

EMBARK EDITORIAL AGENCY

Your copyediting
career starts here.

The Embark Q&A: Interviews with Professional Copy Editors

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Professional Profile

Name: Gabi Lorino Tyner

Number of years professional copyediting: 3

Brief professional history: I've worked with business documents much longer than I've worked with fiction and nonfiction books. I started off as a writer for an investment firm and moved on to writing and editing in the science field. As a freelancer, I've written newspaper and magazine articles and advertising copy as well as edited fiction and nonfiction books, blogs, and other documents.



Copyediting specialisms: Medical, aerospace; nonfiction and fiction books

Professional bugbear: Homonyms (words that are spelled differently but sound alike). There's no such thing as a book "revue" or someone "peaking" through the curtains!

Reading for pleasure: Most of my reading for pleasure relates to writer friends and their work. Beyond that, I like stories with strong female protagonists and those set in WWII.

Professional links:

<https://glorinowrites.wordpress.com>

<https://www.linkedin.com/pub/gabi-lorino/5/b16/912>

1. GETTING STARTED

Where did you receive your copyediting training?

Copyediting came with the territory when I took my first job as a technical writer. In addition to writing policies and procedures, we copyedited documents created by other tech writers right before those documents were to be published. A few months into my technical writing job, which was for a community blood center, I was also asked to copyedit the company newsletter.

How did you land your first paid copyediting job?

I was new to California and had no job and lots of time. I knew someone who was about to publish a fiction book, so I asked her if I could work on her book.

How did you get into editing medical copy in particular?

I worked for a blood bank, and then for two pharmaceutical companies as a technical writer and editor. Because of my background in journalism and my prior work experience, I was chosen to copyedit whenever it was needed.

Can you describe what editing medical copy involves and what particular skills are required?

You have to have an inquiring mind and look up information about what you're editing. Make sure that the spelling is correct for diseases, medical procedures, medications, and other items discussed in the documents. Search engines are your friend as you wade through information. My job as a medical database copy editor was to make technical information written by scientists palatable for a variety of audiences. It's a balancing act between keeping the meaning of what the person wrote and also making it understandable to non-scientists or medical professionals.

2. FREELANCING

What were the career stepping stones to becoming a freelance copyeditor?

I'm still figuring this out. I went onto elance.com, which is now upwork.com, and had a steady client for a while there until I had to give up all outside work for a government job. Nowadays, I have a remote client who occasionally sends me work.

What do you enjoy most about freelancing and contract work?

There's freedom and uncertainty. Sometimes that feels good, other times not so much. It's exciting to wonder about what your next job will be and where it'll take you. Work leads to more work, and networking allows more people to find you.

Over time, the gaps between gigs feel less like unemployment and more like the journey to where you'll find the next thing. The duration of the next job can vary from a few hours to months or years, depending on what you find and what the client(s) need.

What's the most challenging thing about freelancing and why?

When your income varies, it's hard to manage a car payment or ongoing expenses. On a boring and practical note, there's no way I could do this without being covered by my husband's health insurance. For me, it's also hard to plan ahead financially; it's a steep learning curve when you're used to steady income. Both the upside and the downside to freelancing is you never know what's next. I find that if I get to a place where I give up trying to find something, a new opportunity will appear from nowhere within a few days. Perhaps "giving up trying" is the same as "letting go." You don't have control over a lot of things with freelancing, but then again, you don't have a lot of control with most types of work!

What marketing tips do you have for someone building a freelance business?

Network with writers groups and go to conferences to meet potential clients face-to-face. Group leaders may ask you to come to a session and talk about your work with the writers or recommend your work to writers they know.

What's your most embarrassing / funny / horrifying copyediting story?

Windows 10 was a nightmare, especially Microsoft Word 2010. Strange things happened when you passed documents back and forth between Macs and PCs. This was revealed one day at work, when I made an update to one page, saved the document, scrolled to the next page, but then scrolled back to find that the change had been undone.

Unfortunately, I'd recently copyedited a book as a freelance for a client in MS Word on my Mac and, horror upon horrors, many of my changes on her manuscript weren't saved. They were changes I remembered making, and if it hadn't been for the discovery of this issue at work, I would've thought I was crazy. One of her readers actually pointed errors out to her and told her to find a different editor. She emailed me about this, and I worked furiously to make it right, apologized a lot, "Saved As" about a thousand copies of her manuscript in the process of fixing it.

I pouted for a long time over this, working in Pages on my Mac and exporting to Word if a client needed something in Word. This went on for almost two years, until Word 2013 came out. Luckily we've had no problems with it.

3. WORKING PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How do you assess a project to determine the cost for the client?

I work on a sample of the work, such as the first ten pages. By showing my suggested changes via Track Changes or using formatting (such as red text) to point out where I make changes to their work, the client can see my edits and determine if it's what he or she wants. Providing this sample also allows me to time myself on the work I'm doing so that I can figure out a fair price to charge for my work and time.

Can you describe your working method? Do you have set way of working on manuscripts?

The phrase "low-hanging fruit" comes to mind. I go through the entire manuscript and find the obvious errors, the things that catch my eye first, make those changes, and then take a break from it (if there's time). Later, I'll go through it again, save all my changes, create a PDF, and take it to the print shop. I take the printed version home, read it aloud, and find what was hidden in the first two rounds. The final edits are done on paper with a red pen, then made on the document file itself.

What style guides, manuals, or other editing books are on your virtual and literal bookshelf?

AP Style Guide was my first, and I wanted it to be my only, but *Chicago Manual of Style* is used often so I acquired that one, too. In addition to that, I have several books on writing techniques and other tips that make writing better.

How do you continue to develop professionally?

Right now I co-run a Meetup.com group for writers, and it's very rewarding. The three of us running the group choose topics that writers need to know more about, research them, then take turns presenting our findings at meetings; we have two to three meetings per month. In the course of researching writing and editing techniques, I learn and retain more. Many of the tips we share about good writing overlap with good editing.

The other focus of the group is to provide constructive criticism for other writers. We assign groups to writers who have read each other's work and they trade observations and tips. This allows me ongoing practice with copyediting.

4. Other

How does copyediting fiction differ from copyediting nonfiction?

My job is to look for spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors, and that doesn't change depending on the material.

Nonfiction is straightforward, and hopefully by the time the copy editor is being called on to work on it, the book is arranged in a logical manner.

I often use a hands-off approach to fiction as far as making content suggestions, but occasionally I will run across a glaring issue and point it out. I find that writers don't generally listen to me, but if they hire content editors later on, the same changes I suggested end up being made!

Generally speaking, when you're editing someone else's work, you can't be attached to whether or not they take your suggestions.

As a writer yourself, who do you go to for editing and what is the relationship with your editor?

I'm still figuring that out, too. I'd like to find someone like myself, who can home in on the errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and point out glaring issues in the text (as in, did you switch this character's name from Teresa to Maria? Whatever happened in that subplot that you started to explore and then didn't mention again?).

5. THE FINAL WORD

What are your top three tips for copy editors who are just starting their careers?

1. **STUDY STYLE GUIDES** (Chicago and AP) and know the basics of each. Keep them handy for reference.
2. **NETWORK WITH WRITERS** to learn more about their experiences with different editors, and aim to be the kind of copyeditor that they would rave about and hire (or rehire).

3. **BE PRESENT FOR PEOPLE AROUND YOU, AND VOLUNTEER YOUR SERVICES** to get more experience (and hopefully, a positive reference). Before I'd considered doing this work, a friend of a friend asked for my help with her nonfiction manuscript. Later, I could say I had copyedited a book.