

Code of Practice

The craft of a professional copywriter

A way with words isn't enough. This code defines the craft behind the creativity – the processes, systems and working practices that make a creative a professional.

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Employed or independent?

The code has two parts:

Part 1: applies to all professional copywriters, regardless of employment status.

Part 2: covers self-employed copywriters (e.g. freelancers, contractors, agencies).

Part 1: Core Standards

These standards apply to all Pro+ members of ProCopywriters, whether employed or independent.

Professional competence

Clients and employers can't see your thought process. They judge your competence by what you deliver and how you work. This section covers the experience, learning and self-awareness that underpin professional credibility.

Pro+ membership is open to copywriters with at least two years' professional copywriting experience, or equivalent experience gained through formal training programmes, internships or mentored practice.

Copywriters must maintain and develop their professional skills through continuing professional development and by staying up to date with legal, ethical and technological developments affecting our work.

Copywriters must work within the limits of their competence. This means taking on work they have the skills and experience to deliver, being honest about their capabilities, and recognising when a project requires expertise they don't have. The Competency Framework can help you assess your own strengths and identify areas for development.

Continuing professional development

Copywriters must commit to ongoing professional development through structured learning, peer review and keeping up to date with legal, ethical and technological developments affecting our work.

Membership type	Annual CPD requirement	Structured learning minimum
Pro+	20 hours	5 hours
Accredited	35 hours	10 hours

Structured learning means activities with a defined learning objective and active participation, such as workshops, courses, structured mentoring, or peer review groups.

General CPD includes any professional activity that intentionally develops your knowledge or skills, such as industry reading, attending webinars, writing articles, peer feedback, or learning from challenging projects through reflective practice. CPD doesn't need to cost money.

Project management

Most project failures aren't about the writing; they're about miscommunication, unclear expectations, or problems that weren't flagged early enough. This section covers how we manage the work around the work.

Copywriters must maintain high standards of professional conduct throughout the duration of a project.

Copywriters must manage client expectations and communicate openly and proactively about project progress. They must highlight unrealistic deadlines before work begins, work to the agreed brief, and ensure that any changes to original agreements are documented and agreed by the appropriate stakeholders.

Copywriters must deliver copy, content and concepts in agreed formats, adhere to agreed approval processes, and report immediately any issues preventing the expected delivery of material.

Accessibility

Accessible writing isn't a nice-to-have – it's a legal requirement and a core professional skill. This section covers what the law expects and what good practice looks like.

Copywriters must ensure their work is accessible to people with disabilities. This is both a legal requirement and a professional responsibility.

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. Public sector organisations have additional duties under the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018. Many other contexts — including financial services, healthcare, and organisations serving the public — have enhanced accessibility expectations beyond the legal minimum.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) provide the international standard for accessible digital content. Copywriters should be familiar with the principles relevant to written content and understand the level of compliance required for their context.

Copywriters must apply accessible writing practices: using plain language appropriate to the audience, structuring content logically with a clear heading hierarchy, writing meaningful link text, describing images with appropriate alt text, avoiding reliance on colour alone, keeping sentences and paragraphs manageable, and defining acronyms and technical terms.

Writing for vulnerable users

When someone is in crisis, in debt, or facing a difficult decision, the words we choose matter more than usual. This section covers the additional care required when your audience may be vulnerable or distressed.

Copywriters working in health, social care, financial difficulty, crisis services, or other sensitive contexts must take additional care to protect users who may be vulnerable, distressed, or facing critical decisions.

This includes applying trauma-informed principles: ensuring content doesn't re-traumatise or trigger distress, using plain language, making actions obvious, avoiding language that implies blame, and signposting support.

Content that supports critical decisions (medical choices, legal rights, financial commitments, safety planning) requires particular care: presenting options clearly, explaining consequences in concrete terms, allowing time for reflection, and making it easy to get human help when needed.

This section applies when the nature of the content or the context in which it will be used means readers are likely to include people in vulnerable circumstances.

Part 2: Independent Practice

This section provides additional requirements for freelancers, contractors, agencies and other self-employed copywriters.

If you are employed by an organisation, these requirements are likely to be managed by your employer.

Scoping and pricing work

Most freelance disputes start with a vague brief or an unspoken assumption. This section covers how to define the work, agree on the price, and protect both sides before you start.

Independent copywriters must define and agree on the project scope in writing before commencing work. This includes objectives, deliverables, approval requirements, feedback and revision limits, and timelines.

Independent copywriters must establish clear pricing before work begins. They should define what constitutes reasonable revision requests versus scope expansion, and charge appropriately for additional work beyond the agreed-upon brief.

Insurance

If something goes wrong, insurance is the difference between a professional setback and a personal crisis – plus it protects your clients and collaborators.

Professional indemnity insurance is recommended for independent professionals subscribing to this code. Public liability insurance is recommended if you meet clients in person or work from premises other than your own home.

Cyber insurance is recommended (some professional indemnity policies include cyber cover) if you:

- store client data, customer information or sensitive documents on your own devices or systems
- handle work in regulated sectors such as healthcare, financial services or legal
- regularly input confidential client information into AI tools or other third-party platforms
- manage client websites, email systems or other digital assets
- work with large organisations that require proof of cyber cover.

Self-promotion

Your website, portfolio and LinkedIn profile are promises to potential clients. This section covers how to make sure those promises are honest and verifiable.

Copywriters must be honest about their experience and expertise, displaying credentials and evidence wherever possible. Copywriters must represent their services and skills honestly and fairly.

Client and employer testimonials must be genuine and approved for use by the author.

Managing disputes

Even well-established working relationships can run into trouble. This section covers how to prevent disputes and how to handle them when prevention isn't enough.

Projects can fail for many reasons. Independent copywriters should prevent problems by ensuring briefs are clear and agreed in writing, documenting significant decisions, raising concerns early, and building review points into longer projects.

When difficulties arise, copywriters should understand the cause, review the original brief and agreement, propose specific solutions, and document communications. Contracts should specify revision limits.

Payment disputes should be handled systematically: invoice correctly, follow up promptly, escalate gradually, and understand your legal rights.

Subcontracting and white-labelling

Working through another copywriter or agency doesn't change your professional obligations. This section covers accountability, confidentiality and fair treatment when you're part of a chain.

When working as a subcontractor, copywriters must treat all project information as confidential, apply the same professional standards regardless of who is paying, and raise concerns with the contractor rather than the end client.

When subcontracting work to others, copywriters remain accountable to their client for quality and delivery. They must vet subcontractors appropriately, provide clear briefs, review work before passing it to clients, and pay subcontractors according to agreed terms and within reasonable timeframes.