

The Writer's Life



SPRING 2021

02

A Quarterly Publication
of the American Society of
Journalists and Authors

ASJA MAGAZINE

LIVING YOUR BEST WRITER'S LIFE

Special Feature

ASJA 2021 WRITER'S
CONFERENCE



asja

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Productivity Lessons from the Pandemic // Boosting your Odds in Writing Contests

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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 brings 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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From the President's Desk



LAURA LAING

*Freelance Writer
and ASJA President*

A WEASEL'S LIFE

Lately, I've become obsessed with Annie Dillard. As an essayist, it's a shame that I hadn't read much of her work until recent months. It all started with "Living Like Weasels," the first essay of her 1982 book, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. Since I first read it about six months ago, I've returned to the piece at least a half-dozen times, pulled in by the first Dickinson-like sentences: "A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks?" There's a lovely cadence in that opening, like a poem, and it deftly invites me to follow along, in case there is an answer to the question itself.

I've always been obsessed with cadence, in particular the rhythms of daily life. Years ago, I would get up before dawn to walk a set route through my neighborhood. I exercised because I was supposed to, and about 30 minutes in, I would walk past a house showing lights in the living room. Through the window, I could see the television tuned to a business channel, a ticker running below the image. I wondered if the inhabitant was in finance, starting their workday when the Tokyo Stock Exchange was closing. My thoughts then considered how the early morning affected the remainder of this person's day. Did they eat breakfast at 4:00 a.m., lunch at 11? What time did they retire in order to think clearly at such an early hour?

I've never minded waking up early. When I was fitting freelance writing around a

full-time journalism job and motherhood, I would rise at 4:00 a.m. to write stories while sitting on the bathroom floor, the only room in the house that was warm and bright. I was oh-so tired for those few years. Later, I heard an interview with Elizabeth Strout, in which Terry Gross asked how she balanced motherhood with writing Olive Kitteridge. It was a dumb question, but I really wanted to hear her answer.

I tried to read Annie Dillard's *A Writing Life* a few years ago, but because I didn't know her essays, I couldn't fall into the lyricism. To be completely honest, I was looking for something she couldn't provide: a blueprint, a how-to. I've had a successful writing career, but I've never felt comfortable in a so-called writing life. Dillard wasn't going to give me what I needed, so I put the book down. In "Living Like Weasels," she reveals that walking through the woods is writing for her, at least it plays a role. She sees a weasel at Hollins Pond, near Tinker Creek, and her thoughts turn on, twist with curiosity. I wanted to know her geographic location. Lo and behold, Dillard was writing in the early 80s, just 70 miles from where I was sitting in my high school English class.

Since that revelation, friends from my hometown have shared their memories of meeting Annie Dillard in the woods. (She has at least one cabin in the county where I grew up.) She walks through hidden paths—a

bourbon in one hand, a cigarette dangling from her lips, her silver hair disheveled. She likes to greet horses. And sometimes she hosts intimate suppers.

This is exactly the kind of writer's life I knew I could never have. I am too controlled, too afraid of getting lost. And of course, it's not the only kind of writer's life. So many of us have regular 9-to-5 writing practices. Others fit writing between school hours, and still others give in to our early-bird or night-owl circadian rhythms.

"I would like to learn, or remember, how to live," Dillard writes in "Living Like Weasels." "I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should." To write is wild. It is risky, whether a profile of a movie star, a piece about the supply chain, or a personal essay. When choosing an independent writing life, we risk even more. Is my need for defining this thing I do an attempt to mitigate that risk? Here is my desk, my computer, my notebook, my clock. My thoughts, my ideas are so much less concrete, so much more dangerous.

I write in a room that I used to call "the library" and then called "my office." Last winter, I began calling it my studio. A sound machine bubbling in the corner is a trick of boundaries: when I turn it on, it is time to write. Once the pandemic began, I scheduled my writing time within Zoom sessions with other writers. We begin these two-hour sessions with a quick check in and then get to work, writing together without speaking.

"The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way," Dillard writes. "To locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse. This is yielding, not fighting." I didn't think I could become a writer, but I finally yielded. Twenty years later, I'm still fighting, but perhaps, like Dillard's weasel, with less choice, more necessity.

To be completely honest, I was looking for something she couldn't provide: a blueprint, a how-to. I've had a successful writing career, but I've never felt comfortable in a so-called writing life.



*From
the Editor*



STEPHANIE
VOZZA

*Freelance Writer
and ASJA Editor*



LIVING THE WRITER'S LIFE

As I write this letter, the winter holiday season has just come to a close. Part of the Christmas tradition in our family involves watching sappy Hallmark movies. Yes, they're mindless and predictable, but during the pandemic they were exactly what we needed.

One thing that always strikes me is how often one of the movie's main characters is a writer. From travel journalists to authors to bloggers and even quiz creators, writers seem to be a favorite occupation for writers of Hallmark scripts. I guess that's because it seems like a glamorous profession. And it can be... at times.

I always roll my eyes, however, when I see the writer jetting off to an exotic location to write a feature story—the same month it will be published. Anyone who's worked on a print publication knows how long the process takes. We work on this magazine four months ahead.

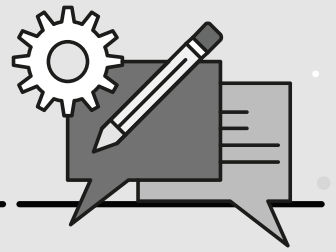
The movie characters also seem to make a living by writing one story a month. (Of course, this gives them time to attend all of those cookie decorating parties and Christmas tree lighting ceremonies.) Most of the real-life writers I know have several assignments on their plates. Their day is spent with their behinds in a chair, working on drafts, pitching editors, interviewing

sources, and meeting deadlines. One of my friends calls the process "crank and bank."

Your writer's life may or may not look like your peers. What I love most about mine is that no day is the same. One day, I may be interviewing a well-known author about their latest book while the next I'm researching how COVID-19 is changing the job of an HVAC technician. (True story.) The variety feeds my curiosity, fits my fleeting attention span, and provides interesting fodder for conversations.

This issue is all about the writer's life, and our writers have shared a glimpse into theirs, with tips on how they juggle work and family, get more done, feed their creative juices, and earn accolades in the process.

I love my writer's life and wouldn't trade it for the world. I'm guessing you agree. Maybe someday I'll be jetting off to a fancy location to write a travel feature that goes viral. For now, I prefer the view from my chair and the next story that awaits.



NEW ASJA MEMBERS!

APRIL 2021

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ASJA >>>> Membership Benefits

> *Often Forgotten Membership Benefits*

Did you remember that ASJA provides membership benefits that go beyond this magazine, the annual conference and Client Connections, Pitch Slams and Special Interest Group (SIG) events?

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

Some benefits you may not have taken advantage of lately include:

- **Delta Airlines:** Special discounted airfare for ASJA members traveling across the world, up to 10% of the fare.
- **Avis car rental:** A corporate discount program for ASJA members to enjoy low rates.
- **WeWork:** Collaborative workspaces for ASJA members to help get their writing done when they need an office space, up to 20% off new WeWork memberships.
- **Contract Assistance:** We offer free contractual rights assistance to ASJA members trying to negotiate or understand a contract when there's a sticky contract clause you need assistance with.



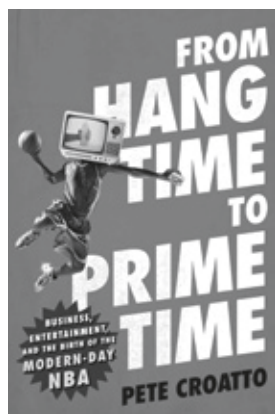
MEMBER NEWS



Book News



After being awarded the UNESCO City of Literature residency in Krakow in 2019 for her debut fiction manuscript *Divided Island*, **Koraly Dimitriadis** was approached by Polish and Czech journal editors to have poetry from her books *Love and F--k Poems* and *Just Give Me the Pills* translated. Dimitriadis was recently interviewed and published in the Polish journal *Fragile* and the Czech journal *Partonyma*. During her residency Dimitriadis, performed at Krakow's yearly Milosz Festival. Dimitriadis' *Love and F--k Poems* has also been translated into Greek.



Pete Croatto's first book, *From Hang Time to Prime Time: Business, Entertainment, and the Birth of the Modern-day NBA* was released December 1, 2020 by Atria Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster. The book, which received a starred review from *Publishers Weekly*, tracks the National Basketball Association's rise from an afterthought in American sporting life to an international cultural and business behemoth during the 1970s and 1980s. Croatto found an agent for the book's proposal at ASJA's annual conference in 2017.



David Krueger contributed a chapter, "Sustaining Extreme Success: Mindset Matters for Peak Performance," to the recently released Amazon #1 bestseller *The Successful Mind: Tools to Living a Purposeful, Productive, and Happy Life*, edited by Erik Sevensen (Thin Leaf Press, Los Angeles, Calif., September 2020). The chapter is excerpted from the NeuroMentor® Institute of Peak Performance Training Program.

Articles and Accolades



Stephanie Golden's article "Canvassing Like a Buddha: How I learned to listen from across the political line" about her experience "deep canvassing" in Pennsylvania before the 2020 election, appeared on Tricycle.org. Deep canvassing is a method of voter outreach that bypasses political speech by connecting with people

emotionally and engaging with their sense of values. It is based on the principle that facts and opinions do not change people's minds, values do.

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

IN MEMORIAM

Juli Cragg Hilliard

ASJA was saddened to learn of the passing of Juli Cragg Hilliard, 62, of Bradenton, Florida on October 18, 2020. Juli was a long time ASJA member who specialized in food and travel writing. She wrote for *Publisher's Weekly*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Tampa Bay Times*, *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, and many others. Juli was known for her radiant smile and positive energy. She is survived by her husband, Dozier, two daughters Rebecca (Chris) and Olivia, and a grandson, as well as her parents Tom and Nita Cragg of Gallatin, Mo., two brothers, and two sisters. Our hearts go out to her family and friends.

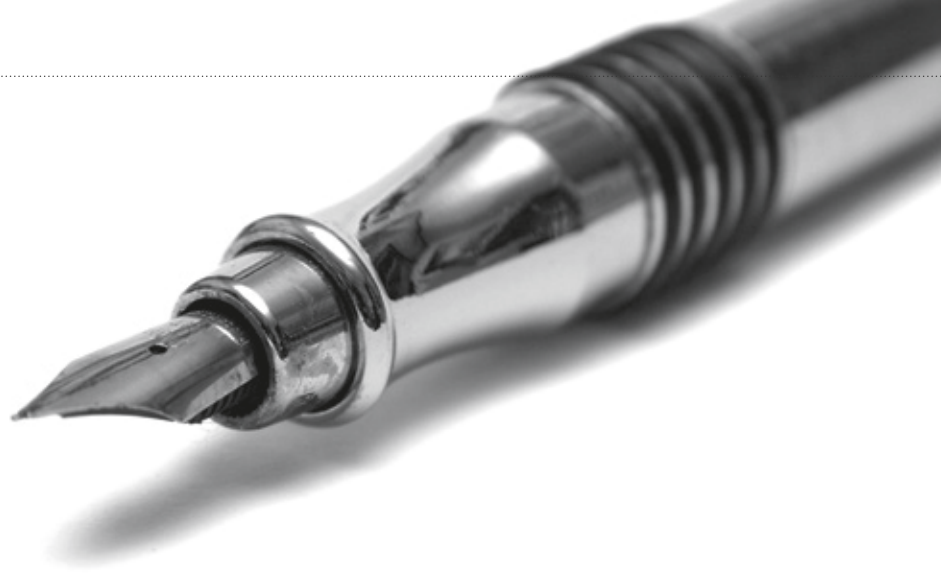


Harvey Rachlin wrote an opinion article for the *New York Daily News* entitled "What About Titles for the Rest of Us?" Following the brouhaha that resulted from the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed about the "Dr." title used by Jill Biden (as well as all others who have an M.D., Ph.D or Ed.D degree), Rachlin's piece discusses the mediocre "M" prefixes (Ms., Mrs., Mr.) the rest of us are stuck with.

During the Spring 2020 pandemic, **James Patterson** wrote an account of his battle for LGBT employment opportunity with North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms for *The Gay & Lesbian Review* entitled "Supreme Job Blow to Jesse Helms."



Barrett White used the pandemic lockdown to launch a literary journal, *Hearth & Coffin Literary Journal*, a project he had on a back burner for years. The first issue is scheduled to publish in March 2021. White has received submissions from around the United States, Canada, and Nigeria. White was also interviewed by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs about H&C publishing.



>>>>>>>

PAYCHECK

LEGALZOOM

Blog

Scope of work: 700 words

Total fee: \$450.00

Great managing editor. Interesting assignments.

Feedback: 10

THE SUNDAY LONG READ

Article, consumer pub

Scope of work: 4,000 words

Total fee: \$500

Article terms: POP

The Sunday Long Read is a curator of longform reporting, and it recently began commissioning original articles. I got the fee up from \$300 to \$500 on a story that I wanted to be out there for performance option.

Feedback: 9

AARP

Article, consumer pub

Scope of work: 5,300 words

Total fee: \$2,250

Slow payment was due to new paperwork, I think. I do not believe that is a regular issue. EFT bank deposit. Also paid \$200 of expenses. These were stories for a series on national parks. Assigned at \$2,250 for 2,250 words. With edits, it became 5,300 and 6,000 words each. Editor inserted lots of factual mistakes (like the mileage between X and Y) on his edits, which expanded the scope of the projects considerably over the more than three months I waited for edits. Asked for more money when the scope was changed and was denied.

Feedback: 3

SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE

Article, consumer pub (online or print)

Scope of work: 4,000 words

Total fee: \$6,000

I wrote this for the print edition of *Smithsonian*. I sent a cold query that was assigned within 36 hours. Fantastic contract allowed me to keep performance and all other ancillary rights. All I had to do was ask for it. Excellent editing.

Feedback: 9 (Payment arrived a few weeks late. If not for that, I would have rated the experience a 10.)

UNIVERSITY

Teaching

Scope of work: 1 hour

Total fee: \$350

Recorded a Zoom lecture for a creative writing class.

Feedback: 10

PRIVATE COMPANY

Blog

Scope of work: 1,500 words

Total fee: \$700

I write two to four blog posts per month, and they provide the topic and keywords. Length ranges from 800-1,500 words depending on their SEO research. Posts are boring, use internet research, and keyword stuffing. But no edits, and payment is made within one to two weeks. I work directly with the company, though they use an agency. I used to work with their prior agency, and payment was so late and took so long to track down, I was about to quit. Fortunately they switched and now I deal directly with the company.

Feedback: 10



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





Help your fellow members by submitting a paycheck report. Simply visit the Member section of the ASJA website. Under the Paycheck tab, click on Report a Paycheck. Knowledge is power!

INDUSTRY DIVE

Article, consumer pub
Scope of work: 1,200 words
Total fee: \$600

I have been writing for *Industry Dive* for several years. Articles are around 1,200 words, reported with at least three sources. Smart editing, fast payment. It has led to other outside work as the articles get a good industry following. Not all verticals pay the same. They pay direct deposit, usually within a week.

Feedback: 10

ACADEMIC MEDICAL CENTER

Blog
Scope of work: 34 hours
Total fee: \$4,219

Dream Client. Treats writers with respect and has built a freelance team that has real team spirit and supportiveness.

Feedback: 10

MINNESOTA MEDICINE

Article, trade pub
Scope of work: 1,500 words
Total fee: \$2,000.00
Smooth editing process, minor changes.
Feedback: 9

MADOVER MEDIA

Article, trade pub
Scope of work: 1,800 words
Total fee: \$500
I've written for *Madover Media* several times, and this is going to be the last time. They are notoriously slow payers (and not very high payers either), but this time it took six months from publication to payment. After several follow-ups with no response, they urged me to be patient. They also blamed the pandemic, which is a poor excuse because the article was published months prior. Finally, I was told that payment would go out the first week of July. It did not, so I called and firmly demanded payment. That finally worked. I love seeing my articles in the magazine, but it is just not worth the trouble of collecting payment.
Feedback: 2

AUTO DEALERSHIP CHAIN

Books
Scope of work: 30,000 words
Total fee: \$87,000
History of a large auto dealership chain. Work came to me via LinkedIn.
Feedback: 9 (I would rate this project a 10 if the client had not delayed approvals during the pandemic.)



ASJA EVENTS

CALENDAR

SPECIAL EVENT

ASJA 50th Annual Conference

April 13 –29, 2021

ASJA's 2021 Conference will be hosted virtually with three tracks:

- Journalism (April 13-15)
- Books (April 20-23)
- Content Marketing (April 27-29)

All sessions will be streamed virtually from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. ET each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

2021 Tele-Connections

May 24-25, 2021

A virtual version of Client Connections will be held May 24-25, 2021.

Registration details will be available on the ASJA website.

Summer Virtual Client Connections

June 29-July 1, 2021

July 6-8, 2021

Check the ASJA website for the latest details.



LINDA KONNER

*ASJA member and
president of the Linda
Konner Literary Agency*

>> From the Agent

EAVESDROPPING ON THE AGENT

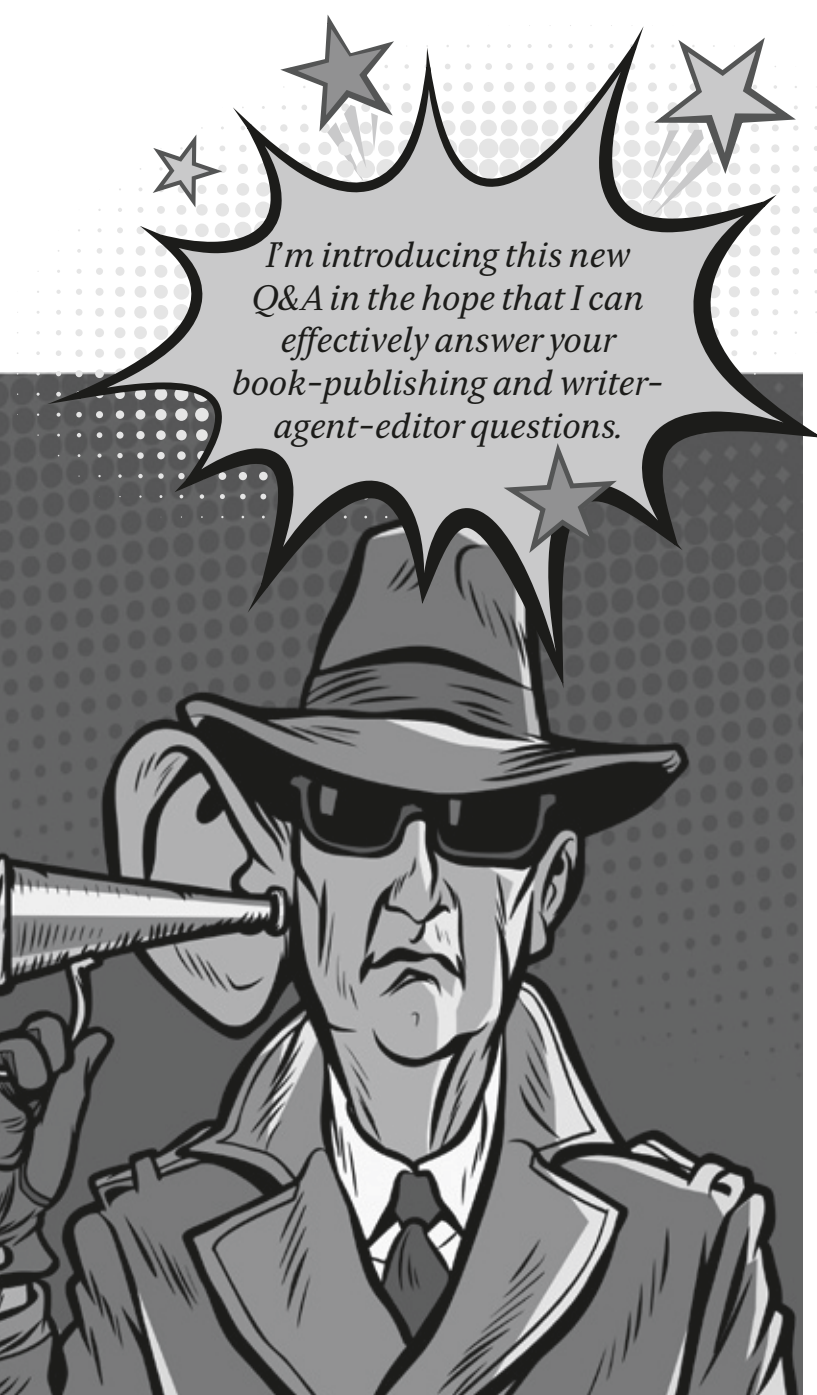
>> Linda Konner launched the Linda Konner Literary Agency in 1996. She represents approximately 75 authors of adult nonfiction books.



It's been a tough 13 months for everyone, including writers. Many authors, bloggers, and others who write for a living have made the best of a difficult situation, one that finally—finally!—seems to be easing up for all of us.

Happily, even during this very trying period, there has been a bright side: books have proven to be the salvation not just for those who write them but especially for those who buy and read them.

A New York Times business section headline on Jan. 1, 2021 said it all: “It Was a Good Year for One Industry: Books.” It went on to report that print-book sales were up nearly 8 percent by the close of 2020.



I'm introducing this new Q&A in the hope that I can effectively answer your book-publishing and writer-agent-editor questions.

No surprise there. After all, we all needed a break, an escape from the realities of the non-stop bad news, such as health, politics, social injustices. Mercifully, books did their job, providing that refuge for so many of us. As a result, book publishing actually did fine compared to so many other businesses. Yes, companies laid off key staffers, publishing offices went dark (some maybe permanently), independent bookstores struggled, and big publishers were gobbled up by even bigger ones, making bookselling more challenging than ever. But overall, books and those who create them did fairly well in what was otherwise the worst year through which we've ever lived.

So, while I launch this Q&A column on a semisweet note, I do hope you'll see it as it's intended to be read: as a source of answers to your book-publishing questions, from someone who started out on your side of the desk, as a freelance writer and author (and proud ASJA member!) and morphed 25 years ago into a literary agent.

As for the name of this column, it's actually a variation on the title I came up with for a book I wrote many years ago about freelance magazine writing. I had wanted to call it *Eavesdropping on the Editors*. Unfortunately, my publisher changed it to the far-inferior *How to Be Successfully Published in Magazines*.

So, right there, perhaps, I'm answering a question you might have about your book: Who decides on the title? Answer: the publisher. Oh, they may go along with yours for a while, but eventually it's decided in-house at the publishing company, perhaps with some input from a book buyer or two from Amazon or Barnes & Noble (or possibly somebody's spouse). You will be told—usually too late to do anything about it—that “everyone here LOVES this title!” The hope is that you will, too, but if you don't, good luck getting it changed. If you have a super-high-powered agent to chime in and defend you, that might help, but in case of a dispute, the publisher prevails. (I'll bet you can't wait to write that book now!)

If I sound a bit cynical after 25 years as a literary agent, I really don't mean to. I have written previously in these pages that I love being an agent, that of all the jobs I've ever had, this is the one I've enjoyed the most. Sure, I had a good time writing my eight books, getting paid for them, and promoting them, sometimes even on national TV. But these days I'd rather get 15 percent of a book I don't have to write than 85 percent of a book that I do.

I'm introducing this new Q&A in the hope that I can effectively answer your book-publishing and writer-agent-editor questions, big and small, and thereby make the process of being an author—whether you're a book-publishing newbie or a veteran—a little smoother and more pleasant.

And since I don't claim to have all the answers (has a literary agent ever made that admission in public?) I will occasionally call upon my brain trust, my group of agent buddies I put together when I was a new agent a quarter-century ago. So... ask away!

Got a Question for Linda?

Send it to asjamagazineeditor@gmail.com.

50TH ANNUAL

April 13–29



ASJA 2021

*Sign up by clicking
the link on the
ASJA home page!*

Virtual WRITERS



This Spring's annual conference takes place virtually April 13-29, 2021 in the comfort of your own home office. There will be three distinct tracks: Journalism, Books, and Content Marketing.

Each track will have its own keynote speakers and set of moderated panels and workshops designed to improve your career. Additionally, Snack Chats—virtual writer meet ups and special opportunities will be offered within each track.

Tele-Connections, our virtual Client Connections, where you can meet with editors and agents one-on-one, will be held May 24-25, 2021.

Virtual Conference Tracks

Journalism ▶ April 13–15

Books ▶ April 20–23

Content Marketing ▶ April 27–29

All tracks will run from 1–5 p.m. ET

Pick from one track or all three, add Tele-Connections and Snack Chats and gear up for an amazing virtual 2021 conference. Don't miss out on great sessions and speakers from around the globe!



50TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE



FROM THE CONFERENCE CHAIR



Kristine Hansen
CHAIR

Kristine Hansen has been a member of ASJA since 2006 and is a food, design and travel writer based in Milwaukee. Past involvements with ASJA include chairing Virtual Client Connections.

By now, we're all familiar with Zoom. Maybe you've played games with your cousins, toasted your BFF's good news at a virtual happy hour, or even toured college campuses—all from the comfort of your home. (I keep a glass of water and lipstick by my computer at all times, just for these video calls, another indicator we are in strange times.) And we've probably all had our share of Zoom meetings for work.

Still, the question remains: How can you get the most out of a virtual conference? Just like when you step off the elevator at the Marriott Downtown in New York City each spring, ... you will get out of the experience only what you put into it.

Because traveling to New York City for our annual conference in 2021 is not a safe proposition, we are bringing the conference to you via—you guessed it—Zoom. Sessions will be streamed starting April 13. The Journalism track will be April 13-15, the Books track will be April 20-23, and the Content Marketing track will be April 27-29. All will run from 1-5 p.m. ET.

Kicking off each track is a keynote speaker—with a message uniquely tailored to that track—followed by other goodies, like virtual happy hours (which, by now, you may be a pro at!), snack chats (replacing our themed lunches at the conference), and mid-week meditation and yoga.

You can sign up for the entire conference or just one track, although I hope you will consider committing to the whole shebang. While in the past you paid for recordings of sessions, we are making those free for streaming later on, at your own convenience.

Tele-Connections will not take place during the conference. Instead, they'll be held May 24 and 25. These short and sweet "speed dating"-style appointments with editors and agents will be hosted over Zoom, with sign-up beginning May 7. Appointments, awarded via a lottery system, will be released shortly after.

Still, the question remains: How can you get the most out of a virtual conference? Just like when you step off the elevator at the Marriott Downtown in New York City each spring, ready to strike up conversations with your fellow writers and cull tips from panelists on how you can make this your best year yet, you will get out of the experience only what you put into it.

In the weeks leading up to the conference, we'll have Facebook groups for each track so you can get to know other attendees. I also encourage you to check in on ASJA's Facebook group for news of panel additions, questions from fellow attendees, and the opportunity to simply be a part of the buzz and excitement surrounding our annual conference.

TELE- CONNECTIONS

JEANETTE HURT | Freelance Writer

Client Connections, our conference's signature event, will continue virtually for the second year in a row as Tele-Connections on Monday, May 24 and Tuesday, May 25. Mark your calendar now! Given the disruption of the pandemic, new work opportunities are more important than ever, and this valuable event allows professional members to connect for nine-minute virtual meetings with editors, book agents, and content marketing managers.

In the past, this event has attracted top outlets, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Wine Enthusiast*, *The Boston Globe Magazine*, *Next Avenue*, *Forbes*, the American Institute of Cancer Research, Vox Media, and *Parents*, as well as a slew of nonfiction book agents.

Our volunteers are working right now to get these fantastic editors, agents, and marketing managers to sign up for the event, and we are always looking for more people who are interested in getting involved. If you'd like to join our team, or if you'd simply like to personally invite some of your favorite clients, please email us at jeanettehurt@sbcglobal.net or erinodl@gmail.com.

We're also bringing back the contest where your efforts to invite the most editors and agents who say "yes" will be rewarded with free conference and Tele-Connections registration. Contact Cheryl Alkon at cheryl@cherylalkon.com with leads, and she'll walk you through how to send out the invites.

Many of our members have received book contracts, established long-term clients and been published in their dream markets as a result of this event. To participate, members must enter the lottery, which will be held May 3-7. Again, please mark on your calendar now; you won't want to miss out.



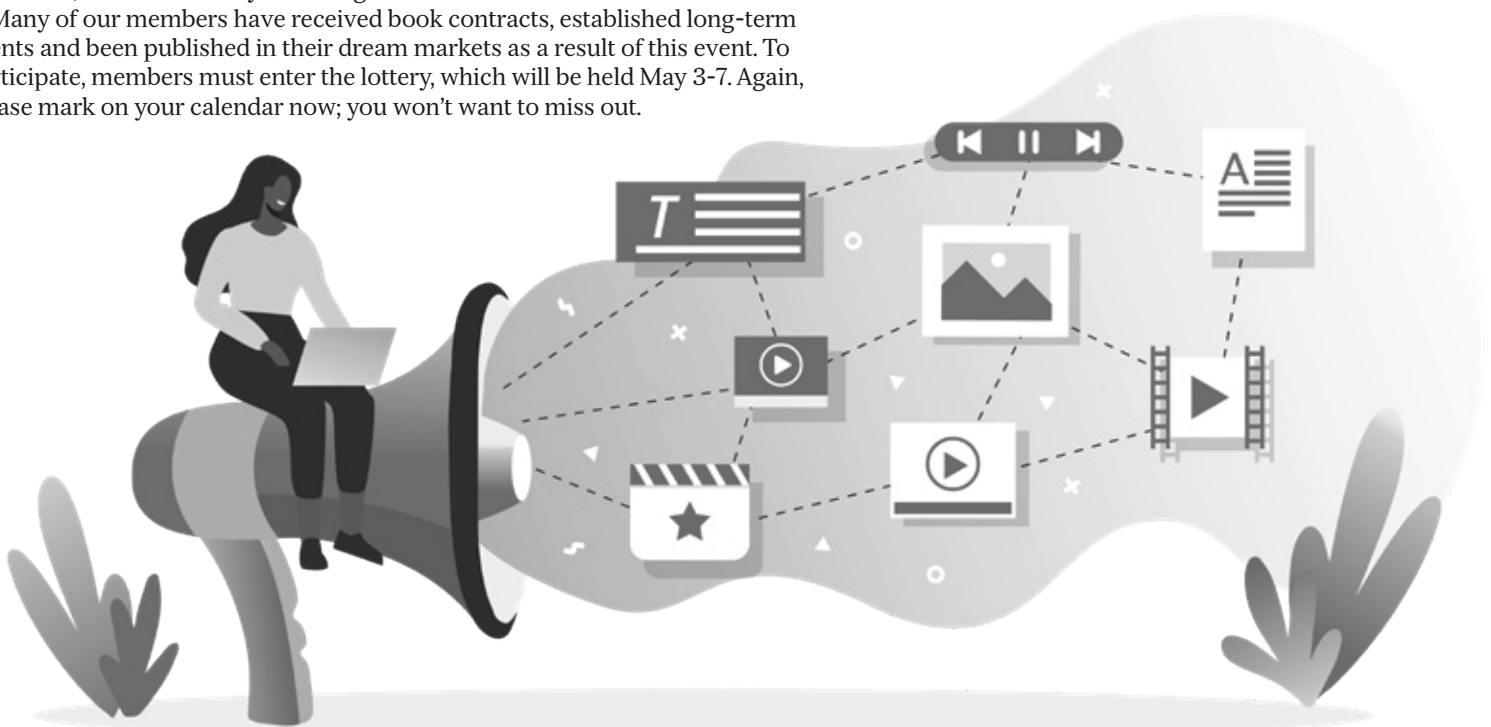
SIGNATURE EVENT

May 24–25



Limited Participation

To participate, members must enter the lottery, which will be held May 3-7.



50TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE



CONFERENCE TRACK

April 13–15



Keynote Speaker
Katherine Standefer

JOURNALISM

KRISTINE HANSEN

Freelance Writer

Kicking off the Journalism track—and the entire conference—is a keynote by Katherine Standefer, author of the groundbreaking memoir *Lightning Flowers: My Journey to Uncover the Cost of Saving a Life* (published by Little, Brown Spark in November 2020).

As a teacher of writing and author of a memoir that reads like gripping fiction, Standefer will give a keynote that promises to inspire whether you write nonfiction or fiction. Her curiosity about her implanted cardiac defibrillator led her to trace its materials' journey before they entered her body, including Southern California labs and a Madagascar mine. Kirkus Reviews calls her book "an intensely personal and brave accounting of a medical battle and the countless hidden costs of health care." *The New York Times* says it "reads like a detective story."

Each of the Journalism track's sessions includes tips on how to run your writing career as a business, whether it's navigating freelance contracts or gaining insight into what pisses off an editor. Other areas of focus include writing responsibly about travel, keeping alive your dreams of snagging a byline with top-tier outlets during a pandemic, and writing and pitching personal profiles that draw the reader in. And if you're the kind of person who always has deep questions about life, consider a panel about finding that "sweet spot" between culture and science, with an editor from *Discover* who will share what the magazine needs from writers.

"Thanks to the solutions-journalism panel during the 2020 virtual conference, I am writing for a publication that has been on my bucket list but I didn't know how to crack—Ms. Magazine. Thanks, ASJA!"

LISA RABASCA ROEPE

Each of the Journalism track's sessions includes tips on how to run your writing career as a business, whether it's navigating freelance contracts or gaining insight into what pisses off an editor.

Rhea Wessel's panel about breaking into restorative narrative fits right into our current times when there's a desire to cover people and communities experiencing adversity. This strengths-based approach to journalism was created by the non-profit Images & Voices of Hope.

And, finally, there's a continued call from editors to feature a diverse group of sources. But what if you don't know where to find these people? The Diverse Voices for Every Beat panel walks you through the many ways. Also, rules about writing about marginalized groups is shifting. Check out the Everything You Want to Know About Covering Diversity panel so you're up to date on style changes and publication expectations.



Track Sessions

- ▶ Navigating Freelance Contracts
Karon Warren, Moderator
- ▶ How to Piss an Editor Off
Anna Goldfarb, Moderator
- ▶ Everything You Want to Know About Covering Diversity
Court Stroud, Moderator
- ▶ Responsible Travel Writing
JoAnna Haugen, Moderator
- ▶ Pitching to Top-Tier Outlets During a Pandemic
Estelle Erasmus, Moderator
- ▶ Portraits of People: Writing and Pitching Personal Profiles
- ▶ Restorative Narrative
Rhea Wessel, Moderator
Jacqui Banaszynski, Speaker
- ▶ Diverse Voices for Every Beat
Theresa Sullivan-Barger, Moderator
- ▶ The Sweet Spot: Where Science and Culture Mix
Caren Chesler, Speaker



50TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE



CONFERENCE TRACK

April 20–23

“Thanks to ASJA relationships, I have accelerated with high-value book ghostwriting. A valued ASJA colleague referred me to a corporate client, resulting in a \$75,000 project. And a different ASJA colleague (an agent) helped that client land a publishing deal.”

JOANNE CLEAVER

BOOKS

KRISTINE HANSEN

Freelance Writer

Grapppling with civil unrest and divisive politics has led major publishers to cancel book contracts and, in turn, recruit more BIPOC authors. This new lens into what types of books agents want to sign, publishers want to publish, and readers want to read will guide the Book track's sessions, including an all-Black panel talking about Book Publishing in the Age of COVID and Racial Reckoning.

Experts will share, in a salon-style discussion format, how writers fit into this new reality and the new opportunities out there. With Simon & Schuster hiring the publishing industry's first Black person to lead a major publishing imprint (Dana Canedy), and also Aminda Marqués González (the Miami Herald's former executive editor) to increase diversity among its authorships, where do you authors fit into the changing landscape? And how important is it to hire a sensitivity reader?

Many ASJA members wishing to dabble in fiction found an article in ASJA Magazine helpful, and a panel on this very topic will dig deeper on how to make that transition. What can be learned from the hundreds of journalism articles you've already written when you sit down to develop characters and a plot? Published novelists with track records as journalists will walk you through how they did it.

A panel about kid lit (writing books for younger audiences) coaches you on how to modify years of subject knowledge into a picture book or YA book. Similarly, there are opportunities to turn an article into a book deal and also sell your book to Hollywood—topics of two other panels in the Book track. With theaters closed for the foreseeable future, maybe it's time to visualize your articles and books as a Netflix series?

Then, once you're published, how do you earn positive reviews when 4,500 books are published daily? Penny Sansevieri provides tips on how to rise above the pack and cut through the noise.



Track Sessions

- ▶ The Business of Book Writing
Sylvia Harvey, Speaker
Katherine Reynolds Lewis, Moderator
- ▶ Make the Transition From Non-Fiction to Novels
Arielle Emmett, Moderator
- ▶ Kid Lit: Writing for Younger Audiences
Chris Barton, Speaker
Tara Haelle, Moderator
Susan Johnston Taylor, Speaker
- ▶ Hollywood Calling! Books to Film/TV
- ▶ Book Publishing in the Age of COVID and Racial Reckoning
- ▶ Turning an Article Into a Book
Olga Mecking, Speaker
Lisa Selin Davis, Speaker
- ▶ Fact-checking: What You Need to Know
Melinda Wenner Moyer, Speaker
Wudan Yan, Speaker
- ▶ The Secrets to Getting More Book Reviews
Penny Sansevieri, Moderator

CONTENT MARKETING

KRISTINE HANSEN | *Freelance Writer*

ASJA member favorite Jennifer Goforth Gregory is the official host for ASJA 2021's Content Marketing track and has cooked up an inspiring lineup of sessions. This includes niche subjects like how to break into freelancing in higher education—which is very different than writing for corporations and non-profits—as well as good practices, such as how to become your client's favorite freelancer. You want to be the first writer a client calls when they need a job done, right? And turn an occasional client into a steady anchor? Editors at top content-marketing agencies will talk about the skills, habits, and qualities a dream freelancer should have.

Whether you're new to content marketing or plan to ramp up your projects in that space in 2021, the session on how to make your content-marketing portfolio stand out is a must. In this workshop-style session led by content-marketing writer and copywriter Tina Nazerian, who crafts content for tech companies, you'll walk away with tips on not only what you need to include but also what you should be curating from editors now.

This ties into a very important skill every content marketer should know: how to write a kicka\$\$ blog post. Whether this is for your own website or for a client's website, you'll be hired many times over once you master how to write quality content. Moderator Bethany Johnson, who writes for Twitter Business, MasterCard, and Fidelity, will share the formula—from “your tasty title to your hypnotic hook”—she's used to author thousands of articles ... even when she lacked technical knowledge, experience or the authority to write with natural gusto.



CONFERENCE TRACK

April 27–29



Track Sessions

At press time, these are a few of the content panels that have been planned.

- ▶ How to Write a Kick-Ass Blog Post (and Why Your Content Marketing Career Depends on It)
Bethany Johnson, Speaker
- ▶ How to Become a Favorite Freelancer
- ▶ How to Make Your Content Marketing Portfolio Stand Out
Tina Nazerian, Speaker
- ▶ Break into Freelancing in Higher Education
Jenna Spinelle, Speaker



How to BOOST YOUR ODDS in Writing Contests



*A judge gives her inside tips
on increasing your chances of
walking away with a prize*

Isn't it a dream, though? To write something so sparkling and engaging that it's chosen as the winner? Plus, thousands of dollars in winnings, publication, conference fees, and champagne lunches with thirsty literary agents? Okay, the champagne lunch may be a bit beyond expectation, but everything else is quite possible.

Writing contests are just a bit better than lottery wins, because you've created a special piece of work. You've floored multiple, acclaimed writing contest judges, and you have won. You might feel that beginner's elation spring up through your hardened edges as a longtime writer, or you might be a shiny, new writer looking to be placed on a golden springboard into your writer's life.



SHARON
NAYLOR TORIS

Freelance Writer

Sharon Naylor Toris has served as senior judge for writing competitions over the past 15 years. She is also the author of 35+ books, two novels, and many to-do lists. She lives with her husband, Joe, in Morristown, N.J.

As a senior writing contest judge with more than 20 years of experience, I've seen it all. I've seen winners in every age group, from teenagers to a 92-year-old in a retirement home's writing club. Over the years, I've helped deliver over \$500,000 in prize money. I've had a hand in more than 50 bright-eyed conference attendees checking in at front desks and pushing back tears as they slip on their lanyards and step into Writer's World. Where agents are waiting to meet them.

It's all very life-brightening.

So, I thought I'd share my top tips for boosting your odds in any writing contests you may enter, because it's not just about the writing. I thought I'd get that out of the way right up front.

Yes, excellent writing quality will get you in the room, and by that, I mean plucked out of the messy slush pile of diatribes and flatness to join others for a more serious read and feel. Writing judges can feel through the narrative. We feel you. We feel your supporting characters. We feel your aching parents who waited for you to come home, if you'd come home. We feel the colors of the rooms you're in—if you take the reader into the room. Otherwise, you rudely leave us out in the hall with a glass up against the door, getting just dialogue and nothing else. No movements or gestures. We know nothing about those cinnamon rolls on the stovetop, nor the French toast-flavored coffee from the café at the beach.

Here are my top tips for writing winning stories.



I thought I'd share my top tips for boosting your odds in any writing contests you may enter, because it's not just about the writing. I thought I'd get that out of the way right up front.

No
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1

Turn your settings into living, breathing characters

Just as you think about how your walking characters express their own histories and depths, everything in the room or in a scenic landscape can create reality for the reader. Maybe just that one bag of French toast-coffee adds a rich world of realism and the judge feels that to the point of tasting it. Rooms, homes, and robes have histories, so make them live. We're looking for that kind of world.



No
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2

Spend 10 times as long crafting your first two sentences

Judges say those first two sentences are what grabs them. It's when we get a burst of story energy. We certainly don't stop reading a story at the two-sentence mark. We read it all, but if those first two sentences make me push up on my toes as I'm reading, or make me lean in, it's good. I always know from the lean-in that I want to get closer to the writer, maybe to get a sneak peak of what's in their mind.

Within the first two sentences, give me amazing sensory detail in a setting that departs from cliché. Sunsets with gold flickering in water are nice, but sunsets glowing in unexpected colors, in an actual sensory setting that, again, lives and breathes, are great. Give me inner thoughts that defy cliché and make me feel something real and new.

No
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3

Slow burns may be great in story structure, but in writing-contest story structure you need multiple burns

Your chosen contest may be for a full-sized book, self-pubbed print or e-book, short story, memoir, or what have you. In addition to being profusely entertaining, these story forms must hold a prime truth: this chosen-to-enter work must contain essential updrafts and downward dips and plunges in narrative that moves.

Sure, a story noted for its calm demeanor, its meandering in an intended relaxed journey, could certainly win. But in a gladiator pit facing other stories of varying energies, it's not likely to win while picking the prettiest smoothed stones from the arena walls. "Get in there, kid, and show 'em what you've got," says the muse, wanting this gorgeous story to stand out and keep surprising all the way to the winner's circle.

No
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4

Make a scene

Like a setting that lives and breathes, so too should scenes between characters. Give them layers, histories, beliefs we might not like, and beliefs we would champion. Give them signature eye rolls and frustration gestures. Give them movements through which their empathy seeps. Give them knee-shaking anxieties and scars. No one is all good or all bad. We're all a mess, so in which ways will you breathe life into your characters?

A scene is best made through differentiated characters—ones with voices, sentence structure, weird zips, and

gurgles for when they're so angry they are beyond intelligible words and only a step away from growling. Give sounds to their elation, as well.

Here's something I've done with my own writing, back in pre-pandemic days when you could sit at a coffee shop all day. I listened to voices and speech patterns, conversations between young and old, and heard how often they interrupt each other, which is a lot! Holy hell, let someone finish a sentence! And here is my trusty notebook with which I am Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, breaking every utterance of Eliza into phonetic bits. Pssccchhhhtttt.

No
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5 *Give all of your genius a chance by not making a technical foul*

Judges want great writing to shoot up the finalist lists and take the prizes, but we can't break the rules for you. If the contest parameters say there's a 2,000-word limit, make sure your story is under 2,000 words. And don't try to pull a fast one by writing "2,000 words" at the top of your story as if you want me to believe you. Believe me, I'm going to take the time to cut and paste your story into a Word file and hit the word count button. Because after all of these years, I can eyeball a story's length no matter what the font and size.

I'm getting an official count because other entrants deserve to be on a level playing field, and my time is valuable. It's broken my heart a few times in judging contests when a writer has crafted a beautiful, lyrical narrative and the most gorgeous characters, but the story is 500 (or even five) words over the limit. Rules are rules.

The same goes for the acceptable list of e-file formats. If you have pdfs, mobis, epub's or other formats available, do the work, format your writing, and submit it in at least two programs the judges can open safely, if that's permitted.

No
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6 *If you don't win, enter your story again the next time*

I consider this the most important tip: judges are subjective, and as humans they may be slightly triggered by certain topics, whether consciously or unconsciously. Your entry may be a tour de force, but perhaps this current judge can't fully immerse in your story.

And sometimes there's a rare, magical unicorn of an entry that checks all the boxes and makes up some new boxes to check; one that came out of nowhere and knocked everyone's socks off. An A+++++++ story stacked up behind it never had a chance.

Next time, maybe that unicorn will be gone, and your stellar story will take its worthy place in the top spot. I saw this happen in a recent competition. The previous year's fourth-place entrant submitted her story again and handily won first place. Her story gained wow factor with its never-give-up power.

Believe in your work so much that you give it every chance to shine.



If those first two sentences make me push up on my toes as I'm reading, or make me lean in, it's good. I always know from the lean-in that I want to get closer to the writer, maybe to get a sneak peak of what's in their mind.





SLOTH

JOE BECK

Freelance Writer





BADGER

➤ *Writers succeed when they possess the indefatigable resolve of a badger but move at their own pace with the slow, intentional determination of a sloth*



I'm not good at loafing—never have been—and Sunday seems to be the universally accepted day to practice it. Ironically, I'm told I appear to be loafing; however, my mind is always going. It's a writer's blessing and curse.

I learned this habit many years ago for good reason. Mondays and deadlines were always looming, and my paycheck depended on my ability to have stories ready to go at a moment's notice, sometimes a few a day. Trade magazines in New York City were unforgiving if copy was late and the art department needed it or, worse yet, couldn't start the design until they read the copy.

I wasn't always this way. I used to be like LA traffic, inching along, getting there when I got there. A great editor, however, cured me of that. He said writers who know they could rely on adrenaline just before deadline are young and naïve. I now know the limits of loafing and stopped playing chicken with the calendar.

My loafing education started early because I resisted it. Growing up, I was curiously jealous my brothers were able to will themselves back to sleep in their beds after waking up early. I had no such skills. My eyelids snapped open early and I was up, not wanting to miss any part of the day. My oldest sister, Judi, shares this skill and affliction. I haven't changed.

My wife, Gail, is invested in my loafing education and wants to see me do more of it. It's good for me, she says. Our kids are grown and out, and there's nobody to schlep around town or look after but ourselves. While I'll retire from teaching soon, I'll never retire from writing, although now I have the luxury of picking writing jobs I want to do.

Still, there's loafing involved, more loafing than I could have imagined, considering all the years I've worked two and three jobs. For those reasons, Gail's right. She actively helps me loaf. She also knows when I get excited about a writing job, the badger appears and I'm unstoppable. Whether I have a year to travel, research, and write a memoir or a week for a magazine feature, when I'm deeply involved, I'm relentlessly protective of my time and energy as a deadlines approach.

The stage manager in her sets the TV remote control, my cell phone, and the house phone within my reach on the couch where I'm learning to be still. Have you ever watched Sunday morning TV? Slogging through crap, there's not a good nature or animal documentary or NOVA special in sight. I turn off the flat screen and begin thinking there must be a hinge to fix, an article to write, a window to clean, a bill to pay, or a salad to make. Sunday is the best day to get these things done.

I put the remote down and notice a book Gail had placed there, *The Boy Who Would be Shakespeare: A Tale of Forgery and Folly* by Doug Stewart.

"In the winter of 1795, a frustrated young writer named William Henry Ireland stood petrified in his father's study as two of England's most esteemed scholars interrogated him about a tattered piece of paper that he claimed to have found in an old trunk. It was a note from William Shakespeare. Or was it?"



Joe Beck is a freelance writer and educator who got his start after he sold a story about his African safari adventure when he was 19. He's since written, co-written and ghost-written 12 books, 10 plays and hundreds of articles from banana ripening rooms to medical murder mystery thrillers to a family drama, starring Brian Dennehy and Austin Pendleton. He's accepted an invite to join the Yale Writers' Workshop, taught writing at Kingsborough College in Brooklyn and teaches English on Long Island. He's a proud member of The Authors Guild and The Dramatists Guild.

An hour later I'm about finished with the little book and Gail walks in the room. "Let's go shop and for frozen yogurt. It's a beautiful day outside," she says.

"But I'm still practicing."

"What?"

"Loafing. I'm just about done with this book."

"Come on, you can loaf in the car and finish that book when I go in the store."

"Do you remember when all the stores were closed on Sunday?"

"Yes, collective, societal loafing."

"And Europeans have made it an art form in the middle of the day. And they've added full-blown napping to the mix."

"Keep practicing. You're a teacher and writer with a lot to learn."

I do know this much. To the outside world, we writers appear lazy and unmotivated, perhaps, but what percolates is the important stuff. Sometimes the best writing can't be rushed any more than it can be prevented. Editors don't often like hearing that, but some of them are writers themselves.

The magical mix is akin to a batter at the plate. There are a million styles of batting, but eventually you have to connect with the ball.



Whether I have a year to travel, research, and write a memoir or a week for a magazine feature, when I'm deeply involved, I'm relentlessly protective of my time and energy as a deadlines approach.

MICHELLE V. RAFTER

Freelance Writer



How to Be a More

Efficient Freelancer



Adopt standardized routines and systems to make work more productive and satisfying and yourself a more sought-after contributor



A big part of running a successful freelance business is working in a way that's efficient and productive in how you manage your time and your client relationships. Mastering both is critical regardless of whether you define freelance success as maximizing earning potential, turning a side hustle into a full-time career, taking on better clients, or graduating to more fulfilling work.

To understand more about effectively managing work time and relationships, I turned to two business self-help books, one old and one new. The old one is *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, Cal Newport's 2016 book that explains the psychology and benefits of working in the zone and how to block off time for it. The new one is *The Art of Being Indispensable at Work: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done* published in mid-2020 by business advisor and author Bruce Tulgan.

Neither is specific to freelancers and authors. But the advice they impart can be applied to anyone who is self-employed, including creative professionals such as writers.

ASJA member Michelle V. Rafter is a Portland, Oregon ghostwriter and business reporter who has covered work and the business of freelancing for more than a decade. Her favorite time for deep work is in the afternoon. Follow her on Twitter [@michellerafter](https://twitter.com/michellerafter).



Deep work is work-related tasks performed “in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit” that create value, improve skill, and are hard to replicate.

.....



THE DEEP POWER OF DEEP WORK

Operating in deep-work mode can help you optimize your time, which in turn can help you plan your schedule and calculate

your availability to take on new work.

Newport, a Georgetown University computer science professor who writes regularly about the intersection of technology and culture, defines deep work as work-related tasks performed “in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit” that create value, improve skill, and are hard to replicate.

According to Newport, the ability to do deep work allows you to learn how to do hard things quickly, like write about a new subject, perform at an elite level, and operate in a “flow” state that makes work mentally rewarding. In an always-online world, deep work has also become harder to do.

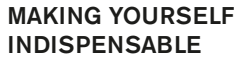
Not everyone’s mind works the same way. Nor does everyone have the same schedule. To accommodate differences, Newport advocates adopting one of these four approaches to minimize distraction and create space for deep work:

- **Monastic** – Minimizing extraneous activities to free up time for deep work, including doing things like batching email or tasks, opting out of social media, and declining to attend non-essential events (physical or virtual).
- **Bimodal** – Switching between normal work and monastic devotion to deep work at regular intervals, which could mean holing up for weekly deep-work sessions, or for the time it takes to complete a project such as a whitepaper, script or book.
- **Rhythmic** – Setting aside regular, specific periods of time for deep work. One now well-established author I know completed his first few books by getting up at 4:30 a.m. every weekday to write for 90 minutes before heading to his day job as a newspaper editor.
- **Journalist** – Fitting in deep work wherever and whenever possible, an approach that Newport named for journalists after observing how some reporters he knew could tune out the world seemingly anywhere, anytime, in order to write, and could sustain periods of deep work longer than most.

Once you’ve identified the approach that works for you, Newport suggests ritualizing it. Calculate how much time you need to block off for deep work. Mark the time on your calendar. Describe how you’ll do the work, for example, using apps to block internet access while you write. He also suggests getting support for how you’ll work, which could mean having the right office set up and tools, or publicly sharing your intentions with others, the kind of nudge that behavioral economics have shown improves the likelihood that someone will stick to their stated goals.

After reading *Deep Work*, I was curious about how much deep work I do. I primarily work as a business ghostwriter and bill by the hour. In 2020, I averaged 120 billable hours a month, or about six hours a workday. I spend about a third of my time on communications and project management, which means I put in about four hours a day of deep work. When I shared my findings with members of a writer group I belong to, the vast majority reported logging two to four hours of deep work a day.





you're going to produce, meet deadlines, and fulfill other obligations of an assignment.

As Tulgan writes in *The Art of Being Indispensable at Work*, the best way to ingratiate yourself to a boss is to add value and make the people you work with look good—without saying “yes” to ill-conceived projects or overcommitting and then not being able to fulfill your obligations.

He recommends standardizing other aspects of an assignment, for example, creating templates for often-repeated processes. If you're new to a publication or client, ask for style guides or best practices to speed up your learning curve and reduce errors. Create similar templates for checking your work before submitting it. Once an assignment is finished, suggest a short wrap-up call or email to review what worked and what could be improved on in the future.

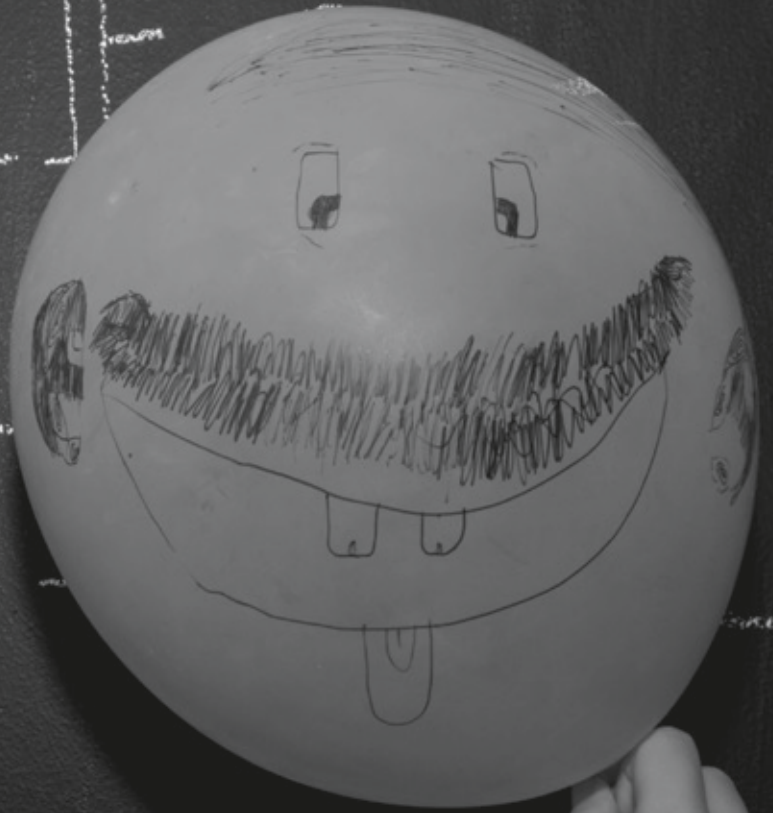
You can't control all the variables that affect your work, especially at a time of shifting routines and non-work responsibilities created by the pandemic. Devoting more hours to deep work and adopting a calculated, methodical approach to improving client relationships can make you more efficient and productive, which can make work more satisfying and bring you closer to your idea of freelance success.



- ▶ Be transparent about what you do and know and ask for help learning new things.

HOMIE

SCIENCE



Coronavirus

$$72 \div 9 = 8$$

$$5 \times 3 + 7 =$$

PRODUCTIVITY *lessons*

from the Pandemic

How an ASJA member successfully juggled work and homeschooling during the COVID-19's lockdown



BRANDI-ANN
UYEMURA

Freelance Writer

For years, I suffered from debilitating fatigue and chronic pain. Fast forward to 2020, the year that would test that unmercifully. I should be the last person to write this article. And yet, I created my own audio show. I was interviewed for various podcasts. I also received the honor of being a 2020 PBChat mentee and had several articles published in a magazine. In a lot of ways, it's been my most productive year.

This, and my five- and seven-year-old boys have been with me 24/7 since summer and now I'm homeschooling. At all moments of the day, our 1,200-square-foot home is bustling with the noise of screaming kids, my husband's constant work meetings, and our new puppy. I've managed to be productive without caffeine, a babysitter, or a nanny.

I write this not to boast or, worse, proliferate toxic perfectionism in a world that's stressful enough as it is. I write this because through my experience plus discussions with authors, writers, and a productivity expert, I've learned effective ways that can help you become more productive no matter what 2021 looks like.

» Brandi-Ann Uyemura has a BA in English, during which she interned at *Skipping Stones* magazine, and MA in Counseling Psychology. She's been a freelance writer for more than a decade, working as an assistant editor for Psych Central, online columnist for *The Writer* and contributor to companies like Intuit, *Nerd Wallet*, and *Hawaii Life*. Currently, she's freelancing, writing children's fiction, and coaching creatives while homeschooling her two young sons in her hometown of Oahu, Hawaii.

Redefine Success

Part of the reason I accomplished so much in 2020 was due to how I chose to define success. How to be productive in a difficult year requires a lot of rethinking. Success to me does not mean that I don't lose my patience with my kids. It does not mean that I'm the breadwinner. And finally, it does not mean that everything I do is perfect. Far from it.

Success to me is writing on the weekends, at least 20 minutes of daily exercise, and a few hours a day teaching my kids. Pete Croatto, a freelance writer and author of *Hang Time to Prime Time*, recounts a successful day spending time with his three-year-old daughter, having sufficient time to prep for an interview, and "nailing it." "When you're a parent, you learn not to be obsessed with perfection. Let's not get fancy about it. Let's get right to the point and get it done," says Croatto.



» "When you're a parent, you learn not to be obsessed with perfection. Let's not get fancy about it. Let's get right to the point and get it done."

PETE CROATTO

Don't Compare

If you've ever gone on social media to mindlessly scroll and landed on a friend's post with her beautiful children in a beautiful spot posing with her beautiful new book, you understand viscerally why comparing yourself is an easy way to lose at winning. Freelance writer, editor, and author Jordan Rosenfeld says, "I'd just say to other parents, everyone is managing and that might look different from how you're doing it. Try not to compare yourself. That creates more anguish. You really are doing your best. This time we're living in is extraordinary."

Reward Yourself

As a writer, positive reinforcement is rare. As a writer during a pandemic, you need to work that much harder to bake in rewards that'll help you persevere when the days are long and rejections are inevitable.

For Croatto and Rosenfeld, deadlines are enough of a motivator. But for moments when she's overwhelmed or needs an extra push to work on writing for herself, Rosenfeld schedules break time, indulges in chocolate, or reads a chapter from a book.

As writer and productivity coach Joy Schoeph says, "A better goal to attain instead of reaching for high goals is accomplishing smaller ones, like completing an outline or creating a schedule, and be sure to reward yourself. Treating yourself to Starbucks or taking a bubble bath, being able to recognize these smaller victories and rewarding yourself for them, can lead to success."





Schedule Your Days

As a right-brain creative type, scheduling sounds as fun to me as outlining. But even I benefit from a simple weekly calendar to help me plan my kids' curriculum and keep my writing on track. Schoeph says it's one way to not let the day get the best of you. "You have a plan of attack; even if things go wrong, you still have that structure," she says.

Chris Bodmann has five kids and works from home as an account director and branding strategist at an advertising agency. While he admits that things can get hectic and he sometimes doesn't have the energy to write, sticking to a routine makes a huge difference. And when things don't work out, he says, "I just try to roll with it. And I don't beat myself up if something slips."

Part of scheduling means understanding when you're the most productive. Schoeph says going with your energy is important. "If you know that you can get more done in the morning or afternoon, work with your energy instead of against it," she says.

For example, author Ava Brody homeschools three kids and works part-time. It makes the most sense for her to write when everyone's asleep.

»» "If you know that you can get more done in the morning or afternoon, work with your energy instead of against it."

JOY SCHOEPH



» Any time you give yourself an intentional break, you also put a pause on that constant hamster wheel of thinking. ... Quiet and mindless activity makes room for problem solving.

Multitask

Multitasking isn't always an efficient way to be productive. However, when I speak of multitasking, I'm talking about doing two very doable and pleasurable things: exercising and brainstorming. When I'm biking, my mind is open. When I'm walking, I allow space for inspiration to flow. Research published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* supports walking as a way to improve creativity.

Any time you give yourself an intentional break, you also put a pause on that constant hamster wheel of thinking. In this playful state, you're unrestrained to all the entrapments that can be impediments to writing. Quiet and mindless activity makes room for problem solving.

The authors in *Burnout* use the term "active rest," or "working one gear while resting the others" to describe this phenomenon. It's the idea that resting an overworked muscle while working on strengthening another one has a cumulative effect, which they say "makes us better at all the things we do." This can come from working on fiction while taking a break from nonfiction or working on your full-time job while writing a novel.

» If I've learned anything in 2020, it's that in the face of everything we've been through, writer parents are a resilient bunch who can shift priorities to get their writing done, rest when needed, and commit to being kinder to themselves.

Let Go of What's Not Important

Remember pre-pandemic when we had all this time but languished it away without much forethought? To be productive, you need to be honest about where your time is going. Croatto says, "I've always felt the more time I have, the more comfortable I am. I've learned very quickly I can take advantage of the time allotted to me. I learned very quickly that time is sacrosanct, and I have to be diligent and vigilant to get the work done." He adds that taking Twitter off his phone, adding tasks lists, and using a timer helps him cut distractions.

For Brody, prioritizing is key. "For me, writing my third book is much more important than tidying the garden," she says. "I have the feeling that people might remember me by my books rather than how my garden looked."

This approach may mean forgoing jobs that don't serve your ultimate goals. Rosenfeld says, "I definitely had to turn away work. At one point, a client referred someone to me to write a book and I realized I was going to spend all this time on his needs, and on what he wanted to do. I needed to take on work in my own little sphere."

If you need extra help discerning which commitments to say "no" to, I've found it helpful to ask these four questions from *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Emily Nagoski, PhD and Amelia Nagoski, DMA:

1. What are the benefits of continuing?
2. What are the benefits of stopping?
3. What are the costs of continuing?
4. What are the costs of stopping?



Make Self-Care Non-Negotiable

I think we can all agree that self-care means something entirely different since 2020. While the phrase might once have conjured up images of a spa day, now it means doing the bare necessities to keep your spirits up.

For Croatto, writing and taking care of his daughter left him too exhausted to exercise in the afternoon. The pandemic forced him to be flexible and now he's shooting baskets for a half an hour in the evening. "I learned to make that an essential part of my day," he says. "It's tiring and it's an effort, but I do feel better. So that's the hardest thing to realize—that I still have to take time for myself. That 30-40 minutes to do something for myself is invaluable."

Rosenfeld says the hardest thing about having her 12-year-old at home is the mental health aspect of not knowing when it will end. "I miss my friends," she says. "It all builds up. It's hard for me. I'm having the same self-talk in my own head. I have to be in better shape than him to go through it and sometimes it can be hard."

The stress of working at home while needing to tend to her child can be overwhelming, but Rosenfeld says little things, like setting aside 20 minutes to take a nap, eating healthily, working at a moderate pace, and sleeping are ways she takes care of herself.

Prior to 2020, I was getting regular massages at my physical therapy office, but now I don't even go to the salon for a haircut. I've found stretching is everything and self-care looks like a closed door. Gone is the brooding, precious, and temperamental writer.

If I've learned anything in 2020, it's that in the face of everything we've been through, writer parents are a resilient bunch who can shift priorities to get their writing done, rest when needed, and commit to being kinder to themselves.



>> Words Matter

THE WORDS WE CHOOSE MATTER

Today, more than ever, the words we choose to connect with loved ones, co-workers, and others are critical. We are dealing with a pandemic, a severe economic crisis, race and equality issues, political divides, and families being torn apart under the pressure of it all. These are trying times, and how we communicate may serve to complicate them more or be the conduit to recovery.

Disruption has become the norm and choices appear to be diminishing. But you can control how you change and respond—from the inside out. You can harness the power of your voice. Your voice is a choice.

Here are a few strategies for choosing wisely to have a greater impact as a mindful communicator:



TERRE SHORT

Author



Terre Short has been a coach in some capacity her entire career. Through coaching, speaking, and facilitating she has inspired staff, physicians, and all levels of leaders to connect to their why, and to harness the power of empathy and personal relationships. She has more than 30 years of leadership experience, a Masters in Business Administration/Healthcare Management, her Professional Coach Certification (PCC), and is a Certified Patient Experience Professional (CPXP). She is also the author of the recently released book *The Words We Choose: Your Guide to How and Why Words Matter*, which was awarded 2020 American Book Fest finalist. Additional information can be found at ShortGroup.net.

Finding ways to communicate effectively is more important than ever



Active Listening >>>

Active listening is underrated for how it serves both the listener and the speaker. When you listen well, you can reaffirm the feelings of the speaker and seek to hear what they need. You get to choose if you are willing and able to meet their needs. Listening is best served with an empathetic ear and compassionate responses. “I hear you.” “Tell me more.” “What do you fear?” These are excellent channels to filling in the gaps that separate us. “What,” “How,” “Tell me” are great approaches for the curious. Curiosity is a more productive posture than judgment. Whereas, beginning your inquiry with “why” may imply judgment regardless of your intent. For example: “Why do you support that policy?” Can you see the negative impact that might have?

Listening carefully begins with your own voice—what words do you choose for the voice in your head? How does your internal narrative support your values? Once you have this internal change figured out you may be equipped to explore external changes. You may be ready for the challenge of a heartfelt inquiry that endeavors to tease out the fears and needs of another. For example: What keeps your loved one from the opposite political party up at night?



Values and Beliefs >>>

Values and beliefs inform our word choices. When we are being authentic and honest with ourselves, our values serve us well. Sometimes our beliefs conflict with our values, and sometimes they conflict with the values others hold. Knowing, living, and speaking our values relies on routine self-awareness. Once you are grounded in your values, you can assess how well your word choices support them. If they do not, consider changing your words.

Consider this thought: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me.” This is simply not true. The harm occurs when your words are out of alignment with your values. Even the words you choose for your internal narrative can harm you. For example, what you tell yourself about your ability to navigate economic challenges will either hold you back or propel you forward. The same goes with the pandemic. You can choose positive words and thoughts that don’t harness more fear and lead you to a productive path.

The various crises upon us require that we learn to connect well with others, in some cases this may be a relearning. Either way, our ability to do so hinges on the words we choose. As we navigate these unstable times, it is incumbent upon each of us to build upon the empathy and compassion we discover when we reflect on our own values. This sets us up for success in relating to others, particularly those who are unlike us or have opposing points of view. We have the capacity to observe and name our feelings and needs. We are capable of learning how words influence inclusion, biases, and judgment. We can choose words that heal, support, and connect. Communication bridges are built on a foundation of compassion and a desire to be a good human. This is what leads us to common ground—ground on which we are all equal. How overtly do your values show up in your conversations?



Perspective >>>

Perspective can be challenging when change occurs rapidly and affects our sense of control. Words have the power to influence your perspective. Simple phrases such as “I get to” as opposed to “I have to” can make a remarkable difference in how you feel. “I have to get this project done by Friday” implies a burden and a lack of control in what I do. “I get to work on this project and share it on Friday” sets you up to feel gratitude for the opportunity and reframes what you control. “I get to pick the kids up after work” has the same impact. Think about it. What do you get to do this weekend?

Connections can still happen at work. Until recent years, we were conditioned not to bring our personal lives to work. But now most of our work is conducted in our homes. Zoom links the hours of our days. Words that connect us at work might be delivered through various mediums, but this does not reduce their impact. Particularly in times of uncertainty, the ability to inspire, recognize, lead, and be of service are paramount. These skills and many others are driven by word choices, ones that provide the power intended. Words that minimize, denigrate, or reduce are replaced with those that uplift, acknowledge, and motivate, to better serve your intent. Your words influence the perspectives of others.



Self-Awareness >>>

Self-awareness is perhaps the most important component of Emotional Intelligence and an important part of communicating effectively at this time of evolving disruption. It takes a deep dive into self-awareness to reconnect with your values and assess how they align with your needs. Your Emotional Intelligence informs word choices that uphold and strengthen your sense of self. With this grounding, your first reflection might be the value of building relationships and contributing to the greater good. Each of us gets to decide how we respond to the challenges of the pandemic. We can choose to see the silver linings and weave them into the fabric of the future, which includes how we communicate with others.

The health of humanity hinges on our collective ability to choose words with greater intent, to use our voices in honor of our values and with respect for others. Your own well-being may be tied to the words others choose. How you respond, and which words you allow to influence your internal narrative, may have a lingering affect. Bridging gaps begins as an inside job and expands outward to the world. How we express ourselves is improved through an empathic lens. Knowing the right words can have a daily impact on our lives and the lives of others. Now is the time to learn how to create positive connections and learn how to speak your values. Knowing what to say and how to say it has never been so important.

Our collective voices will guide us through these difficult times by helping us build (or rebuild) connections. We are stronger together. Yours is the voice of humankind and your voice is a choice. How will you use it differently tomorrow? Who will you positively impact with well-chosen words and your well-tuned ear? Your commitment to some or all of these strategies can create a positive impact that is exponential.



Tami Kamin Meyer

ASJA MEMBER &
VOLUNTEER SINCE: 2017



WRITING SPECIALTY/FOCUS:

Law, business, cannabis, travel,
lifestyle, health, and sports.

PROUD WRITING MOMENT:

Among my favorites is when I successfully sold a story to a local magazine based on an article I had written that was pulled prior to publication due to “outside pressures.” The article topic proved extremely controversial, and I was extremely proud for defeating someone’s attempt at censoring the story.

Another comes any time my oldest son, a journalist himself, compliments one of my articles.

► In which publications/outlets have you been published?

Forbes, MarketWatch, Next Avenue, Cannabis & Tech Today, Your Teen, Trial Lawyer, Ohio Magazine, Ohio Lawyer, and Ohio Lawyers Weekly.

► How long have you been an ASJA member?

Four years.

► How long have you volunteered for ASJA?

Four years.

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

Currently, I chair the Marketing/ Communications Committee, which includes the Social Media Sub-Committee.

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

Sometimes more than I’d like to admit, and then other times, not enough.

► Why do you volunteer for ASJA?

I volunteer for the ASJA because being an active member has reaped benefits for me far more valuable than anything I might have done or will do for the organization or the writing profession. I have gained friends, allies, supporters, contacts, professional opportunities, invaluable lessons, and more. I will never forget the incredible outpouring of support I continue to receive from ASJA and its members since my longtime boyfriend died suddenly May 3, 2019, just before ASJA NY 2019. For that, I will be forever grateful and can’t imagine not volunteering as it is another way of honoring my boyfriend’s memory.

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

I keep very odd sleeping hours. I also consider myself a “professional jugglerette,” meaning I’m used to juggling a lot of balls, as I practice law in addition to freelance writing. Somehow, it all works. Most days, anyway. Okay. Sometimes.

► What are the benefits of volunteering?

There are many benefits to volunteering with the ASJA. I value the friendships, contacts, skills, ideas, and opportunities I have been exposed to due to my volunteering.

► What do you like to do when you’re not writing?

One of my favorite things to do when I’m not actually writing is think about writing. It’s constant and a joy, so it’s nothing I feel a need to get away from. I am also an avid recreational kayaker, a gardener, a “dog-ma” to two rescues I adore, and the proud mom of two adult sons—one a journalist and one studying to be one. I have been taking improv comedy classes (currently online via Zoom) for 18 months, so life, even during the pandemic, is full, busy and crazy as ever.

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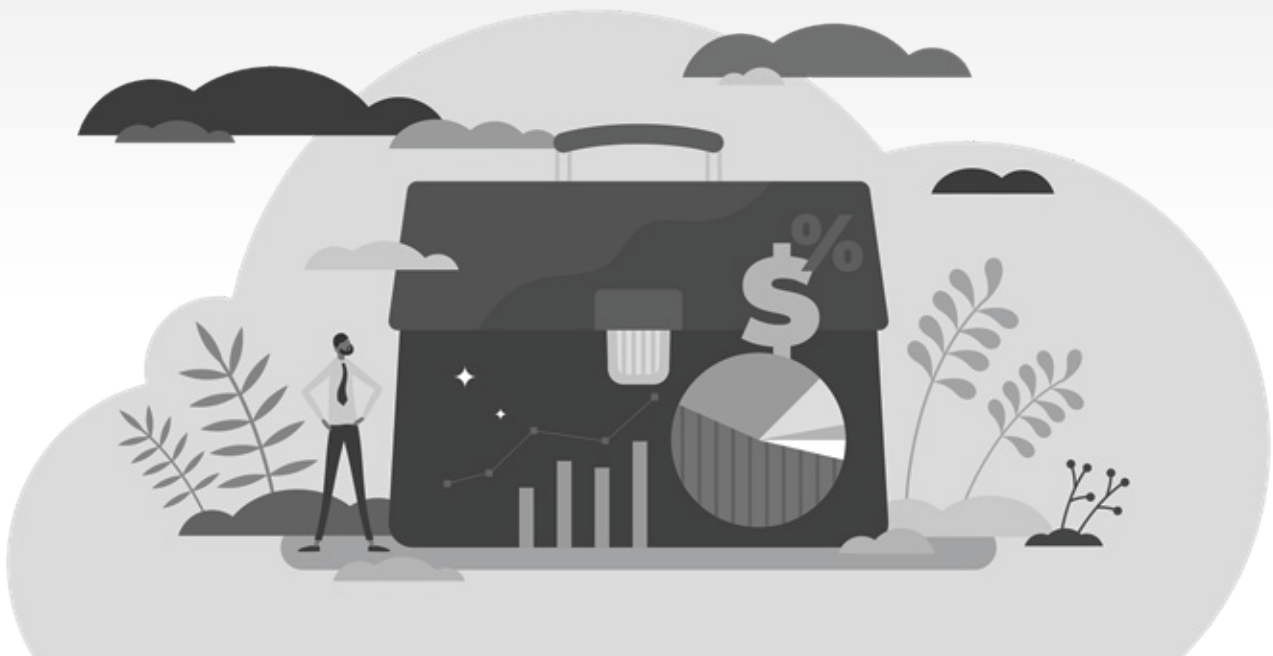
This flagship "speed-dating" event takes place at ASJA's national conference and regional conferences across the country. You get nine minutes of valuable face time with editors, literary agents or content marketing managers. Past participants include: *Scientific American*, *PBS Next Avenue*, *BBC Travel*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Skyword*, and more.

➤ **Virtual Client Connections**

These are the Zoom meetings everyone can't wait to have! Three times each year, you can virtually meet with top clients for 10 minutes of pitching time, all from the comfort of your home office. Past participants include: *This Old House*, *AARP*, *Costco Connection*, *Johns Hopkins Magazine*, and more.

➤ **Virtual Pitch Slam**

Get two minutes to pitch your story idea plus receive follow-up from an A-list editor during this one-hour interactive phone call. Past participants include: *Discovery*, *American Way*, *Sierra*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and more.



➤ **Check ASJA website's 'Benefits' page for upcoming events!** ◀



RUDRI BHATT PATEL

Freelance Writer



Market Report | ON PARENTING THE WASHINGTON POST

A mainstay since 1877, *The Washington Post* started as a newspaper but has evolved over several decades. On Parenting, established in 2011 in the digital version of *The Washington Post*, is the exploration of the multifaceted and complicated layers of parent-child relationships. This section features news, advice, and events for parents, as well as personal essays and perspectives from parenting experts.



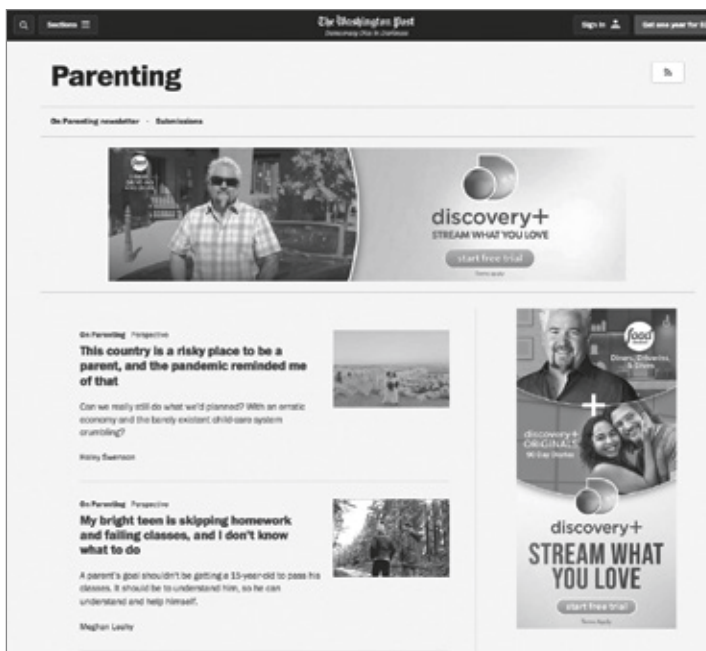
“We’re looking for thoughtful pieces that inspire, make a reader sit up, make them want to pass along to friends and say, ‘Hey, you really should read this.’”

AMY JOYCE



Rudri Bhatt Patel is a former attorney turned writer and editor. Her work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *JSTOR Daily*, *Saveur*, *Business Insider*, *Civil Eats*, and elsewhere. She lives in Phoenix with her family.





Amy Joyce, who served as the *Post's* Weekend section deputy editor, saw the need for additional parenting coverage and moved into the editorial role in 2014. Currently, Kendra Nichols, the Local Living editor, also edits and manages pieces and coverage. A third editor, Mari-Jane Williams, moved to home coverage, but she sometimes steps in to help edit the parenting section.

The On Parenting reader includes “a wide, national audience, with some international readers as well. Readership includes parents of children in pretty much every stage, as well as grandparents, foster and single parents, parents who have adopted, and those who are struggling to become parents,” says Joyce.

If a writer has *The Washington Post* on their bucket list, the good news is they have a legitimate chance to land a byline in the parenting section. Freelancers make up 90 percent of the writing pool at On Parenting. To publish in this section, Joyce recommends all writers read the content. She emphasizes “there is a method to our madness, a certain kind of story, essay, and reported piece. Make certain you’re familiar with the feel of what we do.” The average length of pieces ranges from 900 to 1,200 words.

In terms of essay and reported pieces, Joyce prefers to see personal essays in full. However, “writers should note we don’t take too many personal essays these days. There are so many out there and we want our personal essays to really surprise and delight,” she says. What might be helpful for essays is a peg to anything newsworthy. Joyce emphasizes “we’re looking for thoughtful pieces that inspire, make a reader sit up, make them want to pass along to friends and say, ‘Hey, you really should read this.’ We want a reader to feel like they are seen and heard or to learn from personal essays.”

For reported pieces, Joyce recommends sending a good pitch. “Tell us who you’ll be interviewing, what the nut graf will say, and how the story will look,” she explains. Writers should send pitches to onparenting@washpost.com or through the online freelance portal, The Talent Network, if writers are part of it.

Breaking into On Parenting requires, as Joyce says, “writing an engaging pitch or story, something that we haven’t seen.” There

is so much parenting content and the section receives so many pitches that sound a bit like an echo of what we read elsewhere.

“If we’ve read it or it’s been part of the general conversation for a while, it’s going to be hard for us to decide that’s one of our must-haves,” says Joyce.

On Parenting pieces are primarily digital and Joyce says sometimes “a piece will be a good fit for print as a Local Living cover. That happens once every six weeks.” Some pieces might make it into print in the Style, Health, or Science section if it is a good fit. There is also a special parenting print section that runs once or twice a year.

Whether online or in print, the writer must ultimately make the personal essay or reported piece relatable. Joyce emphasizes, “We want words from a parent who can really help readers understand what someone else is going through.”

ON PARENTING AT A GLANCE



Pay: Varies

Fees: \$300 to \$500 with some exceptions, depending on the amount of reporting and work that goes into the piece

Story Length: Between 900 and 1,200 words

Frequency: Published daily, but can vary

Payment Terms: *The Washington Post* works with The Talent Network (freelance portal) on assignments and invoices to make certain freelancers are paid quickly

Kill Fees: Yes, and depends on the amount of work that went into the piece that is killed and why it was killed



PAUL
VACHON

Freelance Writer

The Writer and ADHD

*Here's some good news for those of us
who often feel disorganized and distracted*



Despite being faced with obstacles, ADHD individuals can ironically discover qualities that can, if leveraged correctly, become sources of strength. Several of these can be beneficial to writers.





What do accomplished writers Clarence Page, James Carville, and Seth Godin all have in common? They've all been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a condition that has been the bane of thousands of professionals.

ADHD is recognized by the American Psychiatric Association as a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects more than 15 million Americans. It typically involves inattention, disorganization, and difficulty in focusing on a given task. It can also include impulsivity, such as a proclivity to speak at inappropriate times, or as a habit of taking risks without considering the possible consequences. This latter characteristic—hyperactivity—may not be present in everyone affected.

The weight of scientific evidence suggests that ADHD is transmitted genetically. Today, it's usually diagnosed in childhood (although this was not always the case). For the youngster, the condition often presents huge challenges. Treatment can involve medication, talk therapy, or a combination of both. Even with treatment, difficulty with academics, bullying by peers, and a lack of social acceptance are common realities. These problems often persist into adulthood.

But while ADHD can be the source of difficulty and embarrassment for those it affects, it can also be a boon to creativity.

A recent article in *ATTitude*, a magazine and website for people with ADHD and their families, reveals this surprising perspective. Despite being faced with obstacles, ADHD individuals can ironically discover qualities that can, if leveraged correctly, become sources of strength. Several of these can be beneficial to writers. Perhaps this explains why the above-named luminaries are among those affected.

The piece cites ingenuity, or a propensity for “out of the box” thinking, as an example. One patient struggled with filing papers alphabetically, so she devised a thematic system based on her own internal links.

“The associations in my head are one of a kind. If my brain thinks of life insurance policies and bicycle warranties the same way, that’s how I file them. When I return to that folder, I’ll find them both.”

Another asset is an openness to take risks—although, as cited above, this one needs to be tempered. The article explains that Thomas Edison, who probably had ADHD, required more than 3,000 attempts at developing a functional lightbulb before achieving success. We surely owe him and his stick-with-it abilities a debt of gratitude! This quality is undoubtedly useful for writers, since writing, regardless of genre, is a “right brain” activity—one that requires persistence, flexibility, and ingenuity.

Fortunately, there are effective tools adults with ADHD can utilize. The advocacy group CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, www.chadd.org) offers a wealth of useful information on its website. These include specifically tailored organizing techniques for home and office, such as “quartering” a home office into zones dedicated to a computer, photos, financial paperwork, and reading. The guide suggests that each quarter be tackled as a project unto itself, and that the person gives herself a small reward upon completion.

Successful time management through use of a planner is another idea, whether a traditional model, a software program, or a smartphone app. While there are advantages and disadvantages to each, a paper planner that devotes a full page to each day is ideal for recording multiple listings: appointments, meetings, and deadlines. Devising a color-coded system for each can also help.

A tool for the most serious of ADHD patients is professional coaching. Over the last several years a number of specialized life coaches have begun offering ADHD clients customized plans aimed at fostering clearer judgment, healthier self-esteem and relationships, and self-motivation skills. Visit ADHD Coaches: Organization and Time Management Experts for ADD Adults at additudemag.com for more information and a directory of providers.

The reality of ADHD has long been an area of interest for me, since I’m personally affected by it. At the age of 31 I was diagnosed with ADHD. When my son was in the first grade he was also diagnosed. As a result, I’ve spent considerable time and energy on the phenomenon over the years. Hopefully what I’ve learned can help you, too.

»» Paul Vachon’s work has appeared in *Crain’s Detroit Business*, *HOOR Detroit*, the *History Channel Magazine*, *Costco Connection* and others. He has written four books on Detroit history: *Forgotten Detroit*, *South Oakland County*, *Legendary Locals of Detroit*, and *Lost Restaurants of Detroit*, plus two guidebooks, *MOON Michigan* and *MOON Michigan’s Upper Peninsula*.

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