

Allie Collins, Editor, Bloomsbury Business



Course of study	English Language & Literature	Year of graduation	2003
City / Region / Country	Somerset		

1. Tell us more about your job; an example of day-to-day work, average week, or a recent project (or how would you describe your job to a friend?).

My job also goes by names such as Desk Editor and Managing Editor; essentially, I'm a project manager for the editorial process that's involved in preparing a book for publication.

I don't commission books – my involvement begins once the Publisher/Commissioning Editor has commissioned the book, and we have an acceptable manuscript from the author. That's the point at which I will introduce myself to the author and explain the editorial process. For me, the editorial process involves sending the manuscript to a copy-editor; liaising with the author over the editor's suggestions/comments; preparing the manuscript for typesetting and sending it to our Production Manager; sending first proofs to the author for review and also to a proofreader; and checking text corrections over several rounds of proofs, until we have a manuscript that is ready for press.

This all happens over the course of several months, and we publish on average 2-3 books a month, so I always have books moving through the process at various stages. Schedules are set by our Production department, but it's my responsibility to manage the flow of my own projects within those schedules, and ensure each book hits key dates along the way to keep it on track. It's also my responsibility to liaise with Production if dates slip, or if we need to bring dates

forward for advance marketing/publicity purposes, and I also keep track of editorial costs within agreed budgets.

2. What attributes make someone successful in this job (or what skills are involved in your current role)?

The most important skill is to be able to keep track of multiple projects and to ensure that key dates are met. It's also very important to be able to build good working relationships with authors, freelancers and the in-house Production department. Often delays will creep in, author expectations need to be managed, favours need to be asked and teams need to pull together, so it's important to be able to work with different teams and have an understanding of everyone's role in the process. You need to be adaptable, and be good at problem-solving, and of course you need to be a skilled editor/proofreader, as checking proofs and ensuring corrections are properly made is an essential component of the job.

3. What do you like most about your job?

I enjoy the variety of books I work on, and I enjoy the fact that I have a constant flow of books at different stages of the process – it's never dull! I also enjoy helping authors to realise their dream of publishing a book – it's always really gratifying when an author tells you how excited they are to receive first proofs, or to hold a finished copy of their book.

4. What are the most challenging aspects (role or sector)?

In my role, the most challenging aspect is dealing with delays to the process – publication dates are usually very fixed, and if an author is late delivering, or something goes wrong along the way, it can be a real challenge trying to bring everything together on time.

In the sector as a whole, challenges mainly centre on the issues of pay and career advancement. Publishing is notoriously poorly paid, and while publishers are working on more pay transparency and a more level playing field, there are still problems. Diversity is also an issue – again, publishers are aware of this, but it's a big talking point at the moment and progress needs to be made.

5. How did your degree prepare you for your current role (or are there any skills/knowledge you developed which you are using now)?

Having an English degree is probably seen as the classic route into publishing, but really I don't think it matters what degree you have (in fact, publishing could probably do with more people with different degrees!) I do think that my degree prepared me for the critical thinking that's involved in my role, and gave me a general understanding of different kinds of writing, and it also prepared me for working to deadlines and juggling different projects.

6. How did you get to where you are now in your career (or what experiences helped you)?

Graduating in 2003, I was able to take a route that probably isn't generally available to graduates these days – I started as a receptionist with a very small independent publishing company. Doing that job for a year, I learned about the different departments within the company, and how they all worked together – editorial, production, publicity, etc. When an editorial assistant position became available, I applied, and moved into that role.

I then worked my way up within the industry with jobs at a couple of different companies – Assistant Editor, Editor, Senior Editor and eventually Editorial Director – before going freelance in 2014. Having got so far up the ladder, I'd decided that I'd ended up too far away from the actual

editorial work that I enjoyed, and freelancing as a copy-editor, writer and proofreader was a great way to get back into hands-on editing and ‘press reset’ on my career. Eventually in 2018 I heard about a great opportunity at Bloomsbury – a maternity cover contract as Editor for the Sport list (something I’m really interested in!) – and I ended up taking on that role. It was a brilliant reintroduction to in-house editorial work, where I do get to use those hands-on skills, and at the end of the contract I was then able to move over to take up a new role on the Business list, which needed an in-house editor for the first time.

7. What advice would you give to current students about getting into / starting out in your sector? (e.g. relevant experiences, supportive people, necessary education)

Be aware that it isn’t easy. Unfortunately publishing is still very competitive, and you need to stand out from the crowd. Consider roles other than editorial – it’s the one most people want to get into, but there are opportunities in other areas such as production, rights, sales, marketing, digital and publicity that can be a great route into the industry.

Also be aware that ‘I love books’ isn’t a good enough reason for an employer to want to take you on – you need to have an awareness of the industry itself and a basic knowledge of what’s happening in publishing at the moment. This can be as simple as doing some research into what different publishers are doing, the books they’re publishing, any current positive or negative news stories to do with the industry, etc. People just want to know that you’re engaged and you have

8. What is on the horizon within your industry that our students should know about? (positives or negatives)

Publishing in general has fared surprisingly well during the Covid crisis so far – we’ve been lucky that people have turned to reading during lockdown. But there are definitely challenges (in particular in my area of publishing – business books aren’t exactly everyone’s escapist cup of tea) and no one knows how the situation will develop.

The biggest positive thing in publishing right now is the focus on diversity and inclusion – for too long, publishing has been dominated by white, middle-class people, and things like low salaries and the London-centric nature of the industry has meant it’s been far too closed off to people outside of certain demographics. But publishers are finally trying to do something about this – many are now involved with apprenticeship schemes, or are offering loans for rental deposits, and there is a real focus on how diversity can be improved.

9. If you could give a current student one piece of advice on something you wish you’d have known prior to starting your career what would it be?

You’ll never earn a great deal of money! Working in publishing can be very rewarding, and it’s a privilege as a book lover to be able to work with authors and be involved in producing books, but unfortunately pay is still one of the biggest issues we face.

Thank you. If you would like to add any comments to the below, please do so.

- Tips for find jobs in this area.

The Bookseller’s Jobs website is a great resource. Also most publishers’ websites will have information about any current vacancies/internship opportunities, and the Society of Young Publishers is a great organisation that’s dedicated to helping people starting out in the industry.

- Advice to make their application stand out.

Do your research on the company you're applying to, and tailor your cover letter to match what they're looking for. Make sure you have a decent knowledge of what they publish and of the history and core values of the company (this can usually all be found online). Don't just list the skills you have – give examples of how you've used these skills (whether it's during an internship, a uni project, or in a job you may have had while at university – it doesn't have to be publishing-related).

- Suggestions for interviews.

Again, it's all about doing your research. You'll probably be asked whether you've read any of the company's books, or whether there are any books of theirs that you'd like to read, so it's good to have a couple of examples to hand. In general, for any interview, take some time to think of examples of times when you've handled a difficult situation (was an unexpected deadline sprung on you, or did someone drop out of a group project?) or when you've worked independently or had to rectify a mistake. And remember that interviewing is a two-way process – a decent interviewer isn't trying to catch you out and there aren't really any objectively 'wrong answers'; it's about interviewer and interviewee having an opportunity to assess whether the role would be a good fit. Don't be afraid to ask questions – you could ask which upcoming books your interviewer is particularly excited about working on, what a typical day in the life of the role you're applying for looks like, or what the biggest challenge of your interviewer's particular role is.