

From the Outside In: Moving From Freelance to Full Time

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My career in editing began as a freelance medical and scientific editor. In the beginning, there was nothing quite like the feeling of striking out on my own, applying my editing services to the varied projects of a variety of clients: from research scientists, physicians, and educational companies to editors looking to subcontract work and larger publishers interested in expanding their freelance teams. I didn't realize it at the time, but beyond the usual benefits of working the freelance business paradigm—the freedom of project choice; the flexibility of the work schedule; the chance to create my own business name, motto, and website; and the absolute convenience of office location (daily commutes typically entailed a short stroll from my bedroom to the home office!)—the greatest benefit of all was the ability freelancing provided me to get to know my clients from the outside in. For the freelance editor, an outside-in approach allows them to observe and get to know their clients, the typical work projects sought by the client, and whether or not a long-term relationship with the client is something that the editor hopes to foster.

According to Webster's dictionary, freelancer is a noun indicating "...a person who pursues a profession without a long-term commitment to any one employer..." and one "...who acts independently without being affiliated with or authorized by an organization."¹ A person who acts independently of an employer must be both the employee and the employer. They must be comfortable playing any and all roles of the employer: the visionary, the manager, the legal counsel, the marketer, and the scheduler. And amid these diverse roles, they must also find the time to edit! During my years freelancing, I enjoyed the challenges of wearing so many organizational hats, in addition to and on top of the editing work that I was doing. I did precise, detailed work on a small scale. After all, a one-person business can take on only so many projects. I was my own



rate-limiting step. However, as time went on, for all the independence and experience that the freelance life offered me, I found myself longing to be part of a team. In a team, I could still do precise, detailed work, yes, but on a much larger scale and within the type of hierarchical structure that is the veritable sum of all its parts.

By advertising to, conversing with, securing projects from, and working for my clients, I was given a front-seat view not only into their research interests, project types, and writing abilities, but I could also gauge their general work philosophy. Who was their target audience? Did they need writing or editing expertise, or both? What was their mission statement? What were their ethics and goals? And most importantly, did my clients' mission, ethics, goals, and needed skill set align with my own? I began to realize that freelancing afforded me a very unique opportunity not available in other modes of employment: the ability to peer behind the curtain and within the inner workings of a client business and interact with the in-house team. Could I envision myself as a permanent part of this team? Or do I prefer to offer my editorial services from the outside, unmoored, without allegiance to any one person or company? Will these people with whom I work continue to

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be repeat clients, or could I envision their eventual transition from client to coworker?

The answer to these questions did not surface immediately, so I cast a wide net when searching for new projects. I grew my portfolio. I worked with individual physicians on short, patient case reports. I helped a group of international scientists choose a journal for manuscript submission that best reflected the kind of research they did. I worked directly with authors to prepare, write, and edit articles, and I worked with them indirectly, through companies looking to subcontract editorial work. I edited manuscripts for biology and biochemistry journals, and I edited manuscripts for medical journals of a variety of specialties and subspecialties. I composed and proofed examination questions for future nurses and physicians. I transcribed medical presentations, organized succinct summaries, and created review material. The more clients with whom I engaged and the more varied projects I took on, the more I learned about the type of editor I wanted to be and the type of subject matter on which I wanted to focus. In peering within the client mindset, I also began to recognize myself. As time went on with more clients encountered, I drew up a list of advantages and disadvantages to my freelance work style. Do I want to continue this adventure of ups and downs, from project to project, through times of editorial feast and famine, or do I want to stop and commit full time to a client with whom my professional goals, work ethic, and career objectives align?

In my life experience thus far, I have found that oftentimes, the answers we seek find us when we least expect them. Eventually, I found myself part of the freelance manuscript editing team of a large and world-renowned medical publisher. Through this position, I edited and formatted the

medical manuscripts of numerous medical specialties. I was able to interact with several in-house editorial teams: the graphics designers, production and layout, the proofreading team, fellow manuscript editors, and the managerial staff. Having an educational background in medicine, I was very pleased to be editing this subject matter on a regular basis. I really enjoyed the work that I was doing, and I was able to see how all the moving parts of this great publishing machine came together to transform a raw-ore manuscript into a carefully hewn and polished printable gem.

Over my 2 years working with this publisher, I appreciated the people with whom I collaborated to accomplish this work. As I became better acquainted with the team, they, in turn, came to know me. In the end, when the opportunity for a full-time position presented itself, I did not hesitate to apply. And when the time came to interview, it was not a sterile question/answer period between manager and stranger; rather, it was like a conversation between old friends. This led to me being hired, and the rest, as they say, is history. It will never cease to amaze me how predictably unpredictable life can be. For all of our planning, we often arrive at our current location simply by chance. When I think about how fortunate I am to have found my place, I find my thoughts drifting to a favorite poet of mine, Robert Frost, who said it best: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."^{2(p599)}

References and Links

1. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freelancer>
2. Frost R. The road not taken. In: Perrine L, Arp TR, eds. *Literature—Structure, Sound, and Sense*. 6th ed. Harcourt Brace College Publishers; 1993:599.