

Setting up as a freelance

Emma Wilkinson



About me...

EMMA WILKINSON

Journalist. Editor. Teacher



- Freelance for 16 years (staff for 5)
- Chose to be freelance because of location
- Health and medicine, mainly specialist titles
- News, features, investigations, profiles
- Editing, teaching/training, podcasting, consultancy, event organisation, report writing, internal comms



the
PHARMACEUTICAL JOURNAL
A Royal Pharmaceutical Society publication

THE LANCET

thelimbic 

thebmj

C+D



WHAT IS A FREELANCE WRITER?

- Self-employed
- Works for variety of clients including self-generated income
- In control of the what, how and when they work
- Diverse group
- Tends to have a 'portfolio career'
- No additional qualification needed



WHY FREELANCE?

NECESSITY
OR
CHOICE?

LACK OF JOBS

LOCATION

VARIETY

REDUNDANCY

GAIN
EXPERIENCE

FLEXIBILITY

CONTROL

TYPE OF WORK

FREEDOM



WHAT MAKES A GOOD FREELANCER?

1. Resilience
2. Self-motivation
3. Organisational skills
4. Tenacity
5. Flexibility
6. Willingness to try new things
7. Full of ideas
8. Passionate
9. Reliable
10. Ability to juggle



REGISTERING WITH HMRC

You need to set up as a sole trader if:

- You earned more than £1,000 from self-employment in last tax year
- But in reality you are best to do this **from the start**

If you have not filed a return online before

- 1 [Register online](#) - you'll need to sign in to your business tax account and add Self Assessment. You'll need a Government Gateway user ID and password to sign in. If you do not have a user ID for a business tax account, you'll be able to create one.
- 2 You'll receive a letter with your Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR) number within 10 days (21 if you're abroad). You'll need your UTR to file a return.
- 3 You'll then receive another letter with an activation code for your account. You can [get a new activation code](#) if you do not receive it or you lose it.



MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A SOLE TRADER

KEEP
RECORDS OF
INCOME
AND
EXPENSES

31st
Jan

PAY INCOME
TAX AND
NATIONAL
INSURANCE

FILE A SELF-
ASSESSMENT
TAX RETURN

6th Apr
to 5th
Apr



EXPENSES

TRAINING

TRAVEL

STATIONERY

PROFESSIONAL SUBS

WEBSITE

ACCOUNTANT

'wholly, necessarily and exclusively' incurred in the running of the business

EQUIPMENT

PHONE/INTERNET COSTS

NEWSPAPERS/MAGAZINES

AWARDS ENTRY



OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Do I need an accountant?

How will I save money I earn?

Do I need a separate bank account?



KEEPING TRACK

DON'T FORGET TO

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Think about:

- General to do list
- Ideas
- Contacts / clients
- Work opportunities
- Pitches
- Commissions
- Invoices
- Payments
- Expenses

DEVELOP YOUR
OWN SYSTEMS



EXAMPLE TEMPLATE: COMMISSIONS

	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	COMMISSION	DEADLINE	NOTES	WORD COUNT	AGREED RATE	TOTAL	INVOICE NUMBER	DATE INVOICED	DATE PAID
2	Feature on freelance rights	16/9/2019	Needs at least two case studies	1,200	£350 per 1,000	£420	JS19-08	20/09/2019	
3	News story on freelance campaign launch	17/9/2019		350	25p a word	£87.50	JS19-08	20/09/2019	
4	Making your side hustle pay	30/9/2019	Five examples needed	1500	30p a word	£450	JS19-09		
5									
6									
7						£975.70			
8									



THINKING OF YOURSELF AS A BRAND...

Whether you like it or not, as a freelancer **you are a brand** and from the very start you need to get the hang of selling yourself, promoting your skills and nurturing your profile.

When a client commissions a piece of work they are buying into you and your brand rather than simply buying your idea. They need to know that you have the correct skills and experience and are able to deliver as promised.

YOU NEED:

- **To be visible**
- **Consistent**
- **Unique**
- **Professional**
- **Control your public profile**

YOU ARE THE BRAND



WHAT IS YOUR USP?



Branding can seem to be all about clever logos, fancy websites, and catchy straplines but at the heart of the brand is you...

- What do you stand for?
- What skills, experience, perspective do you have?
- Think about your values, personality and type of work you want to do



CONNECT YOUR ACCOUNTS

BE CONSISTENT IN THE PHOTOS AND DESCRIPTIONS YOU USE OF YOURSELF IN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS AND WEBSITES/PORTFOLIOS

IF SOMEONE GOOGLES YOU WILL THEY FIND YOU AND KNOW IT'S YOU?

USE YOUR OWN NAME AND BRAND NAME



A WORD ON LINKEDIN

Can be useful to help people find you/provide an online CV

Looks professional and helps you make connections

Having a specialism and flagging this up on LinkedIn can be a fantastic way to secure work

Individuals and organisations will search for those with experience in niche areas and may approach you directly with a specific project in mind.

A convenient place to find people who can commission you and check on their current job status

- FILL OUT YOUR PROFILE
- MAKE SURE ITS UP TO DATE
- YOU NEED TO LOOK ACTIVE
- POST ACHIEVEMENTS
- HIGHLIGHT YOUR USP
- ENSURE YOU CAN BE FOUND
- OPEN FOR WORK BANNER



EMAIL SIGNATURE

- YOU NEED A PROFESSIONAL EMAIL ADDRESS
- CAN BE ATTACHED TO WEBSITE DOMAIN BUT GMAIL OR YAHOO, ETC FINE
- THEN YOU NEED A PERMANENT EMAIL SIGNATURE

Everyone always forgets the email signature but get it right and an editor, client or contact will:

- Automatically know and understand who you are
- Know you are professional and organised
- Have links to all your key information including socials and website
- See your latest work

IT'S A MINI CV



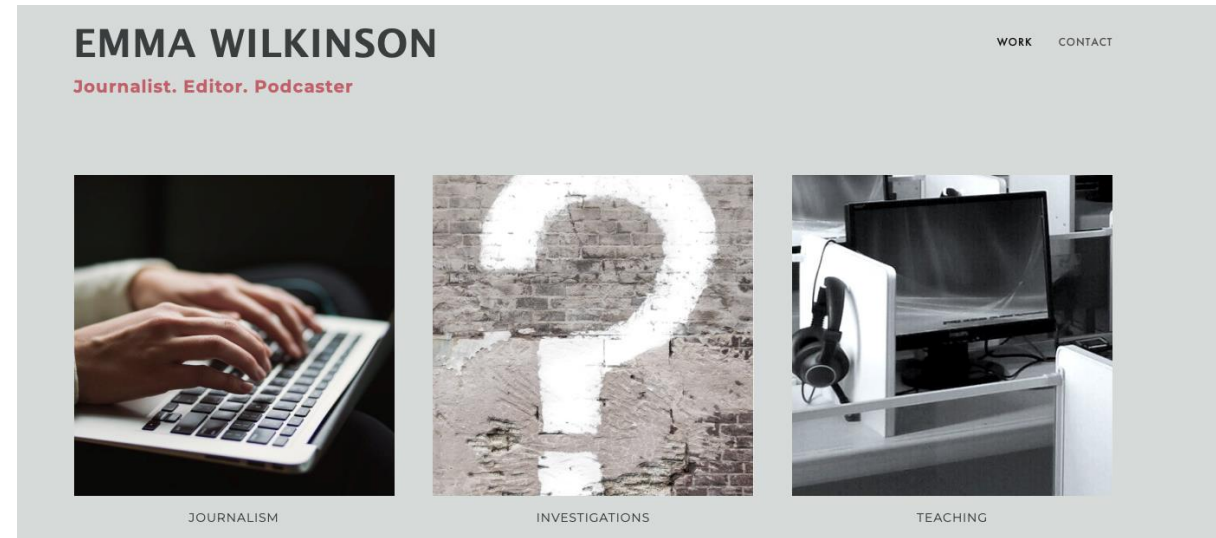
WEBSITE/PORTFOLIO

Your own website or portfolio is incredibly helpful

How you go about building your website depends on your skill, experience and how much you are able or willing to spend. A website can be built using a free platform such as [WordPress](#), [Wix](#), or [Weebly](#) where there are also options to pay for more services.

Other companies such as [Squarespace](#) include hosting and domain services as a complete package.

Some specific website builders such as [JurnoPortfolio](#) or [Clippings.me](#) offer a portfolio style platform which can work well for those who want to regularly update their site with new links and PDFs.



THE FUNDAMENTALS

- **Clear contact details** including an actual email address, rather than just a Contact Us box to fill in, plus a phone number if you wish to divulge it.
- **Links** to all relevant, public social media profiles.
- **Examples** of your work or links to it which are ideally updated regularly.
- **A brief outline** of your experience and training along with a clear head and shoulders photo.

Testimonials from people you have worked with or for, will also give your website credibility and add kudos to your brand. If you have a logo and slogan then these should feature as a banner at the top of each page, to reinforce your brand further.



DIVERSE PORTFOLIO

There are almost limitless opportunities to earn money as a freelance but it is likely that you will need to look beyond traditional newspapers, magazines or broadcast outlets to newer online outlets, trade publications, in-house magazines and more

The most successful freelancers are likely to have a diverse portfolio and do not just target mainstream media organisations. They also do a range of types of work from copy-writing, ghostwriting, PR, editing (general and technical), social media, podcasting, etc, etc.

Relying on just a couple of publications is not a wise move. You have to protect yourself against an editor moving on or a budget disappearing.

Be open to new types of work as it can come along from unexpected places and when you least expect it.



DOES HAVING A NICHE HELP?

PROS

- Have somewhere to start finding ideas/focus
- Build good contacts
- Good working relationships in your 'patch'
- Gain specialist knowledge

CONS

- Can be limiting
- You may not have a natural interest in a specific area
- Work may be less varied
- Are there enough stories in that 'patch'?



WHERE TO START?

JOB ADVERTS

Working for yourself as a writer or journalist can be very daunting at the start

You may have no idea about who you will write for or how to go about seeking out that work

Even for those who have been freelance for a while, there are always different strategies and tricks to learn as well as new clients to be found.

**COLD
PITCHING**

**SOCIAL
MEDIA**

NETWORKING

CONTACTS

**CREATING
YOUR OWN
WORK**

NEWSLETTERS



NEWSLETTERS



Journo Resources - The Opportunities

Sonia Weiser

[About/Contact](#) [Published Clips](#) [Opportunities of the Week Newsletter](#)

Opportunities of the Week Newsletter



Write At Home | journalist and writer jobs newsletter

A bi-weekly freelance journalist and writer jobs newsletter.

Freelance Writing Jobs

Science Writing News Roundup #153

How to get a book deal in science/tech (and then write it) + Call for pitches to write about the environment, health, science, and more.

MARIANNA LIMAS
JUN 16



Freelancing for Journalists

Lifting the lid on freelance life

freelancingforjournalists.com



CRAFTING A PITCH

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- Sell your story
- Sell yourself
- Instantly interesting
- Attention grabbing
- Persuasive
- Have a clear headline and angle
- Explain access to relevant sources
- Targeted to outlet/section

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Sell an idea/topic rather than a story
- Send a finished article
- Waffle
- Use attachments
(unless low res photo)
- Get their details wrong
- Send an irrelevant idea
- Send an idea they've already done

SHORT, SWEET AND TO THE POINT



PITCHING PROCESS



PITCHING TEMPLATE

EMAIL SUBJECT HEADING

PITCH: (Add suggested headline)

BODY OF EMAIL

Dear (add name of commissioning editor)

A brief hyperlinked line about yourself

Headline again

Concise pitch summary setting out the story and sources

Salutations (Regards, Best wishes, Thanks)

Email signature



Hi Katherine

I have a suggestion for a news feature based on a piece of research looking at trends in new oncology trials launched before and after the Covid-19 pandemic that was published on January 27th in [JAMA Network Open](#). The analysis found a 60% drop in oncology trial launches internationally. [As reported here](#) this is another sign of the worrying slowing of pace in cancer research. I would look at the latest findings and their implications but also get comment from international funding bodies/societies such as ASCO and Cancer Research UK who have [previously published figures](#) about the extent to which the pandemic has slowed down existing clinical trials. I note that TLO has previously covered [the impact of cuts to cancer research funding](#) and these latest figures are more evidence of the potential long-term impact on clinical research in oncology.

I am a medical journalist and I actually started out at TLO as a manuscript editor many years ago! Here's a [recent feature I did for the BMJ](#) on cancer care in the first pandemic. You can find more examples of my work at my website link in my bio.

Best wishes

Emma

Cold pitch to
The Lancet Oncology
for a news feature



FINDING COMMISSIONING EDITORS

- Not always easy to find the right person
- Target an outlet
- Use social media and LinkedIn to find the commissioning editor
- Try and work out email addresses
- Ask peers/call them

Hi all,
I'm Commissioning Editor for Prima, GH and Red.
Prima is looking to commission a strong, emotional real life story involving a woman aged 35+ for our January issue.
Nothing too specifically medical/health/illness related, but otherwise open to all ideas. Poignant, emotional but ultimately uplifting is what we're after. A link to January/new year/new life or start would also be good.
Please email me pitches: ella.dove@hearst.co.uk (rather than commenting on here).

telegraph commissioning editor. Repped by @tagentandry of @sh...

Sayantani Ghosh
@sayantansunnyg
Senior Commissioning Editor @SimonSchusterIN, Words: Scroll/The Telegraph/The Hindu Business Line/DailyO/National Herald/Firstpost/Electric Literature, etc.

Rupert Murray
@rupertmurray
Commissioning editor, The Telegraph, London

Boudicca Fox-Leonard
@BoudiccaFox
Commissioning Editor at Telegraph Weekend. boudicca.fox-leonard@telegraph.co.uk Petal to the mettle.

caroline gammell
@carolinegammell
Caroline Gammell is a commissioning editor on the Investigations desk at MailOnline. Previous years spent reporting and news editing at Telegraph and PA

Alice Barraclough
@al_barraclough
Commissioning editor @telegraph & freelance features writer 🖋️ London Marathon: in training 🏃‍♀️ Iron Man 70.3: Pending 🏊‍♀️ 🚴‍♀️ Views my own

60 results

Portia Valdes-Scott •2nd
Commissioning Editor at The Times
London, United Kingdom
John Thompson is a shared connection

Daisy Greenwell •2nd
Senior commissioning editor at The Times
London, United Kingdom
Current: Senior **commissioning editor** -Times2 at The Times
John Thompson is a shared connection

Elisabeth Perلمان •2nd
Commissioning Editor at Times2, The Times
London, United Kingdom
Current: Times2 at The Times - I am the **commissioning editor** on the features desk at The Times.
John Thompson is a shared connection

LinkedIn Member
Commissioning Editor at The Times
London, United Kingdom

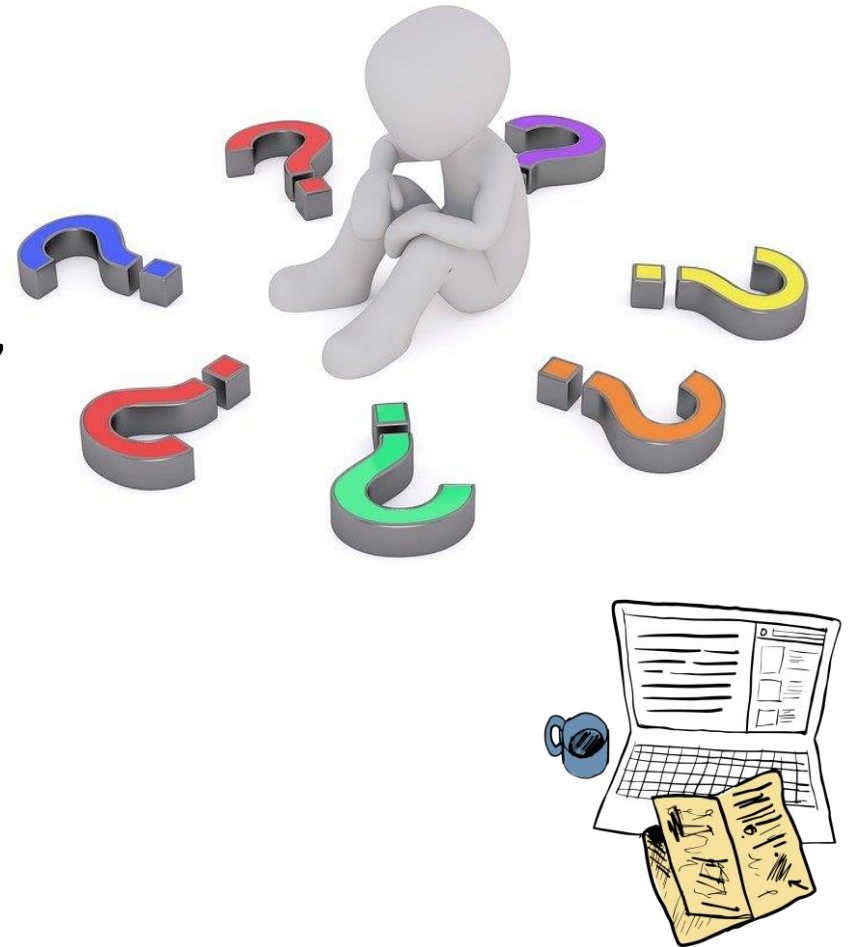
Jade Cuttle •3rd
Arts Commissioning Editor at The Times
United Kingdom
Current: Arts Commissioning Editor at The Times - * Writing and **commissioning** weekly arts features for the Arts and Saturday review department...

Anna Behrmann •2nd
Features writer and editor
United Kingdom
Current: Features writer and **editor** at The Times, BBC, i Paper, The Observer, Wired, Psychologies
John Thompson and Suchandrika Chakrabarti are shared connections



SETTING RATES

- Do freelancers set their own rates?
- What are rates based on (word count, length, whole article, project, shift, day rate???)
- How would you decide on a rate?



RESOURCES FOR INDUSTRY RATES

[Journo Resources Freelancer Rates](#)

[NUJ Freelance Fees Guide](#)

[NUJ Rate for the Job](#)

[#FreelancerPayGap](#)

[ABSW Rates Guide](#)



Top tips for negotiating a fair rate:

TIP 1 Do your research. A growing number of guides show how much your [peers are being paid](#), what [industry rates](#) are and what the [gold standard](#) is. Check these before accepting a rate to ensure you're being paid in line with everyone else.

TIP 2 Understand the brief. The devil is in the details. What are they expecting you to do for that rate? Is it a short timescale? How much background research is involved?

TIP 3 Consider how long it will take. This is usually the best way to decide if a rate is fair. £150 for a project that will take 2 days is not great but if you can knock it together in a few hours then it could be worth your time.

TIP 4 Set your limits. Before starting negotiations, have a clear figure in mind you will not go below. Stand firm on this.

TIP 5 Take your time. Don't be pressured into making a snap decision. It is fine to pause to give yourself enough time to think and do your research on industry rates.

TIP 6 Be polite and make your case. Never apologise for asking for more money. Simply make a rational case. Explain how long it will take, your level of expertise or the going industry rate. Don't burn your bridges, always be civil and professional.

TIP 7 Ask your peers. If you are unsure whether a rate is fair then ask around in your networks and ask for advice on how to negotiate a better rate.

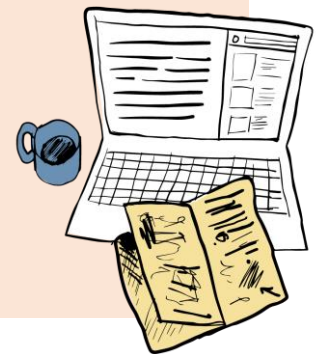
TIP 8 Negotiate in other areas. It's not always about money. You may want to negotiate for a longer deadline, flexible working pattern or which parts of the project you take on.

TIP 9 Don't be afraid to walk away. If you have done your best to negotiate and the numbers don't stack up then cut your losses. It is perfectly reasonable to turn down work if the fee is too low.

INVOICING

You need to create a system for your invoices. This is usually your initials followed by the invoice number e.g EW001. You also need to include:

- Your name or company name
- Your address, email, and phone number
- Commissioner or client name, company, and address
- Date
- Job details
- Payment amount and due date
- Your bank details
- Payment terms



YOUR NAME HERE

Journalism & Media Services

[INSERT YOUR ADDRESS YOU USE FOR YOUR BUSINESS]
T: [INSERT MOBILE NUMBER] E: [INSERT YOUR EMAIL]

Date: [DATE OF SENDING INVOICE]

Date Due: [DATE 30 DAYS LATER]

Invoice No: [INVOICE NUMBER. USUAL FORMAT OF 001/18 (NUMBER OF INVOICE / YEAR)]

Client: [WHO YOU ARE SENDING THE INVOICE TOO]

Client Ref: [IF THEY HAVE A CODE TO REFER TO YOU]

Details	Cost
1x DETAILS OF WORK (eg title, shift day, who commissioned it, etc)	[COST]
Total:	[TOTAL]

Payment via bank transfer only to the following account within 30 days of this invoice.

Bank: [BANK NAME]

Name: [NAME ON ACCOUNT]

Account No: [ACCOUNT NUMBER]

Sort Code: [SORT CODE]

Business:

Lily Canter

Market Harborough

lilycanter@yahoo.co.uk

Invoicing Company:

Vanessa Jones

S'leau

Date: 17/09/21

Invoice: LC00193

Commission	Commissioning Editor / Publication	Payment
<u>Microdosing</u> and history of psychedelics	Vanessa Jones <u>S'leau</u>	£350
	TOTAL	£350

Payable via BACS

Lily Canter

Natwest

Sort code: [REDACTED]

Account number: [REDACTED]

PAYMENT RECORD KEEPING

You will need to keep track of the following:

Commission date

Details of the commission and the client name

Commission payment amount

Commission payment due date

Commission pay date (when it is actually paid)



PAYMENT ON ACCOUNT



In your first year you are expected to pay 50% of your tax bill for your second year up front, once your tax bill is more than £1,000. This is calculated on the previous years' earnings and if you expect this to drop dramatically you can apply to reduce the payment on account.

For example, if you owe £2,000 in taxes for the first year you will be expected to pay £1,000 on top of that, towards the next year's tax bill (this is usually paid in July), so £3,000 in total.

This will reduce the amount you will be required to pay in year two as you have already contributed, but can be a bit of a hit initially.



WHY IS NETWORKING IMPORTANT

Networking is an important part of any business or career but this is **doubly so for the freelancer** who will be more isolated than someone in a staff job.

Creating networks with key individuals, both peers and those you do or potentially could work for is vital for several reasons:

- **Growing your business**
- **Staying motivated**
- **Finding new work**
- **Generating ideas**
- **Getting advice and feedback**



BENEFITS

Being recommended for work because people know who you are

Finding out about opportunities such as awards, grants, get-togethers

Finding new people with a freelance budget happy to commission your ideas

Making friends with other journalists you admire and having the opportunity to learn from them

Feeling less isolated

Having connections throughout the industry you are working in despite being self-employed

Finding out about and avoiding exploitative situations such as people not paying

Creating a support network of people you can rant and complain to and get advice on how to solve a problem

Peers noticing, appreciating and commenting on the work you are doing



PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES/ORGANISATIONS

SOME FREE SOME
SUBSCRIPTION BASED



BUILDING ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS

Networking is not just about making new contacts you also have to build on and cultivate the existing ones.

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS?



freelancingforjournalists.com



HOW?

Building up a relationship with an editor

- Be reliable (helps to develop trust)
- Respond quickly to queries
- Be helpful (never rude)
- Ask for feedback
- Learn what they want (and apply it)
- Say thanks if they have done a particularly good job with an article
- Keep in touch occasionally even when you don't have a pitch
- Once you're on their radar make sure you keep sending ideas
- If you get the chance to meet them in real life/Zoom take it! You can even be the one to instigate it.
- Note that it can take time and you need to keep at it.

