

Temporary (or Contract) Employment: The “Advantages” and “Disadvantages”

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There are several ways to gain experience as a technical communicator. Obviously the most commonly known way into the profession is through direct employment. Another lesser known (and sometimes overlooked way) is via temporary (or contract) employment through an agency, consulting company, or temporary employment firm. If new to this option, one might ask: What are the advantages of working as a consultant (or contractor)? What are the disadvantages?

NOTE: The words “contracting” or “contractor” often has somewhat binding and misleading connotations for those who are not familiar to it. However, this first impression is completely unfounded. There are never any fees or costs due from the candidate. Also, the candidate can feely exit a temporary employment arrangement “at will” without any financial or legal obligations.

Advantages:

- If you are a new grad, or you are already working in another profession and crossing over into technical communication, then consulting (or contracting) is a convenient and effective way to break into the tech. comm. profession.
- Being a consultant allows you to have the independence of choosing projects that interest you, as well as the ability to choose a variety of projects to broaden your experience.
- As a consultant, you learn how to work independently very quickly.
- Consulting allows you to try out different industries, companies, corporate cultures, without having the long-term commitment associated with direct employment.
- Also, it provides you the ability to move around and observe different technical communication departments and thus be exposed to different approaches to project development—including software tools, policies and procedures, unique methodologies, etc.
- It gives you the opportunity to have a flexible work schedule, often with the option of working from home.
- Being a consultant also frees you from corporate politics within an organization.
- Finally, compensation for consulting generally pays very well on a “per hour” basis, with many expenses potentially being tax deductible.

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Disadvantages:

- While some may consider this an advantage, consultants sometimes find there is "down time" between projects, until another assignment becomes available.
- There is also a perception of less stability with consulting, as consultants are sometimes laid off when there are budget cuts at a company (however, one may argue that a full-time permanent position is not always stable either).
- Another disadvantage of consulting is that you will not receive benefits with your compensation (the hourly bill rate that you command is your only compensation, along with potential tax with-holdings).
- Consultants are also usually not included in corporate events, meetings, or parties.
- Finally, consultants are often held to a much higher standard of productivity versus full-time direct employees, with the added disadvantage of minimal or no training from the client company.