

# Lesson 1: Becoming a Freelancer

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**Learning Objective:** Understand what a freelancer is, the prerequisite steps to prepare yourself for freelancing, and the basics of entering the industry.

Congratulations on starting your TTRPG creative journey and dedicating time to building your expertise in your professional TTRPG freelancing career! This lesson covers three topics:

- What is a freelancer
- Preparing yourself for freelancing
- Getting your first assignment

## What is a Freelancer

This course defines the term “freelancer” as a tabletop roleplaying (TTRPG) writer who sells their services to a client. In this course, we’ll focus on publishers—a person or company that uses your work for publication in a TTRPG product—as your client since the standard of success for many freelancers is to work for reputable publishers in the TTRPG industry. Publishers hire freelancers to complete specified assignments such as designing adventures, monster stat blocks, magic items, player options, world setting material, or anything else a publisher might need created for their TTRPG products. As a freelancer, you are essential to the TTRPG ecosystem—many publishers lack full-time design staff to create their TTRPG products and rely heavily on freelancers to help create their products. The path to building a successful freelancing career is varied but there are some common best practices that if followed, increase your odds of meeting publisher expectations and landing fulfilling assignments that grow and enhance your freelancing career.

## Preparing yourself for Freelancing

Turning in quality work, on time, to specification to a publisher is one method of guaranteeing your success as a freelancer in the TTRPG industry. Failing to do so can cost you future opportunities and impact your reputation—publishers frequently talk to each other about which freelancers are dependable and which ones aren’t so make sure you live up to the expectations you agree to on every project! The first thing you need before you seek out freelancing work is an example of published material you created. Fortunately for you, self-publishing is easily achieved by using websites such as [DriveThruRPG](#), [Dungeon Masters Guild](#), or [itch.io](#) to self-publish your work. For an overview of self-publishing, watch [Getting into Game Design](#), a short 15-minute video by MCDM’s Lead Game Designer, James Introcaso that details the process of self-publishing TTRPG content. In addition to self-publishing a TTRPG product, you can pursue several educational methods to help ensure you are ready for your first freelancing

assignment. Educational methods include self-education, formal education, and mentorship; using one or more of these educational methods helps you prepare for your freelancing career.

## Self-Education

Self-education is the process of learning game design through informal study. This approach largely entails reading TTRPG rule books to learn a game system's ruleset so you can properly design new mechanics or adventures in line with that game system's design philosophy and style. Many TTRPG systems have a style guide, a document that provides guidance and writing standards for presenting information and text within their TTRPG products. An example of a style guide is the Wizards of the Coast's style guide available for free in the [DMs GUILD Creator Resource](#) pack on the Dungeon Masters Guild. In addition to reading TTRPG books or published style guides, you can read books or articles on game design to build your knowledge and skill set. The outcome of self-learning is varied and depends on your ability to have access to TTRPG books, style guides, and your ability to internalize game design styles. If you'd like to pursue self-education I recommend using the following to learn more about TTRPG game design:

- [Success in RPGs](#), a YouTube series for TTRPG creators of all experience levels by Teos Abadia
- [Kobold Guide to Game Design, 2nd Edition](#), a book with a compilation of game design advice by Kobold Press
- [Let's Design an Adventure](#), a series of game design articles by Shawn Merwin
- [The Anatomy of Adventure](#), a book with adventure design insights by M.T. Black
- [The Dungeon Master Experience](#), a series of game philosophy articles by Chris Perkins

## Formal Education

Formal education is the process of learning game design through structured learning programs and institutions. Pursuing formal education allows freelancers to provide certificates of learning to publishers—initially, this might help secure an assignment with a publisher since this provides evidence that you understand some degree of game design. There are various degrees of formal education from professional certificate programs to full-blown college degrees. The [Storytelling Collective](#) offers several affordable formal education courses for TTRPG game design to include courses on designing encounters, magic items, adventures, and more. If you'd like to pursue formal education I recommend taking the following affordable courses offered by the Storytelling Collective to learn more about TTRPG game design:

- [Dungeon Design Essentials: Moments](#)
- [Dungeon Design Essentials: Treasure](#)
- [Write Your First Adventure](#)
- [Write Your First D&D Encounter](#)

## Mentorship

Mentorship is a professional relationship between an experienced TTRPG creator referred to as a mentor and a less experienced TTRPG creator referred to as a mentee. The role of the mentor is to provide guidance, coaching, and advice to the mentee so that the mentee can grow and learn within the TTRPG industry. Mentorship is a powerful educational approach that enables mentees to learn TTRPG game design and industry lessons from mentors who are established freelancers or project leads working for publishers. These relationships help mentees improve their TTRPG game design and potentially lead to freelancing assignments if the mentor recommends the mentee for projects. You can seek out mentors in the TTRPG industry by sending a professional mentorship request to individuals in the TTRPG industry you regularly interact with. An example of a mentorship request is a professional message, such as an email or other comparable communicate, that includes a mentee's concise biography, portfolio, and industry goals. If you'd like to pursue a mentorship I recommend considering the following when approaching a potential mentor:

- Join a TTRPG community, build relationships with TTRPG creators, and request mentorship
- Be honest and upfront with your goals when you approach a potential mentor
- Don't be afraid to ask openly for mentorship

## Getting your First Assignment

Once you have a game design portfolio and are proficient in game design you can seek out your first freelancing assignment. There's no centralized job board or application process to land a freelancing assignment; rather the process is decentralized relying on word of mouth and irregular assignment announcements. The TTRPG industry is active on social media platforms such as Discord and Twitter where project leads or game designers that work for publishers regularly seek out and hire freelancers. Building a positive social media presence and showcasing your existing portfolio online while interacting with others in the community is a viable method of seeking out assignments. You want to show the TTRPG industry that you are professional, produce quality TTRPG content and are seeking freelancing assignments. This process takes time and might not come quickly, so it's best to work on self-publishing or getting involved in collaborative projects to continue to build up your portfolio and improve your game design experience.

## Real Talk: The Long Wait for an Assignment

As of this writing, there is no formal standard process publishers use to hire freelancers for assignments. The process of hiring freelancers is an informal process of networking and word of mouth. Getting your first assignment is a matter of circumstances you may not be able to control, so it's essential that when you finally get an assignment you successfully complete it so your network and renown via word of mouth increases. When I first began publishing TTRPG material on the Dungeon Masters Guild in September 2018 I was eager to freelance professionally. I was successful early on and several of my products surpassed 2,500 sales

while my social media presence grew on Twitter. I believed it'd only be a matter of time before big publishers reached out to me, but time dragged on with no assignment in sight. It wasn't until March 2021—two and a half years later—that I was finally offered my first freelancing assignment. After that first assignment, I've been fortunate to have continued work as a freelancer since I adhered to many of the lessons contained within this guide.

## Homework

Succeeding as a freelancer requires taking actionable steps to prepare yourself for opportunities. The homework for this lesson is to establish a professional portfolio and online presence. Complete the following homework assignments to establish your professional freelancing presence:

- Assignment 1:** Create an online portfolio, such as this example portfolio <https://anthonydreams.com/> easily made using [Carrd](#), to show prospective publishers your work. I recommend you choose a website that is easy to update your game design credits or products since you'll be updating this frequently.
- Assignment 2:** Create a professional social media profile with a link to your online portfolio. I recommend starting on Twitter as the TTRPG community is very active there and is a useful social media platform to connect with publishers looking to hire freelancers.
- Assignment 3:** Join an online TTRPG community and begin partaking in TTRPG discourse. I recommend spending time on Twitter using the #dnd and #ttrpg hashtags, or other TTRPG-related hashtags to join in on conversations. Discord is another great place to join communities, such as the [Storytelling Collective](#) or DMsGuild Creative Lounge discord servers. To join the DMsGuild Creative Lounge you'll need to find someone to invite you; join Twitter or a TTRPG-related Discord to ask around for an invite and you'll likely get one soon—consider this the first step in networking!

## Lesson Conclusion

You've made it to the end of lesson 1, congrats! The journey ahead covers a variety of topics you'll want to know such as:

- How much do freelancers make?
- What do publishers expect from freelancers?
- How does a freelancer grow and foster a professional presence on social media?
- How do publishers look for and hire freelancers? (As explained by publishers themselves!)

All this and more await you in your adventure to achieve freelancer glory!

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