

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Name: Janice Lee

Years professional copyediting: 3.5

Professional history: Started as an in-house copyeditor at Fantagraphics Books before becoming a full-time freelancer.

Specialisms: Comics, fiction and nonfiction books

Professional bugbear: Seeing dangling modifiers in print

Reading for pleasure: Literary fiction and nonfiction

1. EMBARKING ON A CAREER

Q: What was your very first copyediting job (paid or unpaid)?

A: I think I was copyediting before I even knew what copyediting was—whether it was a friend’s paper or my mom’s annual Christmas card. But my first paid copyediting job was my in-house position at Fantagraphics Books.

Q: What training did you do to become a professional copyeditor?

A: I interned at Fantagraphics for a long time before they hired me. I also completed an editing certificate program at the University of Washington.

2. IN-HOUSE COPYEDITING

Q: How did you land the job as an in-house copyeditor at a publisher?

A: As an intern, I tried to get as much copyediting and proofreading experience as possible. I worked on several books while I was still an intern, and my bosses at Fantagraphics liked my work enough that they decided to create a position for me.

Q: What specific skills did you need to develop for copyediting comics?

A: I needed to learn to let go of certain rules that I would normally enforce in prose—e.g., consistent numbers style (because sometimes “85” fits in a speech bubble better than “eighty-five”).

3. FREELANCING

Q: *Why did you decide to go freelance?*

A: I started freelancing on the side while I was still working at my in-house job, and as I started to get more and more freelance gigs, I found it difficult to balance the two. I loved my in-house job, and I still miss it sometimes, but freelancing was always my ultimate career goal.

Q: *Do you find work, or does work find you? What tips can you give new freelance copyeditors for building their client base?*

A: At this point, work usually finds me. Once I had built a reputation for myself, other editors started to refer me to new clients. I'd advise anyone new to this field to think of other freelance copyeditors as your colleagues, not your competition. It's important to build up your network—find a mentor, attend conferences, enroll in a certificate program, and get involved in local and national editing organizations.

Q: *Do you find it necessary sometimes to turn down jobs? If so, how do you do that?*

A: When I first started out, I said yes to everything—and I'd advise all new freelance copyeditors to do the same! But once I started to get more clients, I had to learn to say no to projects that I just didn't have time for so that I could still have a life outside of editing. If I have to turn projects down, I always thank clients for reaching out to me and tell them that although my schedule is currently full, I'd still be happy to work with them in the future.

Q: *How do you quote an accurate price and time for the work you've been asked to do?*

A: It's usually not up to me. Most of my clients are book publishers, and when they contact me about projects, they offer me an hourly rate or a flat rate and give me a deadline. If both the schedule and rate work for me, I say yes, and if not, I say no.

Q: *You work mainly with book publishers. Do they work in broadly similar ways with copyeditors?*

A: Expectations do vary from publisher to publisher and between new clients or project managers; I always ask questions to make sure we're on the same page.

4. WORKING PRACTICES

Q: *What style guides or manuals are on your virtual and literal bookshelf?*

A: *The Chicago Manual of Style*—all my clients use it!

Q: *Do you network with other editors? If so, how and why?*

A: Yes! Networking has been crucial to my success in building a freelance business. I've done most of my networking through my editing certificate program and the Northwest Independent Editors Guild. As a freelancer who works in isolation most of the time, I value having other editors to turn to for support. Several editors have helped me by offering advice or referring me to clients, and now I'm trying to do the same for new editors!

5. THE FINAL WORD

Q: What are your top three tips for copyeditors who are just starting their careers?

A:

1. Work for free
2. Get to know other editors who share your interests
3. Say yes to everything you possibly can