

Handshake

This is not a legal document. It is a handshake. Written down so we both remember what we agreed to.

It describes a pro bono design project: I don't charge you, and you don't pay me. Instead, we're trading something else. You get design work you wouldn't otherwise have. I get a piece for my portfolio and a story to tell about the work we did together.

Because there is no money, there is also no leverage. Everything here rests on mutual trust, honesty, and respect for each other. If either of us stops feeling that, we stop the project. That is the whole enforcement mechanism.

Section 1 — Project

- **Client:** [Client name]
- **Project name:** [Short working title]
- **One-line description:** [What we're making, in a sentence]
- **Desired outcome:** [One or two sentences describing what good looks like when this project ends — captured together in our stakeholder interview (see Section 3).]
- **Desired deliverables with format:** [Figma share link + PNG/PDF exports + source files for anything custom]

What's in scope:

- [Deliverable 1]
- [Deliverable 2]
- [Deliverable 3]

What's out of scope:

- [Anything we are explicitly not doing, so there's no confusion later]

If something outside this list turns out to be important, we can talk — but the default answer is “not this project.”

Section 2 — Timeline

- **Start date:** [DD Month YYYY]
- **End date:** [DD Month YYYY]

On the end date, the project is finished. Whatever we've arrived at by then becomes the final version.

If we haven't reached what we hoped, we'll have an honest conversation about why and discuss if we want to extend the end date. Holding a pro bono project open indefinitely is unfair to both of us, and setting a hard end date is an important protection in this agreement.

Section 3 — Process

Every project I take on follows the same five phases. The details change; the shape doesn't.

Phase 1 — Stakeholder interview

We start with a structured conversation before any design work happens. I ask who you are, what your business is, what success looks like, what's been tried, and what you're worried about. The output of this phase is the "Desired outcome" entry in Section 1 and a shared understanding of constraints.

Phase 2 — Design

I work quietly for an agreed stretch, then present one concept direction. I bring reasoning, not just artefacts, so you can respond to the thinking, not only the pixels.

Phase 3 — Revision

The project includes one round of revisions after the initial concept. One round means: I present the work, you send me consolidated, prioritised feedback, and I address it. The revised version is the final version.

This isn't about limiting your voice in the work, your feedback shapes it. It's about making sure the project actually finishes. Endless small adjustments are the most common reason pro bono projects die slowly, and I'd rather we both avoid that.

Phase 4 — Handover

I deliver the final files in the agreed formats, plus any working notes that would help future designers pick it up. This is the formal end of the project.

Phase 5 — Follow-up feedback

At four moments, right after handover (0), then at 3, 6, and 12 months I'll send you a short survey (maximum 10 minutes) asking how the work is holding up and what you'd tell a friend thinking of working with me. More on this in Section 6.

Section 4 — How We'll Work

What I commit to:

- Showing up, doing good work, and communicating clearly about where I am.
- Delivering the direction, if necessary incorporating your feedback in one round of revisions.
- Handing over the final files in the agreed formats by the end date.
- Being honest when something is harder, slower, or different from what I originally planned.

What you commit to:

- Giving timely feedback within a couple of working days of each delivery.
- Sharing the assets, brand information, and access I need, when I need them.
- Making decisions when decisions are needed, or telling me clearly who can.
- Being honest when something isn't working for you, as early as you notice.

Section 5 — References

In exchange for the free work, I'd like to be able to show it. Specifically:

- Publish the final designs, selected process artefacts, and your name or brand on my portfolio, website, and agreed upon social channels.
- A short written testimonial, a quote, a paragraph or two about working together, in your own words, whatever length feels right for you. You're free to write whatever you honestly feel. If the experience wasn't great, say so.
- The freedom for me to write a reviewed case study about the project, what you came to me with, what we made together, and what I learned.
- Keep a copy of the working Figma file (a shared link or a duplicate) as part of my archive. I won't publish raw file access, it's for my own reference, and for screenshots in the case study.

If there's something sensitive that should stay out of a public case study — an unreleased feature, a confidential partner, a personal story — tell me before we start and we'll agree on what's okay to show. The default is "yes I can show it;" exceptions are things you flag.

Section 6 — Feedback

When we're finished, I'll ask you for feedback. Pro bono projects give me portfolio pieces. What they can't give me, unless we plan for it, is evidence that the work actually worked.

At four moments after handover, immediately (month 0), then at 3, 6, and 12 months I'll send you a maximum 10-minute survey. The questions are light: what's working, what's aged badly/well, what you'd change, what you'd tell a friend who's considering working with me.

Answering isn't optional, it's part of what I'm asking for in return for the work. But it's genuinely short, and your honest answers are more useful to me than polished ones.

Section 7 — Ownership

Once the project ends and the final files are delivered, the work is yours. You can use it commercially, privately, modified, unmodified, however you want.

I keep the right to show the work in my portfolio and case study (Section 5), including an archived copy of the Figma file. That right doesn't go away if you later rebrand, redesign, or stop using the work.

Default use for third party assets is free or open-source. If we identify any required paid licenses, you can request and provide them.

Section 8 — Data and Confidentiality

If this project involves me accessing or processing personal data on your behalf, customer lists, user-research participants, analytics with identifiable users, anything covered by the GDPR, we'll sign a short Auftragsverarbeitungsvertrag (AVV / data processing agreement under Art. 28 GDPR) before that phase begins.

I'll provide a template. If the project doesn't touch personal data, we skip this. But the default is to check before I get access, not after.

Anything you share in confidence, for example unreleased plans, internal problems, business specifics, I'll treat as confidential, including after the project ends.

Section 9 — Use of AI

I use AI tools (Claude, Figma's AI features, Black Forest Labs and others) as part of my design process, for research synthesis, exploring visual variations, drafting copy, and speeding up repetitive work. A human (me) reviews and owns every deliverable.

I won't paste your confidential information, unreleased plans, or personal data about your users into public AI tools. If you have specific restrictions, e.g. "no AI-generated imagery in the final deliverables" or "no AI tools at all", tell me before we start and I'll work within them.

Section 10 — Early Exit

Either of us can end this project early, for any reason. If that happens:

- No hard feelings, no invoices, no arguments.
- I won't publish work-in-progress without your okay.
- You're free to take whatever we've made so far and do what you want with it.
- If I can't continue the project (illness, life circumstances), I'll tell you as soon as I can and hand over everything I've produced so far in usable form, no strings.

The only ask is that we tell each other directly, rather than letting things drift into silence. A short honest message is always better than a slow fade. I will still hope for your feedback as described in Section 6.

The handshake

This isn't a signature in a legal sense. It's a record that we both read this, understood it, and agreed to work together on these terms.

SIGNED	DESIGNER	CLIENT
NAME	Max Pinkert	[Client name]
DATE	[DD Month YYYY]	[DD Month YYYY]