

# How Much Should I Charge?

By [Lynn Wasnak](#)

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It may seem strange to open a chapter on freelance pay rates by saying there are few "standard rates"-but if you look at the data, it's true. In this latest rate survey, as in surveys past, almost every category shows wide variation. Freelancers in general are an independent bunch-no groupthink for us! No matter how long and hard full-time freelancers beg their part-time and beginning counterparts to *not* write for free or for cheap-freelance writers and editors do what they've always done about rates. They charge whatever they please. They guess what the market will bear. Sometimes they get the rate they want, sometimes not, but decisions on rates are made individually.

Freelancers are not interchangeable widgets. What you as a freelancer offer for sale is simply *yourself*. The teeming contents of your brain-skills, abilities, personality, experience-form a unique combination that no one else can duplicate. It's no secret the pros make money writing by finding outlets where their special qualities meet needs for which others are willing to pay. Factors affecting pay range include product complexity (technology and medical writing pay higher rates than general topics) and geographic location (rates tend to be higher on the coasts than the Midwest, while urban rates are higher than small towns or rural areas).

Overall pay rates and volume were down the past two years, yet some freelancers enjoyed gains despite the economic downturn. Those with improved income found new markets when old ones collapsed. They made the choice to keep going despite the difficulty. You can too. Becoming a well-paid writer takes a little study, a lot of networking, and plenty of practice.

## WHERE DO YOU FIT IN?

Three variables can help you determine where you fit on the freelance pay scale:

1. **Expertise and experience.** How well can you craft the results a publisher or client expects in the given category? Have you done it before? Can you demonstrate your skill with clips or samples?
2. **Special knowledge.** How thoroughly do you know this subject area?
3. **Chutzpah, courage, confidence-or just plain nerve.** Aside from basic writing skills, this may be the most important quality any freelancer can develop. From contacting new markets to negotiating rates and contract terms, you must believe in yourself.

Next, develop a sound pricing strategy. Monitor your personal writing, research, and editing speed on typical assignments to convert per word or per page rates to a targeted hourly range. (Rates of production vary, but one rule of thumb is to plan for about three hours per page of copy.)

## HOW DO YOU DETERMINE YOUR RATES?

To choose the income target you want from freelancing, remember that as an independent business person you must pay all your overhead, health benefits, vacation pay, retirement savings and taxes. Also, you must set aside regular time for marketing, accounting, and other nonbillable work. Total cost of living, expenses, and overhead are then divided by billable hours to figure the minimum per-hour rate you need to stay afloat. Billable hour estimates range from 1,000 to 1,500 hours per year. A quick ballpark estimate takes hourly rate X 1,000 hours to project potential annual income: i.e., \$55/hour X 1,000 hours = annual income of \$55,000. (To fulfill this goal, though, you need 1,000 hours of billable work!)

Once you have determined your estimated hourly rate, you can use it to decide if you'll earn more than the average fast-food employee on a particular assignment. You can also use the rate to prepare project rates-a single all-inclusive fee where Project X is delivered for Y amount by Z deadline. Many clients and publishers prefer project rates, since they know the

total cost in advance. It's good for the freelancer who works fast, too. If a given assignment pays \$500, but takes 40 hours to complete, you've earned \$10.50 an hour. But if you do that same assignment in 10 hours, you've earned \$50 an hour--and have 30 hours left over to devote to another paying project. Some freelancers add an extra "hassle factor" charge for difficult clients or rush jobs.

The following rates are generic basics to get you started in setting a personal fee. Learn the going market rates for specific projects of interest by networking with other writers in your region and joining professional writers' organizations. The benefits received from membership in professional writers' organizations--learning to thrive as a writer--will more than offset the annual fees.

### **ADVERTISING, COPYWRITING & PR**

**Copywriting:** \$300/half day, \$500/full day on-site in agency.

**Advertising copywriting:** \$120 high/hour, \$33 low/hour, \$66 average/hour; \$750 high/project, \$250 low/project, \$525 average/project; \$1.50/word.

**Book jacket copywriting:** \$100 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$65 average/hour; \$500 high/project, \$75 low/project, \$300 average/project.

**Campaign development or product launch:** \$150 high/hour, \$60 low/hour, \$82 average/hour; \$7,500 high/project, \$1,500 low/project, \$3,740 average/project.

**Catalog copywriting:** \$85 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$60 average/hour.

**Copyediting for advertising:** \$120 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$60 average/hour; \$120/project for 1,000 words.

**Direct-mail copywriting:** \$150 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$78 average/hour; \$15,000 high/project, \$500 low/project, \$5,000 average/product.

**E-mail ad copywriting:** \$100 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$70 average/hour; \$2,500/project.

**Event promotions/publicity:** \$100 high/hour, \$45 low/hour, \$67 average/hour.

**Fund-raising campaign brochure:** \$75 high/hour, \$23 low/hour, \$58 average/hour; \$2,000 high/project, \$1,000 low/project, \$1,500 average/project.

**Political campaigns, public relations:** \$75 high/hour, \$23 low/hour, \$49 average/hour.

**Press kits:** \$125 high/hour, \$53 low/hour, \$85 average/hour; \$5,000 high/project, \$1,000 low/project, \$2,334 average/project.

**Press/news release:** \$100 high/hour, \$23 low/hour, \$62 average/hour; \$1,000 high/project, \$75 low/project, \$305 average/project.

**Public relations for businesses:** \$115 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$76 average/hour.

**Public relations for government:** \$60 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$49 average/hour.

**Public relations for organizations or nonprofits:** \$95 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$56 average/hour.

**Public relations for schools or libraries:** \$75 high/hour, \$50 low/hour, \$65 average/hour.

**Speechwriting/editing (general):** \$100 high/hour, \$65 low/hour, \$83 average/hour; \$6,000 high/30-minute speech, \$2,700 low/30-minute speech, \$4,064 average/30-minute speech.

**Speechwriting for government officials:** \$90 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$52 average/hour.

**Speechwriting for political candidates:** \$60/hour.

### **AUDIOVISUALS & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS**

**Copyediting audiovisual:** \$85 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$58 average/hour.

**Business film scripts (training and information):** \$125 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$82 average/hour; \$500 high/run minute, \$200 low/run minute, \$325 average/run minute; \$550 day rate (with discount up to 20% for multiple-day project); \$3,500 high/project, \$1,500 low/project, \$2,500 average/project.

**Educational/training film scripts:** \$100 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$77 average/hour; \$6,000 high/project, \$1,500 low/project, \$3,500 average/project; \$500 high/run minute, \$200 low/run minute, \$325 average/run minute; \$500 high day rate, \$300 low day rate,

\$400 average day rate.

**Corporate product film:** \$100 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$70 average/hour; \$500 high/run minute, \$200 low/run minute, \$325 average/run minute.

**Movie novelization:** \$10,000 high, \$5,000 low, \$7,000 average.

**Options (feature films):** First 180 days, 5% WGA minimum; 10% minimum each 180-day period thereafter.

**Radio editorials:** \$70 high/hour, \$50 low/hour, \$60 average/hour.

**Radio interviews:** \$1,500 high, \$35 low, \$100 average (rates depend on who you are and how badly the radio station wants you); \$100 high/run minute (produced pieces over 2 minutes), \$65 low/run minute (produced pieces over 2 minutes), \$75 average/run minute (produced pieces over 2 minutes).

**Radio commercials/PSAs:** \$85 high/hour, \$70 low/hour, \$72 average/hour.

**Script synopsis for business:** \$70/hour; \$20/news show.

**Screenwriting (original screenplay):** \$91,495 high, \$48,738 low, \$70,117 average.

**Script synopsis for agent or film producer:** \$2,000 or \$500/day.

**Scripts for nontheatrical films for education, business, industry:** \$100 high/hour, \$55 low/hour, \$80 average/hour; \$500 high/run minute, \$200 low/run minute, \$325 average/run minute; \$5,000/script (starting point).

**TV news story/feature:** \$100 high/hour, \$70 low/hour, \$90 average/hour.

**TV scripts (nontheatrical):** \$150 high/hour, \$70 low/hour, \$100 average/hour; \$1,000 high/day, \$550 low/day, \$800 average/day; \$250/page; \$1,200 (minimum)/project.

**TV scripts (teleplay/MOW):** \$500 high/run minute, \$200 low/run minute, \$350 average/run minute; \$6,567 story only (30 minutes or less); \$19,699 (plus teleplay); \$11,560 (story only); \$28,974 (plus teleplay).

**TV commercials/PSAs:** \$85 high/hour, \$60 low/hour, \$73 average/hour.

## **BOOK PUBLISHING**

**Abstracting and abridging:** \$35 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$33 average/hour.

**Anthology editing:** \$60 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$39 average/hour.

**Book proposal consultation:** \$60 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$48 average/hour; \$500/project.

**Book proposal writing:** \$60 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$47 average/hour; \$5,000 high/project, \$500 low/project, \$2,300 average/project.

**Book query critique:** \$55 high/hour, \$45 low/hour, \$51 average/hour; \$30/page.

**Book query writing:** \$500 high/project, \$120 low/project, \$200 average/project.

**Children's book writing:** Advance against royalties: \$10,000 high, \$200 low, \$4,900 average.

**Content editing (scholarly):** \$80 high/hour, \$20 low/hour, \$40 average/hour; \$3-\$5/page; \$850-\$2,000/project.

**Content editing (textbook):** \$65 high/hour, \$20 low/hour, \$36 average/hour.

**Content editing (trade):** \$75 high/hour, \$20 low/hour, \$46 average/hour.

**Copyediting:** \$75 high/hour, \$17 low/hour, \$38 average/hour; \$3,000 high/project, \$1,000 low/project, \$1,875 average/project.

**Fiction book writing (own):** \$7,500 advance against royalties.

**Ghostwriting, as told to:** \$55 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$40 average/hour; \$55,000 (one report)/project.

**Ghostwriting, no credit:** \$80 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$55 average/hour; \$20,000 (one report)/project.

**Indexing:** \$8 high/page, \$2.35 low/page, \$3.50 average/page.

**Manuscript evaluation and critique:** \$65 high/hour, \$45 low/hour, \$55 average/hour; \$1,500 high/project, \$350 low/project, \$950 average/project.

**Movie novelization:** \$7,000.

**Nonfiction book writing (own):** Advance against royalties: \$150,000 high, \$5,000 low, \$25,500 average; (textbook) \$60/hour.

**Nonfiction books (collaborative):** Advance against royalties: \$30,000 high, \$5,000 low, \$15,700 average; \$65 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$50 average/hour.

**Novel synopsis (general):** \$60 high/hour, \$45 low/hour, \$51 average/hour.

**Proofreading:** \$45 high/hour, \$16 low/hour, \$26 average/hour; \$3 high/page, \$1 low/page, \$2 average/page.

**Research for writers or book publishers:** \$75 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$49 average/hour; \$500/day.

**Rewriting:** \$75 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$46 average/hour.

**Translation:** (fiction) 12¢ high/target word, 6¢ low/target word, 9¢ average/target word; \$10,000 high/book, \$7,000 low/book, \$8,500 average/book; (nonfiction) 15¢ high/target word, 8¢ low/target word, 10¢ average/target word; (poetry) \$15 high/page, \$0 low/page, \$7.50 average/page.

**Work for hire (flat fee, no royalties):** \$10,000 high, \$1,000 low, \$2,484 average.

## **BUSINESS**

**Annual reports:** \$150 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$65 average/hour; \$15,000 high/project, \$3,000 low/project, \$8,334 average/project.

**Associations and organizations (writing for):** \$100 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$62 average/hour; \$20,000 high/project, \$2,500 low/project, \$7,500 average/project.

**Brochures, fliers, booklets for business:** \$150 high/hour, \$28 low/hour, \$75 average/hour; \$100/page; \$5,000 high/project, \$500 low/project, \$3,125 average/project.

**Business editing (general):** \$100 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$57 average/hour.

**Business letters:** \$150 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$70 average/hour; \$1,200 (minimum) high/project, \$200 low/project, \$500 average/project.

**Business plan:** \$150 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$80 average/hour.

**Business writing seminars:** \$200 high/hour, \$65 low/hour, \$83 average/hour; \$3,500 high/project, \$1,000 low/project, \$2,250 average/project.

**Catalogs for businesses:** \$150 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$73 average/hour; \$2,500 high/project, \$2,000 low/project, \$2,250 average/project.

**Consultation on communications:** \$150 high/hour, \$28 low/hour, \$84 average/hour; \$500/half day; \$1,200 (minimum)/project.

**Copyediting for business:** \$100 high/hour, \$27 low/hour, \$57 average/hour; \$4/page.

**Corporate histories:** \$115 high/hour, \$28 low/hour, \$71 average/hour; \$200/printed page.

**Corporate periodicals, editing:** \$100 high/hour, \$27 low/hour, \$56 average/hour.

**Corporate periodicals, writing:** \$125 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$72 average/hour; \$2/word.

**Corporate profile:** \$115 high/hour, \$80 low/hour, \$98 average/hour; \$350/project (200 words); \$1.40/word.

**Ghostwriting for business (usually trade magazine articles for business columns):** \$115 high/hour, \$50 low/hour, \$82 average/hour.

**Government research:** \$100 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$65 average/hour.

**Government writing:** \$100 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$64 average/hour.

**Grant proposal writing for nonprofits:** \$100 high/hour, \$15 low/hour, \$49 average/hour.

**Newsletters, desktop publishing/production:** \$100 high/hour, \$23 low/hour, \$54 average/hour; \$3,800 high/project (4 pages), \$1,000 low/project (4 pages), \$2,520 average/project (4 pages); \$750/page.

**Newsletters, editing:** \$100 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$53 average/hour.

**Newsletters, writing:** \$150 high/hour, \$23 low/hour, \$63 average/hour; \$1 high/word, 30¢ low/word, 69¢ average/word.

**Translation (commercial, for government agencies, technical):** Rates for translating vary widely, from 12¢ to 20¢/target word, depending on language combination (source and

target) and area of specialization. (Example: Spanish is inexpensive, Chinese is expensive.) Also may charge by target line (\$1.20 line) or \$90-\$120/1,000 words.

#### **COMPUTER, SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL**

**Computer-related manual writing:** \$125 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$75 average/hour.

**Copyediting scientific journals:** \$18/hour (one report).

**E-mail copywriting:** \$150 high/hour, \$50 low/hour, \$77 average/hour; \$1,200/project (minimum).

**Medical and science editing:** \$100 high/hour, \$16 low/hour, \$54 average/hour.

**Medical and science proofreading:** \$75 high/hour, \$16 low/hour, \$35 average/hour.

**Medical and science writing:** \$200 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$86 average/hour; \$5,000/project.

**Online editing:** \$120 high/hour, \$28 low/hour, \$58 average/hour.

**Technical editing:** \$100 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$51 average/hour.

**Technical writing:** \$110 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$66 average/hour.

**Web page design:** \$75 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$59 average/hour; \$4,000 high/project, \$500 low/project, \$2,000 average/project.

**Web page editing:** \$120 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$65 average/hour.

**Web page writing:** \$120 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$75 average/hour; \$1 high/word, 50¢ low/word, 69¢ average/word; \$300 high/page, \$50 low/page, \$150 average/page.

**White Papers:** \$120 high/hour, \$45 low/hour, \$80 average/hour.

#### **EDITORIAL/DESIGN PACKAGES**

*(Editor's note: For more information about photography rates, please see [2004 Photographer's Market](#).)*

**Desktop publishing:** \$150 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$61 average/hour.

**Greeting card ideas:** \$60/hour; \$125 high/card, \$25 low/card, \$77 average/card.

**Photo brochures:** \$75 high/hour, \$65 low/hour, \$70 average/hour.

**Photo research:** \$75 high/hour, \$60 low/hour, \$69 average/hour.

**Photography:** \$125 high/hour, \$60 low/hour, \$83 average/hour; \$100 high/photo, \$10 low/photo, \$35 average/photo.

**Picture editing:** \$150 high/hour, \$40 low/hour, \$60 average/hour.

#### **EDUCATIONAL & LITERARY SERVICES**

**Educational consulting and designing courses for business or adult education:** \$50 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$45 average/hour; \$2,500 high/project, \$600 low/project, \$1,213 average/project.

**Educational grant and proposal writing:** \$50 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$43 average/hour; \$2,500 high/project, \$600 low/project, \$1,550 average/project.

**Manuscript evaluation for theses/dissertations:** \$95 high/hour, \$20 low/hour, \$46 average/hour; \$1550 high/project, \$250 low/project, \$700 average/project.

**Poetry manuscript critique:** \$200 high/hour, \$75 low/hour, \$100 average/hour.

**Presentations at national conventions by well-known authors:** \$30,000 high/event, \$1,000 low/event, \$5,000 average/event. (Note: Celebrity authors may earn much higher rates. Some presentations are given for travel expenses only or honorarium.)

**Presentations at regional writers' conferences:** \$10,000 high/event, \$50 low/event (or expenses only), \$1,180 average/event.

**Presentations to local groups, librarians, or teachers:** \$50/hour; \$250 high/event, \$35 low/event, \$129 average/event.

**Presentations to school classes:** \$900/day; \$500/half day; \$3,400 high/five-day visiting artist program, \$2,500 low/five-day visiting artist program, \$2,750 average/five-day visiting artist program. (Note: Some presentations to local groups and school classes given free or for a very nominal fee.)

**Readings by poets, fiction writers:** \$3,000 high/event, \$50 low/event, \$200 average/event (highest fees for celebrity writers).

**Short story manuscript critique:** \$200 high/hour, \$53 low/hour, \$75 average/hour;

\$5/page.

**Teaching college course/seminar (includes adult education):** \$4,500 high/course, \$500 low/course, \$1,827 average/course.

**Writer's workshop:** \$1,000 high/event, \$100 low/event, \$606 average/event.

**Writing for scholarly journals:** 14¢/word (one report); \$450/article. (Most scholarly writing is authored free as a "career enhancer.")

### **MAGAZINES & TRADE JOURNALS**

*(Editor's note: For specific pay rate information for feature articles, columns/departments, fillers, etc., please see individual market listings.)*

**Article manuscript critique:** \$35 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$30 average/hour.

**Arts reviewing:** \$300 high/project, \$25 low/project, \$125 average/project; \$1.25 high/word, 25¢ low/word, 75¢ average/word.

**Book reviews:** \$650 high/project, \$20 low/project, \$150 average/project; \$1 high/word, 5¢ low/word, 44¢ average/word.

**Consultation on magazine editorial:** \$200 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$95 average/hour.

**Content editing:** \$55 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$46 average/hour; \$6,500 high/issue, \$2,000 low/issue, \$4,250 average/issue.

**Copyediting:** \$55 high/hour, \$18 low/hour, \$40 average/hour.

**Fact checking:** \$20 high/hour, \$15 low/hour, \$18 average/hour.

**Ghostwriting articles (general):** \$100 high/hour, \$55 low/hour, \$77 average/hour; \$3,500 high/project, \$2,000 low/project, \$2,750 average/project; \$1.50 high/word, 75¢ low/word, \$1.25 average/word.

**City magazine, calendar of events column:** \$150 high/column, \$50 low/column, \$75 average/column.

**Consumer magazine column:** \$575 high/project, \$200 low/project, \$350 average/project.

**Consumer magazine feature articles:** \$4 high/word, 30¢ low/word, \$1.19 average/word; \$3,000 high/project, \$100 low/project, \$822 average/project.

**Magazine research:** \$100 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$52 average/hour; \$150 high/topic, \$100 low/topic, \$125 average/topic.

**Proofreading:** \$40 high/hour, \$25 low/hour, \$32 average/hour; \$7/page.

**Reprint fees:** \$700 high/project, \$20 low/project, \$200 average/project.

**Rewriting:** \$50 high/hour, \$35 low/hour, \$45 average/hour.

**Trade journal column:** \$1 high/word, 50¢ low/word, 74¢ average/word; \$550 high/column, \$75 low/column, \$219 average/column; \$50/hour.

**Trade journal feature article:** \$1 high/word, 15¢ low/word, 61¢ average/word; \$90 high/hour, \$50 low/hour, \$70 average/hour.

### **NEWSPAPERS**

**Arts reviewing:** 60¢ high/word, 10¢ low/word, 36¢ average/word; \$200 high/review, \$20 low/review, \$80 average/review.

**Book reviews:** 60¢ high/word, 25¢ low/word, 40¢ average/word; \$250 high/review, \$50 low/review, \$100 average/review.

**Column, local:** \$175 high/column, \$10 low/column, \$100 average/column.

**Copyediting:** \$35 high/hour, \$17.50 low/hour, \$26 average/hour.

**Editing/manuscript evaluation:** \$35/hour.

**Feature:** 50¢ high/word, 8¢ low/word, 22¢ average/word; \$1,500 high/project, \$50 low/project, \$276 average/project.

**Obituary copy:** \$75 high/story, \$35 low/story, \$50 average/story.

**Proofreading:** \$22 high/hour, \$18 low/hour, \$20 average/hour.

**Stringing:** \$300 high/story, \$150 low/story, \$225 average/story.

**Syndicated column, self-promoted (rate depends on circulation):** \$35 high/insertion; \$4 low/insertion, \$8 average/insertion.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

**Comedy writing for nightclub entertainers:** \$50 high/joke, \$5 low/joke, \$33 average/joke; \$500/group of jokes.

**Comic book or strip writing:** \$35 for short back-up script.

**Craft projects with instructions:** \$350 high/project, \$75 low/project, \$212 average/project.

**Encyclopedia articles:** \$200 high/article, \$50 low/article, \$125 average/article; 30¢/word.

**Family histories:** \$80 high/hour, \$30 low/hour, \$65 average/hour; \$20,000 high/project, \$5,000 low/project, \$9,500 average/project (plus expenses).

**Gag writing for cartoonists:** \$40/gag.

**Institutional (church, school) history:** \$125/printed page.

**Manuscript typing:** \$2.50 high/page, 95¢ low/page, \$1.27 average/page.

**Original prose story for comic book:** \$200.

**Playwriting for the stage:** 10% box office revenue (if any).

**Published plays:** \$100/10 minutes; \$300/one-act; \$400/three-act.

**Re(c)sume(c)s:** \$500 high/project, \$200 low/project, \$300 average/project.

**Story set in publisher's comic universe:** \$500. (Some write for percentage of profit, which may be \$0.)

**Writing contest judging:** \$250 high, \$0 low, \$50 average (includes some gift certificates or books. Judging of finalists may be duty included in speaker's fee.).

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**Lynn Wasnak** has experienced the highs and lows of full-time freelance writing for 25 years. She specializes in medical and business topics, and chases rainbows at every opportunity.