Applying TPC Research

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21st Century Editing: What it Takes

In recent years, technical editing (TE) has come to mean more than simply correcting an author's technical mistakes. Trends in Technical and Professional Communication (TPC) scholarship show that more is being done to advocate for marginalized groups and combat longstanding traditions that aren't necessarily the best practices in TPC and TE work. Current editing practices emphasize mentorship, inclusion, and American Standard English (ASE) awareness. Editing is a diverse field with countless, and growing, opportunities. This article will outline what it takes to become an editor, skills editors acquire, and current trends in editing practice in order to help those interested in editing careers take actions that will enable them to reach their editing goals.

There are different types of editors. This article focuses on technical editors, not book editors or other literature-based editors. One technical editor's job description may be very different from the next. Even the labels an employer gives to certain positions can change from one company to another (e.g., proofreader, copy editor, editor, editor-in-chief, technical editor, content editor, etc.). This makes it especially important for a candidate to ask detailed questions in an interview about what a specific job truly entails. While one editor might mostly be fact checking and correcting grammatical errors, another editor might have a heavier hand in the mentorship process with an author: providing specific, actionable feedback. Social media or website editors and academic editors will face expectations unique to their positions as well. An editor may also edit different genres as well as texts presented through different mediums. The work of an editor also changes based on who employs the editor. Whether a person is working for a corporation, nonprofit, government agency, or is self-employed, their work can change dramatically (Kreth & Bowen, 2022, p. 254). Those looking to become editors should be aware

that, as a rule, no two editing positions are created equal. Thus, it's very important to have an idea of the type of work one wants to participate in before interviewing. Ultimately, an editor always takes into consideration their position at an organization and what genre of text they are editing, so finding a good fit between employer and employee is important to success on the job.

The path to becoming an editor is as diverse as the many job titles editors receive. Research by Kreth and Bowen (2022) brings to light these varied backgrounds. Among the participants (working editors) in their study, over half hold graduate degrees while about a third obtained some kind of editing certificate. Additionally, the study shows that editors found courses in editing, publishing, technical communication, nonfiction writing, general composition, and general science classes to be most beneficial in their path to becoming an editor (p. 248). Internships off campus and working for school newspapers were also helpful. Those looking to pursue careers in editing should be sure their own coursework and internships reflect some of these same experiences of working editors. However, it should be noted that having a background in a specific content area can be helpful when editing content-specific materials, and there is a growing need for these kinds of editors in specific fields. Ultimately, Kreth and Bowen (2022) outline that there are two routes for becoming an editor: direct route (degrees in English, Technical Communication, Journalism, etc.) and indirect route (degrees outside the traditional English department degree then later pursued editing, including obtaining certificates). While many would emphasize the importance of obtaining a more traditional editing-focused degree (something from an English department), it's not a terrible idea to pursue a degree in a content area outside of English departments because certificates can be obtained, and this indirect route offers a needed background for work in content-specific workplaces who hire editors. Doing a quick Indeed.com search will show that companies often want editors with backgrounds in

medicine, science, computer science, or education. More important than obtaining a specific degree or certification in editing is the willingness to learn and to pursue interests.

There are skills specific to the job of an editor that someone interested in this type of work should consider before moving forward down this path. As expected, editors should be masters of English, syntax, and grammar. Editors work closely with co-workers, content specialists, and authors. Some editors collaborate more than others. Editors may be tempted to rewrite according to their own style, but they must learn to preserve an author's voice while maintaining clarity and meaning for the audience (Hayhoe, 2010). Technology skills are helpful depending on the type of editing being done. Most editing is done on computers now, so it goes without saying that editors should be familiar with Word and other Microsoft Office products. Any additional familiarity with Adobe or other programs is a plus. An editor's primary job should be to preserve an author's voice in getting their message to the audience, and along this path the editor should ensure that nothing about the message is harmful to the author, the audience, or the institution at which the editor is employed.

The long standing "editor as gatekeeper" perspective has no place anymore (Hayhoe, 2010, p. 165). Editors should be seen as a resource for an author, not as the person they must get through in order to get published. As Hayhoe (2010) emphasizes, an editor should be a mentor to an author. An editor should not refuse to publish due to their own preferences or for minor grammatical errors; their job is to serve the author and assist them. Editors should seek to preserve authors' voices, making changes to grammar only to clarify meaning for a reader (p. 165). Clem and Cheek (2022) also call for editors to "care for a text rather than police it" (p. 142). The editor's job should focus on collaboration and mentoring the author. Furthermore, an editor's loyalty is first to the organization it works for and next to the author. It's important for

editors to see beyond a manuscript and think about how what an author has said will impact certain groups within an audience.

Current trends show that editors in TPC are concerned with social justice (Clem and Cheek, 2022, p. 135). Editors today are also concerned with cultural studies. Editors should be looking at the TPC research and implementing findings into their practice. Today, this includes thinking about how certain messages, words, phrases, idioms, and other figurative language will be understood by members of multiple groups who are part of the collective audience. Editors are always concerned about the audience who will view the texts, but it's important to remember that the audience itself includes people from various backgrounds, races, genders, classes, cultures, etc. Strong editors know how to provide feedback to authors that corrects exclusionary language. An editor often must keep in mind that people from other countries and cultures may view the content due to content often being translated into another language. It's important to edit in ways that include as many as possible, so changes don't need to be made when translating technical texts. Above all, an editor is "trained to maintain the author's voice except to correct errors in grammar, syntax, or usage, or to clarify the author's meaning when needed" (Hayhoe, 2010, p. 169). An influential editor will be able to maintain an author's voice while also editing for clarifying meaning for a diverse audience.

There is a push in TPC for editors to be aware of adherence to ASE and seek to understand how this one-sided approach, at times, excludes certain people. Editors should ask themselves, *Will fixing this error take away from the author's voice?* Hayhoe (2010) mentions that editors sometimes must make the decision to either keep an author's voice or maintain clarity and understanding for the audience (p. 169). Additionally, editors identify that working with ESL authors is a challenging aspects of their jobs (Clem and Cheek, 2022, p. 139). There

may be times when it's more appropriate to the rhetorical situation for some grammatical errors to be left uncorrected in order to preserve an author's tone/voice. Editors are specialists, and as such, they can break the rules because they are qualified to do so (Clem and Cheek, 2022, p. 141). When making decisions, an editor should take into consideration the rhetorical situation, the groups that make up the audience, the author's voice, and the effects of not fixing writing to be congruent with ASE or vice versa.

In conclusion, those hoping to become an editor can do many things now to prepare for future employment. Knowing the various types of editing positions out there with diverse job titles will help in planning which route to take to get a desired position. Understanding how cultural studies is applied to the field will help with marketing oneself to employers and being a reliable editor for a company or author. Being familiar with computer programs, especially Word, and having a solid foundational knowledge of ASE are must-have skills. Additionally, being detail oriented, working independently, and collaborating well with others are important skills. Editing at its finest is mentoring, so gaining experience with mentorship will be invaluable on a resume. Kreth and Bowen (2022) mention that serendipity played a role in editors gaining their current positions, so those hoping for similar jobs can remember to take advantage of opportunities placed before them. All in all, there is no one specific, all-encompassing path to becoming an editor. Even the skills or knowledge needed can vary. Each editing job is incredibly different whether it is the content being edited, the daily work of the editor, a company's environment or values, etc. Future editors should take advantage of opportunities before them, gain new skills including technology familiarity, and remember to market themselves well in interviews.

References

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