

[Navigating the Publishing Path: Job Application Tips and Tricks](#)

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The [Association of University Presses Job List](#) (AUPresses) is currently flush with terrific opportunities for editorial assistants, publicists, acquisitions assistants, and other early career positions. Whether you're an ABD/PhD or already in the industry, applying for these early career opportunities can be a stressful task. For those moving into or freshly out of entry-level positions, it can be particularly challenging to work through the many layers of the application: writing the cover letter, refining the CV or resume, preparing for the interview, and, hopefully, working through the negotiation process for accepting a position.

Finding the right fit and distinguishing yourself from the other candidates is a major undertaking: the reality is that there will be many candidates and many of them will also be fantastic. Honing your cover letter and resume and practicing your best interview responses will help you distinguish yourself. It's crucial that you use a support system to help you, both in reviewing your materials and by providing mentorship throughout the entire process. We encourage you to check out [Paths in Publishing](#), a free mentorship program we recently launched to support early career professionals in scholarly publishing. We have a strong set of mentors from scholarly publishing who work at varying size presses and in different departments and can provide cover letter and resume review, support in preparing for interviews, and offer guidance on the negotiation process.

While others have discussed how to prepare for a scholarly publishing career ([Amy Sherman's Early Career Resource Guide for Book Publishing and Editing is a particularly valuable resource](#)), our goal is to help you frame your experiences in ways that will help advance your candidacy from the very beginning. Each stage of the job application process is an important way to layer your professional and lived experiences. You're building a profile as a candidate and knowing how to do that can be difficult, especially without a support system or knowledgeable mentor to guide you. There are many paths into and through publishing, but whatever road you take, we hope the following tips serve you well.

Cover Letters

The cover letter is the first chance you have to introduce yourself—and it's a very important one. Here are some ways that you can make your application stand out:

- *Don't just repeat the resume.* Use the cover letter as an opportunity to expand on specific points in your resume and tie them to the language of the job description. Is there an emphasis on certain skills or commitments, like diversity, equity, and inclusion or a strong investment in peer review? Tie your own experiences or work efforts—in and out of publishing—to those shared by the press.
- *Demonstrate that you researched the press.* Talk about a few titles or a list that is akin to the kinds of books you're passionate about. Connect your work to the mission, statements of purpose, or conversations this publisher has communicated in the media. Check out the academic conferences the press attends, its social media, and forthcoming titles, and tie the job you're applying for to those larger efforts. Be specific and constructive.
- *Use your educational background strategically.* If you're positioning yourself as academic-adjacent, know that the PhD is not necessarily a positive or a negative, but rather a neutral. The PhD can be advantageous in demonstrating that you can engage in scholarly conversations, but publishing requires additional specific and attainable skills that you'll also need to articulate. Having a PhD or being ABD does not automatically pave the way, but you can position your academic experiences as complementary to scholarly publishing (consider reading [Going Alt-Ac](#) for some first-person narratives of how to do this).

Resumes

Your resume is not just a list of your experiences; you should use it to demonstrate the breadth and depth of what you've done and to communicate what you value.

- *Highlight relevant experience,* which can include much more than your education. If you've done non-profit work (especially mission-driven), had internships, volunteered, or have work experiences that aren't immediately connected to the industry, include a brief statement about what connects them (perhaps through internship/job responsibilities). Include your proficiency in software programs that might prove beneficial, even if they're not listed as necessary in the job (InDesign, Canva, etc.).
- *Find a way to generalize skills* to apply to a number of different scenarios. Whether you have a background in publishing or you're coming from outside the field, you've likely had to exhibit organizational, communication, and problem-solving skills in various aspects of your life. Break down prior experience into these basic skills.
- *Tailor your resume for each job.* If a position requires data processing skills, highlight that. If it requires independent thinking, highlight some solo project work. As with a cover letter, you should mirror the language from the job description.

Interviews

The interview can feel like the most stressful part of this process, but it doesn't have to be. Rather than thinking of it as a make-or-break chance, consider it a natural progression, a conversation that continues to unfold.

- *Practice.* Do a mock interview with friends, mentors, or, if all else fails, in the mirror. Do as much as you can to replicate the actual format of the interview. Is it remote? Log in for a Zoom meeting. Is it in-person? Ask your mock interviewers to treat it as seriously as possible, meeting you at the door and chitchatting.
- *Make a plan.* If your interview is an hour in length, consider that at least 40-45 minutes of that will likely be questions for you to answer. Expect this and pace yourself: no one answer needs to hit every single point. Take some time to answer the question fully, but then stop when you feel your answer is complete.
- *Think big picture.* Every question is an opportunity to connect your answer to the larger mission of the press. When you answer, think not just about the answer they might be looking for but the answer that could circle back to your previous answer and begin building bridges to the next question. Demonstrate synthesized thinking and don't be afraid to operate at multiple levels to answer a question.
- *Take your time.* There's no reason to rush your answer—feel free to pause, take a few notes, and begin to consider and formulate your response. Interviewers would rather get a quality answer than a quick one. You can also ask them to clarify parts of it, or you can even take it in a slightly different direction if you can constructively build on the question itself.
- *Ask good questions.* As much as you're interviewing for an employer, they're also interviewing for you. In most interviews, you will have an opportunity to ask questions at the end. Think beyond standard questions related to department structure, job functions, or about hiring timeline and instead ask about things like: larger organizational structure (press committees, contracts, etc.); systems and processes; work culture and interdepartmental dynamics; relationship to host university or academic unit; favorite books and upcoming projects; or opportunities for advancement or mentorship. Make clear you're curious about your role within a larger system and that you've taken the time to think about the press as a broad organization.

Across the resume, cover letter, and interview, don't be afraid to sell yourself as a coworker with hard skills as well as a human being who will bring your own lived experiences and personality to an organization. Learning how to effectively put yourself forward for the job isn't an innate skill: it's something learned and honed over time. Ask your friends or mentors to review your materials and

listen to you talk, but if you don't have those structures in place, consider calling on your friends, mentors, and even mentorship programs like [Paths in Publishing](#) for that extra support.

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Have something to say on this topic? Reply to this post or [email the Elephant](#) about writing for us. We welcome submissions from stakeholders on all sides of scholarly publishing.