

Freelance or “Medical Writing”; Blogging, and Proofreading

Part 1. Freelance/Medical Writing

I want to introduce you to a writing opportunity that falls under two names-- freelance writing and medical writing. I will also tack on a paragraph about serving as a proofreader to improve content created by others.

The functions of freelance and medical writers are about the same, although medical writers may work either as a freelance contributor or an employee. In contrast, the freelance writer generally works by contract. Examples of the types of organizations that “hire” these writers include healthcare content company, healthcare institutions, and pharmaceutical companies. However, as “freelance” they can pitch to a broad range of potential users. I combine them here as their roles and skills are typically the same. I’ll tend to use the term “medical writer” which specifies I am talking about health-related content. As a nurse or NP, you may certainly promote yourself as NP Freelance Writer.

There is a wide range of information types that can be developed by these writers, including

- Grant proposals
- Abstracts
- Magazine articles
- Health policies
- CE material
- Patient material
- Websites
- White papers
- Presentation slide decks
- Posters
- Course material

The preparation for these roles may vary. They come from a broad range of academic training but generally have a life science degree, with advanced preparation as an MD, NP, or PhD in a relevant field. And, of course, they are good writers!

I have worked with many medical writers from varied backgrounds over the years. The best I worked with over several topics was a PhD epidemiologist. She consistently demonstrated the attributes I consider as important for this role: always followed the client’s lead; understood the health condition of focus; searched for and located current references, provided a well-developed review of the literature, and could interpret and ground content based on the intended audience (patients or clinicians). And could write well, focusing on the audience.

Free lance writers are usually acknowledged as the authors of their work; medical writers may not be acknowledged if they are employees of or working under contract for an agency

or company. However, authors of professional journal articles, these writers are paid for their contributions.

I encourage you to search for online information about medical writing and freelance writing, as this is a good opportunity for good writers who are familiar with health-related topics. You need solid writing skills and content knowledge. To contract for work, you should have samples to share potential clients. Be sure to collect and save samples of all your work, whether a blog, patient material, newsletter column, journal article, or chapter. If you are just now thinking of writing professionally, it will be a while to gain the skills and examples necessary. Never belittle the importance of content you create for your own patients or a local organization. Somewhere, I still have copies of columns I wrote for the post newspaper as a new NP (I served in the Army). Keeping all this material helps you to build a catalog of your work.

A history of and proven skills of writing allows freelancers to also pitch ideas to large-audience magazines that cover health topics. Almost any magazines directed towards women, men, teens, older adults, or families include health content. This could become a career or sideline revenue stream.

If this type of writing sounds interesting, visit for the American Medical Writers Association (amwa.org). They offer conferences, certifications, training, and much more. They list the essential skills for a medical writer as: grammar, punctuation structure, medical terminology, tables and graph, statistics and ethics. These are about the same as the skills needed for any manuscript writer. Although there is no “freelance nurse writer organization” there are some websites that provide relevant information. A quick search confirmed the following sites: “savvy nurse writer”, “nurse fern”, “thewritern” and “rn2writer.com. where you can learn more about the journeys these nurses took in becoming freelance writers. There is usually relevant information on YouTube on the topic.

Mini-Part 2 Proof Reading: Helping Others Improve their Messaging

Once while talking about writing opportunities, this topic occurred to me. Serving as a proofreader does not enhance YOUR work or YOUR visibility. It can be a potential revenue stream or an important service to other writers. Writers often need assistance from better writers. Proofreading involves reviewing content before others submit it with an aim at improving the copy. You must be good at spotting errors and suggesting improvements and have solid grammar and spelling skills (which software helps with). There are courses in proofreading. It is a rare author who would not benefit from having a proofreader focus on their copy, despite access to systems such as Grammarly. Something to consider.

Part 3. Blogging

Blogging involves creating a web page or online publication written in informal style, with regularly added content. Blogs tend to be more fluid and far less formal than other forms of writing. You may already have a blog. Several NPs are excellent bloggers. I'm not one of them, though I am trying.

Some NPs have humorous blogs, clinical development or administrative/management blogs. Some are very focused. Others cover a wide range of topics.

Blogging helps you informally reach others, share your passion and experience, and gain recognition in an area. It is not scientific work. I have been a dismal blogger in that I have allowed myself to take a couple of extensive breaks and often published less often than monthly. I recently seem to have gotten my act together, adding content regularly. My blogs generally cover promotion of excellence and leadership skills among NPs. It is a topic I'm committed to and may become a "good" blogger, yet.

To become successful at blogging, one ideally should have a set schedule for content release. The content can be created in batches but released in individual posts. Bloggers can address broad or narrow topics. They share their personal perspective to reach an audience with topics such as life experiences, clinical experiences, and/or patient-oriented content.

I notice that many of the NP blogs I knew of are no longer active. However, the older posts remain online. The following are common NP blogs:

- Nurse Practitioners Business (Barbara Phillips)
- Nurse Barb (Barb Dehn)
- Nurse Nat
- Blogs from state or national NP associations
- Mary Jo Goolsby on npexcellence.com
- Some NPs post blog-like commentary on social media, instead of a specific blog.

Finally, if you have heard me talk on leadership, you know I am a Seth Godin fan. He blogs almost daily in thought provoking posts. His blog is worth visiting to see his unique, engaging style of blogging. Seths.blog

Starting a Blog:

Starting a blog takes low-level technical skills using any of the good providers available. WordPress software is an easy route and site providers such as GoDaddy can provide all that you will need to get started. Alternatively, you can "blog" through social media. If you

are seeking an opportunity to provide brief commentary on issues important to you and blogging sounds feasible, investigate different sources and systems.

Once you start, you'll need to develop a regular style and have a library of topics to cover over time. Pick a niche you want to focus on over time, to ensure ongoing dialogue. It can be as narrow as "entry to practice—the first year" or "keys to being the best preceptor". Or you can go more broadly with a topic such as "primary care adventures" or "teaching challenges". Pick a blog name to help you market yourself and the blog.

Beyond this, I'm not going further into the weeds because there are many online resources online to learn from—specific websites, vendors, YouTube, and more. However, if you can be persistent in writing and disseminating content, blogging is a great opportunity for visibility.