

Kathryn:

Welcome to episode 54 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Are you unsure about charging per piece or by the hour? Today, Phon Baillie and I talk about that and more when we discuss becoming a proofreader. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Phon, welcome to the show.

Phon:

Hi, it's nice to be here. Thanks for having me, Kathryn.

Kathryn:

I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Phon:

When I was five I actually wanted to be a writer. I loved books and I read them like, voraciously. I was like, you know, the kid walking to school with her nose buried in a book.

Kathryn:

And how had that changed by the time you left high school?

Phon:

By the time I left high school, I still wanted to be a writer. I did love to proofread, but at the time I didn't know that it was a career opportunity for me.

Kathryn:

Did you pursue college?

Phon:

Yes, actually I went to university and I studied media and communications and that's where I discovered proofreading as a career opportunity.

Kathryn:

Did your studies directly translate into what you do or is it just some aspects?

Phon:

I would say that it did because we studied a lot of content and messaging and I had some classes that were specific to working with communications with content, hands on. So, when I, I remember once or a class project, we had an editing assignment and at the end of the class the professor had pulled me aside and told me I was, he thought that I had a natural gift for proofreading and editing. And that's when I, that was when it came into my frame of reference that this was a possibility for a career.

Kathryn:

How did you get into being location independent?

Phon:

So, after university I went to publishing school and after I graduated publishing school I decided to freelance and that's when I discovered that I really enjoyed the flexibility and the freedom of a location, independent lifestyle.

Kathryn:

How do you describe your job to people who are just being polite when they ask?

Phon:

In that case, I tell them I'm an editor and that I'm also an editing instructor.

Kathryn:

And when you're talking with someone who really wants to know the details?

Phon:

That's when I go a little bit deeper and I tell them I'm a proofreader. I also copy edit and I do other forms of editing. And then that's when it opens up the discussion into how they can start. And what does proofreading entail and what kind of content that people can work on.

Kathryn:

How did you get into freelancing for proofreading?

Phon:

Well, when I was in publishing school, it was a very general and holistic curriculum. So we learned about different aspects of publishing. However, they didn't teach us about marketing and about a specific freelancing skills that we needed. So how I got into it was just through talking to mentors and getting advice from other freelancers and trying different strategies to see what worked. And I found that networking and leveraging my relationships really made a difference in freelancing.

Kathryn:

How did you find your first clients?

Phon:

I found my first clients through networking and through referrals. I found that by being professional and diligent and having great communication skills, that my clients were more than happy to recommend me to their network. So that was excellent. And at the time there were only a few freelance websites available for freelancers to go find work. So I would go to those websites on a daily basis. And also throughout the years, as social media has grown, I've also used social media very effectively. And I love it because it's a great way to make a big impact without having to spend a lot of money or any money at all on ads.

Kathryn:

Tell us about your first major struggle.

Phon:

My first major struggle I would say, would be gaining experience and therefore finding work because you know when you're new, especially as a freelancer in any industry, you really want to have that experience so you can build on that and then you can get quality paying clients. So that would be my first major struggle.

Kathryn:

And how about your, your first major success?

Phon:

My first major success was landing a six week contract with a lifestyle trade magazine. And that was after having freelanced for about a month or so. And it was a great opportunity to see what it was like to work in house and also to be able to command a higher rate than I was used to.

Kathryn:

If you could go back and give your younger self just starting this business, any advice, what would you say?

Phon:

I would say don't get distracted because when you're learning or you're just entering something, there will be, you know, like the shiny bright things that will attract you, like different opportunities or relationships or, or other obligations. But if you're really passionate at something stay focused on that. And also I would say don't think that anything that inspires you is out of reach. So if you see someone who is higher levels up from where you are and you see them as an inspiration, absolutely feel that you can get to their level. So don't ever think that something is out of your reach.

Kathryn:

Odds are, there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Phon:

Well, I wake up and I'll do my morning routine, which is about 15 minutes. And that's when I will journal and I'll do my affirmations and I'll just get my mind right for the day. And then I'll go through the routine of getting my son ready for school. I'll drop him off and then when I come back home, that's when I, I will spend the first part of the day focusing on one task, one important task that I feel moves my business forward so that no matter what happens throughout the day, if I don't get anything else done, I make sure that that one important task is completed. And then my husband is also my business partner. So we will go for a lunch and then when I come back I will mark student final assignments from my proofreading course and I'll also take care of client emails, some administrative tasks and maybe do some marketing. And then I'll pick my son up from school. And then after that it's family time. After dinner it's a, I'll spend another half hour to an hour or so marking more finals or doing some more marketing for my business.

Kathryn:

Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education, formal or informal?

Phon:

Yes. I actually take a lot of online classes where I will, you know, go to learn about things that I don't know about like tech issues or SEO or stuff like that. And then I'll also research industry trends. I'll read articles and go into forums to see what's happening in the editing and proofreading industry.

Kathryn:

What are you excited about right now in proofreading?

Phon:

I'm excited about how content is changing. I mean it's changed a lot since content publishing has gone up because of the internet, but content itself has really changed and so has messaging and it's been really exciting to see all the diverse voices and the content and the personalities come forward and to be able to work with all of that but yet able to maintain their unique style and voice. And I'm just excited to see where else it goes.

Kathryn:

Now it's time to get into the numbers. What is your income range and how long have you been doing the work?

Phon:

I have been in the publishing industry for over 17 years. I've been freelancing, working remotely for over 12 so my, my income range is in the mid five figures. So I've been able to support my family on my sole income when my husband went back to school full time. And that's also in Canadian dollars as well.

Kathryn:

What would you say at the beginning range would be?

Phon:

For proofreaders, it can start from \$20 to \$35 an hour. And for copy editors, the beginning range can be from \$30 to \$40 an hour.

Kathryn:

Where do you see it topping out?

Phon:

Well, that really depends on the niche and the type of content you could be working on. So for instance, if you're working in medical or you're working for a tech company, you're going to command higher rates. So if you were a copy editor for a tech company, say you would be making \$60 an hour or up because of that specialized knowledge. And then if you were working on say, books for publishing houses or indie writers, then you're going to be working on a per project basis or a per word basis.

Kathryn:

How do you decide your pricing structure?

Phon:

It depends on the type of project and the scope of the work. So if I'm working on a short piece, like say a memo like or or a one page document, then I'm going to charge per hour there. But if it's something longer, like a book, I will most likely charge by word or per project, and again, it's also up to the person. If someone is, if you're more comfortable charging per hour for everything, then you can do that, but you know you want to make sure that you're also factoring in the lifelong intrinsic value of the work that you contribute to the project.

Kathryn:

Is there anything you do to keep your income stable?

Phon:

Yes, I prioritize marketing. Marketing is probably one of the most important tasks a proofreader or anyone who's a freelancer can do. So, I market myself by connecting with my connections through LinkedIn or through people on social media. I'll seek out people and engage with them.

Kathryn:

Are there any tools or software that you recommend beginners start with?

Phon:

You need a laptop or a desktop with a great wifi connection so you can send and receive work. And also having Microsoft word is an excellent place to start. So to proofread, you don't really need too many tools.

Kathryn:

What's your number one tip for women looking to get into proofreading?

Phon:

You have to receive training. A lot of people think that proofreading is just very simple and yes it is the basic form of editing, but it's not simple because there are a lot of tasks that proofreaders do have to do and then there's, there's a level of due diligence that you have to maintain. So you do have to receive training. There's a difference from loving reading and being able to spot an error. And then there's a difference between reading specifically to spot errors or issues or inconsistencies and knowing how to fix them. And it's also important to be trained so that you know how to work according to industry standards and also so you can meet client expectations.

Kathryn:

What are your next steps?

Phon:

My next steps is continuing doing what I'm doing. I love my work. I also, as a proofreading and editing instructor, I also have a master class coming up, a free master class where I'll be teaching more about how people can start proofreading and copy editing books with no prior experience.

Kathryn:

Where can listeners find you?

Phon:

They can find me at my website, which is [art of proofreading.com](http://artofproofreading.com) and if they want to learn more about proofreading, I have a lot of free resources. I have a free five day email course, I have free resources, I have a blog with lots of great educational blog posts, and I also have a free masterclass that people can watch and see and discover if proofreading and copy editing is for them. I also have for people who feel that it is for them and they're ready to receive training, I have a premium editorial training course called High Level Proofreading Pro, and that teaches proofreading copy editing business and marketing skills that you need to start and maintain your editorial business

Kathryn:

And we will get all of that in the show notes to make it super simple for everybody to connect. Phon, Thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Phon:

Thank you, Kathryn for having me. It was a pleasure.

Kathryn:

If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in compass insiders where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at compasspod.com/insiders Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at compasspod.com/054, that's compasspod.com/054. Join us next time when we talk with Sheila Brown, low content book creator.