



How Much?! Demystifying Pricing for Designers

A guide to pricing your work as an emerging designer with tips from experts in the industry



Table of Contents

- 03** Introduction
- 04** Frequently Asked Questions
- 06** Guide to Setting a Price
- 08** Case Studies
- 12** Acknowledgements

Introduction

This resource summarizes a panel and interactive workshop co-hosted by OCAD U's RBC Centre for Emerging Artists & Designers and the Graphic Design program on Feb. 16, 2021. The event provided OCAD U students and alumni first-person insights into determining and setting prices their work from designers **Julian Brown, Jessica Leong, Rebecca Wilkinson, and Graham Nhlamba**. This resource presents key reflections and lessons for emerging designers who are asked to provide a quote for a project. Rather than framing pricing as what a designer *should* be charging, this resource provides a starting point to consider:

- Strategies for setting a fair price,
- Research and questions to define scope of work,
- Methods to present the quote, and
- Strategies to communicate or negotiate with the client

Watch the recorded workshop at: vimeo.com/showcase/8411477

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is setting a fair price for your work important? Should new designers underprice themselves?

“Pricing can really affect your willingness to work on a project or how much work you put into a project. Taking on projects where you feel you’ve severely underpriced your work can lead you to feeling disgruntled and not putting in 100%.” **Rebecca Wilkinson**

“Clients actually respect you more if you believe that you deserve a fair working wage and they’ll be a lot more organized with working with you. They’ll actually take the time to send the assets to you and make sure a plan is in place because they know that it’s going to cost them money if you’re wasting your time.” **Rebecca Wilkinson**

“You could lose a job for charging too low because it may make you seem like an amateur. The client might wonder ‘does this person really know how much work this is going to be?’” **Graham Nhlamba**

What are some strategies to help you set prices?

“We were talking about this venn diagram of fame, fortune and fun. It’s not to say that every job has to hit all points. So step one is an honest evaluation of where this potential freelance job may sit within this venn diagram, and how that balances out with all the different things in your life, including all human aspects and needs” **Jessica Leong**

“Think about more than just yourself and the hours needed when pricing. Value-based pricing is a good way of putting your client, what they’re doing, and the project first. How much money are they going to make from this project? What does success look like?” **Julian Brown**

“You’re not just the designer on the project. There’s a whole part where you’re guiding the client, helping them understand who they are. You should account for those hours in which you’re helping them understand who they are.” **Jessica Leong**

When should you raise your prices?

“When you’re starting - always charge more. There’s no way you’re starting at the right scope. If you get an instant ‘yes’ you should think about raising your prices.” **Julian Brown**

“Start raising your prices today. Remember, if they approach you, they’re already interested in working with you.” **Graham Nhlamba**

What are some strategies to help you communicate and negotiate with clients?

“The value a client is giving you for working on a project doesn’t always have to be monetary. You can ask for a simple thing, like credits on work, but everything from scheduling to licensing is a possible alternative.” **Julian Brown**

“Set the context. You’re helping the client understand the value of this new design project and how it plays into their larger vision. Any advice should be backed up with an explanation to show that this is an informed perspective you’re offering.” **Jessica Leong**

“Frame everything as an opportunity. If you want to suggest a change, present it as an opportunity for the client and make them see the what the result of making a change would be.” **Graham Nhlamba**

“Explaining your process to clients is helpful. It draws clear lines to the steps you take to reach conclusions or suggestions for them. It makes them feel excited and makes them feel like they’re part of the process.” **Rebecca Wilkinson**

Additional Resources

- ↗ [Freshbooks](#)
- ↗ [Wave](#)
- ↗ [The Association of Registered Graphic Designers \(RGD\)](#)
 - ↗ [Business of Graphic Design Handbook](#)
 - ↗ [In house estimate worksheet \(pdf\)](#)
 - ↗ [Estimate sheet for clients \(pdf\)](#)
- ↗ [Creative Earners Report](#)

Guide to Setting a Price

STEP 1

Discovery & Research

Develop a clear sense of the deliverables required and the process needed to do the work.

- Do you understand the expected deliverables and key milestones the client wants?
- Have you clarified all the possible details of the brief?
- What's your stake in the project?
- Can the client provide a rough sense of their budget?
- What materials (i.e. past designs, mood boards, inspirations, similar projects, assets, etc.) can the client provide to help you understand the scope and needs?

STEP 2

Determining the Quote

Determine the actual number you will present as your quote to the client.

- For each deliverable, create a breakdown of how many hours it will take you. Speak to peers and mentors to get advice on how long something should take.
- A starting point to establish the quote is your ideal hourly rate x the number of hours it will take to complete the project.
- Consider the number you came up with: does it seem too low? If yes, your time estimate may be conservative or maybe you're charging too low of an hourly rate.

STEP 3

Presenting the Quote

Organize your quote to summarize the deliverables, process, and total price for the project.

- You can use project-based billing to present the quote. This means grouping the numbers into key deliverables to focus on what you're delivering to the client versus hourly billing that focuses on how long something takes you.
- Include any project-related expenses (i.e. typography, stock photography, test prints, etc) the client will need to cover separately.
- Include how you will charge for additional rounds of revisions outside of the quote (i.e. rate x hour / revision).
- Ask for a portion of the quote upfront (i.e. 50%).
- Include wording that articulates the process, timeline, etc. Consider the "Terms" you include at the end of the estimate.

STEP 4

Client Management

Strategize how you will negotiate and communicate with your client throughout the project.

- Determine an internal process for tracking your own time to make sure you're being paid fairly - you don't have to share this with the client.
- Don't start work until you've received confirmation that initial payment is processed.
- If you get pushback on the initial quote, modify the scope and present what's feasible with the rate they're proposing.
- If a client changes their mind on a project, discuss what's changed, reframe the estimate accordingly, send them that new quote.
- Consider bundling individual projects into packages with set timeframes, as opposed to one-off quotes for every deliverable.

Read Case Studies on the next page!

Through four case studies, read how you might approach pricing different types of design projects. Case studies cover possible questions to clarify, deliverables, and ways to present the quote to the client.

Case Study: Brand Identity

Led by Graham Nhlamba

Scenario

A local clothing designer has just started a small retail company which operates mainly online. They are looking for a versatile logomark which can be used on promotional material and on the clothes themselves. They have asked you to develop that mark as well as a style guide, some basic assets (stationery, invoices, promotional material, misc. ephemera).

Turnaround: 4 weeks

Graham's Advice

- **What are the specific deliverables of the identity?** Possible deliverables include visual toolkit, typefaces, colour palette, brand assets such as web banners, templates, and presentation deck.
- Breakdown the quote based on each deliverable.
- **Clarify how the client plans to use each asset as it could impact the final formats you'll deliver.** For example, will the client make t-shirts, use it on their storefront, for social media?
- **Additional costs to include in the quote** include the need to purchase fonts or stock images.



Graham Nhlamba

Graham Nhlamba is a designer, entrepreneur, OCADU alumni and avid dancer – born and raised in Zimbabwe. He merges social impact with his design, working towards building equity initiatives in and around his creative community – making considerable contributions to the development of initiatives such as OCADU's Black Youth Design Initiative & Anomaly's Equal Advantage. He has also helped build holistic brand identities and experiences for clients like Budweiser, Sea-Doo, Sportchek, We Rise Experience and Kai XR.

Case Study: Motion Graphics

Led by Julian Brown

Scenario

An independent documentary film production company is completing a film about the history of Hip Hop in Toronto. They have asked you to develop type-based motion assets for all title sequences, interstitials, and lower-thirds for the film.

Turnaround: 8 weeks

Julian's Advice

- The most important factor in determining cost is **the length of time the end product will be.**
- **Aspects of a motion graphics project usually include:** script, storyboard, design & illustration, animation, audio (music, sound fx, voiceover)
- **Delivery tech specs should be agreed on up front** (screen size/ratio, format), including any requests for extra versions (language, brand)



Julian Brown

Julian Brown is On The Chase! One guy. Ten years. 200+ motion projects. He's worked with tons of amazing clients including Cineplex, Shoppers Drug Mart, WWF and Elections Canada. Julian is a speaker on motion design, running a solo studio, talking about money... and sometimes telling people why their offices really f*cking suck. An active member of RGD, Julian is a VP on the RGD Board of Directors. He is a graduate of the York/Sheridan Design Degree program, a world traveller, and most recently, a proud and terrified father.

Case Study: Print Publication

Led by Rebecca Wilkinson

Scenario

The editors of a current issues magazine saw your instagram and have asked you to be the guest designer of their upcoming issue. The magazine is 48 page long and full color. You are expected to use their existing grid and typographic choices, but they want your designerly flourishes to come through.

Turnaround: 4 weeks

Rebecca's Advice

- **Ask questions about unknown variables.** For example, ask if there an established graphic language, what colours are within the approved palette, and if you need to develop new assets.
- **Figure out logistical information and process.** How will assets be delivered to me? Is text copy final? How much edits will be made to the copy throughout the process?
- **Ask for a meeting and to see materials in progress.** This can help you get a sense of their vision and the work involved.
- **Ask about the printing process and method** as it may affect your time and how you design.



Rebecca Wilkinson

Rebecca Wilkinson is a Toronto-based graphic designer originally from Montreal. Before returning to school for design, she worked as a freelance fashion stylist, producer, and art director in commercial photography. She received her design education from Concordia University in Montreal, OCAD University in Toronto, and the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK). Since graduating from OCAD in the spring of 2020, Rebecca has worked with clients in the food, fashion and cultural sectors as well as several Canadian design studios including Public Address, Rap Agency, and Concrete.

Case Study: Website

Led by Jessica Leong

Scenario

An architecture school is hosting a series of six lectures. They would like you to design/develop a simple website (as well as graphics for social media) to advertise the forthcoming talks. The website needs to be clear, novel, and you would be expected to maintain it for the duration of the semester that the lectures take place.

Turnaround before launch: 8 weeks

Jessica's Advice

- **Put together a list of clarifying questions regarding information that you're missing.** This includes clarity of terms like "clear", "simple", "novel", and expectations of the actual work you will have to do.
- **Breakdown the project into:** planning, research and analysis, concept and ideation, further refinement and development, delivery, and maintenance
- **What milestones** are expected from you during the eight weeks?



Jessica Leong

Jessica Leong is a detail-led designer who helps motivate and lead the Frontier design team to craft thoughtful and engaging experiences for clients big and small. In addition to being the Senior Design Lead at Frontier, Jessica works with freelance clients on a variety of projects. She teaches graphic design at OCAD University and was previously a Creative-Professional-in-Residence.

Acknowledgements

Speakers

- ↗ [Julian Brown](#)
- ↗ [Jessica Leong](#)
- ↗ [Graham Nhlamba](#)
- ↗ [Rebecca Wilkinson](#)

RBC Centre for Emerging Artists & Designers

Alexandra Hong, Project Officer
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Quotes have been edited down for clarity.

Watch the full workshop:
vimeo.com/showcase/8411477

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