Hiring and Training Copy Editors for Scholarly Publishing

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Hiring a new copy editor is one of the most challenging and rewarding parts of my job. The decision to make a new hire is usually determined by the exit of an existing staff person, but may also be driven by the need to keep up with a constant influx of new submissions.

After securing official approval to add to my staff, the next step is to craft an ad to attract candidates with the right qualifications. This step can be surprisingly difficult. A good job ad must be more than just a list of required education and years of experience. It should give potential applicants a sense of the kind of working environment they can expect if they are hired, not only what is expected of them. It's a lot like dating: you wouldn't get very far if your dating profile simply listed all the things you want in a potential mate. You must also give a sense of the kind of person you are, what you enjoy, and how you express yourself. Potential matches should not be caught unawares, to meet up for a first date and feel you are not at all the person they expected. Likewise, if applicants have a sense of our company culture and working environment, they are better able not only to tailor their application materials to the specific position they are applying for, but also to understand what they are getting into.

Finding qualified copy editors is not easy. Few people outside our industry know what a scholarly society is or does, and even those already in publishing are unlikely to be aware that some of these societies have publications departments. Once I start to receive resumes and cover letters, the real work begins: evaluating candidates to determine who will move onto the next stage—phone interviews. After years of hiring copy editors, one thing I would recommend to applicants is to pay attention to the content of the job ad. Too many candidates apply from out of state, asking about remote or freelance work, when the ad clearly states we are hiring for an on-site, in-house position. Other candidates submit only a resume and no cover letter, leaving me wondering about their interest in the job or anything about them other than their previous positions

and where they went to college. A sincere, engaging cover letter is an effective tool for drawing the hiring manager's attention, and I highly recommend candidates include one when applying for jobs.

Once I've narrowed the field down to the most likely candidates—those who have the necessary qualifications and also who seem like a good fit for the job—I start setting up phone interviews. As an introvert, I find talking to people on the phone somewhat nerve-racking, but I've gotten better at it over time. I usually have a script of sorts to work from; it includes a spiel about the organization as well as a list of questions. The questions for each candidate are the same so I can review the answers and compare them against those of other applicants. The most difficult phone interviews are the ones in which I receive curt, one-word answers. As I'm asking questions of the candidate, I want more than a single sentence: the questions are designed to spark a conversation that flows, in which we can each learn more about one another and about the job: whether the candidate would be interested in and satisfied with the work, and whether they would be easy to train and work with. Candidates who give short responses and wait in silence for the next question are rarely called for a second interview. Some phone interviews develop organically as a conversation, and these are a delight—at these times I wish I had more than one available spot for a new copy editor.

After sifting through 180+ resumes and conducting 15+ phone interviews, I select 3 to 4 candidates to come for in-person interviews during which they will meet me (their potential future supervisor) as well as my direct supervisor (the American Meteorological Society [AMS] director of publications) and the rest of the copyediting team. Our interviews are simultaneously casual and comprehensive: the candidate takes a copyediting test and answers questions from me alone, meets with my supervisor (alone), and sits in a room with the 9 copy editors who will be their new coworkers, where they answer questions on any topic the copy editors choose, from their education and work experience to what *Lord of the Rings* character they see themselves as and why. The choice of questions is entirely up to the copy editors, and I am not present while they meet with the candidate. I want them to feel they can evaluate the potential new hire according to the criteria that matter to them, and I want the candidate to feel comfortable asking questions they might be hesitant to ask if their potential supervisor is in the room. After these interviews, the copy editors and I convene to

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discuss the candidate and compare notes. We often agree, although candidates can seem quite different in the one-on-one interview with me than with the other copy editors, and I've often been surprised by the copy editors' assessments.

Once a candidate is hired, the training process begins. New copy editors are typically in training for about 6 months before they start copyediting manuscripts without supervision. Several weeks after that, they are trained to work on proofs, accepting or rejecting the authors' edits and proofreading carefully to catch any errors left over from the manuscript editing stage.

First thing each week, I check the queues: manuscripts that are ready to be copyedited, proofs that need proofreading. The queues vary from journal to journal. Some broader-interest journals get so many submissions they are always full to bursting; other, more narrowly focused or technical journals receive fewer submissions and thus tend to have smaller queues. Copy editors are assigned their own queues to monitor, and manuscripts are handled on a "first come, first served" basis (with the exception of articles that have been designated as "expedited," which can happen for a number of reasons).

When the work day starts, a copy editor may choose first to check email or to finish up a paper or proof left over from the previous day. We aim for an average of one paper and one proof each work day, although each day is rarely wrapped up so neatly. Often, a more challenging paper will take a couple of days, and a copy editor might choose to do a week's worth of proofs in one afternoon.

The first several weeks of a copy editor's training consist of learning how to properly format reference lists in AMS style. Then the training progresses to title page elements (article title, DOI, authors' names and affiliations, corresponding author contact information, etc.), figure and table callouts, and section headings. The process of copyediting a paper proceeds along the same path: first references are carefully checked for accuracy and completeness and set in AMS style, then title pages are copyedited, figure callouts are placed, and section headings are styled. Reference sections are given such care they can take up most of the time of copyediting a paper. Copy editors occasionally contact an author to resolve queries during the manuscript copyediting stage, but more commonly queries are sent to the author in the proofs, where authors can respond to them and make any additional corrections.

Once the preliminary steps are done (references, title page, etc.), it's time to get down to the "meat" of the paper: the main body text. Copyediting this might take a day or more, or it might take only a few hours. Somewhat surprisingly, the length of time it takes to copyedit a paper rarely correlates directly to its length. Copyediting slows down significantly when the paper contains references that have not been cited in the text or citations that have no corresponding references. This may happen when the paper has undergone multiple rounds of revisions, and sections have been significantly reworked, rewritten, added, or omitted entirely.

Copy editors rely on a number of sources for style: the *Chicago Manual of Style* and *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* are essential, and along with these we have an 82-page in-house style guide that includes detailed instructions on how to handle every aspect of a manuscript, from citations and references to table and figure captions, number/unit pairs, author affiliations, and footnotes, as well as how to set dozens of words and phrases that are specific to the atmospheric and oceanic sciences.

Copy editors meet monthly to discuss style points and workflow matters, and they have joint meetings with the technical editors (subject-area experts) quarterly. Most copy editors are also involved in other aspects of AMS operations, including marketing and web development, which require additional meetings. Not a week goes by without at least a couple of meetings copy editors need to attend, which cuts into the time that can be spent copyediting. A delicate balance must be maintained between the many competing needs of the organization and the various hats we all wear, and the necessity of copyediting as many papers as possible: take too much time and authors start to complain; move too quickly and quality can suffer.

Since I've been the managing copy editor at AMS, I've hired 6 of the total of 10 full-time copy editors. As time has gone by, these newer staff members have flourished, establishing monthly board game nights and writing workshops, and expanding into roles in web development and other realms of technical support for the department. They've also become friends. These tight-knit relationships contribute to the overall happiness and thus productivity of my copyediting team, resulting in its functioning as a well-oiled machine. That's why I take such great care when selecting and training a new copy editor: it's a complex challenge, but the rewards make it all worthwhile.