

TO: Recipient
FROM: Mara Lowhorn
SUBJECT: Potential Steps for Pursuing Literary Journal Editorship
DATE: 4 February 2022

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to my reader, who is interested in a career in the literary journal publishing field.

Literary Journal Background

Editing for a literary journal is a rare and highly sought-after position in the world of publishing. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job outlook for editors is projected to grow by at least 5% within the next decade, which is promising news for someone like you who aims to enter the workforce soon (Bureau). Literary journal editing requires someone who is truly passionate about writing, reading, editing, and promoting the value of literary journals to the greater publishing world.

With your bachelor's and in-progress master's degree in creative writing, a position in this field would be a good fit for you. You have a lot of hands-on experience with this type of job, as shown by your time as a reader and editor for the WKU English Department's *Zephyrus* publication and your internship with *Hunger* press, clearly demonstrating your "skill[s] at identifying good stories, recognizing writing talent, and interacting with writers" (Bureau).

Poet and managing editor of *Pleiades* literary magazine, Jenny Molberg, claims that her writing experience has helped hone her editing skills, and vice versa. After realizing the sheer number of submissions that literary journals typically receive, "rejection [has] become a bit easier to cope with" and she is "sure to spend a lot of time with submissions and give them their due attention" (qtd. in Edwards). Clearly, both the concrete and soft skills that you have developed during college will translate well into such a career.

Steps to Success

As you enter your final few semesters of your MFA program and approach graduation, there are several key points to consider while striving toward a career in literary editing. There is no clear-cut path to a career in this field, but there are many things you can do to set yourself up for future professional successes. In the following pages, I have outlined the three most important steps for you to take as you embark on this journey.

Professional Development

The concept of professional development may seem abstract, but at its core, it can be most applied to the world of literary editing through the lens of "making yourself known ("Editor

Talk” 03:36-03:50).” As in other sectors, a big part of this sort of development is networking. It is imperative to make connections with other editors, writers, or anyone else in the literary world.

In the world of social media, it is exceptionally easy to contact someone through direct messages, reach out to editors at literary journals or even the marketing accounts of those literary journals themselves. Freelance Editor and YouTuber Book and Quill recommends “following as many publishers and publishing-people as you can” to stay up to date on news, potential job openings, and “what the current conversation is” within the profession (“10 Tips” 02:44-03:15).

It is important to establish connections in the real world too, which is especially easy in the community of professors, students, and alumni within WKU’s English Department. Not only do many English personnel have established relationships with publishers and literary presses, but the department also hosts a Creative Writing Reading Series, which offers attendees a chance to hear insights from published writers. Similarly, Bowling Green’s SOKY Bookfest can be an extremely productive event for someone interested in the world of literary publication, as it allows you countless opportunities to interact with published authors and establish even more connections with them.

Attending classes, conferences, and workshops, whether open-admission or sponsored by a specific association, is another way to branch out, make connections, and gain new insight about the field. WKU English alumni Rachel Hoge suggests to aspiring editors and publishers: “absorb all the wisdom you can. Read more. Revise more” (qtd. in Mason). Enrolling in online development courses through SkillShare or Coursera would grant you the opportunity to apply Hoge’s advice and subsequently help you maintain your editing skills and possibly learn about new aspects of the craft that could make you a more well-rounded editor. By pursuing ventures like these, you can work on building your own community of valuable resources and support, which will be of great benefit to you as you begin to break into this profession.

Portfolio Construction

Compiling a collection of your professional and creative work will go a long way toward showing publishers and potential future employers your editing and writing skills, as well as your penchant for understanding what publishers want to see from submissions. As referenced earlier by Molberg, being a published writer can give you an advantage within the field because it shows you understand the publication process from both sides of the submission box (qtd. in Edwards).

Because of your ample prior experience with both writing and editing for publications, it should not be too difficult for you to find samples of your work to compile for a portfolio. Examples of your editing work can include the assignments you completed for Dr. Jones’s Editing and Publishing course, as well as pieces you edited for Hunger Press, the WKU *Herald*, and the English Department’s literary magazine, *Zephyrus*. It will be beneficial to include samples of your writing as well, such as your poems that have been published in various journals and those

that have won awards like the Jim Wayne and Mary Ellen Miller Poetry Award and WKU's Gender and Women's Studies Writing Contest.

In the digital age, portfolios can take many shapes. Many writers and editors, much like WKU alumni Rachel Hoge, "start [their] own website to showcase some of the articles and more creative pieces [they have] written that were featured in high profile journals and papers" (Mason). Sites like Wix, Weebly, and SquareSpace allow users to link online publications, share documents or files that contain work samples, or simply post their work directly to the website itself. On the other hand, many writers and editors have turned to social media applications like Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest to showcase their work through a more creative, visual medium. Also common is to link one's interactive/hyperlinked CV or a Google Doc within a personal bio or to link their contact information across various social media platforms. Any of these options would be a smart way of making your work accessible to those who are interested in viewing it.

Internship and/or Volunteer Work

Even if you can't secure one of the coveted paid positions at a literary journal right out of grad school, it is still important to stay involved with a publication, journal, or press in whatever capacity you can. You already have internship experience from your time at Hunger Press, so it would benefit you to either transfer to a higher position within that press, or to seek an internship elsewhere in order to broaden your skill set.

As WKU alumnus Kelly Kamp advises students "to do internships or participate in real-world English experiences, even if it is just editing a friend's papers throughout a semester or writing a blog (qtd. in Miller). Your past experiences within this field are giving you a good start, but it is important to build on your past work and pursue "real-world English experiences," just like Kamp said. *New Yorker* copyeditor Mary Norris argues that staying involved with a literary magazine or press is a way of maintaining your skill and learning more about the "house style" of certain literary publications, which you could undoubtedly use to your advantage (qtd. in Literary Hub).

Literary journals are in perpetual need of volunteers to help read and sort through their submission "slush pile." Though such work is usually unpaid, it is valuable to get your foot in the door at different publications. It is yet another way to add experience to your portfolio and make connections with a new set of people. The CLMP (Community of Literary Magazines and Presses) website keeps an up-to-date list of reader and editor openings and potential job opportunities on their website. I recommend checking their website regularly to see what kind of jobs you would be interested in applying for.

An agent at BookEnds literary agency claims that "anywhere you can be working, doing things, and learning...reading blogs, tweets, watching Youtube videos... will help you" ("Landing a

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Publishing Internship” 12:30-13:20). In other words, stay involved, no matter how small the position or the pay may be at first.

Final Recommendations

These are not the only tasks you should be focusing on, nor are there *only* three steps until you achieve a successful career in this profession. Completing your MFA and earning your degree is another logical step on your journey, as your time in school is valuable toward honing your craft and pursuing countless networking opportunities. During the remainder of your time in school and after you graduate, you may view this memo as a source of guidance as you embark on the journey of your editing and publishing career.

Best,

Mara Lowhorn

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