

# DELAWRITER

The quarterly newsletter of AMWA-DVC

Delawriter Editors

Spring Edition, April 2019

## 10 Essential Criteria for Building and Maintaining a Freelance Business

By Suzanne Bujara

Laura J. Ninger, ELS, a self-described "generalist" freelance writer and editor, acknowledged that she was addressing an audience with different business models and medical writing experience, so she suggested "your mileage may vary." She also reminded her audience that there's no set order for her list of 10 tips in creating or expanding a business-it all depends on one's goals.

### 1. Be Businesslike

A company e-mail address demonstrates a freelancer's commitment to her professional image. So does behavior on social media. Instead of cobbling hasty replies to clients on smart phones with the tag line "Please excuse typos," Ninger advised that writers reply from the office computer and proofread their replies before sending.

Templates for commonly used documents such as a résumé are an efficient way to respond to clients professionally and in a timely manner. Ninger also keeps a project CV of all the assignments she has completed grouped by client. Though she doesn't circulate this list, it enables her to speak cogently about her experience in a therapeutic area when prospective clients contact her. Other template documents such as checklists facilitate work on projects.

### 2. Educate and Certify

By joining professional organizations such as AMWA, Council of Science Editors, Editorial Freelancers Association, International Society for Medical Publication Professionals, and Science Writers in New York, medical writers can learn best practices as well as getting certified by some of the organizations. Speaking at conferences can also boost a medical writer's knowledge because presenting is learning.

### 3. Establish a Niche

While specializing in a niche can be a great marketing tool, it might also encourage monotony and financial ruin should the market disappear. Generalizing might be initially appealing, but the competition for new writers could be fierce. On the plus side, learning is one of the benefits to remaining flexible enough to field a variety of topics.

### 4. Network

Though social media such as LinkedIn have expanded writers' geographical reach, meals with colleagues and fellow freelancers are where real interactions happen. A relationship forged over coffee is stronger than a social media connection.

### 5. Deliver on Promises

To enable on-time delivery of projects, Ninger said that it's essential to get important details up front to set expectations on both ends. She suggested setting up a Word document of all the emails pertaining to an assignment so that if something should go awry, it will be easier to identify requests or changes in scope.

### 6. Maximize Earnings

Ninger cautioned writers never to discount their services. She likened the "lowball to the snowball." She recommended when to offer project vs hourly fees. Citing her own business as an example, she typically uses a project fee for the first draft and bills each revision on an hourly rate.

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### QUICK NOTES

#### Join the DELAWRITER

The DELAWRITER needs contributing authors for the quarterly publication. *Have an idea for an article? Haven't used that byline recently? If so, please contact the [editorial team](#).*

### Quarterly Quotes

*Just remember, you can do anything you set your mind to, but it*

*takes action, perseverance, and facing your fears.*  
Gillian Anderson

*Words do two major things: they provide food for the mind and create light for understanding and awareness.* Jim Rohn

*Commitment leads to action and action brings your dream closer.* Marcia Wieder

Should a prospective client require a writing test, Ninger said "No" is her usual answer. However, if a medical writer deems a test reasonably short, it could lead to other work. She suggests reaching an agreement on the pay rate before taking a test, so that when a prospective client says, "We love what you did with the writing test," the fee is already set.

### 7. Consider Legal and Tax Issues

Contracts are an important part of doing business but can be contentious if a writer doesn't read the documents thoroughly. Ninger recalled that a lawyer relative said that one "can sue a ham sandwich," so it pays to be aware of legal pitfalls (eg, indemnification clauses) and to have complex documents reviewed by an attorney. Most importantly, she said, "know what you don't know."

One of the many advantages to having a separate business entity such as a limited liability corporation or an S-corporation is the use of a taxpayer identification number rather than a social security number. Setting up a business entity also helps protect you from legal liability, and compliance with the IRS "20 questions" protects your clients from having you mistakenly classified as an employee vs independent contractor.

### 8. Be Your Own Best Advocate

Sometimes it's best to say "No" to prospective clients, said Ninger. A common request for a sample needs assessment, for example, is a red flag because such documents are proprietary. If a prospective client cannot gauge a writer's competence based on a résumé, LinkedIn page, samples from their website, testimonials, and certification (if any), it's time to walk away.

Women freelancers are especially taken advantage of when negotiating fees. Ninger cited a recent internet survey that found a 28% wage gap between self-employed men and women, compared with the 22% gap in in-house wages. She advised all writers to be wary of "scope creep" in contracts and in subsequent dealings with clients. "Claim your worth," Ninger advised.

### 9. Give Yourself a Report Card

To properly assess your business, it's essential to know your effective hourly rate and other metrics. Track every client and project to determine whether you have achieved your goals for the year. For some businesses and writers, income is the top goal, while others want to obtain new clients, learn new topics, or achieve other business milestones.

### 10. Don't Take It Personally

Ninger reminded the audience that "your competition is you." Ask yourself whether you are now better than you were last year according to the goals of your business. If you are, then your business has succeeded.

Suzanne Bujara is a freelance medical writer who focuses on continuing medical education programs, needs assessments, and blogs for professional and lay audiences.

## Mentoring Synergy: 4 Steps for Mentoring Success

By *Nathalie C. Franc*

Susan Morris, Associate Certified Coach (ACC) and Certified Professional Co-active Coach (CPCC) with a Master of Education (MEd), from Morris Consulting Group embarked on a fun interactive workshop entitled "4 Steps for Mentoring Success" at the 17th Annual Freelance Workshop. The goals were to define the roles of mentors and mentees, discuss the benefits of mentorship and help us all put into place a 4-step plan for its successful implementation and practice.

Traditionally, the relationship between a mentor and a mentee was hierarchical. The mentor, an upper manager with years of experience, provided wisdom, knowledge, and expertise to the mentee, a junior, novice subordinate who was aspiring to learn the tools of the chosen trade. The mentor would be expected to comment on the mentee's performance, help with difficult business decisions, and act as a role model for the mentee's career. Mentees would gain confidence and recognition as they would learn the dos-and-don'ts and the who's-who of the profession, explore alternative views or ways of solving problems, and broaden their perspectives. Mentors expected to enhance their reputation and be viewed as a leader in their field by developing others' careers, thereby leaving a legacy. The long-term benefits of mentorship included getting promotions and higher salaries, better job satisfaction, and work-life-balance.

Morris encouraged us to take on a more contemporary view of mentorship in which the relationship is synergistic and egalitarian. It relies on shared interests, reciprocal exchanges, and mutual respect. In this relationship, the achievement of the pair is greater than the sum of the mentor's and mentee's individual accomplishments.

Morris advocates for a mentoring board of directors with several external mentors, such as a former supervisor, a business partner, a sponsor, an advocate, a professional coach, a colleague with shared interests, and a cheerleading friend. Together, they would encourage the mentee to think of different ways to develop and use all the various skills needed to achieve his/her career goals.

Morris's proposed 4-step plan for a successful mentorship is rather simple:

1) Get ready 2) Agree 3) Start and 4) Close

### Quarterly Tip

When an online action just doesn't work for you but does for others, here are a few troubleshooting tips (try them in order):

1. Clear the cookies from the computer. Close down your computer, wait at least 20 seconds, then restart.
2. Try using Firefox or a different browser.
3. When entering your credit card information, consider toggling the right down arrow for the month, year, and the state on the credit card info and highlighting the correct response in the list as typing it into the space may not be recognized by the host.

[Note: If you don't clear the cookies, the host may keep your information, so it may not be updated.] If you own several credit cards, consider rechecking the info that you entered.

In **Step 1**, the mentor and mentee explore, assess, clarify, define and determine the viability of their mentoring relationship. For this, the mentees need to know their strengths and weaknesses and needs, and to have clear career goals with specific milestones in mind. The mentor needs to have the skills and expertise and be able to commit both time and effort to provide meaningful advice.

In **Step 2**, both mentor and mentee come to a shared understanding and establish an agreement about the logistics, terms, and conditions of their relationship. When will they meet or speak on the phone? What issue will be discussed? What action plan will be put in place? How will the outcome be assessed? A mentoring agreement is drafted as its documentation is more likely to hold each party accountable for a more productive relationship.

**Step 3** signifies the actual start of the mentorship. A need for mentors often arises when one faces a pivotal moment in his or her career, such as being laid off, getting a new position in a new company, or being promoted into a different role in the same company.

To have true value, both mentor and mentee need to have a deep trusting relationship, with critical and constructive feedback being provided both ways and in a confidential manner. This step is about building and maintaining trust, without which the relationship will fail. Both mentor and mentee need to practice active listening, ask questions, brainstorm ideas and come to a joint solution to the issue at hand, apply the chosen solution and follow up on it. A trial mentorship period can be set, after which the viability of the relationship is assessed and re-evaluated if necessary or terminated by either or both parties.

Finally, in **Step 4**, both mentor and mentee acknowledge the pros and cons of the relationship, celebrate their achievements in a meaningful way, discuss the lessons they have learned from their successes and failures, and apply them to future mentoring relationships. As mentees learn and evolve in their career, they can then take on a mentor's role and perpetuate the acquired skills, knowledge and wisdom to others.

Nathalie C. Franc, PhD, is a freelance scientific and medical writer. She is the owner of Franc Consulting in San Diego, CA.

## Streamlining Your Work with Digital Tools

By Jeff McCrindle

Monica Nicosia, PhD, presented "Streamlining Your Work with Digital Tools." This presentation blended her personal experience as a freelance medical writer with the results of her 2018 survey of Freelance Medical Communicators. This presentation provided insights into the digital tools available to freelance medical writers to help them manage their business and increase their efficiency in supporting their customers. This informative, entertaining presentation began on a personal note that emphasized work-life balance as demonstrated by Nicosia's professional credentials and her passion for competitive ice skating.

Why should freelance medical writers select digital tools? Time is money. Digital tools can save time, so digital tools can help freelance medical writers make more money. Three characteristics - ease of use, integration of features, and cost - should be primary decision criteria for selecting digital tools.

Nicosia presented the results of her 2018 surveys of which digital tools were being used. Most of the 262 participants were full-time medical writers living in the United States. Digital tools were grouped into 3 categories: office, business, and work.

The office category had two key messages. Backup, in fact redundant backup (hard drive and cloud), is a best practice for managing risk. Personalized e-mail IDs that highlight the freelance writer's branding are also a best practice that many current freelance writers do not currently use.

Business tools span accounting, estimating, invoicing, and time tracking functions. This presentation highlighted two best practices for selecting tools. Look for integrated features that eliminate unnecessary data entry and seek easy-to-use software. Taking advantage of free trials offered by vendors is a great method for ensuring a good fit.

Digital tools to support work tasks include file transfer, reference management, project management, PDF unlocking, and transcription capabilities. In most cases, only 30% to 50% of freelance medical writers are using digital tools for work tasks. In some cases, clients provide the required tools to the writer.

How to select the right tools? Decide what you need. Do your research, which should include referencing the 2018 Freelance Medical Communicators Tools of the Trade Survey results. Don't let yourself lag too far behind the latest technology. Leverage the new subscription pricing models to enable vendors to keep you updated with the latest features.

And one last point: back up your computer.

Jeff McCrindle is VP of Sales at Yseop, Inc. which is providing digital tools to help automate adverse event reporting within Clinical Study Reports and Patient Safety Narrative regulatory submissions.

## Volunteer Corner

Showcasing members who contribute time, energy, and expertise to AMWA's Delaware Valley Chapter

### From Liberal Arts to Drug Development

By Jacqueline M. Mahon

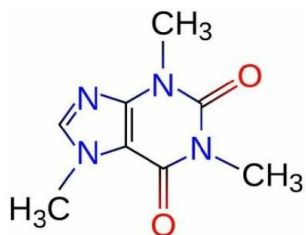
Darryl Z. L'Heureux, PhD, was not always a life-sciences man. Currently, he leads integrated oncology lung protocol development at Bristol-Myers Squibb and is Chair of the Medical Affairs and Scientific Communications track for the Drug Information Association Annual meeting, as well as president of our Delaware Valley Chapter of AMWA. But his first degree was a Bachelor of Arts at Franklin & Marshall College. Darryl's interest in history is apparent early in our conversation, when he explains that the school was founded in 1787 with a generous financial contribution from Benjamin Franklin and originally called Franklin College. "It was located in Lancaster, PA, to help educate the German farmers," he said. It was also the first bilingual college in the US. (Earlier, in 1749, Franklin founded the Publik Academy of Philadelphia, which became the University of Pennsylvania.)



*Darryl L'Heureux,  
current DVC chapter president*

Darryl's path from history to drug development started with a position as a psychiatric treatment assistant where he rubbed elbows with healthcare professionals. A Master of Science (MS) degree from Temple University in Philadelphia soon followed. This was succeeded by a Doctor of Philosophy in tumor biology and another MS degree in quality assurance and regulatory affairs, both from Temple. "Eventually," Darryl said, "I was able to fine-tune my career with the realization that, while I enjoyed laboratory bench work, my true niche was designing and interpreting science." Communicating science and medicine requires creativity, and the combined endeavor is intellectually stimulating.

Teaching is fulfilling in a different way. As an adjunct professor in the Professional Science Master's program in Scientific Writing at Temple University, Darryl teaches scientific writing while coaching and mentoring students. "I always say, teaching is learning twice. Because when I'm in the classroom or presenting at a conference, it's the end result of a deep dive into the pertinent topic." Most medical writers enjoy research and continual scholarship. As a teacher, Darryl can share his discoveries while helping others grow. A similar motivation underlies the existence of AMWA.



*Caffeine molecular structure*

Founded in 1940, AMWA is the leading professional organization for writers, editors, and other communicators of medical information. Darryl has volunteered with AMWA in various roles since he joined in 2011. He has offered workshops on pharmaceutical regulatory processes and shared his expertise with aspiring writers, and he is the designer and Executive Editor of this newsletter, the Delawriter. He finds time for all of these activities with astute project management and juggling. But where does the energy come from? "Caffeine," he laughs. "Really, it comes from loving what I do. Bringing people together to create something." Interacting with peers and students is energizing, and AMWA provides many such opportunities.

Darryl notes that the only way to promote yourself is to engage others. As a volunteer for AMWA and other organizations, he has made terrific contacts. "We share ideas; we build networks." This is how you become a star in your own career.

But that light dims without time off. For relaxation, Darryl switches from work to live arts performances: the Philadelphia Orchestra, Opera Philadelphia, Fringe Festival, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts, and Curtis Institute of Music. Philadelphia's culture and arts are exciting, with a huge variety of dance, theater, and spectacle available. The average medical writer brain is heavily taxed each day. Consider trying something new for inspiration! Activities that are completely different from your work can help you shift gears and promote brain-and spirit-health.

So, yes: Work. Volunteer. Mentor. And take time off to refresh your senses.

Jacque Mahon, MA, is owner of Acorn Freelance in Philadelphia and has been a writer and editor of medical education and pharmaceutical communications for 24 years.

## Upcoming Education and Networking Events for our Members

**AMWA-DVC Dinner in Princeton, May 3rd**



## Let's Eat!

Dinner before  
the Princeton Forum  
on Friday May 3<sup>rd</sup>  
@ 6:30PM

Join us for an informal networking dinner, to be held at a local restaurant on Friday, May 3, 2019 (details to follow). Each person will pay their own dinner and beverages.

To sign up, e-mail Kathy Molnar-Kimber at: [molnarkimber@verizon.net](mailto:molnarkimber@verizon.net) and insert "AMWA-DVC Princeton May 3rd Dinner" in the subject line. We will be in touch with details in mid-April.

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## Princeton Forum May 4th at the Princeton Marriott Forrestal Center, Princeton, NJ

AMWA-DVC is pleased to announce the 23rd Annual Princeton Conference on Saturday, May 4, 2019, at the Princeton Marriot at Forrestal. This year's conference offers programming in an all-open-session format that include sessions in 2 areas:

- AMWA-DVC's Medical Writing Essentials
- Hot Topics in Medical Communications and Scientific Writing

These dual tracks allow participants to pick-and-choose relevant sessions for their individual needs. Expand your business with insights on Essentials of Real World Evidence, Clinical Pharmacology in Drug Development, Clinical Study Report Narratives, Patient Centricity, and Introduction to Writing Continuing Medical Education Documents.

Boost your productivity by learning the Ins and Outs of Regulatory Submissions, Assessing and Writing to the Target Audience, and learning about Editing, Proofreading, Fact-checking, and Annotating. The full brochure can be opened by clicking [here](#) and to register, click [here](#).

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## Continued Medical Education at the Spring CMEpalooza on April 17



**CMEpalooza Spring** is a free 1-day event scheduled for Wednesday, April 17 that will feature a series of webinars on various aspects of writing continuing medical education grant proposals and programs. The event is archived on the same website for easy access.

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## Delawriter Editorial Team

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