

CAREER

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CLIENTS ONLINE



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Freelancing essentials for beginners

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Freelancing platforms, such as Fiverr and Upwork, have over 500,000 freelancers from Bangladesh. With each passing year, many more are signing up for the platform, aiming to make a living from the comfort of their homes.

However, one thing that many Bangladeshi freelancers struggle with is communicating with their clients. Having worked on these platforms for over five years, and also with foreign clients outside of these platforms, I have learned a few things in regards to this type of communication.

From my personal experience, I will share some of the things that all beginner-level freelancers should know when it comes to communicating with clients online.

Reply ASAP

Clients will be very appreciative of the fact that you reply or respond to their queries swiftly. Their query may or may not require urgent attention, but that shouldn't be a factor influencing you to not reply to them as soon as you can.

Client communication is usually carried out through emails, WhatsApp, Skype, or any other messaging platform. In some cases, the freelancing platform itself will be the only means of communication between you and your clients. Hence, the best way to ensure instant and speedy communication with your client is to download the mobile apps of the communication platform you two are using. That way, even when you're on the move or away from your PC or laptop, you can reply to their queries instantly.

Some queries might require a more thorough or elaborate response, and it's not always possible to provide it instantaneously. In such situations, simply tell them that you're looking into the matter, or are unable to provide a detailed response at the moment. You must also mention when they can expect that detailed response.

When working with foreign clients, you must remember that there might be a major time difference between you two. So, if you get a message from them late at night, don't get frustrated, because they'll operate as per their time zone and not yours. If you're unable to respond at such times, clarify this beforehand. That way, they won't be expecting your replies instantly in the first place.

Structure your reply

Some clients tend to ask a lot of questions in a single message. My approach to replying to such messages is very simple – I make multiple paragraphs, each dedicated to a single question.

At times, you might have to deal with a single query which requires multiple explanations or points. Make

paragraphs or numbered points here as well. Don't beat around the bush; they don't enjoy such conversations. Be direct and know what you want to say before typing it down and hitting the send button.

Prioritise clarity over accent

When working with people outside of America and Europe, most clients know that these individuals don't have a good grasp of the English language. Hence, they're usually fine with a lack of accent.

However, while accent doesn't matter, the clarity of what you're trying to communicate to them does. Therefore, when talking to clients directly over the phone, prioritise clarity instead of trying to fake an accent. For that, you don't need extensive vocabulary knowledge. Talk to them in short and clear sentences, and avoid dragging the conversation for too long.

That being said, if you do have an accent that sounds nice, more power to you. If anything, this ability of yours will earn you their praise, something that I had the good fortune of experiencing once when talking to a Spanish client. If speaking fluent English isn't your forte, don't worry. Clients will be more than happy to have you speak clearly to them.

Keep your conversations professional

Your clients are anything but your friends, unless you end up working with them for a very long time and they end up talking more casually to you. However, as a beginner, it's best to avoid casual conversations and keep things strictly professional.

Even then, if they do hit you up with a couple of casual talks once in a while, don't hesitate to reply to them accordingly.

Don't use abbreviations that your client themselves don't use, no matter how commonly they're used elsewhere. I once had to deal with an American client where they were repeatedly using abbreviations like ICYMI, FYI, BTW, EOD, etc. I didn't have any problem understanding these abbreviations, but the moment I used the abbreviation "LMK", which means "let me know", they were a bit puzzled. Since then, I hesitate using abbreviations that my clients don't generally use.

Is it that big of a deal? Not really. But at the same time, both you and your client surely value your time, and the last thing either of you want is a quick lesson on internet lingo.

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A few more tips for beginner-level freelancers

HIGHLIGHT YOUR WORK BEFORE YOUR SKILLS

Buyers will not put blind faith on your skills just because you said so. Instead, send them your portfolio first, with all your completed websites or mockups, and then brief them about your skills.

APPROACHING THE BUYER

As newbies, you have to send in your offer for the work that buyers post. Your proposals should contain your portfolio, a briefing on how you plan to proceed, and the time you need.

START WITH SMALLER PROJECTS

Many people would argue that if you can go big, why not? But it's best to start small and gain confidence, ratings, and most importantly, experience before trying to land a big deal.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

There will be clients who have no idea of what they want from you. It might fall on you to use your own creativity and experience to deduce what they actually need with the little info they provide.

AVOID GETTING BANNED

Freelancing websites, like Fiverr and Upwork, ban accounts if the account holders breach their website policies. It doesn't matter if you're new or have been a part of the platform since its birth, if you're flagged for inappropriate activities, your account is most likely to get banned.

