



Do you like to read and write?
Have you ever dreamed about a position that blends writing and nursing? A career as a nurse editor might be in your future.

Notes on Nursing: Launching Your Career as a Nurse Editor

By Cheryl L. Mee

*the human mind, we observe
fact precedes desire to do
the greater desire to do
felt before. This new
causes which had been
these were ages*

Besides a knack for writing and editing, a career in editing requires great time management and organizational skills, plus strong attention to detail. Consider the following points to decide if an editing career might be right for you.

What does a nurse editor do?

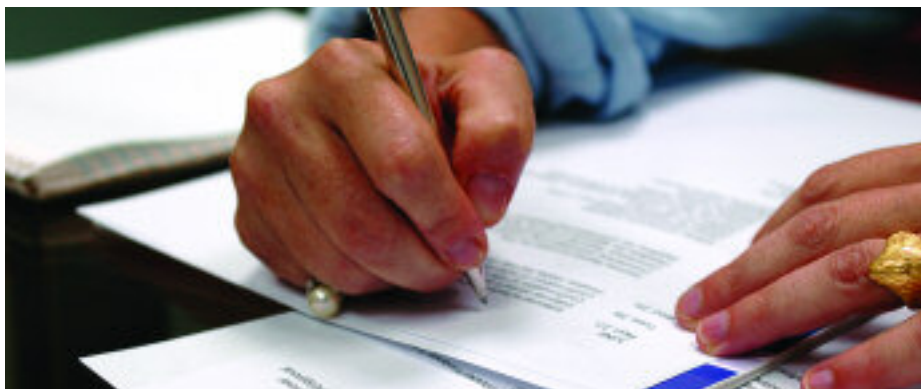
Nurse editors work for publishing companies to develop nursing books and journals. Some nurses have regular full-time positions with a publisher; others work as freelance clinical editors, either part-time or full-time. Freelance editors may have many clients and work for various publishers as needed.

To be a nurse editor, you don't need a degree in English or journalism, but you should learn as much as you can about writing. Consider taking some writing or journalism courses to build your skills.

As a nurse editor, you also need a keen sense of what's happening in the nursing profession. You'll need to stay on top of trends, issues, and clinical practice changes so your work as an editor is current and relevant.

In the publishing company where I work, clinical editors work with a team that includes nonclinical editors, copy editors (who review copy for spelling, accuracy, style, grammar, and so forth), and artists who design journal pages and commission artwork.

A typical day for a full-time clinical editor includes meeting with other editors to plan future articles, reviewing manuscripts submitted for publication and sending promising ones out for peer review, reviewing comments by peer reviewers, helping an author revise a manuscript, and editing an article that's been accepted for publication for clinical accuracy and relevance. You'll find yourself digging into current research to make sure that you've covered any late-breaking information, helping to develop original art to illustrate key clinical concepts, and contacting



potential authors to write manuscripts on hot nursing topics.

You needn't be a nursing guru or a doctoral candidate to do this job well. What you do need is energy, enthusiasm for sharing nursing knowledge with your readers, a healthy respect for good grammar, and a commitment to getting every detail "right." If you know how to search for information, find knowledgeable authors, and network with other professionals, you've got the foundation you need to work for a leading nursing journal.

Get started by building a strong foundation

Any career in nursing—editing included—is based on a solid background in clinical nursing practice. When you have a strong clinical foundation, a myriad of career options will be open to you. So focus first on a clinical nursing position working with patients. Consider a hospital position where you can learn about technology and see a wide array of patients with various diagnoses. Working with patients in a hospital is a great way to learn more about time management, prioritization, and organization of your work load.

Most advanced nursing positions

require you to continue your education; both formally with advanced degrees (you'll be honing your writing as you continue through school) and through continuing education opportunities. Attaining a nursing certification in a specialty also increases your expertise and improves your chance of landing that dream job. I've never met a nurse who regretted making the effort to get more education, so make this a basic element in your plan for career advancement.

But what about developing your skill as a writer and editor? First, don't worry if you're not a natural-born writer—you don't have to be John Grisham or even Danielle Steele to succeed in this business. For most of us, writing is a "learned skill" that improves with practice, so take the time to learn about the craft.

If you already enjoy reading, you're ahead of the game. Most writing teachers agree that reading all kinds of writing is fundamental to learning how to write well. So read, read, read. The more you read, the more you'll notice the difference between very good writing and writing that needs work. This not only helps you improve your own work, but it also helps you develop the eye and ear for language that you'll need as an editor.

When you're looking for things to read, pick out articles and books about the craft of writing. One book on nonfiction writing that I like to recommend is *On Writing Well, The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction* by William Zinsser. Updated in 2006,



this writing classic is fun to read and packed with practical information for novice and experienced writers alike. I promise that you'll learn a lot from it and have a few chuckles too.

Here are some other steps you can take to build your editorial skills:

- Keep a journal and write regularly.
- Write for publication. To get your feet wet, start small. For example, write a letter to the editor of a nursing publication, or ask the editor of a nursing newsletter how you can contribute. Most editors are on the lookout for enthusiastic and reliable contributors.
- Join a journal club or start one where you work. These groups analyze published works for application to practice. This gives you a good incentive to keep reading and stay up-to-date on the latest nursing literature.
- Join or start a writing club. These groups, which are natural outgrowths of journal clubs, support nurses as they develop manuscripts for publication. Members meet regularly to help nurse authors stay on track with their writing plans.

More on the nurse editor's role

In my experience, most nurse editors love their jobs, but they admit that they needed to shift gears when they switched from clinical nursing to editorial work. Nurse editors work independently, often spending hours in front of a computer. That means a lot of sitting is involved—a big change from running around a hospital every day! But it's not all lonely work—besides interacting with the editorial team and authors, you also have the chance to meet and greet colleagues when you travel to conferences, hospitals, or nursing events. As a nurse editor, I communicate daily with other nurses about issues and clinical information that will interest my journal's readers.

These are some primary areas of responsibility for the typical nurse

editor working for a nursing journal.

Manuscript review. Each manuscript submitted for publication is reviewed by several experts who are knowledgeable about the topic (peer reviewers); this helps the nurse editor evaluate the manuscript's quality. Peer review is typically double blind, which means the author doesn't know who reviewed the manuscript and the reviewer doesn't know who wrote it. Other editors working for the journal may also review the manuscript to determine whether the topic and presentation are appropriate for the journal's readers. As a nurse editor, you're not expected to be an expert on every subject; nor are you left on your own to judge a manuscript's merits. The peer reviewers and other colleagues will help you make good decisions.

Manuscript development. Another big part of the job is helping authors as they develop articles. This may start when someone contacts you with a topic query. If the topic is appropriate for the journal's readers, you may encourage the prospective author to develop an article for publication and guide her through the process. I like this part of the job, because it's an opportunity to teach and mentor nurse authors. I believe we all have a story to tell and that any nurse can be an author. Nurse editors work to help nurses get their story or clinical information down on paper.

Not every manuscript submitted for publication gets accepted—in fact, many are rejected. This can be a difficult part of the job. But as an editor you can turn rejection into a learning experience for a promising author, who may try again and succeed next time.

Legal and business issues. Nurse editors need to be aware of copyright laws and regulations. Typically, authors sign an agreement that gives the publishing company ownership of the content it publishes, although the author is credited with creating the work. Some authors object to this, feeling that the work is their own and

no one else's. But the authors benefit from having their work presented to a wide audience that they couldn't reach by publishing on their own.

Plagiarism, although rare, is a concern for all nurse editors. Intentionally or unintentionally, an author may pick up content from

I believe we
all have a story
to tell and that
any nurse can
be an author.

another source without appropriately crediting the source. Plagiarism is unethical and never acceptable. Reviewers and editors who identify or suspect plagiarism should notify the lead editor immediately.

In summary, what should be on your resume when you apply for an editorial position? A strong clinical background, advanced education, a few published letters or newsletter articles, an eye for detail, and strong communication, computer and research skills will all help you land a job as a clinical editor. Questions? Email me at Cheryl.Mee@wolterskluwer.com. ☺



Cheryl L. Mee, MSN, RN, BC, CMSRN, is the Editor-in-Chief of *Nursing2007* and she works as a staff nurse for an inpatient hospice unit.