



*[Welcome to the Writers' Rough Draft Podcast, where I climb behind the glamorous book launch world of successful writers and entrepreneurs and into the mind of folks like you who are just getting their start. Equal parts witty writing information and unabashed content curiosity—with a healthy dose of laughter thrown in—my conversations with these pros shares some of the trials, tips, and techniques that others have used to help you build your writing and content and establish you as a leader in your field.]*

*[I'm your host, Elisa Doucette, and I'm here to talk about all of that and have some fun with Alexis Grant today. In this episode, you'll learn the tips and tricks journalists use to meet every deadline they are assigned, the best way to start writing any piece and a bit of conversation about pitching and getting your name out there with the big publications. You can find the links, resources, and transcript of our chat on the website at [CraftYourContent.com/episode21](http://CraftYourContent.com/episode21).]*

**Elisa:** Alexis is an entrepreneurial writer and digital strategist who transitioned from a thriving journalistic career. Writing for publications like the Houston Chronicle and US News & World Report, she decided she needed more freedom and creativity in her life. Having spent time as a solo traveler through Africa, she started making money for her site, The Traveling Writer. Quickly, she expanded her offerings to digital products, courses, and eBooks, in addition to the freelance writing and social media consulting she was doing.

In 2010, she transitioned from the solopreneurial life to working with a team and built her first business, Socialexis, a blog management and content marketing agency that puts out over a hundred and twenty pieces of content for various clients every month—not including daily social media posts.

In 2013, she founded the site, The Write Life, for writers and authors looking for resources and advice to create, connect, and earn money. She also manages to carve out her own little corner of the internet on her site, AlexisGrant.com, where she shares her personal journey and the behind scenes details of life as a creative entrepreneur.

Thank you so much for taking the time out from all of that to chat with me today, Alexis. Is there anything I missed?

**Alexis:** Sure, no. That was a great into. You pretty much summed up the last ten years of my life.

**Elisa:** All in a one-minute blurb.

**Alexis:** Exactly.

**Elisa:** So going back to the beginning of that ten years, how did you get started in writing regularly—writing full-time?

**Alexis:** Well, I went to grad school for journalism. So journalism was really my first career and it was a career that I thought I'd have forever. And that's how I guess became a decent writer, is just by writing again and again and again on deadline. And I think that on deadline pieces it's a big component. And it still helps me today because I'm able to kind of write something quickly and not feel like it has to be absolutely perfect before I release it. Which becomes useful both when I'm writing for clients through my blog management business, but also for my own blog and other projects.



**Elisa:** Deadlines are obviously a scary thing for someone who's just starting out or even someone who's been in the business ten, twenty years. Deadlines are this kind of “catch in your throat” type of things. As a person fresh out of grad school that’s in a high-pace journalistic environment, with people kind of barking deadlines at you, how did you deal with that? How did it make you feel?

**Alexis:** No one’s asked me that before, but it's true. So I went right from grad school to the Houston Chronicle. I worked first as an intern in their Washington bureau, but then they hired me after six months or so in their newsroom. So I was part of a big news room. And literally, when I was writing a front-page story—which shouldn’t happen that often, but occasionally—I would have the top editor of the paper looking over my shoulder at 5:55, saying: “What is this lead going to look like?” You know, knowing that it's due in five minutes.

So it was nerve wracking sometimes. But I always had kind of a natural knack for writing since I was a little kid. And learning the basics of journalism, it was really more about being a good journalist and not necessarily about being creative at that point. When you're writing on deadline, you're writing a new story that says exactly what happens in the lead. It has to be interesting, but it's probably not going to be an anecdotal lead about... you know, it's not going to be a story about somebody.

And so sometimes you'd have to be a little creative with like, your last line in the article. But as a journalist, it's more about getting all the information there and making sure it's accurate. So it was a lot about being organized, which still helps me now—not waiting to the last second. I try to work on things ahead of time when I can, so that I'm not stressed out at that last second coming up to the deadline. And I think kind of just forcing myself, like I've said earlier, to be able to let go of something at six o'clock. Or, you know, it's good, and it's good enough. But maybe it's not perfect and it never will be, but something that's good enough can then be released to the world.

**Elisa:** With the stuff that you used to do to prepare in the organization and everything, do you remember any kind of... I hate the like, term “tricks,” because they're not tricks—they are actual processes and systems, but what did that organizational process look like that got you to the point where you could have an editor standing right over you without freaking out?

**Alexis:** When I write—and I still do this now—I get all the information down a page that I can get down without starting from the beginning. So if I wanna start from the beginning, I can, but a lot of times if you look at early drafts of blog posts, and when I was a journalist, early drafts of stories that they are just trying to form and take shape—especially ones that had to be done within a four-hour period—I would get all the information down onto the page as it came into my brain. Or take care of what I knew first; get all the easy stuff down, and then go back and fill in the gaps.

And usually, I would write my lead last. Even if I wrote it once in the beginning, I’d often rewrite it at the end. Because you can write all the other pieces of your story and make sure that it fits together, and then come back and make sure you have an intro that succinctly sums that all up and hooks the reader and makes them want to keep reading.

**Elisa:** Right. And sometimes as you write the rest of the piece, you suddenly realize when you go back and review, like “oh, I thought the piece was going to go in this direction but as I was writing it, obviously pulled me in this completely other direction.”



**Alexis:** Exactly. And that happens with a lot my blog posts now. Like, I know I wanna write about something but I haven't really fully formed the idea in my head, so I'll write pieces of the posts and then see how it comes out. And sometimes, that means I end up nixing it at the end because it's no good. But more often, it means that it helps me form it in my brain so that I can then create a beginning and a lead that makes sense and that's interesting.

**Elisa:** When you do pieces and what not, do you just sometimes, like—I know I'd follow a very similar process myself for when I'm writing long articles, or just writing any articles, I guess. But sometimes, what I'll do is: I'll actually go in, and it's not even fully formed out paragraphs and thoughts on the particular research pieces, it's literally just a bullet point of... Or you know, “insert John’s statement here.” And I don't know like exactly what I'm using from John's statement yet, but that's what's going to fit into this particular piece.

**Alexis:** Yes, for sure. And in fact, my own personal quirky way of doing that is I write “blah, blah, blah” through my piece a lot, which is like in caps. Especially when I’m working on an eBook and I have ideas of things that I wanna include that I don't know the details or I don't wanna do the research at the same time as I'm writing. Because I find it's better for me to just get it out and start writing even if there's gaps. So I'll write half a sentence and then write “blah, blah, blah.”

**Elisa:** That’s such a good idea!

**Alexis:** And I'll go back later and finish it. Especially when it requires research or like there's a statistics I wanna put in or something like that. Or I just don't know how to kind of flesh out the idea yet, but I know it needs to be in there. So there's like, a placeholder. And that also lets you get everything out of your brain and onto the paper so that you could stop worrying about including everything, and then just worry the best way to phrase different pieces of it.

**Elisa:** Switching from kind of that journalistic, where the “blah, blah, blahs” were perhaps a statistic or the research or different things—not that we don't include those, obviously in online content and blog posts—but definitely, it is much more of op-ed type writing and a lot of content marketing, as opposed to journalistic writing. So in, I think it was 2010, you completely transitioned out of that and started how?

**Alexis:** Well, I was working for US News & World Report at the time, when I had a few clients that I was doing social media for on the side. And actually, I have a guide on this—an eBook—that’s called *How to Build a Part-Time Social Media Business*, because it's exactly what I did and how I basically launched this blog management company. It started out as me doing freelance social media work, but I just saw the potential and realized there was a lot of people who wanted to hire me, and I couldn't do it while I was working a fulltime job. And I wasn't totally satisfied with my full-time job at that point either, so that helped me make the decision.

And so I was only at that particular job for a year, and I decided to leave and focus on this business full time. And it’s since morphed now; we do mostly blog management for clients. So as you mentioned in the intro, we run blogs. A lot of them are large blogs; so, blogs that are publishing between eight and fifteen posts a week. We manage all the writers, do all the editing, optimize for SEO, actually publish the posts. And that cycle is specialized. And sometimes, we do social media services in addition to that, but



most of our clients now are, at the core, blog management. So it's more kind of in the last four or five years.

**Elisa:** Which is good for a business—especially an online business—to be following kind of the demands of what your market is looking for. Wherein five years ago, everyone thought social media was like the content marketing strategy, now, people are getting back into the blogs being the content marketing strategy.

**Alexis:** Yeah, and it also revolves around what I want to and what I want my team to be doing. I find social media to be tedious and really repetitive. And my own personal strength is in editing and writing, and so that's why I decided to move more towards building a team around blog management instead. And it's also... well, I don't wanna say "it's more scalable," because you can scale social media too, but we're able to get bigger clients this way and work on bigger accounts and do more work, basically.

**Elisa:** Gotcha. So, when you were transitioning out of US News & World Report and transitioning into the blog management, I'm guessing you didn't have the full team that you have currently. It was probably just you and maybe one or two other people?

**Alexis:** Yeah, exactly.

**Elisa:** So how were you finding time? Because at that point in time, you were also—I remember because we kind of bumped into each other online a lot through our social circles—that time, you were also like putting out a bunch of new courses, you had e-books coming out all the time, you have your own site—which I actually really enjoy reading myself—how did you find time to do all of that writing and creating while still building this kind of evolving business?

**Alexis:** Well, half the point, like when I left my day job... So I did have these social media clients on the side, but I had also released my first guide (the one I mentioned about how to build a part-time social media business) and it had done really well. And so my intention with leaving the job was partly to build a system around serving clients, but also to have more time to work on my own brand and my own guides and courses. So yeah, I blog at AlexisGrant.com, and that's how I monetize that: is through eBooks and courses, generally. And so that was a piece of my plan, was to kind of have more time to spend on that piece while knowing that I had some money still coming in from clients.

**Elisa:** It is nice to be able to do things like eat and have a place to live while you're working on your creative projects.

**Alexis:** Exactly.

**Elisa:** And I'm guessing you have a lot of these conversations with people who are looking to do the same thing you did. Because obviously, a couple years ago, you built the site, The Right Life, which is basically kind of all about how to make money writing online—or writing in general, I guess.

**Alexis:** For a while, when I first started blogging, I was writing about traveling, then I kind of moved into writing. And now, I do more of a mix of... I kind of use my blog as my creative outlet to write about whatever I want, but I will write about business stuff and to make money as a creative person.

But there's a phase I went through when I was writing a lot about writing. And when I realized it, I just didn't wanna just stick to writing about writing. There's such a big piece... there's a lot of people who



wanted to learn about that, and so that kind of gave me the idea of “I should create a website that’s dedicated just for writers and a resource for writers.” That’s how we created The Write Life. But for people who asks me how to get started, I usually recommend... One thing that really worked for me when I left my day job was I had several clients who I had already started working with, who were paying me on a monthly retainer. So they weren’t just paying me one sum, they are paying month after month after month to manage their social accounts. Or at that point, I even took on one blog management client. That was my first one.

And it wasn't totally making up my full time income, but it was making up enough of it. And it was on a recurring basis, which is really important because I knew that after thirty days, I wasn't going to be completely struggling and that I still will have the money coming. And so if you're trying to build a business on this—a side hustle—in addition to your full time job—which I think is a really smart way to transition: try to get a client or two that is going to be paying you on a recurring basis for work you do again and again and again. Mainly, so you have that income that know you know you can rely on, but also, it helps you systemize your process and it means you're not always having to pitch.

So like a lot of freelance writers, they write one piece here, one piece there, and then another piece in another place. And it's not really sustainable, especially now that writers aren't getting paid as much as magazines used to pay a lot back in the day and they don't anymore. So freelance writers really need to think of ways to build that recurring revenue model for themselves—whether that's writing a column every two weeks for a publication or taking out a client that you're doing copywriting for. It doesn't make sense anymore to just pitch, like, one piece after another to all different outlets. You spend half the time pitching and not a lot of time to actually doing the work.

**Elisa:** Right. And for every pitch that you put out, or depending on what your closing rate is for pitches, you get rejected more and more times and spend a lot of time doing work that you don't actually end up getting any return on the investment.

**Alexis:** Exactly. Creating those relationships is what really benefits both you and the editor. And now, through my blog management company, we work with about thirty writers regularly every month because they write for all these blogs that we manage. And they like to know that we go to them when we need things written because it means they have work coming to them; they're not always having to look for it. But it's good for us too, because we can rely on these writers and I wanna give the same writers assignments again and again and again, because I know I can rely on them to turn in something that's really good, and that we can use, and that doesn't take a ton of editing. You know, editors want these types of people too.

**Elisa:** What which is really interesting for... You know, there’s the people who do wanna become freelance writers and do wanna make all of their money online. But then there's also this this new thing—I liken it to how in the modeling industry, all of the actors and actresses have started becoming spokespeople. So now, like, we don't really have big spokes models like we had Cindy Crawford and Tyra Banks and those people in the 70s, 80, 90s—we now have, you know, Jennifer Aniston for Smart Water. Similarly, it seems to be with a lot of the magazines that writers used to be able to pitch and get big payouts on—it's actually transitioning to be a lot more entrepreneurs and a lot more people who were kind of in the trenches and doing what PR companies used to do: getting those assignments and getting those articles published. So what kind of advice would you have—coming from both sides of



having been someone who pitched and now someone who gets pitches—for business writers or entrepreneurial people who want to have some writing authority to get their stuff picked up?

**Alexis:** Well, a lot of the publications do want people who have walked the walk, so to speak—to write about what they're writing about, right? Because you don't wanna hear all this advice from someone who has never actually gone through it. At the same time, I still think that there's a place for reporters who are talking to a lot of different types of people, and then using that advice to create an article that they wanna read. The difference is—now with blogging and columns—is you have a lot of people who are just writing what they think and what they've learned about their experience. It's like a one-sided... almost like personal advice coming from this one person.

So when we contribute to these different blogs, we actually think about it in these different ways. Like we think, “Okay, what experts can we get who know what they're talking about and who can write about these certain things and have actually experienced this?” And that can be something as simple as, you know, we're writing for a personal finance site of someone who use a certain kind of credit card. It doesn't mean you have to be an expert on having run your own business for ten years; it's just that you have a specific experience that you can write about in a post. And that kind of stands alongside a lot of different articles that we write that come from reporters who we assigned a topic to them, and they probably haven't experienced it themselves, but they can go out and do five interviews and talk to these different people and link to various sources around the web and create an interesting article that way. So I think there's room for both types of writing in the blogosphere.

**Elisa:** Well, the going out and getting experts—I have such a love-hate relationship with this guy because I agree with so much of what he says, but as a writer and someone who does have a regular... works for a publication, the media manipulation drives me absolutely batty (partly because I know it's true). But Ryan Holiday writes a lot about, you know, if you're just trying to start getting into writing as more of an authority and doing more of the journalistic pieces for big magazines that they're looking for, you should really be seeking out those opportunities to connect with these reporters who are looking for that entrepreneur, who's used this particular type of credit card to get started. Not only because it gets you the coveted “as seen in” mentions somewhere, but it also starts building relationships—which, for most of us who have been writing for a while, we all know relationships are the number one way to get featured or write for any of these publications is knowing someone who can get you in. Do you find a lot of people who do that kind of stuff that are kind of approaching you being like, “Where can I fit into your site and blogs? And can I be an authority for just a little piece?”

**Alexis:** Yeah. I do get a lot of pitches like that. And I don't really use that kind of pitch right now, where I am in my career. They wouldn't really know that though. So like I, personally, am not. I don't do as much writing anymore; I'm more managing and I do a lot of editing. I write for my own site. I write eBooks and stuff. It's not like I'm not doing any writing, but more of my day now is spent on directing the overall strategy for the blogs that we manage—and for our own brands, like, the right way. So when people send me these pitches, I mean, very occasionally—like one percent of them—I might assign to one of our reporters and say, “Hey, can you do something with this?” But we're typically relying on the reporters to come up with the story ideas and find the sources. And so unless I see something that's like really specific, like, something I know we happen to be working on, it doesn't really benefit those types



of people to pitch me. They'd be better off pitching one of our reporters or someone that writes regularly for lots of different sites.

**Elisa:** Do you guys ever use any of the services like—HARO was a great one, you know, again unfortunately, Ryan kind of exploited and did very publicly in his book, but it's a great resource for getting connections in with those writers who are looking for sources.

**Alexis:** Yeah. When I was a reporter, HARO was the devil. I mean, it's pretty much the laziest way to find a source, but now, as someone who does... I don't like to call myself a PR person, but we do try to get publicity or buzz for some of the clients we work with. So we do occasionally use HARO either... in two ways: we look through... I have someone who looks through like that the pitches and looks for pitches—or I guess you can call them “queries”—looks at the queries for things that our clients might be a good fit for. And then we sometimes pitch our clients to answer those questions. But we also use it on the opposite end, which is sometimes—our writers will put a query out through HARO to find a certain specific types of people who have done something that we wanna write about. You always get a million responses when you use HARO, so you have to be very selective when you're using it a lot. And you wanna have something set up in your email, so all these answers go to one folder and you're not totally overwhelmed with the email. And a lot of them aren't any good, but it does work for finding types of people that you might not have otherwise been able to find.

**Elisa:** With trying to do this publicity or gain this buzz for certain clients that you're working with, if you're not using HARO, what are some of the things that you've done or even recommended to your clients who are just looking for advice on it, to be able to reach out and get those source statuses?

**Alexis:** So the big thing we do is actually guest posting, which allows us to write a piece for other publications—hopefully, big publications. And that's not being interviewed, that's not exactly the same thing you're talking about, but it's good because, well, often, we do it for the backlinks, so if you have a link from big publications to your site—it's helping your SEO, it's helping your search engine optimization, it's helping your site pop to the top of Google when some searches for certain terms. So we often strategically-placed guest post on different places that will help our SEO or help our clients' SEO. But it has to be, like, a really high-value, great blog post that we're placing because the second benefit is someone sees, “Oh this client knows how to... that they're an expert on a certain topic and I wanna read more of their stuff, so I might click over their site.” And so you get some traffic from it as well. So that's the number one thing we do. Sometimes, we also pitch publications. We might pitch like a reporter at a publication and say, “Hey, do you wanna write about this thing that our client is doing?” I try to stay away from that, because I don't wanna be known as a PR firm. But unfortunately, a lot of our clients do end up wanting that, so we do it on a case-to-case basis.

**Elisa:** Well, and as someone who is a journalist before and as the online stuff has become more and more prevalent, I'm sure you get the same thing; just off of my like tiny little weekly column on Forbes, I get so many pitches all the time. I almost want to write a guide on my site, like, “This is how you should pitch me and these are the things that will automatically get you eliminated from my inbox.” Because of so many of those terrible pitches you know, telling me things like, “You should do this, that and the other thing” wherein, no, I don't really have to do any of that. I'm the writer—I get to choose.

**Alexis:** Yeah, it's a lot about how can you make yourselves appealing to... I mean, as the person who's pitching, how can you make what you're offering really relevant and really appealing to that writer? And



sometimes we pitch and if we do it well, the writer might not write about you at that moment, but three months down the line, they go, “Oh, I mentioned you on this article,” or whatever. So there's kind of a long tail effect to it as well. You have to be patient; it doesn't mean you're necessarily going to get an article up the next day.

And I think honestly, one of the reasons I wanna get away from doing this is I think that there are PR firms that specialize in this, that probably do better than we do. And they are very expensive, which is why a lot of our clients would rather just add on a little bit of the retainer to us. But they do this all the time. They have the relationship that, it's... It's mostly about relationships like, do you know someone at all of these different publications? Does this person respect you? And there's a lot of turnover at these publications, so the editor you knew there last week might not be there next week when you go to pitch. And so, since having these relationships is such a big piece of it, I think sometimes it's a better job for somebody who does it full time.

**Elisa:** Well, the thing with those PR firms as well, is so many of them are actually... they are fine kind of trading in on the relationships, because that's exactly what they do. And I think there's kind of that understanding there when you're PR firm, and like, you build a relationship with the reporter, the reporter is going to be consistent or build a relationship with contact. Like, you're going to be constantly pitching that contact and that contact is aware of that. Wherein what you do, where you're like, “We write really great content. We create authority for our clients. We really help position them to get the most out of their content marketing... Oh, by the way, do you mind if I send you queries every single week?” It kind of puts you in an awkward position.

**Alexis:** Right. Sometimes I use my own personal network for those inquiries. And that's something that can be overdone, so I don't wanna over use my own network that I have built. Sometimes, but you can't use it all the time.

**Elisa:** Definitely. Well, speaking of personal networks and having fun, I'm going to actually move us into the next section. This is a fun little game I like to play with folks. It's super easy. Over the next two minutes, I'm going to ask you a series of either/or questions and I want you to answer with the first thing that pops into your mind. We're going to try to get through as many as we can and get a little sneak peek into the thoughts of your writer's mind. Are you feeling ready?

**Alexis:** Cool. Yeah, that sounds good.

**Elisa:** All right, let's go. Pen or pencil?

**Alexis:** Pen.

**Elisa:** Mac or PC?

**Alexis:** PC.

**Elisa:** Coffee or tea?

**Alexis:** Tea.

**Elisa:** Night or morning?

**Alexis:** Morning.





**Elisa:** Good writing or correct writing?

**Alexis:** Good writing.

**Elisa:** Noise or silence?

**Alexis:** Silence.

**Elisa:** Lefty or right?

**Alexis:** Righty.

**Elisa:** Weird or typical?

**Alexis:** Weird.

**Elisa:** School or no school?

**Alexis:** School.

**Elisa:** Outside or inside?

**Alexis:** Outside.

**Elisa:** Clean or messy?

**Alexis:** Clean.

**Elisa:** Teacher or student?

**Alexis:** I would say both, but I'll go with teacher.

**Elisa:** Town or city?

**Alexis:** I live in a city but I'd like to live in a town, so I'll go with town.

**Elisa:** Trains or planes?

**Alexis:** Planes.

**Elisa:** Skiing or surfing?

**Alexis:** Skiing.

**Elisa:** Fantasy or reality?

**Alexis:** Reality.

**Elisa:** Love or money?

**Alexis:** Love.

**Elisa:** Introvert or extrovert?

**Alexis:** Introvert.

**Elisa:** Good content or good marketing?



**Alexis:** Good content.

**Elisa:** Smile or game face?

**Alexis:** Smile.

**Elisa:** Call or text?

**Alexis:** Text.

**Elisa:** Money or fame?

**Alexis:** Money.

**Elisa:** Be older than you are now, or younger than you are now?

**Alexis:** I'd say younger.

**Elisa:** All right. And as we can tell by the little phone ding off to the side, that is the end of the two minutes. So, thanks again for taking time to join me today. Where can folks find your writing and your business?

**Alexis:** Sure. I'm at AlexisGrant.com. And I'm on Twitter @alexisgrant—that's the best way. My business is at Socialexis.com, but you can get to that from AlexisGrant.com too.

**Elisa:** Fantastic. And we'll have all those links on your episode notes for the episode. So do you have any parting thoughts or kind of writerly wisdom from being in the game so long and building such a great business around it?

**Alexis:** I would say just keep writing. I think we talked about this a little before on the call that people often compare themselves to other people who have a lot more experience in them. And I'm guilty of this—I think we all are. Just remember that we all have a starting point. And practice makes perfect, so just keep at it.

**Elisa:** Fantastic. Well, thank you again for taking the time to join us.

**Alexis:** Sure. Thank you for having me!

*[You can find this episode's notes and resources at [CraftYourContent.com/episode21](http://CraftYourContent.com/episode21), and the Writers' Rough Drafts' full archive at [CraftYourContent.com/podcast](http://CraftYourContent.com/podcast). If you wanna talk more writing with me, or just say hi, you can always catch me on Twitter at [@elisadoucette](https://twitter.com/elisadoucette). This show was produced and published by my outstanding content management team over at [CraftYourContent.com](http://CraftYourContent.com).*

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**[Outtake]**



**Alexis:** Yes, she's like in real life a friend of mine.

**Elisa:** Yes, those are always nice to have in the crazy online world.

**Alexis.** Yes.