



EDITORS  
CANADA

# So You Want to Be an Editor

Information  
about a career  
in editing



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Association canadienne des réviseurs

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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 countless different tasks. But no matter what project an editor is tackling, the goal is always the same: to improve the quality of communication.

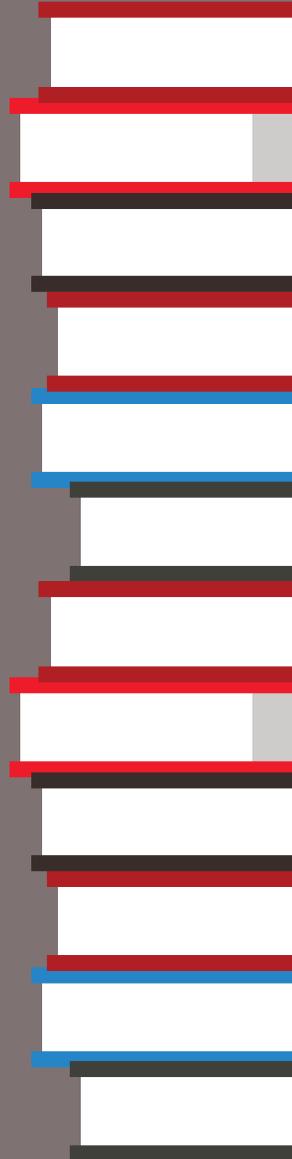
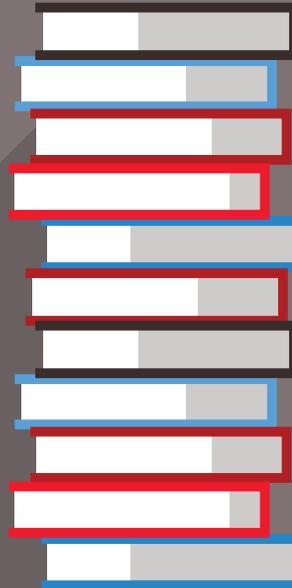
Whether a text is in the form of an article, book manuscript, website, report, blog, news release or some other form of communication, the editor (along with the writer) is responsible for ensuring that the document is

- accurate enough to satisfy the most informed audience member
- clear enough for even a novice to follow
- 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, anyone can now be a published writer. To ensure that written communications and the accompanying visuals are accurate, clear and interesting, editors are more important than ever.

“Edit: assemble, prepare, or modify (written material, esp. the work of another or others) for publication.”

*Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2nd ed., 2004*



# An editor's interests 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 working with text until it flows smoothly. 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.

A career in editing 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.



## Meet an Editor

I became an editor, translator and copywriter because of my love for language and because of past job opportunities that allowed me to work with language professionals, including editors. Pointing out mistakes wasn't enough: I had to correct them, suggest other word choices, and sometimes rewrite texts to ensure better readability.

Being an English editor in a bilingual milieu has its challenges. I constantly grapple with French interferences in English, which often result in poor syntax and faulty sentence structure. Some clients don't value my linguistic judgment. Thankfully, many individuals, small businesses, government offices, not-for-profit organizations and communications companies in Quebec rely on editors to ensure that English copy is top-notch. We're all winners when we realize how important it is to produce quality documents in both of Canada's official languages.

 **Dwain Richardson, Montreal, QC**

## An editor must have

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

## An editor must not only be proficient in grammar, spelling and composition, but must 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
- ✓ work well with the many other people who are a part of the publication process

Editors come from a variety of 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, McClelland and Stewart  
Vice President, Random House of Canada**



## Where and how editors work

Editors can be found everywhere. They work in publishing, sales and marketing, manufacturing, government, law, education and many other fields. Editors can be specialists who, for example, edit only scientific or medical documents, or they can be generalists who work on all kinds of content.

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 a digital pen and tablet. Editors receive and share documents with other team members electronically. Jobs can involve working with 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 the Internet and computer software, editors must be adaptable and flexible.

Editors are 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 writers, publishers, web developers, designers, artists, photographers, project managers, printers and other editors.

Editors do acquisitions, manuscript and project development, research, structural editing, stylistic editing, rewriting, fact checking, copy editing, picture research, proofreading, indexing, layout and production editing. *Professional Editorial Standards* ([www.editors.ca](http://www.editors.ca)) describes a number of these key roles.



### 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



## 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 then 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.



### 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 the Editors' Association of Canada (Editors Canada), 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 Editors Canada job posting for an in-house position with a professional association. It was a great fit for me—variety and stability. In the 15 years that I've held that job, I have continued my education through courses and Editors Canada certification, as well as on-the-job experience. In a way, I will always be becoming an editor.

 **Kristina Lundberg**, Certified Professional Editor (CPE), Edmonton, AB

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 choose their colleagues and clients, to a degree. They can also focus on marketing their services to industries that interest them.



### Meet an Editor

When I moved from academia to freelance editing, I was afraid. It could be a huge mistake; I'd miss the classroom terribly... Wrong. No essays to mark! I could choose my own hours and see more of my kids. When I finish a project, that's it—I will have learned lots about safety suits, Welsh literature, undersea oil pipes, Beethoven—and then it's time to start the next adventure. Volunteering for Editors Canada has brought a community of editors into my study (the screen, the phone), so I don't feel isolated, and the annual conference feels essential for keeping up with what's happening in the industry.

 **Claire Wilkshire**, St. John's, NL



Since freelance editors generate their income from a variety of employers (as independent contractors) rather than earning a steady salary from just one, they may have busy periods and leaner times, and a fluctuating monthly or annual income. They can choose to seek out higher-paying clients or work longer hours for more financial stability.

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

Today, many companies see hiring an independent contractor as an economical alternative to hiring full-time staff. Freelance editors are in great demand as companies downsize and as advances in technology make it easy for editors to work from anywhere.



**52%**  
work full-time as  
freelance editors

**19%**  
work in-house  
(as employees)

**17%**  
work both freelance  
and in-house

# Rewards and drawbacks of an editing career

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—which takes discipline. For many editors, the tight deadlines and pressure to ensure absolute accuracy are also welcome challenges.

Editors are not always recognized for their work. Some say they are invisible. But 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*



## Income

An editor's hourly rate can vary quite a bit, depending on factors such as the local (and even global) economy, the sector they work in (not-for-profit, public, private), their willingness and ability to seek out work opportunities, and their skill level and talents.

Based on a 2012 survey of Editors Canada members, most respondents charged between \$40 and \$59 per hour for most types of work.



**44%**

of respondents who work with not-for-profit clients charge less than \$40 per hour

**46%**

of respondents who work with public sector clients charge \$60 or more per hour

**42%**

of respondents who work with corporate sector clients charge \$60 or more per hour

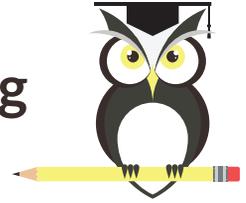


## Meet an Editor

Membership in Editors Canada is a great investment. Not only do you gain access to the Online Directory of Editors and professional development opportunities, but you also gain access to a diverse community with combined expertise that you won't find anywhere else. As a freelance editor who specializes in academic editing, my membership in Editors Canada has been invaluable in helping me build and maintain my business. Whether it's new information learned at seminars, new skills gained from volunteering, or new friends made at meetings and conferences, my membership is always giving something back.

 **Suzanne Purkis, Ottawa, ON**

## Education and training



Many editors have a university degree in subjects such as English literature, history, communications or journalism. Technical editors may have studied in their chosen field; for example, medical editors may have a science degree.

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 university or college 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 with solid experience and high standards.

Editors with strong skills and several years' experience can obtain recognition through Editors Canada's professional certification program ([www.editors.ca](http://www.editors.ca)), which tests for mastery of proofreading, copy editing, stylistic editing and structural editing skills. Editors who are certified in one or more areas of editing find that this credential opens doors to higher-paying work and more clients.

## Resources

Colleges and universities across Canada offer courses in writing, editing and publishing, including distance learning options (see [www.editors.ca/training/education.html](http://www.editors.ca/training/education.html)). Check with Editors Canada to learn about seminars in your area.

# 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, designers, artists and other editors to reach a common goal.

4

Technology is changing the way editors do their work and the types of documents they edit, 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

Experienced editors can develop and obtain recognition for their skills through Editors Canada's professional certification program.



**“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*

Responses to a 2012 member survey provided the following snapshot of the average Editors Canada member:



**91%**

is female

**91%**

is university educated

**75%**

is self-employed

**70%**

works from a home office

**66%**

lives in an urban area

**61%**

has 10 or more years of experience

**56%**

is a regular participant in continuing education

**78%**

is a regular participant in Editors Canada workshops and seminars



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**Editors Canada**  
505-27 Carlton Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 1L2  
Canada

416.975.1379  
1 866.226.3348  
info@editors.ca

[www.editors.ca](http://www.editors.ca)

