4.1 Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Freelancing but Were Afraid to Ask

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THE QUESTIONS I ASKED
(AND A FEW THAT I SHOULD HAVE):

NOTES FROM A SECOND-CAREER ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCIENCE EDITOR

CSE 2019 Annual Meeting
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Columbus, OH
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Freelance Editor
WHY FREELANCE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCIENCE EDITING IS REWARDING

All the interesting and enjoyable aspects of copy editing, plus:

➤ Opportunity to help lower the barriers to publication faced by scientists for whom English is an additional language
➤ Relatively easy entry:
  ✓ English as primary language
  ✓ Graduate science/medicine degree
  ✓ Familiarity with the various style guides
  ✓ Proficiency in MS Word
➤ Large market - Numerous US and non-US vendors
➤ Ability to quickly amass a high-volume workload
➤ Variety!

WHY FREELANCE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCIENCE EDITING CAN BE FRUSTRATING

➤ Variable quality of services provided by some English-language science editing (ELSE) vendors
  ✓ Check your favorite journals’ manuscript submission instructions for names of vendors they recommend
  ✓ Post an email list query (CSE, BELS, others)
➤ Nontransparent pay scales and unsatisfying salary negotiations
  ✓ Review publicly-available editorial rates. Self-advocate for increases
➤ Little opportunity for human interaction
  ✓ Kind words go a long way with managers and clients
  ✓ Cultivate relationships with other editors on-line and at meetings

Relationally, ELSE can feel arid
QUESTIONS TO ASK THE ELSE VENDOR

➤ What is the algorithm for assigning manuscripts?
➤ Can I set daily word limits?
➤ What are the customer feedback and QC mechanisms?
➤ Can I reject assignments? How many? Under what circumstances?
➤ How do I indicate unavailability?
➤ What are the guidelines for handling formatting, reference editing, and ‘second-look’ editing requests?
➤ What style guides should I follow?

TECHNICAL ISSUES

➤ Where did the help desk go?
➤ Do I have ready access to knowledgeable and responsive project managers?
➤ What resources are available for trouble-shooting manuscripts in non-editable formats, language settings other than US/UK English, and other incompatibilities?
➤ Which technical tools are necessary/permissible? Examples: Grammar- and spell-checkers; reference managers

I am my own help desk
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

➤ How do we balance the imperative to edit lightly with the expectation that the edited scientific manuscript will be “perfect”? 

*I try, when I am marking [academic writing students’] work, to resist the old chestnut ‘This is not how we say it in English’, and look past the strangeness, to see if that which is different is not perhaps better, clearer or more interesting. Even if it is none of those things, if it is intelligible, should I indicate that change is desirable?*

Strauss, 2017, “It’s Not the Way We Use English”

➤ What are the confidentiality and security considerations for the use of grammar-checking software and applications?

BIBLIOGRAPHY


➤ Saller, Carol. “For Freelance Editors: How to Set Fees.” CMOS Shop Talk.

➤ Strauss, Pat. “It’s Not the Way We Use English”—Can We Resist the Native Speaker Stranglehold on Academic Publications?” *Publications* 2017 5 no. 4: 27.

OTHER RESOURCES


➤ Springer Author Tutorial - helpful for developing comments [https://www.springer.com/gp/authors-editors/authorandreviewertutorials/writinginenglish](https://www.springer.com/gp/authors-editors/authorandreviewertutorials/writinginenglish)

THANK YOU!

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Why vendors use freelancers

• **Cost efficiency.** Because freelancers require no overhead costs (e.g., employee management, benefits, office equipment/supplies), a vendor can complete more work at lower cost to themselves and their clients.

• **Flexibility.** Because freelancers often work evening and weekend hours, they are often able to complete work more quickly than in-house staff.

• **Scalability.** Using freelancers increases a vendor’s ability to take on large accounts or projects, often on relatively short notice.

• **Availability.** By not restricting themselves to a workforce that resides within a commutable distance from their physical location, vendors can tap into much wider talent pools.
Freelancing: A Vendor’s Perspective
Peter J. Olson, ELS
Sheridan Journal Services, Waterbury, Vermont

Reaching out

Your cover letter
- Keep it brief and focused; limit/omit personal information, philosophical musings, etc.
- Err on the side of formality; use formal salutations and complimentary closings
- Proofread it!

Your résumé
- It doesn’t need to be restricted to one page—but keep it in check
- Keep it updated and consistent with your cover letter
- Proofread it!

Resources
- Editorial Freelancers Association (https://www.the-efa.org/)
- Copyediting.com (https://www.copyediting.com/)
- Publishing Professionals Network (https://pubpronetwork.org/providers/)
- Northwest Editors Guild (https://edsguild.org/)

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Taking tests

Freelancers should:
- always be willing to take a test
- approach it as though it were an interview (it is)
- ask questions (just not for the answers)
- offer explanations as necessary/appropriate

Vendors should:
- devise a test that reflects the work involved
- consider quantitative vs. qualitative scoring
- look for indicators of extra credit
- look for indicators of potential discord—even among candidates who pass

“i” before “e”… except after “c”…
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Starting with a new vendor

Make sure you understand the gig
• Editing and style requirements, including any reference materials you may need
• Expected workload and turnaround times
• Technological requirements and procedures
• Pay structure and invoicing protocol

Ask questions
• Confirm your understanding of the expectations
• Establish that you’re invested in the work

Meet your deadlines
• Always important, but especially so early on
• Negotiate for extensions only if absolutely necessary

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Communicating with your vendor

Communicating with your vendor is critical—the trick is striking the right balance between too much communication and not enough.

The basics:
• Respond as promptly as possible
• Confirm receipt of important updates, queries, materials, etc.
• Identify potential problems early on
• Stay focused and on point

NOTE: Consider asking your vendor whether they have a preferred way of receiving questions (e.g., Piecemeal? Compiled in one message? As annotations within an edited file?)
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Lucidness is next to godliness
Avoid vague and/or incomplete questions so that your vendor doesn’t have to send you a follow-up message to request critical information.

The article I’m working on is missing an abstract. What should I do?

Which article is it? Your vendor may want to consider factors such as article type, file type, or other special circumstances that may explain the absence of the abstract.

I have an article that cites a technical report, but the style guide doesn’t have an example of this reference type. How should I edit it?

Which reference is it? Your vendor will likely need to review it in order to advise you properly. Include the reference in your message so the vendor doesn’t have to look it up.

I have several unpaid invoices. Can you look into this for me?

What are the invoice numbers? Regardless of whether you are corresponding with an Accounts Payable representative, they will need this information.

Let me Google that for you...
Before asking a question—particularly a technological question—consider whether it could be answered after a short session of independent research.

How do I take a screenshot?

How do I change my user name in Word’s Track Changes?

How do I clear the cache on my computer?

How do I find out what version of Word I have?

NOTE: As a freelancer, you are your own IT Department. Some vendors may provide you with guidelines for select technological processes that are specific to the work involved—but other than that, you’re on your own.
Receiving (and giving) feedback

Receiving it
• Respond courteously and constructively
• If unclear, ask for clarification
• Question feedback that is contradictory or unfounded

Giving it
• Identify areas of potential improvement in documentation, procedures, etc.
• Suggest potential solutions

NOTE: Your vendor wants you to do your best work. If anything is preventing this, and the vendor can fix it, let them know as soon as possible.

Thank you!

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Balancing Acts

A Contractor's Take on Freelancing, Freedom, & (Avoiding) Free Work

Nikki Zielinski, MFA
Freelance Editor, Writer, Peer Review Coordinator, & Consultant

Time Management: Tracking & Budgeting

- Tracking time spent per assignment (including correspondence, feedback processing, meetings, training, etc.)
  - Establish your salary (the “dollar-value” of your time)
  - Determine which projects are worth pursuing
  - Accurately estimate tax payments
  - Provide accurate quotes & delivery times
  - Assess new opportunities against current workloads
  - Plan ahead for travel, personal projects, family obligations, etc.
Time Management: Scheduling

- **Know thyself**: Know your goals & budget your time to preserve work/life balance.
- **Budget your time**: Track time to develop a realistic budget.
- **Avoid work overflow**: Consult your time budget before accepting new projects/clients.
- **Be proactive**: Communicate early & often regarding your availability.

Time Management: Maximize Opportunity

- **Maintenance**: Check in periodically to determine whether to trim your project list & if/when to seek new opportunities.
- **Wrapping up**: When completing work with a client, thank them, ask that they keep you in mind for future projects, & check in periodically re: available opportunities.
- **Saying “no”**: If you decide to decline a project, thank the potential client for the opportunity & suggest alternate freelancers if appropriate.
Workspaces: Borders Between Work & Life

Consider a dedicated workspace to avoid the sense of being always "on the clock"

- **In-home options**: Home office vs. dedicated workspace, portable workstation
- **Outside-the-home options**: Libraries, cafés, cooperative workspaces, parks
- **Flexible options**: Portable work stations

Challenges

- Identifying quality opportunities
- Fair testing procedures
- Invoicing & quoting
- Workload management & conflicting deadlines
- Soliciting & applying feedback
- Scheduling time off
- Networking & Advocacy
- Isolation
Finding Community in Solo Work

Resources for building & maintaining professional community outside a traditional office

- **National**: Freelancing networks (e.g., Freelancers Union), professional conferences
- **Local**: Workspace cooperatives, MeetUp, cafés, libraries
- **Virtual**: Online workspaces (Zoom, Skype, Slack)

Freelancer Finance 101

- **Income**: Tracking time & wages; invoicing; proposals; etc.
- **Taxes**: Working with a tax professional to navigate tax complexities, identify deductible expenses, & arrange on-time tax payments
- **Organizations & memberships**: Joining & utilizing editorial & freelancing organizations (CSE, ISMTE, Freelancers Union, et al.)
- **Legal issues**: Establishing a sole proprietorship or LLC; navigating legal pitfalls such as liability issues, insurance obligations, etc.
- **General considerations**: Health insurance, retirement savings, etc.
The (Many) Upsides

- **Flexibility:** Pursue goals beyond the professional (hobbies, education, etc.)
- **Time-savings:** Get things done when others are in the office
- **Relaxation:** Live in the moment & seize recreational opportunities
- **Work/life balance:** Take breaks when needed & be present for family/pets
- **Travel:** Work from anywhere in the world!

Resources: Organizations & Societies

- **Council of Science Editors (CSE):** [https://www.councilscienceeditors.org](https://www.councilscienceeditors.org)
  - Informational, professional, & educational resources
  - Professional opportunities, including a job list
  - Annual conference

- **Freelancers Union:** [https://www.freelancersunion.org](https://www.freelancersunion.org)
  - Informational, professional, & legal resources
  - Group insurance benefits
  - Networking & Advocacy

- **International Society of Managing & Technical Editors (ISMTE):** [https://www.ismte.org](https://www.ismte.org)
  - Informational, professional, & educational resources
  - Professional opportunities, including a job list
  - Annual conference

- **LinkedIn:** [http://linkedin.com](http://linkedin.com)
  - Networking
  - Experience tracking
  - Professional opportunities
Resources: Time-Tracking Apps

- **Clockify** ([https://clockify.me/freelance-time-tracking](https://clockify.me/freelance-time-tracking)): Free time- & productivity-tracking app
- **Toggl** ([https://toggl.com](https://toggl.com)): Free* time-tracking app designed to simplify tracking across multiple clients/projects
- **TopTracker** ([https://www.toptal.com/tracker/](https://www.toptal.com/tracker/)): A free, full-service platform developed by freelancers for time-tracking, invoicing, privacy, etc.
- **RescueTime** ([https://www.rescuetime.com](https://www.rescuetime.com)): Free* time-tracking app specifically designed to manage work/life balance

Asterisk (*) indicates free apps with additional paid/premium options.

Resources: Finance-Management Apps

- **And Co** ([https://www.and.co](https://www.and.co)): Free* invoice- & proposal-management
- **Bonsai** ([https://www.hellobonsai.com](https://www.hellobonsai.com)): Paid invoice- & proposal-management (site includes numerous free resources for freelancers)
- **Expensify** ([https://www.expensify.com/](https://www.expensify.com/)): Free expense-tracking
- **Harvest** ([https://www.getharvest.com](https://www.getharvest.com)): Free* expense-tracking

Asterisk (*) indicates free apps with additional paid/premium options.