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Tiny Writing Tips

to start you on your path to being a paid writer

by **Christine Wolf**

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You've loved writing your whole life -- and now you're considering making a serious go of it.

You find yourself asking questions like,

“How do I get started?”

“What does it take to write for a living?”

“How do I know if I'm doing things right?”

When I launched my writing career more than 10 years ago, I had those same questions -- and more. Through the years, I've picked up a ton of tiny tips along the way. Now I'm sharing these tips with you, since a community of writers is better when we all lift each other up.

Before the tips, though, let's get your biggest questions out of the way:

HOW TO GET STARTED

The simple answer is, you just start, beginning with one simple phrase you must say to yourself: **"I am a writer."**

No one's going to say that for you, and no one will give you permission. You've always loved writing because, let's be honest -- you were born to write.

I was 39 years old when I finally made the decision to write full-time. I didn't know a thing about publishing or journalism. I didn't have any connections. I didn't even know what I wanted to write. All I knew was that writing made me feel empowered and filled with purpose. Until then, I'd only written for myself (or family and friends). And, since my writing seemed to make me (and others) so happy, I asked myself why I didn't do it more.

My only answer? Fear.

Still, I worried I was starting too late. I saw professional writers -- and their published work and their burgeoning social media platforms and their multi-figure book deals and their decades of experience and wisdom -- and thought, "Who am I to jump in now?" Then, I heard someone state the obvious: "You just have to start somewhere."

That someone turned out to be me.

WHAT IT TAKES TO WRITE FOR A LIVING

I know you don't want to hear this, but the truth is, *it depends* -- and that's because every writer's needs vary. You may need your writing to pay the bills. You may write to make a difference in the world. You may write to figure yourself out. You may actually want all the above.

But, no matter *why* you write, you can make a living at it by remembering 2 things:

1. “Success” will take longer than you think, especially if you write for more than 1 reason, and
2. Having a marathoner’s mentality is essential

I’ll elaborate on those points later, but the key takeaway is this:

If you decide to write for a living, then OWN it. COMMIT to it. TELL people you’re a writer. Write every day, and seriously consider every opportunity -- even the ones you think are “below” you, and especially the ones you don’t think you can handle. Aim high, and remember that you’ll be your best (and sometimes your only) cheerleader, so try to choose projects that speak to your heart.

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU’RE DOING IT RIGHT

Imagine all your favorite writers. Do you honestly love all their work equally? No way. One writer’s work can’t possibly please everyone all the time.

You can’t ever know if you’re doing it “right”, and frankly, you’ll be too busy to care. As long as you’re authentic, trust that you’re on the right track. As a writer, your life will be touched by equal parts of growth, self-doubt, setbacks, celebrations, and the constant need to shift and redirect. And, you’ll do far more than just writing. You’ll be reading, researching, outlining, drafting, workshopping, editing, rewriting, submitting, crying and solemnizing the wonders of the written word.

AND NOW, ON TO MY 7 TINY WRITING TIPS...

7 Tiny Writing Tips

to start you on your path to being a paid writer

By [Christine Wolf](#)



1. Your background is less important than your desire to learn and grow.

You **can** make a living at writing, and you don't need writing "credentials" to do it. I don't have a degree in journalism OR writing. I majored in Advertising, minored in English, and earned a Master of Arts in Teaching. I worked in business for 10 years, then taught for another 10 before deciding to write full time. As a result, I've written two paid, weekly newspaper columns and two books; I manage two writing businesses; I now earn money as a writing coach and public speaker; I've been featured in national media outlets and in a documentary about women's empowerment; and I have interviewed a sitting president.

I accomplished all those things after I decided, at 39, to pursue writing full time. So how did I make that all happen without a degree or formal training in journalism or writing?

Two things:

- a) I said yes to almost every writing opportunity, and
- b) I constantly asked the writing community for help when I stepped out of my comfort zone.

2. You're not going into this for the money.

I'm not saying you won't **make** money writing; I'm saying that when you go into writing with an expectation of riches, you will fail -- spectacularly.

This is because readers are wise. They'll understand you and your intentions from the first sentence you share. But if you go into this for the love of the story, for the appreciation of the craft, and for the honor of sifting and weaving and shaping words into life, you'll have gone into the profession for all the right reasons, and your efforts will eventually pay off.

3. Speaking of money, prepare to write a lot of stuff for "free".

I'll catch a LOT of flack for saying that, and I understand why. Anyone who knows their own worth will (and should) scream, "NEVER WRITE FOR FREE!" "NEVER GIVE AWAY YOUR SKILLS FOR NO PAY!" "DON'T MAKE IT HARDER FOR THE REST OF US BY LOWERING RATES OR GIVING YOUR WRITING AWAY FOR FREE!" And they are right.

But note that I put quotation marks around the word "free".

Take, for example, this PDF. I wrote it without being paid for it, and I'm sharing information that took me years to learn and assimilate and understand. There is value in what I'm offering (my experience and perspective), and yet I'm just "giving it away"??? Yes, yes I am. And why? Many reasons:

- Being a good literary citizen is important, and I've appreciated learning from the experiences of others who've gone before me.
- Creating a document like this actually helps ME see the big picture of where I've been and what I've learned.

- For me, **all** writing is practice, and not all writing is necessarily publishable or shareable. And so, when I'm working things out in my mind or trying to make sense of a new concept, I often write to process and distill the issues. Consequently, by sharing what comes to mind during all that processing and distillation, I find that I have an opportunity to connect deeply with readers and build trust that comes from not expecting anything in return. It's me being me, simply sharing my views—and believe me, I've also shared my views as a paid opinion columnist and paid author and paid writing coach. However, if I'm being honest with you, it took me a lot of practicing and processing and distilling before I felt confident and comfortable enough to recognize and claim my value and my worth. Maybe I'm a slow learner. Maybe I'm a deeply insecure person. Maybe I'm infuriating writers who believe we should NEVER give our writing away without charging. All I know is what's been true for me. For many reasons, this is the approach I've taken, and it's worked for me. My hope for you is that you write as much as possible and recognize the worth and value of your efforts sooner rather than later, because once you do, it's an incredible feeling.

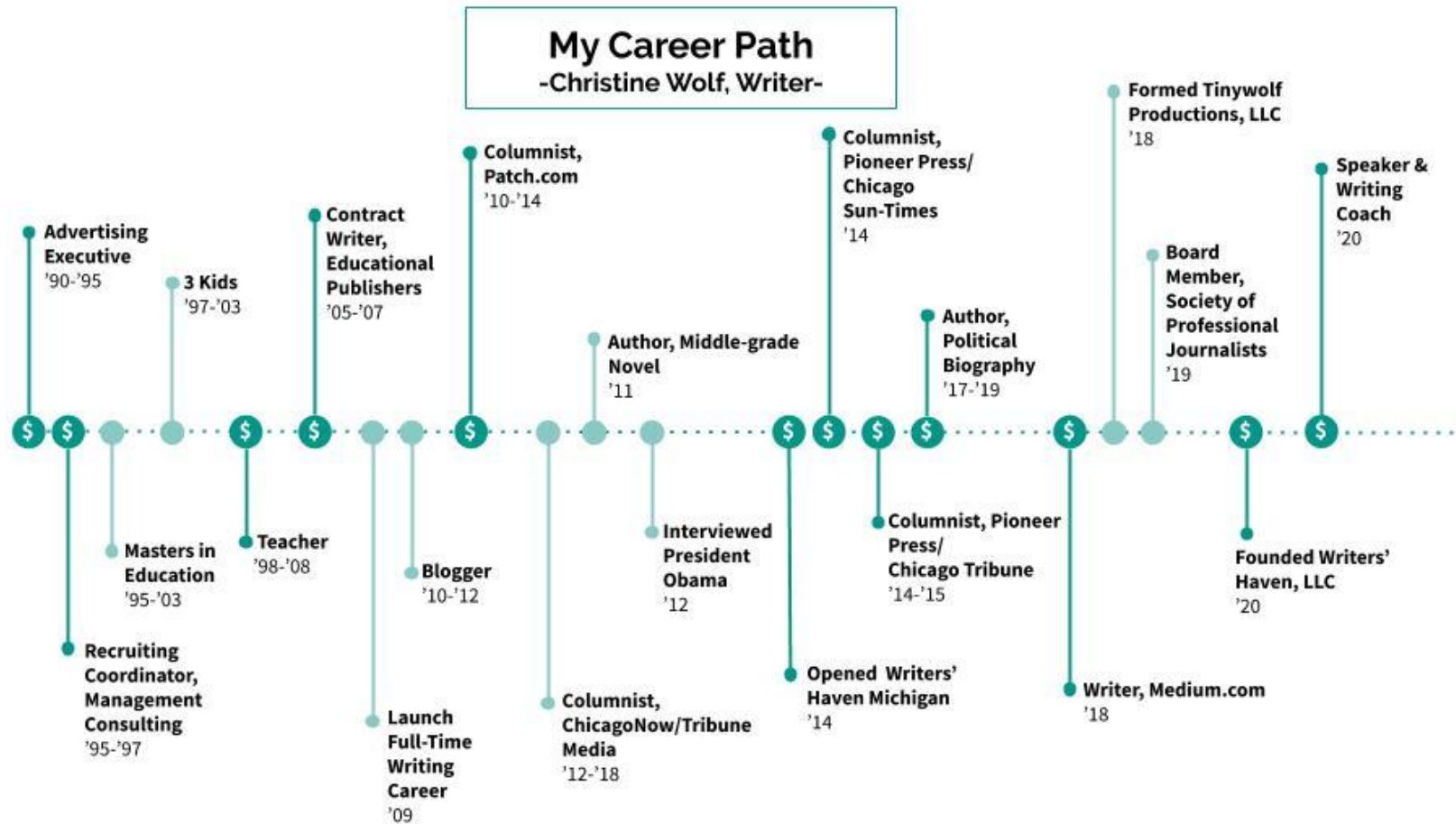
I'll add here that, when I first started out as a writer, I honestly didn't know what I was doing.

I'd always dreamed of writing a memoir, but I didn't have a clue how to do it. While mulling ideas and learning the world of publishing, I started a Wordpress blog, which allowed me to express my feelings, gave me a much-needed sense of accomplishment whenever I hit "publish", and helped me start building a body of work. My blog wasn't monetized, but at that point, I didn't believe my work was worth much to anyone. I was just grateful for eyeballs and comments -- and I got them, along with the attention of an editor at a national, digital news service.

And that's how I got my first paid job as a reporter and columnist: I wrote for free, posted regularly, and got discovered by someone who appreciated my voice.

But, even with my paid gigs, I continued to "write for free" -- except I never think of it in that term. I consider my unpaid work as an investment in my craft. Putting my work out there isn't always easy, particularly since I'm learning as I go. I grow stronger as a professional every day that I write, and when I can get paid for my content, I'm thrilled. And when I'm not paid, I consider myself a Literary Citizen, putting my writing out there in ways that will (hopefully) elevate the writing community.

The following chart highlights work I've done during my 30-year career path. During this time, I've spent time in paid and unpaid roles, including "Advertising Executive", "Mom", "Contract Writer", "Blogger", "Columnist", "Author", "Business Owner", "Speaker" and "Writing Coach":



4. Fewer words make a stronger impact.

As a recovering overwriter, I struggle with this one, and I suspect I always will. I used to believe more words would mean more money, but what I've learned is *fewer words make a much stronger impact*, so I've learned to embrace white space.

5. Revel in every gain and accomplishment.

Since you'll be your own worst critic, it's essential you exercise the part of your brain that recognizes all the things you do *well*. For example: As you now know, I'm a chronic overwriter, so I'm proud to say this tip is only two sentences long (as was my last)!

6. The majority of what you write may not be “presentable”, but it's still valuable.

You may find yourself making little notes everywhere. You may fill folders with half-written drafts. You may make lists upon lists of headline ideas that never get written.

None of these efforts are a waste of your time. They're all steps to help you find and strengthen your voice.

Don't beat yourself up, especially as a new writer, when you have little content to show for your efforts. Remember: Every abandoned idea indicates something that didn't hold your interest enough to continue. Try to find peace in that innate wisdom. It's not “failure”. It's not “writers' block”. It's not “giving up”. It's the work you need to do to find your voice.

To be sure, there are times we must write about things that just don't resonate. Sometimes, we need to write through that morass to find our *real* stories...our *real* characters...our *real* angles. To write *well*, we need to feel

invested and absorbed, and this rarely happens without doing the “hidden” work of writers -- including (but not limited to) reading, researching, thinking, drafting and revising.

Whether you write fiction or nonfiction, it’s essential to find your personal connection to the project -- to the characters, the subjects, the stakes, the settings, and the unique story arcs only you can design.

7. The key to success as a writer is never, ever giving up.

As a writer, you’re in control of language and tone. You set the scenes, you create the worlds and you direct the narratives. You’re at the helm of the stories. And if you’re anything like me, you’re grateful that you get to express *you*.

But let’s be very clear: Making it as a writer is extremely hard work. One of the hardest parts is believing in yourself when things get really tough. It calls for levels of personal investment unlike any other career.

At times, it’s an extremely lonely, emotionally exhausting profession. Writing is not a get-rich-quick endeavor. It requires more patience than I ever knew possible. A writer’s life demands equal parts flexibility, self-discipline, creativity and sacrifice.

To make a living as a writer, you must accept there’ll be frighteningly lean times, as well as periods of bloated ambiguity. It’s not uncommon to question why the hell you’ve chosen this path. Trust me on this. Good Lord, trust me.

But, let me tell you one story that might bring things into perspective:

Growing up, I never thought of myself as a runner. I’m barely five feet tall with a body designed for gymnastics and pirouettes -- not gaits and pacing. Still, in junior high, I tried out for track (and even basketball!). I wanted to know how these sports *felt* for people who weren’t vertically challenged. Honing skills I’d later use as a journalist -- observation and investigation -- I tried out for and then embedded my 13-year-old self in these unfamiliar environments.

The only thing I'll say about my first and only basketball season is that, on the rare occasion I DID make a basket, it went into the opposing team's net.

My track and field experience, though? It was life changing. The hurdles were a complete disaster, and the high jump and long jump events even more humiliating, but when I discovered long distance running, I amazed everyone -- including myself. It was here that I could just run, and run *long*, a physical representation of my natural operating mode. I quickly realized the 500m race was as much **in my mind** as in my little legs. *If I just keep going, I'd tell myself, I will cross the finish line.*

On that track, I discovered one of my two superpowers: *Endurance*. Three years later, I discovered my second superpower: *Parallel Parking*.

Endurance is *still* my guiding force, one that helped me finish two marathons, two books, and hundreds of investigative pieces and blog posts. I know that even when I'm tired, even when the story isn't clear, and even when all hope seems lost, as long as I keep going, I'll eventually reach the finish.

You, too, have your own superpowers -- and your own, unique voice. Maybe you've already found them. Maybe you're still figuring them out. They're there, though, and as long as you recognize their value, they'll guide you through your personal writing journey.

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Need more tips and writing support? Looking for inspiration for your own writing journey? Have a project that needs a fresh set of eyes? Visit www.christinewolf.com/contact to schedule your free 20-minute consultation.

