



CONTRACTOR MANUAL

GET TO WORK, GROW YOUR CAREER,
AND BE AN ODESK SUPERSTAR!

What's Inside

Part 1: Welcome to oDesk

What does oDesk do?	3
Why should I work on oDesk?	3
How does oDesk make money?	3
What is online work?	4
How is online work different from traditional work?	4
Who will I be working with?	4
The oDesk Guarantee	4

Part 2: Let's Get Started

What you'll need	5
Three steps to getting started	5
What makes a great profile?	6
Ready...set...search!	7
What to look for in a job post	7
Fixed-price vs. hourly	8

Part 3: Applying & Interviewing

How the process works	9
Setting your rate	10
Seven steps to an excellent cover letter.....	11
Example of a winning cover letter	12

Ace the interview	13
Before the interview	13
During the interview	14
After the interview	14
Waiting on the results	15
Got the job? Yay!	15

Part 4: Get the Job Done

Making it work	16
Start the project right	16
Using the Team App	17
Trust & Safety	18
Project management 101	19
Dos and don'ts of written communication	20

Part 5: Great Job. Now What?

When a job is finished	21
Get ready for more work	21
Seven habits of successful contractors	22

Welcome to oDesk

We're so happy you're here. This Contractor Manual will help you get started, find work, and build a successful oDesk career. So give it a read and get ready to love the way you work!

What does oDesk do?

oDesk connects talented contractors with businesses around the globe, giving skilled workers access to jobs that are personally, professionally, and financially rewarding. We are the world's largest online workplace, ranked #1 by annual contractor earnings, with over 100,000 jobs posted monthly.

Why should I work on oDesk?

If you've got the skills, we've got the opportunities! You'll find the tools, resources, and connections you need to build a long-lasting professional career. Payments are reliable and secure, and every hourly contract is covered by the oDesk Guarantee that an hour worked is an hour paid.

→ Great work is rewarded

Build your professional reputation on oDesk by working hard and getting great client reviews. Positive feedback leads to more work. And more work leads to more money. In fact, we've found that oDesk contractors on average increase their pay rate by 190% over three years.

→ Our technology builds trust

When you work with people around the world, having the tools to build mutual trust is key. So, we created the oDesk Team App to let you log your time and get paid quickly and reliably.

→ Work without risk

There are no upfront costs when joining oDesk. You can create a professional profile, apply to jobs, and interview without paying a penny.

So, how does oDesk make money?

It's pretty simple. Once you're hired, oDesk charges clients 10% of what they pay on your contract. For example, if your contract rate is set at \$20/hour, your client will pay \$22.20/hour. oDesk keeps \$2.20 paid by your client, so we only make money when you make money!

What is online work?

Practically any work that doesn't require a physical presence can be done online. Writing? Yes! Fixing a sink? Not so much. Successful online contractors have built careers as developers, designers, marketers, accountants, personal assistants, and more.

How is online work different from traditional work?

From setting your own hours to using your favorite café as an office, online work offers a level of freedom and flexibility you don't usually find in the traditional workplace. All you need is a computer, a reliable Internet connection, strong skills, and the willingness to work.

You'll also have a new boss—yourself! And while oDesk can supply the opportunity and tools, what you do with them is up to you. This is why the most successful contractors are disciplined, entrepreneurial, and determined to build their own career.

Who will I be working with?

You could work with a wide range of clients, from small businesses to large multinational companies. Some jobs offer 30 hours in a single week; others may need you for five hours a week for three months. Either way, expect to work with clients of all shapes and sizes.



Let's Get Started!

Are you ready? Are you excited? Yes? Then let's go!

Here's what you'll need to get to work:

- A fast, reliable Internet connection and an up-to-date Internet browser
- A work-only email account and a free Skype account
- A workspace that is quiet and distraction-free
- A basic understanding of the English language
- A ready-to-work attitude, a strong set of skills, and an entrepreneurial spirit

You're just three steps away from joining the growing ranks of online professionals...

1 Sign up

If you haven't signed up already, now's the time. It's free and easy and the first step to an oDesk career.

2 Create your profile

Impress prospective clients and land your first job with a well-done contractor profile. It's like a personal resume, business card, and marketing brochure all rolled up in one. So, take some time and do it right.

3 Set up your payment option

Get ready to get paid! We recommend setting up two funds transfer methods so that you can be paid easily. The method you choose will depend on your location. ACH for U.S. contractors and Local Currency Wire to countries where it is available are popular because they are generally faster and less expensive.

What Makes a Great Profile?

Successful profiles are complete, accurate, and paint a compelling picture of your skills and accomplishments. Here's how to make a great first impression.

Introduce yourself

A complete, professional-looking profile starts with your full name, title, and photo. Write a title that accurately reflects the type of jobs you're looking for. Your picture should be of yourself—stock photos, celebrity pics, or logos are not allowed.

Tell the world why you're right for the job

The overview is your opportunity to let a client know what you can do for them. Include past successes (number of years worked in a field, education level, significant projects) and highlight your skills. Put the most important information first—only the first few lines from your overview will appear in search results.

Set your rate

Your rate should reflect your experience and work capabilities. Not sure how much to ask for? Look at the going rate for those with similar skill sets, experience, or geography.

Take a few oDesk skills tests

Skills tests are a great way to prove your value to potential clients, especially for new contractors without an oDesk work history. All our tests are free, so be sure to take the U.S. English Basic Skills Test and a few others that showcase your specific skills.

Post a portfolio

If you have images or links to work you've accomplished, post them! (But be sure to get permission from your client first.) Describe what you were responsible for, what went into your decisions, and any success metrics. Don't have a portfolio? Upload letters of recommendation from previous jobs.

Check for errors

The contractor with a well-written, professional profile will always be a client's first choice. Keep the tone positive, avoid using ALL CAPS or text shortcuts, and double-check that everything is grammatically correct and spelled properly.



SHOW US YOUR SMILE

In some countries, a serious portrait indicates professionalism. However, many oDesk clients are based in Western countries where someone who smiles is considered more trustworthy and pleasant. So increase your chances of getting hired and show us your smile!



Ready...Set...Search!

Search is the best place to start looking for your first job. Look for projects requiring your skills, then narrow down by category, subcategory, hourly or fixed-price, and workload.

What to look for in a job post

When you find an interesting project, ask yourself these questions:

→ **Do I have the right skills?**

Only apply to the jobs you're qualified for. Performing poorly and getting negative feedback can damage your professional reputation. If you're not 100% qualified, keep looking. The right job is out there!

→ **Can I prove I have the skills being sought?**

When potential clients view your profile and cover letter, they look for the experience, tests, and other proof that you can do the job. If your profile doesn't demonstrate the skills requested in the job post, search for a project more suitable to your proven experience.

→ **Do I have the time?**

If the post provides information on timing and deadlines, be sure you can commit to the timeline before you apply.

→ **Is the offered rate acceptable?**

The rates offered by oDesk clients vary widely. If the rate is too low for the skills you offer at this point in your career, move on.

→ **Will I work well with this client?**

Job descriptions say a lot about a client. Generally, the more detailed the description, the more thought the client has put into the work and the greater their understanding of what it takes to get the job done.



REAL-LIFE CONTRACTOR TIP!

“For your first few jobs, I recommend working with clients who have oDesk experience. They understand how to manage an online project, how the Team App works, and how to budget for your hours. This helps you showcase your skills, get acquainted with the platform, and improve your chances for positive feedback.”

Sayeed Islam, *IT Consultant*

★ FIXED-PRICE VS. HOURLY CONTRACTS ★

Clients can choose between one of two contract types. Here's how they compare.

HOURLY

Hourly contracts are often preferred by contractors. All time is logged through the Team App and is covered by the oDesk Guarantee.

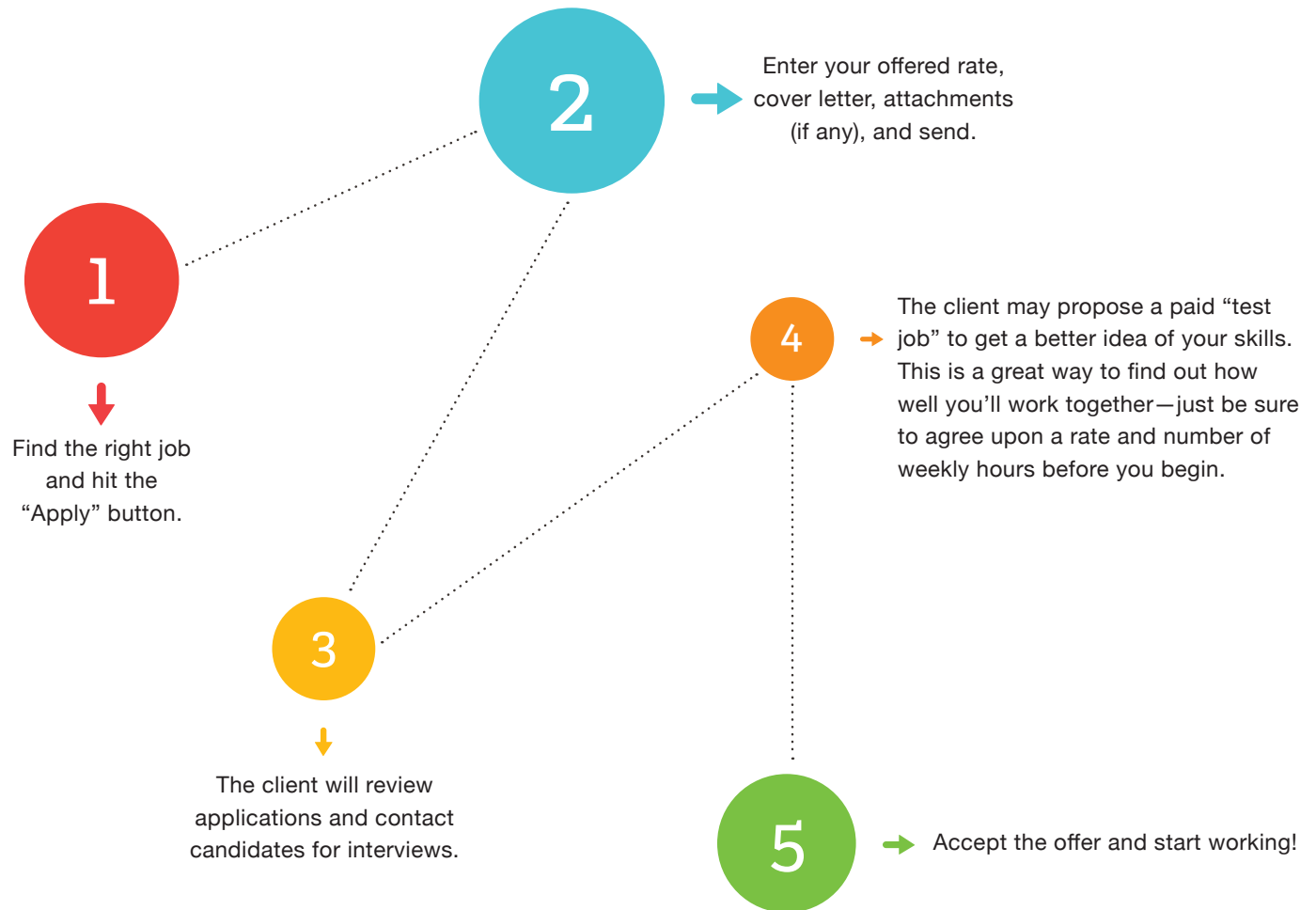


FIXED-PRICE

Fixed-price contracts are not covered by the oDesk Guarantee and payment is at the client's discretion. These jobs are generally smaller and are paid on completion, with terms agreed upon before work begins.

Applying & Interviewing

Now that you're ready to work, the path to finding the right job is simple. Here's how the process works:



This is our recommended process for those new to oDesk. Once you complete a few jobs and become more familiar with working online, you may skip a few steps. For example, some clients may hire you on the spot, without an interview. We encourage you to work on oDesk in whatever way is best for you!

Setting your rate

You can set your hourly rate when you apply to a job. Just change the default rate in the application before you hit “send.”

To estimate your charge for fixed-price jobs, you’ll have to figure out how long it will take to finish. Here’s one way to do it:

- 1 Break the job into phases. For instance, building a website may include five phases: planning, design, building, review, and testing.
- 2 Break each phase into the steps involved so that you can communicate this to your potential client.
- 3 For each phase, calculate your charge by estimating the time it will take to complete, including revisions.
- 4 Add up the estimated cost of all phases, plus a little extra to account for unexpected issues.

We recommend this process even when the client has specified a price for the job. That way, you can judge whether the amount of money will be worth the amount of work.

REAL-LIFE CONTRACTOR TIP!



“The first mistake a newcomer usually makes is to drastically lower their rate in hopes of landing a job. I suggest offering a ‘test hire’ option to your client instead. Get them to hire you for an hour or two so they can sample your skills firsthand. The small test project will land you feedback, while assuring the client of your quality and building trust.”

Ayesha Kamal, *Creative Writer and Social Media Expert*

Seven Steps to an Excellent Cover Letter

So, you created an awesome profile and found the perfect job...now how do you convince the client you're the best for the job? By writing a fantastic cover letter every time, for every job application.

Your cover letter is how you introduce yourself, highlight your skills and experience, and tell the client exactly why they should hire you. It's your big chance to show that you've read the job description, understand the project, and are qualified for the job.

Here's how to write a cover letter that impresses clients and leads to interviews:

- 1 Make a professional impression**
Begin with a warm, professional greeting. "Hello Mr. Smith" or "Hi John" are both polite and appropriate. A simple "hello" sets a professional tone when you don't have the name of the person doing the hiring.
- 2 Be specific**
Keep your cover letter short and sweet. Tell the client why you're writing and why you're qualified. Stand out from the crowd with specific examples of your experience and how they relate to the job.
- 3 Relate back to the job post**
Call out the skills you have that are specific to the job post. This makes it clear you have read the job description and are ready for the job.
- 4 Ask clarifying questions**
Asking a thoughtful and appropriate question about the job shows that you understand how to do the work and demonstrates the value you bring to the job.
- 5 Follow directions!**
Some clients might ask you to answer a specific question or include a keyword in your cover letter. This helps them filter out generic, "copy and paste" cover letters. Look for these directions and follow them. It shows that you're paying close attention to their job post.
- 6 Close the deal**
Let them know your availability to discuss further. It's a polite way to "ask for the job" and reinforce your enthusiasm.
- 7 Reread, edit, and consider**
Take another look at the job description. Did you address all of the criteria and answer the client's questions? Have you added relevant links to samples of your work? Do a final grammar and spelling check before you hit "send."

The #1 mistake new contractors make is not taking the time to write a relevant, error-free cover letter! Here's how to do it right:

showcase certifications

refer to your portfolio

discuss availability

demonstrate added value

Hello,

I found your Sales Training Deck job post and I'm very interested in your project. As a certified Microsoft professional with experience developing compelling presentations, I think you'll find I have the skills you're looking for.

Please take a look at my portfolio to get an idea of the kind of presentations I have developed. Typically, I can edit and design a 20-page presentation like yours within three hours. I'm wrapping up a project now and will have availability beginning tomorrow.

I do have a few questions about the requirements and would be open to an interview. I will be online for the next 2 hours if you would like to discuss. Otherwise, please let me know what times work for you.

Thank you for your consideration,

Joe Contractor
Presentation Specialist

Once you've applied, you may receive a notification that the client would like to set up an interview, or maybe even hire you immediately. Occasionally, you may not hear anything back. Clients are not required to respond to applications, so keep your options open by applying to other jobs.

REAL-LIFE CONTRACTOR TIP!



"Getting clients to read your cover letter is the test of your ability to brand and market yourself. Without unique and relevant content to make you stand out, your letter will get tossed aside like all the others."

Stef Gonzaga, *Freelance Copywriter and Professional Blogger*

CAN THE SPAM



Please don't send the same "cut and paste" cover letter to every job post. It hurts your chances of getting hired and can result in a suspension from oDesk. It's okay to adapt an old cover letter, but you must rewrite it to make it specific to the project you're applying for.

Ace the Interview

Congrats! You made it to the interview. Now it's time to get prepared, just as you would for any face-to-face interview. You're this close to getting the job, so set yourself up for success.

If the client requests an interview, reply quickly with your availability and find a time that works for you both. If your potential client is many time zones away, you may need to interview at a time that is early or late for you. Interviews can be text-based through the oDesk Message Center, over Skype, or over the phone, so agree on a method that works best for both of you. Make sure you understand how the interview will be conducted (for example, voice vs. text on Skype) so you can prepare!

Get set for success

Just as for any meeting, you should be prompt, polite, prepared, and professional.

Here's how to make your interview a success:

Before the interview:

Be flexible

Time zones and communication preferences can be tricky; be willing to adapt to the time and interview method the client prefers.

Do your homework

Research your client so you can have a smart conversation about their business, and write down a few project-specific questions.

Find a quiet space

If you're on the phone or Skype, background noise or interruptions can make you seem unprofessional.

Double-check your portfolio

If you have a piece especially relevant to the project, be sure to include it in your portfolio and share it with the client.

Be prepared—mentally and technically

Give yourself ample time before the interview to review your materials and think about what you'd like to say. Make notes of past work examples to discuss. Test your computer's microphone and speakers early so you can fix them before the interview if necessary.

During the interview:

Be professional

Talk about your accomplishments and ask questions about the job in a way that is respectful and polite.

Be honest

If you don't know the answer to a question (or don't like the answer you have to give), be honest. Misleading a client will lead to a bad experience for everyone.

Suggest a test project

If you think it will help, consider suggesting a small paid test job that lasts only an hour or two. This shows confidence and sends a good message to the client.

End on a positive note

Ask if there is a deadline for hiring so you'll know when the client will make a decision. And always thank them for the interview!

After the interview:

Provide additional info

If you promised to provide additional information or a link to an extra portfolio piece during the interview, do so promptly and include a thank-you note.

Always follow up

Send a short and friendly thank-you note. You may also add a line or two to reinforce a point made in your interview.

APPLICATION QUOTAS



Our job application quota limits the number of applications you can submit at a time. So be sure you only apply to jobs you're qualified for. Increase your quota by:

- Taking and passing the oDesk Readiness Test
- Taking and passing four or more free skills tests
- Verifying your identity
- Getting good feedback for a completed job

SPEAKING ENGLISH



Be up front about your English skills. Our clients are used to working with people around the globe, so don't be afraid to politely ask them to speak a little slower or repeat their question during an interview. That said, English is the official language of oDesk, and our most successful contractors tend to be those who communicate well.

Waiting is the hardest part

Waiting to find out if you got a job is never easy, but it's important to give the client time to finalize their decision. You can get an idea of their progress by checking the job post to see how many candidates have been interviewed and if the job is still open.

If you don't receive a response, you can withdraw your application and find other jobs. Before withdrawing your application, we recommend sending a brief note letting the client know that you are moving on to other opportunities, but would love to work with them in the future.

RED FLAGS!



If a client asks you to start work without creating a contract on oDesk, beware! You won't be protected by the oDesk Guarantee, and if the client doesn't pay you for your work, you're out of luck.

Just as important, if you work outside of oDesk, you won't receive any client feedback for your profile. Your feedback score plays a huge part in landing jobs and growing your professional reputation—good feedback is often the key to getting hired. So, if a client asks you to work outside of oDesk, please contact Customer Support.

★ ★ You got the job? Yay! ★ ★

Well done! If your pay rate hasn't been discussed, you'll have to do so now. Make sure that you're comfortable with the agreed-upon rate.

When you're ready, hit the "accept" button and do a happy "I got the job" dance! You've earned it. Now, get ready to work.

Get the Job Done

Here's where the real fun begins! This section will help you understand what it takes to work well and build a career on oDesk.

Making it work

Working alone can be difficult. There are a million distractions and no supervision, so it's easy to procrastinate. But a little discipline goes a long way—use these tips to stay on track.

→ Create a workspace

Find a dedicated “office space” with minimum distractions. If there are kids in the house, let them know that you are working and should not be disturbed unless it is important. Establish your workspace and teach them to let you work uninterrupted.

→ Set regular work hours

Having the freedom to set your own schedule is fantastic, but creating an established workday makes it easier to get work done and lets your client know when you're available. But it doesn't have to be the traditional 9-to-5. Maybe it's four hours in the morning and then a second shift in the evening—whatever works best for you on a consistent basis.

→ Disengage your gadgets

If you're at home, turn off the TV and power down your smartphone. The fewer distractions, the better!

Start the project right

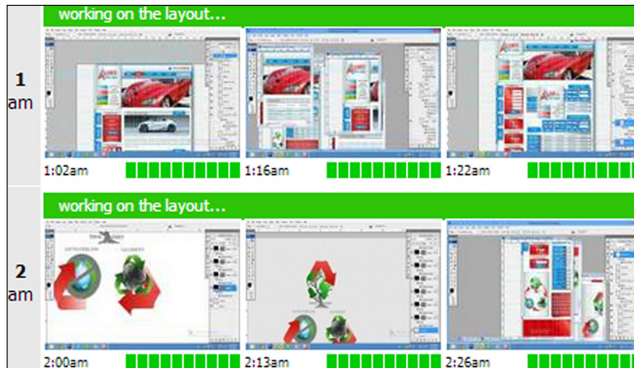
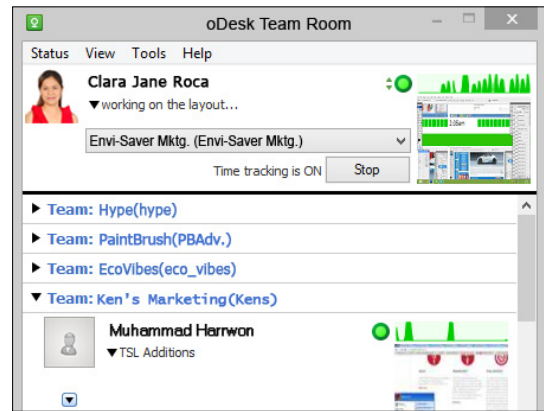
Before you start working, set up a kickoff meeting or write a message to your client. Make a list of what you need, including passwords and permissions to any databases or websites, access to any Google Docs or Basecamp tools, and contact info for team members you'll be working with.

Establish a client communication plan that details how often you'll need to report on progress. You can communicate with your client through the oDesk Message Center, email, or chat, but choose one method and stick with it to avoid confusion.

Using the Team App

If you're starting an hourly contract, you'll have to download the Team App to enter hours and get paid for your time.

The Work Diary feature of the Team App tracks your time and takes work-in-progress snapshots at random times in 10-minute intervals. These snapshots reassure your client that work is being done and allow us to guarantee you'll be paid, even if a dispute arises. (You can always delete the ones you don't want shared and billed to your client!)



Your client may set a maximum number of hours you can log in one week. Know your limit and tell your client when you're getting close to reaching it. This allows them to decide whether to increase the limit or wait until next week to continue.

When the workweek is over, you and your client have a chance to review your timelogs before they are finalized and payment is processed. The workweek ends every Sunday and your earnings become available 10 days later.

WEEK 1							WEEK 2							WEEK 3			
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	
Workweek							Client Review							Security Hold			Pay Day

TRACKING YOUR OFFLINE TIME

Does your job require work that can't be tracked via a screenshot? No problem. This is called manual time, and it can be used to log time for phone calls, sketching, offline research, and other non-digital components of the project. Because manual time isn't protected by the oDesk Guarantee, clear it with your client first and be extra communicative to avoid disputes.





Mutual trust, honesty, and respect keep the oDesk workplace professional and secure. And every hourly contract is covered by the oDesk Guarantee that an hour worked is an hour paid.

To avoid disputes and have the safest work experience possible, follow these rules of thumb:

- ➔ If it looks too good to be true, it probably is. Use your best judgment when applying to jobs and don't be afraid to ask questions if you have any concerns.
- ➔ If you don't know it, don't click it. Only download files onto your computer or click links from identified trusted sources.
- ➔ Avoid any client who requests free work in exchange for feedback, and never pay for the chance to work!
- ➔ Research your potential client to decide if you want to work with them. Verify legitimacy by looking at their:
 - Jobs posted
 - Number of hires
 - Current team size
 - Verified payment method
 - Feedback received
 - Budget or hourly rate paid for past jobs
 - Total amount paid or hours billed to date

If a job post looks suspicious, please report it to our Customer Support team. Keeping your online workplace safe is our top priority, and we work around the clock to remove inappropriate content.

Project Management 101

Managing your own projects is a big part of working online. This may mean juggling multiple jobs and deadlines, all while communicating with your client and doing great work. Help yourself out by:

→ **Being your own best manager**

Take responsibility for doing excellent work and delivering on time, every time.

→ **Setting expectations**

Establish realistic deadlines and give your client regular progress updates.

→ **Resolving issues quickly**

No project is perfect, so be proactive and honest when problems arise.

→ **Using a project management tool**

Or simply use a spreadsheet to track what needs to be done. Create a project road map to help tackle each phase of the project, one by one.

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES



Things go wrong. Power goes out. The weather goes bonkers. Prepare yourself for emergencies by:

- Backing up your data frequently, especially if you live in a place where power outages are common.
- Having a secondary way of working despite power or tech failures.
- Writing down your clients' contact info so that you can get in touch even when you're offline.

Dos and Don'ts of Written Communication

- DO** be professional and polite. A safe bet is to behave just little bit more formally than your client.
- DON'T** use **ALL CAPS** unless you truly need to emphasize a point. All capitals can be interpreted as shouting.
- DON'T** use too many emoticons. They can come off as unprofessional.
- DON'T** use slang like “I dunno” or “gotta,” and definitely steer clear of “TTYL” and other text shortcuts.
- DO** be careful with your jokes. Humor can translate poorly in written form and across cultural gaps.
- DON'T** bring up religion, politics, or personal issues in your professional communications.
- DO** be concise. It's your job to save your client time while communicating thoroughly. After you write an email, give it a quick reread to see whether you can convey the same information in fewer words.

Following up

You're responsible for keeping your projects on track, so if you sent something to a client and haven't heard back, follow up with a friendly note to make sure your work was received. And don't wait too long. Your original email may have been swallowed by a spam filter.

A NOTE ABOUT CHAT

IM and voice chats are great tools to touch base and get quick answers to questions. Let clients know your availability and keep an eye out for their chats. Get in touch before initiating a call so you don't catch a client by surprise, even if their IM status shows “online/available.”



★ ★ You're Done! Now What? ★ ★

When a job is finished

Once you deliver the final product, send an email to thank your client and let them know you're available if they have questions or concerns.

If your contract remains open, your client may still be reviewing your work. But because you receive feedback only after the job is closed, feel free to ask them to close the job once the work is reviewed.

Get ready for more work

Update your portfolio once a job is done, adding an image or link to the final product if your client has given you permission to do so. Learned something new? Add it to your overview and skills list. And if you strengthened a skill, retake the skills test or mention that skill more prominently.

DO GREAT WORK, GET GREAT FEEDBACK, GROW YOUR CAREER



Once you complete a job, your client will rate your work from 1 to 5 stars and leave a note about their experience. Delivering quality work and being a pleasure to work with are the most important things you can do to get positive feedback.

Congratulations on a job well done. Now that you have experience, it will be easier to land another job and increase your hourly rate.





Print this out and
pin it up where you work.

oDesk

★ 7 ★

Seven habits of Successful Contractors

1 **Communicate early, communicate often**
Be proactive—don't make your client come to you.

2 **When in doubt, ask**
This will help clear up confusion, save time, and keep the job going smoothly.

3 **Set clear expectations**
Provide honest and realistic project updates and quickly alert your client when you encounter a problem.

4 **Respond quickly**
Clients get concerned when they don't hear from a contractor.

5 **Hit deadlines**
Deliver your work on time, every time. If you think you'll miss a deadline, let your client know so they can plan accordingly.

6 **Be a pleasure to work with**
Listen to your client's concerns and respond with a smile. A positive attitude is key to building your professional reputation.

7 **Under-promise, over-deliver**
Never promise more than you can deliver and always give a little extra to every job. That's the secret to happy clients and a successful career!