

An Inside Look at Elsevier

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At the 2017 CSE Annual Meeting, Elsevier hosted a group discussion at its San Diego office with a small group of students and young professionals attending the meeting. Thirteen employees at Elsevier spent an hour answering the group's questions, giving the inside scoop on what it is like to work for one of the largest companies in scholarly publishing. Those employees' positions included content editor, training team lead, editorial project manager, product manager, and various positions in productions, acquisitions, and community engagement. Several of the employees mentioned that they enjoy working with scientists and doing something that really matters. Several began far from scholarly publishing, with degrees in English, English literature, and journalism.

The meeting began with an overview of Elsevier's background. Founded in 1880, Elsevier's headquarters are in Amsterdam, though there are offices in 77 countries around the world. A leading publisher, Elsevier currently publishes approximately 16 percent of the world's published research data and articles, with 1 billion scientific articles in its repositories. Despite this, Elsevier considers itself an information analytics company more than a publisher. It has been working to help doctors, scientists, and funders "solve problems to benefit humanity" by suggesting the best things for them to read, search, and do. These suggestions address the top problems scientists are facing, such as which research questions are the most vital.

Elsevier has been working on a project to create free "topic pages" on ScienceDirect, an online database of scientific, technical, and medical research articles. These pages provide a Wikipedia-style overview of terms that could be unfamiliar to readers, allowing them to click a highlighted term, read the summary, and press forward in the article they are reading, with the added benefit of obtaining the information from a peer-reviewed, reliable source. Besides clicking hyperlinked terms in an article, these pages can be accessed at sciencedirect.com/topics/.

Elsevier has recently been working to more accurately represent citation impact. When asked about the metrics Elsevier uses, the panel mentioned a new metric, CiteScore.

This metric is designed to be more comprehensive and transparent than Impact Factor. Also, in February 2017 Elsevier acquired Plum Analytics, a provider of powerful alternative metrics that cover captures, usage, mentions, social media, and citations. The wider coverage that alternative metrics provide is greatly needed, making it necessary to use "alternative" metrics as primary metrics. Elsevier is applying Plum Analytics to many of its research products, including Mendeley, a free social collaboration network, to make these altmetrics more widely available.

The group asked what the representatives thought about remote work, since Elsevier employs many remote workers. The answer was that remote work can be effective, but it is not for everyone. Face-to-face time is important, and communication is vital for those who work remotely. A remote worker needs to have the initiative to reach out to fellow employees and pick up the phone when needed. One panelist said she has a remote team that is very tight-knit, but it takes effort to make it that way. Discipline to stick to the task when out of the office is also important.

Is Elsevier a good place for someone just starting a career in editing or publishing? For technical copyediting, the answer was not really. Because of the sheer numbers of articles being submitted daily and the push to get the science out there as fast as possible, careful copyedits are becoming less and less practical, and machine learning is starting to take a bigger place in copyediting. At Elsevier, writing and copyediting go together, and there are more opportunities to work on articles that provide commentary about science than on scientific articles themselves. The representatives suggested that marketing is a good place to start in one's career, and stated that Elsevier is a nurturing environment for employees. As with most of the scientific publishing industry, Elsevier has been changing along with the times. It is hard to say exactly what jobs in publishing will be like in the future, but according to Elsevier's representatives, that is part of the fun.

This discussion was enlightening, both for understanding one of the world's largest scholarly publishing companies, and, as students and young professionals, for getting more acquainted with the world of scientific publishing in general.