

A surefire way to impress any editor

The way we present ourselves and our work can be the difference between landing an assignment and getting passed over.



FREELANCING WITH TIM

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Workshop alert! Join me **this Thursday at 4:30 p.m. Eastern** for an in-depth tutorial on writing the perfect pitch that editors will actually read – and commission. We'll cover everything from how to structure a pitch for almost any story, to what you must include (and leave out!), to finding editors and best practices for following up. [Click here to register](#), and remember that [paid subs get free access](#) (for details on that, see [the middle of this post](#)). See you Thursday!

Hello friends! I hope your week is off to a lovely start and you're enjoying some beautiful spring weather and activities. I, um ... watched TV and movies all weekend inside. Couldn't have been better tbh.

Anyway! Today we're going to cover an often-overlooked but absolutely key component of any successful freelance business: **How we present ourselves and our work to potential editors.**

I've invited freelance writer and former editor [Liz Massey](#) to share some insight and knowledge on the topic that she's gained from her many years on both sides of the equation.

Take it away, Liz!

Getting on an editor's "regulars" roster can be a tricky, mysterious affair, a process that is equal parts skill, reliability, being able to deliver the goods, and sometimes just plain luck. However, there are two things within your control that you can do to help your odds of getting that initial response, gain an editor's trust, and put your best foot forward: **(1) Construct your online portfolio thoughtfully and with intentionality**, and **(2) Be extremely mindful and methodical about how you portray your published work.**

I've experienced the writer-editor relationship from both sides. I've worked for more than 30 years as a freelance writer and editor, and I was on staff as a

magazine editor for more than 15 years. I have seen firsthand how improving your self-presentation to editors can take your career to the next level and remove obstacles to showcasing your talent.

What editors look for when they visit your portfolio

When I vetted writers as a magazine editor, this is what I paid attention to when I reviewed a writer's published work:

- Each article's relevance to the pitch or assignment under discussion
- How the writer selected sources and how they handled quotes (i.e., how they set them up and provided context)
- Evidence of good old-fashioned writing and reporting skills, like how they handled transitions and how clearly they framed the article's purpose early on (like, say, in the [nut graf](#)!)
- My evaluation of their ability to deliver the story under consideration

Your focus when building your portfolio should be on the quality of your samples, but don't forget to make it easy to use. A portfolio site that's challenging to navigate puts a barrier between your work and the editor.

Portfolio hosting options

If your budget allows, your own personal, branded website, complete with a custom URL, is a wonderful option. However, you have to pay for a lot of moving parts, like design work, the domain name, and site hosting.

Using a free platform like [wordpress.com](#) to host your portfolio can be a much cheaper option, but it comes with the usual "freemium" limitations that other, similar, platforms have as well. Dedicated portfolio platforms, like [clippings.me](#), [Notion](#), or [Authory](#), offer a decent compromise, providing a platform designed for portfolios with relatively low upkeep fees. I recently started using Authory's paid platform, which allows unlimited clips to be posted and allows you to create an unlimited number of collections. Its free option could work for many, as it lets you host up to 10 work samples in a single collection.

More workshops! Next month I have two workshops that will go deep on finding freelance work using social media and launching and growing your

own newsletter. (All registrants will get a full playback of the workshop, whether they attend live or not, and [paid subscribers](#) get 100% off tickets!)

• **May 7 @ 4:30 p.m. Eastern: How to use social media to find work.** Join me and freelance extraordinaire [Kaitlyn Arford](#) for a workshop on finding work using social media and how it can help you build a sustainable — and profitable! — business. There is SO much out there for those who know exactly how to look, and Kaitlyn is the best in the biz at digging up those opportunities.

• **May 14 @ 4:30 p.m. Eastern: How to start and grow a newsletter.** Join me and Parker Molloy of [The Present Age](#) for a workshop on how to launch and grow a successful newsletter. We'll cover the best platforms for publishing your newsletter, how to find your target audience, how to promote your work, the ins and outs of developing your niche, and so much more!

Portfolio do's and don'ts

Maintaining your portfolio is like brushing your teeth. It's necessary, you'll see results down the road, and you'll be glad you made it a habit. Here are some quick tips that will help you make the most of whatever platform you choose.

Do's

- Add clips to your portfolio as they're published
- Save articles in multiple formats, including PDFs, in case the original online link goes dead
- Spend time planning how you'll organize your clips. If you have more than five, say, do you need to organize them by subject? Do collections of clips need a separate page?
- Create custom collections to showcase specialties
- Keep your portfolio simple and easy to follow

Don'ts

- Exceed your budget for a portfolio site; remember, it's just one part of developing your career and of your overall freelance business
- Post less-than-great work to your portfolio; you're better represented by five outstanding articles than 15 mediocre ones

- Make editors hunt for a specific article you want them to read; send them a link from your portfolio to that story in the [clips part of your pitch](#)
- Use scanned or photographed images of print pages if you have other options

How to talk about past writing work

Framing your previous assignments in a positive, productive way is also essential to building an ongoing relationship with an editor, whether you're talking casually on the phone or writing a pitch. One helpful mental model for discussing your work is the case study, which is a deep dive into a specific real-world example that you want to highlight. You can apply the case-study model when talking about your portfolio by focusing on:

- Challenges you overcame in a writing assignment
- Lessons you learned along the way
- How you partnered with the editor to make the final draft amazing
- How this assignment moved your freelance career forward

And, of course, this goes without saying, but don't bad-mouth editors when talking about prior assignments. This shows prospective editors how you may speak of them.

Finally, a crucial point: Don't worry about shameless self-promotion. No one else is going to do it for you.

Self-promotion is critical to developing your freelance career. You control how you present yourself, so curate your best work and your best stories about your work. Editors will appreciate you for presenting an honest portrait of yourself and what you have to offer, and that may even help to grease the wheels to more assignments!

Liz Massey is a freelance writer in Northern Maine who frequently shares insights on how to create better nonfiction. You can catch up on her professional writing activities (which include résumé writing and content strategy, in addition to freelance writing and editing) on [LinkedIn](#). You can take a peek at her freelance portfolio on [Authory](#).

Oh, a few other things ...

- **Got a question about freelancing or the wider world of journalism?** Let's hear it, and I may feature it in a future Q&A post! Drop any of your questions, comments, and thoughts about freelancing and journalism in general in a comment below, or email me at tim@freelancingwithtim.com.
- **Sell a pitch recently? I want to see it!** If you had a story picked up not long ago, I'd love to feature you and your story in our [ongoing series](#) highlighting pitches that sold. Email me at tim@freelancingwithtim.com and put "Pitches that sold" in the subject line. Can't wait to see 'em!
- **I offer one-on-one coaching!** Is your story falling apart and you need a second set of eyes on it? Want a seasoned perspective on a pitch you're kicking around? Interested in talking about careers and building your freelance business? Maybe just want an edit on a story draft? I've got you covered! Click below to book a one-on-one coaching session to talk about pitches, story ideas and development, editing, careers, or anything else you might need help with! ([Paid subscribers](#) get 33% off — email me at tim@freelancingwithtim.com for details!)



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