



*[Welcome to the Writers' Rough Draft Podcast, where I climb behind the glamorous book launch world of successful writers and entrepreneurs, and into the mind of folks like you who are just getting their start. Equal parts witty writing information, and unabashed content curiosity—with a healthy dose of laughter thrown in—my conversations with these pros shares some of the trials, tips, and techniques that others have used to help you build your writing and content, and establish you as a leader in your field.]*

*[I'm your host Elisa Doucette, and I'm here to talk about all of that and have some fun with Jenny Blake today. You can find the links, resources, and transcript of our chat at my website at [elisadoucette.com/episode4](http://elisadoucette.com/episode4).]*

Jenny Blake is a bestselling author, international speaker, entrepreneur, and strategy pro who likes to help people organize their brains to build their careers, businesses, and lifestyle they love—all while managing to find the time to fit in daily yoga practices to keep her own body and mind happy and healthy.

Her first site, Life After College, is considered by various sources and readers alike to be the quintessential guide to navigating your twenties. Her first book, *Life After College: The Complete Guide to Getting What You Want*, is an internationally-published bestseller that has been featured in Target's graduation must-have displays.

Before that, Jenny spent five years working at Google (you may have heard of them) on the training and development team. Since then, Jenny has managed to launch a handful more businesses, start work on her second book, write regularly for her own sites and multi-million dollar publications, and speak at events around the world about her work at the intersection of mind, body, and business.

**Elisa:** Thank you so much for taking the time out from all of that to talk with me today, Jenny. Did I leave anything out?

**Jenny:** I think you got it, Elisa. I'm thrilled to be here. The only thing you left out is that we met because of our blogs. And therefore, blogging is priceless.

**Elisa:** This is true. Blogging is how I got my best friend, who is on the show with me today. So we will try to keep the inside jokes to a minimum, but we can promise nothing in that respect. So, back to the beginning of your blog and your writing and everything: how did you get started down this crazy path of writing in business?

**Jenny:** Like so many of us, I did not start with any grand plan or strategies. It was really: I had always had a love of writing that I attended to on and off. I would say sometimes I was good about it growing up, sometimes I wasn't. But it was always there. And honestly, I was teaching myself CSS and HTML, and I thought, "How can I practice these skills? Oh, I should practice a website." And I felt like, "Oh yeah, maybe that will help me get into business school someday. What could I start?"

<http://www.elisadoucette.com/episode4>



And so it was these really funny roundabout ways that I ended up setting up a website called Life After College in 2005. Part of the motivation, too, was wanting to help others. But I would say it took me time to get to that place because for so long, it felt like, “What the hell do I know? I'm no expert.” It's kind of scary to declare a little corner of the internet and make it our own soap box and have actual opinions. For so long, I only shared tips or book summaries or things that felt really safe. So my writing started as really an experiment and has evolved into full-blown career in almost ten years since.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what writing was like for you when you were first starting out? Like, did you follow any sort of routines or have any sort of processes to get that stuff out the door?

**Jenny:** Part of it was that I was working fulltime at Google for much of the early days of the Life After College blog, so my practice was not to worry at all about it during the week. But every Sunday, I would draft two blog posts on Sunday afternoon. And that's advice I give anyone in a fulltime job who says, “How do you do it? I'm so tired at the end of each day.” I was not the girl waking up at four a.m. That was never me. I was too tired during the week. So as long as I knew I had Sunday afternoons and a goal of two posts, that I would then schedule to go out during the week, that was really helpful for me.

**Elisa:** Nice. Now, when you are getting started with all that writing, one of the things I think most writers, and especially online writers, kind of feel or struggle with the most is that initial process, and that initial fear of actually hitting that “publish” button. How does one get over that? Or how does one persevere through?

**Jenny:** Yeah. Trial and error. But more so, it's a muscle. And a lot of it for me came from feedback. In the beginning, I said, “Contact us. Learn more about us.” I didn't even have first person. I didn't even have a picture. I didn't really have my name. It was the anti-personal brand. And I was hiding, like I said, because I wasn't sure what I had to offer. So as people said, “Who are you? We wanna get to know you.” A woman who is still my mentor to this day gave me that feedback.

So slowly, I started to build in more personal touches. Then as my readership started to grow, I also could get a sense for what they liked. And without fail, it was the post that I was most afraid to hit publish on, that I thought was certain to send everybody mass unsubscribing, that would bring people closer and end up being the most popular and the most commented on.

And so counter-intuitively, I started to look for when I got that pit in my stomach: “Oh, I must be on to something.” Of course, it's a terrible thing to realize because you then have to kind of invite more of that. But over time, the vulnerable posts... sometimes now I'll post something that I think is pretty normal, and someone will comment, “Wow, I can't believe you shared that. Thank you.” And I realized that to them, it might sound a lot more risky just because maybe they haven't been building the muscle there yet, or they may have no desire to.

**Elisa:** Speaking of those people who maybe haven't built it yet, or maybe don't desire to, a lot of your writing does focus a lot on what people can do to better themselves and to really advance what they want in their lives. I'm going to go out on a limb and say that in addition to all of the great feedback you



get about those posts, you also might get a fair bit of resistance from people. Do you ever have to deal with that?

**Jenny:** Knock on wood, I've been so fortunate to have a very, very positive, warm both at Life After College and at jennyblake.me. And so again, knock on wood, because I don't wanna invite trolls, but people tend to be pretty respectful. Really, my book was where I get the one-star reviews like, I'm a horrible person that rolls into a ball and cries in a corner, and I'm partly unstable. And clearly, the Amazon reviewer is the one that has it all figured out and I'm the dramatic, crazy person who had no right to write the book.

But once those came in, what I realized is that, "Wow, that was my worst fear. And here it is on the page and bullied me." No critic can say anything worse than what I already have for myself. So to see it on the page and realize it's kind of funny and it doesn't kill me, there's a sense of feeling that I'm so much stronger because of that. Because now, when I go to write the next book, yeah I know those are going to show up, but hey, I'm the one that gets to say, "I wrote the book. I had the courage to do it. What are you doing, Amazon guy?"

**Elisa:** That's very, very true. There's a healthy amount of anonymity that comes with those Amazon reviews for so many people.

**Jenny:** Right. And here's the thing: sometimes I agree with what they say. Sometimes I agree, and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm with you, buddy. My book, I wrote it four years ago. I'd write a very different book now, but I'm still so proud of what I wrote." So for me, this goes to Seth Godin's thing about shipping. I would rather be a person that takes risks and ships, even though I'm a perfectionist—nothing will ever be done, it will never be good enough for even myself. So for a reviewer, it's kind of having these judgments. I can at least live with myself knowing that I gave it the best I could at the time, and then I moved on. And that's what makes me happiest in my writing life.

**Elisa:** Moving on, you have moved on immensely from your days of publishing as an unknown third-person entity on a website, to having a really prolific career with everything else. How has your life changed? What does your routine look like now? I'm guessing you don't do everything on a Sunday anymore.

**Jenny:** That is correct. What I did is optimize two things: my health and my best energy windows. So sleep is of utmost importance to me. I will not run myself into the ground. My anti-motto is, "I'll sleep when I'm dead." It's my least favorite saying, because you'll die a lot sooner if you deprive yourself of sleep. And you'll be like a half-functioning robot.

So for me, my best energy window is in the morning. The earlier I can wake up, the better, but only if I've gotten eight hours of sleep. But I really try and plan my mornings, so that I might read a nonfiction book with coffee or tea, then I do my highest priority work which—two days a week when I don't have meetings—is writing. But on days where I have meetings, it might be just getting other things done for the blog or my newsletters or email response, speaking contracts, anything like that. And then my calls are usually blocked from maybe 11:00 to 2:00 or 3:00, and then I'm out of the house. I get really



start crazy,” so I get up, go to yoga (like you said in the intro), or go to stay in the park and just get oxygen and fresh air.

And I actually don’t put pressure on myself to even work after that. So, I work for a very intense, I’d say six to seven hours solid in the morning, and then I’m done. And as far as writing specifically, I don’t do very well writing on days where I have a lot of business nuts and bolts and meetings. So I tend to get the best concentrated writing done Thursday through Sunday, when I don’t have any meetings, and I can really just set some quiet time aside.

**Elisa:** Even with the Thursday through Saturday, Sunday, do you find that sometimes business creeps in even on those really utmost important creating days? And how do you handle that?

**Jenny:** Definitely. “All or nothing” mindset is really a trap a lot of times. If I can’t write for four hours, I can’t do anything. And so I try and remind myself, “Just sit. Just give it 20 minutes or just 30 minutes.” So even if I get interrupted or even if things go off course—which more often than not is what happens—I try and just do a little bit. But I have to say, I’m still learning. I’m getting ready to write my second book as we speak.

And right now, I feel like I might as well be a six-week-old puppy as far as my focus and accomplishment at actually writing when I’m going to say I’m going to write. So I think it’s retraining my brain and my habits, and my environment, to kind of: rain or shine, do that. And I just started reading this amazing book that I highly recommend. I’ll have to find it for you. It’s on kind of writing and the habit of it. It’s called Still Writing by Danny Shapiro. It’s fantastic for anyone listening.

**Elisa:** So as someone who is so good at systems and strategy and everything else, what are some of the things that you do to create those systems and strategies, and routines to kind of pull yourself into head down, focus mode for something like an upcoming book?

**Jenny:** Right. A couple of things: one, every piece of information has a home. So I have a very robust Evernote system, where I have multiple notebooks for my book; not just for one, but I have notebooks for—and I will tell you right now, I’m going to pull it out. I have a general capture bucket; then I have articles that I save from the internet using Evernote’s web clipper; I have models that I’m going to reference, like theoretical models, quotes, people to interview; books that are related, feedback, and then find.

Every time I encounter a piece of information that’s relevant to my book, it goes into a proper notebook, so that when I do sit down to start writing, everything is there and it is well-organized already. And then a lot of the systems that I set up are the container that allow me to have more free time. And these are resources that are all available on my website, but how I work with my virtual assistant, how I work with my communications director. Email Exhale is my \$10 toolkit on all the systems and tools and tactics to reduce my email overwhelm. And so I found that for me, it’s when I put systems in place to free up my workload, or rather get me much more efficient. Then I feel calmer when I do sit down to do the writing.



**Elisa:** That's a very, very smart way of getting to the creative, important parts without making yourself go crazy.

**Jenny:** Right.

**Elisa:** So something that is more fun and kind of crazy still is a fun little game we like to play with folks here. It's super easy. Over the next two minutes, I'm going to ask you a series of either/or questions and I want you to answer with the first thing that pops into your mind. We'll try to get through as many as we can, and get a little sneak peek into the secret thoughts of our writer's mind. Are you feeling ready?

**Jenny:** Oh boy, I'm ready.

**Elisa:** All right, we'll get the stop watch ready, and we will go. Pen or pencil?

**Jenny:** Pen, always.

**Elisa:** Mac or PC?

**Jenny:** Mac, no question.

**Elisa:** Coffee or tea?

**Jenny:** Ooh, it's a tie. Coffee, I'm more tired in the afternoon. Hate to say it.

**Elisa:** Good writing or correct writing?

**Jenny:** Good writing.

**Elisa:** Noise or silence?

**Jenny:** Noise.

**Elisa:** Lefty or righty?

**Jenny:** Righty.

**Elisa:** Weird or typical?

**Jenny:** Weird.

**Elisa:** School or no school?

**Jenny:** School.

**Elisa:** Outside or inside?

**Jenny:** Well, outside when I want to take a break from writing, but writing inside.

**Elisa:** Clean or messy?



**Jenny:** Clean.

**Elisa:** Teacher or student?

**Jenny:** Both.

**Elisa:** Town or city?

**Jenny:** City. New York.

**Elisa:** Trains or planes?

**Jenny:** Planes. Oh, trains are good too—all moving vehicles.

**Elisa:** Skiing or surfing?

**Jenny:** Skiing. I have an irrational fear of fish.

**Elisa:** Fantasy or reality?

**Jenny:** Reality.

**Elisa:** Love or money?

**Jenny:** Love.

**Elisa:** Introvert or extrovert?

**Jenny:** I'm so much more introverted than anyone would realize, but I'd say there's a time and place for both.

**Elisa:** Good content or good marketing?

**Jenny:** Content. Always.

**Elisa:** Smile or game face?

**Jenny:** Smile!

**Elisa:** Call or text?

**Jenny:** Call.

**Elisa:** Money or fame?

**Jenny:** Money.

**Elisa:** Be older than you are now, or be younger than you are now?

**Jenny:** Younger and wiser.



**Elisa:** Think before you talk, or talk before you think?

**Jenny:** Think before you talk.

**Elisa:** Have a dragon or be a dragon?

**Jenny:** Have a dragon.

**Elisa:** Bestselling book, or million-dollar business?

**Jenny:** That's hard.

[Timer rings]

**Elisa:** We're not going to let you get off just because...

**Jenny:** The timer rang. What are you going to do? Bestselling, million-dollar book that cashes in millions in royalties every year—and I don't even have to run the business. How's that?

**Elisa:** Very, very crafty.

**Jenny:** The dragon takes care of it all.

**Elisa:** The dragon is my business.

**Jenny:** That's right. I want a dragon. Yeah, I could just host dragon visitation and people would pay \$1000 to pet the dragon. He would be lucky—a lucky dragon.

**Elisa:** I think you are on to something. And then you can write stories and tales of the people who came to visit the dragon.

**Jenny:** Totally.

**Elisa:** So, business, and then the bestselling book off the backend of that.

**Jenny:** Yes, I love it. Those were great questions.

**Elisa:** Thank you very much for playing. And thank you so much for taking the time to joining me today. Where can people find your writing and business stuff?

**Jenny:** Most of my stuff is at [jennyblake.me](http://jennyblake.me). And if you go to [jennyblake.me/toolkit](http://jennyblake.me/toolkit), you can get a lot of the ways that I stay organized. And you can find me on Twitter at [@jenny\\_blake](https://twitter.com/jenny_blake). If you want eight years of archives, those are at [lifeaftercollege.org](http://lifeaftercollege.org), where I now have actually an amazing small team of writers who are helping me keep that fresh and interesting.

**Elisa:** I think the dream for many of the content writers and businesses that listen in is kind of figuring out how to get your stuff built up to such a point you actually are able to build out a team of people who are invested in spreading your message.



**Jenny:** Right. And this is a side note or a side resource, but how I work with my communications director is a post you can find on my site, [jennyblake.me](http://jennyblake.me). That talks about how I maintain two websites and actually four businesses, and four websites because I'm consulting for a few other ones. And it's not easy, so like you said, it takes time to just work up to that and have the systems, and have the workflow, and the audience to keep things running. As you know Elisa, even maintenance mode can be a 24/7 activity.

**Elisa:** So much. And we will be sure to link directly to that post right on the show notes page for this episode. Do you have any other parting thoughts or wisdom or little sneaky toolkits and tricks that are on the site that people should know about?

**Jenny:** I think you can find it all there. The parting wisdom that I have is nobody has it figured out. Especially the ones you think, when you look from the outside, that they do. I know it's easy to podcast and think that maybe you or I, Elisa, have everything figured out—and we don't. We're just experimenting like everyone else. And that's a thought that I think can help writers, where you just realize none of us are perfect; none of us have it all figured out. So the important thing is really just butt-in-chair for, let's say, twenty minutes a day of writing that you wanna do, even if that's all you are able to carve out for yourself, it's a great place to start.

**Elisa:** And everyone has to start somewhere, so that's sounds like a good place for them to start. Thank you so much again for being here and I hope you have a great time over at yourself.

**Jenny:** Thank you so much. Thanks everyone for listening!

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#### **[Outtake]**

**Elisa:** So, yeah. Well, thank you very much for being on. I do wanna let you know, I know that you have like super important, big things going on.

**Jenny:** Oh, but nothing is more important than my girl, obviously.

**Elisa:** Well, I feel likewise and that's why I'm being like, "I'm going away now. So that you can do your important things."

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