

Review of Greg Giberson, Megan Schoen, and Christian Weisser’s *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing: Editors in Writing Studies*.

SHARE   

Paul Butler, Erin Cadenhead, Lea Colchado-Joaquin, Ann O’Bryan, Rand Khalil, Dalel Serda, Virginia Swindell

Giberson, Greg, Megan Schoen, and Christian Weisser, eds. *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing: Editors in Writing Studies*. Utah State UP, 2022.

Most in the field of Composition Studies have probably had some experience with the publishing process for a journal article, a chapter, or even a book, but for many, the nuts-and-bolts decision-making of scholarly editing remains a mystery. The growing importance of publishing for scholars across the academic world amplifies this lack of insight. This scenario forms the backdrop of *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing: Editors in Writing Studies*, a welcome work for the discipline. As mentioned in the introduction by Megan Schoen and Greg Giberson, the collection breaks ground by offering a unique vantage point to scholars who have already scaled editorial walls, those aspiring to ascend their heights for the first time, and a generation of would-be editors waiting in the wings. Although the volume’s compelling nature is most evident in its overall presentation, the strength of the whole is certainly not greater than the sum of its parts. The contributors, all editors themselves, share in their chapters not only their individual journeys, but also useful tips and practical wisdom, guiding readers through the challenging job of scholarly editing.

Despite some overlap, each editor’s narrative is so distinctive—along with their philosophy, history, and advice—that we marvel every time the curtain is pulled back, allowing us to pierce yet another layer in an Ozian excursion of insight and epiphany. While moving at a delightfully brisk pace, this volume reveals not only various uncanny yet expected connections among the editors’ experiences, but also a surprising centripetal force, emphasizing the increasing importance of open-access publishing and the WAC Clearinghouse for a future one might not have anticipated just a few years ago.

In “The Journal You Have,” Kelly Ritter says she learned that her fiduciary role as *College English* editor meant setting aside her “scholarly identity” and considering the journal’s best interests (16). Her messages for prospective editors: (1) tell the truth, offering blunt feedback when needed; (2) publish work valuable to the field even if you disagree with it; and (3) trust reviewers until their reluctance to “Take a Stand” renders them unreliable (26). She recommends authors “write the work you have inside you,” not what “you think other people... want” (Ritter 28).

Laura Micciche’s “Minutiae Matters: On Editing an Independent Journal” might be renamed the “Indie Editor’s Survival Guide,” given the former *Composition Studies* veteran’s focus on the labor-intensive, financial, emotional, and intellectual tolls on indies, informed by conversations with four open-access independent journal editors. She unmasks copyediting as the tail that wags the indie dog, arguing it “reveals microchanges that produce macrodifferences” (32). Micciche advises would-be authors to: actively seek feedback before submitting work; embrace copyeditors’ suggested changes; answer editors’ emails promptly; and support authors by reading, teaching, and citing their work (36-38).

In her chapter on *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, Muriel Harris might sum up the publication’s evolution as “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.” She chronicles extraordinary editorial developments along with philosophical stability, citing Robert Connors’ assessment, “It is the only writing journal that makes its readers feel like friends” (42). She ends with prescient advice to authors: Ask why others will read the text. Offer adequate context, explaining rather than summarizing. Add a conclusion with implications. Research the journal before submission and welcome revision suggestions (Harris 54-56).

Victor J. Vitanza’s chapter about *PRE/TEXT* mirrors his editorial approach as well as his philosophical view of rhetorics and rhetorical theories; above all, they are two things: transdisciplinary and democratic. His chapter is partly a Richard Lanham’s paratactic-style collage and partly an homage to the who’s who of authors and guest editors his journal has housed since its inception. The chapter is *PRE/TEXT*’s unranked “résumé” that leaves readers to draw their own conclusions “for the fun of it” (Vitanza 79).

In “Getting Up from a Fall: Five Years as Editor of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*,” Alice S. Horning emphasizes “the myriad aspects of sponsorship involved in serving as a journal editor”; she defines sponsorship as “provid[ing] support for literacy activity” that advances a scholar’s goals (69). Horning’s focus on sponsorship reflects her perspective that the needs of authors, readers, reviewers, staff members, and others shape her approach to individual editorial tasks. Horning ends her essay with useful tips for emerging scholars, including a suggested timeline for post-submission follow-up communications.

In “Opening Spaces in Writing Studies: An Impetus for Change at *Composition Forum*,” Christian Weisser reveals how the decision by composition’s first peer-reviewed journal to “flip” from print to open-access helped it grow organically and enhanced its theory-pedagogy emphasis (84). The chapter’s main take-aways, enumerated by Weisser, are the advantages of an online, open-access format, such as saving the costs of printing, binding, and mailing; boosting “access,” “visibility,” and “readership”; expediting publishing schedules and increasing content; affording digital and multimedia formats; and facilitating more searchable content (85-89).

Kathleen Blake Yancey opens “Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts: Enacting an Editorial Philosophy at *College Composition and Communication*” with the brass tactics of editing, quantifying the number of articles and other pieces published during her tenure. She texturizes these data by describing her efforts to harmonize mundane editorial tasks with their overall purposes. Yancey encourages authors to place their arguments in “the context of on-going discussions” and “allow for complexity” (100-01). Yancey’s final insight—that “editing a journal... is an act of supporting community”—echoes the collaborative approach in this collection (101).

In “The University of Pittsburgh Press Series: Composition, Literacy, Culture,” David Bartholomae and Jean Ferguson Carr dive into the history and complexities of their award-winning series *Composition, Literacy, and Culture*. Striving to publish “serious work that is well written and engaging” and that offers innovative disciplinary perspectives, they cast themselves as both readers and editors, blurring the divide between academia and audience (Bartholomae and Carr 112-14). The pair end with instructions to first-time authors, warning against the submission of a dissertation itself as a proposal and encouraging attention to the writer’s book prospectus and the development of their individual voice (Bartholomae and Carr 114-17).

Mike Palmquist’s proposition in “Opening a New Chapter: Open-Access Publishing in Writing Studies” is that we must “work together to reinvent publishing” because too much “good work” does not find a home due to the inefficiencies of traditional academic models (135). For him, the answer lies in (r)evolutionary publishing models like his renowned and always innovative WAC Clearinghouse. What makes it seminal is that it centers open-access scholarship sharing, collaboration, aligning work with institutional rewards, and inclusiveness. Palmquist encapsulates his philosophy by quoting Michael Pemberton: publishing is not “merely a *rite* of passage” but a “*right* of passage” (127).

In “Gatekeeper, Guardian, or Guide?: Negotiating the Dynamics of Power as an Editor,” Michael A. Pemberton explores the dynamics of power inherent in peer-review and the publishing industry. Drawing upon Joseph Campbell’s hero narrative, Pemberton likens an editor to a gatekeeper, or “Threshold Guardian,” who controls which authors and topics are granted access to print (146). While Pemberton acknowledges the importance of this decision-making role, he urges editors to do more to navigate ethical imperatives. Citing Richard Gebhardt, Pemberton opines that editors should be allies to their authors (151).

For “Reflections: Edit to Learn,” Victor Villanueva traces his educational trajectory from his early English lessons with a Dominican nun to editing academic journals. He emphasizes the tie between his identity as a writer of color and his approach to editing, and he challenges the blanchéd scholarship standard by asking, “[W]hy not an *écriture de couleur*?” (156). Villanueva advocates rethinking the orality-literacy binary, coins “*rhetorical meshing*,” and asks that authors “worry less about ‘proving’ and worry more about teaching,” for their writings must not be limited to but accessible beyond academia (161).

“Everything Is Rhetoric: Design, Editing, and Multimodal Scholarship” features descriptions of Douglas Eyman and Cheryl E. Ball’s editorship of *Kairos*, including their complementary philosophies of pedagogical mentoring and networking. Eyman and Ball advise those undertaking digital humanities projects to: 1) make strategic choices during invention, because they are key to process and production; 2) think of the “sixteen pairs of hands” during editorial production that are part of your overall audience (175); and 3) foster more-than-physical accessibility (173) by including diverse authorial sources, rhetorical theories and methods, and editorial and design choices (178).

What sets apart Byron Hawk’s “*Enculturation* and Scholarly Editing as Network Coordination” is his claim that the journal enacts the very process that bears its name: offering authors a forum to participate in, invent, and ultimately reshape disciplinary conversations while “coproduc[ing] something new” (188). He suggests authors clarify the “destabilizing condition” of a disciplinary issue and editors to help them transform it by adapting Kenneth Burke’s parlor metaphor of ongoing conversation (Hawk 187). Hawk’s perspective is that editors should intervene in the author’s process and help them unsettle conventional ways of thinking.

In “Building a Field through Editorial Work: The Case of Second Language Writing,” Paul Kei Matsuda explains how his editorial work helped shape the field of second-language writing, in part through his affinity for edited collections and their ability to disrupt the field by generating new ideas through *dissoi logoi* (198). For would-be editors, Matsuda’s recommendation is to read widely to understand gaps in disciplinary knowledge; network at conferences to identify projects and collaborators; co-edit to generate multiple perspectives; and analyze how editing volumes will be valued institutionally. He also counsels authorial agency: “It is up to us to consider how our editorial work is evaluated... and to maintain a balanced academic profile” (Matsuda 201).

In “Making Space for Diverse Knowledges: Building Cultural Rhetorics Editorial Practices,” Malea Powell cites the common denominator of fostering “more spaces for diverse scholarly voices” in her editorial trajectory ranging from founder and chief editor of *constellations* to editing *CCC* (202). She shares lessons she learned overseeing *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (*SAIL*), such as building trust, visibility, and collaborative editorial praxes among Indigenous scholars, ultimately working to change disciplinary conversations and expand inclusiveness. Her unique ending addresses readers directly: “we are connected as a large, diverse, lively community of humans” (Powell 211).

In “Won’t You Be My Neighbor? How to Build Scholarly Community,” WAC and genre scholar Charles Bazerman illuminates the importance of editing and discipline building to feel “part of something bigger than oneself” (226). Acknowledging open-access publishing’s transformative influence, he provides significant editorial instruction: identify “curiosities” in initiating projects connected to undeveloped disciplinary needs that engage others in the field; draw on different types of knowledge to shape and direct inquiries; adopt “disciplined generosity” to encourage and sustain projects; use facts, data, ideas, and language to empower work; and be timely and collaborative.

Both as a whole and in each contributor’s essay, *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing: Editors in Writing Studies* offers a tremendous resource for rhetoric and composition scholars, and anyone wanting to work in scholarly editing. The collection is bound to generate helpful discussion in the discipline. Nonetheless, the book would be strengthened if it included not only stories of success and achievement but a few tales of woe or failure, such as efforts to start, or sustain, scholarly journals, books, or edited collections that did not work out. After all, not every narrative needs to be a progress narrative. We all learn from our mistakes—or from the mistakes of others. Still, the chapters collected here are nothing short of inspirational, and their collective wisdom will serve the field well for years to come.

“Review of BEHIND THE CURTAIN” from *Composition Forum* 52 (Fall 2023)

© Copyright 2023 Paul Butler, Erin Cadenhead, Lea Colchado-Joaquin, Ann O’Bryan, Rand Khalil, Dalel Serda, Virginia Swindell.

Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License](#).

SHARE   

Return to [Composition Forum 52 table of contents](#).