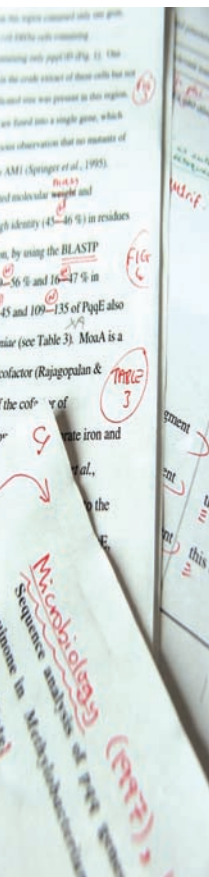


Gradline aims to inform and entertain members in the early stages of their career in microbiology. If you have any news or stories, or would like to see any topics featured, contact **Jane Westwell** (j.westwell@sgm.ac.uk)

Careers in scientific publishing



If you are nearing the end of your PhD you are probably considering your career options. For those who want to continue in research, decision making can be fairly simple. But, if you know your future lies away from the bench, it can be hard to find a new direction.

As your supervisor will have told you (possibly many times!) publishing and disseminating research findings are essential to the success of all academic scientists. What s/he may not have mentioned is the range of career opportunities that publishing offers to scientists with a PhD.

Scientific publishing falls into three main categories: books, journals and periodicals. All of these can include an element of e-publishing. Scientists tend to find a role either as a commissioning editor for a book publisher or as an editor in the production of books and journals.

Commissioning editors are usually employed full-time by a publishing house and their responsibilities include researching future topics, identifying suitable authors and supporting them and the book throughout the process. Most commissioning editors attend conferences to keep up-to-date with recent research and make contacts. They may also sell books on conference exhibition stands.

Staff editor, copy-editor, desk editor and production editor all relate to the people involved in preparing books and journals for printing. They are

responsible for getting the book or submitted articles from 'raw material' to a finished product. This includes checking spelling and grammar, making sure units of measurement are the same throughout the document, that tables and illustrations are integrated with the text and ensuring that references are consistent with the house style. Editors also look at the style and clarity of the writing and may need to make changes, such as re-wording sentences or dividing long sections into shorter paragraphs. In the past, much of this work was carried out on hard copy, but the vast majority of journals now accept online submissions and most copy-editors work on-screen. Dealing with authors at this stage can require tact and diplomacy, especially if you are proposing significant changes to their writing. Editors may also be involved in other preparations for printing, e.g. allocating page numbers and checking proofs. More specialized posts may require electronic typesetting skills, using software such as Quark Xpress, or the creation of web pages. Most editing posts are full-time, but there are opportunities for experienced copy-editors and proofreaders to work freelance.

If you love your science but don't want to remain in active research, a career in scientific editing can be a good choice. It offers the chance to stay up-to-date with cutting edge science, keeps you in contact with the research community and offers you the opportunity to apply

the transferable skills (e.g. project management, writing) and specialist knowledge developed during your PhD. A good eye for detail and a grasp of English grammar are essential. If you are still not sure about this career and have the financial resources, there are one-day taster courses available and also distance-learning courses in proofreading and copy-editing. If you know that you want to work in publishing it is a good idea to get some relevant experience, such as editing student or departmental publications.

Jobs in publishing are advertised weekly in Monday's *Guardian* (www.jobs.guardian.co.uk) and in *New Scientist* (www.newscientistjobs.com).

Further information

SGM journals (www.sgmjournals.org).

The Association of Learned Society and Professional Society Publishers (www.alpsp.org).

The British Society for Immunology website (<http://immunology.org/careers/p5.htm>) features a profile of a commissioning editor.

The Publishing Skills Group website (www.workinpublishing.org.uk) contains extensive information and downloads on book, journals and magazine publishing, with links to other organizations and jobs pages.

The Publishing Training Centre at Book House (www.train4publishing.co.uk) provides information on publishing careers including higher education courses. Book House also offers distance learning courses in proof reading and copy editing in addition to its open courses.

The Society for Editors and Proofreaders (www.sfep.org.uk) offers accreditation and registration to editors and proofreaders – useful for freelancers. It also offers training.

Trevor Horwood, an established freelance copy-editor and author of *Freelance Proofreading and Copy-editing: A Guide* (ISBN 0-95239-747-1), hosts www.copyediting.co.uk which includes a range of FAQs for the potential editor.

A job in ... journal publishing

Name Natalie Wilder
Age 28
Present occupation
 Senior Staff Editor *Journal of General Virology*
Previous employment/ relevant work experience
 Staff Editor *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology* / *Journal of Medical Microbiology*
Education
 University College London: PhD Viral Molecular Genetics (2003);
 Oxford University: MBiochem (4-year first degree in Biochemistry) (1999)



Q What attracted you to an editorial post rather than pursuing a research career?

I first started thinking about publishing as a career when I was in the final year of my biochemistry degree, but I wasn't sure, so I decided to do a PhD because it opened up a lot of different avenues. When I finished my PhD, I knew that I wanted to stay in science, but research wasn't for me – I got frustrated with the repetitive nature of lab work and the 'nanofocus' of working on one specific project. Journal publishing seemed like an interesting prospect, as you stay at the forefront of scientific research in several diverse areas. So, while I was writing up my thesis, I sent off my CV 'on spec' to several publishers and applied for any publishing jobs that were advertised.

Q How did you find the transition from lab-based to office-based work?

I was asked this at my interview at SGM for the Staff Editor post! I didn't find it a problem at all – I had been writing my thesis for several months and analysing data for a while before that, so I was already completely comfortable

working at a computer, rather than in the lab. I also don't miss working with smelly and toxic reagents! A lot of skills that you learn during a PhD are very transferable into a publishing job – for example, time management, writing style and good presentation.

Q What does your current job involve?

Working on *JGV* is great, because every manuscript is different – I could be editing a paper about an HIV vaccine one day, potato viruses and famine the next, then Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease the day after that! Copy-editing is the 'nuts and bolts' of my job – this involves checking accepted manuscripts for spelling, grammar, scientific consistency and readability. The standard of authors' writing varies enormously and there's something very satisfying about editing a manuscript where the science is fascinating, but badly written, and turning it into something that people find interesting to read. The other tasks that I spend varying amounts of time doing include sorting out graphics for the figures, preparing issues of the journal (allocating page numbers, etc.), checking proofs, dealing with correspondence from authors, editors, freelancers and printers, helping to select cover pictures for the journal, updating

web pages and preparing monthly and annual statistics. I also attend national and international meetings and conferences to represent *JGV* and SGM.

Q How do you see your future?

At the moment, I'm very happy in my current position. Senior Staff Editor is my first managerial post, so I'm gaining confidence in managing *JGV* and its employees, as well as building up experience in the publishing industry as a whole. I definitely plan to stay in journal publishing in the long term – I really think that I've found my niche and a job that I love. I'm quite ambitious, so in the future, I'd like to increase my responsibilities and move up the career ladder in publication management.

Q What advice can you offer people looking for a similar career?

You need to be very precise in your written work, and to have a good 'eye' for spotting errors and inconsistencies. Any experience that you gain will help – for example, checking other people's work (particularly those who are not native English speakers), entering essay competitions or preparing your own papers for publication. Think carefully about whether it is editing or writing your own material that you enjoy, as these are two complementary, but separate, career choices. Some journals do offer scope for copy-editors to write articles, so check job descriptions carefully. You must be able to work to deadlines without sacrificing standards, and to deal politely and tactfully with members of the scientific community. My final advice, if you feel that this is the career for you, is to go for it – I find my job hugely rewarding and satisfying.