

The Focus Issue



WINTER 2020

02

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

ASJA MAGAZINE

LOOKING AHEAD

*Creating a Business
Plan for 2020*



>> ALSO INSIDE New Year, New You // Recession-Proof Your Business //
I Fought the Law // Business Goals for 2020 // A Day in the Life

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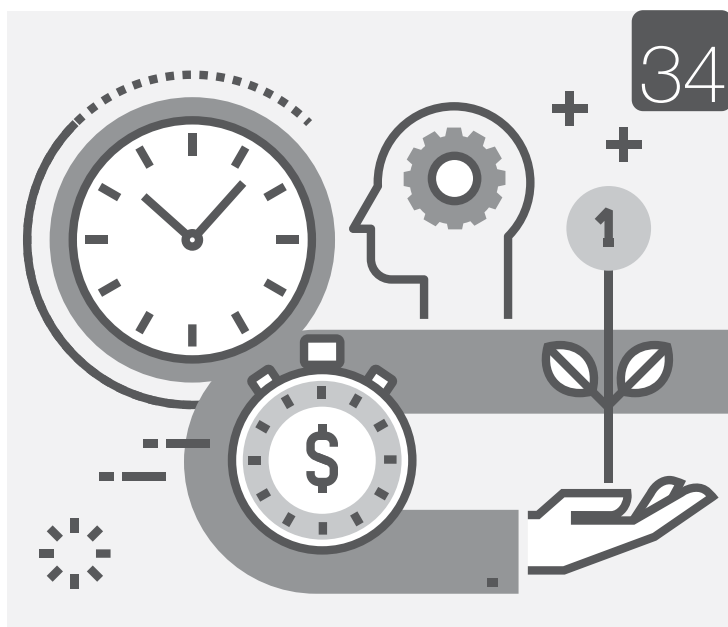
by Wendy Lyons Sunshine



ASJA MAGAZINE

Quarterly / No. 2

*The Official Publication
of the American Society of
Journalists and Authors*



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Founded in 1948, the American Society of Journalists and Authors is the nation's professional association of independent and entrepreneurial nonfiction writers. ASJA is a primary voice in representing freelancers' interests, serving as spokesperson for their right to control and profit from the uses of their work wherever it appears. ASJA and the ASJA Charitable Trust bring leadership in establishing professional and ethical standards, as well as in recognizing and encouraging the pursuit of excellence in nonfiction writing. Since 2010, the ASJA Educational Foundation has been offering programming that covers all aspects of professional, independent writing for both established and aspiring writers. ASJA headquarters is in New York City.

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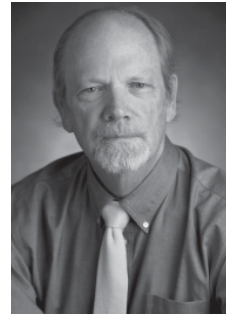
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CHAIR Laura Laing



From the President's Desk



MILT TOBY

*Freelance Writer
and ASJA President*

NOW, MORE THAN EVER

During more than a decade representing inmates awaiting execution on Kentucky's Death Row, I usually carried a copy of the U.S. Constitution with me. The protections against unreasonable search and seizure, the right to effective counsel, and the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment in the Bill of Rights often were a literal matter of life or death to my clients.

As a journalist and author, on the other hand, my interest in the Constitution revolves around the copyright provisions in Article I, Section 8: "The Congress shall have Power . . . To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries." The framers of the Constitution considered copyright important enough to include in the first Article of the document. More than two centuries later, this clause continues to protect my writing and that of my colleagues and friends who do creative work for a living.

When I taught equine law courses in the Equine Industry Program at the University of Louisville's College of Business, I gave each of my students a bound, pocket-sized version of the Constitution (\$1 apiece at Amazon). One of my students wound up pursuing a Master of Arts in Magazine, Newspaper, and Online Communications at Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications. She got her degree and now is working on the staff of a national Thoroughbred racing magazine.

During a media law class at Syracuse, her instructor asked—half-joking, I suspect, because he thought he knew the answer—if anyone had a copy of the Constitution. My student still had the copy that I'd given her a couple of years earlier, and she produced it to the collective amazement of her classmates and her professor, who was making a point about the relationship between the Constitution and media.

"We might not carry a copy of the Constitution with us every day as I did a few years ago, but we carry the language, and just as important the intent, of the First Amendment every time we put words to a keyboard or a piece of paper."

In one context or another, depending on my various roles as a criminal defense attorney, teacher, journalist, and author, the Constitution has been important to me. Today, with the press and journalists under constant attack from an administration that considers reporters enemies of the people, we need the Constitution—and an understanding of what it means—now more than ever.

The First Amendment was ratified in 1791 along with the other nine amendments making up the Bill of Rights: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Most of us probably know the words, or at least an approximation of them, but what do we understand?

James Madison considered the final version of the speech and press clauses to be too abstract to be useful in the real world. His proposal—"The people shall not be deprived or abridged of their right to speak, to write, or to publish their sentiments; and the freedom of the press, as one of the great bulwarks of liberty, shall be inviolable."—was modified in the House of Representatives, however, and then modified again in the Senate. A committee finally approved the language as we know it.

I had two semesters of Constitutional Law with an extraordinary professor, John Garvey, who since has written extensively about the First Amendment. I disagreed with some of

what Garvey had to say about the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, but I came away with a well-grounded understanding of why I disagreed. Decades later, I still struggle at times with the intent of the framers, sorting out the differences between what they said and what they meant.

Those inquiries got significantly easier a few months ago, on Constitution Day, when the Library of Congress launched a new website dedicated to the "Constitution Annotated." For over a century, the Constitution Annotated (officially the "Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation") has been the authoritative source explaining how the Supreme Court has interpreted the Constitution over the years. Accessible at constitution.congress.gov, the website has advanced search tools and a user-friendly interface that makes the 3,000-page Constitution Annotated more accessible than ever before. It's worth a look, or several, if you're interested in the history of the Constitution and what it means to our country.

We might not carry a copy of the Constitution with us every day as I did a few years ago, but we carry the language, and just as important the intent, of the First Amendment every time we put words to a keyboard or a piece of paper. We can do what we do because a handful of men tasked with forming a country had the foresight to recognize the importance of free speech and a free press. We owe a debt to those men and a profound responsibility to future generations of journalists to protect the First Amendment.

*From the Editor*

THE FOCUS ISSUE

STEPHANIE
VOZZA*Freelance Writer
and ASJA Editor*

Did you set a New Year's resolution? We live in a world that loves the idea of new and improved, which is why resolutions are socially accepted and encouraged. Unfortunately, fewer than 10 percent of us keep them. Experts suggest that it's because our brains are wired to like the idea of new and improved, too. It's much more fun to chase a shiny new goal than to finish the one we started.

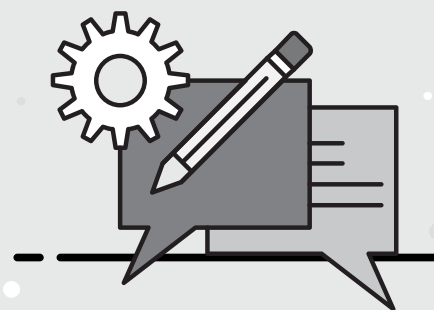
Whether or not you make a personal resolution, consider setting one for your business. This issue is filled with ideas and inspiration. From goals and business plans to healthy habits and more, your fellow members have penned amazing advice inside these pages that can put you on track to having your best year yet. (And if you need a little extra motivation, Wendy Helfenbaum—aka “The Job Fairy”—does just that in “The Last Word.”)

Research shows that you're more likely to stick to resolutions you make public. Why not head over to the forum and share the changes you plan to make for 2020? One of the best benefits of ASJA is the support and encouragement we can get from our peers.

Here's to your success in the New Year!



*Want to write
for your peers?
magazine@asja.net*



NEW ASJA MEMBERS!

JANUARY 2020

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS

Salynn Boyles,
Nashville, Tenn.

Sara Clemence,
La Jolla, Calif.

Masada Siegel,
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Kathleen Carroll,
Montclair, N.J.

Ann Griffith,
Pasadena, Calif.

Joanna Theiss,
Washington, D.C.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Katie Jackson,
Opelika, Ala.

James Patterson,
Washington, D.C.

Lisa Watts,
Durham, N.C.

Karen Whiting,
Rockledge, Fla.

CORRECTION: In the October 2019 issue, ASJA member Claire Zulkey's name was misspelled in the article "Pitch Perfect." We regret the error.



ASJA >>>>>> Membership Benefits

KNOW SOMEONE WHO MIGHT
BE ELIGIBLE TO JOIN ASJA?
SEND THEM OUR WAY!

> *Below are some of
ASJA's Member Benefits:*

VISIT ASJA.ORG/MEMBERS

► Want one-on-one appointments with editors and agents? That's a Member Benefit at ASJA's Annual New York Conference and at some regional conferences. These **Client Connections** are among the most popular of ASJA Member Benefits.

► Periodically, members connect with editors via ASJA's **Virtual Client Connections**. ASJA also offers **Virtual Pitch Slams**, interactive conference calls during which members get their story pitches heard live with feedback provided by a top editor.

► And members enjoy multiple networking opportunities during ASJA's **Conferences**, or via **Special Interest Groups (SIGS)**. Members share experiences and tips on **ASJA Forums** – an online community.

► **ASJA Weekly** is an electronic newsletter, updating events and news about the freelance experience.

AND THERE'S MORE:

ASJA Direct, periodic calls that cover the business and craft of freelance writing.

ASJA Paycheck, rights-and-fees database, which collects member reports of payments and terms to help them negotiate from a position of strength.

ASJA Press Card that enables entry to many museums, conferences, and other press events.

Freelance Writer Search, where members can access new job opportunities.

Discounts to ASJA's conferences, *Publishers Weekly*, Delta Air Lines, and Avis Car Rental.

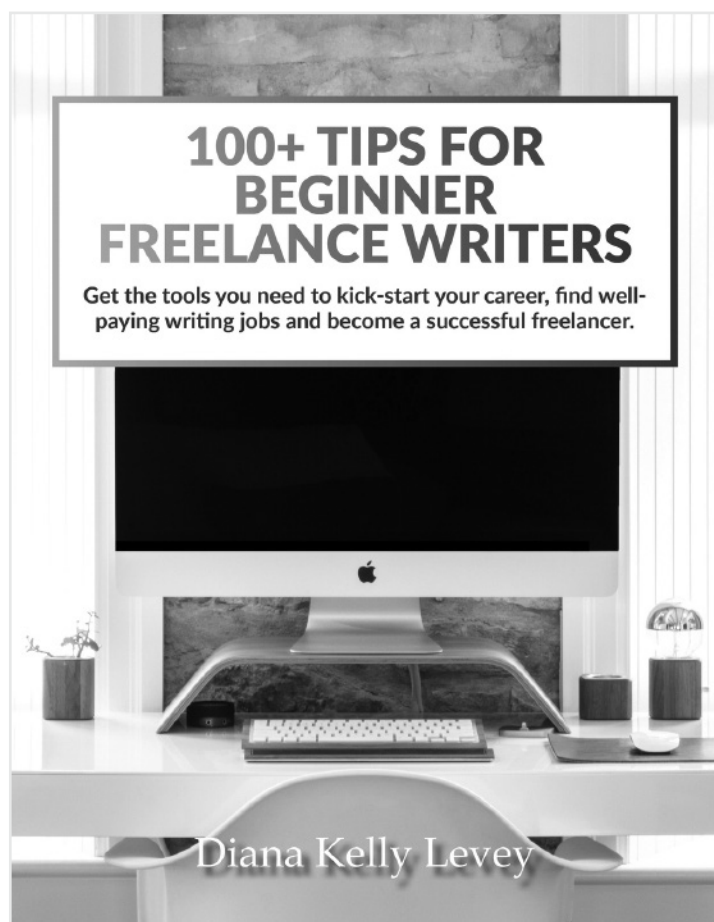
ASJA Magazine, our state-of-the-industry publication providing information, inspiration, and motivation.

Emergency Fund, for members in need.



MEMBER NEWS

»»»» Book News



Diana Kelly Levey self-published her first e-book, *100+ Tips for Beginner Freelance Writers*. The 70-page e-book gives freelance writers the tools they need to kick-start their careers, find well-paying writing jobs and become successful freelancers. Freelancers and newbie writers can learn how to get started, set rates, run a business efficiently, build an online presence and utilize technology to maximize productivity.

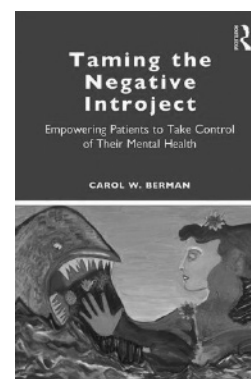
Following a tip from fellow ASJA member Claire Zulkey posted on the forum, **Lawrence Tabak** began working on a piece on Wisconsin's incentives to support a major industrial development by Taiwanese iPhone manufacturer Foxconn for *Belt* magazine.

The first piece caused a bit of a splash, with excerpts read into the record during the legislative debate over the deal. Tabak went on to write two more major features for *Belt*, one of which went viral, becoming by far the most read piece ever on the site. The series received a "Best of 2017" from *Longreads*.

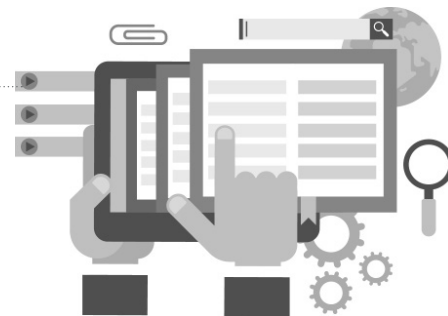
Tabak published a fourth long feature in *The American Prospect* and another major feature in Madison's progressive newspaper *The Capital Times*. Recently, he put together a book proposal and received an offer from the University of Chicago Press, Tabak's first significant nonfiction book deal.

New York-based journalist **Alina Tugend** recently had an op-ed published in the *Los Angeles Times*, her family's hometown newspaper. Entitled "My father fled Nazi Germany. His homeland remembers him with a marker inscribed 'Here lived'" the story was well-received and advocated by editors who gave the piece three-quarters of a page and two large photos. Tugend says there was a great response to the story both from people she didn't know and friends, many of whom had been long out of touch, as well as distant relatives who had known her family.

Carol W. Berman's book *Taming the Negative Introject: Empowering Patients to Take Control of Their Mental Health* was published by Routledge Press in June 2019. In it, Berman describes how psychotherapists can help patients control the self-sabotaging element of their unconscious minds.

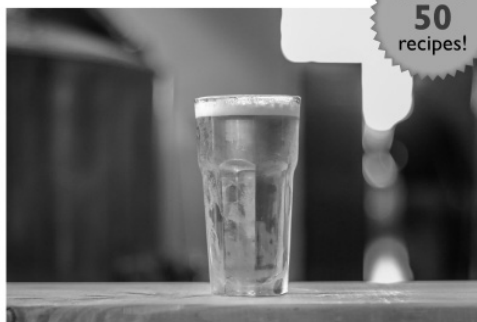


Got news to share with ASJA?
Submit your items at asja.org/members.



THE JOY OF **cider**

ALL YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT
DRINKING AND MAKING HARD CIDER



Includes
50
recipes!



Jeanette Hurt

In August 2019, **Jeanette Hurt** published her latest book, *The Joy of Cider: All You Ever Wanted to Know About Drinking and Making Hard Cider*. Part of Skyhorse Publishing's "Joy of" Series, it's being called "a fun, festive guide for both the enthusiasts and bar professionals," and "a smart, pop culture-driven look at the hard cider revolution—the what, how, and why of this fantastic beverage."

Proving it's never too late to jump on a trend, **Kate Hanley** launched a short, daily podcast called "How to Be a Better Person," based on her book of the same name. With what one reviewer calls "bite-sized, actionable goodness," Hanley aims to help you end the day better than you started it with advice that's fun, not preachy.

Thomas Lee announced the launch of his ghostwriting company Active Voice Editorial Services, turning ideas into sophisticated, highly readable manuscripts that honor the author's vision and voice.

LISTEN UP!



Join us for the newly launched 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
Lead Writer and Editor of
Solo-ish, a WaPo blog

ASJA DIRECT

INSIDE INTEL ON GETTING
PUBLISHED AND PAID WELL

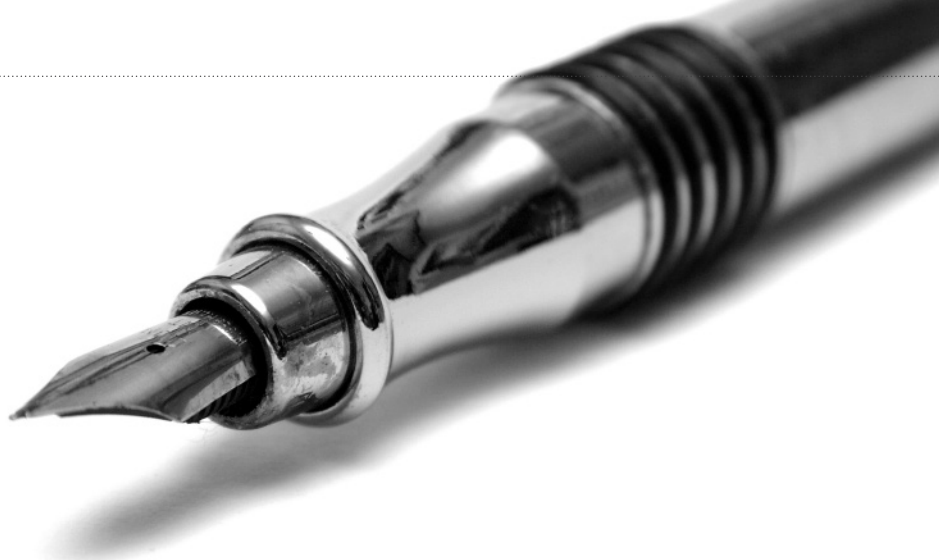
HOW TO ACCESS THE PODCASTS

>>> 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

HR TECH CONFERENCE

Various pieces

9,000 words

Total fee: \$9,000.00

Client hired me to cover their two-day conference. I wrote a blog post, four case studies and an article about a panel discussion. They put me up at the Ritz, where the event was held and paid for all of my meals. It was a great gig and they were wonderful and easy.

Feedback: 10

NEW HOPE

Article, custom publication

Retainer, \$1,500 a month

Total fee: \$6,000.00

Was very excited about doing the ASJA VCC pitch slam. A year later the editor came back and remembered me and asked to put me on retainer and was excited to have a new steady client. I was told it would take 60 days to get paid. I sent in the paperwork in June. I was supposed to get paid for the first time in August. It's now October and I still haven't been paid. Really frustrated. I had to stop work until I now get the more than \$5,000 I'm owed. Editor has been nice to work with but this delay on payments is awful.

Feedback: 1

TOWN & COUNTRY

Article, consumer publication

10-page project

Total fee: \$8,000.00

Feedback: 7

INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT FIRM

Corporate writing/editing

3,000 words

Total fee: \$6,000.00

Sometimes slow with revisions, otherwise this client is great to work with.

Feedback: 9

DELTA SKY

Article, consumer publication

650 words

Total fee: \$650.00

I was assigned a 650-word story for Delta Sky as part of one of the city features (they do a back of the book feature on a particular city or market in most issues). The sources to feature were agreed upon ahead of time and I received no edits to complete. The editor was a delight.

Feedback: 10

THE RHEUMATOLOGIST

Article, trade publication

1,100 words

Total fee: \$825.00

Medical journal reviews can be very technical and footnote format very specific but the editor is a pleasure to work with.

Feedback: 9

CARLETON VOICE

Article, custom publication

2,000 words

Total fee: \$2,500.00

Alumni magazine. I proposed story to editor. Good editing and prompt payment.

Feedback: 9

BIMONTHLY MEDICAL ONLINE NEWSLETTER

Article, consumer publication

Three articles; \$1.20/word

Total fee: \$3,625.00

I've been writing for this publication for 15 years, and it's everything an article-writing experience should be. I fax an invoice twice during development, and acceptance is immediate when I fax the final invoice. Payment is in my bank sometimes within minutes, but no later than within a few hours. Publisher sends funds via Zelle—a transfer service between banks. It's free. No one pays. Not the sending bank, not the receiving bank, not the client, not the publisher, not me. Why don't magazines do this? For this publication, my services include copyediting and substantive medical editing of articles written by others (\$75/hr). For this issue I earned \$500.

Feedback: 10

AARP

Article, custom publication

400 words

Total fee: \$800.00

Article terms: Acceptance

This editor is not a big communicator. Gave very little guidance in the assignment letter. Asked me only one question about the piece after it was in edits. I assume it's accepted because it looks like it's been edited. I haven't been paid yet. He made no comment about whether it was good/bad/meh.

Feedback: 8



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

THE EPOCH TIMES

Article, consumer publication
1,000 words

Total fee: \$250.00

This market pays monthly, so whatever work you do during the month gets paid at the end of that month. In some cases, your work may have been published by the time you get paid. *The Epoch Times* has an ideological bent and is more conservative than I am. That said, the features section I wrote for is politically non-sectarian and is well edited. The only downside is the low pay.

Feedback: 10

MOVIE PRODUCTION COMPANY

One-year renewal of film option on nonfiction book

Total fee: \$5,000.00

This is the seventh renewal of the producer's film option on my book. Maybe the movie will actually get made sometime. Producer says this is the year.

Feedback: 10

CNBC

Article, consumer publication
One post

Total fee: \$750.00

Feedback: 9

OSHI HEALTH

Article, consumer publication
500 words

Total fee: \$350.00

The process was very smooth. This client came to me via ASJA's VCC and told me to expect ongoing assignments. That hasn't happened yet but I have no complaints about the process.

Feedback: 8

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA LEARNINGLIFE

Teaching
Three-hour writing workshop

Total fee: \$350.00

LearningLife is a continuing education program. I have led this writing workshop before and needed minimal preparation.

Feedback: 10

REALTOR MAGAZINE

Article, trade publication
1,000 words

Total fee: \$500.00

I've written several pieces for the "Broker to Broker" section of the website. They have a flat fee of \$500 for this section, though other sections vary (for instance, I wrote for the "Success Stories" section and they paid a flat rate of \$300). The editor is friendly and easy to work with. Edits are minimal. Pay can be a bit slow.

Feedback: 8

REALTOR.COM

Article, consumer publication
350 words

Total fee: \$175.00

I write for this site regularly. The editor I write for assigns me article ideas and I pitch my own as well. The work is relatively easy and fun to write. I invoice once a month for everything I've written within that month and they pay within 3 weeks consistently.

Feedback: 9



CALENDAR

SPECIAL EVENT

ASJA 49th Annual Conference

April 19 – 20, 2020

New York Marriott Downtown,
85 West Street at Albany Street

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)



Each month we ask editors the questions writers most want answers to—the answers they need to improve their pitches and growth their businesses. This issue's question is about timing:

Q: How important is timing when it comes to pitches? Is there a best time of the month? Day of the week? Or even the best time of day? And when is the best time to follow up after sending a pitch?



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.

Here is what six editors had to say:

“It’s hard to calendar that. Right before we go to layout we’re really busy but there’s no way a writer would know that. For better or for worse, we’re fairly connected all the time so there is no best time. If I don’t respond, it’s probably because we’re swamped.

“I don’t mind a follow up nudge. I know we want to get answers so we can plan our life and get paid. Wait a week or two unless the story is timely and it fits with something that happened in news. Then wait a day or so and say this is timely.”

— SHARON HOLBROOK managing editor, *Your Teen*

“There is no day of the week or month that is best for pitching us. We assign stories as openings become available in our production calendar. Sometimes we have more availability than others, but in general opportunities are fairly few because we only publish one feature a week (and a number of these each year are spoken for by our early-career fellows).

“I aim to always respond to pitches promptly, and if a freelancer pitches and for some reason doesn’t hear back within about a week, they are welcome to email me at sircarpenter@theopennotebook.com to nudge me. Our submission guidelines are available on our website.”

— SIRI CARPENTER editor-in-chief, *The Open Notebook*

"I'd say 'not very.' Since we're cranking out content daily, the time-of-the-month question isn't usually an issue at CityLab. In my print mag days, there was indeed more of a predictable metabolism to the work cycle, with a post-shipping period that allowed you to recharge, editorially, and spend more time pondering new pitches (and cleaning off your desk). Now every day is a whole publication cycle.

"I have noticed that Friday afternoon pitches tend to be the most likely to be buried and forgotten. Your mileage may vary, but I find that it's a challenge to engage with a potential new story idea at the very end of the workweek, when we're all sort of scrambling to wrap things up, inasmuch as that is possible these days. I'd also avoid emailing your pitch over the weekend; even though we're checking email, it might be begrudgingly. (On the other hand, there's less email traffic to content with...)

"As far as the time of day does. I think early mornings and evenings might be the most effective; these are the shoulder seasons of the workday, when an editor tends to be between tasks.

"The first follow up? I'd give the poor editor at least three days to digest, unless your pitch is truly screamingly urgent. And the first follow-up should be via email. If I don't respond to that one, it's time to bring out the big guns."

— DAVID DUDLEY executive editor, CityLab, *The Atlantic Media*

"To help streamline the pitching process, we've created an editorial mailing list and we send a detailed pitch call to this list one to two times per issue cycle. We publish three times a year, so this newsletter comes out once every four months, on average. We give writers a week to pitch once it goes out, and as long as we get the pitches prior to our deadline, the day or time doesn't matter. Writers can sign up to the list anytime via our website, and it has been a helpful tool for managing pitches."

— EDITORIAL TEAM *The Broccoli*

"As in writing a lede, time is probably the least important element in deciding on sending a pitch to an editor. There is no best time of the month, day of the week or time of day to send a pitch. We have a small editorial staff, so we tend to be busy pretty regularly and even more so during production cycles.

"That said, the best method to pitch a story idea is by email so I can look at it when I do have some down time. I also understand that it's generally considered professional to get back to somebody within 24 hours.

"The one time factor that is relevant is if a story is pitched based on our editorial calendar. If that's the case, I would pitch at least four months in advance of the print date to help ensure that the story you're interested in is still available for assignment."

— ALLAN RICHTER associate publisher & editor, *Discover Life/Energy Times*

"Timing: At least three months in advance of an issue. In terms of time of day, week or month, it doesn't make that much of a difference. I get pitches throughout the day, week and month.

"Follow-up: If you haven't gotten an acknowledgement of receipt from me within two weeks, check back. We have a vigorous spam filter! If you received an acknowledgement of your pitch and I indicated I was interested and/or going to discuss it with our team, and you have not heard back within two weeks, check back.

"If I have indicated that I like your pitch and want to assign it, and it's for an issue that is well off into the future, check back when we are within three or four months of that issue, which is when I'm typically finalizing assignments."

— TOD JONES managing editor, *Costco Connection*

COVER STORY



How to Create a Business Plan for 2020

LOOKING AHEAD>>>>



CAROLYN
CRIST

Freelance Writer

At the beginning of the year, “business planning” can seem like a staid, formal time-suck. Visions of executive summaries and profit-and-loss spreadsheets crowd the mind, inviting us to push off the task until we have more time. Eventually, it falls off the to-do list. For those who have been at the freelance writing game for some time, it may feel boring or unnecessary to write down similar goals year after year.

However, ASJA member Sophia McDonald Bennett sees a big difference between writing a “business plan” and doing “business planning” itself. As she says during presentations about business planning, writers should do what they do best — tell a story. Instead of tweaking a 40-page document that goes unused for the rest of the year, it’s less intimidating (and far more entertaining) to craft a narrative about who you are, what you care about and value, what you want to do and where you’d like the next year to go.



"Writers may not realize it, but we are well-positioned to be successful at business planning," McDonald Bennett says. "It's about telling your story and creating your mission."

— MCDONALD BENNETT

When she moved to full-time freelancing about seven years ago, McDonald Bennett created a business case for herself and her husband so she could quit a full-time job and also pay for daycare. At the beginning, she made detailed lists and spreadsheets, but now she blocks off about 30 minutes in July and December to review her plans for the next six months.

"The twice-a-year practice has helped me to stay on track toward meeting my goals as a writer," she says. "I've transitioned from taking every assignment I could to having enough and being more selective about what I want."

Plan It Your Way



McDonald Bennett recommends following whatever practice works best for you. She enjoys writing out goals by hand and starts by making lists in a notebook before organizing the ideas. One year, she received an adult coloring book for Christmas and decided her business plan would be an art project. She doodled ideas in the margins while she colored the pictures and then pulled them together on a separate page.

To get the ideas flowing, she suggests brainstorming around the typical areas found in a formal business plan, including a mission, goals, finances and marketing. In 2019, for instance, her overall focus shifted to include more self-care and time with family. Now she has a reason to say "no" to certain assignments, add mindfulness to her daily routine and block out time to enjoy moments with her kids.

"My goal in July was to cut down and slow down," she says. "It's not brand new, but I had really burned myself out and decided to become more selective."

In the end, a business plan forces objective introspection about personal aspirations, says Kimberley Grabas of YourWriterPlatform.com. Grabas, who writes about author branding, created a business planning system called *Believe, Plan, Act: A Platform + Productivity Planner for Writers* to help fellow authors nail down mindset and priorities for their marketing. It helps her to schedule, track and evaluate her progress. Plus, it offers a better way to communicate vision to agents, assistants, publishers, potential collaborators and readers.

"Whether you write fiction or nonfiction, are working toward a traditional publishing contract or self-publishing, dedicate the time to write your business plan and review it frequently," she says. "Recognize and filter out distractions so you can concentrate only on those activities that will help you grow."



Create Your Own Metrics

Although she previously wrote a guide on the business of being a writer, Jane Friedman doesn't create a formal business plan for herself. Friedman curates *The Hot Sheet*, a publishing industry newsletter for writers. Instead, she advocates for setting intentions – and outlining which steps must be taken to meet those intentions.

Goal-setting won't increase earnings by 25%, for instance, but specific, small steps will. She suggests revisiting and renegotiating contracts with editors, sending out 50% more pitches to higher-paying markets, or developing a Patreon or subscription newsletter to generate reader income.

"It's much better to focus on what you can control. You can control how much you pitch, how many new article ideas you come up with in a week or how active you are on social media," she says. "You can't control how many contracts or clients you get or final pay rates."

For ASJA member Katherine Reynolds Lewis, this means "balancing the buckets" on a weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis. She marks out the hours for sleep, exercise, conferences, volunteer work and developmental reporting for big projects such as books or feature-length stories.

Reynolds Lewis also plans a major theme for each year. In 2017, she scheduled time to write her book *The Good News About Bad Behavior*. In 2018, she focused on marketing the book. In 2019, she shifted toward speaking engagements and landed 28. For 2020, she plans to speak on 15 stages but charge twice as much. She also wants to develop her next book idea.

"So many freelancers work without a plan, and it's heartbreaking to see that they don't feel like they have any control," she says. "They move from gig to gig instead of using an overarching plan or strategy, and that's nerve-racking and financially unstable."

Better opportunities often take detailed planning and focused networking to lay the groundwork.

"Take time now to think ahead," she says. "Get in the position to take advantage when an opportunity arises that meets your goals."



Carolyn Crist is a freelance journalist based in Georgia. She has worked as a staff reporter for three daily newspapers. You can now find her work in consumer and trade publications such as *AARP*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Atlanta Magazine*, *Anesthesiology News*, *District Administration*, *Georgia Magazine*, *Paste Magazine*, *Reuters*, *Tales of the Cocktail*, *U.S. News & World Report* and *WIRED*.



DRAFT YOUR PLAN

Need inspiration to get started? Mix traditional business plan sections with thought-provoking questions to arrive at the process that works best for you.

SECTIONS

Mission/priorities

Services (Do you want to add blogging? Speaking? Books?)

Financial details and projections

Marketing plan

Sales strategy

QUESTIONS

- What worked this year? What didn't?
- What was your monthly income, and which clients provided what amounts?
- Which clients do you want to keep, and which do you want to shift or drop?
- What priorities matter most for the next year?
- What buckets need to be balanced?

NEW YEAR NEW *You*

Personal Habits that Also Help Your Writing



STEPHANIE
BERNABA
Freelance Writer

Life's not easy. We hear it all the time. And it becomes a lot more difficult at every turn of a new year. You go to sleep on New Year's Eve considering all your failures – what you did wrong, and how you hope to atone for those mistakes in the year to come

It's for that reason, I prefer not to provide you with a list of New Year's "shoulds." You probably put yourself under enough pressure already. What I will do, however, is explain to you what I've done to make my life and, more significantly, my career, work. I've been freelance writing since 2013, and in 2016 I began my own media company, writing, taking pictures and consulting for nonprofits. I've also made every mistake one can make along the way.

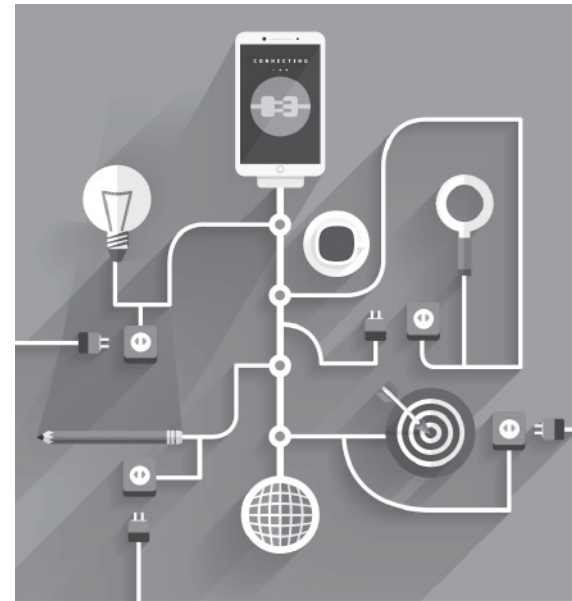
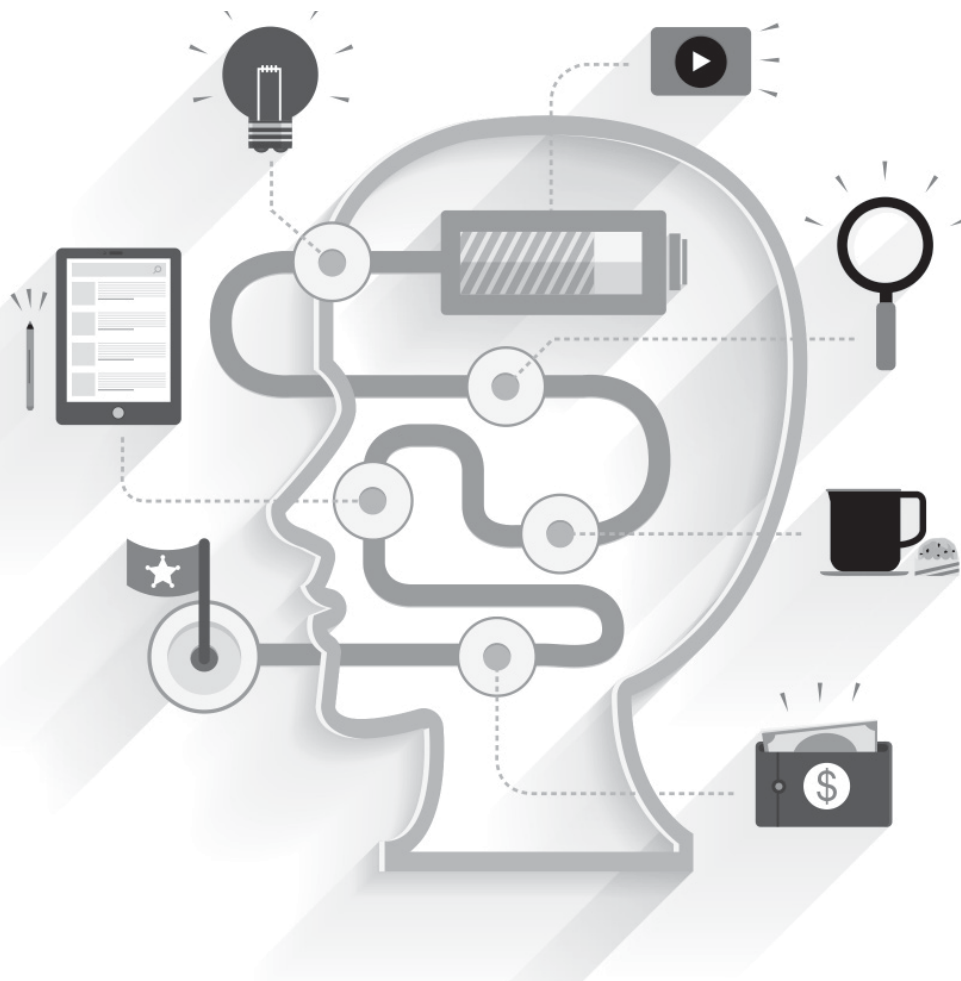


HERE'S HOW I'VE SHAPED UP MY PERSONAL LIFE, WHICH HAS, IN TURN, HELPED MY BUSINESS TO BLOSSOM.

No 1 TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST

Good habits begin at home. How's your sleep, your diet, your routine? Is your family being taken care of? You can't go out there and be the best person you can be if your proverbial (and literal) house is in shambles. Taking care of yourself means drinking water, sleeping well, eating healthy, taking care of your home and cultivating and maintaining supportive relationships. When this happens, everything else falls into place. Your immediate surroundings, including those who are important to you, should come first. No matter what.

Be very mindful of what you consume – visually, auditorily and psychologically. You will get out of your brain whatever you put into it. Be mindful of how you feel after watching, listening to or interacting with your chosen media. What you consume will affect the tone and quality of the work you provide to your audience.



No 2 LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

My work leads me back and forth through three states. I've driven far and wide for interviews, meetings and photo shoots. Sometimes I find it very tiring. In 2019, I resolved to stay closer to home, and with the help of technology I've been able to do just that. Between the Bluetooth in my car, allowing me hands-free conference calls and meetings, and apps such as Skype and Zoom, my journalist life has become a whole lot easier. I've opted to conduct phone and email interviews as opposed to face-to-face meetings when appropriate, and feel I've done a good job developing and maintaining rapport with the subject. Where I used to spend hours in the car, I've now freed up valuable time for creative pursuits. This arrangement also seems to work for my colleagues and subjects, because we're now able to focus on our crafts instead of travel. It has also helped me to manage my domestic life better, as I'm home more often to take care of necessities, including maintenance and chores. It's a win-win.

Journalism is a competitive field, with many talented people vying for limited resources. While it's a great comfort to be part of a network, be careful with whom you share your assignments.

No 3 >>> KEEP YOUR BUSINESS TO YOURSELF (LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY)

I recently happened across a video on Facebook with three older women urging us all, in three-part harmony, to “Keep your business off of Facebook.” In a world of TMI, nosey neighbors and uncredentialed sleuths, if there’s an aspect of your life you’d prefer not to spread publicly, do your part and keep it to yourself. Think ahead to problems that may arise from sharing that information, and what you are prepared to discuss. Though being extremely vulnerable online and giving the world open windows to our hearts and homes can be healing and positively beautiful in certain circumstances, the very same scenarios may give others reasons to avoid, exploit or exclude you.

Journalism is a competitive field, with many talented people vying for limited resources. While it’s a great comfort to be part of a network, be careful with whom you share your assignments. It’s difficult to know whom you can trust, especially when there’s remuneration and notoriety on the line. Use your best judgment. While you may not be able to avoid all unethical situations, you may be able to dodge a few. My husband has a saying he repeats often, “Cover your candle so it continues to shine brightly.”



No 4 >>> BE GRATEFUL

In life and in work, it is imperative to stay grateful, both for what you have as well as the opportunities that have eluded you.

Have you ever been passed up for an opportunity only to realize months later the rejection was a blessing in disguise? If we approach life and work with grateful hearts, we can begin to see and assimilate gratitude into our lives and our writing. We begin to see larger patterns, and can relate to others in more empathetic ways. Stay grateful, and I promised you’ll stop feeling angry or cheated when things don’t go the way you’d hoped.

No 5 >>> STOP WORRYING

Pardon my dog-eared cliché, but Let Go and Let God, or whatever inspiration speaks to you. I’ve worked with professionals who are truly excellent at their crafts, but who worry excessively. That desperation comes through when talking with potential clients.

If you provide a solid product, a simple, “Take a look at my website” will suffice. And don’t discount word-of-mouth. If you’re qualified, people will find out. Also, take rejection or avoidance with grace. There will always be another job. Turn your sails northward. You’ll find a new current soon.



If it won't matter in five years, don't ruminate about it now. You stifle your creativity that way.

No >>> 6 DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

There are a lot of seriously driven, exacting individuals out there. The flipside is there are just as many unnecessarily stressed people out there who equate their worth with their accomplishments. The demands they put upon themselves make it very difficult to have any patience with you. If you find yourself dreading a big meeting with "Mr. Big," or you're wringing your hands feeling like you just can't measure up to your critical colleagues, consider stepping back in favor of a more peaceful landscape. You deserve a work environment that is as stress-free as possible to keep you healthy and attuned to your muse. If it won't matter in five years, don't ruminate about it now. You stifle your creativity that way.

No >>> 7 LET IT GO

If you find yourself in the company of people who don't put you as high on their priority lists as you do them, quietly and gracefully step away. If a person's lack of engagement with you is worrisome, that's a sign your levels of investment don't match. Likewise, if you're in a work situation where you're doing most of the communicating, research or follow up, getting little in return, it's time to consider moving on. Should you decide to do so, you'll make room for new and exciting possibilities.

No >>> 8 RESIST THE URGE TO FIGHT BULLIES

This was a hard lesson of mine. I've always been very justice-oriented, and I'm almost hard-wired to stick up for the underdog. (I watched a lot of Wonder Woman growing up!) But I learned a very valuable lesson observing interactions on Twitter and Facebook. If you confront an online bully, that bully will turn on you faster than a tuna sandwich in July. Nothing productive, healing or therapeutic will result from interactions where people do not communicate face-to-face, with no real desire for change. In life, it will keep you from unnecessary dustups, and in your work, it may cause you to think twice about writing or supporting inflammatory or sensationalistic pieces that can result in anything from mean-spirited comments to tangible threats. Speak your piece, but always have facts to back it up. And never dish it out if you can't take it. Many journalism careers have been compromised, and even lost, because of a few wayward words.



No. 9 CHOOSE A HOBBY – OR SEVERAL

One great source of joy in my adulthood has been my hobbies. I personally believe every writer should have at least one that has nothing at all to do with writing. My hobbies are music, photography and biking. They stimulate my mind and (sometimes) yield beautiful results. You simply cannot sit at a desk writing for 40+ hours a week. Not only will you grow bored, tired and possibly resentful; you'll lose your *joie de vivre*—joy of living. Find an activity that brings you happiness and learn it, study it, live it. And bring someone along with you if you can. These activities will open your mind, shift your perspective and broaden your horizons, giving you novel experiences and inspiration from which to draw in your writing.

No. 10 BE NICE TO EVERYONE

Have you ever been in a room with someone with whom you immediately did not click? Have you ever sat in a group and found one person undeniably annoying? Has it ever turned out that the person just happens to be the boss's son, the CEO's daughter or your kid's new teacher? Well, hold it in, smile and introduce yourself, as much as it may pain you to do so. Your next gig may be in their hands.

» Stephanie Bernaba has been writing personally since she was three apples tall, and professionally since 2011. She has been an expert in entertainment and pop culture, parenting and family, and currently writes news and special interest series for local news outlets. Find her online at whiteorchidmedia.com.

No. 11 FIND WRITERS YOU LOVE TO READ

I don't know about you, but it's a great joy to me to discover fellow writers I find engaging. In my downtime, I love to read or listen to as much of their work as I can get my hands on. I love exploring the recesses of other writers' minds, learning their worldviews and marveling at their intellects and imaginations. When I just need a break from my assignments, I can pop in my earbuds, grab my jacket and take them along with me on my walks. They also make excellent road trip companions.



No. 12 BE GENUINE

I personally prefer not to work with people unless I have some connection to them, and as a rule I do not spark relationships purely out of my desire to earn money. It happens in the personal sphere as well as the business world. You may have an insurance salesman or travel agent in your neighborhood who only talks shop. You may have a dance mom pushing her kid's trip to the Nationals, or a neighbor carefully cultivating his GoFundMe. My advice – in life and in work – is to be genuine. Don't sidle up to everyone you meet with a business card and a what-can-you-do-for-me attitude. If it happens that you hit it off, professional connections will occur organically. Unless you're actively campaigning for political office, I'd keep the lobbying to a minimum. Also, if your product or service is valuable, it will sell itself. In an age where good (and bad) reviews take milliseconds to appear, there's no reason to work that hard. And remember, people can smell an opportunist a mile away.

In this New Year, you deserve to feel valued, appreciated, and that you possess the tools, wisdom and mindset to perform at your very best. Take care of yourself and your loved ones, leave negativity at the door, and be grateful for all that is brought to you. Don't be afraid to turn over that new leaf. You never know what treasures wait underneath.



Recession Proof



DEBORAH LYNN
BLUMBERG

Freelance Writer

YOUR BUSINESS

Clients stop taking your calls, payments come in late or not at all, and new assignments grind to a halt. That was the case for a number of freelancers in 2008 and 2009 when the “Great Recession” hit. Companies hunkered down, cutting costs during the worst recession in history.



>> 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. Find her online at deborahlynnblumberg.com and on Twitter @dlblumberg.

Now, chatter about the next recession is all around us, from the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* to the nightly news, as the U.S. economy cools off after 10 years of steady growth. Trade tensions, shaky consumer sentiment, and signs of slackening business activity have economists on alert. What's more, the bond market is showing a huge red flag—the so-called yield curve, or line that plots the rates on government bonds, has inverted, a move that's long signaled a looming recession.

Many believe a recession—defined as two consecutive quarters of negative GDP—could hit as soon as 2020. Like death and taxes, ups and downs in the business cycle are a given. Whether the next downturn hits us as a slump or an outright recession remains to be seen. Either way, preparing for the inevitable will help you weather the storm. Better yet, it might even help you to get ahead.

“A recession can be a big opportunity,” says Jonathan Slain, author of the recent book *Rock the Recession: How Successful Entrepreneurs Prepare for, Thrive During, and Create Wealth After Downturns*. “But if you're so busy just grinding it out, you're not going to be able to capitalize on it like the few that spent time thinking it through.”

Consider the following seven strategies on how to recession-proof your business.

1 >>> DO A BUSINESS AUDIT

Certain industries do better in recessions, so make a list of your current clients broken down by industry. Create a second list of the type of work you're doing—articles, speaking engagements, books—to measure how diverse your work is.

As you think about your clients, ask yourself, do certain ones chronically pay late or make unreasonable requests? If so, double down to find new, better ones now.

Slain created a recession readiness assessment on recession.com that freelancers can take to see how prepared they are.

»» *Financial Strategies*

FOR RECESSION
READINESS IN 2020

2 »» DIVERSIFY

The most vulnerable freelancers in a recession are the ones who depend on just a few clients for the bulk of their work. ASJA member Damon Brown felt the effects of that firsthand during the last recession.

Brown was writing business, tech and pop culture articles for a few major magazines and had just funded his own book tour. Then, clients started holding onto content and carving up his pieces to run in multiple issues. “You could tell the pie was getting smaller,” he says.

Within a two-month period, two major publications he wrote for let go of most of their editorial staff, removing his connections to the magazines. One major publication dramatically scaled down the work it gave freelancers. His income took a major hit as he faced paying his lofty San Francisco rent. “It hit me like a mack truck,” he says. An idea for a new book helped him bounce back, but the experience was “the genesis moment” for diversifying his business, he recalls.

Now, Brown writes books and articles, but also delivers keynote addresses and offers coaching services and online classes related to entrepreneurship, time management and tech. He has about two dozen sources of income, some passive like book royalties.

To hone in on your own niche that could lend itself to diverse products or services, think about the types of stories editors ask you to write, Brown suggests. What do people see you as an expert in?



When ASJA member Bill Hinchberger realized the bulk of his income was coming from one company, he started a “re-diversification campaign.” He wrote queries and reached out to more potential clients. Soon, in addition to financial writing, he started covering environmental topics and doing conference coverage for organizations. Hinchberger has also taught as an adjunct professor and now trains journalists abroad.

As you diversify, says Samantha Gorelick, a certified financial planner with the coaching service Brunch & Budget, think about which markets suffer during a recession. People may forgo vacations, so travel is vulnerable, but they’re less likely to skimp out on healthcare. The funeral industry is also recession-proof, she says.

Slain says areas that could suffer include jewelry, four-year universities—people want education but at a lower cost—hotels and cruise lines. Safer areas include correctional facilities, businesses that deal in natural disasters, and veterinary clinics.

“People still pay for what Fido needs in a recession,” he says.

3 »» TALK TO YOUR CLIENTS

Will your clients scale back their freelance budget during a recession or sever ties with freelancers completely? It’s better to know now so you can fill in the gaps.

“You’re having this conversation every couple months as this thing is heating up,” Slain says. You might be surprised, he adds, to find some companies are looking forward to a recession, eager to buy up businesses that didn’t plan ahead. “Those are the companies I’d want to be aligned with,” he says.

As you talk to clients, ask them what skills you can develop to better help them. Make suggestions that go above and beyond so you’re seen as integral to their business. As a recession nears, keep your fees the same.

4 »» UP YOUR MARKETING GAME

If you’ve been toying with joining a business networking group, think no more, says Gorelick; just do it. “Build your network as much as possible now,” she says, “so you have people to reach out to for work.”

ASJA member Marcia Layton Turner regularly markets herself by sending out queries, engaging on social media and attending ASJA conferences even when she’s slammed with work. “If you’re always doing it, you have a better chance of getting a steady stream of new work coming in,” she says.

Marketing doesn’t have to be expensive. It can be as simple as emailing a past colleague who’s now at a company you want to write for, or updating your LinkedIn profile.

“If the worst happens and the recession hits hard, having a detailed plan in place will provide some comfort. Do it now when you’re logical instead of when it’s emotional.”

- JONATHAN SLAIN



Don't discount content platforms like Upwork, adds Layton Turner. Some jobs are low paying, but she's found high-paying ones by taking the time to read and respond to ads.

Developing relationships with fellow writers can also pay off in spades. Layton Turner has gotten a significant amount of work as referrals from other writers. Connect online, at industry conferences or over coffee. When people get to know you and trust the quality of your work, they'll be happy to refer you, she says.

5 >>> REEVALUATE YOUR FINANCES

Bolster your savings as much as possible. Set up an automatic withdrawal from your checking to savings to make it seamless. “Start small and see how that feels, then increase it as much as it feels comfortable,” Gorelick says.

Check the rate on your savings account. Often, online banks like Marcus by Goldman Sachs offer a higher rate. Also think about your access to cash, Slain says. If you don't have savings to fall back on, consider talking to your bank about a home equity line of credit to help pay the bills during a downturn. Closing costs and interest payments might be worth the peace of mind, he says.

“These products are available now when the economy is doing well. In a recession, they're harder to get,” Slain says.

6 >>> TRIM EXPENSES, BUT INVEST IN EDUCATION

A sports car, a new laptop. Now isn't the best time to buy. Sit on any big purchase decision for 12 months, Slain says.

Do invest in professional development though. Learn new skills by taking classes and attending conferences. Invest in new tools—signing up for Quickbooks, or hiring a virtual assistant—that will help you work more efficiently.

“All of these things need to happen when the times are good,” says Slain.

7 >>> DEVISE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

If the worst happens and the recession hits hard, having a detailed plan in place will provide some comfort. “Do it now when you're logical instead of when it's emotional,” Slain says.

If you use accounting software, download your business and personal profit and loss statement, then print out expenses. Go by line by line deciding what to cut and in what order depending on how much you anticipate your total household income might drop.

Create a four-tiered list starting with eating out, having a housekeeper, and vacations, Slain says. If you have a partner, plan it out together. “I recommend doing it over a bottle of wine,” he says. Afterwards, tuck the list away behind glass. Then “if all hell breaks loose,” he says, “break the glass and execute.”



RANDY
DOTINGA

Freelance Writer

I Fought »» *THE LAW*

ON THE FRONT LINE IN THE FIGHT TO SAVE FREELANCING

The most powerful legislator in California began a meeting last summer by angrily chewing out the four independent journalists who sat in her office. One of them happened to be me. I snapped back and may have used what's politely known in grammar circles as an expletive participle. That moment is still a bit hazy. Then we got down to business. The future of freelance journalism was at stake, and we had something to say.

Fast forward to late 2019. Freelancing is still in danger in the Golden State thanks to a new state law, and it could go national. Fortunately, countless journalism advocates are uniting around a single message: Leave independent journalists alone.

THE BLACKLIST COMETH

Back in the summer of 2018, fellow California writers started letting me know they were losing work. But it had nothing to do with the usual reasons we're sacked such as client bankruptcy or, well, client bankruptcy. They'd been blacklisted purely because they live in the Golden State.

One woman told me that Reuters wouldn't use her as a stringer anymore. Then dozens of travel writers got the news that their lucrative gigs would end on January 1, 2019. Finally, a local public broadcaster in San Diego, where I live, told me, "They can't use me on a freelance basis because of new state labor rules."

That's when the word "Dynamex" entered my vocabulary, where it is now typically preceded by an expletive participle. The word refers to a 2018 California Supreme Court case in which judges essentially banned most forms of freelance work in the state.

The court didn't want to hurt us. In fact, they sought to help countless workers – Uber drivers, physical therapists, interpreters and hair stylists – who are treated as freelancers when they really should be put on staff with employee protections and benefits. By changing the rules about independent contracting, the idea was to stop companies from exploiting workers.

Unfortunately, freelance journalists were caught in the net: All of us, whether we write, shoot photos/video, edit, record audio or (like so many of us) make our living doing some combination of the above.

The Dynamex ruling allows independent contractors, including freelance writers, to sue their employers if they were wrongly treated as freelancers. This is why the blacklist against us began. But few clients cut us off. They may not have been aware of the ruling, or they might have been waiting for legislation to clear things up.

The legislation came in January 2019. It's called Assembly Bill 5 (AB5). The bill puts the court ruling into California's legal code while adding exemptions that allowed certain professions, such as doctors, lawyers and accountants, to work as independent contractors.

Early on, freelance journalists had no exemption in the law. In general, it would remain illegal for our clients to hire us as independent contractors. It was time to speak up, but we needed reinforcements. As a legislator told me, one voice doesn't go far in a state of 40 million people. We needed to speak as a coalition.

That's when I led the creation of an AB5 coalition of 20 non-profit groups including the ASJA, the National Writers Union, the Authors Guild and the Freelancers Union, plus associations representing photographers, science writers, book critics, food journalists and more.

The good news: Freelance journalists now have critical mass thanks to thousands of our colleagues and allies who are speaking up to legislators and AB5-friendly Democratic presidential candidates.

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FROM THE FIRE INTO THE FRYING PAN

In a journalism career of more than three decades, I've only wanted one thing from local politicians – a juicy quote or two. On that front, there's no way to ever beat the school board member who memorably compared group math to another, decidedly non-academic group activity ("nobody gets the attention they deserve").

Last summer, I found myself sitting down with coalition colleagues to plead our case – twice – to legislator Lorena Gonzalez, who authored AB5. We know each other because I report on politics in San Diego, where she's based, and I deeply admire her fierceness and progressive politics. But now we were on opposite sides and tensions were high, and not just because we'd managed to really piss her off not once but twice. (Long story, but we were able to work past that both times.)

She wouldn't give journalists a blanket exemption in the law, and she asked us for a better idea about how to draw a line where freelancers must become employees. Many of us love to work as independent small businesses, and we don't want to go on staff even if jobs are available in media, which they generally aren't. I felt like she'd saved our lives – goodbye, Dynamex – but was now asking us which limb we'd like to lose.

We waited for Gonzalez to make the first move. For writers, she offered a cap of 25 submissions per client per year. Go above that and your employer would have to sack you or put you on staff. We joined the California newspaper publishers trade group to ask for a cap of 52 submissions so freelancers could still write weekly columns. But Gonzalez put the number at 35 with broad definitions of a "submission," and that's what went into law. Newspapers now can't use weekly columnists unless they hire them. We'd gone from the fire into the frying pan: The bill made it legal for clients to hire freelance writers – but only to a point.

That's not all. Thanks to the bill's crazy quilt of exemptions, news outlets generally can't hire freelancers (including writers like me) to shoot video or record audio. But we can write all the press releases we want as freelancers. Marketing firms got – you guessed it – a full exemption.



APRÈS DYNAMEX, THE DELUGE

Few people cared about the Dynamex ruling, and AB5 got fairly little attention beyond its effects on Uber/Lyft drivers who have to be put on staff. Most freelance journalists had no idea their careers were endangered when the governor signed the bill into law in September.

Suddenly, awareness grew. Freelance journalists – especially writers – started to panic. Across social media, our colleagues began to talk about how they feared for their careers, especially those who work in digital media and may produce dozens or hundreds of short bits of content for clients each year. Instead of hiring them on staff, clients seem likely to set limits on their freelance work or just hire someone from out of state to avoid the hassle.

Then news articles and prominent Twitter accounts highlighted our plight. As of this writing, in late October, I've been interviewed by about a dozen reporters, including writers from the *New York Post*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

What now? There may be a fix in state legislation in 2020, but it likely wouldn't go into effect until 2021. ASJA is lobbying for protections, and we're considering whether to sue the state of California. The law treats types of freelance speech in different ways – press releases have no limits while journalistic writing does – and that violates the First Amendment.

Meanwhile, ASJA and our allies are taking part in talks about pending AB5-style legislation in New York. We want to make sure that what happens in California stays in California!

The good news: Freelance journalists now have critical mass thanks to thousands of our colleagues and allies who are speaking up to legislators and AB5-friendly Democratic presidential candidates. Our rights to freelance have been under attack for a while. But now, to borrow a phrase, we're getting the attention we deserve.

BUSINESS GOALS

for 2020



“ALL SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE HAVE A GOAL. NO ONE CAN GET ANYWHERE UNLESS HE KNOWS WHERE HE WANTS TO GO AND WHAT HE WANTS TO BE OR DO.”

- Norman Vincent Peale

DEBORAH
ABRAMS KAPLAN

Freelance Writer



Why you need to set goals for your business this year



When I was in corporate life, I had to fill out my goals each year, assessed by my supervisor during the annual review. It was not a fun process. Yet, without that assessment, how would my supervisor know if I successfully did my job and increased my responsibilities – warranting a possible promotion and raise?

One of the benefits of freelance life is that no one tells me what goals to set, nor do I even have to set them. No one follows up with me each year, offering a formal review or accounting of what I've accomplished (granted, no one offers me a raise or paid vacation either). Does that mean I shouldn't set goals? Not at all.

“Without setting goals for your freelance business, there'd be no way to know what you're working for and what you're truly accomplishing,” said Mandy Ellis, an ASJA member and Austin-based freelance writer, focusing on food, real estate, travel and health.

Setting goals and monitoring progress not only helps ASJA member Sandra Beckwith decide what work to pursue and accept; it also helps her decide what work to turn down. “If one of my goals is to earn at least \$100 an hour for writing assignments, I need to turn down opportunities to write for five cents a word,” even if billing at a project rate, says the Fairport, N.Y.-based book marketing and business writer.

Deborah Abrams Kaplan writes about supply chain management, medical/health topics and personal finance in both journalism and content marketing settings. She's been an ASJA member for more than a baker's dozen years, and continues to set new goals after seeing ASJA members accomplish theirs. See her work at kaplanink.com or follow her on Twitter [@kaplanink](https://twitter.com/kaplanink).

How to set goals

Now is the perfect time to start setting work goals for 2020. ASJA member Leslie Lang goes through a formal process, writing down her marketing and monetary goals, as well as the vacations she wants to take that year. The Hawaii-based B2B technology content marketing writer starts a new Word document, including the previous year's year-end review, and notes about what she wants to change. She adds her new goals, and how she'll accomplish them, including the people, publications and agencies with whom she wants to work.

Diana Kelly Levey, a freelance writer, editor and author of *100+ Freelance Tips for Beginner Freelance Writers*, sets annual, quarterly and even hourly income goals. She wants to work six hours a day, which includes both writing time and business maintenance. "I sometimes set 'reach' goals, like writing a personal essay this

year, or getting more anchor clients and walking away from lower-paying one-off assignments," said the Long Island-based ASJA member.

Levey further breaks her goals into three to five must-do tasks daily to stay motivated throughout the year. "Having goals helps me keep up with marketing when I don't feel like it, and ask for higher rates to help me hit those goals," she said.

Snagging dream clients is an important goal for Ellis. "We know that dream clients can sometimes take quite a bit of nurturing and following up until you finally get a signed contract," she said.

Another goal is taking weekends off. "I used to work every weekend, and I burned out," she said. She measures that goal by seeing how many weekends she worked, attempting to get that number close to zero.

"I NOTICE A HUGE DIFFERENCE WHEN I SET GOALS; I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU STRETCH AND GET TO A NEW, BETTER PLACE IF YOU'RE NOT AIMING HIGH." – *Leslie Lang*



Working with an accountability partner

Beckwith shares her goals with Marcia Layton Turner, an ASJA member who lives near her. They are goal buddies, holding each other accountable for their individual goals. They meet quarterly to ensure they're both on track. They also meet at year-end to review the past year's accomplishments and discuss goals for the coming year. While Beckwith and Turner meet in person, others who use the accountability partner model call or email each other on a regular basis.

"She not only holds me accountable; she pushes me to get specific, asking questions like, 'When do you want to complete that?' and 'How much do you expect to earn from that?'" Beckwith says. Turner encourages her to make concrete plans. "She doesn't let me get away with being vague, and I do need that nudging," Beckwith adds.

Research shows that the shared accountability works. A 2015 study by Dominican University of California psychology professor Dr. Gail Matthews showed that more than 70% of those who sent weekly goal updates to a friend accomplished their goals, compared to just 35% of people who did not write down or share their goals.

Monitoring and updating goals

Making goals is helpful, but regular self check-ins are needed to ensure they're being met. Several ASJA writers do this daily as part of their routine, even if it's just glancing at the income sheet and looking at a list of the year's goals. Levey writes several items on her to-do list addressing her goals. "If I don't write down the must-complete tasks for the day, I find myself spending too much time on social media, checking email and not being focused," she says.

If your work ebbs and flows, the slower times of the year can be used to dive into the goals. "This summer I took advantage of a slower season and increased marketing efforts," Levey says, earning an additional \$10,000 in the next three months. This marketing push was thanks to a Freelance Success marketing challenge, a popular accountability method. Levey also used down time this

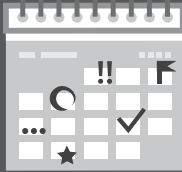
GOAL-SETTING TOOLS AND RESOURCES >>>>



> **DUBSADO:** Ellis uses this CRM tool, which shows her income, expenses and profit. She can set report parameters, to show whether her income, expenses and profits are increasing or decreasing, comparing periods of time.



> **SPREADSHEET:** Whether using Word, Excel or a Google sheet, you can track goals numerous ways. Beckwith uses an Excel sheet to track monthly income, stepping up marketing if she sees the previous month was low. Lang uses a Word document, adding notes each day about her accomplishments (pitches, letters of introduction, assignments) on the document, in addition to tracking income. "By the end of the year, it's 20 or 30 pages," she said. "This has been a great tool for me."



> **PRODUCTIVITY PLANNERS:** Planners abound and each writer has their favorite. Beckwith uses the free Productive Flourishing pages. I use Planner Pad, which also helps break down goals.

year to create a freelance writing course, an e-book, refresh her website, and hire and train a virtual assistant.

Goals don't need to be written in stone and can be revised during the year. Beckwith sometimes realizes her goals are too ambitious or need a timing shift. If one goal is to create a new book marketing course in the first quarter, but she gets a high paying writing project that helps her meet her first quarter income goal, she may postpone the course creation. "On the other hand, I might realize that I'm not going to hit my annual income goal without creating that online course, so I might turn down writing work to make sure I have the time to spend on the course," she says.

If Ellis is off track for her annual goals, she'll question why. It could be that she's working for the wrong types of clients, working too much, not working on projects she likes, not getting paid on time, or other reasons. Finding the answer will help her to pivot, going in a different direction.

Do the experiment

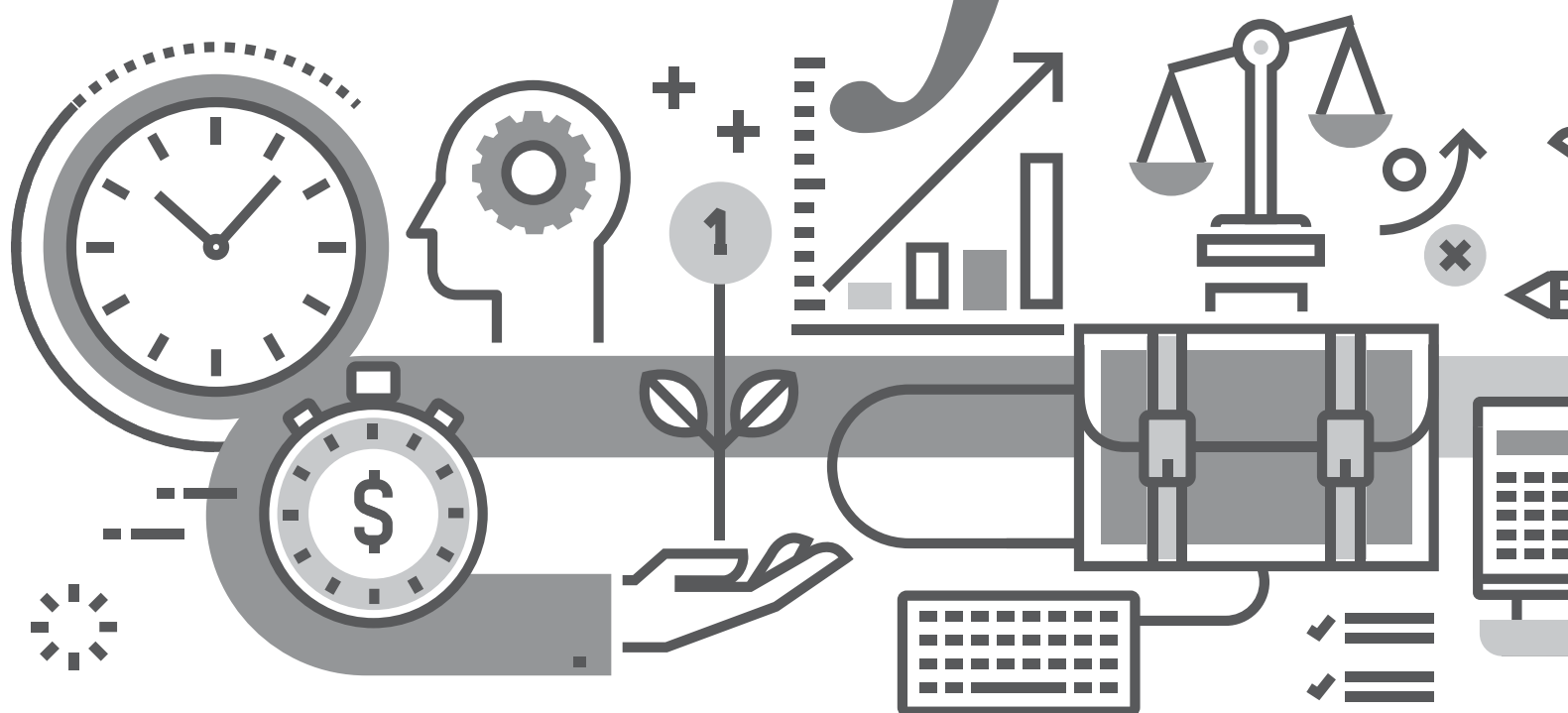
If you haven't set goals before – or if you have, but not written them down – try it out this year and see if you notice a difference. Sharing your goals with a friend and following up on a regular basis can help you stay motivated and accountable.

Setting goals helps you create a plan for where you want to go. "I know what clients to go after. I know what rates I need to accept. I know how long until I can afford a vacation or pay off debt. There's a roadmap of events that are organized in a trackable way," says Ellis. Without tracking, there's less of a sense of accomplishment for what you did that year.

"I notice a huge difference when I set goals," Lang says. "I don't know how you stretch and get to a new, better place if you're not aiming high. If I just sort of showed up to my desk every day and did whatever work turned up, my career would be a disaster."

A DAY IN THE

life



➤ with Susan Shapiro



WENDY LYONS
SUNSHINE

Freelance Writer

Every writer finds his or her own path to productivity, shaping work-life balance and daily routine to suit their own unique style and goals. What about when the writer also teaches, organizes panels, and contributes frequently on social media? How do you make that mix work? Wendy Lyons Sunshine spoke to prolific author Susan Shapiro, winner of the 2019 ASJA outstanding book award for *The Byline Bible: Get Published in Five Weeks*, to find out how she juggles personal writing projects with more public roles on behalf of students, writers, and editors.

»» Wendy Lyons Sunshine specializes in editorial projects that spotlight solutions and improve lives. She co-authored the bestseller, *The Connected Child*, winner of ASJA's 2008 Outstanding Book of the Year Award, and *Raising the Challenging Child*, new in January 2020 from Revel. Visit her online at polishedwriting.com.

"I think my writing workshops, classes, and being a member of ASJA — where I get to hang out with my tribe — is self-care."

— SUSAN SHAPIRO

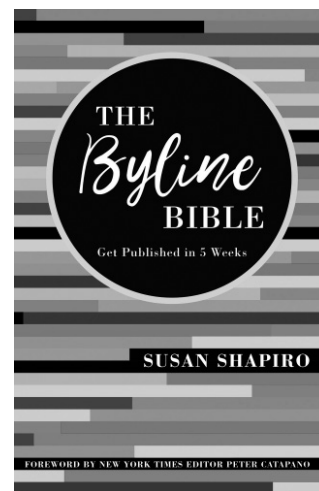


>>> Can you describe your writing ritual?

At the risk of sounding mundane and boring, I wake up, drink green tea, and write. Just green tea until 2 p.m., then water.

When I once complained of writer's block, a mentor told me, "Don't be self-indulgent. Plumbers don't get plumber's block. Just get up every morning and write." He added, "A page a day is a book a year." That stayed with me. So a page a day is my rule, though sometimes I'm trying to finish an essay, or a chapter, or a section from a proposal.

Lately I try to keep 9 to 5 hours, unless something is due. No music. Mostly I sit home in sweats writing, with my brilliant scriptwriter husband in the next room. We leave each other alone while working, though we sometimes have a quick lunch or dinner together. Maybe order in Japanese salmon and vegetables or an egg white omelet. We don't have kids so my books are my babies. My shrink once joked I'm too neurotic to have one kid; I would make it crazy, so I needed to have a whole bunch.



>>> What tools do you rely on?

I work on an Apple laptop, using Word. I have a table for one of my laptops, so I stand while doing email and social media.

I did therapy with a great addiction specialist to quit smoking, drinking, and drugs (we coauthored *Unhooked*, a best-selling addiction book, together.) He helped me to eat healthier, exercise six days a week, set strong boundaries. I don't answer the phone or make any plans until I finish my work, usually around 5 or 6 p.m. Now I'm addicted to book deals and literary events.

>>> Where do teaching and writers' panels fit into the day?

I'm lucky that at this point I write by day, every day, and moonlight as a writing professor two nights a week. I usually go teach around 5:30 or 6 p.m. After work or teaching, I do walking-talking office hours with students.

My new writing book *The Byline Bible* was a way to bridge both worlds. I used to have these big fat ugly 600-page black course packets every term overstuffed with student clips. Every school I taught at (The New School, NYU and Columbia) hated making them. At one point the students had to pay \$29 to get one. So it's exciting to now tell students to get a beautiful little book crammed with everything I knew about freelancing and helping students get published for 25 years. I was able to reprint 60 pieces by students and link hundreds more. In her smart book, *One Person, Multiple Careers*, my former student Marci Alboher interviewed me in a section about writer/teachers and called having dual professions the wave of the future.

I invented the "Instant Gratification Takes Too Long" method where the goal of my class is to write and publish a great piece by the end of the class. Many students do. The New School also generously gives me stipends to pay speakers. So it's amazing to have editors from *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Daily News*, *Newsday*, *New York Magazine* and *The New Yorker* spill the secrets of what editors want. I also have great editors and agents at my panels, which is probably why former students have published 150 books over the last decade from the top houses in the country. It's a vicarious thrill, and doing book events with former students makes me younger and hipper.

>>> How do you fit self-care into your schedule?

People see me all lit up at book events and think I'm always a firecracker. But there's a lot of downtime. A book can take years — my first novel took 13 years from start to publication, so instead of a Book Launch, it had a Book Mitzvah. I think my writing workshops, classes, and being a member of ASJA — where I get to hang out with my tribe — is self-care. It brings me joy and makes me feel connected.



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

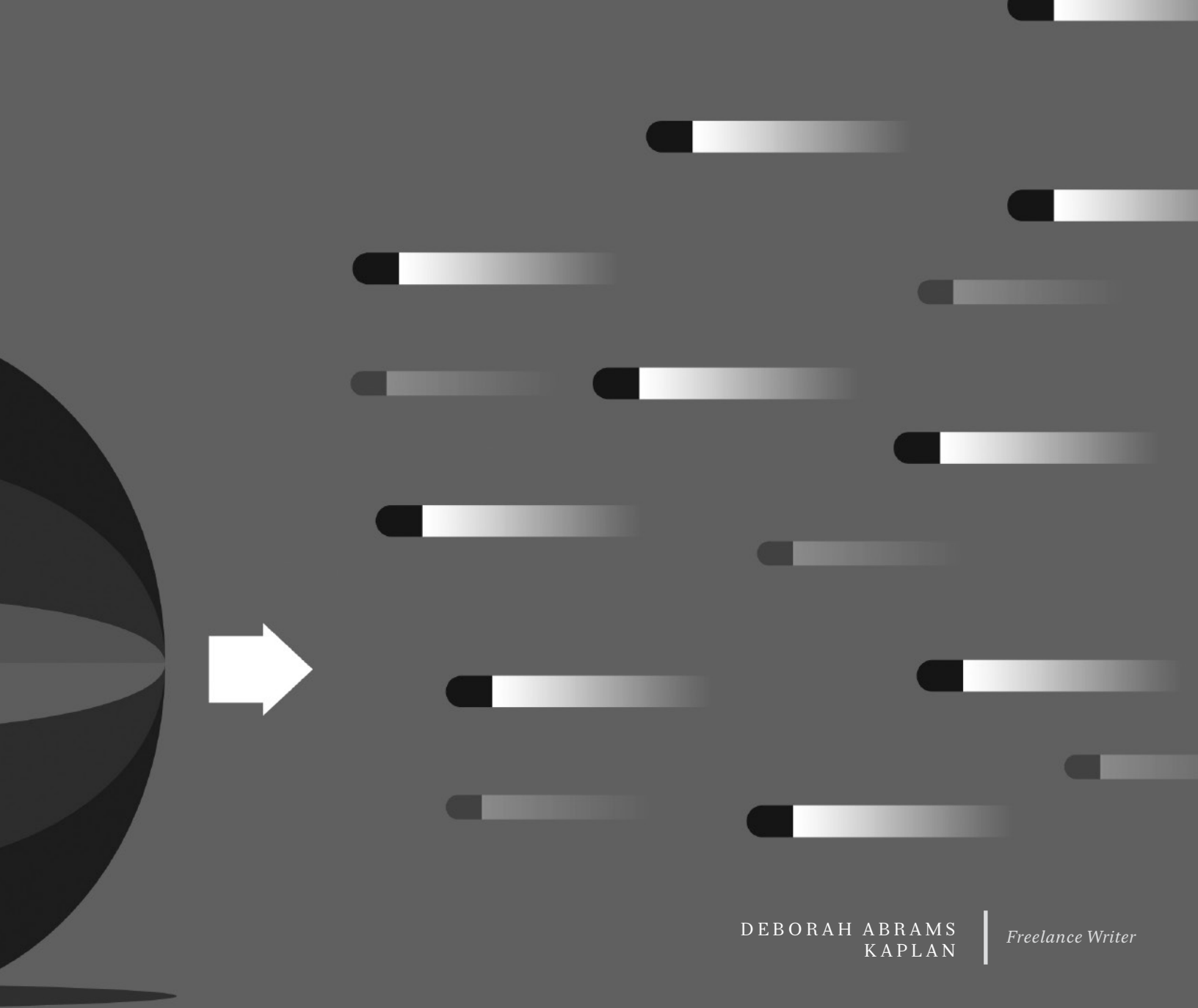
MEDIA PERILS & LIABILITY INSURANCE

One writer's adventure in getting coverage



Writer Annie Logue can tell you about getting sued for libel. A former hedge fund manager and convicted felon didn't like what she wrote about him on a website, and he sued her for \$10 million. Logue had no insurance, and over three years spent \$50,000 on out-of-pocket legal fees. She prevailed. "I was awarded my legal fees but, of course, will never collect them as the estate of a retired rabbi is ahead of me. Yes, this man stole money from a rabbi."

Logue did not have insurance to cover the lawsuit, nor does she think she could qualify for it now, given the suit. "I remain surprised at how many writers thought I should just settle or take the post down. There was nothing defamatory in it. The plaintiff is a convicted felon. That's a fact."



DEBORAH ABRAMS
KAPLAN

Freelance Writer

As Logue learned, a journalist can be sued even if the lawsuit has no merit. And it will still cost a lot to defend. While I've heard occasional stories of journalists and bloggers being sued, Logue is the only one I know personally. However, if you've signed a publishing contract in the last decade, you've seen the clauses where you agree to cover a massive media empire for any claim brought against them or you, for your work. It's hard not to get nervous.

I don't write about celebrities.
I don't write investigative pieces.

I don't write about politics. But every time I receive a contract from a new client, I get a pit in my stomach. There it is – the indemnity clause. I have walked away from clients who insist I sign it, but sometimes I do sign it, after trying to change it. Last March I finally got media perils insurance. And this year, after hearing about other writers getting the same policy and coverage for less money, I started shopping around, and learned that very few journalists understand exactly what they're buying.



Deborah Abrams Kaplan is an ASJA member who writes journalism and content marketing, mainly in the medical, health and supply chain areas. In her previous life, she investigated physician professional liability claims (medical malpractice) for seven years. She evaluated claims-made coverage dates for each case. You can see Debbie's work at kaplanink.com.

HERE'S WHAT I WAS QUOTED AND WHAT I FOUND OUT.

<i>Insurance company & broker</i>	<i>Insurance type</i>	<i>Coverage type</i>	<i>Annual cost</i>	<i>Claim limits & deductible</i>	<i>Membership fee</i>
Axis (John Buttine Insurance)	Media perils	Occurrence	\$1574 + \$9 (NJ surcharge) (other writers I know are paying \$1,000-1,400 for the same policy)	\$1 million per claim & aggregate, \$5,000 deductible	Authors Guild: \$135 (the policy was \$500 more without membership)
Philadelphia (Insureon)	Media perils	Claims-made	\$1496 + \$9 (NJ surcharge)	\$1 million per claim & aggregate, \$1,000 deductible (extended reporting period = 75-150% for 1-3 years)	
CNA (Bizinsure)	Professional liability	Claims-made	\$891	\$1 million per claim & aggregate, \$1,000 deductible (extended reporting period = 100-200% for 1-3 years)	
Liberty (Bizinsure)	Professional liability	Claims-made	\$624	\$1 million per claim & aggregate, \$1,000 deductible (extended reporting period = 75-150% for 1-3 years)	
Hiscox (DeWitt Stern)	Media perils	Unsure*	More than \$2,500*	\$1 million per claim & aggregate, at least \$10,000 deductible*	*I was not given the actual quote – I was told this was the minimum premium and deductible



While I did not apply to Chubb Specialty Insurance through Waltery Insurance Brokers, they offer a policy for \$300,000 per claim, \$500,000 aggregate for \$495 a year, with National Federation of Press Women premium membership (\$140). It does not cover claims against third parties, and it is a claims-made policy (more on that later).

Media perils vs. professional liability

I asked broker Gregory (Tavy) Smith of DeWitt Stern (who sells Hiscox and others) about the difference between media perils and professional liability, and which I should get. “Media perils is what you’re looking for,” he said. “It gets tricky with professional liability – it’s slightly ambiguous.”

Media perils insurance is for journalists producing written content, covering lawsuits alleging intellectual property infringement, copyright, trademark, invasion of privacy, slander – pertinent to writers and content producers. Professional liability, on the other hand, is for anyone providing professional advice, like a financial advisor, lawyer or journalist commenting on content marketing or certain products, he said. An example would be coverage for writing a “how to” article, where a reader sued because they suffered damage after taking the advice.

The Axis and Philadelphia media perils policies specifically cover contextual errors, copyright infringement, trademark infringement, plagiarism, defamation, libel, slander, invasion of personal privacy, and claims resulting in emotional distress.

They cover newsgathering torts, like wrongful entry, detention, eavesdropping, and false imprisonment.

The Liberty professional liability policy excludes damages and claims expenses for any claim of infringement for copyright, trademark, and the like. It excludes coverage for “emotional distress, mental anguish, outrage, humiliation...” which are claims you’d expect if your source didn’t like what you wrote. Also, the Liberty policy excludes coverage for polluting and failure to assess or prevent microbes or fungi, which shows how the policy is not geared toward writers! The CNA professional liability policy had no information about what it covered.

The good news is that if you agree to indemnify a third party (i.e. a publisher) from claims regarding your work, it is expressly covered in the Axis media perils policy, according to Axis Pro senior vice president Louis Scimecca in an interview with Freelance Success. This is the “Assumed Under Contract” clause, with examples including “hold harmless or indemnity



agreements” with advertising agencies, publishers, authors and other entities distributing the work. Smith said that media perils policies can provide blanket coverage, which gives a third party rights to defense from my policy, without having to actually name them in the policy.

I can’t stress enough that you have to read the policy before buying it. Make sure you’re getting the coverage you need. In the ASJA forum and other writing forums, I’ve heard writers say they got professional liability or errors and omissions (E&O) insurance instead of media perils, and it cost \$360 to \$1,500 a year. Clients sometimes require that you carry a liability policy, and these will pass the smell test. The policies might protect you from some claims. But they might not.

Occurrence vs claims-made policies

You need to understand whether the policy is “occurrence” or “claims-made.” My Axis policy is occurrence, but it only stated that on the declarations page (along with policy limits and premium), not in the actual policy. An occurrence policy protects you from a covered incident if it occurs while the policy is in effect. For example, you published Article XYZ in September 2017 and you had an occurrence policy during 2017. You did not renew it in 2018 or after (known as “going bare” in insurance lingo). In March 2019 your 2017 source sues you for defamation. The insurance carrier would cover you, even though you’re now bare.

Claims-made policies provide coverage for alleged wrongful acts committed and reported while you have active coverage. It will also cover you after the active coverage period, if you paid for an extended reporting period. For example, Article XYZ was published in 2017. You did not renew your policy in 2018 or later, and did not buy extended coverage. When you’re sued over that article in 2019, you are paying for that lawsuit yourself. However, if you purchased extended coverage for two years (2018 and 2019) and you’re sued in 2019, your policy covers you.

The claims-made policies I reviewed charge extended reporting period fees of 75%-200% of the annual premium for one to three years coverage – 75% for one year, 150% of the premium for two years and 200% for three years – depending on the policy. The Philadelphia media perils policy provided excellent coverage, and the premium was similar to Axis. However, the Philadelphia policy is claims-made. It would cost me more if I cancel the policy and still want coverage for past claims, even if I move over to an occurrence policy.

Anyone can sue. A nuisance claim will still cost you tens of thousands in legal bills, if not more. It’s worth doing some research to get the right insurance for your needs, or as one writer I know is doing, skipping insurance and saving up money just in case.



RESOURCES

Read more about Annie Logue’s lawsuit on her blog:

<http://bit.ly/2HWxwVw>

• Axis: www.buttine.com

You can get this policy through a broker, but you’ll need to contact the Buttine Agency for the Author’s Guild discount. They can quote you with and without membership to compare. You don’t need to join AG until you’re ready to buy the policy. They require your membership number.

Mary Beth Ryan mbr@buttine.com

800-964-4454 or 212-697-1010, ext. 22

• Chubb: www.walterry.com/national

• Hiscox: hiscox.com/brokers/media-liability

Gregory Octavius (Tavy) Smith, DeWitt Stern

gsmith@dewittstern.com or 212-297-1404

(email or call them for a broker recommendation in your state)

• Insureon: www.insureon.com

(choose professional & specialty services, and then technical writer)



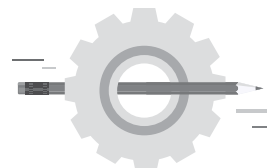
PITCH PERFECT



>>>>

*with Diana
Kelly Levey*

It's helpful to read a pitch that landed a writer an assignment, especially when you can pair that with some behind-the-scenes insights. In this issue, we get to peek at an email ASJA member Diana Kelly Levey sent to an editor at Headspace, a popular meditation app, that resulted in a content marketing assignment. While she had worked for Headspace before, Kelly Levey sent a well-crafted pitch that the editor accepted with some tweaking.



**Want to see more
successful pitches?**

*Kelly Levey shares other
examples on her website,
**[dianakelly.com/freelance-
article-pitches-that-worked](http://dianakelly.com/freelance-
article-pitches-that-worked)**.*

DIANA'S PITCH

New Message

To Editor

Subject Pitch: The Mindful Way to Spend Money This Holiday Season without Going Broke

Hey EDITOR'S NAME,

How are you?

I saw this piece "mindful money tips" on The Orange Dot and was wondering if you'd be open to a piece for the holidays on how to be a conscious and mindful spender during the holiday season without going broke.

I got a hold of this new book from Rachel Cruze (daughter of personal finance guru Dave Ramsey) "Love Your Life, Not Theirs: 7 Money Habits for Living the Life You Want" and she addresses some issues I think we all can relate to with her real-world advice (including even the most mindful Headspace meditation practitioners) whether it's comparing ourselves to a friend's beautiful yoga or meditation retreat photos, another's love quotes about her "perfect relationship," over even being slightly jealous of that fancy kitchen a nutritionist we follow makes her perfectly healthy recipes in.

In Cruze's book, she discusses finding contentment in your life with what you have. And that even when we are "fake" on social media (yes, even adding filters to make our photos look better counts—guilty!), it's causing our happiness to be more fleeting. I read Cruze's book and am in contact with her reps as she is doing her book tour now.

As we go into holiday season, I'd like to get Cruze's take on the "comparison living" aspect that infiltrates our lives (especially through social media) and how that doesn't make us feel good. It can cause us to spend money we don't have to keep up with a lifestyle we think others have. I'd like include Cruze's tips to address ways to better plan for holiday spending in a way that lines up with your budget, values, and relationships so you can feel good about how you approach gift giving (and charity giving) in a way that makes you feel good, without having spending regrets in January. We can also cover a few "just in case" items to possibly have on hand for last-minute gifts and what to do if someone spends more on you than you can afford.

Let me know if this is of interest for a November or December piece.

(Cruze also has a section on money and relationships that might be a different angle if you're thinking January content.)

Thank you for reading.

Best,
Diana

SEND

EDITOR'S RESPONSE

New Message

To Diana

Subject RE: Pitch: The Mindful Way to Spend Money This Holiday Season...

Diana, would you be interested in a different spin on this, "How to start the year off right ... financially"?

We're all set for holiday content, so I think a New Year twist would be a nice way to make this fit.

SEND

FINAL ARTICLE

For the article, Kelly Levey interviewed Rachel Cruze and Kathleen Gurney, Ph.D., founder and CEO of Financial Psychology Corporation. The published article is called "Are You Afraid To Check Your Bank Account? 5 Tips To Get It Back On Track."

You can find it online at headspace.com/blog/2017/01/06/fear-of-checking-bank-account/



Lori Ferguson

ASJA MEMBER &
VOLUNTEER SINCE: 2015

WRITING SPECIALTY/FOCUS:
I specialize in providing content for independent schools and institutions of higher education. The lion's share of my work involves writing profiles and features for alumni magazines all around the country.

PROUD WRITING MOMENT:
My degrees are in art history, so any time I can write about the arts, I'm in heaven. Writing a story on sculptor Vivian Beer for *MODERN Magazine* was a thrill.



"Volunteering helps me to get out of my head. As a freelancer working from home, it's all too easy to become isolated. Volunteering gives me an opportunity to interact with others on topics that aren't strictly business related."

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

As I said, most of my work appears in alumni magazines, but I also write for consumer publications now and again. My work has appeared in *MODERN Magazine*, *Costco Connection*, *New England Home*, *Design New England*, *Coastal Home*, and *Woodshop News* among others.

► ***How long have you been an ASJA member?***
I joined the organization in 2015.

► ***How long have you volunteered for ASJA?***
I've been volunteering since almost the moment I became a member. Jennifer Goforth Gregory encouraged me to join and then quickly recruited me to become involved as a volunteer. It's been a great way to get to know many of the wonderful folks involved in this organization.

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

I worked with Wendy Helfenbaum and others on Client Connections at my first conference, served as an ASJA website forum host in the Content Marketing section, served as Chair of the Peer-to-Peer Program for approximately 18 months, and in July of 2017 assumed the role of chair of ASJA's new Associate Member Mentoring program.

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

I would say three to five hours a month. I've got systems in place for the work I do with the mentoring program, so it's not that time-consuming now.

► ***Why do you volunteer for ASJA?***

Over the years many people have generously shared their time and experience with me, and it's important to me that I pay it

forward. I also enjoy meeting other writers, and volunteering for ASJA gives me the opportunity to interact with other members on a regular basis.

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

It's generally not that difficult. I try to devote an hour or so each day to admin work, be it for my business or for my various volunteer efforts. That's the beauty of freelancing—your schedule is your own. I'm also an early riser and tend to do a lot of work in the pre-dawn hours before the rest of the household gets rockin'—so if you get an email from me with a 4:30 a.m. time stamp, don't be surprised!

► ***What are the benefits of volunteering?***

Volunteering helps me to get out of my head. As a freelancer working from home, it's all too easy to become isolated. Volunteering gives me an opportunity to interact with others on topics that aren't strictly business related.

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

I'm a bit of a health nut, a huge animal lover and an inveterate museum and gallery hopper, so when I'm not pecking away at the keyboard, I'm usually out hiking, biking, walking the dogs, working at our local animal shelter, or nipping into an exhibition or gallery opening.

It Happened

➤ AT ASJA

Got an ASJA story to share? Send it to
asjamagazineeditor@gmail.com
and we'll follow up!

A lot happens at ASJA events. From camaraderie to networking, finding a new client or an agent, attending conferences can pay off in so many ways. In this new department, we'll share some of those stories so you can see what your membership can bring to life.

A Recurring Client

"When I joined ASJA in the summer of 2016, I wasn't all that sure about how to get the most out of my membership. The next annual conference was 10 months away, and the membership directory only listed a few people in Kentucky (including current president Milt Toby, who lives several counties away.)

"One of the first things I tried was a Virtual Pitch Slam (VPS) with Tod Jones from *Costco Connection* that October. I didn't actually pitch, however; I just listened in. I found it immensely helpful to learn more about the publication, which I really hadn't paid attention to even though I'm a Costco member.

"Tod said he was always looking for supplier profiles, so I soon visited my local warehouse to see what interesting suppliers Costco was using. I pitched three ideas a couple of months later, and Tod bit on Bob's Red Mill. That story ran in October 2017 (a year after that VPS session), the same month I also got my second assignment, this one on Kodiak Cakes.

"All told, I've done nine stories for *Costco Connection*, about half of which I didn't have to pitch. And I should have a cover story sometime in 2020. I figure that one client from one VPS has paid for my ASJA membership—and my Costco membership—for the next 20 years or so."

— Mark Ray, professional member

An Agent

"I signed up to meet with longtime Client Connections attendee Marilyn Allen (founding partner of Allen O'Shea Literary Agency) back in 2007. The idea I pitched wasn't a fit but we kept in touch, and she encouraged me to submit a proposal for a book one of her contacts wanted to publish. It led to my first book, *The Green Year: 365 Small Things You Can Do To Make a Big Difference*.

"We worked together on a subsequent book and continue talking about publishing trends and tossing around ideas at every ASJA conference (and via email). Marilyn was a great guide to the world of book publishing and continues to be a valuable contact—and we would never have crossed paths if not for the ASJA conference."

— Jodi Helmer, professional member

Valued Peer Relationships

"I am very introverted and seriously lack confidence in myself. I seem to be together, so people are often surprised to learn that when I'm in a social situation, I'm a mess. When I became serious about freelancing, I forced myself to join some professional groups, including ASJA. Little did I know that I would end up developing such good friendships with some other ASJA members – and I don't make friends easily.

"Some of these friendships have gotten me work. One person who became a dear friend referred me to a client who has given me several thousand dollars of work over the past few years. Another friend drove up from New Jersey for my 55th birthday party a few years ago – a six-hour drive. I was so touched.

"Other friends I've made aren't as close, but they are still treasured. I can email or text them if I'm having a tough time, either with work or personally. All these people understand the writing life and they try to understand the unique problems and issues I have. But it's not all one way. I love that I can help them, be a shoulder for them, make them something that I think they will like. Creating and giving things to my friends gives me such pleasure. And all of this was because of ASJA."

— Marijke Vroomen Durning, professional member

A Blog Idea

"I came up with the idea for my blog at an ASJA conference in 2013. People often focus on getting clients, but sometimes a conference gives you the space to focus on your business and absorb new ideas. To me, that really is the biggest benefit, but it's hard to quantify.

"Everyone had been asking me about content marketing and how to get into it. I sat in a panel on creating a blog – I didn't mean to attend, but it was in the ballroom and there was an open chair. I just sat down to check my phone.

"The panel gave me the idea to start a blog. Eventually my blog became the number-one keyword search result for "content marketing writer," which has gotten me hundreds of thousand of dollars. Plus I turned my blog into my book, which has helped other writers. My blog made my career."

— Jennifer Goforth Gregory, professional member

Editor Relationships

"Before ASJA, I had already worked with Lina Zeldovich, the science editor at JSTOR Daily. So when I ran into her at [an ASJA] conference, I said 'hello' and introduced myself. Later on, at a panel, someone asked her which were the most memorable stories she had published in the last year. And she mentioned mine as an example. I was floored! Up until then I had viewed editors as unapproachable and kind of intimidating. Meeting Lina (and other editors) at ASJA helped dispel some of that mystery/fear factor."

— Poornima Apte, professional member

Insider Knowledge

"At one of my first conferences I sat next to [the late] Sarah Wernick at lunch. I'd never ghostwritten a book at that point, and she was a bestselling ghostwriter. She took up almost her entire lunchtime talking to me about ghostwriting, how she got clients, how she structured collaboration agreements, etc. I could not believe she was spending so much time with me. After that, we continued to chat by email, and she coached me through a lot of ghostwriting gigs. What a generous soul she was, and oh, how I miss her!

— Leslie Pepper, professional member



Market Report | YOUR TEEN

When your children are young, it's easy to find magazines and websites that offer advice and support. When they turn into tweens and teens, however, expert advice is harder to come by. That lack of information is what prompted Susan Borison, publisher and editor in chief, and Stephanie Silverman, publisher and chief revenue officer, to start *Your Teen* magazine in 2007.



Your Teen's core readers are parents who have at least one child between seventh and tenth grade. Its goal is provide expert advice with a "we're in it together" perspective and non-judgmental approach.

"Susan was in the midst of raising teens," says *Your Teen* managing editor Sharon Holbrook. "She was leaving the *Parents* magazine stage, looking for the next source of advice and found nothing. So she and [her friend] Stephanie founded *Your Teen* magazine, and it's been growing and adding new ways for parents to learn and connect since then."

Your Teen's core readers are parents who have at least one child between seventh and tenth grade. Its goal is provide expert advice with a "we're in it together" perspective and non-judgmental approach.

"We don't lecture and we don't simply present an individual perspective," says Holbrook. "No other national magazines cover this area. It's a hard time for print, and a lot of experts say print magazines that provide something specific are best positioned to survive. We feel like we're occupying a really important place in the market and serving an important need for parents. Our subscriptions continue to grow and we continue to get support from sponsors and advertisers."

What *Your Teen* Looks for in a Pitch

To pitch *Your Teen*, Holbrook recommends that writers be familiar with the magazine, understanding the types of stories it runs and where there may be gaps in coverage. If you cannot find a copy of the print publication at your local indie bookstore or Barnes & Noble, she says she'll email a PDF copy to anyone who emails and asks.

"Subscribing is always welcome," she adds. "If you can afford to, it's a good idea to subscribe to any publication you want to write for. Hopefully you'll find it personally helpful, too."

Writers don't have to have teenagers, but having a first-hand sense of what parents are dealing with is helpful. Holbrook says having experience in reporting and service journalism is also a plus.

"When a pitch comes in, it's nice to see that the writer has a sense of what we do, a sense of whether we've covered something already, and a sense of where there are holes in our coverage," says Holbrook. "It also helps to know what parents are talking, wondering and thinking about. Explain to us why the story would be useful to our readers and show that you've done the background research."

Your Teen also purchases pieces for its website. If Holbrook gets a pitch that's better suited for online publication, such as something timely, she will forward it to the web editor.



The Best Way to Break In

Holbrook says the magazine doesn't assign features to writers with whom they've never worked. Shorter reported pieces, however, are open to new writers, as are essays. The magazine also has two sections where a parent and teen write first-person accounts on a shared topic. One section is lighthearted, such as deciding to get a dog, while the other is more serious, such as handling academic stress. *Your Teen* gets an expert to provide an opinion, as well. At this time, however, Holbrook isn't accepting pitches for the first-person pieces.

Once Holbrook establishes a good relationship with a writer, she'll often assign stories without pitching. "If we have a topic we want to cover, we'll go back to a writer we've enjoyed working with and ask, 'Are you up for assignment?'" she says. "We know we love this writer and the writer doesn't have to jump through the hoops of pitching. One of the reasons writers like to write for us is because of this."

What's Off Limits

Some short front-of-book sections are created in house, such as sections on statistics and parenting book recommendations. Product reviews are also done in house. Otherwise, most everything is open to freelancers.



YOUR TEEN AT A GLANCE

Fees (print): Range from \$50 to \$500, depending on word count

Story Lengths: Short pieces range from 250 to 300 words, medium-length articles are 600 to 800 words, and features run from 1,200 to 1,500 words

Circulation: 35,000 print copies per issue

Frequency: Six times a year

Payment terms: Payment is sent about a month before publication

Kill fee: Half of fee

Rights requested: Exclusive rights for six months; after six months writers can resell work with notice to *Your Teen*

Address pitches to holbrook@yourteenmag.com

The Work Process

Your Teen is published six times a year. Holbrook starts assigning about four months in advance. For example, the January/February issue was assigned in September. Writers are typically given two to four weeks to complete an assignment, sometimes less time if something comes up quickly. Holbrook often assigns up to three issues ahead.

"I don't want to assign something for a year from now; it's hard to keep track," she says. "It's easier for me to focus on two to three issues instead of a whole year. I might consider a future piece, but I might say, 'Email me again in four months.'"

After a writer submits their finished work, Holbrook reads it and will contact the writer if she has questions or needs rewrites. Another editor will read the piece, as will a copy editor and proofreader.

"We always send the piece back to the writer for another read before it goes to layout," she says. "It's about a month before the magazine goes to print."

A Recent Successful Pitch

Recently a writer pitched *Your Teen* a story about teens who want to quit music lessons and how parents should handle it.

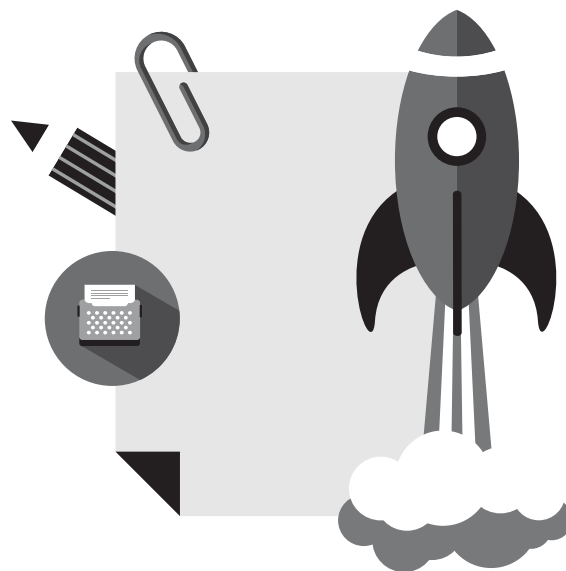
"The writer came to me, she had looked at our website and saw that we had covered articles about quitting activities but there wasn't anything specific about quitting music," recalls Holbrook. "She shared that music has particular cognitive benefits. She hit all the things we look for: she was familiar with our coverage, saw a gap in coverage and was aware of what parents worry about. She got the assignment."



That's Productive

"Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work," writes Stephen King in On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft.

When you work for yourself, you're your own boss. Sure, you have to answer to clients, but you've also got to be disciplined enough to go out and get those clients as well as sit down and work when a variety of other distractions fight for your attention.



HERE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOUR ASJA PEERS DO TO GET THINGS DONE.

1 START THE DAY WITH EXERCISE

To start her day with energy focus, Theresa Sullivan Barger exercises first thing in the morning. "If circumstances prevent this, I'm much less productive," she says.

If Sullivan Barger starts dragging in the afternoon, she takes a 10-minute walk outside or spends five minutes walking up and down her stairs. "If time permits, I'll take a longer walk and return to my desk with greater focus and efficiency," she says.

2 HAVE A HARD STOP

Leslie Lang's daughter helps her stay productive. She jokes that her productivity tip is to have a child in school. "I fear the day mine graduates ... will I ever work again?" she asks.

What keeps her focused is working during the structure of the school day. "I know I only have so many hours to get it all done, so I just keep going," she says. "I find it hard to be as productive during the summer break, when there's not a built-in structure."

3 FIND A WRITER BUDDY

Lang has another person in her life who helps keep her on track: her writing buddy, Ilima Loomis. "[She] and I each work alone in our home offices, on different Hawaiian islands," Lang shares. "Most days we check in with each other by text at 9 a.m. and work 'together' during the day. We set our goals for one- or two-hour blocks, go do that work, and then report back."

Most days the two writers stop for lunch at the same time. "We also bounce ideas, problems or whatever off each other," says Lang. "It's amazing how much more productive I am with that external accountability. I think she'd tell you the same thing."

4 DO THE HARD STUFF FIRST

In addition to being a writer, June D. Bell is a professional organizer. Her business is called "Enough is Enough Professional Organizing," and she helps clients create spaces that foster greater productivity and happiness. When it comes to her personal productivity, she starts her day off strong.

"I try to tackle my toughest and/or least appealing task early in my workday, when I'm most energetic, focused and creative," she says. "Knowing that I've crossed that sucker off my daily to-do list helps to power me through the rest of the day and makes everything else seem like a breeze."

5 TAKE A BREAK TO REGROUP

Even the most productive people can feel stuck or distracted. When this happens to Bell, she says she makes a point to get out of her office and take a walk instead of hunkering down and forcing herself to work.

"Even a 10-minute stroll around the block clears my head and airs out my brain—and I return to my desk energized," she says.

6 OUTSOURCE TASKS

Another way to make the most of your time is by taking tasks off of your plate and hiring help.

"The most productive thing I've done is start recording calls and paying for transcription," says Jodi Helmer. "Being able to copy and paste from those notes straight into a draft saves me a ton of time."

Having a transcript recently circumvented a potential problem for Helmer that could have taken a lot of time to resolve. "A source—someone in a prominent position in city government—emailed insisting that I made up information in an article because the statement in question made him look bad," she says. "I was able to send him the transcript with the quote highlighted. He never emailed again. If I didn't have the recording or the transcript, it might have been a time-consuming issue to solve."

7 NUMBER YOUR TO-DO LIST

Sullivan Barger starts her day by writing out a numbered to-do list. The practice helps her identify what to do first.

"I keep an ongoing to-do list on Gmail, but find writing out the list forces me to prioritize when facing multiple deadlines," she says. "First, I do a brain dump of everything I need to do, including family stuff, then I assign numbers."



WENDY
HELFENBAUM

Freelance Writer

»» 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

Are you a sloth or a superhero?

It's time to get real about why you're not getting to that next level in your career

Can I be honest with you? When it comes to not hearing back from editors, content marketing agencies, job ads or literary agents, chances are it's not them; it's you. When was the last time you took a hard look at how aggressively you pursue new clients, seek out opportunities, follow-up on queries or put yourself out there?

What's that you say? You don't actually have a marketing strategy, or even the slightest idea how to develop a successful writing business? Let me guess: You also don't have the time to troll job boards and read blogs for story ideas, and you can't afford to attend a conference.

Here's what you really can't afford to do: Pass up on Every.Single. Chance to boost your bottom line. Instead of whining about dwindling markets and low rates, try this two-step action plan:

They're called Member Benefits for a reason

You've paid for your ASJA membership. So why aren't you using it? I laugh when I hear writers complaining that dues are too high and there's no value in joining the organization.

Quick question: Are you actively participating in any programs, groups or conferences? Do you listen to the podcasts, read the magazine or post discussions on the forums? If not, why not? Listen, if you cannot make back \$235 in one year from the huge variety of client-facing programs and resources offered, maybe you're in the wrong business.

Feel free to do the math: Between Client Connections at our national conference (65+ clients attending) or regionals (20 clients), Virtual Client Connections held bi-monthly (a dozen or more clients) and monthly Virtual Pitch Slams with editors dying for great story ideas, promising chances of landing a gig are right there in front of you.

There's just one catch: You actually have to do one of them. Or all of them! Sure, there are no guarantees – editors are slow to respond, pitches don't hit the mark, a meeting proves you're not the right fit – but freelancing is a numbers game. Scatter enough seeds, and some will take root. Please don't tell me you don't have time – if you're serious about advancing your career, put aside time for business development.

Don't hide in your home office

Freelancing can be a lonely, frustrating way to make a living. It can also be incredibly awesome and lucrative. Want to know how most writers join the six-figure club? It's thanks to their peers. Some of the best gigs they've landed came from referrals or tips from other writers. Whether you network through ASJA or another writing community, building relationships with other writers is the key to moving forward in your career.

Think you're too introverted? So what? Many writers describe themselves that way. Strike up conversations on the forum, in ASJA's new Facebook group, on Twitter and in person at a conference. You'll make new contacts that could lead to potential projects, and forge friendships with like-minded people.

Stop blaming the world for your freelancing woes and take a step towards superhero status. What do you have to lose?



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PERIODICALS

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