Examining the Changing Role of Professional Editors in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING THE CHANGING ROLES OF PROFESSIONAL EDITORS IN THE WORKPLACE

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In this study, I explore how the professional experiences of nontechnical editors, a group often underrepresented in existing scholarship, are being shaped by current workplace environments and identify which of their skills are particularly valued by superiors and colleagues to determine how editors can best position themselves to succeed in the modern workplace. The findings of my online survey of 51 nontechnical editors, primarily self-employed or working in nonprofit environments, demonstrate that currently employed editors and those preparing to enter the field must align their work with the priorities of their workplace and profession, proactively adapt to changes in these priorities and professional expectations, and maintain a strategic, big-picture orientation if they are to be successful in their jobs. I argue that editors need to be more aggressive in bringing their contributions to the attention of those in charge so that their work will not go unnoticed, denying them opportunities for advancement or other
professional rewards. They must also continually ensure that they get the training they need to not only learn how to skillfully use relevant new technologies (e.g., word-processing software, online content management systems, design programs) but also understand how to best utilize them in their work. To prepare editors for success under these conditions, undergraduate and graduate education programs should help students learn business-related skills like strategic thinking and effective collaboration, as well as textual-editing skills. Additionally, I recommend that current professional editors work with editing students to build professional resources and communities that will help new and current editors develop the skills they will need to be successful at a multifaceted job in a dynamic environment.
I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Editors were once considered primarily to be keepers of words. They minded punctuation, guarded grammar, checked facts, and eliminated typos. But the work of professional writers and editors is undeniably changing with the times. Technological advances and shifts in organizational priorities are affecting both the way these professionals work and the types of work they can and must do. As print formats are giving way to the Internet, editors are working with different media and in different contexts than in the past. Because of these changes, many editors are now expected to possess additional skill sets and master additional roles and responsibilities within their organizations, including problem solver, technical expert, liaison, and designer—all while still watching over grammar, spelling, and clarity. Though some of these additional roles are not foreign to editors, they must learn to think about these roles, individually and in terms of how they relate and intersect, in new ways.

As an editor, I have experienced this phenomenon in my own workplace. Though I was hired to edit both print and Web materials, over the nearly four years I have been at my job, I have found myself spending less time editing print materials and more time on Web work—work that often includes not just editing text but troubleshooting technical issues, editing HTML, consulting with developers, and performing user testing of
features on our Web site. I frequently communicate with Web content creators and serve on cross-functional teams to find new ways to utilize our Web site. I finish some days realizing that I have not edited a single word all day, except in e-mails. To fulfill these new responsibilities, I have needed to both pick up skill sets not frequently used in “traditional” editing and adapt existing skills to new situations. While I am accustomed to using my problem-solving skills to, for example, determine the most effective wording for a sentence, learning to apply them to figuring out what is causing an error within a block of HTML code has been a new challenge. Conversations with fellow editors have led me to understand that my situation is not unique.

The goal of my research was to explore exactly what additional skills and responsibilities editors are being asked to assume, how they are dealing with such changes in their work, and how these changes affect their perceived value within their organizations. Specifically, how are professional expectations and roles for editors changing? How do these expectations influence editors’ perceived value within their organizations? Is editors’ value now being attached primarily to skills other than textual editing? And what should editors do to increase their perceived value and adapt to the current professional landscape? All of these questions are relevant both to editors’ daily work and to their long-term futures if they wish to remain attractive candidates for employment in an increasingly competitive economy. To become and remain valued employees, they must understand how to effectively deal with current work-related challenges to ensure their work is positively perceived by others, while also preparing for further shifts and challenges that may be ahead. The implications of these questions and
issues also extend directly to professionals in other professional communication–related fields—including writers, who face similar challenges in shifting roles and expectations—and indirectly to everyone who works with professional communicators. The editing and writing fields are at a critical crossroads between “old” media and new, and now is the time to investigate the current situation to shed light on potential future directions.

Though all types of editors are being affected by these changes, I am particularly interested in the experiences of nontechnical professional editors (i.e., those involved in editing publications and communications geared toward a fairly general audience), both independently and as they compare and contrast with the experiences of technical editors. This interest is largely motivated by my own work as a nontechnical editor. However, it is also inspired by the lack of representation in current literature of the roles of nontechnical professional editors. Though current scholarship has much to say about the work of technical editors, we need to look at how this research does or does not apply to their nontechnical counterparts. Nontechnical professional editors would likely offer a different perspective on what constitutes work in the field because of the differences in the types of content they work with, the ways technology influences their work, and the professional opportunities available to them. My study will help illuminate what has been overlooked with the hope of changing the conversation about the roles that editors have in all types of workplaces. This study will also help determine what areas of the field offer the most opportunities for editors looking to expand their existing skills or move in new and potentially more lucrative professional directions.
Literature Review

In reviewing recent literature about professional editors, I noticed two particular trends: (1) editors are frequently lumped in the larger category of “writers,” or even more broadly, “communicators”; and (2) when editors are given independent attention, the category of the profession most often represented is technical editors. While research exists about the general practice of editing in both technical and nontechnical categories—often focusing on revision patterns, technologies, or techniques—information about the roles, experiences, and perceived value of nontechnical professional editors in existing literature is more limited. The various studies regarding editors and writers show that these professionals need a broad range of skills to meet the challenges of the modern workplace and be valued for their contributions; however, there is not a clear sense of how these individual skills coalesce to form a professional communicator’s full experience—or of how best to prepare these professionals to meet these new challenges through professional development and education.

One segment of the current literature that is relevant to my investigation looks at how editors are increasingly using their existing skills as decision makers and problem solvers. Studying the ways editors exercise these skills can help us understand how they might adapt the skills to new professional situations. Jocelyne Bisaillon argues that editors use several specific strategies, which have varying degrees of effectiveness, to detect and solve problems they encounter when working on texts. These findings apply not only to the process of textual revision but also to how editors are able to solve a wide range of problems by drawing upon their stored knowledge and available resources.
Specifically, Mary Fran Buehler argues that a successful editor takes a rhetorical approach to editing, considering situation as well as grammatical rules. This ability to see the big picture, in addition to the details, in any situation is one that can serve editors well in other aspects of the workplace. As publication formats and situations become more fluid, the most successful editors are able to make decisions that allow them to appropriately adapt their work to fit these rhetorical situations.

One way editors are using these big-picture skills is by becoming increasingly involved in collaborative development processes. Carolyn Rude argues that editors should be involved at the outset of a project to improve their understanding of the project’s purpose and reduce significant changes to content or format later in the process. Julie Fisher agrees; she found that developers generally preferred to have a technical editor involved as early as possible in the system development process, particularly because of their contributions to interface design and help functions. Involving editors in this way is, for the most part, a relatively new concept that expands the range of problems editors are being exposed to, the types of skills they will need to solve those problems, and the influence they can have in shaping a document. To ensure project goals are met during this process, editors must be able to effectively collaborate with project stakeholders, including, as Carol Gerich notes, negotiating with authors about proposed revisions. Rebekka Andersen shadowed a technical editor through the development of a document and observed that the editor collaborated with the writer throughout the project in ways outside of traditional editorial functions, including providing input on proposals, planning for the project, reading and commenting on early drafts, and enforcing
deadlines. This constant collaboration was vital to the success of the project. And Shannon Wisdom proposes that technical editors are the ideal people to lead the academic peer review process because of their experience in working collaboratively, their ability to look impartially at content, and their good management skills. These abilities to collaborate with others and see the big picture are valuable skills that editors can adapt to a variety of professional situations, such as participating on project planning teams and in other cross-functional company efforts.

Editors may also need to apply these problem-solving skills to adapt to the challenges presented by the increasingly ubiquitous presence of technology and online media in their work. One challenge, as Michael Albers asserts, is that editors must be increasingly concerned with consistency and coherence because of their increasing work with dynamic documents—information stored in chunks in electronic databases and displayed on screen in response to user queries (e.g., a Web search). Dennis Bockus believes that editors must work more closely with software developers to maintain consistency and quality because of the increasingly fragmented nature of online texts. This type of work presents new challenges for editors in assessing user needs and usage patterns, as their text will not always be used in any one way. Both Albers and Bockus emphasize the importance of editors’ involvement in user testing so that they can see these theoretical interfaces in action and help make them more effective. Editors’ increasing responsibility for online materials thus constitutes a paradigm shift in the nature of editorial work, making the rhetorical view that Buehler references more necessary than ever.
In addition to new problem-solving approaches, editors working with online projects need new technical knowledge and skills. Steven Anderson and colleagues discuss the different types of editing that must be done for a Web site and note that while there are similarities between online and print editing, “Web site editors, more than editors working in print media, have to think about how the medium itself affects the way people read” (52). George Hayhoe, too, sees the Web medium itself as a new challenge for editors; he emphasizes the importance of “presenting [information] in a style that works with and not against the delivery medium” (282) and understanding how online editing methods differ from those used with print media. Editors must learn about Web usage patterns, the way Web users read text on a screen, and optimal page layouts for communicating different types of information. Jan Thiessen and Vincent Ambrock look at the editor’s role in designing and developing online courses, an increasingly popular genre that mixes technical editing considerations with content that may be nontechnical in nature. They believe that the rise of Web 2.0 media such as blogs, wikis, and social networking sites has expanded the scope of editors’ work, noting that the complexity of these environments means that “a simple-looking but effectively designed multimedia tool often requires many resources [and] a significant amount of time to produce and test, and increases the workload and knowledge level required of instructional, technical, and production staff to implement and maintain it” (268–69). And Tony Scott points out the ethical responsibility editors have to understand the new technologies they are using and their potential social consequences. Though print editing also has its own set of specific challenges and considerations in terms of format, readability, and ethics, those are
challenges that have remained largely unchanged since the inception of mass-printed documents. Work with online media presents challenges that are both unfamiliar and fluid; to do their jobs successfully, editors must be able to understand these problems and respond effectively to them.

Those editors who can master technology’s challenges often find themselves with opportunities to use their unique skill sets to take on new—and often higher-profile—roles in the workplace. William Hart-Davidson focuses on how the existing knowledge and skills of editors position them to meet several important technology-related needs, including developing content and systems that are both customized and dynamic.

Michelle Corbin, Pat Moell, and Mike Boyd see editors playing an important role in the quality-control process, similar to the role usability testers play in software development. They view content editing as an important job of editors and believe that a thorough, quality-focused edit is crucial to ensuring a document’s usability. Joseph Bocchi pushes the boundaries of the editorial role further toward information technology, suggesting that editors are perfectly positioned to play an important part in intranet site development. He posits that editors’ skills would be particularly helpful in areas such as the adaptation of messages for a variety of constituencies, mediation between users and upper management, and the distribution of responsibility and accountability among stakeholders. And Betsy Brown and colleagues note that during their company’s move from print to online documentation, editors retained their original roles of schedule minder, mediator, user champion, and language advisor but also took on the new roles of supporter and motivator to guide other team members through the transition to online
processes. They played an important part in facilitating change and helping others adapt to it. Moreover, in addition to gaining new opportunities within their current jobs, editors who are proficient with online and technology-related work may find new career paths open to them. In a study of the career paths of technical communicators, Lori Anschuetz and Stephanie Rosenbaum profile two individuals who started out in traditional editing roles and seized on interests and skills they developed through the course of their work to move into different job roles, including Web writing and usability testing. Most companies now prioritize communication via online sites and other new media, and editors who can recognize opportunities in these areas and step up to seize them stand a greater chance of being seen as valued employees.

Indeed, editors must take deliberate steps to understand what they need to do to be deemed valuable to their organizations if they wish to be thought of as indispensable and be given opportunities to advance. Several scholars identify the factors at play in determining an editor’s organizational value, including broad perceptions about the work of editors, opinions of coworkers and others with whom the editor interacts, and editors’ own efforts to demonstrate their value to others. Janice Redish ties the question of what constitutes value directly to the financial bottom line, stating that, as editors, “we add value when we contribute to improving an organization’s return on its investment in what we do” (26). She suggests customer satisfaction, cost savings, and efficiency, among others, as measures to help determine an employee’s value and demonstrate it to management. Michael Hughes suggests that value is tied to the perception of technical writers and editors as creators of knowledge, or “agent[s] of organizational learning”
They are seen as adding value when they create knowledge, not just package information. In separate work, Deborah Brandt and Johndan Johnson-Eilola both agree that editors’ skills in working with knowledge and information are what will make them particularly useful contributors to the emerging knowledge-based economy. But making these important contributions is only part of the battle. Editors must also find ways to have these contributions recognized by others.

For editors to increase their visibility in the workplace, they must be perceived as valuable contributors by not only their colleagues and supervisors but also the constituents outside their departments or companies with whom they regularly work, including authors, information systems professionals, and readers or end users. Fisher found that information systems developers considered editors a valuable part of the software development process because of the user-focused perspective they are able to bring to the work. Additionally, she found that systems for which technical editors assisted in development were rated as more usable than those that did not have a technical editor involved. Angela Eaton and colleagues found that authors generally had positive impressions of their relationships with editors and particularly valued “an editor who understands the content . . . in addition to his or her facility with language” (120). Editors who want to develop positive working relationships with these groups must learn what they value in the editing relationship. This will help them determine how to most effectively and visibly deliver this value.

Though it seems evident that editors have much to offer to their workplaces, several authors emphasize that editors are largely underappreciated, a major obstacle they
must overcome. Sylvia Hunter states the problem bluntly: “The copy editor’s pivotal role in saving countless academics from various degrees of public humiliation (and, occasionally, from legal action) is almost never acknowledged” (8). Rosemary Shipton agrees that though the goal of good editing is to be invisible to the reader, the editor often falls into the same category in the workplace. And David Henige points out that editors are more likely to be noticed for mistakes than for positive contributions: “Editors stand at the fulcrum of the scholarly communication process—the point where several proverbial bucks stop. . . . As is so often the case, credit is hard to find while debit is there for the taking” (63). All of these authors wisely warn of the danger of editors’ fading into the background without getting proper recognition for their good work. Editors must be aware of this tendency and prepared to fight against it.

How can they wage this battle against invisibility? Saul Carliner contends that wiser choices about professional development and more interest in helping themselves and their profession become more visible will help editors become more valued. Lorraine Sharon argues that for technical editors to increase their perceived value, they must hone their skills in technology, information design, writing, and project development and take opportunities to raise their profile within the organization wherever they can find them. She encourages editors, “Exploit your knowledge to benefit your company, your profession, and yourself in an effort to make editing indispensable” (Sharon 4). Hughes also emphasizes technical communicators’ responsibility in advocating for their own organizational value, encouraging them to “articulate their value in more explicit terms” (284). Several authors view timely and relevant professional development and training as
another critical part of the equation. Robert Baensch believes that both education and training, particularly about the management of the publishing process, are critical to success of professionals in the evolving publishing industry. Anschuetz and Rosenbaum suggest that technical communicators take the initiative to develop a field of specialization, seize opportunities for training, and make contacts inside and outside of their companies to raise their profile. And Redish advises technical editors: “You have to consider it part of your role to show the value that you add as a technical communicator” (38). Editors cannot rely on their employers to provide professional development or recognition; they must seek out necessary education and advocate for their own advancement.

As this review shows, editors face a number of changes in processes, priorities, standards, and tools, and it is important to determine how all of these changes affect their overall professional experience. Though this research reveals many trends and concerns that could apply to both nontechnical and technical editors, important areas of separation in their work exist and should be addressed if we are to have a complete picture of the experience of editors. This is especially true in terms of editors’ relationship to technology, a relationship that is newer and less clear in nontechnical than technical editing. These two groups’ experiences may also differ in terms of workplace priorities, budgets, and the values of their target audiences, among other factors, all of which can affect the work they do and how others view it.

Other deficiencies in the existing body of research are also evident. While the current research says something about what editors are responsible for now and what they
need to learn to do to be successful, it less thoroughly addresses how the types of work they do are balanced between more “traditional” work (e.g., textual editing) and new skills related to areas like technology. As editors spend more time in new areas, are they doing less textual editing or just spending less time on the same amount of work? And which of their tasks do they find most important or meaningful? Additionally, while there is a fair amount of literature addressing how editors might in theory add value to a project or company, I have found little focusing on how and to what degrees their contributions are recognized or rewarded. For example, are editors who learn and use new technologies or make significant contributions to the development of a product actually treated any differently within their companies than those who are good with text but not much else? Recognition and rewards indicate what skills will soon be considered unnecessary or passé. Ambitious employees pay attention to these trends in deciding what type of work and opportunities to pursue. If, for example, attention to grammar is a skill that goes unrecognized by superiors while ability to learn a new content management system is lauded, editors will be more likely to shun the former in pursuit of the latter. I hope to fill some of the gaps surrounding these significant issues through my research.

**Research Methods**

Because the field currently lacks research on the roles of nontechnical editors, I conducted empirical research to gather information about the experiences of these professionals. With approval from my university’s Human Subjects Review Board, I distributed an anonymous, Web-based survey to a number of professional editors,
primarily in the Washington, D.C., area. The survey (See Appendix.) consisted of 27 questions in a variety of formats (multiple choice, short answer, Likert scale) and included questions about demographics, professional experience, use of technology, professional development, and perceived value of professional contributions.

I solicited survey respondents on two local e-mail discussion lists for communication professionals: DCPubs, a discussion list for “editors, designers, production folks and other people in the Washington, D.C. area working on publications” (http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/dcpubs/) that has more than 2,000 members; and the Coalition for Education Association Publications (CEAP) e-mail list, which has more than 200 subscribers who are primarily D.C.-area employees of education-related nonprofit associations involved with publishing. I subscribe to both of these lists and, in both cases, requested and received permission from the list moderator to send out a message soliciting participants for the survey. In the message with the survey link, I briefly described my project and requested responses from editors who did not consider themselves technical editors. The survey was open for three weeks (August 3–24, 2009), during which time 64 people completed some or all of the survey. Respondents were not compensated in any way for their participation. The survey was built and hosted online using SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

In analyzing the survey responses, I discarded the responses of 13 participants who indicated that their primary responsibility is technical editing by responding “Yes” to Question 8 (“Would you identify yourself as a technical editor?”) or who did not
respond to Question 8 at all, leaving 51 participants in total. All other respondents’ answers were considered, whether or not they completed the entire survey.

My survey included questions about respondents’ current employers and the types of projects they work on. I also asked a series of questions about respondents’ use of technology in their jobs, including types of technology they work with regularly, how they learn to use new technology, and how technology has affected their job satisfaction and ability to advance professionally. As I previously stated, technology seems to be one of the most significant factors affecting editors’ work today, and I designed these questions to determine the extent to which nontechnical editors are feeling its effects. I also asked respondents about the amount of time they spend on tasks that involve textual editing versus those that do not, how this breakdown has changed, and examples of nontextual editing tasks that these editors are regularly undertaking. These questions were designed to provide a clearer idea of the types of work that editors are doing and how much of this work lies outside the “normal” definition of editing.

Additionally, I asked a number of demographic questions to get a fuller picture of who my respondents are. The majority of my survey respondents (74.5%) were female, significantly higher than the Bureau of Labor Statistics’s 2008 finding that just under 55% of editors were female (211). Additionally, 66.7% of my respondents were over the age of 40. All of them had obtained at least one professional degree or certification, and 51% of them held at least two. On average, these respondents had 18.6 years of experience in the editing field and 6.7 years with their current employers. None of them identified themselves as technical editors, and 70.6% were employed by nonprofit
organizations—not surprising for the Washington, D.C., area, which has a large concentration of such organizations. However, the fact that such a significant percentage of the respondents work in the similar types of workplaces may have limited the scope of the experiences represented in the survey.
II. CHANGING ROLES FOR PROFESSIONAL EDITORS

What Editors Do Now

A primary goal of my research was to find out how editors are spending their workdays so that we can see both what it is like to be a professional editor in this moment and what it may be like in the future. Digging deeper into what types of roles editors are filling today helps us see potential areas of growth, stagnation, and uncertainty in the profession. It also helps us better understand how editors can shift their work to increase their value in the workplace. (See Section III.) Additionally, editors who understand the full range of work their colleagues are doing will be better able to determine what they need to know and do to be competitive in the field. As I stated earlier, my research focused on the roles that nontechnical editors are filling in an attempt to understand the particularities of their work, how it differs from that of technical editors, and the implications of these differences.

Though the results of my survey and my study of literature related to the field reveal evident commonalities in editors’ work, defining “typical” work for an editor is nearly impossible. Because editors work in a variety of settings, with a variety of media and formats, and on a variety of content, editorial positions can have any number of potential job descriptions. Some editors are heavily involved in management and oversight of publications, while others are primarily responsible for editing copy. One
editor might spend her days managing production of an academic journal, while another edits a Web site or a blog and yet another substantively edits trade paperbacks. Though the common thread in all of these positions is words, the ways editors work with them can be vastly different—and the variety of job descriptions among these positions is ever increasing. Overall, my survey results reveal that nontechnical editors are being tasked with work that includes everything from designing publications to setting budgets to managing Web sites. Editors of all sorts are being asked to stretch in their work, expanding the boundaries of their individual positions—and, as a result, the profession as a whole—beyond their traditional limits. Editors cannot afford to be just editors anymore; they must be some combination of writers, negotiators, businesspeople, decision-makers, and technology experts. As the boundaries of the profession expand to include these nontraditional types of work, editors must seek out professional development that will best prepare them for these potential changes in their roles. If they cannot or will not successfully transition into these expanded roles, they may be left behind by the changing profession.

The most familiar and fundamental role of the editor is working with text, usually written by someone else, to ensure its clarity and correctness. Nearly every professional editor performs this function in some form, even if copyediting is not his or her primary job responsibility. However, the emphasis on textual editing is clearly shifting. As George Hayhoe states, “when we look at what [technical communicators] do, how they spend their time on the job, it often seems as though writing and editing account for a very small portion of their typical workdays” (281). Nearly a third of respondents to my
survey indicated that they spend 41 to 60% of their typical workdays on duties other than traditional textual editing, a figure that seems high considering the traditional perception that editors’ job is to work with text. However, responses to this question were fairly evenly split, a reflection of varied job duties within the profession. The majority of my respondents said this percentage had not changed over the past three to five years; however, just over a third said that this percentage had increased either a lot or somewhat while only three respondents said that the percentage had decreased. This could be because these respondents have advanced into positions that involve, for example, more managerial work than textual editing. However, another potential scenario is that a significant number of editors at all levels are spending less time working with text.

Among their nonediting duties, survey respondents listed design work, brainstorming and writing content, social networking, project management, posting online content, collaborating with colleagues, and marketing and media relations. The boundaries dividing the editing profession from other fields are becoming more porous, allowing editors to accept (or forcing upon them, depending on whether the change is welcome) more nonediting responsibilities than before and often changing the ways they think and work.

Writing is one area in which editors are participating more frequently; this field has much in common with editing but does require some different skills and ways of thinking. As Jocelyne Bisaillon points out, both writers and editors engage in revision, though the professional editing process is very different from self-revision (296). Editing occurs independently of writing, with the editor helping the writer by bringing a fresh eye
and a different viewpoint to the text. In these traditional situations, the writer, not the editor, has ultimate agency over the text. However, this line between writer and editor is beginning to blur. Several respondents to my survey indicated that they often engage in a variety of writing or writing-related tasks, including brainstorming ideas for publication content, posting to blogs, communicating with authors or customers, developing online content, and composing reports. All of these tasks involve creating content in various genres and at various stages (brainstorming through development to the final product), rather than revising existing content, and require editors to draw on writing and communication skills, as well as critical thinking and content-related knowledge. Professionals who are engaging in these writing activities are using their communication-related expertise to add value in these other areas.

Significantly, some editors are even leaving the profession entirely to shift into writing-related careers. Lori Anschuetz and Stephanie Rosenbaum present a case study of Sally, a marketing and Web content writer who started her career as a junior technical editor at an architecture and engineering firm (155–56). As she became more interested in improving the end-user experience, Sally applied her experience editing technical texts from a nontechnical perspective to technical writing positions, crafting texts that would be helpful for end users. She found that her content and organizational knowledge and communication skills provided her with a strong foundation for these new types of work. While the respondents to my survey have not followed Sally out of the editing profession, a number of them have had experiences analogous to hers and are doing similar types of
work within their current jobs. They would be well positioned to move into full-blown writing positions should they choose to do so.

Why are editors beginning to take on more writing roles in the workplace? The literature and my findings do not indicate a particular reason for this trend. However, it seems reasonable that the increased emphasis workplaces are placing on efficiency could be allowing for more multitasking opportunities for editors who have sufficient skills to take them on. Though editing and writing require a number of common skills, namely language mastery, not all good editors will necessarily be good writers (and vice versa). But one professional who has the skills to do both of these jobs well—like the three survey respondents who said that writing was one of the skills for which they are most valued—would be a desirable employment prospect for any company wishing to cut costs. And because the average salary for editors is lower than that of writers (see Section IV), an editor who can write may be an even more attractive investment than a writer who can edit. Taking on more writing responsibilities will clearly affect editors’ work in that it involves them more thoroughly in the creation process and forces them to think about revision differently. One danger in combining these roles arises if editors are being asked to revise their own work; one of the biggest advantages of the editing process is that an editor brings an objective, fresh eye to a writer’s text. Editors who work on their own writing will likely be unable to objectively make all of the changes necessary to optimize the text. If consolidation of roles starts to negatively affect quality, it could become a hindrance, rather than a help.
Editors are also increasingly taking on the role of collaborator. As they mediate between the author and the end user, they have traditionally needed to be able to understand the needs of all parties and ensure those needs are fulfilled. In contemporary workplaces, the list of stakeholders is often long—including writers, designers, production staff, management, and end users—and editors are the common link between these parties because of their work to ensure the document is effective in all of these areas. An editor can know how to meet all of these needs only through effective collaboration, which involves building positive relationships with these individuals throughout the process of editing the document. Through her study of the collaborative revision process at a large research and development lab, Carol Gerich found that collegial relationships between technical editors and authors helped the revision process go more smoothly. However, a key factor in the development of these relationships—organizational structure—lay outside either party’s control. Both editors and authors whom she interviewed generally preferred that the two groups be housed within the same department. One of the authors Gerich shadowed stated that this arrangement helps the two groups “develop personal relationships, so the editors get to know exactly what [the authors are] doing” (67). Her other subject stated that “the in-house editorial arrangement means that he no longer fears losing control of his paper” (67). In both cases, these positive collaborative relationships foster trust and shared knowledge that are key to putting authors at ease about leaving their content in the hands of the editor. In workplaces where editors and authors are not currently in close contact, editors may need
to go the extra mile to lobby management for new department structures or to find other ways to build trust and collegiality with authors.

Increased trust in collaborative editorial relationships allows for more effective negotiation, another key skill that editors are putting to more frequent use. Every time an editor argues for a change he feels is important, he practices strategic negotiation skills. Shannon Wisdom, who studied editors’ roles in the academic peer review process, emphasizes that a technical editor “must be a master negotiator and a diplomat” to be successful in his collaborative efforts (136). Collaborative relationships by necessity involve multiple viewpoints and needs that editors must deal with respectfully, especially when working with authors. Often, knowing how to most diplomatically propose a revision to an author who is personally invested in her text is as great a part of the battle as knowing the best revision to propose. Negotiation skills are becoming increasingly valued in all types of businesses, and editors who have honed these skills could be looked to for help in situations outside their normal work duties that require mediation or negotiation.

As managers recognize editors’ skills in collaboration, editors are likely to be asked to participate in situations that require collaborative work, even when this work falls outside their normal duties. This type of work, again, takes away from actual time spent editing text, though it may help editors in their overall work by broadening their organizational perspectives. More than half of the respondents to my survey said editors in their workplaces frequently serve on cross-functional teams and committees, proving they are trusted to collaborate effectively with not only their colleagues and clients but
also those in other areas of their organizations. Workplaces are becoming more collaborative in the sharing of ideas, talents, and work with both internal and external constituents. As this happens, it is more important than ever for editors to leverage their existing collaboration skills to develop strong relationships and communicate effectively and strategically.

One major and relatively new way editors are participating in collaborative situations is by becoming more actively involved in document development processes. Traditionally, editors’ involvement with a document or project has been limited to refining text, but as editors become more valued as collaborators, they are often being involved earlier in development. A significant majority, nearly two-thirds, of respondents to my survey said editors in their workplaces contribute ideas and expertise throughout the product or project development process. Early involvement in this work has some definite benefits. Gerich’s study of technical editors and writers during the revision process led her to conclude that though writers valued editors’ suggestions for substantive revisions, the suggestions often came too late for writers to be able to take them into account (69). Thus, she feels that editors should be involved earlier in the writing process, particularly if a document is complex or flexible in format or content. Rebekka Andersen shadowed an editor at a technical publisher and observed that this editor was involved throughout the process and that her role was fluid, generally conforming to her organization’s expectations for team collaboration. Andersen’s subject was considered a key part of the team and adjusted her involvement as necessary to the project, attending meetings, proofreading when the proofreader was unavailable, and consulting on early
drafts. This type of involvement was beneficial, as the editor’s early participation allowed her “to help shape the concept, scope, and objectives of a project and develop a close working relationship with all those involved” (493). Several other researchers, including Julie Fisher and Carolyn Rude, also advocate for technical editors’ early involvement in collaborative development processes, and responses to my survey indicate that early involvement is equally important for nontechnical editors.

This procedural shift means editors are exerting a greater amount of influence on projects because they can make constructive suggestions before the point at which large-scale changes are no longer feasible. For example, a recent high-profile Web-based project I edited for my company involved both text and Flash graphics. I was brought into the project early to review the initial design so that I could ensure that it would be appropriate and user-friendly in relation to the text. If my input had come after programming was complete, any changes I suggested would have been much more difficult to make because of the tight schedule and budget and, therefore, less likely to be approved. If, as existing research and my survey findings suggest, early involvement is becoming more of a norm, editors will be involved even more heavily in collaboration and overall substantive improvement of the projects they work on, marking a shift in their work from reactivity to creativity.

This type of document development work also feeds into another trend: editors’ increased responsibility for big-picture decision making. Editors have always needed strong decision-making skills and the ability to see a situation from multiple viewpoints to make choices about everything from where to place a comma to how to structure a
document. Though a fair amount of editing revolves around set rules of grammar, spelling, or punctuation, Mary Fran Buehler argues that editors must take a rhetorical approach toward their work to both determine when strict adherence to these rules harms, rather than helps, readability, and deal with gray areas for which there are no set rules, such as determining the appropriate tone for a piece or how to best organize the text to improve flow. As new media formats and unfamiliar usage situations are complicating rhetorical situations, gray areas are increasing in number, and editors must be able to adapt the existing rules as necessary to new situations. For example, style manuals that have not been updated recently may not have instructions on how to style a reference to a blog post or electronic discussion board; in these cases, the editor may have to decide the clearest and most consistent format for the reference. Buehler posits that this rhetorical approach to the editing process requires different editorial skills and types of knowledge than a mere grammatical approach, including breadth of perspective, investigative persistence, flexibility, rhetorical knowledge and taste, and self-confidence (463). In their everyday work, editors must see the big picture and confidently work to find solutions where the right answer may not be obvious. These skills come into play when an editor selects articles for a newsletter, decides on the most reader-friendly way to format an internal document, or negotiates with an author to convince him that more information is necessary to prove a certain point.

These decision-making skills may also position editors to take advantage of new workplace opportunities in situations that require them to take a big-picture, strategic view toward their work. According to William Hart-Davidson, “the knowledge and skills
of technical communicators is, indeed, in high demand at the highest levels of technological decision-making: research, policy, business planning, management, and design” (146). Because editors often work on projects across their organizations, they can gather organizational knowledge and make contacts that can assist them as they branch out into new areas. Editors I surveyed are using this knowledge they have developed in a variety of big-picture decision-making situations outside textual editing. One mid-career print publications editor indicated that she is responsible for “reading and evaluating proposals and manuscripts [and] giving feedback to authors and potential authors,” helping influence what appears in the organization’s publications. Another experienced nonprofit editor listed among his job duties “overseeing production of academic journal and interest section newsletters; monitoring and strategic planning for journal subscription program and association serials . . . [and] monitoring journal budget[s],” all tasks that require oversight of various parts of the publication process. Another nonprofit editor of print publications is involved with “project management, including schedule development; the hiring[,] oversight, and evaluation of freelancer editors, proofreaders, and indexers; and design oversight,” among other duties. This individual must make decisions for the organization that affect both publications and staffing. These responses reflect a wide range of decisions editors are being empowered to make in their workplaces.

Editors are consistently finding ways to extend their work into more situations involving long-term planning and oversight that may help them gain recognition in their workplaces. However, this work, along with writing and collaborating, may reduce the
time editors have available to spend on textual editing, continuing to shift the balance of time spent between traditional and nontraditional editorial duties. As editors move into these more comprehensive and high-profile areas, they will have the foundational skills needed to succeed in them but may need to supplement these skills with additional education and training in areas such as business and strategic planning if they are to fully take advantage of these opportunities.

**The Influence of Technology**

In recent years, technology has changed many aspects of how editors (and other workers) do their jobs, including the tools used to work, the ways that they interact with one another and their audiences or clients, and the type of work that they must do. It is easy to see that technology has affected the ways in which editors work: word-processing software, not paper and pencil, is the norm now, and completed projects are more likely to be sent over e-mail, uploaded to an FTP site, or saved on a shared network drive than hand-delivered on paper to the author or project manager. For example, 100% of my survey respondents now use word-processing programs in their daily work; hard-copy-only editing is no longer efficient in most situations. A more important issue to examine, then, is how technology has affected the kinds of work editors do and the tasks involved in that work. Of my survey respondents, 80% said technology had changed the tasks they do now, as compared to five years ago, with 46% of them indicating that it has greatly affected the tasks they do, presumably by either influencing their existing tasks or pushing them into new types of work. Significantly, though not unexpectedly, no
respondents said technology has had no effect on their work. In addition to assisting editors in doing their editorial work, technology is also helping editors take on duties once reserved for other professionals, including design and layout, programming, and production management, contributing to the blurring of professional boundaries I referenced earlier.

The nontechnical editors who responded to my survey work in a wide variety of formats, including print and online publications, Web sites, blogs, internal documentation, proposals, and print and online manuals. Not surprisingly, all but three (more than 90%) of my survey respondents indicated that they work on print publications. But more notably, nearly 70% of respondents work on online publications, while just over half work on Web sites and/or blogs. And nearly a third mentioned Web-specific tasks—including “posting on blog, sending blast e-mails, updating the Web site”; “posting articles online”; “social networking”; and “project management for Web rollout”—when asked to elaborate on tasks outside traditional editing that they are responsible for in a typical week. This means both that the majority of these nontechnical editors are regularly working with online publishing technologies in some form and that many of them consider this work to be outside the traditional duties of their jobs. Much of this work does not directly involve text, but these tasks are increasingly figuring into editors’ workloads. This increased work with technology presents both new challenges and new opportunities for editors.

One consequence of the current dominance of technology, particularly for publications editors, is that online-only self-publishing technologies now offer authors a
cheap (or often free) and easy way to publish their work. However, it seems unlikely that editors will be cut out of the publishing equation anytime soon. Ya-ning Chen notes that the ease of distribution of e-books and their relatively low production cost mean that self-publishing is much easier now than when print was the only option (10). Aspiring authors can produce and distribute books themselves, by posting them for sale or free download on a personal Web site or blog or via an intermediate distributor such as Amazon or Barnes and Noble (Chen 11). Self-publishing is certainly still unlikely to be anywhere near as profitable as going through an established publisher, but it may become an increasingly viable option for fledgling authors attempting to build a name for themselves or wanting to dabble in writing without the hassles of traditional publishing. Interestingly, despite his belief that print will eventually fade into the background, Jeff Gomez still sees publishers finding, supporting, editing, marketing, and paying talent in the book market of the future (187–91). Readers will need to know which writers have been professionally vetted because the market will be flooded with unproven talent. Editors are an important part of that vetting process, as they lend credibility to an author’s writing through their work in improving content. But those involved in publishing will need to contend with the fact that publishers need to publish faster and more cheaply to keep up with competition caused by these online publishing options; the effects of these pressures will certainly trickle down to editors’ work, meaning they will both need to be prepared to defend the necessity of their current work and adapt their work to meet business priorities.
Most obviously, technology complicates editors’ work by presenting them with a variety of new skills to master. Though professional learning and development is not a new concept for editors, who must keep up with changing standards in language and their content areas, learning new technology presents particular challenges. Unlike reading or writing on paper, editing using a content management system or blogging software is not a universally taught skill—instead, it requires a learning curve, especially for those who have not had much prior experience with it. In situations involving new technologies, editors must be able to get the training necessary to help them attain at least a basic knowledge of these platforms becomes. The majority of editors I surveyed (54%) said self-training is the primary way they learn new technologies required for work, with informal on-the-job training with colleagues or supervisors the next most frequently selected option (30%). These numbers suggest a lack of (or lack of access to) formal training opportunities regarding new technologies. However, 34% of respondents said the training they had received prepared them somewhat well for their technology-related job duties, while 28% were neutral on the topic. Only 24% felt very well prepared by the training they had received or completed on their own. These numbers suggest a need for more effective training so that editors will feel fully prepared to embrace technology in their jobs. They must be prepared for these possibilities because 46% of respondents indicated that their aptitude for learning new technology has had either a positive or a negative influence on their professional advancement. This percentage is significant, again emphasizing that training is especially important in technology-centered work environments. (See Section IV.)
But not all of the learning editors must do to prepare for using technology is tool-related. With the Internet and increased use of technology have come a significant number of new publication genres, including Web sites, blogs, online courses, and social networking and media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Wikipedia, and Twitter), in addition to online publication of traditional print documents like books, articles, and press releases. While the core principles of text editing apply to each of these genres, each carries significant new rhetorical considerations and implications for the work of writing and editing. Joanne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski state that genres are shaped by explicit or implicit rules that help identify the genres to both those producing them and those using them (302–3). They emphasize that genre rules are fluid and can be affected by changes in contexts, group responses to situations, or forms (including available media, structuring devices, and language), all of which may facilitate the violation of existing genre rules and creation of new genres (Yates and Orlikowski 306). A number of these conditions are certainly present in the move toward Web genres, many of which have sprung, with modifications, from existing print genres. Because many of these Web-related genres are relatively new, editors may be involved in making decisions that will shape the already-established rules for these genres or maybe even shift toward the creation of new genres. To do this effectively, they must understand existing genres and how they are used so that they can choose the appropriate genres for their work and, when necessary, understand how to shape those genres to better meet user needs.

For example, people read Web sites very differently than they do books, and modern editors must know how best to craft and format Web text to make it most useful.
As Hayhoe observes, “we cannot simply assume that because we write good instructions for printed manuals, we know how to write and edit Web-based text that is equally user friendly and effective” (282). Steven Anderson and colleagues look at how the Levels of Edit framework, originally designed to help print editors determine what type of editing needs to be done to a document, applies to Web editing. They note that the interactive nature of the Web requires editors to adjust their outlooks in several ways when moving from work with print to Web site editing:

- At Level Three, which deals with the big-picture issues [related to content and structure], editors may find themselves refining the definition of the audience, rethinking the categories of information, building a hierarchical model of the information on the site, tinkering with that structure, modifying the screen layout, then calling on users to report their moment-to-moment experience of the site as it undergoes revision.

- At Level Two, which in print editing aims at improving the clarity and cohesion of the prose, editors still have plenty of traditional work to do on the language, but may find themselves modifying style more aggressively than before, and trimming verbiage with a sharper blade [to keep text to a minimum for easier on-screen readability].

- At Level One, which is concerned with correctness and consistency, editors still need a style guide but must add many new issues to their list: enforcing file-naming and layout conventions, confirming links, and correcting HTML tags. (Anderson et al. 49)
Some of these tasks (e.g., user testing, correcting HTML tags) are more removed from traditional textual editing than others, but all represent new skills and mind-sets that editors who are not accustomed to working in online formats have to learn. The Level Three category, in particular, asks editors to incorporate information design, layout, and user testing into the editing process. For example, editors need to consider design of not just the text but also the navigation menus on the site, to make sure they are appealing in design, clear in hierarchy, and dynamic enough to accommodate changing content so that users can find what they need (Anderson et al. 49–50). Editors working with print formats often must have a knowledge of design, too, but Web layouts may be more likely to require design flexibility because of the variety of types of content, genres, and rhetorical situations and the frequency at which they change.

Editors must also learn how to best work with information that is chunked and repurposed in forms such as Web pages and databases. As Dennis Bockus puts it, “online information does not uncoil in a line; it collects in clusters” (139). This means that editors, who are accustomed to working with an entire document at once to ensure overall consistency and usability, can never know exactly in what order or combination these chunks information will be read. I recently encountered this situation in my own workplace when editing e-mail notifications for my company’s new social networking platform. These e-mails are not stored in the system in complete messages; instead, specific sentences or paragraphs are pulled from the system automatically, depending on what action the user has completed, and cobbled together in a single e-mail. For example, the sentence that instructs a user how to contact us for help (“If you have questions,
contact us at website@xxxx.org.”) is stored in one place; any edits to the wording appear across all e-mail notifications. The challenge comes in editing each chunk individually while also considering how they could all work together in a number of combinations. We can make sure a particular sentence reads smoothly and clearly, but we also have to consider all the possible sentences it might be paired with to ensure the e-mails are consistent in tone and voice and avoid potential redundancies. Betsy Brown and colleagues describe this way of thinking as a mental shift “from the book metaphor into chunks of information” (135), or from long, linear documents to smaller, interchangeable parts. Adhering to a consistent style is especially critical to ensure a coherent reading experience for the Web user, and this is an area in which editors’ training is particularly strong. While editors must always work toward consistency, thinking of documents in small chunks requires a different mind-set in terms of considering what revisions will optimize the user experience. This type of work again brings the big-picture rhetorical skills Buehler mentions into play—editors must be able to step back to see how the online pieces fit together and then make appropriate decisions based on those flexible relationships.

Editors must also be aware of the ethical and legal issues that are involved in working with technology. Tony Scott argues that, in addition to learning how to use new technologies relevant to their work, publications professionals also “have an ethical responsibility to understand the ideologies and values technologies carry and the social consequences they can bring about” (232). These new concerns include issues surrounding socially responsible communication, agency, confidentiality, and responsible
and appropriate use of information. As the Internet provides a medium for material to be shared more freely, permissions-related issues also become more complex. For example, an editor might have to determine if an image or a video pulled from another site has been properly credited or if she must seek permission from the original source to reuse it. Though editors have always needed to be aware of permissions-related issues, they now have new situations to consider and rules to learn—situations that are changing so rapidly that precedent hasn’t always even been determined yet. Editors must increase their understanding and vigilance of these issues to ensure the material they are working with is being used properly and legally. They must also understand the complex ethical, social, and even legal considerations involved with common modern technologies like social networking software, including whether personal information is being gathered and used responsibly, how heavily to moderate online interactions, and if material is being used in accordance with copyright laws. For example, an editor working on a company-run blog may assist in comment moderation; each company must determine its own policy on this issue, and editors may be involved in making or enforcing those decisions. All professionals must consider and understand these broader implications and issues before they can effectively utilize these technologies in their work. This will likely mean that they need to seek out research or training to educate them in these areas.

Technology is also affecting editors’ work by consistently shaping and changing language. Many people interested in language standards, including linguists, media pundits, and educators, argue that as instantaneous and informal communication methods like text messaging, Twitter, and online chat are becoming more widespread, grammar
and readability standards are declining, meaning editing may eventually fall by the wayside. In other words, as more people produce and disseminate unedited text, people will grow more accustomed to reading it. Naomi Baron posits that young people are becoming less concerned with prescriptive language rules (i.e., grammar rules that govern things like whether or not to end a sentence with a preposition), displaying “a growing sense of laissez-faire when it comes to linguistic consistency” that she refers to as “linguistic whateverism” (169). A quick look at the majority of Twitter feeds or personal blogs shows that their focus is on communicating ideas quickly and briefly in a conversational tone, not on using commas correctly (or, in many cases, at all) or carefully constructing sentences. Additionally, Baron points out that technological innovations like spell check and Google can recognize when mistakes in spelling or usage and suggest accurate alternatives, reducing writers’ motivation to write correctly in the first place—and, potentially, reducing the need for editors who can fix these errors (178–79). This change is certainly not going to happen overnight, though; formal writing is still the norm in many genres (it seems highly unlikely that we’ll see “LOL” in a business proposal anytime soon), and many writers and readers still care about prescriptive rules. We can’t predict if this type of more casual writing will ever become the norm, accepted by readers even in formats like books in which grammar and correctness have historically taken high priority. But editors must be prepared to accept more compromises in terms of prescriptive rules in genres where less formal writing may be acceptable, or even preferable.
New online technologies clearly have the potential to complicate editors’ work in significant ways by presenting them with new skills to learn, new ways to think, and new factors to consider; however, technology is also helping them find new ways to excel in the workplace. As I mentioned earlier, the boundaries of the editing profession are becoming more porous. In many cases, technology is contributing to this opening up of professional roles. As technology becomes more user-friendly, editors can more easily, with some basic training, cross previously existing professional boundaries to create Web pages, use design software, and manage schedules and databases. Because editors are already familiar with some or all of these areas, they are often able to learn new skills particularly quickly. Clearly, though, targeted and timely training is required for editors to master all of these technologies.

Technology can also open doors for editors that lead even farther afield from their normal duties. Joseph Bocchi suggests that editors’ existing skills perfectly position them to play an important role in intranet site development and internal Web publishing. Bocchi describes the intranet editor’s role as “information ‘gatekeeper’ . . . part editorial, part project management, and part advocacy” (7), all skills with which the editor is familiar. Applying these skills to this type of new role allows the editor to play a greater—and often higher-profile—role in corporate communication initiatives. Anschuetz and Rosenbaum profile an individual (Joe) who started his career in technical editing and eventually became a usability labs manager, testing software and documentation during the development process in an effort to ensure the optimal user experience (152–53). Like Sally, the other editor Anschuetz and Rosenbaum profile, as
well as the intranet editor Bocchi envisions, Joe picks up technical knowledge while
working as an editor and later applies it to a career path that has some commonalities
with editing but is more technical in nature. Because work with technology exposes
editors to a variety of experiences and formats, they can develop a broad range of skills
and explore a number of potential career paths.

In the face of these potential challenges and opportunities, we must consider how
editors feel about the ways technology is affecting their jobs. Job satisfaction is an
important indicator of whether individuals will remain in the profession or seek out other
opportunities. Of respondents to my survey, 70% said that technology had increased their
job satisfaction either somewhat or greatly, while only 6% said it had decreased their
satisfaction to some degree. This wide gap suggests that editors appreciate the new
opportunities technology is providing them to stretch their wings in their workplaces. But
are these new opportunities helping others to appreciate editors’ work more fully as well?
III. RETHINKING EDITORS’ VALUE

What Is Valued in Today’s Workplaces?

The workplace roles that editors take on depend heavily on what types of work employers value. Employees do not work in a vacuum; their professional futures are determined by how successfully they do their jobs according to their employers’ standards or, in the case of self-employed workers, how successfully they can compete in the open market. To effectively compete for jobs within their fields and professional recognition within their companies, editors must align their work with modern workplace values. As these values change, editors must constantly make strategic moves to position themselves as experts in valued areas, which may involve expanding their existing skills or moving into new areas altogether. Editors also face a particular challenge in that their work generally happens behind the scenes, rather than in ways that will garner them obvious recognition. Therefore, they need to make a conscious effort to avoid fading into the background of their companies, forgotten by those who sign paychecks and make promotions. Editors must be aware of perceptions of the value of their individual work and of editing in general so that they can work to increase their perceived value and open up more professional opportunities. And those who train and educate editors must have a similar understanding of what combinations of skills are most highly valued so that they can help editors be marketable and succeed in the workplace.
Today’s editors are working in a professional world that values different skills than did that of their predecessors. In contrast to the predominantly product-based economies of decades past, businesses today largely trade in knowledge, relying on creativity, innovation, and critical thinking to distinguish themselves from the pack. Andrew Mayo observes that “managing ‘talent’ and managing ‘knowledge’ have become the imperatives of the new millennium for all organizations” (30). And according to Deborah Brandt, “Some analysts estimate that knowledge, most of it codified in writing, now composes about three fourths of the value added in the production of goods and services” (166). The global change in business priorities that Mayo and Brandt describe means employers are looking for and valuing different types of skills than in the past. Employees who effectively add to their organizations’ knowledge—and who help others do the same—are valuable assets to their employers. Moreover, companies that trade in knowledge-related assets must have a way to transmit them clearly and effectively through a variety of media, including traditional print and online formats and more innovative electronic formats such as social networking outlets. Editors are particularly well positioned to meet these needs: they have direct experience shaping the written knowledge work of others, often take on the work of fixing knowledge through writing, and are increasingly experienced in working with online distribution of knowledge.

This move away from rote production tasks in the workplace toward tasks that involve more critical thinking favors employees who take initiative and are proactive in their own development and that of their companies. In their article “Personal Initiative (PI): An Active Performance Concept for Work in the 21st Century,” Michael Frese and
Doris Fay posit that, to keep up with the demands of today’s fast-paced, competitive, and dynamic economy, employers are looking for more proactive employees now than in the past, when employees were generally expected to follow orders given by their superiors. Frese and Fay argue that today’s employees must be willing to accept that their job tasks are not fixed and to maintain a long-term orientation, always looking out for how they can make extra contributions to advance the good of the company. To a certain extent, highly motivated workers are able to influence the complexity and direction of their jobs; Frese and Fay give the example of a secretary originally hired for her typing skills who gradually takes on more responsibility until she becomes indispensible to her supervisor (137). This phenomenon may explain some of the blurring of professional roles discussed in Section II. As editors take the initiative to find ways to fill new responsibilities in their workplaces, they are expanding the traditional definition of their roles and becoming more valuable to their employers. Adam Grant, Sharon Parker, and Catherine Collins agree that the uncertainty in today’s workplace means that employees have to secure their employment by doing more than merely their assigned tasks. Frese and Fay agree that “uncertain situations require an active approach to work that helps to identify the present tasks and long-term needs of the organization” (136). Employees must be aware of the company’s changing needs and adapt to fulfill them. Editors who resist or ignore new technology, changing language standards, or shifts away from traditional editorial work may be marked by their employers as inflexible and, therefore, ineffective.

Current, relevant professional development is an important part of this equation. Knowledge, the new workplace currency, can change quickly, and successful employees
know that they cannot expect their current skills to carry them through their entire careers—or even, potentially, from year to year. Tony Scott argues that, like physical goods, workers in this post-industrial society can depreciate in value and must continually “retool” their skills and knowledge if they wish to remain or become valuable (236). According to Scott,

When living “post-industrial lives” people constantly move along a continuum between “skilled” and “unskilled.” The position is never stable. When skilled, the onus is upon workers to quickly exploit their agency, making whatever gains are possible. When moving toward “unskilled,” workers must anticipate the new knowledge they will need and adapt accordingly—or risk quickly becoming victims. (236)

The burden is on “post-industrial” editors to pay attention to trends in the profession and take the necessary steps to stay ahead of the curve. An editor who learns to use content management systems or design software before most of her peers will likely have more job options than someone who lags behind in those areas because she both has the desired skills and has shown initiative in learning them that suggests to her superiors she will be able to learn quickly in other areas. Professional improvement is important not just for those who are considered deficient in skills; even currently successful employees must be constantly working to improve to avoid losing their place on the continuum. Editors must be able to fill both their assigned niches and other niches as needed, often without much forewarning or additional training, in order to be seen as valuable contributors to their workplaces.
Recognition and Perceived Value

Editors must be especially aware of these valued skills and mind-sets because they have many factors working against them in the struggle for professional recognition. Editing is, with few exceptions, not a glamorous, high-profile profession. In fact, as Rosemary Shipton points out, skillful editing is often invisible. Editors usually do not have their names in bylines or on book covers. Instead, they work behind the scenes, supporting writers or content creators. Often, as David Henige observes, countless good editorial efforts may go unnoticed, attributed to good writing, while one mistake can draw considerable negative attention and blame (63). If, for example, a journal article contains numerous grammatical errors, readers will likely blame the problems on bad editing; however, a smoothly crafted piece most often wins congratulations for the writer. How, then, do editors overcome this visibility challenge? Despite the factors working against them, editors must seek workplaces that offer professional advancement opportunities and find visible ways to contribute to their organizations and work with their external colleagues to ensure their professional survival.

The people most likely to be able to recognize the valuable work editors do are supervisors and colleagues who work with them on a daily basis, and their opinions provide an important indication of editors’ status within their companies. The majority of editors I surveyed feel they receive adequate internal recognition for their work. About two-thirds of respondents, a fairly strong majority, rated themselves as very or somewhat satisfied with the level of recognition they receive from their colleagues for their professional contributions, while only 19.1% were somewhat or very dissatisfied.
Because of my reading and personal observations, I found these data to be opposite from my expectations. However, answers to another survey question shed some light on this issue. When asked to elaborate on how they know their colleagues and superiors value their contributions, just under half of the respondents referred to some type of informal oral or written feedback, including comments, compliments, or thanks. But only 5 of the 38 respondents referred to official acknowledgments, via performance reviews or recognition in publications. This suggests editors are significantly more likely to receive informal feedback than formal, high-profile recognition. While both are important indicators of value, official recognition more strongly improves an employee's professional image and chances for advancement. Jim’s supervisor may stop by his desk to praise his skillful handling of a difficult project, but if that praise isn’t codified on his performance review or translated into a promotion, it’s not particularly helpful to Jim’s professional future. Other methods of recognition my respondents indicated include repeated consultation by colleagues or management on particular issues (10 respondents), another type of informal recognition, and financial rewards or additional work (3 respondents), a more formal type of recognition. While some respondents did not specifically address the ways in which they receive recognition, none indicated that they receive no feedback or acknowledgment whatsoever. This indicates that all of my respondents are receiving some measure of recognition in their workplaces or from those they work with. However, editors need to consider whether the recognition they are receiving is actually furthering their careers. While a pat on the back from a colleague is always nice, more official recognition is key to career advancement. If these
opportunities do not exist within an editor’s current company, she may need to be willing to seek another workplace with more chances for upward advancement.

Editors must also be able to keep their external constituencies happy if they are to be perceived as valuable to their companies. Authors are probably the group with whom editors work most closely, so their opinions of the editors they work with carry a lot of weight. In one recent and particularly relevant study, Angela Eaton and colleagues surveyed 449 authors who frequently work with technical editors to get their perceptions of their working relationships with these professionals. The results of their survey show overwhelmingly positive opinions of editors. A majority (71%) rated the value of editing as 5 out of 5, or “very valuable,” and 92% believed editing is valuable even when time and money are limited (129). Additionally, 76% characterized their relationships with editors as “good, very good, positive, or excellent” (120). Many of the surveyed authors indicated that they valued opportunities to collaborate with editors and viewed them as allies and sources of knowledge about content and language. The researchers found that respondents particularly appreciated editors’ contributions to the quality of the final product, ability to teach the author about writing skills, ability to provide an objective review, encouragement during the writing process, and content knowledge, among other aspects. These findings indicate that authors see editing as an important part of the publication process and see editors not as correctors, but as collaborators whose opinions they value. A similar study by Julie Fisher of information systems developers who work with technical editors found that the developers valued the user-focused perspective and focus on consistency that editors bring to that collaborative relationship. Editors who can
foster these types of positive relationships with authors and other stakeholders will certainly earn points for being able to work well with others; however, because authors and developers are not frequently in direct positions of power over editors, editors must make sure to build these relationships in ways that will get attention from their superiors.

My survey respondents agree that their employers often particularly value their ability to build these positive collaborative relationships. One self-employed editor mentioned that her clients value her ability both “to work with extremely difficult text, and . . . to work with difficult people,” which they prove by saving certain jobs for her that involve these types of situations. One nonprofit editor emphasized his ability to work effectively with internal colleagues, citing “intraoffice communication” and the “ability to keep confidences” as sources of his value. Both of these skills are not normally associated with textual editing, demonstrating again how editors are being valued for nontraditional skills. And several other respondents mentioned collaboration on teams or with colleagues in other areas of their organizations as being an important part of their work. Increasingly, editors must not only communicate and collaborate effectively with peers but also make sure both their collaborators and their superiors are recognizing this valuable work.

While their responses indicate that the editors I surveyed are relatively satisfied with their professional standing, in the additional comments section of the survey, a few respondents did raise important concerns over the issue of value. One midcareer nonprofit editor described a perceived lack of opportunities for upward mobility, stating that she “would be more satisfied with [her] job if there were more opportunities to move
up, more recognition and appreciation from leadership.” Another respondent, who has been in the profession for 37 years, noted, “Editors, like trainers and teachers, seem to be hired out of some vague recognition that they are needed to produce publications, but when budgets or schedules become tight, their value is understated and they tend to be bypassed or disregarded.” This respondent sees editors’ work falling by the wayside when corners need to be cut. As pressure to publish cheaply and quickly increases, it is important to observe the effect these conditions have on the perceived necessity of editors’ work. Other respondents observed shifts in the type of skills that are being valued for editors related to increased online work. One midcareer nonprofit editor stated that she feels valued for her specific work but perceives that print publishing “is less valued by the organization overall because it seems old-fashioned.” A self-employed respondent pointed out that “the demand for skillsets [sic] has shifted from expertise in use of English (excess labor available for this) to expertise in Web design and Web site management (insufficient skill available for this).” This comment emphasizes how editors who can shift their skills to fill these highly demanded but less supplied areas will be considered more valuable. A nonprofit editor with 35 years of experience lamented that changes are happening not only in valued skills but also in overall standards, noting that, years ago, editing “was very much about words” but now is focused on production of online publications intended for quick consumption, for which high quality is not paramount. This respondent noted that this change in values nearly inspired her to leave the publishing industry altogether. While this opinion doesn’t seem to be the norm, this respondent likely isn’t alone in feeling uneasy about value shifts within the profession.
We must be aware of potential areas of concern related to these shifts so that we can actively work to address them.

These comments indicate that survey respondents are mostly comfortable with their relative value within their organizations but more concerned about trends in the value of their profession as a whole. Like Frese and Fay and Scott, they recognize that the workplace is in flux, as are the skills they must possess. These professionals’ concerns also echo the points researchers such as Shipton and Henige regarding the possibility that factors such as changes in budgets, quality standards, and user expectations may cause editors’ traditional work to be valued less than in the past. Thus, we must ensure that editors get proper education and training to prepare them for these changing values and that they understand the new roles they can fill to help secure their own careers. While it is unfortunate that many employers and other stakeholders no longer think the ability to correct comma errors is as worthy of recognition as the ability to code a Web site, editors may not be able to change these perceptions; instead, they need to change their work to align with them.

**How Editors Add Organizational Value**

What types of work that editors currently do are most likely to garner them more professional attention? Though editors undeniably have much of value to contribute to their workplaces and their fields at large, they must align their contributions with business priorities to ensure they are recognized. Janice Redish argues that editors, like any other professionals, “add value when [they] contribute to improving an
organization’s return on its investment in what [they] do” (26). An editor who works for
any kind of business must find direct or indirect ways to improve her employer’s bottom
line by helping cut costs, generate profit, or attract members or customers. One way
editors can do this is through their work with quality control. A high-quality product or
publication is more valuable to end users than one that is difficult to read, filled with
factual errors, or otherwise sloppily produced. Michelle Corbin, Pat Moell, and Mike
Boyd see the technical editor as a key part of the quality assurance process who improves
not just the mechanical aspects of the text but also the readability and usability of the
entire product or publication. If the editor is involved throughout the development
process to impart his or her knowledge about end-user needs, the resulting product will
more likely be useful and attractive to users, resulting in increased sales or customer
satisfaction. Though it is difficult to quantify the financial impact good editing has on a
company’s bottom line, envisioning user needs and managing quality to fulfill those
needs is one of the most visible ways editors contribute to the financial health of their
companies.

Several of the editors I surveyed agree their responsibility for quality control is a
primary reason for their value within their companies. Some directly mentioned
“attention to detail” or “quality control” as being particularly valued by their colleagues
and superiors, while others more broadly referenced their aptitude at textual editing. One
experienced nonprofit editor noted that “improvement of content by editing” earns him
gratitude from colleagues, while another mentioned “polishing others’ work” as a valued
strength. These employees’ colleagues clearly see value in their work to refine and
improve text. An editor who works on her company’s communications team referenced business priorities, mentioning that her ability to “keep style consistent in all publications” is important to the company because “style is part of brand.” This editor is playing a significant, though behind-the-scenes, role in strengthening the company’s image, a contribution that she noted is “important to those in charge.” And another editor specifically mentioned being consulted by colleagues and upper-level management for advice on “navigating through intellectual property issues.” In all of these cases, editors are being called on to regulate quality in ways that protect their employers’ products, brand, legal interests, or reputation.

As I mentioned in Section II, many editors are actively contributing knowledge through writing, often by assisting experts in creating “knowledge assets” for laypeople. In addition, Hughes posits that editors can utilize their broad range of experience with projects and groups across their workplaces to help internal teams better understand their projects or the inner workings of the organization, supporting another element of an organization’s knowledge base. In fact, several survey respondents referenced their own organizational knowledge as a primary source of their value. One nonprofit editor cited “knowledge of the organization” as a valued skill, adding, “I make suggestions for story changes that help our writers adhere to the organization’s mission.” This respondent’s mission-related knowledge not only establishes her as a valuable resource for the company’s writers but also prepares her for other roles within the company that require the same type of knowledge. Another experienced editor received gratitude and recognition for developing “a visual identity system, an editorial style guide, and a
publications development process where none previously existed.” In all three projects, this editor contributed to organizational knowledge by helping to fix rules and procedures for use by others. Other respondents mentioned content development and strategic planning, areas that also involve strengthening consumer- and internal-facing stores of knowledge, as skills of particular value. Editors’ familiarity with company policies and with people and projects in many departments can enable them to contribute to the knowledge-based economy Brandt and Mayo describe in ways that include more business-focused and strategic work, even though these areas have not been a traditional part of editors’ experience.

The increasing importance of business savvy is evident in these survey responses. One respondent said that her workplace values her “leadership on projects, particularly those with many collateral pieces requiring multiple overlapping deadlines.” This editor was one of several who mentioned strategic efforts as being particularly appreciated by their companies or clients. This same respondent also identified her “enthusiasm for applying new technologies in strategic ways” as a source of value, another strength mentioned by several respondents. Supervising staff and project management were other skills named by editors that are more traditionally associated with business-related positions. Other respondents mentioned areas in which they are working strategically to fill specific holes or align their work with company priorities. One nonprofit editor who is relatively new to the field observed, “I feel that my graphic design skills are more valued than my other abilities: because of the budget we’ve had to cut our in-house graphic designer, and I am the only one left who has any graphic design knowledge.” The
same respondent also indicated that, overall, nontextual editing contributions are
rewarded most often or strongly by her employer. And another cited “enough familiarity
with technology to ask the right questions,” suggesting the ability to think critically and
look for connections between innovations and her existing work. These responses show
that editors feel valued for their involvement in a variety of strategically focused areas
largely unrelated to their traditional textual editing responsibilities.

Because editors’ work improving text is so frequently difficult to formally
recognize and quantify, they can no longer stake their professional futures on their
knowledge of comma rules or ability to correct dangling modifiers. As the boundaries of
the profession expand, editors who can add value in as many ways as possible,
particularly ways that align with business priorities, will have the greatest likelihood of
being recognized in ways that might advance their careers. Editors who develop a broad,
flexible skill set—including everything from knowledge of grammar to technology
proficiency to business savvy—will have more options for making contributions to their
workplaces that may be deemed important by those in charge. To ensure editors’
continuing success, the editing field needs to reconsider the skills necessary to be a strong
editor and develop practical ways of training and educating professionals based on the
new values of the modern workplace.
IV. PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The Outlook for Editors

The editing profession clearly has faced—and will continue to face—a great deal of change. Some people have predicted that these changes spell a bleak future for editors where their work will be automated, farmed out to cheaper labor sources, or just disregarded entirely. However, nothing in my literature review or research suggests that editors will go the way of the dinosaur anytime soon. Editors who are willing and able to adapt their skill sets to new formats, values, and rhetorical situations should have plenty of professional opportunities, though these opportunities may not look the way we might expect. Though the changes I have mentioned are affecting both technical and nontechnical editors, the outlook indicates a brighter future for technical editors. Editors should be aware of these differences when deciding what type of editing they want to do so that they can know which areas of the field are likely to offer the most job security and highest salaries. These certainly aren’t the only factors that go into career decisions, but they are the key factors to consider if career advancement is an individual’s primary goal.

Technical writing and editing is one of the fastest growing sectors of the communication industry. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 20% growth in the number of technical writers in the United States between 2006 and 2016, well above the average rate of growth for all professions. This figure is higher than the 2% projected
increase during the same period in the overall number of editors (not subdivided into technical and nontechnical), as well as the projected 13% increase for nontechnical writers and authors. These figures suggest that technical positions should provide the most future job opportunities for both writers and editors. Another measure that has implications for both job prospects and employee value is salary, which indicates what employees are most valued and also attracts employees to a job or profession. In May 2006, editors’ mean annual income was $46,990, below the mean income of writers and authors ($48,640) and well below that of technical writers ($58,050). If differences in pay and job opportunities between technical and nontechnical editing become more pronounced, more editors may move into technical editing or even writing fields in the hopes of securing more lucrative job prospects and higher paychecks. Though the salary gap between these areas is not vast, it may be enough to attract the attention of editors who believe they are underpaid for their skills and who have the technical knowledge or writing skills to succeed in those areas. This could presents an undesirable situation in which editing (and nontechnical areas, in particular) is undervalued by not only those outside the field but also those within it; if editors themselves begin to see their work as a less promising career path than writing or information technology positions, the profession could lose a number of strong employees.

This gap between technical and nontechnical growth projections and salaries reflects modern workplace priorities. Throughout its employment outlook for writers and editors, the Bureau of Labor Statistics emphasizes the importance of specialized subject-matter knowledge and technology skills. It identifies areas such as law, medicine, and
economics as having particular growth potential because “legal, scientific, and technological developments and discoveries generate demand for people to interpret technical information for a more general audience.” As the technology industry grows, users need more manuals and training materials to keep up with new innovations, providing extra opportunities for writers and editors who have technical knowledge and training. One factor in the salary discrepancies between the two sectors is that nontechnical editors are most likely to be employed by publishers or nonprofit organizations, fields that are traditionally less able to offer high salaries than the science or technology companies or government organizations that often employ technical editors. Specialization also plays a role in the discrepancies, as supply and demand principles come into play: more specialized knowledge means a smaller pool of potential employees with that knowledge, which means employers must offer higher salaries to attract them. Though specialization can be an advantage, editors must realize that it does not replace the generalized skills necessary to meet the modern need for professional flexibility. An editor who decides to specialize in legal editing must be careful to ensure he is strong in foundational skills, like grammar and technology use, that can transfer to other areas, even as he is developing his legal content knowledge. This will give him the ability to change his career path to take advantage of shifts in values as they occur.

Though the outlook seems brightest for technical editors and writers, the Bureau of Labor Statistics describes several growth areas relating to online media that could provide opportunities for nontechnical editors, as well. Its recent report explains that “more companies are publishing materials directly for the Internet. Online publications
and services are growing in number and sophistication, spurring the demand for writers and editors, especially those with Web experience.” This statement supports the pervasive theme in my reading and survey findings that technology is playing a major part in the future of editing. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also projects that “blogging, and other writing for interactive media that provide readers with nearly real-time information will provide opportunities for writers.” This proliferation of new writing opportunities also means editors are getting more work to edit, which increases their job security, and more chances to segue into writing if they choose. These new areas balance out the work that editors are losing as print formats decline in popularity and provide fewer work-related opportunities. They also provide new chances for editors to show they are valuable employees.

Increasing Professional Value

Though job outlooks suggest that technical editing and writing provide the most high-profile job options for editors, entering these fields does not guarantee an editor a large paycheck and steady stream of recognition. As I mentioned in Section III, Rosemary Shipton, David Henige, and others point out that both technical and nontechnical editors are prone to being looked over in the workplace because of the behind-the-scenes nature of their work. To overcome the challenge of being ignored in the workplace and make themselves noticed by those in positions of power, editors have to both step up and speak up in ways that will make their worth evident. They must continually advocate for their own worth (and that of the editing profession as a whole)
and look for strategic opportunities to demonstrate it, whether through traditional or nontraditional avenues.

Editors must recognize, as Janice Redish puts it, that “tooting [their] own horn[s],” or making evident the value they add, is part of their jobs (37–38). She emphasizes that because editors’ contributions cannot be easily quantified in financial reports, they must find alternate ways to make their contributions recognized, including advocating for changes in accounting practices and reports to reflect more qualitative contributions instead of just hard financial data (37–38). For example, a scholarly publisher for which I once worked kept monthly data on trends in numbers of changes made to articles during proof stages and numbers of corrected versions of articles that had to be posted online due to errors in order to show improvement (or decline) in quality and, therefore, in effectiveness of editors’ work. Other potential measures are time-to-market for projects, number of words edited in a given time period, and process efficiencies editors have introduced. The key is for editors to find ways to call attention to their work without seeming self-serving. For example, an editor at a small nonprofit association, “Jane,” may develop a section on her company’s intranet where she posts weekly tips for good writing and links to editorial resources. This both helps her colleagues write better (in turn, making Jane’s job easier) and establishes Jane as a dependable source of information. In another case, after noticing that financial reports are a major focus of internal meetings, “Ted,” a document editor at a large financial company, may ask for the opportunity during these meetings to provide regular status updates on editorial projects that his team is working on; these reports may include data
on turnaround times and number of words edited that show how the team contributes to the bottom line and anecdotal evidence of their involvement in high-profile projects.

Ted’s challenge would be to find ways to frame his data that ensure his reports are clear and enlightening to colleagues outside his team so that he can call attention to his group’s work in a way that serves the interests of the company. Eventually, a manager may read and use one of Jane’s writing tips or the CFO may be impressed by Ted’s monthly reports, leading to promotions or interdepartmental team appointments they may not otherwise have secured. Editors’ big-picture skills also help in this area; while remaining focused on their daily tasks, they must be able to draw on their business and strategic knowledge to see the impact their work is having on the company and recognize opportunities to gracefully highlight these contributions.

Unfortunately, some editors may exhaustively tout their own merits, and those of editing in general, and still find themselves toiling away, invisible, without the recognition they desire. What options—other than seeking new employment—do they have? Hughes proposes that technical communicators redefine themselves as “agent[s] of organizational learning” instead of packagers of information (283). While he primarily refers to technical writers’ work with documentation, this principle can also apply to editors. When they make more of an effort to position themselves as company resources, as Jane did in my earlier example, editors add a new dimension to their work that others may perceive as valuable. But advocating for their own value is just one part of a larger strategic approach editors must take toward their work. Business savvy is perhaps more important now than ever before. To be the flexible, creative-thinking employees this
economy requires, editors must be aware of business priorities and recognize how they can both contribute to fulfilling them and, like Tom with his monthly reports, demonstrate that they have done this. This may involve finding new procedures for working that are more efficient in terms of time or budget or that better fulfill strategic goals of the company. Training and education in management-related topics, either incorporated into editing courses or as separate courses, would help prepare editors for this type of forward-thinking work.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics projections I mentioned earlier in this section, editors might also increase their professional value by developing a field of specialization. Broad foundational knowledge that can transition from one position or field to another is obviously important, but developing a deeper knowledge of one or two particular areas—whether they be subject areas, like law or education, or skills, like Web design or substantive editing—provides editors with more opportunities to be considered experts, which will likely afford them more job prospects and professional recognition. One relatively easy way editors can specialize is by taking any opportunity to learn more about the fields in which they work, even in ways that do not overlap directly with their work. For example, an editor who works on medical texts may subscribe to related journals or attend company-sponsored education sessions about new medications to gain more subject knowledge that can facilitate her current work, improve her job prospects in her field, or help her develop the knowledge necessary to transfer to another area of the company. This is another instance where a strategic perspective is important; editors should always be looking for opportunities to apply their specialized knowledge.
But as editors develop their skills, will they leave the profession in search of higher-profile positions? Many of the ways editors have of advancing in their careers involve learning skills or taking on duties outside textual editing. My survey findings suggest that this may be because of differences in how types of editorial work are rewarded. While 40% of my survey respondents said that textual editing skills are rewarded no more or less strongly in their workplaces than their other contributions, exactly the same percentage said that contributions not related to textual editing are rewarded either much or somewhat more often or strongly. By contrast, only 8.5% of respondents said textual editing was rewarded somewhat or much more often. This gap would likely be even larger for technical editors, who are further along the progression away from textual editing than their nontechnical counterparts. Even so, these data suggest that an editor is more likely to be recognized for his work on a Web site or committee than for his ability to skillfully craft a sentence. Katya Johanson posits that because word-processing software is capable of checking grammar and spelling, editors’ work in these areas is often seen as less necessary than it used to be; she even theorizes that software may one day be developed that can check readability of text more cost-effectively than employing a person to do the same work (52). It makes sense, then, that editors who believe their copyediting work is a less secure or lower-profile career choice would choose to go where the recognition and job security are.

Unfortunately, though, it is difficult to determine exactly how wide the value gap between the two areas is now and if it is widening. I was able to find no current data about how quickly editors may be fleeing to other fields; this is a potential trend that the
field will need to monitor to determine any overall implications for the editorial workforce. More likely, though, editors will continue to redefine their roles within their current positions, with skills that are more visibly valued coming to the forefront; in 10 or 20 years, editors will likely still exist in the workplace but may be, for example, user interface specialists who make text readable as just a part of monitoring and improving the overall user experience. This type of position is not far from where some editors are currently. But those who are still working primarily with print formats or in more traditional editorial roles may need more training and preparation to help them transition into these new types of positions.

**Improving Training and Professional Development**

I have already addressed the importance that today’s economy places on adaptability and keeping skills and knowledge current. (See Section III.) More effective and wide-ranging professional development will help editors meet this challenge. However, what constitutes effective training and education is not clear-cut. The difficulties seem to be in determining the most critical areas to focus on and how best to ensure effective delivery of the appropriate training and information to those who need it. To solve this dilemma, the field needs to offer a variety of options that educate editors both in specific skills and the concepts behind their use.

Not surprisingly, technology and strategic skills must be key foci of this training and education. A significant majority (just over 75%) of the editors who responded to my survey question about their professional development needs mentioned technology-
related topics in some way. A number of respondents said they needed training in using several types of offline software (e.g., word processing, design and layout, and Adobe programs) for a variety of purposes. One respondent saw an opportunity to add value to her work by using technology, stating, “I would like to learn InDesign better to be able to take on more layout tasks in-house, which would then give us more control over the look of our products,” while another would like “additional training in using Adobe software, particularly for producing online publishing.” Others mentioned needing training in social networking technologies, HTML or XML coding, and online content management systems. However, in addition to these specific tools, several respondents referenced broader technology-related concepts or practices they wish to become more familiar with.

Several respondents feel they need to keep up with trends regarding online and digital media. One nonprofit editor stated, “Most of my career has been in print products. It is essential I learn how to work in the world of online media.” Another would like “more exposure to emerging technologies and digital publishing and marketing.” Another cited a need to “keep abreast of new technology and trends in social media.” And some respondents specifically mentioned the desire for professional development that will help them better transition their work from print to online. One respondent would like “more training on adapting print material to the Web,” while another expressed a desire to learn “how to visualize information and how to transform print publications (which we still need) into something that feels like an online publication and thus is actually used and valued.” All of these individuals see the new challenges that technology is presenting and
are looking for ways to meet them. However, most are expressing their needs vaguely, perhaps not certain of how to go about fulfilling them.

These responses reflect a frequent debate over which type of learning is more valuable: teaching the use of specific tools or teaching the ideas behind their use. Robert Baensch emphasizes the need in the publishing industry to understand the difference between training (learning skills) and education (learning to manage skills in relation to one another) (32). The argument for education is that it would be difficult for editors to get training in all types of software they could possibly use for a particular function. For example, under the theory that training is most important, a designer would need to master InDesign, Quark, Publisher, and any number of other disparate layout programs, leaving little time for learning best practices to apply to any of these programs. However, what can a person do with design-related knowledge if she does not have the skill to apply it to a specific layout program? Complicating the issue further is that both parts of the equation are transient; as technologies change, so do the processes through which we use them. Editors who wish to be successful in their work must be able to master both areas, and the field must determine effective ways, through training and education, to ensure this happens.

Business and strategic skills is another critical area in which editors need training and education. For editors to develop the orientation to the long-term needs of their organizations that Michael Frese and Doris Fay argue is critical, they need some degree of education about these potentially unfamiliar areas. A few of my survey respondents acknowledged this need for strategic learning is becoming more pressing. One nonprofit
editor stated, “Personally, my job has evolved from a focus on editing to a wider responsibility for all things related to our publishing venture. My professional development often involves learning about the publishing industry so that we can benchmark our operations and stay on top of advances in the field. And I think this knowledge helps keep me marketable.” This response reflects an emphasis on business-related knowledge that will help solidify the position of this editor’s employer within the publishing industry. To contribute successfully in this area, this editor must be aware of industry priorities, internal costs and budgets, and internal capacity, among other areas, none of which are concerns traditionally associated with editors’ work. Other respondents also mentioned a need to stay current with industry trends, particularly in online and print publishing.

My survey indicates that editors are largely aware of what they need to know to succeed in this rapidly changing profession; however, something is preventing them from getting what they need. Part of the challenge in preparing editors for the demands of today’s workplaces is determining the best ideas and skills to teach in degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. George Hayhoe acknowledges that the changes in the field mean “the ways many academics (me included) have taught [technical writing and editing] skills in the past are inadequate to prepare young professionals to face the challenges of today, much less tomorrow” (282). He says that though many of these approaches are still valid, educators in the field will not truly be preparing graduates for their careers until they “adapt [their] courses to the media, genres, and composing and editing processes that did not exist just a few years ago” (282). Rebekka Andersen
concurs, but she believes that the problem is in students’ lack of exposure to the full range of editorial skills, duties, and situations (495–96). Students are being taught rules or mechanical methods that often don’t reflect the situations found in real workplaces. Andersen believes students should get practice not only in substantive and copy editing but also in working with information technology and in collaborative situations that might be part of a document development process (496). Workplaces and education are frequently disconnected, perhaps as a result of a lack of communication between academics and professionals in the field or perhaps as a result of the differing paces of change in the two arenas—workplaces are all about responsiveness and change, and academia tends to move more slowly. These two areas need to connect more frequently and solidly to help prospective editors get what they need out of their educations.

Ability to adapt to change is, as I’ve already noted, a skill that today’s employers value highly, and educational opportunities that simulate the real-world situations editors could encounter in the workplace seem especially likely to help prepare students. Undergraduate and graduate editing programs should integrate these experiences into a range of courses that focus on both skill-building and conceptual education. For example, in copyediting courses, students could work in collaborative situations with real authors. In business of editing courses, they could develop business plans for a company’s publishing division. In rhetoric courses, they could perform rhetorical analyses of various types of documents to see how situation contributes to their creation and influences editing decisions they might make. And in Web-focused editing courses, they could redesign existing Web interfaces to make them more user-friendly. Mandatory
internships would help further expose students to real-world situations as part of their education. Educators should also make students aware of the ways they can supplement their education once in the field, including available professional resources and options for training. Developing such resources for use by editors in the field might be another beneficial activity for these classes. This range of experiences would produce editors who leave school better prepared for the multiple facets of the editorial role.

But what about those editors already in the workplace, most of whom were educated via the methods Hayhoe considers “inadequate”? For these individuals, strong job-related professional development is key. Unfortunately, much of the responsibility for obtaining necessary professional development often falls on editors themselves. Of my survey respondents, a majority (54%) said self-training was the primary way they learned new technology required for their jobs, with informal on-the-job training with colleagues and/or a supervisor the next most frequent choice (30%). Only a small number of respondents (14%) said they most often learned through formal training their companies provided. In this economy, especially, corporate training budgets are tight, and unless editors can make an airtight case for why they need particular training opportunities (and, sometimes, even if they can), they may be forced to pursue the necessary learning on their own or go without it altogether. Saul Carliner highlights a truth that writing and editing professionals must accept: “when we [writers and editors] rely almost exclusively on our employers to fund our professional development, we take options away from ourselves” (267). He argues that professional development is an investment in the future, just like insurance or retirement funds (Carliner 267). But because few editors have
unlimited personal time or money to pursue training, informal self-training is often attractive. Free online training modules, discussion forums, and documentation are prevalent for most types of technology, giving editors a number of choices for learning on their own. Training providers should keep in mind that online webcasts or tutorials may be cost-effective options for individuals who cannot afford to travel for in-person training. And training providers who establish an online presence with free resources will be even more likely to build awareness of their business within the editing community and establish a customer base for the paid training opportunities they do offer, while allowing editors valuable opportunities to learn and interact. In these situations, the ability to learn independently will help editors advance more quickly.

My survey respondents also cite professional networking as another important source of learning. Several respondents indicated that attendance at professional conferences and other networking events is critical to their development because these events help them keep up with developments specific to their fields. One respondent who works in publishing said, “Networking with colleagues is important to keep up to date on changes in the publication field. I belong to several local and national organizations to give me those resources.” Others appreciate the opportunities to share with and learn from peers in the field that conferences provide. One said, “Being part of editing communities is important—knowing others are like-minded and face the same issues is a great support.” Conferences and other networking events provide perfect opportunities for editors to offer one another professional guidance. However, though a variety of training opportunities around specific skills exist for editors, fewer in-person conferences
and workshops offer an opportunity for networking with colleagues. Technical editors who are members of the Society for Technical Communication have chances to interact through conferences and special-interest groups, but nontechnical editors often must seek out one another at conferences and events related to the industries in which they work, rather than to editing in general. A professional association for nontechnical editors that could sponsor these types of events would likely help to meet some of these networking needs, but this would likely take some time and advocacy on the part of editors to establish. And even if more focused networking opportunities existed, the aforementioned lack of money to fund trips to them would be an obstacle.

However, as online social and professional networking forums increase in popularity and availability, they can help provide some of the collegial interaction editors are seeking. Editors have many options for gathering online around aspects of their work—for example, grammar or punctuation, which are celebrated in forums like the Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar (SPOGG, http://www.spogg.org) and the Grammar Girl podcasts (http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com) and Twitter feed (http://twitter.com/grammargirl). Both of these resources also have pages on Facebook with thousands of fans or group members and lively discussions of grammar and copyediting issues. However, to my knowledge, fewer opportunities exist for editors to discuss and learn from one another in regard to their jobs as a whole. Online resources such as Copyediting (an e-newsletter, as well as a blog) provide a valuable start in terms of professional learning and opportunities for interaction, but more comprehensive chances for online connections might better help meet editors’ needs. To meet
networking needs of both established professionals and editing students, these groups could develop an online community on Facebook or another networking platform where they can interact to share tips and best practices and even organize informal in-person gatherings. This would be a good project for a graduate- or advanced undergraduate–level editing class to start and maintain. This project would give editing students experience working with social networking software and making professional contacts as they reach out to established professionals and encourage them to participate. These types of online opportunities may also prove useful for the significant number of self-employed editors who lack opportunities for workplace interaction with colleagues.

Editors in all areas of the field need responsive, timely, and comprehensive professional development and education to prepare them for the changing demands they are facing today. Traditional skills related to textual editing certainly remain important and should not be ignored, but editors trained in only those areas are likely to be unprepared for the demands of the modern workplace and unable to garner recognition from superiors for their work. And now, more than ever, editors need to take an active role in managing their own professional development needs by recognizing what skills they need to learn, advocating for the importance of formal training opportunities, and pursuing self-training options when necessary. The more editors are able to master the skills and concepts behind their work, the more prepared they will be to seize opportunities within their workplace—and even to create new ones that suit their areas of expertise.
V. CONCLUSION

Undeniably, editors are no longer just keepers of words or “grammar janitors” (Andersen 485). In fact, their work with words seems to be fading into the background as they stretch into other workplace roles. My survey shows that today’s nontechnical editors are designing and writing for publications, building Web sites, managing personnel, participating in long-term content planning, and maintaining budgets and schedules. These duties represent a change in both the work editors do and how they must think about that work. This shift will require a new definition of the boundaries of the field, encompassing a variety of new skills, and it leaves several key questions to be answered: What percentage of time must someone spend working with words to be considered an editor? Should editors who spend most of their time focused on online or technology-related work be housed in information technology departments so that they can collaborate more effectively with their constituents? Should education and training focus primarily on broad concepts and understandings or particular practical skills? None of these questions has a clear answer, but all need attention from everyone involved in the field—academics, practicing editors, and employers of editors. Because situations vary from company to company and because flexibility is key in modern workplaces, we cannot define strict boundaries for the profession. However, understanding what editors
are doing now and what doors might be open to them will help editors position themselves in the most strategic and best possible ways to contribute to their workplaces.

Though editors must possess a variety of skills and understandings to be successful in the modern workplace, five crucial concerns for 21st-century editors emerge:

- They must be proficient in use and understanding of technology. Print editing is not dying off anytime soon, but it is declining in importance. The majority of my survey respondents do some type of work with online editing, and all of them use word-processing or design software. The more skillfully editors are able to use and adapt to changes in technology, the more successful they will be.

- They must know how to deal effectively with people in collaborative situations. Editors need to be able to work as part of a team, both to improve their projects and to develop strategic relationships in the workplace. They also must be able to negotiate effectively so that they can deal with situations in which their priorities differ from those of their collaborators.

- They must take initiative to meet their own professional needs and those of their employers. They need to be prepared to go beyond their assigned duties to add value in ways that their employers will recognize. They also need to realize that they must take action to secure the training they need and improve their career prospects—quite possibly, nobody else will do it for them.

- They must maintain a long-term outlook on their work, thinking critically at every turn about how they can fulfill—and exceed—professional expectations. Editors
who are able to step back from the details and see the big picture will be able to help their companies in ways that add value and call attention to their work.

- They need resources to support them in their work, and they need to be aware of these resources and willing to take advantage of them. Editors who are continuously improving their skills have the best chance of being prepared for the shifting values of the workplace.

As the role of editor is redefined, the content of education and training must shift to keep up with professional needs. The scope of both education and training needs to widen to include content related to business and technology, as well as foundational principles related to language. Editors don’t need intensive, MBA-level training in accounting or management, but they do need education in strategic thinking, in particular, to help them adapt to changes in the industry. In addition to the ability to skillfully use basic word-processing programs like Microsoft Word, editors entering the field need a basic understanding of Web coding and content management systems, as well as an understanding of emerging social networking technologies. These skills are ones that many students growing up in this Web 2.0-saturated world will bring with them to their coursework; however, these students will need to learn how to think critically about these technologies in relation to editing. While many students will have previously used Facebook or created a blog, they may not have considered ethical or legal issues around this work or how to relate it to a business environment. Undergraduate and graduate programs must establish and maintain a forward-looking, real-world focus to produce editors who can deal effectively with rapidly changing workplaces. Students wishing to
become editors should seek out those types of education and take advantage of any practical opportunities their schools offer, such as internships. Professionals already in the field will find much of the burden of improving their skills falling on their shoulders; they must make their employers aware of their needs but also be cognizant of ways they can satisfy these needs on their own. It is critical that these professionals learn to take initiative for their careers; anyone who does not will likely be overtaken by those who do.

To adequately assess and plan for the future of editing, we need more research to fill gaps in the field. First of all, more research on editorial roles is necessary, particularly among often-ignored nontechnical editors. My survey sample consisted almost entirely of editors who were either employed by nonprofit organizations or self-employed; though the experiences and opinions of these groups likely represent those of other segments of the profession in many ways, experiences of nontechnical editing professionals who work for for-profit businesses, including publishers, would also be useful to study. The differences in priorities and working environments between for-profit and nonprofit businesses almost certainly has some influence on editors’ daily tasks and the skills for which editors are valued. Additionally, surveys of or interviews with colleagues and supervisors of editors, similar to the study Angela Eaton and her colleagues did with authors who work with technical editors, would also help shed light on how others view and value these professionals. Self-perceptions editors have of their relative value may not be entirely accurate, and consulting these third parties could help to clarify editors’ positions in the workplace. Practicing professionals in the field often do not have or take the time to do and publish research, so this type of work often falls to professors or
graduate students. Any of these studies would be useful for a prospective editor to undertake to help her better understand and prepare for her chosen field. Research into all of these issues should be published both in academic journals read by those educating editing students and in distilled form in professional newsletters that are more likely to reach those already in the field. More effective bridging of the academic and professional worlds will help editing students become more informed about practice (what they will need to know to do their jobs effectively) and existing editors become more informed about theory (how to think about their jobs more effectively).

Despite the many challenges facing the field, editing has a promising future. When I asked my survey respondents to rate their professional satisfaction, nearly 70% rated their satisfaction on the positive end of the scale, with the largest number of respondents (24.4%) choosing the top rating. Though they do recognize some problematic areas related to deficiencies in training and lack of recognition, editors seem overall to enjoy their work and see potential for positive change. The profession holds the most promise for those who are able to adapt to current and future conditions and take the initiative to move their careers forward. Words will almost certainly always be an important part of editors’ work, but in the future, editors’ value will likely be defined in terms of all of the other roles they can fill in their workplace communities.
APPENDIX

Survey Questions

1. Consent
   I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.
   I do not agree to participate in this study.

2. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female

3. What is your age?
   a. Under 25
   b. 25-30
   c. 31-40
   d. 41-50
   e. 51-60
   f. 60+

4. Please list all academic and professional degrees or certifications beyond a high school diploma you have obtained.
   Degree/Certification:
   Major/Concentration:
   Degree/Certification:
   Major/Concentration:
   Degree/Certification:
   Major/Concentration:
   Degree/Certification:
   Major/Concentration:

5. For how many years have you been an editor?

6. For how many years have you been an editor with your current employer?

7. By what type of company are you currently employed?
   a. Publisher
   b. Nonprofit organization
c. For-profit business
d. Self-employed
e. Other (Please explain.)

8. Would you identify yourself as a technical editor (i.e., one who works primarily on highly technical or specialized documents or publications)?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. What types of documents/projects do you work on? (Choose all that apply.)
   a. Print publications
   b. Online publications
   c. Print manuals/documentation
   d. Online documentation
   e. Web sites/blogs
   f. Proposals
   g. Internal documentation (correspondence, minutes, reports, etc.)
   h. Other (Please explain.)

10. What types of technology do you use on a regular basis in your editing work? (Choose all that apply.)
    a. Word-processing programs (e.g., Microsoft Word)
    b. Design/layout software (e.g., Quark, InDesign)
    c. Online content management systems
    d. Web site markup language (e.g., HTML, XML)
    e. Databases
    f. Other (Please specify.)

11. What role does technology play in the tasks you do now as compared to five years ago?
    a. It has greatly affected the tasks I do.
    b. It has somewhat affected the tasks I do.
    c. It hasn’t affected the tasks I do very much.
    d. It hasn’t affected the tasks I do at all.
    e. Neutral/no opinion

12. What is the primary way you learn to use new technology required for your work?
    a. Training provided by my company
    b. Training provided outside my company on personal time
    c. Informal on-the-job training with colleagues and/or supervisor
    d. Training provided as part of college or university coursework
    e. Self-training
13. How has the technology training you have received prepared you for your job duties?
   a. Very well
   b. Somewhat well
   c. Neutral
   d. Not particularly well
   e. Not well at all
   f. Not sure/not applicable

14. How has your use of technology affected your job satisfaction?
   a. Increased greatly
   b. Increased somewhat
   c. Neutral
   d. Decreased somewhat
   e. Decreased greatly
   f. No effect/not applicable

15. Which best describes the rate at which you feel you have been required to learn new technology on the job as compared to your colleagues who are not editors?
   a. More quickly
   b. About the same
   c. Less quickly
   d. Not sure

16. Has your ability to keep up with new technology noticeably affected your ability to advance professionally?
   a. I am adept at learning new technology, and this has helped me advance professionally.
   b. I am adept at learning new technology, but this has not helped me advance professionally.
   c. I am not adept at learning new technology, and this has prevented me from advancing professionally.
   d. I am not adept at learning new technology, but this has not prevented me from advancing professionally.
   e. I am not sure if my technology skills have had an effect on my professional advancement.
   f. Other (Please specify.)

17. Approximately what percentage of your work day is spent on duties other than “traditional” textual editing?
   a. 0-20%
   b. 21-40%
   c. 41-60%
   d. 61-80%
e. 81-100%

18. Has this percentage changed in the past three to five years?
   a. Yes, increased a lot
   b. Yes, increased somewhat
   c. No change
   d. Yes, decreased somewhat
   e. Yes, decreased greatly

19. In your company, how often are editors consulted by noneditor colleagues?
   a. Editors are consulted frequently.
   b. Editors are consulted sometimes.
   c. Editors are consulted only when company policy requires it.
   d. Editors are rarely consulted.

20. In your company, what types of contributions are editors expected to make? (Choose all that apply.)
   a. Editors contribute ideas and expertise throughout the product/project development process.
   b. Editors frequently serve on cross-functional teams and committees.
   c. Editors serve as a resource to colleagues, providing content expertise.
   d. Editors serve as a resource to colleagues, providing grammatical/style expertise.
   e. Editors serve as a resource to colleagues, providing technological expertise.
   f. Editors are responsible for working with text only.
   g. Editors are rarely given the opportunity to contribute.
   h. Other (Please specify.)

21. Which best describes your satisfaction with the level of recognition you receive from your colleagues for your professional contributions?
   a. Very satisfied
   b. Somewhat satisfied
   c. Satisfied
   d. Somewhat dissatisfied
   e. Very dissatisfied
   f. Neutral/not sure

22. How do reward structures within your workplace differ for your textual editing compared to your other contributions?
   a. Textual editing is rewarded much more often/strongly.
   b. Textual editing is rewarded somewhat more often/strongly.
   c. No difference
   d. Other contributions are rewarded somewhat more often/strongly.
e. Other contributions are rewarded much more often/strongly.
f. Not sure

23. What types of duties other than “traditional” textual editing are you responsible for in a typical week?

24. Please list two or three aspects of your work that you feel are most valued by your colleagues and superiors. How do you know that they value these contributions?

25. What type(s) of professional development do you feel like you need to do to keep up with your current job or to be a viable candidate for other jobs in the editing field?

26. How would you rate your overall professional satisfaction? [1-10 scale]

27. Please use this space to clarify any of your responses or add any additional comments.

Thank you very much for your time.

If you would be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview, or if you would like to see a brief report of the results of my research when it is completed next spring, please e-mail me at csadler@gmu.edu.
WORKS CITED


CURRICULUM VITAE

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