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Intro to Professions in Writing

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### Writers: Quit Selling Yourself Short!

The pursuit of a degree in English is more often than not scrutinized by those who don't understand the countless promising opportunities within this intrinsically open field. In reality many, but not all, of the challenges that come with following a career in writing are quite similar to those found in the majority of both small and large business positions. When narrowed down to the basics, technically, everything is a business, even an individual working for themselves. The typical positions attached to modern writing and modern business similarly deal with complications as a result of competition, work complacency, and attempting to be continually strategic when it comes to understanding target audiences. However, writers additionally face unique encounters with writer's block, procrastination, and "finding their voice" on a daily basis. Degrees based in writing, and in a broader sense communication, actually provide students with the tools they need to hone a specific set of skills that could help in proficiently overcoming all such obstacles. These skills would give anyone who can master them the ability to garner success through a multitude of career paths; one of the most diverse of these paths being a career in content marketing.

Similar to the world of business marketing, the world of content writing battles with conflicts surrounding cut-throat competition, getting stuck in a rut of "going through the motions," and staying on top of creating the best strategy possible to target a specific audience.

Content writers have very little room for error when it comes to producing the best in their respective fields. In an article entitled “11 Big Content Marketing Challenges (and How to Overcome Them),” Dan Shewan explains that “it’s better to publish one truly excellent post per week than post five mediocre posts every week... with so many publishers vying for attention, the only think that will differentiate you from other publishers in your industry is quality content” (Shewan). An English degree prepares writers to think outside the box and be creative in terms of setting themselves apart from the rest. Students of all writing backgrounds have surely come up against somehow creating a new claim out of an idea that has been analyzed and reworked thousands, if not millions, of times. (Anyone else remember struggling to elucidate on classics like *Moby Dick* in some new, insightful way that hasn’t already been done before?)

Effective content writers understand the importance of an enthusiasm towards creative thinking. Writers, for the most part, write to be heard. If they are writing for the readers, then it stands that they must know people because their content has to connect with others in order to be successful.

Ben Allen is a freelance content creator and digital marketer who aims to help increase the success of small businesses. He points out how the ever-evolving nature of target marketing has become a challenge for content writers in an article entitled “The Marketers Approach to Overcoming the Content Writer’s Block” for Marketing Insider Group. Allen elaborates saying “as new research, technology, and tactics are developed, you need to have spot on personas that actually represent your target market [now], not... a year or two ago” (Allen). In order to understand people content writers, and truly any writer, must persistently seek out what will persuade or entertain their intended audience. And in today’s world of many options that means not only knowing what an audience wants to consume, but knowing how they want to consume it. For content writers especially, Inbound Marketing advises that

“writing compelling, actionable posts is completely pointless if your audience would rather listen to a podcast or watch a live broadcast on Periscope or Facebook live... and even if your target audience does love reading blog posts, adding visual content greatly increases its effectiveness and makes it that much more compelling.”

Students with an English degree have spent a significant amount of time honing their analytical skills and critical thinking, two key components any marketing position would require in achieving the optimal comprehension of a target audience. Writers from all subtopics of the study of language have the opportunity to take a variety of courses that would seem to be elective but still fall under the core curriculum. Courses based in creative writing typically participate in group workshops in which students get the chance to critique their classmates and to respectively listen to several peers critique their own work. Internship courses connect students with career environments of interest. Modernized writing courses connected to digital media teach students how to take advantage of the tools technology provides to become better writers and understand how to better market themselves in today's world. English degrees arguably have more options now than ever before when it comes to turning one's education into a fulfilling profit in a variety of career fields.

However, there are a few challenges unique to writing in and of itself that students of literature and language are similarly well equipped to fight. The issues of writer's block and procrastination come with an exhaustive list of solutions, but there are a few general resolves that well-studied writers are certainly prepared with. Ben Allen continues his argument for the importance of understanding target audiences in relation to overcoming writer's block. He suggests researching trends such as when certain topics get more search traffic, content types that are more profitable for a particular business, or looking into what could possibly be the next big

thing in a particular industry. Allen suggests further that through “properly analyzing available data, you can get ahead of the curve with your content” (Allen). Any English major knows that with enough continuous research, a writer is bound to stumble upon new information and find inspiration. But, even solo research can become monotonous to the point of growing stagnant. While writers tend to work very well by themselves, the majority can excel greatly within a group environment. Allen urges collaborative writers, especially those in content marketing, to keep a few things in mind in order to achieve successful results from group work. His simple recommendations include making sure all participants come prepared and up-to-date on the topic at hand, sticking to smaller, hand-picked groups, and not inviting the boss or person in charge in order to create a more relaxing and less-stressful setting for better brainstorming (Allen). It is also important to remember, in solo or group brainstorming, that no idea is a bad idea because the more thoughts that are shared the greater chance there will be of discovering a good one!

Best-selling author Jeff Goins seconds the significance behind keeping an incessant flow of ideas as a writer in order to overcome procrastination. The choices for tackling this particular issue are endless; Goins lists solutions such as eliminating distractions, reading, creating and sticking to a routine, free-writing, or browsing through a few favorite inspirational quotes to get that extra boost. Above all else, he asserts that “movement is critical... you need to generate momentum to get out of your funk” (Goins). Any student who has taken more than one writing or literature course in a semester is accustomed to breaking through the barrier of procrastination; how else would they be able to conduct the proper amount of research, writing, and feverous editing it takes to finish up to four or five lengthy papers or projects at a time? Goins goes so far as to even add a few reminders on getting past some of the habits even experienced writers can find themselves falling back into. He warns against setbacks such as refusing to write altogether

(momentum, remember?) and succumbing to distractions such as “wallowing in self-pity or watching television” until one feels “inspired” (Goins). A writer armed with a degree in the liberal arts is well studied on the concept of writing and researching until they find something that inspires them, not the other way around.

There is one final issue faced by writers in general and indefinitely by those fitting the content marketing career field. This issue is perhaps one of the most difficult: finding one’s voice. The solution, though worded just as plainly, is arguably just as time consuming: finding one’s niche. With access to information on pretty much anything at their fingertips, content writers can become tempted to stretch themselves thin by attempting to focus on too many different subjects or projects at once. Narrowing focus to attain a continually profound understanding of a certain topic will increase not only the quality of one’s content but the quantity of its success within respective target audiences. Neil Patel reiterates the importance of quality when it comes to content writing stating that “if you look at the trends in content marketing, you’ll see that people prefer depth... in the marketing funnel itself, long-form content – usually the deep stuff – is what helps users circle closer towards a purchase, encourages loyalty, and improves user experience” (Patel). In an article for the Inbound Marketing business webpage “Overcoming Content Overload: 4 Tactical Ways to Create Content That Stands Out” resolutions for finding one’s voice involve vocally expressing opinions and finding “the niche within your niche” because possessing a unique expertise or skill set in regards to a certain topic “can really set you apart from your competitors” (Inbound Marketing). The vastness associated with narrowing down one’s interests should be seen as an opportunity for greatness rather than an inhibitor to an individual’s success as a writer. Endless topics for content just means that a writer has pretty much the world to choose from when it comes to following a career in

marketing. A personal suggestion? The level of passion that an individual brings into their career will correlate to their levels of both success and happiness. Create a narrowed list of unquestionable interests and from that any writer will find at least a handful of topics that could be starting points to discovering their niche.

While business degrees limit students to business positions and teaching degrees limit students to teaching positions (the list could continue down the line), degrees based in writing and literature arguably hold little limitations comparatively. Communication is the basis for any job in any field, but the skills required to master it are not fully taught in all paths of study. Even students in business marketing may be proficient when it comes to problem solving or seeing things from a more factual, scientific standpoint, but they oftentimes lack the persistence towards sharpening their creativity when it comes to the work place. And in a world where competition is as vigorous as ever, creativity is key in marketing one's self in a way that makes them stand out from the rest of the applicants in a mile-high stack of resumes. Writers always remember that your English degree is not a waste if you commit to doing just one thing: stop selling yourself short!

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