

The Future of Medical Editing: My Experience at the JAMA Network Internship

Melissa Leon

The JAMA Network journals—like many medical journals—publish extensive research on the effects of systemic racism on health and the health care industry. It is now well-understood that we need a health care workforce that matches the diversity of the United States and that of other countries, in terms of sex and gender, race and ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic background. Among many obstacles, an important one is a pathway problem; that is, not enough candidates join the field who are underrepresented in medicine. These opportunities and obstacles also apply to medical editing.

The JAMA Network medical editing internship program is designed for a third- or fourth-year college student who is underrepresented in medical editing. The goal is simple: to introduce young people to the field so they know to look for these sorts of jobs when they graduate and can succeed when they are hired.

We met a number of excellent candidates—so many that we plan to expand the program in the near future—and ended up bringing on Melissa Leon, a third-year student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Twice a week for 8 weeks, Melissa worked closely with manuscript editors, managing editors, editorial assistants, and our graphics and proofreading teams to see how an article goes from acceptance to publication. Along the way, she received the greatest hits of the *AMA Manual of Style*—everything from correct and preferred usage to statistical editing.

Our hope is that this program continues and expands and is adopted by other major medical journals so that,

like the field of medicine, medical editing can benefit from diversity and inclusiveness.

—Jen Phillis, Senior Manuscript Editor, the JAMA Network

Reflecting on my recent internship at the JAMA Network, I realize it was not just a professional engagement but a transformative journey. This experience has helped shape my career aspirations, honed my skills, and offered me invaluable insights into the field of medical editing. Here, I share my personal journey: the challenges faced, the lessons learned, and the profound impact this internship has had on my career trajectory.

Background

As a first-generation student at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), I have been pursuing my Bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in Professional Writing and Publishing. Going into university, I was unsure what I would do with my English degree on entering the workforce. I had always known that I wanted to go into the editing field, I just was not sure how. That was until I applied to the JAMA Network medical editing internship program for undergraduate students and received the experience that helped align my future endeavors. As good fortune would have it, I was accepted into the Summer 2024 program and became the first manuscript editing intern to participate in the program.

Gaining Experience

The JAMA Network includes 13 medical journals: *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)*, *JAMA Network Open*, and 11 specialty journals.

Over the 8-week internship, I worked closely with my manager, Jen Phillis, and 9 other members of the in-house JAMA Network editors. In the first week, I adapted to the schedule of the hybrid internship; on the first day I would meet with a member of the editorial team and review a section of the research manuscript articles (i.e., abstract, results, tables, figures, and reference section). The next day, I worked remotely and practiced asynchronously what

Melissa Leon is a third-year student at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of their employers, the Council of Science Editors, or the Editorial Board of Science Editor.

<https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-4801-08>

CONTINUED

I had learned the previous day. The *AMA Manual of Style* was the foundation of my editing. I referred back to it for any questions or specific technicalities regarding editing a research article. From correct and preferred usage to statistics queries, I referred to it often.

Over the 2 months, I was given practice assignments to become familiarized with editing different sections and the requirements. Then I worked on editing different types of manuscripts, such as research letters, commentaries, and full research articles. Afterward, I met with my assigned editorial colleague for the week and received written and verbal feedback for my edits. Feedback was a crucial part of the internship because I wanted to learn how I could improve my editing toolbox. Additionally, I asked multiple questions and took notes of the revisions so that I could keep them in mind for the next manuscript.

Through the JAMA Network, an article-based network for physicians and researchers, I collaborated with other team members on the editorial team, including editors, HR specialists, and graphics specialists. I attended a JAMA Network town hall meeting, a collaborative meeting where the editorial and publishing staff met and shared their progress in their specific subdivision of the JAMA Network. Working with JAMA Network's diverse editorial teams provided me with different perspectives and intelligence from various people, including the specific role every team member plays in the transformation of a raw manuscript to a polished, published article. The internship has also shown me the importance of collaboration and remaining open-minded to different editing techniques. I have gained a deep understanding of the technical aspects of medical editing and learned how to effectively communicate with authors to query for specific data regarding their research.

Editing authors' and physicians' research manuscripts has proven to be one of the backbones of society, as it is among one of the most important jobs for clear and concise communication. I have also learned that when you are passionate about something, your job will not feel like work; rather, it will be a source of joy and accomplishment over the course of a lifetime.

Long-Term Goals

Interning at the JAMA Network has reinforced my love of the written word. I can more clearly visualize the trajectory of my career path in this field and how to become a successful manuscript editor in the future. Being able to follow my dreams while truly enjoying my work is something that I have desired since I first began my undergraduate training.

Thanks to my experience this summer, on my return to school in the fall, I plan to take more classes specifically geared toward the editing industry, as I want to expand my knowledge on the editing and publishing field. Furthermore, I will begin a position to work in the UIC Writing Center, a collaborative place for writers to talk to fellow peer tutors regarding their writing. I believe my communication skills, my experience with editing, and my ability to listen and receive feedback will perfectly align with this position in the fall, and I look forward to bringing the skills I learned at the JAMA Network with me in the future.

The JAMA Network internship has solidified and confirmed my love of the editing and writing field, and it has improved my skills, such as attention to detail, organization, and clear communication, all of which will serve me well in my career aspirations and my future.