



41 Conversation Starters

To Negotiate Your Freelance Rates

Introduction

In 2022, frustrated by the ever-narrowing profit margins of freelance writing, I decided to do something about it. I started negotiating my rate on every single assignment that came my way.

The results were staggering. A whopping 68% of my work benefited from my willingness to ask, “Is that the best you can do.” I chronicled the process for the Canadian Freelance Guild’s publication, [The Storyboard](#), and I vowed never to stop negotiating.

You might think that I’m a natural negotiator, but the truth is that I find the entire process TERRIFYING! Trust me, you are not alone if you find this awkward or intimidating. I know how scary it is to claim your worth. But no one is going to fight for your finances harder than YOU. Along the way, I’ve learned that it helps to have some conversation starters on hand. These easy and natural prompts will help you get the process rolling (so you can start rolling in dough...)

I want to hear about your success stories!

Drop me a line at VanessaChiasson@gmail.com to tell me how you slayed your negotiation game, and please don’t hesitate to let me know if there’s anything I can help with. You can also explore my [full portfolio of services](#) for writers.



Use Time As A Prompt With Existing Clients

Asking for more money on specific dates can be a confidence booster. It feels less random to peg your increase to a point in the business calendar than, for example, April 13th or August 7th.

- “I wanted to give you advanced notice that, starting on July 1st, my hourly rate will increase by \$5. As always, I’m grateful for our ongoing partnership.”
- “In the new year, my rates will increase by 10%. I look forward to continuing our work together, and please don’t hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.”
- “Please be advised that, starting September 1st, my rates will increase from \$1.00 to \$1.10 a word. I appreciate your support and look forward to our future projects”.

Use Milestones As A Prompt With Existing Clients

You don’t have to explain your rates to anyone, but it can feel more comfortable to frame these discussions in a natural and logical way.

- “Since we last worked together, my rates have increased to...”
- “Since earning my M.A. last fall, my rates have been set at...”
- “Now that I’ve passed the ten-year mark in business, I’ve increased my per-word rate to ___ to reflect my seniority.”
- “This marks my third anniversary freelancing with you! I’m so proud of the pieces we’ve worked on together. Can we have a call to discuss my rates going forward? I’d like them to align more with my other projects.”

Negotiating New Freelance Assignments With New Editors

Set clear, firm expectations when you’re establishing new relationships.

- “I can’t wait to work with you on this piece. Would you have any wiggle room in your budget?”
- “This sounds like such an exciting project! Are you able to increase the hourly rate at all?”
- “I wouldn’t be doing my freelancer’s due diligence if I didn’t ask: Is that the best you can do on the rate?”
- “For these kinds of stories, I typically charge ___ a word. Can the publisher match that?”



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- “I’d like to check on some details. Please confirm the word count, share your preferred delivery method, and let me know if there’s any wiggle room in the budget.”

Negotiation Meets Justification

“Justification” is a tricky word in negotiation. You shouldn’t have to justify your need for a living wage! However, sometimes it does help to explain to your editors precisely why you’re asking for more money.

- “This piece will involve more interviews than normal. Are you able to raise the rate?”
- “This is a very sensitive piece to work on. Do you have any wiggle room in your budget?”
- “Before I commit to sharing my story in such a personal essay, I’d like to chat about rates. Are you able to pay ___ a word?”
- “This is a controversial topic, and I need to consider the potential impact of online harassment. Do you have flexibility with your proposed compensation”.
- “To be blunt, I know this piece will be polarizing. My name will be attacked along with the essay. Can you offer a better rate for this intense assignment?”
- “This assignment involves testing recipes/ campgrounds/ craft supplies. Can you increase the rate to account for the extra time in this project?”

Negotiating More Than Your Words

You know how this story goes. You negotiate what you think is a good rate for a reasonable word count, and then the creep begins. Photos, recipes, sidebars: That’s all extra stuff that YOU should be paid for!

- “I’m letting all my clients know that starting on ____, I won’t sit in on staff meetings unless necessary. It’s much more efficient for me to focus on story development instead. My new policy is to charge ___ per hour for attending meetings.”
- “Do you have a budget for photos?”
- “Can you increase the rate to account for using my images?”
- “What is your usual rate for adding a recipe to a food article?”
- “Are you able to pay extra for sidebars?”
- “For rush jobs, I charge an additional ____.”
- “My typical rate is for turnaround times of less than a week. Are you able to meet this?”



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- “If you’d like a social media promotions package, I have one for ___ that includes ___ posts on the following networks. Otherwise, I typically share new pieces to my portfolio.”

Negotiating Away From Low Paying Work

If you can’t ask for more money, ask for better-paying gigs.

- “Starting on ___, I won’t be able to continue doing the monthly business leader profile as I’ll be focusing more on feature stories. I hope that includes features for you too! I’d love to send you some story pitches next week.”
- “I’ve enjoyed working on these digital pieces with you and would love to offer some pitches for print as well. Do you have an editorial calendar you can share?”
- “I’ve enjoyed working with you on this vertical, and I understand that your hands are tied regarding rates. I’d love to collaborate again in the future on higher-paying projects. Can I reach out in January and check in about your editorial needs?”
- “To be frank, as much as I’ve enjoyed working on the ___ pieces, I need to free up my calendar for higher-paying features. I hope we can connect when you need ___ profiled during ___ season.”
- “Do you have any sponsored content that you need help with?”

Changing Conditions, Not Money

When working on passion projects with lower rates, there may be some things you can negotiate that make the situation more fiscally viable.

- “I bet there’s a solution that can work well for both of us. If the rate is already set in stone, do you have any flexibility in your word count?”
- “Since you pay a max of \$200 an article, can we take a different approach and break this assignment into smaller segments and create a series of three pieces?”
- “Can we adjust the writer’s rights in the contract? I’d like the flexibility to offer this piece to an international publication next year.”
- “Do you typically syndicate your content across several platforms or websites? Are you able to increase rates for the extra publications involved?”



Negotiation To Push Back

Pushback is rare. 99% of editors will either say yes or offer a kind no (often with a reasonable explanation). Rude pushback is extremely rare. However, it boosts my confidence to feel prepared with some helpful responses, even if I never need to use them.

- “Like all small business owners, I regularly review my rates and market conditions to establish a fair price for all parties.”
- “I look forward to delivering the same high standard that I always commit to my writing” (for reluctant negotiators who say things like “I expect really good content if I’m going to be paying you more”.)
- “Alternatively, if the board can’t increase your weekly budget, I can decrease my hours so your finances remain the same and my rate criteria is met. However, we must draw up a new agreement reflecting the more limited project scope.”
- “I am confident my rates reflect an excellent market value.”
- “As my business grows, I won’t remain accessible to all market segments. For budget-minded clients, I have a new writing workshop that will meet your needs if you want to take things in-house”.
- “I’m sorry you feel that way, and I wish you all the very best.”