

Publishing Editor interview questions

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What to expect

Publishing Editor interviews test editorial judgement as much as technical skill. Expect questions on how you assess manuscripts, manage competing deadlines and handle author relationships, alongside practical checks on style guide knowledge and tools like InDesign or editorial management systems.

- **Process:** Questions on how you actually run an edit or manage a workflow, from first read to handover to production.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions probing how you've handled difficult authors, tight deadlines or conflicting feedback.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypotheticals testing editorial decision-making, such as a manuscript that misses deadline or a proposal that's commercially risky.
- **Technical:** Direct checks on style guide familiarity, grammar knowledge and tools such as Adobe InDesign or editorial management systems.
- **Stakeholder management:** Questions on coordinating across authors, designers, marketing and production, since editors sit at the centre of that traffic.

Most editorial interviews open with a walk-through of your current or most recent editorial workload, move into scenario and behavioural questions on handling authors and deadlines, then narrow into technical questions on style guides and tools, before finishing on questions about the publisher's list and where you'd fit within it.

1. Walk me through how you assess a manuscript or content proposal before deciding whether to recommend it.

Why they ask

This is core to the role and tests whether you can separate personal taste from commercial and editorial judgement.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: describe your process in order, from initial read to written recommendation, naming the criteria you weigh at each stage.

Example answer

"I start with a full read without marking anything up, just to get a sense of voice, structure and whether the concept holds together. Then I go back through against our publishing strategy: does it fit the list, is there a clear audience, and is the writing at a standard we could bring to publishable quality within a reasonable number of revision rounds. I write up a short assessment covering strengths, the main structural or clarity issues, and a realistic view of the work involved, so the acquisitions decision is based on more than gut feel."

2. Tell me about a time you had to give an author difficult developmental feedback.

Why they ask

Editors need to protect the work's quality while keeping the author relationship intact, and this question checks for tact alongside editorial rigour.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A manuscript I was developing had a strong voice but the second half lost narrative momentum. The author was attached to a subplot that was causing the drag. I set up a call rather than sending feedback cold, walked through specific scenes where pacing dropped, and framed the note around what the reader needed rather than what was wrong with their writing. We agreed to cut the subplot back rather than remove it entirely. The revised draft tightened considerably and the author later said the feedback process, while hard to hear at first, made the book better."

3. A title is falling behind schedule two weeks before it's due to go to production. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under time pressure and whether you understand the knock-on effects across design, marketing and production.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state the immediate priority, the options you'd weigh, and how you'd communicate the decision to affected teams.

Example answer

"First I'd work out exactly what's outstanding and how much of it is editorial versus author-side. If it's a content gap, I'd look at whether a tighter edit can cover it without a full extra revision round. I'd flag the risk to production and marketing early rather than waiting, since a shifted print date or campaign date affects more people than just me. If the date can't move, I'd rather negotiate a short, defined extension upfront than quietly slip the schedule and surprise everyone later."

4. Which style guides have you worked with, and how do you handle a house style that conflicts with an author's preference?

Why they ask

Direct technical check on style guide knowledge and how you apply it in practice.

How to structure your answer

Direct technical answer: name your experience, then explain your approach to resolving conflicts.

Example answer

"I've worked mainly with the Chicago Manual of Style for book-length work and the AP Stylebook for shorter or digital content. When an author's preference conflicts with house style, I try to work out whether it's a genuine style choice tied to voice or just habit. If it's habit, I apply house style and note why. If it's a deliberate stylistic choice that doesn't affect clarity or consistency across the book, I'll flag it to whoever owns the style guide and get a call rather than overriding it unilaterally."

5. How do you keep track of multiple titles moving through different stages at once?

Why they ask

Editorial roles routinely involve juggling several projects at different points in the pipeline, so this checks organisational method rather than just claiming to be organised.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: describe the actual system or tools you use and how you prioritise when things clash.

Example answer

"I keep a single view of every title's stage, whether that's in an editorial management system or a project board in Asana, so I can see at a glance what's due for developmental feedback, what's in copy edit and what's about to hand off to design. When two deadlines land in the same week, I look at which has less flexibility downstream, usually whichever affects a print date or a marketing campaign already locked in, and prioritise that one first."

6. Tell me about a time you disagreed with a colleague, such as a designer or marketing lead, about a publishing decision.

Why they ask

Editors sit between multiple teams and need to hold an editorial line while staying collaborative.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"Marketing wanted to bring a release date forward to hit a seasonal window, but that would have meant cutting a proofing pass I thought the manuscript needed. I laid out specifically what would be missed and the quality risk, rather than just saying no. We agreed on a compromise: a slightly shorter but still complete proofing round, plus a freelance proofreader brought in to keep pace. The book still hit the earlier date and came out clean."