



FREE GUIDE · NO EMAIL REQUIRED

Hiring a photographer without getting burned.

Written by one, for the person doing the hiring. What to ask, what a fair quote contains, what usage rights actually mean for you, and the six things that should make you walk.

I make my living taking these bookings, so read this with the appropriate scepticism. But a client who knows what they are buying is a better client, gets a better result, and does not end up in a fight three weeks later. That is worth more to me than a job won on confusion.

Answer these before you contact anybody

1. **What is this actually for?** A website header, a menu, an ad campaign and a wall print are four different jobs. The answer changes the shoot and the price.
2. **Where will it be used, and for how long?** This is the usage question, and it is the one that moves the number most.
3. **What are the three shots that, if missing, make this a failure?** Write them down. Send them.
4. **Who has final say**, and will they be there on the day?
5. **What is the real deadline**, and what is happening behind it?
6. **What is your budget?** Saying a range is not weakness. It stops both of you wasting a week.

ON SHARING YOUR BUDGET

Photographers are not going to spend your whole budget just because you named it. What actually happens is that they build the best possible version of the job at that number, or they tell you honestly that it does not fit and point you somewhere that does. Hiding the budget usually just means you get quoted for the wrong job.

What a fair quote contains

- **The coverage window**, in actual times, not just a date.
- **The deliverables, counted.** Number of edited images or the length of the film. Not *some photos*.
- **The delivery date**, as a real date, and how you receive the files.
- **Revisions** — how many rounds are included and what a round covers.
- **Usage rights** — what you may do with the files, where, and for how long.
- **Expenses** — travel, parking, permits, assistants, listed rather than hidden.
- **Payment terms** — deposit, balance, and what happens if either side cancels.

If a quote is one number in a text message with none of the above, you are not being quoted. You are being guessed at.

THE SINGLE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD THING IN THIS INDUSTRY

Paying for a photo shoot does not automatically mean you own the photographs. In most places the photographer holds the copyright as the author of the work, and what you are buying is a **licence** to use the images in agreed ways. This is normal, it is not a trick, and it only becomes a problem when nobody wrote it down.

What matters is that your licence covers what you actually plan to do. Ask for it in writing, in these terms:

KIND OF USE	WHAT IT COVERS	WHAT TO ASK FOR
Personal	Prints, your own social, sharing with family	Fine for a portrait or a private event
Business and marketing	Your website, your socials, brochures, signage, email	What almost every business actually needs. Ask for it explicitly.
Paid advertising	Anything you put money behind, plus billboards and print ads	Usually priced separately. Say so up front and it costs less than adding it later.
Third-party or resale	Giving files to a sponsor, brand, venue or publication for their own use	Almost never included by default. Ask before you promise it to anyone.

Five more things to settle in writing

- **How long the licence lasts.** Perpetual is common and worth asking for.
- **Whether you can edit or crop.** Cropping and straightening are usually fine; heavy filters usually are not.
- **Whether they can use the photos in their portfolio.** Most will want to. If your shoot is sensitive, say so before the day, not after.
- **Whether you get raw or unedited files.** Usually no, and usually for good reason. If you genuinely need them, expect to pay.
- **How long the gallery stays live,** and what it costs to restore it later. Download and back up your files the week you get them.

1. **They resist any written agreement.** *We don't really need a contract, do we?* is the loudest possible signal. A contract protects you at least as much as them.
2. **No deposit, no paperwork, no invoice.** Casual on money means casual on delivery.
3. **A portfolio of work that is not theirs**, or that never shows a full job, only single hero frames. Ask to see one complete gallery from one real client.
4. **They will not name a delivery date.** *Soon* is how you end up chasing someone in March.
5. **They dodge the usage question.** If they cannot explain in one sentence what you are allowed to do with the files, they have not thought about it, and you will find out later.
6. **Disrespect before the deposit.** Late replies, vague answers, pressure. It never improves after they have your money.

One thing that is *not* a red flag: a photographer who asks a lot of questions before quoting. That is the good version. The ones who quote instantly without asking what it is for are guessing.

How to brief well, in five lines

The single biggest thing you can do to get a better result is send a real brief. It takes ten minutes and it changes the entire shoot.

WHAT THIS IS FOR, AND WHERE IT WILL BE USED

THE THREE SHOTS THAT MUST EXIST

DATE, COVERAGE WINDOW, AND THE HARD STOP

LOCATION, PARKING, AND WHO TO CALL ON ARRIVAL

ANYONE WHO SHOULD NOT BE PHOTOGRAPHED

One more, and it is free: tidy the space before they arrive. Move the boxes, the cables, the mop bucket. Ninety percent of retouching is tidying that could have been done in ten seconds, and no amount of editing makes a cluttered room look like a calm one.