

How I Make a Living Writing (and How You Can Too)

Printable Workbook

This is a printable workbook version of www.aliventures.com/make-a-living-writing. Note that the pages are A4 size, as I'm in the UK. If standard paper sizing differs in your country, you may need to select a "scale to paper size" or similar option in your printer settings.

This week, the start of August 2016, marks the eight year mark since I left my day job.

Ever since then, I've been supporting myself through writing. It's my dream career – and I love being able to set my own hours, work from home, and have a huge amount of flexibility and freedom.

In the past four years, I've been particularly glad of my career: I now have two young children, and I've been able to spend a lot of time with them while continuing to do what I love for a living.

I haven't written much here on Aliventures about how exactly I actually make money. Maybe you suspect that there's some amazing secret skill involved, or some sort of dark art.

But there really isn't. Turning words into money might sound like spinning straw into gold ... but it's a darn sight easier.

And ... if you want to ... there's no reason why you can't do exactly the same as me.

In short, over the past eight years, I've had a bunch of different revenue streams: some for a year or two, some for the whole time. I'm going to explain the basics of each, and provide some links to places where you can get further information or try these methods out for yourself.

I'll start with the ones that were easiest to get going with, and work up to the methods that take a bit more time.

Note: for each method, I've indicated *when* I did it and, if I stopped, I've noted why.

#1: Paid Writing for Blogs (2008 onwards)

This is how I started out, in early 2008. My first ever paid position was with Diet Blog [www.diet-blog.com] (thanks Jim!) and my second one was with Daily Writing Tips [www.dailywritingtips.com] (thanks Daniel!)

At first, my family and friends found it quite weird that I could get paid to write for blogs, and even eight years on, people are still sometimes surprised that paid blogging exists. It's no big mystery, though. **Like magazine and newspapers, blogs need regular content.** Many generate revenue through advertising, and they need a constant stream of new articles to bring in readers.

Writing for blogs typically means:

- Regular work – often writing one or more posts every week
- Flexibility over what you write about – most of the time, I've chosen my own topics
- Quick payments, usually via PayPal
- The chance to get your work in front of tens of thousands of people

How Much Does Paid Blogging Make?

I've been paid anything from \$20 - \$300 per post, depending on the length and complexity. **Around \$50 for a 750 word post is a decent rate.**

Magazines often pay more per word – but they'll also have longer turn-arounds, and higher requirements.

These days, when I write paid blog posts, I usually make \$70/hour. (Including admin time.) I write fast! This is also my current standard hourly rate for any freelance writing.

Learn More:

Make Money Blogging, Darren Rowse, ProBlogger [www.problogger.net/make-money-blogging] – if you're new to blogging, start here. Although this post is aimed at bloggers looking to make money from their own sites, there are loads of links to great information about writing great blog posts and building engagement (both important when you're undertaking paid blogging).

Earn Money Online: 92 Websites That Pay Writers \$50+, Jennifer Roland, Make a Living Writing [www.makealivingwriting.com/earn-money-online-websites-that-pay-writers-spring-2016] – this is a great place to begin when you're looking for well-paid blogging work.

The Blogger's Guide to Freelancing (ebook) [www.bloggers-guides.com/freelancing] – I've written a whole ebook about making money as a paid blogger. It'll teach you everything I've

learnt in my years of writing for blogs. *(Note: this one's on my schedule for an update and some extra bonuses in late 2016 or early 2017: if you buy now, you'll get the update when it comes out at no extra charge ... even if I raise the price.)*

The Blogger's Guide to Freelancing special offer: as a member of the (free) Aliventures email newsletter, you get a 35% discount on any/all of my ebooks. Just enter the coupon code **"alinewsletter"** to get your discount.

Questions and Notes about Paid Blogging

#1: The list of "websites that pay writers" on Make a Living Writing includes blogs on the following topics:

- Business, Career, and Finance
- Personal Essays
- Family and Parenting
- Health
- Lifestyle and General Interest
- Tech
- Travel and Food
- Writing

Circle any of these topic areas that you have some experience in and would enjoy writing about. You might want to jot down notes about potential angles or topics.

#2: Think about the blogs you read. Do any of them accept guest posts – whether paid or not? Guest posting can be a great way to get pieces for your portfolio, and even unpaid opportunities can boost your career as they get your writing in front of a large audience.

Blogs that I'm familiar with and could guest post for:

#2: Website Advertising (2008 onwards)

In November 2008, I got my very first Google AdSense cheque, for a whopping \$100 or so. **Nowadays, most of my advertising income is from people who pay to have a link or banner ad up on my site.**

As of November 2015, I no longer run any advertising here on Aliventures. These days, all my advertising revenue is from a couple of dormant blogs: The Office Diet [www.theofficediet.com] and Alpha Student [www.alphastudent.com]. I wrote a lot of content for those sites seven+ years ago, and I'm still reaping the benefits every month.

If you're selling text links as adverts, do be careful with this: Google states you should "no-follow" these links (so they don't boost the advertisers' Google ranking) and you could find your blog dropping way down Google's search engine results if you don't obey their rules.

Also, keep in mind that advertising may not combine well with other strategies for making money. For instance, if you sell high-end services, you won't want to put prospective clients off with lots of garish ads.

How Much Do Ads Make?

This varies hugely depending on how big your site is. Unless you have a lot of traffic to your site, you'll probably want to combine this with other methods.

Advertising is a long-term strategy. It took me eleven months to get that first Google AdSense cheque – but since then, the time that I invested on writing content has really paid off. If you're a fast writer, and if you're willing to put in the work to build a popular website, then you may well be able to make good advertising revenue.

Learn More:

Google AdSense [google.co.uk/adsense] – this is a good place to start, though as your site grows, you'll want to look at approaching advertisers direct.

6 Ways to Make Money with Advertising on Your Blog and the Websites to Help You, Jeff Bullas, JeffBullas.com [www.jeffbullas.com/2015/03/20/6-ways-to-make-money-with-advertising-on-your-blog-and-the-websites-to-help-you] – this detailed post explains the key types of advertising that you could try, and gives links to loads of ad networks and other companies that can help you get started with each of them.

13 Reasons Why Blog Ads Are a Silly Monetization Strategy (And What to Do Instead), Sarah Peterson, SmartBlogger [smartblogger.com/blog-ads] – ads aren't right for every blogger or every blog, and there are some good reasons to think twice about using them ... which this post explores.

Questions and Notes About Website Advertising

#1: How comfortable do you feel about running advertising on your website? Do you think advertising other people's products / services will be suitable for you and your audience?

(Think about: are you building a large site with a transient following, e.g. a blog that offers light-hearted entertainment, or a much smaller site with a small but loyal readership, e.g. a blog where you sell your high-end coaching services.)

#2: If you do run advertising, is there a particular type you'd favour?

(Think about: banner ads; text ads; direct ad sales versus using ad networks like Google ads; sponsored posts, where a brand pays you to post about their product / service.)

#3: Affiliate Promotions (2009 onwards)

A small proportion of my income comes from affiliate sales. **When I write a review of a product, I normally link to it with a special URL that lets me get commission on any sales that I make.**

This is one of my smallest revenue streams, largely because I don't review books and products all that often, and I don't like to be pushy about them. Whenever I use an affiliate link, it's for a product that I own and that I like – I'll only promote things that I'm happy to be associated with.

If you're in the US, note that you are required by law to clearly disclose affiliate links or relationships to your readers: Amy Lynn Andrews has an in-depth post on that here [amylynnandrews.com/how-to-disclose-affiliate-links].

How Much Do Affiliate Promotions Make?

On premium, independently sold ebooks (ie. not through Amazon or other retailers) and other digital products, many authors/creators will pay 50% commission. With products on Amazon, you'll normally get 5-6% commission.

Obviously, you're more likely to make sales if (a) you have a big audience and (b) the book or product is very on-topic for your audience.

Learn More:

The Ultimate Guide to Making Money with the Amazon Affiliate Program, Darren Rowse, ProBlogger [www.problogger.net/archives/2013/04/24/the-ultimate-guide-to-making-money-with-the-amazon-affiliate-program] – an in-depth post on ProBlogger about Amazon specifically, but with plenty of advice that applies to any affiliate endeavours

Blogger's Guides affiliate program [www.bloggers-guides.com/affiliates] – my own affiliate program, if you're interested in spreading the word about my Blogger's Guides. It has step-by-step instructions to get you started, plus images of the Guides that you can download.

7 Simple Ways to Make More Affiliate Income from Your Blog, Ramsay, Blog Tyrant [www.blogtyrant.com/affiliate-income] – a detailed post helping you go further as an affiliate, though it starts off with a beginner-friendly introduction to affiliate marketing.

Questions and Notes About Affiliate Promotions

#1: Have you purchased (and loved!) any products that you could review on your blog, with an affiliate link?

(Higher-priced / high-pay-out products like premium ebooks, digital courses, software, and expensive physical products on Amazon like cameras work well here – but you could also make a practice of regularly reviewing books on Amazon. The commission for each one is small, but you'll get a steady trickle of income – and your reviews may help establish you as an online authority in your field.)

#2: Which of these rules, if any, will you stick to for your affiliate promotions? You can choose more than one, and you may want to make these the basis of an affiliate disclosure on your website.

- I'll only promote products that I own.
- I'll only promote products I really love.
- I'll always be fully honest about the products I promote.
- I'll promote products I don't own and haven't used, so long as I know and trust the person who created them.
- I'll let readers know when a particular link is an affiliate one.
- Other:

#4: Coaching (2010 - 2012)

For a long time, coaching wasn't on my radar. But after I was asked if I offered mentoring, and after several friends had turned to me for help with blog posts or sales pages, **I realised that there was definitely a demand out there for writing coaching.**

All through my teens and my twenties, I'd been involved in workshops with other writers, so I'm used to giving feedback and I know what sorts of issues to watch out for. I also really enjoy working with people on their writing, so it was quickly obvious that coaching was a good fit! I've also got a degree in English and a Masters in Creative Writing, which means that I usually know what I'm talking about...

I started out by working with a few people for free, until I was confident in charging for my coaching, then worked one-on-one with paying clients over Skype. Almost every client I worked with booked multiple sessions.

(If you want to do something similar, note that you can use Skype to call landlines and mobiles. This is much cheaper for international calls than using your phone!)

Although I loved coaching, there were a couple of key reasons why I stopped offering it in 2012:

- I was pregnant with my daughter Kitty (now a great big three year old), and I guessed (rightly!) that once she came along, it would be tricky to schedule a lot of calls around her.
- Many of the writers I wanted to help – those near the start of their writing career – simply couldn't afford my coaching rate.

How Much Does Coaching Make?

I started at \$79 for an hour-long session, then charged \$79 for an 45 minute coaching session. I usually spent around half an hour preparing for each session in advance, reading the client's work.

The price of coaching can vary enormously, and my prices were definitely on the low end. I've seen some business coaches charge \$500/hour or more. If you've got expertise in a particular area of writing or publishing, coaching can be a great way to bring in a solid income with just a handful of clients.

Learn More:

Coach the Life Coach [www.coachthelifecoach.com/blog] – a blog from Tim Brownson with lots of great advice on life coaching (though much of this would be helpful for any sort of coaching you might think about offering)

What Does a Writing Coach Do, Anyway?, Charlotte Rains Dixon, Words Trumpet [wordstrumpet.com/2012/03/what-does-a-writing-coach-do-anyway.html] – this post sets out some different ways in which coaches or teachers work with writers, which may help you narrow down what you want to offer as a coach.

Which Coaching Model Makes More Money?, Naomi Dunford, IttyBiz [ittybiz.com/which-coaching-model-makes-more-money] – here, Naomi takes a look at different coaching models, including one-on-one, and explains some of the pros and cons of each.

Questions and Notes About Coaching

#1: How could you work with other writers as a coach? That might involve giving feedback on their writing – but you could also focus on other related areas (e.g. helping with time management, procrastination, organisation, marketing, websites).

#2: What sort of coaching would suit you best? (Think about whether you want to work with people one-to-one or in small groups, and whether you want to meet up or talk over Skype. Some coaches even work by email or text chat.)

#5: Ebook Sales (2009 onwards)

I make considerably more money selling my own ebooks than promoting other people's.

Back in 2008, I brought out my very first paid ebook (it was okay, all things considered) and since then, I've created several more. The ones that have sold best are my four (so far!)

Blogger's Guides:

- The Blogger's Guide to Freelancing [bloggers-guides.com/freelancing]
- The Blogger's Guide to Effective Writing [bloggers-guides.com/effectivewriting]
- The Blogger's Guide to Irresistible Ebooks [bloggers-guides.com/irresistibleebooks]
- The Blogger's Guide to Loyal Readers [bloggers-guides.com/loyalreaders]

I really enjoy writing ebooks, because they give me a chance to work on an extended project (the Blogger's Guides are all over 20,000 words long) and because they're affordable for people who might not be able to pay for my coaching or for an ecourse.

How Much Do Ebooks Make?

If you're writing business-related ebooks (rather than novels or popular non-fiction) then you can charge almost any amount that your audience will pay. A few years ago, it wasn't uncommon to find ebooks that cost \$97 or even more.

These days, with the rise in popularity of e-readers like the Kindle, people are used to cheap ebooks. You can still position yours as a premium product, especially if it contains specialist information and includes bonuses like audio interviews or video tutorials. **Anything from \$10 - \$50 could easily work, depending on your topic and the length of your ebook.**

Alternatively, you could create a much cheaper ebook aimed at a wide audience and sell it through Amazon (and potentially other ebook stores).

As to how many you'll sell ... that depends on how large and responsive your audience is. I sometimes guest post on much bigger blogs (like ProBlogger, Write to Done and The Write Life) to get my ebooks in front of more people.

Learn More:

21 Dumb Mistakes to Avoid When Writing Your First E-book, Ali Luke, SmartBlogger [smartblogger.com/ebook-mistakes] – this post of mine went down really well on SmartBlogger (formerly Boost Blog Traffic), and is packed with advice on what to avoid and what to do instead. Even if you're only creating a short, free ebook – perhaps as an opt-in incentive for your email list – give this one a read.

The Blogger's Guide to Irresistible Ebooks [www.bloggers-guides.com/irresistibleebooks] – this will teach you about creating and selling a premium ebook. *Note: it's on my schedule for an update plus some bonus goodies in late 2016 - early 2017; if you buy it now, you'll get the updated version free even if I increase the price.*

The Blogger's Guide to Irresistible Ebooks special offer: as a member of the (free) Aliventures email newsletter, you get a 35% discount on any/all of my ebooks. Just enter the coupon code “**alinewsletter**” to get your discount.

e-junkie [<http://www.e-junkie.com>] – this is the site that I used for my ebooks from 2008 - 2014. It hosts the files, provides an affiliate program so people can sign up as affiliates for your ebooks, keeps track of sales, and so on. It's very cheap, starting at just \$5/month.

PayHip [<https://payhip.com>] – this is the site I now use for my ebooks (after they were off the market for most of 2015). I was perfectly happy with e-junkie, but changes in EU law meant that I needed to pay VAT on ebook sales: PayHip handles this for me and e-junkie doesn't!

Questions and Notes About Ebooks

#1: Do you have any ideas for an ebook? (Perhaps you keep getting the same questions from your clients or blog readers, for instance, and you've realised there's not enough information out there.)

#2: An ebook is a lot of work, and you need to be sure that there's an audience for it. How will you test your idea out before starting to work on your ebook? Choose at least one of these, or come up with your own ideas:

- Run a survey of my blog / newsletter audience to ask them about several possible topics.
- Investigate similar books currently on the market. *(If there's nothing similar, that can be a warning sign – though it can also indicate a gap in the market.)*
- Look at popular questions-and-answers sites, like Quora and Yahoo Answers, to see what questions tend to come up again and again related to your particular topic(s).

- Create a “minimum viable product” version of the ebook – perhaps a free or very cheap version – to see whether there’s enough demand to write the whole thing.

Other ideas:

#6: Running Ecourses (2011 – 2014; resuming soon)

When I started out with ecourses, I first ran them through email, then through a membership site where members could login for the latest modules. (I prefer the membership site route, because it means that if I add or update course materials, everyone has access to the latest versions – including members who took the course a year or two before.)

Over the past couple of years, it’s been tricky for me to launch and administer e-courses (due to very small children in the house!) Currently, my ecourses are only available to members of Writers' Huddle, but I hope to offer them to non-Huddle members next year (2017). Stay tuned for more on that.

I've also created and co-run ecourses with Daily Writing Tips [www.dailywritingtips.com] and Daily Blog Tips [www.dailyblogtips.com]. Along the way, I've found that:

- Ecourses are a great way to have some small-group interaction with people who don't want or can't afford one-to-one coaching.
- They’re incredibly fun – I get to see members cheering one another on, conquering new challenges, and so on.
- When I run courses live, with a group, they take up a lot of energy and time. It’s not just a case of writing the materials – I’m showing up to answer questions, to encourage people and so on. There’s also a lot more admin involved.

- With membership site software (I use Digital Access Pass), it's easy to set up an ecourse to run automatically when a new member joins: this is what happens for On Track. Members get a new module ever seven days, and can join at any time.

If you're working on your first product, I'd suggest tackling an ebook before an ecourse: you'll find that the skills (and customer base) you develop while writing an ebook will help a lot when you tackle a full course.

How Much Do Ecourses Make?

When I first ran my stand-alone ecourses, I priced low – but I figured that was only fair, as my first groups of members were acting as my willing guinea-pigs!

More generally, ecourses can cost almost anything, from a few dollars up to a few thousand. Some huge courses like Teaching Sells go for \$2,000+. How much you charge depends on the value of the course to your audience, the format of the course (video tends to sell for more than text), and the amount of support you offer, by email or through forums.

As a very rough guide, you're probably looking at somewhere around \$40 - \$100 per member for a six – eight week ecourse. You'll also want to look around at similar courses to see what other people charge.

Learn More:

9 Steps to Creating a Successful e-Course, Jen Loudon, ProBlogger

[www.problogger.net/archives/2013/03/21/9-steps-to-creating-a-successful-e-course] – great advice on putting together and structuring an ecourse.

15 Platforms to Publish and Sell Online Courses (and Counting), Jeff Cobb, Learning

Revolution [<http://www.learningrevolution.net/sell-online-courses>] – there are loads of different platforms out there that make running a course a breeze, and Jeff runs through some key options here.

How to Build and Sell Your First E-Course [www.madevibrant.com/blog/how-to-build-and-sell-your-first-e-course], Caroline, Made Vibrant – an incredibly in-depth post taking you through every step of creating and selling an e-course. Caroline includes lots of links to useful tools and resources along the way.

Questions and Notes About Ecourses

#1: Have you taken any online courses yourself? What worked well about them ... and what could have been better?

#2: What topics could you potentially run a short (four to six-week) ecourse on?

#7: Running a Membership Site (2012 onwards)

At the start of 2012, I launched my first fully-fledged membership site, Writers' Huddle, a community / teaching site for writers. Of everything I've created, this has been one of my absolute favourites. It's been great to get to see members flourish and succeed in their writing goals, and (on a rather more mercenary note), I've enjoyed having some regular monthly income.

If you've not come across the idea of membership sites before, they're simply sites where people pay a monthly fee for as long as they want to remain members. Of course, you can use the same software to deliver something a bit different (e.g. a course with a one-off membership fee, or a course that people pay for over several months).

I'd definitely recommend joining at least one membership site before launching your own, so you can figure out what works well and what could be tweaked. I was a member of Copyblogger's Third Tribe for a couple of years (their new membership site is Authority []) and I've also been in Michael Hyatt's Platform University.

You'll want to think about:

What content will you be providing on a monthly basis? I offer video or audio seminars, with an edited transcript plus a worksheet, and occasionally add in extras like "Challenges" (run through the forums) and ecourses of varying lengths.

How much will you charge each month? Keep in mind that committing to a monthly fee, even if there's an option to cancel at any time, can be off-putting to potential customers. You want to keep the fee low enough that they won't immediately cancel if they have a busy month or two and don't manage to login. However, you'll also need to consider how much time you'll need to put in for each new member: e.g. helping them with any technical issues, responding to questions in your forums (if you have them) and so on.

Whether you'll be permanently open for new members, or whether you'll only open up at certain times of year. With Writers' Huddle, I've found that opening up periodically is better than taking new members at any time. (It cuts down on admin, and makes it easier to launch new courses etc ... plus having a deadline gets people to make up their minds about joining!)

How Much Do Membership Sites Make?

This obviously depends on (a) what you charge per member and (b) how many members you have. You might decide to create a small, exclusive site with a limit of 20 members ... but if you're charging \$200/month per member, you'd make \$4,000 per month. Right now, I charge \$19.99 per member for Writers' Huddle.

I'd suggest launching at a slightly lower price than the one you plan to stick with, so that trail-blazing early members can get locked in at a great rate for as long as they stick around. This lets you get a good core of members to begin with, which is a big help if you've got forums or other interactive elements. It also allows you to get feedback and improve your site before raising the price.

Learn More:

7 Tips for Creating and Running Your First Membership Site, Ali Luke, Copyblogger
[\[www.copyblogger.com/membership-site-basics\]](http://www.copyblogger.com/membership-site-basics) – key tips I've learnt from running Writers' Huddle

The Insider's Guide to Running a Six-Figure Membership Site from Home, John Yeoman, SmartBlogger [\[smartblogger.com/membership-site\]](http://smartblogger.com/membership-site) – lots of detail on both the "why" and the "how" of running a membership site. John has a lot of detailed figures which will be really useful once you're up and running with your site and want to work out how to attract new members in a cost-effective way.

Digital Access Pass [digitalaccesspass.com] – this is the software I use to run Writers' Huddle, and I've been pretty happy with it.

Questions and Notes About Membership Sites

#1: Have you ever been involved with a membership site? Which one(s) and what did you think of them? If not, is there a site you could join, to see how the member experience works?

#2: If you did run a membership site – perhaps not right now but in the future – what sort of site do you envisage running? E.g. small, exclusive and lots of access to you versus bigger, more scalable, and more impersonal?

Whew!

I'm hoping this has given you a clearer idea of how I actually make money from my writing, and I also hope I've inspired you to try out some entrepreneurial routes yourself.

Don't forget that, as a member of the Aliventures newsletter (which is free, and comes out weekly by email), you also get full access to a mini-library of short ebooks on writing and blogging related topics.

Get those here: www.aliventures.com/newsletter-secret Password: **alinewsletter**