Hubstaff Talent 101: Remote Team Fundamentals
Companies who hire freelancers reduce costs related to employment taxes and benefits. They eliminate salaries, paying only for work completed. They gain access to talent all over the world. Taking advantage of the gig economy can propel business growth—but only if you’re hiring the right freelancers.

Hiring the wrong freelancer—or providing unclear instructions—can be an expensive mistake that negates all of these cost-saving benefits. Mistakes can result in significant delays, exponential costs, or half-finished projects that are wholly unusable.

For these reasons, hiring a freelancer can be a daunting task. But it doesn’t have to be.

Use this step-by-step guide to learn how to hire a freelancer the right way. Understand what you should look for in candidates, learn what’s expected of you as a client, and discover best practices that will allow you to derive the most value from your freelance contracts.
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Step 1: Create a specifications document

One of the biggest mistakes that clients make when hiring freelancers is providing unclear requirements. Unclear requirements lead to increases in scope, costs, and the likelihood that your budget will be exhausted before the work is completed.

The Toaster Example...

Let’s say you want to hire a freelancer to build a toaster for you. Building a toaster seems to be a fairly straightforward task, so you post a vague job description and begin reviewing applications and quotes.

It’s highly likely that the variation in quotes will be extreme. Some quotes may be low because the freelancer’s interpretation of the request is that you want a basic toaster like this:

This basic toaster holds two slices of normal-sized bread, operates using a timer, and uses a basic dial to determine the appropriate toasting duration.

Other quotes may be high because the freelancer interprets your request for a toaster as this:

This toaster can handle a variety of bread types: bagels, English muffins, and regular slices. It has toasting and defrosting capabilities, uses buttons to set toasting levels, and shuts off automatically.

Most clients are inclined to choose the freelancer providing the lowest quote, but this doesn’t account for what will be delivered for the quoted amount. The outcome: work delivered by the freelancer doesn’t match what was needed/desired. Completed work must then be revised, increasing the scope and cost of the project.

The freelancer you hire based on cost alone spends several weeks developing the toaster before showing you the work. When you finally see it, you realize it’s not what you wanted.
The freelancer delivered a basic, two-slice toaster, but you wanted it to accommodate four slices.

He made the toasting slots for regular-sized bread, but you wanted the toaster to be able to accommodate bread slices and bagels. He built a plastic frame, but you wanted stainless steel.

Each of these requests represent changes in scope, and each scope change increases the cost and length of the project:

**Original Quote for Basic Toaster:**
$700.00 | one month

**Increase Size of Toasting Slots:**
+ $300.00 | + one week

**Increase Number of Toasting Slots:**
+ $250.00 | + one week

**Change Frame to Stainless Steel:**
+ 500.00 | + two days

Before you get exactly what you want, you may run out of money and be stuck with a very expensive, half-developed, nonfunctional toaster. Even if you do have the funds to complete the project with the various scope changes, your original release timeline will be significantly delayed.

The only way to avoid these issues and complications is to create a specifications document.
How to create a specifications document

A specifications document can have as much or as little detail as needed/available, but at a minimum it should detail your goals and requirements.

What are you trying to accomplish?
What outcomes do you hope to achieve?
What pain points are you trying to solve?

**Goals:** Defining the reasoning behind the project allows the freelancer to brainstorm and recommend alternative solutions that may be more cost-efficient, user-friendly, effective, technically sound, etc.

What are your expectations for the product being delivered?
What features are you looking for?
Do you have expectations when it comes to the technology or type of code used?

**Requirements:** Defining the requirements up front allows the freelancer to provide more detailed and accurate estimates on overall costs, as well as timeframes for project completion.
WHAT ELSE SHOULD I INCLUDE?

These general requirements are sufficient, but they could go into much more detail if necessary or required. Detailed specifications could include blueprints, wireframes, comps, service interface contracts, preferred programming languages, or any other information or requests.

PROJECT GOAL

I own a bed and breakfast, and bread is a regular component of the breakfast I serve to guests. Some guests like to eat bagels, some like English muffins, and some like sliced and toasted white bread. My current toaster frequently burns bagels but undercooks regular bread slices. I am looking for a developer who can build a toaster that will toast all bread types the right amount the first time.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

- Toaster will have a stainless-steel frame to match my other kitchen appliances
- Toaster will have four toasting slots
- Each slot should be able to toast bread slices, English muffins, and bagels
- Toaster should have a sensor to detect when bread is sufficiently toasted

DETAILED SPECIFICATIONS

- Toaster should be the following dimensions 12x12x8 (LxWxH in inches)
- Toaster should operate using a 110-volt plug
- Plug cord should be three feet long

Take time to think through what you need and document as much detail as possible. If you're struggling to get started, browse some related job posts from other employers on Hubstaff Talent for inspiration.

By documenting project goals, you're forced to think through your request in more detail. This helps you identify edge cases, prioritize the things you want completed, and separate requests into tasks that can be completed individually and incrementally.
Benefits of creating a specifications document

Creating a specification document provides a wealth of benefits all around—to the client, the freelancer, the project, and the budget. The final benefit of creating a specification document is that it will allow you to isolate a single task that can be used as a trial when evaluating freelancers.

- **Creating a specification document makes you think through the project in advance.**
  You’ll define goals, requirements, designs, and priorities before implementation begins. This reduces the likelihood of delays and expenses from mid-implementation scope changes, and it increases the likelihood that what your freelancer delivers will be exactly what you wanted.

- **Defining your goals allows the freelancer to provide alternative solutions.**
  What you think is the best solution may not be feasible, or a better solution may exist. Defining your goals and requirements gives the freelancer an opportunity to brainstorm and propose alternative, technically feasible, less expensive, or more effective solutions.

- **Detailed project specifications leads to more accurate and detailed estimates.**
  Greater detail leads to more accurate estimates of time and cost. The freelancer can better estimate how much time something will take to complete, and the client will know that the quotes received are for doing the exact work requested and not some other interpretation.

- **Feature estimations can help with prioritization.**
  If you break the project into releasable components, you can get an estimate on each request. This may help you prioritize tasks to ensure you have something releasable when it’s time to go live—and before budget for the project runs out.

- **Good specifications attract good freelancers.**
  Constant revisions, increases in scope, and unclear requests aren’t just bad for employers—they’re bad for freelancers too. Professional freelancers are more likely to want to work for clients who know what they want because those projects tend to be the most successful for both parties.
Once you start accepting applications for freelancers, you’ll have resumes to scan and portfolios of work to review. These materials are great for an initial screening process, but they don’t show whether or not a freelancer is a good fit for your specific needs.

To determine the latter, you’re going to need to work with the freelancer on a project, provide some instructions, and review the work output.

Using the specifications document you created in the last step, choose a small task that can be completed, reviewed, and tested on its own. This will become a trial that you’ll assign to all of the freelancers you’re considering.

Even if the trial isn't something you’ll end up using, it's still a crucial part of the process of hiring a freelancer. The trial gives you an opportunity to evaluate the freelancer’s ability to follow instructions and satisfy requests. It gives you a way to evaluate if quality is high and style is a good fit. It also allows you to determine if working styles are a good match and personalities are compatible.

A trial is important for the freelancer as well because it will prove to them that you’re the kind of client they want to work with.

It’s up to you to decide whether or not you’re going to pay for the trial work. Keep in mind that unpaid trials may deter experienced and professional candidates from applying for your job or accepting the trial assignment.

Additionally, paying a freelancer for their trial work is a sign of good faith—if you paid for the trial, they may feel more confident that you’ll continue to pay after the real work begins.
Step 3: Determine what type of freelancer you want to hire

**COST**

How much can you afford to pay someone to complete the requested work? Ask applicants to provide an estimate and review provided estimates to determine if they’re within your available budget. Conversely, you can state the amount you’re able to pay for project work in the job post to deter applicants who will expect rates higher than what you’re able to pay.

**EXPERIENCE**

Are you willing to train someone to do the work you need completed, or do you want someone who requires little guidance and produces exceptional work? More experience usually equates to higher quality work—but also more expensive fees. Decide how much experience your freelancer should have, and state those preferences in your job post.

**LOCATION**

Location can affect both costs and quality. For example, freelance writers in the UK may charge more than those in the US, so it may be less expensive to hire a US-based freelancer. However, the writing submitted may use American-English spellings, grammar, and colloquialisms. This could be a quality issue and deterrent for some clients.

**PERSONALITY**

Consider personal compatibility when hiring a freelancer. Because much of your communication will happen by phone, email, chat, or text instead of in person, compatible communication styles and work ethics are a crucial component of developing positive working relationships.

**TIME ZONE**

Does it matter when your freelancer works? For some roles, all communication will occur over email, so overlapping working hours isn’t a concern. For others, daily meetings and reviews may be required, or urgent requests may need to be accommodated. Consider if your freelancer needs to be available when you’re working and set time zone limitations as needed.
If you’re not sure exactly what you can afford to ask for given your budget limitations, you can view some average rates for freelancers in different industries and geographic regions in our **2017 Freelancing Trends report**.

Document your budget constraints and other preferences. You can include these in your job post if desired, but it’s optional. You mostly want to make sure you have them to help you conduct a first pass when applications

**UK has the highest average hourly rate ($46.54)** while **Philippines has the lowest.**
Step 4: Create your job post, publish it, and begin screening applicants

With the upfront work complete, you’re ready to create your job post, publish it, and begin accepting and reviewing applications. When creating your job post, there are a few best practices to follow:

Include your specifications document. This allows freelancers to decide if the job is something they’re interested in and qualified for up front.

Include your company information. Reputable freelancers want to work for reputable clients. Make sure to include information about your business—its name, website address, and other details—so freelancers can conduct research before applying.

Ask for a bid on the project or for general rates to be provided. Experienced freelancers will likely have many more questions before they’ll provide final rates, but all freelancers should be able to provide high-level estimates or general/hourly rates for their services.

Make a special request. One simple way to weed out people who are applying to jobs en masse is to ask for a specific subject line to be used in replies, or to ask for a very specific question to be answered. Applicants that neglect to follow these instructions can be disregarded.

Request work samples. Ask for freelancers to provide samples of related and relevant work in their responses.

When posting a job, it may not be uncommon to receive dozens—or even hundreds—of replies. To narrow down your pool of applicants, first eliminate any that neglected to follow instructions provided in your job post (such as using a specific subject line).

Next you can get rid of those with quotes higher than your budget or who don’t meet your preferences for experience, location, or time zone.

For those that remain, review their work samples. Find those that match the quality, subject matter, tone, style, aesthetic, functionality—and so on—that you’re looking for.

Choose a few to follow up with, and send those the trial assignment you designed in step two. Review submitted trials to determine which candidates are the best fit for your role.
Useful tools for hiring and working with freelancers

**Google Docs** – Google Docs is a free word processing tool that allows multiple contributors to collaborate, edit, and comment on shared documents. It can be an excellent tool for building, sharing, and gathering feedback on your specifications document.

**Google Hangouts** – Another free Google tool, Hangouts allows freelancers and clients to have video calls and share their screens for demos, training, or tutorials. It’s a great tool to use to allow freelance developers to show off completed functionality.

**DocuSign** – If you need to have your freelancer sign a contract or fill out and sign a W-9 form, DocuSign simplifies the process of obtaining an electronic signature without anyone having to print, sign, and scan paper documents or mail hard copy contracts.

**Slack** – If you need to collaborate with multiple freelancers at once or want a simple system for instant messaging, Slack provides a solution. Create chat rooms for ongoing discussions with multiple team members/freelancers or engage with freelancers over instant messages to chat in real-time.

**Trello** – Assign tasks to team members, add details, and move tasks across workflows with a Trello board. Using cards and lanes, Trello allows teams to take an assembly-line approach to getting work done, reviewed by necessary parties, and closed out upon completion.

**Hubstaff** – The Hubstaff time tracking tool was built to help employers manage payroll, time tracking, and productivity for remote employees. Use it to track of how many hours freelancers are spending on your project and deliver accurate payments for completed work.