

## Pyjamas and Jelly-Beans? Seven Misconceptions about Freelance Writing Life

Across all industries, about 150 million workers in North America and Western Europe currently work as freelance or independent contractors (*Harvard Business Review*). In the US, more than 30% of all workers work freelance (IABC). And in Saskatchewan alone at least 24% of journalists, per se, opt to work as freelancers, instead of holding traditional, salaried employment (*JSource*).

Demographics show that these numbers are growing in the creative industries, even on the Canadian Prairies, with its small and conservative market.

But despite this trend, as American writer Barb Sawyers indicates, plenty of misconceptions persist as to what freelance writers *actually* do. Here are seven that she names. If you're a writer, some of them may resonate with you. If you're not, you may be surprised by this glimpse into the lives of independent contractors. Freelancing is rarely about wearing pyjamas all day (hygiene can affect one's mood) or about over-indulging in jelly-beans or other snacks:



- (1) People often say to freelance writers, “It must be great to work for yourself.” But the reality is that freelancers work for clients, not ourselves, so if we choose to read the newspaper at the start of every morning, or to take a run at noon on a weekday, the “trade-off” is often working during evenings or weekends.
- (2) People often advise, “You must keep marketing, even when you're busy.” Ideally, this is true. But when we're working on a demanding project that may spill into our evenings and/or involve a client who communicates unpredictably and so on, we may not have the energy or time to engage seriously in cold calls or to dress up and commute to networking events. Sawyers advises against networking if you have a “stress-induced eyelid twitch” from your current project. High stress doesn't mix well with networking.
- (3) People often say, “It must be nice to save money on clothes.” This is true, in part, but most freelancers maintain at least a small range of professional clothes in order to dress appropriately for client meetings or networking events. Few of us are comfortable with wearing pyjamas all day. Clothes still matter, as many self-employed people anecdotally report buying themselves a coveted article of clothing, whenever they're well paid. Further, some independents dress like we're heading to Wall Street even if we're at home, citing studies that dressing well can make us “more efficient and confident.”

- (4) People often remark, “It must be tough, what with all the layoffs.” This misconception is a particularly glaring one since layoffs in the traditional, salaried world can often result in more work for freelancers.
- (5) People often comment, “Not knowing where your next assignment is coming from, all that insecurity, it must be tough.” Freelancing does entail uncertainty, which some describe as living “closer to the edge.” But repeat clients and retainer contracts allow for some security and wise contractors save what income we can for “rainy day” funds.



(6) People often remark that “It must be nice to take time off whenever you want.” This is a particularly unfair misconception since most contractors take only brief vacations, fearing that our clients will replace us while we are gone. For instance, we tend to cut short health and maternity leaves or to integrate them with part-time work. But it is true that having the flexibility to work less or shift our working hours when facing personal responsibilities (e.g. child or elder care, etc.) is one freedom that keeps freelancers freelancing.

And . . .

- (7) People also often say, “You must be a loner or else you must get lonely.” Many freelancers are social people, but are happy to give up the traditional workplace of small talk with boring people, endless meetings and corporate power games. Some writers opt to rent co-working space. Healthy freelance life involves connecting with family and friends outside of work hours, doing volunteer work and otherwise enjoying life.

Sawyers’ seven misconceptions are certainly not an exhaustive list. But they do offer insight into the complexity of freelance writing life.

*Are you a freelance writer or worker? What misconceptions have you faced, while working the “gig economy?”*

*Please write in: I’d love to hear from you.*