

A Career In Writing

Claudine Land:

Well, first of all, Gabrielle, I do want to thank you so much for inviting me on your podcast. I appreciate it. This is an honor to be here. I'm a fan of One Step Ahead Tutoring Services. You all have done a fantastic job tutoring the kids, and kudos to you all.

Claudine Land:

Just want to say, for those who are interested in a career in writing, go for it. There are several things that you can do to get started. Be positive. And it's really important to nurture your gift. At Virtual Ingenuity, LLC, we are a business support organization focused on helping clients across the United States to hone in and focus on what they do best. And it's so important to only really focus on what you do best. It's great to outsource or delegate everything else to others. But if you have a gift for writing, by all means, focus on that. Move forward with it. Contact as many people as you can to assist you with that gift. And do what it takes to get your writing skills up to par.

Claudine Land:

One of the things when I work with my clients, they always ask me is: "Claudine, how do you write for other people? Because everyone's writing style is so very different." That's just one of the things that I've been able to do for well over 16-years now is just to hone in on and focus on what each person's writing style is. And it's really important in business to listen to your clients. Listen to folks that are around you and find out what they are good at. So with Virtual Ingenuity, LLC, I have to decipher each person's style of writing. And I write a lot of blogs and content [for my clients], whether it's [content for] website development, or helping to edit books or manuscripts. Whatever it may be. I have to get into that person's head and decipher or figure out, that person's writing style. And then write as if I am that person. So it's important to focus and find out what [each client's] writing style and being good at that.

How Did You Become a Grant Writer?

Claudine Land:

Grant writing, that's a really fun story many years ago. I've shied away a little bit now from writing grants, but I do provide content writing or editing and writing content for those that are interested in starting a website or already have a website and they just need their content edited. I got started grant writing many years ago. I worked at a medical university right out of college as a research assistant. I was also na assistant coordinator for a diabetes study. And the principal investigator, a physician at the time, asked me to review a grant that he had was thinking about getting funded.

Claudine Land:

He had written the grant and I had asked me to review it. I said, okay, fine. I'll do it. I took the grant and looked it over. And a couple of days later, I tore up the grant, edited it and I handed [the fully revised version] back to him several days later and I said, "this is what I thought of the idea [grant]". I just made a few changes. It was really more than just a few changes - it was quite a bit. I just almost rewrote the entire grant. Handed it back to him. And needless to say, he was more than impressed with it. And I wrote myself into that grant because I said [to myself], if he's trying to get this grant funded, I want to be a part of it. Because it was a really great health initiative for families with diabetes and the goal was to try to find out the gene that caused diabetes.

Claudine Land:

So I turned it into him and then he was blown away, pleasantly blown away with it, and submitted it as is, as I had edited it. And the grant got funded. And so Gabrielle, that solidified my position for the next several years with that medical university because the grant was funded. And so after that, after working in that grant-funded position for several years, word started to get around in the medical university. And then other physicians started asking me: "can you look this [proposal] over? Can you work on my study?" A physician called me from another medical university in another state. And I ended up, after I completed that grant at the local medical university where I was working, going to work in another state with the other physician. Let me back up a little bit. As I completed the initial grant that I had written, I was asked by that medical university to be a part of the Centers for Outcomes Research and Effectiveness (CORE).

Claudine Land:

And so I worked for several years there just writing grants all day, literally chasing physicians before [they went into] surgery to get the necessary information for writing the grants. And it was at that time that I realized what my true gift was in writing and how effective I was in writing. I had seven physicians. So I wrote grants for all seven physicians. Chasing them all over the hospital, getting the necessary information from them. And needless to say, the grants got funded. And then I received a call from another physician at another medical university. And so I worked there writing grants as well. And then folks started hearing about what I had accomplished in the community and of my gift for writing grants. And so I started a grant writing business for folks in the community. I helped small businesses and then I helped other medical universities [across the U.S.] to write grants. So that's just the true testament of honing [focusing] in on what I do best and taking that to the next level. And that solidified my career for years to come.

How has the transition been from writing grants to writing content and blogs?

The transition from writing grants to writing content is completely different. Grants, especially in the healthcare industry is really focused. You have to pay attention to the fine details. Grant entities are very specific in how you write details into the grants. Writing content just is not as intense [as writing a grant] because you're not following a script or a guide. You're not following a guide from that funding source of what information needs to be there [in the grant]. When I write content for my clients, I am focusing on their [particular] writing style. And so it's a different kind of focus. So now Gabrielle, what I do with my clients is I have to figure out what that writing style is for that [particular] client.

How is my client speaking to me? A lot of times people will write how they speak and that could be good or bad. So I just have to listen in closely to find out how a client is speaking to me and find out what's important to them. If it's a blog, what [message] are they trying to portray in that blog? What are they trying to highlight? And when I have my discovery calls with my clients, a lot of times, they're not sure what they want to write about. And so I have to listen and we sit down and we go over their long-term goals. I ask my clients: "What do you want to accomplish in a year?", "What do you want to accomplish in three months?" And then I take those three-months goals and say: "let's sit down and write your blog topics [based on those goals]". And it may only be a month's worth of blog topics.

Claudine Land:

[I ask my clients]: “What [topics] are more important to you [during a given time period]?” [I find out] what topics are trending. I'll research and find out what those topics are in their field [area of business] – the topics that is trending. And then whatever that topic is, we'll sit down and write posts for a month. And that's how it gets started. Again, it's just getting into my client's mind [vision] and figuring out what's important to them. Looking at the bigger picture first and then narrowing it down to about three months. [I find out] what their goals are in three months. And then narrowing it down to the next 30-days.

What techniques do you use in writing for others?

Claudine Land:

So [an important] technique that I use, without giving too much away, is listening. It' as simple as that. It's just really listening to the cadence in someone's voice, to what they emphasize, what is important to them, and [deciphering] their goal for that blog. What is the idea that my client wants to relay to a first-time reader to that website or to that manuscript or to that book? What is the idea that my client wants a first-time reader to take away [from reading that written content]. What's the takeaway from it? And then moving from there.

What is a content writer?

Claudine Land:

We have several types of people. There are people that really don't know that they need a content writer. There are folks that don't know what a content writer is. So let me shed some light on that for everyone out there that's not aware of what a content writer is. So a content writer is someone that focuses on how the client wants the written content relayed and focuses on what the client's writing needs are. How the client tells a story is so important. So with all of my writing, I have to tell my client's story in the client's words [through writing] and from the client's point of view [to create a story through words]. So that's the main goal for me when I write for my clients is that I need to tell their story. I need to listen very closely to what their story is. And I need to portray that [story] on paper. For me, I don't get a second chance. I mean, if it's a book it's going to be a bestseller or it's not. So I listen very close to what my clients' needs are and what they want to portray and relay that on paper.

Where did you find your love for writing?

My love for writing, I believe came from my mother. She was a department chair and taught at several universities. And I honestly believe that just reading [from an early age] helped. Also, growing up on the British system in Jamaica, we read a lot. The school system there is a lot different than in the United States where the focus abroad, in Jamaica, is on education and reading.

Claudine Land:

And I grew up reading a lot, day in, day out. My daughter to this day and my son, read a lot. And they enjoy it. And it's just, as I mentioned before, telling a story and just being part of the story...is just amazing to me. Knowing I could travel to many different places just by reading a book. I learned so much before I moved to the United States about different places in the States, just from reading. So in our household, it was all about reading and writing and focusing on those things. Speaking properly, just being educated, and asking a lot of questions. My clients will tell you that Claudine asks a lot of questions because I need to find out truly what their goals are. What motivates you? What is your story? I talk to a lot of people on a day-to-day basis because everybody has a story [to tell] and everybody loves to tell their story. So I just tune in on finding what everyone's story is. Everybody loves a good story.

What is your educational background?

I had two separate experiences with school, one being abroad, and then one being here in the States. Schooling meant a lot to me. It was pretty easy abroad in Jamaica - being on the British system. To me it was easy. Then I came to the United States later on and went to high school and college here and never had a problem. English was so easy for me. I could not understand why folks struggled with writing. The focus abroad is just more focused on speaking and writing in English. And here in the United States, I progressed so much faster and was bored in school because it was just easy for a couple of years. I was ahead for a couple of years just because of my initial training in schooling and writing. When I came to the states, I helped a lot of my friends out with writing because they just had difficulty with that and difficulty expressing themselves on paper, and difficulty with grammar. I love reading everyone's story. And oftentimes with my clients, when I speak to them, they ask: "Claudine, how can you tell what I really need?" And when I say back to them: "this is what I'm hearing from you. And this is what you're telling me..." Then they say: "Yes. How did you know that?" There's a lot of deciphering what my client's needs are and reading between the lines. Initially, when I meet with a client in my discovery call, they usually say: "I need this. I need editing services." Okay, well, let's have a discovery call. Let's talk about it. Turns out they may need more than that [after digging deeper] . [It may turn out that] they need direction in their writing. Their writing may be all over the place. And I tell them: "let's focus on really what you're wanting your readers to know about you". I ask: "What do you want readers to know about your writing?" And so that's what I do. I listen to my client's story and focus on what their goal is for the reader when they're reading that content.

What is your connection with reading and writing?

To most people, there's a strong disconnect on how to write what they mean. Some people write how they speak, and that's not necessarily a good thing. But the more you read, you can create your writing style. And the more you read, you can figure out and be informed of the different writing styles that are out there. And I think that's why a lot of my clients hire me is because they read a lot of these different genres of literature or books. And they haven't yet found what's right for them. How should they get their story on paper? And so reading can expose someone to different genres and to different writing styles. I listen in on what my clients tell me and how they phrase things. And it's just a delicate art that has to be mastered. And for me, it's natural. And I just let [my clients] know that "I think this is more of your writing style". "Read this, and let me know what you think", "Does this sound like what you are trying to portray?" And I nail it each and every time. It takes a lot of listening, a lot of deciphering, a lot

of digging, almost like an investigator to figure it out what my client's writing style is. And what I will do a lot of times is I will even ask several questions and say; "here are my questions for you. I'm giving you homework. I need you to come back and write the answers to these questions for me." And I just pay attention to how they write their answers. How they formulate their answers. And what's in front of me and what I'm reading. And [their written response] tells me a lot about a person.

How Did your business start?

Claudine Land:

I was, for many years, in the healthcare industry, traveling from state to state, between four different states at the time. And I had my baby, had my first child, my son. And my company made provisions for me to work from home. They didn't want to lose me. And so they said, you don't have to leave [the company], you can stop traveling for a year or a year and a half. And I transitioned more into the training [side of things with the company]. So they made provisions for me to work from home. And I decided that I want to be a mom and that I love what I do [being a mom without the constant traveling]. I love traveling, but now it was time to shift gears. I did not want my children to miss out on the world, on their reading. I wanted to be there to nurture them... make them love reading too. I read a lot to them [my children] in the womb, before they could talk and express themselves and just kept doing that. From my educational background of reading and writing is why it was so important. So I stayed at home for a year and I said I feel as though I'm not dedicating enough time to my children. I'm sure I was, but for me, I just wanted to be a mom. And so I took 10 years off, had two children and stayed at home and nurtured them and then got back into the working world. My kids were eventually old enough now and they didn't need me as much. I did all the PTO/PTSO things and later started backing away from that and from serving on those committees.

Claudine Land:

I knew that is was now time for me and wanted to have a business that enables me the flexibility so that when my kids have assemblies at school or school-related events, I can attend and be there for them. And because my kids were so used to seeing me and I didn't want to miss out on any stage of their life, the time growing up. So my husband said to me, he said, "Claudine why don't you become a business strategist? Why don't you work remotely? You've always been good at deciphering people's needs and helping them to articulate really what their goals are and helping them with that." And so I said that's a great idea. I started writing down my personal goals.

Claudine Land:

Writing is always and has always been number one for me. I also love to talk to people. As I said, everyone has a story and I knew that I still wanted to help entrepreneurs and guide businesses to be more productive and to boost their productivity and growth. In addition. I wanted to work with clients across time zones. I did not want to be limited to the State in which I was living. And so my focus was to just build a genuine results-driven strategy for businesses and success. One of the companies that I researched was Apple. Not a lot of people at the time knew that apple had remote employees at the time. I would call Apple and talk to their employees and ask, "are you working remotely?"

Claudine Land:

They would say, yes, but you're not supposed to know that. So I just did my research on companies that were remote. And went from there. I told myself that if apple can do it, I certainly can do it. And I will do it. My first client was one of my former managers from a prescription monitoring company that I worked for. He called because he saw my profile on LinkedIn. He called me and said, hey Claudine, what are you doing? What do you mean you're a business strategist? What is this? Tell me a little bit about yourself. And so I told him that I own a business support organization, and I love to help businesses to improve their efficiency on a day-to-day basis. A lot of business owners know the long-term goal which is that they want to have a successful business.

Claudine Land:

When I talk to my clients and they ask, "Claudine, can you help me?, I know what I want to do, but I'm not sure how to go about do doing it." I started out helping businesses. I set up the business whether they 501(c)(3) status or [if they want to get incorporated as an LLC] , whatever their business entity aim is, I help them set up [their business] from the scratch. And then help them get their goals together, writing their mission statement and helping them with their business plan. [Helping to] write that for them. I listen very closely to their needs and what they want [for their business] and I write that for them. I customize workflow systems that will help them to set reminders . I introduce them to the right CRM for [their business needs]. I perform background research for them. I put together content for them and project management systems that will help them on a day-to-day basis.

Claudine Land:

And so that's how it started. Doing your research is so important and get started. A lot of people are fearful of getting started. They have an idea. Everything starts as an idea. But you know, like I did with Apple. I said to myself, if Apple can do it, I'm certainly going to do it. And that's what I did. And so I'm helping clients all across the United States and I love doing it. It's a lot of satisfaction for me to see my clients excel in something that they were so uncertain of in the beginning. I help my clients to write content that they need and they see their SEO increase due to the content that's on their website. It's just an amazing experience.

How does it feel knowing your words impact so many?

Claudine Land:

Great. It's satisfying because my clients are happy and I'm happy with the results.

And they will tell others."Hey, this is what Virtual Ingenuity, LLC did for me." And they get a lot of responses. And people respond by saying "Gosh, that article was awesome. Where did you get that information? How did you go about writing that article?". It's great hearing my clients say: "Virtual Ingenuity helped me and they can help you." It's really great. My main concern is making sure that my clients are indeed reaching their goals and increasing their productivity and maximizing their profits.

What advice do you have for others?

Claudine Land:

Ask a lot of questions. Find out who can help you. Never be afraid to ask questions. I tell that to my clients all the time. Ask questions. Find out what's available. Find out what sources are there so that you can get the help that you need to be a better writer. Also, never be complacent because that's when you can fall into this hole of never get out and you may say "I'm happy with my writing". No, never be happy with that. Always aim to be better at writing. Find out different writing styles. Push yourself to write in a different genre and a different writing style. Do your research on what's out there. Know what writing platforms are out there for you? Find out if you want to write publications. Find out if that's what you want to do? Do you want to write blogs? Do you want to help folks to write content for websites? Is there a focus that you'd like to write? Is it healthcare? Is it social media writing? Is it literature?

Claudine Land:

What writing style are you interested in? And share your writing with other folks. Let them read it, even professionals too at that. And be open to taking critique. It's very important. And take critique from a professional and don't be embarrassed by it by learning. Just be open. Keep an open mind and push forward. Writing is so important in today's society. And we're doing a lot of things virtual because of COVID. Even writing a simple email is important. Emails can be deciphered very differently. There are different tones to writing. So it's really important to know how to write effectively and get your point across.

Let's impact together!