A Guide to Freelancing and Navigating the Gig Economy for Communications Students (2025 Edition)

What is Freelancing? (Adapted from [Freelancing School](#) and [Upwork](#) Resources)
Freelancing means working as an independent contractor rather than being employed by a single company. Freelancers are self-employed and take on projects from a variety of clients, often on a part-time or short-term basis. They typically don't receive employee benefits like health insurance or paid leave.

Other Terms for Freelancing:
- *Contract Work*: Short-term or project-based jobs
- *Independent Contractor*: IRS classification
- *Consultant*: Short-term expert hired under a contract (often 1099)
- *Contract-to-Hire*: Trial period before potential full-time hire

What is the Gig Economy? (Adapted from [Cleverism](#) and [Upwork](#))
The gig economy refers to a labor market where temporary, flexible jobs are common, and companies contract with independent workers for short-term engagements. Gig workers may include freelancers, part-time workers, and on-call staff.

The Rise of Freelancers (Sourced from [Upwork's Freelance Forward 2023 Report](#))
- 64 million Americans freelanced in 2023, representing 39% of the U.S. workforce
- Gen Z (18–24) is the fastest-growing segment of freelancers
- Freelancers contributed over $1.27 trillion to the U.S. economy in 2023
- Skilled freelancers earn a median of $28/hour
- 78% of freelancers say freelancing allows them to live the lifestyle they want

"Freelancing isn't a side hustle anymore. For many, it's a first-choice career." – Hayden Brown, CEO of Upwork (2024)

What Type of Communications Work Can Be Freelanced?
Writing & Editing
- Copywriting, Content Writing, Ghostwriting
- Technical Writing, Business Writing, Grant Writing
- Proofreading, Editing, Creative Writing, Blogging

Design & Creative
- Graphic Design, UX/UI Design, Animation
- Brand Strategy, Illustration, Photography, Videography

- Presentation Design, Motion Graphics, Interior Design

Marketing & PR
- Social Media Strategy, Email Marketing
- SEO/SEM, Digital Ads, Community Management
- Market Research, Public Relations

Audio/Video & Web
- Podcast Editing, Voice Acting, Video Production
- Web Design, Mobile Development, Product Management

Emerging Fields
- AI Prompt Engineering
- Newsletter (Substack) Writing
- Virtual Event Production
- TikTok/Reels Content Strategy

Other
- Project Management, Career Coaching, Online Research

Selected List of Alumni Freelancers

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

Why Businesses Hire Freelancers
- *Financial Efficiency:* Save on training, office space, and benefits
- *Access to Top Talent:* Hire experts for specific, short-term projects
- *Flexibility:* Scale workforce based on demand without permanent hires
- *Specialization:* Rapid onboarding of niche skills like AI, video, or UX

Pros & Cons of Freelancing
Pros
- Flexibility: Choose your hours and clients
- Remote Work: 70%+ of freelancers work from anywhere
- Meaningful Work: Take on projects you're passionate about
- Earning Potential: Income not capped by a salary
- Diverse Work: Explore different industries and roles

Cons
- No Safety Net: No health insurance, paid leave, or retirement match
- Income Instability: Irregular pay and unpredictable workload
- Emotional Toll: Constant job hunting can be draining
- Financial Planning: Difficulties qualifying for loans, mortgages

Essential Traits & Skills for Freelancers
Top Traits (Myers-Briggs/Knack/Forbes Research)
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Confidence
- Strong Personal Brand
- Independence/Autonomy

Helpful MBTI Types
- ENFP, ENTP (thriving in creative and uncertain environments)
- Less suited: ISTJ, ISFJ (prefer structure and predictability)

Build a "Holding Environment" for Success
- *Place:* Distraction-free, inspiring workspace
- *Routines:* Daily habits and time-blocking
- *Purpose:* Align work with personal values
- *People:* Create a support system of peers, mentors, and collaborators

Freelance Business Basics

- Create a Budget: Use tools like Google Sheets or Wave
  - Plan for taxes (set aside ~30% of net income)
  - Save for emergencies and retirement
- Time Management
  - Digital calendars, task blockers (Notion, Trello)
  - Theme your days (e.g., Tue = Admin, Wed = Creative)
- Contracts
  - Use tools like Bonsai or The Contract Shop
  - Include a Scope of Work (SOW) that defines deliverables, deadlines, and payment terms
- Invoicing
  - Platforms: Stripe, FreshBooks, Wave
  - Include itemized services, due dates, and payment instructions
- Pricing
  - Value-Based Pricing and project-based pricing preferred over hourly rates
  - Highlight ROI or transformation your work brings

Marketing Yourself as a Freelancer

- *Messaging*: Use a positioning statement like: "I help X do Y"
- *Portfolio*: Showcase testimonials, case studies, and visuals
- *Networking*: Attend events, reach out on LinkedIn, join Slack groups
- *Cold Outreach*: Email pitching with examples of your work
- *CRM*: Track leads and communications using Notion or Airtable

Free & Recommended Resources

Learning & Community

- Freelancing School (free intro courses)
- Freelancers Union (legal guides, community meetups)
- HubSpot Academy & Google Digital Garage (certifications)
- LinkedIn Learning: Freelancing Foundations (free for Elon students)

Job Boards & Marketplaces

- Contra (0% commission)
- Upwork
- Fiverr
- Toptal
- We Work Remotely
- PeoplePerHour
- FlexJobs
- SolidGigs

Other Tools
- [Notion](): CRM, portfolio, project tracker
- [Bonsai](): Invoicing, contracts, proposals
- [Wave](): Free invoicing/accounting
- [16Personalities.com](): Personality tests
- [Zippia](): Salary/job function insights for freelancers
- [Crosby Travels]() – Elon alumna freelance blog

Try Freelancing Through Micro-Internships
- [Parker Dewey]()
- [Forage]()

Advice from the Field

"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, Dean, College of Communication, Boston University

"Hustle. Sell yourself. Shake off rejection. Price yourself fairly. Send those invoices. And save those receipts." – Joel Brown, BU Today