

OCTOBER MEETING

Experts Will Tell How to Find Really Good Writing Assignments Online

BY NANCY SOLOMON

I don't know about you, but I need all the help I can get to find really good freelance assignments online. And by really good, I mean assignments that pay well.

Which online job sites are worth my time? Which sites should I avoid? Should I even bother with bidding sites? If so, which ones – and how do I bid? How can I turn a listing for a full-time job on Indeed.com, say, into a freelance assignment? How much do online assignments pay? What's revenue share? Do I have to be a very fast writer? What are typical assignments? Do I need an online presence? What's an online presence?

Those are just a few of my questions. Bring yours and get the inside dope about how to find really good assignments online at the Oct. 11, 2011, IWOC meeting. Our presenters are Sam Bauch – who's joining us by Skype -- and Angela Atkinson.

Bauch went to work for Solvate, a nonbidding online job site that matches freelancers to assignments, in January. He works on the talent and marketing team. He vets applicants

(we'll find out exactly what that means on Oct. 11) and provides support for Solvate talent, which includes making sure the website works well for freelancers. He also maintains Solvate's Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels.

He really knows the Internet, and he really likes freelancers.

In 2005, Atkinson turned her years of corporate communications experience into what's become a successful freelance business. In addition to being a freelance writer, editor, researcher, and online news reporter, she somehow finds the time to create websites, manage The WM Freelance Connection on LinkedIn (among other sites), conduct workshops, release her first nonfiction e-book, and be a wife and mother. Luckily for us, she's a big believer in helping other freelancers succeed.

Even if you're making money hand over fist through the Internet, come to the meeting on Oct. 11

anyway. There's always something new to learn. And it will be good for the rest of us to hear about your experiences with online assignments.

IWOC members, guests, and total strangers are welcome. The meeting is on Tuesday, Oct. 11, at National Lewis University, 122 South Michigan Ave., Room 4020, in Chicago – across the street from the Art Institute. Admission is free to IWOC members, \$15 for nonmembers who pay at the door, and \$10 for nonmembers who preregister at www.iwoc.org/calendar.htm.

Social hour with snacks and beverages starts at 5 p.m. The program runs from 6 p.m. to approximately 7 p.m., and there will be plenty of time for questions. After the meeting, attendees are invited to reconvene at a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own-dinner to continue the conversation, catch up, and wind down. For more information, please contact IWOC at 800-804-IWOC (4962) or go to www.iwoc.org/iwoc.events.htm. We'll see you there. ♡



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Stet is published 11 times per year by the **Independent Writers of Chicago**, 28 East Jackson Building, Suite 1020 #W686, Chicago, IL 60604, 800/804-4962. Internet address: www.iwoc.org. Copy submissions and advertising materials are due by the 15th of the month preceding publication. All submissions and ideas will be considered. The subscription rate of \$1 per year is included in the annual membership dues. Copyright ©2011 by Independent Writers of Chicago.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/DAVID EPSTEIN

A Column, a Column, My Kingdom for a . . .

In the words of that profound American philosopher, Chester A. Riley, "What a revoltin' development this is!" I have to write my first column as IWOC president, writing for an audience of writers, so I get a bad case of Writer's Block. I could start by saying that I'm proud and gratified you've chosen me to join the distinguished line of IWOC's previous presidents. I want to—and should—thank Roger Rueff, our Jefe Máximo, for all his hard work in leading us effectively for four years—with such style and panache.

All of this is true and important. But where to go from there? I tried sending Joan photos of three perfectly good—indeed, famous—columns: Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square (an admiral); Trajan's column in Rome (an emperor); and the Washington Monument, which is a truly Presidential and very tall column. Certainly enough to fill a page. But Joan insists on having a column of mundane text (what we are learning to call "content").

What to do? What to do?

When desperate, plagiarize! I went to the *Stet* archives at www.iwoc.org to read first columns by some past presidents. Found some good material. Jim Leman wrote, "Now, as your new IWOC president for 2003-2004, I have a similar goal: to let IWOC burn down." He went on to give specific steps to meet that goal, and in fact to strengthen IWOC. I also resolve that the new board and I will try

not to let IWOC burn down.

Or listen to Christina Foster, Jim's immediate predecessor, in February 2003: "In this stumbling, and simultaneously expectant, economy, preparing for possible war, times are tight for every one of us, in one way or another." Truly there is nothing new under the sun. She continues in that column, "For a while now, IWOC's board has been kicking around the idea of a group strategy session—a sort of brief retreat, during which we could evaluate critically all the challenges we're facing as an organization, and together let our minds wander among new possible solutions."

Does history usually repeat itself this literally? For several months (with no reference to the 2003 project), the board has been talking about a similar informal retreat, and we are now planning to make this happen before the end of the year. It won't be just board members, but a half-day board-plus think tank on a weekend. We're aiming for a representative group of 12-18 members, including the board (multiples of 2 and 3 have mystic powers). If you have a strong desire to contribute to this project and are willing to give up most of a Saturday, please email me at president@iwoc.org.

Like the whole country—indeed, the whole world—we writing professionals are struggling through hard times, finding clients more elusive and rates under pressure for many reasons. But in many ways, the rapidly



changing media markets and technology are making life especially tough for writers. It's not just that cyber-text has eaten into the print media markets, but the very ways freelance writers have to market and promote our work to existing and new clients are experiencing upheavals of 9+ on the Richter scale. Who writes "query letters"? Have you started a blog yet? Would it help you find new business if you did?

We must learn to navigate the fast and tricky currents of this brave new net world, but the work is out there. Even as traditional print outlets are shrinking and freelance competition is increasing, more written "content" is being published than ever before—by businesses; associations; city, state, and federal agencies; web media; Huffington Post; Groupon, etc. In fact, the world is drowning in a tsunami of shoddy prose, sloppy reporting, and shallow analysis from dime-a-word websites. Writers of skill and talent are more needed than ever, but we need to use new tools and look in different places to promote our work and find clients who will pay fairly for real value.

That's why an organization like IWOC can be especially valuable now. IWOC is a great resource for sharing knowledge and experience and learning to navigate these new seas. Not to mention support and encouragement. However, we must help IWOC adapt to new currents.

Continued on page 5.

Freelancing from the Hirer's Perspective

BY ROGER RUEFF

When it comes to finding employment, freelance writing is a lot like professional acting. A freelance writer must audition for jobs, have ready a resume of past accomplishments, network with others in the business, and hone his/her skill set to meet the current needs of the marketplace. And just as an actor must figure out where and how to look for work, so must the freelance writer—and the task in both fields



employs similar tools.

For actors, the two main tools for getting work are agents and industry contacts—producers and/or directors who are directly involved in hiring decisions. The freelance-writer analogs comprise staffing firms and executives with hiring authority, respectively, both of whose perspectives were insightfully represented at the September IWOC meeting.

Staffing Firm Perspective

The staffing-firm perspective was offered by Judi Wunderlich, vice president and co-founder of WunderLand Group, a staffing firm that matches freelance writers with contract writing assignments and full-time employment. As Wunderlich described the process, writing assignments and employment opportu-

nities come to any staffing firm by way of clients who hire the firm to find writers with specific skill sets. To do so, the firm taps its own database of freelancers and/or makes use of the Internet to find qualified writers who match the job requirements. When a potential writer-client match appears, the staffing firm makes the necessary introductions—which often involve face-to-face interviews—and manages the initiation and payment aspects of the assignment. In the case of WunderLand Group, the writer is employed and paid by the staffing firm itself, which covers its own expenses by taking a cut from the hourly rate charged to the client.

On the plus side of the arrangement (for the freelancer), a staffing firm can provide exposure to job opportunities that the freelancer might not be able to find on his/her own. In addition, some staffing firms, such as WunderLand Group, offer benefits (think insurance and retirement) to their freelancers. On the minus side, any job obtained through a staffing firm necessarily pays less to the freelancer than it would if he/she found the same job on his/her own. And according to Wunderlich, 95 percent of the freelance jobs offered by her firm require the writer to work at the client site—which negates the work-at-home perk of the freelance writing lifestyle.

On balance, she recommended that freelance writers consider staffing firms as just one more set of resources to include in their job-

getting toolboxes—and that they view any jobs obtained by means of a staffing firm as temporary employment.

Executive Perspective

Antonio Hernandez, communications manager for Commonwealth Edison (ComEd), addressed the issue of freelancing from the perspective of an executive with hiring authority. He noted that in over 20 years of public relations and marketing communications work, he has used freelancers in every one of his corporate assignments, to leverage resources outside the company. Although he does hire freelance writers directly, he also uses staffing firms on occasion, and he recommended that freelance writers register with many different staffing firms to make themselves available through that employment channel. He also recommended that freelance writers get involved with organizations like IWOC.

Shared Perspectives: Q&A

In the Q&A session that followed their presentations, Wunderlich and Hernandez addressed matters concerning the use of online networking resources, such as LinkedIn, as well as networking in general. Both speakers agreed that LinkedIn is rapidly positioning itself as the top online recruiting tool for job seekers and hirers. Wunderlich noted that it is becoming an essential tool for her firm to use when searching for freelance writers, and Hernandez added that corporate recruiting firms and human resources depart-

ments are using LinkedIn more than ever before.

Both speakers recommended participating actively in LinkedIn groups, like the IWOC group, and using LinkedIn proactively—that is, as a tool to search for potential hirers, not merely a place to hang another Internet shingle. Wunderlich also recommended that freelancers construct their LinkedIn profiles as one-page “sell-sheet” marketing brochures, ensure that their profiles contain keywords specific to their writing specialties, and include positive recommendations from former clients, if possible.

With regard to face-to-face networking, both speakers agreed strongly with the anti-wallflower philosophy—that timidity is not a path to employment. They differed, however, in their feelings regarding persistence in following up a networking contact. Whereas Wunderlich ignores follow-up e-mails from freelancers with whom she is not familiar, Hernandez appreciates the occasional follow-up e-mail (and does not mind the snail mail or phone call) and tends to remember better those who take the time to follow up.

So no, there are no footlights or applause. No singing, dancing, or Ben Nye makeup kits. But when it comes to searching for work, freelance writers must heed the same advice as their actor counterparts: Polish your resume, network with others in the craft, build and hone an online presence, and make yourself known and available to those who hire.

And smile! ☺

Be A Giver: Refer Jobs to Writers' Line

BY KIM MACGREGOR

We've got an opportunity for you to generate some good karma.

IWOC is working to increase the number and variety of opportunities that get posted to our Writers' Line ... and we need your help. Please refer opportunities to Writers' Line when:

You're asked to do a job that's not a good fit.

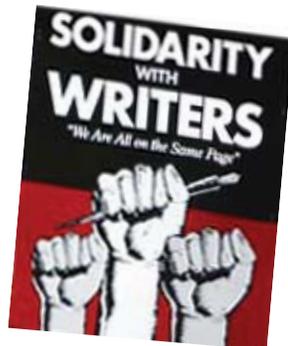
It happens. You get a call or e-mail about a project that's beyond your comfort zone, or perhaps it's a temp or full-time position when you're only interested in freelance gigs. Or maybe (we hope!) you're too busy to take on more work. Rather than just turn the opportunity away, you could steer the inquirer to Writers' Line. Simply direct him/her to visit www.iwoc.com and click on "Post a Job."

You see an opportunity posted at another site.

We all come across opportunities online that don't match our skills/experience. When you do, please email a link to Kim MacGregor, Writers' Line Chair, at jobs@iwoc.org. We'll check with the employer to see if the position is still open. If so, we ask for permission to post the opportunity to Writers' Line. Either way, we have a new prospective hirer to add to our database—and perhaps more jobs to come in the future.

Questions? Contact Kim MacGregor at 630-359-0055; kim@kimmacgregor.com

P.S. – We'd be so grateful if you'd post about Writers' Line on your social media channels. Interested? Contact Kim for verbage you can use.✍



You'll Be Much Cleverer After You Read This

BY JOEN KINNAN

Why will you be much cleverer? Because I'm going to teach you a new word with examples to dazzle your friends and confound your enemies. The fact that I'll also fill an uncomfortably large expanse of white space is totally immaterial and certainly not my purpose. Perish the thought!

This astounding and unfamiliar word is *paraprosdokian*. See, I knew you never heard of it. Well, kiddies, a paraprosdokian is a figure of speech in which the latter part of the sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected in a way that causes you to reinterpret the first part. Paraprosdokians are often humorous, and they sometimes play on a particular word that has a double meaning, creating a *syllipsis*.

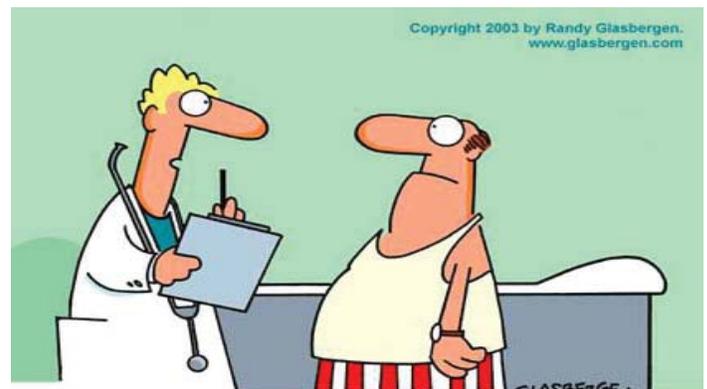
Before your eyes glaze over, let me give you some examples: "If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong." "The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese." Or, how about, "The last thing I want to do is hurt you, but it's still on the list."

Here are a couple I like: "You do not need a parachute to skydive. You only need a parachute to skydive twice." "I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not sure." "Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine." And I love this one: "I want to die peacefully in my sleep like my grandfather, not screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car."

This one is a cautionary paraprosdokian: "When tempted to fight fire with fire, remember the Fire Department usually uses water." Politicians have raised the principle behind the following to a high art. "To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first and call whatever you hit the target."

Not mentioning any names, but this one could hit home for a writer or two: "The place where a train stops is a train station. The place where a bus stops is a bus station. I have a work station on my desk." This one's cute too: "The voices in my head may not be real, but they have some good ideas."

Enough, already. I have more of these witticisms, but I'm saving them for dinner after the next IWOC meeting, where I plan to be an absolutely sparkling conversationalist.✍



"What fits your busy schedule better, exercising one hour a day or being dead 24 hours a day?"

**IWOC Welcomes
New Members
Adam Smit
&
Royal Pitchford
&
Returning Members
David Cohen
&
Kirk Anderson**

President's Column, Continued from page 2.

We're already moving in new directions, offering programs on different aspects of online research (e.g., an insider tour of Google), writing for online markets (web media, blogs), and how writers can use LinkedIn, Facebook, and other social media to build modern self-marketing strategies. The IWOC programs committee, chaired by Stewart Truelsen, with Jim Hodl, Karen Schwartz and Nancy Solomon, is delivering practical programs with a forward-looking focus for this fall, and they are already planning for next spring. They're looking for new speakers, topics and formats. If you have concrete suggestions, please talk to Stu or someone else on the committee.

Writers' Line is being substantially revamped under a new team led by Kim McGregor. She just took over in September and is already implementing new methods like networking each month at a different organization, such as IABC, where she can talk with many people who hire freelance writers. She also plans to do a quarterly e-newsletter to prospective hirers.

Our PR committee, chaired until now by Michelle Beuscher (just elected to the board), and including Laura Stigler and Katherine Mikkelsen, has been working to expand our contacts list. They are also coordinating more closely with programs and Joen Kinnan as *Stet* editor to get earlier and better publicity for IWOC activities, including monthly programs.

But our rapidly shifting world demands that IWOC must continue to evolve to make sure we are meeting the needs of our members today, attracting new members, and preparing to meet future needs. That's why we need that board-plus retreat to give a group of members some mental space and time to think and talk frankly and productively about tough questions like these:

What types of writers are we trying to serve, and what value do we offer them now?

How well are we meeting current professional needs of members? How do they perceive IWOC?

Are there unmet needs we should try to meet to retain members and attract new ones?

Do members of the Chicago writing community see value in belonging to IWOC?

Do the people, companies, and other organizations that hire writers think of IWOC as a key source of talent?

How well are we communicating the value we offer? How can we do that better? How can we strengthen our communications and publicity strategy, especially our online presence and IWOC's own strategy for using social media?

How can we make IWOC more useful, accessible, and convenient for members and prospective members? Do we need to consider changes to practical details like time, location, format, and content of monthly meetings? What about other IWOC "gatherings," in person and/or on the web?

This month we're going to send all members a short survey to help identify key questions we should focus on at the retreat. Please take 5-10 minutes to answer that survey as soon as you get it while it is fresh in your mind. That will help make sure everyone's voice is heard at the retreat. And I hope that will just be the start of a conversation among board and other members about the future of our organization.

There's plenty to do in IWOC—and you can get plenty out of IWOC—but only if you get involved. So let's hear from you.

(Next month: What *really* happened to Riley.)

Calendar

October 11

IWOC Monthly Meeting. "How to Find Really Good Writing Assignments Online." Speakers are Sam Bauch and Angela Atkinson. Nonmembers welcome. For more information, call 800/804-4962 or visit www.iwoc.org.

November 8

IWOC Monthly Meeting. We think this is a first for IWOC. The program will be about food writing. Details coming soon. Check the website.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact webmaster@iwoc.org.

October 25 (4th Tuesday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Check before you come. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend. Note: The lunch is now on the 4th Tuesday, not the 4th Thursday as it had been in the past.

November 3 (1st Thursday)

IWORP Monthly Breakfast. Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

Browse Resources

See What's Doing in Coming Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG