**Getting the Job You Want — Hiring for the Web**

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**Important skills:**

When I’m hiring a copy editor for the web, what’s most important is that the candidate is a strong copy editor, hands down. How does one prove this? By taking a copy test. Having a top-notch copy test is the single most essential thing I look for in a potential hire, regardless of the medium in which they’ll be copyediting — most other things can be taught: how to use the CMS, how to use Google Analytics, etc.

That being said, you will certainly be at an advantage if you have a background in and a solid understanding of the web. Secondary skills that are important for landing a web copy editor job: basic HTML, knowing your way around a CMS, basic knowledge of credible sourcing, both for text (e.g., don’t link to Wikipedia) and photos (e.g., don’t steal professional photos and credit without permission), having a social media presence and familiarity with social media sites/apps (how to optimize a story’s thumbnail/title for Facebook vs. Twitter vs. Pinterest, for example), familiarity with Tumblr and Reddit, etc.

**What’s the copy test like?**

Copy tests in publishing can run the gamut from in-person tests on paper or InDesign to tests via Microsoft Word returned over email. Most magazine copy tests are approximately an hour long, and may include a combination of sentences and stories to edit in hard copy as well as an InDesign component. At BuzzFeed, I send candidates an edit test via email on a date and time we agree on; it’s typically a set of sentences two stories to edit in Word within a specific amount of time. Candidates turn on track changes, edit the document, and send it back to me within two hours. Some sample sentences:

1. Lisa suggested that the team 1) work on defence, 2) learn to hit, and 3) new manager.
2. The President will speak on gun control legislation tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.
3. Mark it down the history books: April 26, 2013 was the the day the White House joined tumblr.
4. I wore a Betsy johnson dress to my high-school prom and my date wore John Lennon styled glasses.
5. I was visiting Karen last Fall when I something that peaked my interest.

**Crafting your resume:**

Ideally, all of your relevant information should fit on one page, though don’t sweat it if it trickles onto a second page. If you have tons of experience, it’s better to have a two-page resume than to use a 9-point font to cram it all into one. If you’re at entry level, however, one page should typically be enough — include only the most pertinent information. Tailor your resume to the job you’re applying to rather than firing off copies of the same one everywhere; it's OK to change it slightly with each application to highlight the jobs/skills most relevant to the position you are seeking, but make sure that all the info you do include creates a unified image.

Many companies, even small ones, use search technologies, so using the right keywords can put you at a great advantage; use the same words found in the job listing you may be responding to.

Your résumé is your first chance to hook to a prospective employer — so it's essential that it makes a strong and lasting impression. Since most employers typically scan the highlights of a résumé within 10 to 30 seconds, make sure yours accurately reflects your qualifications in the most concise, coherent, organized way. Don't use any technical jargon or acronyms — spell everything out in plain language. If you don't have much work experience or are a recent college grad, bulk up your résumé with any relevant or notable volunteer work, professional activities/skills, internships, or blogs (if they’re professionally presented, of course).

**Writing your cover letter:**

How should your cover letter differ from your resume? Some tips:

• It should be brief and enticing. The idea is to make someone finish your letter and say, “I want to meet this person!” instead of saying, “All right, I’ve had enough of this person!”

• Remember: This is where your personality should really shine! If you’re applying for a copy editor position at BuzzFeed, for example, tell me what you love about the site, something you’ve read lately, and/or why you want to work here specifically.

• Don’t be afraid to sprinkle your cover letter with personal anecdotes, and, depending on where you’re applying, a bit of humor — something that will make you stand out amongst a sea of bland cover letters. Now’s the perfect time to use that nerdy story about comma splices or mention how a lowercase “is” in an title makes your eyes bleed.

• Have we met before? Or perhaps you met someone else on the staff at an event? Mention it!

• Are you applying to an entry-level position? If you don’t have the professional experience, this could be a prime opportunity to prove why you’re the right person for the job and explain in your own words why you’re passionate about it.

• If you’re applying for a freelance or part-time gig, be specific about your availability in your cover letter.

This goes without saying, but please, PLEASE review your résumé for typos, inaccuracies, and inconsistencies. For a copy editor position, I immediately disqualify anyone with a typo in either their resume or cover letter. That might sound a little harsh, but to me, that sends the message that if you haven’t been careful enough to proofread your own application materials, how are you to be trusted with copyediting important stories?

**Making contact in the absence of a job listing:**

Consider reaching out to editors at a publication or site that you love and would love to work for, and ask for an informational interview — a casual talk about what it’s like to work there in a role that you’re seeking. Most editors will be happy to spare 20 minutes or so to chat, and some of them may be willing to do it in their office so you can get a sense of the working environment.

**How to enhance your chances when you don’t have much copyediting experience:**

• Consider volunteering some of your time (but only as much as you can afford) to a local charity office or outreach program. These kinds of offices frequently publish various materials to supplement their initiatives, and they’re frequently without formal editorial support, often due to budget limitations.

• Want to work for a local publication or favorite website? Do you get itchy because you routinely find typos, misspelled words, bad headlines, and a host of other shortcomings in there? Why not ask if any help would be appreciated keeping mistakes out of the copy? You might offer to do a few stories for free, just so you can show the publication or site’s managing editor the considerable editing abilities you can bring to the table. Remember: It never hurts to ask!

• Offer your services to friends or colleagues who need edits on their papers, dissertations, reports, etc.

• Enroll in a copyediting class or certificate program.

**Following up:**

If you’ve applied for a position that you’re really itching for and haven’t heard back in a while, send a follow-up email to the hiring editor/hiring manager. Try to find a specific email address rather than a general HR email address or making contact via a form, which can seem to send your message into a black hole. This will at least put your name on their radar if they haven’t started filtering applications yet. If you’ve gotten through the interview and copy test stages, send a (handwritten!) thank-you note to everyone you spoke with, reiterating why you’d like to work there.

**American Copy Editors Society Conference 2015: Getting the Job You Want**

**What can I do to increase my chances of being hired as a web copy editor?**

• **Do** familiarize yourself with basic HTML, with using a CMS, and with sourcing standards (e.g., don’t link facts to Wikipedia!).

• **Do** know your grammar rules! If you don’t have tons of professional copyediting experience, enroll in a class or a certificate program; check out Mediabistro for online classes (or in-person classes if you live in the NYC area).

• **Do** some research on copyediting (some recommended books: *The Elephants of Style* by Bill Walsh, the *Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* by Jane Strauss); quiz yourself in areas in which you feel you can improve (grammarbook.com is a great resource).

• **Do** familiarize yourself with commonly used style manuals, like *Associated Press Stylebook* and *Chicago Manual of Style*.

• **Do** tailor your resume and cover letter to each job you are applying for.

• **Don’t** use wacky fonts, a photo, images, or a font size smaller than 11 in your resume. One page is ideal, but a two-page resume is just fine. Always lead with professional information rather than education.

• **Do** show some personality in your cover letter: an anecdote related to the position you’re applying to, what it is about the company you admire, or something on the site you’ve read recently that you loved. Also, if you perhaps don’t have all of the qualifications listed in the job ad, this is a place where you can explain why you should still be considered.

• **Do** find the contact information of the copy chief or managing editor at a place you’d love to work, and ask if you can have an informational interview or take a copy test. Being proactive before a job listing even goes up can make a lasting impression on a hiring editor.

• **Do** spell the name of your contact correctly!

• **Don’t** include any typos or inconsistencies in formatting in your resume and cover letter.

• **Do** offer to volunteer your services (as much time as you can afford) in terms of offering pro bono copyediting work for a website or a newsletter you love.

• **Do** follow up after an interview with a handwritten thank-you note.