
My Life as an Editor



Yateendra Joshi (yateendra.joshi@gmail.com) is a double-titled editor for WISE in Pune, India. He is a longstanding sponsored member of EASE and contributes regularly to discussion on the EASE forum and is the author of the chapter on designing tables in the *Science Editors Handbook*. We asked Yateendra some questions about his experiences of editing.

ESE: Yateendra, what is your current job title?

YJ: I have more than one: Senior Trainer, Cactus Communications, and Senior Fellow, WISE (World Institute of Sustainable Energy).

ESE: What was the career path that led you here?

YJ: While working as a scientist in agriculture, I became interested in information science and documentation. I was interviewed but was turned down because I lacked formal qualifications in documentation. However, the interviewer (and later my boss for 15 years, Dr R K Pachauri) hinted that I should consider editing – something that had never crossed my mind. I was lucky to win a place on an intensive, 14-week course on editing and publishing led by Ian Montagnes, who was then Editor-in-chief at the University of Toronto Press. This was a turning point: I not only benefited immensely from the course but was able to join the Tata Energy Research Institute, New Delhi. I worked with TERI for 15 years before moving to Pune to join WISE. It was while working part time with WISE that I got to know Cactus Communications in Mumbai. I joined the company in early 2007.

ESE: What does a typical day at work involve?

YJ: That depends on who I am working for that day. If for Cactus, currently it involves working on modules of a distance-education course on writing for postgraduate science students. If for WISE, it is copy editing manuscripts of book chapters and attending to routine correspondence.

ESE: What do you love about your job, and what do you dislike?

YJ: I love it when authors are obscure but I am able not only to understand them but also to put their message across clearly and elegantly; I am pleased if I can chase harmless facts to their lair (things like the missing bits in references and less common abbreviations and units of measurement); and I like being able to spot tiny irregularities (a decimal in place of the raised dot or a single letter of Garamond raising its head among a sea of Times New Roman).

I hate having to re-work copy-edited matter when authors make large-scale changes to their so-called final versions; I dislike seeking clarification from authors about missing figures and tables; and I am annoyed at being interrupted by telephone calls reminding me of my deadlines from those who have defaulted on theirs – yet, this is the copy editor's lot, and I end up doing it all nevertheless.

ESE: What changes would you make, given the chance?

YJ: I'd like authors and copy editors to understand a bit more of each other's jobs, and both to know more of the work involved in turning data, images, and word-processed text into published output, whether print or electronic.

ESE: In terms of your career, what is your ambition?

YJ: I believe that the ambitious rarely turn to copy editing! That said, I'd love to write a style guide for agricultural sciences (published by the CAB International in Oxford?) and to design a handbook that will allow people in Mumbai or Pune (or any large, populous, and chaotic Asian city for that matter) to use public transport with ease and confidence.

ESE: Why (and when) did you join EASE? What benefits do you get from your membership of EASE?

YJ: Joining a professional organization helps editors to become part of a community. In that respect, I have been singularly lucky. Members of EASE have been gracious to sponsor me as a member all these years (I became a member in 1989) and EASE helped me to participate – and even to lead a session or two – in three of its conferences. A member in India accepted me as an intern. These gestures have been immensely rewarding both personally and professionally.

ESE: Which is your favourite column in *ESE*, and why?

YJ: Hard to say, although Viewpoints, News Notes, and the Editor's Bookshelf and Webwatch are interesting and useful.

ESE: How do you think *ESE* can be improved?

YJ: I was amused by the polarized discussion on Copyediting-1, a virtual discussion group of copy editors, on which is right, "bring water to a boil" or "bring water to the boil", proving Bernard Shaw right about Britain and USA being two nations divided by a common language. It will be interesting if *ESE* were to start a column about debatable issues of style.

ESE: Do you have any interesting anecdotes to share with us?

YJ: I can recall two. The author (who also happened to be my boss) of a chapter in a book about global warming that I had carefully copy-edited pointed out, some months after the book was published, that throughout his chapter, carbon dioxide had been rendered as CO₃. Horrified, I checked all the printouts and soft copies and all were fine. This remained a mystery until one day, while taking printouts, I noticed that the title of a paper began with the word *Qricing* where it should have been *Pricing*. Immediate enquiries brought out a rueful admission from our IT group that sometimes, when two PCs are sharing a printer through a data sharer, such things are known to happen.

In a table showing how much wood was required annually for different uses (construction, packing, and so on), one row said "shoe laces". The author simply said that the table was being reproduced from another book but was gracious enough to admit that correction was needed. The answer occurred to me while discussing this problem later at home – for "shoe laces", read "shoe lasts".