Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

Today we're talking about the Art of the Followup. I've called it an "Art" rather than a "process" or "science" because there are a lot of things that I can tell you, like just do A, B, C and D, and in most cases it is that easy. But there's some nuance involved and we're going to talk about specifically how and why. Some of you have been kind enough to send me some actual interactions you've been having with editors so I have some interesting, perhaps obscure, perhaps not-so-much, cases that I can share with you guys today.

Things that I want to cover are: I want to first of all talk about why following up is so absolutely important. Because it's not just what you think: if you follow up you might get more responses. It's about your whole attitude as a freelance writer and the way you interact with others. As you start to change that method of interacting with editors through these types of email of interactions, a lot of things—the ease and the frequency with which you send pitches, issues that can come up when you're working on assignments that you might be scared to take to editors—all of these things will also get easier.

Then we're going to look at the main reasons—and there might be some other ones but I think I've corralled pretty much everything—the reason an editor might not respond falls into. We're going to talk about why those are and what you can do about it. I have this essentially organized into a "them versus us," so what things are caused by—not necessarily the fault—but caused by the freelancer, which means you can do it differently in the future versus things that are caused by something to do with the editor. What you can do in the future is write that editor off as not being someone you want to work with.

Then we're going to talk about how to respond to every type of response you're going to come across. I've included quite a few and I'm going to talk about various shades of these different situations.

In terms of my own experience with following up, I have to say that this has really changed the whole course of my freelance writing in terms of working with magazines and I really want this to do the same for you. I remember there was a period where I just started pitching big magazines, not necessarily indiscriminately, but I think I just went through Media Bistro's "How to Pitch" because it was really the only thing at the time that had contact info for editors, because obviously our database wasn't around then.

I just went through and was just pitching things. I could not believe how many editors of very major national magazines that you're going to see on any newsstand in America got back to me and got back to me pleasantly. Many of them were "no's" and some of them were "no's" for perfectly understandable reasons, like they'd covered that too frequently—we'll get into

different types of "No's" later—I also got a fair number of "Yes's" right off the bat from the first pitch that I sent and then following up on that first pitch.

No back and forth, no more pitches, "Oh this isn't quite a fit for us," but just from that very first cold pitch. More often than not, it was on the follow up, and that has a lot to do with the busy, busy lives of editors. I have up on the blog, actually, a post about what a day in the life of an editor is like, so I recommend you checking that out if you're curious about when I say editors are busy what all they really are doing.

Before we get started in terms of talking about techniques for following up or why editors aren't responding to you, I want to zero in on this: why is following up really going to change your career in so many different ways, not just in getting assignments from those particular pitches that you're following up on?

First and foremost, it helps you see that editors aren't that scary. This is really important. I can say that editors aren't that scary and you can say, "Yeah, I know, they're people too and they go home and watch TV and sit on their iPhones when they're having dinner with their spouses for their anniversary just like everybody else," but the thing is, we don't really think that.

I see so many questions or that are in various Facebook groups for writers or that I hear at conferences that act like, not that editors are some alien species, but that they're untouchable, that they're unable to communicate with on some sort of pedestal and we can't have normal human email interactions with them.

Some of this certainly comes from the type of emails you may have gotten from editors, and what I'm going to talk about later is that the editors that you get crummy emails from are often not editors that you want to work with, but in the meantime, in terms of the majority of pitch responses that you're going to get, are going to show you that editors by and large, especially the ones you want to work with, don't suck and they're going to help you see which editors you do want to be working with.

Here's the interesting thing: it also goes both ways. I've spoken in the past about the types of reasons that editors don't respond to you, and I want to talk a little bit more about that in a second, because the thing is that we often think, "Oh, editors are being rude to us." I actually have an email from somebody who sent in that question that talks about a rude response from

an editor. But like I said, editors have a lot of stuff going on; they might have just gotten burned by a freelancer.

Editors get burned by writers all the time in all sorts of ways that you might not even think of, and they are very skittish about working with new writers for this reason. I think editors, and even people who accept guest posts on their blog mostly from people they know or people who put together events, get a lot of flack for working with people they know and only supporting your friends.

But here's the thing: a magazine has to come out every month or every quarter or whenever it comes out on a schedule with a certain number of pages filled with text that is edited to the level of professionalism for that publication, and if an editor doesn't have a piece, they have to sit down on their weekend and not hang out with their kids and write that piece or something like that. So editors are, for very good reason, skittish about people they don't know will allow them to complete their mission, which is filling the pages of their magazine.

That doesn't mean that they don't work with freelancers or that they don't want to work with you. It means that they need to be like alley cats and wary of anyone new until proven to not be frightening.

I don't usually say them in webinars, but I shared in the past in our live events, a lot of situations of really ridiculous emails that I've gotten. I have to say, there are various categories that the kind of emails that make editors be like, "Oh my god, freelancers are crazy. I don't want to work with them ever again," fall into. We're going to look at those in a little bit, but this whole concept of following up and being in more regular communication with editors, of literally having a process like all businesses do, that you follow as part of your following-up procedures for your freelance business, will help you to, in every single word that comes out of your keyboard, look like not a crazy freelancer.

We're going to look more at this in a bit, but it's really key in terms of your confidence, which spills into all of your words, all of your emails, because there's always going to be a moment where you are working—perhaps with a crazy editor or an editor who's in this crazy situation or who has just sent you an offhanded email when you really feel like you're being attacked by an editor—and in those situations you need your professional reserves of confidence that editors don't suck and that you are a worthwhile freelancer and that you can handle this just like you would if you were working in an office and not in a way like you have been insulted personally.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

You need to have those reserves to draw upon in order to send editors back the right email, and that's why the art of the followup extends way past just following up on your pitches but also into all of the email conversations that you're going to have with editors. We're going to talk more about that after we talk about pitch responses.

Here's what's happening when you send a pitch: I think when you send a pitch a lot of writers think that the point of that pitch is to get an assignment for the story that they're pitching. You can tell me if that's in line with your experience. I think that's generally the sort of accepted idea: you send this pitch and the purpose is to get an assignment for that particular story.

Now we've looked before at how you should be aiming to build a relationship with that editor and how you should be aiming just to get a response from that editor, but on the side of the editor, here are the things that your pitch actually needs to be accomplishing in your very first communication with the editor. These are actually the steps that you need to follow in terms of breaking down the walls that the editor has.

The first one is to show that you're sane. And that sounds kind of laughable, but I can't tell you how many pitches I get from people to review, even if it's just for an event and I say, "Hey, just give me a sample of the pitch that you've sent in the past so we can see where we all are with the pitches," and I get pitches that I'm like, "Oh my god, if I were an editor and I saw this I would put them in the block this email address list." I know that these people are totally normal, functioning people who write for markets and are not at all crazy, but their emails have started to sound like that with corresponding with editors.

Either there's a hint of desperation or there's just so much information that it looks like you don't know what you're talking about or you don't know what your story is about or you're offering them 25 different story ideas and you look schizophrenic. There's so many different semi-psychotic writer things that can creep into your pitches if you're not careful. So the very first step is to show them that you're sane.

It sounds scary, crazy, weird but its true. That's the very first step and you should always give your pitches a comb afterwards, like sift through them to make sure that there's nothing that sounds desperate, schizophrenic, all these writer psychoses that editors are on the lookout for the smallest, smallest whiff of.

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

The next step is to show that you understand the magazine. I understand that a lot of us think that we're pitching just to get that particular story placed, so you can get really in love with this story that you're pitching, the destination that you've been to, with the business that you want to profile, with this person that you met on the trip that just has this amazing story, but in your pitch, it's absolutely fundamental that none of that matters, that the very highest priority that you have is actually how all of that matters to the magazine. Not the wonderfulness of the person that you met or the incredible back-story of this business, but why that matters to the magazine. That's the second hurdle that you have to cross.

The third one—this is the last one—Is to show that you are a professional writer. By that I mean the quality of your writing, not that you're a professional. That was action number one: showing that you're sane. The quality of your writing is actually much further down on this ladder, and the reason for that is that editors can fix your writing, that's their job.

I'm going to look more at this later, but many editors get into editing because they want they fervently want to be out there helping writers become better writers, and I know that if you've had negative interactions with editors, that seems a bit dreamy, but it really is true.

I have this quote in my book and I use it all the time, the editor of 5280 at the Denver City Magazine was saying, "I can fix the writing but not the idea. But if you have a good idea I can bring it home. I can help us get there."

What he means by that is that you need some specific information, some specific background, some specific experience that is special enough to become an article idea that is of great interest to his audience. If you have that blah-blah-blah, we can bring it home. But if the editor thinks you're crazy—and by crazy I mean again too desperate—you don't know what you're idea is, you have too many things on, you're exhibiting a whiff of one of these writer psychoses, then they're not going to want to bring it home with you.

In so many ways, showing the quality of your writing is the last thing that you need to be doing in the pitch. You need to be showing that you're somebody that they want to work with, and part of that is showing that you understand the magazine, and a large part of that is just showing that you're a human being.

Let's get into that. We have a question over here: Summer asks, "Are you using a particular software or type of document to manage your submissions and followups that aren't included

in your book?" We're going to get into my followup procedure in a little bit, and I get this question a lot about using a software or a document to manage your submissions.

If you, and I'm not saying this to you particularly, Summer, but if any of you are sending 25 pitches a week, so every month you're sending 100 pitches, then by all means, set up a spreadsheet for yourself. If you are sending 25 pitches in a whole month or you're sending 5 pitches a month or 10 a month you really don't need a software. You just need your calendar.

We're going to talk about how to do that in a minute, but what I see by and large, in fact I just saw somebody recently show me their incredibly detailed apparatus for tracking pitches, what I see by and large is that having that tracking system, it's like a kind of like technology fetish in a way. Like checking your email all the time or going on twitter for new updates. It's like this thing that you kind of look and hope that you'll look at it and it will change and give you something and that working on that makes you feel like you've moved forward somehow.

But the fact is, your pitching time, unless you are so high-level with your pitches that you're making tiny, tiny tweaks to the process to make it better, you're pitching time should be spent writing pitches, not on tracking or organizing or making logs of how many times you've interacted with this particular editor, because you're probably not writing so many people that you can't remember off the top of your head when this editor emails you what's happened.

If you want to be really quick and easy about it past just using search in your email folder or email provider, whatever that is, to find every other email that interacts with this person, there's contact management systems you can use. One that I have that I totally don't use to full advantage is called Contactually, and I'll write that here because it's spelled really weirdly.

Contactually is a contact management system and what that actually does is it hooks in to your email itself, it hooks into your email provider, and it logs all of your emails so it can do in the background these things of making sure that you followed up with a certain editor within a certain amount of time, or you've sent them a new pitch if you haven't pitched them in a while. Most of you probably don't need that, so we're going to get in a bit to the actual process that I recommend for following up, but first let's talk about why editors don't get back to you in the first place.

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

This is what I was talking about with this you-versus-them idea. Some of the things on this list, and you've probably taken a moment to scan over it while I was answering Summer's question, some of the things on this list are about you and some of the things on this list are about them. Notice that I've said some of them are positive and some of them are negative and I'm going to talk about why.

One other question. Someone said, "Should we send a thank you note once the story is published?" This is an interesting question that goes back to what I was saying about Summer's question, which is that you want to be in regular communication with these editors. So if you have pitched them a story and they've accepted it, you should pitch them another story so by the time that the story that you've originally pitched them, that was commissioned, has come out, you should already by on your third story with them.

I say this because I had a coaching call with somebody the other day that's in our full coaching program, so I talk to her really often, and she had a piece that I know she was working on for this outlet that we were really excited she was working with. It was an online outlet that has her do feature style stories that she can report that are really interesting and they pay quite decently for an online feature outlet, especially for the length and the amount of work involved.

She had done this piece for them and I knew she had gotten the piece assigned and I knew she was working on it, but then I didn't hear anything else about it. So I asked her and I said, "What else are you doing for this outlet right now?" and she said, "Oh yeah, I should talk to you about that." What she went on to say is that she sent them another pitch, and this is a great followup story here, and the editor said, "Well that doesn't quite work for me, let me send it to this other editor."

Somebody else has sent us a question about this and I'm going to get to the reader questions in a bit. She said that this pitch went to another editor and that editor said it didn't work for them and then she sent another pitch and she's following up. That's great she sent another pitch back to her first editor and the editor said it didn't work for her and now she's in the two strikes but she already did a piece with them, so it's not like she's in the two strikes you're out zone, if you really want to call it that.

She's done a piece with them and the editors were still responding to her, so the thing is that she did stop pitching after this second rejection. She stopped pitching them, so we sat down and generated like 5 or 6 super applicable ideas for them and now she can run through those. What we did is we took the feedback from the two pitches that they didn't accept and we

completely changed what she was pitching them, because what had happened was that she had sent them one story and they had bought the story, and then she started pitching them similar stories. This is a really important anecdote to use because I see this happen a lot, and in fact this is one of the reasons why I say to be very careful if you get an acceptance on your first pitch out of the blue without any other interactions with the editor.

Because it can validate for you the idea that the ideas you have for that market are great in and of themselves and you don't need to be checking in very closely all the time with what they're publishing. She pitched them a new idea that was similar to what they had done before, and they said it didn't work for them because they didn't cover blah blah blah and in her head she thought, "Well, the story that I did for you was kind of peripheral, so I know you do stories that are kind of peripheral to those topics, so let me send you one more idea that's peripheral to those topics even though you just told me you only cover blah blah and blah."

What happened was that she sent a second pitch that was too much like the first pitch they had rejected, and that's something you never want to do. If an editor rejects you—and we're going to get back into how to do all these responses in a minute—If an editor rejects you, you always want to make sure that your new pitch is offering them something new. Not a new idea, but its showing an improvement based on whatever feedback they gave you of what didn't work about the previous pitch.

Let's talk about some reasons, actually this should be all the reasons, editors aren't getting back to you.

First reason: I'm alternating here between them and you, so the very, very first, most important reason is that they're too busy. This is the very first and most important reason because this is almost always, more often than not, the reason that they are not getting back to you. This is like the hugest bucket of non-responses in the world. This is very easy to fix.

Here is I say it's "them," as in they are the cause of this, but it's a positive non-response for you because it's easy to fix. All you have to do is follow up until they pay attention. It's really easy. So this is the type of editors-not-getting-back-to-you that doesn't have some sort of negative connotation and most aren't getting back to you for this reason. And that means that most of the time that editors aren't getting back to you it's not because of anything bad.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

Now I'm getting the worst reason that could be your fault that involves your impetus out of the way here. The second reason they might not be getting back to you is that your pitch is just that bad. And isn't that what we're all afraid of? That our pitch is so bad that the editors just don't even want to respond, they don't want to engage with you because it seems like you're putting whiffs of crazy, right? Of desperation, of pitch idea schizophrenia, so here's the thing: this is very easy to figure out.

If you are pitching multiple editors and you are following up on the schedule that I'm going to tell you about, and no one gets back to you at all, it's absolutely this. So this is actually like it's a bad thing as in it's like negative, but if this is the reason that you aren't getting responses, it's also incredibly fixable and it's also very clear very quickly if this is the reason you aren't getting responses.

If this is happening to you, if you are pitching many different editors and you are following up and you are not ever getting responses or you're always getting very bland "No's"—we'll talk about different kinds of "No's" in a minute—then it means that your pitches are bad.

And that's great! That's so weird for me to say, that it's great to find that out, because then you know what you need to do. You need to improve your pitches, and probably not just your pitches, but your ideas. If you are getting, across the board from different editors after following up, all non-responses or "No's," it is a 100% indication that all you need to do next is improve your article ideas and your pitches.

We've got a lot of resources on that. I know many of you fall into this bucket. I have people come into Pitchapalooza and things like this that are like this and, like I just said, it's not only not the end of the world, but it's a very diagnosable fix. So if this is something that you're suffering from, don't feel sad. It's not the end of the world; it's just a very clear sign for what your next step in your travel writing career needs to be.

You need to work on your article ideas. They need to be better. You need to be paying more attention to what magazines are looking for and we've got all sorts of resources, from the webinars I mentioned earlier to the Travel Magazine Database, to help you with that. And if you feel like you're sending editors exactly what they are asking for and you're getting these responses, then the issue is that you are not being aware of the differences between what they want and what you're sending and that means you need to work on your market awareness.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

The prescription for that that I always give is to just spend time sitting in the Travel Magazine Database reading it, just reading exactly the type of articles that magazines are publishing, exactly the types of sections that they have. My prescription for this is usually like 15 minutes a day in the morning or in the evening when you're watching television. Just skim over different articles.

That is your first prescription. If you're just not getting responses, you need to figure out what editors are looking for that you're not providing and that's where to start.

Now. Next one—and we have a very interesting case about this that somebody emailed me about that we'll talk about later—Is an editor might not get back to you because of themselves if they or their magazine—It can vary—have a policy of not responding to "No's." And I'm going to put off talking about what's going on here until later because I have a really good example of this coming up, but if they say that or if you see it on the magazine's website that there's a policy of not responding to "No's," it's probably a sign that you don't want to work with that editor.

Because even I, for instance, I can't help it, I have had crazy interactions with people who pitch me things, but I still can't help but respond to the "No's" of the people who look somewhat sane because I just want them to have closure. Most editors—and we'll talk more about this—most editors that you want to work with can't help but respond even if the answer is no.

The next one is a bit different. This is something where you are the cause of this non-response but it can look like it's the editor's fault. And this is the kind of thing where I see/hear a lot of people acting like the editor is somehow wronging them in these situations.

What's happening here is that you've sent a pitch and then the editor sits on it, and what that means is they refuse to respond to your emails following up on the pitch because they might want to use it but they don't want to get your hopes up, because they aren't sure. This seems like the editor is being a douche, right? You have created this situation most of the time.

And what I mean by that is you haven't given the editor an incredibly clear reason why the article needs to come out now. You haven't very clearly shown them which section it needs to be in or how it needs to look like. The reporting isn't there, they aren't sure if you're the person for the piece, but if you are in maybelandia, as I call it, that's pretty much always on you.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

We're going to talk about pitching in a minute and how you can you can avoid getting stuck in maybelandia, and this is really something that you don't want to be in because it sucks and it sucks for the editor too, because they want to get back to you, but they don't want to get your hopes up or tell you an article is going to happen when they're not sure, but you can avoid it.

The next one, this is something that a lot of people are afraid of, and I always tell them it doesn't happen, so I'm going to tell you exactly the instances in which it happens. This is something where it's the editor's fault and it's horrific and people in the industry, as in other editors, not only don't condone this, but I literally heard an editor at a conference say, "Well that's karma come back to bite them," so if you don't hear back from an editor and not in one month, not in two months and maybe not even in three months, but in like a year or something, you see a story with your exact source, with your exact words and it might have been stolen.

When I say, "It might have been," I'm saying this practice is very, very rare. I'm going to tell you about two examples where I've seen this. One is—I'm going to try to make this as vague as possible so as not to out people involved—I recently heard of a magazine where someone was, I believe, interning or she was working and she caught wind that there was an internal spreadsheet where they would log every single pitch that came in and the sources and essentially the content of that pitch in case they wanted to write that story in-house in the future.

I know which publication this is and I think it only affects perhaps some of you. It's a regional publication and it's a really, really horrible practice. But this is the only time I've ever heard of something this heinous in a systematic fashion.

The other time I've ever heard of this seriously happening is from a writer who had seen an article with the exact words of her pitch, so that's pretty unmissable, but what happened was it was in a different magazine than the one that she pitched. I'm not sure if it was even the same magazine company that that could legally even be an issue.

What seems to have transpired is that one editor forwarded this individual's pitch to a different editor that was a friend of theirs saying, "Hey, you should run this in your publication," and somewhere in those lines of communication they wrote the piece themselves instead of getting in touch with the editor, which, whether it was the receiving editor or the publishing editor that was really at fault there isn't really clear, but these are literally like the only two actual verifiable idea stealing schemes that I've ever heard.

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

One of them is clearly an evil publication that none of us wants to work with and the other one is like an evil person or set of people that none of us ever want to work with. These things aren't systematic and, like the very lovely editor at the conference that I just mentioned said, "That's horrible karma that's going to get them."

This is like the smallest, tiniest piece of the pie in terms of why editors aren't responding to your pitch. This is a small piece of the pie not because it doesn't happen, but because the time window on it is short. This is a version of maybelandia, but it's smaller. This is the case where they're going to say yes, but they have to hammer out some details that just take time, and it usually means that they have an editorial meeting that they need to present their idea at and their ideas for various issues are decided collaboratively by a team.

I don't know if I want to say it's becoming increasingly common, but I definitely know many outlets that work like this. I wouldn't say its all of them, and if you're pitching outlets that are of this size and there's essentially one editor-in-chief that's doing the assigning, it probably isn't the case, but it still can be.

For instance, I know AFAR decides their article ideas like this, and maybe that's why it takes them so long to respond to us, but some editors are just handicapped by the fact that they have to take all ideas that they're interested in to their editorial meeting and discuss them with their peers and get a group yes there. Now some editors will write back to you and say this, however, like being in maybelandia, they often don't want to get your hopes up. This is something that has a statute of limitations; it's not ever going to take more than a month just in terms of how frequently editorial meetings happen. If they only have them once a month and you sent your pitch the day after, within the next month they're going to have another one.

Typically they happen more often than that. This is kind of a version of Maybelandia, but it's not really avoidable unless you just pitch different publications. If this is something that's going to bother you, you can exclusive pitch publications where the editor-in-chief has all the say and that's that. So that's the way to avoid this, but it's not the end of the world, and if you want to work with big, big national magazines, this is often going to be the case.

I mentioned this earlier, how I compulsively respond "no" to people even when I shouldn't, even when I'm sure they don't care, but because I want to give people closure. But across the board, editors that I have met that have an actual very deep interest in working with writers to improve their writing and really making your writing shine, not just in this piece but overall,

and to create lasting relationships with the same writers to work with them again and again will get back to you one way or another at some point.

I am talking about editors at the level of the New York Times and the level of AFAR. I'm talking about serious, very major publications here. I hear this from editors again and again, that they feel bad that they have all these pitches that they haven't responded to and they try to get though them. I heard an editor at a publication that I know all of you want to be pitching the other day tell me that she tries to get back to every single pitch within at least three weeks. That's amazing. That's ridiculous.

I see editors of small publications who don't get back within six months. Even the editors of the publications that you think never get back to you, they really, really do try. Here's the thing: when an editor does get back to you, when they make a point to do that, it's very important to honor that with a response. The editors who are doing this are the good people, the editors that you want to work with, and they are doing it because they feel an obligation to you like they feel guilty about not getting back to you and its so important to honor that, and we're going to talk about some ways to do that.

I mentioned this earlier. I've talked about it in the past but I just want to reiterate what I mean by this: always pitch to No. What that means is that your pitch, the text of your pitch, should be orientated that the editor has to give some kind of response. You have chosen a specific section, your idea has a time peg that will expire, and so if the editor simply doesn't have space for your story in the allotted time they'll have to tell you no. Your idea is so specific that the editor should know immediately whether or not they should use it. And here's why: because No gives us so much information.

Let's talk about different types of No's. I'm going to go forward to one slide and then we're going to go back to the previous, or maybe it's more than one slide. New platform. I can't see my future slides. Let's see, alright. Ok, different types of No's that you might get. I want to talk about this first.

There's 3 different types of No's. In book publishing they call then A, B and C No's, because publishing essentially has these letters, these form letters, that they send out, so they have names for them and they're A, B and C. I'm going to actually go up the ladder starting with C.

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

The C is the form letter like 1 that is just so bland and general that it gives you no information. They might say it's "Not for us, it's not a fit," it's just not giving you much, it's pretty useless. I like to treat form No's like the useless non-communication that they are and just send a brand new pitch. We're going to talk about the process for that in a second, but a form no that gives you no information just means "send a new pitch."

I mentioned earlier that if you're getting a lot of No's or non responses, that means at some point you need to start looking at your pitches and you need to make sure that you're pitches are good enough. If everything that you're getting all the time, including on follow ups, is a C no, that means that you need to take a look at your pitches, but you don't have enough information from the editors to do that, so it's a tricky situation and you need to self-diagnose, or you can have me do it for you for cheap.

But a B no gives you information you can work with. This is what I was talking about with the anecdote with the student who had sent two pitches but didn't get responses, and then she stopped pitching because she didn't want to ruin the relationships. She'd already done an article with them and we figured out what was the feedback they were giving her that she hadn't been responding to and then she was able to move forward.

The B no is a type of no that's pretty brief. It's not like a one-word email that just says "no" or that just says "no thanks," no capitalization, no period. These things happen from editors. This is the type of email where they say, "This sounds like a great story, like I'd love to see it when it comes out, but we just can't use it," or "You know, we're done with truffles right now. It doesn't matter where they are, but we just can't do anymore truffle stories," or "Wow, that sounds amazing, but I just don't think we can do Abu Dhabi more than once a year and we just did it in January."

Some type of reason like this where the editor actually, like a normal human being, just tells you why they are saying no to you. This is something that you can absolutely use, but the best type of No, of course, is the one where they say please pitch us again.

Here's the thing they all mean by that. I have to say this because so many people think that they don't, so many people think that editors are just saying that to be nice, but they don't. You see they have all of these other types of No's that they could have given you and they didn't. They chose to give you the golden no. They chose to give you the please-pitch-us-again no. They really, really do mean it and please, please, please, please, please, please pitch them again, and soon, while they still remember you.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

Let's back up and talk about the process here. I talked about A, B and C No's. Here's how A, B and C No's fit into this process. This is the process that I teach, and I basically guarantee you that if you do this process you can break into absolutely any publication that you are possibly interested in. It sounds crazy, but here's the thing: it's a rinse and repeat process and you should be improving on every single re-pitch, because—I'm going to keep going back and forth between the slides here—because every time you get one type of no or another, it's giving you some information that's helping you move forward.

Either you get the A pitch, which tells you the editor really likes what you're doing and you just need to send them more pitches. You get the B pitch (no), which means they've given you something specific to change and just go change that, or you've gotten the C pitch, which means your pitches period need to change/improve and that you need to go work on that before you pitch again.

I've got a couple of questions building up but let me quickly go through this process. Here's how I teach it—and this is also the answer to Summer's question earlier that I said I was going to follow up on—and if you just follow this process you don't need anything besides your normal calendar on your phone or computer in terms of tracking your pitches.

Here's how it works. Day 1 (not necessarily the first of the month, just day 1 in our current timeline), we'll call it pitch A because it's the first pitch for the publication. I was going to call it pitch 1, but there are already too many numbers on this slide.

You send Pitch A. Two weeks later you follow up on Pitch A. if it's an online outlet you can do all these follow-ups in one week rather than 2 weeks, and actually you shouldn't let it go so long if it's an online outlet, so we're talking about print for now. Day 1 you send pitch A. Day 15 you say, "Hi, I just wanted to check in with you about Pitch A. Do you have any questions? Thanks."

Seriously, that's it. It should be short and you should respond with the pitch that you already sent and, pro-tip, don't forward your pitch reply because then when it shows up in the editors inbox it says RE and then the subject line.

Now here is the trick, here is the difference that most people aren't doing. In another two weeks you follow up again but with a new pitch. What do I mean by that? You say, "Hi, brilliant editor. It seems like pitch a didn't do it for you, wasn't what you needed, doesn't work for you, whatever language fits with your personality, so I wanted to send you pitch B."

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

Then you have a brand new, completely fleshed out, not, "Oh, would you like another pitch on this, this or that?" You send them a completely fleshed-out pitch. Now here's the thing: this process that I've outlined here, this whole thing, is what you do when you're getting no responses at all. We're going to talk about what happens when you're getting responses and how to respond to each type of one.

This is what you do when you're operating in a complete vacuum. You say, "Hi, editor. I wanted to follow up with you about pitch A. Do you have any questions? Here it is again." Next time: "Hi, editor. It seems like you weren't interested in pitch A, so I wanted to see if this would work for you." Include text of Pitch B. Next email: "Hi, editor. I wanted to follow up with you on pitch B. do you have any questions?"

Just like that. It's so easy. You just use exactly what I just said. Nothing fancy, no more words, keep it short and you just keep doing that and I promise you that they will eventually respond to you one way or another.

Let's incorporate all these things. Part of this whole rinse and repeat thing and incorporating them into your next pitch or your follow-up is trusting that no matter how much you have read the publication, you really don't know what they need. What I mean by that is that I had a really interesting conversation with some editors at a conference recently and that was basically along the vein of "How we can know what to pitch you," or "Is there something that you need right now? You know, this interesting thing happened and now I need pitches on that next month. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know what pitches I'll need."

This is why you might be falling into maybelandia, because editors don't know what Trump is going to do next, they don't know what the next newsy thing that they're going to have to pay to travel is going to be. They don't know what pitches they will need, but at the time that they need them they will know, so you have to just kind of trust that editors have whims for very real reasons that we can't do anything about, that we should just understand. It's our job as the freelancers to help them with whatever it is that they need.

I'm just going to take a quick question, and we'll get into more questions in a bit, but someone said, "Can we ask for an editorial calendar?" You can totally ask. It's absolutely useless. Editorial calendars, in terms of what is happening, in terms of printing, if it's from a freelancer and it's on an editorial calendar, it's been assigned. If it's on the editorial calendar and it's not from a freelancer it very well might not happen.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

Things get assigned when they get assigned, when editors have the time to assign them, when they have the deadline going, when they know what needs to be in that issue. The editorial calendar is for advertisers. Editors really don't have anything to do with the editorial calendar in terms of checking in with it regularly about what story ideas they're looking for. It's absolutely for advertising, so it's pretty much next to useless.

You can ask for it if you want; you also can find it on their website. Editors of big magazines hate when you ask them for their editorial calendar. Editors of small magazines don't mind. By and large I think you don't really need to, but what you do need to do is be prepared that the editor might need something completely different than what you think they need because something behind the scenes has changed, but hasn't yet come to fruition in the magazine.

It might be that they are revamping their magazine. It might mean that somebody left. It might mean that you need to find a way to ferret that out without sounding crazy. I mentioned this before and I'll mention it again. I'll give you some particular things to look out for here.

As we are following up, part of the reason I said to implement this regimented every two week, one week if you're pitching online markets, schedule and stick to it is because if you don't have a schedule and you think, "Oh god, I sent this pitch, when am I going to follow up on it? Oh, oh," then you can start to get into this mode where the text that comes out of your fingers as you type starts to veer into having a whiff of crazy.

We can make like a little meme of this: Keep Calm and Reply On. Just follow your schedule, just use your text, don't deviate, just operate like a standard operating procedures business. This is what you do, this is the schedule that you do it on, there's no other text that needs to go in those emails.

You'll notice in my process I said Pitch A, follow up on Pitch B. There is a statute of limitations for following up on the same pitch. Some editors are Ok with you doing it twice, some editors aren't even ok with you doing it once. Those aren't really editors that we want to work with, but we're going to look at that in a minute.

Two is kind of the golden number here. You sent the pitch, you're following up on it. When you send the next pitch and the editor was really interested in the idea and it's in maybelandia or they're waiting for an editorial meeting, sometimes they will often get back to you with when you send pitch B and be like, "Wait, wait, wait. I want to assign you pitch A. Let's get back to pitch A."

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

Totally weird secret thing, but it happens a lot because then they get FOMO. This is like the only popular term that I use. They get FOMO that they're going to lose that story. Now we should all be simultaneously pitching all the time and I'm going to talk about that as well.

Another thing, never, there might be some exceptions to this, but it's like you accept an article then your mother died and you have to back out. There are very few exceptions here. Never write an editor a brand new email right after you have written them. Especially more than one. I cannot tell you how often people apply to write for me or work for me or something and they send me three, five emails in a row like they've forgotten something and then they write me to say they've forgotten it and then they write me to say, "Oh, yeah, and here's the attachment," and then they write me to say, "Oh, no, I misspelled attachment in that last email." That is like more than a whiff of a crazy; that is like I am absolutely not responding to you, although I usually do, but that is like I'm absolutely not working with you and that's how every single editor feels.

Now there's a Monday Mailbag post where somebody had an email about this and I recommend you read in a little bit more detail, but don't pull a pitch-switch. What I mean by that is it's sort of similar to writing the editor right after you've written them, but what I mean is don't pitch the editor a story and then on the follow-up with an improved pitch for the story.

Your pitch is your pitch. You can't change it now. Not with that editor, at least. Especially not in the short-term future. Once you send a pitch, that's it, that's the text and your follow-up should be, "Hey, following up on this. Do you have any questions?"

I talked about the different types of No's. We're going to skip over these slides because we already did them and when they say "Please pitch me again," they really, really, really mean it.

What do you say, however, if you get a good No or even like a B No? If you get an A No or a B No and you don't have another pitch ready for that publication? Two things: first of all—keep jumping around on the slides—first of all, I highly recommend that when you're working on Pitch A—because you know you'll be sending Pitch B, and perhaps eventually Pitch C, and hopefully you'll keep working with them and you're going to go all the way up to Pitch Z—as you're working on Pitch A, jot down ideas for Pitches B, C, D, E, F, etc. Jot down more ideas for this publication.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

It helps you – you can even write the whole pitch – it helps you in case you get to day 30 and you haven't heard from them, but it also helps you when you get a B No and A No. Especially an A No, because it means you can send them any old pitch you think might fit for them because you're already on the right track.

It also helps when they send you a B No. But what happens if you should be responding right away but you don't have time to send a proper pitch? Pro-trip: write the editor back and say, "Thank you so much for getting back to me." Honor the fact they responded to you. "I'm about to board a plane for Zambia right now, but I'd love to send some more pitches later. Is there a certain section that you need pitches for?"

Another way to say that is, "Is there a destination that you've been looking for pitches on," or "Is there is a topic that you've been looking for pitches on," so if you don't have time to write them a pitch right away or if you don't have one ready—don't do this more than once with the same editor though—ask them what they need. Ask them how you can help them.

Here is the real icing on the cake of this pro-tip: after you ask is there a destination you need pitches on, is there a topic you need pitches on, is there a section you need pitches for, say, "Even if I don't have something for you I'd love to connect you with another writer who does." You are showing the editor that you want to help them, that you understand it's your job to help them, that you are in their court.

I promised you that I would get to a couple of things I mentioned in passing earlier, so I'm going to get into the questions that came over email to me before. I've got a bunch of questions that have come in from chat so let me pop over and take a look through. I'm just going to read these verbatim; I haven't gotten a chance to read them yet.

What do you do when a pitch is accepted, write the story, do two edits and then you don't hear anything further from the editor.

This is great. We need one more edit, no replies as to when the article is going to come out or when it's going to be published. I have a whole slide on this so we're going to get to this question in a little bit.

Now somebody asked, "Is the reply versus forward instruction so they can see the entire thread of what was pitched and rejected?"

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

No, you should keep your thread pretty clean, so basically if you're sending the follow-up on Pitch A, Pitch A should be in the thread so they can see Pitch A. You always want the editor on the follow-up to see the pitch that you sent earlier. Don't make them search for it; they really won't like it. When you send Pitch B and you said, "Hey, it seems like you weren't interested in Pitch A, here's another pitch for you," you can keep Pitch A in there. But then when you're following up on Pitch B and you say, "Hey I just wanted to follow-up on pitch B, do you have any questions," get rid of the earlier part of the thread with pitch A.

The only time there should be that overlap is when you say, "Hey, it looks like you weren't interested in that; I'm sending in a new pitch," because that's their kind of last chance to look and say, "Hey was I actually interested in that, hmmm, no hey it's fine."

Next question. "When I worked in PR I had a good relationship with an assistant editor. When I moved to freelance the assistant told me to add her in addition to the senior editor to pitches. I did and heard back immediately from the assistant editor and not the other. Followed up and still nothing. It's time to pitch something new but should I still ping the assistant editor with the main editor or just the assistant editor separately?"

I think in this case, and this is an interesting one because I have another reader-submitted question here about extending pitches to a different editor, but I haven't heard anybody saying anything about CC'ing editors, so if somebody's told you that you need to CC another editor on the pitches, it means that they probably need to discuss the pitch with the editor or that they need to get some interest from that editor or go-ahead or something.

This is really something they should do internally, and what I mean by that is that you should pitch your editor, your editor should interact with the higher-up editor, and then they should come back to you. This situation sounds a bit wonky, and what I mean by that is that you are super exposed basically.

In this case the assistant editor has responded to the pitch and then nothing, which probably means that the senior editor wasn't interested and the assistant editor kind of jumped the gun, so in this case, especially since you had a relationship, I would maybe check back in to the assistant editor and say, "Hey, I heard from you about this pitch, it seemed like you weren't interested. I'd like to send some new pitches. Should I just send them to you directly?"

What I feel is probably the case is that there's something weird going on with their internal system and it gets into the category of editors who aren't responding for reasons that are their

fault, so you don't really want to work with them. It's a weird situation and if you have a really close personal relationship with them, you can just ask them what's up, but it sounds like there's internal weirdness that you just don't want to get involved in.

Summer has a question about if there are niche magazines that you write for regularly, do you recommend setting up your own editorial calendar in Google for future pitches and reminders.

Yeah, this is called a tickler file and this is an old, pre-Internet concept where you set reminders for yourself of things that are coming up so that you do it at the time. I think that's a great idea kind of in theory, like to remind yourself that's it's the 150th anniversary of Canada before every body starts pitching it, but I also think that if you have a pitch idea, it's kind of never too early.

If you have a relationship with an editor, I often send the—this is people that I've written multiple stories for, you guys don't do this to new to you editors—I'll send like all my ideas for the year. So basically like in September or October or even earlier in the year before I send them all the stories I want to do for them for the next year and then they assign from that and it's very common for magazines that you work with regularly. That's how those stories end up on the editorial calendar, because other freelancers have pitched their whole year of stories in advance.
I think I've gotten through most of these questions. Oh, right. Jade has a question: "What do I do after pitching, getting an A response, then pitching again, getting a "let me take it to the editorial meeting response," and then hearing nothing."

My question about hearing nothing is, did you follow up on that? How long did you wait to follow up? Because here's the thing about pitching to no, is that we pitch and follow-up and then send a new pitch when we're working in a vacuum. Once an editor shows an interest or is on the line for an idea, you should just keep following up with them. Not more than once every two weeks for magazines or once every week for websites until you get a response, and I've got a really interesting case about that coming up when we talk about how to deal with things that you've already been assigned.

OK, let's talk about things that have come in from readers, because we're over time now, because I know it took us a while to get going. Now on to simultaneous pitching. You guys might have read this reader-submitted text in the background while I was going through questions, so this is kind of the situation where all you guys are like, "This person is horrible

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

and I want to be in her shoes and don't talk to me about this situation," but I want to bring this up because we should all be pitching simultaneously.

I say this all the time and people still don't believe me and this whole, in Italian we call it ansia, but really it's like these closing-in, kind of clenching feelings that we get about sending pitches and not getting responses are alleviated by simultaneous pitches.

I recently sent a very similar, nearly identical, pitch to editors at four different magazines, and three of them replied to me, within days, with a yes! Now I'm not sure what to do, as I've found myself in a situation I never thought I'd be in.

Do I just go with the one offering the most money? There are offers on the table for $101, $500, and $600, all for a piece around 1,000 words. Do I pit them against each other and bid up?

I'm a little lost of how to handle this so I've been trying to figure it out, but some advice would be greatly appreciated!

You should never be sitting on ideas. She sent a very similar, nearly identical to pitch to editors at four different magazines and three of them replied to her with a Yes. Now she's not sure what to do and she found herself in a situation that she'd never thought she'd be in.

This is great you should all be in these kinds of situations guys. She says do I just go with the one offering the most money or do I pit them against each other and bid up? You can pit them against each other and bid up. What I told her when I got this email was absolutely go with the one with the most money. However, if its possible to spin the ideas, and not necessarily the idea itself,, but the way you are physically writing it, the text that goes on the page, the interviews that you do, the examples that you use, the lede that you begin with, if it's possible, then you can make those different so that you can make these 3 different articles.

First I would go to the highest bidder and I would say, "Great, thanks. I have a couple of other people interested in this idea can you give me a contract so that we can move ahead with this?" Once that's in place, I would go to the other ones and say, "Hey, so and so got to this idea before. If it's ok with you, I can write this piece for you in a way that's different from theirs, 100% copyright different, by doing X, Y and Z. If not Ok, no hard feelings, let me send you a new pitch or here's a new pitch for you below."

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

That's how I would handle the situation. Part of why I started with this first is to show you that editors can get back to you, they can be awesome and you absolutely need to follow-up.

More common situations, this is sort of similar to the one that Emily mentioned, "Thanks for your pitch. I've sent it on to so and so who deals with the section and she'll be in touch if it's of interest."

This is totally like the don't call us we'll call you response, so this is a little tough because she doesn't give you the email of the so-and-so. You should be able to find out the email for so-and-so and here's what I would do. This happened, this went this way, I would find the email for so-and-so and in about two weeks I would say, "Hey, So-and-So first so-and-so said that they were sending you this pitch – make sure you include the pitch in the body of the email – and I just wanted to follow up and see if it's a fit for you."

In the background, as soon as this first editor says thanks for the pitch, I've sent it on to blah blah blah who deals with this section, say, "Great, thanks. Here's a new pitch for you." Keep the relationship with this current editor going while the other one is bubbling around with the other editors.

This is a rude response, one that I mentioned earlier.

I recently followed up on a pitch and received a rude response about how they said due to the volume of submissions, they wouldn't be able to answer every pitch. I was a little annoyed but I responded very nicely and she ended up writing back and telling me why the pitch as it was wouldn't work, and recommended ways I could refine the angle and try again!

Two things here: this went on to turn into an assignment, but you'll notice that this is the alley cat. In the beginning they are weeding out crazies, but then they could tell from this writer's response that she wasn't crazy and then they started to interact with her. This is very important, and I've bolded here. It wasn't bolded in her original email, but this rude response, I didn't see it when she forwarded it to me, but I bet that was their very standard lines and here's the thing: standard lines, whether they come from you or the editor, can come sometime look rude if you are looking for that.

But here's the thing: editors 100% do not have time to think about whether emails are rude. That is why emails from editors that you are getting look rude. Because they don't have time

to think about that and so all of the time that you're spending on your emails thinking about whether or not it looks curt to the editor is completely wasted. They're not thinking about those things, they are just conveying information in the fastest way possible and you should do the same.

The fact that she wrote back and said thanks, I understand, that I just wanted to see if this would work for you, if not no problem, I just wanted to make sure that you had seen it, is also just facts, so it's really important, the art of the follow-up, is to keep calm and reply on.

Forget feelings, forget being personally insulted, just take the facts on the page and, if you're getting a lot of C responses, the facts are that you need to improve the quality of your ideas. If you're getting a lot of B responses, the facts are that you need to incorporate the feedback that the editor is giving you. And if you're getting A responses, then the fact is that you absolutely need to follow up and send more pitches.

There were a couple of questions on this, and I promised I would circle back on this: Other important areas to not drop the follow-up ball. I literally put this in here because there are some writing groups on Facebook where most questions are about this. It boggles my mind how people keep asking essentially the same question over and over again.

Like there are people who file a story, and then go on Facebook and put a 1,500-word, minute-by-minute thing about how they filed that story, and then they realized something, and then they realized something else, and "Oh my god, what is the editor thinking?" And then they send the editor an email, and then they realized, "Oh my god, they shouldn't have sent that email," and another email that, "OK, we can just talk about it." And all of this is happening in like a 10-hour window when the editor isn't even in the office, and in the morning they say: "I don't have time to look at the piece until Friday. Just send me the new version of whatever you want to send me."

Don't stress out about these things, OK? Reply like a normal human being. I'm going to talk about some specific situations. If you have gotten an assignment and you are waiting on information that you need from the editor in order to create the article itself, don't work on the article. Until the editor sends you the thing they said they would send you for you to commence working on the piece, don't do the piece. Just don't.

Because otherwise, what happens is you work on the piece, something has happened behind the scenes in some way, shape or form, and that piece isn't going to fly anymore. But now

you've sunk this time into it and then you feel bad about it, and then you have to go shop it around somewhere else and then its just a whole rabbit hole. If an editor is not-themselves-crazy, and has something happen that involves them not being able to answer your question, they will understand that you will then need to adjust the deadline.

I think I talked about this in my book, but I had mentioned it before. I had an editor for a major newsstand publication literally call me during East Coast brunch time on a Saturday – he was on the West Coast, so it was super early for him to call me on the phone – to accept a pitch and ask me if I could do it on a rush, so there were no emails going on. I said, "OK, send me the contract and the style guide."

I go out, do the research. Time goes by, I write up the piece. It's essentially the day it was due because it was due in like five or six days, and I haven't gotten anything. So then I followed back up with the original editor I pitched, who was like an assistant editor or something. She clearly nudged the other editor and I eventually got a style guide, which was crazy. They had all these words that you can't use because they consider them trite, and all this stuff.

I thankfully did the research and didn't start writing the piece. I just kind of started outlining it. If I had written up the whole piece before I got that thing, I literally would have had to rewrite the entire thing from scratch, and it would take me about three or four times as long, because I'd be really pissed off that I had already written the thing and was having to write it again.

But then the saga continues. I didn't ever get that contract or the assignment from that Editor-in-Chief. Then, the next interaction that I got from him was that he needed my information for the masthead for that little contributors part where they ask you some questions about yourself and they have your picture. Still, no contract, but I kind of have a publication date.

Then, finally, I see it on the newsstand, and I write him and I say, "I never got a contract for this, can you please deal with this?" He's like: "OK, great. We pay $50 for this section, but it was really great working with you, so please pitch us features. Those pay like a $1,000." And I'm like, "Are you effing kidding me that you pay $50 for this two-page spread and you pay $1,000 for features that are about the same? If you had been not completely BS-ing by hiding this in order to get the piece from me and run it before you told me that, I never would have written a piece for you!"

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

If you have gotten an assignment, but not a signed legally binding contract, don't do stuff. Don't get invested. Don't do stuff until that happens. That means follow up until you don't care anymore about working with that editor, until they have shown that they are totally not worth your time, and then say, "Hey, I'm not going to work on this piece with you. I haven't heard back from you. I'm going to take this piece somewhere else. Thanks so much for your time."

Funny story about that. I'm actually going to do this about submissions, so Donna had this question: "What if a pitch is accepted and you write the story, you do two edits and you hear nothing from the editor?" I think there was a similar question: "How do you follow up with an editor who's sitting on your article and not running it because it's not time sensitive? This piece is important to me and I wanted to use it to get clients in this particular beat."

These two questions: I recently, in Australia, did a workshop where a gentleman had this guy, a journalism professor in universities, he is a serious journalist, but he's new to travel. He had been on a press trip by the publication, so they hooked him up with the press trip, so it wasn't even just that he wrote the piece for this publication, he kind of felt this onus that he needed to do the piece related to the trip for that outlet because they had set up the trip.

They didn't pay for the trip but they set it up with the sponsoring agency. Now they had been sitting on this piece for something like two-and-a-half years. It was his favorite piece that he had ever written. I would read the email to you, but I didn't talk to him about using it, so I'll just paraphrase it.

Basically what happened was he brought this up in our workshop. We talked about it, and I told him to tell her point-blank, "You have until this date to run the piece, and if it hasn't been used by then, I am retracting it." Here is the reality of situation people: until they have paid you for your words—and this was not an outlet that paid on acceptance and I assume that's the case for all these questions that I'm seeing here—until that outlet has paid you, they don't own the effing piece.

You can take it away. You should take it away. If you have been commissioned to write a piece, written a piece, especially in Donna's case if, they've done edits on it and then they're not getting back to you, just send them a very clear email that says, "If I don't hear back from you with a firm publication date, if this aritcle is not going to be published by X, I am retracting it and I will publish it somewhere else."

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

In the case of this gentleman that I mentioned, he got an email response from someone who had literally stopped responding to him years ago. He got a response in minutes, and she said, "What magazine are you taking it to? Are you taking it blah-blah-blah competitor?" Again, I'm not going to read you his exact email, but his first thought was like, "Screw you!" Then he responded professionally and she was like, "OK," and he got it back.

All of you who are sitting on pieces for magazines, just tell them, "I'm taking the piece back if either you don't give me a firm publication date by X or if you don't publish by X." Just take it back. You absolutely can. It's 100% within your rights if you don't already have a contract.

What is the moral of all these stories? The first thing you should do when getting an assignment is to get the contract. That goes back to your professional communication process. Once the editor gets back to you with an assignment, which is like, "Hey, can you do it in this many words by blah-blah-blah date, we want to put it in blah-blah-blah issue," you say, "Great, thanks. Do you have a contract that you prefer to use or should I send you mine?" Write that down. "Do you have a contract that you prefer to use or should I send you mine?" That is your very next email and don't start working until you have that.

I recently spoke to a legal expert that were going to have come on in the near future and talk to you about legal issues, and he said actually those emails are actionable. Those emails where they say, "This many words, for this much money, by this date," are also legally actionable, but it's much more difficult to threaten editors over that. It's much better to just get a contract. I've got sort of sideways question about this and then we're going to wrap up, not just because we've gone long, but because I have a plane to catch in about two hours.

Emily says, "I've been doing some content marketing for a travel brand. I've already been paid but haven't seen the clips yet. Is it OK to ask the editor for the clips once they're live for my portfolio, or should I just keep looking through the website for them?" I had this come up the other day with an outlet that I was god-awfully annoyed at, even though they paid fantastically.

I asked her because the editor, the sub-editor who I was working with, wanted me to rewrite the pieces to be significantly longer than the assignment. This outlet has different price buckets for different lengths, so my point was: I don't care if you've already paid me, you're publishing it longer than what it was commissioned as, and you have different prices for that, so you need to pay me that price.

Dream of Travel Writing

The Art of the Follow Up–The Simple Key to Dramatically More Assignments

She was really squirrelly about giving me the clips. Generally, I wouldn't say it's the editor's job to find your clips for you. Very few editors will do that. As long as you know the website that they're going to appear on, just wait for them to come up. You absolutely don't have to ask them about using them for your portfolio, but from a legal perspective you shouldn't copy and paste the whole text. You can have a snippet of the text and link to the original source and make it clear that it's an excerpt, or you can have a screenshot. Those are the two ways to handle your clips.

Alright, so I've kept you for a long time. Thank you so much. I'm going to go pack and get myself to La Guardia to go to the Tribe Brain conference. Hopefully, I'll see some of you in Nashville this weekend as well. Cheers!