



Class Workbook

One of the biggest sources of pain and anxiety for both new and established freelance writers is deciding on a niche.

For new or aspiring freelancers, this "niche quest" creates a lot of confusion. It stalls progress. And it kills momentum. In fact, I've seen this decision kill more dreams than just about anything else during this early phase of the business launch.

Why? Because new freelancers believe that they have to make a final decision on this issue before they go to market.

And that's simply not true!

Don't get me wrong. Having a niche or a specific target market is a good idea. But it's not a prerequisite for launching your commercial writing business.

Those who have been freelancing for a while have a different challenge. They're typically so close to their business, they've developed a "blind spot" of sorts. The options aren't very clear. And the ideal scenario is often not on their radar screen.

In this tutorial and accompanying workbook, I'll give you a simple framework for determining if you should define a niche ... how to find one that makes sense ... and what to do if you can't come up with anything viable.

The End Goal: Smart Positioning

You can't really have a productive discussion about picking a niche without talking about positioning. In fact, positioning is what truly *frames* the whole niche discussion. I really believe that talking about finding a niche is, in many ways, counterproductive. More important is having a discussion about how you're going to *position yourself* in the market.

So, we're going to use positioning as our guide for making this important decision.

The term "positioning" gets thrown around a lot these days. It often creates confusion, and it sounds like the kind of term you'd normally hear used in corporate marketing environment.

What's it about? It's about the *perception* you create in the prospect's mind. It's the perception your prospect has about you and your services when they come in contact with your marketing materials, your website ... or *you!*

It's also about your "uniqueness." You're difference. What makes you different from most others ... and why a prospect should care about that difference.

A good way to start this "positioning" discussion is to talk about how three different companies position themselves. Because, in reality, there's not that much difference between how a company creates perception and how you and I do the same. Sure, the scale is greater with a big company. But the principles are the same.

Ritz-Carlton. The Ritz-Carlton is obsessed about every single detail about the consumer and the consumer's needs, wants, and expectations. Everything they do is about *delighting* their guests. They don't sell hotel rooms; they're selling a memory, an unforgettable experience. And one of the ways they do this is through unsurpassed service to every guest, every single time—no exceptions.

Their "3 steps of service" (which most companies overlook)...

- Deliver a warm and sincere greeting and to use the guest's name
- Anticipate and fulfill the needs of each guest
- Give a warm good-bye, again using the guest's name (the Ritz Carlton believes that guest recognition is a top priority)

Sounds simple and non-revolutionary. But the difference is obvious the moment you set foot in their hotels.

Bottom Line: They're very clear about who they are, how they serve and what makes them different. They're not trying to please everyone; just a small segment of travelers.

Trader Joe's. One of the most profitable grocers in the world. Their secret?

- Innovative, hard-to-find, great-tasting foods
- Great prices!
- "Value" is a concept we take very seriously. And by value they mean great everyday prices on all of their products — no sales, no gimmicks, no clubs to join, no special cards to swipe.
- They can do it because they create their own products directly with contract manufacturers. So they cut out the middleman and direct every aspect of the product's recipe and quality.
- They keep only their best-performing products. Which keeps their assortment manageable, their inventory low, prices low and customers happy.
- I was NOT impressed when I first set foot in there. Was expecting the glitz you see at places like Whole Foods. But it wasn't long before I understood what they're all about: Trader Joe's is all about amazing products at great prices.
- You see a lot of cooks in their stores. People who know food and cooking buy there.
- You're NOT going to find people who want the absolute cheapest food. Instead, you find savvy consumers who want high quality at a good price.

Walmart. The world's largest retailer. What are they about?

- Their motto: Save money. Live better
- Everyday low prices—absolute lowest-cost retailer. Will never be undersold
- Convenience (in terms of locations; you can find them everywhere, even in rural areas).
- Huge assortment
- This is the place to go when you need something (anything!) and you want to pay the absolute bare minimum
- What you DON'T get: customer service, easy in and out, a memorable shopping experience.

None of these businesses is better than the other. It's not about that. My point is that each of these companies has done an amazing job of positioning themselves for huge success! They're crystal clear about who they are, what they do, whom they serve and what makes them different. They DON'T try to be all things to all people. Instead, they take pride in serving a specific segment of the market or meeting a very specific need.

Not Just for Big Brands

It doesn't matter if you're a retailer, a hotel chain, a bookstore, day spa or freelance writer. If you're in business, NOTHING matters until you've clearly identified and communicated your positioning.

I say that because the natural tendency with freelancers and many small business owners is to get the positioning out of the way as quickly as possible so they can begin selling. We all want clients as quickly as possible. And we think that if we just hang our shingle and put up our website, clients will come. They'll be "wowed" by our experience, credentials, samples/clips and beautiful website design.

Not so! The fact is that the world does NOT need another freelance commercial writer. What the world really needs are freelance commercial writers who are clear about their positioning. That way prospects can make better decisions faster, and we can spend less time selling and more time on billable work.

Why Smart Positioning Is Critical

Think about it. As a solo business owner, your time is your most valuable nonrenewable resource. And because you're limited by your time, you CANNOT afford to spend too much time and energy "selling" prospects. Instead, you have to do as much pre-selling as possible through clear and compelling positioning (which often occurs through your website). That way when prospects inquire, they're already pre-sold to a certain extent, and you don't have to do all the heavy lifting at that point.

We have a family friend in West Virginia who recently retired after managing Kroger grocery stores for over 30 years. I was talking with him about product assortments in the stores, and the conversation turned to the Deli department and the challenges of managing that kind of perishable inventory. I asked him if they carried Boar's Head brand deli meats, which is pretty much the standard where I live. He explained that there's no way they could make that work in his West Virginia stores.

If you're not familiar with that brand, Boar's Head is typically 30% or more higher in price than the mainstream brands. That works in the suburbs of Atlanta, which are fairly affluent, compared to many parts of the country. People here seek that

kind of quality and they have the incomes to support it. But in rural West Virginia, Boar's Head products would not sell! The income levels don't support that kind of premium.

His customers are not pre-sold on that brand. So trying to sell the advantages of that product right there at the deli counter would be pointless. It would be frustrating and unprofitable. It's the same with a freelance writing business. Trying to convert the "unconvertible" is a dangerous strategy.

This idea makes sense to people when I explain it this way. I see a lot of heads nodding when I teach this concept at live, on-site workshops. But when you look at freelance writer websites, you see something very different. It's usually a combination of two or more of these core ideas:

- "My words will help you..."
- "I'll write anything for anyone, anytime, for any budget..."
- "I'm a journalist, so I can do a better job than your average writer..."
- "Let me tell you why you need strong copy..."

As a prospect looking for a writer, none of these ideas hook me on why you're uniquely positioned to help me solve my specific challenges.

Pillars of Solid Positioning

For our purposes, positioning is about defining:

- What you do
- For whom
- Why you're different
- And why that difference matters to your prospects and clients

Your positioning should also include one or more credibility elements that answer the inevitable prospect question: "Why should I believe or trust you?" Usually these credibility elements are obvious when you describe the four elements I just listed, but sometimes you have to state them outright.

Also, for our purposes, your positioning will be written from the point of view of what you'll be offering your clients—which is NOT necessarily focused on what you've done in the past. In other words, it's about what you're capable of delivering, not about what you've delivered or done in the past.

So don't freak out if you have little experience with certain types of projects. Or if you think you'd like to take your business in a very different direction that interests you. What truly matters at this point is your overall track record and experience as a professional, not necessarily where you've focused on over the past few years.

A Word on Target Markets

Something else I need to clarify is the language I'll be using here and throughout this program. Probably the most common term used when talking about positioning is the word "niche." You read a lot about picking your niche, deciding on a niche, being clear about your niche.

I don't mind this word. In fact, I use it quite frequently in my articles and podcasts. But for our purposes here, we're going to be using more specific terminology. I'm going to try to stick to the terms:

- Target market, and
- Specialty

Target market refers to a group of prospects you can best serve. There are many ways to slice that, one of the most common being *industry*. However, industry is NOT the only way to look at your target market. There are other attributes to consider, including other:

- Demographics
- Psychographics
- Common desires, needs or challenges

Also, for our purposes, the word "specialty" will refer to a type of assignment you've chosen to focus on. For instance, white papers, or bylined articles, or web copy or book ghostwriting.

Again, there is no right or wrong here. You do NOT need to focus on a particular industry, and you do NOT need to have a specialty. But you SHOULD have a well-defined target market if you want to improve your business in a big way. And again, a target market is simply a group of prospects you can best serve.

Here's why you need to define one or more target markets you want to pursue: Would you rather be a little fish in a big pond, or a big fish in a little pond?

The "I Don't Want to Miss Out" Fear

Many freelancers avoid specificity when talking about their target market because they don't want to miss out on any potential work. But that's a myth! There's more work out there than you and I could ever handle in a lifetime. And as counter-intuitive as it sounds, it's better to narrow your target market and stake your claim. Because when you do that, the prospects that are a good fit for you will be much more committed. They'll be more pre-sold, and everything else being equal, they'll be much easier to work with.

In other words, you'll get more and better-quality clients when you narrow your field than you would when you try to be all things to everyone. And here's a little secret: Just because you've staked your claim doesn't mean that you won't have variety in your clients and in your work. That's a common misconception. You'll still get a wide variety of work. But you won't have to convince those clients to hire you. They'll come ready to do that!

I'll give you an example from my own business. For years I was very clear on my website about whom I served. I was very focused on the enterprise software market, and most of my samples were of software companies in the ERP, data management and construction software markets. However, I had several prospects from other industries come to me to write their white papers or other marketing materials. They were either recommended by one of my clients, or they stumbled on my website and saw something in my approach which they found very attractive.

The great thing about that scenario is that I was able to choose the clients and projects that sounded interesting. I carefully selected the assignments I thought I could do well. And that gave me the variety I needed to keep my work interesting.

One example of that was a division of Kaiser Permanente that sells employee wellness programs to Fortune 1000 companies. Their marketing director found me online and pursued me to write some white papers for her because she really liked my work. I explained that I didn't know her industry, but she felt that my ability to craft a compelling argument transcended this lack of industry background. So she hired me for two white papers and some other miscellaneous projects. It worked really well.

Define Your "What"

OK, let's dissect each of these elements. In fact, that's where we'll spend the rest of this session. And we're going to go through them in order, starting with the "what you do" and the "for whom" elements of your positioning.

"What" and "For Whom" are the two factors that define your target market.

"What" refers to the type of writing or writing assignments you take on. And "For Whom" refers to the types of clients for whom you do that work.

Let's start with "What" because this is the simplest element of your positioning. When it comes to defining your "What," you want to look at factors such as:

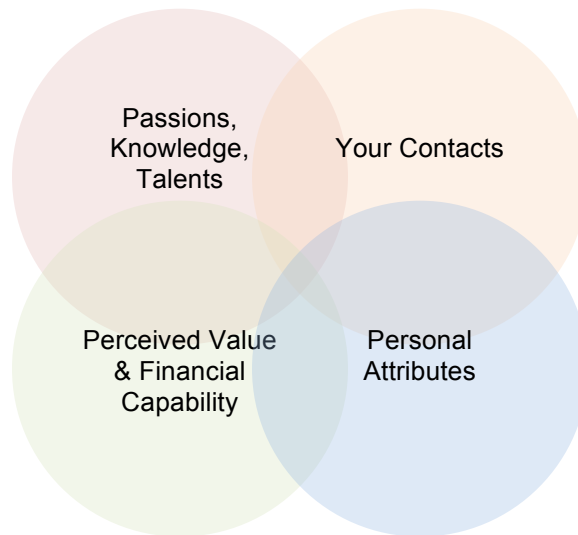
- Type of assignments
- Copy vs. content (or both)
- Short vs. long
- Other assignment attributes

We're going to go through an exercise later in this session that will help you pinpoint your ideal "What." But for now, just know that you'll want to define this in your web copy and prospect conversations. Your "What" doesn't need to be super-specific (e.g., I write case studies). It can be more general.

Define Your "For Whom"

The "For Whom" part of your positioning tends to create much more anxiety than the "What," so we're going to spend more time on this one. And again, this is important because the days of just being "a writer" are gone—at least if you want to earn a handsome income AND have a much more balanced lifestyle.

As I mentioned earlier, this does NOT mean that you have to declare an industry niche. It just means that you have to define a target market that's true to you and to your specific situation. To make the right decision, let me walk you through the four key factors to consider when deciding on your "For Whom." And again, we're going to go through a detailed exercise later, so don't worry about trying to take down all of this information or making a decision right now.



There are four key factors to consider when making this decision, and it's important that you treat each of them with great care, because you'll have to decide where you fall inside each of these areas.

Your Passions and Talents

The first factor to consider is your own passions and talents. By that I'm talking about topics you care about or find interesting. Personal and/or business passions. Fields where you already have a good amount of knowledge. Start there!

We're going to go through an exercise later that will help you define this better. But for now, just know that you'll want to take passions, interests and knowledge into consideration when deciding on your target market.

Who You Know

You'll then want to start thinking about where you already have relationships. Where are your contacts today, both personal and professional? How strong are those contacts? How many of them are good "connectors"?

Why does this matter? Because relationships have never been this important. And very often some of our best opportunities can come from those we know, even if we can't see it at the moment. In fact, one of the most pivotal moments of my career came as a result of a casual conversation with someone who I never imagined they could put me in contact with exactly the right people at the right time. It's the biggest reason I'm here today, doing what I do.

Again, we'll go through an exercise later that will help you see areas of your network that may have good potential.

Perceived Value + Financial Capability

As a potential target market emerges from thinking more about your passions, knowledge, interests and talents, as well as a closer inventory of the people you know, the third factor to consider is the value of your writing to that potential target market. In other words, how important is the type of writing you do? Is it important enough for them to compensate you well? Or do they treat it more as a commodity than an investment with a high potential return?

Also, what's their financial capability to pay according to the value they see in your work? In other words, if they see great value in your product, can they pay accordingly?

Let me give you a quick example and then we'll get into some specific indicators to look for when evaluating potential target markets.

Let's say that your neighbor teaches swimming classes for children at the local neighborhood pool every summer. She does this for fun and for some extra money, and she might do only four or five sets of lessons every season, each with no more than four kids. Lessons are \$80 per child. So her total "take" each summer is somewhere around \$1,000 to \$1,500 per season.

She comes to you because she wants to create a simple website to promote her lessons. And she wants to know what you'd charge to write the copy. Considering that her total profits from this venture are no more than \$1,500 per year, how do you think she would react to your \$750 quote?

Let's switch that around a bit. Say she and her husband travel around the city all summer doing swimming lessons in neighborhood pools around your city of 6 million people. They're now bringing in \$7,000 a month from May through September. They then hit indoor aquatic centers and gyms for the rest of the year, and bring in an average of \$4,000 a month.

How would this impact their desire and ability to pay you well for the job—especially considering that most of their potential customers visit their website to learn more about their approach *before* enrolling their children in one of their lessons?

Here's another example. Say you come across a very specialized consulting firm that goes after big box retailers around the world to help them save 20% or more on their energy costs across their stores. Their typical client engagement runs anywhere from \$500,000 to \$1 million. Assuming they need a series of three white papers to help them market their services, do you think they'd be willing to pay the right writer \$3,000 to \$5,000 per piece?

Financial Factors to Consider

So, what are the markers for both perceived value in your work AND a market's ability to pay well?

First, you'll want to consider the offerings (products, services, solutions) of companies in that market. Ask yourself, are they:

- New or different?
- Expensive? (Expensive for their typical customers.)
- Complex?

Why these factors? Because products, services or solutions that are new/different, expensive and/or complex don't just sell themselves. They're often "considered purchases" (more on that later) that involve a formal buying process, several decision makers and a lot of content from the vendor—content someone needs to write!

Additionally, ask yourself:

- Do the market's typical offerings address an URGENT or VERY IMPORTANT need or desire for their own customers?

You can answer that by looking at the products or services they sell to their customers. If these offerings are tied to:

- Revenue generation
- Profit improvement

- Risk mitigation
- Growth
- Mission
- A strong core desire or goal...

Then their offerings probably fall in the "Urgent" or "Very Important" category.

Why is this important? Here again, when a business or organization needs to market something that solves an urgent or very important problem for their customers, they're going to be much more willing to invest in content and/or copy to help market or sell these offerings.

Let's go back to the earlier example of the individual swim instructor doing this more as a hobby than a business. Are her services new, expensive or complex? No.

What about urgency? Does she help fulfill an urgent or very important need for her potential customers? Maybe. In most cases, parents will consider these lessons to be very important, but not quite urgent.

So you have many factors pointing to a low level of financial value or capability, which doesn't bode well for you.

What about the second scenario—the one with the husband-and-wife team? Here again, their offerings are not new, expensive or complex. But what if they used a proprietary, proven system to teach older kids who are non-swimmers how to banish their fear of water AND develop competence by the second session?

That might fall under "New/Innovative." And if the lessons are expensive, that's another plus. Also, what if they market to parents who have spent years trying many different swim schools/camps with no success? And what if the child is now entering an age where it gets harder to learn to swim without being overly fearful?

Here again, all those factors point towards higher value, which makes them better candidates from a financial standpoint alone. (And, by the way, notice how these folks are actually defining a specific target market for themselves!)

In the other example, the one with the consulting firm that helps retailers reduce their energy costs, the factors are more clear cut. Their offerings are probably new or innovative. They're definitely expensive. And their approach is probably complex enough that it needs to be explained.

Does it solve an urgent or very important need for their customers? Absolutely! So this example scores very high in the financial value and financial capability area of choosing a target market.

Personal Client Attributes

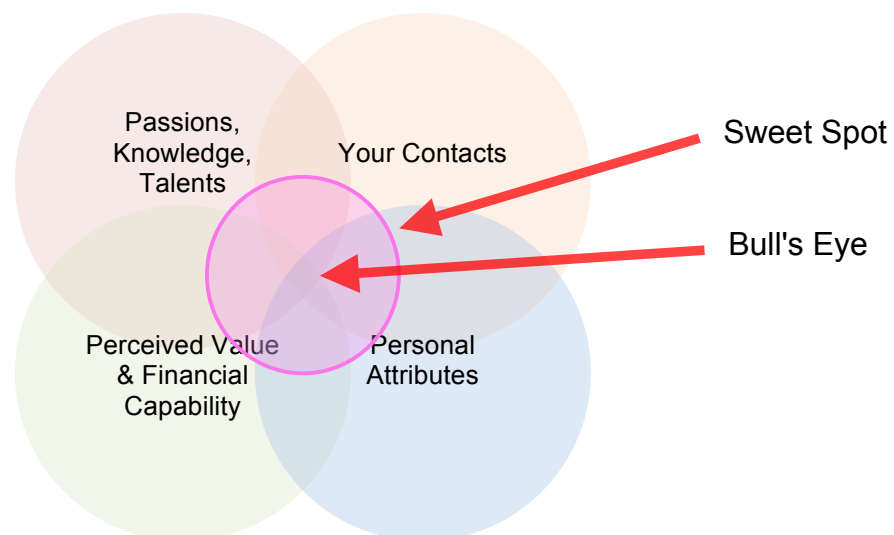
Finally, it's important that you consider other attributes that might play a role in how happy you are working in a particular target market. Specifically the attributes of the people you'd be working with directly.

I'm sure you'll agree that this business is much more fun when you work with people who not only value your work but also respect you as a person. They're fun to work with, they jive with your personality, and they make the work experience that much better, even when the pay is not as good as it might be with other clients.

The ideal target market for you is one where all these factors meet. It's where you get to write about topics that interest you ... where clients don't take much work to close because you're able to leverage relationships and/or word-of-mouth marketing ... where they value the work you do and are willing to pay well for it ... and where the people are a real joy to work with.

In a perfect world, you'd be able to find the intersection of all four of these factors quickly and easily. And while that *does* happen occasionally, most freelancers use this more as a guide than a go/no-go litmus test.

What I mean by that is that there's actually a sweet spot you can focus on that includes—but is not limited by—the "bull's eye," if you will. And the key is to pick a target market that's somewhere in this sweet spot.



In reality, the sweet spot is "moldable" and can bend in any direction that carries the most weight for you. For instance, say that working with clients who have the right personal client attributes is super-important to you—much more so than their willingness or capability to pay high fees for your work. Because you'd rather work with people who are fun, passionate and driven by something you admire than to give that up for a higher income. In that case, your sweet spot will be skewed in that direction—as it should!

I'm NOT suggesting these are mutually exclusive attributes. I'm merely saying that you should give some thought to how you would choose when faced with competing attributes.

We'll revisit this "sweet spot" idea later. Let's get to the exercise...

Target Market Exercise

This exercise is very important. Please take the time to go through it over the next couple of weeks, even if most of the answers seem obvious to you. There's great value in writing down your answers.

I'll walk you through the questions first, and then I'll show you how to find meaning in your answers.

Your "What"

1. What type of commercial writing do you really enjoy (or think you'd enjoy)? Content, copy, other? Long format vs. short format? Other factors?

2. What specific writing assignments do you like the most?

3. Which assignments feel easier to do? In other words, what type of work feels almost effortless when you get into it?

4. Are there any assignments that sound fascinating ... yet you've never had a chance to work on them before? What are they? What is it about them that sounds fascinating?

5. What types of writing assignments do you dislike? Are there any that you absolutely hate? If so, why?

Your "For Whom"

Passions, Knowledge, Talents

1. First, consider your *passions, knowledge and talents*.

2. What topics do you know very well? What have you written about extensively (at least more than the average writer)?

3. In what industries have you written?

4. In what subject matter do you have particular expertise or experience?

5. What type of writing do you do well? What projects and topics tend to generate the most compliments from clients and colleagues?

6. What topics are you passionate about?

7. Let's take that one step further. Say you inherited a \$20 million fortune this week. You no longer had to write for money. What kind of commercial writing would you focus on? What topics?

#2: Contacts / Relationships

Next, let's look at your *personal and professional contacts*. Open your address book or your contact management system and create a list of where your best contacts work—what industries, fields or organizations. See if there are any patterns.

Also, pay particular attention to those contacts who seem to be good "connectors" (they seem to know a lot of people and are very good at connecting people together).

Here a memory jogger to guide you through this effort...

Current and previous employers:

Spouse's (or other family member's) current and previous employers:

People you've worked *with* in the past who may work in the marketing department of an organization or have a good connection in their employer's marketing department:

Fellow church members and/or parents from your children's school/social groups

Previous clients:

Anyone who has inquired into your services. They've called or emailed you in the past. Or you've met at a networking event of some kind:

Anyone who has subscribed to your e-newsletter or downloaded something from your website:

Anyone you know who's a potential referral source. A graphic designer, a consultant who knows you or has sent work your way. Or anyone else you know who's well connected and may know potential clients:

NOTE: You're looking for *quality* here, not necessarily quantity. I've had coaching clients that worked in hot industries that use an incredible amount of marketing content. However, they've had a difficult time getting going because the contacts they have are not high quality. I've also had coaching clients who worked in industries that don't use a lot of outside writers. Yet they were so well connected in their industries that they were able to launch successful writing businesses incredibly fast.

#3: Perceived Value and Financial Capability

The next area is that of *perceived value and financial capability*. Start your search by looking back at your answers above in the areas of knowledge, passions, talents, and interests—as well as your personal and professional contacts. See if you can find instances of products or services that are:

- New or different
- Expensive (expensive for the typical customers that buy them)
- Complex

(You're looking for at least two of out three in order for a market to score well in the "perceived value + financial capability" area.)

As I explained earlier, products, services or solutions that are new/different, expensive and/or complex don't just sell themselves. They're typically "considered purchases" that involve a formal buying process, several decision makers and a lot of content from the vendor—content someone needs to write!

1. So, if you're familiar with industries, markets or organizations (or if you know people in those areas) that have these qualities, list them here:

2. As look at the list above, which ones seem to sell products, services or solutions that are perceived as "Urgent" or "Very Important" by their own customers (as opposed to "Nice to Have"?)

Again, a great way to make this determination is by looking at the products or services they sell to their customers. If these offerings are tied to:

- Revenue generation
- Profit improvement
- Risk mitigation
- Growth
- Mission
- A strong core desire or goal

They're probably perceived as "Urgent" or "Very Important" by their prospects and customers.

Let's go back to the earlier example of the swimming instructors. What if they were also professional coaches for ultra-competitive high school swimmers who are very serious about developing an edge and improving their performance? How does that change the perceived value of their offering to someone with that kind of goal or aspiration?

Let's look at the other example of a consulting firm that helps large retailers reduce their energy costs across all their stores. In an environment of rising energy costs and thinner profit margins, how important is that kind of value proposition? Compare that to a company that sells, say, electrical wire and conduit. See the difference?

Everything else being equal, the market that sells products or services that have a higher perceived value will be better targets for you as a writer *from a financial standpoint*. They'll have a greater need for content or copy, and they'll be more willing to pay higher fees.

If you didn't come up with any markets that fit this criteria based on your knowledge, experience, passions or contacts, work backwards and think of markets that have many of these qualities and that you at least find somewhat interesting. Run them through the litmus test above and see if you discover some possibilities.

#4: Personal Client Attributes

Finally, get clear on the types of people you want to work with. You may not be able to determine much about someone by the market in which they work or the organization they're a part of. But when you have that initial conversation with a prospect, you want to be able to assess that individual and how closely they match the attributes of your ideal client.

1. Think about the people you've enjoyed working with the most—the people you wish you could clone as clients. How do they treat you? What are their attitudes towards you and your work?

2. For contrast, let's look at the other side of the spectrum. Think about the people you've *disliked* working with the most. How did they treat you? What were their attitudes towards you and your work?

Why You're Different

1. Before thinking through your differentiators, I want you to list the attributes your current and previous clients value in a freelance writer. Think about your clients and what they've told you about you and your work. What did they compliment you on?

2. Don't stop there. What do you think clients value in a freelance writer? If you hired commercial writers, what qualities would you look for?

Here are some ideas:

- Dependable
- No handholding required
- Quick turnaround
- Error-free work
- Excellent storytelling skills
- Can craft a compelling argument
- Professional
- A long-term resource
- Trustworthy
- Can hit the ground running
- Understand the industry, our business, our customers...

3. Next, describe what makes YOU (as a writer and a professional) different. What makes you a better choice than most of your competitors?

This is where I really want you to take your time. Some ideas to get you thinking:

- Background
- Career accomplishments
- Experience
- Education

- Skills
- Specialized knowledge
- Certifications
- Achievements, accomplishments, awards
- Track record
- Client roster
- Aptitudes
- Likes and dislikes
- Hobbies

Take inventory of what you have going for you in each of these areas. And again, take your time doing this. In some cases, your biggest differentiators aren't the ones you thought would be the strongest.

Also, please remember that the idea here is not necessarily to figure out why you're different from EVERYONE. That's a common mistake. Your goal is to describe what makes you different from MOST (or at least from MANY).

In my case, I decided to highlight both my sales experience and my software industry background. Does that make me the only writer in the world with those attributes? Absolutely not! But it's been different enough to stand out with many prospects.

List those differentiators here:

Next, go back to questions #1 and #2 above—the questions about what clients truly value in a writer. Then, for every differentiator you listed in question #3 above, explain why that differentiator matters by matching it to what your clients need.

For instance, say you listed "someone who can hit the ground running quickly" as one of the attributes you feel clients value in their writer. And then you listed "Eight years' experience in the commercial insurance industry" as one of your

differentiators. Match the two by explaining why the differentiator matches a client need. You could say, "The fact that I have eight years' experience in the commercial insurance industry means that I can hit the ground running and tackle your projects with no handholding."

Essentially, what you want to do is ask yourself the following question about each differentiator you listed: "So what? Why does that matter?" And specifically, "Why would that differentiator matter to a potential client?"

Putting It All Together

I've just given you a lot of questions, which will require some serious thinking. So let me recap how I would approach this:

1. Start with the "What" questions. That's usually the easiest area to define and get clear on.
2. The "For Whom" area will require the most thinking. Go through the questions in the order I've listed them. So, start by thinking through your skills, knowledge, passions and talents. Let that kick-start the process.
3. Next, move into the questions about the people you know. That will help you see potential opportunities in terms of people who could help you. It's also a good segue into the next area.
4. With the "financial capability" stuff, rather than creating a random laundry list of industries or markets to explore, start your search by looking back at your answers above in the areas of knowledge, passions, talents, and interests—as well as your personal and professional contacts. Let those answers guide your brainstorming effort. So, in other words, don't list software, medical devices and green technologies as potential target markets just because you're trying to come up with industries you feel can

- pay well. Instead, let your own answers to the questions about passions, knowledge and contacts guide your brainstorming effort.
5. Don't discount the personal attribute questions. Those are very important. And again, they will give you the clarity you'll need when you talk with potential clients and you're trying to determine if that person feels like a good fit for you on a personal and professional level.
 6. Finally, move to the "Why You're Different" and "Why that Matters" questions. And make sure to ask yourself "So what?" for every differentiator you list.

Bottom line: Go through this process methodically. Don't jump around.

Choosing Your Target Market

For many of you, the decision on a target market WON'T be very straightforward. You'll have to give this some thought, even once you have clarity on the issue.

I've found that most people weigh some of these four areas higher than others. In my case, when I launched my freelance business, I placed a greater weight on my contacts, because I realized early on that the people who knew me well would recommend me to potential clients. And at the time, I didn't care as much what I wrote about or whom I wrote for. I just wanted to get my business started and then take it from there.

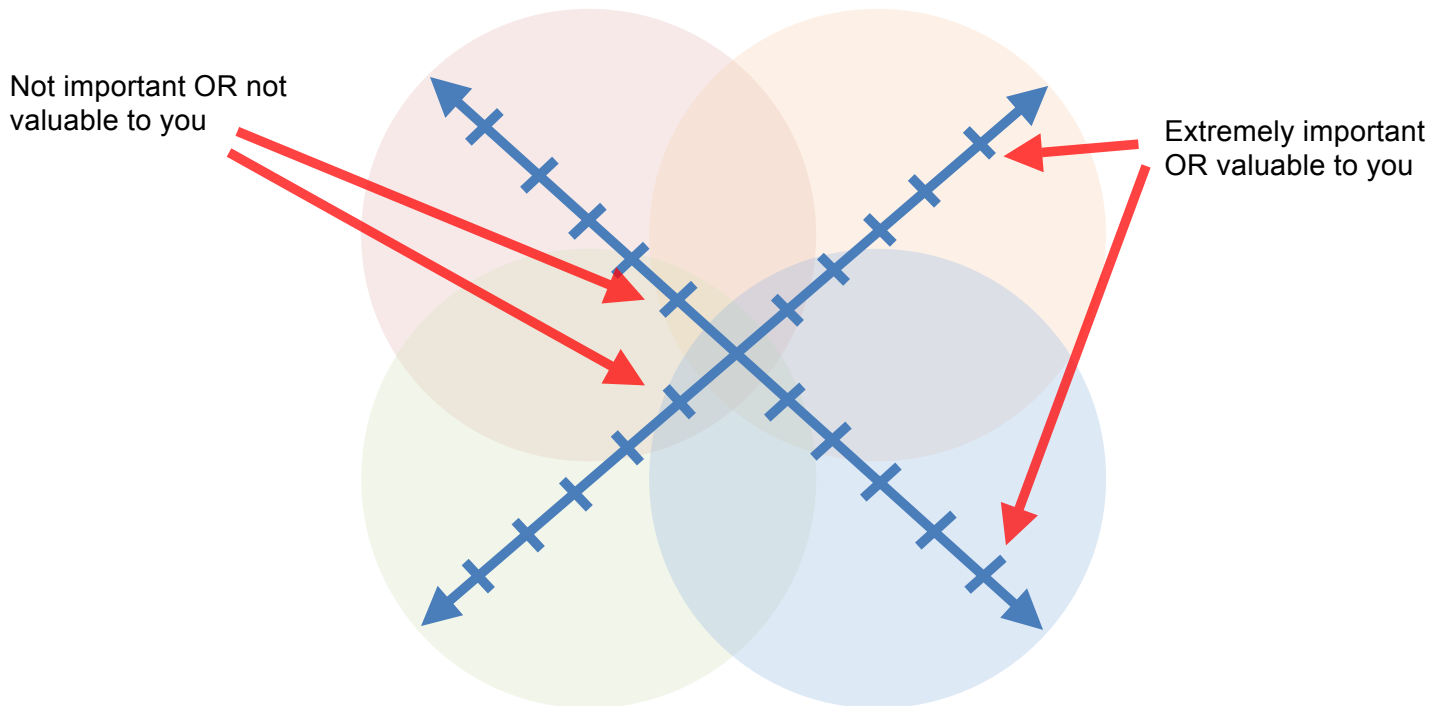
As my business evolved, I started placing more emphasis on the financial aspect. I wanted to work for clients who valued the type of work I did and were willing to pay well for it, because it made financial sense to do so.

I also started paying more attention to personal attributes. I wanted to work with people who jived with my personality, were fun to be around and respected me as a professional.

Today, I'd say that I place the most emphasis on "Perceived Value and Financial Capability." On a scale of 1 to 5, I would give that a 5. Next, I care about "Personal Attributes." I would also weigh that as a 5. I would weigh "Passion, Knowledge, Talents" as a 3, mainly because I have a wide range of interests and am willing to write about many different areas of technology or business in general. And I would weigh "Contacts" as a 4, because I prefer to work with clients who come recommended by people I know.

In fact, I encourage you to use this "weighted approach" in your decision. I don't think this is a decision you can make in a purely scientific way. But if you're really torn, try assigning each of these four areas a score between 1 and 5. A score of 1 means that area is either not important to you OR there's nothing there that

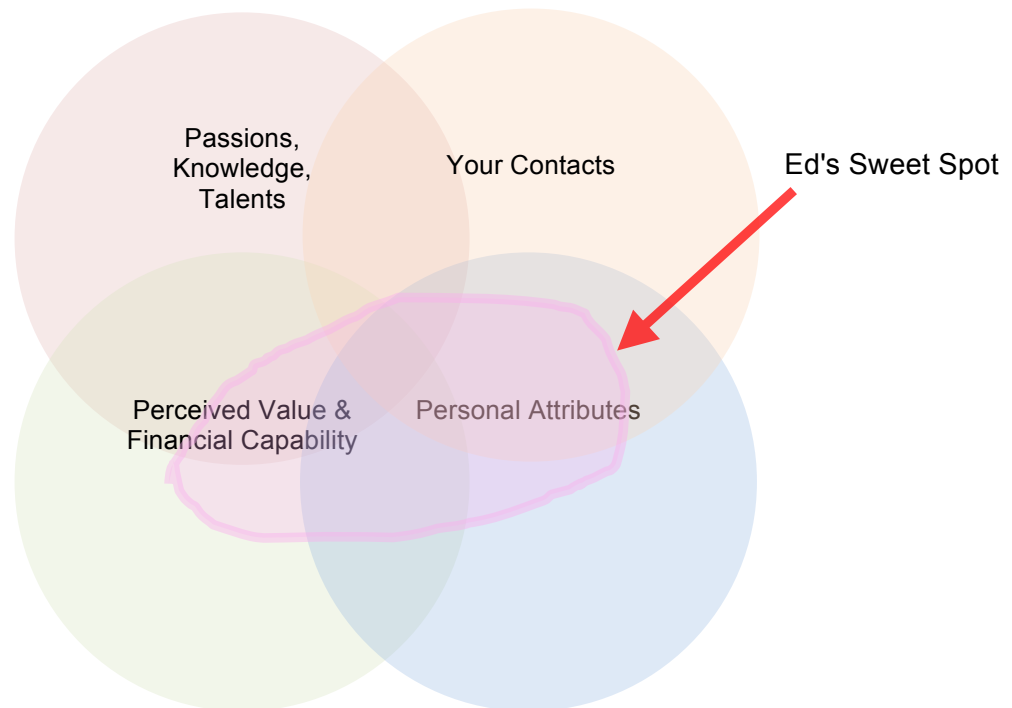
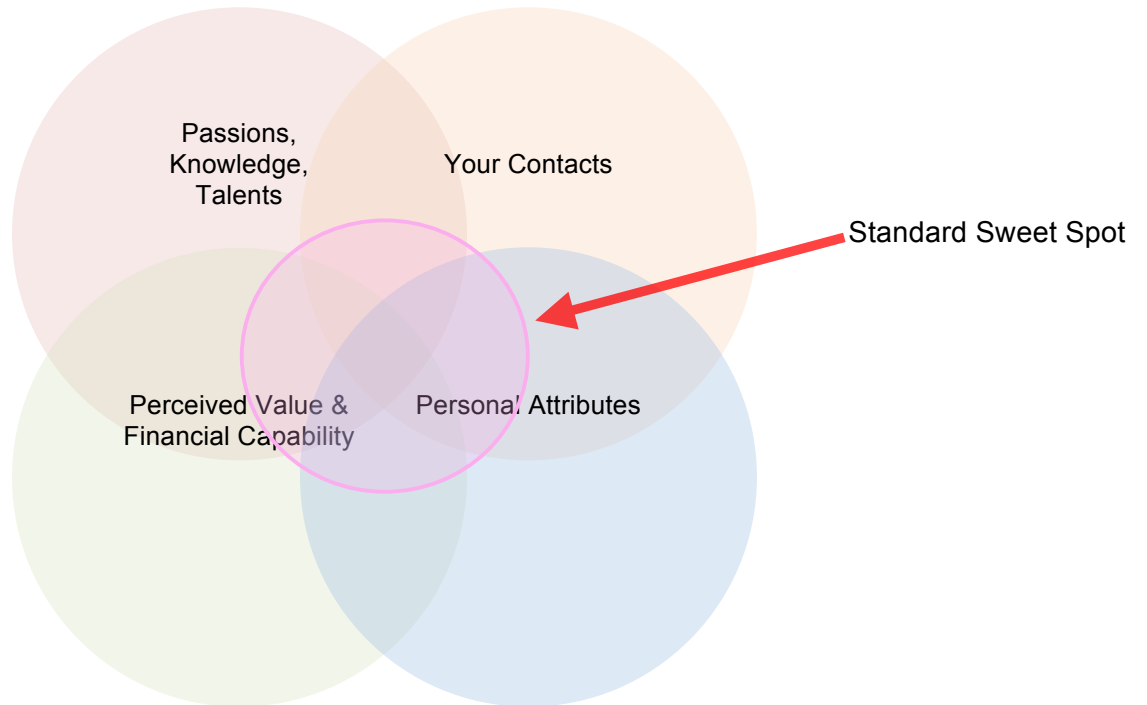
would help you get to where you want to go. Conversely, a score of 5 means that this area is incredibly important to you OR you have something very valuable to leverage there.



As you can see from this visual representation of where the scores would fall under each category, this approach breaks down if you give ALL categories a weight of 1 or a weight of 5. But that's not the idea. If you gave each one a weight of 1, you'd end up in the bull's eye. And if you gave each one a weight of 5, then your sweet spot would be too large.

So make sure to weight each category honestly. And let the weights guide you. Use the results to think about your final answer, NOT necessarily to arrive at your final answer. And by that I meant that this is not the sort of decision that you make simply by plugging in some numbers into a formula and accepting whatever comes out of it. You have to factor everything you've done here into your decision—especially the answers to your earlier questions.

Just so you can see why this approach can help, let me give you a couple of ways to show this visually. The first image here is that of a basic sweet spot. Notice that there's that bull's eye in the middle, but then there's a larger area around it that's completely acceptable. In my case, the sweet spot is a bit skewed. And that's represented by the second image.



Here are some pointers to make sure you choose well:

Choose Wisely

Make sure your chosen target market is big enough to support you AND clear enough to attract the right prospects.

Don't Go Too Narrow at First

Resist the temptation to go too narrow at first, in terms of target market specificity. It's safer to go down just enough to separate yourself from the crowd, but not so narrow that you drastically limit the size of your prospect base. Over time, you'll be able to go narrower as you get a better feel for the nature of your chosen market.

For instance, I went from offering to write *anything for anyone* to specializing in the high-tech industry. That's still a huge market, but it was narrow enough to make a big difference in my ability to attract great clients and differentiate myself. Over time, I started narrowing down that target market to software companies that sold data management, ERP or construction management solutions. But I did that only once I had developed a following in each of those areas and I felt comfortable enough taking a stand.

If You're a New or Aspiring Freelancer...

Resist the temptation to be too rigid or focused. For instance, unless you have extensive experience writing case studies from your last two jobs in corporate marketing communications, don't say, "I'm a case study writer, and that's all I do."

Instead, be more flexible. It's OK to pick one, two or three main project specialties. But don't be so rigid unless there's a VERY good reason for doing so. Instead, follow the flow. Tap your personal and professional network. See where that leads you. Be open to working on just about any writing project just to get the experience of working with a client and managing a project. And see where that takes you.

Going back to my earlier example of when I was starting out, when I chose high-tech as my target market, I also said that my focus within that market was writing lead generation materials. But something interesting happened. As I talked with prospects, I found that lead generation was not something they were desperate to outsource.

They would tell me, "Hey, Ed, that's great about your lead generation writing. But what I really need help with right now is a white paper. Do you write white papers?"

I would, of course, accept the offer. As a result, I started getting more and more of that content writing work. And before I knew it, more than 90% of my work was marketing content, NOT lead generation copy.

The lesson: stay flexible. Let the market show you the way. Sure, make necessary adjustments along the way (don't let them take you down a path you absolutely hate or doesn't pay well). But stay flexible and open-minded.

Take Your Time

You may have to let this information (and your answers) marinate for a few days (or a week or two) before the right answer emerges. Walk away from this work. Tell yourself and the Universe that you expect good answers; that you expect clarity. Then, try to forget about it for a day or two. The answer may just come out of the blue.

Don't Wait for Perfection

Yes, you want to do this right and not jump into conclusions too early. But at the same time, it's best to make a "good enough" decision and take action on that decision than to sit around until the "best" solution emerges.

Let's Work Together!

If you've stayed with me so far and you've completed every step of this process and are even starting to prospect, congratulations! You've gone further than 95% of the people who set out on this journey.

And if you still feel you could use some help through this process—or if you're not sure where to go from here—I'd love to help you.

I have a 10-week group-training program called B2B Biz Launcher. It's designed specifically for B2B or commercial writers who are either trying to launch their writing business or they've already launched but are not happy with the results they've achieved so far.

In this program, you and I work one-on-one and in a small-group setting to make sure your ignition phase is solid and done right. We then go beyond that into key strategic topics such as how to:

- Manage your prospecting effort more effectively
- Handle prospect conversations with ease
- Price your work profitably (and present your fees for maximum impact)
- Negotiate like a pro
- Close more of the projects you quote

Plus, how to build on this launch foundation so that prospects start coming to YOU instead of you having to chase them all the time.

If this sounds interesting, visit www.b2blauncher.com/waiting and get on my early notification list. You'll then be one of the first to get all the details next time I open enrollment.