

naturejobs

**JOBS OF
THE WEEK**

In the 1999 comedy film *Office Space*, three guys get sick of working in a cubicle farm for an idiotic boss and a measly salary. They decide to rebel, and in one scene they abscond with the office printer — which never seems to work and causes no end of frustration. They carry the hapless machine out to a field and take turns hitting it with a baseball bat. To them, the printer represents all that is wrong with the office experience. Many who have worked in an office can empathize, including scientists who do their share of office work and have to deal with bureaucracy. What if there were a better way?

This week's Feature (see page 750) looks at the pluses and minuses of doing astronomy research from the comfort of your home. Some US astronomers are now making a living as freelancers, receiving grants directly, without involving a university. There are advantages: no commuting, the freedom to make your own schedule, fewer overhead costs than at a university, and no university bureaucracy.

But anyone who has done any sort of freelancing knows that there are also drawbacks to being completely on your own every day from nine until five. The daily rat race, although gruelling, also provides human interaction, structure and a bit of discipline. Working at home can get lonely — or not lonely enough, if you have children in the house craving attention. Freelance astronomers — or anyone else working for themselves — might benefit from the experiences of freelance writers. So here are some tips that I have accrued over the years.

Create a schedule and stick to it. Work every day for a specific number of hours — this is key to remaining productive and efficient. Make sure you get exercise; it is all too easy to remain inside all day. Network — you need to stay in touch with the community to keep abreast of job opportunities. And, perhaps most importantly, be aware of your financial situation. Freelancing requires dedication and hard work to keep multiple funding sources going so that your income remains steady and sufficient. Freedom from the daily commute and the office has its rewards. It has caveats as well.

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