



SECRETS OF FREELANCE ILLUSTRATION

How to become a successful freelance illustrator

howtobeanillustrator.com

Mark Dickson

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Thanks again!

Mark Dickson



Contents

www.howtobeanillustrator.com 1

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MARK DICKSON 3

How to reach the author 3

INTRODUCTION: TIME TO TAKE THE PLUNGE? 7

PART 1: “ANCHORS AWEIGH!” 8

Do I need a degree in illustration to succeed? 8

How do I choose the right university? 8

That’s all well and good, but what if I don’t want to study at university? 9

The illustrator’s mindset 9

Kit out your career 10

Managing your freelance time 13

Working full-time, part-time and everything in-between 15

Teaching to supplement income 15

Creative ways to support your fledgling career 16

Your support network: family, friends and colleagues 16

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Tracey Jane Bradley 18

**PART 2: ASSESSING THE WATERS – IDENTIFY YOUR ILLUSTRATION
MARKET 24**

Top tips for writing and illustrating children's books 25

Finding potential clients in five easy steps 26

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Karolien Vanderstappen 28

PART 3. BUILDING YOUR RAFT – THE KILLER PORTFOLIO 34

Presenting your work 35

Your online presence 35

A physical portfolio – do you even need one? 36

How to really make your portfolio irresistible to art directors 37

Portfolio investment – will you work for free? 37

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Gregori Saavedra 39

PART 4: THE MARKETING MIX AND SELF PROMOTION 44

P1 Product 45

P2 Price 46

Slashing prices cuts you deepest. 46

Setting your freelance rates 46

Billing by the hour 47

Negotiating tactics 48

P3 Place 49

P4 Promotion 49

Five brilliant ideas for self-promotion 50

Courting publicity – writing press releases 50

Services marketing - the extended mix 52

P5 People 52

P6 Process 52

P7 Physical evidence 53

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Nigel Buchanan

PART 5: HOOKING YOUR FIRST CLIENT 59

Making the call 59

The meeting – five tips to landing a job 60

**ART DIRECTOR INTERVIEW: Adriano Cattini, Women's Health magazine
62**

ART DIRECTOR INTERVIEW: Mark Wagstaff, MOJO magazine 64

PART 6: AGENCY REPRESENTATION 66

Feedback – are you asking for it? 67

AGENT ADVICE: Chris Belson, Folio Illustration Agency, London 68

PART 7: YOUR FIRST ILLUSTRATION JOB 70

Five essential questions to ask your client 70

What a brief might look like 70

Brief 1: Informal 71

Brief 2: Formal 72

Tackling the brief in five stages. 73

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Jasmin Lai 77

PART 8: CONTRACTS, COPYRIGHT AND YOUR PATH TO PASSIVE INCOME 83

Copyright 83

Licensing your images 83

Passive income – making money while you sleep 84

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Faith Wibberley 86

PART 9. GETTING PAID 92

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Naomi Tipping 95

PART 10: INCOME TAX 101

The income spreadsheet 101

The expenditure spreadsheet 102

What can you claim as a business expense? 103

Profit or loss? 103

Should I employ an accountant? 103

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Mitchy Bwoy 104

PART 11. SETTING SAIL – TEN STEPS TO LAUNCHING YOUR FREELANCE CAREER 109

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Tim Marrs 111

USEFUL RESOURCES: Free downloadable resources you can use TODAY: 118

Acceptaance of Commission form 118

Invoice 118

Statement of Account template118

Late Payment chaser 118

Bookkeeping Spreadsheets 118

Recommended Reading 118

Agency Representation List 119

Competitions and Awards 121

Websites to Bookmark 121

TEN PROJECTS TO PUMP UP YOUR PORTFOLIO

Please review my book 125



www.howtobeanillustrator.com

Secrets of Freelance Illustration

How to become a successful freelance illustrator

By Mark Dickson

A step-by-step guide to starting up and maintaining a successful
freelance illustration business

Secrets of Freelance Illustration: How to become a successful freelance illustrator

This book is for you if...

1. You long to spend your days working creatively and for yourself, but you just don't know how to yet
2. You want to earn your living from illustration
3. You want to unearth a treasure trove of powerful, effective and proven 'insider' tips and techniques
4. You want to reduce your freelancing mistakes and increase your illustration success
5. You want inspirational advice from practicing illustrators and creative professionals
6. You need somebody to believe in your desire to succeed
7. You want a road map to success
8. You want to avoid the common pitfalls of the industry and deal with clients and agents with confidence
9. You want practical resources that you can download and use today, from accounting to contracts
10. You know that now's the time to start living the life you're dreaming of

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MARK DICKSON



Well, what's to tell..?

Drawing has been a constant companion throughout my life. I crave the narcissistic feedback you get when you create a piece of work that someone recognises and likes. I always have done.

I graduated from Leeds Metropolitan University in 2000 with a First Class Honors degree in Fine Art. After completing my degree, and having a couple of unfulfilling shows, it was time for a rethink. I wanted my work to have more of an obvious function other than having people stand around in a gallery pondering it. I also wanted to earn a living from drawing. Illustration was just a natural step in the right direction.

Now thirteen years later, I still illustrate commercially, and have been lucky to have worked for some great clients including; **Penguin, Virgin, Nokia, The Observer, The Telegraph, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Cosmopolitan, Firetrap, Channel 5 TV, Digital Creative Arts Magazine...** and my work has been featured in 'Illustration NOW! 3' and 'Portraits' published by Taschen.

The thrill of seeing your work up on the shelves of a bookstore or newsagent never wears thin. As the Course Coordinator for Graphic Design and Illustration at a local further education college, I'm working hard to communicate that feeling to my students in the hope that I can spark a flame inside them for visual communication. I want that flame to engulf them - a flame that can't be put out, and that burns inside them for the rest of their careers.

And I want the same for you too.

How to reach the author

You can find me at <http://www.howtobeanillustrator.com>, and you can email me here:

mark@howtobeanillustrator.com



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INTRODUCTION: TIME TO TAKE THE PLUNGE?

You're here right now, standing on the edge of your illustration career. **Are you ready to take a leap of faith?**

You might have the safety net of savings or a job, or you might just be closing your eyes and hoping for the best - but whatever way you take the plunge, **you're going to need to know what success will look like to you.**

For some, success will be keeping your head above water, paying the rent and household bills. For others, only when they can sail off into the sunset on a luxury yacht will they feel like they've made a success of their career. What will be the signifier of your own success?

It's important to know what success will look like for you, so you know the steps to take to get there, and be able to recognise the milestones along the way. Without a map that plots the coordinates of your journey, you're just a small rudderless boat floating about in the illustration ocean.

A good place to start is to ask yourself why it is you want to become a freelance illustrator?

My reasons for wanting to become an illustrator were simple: I just didn't want a normal nine to five job that I hated; where I'd have to spend my days watching the hands on the clock tick my life away in sixty second chunks.

I LOVE drawing. In fact, it is more accurate to say that **I LOVE communicating visually.**

I studied Fine Art at university, and ended up focusing on video and performance art. I loved the medium, and I loved the ideas process, but what it lacked for me personally, was a clear function and a broader audience.

The broad audience that your work is exposed to as an illustrator is limitless. You never quite get over the thrill of walking into your local newsagent or bookstore and seeing your work up there on the shelves for all to see. Call me vain or desperate, but that's the kind of recognition that I look for. I can't wait for that day when I can say to my (newly born) son, "Daddy drew that book cover."

So why do you want to become an illustrator?

Only you can answer this question, and only you will know what success will **look like, sound like, and feel like.** Take some time to sit down and write it out. What would your perfect day consist of? How much would you like to earn? Where would you like to work? How much free time would make you happy? Paint as clear a picture as possible, and use that as a beacon to light your way.

PART 1: “ANCHORS AWEIGH!”

Let's start our journey off as we mean to go on...

YOU ARE AN ILLUSTRATOR.

There you go, plain and simple. I've named you. I've given you permission to call yourself an illustrator! Now you can concentrate on building up your career...

Do I need a degree in illustration to succeed?

The short answer is, **no you don't**. But... studying at degree level will give you so much more than a qualification and a large overdraft. University and college is a place to learn the language of visual communication with the time, space, and dedication to carve out your own style. Courses are designed to help you become more effective visual thinkers, give you the independence to follow your own creative path, and practice working to tight deadlines.

The massive advantage that studying illustration will give you is the industry contacts you will make.

Your fellow students, your tutors and any external contacts with your institution are all valuable resources to help give you a leg up into the world of illustration. Follow your tutors instruction and constructive criticism and, (this sounds obvious) make sure they know how hard you work. The golden rule is: **NEVER miss an assignment deadline**. Building up your relationships with staff and students, and showing a professional attitude towards your study will make it even more likely for them to introduce you to their contacts, and give you a step up on the ladder. It also makes your life rich and varied – it's a win / win situation.

How do I choose the right university?

At the time of writing this book, there are over fifty different colleges and universities offering illustration specific higher education courses in the UK. In addition to this, there are illustration related courses available too, like Visual Communication, Animation and Communication Design. With such an abundance of courses and institutions to choose from, how do you know you're committing three years of your life to the right one?

The answer of course is **research**. Now, I could tell you that Brighton University has the best illustration course in the country, but unless you pay a visit and get a feel for the university, how do you know it's the right place for **YOU**?

(I have included a list of all the main UK illustration courses, with links to their websites and contact numbers in the Resources section at the end of this book)

Degree courses aren't cheap, so you might want to consider looking closer to home, and then there's travel and living costs to think about. Invest your time in visiting at least a few local courses to see what you do and don't like about each.

Most higher education institutions put on open days for you to take a look around at the facilities and let you chat to some of the student representatives. Remember though that these are marketing exercises designed to sell courses, and like any form of advertising, they'll be focusing on presenting the best image possible.

I always advise my students to try and look around a university when it isn't an open day. Just make a call to the course administrator (you can find their name in advance by calling the main switchboard and asking for their

name) and ask to visit. This way, you'll get to see what the course is normally like, and get to speak to regular students, not just representatives (who are sometimes paid to be ambassadors).

Whether you go to an open day, or just turn up unannounced, there are a few questions you should try and answer:

What is your gut feeling about the place? Does it give you good vibes? Could you picture yourself coming to this university everyday for three academic years?

How busy are the studios? Are there plenty of people about? Do they look like they're getting on with exciting work, or do they look utterly bored and unmotivated?

What sort of work is being created? Is it the kind of work you like? Is the course structured with set briefs, or is it more self-motivated? If you're the kind of student that likes to be given tight deadlines and project briefs, make sure your chosen course offers this.

What professional opportunities are there? Does the course offer you the opportunity to exhibit your work? What industry links do they have? Do they set 'live' briefs where you work for real clients? All of this will be important when you launch your career, and it's much harder to make these contacts outside of university.

Do they offer students a foreign exchange programme? You could spend part of your university life studying abroad. I studied in Utrecht, Holland for six months as part of my fine art degree and it was one of the best, most productive experiences of my life. And it was paid for by the university. Bonus!

These are just some of the questions that need answering. Every university and college has its high and low points, and it all comes down to your personal choice. Make sure you find out for yourself what each has to offer you.

That's all well and good, but what if I don't want to study at university?

In the end, it's down to you to decide if the course fees and time required to complete a three-year degree is worth it. Studying illustration at college or university doesn't make you an illustrator; the same as knowing how to write sentences doesn't make you a poet. There won't be a magic key at the end of your course that unlocks the door to all the riches that bestows the lucky freelancer.

What makes you an illustrator is *believing* that you're an illustrator, *thinking* like an illustrator, and the *act of creating illustrations itself*. It's about walking the walk, not just talking the talk. You don't need a degree to be successful, but what you will need is passion, drive, and enthusiasm with some amazing work thrown in for good measure!

The illustrator's mindset

So, now we've got that out of the way, we should also look at other elements of the illustrator's mindset...

Freelance illustration is a business and a valid profession.

It's time to start taking yourself, your work, and your career seriously.

As a freelance artist, you're running a business, most probably acting as a sole trader. You have a product and service that will fulfill a need in the market, that's sold at the right price to be of value to both you and your client, offered at a convenient location for purchase, and promoted in a way that reflects your own personal

brand identity.

How much do you want to earn as an illustrator, and how much time, energy, and resources do you want to spend in order to earn it?

The beauty about working as a freelance illustrator is that it's a truly global marketplace.

At the time of writing this book, the western world is in the grip of a deep global recession. Public sector jobs are being slashed and budgets viciously cut - you'd be forgiven for thinking that the situation couldn't be any worse for someone looking to start up as an illustrator.

But you'd be wrong. Think about the millions of companies world-wide that require the skills of a visual communicator, especially at times like these - and **YOU** only need a tiny bite of that cherry to have a successful freelance career.

As long as you have a computer, an Internet connection, and a paying client, you could be working **from anywhere in the world!**

I started my career working from the sunny beaches of Ibiza. I drew nightclub flyers by day, and drew caricatures of holidaymakers by night. It was an unbelievable experience to be sat in the shade of a beach bar listening to cool Balearic beats, watching azure waves lap the sand with the sun setting over the warm Mediterranean, all the while earning money from something I love - **drawing!**

The myth of scarcity

It's time to change your internal tape that tells you there's not enough to go around - it's a lie that we tell ourselves in order to stop ourselves taking that all important leap of faith. Turn off your internal critic that only ever says bad things about you, and start believing in yourself and your skills.

Stop seeing the world as a limited resource, and start living your life in abundance. A simple visit to a bookstore or newsagent should open your eyes to the endless possibilities offered out in front of you.

There are books and magazines to cater for every kind of specialised interest, and nearly all of them employ the use of an illustrator. Someone **just like YOU**.

The key to your success is **action**. Don't just passively read this book and think 'I'll start that when I... (insert excuse)', **take action on each of the steps presented to you now, no matter how small**. Soon, those drips will become a flood.

Ok, so now we know that we do actually want to be illustrators, we know what our measure of success will be, and we have debunked the myth of scarcity - it's time to get ourselves prepared to take our work to market.

Kit out your career

There are a few things you're going to need as a minimum requirement for ensuring success in the freelance arena. The following list is not exhaustive, and as each illustrator's work is unique - so are his or her working methods and equipment list - find what works best for you.

Computer - Mac or PC?

Not only is this argument totally redundant, it's also very tedious. Go with what you like - there really isn't that much in it. I'm Mac based myself because that's what I learned to use, and I'm a brand whore who loves to carry a symbol that says, "Hey! Look how creative I am - I have a MacBook Pro!" Sad I know. But true.

Scanner

Get the best you can afford. The ideal would be an A3 sized scanner, but you can get away with an A4 one to start with, and use some of your Photoshop skills to stitch images together.

Printer

A decent A3 printer is a must - use it to create a physical portfolio, sell small print runs, and create your own promotional material.

Software

The very minimum would be Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator and the Microsoft Office suite.

Graphics tablet

These are the little bad boys that allow you to draw directly with your computer, and free you up from struggling along with a mouse.

The best-known brand is Wacom and they've become so much a part of my tool kit that I just couldn't function without mine now. The price for a small tablet has become really affordable.

Portfolio

A physical folder or box to keep your most representative pieces of work in. NEVER bigger than A3 if you want to be taken seriously by art editors.

Website

You really need to get this sorted as soon as you have a portfolio of work. We will be looking in to this in a little more detail later.

Social media presence

The motto that my favourite Internet marketer, Pat Flynn uses is, "**Be everywhere!**" Get yourself a Facebook fan page, a Twitter, Google + and a LinkedIn account for starters. Just remember, these are tools to promote your business, not distract you from it.

An art box full of bits and bobs

Watercolours, acrylics, pencils, crayons, markers, ink... and whatever else you can get your hands on to create your body of work.

Workspace or studio

You're going to need somewhere to create your illustrative masterpieces. This could be in a spare room at home, a garden office, or if you have the resources, you could rent some studio / office space.

It's important that you have some privacy to concentrate on the task at hand, and you aren't going to upset anyone when you leave your paint pots out.

When I first started out, I was living in a one-bedroom studio flat. We did our cooking, socialising and TV watching all in the same room, and I had a neat little desk in one corner. I actually really enjoyed working in there, and worked on some decent commissions - burning the midnight oil meeting deadlines. The only problem was that my girlfriend at the time was getting pretty fed up of seeing me sat on my computer while she watched the telly, alone, and we did A LOT of arguing over it (we're not together anymore ha ha!). When you're working from home it's easy to fall into an 'always on duty' mode.

If you can, try and make sure you have a table to work on away from your computer. This will give you a chance to go analogue and generate ideas in your sketchbook, do some media experiments, and read a bit of the newspaper if you so desire.

When you're setting up your studio, it's worth considering sharing space with other creatives. Not only does this make renting space cheaper as you can share the costs, it also helps prevent the isolation that you can feel working alone in a spare room.

If sharing space isn't an option for you, then **avoid the illustrator's loneliness with these tips:**

1. Set up an art group. This is really easy - ask friends to join you regularly to talk about any projects you're working on, and goals you want to achieve. Three or more people make up a group, and make sure you stick to an agreed meeting schedule. Keep this time protected - it's really important to make this time for yourself and it's a great way to stay motivated.

2. Go on an 'Artist Date'. In her inspirational book, '**The Artists Way**' art consultant Julia Cameron, advises artists to book a weekly Artist Date with themselves.

What's an 'Artist Date'?

- A commitment of time spent on yourself once a week.
- Time spent solely on you - no companions allowed.
- A date with your inner-artist, or your inner-child.

This sounds so easy to do, but I still find it hard to commit some time for just me and my inner artist each week. The dates don't have to be expensive. Here are some ideas of what you could do on your date:

- Go for a walk, and take your camera or sketchbook with you to document the experience.
- Watch a film you would never normally choose for yourself.
- Grab a stack of magazines, and clip whatever looks interesting or cool to create your own inspiration board.
- Spend an hour going through your books. Pick ten to read or re-read and ten to donate to charity.

For more Artist Date ideas, check out this fantastic blog: <http://www.theartistswayblog.WordPress>.

3. Join online forums and communities. There are plenty of online illustration forums you can join. I find that the **Association of Illustrators** (AOI) <http://www.theaoi.com> is a brilliant place to chat with other illustrators and to find out answers to those burning questions like “What biscuits are you having today?” and “What’s the best music to listen to while illustrating?” Seriously though, it’s a cracking resource and a very supportive community.

4. Skype someone. Or FaceTime if you prefer. Having a chat with someone this way makes you feel much more like you’re not alone.

Managing your freelance time

While we’re on the subject of work set-up, you could do with sorting out a work schedule. This is going to depend on your other commitments - if you have a day job or a family for example.

I have a wife now, and a son, so I try my best not to work in the evenings if I can help it. When I started out, I got a bit of a reputation of turning jobs around under ridiculously tight deadlines. This was great for my portfolio, and my client list, but as my priorities have changed, so too have my work hours.

If you’ve decided to bite the bullet and go full-time as a freelancer, spend a week or two working out when you’re most productive, and try to keep to that schedule. I’ve found I get loads done early in the morning, from around 7:30am until about 12 noon. Things go a bit slow from then until about 2pm, so that’s when I get my admin bits done, or meet up with other folk not following the nine to five chore. I then crack on again from 2pm until 5pm. It works pretty well for me.

A great tip to help you stay focused on your tasks is to turn off your automatic email updates, and don’t check them for the first hour of your work day. Emails and enquiries can easily distract you from your illustration work. I check mine at 10am for anything coming in from the day before, then do all of my answering of enquiries etc. between 12 noon and 2pm. I do a final check at 4:30pm to see what I need to deal with immediately, or what I can push over to the next day. I even have these times on the bottom of my auto responder.

Any business person, whether working in the creative industries or not, needs to learn to maximise their time in order to get all the important stuff done.

You need to be aware of falling into the ‘busy trap’, where you make yourself feel secure by busying yourself with small and insignificant stuff, whilst neglecting, or at best, delaying the important tasks.

You need to prioritise your tasks and focus on the ones that will achieve your business objectives. It’s easy to just say - “prioritise”. It’s like the teachers at my school telling me to “revise” for exams. It’s all well and good saying it, but how exactly do you do it?

You really have two basic, top priority criteria:

1 Work that gets you new clients

2 Work you’re completing for existing clients

Here are some actions you can put into practice today to help you achieve the most out of your day:

Two ways to prioritise your time and boost your productivity:

1. The ABCD approach:

In his book, '**Organise Yourself**' John Caunt provides a concise but comprehensive guide to improving all aspects of personal organisation. He advises readers to work out exactly what they want to achieve from their day and to write out a 'to-do' list with everything that is competing for their attention.

Using a clean sheet of paper, draw a cross through it so you have four segments. Label each segment **A, B, C** and **D**. Separate out your to-do list in order of importance and urgency.

A items are tasks that are both **important and urgent** and must be given immediate attention.

B items are tasks that are **important but not urgent** and tend to be concerned with longer-term objectives.

C items are tasks that are **urgent but not important** and are usually somebody else's **A** items that they want action from you on. You should question why they're urgent, and decide whether or not you need to act immediately.

D items are tasks that are **not important or urgent** and are often used as self-generated distractions. You shouldn't really be wasting your time on these items and instead be focusing your efforts on the other items on your list.

Only work on one task at a time, and see it through to completion or a stopping point – like when you've sent your roughs to the client and are waiting their instructions for you to be able to continue.

2. Use the Pomodoro Technique®:

Created in the 1980's by Francesco Cirillo, the Pomodoro Technique is founded on the idea that frequent breaks can improve mental agility.

Pomodoro literally means 'Tomato' in Italian and is based on a famous tomato shaped kitchen timer that Cirillo used as a university student. With the Pomodoro technique, tasks are broken down into 'Pomodoro's' (typically 25 minute segments).

There are five basic steps to implementing the technique:

- 1 Decide on the task to be done.**
- 2 Set the Pomodoro (timer) to 25 minutes.**
- 3 Work on the task until the timer rings; record with an x (this marks one Pomodoro).**
- 4 Take a short break (5 minutes).**

Every four "Pomodoro's" take a longer break (15 – 20 minutes).

As 'Pomodoro's' are completed, they're recorded on a sheet of paper, adding to your sense of accomplishment. I'm using this technique to focus on writing this book. It seems deceptively simple - and it is - but I must admit, I still find it difficult to take a break when I'm in full flow. I'm using the paid for Pomodoro iPhone app, which is really helping me to stay on track.

Working full-time, part-time and everything in-between

Now, I'm all about motivating you to jump into illustration and help you to create an awesome creative career for yourself, but it would be irresponsible of me to tell you to leave work tomorrow and try to start paying all your rent and bills from drawing pictures.

Don't get me wrong – I'm not saying that this is an unachievable goal, in fact I imagine that earning your living solely from your illustration endeavours is your **ULTIMATE** goal. This is totally achievable and you'll undoubtedly be the envy of your nine to five friends when you get to do this, but unless you're very lucky, or have fantastic industry contacts already, you're going to need to work your way up to full-time freelancing.

So how are you going to generate income while you're building up your creative business? Well, this will depend on your financial needs and your criteria for success. What you see as success will probably be different to mine and anyone else's.

A common goal would be to generate enough money to pay the rent and bills, with enough money left over for your creature comforts. Get a sheet of paper and write down all of your outgoings including stuff often overlooked like birthday gifts, petrol for a car and mobile phone bills. Work out your base income needs from these and you have a target to reach from employment.

When I started my own illustration career I was working full-time for my father as a landscape gardener, at below minimum wage (yeah, thanks Dad!). I absolutely hated this job; early starts and working in the pouring rain. There's nothing quite like manual labour to focus the mind on creating an alternative income!

I went to Ibiza to draw caricatures and create nightclub flyers over the summer – this helped to build my fledgling portfolio.

On my return to the UK, I decided I needed a more creative job than gardening (hey I'm not knocking it – but digging holes just wasn't for me), and I started working at Lawrence art materials shop in Hove, UK. This was much better, and as a bonus I got a great discount too.

I worked on my portfolio and commissions in the evenings and served customers in the day. Eventually (after about a year) I was getting enough work to go part-time at the shop. My employers were really very supportive of my illustration career, and would at times let me go home early or book holiday time at very short notice to allow me to deliver on a brief.

Before long it was clear that I wasn't able to do either job satisfactorily and so it was a natural progression to go full time as a freelance illustrator. This took about two years from graduating from my BA Fine Art course in 2000. I haven't looked back since.

Teaching to supplement income

I do still have a day job though. I'm one of those annoying people who get bored easily doing the same thing day in and day out, so I also teach on a Graphic Design and Illustration course at a Further Education college.

Teaching is a great way to earn a better part-time wage. I work at my local college on a sessional basis and this pays £20.85 per hour.

I love teaching – well, that's not strictly true – I love the delivery side of teaching; being with students in Further Education and helping them gain places at university.

It helps to keep you on your toes creatively, and you constantly have to update your abilities to stay relevant. You

also get to develop your presentation skills with teaching which will be invaluable to your illustration skills set.

Seeing students go beyond the expectations they've set themselves is the most rewarding aspect of the job. The worst part is the paperwork, and constantly having to jump through hoops, especially when the Ofsted inspectors ride into town.

If you're interested in teaching, most colleges prefer you to have a qualification. In the UK Further Education sector, you have a couple of options:

P.G.C.E

A Post Graduate Certificate of Education is recognised throughout the UK and some European institutions as the standard teaching qualification. You can study for it both part-time and full-time, but you'll require a Higher Education qualification first. I completed my PGCE at Northbrook College in West Sussex and it was fantastic. I studied full-time which was intense, but was more than worth the effort.

PTLLS (also known as PETALS)

If you don't already have an HE qualification, you could opt for the shorter PTLLS qualification. This is a thirty-hour course that must be completed in the first year of teaching and it gives those who complete it their licence to practice.

Before jumping into employment, carefully assess your situation and your current time commitments to determine if the job will really be a stepping stone to a full-time illustration career, or stop it dead in its tracks.

Creative ways to support your fledgling career

There are more ways to supplement your income that can be a little more creative than working behind a bar in your local pub. Here's a few ideas:

- **Design and sell t-shirts.** Get your illustrations featured on walking canvasses
- **Customise existing products with your illustrations.** Turn your illustrative masterpieces into highly desirable merchandise and sell these via your website or on Etsy
- **Transform your work into iphone cases.** Get yourself a bulk load of blank cases and embellish them with your own designs
- **Organise an exhibition.** Set up a small show in a funky cafe and sell your own limited edition prints
- **Work in an art gallery as an invigilator.** A great way to network with other artists and buyers

Your support network: family, friends and colleagues

As a freelance illustrator, you'll probably find yourself working alone at a computer quite a bit (unless you're in a shared studio). It's essential that you cultivate great relationships with your friends and family to stop the '**loneliness of the freelance illustrator**' setting in.

Having the support of your family is also vital in ensuring your success. Not only will your income be unpredictable, you may also be working unsociable hours to meet tight deadlines. Make sure you discuss this with your partner or spouse, and anyone else living with you.

If you're working from home, you need to make it clear that you **are working** and not just watching daytime TV.

It's difficult to turn down well-meaning family members from coming round for a 'chat', and even though you tell them that your back is against the wall with a deadline, their puppy dog eyes as you usher them away can turn your heart to stone.

The key here is to be as explicit as possible about your work schedule and commitments, and your unavailability to pick up the shopping, the dry cleaning, or your in-laws children from nursery.

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW: Tracey Jane Bradley

Tracey Jane Bradley is a designer and illustrator currently studying in Manchester. She regularly shows at print fairs and is steadily building her portfolio of work, ready to launch her illustration career.

What university are you studying at, and for what qualification?

BA (Hons) Graphic Design at Manchester Metropolitan University.

What made you decide to extend your education after college? What were you hoping to gain?

I extended my education after college to increase my potential. I wanted to make a career out of what I love doing which is image making! I'm not all that sure I chose the right course in which to develop my skills, as I'm pretty much still trying to figure out what area of design I'm more involved with personally. I find that I still have the determination to carry on doing what I love outside of university, even if I don't get to do it there.

What made you choose Manchester Metropolitan University?

Honestly, I'm not quite sure why. I think it was because I didn't want to go to a university in London so I chose the next big thing. Also, I do remember MMU having high employability rates after graduating in graphic design.

How much has your course cost so far?

My course in total has cost me around £6,800 so far, and that's only the course fee. God knows how much I've spent on materials and resources for my course but I feel like it's worth it.

What has your experience been like? What are the best bits? What are the worst bits? Are you set briefs or is it self-directed?

My experience of the lifestyle of university has been like no other experience I've had. It's certainly taught me to be independent and that shit happens but you learn to carry on.

Students applying for university think they're gonna make a billion new friends and party every night but it's really not like that. I made lots of new friends but not as many as I thought I would, especially because I didn't know anyone in Manchester and I was the only one to venture out of my comfort zone of friends at college. The parties on the other hand, yeah there's quite a few, but not as many as you'd expect. It's just completely different to how you imagine it.

The best bits have got to be making new friends, exploring a new city, living independently and learning to embrace your course – it makes it easier if you don't battle against it. I'm paying a lot of money for it so why shouldn't I embrace it, right?

The worst bit is that I find I always question myself. I worry about what direction I want to take my career, and I still don't really know. I guess it's partly to do with the pressure of today's economy and the fear of not getting a job for which you went to university to get.

The other difficult bits are just trying to adapt to a new lifestyle at first; your parents aren't there to buy your toilet roll and wipe your arse anymore – you have to do that all by yourself (I steal my toilet roll from local pubs and

bars. That's a top tip from me when you're skint).

At MMU we're given set briefs most of the time. Mostly they're restricted too - this is to make us think more about our client rather than pleasing ourselves for a change. We have the odd self-directed project thrown in.

Do you think that higher education is necessary for a successful career in illustration?

I used to think so and I still do in a way. You need higher education if you're not stable enough to go it alone in my opinion. There are plenty of illustrators and designers that have gone at it alone without H.E, but they have determination and willpower already, they can stick at it. If you haven't got those essentials then you're screwed - you need university to guide you through the process of building up not only your skills, but also potential, confidence, willpower and passion too.

Can you describe the processes you go through when working on a design from start to finish?

Well, I am naughty with the process. My process doesn't seem the right way in my lecturer's eyes, the same as it did at college, but as always I start with idea generation. This sparks all sorts of imagery in my mind to work with. As soon as I envisage imagery in my imagination I look up designers that have either worked with something related to my idea, or styles I think would suit the idea. This gives me inspiration of how my design could look and I go ahead and do it. I'm quite impatient so I don't really do many thumbnails like I'm told to at the beginning. When designing I'm constantly changing the appearance of the design until I'm satisfied.

Would you say that a traditional or digital process has a more important role in your work (I mean computers opposed to pen and paper)? Why?

I tend to work with both traditional and digital processes. I like to combine them both in my work as it lets me be more experimental and lets me explore as best I can.

Who are the illustrators you most admire?

Kelsey Dake, Gemma Correll, Stanley Donwood and Generic Greeting Collective to name a few illustrators that have influenced and inspired me.

What methods do you use to market your work? Is there anything that's working particularly well?

I use numerous websites to display my work such as Behance, Cargo collective, Flickr, Instagram and Facebook. I also take part in print fairs which helps me understand what people are interested in and gather feedback from the public who are interested in illustrative work.

Do you do anything to support your studies? Part-time job or sell limited edition prints etc.?

I'm constantly looking for part-time jobs but with the recession it's hard without experience. So to make a bit more money I create commissions for friends and family, as well as sell my work at the print fairs as I mentioned before. I occasionally mention my work for sale on social networking sites to generate interest.

How do you keep your work fresh? Do you need to consciously adapt your style or does it progress naturally?

I think my work progresses naturally. I'm forever looking at new artists and styles emerging within the industry.

Checking out galleries, exhibitions and chatting to other illustrators/graphic designers is a big way for me to progress.

Where do you most commonly find your inspiration? (I imagine your first answer would be 'everywhere' but is there something that really gets the juices flowing)?

I find my inspiration from a lot of students on my course at university as we share a lot of research with each other. We're all constantly looking at different mediums to inspire us because we're interested in all kinds of things. Local magazines are good for inspiration too.

What do you think is the most important thing an art college should teach a student of illustration?

Just make. Don't make to impress or delight – just make things constantly. This will not only keep your drive to succeed but it will help you with all the projects you face.

Do you actively use social media? What's the best way my readers could follow / find out more about your work?

I do use social media but I'm in the progress of updating my website to show a little more professionalism. I can be found on Behance and Cargo Collective!



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