



Episode #2 Transcript

## How to Act Like a Professional Writer

(Even when you don't feel like one)

<https://bloggingbistro.com/podcast/how-to-act-like-a-professional-writer>

I received an email from a writer who's been blogging for 10 years. She wrote, "But I am still a novice! I've never taken it seriously. It's just fun and a hobby."

She went on to tell me how she's experimented with several types of topical blogs over the years, including a travel blog, a recipe blog, a mommy blog, and a homeschool blog. She's getting ready to start an author blog.

She admitted that her blogging has been sporadic. She wrote, "I would like for that to change since I would like to be taken seriously as writer." She admitted that means sticking with blogging consistently.

I was excited to hear from this reader, because I sense she's on the cusp of making major changes in her writing life.

For 10 years, she's been writing for fun and as a hobby, experimenting with different genres and practicing writing for different audiences.

Now she's getting her writing published and she's starting a writing-related business and she is ready to make the mindset shift from *hobbyist* writer to *professional* writer.

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At some point in our writing life, those of us who want to write as a business face this decision-making point, where we take a leap of faith from *hobbyist* to *professional*.

Actually for most of us, stepping into our new identity as a professional writer is less like a leap of faith, where you make a decision and jump right in. For most of us, it's more like crawling through a muddy swamp – the mindset shift is slow going, messy, and there can be obstacles along the way.

As I mentioned in episode 1, there are three huge components into making that mindset shift from *writing as a hobby* or *writing in my spare time* into *working writer mode* or *writing as a business, a profession, an occupation, or a career*.

One is cultivating a life of writing -- that is, seriously pursuing whatever form of writing you want to do. Not haphazardly, but seriously, with commitment.

In my new Professional Writer Podcast Community Facebook group, one person wrote that she feels passion and excitement when writing memes using her photos with words of encouragement or a quote.

She posts memes consistently as one means of growing her writing platform, but says that most people pass off what she does as a hobby. She wrote: "If they only knew the work involved!"

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So, while others may view this type of short-form writing, often referred to as micro-blogging, as “merely” a hobby, this writer sees it as a viable means to forge relationships with her ideal reader. She’s a perfect example of someone who is cultivating a life of writing – she’s making an effort – every day – to find meaningful ways to connect with her readers. She’s not writing an 80,000-word manuscript – she’s putting more like 8 words atop a photo. It doesn’t matter how many or how few words you write. What matters is that you cultivate a life of writing.

The other is thinking like an entrepreneur who’s starting a business.

That’s what The Professional Writer podcast is all about – learning what it takes and DOING what it takes to transform into a professional writer. If you sense that you’re somewhere in this transitional mindset shift phase, you’re in the right place. Together, we’re going to work on moving from passive action, which means consuming information and learning to taking massive action, which means DOING what it takes to transform into a professional writer.

As you’re listening to this podcast, you’re taking passive action. You’re consuming information. Another person in our Facebook group commented that she’s spent the last several years reading and studying the “art” of writing. Those are both fantastic things to do to prepare you for a life of writing.

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But guess what this writer discovered as she studied the art of writing? She learned that, in order to become a good writer, you have to write!

If you're feeling stuck in the "passive action" zone, I'm going to challenge you in every episode with action steps that will spur you to take massive action. I know that "massive action" sounds as if I'm going to ask you to do a bunch of really hard, complicated stuff. I use the phrase, "massive action" because it rhymes with passive action and it's easy to remember. My action steps are going to be more like baby steps. Simple things you can begin doing right now. But compared to what you may have been doing, which is *passive* action, even one baby step will feel to you like you're taking *massive* action.

If you're truly committed to making the mindset shift into professional writer mode, you're going to listen, learn, and then apply what you're learning. That third step: applying what you're learning, is the most important one. Because you will only begin morphing into a professional when you start acting like one.

Let's explore 5 traits of a professional writer.

This is not a definitive list – I'm sure there are traits that I haven't included, and I'd love to hear from you about what YOU think the most important characteristics of a professional writer are.

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After you've finished listening to this episode, head over to [BloggingBistro.com](http://BloggingBistro.com). In the show notes for Episode #2, you'll see a link to join [The Professional Writer Podcast Community](#) on Facebook. Join the group, and chime in with your thoughts about the characteristics of a professional writer.

Trait #1: Identify what you want to be known for.

Remember how I said that one huge component of making the mindset shift is cultivating a life of writing – that is, seriously pursuing whatever form of writing you want to do.

In order to cultivate a life of writing, you need to identify what you want to be known for. For some people, this comes easy. They instantly know, “I want to be known for writing 150-word devotions for moms of preschoolers.”

Or: I want to be known for writing historical fantasy romance novels that take place during the Arthurian period.

Or: I want to be known for writing a centrist political blog for U.S. voters who consider themselves moderate independents.

For most writers, however, deciding what we want to be known for is exceptionally challenging. I think that's because most writers are multi-talented. We love exploring and researching and learning new things. It's really hard to niche down. In fact, the woman whose email I read to you at the beginning of the episode told me, “I can't settle on a niche.”

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We're going to spend a lot of time in upcoming episodes discussing why it's important to choose a niche and stick to it, particularly if your goal is to write books.

While some writers are quite successful writing in several genres or in various niches, they are the exception to the rule. For most of us, identifying one thing we want to be known for works much better than being a generalist, in terms of managing your brand and efficiently running a viable writing-related business.

Your niche might be a writing-related service you provide. Here's how some writers I know replied to the question: What do you want to be known for?

- I want to be a trusted and in-demand instructor on the topic of how to write a memoir.
- I want to be the top content writer in my area for local businesses that specialize in selling garden supplies.
- I want to mentor self-published authors how to promote their book.
- I want to be the go-to virtual assistant for novelists looking to outsource their social media content.

Your niche might be a genre of writing, such as sci-fi or steampunk or literary criticism or educational curriculum.

Your first action step for today is to write 1 sentence that states what you want to be known for. If you could choose any type of writing-related business to become the world's top expert in, what would it be? Don't be

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afraid – you don't have to show this to anyone. But writing it down will make it seem real.

If you're feeling brave and want to publicly hold yourself accountable for taking action, post what you want to be known for in the [private Facebook community for this podcast](#). You'll find a link to join the group in the show notes at [bloggingbistro.com](http://bloggingbistro.com).

For many of us, making a public commitment makes it really REAL and vastly increases our chances of following through.

Trait #2: Practice.

Once you've identified what you want to become known for, it's essential that you begin practicing it, if you haven't already started.

In his book [Outliers](#), Malcolm Gladwell says that it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become an expert. To achieve mastery. That's equivalent to devoting 3 hours a day to your craft every day for 9 years.

The sheer volume of practice you put in alone won't make you a competent writer, although it certainly helps.

There's also that intangible factor of having some innate skill. For example, I could study math 8 hours a day for the next 30 years, and I would not achieve mastery. That's because I do not have a math mind. My brain is not pre-disposed to loving numbers, and I would find the experience frustrating and life-sucking.

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When it comes to words, however, my brain IS wired to understand words and use them effectively. If I could choose ways to spend my time, I would be absolutely delighted to write, edit, and read words all day, every day for the rest of my life. My innermost being knows that I will never tire of the wonder of words.

Now, I'm not saying that you need to spend 3 hours a day for the next 9 years practicing before you can call yourself a professional. Not at all. You need a 10% edge. You need to know 10% more than the people you serve. You'll pick up the other 90% as you go along.

So, while practicing is critical to mastery, other factors come into play, such as your innate talent or ability to grasp the intricacies of language and business and marketing, as well as your personality and what I call your stick-to-itiveness.

Speaking of stick-to-itiveness, here's your next action step:

As you plan your calendar for each day, keep what you identified as the thing you want to become known for top-of-mind. Then intentionally make decisions throughout the day that align with what you want to become known for.

That means building in time each day to practice. Practice time won't just magically appear in your daily schedule. You're going to have to say NO to some of the things you're currently doing that do NOT align with what you want to become known for.

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### Trait #3: Fight against imposter syndrome

As you begin making the mindset shift and practicing the thing you want to become known for, and saying NO to things that get in the way, you are going to experience imposter syndrome. You'll think: *I'm a phony! I'm a fraud! How did I ever convince myself that I could do this? I'm not experienced enough. I'm not good enough. I'll never be good enough.*

Like most people, I've battled imposter syndrome. I remember the time I was invited to teach a course on branding at a writers conference.

Determined to master every nuance of branding, I read a bunch of books on branding (this was in the days before podcasting; otherwise, I would have listened to a bunch of podcasts on branding, too).

As I read the books, it occurred to me that I already knew a LOT about branding. In fact, I started branding *waaaay* back in 1983. Yes, you heard that right. 1983. At the time, I was advising the yearbook class at a high school. My staff and I would come up with a theme for the yearbook. We'd design a logo, decide on a color palette, create a style guide for graphics and copy. Throughout the year, we ran all kinds of sales and promotions. We were doing brand development – we just didn't call it that.

Making the realization that I had plenty of experience as a brand development specialist helped me to say, "Imposter syndrome, begone!"

When you start feeling anxious and imposter-ish, you're even more prone to compare yourself with others. *I'll never be as good at this as so and so.*

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For example, if you've started an Instagram account and you have 250 followers, you might compare yourself with a writer in your niche who has 25,000 followers. "I'll never get as many followers as her," you moan.

What you may have neglected to take into account is that this writer has been conscientiously building her Instagram following for 5 years. She's 10 or 20 steps ahead of you.

A better way for you to look at this might be to say, "Hey, I have 250 Instagram followers. That's a fantastic start! I'm going to be committed to my followers, and I'm going to generously serve them.

We all start out with zero fans, zero followers and zero email subscribers. Or maybe a handful – your mom, your siblings, and your best friends. Whether you interact with 5 or 50 people, commit to serving them with your all, the same way you would serve 500 or 5000 or 500,000 subscribers.

And this is Trait #4: Generously serve your audience

Your readers have challenges, questions, and frustrations related to that thing you want to become known for. They want to overcome a challenge or achieve something, and you can help them achieve it because you've been practicing it yourself, you've seen results, and you believe you can help them get results, too.

When you are committed to confidently and lovingly leading them, serving them unselfishly with the intent that you will help them achieve the results they want, that imposter syndrome is going to shrivel up like a dried apple.

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You're going to begin feeling more comfortable in your new "professional writer" skin.

Trait #5: Ethical

Being a professional also means working and behaving in such a way that others view you as consistent, competent, reliable, confident, and worthy of respect.

For me, all those things are summed up in one word: ethical.

When you say you're going to do something, you do it. You honor your commitments.

You meet deadlines.

You exceed expectations by routinely overdelivering.

When you make mistakes – and yes, you will make them – you are accountable. You own your mistakes and don't blame them on others. You apologize, you find solutions, you work to fix it, and you vow not to make the same mistake again.

You're truthful. You don't tell little white lies or cover for others' deceptions.

You show respect to those with whom you interact. Before you say a word or take an action, you consider how your words and actions will impact others.

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You're consistent. Your behavior, when working with clients or co-workers, is the same as when you're around your family, your friends, or by yourself.

Some of those behavioral traits seem like a tall order, don't they? You may be thinking, "Oh, wow, I have trouble meeting deadlines. I really need to work on that one."

Or, "I have a really hard time admitting when I'm wrong. I need a lot of practice in that area."

So, third action step for today. Choose one trait of being an ethical professional that you most need to work on. And then commit to start working on it, today.

I heard from another reader named Tammy. She's a life coach who started blogging back in 2011. She wrote, "I have finally begun believing the seeds God planted long ago are meant to blossom into something more than I had imagined."

Isn't that beautiful? Since 2011, Tammy has been making the mindset shift to "professional writer," and she has reached the point of beginning to believe that she truly is a professional writer, and that these many years of faith and courage are going to result in something more gorgeous than she could ever have imagined.

It all starts with having a dream or a vision or a calling. Taking action on that dream. Practicing and practicing. Connecting with your readers. Serving them selflessly and generously.

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Today, choose to be fearless. Decisive. Say out loud, “I am a professional writer.” And begin to live it.

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