

A guide to freelancing: Tips, strategies and advice

Freelancing is an incredibly flexible career path, allowing you to set your own schedule, decide who you work with and even experience different areas or industries at once. It's become a popular way to work in recent years, giving freelancers the freedom to travel and set their own work terms.

What exactly is a freelancer? Simply put, a freelancer is someone who provides a service on a contract or project basis. Roles include [freelance writer](#), graphic designer, bookkeeper, programmer, virtual assistant and more. One of the main benefits to freelancing is flexibility, which is why it's a popular option for digital nomads, students and parents and other carers.

If you're thinking about starting to work as a freelancer, this guide can help you figure out the type of work you can do, how to find clients and the best ways to manage your freelance business.

What is freelance work and how to get started

Freelance work can suit those with a unique skill set who want to work for themselves. It may involve accepting contracts from different businesses, or having your own clients with whom you have an ongoing service agreement.

Like any business, it will take time to build your reputation, get the word out about your services and maintain regular, steady work. This is why many freelancers start while also working a full-time or part-time job – to build up their client portfolio before moving to freelance full time.

Six steps to becoming a successful freelancer

So how do you get started in your freelancing career? Here are six steps to set you up for freelance success.

1. Assess your skills and interests

To decide what freelance service you will provide, first look at your current skill set and your interests. There are few limits to what you can do for work as a freelancer. While writers and designers are some of the most common freelancers, you could leverage your skills in painting, plumbing or piano playing to launch into independent contract work.

2. Choose your niche

Once you know the type of work you will provide, narrow down your niche. Choosing a freelance niche will help you market yourself and build your reputation quickly for a very specific service. For example, if you are a freelance developer, your niche might be app development. A freelance writer might focus on finance or crypto.

3. Set up your workspace

For some freelance jobs, a dedicated workspace is essential. If you're working from home, it helps to have a dedicated workspace so you can keep your professional and personal lives separate, and stay focused and productive when you're working. Make a [list of the work-from-home equipment](#) and furniture you can't live without to do your job.

4. Assemble a portfolio

Creative freelancers will find that a portfolio of work is a must. Once you've made the decision to freelance, start setting aside samples of work that you're most proud of and that showcase your skills. Create a presentation or online portfolio you can share with potential clients so they can see the style and quality of your output.

5. Build and grow your online presence

A key part of being a freelancer is marketing yourself. After all, you'll want to bring in work without spending too much time actively finding clients. One strategy is to grow

your online presence. Ideally, every freelancer will have a website and basic social media presence, but you may also want to venture into paid ads.

6. Keep track of your obligations

When you work for yourself, it's up to you to manage your tax, superannuation, GST, insurance and other obligations. It's wise to set up an appointment with an accountant, bookkeeper and/or business advisor to learn what you need to prepare for and keep track of from day one.

Finding work as a freelancer

There may come a time in your freelance career when you need to find new customers. To land new clients you'll need to pitch your services and negotiate rates. Here's a snapshot of how to find work and get new clients on board.

Best ways to find new clients as a freelancer

The best way to find work as a freelancer is for your clients to find you – but that's not the reality, especially in the beginning! While you're still building your professional network, some of the best ways to find new clients include:

- Attending industry events (in person or online)
- Cold-emailing contacts
- Asking existing clients for referrals
- Reaching out to your personal network for opportunities
- Using freelance job platforms, like [seek.com.au](https://www.seek.com.au)

How to pitch your freelance services

Pitching is how you sell your services when you have a potential client. First, the client will give you the details of the project and brief you with exactly what they need. Once you have this information you can prepare a pitch.

During the briefing, you should find out:

- The objective of the project
- The deliverables
- Their budget

- The deadline
- All the background information and context you need to fulfil the service

During your pitch meeting, you present a proposal with:

- A document outlining the project
- A list of services/deliverables you will provide
- A timeline
- A fee or hourly rate.

Depending on the type of services you provide and the brief, you could offer different options for timelines, deliverables and rates.

Tips for negotiating freelance rates and contracts

Part of securing any freelance job is negotiating your rates and sending the client a contract. When setting your freelance rates, consider:

- Costs to cover equipment needed
- Your experience
- The time the job will take
- The urgency of the job
- Any additional action you need to take for this job, like specific industry research
- The complexity of the job

You can choose to set an hourly rate, a monthly rate or bill on a per-project basis. Research what other freelancers in your area charge, and even look at job ads to see what equivalent jobs offer.

Once you have decided on your rate and the client has agreed, it's time to get your contract sorted. While having a lawyer to draft a contract is ideal, it may not be possible in the beginning. There are plenty of freelancer contract templates online for you to use as a guide. You want to include the agreed rate and services, ensuring you specify exactly what work is being provided, and any fees for work that falls outside of the initial scope.

Managing your freelance business

Freelancing means you work for yourself, with your own start and finish times. But it

also means keeping yourself accountable, managing your workload and being a responsible business owner.

How to improve your productivity as a freelancer

The more efficient and productive you can be while working from home, the more earning potential you'll have. It will take some trial and error as to what works for you, but learning some basics for improving your productivity as a freelancer will give you a good place to start. Some ways to increase your productivity include:

- Creating a dedicated workspace, separate to where you relax
- Using a planner or work-management software to keep track of tasks
- Creating a to-do list and prioritising what needs to be done first
- Keeping a regular schedule for when you start and finish work and [creating good work from home habits](#)
- Taking regular breaks, including lunch, to keep active and stay inspired

If this is the first time you have worked for yourself, give yourself some grace and room for growth. It might take some time to adjust to your new life.

Managing your finances and taxes

Unless you are a freelance accountant or bookkeeper yourself, it's best to get one as soon as you decide to start freelancing. They will guide you on accounting software, how much tax to pay, what your invoices should include, when to register for GST and how to apply deductions. Until your meeting, there are a few things you should do to stay organised.

Basic things to do to make managing your finances easier as a freelancer:

- Keep track of every expense, including storing copies of receipts
- Log every invoice you send, when it's paid and how much you have earned
- Open a business banking account to receive income and pay for business-related expenses
- Use an online tax calculator to estimate how much money to keep aside
- Use a spreadsheet to keep track of incoming and outgoing finances

How to handle difficult freelance clients

Learning how to handle difficult clients is a good skill to develop when you're a

freelancer. If you have a client who is asking for work outside of the scope you agreed upon, let them know you're happy to offer the extra services at an additional cost. In cases where they need work provided urgently, give some gentle pushback with a timeline you can manage – and let them know how much notice is needed in the future.

If the client is unhappy with your work, it's important to communicate openly about their expectations. Have them clearly explain their concerns. Refer back to your agreement to see if there has been a misunderstanding. Give your client options for moving forward, to help resolve the matter as soon as possible.

When to outsource work as a freelancer

Having too much work is a good problem to have as a freelancer. But if you find yourself overwhelmed, it may be time to consider hiring someone to help.

Some things to consider when outsourcing work:

- Whether you should hire a business or use another freelancer
- Whether automating some workflows or steps could help you save time
- Which tasks you'll outsource, like answering new enquiries, account management, invoicing, etc.
- Your budget and how much outsourcing you can afford
- If bringing on help would free up time to get new clients

As a freelancer, when you hire someone, you step into the realm of employer. If you do go down this route, be sure to learn what your responsibilities are to your new team member.

Growing your freelance business

You can [earn a good living contracting or freelancing](#), especially if you grow your business. There are many ways to grow your freelance business and your income, including marketing, employing an assistant, or restructuring your business to make better use of what you already have. Here are some ways you can grow your freelance business.

Expand your services

When you start freelancing, it's likely you only have a few key services. As you grow,

you can add services depending on the skills you develop and the needs of your clients. By expanding your services, you have more ways to help your clients, with more money coming into your pocket with every new offering.

Increase your rates

It's common for freelancers to set their rates lower than they'd like when they first start to get clients. For those with a case of [imposter syndrome](#), it can be hard to charge what you're actually worth, even though clients would be happy to pay for your expertise. At the very least, you should be increasing your rates regularly to keep up with inflation.

Building a referral network

A freelancer referral network is a group of freelancers with different services, who recommend each other to their clients. For example, if a member of the network has a client who needs something you do, they may refer them to you. It's a great way to grow the number of clients you work with while enhancing the experience of your own clients by helping them connect with other reliable professionals.

You may already have a network of freelancers and businesses but if not, a good way to start building one is by attending industry events.

Creating passive income streams

Passive income provides a regular flow of money through a low-maintenance business activity. Some of the top passive income streams for freelancers include:

- Creating online courses
- Selling downloadable content or templates
- Offering guest posting or newsletter spots
- Having a membership option for clients
- Selling stock photography

The right passive income stream will depend on the service you provide, but there are options for every freelancer.

Securing long-term contracts

Long-term contracts are key for the growth of your business. Securing 6- to 12-month contracts gives you the ability to plan ahead, so you know when you're at capacity (or need to expand), and when you may need to lift your marketing game.

To get your clients to sign long-term agreements, there needs to be a benefit and risk for them. The benefit could be a bigger discount for longer periods, like 6 or 12 months, while the risk could be a cancellation fee and 30 days' notice. The latter will help give you time to recoup the loss and gain a new client if they no longer need your help.

Scaling your business

There may come a time when you have the opportunity to bring on a team member or outsource your work to scale your business. By scaling up your business, you are able to support more clients and increase your revenue.

Another way to grow your business is to automate some of your repetitive tasks, by using automated reporting tools, email systems or marketing funnels. By saving time on regular tasks, you have more time to spend on finding and servicing new clients.

Staying motivated and avoiding burnout

One of the biggest reasons people freelance is to enjoy a [better work-life balance](#). However, when you work for yourself at home, it can be easy for your work to creep into your personal life or to become unmotivated. Knowing how to spot signs of burnout and learning what to do when it arises can help you keep your freelance career on track.

Practise self-care

Self-care is very important when you work for yourself. Having healthy habits will help keep you in good mental and physical shape, allowing you to be more productive and to thrive in your business. Some healthy self-care habits to have as a freelancer include:

- Keeping a routine: waking up and going to bed at the same time every day
- Getting dressed every day, even if it is tempting to work in your pyjamas
- Staying active: getting out of the house, even if it's a five-minute walk
- Eating a healthy diet and staying away from the temptations of the fridge
- Maintaining social relationships with friends and family

Learn how to handle rejection

At some point, you may have a potential client say 'no' or have an existing client cancel. The first time this happens can be difficult to handle, but you shouldn't let it get you down. Treat yourself with compassion when something doesn't go to plan and don't let that one experience define you.

Every failure and rejection is an opportunity to grow and learn. How could you have done better or changed the situation? In some situations, there is nothing you could've done, and learning to recognise that is crucial to the future of your freelancing career.

Find inspiration and stay creative

For people in the creative industries, freelancing allows for diverse ways of working and thinking outside the box. As your freelancing business grows, nurture these unique processes to stay motivated and inspired. If you feel yourself falling into a rut, try getting outside of your physical workspace to find new sources of inspiration and reset your headspace.

Fight the imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome is the feeling of self-doubt in your skills, intellect or accomplishments, negatively comparing yourself to others. Letting go of perfectionism is essential for overcoming imposter syndrome. Look at the work you produce, celebrate when you do great work and be gentle with yourself when you don't. It's also good to have friends you can speak to – ideally other freelancers or business owners who share these feelings – to get reassurance and bring back a positive mindset.

Find your freelancing community

If you're going from working every day with people around you to the solitary life of freelancing, it can take time to get used to the lack of social interaction. Freelance life can be lonely! This is why having a community is important. Your friends and family play a big role in supporting you, but it's just as important to have freelancing buddies you feel a connection with, to reach out to whenever you feel the need.

What are freelance careers? Examples and industries

There are so many opportunities for freelancing: creative roles, technical roles, coaches, essential service providers and the list goes on. What are freelance careers you can explore to grow your own thriving business? Read on.

Writing careers

Writing is an essential skill needed for nearly every business. Most businesses need website landing pages, SEO content, ad copy and other marketing collateral. You can also find work with non-corporate clients who need ghostwriters, grant writers and even resumé and cover-letter writers.

In-demand roles for freelance writers

- **Copywriting** aims to help sell a product or service, needed for writing ads, landing-page copy, emails, billboards, radio scripts and more.
- **Content writing** is used to inform and educate readers while building brand awareness, typically without promoting a specific product.
- **Technical writing** is the skill of taking complex information and simplifying it into easily digestible content, like reports, instructions or product descriptions.
- Ghostwriting is producing work under the name of another person, and can include blogs, books and memoirs.
- Grant writing is writing proposals for businesses, groups, people and organisations applying for funding.
- Resumé writing is the **creation of resumé**s, cover letters and other documents supporting a job application, to help job seekers secure a role.

Design careers

Designers play an important role in many different industries. This broad category includes web design, fashion design, product design, interior design and more. There are myriad opportunities for aspiring design freelancers looking to use their creative and technical skills to work for themselves.

In-demand roles for freelance designers

- [Graphic design](#) is the craft of creating visual content for ads, magazines, books, flyers, billboards and more.
- [Web design](#) refers to designing websites and web pages, typically for businesses.
- [UX/UI design](#) focuses on designing apps, websites and other digital platforms with the intention of creating a seamless experience for users.
- [Interior design](#) entails creating aesthetic indoor spaces in commercial and private premises.

Audio visual careers

Going freelance in music or photography gives you the freedom to work in the niche you're most passionate about. You can choose to specialise in wedding photography, music production, voiceover work – or expand your skills and offer services in multiple areas.

In-demand roles for freelance design creatives:

- [Photography](#) freelancers can find lucrative jobs shooting weddings, events, fashion, real estate, consumer products and more.
- [Videography](#) is shooting and producing digital or film videos for events, weddings, training purposes and more.
- [Illustration](#) freelancers create visual artwork, either on traditional mediums or digitally, for books, websites, and other media.
- Music composition involves writing, recording, mixing, editing and custom-composing music.
- Voiceover work is the process of recording your voice to be used for media, like movies, ads, marketing videos and more.

Tech careers

As technology continues to crossover into other industries, tech freelancers are more in demand than ever before. Which freelance career you pursue will depend on your technical skills and experience.

In-demand roles for freelance technology experts:

- [Software development](#) refers to the process of designing, creating and supporting the ongoing maintenance of software.
- [Mobile app development](#) is the design, documentation, programming, testing

and maintenance of mobile applications for all different purposes.

- [Game development](#) plays a role in the creation, design, development and on-going maintenance of video games and console software.
- [Cybersecurity](#) refers to the technical process of measuring the threat of and preventing cyberattacks, and reducing their impact when they occur.
- Artificial intelligence freelancers are typically engineers who work on the development and programming of algorithm networks and the advancement of AI technology.

Corporate careers

Companies frequently need freelancers to help them handle peak periods or provide temporary cover for full-time employees. This presents a great opportunity for freelancers with specialised skills to expand their professional network while adding a reputable client to their portfolio.

In-demand roles for freelance business service providers:

- [Accounting](#) services help businesses and individuals with tax, payroll and other accounting obligations.
- [Bookkeeping](#) is the support of businesses in recording and tracking their financial transactions and activities to meet their financial obligations.
- [Social media management](#) is the process of creating, scheduling and optimising content for brands on social media to help increase their reach within target audiences.
- [Project management](#) in a freelance capacity allows businesses to have projects led by a specialised expert outside of their day-to-day operations.
- Virtual assistants help businesses with administration and ad-hoc tasks, such as managing emails, taking incoming calls, data entry and more.

Freelancing can be a rewarding career for those with the skills and commitment to run their own business. Importantly, it gives you the chance to work when, where and with whom you want. For writers, designers, creatives, technology specialists and other in-demand professionals, there are endless opportunities for growing your own business while striving for a healthy work-life balance.

FAQs

What skills do I need to become a freelancer?

While the skills you need depends on your niche, here are some that can help all freelancers succeed:

- Good communication, to properly understand your clients' needs
- Networking, to make new contacts
- Marketing, to have new work come to you
- Time management, to organise your workload efficiently
- Administration skills, to keep track of invoices, expenses, and so on
- Sales, if you need to pitch to new clients and win contracts

How do I set my rates as a freelancer?

When setting your rate as a freelancer, you need to take into account your experience, the time the job will take you, the urgency of the job, any equipment needed, and your take-home income after tax. You'll also need to decide whether to charge an hourly rate or a set price for the whole job. If you charge per project, ensure you detail the deliverables, to guard against scope creep. You can also talk to other freelancers to see what they charge, helping you set a competitive rate.

What are the best platforms for finding freelance work?

Jobseeker websites, like [seek.com.au](https://www.seek.com.au), are some of the best platforms for finding freelance work. Businesses will post job ads that let you know if they're open to freelancers – but you can apply for almost any role, offering your services as a freelancer if you feel it's a good fit. Other good platforms for finding freelance work include social media, service marketplaces and online networking sites.

How do I deal with difficult clients?

To deal with a dissatisfied client, it's essential you stay calm, listen to them with empathy and offer a prompt solution. Sometimes a client won't be happy with your solution, in which case assure them you are committed to finding a mutually beneficial outcome. Offering a solution doesn't have to mean admitting any party is wrong, but rather finding a way you can move forward with your contract intact.

How do I stay motivated and avoid burnout as a freelancer?

Finding a good work-life balance is vital for staying motivated and avoiding burnout as a freelancer. It's important to eat a healthy diet, stay active and enjoy hobbies outside of

what you do for work. If you work from home, create a dedicated space so you can fully switch off and relax when you clock off for the day.