

how to
get set up
on

upwork

The following is an excerpt from a short self-published Kindle book I wrote once, *How to Become a \$150/Hr Sales Copywriter on Upwork: A Personal Success Story that Almost Anyone Can Replicate*.

I pulled that book off Amazon a few years ago, and I won't be making it available again. But below, you can find my best advice for how to actually get set up on Upwork – the details of your profile page, your description, your title.

Everything below is based on my personal experience. I believe that if you follow the advice below honestly, and if you combine it with the other bonuses I've given you, you have a great shot of winning a job on Upwork by the end of this week, and a fair shot of winning a job on Upwork by the end of today. Here goes:

My only piece of advice about getting verified on Upwork

I've read that Upwork is becoming more selective about allowing freelancers onto the platform

Frankly, I don't know much about this, because when I got on the site, it was simply a matter of creating a profile with my email address. And since this book is all about actual Upwork experiences I've had, I won't try to rehash Googled information about what Upwork wants today.

I did have a verification call at some point

I got an email from Upwork support telling me my account had been placed on hold, and asking me to get on a video call to verify my identity. I was honestly a little concerned. Not because I had anything to hide, but simply because Upwork is a corporation and this was some kind of bureaucratic matter. I thought I might somehow fall through the Upwork cracks if this verification call didn't go according to their (unstated) expectations.

In the end, it turned out to be a non-issue

I got on the call as quickly as possible, because I couldn't apply for new jobs or get paid until it was done. The whole thing lasted less than two minutes. I think they just wanted to verify that I am an actual person and that I really do speak English at a native level.

Use your common sense

My only advice for you when it comes to this part of the process is not to sneak around. Use your real name. Use your real location. Appear professional. Don't create multiple Upwork accounts. Hopefully, this will be enough – after all, it's in Upwork's interest as well as yours to get you on the platform if you can deliver to clients.

The two-fold purpose of your Upwork title

Let's talk about actually creating your Upwork profile

That's the page on the site where clients can find out more about you and figure out whether you're the kind of person they want to hire. Some parts of the profile are very important, some not so much. One part that I believe does matter is your title, which we will discuss first.

You're writing both for a human and a computer

Your title (and the rest of your profile page) serves a couple of different purposes. One is very mechanical – it should signal some keywords to Upwork's internal algorithms. This is how Upwork recommends you as a freelancer when clients post jobs. The second purpose is to actually convince potential clients who have found your profile to consider you for a job.

"Hype-Free Sales Copy (Emails, Advertorials, and Sales Letters)"

That's my current portfolio title. There's a bit of positioning there ("Hype-free"). There's a description of what I do ("Sales Copy"). And there is a bit of specific info ("Emails, Advertorials, and Sales Letters"), which serves both to signal specialization to potential clients, and to get the Upwork algorithm to occasionally recommend me for those terms.

Pivot as needed with your title

I've gone through several different titles, based on the kinds of work I actually wanted to do and what was in demand on Upwork. For example, when I got started on Upwork as a copywriter, I was trying to focus on writing autoresponder sequences. I think the title on my Upwork profile read "*Email copywriter for soap opera sequences.*"

There wasn't that much demand for SOS sequences

However, people started hiring me to write cold emails, even though I didn't really know what those were. Nonetheless, I soon became a "*Cold email specialist,*" at least in my title. I eventually moved on from cold emails (I don't believe they work well most of the time, and when they do, you don't need a copywriter). Since lots of clients started hiring me for advertorials and writing Ben Settle-style daily emails, I pivoted again. Eventually, I wound up with the title I listed above.

Just get going

When you're getting started on Upwork, just pick a title that makes sense and don't agonize over it too much. The market will quickly tell you which services you should offer, which ones you should drop, and which skills you should highlight.

How to properly toot your own horn in your Upwork overview

A while back, I was lurking in the CopyHour Facebook group when a post caught my eye

CopyHour, by the way, is a course offered by Derek Johansen. It's based on copywriting legend Gary Halbert's idea of neural imprinting – basically, copying out successful sales letters by hand each day. Anyways, the post in the CopyHour group was by a guy going through the course, and trying to get started on Upwork as a sales copywriter.

He was asking for feedback on his profile "overview"

That's the big block of text on your Upwork profile where you sell yourself to clients. The trouble is, copywriters –

especially new ones – mistake this for an opportunity to display their copywriting skills.

That's exactly what this guy did

He wrote a long, conversational post. He tried to make the skeleton dance ("*I'm new and inexperienced but that means I'll work extra hard*"). And he even used a "secret" lead, where the secret doesn't get revealed until you've reached the end of the copy.

In my opinion, this is not the right way to toot your own horn as a sales copywriter on Upwork. Here's what I wrote to the guy, and what I recommend to you:

1. Don't be clever. There are good clients on Upwork but they are outnumbered by people who need miracles for under \$50. By being cute and clever with your description, you will appeal more to the second group than to the first.

2. Don't apologize for starting out. The majority of people offering services on Upwork are incompetent to begin with – odds are, you're already better. Instead, tell potential clients in detail what you will do for them, and give them reasons to believe you will deliver (beyond just trying hard).

Upwork is a B2B platform

Serious clients who are searching for freelancers on Upwork already have a pretty good idea of what they need. They just want to make sure you're it. And that's why fancy copywriting tricks that are designed to suck in prospects from Facebook to buy consumer offers will only get in your way.

Instead, I think it's much better to be direct with your Upwork overview

I'm still using the same basic overview that I wrote up when I started on Upwork. It makes a promise to start ("*My writing will help you make money*"). It then gives some detail about the process I use to make sure that promise is fulfilled. Here's my current overview:

You have a product or a service. I can help you sell it with the stories I write.

I specialize in email marketing and in copy for sales letters and advertorials. I've promoted just about everything – coaching and consulting services, B2B software, information products, supplements, even shipping containers.

I do a few key things to make sure the copy I write for you is effective.

First, I do a lot of research about your target audience. I read forums, blog posts, LinkedIn profiles, and Amazon comments written by your customers or by people who are similar to them.

For big projects, I even track down potential customers and conduct interviews.

I do this in order to figure out the language your audience uses and responds to, and to see what problems and concerns they actually face.

Second, I do a lot of research on your product or service. I'm looking for answers to questions that your prospects are sure to have.

Why is your product or service a life-saver for your customers? How is it unique or different from the competition? Why does it deserve the price tag you've put on it? Why should your prospects believe you when you say so?

I dig for answers to these questions in your product or service itself, in interviews with you or your team, in feedback from your customers, and in your (and your competitors') current marketing materials.

Third, I give readers a lot of value in my copy. Sometimes, this is soft information that helps them solve their problems. Other times, it's simply

entertainment or a personal story that gets them to feel that they are not alone in their situation. Empathy is a very powerful way of convincing people to buy.

What are you trying to sell and who is your audience? Get in touch and let me know, and I will help you make some money.

Is this the optimal description?

Who knows. Clients frequently hire me on Upwork. A few have commented that they read through my profile and they liked what they read. Plus, one time I saw a newbie copywriter ripping off this exact description to advertise himself, word for word.

One final tweak

If you look at my Upwork profile right now, my description isn't exactly like the one I posted above. In the real version, there's an extra section at the very beginning. That's because I've already completed a lot of projects, and a lot of clients have written nice things about me. So I've gone through and picked out the best testimonials I've gotten and I put them at the top of my overview.

Make it easy for potential clients

You might think, *"Oh, when I get reviews, they will be right there at the bottom. Potential clients can see them if they just scroll down."* Don't count on that. Pick out the most impressive ones, 4 or 5 of them, and put them at the top. It will give you a lot of credibility – with one caveat.

Don't rush to do this

A mediocre testimonial is worse than no testimonial. If you're just getting started and the only reviews you have are the ones that say, *"Good work,"* or *"It was a pleasure working with John,"* then wait to get juicier, more convincing reviews before you highlight them and put them at the top of your description.

The secret to triggering the Upwork recommendation algorithm

One day, I got an invitation to interview for a job on Upwork

The invitation read, "I'd like to invite you to apply to my job - and I found you by looking up something related to sex and gender. Please review the job post and apply if you're available."

The job itself wasn't interesting to me

What was interesting was this mention of "sex and gender." You see, just a day before, I had added a new item to my portfolio. Here's that portfolio item in full:

TITLE

Daily Emails for a Dating & Men's Health Guru

OVERVIEW

This client sells several popular men's sexual health ebooks on ClickBank. He also has a large email list, and wanted to start sending daily emails to this list, to promote both his own products and affiliate offers.

I wrote around 70 Ben Settle-style daily emails to his list. Each email promoted an offer in the dating, relationships, or sexual health fields. It would kick off with a personal anecdote or interesting news story, before tying in to the offer. The client was very satisfied with the emails.

This was the only mention of "sex and gender" in my entire Upwork profile

That's why I'm sure it was this portfolio item that got me the job invite above. I think this story illustrates perfectly the importance of regularly adding in new portfolio items to your Upwork profile. Here's why it works so well.

1. Your portfolio helps clients find you directly

Potential clients can find you by searching for specific keywords that are mentioned in your portfolio. In this case,

they found me by searching for "sex." As another example, I've also gotten invitations to interview because the client was looking for "native advertising," and somewhere deep in my portfolio, I had an item which mentioned I had written advertorials for native advertising platforms.

2. It triggers the Upwork algorithm

I believe (though I certainly can't prove it) that Upwork gives you a bump in its recommendation algorithm after you add in a new portfolio item. In other words, you'll get more job invitations overall, even for jobs that don't have to do with the portfolio item you just added. It certainly doesn't happen every time, but I've seen such a bump in invitations often enough to think it wasn't just chance.

3. Anything goes

And here's the beauty of the portfolio: you can put anything in there. Of course, you should only put in actual writing projects that you've done. But it can be on Upwork or off Upwork (hello Fiverr), it can be paid or done on spec (ie. for no money), it can be professional or a school project – whatever, as long as it's relevant to a potential client who is looking for a copywriter.

Here's what to do

Let's look at how to actually write each of your portfolio items for greatest effect. Upwork already gives you a good recommendation in the little form that pops up:

1. Write about what your client wanted for this project
2. Write about what you did on this project
3. Write about any results

And that's largely the template I follow – like in the sample I gave you above. Describe what they wanted, describe what you did, and say what the outcome was. If you've got actual hard numbers about how your copy performed, or how much money it made for the client, definitely add that in. If you have a positive testimonial (like an Upwork review), you can paste that in as well.

Now here's something a bit controversial

Overall, I don't feel it matters too much how persuasive or elegant you make these portfolio items, because few clients will actually read them. I'm saying this because out of the hundreds of potential clients I've talked to, at most one or two have ever mentioned anything about an item in my portfolio – and that was only in passing.

You're mostly talking to a machine

What is important are the keywords you put in your portfolio item, because those increase the chances (so I suspect) that clients will find you, or that Upwork will recommend you to customers for certain jobs. For example, if you look at my description above, there are a bunch of keywords that could be relevant to potential clients: "sexual", "men's health", "Clickbank", "daily emails", "Ben Settle".

What about the rest of the fields?

First, there's the thumbnail picture. I've gone to both extremes: clever, eye-catching pictures that make my portfolio look nice; and simple screenshots of the actual copy. Again, I don't think it matters too much, because most potential clients won't actually go through your portfolio. That said, if you're trying to present yourself as a sales copywriter, it definitely won't hurt to put in good pictures and show off you know how to capture attention.

One field I always skip

I almost never tie my portfolio item to the actual Upwork project which it's linked to – although Upwork allows this option. If you do connect your portfolio item to the project, then the client for that project has two weeks to approve this item (it's approved automatically following that period). However, during this period, the item is shown in a funky way on your profile page, which I found annoying and discrediting. And since I don't see any benefit of tying the portfolio item to the project, I usually skip this step.

Any and all skills

The only other field that is worth mentioning is the "Skills" field. As far as I can tell, you can put in as many skills here as you want. I usually put any relevant skills I can think of (and that Upwork supports at that moment – they keep

expanding them). The more skills I list, the bigger the chance that clients will find me when they are looking for a specific profile of copywriter.

The golden rule for filling out your profile page

Straight from the reclusive Parris Lampropoulos

I recently watched a series of webinars by one of the most successful copywriters active today. His name is Parris Lampropoulos, and he only takes on 2-3 projects a year – because each project tends to make him hundreds of thousands of dollars. Parris shared a lot of fantastic information on these webinars, but one bit seems particularly appropriate here.

Does it help your case?

When deciding whether to include something in a piece of sales copy, Parris asks himself, "*Does this help my case, hurt my case, or is it neutral?*" Only if something helps his case does he actually include it. If something hurts his case or is neutral, it gets thrown out. And this attitude is the golden rule for filling out your Upwork profile as well.

Your picture

You have to include a picture of yourself on Upwork, so make sure it helps your case. You want to look approachable. At the same time, you should look professional enough – remember, Upwork is a B2B platform, not a social network. The only picture I've ever looked good in is from a trip to Australia five years back. I cropped it down to show just my face, and I use it on my Upwork profile and just about everywhere else online.

Your education and employment history

Fill these fields out only if they help your case. As with testimonials, better put nothing rather than something weak. I went to good schools with some name recognition (Johns Hopkins and UCSC), so I put those in as my education. My previous job experience is completely irrelevant to my

freelancing work, so I did not list it in any way – my employment history simply says "Freelance copywriter."

Other experiences

Again, I would only put things in this section if they help your case as an Upwork freelancer or if they might catch the attention of Upwork's recommendation algorithm. Personally, I only have two items in this section: my subscription to Ben Settle's Email Players newsletter; and the fact I've gone through Andre Chaperon's Autoresponder Madness course.

Upwork tests

I took a few of the available Upwork tests when I was setting up my profile. It took 15 or 20 minutes. They are still shown on my profile but I have no idea whether they matter at all. I suspect tests may be more relevant for specific tech skills, but for copywriting I think you should simply prove you speak English at a high level and be done with it.

How to set your initial hourly rate

Start low, work up

When I got started on Upwork, I was charging \$15/hour. Yes, that's a very low hourly rate, but I didn't stay in this rate-basement for long.

If you have experience, start higher

If my Upwork profile got wiped out somehow, I wouldn't go back to this low rate. I would simply fill out my profile and my portfolio with previous projects, and start applying with my normal rate of \$150/hr. If you already have experience with sales copywriting, you can do the same.