



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Control That Quality

Today, we are continuing our Freelance Business System series speaking about quality control. And this is actually, I know I keep saying this in the Freelance Systems series that I'm so excited and that this is something that I am very passionate about and I'm really excited to talk to you about. But I feel like, in this case, it is even more true than usual. And I wasn't quite thinking about how important this topic is for you guys, I guess, until I started working on the slides. I mean, obviously I had it in the series. But as I was working on the slides, I really realized just how much I get asked by people, is this good enough. How do I know if it's good enough? I don't want to send my pitches until I'm sure that they're good enough. Is that the right thing to do or not? There's just so many questions that I get around this topic of good, good enough, what does that mean?

And so I'm really excited to dive into this today for you guys, because there are ways to do this. Companies everywhere release products that they have worked on that have never been purchased by customers in the past with, you know, millions if not billions dollars worth of marketing campaign, because they have some sort of belief that the product is in fact good. So there are ways, there are processes, there are, you know, various strategies that we can use to ensure that our work is of a certain level of quality or the needed level of quality or whatever that is. And so that's what we're gonna talk about today.

So specifically, I'm going to go through what quality control is kind of more on a general, you know, business, in terms of all businesses level, and then talk about how that translates for writers. And as I was just talking about this idea of knowing if your work is good enough is so important. It occupies a lot of people's minds for a lot of time. And, you know, if you're looking at writing the next breakout novel, that's not like anything that's ever been done before, then we're talking about a very different can of worms here. But most of the writing that we're all doing day-to-day is something that does exist out in the world, albeit in a slightly different form, or the same form but about a slightly different topic. We're writing an article for a magazine that's new to us, but the magazine has existed. They've been publishing features like the ones that we're writing in the past. So there are always ways for us to be able to know if we have hit that quality benchmark to the best of our abilities, okay? This is important. Because there's always gonna be things you don't know. And we'll talk about that. And we'll talk about risk as well. But there are ways to know that.

And so we'll look at how you begin with that. There's some different facets that quality control breaks out into. And we're gonna talk about conceptually how you can start to integrate that into your business. And then we're gonna look at... This is kind of different than why I'm doing this today. I have some things that came up in terms of quality control, best practices. And because they're kind of strategies and best practices, they're not exactly, like, some of them are things you can do, but they're more sort of thought points. I've put a bunch of them together on one slide.

And I wanna kind of introduce them to you not because I want you to feel like you have to do all of it. So that's like the bonus or the future or the advanced level slide, if you will. But



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because there might be something there that really catches your eye and is like, oh, I get that. I resonate with that. I connect with that. I understand how that works for me. That's the thing that I wanna rally around. But then I'm also gonna look at some very specific tactics that are, you know, whether it's an app or maybe something that you already have, you know, installed on your computer that you're not using this way or thinking about in this way, or something that you can create very quickly, looking at some tactics that you can start to get going with, you know, very much tomorrow.

I've talked with quite a few folks about the sustainability idea lately. I think because as we're heading into the summer, when a lot of people are traveling, for folks in the U.S., there's a holiday weekend this weekend, in fact, starting tomorrow. And this idea of being able to do the writing and do deep work always feel so much easier in the winter, right, when, you know, there's not the call for us to go outside. There's no places that we wanna go. Our family isn't also on vacation. They wanna hang out with us. And this idea of what is the business that's sustainable for you is often something that people don't think about until they're burnt out.

So this is something that I really like to explore with people, this idea of sustainability, early on and crafting what their freelance writing is. And what we talked about in this same webinar series last week, last iteration in the series, if you're catching on the replay, this idea of controlling your operations. It's really how, at the core, to make the best of the time that you have to achieve the goals that you wanna do and make sure that those two things fit together.

And what we're going to look at this week in this webinar is also a really important part of the sustainability. Because I know a lot of people spend far too much time in terms of the amount of time they have available in relationship to the goals that they have. So far too much time for wherever they personally are on things because they wanna make them perfect, or they're not sure that they're good enough, or whatever that is.

So what we're gonna talk about in this webinar today really dives into this idea of how do you start to create for yourself that professional outlook towards the quality of your work, which is very different than someone who has all the time in the world to work on an essay that they wanna see in "The New Yorker" someday or a book that they want to see published by a major publisher someday, where that's kind of a lifetime goal or a reach goal or an achievement goal. So I'm really excited to talk to you guys about this today.

So before we dive into this webinar, I've said this on the past webinars, for anybody who's jumping into this series kind of midway that these Freelance Business Systems webinars that we're doing are really important for a variety of reasons. I just touched on the sustainability aspect. But also there is kind of this bigger picture idea that I've mentioned in the last couple webinars because I'm getting audited by the state of New York right now, which is that most folks, I have to say, and I say most because I'm counting the hundreds of thousands if not



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millions of people out there who are doing some form of something that they're calling travel writing, okay?

So the vast majority of people out there are not pursuing their travel writing or their freelance writing or whatever it is as a business, okay? This includes even people who are, you know, full-time editors at magazines or some other full-time job and doing some freelance writing on the side. It's something that is like a hobby, like going to dance class or going to train for a marathon or something like that. There might be, as with a marathon, an end point in mind, but it's not being pursued as a business.

And for those of you that either are currently full-time or have designs on being so, particularly if you're in the U.S. where the tax code has changed recently and they're much more stringent about this, it's really important to be pursuing what you're doing as a business in terms of the way that you operate, the way that you run your accounting, the way that you track your financial goals, other things that we're gonna do later in the series such as the way that you set goals and achieve them for sales, the way that you conduct your marketing, and different things like that.

And the flip side of that, which is interesting, is that I know a lot of people shove all they're kind of "business stuff" on something that's often called an admin day or something like that that they do once a week or once a month, maybe a half day week, something like that. And it's kind of seen with derision as this thing that you get done because you have to. And what I find unfortunate about that is that the writers who have built really fantastic businesses for themselves that achieve not only their goals for themselves professionally but also for their families, whether it's, you know, to acquire a home or a vacation home for themselves or something, take a vacation or whatever it is, they're always the ones that are systematic and strategic about the business side of their writing.

I was just chatting with somebody earlier today, who was telling me, you know, almost in a very offhanded way about the clips that she's been getting lately and talking about how she feels like, you know, but there's other things that she wants to do or she's frustrated that she's not getting there fast enough. And she's very on point about tracking what she's doing, how long it takes her, the time it takes to get there. And the interesting thing is, you know, while she might feel frustrated with the amount of time it's taking her to get somewhere, I see a lot of other people that are doing, like, one-sixth of what she's done and, you know, two times the time, and they aren't frustrated, because they don't know what they're not achieving, or they don't have goals for themselves, and they're kind of getting there by accident.

And so my wish for all of you, whether this is something that you're doing full-time now or something that you are currently trying to ramp up to do full-time, is that you have the wherewithal to bring to bear, you know, centuries-old best practices on how to make a business work to make your business work. Because there's way too many people out there reinventing the wheel with their writing businesses and their online businesses when you



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really don't have to. All of these things that have worked for ages and ages for other types of businesses, whether it's, you know, banks...Well, maybe not the banks of today, but, like, Renaissance banks in Italy or something. Banks or manufacturing firms or retail stores or whatever, all of these same principles still work for us. So that's what we're doing in this series. I'm trying to kind of distill, you know, if you wanna call it a business school education or an apprenticeship in business or whatever, I'm trying to distill that and put it in to the freelance writing context so that you guys can reap the benefits of those lessons.

So last week we talked about, or last webinar, for those of you who are catching this in the replay, we talked about this idea of your operations. And we looked at this idea from Andy Grove, who was the CEO of Intel, this idea of your production as kind of this box, and what goes in and what comes out and how to control what happens in there and make sure that you're cutting windows into the box to see what happens and check that the right things are happening.

So the logical next step from us, talking about operations and gathering data on your operations to make good decisions, is to optimize those operations in a way that ensures quality. We touch on this a little bit last week, but this week, I'm gonna really dive into how exactly we that. How is it that we optimize things to ensure quality?

So when I say quality, it could be work quality. You could even just think of quality in terms of craftsmanship of stuff you buy, if you like. But I want you to just take a second and think for yourself, like when you think something is a thing of quality, what does that mean? I think about this a lot of things that we go through quite frequently, like shoes or jeans that even though they might last six months, they always seem to end up with holes or variously tattered from wear at the end. So, like, maybe it could be something that you find that you have to buy relatively frequently and that you've intentionally chosen to go with a certain brand, because you know that that brand works over time. It could be what you expect from yourself in terms of quality. It could be if you've been in or you're currently in a management position, you know, in some other job or the job that you have now that's not travel writing, what you expect from your employees.

So whatever that definition of quality is, I want you to think about it for a second. Because, like I said, I was using the jeans example just because my husband is down to, like, a pair of jeans that I allow him to wear in public, because they have, you know, not too many holes. And so, like, whatever that thing is that you think about, you know, there's traits that go into it. It might be that it lasts a long time. It might be that, for instance, you know, to continue the clothes example, it might be that it has a very specific fit, that it has a kind of tailoring that's not for the masses, that it's something, you know, that's really snug and that you can tell that some thought has gone into it. That's something that I often see people talk about when I think about quality workmanship. It could be, for instance, if you're thinking about people that you supervise, whether now or that you've supervised in the past, it could be that you want a complete solution. That's often something that people say.



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So whatever that is that quality means for you, I want you to just keep that in your head for a second before we talking to about what quality means in a business setting and controlling that quality. So obviously, there's as many definitions for quality out there in the world as there are people and circumstances to be honest, right? You might have one definition of quality for one thing and a different definition of quality for your breakfast sandwich that you get, you know.

But this is one that I found in the course of researching this webinar that I wanted to share with you. Quality in business means that something does what it is supposed to do, and it's suitable for its intended purpose. Now I think this is really interesting, because I often when we think of quality or talk about high quality, we think of something being fine. Like, you know, it's like a fine, like, source material. Like, you know, a quality tomato might have a great taste. It might also have a nice look to it. You know, maybe when you slice it, it has a certain texture, right? I think we often think of quality is having some innate traits. But the reason that I wanted to share this with you is I wanted to introduce this idea that quality is not always something that is innate, that quality is or can be something that is relative to the situation and the person who is evaluating its quality. Now I say this because when you are the person evaluating the quality of a piece of work that you have done, you tend to not be the intended recipient of that piece of writing, okay? The intended recipient is a reader, an editor, there's not a lot of other people that can be the intended recipient, right?

So it's very interesting, because so many of us get really caught up on assessing the quality of our work without getting caught up on assessing the intended audience, I harp on this a lot when we're talking about magazines, but the intended audience and the intended purpose of the work, okay? And if you think about it that way, you are essentially incapable of judging the quality of your work. I say judging here, not assessing. But you are essentially incapable of judging the quality of your writing work. Because its intended purpose is not for you. In fact, its intended purpose can't be accomplished with you reading it, because it's intended to accomplish something with a reader who doesn't already know all of the things that you know about the topic or about what has gone into writing the work. So you are essentially categorically incapable of assessing the quality of your writing particularly.

Now in some other things, this might not be true. Like, if we'd go back to this example of jeans, like, a person who makes jeans can look at them and evaluate so many of these different things that, you know, a wearer of jeans might evaluate. Because they could also be a person that wears those jeans. But we're not a person who reads our writing in the same way that a reader who didn't write it would read it. So we have to start from that departure point, that as writers, there are many ways in which we are not capable of really judging the quality of what we're doing and go from there, okay?

So if we look at some definitions that are more from the industry of what quality control is, I've pulled out three of them for you, I know I had a lot of definitions last week, but we'll go



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through these kind of quickly. I've highlighted a couple things in each of these that I really like in terms of what they say about the concept of quality control.

So one is that the aim of the quality assurance process, and we'll talk about the difference between quality control and assurance and everything a little bit, but for now let's just imagine they're the same, okay? So the aim of the quality assurance process is to provide assurance to senior management and other stakeholders that the processes and activities used throughout the development of your software are designed to maintain the high quality of the end product.

Now before I point out some of the things in here, I just wanna say that some of the examples that I've pulled here come from software, because that's, like, really big...software and manufacturing are two really big areas of quality control. Obviously, it happens in food, right? We have the FDA for that. And, you know, there's the tobacco and alcohol commission. There's a lot of, whether government agencies, out there or not, there's a lot of things that we encounter here about day-to-day that ensure quality in different things that touch us. But I think software is one of the things that touches most of us in many ways, whether we, you know, like it or not, that we're attached to our phones or computers or the internet.

And the software quality assurance process is a really interesting one, because they have a product that's out there all the time being used, and they're constantly making fixes to it. And so they have, like, they call it a continuous iteration there. So a lot of things in quality assurance, if you decide after this webinar to go look it up, tend to come from a software setting. So that's why that's there.

Now as the owners of our businesses, I like this idea that quality control provides assurance to management. Because that's something that I really want for more of you. I want more of you to have assurance that what you're creating in your writing work for clients, you know, what you're creating for yourself in an exploratory way, like if you're doing an essay workshop or something like that, that's totally different. But what you're creating for clients is terms of work that you're gonna put in, it's great to have assurance as the worker in that setting that you're creating the thing that the person who's paying you wants to see. And there's a lot of feeling that as writers, that's, like, very difficult/impossible, but writers who do a lot of work tend to have a pretty high degree of whether you wanna call it certainty or assurance or whatever around this. So I can tell you it's definitely possible, and we'll get to some different ways to do that in a little bit.

So quality control is the consistent process that ensures the obtained result within a project is aligned with the product scope. During this process, the project manager and the quality control team review the project against acceptance criteria, we'll talk about this, too, to ensure that all features and functions that characterize the product are completely embodied in it and work properly.



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So you'll notice here a word that we talk about a lot, especially folks that work for the companies, but also even for writers who work more on the magazine side, is this idea of being aligned with the product scope. And then there's this term acceptance criteria that we'll get into more. And I think when we think of acceptance, we tend to think of, you know, like we pitch an article, the article gets assigned, we write the article, maybe there's some revisions, and at some point the editor accepts it.

And, you know, we talked last week about this idea of the black box. But I think the black box comes up in a huge way in terms of this idea of how, when, what will make my editor accept my piece, right? And like, it's always the dreaded thing when you think a piece is done, because you haven't heard back from an editor. And then, you know, they come out of the woodwork wanting all sorts of stuff, and you have absolutely no time.

And I use the example, I can't remember if it was one of the webinar, so when I was on a coaching call with somebody, but I've used this example recently of somebody who I was working with through a situation where she had a book project, and the editor from her book project owed her edits on the entire book, okay? And these are usually edits that are relatively deep. And she had a travel schedule coming up, and she just knew given the number of weeks until the final final, as they call, like, the draft that is accepted, the final final of the book was supposed to be done, she knew that she was at a pace of one week per chapter if the editor started sending her edits right away, which was not guaranteed. And we had to essentially, you know, go back and work with that editor to make sure that those edits started coming right away so that the editor could get what she wanted in time.

Now that wasn't in the original project scope. The scope had changed a little bit from when the project started. And there's times when this happens when you have scoped out something, and for reasons that are totally valid, you know, maybe you push back the deadline, maybe there was an issue in terms of being able to get the material for the piece with interviews or something, that the scope has changed. But it's always important, and we'll talk more about this throughout this call, but it's always important for you to be able to do your best work to be really super clear on the scope with the folks that you're working with.

I just came back from a conference that wasn't explicitly for writers but had a lot of writers and editors as well, where we were talking about this idea that there are more and more, very frustratingly, demanding magazine editors who come back to new-to-them writers six months after the writer has pitched an idea and say, "Hey, I want this thing, and I want it in three days, five days, maybe six days," something like that.

An editor, I'll tell you where he's from, because it was a fabulous thing to say, an editor from "Epicurious," which has, like, been around for a long time and is a very respected outlet, he said, "Any editor who comes back to you six months after the pitch out of the blue is an asshole." And I'm quoting him very verbatimly there. And I really appreciated that, because I



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think that often writers think it's a very us or them thing with editors. And here's an editor saying this thing that another editor is doing is not okay.

And yet, at the same time, this definitely happens. And the person who asked this question in the panel at the conference that this happened at, she told me that, basically, she submitted this thing to this editor, you know, in three days as he wanted. And then the editor came back and said, "Whoa, whoa, I haven't even sent you a contract yet. Like, what is this?" And she's like, "This is the scope that you gave me. These are the parameters for success that you gave me, was that you wanted this by this deadline. And now you're saying that there's other parameters for success. What am I supposed to do here?" So there's certainly times when the acceptance criteria, if you will, whether it's accepting, you know, the full article or accepting the first draft of the article or whatever it is that's gonna be acceptance where we are missing some information that's gonna help us know what will allow the editor accept the piece. But there's other ways that we can figure that out. And we'll dig into this.

So the last definition that I have in here is the concept of quality assurance isn't to test yourself all at once at the end to report the bugs and then fix those bugs, but is to create a quality product in the first place and then also test the quality of product. In order for QA to work and to result in a real process improvement. So this is interesting, because I also see this particular definition coming to play a lot less, but a lot with less experienced people, which is that I see people write a pitch that they may have spent really, really, really, really a lot of time on, and that might even be like months of thinking about this thing and trying to get themselves to write and writing and scratching it out. And then I look at the pitch, and I can't even look at the pitch. I can't give them feedback on the pitch. Because the idea at the basis of the pitch is so not an idea that would fit any magazine whatsoever, because it's a place, not a concept. And all of these, you know, things that you hear me say all the time, that they have to go back to the drawing board.

And so this is something that, like I said, isn't happening to most of you, but I want you guys to keep this in mind, that as we're talking about quality control now, it's something that has to be part of the process, the process of creation. And it starts at the beginning. And we'll get into that. Because if you just do it at the end, you run the risk of having to go back and redo a lot of things that could have failed a quality check and thus had you work more on them earlier on.

So let's have a look at how that works. But before I do that, I wanna say one more thing in that last definition. So I know that I said some of these examples that come from software. So there's this idea of bugs. I think we've all heard of this that software has bugs, like when your phone or your computer just restarts randomly, that's because, like, it had a bug or had a fatal error or something like that. Now everything that I was reading that was about quality assurance in the software world, and this is not something new, I've heard this a lot before, is that there is no such thing as bug-free. I want you to know that. No company out there is intentionally sending things out in the world that are bug-free. This is real. This is, like, the



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way that the world works. Nobody sends things out that are bug-free. Bug-free is not possible. Bug-free is not the goal. Look up quality assurance and bug-free, and you will see this over and over again. There is 100% no such thing as bug-free, okay?

And part of that is because, for instance, in an article that you're working on for a new-to-you editor, you have no way of knowing exactly the way that that editor likes to receive their things until you send something to them, until you put yourself in that situation, and then you figure out what the bugs are, and then you can iron them out for next time. So this person who had the editor come back to her six months later and then say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, I haven't sent you a contract yet." She didn't know that, for him, the contract has to come first. I mean, I hope that for all of you the contract has to come first, right? But this is something that she wouldn't have had a way of knowing. She wouldn't have had a way of knowing, you know, other things that that editor might need that are in his style guide, for instance, okay? So there is no bug-free because you can't have all of the information. So be heartened and be emboldened by that. Because that is not, being bug-free, is not actually the definition of quality, okay? Quality like we looked at in the earlier slide is something that does what it's supposed to do and is suitable for its intended purpose. It's not perfect. It doesn't include every single feature somebody would want. It doesn't address every single problem that they may have, okay?

So what that means is that, if we can't be bug-free, what is the goal of our quality, okay? If even the biggest companies who have huge stakes in this and pissing off their existing customers and all of these things, if they're not releasing things that are bug-free, what do we do? What quality assurance people try to do, quality control people, we'll get into the definitions of these different terms in of it, is that they focus on the things that they know are gonna impact customer usage the most, okay?

And I really wanna share this idea with you, because we need to remember that our customer is the editor or the client if it's, you know, a company owner who's not actually gonna edit your stuff, okay? Our customer is the person who receives our written words. They are really our customer. The reader is not really our customer. The reader is their customer, okay? And it's always great to help our client, our editors, our, you know, company clients, whoever that is, with their job of meeting what their end clients will want, okay? But our job is to do what our customer needs.

So if your editor really needs you to do something in some cockamamie format because that's how it goes in her CMS or content management system, and if you don't do it that way then she'll have to do it, then that's really important to her. She'll be really pissed if she doesn't receive something in that format no matter how beautifully it's written, no matter how many amazing facts that you have found for her, okay? So when you are thinking about how to spend your time on an article, you need to think about what are the bugs or what are the issues that will affect your editor the most.



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So let's say, for instance, that you have a magazine that you're working with, let's say it's a trade magazine, but it doesn't have to be. And they have an editorial requirement that there must be a minimum of three interviews per piece. And this even includes, like, you know, front of book pieces that are maybe gonna be 200, 300, 500-words long. They just have an editorial requirement that for, you know, fact-checking and expertise purposes and all this stuff, there must be a minimum of three articles.

So what customer usage in this case means is that do you necessarily need to focus all of your piece around those three interviews? No, it means that for the editor, she needs to know that you have done the three interviews that that is checked off the list. You can just include, you know, I spoke to such and such and such, and this person completely agreed that this is a trend, okay? So it's really interesting how sometimes people read into something that is important for your user, for your editor and take that to be a larger goal, something that you have to wrap all of your work around when it's really just a requirement for your end purpose.

And so we'll get into this idea of requirements in a little bit, because this is really important. I'm hoping that this idea of what requirements will kind of help reshape how you get into your writing work in terms of how much time it takes you to get into your work. But first I wanna look at two maxims in quality control. So one is that something is fit for the purpose and right the first time. Now particularly that second one, how gorgeous would it be if everything that you wrote is right the first time, right? Like, wouldn't that be the dream? And I don't mean grammatically when I say that. I mean, that it's right in terms of like what we talked about before. Like, it's suitable for its intended purpose, okay? Or it does what it's supposed to do and its suitable for its intended purpose, but also this idea of fit for purpose.

I see very, very, very often, and this is one of the reasons why I won't read drafts of articles, that people, like I mentioned with pitches, people have spent a bunch of time on something like an article, and I can look at it right away and know that it's not gonna fly for whatever it is they're gonna do because it doesn't look like the article in the magazine. So for instance, this might be, you know, the classic case of somebody who has written, some of this happens still to this day, I hear it all the time, somebody who's written something that's 2,000 words that's supposed to be 500 words, and they expect the editor to cut it down or worse. They think the editor will be grateful that they wrote more words and that they did that extra work. Okay, that's not fit for the purpose. The purpose is that it needs to be a super-tight, 500-word article that addresses all of these things in just 500 words and doesn't include things that don't fit into the scope of a 500-word article.

So, like, that also doesn't fit into this category of right the first time. Because when the editor receives that, they're gonna send it back, and they're gonna say, "Not only do you need to make this shorter, but I also need you to include these three things that you didn't touch upon." I've seen this happen, too. And then my favorite part of this particular situation is then writers get really upset because they say, "Well, the editor wants me to write more words than



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the word count. They assign me a piece that's this long, but then in the edits they told me they need me to include additional things. So they're gonna pay me for the extra words, right?" Like, I'm not kidding you, this actually happens. And editors' responses are always like, "I will pay you for the number of words that I assigned you. If I assign you a certain number of words, why would you try to bill me for more words than I assigned you? That doesn't even make any sense."

So right the first time is something that we need to do not only for ourselves. Obviously, like I said, it's not necessarily grammatically perfectly right, but the first words that you put on the page for any article can be more or less right the first time. I promise you, I see it happen all the time, okay? And the way that we do this crazy-sounding thing of right the first time, is by being really dialed into what means quality for that outlet, which means what is the structure of the article, what are the type of sentences they're looking for, how much of it should be quotations, how much of it should be detail, how much of it should be historical background, and so on and so forth. And when we have that formula, then we can just sit down and plug things into it, and then our first draft can be very close to being right the first time. And likewise, that will also check the box of fit for purpose. And when you're able to do something right the first time, not only does that make you happy because you spend way less time on it, but it also makes your editor very, very, very, very happy and much more likely to work with you. And then you're happy to work with them, because you don't have an astronomical hourly rate, because you can do it relatively fast. And then everything spirals delightfully into happily ever after.

So I want you to really think about how these two things fit for the purpose, okay? Nothing should go in that page that's not fit for the specific singular purpose of the specific singular assignment that you have at this moment, okay? And how can you make something be right the first time? I really love the idea of this challenge. Not how can you labor and work over something for it to be right eventually, but how would it change the process of you going towards the blank page and working on the writing in the first place? How would it change things for you to think about putting something that was pretty much right down the first time...?

There's somebody who, I think she's doing kind of other stuff now, but who used to have a blog about writing and freelance writing, like, way back in the day when I started named Linda Formichelli. And she would say that she would write for these, like, \$2 a word big women's outlets like, "Oh!" and "Elle" and "Allure" and all these things, and that she would write her 1,500-word pieces in an hour, that she would pretty much always do that. So she's writing for these really high-level outlets, and she's writing up the pieces in an hour, and she's spending only a little bit of time, really, to be honest, during the research.

And I remember we were talking on the phone one time, and I was saying something about having \$100 an hour hourly rate that I really like work to consistently maintain. And she was like, "Well, I wouldn't do anything less for a \$350 an hour hourly rate, you know, when I



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started moving away from writing for magazines." And you could certainly say, "Well, she's writing for \$2 a word outlets, and so that gives her a lot more hours, you know, if she's got, like, \$2,000 a story coming in." But I just love that idea of, like, be pie-in-the-sky. You can be a freelance writer with a \$350 an hour hourly rate no matter what size of publications you're writing for if you can use this right the first time approach to controlling your quality. And you also have to be able then to let it go.

So for writers, you know, it's so often comes down to this question, is this good enough? This comes up all the time. It comes up when people are working on pitches. It comes up when people are working on articles. It comes up when even, you know, just when people are, like, at the idea stage, before they've even written the pitch, is this good enough, okay? But I want you to think about reframing that question. Is this good enough for blank, for who? Is this good enough? And what time frame? Is this good enough for what circumstances?

So somebody that I work with was recently on a press trip that she did just a big pitch blitz beforehand to get some article placed so she could go on the trip. And she came back and then did a big pitch blitz based on the trip that she had done, they get stories out. And she's worked really hard on honing her pitches down to be written in about 15 minutes. And she spent a bunch of time going through "The Travel Magazine" database and finding new outlets a pitch and things like that.

And I have seen other people who have trips like this where they would never have accomplished, you know, 20, 30 pitches in the span of a week before and after the trip. It just would have been impossible. Because to them, each pitch is like a precious dragon egg that only comes into this world, you know, once every 1,000 years or something, pardon the "Game of Thrones" reference. But the real idea needs to be you want to maximize, in this situation, for instance, you want to maximize the chance that you're gonna get a response by singing the most pitches for the most outlets in the quickest time possible.

And that's what your good enough metrics are. You know, is this pitch readable? Is this pitch focused on a particular area of the magazine? Does this pitch accurately get across, like, my background and the details, you know, at least some details about why this is interesting? Great, it's good enough. It goes out the door. So this idea of thinking about...I'm actually just gonna skip ahead for a second. This idea of thinking about what is good enough starts with the requirements, okay? So I just introduced this idea of good enough being for who, in what time period, in what circumstances, okay?

And in this, you know, like, mythical but, like, real-life example that I used of having a trip where you wanna get on the press trip, and then when you get back you wanna get as many pitches out as you can so you can land stories quickly from that trip. We have some requirements here, right? We have requirements that you need to hit the maximum number of places, that where you will have the best chance of success. We have the requirement that you need to get some pitches out and land one story before you leave the trip. And we have



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the requirement that when you get back, whatever that requirement is, you know, in this case, it might have been that she just wanna have at least one story, it might have been that she wanted to get as wide an exposure if possible, it might have been that because this person was gone for a certain number of days, let's say, like, eight days, she wanted to make sure that she had eight stories come out of it, or at least income worth \$5 grand or something like that. So assuring your personal quality is met starts with outlining what that quality looks like, okay? So this involves the way, I really like how it says in here, that these requirements are captured, phrased, prioritized, and managed, okay?

So let's go back to this article for a new-to-you magazine example, okay? So I'm not gonna take the person where the editor got back to them after six months and one of them in three days, because that's hopefully, like, more of an outlier. But let's just start with the normal you are working with a new-to-you editor example, okay? So in this kind of setting, you have an assignment, right? You have an editor who said, "I need you to cover this in this many words for this section by this deadline." So we've already got some requirements right there, right? We know the framework in terms of the length of the articles. We've got a cap there. We know the framework in terms of the total amount of time we could possibly spend if we're gonna dedicate all of our time to it in terms of the deadline. And then you know that it's for a certain section, so you can look at what has gone in that section before, and pull from there some requirements in terms of how the article is addressed. You can also look at how the magazine has treated similar topics previously. And you can pull some requirements out from there.

Like I said, if you're working on an article, some typical requirements you can pull are how many interviews need to be completed, how much background information does this magazine typically include. Because that's the place where I see a lot of you guys go really deep on your research in a way where you're never gonna use all of that stuff in your article, and you end up finding things that become darlings that you have to kill, like little historical facts that you're just fascinated with or anecdotes that you really wanna include, okay?

But if that's outside of the requirements to have five different historical antidotes, then you shouldn't necessarily be going that far in to that research in the first place, okay? It's out of the requirements. And doing that is going to negatively impact the end quality of the project. Because the time that you've spent researching those things, writing them up, and then deciding you have to cut them is time that you could have spent on something else in this article or otherwise.

So some other requirements that you might have, that you might wanna capture at the beginning, is you can talk to the editor about what their style guide is, if they haven't already provided you one. You can ask the editor a question...I always like to ask new-to-me editors, you know, is there another article that you've done in the past or recently that you would like me to use as a model for this? And some of them will, you know, want you to do that work yourself, but some of them will be like, "Yeah, you know, I didn't really like the last couple,



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but here's one that we did, you know, last November that I really like. Like, look at this as an example, okay?"

Now this idea of pulling out requirements, like I said, there are some that are really obvious. You have the deadline from your editor. You have the word count. You know, you have the section that it's gonna be in. But there's other ones, like I said, in terms of the structure of the piece, how many interviews they include, how much background information that you need to pull yourself.

But what I really like to do, and I've done this ever since I was in school, I really love to do this, is at the top of the page where you're working in your draft, write down all the requirements that you know about. And I mentioned in the past, you can also write down, you know, your thread, your sort of thesis sentence. You can write down your who, what, where, when, why to keep yourself focused. There's a lot of different ways that you can choose to set up the requirements for yourself, and so I don't wanna give you restrictions on that. But get your requirements in hand and put them somewhere that you can focus on them, okay?

Because quality control includes three main segments. And we've used these words interchangeably, but now I'm gonna tell you what they mean. So quality planning, quality assurance, and quality control. So I just talked about getting those requirements and putting those out for yourself at the top of the page. That is quality planning. You are planning what the end product needs to look like.

Now in a larger way, there's a lot of sort of industry buzzwords that you can use around this that I just wanna touch on quickly. There's cost-benefit analysis, okay? So this is where you say, do I wanna spend 12 hours on this because it's a new to me editor and I really wanna impress them? What is the pay for this? What is the potential long-term relationship here? Let's say it's a magazine that comes out three times a year, and they're paying you \$400 for a feature. So at the maximum, this would be a \$1200 a year assignment.

Now let's say that you would generally spend, like, 6 to 8 hours on it, and you're contemplating spending 10 to 12 or maybe 15, okay? What are the other things that you could be doing with that time, okay? And what is more valuable? So that's cost-benefits analysis there, right?

Now benchmarking is something that I think we've probably heard about in a lot of other settings, but I wanna introduce it for you as writers. So benchmarking is when you look at a publication, whether a publication you're working on an article for or, like, a super dreamy publication like "The New York Times" aside from their, you know, can never have accepted any free anything for your entire lifetime policy, but you know "The New York Times" or Conde Nast Traveller or Travel and Leisure. And you think about what is the level of writing on this page? What is the benchmark for quality that's being set by this publication?



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And so I've had people, for instance, who are really in an impostor-syndrome moment go through several magazines that they feel like are really beyond them and then grade the writing for like A, B, C. A being this is absolutely outstanding. This should win an award. It's so poetic. It's just a delight to read. B being like this is really solid writing. And C being like, wow, like, I would write this when I'm drunk. And that can be really effective in terms of benchmarking to look at other publications that way and see what is the quality of writing that's being submitted. Because we don't know what the submission looks like, right? We can only imagine the submission wasn't as good as what's on the page, okay? That's food for thought. But what is the quality of writing that's actually appearing on the page compared to what you think you need to be writing and submitting, okay?

Now this last thing, acceptance criteria, I touched on a little bit earlier, but you can really easily look at existing articles in the magazine that you're working on or existing writing on the website of the client that you're writing for and see what has been accepted in the past. What are the characteristics of this thing? And you can ask your editor or your clients, what's the most important thing for you, you know, in a good working relationship or in this article or in the work that we're gonna do together? And you can create, just like you can those requirements, you can create what are the criteria that will allow this piece to be accepted by the editor.

And I can tell you that by and large those acceptance criteria are almost always, from what I hear from editors, adhering to what needs to be in that section, what's in that section, every single month, okay? So, like, even if you think you've written like the most beautiful piece ever, if it doesn't look like the way the section looks like last month, they're gonna have to ask you to change it, unfortunately. So quality assurance is something that for us is typically done by our clients, especially if we're writing for magazines. Because this is assuring that what goes out meets the standards of the publication and that's something that we're not gonna know the standards of the publication.

So I want you guys to all relieve yourself a little bit of that onus, because unless you are the last check step for a client of yours, like you're doing their blog and no one else looks out after you, in which case, I recommend that you personally shell out and include this in your quote, but for somebody to look at your piece, like for an editor who you work with directly, there's somebody else who's worrying about that, okay? So that's not usually your goal. To ensure that every article in a magazine that comes out is of the same quality is the onus of the editor or of the chief editor or the publisher, okay?

But quality control is something that we touched on last time. And I'm going to jump ahead to the slides on that in a second. But quality control is what we do in our work process to ensure that our work is quality, to ensure that we can be right the first time, to ensure that it is suitable for its intended purposes. And there are three main aspects of that: it's prevention, inspection, and tolerances. So tolerances, to start there, are what is it okay to give a little bit on? What doesn't need to be perfect? You might need to have three interviews, but you might



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not need to include a quote from all of them, okay? Or it might need to be 500 words, but those can be breaking up into paragraphs however you want. Or maybe it needs to be just one paragraph, okay, but you're you have a little more leniency in the word count. So whatever is that tolerance. Inspection is these steps where we look at the work that we're producing and ensure that it's in the right track. And prevention goes back to quality planning. How early on are we avoiding creating work that's not what the client looks for.

So we looked last time at this idea...Oh, sorry, I love this quote. I just wanna take it for a second, but I'll come back after these. We looked last time at this idea of the production black box. So things go in, you know, our thoughts, our research, our interviews, and what comes out is a piece. We talked about the breakfast example last webinar. And then we talked about the idea that we can cut holes in this black box, which is our process for how we create these pieces, and start to see how, you know, the sausage is made, as they say, but how are the piece is really written and where we can introduce check steps to make sure that that happens correctly.

Now, like I said, to make sure that something happens correctly, it really depends on your requirements, right, on what the end product is gonna look like. And so there's another quote about sailing in the Spain that I also really like, but I found this one I hadn't seen before, which is actually like an ancient Roman quote. "If a man knows not to which port he sails, no wind is favorable."

And I like this because I think that we often think, oh, I have a deadline you need to write this piece, and that that's enough in terms of a destination. But I really encourage you to take this idea of requirements to heart and that quality planning and outline for yourself on a more granular level what an acceptable to your editor piece looks like, okay? Because otherwise, if you're not writing to that, if you haven't created a template for yourself, for this magazine, or a general template for writing a profile or writing a feature or whatever, you are gonna be doing a lot of meandering through the very large ocean of information to get there, okay?

So I told you I have this slide that has a lot of, like, interesting ideas that I wanna introduce to you. And I'm gonna leave this up here. But these are some things that I saw come up in this idea of the realm of quality control best practices. And I just wanted to throw out there, in case some of them for some of you really light upon, oh, this is a thing that I get that really resonates with me. This is something that I can do. So part of quality control is risk management. For us, a big part of that is money, right? Like, what if I do this thing and the person doesn't pay me? What if I do this thing, and they don't like it, and they don't pay me? You know, there's, like, so many things around that.

But also part of it is peace of mind. Like, what if I do this thing and I'm not confident that it's good, and it just continues to needle at me, and I just continue to pick at it, you know, between now as I'm working on it, the deadline, which isn't for two months, or something like that. And I think that aspect of not being able to feel sure that something is of the quality



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level it needs to be is one of the things that can make us put things off until deadline, because that's something where we won't be able to question the quality anymore. We need to just turn it off, right?

But another part of quality control in terms of risk management that I want you guys to think of is availability of supply. So for us on the editorial side, that might be interviews. It might be background information that we're trying to have. It's usually some pieces of information or access to something on the ground or something in that vein that we need to get, because it needs to go into article, okay?

But also I see this come up so often on the client side for people who have content marketing clients, okay? Like, a lot of you have contracts where you are doing some sort of blog post, social, something rather based on some piece or pieces of information that you need to get from your clients, and there's a delay there, okay? So any time you have other things that you need to get to do your work, that's a risk. And you need to manage, as part of your overall quality control and process, how much that risk can affect you.

So another best practice that I liked was this idea of to consider the entire lifecycle. So that means, like, each... We talked a little bit about this before about, you know, that it's not just fixing the bugs at the end. But as you're starting to plot out how do you plan quality, how do you create quality, how do you need to look at that at different stages of the lifecycle of an article. You know, there's the beginning when you're working on the pitch, that has a certain standard for quality. Then, you know, as you're going back and forth with the editor, answering questions, that has a certain standard for quality. As you're gathering the information from sources and interviews, each interview has a certain standard of quality, what you need to get from that source, and so on and so forth.

Something that I read that I really liked is this idea of applying effective methodologies. I think, like I said, writers tend to have the sense of, like, you're in the Wild West, and you're doing something on your own, you know, maybe that other people haven't done before that interferes with the idea of applying effective methodologies. But there are methodologies, you know, like I've come up with quite a few myself, but particularly in the writing space, there are so many out there. And so if you feel like you're stuck on the how, go and look for a methodology. Go check out a journalism website and see how they say to do it.

Reduce maintenance cost. Now this is a place we'll get into more down the line. But in this particular setting, maintenance means when you have done something and you need to keep changing it. And so I mean that in terms of your pieces, okay? This goes back to the idea of, you know, creating that final thing first.

This other best practice that I really like, consider the end user's mindset, okay? Consider in what circumstance somebody would be picking up the magazine that you're writing for, what their mindset might be at that time. Do they not have a lot of time? Are they looking to really be devoured by a piece of writing? What is their mindset?



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Align enterprise quality with strategic goals and initiative. So you are an enterprise, you personally, your company, or LLC, or whatever you are, and what are your goals for your overall quality of the work that you're putting out in terms of how they align with your larger strategic goals? So if your goals are to get as much money as you can from content marketing so that you have more time available to do other things, that's a goal, and that aligns with how you're gonna produce things in terms of quality.

Establish structures and resources to get the desired results. We'll talk about procedures again in a minute, but I would love to see more of you guys have procedures. I see a lot of procedures around pitching, but I'd love to hear from more of you guys that you're creating really specific procedures in terms of how you approach writing your articles and particularly the articles that you write for clients regularly where it's a really repeatable thing. You probably have a procedure that you're doing kind of, like, automatically, but I'd love to see that more standardized.

Creating supporting policies procedures and tools, not mandates. As we all see, like telling ourselves, oh, I'm gonna X. I'm getting more pitches out. I'm gonna read more magazines. Like, that doesn't work unless you have a super, super disciplined mindset. So how can you create whether it's a policy or procedure? You know, like, a policy might be like I don't get to watch "Game of Thrones" until I've sent, like, 25 pitches, right? Like, that's policy. Like, it's just something I don't do. I don't watch "Game of Thrones" until I've done X, right?

Select, define, and standardize quality measures across the enterprise. We're gonna get into it in a second, what quality measures can be. But this other one I also like. Problem analysis and not mere identification. So anytime you come up with something where you're having an issue with ensuring consistent quality, don't just point out like, oh, well, because, you know, this editor didn't tell me, there was no way that I could have done what she wanted in advance. No. Introduce a step for when you have a new-to-you editor. You ask them XYZ questions before you get going.

So some tools that you can start with today are a definition of ready. So often people tell me that, you know, they sit down to work on something. And I asked them have you X, have you Y, have you done this? Like, what about this research, have you heard about this? And they haven't. So make sure that you have a definition for yourself of once all of these things are met, then you are ready to work on a piece, and that you don't try to do that beforehand.

Likewise, a definition of done, what does done actually mean to you? Is it when you hit the word count? Is it when you hit the word count and you've incorporated all these things? You know, because for some content marketing work, it's just when you hit the word count. Like, that's it, right? So have a definition have done and be ready to change that when appropriate.

Now I have these open, and I'm just gonna flip over really quickly, but this idea of procedures. This is a tool in your quality control arsenal. And we've looked at this a couple times, this idea of this procedure for copywriting, right? This procedure that I've looked at,



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there's a lot of things that they ask the client for at different points in times that they go back and they check with the client to make sure that they have them all. Like, you request all these things from the client. You send them to the client. You ask them to get this.

And this type of procedure for making sure that you've collected all these things, it is a form of quality control, because you're making sure that you have those things not only in a timely fashion but also to include them in the end result. And something else I just wanted to look at, we've looked before at the Free to Focus program and how we have that available in your client libraries. And I just wanna pop over to one of the PDFs here for a second. This is in the Free to Focus program. This is lesson number five. And it talks about some different types of automation.

So I have this on the side we were just looking at. But the idea is that there are several different types of automation you can use, and they're not all digital. They're not all text expander, okay? So there's self-automation that you can do in terms of rituals, okay? There's template automation you can do in terms of documenting a workflow. And that's what we were looking at before with that copywriting procedure, right? Did we skip one? Oh, template automations. Template automation, sorry. Template automations are not process automations. Template automations are a checklist. So a really good example here that I mentioned on the next slide is, if you have a blog or you use blogs for any of your clients, there's this thing called Yoast, however you wanna say it, which is an SEO plugin. It basically has a checklist of different things that you wanna check before your blog post goes out to make sure that you're doing, you know, what you can in terms of SEO. So that's a template. A template is, like, any sort of checklist that you have for yourself. And I have a couple ideas for that on the slide, and we'll go back.

So we talked about a process or procedure automation. And then of course there's tech automations. You know, there's, like, you can have text expander software. You can have email filtering software. You know, you can put all of your emails from a given client, have them go into a folder, and you only look at those when it's time to deal with that client. And that helps you, you know, from having concerns about that client creep into the rest of your day and all sorts of things like that.

A couple other sort of tech-oriented automations are like Grammarly is an automated test that you can use on your sentence structure and grammar. It's not a be all and all thing. And you should also have a manual read through that you do with that as well. There's a lot of issues with Grammarly that I think I've spoken about in the past. Yoast is another SEO one. But then in terms of checklist that you can create for yourself, like, I know people that have really cool ones where there's words that they know that they overuse. Or, like, one I always look at is, like, do all of your paragraphs start with I. This is a really quick test that I do whenever people send me pitches. As I look, does every single paragraph in that pitch start with the letter I? Because that'll really jump out and send a very strong visual signal to the editor.



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So there's a lot of little things like this where you can just make a checklist. Like before I send in a pitch, one, I wanna check that not all the paragraphs start with I. Two, I wanna check that there's a place where in, like, 7 to 10 words I have very clearly outlined what this article is about. Three, does the lead actually tie back into what this article is about. That's something that often people go awry on. You know, four, have I mentioned that I have specific experience with the topic of this article. Whatever that is. Or it could be like, have I said that too many times, or whatever that is for yourself, okay?

And you can also have checklists of best practices specifically by client. And this is one thing that I just wanted to throw in there for those of you who do, like, a lot of work in the content marketing arena and feel like, you know, you're not sure how that is affecting your writing quality or you don't get a lot of feedback on those things, so you're not sure if it's really good anymore, is that you can introduce, like, a quarterly call-center-style update.

What I mean by that is that you use the random number generator, and you pick a random date, and you pick like a random article that you've written on that date, and you check it for certain things. Like, you know, have I said something witty? Have I stuck to the point of this article? Have I covered, you know, a lot of information in a small space? Have I, like, effectively used facts or whatever to check for yourself in a randomized... This is very, like, classic quality control here. Have some assurance for yourself that even these things that you're kind of churning out meet your personal quality standards for that type of work.

So in the continuation of this series, we're gonna talk about something, I'm so excited, I have so much to talk about about this, about human resources. We're gonna talk about legal issues. And we're gonna talk about technical support.

So thank you all for joining me today, and I will catch you soon. Have a great holiday weekend.