

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?

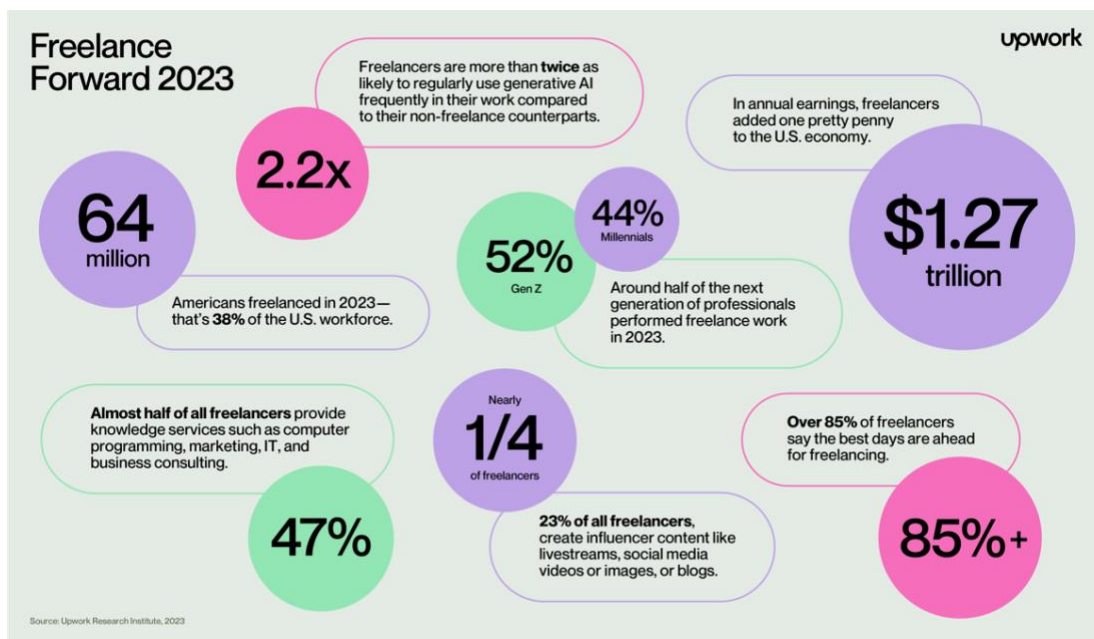
(Adapted from Cleverism's "[Introduction to the Gig Economy](#)")

- 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 Upwork Research Institute's [Freelance Forward 2023](#), an annual study of the U.S. Independent workforce)

- In 2023, a total of **64 million Americans, 38% of the U.S. workforce**, performed freelance work
- The share of professionals freelancing has seen steady growth: on average, every year over the past decade, an additional 1 million people in the U.S. decided to join the freelance workforce



"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
([Freelancing in America Press Release](#), Upwork, Oct 2019)

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

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?](#)", and Cleverism's "[Introduction to 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"> • Flexibility & Control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Choose your own hours and clients</i> • Better Work Life Balance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Create your own schedule</i> • Work from Anywhere <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>60% of freelancers work remotely, compared to 32% of non-freelancers (Freelance Forward 2023)</i> • Freedom to work on the projects that interest you • Work that is more personal and meaningful • Unlimited Earning Potential • Variety in work • Can explore new projects and industries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of Job Protection and Security • Emotionally and Financially Draining at times <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Constantly looking for your next job can be stressful</i> • Less Affordable Access to Insurance and Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Lack of company-provided, discounted healthcare</i> ○ <i>No matching contributions for retirement plans</i> ○ <i>No Paid Sick Time, maternity/paternity leave, etc.</i> • Irregular earnings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>No guaranteed minimum wage</i> ○ <i>Can be more difficult to pay fixed monthly expenses or get approved for a mortgage</i>

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

*"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)

A Sample of Elon Alumni Freelancers

GRAD YEAR	TITLE	LOCATION	MAJOR/PROGRAM
2023	<i>Comedy Producer and Graphic Designer</i>	Los Angeles, CA	Cinema & Television Arts, Communication Design
2023	<i>Production Assistant</i>	New York, NY	Cinema & Television Arts
2023	<i>Photojournalist and Photo Editor</i>	San Diego, CA	Journalism, Cinema & Television Arts
2022	<i>Creative Director, Marketing Manager, Photographer</i>	New York, NY	Strategic Communications
2022	<i>Video/Event Production and Lighting Designer</i>	Los Angeles, CA	Cinema & Television Arts, Theatrical Design & Production
2022	<i>Social Media Manager, Script Writer, Video Editor</i>	Santa Monica, CA	Strategic Communications
2021	<i>Writer and Reporter</i>	Charlotte, NC	Journalism, Anthropology
2021	<i>Filmmaker</i>	New York, NY	Cinema & Television Arts
2021	<i>Stage Manager</i>	Franklin, TN	Theatrical Design & Production
2020	<i>Voice Actor/Director and Writer</i>	Raleigh, NC	Cinema & Television Arts
2020	<i>Social Media and Branding Strategist</i>	Tampa, FL	Strategic Communications
2019	<i>Sports Photojournalist</i>	Washington, DC	Communication Design, Strategic Communications
2018	<i>Designer and Animator</i>	Los Angeles, CA	Cinema & Television Arts
2018	<i>Music Producer, Audio Engineer and Musician</i>	New Haven, IN	Music Production & Recording Arts
2017	<i>Photographer</i>	Virginia Beach, VA	Human Service Studies
2017	<i>Hair and Make-up/Special Effects Artist</i>	Los Angeles, CA	Drama & Theatre Studies
2016	<i>Multimedia Specialist</i>	Charlotte, NC	Interactive Media (graduate program)
2015	<i>Casting Assistant</i>	Chicago, IL	Acting
2015	<i>Copywriter, Blogger, and Contributory Editor</i>	Durham, NC	Professional Writing and Rhetoric
2014	<i>Strategy Director</i>	New York, NY	Strategic Communications
2014	<i>Graphic, UX & Web Designer</i>	Raleigh, NC	Journalism

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) if you would like access to these samples

Articles

- [How to Start a Freelancing Business in 2024](#): My Ultimate Guide to Start Freelancing (on the Side) & Why You Should
- [Freelance Websites: 16 Best Places to Find Work in 2024](#)
- 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 (some are free, some you may pay for an account)
 - [FlexJobs](#), [SolidGigs](#), [Upwork](#), [Fiverr](#), [Video Collective](#)
 - *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](#) with Parker Dewey

“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.”

Mariette DiChristina, College of Communication Dean at Boston University
 ([Teaching How to Navigate the Gig Economy](#), BU Today, Oct 2020)