

Doubt Days

After taking several days off for a trip to California to see the beach, I was back home in the Las Vegas desert. I sat at my computer and started sorting through emails, including all the job alerts I missed while I was away. Several said they were no longer accepting applications, though they had only been posted within the last few days, some within the last 24 hours. Many indicated there were already over 100 applicants. Others offered pay that made me think I made more waiting tables in college. What was I thinking!?

Rather than looking for a legal job that might actually pay the bills, I'm starting a freelance writing and editing business. Practicing law is the only thing I know how to do—the only thing I've done for nearly 20 years. And here I am, in the age of AI, of remote work, of scores of unemployed college grads willing to accept peanuts for pay, in the midst of a war, an unstable economy, sky-high gas prices, rising inflation and interest rates, and everything, from groceries to health insurance to airfare, is so expensive.

I muddled through, applied for several more jobs, and hit a wall around 4:00 in the afternoon, losing all will, energy, and brainpower as I stared at more job listings. I turned on the TV to watch some baseball and relax. I couldn't watch either of the games I was looking forward to—blackouts or some such nonsense. I started to watch two other games: one a blowout by the fifth inning, the other a pitcher's duel that could put even the most avid fan to sleep. *Oh, just forget it.* I retired to my trusty word games and crossword puzzle and then called it a night.

When I woke up around 2:30 in the morning after some bizarre dreams involving waiting tables, a ton of snow, and an albino skunk, I knew I would not be getting back to sleep anytime soon. As I lay there in the quiet, a sentence floated into my mind—a sentence I had written in a cover letter the day before. *Oh no . . . did I really write that!? It was awful!* An awful sentence, in a cover letter, for an editing job. It was for a great freelance editing job, too. As I obsessed over the wretched sentence, I started thinking about overhauling my cover letter.

It's boring and stilted. It shows absolutely zero of my personality. Because I'm an imposter. Corporate lawyer posing as a writer and editor, competing with actual writers who've been at it for longer than I've been an attorney. But I have been writing for a long time. I was an English major after all. How many pages have I written since I went to college? Too many. How about since I went to law school about 20 years ago? Yikes, still a ton. How many briefs, discovery requests and responses, appeals, letters, articles—too many to even guesstimate.

I thought about the jobs I had been applying for: researcher, content writer, copy editor, fact-checker, proofreader. *Wait a minute—research, write, edit, fact check, proofread—that’s all I’ve done since college (and really starting in high school).* Even just focusing on the lawyer years, I researched the law and the facts; verified and documented the facts; wrote persuasively; checked the cites and checked them again for accuracy and format; edited and proofread and edited and proofread again.

Being a lawyer also required compliance with style and citation guides, procedural rules, court rules, and sometimes even rules of the individual judge. Deadlines were king. Everything was driven by deadlines—of the court, of the client, of the partner, of the magazine where you want to publish that article. And everything I did as a lawyer, including client interactions, writing, arguing before the court, communicating with opposing counsel, and marketing, was all governed by more rules—ethical rules that only apply to attorneys. Listed out, it sounds exhausting. It was.

But I can research, write, and edit—damnit! (I think.)

Later in the morning, after a few more hours of fitful sleep with even weirder dreams, I decided I would not start my day slogging through job postings. I would grab my laptop from my office, get comfortable on the couch with my iced coffee, and do what I started this insane experiment to do—write.

I first revisited that cover letter with the awful sentence. It was, in fact, awful. An email with job listings caught my eye, and I saw one that was custom fit for me. I had to apply. I overhauled my cover letter—eviscerating that dreadful sentence. I explained that, as a lawyer, I am a professional researcher, writer, editor, and fact-checker. I proudly left in my Oxford commas because my cover letter is not governed by some style guide requiring that I torture my sentence structure just to avoid them. I sounded like me. And I applied.

Then I started writing.