How to Make Money Copywriting

Lately, I took some online training about copywriting and I'm involved with a community of copywriters now – both those new to it and those who have done it for a while now. One thing that both groups (especially the newbies) want to know is…

How Do You Get Hired as a Copywriter?

I'm an owner of a website design company and **we get projects we need copywriters for** . We really push adding copywriting to a project because those projects are much more successful. I mean, why spend all the money on great design and SEO if the copy is poor and doesn't convert? That would be like buying a Corvette with a small, 4-cylinder engine.

Since we promote copywriting, we naturally need to hire copywriters for projects.

We like to outsource that job rather than have copywriters on staff because you need to **match the right writer with the right client/industry**. We won't put a technical writer on a project for a restaurant where the copy needs to help make people hungry.

So, over the years, I've helped hire many different copywriters (and we're still looking for good ones for new projects – all the time). Since **I have experience hiring copywriters**, I thought I'd put together the things we look for when hiring a copywriter for website projects.

7 Things We Look for in a Copywriter



We've had the good and the bad, over the years. Then there are some projects where the client was picky and we had to change copywriters on a project several times. In those cases, the client clearly didn't get it but part of that does sometimes fall on the copywriter, too, so here are some tips to avoid that and show you what we look for.

1. Be Organized and Communicate Well

I'd say **the most important thing about hiring a copywriter is not the copy itself**. Surprised?

Think about it from our perspective. We have a project and there all kinds of pieces, parts, and tasks that need to be done like:

- Design wireframes
    - Desktop and mobile designs for the home page and inside pages
- Rendered designs
    - Desktop and mobile designs for the home page and inside pages
    - Illustration
- SEO
    - Keyword research
    - Competitor research
    - Optimization
- Coding (design to HTML, CSS, and JavaScript)
- PageSpeed optimization
- Administration
    - Sales support/writing the proposal
    - Client on-boarding

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    - General project management
    - Client meetings
    - Team meetings
    - Billing
- Testing
    - Desktop and mobile on multiple devices, browsers, and operating systems
- Training

Oh, and then manage a copywriter.

Since there's a lot for us to do, **we can't babysit a copywriter** or wonder where they're at or what's going on. They need to be pro-active, stay on task, communicate with us, and communicate with the client.

We need, at least:

- Weekly check-ins about the project status
- Reporting on how many hours have been used
- Timeline updates
- Updates on changes to the site map

We also need to see what copy is being developed, which means we should be copied on all communication with the client. It's our job to also make sure the client is happy, so we need to see what's going on and their feedback – to head off any pending disaster.

It's good to ask who is hiring you how they want you to communicate with the client and when – **in case they want things done in a certain way**. You need to match the style of the company you're working for, as well as respect their wishes.

There was one copywriter we had that did great work but when she would post messages in Basecamp (a project management tool), she wouldn't say who the message was for. She would just post the message and the client was wondering if it was for them or for us. We had to fix that, even though it was a small thing, but it would have been better if we didn't have to deal with that at all.

Good communication would, of course, mean:

- Timely check-ins (every 2-3 business days)
- Clear messages with a good subject line, summary, details, and call to action (if needed)
- Clearly directing the message to a certain person (as mentioned)
- Short paragraphs
- Business etiquette
- Put questions on their own, separate line so they're easy to see (if the client is just scanning messages)

- Proving a timeline – when something will be delivered or when the client needs to provide something by

We're hiring you but **you're not just representing yourself but our company as well**. Our clients know you're not full time with us but they know we chose you, so you need to meet the standards of our company so that our clients get a consistent, quality experience and service.

And then, of course, **make sure you understand the project well**. This would include knowing for sure what the deliverables are and when we need them. Find out when we'll be delivering wireframes and if copy is needed by then. Working with us on wireframes is huge, by the way, because your copy just fits better into the website if you work with our designers.

If we're not providing something you need, just ask. Be on top of things.

2. Be "Put Together" Well

This goes along with being organized but the copywriter we hire should be confident and know their stuff. They need to come across as an authority in writing copy.

You should **know the reason** behind what you're suggesting as good copy. Why is that headline good? Why are you choosing the direction you're taking this?

The work you provide and reasons behind what you're doing should not appear haphazard but be solid. You need to stand behind your work with solid reasoning. In other words, be educated.

Along with education, you shouldn't appear scatterbrained. Be prepared for meetings and have your stuff together.

Your appearance should be neat, too. Copywriting is creative, so things like colored hair and some eccentricity is perfectly fine but even that should appear to be on purpose and skillfully planned. You will meet with our clients (in person or visually), so you need to look put together.

3. We Expect You to Do Research



You will need to plan time to do research in the client's industry and then present your findings. **Everything you produce should be considered an asset and be presented that way.**

The research should be thorough and there should be clear personas created. Sometimes this is pretty easy but other times it won't be. Confirm with the client that you research matches the real world to make sure you're going in the right direction.

4. Back Up Your Work

I don't mean keep backup copies of things (that's a given) but own your work.

If a client questions something written, you can concede to their point but you don't always want to or else the copy loses its power. Again, you should **have reasons for everything you've written**, so back it up. Explain why something is written a certain way. You do want to let clients make some decisions and change some things to how they want but if, in the end, their changes will affect their bottom line, you need to stand firm and do what is best for the client's business.

Just remember this copy will be out there in front of the client's customers and it better perform well. If you do too much of what the client wants, then why did we all hire you in the first place? You're bringing your education and you bring value to the project. If all of

that is hacked away, then you really end up providing nothing. Clients like to see you stand firm on what you did, too (good clients, at least).

5. Make it Easy for Clients to Do Edits

Client edits can sometimes go really well or go really badly. Some of how it turns out is dependent on you and sometimes, well… crap happens, right?

Either way, **how you do the editing process should not get in the way or be a distraction**.

I'd say using Google Docs has proven to work really well because clients can easily get access, changes can be tracked, and it's very collaborative.

6. Present a Final Version

Closure, baby!

When your drafts get final approval from the client, present all your deliverables at once and close things out. In other words, **put a nice bow on it**. ?

This also means that at some point, you've asked for final approval and you've received the client's approval/blessing on the work. Don't leave it "sort of approved" or that can/will lead to problems.

Make your final presentation of the work a big deal. Present it all nicely.

7. Don't Flake Out on Us



I don’t know why I have to write this but we had one guy who just got all emotional a few times and completely just wigged out. He did. We were stunned. Something triggered something else… I don’t know, but it got ugly.

Things were fine one day and then completely opposite the next. Maybe something was our fault – I’m not sure what that would have been. This happened twice with this guy and then we mutually decided to just part ways. It was weird but that’s life.

And then another guy, a freelancer, had his living/personal situation change and he had to take a full time job instead of being freelance. He provided pretty good hand over of the project back to us and didn’t charge us any more, so it was fine, but it definitely threw a wrench into things for us. Life happens, we get it. He didn’t go into the project with this in mind, so it was understandable, but try to minimize this if possible.

One more… recently, we were working with a copywriter that a client provided. We hadn’t heard anything from her in almost two weeks, so I wrote a nice, polite email asking status. Her response was that she was “taken aback” by our request. What? Just nicely asking for an update was shocking to her? That made no sense. Her email response came in really quickly too (which indicates an emotional response).

I can understand anyone having a bad day but don’t take it out on people hiring you or your client’s partners. Pause before you respond if you know you’re responding

emotionally and not logically. Taking 15 minutes can make a huge difference and it shows maturity.

Don't get me wrong, **we have a lot of project go really, really well**. I just wanted to list a few situations where there were problems so you could see and try to understand things from our perspective.

How to Get Copywriting Projects

Now that you know what we're looking for, **we need to find you in order to hire you**.

We mainly hire copywriters by referral or else on LinkedIn. Sometimes, our clients have their own copywriter for a project and, if we like what they do, we'll ask our client if we can hire that copywriter for other projects as long as they don't compete with the client.

Your LinkedIn profile should show:

- What kind of writing you like to do
- A list of clients you've worked for (if you're allowed to do this by your clients)
- Samples of your work

We should also be able to see if you're organized and present yourself well (you know, all the stuff I mentioned already).

Some **bonuses** would be if you've done **SEO copywriting** before. That's a huge plus! It means you understand SEO (search engine optimization), how it works, and how to safely integrate keywords into copy. Knowing how to do SEO keyword research would also be a huge plus.

And you need to be local to the client in most cases. More work is being done virtually now, so this isn't as big of a deal as it used to be but there's just something about being with someone in person.

Regarding what kind of copy you write, to us, there are different kinds of writers:

- Technical writers
- "Salesy" writers
- Corporate writers
- Casual / comical writers
- Food writers
- Industrial / manufacturing writers

There are probably more types but for the projects we get, these are the categories we look for. The kind we hire the most are writers for manufacturing that have technical and

sales writing experience. After all, with most websites, the purpose is to sell something or get leads.

We sometimes need writers for restaurants, which I think is a different kind of writing. You may end up writing both content for the website and the client's menu.

Project Terms/Payment

Typically, our projects are 30-40 hours or more and you get a pretty nice hourly rate (I won't say how much here but it's good). It's a high enough rate to make sure it's worth it for you and since you're not an employee, we know you need to take out your own taxes, FICA, and pay your own health insurance, etc.

If you're new to copywriting, you can safely charge $40/hour. That's a rate where you're not too cheap but we won't be paying too much, which **minimizes the risk on our end**.

We usually get 40-50% of the project down as a deposit, so whatever percentage we get, we'll give you that percentage of the copywriting budget when starting a project. This gets the money issue out of the way so you can work.

As stated, we need you to report time used on a consistent basis. If you're starting to get close to the copywriting budget and you see there's more work to do or if the client has increased the scope of work, we need to know. The worst case would be that we gave you 40 hours and you first notify us of the time you've used at 35 or even 45 hours (exceeding the budget). If you exceed the budget without first asking, there's a good chance **you might not get paid for the extra time you've put in** since you didn't ask and that puts us in a bad place with the client.

If you had a project with 40 hours, for example, I'd expect reporting at these points:

- 20 hours
- 30 hours
- 35 hours

However, if you somehow reached 20 hours and there was no research done or anything to show for your work, we might fire you on the spot – we need to see some progress.

Remember to always show your value and do really good communication/reporting. **Do not make it a chore for us to work with you** – that's super important. **Make it easy for us to work with you.**

When the work is done, you'll get a check for the remainder of the project. That's typically the terms for a project around 40 hours (deposit and final payment when the work is completed). If the project was larger, like 100 hours or more, it would be reasonable to build in milestones where you could get payments along the way. It's up to you to work that out before the project begins – not halfway through the project.

Go the Extra Mile



Here are some things you can do to go the extra mile on a project. Doing these things impresses us and the client, which can **make us choose you first for upcoming projects**. Basically, if you want us to use you for more projects, do a little extra.

When you think about it, doing a little extra is like your advertising costs, which most businesses have. It's a part of doing business.

Here are some examples of going the extra mile on a copywriting project:

- Throw in some extra time you don't bill for if there are just a few hours you'll go over
- Provide extra assets/deliverables – sometimes these things don't take much time to make
- Provide multiple versions of some copy. Don't give the client too much homework but with certain, key sections, let's see some options so we or the client can make some decisions.

- When presenting your copy, include notes or make it clear to the design team how you want things to be laid out.
- Check with us after you've delivered your work and ask to see design drafts, etc. Maybe you can offer suggestions.

Show us you care about your work, the project, and our mutual client.

Interested in Being a Copywriter?

You can get paid pretty well as a copywriter – either at a business or as a freelancer.

If you freelance, just know that it'll be up to you to manage other things like sales, accounting, and so on, but you will have more freedom.

If you haven't gotten any training or education yet, then here are some resources for you:

- Content Writing Tips for Beginners
- *The Best Punctuation Book, Period*
- *The Copywriter's Handbook*
- *The Adweek Copywriting Handbook*

Next, get some projects to give as examples of your work. You can do them on your own:

- Rewrite a sales page
- Come up with sample headlines
- Write a sales page about a fake product
- Create a blog and write articles

Skip College and Become a Copywriter?

You know, that's not a terrible idea… in fact, it's pretty good.

College is a great experience but if you just get the training you need and start working as a copywriter, you can do pretty well without going to college. You'll save a TON of money and you can start working in a market that needs good copywriters since every business now has an online presence.

If I could do it over, I would seriously consider this option.

Copywriters sell. They're the new salespeople since it's all online now. Salespeople make good money no matter if they're online or in person. Heck, it's easier online because you're not facing real people – it's virtual. Become a great copywriter and nobody will care that you didn't go to college.

You just need to get down the psychological strategies copywriters use and you're halfway there. A really good headline can make or break a page. If you're good at the art of creating headlines, you can do very well.

To Conclude…

I hope this was helpful. Writing this helped me think through this process some more.

And, since I'm now seeing more and doing what copywriters do, I wanted to write this up to help anyone starting out being a copywriter get some projects.

What if You're New With No Experience?

If you don't have projects yet, then post some sample work or have it available upon request. You can take a page from a website and re-write it for free. This can be an example of work you've done (you don't have to say it was paid but just work you've done) or you can even offer it to the website owner and they might even pay you for it if the copy is good and it helps them (or they may hire you to work on more pages).

Again, **your LinkedIn profile is where we're mainly going to look**. We'll want someone local, so say where you live and talk a bit about yourself so we can see your personality and how you might be to work with. **List what kinds of projects you want.** There are so many companies like ours looking on LinkedIn that you're going to be a fit for some project, most likely. What I mean is, by saying what kinds of projects you would like to do, will most likely get you those kinds of projects, which makes you… happy, right?

Most Importantly…

I can't stress enough that you need to make it easy for us to work with you. This is a basic life skill – even with friendships and relationships. You don't want to be the person full of drama that nobody wants to deal with but the solid person that's fun to be around. If you're more on the drama end of the scale, maybe you need to first make some changes in your life to shed the drama before becoming a copywriter.

And have fun, darn it!

Copywriting is being the "cool kids" in a nerdy but cool kind of adult/career way. Really. If you're a good copywriter, those kinds of skills you use to write copy come out in your personality and life. You're more confident and, as I say, put together. You're solid. That kind of confidence shines through and is attractive.

And remember that **with great power, comes great responsibility**. As I've gotten into understanding the psychology behind copywriting, I've seen how you can carry these skills into your life and you can get people to do what you want them to do. It's scary how powerful it is, but you should only use these powers for good. Please promise me that.

Did I Miss Anything?

I probably did since this is a huge topic. Feel free to leave comments or opinions below in the comments. Please also share this article – thanks!

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