

Selling Stock Photos for Income — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a working stock business plan. You will research what buyers license, build reusable keyword sets, plan high-yield shoots, set up multi-platform distribution, and project your own earnings from real dashboard data. Work through one section per module, then use the templates to run the business week after week.

How the Stock Business Actually Works

Map the licensing model, the agencies you will sell on, and the demand you will shoot for.

Exercise: Decode Three Best Sellers

Pick one concept you could realistically shoot (for example remote work, healthy food, or autumn background). Search it on Adobe Stock or Shutterstock, open the three top-ranked results, and study them. Write down what you observe so you can replicate the winning pattern.

- What subject, setting, and lighting do the top three sellers share?

- Do they include copy space or negative space, and where in the frame?

- What concepts beyond the literal objects are they clearly selling (for example freedom, productivity, health)?

- What could you add that is missing or underserved in the top results?

Worksheet: Agency Setup Plan

Fill one row per agency you will join. Leave the commission column to fill from each agency's current contributor page, since rates change. This becomes your account checklist.

Agency name

Account status (not started / applied / approved)

Microstock or macrostock

Current commission or tier (verify on their page)

Exclusive or non-exclusive

Date applied

Checklist: Demand-Research Routine

- Read the latest Adobe Stock Creative Trends report
- Read the latest Shutterstock trend report
- List five evergreen subjects I can shoot (business, food, lifestyle, nature, backgrounds)

- [] List three timely or seasonal subjects relevant in the next 90 days
- [] Confirm each chosen subject already has buyers by checking it returns many results in-agency

Keywording and Metadata That Get Found

Build the titles and keyword sets that make your files discoverable in search.

Exercise: Layered Keyword Build

Choose one of your own images or a planned shot. Generate a complete keyword set using the five-layer method from the course, then order it with the most important, most-searched true terms first.

- Literal subjects: list every person, object, and place actually shown.

- Concepts and themes: what does the image communicate (teamwork, growth, balance)?

- Emotions, actions, setting, and time: what is happening, where, and when?

- Now reorder the full list so the top ten are your strongest, truest, most-searched terms.

Worksheet: Title and Metadata Draft

Draft the buyer-facing metadata for one image exactly as you would submit it. Keep the title a natural sentence and confirm every field is true and brand-free.

Image file name

Title or description (natural sentence: who does what, where)

Commercial or editorial

Top 10 keywords in priority order

Remaining keywords (up to ~50 total)

Category

Brand or trademark check (none present? yes/no)

Checklist: Pre-Submit Metadata Check

- [] Title is a natural sentence, not keyword soup
- [] Every keyword is genuinely true of the image
- [] Conceptual keywords included, not just literal objects
- [] No brand names, logos, or trademarks on a commercial file
- [] Spelling checked on all keywords
- [] Editorial files use a factual location, date, and description caption

Shooting, Releases, and Passing Review

Produce clean, legally clear, high-demand files that pass review and unlock commercial sales.

Exercise: Plan a High-Yield Home Shoot

Design one evergreen shoot you can stage at home this week to produce many sellable variations from a single setup. Write a shot list before you shoot.

- What single setup and concept will you shoot (for example home office, healthy meal, exercise)?

- List at least eight distinct variations (expressions, actions, framings, props).

- Which shots will include copy space, and which will you take in both landscape and vertical?

- Will any recognizable person appear, and therefore need a model release?

Worksheet: Release Tracker

Record every release you capture so you can attach it at upload. Fill one row per model or property. Use the agency's approved form and capture it at the shoot.

Shoot date

Model or property name

Release type (model / property)

Signed (yes/no)

ID captured (yes/no)

Linked image files

Checklist: Technical Acceptance Check

- Shot in raw at the lowest workable ISO
- Main subject critically sharp at 100 percent magnification
- Shadows clean with no visible noise
- Dust spots, chromatic aberration, and halos removed
- Natural color and restrained sharpening, no heavy filters
- Exported at full resolution as high-quality JPEG in sRGB
- Release attached for any recognizable person on a commercial file

Distribute, Track, and Scale to Passive Income

Distribute one library across agencies, read the data, and build the habit that compounds into income.

Exercise: Read Your Dashboard Like a Brief

After your first uploads have been live a few weeks, open each agency dashboard and let the data set your next shot list. If you have no sales yet, do this with the agency best-seller pages instead.

- Which of your files are best sellers, and what subject and style do they share?

- Which files get views but no downloads, and what might they be losing on?

- Which agency pays you the most per download so far?

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- Based on this, what exact subject and variations will you shoot next?
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Worksheet: Earnings Projection

Build your own projection from real numbers. Fill the known fields from your dashboard and leave the calculated columns empty for you to compute, so the figures stay honest to your data.

Current portfolio size (number of live files)

Total earnings last month

Average earnings per image last month (you calculate)

Target portfolio size in 12 months

Projected monthly earnings at target (you calculate)

Weekly upload target to reach it (you calculate)

Checklist: Weekly Operating Routine

- Hit my weekly new-file upload target
- Keyword every file with the layered method before upload
- Distribute each batch to all my chosen agencies
- Log any rejections with the reason and file
- Review best sellers and set next week's shot list from the data

Your Action Plan

1. Choose three evergreen subjects you can shoot now and verify each has buyer demand in-agency
2. Open contributor accounts on Shutterstock and Adobe Stock, then add two more microstock agencies
3. Build and save a reusable base keyword list for each of your core subjects
4. Plan and shoot one high-yield home setup that produces at least eight sellable variations
5. Capture model or property releases at the shoot for any recognizable people or property
6. Edit to the technical standard and keyword every file with the layered, prioritized method
7. Upload your first batch to all chosen agencies, embedding metadata so you keyword once
8. Log every rejection with its reason and resubmit corrected files
9. After a few weeks, read your dashboards and let best sellers set your next shot list
10. Set a sustainable weekly upload target and run the weekly routine for at least 12 months

