

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Freelancing but Were Afraid to Ask

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Freelancing can be a rewarding career, but prospective freelancers are often met with the daunting task of entering a career with little support. Ellen Lazarus, Peter Olson, and Nikki Zielinski outlined the questions anyone interested in freelancing should ask their potential employers as well as many they should ask themselves.

Ellen Lazarus began the presentation by listing many of the questions she has asked as well as some she wished she would have. While English language editing has a low-barrier for entry, it can be frustrating to navigate the landscape. Some vendors may be more transparent than others, so it is always a good idea to ask questions: How are manuscripts assigned? Can I reject assignments? Are pay-scales different for "second-look" editing versus a first edit? How do I specify my workload or schedule vacation time? She also expresses the importance of asking questions about the work itself: While most freelancers are expected to be their own help desk, does the vendor have resources available? How should I handle issues of confidentiality and security?

Peter Olson then followed up with a vendor's perspective on these relationships. Vendors often prefer to use freelancers for cost-efficiency, flexibility, scalability, and availability. When reaching out to a vendor, potential freelancers should be sure to have a brief and focused cover letter and a proofread resume. Many vendors will require a test to prove their freelancer's abilities, so to get ahead, offering early to take any required tests will be seen as a proactive move. Vendors who use freelancers should make sure they explain the arrangement for their own benefit as much as for anyone freelancing for them. Communication between both parties is critical. In general, freelancers should let vendors set the tone of their relationships but then take responsibility for responding promptly, asking questions early, and giving and receiving feedback courteously. "Ultimately, your vendor just wants you to do your best work."

Nikki Zielinski rounded out the seminar by providing an insight into the work-life balance that can be difficult when freelancing. She emphasized the importance of tracking time and money to prevent future problems. A freelancer should be aware of how long they work on a page or any extras that may be asked of them so that they can accurately track exactly how much an hour of their time is worth. Budgeting time and creating a defined workspace can go a long way in creating a healthy balance. Some of the drawbacks to freelancing include finding community in solo work and the lack of a human resources department. She suggests finding a tax professional early. Creating an LLC may be an advantage to combat any major security questions and legality. Despite these challenges, freelancing provides many upsides, like the flexibility to work any hours and the ability to take breaks or travel, which can aid in creating a more ideal work-life balance.

The tips from Lazarus, Olson, and Zielinski provide a great starting point for anyone considering freelance opportunities.