

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

IN THIS MODULE:

We'll be taking a look at different types of freelancing, identifying your core topic areas, looking at the experience you already have ... and tackling your first course assignment.

The first big freelancing decision you need to make is to figure out what type of writing you want to do.

You might be willing to turn your hand to whatever comes along – which is sometimes a necessary part of the freelancing life! But as we'll cover later in this module, it's very helpful to have a particular focus in mind from the very start of your freelancing journey.

For instance...

Will you write original material – like magazine articles, blog posts, or books – or are you going to work on other people's writing, as an editor or even a proofreader?

What topics will you specialise in? You may feel that there's no area you know enough about ... the second part of this module is going to tackle that, and hopefully after that, you'll feel much clearer about what you could potentially focus on when it comes to subject matter.

Of course, what you do may well change over time. With my own freelance work, I started out freelancing for blogs, then took on some additional work like editing and writing for magazines. In recent years, I've switched to doing a lot of ghostwriting (as well as continuing to freelance under my own name).

As a freelancer, you have the freedom to shift your focus over time, so don't feel you have to get everything "right" from day one.

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

Why Do You Want to Freelance?

Before we dig into the things you could do, it's important to think about *why* you want to freelance – because this will affect the choices you make.

You might want to freelance so that you can:

- Bring in money to support you as you work on other writing projects that might not pay off any time soon (e.g. poetry or a debut novel).
- Build up a full-time career and leave your day job.
- Make money on the side of an existing job.
- Bring in some income despite other major responsibilities, like studying, parenting, or caring.
- Try your hand at lots of different types of writing.
- Work with fellow writers (who might be at a different stage of their journey from you).
- Use freelancing as a stepping stone to something else – e.g. you could write freelance pieces about parenting to help you build a platform to launch a book on parenting.

All of these reasons are perfectly good, legitimate ones. You may find that several of them resonate with you – or you may have a different reason entirely for freelancing.

For me, while I genuinely enjoy almost all my freelance work and really appreciate the flexibility it gives me, it's not something that I want to do 40 hours a week. I also love writing fiction, writing for my own blogs, and having time with my husband and kids ... and my freelancing supports all that.

Because of that, I've focused my freelancing in a particular way. I don't seek out roles that would have me working from a client's office, for instance (I'm only too glad to leave my office days well behind me). I look for work that mainly involves short, straightforward pieces – normally blog posts – so that I can easily fit my freelance writing around everything else rather than getting caught up in cycles of rewrites, meetings, and so on.

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

You might be looking for something quite different from me. Perhaps you want freelancing to be your full-time career, and that means you'll be happy to take on big, complex projects that involve a lot of back-and-forth – but that also involve a large cheque when you're done.

Have a think about *your* reasons for freelancing – if you can, jot down a few thoughts (or even questions for yourself) before you move on to the next section of this module.

We'll be coming back to this in the assignment at the end of the module, though, so don't worry if it's not convenient to make notes as you read.

Will You Write or Edit as a Freelancer?

Although I've aimed this course at freelance *writers*, the reality is that there's a fair amount of overlap between writing and editing – and I want to briefly discuss each of them at this stage. We'll also continue to keep editing in mind as a possibility throughout the course.

Writing means you're producing material yourself. This can be very rewarding, if (like me!) you actively enjoy the process of writing – but it can also be draining if it's what you do all day, every day.

Editing means you're working on material someone else has produced. This could be almost anything – a resume, a blog post, a novel – depending on the type of clients you work with.

I've done both, but my focus has always been on writing, which I enjoy more than editing. You might find that editing is a better fit for you, though.

Writing is great if you want to:

- **See your own name on a piece of published work.** (Though keep in mind that there are some types of writing, like copywriting and ghostwriting, where you'll generally be anonymous.)

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

- **Choose your own topics to work on.** Even if an individual publication doesn't offer much flexibility, you can pick and choose between plenty of different gigs.
- **Develop and hone your own writing style.** If you're freelancing as a springboard to something else, just getting into the habit of writing and finishing pieces regularly can be very helpful.

Editing is great if you want to:

- **Reserve your creative energy for your own projects.** You might, for instance, edit in the mornings and write your novel in the afternoons. *(Not that editing doesn't take creativity ... but for many writers, it feels like a different sort of creativity from actual writing.)*
- **Work in short bursts on something.** It can be tricky to write a piece that flows if you have to write for 15 minutes at a time; with editing, short sessions can be beneficial.
- **Avoid spending time coming up with and pitching ideas.** You may find you don't need to reach out much as an editor – people will often come to you by word-of-mouth.

Can you do both writing and editing? Well, of course you *can*, but you'll probably find it easiest to pick one to focus on – at least initially. Clients will often prefer to opt for a specialist rather than someone who does a bit of everything.

Of course, if someone hires you as a writer and later asks if you'd be able to help edit too, then you can certainly take that on. On your website or on social media, though, it's generally best to bill yourself as either a writer *or* an editor.

What Sort of Projects Will You Work On?

As well as specialisation being helpful for your clients, it's also helpful for you: it means you can get really good at doing a particular type of writing (and you can hone the processes that make that type of writing easy for you).

As a freelancer, there are a huge range of projects you might choose to work on. For instance, you could:

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

- Write blog posts on almost any topic imaginable, in a wide variety of styles.
- Write magazine articles – again, there are a huge number of different markets for these, covering all the topics you can think of (and probably a few you'd never even imagine).
- Write sales copy for web pages, printed letters or brochures, or advertisements. (This is often called “copywriting”.)
- Write books (of any length) – probably as a ghostwriter, though also potentially under your own name.

If you'd rather edit than write, you've still got plenty of options available. You might opt to:

- Edit novel manuscripts for authors who are planning to self-publish their work.
- Join a large website as a part-time (or even full-time) editor – this would likely involve administrative tasks as well as actual editing.
- Work for a publishing house that sends editing or proofreading out to freelancers.
- Edit resumes, proofread website copy, or specialise in some other area.

Of course, this is hardly an exhaustive list – and you might have different ideas about what you want to specialise in, based on your past experience, what you enjoy doing most, and what would fit best into your freelancing schedule.

For instance, if you want to build up a name for yourself as a writer, you might choose to freelance for magazines. You (and others!) will see your name in print, and you may not mind that there's often a long turn-around between writing a piece and receiving payment.

However, if your goal is to make steady money around your day job, you might prefer to write for blogs: they often want regular (weekly or monthly) content, and the time between writing a piece and receiving payment for it is usually no more than a few weeks, and often less.

I'd suggest choosing between one and three types of project to focus on, so you can clearly explain to potential clients what you do (e.g. on the About

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

page on your website, which we'll be coming to later in the course). Ideally, you want all of your areas to be fairly closely related.

For instance, you might decide to write articles for both blogs and magazines, or you might offer ghostwriting services for non-fiction authors, covering a range of different material (e.g. you might ghostwrite books but also articles).

I know it can be very tricky to figure out what you want to do if you haven't freelanced before, and if you'd like some help thinking through your ideas, do come over to our Facebook group to share what you've come up with so far:

facebook.com/groups/startfreelancing

Once you've chosen the type of writing (or editing) you'd like to focus on, you'll want to think about the *topics* you're going to tackle.

Choosing Your Specialist Topic Areas

What exactly should you write about? You're probably not an expert on a particular topic (most freelancers aren't), so it's not necessarily an easy or obvious decision.

The good news is that you definitely don't need to know everything there is to know about something before you write about it. Freelancers can supplement whatever they already know with:

- Research
- Quotes from experts

(We'll cover both of these in detail during Module 4 of this course.)

As a freelancer, you're primarily being hired for your ability to *write*. You definitely don't need to be the world's leading authority on whatever it is you're writing about.

Most publications – especially magazines and blogs – are aimed at a beginner to intermediate audience. (After all, in any given subject, there are a lot more

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

beginners than experts.) So even without doing a lot of additional research, you may well already know quite a bit more than your readers.

If you're reasonably new to the subject yourself, that can be an advantage, too: you'll be able to remember the questions and struggles you had when you started out.

What Experience Could You Draw On?

So what could *you* write about? Probably more than you think! Even if you don't consider yourself a "specialist" in any one thing, there are bound to be plenty of areas where you've already gained quite a bit of experience.

- **Your professional life.** Think about all the jobs you've done. What knowledge and skills have you gained from each? (E.g. if you're a software developer, you might know how to code in C++, but you might also have gained project management skills.)
- **Your personal life.** What have you accomplished over the past decade or two? Maybe you graduated from university, found a job, lost weight, got married, started a family, got out of debt... you could potentially write on topics related to any of these.
- **Your hobbies and interests.** Maybe you love knitting, geek culture, fashion, gadgets, watercolour painting, hiking, great coffee, golf, coaching kids' sports ... think about what you like to do in the evenings, at the weekends, or when on holiday.

Don't worry about making your list comprehensive. All you need is to get enough down on paper that you can pick a few good topic areas to focus on initially.

Here's what my list looks like:

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

Professional life:

Babysitting: childcare ideas, working as a teenager.

Full time job in a small IT company: various technical skills, office politics, finding and starting first “proper” job.

Working as a self-employed writer: becoming self-employed, blogging, speaking, selling products online, ebooks, online courses.

Personal life:

Finished university with a 2.i degree.

Successfully lost weight and kept it off (during uni onwards).

Developed strong time management skills – during uni, job, self-employment.

Got married and now have two kids (age 6 and 8 currently).

Hobbies and interests:

Reading – especially contemporary fiction, anything with a fantasy/SF/supernatural edge.

Writing fiction (which could also go under “professional life”).

Board gaming (“Euro” style games, kid-friendly games).

Cult TV – mainly sci-fi.

As you can see, it’s a pretty rough list, but it offers plenty of ideas about where I might look for freelancing work, if I wanted to take on more clients.

Quite a few of these areas are ones I’ve written a lot about as a freelancer – e.g. when I started out freelancing in my early 20s, I wrote quite a bit about weight loss, time management, and being a successful student. Others are

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

ones I've moved into over the past few years – like writing about parenting, as that's been a big part of my life since having my kids.

It bears repeating that **you do not need to be an expert at all in any of these**. You can research an area, or find experts to quote or interview. The key thing is you're familiar with a topic and you'd enjoy writing about it.

How the Assignments Work

Each week, you'll have an assignment to carry out (based on what we've covered that week). Even if you don't have much time, I'd encourage you to do as much as you can on the assignment – you'll get a lot more out of the course.

I suggest keeping your assignment answers in a single document, folder, or notebook. That makes them easy to find if you want to refer back to them.

ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is in three parts:

#1: Write down your main reason(s) for freelancing.

#2: Write down your thoughts about the type of writing (or editing) you might want to do.

#3: Write down your ideas about what topics you could write about, based on your professional life, personal life, and/or hobbies and interests.

Don't forget to head to our Facebook group if you get stuck, have questions, or want to share your answers with me and other members of the course:

[facebook.com/groups/startfreelancingcourse](https://www.facebook.com/groups/startfreelancingcourse)

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

Module #1: Further Reading

All of the further reading is optional, but if you want to find out more about something we've covered, it's highly recommended! If you find other useful resources, you're very welcome to share them in our Facebook group.

Why It Pays to Be a Specialist When It Comes to Freelance Writing,

Alexander Cordova, Leaving Work Behind

In this post, Alexander explains why you'll be able to charge more if you specialise rather than writing about anything that comes your way – and why it'll make it easier for you to find clients and ongoing work.

5 Major Types of Freelance Writing Jobs (And How To Get Them),

Claire Bradshaw, Writer's Edit

Claire goes into detail about five big areas of writing jobs, and – crucially! – offers tips on how to get that type of writing gig. There are some areas covered here that you might not have considered, like writing social media posts for clients.

What do freelance writers write about?, Quora

This question on Quora has some really interesting answers: take a look at Annie Mueller's in particular, as she lists a huge range of topics (note that many of these are connected, e.g. I'd class most of them under "small business", "productivity", "early career tips" or "parenting"). Donald Tepper's answer is also fascinating as it gives an editor's perspective.

MODULE #1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF YOUR FREELANCING BUSINESS

What's Coming Up in the Next Module:

Well done on reaching the end of this week's module. Remember, if you have questions at any point, please do ask in our Facebook group. If it's something you'd prefer to discuss privately, the best way to get in touch is to email me at ali@aliventures.com.

Here's what you'll find in Module 2:

MODULE 2:

In the next module, we'll be covering websites and social media. We'll go through the different options for naming your freelancing business (and website), with full instructions for getting everything set up.

If this all sounds like it might be a bit technical and daunting, don't worry: I'll be giving you step-by-step instructions in the module.

If you already have a website and/or social media accounts, that's fine too: we'll be covering how to use (or potentially rethink) those for your freelancing.