



Illustration by Priscilla Fung

Guide to freelancing

A Freelancer works on a contract or project basis. This guide will explain how to successfully set up as a freelancer and how to promote yourself.

What is freelancing?

Freelancing is self-employment, where you lend your skills and talents to one or more clients flexibly. Freelancers have the freedom to choose which projects they complete and usually work from home. Although, some professionals rent studio or office space. They are paid according to an hourly, daily or project rate.

To become a full-time freelancer, you will need to complete contract-based work. This means you will have different clients or work on specific projects for a varying lengths of time. An advantage of freelancing is being able to manage your own work/life balance and can decide what clients to work for. The disadvantages are you may not have the financial security of a salaried role and you will not be entitled to sick leave, paid holidays, and office perks.

Be flexible, resilient, and self-motivated. Freelancing can be lonely, so network regularly. Being realistic about earnings and preparing for financial gaps is also important. Develop new or complementary skills in your downtime and look after your well-being. Talking to other freelancers in the industry can be a great way to prepare yourself and learn from their experiences.

How to set up as a freelancer

- Decide what your services are
- Decide how to promote them
- Create a plan to get clients
- Work out your finances

Defining your services

- What are your key skills?
- What is your offer and Unique Selling Point (USP)?
- What is your purpose?
- How do you want your clients to perceive you?
- What can you bring to the market to make you stand out from the competition?

Once you have the answers, think about how to plan your story, and create a pitch for potential clients. Make sure your message is consistent across all promotional materials.

How to promote yourself online

You should always have a website or online portfolio to showcase your work. Update your portfolio every time you finish a job. Make sure you also promote the work on your social media channels, making sure the client agrees first. Create a



Doyeon Kim in studio. Image: Alys Tomlinson



Tolu Ashiru Jewellery pieces. Image: Alys Tomlinson

networking strategy by researching companies that are looking for your specialist skills. LinkedIn is a great resource for this. Contact their HR department or a relevant employee, such as their Design Director or Creative Director.

Curate your social media presence by opening a business account on Instagram. Post content regularly and connect with potential clients and collaborators. Sites like Upwork and People per Hour match freelancers with projects. The Dots allows you to showcase your previous projects and to connect with clients. Registering with different recruitment agencies could also help you find relevant work.

Make an impression

Word of mouth is a highly effective way to get work as a freelancer. If you are friendly and productive, clients are more likely to recommend you.

- Attend events where there are potential clients, such as private views and industry networking events. Make sure you have business cards to hand out.
- Collaborate with other freelancers. This allows you to offer a combination of skills and to introduce clients to one another.
- Get testimonials from partners and clients. Include them in your marketing materials to add credibility.

Aim at having a variety of long term and one-off clients. One-off clients can be good for a quick cash injection. Do not rely on one big client as you will need other sources of income to stay afloat.

Maintaining good relationships with clients is essential. If they enjoy working with you, they are likely to offer more opportunities. Stay in touch with contacts on LinkedIn, if they change jobs they will still be part of their network.

Contracts

If you work at your client's studio, the contract might include the job title, hours and your rate. If you are creating an entire project, you will need to include much more information. For example, the scope of the project and an estimate of your turnaround time. After client negotiations, write a contract listing everything that is agreed. It creates clarity and protection on both sides. Before signing it, think about your deadlines and other work

commitments. Be honest about the completion time. Decide which areas you can compromise on if the client asks for a fee reduction.

What to include in a contract?

- Your fees and terms of payments (for example: 50% when you start and 50% when you finish)
- A detailed description of the service plus the number of changes, updates, redrafts or amendments requested by the client
- Delivery dates and deadlines
- What the client needs to provide you and how you will maintain communications (e.g. email, phone calls or in-person meetings)
- Permission to show the finished work on your online portfolio, social media, and to future clients
- Who will have the copyright? For more information, visit UAL's Creative IP (Intellectual Property) website creativeip.org

Finances

Becoming a freelancer means starting a business. You will have to manage your finances and pay taxes. Being self-employed, you must submit an annual tax return to HMRC. You will also need to pay National Insurance contributions. You also will need public liability insurance and clients may ask to see proof of policy. If you are giving advice, you will also need professional indemnity insurance. Set up a new bank account to keep your work and personal finances separate. Look for accounting software like Quickbooks, FreshBooks and Free Agent.

It is possible to be both employed by someone, whilst also being self-employed. You can have a part-time job and still work as a freelancer. You will need to do a self-assessment tax return on the HMRC website. It is important to have a clear perspective about how much money you want to earn. Be realistic about how many projects you need to complete, to achieve your goals. Create a basic business plan with a budget and a brief explanation of your offer, services, and market.

How much can you charge?

You can charge by the hour, day, or project, depending on your work. When calculating your fees, consider the amount of work or the number of hours required. Include extra hours for tweaks or amendments. As you gain experience, you will have a better understanding of how much to charge and when to raise your prices.

Invoices



Dominic Afshar Akhavan-Moosavi working. Image: Alys Tomlinson

An invoice is the bill you send to a client to get paid. You need to keep a copy of all invoices, as part of your financial record for HMRC. Many accountancy platforms have invoicing tools, so you can keep track of them. Save your invoice as a PDF to prevent any information being changed and send it to your client via email unless your client has requested a paper copy. Here are some examples of UAL Invoice templates (PDF 1335KB)

If you have not received payment by the deadline, call the client to check what has happened and negotiate payment. If this does not work, you can send a 'letter before action'. This letter says that if the contract is not fulfilled within seven days, formal court proceedings will begin. A free template is available on the Citizen's Advice website.

Receipts

If a customer buys something from you and pays straight away, you will need to issue a receipt instead of an invoice. Brands such as iZettle offer simple and affordable kits, to take card payments and email receipts to customers. For cash payments, you can buy carbon paper receipt books.

Useful Links

- [IPSE \(Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed\)](#)
- [How to set up as a sole trader](#)
- [How to exhibit and sell your work](#)
- [Setting up business partnership](#)
- [Setting up a limited company](#)
- [Startup donut](#)
- [Self-employment Prospects](#)
- [Working as a Freelancer \(video\)](#)
- [Finding work as a Freelancer \(video\)](#)
- [Freelancer Club](#)
- [Gov.uk - Writing a business plan](#)



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