



# How to Narrow Down Your Niche

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You've probably heard that writers who specialize can command higher fees. That's true, and it leads to this question, which I get from writers all the time: What niche should I choose?

Whether you're just starting out, or have been writing for a while and want to increase your earnings, here are some ways to choose the most profitable specialty for you.

## PICK A TOPIC

The most obvious way to specialize is to choose a topic you know a lot about, and pitch related publications and businesses.

Think about your background. Where have you worked? What did you go to college for? Do you have any hobbies? These can lead to some lucrative niches.

For example, if you have a background in PR, you could write on PR topics for trade magazines in many different industries, from banking to hospitality. They all need to do PR!

Or say you're an amateur (but passionate) baker interested in content writing. Pitch yourself as a baking writer.

Maybe you have a B.S. in Athletic Training. Your niche can be writing about competitive sports!

**Picking a niche where you have previous experience is probably the easiest way to get a foot in the door if you're a new writer with no clips.**

## **PICK A FORMAT**

Another way to choose a specialty is to concentrate on one type of writing. For example, you might choose to focus on:

- Blogging.
- Case studies.
- Ghostwriting.
- White papers.
- Magazine articles.
- Web copy.
- Direct mail sales letters.
- Profiles.

**This lets you vary the topics and the types of clients—which is a plus if you're easily bored writing about the same thing all the time—but still lets you specialize in a way that lets you earn more.** If you focus on, say, case studies, chances are you'll get to know a lot more about this type of writing than a generalist who writes case studies along with brochures, blog posts, articles, and everything else.

## PICK AN AUDIENCE

Here's yet another option: Narrow your audience down to one specific reader or client type. For example, you could write for technology startups, teenagers, banking clients, farmers, legal firms, middle-aged men, or a certain type of nonprofit.

Often it seems there's a clear overlap between a topic niche and an audience niche. If you're a baking writer, your clients might naturally be cooking magazines or manufacturers of baking equipment, ingredients, and supplies. **But you don't always have to go with the obvious!** Maybe you can become the baking writer who:

- Writes about baking for kids.
- Focuses on urban gardeners who grow their own ingredients.

- Writes tips on healthy baking for medical centers' newsletters, websites, blogs, and magazines.
- Writes content about gluten-free baking for manufacturers of gluten-free baking products.

These are even narrower niches, and they can help you cut through the competition. It seems like so many food writers want to write about, well, food. Not as many want to write about baking for heart disease patients...and there is a need for this!

## PICK AN AUDIENCE

Want to specialize, but not really? You could be a jack-of-all-trades who focuses on businesses or magazines in a particular region.

When I started out as a freelance writer, I pitched dozens and dozens of businesses in Massachusetts, where I was living at the time. If they seemed big enough that they might be able to hire writers, and they were in an industry I could possibly write about (meaning not too high tech), I would pitch them. I ended up writing for a bank, a roofing company, a liquor store, a utilities company, a business that makes Judaica, a pizza chain, a company that manufactures cables, and more—all within driving distance of my home office.

Not into copywriting? Many magazine writers focus on local publications; some cities have business magazines, parenting magazines, lifestyle magazines, health magazines, and more...all targeted to readers in their general region.

**The great thing about writing for local clients is that you often get to meet your prospects and clients.** Lots of prospects will want to meet you before hiring you, and some clients will want you to come in for regular meetings once they hire you (which you can charge for, of course) When I wrote for the Massachusetts company that made cables, each month I would don a nice suit and drive down to their offices to discuss the next internal newsletter I'd be writing for them.

What's that? You live in East Podunk and there are no businesses or magazines near you? Look to your nearest big city, or choose another type of niche.

## LET YOUR SPECIALTY PICK YOU!

Many of us start out as jacks-of-all-trades, writing whatever people will pay us for. I know I did; I've written about everything from vacuum cleaner technology to dog training.

While many experts suggest picking a niche right away, I've found that there is an upside to being a generalist: Your niche will find you.

**Starting out as a generalist lets you experiment with different topics and writing formats to learn what you enjoy most and what pays best.** Eventually, you'll naturally start narrowing down into certain niches (yes, you can have more than one!); for example, over time I developed specialties in health and fitness, nutrition, self-help, restaurant management, cleaning, small business marketing, pet care, and a couple other topics.

The key is to tailor your pitches to the market. When I pitch a pet magazine, I call myself a pet writer and pull out my pet-related samples; when I pitch a sanitation business, I call myself a cleaning writer and pull out those clips.

If you do this, the website situation can be tricky: What clips do you showcase?

One option is to divide up your portfolio page by niche: Women's Magazines, Financial Trades, and so on. Or you could even create one page on your site for each niche. When you pitch, simply send prospects the link to the page that's most relevant to them.

**As for your website or LinkedIn title, I actually like ones with unusual combinations!** I have one student in my Volume Marketing Challenge for Freelance Writers who wanted to use the title "Construction and Wine Writer" on his LinkedIn profile. Now that's memorable!

Remember, your prospects are smart people. Give them some credit! I promise they won't look at your website or LinkedIn headline and think, "Wait, what? He writes about the construction of wine?" They'll be able to understand that you have two distinct niches.

## MIX AND MATCH

Of course, you could always combine two (or more) different types of niche. Several years ago I sent sales letters to universities in New Hampshire and Massachusetts—so I was niching by audience and region—and ended up landing two regular freelance writing gigs: I wrote a series of alumni profiles for one university and edited a section of the alumni magazine for another.

So how about, say, a PR writer who focuses on startups? Or a health writer for San Francisco-based magazines and businesses?

**The advantage to this is that the more you specialize—up to a point—the more you can charge**, because really, how many writers are there who are experts in writing doctor profiles for hospitals or profiles of mini-storage companies?



## WHEN IS A NICHE TOO NICHED?

There's always the danger that you'll niche yourself right out of freelance writing jobs. You don't want to be the ferret writer who writes case studies for pet food supply businesses in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Sometimes your gut will tell you a niche is too narrow (like the ferret writer example above, I'd hope), and other times you'll need to start building a list of prospects and see what you come up with. If your list is pitifully small, you'll know you need to broaden your niche.

And that's okay! **A lot of freelance writing is about experimenting and seeing what works.** Better to experiment and discover what doesn't work, and then try something else, than to take the path everyone else is taking and have to battle loads of competition along the way.

## YOU CAN ALWAYS SWITCH!

Many writers freak out when I suggest that they start out with a niche where they have some personal or work experience, because they want go freelance in order to get away from that stuff! "I'm an accountant, and I hate it...I want to write about butterfly collecting!"

The great news is, **you can always change your niche once you have good traction and clips.**  
(Or you can develop a second niche)

And of course, you don't have to listen to me at all. If you want to jump right into butterfly writing when you have no clips and no background in it, that's fine...you never know what opportunities will arise if you just try!

Your Freelance Writing Success Coach,

*Linda Formichelli*

P.S. The Freelance Writers Den is opening to new members on March 21! So if you've been wanting to join this community of 1,200+ writers—which includes an active forum, free trainings, and a Junk-Free Job Board—jump on the [Den's waiting list today](#) to be notified the minute you can join. Carol opens the Den only a few times per year, so don't wait! If this isn't the right time for you to join the Den, the best way to find out when you can officially sign up in the future is to join the waitlist.