

# THE FREELANCER'S POND

User Manual

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Offline.Ltd

*"No cloud. No nonsense. Just tools."*

Screen edition (dark)

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# Introduction

*You built something from nothing. This helps you keep it.*

There is a particular silence that settles around two in the morning when you are a freelancer. The client email you cannot answer until you have slept on it. The invoice that should have been paid eleven days ago. The quiet arithmetic of whether next month will be abundant or thin.

You probably did not start freelancing because you love spreadsheets. You started because you are good at something, and someone was willing to pay for it, and the idea of building your own thing felt more honest than sitting in someone else's fluorescent-lit plan for your life.

But the work *around* the work — the pricing, the pipeline, the tax set-asides, the slow creep of software subscriptions — that part nobody romanticises. And yet it is precisely that machinery that determines whether freelancing feels like freedom or a trap with no HR department.

The Freelancer's Pond is eleven interconnected tools that model your business from rate-setting to runway planning. Change one number — your hourly rate, your utilisation, your costs — and every downstream calculation updates instantly. Like dropping a stone into still water.

It runs entirely in your browser. No server. No account. No internet connection required. Your financial data never leaves your machine, because it is *your* data, and that should not be a feature — it should be the default.

## WHY A POND?

Traditional freelance tools analyse one thing in isolation — invoicing here, tax there, time tracking somewhere else. The Pond connects everything. Pull a lever on any tab and watch all the dials move at once. That interconnection is the product.

# The Ripple Effect

*How one number becomes every number.*

Your hourly rate is the stone. Drop it in, and the first ring of ripples appears: your maximum annual revenue, the utilisation required to hit your target, the implicit price of every non-billable hour.

The second ring is operational. Services are priced against your rate. Pipeline deals are weighted. Time tracking reveals whether your calendar matches your ambition. Revenue accumulates — or does not.

The third ring is structural. Cash Flow subtracts the cost of running your business and the cost of running your life. Tax calculates the silent partner's cut. Reserves determine how many months you can weather silence.

The final ring reaches the shore. The Dashboard aggregates everything into five health indicators. The Oracle runs sensitivity analysis, finding the single lever that would improve your position most. And the Decision Log captures your reasoning — so that six months from now, you can look back and understand why you charged what you charged, why you dropped that client, why you invested in that course.

| SOURCE    | FEEDS INTO                         | WHAT FLOWS                  |
|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Profile   | Services, Time, Revenue, Dashboard | Rate, capacity, target      |
| Services  | Pipeline, Revenue                  | Pricing, packages           |
| Pipeline  | Revenue, Dashboard                 | Expected revenue            |
| Time      | Revenue, Dashboard                 | Utilisation, effective rate |
| Revenue   | Cash Flow, Tax, Dashboard          | Monthly and YTD income      |
| Costs     | Cash Flow, Tax, Dashboard          | Monthly expenses            |
| Cash Flow | Scenarios, Dashboard               | Net monthly, runway         |
| Tax       | Dashboard                          | Liability, set-aside        |
| All tabs  | Dashboard, Decisions               | Health metrics, auto-fill   |

#### THE POND METAPHOR

Your rate is the stone. Services and time are the first ripple. Cash Flow is where the ripples converge. Scenarios and Tax are the waves that reach the shore. The Decision Log closes the loop — informing your next stone.

# Before You Begin

*A few things worth knowing before you wade in.*

The Pond does not prescribe how to run your business. It does not tell you to raise your rates (though it might quietly show you what would happen if you did). It does not judge a negative cash flow month. It does not have opinions about whether you should take that project at a discount.

What it does is connect the dots. You provide the numbers — honest ones, aspirational ones, anxious-at-3am ones — and it shows you the shape they make. The judgment is yours. The tool just turns the lights on.

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

A modern web browser. Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge, Brave, Arc — any of them will work. The file runs on desktop, tablet, and mobile. No internet required after you have opened it once.

Some numbers about your business. Your rate. Your typical monthly revenue. Your costs. If you do not know these precisely, estimates work. The Pond is designed to be refined over time — start rough, get sharper.

About twenty minutes of honest attention. Not the multitasking kind. The kind where you sit with a cup of something warm and actually think about what your business looks like from above.

## WHAT YOU WILL NOT NEED

An account. A subscription. A credit card. An internet connection. Permission from anyone. The file is yours. It works offline, forever, on any device. That is the point.

# Quick Start

*Ten steps. Twenty minutes. A clearer view.*

- 1. Open the file** — Open **The\_Freelancers\_Pond.html** in any modern browser. That is the entire application — one file, no installation.
- 2. Profile tab** — Enter your hourly rate, target annual income, and weekly capacity. This is the stone — everything else ripples from here.
- 3. Services tab** — Define your offerings. Fixed-price packages, retainers, hourly. The effective rate per hour tells you which services actually make you money.
- 4. Pipeline tab** — Add your current leads and active projects. Set the value and your honest estimate of win probability.
- 5. Time tab** — Enter this month's billable and non-billable hours. Watch your utilisation rate appear.
- 6. Revenue tab** — Enter this month's revenue and your year-to-date total. The run rate projects your annual pace.
- 7. Costs tab** — Add your recurring business expenses. Software, insurance, co-working, everything. The overhead ratio is your efficiency score.
- 8. Cash Flow tab** — See your net monthly number. Set your cash reserves and personal draw. Runway tells you how many months of silence you can survive.
- 9. Dashboard tab** — Check the five health badges. Click the Oracle for sensitivity analysis — it finds your biggest lever.
- 10. Decision Log tab** — Record where you are and what you are thinking. Click Auto-fill to capture today's metrics. Future you will be grateful.

## THE TWO-FILE SYSTEM

Keep two files together: the HTML tool and your latest state JSON export. Email them to yourself, put them on a USB stick, store them in a cloud folder. Open the HTML anywhere, import your state, and you are exactly where you left off.

# Profile

*The stone you throw in.*

Every calculation in the Pond starts here. Your hourly rate is not just a price tag — it is an implicit statement about how you value your time, your expertise, and the years it took to get this good at what you do.

Enter your standard hourly rate, the income target you are working toward, and the realistic number of billable hours you can sustain per week. That last number matters more than most freelancers think. It is not forty. It is probably not even thirty-five. Account for the hours consumed by email, admin, marketing, invoicing, the conversation with your accountant, the afternoon you spent learning a new tool that might help next quarter.

## THE FIELDS

**Hourly rate** — your standard rate for new work. If you charge different rates for different services, enter the one you use most often. Services can override this with fixed pricing.

**Target annual income** — gross, before tax and expenses. This is not what you take home; it is what you need to earn before the government and your software subscriptions take their share. The stat cards will show you the utilisation percentage required to hit this target at your current rate and capacity.

**Billable hours per week** — be honest. If you track your time for a month, you will likely find it is lower than you assumed. That is not a failure. That is information.

**Weeks working per year** — fifty-two minus holidays, minus sick days, minus the weeks you are technically working but actually recovering from the last project. For most people, forty-six to forty-eight.

### RATE PSYCHOLOGY

If the utilisation required to hit your target is above 80%, you have two choices: raise your rate or lower your target. There is no third option. Working at 80%+ utilisation is a short road to burnout and a long road to nowhere. The numbers are not judging you. They are just math.

## How Profile Ripples

Changing your rate does not just change a number on this tab. It recalculates your maximum annual revenue. It shifts the utilisation threshold for hitting your target. It reprices every hourly service. It alters the effective rate comparison on the Services tab. It changes the value of each billable hour on the Time tab.

This is the stone. Watch the water move.

### THE STAT CARDS

| CARD                      | WHAT IT SHOWS   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Hourly Rate               | Your standard rate, displayed prominently as your pricing anchor              |
| Capacity (hrs/yr)         | Billable hours per week multiplied by weeks per year — your annual inventory  |
| Max Annual Revenue        | Rate multiplied by capacity — the ceiling if you billed every available hour  |
| Utilisation to Hit Target | The percentage of capacity you must actually bill to reach your income target |

That last card is the one to watch. If it reads 95%, something needs to change. If it reads 55%, you have room. Room to take on exploratory projects. Room to say no. Room to breathe. And breathing, it turns out, is how you do your best work.

# Services

*What you sell, and what it is actually worth.*

Here is a thought that might sting slightly: if you only sell hours, you have put a ceiling on your income that is exactly equal to the number of hours you can stay awake and useful. Services are how you escape that ceiling.

A fixed-price strategy workshop that takes you twelve hours but is priced at the value it delivers to the client — that is how you decouple revenue from time. A retainer that guarantees monthly income regardless of whether the client uses all the hours — that is how you smooth the feast-famine curve.

The Services tab lets you define each offering with a name, pricing type (fixed, retainer, or hourly), a price, and the estimated hours involved. The tool then calculates the effective rate per hour for each service, so you can see — clearly, without guessing — which services are actually making you money and which are quietly subsidised by the others.

## THE THREE TYPES

**Fixed price** — a defined scope for a defined fee. Your profit margin depends entirely on your estimate of the hours involved. Underestimate, and you are working for less than your rate. Overestimate, and you have given yourself a raise without anyone noticing.

**Retainer** — a monthly fee for ongoing availability. The client books a set number of hours; you block them in your calendar. The beauty of retainers is predictability. The risk is scope creep — when the client assumes the retainer covers everything, including emergencies at midnight.

**Hourly** — time for money, the simplest model. Transparent and easy to scope, but it caps your income at your rate multiplied by your hours. The effective rate always equals your standard rate, by definition.

### THE EFFECTIVE RATE LENS

Sort your services by effective rate per hour. The service at the top is your most valuable offering — the one where you earn the most for each hour invested. If your hourly consulting is at the top, your fixed-price packages are underpriced. If a retainer is at the bottom, you are giving away too many hours for the fee.

## Pricing Without Flinching

There is a specific facial expression that freelancers make when they are about to state their price. A micro-wince. A slight holding of breath. As though the number might physically hurt someone.

The Services tab will not cure this. But it might help you see that your pricing is not arbitrary — it is connected to your rate, your capacity, your costs, your target, and your tax obligations. When you can trace a line from your price to the life it supports, the wince gets smaller.

### STAT CARDS

| CARD                  | WHAT IT SHOWS   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Services              | The number of offerings you have defined  |
| Total Catalogue Value | The sum of all service prices — not monthly revenue, but your full menu           |
| Avg Effective Rate    | Total catalogue value divided by total estimated hours — your blended hourly earn |

A note on the catalogue value: it is not a revenue projection. It is the total value of your offerings if a client bought one of each. Think of it as inventory — the range of things you are prepared to deliver, priced and ready.

If that range is narrow — one service, one price — consider whether you are leaving money on the table. Different clients have different budgets. A three-tier offering (quick audit, strategy workshop, full engagement) lets each client find the door that fits.

# Pipeline

*The work that might be coming. Or might not.*

Every freelancer has experienced the peculiar optimism of a warm lead. The email that says *we are very interested in working together*. The meeting that goes well. The proposal they asked you to send by Friday.

And every freelancer has experienced the silence that follows. The weeks of nothing. The follow-up email that feels slightly desperate. The quiet acceptance that this one is not going to happen, and the scramble to replace it with something — anything.

The Pipeline tab brings structure to this uncertainty. Each lead gets a name, a stage, a value, and a win probability. The weighted pipeline value — total value multiplied by probability — gives you a more honest view of your forward-looking revenue than raw optimism can.

## THE FIVE STAGES

| STAGE       | WHAT IT MEANS  | TYPICAL PROBABILITY |
|-------------|--|---------------------|
| Prospect    | Initial contact. They know you exist. That is about it.          | 10-25%              |
| Proposal    | You have sent a formal proposal or quote. They are considering.  | 25-50%              |
| Negotiation | They want to proceed but are discussing scope, timing, or price. | 50-75%              |
| Won         | Contract signed or work started. This is now revenue.            | 100%                |
| Lost        | They went elsewhere, went silent, or the project was cancelled.  | 0%                  |

Be ruthless with your probabilities. That prospect who seemed enthusiastic three weeks ago but has not replied to two follow-ups? They are not at 50%. They are at 10%, and dropping. The Pipeline is only useful if it reflects reality, not hope.

## Reading the Pipeline

The stat cards show four numbers that tell a story:

**Active leads** — how many opportunities are in play, excluding won and lost. If this number is zero, you have a marketing problem. If it is above eight or ten, you may have a focus problem.

**Pipeline value** — the total unweighted value of all active leads. This is the optimistic number, the one you tell yourself at night.

**Weighted value** — each deal multiplied by its probability, then summed. This is the realistic number, the one you should actually plan around. If there is a large gap between pipeline value and weighted value, your deals are early-stage or uncertain.

**Won this period** — the value of deals that have moved to Won. This is the retrospective number, the proof that the pipeline actually converts.

### PIPELINE VELOCITY

Track how long deals stay in each stage. If proposals sit for more than two weeks without a response, your follow-up cadence needs work. If prospects rarely move to proposal stage, your initial conversations may not be qualifying hard enough. The pipeline is not just a list — it is a diagnostic.

A note about the relationship between Pipeline and the rest of the Pond. Weighted pipeline value appears on the Dashboard as a forward-looking indicator. It does not feed into Revenue — revenue is what you have actually earned, not what you might earn. The distinction matters. Hope is not a financial plan.

# Time

*Your only inventory. It does not restock.*

You cannot buy more of it. You cannot store it for later. Every hour that passes unbilled is revenue that will never exist. This is the fundamental scarcity of freelancing, and it is worth sitting with for a moment.

The Time tab tracks two categories: billable hours (time spent on client work that generates revenue) and non-billable hours (admin, marketing, learning, business development — necessary but unpaid). Together, they reveal your utilisation rate: the percentage of your available capacity that actually earns money.

## THE FIELDS

**Billable hours this month** — hours worked on client projects, whether billed hourly or as part of a fixed-price engagement. If you do not track time, start. Even rough estimates are better than nothing.

**Non-billable hours this month** — everything else. Email. Invoicing. The LinkedIn post you spent ninety minutes on. The portfolio update. The coffee meeting that was networking but felt like socialising. All of it counts.

**Average hours billed per month (trailing)** — your three-to-six-month average. This smooths out the spiky months and gives you a more stable baseline for projections. One great month does not mean you have solved freelancing. One terrible month does not mean it is over.

**Effective rate this month** — actual revenue divided by actual billable hours. On hourly work, this equals your rate. On fixed-price work, it might be higher (you finished fast) or lower (scope crept). This number tells you the truth about what your time is actually worth this month.

## The Utilisation Question

Utilisation is the single most important operational metric for a freelancer. It is the ratio of billable hours to available hours, expressed as a percentage. And it carries a tension that never fully resolves.

Too low, and you are leaving money on the table. Your skills are available, your calendar has gaps, but the work is not there — or you are spending too much time on activities that do not directly generate revenue.

Too high, and you are in danger. Not immediately, but eventually. Sustained utilisation above 80-85% means no margin for illness, emergencies, professional development, or the kind of unfocused thinking that produces your best ideas. It means saying yes to everything. It means there is no slack in the system for when things go wrong. And things always go wrong.

| UTILISATION | WHAT IT MEANS  |
|-------------|--|
| Below 40%   | Significantly under-utilised. Pipeline and marketing need immediate attention.         |
| 40-55%      | Below target. Enough to survive, not enough to thrive. Focus on conversion.            |
| 55-65%      | Reasonable. Room for growth, but not uncomfortable. Many freelancers settle here.      |
| 65-75%      | The sweet spot. Strong revenue, sustainable pace, room for the unexpected.             |
| 75-85%      | High performance. Monitor for burnout. Consider raising rates instead of adding hours. |
| Above 85%   | Red zone. You are trading tomorrow's capacity for today's revenue.                     |

### THE NON-BILLABLE PARADOX

The hours you do not bill often determine the quality of the hours you do. A week with zero non-billable time means you did no marketing, no learning, no planning. Next month's pipeline will reflect that. Protect your non-billable time. It is the maintenance that keeps the machine running.

# Revenue

*What actually came in.*

There is a difference between working and earning. You know this. You have had months where you worked constantly and earned modestly, and months where a well-scoped project landed in week one and the numbers just worked. Revenue tracks the earning side — what clients paid, what is still outstanding, and what your trajectory looks like.

## THE FIELDS

**Revenue this month** — total invoiced or earned this month, before tax and expenses. Include everything: hourly billing, project milestones, retainer fees. This feeds directly into Cash Flow.

**Revenue last month** — used to calculate month-over-month growth. Not every month needs to grow, but a consistent downward trend is worth investigating.

**Year-to-date revenue** — your cumulative earnings for the year so far. Compared against your target, this tells you whether you are on pace.

**Months elapsed this year** — divides your YTD revenue into a monthly average, which then projects to a run rate. If you are four months in with one-third of your target earned, you are on track. If you are four months in with one-fifth, you have ground to make up.

**Outstanding invoices** — money you have earned but not yet received. This is cash in theory but not in practice. If this number is large relative to your monthly revenue, your collection process needs attention.

**Average collection days** — how long it typically takes to get paid after invoicing. Net-30 is standard. Above 45 days is a cash flow risk that costs you more than you think — it is an interest-free loan to your client, funded by your reserves.

## The Run Rate

The run rate is your year-to-date monthly average, projected forward to twelve months. It is the simplest possible forecast: if you keep earning at this pace, where will you end the year?

It is not a prediction. It does not account for seasonality, for that big project landing in Q3, or for the summer slowdown. But it is a useful benchmark — a baseline against which you can measure your target and your progress.

### STAT CARDS

| CARD            | WHAT IT SHOWS  |
|-----------------|--|
| This Month      | Current month's revenue                                    |
| Monthly Avg     | Year-to-date revenue divided by months elapsed             |
| Year-to-Date    | Cumulative revenue for the year                            |
| Run Rate        | Monthly average projected to twelve months                 |
| Of Target (YTD) | Year-to-date revenue as a percentage of your annual target |
| MoM Growth      | Month-over-month change, expressed as a percentage         |

The 12-month revenue projection chart shows your monthly average extended as a flat line across the year. It is deliberately simple. If your revenue is volatile — some months high, some months low — the flat line represents the central tendency. The real months will bounce above and below it. That is normal. That is freelancing.

#### COLLECTION AS CASH FLOW

Revenue is not cash until it arrives in your account. A freelancer with strong revenue and slow collection can still run out of cash. Track outstanding invoices aggressively. Send reminders at 7 days, 14 days, and 30 days. Consider offering a small discount for early payment — 2% for paying within 10 days can dramatically improve your cash position.

# Business Costs

*Where the money goes when you are not looking.*

Costs are quiet. They arrive as monthly charges on a credit card statement, individually small enough to ignore, collectively large enough to matter. The Business Costs tab asks you to name them, categorise them, and look at the total.

There are eight categories: Software, Professional (accounting, legal), Insurance, Workspace (co-working, home office), Marketing, Education, Equipment, and Other. Add each recurring monthly expense as a line item with a name, category, and amount.

## THE OVERHEAD RATIO

Total monthly costs divided by monthly revenue. This is your operational efficiency score. A freelancer with a 10% overhead ratio keeps ninety cents of every dollar earned (before tax and draw). A freelancer with a 35% overhead ratio keeps sixty-five cents.

There is no universally correct ratio. A developer working from home with minimal tooling might run at 8%. A photographer with studio rent, equipment leases, and editing software might run at 25%. The question is not whether your ratio is high or low in absolute terms — it is whether every line item is actively contributing to revenue.

## THE SUBSCRIPTION AUDIT

Once a quarter, read through your cost list and ask one question about each item: *if this disappeared tomorrow, would I earn less?* If the answer is no — or if the answer is *probably not but it might be useful someday* — cancel it. Someday is expensive when it arrives twelve times a year.

### THE 50% RULE (ADAPTED)

In real estate investing, operating expenses typically hover around 50% of rental income. For freelancers, the equivalent benchmark is lower — total costs including personal draw should be well under 80% of revenue. Above that, you are running too thin. Below 60%, you have built a genuinely profitable operation.

## Categories That Matter

| CATEGORY     | WHAT BELONGS HERE   | WATCH FOR  |
|--------------|---|--|
| Software     | Design tools, dev environments, project management, accounting, communication | Redundancy — are two tools doing the same job?               |
| Professional | Accountant, bookkeeper, legal counsel, business coach                         | Value — is the advice saving you more than the fee?          |
| Insurance    | Professional indemnity, public liability, health, income protection           | Gaps — what is not covered that should be?                   |
| Workspace    | Co-working membership, home office costs, internet                            | Necessity — do you actually use that desk five days a week?  |
| Marketing    | Website hosting, domain, portfolio, ads, networking events                    | ROI — which spend actually brings in clients?                |
| Education    | Courses, conferences, books, subscriptions to learning platforms              | Application — are you learning or just collecting?           |
| Equipment    | Computer, monitors, camera, microphone, desk, chair                           | Amortisation — spread large purchases over their useful life |
| Other        | Everything that does not fit above  | Accumulation — does this category keep growing?              |

The stat cards show your total monthly and annual costs, the overhead ratio, and a breakdown by category. If one category dominates — say, Software at 40% of total costs — that is worth examining. Not because it is necessarily wrong, but because concentration creates fragility. If that one tool raises its prices, your entire cost structure shifts.

# Cash Flow

*The number that determines whether this is a business or a hobby.*

Net Cash Flow equals Revenue minus Business Costs minus Personal Draw. Three numbers. One truth. Are you keeping more than you are spending?

The large-format display at the top of the tab shows your monthly net in a font size that leaves no room for ambiguity. It is colour-coded: green when you are accumulating reserves, amber when you are breaking even, red when the business is consuming its own savings, and a pulsing red when the situation is critical.

Below this, four stat cards show the components: revenue per month, costs per month, personal draw per month, and annual net.

## THE SECOND HALF: RESERVES AND RUNWAY

**Cash reserves** — money currently in the business account, set aside as a buffer. This is not savings for a holiday. This is the cushion between you and panic when a client pays late, a project falls through, or the economy decides to have one of its episodes.

**Personal draw** — what you pay yourself each month. As a freelancer, this is your salary equivalent. Too high, and your reserves drain. Too low, and freelancing starts to feel like volunteering.

**Runway** — cash reserves divided by monthly burn rate (costs plus draw). This is the answer to the question you think about at 2am: *if no new money came in, how long could I keep going?*

### THE RUNWAY BENCHMARK

Three months is the minimum. Six months is comfortable. Twelve months is fortress-level security. Below three months, you are one lost client away from making decisions under duress — and decisions made under duress are almost always bad ones.

## The 12-Month View

The projection chart and monthly breakdown table show what your cash flow looks like extended across twelve months, using your current monthly average revenue. Costs and draw are held constant.

This is a *status quo* projection: what happens if nothing changes. If the net is positive, your reserves grow month by month. If negative, they shrink — and the runway shortens.

The cumulative column in the breakdown table is particularly telling. It shows the total net cash accumulated (or lost) over the year. A positive cumulative means the business is generating surplus. A negative cumulative means you are drawing down reserves — which is sustainable only until you run out.

### THE COLOUR CODE

| NET CASH FLOW    | COLOUR      | MEANING  |
|------------------|-------------|--|
| Above \$500/mo   | Green       | Healthy. Reserves are growing. You have margin for error.  |
| \$0 to \$500/mo  | Amber       | Break-even to modest surplus. Functional but fragile.      |
| \$0 to -\$500/mo | Red         | Negative. The business is consuming reserves. Investigate. |
| Below -\$500/mo  | Pulsing red | Critical. Reserves are draining fast. Action needed now.   |

The thresholds are not arbitrary, but they are not universal either. A freelancer in a low-cost-of-living city might be healthy at a lower surplus than one in London or San Francisco. What matters is the direction, not just the number. Is the trend improving? Stable? Declining?

Trend is information. The Pond gives you the trend. What you do with it is yours.

# Tax Estimate

*The silent partner you never chose.*

Nobody becomes a freelancer for the tax benefits. In fact, the tax situation for self-employed people in most countries is the opposite of a benefit — you pay both the employer's and the employee's share of social contributions, often with fewer deductions and less certainty about what you owe until the year is over.

The Tax tab does not do your taxes. That is your accountant's job, and if you do not have an accountant, getting one is probably the highest-return investment in this entire tool. What this tab does is estimate your tax liability so you can set aside the right amount each month and avoid the January surprise.

## THE FIELDS

**Income tax rate** — your marginal rate on freelance income. In the US, this might be 22-37% depending on bracket. In the UK, 20-45%. In the Netherlands, the box-1 rates. Enter the rate that applies to most of your income.

**Self-employment tax** — the additional contribution for being your own employer. In the US, this is roughly 15.3% (Social Security plus Medicare). In other countries, the equivalent social insurance contribution. Some jurisdictions fold this into income tax; others charge it separately.

**Estimated deductions** — annual deductions you expect to claim: home office, equipment depreciation, professional development, health insurance premiums, business travel. Your accountant can advise on what qualifies in your jurisdiction.

**Tax already paid** — quarterly estimated payments or other tax already remitted this year. The tool subtracts this from your estimated liability to show what remains.

### THE SET-ASIDE HABIT

From every payment you receive, immediately transfer your combined tax rate percentage to a separate account. Do not look at it. Do not borrow from it. When quarterly payments are due, the money is there. When year-end comes, the money is there. This single habit eliminates the most common freelancer financial crisis.

## Reading the Tax Cards

| CARD                 | WHAT IT SHOWS   |
|----------------------|---|
| Combined Tax Rate    | Income tax plus self-employment tax — the total percentage you owe      |
| Taxable Income (YTD) | Year-to-date revenue minus costs minus deductions                       |
| Est. Tax (YTD)       | Taxable income multiplied by combined rate — what you likely owe so far |
| Already Paid         | Tax payments already made this year                                     |
| Remaining Liability  | Estimated tax minus already paid — what you still owe                   |
| Tax Set-Aside / Mo   | How much to set aside from this month's revenue for taxes               |
| Projected Annual Tax | Full-year tax estimate based on your current pace                       |

A word about accuracy: these are estimates. Tax calculations in real life are more complex — brackets, phase-outs, credits, quarterly payment timing, jurisdiction-specific rules. The Pond gives you a directional view, not a precise figure. Think of it as a compass, not a GPS coordinate.

If the remaining liability card shows a number that surprises you, talk to your accountant sooner rather than later. Tax surprises are always more expensive than tax planning.

*The freelancer who sets aside tax monthly sleeps better than the freelancer who earns more but saves nothing for April.*

# Scenarios

*What if. The two most productive words in planning.*

The future is not a single line. It is a cone of possibilities, some bright, some dim, most somewhere in the middle. The Scenarios tab lets you model three versions of that cone: best case, base case, and worst case.

Each scenario has four sliders:

**Rate growth** — how much your effective rate increases (or does not) over the planning horizon. A 10% increase might come from raising prices, shifting to fixed-price packaging, or attracting higher-budget clients.

**Utilisation** — the percentage of your capacity you actually bill. This is the lever most freelancers underestimate. The difference between 50% and 70% utilisation, at any given rate, is enormous.

**New clients** — how many new clients you expect to acquire over the planning period. Zero is a valid answer for the worst case. It is a useful one to model, because it shows you what happens when the pipeline dries up.

**Cost growth** — how much your operating expenses increase. Software prices go up. Insurance premiums go up. Inflation touches everything eventually.

## SCENARIO DISCIPLINE

Always check the worst case first. If you can survive the worst case — positive or near-zero net, runway intact — your business has downside protection. A business that only works in the best case is not a business. It is a bet.

### THE BASE CASE TRAP

Most people set their base case too optimistically. The base case should be boring. It should be what happens if nothing particularly good or bad occurs. The same clients, the same rate, the same effort. If your base case includes winning two large new clients, that is your best case wearing a disguise.

## Reading the Comparison Table

| ROW             | WHAT IT TELLS YOU   |
|-----------------|---|
| Effective Rate  | Your rate after growth — the price per hour in each scenario      |
| Monthly Revenue | Rate times capacity times utilisation — what you earn per month   |
| Total Revenue   | Monthly revenue times planning horizon — cumulative income        |
| Net Income      | Total revenue minus costs minus draw — what stays in the business |
| Monthly Net     | Net income divided by months — the sustainable run rate           |
| End Reserves    | Starting reserves plus net income — where you end up              |

The most useful comparison is between the worst case and your current reserves. If worst-case net income is negative but your reserves can absorb it over the planning horizon, you are resilient. If worst-case net income would drain your reserves within six months, you are fragile — and you should know that now, while you can still do something about it.

Drag the sliders. Watch the numbers change. Try extreme values. What happens if you double your rate but halve your utilisation? What happens if you lose all clients but cut costs to the bone? The Scenarios tab is a laboratory for courage — a place to test decisions before they become real.

# Dashboard

*Everything at a glance.*

You have entered numbers across ten tabs. The Dashboard distils all of it into a single view: five health indicators, a monthly breakdown, and a quick metrics panel.

## THE FIVE HEALTH BADGES

| BADGE           | GREEN             | AMBER           | RED                  |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Cash Flow / Mo  | Above \$500       | \$0 to \$500    | Negative             |
| Utilisation     | Above 65%         | 50-65%          | Below 50%            |
| Runway          | Above 6 months    | 3-6 months      | Below 3 months       |
| Overhead Ratio  | Below 15%         | 15-30%          | Above 30%            |
| Target Progress | On track or ahead | Slightly behind | Significantly behind |

All green does not mean you are done. It means the fundamentals are sound. Amber means attention is warranted — not alarm, but focus. Red means something needs to change, and soon.

The monthly breakdown card shows the arithmetic clearly: revenue minus costs minus draw equals net. No hiding. The quick metrics panel adds effective rate, annual run rate, collection days, and weighted pipeline — the numbers that tell you where you have been and where you are heading.

### DASHBOARD CADENCE

Open the Dashboard once a week. Not to obsess, but to notice. Trends reveal themselves over weeks, not days. A badge that flips from green to amber is a gentle tap on the shoulder. A badge that has been amber for three weeks is a conversation you need to have with yourself.

## The Monthly and Quick Metrics

The two summary cards sit side by side, offering different lenses on the same business:

The **monthly breakdown** card is the income statement in miniature. Revenue at the top, subtractions in the middle, net at the bottom. If you could only see one number about your business each week, it should be the net on this card.

The **quick metrics** card adds context that the income statement misses. Your effective rate tells you what your time is actually worth this month. The run rate projects your current pace to a full year. Collection days measure the lag between earning and receiving. Weighted pipeline shows what might be coming — emphasis on *might*.

Together, these two cards answer two questions: *how is the business doing right now?* and *where is it pointing?*

*A freelancer who checks their dashboard weekly makes better decisions than one who checks their bank balance daily. The dashboard shows the system. The bank balance shows a snapshot.*

# Decision Log

*Your business journal. Write it for the person you will be in six months.*

Decisions made in the fog of the present become clear in the light of the past — but only if you wrote them down. The Decision Log is where you record what you decided, why, and what the numbers looked like at the time.

## THE FIVE TYPES

**Raise** — you increased your rate, repriced a service, or otherwise raised the price of your work. Why? What triggered it? What were you afraid of?

**Hold** — you decided to keep things as they are. Not every period requires change. Sometimes the wisest decision is to let the current strategy play out. But document *why* you are holding, not just that you are.

**Pivot** — you changed direction. A new service offering. A different client type. A shift in positioning. Pivots deserve the most thorough documentation, because they are the hardest to evaluate in hindsight without context.

**Invest** — you spent money on growth. A course. A tool. A contractor. A marketing campaign. Record the expected return and the timeline. In six months, you can assess whether it paid off.

**Cut** — you removed something. Dropped a client. Cancelled a tool. Stopped offering a service. Cuts are underrated. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your business is make it smaller in the right places.

### AUTO-FILL

Click the Auto-fill button to populate the key numbers field with your current metrics: rate, utilisation, monthly net, runway, and year-to-date revenue. This creates a snapshot of the business at the moment of the decision — invaluable for retrospective analysis.

## Closing the Loop

The Decision Log is the tab that connects the end to the beginning. When you make a decision — raise your rate, invest in a new skill, drop an underperforming service — the effects ripple forward through the Pond. Your rate changes. Your revenue shifts. Your cash flow adjusts. And eventually, you find yourself back on the Decision Log, recording the next decision, informed by everything that happened since the last one.

This is the loop: observe, analyse, decide, record. Then observe again.

Over time, the Decision Log becomes something more than a record. It becomes a teacher. You start to notice your patterns — the decisions you make under stress, the ones you defer too long, the ones that turned out better than you feared. You start to see the shape of your judgment, and you get better at trusting it.

Or — just as valuable — you learn where your judgment has blind spots. The rate increase you should have made six months earlier. The client you knew was trouble but kept anyway. The investment that felt necessary at the time but produced nothing. These are not failures. They are the tuition fees of self-employment.

*A stone thrown from the shore back into the pond.*

## FEATURES

# The Oracle

*Where is the biggest lever?*

The Oracle lives behind a button on the Dashboard tab. Click it, and it runs a sensitivity analysis across six levers, then ranks them by the monthly cash flow impact each would produce. The biggest opportunity is always at the top.

## THE SIX LEVERS

| LEVER                   | WHAT IT MODELS                                      | TYPICAL IMPACT                      |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Rate +15%               | Raising your hourly rate by 15%                     | High — often the biggest lever      |
| Utilisation +10pp       | Filling 10 more percentage points of capacity       | High for under-utilised freelancers |
| Costs -20%              | Reducing operating expenses by 20%                  | Moderate                            |
| Draw -10%               | Reducing personal draw by 10%                       | Moderate                            |
| Add 1 retainer client   | Winning a 20hr/month retainer at your standard rate | High                                |
| Effective rate +\$10/hr | Increasing effective rate through better packaging  | Moderate to high                    |

The levers are sorted by dollar impact with proportional colour bars. Green indicates high impact, amber moderate, grey low. Click any lever to jump directly to the tab where you can make the change.

Below the levers, the Oracle generates **low-hanging fruit** — contextual, specific recommendations based on your actual numbers. These are not generic tips. They reference your utilisation rate, your overhead ratio, your collection days, your pipeline. And they include the exact dollar amount each adjustment would produce.

## Low-Hanging Fruit

The Oracle looks at your numbers and flags the opportunities hiding in plain sight. Here are the triggers:

**Utilisation below 50%** — the Oracle will suggest focusing on pipeline and lead generation, and will quantify the revenue gain from each 10-point improvement in utilisation.

**Utilisation above 85%** — instead of more hours, the Oracle will suggest raising rates, and will show the monthly gain from a rate increase that replaces volume with value.

**Overhead ratio above 30%** — a prompt to review each line item in your cost list. Are all subscriptions actively earning revenue?

**Collection days above 35** — suggestions for improving cash flow through deposits, milestone billing, or early payment incentives.

**Runway below 3 months** — a clear warning to prioritise building reserves before investing in growth.

**Outstanding invoices exceeding half your monthly revenue** — a nudge to chase overdue payments. This is cash you have already earned.

**Effective rate below standard rate** — a signal that fixed-price projects may be underpriced, or that scope creep is eating your margins.

**Negative cash flow** — the Oracle highlights the single biggest lever and tells you exactly how much it would improve your monthly position.

### ORACLE RHYTHM

Run the Oracle whenever something changes — a new client, a rate increase, a cost cut. The recommendations update based on your current numbers, so the biggest lever today may not be the biggest lever next month. That is the point.

# Files and State Management

*Your data is yours. Take it with you.*

Your work is saved automatically in the browser's `localStorage`. Every time you change a field, the Pond waits 400 milliseconds for you to finish typing, then persists the entire state. If you close the browser and reopen the file, everything is where you left it.

But `localStorage` is local. It lives in one browser on one device. If you clear your browser data, switch devices, or want to keep a historical record, you need the Files tab.

## EXPORT AND IMPORT

**Export All** — saves all eleven tabs into a single JSON file. The file includes the tool ID, version, timestamp, and the complete state of every tab. Keep dated exports as your business evolves — they become snapshots of your business at different points in time.

**Import All** — restores a previously exported state. This overwrites all current data with the imported file. Use it to move between devices, restore a backup, or revisit a past analysis.

**Individual tool export/import** — each tab can be exported and imported separately. Useful if you want to share your cost structure without sharing your revenue, or if you want to import pipeline data from a different analysis.

### THE TWO-FILE SYSTEM

Keep two files together: the HTML tool and your latest state JSON. Email them to yourself, put them on a USB stick, store them in a cloud folder. Open the HTML anywhere, import your state, and you are exactly where you left off. No account. No sync. No dependency.

## Keyboard Shortcuts

| SHORTCUT     | ACTION            |
|--------------|-------------------|
| Ctrl/Cmd + 1 | Profile tab       |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 2 | Services tab      |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 3 | Pipeline tab      |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 4 | Time tab          |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 5 | Revenue tab       |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 6 | Costs tab         |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 7 | Cash Flow tab     |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 8 | Tax tab           |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 9 | Scenarios tab     |
| Ctrl/Cmd + 0 | Dashboard tab     |
| Ctrl/Cmd + S | Export full state |
| Escape       | Close modals      |

# Glossary

*The language of the Pond.*

| TERM                | DEFINITION   |
|---------------------|--|
| Billable Hours      | Hours spent on client work that generates revenue. The core unit of freelance production.                                    |
| Break-even Revenue  | The minimum monthly revenue needed to cover costs and personal draw. Below this, reserves are consumed.                      |
| Cash Reserves       | Money set aside in the business for emergencies, slow months, and opportunities. The buffer between you and panic.           |
| Collection Days     | Average number of days between sending an invoice and receiving payment. Net-30 is standard; above 45 is a risk.             |
| Effective Rate      | Actual revenue divided by actual billable hours. On fixed-price work, this may differ significantly from your standard rate. |
| Hourly Rate         | Your standard per-hour price for client work. The stone of the Pond.   |
| MoM Growth          | Month-over-month revenue change, expressed as a percentage. Positive is growth; negative is contraction.                     |
| Net Cash Flow       | Revenue minus business costs minus personal draw. What stays in the business each month.                                     |
| Non-billable Hours  | Time spent on admin, marketing, learning, and business development. Necessary but unpaid.                                    |
| Overhead Ratio      | Total business costs as a percentage of revenue. Lower means leaner.   |
| Personal Draw       | The amount you pay yourself from the business each month. Your salary equivalent.  |
| Pipeline Value      | Total value of all active leads and proposals. The optimistic view of future revenue.  |
| Run Rate            | Monthly average revenue projected to twelve months. A simple annualised forecast.  |
| Runway              | Cash reserves divided by monthly burn rate (costs plus draw). How long you can survive without new revenue.                  |
| Self-employment Tax | Additional tax paid by self-employed workers to cover social insurance contributions.  |

| TERM              | DEFINITION  |
|-------------------|---|
| Tax Set-aside     | The amount to transfer to a dedicated tax account from each payment received.                           |
| Utilisation Rate  | Billable hours divided by available hours. The percentage of your capacity that earns revenue.          |
| Weighted Pipeline | Each deal's value multiplied by its win probability, then summed. The realistic view of future revenue. |
| Win Probability   | Your honest estimate of the likelihood that a lead will convert to paying work.                         |

# Workflows

*Paths through the Pond for common situations.*

## The Weekly Check-in

Open the Dashboard. Scan the five badges. Note any colour changes from last week. Check the monthly breakdown and quick metrics. If anything is amber or red, navigate to the relevant tab and investigate. Log a note on the Decision tab if warranted. Time: five minutes.

## The Monthly Review

Update Revenue with this month's actual numbers. Update Time with actual billable and non-billable hours. Update Costs if anything has changed. Check Cash Flow — is the net improving, stable, or declining? Run the Oracle for fresh sensitivity analysis. Export your state as a dated backup. Log a hold decision on the Decision tab with current metrics. Time: twenty minutes.

## Raising Your Rate

Start on the Profile tab and increase your rate. Watch the ripple: maximum revenue increases, required utilisation decreases, service effective rates shift, and if you are under-utilised, the Oracle may stop flagging rate increases as your biggest lever. Check the Scenarios tab to model what happens if you lose some clients due to the increase (reduce utilisation in the worst case). If worst-case survival is acceptable, commit the change. Log a Raise decision with your rationale and the numbers before and after.

## Evaluating a New Client

Add the lead to Pipeline with its value and your honest win probability. Check the weighted pipeline — does this deal materially change your forward-looking revenue? Navigate to Scenarios and model a best case that includes winning this client (higher utilisation or revenue). Does it move the needle? If the client requires a lower rate, adjust the Profile tab temporarily and check if the Dashboard badges change. Revert and decide.

## Surviving a Dry Spell

Start on Cash Flow. Check your runway. How many months can you sustain current costs and draw with no new revenue? If runway is below three months, consider reducing draw temporarily. Navigate to Pipeline — is it empty, or are there leads stalled? Run the Oracle. The

biggest lever during a dry spell is usually utilisation (which means: find work) or cost reduction (which means: cut the non-essential). Log a decision about your plan.

## End of Year Planning

Export your current state as a year-end snapshot. Update Tax with final numbers and check your remaining liability. Compare your YTD revenue against your target — what percentage did you achieve? Navigate to Scenarios and set the planning horizon to twelve months. Model next year's best, base, and worst cases. Adjust your Profile rate for the new year. Set new targets. Log a comprehensive decision entry that summarises the year and your plans for the next one.

## Onboarding a New Freelancer

If you are opening the Pond for the first time, here is a path that takes about thirty minutes and gives you a functioning model of your business:

**Step 1: Profile** — Enter your rate and target. If you do not have a formal rate, calculate it: take your desired annual income, add 30% for taxes, add your expected annual business costs, then divide by your realistic billable hours per year. That is the minimum rate at which freelancing is financially viable for you. Many people are surprised by this number. Sit with it.

**Step 2: Costs** — List every monthly business expense. Include the ones that feel small. They add up. If you are unsure, check your bank and credit card statements for the last three months.

**Step 3: Revenue** — Enter your best estimate of this month's and last month's revenue. If you are brand new, use zero. That is honest, and honest numbers produce useful analysis.

**Step 4: Time** — Estimate your billable hours for this month. If you have never tracked time, start now — even a rough log on paper is better than guessing.

**Step 5: Cash Flow** — Enter your cash reserves and what you need to pay yourself monthly. Watch the runway number appear. This is the number you build around.

**Step 6: Dashboard** — Look at the badges. They will probably not all be green. That is fine. They give you a starting point. Run the Oracle to see where the biggest opportunity is.

**Step 7: Decisions** — Log your first entry. Type: Hold. Subject: Starting out. Rationale: where you are, what you know, what you are uncertain about. Auto-fill the numbers. This is page one of your business journal.

### PERMISSION TO BE IMPRECISE

The Pond works with estimates. It is not an accounting system. If you do not know your exact revenue, approximate. If you are unsure about a cost, round up. The goal is directional accuracy, not decimal precision. You can refine later. What matters now is that the model exists at all.

# Disclaimer

All calculations, projections, and analyses generated by The Freelancer's Pond are estimates for informational and planning purposes only. They do not constitute financial, legal, tax, or investment advice.

Freelance income is inherently variable. Projections are based on assumptions that may not reflect actual outcomes. Tax calculations are simplified and may not account for jurisdiction-specific rules, credits, deductions, or bracket structures. Users should independently verify all outputs and consult qualified professionals — particularly for tax and legal matters — before making business decisions.

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