THE NEON TRADE

What to Charge

How to work out a price for a sign, using the material and the hours from the lessons. Not a price list — a method.

Why there is no price list here. Nobody in the lessons says what to charge, and it would be dishonest to invent it. Material costs and hourly rates are different in every country and change every year. What does not change is **how you work the price out**, and that is what this sheet gives you.

The formula

Materials + (Hours × your rate) + Overheads + Margin = Price

Most people starting out charge for the material and forget the other three. That is why they work all week and end up with nothing.

1 · Materials — count what the job really eats

Take the quantities from the lessons and price them at your own supplier. Two warnings from real jobs:

What happened	The lesson
Paint ran out	The festival letters were budgeted at 8 litres per colour and took nearly 12. Half again over the estimate.
Discs wore out	One job went through about 10 flap discs and needed more. Consumables are material too.

Things people forget to count: primer, filler, flap discs, cutting discs, cable ties, screws, glue, the offcut you ruin getting a curve right. Add **10–15%** to your material total for waste and consumables.

2 · Hours — measure them once, honestly

Real times from the lessons:

Job	Time
Laser-cutting one neon base	15 minutes of machine time
Set of 1.80 m sheet metal letters	Two full weeks, Monday to Friday — 10 working days
Repairing an LED floodlight	Under an hour

Machine time is not your time. While the laser cuts for 15 minutes you can be doing something else. Charge for the machine (it cost money and it wears), but do not confuse it with your hours.

Time the first one of each type you build, and write it down. After three or four jobs you will know your own numbers, which are worth more than anyone else's.

3 · Overheads — the costs that exist even with no work

Rent, electricity, tools wearing out, transport, the phone. Add them up for a month, divide by the jobs you do in a month, and put that figure into every quote. If you do 10 jobs a month and your overheads are 500, that is 50 per job before you have earned anything.

4 · Margin — this is your pay, not a bonus

Everything above only covers your costs. The margin is what makes the work worth doing. If you do not put it in, you are working for free and paying for the privilege.

Two things worth charging for that people give away

What	Why it is worth money
Sizing the power supply	You measure the draw and hand over the right adaptor. That is what stops the sign burning out. Say so: it is the difference between your sign and a cheap one.
Installation	Marking the wall, drilling, running cable, levelling. It is a separate job with its own hours and its own risk.

Repairs: a different price

From the lesson on the LED floodlight: a repair usually costs the customer **a third to a quarter** of what a new unit costs in the shop. That is what makes it worth their while — and it is a good rule for pricing any repair.
It is also work with almost no material: two LEDs and some solder. Most of the price is your knowledge of where to look.

Your quote sheet

Print this and fill one in per job, before you give a price.

Line	Amount
Sheet / board	
LED, strip or neon flex	
Power supply and cable	
Adhesives, paint, filler	
Fixings and trim	
Consumables and waste (+10–15%)	
Hours × rate	
Machine time	
Installation (if it is yours)	
Overheads per job	
Margin	
PRICE	

Before you quote, ask five things

1	How big is it, in centimetres? A 1.80 m letter is a different trade from a 30 cm one.
2	Indoors or outdoors? Outdoors means vinyl over the PVC, primer on the metal, sealed backs.
3	Does it move? The festival letters had to come apart and travel between provinces. That changes how it is built.
4	Who installs it, and is there power at the wall?
5	One colour or RGB? RGB means a controller, more current and more cable.

The Neon Trade · What to Charge · The times and quantities here are quoted from the lessons. The prices are yours to work out — nobody else can do it for your country.