How to make **$10,000** while learning to code

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Chapter One: Using Freelance Websites

Earnings Summary

Before This Chapter	After This Chapter
TOTAL EARNED: $0 TOTAL TIME SPENT: 1 week	TOTAL EARNED: $200 TIME SPENT: 4 weeks

Getting web development work in the early stages is tough. That is why I suggest using freelance websites such as freelancer.com, peopleperhour.com, elance.com or one of the others in the bibliography at the end of this chapter. The competition is strong, and it may take a few attempts before you get your first paid gigs, but remember that you have a few crucial advantages over the more experienced developers on those sites:

- **You're primarily there to learn.** Your first job may take you 3 hours and earn you $10, but that's *fine* because you will have learned a great deal about communicating with clients, fixing website code and bidding for a project. Not only that, but you will have earned your first 5 star review (a proud moment, I can tell you!)

- **You can take your time.** Most developers on those sites post generic bids on a large number of projects. You're still learning, so you can take your time and post a thoughtful, relevant bid that shows that you've actually read the details of the post. Believe me, bids like that are few and far between.

- **You can use geography to your advantage.** If you live in the US or Europe, make the most of this by offering to speak to the client on the phone, and using polished English when bidding and replying to messages. Doing this, you'll stand out by a mile.

- **You can go the extra mile.** As you're there to learn, you can do more than what the client asked for without worrying about the extra time spent. If you're setting up Wordpress, install an SEO plugin for them. If you're making a form, use some custom CSS to make it beautiful. Reply quickly and thoroughly to all their questions, and earn their gratitude.

I'll say it again - you will earn money here, but that is your secondary goal. Primarily, you're here to learn how to do freelance web development, and build up your

online portfolio and positive reviews.

Pick A Freelance Site, And Stick With It

The hardest part of getting your first gig will be overcoming your lack of positive reviews. For that reason, I'd advise picking one freelance site and sticking with it, at least for now. You can join another later, but once you've got three 5 star reviews on freelancer.com, you'll find it much easier to find work there than you will with an empty profile on elance.com.

I'm not going to go into the pros and cons of each of the freelance sites - I'd simply advise that you check out a few of them and pick whichever site you like the look of. Check that you can receive funds in your country and that you are happy with their payment terms, and sign up - don't waste a lot of time going through all the sites. I've had the most experience with freelancer.com, so I'm going to focus on that site, but the others all work in a similar way.

Here's my list of sites you should check out:

- Elance
- Guru
- Freelance

- [Freelancer](#)

- [Go Freelance](#)

- [oDesk](#)

- [vWorker](#)

A really useful comparison of these and other sites is available online at http://www.freshbooks.com/blog/2013/01/16/freelance-jobs/. It's focused on writing rather than web development but the same principles apply.

Should You Use Fiverr?

Fiverr.com deserves a particular mention, as it can be an easy way to find a lot of quick and easy jobs. On the whole, I would only recommend using fiverr.com if you are having difficulties getting work on one of the other freelance sites. Unlike those sites, there is little potential for getting larger jobs on Fiverr, which is ultimately what you want. Fiverr can be useful for practicing your skills and earning a little cash (and getting some good reviews to post on your website or Twitter feed), but my advice

would be to prioritise the other freelance websites if you can.
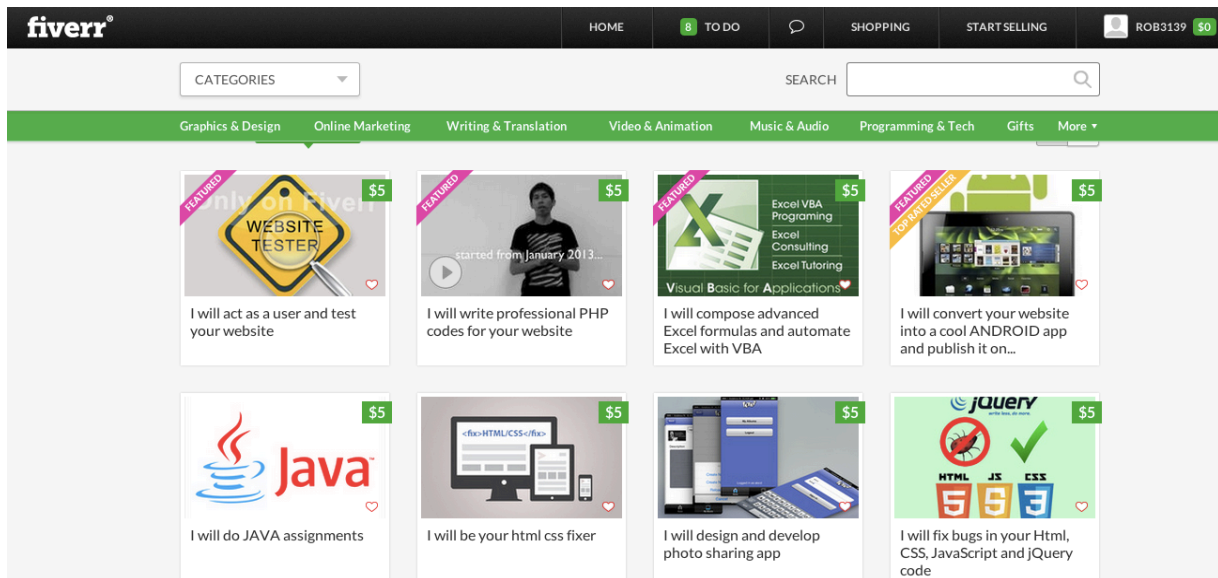
Challenge: Create Your Profile

Once you've picked which site you want to work with, you need to sign up and create your profile. I've linked to a couple of guides in the bibliography of this chapter, but here's a few basic tips.

- **Use your real identity.** You'll want all the parts of your online presence to tie together, so use your real name, upload a photo and talk about yourself

- **Be honest.** Don't claim to have skills you don't have. At this stage 'Proficient in HTML, CSS and Javascript' would suffice, and you can then add further skills as needed.

- **Link to your Twitter feed.** If the freelance site allows, put in a link to your Twitter feed - this will add authority to your profile and reassure prospective clients that you are a genuine developer.

- **Complete the exams.** Most freelance sites have 'exams' that you can take both in language (English being the most useful) and various languages. They usually cost around $50, but are worth it to get you off the ground when you don't have any reviews.

When you're done, link to your profile in the forums, and get feedback from me and other students.

Bidding For Gigs

Initially, look for small, relatively straightforward gigs, with a maximum of $50. Updating websites, fixing broken layouts and adding small features are all common requests. Bid on as many projects as you can, bearing the following in mind:

- **Keep your bid low.** Remember you're here to learn and build your reputation. Keep your bid low, especially when you have zero reviews. This will get you gigs more quickly and you can increase your price as you go.

- **Explain why your bid is low.** You don't need to tell the client that you are learning, but you might want to say that you are bidding low in order to get your first reviews on this site. They will see that you have no reviews, and referring to it yourself will show that you understand their concern and have made a low bid as a result.

- **Don't take on big jobs.** You're still learning, so avoid big or technically advanced jobs. Feel free to take on jobs slightly above your current skill level, as long as you're confident you can learn what will be required, but the last thing you want is a bad review and a disgruntled client.

- **Clarify the job.** It's essential that you're clear on what is required, and that it has been objectively stated on the freelance site messaging system. That way, if there is any disagreement, you can refer back to what the job was originally set out to be. Ambiguous language or general aims (such as 'build me a site') are a recipe for disaster.

- **Agree on payment structure.** Even with small projects, it's important to make it clear when payment will be due. I would advise not to start work until a milestone is created (ie. the buyer has made a downpayment, which is held by the freelancer site until the job is finished). That way, if there are any disagreements, it is up to the freelancer site to establish whether the work has been done and release the payment.

- **Be wary of buyers with no reviews.** Buyers have reviews too, and if a buyer has no reviews, be careful. They may well be reliable, but they may not - in this

case it is particularly important to make sure the requirements of the job are clear, and that a milestone is paid before you start work.

Challenge: Get Your First Gig

This is the challenge you've been waiting for! Get out there and get your first paid gig as a web developer. Follow the steps above and don't be disheartened if it takes a lot of bids before you're chosen. It will happen eventually, and every bid is a learning opportunity.

Then post your success on the forum so I can congratulate you!

Wash. Rinse. Repeat As Required.

After you've got that all important first gig, you'll find the others come much easier. Keep bidding, keep going the extra mile and earning great reviews and within a month you should have been able to complete 10 jobs, with an average cost of at least $20 per gig. That's $200 (incidentally, the cost of The Complete Web Developer Course!).

While you're waiting for those gigs to come in, you should have been working through the next few chapters of the course, so should now have experience of Wordpress, Bootstrap, and PHP/MySQL. Add these skills to your profile and take gigs using the new skills whenever you can.

Congratulations! You've started earning real money as a web developer. You should also have continued to build your Twitter following to around 200. In the Wordpress chapter of The Complete Web Developer Course) I show you how to build an awesome portfolio site and blog, so your online presence should now be looking pretty professional. Nice one!

Progress Update

So far, we have total earnings of $200:

Activities	Total Income ($)
Month 1 10 small freelance jobs at $20 each	200

TOTAL	$200

Further Reading

http://www.freshbooks.com/blog/2013/01/16/freelance-jobs/

17 freelance websites - a great comparison

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-gMy2IoMfQ

Introductory guide to freelance sites

http://www.freshbooks.com/blog/2013/11/12/6-steps-to-creating-a-freelance-profile-that-wins-business/

http://www.shoutmeloud.com/creprofessional-freelancing-profile-more-leads.html

https://ebyline.zendesk.com/entries/22311088-How-to-create-a-great-Freelancer-Profile

https://www.odesk.com/info/terms/contractor-guidelines/

Creating a great profile

https://www.workhoppers.com/blog/bidding-on-freelance-work-good-bad-ugly/

Advice on bidding for freelance work