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Wake Forest University
Office of Personal & Career Development

Publishing

Job Functions within the Publishing Field

Skills

- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Teamwork
- Interpersonal skills
- Organization
- Multi-tasking abilities
- Analytical
- Knowledge of literature
- Flexible

Editorial

Book editors come from a variety of educational backgrounds, although most are liberal arts graduates with degrees in English, communication, or journalism. If you major in a non-liberal arts field (like biochemistry or economics) you should ensure that you get experience in writing and editing.

The most valuable experience for editorial jobs comes from internships with publishing firms or positions at small nonprofit, college, association, or online publications where you have the opportunity to write a lot and to edit other people’s writing. Getting a good internship often requires that you have worked on the campus magazine, newspaper, or yearbook, preferably in a responsible editorial position.

Extracurricular activities that involve writing and editing are also valuable, as are any part-time positions that involve the business side of publishing. Jobs at bookstores, for instance, can teach more than you might think about how the retail part of the publishing industry works. And read as much as you can; stay current with what’s hot in the market.

Marketing

Business majors are useful for prospective book marketers, although English, journalism, and communication concentrations are more common. Courses in public relations are especially helpful. Experience in handling publicity is extremely useful, as is any general marketing experience involving writing marketing copy, buying advertising, and/or working with retailers. Event management is also helpful; try to get involved in running book signing events, handling speakers, etc.

Production

Art and design programs give a solid foundation in the principles of graphic design and typography. You should also work in production for a college publication (newspaper, yearbook, literary magazine, etc.) Any work that will help you to fill out your portfolio is useful training for a graphic arts production job. These days you need fluent mastery of digital tools, so get experience with design software, scanners, and digital cameras wherever you can. Get this experience under your belt and have examples of your layout and artwork to show. Any familiarity you can gain with printing terminology and processes by working at printing firms or copy shops doesn’t hurt either.

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Entry Level Job Positions

Editorial Assistant  See last page.

Production Assistant maintains the deadline schedules of the magazine and follows up on all internal delays, in addition to typical administrative duties. The production department focuses on all stages of editorial production from beginning concepts, page numbers, and budgets to final approvals by editors and editors-in-chief. Approximate salary: $47,000 (Source: simplyhired.com)

Getting Hired: A genuine interest in management and production is essential. Don’t take this job as a back door to another department. You have to be extremely organized, willing to work long hours, and able to work well under pressure and when things go wrong.

Copy Assistant is responsible for maintaining records of what pages and projects have gone through the departments as part of the production process. The copy assistant may also line edit short copy and fact-check on credits as well as perform administrative duties, usually for the Department and Copy Chief. Approximate salary: $46,000 (Source: simplyhired.com)

Getting Hired: An interest in the written word, familiarity with the Chicago Manual of Style, and a journalism or English background is key. Experience at a newspaper or internship is also a plus. Attention to detail and the ability to work long hours under deadline to get the job finished are required.

Research Assistant is responsible for the department’s administrative duties as well as any research requests that come in from other editors. The research assistant also makes certain that every fact published is correct. This is a great position for someone who loves detail, research, and fact-finding. Approximate salary: $48,000 (Source: simplyhired.com)

Getting Hired: This is not a back door position into another department and there is careful screening for that. A two-year commitment is usually preferred. Attention to detail and a great deal of follow-through are essential.

Photo Assistant logs in and returns film and portfolios; corresponds with photographers; assists with travel arrangements for shoots; orders prints; prepares expense reports, invoices, and budgets; sends issues to contributing photographers; and organizes countless files for the department. Approximate salary: $33,000-52,000 (Source: simplyhired.com)

Getting Hired: An interest in photography, especially the type used in the magazine you’ve chosen, is a must. An educational background in photography is also beneficial. Being good with numbers and budgets is essential, as are follow-through skills. You may also have to be diplomatic when faced with irate requests from photographers and other editors.

Art Assistant does administrative follow-up and page proof trafficking and finds pictures and photographs for relevant pages. Computer knowledge and use is essential; most art assistants use InDesign, Illustrator, and Photoshop. Approximate salary: $48,000 (Source: simplyhired.com)

Getting Hired: A BFA and folio of past layouts or design projects is needed, in addition to extensive knowledge of desktop publishing programs.

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Creative Side vs. Business Side of Publishing

Before pursuing a career in publishing, you must first determine whether you’re more attracted to the creative side (editorial and production) or the revenue side (publicity, advertising, and marketing).

If you gravitate toward the satisfaction of creating and packaging compelling content, then editorial and production positions are where you will be more comfortable. Professionals in both departments tend to be big readers and fans of other creative arts. But keep in mind that the skill sets needed for editorial and production are quite different and the two career paths are very distinct.

Business-side folks in sales and marketing, on the other hand, tend to be more interested in the prospect of high earnings, travel and interacting with other salespeople. Enthusiasm about books, however, is still a necessity.

Creative side
The compulsion to take a chunk of text and craft it into clear, concise, and correct English is something that is simply second nature to editors. They feel the need to rewrite prose until it is “right.” If you find poor spelling, mispronounced words, or shoddy journalism highly irritating, then editorial work may be for you.

Production staffers must have artistic talent and a strong eye for design that “works.” They use sophisticated software tools that help them make their vision come alive in print. Those who appreciate great design, have artistic talent, and are comfortable with technology will gravitate to this creative path.

In terms of which path has the greatest earning potential or prospect of professional advancement, it’s fair to say that you’re more likely to reach the upper echelons of a publishing company from the editorial side. That said, the field is very competitive and poorly paid; only the highest-level editors are well-compensated. Production careers are stressful and rarely lead to top management positions. However, senior positions pay well, and opportunities to freelance are ample.

Business side
The sales and marketing folks on the company’s business side are an outgoing bunch. These are the people who organize the softball teams, are constantly on the phone, and know all the best happy hour spots. They also stand a decent chance of moving up to more senior management positions if they can move their company’s products and help the rest of the company understand what’s “hot” in the marketplace.

Salespeople talk for a living. Their responsibilities involve schmoozing bookstore buyers, calling on libraries, and working convention booths. Book marketers are focused on the promotion of authors and other types of publicity for new titles. Successful marketers are strong communicators and not afraid of hitting the phones to arrange book signings and talk show appearances.

Sales and marketing professionals must be detail-oriented. Designing publicity campaigns, coordinating advance copy distribution in time to get reviews before a book publication date, and front-loading advance sales in time to accurately estimate print runs all require keen organizational skills.

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Looking to get your foot in the door through a temp agency?
Check out Lynne Palmer Inc for possible opportunities in the Publishing field:
www.lynnepalmerinc.com
The Editorial Assistant

The entry level position in publishing is the editorial assistant.

An unspoken rule is that the level at which you assist has a great bearing on how far you will go and how quickly you will get there. Assisting lower level associate editors, some of whom have just been promoted and given their first-ever assistant, may include more menial tasks and doesn’t allow for the direct experience you’d get assisting someone on an executive level. With most assistant level positions, salaries are usually in the same, low range. Executive Assistants (usually for an Editor in Chief, who has both editorial and executive assistants), however, get paid almost as much as the assistant editors, in some cases more.

Generally, you could be an assistant for anywhere from one to five years before you are promoted from within. It all depends on how much you learn, how fast you master your menial tasks and what kind of changes may be happening within the magazine. If you are given extra editorial writing and editing responsibilities, or if you work for an executive editor or director for 1-2 years, you may be able to score an Assistant Editor’s post by moving to another magazine.

The department you choose to work in will have direct bearing on how you move within the magazine. Switching directions just wastes time, so choose wisely. Select something you have a personal interest in and can dedicate yourself to for the long-term.

General Responsibilities of ALL Editorial Assistants

You will do grunt work and love it. Filing, opening and sorting mail, faxing, scheduling, expense reports, typing, research, making appointments, copying and anything else that will make the editors’ lives easier. You’ll need excellent organizational and phone skills, and be responsible for maintaining updated contact lists, juggling the phone, faxing and figuring out which tasks are most important and which you can hold off on in an emergency. When you get promoted to a higher position, your success will depend on just how organized you are and how successful you’ve been in these areas. This phase seems never-ending at times, but it prepares you for the mania to come. You definitely need to know Excel, Word and all Microsoft Office suite programs thoroughly. It’s a plus if you are familiar with desktop publishing software like InDesign. You’ll also need to know how to draft letters, make charts etc. Even though you may think that personal requests such as dry cleaning, shopping and dinner reservations are not part of your job responsibility, you’ll need to realize that attitude is everything. How badly do you want to make your boss’ life easier, and how much will you appreciate it when someone does it for you later on?

According to Simplyhired.com, the average salary of editorial assistants is $43,000. Of course, starting salaries might be much lower and salaries can vary greatly depending on company, location, industry, experience, and benefits.

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