

What Ball and Chain Shackles Most Freelance Teachers?

Chapter 1.2.1: *The Teacher's Guide to Pricing Matters*

WWW.FT-TRAINING.COM

The only website to help teachers start-up their freelance business and find students successfully!

Janine Bray-Mueller



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CHAPTER 1.2.1

What Ball and Chain Shackles Most Freelance Teachers?



The chains that hold you...
(and many other freelance teachers, too)

Do freelancers underearn *by choice*?

Iron balls and chains restrict the movements of prisoners. Metaphorically speaking, some freelance teachers feel the weight of balls and chains limiting their ability to improve their earnings. The same restriction affects dieters. Whatever they undertake, they feel they cannot lose weight. It has become an argument that convinces both freelance teachers and dieters alike they are not capable of mastering the situation.

However, the problem may well lie elsewhere, as was written in an article published in *Parade* magazine (January 2005). It stated:

Diets aim at the wrong target, the belly, not the brain. They focus on a symptom rather than its underlying causes. The key to permanent weight loss is changing the attitudes, feelings and habits that determine what, when, why, how often, and how much we eat.

Freelance teachers suffer the opposite problem to dieters. It's necessary to reveal the reason why many freelancers don't *gain weight* (i.e., earn more). This could be because they have chosen not to; they are fatalistic in their mentality, or there are other underlying reasons.

Before we go looking for reasons, we must first decide whether freelance teachers are underearning *by choice*. To make the distinction clear, allow me to explain the difference.

What is underearning *by choice*?

It is a voluntary choice made by teachers who have chosen to live a simple life.

These are freelancers who have made a conscious decision to reap the rewards and satisfaction their work brings while earning *just enough money to live on*. These choices are never *imposed* by reasons such as perceived market restrictions, wage limits set by employers, and global recessions. And yet, these are the reasons they use to justify why their earnings are so low and resign themselves inwardly to 'imaginary forces beyond their control.'

This is underearning *by choice*.

What underearning *is*—and its consequences

Underearning is *earning less than you can potentially make*. It means having to go without—on both an emotional and a physical level.

Teachers become deprived of satisfaction or pride in their jobs, and without that, feel it is futile to try doing anything worthwhile. The outcome is foreseeable—a downward spiral into depression. This inevitably ends in a loss of students, without which there is no income, leading to physical deprivation. Unmet physical needs may not be restricted to the freelance teachers themselves should they have dependents.

It's only a question of time before the three-year death cycle of a teaching service forces a freelancer to give up on their teaching career.

Many teachers suffer from underearning because they feel it lies beyond their control. There is always a reason why they cannot earn more. What is surprising is the creative fantasy that supports their arguments. They believe they are trapped victims of circumstance.

For example, you'll hear talk about:

'There's a global recession.'

'The market is cutthroat.'

‘There are too many teachers and not enough students.’

‘The timing is not right to raise prices.’

‘It is not possible to fight alone against policies on low rates, long and unsociable hours, or the number of students in each class.’

‘There are too many unqualified jobbers/students/bored spouses teaching for pocket money where I live.’

‘I live in a city where I have to compete against a lot of other freelance teachers.’

‘I don’t live in a city where my students can walk in from the street and sign up for lessons.’

‘Price dumping is rife where I live/work.’

Have you heard them as well?

Four typical reasons for not earning enough

Based on discussions with freelance teachers, here are the four most common reasons given for not earning more:

1. Not understanding personal and social value of teaching work

How do you estimate the personal and social value of the work you do? Most under earners belittle or underestimate the importance of their work, so take a minute and reflect as objectively as you are able to on the following questions:

How does your teaching help your students?

Does your work help fulfil their desires, or improve their jobs, their wages and their standard of living? Don’t forget their dependents—the people who are dependent on your students’ successes.

What about society in general?

Does your work bring society any benefits? Such as helping people avoid unemployment or even helping them get out of unemployment with better qualifications?

Question:

What monetary value would you give to your teaching service if it had a price label?

Quite right!

The job you are doing is beyond monetary measure.

2. Self-sabotage: pricing

Self-sabotage is another classic example. Many freelance teachers sabotage themselves all the time. Have you ever been guilty of saying this when the time comes to state your price?

‘Well, my price is usually 50 euro—but for you—I’ll make it 30.’

Tsk tsk! When did the potential student have a chance to protest against the 50 euro?

Self-saboteurs often lower their prices in advance and without reason. They will never get the chance to see whether students would have accepted their prices outright. Instead, they plan an automatic loss in earnings before the lessons begin. You know the value of your work. And the value of cheap is—cheap. Stick to your guns, and look them in the eye.

3. Self-sabotage: voluntary work

Another typical self-sabotage act is engaging in *too much* volunteer work without giving thought to the reason why you are in business—to earn an income.

Some free work is admirable. However, it has to fit in with your ethics and satisfaction aims, and it shouldn’t be allowed to undermine your core income. It becomes an act of self-sabotage when it takes up the majority of your available working time.

Doing voluntary work to earn a pat on the back won’t pay the rent. However, it is possible to obtain that soul-feeding pat on the back *and* get your expenses and time paid for—*just ask to be paid*. Take note that even non-profit organisations and local events have a better-perceived value for your time and expertise when money crosses the table.

4. Vagueness about money and success

The fourth symptom is that nearly all underearners are vague about earning their money and are as equally ambiguous about their successes. As a teacher, your income will be influenced by your self-esteem and the value you place on your work. Let me repeat that...

YOUR EARNINGS LIE IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO YOUR SELF-ESTEEM.

Who can possibly believe teachers can teach successfully (i.e., help students to achieve their objectives) when they don’t believe in themselves? If you can’t believe in yourself, how can you expect your students to believe in you?

Who is responsible for underearning?

Did you notice how all four reasons had one thing in common? They are all *self-inflicted*.

If you were able to cross off each of the four reasons above as not applicable to yourself—you are not an underearner. The responsibility for underearning lies with the freelance teachers themselves. In each case, they can decide how much they want to earn.

Summary

Changing self-sabotaging traits means *changing your attitude* to the values you hold about your teaching skills. It will feel uncomfortable at first because any change means a temporary disruption to your daily life. However, this type of change is not difficult; it's easy.

Once your brain has logically worked out the immense value your teaching brings to your students as well as to society as a whole, your enjoyment, motivation and attitude towards your own worth will increase, and so too, the quality of your teaching.

What happens then? Your income as a freelance teacher invariably rises in direct proportion to your own self-perceived worth.

Your Next Step

Waking up from your dream of self-imposed negativity, you need to think of ways to make yourself stand out from other teaching services. By specialising, you take the first steps to define your USP (unique selling proposition)¹. A USP lets your professionalism become visible and at the same time allows you to raise your earning power. Everyone can do something exceptionally well, whether it is technical, medical, commercial, grammatical, or whatever. First decide on the topic of interest, then focus on one small area within the topic to build your teaching service².

How is this done?

Take as much undisturbed time as you need. As you work through the exercises below, see if you notice a subtle shift in your attitude.

1. Make a list of all the possible variations of schooling within your freelance teaching niche.
2. Narrow down language areas you are good at or have fun teaching even though you imagine such language areas as being too small to specialise in.
3. Check for similar fields and courses on the Internet, in the media and printed material. Find out for what monetary value these similar services are offered, especially in your teaching niche.

¹ USP is explained in more detail in my forthcoming book *What Do You Teach?*

² How to establish your teaching niche is explained in my book on *Teaching Niches*.



About the Author

Teaching English has been my business and my passion, and I've been successfully freelancing for around 30 years. Meanwhile, I decided to share my knowledge of marketing by writing a series of books giving practical advice to teaching freelancers. These books are not restricted to pedagogical and academic subjects—these are to help colleagues in their teaching careers to find students and earn enough to live from their work.

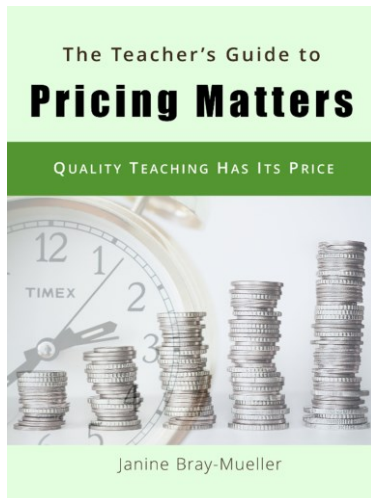
I believe I can help other freelance teachers attain success similar to mine.

I have worked in the sales and marketing departments in Brussels, Belgium and in Germany, and also completed a two-term voluntary member in the IATEFL Executive Marketing Committee. In as such, this experience has contributed to *avoiding* what I call the **three-year death cycle of freelance teaching businesses**. That is to say, these jobs helped me thrive in the freelance English language teaching market.

Meanwhile, I have given presentations at the TESOL France annual conferences and have also been published in several language teaching magazines.

Janine

More from Janine Bray-Mueller



The Teacher's Guide to Pricing Matters

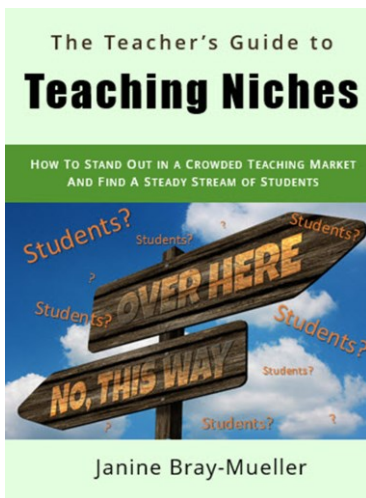
Quality Teaching Has Its Price

Freelancers, who have relied on 'the going rates' only to find out they have continuously undercharged their students and customers, can now work out an acceptable pricing rate for their teaching services to overcome the three-year death cycle causing many freelancers to give up their teaching careers.

Teachers see many opportunities for freelance work but is it really possible to make a living as a freelancer in the long-term? Janine Bray-Mueller has encapsulated the key lessons on pricing she learned during her career as a freelance language teacher.

Din A4 Paperback: <https://boook.link/The-Teachers-Guide-to-Pricing-Matters-ti3tab>

eBook: <https://boook.link/The-Teachers-Guide-to-Pricing-Matters>



The Teacher's Guide to Teaching Niches

Stand out in a crowded teaching market and find a steady stream of students

How can I gain visibility on the global teaching market to attract a steady stream of new students?

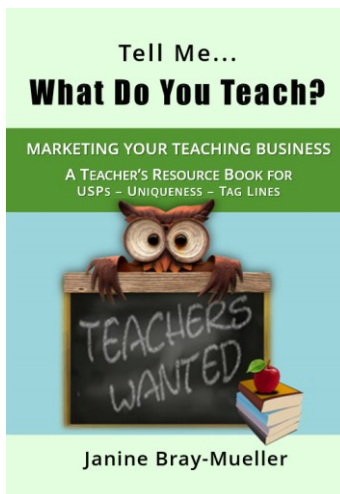
What you don't need are theoretical discussions about niches and specialising. What you need instead, is a practical hands-on system that works.

The Teacher's Guide to Teaching Niches lays out a precise system showing freelance teachers and coaches what they need to know when they want to define a teaching niche. One that helps them to stand out confidently in a crowded teaching marketplace.

Din A5 Paperback: <https://boook.link/The-Ultimative-Guide-to-Teaching-Niches-d1o5cm>

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The newest book in the series!



Tell me... What Do You Teach?

Marketing your Teaching Business

A Teacher's Resource Book for USPs—Uniqueness—Tag Lines

Without a steady stream of new private students or customers, freelancing teachers will slip into the three-year death cycle and go out of business. Yet most brochures and business cards end up in the dustbin.

Most start-ups and online teaching services don't know what to write when they advertise their teaching services. They believe that mastering the many aspects of teaching is enough to guarantee a successful career. But contrary to attracting potential private students and business customers, they end up doing the opposite. Instead, they write about framework levels or quote tired stock phrases such as '*we tailor our offer to your specific needs*'.

TEFL/TESOL and CELTA courses teach classroom management, pedagogical issues, and teaching methodologies. They don't teach how to start-up freelancing careers needing websites, social media pages, brochures and business cards. What is needed is a teacher 'must have' freelance marketing book that fills this gap.

Tell Me... What Do You Teach? is a business and marketing book giving insights and worksheets on how to be a successful freelancer. It guides teachers to work out why their freelance teaching service exists and continues to develop the copywriting skills they need to advertise their professional teaching activities. A clear statement that tells potential private students and business customers exactly what is being taught and what skills (or benefits) they gain by attending their courses. This is what our customers want to read.

Get your teacher 'must-have' marketing book **Tell me... What Do You Teach?** and avoid making mistakes that could affect your freelancing career. Take your teaching service beyond classroom management and teaching itself. These skills can be used for your advertising and acquisition situations as a professional teaching freelancer. And 'teacher wanted' is a thing of the past.

Din A5 Paperback