Tips for Meeting Deadlines for Aspiring Copywriters

Hello everybody! Mike Miller here, Copywriter at *Go Media*. Today I'm going to talk to you about meeting deadlines as a professional copywriter. But first, a little disclaimer:

I used to follow the old Jack Kerouac/Hunter S. Thompson approach to churning out copy – on a healthy diet of absolute debauchery (*cue Ian Dury & The Blockheads, please*). I'm not gonna lie. It was a hell of a lot of fun for awhile. But unfortunately it wasn't the healthiest way to meet deadlines. Luckily I wised up and figured that, if I wanted to survive and make a decent living, I had to develop a healthier, less self destructive approach. I soon discovered after cleaning up my act that my inherent weirdness shone through regardless of my routine.

So here are some tips for aspiring copywriters on meeting deadlines without losing your edge (aka *The Reformed Person's Guide to the Writer's Life*).

Tips for Meeting Deadlines

Visualize the Finish Line. Paint a mental picture. Keep your deadline at the front of your mind, like a beacon of light at the end of a tunnel, or the end of a demanding race with a cheering crowd waiting for you at the finish line.

Know your subject. Investigate. Do your homework. Get acquainted with your client and the market they serve. This process is much like having a conversation with someone you've just met. Usually there's a preliminary phase when you're fishing for small talk. Eventually you find a common thread to follow. The same applies when writing for hire. Schedule a couple days for total immersion in your subject matter, relative to your deadline, and dive in. Give yourself the

opportunity to effectively learn the lingo and body language of a specific market so that you can convincingly talk the talk and walk the walk, both figuratively and literally. To paraphrase Bob Dylan, *"know your song well before you start singing."*

Take note of things that pique your interest and grab your attention while investigating your client's goods and services. It's precisely the little things that grab your attention early that might help move your narrative forward should you get stuck attempting to communicate an idea further on up the road.

After you've done your homework, find an angle – a thematic hook – from which to intuitively get some traction. Dig in your heels and use it as a launch pad to get started. *[Note: If this sounds a bit abstract, just stick with me here. The creative mind often relies on intuition to carry it forward. Finding a hook means trusting your instincts and letting intuition be your guide.]*

Get some exercise. Nothing frees the mind better than a long walk, jog, or bike ride. I had a writing instructor in college who taught me the importance of physical exercise to open the mind and generate ideas. Over the years I've found that it's a tried-and-true, effective way to shape ideas. But don't go out there empty handed. Be sure to bring along your phone or a voice recorder to capture your ideas while on the move. *[Side Note: I've established a few physical routines over the years to fortify my writing. First, long runs: I often start a run with my mind all scrambled; but by the time I finish, everything is all sorted out. Works like a charm. Second, I prefer to commute to work each day by bike. I find it provides a great opportunity to get inspired and focus on conquering creative road blocks. On top of that, a morning or evening walk is always a winner. After all, walking is the most essential form of exercise. And since running and biking isn't for everyone, walking is a relatively safe alternative. I*

actually dictated the first draft of this article on my morning walk. No kidding.]

Get started. Freestyle. Don't be cautious. Don't ease into your first draft. Charge! Like a bull in a china shop! It's the best way to combat all of the emotions that stifle writers at the start of any project: trepidation, apprehension, consternation, and most importantly, procrastination – all those *-ation* words. They're a bummer. But you can beat them by being bold and a bit daring with your first draft.

Take, for instance, the toughest of them all: Procrastination! You're inevitably going to procrastinate. Everybody does. It's human nature. In fact, some of you out there (*myself included*) might swear to writing better under pressure. To heck with that. Don't let your deadline control you. Know your timeline inside and out and stay on top of it.

The sooner you get something down on the page, the closer you are to the finish line. And, as an added bonus, the sooner you begin, the more time you free up for dilly dallying later on [dilly dallying: verb dil·ly·dal·ly-ing \ ˈdi-lē-ˌda-lē-ing \ : 1. writer's speak for engaging in a bit of frivolity to give yourself a break. 2. a technical term for screwing around on the job.]

Drafting. Hit the ground running with what I like to call the "word vomit" or "brain dump" phase of copywriting. Sounds kinda gross, I know. And it can be, depending on how your mind works. But it's rewarding nonetheless because this is the point in composition when you just go for it by leaning into your hook or your angle, pounding out ideas on your typewriter *(or pc, tablet, or whatevs)* like an old newspaper man. Your first draft doesn't have to be pretty. It doesn't even have to make sense. Let it run wild. To heck with punctuation and proper diction, or even rational thought for that matter! Your first draft is your most organic and primordial – where your best ideas are born and begin to take shape. Keep it raw.

“The rain in Spain looks strange from the plane. And it’s downright insane.” No.

“ The rain in Spain drains like a water main on that godforsaken plain?” Not quite.

“The rain in Spain stays mainly on the plain?” Yeah! That’s it!

Editing is fundamental. Proactively read and re-read what you’ve written. Make changes and adjustments to your copy by reworking and rewriting your text as you read through it. Be diligent. Take notes. Doublecheck your deadline, and keep carving until you’re sure you’ve shaped your text to your liking. You’ll know it when you see it. *[Note: I recommend a three draft minimum for any project, and I don’t mean “barley pops” either. Save that for when you’re done.]*

Cutting room floor stuff. One of the biggest stumbling blocks that writers encounter is the fear of letting go – letting go of a good idea that doesn’t quite fit thematically with the rest of their work; letting go of a bad idea that just doesn’t cut it. Point is, don’t get precious with your work. Don’t be afraid to leave content on the cutting room floor. You can always keep track of any unused ideas by simply cataloging them in a separate file. Good ideas are recyclable. An idea that seems unfit for today might come in handy tomorrow.

So those are my tips for meeting deadlines for aspiring copywriters. Remember to stay busy. Stay healthy. Stay weird!

For more information on a complete list of communication services for your business including copywriting from Go Media, Holla!

-Michael J. Miller