

THE
PROFESSIONAL
COPYWRITERS'
NETWORK

ProCopywriters
SURVEY
2017

A survey investigating the
work and lives of UK copywriters

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**COPYWRITING
CONFERENCE** 2017

13TH OCTOBER 2017, LONDON
WWW.COPYWRITINGCONFERENCE.COM



INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, the Professional Copywriters' Network has been championing the work of copywriters throughout the UK.

This, our second annual survey, is a snapshot of the copywriting industry in 2017.

This survey attempts to capture the experience of being a copywriter in the UK, in terms of job satisfaction, income and prospects.

We repeated the 2016 questions so that we can directly compare results. And we added a few extra questions to help us understand the client's perspective.

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Thanks to all the 538 copywriters who gave their time to share and complete this survey.

Leif Kendall

Director, The Professional Copywriters' Network


SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



Copywriters love working with words. Only **0.5%** want to change careers



£339 is the average freelance day rate



Per-word pricing is widely unpopular



In-house copywriters spend the least time working with words



The gender pay gap is **29%** though many people do not believe gender affects pay

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The biggest surprise from our second annual survey is just how few surprises we found; many of our findings mirror last year's statistics. But this, of course, is good news because it suggests that our survey is a reasonably accurate representation of the copywriters in our network.

KEY FINDINGS:

Gender pay gap is only getting bigger

There is a great divide between the income of men and women – and it's not getting any smaller. This year, when we only consider the incomes of full-time copywriters, across all modes of employment, the gender pay gap is 29%. Most men and women do not believe that gender affects income – although significantly more women than men do perceive a difference (31% vs 16%).

Education is not essential for a career in copywriting

You don't need book smarts to write great copy – or to succeed professionally. This is one of the most remarkable findings of our survey. The highest earners among our respondents – by a margin of 36% - are those whose highest educational qualification is GCSE-level. While we might be tempted to write this off as an anomaly, last year produced the same result. This suggests that copywriters can work and succeed without a formal education – though of course it may be harder to land your first gig without a degree on your CV.

Clients need our help

Some of the clients who commission copy need guidance and support to help them make better decisions and navigate the copywriting process efficiently. For example, clients may need advice on what to include in briefs, or how to review the copy they receive. This may be less applicable for larger or more experienced clients.

Copywriters love their work

Just 0.5% of our respondents want to leave copywriting. While many others want to change the way they work (e.g. go freelance or start an agency), very few want to leave commercial writing behind. This is a clear affirmation that copywriting, for anyone who loves working with words, is a great way to earn a living.

RESPONDENTS

NUMBER

538 people completed our 2017 survey. This is less than in 2016, when 610 copywriters responded.

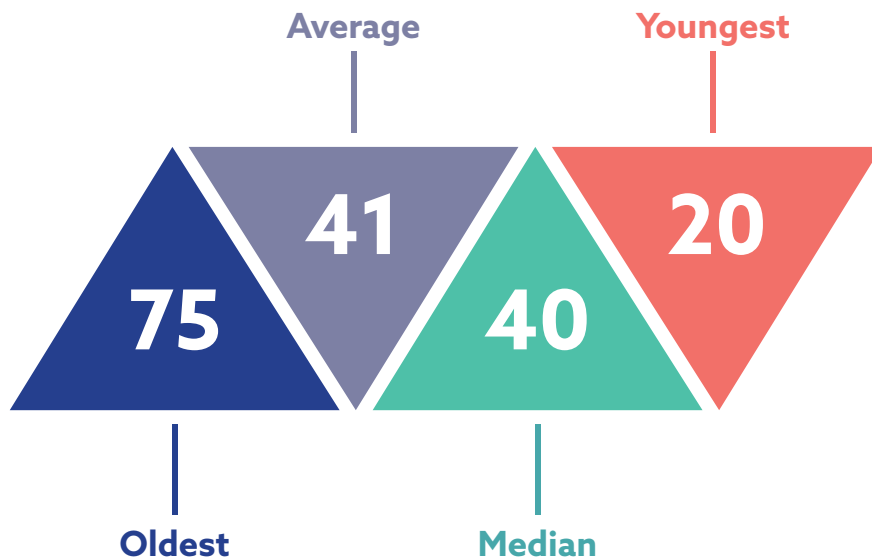


2017



2016

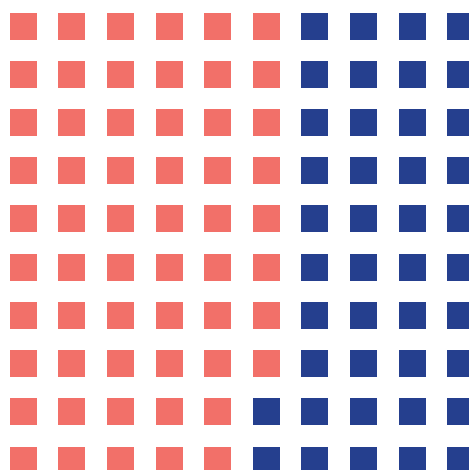
AGE



	2016
Oldest	75 yrs
Average	40 yrs
Median	40 yrs
Youngest	19 yrs

GENDER

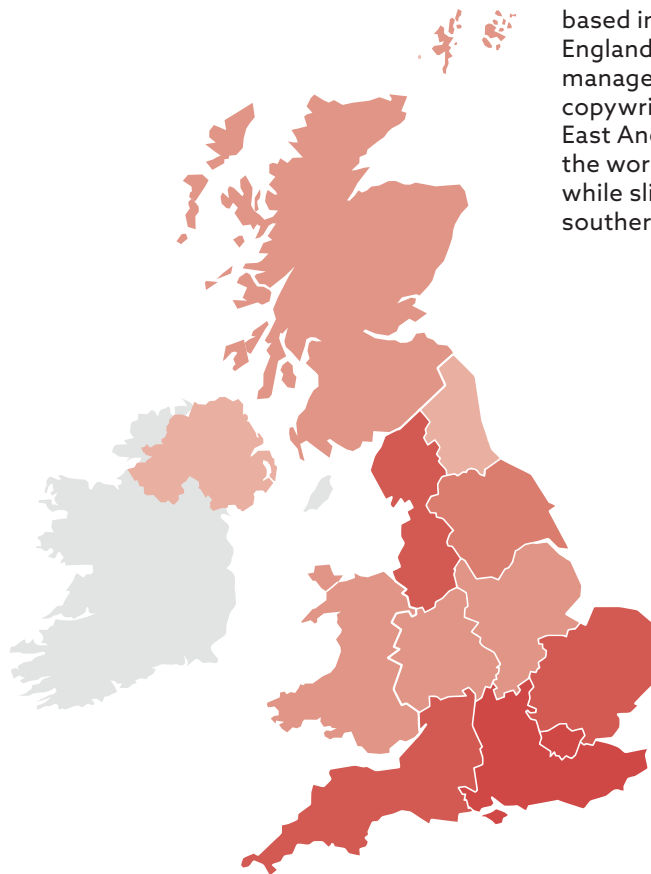
More women than men responded to our survey - and this gender imbalance has increased since last year. This raises several questions, including whether copywriting is attracting more women, and whether our survey is failing to reach and attract enough male copywriters.



	2017	2016
Female	58%	56%
Male	41%	44%

LOCATION

	2017	2016
London	18%	21%
South East	18%	20%
South West	11%	14%
East Anglia	9%	7%
International	9%	5%
North West	9%	9%
Yorkshire & Humber	6%	5%
Scotland	5%	3%
West Midlands	5%	5.5%
East Midlands	4%	6.5%
Wales	3%	2.5%
North East	1%	1%
Northern Ireland	0%	0.5%



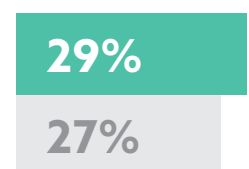
As in 2016, the majority of our respondents are based in the south of England. However, we have managed to reach more copywriters in Scotland, East Anglia and the rest of the world (international), while slightly reducing our southern bias.

WORKING HOURS

Full time



Part time



■ = 2016

LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE



Total years' experience combined

Average



	2016
Total combined	6452 yrs
Average	10.5 yrs

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

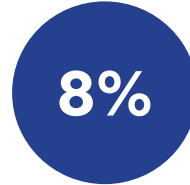
Do copywriters need degrees? To what extent does a formal education support a career in copywriting? While most of our respondents attended university, few copywriters find their degree particularly useful when it comes to their career, with only 22% claiming their education is 'very useful'.

HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL ATTAINED

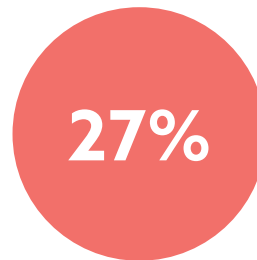


Undergraduate degree

A Levels



GCSEs or equivalent



Postgraduate degree

2016

GCSEs	5%
A Levels	10%
Undergraduate degree	57%
Postgraduate degree	29%

AREAS OF STUDY



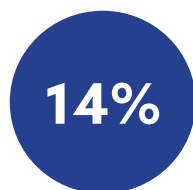
Other humanities



Science or social science



Other



Marketing, advertising or communication

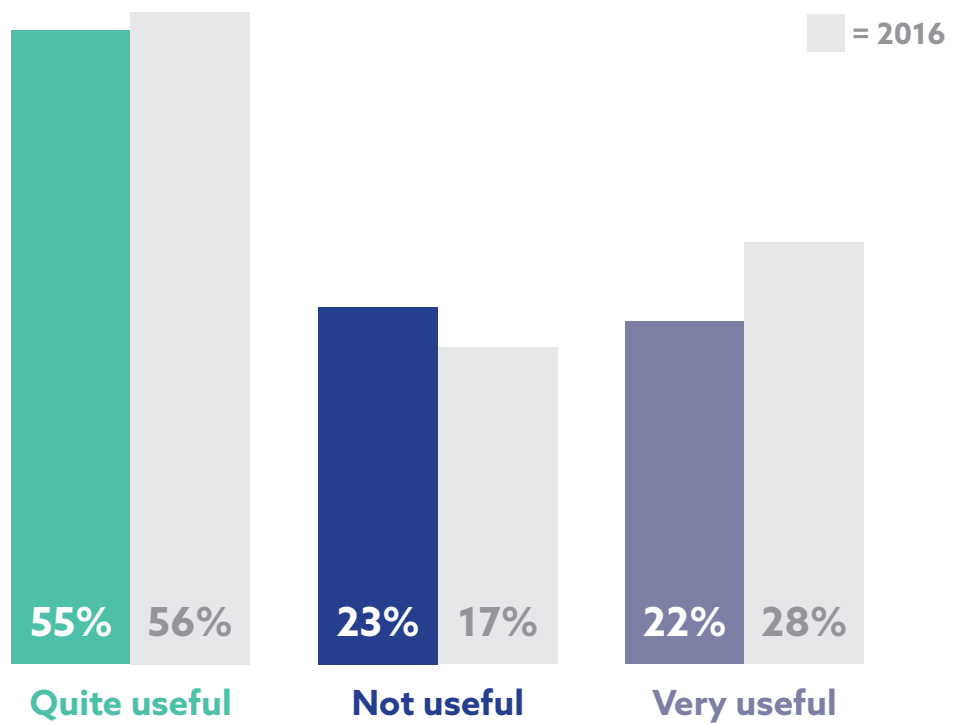


English language or literature

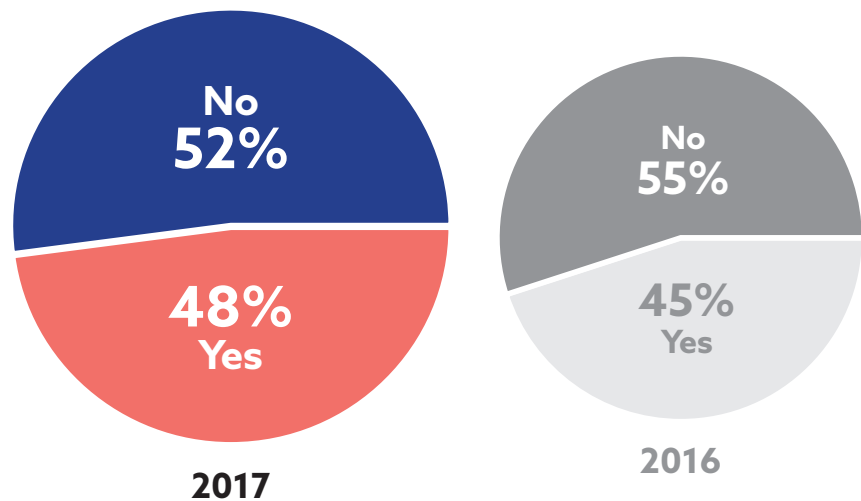
2016

English language or literature	38%
Other humanities	21%
Other	12%
Science or social science	11%
Marketing, advertising or communication	18%

HOW USEFUL DO YOU FEEL YOUR DEGREE HAS BEEN FOR YOUR COPYWRITING CAREER?



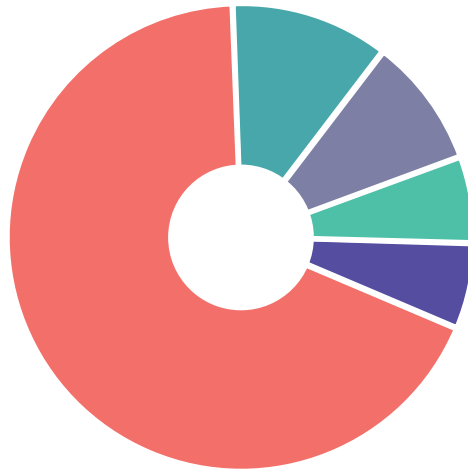
HAVE YOU COMPLETED ANY COPYWRITING TRAINING?



HOW COPYWRITERS WORK

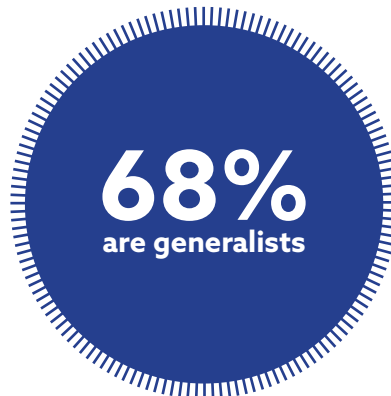
EMPLOYMENT MODEL

Once again, our survey reached more freelancers than agency or in-house copywriters.



	2017	2016
Freelance	68%	66%
Agency-side	11%	14%
Client-side	9%	8%
Agency founder	6%	7%
Employed/freelance	6%	6%

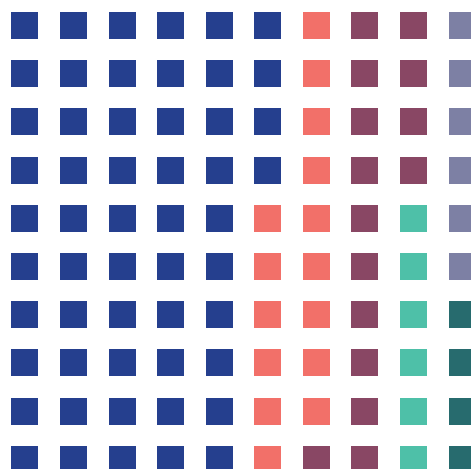
DISCIPLINES AND SPECIALISMS



While it's common for copywriters to specialise and become experts in a niche, the majority (68%) remain generalists who work with a wide range of clients.

The figures were the same in 2016.

ADDITIONAL SKILLS



	2017	2016
None	54%	51%
Digital & SEO	15%	18%
Marketing materials	15%	15%
PR & journalism	6%	7%
Advertising	6%	7%
Technical	4%	3%

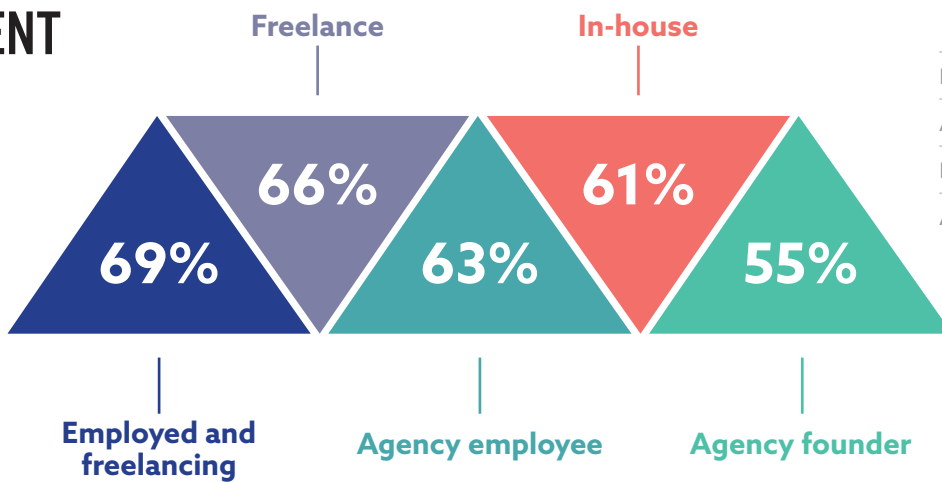
OTHER TASKS AND ROLES

Copywriters often do more than just writing, so we asked our audience to tell us about the other services they offer. Compared to last year, the numbers have generally risen, suggesting that copywriters are continuing to diversify their skills. This may be a natural process of skill accumulation, or it may be a deliberate effort to access new streams of work.



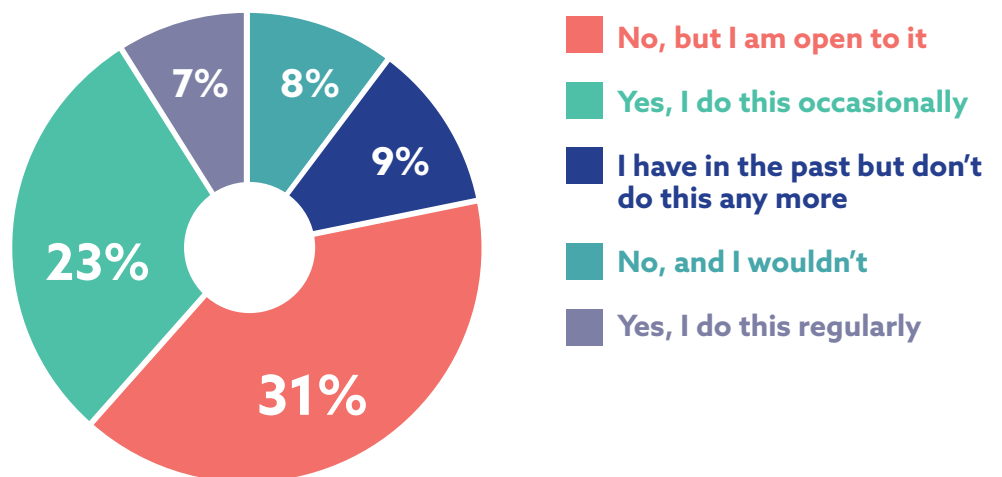
	2016
Tone of voice strategy	60%
Copy editing	38%
Training others	24%
Design / layout	21%
SEO	18%
Developing style guidelines	12%
Content management / strategy	12%
User experience	12%
Proofreading	11%

TIME SPENT WRITING



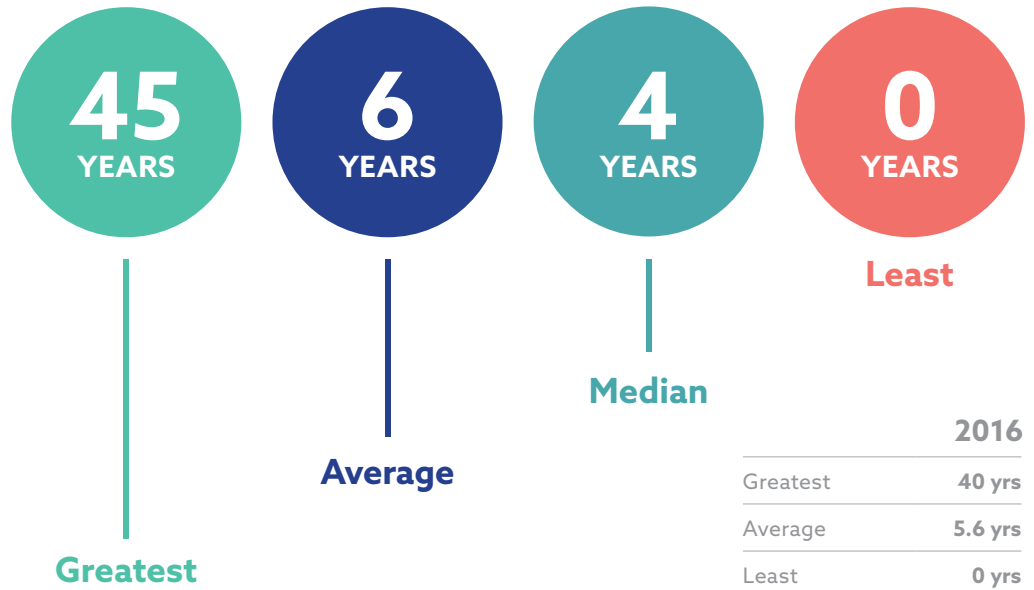
	2016
Freelance	64%
Agency employee	62%
In-house	60%
Agency founder	56%

HAVE YOU EVER DONE PRO BONO (UNPAID) WORK FOR A CHARITY?



FREELANCE COPYWRITERS

EXPERIENCE BEFORE GOING FREELANCE



FINDING NEW CLIENTS

The most popular method for finding work remains word of mouth (referrals), with web marketing and social media in second and third places.

It's worth noting that referrals are likely to be of greater benefit to established copywriters who have a portfolio of work and a history of successful projects.

Networking events and conferences are also valued as a source of work, but with only 27% claiming to use this method, our survey suggests that this is an under-exploited approach to finding work.

■ = 2016

Word of mouth



Website



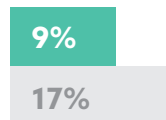
Social media



Networking events / conference



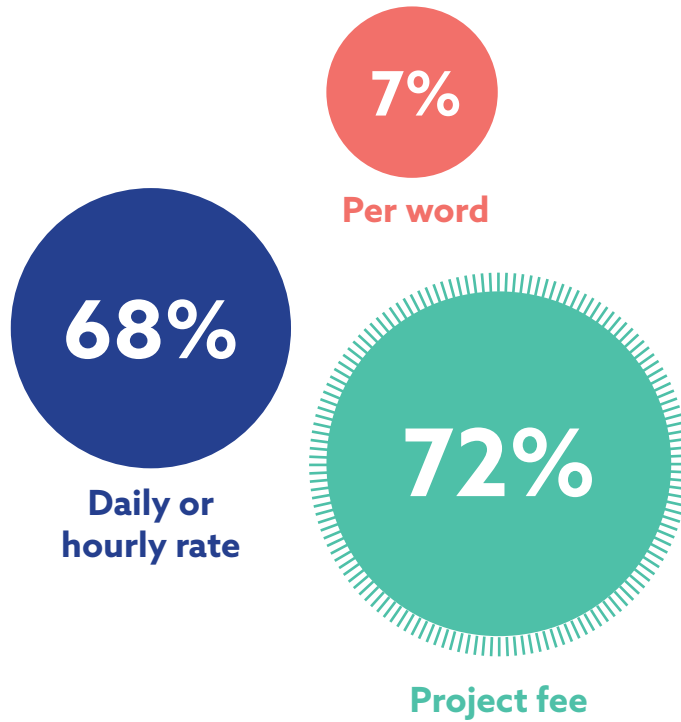
Advertising



FREELANCE RATES

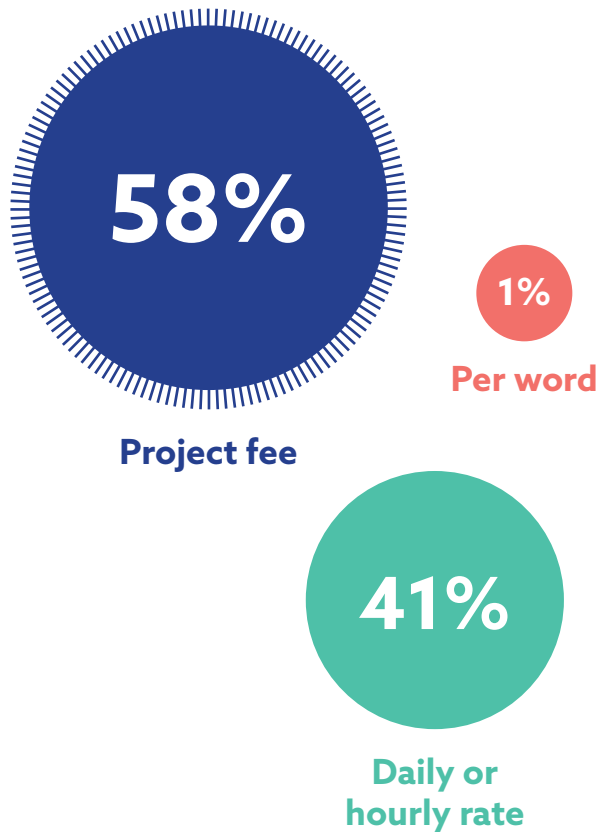
HOW FREELANCERS CHARGE

Copywriters charge on a per-project basis, by the hour (or day) or per word - though a relatively small number of our respondents use this method (just 7%) and even fewer would use per-word pricing if they had a choice (1%). Many copywriters use more than one pricing model.



	2016
Daily or hourly rate	71%
Project fee	70%
Per word	9%

PREFERRED CHARGING MODEL



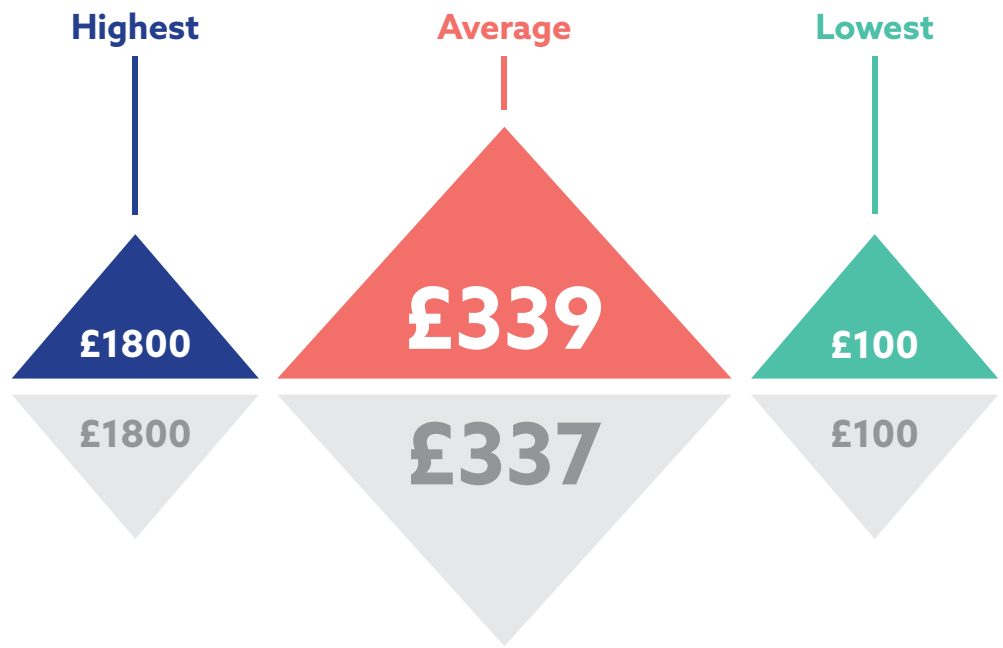
	2016
Project fee	55%
Daily or hourly rate	43%
Per word	2%

DAILY RATES

The average freelance day rate reported is £339, just £2 more than our 2016 figure.

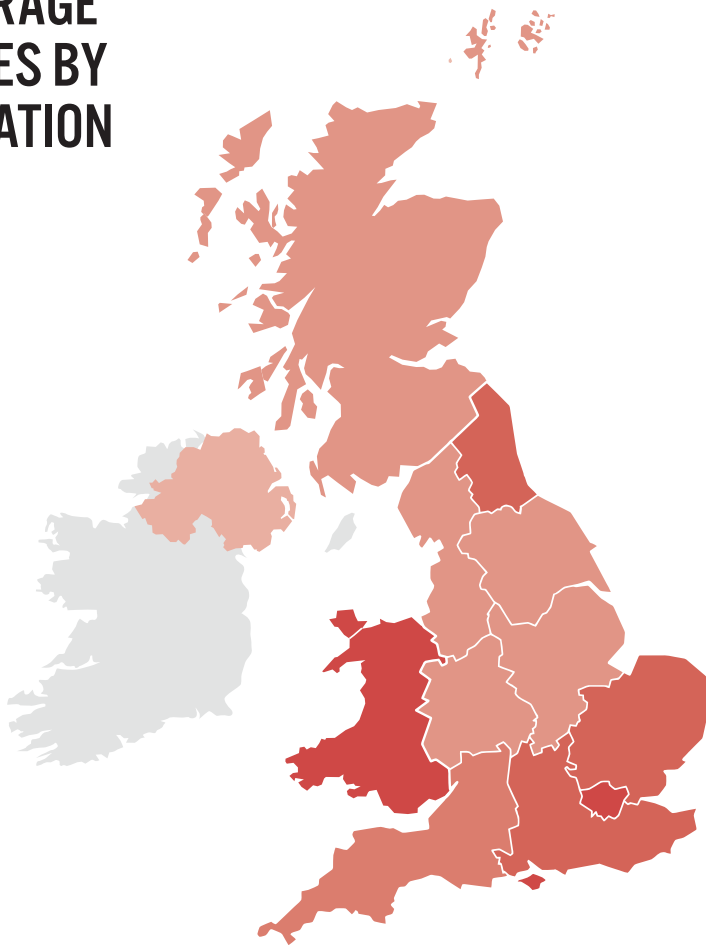
Once again, London and the south of England attract the higher rates, although all regions have seen slight rises in day rates. The average for Wales has risen dramatically, but our survey data only includes 14 respondents from Wales, so this figure is statistically weak.

International copywriters who serve the UK market also appear to be performing well, with 27 copywriters achieving an average day rate of £433 – the highest for any regional group. Once again, the small sample size may account for the relatively high average.



■ = 2016

AVERAGE RATES BY LOCATION



	2017	2016
International	£433	£344
Wales	£400	£279
London	£392	£426
East Anglia	£357	£336
South East	£350	£362
North East	£350	n/a
South West	£316	£301
West Midlands	£286	£283
East Midlands	£281	£288
North West	£277	£311
Yorkshire & Humber	£269	£252
Scotland	£262	£254
Northern Ireland	£236	n/a

AVERAGE RATES AND AGE

■ = 2016

40-49

£376

£371

50-59

£360

£415

60+

£356

£300

30-39

£297

£278

18-29

£250

£244

RATE ASPIRATIONS

How much do copywriters want to charge? And how does that compare with their current rates?

Of those copywriters who responded, the average day rate was £324, and the average target rate was £434, a difference of 33%.

£434

Aspiration

£324

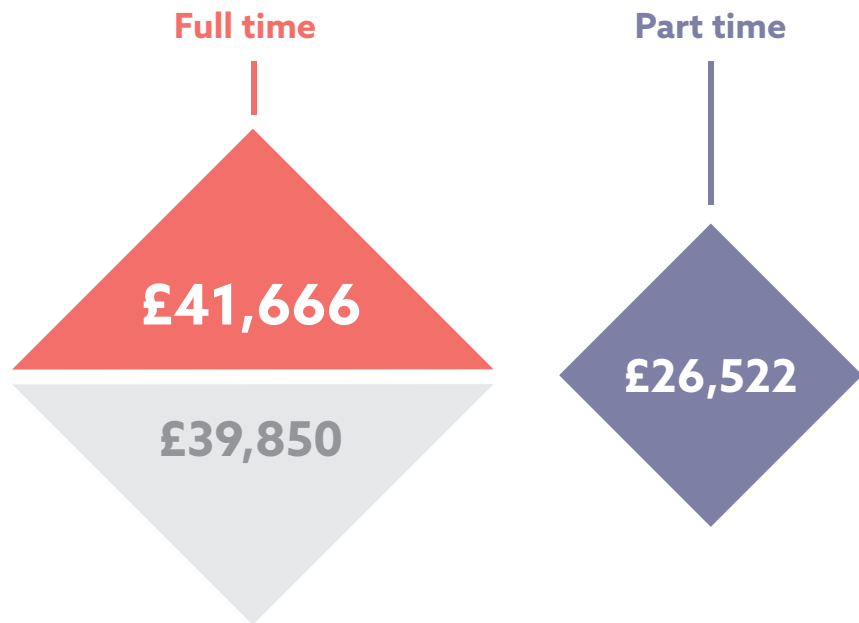
Actual

EARNINGS

AVERAGE EARNINGS ACROSS ALL EMPLOYMENT TYPES

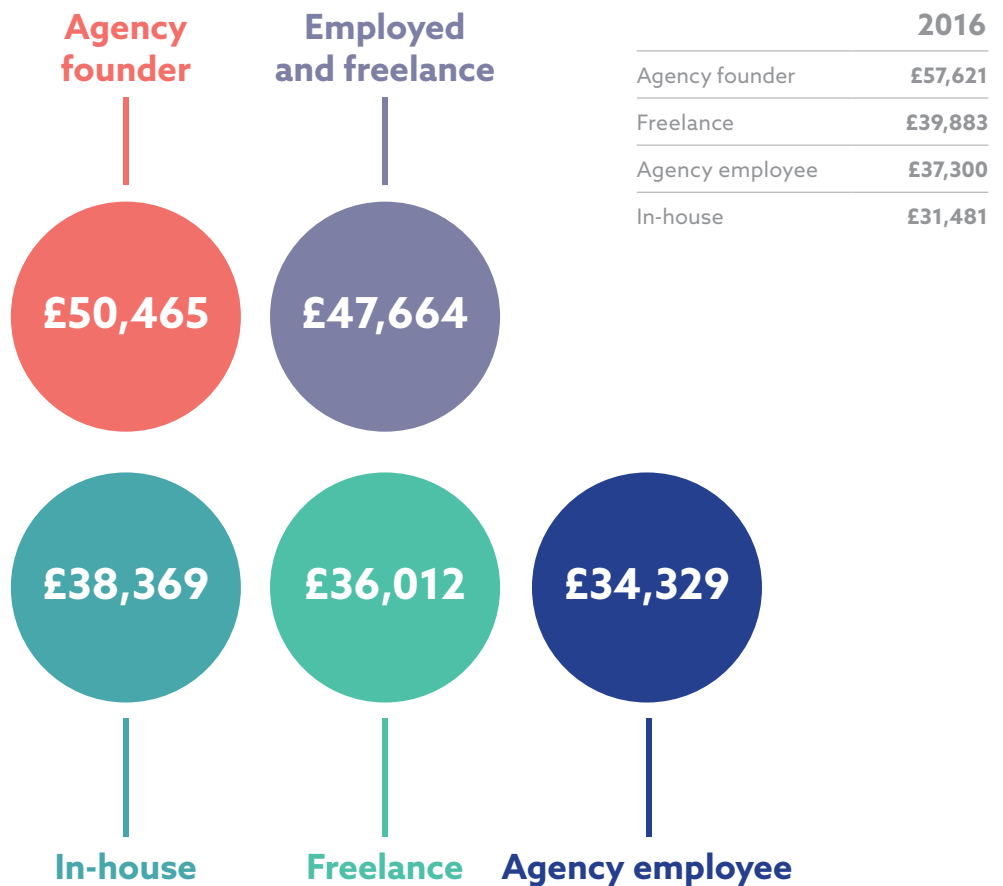
As a copywriter, how much can you expect to earn?

■ = 2016



INCOME AND TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT

Changes since 2016 include a rise in pay for in-house copywriters and falls in income for agency founders, agency employees and freelancers. The biggest leap is in the reported incomes for those copywriters who add a bit of freelance work to their salary, climbing an average of £10,000.



MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM ANNUAL INCOME



INCOME AND AGE

As in 2016, our results suggest that earnings increase with age until they peak at age 49 - although this year our respondents aged 60+ have bucked the trend.

■ = 2016

60+

£48,733

£46,772

40-49

£42,050

£49,995

50-59

£38,603

£47,240

30-39

£35,712

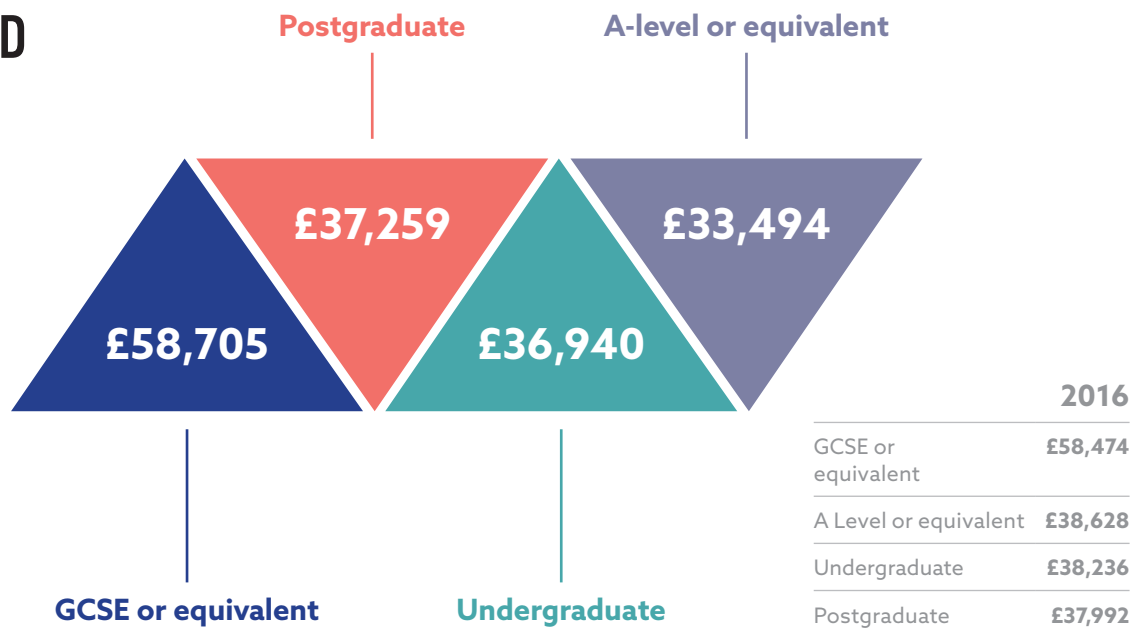
£35,967

18-29

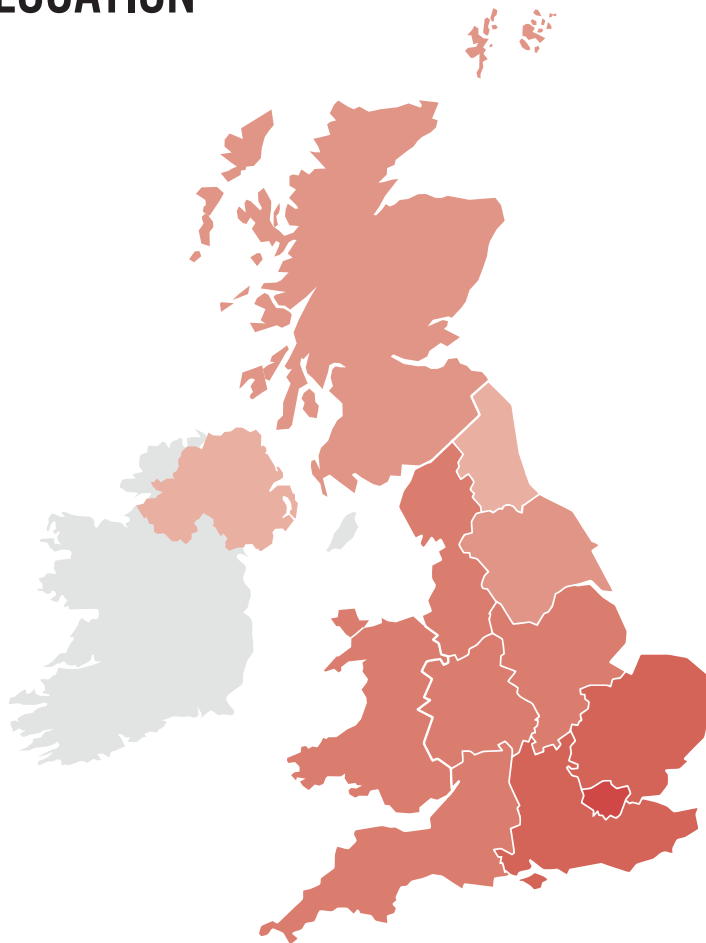
£27,405

£27,503

INCOME AND EDUCATION



INCOME AND LOCATION



	2017	2016
London	£55,340	£49,298
East Anglia	£44,081	£47,478
International	£43,309	£30,824
South East	£38,602	£40,507
Wales	£32,656	£32,200
South West	£30,456	£33,996
North West	£30,449	£28,214
East Midlands	£28,950	£27,818
West Midlands	£28,740	£29,938
Scotland	£25,754	£25,045
Yorkshire & Humber	£23,793	£35,462
North East	£20,019	n/a
Northern Ireland	£20,000	n/a

INCOME AND GENDER

Is there a gap between the income of men and women in copywriting? Just like last year, our data suggests that there is a significant divide between men and women copywriters.

This year, we have removed part-time respondents from our data, in order to create a fair comparison between the reported income of men and women. The difference is still stark.

29% - that's the average difference in earnings between men and women.

The UK gender pay gap, according to GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-gender-pay-gap>) is 18%.

Women who combine a regular job with freelance work appear to suffer from this inequality the most, with their average income 46% less than their male peers.

2016	Gap
Agency employee	33%
Freelance	22%
In-house	9%

Employed and freelance



Agency



Freelance



In-house



Agency founder

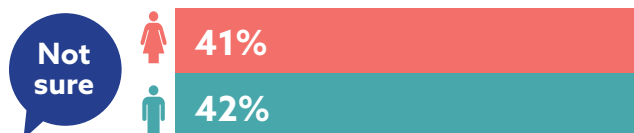
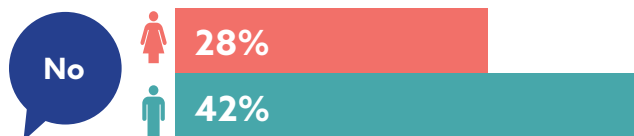
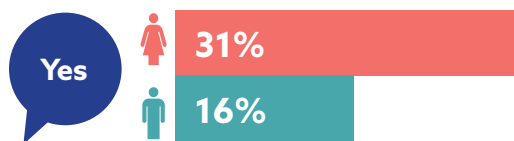


PERCEPTIONS: DOES GENDER HAVE AN IMPACT ON PAY?

How can we shrink the gender pay gap if people don't believe it exists?

We asked our respondents if they believe that gender makes a difference to how much copywriters get paid.

31% of women said yes. Nearly half the number of men (16%) believe that gender is a factor in determining pay.



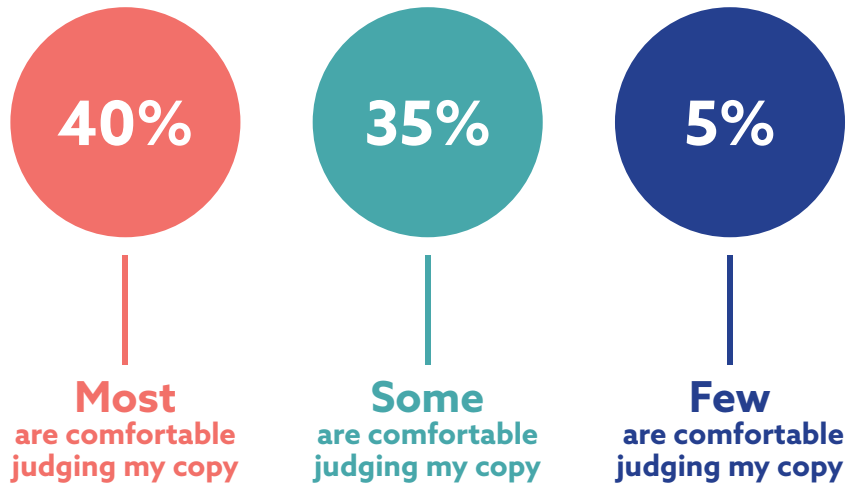
2016	Yes	No	Not sure
Women	29%	32%	39%
Men	9%	52%	39%
Overall	20%	41%	39%

THE CLIENT'S SIDE OF THE STORY

Four new questions for this year, focusing on the client's experience of commissioning copy and working with copywriters.

These responses suggest that copywriting is sometimes misunderstood, and some clients would benefit from support when it comes to commissioning, critiquing and approving copy. A little extra information could help clients get more value from every engagement.

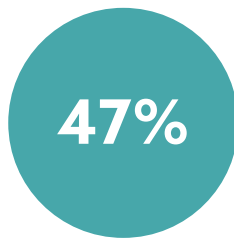
HOW MANY OF YOUR CLIENTS ARE COMFORTABLE JUDGING YOUR COPYWRITING WORK?



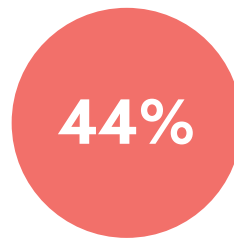
WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS WITH BRIEFS YOU RECEIVE?



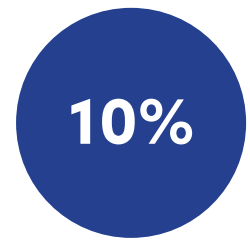
HOW MANY OF YOUR CLIENTS WOULD BENEFIT FROM ADVICE ON COMMISSIONING COPY?



Some
of my clients
would benefit



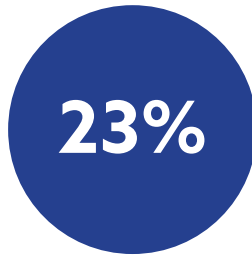
Most
of my clients
would benefit



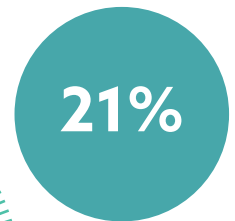
Few
of my clients
would benefit

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE WHEN WORKING WITH CLIENTS?

Unrealistic
expectations



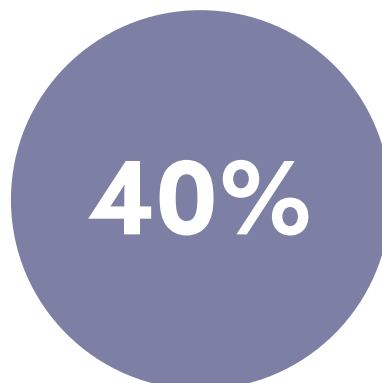
Lack of time



Lack of experience
or confidence
judging written work



Copy by committee /
complex sign-off
process



Poor brief or
source materials

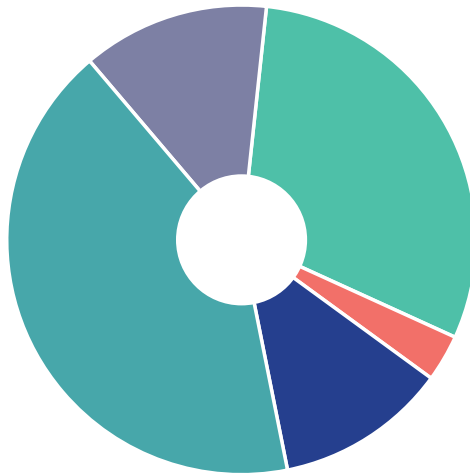


Lack of understanding
of writing process

MOTIVATION AND ASPIRATIONS

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT BEING A COPYWRITER?

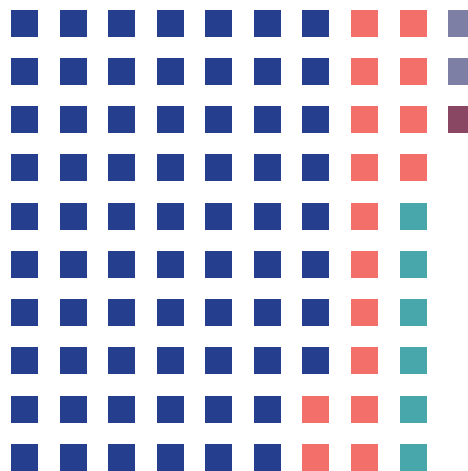
Once again, our survey suggests that many copywriters are delighted to have a career that spins words into money.



	2017	2016
Being paid to write	39%	36%
Being creative	28%	20%
Getting results for the client	12%	12%
Something else	11%	4%
Being persuasive	3%	28%

WHAT TYPE OF RECOGNITION DO YOU MOST VALUE?

This year, even fewer people are interested in industry awards. Money is clearly important to copywriters, but the single thing that most of us crave is feedback from our clients and colleagues.



	2017	2016
Employer/client feedback	68%	70%
Financial	16%	13%
Peer recognition	6%	9%
Something else	2%	6%
Industry awards	1%	2%

FUTURE PLANS

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR CAREER TO DEVELOP OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS?

Out of the 538 copywriters who completed our survey, only 3 want to change careers. Perhaps one reason for this low figure is the flexible nature of this profession; copywriters can get a traditional job, or go it alone. They can start agencies, or work from a beach in Thailand. Copywriters can write for multinationals, charities, startups or local businesses. Copywriting is as flexible as we are.

While fewer than 1% of our respondents want to leave copywriting, 3% want to go freelance, 13% want to do more strategic work and 4% want to start an agency - which suggests that not everyone is completely content where they are.

■ = 2016

Earn more money



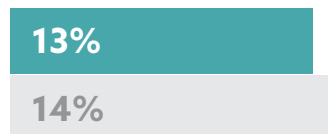
Do more creative writing



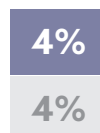
Something else



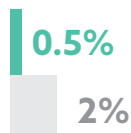
Do more strategic / consultancy work



Start my own agency



Change careers



COPYWRITING IS...

Our respondents describe copywriting in their own words.

Maximum meaning, minimum means

Writing to sell

Persuading people to take action

Writing copy that will make people read, remember and react

The application of creative writing for commercial ends

Distilling reams of incoherent nonsense down into something vivid, clear and relevant

Customer focused, persuasive writing that guides readers through the buying decision-making process

A mashup of skilled writing, research, marketing and advertising

Making words work harder

The art of finding a way to make people care enough to act

A misunderstood and not always known career that is populated by people rescued from other careers

Taking woolly thinking and turning it into silky threads of clear communication

Selling remotely

An underrated craft

It's the strategic use of language as a tool to engage, inform, inspire and persuade

Writing to attract, inform and persuade

Using words to get the right message, to the right people, in the right way, and at the right time

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

AIM

Our aim is to collect and share information about the working lives of copywriters in the UK. This survey is freely provided to anyone who wants to learn about the copywriting profession.

QUESTIONNAIRE

This year we repeated our 2016 survey, with the addition of a few new questions. The original survey was composed by Joanna Tidball with support from Tom Albrighton.

ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

The data was analysed using Excel. This report was written by Leif Kendall.

DATA COLLECTION AND PUBLICITY

The survey was available on SurveyMonkey from 14 December until 10 March. We shared the survey on our blog, newsletter, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

RESPONDENTS

We invited all copywriters who serve the UK market to respond.

ANONYMITY

We didn't ask for, or collect, any personal information. This was a deliberate choice to encourage people to give frank accounts of their earnings and experiences.

DATASET

538 copywriters responded. Most questions were obligatory. A few (such as gender) were optional. When analysing the data, we included only those respondents who gave a valid response.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to everyone who completed this survey, and to Helen Keevy, Anna Gunning and David McGuire who reviewed this report.

LIMITATIONS AND DISCLAIMERS

This was an open survey conducted in good faith. We have not vetted or controlled respondents, so we cannot rule out distortions or inaccuracies resulting from errors, misinformation or malice.

SurveyMonkey restricts people from responding twice from the same IP address, but this can be circumvented, so we can't rule out the possibility of duplicate responses.

Our reach is limited to the people who have connected with PCN – and their networks – so our data is unlikely to represent the entire UK population of copywriters. One of our goals for next year is to improve the reach of this survey and the quality of our data.

The data in this report is provided for information only and does not constitute advice or recommendations, nor is it intended as a basis for negotiating fees, contracts, salaries or commercial arrangements of any kind or between any parties. PCN accepts no responsibility for any actions you may take, based on the information in this report.

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