

# Making Money Writing Transcript

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*This is a transcript of the audio seminar, edited slightly for easy reading!*

You can find the audio version at [www.writershuddle.com/seminars/april2012](http://www.writershuddle.com/seminars/april2012)

Hi, I'm Ali Luke, and this is the April seminar for Writers' Huddle: Making Money Writing.

Unless you're just interested in writing for personal reasons (perhaps you're working on a memoir for your family, or you're working on fiction simply because you enjoy it, without really any thoughts of publication) then **at some stage you're probably going to start thinking seriously about how to make some money from your writing.**

It may even be the case that you're already making money, perhaps through freelancing, perhaps you have a blog or something, and even if you're not quite making money from that yet, you're certainly getting towards that stage, and you're looking to that as a possibility.

In this seminar, we're going to go through three broad ways of making money from writing, and those are:

1. Selling your writing to a publisher
2. Selling your writing to readers
3. Giving your writing away in order to build a business which may or may not be writing related

## How I Started Making Money from My Writing

I thought I'd begin by telling you just a little bit about my own evolution as a writer, and how my plans have changed slightly over probably the last decade.

When I started becoming serious about writing, I was working on fiction and I was very keen to be a published novelist, and not just a published novelist but

eventually somebody who could make a living through writing novels. I guess that's what I saw as 'real' writing: non-fiction writing didn't really interest me, and I perhaps thought that it in some way was less worthy.

**My dream was to land an agent, and then to get a novel published, and then on the back of that to get more deals** and to keep selling novels to the same publisher, and to keep doing that full-time.

That's obviously not how it's worked out, or I wouldn't be recording this today. I wouldn't have the Huddle, I wouldn't have my blog, I wouldn't have lots of the great things that I now love doing, because something I discovered along the way is that **there's a lot more money in non-fiction writing than in fiction.**

It's much easier to make some money, and certainly to make a full-time living, through non-fiction writing than through selling short stories or novels, which is what I started out trying to do.

Don't let that put you off writing fiction, though. There is money in fiction as well. Particularly, at the moment, lots of indie authors are doing well with novels on the Kindle and for other ebook readers. Obviously publishers are still taking on books, readers are still buying books, so if you love fiction and you enjoy writing it, then by all means keep doing that, but **be aware that fiction is probably not going to be an easy way to make money, certainly in the short to medium term.**

It takes a while to get good enough at fiction to really make some money from it, whereas with non-fiction it's a bit easier to get up to a standard where you can start making money.

## **Method #1: Selling Your Writing to a Publisher**

We'll start off with the first way of making money from your writing, which is to sell it to a publisher, and that can either be for a flat fee (so you get paid, say, for a magazine article, or a blog post) or it could be for royalties, which is most common with books.

So three ways of doing this are:

1. Paid blogging, which means writing articles for a website.
2. Magazine writing, which is similar, though it's for print publications, obviously.
3. Writing a book, which can be a non-fiction book or it could be a novel. (We're going to focus on non-fiction during this seminar, because that's where you're more likely to start making money.)

**All of these could provide you with regular income or work, at least over the medium term.** You might write a magazine column, for instance, over the course of perhaps a year or several years. If you're taken on as a paid blogger that would probably be something you do over months or years. If you write a book then it may just be the one book, but it would still take you perhaps a year or two to write.

When you sell your writing to the publisher, **you get the publisher's audience, as they've already done the work of building up a readership; they, in turn, will get some of the profit from your writing.** So when you sell the piece they will publish it in some form, whether they're a blog editor and they publish it online, or they're a magazine editor and they publish it in the magazine, or they're a publisher of books and they publish the book and so on.

## Pros and Cons of Selling Your Work to a Publisher

There are a number of different advantages to you here. **The key one is that the publisher is taking on much of the risk, particularly if you're getting a flat fee,** so if you've agreed that you'll get \$50 for a blog post, then you're going to get the \$50 when the post is published, whether or not it gets a good reception, whether or not it brings in much traffic for that blog, whether or not it makes back for the publisher that \$50 or not, and so on.

On the downside, you could do an article that does extremely well, that gets loads of traffic, that brings in thousands of new readers to the blog, but you'll still only get that \$50. So, unless you've got some kind of arrangement where you're being partially or completely on performance, then **you have the potential downside that however great your writing is, it's still going to get you the same rewards.**

## Getting Started with Blog or Magazine Articles

So, how can you get started with this kind of writing, then?

This is essentially freelancing, so you may want to take a look at the [Freelancing 101 seminar](#) for more on this.

**The easiest ways to get into selling writing to a publisher are blogging or magazine writing, both with non-fiction.**

So with blogging you might potentially do some free guest-posting first before working your way up to a paying gig.

With magazine writing, you don't necessarily need to have a relationship with the editor, but it does help if you've read a few issues of the magazine, you can write a really good pitch, and you can deliver them something that's going to be a really good fit. It may help if you've perhaps written letters to that magazine, or you've had some kind of correspondence with them before, but it's not absolutely essential by any means.

## You Don't Have to Know Everything

Something else to say here is that **you don't necessarily have to be an amazing writer to start making money through this method.** Obviously you need to be competent and you need to have a good grasp of the basics, but you don't necessarily need to feel that you've mastered everything.

Particularly with blogging, some sites just need a high volume of content, and it doesn't have to be absolutely perfect. It may be that the blog's owner, or editor there, will do some work to polish things up a little bit, and it could well be that if you've got some really good ideas, and some great subject matter knowledge, that they're willing to work with you.

So, **don't be put off having a go, even if you think that you're perhaps not quite there with the writing,** and if you do want a hand getting your writing up to scratch, please feel free to post it in the [Critiques forum of the Huddle](#), where we'll be really glad to give you a hand with that.

On the flip-side of that, if you're a really good writer but you don't have a lot of subject knowledge, bear in mind that **you can easily interview people, or do**

**some research, or get some quotes that can help you pull together a really good article.** There's a mailing list called HARO – Help A Reporter Out, which you can join, and by sending out a message on that list, which goes in with a lot of other messages in an email to people, then you will get responses from people who have knowledge in a particular area, so if you are looking for experts, looking for quotes, that's a potential place to go to.

## Method #2: Selling Your Writing to Readers

The next method, then, is selling your writing directly to readers, and this means that you're cutting out the middleman. You don't have a publisher, you're acting as your own publisher: this could mean that you've written an ebook, or even a physical book that you're producing through print-on-demand, and you're selling that book directly to your audience.

Your book isn't going to be on bookshelves, and it's not going to be promoted by a publisher who already has a big mailing list, or lots of contacts, or the ability to get reviews in the newspaper and so on, but **you're going to be selling that book to people who you have some form of contact with.**

Or you could have a different model here, you could have something like an online newsletter or magazine, or a print newsletter or magazine, that people pay to subscribe to, or you could have a membership site that people pay to belong to. That's what I have with the Huddle, where I get a monthly fee from all of the members, which allows me to produce seminars and mini-courses and so on.

## Pros and Cons of Selling Your Work Direct to Readers

Again, there are advantages and disadvantages here.

One of the advantages is that **if your writing is really good, if you do a great job, then you're going to make more money.** So, if you write a great ebook that people recommend to their friends, you're obviously going to make more than if you write an average ebook, where people don't ask for their money back, but it's not something they'd necessarily shout about.

If you've got an online magazine, or a membership site or something, that's going really well, again you can grow the membership, you'll get more people coming in and so on, and in the end that's going to result in more profit for you.

**The disadvantage here, obviously, is that you take on all the risk**, so you might spend months and months writing an ebook that nobody buys, or you could spend ages building a membership site and end up with five members, and it might just not be worth your time at all for that.

**Another difficulty here is that you need to do all the work in building up your audience.** Some writers really enjoy doing this. They like the challenge of it, they find they really get into the marketing side of things.

Other writers just want to be able to write their book, or their articles, or whatever it might be, and not have to worry about building up a readership for those.

## **Getting Started: Writing and Publishing Ebooks**

Something that I thought I'd touch on in just a bit more detail here is ebooks, because these are obviously becoming more and more popular, with the Kindle and with other e-readers really taking off over the past few years, and **this has opened up possibilities that just weren't there even five years ago.**

In the past ebooks tended to be PDF files, and that's still quite common in many areas, particularly in the blogging world. My own [Blogger's Guides](#) are PDFs, they've got a lot of graphics and colour, and that's the easiest format for me to provide them in and for people to view them in.

Obviously ebooks are now becoming more popular in mobi and epub formats, so those are for the Kindle and for other e-reading devices, and these are not too technically difficult to produce.

It's not the easiest thing in the world to make the epub and mobi versions, PDFs are fairly straightforward, but even if you're not perhaps particularly technically minded, you can always pay someone to do file conversion for you, so say you've got your ebook written as a word document, you could get someone to turn it into the right sorts of files.

**So making an ebook, technically speaking, isn't too much of a challenge. The biggest challenge is writing it and selling it to an audience.**

Ebooks can be fiction or non-fiction. Again, non-fiction is where the easier money is. Non-fiction's much easier to market because you can find people who are interested in that particular topic, and you can tell them about the benefits of your book, whereas with fiction you perhaps have to just rely on people thinking your book might be a good and entertaining read, when there are a lot of other novels that can make similar promises.

**A good way to get started here is to start building up your audience before you begin writing your ebook, or certainly during the writing of it.** Assuming you're writing non-fiction, this would mean having a good idea of what you want to write, and building up a readership of people who are interested in that topic, so that could be through a blog, it could be through a Tumblr account, it could be through social media like Twitter, Facebook, and so on.

You can see how I do that with my blog, Aliventures. The content on Aliventures is aimed at writers, and it helps to draw writers in, and it means that I can perhaps later sell them an ebook, or one of my other products as well.

You don't necessarily have to get a massive readership before launching an ebook, you could just put your ebook out there and just gradually promote it over time and just hope that it sells. I certainly don't want to put you off from getting started, but it helps if you've got a readership – not just because you've got the people who you can sell your ebook to. **You can also ask those people what they'd like to see in your ebook**, so you could run a survey, for instance, giving them the opportunity to tell you which topics are most relevant to them, perhaps what stage they're at, so whether they're complete beginners, or whether they're a bit more advanced than that.

This is something that I've done a lot of work on, because I've written not only my own ebooks, but I've published ebooks for other writers, and I'm also writing a book for Wiley's *For Dummies* series, *Publishing eBooks For Dummies*, so if you would like a seminar that goes into a bit more either on the writing and marketing side of ebooks, or the technicalities of putting an ebook into the

right format, then let me know and I'll be more than happy to put something together on that.

## **Method #3: Writing for Free and Building a Business**

The third method of making money from your writing is to write for free, and then use your writing to build up a business.

Many blogs work on this kind of model. They produce lots and lots of posts for free, but that doesn't mean that they're just doing it for altruistic reasons, and that they're not making any money from it – often this can be the backbone of a very strong business model.

**So, blogs that are doing this might sell advertising, in the same way that local newspapers, or even bigger newspapers, sell advertising, and that could cover all or some of their costs, at least.** These blogs might use their content to get sales of a particular product, so if you go to [Copyblogger](#), they're well known as a blog, but they also have several products that they sell, and now their homepage actually advertises those products.

**As a blogger, you can also use affiliate links, which means you're promoting other people's products,** so you could be linking to books on Amazon, for instance, and you get a small commission on each book that sells.

**And as a blogger you can also do coaching or consulting, or you can sell physical products,** so that can be anything from handcrafted items to paper copies of your book. You can use your blog as a way to gain an audience, and to build the trust and the loyalty with that audience, which means that they're more likely to buy from you.

This is a method used by people who might not consider themselves primarily as writers, so I know bloggers who are life coaches, or business coaches, or nutritionists, or fitness experts, people from all sorts of professions, who are using their blog as the way to build up an audience and to bring custom to them.

## **Pros and Cons of Writing for Free**

So, again, advantages and disadvantages of this method:

**One advantage is that it's very easy to get started and to begin to get an audience because you're providing things for free,** and to perhaps start getting some feedback as well on your writing.

That means that this can be quite an encouraging way to go, because it's quite immediate, and it's easy to get some results early on. Even if you're not necessarily getting money coming in, you'll at least have a readership and maybe some comments or some emails from those people.

**The disadvantage is that it's easy to pour a lot of time into building up a blog or a really great resource, without necessarily having the means to monetise that,** or to really get an audience of people who are going to be willing to buy products or services from you.

It's definitely a good idea to think about this in quite businesslike terms right from the start, not just as a hobby that you eventually hope might make a little bit of money.

You particularly want to think carefully about your business model in terms of whether you're going to make money from advertising and, if so, how much, because covering a blog or any other resource in ads is going to put people off, so it may harm your attempts to build a readership. If you've got your own products or services that you're trying to sell, then those ads may end up in direct competition with you: it's obviously not a good idea if you're promoting your competitors on your own website.

## **Getting Started: Setting up Your Blog**

In terms of getting started, [there's a mini-course in the Huddle on starting your first blog](#), which will take you through the process of setting up a blog on **wordpress.com**. This site lets you have a blog for free, and some webspace for that blog, so it's a great place to begin, especially if you're not, perhaps, totally confident with the technology.

The other option that I'd recommend would be setting up your own website on your own hosting space with **wordpress.org**, which is the self-hosted version, but both **wordpress.com** and **wordpress.org** are relatively similar to

work with, and you can switch from wordpress.com to the self-hosted wordpress.org.

**Something else you'll want to think about here is what actual topic you want to write about**, so you don't have to write about writing, you could write about gardening, you could write about music, you could write about anything that interests you and you can potentially make some money as well, so something where people might be willing to spend money either on books about that topic, or on actual products that you could sell.

## Deciding What's Right for You

So, which of the three methods is right for you, then?

We've covered selling your writing to a publisher, who then sells it on to readers, we've looked at selling your writing directly to readers, and we've looked at giving your writing away, but using it as a promotional tool to help build up a business ...

... and there's no one right answer here.

**I like to use a combination of all three of these methods, and you can certainly do something similar.** In practise this might mean that you have a blog that draws people in through free content, and that you then sell those people an ebook, or maybe a series of ebooks that you've written, or you sell them a particular service, like coaching or consulting, and then you might even get a book deal on the strength of what you've been doing.

You might have built up a reputation, perhaps, within your field, maybe you've spoken at some conferences and so on, and that's given you the leverage to have a book deal with a traditional publisher, so there's no reason why you can't combine the methods like that.

**When it comes to making a living from writing, it's a good idea to have multiple streams of income**, and not to only have one way of making money, because that means that even if something happens to be down one month, there's a good chance that a different income stream may be up, and if one

particular project doesn't pan out so well, then you've got plenty more projects that can still be making you money.

What I'd really recommend is to explore the possibilities.

## **If You're Already Making Some Money Writing**

If you're already making money from writing, look at ways that you could take that further, not necessarily by just going forwards further down the path that you're already on, but by exploring other paths that might branch off from there.

So if, say, you're making some money from freelance writing, that might mean that you could look at doing perhaps an ebook, or perhaps doing something where you'd be getting royalties rather than just a flat fee. That way, you're not just trading your time for money, you're maybe making a little bit of cash from other things, like ebooks or affiliate sales, or physical products, even when you're not actually at your desk working.

## **Be Flexible and Open to New Ideas**

**Don't get too set on one particular method of making money, or one plan.**

When I started out as a writer, I was convinced that all I wanted to do was write fiction, I didn't see myself ever doing non-fiction.

At the point that I was really beginning to get into writing seriously, blogging was only just taking off, and blogs were more of a medium for personal diaries and so on, rather than for serious professional websites, so there was no chance that I was even going to imagine that I could make money from blogging, either as a freelancer or through having my own blog, and now, of course, I make money at both of those.

I really love what I do today, I'm really glad to be a full-time writer, and although I do still write fiction some of the time, I can't see myself wanting to now live a life where all I did was writing fiction, I think I'd just get bored of that, and I'd really miss the interaction that I have through lots of my non-fiction writing as well.

**Whatever stage you're at currently, do spend a bit of time exploring where you might want to go next**, and maybe even try out a few things that you don't necessarily think will be quite right for you, you might be surprised to find what you do enjoy.

## What Else Would You Like to Learn?

Obviously we've covered a lot in this seminar, without going into too much detail.

I'd love to go into more detail on any of these topics, so if, for instance, you'd like me to talk about the process of putting an ebook together, as I said before, then please do let me know either by email or in the forums.

If you'd be interested in more about building up a blog and getting readership there, again just let me know, and I'd be very happy to talk about that.

So, if there's a specific way of making money through writing that you are looking into, or that you've started exploring, then feel free to open up a discussion [in the forums](#).

As well as it being a possible seminar topic, it's also something where we can hopefully pool our knowledge, and get ideas from one another and just bounce some things around, and hopefully get to a position where everyone in the Huddle who wants to make some money from their writing is able to do that.

I've put up [a specific thread for this seminar in the Seminar forum](#), and you're welcome to post any questions there about anything that I've said that you perhaps want a slightly fuller answer.

[There's also a worksheet for this seminar that you can download here](#), which should help you to just have a quick overview of the things that we've discussed, and help you to take some first steps towards making some money or making some more money from your own writing.