



Why Copy Editing

< I entered the world of copy editing quite by accident. I was in college, studying journalism at the University of Minnesota, and needed a job. A friend told me the Minnesota Daily (student newspaper) was looking for copy editors. I didn't really know what a copy editor was, but when I heard a brief job description--get paid to read the paper--I was intrigued. I took the editing test and was hired, and have loved the craft ever since.

Carrie Camillo
The Washington Post
ACES treasurer

I got into the newspaper business to tell the truth as accurately as possible on any given day and to do it better the next time; copy editing lets me help the whole paper to achieve that goal.

James L. Franklin
Copy Editor
Boston Globe

Copy editing keeps me off the streets and out of trouble. In the past, I would scream into the wind at advertisements with misplaced apostrophes, embarrass dinner companions when "vegetarian" was misspelled, and risk arrest on the street rubbing out errors on signs placed in front of businesses. Copy editing allows a safe and minimally profitable alternative. Plus, I get to learn Quark Xpres.

Kate Karp
Intern
Seal Beach (Calif.) Sun

For me, copy editing isn't just a job, it's a calling. I've always been pretty good with words and what better way for me to use my skills than to help others improve. Since there are so few black men in the business I also feel that I have to serve as a role model to show others that black men cannot only do the job but also thrive in it.

Jerry McCormick
special sections copy editor
San Diego Union-Tribune

I'm not sure whether I chose copy editing or whether copy editing chose me, but I do

remember the excitement and fulfillment I felt as a young reporter and editor given a rookie reporter's story to edit. It was a chance to help them tell their stories better and to share what I had learned about writing. The fuller understanding of copy editing's rewards--the ability to serve as the readers' advocate, the feeling of being close to history in the making, the duty of upholding the standards of a great paper--would come later. For whatever frustrations the craft brings, there is always the satisfaction of knowing that copy editing is crucial to ensuring credibility for work that has the potential to do great public good.

Vince Rinehart

National copy desk chief

The Washington Post

Part of the problem with defining the position of copy editor is that the position is a movable feast. If a copy editor is what a copy editor does, it's difficult to sketch out a common job description because copy editors do very different things at different papers.

At the most basic level, a copy editor is someone who edits copy for grammar, punctuation, spelling and accuracy and writes headlines.

Beyond that, a copy editor can be someone who...

writes captions

proofreads pages

edits photos

compiles columns of briefs or shorts

reads for taste and potential libel

reads for focus and organization

acts more like an editor on an originating desk, supervising reporters, shaping stories and filling holes

coaches reporters

does any or all of those things and designs pages too

primarily designs pages and paginates

paginates for the better part of a shift

John Russial

Associate professor

University of Oregon

BR>When I was growing up, my mother would pay my brothers and me a nickel for every mistake we found while we were reading.

We looked in books, magazines and newspapers for grammar, spelling or typographical errors. (Our small town newspaper, which shall remain nameless, was a literal gold mine.) It started as an incentive to get us to read more, but it ended up as a career path for me.

I love the gotcha! moment in copy editing when my language skills, journalism training, knowledge of current events and passion for trivia come together and I make a brilliant catch.

Colleen Almeida Smith

Night Editor

Tulsa World

I had a knack for grammar in high school that made copy editing a good fit. But I've realized that editing is so much more than comma splices and conjunctions. The work we do keeps some of the most embarrassing errors out of print. Our headlines are the most-read words in

the newspaper. And you'll be hard-pressed to find a smarter, more interesting group in any newsroom.

Nicole Stockdale
Copy editor
The Wichita Eagle