# INTRODUCING THE DIFREE CV/ RESUME/ PORTFOLIO TEMPLATE DATABASE: AN OPEN-SOURCE MULTIMODAL LIBRARY AND A CONTENT REPOSITORY

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## Abstract

Digital freelancing combines working on a project-by-project basis for a variety of companies or for multiple clients with the use of digital skills and entrepreneurial abilities. Facilitated by the impact of the digital surge during the Covid-19 pandemic, the sector of independent remote work is the fastest-growing segment of the European labor market and is set to become the US majority workforce by 2027[1]. Despite this trend, which has been apparent since the early 2000s, students are not well informed about freelance job opportunities and are even less informed about how to seek self-employment.

Digital Freelancing for Higher Education (shortened to DiFree) is an Erasmus Plus project engaging a consortium of five European Universities which aims to disseminate information especially among graduating students and recent graduates about self-employed occupations, which are increasingly performed online and more and more dependent on continuous learning and skill development, and how to succeed in those professions in Europe with the help of DiFree tools, among which are insiders' and mentors' advice and freelance hubs.

The purpose of the article is therefore twofold: to outline the project's expected results and to focus on one of its major outputs – the creation of an online collector of freely usable multilingual CV/ Resume/ Portfolio templates (most of which will be available in English) for freelance, digital, remote jobs.

Besides being a graphical user interface and relational database containing information on where to find a job (freelance contractors' platforms, communities and job search sites) and tips on how to write an attractive CV/Resume, an effective portfolio and a convincing multimodal self- presentation for a job offer, the digital repository will be an open educational resource allowing language skill development with its multilingual glossaries of key career and job-hunting terms and appropriate phraseology, and a collection of annotated CV/ Resume/Portfolio models and interactive self-assessment exercises.

Keywords: Digital Freelancing, DigComp, EntreComp, e-learning digital library, content repository, CMS (Course Management System) design, LSP (language for special purposes) learning.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Technological innovation and increased digital access, compounded by economic and geopolitical disruptions, are accelerating work-force/place transformations favoring job displacement, digital nomadism, and self-employment, which, especially in the form of freelancing, is the fastest growing segment of the global labor market. The increase in the number of digital freelance jobs is not a new trend though. Already in 2011, a study conducted by the software company Intuit predicted that more than 40% of the US workforce would include freelancers, contractors, and temporary workers by 2020 [1], which means more than 60 million people, a number that has risen to 73 million in 2023 according to DDIY[2], and that in Europe amounts to 25% of its 13 million digital professionals, according to the Malt and BCG 2022 Report [2]. In the wake of Covid-19 lockdowns and subsequent global economic recession, the labor market has been affected by record layoffs and cuts on the one hand and the so-called Great Resignation[3] and a rise in remote, pay per task-jobs on the other. These are two phenomena that are often interrelated because the automation or digitalization of non-routine jobs, besides knowledge-based jobs, greatly accelerated by the pandemic, has favored the choice by talented

[1] See on this the BCG Report *Freelancing in Europe 2021*, available at the site: malt-bcg-freelancing-in-europe-2021.pdf and *Freelance Market Statistics & Trends* updated for 2023, available at the site: https://flexiple.com/freelance/freelance-statistics-and-trends-2020/

[2] DDIY (Don't Do it Yourself) provides statistical data aggregation and small business analysis. Its *Freelance Statistics* are available at the site: https://ddiy.co/freelance-statistics/

[3] The Great Resignation or Big Quit describes the phenomenon of a great number of employees voluntarily quitting their jobs since March 2021, probably as a consequence of a reconsideration of life priorities and long-term career goals during Covid. Cfr. [3].

professionals of more independent working settings (opting for work from home or in co-working spaces) and has also enhanced companies' opportunities to choose from a wider range of geographically dispersed, decentralized workers to meet their project-related needs.

Hence, the rapid increase in the number of freelancers, which is not only limited to high-tech jobs, is partly due to the fact that working remotely has become much easier thanks to digital tool innovation and dissemination and partly due to the benefits of working remotely both for companies and employees such as the flexibility of working hours, better work-life balance, lower operational costs, and more availability of professional opportunities. Despite this growing trend, however, students are not well informed about freelance job opportunities and are even less informed about how to seek self-employment.

Freelancing appears to be included in University curricula when related to subjects preparing for specific professions that can be conducted as a freelancer[4] and is not yet mentioned in University Career Prospectuses and job-hunting handbooks or guidelines, which continue to promote CV and Resume writing as necessary steps in the job application process[5]. *Digital Freelancing for Higher Education* (shortened to DIFREE) intends to fill this information gap. It aims to provide graduating students, recent graduates, and young professionals with practical information on the freelance job market and how to succeed in it. It also targets teachers, trainers, and mentors to whom it aims to offer tools to stimulate innovative teaching and learning strategies.

## 2 DIFREE GOALS

DIFREE is a thirty-six-month Erasmus Plus KA project (code: 2021-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000032241) which started on 1st February 2022. It involves two Italian partners, University of Tuscia in Viterbo (acting as coordinator) and the Research and Study Center of the Lakes CRS Laghi, a spin-off of the Carolina Albasio University of Castellanza, with extensive experience in the training sector, a Greek partner, the University Panteio Panepistimio Koinikon Kaipolitukon Epistimon, a Spanish partner, the University of Cadiz, and a Portuguese one, the Accounting and Business School of the Polytechnic Do Porto Institute, selected for their expertise in the field of digital humanities and in the creation of inclusive and innovative distance learning environments, applied to the development of entrepreneurial and managerial skills.

DIFREE aims to achieve several tangible outputs:

- An E-book, 'How to freelance online'', translated in the national languages of the partners, with practical information about the skills and competences necessary to pursue a career as a digital freelancer, self-employment legal status, and fiscal aspects applying to the Consortium countries. This manual has been complemented with interactive learning activities, simulation games and exercises (fill-in the gap, drag and drop, and multiple choice) useful to both students and teachers and uploaded on the DIFREE Moodle page hosted by the Coordinator University E-learning platform at the site Corso: Digital Freelancing (unitus.it), in the section devoted to "A Focus on Self-Employment", designed as a component of the DIFREE Repository;

[4] Udemy has, for example, a course on copywriting advertised as "Become a Freelance Copywriter, your own boss". Coursera has started offering a 5-course series on *Freelancing* taught by a venture capitalist, and the BBC and Channel 4 in partnership with the National Film and Television School are about to start a two-week webinar series "Focus on Freelancing", tailored to UK residents working in the media sector.

[5] The Cambridge University Career Services Publication, available at https://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/applying-for-jobs/cvs-and-cover-letters, provides useful guidelines with several CV and cover letter samples appropriate to undergraduate students, recent graduates and Master' students of different disciplines (Political Science, Criminal Law, Sociology, Engineering, English, Philosophy) who are often short of work experience and/or, quite realistically, applying for summer jobs/internships not directly related to their field of studies. The booklet copyright notice indicates 2017. It does not include portfolio models nor references to freelancing careers. The same can be said about the *Cambridge English for Job Hunting*, by Colm Downes, published by CUP in 2008, which clearly needs an update having six-stand-alone units covering the following topics: Researching the market, Preparing a CV, Writing a cover letter, Answering interview questions, Answering competency based interview questions, Turning negatives into positives, Telephone interviews, Negotiating terms and conditions of service. When portfolio writing is included in University publications this seems to be intended as a collection of academic and professional material also including a resume, as in the *What is a Portfolio?* leaflet made available by Clarke University at the site:http://myclarke.edu. Interestingly, even informative material available on the site of one the most popular online platforms for finding remote work, freelance work, and part-time positions, Flexjobs, *Flexjobs' Guide to Resumes, Cover Letters, & Interviews*, provides instructions on how to write a chronological, functional or hybrid resume (a combination of both), suggests highlighting remote work abilities and self-management skills if applying for an online job, but does not mention (not even in its online *Resume Updates* at https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/simple-resume-updates-make-if-planning-to-go-remote/) any other personal branding tool (e.g., Video-CVs or Portfolios) or strategy (networking, social media, weblogs, etc…) a freelancer may use to acquire clients.

- An OER in the form of a Content Repository of multilingual and multimodal portfolio/CV/Resume samples enriched with readings, glossaries, vocabulary lists and useful phraseology to help job seekers learn about required competences, develop the (foreign) specialized language, and improve the writing skills necessary to succeed in job hunting in an international labor market;
- An "incubator program" to support aspiring freelancers and consisting in a short mentoring course, targeting students (future autonomous workers) and teachers (interested in mentoring students), and in a workshop to help freelancers-to-be meet senior freelancers to receive guidance and advice;
- A self-evaluation and self-vocational professional assessment tool consisting in a platform where users can test their digital and entrepreneurial competences and keep track of their development over time;
- Freelancer hubs - virtual and physical places where the target groups can find a meeting place to share and produce knowledge and create a community of practice;
- A final "Transferability Manual" describing the project outcomes with the intermediate steps taken to accomplish PRs (products results), such as an initial Digital Freelance Market Survey, video-interviews with professional freelancers', focus group discussions with students, self-employed professionals and solopreneurs on the importance of the proficiency levels and core areas of DigComp and EntreComp, and success stories and useful advice for aspiring freelancers, collected from the mentorship program and the hubs.

## 3 AN E-LEARNING CONTENT REPOSITORY TO SUPPORT (FREELANCE) JOB HUNTING

The DiFree Repository is a multimodal library in open source and much more[6]. It has not only been conceived as a virtual archive or a searchable database containing multilingual and multimedia material which might help (freelance) job seekers write an (unsolicited) application: textual samples of CV, Resume and Portfolio, Video-CVs, and glossaries of job-related expressions (nouns, adjectives, action verbs and phraseology useful to describe personality traits, qualifications and work experience). It is also a repository of didactic content, which is an IT solution to store, process and retrieve didactic material. In order to create such a collector, the free Open-Source software Moodle has been used to create an e-learning course, entitled "A Focus on Self-Employment", designed to reflect the UCTS (Universal Curriculum Taxonomic System) model [5]. Here, topics are covered in independent units of knowledge like learning objects (LOs), which can be organized into a hierarchical structure suggesting an ideal learning path but also allowing a nonlinear use. In the DIFREE Moodle course, these small sections of didactic material are self-sufficient, containing self-verification tests; hence, they can accommodate a non-sequential learning style if the course administrator decides to opt for an objective-based topic format, with no access restrictions, rather than for a weekly format where materials are opened gradually over time. In other words, they can be completed in a sequence of three modules – *Types of Jobs*, *The Skills You Should Have*, and *Job Hunting* (Fig 1), all provided with self-assessment exercises and a final quiz, or as Module-type components leading to the understanding of one or more specific aspects of the job-hunting procedure, of self-employment, and freelancing. The Moodle course content mainly consists of reading material, in the form of reading comprehension tests, on job forms and possible future employment scenarios, on the pros and cons of remote work, on digital and entrepreneurial competences, on the soft and hard skills a job seeker should possess, and information and advice on the typical steps of the job search process (looking for a job, writing an application, preparing for an interview). The Moodle course also provides increasingly difficult interactive vocabulary exercises (Fig.2) to test both concept and language acquisition, since the selected material is designed for non-native English language speakers. Furthermore, there are also plans to translate or reproduce it in the national languages of DIFREE project member countries. To such an aim, the material inspired by Professional and Business Communication handbooks, Career Service (online) booklets, job-hunting manuals and remote labour platforms, has been simplified and adapted to accommodate cultural differences.

[6] The operational questions raised by this configuration, which should combine the free accessibility of an OER (Open Educational Resource) with the preservation of the collected material on an institutional website (that of the Coordinating partner university) and the rational for the content selection have been outlined in [4].

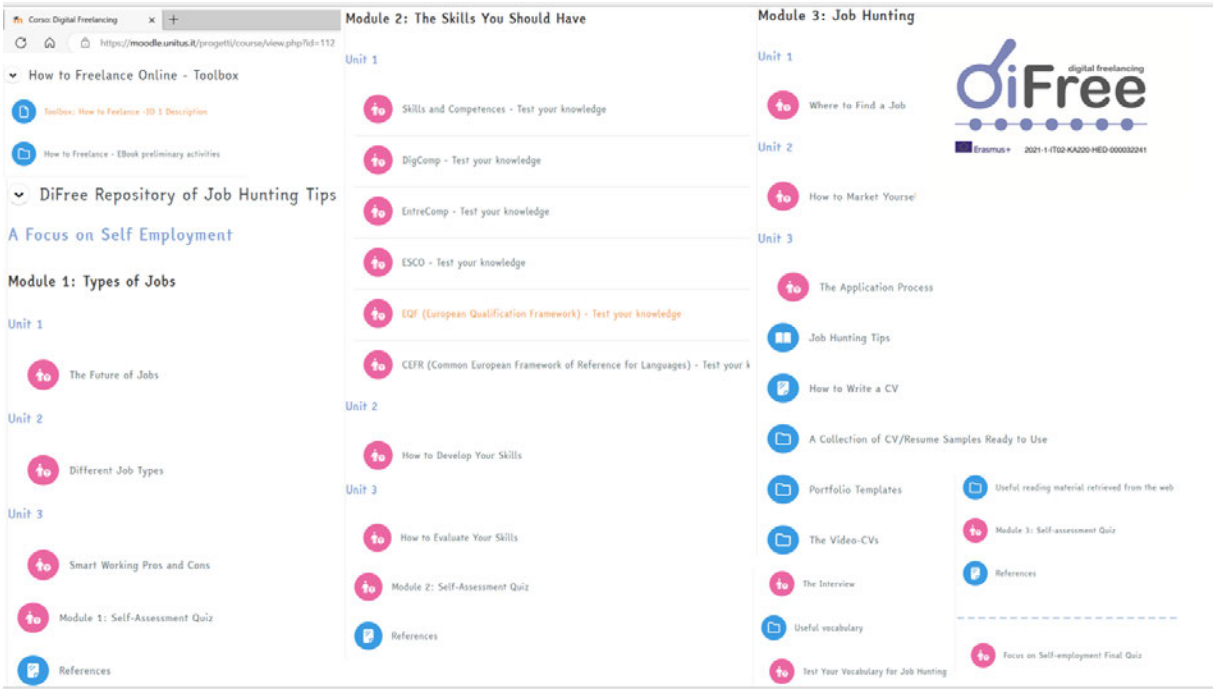


*Figure 1. Moodle Repository and course "A Focus on Self-Employment".*

## 3.1 The Current Structure

The DiFree Repository is not yet completed. At the time of writing, its searchable interface which should guarantee indexing the collected material, and enable queries by phrases or keywords, and multimedia browsing, is not ready yet. However, the database already includes 48 resume samples with 4 models for different levels of professionalism (from entry level to mid-career experiences) for 12 jobs that can be done remotely (accountant, architect, copywriter, editor, graphic designer, IT specialist, journalist, photographer, psychologist, teacher, translator, virtual assistant), 22 portfolio templates, which will soon match the number of the CVs, 41 video-CVs (to be increased to match the professions listed) and a series of folders containing useful tips, lists of online labour platforms advertising temporary work, and other useful resources developed during the project development and its LTTAs (Learning/ Teaching/Training Activities). For the time being, this multifaceted material is collected in specific folders both in the DIFREE Moodle Course and in the DIFREE Google Drive associated to the Project contact email (Fig.3). It will be presented with the Moodle interactive exercises during the first LTTA of the Project on the 10th and 11th of October 2023. Once transformed into a digital library and hosted on the UNITUS University Job Placement webpage, it will reside in the public sphere and outlive the inevitable expiration of the Project webpage domain.

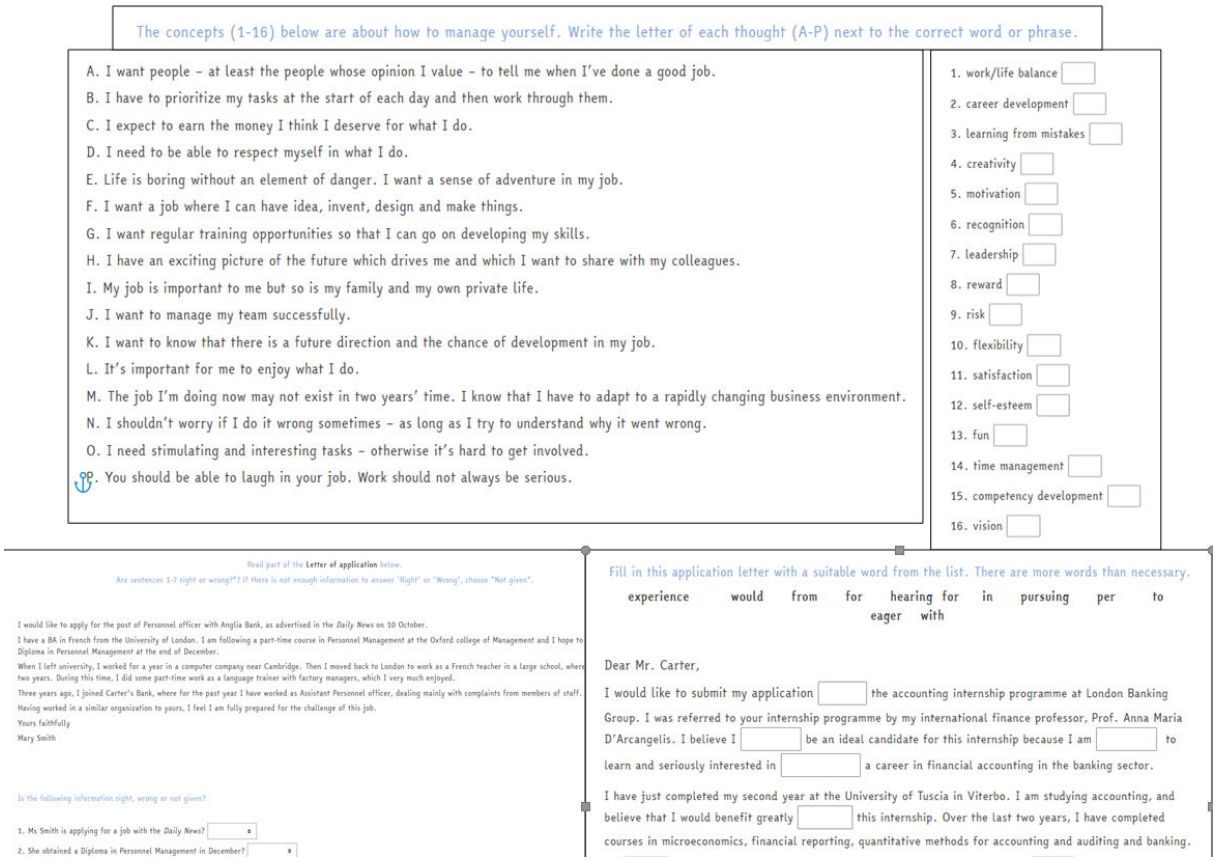


*Figure 2. Sample DIFREE Moodle exercises.*

### *3.1.1 The Function*

Originally imagined as a collector of "of e-portfolios/digital CVs templates"[7], DIFREE Repository design has evolved in a complex multifunction structure aimed at providing not only freely downloadable CV/Resume/portfolio samples but also at supplying users with content-based language learning exercises that will help develop the language skills necessary to write an effective application and to carry out self-promotion in the freelance job market. There is no all-purpose CV/Resume or portfolio sample that can fit all possible jobs openings, culturally diverse working environments, and their future transformation. Therefore, a good command of English (and of any other foreign language spoken by a potential client) is necessary to adapt a suitable CV/Resume/portfolio model to one's needs. While complementing the other project outputs by providing supplementary readings on digital and entrepreneurial competences, information on freelancing platforms and advice on job hunting (including adaptable/reusable CV/Resume/portfolio samples), the Repository intends to promote foreign language acquisition and develop awareness of professional discoursal conventions that a jobs seeker, especially if self-employed, needs to master if s/he wants to win and retain a client in an increasingly competitive international job market.[8]

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Language competence, implying not only formal correctness but also socio-pragmatic awareness, is essential for establishing appropriate interpersonal and professional relationships that facilitate workplace communication and allowing trust building. An excellent grasp of the English language is not only mandatory for specialized jobs that require writing skills (e.g., editing, copywriting, translating, content writing, etc.) but is also necessary to interact with clients and co-workers with an international

[7] In the Project Grant Agreement, Product Result 2 is repeatedly defined as "repository of e-portfolios /digital CVs templates", and, in a lengthier description on page 59, as including "easily accessible, interactive, modifiable CV templates and resume models suitable to entry-level positions in different sectors of the freelance job market" and allowing "the insertion of a multilingual version of the models provided".

[8] English is the official language in more than 50 countries; more than 400 million people speak it as a first language and more than 2 billion people study it as a foreign language. Cfr. [6]

background, and is surely needed to succeed in typical freelancer personal branding activities such as participating in online communities, registering on labour platforms, managing one's (professional) social media profile and webpage.

Language competence is not directly targeted by the DIFREE project proposal nor explicitly defined as a set of necessary skills for a freelancing career, but is implied by the multiple language-related activities required by the intermediate steps taken to reach the project objectives, such as the multilingual translation of the E-book, the multilingual translation of DigComp and EntreComp descriptors, the translation of professional freelancers' video-interviews, and finally by the Repository (course) material which, in a future follow-up project, may be extended to include tips and interactive exercises to develop self-marketing strategies.




*Figure 3. A display of the collected items.*

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