

Editing: A Plausible Career Choice

Honors Project

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By

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## ABSTRACT

TITLE OF PROJECT: EDITING: A PLAUSIBLE CAREER CHOICE

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This project aims to explore the plausibility of editing as a career choice and what that career would entail by examining available research and by consulting with those already in the profession. Further, the research also seeks to examine the different methods through which an individual can enter the profession and the level of satisfaction professionals experience as it may correlate to the method of entry and to their salary. Other goals of this research include ascertaining which methods of entry prove most useful, along with what degrees would be most beneficial, if any. The study was conducted using a simple, twelve-question survey containing questions related to the overall research and was targeted towards editors working for different publishing companies. The study provides useful information about editing and the tasks involved, even though the results of the survey were not as complete as hoped due to a lower response rate than anticipated. With further research and more responses from people in the field, this study could provide even more beneficial information not only about editing, but also about the best methods of entering the field.

## **Introduction**

Editing is a term whose meaning is often misconstrued or misunderstood because of the broad parameters covered by this single term. A general definition of an editor, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “One who prepares the literary work of another person, or number of persons for publication, by selecting, revising, and arranging the material; also, one who prepares an edition of any literary work” (“Editor”). Editors can enter the field through various methods, and though there is not one prescribed method of entering this field, there is still a process through which a prospective editor can proceed. Yet, without clear pathways of entrance into the field, individuals may not know how to pursue the profession. It is hoped that through this research, the pathway to entering the field of editing will become clearer, shining light on how to introduce oneself into the world of editing. In addition, the research will also examine the level of satisfaction experienced by different editors.

## **Literature Review**

Though there may be various perspectives regarding what editing is, one thing that is certain is that, at some level, it involves both author and editor. One can perceive this through a statement that Faith Sale, former vice-president and executive editor for G. P. Putnam’s Sons, made in an article for *Editors on Editing*. She states that, to her,

the editing of fiction is an organic process, a back-and-forth exchange, in which both author and editor benefit from listening as well as speaking/writing. It becomes a building process, often deepening or enriching what already exists, in the best case making sublime what had been merely adequate, when an author is led to reimagine or create anew, rather than just make repairs. The author and I might come up with a number of possibilities for the shape of a book or a chapter or a scene, for the behavior of a

character, for the runs of a plot. But in the end neither of us may remember – or care – which one suggested the solution that appears in the final version. (270)

This explanation shows the participation of both parties in the process. Further, Patrick Miller, a former professor of Princeton Theological Seminary and editor of *Theology Today*, explains editing as “a highly *mediatorial* activity, bringing author and reader together, acting in such a way that the author’s integrity and voice are preserved and heard and that the reader is able to receive, grasp, learn from, and respond to what is written” (436). His description, much like Sale’s description, reveals the collaboration between author and editor as they work together to improve the manuscript. To further explain the cooperation needed between editor and author, Gerald Gross mentions that the “relationship should be collegial” and symbiotic, rather than parasitic” (181). Even among this cooperation, though, there are many types of editors, and in any discussion of editors, it is important to note these different types. While this research primarily deals with those editors that work with books, there also exist levels, or types, of editing for a variety of publications. Thus, it is beneficial to understand the differences among the spectrum of the editing world, as this will help to clarify the focus of the research and to specify the definition that is meant when the term “editor” is used throughout the research.

Generally, the term editor is often used casually as a synonym for proofreading, as exemplified in statements such as “I need to edit my paper,” where the meaning is to check for grammar and syntax issues. This casual use, however, introduces the distinction between editing and copyediting. Often, copyediting is viewed as a specific type of editing within the broader parameters of editing (Berkun; Curtis 30; Peltier; da Silva). Ally Peltier, an editor and writer for Simon & Schuster, states that, more broadly, “the word ‘editing’ is often used as an umbrella term for various types of editorial work.” In addition, Alan D. Williams, an editorial consultant

and author of the essay, “What is an Editor?” in *Editors on Editing*, states, “An editor is so many things to so many people that this rhetorically questioning heading [“What is an Editor”] is virtually impossible to answer in any concise form” (4). In a more specific manner, William Germano, editor, professor, speaker, and author of *Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books*, echoes Williams when he says “Whatever else an editor is, he or she may also be your [the author] personal advisor, guide, shoulder, cheerleader” (77). This quote serves to show the various functions an editor may perform, including those that one would not normally attribute to an editor. Germano also states that editors may be viewed as friends or naggers, but they are also the first salesman and the advocate for the author’s work (77). Together, these interpretations portray the different opinions of what an editor is, while these statements together portray the vagueness of the term. Yet, the authors then also proceed in their works to explain what, in general, an editor is, as well as what an editor does.

Though numbers may vary depending on how functions and tasks are divided, Williams and Germano state that there are three main roles, or functions, of editors within a publishing house. Williams separates these functions into finding and selecting books to publish, editing, and also “representing the house to the author and the author to the house” (4). Germano, in comparison, considers the third task to be acting “as managers, cheerleaders, artistic consultants – even therapists;” he essentially has the same first and second tasks as Williams (73). Within these three main functions are more specific tasks that editors complete, though there are various perspectives over which of these tasks are, in fact, completed by editors. According to Peltier, the tasks depend on the type of editor, of which there are four main divisions, which she lists as book doctoring, developmental or substantive editing, copyediting, and proofreading. Another listing of editing types from Manuscript Editor Online provides an additional type, formatting,

not listed previously; formatting is an important step for publication, as it is the process in which the manuscript is aligned with the style of a particular publisher (“Types of Editing”). With various types of editing listed, it is important to learn what each of these tasks comprises in order to fully understand editing.

Peltier describes book doctoring as “an intensive hybrid of editing and rewriting” in which “some book doctors will do whatever is necessary to ‘fix’ your manuscript, rather than showing you how to fix it yourself” (Peltier). This is the most intrusive form of editing, as it allows the editor to make the changes he or she deems necessary. Because this form is so intensive, it is really similar to developmental, or substantive, editing. Along with Paul D. McCarthy, senior editor at Pocket Books and member of the National Book Critics Circle, both Peltier and Manuscript Editor Online discuss this type of editing. The main difference between these two forms, however, is that the developmental editor works with the author, while the book doctor simply changes the text for him. Paul D. McCarthy explains that developmental editing helps to expand ideas, then eventually moves to what he terms comprehensive editing, in which the editor provides detailed editorial notes regarding the manuscript (135). According to the article, “Types of Editing,” substantive editing is the “most intensive form of editing,” since it deals with the overarching issues, such as “structure, organization, coherence, and logical consistency” (“Types of Editing”). Further, for fiction works, this type of editing also deals with “plot and character development, dialogue, setting, pace, tone and audience suitability as well as...basic writing skills, grammar and punctuation” (Peltier). Beth Hill, a fiction editor, describes the tasks of a developmental editor and explains that a developmental editor helps the author develop the idea and makes sure that it meets what the publisher and readers want. Hill also discusses the substantive editor, which she separates from the developmental, and explains that

the substantive editor typically does not become involved until later, but, like Peltier, states that this editor focuses on story plot, characters, organization, flow, and other elements of the work in general (Hill). Whether separated or placed together, these types of editing focus on the overall story and its development.

The next two types of editing, copyediting and proofreading, are also closely related to one another. Copyediting, which Peltier as refers to as line editing, deals with the correction of grammar and syntax, as well as other issues in style or repetition (Peltier; “Types of Editing”). Maron L. Waxman, editorial director of HarperReference and former professor, further explains that line editing asks questions regarding “clarity, coverage, organization, and tone” (154). This type of editing deals, on one level, with the readability of the manuscript, rather than with deep story and character details. In this way, it is closely related to proofreading, which is normally associated with checking for sentence errors. However, copyediting entails more than just the readability of a work. One of the elements copyeditors look for is style. Gypsy da Silva, a production editor at Simon and Schuster, explains that style, for a copyeditor, deals with grammar, syntax, and spelling (145). Da Silva notes that the copyeditor also checks for chronology or other discrepancies throughout the novel (145). In addition to these, Scott Berkun, a bestselling author and speaker, explains that the copyeditor also notices when certain components are lacking, such as “honesty, relevance, humor and value.” So, while copyeditors do look at grammar and syntax, they also look for the intention of the author, helping the author to make sure that intent is conveyed through the writing. Proofreading, on the other hand, “the lightest form” and normally checks for more minor issues (“Types of Editing”). Yet, da Silva explains that proofreaders do more than just read word for work; they support and check back over the work of the copyeditor (150). She states, “And just as the wise author hopes to be

backed up by a good editor and a good copy editor, the wise copy editor earnestly hopes to be backed up by a first-rate proofreader” (da Silva 150). Da Silva’s assessment provides significance to the contribution of proofreaders. They may be the last ones to check over a paper, but they are still important to the publication process. According to Peltier, proofreading is “traditionally only for material about to go to the press,” since it is mostly checking for any errors that went unnoticed in the earlier stages. After proofreading, the manuscript is formatted for publication.

In addition to these types of editing, Beth Hill adds the acquisitions editor, who is in charge of finding new authors to publish and possibly following them through the process to publication. Yet, while Peltier and others make a clear distinction between these types of editing, others do not make it so clear, choosing instead to detail the tasks of an editor within a publishing house. Williams and Germano both mention acquisitions as the first task of an editor. Williams views the acquisitions editor as a hunter-gatherer, explaining that this role is the most vital, since editors need and want books (4). In gathering new manuscripts, editors have to make critical decisions based on the skill of the writer, but also upon the current desires of the publishing house and the likely readers. Germano also discusses acquisitions, comparing it to gatekeeping; he views it as such because editors are responsible for learning to “Let in only those projects good enough to meet our [the publishing house] standards” (74). Thus, editors must do much more than simply help an author improve a work. As Richard Curtis, a literary agent and author of a column, adeptly notes,

today’s editors must master an entire gamut of disciplines including production, marketing, negotiation, promotion, advertising, publicity, accounting, salesmanship, psychology, politics, diplomacy, and – well, editing. But into that last designation goes a

bewildering variety of activities, many only remotely connected with the stereotyped one of sitting in a monastic office hunting for typos. (34)

The passage from Curtis exemplifies the reasons why the term “editor” is so misunderstood and hard to explain. There are many and multiple tasks for which an editor is responsible, and there are distinctions between types of editors, though these distinctions sometimes blur together or overlap. However, through the reading of this literature, one can gain a better understanding over the term in general and how it is broadly applied in this study.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook states that editors “plan, review, and revise content for publication.” The existing data states that, in regards to entering the field, “employers generally prefer candidates with a bachelor’s degree in communications, journalism, or English,” as well as those that are proficient with computers (“How to Become an editor”). Further, the Editor’s Association of Canada (EAC) supports this idea, stating “Editors often have a university degree in subjects such as English, history or journalism. Technical editors may have education in their chosen field.” In addition to education, many places, according to the EAC, preferred experience and reputation. Today, many people desiring to be editors “are graduates of in-depth editing and publishing programs taught by respected instructors who provide conscientious feedback.” This information explains that while a degree may be recommended, experience is also important. In addition, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics’ *Occupational Outlook Handbook* provides data that shows that editors make approximately 53,880 dollars a year, or \$25.90 per hour (“Editors: Summary”), though this number is also dependent upon where they work and how many manuscripts they complete.

Another interesting area of research centers around an idea that editing is in decline in some areas of the world. Blake Morrison discusses this issue, noting that there are some authors

that are uncertain that they would receive large scale editing, the type of editing that is critical and makes large changes to a work should they need or want such tough critique. Morrison suggests that this is perhaps largely because of the amount of manuscripts that pile in and the lack of time to focus on each manuscript as in depth as that amount would require He is not the first one to propose this idea; Richard Curtis discusses it within his article, “Are Editors Necessary?” After listing invaluable qualities for editors, Curtis states, “But none of these virtues means anything if editors are lacking in courage. The biggest threat to the health of our industry is not mergers and acquisitions. It is failure of nerve on the part of its editors” (34). Though both of these articles are dated, Curtis in 1984 and revised in 1993 and Morrison in 2005, together they show a lingering fear about editors in the publishing industry. However, toward the end of the article, Morrison states, “A culture that doesn’t care about editing is a culture that doesn’t care about writing. And that has to be bad.” Yet, despite Morrison’s fear about the decline of editing, they do still exist, and where there is a need for editors in the publishing realm, there also exists the opportunities for jobs as editors. Some believe that need is debatable, or will be debatable in the future; Alan D. Williams states as he closes his article:

The future, as Mort Sahl says, lies ahead, and the role of editors, like everything else, is bound to change. Corporate pressures for economies in overhead and benefits are likely to lead to more outside free-lance editing and diminished house staffs. It’s a toss-up question as to whether more or less editing in general will be needed. On the one hand, entropic degeneration of the language, diminished devotion to accuracy, and word processor bloat all cry out for increased editorial ministrations. On the other hand, the legions crying ‘Who cares?’ show no signs of fading away either. (9).

Of course, editors are still present and working today; in what capacity they participate in tough, developmental editing remains to be examined, though, as does the ease of access into editing as a career.

## **Method**

### *Design*

The overall design for this research was simple, consisting of a survey sent to different editors with the hope of obtaining adequate feedback. The expected sample size consisted of ten publishing companies, and thus approximately ten editors. I chose the companies from a list of existing publishing houses that provided contact information. The actual sample size consisted of only four editors. The research did not particularly take into account variables, aside from looking for publishing companies with which to correspond. Perhaps the only dependent variable was that all survey responders were editors. However, independent variables, though I did not target them, included differences in age, gender, location, and experience. Though I did not target these variables, they still influence the answers the editors provided, while also providing beneficial information for comparison.

### *Participants*

As I aimed this research towards the editing profession, the participants chosen were editors of various types. The editors were chosen semi-randomly. I sent requests to a compiled list of publishing companies for their editors to participate in a research survey. The executive editors or publicity managers then chose the editors that would complete the surveys based upon their availability and willingness to participate. Participants ranged in gender and in age, and included various types of editors, such as acquisitions or chief editors. The participants also ranged in length of time for which they had been working as editors.

The size of the sample will create limitations upon the results. Approximately 10 emails were sent to companies, and 4 surveys were completed, providing a 40% response rate. Though this is not a too unusual rate, the sample size is still small, and thus large generalizations cannot accurately be made. However, we can still gain valuable knowledge from the ones that did respond.

### *Materials and Procedure*

In order to obtain information about specific topics from the prospective participants, I compiled a survey. The survey consisted of twelve questions, all qualitative in nature. I designed the questions to provide substantial feedback in answering the research questions. The survey in its entirety can be viewed in Appendix A. Because participants could complete the survey electronically, the only other material that was essential to the research was access to a computer with internet.

Before compiling the survey, I completed preliminary research to provide background to the topic and to help stimulate questions for research and for the surveys. That completed, I created the surveys with open-ended questions, which would allow the editors to provide detailed feedback. Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) completed and approved the study, I contacted companies via email. I then sent a consent form along with the survey to those that responded. Finally, once the participants completed and returned the surveys, I read and analyzed them for integration into the final report. This analysis will be further detailed within the results section of this report.

### *Validity and Reliability*

The majority of this research is both valid and reliable. The instrument used, the survey, was reliable in that the questions were straightforward; none of the participants experienced

confusion in answering the questions. However, question twelve (See Appendix A) could possibly be considered leading because of the information provided before the question. However, the question itself still fully allowed for the opinion of the respondents, and thus was not leading. Further, the research is also valid because the editors were able to freely express their true and honest opinions.

### **Data Analysis**

As the survey consisted solely of open-ended questions, all research data is qualitative. I reviewed and examined the responses for trends and differences, which are discussed in detail below.

The survey consisted of a total of twelve questions, the first three of which focused on the participants' desires to become editors and the process through which they achieved this. For two of the participants, they knew that they wanted to work or would like to work with books in some capacity, while another stated that she would "be good at working on books and would really enjoy doing it" (see Appendix D). One of the four sought the editing profession based on her own skill sets, believing that it would fit well with her skills and personality (see Appendix E). Finally, three of the four noted they realized their desire to become an editor while in undergraduate or graduate school. In regards to the preferred media they would want to edit, all participants indicated novel, or book, publishing, though the genres of fiction varied. In addition, two stated that they started as editors for newspapers before obtaining editing positions with book companies – the others did not state whether they did or did not start in newspapers. In obtaining the positions in editing, however, the participants experienced different situations.

After college, three of the four participants went straight into the editing field, though one stated that it "took a year to find my assistant position" (see Appendix C). One "spent three years

as a reporter at a newspaper” before entering the editing field (see Appendix E). However, all four placed applications for positions with publishing companies. Thus, there was no “lateral entry” or entering the editing field by chance or as a side job – all participants were intentional in becoming editors and making that their full-time profession. Further, one of the participants noted that editing is one of the few apprentice-style jobs still in existence, as one needs “experience and mentorship...to advance” (see Appendix C).

The survey also asked about degrees and their benefits toward an editing profession (Question 4). While three of the participants hold degrees in English – two bachelor’s and one master’s – and three believe that they are, or could be, helpful, two also stated that it could vary based on the type of editing. One participant explained that “there can be a slight bias against young editors with too much academic training,” but that for specialized editors, “it’s expected that they’ll stay current on the scholarship in that field,” and so some have PhDs (see Appendix B). Another participant stated along similar lines that “It’d be good to have a degree that seems to fit what you might be interested in doing” (see Appendix E). One participant had a bachelor’s degree in communications, while another with a master’s degree in English claimed that, while a liberal arts degree might be helpful, her degree did not help her obtain her job, nor has she used it.

Following questions about the process of entering the field, the participants were asked about any misconceptions or preconceived notions they may have had before becoming editors (Question 5). In close connection with this question, they were also asked if they are currently doing what they expected to be doing as editors (Question 6). For the first question, two stated that they did not really have any preconceived ideas, and therefore did not have misconceptions. The other two, however, did have some misconceptions. One stated that he believed he would

only be working on two to three manuscripts at a time with much time spent in back-and-forth exchanges with authors. However, he has since realized that “the longer you’re at it [editing], the more your time is spent doing things other than copyediting” (see Appendix B). The other editor with misconceptions simply stated that she believed “editors sit around reading and talking about poetry and literature all day” (see Appendix C).

In answering the seventh question of the survey, all the participants stated that yes, they were doing what they expected to be doing. However, three also noted or implied within the answer to these two questions that they were also doing more than what they expected, such as acquisitions, early-stage manuscript development, brainstorming, publicity, and production, among other tasks. The one who answered strictly yes stated that, though she did not really have misconceptions or expectations of the specifics, the overall idea of working on the big picture with authors was what she expected.

The next three questions, seven, eight, and nine, are related, and can thus be reported together. Question seven asked what they considered their main tasks. The participants answered with various tasks; these tasks were then described either within the same question or in question eight. The main tasks, in summary, were to acquire new works, to represent the company, to improve the quality of works (editing), and project management. In describing these tasks, the responses included “dealing with people,” specifically authors, establishing connections, finding new authors to publish, working with authors to enhance and better the quality of the book, making “it the strongest it can be,” including “story/character development, structure, language polishing,” as well as making sure the book makes it successfully through the production process, including the copyediting process (see Appendices B and C). Three of the participants noted doing some work with copyediting, even if it is not their first priority. However, one stated

explicitly that she was not involved with copyediting, but rather the big picture issues. For more detailed descriptions of the tasks, see Appendix F.

The ninth question on the survey asked if the editors were actually able to sit with their authors and discuss changes for the manuscripts. Only one of the four participating editors answered affirmatively to this question. Another stated that actually sitting down with the author seldom happens, and another also contributed that this is often unreasonable since authors live all over the country. However, the three that stated they do not often actually sit with authors did indicate that they still have tough and engaging discussions with authors about large-scale or smaller-scale changes to manuscripts, but these discussions either occurred through emails or phone calls. One editor explained that she begins with an editorial letter, as “That gives the author time to absorb the feedback without having to react on the spot” (see Appendix D). All four editors consented to engaging in discussions with the authors, but three clearly stated this often does not happen in person.

The participants were also asked about the difference between editing and copyediting. The responses included three clear answers. One participant, having worked in the field for 17 years, stated that he does not always make the distinction between the two. However, when he does, editing encompasses everything from big-scale to small-scale, including line edits, while copyediting deals only with the latter – small-scale, line edits and proofreading. Another participant noted that it comes down to the existence of different types of editors. In her view, acquisitions or development editors are responsible for discovering works and then editing to make them stronger, while “Copyeditors are a small part of that publishing process” who “correct grammar, identify inconsistencies, and make sure the manuscript conforms to house style” (see Appendix C). Two editors both stated that there is overlap between editing and

copyediting, but also that, ultimately, editing deals with the big picture while copyediting deals with the details. As a whole, all participants were able to make some distinction between editing in general and copyediting in specific.

In an attempt to answer one of the prime research questions, the survey asked about the editor's satisfaction with their jobs. Though the responses varied in wording, all four editors expressed satisfaction with what they do. The answers ranged between "I guess so" to an enthusiastic "Yes!" (see Appendices B and E). For the one that provided a seemingly unsure answer, he explained that "Sometimes it feels as if the work I put in is greater than the feeling (of accomplishment, of pride) I get out...and sometimes I'm intensely happy to have played a small part in the life of a book" (see Appendix B).

The final question of the survey related to Blake Morrison's article, discussed within the literature review, about the decline of editing and whether the participants thought that this was occurring in America. One stated that there could be truth to this in regards to copyediting as companies try to cut costs and produce faster, resulting in editors "doing triage – addressing the bigger, more conspicuous problems and leaving the rest" (see Appendix B). Another explains that she has heard that editors no longer have the time needed to perform in-depth edits, but she herself does not know of any actual cases of this occurring. A third stated that while she has not experienced this, she knows there is compromise in deciding what changes to focus on. Finally, another editor stated that it would likely depend on the context, though "Socially speaking, there is a level of fear, almost, of offending someone with harsh or negative comments" (see Appendix E). Even amongst these different responses, all four participants responded that there could be some truth to the statement or that it could be possible, due to the pressure to produce more books to sell, leading to the cutting of corners for production purposes. However, these four

participants all feel as though they still provide tough and in-depth feedback to the authors with whom they work.

## **Discussion**

Because there was such a small sample size, it is difficult to make broad generalizations of the data. However, based upon these four editors, there are a few trends that can be noticed. Overall, every participant stated that they wanted to go into editing, and each went directly into the field, even if not immediately, compared to entering the field “laterally” or through another field or as part of an expert opinion – the process of becoming an editor was not completed as a side job, but rather as the primary career choice. The choice for all participants to become editors was very much intentional. This correlates with some of the literature, as Casey Fuetsch, a senior editor at Doubleday, states that “Typical of most editors in the book world, I began my career in trade publishing as an editorial assistant” (174).

The responses given in regards to beneficial academic degrees show that, overall, a degree in the liberal arts might be the best degrees to help one within the field. On the other hand, though while possessing an English degree may sometimes provide beneficial or helpful, this may not always be the case, especially depending upon the type of editing one wishes to do. It also did not seem that the editors believed the degree was necessary for the obtaining of the job, but rather could simply be helpful. These results align decently well with the existing literature. As mentioned earlier, the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* states that employers prefer candidates with degrees in communications, English, or journalism, while another source provided a few other degrees. Though the respondents stated that degrees were helpful, they did not state they were necessary, nor does the literature. In addition, Phyllis J. Fogelman, former president, publisher, and editor-in-chief of Dial Books for Young Readers, mentions that when

she is asked about the best training in order to be an editor for children's books, her thoughts are that "Two essential ingredients are a lifelong love of books of all kinds and an interest in a wide range of subjects and issues" (309). This statement may have been directed towards children, but it shows the different trainings possible for the job of an editor, and helps to show that the special degrees are not always needed.

Further, the participants all seemed to have a pretty clear idea, in a broad sense, of what they might be doing as editors – they did not enter the profession completely clueless, even if they did not know all of the specifics. This, perhaps, can show that those who become editors know what they will generally have to do before accepting a job offer or pursuing a position as an editor. In further regards to tasks, all of the participants seemed to complete similar tasks, even though some of them may have had different titles. This shows the overlap among the differing types of editors, but also provides a representation of what an editing job at any level might consist. It also coincides with the literature and what it described as the different tasks of editing.

The results help to portray the significance of editors and the work they perform. Though not all of the editors are able to actually sit down with their authors, they were all clear that they do, in fact, have in-depth discussions about the work. This shows that editing is indeed still an important aspect of the publishing process, even though there are instances where some corners may be cut, as indicated in some of the responses on the surveys.

### *Limitations*

The biggest limitation to this study is the sample size. Because there were not many that provided feedback or response to the emails and phone calls, there was not much data to analyze. Thus, while some broad generalizations have been stated, the validity of these statements cannot

be proven comprehensively. There is simply too much room for error without having more evidence. However, with the combination of the literature and the responses, this room for error decreases. Further, as more responses are collected, a better and more complete analysis can be made.

Another limitation that deals with the sample size is the similarities found among the participants. Because they all entered the field directly, rather than laterally, there is not much room for comparison among them, especially in regards to satisfaction. Thus, one of the research questions, “how does satisfaction differ based on method of entry into the field,” must remain unanswered. The lack of differences, though, may also signify a greater percentage of editors that enter directly into the field, meaning that there are not an overabundance of editors who enter through “lateral entry.”

The research instrument itself also proves to be a limitation, as it is missing a question that would help to answer one of the initial research questions. This question, dealing with the correlation between job pay, or salary, and satisfaction, cannot be answered because the survey did not include a question through which an analysis could be made.

### **Conclusion and Future Study**

Ultimately, though the research was unable to answer some of the research questions, it still provided valuable information. While part of this inability was due to the research instrument not containing necessary questions, a large part of this lay within the small sample size. Because the sample size was so small, there were not many differences to be compared and large-scale generalizations could not be adequately drawn. In the future, researchers should provide themselves with ample time to contact editing companies multiple times. In order to obtain a response, I had to contact some of the companies multiple times. Also, it would be

advised to start with a much larger sample size in order to allow for the possibility of not receiving a response from each company. A final recommendation would be to alter the survey that was sent out so that it contained all questions needed for the answering of the initial research questions. However, despite the limitations and small flaws within the study, it did help to explain the different types of editing and the tasks that editors perform throughout their careers. It also allowed this information to be presented from actual editors, rather than just from secondary, written sources.

In closing, it is important to note the cooperation and the relationship between the editor and the author as they work together to improve and enhance a manuscript through editing. This relationship is evidenced clearly in the following statement by Fredrica S. Friedman, President of Fredrica S. Friedman & Co., Inc. and former vice-president, executive editor, and associate publisher of Little, Brown:

When the writer and I realize we have each done all that we could with the material, we have fulfilled separately and together the editor-author relationship. If the book reaches its potential, then the author's work will be acclaimed. For no matter the extent of an editor's backstage contributions, the book is first, foremost, and always the author's success. And that's the way it should be. The editor's satisfaction comes from knowing he did the first of several editorial jobs well, that of helping the author articulate his ideas to the very best of his abilities. (288)

This statement clearly shows the relationship among editors and authors, and establishes the fact that, regardless of how much work the editor puts into a manuscript, the work and the success still belong to the author, and the editor is happy with that.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Editing: A Plausible Career Choice Research Questionnaire**

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Years as an Editor: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What made you decide/realize that you wanted to become an editor?
2. Did you have a preference as to media (newspaper, journal, fiction, non-fiction, literary, etc.)?
3. What was the process through which you became an editor?
4. What degrees would you suggest as most beneficial to a career in editing? Do you hold any degrees that have proved beneficial in this field?
5. What misconceptions, if any, did you have about editing before your first job as an editor?
6. Are you doing what you expected to be doing as an editor?
7. What would you consider your main tasks as an editor?
8. How would you describe those tasks and what they entail?
9. Do you actually sit with the author to discuss what works or does not work within the text and offer suggestions for changes, even if they are drastic changes?
10. What do you view as the difference between editing and copy-editing?
11. Are you satisfied with your job and what you actually do, compared to what you may have thought you would be doing?
12. One article I read discussed the prospect that editing – in the form of tough, critical reviews by editors unafraid to make or suggest drastic changes – is in decline in Britain. Do you

think, based on your knowledge and experience, that this is also the case in America? Please explain why or why not.

## APPENDIX B

### Editing: A Plausible Career Choice Research Questionnaire

Gender: M

Years as an Editor: 17

13. What made you decide/realize that you wanted to become an editor?

I was in graduate school, for English, and our department brought in a newly retired Thomas Wolfe scholar to talk to us. As it turned out, the subject of his talk was not Wolfe or literary scholarship but why it would be a mistake for us to pursue a PhD and an academic career. (“You’ll be scholar-gypsies! No health insurance, long commutes between the three community colleges you have to work at just to meet ends meet!”) Not long after that, I heard about an opening for an entry-level editor at a local book publisher. Thinking that I’d like to work with books one way or the other, I applied for the position.

14. Did you have a preference as to media (newspaper, journal, fiction, non-fiction, literary, etc.)? Although I was open to a career in newspapers, having worked for a couple, I was most interested in books, and in particular scholarly books.

15. What was the process through which you became an editor? I applied for the job, along with dozens and dozens of other people. For the first round, we had to take a proofreading and editing test at the local community college. The folks who survived that round were given take-home tests that included editing and copy- and letter-writing. (I spent nearly more than 10 hours on mine!) For the handful of us who made it through that, an interview with the president, vice president, and head of personnel awaited. (One exchange from the interview: “So what is the biggest challenge that faces this company in the next five years?” Seconds of panicked silence on my part, then this from the president: “I know you have no idea. Make it up!”) The next day, they called me and offered me the job. That was 17 years ago this June (2015).

16. What degrees would you suggest as most beneficial to a career in editing? Do you hold any degrees that have proved beneficial in this field?

The answer depends in part on what sort of editing you hope to do. In some parts of the publishing world, there can be a slight bias against young editors with too much academic training. (The idea, which is a little silly, is that if you stay in grad school too long, you begin to identify too deeply with the culture—and especially the jargon-laced writing—of academia. Danger!)

On the other hand, for some of my peers at university presses, an advanced degree is all but essential. These folks tend to specialize, serving as, for instance, the women’s studies editor for their press. Because it’s expected that they’ll stay current on the scholarship in that field, these individuals are often academically trained researchers themselves, some of them with PhDs.

Generally speaking, though, an undergraduate or graduate degree in the humanities is probably a good idea. Most of my editor friends have English degrees, and I feel well served by mine. My

opinion is that to be a good editor, you need to be a critical thinker, and it certainly helps to have a background that required you to think a fair bit about language.

17. What misconceptions, if any, did you have about editing before your first job as an editor?

I assumed that all editors are brilliant and never, ever made mistakes with the language. I don't know anyone, of course, who could live up to those standards.

I also assumed that editing meant working on maybe two or three manuscripts a season, with most of my time spent poring over the text and engaging in back-and-forth exchanges with the author. At least at McFarland and most of the other publishers I'm familiar with, an editor is involved to varying degrees on a great many projects at any one time. And the longer you're at it, the more your time is spent doing things other than copyediting. Acquisitions work—conference travel, journal and dissertation research, early-stage manuscript development—takes up nearly all of my time, and did so well before “acquisitions” appeared in my title.

18. Are you doing what you expected to be doing as an editor?

I am, yes. When people ask me what an acquisitions editor does, my answer is the one I might have expected to receive: My job is to seek out and develop manuscripts for McFarland's various lists. It's about that simple.

19. What would you consider your main tasks as an editor?

The company would say that it's simply to acquire a fairly large number of titles each year. I'd say that my main job is to represent McFarland well to new authors, establish connections (with authors but also with groups) that will serve me well down the road, be an advocate for my authors, and do my part to maintain or improve the quality of the books we publish.

20. How would you describe those tasks and what they entail?

Maybe the biggest thing that being an effective acquisitions editor involves is dealing well with people. And not with just any people but with authors, who can be confounding creatures. I'm not an extroverted person, so it hasn't always been easy to hold up my end of a conversation with a stranger; but it has made me an effective listener, and since most authors seek an audience, I've used (an admittedly slight) introversion to my advantage.

21. Do you actually sit with the author to discuss what works or does not work within the text and offer suggestions for changes, even if they are drastic changes?

I seldom have the opportunity to sit with an author to discuss such things, although it does happen. More often, I review a manuscript in the quiet of my office at McFarland and then write a detailed email or letter to the author. But, yes, these communications do fairly often involve discussion of tough topics, including the need for large-scale revision and deep-running problems with writing.

22. What do you view as the difference between editing and copy-editing?

When I make the distinction—sometimes I don't—I take “editing” to mean everything from manuscript development to a line-by-line markup of the manuscript. “Copyediting” implies only the latter, although it can be focused on big-picture issues (organization and argument) or small (sentence-level slips and tics).

23. Are you satisfied with your job and what you actually do, compared to what you may have thought you would be doing?

I guess so. I do work with books, after all. Sometimes it feels as if the work I put in is greater than the feeling (of accomplishment, of pride) I get out, but I don't know that that would be different elsewhere or in some other line of work. And sometimes I'm intensely happy to have played a small part in the life of a book.

24. One article I read discussed the prospect that editing – in the form of tough, critical reviews by editors unafraid to make or suggest drastic changes – is in decline in Britain. Do you think, based on your knowledge and experience, that this is also the case in America? Please explain why or why not.

There is also a belief that editing—or, anyway, copyediting—is in decline here in the States, too. And there's truth to it. As per-unit sales fall, publishers are having to look for new ways to cut costs. Sadly, one of those ways involves radically reducing their investment in editing. They might place a greater emphasis on finding “clean” manuscripts that don't have to be sent under the red pen, for instance, or decide that some manuscripts receive non-line edits, which amounts to doing triage—addressing the bigger, more conspicuous problems and leaving the rest. This approach saves money not only on the editing end of things but in production, where man-hours are saved during the corrections stage.

## APPENDIX C

### Editing: A Plausible Career Choice Research Questionnaire

Gender: \_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_

Years as an Editor: \_\_\_\_ 12 \_\_\_\_\_

25. What made you decide/realize that you wanted to become an editor?
- I studied English in college and always knew I wanted to work with books. I just wasn't sure if that meant as a teacher, an editor, or a librarian. I went to graduate school to pursue teaching and quickly realized that was the wrong path. I'm not sure how I knew editing was the right path, but it was. I just went for it.
26. Did you have a preference as to media (newspaper, journal, fiction, non-fiction, literary, etc.)?
- I enjoy working with stories and voices and I knew I wanted books – fiction and narrative nonfiction. Newspapers and journals are transient; they capture a brief moment of time and are often forgotten. Books capture a culture, an era, and they can have lasting impact.
27. What was the process through which you became an editor?
- It was hard to get a foot in the door. At the time there were only 6 major publishing houses – now there are 5. Job openings are few and often filled through word of mouth, and I knew no one. It took a year to find my assistant position. After 4 years I was promoted to associate editor, then after another 2 I became a full-fledged editor. Editing is one of the few apprentice-style jobs that still exist. You need experience and mentorship – not to mention persistence, patience, and a very thick skin – to advance.
28. What degrees would you suggest as most beneficial to a career in editing? Do you hold any degrees that have proved beneficial in this field?
- A liberal arts bachelor's degree. Most editors I know studied English, history, philosophy, classics -- that sort of thing. I have a master's degree in English, but it didn't help me get my job, and I haven't used it.
29. What misconceptions, if any, did you have about editing before your first job as an editor?
- I thought editors sit around reading and talking about poetry and literature all day.
30. Are you doing what you expected to be doing as an editor?
- Yes, and a lot of additional things I didn't expect. Editors are the central hub for the entire publishing process, so in addition to editorial work, we do a lot of work that relates to sales, publicity, marketing, production, etc.
31. What would you consider your main tasks as an editor?
- Acquisitions: A big part of my job is to find new authors to publish. I remember my first boss explained to me during my interview that her job is to read bad books so other people don't have to. I work a lot with literary agents, who send me their

- clients' work, and my job is to decide whether it's suitable for my publishing house. Most of what I read is never published, but the greatest joy is finding the gem.
- b. Editing: Once I acquire the book, I work with the author to make it the strongest it can be. This includes story/character development, structure, language polishing, etc. I don't work on grammar; that's the copyeditor's job (a big misperception about what I do).
  - c. Project management: A lot goes into publishing a book, and the editor's job is to strategize the book publication and serve as key liaison between the author and the rest of the publishing house. It's a lot of multi-tasking.
32. How would you describe those tasks and what they entail?
- a. See previous answer.
33. Do you actually sit with the author to discuss what works or does not work within the text and offer suggestions for changes, even if they are drastic changes?
- a. Yes. That's exactly what I do. It's not uncommon for large portions of a book to need drastic changes. Sometimes an author's ending doesn't work – or doesn't work as well as it could – and I'll make a suggestion that will require rethinking everything that came before it. My favorite part of the job is helping the author figure out how to make their work stronger, and then seeing them knock it out of the ballpark on the next draft.
34. What do you view as the difference between editing and copy-editing?
- a. There are different kinds of editors. I'm an acquisitions/development editor. My job is to discover great books and work with the author to make them stronger, then take them through the publishing process to share them with the world. Copyeditors are a small part of that publishing process. Once I'm finished working on a manuscript, I submit it for copyediting. Copyeditors correct grammar, identify inconsistencies, and make sure the manuscript conforms to house style.
35. Are you satisfied with your job and what you actually do, compared to what you may have thought you would be doing?
- a. I love what I do. It's a lot of work, but extremely creative and rewarding.
36. One article I read discussed the prospect that editing – in the form of tough, critical reviews by editors unafraid to make or suggest drastic changes – is in decline in Britain. Do you think, based on your knowledge and experience, that this is also the case in America? Please explain why or why not.
- a. I'm not sure I understand the point. (If the editor is unafraid to make changes, how is editing in decline?) What I *have* heard is that editors no longer have time to edit because the role of an editor has expanded so greatly beyond the job of simply editing, and there are only 24 hours in the day. But truthfully I don't personally know any editors where this is actually the case. Most editors I know work nights and weekends to make sure their authors' books are the best they can be – regardless of how much work they need and how drastic the changes. I like to think I'm one of those editors.

## APPENDIX D

### **Editing: A Plausible Career Choice Research Questionnaire**

Gender: Female

Years as an Editor: 11

37. What made you decide/realize that you wanted to become an editor?  
As a voracious reader, I'd often noticed authors mentioning their editors in acknowledgments. I majored in English literature without a clear career path, but as college went on, I gradually realized there must be editing jobs out there, and that I'd be good at working on books and would really enjoy doing it.
38. Did you have a preference as to media (newspaper, journal, fiction, non-fiction, literary, etc.)?  
Yes—I always wanted to work in book publishing, preferably fiction.
39. What was the process through which you became an editor?  
After college I got an entry-level copy editor job and have worked my way up from there.
40. What degrees would you suggest as most beneficial to a career in editing? Do you hold any degrees that have proved beneficial in this field?  
I have a BA in English literature, which is helpful for exposure to a lot of literature and practice with the kind of critical thinking needed in editing. I only took a few writing courses but would imagine a writing concentration would also provide a lot of useful training.
41. What misconceptions, if any, did you have about editing before your first job as an editor?  
I don't think I had any misconceptions; I just didn't yet have a clear picture of the specifics of an editor's work.
42. Are you doing what you expected to be doing as an editor?  
In general, yes. As I said in the last question, I didn't have a good idea of all the specific tasks involved, but the big picture of working with authors to improve their manuscripts is what I expected.
43. What would you consider your main tasks as an editor?  
I'd say my work falls into three primary stages: Reviewing a manuscript, editing that manuscript, and overseeing the copyediting and proofreading work that follows.
44. How would you describe those tasks and what they entail?

The first stage involves reading a manuscript and writing up a summary of its strengths and weaknesses, along with suggestions for improvement. From there I talk to the author about an editing plan and then work directly on the text, making corrections, including specific suggestions to implement the changes we discussed, and asking questions about points of the story or characters that might be unclear, inconsistent, etc. When we've finalized those changes, I hand the manuscript over to copyediting and, later, proofreading, approving changes and answering additional queries as needed.

45. Do you actually sit with the author to discuss what works or does not work within the text and offer suggestions for changes, even if they are drastic changes?

Usually this starts with an editorial letter, especially if extensive changes are being suggested. That gives the author time to absorb the feedback without having to react on the spot. That's usually followed by a phone call; my authors live all over the country, so unfortunately, it's very rare that we can sit down in person for this discussion.

46. What do you view as the difference between editing and copy-editing?

There's certainly overlap, but in general, editing looks at the big picture—in the case of fiction, this means things like story arc, pacing, character consistency and likability, theme, as well as making the language clear and strong and correcting errors. By the time a manuscript is in copyediting, these big areas should be locked in; then it becomes about the details of consistency, clarity, overlooked errors of grammar or spelling, etc.

47. Are you satisfied with your job and what you actually do, compared to what you may have thought you would be doing?

I am; the job is challenging in a good way and has been a richer experience than I would have expected. Working directly with authors is particularly rewarding.

48. One article I read discussed the prospect that editing – in the form of tough, critical reviews by editors unafraid to make or suggest drastic changes – is in decline in Britain. Do you think, based on your knowledge and experience, that this is also the case in America? Please explain why or why not.

I hope not. That hasn't been my experience at the publishing house where I work. While there's compromise involved in what changes we might decide are worth going after, I haven't seen any fear of pursuing big changes when we truly believe they're necessary. I don't feel qualified to speak to all of American editing, but I know that editors at many houses are overloaded with projects and there's pressure to get books, especially high-profile books, out faster and faster. I'd imagine that's led to some cutting corners when it comes to the editing process.

## APPENDIX E

### Editing: A Plausible Career Choice Research Questionnaire

Gender: \_\_\_\_female\_\_\_\_

Years as an Editor: \_\_\_\_8\_\_\_\_

49. What made you decide/realize that you wanted to become an editor?  
I've always loved to read and have had a good grasp of basic grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules. Editing seemed to be an excellent fit for my personality and my skill set.
50. Did you have a preference as to media (newspaper, journal, fiction, non-fiction, literary, etc.)?  
I started out in newspapers, thought about working at magazines, but really always wanted to end up in book editing. Specifically Christian fiction, since that comprises much of what I read.
51. What was the process through which you became an editor?  
After finishing college with a BA in communications, I spent three years as a reporter at a newspaper. When I was tired of my schedule there, I began searching for new career options. It was a God thing when I saw a fiction copy editor position posted at my current company. I applied, got through the weed-out round, passed a fairly rigorous proofreading test, was asked to interview, and then received a job offer.
52. What degrees would you suggest as most beneficial to a career in editing? Do you hold any degrees that have proved beneficial in this field?  
English is certainly helpful, though I like to say I learned everything I needed to know to do my job from my junior high English teacher. I'm pretty sure she literally read portions of the *Chicago Manual of Style* to us. It'd be good to have a degree that seems to fit what you might be interested in doing. If you're interested in working on Bibles, something closer to a Bible degree might be better. Communications was general enough for me to use it in many contexts.
53. What misconceptions, if any, did you have about editing before your first job as an editor?  
I don't know that I had a lot of preconceived ideas before becoming an editor, but one thing I've learned is how much a good editor is like a pastor, guiding or shepherding the author along, being a cheerleader for the author's message and the way they want to express it.
54. Are you doing what you expected to be doing as an editor?  
Yes and no. Many of my projects consist of doing a lot of grammar and spelling and punctuation cleanup work, which is what I expected to do. But I'm also challenged to brainstorm ideas with authors or explain why something isn't working and how it could be fixed. It's a little more creative than I was expecting but very fun.
55. What would you consider your main tasks as an editor?  
I work directly with authors on big-picture, or macro-level, changes to their stories. Sometimes that involves adding, deleting, or moving scenes around or even adding or

eliminating characters. I also do what's called a line edit, where I read through the entire text and make adjustments to paragraphs or sentence structure. When copyediting, I look for those grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, striving to make the manuscript as error-free as possible. I also do a lot of fact-checking (even in fiction!) to make sure the story is believable. If I'm proofreading, not only am I looking for spelling and punctuation mistakes, but I'm also checking how the pages are laid out: fixing bad line breaks, making sure the fonts used throughout the book are consistent, that page numbers and headers are on the appropriate pages, etc.

56. How would you describe those tasks and what they entail?

See above answer.

57. Do you actually sit with the author to discuss what works or does not work within the text and offer suggestions for changes, even if they are drastic changes?

Because authors live around the country (and sometimes out of the country!), it's not always reasonable to actually sit and have a face-to-face conversation with them about what's working and what's not in their books. (Although that is ideal.) However, we do communicate these things by phone and e-mail. We never work without telling the author what we're doing and why nor without getting their permission to proceed, especially if we are suggesting drastic changes. In fact, quite frequently, we would ask the author to work on those areas that need more substantial revisions and would provide sufficient feedback to explain how to fix the problems.

58. What do you view as the difference between editing and copy-editing?

There is some overlap between the two, but one way to break it down pretty simply is this: editing focuses on the big picture and copyediting looks at the details. When editing, I'll do my best to correct spelling or punctuation errors that I see, but it's not necessarily my first priority. I need to make sure the story is being told as effectively as it can be. I'm focused on the chapters, the paragraphs, the sentences. In copyediting, I'm looking at the words and the characters.

59. Are you satisfied with your job and what you actually do, compared to what you may have thought you would be doing?

Yes! I really enjoy what I do day in and day out. My friends are pretty jealous that I get paid to read fiction. (Somebody has to do it, though, right? ☺)

60. One article I read discussed the prospect that editing – in the form of tough, critical reviews by editors unafraid to make or suggest drastic changes – is in decline in Britain. Do you think, based on your knowledge and experience, that this is also the case in America? Please explain why or why not.

Interesting question. I think it would depend on the context. There are many, many authors who hit bestseller lists over and over again who really aren't the best writers out there and whose editors probably could have done a better job at squeezing out a higher quality product. But in many of those cases, there could be a perception at the publishing houses of "Oh, this author will sell a gazillion copies no matter how bad the book is." And there are many authors with talent who will not be found and will not make bestseller lists, no matter

how much they might deserve it. And then there are aspiring authors who don't have a compelling story or a strong enough hook who aren't even getting the opportunity to be published. It is really difficult to be published. For every 100 manuscripts that come in, maybe two or three will be published.

Socially speaking, there is a level of fear, almost, of offending someone with harsh or negative comments. That's why everything I do is couched with a measure of respect for the time and effort the author has put in already. I offer comments outlining what is good before getting into the areas that might need work. And I do my best to align myself with the author's goals, to uncover the message that might be buried.

APPENDIX F

	GENDER	DEGREES	YEARS EMPLOYED	PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS	TASKS AND DESCRIPTIONS
APPENDIX B	M	MA ENGLISH	17	2-3 manuscripts at a time; most time spent poring over manuscripts and exchanges with authors	Acquisitions – acquiring authors and manuscripts; representing the company; maintain or improve book quality
APPENDIX C	F	MA ENGLISH	12	Editors sit around reading and talking about poetry and literature all day	Acquisitions – find new authors; editing – making a book the strongest it can be; project management – key liaison between author and publishing house
APPENDIX D	F	BA ENGLISH LITERATURE	11	No misconceptions, just not a clear idea of specifics	Reviewing– providing summary of strengths and weaknesses; editing – corrections and suggestions; overseeing the proofreading and copyediting process
APPENDIX E	F	BA COMMUNICATIONS	8	Did not really have any	Work directly with authors on big-picture (macro-level) changes to stories – adding, deleting, moving scenes, etc.; line edit – paragraph or sentence structure; copyediting; fact-checking; page layout and proofreading