for editors" thread. We'll try to get you some answers in an upcoming issue.

THINK TANK

\$95 hour for 9.5 hours

Total fee: \$902.50

Article terms: Acceptance

Op-ed ghostwritten for researchers at think tank

Feedback: 8

JOHNS HOPKINS

Article, custom pub

Scope of work: 1,500 words

Total fee: \$1,500.00

Article terms: Acceptance

I met this editor at the DC conference and pitched him some ideas. After a few polite follow-ups, he assigned me to cover a topic they'd identified internally and he provided a list of university sources to contact. Editing and fact-checking was rigorous but ensured that the piece read well and thoroughly explained a complex topic. Acceptance dragged on a bit longer than expected when COVID-19 derailed the editing process but I politely nudged the editor to let me invoice, which he did. I hope to write for him again.

Feedback: 9

CANCER HEALTH

Article, consumer pub (online or print)

Scope of work: 1,800 words

Total fee: \$1,800.00

Article terms: POP

This was a complex story, so time was not worth the fee. I've done other stories for them that worked out better, but not by much. Nonetheless, I like the people and subject is one of my specialties. Their payment policy is to pay 30 days after the magazine is sent to the printer, which is on a quarterly basis. This is unreasonable but unchangeable (I've tried.). They don't want an invoice; they process payment at their end as part of editorial function. The one time I had an accepted story held, they paid me in following cycle.

Feedback: 9

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Blog posts

Scope of work: 1,200+ word profile of patient focused on one concern related to condition/disease

Total fee: \$900.00

Article terms: Acceptance

Work assigned under a grant with seven profiles, spread over year. This is on-going work, under grant funding obtained by the non-profit.

Feedback: 10



FAIR WARNING TO FELLOW WRITERS

I'm writing this letter as a warning to my fellow ASJA writers so they won't fall victim to one of these scams.

It started on May 11, 2020, while I was under quarantine. Someone named "Samantha Paige" sent me an email after looking at my website and my profile on ASJA. She wanted a 2,550-word article about exercise and mental health. It was certainly appropriate since that's my platform: I'm a writer, a psychiatrist, and a woman who believes in exercise. She claimed she was an academic consultant in Canoga Park, Ca. who organizes seminars and workshops to educate the public. In this case, she wanted to use large corporations for sponsorship of



It was a common scam. People were taken in because they assumed that the person conning them was a legitimate client or customer, as I had assumed.

her program. She was hiring other professionals and me to write the content. I wrote back and said it was interesting; let's talk. She wrote that she couldn't talk because she'd had an accident which left her with speech distortion from apraxia. We worked out a letter of agreement, in which I would receive \$1/word, i.e., \$2,550 before the due date of June 12, 2020.

It all sounded legitimate, right? On May 18, I received a check from a "Michael Hansen" in Washington state sent by USPS Express mail from "Pennsylvania Steel Company." It was for \$5,400. I thought this was strange and circuitous, but I assumed this was one of her corporate sponsors. I immediately put the check in the bank, assuming that "Samantha" was going to ask me to write another article of 2900-words, something at which she had hinted. Then she kept texting and asking me if the check cleared. The next day when I looked, it had cleared, and I told her so.

Then things turned very strange. "Samantha" wrote that now the project was on hold due to the quarantine, and she wanted a return of \$2828. She wanted me to send it to some Chase Bank account of still another person in California. I told her that her math was wrong and that if I were paid \$2550 (that she wanted me to have) out of \$5400, she would get a return of \$2850. No problem, she wrote, but hurry, hurry. Now I know that if you are being rushed to send money somewhere, something must be wrong. I also know that if something seems too good to be true, it usually is.

I went back to the bank on May 22 and found out that now her check had bounced. The bank said it was a fictitious check. The fraud department there said it was a common trick. People were given checks for twice what they were owed and then told to rush the difference to someone else. It was a common scam. People were taken in because they assumed that the person conning them was a legitimate client or customer, as I had assumed.

I was so embarrassed and upset that I had fallen for this. In all good conscious, I had written the article, expected to be paid, and assumed that "Samantha" was really interested in an article written by me. When I think back, I should have questioned her more thoroughly, forced her to speak with me, asked what she had done in the past, etc. Everyone told me I was lucky I hadn't sent the money that she demanded, but still, I felt terrible about the entire incident. Please don't fall for one of these scams.

Sincerely,
CAROL W. BERMAN



>> Tools of the Trade

CAN ZOOM REVITALIZE YOUR REGIONAL CHAPTER?

HOWARD BALDWIN

Freelance Writer



Earlier this year, we all got a crash course in videoconferencing. As most people now know, it's a real boon to see colleagues face to face during this pandemic.

Regional ASJA chapters can also reap the benefits of videoconferencing. Even though many members cluster in metropolitan areas, it's difficult to maintain regional meetings because of a lack of public transportation or the presence of unpredictable travel times. Traffic and weather conspire to make in-person meetings difficult. But videoconferencing may hold the key to making regional meetings easier and more productive.

The recently formed ASJA Pacific Northwest chapter began experimenting with Zoom early in 2020, even before the pandemic, and quickly learned some key lessons, according to chapter founder and president Carolyn Miller.

"We tried teleconferencing a few times," she says, "and it's not as personable. It's hard to know when to insert yourself in the conversation [when you can't see other people]."

Now, with Zoom, "more ASJA members in the Pacific Northwest are participating," says Miller, including members from southern Oregon, the Seattle metropolitan area, and even Idaho. "The more we reach out to members who are not local, the more attendance we'll get." It's also a boon to members in the Portland metropolitan area, some of whom live as far south as Salem, forty-five minutes south. In inclement weather, sometimes it's just easier to dial in.

Zoom allows members to call in from computers, tablets, or from mobile phones; the latter requires a download of its app,

but members have called in from outside their children's dance lessons in order to participate.

Miller licensed the Zoom application herself, for use beyond the ASJA meetings. She's started using it for her work as a writer and business consultant, deducting the \$15-per-month cost as a business expense.

"I did an interview with a veterinarian in Maine recently," she says. "We used Zoom because my cell phone had been acting up, and it was more personable than a phone call."

This isn't to say that the chapter didn't initially encounter some glitches. At one point, before the pandemic, members combined in-person and remote participation. Some people congregated in person and others called in.

"I was reticent to conduct meetings that way because I thought it would be a distraction, and it was," says Miller. "We kept looking at our screens instead of each other."

There were other issues as well. Using one computer was difficult because the in-person group had to congregate at one end of the table. When everyone brought computers, only one could have its sound on because of the feedback the microphones created.

But once the chapter worked out the technology kinks, the benefits kicked in. Chapters in both urban and rural areas can take advantage of those benefits, boosting affinity through the kind of meetings everyone is getting more accustomed to.

Miller says wryly, "It turns out Zoom works best when nobody is in the room."

>> Howard Baldwin was ASJA's Treasurer from 2016-2020.

COVER STORY



Nailing the PERFECT *Interview*



MARGIE
GOLDSMITH

Freelance Writer



Publications continue to decrease their editorial pages, and some are using re-purposed stories. Even worse, many have gone or are going out of business. However, as long as there are magazines and ezines, there will be a need for CEO and celebrity interviews.

So how do you interview an A-lister or CEO? It's not just a matter of finding the right questions. It takes some preparation and the right tools.

NYC-based Margie Goldsmith, who is a contributor to *Forbes.com*, *Business Jet Traveler* and *Wine, Dine & Travel*, has interviewed such celebs and CEOs as Francis Ford Coppola, Harry Connick Jr., Barbara Corcoran, Sir Richard Branson, Larry Fitzgerald Jr., Terry Bradshaw, and scores of others. She has traveled to 140 countries and written about them all, winning 90 awards for her stories. She is the author of *Screw-Up*, *Nocturnes*, and *Diurnes*, and *Masters of the Harmonica: 30 Harmonica Masters Share Their Craft*.

1



Your equipment

Even before you do your interview, you better make sure you have a tape recorder that works (and preferably, a backup) and know when to turn it on or off.

I've been interviewing CEOs and celebrities for more than 20 years, and during that time, I've had some pretty harrowing experiences with recording devices. Once, I interviewed a former reality TV star (who has now advanced to a much more powerful political position) for a business publication. I was led into his office and turned on my tape recorder to test it. It was dead, even though I'd just changed the batteries.

This was during the days when tape recorders used actual tape. I knew it would work if I plugged it in, so I was down on my hands and knees looking for an electrical outlet when my interviewee walked in. "What are you doing?" he said in a gruff voice.

"Plugging in my tape recorder," I replied.

"Why?" he asked.

I stood up, looked him in the eyes, and said, "Because I wouldn't want to take the chance of losing an interview with you if my batteries went dead."

He beamed and said, "All journalists should be required to do that."

I was saved.

Another time I wasn't so lucky. I was beginning an interview by phone with a Hollywood TV super-star, and I pushed RECORD on my two recorders. I was about to ask the first question when suddenly she said, "Ooops, have to call you right back." She hung up, I turned off the tape recorders and waited and waited. When she finally got back on the phone, I was so relieved that I did the entire interview before realizing I hadn't pushed RECORD. (A month later she finally consented to re-do the conversation, but she will undoubtedly hate me for life).

Always do a sound check with your tape recorder and always have a backup recorder. Run both during the interview, so that if one conks out, the other is still recording. If your subject has to hang up suddenly and you're going to have to re-start the interview, remember to turn the record button back on both recorders before picking up the phone. When buying a tape recorder, get one with an omnidirectional mic, which means it will pick up sound equally from all directions, especially crucial in face-to-face interviews in which the subject might turn his or her head in many directions while speaking.



INTERVIEW TIP

Always do a sound check with your tape recorder and always have a backup recorder. Run both during the interview, so that if one conks out, the other is still recording.

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Do your homework

Tape recorders are the easy part. A harder part is deciding which questions to ask because you're only as good as your questions. Don't use boilerplate questions. Do your research. Has the person written a book? Read it. Choose a couple of questions from the book, as most interviewers will not take the time to read a book (I skim the text for good questions to ask). The highest compliment you can get is, "Wow, that's a good question."

Google that person and read or listen to any interview they've done in the past. Ask their assistant, handler, or PR rep (or with whomever you are dealing) for their most updated biography. Do not depend on Wikipedia as that information might not be up to date. See if the representative will give you a couple of names of people who know him or her well so you can ask them about the person.



INTERVIEW TIP

Don't use boilerplate questions. Do your research. Read or listen to any interview the person has done in the past.



3

Don't be nervous

Believe it or not, your subjects are more nervous than you. They want to be sure to express themselves correctly and can be fearful of saying something they should not have said.

Sometimes CEOs insist on having their PR or marketing person sit in, which is always unnerving to the writer, especially if the rep tries to interfere or says, "that question is off-limits." Pretend you are thrilled they are there.

Believe it or not, your subjects are more nervous than you. They want to be sure to express themselves correctly and can be fearful of saying something they should not have said.

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The venue for the interview

You need a quiet place to do the interview, even with an omnidirectional microphone. One of the toughest interviews I did was with a midwestern entrepreneur who insisted I come to White Plains Airport, meet him on his private plane, and do the interview while flying to Teterboro (where he'd let me off). When I later listened to the conversation, it was hard to hear because of the ambient noise on board the plane even though the aircraft was a sleek Global Express.

One of the worst sound-quality interviews I ever did was with a baseball star who insisted on meeting at a new trendy restaurant where he was a silent partner. I had to hold the mic an inch from his lips the entire interview. Another time, I was interviewing a famous singer in the library room of a hotel in Beverly Hills, but there were guests in the library! I managed to convince the handler to let me conduct the interview in his suite.



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The questions

Be prepared with more questions than you think you can possibly ask. Many times the handler will say you only have 30 minutes. I like 45 minutes to one hour for a five-page interview.

After asking a question, listen for the answer. Don't just charge ahead to the next question. Something the interviewee unexpectedly said might lead to a new question that's not on your list, which might end up being the best part of your interview.

Also, when you're interviewing someone and they tell a great story, let them go on. Never interrupt because something great might emerge. Keep a pen and paper ready to ask further questions that come to mind as they speak because I promise that if you don't write them down immediately, you'll forget the new questions.



> INTERVIEW TIPS

After asking a question, listen for the answer and don't interrupt.

Keep a pen and paper ready to ask further questions that come to mind.

6

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The roadblocks

No matter how much homework you've done, there are bound to be disasters. Once, I interviewed a golf celeb who answered every question with "yes" or "no" or as few words as possible. I started making up questions on the spot. The only thing that seemed to pique his interest was not any of his golf championships but his Presidential Medal of Freedom. He spent a good fifteen minutes telling me how he had it displayed under glass in his home. I ended up calling his best friend and relying on him for the answers I needed.

Even worse, was an interview with a Las Vegas entrepreneur who'd had ADHD since childhood. The PR person told me, "Make sure you ask him about that. He loves to talk about it." I began the interview and about three questions in asked him about his ADHD.

"HOW DARE YOU ASK ME ABOUT THAT," he screamed into the receiver. "I don't even want to finish this interview." And he slammed down the phone. Fortunately, I had enough time to find a substitute celebrity for my deadline, and best of all, because the PR person admitted it was her fault, I was paid in full.

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The long and short of it

Be prepared for anything—someone who talks for hours (and will cost you more in transcription time and money), someone who answers only "yes" or "no," or a person who goes berserk on the phone. Layer your questions the way you'd layer clothing if you were going on a hike. Do your homework—really study the person as much as you can, and lastly, have fun. Not only do you have the chance to meet someone famous or important, but submitting a great interview makes both your editor and your interviewee happy.

*Be prepared for anything—
someone who talks for hours,
someone who answers only
"yes" or "no," or a person who
goes berserk on the phone.*

What to Do When a Source Doesn't Cooperate



LEIDA SNOW

*Freelance Writer and Former
ASJA Publications Chair*

Sometimes a tough experience teaches a valuable lesson. When someone I knew was suddenly unavailable for input, I racked my brain to figure out how I'd offended, then finished my article without her. Months later, I received an invitation to a memorial in her honor. Lesson learned: If a source doesn't cooperate, don't take it personally. You never know what's going on in another person's life.



»» Leida Snow, ASJA's former Publications Chair, is a widely published, award-winning journalist, former network radio news anchor (ABC/NY), and theater critic (WINS-AM/NY). As president of LS Consultants, she provides communications coaching to professionals. Leida is a passionate New Yorker and a Francophile. @LeidaSnow

For one story, I couldn't get past the office secretary. When I called the executive on his cell phone, he was furious. When I confessed I'd Googled to find his number, we both laughed. When I explained I wasn't doing a "gotcha" piece, he relaxed. We had a useful interview, and he even supplied some additional leads for me. The take-away? Do your research and go around the gatekeeper.

For a different story, I had a tight deadline, and the public relations representative kept making promises, but not setting an interview. At first, I stewed. Then I changed focus and reached out elsewhere. There's never only one person to go to. There's always another source.

One time, the subject of my profile was taking over a prestigious appointment. He was candid that his long-term relationship with another man had ended. He asked me not to include that. If he were still with his partner, that would have been a positive for my article. Since the relationship had ended, it was irrelevant. Are you writing a friendly profile or an investigative story? Key the article to the assignment.

In the classic film "All the President's Men," about Watergate and the eventual resignation of President Richard Nixon, the journalists try endless avenues to get sources on the record. Their journey takes months as they investigate what began as a "third rate burglary" and eventually brought down a president. Don't get discouraged. Persistence pays.

When I first proposed a profile to a famous guy I've known casually over the years, he refused. He said his work should speak for itself. Some years later, I broached the subject again, and he was ready. Civility and professionalism are the best advocacy.



The person who won't talk to you today may be more willing tomorrow. If not, move on:

- You never know what's going on in another person's life.
.....
- Do your research and go around the gatekeeper.
.....
- There's always another source.
.....
- Key the article to the assignment.
.....
- Persistence pays.
.....
- Civility and professionalism are the best advocacy.



Slicing *and* DICING



WENDY
HELFENBAUM

Freelance Writer

With rates sliding downwards in most markets, it can be challenging for writers to meet their business goals. But if you think strategically when researching stories and planning interviews, one source can yield material for several different articles in addition to the one you're working on. ASJA members share how they cull information from interviews to then spin into other articles for non-competing outlets.

No. 1 PLAN YOUR INTERVIEWS WITH MULTIPLE MARKETS IN MIND

As you're preparing questions for a source, make a note of interesting bits you find in your research, even if they aren't related to the article you're talking to them about. Once, while reading about a source who owned a novelty store that carried some products he'd invented—including a Fart Clock that chimed on the hour with silly sound effects—I learned he had a degree in forensic accounting. I realized that in addition to the trade magazine round-up story I was writing about trends in party favors, this guy would make a delightful alumni profile—the number cruncher who pivoted to fart clocks. So I made sure to ask him about that shift. The result? Two separate stories (and checks) for non-competing publications.

Chicago journalist Dawn Reiss thoroughly researches a source prior to doing an interview.

"By understanding more about the source, I can think about relevant questions in advance," she says. "I usually only go into a story thinking about using that source for that story, but sometimes something emerges."

After Reiss wrote a national investing story about Farmland REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts) for *U.S. News & World Report*, she turned extra material into a localized business piece about the first organic Farmland REIT in Evanston, IL for Crain's Chicago Business.

"By understanding more about the source, I can think about relevant questions in advance. I usually only go into a story thinking about using that source for that story, but sometimes something emerges."

DAWN REISS

No. 2 LET THINGS HAPPEN ORGANICALLY

Often during an interview, a source's comment sparks another story idea. While covering COVID-19, Michelle Rafter has found several opportunities to re-use sources.

"It's never intentional. But when I do interviews, I always look for nuggets I could use in a follow-up piece, or on a related topic," says Rafter, a Portland, Ore.-based journalist and content marketing writer.

Rafter wrote a story for IEEE Spectrum about state unemployment insurance benefits' computer systems crashing under the weight of new claims.

"Some systems are decades old, and some states put out a call for software programmers who could work in older computer languages like COBOL. That led me to sell a story to NextAvenue.org on software coders over 50 who are volunteering to help during COVID-19," says Rafter.

While reporting that story, Rafter interviewed a startup non-profit that matches people with coding skills and the government agencies that need them, and ended up selling another story about the organization. For all these pieces, Rafter supplemented existing interviews with new ones, and used different quotes.

"I don't usually use the same interview source for noncompeting clients, but rather for the same publication," says Debbie Abrams Kaplan, a Westfield, N.J.-based writer who covers healthcare and supply chain. "Sometimes I can turn one story into two stories during reporting, as there are other angles to cover."

Go with your gut instinct: When you hear something off-topic but fascinating, go with it, says Jeanette Hurt, a freelance journalist and author in Milwaukee, Wis.

"About a year ago, I was profiling this really cool bartender in London for *HOTELS* magazine, and around the same time, I got my Forbes gig (as a columnist). In the middle of the interview, I realized she was perfect for Forbes, and I saved material for a separate story that I wrote months later," recalls Hurt. "It was easy to write because I already had done the reporting."



No. 3 ASK EXTRA QUESTIONS ABOUT RELATED OR UNRELATED TOPICS

“When you ‘give a horse its head,’ that means you let it take you where it wants to go. When you do the same thing with an interview, you discover some surprising gems,” says Tom Gerencer, a Fayetteville, W.Va.-based journalist, content writer, and editor.

“You have to get the quotes you need, but don’t be afraid to have a longer, rangier chat,” he says.

Pay attention, ask good questions, and let the interviews lead you elsewhere, adds Hurt.

“I think it’s important for writers to actually talk to people—email interviews are fine in some cases, but in my experience, you will just get what you need for one story,” she says. “Don’t guide interviews with a tight fist. You learn really interesting things if you just let people talk.”

Estelle Erasmus, a New York City journalist and writing coach, usually concludes each interview the same way.

“I’ll ask, ‘Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you want to share?’” she suggests. “That always opens up a new avenue of information, and a new idea for me on what to do with it.”

While speaking to someone, if you think they’d make an excellent profile or if they mention a new study in a different area than what you write about, you could take it to another pub or in a different direction, Erasmus adds.

“I mostly cover parenting, health, psychology and publishing, but when I spoke to an expert for a parenting story, he ended up also being a science story in Vice where I wrote about his newest venture,” she shares.

No. 4 CREATE A SYSTEM TO TRACK QUOTES

Since Abrams Kaplan writes in several niches, she routinely uses research multiple times for various clients, both for content marketing and journalism.

“I’m building up a treasure trove of links and data, which shortens the research and writing process,” she says.

It’s one thing to gather a treasure trove of fabulous material from a source, but if you can’t keep track of it, it’s useless to you, says Gerencer.

“I wrote a supplier profile for Costco Connection over a year ago, and recently, while writing a piece for an association magazine, it hit me that the old interview had a great quote about the value of building a dialogue with customers,” he recalls.

“Sifting through everything would be a nightmare without technology, but a phone recording app—plus an AI transcription app like Temi.com—makes it easy to build up a massive reservoir of useful content, do a word search in my transcript, and then pull the snip I need. I emailed it to the former interviewee. He was happy to let me use it and the association loved the quote.”

“I’m building up a treasure trove of links and data, which shortens the research and writing process.”

DEBBIE ABRAMS KAPLAN

No. 5 BE MINDFUL ABOUT HOW AND WHERE TO USE YOUR SOURCES

We've all seen grabby contracts that list 'all research, interviews and files' as deliverables. Don't sign those, or at least, get that section off the table. You want to keep the rights to your notes and interviews so that you can use them elsewhere—as long as it does not breach other clauses in your contract, that is. Read your contract carefully before using a source in another story, and if there's anything you're unsure about, ask your editor.

It helps to write for publications in different niches, so you can avoid pitching competitors, says Rafter.

Hurt says that in her 18-year freelancing career, only two editors stopped working with her after finding out she had written similar stories for other outlets.

"I felt bad about it for one editor, but not the other—neither had exclusivity clauses in their contracts, and they were completely different audiences," she says.

Always get permission from your sources if you want to quote them elsewhere.

Hurt lets sources know during the interview that she'd like to use them in a separate story.

"I've never had a source get upset by more publicity," she says.

Never assume, though, that an interview subject wants to be in whatever publication you happen to sell an idea to. Abrams Kaplan goes back to sources when she finds another outlet for part of their interviews, to make sure they're okay with being featured there.

"It's important to do this, especially if you write content marketing, as some sources do not want to be featured in a brand story, even if written in a nonpromotional way," she explains.



No. 6 MAKE IT STANDARD PROCEDURE TO USE YOUR SOURCES

Hurt spins articles based on her books about cocktails and cheese. She has leveraged quotes many times over from an interview with the founder of a Milwaukee distillery.

"I wrote about him for Wine Enthusiast, then for a local publication, an airline in-flight, and then, ten years later, I wrote about one of his products for Forbes. Plus, he's been featured in a couple of my books," she says.

Boston-based Sally Abrahms is a master at milking material gathered for one story to use in other assignments, though always with different angles. The key is having topics that are interrelated, she says, like caregiving and technology or housing and seniors.

"I have repurposed stories from the same source in many of my stories—using different quotes and context, obviously—but always because that person is an expert or pioneer in their field, and I may go back to that source via email to see if there is any new info since I interviewed them last," she says.

"I have repurposed stories from the same source in many of my stories—using different quotes and context."

SALLY ABRAHMS

Wendy Helfenbaum is a Montreal-based writer and TV producer who writes for consumer, trade and custom publications. She also works with companies, nonprofits and universities. Follow her @WendyHelfenbaum.



How to find great sources



TAMI KAMIN MEYER

Freelance Writer

Congratulations! Your dream publication just accepted your article query, so now it's time for research. Often, that includes interviews of experts and everyday folks whose contributions can transform a piece from flaccid to fab. Finding and speaking with just the right people is critical.

Of course, sources aren't lining up at your door, waiting for their opportunity to speak. You, the writer, have to find them.

You likely have methods for locating people to interview for articles. We spoke with eight ASJA members who shared their best tips for finding sources.

»» Tami Kamin Meyer is an Ohio attorney and freelance writer. Her byline has appeared in *Forbes*, *MarketWatch*, *Cannabis & Tech Today*, *Next Avenue*, *Your Teen*, *Ohio Magazine*, and more. She is ASJA's Social Media Chair and tweets as @girlwithapen.



» Sources aren't lining up at your door,
waiting for their opportunity to speak.
You, the writer, have to find them.



Jen Billock, Chicago

Although Jen Billock has been an active member of ASJA since 2017, her full-time freelance status began in 2014. She says she spends a lot of time finding sources through mutual connections, which evolve from Google searches. She also surfs Facebook to glean potential candidates for her pieces, a social media platform she uses far more often than Twitter.

It's important to include diverse sources, Billock adds. She suggests locating aggregate lists of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as well as women and any other minority group.



Randy Dotinga, San Diego, Calif.

"Google is your best friend when seeking sources," says Randy Dotinga. The former ASJA President, who has been a member since 2000, says that despite writing countless articles in the past two decades, "I'm not good about keeping a Rolodex. Google is my Rolodex."

Dotinga says sometimes he researches his older articles to find people he's interviewed before. He also likes that Google offers millions of digitized books, a method he uses to find authors to speak with for articles.

Dotinga suggests checking articles on topics similar to yours to determine if any of its experts are ideal for your piece. He also reaches out to PR people as they often have contacts with experts appropriate for his works. And Dotinga finds business associations to be fertile grounds for locating sources.

"There is a business association for everything," says Dotinga. "They have an Executive Director and specialists."

»» Dotinga likes that Google offers millions of digitized books, a method he uses to find authors to speak with for articles.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR FINDING SOURCES

- ▶ Google searches
- ▶ Facebook connections, forums, and groups
- ▶ Twitter
- ▶ Public relations professionals
- ▶ Business associations
- ▶ www.hunter.com
- ▶ Webinars
- ▶ ProfNet



- ▶ LexisNexis
- ▶ Findarticles.com
- ▶ Google Scholar
- ▶ LinkedIn
- ▶ Interviewee recommendations
- ▶ University experts
- ▶ Help a Reporter Out (HARO)
- ▶ Fellow authors and writers



Debbie Abrams Kaplan, New Jersey

Debbie Abrams Kaplan has been a self-employed writer for 19 years, with the last 10 being a full-time effort. She joined ASJA 15 years ago.

Abrams Kaplan, who focuses her writing on medicine, supply chain management, and finance, says Facebook has proven fertile ground for article sources. For example, she relies on the Facebook pages of advocacy and support groups for patients with specific afflictions as well as support group forums. She has also found success finding sources when she posts her source request on those various groups' Twitter pages.

A site she utilizes to obtain people's email addresses is www.hunter.io, which she found through fellow ASJA member Jennifer Goforth Gregory.

Abrams Kaplan offers advice to writers regarding their efforts to locate sources. "I watch a lot of webinars without a story in mind, then get ideas," she says. Experts that speak at the webinars give her a jumpstart on research if the exercise results in an assignment.

»» "I watch a lot of webinars without a story in mind, then get ideas."

DEBBIE ABRAMS KAPLAN



Estelle Erasmus, New Jersey

Estelle Erasmus has been a member of ASJA since 1997 and is the proud owner of a 2003 book published by the organization about working as a freelance writer. She referred to page 105 of that book to learn that back in 2003, source suggestions included Profnet.com (still in existence) and Media Map (no longer viable). The book also suggested writers find sources by consulting with LexisNexis (for law-related pieces) and Findarticles.com.

Today, Erasmus uses Twitter to find sources, tagging posts with #journorequest. She also contacts her Facebook friends, as many are authors and writers and are likely to have contacts Erasmus will find useful. Google Scholar is another trusted source.

Erasmus urges writers not to interview someone without doing their due diligence. Think about "what makes the source credible," before extending the request to speak with them, she says.



John Peragine, Davenport, Iowa

John Peragine has been a member of ASJA for the past five years. He calls LinkedIn his “go-to” to find sources for articles about trendy topics and surfs Twitter when seeking interviewees to share their opinion.

His advice to writers seeking sources, especially public figures, celebrities, and other people of influence: “Don’t be afraid. The worst thing you will hear is ‘no.’ I once interviewed John Edwards (former Democratic presidential candidate and the Democratic nominee for Vice President in 2004) standing at a urinal. Not the best place—but I got my quote.”

»» “Don’t be afraid.
The worst thing you
will hear is ‘no.’

JOHN PERAGINE





Megy Karydes, Chicago

Megy Karydes, a member of ASJA since 2012, balances her professional life between freelance writing and business consulting. For Karydes, PR pros have proven a goldmine of sources over the years. While she acknowledges other writers don't always share her affinity for this group, she provides public relations services to businesses and knows how PR people work.

"There are some (PR representatives) who are annoying, but often they find great sources for me," she says. She especially relies on her PR connections for experts when she's under a tight deadline. "They have sources or networks with other contacts. They are also responsive because that's their job," she says.

Another method Karydes uses to find sources is asking people she interviews if they have recommendations on others who might be appropriate for her article. "That's garnered a lot better response than (business) associations lately," she says. "Not only do I get qualified sources, they're more likely to speak to me since someone in their own network referred them to me."

Another tip: Be smart about starting a Rolodex with sources as soon as you can. Karydes maintains an Excel spreadsheet of people she has interviewed. She also writes a monthly email newsletter and asks sources if they would like to receive it. In it, she often puts out a call for story ideas and sources.



Kate Silver, Chicago

Kate Silver has been an ASJA member for a decade. Three years before joining, she began her career as a full-time freelance writer.

A generalist, Silver says she found sources for one of her most labor-intensive articles in a combination of ways. She spoke with people she knew, conducted online research, and emailed potential sources. She also emailed the PR departments of different universities to connect with anatomy professors for the piece. "I had well over 12 sources," she says.

Social media has proven fertile ground for Silver when it comes to finding sources. She also uses free source sites such as ProfNet and HARO.



Susan Johnston Taylor, Austin, Texas

Susan Johnston Taylor has been a full-time freelance writer since 2008 and joined ASJA the following year. She relies on Crowdsourcing Central on Facebook to locate sources.

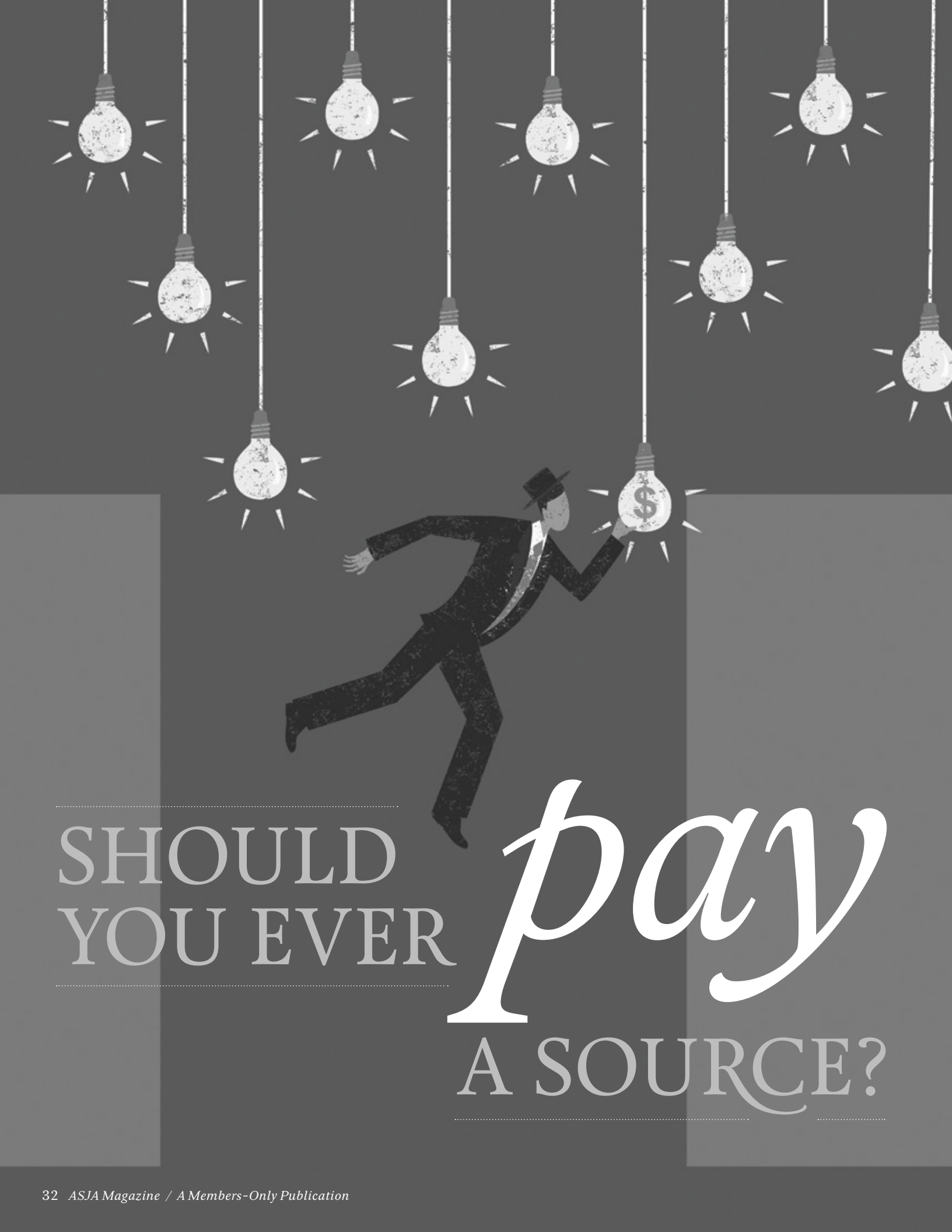
"It's sort of like what [Help a Reporter Out (HARO)] used to be 10-12 years ago when it originated as a Facebook group for helping journalists find sources and before HARO got acquired," she says.

Johnston Taylor also posts on Twitter while looking for sources and includes #JournoRequest in her tweet. "People reach out to me to pitch themselves or someone they know, and it's often not the same people using HARO, although there is some overlap," she says.

For real people sources, Johnston Taylor "utilizes Twitter's advanced search for first-person pronouns like 'I' or 'me' and a keyword of what I'm looking for." She discovered that strategy from an article posted on Medium by *New York Times* senior staff editor Daniel Victor several years ago.

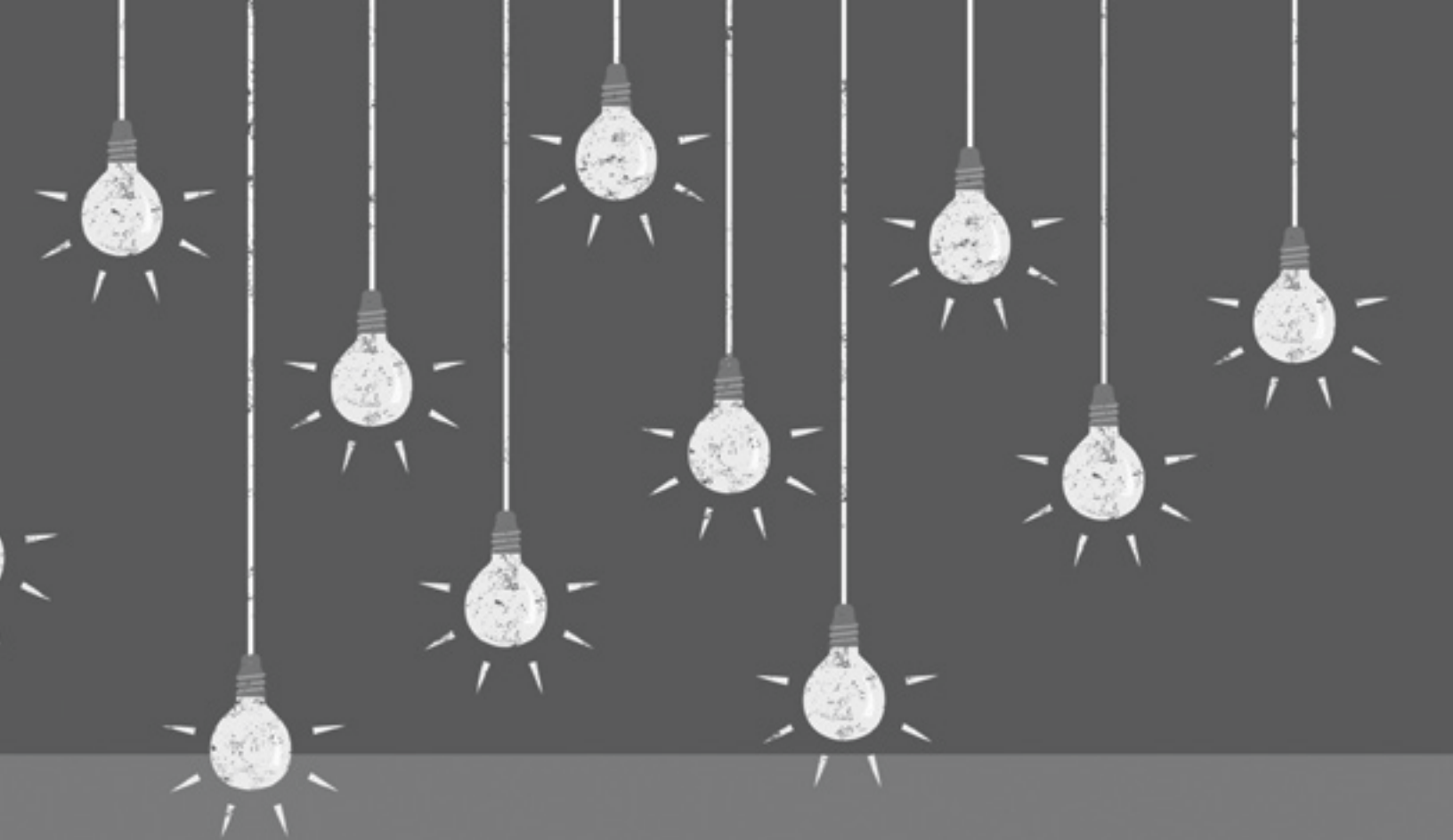
Diversity in her sources is of paramount importance to Johnston Taylor. "Diversity doesn't just mean people of color or in different places, but it can also mean neurodiversity (people whose brains are wired differently), gender diversity, etc. There can also be a tendency to quote non-white or neurodiverse sources on issues of race or neurodiversity, but their expertise isn't limited to their point of difference."

»» Diversity in her sources is of paramount importance to Johnston Taylor.



SHOULD
YOU EVER

pay
A SOURCE?



When ASJA member Debbie Abrams Kaplan called a source for a medical journal feature on multiple myeloma—a type of cancer—the doctor she wanted to speak with asked her for \$500 to do the interview.

The New Jersey-based Abrams Kaplan, who writes both journalism and content marketing, balked at the request. She had interviewed the doctor two years prior, and he didn't ask for money then.

"I said, if he was interested in talking with me to share his knowledge with other treating physicians with no compensation, we could set up a time," Abrams Kaplan says. "If not, I wished him well. He didn't respond."

In New York, Lisa Collier Cool has also had sources ask her for money. One woman she wanted to interview for a woman's magazine feature was especially dogged. When Collier Cool said no to cash, the woman came up with other ways to be compensated—a gift card, or a piece of pricey computer equipment. Collier Cool walked away from the interview and found another source that ended up having a better story.

"If publications paid sources, they might be tempted to invent or embellish their material to make it more saleable," Collier Cool says.



DEBORAH LYNN
BLUMBERG

Freelance Writer

>>> To pay or not to pay

In Asia and Europe, some journalists have more relaxed views on paying sources for information. British tabloids have a history of "checkbook journalism," paying money for exclusive rights to information for newspaper stories. In China, the concept of "red-envelope" journalism, or giving cash to sources, is also well documented. But in the U.S., paying sources for interviews is generally frowned upon.

A Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism study found that slightly more than half of U.K. journalists surveyed said they were okay with occasionally paying for information. While in the U.S., just 5% of reporters said they would pay for information only on special occasions.

Still, American TV news shows often do pay licensing fees for access to interviews. A notorious example of that in recent years was when ABC News gave \$200,000 to Casey Anthony while she was under investigation, but before police charged her with killing her daughter. Entertainment news site TMZ also pays for tips and photos. And Gawker has used crowdsourcing platforms to raise money for information, most notably in 2013, for a video of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford smoking crack.

Perhaps in part because of these inflated examples, some sources readily expect journalists to pay up before they talk. And others, such as physicians and certain professionals, may be used to being compensated for side work like consulting and might not understand journalism doesn't work the same way.



>>> **60% of Americans**
think reporters get paid
by their sources either
sometimes or very often.

According to a poll conducted for the
Columbia Journalism Review by Reuters/Ipsos

In fact, many Americans don't understand the process. A poll conducted for the *Columbia Journalism Review* by Reuters/Ipsos found that 60% of Americans think reporters get paid by their sources either sometimes or very often.

"I think there's a lot of confusion out there about the role of journalists," says Adam Penenberg, director of NYU's Online Master's in Journalism Program and an investigative journalist known for breaking the Stephen Glass story for *Forbes*. "My faculty colleagues and I are adamantly opposed to paying sources."

>>> Journalistic integrity

Penenberg included a section on paying sources in the recently revised NYU Journalism Handbook for Students, noting that "no reputable news organization or reporter pays a source for information."

It is possible to take a source out for a meal, or, in special cases, pay the expenses for a source to travel to a reporter, the handbook says. But then, that payment should be disclosed to both editors and the audience, says Penenberg.

"You don't pay because it sets a terrible precedent," says Penenberg. "It would encourage someone to doctor the truth, to exaggerate."

Lynn Walsh, ethics chair for the Society of Professional Journalists, agrees. "The problem really is, will the source skew what they say in one way or another? It brings into question anything the source says and calls into question the journalistic integrity of the article," she says.

However, the topic of paying sources can get a bit murky when it comes to content marketing or writing copy like blogs for corporations selling a service or a product. Some believe that since the content's goal is to help sell a product, a source that lends their voice should be compensated. Others are adamant it's not right to pay.

Diane Faulker, a ghostwriter and content marketing strategist based in Jacksonville, Fla., is in the "no money for sources" camp regardless of whether it's journalism or content marketing. With content marketing, she says, "you have to remember that writers are not getting paid enough to pay their sources."

The free advertising that sources get for their own business and personal platforms increases their authority and status. That's payment enough, says Faulker.

Walsh says that any marketing content prepared with material from a paid source should have a disclosure stating that the source received payment.

>>> Workarounds

With book writing, some non-fiction and memoir authors do decide to give money to people who've contributed to their project. Rebecca Skoot, author of the bestselling book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, for one, set up a charitable foundation to help Lacks' descendants and donated book proceeds to the foundation.

Los Angeles ASJA member Vanessa McGrady, author of the memoir *Rock Needs River*, gave her daughter's birth parents 15% of her advance and plans to provide them with an additional 15% of royalties from book sales. "They're part of a marginalized population, homeless, and they deserved a cut," she says.

Walsh says that as a reader, she would also want to know that people appearing in a memoir were paid. In her work as a journalist,

»» “You don’t pay because it sets a terrible precedent. It would encourage someone to doctor the truth, to exaggerate.”

ADAM PENENBERG



Walsh has had sources who request money. “People have asked me, ‘well, what do I get?’” she says. “It’s up to us to explain how journalism works. If a source won’t talk to you unless you pay, just walk away.”

Penenberg says that it’s possible to do a compelling “write-around” if needed or craft an excellent narrative without ever talking to a critical source. A classic example of this is Gay Talese’s 1966 profile of Frank Sinatra in *Esquire*, “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold,” for which Sinatra declined to be interviewed. More recently, Wright Thompson wrote “The Secret History of Tiger Woods” for ESPN without a word from the famed golf player.

When Abrams Kaplan’s source asked her for payment, her tactic was to explain that paying sources isn’t a typical practice for journalistic pieces. She also told the doctor that the journal didn’t have any budget to pay its sources.

Collier Cool often tells potential interviewees who request money that her understanding is that only tabloids pay sources for celebrity gossip items. “After I say that, they’re usually embarrassed and apologize for making the request,” she says.

But perhaps Penenberg says it best. “Just don’t pay,” he says. “Who has the money anyway?”

Deborah Lynn Blumberg is a Houston-based freelance writer specializing in health and wellness and business and finance. She has written for publications and clients, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Barron’s*, *MarketWatch*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times* T Brand Studio, JPMorgan Chase, the American Heart Association, and the YMCA. Previously, she was a reporter for Dow Jones/The Wall Street Journal. She’s the co-president of the Texas ASJA chapter. deborahlynnblumberg.com; @dlblumberg.



PITCH PERFECT

If you are moving from journalism or corporate marketing, you are likely familiar with the concept of pitching or querying, which is sending ideas for stories to consumer or trade publications. Pitches typically include a story idea you want to write (or have published), with details such as sources, scope and maybe even a quick outline of what you wanted to say.



JENNIFER
GOFORTH
GREGORY

Freelance Writer

In content marketing, things work a bit differently. Brands typically generate their own ideas for content and are not looking for blog, whitepaper or article ideas from freelancers, especially brand new freelancers. They do not want pitches or story ideas. Instead they are looking for freelancers who can join their team and regularly write content for their brand that fits in their likely already established editorial calendar or content strategy.

As a content writer looking to land a new client, you should not send pitches unless specifically requested by that brand. Instead send a Letter of Introduction (LOI). An LOI sells your skills, experience and expertise to the client. And yes, a great LOI sent to the right person can easily be worth \$10K in work or considerably more.

As a content writer looking to land a new client, you should not send pitches unless specifically requested by that brand. Instead send a Letter of Introduction (LOI).

HERE IS MY SAMPLE LOI:

New Message

To

Name

Subject

Introduction

Hi X,

Does your agency [or brand or association or nonprofit or university] use freelance writers?

I am a freelance technology content marketing writer specializing in artificial intelligence, cloud computing, IoT, and security. My clients include IBM, Adobe, Samsung, Verizon, Hewlett Packard, Vonage and Microsoft. Additionally, I worked in the software industry as a X designer/writer for over 10 years, including IBM.

You can see what my editors have said about me on my LinkedIn profile (include link) as well as samples of my work on my website (include link). I have also included links to a few relevant clips below.

I look forward to hearing from you and hopefully working with you in the near future.

Jennifer Goforth Gregory

SEND



Excerpted from
The Freelance Content Marketing Writer: Find your perfect clients, make tons of money and build a business you love by Jennifer Goforth Gregory



Janine Latus

ASJA MEMBER &
VOLUNTEER SINCE: 2010

WRITING SPECIALTY/FOCUS:

I write about art, science, and personalities. The best stories combine all three. But I also give a lot of speeches on the insidious signs of abusive relationships. I can kill a dinner party!

PROUD WRITING MOMENT:

My memoir, which would not have happened without my fellow ASJA members' support and guidance, became an international bestseller. Even better, it won ASJA's Arlene Award for a book that makes a difference in the world.

► *In which publications/outlets have you been published?*

Craftsmanship Quarterly; the alumni magazines for Duke, the University of North Carolina, Duke, Old Dominion, and Denison; and Distinction. In the past, I wrote for O, Parents, Fitness, More, and other publications that no longer exist.

► *How long have you been an ASJA member?*

20 years. Wow!

► *How long have you volunteered for ASJA?*

20 years

► *What kind of volunteer work do you do for ASJA?*

I served as an at-large board member for most of a decade and a year as vice president. I co-chair the annual awards committee and chair the Crisis Coverage Awards: COVID-19 Edition. I have served as a wrangler for VCC, a greeter at conferences, a moderator and panelist, and a magazine copy editor.

► *How much time do you spend per month volunteering for ASJA?*

In the throes of award season, I put in 10 hours, plus/minus. The rest of the year it's dribs and drabs.

► *Why do you volunteer for ASJA?*

I volunteer because I get out of it in proportion to what I put in. Friendships, professional networking, intel about editors and markets, how to write a proposal, how to negotiate a contract—ASJA inspires and informs me. The organization also fights for those of us who make a living as independent writers. I'm just doing my share to keep us all moving forward.

► *How do you fit volunteering in with your work commitments?*

I find this work isolating, so my ASJA commitments are refreshing. They're a chance to talk with peers. They also add structure and deadlines to what can be amorphous days, so I find it not just easy but enriching to volunteer.

► *What are the benefits of volunteering?*

Volunteering keeps me engaged in ASJA. Running the awards programs introduces me to a spectrum of members I might not meet otherwise and excellent writing and intelligent conversations. I would probably set the magazine aside to get to later if I didn't take on some of the copy editing. Volunteering makes my membership far more meaningful.

► *What do you like to do when you're not writing?*

Stand in front of audiences with a microphone in my hand, dance, cook, hike with my most excellent dog. Not all at the same time.



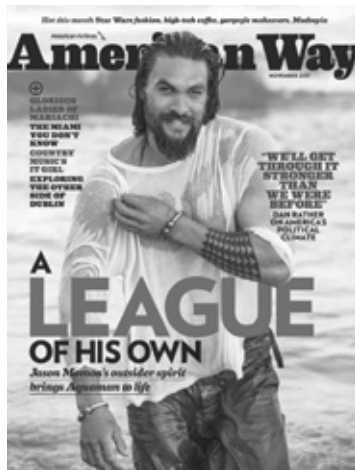
"I volunteer because I get out of it in proportion to what I put in. Friendships, professional networking, intel about editors and markets, how to write a proposal, how to negotiate a contract—ASJA inspires and informs me."

JANINE LATUS



Market Report | AMERICAN WAY

In the pantheon of inflight magazines, *American Way* resides near the very top. The signature publication of the world's largest airline (when ranked by fleet size and the number of passenger miles), AW is one of the few inflights that did not pause publication due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



"The airline decided that since the brand is so iconic, maintaining continuity was essential," explains Managing Editor Fred Gonzalez.

No one could accuse him of an overstatement. Published since 1966, the magazine is seen by 16 million American passengers each month. Since January 2015, *American Way* has been produced by Ink Global, a UK-based company that produces inflights for some of the world's most prestigious carriers.

While the signature publication is placed in all seatbacks on all flights, American also commissions Ink to produce two sister brands: *Celebrated Living*, a bimonthly lifestyle magazine for first and business class passengers, and *Nexos*, a bimonthly Spanish and Portuguese publication carried on routes within Central and South America, Spain, Portugal, and some southern U.S. locations.

Like many of its peers, the mag's front-of-book (FOB) departments are the best entry points for freelancers. For example, **Need to Know** consists of short, timely pieces about interesting happenings in cities that are American destinations. Recent examples include a move by major art museums to offer virtual tours to travelers who would otherwise visit in person, and a new hotel with unusual amenities. The typical length is 100-150 words.

"These are helpful bits of information readers might want to share with friends," says Gonzalez.

On the Spot pieces are evergreen, but occasionally include quirky stories that both inform and entertain. The May issue had an article about an artist who loved painting distant landscapes but couldn't stand the burden of hauling an easel and other supplies. Her solution was to paint miniatures on the inside lids of Altoids tins. She now sells her work online.

The section can also include stories about community fixtures, like a look at older corner markets in New Orleans. On the Spot also runs reviews of popular new books, especially ones with dramatic imagery.

Neighborhood Watch is a subsection of On The Spot that lists four or five interesting or unusual businesses within a defined neighborhood. Think of vegan bakeries or avant-garde art galleries.

On the Spot stories typically range between 300 and 450 words, but can run up to 700.

>> Paul Vachon is a Detroit-based writer and author who writes on Detroit history, Michigan travel, plus general feature stories.



Published since 1966, the magazine is seen by 16 million American passengers each month.

American Way usually runs two to three feature articles per issue, but may include as many as four in the latter half of the year. These are typically assigned to writers with whom the editors have existing relationships, but pitches are accepted. Like *FOB* pieces, features are also destination-oriented. A recent article profiled five notable locals in Miami, including a filmmaker and a Latin singer. Another focused on the plethora of donut shops scattered around Los Angeles. Features typically run from 1,500 to 3,000 words. Images are procured by Ink and are not the writer's responsibility.

American is currently transitioning its overall online strategy. Its recently unveiled site, www.americanway.com, is becoming the primary point of contact with readers. Pieces assigned to appear on the website may subsequently be used to augment the print edition, which will continue in its traditional role. The print edition has roughly a three-month lead time.

"The site will be a continuously updated repository of travel-related information," explains Gonzalez. The website will link to American Airlines' main site, where a passenger can book a flight to a destination they just read about. The idea is to make the content viewable to both passengers and potential passengers, allowing it to serve the airline's mission better.

AMERICAN WAY AT A GLANCE



Pay: \$1/word for stories initially assigned to the print edition and \$0.50 /word for assignments commissioned for the website

Story lengths: 100-150 words for Need to Know, 300-450 (occasionally more) for On the Spot and Neighborhood Watch, 1,500-3,000 for features

Frequency: Monthly

Kill Fee: 50%

Rights: Publisher retains all rights

Send pitches to:

- Need To Know: Jordan Blumetti, jordan.blumetti@ink-global.com
- On The Spot: Jess Swanson, jess.swanson@ink-global.com
- Features: Bill Kearney, bill.kearney@ink-global.com



SHARON
MCDONNELL

Freelance Writer

Wondering How to Find Story Ideas? Wonder Some More!

"Where do you get your story ideas?" has become one of the most popular questions I get from writers starting out. As a full-time freelancer on travel, culture, history, food, drink, pets, and careers since 1993, it's been the easiest part of my writing career. Ideas literally bubble up everywhere. The key is noticing things and people—the odder, the better—asking questions, going to various places and events, and converting it to a story.

What do I mean?

I once turned an insult into a story.

While I was traveling in southern Spain, our tour leader physically hoisted me out of my chair to "make room for our honored guest, a descendant of Washington Irving, who's making a film and writing a book about him."

WTF? The woman honored was actually doing nothing of the sort; she was in ad sales, descended from a relative of his, and told me if she ever won the lottery, she'd love to make a film about him. Clearly, something had gotten lost in translation, but she sheepishly accepted her VIP treatment and wasn't about to stop it.

But I was curious: Why was the 18th-century American author, famous for *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, so regarded in Spain? I even noticed road signs pointing the way to "Route of Washington Irving," and saw a guidebook about the tourism route created in his honor and fliers about the route.

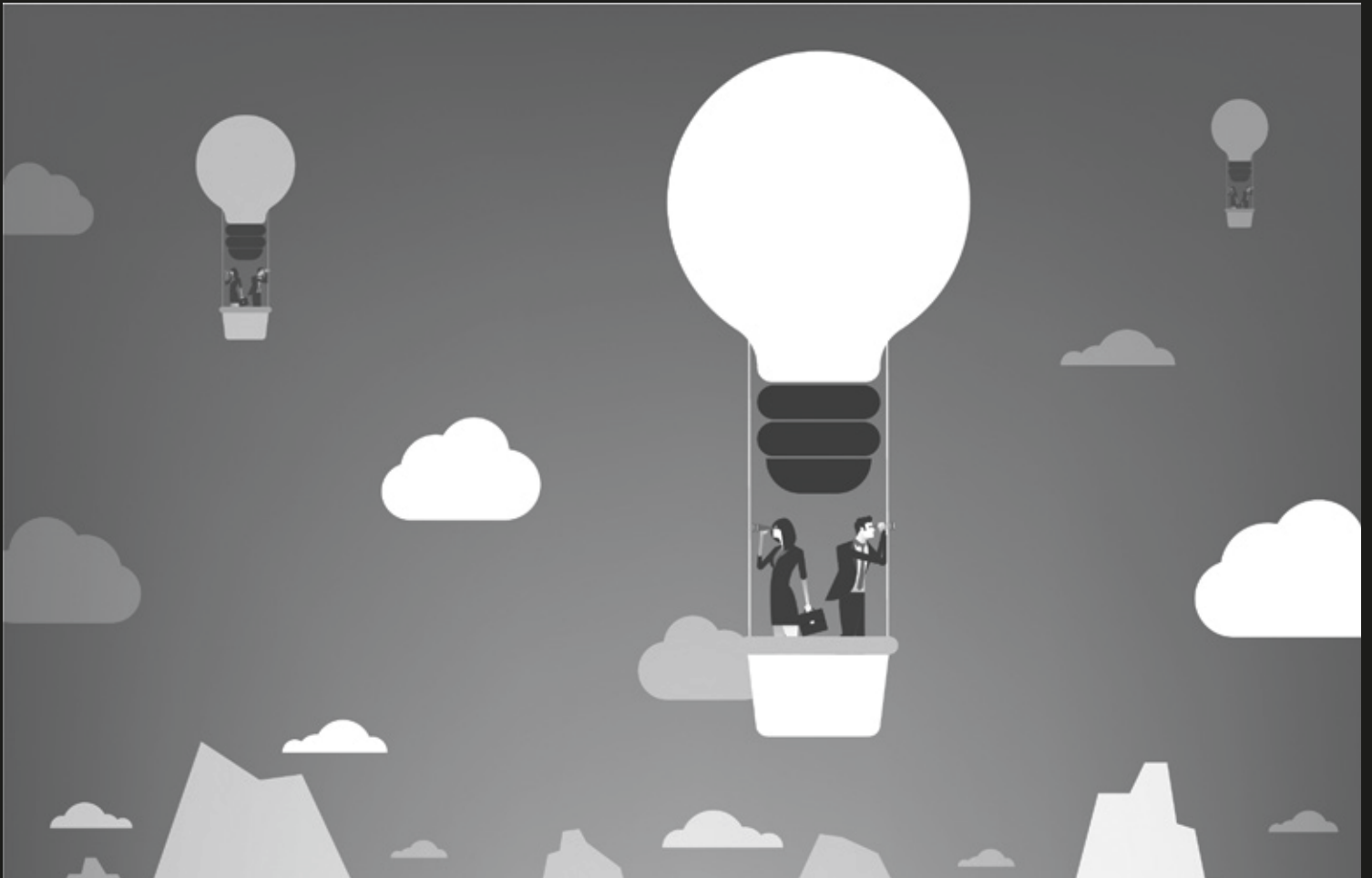
Back in New York, where I lived (and where he was from), decades could pass without my hearing his name. Looking into it, I learned he's beloved in Spain because his book *Tales from the Alhambra* was the first to make Spain famous as a tourist destination worldwide—and he was the first U.S. Ambassador to Spain who spoke Spanish. Who knew?

I sold a profile about him, the tourism route, and his historic home in Westchester, N.Y., to an association magazine. I sold two more stories: a short on his home to a regional travel magazine and a feature on Spain's Irving trail to an upstate New York newspaper.

I wondered why my waitresses were wearing plaid.

In St. Lucia, my hotel waitresses wore plaid, a design I'd always associated with Scotland. I then read a passage on the menu that said it was called madras, was very popular in the Caribbean, and was named after Madras, a city in India. But why? This wasn't a particularly Indian island, like Trinidad.

Curious, I researched it—and discovered a tangled tale about Colonialism, trade, and the fact that madras evolved into a symbol of Creole identity, featuring prominently in several islands' national costume. I sold my story on the history of madras textiles in the Caribbean to a cruise line's in-cabin book.



I found something unusual was widespread.

In a town in Sicily, I heard locals decorated streets with “flower carpets” for a religious holiday. Huh? Years later, I heard a town in Guatemala held a spectacular Easter Week celebration, which featured “flower carpets” blanketing streets, recreated daily after processions trampled them. *Déjà vu*, I thought.

A year later, I browsed a years-old travel magazine and spotted a throwaway sentence about “flower carpets” in South India. Bingo! Three is the magic number in journalism, signifying a trend. I researched it, found to my surprise more examples from Spain to Belgium, and sold a roundup—a category beloved by many editors—to *ArchitecturalDigest.com*.

I read an obituary.

Glancing at the obituaries here in California, I was electrified to find a journalism professor in Boston, a former Communist spy in Czechoslovakia who led disinformation campaigns against the West, had died. What did his resume look like and how was he hired, I wondered (as an author of job-hunt books).

I sold my profile of Lawrence Martin-Bittman, who in later life had metamorphosed yet again to become a kindly local artist in a small Massachusetts town, to *Writer's Digest*. Its title (hypey, but not my idea): “The Father of Fake News.”

»» Sharon McDonnell is a travel, culture, history, food, drink, health, and pets writer in San Francisco. Follow her on Instagram at [sharonmcdonnell2](https://www.instagram.com/sharonmcdonnell2) and read her work at <https://sharonmcdonnell.contently.com>.

GET YOUR
DUES FREE!

Know someone who might be eligible to join ASJA?



If you know an associate or professional-level writer who'd benefit from ASJA membership, refer them and enjoy a dues discount when they join! The referral discount is 25% off your membership dues, so if you refer four people your dues are free!

MEMBER BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- ▶ Virtual Pitch Slams
- ▶ ASJA Weekly newsletter
- ▶ Member-only private Facebook group & virtual Zoom chats
- ▶ ASJA monthly magazine
- ▶ New mentorship opportunities
- ▶ Virtual Client Connections

➤ Visit <http://asja.org/Join-or-Renew>