

*Subject: long response with many questions*  
*Date: February 16, 2008 9:53 AM*

Hi Caitlyn!

Glad you saw my note. I don't approve the comments, so it was kind of a fluke that I saw yours. And I'm glad that I did!

### Getting Hired

It really is disturbing how hiring folks ignore applicants. Although there's a certain expectation of that with freelance writing, I don't expect it from full-time gigs and especially not internships where you are expected to work your butt off, for free. It's a tough go, though I didn't realize that it would be so for those soon to graduate.

I am sorry that you are dealing with inconsiderate dopes on top of trying to get a job.

So, you must have a few clippings from DRMG, or the Ajax-Pickering News Advertiser? Is that right? But you're really looking to get more work published as a freelance writer, so you can have an amazing portfolio when you look for fulltime work. Right?

### Markets

Basically, you're looking for a short list of markets?

Okay, What are you interested in writing about?

What about the troubles of getting work and getting published? There's a belief among my colleagues, especially those who have started writing as a second career (as I did), that it is easier if you are younger and you can get an internship and magazines and local papers will hire you because you are young and thrive in the fast-paced news business, etc.

It is interesting to note that this is not true. And that you have a personal take on it. Maybe either of the associations I belong to (PWAC, WCDR) are interested in a brief 600-700 article about the trials of a young(er) person faces the same trials of an older (the overall membership)... blah, blah, blah, we're all in the same boat.

Or maybe there's a story about mentorship and how desperately it is needed.

I wrote a book about getting into the film/tv business. Maybe there's something you can offer for media and magazine writing.

My target markets are different than yours, I'd think. I recently sent something to "More" magazine (a mag for 40+ women), two articles to our local writers group for our newsletter, and a query to "Cahoots."

Would you like to guest blog for me? Would that be a helpful start?

### My experience

I came to freelance writing from technical writing, which I still do because, as much as I hate to say it, it pays the bills - but still I think our experiences are the same: lots of rejection, no responses.

I am currently trying to move away from corporate work (the business is changing anyway and many tech writing positions require programmer/developer skills) and to make my living solely on freelance, but it is indeed a trying task.

Are you interested in getting into corporate writing? It pays well, but you can also get sucked into the solid paycheck then you can't get back out to write. (Corporate writing isn't about writing. Just like newspaper writing is about news and not writing. If you know what I mean.) So, if you're keen to stick with magazine writing, it will be difficult at first. I am just surprised that you're not getting results you desire.

Have I said anything remotely helpful?

Ask again if I have not. Feel free to send more questions.

*Subject: Re: Writing*  
*Date: February 16, 2008 10:09 AM*

Caitlyn,

I rec'd this email message from an agency after submitting my resume. It is the first one of it's kind I've ever received.

I have received your resume and have considered you for ...

... you may be qualified for.

It's obviously a form letter, but it sure made me feel like they might care about having me as a customer. After all, they take a percentage of my hourly wage (15-20%), which over the course of a contract can be quite considerable.

Just wanted to say, that there are some folks out there who are considerate. Don't lose heart. Because it's not you. It's them.

*Subject: Re: long response with many questions*  
*Date: February 18, 2008 1:54 PM*

Oh, good. I tend to ramble.

While, it's true that \$\$ is a need, I try NOT to go where the money is, sort of. Let me explain. My personal experience has been that I spent 10+ years in a corporate environment learning the ropes, climbing the ladder, working overtime/weekends, to discover that management was not where I wanted to be. That's my perspective, so some of what I do might not apply to your situation.

Like feedback on your writing, take what you find useful and toss away the rest.

It is discouraging, for sure. But don't allow it to discourage you.

To be honest, I am really just learning to do good queries because mostly I write about what I want to write about (again, that's the freedom I have by not making my primary income from this type of writing ... though I am working towards that being the case).

Finding the right markets for what I've written isn't any easier, but that's my process - write first, find market second.

Many freelancers look for the opportunity, query a magazine, and that way they are paid for the work before they start the writing part (though they've invested time in the pre-writing stage, so to me there's no difference.)

In the few times I've done a query, or been hired to write something specific I freeze. I can't determine what the issue is, but I find writing based on an assignment more difficult than just writing about what I want to write about. In these cases, they've been profiles, so perhaps I'm worrying too much about what the person might think of

It's interesting to me that you would like to write about women's issues because just lately I've wondered about my own generation and how we take for granted our choices. For example, my mother wasn't allowed to continue in nursing school once she got married. I cannot fathom that, though I know it is true. And while I've faced sexism in the workplace, it has been to a lesser degree than what some have faced.

If you're looking for publication credits, you may have to give some stuff away. That's okay. If it is something you are passionate about it's sort of like giving money to charity. At least, it is for me.

So, you need a strong query or a finished article to send to a publication so that you have something to show prospective employers.

Do you have query letters ready to go? Are there articles you've outlined and are just waiting to send but don't know where to send them?

One place that will most likely print an article is the Outreach Connection. You know, the community newspaper sold by homeless and underemployed vendors. Though it is difficult to get a copy of the article, if you can manage that, you'll have a start. Or, write something for the Habitat or Humanity website, or another charity.

You could offer an article and tell them that's what it is – here's a piece I wrote specifically for you – I'm a journalist just starting out and I'm expanding my portfolio.

If all you are honest and your work is good, who wouldn't say no to a free article?

On the other hand ... don't give too much away

And if what you really, really want is a job at a magazine, then look for it. Focus on it and you'll find it. It may not be EXACTLY what you're looking for at first, but you may get your foot in the door.

Don't get off track with your career goals.

I'll have a look at your resume and email you back.

*Subject: query letters*  
*Date: February 18, 2008 2:10 PM*

Caitlyn,

Here are two query letter samples. Both were successful in getting me work. One paid \$50 USD, the other \$300 CAD.

Valerie

*Subject: where did I start?*  
*Date: February 18, 2008 2:19 PM*

Caitlyn,

First started writing when I wrote a poem when I was 11 years-old. Poetry is my love, but even successful Canadian poets must supplement their income with teaching and writing and workshops.

As I mentioned earlier, I took to a career in the financial industry then moved into technical writing and when I found that to be unsatisfying work, I started to freelance between contracts. When I was your age, I didn't realize that one could earn a living as a writer. I know. It sounds ridiculous, but it's true.

For now, I still contract in the corporate world, though I find it more difficult to do the work with a smile on my face, if you know what I mean.

Hey, I noticed that you work at [edited] downtown. Have you contacted their communications department? There might be something there. You could do a profile on someone you work with or whatever -- for print or their intranet. Do they still do that HR newsletter?

You know those magazines that come in the News Advertiser? They need articles, too. If you're looking locally. You might broaden yourself a bit. You've got some freedom to move around campus and downtown and working at a branch there are likely lots of stories to tell. Look for markets in all those little places. They are more likely to accept your work to begin with.

If you query me on a few items, I will help you source some markets for the work as much as I can.

*Subject: resume + covering letter*  
*Date: February 19, 2008 4:29 PM*

Caitlyn,

I think that your covering letter is well written and your writing talent is clear. I would only recommend that you format it in the proper letter format and trim it a little. Some of what is detailed is already in your resume. You can simply make note of it.

Your resume, too, requires a little work to comply with standard format.

I'll work on both of them as I am able to, in order to show you what I mean.

Later,  
Valerie

*Subject: Cold calls*  
*Date: February 20, 2008 11:02 AM*

Oh, good. I'm glad you were able to find something useful. Although those "downer talks" are probably a snap-shot of reality, though I will say that it's not impossible to earn a living as a freelance, it just takes effort. And a little creativity. So, don't let it dampen your enthusiasm.

You will find a balance in what works best for you. Between writing what I really enjoy and the working in a corporate marketplace, I find my income. Not everyone is okay with income fluctuation; some prefer the stability of a regular paycheque. Your circumstances determine that as well as your flexibility. (Stay at home as long as you can!!! lol)

I adore and envy novelists who earn a living at it.

The confidence comes and goes, even for established writers. Mine is great when I'm working and creating and not so good when I'm in a lull. You may find the same goes for you. So when you're "up" is when you make the calls and send the queries. You can even fool yourself into an "up" period by ignoring the fact that there's little work. (There's the self-starter in me talking.)

That might also be a time to make cold calls. I am much better on the telephone, so cold calls don't hamper my drive. Though, it is not great for interviewing even though I prefer it to face-to-face interviews.

As I see it, the interviewee cannot see me, so I don't see their facial reactions and they don't see mine. Plus, you can use silence effectively as a telephone interview requires more of it while you write notes. (Headsets help, but if the silence elicits more info, so much the better.)

I like to mention to the interviewee that there will be strange moments of silence, so that s/he is aware of the awkwardness before it happens.

A phone interview allows for brevity, too. You can keep it to 15 minutes and dispense with niceties if the interview isn't going well. "I have a call holding" or "my boss just stepped into my office" or whatever excuse frees you up to get on with other interviews.

Plus, you can call back without any awkward (oops, I forgot to ask...) stuff.

TIP: If you're really nervous about a particular call, make initial contact by voice mail. Call and leave a message. Explain that you are just giving the person a heads up that you will be calling back at whatever time. This helps with the jitters and allows the interviewee to set aside time and to be at their desk for your call.

You'll be fine.