

50 Tips for Freelance Writers

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1. Tidy up after every project. Clean thoroughly at least once a month. Otherwise, you'll waste a lot of valuable writing time looking for things. (Trust me, I know.)
2. Keep track of all email addresses and other information from markets, contacts, etc.
3. Try to do your business—answering mail, updating subscriptions, writing query letters—one day each week.
4. One day per month, check what items you have out or who hasn't responded to a note and follow up when necessary. You can write tracer letters for anything out longer than three months. Be polite, never rude or impatient.
5. Look for new markets while you're watching TV, listening to music, etc.
6. Write down at least 5 markets so that you're ready for the rejection (resubmission?).
7. Plan a regular "business trip" every two or three weeks to visit the library, mail letters, and do other business that doesn't have a short deadline.
8. Never be without a notebook and pen or a digital recorder of some kind. Ideas are fleeting. Make a note of them as soon as you get them. For years, I used a small unlined sketch pad with a coil binding. I tore out the pages and filed my ideas under appropriate topics. I now also use Notes on my iPhone, and sometimes Microsoft OneNote, which I love.
9. Have a list of markets ready and continually resubmit rejected articles.
10. When you can't think of anything to write, go through old notebooks or files of ideas you have written down.
11. Change from one form to another (fiction/nonfiction/poetry) when you're having difficulty doing anything productive.

12. Always have the next day's work clearly in mind when you stop for the day.
13. Use personalized stationary & envelopes, or a short, classy signature on the bottom of your email.
14. Have a shelf for extra paper, toner, ink cartridges, pens, batteries, or whatever you might need, and keep it stocked.
15. Keep track of the journeys your work goes on so you don't embarrass yourself.
16. Keep all publishing credits neatly typed and up-to-date so you don't have to guess.
17. Have photocopied tear sheets on hand so you can attach one or two into a query letter, or post them online.
18. Create a blog/website. I prefer Wordpress. Get the url for your name. I use Hover. And have a self-hosted site. We use Host Excellence but there are many good hosts out there. Your website should be similar to a press kit.
19. Have business cards. Make them professional-looking. Don't say "writer" or put a cutesy feather-pen. Look professional.
20. When you go out to a meeting, dress as a business person should—suit, business casual, briefcase, etc.
21. Never apologize for your work.
22. Keep accurate, all-encompassing files on every article or story so you can double-check anything in a minute.
23. To break into a new market, begin with short fillers.
24. Build a portfolio and a press kit. Photocopy your published work (reduce if necessary) to 8 x 11 pages and store between clear plastic covers in a loose-leaf binder. Put in chronological order by category. Keep it up to date.

25. Make up a mini-portfolio with a duotang pocket folder. Include a business card, photo with bio or resume, and appropriate articles as needed. Use this as a press kit to give to people who might be interested.
26. When you have a book out (or even if you have an article or story in a book) have autograph parties at local bookstores, etc.
27. Appear on a radio or TV show if you have the opportunity.
28. Local library and school appearances are good. They're also a good place for you to practice making public appearances.
29. Get a blurb after a magazine article to mention your book.
30. Go to booksellers' conventions, book fairs, etc., if you have the opportunity.
31. Begin filing tax returns as a business the day you start writing seriously. Keep accurate records of every conceivable expense. Get the right tax bulletins and forms.
32. Never give out "all rights" unless you know for a fact you'd never be able to use that particular item again.
33. Make sure you keep track of all business calls, mailing expenses, mileage, and everything you have to buy, and record them clearly. There are several good computer programs (e.g. Quickbooks) that will help you do this, but even writing everything down in a simple notebook will suffice.
34. There are computer programs that count words! Use them to make sure you don't go over your given word count. Otherwise the editor will have to get rid of words and you may not agree with what is cut out.
35. Use email, fax machines, overnight couriers, etc. to get things there on time. If you absolutely can't get it done in time, let the editor know as soon as possible. Editors are human. They know life sometimes get in the way. But they appreciate being told ahead of time. Often, they can make adjustments.
36. Writing is only words unless there is emotion...human interest, caring...

37. Keep a journal. Write down feelings as well as ideas.
38. Have a well-organized action plan you can follow automatically when an assignment comes.
39. Don't allow interruptions when you're intensely at work. Teach your family or friends that your writing isn't a simple hobby but a profession. (And of course you'll treat them in the same way with whatever they are passionate about.)
40. Verify the facts for everything you write.
41. Editors are human. Treat them as such.
42. Once you have a foot in, you can break a few rules, negotiate contracts, etc. But when starting out or breaking into a new market, follow the rules and don't make waves.
43. Meet editors, publishers, agents, other writers, etc. in person whenever possible.
44. Make contacts and use them.
45. If there's an experience to be gained from a writing assignment, make sure you take advantage of it.
46. Always do more than is expected. Be early. Add an extra sidebar. Treat others as you would like to be treated.
47. Writers who give editors exactly what they want when they want it get more assignments.
48. Be professional—present yourself well, polish what you do, and perform well.
49. Publicize your accomplishments whenever and wherever possible. Don't brag. Promote.
50. Believe in yourself and in your work.