

What a Managing Editor Should Know: Backward and Forward Reflections

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In the late 1960s, F Peter Woodford (president of CBE, 1968-69) was awarded a grant from the National Library of Medicine to train people with MD degrees or PhD degrees in the biological sciences to manage scientific journals. He was then the executive editor of the *Journal of Lipid Research*, one of the Rockefeller University Press journals. During the 3 years of the grant, Woodford trained 3 groups of aspiring editors. I was fortunate to have been one of his trainees.

Woodford began with the premise that none of us knew anything about how a journal operated or, indeed, anything about publication in general. We started by taking his course on scientific writing, which he gave to the Rockefeller University students. We were confined in the basics of typography, proofreading, and copyediting by the able staff of the Rockefeller University Press journals under the guidance of Margaret Broadbent (president of CBE, 1975-76). Woodford invited the editors of various journals to talk to us about scheduling, manuscript flow, the review process, and how to set up an editorial office. He gave us lessons in indexing; he even gave us lessons in the elements of double-entry bookkeeping. The highlight of my group's training came when we went to the offices of *Science* in Washington, DC, for a week to help edit the articles for the issue on the Moon rocks.

I have now been a scientific editor for about 25 years. I have worked both in journal offices and at the opposite end of the process as an author's editor. I have been an author myself and have reviewed articles submitted to journals. After 25 years of experience, if I were designing a course for training managing editors, what would I include?

The 1st topic that I would address is the role of the managing editor. Managing editors do different things for different journals. If 5 people with the title of managing editor


were asked what they did, they would all give different job descriptions. However, they would all probably agree that getting the journal out on time is the major responsibility of a managing editor.

In order to meet a journal's demanding schedules, a managing editor must have good organizational and people skills. Organizational skills include the ability to make a realistic schedule for producing the journal. What is the process by which a journal is published? How much time should each step in the process take? What kind of forms or form letters can be used to expedite each step? How much of the process can be computerized? What kind of computer databases would be helpful? How much editing can be done on each article, given the time constraints? Is it better to use inhouse editors or freelance editors? Should the articles be typeset by the printer, or should the journal accept camera-ready copy, or even electronic versions, from the authors? How should an editorial office be set up to produce the journal as efficiently as possible?

Because there are so many different types of journals, there are many ways of organizing and running a journal office and many ways of scheduling the work flow. No one way is the right way. A course for training managing editors should include discussion of the many ways to set up and run a journal office. Examples from real life would be useful.

The skills of developing procedures and following them are fairly easy to teach and to learn. The skills of dealing with people, however, are much less tangible and, therefore, harder to teach and learn. Many people contribute to the publication of a journal, and managing editors must be able to work well with all of them. The editor-in-chief and the editorial board, authors, reviewers, copyeditors, proofreaders, printers, and administrative help—the managing editor deals with them all. A course for training managing editors should include discussion of the roles of these people and how the managing editor can work with them efficiently and amicably.

What would I include in a course for

training managing editors? Everything that has anything to do with running a journal, except for double-entry bookkeeping. 

◆ Resources in Training

Contact information for some programs that came to our attention is shown below. If you know of others, please send the information to the *CBE Views* Editor for possible publication at a later date.

CBE Short Course for Journal Editors

This 2-day short course presented just before the annual meeting offers much information for managing editors of scientific publications. Contact: CBE, telephone 847-480-9080; fax 847-480-9282; e-mail cbehdqts@aol.com

University of Chicago Publishing Program

This offering includes a 1-, 2- or 3-year certificate program plus individual courses. Contact: telephone 773-702-1724.

EEl Communications

This Alexandria, Virginia, organization offers a 1-day workshop, "Advanced Editing", and a 2-day workshop, "Managing the Publications Department". Contact: telephone 888-2LEARN2 (888-253-2762).

Georgetown University

The Editing and Publications Certificate Program requires completion of 6 courses within 2 years. Contact: telephone 202-687-6969.

The George Washington University

Certificates in the Publication Specialist and Desktop Publishing Specialist programs are available in addition to individual courses. Contact: telephone 202-973-1150; fax 202-973-1165.

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