

Learn how to make money freelance writing for the casino/gaming industry!

FREELANCE POKER WRITING: How to Make Money
Writing for the Gaming Industry

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Freelance Poker Writing



How to Make Money Writing for the Gaming Industry

LEARN HOW TO:

Market yourself for success

Write poker-related content

Sell what you write to
magazines & websites



by **BRIAN KONRADT**



PREFACE

This book is slightly ahead of its time. *Freelance Poker Writing* is the first book showing freelance writers how to make money writing for the gaming industry. Why now? Both poker and casino-style games have been growing in popularity — and so has the writing opportunities. If you search for “poker writing” or “legalized game writing” on Google, you won’t come up with much information on how to break into this industry as a freelance writer. This does not mean writing opportunities don’t exist or freelance writers aren’t making money writing about poker and gaming. If you dig long enough, interview the pros in the industry, and research everything about poker and gaming, you will come up with what I came up. And I crammed everything I found into this guide for you.

WHAT IS FREELANCE POKER WRITING?

There are many popular casino-style games, but nothing matches the growth and popularity of poker and how poker influences society. In writing this book I have focused more on the games and influences of poker than on any other casino-style games. I use the term “poker writing” in this book to mean writing about the games of poker, as well as writing about the influences of poker. As you will learn throughout this book, poker writing covers limitless topics in the gaming world; and poker writing can be a blend of journalism, feature writing, sports writing, entertainment writing, travel writing, food writing, technical writing, and so on, depending on what you choose to write.

WHAT DOES FREELANCE POKER WRITING INCLUDE?

You might think “freelance poker writing” is exactly that: writing about poker games. You might also think poker writing is about writing for one specific market: poker magazines. This might have been true years ago, but not so today. The expanding market of online and offline poker and gaming magazines is one small fragment, out of dozens of paying markets, to find freelance work. The Internet has spawned many online writing opportunities, such as blogging, writing for poker and gaming websites, self-publishing, and writing SEO articles for companies and affiliates. And “poker writing” is more than writing about the games of poker. Poker writing encompasses the *influences* of poker, such as entertainment, technology, psychology, law, lifestyle, money, travel, and so on. Writing about poker and gaming, along with their influences on society, is limitless.

My research and interviews with the pros revealed that many freelance poker writers make money in this industry by writing on **diverse subjects** for **diverse markets and clients**, both online and offline, all related (or slightly related) to topics, subjects and influences of poker and other gaming.

Many successful freelance writers tap into an arsenal of online and offline media outlets to sell their work, not just to poker and gaming magazines. Their recipe for success is simple: they write varied topics related to poker and gaming that don't just fit into a specific poker magazine, but also fit (with some reslanting) into many other non-poker magazines and media outlets (i.e. trade magazines, regional magazines, newsletters, tourism guides, newspapers, websites, blogs, ebooks, etc.) that cover varied subjects (such as gambling, gaming, professional sports, sports betting, travel, lifestyle, women's issues, money, finance, real estate, hobbies, and so on).

This is the case with freelance writer **Nora Cheyenne**, who said: “Generally, the best paying projects are those that require writing about all aspects of a venue. This includes the gambling, hotel, dining options, activities other than gaming in the area, shows, concerts as well as poker as a separate entity.”

Later we will talk more with Nora Cheyenne, and you will meet other freelance writers who broke into the business. In later chapters you will discover how to find writing opportunities, multiply your sales, and maximize your income.

Writers ask me how easy or how difficult is it to break into this industry as a freelance poker writer. There is no right answer. Success depends on you, the writer. It depends on your level of knowledge, experience, writing skills, marketing abilities, your willingness to learn, and so on. The short answer: if you are a newbie, it is difficult to break in. If you are a writer who already has an established freelance career, it is easy to add poker writing to your list of services.

This book assumes you are already freelancing, part-time, full-time, or in your spare time. This book also assumes you have some published clips; you’ve read some popular books on freelance writing; and you have some business and creative skills. If not, you need to introduce yourself to the wonderful world of freelance writing before you read this book.

CHAPTER 1 THE POKER PHENOMENON AND THE PEOPLE WHO WRITE ABOUT IT



“I don’t know much about creative writing programs...but they’re not telling the truth if they don’t teach one, that writing is hard work. And two, that you have to give up a great deal of life, your personal life, to be a writer”

Doris Lessing, Writer

If you haven’t heard of Texas Hold’em (<http://www.texasholdem-poker.com>) then consider yourself out of the *loop*. Texas Hold’em has been sweeping swiftly across card rooms in Nevada and beyond. The popularity of Texas Hold’em has forced many poker rooms to revamp and revise their empty tables with Hold’em games.

Johnny Moss (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_Moss), the famed poker player who played Nicholas Andreas "Nick the Greek" Dandolos (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick_the_Greek) in the 1949 multi-month poker challenge (arranged by the legendary Benny Binion) commented about the game of Hold’em. Mr. Moss said, “Hold’em is to Stud what chess is to checkers.” Johnny Moss should know because he has seen it all in poker; in fact, he has made a lot of poker history on his own.

Texas Hold’em made poker a sport again and a good way for legendary professionals and risk-savvy amateurs to earn a sizable income. Once Hold’em

came to town, anyone and everyone could play. Many of the best players in the world are still yet to be discovered.

Amateur players who were happy to play Friday night poker with the boys are now moving into a new league of their own. Amateur players are winning the coveted WSOP main events now. In fact, two of the World Series of Poker main event title winners were amateur players who played in online poker rooms before winning the title of World Champion.

Casinos are expanding floor space to accommodate more poker rooms, and poker rooms are adding more tables. Casinos are drawing crowds in record numbers to the game of poker. Poker is alive and thriving. We can attribute the re-birth of the game to the universal love of Texas Hold'em.

The excitement, nonstop media attention, and popularity of poker have given birth to a new career path for freelance writers. Even sportswriters are looking to poker to uncover profitable writing opportunities. The poker writing marketplace is growing and becoming more obvious as companies, casinos, poker rooms, magazines, and websites seek freelance writers to write and report on poker.

For example, last year PokerListings.com ran a job posting for writers to work for them in Las Vegas on covering the most coveted of all poker events—the WSOP! Writers are riding the wave of opportunity. Surf's up! Now is the time to learn how to write for the greatest game in the world! Now is the time to make your move and raise your writing expectations. It's your call. The game of poker is offering a world of possibilities. Are you ready to ante up?

CURRENT TRENDS IN POKER

Historians and poker fanatics debate when and where the traditional game of poker

began. Different countries would like to credit themselves for the game's early and humble start. This makes the history of poker unsettled. One thing we can agree on is that poker has evolved into big, BIG business.

Some fast facts about the gambling industry:

- The online gambling industry has grown from \$3 billion in 2001 to \$12 billion at the end of last year.
- In 2006, the World Series of Poker generated more than \$158 million in total prize money.
- The 2006 Main Event attracted the largest field of participants ever to enter a live poker tournament. The previous record of 5,619 players was set at the 2005 World Series of Poker Main Event, won by Joseph Hachem of Melbourne, Australia. Hachem pocketed a then-record \$7.5 million.
- The gambling industry in the US alone is a 50-plus billion dollar industry
- The US gambling industry is expected to reach \$70 billion by the year 2011.
- Nevada, alone, generates \$11.6 billion in gaming revenues.
- Canada's gambling industry is \$13-billion.
- United Kingdom's gambling industry rakes in 42 billion pounds each year (that's \$78 billion in US dollars). This figure is expected to grow significantly starting in 2007 due to the ban of online gambling (for money) in the U.S.
- PokerStars.com estimates that from 50 million to 60 million people play poker at least once a month.

- Nevada became the first state in the nation to permit mobile gaming (cell phones and handheld devices) in public areas of casino resorts, including lobbies, lounges, restaurants and poolside.
- Juniper Research predicts that worldwide revenues for mobile gambling, which is composed of casino-style games, sports betting, and lotteries, will reach \$19.3 billion by 2009. Windsor Holden, author of the Juniper report, says that mobile gambling will make up roughly a third of the entire estimated \$60-billion mobile entertainment market for that year.
- The Travel Industry Association (TIA) reported that casino gambling is a common activity on many trips and one that is growing in popularity.
- JENNIFER VARGIN, a twenty-two year veteran of the gaming industry, said, “In the past couple of years I've seen a definite increase in poker tournaments on the college level, even college sponsored tournaments. More and more we are seeing tournaments from international locales. One particularly exciting aspect of poker today is seeing more women making it to the big tables and gaining notoriety along with some of the poker legends.” (You will read more about Jennifer Vargin in an interview with her in a later chapter).
- According to the search engine Lycos, the top-rated search term for the year 2006 was "**poker**."

Today television inundates us with poker tournaments and poker TV specials. According to **Rachael Church**, author of *The Global Business of Poker*: “The growth in the poker industry has been fueled by many factors including increased television exposure, celebrity participation, high net-worth prizes and ease of

online access through broadband penetration.”

When Chris MoneyMaker (<http://www.chrismoneymaker.com>) won \$2.5 million at the WSOP Main Event (<http://www.worldseriesofpoker.com>) in 2003, many pros said he changed poker forever. There are several reasons many felt this way. For starters, MoneyMaker paid only a \$40 entry fee and won his way to Las Vegas through an online satellite tournament offered by Pokerstars Online Poker Room (<http://www.pokerstars.com>). Secondly, MoneyMaker’s win threw a spotlight on poker because he was a player who played in online poker rooms. Finally, he proved that poker players from online poker rooms could play and compete with the seasoned veterans. And as MoneyMaker has proved, they could win against the pros of the game.

In 2003, there were few online poker rooms, such as the famous Party Poker (<http://www.partypoker.net>), the world's largest online poker room. After MoneyMaker’s win, online poker rooms seemed to open their doors overnight, and more and more casino poker players moved their poker playing skills to the virtual card rooms.

We constantly hear about poker players in online gambling rooms winning prizes that take them to WSOP. The 37th annual World Series of Poker crowned the new king of poker, Jamie Gold, 36, when he won the No-Limit Texas Hold’em Main Event. Online gambling company, Bodog, had sponsored Gold and paid his \$10,000 entry fee. In the end Gold pocketed \$12 million, the largest prize ever awarded in a live poker tournament. He had beat a record of 8,773 players who anted up the \$10,000 buy-in for the Main Event, creating an unprecedented prize pool of \$82.5 million — the largest prize pool for any sporting event in history.

THE GAME OF CHOICE

Texas Hold'em has become the poker game of choice (specifically, No Limit Hold'em — <http://www.ddpoker.com/faq-poker.html>). Players who felt they were good enough to play in Las Vegas for the Main Event were now enthusiastic about their chances to win their seat via online poker rooms. After all, if a good ole' boy who had graduated from the University of Tennessee could do it, anyone could. The boys and girls in Las Vegas weren't the only contenders in the big games anymore.

Fast forward to present day and the race to enter major poker tournaments in the U.S. and abroad is still on. Not only do Pokerstars and Bodog offer to send their players to major poker tournaments, but many other online poker rooms do the same. These virtual poker rooms understand the fees to enter a major poker tournament can be steep, so winning a seat is often the only way some players will get a shot at the big mounds of cash stacked in the middle of the poker table.

If you play poker in the U.S., you are now able to compete in the famous World Poker Tour (<http://www.worldpokertour.com>) which holds tournaments throughout the year in Mississippi, Indiana, The Bahamas, California, Atlantic City and many other locations. Poker is thriving throughout the world, whether you play online or offline. Poker players no longer need to travel to find competitive poker games. Playing poker can be as easy as turning on your computer.

From Las Vegas to South Africa to the Bahamas, the world of poker encircles the planet. Writers who want to make their income from writing about poker are finding many writing opportunities as the game of poker and poker players increase in popularity year after year.

You can make money writing about poker, whether you are an amateur poker writer or someone who plays poker. Your chances of breaking into this industry

increase dramatically if you play poker or know the rules of poker, *PLUS* you know the people of poker. If you know nothing about poker, no problem! You can tap into many resources, online and offline, which can teach you what you need to know before you start writing for this industry.

WHY POKER IS ON THE MINDS OF SO MANY PEOPLE

To write about poker, you need to know why it is on the minds of so many people. Why all the excitement? What do players see in a little game of cards? Many people fall in love with playing poker because it challenges the mind; poker games are thrilling and competitive; and let's face it, we love the winnings. The winnings in poker games, even online, can trail with many zeros. What other game can you play with a \$40 entry fee and win a couple of hundred thousand dollars, or as with WSOP winners, several million? It's what lures the crowds to the game. Once players begin to play, everyone is a legend in their own mind. The enticement and excitement of winning drives players to want to play more. Typically, players just play more and more once they discover Texas Hold'em.

Even if you aren't playing poker for the money, you will quickly become aware of the jackpots of money that poker players play for online and offline. Many people play poker because of the great challenges of the mind. **Amarillo Slim** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amarillo_Slim), another legendary poker player once said, "Poker is a game of people....It's not the hand I hold, it's the people that I play with." Most of the older players do play with dollar signs glinting in their eyes. On the other hand, if you read some of the articles written about Slim in the past, you'll discover he enjoyed beating his opponents as much as anyone else.

The players you meet in the poker rooms (online and at casinos) throughout the world are the people who keep the games interesting. They come from everywhere to play, no matter where the games are played. Legendary poker players, as well as

some of the new blood, know many new players can talk themselves right out of a win before they even sit down. Amarillo Slim said once, “They anticipate losing when they sit down and I try my darndest not to disappoint one of them.”

The good players aren’t intimidated by the pros or the legends of the game. If they are, these players don’t show it. This is just one element which can make for a very interesting game. Freelance writers who go into the field to write about poker must know how to write about the poker players, legendary and amateur players alike, as well as find out a lot about the games of poker. These writers need to find out why people play, how they began to play, what their playing strategies are, and many other elements of poker that readers demand to know.

An Interview with JOHN CARLISLE

John Carlisle may be the most well-published writer in the field of poker psychology. With a Master’s Degree in Counseling from West Virginia University and a Bachelor’s from Lock Haven U. in Psychology with a minor in Sociology, John has found his niche as “the Poker Counselor.” He is a National Certified Counselor (NCC) who works with troubled kids, families, and couples. He is also a poker enthusiast who understands the undeniable link between human psychology and the game of poker.

BRIAN: Why is poker on the minds of so many people?

JOHN CARLISLE: People tend to have a deep emotional reaction to poker. It taps into our competitiveness, our quest for self-betterment, our sense of hope, and more. People often love poker so much that they hate it at times, too. Chances are, you've known quite a few players who've sworn-off poker forever after tilting, only to find themselves back at the tables a few weeks (or days) later. Often, players will see their bankrolls dwindle and their confidence shattered after a run of poor cards and bad beats. Like a love relationship that has turned sour, the poker player

often reacts by turning against their chosen game while exclaiming, "I hate poker!" The psychological roller-coaster ride is a continual challenge which we must all endeavor to battle through.

It seems the reason we can grow to have hatred for this amazing game is basically because we love it too much. We read about it, think about it, talk about it, dream about it, and play it as much as we possibly can. In essence, the game of poker has grown to be a part of us. If I ask players to identify themselves by listing "what they are," I often hear responses such as, "I am a father, husband, son, construction worker, poker player, Patriots fan ..." How far down the list you go until you mention poker may be a good indicator of just how invested into the game you are. For most, the infectious and challenging nature of poker causes us to have poker continually rise to be a bigger part of the basic fabric of who we are.

BRIAN: What is poker psychology and how does it affect players?

JOHN CARLISLE: To start talking about what poker psychology is, you have to start by clarifying what is ISN'T. Way too many poker magazines and books have a list of Do's and Don'ts that they call poker psych. Don't play when bored, hungry, lonely, tired, etc. Other articles give a list of common tells to look for in opponents and call that poker psych. This is just plain laughable. Poker psychology is not a series of simplistic lists. Poker psychology is really what drives the game of poker. It is self-motivation, self-confidence, and out-witting opponents.

We've all heard that professional sports teams hire Psychologists and Counselors to help meld the minds of their players. They harp on confidence, teamwork, visualization, and more. If it is recognized that athletics involves a heavy dose of psychology, it is pretty foolish to think that we can muster through poker without mastery of psychology. In essence, poker is the most psychologically pure contest that we can find.

First, let's break down poker psychology into two separate entities: *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal*. Interpersonal psych focuses on interactions with others. This is

what we see the most writings and discussions on: reading others, tells, assigning opponents to a certain playing style, etc. In my opinion, the skills that fall into interpersonal poker psychology are a refined skill, which amateur players should wait to delve into until other skills are honed. As we go, we will explore this more complete avenue of the game.

Our first task in poker psych is personal in nature; it comes in the form of intrapersonal poker psychology. Intrapersonal is "within self," and often involves key skills and characteristics such as patience, confidence, instincts, and goal setting. The best poker players understand that optimizing your intrapersonal psychology is the true key in maximizing your winnings. Likewise, it is the key to improving. Each session that you play, each deal that you take, the goal is to improve your knowledge and ability. When I say the goal is to improve, I do not just mean improving your strategic skills of using position and pot odds. Remember that we are talking poker psychology, so with each hand you should be getting more confident, more patient, more self-understanding, etc.

BRIAN: What skills do you need as writer to write informative, convincing articles on the subject of poker?

JOHN CARLISLE: Write about what you know. I am a therapist with advanced degrees in psychology, so I write about poker psychology. A friend of mine is a math professor, so he writes on the algorithms and statistics of the game. Another writer I admire is a lawyer, so he writes all about the legal aspects. Don't panic if your education or training does not lend itself to writing about poker, though. If you host a home game every Friday night, maybe you could write about hosting the best possible home games. If you are a college student, you could write about the college scene of poker playing. One warning ... never write about something that you don't know. You'll look foolish and hurt your chances to get your next gig. So don't write an Omaha Hi/Lo "how to" article if you are not truly experienced in the game.

BRIAN: You've written over 100 articles on poker and gaming. How do you decide what to write about, and where do you find your ideas and inspiration?

JOHN: At last count I had over original 220 articles online and in print magazines about poker. Most of the time I come up with my ideas for articles by being immersed in the game. I got three article ideas out of one short conversation with Doyle Brunson one time, as he is just a fountain of experience and knowledge. Anytime I talk with Phil Hellmuth Jr. I tend to get lot of article ideas, as he is an igniter of controversy and thought-provoking comments. When I'm at the World Series events, I carry a digital voice recorder and a notepad. In one afternoon I might get a dozen article ideas just by keeping my eyes and ears open. If people are talking about it on the rail and at the tables, then the topic will make a sizzling article. Even if you don't know the pros and can't make it to Vegas often, the same principle holds true on the local scene. You can use the people in your home game as a springboard. If the old timers in your home game start yapping about how the new generation does not respect the game, maybe you have the makings of an article on the "generation gap." Poker is such a deeply complex game, that there should never be a shortage of ideas to write about.

BRIAN: Thank you John.

Read more about **John Carlisle** at

<http://www.freelancepokerwriting.com/contributors-john-carlisle.php>

GROWTH IN THE WRITING PROFESSION

The writing profession is growing by leaps and bounds. The US Department of Labor and the Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts "writers face a job outlook which is expected to grow faster than the average through 2014" with freelance writers in general facing opportunities "expected to grow at an average pace during the same time frame."

Poker writers face unmatched opportunities in the freelance marketplace.

Guru.com, CraigsList.com and Elance.com showcase job postings for many different freelance opportunities. If you have the skills to write on gambling, specifically poker, then you'll never be short on writing gigs.

In fact, a search on a handful of job boards produced many writing opportunities, from blog posting, to writing articles on poker games and strategies. You will see examples of these ads in a later chapter.

If you want to write about poker and gaming, the opportunities are there. If you are educated about poker and you can write well, the opportunities will be endless. However, you have to be better than average to earn a decent income as freelance poker writer. You must know your “stuff” in this field.

Look at it this way: many professionals play poker and that's all they do to earn an income. If you were a dentist getting ready to perform a root canal on your brother, would you want to consult a book written by a housewife? No, you'd want to consult a book written by a dentist with writing and professional experience. Poker is becoming a lot like any other profession. People want to read about poker from writing professionals who know how to describe, explain and report newsworthy poker information. Professional players who are good at their game would rather read a book or a magazine article written by a professional.

Writing about poker and its players requires you to learn about the games of poker and about the players whom people want to read. For instance, Doyle Brunson and Amarillo “Slim” Preston are two old timers who many consider two of the last living legends of the game. However, Brunson pulls a crowd more so than Preston. People look for articles, books and information on Doyle Brunson because he is still an active player in Las Vegas. Furthermore, Brunson lives where poker rooms are on every corner, whereas Amarillo Slim lives in, well, you guessed it—Texas!

Players want to know about the cool cats of poker, like Tom McEvoy, Phil

Helmuth, Annie Duke, Chris Moneymaker, Jennifer Harman, Phil Ivey, Joseph Hachem and many others. As a writer, when you report on large poker events, it will be your job to report on the professional names in poker. When you finish this book, you'll know who readers want to read about in poker.

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