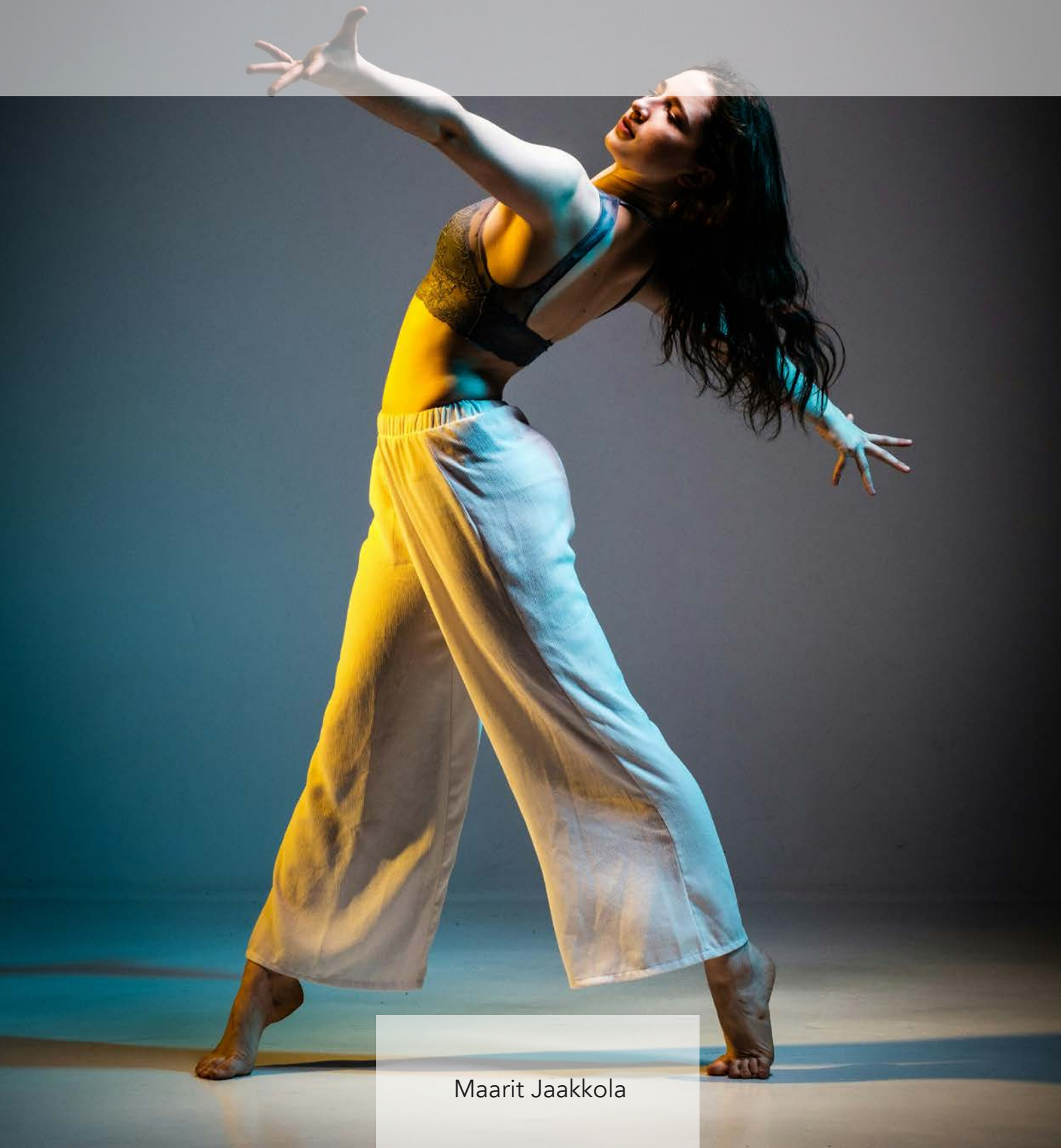
From Author to Editor

Developing Academic Editorial Competence



Maarit Jaakkola

From Author to Editor: Developing Academic Editorial Competence

Maarit Jaakkola 2026

https://doi.org/10.57943/hxz7-9d91

NordMedia Network Online Educational Resources
Nordicom, University of Gothenburg
P.O. Box 713, SE-405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden
http://nordmedianetwork.org

Cover image: Morgan Petroski / Unsplash 2019

From Author to Editor

Developing Academic Editorial Competence

Maarit Jaakkola

Content

1. Introduction

Academic scholarship encompasses a wide range of activities that both require and cultivate research expertise. Beyond conducting research itself, scholars write and edit their own manuscripts as well as provide comments on others' texts. They peer review manuscripts, teach, coach and supervise students in writing, deliver lectures, and serve on editorial boards. One important scholarly activity that receives comparatively little attention, however, is editing the work of others.

Academic editing is a broad term referring to the process of initiating, supporting and improving the process of producing a scholarly manuscript without altering its intellectual contribution or authorship. The editor's role encompasses a wide range of activities, from initiating and evaluating proposals and accepting submissions to guiding manuscripts through review and revision, as well as improving language, style, structure, coherence, consistency, and adherence to disciplinary and publication standards. Although often regarded as a practical task, editing is also inherently strategic and pedagogical, requiring editors to support authors in developing their ideas and communicating them more effectively.

For many scholars, editing becomes part of academic life almost unnoticed, accompanying increasing levels of responsibility, autonomy, and leadership. Early-career researchers typically begin by commenting on colleagues' drafts and providing informal feedback. Later, they may be invited to co-edit a special issue, join the editorial team of an edited volume, or assume broader editorial responsibilities for journals or book series. Yet despite its central role in scholarly communication, editing and editorship are rarely addressed explicitly during doctoral education or formal research training.

To fill this gap, this open educational resource introduces the fundamentals of academic editing. Its purpose is to support young researchers especially in social sciences and the humanities in making the transition from author to editor by presenting the principles, responsibilities, and practical skills involved in scholarly editing. The booklet forms part of a series of educational resources for early-career researchers that address important aspects of academic life which are often learned informally rather than through formal doctoral training.

It is worth highlighting that the journals that we have in mind for this booklet are the so-called SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities) journals or non-STEM journals, as distinct from medicine, engineering, and the natural sciences (or STEM, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathema-

tics). The discussions on scientific editing have largely been promoted in STEM fields, which further motivates the advancement of editing dimensions from the non-STEM perspectives.

We begin by placing editing within the broader landscape of academic expertise. We then introduce the fundamental distinction between occasional and permanent editors and discuss their respective roles and responsibilities. Thereafter, we examine the principal international frameworks governing publication ethics and scholarly publishing that every editor should know. We then turn to the practical aspects of becoming an editor and managing editorial processes before concluding with suggestions for continuing professional development.

2. Editing as part of academic expertise

Despite its central role in scholarly communication, academic editing has received relatively little explicit attention as a professional practice. Much of the knowledge associated with editing is acquired informally through experience and mentorship rather than through formal training, giving it the character of tacit professional knowledge. Editorial practice is, therefore, seen as highly contextual and shaped by individual judgment, disciplinary traditions, and publication cultures. For example, Pickren (2020) declares that there are almost as many approaches to editing as there are editors. Norton (2023) characterizes editors with organic and intuitive approaches as "the best cooks", "who prepare a meal by seeing what they have in the fridge and cupboard, --- creating as they go" (ibid., p. 1). However, he remarks, many of us are hopeless in the kitchen without recipes.

> "Many editors are cooks who create as they go, but most of us need recipes."

Indeed, reducing editorial competence to an innate or purely subjective quality akin to the notion of artistic genius does little to support the professional development of individual editors or the advancement of editing as a scholarly practice. Not opening up the secrets of the trade is, of course, to some extent in the interests of those who provide commercial editorial services, but it ultimately limits the dissemination of good practices and the development of a shared professional knowledge base.

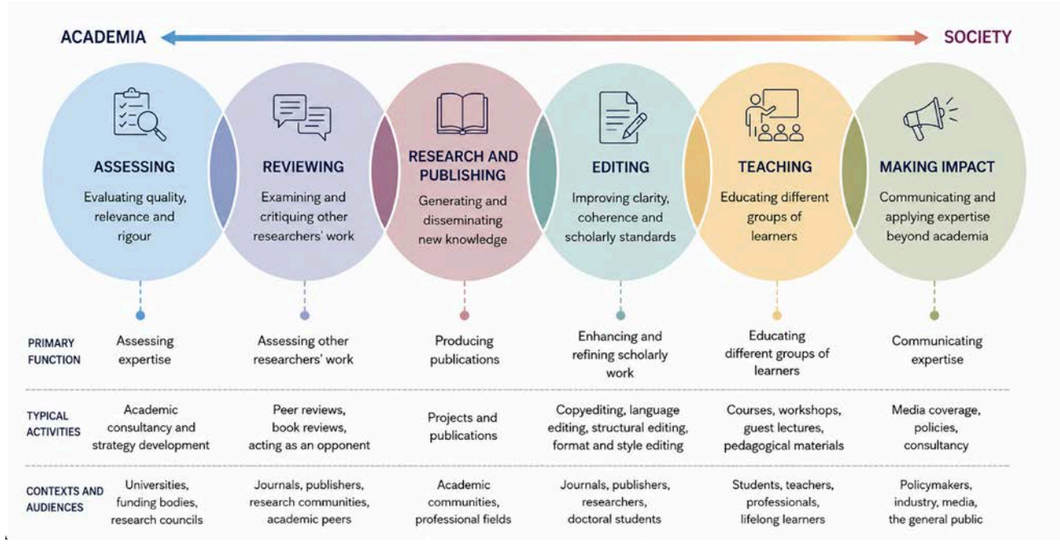
The increasing availability of generative AI has further raised questions about the future of editing, particularly in relation to language correction and stylistic refinement. While many have seen potential in artificial intelligence as editing assistance (see e.g. Castillo-González et al., 2022; Sallam et al., 2024), others have suggested that AI may erode, deskill and degrade core academic activities and that the role of journal editors and reviewers could become less tangible and significant as AI systems increasingly perform tasks historically carried out by humans (see e.g. Gendron et al., 2022). The most debaters have, however, concluded that publishers, editors, reviewers and authors must work collaboratively with AI rather than be replaced by it (Lund et al., 2025).

Here, it is worth noticing that academic editing extends far beyond the technical tasks. At its core lies the editorial judgment: the ability to evaluate scholarly quality, balance competing considerations, support authors' development, and make informed decisions about coherence, originality, audience, and publication standards. These interpretive and relational dimensions remain fundamentally human responsibilities.

Doctoral students acquire very different levels of familiarity with the editorial processes depending on whether they complete a monograph or an article-based dissertation as part of their studies. Those pursuing an article-based dissertation interact closely with several journal editors throughout the publication processes, whereas monograph authors typically have little or no exposure to editorial work, unless they choose to subsequently develop their dissertation into a book published by an academic press.

Academic editorship is widely characterized as demanding, highly responsible, and often insufficiently recognized within academia (see e.g. Serpa et al., 2020; Vuong, 2022; Mondal, 2026). Editorial work is typically carried out without extra compensation alongside research, teaching, administration, and other academic responsibilities, making it a substantial additional commitment. Editors operate within a system of academic capitalism, in which increasing pressures to publish, compete for prestige, and improve journal metrics can conflict with the values of careful scholarship, collegiality, and thoughtful editorial judgment (Hay, 2016).

Figure 1. Editing as one of te contexts of applying academic expertise.



Nevertheless, editorship can be understood as a natural extension of the researcher's and author's role. At the core of academic work lies the production of knowledge through research. This core expertise is applied in a range of complementary activities that contribute to the dissemination, evaluation, and development of scholarship, including teaching, peer review, academic book reviewing, editorship, and broader forms of societal engagement. Rather than constituting a separate profession, editorship builds upon the same scholarly competencies while applying them in a different context.

Why should one act as an editor, then? Some of the most recent articles on academic editing stress that editorship is itself a form of scholarship, not merely academic service (Louie et al., 2025). It requires synthesis, evaluation, mentoring, ethical reasoning, strategic thinking, and the advancement of scientific communication. In other words, editing is a scholarly practice that develops expertise beyond what is acquired through research and teaching alone. As such, it complements the expertise required for scholarship in many ways.

First of all, editing offers a privileged overview of a field, even if it would just be an occasional one, as in the case of guest-editing a special issue or collection. Editors see the newest research before publication and develop a broad understanding of emerging topics, methods, and debates. Evaluating many manuscripts refines one's ability to recognize originality, methodological quality, theoretical contribution, and clear scholarly writing.

Second, many editors report that editing substantially improves their own writing, reviewing, and manuscript preparation. Seeing common weaknesses in submissions helps them avoid similar problems in their own work. In addition, editing often leads into improved peer-review skills. Interaction with reviewers provides insight into effective reviewing and editorial expectations.

Third, editors are exposed to diverse research designs, disciplines, and writing styles, making editorship an ongoing form of professional education or continuous learning. Editors learn to make difficult decisions, balance competing viewpoints, manage peer review, and coordinate complex editorial workflows. Providing constructive feedback to authors and reviewers strengthens diplomacy, mentoring, and written communication skills,

which are important components for leadership and career progress.

Fourth, editing also expands one's professional networks and offers the opportunity to create valuable professional relationships without the perhaps deeper commitment of co-authorship.

Fifth, the competences gained through editing (see chapter 3) are, despite the underrecognition mentioned before, encountered with professional recognition and visibility. Editorship signals scholarly expertise and professional trust, often increasing one's visibility within a discipline.

Last but not least, many editors describe contributing to the advancement of science as one of the most rewarding aspects of the role. Besides the intellectual satisfaction related to being able to help others and make a difference, editorship provides an opportunity to shape the quality, direction, and integrity of scholarship within an entire field in a more strategic role than authoring. Editors can encourage emerging research areas, improve reporting standards, and foster scholarly communities through new ideas.

2.1 Occasional and occupational editors

When talking about editing, we should distinguish between two fundamental roles: editing as an activity and professional role that can be adopted by any academic, called here as the *occasional editor*, and editorship as an employment-based role serving a publisher for a longer time, called as *occupational editor*.

Similar to serving as a peer reviewer or a grant application reviewer, occasional editorship is more associated with the ideal professionalist role of serving as an expert to changing organizations. Typical work titles are guest editor, special issue editor, special collection editor, or editor of an edited volume. The occasional editor is not employed by the publisher but invited to serve as the editor in a project-based role, tied to the release of a single product. In contrast, the occupational editor becomes an employee of the publisher, involving continuous responsibility for a journal, journal section or publication series. Typical titles are book reviews editor, section editor, associate editor, managing editor, or editor-in-chief.

The occasional editor is, therefore, more a scholarly evaluator and developmental mentor, whereas the occupational editor, such as the editor-in-chief, serves as the organizational leader and steward of the publication or publication section as a whole. Occasional editors may not have influence on editorial policy, journal strategy, workflow, and community building but are expected to adopt to them when taking over their role.

Occasional editors are primarily responsible for the successful completion of a scholarly project. Their work is project-based and manuscript-centred. Occupational editors are responsible for the long-term leadership of a publication. Their work extends beyond individual manuscripts to encompass leadership, policy, community building, and the continuous development of the journal or book series.

The organization of editorial work depends largely on the publisher's size and resources. While larger publishers typically rely on dedicated manuscript management systems and well-defined editorial workflows, smaller publishers may use simpler administrative procedures and more flexible working practices. Similarly, many association- and society-owned journals operate with minimal budgets and depend largely on voluntary academic labour. As a result, editorial roles are often combined, and responsibilities may be distributed less formally than in commercially published journals. In contrast, some major international publishers, such as Springer Nature, have prepared self-paced online courses for guest editors regarding their organization-specific work roles and workflows, publication systems and editing cultures.

2.2 Editor as mediator

Both occasional and occupational editor share the same ideals of editing. The academic editor occupies the position of a broker between multiple stakeholders in scholarly publishing. Rather than serving solely the interests of authors, publishers, or readers, the editor creates value by mediating among these perspectives, negotiating quality, relevance, accessibility, and scholarly rigor. It is this intermediary role – not allegiance to any single actor – that constitutes the distinctive contribution of editorial work (on cultural intermediaries, see Jaakkola, 2022).

Although publishers are responsible for the publication process, they should not intervene in the scientific content of manuscripts; editors are, in other words, not advocates of an organization, a company or a brand. Peer reviewers often bring valuable expertise, but are also subject to disciplinary assumptions, personal perspectives, and potential biases, which means that editorial judgment plays a pivotal role in balancing.

Editors are often described as gatekeepers of scholarly communication. While this characterization captures their responsibility for maintaining quality standards, it overlooks another equally important dimension of the role (see Starfield & Paltridge, 2019). Editors are also custodians and stewards of scholarship: they identify potential where others may see shortcomings, support authors in developing promising work, and facilitate the dissemination of research that advances knowledge. Their responsibility extends beyond filtering submissions to nurturing the quality, integrity, and development of scholarly communication.

3. Editorial competences

Academic editorial competence can be conceptualized as the integrated ability to initiate, evaluate, improve, and manage scholarly manuscripts and publication processes through a combination of disciplinary expertise, editorial judgment, ethical reasoning, communication skills, and knowledge of scholarly publishing.

The etymology of verb "edit" reflects a broad understanding of the editor's role. Derived from the Latin *ēdere* ("to bring forth" or "to publish"), the term originally referred to preparing a work for public dissemination. Historically, the editor's primary responsibility was therefore not textual polishing but enabling scholarly communication by bringing knowledge into the public domain. This original meaning closely aligns with the contemporary understanding of academic editors as stewards of scholarly communication.

Scholars in biomedicine (Moher et al., 2017) published a consensus statement describing a minimum set of core competencies for scientific editors of biomedical journals. They identified 14 key core competencies grouped under three major areas: editor qualities and skills (5 competencies), publication ethics and research integrity (3 competencies), and editorial principles and processes (6 competencies). Each of the 14 competencies is further divided into descriptions of more specific knowledge, skills, and characteristics that contribute to its fulfillment.[1] These competencies described the abilities and characteristics of an academic staff editor, and some dimensions, such as identifying and upholding the principles of ethical research involving humans and animals when appraising manuscripts, are less relevant for editors in SHH journals.

> "Etymologically, editing refers to preparing a work for public dissemination rather than improving the language."

Based on, we can summarize the key competences as follows:

- Scholarly competence: Knowledge of the field, understanding research methods, disciplinary standards, theory, and what constitutes an original scholarly contribution.
- Management competence: Organizing editorial teams, coordinating workflows, managing deadlines, and making accountable decisions under uncertainty, while using editorial management systems and technologies appropriately to maintain human editorial judgment and responsibility.
- Linguistic competence: The ability to improve texts to improve clarity, coherence, argumentation, structure, consistency, and scholarly style without changing the author's intellectual contribution.
- Publishing competence: Understanding a particular journal's or publisher's aims and scope on one hand and mechanisms of scholarly publishing on the other hand. The knowledge about publishing includes. for example, the basics of editorial workflows, copyright, open access, metadata, indexing, publication standards and production processes, which

[1] The entire list can be accessed here: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5592713/table/Tab2/.

need to be applied to the particular context. Based on that knowledge, the ditor can assess significance, quality, novelty, journal fit, and balance reviewer recommendations with independent editorial decisions.
- Interpersonal competence: Communicative abilities to work with authors, reviewers, audiences and other stakeholders to give constructive feedback, communicate decisions diplomatically, support authors' development, and manage reviewers.
- Communicative competence: The ability to plan and implement external communication strategies that disseminate published research, engage relevant scholarly and public audiences, and enhance the visibility and reputation of the publication, its contributors, and the publishing organization.
- Ethical competence: Handling conflicts of interest, plagiarism, authorship disputes, research integrity, confidentiality, bias, and publication ethics to ensure integrity.
- Strategic competence: Shaping the direction of a publication by commissioning content, identifying emerging topics, and proposing ideas for constant development.

No one enters the editorial role having fully developed these competencies. Rather, editorial expertise is acquired progressively through experience and participation in the editorial community of practice, into which newcomers are gradually socialized.

4. Editorial responsibilities

The primary objective of an occasional editor is to ensure the scientific quality and scholarly contribution of the manuscripts under the editor's responsibility while facilitating authors' development through a fair, constructive, and rigorous editorial process. A guest editor's responsibility generally ends once the publication has appeared. Typical core responsibilities include:

- developing the intellectual concept of a publication (e.g. a special issue);
- preparing and disseminating the call for papers;
- inviting contributors in a way that aligns with the plan (open call for papers vs. upon-invitation submission);
- conducting the initial assessment of submissions;
- selecting and sometimes coordinating peer reviewers;
- making editorial recommendations (the final decisions being under the editor-in-chief's responsibility);
- providing developmental feedback to authors;
- ensuring coherence across the collection;
- writing the editorial introduction or preface;
- delivering the completed publication to the publisher or journal.

Occupational editors may often perform some of the same manuscript-level tasks as guest editors, such as assessing submissions and inviting peer reviewers. In addition, as they hold continuing responsibility for the journal or publication series – depending on their responsible role in the organization – their work also combines scholarly evaluation, organizational leadership, everyday management, and strategic development. Beyond handling manuscripts, they are typically responsible for:

- defining editorial policy and standards;
- maintaining scientific quality and ethical integrity;
- appointing and mentoring occasional editors and editorial board members;
- overseeing editorial workflows and production schedules;
- managing relationships with publishers and scholarly societies;
- developing reviewer networks;
- increasing the visibility and reputation of the publication;
- monitoring performance and implementing improvements;
- responding to developments such as open science, research assessment reforms, redesigns and technological integration (e.g. AI).

Many researchers first encounter editorship as guest editors of special issues or edited volumes before gradually assuming more permanent editorial roles within journals or book series. Editorship is

Table 1. General principles for academic editing activity.

Ten principles for an academic editor

1. Serve the scholarly community. View editorship as a form of strengthening scholarship rather than advancing personal interests.

2. Maintain editorial independence. Ensure that editorial decisions remain free from inappropriate influence by publishers, institutions, sponsors, colleagues, or personal relationships.

3. Be fair, impartial, and transparent. Base editorial decisions on scholarly merit and apply the same standards to every submission. Clearly communicate the journal's editorial priorities and decision criteria.

4. Communicate professionally. Communicate with authors, reviewers, and colleagues in a timely, respectful, and constructive manner.

5. Protect research integrity. Act promptly and consistently when concerns arise regarding publication ethics or research misconduct.

6. Manage time and editorial resources efficiently. Recognize that some manuscripts require disproportionately large amounts of time and intervene early when problems become apparent.

7. Respect confidentiality. Treat manuscripts, reviews, and editorial deliberations as confidential documents throughout the publication process.

8. Manage peer review responsibly. Select appropriate reviewers, interpret their comments critically, and remember that reviewers advise rather than decide.

9. Document editorial processes. Keep a systematic record of editorial decisions and correspondence within the journal's manuscript management system.

10. Learn from feedback. Editorial competence develops through feedback, reflection, training, and engagement with the wider editorial community.

therefore not a single role but should be envisioned as a continuum of increasing responsibility, from managing a one-off publication project to stewarding a scholarly publication and its community over the long term.

5. Ethical principles

While editorial practices differ across disciplines, publishers, and publication formats, these international standards provide a common framework for ensuring that scholarly publishing remains rigorous, transparent, ethical, and trustworthy. The international frameworks are typically adopted to national publishing ecologies (see Smart et al., 2013), and national-level coordinating organizations such as national libraries or associations of learned societies provide more specific guidance and support. While the national ecologies greatly differ from country to country, we can take a look at the common international frameworks that constitute an essential part of every academic editor's professional knowledge within the SSH field.

Scholars across different disciplines have frequently compiled "ten simple rules for an editor" to capture the editors' most important principles (see e.g. Mura & Bourne, 2023; Simmons, 2018; Erren & Erren, 2007). Table 1 shows a summary of some commonly mentioned editor principles reflected in international frameworks. The cornerstone of scholarly publishing is the editorial independence – the aim that editorial decisions should be based solely on scholarly merit, ethical standards, and the journal's aims and scope, free from inappropriate influence by publishers, owners, sponsors, institutions, or commercial interests. Editors should through editorial independence safeguard the autonomy and integrity of the editorial process and, therefore, research that is made publicly available.

Another cornerstone is combatting infringement of misconduct. Therefore, editors need to have tools to identify and react on problematic situations. The most common include:

- Plagiarism: Author presenting another person's words, ideas, data, or images as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement. If plagiarism is suspected, the editor should investigate the evidence, contact the authors for an explanation, and follow the journal's ethical procedures before making a decision.
- Duplicate publication: Publishing substantially the same work in more than one journal or publication without appropriate disclosure or justification. Editors should assess the extent of overlap and determine whether the submission constitutes redundant publication or a legitimate secondary publication. This can occur, for example, if an author presents an English-language manuscript that is based on another manuscript written in a national language.
- Authorship disputes: Disagreements about who qualifies as an author, the order of authors, or individual contributions. Editors should not determine authorship themselves but should request that the authors and their institutions resolve the dispute according to established authorship criteria.
- Conflicts of interest: Personal, financial, professional, or institutional relationships that could influence – or appear to influence – the objectivity of authors, reviewers, or editors. Editors should require disclosure of relevant conflicts and recuse themselves from handling manuscripts where their impartiality could reasonably be questioned.
- Image manipulation: Altering figures, photographs, or visual data in a way that misrepresents the underlying research. Editors should distinguish between acceptable technical adjustments and manipulations that affect scientific interpretation, requesting original files when necessary.
- Fabricated or falsified data: Inventing data that were never collected or intentionally altering research data or results. If fabrication or falsification is suspected, editors should seek clarification from the authors and, where appropriate, refer the matter to the authors' institution for formal investigation.
- Reviewer misconduct: Behaviour by reviewers that violates the principles of confidentiality, fairness, or professional integrity – for example, breaching confidentiality, allowing bias to influence reviews, or producing disrespectful or inappropriate review reports. For example, this might be about using generative AI to create the entire peer review report, which is not acceptible (for analysis of a case and guidance, see COPE, 2025). Editors should disregard compromised reviews and, where necessary, remove reviewers from future assignments. If the quality of a peer review is poor, editors can invite more reviewers than the minimum.
- Corrections and retractions: When errors or misconduct are discovered after publication, editors have a responsibility to maintain the integrity of the scholarly record and report them. Minor errors may require a correction (erratum or corrigendum), whereas serious flaws, fabricated data, plagiarism, or unethical research may necessitate retraction. In some cases, an expression of concern may be issued while an investigation is ongoing.

Occasional reviewers are not alone with these questions but constantly supported by the organization's occupational staff. However, the education of guest editors typically focus on organizational specifics and details, and basic knowledge is expected.

6. Initiation of an editorial process

There are two common routes into academic editing: guest-editing a special issue of a scholarly journal or editing an academic anthology or edited book. A special issue is a collection of articles on a common theme published as part of a journal, whereas an anthology (or edited volume) is a book comprising chapters contributed by multiple authors. Regardless of the publication format, such projects are always initiated by someone – either by a publisher's representative (e.g. an acquisitions editor), a journal editor, or by researchers who develop an idea and propose it to a publisher or journal.

Most journals welcome proposals for special or thematic issues that address emerging or specialized topics and bring together researchers working on a shared question. Typically, prospective guest editors prepare a proposal outlining the theme, its scholarly significance, the proposed contributors (if known), and a preliminary timetable. The proposal is submitted to the journal's editor-in-chief or editorial board, which initially evaluates whether the topic fits the journal's profile (aims and scope).

When choosing the publisher and journal, it is important to consider whether the journal is open access (OA) or not and employs an article processing charge (APC) or is free of charge for authors to publish. Both factors may significantly restrict the possibilities to publish, as funders may only accept open access publishers and the authors' affiliations may not have publishing agreements that cover the expences for APCs, which can be very high (that is, amound to several thousands of euros).

It is equally important to assess the credibility and reputation of the publisher or journal. Researchers should exercise caution when dealing with predatory publishers, which typically prioritize publication fees over rigorous peer review and editorial standards. Rather than relying on a single source, journals should be evaluated using multiple indicators, such as membership in the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, 2026), inclusion in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) for open-access journals, indexing in recognized databases, transparency of editorial policies, and the composition of the editorial board. Although Beall's List remains a useful historical reference and is still maintained by third parties, it should not be used as the sole basis for assessing a journal's legitimacy.

Once accepted, guest editors prepare the call for papers, promote it through scholarly networks, manage submissions, coordinate peer review, and recommend editorial decisions. Although the editor-in-chief usually retains final responsibility for publication decisions, guest editors conduct much of the scholarly editorial work.

Another route is editing an anthology or edited volume. Here, the process usually begins with a book proposal submitted to an academic publisher of choice. Rather than presenting a completed manuscript with chapter synopses, editors first propose the intellectual concept of the volume, explain its originality and intended readership, outline the structure, and introduce the (potential) contributors. Publishers normally subject book proposals to an initial editorial assessment and often external peer review before deciding whether to commission the volume. Once accepted, the editors recruit contributors either through an open call or upon closed invitation, coordinate the writing process, edit individual chapters, ensure coherence across the volume, and act as the primary liaison between authors and the publisher throughout production.

Many publishers maintain proposal templates or describe the content of proposals on their websites. As part of special issue or edited collection instructions, they also often tell the desired range of length (in words, characters, printed pages). It is, then, important to adjust the structure and vocabulary of the proposal according to the publisher's.

Early-career researchers should not hesitate to express an interest in editorial work. Ideally, a first editorial assignment is undertaken together with a more experienced co-editor, allowing for the transfer of tacit knowledge and practical expertise that is rarely captured in formal guidelines. At the same time, prospective editors should recognize that editorship entails a substantial commitment of time and effort. The editorial process typically extends over several months and may continue for a year or longer. It may involve multiple rounds of peer review, extensive correspondence, and the need to make difficult editorial decisions that are not always well received. A useful rule of thumb is to avoid taking on more than one major editorial assignment at a time, particularly during the early stages of an editorial career.

First-time editors are also advised to arrange an initial briefing with the publisher's in-house editorial staff to gain a clear understanding of the workflow, responsibilities, timelines, and available support. Such discussions help establish shared expectations and reduce the risk of misunderstandings later in the process. As editors gain experience, many aspects of the workflow become routine, allowing them to navigate individual publishing projects more efficiently while adapting to the specific procedures and requirements of different publishers.

7. The editorial process

The editor's core responsibility is to manage the editorial process while maintaining communication with the corresponding author throughout the review process. Following an initial editorial assessment (often referred to as a desk review), the editor is expected to communicate to the authors whether the manuscript will proceed to peer review or be rejected without external review.

At this point, editors may still suggest some crucial changes of a more formal character without altering its scholarly content that can be anticipated to improve the consistency and readability of the manuscript and increase the possibility of its acceptance, such as reorganizing section headings, standardizing terminology, improving the structure of tables and figures, or ensuring consistency in citation and reference style. When the manuscript is formally ready to be sent for review, the editor also ensures that it has been properly anonymized (where single or double-anonymous peer review is used instead of an open review).

Major international publishers have internal databases of peer reviewers, but invitations to potential reviewers do not have to be restricted to these. One of the simplest ways to identify reviewers is through literature searches in international (e.g. Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science) and national publication databases (e.g. DiVA in Sweden, Cristin in Norway) or institutional repositories. Examining the submitted manuscript's reference list is equally valuable, as the authors whose work is cited are often among the leading experts in the field and may be appropriate reviewers, provided that no conflicts of interest exist. Editors can also increasingly employ AI-powered research discovery tools, such as Semantic Scholar, ResearchRabbit, or Connected Papers, that use semantic search, citation networks, and machine learning to identify researchers whose expertise closely matches a topic of the manuscript. However, unpublished manuscripts shall not be uploaded to AI tools (see Jaakkola, 2024), and candidate's expertise always needs to be verified by complementary, more traditional searches.

Most publishers provide manuscript management systems with standardized invitation and reminder templates, which are also used to acknowledge reviewers' contributions once the review has been completed. In some journals, guest editors are only asked to suggest names of potential reviewers, while the invitations are sent out by staff employees.

Once the peer-review reports have been received, the editor evaluates the reviewers' comments and determines the appropriate editorial decision – for example, minor revision, major revision, rejection, or acceptance. This requires more than simply forwarding the reviews to the author. The editor should take an active role in synthesizing the reviewers' feedback, identifying the issues that require particular attention, and explaining how the author should respond, especially where reviewers disagree or offer conflicting recommendations. In this way, the editor helps ensure that the revision process is constructive, coherent, and focused on strengthening the manuscript's scholarly contribution.

Some editors view their role as primarily concluding with the communication of the editorial decision and the synthesis of reviewers' comments. From this perspective, it is the author's responsibility to address the reviewers' concerns and revise the manuscript accordingly. However, editors may choose to adopt a more developmental approach (see Norton, 2023), particularly when working with early-career researchers or authors who would benefit from additional guidance. In such cases, editors may provide more detailed editorial advice, identify priorities for revision, or, especially in smaller journals and edited volumes, suggest concrete changes to improve the manuscript's clarity, structure, or argumentation.

> "Even developmental editors should respect the boundaries of authorship."

Even when adopting a role closer to developmental editing, editors should respect the boundaries of authorship. Their responsibility is to strengthen the manuscript, not to rewrite it or make intellectual decisions on the author's behalf. The authors remain responsible for the content, arguments, interpretations, and final wording of their work. Balancing constructive intervention with respect for the author's intellectual ownership and academic autonomy is not always easy in developmental editing approaches, which makes it understandable why most editors remain more passive.

When discussing the improvement of manuscripts, it is important to distinguish between the scientific (or academic) editor and professionals whose primary responsibility is language and production. Scientific editors focus on the scholarly content of a manuscript – its originality, argumentation, structure, methodological soundness, and contribution to the field. By contrast, language specialists concentrate on linguistic accuracy, readability, and consistency. These may include professional copyeditors, proofreaders, or language editors, who are either commissioned by the publisher or engaged independently by the authors. In some publishing houses, manuscript editors (also called copyeditors) are employed in-house and work closely with authors, but only after the manuscript has been accepted.

The larger the publisher, the more likely the production process involves additional professionals. Production editors coordinate the manuscript through copyediting, typesetting, proofreading, and publication. Typesetters prepare the final layout, while proofreaders review page proofs for remaining typographical or formatting errors before publication. Editorial assistants or managing editors may also support communication with authors and reviewers and oversee administrative aspects of the publication process.

One of the most common surprises for new editors is that their role is primarily supervisory rather than text-related. Editors evaluate manuscripts at what O'Connor and colleagues (2013, p. 3) describe as "a macroscopic level", ensuring that the science, argumentation, and overall scholarly contribution are sound. By contrast, responsibility for the detailed presentation of the manuscript typically lies with another group of publishing professionals, the copyeditors. As O'Connor and colleagues (ibid.) explain, copyeditors "put the same material under a microscope, making sure the presentation of the science is right."

Larger publishing houses also employ dedicated communications and marketing professionals to promote newly published books and journal issues. In contrast, smaller publishers and scholarly journals may rely largely on editors to undertake post-publication dissemination. Editors may therefore be responsible for sharing publications through professional networks, creating content for social media, organizing book launches or release events, and engaging with relevant scholarly communities. This expands the editor's role beyond editorial management to include external communication and science communication competencies.

Although the editorial efforts contribute substantially to the quality of the final publication, responsibility for the scientific content remains with the authors. Responsibility for editorial decisions, in turn, rests with the scientific editor(s). Effective scholarly publishing therefore depends on collaboration among professionals with complementary expertise, each contributing to a different aspect of the publication process.

The details of the editorial and publication processes, including the responsibilities and roles of guest editors, vary across publishers. Major international academic publishers have therefore developed extensive guidelines, workflows, and resources to support external editors throughout their own publication process (see e.g. De Gruyter Brill, 2026; Elsevier, 2026; Sage Journals, 2026; Springer Nature, 2026; Taylor & Francis, 2026; Wiley, 2026).

8. Effective management

Perhaps the most common source of authors' frustration with editors is delays in communication. When authors receive no updates for an extended period, they may feel that their manuscript has been forgotten or neglected. In reality, editors often have little time to provide regular progress reports, as much of their effort is devoted to the less visible aspects of the editorial process. Before peer review can even begin, they may need to contact numerous potential reviewers before securing enough who are willing to accept the invitation. Once reviewers have agreed, editors must follow up with reminders and encourage them to submit their reports on time. Consequently, what appears to authors as silence often reflects intensive editorial work taking place behind the scenes rather than inactivity.

The delays are related to one typical challenge that is time management. A constant flow of submissions is, of course, preferable, but journals may get crowded. Mura and Bourne (2023) address the "90:10 rule": 10 percent of manuscripts may take

90 percent of the editor's time. What they mean is that a small proportion of manuscripts are likely to consume a disproportionate amount of editorial time. Rather than allowing such cases to become prolonged and resource-intensive, editors should identify the underlying problem early and make timely decisions – for example, by rejecting submissions that clearly fall outside the journal's scope or are unlikely to receive a fair and efficient review.

More broadly, the relationship between the editor and the author is central to the publication process. The quality of editorial communication largely shapes authors' perceptions not only of the editor but also of the journal or publisher as a whole. Editors who communicate in a timely, respectful, constructive, and transparent manner are more likely to foster trust and encourage future submissions. Clear explanations of editorial decisions and revision requests can also serve an important pedagogical function, particularly for early-career researchers. By contrast, minimal or impersonal communication, or an overreliance on automated submission systems without sufficient personal engagement, may leave authors feeling unsupported and disconnected from the editorial process.

Effective communication is equally important within the editorial organization. Editorial workflows often involve multiple actors – including editors-in-chief, managing editors, section editors, editorial assistants, communications staff, and editorial or advisory board members – as well as external peer reviewers. Clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and communication channels are therefore essential to ensure an efficient, transparent, and well-coordinated editorial process. Journal management systems are not always the automatic answer: they can, in fact, complicate the internal communication processes, if it is not clearly stated *how* the systems are supposed to be used.

Smaller journals may not be able to provide guest editors with dedicated digital editorial systems, requiring them to organize the editorial workflow independently. While this places greater responsibility on editors, it also gives them more autonomy to manage the process without relying on automated manuscript management systems. In such cases, editors typically make use of their university's cloud services, collaborative digital platforms, and other freely available tools to coordinate submissions, peer review, and communication.

At a general level, to support accountability and continuity, communication concerning individual manuscripts should take place within the journal's editorial management system and not through occasional private correspondence (Mura & Bourne, 2023). Editorial processes may extend over many months and frequently involve parallel communication with authors and reviewers, making systematic documentation essential. Maintaining a complete record within the journal system facilitates transparency, enables smooth handovers if editorial responsibilities change, and preserves an auditable history of editorial decisions and correspondence. Comprehensive documentation enables the editorial process to be traced and reviewed if concerns arise, such as suspected misconduct, allegations of bias, or complaints from authors or reviewers.

9. Making a difference?

If editors act as mediators, to what extent may they exercise their own preferences, values, and editorial priorities?

Editors cannot – and arguably should not – be entirely, clinically and mechanically neutral in the sense of having no values, emotions or preferences. In that case, they could be replaced by a machine. Every editorial decision reflects some form of judgment regarding scholarly quality, originality, relevance, methodological rigor, and the aims and scope of the publication. These judgments are necessarily informed by the editor's disciplinary expertise, experience, and professional values.

However, editorial preferences differ from personal preferences. An editor's role is not to promote personal opinions, theoretical allegiances, or favored methodologies. Rather, editors are expected to exercise professional judgment that is transparent, fair, and consistent with the journal's editorial policy and the standards of the scholarly community. Their responsibility is to facilitate the publication of high-quality research, which does not equal research that aligns with their own intellectual preferences.

Editors may therefore legitimately shape the identity and direction of a publication. Indeed, journal editors have also explicitly been seen as vehicles for development for greater justice and equality (see Walton, 2025). They may choose to make deliberate efforts to address the underrepresentation of certain geopolitical regions in scholarly publishing. The challenge, however, is to do so without compromising scientific standards.

For example, editors may prioritize methodological diversity, interdisciplinary research, geographical representation, early-career scholars, or topics that address emerging societal challenges such as climate change – all of these issues have been richly debated in academia and identified as issues of development. Such editorial priorities are appropriate when they are explicit, communicated openly, consistent with the publication's mission, and applied fairly to all submissions. If priorities are deemed not appropriate to be incorporated into the publication's standard editorial policies, editors and publishers may pursue them through separate initiatives. These might include targeted calls for papers, mentoring programmes for prospective authors, best paper awards, capacity-building activities, or educational workshops designed to advance specific editorial objectives without altering the criteria used for routine editorial decisions.

Exercising editorial judgment without allowing personal biases to override scholarly merit requires self-awareness and critical reflection. Editors should be able to articulate and justify the values and priorities that guide their decisions. For example, an editor may seek to address the underrepresentation of certain scholarly communities. Such priorities are legitimate provided they are clearly motivated, transparently reflected in the publication's editorial policies, and implemented without compromising standards of scholarly quality or fairness. When exercised in this way, editorial judgment becomes a strength rather than a source of bias. In practice, this requires editorial priorities to be stated explicitly in advance – for example, in the journal's aims, scope, editorial policy or external communication – rather than being invoked retrospectively to justify individual decisions. In other words, editorial priorities should be embedded in the publication's institutional structures, rather than relying on the personal values or preferences of individual editors.

10. Adopting an editor's role identity

As articulated in the difference between occasional and occupational editor roles, there is a fundamental difference in saying "I'm an editor" versus "I'm a researcher/scholar/an academic who edits/is editing a publication". The most academics would, in fact, say the latter. Even if they serve as publication series editors or editors-in-chief, they see themselves primarily as professors, postdocs or senior lecturers in whose academic expertise editing is included.

Still, the transition from author to editor entails adopting a new *role identity* that can be integrated into one's academic profile. In their role of academic editors, academics must learn to approach manuscripts not primarily as authors defending their own ideas, but as facilitators of another scholar's work. Those with a background in journalism or professional editing may already possess valuable prior experience in critically evaluating texts, providing constructive feedback, restructuring arguments, and suggesting substantial revisions while respecting the author's voice, intentions, and intellectual ownership. For researchers who have had little or no experience editing others' work, this transition can be more challenging. A common concern is how to intervene in another person's manuscript without overstepping the boundaries of authorship or compromising the author's intellectual autonomy. Learning to balance critical intervention with respect for the author's contribution is one of the defining characteristics of academic editorship.

There is no universal solution but individuals need to develop an approach that aligns with their preferences, strenghnesses and personality. Developing based on feedback from authors is valuable, so as a new editor you should not hesitate to ask about their experiences.

One useful exercise is to develop a personal *editorial manifesto* that articulates your aims, values, and guiding principles as an editor. In the arts, creative practitioners have long published artists' statements, declarations of their aesthetic-artistic intentions, to express their philosophy and commitments. Similarly, an academic editor might formulate a concise set of, for example, ten editorial principles – a personal editorial credo – that defines the standards, values, and practices they seek to up-

hold. Such a manifesto can serve both as a source of professional guidance, a horizon of expectation for others and as a point of personal reflection when faced with difficult editorial decisions.

Another reflective exercise is to map one's current editorial competencies using a framework inspired by SWOT analysis. This involves identifying your editorial assets (strengths), needs of further development (weaknesses), realistic possibilities (opportunities), and potential risks or blind spots (threats). Such competence-based self-assessment can help you recognize both the competencies you already possess and those you would like to cultivate as your editorial experience grows.

"For a self-assessment, you can ask: "How do you want editing to feel?"

Self-assessment can also be role- or experience-based. A role-based assessment encourages emerging editors to reflect on the type of editor they aspire to become. For example, they may see themselves primarily as a facilitator, supporting authors in developing their work; a mentor, particularly for early-career researchers; a gatekeeper, safeguarding scholarly standards; a steward, serving the long-term interests of the discipline and the scholarly record; a community builder, fostering collaboration within a research field; or an advocate for values such as open science, interdisciplinarity, or diversity and inclusion. Reflecting on these orientations can help editors articulate the principles that guide their editorial practice.

An experience-based assessment, by contrast, focuses on the desired experience of the editorial role. Rather than asking "What kind of editor do I want to be?", it asks "How do I want editing to feel?". For example, an aspiring editor may wish the role to feel collaborative, well organized, intellectually stimulating, calm, or purposeful. Creating a mood or vision board, mind map or career roadmap – or any other visual representation of the desired editorial experience – can help clarify these aspirations. Such a reflection can contain a starting point ("my current editorial experience"), a destination ("my editorial aims/identity"), milestones, obstacles, allies, resources, and desired achievements along the way. Once an overall direction has been identified, it can be translated into concrete goals and practices that support the development of a sustainable and personally meaningful editorial approach.

Equally valuable is learning from colleagues and experienced editors. Conversations with colleagues about career paths, editorial dilemmas, decision-making, and everyday practices often reveal aspects of editorship that are rarely discussed in formal training. Although editorial work is frequently learned through practice and mentorship, there is considerable scope for more open discussion about editorial judgment, leadership, and professional development within the scholarly community. Seeking feedback from colleagues on your strengths and areas for development may reveal personal qualities and professional capabilities that you have not previously recognized.

Several professional organizations provide opportunities for networking, training, and discussion among editors. These include, above all, the European Association of Science Editors (EASE), the Council of Science Editors (CSE), the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Association of University Presses (AUPresses) and cOAlition S (initiative to suppor Open Access publishing). Even editors' associations beyond the SSH field, such as the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), provide resources that can be partly applied to social sciences and humanities. The growing availability of online professional development makes webinars and virtual workshops on editorial practice both feasible and accessible for academic societies and scholarly associations.

However, virtually every disciplinary conference has the possibility to incorporate a panel discussion, workshop, or roundtable on academic editing into its programme. Such initiatives are particularly valuable because they allow editorial issues to be discussed within their disciplinary contexts, where publication cultures, methodological traditions, and conventions of scholarly communication often differ. Discipline-specific forums can therefore address the unique editorial challenges, writing practices, and methodological developments characteristic of particular fields or subdisciplines, making editorial training both more relevant and more effective.

11. Conclusion

For many early-career researchers, academic editing may at first appear to consist primarily of managing and improving manuscripts. As this booklet has shown, however, editorship reaches far beyond textual work to encompass organizational leadership, ethical decision-making, and the stewardship of scholarly communities. Editorship is therefore not merely an editorial function but a lifelong and lifewide professional pathway that evolves alongside an academic career.

At the same time, relatively little research has been conducted on professional academic editing. One reason is that editorial work largely takes place behind the scenes, making its processes difficult to observe, reconstruct, or analyse through the final published texts alone. Another is that academic editing itself is still undergoing a process of professionalization, with its practices, competencies, and standards only recently attracting scholarly attention. Expanding research in this area will not only deepen our understanding of editorial work but also provide an evidence base for the systematic development of editorial competence, training, and best practices.

This said, editorship is not a career obligation. Becoming an academic editor is not a prerequisite for a successful academic career. Many scholars devote their careers primarily to conducting research, teaching, and publishing their own work without assuming formal editorial responsibilities. Nevertheless, editorship offers unique opportunities for professional growth. Even if editorship does not become a permanent part of one's career, experiencing the editorial role can enrich academic practice in ways that extend well beyond authoring.

References

Castillo-González, W. Lepez, C. O., & Bonardi, M. C. (2022). Chat GPT: A promising tool for academic editing. *Data and Metadata*, 1(23), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.56294/dm202223

COPE, Committee on Publication Ethics (2025). *Case: Reviewer suspects use of AI by an author.* https://publicationethics.org/guidance/case/reviewer-suspects-use-ai-author

COPE, Committee on Publication Ethics (2026). *Guidance*. https://publicationethics.org/guidance

De Gruyter Brill (2026). *Resources & tools for journal editors.* https://www.degruyterbrill.com/publishing/services/for-editors?srsltid=AfmBOopwYhf3aIYxqqrEQWH4MjTwpX-icx-09-H6nieWoR-8bZ3Q1W_Y5

Elsevier (2026). *Elsevier for editors.* https://www.elsevier.com/editor

Erren, T. C., & Erren, M. (2007). "Simple rules for editors"? Here is one rule to tackle neglected problems of publishing. *PLoS Computational Biolology*, 3(5), e88. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.0030088

Gendron, Y., Andrew, J., & Cooper, C. (2022). The perils of artificial intelligence in academic publishing. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 87, 102411. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2021.102411

Hay, I. (2016). Why edit a journal? Academic irony and paradox. *The Professional Geographer*, 68(1), 159–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2015.1062704

Jaakkola, M. (2024). *Academic AI literacy: Artificial intelligence in scholarly writing, editing, and publishing.* NordMedia Network Open Educational Resources. https://doi.org/10.57943/rp4x-xy56

Louie, A.K., Beresin, E.V., Coverdale, J., Balon, R., Castillo, E. G., Guerrero, A. P. S., Morreale, M. K., Aggarwal, R., Seritan, A. L., Thomas, L. A., & Brenner, A. (2025). Work and scholarship: Would you thrive as a journal editor? *Academic Psychiatry*, 49, 305–310. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-025-02170-2

Lund, B., Lamba, M., & Oh, S.H. (2025). The impact of AI on academic research and publishing. In: Friese, H., Nolden, M., & Schreiter, M. (Eds.), *Handbuch Soziale Praktiken und digitale Alltagswelten*. Springer Reference Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-08460-8_85-1

Moher, D., Galipeau, J., Alam, S., Barbour, V., Bartolomeos, K., Baskin et al. (2017). Core competencies for scientific editors of biomedical journals: Consensus statement. *BMC Medicine*, 15(1), 167. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-017-0927-0

Mondal, H. (2026). Ninety-seven ignored: A personal reflection on the hidden struggles of an academic editor. *European Science Editing*, 52, e182020. https://doi.org/10.3897/ese.2026.e182020.

Mura, C., & Bourne, P. E. (2023). Ten simple rules for serving as an editor. *PLoS Computational Biolology*, 19(3), e1010911. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1010911

Norton, S. (2023). *Developmental editing: A handbook for freelancers, authors and publishers.* 2nd Ed. The University of Chicago Press.

O'Connor, M., Cooter, M., & Ufnalska, S. B. (2013). Copy-editing scientific papers. In: Smart, P., Maisonneuve, H., & Polderman, A. K. S. (Eds.) (2013). *The EASE science editors' handbook.* European Association of Science Editors (EASE), 3–6.

Pickren, W. E. (2020). Watching the detectives: The multiple lives of academic editing. *History of Psychology*, 23(2), 149–153. https://doi.org/10.1037/hop0000120

Sage Journals (2026). *Information for editors.* https://www.sagepub.com/journals/information-for-editors/editor-resources

Sallam, M., Al-Mahzoum, K., Alfadhel, M., Al-Ajmi, A., Al-Ajmi, M., Al-Hajeri, M., & Barakat, M. (2024). Evident gap between generative artificial intelligence as an academic editor compared to human editors in scientific publishing. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology,* 8(6), 960–979. https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v8i6.2189

Serpa, S., Sá, M. J., Santos, A. I., & Ferreira, C. M. (2020). Challenges for the academic editor in the scientific publication. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 9(3), 12–16. https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2020-0037

Shillingsburg, P. L. (1996). *Scholarly editing in the computer age: Theory and practice*. 3rd Ed. The University of Michigan Press.

Simmons, M. P. (2018). Ten rules for associate editors. *Botanical Review*, 84, 99–107. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12229-018-9199-4

Smart, P., Maisonneuve, H., & Polderman, A. K. S. (Eds.) (2013). *The EASE science editors' handbook*. European Association of Science Editors.

Springer Nature (2026). *Editing a journal*. https://www.springernature.com/gp/editors/information-guide

Starfield, S., & Paltridge, B. (2019). Journal editors: Gatekeepers or custodians? In: Habibie, P., & Hyland, K. (Eds.), *Novice writers and scholarly publication*. Palgrave Macmillan, 253–270. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95333-5_14

Subrata, S. A. (2026). Mastery of academic writing for journal editors. *Innovation in Health for Society*, 6(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.31603/ihs.16291

Taylor & Francis (2026). *Editor resources: Supporting Taylor & Francis journal editors.* https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com

Vuong, Q.-H. (2022). The editor: A demanding but underestimated role in scientific publishing. *Learned Publishing*, 35, 418-422. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1466

Walton, R. (2025). Journal editing to shift disciplinarity towards justice. In: Jones, N. N., Gonzales, L., Haas, A. M., & Williams, M. F. (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of social justice in technical and professional communication.* Routledge, 41–52.

Wiley (2026). *Editor resources*. https://www.wiley.com/en-it/publish/article/editor-resources/