



## Top Freelancers Give Advice...

by  
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I had a pen but no paper on which to record their advice. "Quick! This is great stuff!" I had to find something, anything.... I faced this dilemma in 2003 as I was listening to four well known freelancers talking about why they were so successful. Today the only paper available sits to the left of my keyboard; it was a greasy brown paper bag that had held a muffin five minutes before....

Unanimously, the foursome agreed that a good freelancer has "To live hard, write free." They were referring to experiencing life to the fullest before you can write about it with passion. "Get into situations," they said, "Live on the edge." Hmm!

Starting out, each wrote prolifically with high aspirations and for little or no fees. Three said that they analyzed the publications they yearned to sell to for 'gaps.' All said that they quickly evolved into experts in a key area of interest. "Write, write, write for that 'killer clip' that will launch your career." Hmm!

The query letters that worked best were "lively and spoke with their own unique voice." The freelancers talked about grabbing the editor by the throat and not letting go. All agreed that each query had to have a unique slant on a story. "Remember," they said, "local events have international impact." For example, Europeans had a surprising appetite for stories about the wildfires that threatened the city of Kelowna, BC, Canada in 2003. Hmm!

These writers discussed the art/science of research and advised that writers must know what they are looking for in a story: weirdness, conflict, universal appeal, melancholy, irony, truth, to name a few angles to follow. Then when a writer writes the piece, the freelancers insisted that you must "storytell it." The article must have people in it to give human interest and perspective. After all the elephants you may be writing about are not going to be reading the article! Hmm!

Most importantly, the advice that many writers minimize, revolves around the editing of the piece. Every one of these successful, international writers said that we must make it easy for editors to buy our work, i.e. nothing less than perfect manuscripts. Also, never

pester a magazine editor, either by phone or email, and submit your articles with three to six month lead times for the top publications. Hmm!

Lastly, the 'killer clip' – it must be from a big name magazine, be outstanding in every way, and be published within the year. Hmm!

Since that salutary experience, I now carry a small notebook with me everywhere I go – no more scrabbling for used paper bags, which moulder in my 'morgue.'

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