

Chandler Bolt Interview

Caitlin Pyle

Hey everybody, thanks for joining us for this blog post interview/transcript. Glad you guys are tuning in. We have a really exciting special guest, the king of self-publishing, Chandler Bolt. Hey, Chandler. How are you?

Hey, Caitlin. Thanks for having me. So great to be here.

Yeah, yeah. Thanks for coming on and for sharing your knowledge with our blog readers and for potential students of proofreading courses that we offer here on Proofread Anywhere. So tell us a little bit about yourself. You know, who are you, where you're from, what you do, why are you the king of self-publishing?

So my name's Chandler Bolt. I run a company called Self-Publishing School. It's an online training program, we teach people to write, market, and publish their first book and then how to use that book to grow their business. I'm the author of six books, one of which is called Published: The Proven Path from Blank Page to Published Author. So this is my most recent book. And my whole backstory is that I was a college dropout and a C-level English student. And I hated writing and I wasn't any good at it. And then, I ended up writing my first book. It did really well, brought in close to \$7,000 in the first month, continued to bring in thousands of dollars a month in passive income. Did another book. People started asking, "Hey, how are you doing this?" That sparked Self-Publishing School. And now we've had thousands of people go through the program. And books are just -- anywhere from five to ten books a week get launched through the program, and books are always coming out. So it's a lot of fun. But I'm excited to be talking about this because as someone who was a C-level English student and horrible at writing, proofreaders and editors are very important. Especially to me. So this will be fun.

Awesome, awesome. Well it sounds like Proofread Anywhere got its start quite a bit the way Self-Publishing School did, where people just ask, "Hey, Caitlin, how are you making money as a proofreader from home?" And that's exactly why I started Proofread Anywhere and eventually the courses as well.

Yeah.

So that's really cool. Yeah. And it's funny that you're a C, C-minus English

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student. You wouldn't expect that. I've read a lot of your writing, and of course, you get better with practice. And the more you do something, the more you tend to enjoy it. And so, that doesn't surprise me at all that you've improved a lot over the years, as have I. I look back at some of my old blog posts and I'm like, "Oh my gosh." Just from two years ago.

Yeah.

So much can change in just the span of two years. So you said five to ten books per week. I want to get to that, so don't let me forget. I think I have it on my list of questions.

Yep.

But let's talk about, what is self-publishing? And is it new? It seems like this is something that we haven't heard about. Where did it all start and what does it mean for the people interested in this?

Yeah, so when a lot of people think of writing and publishing a book, they think of the old, antiquated model that's existed for, gosh, decades, potentially even centuries. But you get an agent, you do the dog-and-pony show and go to all the publishers and try to pitch your book. And then, you hopefully get a book deal, you hopefully get an advance. You hopefully don't have to pay back that advance, if you don't sell enough books, which you will if you don't sell enough books. And so, it's just really an antiquated model. And self-publishing used to be this taboo thing, right? It's the red-headed stepchild. It's the thing that people do if they can't get a publisher. It's like, "Oh, you couldn't get a publisher so you self-published." But really one of the biggest changes that have happened in the industry is now, self-publishing is not just an option, it's the best option. Or it's on its way to becoming that, right? And that's what we feel like we're leading the charge at self-publishing school. Because people realize that, "Oh, if I want to go through a traditional publisher, it's going to take me years. I'm going to make pennies on the dollar. They're going to strip me of all my creative liberties." It's going to be a very frustrating process. And at the end of the day, they're not going to do any marketing for the book. Which is one of the biggest misconceptions is, "Oh, how are you going to market it?" "Well I've got a publisher." They're not going to market the book, they're going to ask you how you're going to market the book. So the publishers traditionally had a chokehold on one piece of the industry, which is why they've been able to reign, which is distribution. So if you

want to get in bookstores, you got to get a publisher, right? But now, as we see, as sad as this might be, bookstores going out of business across the country. Barnes & Noble is just crumbling under horrible management and the fact that people just aren't going into bookstores anymore. And over 70% of all books sold are sold on Amazon. So now, there's this unique opportunity that's never before existed, which is, you can self-publish and make way more money, and you're going to be where books are sold. And you don't need the publisher for distribution anymore. So it's kind of this perfect storm where it's creating a lot of opportunity for a lot of people.

Yeah. I mean, and I'm one of those people. I've self-published about five times, now. I do it through my blog. I think I have one on Amazon, but I never marketed it, so nobody even knows it's there.

Mm-hm.

But it's definitely an awesome platform, and it really does open up the opportunity to get your stuff out there. And you own it. That's probably the biggest thing in the old way of doing this is that you just really don't own your stuff anymore.

Nope.

But you got to do all the work to actually sell it.

Yep.

And so, this is like, you're selling a product, you're not even just selling a book, anymore. It's a product, it's your knowledge. You're able to create yourself as an authority, because you are an authority with the knowledge that you want to share. So I just love it. And so, you said five to ten books a week are coming just through Self-Publishing School. I can only imagine - I've seen other bloggers that are talking about self-publishing and there's other ways to learn, stuff like that. Of course, I wouldn't want to learn from anybody but you if I were starting over again. And that's what I tell my readers is, "Well, why is it that so many people that want to publish books? What's the draw there? How do they start with that idea?"

Yeah, there's a lot of different reasons. For some people, it's passive income. For some people, it's business growth. So it's leads and sales for their business. For some people, it's a passion project. It's a message that they want to share, lessons

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that they've learned the hard way, or just things that they maybe even just want to pass down to their kids. And then, the fourth thing that we say is it's an authority piece. A book is the new business card. So when you give someone a business card, I don't know about you, but if a business card is given to me or thrust upon me at an event, it's probably going in the trash within 24 hours.

Yep.

You've got your different pockets. Like, "This is to keep," and then you've got your other pocket that's like, "This is going in the trash immediately." And most of them end up in that going in the trash immediately pocket. And they get thrown away. But when you give someone a book, there's something about it. I grew up in the south. My parents were dirt-poor, met at a factory. And my mom taught me early on, "You don't waste," right? So if someone hands you a book, you're going to hold onto this book, and you're not going to throw it away, because you'd probably just feel bad. So guess what? When you have this book, every time you see this book, you think of me. Or in your case, every time they see your book, they think of you, they think of your business, they think of your service, whatever it is that you provide. So those are the reasons that we see people writing a book as well as just, like, it's a bucket list item. I mean, a lot of people have dreamed about it, they've thought about it. Maybe they've even been sitting on five chapters for the last ten years, and they just can't get around to finishing it. So it really is a sense of pride, and people feel pretty good about it.

Yeah, definitely. And I have to say that there's probably more people out there that want to write books than proofread them.

Yep.

And so, that's good news, very good news for people that want to proofread them.

For sure.

And I know for a fact over the last two years, if I've learned anything, it's that people want to proofread. And we're already reading books all the time, because we're word nerds. So why not get paid for it, right?

Yeah.

What can be better than just reading for fun is also getting paid for it. So that's a

good thing, that self-publishing is on the rise. It's definitely positive for people who are looking to make money as proofreaders. So hell yes, there is a need for proofreaders. That was the list of questions that I wanted to ask you is that, do these self-publishing authors have a need for proofreaders?

Yeah. Oh gosh, yes. I already told you, as a C-level English student, my running joke is that my editors and proofreaders turned my third-grade paper into a best-selling book. That's what I always tell people. And I truly believe it. I mean, if you'd see what I hand over to editors and proofreaders, it's pretty rough. So it's such a talent and such a gift. And I tell all of my students, I'm like, "Some of the best money that you can spend is A. a good book cover and B. a good editor." Right?

Mm-hm.

Those are the two things that -- some of the best business advice I got was, "You can never spend too much money on a good accountant and a good lawyer. Because the accountant will make sure you save your money and you manage it, and the lawyer will make sure that you keep it."

Yes.

And it's very similar with books. Like, cover designer, editor. Right? Proofreaders.

Mm-hm.

Two very important things that you just don't want to cheap out on.

Yeah, I agree. I mean, even as a writer myself and a former proofreader -- now my blog is kind of my life and that's what I do. I'm obviously proofreading all the time, everything I write. But I have an editor go through it, and then I have three or four different proofreaders go through it. And I pay all of them. And so, even somebody with a proofreading blog uses a proofreader and pays for proofreaders. And so, I'm walking around as living proof. And that's just for blog posts and the books. I'm working on expanding a book that's already been published, but we're kind of rewriting it, expanding it. And I sit down, I start trying to edit it myself, and I'm like, "I just don't have the mind for it. I need an editor." And then, after that, it's like, "Okay, I can go through and read it." Just like, "I know what it says. I wrote it. Blah, blah, blah." And so, you can't proofread your own stuff. And I think a lot of us, especially a lot of us proofreaders, have gone through, and they've read some great books. But then

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they see that it's littered with errors because either they had a bad proofreader, or they didn't have a proofreader at all.

Yeah, yeah.

And proofreading costs money. And some people try to cut those corners. But really, what proofreading does is it shows that a self-published author is a professional.

Yep.

They're not just cranking out stuff to try to make money, making a quick buck. And I always tell my proofreaders that taking shortcuts just makes you look bad. And you end up shooting yourself in the foot by taking shortcuts.

For sure.

Yeah. So what would you say are important traits of a quality proofreader?

For me personally -- now this is not for everyone -- but I want to know that they believe in my topic or that they're at least interested in it. That's my first qualifier is, "Why do you want to edit this book? Why do you want to proofread this book? Why are you interested in this?" Because I just think people pay attention differently if they're actually interested in the material. So that's a big qualifier for me. Obviously, that they're thorough. There's so many different terminology, and what you might call a proofreader, I might call an editor. It's like, there's words in my mind, and some are interchangeable. You would probably disagree. So I always tell people, "There's two types of editing. There's content editing and copy editing." So for me, I'm looking for a different type of person to content edit my books. So to say, "Hey, this chapter sucks." Or, "You need to add a story here." Or, "Reword this." Or, "You lost me here." Things like that. And then, I can massage the draft. And that's the content editing, which is happening first. And then, we're moving into copy editing.

Mm-hm.

Which is more like proofreading, right? It's spelling, punctuation, grammar, formatting, things like that, right? A lot of those things. And so, that's what I'm looking for is, sometimes, someone who can run through both of those steps, sometimes, just people who can run through the last part. Sometimes, I'll have someone run content and copy, then I'll hire someone else to do another copy

edit or a proofread, like you might call it. And so, that's kind of the process that I use. And that's the process I teach as well.

(NOTE FROM CAITLIN: You might notice Chandler uses "copy editing" and "proofreading" interchangeably. It's common to mix these two up, and you'll most likely see others doing the same thing when you start your proofreading businesses. Just know that he means "proofreading" in this interview. :-))

Yeah, that's exactly what I go through is I have somebody go through and edit it, and then I have another person go through and edit it. And then, I have a final set of eyes, probably two or three sets of eyes, go through and just catch anything that we miss, any inconsistencies, anything that just doesn't make sense, doesn't flow well, anything that's a little bit off. And it's amazing that even by the third time, you think you got it all, and then they pick up something that you missed that the other four people who have seen it missed.

Yeah.

And proofreaders are so valuable. So, so, so valuable. And I'm glad that you're able to validate that for us.

Oh, for sure.

Awesome. So this is kind of a fun question, it'd make me really happy if you say no. But do you have any proofreader horror stories, things that make a really bad proofreader that you've experienced?

Oh, man, that's a great question. For some people, they get negative feedback. And that's a horror story for them. For me, I actually love that. I mean, I don't love it. It's not like I get it back with red and I'm like, "Yay, I'm so glad you hated this part in my book." But I hand it off to editors and I say, "I want you to be brutal with this. I want you to cut anything that doesn't add value." And so, I try to write above my target. So if I'm going for 35,000 words, I'll try to write 40, 45, maybe even 50,000 so that we can trim it down. So, sometimes, that can get a little bit close to the heart. And some people, they have bad horror stories about that. I'm trying to think. For me, I've been blessed to have some great, great people. I mean, you'll have some people flake out here or there. But our vetting process is pretty intense. So by the time someone gets down to working with me, they're good, and they're proven, and all that stuff. So for the most part, I don't, luckily enough.

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Awesome, awesome. Yeah, you were telling me before we started recording here that you guys have a rolodex that you kind of put proofreaders and editors through the wringer basically before they're added to this list. And so, a big reason that Proofread Anywhere is in existence is to train proofreaders so they can pass those types of rigorous -- they can measure up, basically.

Yeah. Exactly.

And we're happy to be pretty much the only place you can get that kind of training. So we're really excited to be offering that. I put this towards the end on purpose. And so, probably people are like, "Oh my gosh, when are they going to get to it?" What do proofreaders normally get paid for proofreading books? And before you get into it, I know content editing, where you're ripping things to shreds and rewording things, that's more work-heavy, that's going to get paid more. That's a different thing. But if they're just going through, and they're kind of the last leg of looking for anything that the editor missed, things like that, that last set of eyes, what kind of pay would you normally pay a qualified and trained proofreader?

Yeah, that's a great question. I'll dig into this, and I'll also say that we have really good posts on the Self-Publishing School blog that's, like, "How much does it cost to publish a book?" Which, that kind of gives you an idea of, like, all the different aspects. So we can link that up, and that'll be a helpful resource for people. We generally say -- I'll kind of back down to the number. So we generally say, "Okay, when you're coming in, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$200 to \$800 for the full production of your book." Now, you can certainly go higher than that, and especially if you don't know what you're doing. Or if you just want to pay really, really high quality or just go above and beyond kind of. But you don't have to. I did my first book for, I think all-in, it was \$200 for everything. For the cover, for all that stuff. So you can certainly do it that way. But it's also going to depend on non-fiction versus fiction as well as length of the book. So I like to tell people, "Hey, a good non-fiction book is anywhere between 15,000 to 35,000 words. And for that, for editing, you can expect -- editing or proofreading, and it really depends. You can expect to pay anywhere from \$100 to \$300 to \$500." That's what I like to tell people. Now, some of that could be content plus copy, some of that could just be copy. I know people have found it certainly cheaper than that. And I know this is not the answer -- the classic, "It depends," right? I hate when people give those kind of answers. But I always tell people, "Depending on how

polished your writing is." For me, I know that my writing needs some work. So I'm going to pay on the upper end of that spectrum. Some of our writers are like, "No, my stuff's good. I just need a final copy editor." So they're obviously going to pay a lot less. And if you're looking to move up the food chain, per se, in terms of proofreading, and editing, and etc., I always tell people, "Obviously, start with the base skill that you have. But then if you can provide the content side, you're going to get paid a lot more. Because it's a lot less of a commodity.

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, even at the lower end of the spectrum, it's better than getting paid zero dollars for reading and proofreading, right?

Oh, for sure. For sure, yeah. Yeah.

And it's always good to start at the bottom with your skill level. And as you get more experience, and get your training, and stuff like that, then you can, yeah, add skills. And I always say, "More skills equals more money."

Yeah. I thought you were about to say, "More skills equals more bills."

Yeah, that's true too. More money, more problems. But I can draw a lot of parallels between book proofreading, and the transcript proofreading, and our original course on Proofread Anywhere. We charge by the page, but the price goes up depending on what type it is. So not all proofreaders will charge more for a medical transcript. But if it takes way more time to read, one page, super dense, professional-engineered transcript, you should charge more than something that's super easy - worker's comp, layperson witness, something like that. So, yeah. I really give a, "It depends," answer as well. But you provided a lot of details. I appreciate that. I think we'll get it. We get that. So, yeah. So what advice would you have for aspiring book proofreaders?

Oh, pay attention. Do good work. Don't take shortcuts. And go where people are. Go where your potential buyers are. It's just so easy to find work, because there's so much out there. And it's one of those things where if you take a good approach, you can get it. I'm obviously teaching on the other side of this, so I'm teaching people how to make sure you don't get screwed, how to make sure someone doesn't miss a deadline, how to make sure that you get a fair cost, that you don't get someone bad, all those things. And so, I'm training people to make sure they're setting expectations, make sure they're providing the right things. Asking the right questions. One of the random things that we teach is, somewhere buried in your proposal or your request for a proposal, just say, "Start your

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proposal with the word purple cow." And so, basically, then what all of our people can do is they'll just filter out everyone who doesn't start with purple cow. Because if they didn't read your listing well enough to see where you told them to say purple cow -- and you can do whatever phrase you want to do. But if they didn't read it close enough, then they're probably going to do the same for your book. So it pays to individualize proposals and to individualize things to people. Don't do the shotgun approach, just spray and pray and just send out a canned thing to a bunch of people. Because some people think that works, but it just really doesn't.

Yeah, I have a term for that. I call it mudslinging marketing, where you just throw out a bunch of mud onto the wall and just hope that something sticks. Well, really, you just get yourself dirty. You can risk yourself ruining your reputation. It's just crazy. And it's funny to see that that carries over into other industries as well.

Yeah.

Well, it's clear that the industry's only going to grow from here. There's tons of work that's going to be done. And I think it's definitely worth jumping into proofreading for book authors, because there's continually more. I mean, five to ten per week just in your training program. Per week. Just do the math on that. And your program's continuing to grow, because more and more people are discovering the wonder that is self-publishing. But for the rest of us who are just -- I shouldn't say the rest of us, because I write. But people that just don't want to write, they like to read -- and there's tons of us out there -- this is just a perfect thing to get into. And I'm happy to hear that there's a spectrum, as you build your skills, you can earn more money, because that's exactly the way it is with proofreading as well.

100%.

One thing I wanted to just mention, if it hasn't been obviously so far, is that proofreading for all these different types of authors that have all this different knowledge opens the door to so many different valuable connections with experts in all kinds of industry. That's probably the biggest part.

Oh, for sure. Yeah. This is so cool because it could be this mega, ultra-successful author. And you're getting to interface with them because you're working on their book. And at that time, no one is more important to them. Not even their wife or

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kids, just being frank. When they're at that point in their book, it's such a vulnerable time where it's like, "Oh, you want to talk at 10pm? Sure. Do you need to meet tomorrow? I'll clear my calendar." There's no more valuable person than that person that's working on your book, because that's the only thing that stands between you and getting that thing published and between you publishing the book and it not sucking and people not liking it. That is someone who's super, super valuable. So you're getting kind of an end-road into their life.

Yeah. I refer to proofreaders as ghosts a lot of the time. We don't get our names on the book, but we are so helpful. We make the doers look good, so to speak. But I love what you said about not taking shortcuts. And I say that to my students in the blog posts, all over the website in the last two years.

Proofreading is an art, and it's something that takes practice. You've got to train your mind to move away from just reading books just for your pure enjoyment, and you've got to train your mind to look for all kinds of errors. It's not just spelling errors anymore. There's so much stuff that can go wrong. You know, spacing, things like that. And so, the best thing you can do is practice and learn before you go out and throw yourself at people. Because if you do that, you might be able to make some money here and there, but you're going to be wandering around aimlessly, kind of shot-in-the-dark type thing, not really being sure whether you know what you're doing. And then, if you mess up, that could be it for you. This person could just tell everybody they know, their author friends or whatever, whatever group they hang out with. And you could be done for. So definitely not taking shortcuts is probably the best advice we have here for anybody watching this. So we'll definitely include a link to Self-Publishing School and over to the blog. And we'll have a transcript of this video made so everybody can watch it. And I just want to say, thank you so much for lending your expertise to the community here at Proofread Anywhere. And, yeah, anything else you want to say? Thanks so much for being here.

No problem, thank you for having me. If anyone wants to think about writing a book, there's two helpful resources I can provide for people. One is, we've got a blog post, it's How to Self-Publish a Book in 2017. It's meaty, you'll see things from the other perspective. But the second thing, we've got some free training, some free video training. So it's Self-PublishingSchool.com/free. We'll get you there. That can be helpful for people.

Cool, cool. We'll hyperlink to all that under the video. And, yeah, thanks so

much for being here. And I'm sorry I didn't have - I'm reading your book right now. It's in the bedroom next to my bed. So I was reaching over there at the beginning of the video, because you had your book. I'm like, "Ah, I do, too."

Oh, that's funny.

It's a great book. So if you want to read -- he's so generous, you guys. So go on Amazon and buy Chandler's book Published. You'll have pretty much his whole formula. The Self-Publishing School is just such an enriching experience. It's going to give you more than what you need to be successful in self-publishing, if you're interested in that as well. So thanks so much, Chandler. We'll talk to you later.

Cool. Thank you, Caitlin.