



# How a Rude Comment Turned into a \$500 Article Assignment

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Ever get really, really annoyed about something, and you couldn't stop thinking about it? And you kept turning the situation around in your head, testing out different ways you could have handled it?

Yeah, me too.

But here's something that will turn that frown upside down: As a freelance writer, you can turn your grievances into cash!

The problem is, most writers get irritated at something and immediately want to pitch an article on "Why people shouldn't irritate me that way." Unfortunately for those writers, no one wants to be lectured to—and they certainly don't want to pay good money for the privilege.

For example, I once knew a writer who was in a wheelchair and also had epilepsy, and she wanted to write articles on how to not annoy people in wheelchairs, and why the guy who saved a man with epilepsy who had fallen onto subway tracks wasn't a hero—the man he saved was the real hero, because he had to deal with a debilitating condition every day.

No! Trashing those who aggravate you isn't the way to create change, or to land freelance writing jobs. You're a writer with an agenda, and editors won't touch that stuff.

The trick is to figure out how to transform your grievance from a rant into helpful information for readers.

## "WOW, YOU'RE A PIG" = CHA-CHING!

Last summer, my family and I went to a local Italian restaurant for a nice meal. It wasn't super fancy, but it wasn't exactly fast food, either; it was the kind of place where you'd pay \$18 for a pasta dish with no sides.

Let me tell you, that food was good. And I was hungry.

At the end of the meal, when the server came to clear away the dishes he took a look at my empty plate and said, "Wow, you didn't like that *at all*, huh?" Once the server walked away, my husband, son, and I had a good laugh about his rudeness and promptly forgot all about it.

But now our brains were primed to spot comments of that type, and we started noticing that at every restaurant we went to, the server would make some awkward comment about how much we had eaten. Clearly it wasn't just us getting singled out; I wagered that most diners had to deal with remarks like these.

I could have written snarky reviews on the restaurants' Yelp pages, complained to all my friends, or written an email to the managers of the offending eateries—which would merely chip away at the problem without creating any real change—and continued to feel annoyed whenever a server joked about my appetite.

Instead, I sent a pitch to *Pizza Today*, a trade magazine for pizza restaurant owners and managers...reached 40,000 readers...and earned \$500.

## HOW I TURNED A COMPLAINT INTO A FREELANCE WRITING JOB

This is the pitch I sent (with the editor's name changed).

Hi, John!

[Joke that won't make sense...you had to be there. :) ]

Seriously, though, I've noticed a phenomenon I'd like to write about, and it seems to be getting worse and worse: How servers transition from the end of the main meal to the next stage (dessert or check).

I've noticed that no matter what restaurant we go to, servers come over at the end of the meal and say something, well, awkward. For example:

- "Are you still working on that?"
- "Looks like you have only scraps left."
- "Wow, you cleaned your plate!"

In fact, we heard all of these in just the last few weeks.

I've spoken with other people I know about this, and we all agree that these statements seem somehow less-than-gracious. We don't "work on" our meals—in fact, an old Doonesbury comic has the guest responding, "It's food, not a pile of debris that needs to be removed." And every home host knows that commenting on how much their guest has eaten is just plain rude. (The "scraps" comment had even our 7-year-old aghast.)

Of course, if all guests used the universal silverware signal to show when they're done with their meals, servers wouldn't have to ask; however, servers can't expect diners to know or consistently use this signal...especially when they're, say, using plastic utensils at an ultra-casual joint.

Then there's the issue of clearing plates: Etiquette rules say the server shouldn't remove any plates until everyone is done, because the diners who haven't finished will feel rushed. On the other hand, many guests don't like sitting with dirty plates in front of them while their friends finish their meal. What to do?

In "The Final Word," I'll talk with restaurant consultants and etiquette experts to give pizzeria owners advice on how their servers can graciously handle the end of the meal: How to know whether the guest is finished eating, how to ask if the server isn't sure, when to clear the plates, and more.

John, what do you think? I'd love to write this for you, especially since it's a particular interest of mine. As you know, I've written for you in the past...I've also written for *Independent Joe* (the magazine of Dunkin' Donuts independent franchise owners), and lately have been writing regularly for *FSR* magazine.\*

Thanks so much!

I sent this pitch on July 21. The editor responded immediately that he'd bring the idea up at the next editorial meeting. On September 13, I got the gig.

The article ran in the November 2016 issue of *Pizza Today*. Want to see it? [It's here](#).

*\*I would normally do some research and talk to experts to provide a few of the suggested tips in my query, but because I'd worked with this editor several times in the past, I was able to get an assignment from a quicker pitch.*

## LOVE YOUR PROBLEMS

If you have a problem, chances are lots of other people have the same problem and would love to read about a solution. You hate grocery shopping, commuting, or doing your taxes? Join the club. You're dealing with a bad boss, online trolls, a chronic illness, irritating in-laws, or a fight with your homeowners insurance company? Get in line.

Just pick a publication whose readers need answers to these problems; maybe a women's magazine would like an article on unique tips for cutting down on grocery shopping time, or a business magazine could use a piece on dealing with the six worst types of bosses.

As another example, one of my first freelance writing jobs was inspired by a bad boss. It was a tiny, tiny company—just the owner and two employees—and the owner was a terrible

micromanager. I coined the term "nanomanager" to refer to a small business owner who micromanages her employees (get it?), wrote up a query on how this phenomenon damages small businesses in particular, and scored a freelance writing assignment with *Nation's Business* magazine. Readers learned, and I earned. It's hard to hate your micromanaging boss when she helped you launch your freelance writing career!

Got a complaint? Be thankful, help others, and turn your problems into cash.

Your Freelance Writing Success Coach,

*Linda Formichelli*

P.S. Ready to start getting more freelance writing jobs? Check out the [Volume Marketing Challenge for Freelance Writers](#), which is on sale NOW! You'll learn how to market in volume to generate more freelance writing jobs and earn better—and benefit from a different free teaching resource every week, contributed by Copyblogger and other top experts. Registration ends on March 12, 2017—and the Challenge starts the next day—so don't wait!