

## [Working with Your Editor: Manuscript Transmittal and Launch](#)

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by Clare Jones, assistant editor, Cornell University Press

I first saw Julia Child's *The French Chef* when I was living in Iowa City and working at the University of Iowa Press. I often think of that time when I am working on the preparation of a manuscript for hand-off to a production editor, since it was from Julia Child that I learned the basic, but very useful, technique of setting out all my ingredients on my kitchen countertop before baking anything.

Julia Child recommended putting everything out where you could see it before launching into a baking endeavor. Books have a similar moment in their timelines when a thorough reckoning must be taken: when the author sends in files to the acquisitions department. At this crucial moment—which can span a single day or take weeks—everything is vetted and accounted for with great care.

In this way, the final manuscript submission point is a bit like the process in a kitchen of matching ideal recipe to pantry reality. Forgetting the baking soda (or having mistakenly taken out the salt when you needed the soda) can cause a cake disaster. Not having permissions ready to go can sink a production schedule just as quickly. So, as I turn to manuscript files sent in by an author, the voice inside my head often starts to sound a bit like Julia Child. And the voice starts asking lots of questions: Is everything here? In the right amount and order? Is it ready to whisk into a book?

Specifically, there are the files themselves. They must be the correct format, numbered and organized so that they can be referred to in-house with clarity and precision. It can be hard to look at one's work at a distance after spending so much time with it, but an important question for an author to ask is whether a complete stranger looking at these files will be able to parse them, because that is what is about to happen not just once but many times over. Every press has its own guidelines and they are often highly detailed and technical. The acquisitions department checks to make sure those have been followed and that all the stars align with the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Over the years, as an intern, assistant, and editor, I have received manuscripts that any number of not-yet-resolved elements that meant they weren't in fact ready for production: highlighted text, unresolved Track Changes, a missing note on language, an extraneous callout, two introductions instead of one, a mysterious appendix that was a suspicious shade of red. These knots are discovered and untangled by a member of the acquisitions editorial team who may need the author to identify a correct file, replace an incorrect one, or complete items that haven't been finished. It is important that all this be resolved *before* a manuscript is handed over to production.

If the book will include illustrations, all image files will be checked to ensure they are ready for the printer. Some art is cropped, made grayscale, or modified in other ways at this stage. Captions are

reviewed to make sure they contain correct credit information and match all the figure callouts. Tables and charts are double checked. At this point, the consistency and cohesion of the scholarly apparatus is double checked. Special characters and foreign language queries are addressed and resolved. The front and back matter is fleshed out and standardized. All of this work could be carried out by an intern, assistant, editor, or any combination therein; depending on the size and structure of the press, the person may change, but the department will not.

Permissions are a big part of manuscript preparation as well, as members of the acquisitions department read through and cross-check all permissions before sending a book on its way. In *My Life in France*, Julia Child advises to always start out with a larger pot than what you think you need, and I like to advise authors, if possible, to take the same approach with the permissions portion of the preparation of their manuscript, starting out with extra time and space to make sure everything is ready. I often direct all authors—whether this is their first book or their fortieth—to the [AUP page on permissions](#). That is a great place to start. [AskUP](#) is another great resource in this regard, and the Elephant has also offered some advice including tips for authors on [permissions](#) in general as well as [text permissions](#) specifically.

For edited volumes, anthologies, highly illustrated works, and field guides, the preparation of manuscript files by acquisitions requires ensuring a turning point when there must be cohesion across all documentation. Acquisitions staff assign ISBNs to various bindings of the book (cloth, paperback, and e-book), invoice and process subventions funds, and create metadata specific to the title in progress. Contact and contract information is updated across the press, either in a database or filing system that the press maintains, so that everyone who will be working on the book is working in harmony.

Timing is everything—in baking and in bookmaking—but one of the less visible, but often crucial, ways of ensuring that timing is successful is attention to detail at the start of a project. It never ceases to amaze me how the same ingredients in different combinations can produce so many edible delights, and I feel similar astonishment about the ordinary words in the hundreds of books that have been and are being published by university presses for centuries, all created out of dedication and hard work. From its beginnings in acquisitions all the way through its completion in production and presentation in marketing and publicity, each volume large and small is a feast for the heart and mind. Bon appetit!

[Clare Jones](#) is an Assistant Editor at Cornell University Press. She is the recipient of a grant from the Fulbright Program and an Alberta Metcalf Kelly Fellowship from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

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