

So You Want To Be a Freelancer...

IF YOU'RE READY TO BE YOUR OWN BOSS AND SET YOUR OWN SCHEDULE, FREELANCING MIGHT BE FOR YOU. HERE ARE THE PROS AND CONS AND WHAT YOU NEED TO SUCCEED.

BY **LISA A. BEACH**

Do you dislike working for someone else? Are you tired of the nine-to-five grind? Do you crave more freedom and flexibility in your work life? If so, you might want to consider self-employment by becoming a freelancer.

A freelancer is someone who works independently, offering their services to various clients on a project-by-project basis.



Because they're not tied to any specific employer, freelancers often have the flexibility to choose the type and quantity of projects they work on and the clients they want to work with.

If that idea appeals to you, you're not alone. According to Statista, freelancing is a rapidly growing sector of the United States workforce, with an estimated 73.3 million freelancers in 2023. That number is predicted to climb to more than 90.1 million by 2028.

OLGA S LSHUTTERSTOCK.COM

OLGA S LSHUTTERSTOCK.COM

FREELANCING IS A RAPIDLY GROWING SECTOR OF THE UNITED STATES WORKFORCE, WITH AN ESTIMATED 73.3 MILLION FREELANCERS IN 2023.

DECODING THE INDEPENDENT WORKFORCE PUZZLE

You might have heard the term freelancer used interchangeably with contractor or gig worker, but they're not exactly the same. While all three types of independent workers share similarities (such as the freedom of self-employment and flexible work schedules), they differ in how they find work, how they set their fees and get paid, their responsibilities and their business structures.

Gig workers (like Uber drivers) complete short-term tasks through online platforms (like Uber, Upwork, Instacart and Fiverr). They typically get paid by the task they complete and work with multiple clients. They commonly use a simple business structure, choosing to operate as a sole proprietor. This structure is easy to set up, it provides autonomy and it costs very little to establish. However, there are liability risks and tax implications to consider.

Freelancers (like copywriters) work independently and land projects through various channels such as email marketing, online platforms, word-of-mouth referrals and social media. They typically work with multiple clients and get paid on a project basis. Though some freelancers choose a more complex business structure, many freelancers commonly opt for sole proprietorship.

Contractors (such as IT professionals) secure fixed-term contracts with a company for a project or specific duration. They might work remotely or on-site and, depending on the contract, may not be able to work for other companies at the same time. They typically earn a fixed monthly salary rather than get paid on a project basis. They often use more complex business structures such as a limited liability company (LLC) or S corporation (S corp). These structures vary in the complexity of getting set up, ongoing costs and compliance issues, as well as liability protection and tax implications.

Now that you understand the difference, let's dig into the world of freelancing.

IN WHAT INDUSTRIES DO FREELANCERS WORK?

Freelancing spans across many industries, working in common sectors like:

Creative fields: writing, editing, music production, audio/visual editing, sound engineering, graphic design, illustration, photography, animation, branding

Business services: market strategy, search engine optimization (SEO), sales consulting, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, social media management, bookkeeping, tax preparation, transcribing, virtual assistance, translation, customer support

Technology: network administration, cybersecurity, data analysis, mobile app development, IT support

Education: online tutoring, educational content creation, course development

Legal: contract review, legal research, paralegal services, compliance consulting

Health care: telehealth services, fitness training, nutritional consulting, medical writing

Human resources: HR consulting, talent acquisition, payroll processing, recruitment



FREELANCERS MUST SET DEADLINES, PRIORITIZE TASKS AND MANAGE THEIR WORKFLOW. THIS DEMANDS INCREDIBLE SELF-DISCIPLINE AND FOCUS.

WHAT SKILLS DO FREELANCERS NEED TO SUCCEED?

Regardless of the industry or specific talents, freelancers must possess some core skills to thrive.

Freelancers act as their own boss. While this sounds awesome, it also means they must set deadlines, prioritize tasks and manage their workflow. This demands incredible self-discipline and focus. Plus, freelancers must stay motivated when problems arise—and they will arise.

Freelancers must be organized and able to effectively manage multiple projects with multiple clients. This requires the ability to break down projects into smaller tasks, track a project’s progress and meet deadlines.

Because freelancers work with multiple clients, they’ve got to be skilled communicators—whether they’re meeting in person, discussing a project over the phone or clarifying expectations via email. They need to be good at negotiating, too, so they can earn the fees they deserve and manage client expectations. Long-term success lies in building good client relationships.

Freelancers must be comfortable marketing their business to ensure a steady flow of clients and to grow their business. This might mean creating marketing materials, networking, engaging on social media and developing a website.

Finally, freelancers must develop basic financial management skills and/or outsource key tasks to an expert to handle responsibilities like bookkeeping and taxes.

THE PROS AND CONS OF FREELANCING

Freelancing presents a mix of opportunities and challenges. Understanding the pros and cons can help determine if this independent path aligns with your career goals and lifestyle preferences.

PROS

- Independence and freedom
- Flexible work schedule
- Control of your own workload
- Choice of which clients you want to work with
- Unlimited earning potential
- Multiple streams of income
- Work-life balance
- Continued skill development and career growth
- Ability to work anywhere

CONS

- Inconsistent income
- Unpredictable workload
- Possible loneliness
- Handling your own taxes
- Staying motivated
- All-encompassing responsibilities, from marketing and administrative tasks to service delivery and client communication
- No traditional benefits (health insurance, retirement plans, paid time off, etc.)

OLGA S LSHUTTERSTOCK.COM

OLGA S LSHUTTERSTOCK.COM

NETWORK WITH OTHER FREELANCERS, PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS AND RELEVANT INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS TO SPREAD THE WORD THAT YOU’RE IN BUSINESS.

GETTING STARTED AS A FREELANCER

To launch a successful freelance career, you should start by identifying your niche, defining your services and setting your fees. This will help you market to the right clients at the right rates. Build your portfolio and showcase your work samples on LinkedIn, your website and freelance portfolio sites.

Set realistic goals, knowing it will take some time to gain momentum, build a brand and increase awareness. Network with other freelancers, prospective clients and relevant industry professionals to spread the word that you’re in business. Market your freelance services in a variety of ways, from emails and cold calls to social media posts and videos.

Analyze what’s working, tweak to improve results, then rinse and repeat. No matter how long you’re in business as a freelancer, you’ll need to adapt to changes and market your business on a regular basis to continue attracting new opportunities.

WHERE TO FIND FREELANCE WORK

Freelancers typically find clients in a variety of places, ranging from freelance platforms and social media to job boards and associations.

Social media:

- **LinkedIn:** provides direct outreach/inbound opportunities and industry-specific groups, such as Freelance Professionals, Freelance Graphic Designer and The Freelance Writers’ Connection
- **Facebook:** provides industry-specific groups, such as Binders (for women and gender-nonconforming writers/editors), Virtual Assistant Savvies and Social Media Managers

Freelance platforms: connects brands with writers, graphic designers, videographers, editors and other creatives for content creation

- Contently
- Skyword

Associations: offer industry-specific job boards, networking opportunities and events

- National Association of Freelance Legal Professionals (NAFLP)
- American Translators Association (ATA)
- Graphic Artists Guild (GAG)
- American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA)

Job Boards:

- Toptal
- WriteJobs+
- 99designs
- ProBlogger ♦

BEACH IS AN ORLANDO-BASED FREELANCE WRITER WITH BYLINES IN *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, *USA TODAY* AND MORE. SHE ALSO PUBLISHES A FREE NEWSLETTER CALLED *EXPERT•ISH* FREELANCER.

