

Generalizing

In the freelance world, generalizing is similar to general assignment reporting. It means working in a wide range of subject areas. It includes all types of media and can encompass virtually any subject. Generalizing is a great place for freelancers to get started.

Pros:

- A wide range of topics and any form of media or communication outlet
- An easy way for freelancers to get started, especially those who don't know where they should specialize
- A specific niche or area of expertise is not needed.
- Opportunity for steady cash flow
- Avoid being pigeon-holed into a specific category

Cons:

- May not pay as well as specialized work
- Work in some subject areas may not be challenging enough

Skills and tools needed:

- Versatility
- Ability to learn "on the fly"
- Solid research skills
- General portfolio or online clips to show the breadth and depth of your work

Specializing

As a freelancer, specializing refers to defining a niche or an area of expertise that you become known for. Similar to beat reporting, a freelancer can still try out new topics, but the work will tend to be clustered in areas of interest and expertise.

Pros:

- Specialized work pays better.
- Trade publications tend to be more stable than newspapers and consumer-oriented publications.
- Becoming an expert can open doors to other opportunities (e.g., copywriting, white papers, ghostwriting, advertorial writing).
- Ability to serve your audience well

- Potential for greater job satisfaction

Cons:

- Less variety of subject matter than generalizing
- Need to identify publications or media outlets that serve your niche
- Requires pitching your ideas within your niche to develop a credible portfolio

Skills and tools needed:

- A credible portfolio or online clips showing your expertise in a particular subject (e.g., biotech, military reporting, travel and leisure writing)
- A passion for one or more subjects around which you want to build your body of work
- A solid background in your area of expertise through education or experience

Additional resources:

Freelance Coach: Is Generalization Better for Freelance Writers?

<http://freelance-coach.com/home/is-generalization-better-for-freelance-writers/>

Ezine: Freelance writing on the web – why it pays to specialize by Jennifer Mattern

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Freelance-Writing-on-the-Web---Why-it-Pays-to-Specialize&id=1620559>

Sitepoint: Specialist vs. generalist: who wins? by Alyssa Gregory

<http://blogs.sitepoint.com/2009/04/02/specialist-vs-generalist-who-wins/>

SPJ's Independent Journalist Blog: Best advice: specialize! by Bruce Shutan

<http://blogs.spjnetwork.org/freelance/?p=282>

Writing-World.com: Should you specialize or generalize? by Moira Allen

<http://www.writing-world.com/basics/specialize.shtml>