



A week in the life of ... Linda Liem

by Linda Liem

If I had to describe a typical week in my life as a freelancer a year ago, it would have been much easier than it is now. Last year I really had something like a regular week, so let's start there.

It's one year after I started working as a freelance medical writer and in that time I've built a little business with a healthy load of repeat clients, several new clients that were referred to me and a few leads to new clients. My two daughters, Karina aged 2 and Cinta aged 7, are doing fine in the nursery and at school and the afterschool playgroup, so I can spend about 30–32 hours a week on my freelance activities.

My typical regular week

Monday. Normally, I would start on Monday morning by planning and organizing my week. To stay organised, I have a workbook that I use for my ToDo lists and a stack of storage bins, marked "Action needed", "Pending" and "File" where I keep all my project files. Also, I mark all e-mail messages that need action. Thus, I start my week by going through all these filing systems and checking my planner against all action items. Although this may cost me some time, it does save me the worry of potentially missing anything important and resets my mind in working mode. Since I only have a short afternoon today, I usually use the rest of the day for all those little tasks that I've found during my planning session. This may include acquisition, making follow-up telephone calls or writing e-mails, doing administrative tasks or scanning pharmaceutical newsletters to find interesting news for a pharmaceutical newsletter that I'm editing.

At 2.45 PM, my working day is temporarily suspended and I get my bicycle to pick up Cinta from school, 10 minutes from our house. We go home to sit down a bit, but at 4.20 PM I have to take her to her dancing class. During her class, I cycle like mad to the nursery, approximately 15 minutes away from us, where I pick up Karina. We cycle back, pick up her sister again and can go back home. After the kids have gone to bed, I pick up my work again for an hour of two before finally calling it a day.

Wednesday. Today it's kids time. Only in very urgent emergency situations will I try to find a babysitter and sit down at my desk again. This happens about once every two months, but luckily my parents and mother-in-law are always happy to come over, if they are available. If not, my poor husband has to rearrange his schedule to help me out.

Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. The children go to the nursery and afterschool playgroup on these days, so I have a whole working day waiting for me. Although I prefer to work on one project at a time, I usually have several projects active, since some are being reviewed by the client. Ideally, I can use these days to work according to planning. However, as life is full of surprises, this rarely happens. Sometimes a client is late with comments, but expects me to keep to the deadline. Maybe another client calls with an urgent project that needed to be finished yesterday. I might get a call from the nursery or school that I have to pick up a sick child. In those cases, I pick up my trusty planner again to see if I can shift something or when I can make up for the time lost. This tends to be in the evening after the kids have gone to bed. So, I savour the evenings that I don't have to catch up on anything, pour myself a glass of wine, and try to let my work rest until the next day.

Weekend. The weekend is the time to recuperate and spend time with my family. Only in very urgent emergency situations will I try to find a babysitter and sit down at my desk again. For the rest, see Wednesday.

A big change

Seeing my successful transition to a freelance medical writer, my husband was also longing for a change. After many considerations, we decided to move to Norway after he managed to find a new job there. Thus, I notified my clients that I was moving to another country and that I would suspend my writing activities during the summer months, but that I would be available again in September for work—with a view of the fjords. Luckily, I could say goodbye to the Netherlands knowing that I had a few small projects waiting for me in September.

Moving house can be pretty drastic, but moving country is really radical. We had to find our way through an administrative jungle both in the Netherlands and in Norway, find our bearings in a new society, learn a new language and help the children adjust. I had to close my company in the Netherlands and open it again in Norway. There are so many things that need to be done and that we need to find out. Since my husband is working full time, most of this is falling on my shoulders. In addition, I blog about our adventures here to keep family and friends informed, I look after the children and teach Dutch to Cinta (the kids have to be able to communicate with their family, after all). In Norway, foreign children have the right to receive lessons

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in their mother tongue as long as they need extra Norwegian lessons. Since we're the only Dutch people in our village, the school agreed to appoint me as her Dutch teacher for 2 hours in the week. To be able to cope with all of this, I drastically reduced my freelance activities to about 10–15 hours a week. Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, this was not so difficult, because some clients became very quiet for some reason. Luckily, a few clients stayed loyal and kept me going, albeit somewhat erratically. The children have settled in really well and it even seems that I'm picking up my pace again! So, let's see how I'm spending my week now.

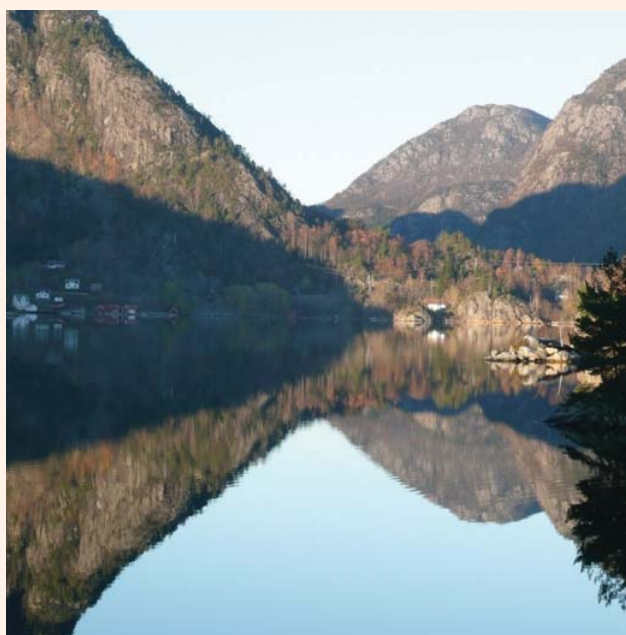
My current typical week

Monday and Friday. I wait until Cinta is on the school bus and take Karina to the nursery. When I come home, I make myself a thermos full of tea, grab a mug and head for my desk. I have from 9.00 AM until 2.30 PM before Cinta comes home again. As before, I still start the week by going through my files and checking my planner. If I have a project active, I use my time for that. If not, I do other tasks that are usually not work-related. After Cinta is home, I help her with her homework. When we're finished she can play, while I pick up the other one around 4.00 PM. At 4.30 PM, my husband comes home (a working day in Norway is only 7 hours) and I can prepare dinner. After dinner, I take Cinta to football training and an hour later, I pick her up again. I might work for a few hours after the kids have gone to bed. Wine is more expensive and harder to find here, so I save that for the weekends.

Tuesday. I wait until Cinta is on the school bus and take Karina to the nursery. When I come home, I make myself a thermos full of tea, grab a mug and head for my desk. This is my regular day for my Norwegian language homework and for preparation of the Dutch lessons of this week. However, if I have a writing project, I work on that and postpone the homework to the evening. At 1.25 PM, I go to school and teach Dutch to Cinta. After that, we pick up some groceries and drive home where she can do her homework. Around 4.00 PM, I pick up Karina and prepare dinner. When my husband is home we can eat and after that we have some time together before the kids go to bed. I might work for a few hours after the kids have gone to bed.

Wednesday. Today the kids are free and at home. It's a bit far for my parents or my mother-in-law to come over, so I don't work today. In the summer, we meet with other mothers and their children for a little hike and lunch outdoors. I might work for a few hours after the kids have gone to bed, but then again, I might also go to the ladies gym evening or the local ladies club, which is once a month, where we eat something, talk (well, I mainly listen) and have a nice evening.

Thursday. I wait until Cinta is on the school bus and take Karina to the nursery. Then I drive on to the Norwegian language class that lasts all morning. Occasionally though,



View from our house

I have to skip class because I need the time for a writing project. After that, I pick up some groceries and drive to school for another hour of Dutch teaching. When we're finished, we go home and I help Cinta with her homework. Around 4.00 PM, I pick up Karina and prepare dinner. When my husband is home we can eat and after that we have some time together before the kids go to bed. I might work for a few hours after the kids have gone to bed.

Weekend. The weekend is the time to spend with the family. I mainly use the evenings as my backup time to get work done and try to keep the weekend as free as possible, so we can do other things, e.g. go out into countryside, that is all around us (see photo above). When I don't have to catch up on anything, I pour myself a glass of wine and enjoy the weekend.

Next year?

As a friend told me, it doesn't appear that we have become less busy, but rather that we now spend more time on things we enjoy doing. Working as a freelancer has enabled me to be much more flexible than before, with all its ups and downs. e.g. being able to attend school performances, but also working till deep in the night. Although I'm spending much more time on other things now, I still have a lifeline to my freelance activities, which is something that would have been impossible with a regular job. Right now, I'm trying to figure out what direction I'd like to take, so I really couldn't say what my typical week next year will look like. However, I have learnt to deal with uncertainty and know what I am capable of, so I'm confidently looking forward to whatever the future may bring.

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