

***The Ultimate  
Guide to Getting  
Started On***

**upwork**

***By Sam Klemens***

# Introduction

## My Story

I stumbled upon Upwork in June of 2015. I was in Ukraine, I had just finished teaching English in Moscow, and I needed a way to start making money online. When I met Sergej who told me that he was making more than \$1,000 a month working online, I knew I wanted to do the same. The rest is history.

Since that time I've gone on to earn more than \$10,000 through Upwork. I've applied to more than two hundred jobs, and I've worked close to 1,000 hours for more than 40 clients. I was also able to use my experience on Upwork to secure a full time job in Manhattan paying \$30 an hour. A happy outcome for someone who started off making \$4 writing about water filters.

With this guide I hope to help you get started on Upwork. When you work online you can set your own hours, work anywhere in the world, and enjoy the perks of not having a boss. All you need is some imagination and a decent supply of discipline and persistence.

If you want to find out more about me, or working on Upwork, I keep at a blog at:

[www.SamKlemens.com](http://www.SamKlemens.com)

So without further introduction let's get started! The first three sections are designed for those of you just getting started on Upwork. The final section won't be that useful until you've been working on Upwork for a while and can relate to some of the ideas. If you find this guide useful be sure to send me an email at [letsliveinteresting@gmail.com](mailto:letsliveinteresting@gmail.com) or post a comment on my blog.

Cheers everyone.

# Part 1. Upwork Overview

## Upwork 101

Upwork is great because there are dozens, if not hundreds, of different types of jobs available. Graphic design, writing, website design, app creation, translation, social media management, and the list goes on. If you have a job that can be done with a computer, you can find someone to pay you for it on Upwork.

Because Upwork is the largest freelancing website at the moment there is a continual supply of new clients from all over the world. However, this global reach is both a blessing and a curse. It means more clients, but it also means competition from people living in countries where \$3 an hour is a big deal. While it can be frustrating to get underbid by people who live in cheaper countries, there is a solution which we'll talk about in a later section.

## Your Potential Salary

Your potential earnings depend on what you do, how good you are, and how much experience you have on Upwork. For example, even if you're a graphic designer with years of experience and a long list of satisfied clients, you still may have to work at a reduced rate on Upwork in order to get good feedback. Clients only hire freelancers with zero hours worked for low wages.

Once you get experience you can start charging more. For example, when I started working as a writer on Upwork I was charging an unsustainable \$4 an hour. One year later, after lots of great feedback and more than 40 unique projects, I can now charge \$30 an hour. In another year I expect to charge \$50 an hour.

What you make depends on your experience, the quality of your work, and how well you're able to sell yourself to a client (we'll talk about this later when we look at how to write a great Upwork application). Even if you're very good at what you do, you should be willing to accept a sub-par wage on your first few projects so that you can build up your Upwork profile.

## **The Awesome Benefits of Upwork**

The primary benefit is that you can work virtually. You're unlikely to ever meet your client in person, and you may not even talk to them on the phone. Many relationships take place exclusively through email and the Upwork messaging system.

Another benefit is the massive number of new job postings that appear daily. For example, there are several dozen new postings for copywriters every single day. That's a lot of opportunity!

Finally, with Upwork you're guaranteed to get paid. So long as you go through the Upwork system, you'll never have to worry about getting stiffed on the bill. I've made more than \$10,000 on Upwork and out of that, I only ever lost \$30. That's not a bad deal!

## **The Annoying Drawbacks of Upwork**

Financially, the largest drawback of using Upwork is that they take 20% of everything you earn under \$500 from a single client. Most projects will fall under this category, which means that you lose 1/5th of your paycheck before it even hits your bank account. Factor in taxes and you can see that your hourly rate actually ends up being a lot less than what the client is paying you.

Next, you'll face competition from people across the world. This affects some people more than others. For example; writing and translation are fairly immune to foreign competition because a foreign freelancer's English tends to be poor. However, website designers and coders can have a difficult go at it, as someone else is willing to work for a lot less.

If you're from a place like America or Australia, the key is to focus on quality, and set yourself apart by the level of service you offer. Someone from Bangladesh may be able to capture lots of clients with their low rate, but there are still lots of other companies that want to hire someone who will do the best job, and is not necessarily the cheapest.

## **Your Payment Schedule**

If you work for an hourly wage you'll get your paycheck ten days after the week ends. This is inconvenient and I feel far too long. If you work on a fixed price project you can expect to get paid several days after the client approves the work.

The good news is that getting paid is easy. Upwork offers multiple ways to receive your money, including PayPal transfer and wire deposit directly into your bank account.

## Part 2. Getting Started

### Signing Up for an Account

Go to [www.Upwork.com](http://www.Upwork.com) and create a profile. When you create your profile you need to take it seriously. A real live human being will actually screen your application and if your profile is incomplete, they won't let you sign up. To get it right the first time do the following.

- \*Upload a professional looking picture of yourself
- \*List any experience you have writing, coding, designing, or doing other online work
- \*List real world experience you have
- \*List what skills you specialize in (or would like to specialize in). Some examples include: SEO, copywriting, translation, creative writing, web design, content marketing, social media expert, graphic design, etc.
- \*Look at the picture below, which will give you an idea about how to create a professional looking profile



**Sam Klemens**

**Web Content and Copywriter**

📍 Silver Creek, United States - 2:56am local time

Copywriting   Content Writing

**\$30.00 /hr**

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▶ Place video

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### Overview

My name's Sam and I've written more than anyone else alive, aside from all those who have written more than me. I specialize in copywriting and writing web content. In addition, I also have a good grasp of search engine optimization and web design.

Tired of working with unprofessional writers? Try working with me. My writing is solid, I'm easy to get along with, and I'm always available to chat on Skype. I take care of my clients, and if you need a writer, I'm your guy.

[www.Epoch Writing.com](http://www.Epoch Writing.com) [less](#)

## Applying for your first jobs

I've applied to more than 100 jobs on Upwork. Sometimes I've gotten the job, and most of the time I haven't. Typically you can expect to hear back from 1 in 5 clients who you message. My experience has shown that by following these five rules, you stand a better chance of getting hired.

**1. Apply for all 30 jobs, every single month.** Now matter how amazing your application or profile is, applying to jobs is a numbers game. The more applications you have floating out there the better your odds. You might be surprised what turns up. I've had clients contact me weeks after I submitted an application.

**2. Make sure that the hourly rate on your profile and the rate you submit on your application are in the same ballpark.** Maybe you submit \$15 an hour on a job application. The client sees this, looks at your profile, and sees that your hourly rate is actually \$8. He's going to ask why he's been charged so much and throw your application away.

**3. DO NOT copy and paste applications.** This is a losing strategy. You should be customizing every single application based on the client's job description. When I needed someone to speed up this website, I posted an application on Upwork. Guess who was rejected immediately? EVERY SINGLE PERSON who started their application with "Dear hiring manager".

**4. Ballpark your application with the job description.** If the job description is long and detailed, you should make your application long and detailed. If the job description is three sentences, writing three paragraphs probably isn't the best idea. This depends though, and should be taken as more of an idea than as a general rule.

**5. Make your first few sentences STAND OUT.** You want to immediately grab a client's attention. Almost without exception, I start every single application with:

*"Hi, my name's Sam and I'm the perfect person for this project."*

What you absolutely don't want to do is say something like *"Dear hiring manager"* or *"Attention sir"*. These generic sentences all but guarantee that you won't get hired. Take the time to tailor each application to the job, and you'll get hired more.

## Successful Upwork Applications

*\$22 an hour*

Hey, my name's Sam and I'm the perfect person for this job. Here's why:

1 – I have extensive experience with rewriting technical product descriptions and documents. One of my current jobs involves improving mechanical engineering product descriptions. My client is pleased with my work, I invite you to look at the feedback on my profile.

2 – I write SEO articles on a daily basis. I've written in more than a dozen niches already, and that number grows every month. I can rewrite keywords with proper weighting, add internal and external links, define H tags, specify image, write title tags, and write Meta Descriptions.

3 – I'm a native English speaker from New York. That means my grammar is always perfect.

4 – I'm a professional writer who takes my job seriously. I'm always available via Skype or Email and I answer promptly.

5 – My writing is clear, concise and too the point. I've been writing daily for years, and that shows.

I invite you to check out my online portfolio at:

[www.EpochWriting.com](http://www.EpochWriting.com)

I'm looking forward to hearing back from you!

Sam

*\$10 an hour*

Hey, I'm Sam. I'm the perfect person to write about small and medium sized businesses. There are a couple of reasons why. First, my father founded and has been running his own small business for over twenty years. That's given me loads of firsthand experience on the topic.

Second, I write high quality articles, just like what you're looking for, all the time. I do my own research, write the headlines, implement keywords, and so on. I encourage you to please check them out by visiting my website:

[www.EpochWriting.com](http://www.EpochWriting.com)

Furthermore, being a native speaker my grammar is perfect. Also, I know my way around WordPress. I've created five websites, for myself and friends as well.

Thanks, and I'm looking forward to hearing back from you!

Sam

*\$14 an hour*

Hey, my name's Sam and I'm the perfect person for this job! First off, I'm a native speaker of English so you'll never have to worry about grammar problems. Second, I have lots of experience writing about different topics. In the last two months I've written SEO articles about:

- Web design
- Household appliances
- Solar energy
- Health food
- SEO
- Renewable energy
- Travel
- Personal development
- Working online
- And more..

I'm a professional writer who clients enjoy working with. I always turn in my articles on time and you can always reach me via Skype or Email. I encourage you to check out recent feedback from clients by visiting:

[www.EpochWriting.com](http://www.EpochWriting.com)

There you'll also find a portfolio of my recent work.

Thanks, and I'm looking forward to hearing back from you!

Cheers

Sam

*\$11 an hour*

Hello, my name's Sam and I'm the perfect researcher for you.

Why?

Well for starters I'm a native English speaker. That means you'll never have to worry about messy grammar errors. Second, I'm invested in your success. I want to have a lasting relationship with you, where we are both happy. Working online is how I make my living, it's not a passing fad.

If I get this job, it will be my highest paying job to date. The reason I feel confident applying for it is my work history. All my clients are pleased with the work I'm doing. In fact I've already gotten raises from two of them.

I want to bring that level of quality to you. I learn quickly, I never plagiarize, and I have a solid work ethic. I also have extensive experience doing research online. That is presumably what you would hire me to do? According to the description, it seems like your project is less about writing, and more about finding content creators online.

Either way, I encourage you to check out my writing portfolio at:

[www.EpochWriting.com](http://www.EpochWriting.com)

There you will find my latest projects, along with some feedback from clients.

Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sam Klemens

*\$8 an hour*

Hey, my name's Sam and I'm the perfect person for your project! I'll start off by addressing my lack of a 4.5 feedback on Upwork. The only reason I lack this rating is that I'm still actively working with all my initial clients.

I'm giving them high quality, 100% original and error free articles. I have no doubt that when it comes time for them to leave me a rating it will be a 5.

I'm in this for the long term. I want to work with you for months or even years, not just the next week. I've been writing daily for years and I'll continue writing daily till the day I die.

My goal is to produce the best written content possible. If you hire me you'll hire someone who always answers emails in a timely manner (often within minutes!), you will NEVER have to worry about plagiarized content and my grammar is excellent. I triple edit everything to ensure a superior written article.

I look forward to hearing back from you!

Sam

*\$25 per article*

Hey, my name's Sam and I'm the perfect person for this job! First off, I'm a native speaker of English so

you'll never have to worry about grammar problems. Second, I have lots of experience writing about different topics. In the last two months I've written SEO articles about:

- Web design
- Household appliances
- Solar energy
- Health food
- SEO
- Renewable energy
- Travel
- Personal development
- Working online
- And more..

I'm a professional writer who clients enjoy working with. I always turn in my articles on time and you can always reach me via Skype or Email. I encourage you to check out recent feedback from clients by visiting:

[www.EpochWriting.com](http://www.EpochWriting.com)

There you'll also find a portfolio of my recent work.

The articles I write for you will result in an increase in the social engagement on your website. What I write is interesting and unique. It's also short and to the point, which is an essential part of keeping people's attention.

Thanks, and I'm looking forward to hearing back from you!

Cheers

Sam

## Part 3. Securing Work

### Why Your Reputation Matters

Your reputation on Upwork is everything. It's highly visible and the first thing that clients see when they're thinking about hiring you. Recently Upwork introduced the *Job Success Score*, which is rather biased in my opinion. However, there's no changing it, so it's best to be aware of it. When a client looks at the applicants for their job the first thing they see is your success score, and that can have a big effect on whether you get hired or not.

So what can you do to keep the score high?

*Always do great work for your clients.* Deliver on time, deliver what you promised, and make sure it's good quality. Do this and you'll keep a great job success score. When you complete a job your client will leave you a rating, and that's what your job success score is based on.

So even if you find yourself in a scenario where you've agreed to do work for a lower hourly rate than you'd like, or the client is being a terrible person, finish up the job and do your best. One terrible review can be a blight on your Upwork record that haunts you for months.

While that really isn't very fair, there is one positive thing you can do ensure that your Upwork profile always looks as good as possible.

### Ask for Positive Feedback

Many clients are not aware of how much a good review matters to a freelancer. They may leave the comments section blank, or give you a mediocre review because of one mistake. However, by just asking for positive feedback you can usually change that. As long as you've done a decent job for the client

they'll probably be happy to write you a nice review and leave you a good rating. I usually say something like this:

*Hey Ben, I hope you liked the articles I submitted. I worked hard on them, but if there are any changes don't hesitate to let me know! Since this is the end of the contract I'm hoping that you can leave me some good feedback. It will make it a lot easier for me to find work in the future and I'd really appreciate it.*

*Feel free to contact me anytime you need some more writing.*

*Sam*

With a simple message like this you'll get significantly more positive feedback, and your Upwork profile will be a glorious magnet for work.

If the client is dissatisfied with the work you've done you should offer to do free revisions or offer a partial refund. It might suck to lose that money or time, but it sucks a lot more to not be able to secure future work because of one bad review.

## **The Upwork Success Score System**

While Upwork hasn't released the formula it uses to create your success score, here are a couple of things to keep in mind.

\*Feedback (negative or positive) from a long time client will impact your score more than feedback from a client who you only did one project with.

\*Having contracts open for more than a month, without any work being done, can drag down your success score.

\*Your success score is updated about every two weeks.

## **How to Apply For a Job That You're Not Qualified For**

The toughest time to get a job on Upwork is when you're just starting out and you don't have any experience. However, even after you get positive reviews and rack up the hours, the next challenge is getting a job that you don't have any experience with. For example, you do social media management and you work with Facebook. If you want to get into Twitter, you might find it hard to get people to hire you if you don't have any experience.

This is an interesting problems, and one we'll look at below. First I'll show you how I was able to get a fantastic job that, according to the description, I was under-qualified for. After that example, I'll go on to list five tips that you can use when you're applying for new jobs you're not qualified for.

## My Proposal (For a Job I Wasn't Qualified For)

"Hey, my name is Sam. I'd like to make a suggestion which you are obviously free to take or reject. Break apart this large \$8,000 a month project, and assign some of the easier parts of it to me. Or, conversely, let me work on the project with you for a trial month, at half the monthly pay that you've suggested here.

Why am I suggesting this?

I'm almost the perfect fit for you, but not 100%. I have a bachelors in psychology, I eat philosophy books for dinner, I live in Brooklyn, and I've been writing for five years. But most of it has been SEO articles and web content. So I don't have the level of experience that you're looking for. However, I am a solid writer and I'm confident that I can deliver content that lives up to your expectations. In fact I'd love to demonstrate this by working for free for a week. If you think it will work, you can pay me. If not, then we can go our separate ways.

Well that's my pitch. I'd love to get the chance to work with you, but obviously I'd understand if I'm just not the correct fit.

Have a good day!"

### The Client's Response

I submitted this proposal believing there was only a small chance I would hear back from the client. However, I was surprised when I got a reply about a week later and I ultimately got the job. Best of all, I never had to hide anything about myself or my experience. By being fully forthright in my application I was able to speak confidently about exactly what I could and couldn't do, and I believe that's part of the reason that I got the job.

In applying for your own jobs for which you don't believe yourself qualified, here are a few suggestions. Hopefully by following them you'll find it easier to get more work, and increase your hourly rate as well!

## Tips for Applying to Jobs

- 1. Never lie.** If you don't have experience doing something, don't lie and say you do. Four times out of five that will lead to a negative result, which can mean receiving bad feedback on your Upwork profile, which is something to be avoided at all costs. Instead, try this.
- 2. Make an irresistible offer.** If you look at my application above, you'll notice I made it a no-brainer decision for the person who would hire me. I offered to work for free for a week, and I also offered to work at half of their advertised monthly rate.
- 3. Focus on your strengths.** Going back to my first example, if you're doing well with Facebook management and want to get into Twitter, talk about how well you're doing with Facebook. Focus on all of the positive results you're getting and how you're going to use that experience to be successful on Twitter.

**4. Consider doing some free work.** If you're really serious about getting work in a certain area, you may want to considering working for free for a while. Regardless of what you do, there's probably some charity or non-profit that would like your services. For example, in the coming months I may contact various non-profits to see if I can write copy for their website. Not only am I helping them out, but I'm gaining positive references and new content to add to [my professional website](#).

**5. Take a course.** [Amazing.com](#) offers great courses, and a thirty day free trial! I can tell you from experience that their courses are incredible and well worth the money. By taking a course you'll learn a lot about your new field, and you'll be able to tell potential clients that you have good training.

As always, when applying for a position that you're not qualified for, you should follow the golden rule. Apply to a lot of jobs. Dozens and dozens, don't give up. For example, even though I've done 41 jobs and have 460 timed hours of work on Upwork, I still only hear back from about every third client. If you're just starting out that number might be much worse. That's normal, stick it out! If you want to learn more about writing a good application, check out my popular article: [How to Make an Awesome Upwork Application](#).

## Part 4. Advanced Principles

### Taking Clients off of Upwork

If you've worked with a client long enough and you trust them to pay you, at some point you may consider working with them off of Upwork. The advantage is that if they pay you with PayPal you'll only pay a 2% surcharge, versus the annoying 20% or 10% surcharge that Upwork charges. The disadvantage is that you won't have any protection and you'll have no recourse if a client choose to not pay you for work.

However, if you're careful that shouldn't be a problem. When taking a contract off of Upwork it's important to follow these steps, otherwise your account could easily get banned.

1. Don't *ever* mention getting paid through PayPal or any other service through the Upwork messaging system. Instead, do this.
2. Get your client's email address or Skype name. Take the conversation to an outside messaging system and discuss the new arrangement there.
3. Have the client end the contract on Upwork and leave you good feedback.

The reason you don't want to discuss PayPal through the Upwork messaging system is that it automatically picks up on this, someone will read your messages, and if they find you discussing taking work off of Upwork they will temporarily block your account.

### Making Your Own Website

This may be a worn out phrase, but it has literally never been easier to make your own website. Using

WordPress you can buy a fantastic theme which will give you a professional looking website in hours. The advantages of having your own website are the following:

1. You can use it to host your CV or to show people what you do
2. You can use it to host your portfolio which will help you to get more work in the future
3. You have *complete* control over content, which is not something you have on any third-party platform whether it's Upwork, Facebook, or LinkedIn
4. Having your own website adds credibility and gives you the appearance of being a professional
5. If you put enough content on your website and / or advertise it, you'll be able to get work with it, and you won't just have to depend on Upwork

The topic of how to create your website is outside the scope of this guide, but there's lots of great information out there on the internet. I will say that if you don't have much web design experience and you just want something that's simple and looks good, go with a self-hosted WordPress website. You can't go wrong and the costs are minimal.

## Securing Clients Outside of the Upwork Platform

There are several ways to go about this. If you have money you can do PPC advertising. However, this can quickly eat up a lot of your budget and if your ad copy is poor you might not see a good return on investment.

For most people, a better option will be to cold-call or cold-email businesses. To be honest I've personally never had success doing this, but I also haven't put in a real effort. I do know people who have put in the effort and they've been rewarded with success.

I know of one person who did SEO (Search Engine Optimization) work and he had a great approach. He would visit a perspective client's website, then run a screen capture program on his laptop as he pointed out all the flaws in their website. Then he would upload this video to YouTube and send it to the client. Not only did this establish him as an authority, but it caused him to stick out because he personalized each email to that business.

## Thinking Long Term

My belief is that regardless of how profitable you are on Upwork at the moment, the goal should be working towards the point where you're working online completely independent of Upwork. I see Upwork as a bouncing off point to something better. It's a way to meet your first clients, get better at your chosen skill, and learn how to work online, not the final solution.

The problem is that when you work for Upwork, *they have control*. At any moment they can suspend your account, change their terms, or charge a higher percentage on the money you make. If you depend entirely on Upwork you're putting yourself at their mercy. In the short time that's fine, and they're

probably not going anywhere. But as you think several years into the future, you should have some idea how you're going to build up your online business to the point that you can leave Upwork behind and function as a fully independent freelancer. That's what I'm working towards myself, and that's what I hope for you as well.

Best of luck, I wish you the very best! If you'd like to learn more about Upwork, and follow me as I travel around the world working online, check out my blog at:

[www.SamKlemens.com](http://www.SamKlemens.com)