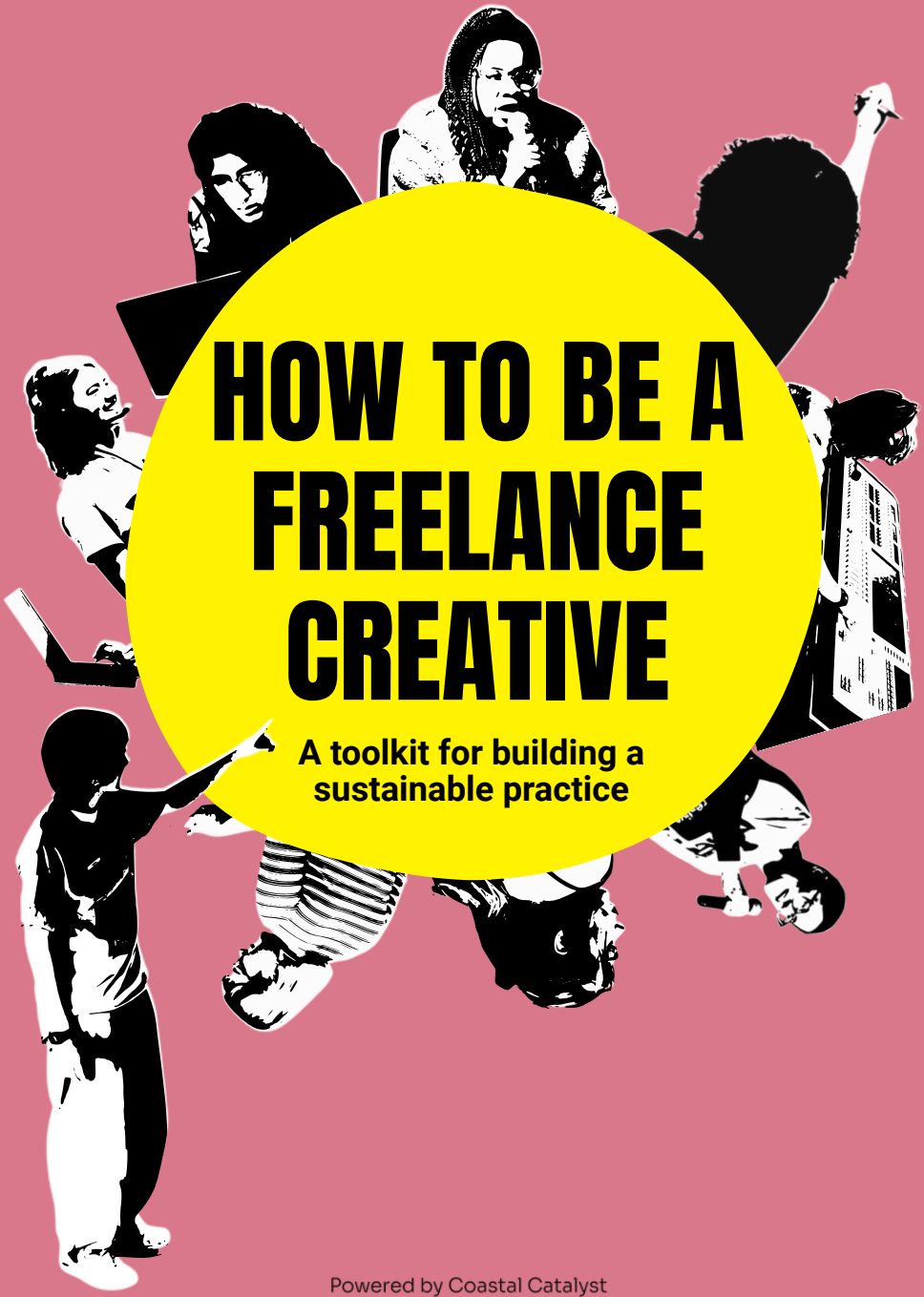


HOW TO BE A FREELANCE CREATIVE

A toolkit for building a sustainable practice

Powered by Coastal Catalyst

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THE FREELANCER LIFECYCLE

FREELANCE WORK ISN'T LINEAR, IT'S CYCLICAL.

BRAND

- ☐ SKILLS
- ☐ IMPACT
- ☐ WORKING ENVIRONMENT
- ☐ PORTFOLIO
- ☐ MARKETING

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

- ☐ LEGAL + TAX
- ☐ FINANCES
- ☐ ORGANISATION

FIND WORK

- ☐ NETWORK
- ☐ APPLICATIONS
- ☐ FUNDING

PROJECT DELIVERY

- ☐ STRUCTURE
- ☐ BOUNDARIES
- ☐ COMMUNICATION

WELLBEING & CONFIDENCE

- ☐ CONFIDENCE
- ☐ SUPPORT
- ☐ BALANCE

Where are you?

What do you still have to do?

Tick off as you go

WHAT IS FREELANCING?

WHAT? WHY? HOW?

TYPES OF FREELANCE WORK

WHAT?

WHAT IS FREELANCING?

Freelancing means working independently as self-employed. You are hired for projects (with clients, organisations, or through self-initiated work) rather than employed long-term by one company.

You decide what you offer and how you work, but you're also responsible for your income, deadlines, and reputation.

WHY?

WHY CHOOSE FREELANCING?



PROS

- Creative control over your work
- Flexible schedule
- Diverse projects (no two weeks look the same)
- Direct relationship with clients
- Opportunity to build a personal creative identity

CONS

- Irregular income
- Rejection is normal
- You are responsible for finding your own work
- Admin and taxes are your responsibility
- Paid holiday, sick pay and employer pension isn't included in jobs

HOW?

HOW DOES IT WORK ?

Freelancing is creative freedom, but it works best when you treat it like a business.

→ **Define** your direction (Brand)
→ **Build** practical systems (Operations)
→ **Find** opportunities (Work)
→ **Deliver** professionally (Projects)
→ **Sustain** yourself (Wellbeing)



DIFFERENT TYPES OF CREATIVE FREELANCE WORK

Freelancing in the creative world comes in many shapes and forms and most freelancers move between these roles at different points in their careers.

Whether you're focusing on one type of work or combining different roles there's a space for your skills.



MORE CASUAL

MORE FIXED

SELLING PRODUCTS / COMMISSIONS

Selling physical/digital products or commissioned work you create

✔️ Flexible and varied, creative control

✖️ Requires production, marketing, and stock management.

E.g: Prints, zines, ceramics, merch, digital templates, stickers.

PART-TIME WORK ALONGSIDE FREELANCING

Combining freelance work with another job (creative or non creative)

✔️ Financial stability, variation

✖️ Less flexibility, can reduce creative time/energy

E.g: Working 3 days in a gallery while freelancing 2 days doing illustration commissions

RETAINER WORK

Ongoing work where a client pays you regularly for continued support or services

✔️ Predictable income and builds long-term client relationships

✖️ Requires preparation and consistency

E.g : Monthly design support, ongoing social media management, regular mentoring sessions

GIG-BASED / ONE-OFF JOBS

Single projects with clear a start and end point

✔️ Flexible and varied

✖️ Income can be inconsistent, requires applications

E.g: Competitions, Photographing a music event, Creating a logo for a small business

SELF-INITIATED PROJECTS

Projects you create without a client (voluntary, passion-driven or collaborative)

✔️ Builds identity and portfolio, allows creative freedom and experimentation

✖️ Often unpaid at first

E.g: Selling paintings, curating a pop-up exhibition/event, voluntary design work

RESIDENCIES

Time-limited funded creative development

✔️ Provides funding and focused time to develop work

✖️ Fixed timeline, requires applications

E.g: Artist residency at a gallery, public art commission, funded research project

TEACHING / WORKSHOPS

Sharing your skills through freelance classes, workshops, talks or mentoring

✔️ Builds confidence in your skills, improves visibility and authority

✖️ Requires preparation, confidence, and public speaking skills.

E.g: Running a weekend workshop, Leading an art class at a community space

CONTRACT / SHORT-TERM ROLES

Fixed-term work (e.g. 3-6 months) within a company or on a specific project.

✔️ More structure and stability

✖️ Endpoint - you must plan ahead

E.g: Freelance graphic designer for a festival or Illustrator for a book cover commission

LICENSING

Licensing your work for repeated or commercial use

✔️ Can generate passive or repeat income

✖️ Income is unpredictable and depends on demand

E.g: Licensing illustrations for packaging, photography for stock libraries, pattern design for textiles

There's no single 'right' type of freelance work, most careers are a mix. You'll likely move between several of these over time, or maybe even invent your own type of career path!

BUILD YOUR BRAND

IDENTIFY THE SKILLS PEOPLE WILL PAY FOR, WHO IT'S FOR AND HOW YOU WANT TO WORK. LEARN HOW TO PRESENT AND PROMOTE YOUR WORK CLEARLY

DEFINE YOUR BRAND

YOUR BRAND IS HOW PEOPLE UNDERSTAND YOUR SKILLS AND HOW IT FEELS TO WORK WITH YOU.

☐ **Use the diagram below to map what overlaps between your skills, audience, and working preferences**



SKILLS & INTERESTS

(e.g. Graphic Design, Performance, Gaming, Events)

AUDIENCE & IMPACT

(e.g. Communities / Clients / Organisations)

IDEAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT

(e.g. Collaborative / At Home / Event Spaces / Workshop)

DISCOVER WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT, WHAT YOU ENJOY AND WHAT INSPIRES YOU.

- What are your current skills / skills you want to learn?
- What brings you joy and a sense of accomplishment?
- Who or what inspires you?

CLARIFY WHO YOUR WORK IS FOR AND THE IMPACT YOU WANT TO HAVE.

- Who is your audience (people, organisations, communities)?
- Where do they already spend time (online/offline)?
- How would you realistically reach them?
- What problems could your work help solve?



IDENTIFY THE WORKING STYLE AND ENVIRONMENT THAT SUITS YOU BEST.

- Do you prefer working independently, collaboratively, or a mix of both?
- Where do you want to work (at home, in an office, co working space)?
- What boundaries do you need to protect your energy?

WHAT YOU NEED TO REACH YOUR POTENTIAL?

ITS GOOD TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK FROM REACHING YOUR FULL POTENTIAL - AND WHERE TO START TO ACTIVATE THE CHANGE

PURPOSE

What impact do you want your work to have and how?

CONFIDENCE

Do you believe your ideas, work, and skills are valuable?

CONNECTION

Are you building relationships with people who can open doors or teach you something?

FINANCE

Are you getting paid consistently for your work?

PHYSICAL

Do you have the tools and space you need to create?

Inspired by Maslow's hierarchy of needs

WRITE A SHORT STATEMENT THAT EXPLAINS WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU DO, AND HOW YOU WORK

This doesn't have to be perfect, it's a working draft. This is great to use when introucing yourself

My main skills include ...

(eg. visual storytelling, graphic design, workshop facilitation, music)

I want my work to ...

(eg. engage people, communicate ideas clearly, and create meaningful experiences)

I work best when ...

(eg. I have a balance of structure and freedom, clear expectations, and time to experiment.)

My next steps are ...

(eg. Seek photography opportunities in local area, speak to a mentor, create portfolio)





BUILD A PORTFOLIO

A PORTFOLIO SHOWS HOW YOU THINK, NOT JUST WHAT YOU MAKE

- [ ] **Showcase your strongest work on a dedicated website, explaining your role and process**
- [ ] **Collect testimonials and reviews after projects finish**
  Add these to your portfolio/socials

MARKET YOURSELF

MARKETING IS HOW PEOPLE FIND AND REMEMBER YOU. BE CLEAR, CONSISTENT, AND INTENTIONAL

- [ ] **Introduce yourself to people (see page 11)**
- [ ] **Connect online with peers and potential clients**
- [ ] **Maintain a professional online presence (social media, email, website)**
  Create your content using free tools like Canva or Wix
- [ ] **Post about your work and what you're up to**

TIP: Your brand, portfolio, and marketing work together.

Use free tools like Canva, CapCut, or Wix to create content and build your presence

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

BECOMING A FREELANCE CREATIVE REQUIRES BALANCING YOUR ARTISTIC TALENT WITH BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

LEGAL + TAX

AS A FREELANCER, YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN LEGAL + TAX SETUP. YOU GET PAID FIRST, THEN YOU PAY TAX LATER

- [ ] **Register as self-employed (Gov.uk)**
- [ ] **Choose a business name (or use your own)**
- [ ] **Understand your setup (sole trader or limited company)**
- [ ] **Know how and when to report your income**
- [ ] **Understand Income Tax + National Insurance**
- [ ] **Know what expenses you can claim**

HOW FREELANCING WORKS

(LEGALLY + FINANCIALLY)

1. EARN MONEY

From clients, customers, projects or workshops

2. SET MONEY ASIDE

(Set aside 20–30% of everything you earn)

For tax, National Insurance, student loan

3. REPORT + PAY (YEARLY)

(self-assessment via Gov.uk)

WHAT YOU PAY

- *Income Tax – a % of what you earn*
- *National Insurance – contributions to the state*
- *Student Loan – if you have one*

MONEY + INVOICING



FREELANCING MEANS TAKING CONTROL OF HOW YOU EARN, TRACK, AND MANAGE YOUR MONEY

- [ ] Track your income and expenses (for HMRC self-assessment)
- [ ] Set up a separate bank account for freelance income (recommended)
- [ ] Create an invoice with clear payment terms (e.g. 30 days) and chase late payments
- [ ] Decide your pricing (hourly, daily, project-based)
- [ ] Plan for irregular income (savings buffer)
- [ ] Be aware of other deductions (e.g. student loan repayments)

INVOICE TEMPLATE EXAMPLE

Full Name

Invoice

Invoice #
Date issued
Due date

Bill to:
Client name
Company name
Client email

Details	Amount
Total Due :	£

Payment details:
Bank name
Account number
Sort code

Your details:
Full name
Email
Address
Phone number

No invoice = no payment

ORGANISATION

SIMPLE ADMIN HABITS KEEP YOUR FREELANCE WORK RUNNING SMOOTHLY

- [ ] Keep contracts, invoices, and documents organised
- [ ] Collect testimonials or feedback after projects finish
- [ ] Manage inboxes and set clear work boundaries
- [ ] Schedule regular admin time (weekly or monthly)
- [ ] Consider insurance (equipment, public liability for workshops, sickness cover)
- [ ] Look into unions or support networks for freelancers



Freelancers don't get sick pay or holiday pay automatically. Plan ahead with savings, insurance, or unions.

FINDING WORK

HOW FREELANCE WORK FINDS YOU AND HOW YOU FIND IT

NETWORK

MOST FREELANCE WORK COMES THROUGH PEOPLE, NOT PLATFORMS

Turn networking into curiosity, not performance.

- [ ] **Make a list of people you know with similar interests and ask if they know of any opportunities**
- [ ] **Go to industry events (online or in-person)**
- [ ] **Send friendly introduction or follow up messages**

QS to ask people:

- **What are you currently working on?**
- **How did you get into your role or practice?**
- **What advice would you give someone starting out?**



JOB APPLICATIONS

JOB WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS CAN HELP YOU FIND OPPORTUNITIES

- Dabbble
- meet-eric.com / ERIC App
- creativeaccess.org.uk
- ifyoucouldjobs.com
- a-n.co.uk
- Social media: LinkedIn, Instagram

- [ ] **regularly search / set alerts for opportunities and apply selectively**

FUNDING

GRANTS AND FUNDING CAN SUPPORT SELF-INITIATED PROJECTS, RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT TIME

Examples include:

- Arts Council funding
- Local council or community grants
- Bursaries and development funds

- [ ] **Keep a simple spreadsheet of opportunities and deadlines**

TIP: FOLLOWING UP IS NOT ANNOYING, IT'S PROFESSIONAL

DELIVERING PROJECTS

DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY WORK ON TIME AND COMMUNICATE CLEARLY.

RELIABILITY AND PROFESSIONALISM LEAD TO REPEAT CLIENTS, WHICH ARE KEY TO LONG-TERM STABILITY

STRUCTURE & TIME

CLEAR STRUCTURE HELPS PROJECTS RUN SMOOTHLY AND REDUCES STRESS

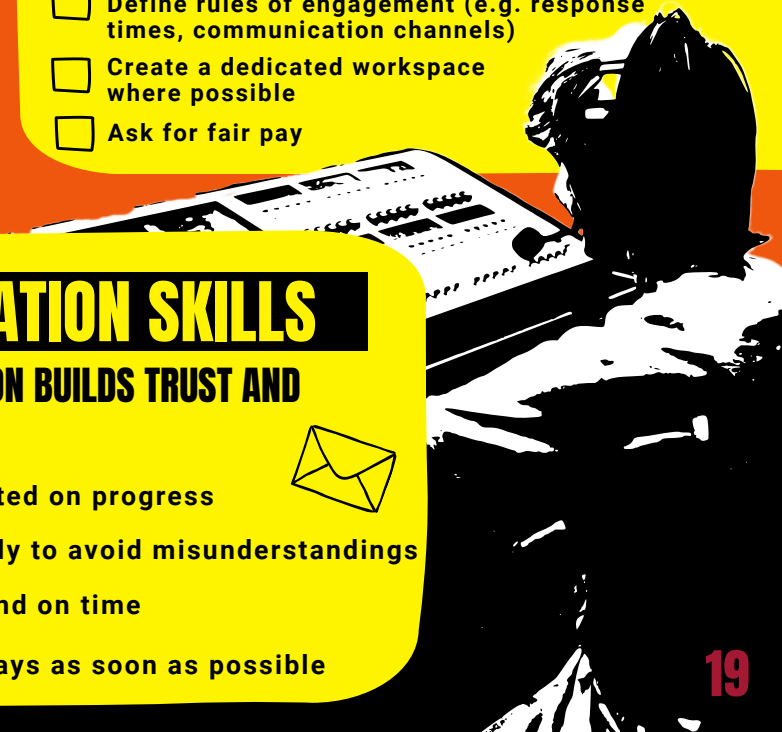
- [ ] Clarify outcomes and expectations with client
- [ ] Set deadlines and delivery stages
- [ ] Confirm payment terms in advance
- [ ] Plan your week or day (time blocking helps)
- [ ] Set regular working hours



BOUNDARIES & DISCIPLINE

COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS CLEARLY, EVEN WHEN IT FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE

- [ ] Write down a list of your non-negotiables
- [ ] Define rules of engagement (e.g. response times, communication channels)
- [ ] Create a dedicated workspace where possible
- [ ] Ask for fair pay



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

GOOD COMMUNICATION BUILDS TRUST AND PREVENTS PROBLEMS

- [ ] Keep clients updated on progress
- [ ] Ask questions early to avoid misunderstandings
- [ ] Respond clearly and on time
- [ ] Flag issues or delays as soon as possible

WELLBEING & CONFIDENCE

FREELANCING OFFERS FREEDOM, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE ISOLATING, UNPREDICTABLE, AND EMOTIONALLY DEMANDING.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR WELLBEING IS PART OF BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE PRACTICE

CONFIDENCE

IMPOSTER SYNDROME IS COMMON IN CREATIVE WORK, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'RE SELF-EMPLOYED

- It often shows up as self-doubt, comparison, or feeling 'not ready yet'
- It doesn't mean you're unqualified, it means you're learning and growing
- Confidence often develops through action, not before it

☐ **Keep an achievement journal to celebrate progress** *(save positive feedback, achievements, when you've done something new or gone out your comfort zone)*

What support do you need?

(Equipment, Materials, Funding, Work space, Community)



SUPPORT

FREELANCING DOESN'T MEAN DOING EVERYTHING ALONE, SUPPORT CAN COME FROM PEERS, ORGANISATIONS, AND COMMUNITIES

Connection helps reduce isolation and build confidence.

☐ **Join or create a creative community**

☐ **Connect with peers to share knowledge and experiences**

☐ **Seek support from organisations or networks**

BALANCE

SUSTAINING A BALANCED CREATIVE PRACTICE

Burnout doesn't usually come from working too hard once, it comes from working without rest, boundaries, or support over time.

☐ **Check in with yourself regularly**

☐ **Pace your workload realistically**

☐ **Take regular breaks**

☐ **Allow time for creative downtime**

☐ **Schedule time off**



BE YOURSELF

KEEP GOING

TAKE REGULAR BREAKS

LEARN & GROW

CELEBRATE THE SMALL WINS

SPEAK UP

MOVE YOUR BODY

YOU DESERVE TO BE HERE

BE KIND

REJECTION IS REDIRECTION

BREATHHHHE...

ACTIVATE YOUR POTENIAL

YOU'VE GOT THIS.

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