

The Changing Life of a Manuscript Editor

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This often lighthearted session on the evolution of the role of a manuscript editor started with a comparison of the life of an editor 50 years ago with the fast-paced, high-technology world in which we operate today. Scholarly publishers have embraced many new technologies over the years in an effort to expedite time to publication, reduce the person-hours necessary to edit a paper, and decrease the potential for error. Tasks that previously took days or even weeks have been reduced to mere hours with the introduction of editorial software tools, e-mail, and online resources for checking citations, references, and image quality. Online manuscript-submission and peer-review systems have eliminated the need to submit multiple paper copies and

send the papers via mail. Those processes, which previously required many hours of logging and following up, can now be managed online with powerful reporting and tracking capabilities. The influx of new technology available to editors has dramatically altered their roles in many ways.

The National Academy of Sciences' Norman Grossblatt recalled the workflows and processes that have changed over the course of his 50-year career. According to Grossblatt, many of the manuscript editors of today have never put pencil to paper in their work. The tools of the trade have changed dramatically—from the days of manual typewriters, carbon paper, and convoluted punctuation (such as creating an exclamation mark by combining a period and an apostrophe) to electric typewriters to word processors and, of course, to the powerful editing tools that are available today.

Another part of the manuscript editor's life that has been greatly improved is "looking things up". We have gone from the tedium of scouring numerous dictionaries and other resources to a simple request on Google. Grossblatt indicated that one of his preferred online resources is <http://onelook.com>, which almost instantly searches more than 1000 dictionaries for more than 13 million words and presents them directly as they appear in the dictionaries. The tasks of formatting references and making copies have vastly improved as well.

Leslie Neistadt discussed the impact of online submission, peer review, and manuscript tracking on the role of a manuscript editor. The staff of the *Journal of Athletic Training* reviewed a number of online man-

uscript-management systems and chose the one that best suited their needs. The adoption of an online system has increased submission rates by 20%, which unfortunately included an influx of unsuitable papers, but these are quickly (and politely) rejected. In addition, they are seeing more geographic diversity in their submissions. Other benefits of online submission include a streamlined workflow, detailed and informative reports, and decreased costs for the publisher, authors, and reviewers. Costs are cut via the online solutions, which are also better for environmental reasons because of the elimination of printed copies and of the need to ship papers back and forth. The only lost component in online management systems is personal interaction, but this important component can be addressed by an attentive staff that maintains communication with editors, authors, and reviewers.

With the influx of new technologies in the world of scholarly publishing, the role of manuscript editor has evolved to that of author's editor; many authors need help. According to Michele Vivirito, of Amgen, editors are relied on to help with various features of Microsoft Word, online submission to journals, and author's guidelines, as well as writing for lay audiences and English as an international language.

Clearly, the role of manuscript editor has maintained a rate of change similar to that of many other aspects of our lives, owing to the developing technologies that ease the process for both editors and authors and get science to readers as quickly and accurately as possible. 📄