

Pre-Press Draft Content from *Going Alt-Ac: A Guide to Alternative Academic Careers*

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Logistics (or, How Much Do I Charge?)

Frequently, one of the most challenging parts about consulting is figuring out how to position yourself in terms of what to charge for your services. All of us want to value our work appropriately, yet there are few places where people actually talk about the numbers involved. Some published advice is helpful in understanding what goes into the how-much-to-charge decision, such as Brian Croxall's article, "What's Your Speaking Fee?"

Consider the fact that although you'll be giving, say, just an hour-long talk that you will have to spend several hours—if not a whole day each way—traveling. In other words, if you recoil at asking for X for that 60-minute talk and Q&A, realize that you'll be spending much more than an hour on the visit and taking time from your other work.

Consider the preparation that you'll have to do for the visit. Will you be leading a workshop that you've done previously? Will it be a brand-new talk, on a subject that you are just exploring? If it's the latter, you will again be putting in a lot more time than simply that one hour.

Consider whether your speaking fee should always be the same or whether it should flex according to the group or institution inviting you. A group of grad

students asking you to come to speak will probably have much different resources than the chair of a department at Princeton. Likewise, small state schools or consortia might not be as flush as R1 universities.

Consider asking colleagues or friends about what they charge for speaking fees. Your discipline might have common practices that you are not aware of. (Croxall, 2013)

However, even in Croxall's article, he does not say how much he actually charges. Most advice in this realm is less than useful, such as the blanket "don't charge less than a thousand dollars" that we saw posted recently in the comments section of an especially exasperating blog posting.

Here is one way to set your speaking and consulting rate. Bring to mind the salary that people in your field typically earn at your level of experience. For mid-career humanities faculty members, for example, this number might be \$75,000.00 a year. Of course, this will be different depending on your field, your level of experience, and your geographic location, but start with a number that fits your circumstances. Now, divide that by 52 to obtain a weekly rate (in our example, \$1,442.31) and then again by 40 to arrive at an hourly rate (\$36.06). Tally up the amount of time you will spend in communication, development, travel, and delivery for a client. For example, for a 90-minute invited workshop, the preparation will involve several actions that add up to a significant amount of time, including

- communicating via e-mail, phone calls, video calls, and other methods (5 hours);
- conducting research about the institution, web-site reading, and learning directly from colleagues about their department or program (10 hours);

- drafting the presentation, handouts, worksheets, rating form, white paper/take-aways for participants (20 hours);
- booking hotel, airfare, and rental-car, along with other logistical planning with the client about the day of the event (5 hours);
- traveling, staying overnight, facilitating the event itself, and traveling back home (35 hours); and
- collating post-event ratings, video editing, and following up with client for testimonials and billing (5 hours).

Every consultation is an iceberg, with the actual visible event supported by a great, invisible amount of work. In our example, the 90-minute workshop is surrounded by 80 hours of time invested—two full work weeks of effort. For our example, multiply the 80 hours by the calculated hourly rate of \$36.06, and we arrive at \$2,884.80. Note that this is what you would charge for your effort alone, and does not include separate payment for things like hotel and airfare costs.

Rounded up or down, the hourly-rate formula works surprisingly well at defining at least a starting point for setting your base fees. Depending on the “salary” that you’d like to earn, crafting an estimate for the total effort involved helps you to see how much you should value your work in a back-of-the-envelope way. There is also something to be said for rounding up or even adding 10-15% to your newly calculated rate to cover such things as self-employment taxes and insurance if you consult full-time. Some also say that more expensive speakers are often perceived—rightly or wrongly—as being more desirable. While we don’t go so far as to endorse this strategy, as you create your materials to support your efforts, it helps to start from a slightly higher price point and adjust down or up based on the clients whom you attract.