What to Track When You Work for Yourself

A simple checklist for solo service pros: what to save, and why it counts.

When you work for yourself, no one hands you a pay stub. Your own records are the proof. Most solo pros report their work on a Schedule C. Here is what to save all year.

1. KEEP WORK MONEY APART FROM HOME MONEY

☐ Open one bank account just for your work. All pay goes into it.

☐ Get a card tied to that account. Use it for all work buys.

☐ Pay yourself by moving money to your home account. Note the date.

One clean account shows what came in and what went out. Mixed accounts are the top reason people lose track.

2. MILES YOU DRIVE FOR WORK

☐ Log trips from one client to the next, to a second work site, and to pick up supplies.

☐ For each trip, write the date, where you went, why, and the miles.

☐ Write down your odometer at the start and end of the year.

The drive from home to your main work site is a commute. Commutes do not count. Use the rate the IRS sets each year, or your real car costs.

3. SPACE AT HOME YOU USE FOR WORK

☐ Measure the space you use only for work. Write down the square feet.

☐ Write down the square feet of your whole home.

☐ Save rent or mortgage bills, power bills, and home insurance bills.

The space must be used only for work, and used often. It must also be where you do most of your desk work. A shared family room does not count.

4. SUPPLIES, LINENS, AND GEAR

☐ Save receipts for oils, lotions, linens, towels, gloves, color, and cleaning items.

☐ File receipts for tables, chairs, and tools that last more than a year on their own. Those are counted a different way.

☐ If a receipt is not clear, write on it what the item was for.

A receipt with just a total is weak. One that lists items is strong.

5. LICENSE, TRAINING, AND INSURANCE

☐ Keep your license and each renewal receipt.

☐ Keep receipts for classes that keep your current skills sharp. Note the class name and date.

☐ Keep bills for your work insurance, such as a liability policy.

Classes that train you for a brand new line of work may not count.

6. PHONE, BOOKING, AND SOFTWARE

☐ Keep bills for your booking app, card reader fees, and web site costs.

☐ For your phone, write down how much of your use is for work. Only the work share counts.

☐ A second line used only for work is much easier to back up.

A rough guess is not enough. Base the work share on a real month of use, and write down how you got the number.

7. TAXES YOU SEND IN DURING THE YEAR

☐ Set aside part of each payment as soon as it comes in. A second savings account helps.

☐ Mark the four due dates. They fall in April, June, September, and January.

☐ Keep proof of each payment you send.

No one takes tax out of your pay, so you send it in yourself four times a year. These are called estimated taxes. They cover income tax plus self-employment tax, which pays into Social Security and Medicare.

8. IF A CLIENT SENDS YOU A 1099-NEC

☐ Check that the amount matches your own records.

☐ Report all your income, even the part with no form. Cash and tips count.

☐ If a form is wrong, ask the client who sent it to fix it.

A 1099-NEC is a form a business sends when it paid you as a contractor. A copy goes to the IRS too. Not every client sends one, and the form does not change what you owe. Your own records still rule.

9. HOW LONG TO KEEP IT ALL

☐ Keep your tax return and the records behind it at least three years after you file.

☐ Keep records for gear you still own for three years past the year you sell it or stop using it.

☐ If you ever pay a helper, keep those pay records at least four years.

Clear photos or scans are fine. Store them in one place, and back them up.

This sheet is general help, not tax advice for your own case.