

Study finds high levels of job satisfaction among copy editors, little negative effects from pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted jobs across the workforce, including the editorial sector. But a new study from the University of

Kansas found it did not significantly affect how copy editors, proofreaders, and fact-checkers felt about their work and that those working in the professions still have high job satisfaction and a passion for their work in a time of declining trust in media.

Researchers surveyed 472 participants in fall 2021 working in both [full-time](#) and freelance roles in [news media](#), book publishing, [corporate communications](#), academic editing, and other fields. Results showed that most respondents did not feel burned out or overworked and that many did not feel that the pandemic negatively affected their work. According to the study, they also felt passionate about the importance of their work.

Alyssa Appelman, associate professor of journalism & [mass communications](#), studies the effects of journalistic practices and how they influence audience perception of news credibility. Copy editors are often behind-the-scenes types who are not visible to readers, but their work determines how audiences perceive news. Research has shown that typos, grammatical errors, and other mistakes affect opinions of news credibility.

"I'm interested in what editors do and how that affects how readers perceive their work. People who do these jobs have a very important role in media, but they don't tend to be studied as much as writers," Appelman said. "We were also interested in this group because perceptions of news credibility are low right now, and editors are important in ensuring accuracy and credibility. So we wanted to see how they felt about their roles in that part of the industry."

In addition to the pandemic, industry changes have also hit media especially hard over the years. With [layoffs](#), downsizing, consolidation, transition away from print, and other shifts, the researchers wanted to understand better how that affected copy editors' morale.

In the study, participants were asked to rate their levels of job [satisfaction](#), burnout, role overload, and perception of work quality and their satisfaction with their schedules, salaries, and prospects for advancement. They were also asked open-ended questions about the consequences of COVID-19 and industry changes in their work and industry changes.

"The editors had high job satisfaction across these measures. People who are doing this work are happy in their jobs," Appelman said. "We were happy to see that editors felt high satisfaction in their work."

Co-written by Kirstie Hettinga of California Lutheran University, the [study](#) was published in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*.

Appelman and Hettinga's hypothesis that copy editors would have above-average job satisfaction was confirmed. However, their hypothesis that the sample would report higher-than-average burnout and role overload was not. That came as a pleasant surprise, Appelman said, though the fact that respondents had more moderate levels of satisfaction with their prospects for advancement and their salaries did not.

Another enlightening finding was that the pandemic did not substantially affect all respondents' job satisfaction, Appelman said. Several reported having to switch to a remote work setup.

But many, especially freelancers, already worked remotely, and many reported they enjoyed the [work-life balance](#) they could attain via remote work and did not look forward to returning to an office. Freelance editors did report a slightly higher level of job satisfaction than those who worked full-time for one employer, according to study results.

The authors are also journalism educators who have worked as copy editors. In addition to understanding the perceptions of those in the

industry, they are preparing the next generation of editors. In securing a survey sample pool from several professional editing organizations, they found a diverse workforce.

"One of the biggest takeaways for us as educators is just the breadth of this field," Appelman said. "Our sample found people doing this work in book publishing, corporate communications, newspapers, magazines, and several other formats. There are opportunities for students with this skill set, and people who do this work report a high level of job satisfaction."

More information: Alyssa Appelman et al, Job Satisfaction in the COVID-19 Era: A Survey of Copy Editors Across Fields, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/10776990231206370](https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990231206370)

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