

# My Upwork Jumpstart Guide

**A 28-DAY CHALLENGE**

- ✓ Optimize your **profile**
- ✓ Win **more jobs**
- ✓ Use **Connects** efficiently

**BY MORGAN OVERHOLT**

# FORWARD

## The strategies I used to earn \$600,000 on Upwork

I've always been a freelancer, but I never took my "side hustle" seriously until I left my salaried job in the corporate world behind in 2017. It was shortly thereafter that my brother-in-law (thankfully) suggested I join a site called Upwork – the world's largest freelance marketplace.

If you'd have told me back then that just four years later I'd not only be

boasting about hitting the **\$600,000 mark** on the platform but writing a guide to help other freelancers do the same, I would have thought you were crazy!

But before I pass on the torch to a new generation of Upworkers with this Upwork Jumpstart Guide, I wanted to offer a few important programming notes:

1

### This guide contains strategies I personally use

The advice you will read on the pages that follow are strategies that I employed when I was just starting out on Upwork, and some are strategies that I continue to employ today to retain my **100% Job Success Score** and my **Expert Rated badge**. However, it is important to note that some things have changed since 2017 when I joined the platform. As such, some advice has been adapted as needed.

I also cannot make guarantees on individual results, but rest assured these strategies have proven effective for both myself and many of those who I **coach one-on-one**.

CONTINUED



## 2

## I created this free guide to help others

As a six-figure freelancer turned six-figure blogger and freelance coach, I offer a variety of premium resources on my website at [morganoverholt.com/courses](https://morganoverholt.com/courses).

However, I realize that there are some individuals who cannot justify these types of expenses early on in their business (and by the way, I encourage all freelancers to think of themselves as a business of one). You will notice that I frequently make references to your “business” throughout my blogs and courses). But **I want everyone to have access to expert-level guidance**.

This is why I created both **my free blog** and this free **Upwork Jumpstart Guide**. This guide features essential strategies to launching a successful career including strategies that I personally used when I joined Upwork in 2017 and strategies that I continue to employ today.

This guide also assumes that you are already a trained intermediate to expert professional with a service to offer. **If you have no skills**, I suggest that you put this guide aside for now, and instead **discover an in-demand niche** and focus on learning and building your portfolio.

If you are interested in deep-dives into certain topics (like Upwork proposal writing, profile and proposal critiques or 1:1 consults with me) visit [morganoverholt.com/courses](https://morganoverholt.com/courses).

## 3

## I am not officially affiliated with Upwork Inc.

While I have a great relationship with the staff at Upwork, you should know that this guide is not officially affiliated with Upwork Inc.

If you are interested in getting advice directly from the source, I encourage you to check out their guides on **getting started as a freelancer**.

CONTINUED



## Upwork itself is not entirely free

All businesses incur expenses along the way – no matter the industry.

Freelancing is no different.

Registration is free on Upwork. However, there are other fees and expenses that you will incur along the way.

For instance, Upwork charges a flat 10% fee on all freelancer platform earnings.

Additionally, in 2019, Upwork launched something called “Connects” which work like a digital currency on the platform. **Connects are valued at \$0.15 each and are required to bid on jobs.** Most jobs require between 2-16 (\$0.30-\$2.40) Connects to apply. You can also (optionally) use Connects to boost proposals.

Upwork gives new freelancers **40 free Connects** (valued at \$6) upon signing up for a new account on the platform. On average, this enables new freelancers to bid on their first 3-20 jobs for free without having to purchase additional Connects.

There are also a variety of ways to [earn more free Connects](#) as you go.

And while some freelancers [have reported](#) never needing to buy additional Connects, in all reality, most platform newbies will likely have to purchase a few extra during their first few of weeks on the platform.

The ultimate goal on Upwork, of course, is to get to the point where you are receiving so many invites (which do not require Connects at all) that you no longer depend on the Jobs Feed to make money on the platform.

I personally haven't had to buy additional Connects in many years.

CONTINUED



# BONUS RESOURCES

## Additional resources and frequently asked questions

---

### FREE RESOURCES

Before we get started with our Upwork Jumpstart Guide, I also wanted to list some of my most popular (free) blog articles on Upwork and freelance related topics. Many of these articles cover some of the **most frequently asked questions** I receive during my 1:1 coaching calls. I will also be referencing some of these throughout this guide.

- [5 Upwork Profile Examples and Tips](#)
- [11 Upwork Proposal Tips \(With Examples\)](#)
- [Upwork Hourly Rates: What Other Freelancers Are Charging](#)
- [8 Ways To Get More Connects on Upwork](#)
- [How To Get 5-Star Reviews on Upwork: A Simple Trick](#)
- [3 Ways To Remove a Bad Review, Dispute Feedback on Upwork](#)
- [Best Tools for Freelancers, Services I Use Daily](#)

### PREMIUM RESOURCES

And below are some of my most popular premium offerings, you can learn more about each at [morganoverholt.com/courses](https://morganoverholt.com/courses).

- [Proposal Writing Bootcamp \(45-Minute Course\)](#)
- [Profile/Proposal Critiques](#)
- [1:1 Consulting](#)



# WEEK 1

## Polishing your profile, your proposals and your pitch

---

Welcome to the exciting (and sometimes terrifying) world of Upwork. It's a platform that can feel quite intimidating for even the most experienced of freelancers – but the payoff can be well worth your time investment.

Week 1 is all about getting to know the platform and perfecting your pitch. Don't forget, this process is all about making constant tweaks to your strategy until you find something that works. **If you have not yet created an Upwork account**, please do so before beginning this challenge.

For best results, **read this week's section in its entirety** before performing any actions, and complete the **following steps in order** else you might burn through too many Upwork Connects during the first week. However, if you want to work through these steps bit faster, feel free to do so.

## WEEK 1 TIPS & STRATEGY

### Connects Spending

As mentioned earlier on page 4, every freelancer starts out with **40 free Upwork Connects**. It costs between 2-4 Connects to apply for smaller jobs, and between 8-16 Connects to apply for medium-large sized jobs. Additional Connects can be purchased for \$0.15 each.

If you want to stretch those 40 free Connects and reduce your need to buy more before landing your first job, you will want to stick to mostly smaller jobs.

**I personally had to apply for roughly 12-13 jobs** before landing my first gig. I mostly stuck to smaller jobs in the early days, as I was more focused on landing an easy job I could complete quickly just to get that first 5-star review on my profile.

Today, that means I would have likely had to spend between 24-48 Connects to land my first gig – so I probably could have done it using the free Connects initially provided. Inversely, had I only applied for larger jobs during my early days on the platform, I would have spent between 96-192 Connects to secure my first job.

While I would never discourage an Upwork newbie applying for larger jobs during their first week on the platform, especially if those jobs are an obviously perfect fit for their skill set, I do recommend that most aim for jobs in the smaller range for the first few proposals for a number of reasons:

- 1. The proposal process requires practice.** Refining the process of applying for jobs on the Upwork platform takes practice. If you're not careful, you could easily waste your entire free Connects allotment on the first day without even really having a solid grasp on how the platform works. Walk before you run.
- 2. Smaller jobs are easier/faster to complete.** They are usually also less competitive. By applying to (mostly) smaller jobs this week, you're improving your odds of landing your first job, completing it quickly, and landing that first 5-star review on your profile (which makes landing job number two much easier).

## Setting a Budget

Either way you go, I recommend setting a daily Connects budget to help you plan. For example, if you want to stretch your 40 free Connects this week, budget to spend roughly 6 per day. Those whose businesses have the funds to invest in a platform like Upwork could easily justify as much as 32-48/day.

## Applying For Jobs

This week, **apply for jobs on the Jobs Feed with the following attributes:**

- The job was posted less than **48 hours ago** (at most), **24 hours ago** (better), **2 hours ago** (better still) or **30 minutes ago** (best).
- The job is a **match for your skill set** and you know you can easily **complete it to the client's satisfaction**.
- The client has **mostly 5-star reviews** or a cumulative rating of 4.5+ stars and a verified payment method. You can see this information on the right hand side of the job post under the "about the client" section (Image 1 below).
- The job has received **fewer than 20 proposals** (Image 2 below).
- **Bonus Tip 1:** Applying for jobs on the **weekends and on holidays** can dramatically increase your chances of being hired as there is far less competition on the platform.
- **Bonus Tip 2: Boost proposals at your own discretion.** Boosting a proposal means bidding to appear (temporarily, until you are outbid) in one of the top four spots in a client's inbox. It is not a necessity, nor is it recommended on job posts with fewer than 5 proposals. But if you can afford it, it certainly doesn't hurt.

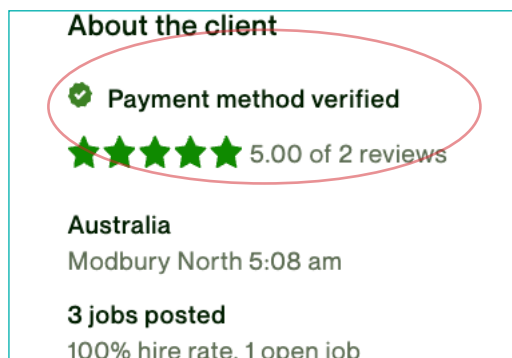


Image 1

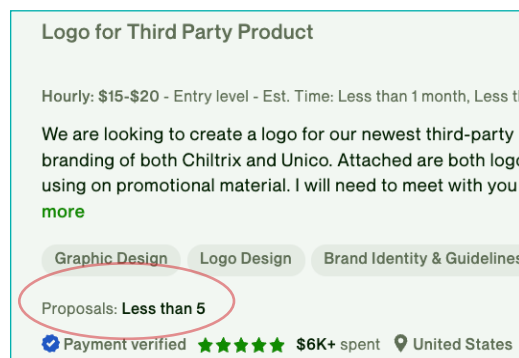


Image 2



## DAY 1

1

Create an Upwork profile using [these tips](#). Upload as many portfolio examples as possible (the more the better – I have over 30). Create samples if you have none.

## DAY 2

2

Read my posts on “[How To Find Your First Job on Upwork](#)” and “[Upwork Proposal Tips](#)” and take notes. **(Do not apply for jobs 'til you've read these guides)**

## DAY 3

3

Browse the Upwork Jobs Feed for jobs that meet the requirements on [page 8](#) of this guide.

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 4

4

If you did not hear back from yesterday's proposals\*, re-read [this article](#) and revise your next batch of proposals accordingly. **Apply for 2-3 more jobs.**

## DAY 5

5

Reach out to **2-3 former clients or professional contacts** and ask them to [write a testimonial](#).

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 6

6

If you're running low on Connects, buy some now.

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 7 & WEEKLY CHECK-IN

7

Day 7 is a mandatory rest day – your **brain functions at its best** after you've had a break! **If you need more than one rest day**, listen to your body. But don't forget, there's often **less bidding competition** on weekends and holidays, which could give you a leg up on getting that first job.

If you didn't get a nibble during your first week on those proposals, don't fret – it's totally normal. It took me almost two weeks to get my first reply. Just don't burn through all your Upwork Connects too quickly.

If you're already winning interviews – be sure to check out my [tips on how to secure a 5-star review](#).

*\* It is rare that you will hear back from the first batch of proposals you send. Most freelancers apply to a dozen or more jobs before getting their first nibble on the platform.*



# WEEK 2

## Your mission: Land your first job and a 5-star review!

---

If you've made it to Week 2 – congrats. That's a victory in itself!

It's all too common for people to give up after an entire week of applying for jobs if they aren't getting a response or hearing back from clients, but that's par for the course on Upwork – even for the most seasoned freelancer!

If you've already landed a few interviews (or even won a few contracts) consider yourself among the elite.

If not, don't fret. This process takes time. Start thinking of your freelance career like you would a new fitness regime at the gym. It takes time and consistency to start seeing results.

## DAY 8

8

If Week 1 produced no results, ask a peer for proposal/profile feedback and revise your Week 2 strategy accordingly.

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 9

9

Reach out to 1-2 more **former clients or professional contacts** and ask them to [write a testimonial](#).

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 10

10

Browse the Upwork platform for Top-Rated freelancers in your niche. Take inspiration from their profiles & strategy.

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 11

11

Freshen up your Upwork portfolio and add at least **2-3 items** or case studies.

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 12

12

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 13

13

**Apply for 2-3 jobs.**

## DAY 14 & WEEKLY CHECK-IN

14

Day 14 is another mandatory rest day (assuming you don't have any deadlines due of course!)

Did you win your first interview this week? If so, congrats! It's important to remember as you go, even as you start to land jobs and win interviews, to continue applying for new work (as much as you can handle).

DO NOT FORGET to **ask for a 5-star review** using [these tips](#) at the end of each successful engagement. If you've asked and the client did not deliver within a reasonable amount of time, politely ask again. Getting that first 5-star review on your profile is crucial to winning bigger and better jobs.



# WEEK 3

## Start focusing on bigger projects & income stability

Welcome to Week 3!

**If you've already landed a job or two**, use this week to begin applying for bigger and better jobs. You may want to even take a moment to consider **raising your hourly rate!** Use [these tips](#) if you need some guidance. Also, use **Week 3** to start applying for **larger jobs including more "ongoing" or "long-term" contracts**. Ongoing work means less time pitching, more time working and more long-term stability.

**If you haven't landed that first job yet**, I recommend repeating the steps in **Week 2** before moving on to **Week 3** and continue making small tweaks to your proposals, profile and portfolio along the way. Review your proposals and ask yourself: "What would make ME reply to a proposal if I were the client?"

**DAY 15****15**

Start looking at larger, more long-term jobs on the platform. Look for jobs with bigger budgets and long-term potential. **Apply for 1-2 jobs.**

**DAY 16****16**

Already have steady work coming in? **Consider bumping your hourly rate.**

Either way, apply for **1-2 new jobs.**

**DAY 17****17**

Reach out to 1-2 more **former clients or professional contacts** and ask them to **write a testimonial.**

**Apply for 1-2 jobs.**

**DAY 18****18**

Freshen up your Upwork portfolio and add at least **2-3 items** or case studies.

**Apply for 1-2 jobs.**

**DAY 19****19**

**Apply for 1-2 jobs.**

**DAY 20****20**

**Apply for 1-2 jobs.**

**DAY 21 & WEEKLY CHECK-IN****21**

Today is another rest day.

By now, you are surely noticing a theme starting to develop.

If you are at the point where you feel like you have a decent workload going, proceed to Week 4.

If not, repeat Week 3 until you're receiving a steady stream of interviews and income. Consider asking a friend or colleague to review your profile, portfolio and proposals. I also offer these services at **[morganoveryholt.com/courses](https://morganoveryholt.com/courses)**.



# WEEK 4

## The journey to Top Rated status begins here

---

Welcome to Week 4! You'll be relieved to hear that the hardest part is over.

If you continue to turn in stellar work for your clients, you will be well on your way to receiving the **Rising Talent Upwork Badge** (in as little as 30 days), followed by the **Top Rated Plus Badge** (in as little as 16 weeks), and then finally Top Rated Plus (after 12 months if over \$20,000 has been earned). Learn how to obtain these badges [here](#).

Each badge comes with its own **perks** like **reduced fees on Featured Jobs**, **faster payments** and access to **Upwork Talent Specialists**. You will also start to receive more Job Invites as time goes on, which means no Upwork Connects are required to reply. Upwork Invites are the real secret to Upwork Success (more on that later).

## DAY 22

22

**Bump up your hourly rate (again).** And continue to do so throughout your freelance career. If you aren't increasing your rates at least 1x a year, you may be leaving money on the table.

## DAY 23

23

If you have the capacity to take on additional work, **test out that new higher hourly rate** by applying for a **1-2 new jobs**.

## DAY 24

24

**Add your completed Upwork jobs** to your Upwork portfolio. Make sure to include relevant keywords to improve the Upwork search algorithm.

## DAY 25

25

If you have the capacity to take on additional work, **apply for 1-2 new jobs**.

## DAY 26

26

If you have the capacity to take on additional work, **apply for 1-2 new jobs**.

## DAY 27

27

**Update your availability** accordingly as you start to take on new work. Keeping this updated is crucial to obtaining the Rising Talent Badge (as soon as next week!).

## DAY 28 & NEXT STEPS

28

Today is a mandatory celebration day. You've officially reached the end of your 28-Day Upwork Challenge. Congratulations!

It's now time to look to the future. To achieve long-term success on the Upwork platform, it is important to focus on obtaining and retaining those Upwork badges we mentioned earlier ([details here](#)).

After you achieve those badges, you'll notice that it gets easier with each passing day to find quality clients and land jobs. You'll even decrease your dependency on Upwork Connects (all of my jobs come through Invites/Project Catalog now). Also continue to focus on ongoing contracts and long-term projects for better income stability and long-term success.



# ABOUT ME

## Meet Morgan Overholt

---

I have 20 years of professional experience in graphic design and sales and am a self-described small business evangelist.

After spending the first 15 years of my career in mostly corporate settings, in 2017, I decided to take the leap and turn my then part-time freelance side hustle into a full-time business.

Today, Morgan Media LLC continues to serve graphic design clients with a concierge level service. In addition to being actively involved with my agency, I also coach other freelancers on how to follow in my footsteps and own and operate four blogs: TheSmokies.com, HeyOrlando.com, MiamiTake.com and MorganOverholt.com.

## I want to hear from you

Did you find this guide helpful? Did I leave anything out? Do I need to add more detail on a specific topic?

I would love to hear from you so that I continue to tweak this guide and help future freelancers.

If you loved it, I'd appreciate it if you connected with me on Patreon, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram using the links below.

