

Have the book lover's dream job!

FabJob Guide to  
**Become a  
Book Editor**



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## 1. Introduction

If you love to read, book editor is probably the most fab job you can imagine. Why? Because book editors shape what the world reads. They help publishers decide which manuscripts are worthy of becoming published books, and then they turn those manuscripts into masterpieces.

If book editor is your dream career, the *FabJob Guide to Become a Book Editor* offers insider information to help you get started and succeed as a book editor. Whether you want to get an editing job with a book publishing company or start your own business as a freelance editor, by following the advice in this guide, you can greatly increase your chances of getting hired. So let's get started.

### 1.1 The Book Publishing Industry

Today is an exciting time to be part of the book publishing community. As the preface of André Schiffrin's 2001 book *The Business of Books: How the International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* notes, publishing changed more in the previous decade than in the previous century.

The changes have continued throughout the 21st century. One significant change has been the dramatic increase in the number of books published. In 2001, when the first edition of this FabJob guide was published, we reported that the annual output of books in the United States was “close to 70,000.” Only 10 years later, in 2011, more than 1.6 million books were published or distributed in the United States according to Bowker, publisher of the Books in Print database, and the growth shows no signs of stopping. Preliminary data for 2012 (the most recent figures available as of March, 2014) projected 1.76 million books published or distributed, an increase of 9.5% over the previous year.

While the number of books published has grown, the number of book publishers actually declined by about 10% over the five years from 2002 to 2007. Like other industries, publishing has experienced restructurings, downsizings, mergers, and selloffs. For example, the Time Warner Book Group was recently renamed Hachette Book Group after Time Warner sold it to Hachette Livre, France’s largest publishing company. Other major publishers that have experienced changes recently include Simon & Schuster, Random House, and HarperCollins.

Outside of traditional book publishing, significant changes have resulted from technological developments such as the growth of the World Wide Web, the rise of print on demand (POD) publishing, and the emergence of electronic publishing through Amazon’s Kindle, Apple’s iPad, and the Barnes & Noble Nook, among others. An interesting spin-off effect from the growth of the Internet has been the increase in self-published authors and the companies who print their books. An analysis of U.S. data released in October, 2013 by Bowker revealed that the number of self-published titles in 2012 jumped to more than 391,000, up 59 percent over 2011 and 422 percent over 2007. Ebooks continued to gain on print, comprising 40 percent of the ISBNs that were self-published in 2012, up from just 11 percent in 2007.

If you are interested in becoming a freelance book editor, the growth of electronic publishing and self-publishing could mean even more opportunities for you in the years to come. While there may be more opportunities for freelance editors, the number of editing jobs in traditional publishing industries has fallen. According to U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) statistics, in 2006 there were 62,450 people employed as editors working for book, newspaper, magazine, and directory publishers.

By May, 2012, that number had fallen by more than 10%, with 56,320 people employed as editors by these publishers. If you are seeking a career in traditional book publishing, your investment in this guide will pay off when you are competing with less-informed job-seekers.

## 1.2 Types of Editors

There are several kinds of editors at most publishing houses, each with different responsibilities. While exact duties and job titles will vary depending on the publishing house, generally, book editors fall into the following categories which are described in more detail below:

- Acquisitions editors
- Copy editors
- Structural editors
- Production editors
- Freelance editors

Depending on the size of the publisher, one or more editorial positions may be combined. For example, if you are an editor at a small publishing house, you may be responsible for everything from acquiring new books to copy editing and overseeing production.

### 1.2.1 Acquisitions Editors

The primary role of the acquisitions editor is acquiring new books for a publishing house. As an acquisitions editor (sometimes called a sponsoring editor), there are proposals to read, literary agents to wine and dine, publishers to convince of a project's merit, contracts to negotiate... and that's for every new book you sign up. You'll read book proposals and make offers to acquire books that you think are written well and will sell well. You'll also come up with marketable ideas and present them to appropriate authors and agents.

Betsy Lerner gives a wonderfully accurate description of an editor's job in her book, *The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers*. She writes,

“Today’s acquisitions editor must walk the high wire of trying to get the best projects into the publishing house, convince her colleagues of their merit, spin the books in-house as effectively as possible with the marketing and publicity departments, and pull whatever strings she can with reviewers, magazine editors, television producers, movie and foreign scouts, and bookstore buyers to give the book a fighting chance in a market crowded with a million titles vying for the same space. On top of that—and usually after hours, when the phones aren’t ringing, deals aren’t pending, and colleagues aren’t appearing at the door with some new crisis or deadline—she must edit the manuscript so that there will, in fact, be a book at all.”

This is perhaps the truest description I’ve ever read and can sum up an acquisition editor’s day-to-day existence. Once you have assigned a book, you’ll work with authors throughout the writing process to ensure that the book stays on track and on time. Different acquisitions editors have different working styles. Some prefer to edit line by line before a book goes to a copy editor—in other words, they’re very hands-on. Others will look only for gaps in plot and character development and leave the line editing to a copy editor. An editor’s own editorial style (as well as schedule) will determine how involved she will be in each of her projects.

The beauty of this job is that there is no typical day. In acquisitions, one day could be spent reading proposals, another day in meetings, another day with the office door closed and an editing pencil in hand. (This last scenario is unlikely.) Some days your head will spin because you haven’t sat at your desk long enough to answer last night’s email, let alone drink a cup of coffee before your (and your boss’s) phone starts ringing. Most days are scattered — a meeting here, a phone call there, running around for cover art for a while, chasing down a proposal from an agent — and the day is over while you’re still on page 1 of the proposal you need to have read by the end of the week.

## 1.2.2 Copy Editors

Copy editors are the people who edit an author’s manuscript line by line. They make sure that the character who has brown, curly hair on page 24 still has brown, curly hair on page 224. They correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. As a book’s copy editor, you will focus on the details of a manuscript to make the book error-free and consistent.

A regular part of a copy editor's daily work life involves "style sheets." Every publishing house has its own style sheet, which is basically a list of words that receive special treatment (either they're not in the dictionary yet or the company wants to hyphenate all words that begin with "co-," for example).

A book typically goes through more than one "pass" (in which a manuscript is copy edited then returned to an author with queries for him or her to answer). Sometimes copy editors work with an author directly, and sometimes their communication with the author is done via the acquisitions editor. In large publishing houses, it is rare for there to be one editor on a project who handles both acquisitions and copy editing.

As a copy editor, your days will be scattered as well, but most likely in a quieter sort of way. You could spend an entire morning doing a global "find and replace" on an author's manuscript where a supporting character's name was changed halfway through the book. You may attend regular production scheduling meetings and provide updates on the status of the manuscripts you're working on.

There is no set pace of number of pages you should get through per hour. Manuscripts are different formats (fonts, type sizes, etc.), and that will play a factor. You'll work at the pace at which you're comfortable, as long as it's comfortable for your boss and you're meeting your deadlines. Some copy editors can copy edit 20 pages per hour; others can work through 8 to 10 pages per hour.

The role of the copy editor is incredibly important to a project, whether the acquisitions editor line edits or not. Will lay readers understand that you've worked hard to have consistent chapter titles (such as all of them being a sentence or all of them starting with a participle)? Probably not. Copy editors are often a book's unsung heroes. Their work is behind the scenes, unnoticed by most people, but yet still critical to the finished product.

### 1.2.3 Structural Editors

While a copy editor focuses on details, a structural editor (also called a substantive editor or developmental editor) focuses on the "big picture." Structural editors are responsible for the overall "architecture"

of a book. Like a building, a properly structured book will have a firm foundation, solid supporting elements, and an overall “flow” to it.

It’s the structural editor’s task to move blocks of text around to make sure that both the entire book and smaller areas of the book (such as chapters or subsections of chapters) keep the reader interested and don’t create confusion. For example, if you were doing structural editing of a how-to book, you might move information around so that the steps the reader must follow are presented in chronological order. Unlike a copy editor, you will not focus on correcting spelling and grammar. Certainly you will point out any errors that you notice, but in most publishing houses your focus is where text should be placed.

You may also be concerned with the “look” of a book. For example, long paragraphs, one after the other, can be overwhelming to the reader. Readers may give up on a book that appears too daunting. As the structural editor you can help prevent this by improving the general appearance and readability of the book.

Although copy editing and structural editing require a significantly different approach (a focus on details versus a focus on the big picture), in some small publishing houses, the jobs of copy editing and structural editing are combined.

## **1.2.4 Production Editors**

Production editors (sometimes called managing editors) are concerned with the nuts and bolts of the printing process. They coordinate the process of getting the book into print, and may oversee budgets, schedules, and coordination with other departments.

For each book, the production editor may create a production schedule which is built backwards from a book’s publication date to allow plenty of time for copy editing, design, and proofreading. If one stage in the schedule slips, the entire schedule often needs to be re-created. With several books at different stages, you can see how there’s a lot for you to keep straight. To help manage the process, you will have regular scheduling meetings to make sure that books stay on track, that authors aren’t holding projects up on their end, that the designers know when to expect the manuscripts to be delivered, and so forth.

Your specific tasks may include arranging for the art department to create the cover and interior layout, coordinating with the editorial and print production team, inspecting electronic pre-print files to avoid errors in the printing process, sending out proofs, and keeping track of expenses. You may also coordinate with the marketing department so they know when to send out press releases, create web content, and prepare other promotional material.

## 1.2.5 Freelance Editors

Freelance editors are self-employed. They don't work for any single employer, except on a project basis. Your clients may include authors, book publishers, and corporations that need editing help. This is the kind of editorial work that you can get started on while you work at another job, because you won't be dependent on the editing for your primary source of income. You can also work from home, which is another bonus.

One of the best aspects of freelancing is that, unlike working for a publishing house, you won't be chained to a desk five days a week. As a freelancer, you're self-employed and a business owner, so you're free to come and go as you please. The downside, if it can be called that, is that you are solely responsible for how much editorial work you take in. In other words, you'll need to seek out your clients. But as you'll read in Chapter 5 of this guide, there are a variety of techniques you can use to attract clients.

Another advantage to being an independent editor is that you're free to accept or turn down any work you choose. If you don't think you'll work well with a client, or your client has unrealistic expectations of what you can accomplish for them given the time and money allotted to the project, then you can walk away. You don't have that option when you're working for a publishing house.

## 1.3 Benefits of Being a Book Editor

### Personal Satisfaction

For many people who become professional editors, there is a priceless sense of personal satisfaction that comes from working in this career. There is nothing more satisfying than doing a job you love. Not to men-

tion that you'll be surrounded by books and other book lovers every day.

## **Free Books**

One of the great perks of being a book editor is that you'll get lots of free books. After all, you're working in a publishing house. Even the lowliest of editorial assistants gets free copies of the books it publishes. Even as a freelancer you'll get to read many new books every year.

## **Helping Others**

One major benefit of working as a book editor is helping others. You'll be the person that deals directly with authors and helps to make their books to be the best they can be. Sometimes, you'll even be a shoulder to cry on for them.

As you progress in your career, you'll have the opportunity to help the next generation of book editors find their way into the career. You'll be a mentor and counselor for them. Maybe you'll even be the one doing the hiring.

## **Recognition for Your Work**

Okay, this one's not really true. In fact, book editors are the unsung heroes in the book publishing industry. As an editor, you can help an author turn their book into a work of genius, and yet, nobody but you, the author, and perhaps your boss might even know about it.

But that's part of the beauty of this job. You get the personal satisfaction of really enjoying what you do every day, you'll help others create the book they dreamed of writing, and you won't even care if your work is recognized. (That aside, some book editors do become quite well-known and respected in the industry.)

## **Working with Celebrities**

There's no doubt about it. Authors are celebrities. Just think of working with authors like John Grisham, Stephen King, or Danielle Steele. As a book editor, you'll get to work with celebrities like these. Maybe you'll

be the first to discover a brilliant new author and help to create a brand new celebrity.

## Opportunities for Advancement

There are numerous opportunities for advancement in the book publishing industry. Advancement is almost a given, in fact. You can start out as an intern, move on to being an editorial assistant, and work your way up to managing editor. (We'll show you how all that works later in this book.)

## Income Potential

As you'll read later in this guide, there is great potential for income in this profession. While you won't be making the big bucks early on, especially if you're starting out as an editorial assistant, once you move up the corporate ladder at your publishing house (or move to another so that you can advance), you'll start to see a nice increase in your remuneration.

Many senior editors make \$60,000 or more annually. As a managing editor, you'll make more than that. Throw in the perks, stock options, and incentive bonuses, and you could very well be earning in excess of \$100,000 a year. As a freelance editor, your income is limited only by the amount of work you choose to do.

## 1.4 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Book Editor* is arranged to take you in a step-by-step manner through getting started and succeeding as a book editor. These steps, and the chapters they appear in, are as follows:

Chapter 2, *Getting Ready*, will give you helpful information on Developing Your Skills so you can succeed in this career. We'll examine the specific skills related to editorial work. You will also find resources for enhancing your relationship skills and business skills, which are just as important as editorial skills in some cases. This chapter also covers the best resources for learning about book editing, and explains how to get experience before you apply for that first editorial position or start your own freelance editing business.

Chapter 3 focuses on *Getting Hired*. You will discover who hires book editors, including large publishers, independent publishers and book packagers. We'll look at how to find out about job openings, how to prepare an effective resume and cover letter, and how to do well in an interview. You will even discover how to create your own job!

In Chapter 4, we'll offer some tips on *Starting Your Own Freelance Editing Business*. As a freelance editor you will be a small business entrepreneur, and as such you will need to be prepared for the many exciting challenges to opening your own business. Whether you choose to do business in a home office or rent office space, you will need to learn about creating a business plan, choosing a name for your company, legal issues and more. This chapter also addresses that all-important topic: "Setting Your Fees."

Chapter 5 is all about *Getting Clients*. You'll find tips and advice about identifying your target market, marketing tools and techniques, including how to get free publicity, and networking with other professional editors and business owners who might need your editorial services. You'll also find advice about selling your services to clients and learn how to create client contracts and letters of agreement.

When you're finished with this guide you will know what steps to take next and where to go from there. By applying what you learn here, it's just a matter of time before you'll be where you want to be... in an exciting career as a Book Editor!

**You have reached the end of the free sample of the *FabJob Guide to Become a Book Editor* To order and download the complete guide go to <https://fabjob.com/program/become-book-editor/>.**