



HOW TO SURVIVE AS A FREELANCER

THE HANDBOOK



Starting out as a freelancer in television can be a daunting experience. It's a fast-paced, vibrant and creatively stimulating industry, but it's also ruthlessly fast-paced, overwhelmingly competitive and highly demanding.

How do you make those vital connections? How do you brush aside the competition with your CV? How do you dazzle in the interview to win the role, and how to do you ace the job so the first person to get a call on the next production is you?

RTS Futures, part of the Royal Television Society, aims to help graduates and those in the early stages of their career to progress and learn about different areas of television. As part of our event, we've asked five hugely experienced and respected tv folk to share their top tips on specific areas to help us create this survival handbook.

Dawn Beresford (Creative Executive, CPL) will be offering top tips about networking.

Caroline Carter (Talent Executive, BBC London Factual & Current Affairs) will interrogate the perfect CV.

Martin Conway (Series Producer, First Dates, Twenty Twenty) will analyse about how to prepare for interviews.

Kathryn Taylor (Series Producer, Who Do You Think You Are, Wall to Wall) will dissect what's expected on the job.

Jude Winstanley (Production Manager & Director of The Unit List) will tackle managing your money, and the tricky topic of negotiating contract.

You'll find their words of wisdom on the following pages...take note, and good luck!

APPROACHING TV COMPANIES / NETWORKING

Dawn Beresford: Creative Executive, CPL

Keep introductory emails reasonably short - no longer than 3 paragraphs - and attach your CV and keep CVs to 2 pages maximum.

Do not flood a company with introductory emails. If there is a Talent Executive or Talent Manager email that person. Do not also email the Managing Director, Head of Production, Creative Directors, etc. By all means email anyone within the company you know or have been recommended to contact. Otherwise, focus on the Talent person as all CVs get forwarded to them. The Talent person will forward your CV to relevant Executive Producer / Series Producer / Production Manager.

If someone recommends you to get in contact with a particular person / company, follow up on this and do it.

Keep in contact with key people from productions you have worked on - in particular, Production Managers, your line manager, Series Producers, Producer Directors. Everyone you make a good impression on has the potential to recommend you for another job.

Keep in contact with Talent Execs / Talent Managers. Call or email when your contract end is in sight and let them know your availability and if your availability changes.

Go to all of the industry or company drinks / parties / forums / networking events you are invited to. These are great opportunities to meet senior staff within production companies / broadcasters. It is an appropriate forum to approach people about upcoming jobs / opportunities.

When senior staff are busy in production or in development, it's not always the best time to ask them about what's coming up next.

THE PERFECT CV: TOP TIPS

Caroline Carter: Talent Manager, BBC

A CV often gets separated from a covering letter – so the CV must stand up in its own right. Remember: your CV is a summary of your skills & experience & is a tool to sell them to a prospective employer.

Make it easy for a Recruiter to find your CV. When sending a CV to an employer, put your name in the email subject heading – not 'Hello' or 'My Availability ...' Talent Managers get dozens of CVs every week ... you need to make yours easy to locate! Save your CV with your name and job title on it and date. A file titled 'My CV' is hard to find. Save as something along the lines of 'Caroline Carter - Talent Manager CV - October 2014'.

A CV should be 2 pages long - no more – despite your length of experience. Some people have separate CVs for their TV & commercials or other work. Another trick is to separate Production credits from Development within the CV.

A CV should be presented clearly & simply so it is easy to scan & easy to read & to pick out key information. Most recruiters staffing projects have a 'shopping list' of skills they are looking for – so your CV needs to quickly enable people to see what your USP & skills are. Avoid long blocks of text – recruiters whizz through CVs at speed. Bulleted lists are easier to scan.

Fonts: don't jazz up your CV with photos, colours, company logos or a fancy layout – they distract, and the logos take up valuable space. **Simple is best.**

Never lie. TV is a very small industry, people have a habit of knowing each other and you'll be found out. Similarly don't exaggerate and write 'Experienced self-shooting PD' if you can only shoot 2nd camera...be honest about what you did and what you were contracted as.

THE PERFECT CV: LAYOUT GUIDE

Caroline Carter: Talent Manager, BBC

In my view your CV should be laid out in the order below:

NAME & ROLE: Always put your role clearly at very top after your name, e.g. Caroline Carter – Producer/Assistant Producer.

CONTACT DETAILS: Mobile and email.

PERSONAL STATEMENT PARAGRAPH &/or KEY SKILLS: Opinions differ on whether to have a short personal statement, or a list of skills, or both, but whichever you choose write these as a series of headlines to sell and sum up all your skills & experience; three or four short sentences tailored to the role you're seeking and summarising your main areas of experience & USP. Say more about what you've done than who you are; concrete skills/achievements over qualities. For example, list genres you specialise in, a brief resume of your technical skills (self-shooting, self-editing etc.), any specialist skills (languages/HEFAT training), other general skills such as working with established or new presenters, complex access, co-productions, graphics etc. and what you are looking for.

WORK EXPERIENCE: Your production credits listed in reverse chronological order (or non TV jobs where the skills are transferable). Always include the PRODUCTION TITLE, CHANNEL, DATES, JOB TITLE, with a line about what kind of show it was and your role on it. People want to know what you've done on a production...did you make tea, and carry props or develop the treatment, cast, self-shoot & edit it? If you were employed as a Runner and performed Researcher duties, don't describe yourself as a Researcher, but do list the research you did.

EDUCATION & TRAINING: Your degree, post grad, any journalism, camera or editing training. Plus any other industry training – for example health and safety, data protection, specialist areas of genre knowledge eg your dissertation.

REFERENCES: At least two and always put the contact details of your referees on the CV if possible, mobile and email address (with their permission!) From the moment you start in your role, you will be judged on your performance, how well your work in a team, how you deliver what's asked of you & how creative you are. These judgements, in the form of references, will be passed from one employer to another & are important to take into account when plotting your career.

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

Martin Conway, Series Producer

TV job interviews can be scary and confusing. Will it be formal, or will it be an informal cup of tea and a chat? Hedge your bets and prepare well no matter what kind of interview or meeting it might be, and remember...the person interviewing you, even if they don't offer you that particular job, could still be the person to offer you lots of other work in the future.

WHAT'S THE JOB?

Don't be afraid to ask exactly what you're being asked to come and be interviewed for. New series in particular are still being thrashed out at the crewing up stage and a lot is up in the air BUT if they don't tell you what the series is about and what the ambitions are, you won't be able to prepare. Some new series ideas are deliberately kept confidential until you get into the interview, but push for as much info as possible so you can think about how best to arrive with some ideas.

PREPARE

The most important - always prepare. Even if you're not explicitly asked for your ideas in the interview find a subtle way to illustrate that you can be creative, understand what the potential stories could be and can think analytically. Put some time aside the night before to think through the top line and purpose of the series and, depending on the role, the kind of people and/or stories you would like to see in it. Then think about how you would go about achieving those ideas - where could those people be found or how could those stories be produced? Or how could the series be directed in order to achieve what you think the series should be aiming to deliver? In an interview no ideas are wrong ideas, they start a discussion with the interviewer that ultimately can demonstrate your instinct for identifying, standing up and producing interesting stories. And, in simple terms, showing commitment, hard work and critical thinking through your preparation will illustrate that you can offer all of those things in the job itself.

RESEARCH THE COMPANY AND THE INTERVIEWER

As part of your preparation you should thoroughly research what you're walking into. What's both the long term and recent output of the company you're being interviewed by? What's your critical view of those programmes? What has your interviewer worked on previously? No one loves a sycophant, but being able to at least discuss both the company's and interviewer's previous output at least illustrates an interest in both.

TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

It's sometimes hard to judge whether you're going in for an informal "chat" about upcoming projects (perhaps with someone you know or have worked with before) or for something that might feel more like a formal interview. So always take the approach that it will be a proper interview (and all the preparation that requires) and you won't get caught out.

TAKE A CRITICAL VIEW OF YOUR PAST CREDITS

Some series are flawed, and we've all worked on them. TV series are massive collaborations made with the best of intentions, but sometimes they are flawed and it's never one person's fault. If you've worked on one of them, don't be afraid to talk about what the flaws were, what you observed and what you learnt from it. Equally, if you're lucky to be part of something successful, be sure to outline why it worked and what your contribution was. And be prepared to talk about when you have found things tough or found something a channel or a previous boss wanted hard to deliver. Making anything worthwhile is never easy, outline what you found hard, what your strategy was to solve it and how you won the day (...or not!).

THINK ON YOUR FEET

If an interviewer is trying to elicit ideas off you, particularly for a new series which the company wasn't prepared to tell you about over the phone, you're going to have to think on your feet. Don't feel under pressure, just enter into an exchange of ideas. Even volunteering a flawed idea that you can explore with the interviewer is better than just looking stumped. Rarely is an interviewer trying to catch you out, the best ones are simply attempting to draw out your own best performance.

EXPECT KNOCK BACKS

Don't take it personally when you lose out on a job. There are a million and one reasons why you might lose out on a job even after a strong performance in an interview. Series Producers are always trying to piece together a patch work of a staffing schedule with the reality of the best people's availability. Dates, schedules and even the roles required to make the series often change even when in production. Or perhaps you don't quite have the technical skill required (e.g. experience of using a new type of camera or office editing system) that the role may require. All you can do is give your best performance and give the SP a difficult decision re who to employ.

DON'T GIVE THEM AN EXCUSE TO SAY NO

Most jobs are oversubscribed and you will be up against lots of other people. Arm yourself in the long term by getting the skills you need to do the jobs you want. If you want to be a casting researcher, find a way to get your hands on the camera and/or editing system used most by casting teams. You might be able to do all the other aspects of the job so don't let your technical skills let you down as when faced with a long list of great people, a SP will need to make that list shorter.

SERIES PRODUCERS HAVE LONG MEMORIES

Take each interview as not just an opportunity to impress for that particular job but also for any other jobs the interviewer or the company might have come up in the future. As above, you can miss out on a job for all sorts of reasons. But Series Producers and employers remember and make a note of the people who impress them. The best teams are built on the best talent, get onto a Series Producer's, Talent Manager's or Channel's approved list and lots of work might come your way in the long term. Talent is rarer than you might think - if you're lucky enough to have it you're still going to need someone to

help develop your future. That person could be sitting across the table from you in this interview.

ASK FOR FEEDBACK

You are absolutely within your rights to ask for feedback and you have nothing to lose by doing so, particularly for something you were genuinely excited about being involved in. It might be useful, it might not (SPs are busy and might not always be able to give this the attention it deserves) but it certainly won't do any harm.

WHAT'S THE LONG TERM GOAL?

I often ask interviewees what they think their next career step might be. If you're just starting out, why work in TV in the first place? Or if you're a Researcher, what do you want to be in the long term, will you be PD-ing in five years or do you want to be a camera operator? Whatever it is, have a view on it and demonstrate your passion for your career and the craft.

DON'T WASTE PEOPLE'S TIME

People are often tempted to just "take the meeting," thinking that just meeting as many people as possible is somehow a good thing, even if you 1) don't particularly want the job they have on offer 2) aren't interested in what the company's output or the genre that particular SP is working in. If that's the case, don't waste anyone's time. If you're going to bother going to an interview do it with the positive mind-set that you want to impress. Going through the motions can do you more damage in the long term. If you're really not interested, don't go.

CHALLENGE THE INTERVIEWER

Clearly there's a line to be judged here but don't be afraid to challenge your interviewer's assumptions about how the series will be made. Are there flaws or problems or difficulties in delivering what a channel has asked for? Identify them and discuss them not as faults but as problems to solve and you might really impress.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS

The job has to be right for you too. And some interviewers might actively avoid outlining the worst parts of the role across working hours or time spent away on location. Know what you might be walking into so that, should you be made an offer, you can make a fully informed decision. You will only have yourself to blame if you find yourself cancelling holidays or weekend plans at the last minute when you could have found out the reality of what might be involved at the interview.

CAREFULLY JUDGE YOUR RATE

Befriend your first production manager and get them to outline the rate boundaries for each role for you. The boundaries as set out in series budgets are pretty clear, but when you're starting out you can feel some embarrassment about asking about the parameters. Find out the latest rate bands and pitch yourself accordingly.

WHAT'S EXPECTED ON THE JOB: THE DO's and DON'TS

Kathryn Taylor: Emmy Award-winning Series producer

Freelancing can be fraught with pitfalls, but a bit of forethought can prevent you from falling into the most obvious! Firstly you'll need to be flexible and enjoy change - if you want a car parking spot for life and a pension then freelancing may not be for you. Once you've decided that it is, be clear about what you have to offer to a prospective employer, and give thought in advance to what you want to get from the role on offer. Set a rate that is realistic and be ready to negotiate (up and down).

When on the job, learn from every stage of the process and embrace the opportunities to learn, however small they might seem. No two jobs will be the same and it might find you a while to find your niche. Be honest about what you have got to bring to the job, positive in the workplace, and respectful of every member of the team. Do enjoy your work!

Here are my do's and don'ts...

DO your homework! Check out the potential employer's track record - who they are, what they make - and if you are applying to join the team for a long running series, make sure you have watched the show!

DO choose potential employers whose output you enjoy - there is no point working on a programme you don't care about.

DO think first and speak second - we all want to make an impression when we start, but considered analysis is better than an uninformed opinion.

DO keep your eyes and ears open - be ready to learn from every member of the programme making team.

DO be relentlessly positive.

DON'T undersell yourself - false modesty will get you nowhere.

DON'T oversell yourself - arrogance is equally unpopular.

DON'T make a false distinction between editorial and production on the job - the one cannot live without the other.

DON'T badmouth your previous employer, series producer, exec ... the chances are someone will know them (or be married to them).

DON'T wait until the end of one contract before searching for the next one - it's easier to get a job while you've got a job.

BUSINESS TIPS FOR TV FREELANCERS

Jude Winstanley: Production Manager & Director of The Unit List

NEGOTIATING YOUR RATE

Be aware that at entry level you won't get much opportunity to negotiate your rate. You don't yet have the skills or specialist experience for the employer to be able to bargain with. The employer will have a set fee in mind and will offer it to you.

It's very important to ensure you are being paid at least the correct legal rate for a job of work. This must be at least the current National Minimum Wage rate, set by the government, plus holiday pay on top of that. Some employers in London, will choose to pay the London Living Wage rate (plus holiday)

Ask questions at the interview to determine what the role is and what sort of hours it may be, without it sounding like you are adding up how much money they must pay you. It's easy to offend an employer unintentionally by enquiring if they are paying you legally. Most of them will be.

When you reach about Researcher or Coordinator level, you are expected to start negotiating your rate. Do your research beforehand on the approximate weekly figure you would expect to be paid for that genre of job. You may have to ask people you know, as it's rarely listed online anywhere.

Ask at the interview how many days a week the job would be and adjust your weekly rate accordingly. You don't want to be having to work 6 days for your usual 5 day week rate, do you?

At interview, have a figure in mind you would accept for the job but ask for a bit more. You never know, they may think you are worth it! If what you ask and what they have in mind to pay you doesn't quite match, the employer may tell you how much they have in mind for the position and you can choose to accept it or lower your original figure.

Sometimes an employer may ask you 'what rate did you get on your last job?' This isn't really any of their business so don't feel you must be truthful, especially if the jobs are very different. You can answer this with, "For this job I would like X."

This is a good phrase to use, "For this job I would like £X for a 5 day week, plus holiday"

Be prepared for the employer to offer you less than you think the job is worth. Before turning the job down flat, consider if you really want to work at the company/with that team/on that location etc and if you can afford to do it if the programme really interests you. Each time this happens, you may consider a different outcome and that's ok too. It's not always worth it of course, but sometimes a lower paid job may lead you in the direction you really want to be.

CONTRACTS

Be aware that not all companies will issue a formal contract in legal speak. An email outlining the terms is sufficient to be considered a legal contract from either party in a court of law.

Send a friendly email to the production manager outlining the job you have agreed to do, where, when, for how long and the rate of pay agreed between you. This serves as a contract for what the employer has asked of you and what you understand the job to be and expect to be paid for. It's also a reminder to both you and them for payment, admin paperwork etc...

Always take time out to read and understand the contract. If you don't understand something, always ask before you sign it. NEVER sign a contract without reading it first. They are not all the same and you could be agreeing to something that you don't actually want to do and would have little recourse to change it after signing. Ask your production manager or HR department for assistance.

If you are unsure of your responsibilities for the role, always ask your line manager. Good communication in the team is key to achieving success.

PAYMENT

Let's be clear - 'self employed' is not the same as 'freelance' but you can be both things at the same time. Self employed (sometimes referred to by the historical term 'Schedule D') essentially refers to your tax status. It indicates that HMRC will allow you to invoice and manage your own tax and national insurance payments. Freelance means you do not always work for a single employer.

When you start working in television, you will usually be a Runner, Logger, Chaperone or assistant of some kind. HMRC, who manage the tax payments for the country, insist that employers put you on the payroll and the employer will deduct tax and national insurance payments from your salary before you get it, and pay it to the government for you. This is why your payslip will show you receive less money in your account than you agreed at the interview. Don't freak out - this is standard business practice in every industry.

If you have a student loan outstanding, once you start earning a certain amount, a contribution will be deducted from your salary by the employer and paid over on your behalf. This is also standard practice.

You will usually be given a 'start form' to complete on your first week at the company so they can get your bank details and national insurance number. If you don't get one, ask

your line manager how you get paid. This is your responsibility – the employer is not your mum!

It's your responsibility to ensure the employer has paid you so find out when payment should reach your account. Check your account to see if it's gone in. If it's not there, alert your line manager or production manager immediately so they can look into what has happened and sort it out.

You may find it of benefit to open a new bank account purely for payments coming in to you. It's then really easy to see if you have been paid and you aren't hunting through transactions at Pret and Sainsbury's for it. Just transfer the funds out and into your other accounts when you need to.

Ensure you retain all payslip, P45 and P46 forms for your records. Don't file them in the bin. If you are on emergency tax code (this often happens when you start at a new company until they get advice from HMRC on your correct tax code) a little more may come out of your salary each month initially but eventually it will return to the correct one and your money goes up again.

If you think your codes may be a bit messed up, you can call the special line at HMRC for Film and TV workers for advice about fixing it and possible cash rebates. I suggest googling 'HMRC Film & Production Unit' for the correct number. It should be in Tyne and Wear and begin with area code 0191.

BEWARE

Employers offering unpaid 'trial' periods. This is illegal and they are exploiting you. Often, there is not actually a job available at all, it's just free labour to them. Would a plumber accept an unpaid trial while they fixed your washing machine? Of course not!

Agents offering to sort out your tax rebate for you. They'll take a cut of whatever you get repaid. You can do it yourself with one phone call to the right department.

Companies you haven't ever heard of and can't find any information about them online that indicates they are a professional business and not a 'filmmaker' in their bedroom with a 5D from Argos, has no insurance and will never pay you.

Companies whose only presence online is a bunch of failed crowd-funding pages. Avoid!

COURSE

<http://www.indietrainingfund.com/courses/business-and-legal/freelancers-survival-guide/>