

# Editing and Linguistics: Editing and Publishing at Brigham Young University

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**Abstract** The connection of linguistics and editing is a central feature of Brigham Young University (BYU)’s editing and publishing (E&P) program, which provides a unique and robust combination of courses in linguistic theory, editing, publishing software, and the history and business of publishing. In addition, the program includes essential hands-on experiences through internships, student journals, and other experiential learning opportunities. This paper outlines the history and structure of BYU’s program to showcase the programmatic strengths that have come from integrating linguistics with E&P. This approach provides students with a higher-level understanding of language that prepares them to enter the workplace in a variety of fields ready to make informed decisions about writing, editing, and communicating. The BYU E&P program is a good example of an interdisciplinary program that creatively uses its resources to benefit student learning and professionalization.

**Keywords** editing, publishing, linguistics, program showcase, experiential learning

Courses and programs that focus on editing and publishing (E&P) are found in a wide variety of departments in the English-speaking world. While most programs are in English departments, other host departments include “business, communications, journalism, media and creative arts, publishing, typographic and graphic communications” (Baker et al., 2024). Only one—the Editing and Publishing program at Brigham Young University (BYU)—makes its institutional home in a linguistics department.

The connection of linguistics and editing is a central feature of BYU’s program, which provides a unique and robust combination of courses in linguistic theory, editing, publishing software, and the history and business of publishing. In addition, the program includes essential hands-on experiences through internships, student journals, and other experiential learning opportunities. This paper outlines the history and structure of BYU’s program to showcase the programmatic strengths that have come from integrating linguistics with E&P.

## **History**

The E&P program at BYU started with a single copyediting course. As interest in editing grew, the course offerings were expanded to include courses in substantive editing, publishing software, and advanced editing. The program also developed experiential learning opportunities, including partnering with dozens of internship providers, promoting and developing over twenty student journals, and creating an academic editing service for BYU faculty. In the early 2000s, the program became an official university minor. In 2018, after several years of sustained growth, E&P was approved as a major, with additional required courses and a more robust linguistics foundation, which will be described below. The program now serves roughly 200 students in the major and minor, which makes E&P compete with the linguistics major for the title of most-enrolled major in the department.

## **Linguistics Foundation**

The initial course offerings for editing were housed in the English Department. In the early 2000s, however, the department was realigned into two departments: English and Linguistics. The E&P courses moved to Linguistics, based on the interests and assignments of the faculty in the program. This move has given BYU's editing program a distinctive linguistic foundation. Aside from the core editing courses, the required and elective courses for both the major and the minor draw from the linguistics and applied English linguistics course offerings. This means that students in the E&P program get in-depth learning in grammar and usage, but they often also learn phonetics and phonology, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and linguistic varieties.

The design of the E&P major was to help students gain an elevated understanding of language—not just the prescriptive rules, but also the pieces, parts, and complexities. The hope was that as students increased their knowledge of linguistic features, they would be better equipped to make editorial decisions. This hope has been realized in the performance of the program's alumni in competitive publishing internships. Internship providers report that students from BYU's E&P program perform significantly better (usually 30–40 points) than their peers from other universities in hiring tests and job performance measures (Olsen, personal communication, October 30, 2019). Alumni from the program also fare well in professional job placement, freelance editing, and graduate school acceptance in companies and universities around the world.

Student employment development is a major focus of the E&P program, and that development is aided by the program's focus on a solid linguistics foundation. And, as the

publishing industry grapples with the rise of AI and computer-aided writing and editing, students who have a higher-level understanding of language and linguistics have a greater chance to not only be employed in the industry but also to shape the future of publishing (Węcel et al., 2023; Noy & Zhang, 2023).

## **Editing Minor**

Originally designed as an expansion of a single editing course, the editing minor quickly became a robust and popular program focused on the professionalization of students. It is usually paired with complementary majors, such as English, creative writing, applied English linguistics, or linguistics, but it draws students from across the university who seek practical classes to improve their editing and writing skills. The editing minor is structured to provide students with (1) an overview of linguistics, (2) specific training in editing and publishing, and (3) experiential learning and professionalization opportunities.

### **Linguistics Overview**

All editing minor students are required to take either *Introduction to Linguistics* or *Introduction to the English Language*. Both of these courses provide students with vocabulary and tools to understand basic linguistic concepts. They also preview some of the major fields of linguistics, including sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics, language documentation, and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

After the introductory class, students take two more courses that bridge linguistics and editing: one on usage and one on grammar. In the usage course, students learn to use style and usage guides but with a critical eye. Students are taught to analyze specific usage guidance and to make informed decisions about their own use of language, whether in writing or in editing. Perhaps most importantly, students learn to decode usage guide entries and to understand whether the presented rules are based in grammar, clarity, tradition, or even prejudice.

The grammar course focuses on helping students learn to describe and analyze the English language. It focuses on teaching students the vocabulary and tools for discussing English and provides extensive exercises and exams to help students identify key features of grammar in authentic texts.

The introduction, grammar, and usage courses are taught by a rotating mix of linguistics, E&P, and TESOL faculty who provide their own perspectives and research on language. The goal is to help students become engaged with the language on a deeper level and to gain an understanding of how English works and the rules and traditions that govern it.

## **Editing and Publishing Training**

The core of the editing minor contains a four-course sequence with specific editing and publishing training. These courses are designed to prepare students for a variety of workplaces and are continually updated with the latest approaches and practices from the wider publishing industry.

The first course is *Introduction to Print Publishing*. This course, taught by faculty in digital humanities, is an overview of the software tools used in publishing. It currently focuses on the industry-standard Adobe Creative Suite. Students learn to edit images, to create illustrations, and to typeset and design different kinds of documents. They are also taught how to prepare electronic files for print publication. The projects in this course include a well-designed magazine spread and a fully typeset book. Students emerge from this class with a variety of portfolio-ready pieces that represent their early education in E&P.

The second course is *Copyediting*. In this course, students learn the practice of copyediting through exercises, exams, and projects. This course focuses heavily on the more concrete decisions an editor can make, including spelling, punctuation, grammar, and style. Students are taught strategies for finding and correcting errors, but they are also asked to employ the critical thinking tools they learned in their linguistics foundation courses to make decisions about how to apply style and usage guidance. In this course, students are also taught important professional skills, such as using software, preparing portfolios, and applying for jobs.

The third course is *Substantive Editing*. This course focuses on the larger problems in editing, including questions of audience, tone, style, organization, and voice. Each section of the course focuses on a different genre of editing, which may include technical editing, academic editing, business editing, fiction editing, and magazine editing. Students focus on learning the details and challenges of editing for a single genre throughout the semester. Although this course also uses some exercises and exams, the primary focus is on larger editing projects that include both substantive and copyediting problems. Most sections of this course include at least one live project, where students work with authentic documents and real authors.

The final course in the editing minor core is a project capstone: *Editing for Publication*. While the other three courses can be taken in any order or even simultaneously, they all must be completed before students enroll in the capstone. Like the substantive editing course, the capstone course is taught in different genres by section: magazine, fiction, or online publishing. The goal of this course is to give students the experience of taking a

publication from draft to publication within the confines of a semester. In the magazine section, students work as a single staff to write, edit, design, and publish a travel magazine. The online course runs similarly, but the publication is a pair of websites that summarize academic or religious content. In the fiction course, students work in small teams to choose a book manuscript and then work with an author through the revision and production process. In each section, students leave with tangible evidence of their editing and publishing skills for their portfolios.

## **Experiential Learning and Professionalization**

Providing students with opportunities for experiential learning and professionalization are important to the entire E&P program. The specific opportunities outside of class, such as internships, student journals, and study abroad programs, will be discussed later in this article. Although these opportunities are not required in the editing minor, they are highly encouraged. The program also emphasizes professionalization throughout the core editing classes. Students are required to build online portfolios, to learn software tools, and to network with other editors and authors. Faculty also spend time working with students to plan their careers and to apply for jobs or graduate schools.

## **Editing and Publishing Major**

When the E&P faculty proposed expanding the minor to become a major in 2016, the criticisms of the program were focused on editing's lack of an academic history and disciplinary home. While the professional preparation elements of the editing minor were proved to be popular and successful, university administrators asked for a more academically rigorous program to be developed before considering the major proposal.

Since editing does not have an established disciplinary identity (refer to Baker et al., 2024), the E&P faculty turned once more to their colleagues in the Department of Linguistics. The linguistics foundation was expanded to include a course in research methods, where students learn the basics of academic research, but also an overview of key concepts in statistics and analysis that prepare them to write and edit academic research papers. The foundation now also includes a course in the history of the English language, which provides additional context of the linguistic origins of modern English.

In the major, the students are required to take two courses that provide perspectives on linguistic context. These courses include *Discourse Analysis*, *Varieties of English*, *Sociolinguistics*, and *Corpus Linguistics*. These courses add depth and context to the

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linguistics core of the E&P major and help students identify their own interests and specializations.

Students are also required to complete an additional three courses from a long list of linguistics courses, which draw from nearly the full catalog taught in the department. Students can pursue linguistic interests further by learning about semantics and pragmatics, phonetics and phonology, or language politics and planning, among many other options. But they can also choose to expand their experiences in the editing courses by taking a different genre of substantive editing or editing for publication. Other popular elective courses include the *History of the Book*, *Social Media Marketing and Analysis*, and *Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. The elective courses give students the opportunity to shape their major to their interests, while expanding their understanding of both E&P and linguistics.

While the primary goals in expanding the minor to a major were to increase the academic rigor, the faculty also felt strongly about requiring professionalization opportunities. In addition to the one software course required in the minor, the major requires an additional course in professional tools, which can include an advanced publishing software course, a web publishing course, a business of publishing course, or an additional linguistics software tools course. The major also requires at least one credit hour of experiential learning.

Finally, the E&P major includes a senior capstone course, separate from the editing project capstone. The senior capstone course is designed to give students an additional intellectual challenge through exploring a topic in-depth by researching academic sources, giving presentations, and writing research papers. While this course was initially cross-listed for E&P, linguistics, and applied English linguistics majors, it is now listed separately to allow for more focused topics based on the interests and skills of the students in each major.

## **Expanding the Breadth**

One of the strengths of the editing minor has always been the wide variety of majors the students represent. The different disciplinary backgrounds provide diverse perspectives and exposure to a variety of complex professional discourses. E&P students have had majors in English, linguistics, business, education, history, and a number of STEM fields (refer to Table 1 for a list of current majors and minors). In many cases, those students drew on their editing training in the minor classes to improve their writing and to prepare for careers and graduate school.

**Table 1. Majors and Minors for E&P Minors and Majors**

<b>Majors of Editing Minors</b>	<b>Minors of E&amp;P Majors</b>
American Studies	Art
Anthropology	Business
Applied English Linguistics	Communications
Biochemistry	Creative Writing
Chinese	Design Thinking
Communication Disorders	Digital Humanities and Technology
Communications: Advertising	English
Communications: Journalism and Sports Media	Entrepreneurship
Communications: Media and Society	Family History—Genealogy
Communications: Public Relations	Family Life
Economics	French
English	Global Women’s Studies
English Teaching	History
Family Life: Family Studies	Information Systems
Family Life: Human Development	Interdisciplinary Humanities
Graphic Design	International Strategy and Diplomacy
Linguistics	Korean
Marketing	Legal Studies
Microbiology	Linguistic Computing
Neuroscience	Linguistics
Plant and Landscape Systems	Mathematics
Spanish Studies	Music
Spanish Translation	Plant and Landscape Systems
	Professional Writing and Communication
	Professional Writing and Rhetoric
	Psychology
	Scandinavian Studies
	Sociology
	Spanish
	Statistics
	TESOL
	Theatre Arts Studies
	Translation and Localization

Like the editing minor, the E&P major is designed to be paired with other programs. Students are required to complete either a minor in another subject or two years of a foreign language. While BYU has many foreign-language speakers among its students, most E&P students choose to get a minor anyway. The most popular minors include English, creative writing, linguistics, TESOL, communication disorders, and professional writing, but E&P students represent a broad range of minors from across the university.

This focus on interdisciplinary training for both the editing minor and E&P major provides intellectual development for students, but also critical professional preparation.

Professional editors almost always function in fields that require adaptation to the audience, expectations, and language of that field. Interdisciplinary work through paired majors and minors, along with advanced training in linguistics, prepare students to make those adaptations to new environments and new discourses throughout their careers.

## **Experiential Learning**

As noted earlier in this paper, experiential learning has been a central part of the E&P program since before it became a minor. Student journals, internships, the Faculty Publishing Service, and a study abroad all offer in-depth training and skills that cannot be replicated in the classroom. Although these experiential learning opportunities are optional for editing minors, most students still complete at least one. E&P majors are required to complete at least one credit hour (representing 42 hours of work) working in an internship or student journal, although the credit can be earned by completing a study abroad. Once again, however, most students complete multiple internships or student journal semesters in an effort to gain as much practical experience as possible before graduation.

### **Student Journals**

BYU is home to over twenty student journals. While some journals operate as classes, overseen by full-time or adjunct faculty, most operate independently, with an assigned faculty advisor. These journals are managed and produced by students who volunteer their time to gain publishing experience. Some of the journals include *Leading Edge* (science fiction and fantasy); *Inscape* (fiction, non-fiction, art, and poetry); *Schwa* (linguistics research); *Chiasm* (neuroscience); and *AWE* (women's studies).

The wide variety of student journals provides students with opportunities to explore their interests while going through all of the steps of the editing and publishing process. In addition to the practical experiences of editing, students also get real-world experience in management, marketing, finances, copyrights, and contracts. The breadth of experience in working for student journals prepares students well for a wide range of careers.

### **Internships**

Since the beginning of the E&P program, the number and quality of editing internships has grown to include dozens of internship providers on campus, locally, regionally, and internationally. The vast majority of E&P internships connected with BYU are well-paid and highly competitive. On-campus internships include university, college, and department

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publications; the university press in editing, writing, graphics, design, and production; the museums, working on signage and marketing; the copyright and legal counsel offices as editors, writers, and researchers; and the Research and Writing Center as peer mentors and tutors. All of these on-campus internships offer real work experience with focused mentoring from supervisors and managers.

Some of the most competitive internships are the ones working for BYU's Faculty Publishing Service (FPS). This service employs several professional editors and student interns, who work together on helping faculty from different departments prepare manuscripts for publication. The FPS offers substantive editing, copyediting, proofreading, indexing, typesetting and design. Student interns edit papers under the direction of professionals and receive feedback and mentoring throughout the process.

Off-campus internships include dozens of companies, ranging from traditional book publishers to tech companies to religious organizations. Most of these internships are highly competitive and highly regarded in the industry. Even though students are off-campus, the internships are monitored by a member of the E&P adjunct faculty for the quality of the work, the mentoring and feedback, and the overall experience. Students who seek university credit for internships submit reflections and employer reports.

Since 2023, BYU has also formed important relationships with international publishers based in Germany and the UK. Students who are awarded these internships stay in BYU student housing and work for a semester with one of several publishing companies. These international publishing experiences expand the reach of the E&P program and provide students with experiences well beyond the limits of the classroom.

### **Study Abroad**

While the E&P program encourages each student to complete at least one internship, it also allows the experiential learning credit to be completed with a related study abroad. BYU runs one of the largest study abroad programs in the world, with thousands of students traveling each semester. The Department of Linguistics sponsors three study abroad programs: one focused on linguistics in Ecuador, one focused on TESOL that changes locations, and one focused on the English language in the UK and Ireland.

While any of the department-sponsored study abroad programs would be counted toward the credit for E&P students, the majority who choose to go settle on the British Isles program. This program travels for eight weeks through England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Ireland. The courses offered include *Introduction to Linguistics*, *Varieties of*

*English, History of the English Language, and History of the Book.* Students visit historic locations, publishing houses, museums, and historic presses as they learn through a variety of rich experiences.

## **Student Success**

The goal of the E&P program at BYU is to prepare students for a successful entry into the world of editing and publishing. Through the connections to linguistics and the wide variety of courses and practical experiences, students gain the knowledge, skills, and practice to enter the workforce. Importantly, the E&P faculty encourage students to see beyond the boundaries of traditional publishing to the many broader opportunities to practice their craft. For over two decades, E&P students from BYU have accepted positions in traditional publishing companies, but even more of them have found work in the broader industry.

The nature of the publishing industry, which includes a significant number of freelancing opportunities, makes some alumni employment numbers difficult to track. However, according to surveys of graduating seniors from the E&P program conducted by BYU each year from 2018 through 2023, 78.9 percent of the students were seeking full-time or part-time employment, while 10.1 percent were planning on graduate or professional school. A significant number (18.3 percent) were also planning to be stay-at-home parents (students could select more than one option in this survey). In the same survey, 68.5 percent of students reported that they had already accepted an offer of post-graduation employment at the time of graduation.

The survey showed that E&P alumni are working for local, national, and international publishers; as freelancers; and for a wide variety of other companies, including airlines, marketing companies, research companies, steel mills, technology and Internet companies, startups, libraries, school districts, and universities. In addition, E&P students have gone on to graduate school editing and publishing, as well as law, medicine, history, instructional technology and design, international relations, library and information science, sociology, and linguistics.

The success of the E&P students after they leave BYU is evidence of the strength of the program. As the discipline of E&P grows, the connections to linguistics should be part of the conversation along with the connections to English, professional and technical communication, and journalism.

## **Key Takeaways**

BYU's program in E&P is a unique, robust program that serves its students well and prepares them to enter the workplace with a carefully designed program of practical editing courses, linguistic theory, and hands-on experiential learning. The keys to its success, as measured by student feedback and career placement, include the following:

1. **A strong academic foundation:** While E&P is a new discipline with a developing body of research literature, editing programs can draw on existing related disciplines, especially those in linguistics, writing, technical communication, and rhetoric.
2. **A strong sequence of courses:** The courses in a successful E&P program need to balance learning essential theory with addressing the pressing needs in the industry. The course sequences should be designed with a close attention to detail and a keen understanding of industry needs.
3. **Robust experiential learning opportunities:** No program can provide all of the necessary experience inside classrooms. Experiential learning should be built into E&P programs to give students exposure to different genres of publishing.
4. **A focus on professionalization:** Professionalization should be a consistent theme throughout the program, even in more theory-based courses. Faculty should be familiar with the industry to advise students and guide them through their professional preparations.

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