

STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO CONTRACTS FOR FREELANCERS

In this short introductory guide, you'll gain some tips on how to manage the client relationship when you start freelancing. It will look at the design process and the importance of agreeing a contract with your client before you start working with them.

At the start of any job opportunity as a new creative, it's easy to start off enthusiastic and throw yourself into the design process - and let's face it, no one really likes talking about money! However, if you take the following steps at the start of a project to manage your expectations and those of your client, you're far more likely to have a positive, long-lasting and profitable relationship.

DEFINE WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Sometimes you will be approached by clients who have a vague idea of what they want but haven't always thought of the specifics.

"I need a logo", "I need a mural", "I'm thinking of having some illustrations for a flyer...", "Can you take some photos at my wedding..." "I want my living room redesigned..." etc.

In situations like these it's easy to make the mistake of firing off a price to a client without fully exploring what the work involves. This is why it is important to first clarify what the client wants.

Clarifying the design brief is the first phase of the design process where you will meet the client and explore and agree on the design deliverables. Things to find out may include:

- Who is the client and what is their budget?
- What are the client's goals?
- What are the design challenges?
- What are the exact deliverables? Be specific - number of images/photos/etc.
- How will they use your work? On a flyer, online, on a product, etc. - this will affect the price significantly!
- Who is the project aimed at? Who is the target market?
- What will be the project's reach? Local, national, international?
- What are your responsibilities and what are your client's responsibilities?
- Who owns the copyright? Will you receive royalties?

- How long will the work be used for? For example, will it be used for a month long promo or a 3 year campaign?
- What is the time frame and deadline/s for completion of the project?

PUTTING TOGETHER A PROPOSAL

Once you have a clear understanding of what the client wants, you can begin putting together a proposal based on the brief. This would include:

- What you have agreed in terms of what you and the client will deliver
- Time scale and deadline/s
- Payment/s (specifying dates of payment/s)
- Terms & conditions - this could either be included or in a separate document that outlines in detail when and how you expect to be paid, how many tweaks can be made on the design, cancellation policy, late payment fee, etc. See an [example contract here](#).

For more information, see Free Work's [guide to Contracts and Schedules for Freelancers here](#).

PRICING YOUR WORK (see additional resource about Costing Work in resources)

A few things you may want to think about when providing a quote can include:

- What will mark the completion of a deadline/phase? e.g. during a meeting on x day, the final design route will be confirmed
- Will you charge by the hour, day, or a flat fee?
- What are your terms and conditions? How many revisions will you allow?
- When should they pay you? A maximum of 30 days after invoicing is common. You can create a financial proposal to be paid in two stages - 50% of the cost up-front before any work is done, and 50% on final delivery of the work
- Royalties, if applicable
- Costs such as travel, gear, printing, phone, etc.
- Try to anticipate any additional or unexpected costs in your original quote - it can be difficult to add things later
- Make sure to keep all your receipts and timesheets used in the making of the project

Once your quote is accepted, you can submit a contract outlining everything that you have agreed to and have both you and the client sign this. Once you complete this you can begin on the work!

REGARDING ROYALTIES

Royalty payments are payments received each time their work is resold. So, for example, if you made an illustration for the cover of a book and stipulated in your terms that you were to receive royalties on this artwork, you should receive a percentage of each sale of the book.

Some publishers will give you an advance which covers future royalties. They will not pay you on royalties until the sales of the work covers the advance paid to you.

DRAWING UP YOUR CONTRACT

You may not be able to afford legal advice for setting up your contract, but do keep in mind that any agreement between you and the client will be legally binding. If you set out your terms and what you have agreed upon clearly, this will make dealing with clients much easier.

Some associations may offer tips about contracts on their websites. For example, the Association of Illustrators has some great advice about contracts [here](#).

It's important that your client sign the contract **before** work is started. To give you an idea of what you can include in your contract, here are some suggestions:

- Your company name, title, address, and contact details
- The client's company name, contact, address, and contact details
- Name of the project - give this a number and keep record of it
- Description of your services, including as much information as possible - the what, when, why how, and where of your agreed brief
- State the number of tweaks allowed in a project. Specify when the tweaks are no longer complimentary (as they may be in the beginning stages), and when they will count towards this limit. You can add in a stipulation that if the client wants more tweaks than the number allowed, they need to pay an additional fee.
- Add a line with the option to renegotiate the fee to allow for any changes from the client mid-project
- Add time scales
- Your final cost for the work as well as any terms for additional expenses
- Attach any additional relevant materials to the contract as supporting documentation, such as your proposal or drafts. Make sure to acknowledge these materials in the contract and explain how they relate to the terms of the contract.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Once the proposal has been agreed upon and signed for, you can finally begin the work! Here is an outline of how you can approach the project:

Phase 1: Discovery and research

This will include further communication with the client to clarify any doubts and confirm direction.

Phase 2: Initial concepts

Now you will want to come up with a few different ideas - 3 is a good number. Propose these concepts to your client and let the client decide which concept they like best and any changes they would like to have made to the concept.

You will finish this phase once you and the client have agreed upon the concept in which the finished project should be based.

Phase 3: Design development

Here you will develop more details designs. This is the point in the project where you may need to enforce the tweak limit as previously mentioned in the contract.

Phase 4: Production/handover

This is where you finalise your project and present the finished product to your client!

FINISHING THOUGHTS

Overall, developing a great working relationship with your client is key - even the best designers might not get any work if they aren't any good at retaining clients! How you work, your professionalism, and meeting deadlines will all help you build your reputation and get repeat clients or even referrals for new ones.