



(SO START ACTING LIKE ONE)

jeff goins

You Are a Writer

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BY JEFF GOINS

You Are a Writer (So Start Acting Like One) / by Jeff Goins

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Foreword

Recently, I was reading a book about writing. In it, the author talked about how she just loved to write.

Teachers told her she was a good writer, and they encouraged her talent. Magazines were eager to publish her work. She was continuously encouraged to write and share, but there was just one problem: She didn't see herself as a writer.

I've heard this kind of story numerous times from other writers: "Everyone encouraged me to write, but I just didn't think I was good enough."

That story is not mine. Not exactly.

I was never told I was a "natural" or that I should consider becoming a writer. I liked to write here and there. Mostly poetry — and bad, teenage drama poetry at that.

I often received negative marks on my English papers, and I can't remember one teacher telling me I was a good writer.

In college, I would regularly watch a paper I was proud of get torn to pieces by my professors. At my first job, I was plagued by the red pen of criticism. It haunted me.

The red pen isn't bad when it's followed up with an encouragement, but without it, such a rebuke can be devastating.

Those red marks spoke to me loud and clear: I was not a writer. I would cry and brush it off and just accept the fact that I wasn't a writer, until the day I realized I was one.

Then, I felt like a fraud. I had an audience and was writing, but I wanted to hide. I never felt good enough. What if I was found out and exposed?

But I've learned something important about my audience: They think I'm a writer. They believe something about me that I'm still wrestling with. That I can actually do this thing called writing.

It's taken me four years of blogging, failing, and growing, to be able to say, "I'm a writer." You know why I say it now? Solely because I do the thing: I write.

I write every day and have the privilege of a platform where people come to read my writing. It's a gift, this thing we do — this writing — and the fact that people give us their time is a blessing we could never repay.

We have an opportunity. To write words that matter, to change lives with language.

I'm a writer. I bet you are, too.

You have a unique privilege here. Jeff Goins is a day-in, day-out writer. He is diligent and focused and living his dream.

He's a writer, and he knows what it takes to guide you through this journey.

In this book, Jeff will inspire you to claim who you already are. Along the way, he's going to teach you some super-practical tips on perfecting the craft, expanding your platform, and getting your work published.

This book is a gift. Indulge in it. Then, turn around and give the gift of writing to someone else.

Sarah Mae, Writer
SarahMae.com

Introduction

Hi. My name's Jeff. And I'm a writer.

Like most writers, I like to write. Not sell myself, or pitch ideas, or wait for publishers to pick me. Just *write*.

I've stumbled upon this idea, you see, that writers shouldn't spend their time doing what they don't enjoy. Instead, they need to do what they love. They need to write.

Sounds idealistic, right? But I believe this is the key to creating your best work.

So how do you “just write”? I mean, let's be honest. We've all heard how writers need platforms and influence and great marketing, right?

But how do you do that?

That's what this book is about.

It's about falling back in love with your craft and building a platform, so you don't have to pitch or sell yourself. Instead, you can focus on what you were made to do: write.

Before we get into that, though, introductions are in order.

Why Listen to Me?

I'm nobody special. Just a writer who got frustrated with a broken system and decided to do something about it.

This idea isn't new. Lots of writers are building platforms that earn them the chance to deliver a message. They're focusing on passion, and people are paying attention.

That's all I'm going to share with you — nothing you couldn't Google on your own.

There is, however, something that qualifies me to share this with you, something unique that I am quite familiar with: the frustrations of a writer.

The long nights. The thankless work. The bad pay. I know them all quite well.

But here's the rub: It doesn't have to be this way. There is a way out of this "feast or famine" cycle in which most writers find themselves.

A way to even break the chains of fame and accolades, to spurn the addiction of an audience and create lasting work. A way for the gatekeepers to come to *you*.

There is a way for you to live what every writer dreams of: never having to write a proposal or query letter again. Never having to pitch, never having to compromise.

Wouldn't that be great?

I've learned the secret to writing for the love of it and getting acknowledged for your work.

And I'm going to share it with you.

Writers Are Born, Not Made

Every day, somewhere, a writer is born.

She comes into the world with a destiny: to share her words and proclaim a message. To make a difference.

These words have the power to move and motivate strangers, to shake the earth and rattle the heavens. If only she would share them.

It's a choice, writing is. One that belongs to you and me. We get to choose it (or not) every single day. So whether or not the world hears your message — whether you leave the impact you were born to make — is entirely up to you.

Scary, isn't it?

There are, of course, thousands who won't make this choice. They'll fail to be who they are and live up to their calling.

We will forever miss their words. And this is tragic.

The Would-Be Poet

Cole Bradburn is a chiropractor who longs to be a poet.

Most days, he works in an office, helping people improve their health. Secretly, though, he longs to make a difference with his words. Some day, he hopes. Maybe. “If I’m lucky.”

It’s not that Cole hates his job. He rather likes it. Which is the whole problem. There’s another life he longs to live, one that feels at odds with the one he’s living.

The world, it seems, is full of people like this. Closet artists and aspiring authors, people longing to do meaningful work that inspires. There’s just one problem: They’re not doing it.

Many of us worry about our lives, whether or not we’ll make

an impact. In the late hours or early mornings, we wonder what we'll be remembered for, what our legacy will be.

While some people are trying to make it through another week, others find themselves succeeding in the wrong things — and despairing as a result.

Make no mistake. **All of us at some point wonder if what we're doing matters.**

The answer taunts us. It whispers from afar. Keeps us wondering and waiting. All the while, deep inside our hearts, something dangerous stirs. Something we're afraid to admit.

Creating a Legacy

Years ago, I was in Spain. As part of a college study abroad program, I was spending the fall semester of my junior year in Seville, a beautiful, historic city full of art and wonder.

On a very ordinary day, my friend Martha and I took a trip to *La Giralda*, the impressive tower adorning the world's third-largest cathedral in the city.

After ascending the massive spiral staircase, we gazed out an opening, overlooking the city. We looked down, watching thousands of souls pass by, from the place where Columbus was allegedly entombed.

As we descended the stairs and exited the tower, Martha posed a thought I'll never forget: "I wonder what kind of legacy I'll leave."

It hung in the air for all to hear.

On the ground floor, we stopped and stood in front of the altar. There we were, surrounded by centuries of art, and Martha wanted to know which of her creations would endure. Would still be standing in another thousand years.

I had to wonder the same.

We are all hoping something we do in this world matters.
That what we create will stay with people forever.

As Steve Jobs, the infamous founder of Apple Computers,
once said, we all long to “put a dent in the universe.” To leave
some kind of impact on this ball of dirt.

But most of us, tragically, won’t.

We’re afraid of the cost. Worried we don’t have what it takes.
Anxious of the road it takes to get to greatness.

So we play it safe and abide by the rules. Before we start, we
sabotage our work and subvert our genius.

And how, pray tell, do we do this? With words. Subtle but
serious words that kill your passion before you can pursue it.
Words like “aspiring” and “wannabe.” Words like “I wish”
and “someday.”

There is a solution to this. A simple but hard way of facing your fears and living the dream: Become who you are.

And who *are* you? A writer, if you'll believe it. I hope you do, because we need your voice. We need your message.

Until you acknowledge this — that you are a writer — you are depriving the world of a gift it longs for. One that stands the test of time. One that could leave a legacy.

Finding the Dream

“All is not lost, all is not lost / Become who you are / It happens once in a lifetime.”—Switchfoot

About a year ago, a friend asked me what my dream was, and I told him I didn't have one. Which was exactly the wrong thing to say.

“That’s too bad,” he said, baiting me. “Because I would’ve said it was to be a writer. I guess I was wrong,” he shrugged, turning away.

I began to steam. Swallowing hard and working up the courage to speak, I finally uttered, “Well, I guess it is. I mean — I suppose I hope to maybe be a writer... *some* day.”

My friend looked at me intently and said without blinking, “Jeff, you don’t have to *want* to be a writer. You *are* a writer. You just need to write.”

Those words struck a chord in me. The next day, I started writing. Without excuse or exception, I began.

And you know what? My friend was right. Pretty soon, I became a writer — at first without realizing it.

It began with a few hundred words before the sunrise. But pretty soon, I was publishing articles and producing work on a regular basis that frankly surprised me.

I found my dream not by searching for it, but by submitting to what I had always hoped was true: I was, in fact, a writer. All I had to do was write.

Anyone can do this. All it requires is a simple, scary solution: **Believe you already *are* what you want to be.** And then start acting like it.

Falling Back in Love with Writing

The first time I fell in love, I was twenty years old. At least, I *thought* I was in love. Little did I know it was quite the opposite.

The relationship was all wrong from Day One. This girl and I broke up and got back together exactly four and a half times — the half being when we started going out again but didn't tell our friends (because we had already broken up four times).

After the last cycle of breakups and make-ups, we stayed together for a while: a year and a half, to be precise.

Eventually, the relationship started to stabilize and grow stale. It became comfortable and then boring. Soon, the feelings faded, and all that was left was a commitment neither of us wanted to be in.

The problem, though, was we didn't know how to end it. We felt *stuck*.

As the relationship fizzled, I grew distant and she stopped showing affection. We found clever and convenient ways to avoid each other. Still, for some reason, we stuck it out. We just couldn't end it — it was an awful, confusing cycle.

I felt the way a lot of people in broken relationships feel. I felt trapped. We were hanging onto something longer than we should have. But we were scared and didn't know how to let go of what had become safe and predictable.

Finally, one day, the relationship ended. The final break happened on accident, as all the best ones do. We started talking about the past few months, and before we knew it, we were saying goodbye.

Afterwards, I remember going to the park, lying on a picnic table and breathing a deep sigh of relief. I finally felt free.

Years later, I'm reminded of that experience when I look at my approach to writing.

When You Feel Trapped

It will happen, eventually. You will do something you love, and after awhile, you'll forget why you started. Whether it's a relationship, a career, or a calling, you'll start to feel trapped.

This happens to the best of us. We lose steam and want to break up with our passions. We achieve success, and it doesn't matter.

Why? Because the reason we started no longer motivates us. We check out and want to move on. We dream of quitting. What you do next, though, is what forms your character.

It's what determines the course of your life's work and what makes a legacy. It's the difference between someone who creates something memorable and meaningful — and someone who just gives up.

When this happens, you're in a tough place. You start resenting what brought you so much attention in the first place. You may even find yourself longing to reinvent your work.

Musicians experience this. So do marketers. Writers do, as well. But what do you do with it?

If you've had any success in your craft, you know what I'm talking about. One day, you write something, and an audience shows up. And this changes *everything*. Because now you have customers — people to impress.

That's when things start to get tricky.

Every writer experiences this. At some point in your journey, you find yourself writing for the approval of others, not for pure love of the craft.

You're no longer satisfied with your passion, and there's nothing you can do about it. All these royalty checks, all this blog traffic — you're *stuck*.

At these times, you'll want to give up. Throw in the towel. Move to another country, buy a cabin in the mountains, and forget about the world. But this is not the end. It's only the beginning of another journey.

Whether you're starting to tackle writing for the first time or a lifelong veteran, rest assured. There is better work you've yet to create. If you will make one important choice: Stop writing for accolades, and start writing for passion.

Once I stopped trying to please people, I found an even larger audience. I fell back in love with writing. And it made all the difference.

This took courage, but it was worth it.

A year ago, I never would have imagined I'd be writing words that would be moving thousands of people every day. Now, I can't imagine living any other way.

The more I love what I do, the more others do, too. This is the paradox: When you stop writing for readers' affections, your work will affect more people.

But how do you do this? Where do we begin? There are three steps I took. Let's look at the first.

Becoming a Writer

It took the tough love of a friend to remind me I had a dream. But the pursuit of fame had poisoned that dream. The promise of getting published and paid the big bucks distracted me from doing the real work. The work of writing.

Those words reverberated in my mind: *You are a writer. You just need to write.*

So that's what I did. Not *thinking* about writing or *talking* about it, but actually doing it. Which is the hardest thing in the world for a writer to do.

I would wake up at 5:00 a.m. every morning and write for hours before going to work. When I finished the day, I'd spend another couple hours in the evening. Just writing.

I would write on lunch breaks and when I could grab a spare moment. I'd stay up late and put in weekend hours. Every chance I could get, I was writing.

I didn't care about anything else. I was euphoric. I was in love.

Maybe you've experienced this. Maybe you hope to. Either way, I want to make something clear:

You *are* a writer. You just need to write.

It's time to kill the excuses and start writing. Time to become a writer again. Not a marketer or an entrepreneur. Not a blogger or businessperson. A writer. A real one.

All of this — this business of becoming a writer — starts not with the hands, but with the head.

Turning Pro

When I started writing, I had all sorts of anxiety. Who was I, pretending to be a writer? How could I possibly call myself

one when I hadn't even written a real book, hadn't been published or paid for my work?

As I began to pursue my craft, I learned something important. In fact, I'm still learning it.

Writing is mostly a mind game. It's about tricking yourself into becoming who you are. If you do this long enough, you begin to believe it. And pretty soon, you start acting like it.

When I started writing, titles intimidated me, and I wondered what it would take to "arrive," to be considered legitimate. I secretly worried I would never feel like a writer, despite what I told myself.

So I asked an expert.

In *The War of Art*, Steven Pressfield explains you have to "turn pro" in your head before you can do it on paper. More important than book deals and hitting the *New York Times* Best Sellers List is this belief in yourself.

In other words, you have to trick yourself, because you *aren't* a writer yet. You're just beginning. But we all have to start somewhere, and a writing career begins with *you*.

At first, I didn't buy this. So I emailed Mr. Pressfield. I wanted to know the truth about this writing business, what it really took.

In an interview, I asked Steve, "When do you *really* become a writer? Is it when you get an agent? When you sign your first book contract? When you sell 100,000 copies?"

He said it was none of that. The truth was much simpler. *When* do you become a writer? "When you say you are," he said.

I didn't get it. I poked and prodded, trying to dig deeper. I wanted practical steps and formulas. Where were my charts and diagrams? But he insisted, "Screw what everyone else says. You are when you say you are."

I decided to give this a shot. What choice did I have? All this self-doubt, all this questioning — I was willing to do whatever it took to alleviate the lack of confidence I felt.

So I started saying I was a writer. I put it on my Facebook page. Included it in email signatures. Everywhere I could, I wrote that I was a writer. It was kind of ridiculous, but something crazy happened as a result of this campaign.

It actually *worked*.

As I started making these public proclamations of identity, I actually started believing them. I began to trust my calling before I had anything to show for it.

Before anyone else called me one, I believed I was a writer. And I started acting like one.

Then something strange happened. I started to get better at my craft. All because of a few, mere words. Through this

process, I learned a crucial lesson. Before others will believe what is true about you, you'll have to first believe it yourself.

Okay, we're going to do an exercise together now. Take a moment and write this down. Do it as an act of faith, of believing before you see. Say it before you feel it.

This isn't positive thinking mumbo jumbo; it's affirming something deep inside of you that you've been resisting. It's time to submit, to surrender. **Are you ready?**

Write it now before this sense of urgency leaves you. Grab a pen and paper — make this a tactile experience — and write the following words:

I am a writer.

Good. Now do it tomorrow and the next day. Continue this practice for the rest of your life until you believe it. And then keep doing it as a means of practice and ritual.

Because there will always be doubt. Always anxiety and second-guessing.

Welcome to the life of an artist.

Being True to Your Voice

Most people don't know what they want. We writers sometimes forget this. So we write the words we think others want to hear. There's just one problem with this. It's not how you create art.

As a communicator, your voice matters. More than you realize. We (your audience) are relying on you for your insight and profundity. **We need you to poke and prod, not merely pander.**

You have to be yourself, to speak in a way that is true to you. This is the next step to reclaiming your life as a writer — taking yourself seriously so your audience will, too.

Admittedly, this was hard for me. I had spent years helping other people find their voices. I wasn't sure I'd recognize my own when it came. The truth is I didn't.

I needed help. I needed people to tell me when I had hit my sweet spot. When I had struck a nerve.

When I started writing every day without excuse, I didn't know my material was resonating with anyone. I was just showing up. It took a few friends telling me I'd found my voice before I realized it.

The same may be true for you. Some days, it's enough of a chore just to put your butt in a chair and stay put. To create something. Anything. If you do this long enough, though, you start to create really good work.

It may be subtle at first, but if you continue — if you persevere — you'll discover a reality all professionals know quite well:

Everything is practice. Every word you write and action you take is a chance to get better.

This is the difference between professionals and amateurs. Pros are always looking for a chance to get better, to improve their craft just a little more.

Practice Makes Habits

Last year, I finished my first half-marathon. But this wasn't my first attempt at running one.

A few years ago, I tried to run a race and failed. I didn't practice, didn't buy the right shoes, and didn't do the work. Halfway through the training, I injured myself and had to quit.

Then I tried again. But this time, I took it seriously. I gave the sport the respect it deserved.

I believed if I put the time and effort in, I could do it. I committed to a plan and made room in my life to practice. I used the right equipment and invested a little money, which made me take it even more seriously.

Several months later, I crossed the finish line.

Not too long after the race, I woke up early one morning, drank some coffee, and went for a five-mile run. After that, I wrote a few pages for my book and went to work.

That evening, I looked back on the day and was shocked by all I had accomplished. Getting up early, running five miles, writing over a thousand words — where did all this discipline *come* from?

It came subtly, as all things well practiced do. It didn't happen by thinking about it. Not through wasting time with meaningless goals or silly, fruitless plans. No, it happened

from doing the work — creating habits and building momentum.

This is the secret to mastering any discipline: **As you conquer one, you'll find it easier to tackle another.**

If you do anything long enough, it becomes habitual. This is the goal for any passions in life: to wake up and do it without thinking.

This can happen for writing, running, and anything else you want to do in life. It won't be easy, but it can become effortless.

Yes, it may hurt on occasion, but if you do something long enough, you eventually stop thinking about it.

Professional weight lifters don't get sore like you and I do when we lift weights. They show up, push themselves, build muscle, and go home. Then tomorrow, they get up and do it again.

The less they think, the more successful they are. The same is true of any craft. Soreness is the result of untrained muscle.

If you practice every day, you don't get fatigued. All muscles are built this way, even creative ones.

When you start writing every day, you'll find yourself getting more comfortable with your voice. So will others. As those two intersect, you'll discover your message.

This may take months or years. But if you keep showing up, keep practicing and doing the work of a professional, you'll find it.

The Secret to Successful Writing

Experts say you're supposed to imagine a specific person and write for him.

This is a trick marketers use to find their ideal customer. They choose someone, give him a name, and focus all communication efforts on reaching that person.

I did the same. I chose to write for one — and only one — person: myself.

The only person you need to worry about writing for is *you*. This is the secret to satisfaction in anything: doing what gives you life and not trying to live up to others' expectations.

As you do this, you may find what I found, that you're not as unique as you thought. There are a lot more people like you than you realize.

When I published my online [manifesto](#) and over a thousand people downloaded it in a week, I realized I wasn't the only one who felt that way. It made me feel not so alone.

Incidentally, that's the same thing people who read the manifesto thought when they read it.

Someone recently put it like this: “If you’re ‘one in a million,’ and the world is full of seven billion people, that means there are seven thousand people just like you.”

When you think about it like that, you don’t feel so alone anymore... *do* you?

Which raises the question: If there are thousands of people out there waiting to hear from you, how do you find them? Is it hard to believe that it starts with you?

It Begins with Passion

For five years, I wrote a blog nobody read. I measured my traffic and did everything I could to maximize my reach. All the while, my heart slowly died, and I grew bitter.

I watched other writers succeed in ways I hadn’t, and I envied them. Eventually, I grew to resent them. Why?

Because I wasn't doing what I wanted. I was writing, but I wasn't enjoying the process. I was only chasing results.

So what did I do? I went back to the basics: **writing for the love of it**. Not profit or prestige. Not analytics or metrics. Just for writing for the sake of *writing*.

As a result, something amazing happened: I started to have fun. And the quality of my work dramatically increased. I finally felt free to do what I loved.

You can do this, too. But this kind of change comes with a cost. As with all good things, there will be sacrifice — a price to pay.

De-clutter

In order to create your best work, you'll have to make room for it. You'll have to cut out the excess noise and focus on what really matters: the writing.

In our world today, distractions abound. Thousands of advertising messages inundate us every single day. As a result, we live hurried, frantic lives full of interruption.

The average attention span is short — less than three minutes (I've heard as short as nineteen seconds). The demand for writers with the ability to capture and maintain interest is high.

Go ahead and try to watch a five-minute video on YouTube. I dare you. If you get through it without checking email, changing browser tabs, or picking up your phone (or wanting to), I applaud you. You have a rare ability that most now struggle with.

For me, the worst of all these distractions is social media.

Facebook. Twitter. Posterous. Friendfeed. Blogger. Ning. Plaxo. LinkedIn. Google Plus. Wordpress. Instagram. AIM. Jabber. Tumblr. Flickr.

Foursquare. LinkedIn. Myspace. Digg. Delicious. Stumbleupon. Yelp. Path. Gowalla. And *more*.

I've been on them all. And I have little to show for it.

Online, there is this expectation (usually self-imposed) for writers and communicators. It's a fallacy, but it doesn't stop well-meaning people from saying it all the time.

The myth goes like this: "You have to be everywhere."

That's ridiculous.

You know who says that? People who are always responding to the latest trend. I know this, because I was one of them.

When I started writing every day, I realized a painful truth: I can't react and create at the same time. Neither can you.

Our brains don't work well when we try doing too many things. Though we may have eclectic interests, we can only do one thing at a time and do it well.

Multitasking is a myth. *You can either create or react.* But you can't do both. Choose wisely.

It's hard to say no, but it's even harder to spin your wheels. To waste your creative energy on frivolous things like an endless series of check-ins.

You know what most of this crazy, social media platform maintenance is? Stalling. Procrastinating the real work you need to do, which is writing.

I don't play that game anymore. I pick a few networks that work for me and I say "good riddance" to the rest. If you're going to be a real writer, you'll have to make similar sacrifices.

I don't know your distractions, but you do. Fess up to them, do a little purging, and get to work.

Cancel Contingencies

There's a trend amongst writers. Most have more ideas than they know what to do with. They have hundreds of half-written articles and a few books started.

How many of these projects have they finished? None. I was the same way.

Once a month on a Saturday, when the wind was blowing just right and I felt inspired, I would write.

I'd write for hours at a time — long, drawn-out essays about who-knows-what. It felt beautiful and precious, but really it was a waste of energy.

I would come up with imaginative ideas and potential projects — websites and communities and other brilliant creations. Some of them I'd actually start, even followed through with a few. But I finished exactly none.

I wasn't creating. I was only dreaming.

This is dangerous territory, when your creativity hijacks your productivity. Do you know what's at work here, when we thrash around with countless projects?

FEAR.

Fear of finishing. Fear of picking one thing and sticking with it. We think, *What if it's the wrong thing? What if I mess it up?*

Here's the truth: There is no wrong thing. Just begin. Once you learn how to finish, you'll be able to start again.

Cancel all backup plans, pick a project (it may be a book, blog or whatever) and move forward. Start writing. If you don't, all you're doing is waiting.

Fail Forward

As you cancel contingencies and find something to stick with, you'll need to learn how to ship. You'll have to move through fear. You'll have to learn the lesson every writer hates learning.

In fact, nobody wants to learn this lesson: how to fail.

Steve Jobs once said, "Real artists ship." I love that. However, someone recently reminded me it's the *shipping* part that's emphasized when it should be the artist part.

In other words, just because it's shipped doesn't make it art. But if it doesn't ship, it doesn't matter *what* it is.

Art is creation. It needs to exist on paper or screen to fulfill its purpose. Which is to change something.

Real artists risk failure every time they release their work into the world. If your words are going to matter, you will have to do the same. You will have to let go.

Until you do, you're not creating art. You're just screwing around.

Remember: **The fear of something is always scarier than the thing itself.** Yes, there is pain and rejection. But the greatest failure is to never risk at all.

When you fail, you don't really fail. You *learn*. You draw a lesson from it. You find new ways to move forward, ways to work around future problems.

As Thomas Edison said, you find 999 ways to *not* succeed. If you persevere, you hit that 1000th try — the moment of breakthrough.

But this happens only *if* you ship.

Build a Community

When I first started writing and sharing my work, it was on a blog. Blogs let you see how many readers you're affecting every day, so it was easy for me to get off-track — to focus on results instead of process.

I chased numbers, not people. I thought like a pollster, not a conversationalist.

Not surprisingly, I failed. I had hundreds of daily visitors, but no friends or followers. No one who really cared about my work.

If you're going to fall out of love with public approval, something interesting will happen: People will be deeply attracted to your work.

They won't be able to help it. Passion is contagious. If you treat people like human beings and write from a place that is deep and true, you will find your audience.

But you won't do it alone.

You will need others' help. You will need a community. And that community begins with one person who truly believes in the work.

That person is you.

So what do you say?
Time to start writing?
Thought so.

The Truth About Writing

Writing is hard — *real* hard. It's work. Somehow, you never talk about that in your college composition class.

Nobody wants to tell you the truth, because if you knew how hard it was, you'd never start in the first place. You'd quit before you began.

Let's begin there — with the truth — shall we?

What Nobody Ever Tells You About Writing

- It's harder than you think.
- It's not enough to be good. You have to be great.
- Nobody cares about you. People care about themselves.
- It's more about who you know than what you know.
- You'd better love it. (Otherwise, quit now.)

So what do you do — now that you've been acquainted with the real world? Do you give up or persevere?

Nobody ever tells you this:

- That writing takes more hours and energy than you'd ever be able to plan for.
- That no one cares about you as the writer until you've actually written something.
- That what you write isn't as important as getting your work in front of the right people.
- That, above all, if you don't love it, you're kind of screwed.

At least, nobody ever told *me* those things. Maybe they did, and I just wasn't listening.

Now that we've debunked some common beliefs about writing, what does it take to become a writer? Well, there are two camps.

The First Camp

“There is nothing to writing. All you do
is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.”
—ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Writing is hell. This is one camp of thinking.

The reasoning goes like this: *This is serious work, so if you want to do it right, it will have to cost you everything. Including your life. No two ways about it.*

We read about men like Hemingway the drunk or Dickinson the recluse and romanticize their lives. We think, *This is just the way it goes.* And we set ourselves up for lives of dysfunction.

It's a cheery thought, isn't it? All it takes to succeed as a writer is the ability to deal with a considerable amount of blood loss? Thanks a lot, Ernie.

No wonder so many creatives are given to suicide and substance abuse.

I have a friend who says this about writing: “Don’t be the sacrifice; *make* it.”

I like that.

There are plenty of writers who choose the Hemingway route and suffer through their life’s work.

They subject themselves to the violence of their art, instead of conquering it. They ruin marriages and type masterpieces while completely wasted. They wallow.

If you’re a wimp like me, though, you may not be too keen on suffering. In which case, rest assured. There is another way.

You don’t have to suffer; you can *work*, instead.

The Second Camp

“Talent alone cannot make a writer.
There must be a man behind the book.”
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Talent is not enough to succeed. We know this. We see it every day.

Hollywood is not just full of the world’s best actors, but those who also made the right connections and paid their dues.

Music Row has welcomed not only the world’s most remarkable musicians, but also those who knew the right people.

Of course, talent is important. But it is also a given. In order to succeed as a writer, you need something more, something vibrant.

In other words, there must be a life behind the writing.

Stephen King said in his memoir *On Writing* that for years he labored under the assumption that life was a support system for art. Only years later did he learn it was, in fact, the other way around.

If you are going to succeed as a writer, you are going to have to learn to be smart. To have thick skin. To be more than talented. You are going to have to be a marketer, an entrepreneur, a talented salesperson.

Because this is a *business*.

If your art is going to have the impact you want for it, you had better learn the tricks of the trade — not so you can become part of the system, but so you can start changing lives.

I wish someone would've told me this ten years ago. I

would've gotten to work a lot sooner. And I would've succeeded, too.

I wish I'd have known there were simple tools to help writers do what they were made to do: Write, not deal with ridiculous bureaucracies.

I wish I'd have known how to network and make meaningful connections. And that it was all easier and less sleazy than I thought.

I wish I'd have gotten online and started blogging much sooner.

If I had done all those things when I was in college, I'd have authored dozens of books by now. I'm sure of it.

But I didn't do those things. Instead I waited for permission. To be picked. Maybe you are, too. If you are, consider this your official wake-up call: **It's time to stop waiting to be asked and start creating.**

The Most Important Lesson a Writer Must Learn

For years, I've been writing and publishing articles — both online and offline. I've experienced the pain of being ignored and the disappointment of being rejected.

In a matter of months, that all went away.

Everything I've learned about writing query letters and book proposals has been thrown out the window. I'm no longer pounding on publishers' doors, pleading to be picked.

Instead, I've learned to choose myself.

Without trying to sound like an infomercial, you can do this, too. And it will make all the difference.

I've been writing my whole life, but in the past year I've

learned the most important lesson about building a writing career, which means it doesn't take long. Doesn't have to, anyway.

I've learned secrets and tricks to publishing that used to baffle and frustrate me.

And I'm going to tell you how I did it: how I focused on the craft and wrote for the love of it. How I got published without having to plead and grovel. How the gatekeepers started coming to me.

Are you ready to get started with this? To live the life every writer dreams of? To stop pitching and start writing?

It begins with having the right tools.

Three Tools Every Writer Needs

It takes more than talent or luck to be a writer. You have to

be intentional. Every successful communicator has three important tools, in some form or another. They are:

1. A **platform** to share your writing.
2. A **brand** to build trust with readers.
3. **Channels** of connection to distribute your art.

Without these tools, your reach will be limited. Your art will only go so far. Let's start with the first.

Building a Platform

Every writer needs a platform. A stage. A place from which to communicate a message. This is the first tool you need.

A platform is something only *you* can build. You can't borrow or steal it. You can only earn it. It's the permission people give you to communicate with them.

There is no set form for any given platform; it all depends on the tribe you're building.

A platform is what you make it.

The question is: Will you build one? Will you create your own rules? Or will you continue to be bound to someone else's standards? To blend in with the rest of the crowd?

Not sure where to start? Let's look at some examples.

Examples of Platforms

There is no set way to do this. There are all kinds of platforms — which one will you build? Here are a few types to consider:

- YouTube Channel
- Podcast
- Blog
- Newspaper Column
- TV Show
- Speaking Career

Oprah has a platform. So does Bono. As does J.K. Rowling. If you want people to pay attention to what you have to say, you have to be legitimate.

You need to have a reason for people to listen.

In the old days, a lot of this was left to chance. Musicians had to play a lot of dives before they ever stepped onto a main

stage. Screenwriters moved to Hollywood and paid their dues for years before they ever made one of their stories into movies.

But now, things have changed. Now, you don't have to wait. The odds are still against you, and this will be hard. But the good news is this isn't left to chance. You don't have to wait anymore.

Now, you can create your own luck.

When it comes to platform, there are so many options — so many opportunities — it can feel overwhelming. Where do we begin? With what we know.

How to Build a Platform

There are three important parts of building any platform:

1. Get experience.

2. Demonstrate competence.
3. Generate buzz.

Let me unpack that. There are three parts to building any successful platform, three steps or actions you need to take to get noticed.

First, you need experience. This is about apprenticeship. About paying your dues. It's about spending time getting good at your craft.

Second, you need to demonstrate competence. This means showing us what you have. It means practicing in public.

For musicians, this means playing live shows. For writers, it means blogging. For artists, it means putting your work on display for the world to see. You need to show the world you have what it takes and to find someone who will give you a chance.

Third, you need to generate buzz. You have to get people talking about you. If you have experience and are good at what you do, but no one advocates for you, you don't matter.

You may be writing for the love of it, which is perfectly fine, but if you want to touch someone's life (as most writers do), this is not enough.

This means more than fans. It includes patrons and supporters and people who will spread your message *for* you. It's a tribe.

This may sound overwhelming or vague. It may be too ethereal. What does it actually mean? *That's all well and good*, you may be thinking. *But I don't even know where to start.* What do you do?

The best way to build a platform and earn influence is actually quite simple. How do you get noticed in a world full of noise, distractions, and advertisements? Easy...

Help people.

Be a resource to others. Do favors. Be selfless. In a world of me-first and gimme-gimme, this is totally crazy. And unexpected. Which is why it works.

Generosity catches people off-guard; they don't see it coming. This is why they trust you, why they take time to listen to you. You have their best interest in mind.

With trust comes permission. With permission, the opportunity to share your work.

Personal Story: How I Got Started

When I first started my writing blog, Goinswriter.com, I felt like a fool. I had never published a book and had only gotten a few articles in print over the years. I did a lot of online writing and blogging, but that was it.

Who the heck was I to offer advice?

Then I heard of other bloggers who were considered experts in their fields. I found out many of them didn't start out as experts, either. Instead, they just started asking questions. They started poking and probing and finding the answers to their burning questions.

So I realized something: The only prerequisite to building a community is curiosity.

If you're struggling with feeling "good enough," stop it. That's not the issue. Not really.

The issue is fear. Namely, fear of starting. What it takes to start is not talent but the willingness to finish, to follow through.

Are you willing to push through the fear of rejection and embarrassment? To be curious and ask questions? To

persevere and commit to learning? To work harder than most so *you* can become the expert?

If so, you're ready to begin. You're ready to build a platform.

Remember: A platform is people. It doesn't get much simpler than that. Help others, and you'll find your helpfulness reciprocated.

As it turns out, the age-old adage is true: *What goes around comes around.*

So start being generous today.

Establishing a Brand

The second tool every writer needs is a strong personal brand.

For years, I neglected this, riding on the coattails of others. I partnered with writers and organizations that had strong brands. I thought somehow their influence would transfer to me.

I was wrong. It doesn't work like that. Only *you* can own your own platform.

Only *you* can manage your own brand.

You have to have an image and personality that people recognize. And it needs to be distinctly yours. Otherwise, you disappear. You don't exist. You're camouflaged, blending in with the background of other voices.

Trust me, I know.

I used to write for a magazine. Every time I sent in a new piece (after publishing multiple articles with them), I had to re-introduce myself. Every. Single. Time.

It was pathetic. And terribly frustrating. But I had no home base — no website, no landing zone, no platform. I got what I was asking for.

Without a brand, you're forgettable.

The good news is you have a choice.

With the Internet and the million ways people are connecting with each other every day, you can take command of your personal brand. In fact, you *must*.

What, exactly, is a brand? That's not a bad question. In fact, there's a lot of confusion about what the word even means. It means different things to different people.

For some, a brand is a logo. For others, it's your reputation or the trust people put in a product.

The word itself may conjure images of Apple or Coca-Cola. It may cause you to wince or make you roll your eyes.

If that's the case, hang in there. Because what I mean when I say "brand" is actually quite simple. And as far as I'm concerned, every writer needs one.

A brand is who you are. But it's more than that. It's your truest self. The part people remember.

Elements of a Brand

There are three elements of every brand. When building yours, you would do well to pay attention to each:

- **Name:** Your actual name, a brand name, or a

pseudonym.

- **Image:** A logo, your face, or some kind of custom headshot.
- **Voice:** Your style and tone of communication. It's how people recognize you.

A brand is your identity. It's what makes you, you. But it's not just your personality. It's who you consciously choose to be. It's an intentional identity you don for the sake of your art.

Don't misunderstand me. I don't mean your brand can be whatever you want.

It's an important part of yourself revealed to an audience. Not in a disingenuous way, but in a way that is helpful, consistent, and understandable to your readers.

I like guacamole, but it doesn't need to be part of my brand. A brand is *part* of you, but it can't be the whole person — with all your nuances and idiosyncrasies, that's impossible.

Choose the parts of your personality you want your brand to emphasize and why. My affinity for avocados doesn't need to be central in my brand. What *does* is my belief that passion is central to life.

The Biggest Mistake Writers Make

The biggest mistake writers make is believing they don't need a brand. *Wrong*. This is a common fallacy and, quite frankly, ridiculous.

Everyone has a brand. One way or another, you are making an impression on your audience.

Branding yourself with a consistent image, voice, and name is how you gain some semblance of control over what people think of you.

It's not a perfect process, but you can guide it. You can

influence what people think of you, if you care enough to act.

A brand will happen whether you do this or not. Either you intentionally *choose* one for yourself, or one will be given to you. Might as well have some say in it.

When it comes to branding, I can't emphasize how important it is to be yourself. Not in a lazy, lackadaisical kind of way, but purposefully and intentionally.

Don't misuse marketing gimmicks to trick your audience into believing something that isn't true. If you do, you will be found out, exposed, and discovered for the fraud you are.

But if you do this branding thing right, your audience will thank you, because you will help them know what to expect.

Think of a brand as a promise — one you get to deliver on with every word you write and article you publish. Every book you sign. Every email you respond to. Every fan you meet.

This is what branding is about: promises delivered.

You have a choice in this. Don't waste the opportunity and inherit a reputation you didn't choose. Make your brand count.

Making Yourself Memorable

How do you build a brand? How do you put all of these elements together and create a reputation people can trust? You make yourself unforgettable.

As Seth Godin says, you make yourself remarkable in the most literal way — so that people will *remark* about you.

The point in all of this is not to turn into a marketing machine, but to get people to *not* forget you. It's about making yourself memorable. About standing out in all the noise.

This won't just happen. You will have to work. Here's how to build a brand from scratch in three, simple (but not easy) steps:

1. Choose a name.
2. Design your look.
3. Find your voice.

Let's unpack those.

Choose a Name

A good brand name can be as simple as your first and last name. In many cases, that will be just fine.

For others, a more creative route will be appropriate. You may have to go with a pseudonym, like Mark Twain or Mary Shelley.

For bloggers, a brand name can also be a sort of “call sign” like Problogger or Tall Skinny Kiwi. It can even be something iconic like Madonna or Avi.

Before choosing a name, take some time to carefully weigh the pros and cons of your options. Once you have a published name, it will be hard (and confusing) to change it, so don’t take this lightly.

Make your name memorable. Make it work for you. Make it consistent with the rest of your brand.

Your brand needs to serve the purpose of your writing. Don’t stick with something that doesn’t work. Also, don’t rush into the first idea that comes to mind. This is important; treat it as such.

Design Your Look

Designing your look takes intentionality. Again, this is

something you want to have a say in, not something you completely delegate or defer.

Your look may be an icon or logotype. It may be a photo of you. It may even be a creative combination of all three. It can be a symbol like Prince had (or whatever name he goes by these days — talk about brand confusion!).

Designing your look is a great example of how a brand is a representation of you, but not your whole self.

For instance, you don't want your headshots to be of you right after you get out of bed.

At the same time, you don't want an image that looks nothing like you. Your image needs to represent you. The whole point is so it causes people to recognize you.

When designing your look, remember these tips:

- Be recognizable, inviting, and interesting.

- Use a professional photographer or designer to help you. Outsource what you can't do yourself, but make sure you speak into the process.
- Be certain people will notice you and your work by your logo, headshots, etc.
- Get feedback from friends, fans, and followers throughout the branding process.

Find Your Voice

Finding your voice is the hardest, most important task a writer will undertake. Some authors say it takes years. Others say it's a matter of writing hundreds of thousands of words.

The one non-negotiable is this: **You will have to work to find your voice.** It will not come to you in a daydream or revelation. It's not just how you talk or act. It's a product of elbow grease.

A writer's voice is the combination of passion, personality, and people. It's communication in a way that is both personally fulfilling and relevant to your audience. It's meaningful and marketable.

If your writing only moves you, then you haven't found your voice.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- Describe yourself in a few adjectives. What do you and others come up with?
- Take note of your interests: favorite books, movies, music, etc. What do they have in common?
- Imagine your ideal reader. Describe him or her. Write a letter to this person (including a name).

As you take note of your unique style of writing and whom you're trying to reach, you will begin to find your voice. Don't worry, though; it takes time. Give yourself lots of grace and room to fail.

You'll need it.

Personal Story: Branding Myself

Stumbling upon my own personal brand was less intentional than it should have been. I kind of backed into it, accidentally. Call me a nerd, but it happened through my blog.

The *.com* domain for my full name was already taken, so I did a variation of it with Goinswriter.com, since I knew I wanted to build a platform around my writing.

Then, I repurposed a headshot from a family photo shoot I did with my wife. I put it on every piece of collateral I had: website, Twitter, Facebook, etc.

Then, I started reaching out to people, building relationships, and writing.

The more I wrote, the more comfortable I became with my voice.

As I looked around, I saw how my writing resonated with others. Before I knew it, I had a brand, a unique writing style that attracted others. And I had no idea.

In fact, a friend had to tell me, “Jeff, you’ve found your voice,” before I would believe it.

Maybe you’ll need the same reminder. That’s why we can’t simply practice in a corner somewhere in a darkly lit room.

You’ve got to get out in the world and share your work.

Otherwise, you’ll always doubt yourself.

Your brand is waiting. You just need to find it.

Channels of Connection

A platform is nothing without channels to connect people to your content. This is the third tool every writer needs: a channel — or better yet, *channels*.

Another word for this is marketing. But it's much deeper. It's relationships.

Most writers don't like promoting themselves. But what alternative do you have?

If you want to get your content in front of people, you have to be connected to others: agents, editors, publishers, readers, and writers.

With a craft requiring solitude and focus, this can be hard. Which is precisely why most writers make this tragic flaw: They neglect the importance of building meaningful connections.

And they pay dearly for it.

The New Assembly Line

Everywhere you look, people are assembling. They're lining up for community. Gathering around unique interests and passions.

The term “niche” has never been more popular. If you're going to find an audience for your writing, you're going to have to jump into this new world. You're going to have to join some existing channels and networks — if you want your message to matter.

Here are a few examples:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Email

- Phone
- Conferences
- Meetups

You need distribution, to get into these channels of connections. You need a tribe — a focused group of followers to spread your message. But what if what you're doing isn't working? How do you start?

“Treating people with respect is the best way to earn their attention.”
—SETH GODIN

This is the hard part of trying to get noticed for communicating a message. It's the part most writers neglect. They get scared or lazy. They procrastinate and delay the inevitable.

Or they get excited about sharing their art, and they rush the process. They jump the gun and burn bridges.

Then, they wonder why nobody pays attention to what they have to say, why they're virtually anonymous.

This concept of building long-term relationships slowly may not be easy for you. But it's necessary. Even if it's a discipline, don't skip this next section.

Making Connections

When two people relate to each other, when they exchange useful information and a meaningful experience is shared — a connection is made.

Therein lies the rub.

A connection must be meaningful. It must be mutual. It must matter.

Meaningful: The listener must care about what you're sharing. You must have permission and attention.

Mutual: Both parties need to be in it. One may benefit more than the other, but it cannot be completely one-sided.

Matter: Not only must both sides care about the content, but there needs to be fruit. Something good must result from the connection.

This aspect of networking is essential to making your work matter.

What you need to do is build a platform, establish a strong brand, and then start creating inroads.

You'll want to earn followers and friends and subscribers, but you'll need more than daily guests and visitors.

You need to build faith with your audience so they give you permission to communicate with them whenever you like.

This is a significant mark of trust. Without it, you have

nothing but a series of one-hit wonders.

How do you earn this permission? You *ask*.

How to Ask Permission

Here are some ways to ask and build permission, so that you can deliver a message.

- Invite blog readers to subscribe to your newsletter.
- Ask another writer or potential mentor to coffee.
- Give away something for free — like an eBook — in exchange for attention.

The possibilities are endless, but not all of them are equal.

Of course, you need to do more than ask. You need to be smart. You need to serve your way into relationships. The most important question you should ask is, “What’s in it for them?”

Without permission, you're only adding to the noise. The best way to combat this is to be over-the-top helpful, to be unexpectedly generous.

Think about what happens when you enter a retail store. Within seconds, a salesperson approaches you. "Can I help you?" he asks.

What do *you* say? Usually, "No, thanks. I'm just looking."

But that's not true, is it? You walked into the store to buy something, and the person that could help you, you just chased away. Why? Because we don't trust salespeople.

Likewise, your audience doesn't trust you. Not yet. There's no relationship, no trust built. Why should they? You need to do something for them to show them you're worthy of their letting down their guard.

When he decided to give away free copies of an eBook,

Michael Hyatt saw his email list grow from 3000 subscribers to over 30,000 in a matter of months. He saw a 1000% trust increase with his audience in less than a year — all because he decided to be helpful.

In other words, generosity works.

Attention Is Earned

It doesn't matter what *you* think. What matters is what *I* think.

Nobody cares about you. Not yet. If you want them to, you have to realize something: You don't get to decide what matters. *They* do.

Who is “they”? Your future fans.

What's the best way to start earning permission and building a fan base? What is the best way to make meaningful

connections? What do you need to make all this happen? A channel of your very own.

For years, I overlooked the importance of having my own channel. I thought it was a nice add-on. It's not. It's a necessity.

A channel of your own is essential to building a platform and extending your reach beyond your immediate networks.

Without it, you are either borrowing attention or stealing it. The only way to earn it is by sharing a meaningful message through a channel you own.

For me, this is the email list that connects people to my blog. For Dan Miller, it's his podcast. For Gretchen Rubin, it's her extensive network of relationships.

What will *your* channel be?

Personal Story: Finally Getting Picked

Remember how I had to repeatedly reintroduce myself to the same magazine? How I had to keep pitching that magazine? *Talk about the definition of insanity.* I just heard from them recently, but this time it was a different conversation.

Years ago, I stopped submitting pitches to this publication. I was frustrated and fed up and frankly, just plain tired.

For about a year, I focused on building a really meaningful platform, which allowed me to share my work with a broader audience.

In other words, I had forgotten about the magazine — and most gatekeepers for that matter. Something strange happens when you do this. Much like the pretty girl who's not interested in you, it makes you want her even more.

I didn't set up the analogy right, because in this case, I am the pretty girl.

A few months ago, the magazine emailed me out of the blue, asking for a contribution. They wanted to republish something I had already written — on my blog. Imagine that.

Don't overlook how monumental of a shift this was. For years, I pitched this magazine, and they'd occasionally publish me (maybe one out of ten pitches).

Every time, I had to fight to get noticed as if it were the first time. Then, after building a platform, they came to me, asking *me* for permission to publish.

I had now become the gatekeeper.

This is the magic of the age in which we now live. We are all publishers. And peers to those whom we previously used to pitch our work.

Since starting a blog and building an audience, I've been approached by more publishers than I have in the past six

years combined. I've been offered book deals and speaking gigs and other writing opportunities. All because of a blog.

Because I chose myself instead of waiting for others to do it.

What You Get (When You Reach Out)

If you decide to build a platform — to create a brand and connect with others, you will see things you've never before seen. I hope I'm not making this sound easy; it's not. But it's possible, which is something that's never been true before.

You, the writer, can now create a destiny for yourself that was never before possible. Amazing, right?

Here are some of the potential opportunities awaiting you:

- Book deals (without the proposal)
- Offers to write for magazines (without a query letter)
- Money (I have to throw that in there)

- Free stuff (like books and products)
- Interview opportunities
- Chances to connect with other writers and influential people

It's simple but not easy and definitely worth the work.

Nowadays, I'm not afraid of publishing. I don't fear rejection. I've picked myself, and others have seen the difference.

Instead of pleading to be published, the gatekeepers are coming to me. Honestly, it's pretty cool.

I'm no John Grisham, but I'm pretty content with where I am. Every day, my writing is read by thousands of people — something I never would have dreamed of when I first picked up a pen and paper and started writing about gargoyles. (I was in sixth grade; give me a break.)

This didn't take years of living in obscurity. It took eight months. I did it with a full-time job and a wife, working in

the evenings and early mornings. It wasn't easy, but it wasn't impossible, either. I put the time in and showed up — and I saw results.

All of this began with a pledge, with a simple understanding: *I am a writer. I just need to write.*

There's no formula, but being intentional is important. You can follow a similar process as I did, or you can try something completely different and find what works for you. Maybe you'll see success sooner; maybe it will take longer.

If you do the work, you'll see the results.

The age in which we live is full of incredible opportunities for writers and communicators. It's the Age of No Excuse — where anything is possible and the only one holding you back is you.

Your opportunity is here. Don't let it pass you by. And remember: It all begins with a change of mind.

*You **are** a writer...*

Getting Started

This is where I'm supposed to say, "Getting started is easy!" But it's not. **Getting started is the hardest part.**

As you begin, you'll find every excuse to wait and every reason to delay. You'll stop to reflect on what to write about. You'll come up with reasons why it's not time yet, why you're not ready. And you will be lying to yourself.

You're ready. Ready enough, anyway. You don't have to have it all figured out yet. You just need to begin. You'll figure out the rest as you go.

Where do you begin? That depends on the kind of work you want to do, but your beginning might look something like this:

- Start a blog and start sharing your work regularly. Practice in public.

- Sign up for an account on [Twitter](#) and begin conversing with others.
- Create a Facebook page for your blog, books, etc.
- Build an email newsletter list (sign up for one on [Aweber.com](#) or [Mailchimp.com](#)) and reward people for subscribing.
- Continue creating great work worth talking about. Show up day after day, making promises and delivering on them consistently over time.

Start small and build. Always asking permission, always showing respect.

This process, mixed with a little patience and faith, will always yield results. They may not be what you expect, but something *will* happen.

Launching a Blog

Okay, let's get technical.

There are so many opportunities to blog out there — where do you begin? What's good? What's bad?

Personally, I love Wordpress (you can download this free blogging software at Wordpress.org).

Having a self-hosted blog (which means you completely own it) is essential for a writer, in my opinion. However, you may want to begin with baby steps, like an account on Wordpress.com (you can get your own domain name for \$15-20 a year).

Having a free account on some blogging service is nice for updating your grandma (who is, apparently, pretty tech savvy), but it's not enough for a professional.

If you've got a presence on a platform you don't own, you're leaving yourself vulnerable to the whims of a stranger who doesn't have your best interest in mind.

Launching a self-hosted blog can be a little technical to set up (you will need web hosting), but once you begin, you will have total freedom over how you communicate and connect with others.

If you need help doing this, there are great full-service providers like the guys at OutstandingSetup.com.

Plus, with websites like Probloger.net and others, there are all kinds of helpful resources to get you started.

Twitter is a great place to connect with other writers. Facebook can be good, too. Often, these relationships go offline and lead to greater influence. That's the whole point of them:

Social media is a means to an end, not the end itself.

Once you begin, you will want to start building connections. Without other people, it will be hard to succeed. So where do you begin?

Three Important Relationships

There are three must-have relationships that will extend your reach, and each of them is absolutely necessary:

Fans: You need to build meaningful connections with your tribe of followers.

Friends: You need to connect with others who are doing what you are.

Patrons: You need to earn influence with influencers who will support your work.

A fan is someone who admires and follows your work. These people will spread your message and pay money for your work.

A friend is a peer — someone who can relate to the work you

do. You should have an inner circle of friends to hold you accountable to being true to your craft and art.

These people will help you get better.

An advocate is a patron — someone who supports you financially or through lending you his or her influence.

These people will mentor you and help you go to the next level. They will increase your influence and help you grow in wisdom.

Here are three ways to start building a fan base:

- **Create amazing stuff.** Find out what people need and deliver it to them.
- **Be generous.** Reward your readers by giving them freebies once in awhile. Do favors. Serve them.
- **Ask permission.** Never assume. Always invite.

How to Win Fans

The best way to win a fan is to create meaningful art — work that will move people and change the world.

However, when you're just getting started, you're working pretty blindly. How do you know what people want? You *don't*.

Once you build a platform, you can ask your audience. Until then, you have to go with intuition.

The good news is that online distribution and communication are virtually free. So you can try stuff out without it costing you a ton of time or money.

Begin, and tweak as you go.

If you're not sure what to do, try writing something dangerous — something that challenges the status quo or contradicts a social convention.

Create something worth adamantly disagreeing with. Chances are you'll find someone who likes it.

Rinse and repeat.

How to Make a Friend

Friends are important to your work. Without peers and cheerleaders, we're doomed to live lives of solitude and limited impact.

Sometimes, though, it's hard to make friends, hard to meet new people. Still, this is essential. Here are three ways to build a relationship if you need help:

- **Reach out.** Email people. Reply to them on Twitter. Start a conversation.
- **Help.** Begin the relationship by serving and showing interest in the other person.

- **Follow up.** Don't let the relationship lie fallow. Stay in touch.

The best way to make a friend is to show interest in someone else without agenda.

I hope you're seeing a pattern here: **Serving people is the best way to earn influence.** The most influential people I know do this regularly. They give more than they take; they ask more than they tell.

If you want your writing to reach the most people possible, you'll need friends to champion your work and encourage you in the process.

The best way to find these people is to be one yourself.

How to Earn a Patron

We live in an incredible age. Technology is amazing and

accessible. Ease of communication allows you to reach millions in seconds — all at the touch of your fingertips.

Ironically, writers and artists are more alone than they've ever been.

One challenge in this age of super-connectedness is the prevalence of competition, especially amongst creatives.

We need help. We need someone to show us the ropes. We need influencers who are generous with their platforms to help us find our audiences.

Without the Medici family, Michelangelo wouldn't have painted the Sistine Chapel. Without his friends at Atari, Steve Jobs never would've started Apple. Without patrons, you won't reach your potential.

We all need people who believe in the work we do and help support us.

How are patrons different from other people? For one, they already have influence and expertise. They are also extremely busy.

It may be hard to get time with these important people, but it's well worth the effort. How do you get potential patrons to notice you? Here are three steps:

- **Ask.** Start with email or a letter. Ask for a short meeting. This can be in person, over Skype, or whatever is most convenient for them.
- **Interview.** Show interest. Come prepared with questions. Respect their time.
- **Stay in touch.** Follow up with an email (or phone call) after the meeting.
- **Repeat.** The real secret is diligence and perseverance. Do this enough with enough people, and you'll find someone who believes in you.

The best way to do this is to demonstrate competency and proactively reach out. Before you ask for a meeting, show

them what you've done or are capable of doing.

When setting up the meeting, the trick is to make it easy. Offer to buy them coffee or breakfast near their workplace. Do it when it's convenient for them, not you.

When you meet, make it more about them than you. However, don't be surprised if they have their own questions. Come prepared to both ask and answer.

Obviously, you want them to help you, to endorse the work that you do. But don't make this "ask" the first meeting. Instead, make it your primary goal to build a relationship. If they like you, you'll have plenty of opportunities to ask later.

After the meeting, thank them and send a list of notes to show you actually remembered their advice. You want them to know you took their time seriously. Then, like any relationship, let it build over time.

Relationships are important. They can lead to all kinds of

opportunities and breakthroughs in your career.

Every success is a story of community — a complex network of people helping each other.

Don't forget: You can't do this alone.

If you're intimidated or afraid of reaching out to potential patrons, know that it gets easier. You just need to start.

If you're already doing this, keep going. It never hurts to have more people on your side.

Personal Story: Connecting with People

I was hesitant to start networking with other people who could help me. It felt sleazy. I didn't like the idea of promoting myself.

Instead, I did what I knew: I offered to interview people I

wanted to connect with. I would reach out on Twitter, Facebook, or via email, and ask someone to coffee. Then, I'd interview them.

Afterwards, I would publish the article and let the person know. This was my excuse to follow up. With many of the relationships, I just continued to stay in touch. Over time, this gave me the confidence to reach out to other people.

This simple formula has allowed me to get people like Seth Godin and Michael Hyatt to endorse my work. It's allowed me to publish exclusive interviews with writers like Steven Pressfield and many, many others.

And it will help you, too, if you take the time to ask.

You must be bold and risk a little, but I promise you: The outcome is worth the risk.

What It Really Takes to Be a Writer

“This business of... being a writer is ultimately about asking yourself, ‘How alive am I willing to be?’”

—ANNE LAMOTT

This isn’t easy, this writing life. It is, however, a noble calling. And like most things worthy of fighting for, it will require *all* of you. Not just your fingers and brain, but your whole self.

When people tell me they want to publish a book but aren’t willing to build a platform or worry about marketing, I don’t believe them. If you want to be a writer, if you want this badly enough, you *will* work.

Why *wouldn’t* you be willing to give this everything you have? If this is your dream we’re talking about? Why would you hold anything back?

Yes, this life will be hard. You will get rejected and be called names. There's no sugarcoating it: Writing takes work. It requires gumption and moxie. No, it won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

There's a foolish way to pursue a writing career (waiting to be picked) and a smart way (building a platform worth noticing). Do yourself a favor and choose the latter. Create a brand that resonates. Make meaningful connections that help you succeed.

This craft is not for the faint of heart, so hang in there. You will need to get tough and learn to stick through some stuff — and I hope you do. Because we need your voice. We need your art — whether you realize it or not.

Now comes the hard part. The part where you apply this (or don't). Where you find your tribe and build your path to publishing.

Before that, though, you will have to do something important. You will have to choose yourself.

This is harder than it sounds. It will take a lot to do this day after day of hardship, misunderstanding, and slander. You *will* struggle. And that's okay, as long as you keep going.

Which brings me to my final point. There is one — and only one — tool you need to be a writer:

COURAGE.

None of this matters one hill of beans if you aren't brave. *If you do not persevere.* No guide or set of tools can prepare you for the rejection you will face, the criticism you will endure, the pain you will experience.

All these strategies carry with them a core, underlying assumption: **You must be courageous.**

The world needs this more than you know. We are waiting

for your words. Longing to be changed. Will you share your art? Will you believe you are a writer and start writing?

I hope so.

Before Your First Book

Every writer wants to get published. It's the dream we long for, the recognition we crave (even when we say we don't).

It doesn't take long to realize getting published isn't easy. It takes hard work, thick skin, and perseverance. At the same time, it's not as difficult as you might think. Not if you know the secret.

Every day, hundreds of books and thousands of articles go into print. And here's the truth: Some of them aren't very good.

What's the difference between published authors and you? What do *they* have that you don't? Maybe nothing. Except they know how to get published, which is actually quite significant.

First Things First

Before you jump into the world of publishing, you need to ask yourself a few questions:

- *Am I serious?*
- *Am I committed?*
- *Am I prepared to be challenged?*

Too many people dream of one day publishing a book or getting a piece featured in a magazine without first counting the cost.

It sounds kind of glamorous — getting published — doesn't it? It's *not*. It's more grisly than anything.

Most writers are content to dream but aren't prepared to do the work. They fail before they start. Before you begin, take a moment to consider what you're about to do.

Are you prepared to dig in and stick it out? Even when it gets

hard? Even when you're discouraged or lose sight of your goals? Will you still get up each day and write?

This is what you must resolve to do. Otherwise, you're doomed from the start.

Let's be honest: **You're probably not a great writer.**

If you are just starting out and don't have decades of publishing your work under your belt, this is a given. Which is fine as long as you don't stay there. We all start somewhere, right?

The best way to get good at something is to practice. You probably already knew that. Here's the twist: The best way to practice is to do it publicly.

Musicians become professionals by playing a hundred live shows. Likewise, writers become authors by publishing a lot of bad work (until it's no longer bad).

A young actor once lamented to Walter Matthau, “I’m just waiting for my big break.”

Matthau laughed and replied, “Kid, it’s not just one break; it’s fifty.”

The same is true for any craft, especially writing. You have to walk before you run.

A writing career happens iteratively, over time. You don’t need to take a giant leap. You just need to take the next step. Publishing a book begins not with a manuscript, but with a baby step, with practicing in public.

Where do you start? With small, gradual steps. Start a blog. Guest post for a friend’s website. Do a freelance gig *pro bono*. Bit by bit, you are building your portfolio before you go for the Big Kahuna.

This is the only practical way to get published. You might be able to forgo this step if you’re a celebrity or heiress of a

tycoon. However, for the rest of us, this will require work — honest blood, sweat, and tears.

Stop waiting for permission and prepare to do the work. **There are no big breaks.** Only tiny drips of effort that lead to waves of momentum.

Walk Before You Run

Before you write a book, you should write a dozen magazine articles. Maybe more.

You should guest post on popular websites and blogs and do radio interviews. You should create a platform (i.e. a blog, a podcast, a newspaper column, etc.) and build an audience now.

You should start generating buzz around the brand of *you*.

All of this is practice for your book — for your career as a

writer. The fun part is it's not practice at all. You're doing it. You're writing and publishing your work. When the time comes, publishing a book will be the next logical step.

There are five steps to getting published in magazines and other publications before you take a leap into book publishing. The first is the most important.

Step 1: Get Your Foot in the Door

A lot of writers make a big mistake.

They come up with a writing topic that would make a good piece for magazine, newspaper, or website.

Then, they spend *way* too much time on the idea without ever getting feedback.

They spend hours or even days writing the article. Then, they try to find someone to publish it. And they fail miserably.

Some people call this “freelancing.” I call it stupidity.

This is backwards thinking. It assumes you know your audience better than the publisher does. (Even if you do, this attitude won’t get you very far.)

It’s better to start with a few loose ideas and contact the publisher before moving forward with the piece.

The whole point of that initial contact is to get on a publisher’s radar. Relationship and conversation are more important than good ideas and great writing. (At least, at first.)

Instead of cold-pitching your ideas to publishers, do something better: **Build a relationship.**

Before you do that, though, do your homework. Study the publisher’s guidelines. Read sample pitches. Email friends who have gotten their work published. Find out what works and replicate it. You may only get one shot at this. Make it

count.

Then, reach out to the editor:

1. Present your ideas in a way that is a clear “win” for the publication.
2. Explain how your piece will be relevant to their readership. Offer samples of other pieces you’ve done.
3. Have something to show them — anything. Just don’t show up empty-handed. This works for a magazine, trade publication, or even a blog.

As it turns out, **content is not king**. *Relationship* is. Start making connections with publishers so when the ideas come, they’ll pay attention to your work.

Step 2: Don’t Fall in Love with One Idea

Many friends with book deals tell me the idea they least expected is the one publishers choose to turn into a book.

The same has happened when I've published articles in magazines, on websites, and in other publications. It even happened with my first book. The publisher picked a topic I never would've considered turning into a book.

There is an important lesson here: **You don't get to decide what makes a good idea; the publisher does.**

As you build your platform and establish your authority as an author, you will earn the right to decide which ideas are good.

However, when you're just getting started, you don't get much of a say. It's best to be "go low" here, to learn and serve your way into influence. Consider this a seasonal discipline; it won't last forever.

If you have great ideas the world needs to hear, you will eventually get to share them.

Why Your Good Ideas Don't Matter

If no one will read your article, then it doesn't matter how good it is — at least not in the realm of publishing.

Sometimes, your ideas aren't as good as you think. Other times, the world just isn't ready for them.

When approaching publishers, if you stay flexible about what should get published, it will make you a better writer. It will also make you a better salesperson of your ideas.

That's right. **Pitching is selling.** There's no other way around it. This doesn't mean you have to slick your hair back and talk funny. It just means you need to be prepared to make your idea appealing to the publisher.

I mean, you're asking them to hire you. They're spending money on you, right? Make it worth their while. Enter their world. Think like *they* think.

The Pitching Process

Before you pitch, gather a few ideas you think are worth publishing. Brainstorm them out, taking notes as you go.

Next, highlight the very best ideas (at least three of them, but no more than ten), and write an interesting headline for each. Under the headlines, write a couple of sentences, describing the potential piece.

Then, try pitching them to several publications or publishers at once, following the appropriate guidelines for each. (You should thoroughly scour a website or magazine for any submission guidelines before ever submitting a piece.)

Make sure you pitch more than one publication. Keeping several irons in the fire will increase the likelihood of at least one getting published.

It will also allow you to put a little pressure on a publisher that may be dragging their feet.

There's nothing wrong with a little healthy competition. In fact, you'll need a competitive spirit in order to pitch and get your work noticed. Get used to it.

What Every Pitch Needs

If you need help, here's a quick list of items every pitch needs:

- Personal salutation (use the editor's name)
- Quick introduction of yourself (if this is the first contact)
- Samples of your work (article links, document attachments, blog posts — whatever is your best work)
- List of ideas with potential titles (scan the publication to get a feel for how they write headlines)
- An abstract of each article (2-3 sentences)
- Closing with your contact info, including a link to your website/portfolio

Want to see how I do it? Following are three samples I've used.

Sample #1: First Contact

Hi [First Name],

My name is Jeff Goins, and I wanted to submit an article idea for [MAGAZINE]. The premise is people in their twenties and thirties need to travel the world.

I spent fifteen days last January with a group that is traveling for a year and saw how that's changing their lives. I'm attaching a press release I wrote to give you an idea of the experience. There are different directions we could take the article, but I think the idea is compelling for your readership.

Some ideas would be to do a Q&A with one of the travelers

who just returned from a year abroad and how they are now living life. Or, I could expand upon an article I already wrote for [WEBSITE].

Another option is to make it a general call to action for young Americans to take a year off and find themselves, as so many other cultures do.

Here's another article I wrote about that: [LINK]. I could expand upon that idea.

Let me know your thoughts. If you're interested, I'd be happy to start drafting something and send it your way. Just let me know when you'd think of running it.

Thanks for your time,

*Jeff Goins
goinswriter.com*

Sample #2: Ongoing Relationship

Hey [First Name],

I had an idea for an article for an upcoming issue of [MAGAZINE]: My friend Paul and I traveled around the U.S. for a year after college to play music. We spent a year, living in community, sleeping in people's homes, and living on nothing but the generosity of strangers.

We communicated with each other regularly, sharing our frustrations and challenges of life and on the road. Sometimes, I think that's all that kept us sane.

Here are my ideas for the article:

- 1. A piece we would co-write, sharing highlights from our year on the road.*
- 2. A piece about traveling, leading peers, and the importance of long-distance friendship.*

3. A travelogue of a year on the ride (just written by one of us).

What do you think?

Sincerely,

*Jeff Goins
goinswriter.com*

Sample #3: Guest Blog Post

Hi [First Name]:

I've been following your work for a while and really appreciate what you write.

I'm working on a piece that I thought might be fitting for [BLOG]. It's called, "[ARTICLE TITLE]". It's based on something I learned from reading your blog.

The rough draft is below: [300 word article excerpt]

Are you interested in running this? If so, I'd love to develop it some more. If you'd like to see samples of my work, here's an article on my own blog: [LINK]. And here's a recent guest post I wrote: [LINK].

Thanks,

Jeff
goinswriter.com

Step 3: Don't Write the Piece Yet

If this is your first foray into publishing, there's something you need to be prepared for. Something you may be dreading. Something you'd rather not do.

You're going to have to write and rewrite a lot.

For every hundred words I write, I spend about thirty to sixty minutes of editing and rewriting. When I'm pitching publications, I plan for this. I schedule accordingly. You should, too. (Your pace may be different; what's important is that you set reasonable expectations.)

A piece that runs about 2500 words (the length of a feature magazine article) can take me anywhere from five to twenty-five hours, depending on the amount of work involved and my familiarity with the topic.

When you break it down, earning a few hundred bucks per piece (when you're spending dozens of hours on it) isn't really worth the effort. *Good thing writers don't write for the money.*

What's that? You *are* writing for the money? Well, good luck with that.

If passion isn't what drives you, you may not have much

tolerance for the pain, rejection, and disappointment of the writer's life. If, however, you write because you have to — because you can't imagine *not* doing it — then there may be hope for you yet.

If you aren't prepared for this arduous process, you had better go find an easier way to make a buck.

Otherwise, it'll be a rude awakening when you come in contact with your first picky editor. And trust me, he's waiting for you. Red pen in hand.

So it really doesn't make much sense to write the article before you pitch the piece. *Does it?* I mean, you're going to rewrite it anyway, right?

Might as well get a guarantee they're going to run the piece first (if you can).

Better yet, get to know the editor's preferences and style before beginning. It'll save you a *lot* of work.

Still, you'll be tempted to do the exact opposite. Excitement over an idea will cause you to jump the gun and start writing.

Avoid this temptation like the plague. It will steal hours, days, and months of your life — if not more.

You will save a lot of time if you focus more on pitching than writing at the initial stages of a piece.

Focus on building relationships with publishers, getting to know editors, and preparing to write the article. It will be worth the effort. Trust me.

Step 4: Be Persistent

Most publishers are bogged down by loads of submissions every day. They don't have time to remember who I am or what I wrote three weeks ago. But that's okay.

Because it's not on *them* to remember; it's on *me*. If I care about my writing, I need to be the one keeping the piece at the forefront of the publisher's mind.

So, I do them a favor by following up regularly. I check in, ask if they need anything else, and see if they're still interested. You should do the same.

There is a relational part of this job of being a writer that you need to embrace — even if you're the most introverted person in the world. Make email your friend.

Find ways to work up the courage to network and introduce yourself to strangers. Depending on your personality, it can be very hard. But it's also worth the awkwardness and discomfort.

This is one of the secrets to prolific publishing: being connected with the right people at the right time.

It's not exactly fair and may not be what you signed up for,

but it's how the world works. Learn to live with it. Or stop complaining that your work doesn't get published.

There is no in-between.

Think of it as the process you follow after interviewing for a job. You want to stay in the mix, and you don't want to be forgotten. So you check in just to see how things are going.

Same deal here.

How to Follow Up with a Publisher

When expecting to hear back on a submission, checking in weekly (as long as the publisher hasn't told you not to) is a good way to stay at the forefront of the editor's mind.

A good way to not be annoying is to ask what they thought and offer to rewrite the piece, if necessary. Be cordial and polite, but don't apologize, either.

Let the editor know other publications may also be considering the piece (only do this if it's true). This will put a little pressure on them to make a decision and let them know your work is in demand.

You can also ask what their typical response time is. For most magazines, the standard is four to six weeks. Websites are often faster.

If you don't hear back in a month or so, they probably aren't going to publish your piece. This is a general rule based on my experience. Always defer to the publisher's submission process and guidelines. Every place is different.

This is why it's always good to have a few submissions going (for the same article). So that the publishers feel like they're bidding on your work. (They are.)

This is better than the alternative — waiting for them to pick you. It puts you at the helm, which is where you belong.

You are a creator of content, a wizard of words. They need you. Act like it.

If you decide to publish your piece with another publication (because you've waited several weeks and haven't heard back), it's courteous to email the publisher. Let them know you've decided to take the piece elsewhere.

The Unbreakable Rule

When pitching, there is one cardinal rule to never break.

I'm a little hesitant to share it, because I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I don't want this to be an excuse to back down or sabotage yourself. But this point is too important to not share.

The thing you must absolutely *not* do is this: Don't keep following up after they've told you no.

This is not playing hard-to-get. If they've told you they're not going to use the piece, don't try to convince them otherwise.

You are only wasting your time and living in denial. Time to move on before you burn a valuable relationship.

Which raises another point: Sometimes, “no” is really “not now.” Don't confuse the difference. If an editor says she wants to work with you again, she means it.

Step 5: Build Long-term Relationships

Wherever possible, build relationships with publishers. A publisher is not a person, but an editor is. Get to know these people; make their jobs easy. They are your greatest allies.

Once you have your foot in the door with a publisher, it's much easier to get a second or third piece published.

Capitalize off relationships and write multiple pieces for places that have previously published you. Why keep fighting an uphill battle? The hard work is done; now, it's time to benefit.

Build a relationship, and maintain it.

Typically, I write a few times for each publisher I work with. Why not? Once you get to know them and what they expect, it's pretty easy to keep writing for them. And you usually don't have to worry as much about pitching.

The hardest part is figuring out what publishers want and getting them to notice you. Once you're in, you're in. Milk it for all it's worth.

One quick note (and this is important): **Make this a relational transaction, not just a business one.** Under-promise and over-deliver, and you'll never have to go looking for work again.

If you do this right, don't be surprised if an editor comes to you on occasion, asking *you* to write a piece. Once your foot's in the door, it's there to stay (unless you really mess something up).

The Business of Relationships

Never burn an editor. Read that sentence again. It's important.

I recently wrote a piece for a website, and they wanted to change some of my content (which is typical). However, there was one phrase I was adamant about leaving, and they wanted to cut it. I was resistant.

Pitching a fit, I emailed a writer friend, saying, "Can you believe this! The nerve. What should I do?"

She gave me some tough love: "Do what the editor says. You have a gift: someone who is willing to work with you. Trust

her. There's nothing like a good relationship with an editor."

You never know what will happen to these people — where they will go and what they will do.

Make friends, not enemies, with editors.

Yes, there will be conflict. Yes, they will frustrate you and want to change your words. But these people are a gift. Their job is to make you better.

When you find an editor you like working with, be nice to them. Build a relationship.

This is a relational business. Always be looking for networking possibilities, so you can have more opportunities to write and get published in the future.

It's acceptable to ask editors for endorsements and referrals for other writing gigs. Realize this is a "withdrawal" from your trust bank. Make sure you've made enough "deposits"

before making a request like this.

Review

Let's recap.

The most important of these five tips is the first one: *If you can learn to pitch well, you'll get an article published.* The rest is details.

Publishing is about more than having the right ideas; it's about having the right connections. It's an art, so be willing to dance a little. (Pardon the mixed metaphor.)

Keep persistently pitching and try to not get discouraged.

Learn to embrace the relational aspects of the business, and you'll find the right outlets for your message.

Remember: **This is about forming relationships as much as it is about creating content.**

When the Pitching Ends

Of course, all of this might seem silly. After all, every writer's dream is to not pitch a single piece, to never have to sell yourself. Right?

But the reality is — one way or the other — you're going to have to do a little selling. At least, temporarily.

You'll have to knock on doors, email bloggers, and ask for guest post opportunities.

You'll have to introduce yourself to agents and publishers before you get a book deal.

You'll have to befriend editors and pitch like crazy to get a piece published.

You'll have to send a few query letters and contact people

you'd prefer would just ask *you*.

But all of this is preparation.

The truth is you won't always have to do this. Not if you're good. One day, you'll be the gatekeeper. The publishers will come to you.

The paradox, though, is if you *are* good — and wise — you will do this, anyway. Even when you don't have to.

The Myth of Arriving

Every diligent writer eventually reaches a point he never thought he'd reach. This will happen to you, I'm confident of it. You may become well known in your niche or finally publish a book or end up on The Today Show or *New York Times* Best Sellers List.

Every writer has a moment of “arriving.” You end up on top

of the world (even if it's a small world). You do something you never imagined. This will happen if you do your work.

But what then? Well, you have a choice:

1. You can settle with what you've achieved.
2. You can keep reaching out, keep challenging yourself, keep growing.

(Hint: Opt for the latter.)

Every milestone affords a new vantage point. You realize how much there is left to explore.

The trick here is to learn to be content with the journey, because you never *fully* arrive.

However, the true masters of the craft are those who never grow complacent. They're never fully satisfied; they're always pushing themselves a little further.

Hear me loud and clear. I'm not advocating for being a workaholic and ditching your family and friends for a writing career.

What I am saying is this: You can always get better. Do yourself (and your readers) a favor and remember it.

Don't get cocky when you see success. You're not as big of a deal as you feel. And the feeling fades. What remains is the eternal joy of getting to do work you love.

Death of a Salesman

The fun part, of course, comes when you don't *have* to pitch your work anymore. When you can finally stop selling yourself.

If you choose yourself, build a platform, and always ship your best work, this is within your reach.

It may take time, but it will happen. It all begins with having the courage to ask. To make a few phone calls, send a couple of emails, even asking someone to coffee.

If you do this, I promise you a day will come (maybe sooner than you realize) when the editors will come to you, asking you for work.

They'll want to pull an article off your blog or have you do a feature piece for an upcoming issue. They'll want to partner with you to reach an audience. You will publish books and share your ideas with the world. And the dream will become a reality.

Until then, keep working. Keep writing. Keep showing up.

Always do the best work you can for less than you deserve (yes, you heard me). Because freelance writing is not just fee-for-service work. It's marketing.

Piecework is platform-building. One piece at a time, you are

building a legacy. A brand. A reputation. It's worth a little sacrifice, a little sweat. Isn't it?

By all means, don't go hungry. But don't make this all about dollars and cents. It's a marathon, not a sprint. And those who win treat it as such. *Drip by drip*. Persevering till the end.

See you at the finish line.

Fin.

(We're done here. Now, go do something that matters.)

What Next?

Well, that's up to you.

I'm sure this book raised as many questions as it provided answers. That was the point. (Sneaky, huh?)

But I don't want to leave you in the dark. This was, in many ways, an introduction to a conversation that I hope continues. Plus, I'd love to hear what you thought:

- What questions do you still have?
- What do you need help with?
- What did I miss?

I'd love to continue helping you in your journey of picking yourself and finding your own path to spreading your ideas and seeing your words in print.

We writers have never seen a time like the day in which we

now live. I hope you take advantage of it.

If you'd like to continue this journey, check out an online writing course I started at [TribeWriters.com](https://tribewriters.com).

If you have questions, you can find how to connect with me on the next page.

By the way, *thanks*. You didn't have to read this book, but you did. I appreciate your sticking with me till the end. That says something about you already.

Remember: You *are* a writer. You just need to write.

About the Author

Jeff Goins is a writer, speaker, and communicator. He believes words can change the world and that brownies are the world's best breakfast food.

He has contributed to various publications and blogs, including *RELEVANT Magazine*, *Copyblogger*, *Problogger*, and *Zen Habits* (voted by *TIME Magazine* as one of the top 50 websites of 2008.)

Jeff lives in Nashville with his wife and dog. He works out of his home and some days never gets out of his pajamas.

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- Blog: goinswriter.com
- Facebook: facebook.com/goinswriter
- Twitter: twitter.com/jeffgoins

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OK. You're done. You've just finished *You Are a Writer*. Or, you skipped ahead to the end (likely the latter, if you're like me — so go back and read it, then come back to this page).

So...

Did you hate it? Love it? Did it inspire anything or confuse you? I'd love to hear from you.

You can tell me what you thought of this book and/or share it with your friends by visiting this website: youareawriter.com.

Or, you can join the discussion on Twitter: *#youareawriter*

*Time to choose yourself.
Start creating.*

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