



ESTABLISHING YOUR FREELANCE BUSINESS 101

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LESSON #4

Potential Clients

You've done a few things to start advertising your business. Now what?

Communicating with Potential Clients

Someone contacts you and is interested in finding out about your services. How do you respond?

You'll want to come up with a "form letter" or template you can email to people who contact you. Here are some of the things you could cover in this letter:

1. A description of your services. (This should be addressed in your flyer/brochure and on your website. But for those who haven't seen your flyer or your website, or don't remember what they saw, you'll need at least a brief outline of what you do.)
2. Your rates. (We'll be discussing pricing strategies in the next lesson.) If you charge by the hour, how many pages per hour can the client use as an estimate? How do you define a "page"—single- or double-spaced, what size margins, what size font, etc.? What happens if the estimate is more or less than actual?
3. Do you prefer clients to send you a complete manuscript or just a few chapters to begin with?
4. Will you work exclusively on hard copy or with an electronic file(s), or is either acceptable? Is one method preferable to you over another/cheaper for the client? If the client sends you hard-copy pages, do you want him or her to include a SASE? If you work with electronic files using Track Changes, you may want to ask your clients if they are familiar with that feature. (For those clients who don't know about Track Changes, you might want to write a brief description of the feature that you can send upon request.)

5. Do you expect to receive full payment up front, half up front and the other half upon delivery, or payment by some other method? How do you prefer that payment to be made? Do you accept personal checks, cashier's checks/money orders, PayPal? (We will discuss this in more detail in the next lesson.)
6. What is your anticipated lead time? How long before you'll be able to start on this project? How long do you expect the project to take to finish?

Personalize each letter to fit what you know about the potential client. For instance, if the client has written fiction, poetry, a children's book, etc., you could highlight your unique background and experience in that area. If you have a special interest in the topic or genre of the manuscript they've written or if you are reasonably impressed with the quality of the writing, or some specific aspect of it, you could mention that too. The more personal your response to clients, the more comfortable they will feel with you, the more they will believe that you may be the right editor for them.

You will want to include in your template letter a sentence referring clients to your website for additional details. You may also want to come up with a separate letter to send to potential clients who have already visited your site. This second letter will have fewer details since the recipient will, theoretically, have already read what's on your site.

Ask a question or two. This will encourage the potential client to get back to you with the answers. For example:

1. What are your publishing goals (self-publishing, getting an agent, submitting to a small traditional publisher, etc.)?
2. Do you have a deadline in mind?
3. Who is your intended target audience?
4. What level of editing are you looking for?
5. How long is your manuscript (in words or pages)?

Of course, you should encourage potential clients to contact you if they have any questions.

Close with something positive. My standard line is either "I'm looking forward to hearing from you" or "I'm looking forward to working with you."

Evaluating Jobs

When a potential client asks you about doing a job, you will want to evaluate it to make sure it's something you can and want to do. For this reason, you may wish to request a representative sample of the client's work.

Quickly glance over the manuscript to assure yourself that the overall content is something you want to work with. Pick a page or two and spend maybe five or ten minutes doing an actual edit to see how far you get in that amount of time. This will give you a rough idea of how long the complete job will probably take.

Sample Edits

If a client requests a sample edit, don't spend more than ten or fifteen minutes doing it. That's enough for you to tell how long a job will take and to give the client a good idea of the type of editing you would do.

If the client isn't sure what level of editing he or she wants, you may choose to do two or three different types. For example, you could spend five minutes on one chapter doing a basic proofread, five minutes on another chapter doing a light copyedit, and five minutes on another chapter doing an in-depth substantive edit. Let the client know how much you estimate each type of edit will cost.

Turning Down a Job

There will be times when you will be asked to do jobs that you simply don't want to do. Perhaps the content is offensive to you. The genre might be outside your area of expertise. The content may be too technical for you or contain some elements you don't understand well enough to feel comfortable editing. The religious perspective might contain points you strongly disagree with. You may not own the reference material necessary to properly edit the material (and are unable or unwilling to purchase them for this one job). There may be so much research required (for example, a lot of footnotes that need to be verified) that you don't believe you could edit it in a reasonable amount of time. The level of writing might be so bad that you can't stand the thought of spending numerous hours working on it. Or perhaps, after looking over the manuscript, you honestly can't think of anything you would recommend to improve it.

Or perhaps you just feel a "check in your spirit" about this particular job. I *highly* recommend that you spend a few moments in prayer every single time you are offered a job. Ask the Lord for guidance on whether or not to accept the job, how much to quote, even what turnaround time to estimate. You never know ahead of time whether a job is going to turn out to be a personal or professional fiasco. But God does. You don't know what unexpected things might happen between the time you take the job and the time you promise to have it done by. But God knows. Ask for His leading, and always follow it, even if it means turning down a lucrative job when you really need the money.

If, for any reason, you feel the need to turn down a job, always do so with grace and professionalism. Of course, you would never tell a prospective client, "Your work is so bad, it would take me far too much time to get this into any semblance of even remotely publishable quality. Frankly, your subject is so boring I'd probably fall asleep in the middle of it, and you wouldn't want to pay me to take a nap, now, would you?" But you can always tell a client that the manuscript is not really in your area of expertise, that you are too busy to take on any new clients at this time, or something like that. You could even say that, in your opinion, the manuscript isn't quite ready for a professional edit.

On the other hand, if the client is willing to pay for your services, your edit may be exactly what he or she needs to learn how to improve his or her writing. Your edit could be considered a writing course, with the client's manuscript as the "lesson plan." I've had a few clients whose first manuscripts were *terrible*. But those who learned from my edits, and sent me revised

chapters that implemented what I taught them, eventually had manuscripts that were ready to send to an agent or publisher. I find that very rewarding.

If you don't want to take on a job because the writing needs too much work, you may want to offer the prospective client professional suggestions for how he or she can improve the writing. You could recommend a list of books, some on general writing techniques and perhaps a few on the specific type of writing the client is doing. You can suggest the client take classes or online writing courses, attend a writers' conference, or join or start a critique group. You may want to provide websites the client can check out for tips on writing, conferences to attend, classes to take, etc. (I offer one caution to this point. Do some research on the client first. If he or she has a website, find out if this person is already a published author. If so, don't offend him or her by offering suggestions for learning how to write, even if you aren't very impressed with the quality of the manuscript.)

I came up with a rather lengthy response to one potential client whose writing was particularly bad but who desperately wanted to get her manuscript published because she truly believed it was her ministry. I outlined the four ways a person who is not a writer can get his or her story into print.

1. Become a writer. (I then listed about twenty steps the average person needs to take to become a professional author.)
2. Hire a professional author to write the book. (I cautioned her about how much that usually costs.)
3. Pay a subsidy publisher to print the manuscript. (I gave her some general tips on that as well.)
4. Take the book to a local print shop (if she just wanted to have copies of her book to give to family and friends).

I told her how much I would charge to edit or ghostwrite her manuscript, and I gave her an estimate of how long I thought it would take. I then told her that if she didn't have the money to self-publish or to pay a professional to help her publish traditionally, she might want to prayerfully consider some financial options: taking on a temporary part-time job, holding fund-raisers, or requesting donations from friends and family (in much the same way as a missionary would solicit support for a short- or long-term mission trip).

I never heard back from this potential client, and I have no idea what she did with her manuscript. But I felt confident that I had given her an honest response to her request.

Whenever you feel the need to turn down a job for any reason, consider referring the client to the [Christian Editor Connection](#). To paraphrase a popular saying, "One editor's nightmare job is another editor's dream job." It could be that you aren't the right editor for this client, but someone else might be. You could suggest that this author visit CEC and fill out the form for Authors Seeking Editors. That director will forward the request to established, professional editors who have been screened for their skills in editing.

Negotiating

If a client responds to your initial letter by saying that he or she cannot afford the rate you quoted or can't wait the amount of time you estimated your turnaround to be, you will need to decide whether or not to negotiate.

Don't let yourself feel so desperate for work that you'll sacrifice other priorities/work for less money than you believe your time is worth. However, if this is a job you really want to do and you're willing to compromise a little, allow yourself to do so. It's your business, your decision.

For example, let's say you've decided you want to charge \$25/hour for your editing services, and a major Christian publishing house asks if you would be willing to do some basic proofreading for \$12/hour. If your schedule is pretty open at the moment, you may want to agree to do that. For one thing, a low-paying job is better than no job. For another thing, working with a publishing house could be steady work (if you do well on the first job). And it could have other benefits as well, such as a "foot in the door" if you should decide to send that publisher a manuscript of your own. And working for a big-name publishing house looks very good on your editing résumé!

Early in my freelancing business, I took a low-paying job turning a typewritten manuscript (yes, done on a typewriter) into a Word file. I was specifically told not to do any editing or even proofreading, just type exactly what I saw. There were a lot of obvious mistakes, but I did what I was paid to do. When the job was done, the client asked me to email the manuscript to Moody Publishers for him. Not wanting Moody to think poorly of my abilities, I mentioned in the cover email that I had noticed mistakes but that the client had specifically asked me not to make any corrections. The next thing I knew, Moody asked me if I would be interested in doing some freelance proofreading for them. They didn't pay much, but it was more than I'd been paid for the original job (and it was steady repeat business). Besides, I rather liked working on manuscripts that had already been accepted and edited. Then one day, I got a manuscript that was "not up to Moody's usual standards of quality." I emailed my contact there and was told some details about the project. They asked me to do "a little bit more than a normal proofread." I did. A short time later, Moody asked if I would be interested in doing editing for them. That paid about twice as much as proofreading, and I happily said yes. I then ended up with several Moody-published books I'd edited on my list of credits.

The point is, be willing to negotiate with a potential client as long as there's enough in it for you to be worth your while.

Following Up

After you've sent a potential client an email describing your services and quoting your rates, set a reminder for yourself to follow up a week or two later. Ask the client if he or she has any questions, would like a sample edit (if you haven't done one already), or needs any additional information from you. Most likely, clients who don't get back to you of their own accord have probably either chosen another editor or changed their minds about paying for editing. However, occasionally a follow-up will be just what it takes for a client to make the decision to hire you.

Sealing the Deal

Once a client has decided to hire you, you may want to send that person a form, contract, or agreement that spells out what both of you agree to do.

I rarely use a contract—only if a client specifically requests one. Instead, I use a Client Communication Checklist, in which the client fills out basic information such as name, phone number, email address, working title of the manuscript, type/genre of manuscript, target audience, level of editing requested, and publication plans. I also ask if they prefer deity pronouns to be capitalized or lowercased (I often find both in a manuscript).

If a client asks for a contract, I'll send an editorial agreement. In addition to the above, it has paragraphs about confidentiality, termination of the agreement, rights, etc. And it specifies that I make no guarantees as to the saleability or marketability of the edited manuscript. This agreement has signature lines for both of us at the bottom of the last page. I ask new clients to print two copies of the agreement, fill out and sign both, and send them both to me. I then sign both copies and send one back to the client. That way we each have a signed copy.

Both forms have a place for the client to indicate a requested deadline (if any). This is crucial if you have a backlog of editing work or a lot of personal situations that require your time. If you know you can't make that deadline, let the client know immediately. If things come up and you realize partway through the job that you're probably not going to make the deadline, tell the client as soon as possible and see if you can get an extension.

You may wish to insist on a contract with any clients you don't know well enough to be reasonably certain they won't try to sue you or get their money back if you miss the deadline by a day or two, or if the manuscript doesn't immediately get accepted by a major commercial publisher.

The Editorial Freelancers Association has a couple of [sample editorial agreements](#) on its website.

[Note from Christi: I typically create a contract for each client to sign. Sometimes, I don't have repeat clients sign a contract—if our first experience went well, if they paid on time, etc. But I believe a contract is *always* good protection for you and for the client. I include a confidentiality clause (also called a nondisclosure agreement) that says I will not share the client's personal information with anyone. This gives the client peace of mind. Instead of using the word *contract*, I call it an “editorial agreement.” This seems less daunting for clients, and I've discovered clients are more likely to sign it. I save the editorial agreement as a PDF so the client can't change it. I have the client print and sign it first, then scan it, and send it back to me. Then I sign and send the client a copy for his or her files.]



LESSON #4 ASSIGNMENTS

To receive a Certificate of Completion, you need to complete at least two assignments from each lesson.

Assignment #1. Communicating with Potential Clients

Come up with a form letter or template you can email to people who contact you for editing. You may want to have a few optional paragraphs you can pick and choose from, depending on the type of client or type of work.

Assignment #2. Turning Down a Job

Imagine that you have been sent a manuscript for a sample edit and have come to the conclusion that this is a job you're going to have to turn down. Come up with a response that is gracious, helpful, and professional. This may include a list of recommended books, websites, writing classes/courses, or writers' conferences. You might want to put together some information on subsidy publishing. You may also want to include a reference to the [Christian Editor Connection](#).

Assignment #3. Follow-Up

Decide on a method that will work for you for following up on prospective clients. Come up with a form letter or template you can customize and use for this purpose.

Assignment #4. Sealing the Deal

Create a form you can send to clients to clarify what services you will provide, what the client agrees to pay for your services, when the job will be done, etc. Or design an official agreement/contract that you will ask new clients to sign.