

# A Guide to Freelancing and Navigating the Gig Economy for Communications Students

## What is Freelancing?

(Adapted from Freelancing School's "[What is freelancing?](#)")

- Freelancing means **to work as an independent company** rather than be employed by someone else. Freelancers are self-employed and often referred to as independent contractors
- Freelancers are hired by clients or other companies on a part time or short-term basis, but they do not receive the same compensation as full-time employees or have the same level of commitment to any particular company

## Other Terms for Freelancing

- **Contract work/job:** Jobs where you are working to fulfill a short-term or part time contract
- **Independent Contractor:** The IRS classification of a freelancer
- **Contract Consultant:** A consultant coming in under a 1099 contract for a short period of time
- **Contract-to-hire:** "Test period" for a freelancer before they are hired full time

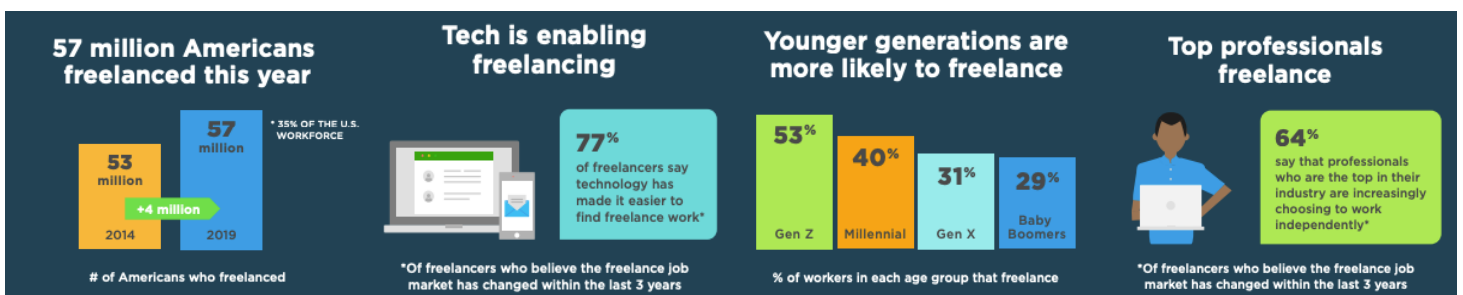
## What is the Gig Economy?

(Adapted from Cleverism's "[Introduction to the Gig Economy](#)")

- A gig economy is an environment where organizations contract with independent workers for **short-term engagements and temporary projects**
- Instead of traditional full-time positions in a specific organization, 'gig' workers provide their services for one or more employers with flexible work arrangements
- Traditionally, 'gig' workers, or 'giggers' are known as freelancers. But the workers can also include agency temporary workers, on-call workers, and standard part-time workers

## The Rise of Freelancers

(Statistics taken from the "[Freelancing in America](#)" 2019 study, commissioned by Upwork and Freelancers Union)



- The share of those who freelance full time increased from 17% in 2014 to 28% in 2019
- The median freelancer rate is \$20/hour. The median *skilled* freelancer earns \$28 an hour, earning more per hour than 70% of workers in the overall U.S. economy
- 71% of freelancers say perceptions of freelancing as a career are becoming more positive
- 59% of non-freelancers say it is likely that they will do freelance work in the future

*"Freelancing is a respected, long-term career path...It's remarkable to see this way of working empowering the youngest generation more than any prior generation and also to see the ways freelancing is opening up opportunities for inclusion in the workforce."*

Stephane Kasriel, President and CEO of Upwork

## What type of Communications work can be Freelance?

(Adapted from Freelancing School's "[What is freelancing?](#)")

<u>Design and Creative</u>	<u>Marketing, Sales, and Data Analytics</u>	<u>Web, Mobile, and Software Development</u>	<u>Writing</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand Identity and Strategy</li> <li>• Animation</li> <li>• Presentation Design</li> <li>• Motion Graphics Design</li> <li>• Audio Production</li> <li>• Video Production</li> <li>• Voice Talent</li> <li>• Physical Design</li> <li>• Graphic Design</li> <li>• UX/UI Design</li> <li>• Art and Illustration</li> <li>• Photography</li> <li>• Videography</li> <li>• Interior Design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing Strategy</li> <li>• Social Media Marketing</li> <li>• Community Management</li> <li>• Display Advertising</li> <li>• Telemarketing</li> <li>• Lead Generation</li> <li>• Public Relations</li> <li>• Market Research</li> <li>• Email Automation</li> <li>• Marketing Automation</li> <li>• Search Engine Optimization</li> <li>• Search Engine Marketing</li> <li>• Data Analytics</li> <li>• Data Visualization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecommerce Website Development</li> <li>• Scripting</li> <li>• Automation</li> <li>• Mobile Development</li> <li>• Product Management</li> <li>• Game Development</li> <li>• QA &amp; Testing</li> <li>• Web Design</li> <li>• Mobile Design</li> <li>• Product Design</li> <li>• Web Development</li> <li>• Software Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copywriting</li> <li>• Editing</li> <li>• Proofreading</li> <li>• Content Writing</li> <li>• Ghostwriting</li> <li>• Grant Writing</li> <li>• Writing Tutoring</li> <li>• Creative Writing</li> <li>• Technical Writing</li> <li>• Business Writing</li> </ul>

### Additional Areas:

- Administrative Support, Project Management, Online Research, Consulting, Recruiting, Career Coaching, HR, Corporate Law, Customer Service, Technical Support, IT, Translation/Interpretation

## Why would Businesses want to Hire Freelancers & Gig Workers?

(Adapted from Cleverism's "[Introduction to the Gig Economy](#)")

- They can benefit financially
  - Instead of hiring a full-time employee, they can contract tasks out to spend less on resources, such as training and office space
- They can find the best talent for specific programs
  - Rather than training in-house staff for a new project, they can temporarily employ a talented person who is already highly skilled in that area
- They are given more flexibility
  - Constantly adjusting to an inevitable changing workload can be difficult with full-time staff. By hiring contract workers, companies can better adapt to the changing situation without having to fire long-term staff or scramble to find a quick permanent hire.

## Pros and Cons to Freelancing and Gig Work

(Adapted from Freelancing School's "[What is freelancing?](#)", Cleverism's "[Introduction to the Gig Economy](#)", and MHR's "[The Gig Economy...](#)")

Full-time employment isn't for everyone, but neither is freelance or gig work. While there are great benefits to this type of work, you also need to consider and be comfortable with the risks involved.

<u>Pros (you are your own boss)</u>	<u>Cons (no safety net)</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility &amp; Control               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Choose your own hours and clients</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Better Work Life Balance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Create your own schedule</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Work from Anywhere               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>71% of freelancers can do their work from anywhere they choose ("Freelancing in America" 2019)</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Freedom to work on the projects that interest you</li> <li>• Work that is more personal and meaningful</li> <li>• Unlimited Earning Potential</li> <li>• Variety in work</li> <li>• Can explore new projects and industries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of Job Protection and Security</li> <li>• Emotionally and Financially Draining at times               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Constantly looking for your next job can be stressful</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Less Affordable Access to Insurance and Benefits               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Lack of company-provided, discounted healthcare</i></li> <li>○ <i>No matching contributions for retirement plans</i></li> <li>○ <i>No Paid Sick Time, maternity/paternity leave, etc.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Irregular earnings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>No guaranteed minimum wage</i></li> <li>○ <i>Can be more difficult to pay fixed monthly expenses or get approved for a mortgage</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Essential Skills/Personality Traits of Successful Freelancers & Gig Workers

(Adapted from Forbes "[Does your Personality Fit the gig Economy](#)," Knack's "[Preparing Students For The Gig Economy](#)," Myers-Briggs's "[Type and the gig economy](#)" research study, Harvard Business Review's "[Thriving in the Gig Economy](#)", and Jay Clouse's "[Freelancing Foundations](#)" LinkedIn Learning course)

### Personality Traits

- You may be better suited for the gig economy if you **enjoy risk and adventure** over security, are **driven by achievement** rather than power/affiliation, and **can set big goals** with a sense of urgency
- These 5 personality traits are more prevalent in gig workers than they are in the general population: 1) creativity, 2) curiosity, 3) confidence, 4) a strong personal brand, 5) apoliticism
- Myers-Briggs Personality Types\*:
  - ENFPs and ENTPs are over-represented in the gig economy
  - ISTJ and ISFJ types are less likely to have a gig job

### Essential Skills

- Develop a "**Holding Environment**" – a physical, social, and psychological space for your work
  - *Allow you the freedom to be creative, while also making sure you stay on task and maintain efficiency*
- Focus on these 4 connections
  - 1) **Place**: Dedicated Workspace that allows for you to be less distracted and find inspiration
    - Reflects the uniqueness of your work; easy access to any tools you need
  - 2) **Routines**: Enhances sense of order and control in uncertain circumstances
    - Following a schedule and incorporating self-care routines can help improve workflow
  - 3) **Purpose**: The "bridge between your personal interests and motivations and a need in the world"
    - Helps you stay resilient during hard times; decline work that doesn't align w/ your purpose
  - 4) **People**: Role models and peers you can turn to for reassurance and encouragement
    - An inner circle of collaborators, family, friends, etc. are vital to our careers and our success

### Business Basics

- Create a **Budget** – use a simple spreadsheet\* or this [worksheet](#) from College Board to identify all your expected monthly costs, broken into fixed (rent, utilities, insurance) and variable (food, entertainment) expenses
- **Save** and put aside money for:
  - Taxes: plan for 30% of your net income (money you earn - business expenses)
  - Rainy Day/Emergency Fund
  - Retirement Contributions
- **Manage** your **Time** – prioritize, use a digital calendar, block off set times for certain tasks
  - Consider Theming your Days (e.g., M/W/TH: Client Work, Tue: Client Calls, Fri: Admin/Invoicing)
- Write a **Contract**, working with a small business lawyer, to protect yourself and ensure payment
  - Scope of Work (SOW) is an important part of the contract that clarifies expectations - outlines what you'll deliver, when you'll deliver, and how much they will pay
- Create and Send **Invoices** - includes itemized services, amount due, payment process & due date
  - Invest in an **Invoicing Software** to simplify the process (e.g., AND CO by Fiverr, Stripe, PayPal)
- **Value-based Pricing** is recommended - services are priced on the value it creates for the client
  - With hourly rates, if you are fast and efficient, you penalize yourself and make less money

### Marketing Yourself

- Sell your work with effective **Targeting, Messaging, and Frequency**
  - Establish your **Elevator Pitch** to communicate your product clearly
  - Good framework for messaging: "**I help X do Y**" (e.g., "I help college students find jobs")
- **Be specific**, rather than a jack of all trades; position yourself as the best option to specific clients
- Use **Client Testimonials** and case studies, which provide evidence of your work
- Focus on **Outreach to Find Clients**: network, meet people face-to-face, send messages via social
- **Use a CRM** (Customer Relation Management) tool that you create or purchase to stay organized

*"COM students and all freelancers need to be forward-thinking, creative, persistent, resilient, organized, and attuned to the needs of clients, bosses, and audiences alike"*

Metiette DiChristina, College of Communication Dean at Boston University

([Teaching How to Navigate the Gig Economy](#), BU Today, Oct 2020)

## A Sample of Elon Alumni Freelancers (Recent Graduates)

GRAD YEAR	TITLE	LOCATION	MAJOR/PROGRAM
2014	Graphic, UX & Web Designer	Raleigh, NC	<i>Journalism</i>
2014	Producer	New York, NY	<i>Strategic Communications</i>
2014	Writer, Editor & Proofreader	Raleigh, NC	<i>English (Creative Writing)</i>
2015	Designer, Illustrator, & Video Producer	San Francisco, CA	<i>Strategic Communication, Art (Photography)</i>
2015	Copywriter, Blogger, and Contributory Editor	Durham, NC	<i>Professional Writing and Rhetoric</i>
2015	Casting Assistant	Chicago, IL	<i>Acting</i>
2016	Graphic Designer	Washington, DC	<i>Communication Design</i>
2016	Multimedia Specialist	Charlotte, NC	<i>Interactive Media (graduate program)</i>
2017	Hair and Make-up/Special Effects Artist	Los Angeles, CA	<i>Drama &amp; Theatre Studies</i>
2017	Photographer	Virginia Beach, VA	<i>Human Service Studies</i>
2018	Cinematographer & Editor	Apex, NC	<i>Cinema &amp; Television Arts</i>
2018	Music Producer, Audio Engineer and Musician	New Haven, IN	<i>Music Production &amp; Recording Arts</i>
2018	Multimedia Designer	Raleigh, NC	<i>Interactive Media (graduate program)</i>
2018	Designer and Animator	Los Angeles, CA	<i>Cinema &amp; Television Arts</i>
2019	Brand Developer/Marketing Consultant	Elon, NC	<i>Sport Management</i>
2019	Social Media Manager	Greensboro, NC	<i>Journalism</i>
2020	Videographer/Editor	York, ME	<i>Cinema &amp; Television Arts</i>
2020	Social Media and Branding Strategist	Tampa, FL	<i>Strategic Communications</i>
2020	Voice Actor/Director and Writer	Raleigh, NC	<i>Cinema &amp; Television Arts</i>
2021	Stage Manager	Franklin, TN	<i>Theatrical Design &amp; Production</i>

## Additional Resources

### Free Resources

- [Freelancing School](#) – free introductory course and resources
- [Freelancers Union](#) – free membership, resources, community meetups
- \*[Freelancing Foundations](#) LinkedIn Learning course (*free access for Elon students!*)
  - This course also includes a zip file you can download with various resources and sample documents, including examples of a budget spreadsheet, how to time block your calendar, invoices, testimonials, proposals, email templates and CRM spreadsheets
    - Contact Alison Doherty ([adoherty2@elon.edu](mailto:adoherty2@elon.edu)) if you would like access to these samples

### Articles

- [How to Start a Freelancing Business in 2021](#): My Ultimate Guide to Start Freelancing (on the Side) & Why You Should
- [18 Best Freelance Websites to Find Work in 2021](#)
- Old Gateway Jobs Are Disappearing: [Try Freelancing Your Way Into Your Dream Company](#)
  - *“Some pundits are suggesting that the “start in the mailroom” approach has been replaced by “start as a freelancer.”*
- \*[Type and the Gig Economy](#) – A research study from the Myers-Briggs Company, 2018
  - *“This study was designed to investigate how personality and other factors relate to the differences between gig and ‘regular’ jobs, the reasons why someone becomes a gig worker, type of gig work done, and view on gig jobs.”*
  - *Don’t know what your Myers-Briggs Type is?* Take the free personality assessment with MyPlan - access [here](#)

### Other Resources

- Freelance Marketplaces to find client work (you do have to pay for an account though)
  - [FlexJobs](#), [SolidGigs](#), [Upwork](#), [Fiverr](#)
  - *These marketplaces serve as the middleman by aggregating freelance jobs on one side of the marketplace and freelance talent on the other*
- [Zippia.com](#) - Option to search for freelance/remote COM jobs; salary and job function info
- [Crosby Grace Travels](#) - Elon Alumna Freelancer Blog
- Try out freelancing by completing a [micro-internship](#)

*“Hustle. Sell yourself. Shake off rejection. Price yourself fairly.  
Send those invoices. And save those receipts.”*

Joel Brown, Staff Writer for BU Today  
([Teaching How to Navigate the Gig Economy](#), BU Today, Oct 2020)