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Designer's Rate Roadmap

Raise Your Prices Confidently,
Keep Your Clients

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Beyond Hourly: Valuing Your Design Work

You already know the fear. You draft the rate increase email, stare at it, and delete it. Surely they'll leave. Surely someone cheaper is one search away.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: that fear is usually louder than the reality. And it's built on a flawed idea of what you're selling.

You're Not Selling Hours

Most designers price by the hour because it feels safe. It's easy to explain, easy to track, easy to defend.

It's also a trap.

Hourly pricing quietly tells your client, "You are buying my time." Time is a commodity. If a client thinks they're buying time, the natural question becomes, "Can I get that time cheaper?"

Worse, it punishes your own skill. The faster and better you get, the less you earn. A logo system that takes you six hours because you've done it a hundred times earns less than the same work from a beginner who takes twenty.

What your client is actually buying is an outcome:

- A brand that makes their product look trustworthy
- A landing page that turns more visitors into customers
- A deck that helps them close a funding round
- Fewer back-and-forth headaches, because you simply deliver

Your hours are just the cost of *production*. The *value* is what changes for them.

The Value Question

Try this with your next three projects. Before you think about price, ask the client (or work out yourself):

- 1. What problem does this solve?**
- 2. What is solving it worth to the business?**
- 3. What happens if it stays unsolved?**

A rebrand for a company that's losing deals because it looks amateur is not a "40-hour job." It's a fix for a revenue problem. Imagine a designer who redesigns a pricing page for a software company. If that page is where customers decide to buy, even a modest improvement matters far more to the client than the designer's time ever could.

You don't need to promise specific results. You only need to understand where your work sits in the client's business, because that's what lets you price with confidence.

Reframing the Fear

Let's take apart the three worries that hold most designers back.

“They’ll leave.” Some might. But clients who’ve worked with you for months have a real switching cost: onboarding someone new, explaining their brand again, risking quality. Many stay, especially when the increase is communicated well (we’ll cover scripts in Chapter 4).

“I’m not worth more.” Check your evidence, not your feelings. Have your skills, speed, or results improved since you set your current rate? If yes, your price is out of date, not your confidence.

“The market won’t pay it.” The market is not one client. It’s a range. Charging more doesn’t mean everyone pays it; it means you attract the clients who value what you do.

Your Action Step for Today

Open a blank document and answer these in writing:

- What are my three best clients actually getting from me, beyond “design files”?
- What would it cost them if I disappeared tomorrow?
- When did I last raise my rates?

Don’t edit yourself. Just write.

This isn’t busywork. It’s the raw material for everything ahead: the math, the emails, the 30-day plan. Once you can name your value in plain language, asking to be paid for it stops feeling like a gamble.

Next up, we’ll put numbers behind it: how to calculate the rate you actually need.

Decoding Your Profit: Simple Rate Calculation

Most freelancers set their rate the same way: look at what other designers charge, pick something that feels safe, and hope it works.

It's a guess, and guesses tend to land low.

This chapter replaces the guess with arithmetic. Four steps, one calculator, about thirty minutes. By the end, you'll have a number you can defend, to clients and to yourself.

Step 1: Start With the Income You Need

Begin with your target take-home pay, not your current rate. Be specific.

- **Personal expenses:** rent or mortgage, food, insurance, debt, subscriptions
- **Savings goals:** emergency fund, retirement, a big purchase
- **Taxes:** set aside a realistic share for income and self-employment tax. Rules vary by country, so check with an accountant or your tax authority for your figure.

Add it up. That's your **target annual income**, the amount you need to *earn after* business costs, plus the tax you'll owe on it.

Step 2: Add Your Business Overheads

Your business has costs your clients never see. List them all:

- Software and font licences
- Hardware, and its eventual replacement
- Co-working space or home office costs
- Insurance, accounting, legal
- Marketing, website, portfolio hosting
- Training and conferences

Total them for the year. Don't forget the unglamorous ones, like the laptop you'll need in three years. Divide its price by its lifespan and include a slice every year.

Target income + overheads = the revenue your business must generate.

Step 3: Count Your *Real*/Billable Hours

Here's where most rate calculations quietly fail. Nobody bills 40 hours a week.

You also spend time on:

- Emails, calls, and proposals
- Invoicing and admin
- Finding new clients
- Revisions that go unbilled

- Sick days, holidays, and slow weeks

Work backwards instead:

1. Start with the weeks you'll realistically work in a year
2. Multiply by the hours you work each week
3. Subtract the share spent on non-billable tasks

If you track your time for even two weeks, you'll see the pattern. Many freelancers find that only a portion of their working hours is billable. Use *your* number, not an optimistic one.

Step 4: Build in Profit

This step is the one people skip, and it's the one that makes a business sustainable.

Profit isn't your salary. It's the margin *above* your salary and costs. It funds slow months, lets you invest in growth, and gives you room to turn down bad-fit work.

Add a profit margin on top of your revenue target. A common starting point is somewhere around 10 to 20 percent, but pick a figure that reflects your goals and how unpredictable your income is.

The Formula

Put it together:

(Target income + overheads + profit margin) ÷ billable hours = your minimum hourly rate

A hypothetical example: imagine a designer who needs a certain take-home amount, carries modest overheads, and realistically bills far fewer hours than she works. Run her numbers through the formula, and the result is often noticeably higher than the rate she was quoting before. That gap is common, and it's exactly why this exercise matters.

Treat the Result as a Floor

This number is your **minimum**, the rate below which you're losing money or working for free.

It is not your price ceiling. Remember Chapter 1: clients pay for outcomes, not hours. Your calculated rate tells you where you must never go below. Your value tells you how far above it you can charge.

For project pricing, estimate your hours, multiply by this rate, then adjust upward based on the value you identified in your action step.

Your Action Step for Today

Grab a spreadsheet and build this in four rows:

1. Target annual income (including tax)
2. Annual overheads
3. Profit margin you want
4. Realistic billable hours

Run the formula. Then compare the result to what you charge right now.

Write down the gap. Don't flinch at it. That gap is the raise you've been underpricing yourself out of, and in the next chapter, we'll look at how to decide who gets it first.

Confident Conversations: Presenting Your New Rates

You have your number. Now comes the part that actually scares people: saying it out loud.

Here's the good news. Most of the fear lives in the *anticipation*, not the conversation. A rate increase handled well is a short, boring, professional exchange. Your job is to make it boring.

The Mindset Shift: You're Informing, Not Asking

Compare these two openers:

- “I was wondering if maybe it would be okay if I raised my rates a little?”
- “Starting March 1, my rate is changing to \$X.”

The first invites negotiation and signals doubt. The second is a business update, the same kind you'd get from a plumber, an accountant, or your internet provider.

You can be warm and still be firm. Warmth is in your tone. Firmness is in your structure.

The Four-Part Structure

Every rate conversation, written or spoken, follows the same skeleton:

1. **Appreciate.** Name something specific about working together.
2. **Announce.** State the new rate and the effective date plainly.
3. **Anchor to value.** Remind them what they get, in terms of results, not hours.
4. **Advance.** Move to the next step so the conversation doesn't stall.

Notice what's missing: apologies, long justifications, and any mention of your rent.

What Not to Say

Avoid these phrases. Each one hands the client a reason to push back:

- “I’m sorry, but...”
- “I know this isn’t a great time...”
- “My costs have gone up...” (it makes your pricing about you, not their outcome)
- “If that doesn’t work, we can figure something out.” (you’ve just pre-negotiated against yourself)

Email Script: Existing Client

Subject: Update to my rates, effective [date]

Hi [Name],

I've really enjoyed working on [specific project] together, especially [specific result, e.g., "seeing the new packaging land well with your customers"].

I'm writing to let you know that my rate is changing to [\$X] effective [date]. Projects confirmed before then will stay at the current rate.

I'm keen to keep supporting [their goal]. If you have work coming up, let's get it scheduled so we can plan around the change. Do you have 15 minutes this week to talk through what's next?

Best,

[Your name]

The "confirmed before then" line does quiet work: it gives the client a gentle, honest reason to act, without any pressure tactics.

If They Push Back

Some will. That's normal, and it isn't a verdict on your worth. Keep three responses ready:

- **"That's higher than I expected."** Reply: "I understand. The new rate reflects [the value they get]. Happy to walk you through what's included."

- **“Can you do the old rate for this one?”** Reply: “I’m not able to on this project, but I’m glad to adjust scope so it fits your budget.”
- **Silence.** Don’t fill it. Don’t rush to discount. Let them respond.

Notice the pattern: you flex on *scope*, not *price*. Scope is negotiable. Your rate is not.

Your Action Step for Today

Pick one client and draft the email using the script above. Fill in three things:

- One specific result from your past work together
- Your new rate
- Your effective date (give at least a few weeks’ notice)

Don’t send it yet. Read it aloud once. If any sentence sounds apologetic, cut it.

Next chapter, you’ll decide which clients get this email first, and which ones may need a different approach entirely.

Crafting The Message: Email Templates That Convert

You've done the math. You know your number. Now comes the part most designers dread: hitting send.

A good rate-increase email does three things. It's short. It's clear. It's calm. It reads like a business update, not a plea.

Here are four templates you can adapt today, plus the rules that make them work.

The Structure Behind Every Good Rate Email

Every message below follows the same four beats:

1. **Appreciation.** One sentence, specific and sincere.
2. **The change.** New rate, plainly stated.
3. **The date.** When it takes effect.
4. **The next step.** What happens to current work, and how to reach you.

Skip the apology. Skip the justification essay. Skip the phrase "I hope you understand."

Template 1: The Standard Notice (Most Clients)

Subject: Update to my rates, effective [date]

Hi [Name],

I've enjoyed working with you on [specific project], and I'm glad the [specific result] has been working well for your team.

I'm writing to let you know that my rates are changing. Starting [date], my [hourly/day/project] rate will be [new rate]. Any work agreed before that date will stay at the current rate.

If you have projects coming up, I'd be happy to scope them now so we can plan around the timing. Just reply and let me know what's on your horizon.

Thanks again for your trust in my work.

[Your name]

Template 2: The Long-Term Client

For clients you've worked with for years, acknowledge the relationship, but don't discount it.

Subject: A quick note on pricing for [year]

Hi [Name],

Working together over the past [timeframe] has been a highlight of my business. Seeing [specific outcome] come to life has been a real pleasure.

My rates haven't kept pace with the work I now deliver, so I'm adjusting them. From [date], my rate will be [new rate]. Because

of our history, I'm happy to hold your current rate on anything confirmed before [earlier date].

Would a short call help? I'd like to talk through your plans for the coming months.

[Your name]

The "hold the old rate until a date" move is a courtesy, not a concession. It rewards early action without lowering your price.

Template 3: The Retainer or Ongoing Client

Subject: Retainer update from [month]

Hi [Name],

Quick heads-up on our retainer. Beginning [date], the monthly fee will move from [old amount] to [new amount]. The scope stays the same: [brief scope summary].

If you'd rather adjust the scope to fit your current budget, I'm glad to talk options. Let me know which works better and I'll update the agreement.

[Your name]

This gives them a choice between the new price and a reduced scope. As you saw in Chapter 3, you flex on scope, never on rate.

Template 4: The Small or Occasional Client

Keep it brief. These clients don't need a long goodbye to your old pricing.

Subject: New rates from [date]

Hi [Name],

A quick note: my rates are updating from [date]. My [day/project] rate will be [new rate]. If you have anything in the pipeline, send it over before then and we'll sort the details.

Thanks,

[Your name]

Before You Hit Send

Run every draft through this checklist:

- **Is the new rate stated in one clear sentence?**
- **Is the effective date there?**
- **Did you give a few weeks' notice, at minimum?**
- **Is there at least one specific compliment about their project?**
- **Did you cut every "just," "sorry," "unfortunately," and "hopefully"?**
- **Is it under 150 words?**

If the email is longer than a short screen, it's over-explaining.

What to Do With the Replies

Most replies will be brief acknowledgments. Some will ask questions. A few may push back. Prepare for all three:

- **"Thanks, understood."** Reply with a short thank-you. Done.
- **"Can we discuss?"** Say yes. Offer two times and keep the conversation on scope and value.

- **“That’s more than we budgeted.”** Don’t defend or discount. Offer a smaller scope or a later start date.

Your Action Step for Today

Choose the template that fits your first client. Paste it into a blank draft, fill every bracket, then trim it by 20 percent.

Save it as a draft. In the next chapter, you’ll build a 30-day plan that tells you exactly when to send it.

Your 30-Day Rate-Up Plan: Step-by-Step Implementation

You have your numbers (Chapter 2), your talking points (Chapter 3), and your draft email (Chapter 4). What you don't have yet is a date.

That's where most rate increases die. Not in the client's inbox, but in your "I'll do it next month" folder.

This plan gives you four weeks and a clear job for each one. Pick a start date and put these steps in your calendar today.

Week 1: Prepare (Days 1-7)

Do the groundwork so nothing about the send feels improvised.

- **Day 1:** List every active and recurring client. For each, note the current rate, the work you do, and when the last increase happened (if ever).
- **Day 2:** Sort them into three groups: *Ready now* (long-term, high-value, healthy relationship), *Handle with care* (price-sensitive, or mid-project), and *Reassess* (low-fit clients you'd be fine losing).
- **Day 3:** Set your new rate for each client using your Chapter 2 math. Write down a number, not a range.

- **Day 4-5:** Finalize your emails. Match each template from Chapter 4 to a client group.
- **Day 6:** Update your proposal template, invoice template, and website or rate sheet with the new pricing.
- **Day 7:** Decide your effective date. Give existing clients at least 30 days' notice, and apply the new rate to new work and new projects first.

Week 2: Start With New Clients and Your Easiest Wins (Days 8-14)

Build confidence before you tackle the harder conversations.

- **Quote the new rate to every new inquiry, starting today.** No explanations, no apologies. A new client has no old number to compare it to.
- **Send your “Ready now” emails.** Personalize the first line, send, and then leave it alone.
- **Log responses.** Keep a simple list: client, date sent, reply, outcome.

Expect most replies to be short and uneventful. That first “Thanks, understood” does more for your nerves than any amount of reading.

Week 3: Handle the Sensitive Conversations (Days 15-21)

Now work through the “Handle with care” group.

- **Mid-project clients:** Finish the current project at the agreed price. Announce the new rate for anything that starts after it.

- **Price-sensitive clients:** Lead with value and offer options, such as a smaller scope, a retainer, or a later start date, rather than a discount.
- **Anyone who asked to talk:** Book the call within two days, using your Chapter 3 script.

Follow up on any unanswered email on day five with one line: “Just checking you saw my note about updated rates. Happy to answer questions.”

Week 4: Lock It In and Review (Days 22–30)

- **Day 22-25:** Reassess your “Reassess” group. Either send the new rate or let those relationships taper on purpose.
- **Day 26:** Check that every active invoice, contract, and proposal reflects the right rate.
- **Day 27-28:** Review your response log. Who accepted? Who negotiated? What did you say that worked?
- **Day 29:** Note one phrase or tactic to reuse and one thing to change next time.
- **Day 30:** Set a calendar reminder to review your rates again in 6 to 12 months, so the next increase is routine, not dreaded.

Rules That Keep You on Track

- **Don’t apologize** in writing or on calls. Confidence is part of the message.
- **Don’t discount to “make up” for the increase.** Adjust scope instead.
- **Don’t wait for a perfect moment.** There isn’t one.

- **Do keep working normally.** Your service shouldn't change just because your price did.

Your Action Step for Today

Open your calendar and block six things: your Day 1 client list, your Day 6 template updates, your Week 2 send date, and your Day 30 review. Name each block with its task.

Once they're on the calendar, you're committed. The final chapter covers what to do after the dust settles, so your rates keep growing with you.

Sustaining Your Value: Future-Proofing Your Income

Your new rates are in place. Now comes the part most designers skip: making sure those rates keep rising instead of quietly eroding.

A rate increase isn't a one-time event. It's a habit. Here's how to build it.

Review Your Rates on a Schedule

Put a rate review on your calendar twice a year. Treat it like a tax deadline.

At each review, ask:

- Has my workload or skill level changed since my last increase?
- Have my costs gone up (software, tools, insurance, time off)?
- Am I still booked solid? If so, you're probably underpriced.
- Which clients stretch my capacity without matching the value I deliver?

Use the profit math from Chapter 2. Update the numbers, and your next rate falls out of them. No guesswork, no anxiety.

Keep Evolving What You Sell

Clients pay premium rates for outcomes, not hours. The more your work ties to results, the easier your price is to defend.

Look for ways to move up the value ladder:

- **Add strategy to execution.** Instead of only delivering a logo, offer the brand thinking behind it.
- **Package your services.** Bundle related work into defined offers with clear scopes and outcomes.
- **Specialise.** A designer who solves one problem for one type of client can charge more than a generalist.
- **Offer retainers.** Ongoing relationships give you stable income and give clients priority access.

Pick one of these to test this quarter. Not all four.

Attract Better-Fit Clients on Purpose

Higher rates work best when the right people see them. Make your marketing do some of the filtering.

- **Update your portfolio.** Lead with the projects you want more of, and describe the result, not just the visuals.
- **Show your process.** Clients who see a clear, professional method are less likely to haggle.
- **Ask for referrals from your best clients.** They tend to know people like themselves.
- **Say no more often.** Declining mismatched projects frees up room for better ones.

Protect Your Premium Position

Once you charge more, small habits keep that position solid:

- Deliver on time and communicate proactively.
- Keep your scopes written down and respected.
- Raise rates for new clients first, without apology, then fold existing clients in on your schedule.
- Don't let a single hesitant client reset your pricing for everyone else.

Track the Signals

Watch for patterns, not single data points. If almost every prospect says yes, you may be too cheap. If nearly all say no, revisit how you present value. A healthy middle means you're priced with confidence.

Your Action Step for Today

Open your calendar and set two recurring reminders: a **rate review every six months** and a **monthly 30-minute “value check”** to update your portfolio and note one way to deepen your offer.

Your rates should grow with your skill. Now you have the system to make that happen.