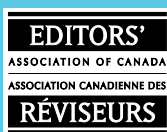


So You Want to Be an Editor

## SO YOU WANT TO BE AN EDITOR

Information about a career in editing



So You Want to Be an Editor

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# SO YOU WANT TO BE AN EDITOR

In a sense, everyone edits. A writer revises a manuscript. A speaker pauses in mid-sentence to find a better word. A student clarifies her lecture notes. They are all editing.

Professional editors carry out those sorts of tasks for a living. Editors work in a variety of industries and take on innumerable different tasks. But no matter what project an editor is tackling, the goal is always the same: to improve the quality of communication.

Whether an editor is working on an article, book manuscript, report, speech, news release or some other form of communication, the editor is responsible (along with the writer) for ensuring that the document is

- accurate enough to satisfy the most informed audience member,
- clear enough for even a novice to follow and
- interesting enough to catch and hold the attention of all readers.

Thanks to the huge number of websites, online publications, blogs and social networking sites, everyone can now be a published writer. The result is that what we have to say may appear to be more important than how we say it. Editors are more important than ever.



“Editor: one who prepares the work of others for publication.” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 7th ed., 1982)

## AN EDITOR'S INTERESTS, PERSONAL QUALITIES AND ABILITIES

Most people become professional editors because they're intrigued by language. They enjoy finding just the right word to convey a point, making sense of a complicated piece of information and manipulating text until it flows flawlessly. They have a passion for detail and accuracy. They find themselves drawn to editing because they can't ignore the mistakes they see in publications. They notice illogical arguments, inaccurate statistics and poorly constructed sentences.

An editor's decision to remain in the profession goes beyond a love of language. Successful editors turn that interest and skill into a way to earn a living and have an impact on the world around them.

An editor must have

- an instinct for recognizing patterns, organizing ideas and creating categories;
- a willingness to question assumptions, theories and facts; and
- an interest in learning new things.

An editor must not only be proficient in grammar, spelling and composition, but also have the ability to

- visualize the end product while focusing on and remembering details,
- think logically and exercise good judgment,
- reorganize a document to achieve clarity and momentum,
- recognize what's missing in a passage,
- use a wide range of reference materials,
- work within deadlines,
- keep an eye on the budget and
- work well with the many other people who are a part of the publication process.

Editors come from a variety of different backgrounds, but they are all skilled at developing effective communications tools by identifying the most appropriate structure, format and content for each audience and purpose. Ultimately, editors are people who think, and they do so on behalf of both the writer and the reader.

### Editors think for a living

*"To be a really good editor, you have to be a really good listener. I don't only mean to the author.... You have to listen to what you're reading."*

**ELLEN SELIGMAN, Publisher (Fiction)  
and Senior Vice President, McClelland  
& Stewart**



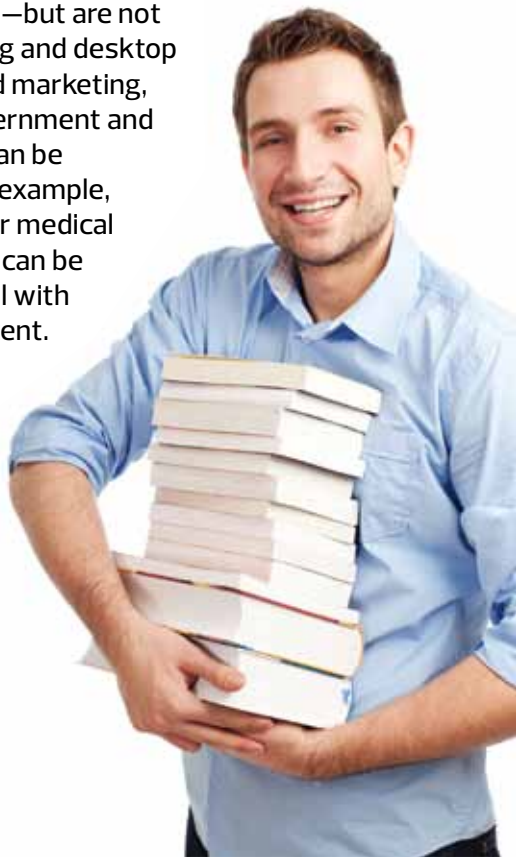
## Meet an Editor }

My friends had me pegged for an editor since childhood, but I took a little longer to get there. After graduating, I tried various jobs in social service, corporate, arts and academic settings, but none felt like the right fit. I had my eureka moment when I realized that the task I enjoyed most in each position was editing—analyzing texts; engaging with new ideas; exercising my creativity within the parameters set by the author, context and audience; and hunting for inconsistencies. I enrolled in the publishing program at Ryerson, did two internships, joined EAC, the Book Publishers' Professional Association and the Young Publishers of Canada, and began freelancing. I've worked on graphic novels, textbooks, policy manuals, biographies, poetry, young adult fiction and nutrition reference books.

\* ALISON KOOISTRA, Toronto, ON

## WHERE AND HOW EDITORS WORK

Editors can be found everywhere. The fields they work in include—but are not limited to—publishing and desktop publishing, sales and marketing, manufacturing, government and education. Editors can be specialists who, for example, edit only scientific or medical documents, or they can be generalists who deal with a wide range of content. Editors often work with a wide range of people, including writers, publishers, web developers, designers, artists, photographers, project managers, printers and other editors.



Technology has changed the nature of editing. Editing used to be done with a red pen. Today it's done with a keyboard and mouse, if not with a digital pen and tablet. Online editing is commonplace, and editors receive and share documents with other team members electronically. Jobs can involve working with various types of advanced software and publishing platforms. Many editors now need to be skilled at using multimedia software and interactive technologies that combine the written word with graphics, audio, video and animation. With the constant evolution of Internet and software, editors must be adaptable and flexible.

Editors are also team players, often working with others to reach a common goal. The best editors have a broad understanding of the communications and publishing industries and work effectively with web developers, graphic artists, printers, project managers and writers.

Editors work in acquisitions, development, substantive or structural editing, stylistic editing, rewriting, copy editing, research, picture research, fact checking, indexing, proofreading, layout and production editing. EAC's website, [www.editors.ca](http://www.editors.ca), describes these roles.

## Meet an Editor }

I telecommute full-time for a small university in Edmonton and also do freelance work. How did I get here? Throughout school, I loved refining language to communicate complex thoughts; I cared that I used en dashes and semicolons correctly; I wrote well and earned a PhD in English. A friend told me about EAC and then offered me my first editing subcontract. What do I do daily? Read, interpret and seek or impose clarity. Know and apply rules. Make 101 judgment calls. Support, educate, coax and appreciate authors.

\* BRENDAN WILD, Wild Words, Ottawa, ON

## Meet an Editor }

My degrees are in science, but I have always had a strong ability in grammar and language. As part of my duties as a research technician at the University of Toronto Department of Zoology, I edited research papers and theses. I discovered that I enjoyed this. I joined EAC and took other courses that reassured me that my editing was acceptable and taught me further skills.

When my family moved from Toronto to a rural community in southwestern Ontario, I began freelancing, specializing in science texts and trade publications. I enjoy making science comprehensible to the general reader.

\* ROSEMARY TANNER, Kenilworth, ON

## AN EDITOR'S CAREER PATH

People pursue careers in editing from many different starting points. Some study professional writing, communications or journalism in university, and move right into full-time editing careers. Others work in completely unrelated fields, and then, their interest piqued, combine that experience with an education in editing to move into new positions.

Choosing between freelance (self-employed) and in-house (part- or full-time) editing work comes down to two key questions: "How important is a regular paycheck?" and "How important is control over your schedule?"

A freelance editor's flexible schedule can be ideal for night owls and parents of young children. Freelance editors can also choose their colleagues and clients, to a degree. They can also focus on marketing their services to industries they are interested in.

## Meet an Editor }

I've heard that few editors originally set out to become editors. I did. I'd recently graduated with an MA in English and was working as a tutor, and I was thrilled to find another way to use my skills. I joined EAC, took every course available, read widely and voraciously, and discovered a new world of style sheets and editing marks. After a less than ideal start editing bodice-rippers and thrillers for minimum wage, I saw an EAC job posting for an in-house position with a professional association. It was a great fit for me—variety and stability. In the decade I've held that job, I have continued my education through courses and EAC certification, as well as on-the-job experience. In a way, I will always be becoming an editor.

\* KRISTINA LUNDBERG

EAC Certified Professional Editor (CPE), Edmonton, AB



## REWARDS AND DRAWBACKS OF EDITING

Editors often work with minimal supervision and may be expected to make decisions on their own. For the right person, this level of independence can be very rewarding. Many freelance editors enjoy the freedom to work from home, set their own hours and choose their own projects—provided they have the discipline required. For many editors, the tight deadlines and pressure to ensure absolute accuracy are also welcome challenges.

Editors are not often highly paid, and sometimes they receive little recognition. Editors regularly talk among themselves about being “invisible.” However, many editors find satisfaction in being a “best supporting actor.”

*“If you do not tolerate a certain level of anxiety over a considerable length of time (say, an entire career), then you are probably not constituted to be an editor.” (GERALD GROSS, ed., Editors on Editing)*

*“The only predictable element in editing is that the next problem to come along will not yield to any of the thousands of solutions developed in tackling previous problems.” (ARTHUR PLOTNIK, The Elements of Editing)*

Since freelance editors generate their income from a variety of employers (as independent contractors) rather than earning a consistent salary from just one, they may have to cope with a variable sales cycle and fluctuating annual income. Whereas an in-house editor’s income is fixed except for annual raises, freelancers can choose to seek out higher-paying clients and/or work longer hours.

Editors who work in-house generally know what their schedule and pay will be every month. Many (but not all) work regular business hours, although the workload varies with the type of job they have.

There has been a marked increase in demand for freelance editing because of the blossoming of technology used in publishing and the changing marketplace. Today, CEOs often see hiring an independent contractor as an economical alternative to hiring full-time staff.

EAC

A 2009 survey of EAC members indicated that 66% work full-time as freelance editors and 12% work in-house (as employees). Another 20% reported that they work both freelance and in-house.

### Meet an Editor }

I didn’t choose a freelance career so much as it chose me. After getting my MA in English, I spent a couple of years fiddling around, including teaching a university grammar course. It eventually dawned on me that maybe I could apply what I’d been teaching, so I decided to give editing and writing a whirl. A friend of a friend offered me a dream job: a federal government editing position. While waiting (and waiting) for the job to come through, I told everyone I knew that I was looking for short-term contracts. The work trickled in and by the time I realized the dream job would never materialize, I was hooked on the variety and independence of freelancing. Every day was different; I worked when I wanted; I called the shots. It was perfect. It still is.

\* FRANCES PECK, West Coast Editorial Associates, Vancouver, BC





## WORKING

*Working in Canada*, a report of the government of Canada, states that the national average hourly wage for editors was \$25.80 in 2006 ([www.workingincanada.gc.ca](http://www.workingincanada.gc.ca)). This information is drawn from Statistics Canada's 2006 Census and Labour Force Survey. However, an editor's pay rate can vary considerably, depending on factors such as the local economy, the sector they work in (not-for-profit, public, private), their willingness and ability to seek out opportunities, and the editor's skill level and talents.

## INCOME

In a 2009 survey of Editors' Association of Canada members, 90% of full-time editors reported earning between \$20,000 and \$89,000 annually, and 66% reported earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000 annually. The average income reported was approximately \$48,500, with at least two weeks' vacation.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Editors often have a university degree in subjects such as English, history or journalism. Technical editors may have education in their chosen field; for example, medical editors may have a science degree. A number of colleges also offer courses in communications.

In the past, there were few formal training programs for editors, so most employers valued experience and reputation (for example, as demonstrated in a professional portfolio) over other credentials. But that is clearly changing.

Significant numbers of people who want to become editors today are graduates of in-depth editing and publishing programs taught by respected instructors who provide conscientious feedback. This rigorous professional training, which includes opportunities to work on "real" manuscripts or documents taken from the work world, is producing editors who maintain high standards in their work.

As well, editors who are established in their profession can develop and obtain recognition for their skills through EAC certification ([www.editors.ca/certification](http://www.editors.ca/certification)), which tests editors in proofreading, copy editing, stylistic editing and structural editing.

## RESOURCES

Many educational institutions across Canada offer courses in writing, editing and/or publishing. As this information changes frequently, the Editors' Association of Canada maintains an updated list of contact information related to education and training programs for editors at [www.editors.ca/training/education.html](http://www.editors.ca/training/education.html). You can also check with a local branch of EAC to learn about additional workshops and seminars in your community.

# Things to Know About a Career in Editing

1. Editors think for a living.
2. Successful editors turn their love of language into a way to earn a living and have an impact on the world around them.
3. Editors are team players, often working with writers, publishers and other editors to reach a common goal.
4. Technology is changing the way that editors do their work and the types of documents they deal with, but not the reason for editing. An editor's goal is always the same: to improve communication.
5. Rigorous professional training in an editing program is now becoming essential.
6. Editors who are established in their profession can develop and obtain recognition for their skills through the Editors' Association of Canada certification program.





Responses to a 2009 Editors' Association of Canada member survey provided the following snapshot of the average EAC member:

- female (88%)
- working freelance (85%) from an urban home office (70%)
- university educated (89%)
- a regular participant in continuing education (64%) and EAC workshops and seminars (78%)
- working primarily for local clients (67%)



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