



A MILLENNIAL WRITER LIFE GUIDE

HOW TO START FROM THE GROUND UP AS A FREELANCE WRITER

9 STEPS TO GET YOU PITCHING, GETTING
PUBLISHED, AND STARTING YOUR WRITING
CAREER

BONUS CONTENT

This guide includes **a successful pitch** from my archives, which ended up becoming [a viral essay on the film, MOONLIGHT, for Electric Literature!](#)

THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU:

I. ESTABLISH NEEDS AND WANTS BEFORE WRITING

- Figuring out what you want to write about
- Learning the mechanics of freelancing
- Establishing what your skillsets have

II. HOW TO START LANDING GIGS

- Learning where to pitch your pieces
 - Drafting your first pitch ideas
- Gaining the courage to send them out

III. HOW TO BUILD A PRESENCE ONLINE

- Identifying your beats and niches
 - The benefits of social media
- Learning what platforms writers use

THE VOICE BEHIND M.W.L



My name is [Prince Shakur](#). I'm a freelance writer, author, and organizer whose work has appeared in Catapult Story, Teen Vogue, Electric Literature, Level, Dazed Magazine, and more. I have written for over a dozen bylines, done press trips, panel interviews, and have had two literary agents since I started freelance in 2017.

I. ESTABLISHING NEEDS AND WANTS BEFORE WRITING

THIS SECTION IS IMPORTANT BEFORE YOU EVEN START PITCHING, WRITING, AND GETTING PAID; KNOWING WHY AND WHAT YOU WANT TO WRITE ABOUT IT WILL SAVE YOU A LOT OF STRESS AND UNNECESSARY WORK IN THE FUTURE.

STEP ONE: ASK YOURSELF, "WHY DO I WANT TO DO THIS?"

- DO YOU WANT TO WRITE TO BUILD YOUR RESUME? BUILD A BODY OF WORK AS A CAREER? AS A WAY TO PIVOT INTO ANOTHER CREATIVE FIELD OR TO ENACT SOCIAL CHANGE?
 - ESTABLISHING AN ANSWER TO THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP PIVOT WHERE AND HOW YOU WRITE, AS WELL AS HOW MUCH YOU EARN.
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STEP TWO: ESTABLISH YOUR WRITING EXPERIENCE AND SKILL SETS

- HAVE YOU WRITTEN ANY OP-EDS IN THE PAST OR HAVE A BLOG? IF NOT, DON'T WORRY. START DRAFTING UP A FEW THINGS TO PUT ONLINE TO SHOWCASE YOUR WRITING.
 - THINK OF THE VARIOUS JOBS AND COMMUNITY ROLES YOU'VE HAD OVER THE YEARS. DO ANY OF THOSE SKILLS APPLY TO WRITING? DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO A CERTAIN COMMUNITY AND CAN REPORT ON IT? THINK BIG AND SMALL.
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STEP THREE: LEARN THE MECHANICS OF FREELANCING

- PITCH: 2-3 PARAGRAPH OUTLINE OF YOUR PROPOSED PIECE
- FILE DATE: THE DEADLINE FOR THE FIRST DRAFT
- BLYINE: THE NAME OF A PUBLICATION
- RATE: HOW MUCH YOU WILL BE PAID FOR WRITING A PIECE
- BEAT: A TOPIC OR GENRE OF WRITING/JOURNALISM
- INVOICE: DOCUMENT TO SEND TO PUB FOR PAYMENT.

II. HOW TO START LANDING WRITING GIGS

THIS SECTION IS IMPORTANT BEFORE YOU EVEN START PITCHING, WRITING, AND GETTING PAID; KNOWING WHY AND WHAT YOU WANT TO WRITE ABOUT IT WILL SAVE YOU A LOT OF STRESS AND UNNECESSARY WORK IN THE FUTURE.

STEP FOUR: LEARN HOW TO FIND PUBS TO PITCH TO

- FOR THIS STEP, TWITTER AND GOOGLE ARE YOUR BEST FRIENDS. MANY EDITORS NOTE THEIR PUBLICATIONS IN THEIR BIO AND ACCOUNTS, LIKE "WRITERS OF COLOR" POST CALLS FOR PITCHES.
- START A WORD DOCUMENT, NOTE PROSPECTIVE EDITORS, THEIR BEATS, AND RATES OF PAY. UPDATE ON A QUARTERLY BASIS.

STEP FIVE: DRAFT 3 PROSPECTIVE PITCHES

- A PITCH TYPICALLY INCLUDES: (1) WHAT YOUR IDEA IS, (2) WHO YOUR SOURCES ARE, (3) WHY YOU ARE THE RIGHT PERSON TO WRITE IT.
- DRAFT THESE PITCHES AND GET FEEDBACK FROM A HANDFUL OF PEOPLE ON THE PITCH'S CLARITY AND STRENGTH
- COME UP WITH FIVE EDITORS AND APPLICABLE PUBLICATIONS.

STEP SIX: HOW TO SEND OUT YOUR FIRST PITCHES

- DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR PITCH, THE PUBLICATION, AND YOUR DRAFT EMAIL THE NIGHT BEFORE
- DOWNLOAD THE GOOGLE CHROME EXTENSION TO SCHEDULE EMAILS
- WRITE OUT YOUR EMAILS AND SCHEDULE THEM FOR A MONDAY TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, OR THURSDAY MORNING. FRIDAYS ARE TYPICALLY WHEN EDITORS TRY TO FINISH NON-PITCH RELATED WORK BEFORE THE WEEKEND

III. HOW TO BUILD A PRESENCE ONLINE

BUILDING AN ONLINE PRESENCE IS MORE THAN JUST ABOUT BRANDING OR MARKETING. IT IS ABOUT MAKING YOURSELF RECOGNIZABLE AND SEARCHABLE ONLINE BASED ON WHAT YOUR WRITING GOALS ARE.

STEP SEVEN: HAVE AN ACCESSIBLE ARCHIVE OF YOUR PAST AND PRESENT WORK.

- THIS CAN BE A PROFILE ON MEDIUM.COM OR A WEBSITE OF YOUR OWN.
- IDENTIFY YOUR BEATS IN THE BIO AND A FEW BYLINES YOU'VE WRITTEN FOR
- UPDATE THIS ARCHIVE/PORTFOLIO OFTEN.

STEP EIGHT: ENGAGE WITH OTHER WRITERS ONLINE AND OFFLINE

- ANOTHER USE FOR TWITTER IS TO START FOLLOWING AND CONVERSING WITH OTHER WRITERS, WHETHER MORE OR LESS EXPERIENCED THAN YOU
- ANOTHER TIP IS TO TRY TO ENGAGE WITH THREE DIFFERENT WRITERS PER DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA. AFTER ONLY A FEW WEEKS, THIS WILL ALLOW YOU MEET COUNTLESS OTHER CREATIVES.

STEP NINE: WORK HARD AND SEEK WISDOM FROM THE MORE EXPERIENCED

- BEING A PART OF THE WRITING COMMUNITY IS IMPORTANT, WHICH MEANS BUILDING A REPUTATION BASED ON THE QUALITY OF YOUR WORK AND YOUR ETHICS.
- WORK HARD AND THE RIGHT PEOPLE WILL NOTICE AS YOUNG AS YOU PROMOTE YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.
- WHEN IMPORTANT CAREER MOMENTS HIT, SEEK ADVICE.

AN EXAMPLE OF A SUCCESSFUL PITCH FROM MY ARCHIVE

Moonlight was a lightning rod in the film industry. Sitting in a movie theater alone and crying as I watched, it's significance overwhelmed me on an entirely new level. I wondered as I watched, "Who loved black gay guys in the media before Moonlight?" I couldn't recall seeing many meaningful representations of black gay men at a young age that would have helped me navigate the coming out process. Instead hip hop, rap, and mainstream world aimed to make our bodies and mannerisms punchlines with gay, black characters only accounting for 7% of LGBT characters on broadcast television.

Would *INSERT PUBLICATION* be interested in an essay the representation of black gay men in television and cinema over the years? As a 2017 recipient of the Rising Stars award from GLAAD for my social and digital activism, the topic of LGBTQIA representation, especially that of gay, black men, is very important to my heart.

My theory on why this pitch was successful...

- I related a media moment to my personal experience ("I couldn't recall seeing many meaningful representations of black gay men at a young age that would have helped me navigate the coming out process.")
- I raised a compelling question ("Who loved gay black boys before Moonlight?")
- I noted my LGBTQIA-based media work