



So you want to go it alone?

Working Freelance in the Outdoors

Here are 21 essentials of being self-employed in the Outdoors.

1. Have A Master Plan

- a. What are you trying to achieve?
- b. Key skills – what do you bring?
- c. Who are your potential clients?
- d. How much money do you need to survive?
- e. How are you going to bring this in?
- f. What is your contingency plan?
- g. What expenses are you going to incur? E.g. – Ongoing training / CPD, memberships, new kit, vehicle, insurance, tax, banking...
- h. Forecast your cashflow in and out for the year.

2. Register as self-employed with HMRC

- a. If you don't do this within 3 months of starting up, its £100 fine. No ifs butts or maybes. 3 months goes quickly and you don't get reminders.
- b. Sign up to the HMRC emails – useful advice on how to submit tax returns, what you can and can't claim as expenses etc.
- c. Keep records of your incoming and outgoing expenses. Standard tax year is April 5th – April 4th (usually people use March 31st as end of year as it is easier). You will need to tot up your income and business expenses to work out profits at the end of your financial year. This then needs to be submitted AND ANY DUE TAX PAID before January 31st the following year. In the first year, this tax bill will also include a payment on account for the following six months of what you anticipate the tax bill to be. MAKE SURE YOU ARE NOT TAKEN BY SURPRISE and put money aside.

3. Get insurance / risk protection

- a. Yes you can be insured through the centres for whom you work, but it is better to be safe than sorry. Professional indemnity, public liability and consider some form of income protection for when you're injured and can't work, or when the work just isn't there. Check out more guidance on that [here](#)



4. Know how much money you need to earn

- a. What is your baseline – how much do you need to bring in to live for a year, cover further training / CPD, keep up to date and have a phone, email, website and overheads. Put in a contingency for emergencies (such as new waterproofs) and multiply the total by 1.25. This will give you how much you need to bring in to break even in a year. The 25% extra you need to put aside for tax.

5. Find out who is hiring and how much they pay

- a. Also how many days are likely in a year given the seasonality, your ability to have some days off. Does this add up to the total needed in no. 4? If not, find a job. IOL Jobsite.

6. Issue proper invoices to your clients

- a. Be prepared to chase up payment. Register to complete your tax return online and do it well in advance of the January deadline each year.

7. Don't sell yourself too cheaply

- a. It is very hard to then increase the cost. Equally often centres will have specific day rates they pay.

8. Have the required base qualifications and awards

- a. Make sure you are up to date with your DBS, D1, First Aid, Safeguarding and Data Protection awareness.
- b. Qualifications are the most quickly and easily recognised things that employers are looking for from freelancers. Technical quals (such as NGB's) give you the technical safety and how to coach each discipline, the IOL accreditation awards look at the quality of the learning experience you deliver. D1 minibus is invaluable if you can get it, expensive if you are younger.

9. Work out how to survive when the weather is rubbish and nobody books you.

- a. What other things can you do?

10. Make sure you have a longer term escape route

- a. Develop other (non-outdoor specific) skills so you can find a job to pay the bills if freelancing doesn't work out.
- b. Join the professional organisations like IOL so you have access to their advice, discounts and skills development opportunities.

- c. Be flexible but don't say yes to everything - you need days off or you will become worn out and less safe (and less sane). Protect your back, your shoulders and your knees.

11. Be great at delivering learning

- a. Stay great at delivering learning by completing the IOL accreditation awards
- b. Attend workshops, events etc. to keep yourself fresh.

12. Be a brilliant contractor

- a. Be loyal, trusted, timely and do more than you are contracted for.
- b. Don't let people down!

13. Keep up to date with the latest guidance

- a. Your membership of IOL gives you access to a great amount of information and support.

14. Play to your strengths

- a. Know what you are good at, and what kind of clients you are best with
- b. Be reflective and understand your own strengths and weaknesses. You can be sure your employers will be looking for them!

15. Know what makes you unique

- a. Knowing who you are, what you offer, who your audience is, how you differentiate yourself, your Unique Selling Point.
- b. These classic marketing questions are important hurdles to negotiate well. Startups need to be heavily focussed on sales, so the point above about who you know carries a lot of weight. Why should anyone use or trust you if they've never heard of you?

16. Get your name known.

- a. Work your network. Make calls. Bookings won't just turn up. Join IOL and come to events to broaden that network.

17. Don't judge yourself against other people's marketing.

- a. Be happy in your own niche. Make sure you are promoting the match between what your client(s) need and what you offer.

18. Get your voice heard

- a. Your opinion matters in developing the industry. Keep in touch with what is going on and get involved in consultations etc. The IOL newsletters will let you know more and offer you chances to say then and there what you think.

19. It is not your dream or ambition you are delivering

- a. Make sure you deliver what your employer has sold / client has bought NOT what you want to sell them.

20. Pay on time

- a. If you are using suppliers, pay them on time or you might not get them next time.

21. Go your own way...

- a. You don't have to buy a van, always wear sunglasses on your head, make all your nice outdoor gear look battered and old, grow a beard (if applicable...)
- b. There are many ways to be successful as a freelancer in outdoor learning – find the way that fits for you.

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Master Plan Template

(Get a tea/water/beer/wine, sit down somewhere quiet, and fill it in...)

Question	Answer	What to do next	When?
What are you trying to achieve?			
Key skills – what do you bring?			
Who are your potential clients?			
How much money do you need to survive			
How are you going to bring this in?			
What is your contingency plan?			
What expenses are you going to incur? E.g. On-going training / CPD, memberships, new kit, vehicle, insurance, tax, banking...			
Forecast your cashflow in and out for the year			