

Megan Sever

Independent Editor and Writer at Gneiss Editing



What is your current occupation?

I am an independent editor and writer, running my own business called Gneiss Editing. (“Independent journalist” is the new way of saying “freelance.”) My business is about 75% editing, 25% writing. I have about a dozen different clients at any given time, so I juggle a lot of projects. Many of my editing clients are state geological surveys, but I also edit for science news magazines, online news, educational nonprofits, environmental consulting firms, and private individuals (books, presentations, abstracts, papers). My writing mainly consists of news and feature writing for science news publications though I do a little bit of press release writing as well. Finally, I mentor budding science writers.

What is your educational background?

Bachelor’s degrees in English (American Literature) and Geology. I’ve also taken courses in creative nonfiction writing and in copyediting and technical editing. Mostly, though, I learned on the job!

A key message for students is that the geoscience workforce is dynamic, and boundaries between sectors and occupations are fluid. How has this been true in your career?

My career path has actually been fairly linear. I knew I wasn’t “going into geology” but I also wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. Out of college, I started out working for the US Department of

Energy in a public affairs type of role, writing newsletters and whatnot. I did that for three years while also freelancing for Geotimes magazine and a couple of other local publications. When a job came open at Geotimes, I jumped on it and started writing full time as a reporter. Three years in, I became editor of Geotimes, which then transitioned to EARTH Magazine. I was in that role for 13 years until the magazine was suddenly closed by its publisher. After that, I transitioned to freelance/independent journalism.

That said, I have worked with dozens of scientists and writers over the years and can easily speak to their career paths as well – many of which have been far less linear! Many of the writers I have worked with and mentored are what I call “recovering scientists.” As in, they were once scientists, or on the path to becoming that, when they shifted course and became science communicators instead.

Where do you see your sector moving in future years? How would you advise students to prepare to be competitive job applicants and successful employees?

If you’re interested in science communication – or even if you’re not! – learn to write for the public, not just for other academics. Learn how to explain things in your science to the public. Learn how to communicate.

What is the role of networking in your sector? Do you have advice for a student who is just beginning to build their network? What is the best way for students to get their foot in the door?

Networking is HUGE in #scicomm (aka science communications). Whether you’re looking to be a science journalist or work in a more institutional role (think public information officer for a university or government agency), learning about jobs, getting freelance assignments and getting further connections comes down knowing the right people. Luckily, most of us are active on social media. And if you find the right person to connect with, you’ll suddenly find yourself connected to the whole scicomm world. So, advice, reach out to someone who you admire or someone whose career path is interesting to you and ask for a 30-minute informational interview. Be cognizant of their time – that they’re giving it to you for free – and stick to a short interview. (Thank-you cards or little gift cards, like a \$5 or \$10 Starbucks card – akin to you buying them coffee for meeting up with you – go a long way too!) Follow people on Twitter and connect with them when the time is right. Attend meetings – scientific meetings like GSA and AGU, plus science writing meetings like the NASW meetings or local chapter meetings – and talk to people.

And, in terms of writing, the best thing you can do is read a lot and learn what you want to write and how to write it, which you can do through: a.) reading a ton! b.) science writing graduate school programs or certificate programs; c.) internships or externships; d.) diving right in and freelancing. Connect with editors at places you’d like to write (through the aforementioned options).

What does a “typical” day of work look like for you?

It’s all different for me. Today, I’m working on covering a huge earthquake that happened last night for one client, while emailing sources to ask for interviews for a story I’m writing in the next week for another client, while editing a book for yet another client, and preparing a contract and documentation for a new client for whom I’m starting work next week.

What is the best part of your job?

The variety of work and the people. I love working with geoscientists and helping make their fascinating work translatable for the public.

Do you have any other comments or advice for students looking to enter your sector of the geoscience workforce?

Read a lot, practice writing, get to know people.

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Learn More:

Check out my work at www.gneissediting.com and at <https://authory.com/MeganSever>.