

THE CORONAVIRUS SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THE ONLINE COPYWRITER

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE



IRIS WRITING INTERNATIONAL

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INTRODUCTION

In the last days of 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to a cluster of patients in Wuhan, China. These patients were suffering from a mysterious new form of pneumonia – caused by a virus that had never before been seen.

If you’ve spent any time online in the past few months, you know exactly what I’m talking about: the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. There is no need to get into too much detail about the coronavirus, as many of us are intimately familiar with its story. In just three months, the virus has spread to over 400,000 people across the world – and lead to over 18,000 deaths at the time of this writing

Even if you or your loved ones have remained healthy during this pandemic, COVID-19 is affecting all our lives on a massive scale. Countries have put their citizens on lockdown, closing businesses, schools, and public spaces to prevent the virus from spreading. Many people have been ordered to stay home in self-quarantine, with the suggestion to do their jobs remotely if possible.

But of course, this suggestion doesn’t work for everyone, and a growing number of people are facing income insecurity while we wait for the pandemic to disappear. If your employer doesn’t offer compensation during this trying time – or worse, if you were laid off – you’ll need an influx of money to stay afloat during this emergency. How can you continue to pay your bills, support your household, and stay sane while under quarantine? One option is to make money at home as an online copywriter.

What is a copywriter? A copywriter is someone who writes words (or “copy”) for advertising or promotional purposes. Traditionally, this career path was focused around writing slogans for ad campaigns (think *Mad Men*), but the internet has allowed copywriters to grow into much, much more.

Today, copywriters work on a multitude of projects which can include articles, blog posts, marketing materials, website content, white papers, and pretty much anything else you read online (hint: a copywriter wrote this guide!).

If you’ve ever wanted to have a thriving career at home, copywriting is a great option – and this is the best time to start. Remote work has become increasingly popular in the past two decades (the number of telecommuters increased 159% from 2005 to 2017), but COVID-19 has forced more and more companies to depend on remote workers. Additionally, other people across the globe are also quarantined with limited activities on their plate; as a result, they are reading much more content online, creating a higher demand for more reading material.

As a freelance copywriter, you can work directly with clients or through intermediaries such as writing agencies or online gig sites. You can work full-time, part-time, or even only occasionally (like when you need extra money to get through a global pandemic, for example). Best of all, you use your creativity and intellect to write copy for the world to read! Not sure how to begin? Don’t worry: this guide will tell you everything you need to know about becoming an online copywriter and making money working from home.

THE SKILLS NEEDED TO BECOME A COPYWRITER

Becoming a writer is one of the easiest remote jobs to start. There is no formal education required to enter the market – and, as I mentioned earlier, businesses are hungry for remote workers at the moment. But while this is a simple job to start, there are certainly some skills needed to become a successful copywriter.

Let's look at the basic skills needed for success:



WRITER'S SKILLS YOU NEED

A SUPERIOR COMMAND OF ENGLISH

If you want to be a successful copywriter, you'll need to be able to speak to your readers in a natural way. This means that you'll need to know and understand English (or your native language if writing internationally).

Native or near-native fluency is required in many writing job descriptions. If your first language is not English, trying to use Google Translate to get by will not help, as grammar and context can easily get lost in translation.

GOOD WRITING SKILLS

Copywriters must be able to describe things clearly in words, as they cannot use no vocal inflections, facial expressions, or body language to help get their point across. As such, you will need to be able to write well and understand English grammar, spelling, and context.

While this doesn't come naturally for everyone (there's a reason we spend so much time learning grammar in English class), you can use some tools like Grammarly or other editing applications to help. However, these tools are no substitute for basic writing skills, as they do not catch everything.

RESEARCH SKILLS

Today's copywriters produce content about a lot of different subjects. Sure, there are some nice writers who focus on only a few industries, but when you start out as a writer you need to be able to write about anything. Trust me, there will be writing topics you won't be knowledgeable in - and you'll need to still write as if you are.

Luckily, today's copywriters also have one of the greatest research tools right at their fingertips: Google! As a copywriter, you'll need to know how to research topics and where to look up information online. You'll need to link to reliable sources and fact-check everything you find (remember, Wikipedia isn't always factual with their information).

TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

One of the most important skills a freelancer can have is TIME MANAGEMENT. This is true whether you're a writer, graphic designer, musician, or any other kind of freelance creator; in this line of work, deadlines are sacred. You will always have a deadline to meet - sometimes more than one if you take on multiple projects - and you must be able to manage your time well and get all your assignments submitted in time.

OPEN TO CRITICISM

Many freelance copywriters get into the industry because they love writing. They want to be creative, use their innate writing skills, and make some money doing it! These are all commendable reasons to start your writing career, but there is one thing you must remember: as a copywriter, your work represents your clients, not your creativity.

You'll be submitting your writing to clients and editors who may have a different concept of how they wanted the article to go. You'll need to be open to criticism of your writing and be willing to make edits or redo your work, sometimes even several times, until the client is satisfied. You need patience, receptive to the clients wishes, and strong enough not to take this personally -- after all, it is a job.

FLEXIBILITY

As a copywriter, you will write for different brands and companies that have different business cultures and materials to create.

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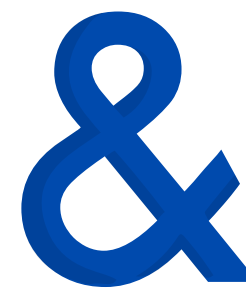
Anytime a client gives you an assignment, they expect you to create a product that matches their brand identity. For example, you may need to be scientific and use business jargon for white papers and technical articles one day, and casual and friendly for a sports blog post the next. To be a successful copywriter, you'll need to be flexible with your writing and able to change your "voice" from one assignment to the next.

BE UP-TO-DATE

The internet is constantly changing, from new algorithms that determine which sites appear in Google searches to new memes and slang terms springing up on social media. If you want to reach a wide audience with your copywriting, you need to stay on top of current events and trends happening online. Use the vocabulary your client uses and what your reading audience understands. Stay on top of SEO keywords that your readers will use and incorporate those in your writing.

As you become an established writer and start to build have a healthy portfolio, some additional education and training can help to advance your career further. You could take courses in journalism, project management, editorial copy, business or technical writing, and more to focus more on your particular field.

Starting your copywriting career, however, only requires the skills you learned in school (which you can brush up on from the comfort of your living room). If you are willing to work hard, rise to the challenge to meet your clients' needs, and have the guts to keep putting your work out there, you are bound to do pretty well. All the more reason to give it a try while you're stuck in quarantine!



A WRITER'S TOOLKIT





When most people think of writers, they imagine a brooding, moody man (probably with a peacoat and beard), typing away on a vintage typewriter in a library filled floor-to-ceiling with books. But in reality, today's copywriters come from many walks of life. They are stay-at-home-moms, balancing babies on their knees between articles; office workers working a side-hustle to pay for a vacation; retirees keeping themselves busy from the comfort of their back porch; and many, many more.

Do all these people have a vintage Corona typewriter and a study filled with books and mahogany furniture? Of course not!

In fact, becoming an online writer doesn't require an extensive amount of equipment or costly software - and it's most likely you already have what you need at home. The first and obvious need is a computer and a good internet connection. This is the whole basis of working "online!" While it is possible to work on a public computer at the library or internet café, I wouldn't recommend it. Some clients may need to reach you outside traditional business hours, and the lack of privacy in these public spaces can make working in them difficult. Besides, most public places are closed during this outbreak anyway.

Now, here's the rest of your writer's toolbox:



TOOL # 1

A WORD PROCESSING PROGRAM

If you're going to be a writer, you'll need a place to write – by that, I mean a place to literally store your words! Your clients will expect you to have a word processing program to be able to write all your material. Some may be already included with your computer, such as Microsoft Word or Mac Pages. But there are free alternatives to these programs that work just as well. These include Google Docs, Apache OpenOffice, and LibreOffice.



TOOL # 2

A PROJECT MANAGEMENT APP

Remember what I mentioned earlier about time management? Just in case you forgot, let's say it again:

In this line of work, deadlines are sacred. Once you have a client (or several) to write for, you'll need to be able to keep track of your writing projects, communicate with your client and team members, and be able to balance your work and personal life. Trust me, you do not want to wing this – if you do, you could end up overwhelmed before you even establish your career!

Luckily, there are many project management apps to choose from these days, many of which are free and easy to access online. You may need to test a few out, but the ones I stand by are:

BASECAMP

Handles 3 projects at a time (on the free account).

ASANA

Tracks all your projects and due dates. You may use this as an individual or part of a writing team.

TODOIST

Tracks tasks, schedules, and errands. Use this for work, teams, and personal reminders.

SLACK

Helps you stay in contact with your team. Great alternate to email and includes “channels” to pay attention to certain topics.



TOOL # 3

A TIME TRACKING PROGRAM

Most freelance writers are paid by the word, but some clients elect to pay their writers by the hour. If your client gives you an hourly rate, you'll need a way to track your working hours. There are many apps out there - Clockify, TSheets, Hubstaff, TimeCamp - and they all have different features that you may find helpful. Do a little exploring and try out a few different programs until you find the one that will suit your needs and make you as productive as possible.



TOOL # 4

AN INVOICING PROGRAM

Unlike a traditional job where the payroll department handles your checks, freelancers are responsible for managing their own invoices. You'll need a way to bill your clients for your writing - or else they may not remember to pay you (which defeats the whole point of your writing career)! Some clients have a specific billing program that you need to use, while others will just ask you to send them an invoice.

The bonus here: these programs are all free to use! This is particularly helpful right now, as many people are turning to freelance work in the absence of their traditional income streams.

Some great free invoicing programs I've used include:

PAYPAL

Has an invoicing tool that will send invoices. Payments are received in your account, which can be transferred to your bank account

INVOICERA

Manages all your clients from one platform and accepts over 25 payment gateways

ZOHO INVOICING

The free account allows up to 5 billing clients and works with many payment services like PayPal, Stripe, Google Checkout, and more

DUE

An easy-to-use invoicing system for all your freelancing needs



TOOL # 5

GOOD ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE

In addition to invoicing your clients, you will also need to keep track of your earnings for Uncle Sam. Again, freelancing is not like a traditional job – there’s no guarantee that your client is keeping tabs on your taxable income! Some clients will send you a 1099-MISC to file in January, but others expect you to keep track of everything yourself. In this case, you’ll need an accounting program for this.

Some free accounting software options are:

ZIPBOOKS

Free accounting program for freelancers

WAVE

Free accounting program that also accepts credit card payments and has an integrated invoicing system

AKAUNTING

Free all-in-one accounting, invoicing, and expense tracking system

OPENMIRACLE

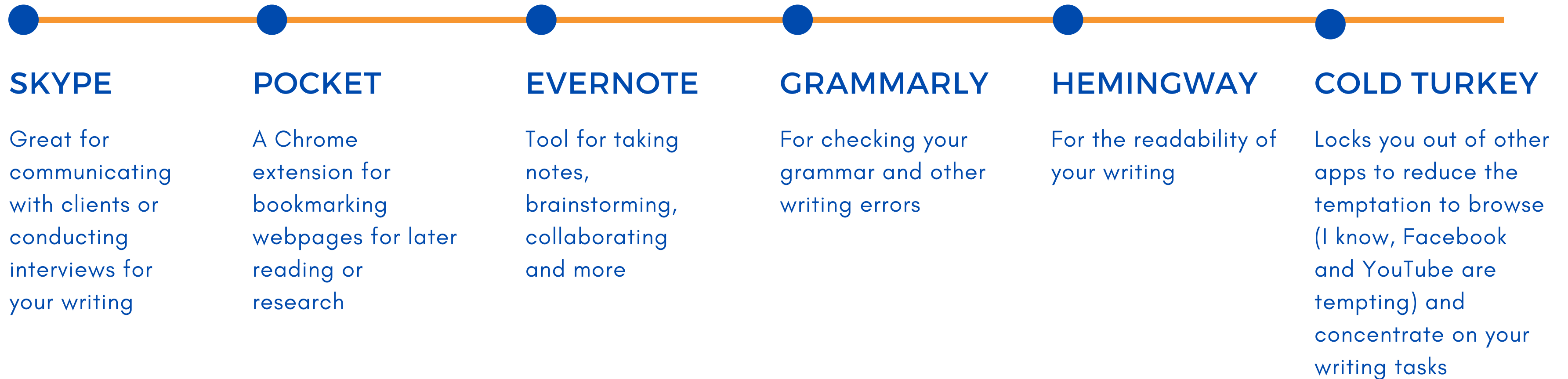
Open source accounting program available free for everyone

Again, these programs are free to use. However, if you don’t like (or trust) these options, you may opt to buy a stand-alone program such as Quickbooks or Freshbooks to use instead. Just remember to use SOMETHING to manage your accounting – or you might have a big surprise coming your way next April!



SOME GREAT EXTRAS

Extra Tools To Make Work Fun



REMEMBER

As time goes on and you settle into a writing routine, you may add or remove different apps and tools in your writing toolbox to make your job more efficient. The important thing to remember that these tools are supposed to work for you and make the job easier. Don't feel like you have to commit to one program or another!



HOW MUCH CAN REMOTE COPYWRITERS MAKE?



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Many of the people reading this guide are turning to copywriting out of desperation. Sure, you might have thought about making a living as a writer – and the idea of working at home is your pjs has always been appealing – but that’s not necessarily the reason you’re looking into it today.

No, you’re looking into copywriting because your current work has been taken from you, either through a business closure or a mass layoff. You have to make money, and you have to make it quickly... so how can copywriting help?

Unfortunately, there’s no clear answer to this question. A copywriter’s earnings can vary wildly. How much you can earn writing from home depends on many factors, such as where you are located, the size of the hiring company, and the type of writing job.

To give you a rough idea, here are a few different scenarios that I calculated on PayScale:



A Copywriter with no experience from New York City, NY can make between \$27,000 – \$56,000 a year. The average salary is about \$37,000.

A freelance writer with no experience from Oklahoma City, OK can make between \$15,000 – \$56,000 a year. The average salary is about \$26,000.

A blog writer with no experience from Los Angeles, CA, can make between \$22,000 – \$77,000 a year. The average salary is about \$34,000.

Keep in mind these figures are based on full-time salaried work.

When you start out copywriting, it's most likely you'll be a contract worker who is paid per writing project. In most cases, this means you'll be paid by the word (and that means the number of words the client assigns; you can't get extra pay by doubling-up on length).

How much will you make per word? Again, the answer varies based on the client and the project. The average pay for new copywriters is between \$0.03 – \$0.30 per word. So, a 1000-word article can make you anywhere from \$30 to \$300. This numbers may seem dismal – especially if you were used to a higher salary in your previous job. Just remember that you are a beginner, and that means there's lots of room to improve your skills, fatten up your portfolio, and land those big-time clients. And even if you don't plan to make copywriting your full-time career, it's still a great way to bring in money during this tough financial period of the coronavirus quarantine!



CREATE A WRITING PORTFOLIO



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Once you have your writing space set up, you can start creating your writing portfolio. A portfolio is a collection of all your writings to demonstrate your writing skills and talent.

So, how and where do you build this portfolio?

The first and easiest place to start is LinkedIn. LinkedIn doesn't just look like an online resume, but it also has options to list your skills, post and share your articles, and network with writing services, other writers and companies.

You can also create a free writing portfolio on these websites:

- ✓ **Clippings.me** – No coding needed – just add a biography, customize it, and add your work
- ✓ **Journo** – Write new articles directly onto your page and have multiple pages listed
- ✓ **Muck Rack** – Searchable base and public relations options for your portfolio
- ✓ **Clearvoice** – Option to share your portfolio inside their writing network as well



If you have some web skills (and you really can't to give professional copywriting the old college try), you can create either a free or paid website to use solely for your writing portfolio on WordPress, Blue Host, SquareSpace, or another web host of your choosing.

But what if you've never written anything before? What now? If you're new to the writing industry, I know what you're probably thinking:

"What do you mean 'demonstrate my writing skills and talent'? I'm a beginner, I don't have any writings to show off!"

Here's the thing: that's not true! While you may not have written any blogs or white papers lately, you've probably got a few pieces from your former job (press releases, presentations, etc.), that you can use to showcase your skills until you land a few freelance clients. And once you get that first writing job – bam! You've got instant material to pad your portfolio!

There are also other ways to establish your writing before you find that first writing job.



ARE YOU FEELING INSPIRED YET?



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CHECK THESE PLACES OUT

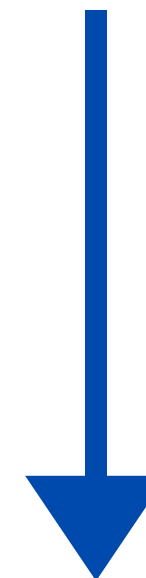
Sign up at These Sites to Get Started



- ✓ **Vocal.Media** – Make \$3.80 per 1,000 reads with a free account, or \$6 per 1,000 reads on Vocal+ for \$9.99/month. You also have the opportunity to earn tips from readers.
- ✓ **Medium** – Medium writers make \$5 per subscribed reader and you earn a percentage of a member's reading time on your article.
- ✓ **Blasting News** – You can earn 1¢ per read for 30 days (up to a maximum of \$150 per article). There are bonuses for writers earning over \$500 a month.
- ✓ **HubPages** – You earn with affiliate links placed throughout your article (keep in mind that HubPages takes 40%).

These sites can help you practice your writing and build your portfolio – and as an added bonus, you'll can get paid for your articles, too!

Once your portfolio is set up and looking good, you can start promoting yourself and your copywriting services. Take your portfolio link and advertise everywhere you can so people can see that you're actively looking for writing work. Add your portfolio link to your email signature and all your social media biography pages. Create a colorful social media image with your information to pin on your accounts advertising your availability for writing work. This will make it easier for companies to find you – and for you to earn some money.



HOW TO WRITE



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If this is your first attempt at writing, you may feel at a loss on what to write. Don't worry, even seasoned writers get stuck at this part – writer's block plagues even the literary giants of the modern era! If you find yourself stumped, staring at a blank Word document with no clue what to do next, consider yourself in good company with the greats.

Of course, being “in company” with great writers is little comfort when you're trying to make money during a pandemic. So, how do you overcome writer's block and get those pieces done?

My first piece of advice is to write for yourself. If you start writing with no audience and just put your thoughts and feelings on paper, you'll find that your creativity opens up and you'll find topics you can expand on and write further.

My second piece of advice is to know your audience. When you create content for an online audience, you're writing for people who want a specific kind of copy; maybe they have a question they want answered, maybe they just want to be entertained, but whatever they want, YOU need to provide it!

It's also a good idea to pair data with visual aids like charts, graphs, or images. Remember to keep your presentation easy-to-read. Avoid overloading a slide with too many words and choose a color palette that won't distract.

To come up with content your readers will want, you need to speak to them in a way that will resonate. Do some research about the people who are interested in the industries you're writing for (or, if you're writing for yourself, the people you want to read your work). Find out about your readers and what they want to know, or what problems they're having – and then meet their needs.



HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR READERS

Forums – Join forums online and see what people are discussing, then write solutions for their problems

Quora – A question and answer site where you can be inspired to answer different user questions with a short-form or long-form article (a great way to learn about your audience and practice your content creation)

BuzzSumo – Search topics and see the most popular content being read and shared online

Blog comments – Read comments on articles you’re interested in and see what readers have to say

Other inspiration can come from:

Reading – Read a variety of online material, especially about things you know (or are interested in). Eventually, you are bound to find an article that you’ll disagree with, feel you can write better, or add your professional or personal experience. Then, write a rebuttal or response!

Social Media – Check out your social media feeds (let’s be honest, you’ve been doing that anyway since the quarantine began) and see what is popular and being shared a lot. That can inspire you to write something similar that could get some online mileage.

Idea generators – Use some online idea generators to create a writing list. Some sample sites you can use for your list are:

Portent

SEOPressor

Inbound Now

Content Row

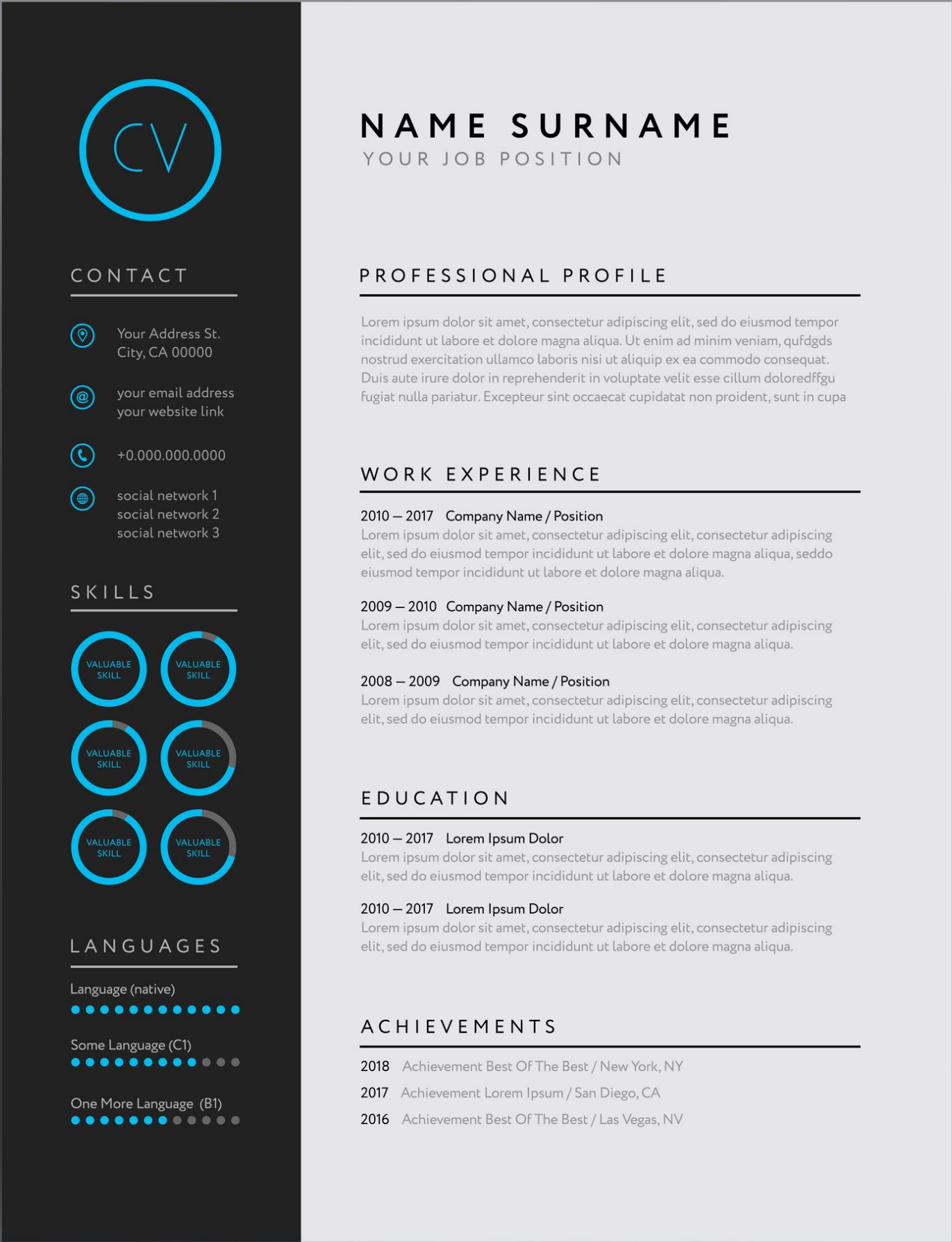
If you use these ideas, eventually inspiration will hit you like a ton of bricks. And when that happens, you’ll have a list of ideas to work on!

PREPARE FOR THE JOB HUNT




Once you have a writing portfolio set up, it's time to clean and update your resume. Firstly, your resume should be current (a good rule of thumb for anyone looking for work at any time). Secondly, your resume should be written to emphasize your vast knowledge in various fields - especially if you've never worked as a writer before. Remember, copywriters need to be knowledgeable in a variety of industries (or at least be great at researching a variety of industries). Your experience and education should reflect that you're a well-rounded worker with a large wealth of information from which to draw.

Here are some tips for a professional-looking writer's resume:



RESUME TIPS AND TRICKS



START YOUR RESUME WITH A RESUME OBJECTIVE

Such as “Skilled internet researcher, fact-checker, and writer who wishes to begin an adventure in blogging with a renowned website”

LIST RELEVANT SKILLS

List the skills relevant to the writing job you’re applying for

USE ACTION WORDS

Use strong action words and numbers to back your statements

SHOWCASE YOUR PORTFOLIO

List a few recent links to your published work

USE BULLET POINTS

Recruiters will spend only a little time on your resume; the easier the resume is to skim for data, the higher your success rate

There are many writing resume examples online for reference, but if you are unsure, you can contact a resume writing service to complete one for you.

In addition to your resume, you should take a little time to draft a great cover letter. Please, don't forget this step! About 40% of recruiters have stated that they'll skip those resumes that don't come with a cover letter. It's also your first opportunity to show recruiters your writing skills, so make sure you proofread the letter and rewrite until it's perfect.

While you can use a basic template to structure your cover letter (you can find lots of those online), do be sure to tailor your cover letter to the specific job listing. Write about your skills and experience, highlighting how these skills match what the hiring manager is looking for. Do state you're attaching your resume and writing portfolio with the application, too.



REMOTE WORK JOB BOARDS



CHECK THESE PLACES OUT

These Are Some Reliable Places That Steadily Post Remote Writing Jobs



Well, you're finally ready. It's time to job hunt! But where do you go?

You can find some freelance jobs using the traditional job search methods (Craigslist, Monster, CareerBuilder). However, these sites do not have an option for specifically finding remote or online work in their searches, so it's harder to find remote work listings. If you want to work from home, you will have to focus your search around the many job boards for remote writing jobs and projects (or gigs).

- ✓ **Upwork** - A freelancing site where you can bid on various projects. Short-term or long-term jobs are available. It costs 15¢ per "connect", and it requires 1 to 6 connects to bid.
- ✓ **ProBlogger** - Lists a variety of remote writing job listings.
- ✓ **MediaBistro** - Choose "work from home" in location search to see the remote jobs.
- ✓ **WeWorkRemotely** - Has a section for Copywriters.
- ✓ **Indeed** - A popular job board that has the option to search remote jobs.

Don't forget to use different keywords in your search such as writer, freelance writer, copywriter, editor, blogger, and so on.

ALTERNATE WAYS TO EARN AS A WRITER



One of the best things about being a freelance writer is the freedom you can have in your career. You often have the chance to set your own schedule, and every project is different – in fact, some of them might not be writing jobs at all!

If you're searching for your next writing job, looking for a way to earn additional income at home, or just want to mix it up in your copywriting career, you can try one of these alternate ways to make money as a writer:



GUEST POSTS ON SITES

Find blogs or websites you like and see if they accept guest post submissions. This is a great way to add to your portfolio, make some money, and appear on a site you love! One easy way to find out who's accepting guest posts is to do a web search for "[topic] Write For Us".

WRITE AND SELL EBOOKS

eBooks are always in demand – and now that everyone is stuck at home, they're even more popular! Write about your experience, your know-how, or even create a fiction story. Smashwords and Amazon KDP are great places to start. It can be a bit of work in the beginning (specifically, writing and formatting) but once your eBook is online, it begins selling itself with minimal work.

CREATE AND SELL A COURSE ONLINE

Sites like Udemy, Thinkific, or other teaching platforms allow users to create and upload courses for people to buy and learn from. Create a course on your favorite subject (maybe make one about your pre-quarantine job). All the work is done upfront, and once the course is up and running it earns passive income.

FIVERR GIGS

Sell various writing gigs on Fiverr, where everything is \$5 to start. Gig ideas can be article writing, proofreading, essays, transcription, proposals, and speeches. While \$5 may not seem like much, it is possible to boost your earnings on Fiverr. You start a basic package offer at \$5 each and add services for more earnings – for example, one gig I found recently was offering book editing at \$125! This can be a great way to get work when you're just starting out.

BECOME A WRITING TUTOR

Are you a grammar or writing expert that wants to help others? Offer to tutor students in writing on sites like Tutor, Wyzant, or Chegg! With schools closed during the quarantine period, there are many students who need help from professionals, and the pay on these sites is between \$10 – \$60 an hour! You can set up your own work schedule to work around your writing assignments.

WORK FOR A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

One of the hardest things about freelancing is finding new clients and consistent work. But if you sign up to work for a content marketing company (like Iris Writing International), you'll receive a steady supply of different assignments on different topics to fulfill. This is a great way to keep your writing schedule full – and your bank account, too!

FINAL THOUGHTS

This is a challenging time for all of us. As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, many people are struggling with anxiety of the future of their loved ones, their jobs, and their income. But you can remove income insecurity from your list of COVID-19 fears by becoming a remote copywriter.

Starting a copywriting career is not a complicated process – and the sooner you begin writing, the sooner you can supplement your bank account when you're forced to stay at home. Who knows? You may just enjoy your new job so much that you'll continue to write long after the coronavirus pandemic is a distant memory!

