

# Five Ways to Fix Your Freelancing Woes

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**Sharing our worries can be helpful. But how do we go about solving them? We spoke to experienced freelancers and career coaches about their top tips for tackling some common problems of freelancing.**

*-Words by Deborah Talbot, Illustration by Will Francis*

Anyone who makes the leap into freelancing will soon find themselves coping with a set of thorny dilemmas. Issues from getting paid, to finding clients, to clients behaving badly, to stress and work-life balance, are all things freelancers worry about.

So what do you do about them? We asked experience freelancers and career coaches to offer their advice. Here's what they had to say.

## 1. Getting paid

Getting paid is perhaps one of the most critical tasks of a freelancer – you won't be able to pay the rent out of thin air. Yet many struggle to achieve appropriate rates for their skills or sometimes any rate at all.

Journalist Danny Bradbury says bluntly, "never work for free." But some writers, artists and musicians work for free or less to build up a portfolio. Is it just a case of knowing when to stop, or should you aim to charge from the get go?

Many freelancers charge fees on a sliding scale – charging more for big corporate clients than non-profits and start-ups.

The best tip I ever came across to make sure freelancing is paying off is to assess your

hourly rate in any month of freelancing. Divide your total income by the number of hours you've (actually) spent working. If the result is the minimum wage or less, you are selling yourself short. You can use apps like [Punch In](#), says Bradbury, which means you can track your time across multiple projects.

But what about the clients who drag their feet over paying up?

[Helen Campbell](#), a careers coach who works with freelancers, says it's important to understand "what might stand in the way between them and receiving payment." Speaking openly and consistently about money in communications with the client, asking for a deposit, making sure you are clear on the company's payroll procedure and following up with the client to make sure they are happy with the work, all matter, she says.

So take yourself seriously, and the money will come.

## 2. Finding regular clients

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Getting regular clients doesn't happen magically. "It's about doing a good job," says Campbell, "over-and-above the minimum required. This approach can lead to referrals."

That means a smooth and honest negotiation about the job and fees, a set of clear expectations for the work, and delivery of the work on time and to specification. If you can find something which 'adds value' to the transaction all the better – anything from a small piece of useful advice imparted in passing or being easy to get along with.

Campbell says it's also important to maintain a professional front – showcasing your skills and experience and being clear about your offering (what marketers call your 'unique selling point' or USP). Many freelancers have their own business or portfolio site and maintain a regular presence on social media.

But it's important not to forget the sporadic clients, says Bradbury, who can keep your workflow ticking over in any lull.

## 3. Clients behaving badly

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The worst has happened. You've been commissioned for a job, but two or three days into it, the client starts acting up – changing the job, demanding more work for the same pay, or just failing to recognise boundaries.

"I could simply scream, says Rae Radford. "Text messages at 6.20am or 11.59pm. Plus emails and phone calls to question every little thing I produce. Plus adding 'very inappropriate content.'"

It really can get this bad.

With time and experience, you can probably learn to spot problem clients before you get caught in the net. But even experienced freelancers make mistakes. So what can you do?

Having a contract can sometimes mitigate against problems, and some freelancers swear by them. I've personally never found them to be useful (and they can be off-putting). But having a written communication trail that clearly pays out the project scope, payment and

deadline is crucial.

Writing coach [Rebecca L. Weber](#) argues it's all about knowing what your own boundaries are – and sticking to them. “For example, a client who contacts you at 5.00 p.m. requesting a piece back the next morning may be unacceptable to somebody who's decided that they don't work in the evenings.”

Eventually, you get to know what kind of clients are the best 'fit' for you.

## 4. Stress

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The isolated nature of freelancing can fuel emotional and psychological stressors. No advice offered in an article can help with serious mental health problems. But for everyday work stressors, getting more grounded means finding ways to interact with other people.

The number one tip offered by the freelancers I spoke to was to become part of a co-working space. It not only alleviates loneliness, says Ross Clarke, “it's surprising the contacts and ideas you can get from others.”

Co-working spaces are great, but they can also be expensive, and many freelancers work part-time. So what are the alternatives?

Getting out for a daily walk and meeting friends for coffee is invaluable. But if you want something a little more formal and work-based, marketer [Chloë Sheeba](#) set up fortnightly co-working brunches. These brunches are so successful they now have a waiting list. All you need is a willing café or [restaurant!](#)

And there are now plenty of online social networks where you can share experiences, ask advice and even pick up some freelance work.

## 5. Finding Your Work-life balance

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The 'feast and famine' nature of freelancing means that it can be difficult to maintain a work-life balance.

Boundaries are all-important, say freelancers. It's not just about time – sticking to your hours of work and not allowing time-spill – it's also about space. “If you can,” says media coach [Joanne Mallon](#), “it's important to have a space you work from that you can close the door on at the end of the day.”

Work-life balance is all about your real-life commitments, whether this is to friends, family or self-care. Freelancer Fiona Brennan says that, while it's taken her years, she has boundaries in place which mean “I no longer find myself telling my kids ‘just one more email and then I'll come and play.’”

Freelancers can often find themselves worrying over the insecurities of their position, and the web is full of helpful advice. But as Beth McLoughlin reminds us, “working in offices can be just as bad, thanks to bullies and heavy workloads, etc. It's important to keep that in mind when you send your twentieth email that week to no reply!”