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## Demystifying Post Production Career Potential Post Grad

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Anjali Bose  
PROD 460  
12/06/23

## Demystifying a Career in Postproduction Post Graduation

As graduation looms nearer, both excitement and anxiety have increased, as what was once fantasy will soon be reality. For this capstone thesis, I have chosen to focus on postproduction editing as my topic of interest. However, one thing that has become more and more clear through this semester, is the wide array of opportunity, choice, and decisions that go into pursuing a career in postproduction. Nothing is merely simple, guaranteed, or optionless. Instead, purposeful decisions must be made at every turn, and what seems like a simple choice or outcome could instead impact the rest of one's livelihood or career. Therefore, I have found this process of completing this capstone incredible insightful, fulfilling, and vital for demystifying the larger pathway of my career of interest. For this capstone, I have let the following work guide me to this paper. I worked as lead editor and postproduction coordinator for two LMU short fiction films, *Haelan* and *Revelation*, and served as an assistant editor on an LMU short documentary film, *A Good Family*. Beyond this, I conducted five informational interviews with professionals who have experience working in postproduction or editing of some sort. They were, in chronological order, AnaMichele Morejon, Andrew Emmerson, Dan Ackerman, M Auday, and Charlotte Traver. While each interview had unique points of focus and perspective, mandatory questions were asked for each. They were as follows: What was your journey from college graduation to where you currently are? What does your day to day schedule look like in this line of work? What has your salary or pay been from position to position? What changes would you have made if you could go back in time? These specific questions allowed me to more easily compare and contrast the different career outlooks and answers of each interview

subject, allowing an analytical structure to form from interview to interview. My practice as well in editing my short films helped me to see myself in the position of editor. I was able to gain real world experience working with a director and navigating both the process of critique and revision, at times dealing with unreasonable demands that are common in the world of postproduction. Through this process, I now hold the necessary foundational knowledge and experience, to better realize the career and life I want for myself as an editor, and hold the necessary skills required to pursue these desires post-grad.

The breadth of my interview subjects cover a wide range of jobs and positions.

AnaMichele Morejon is a freelance editor who has recently entered long term employment as a brand manager for a nonprofit. (Morejon) Andrew Emmerson was an assistant animator and editor for Flying Bark Productions, the leading children's television channel in Australia, before leaving his position to pursue a master's degree in Screenwriting. (Emmerson) Dan Ackerman has worked as a reality TV show editor for the last twenty years, for shows like *Hell's Kitchen*, *Iron Chef*, *Top Chef*, and *Chopped*. (Ackerman) M Auday is also a television writer, who began her career a few years ago as a postproduction Assistant for *The L Word: Generation Q*, as well as a number of smaller documentaries as she's sought out union status. (Auday) Lastly, Charlotte Traver began her career as a freelance line producer and postproduction PA, before eventually joining American Public Media Group, becoming the Audience Engagement Coordinator for their in-house podcasting portfolio. (Traver) The range of positions cover the postproduction world rather broadly, focusing on social media and television freelance work, as well as long term social media management and advertising. While the job of an editor could seem unrelated to some of these careers, the technical skills in tandem with audience expectations and goals overlap tremendously. (Traver) Learning about all these potential career paths was incredibly

helpful toward better seeing which outcomes are more or less compatible with my non career desires and goals in life, socially and mentally. Through this paper, I will break down and explain, with reasonable brevity, the answers and key points of interest gained through each interview, and each film I worked on. In all, the impact this has had on the decisions I have made and continue to make in the coming weeks before graduation will be showcased.

Straight out from graduation, all of my subjects had a similar dilemma. They needed to make enough money to afford rent and basic utilities/necessities. It was interesting to see how everyone who pursued freelance work was not able to meet these requirements initially, such as AnaMichele and Charlotte, and instead had to rely on other means, like parental assistance or service industry positions. (Morejon) The people who found the most financial security were those who could immediately fall into full time or long-term employment of some sort.

(Ackerman) In the case of M, she was a semifinalist for the prestigious Ace Fellowship, opening her to a large network of people, where she quickly received her first post PA position. (Auday) For both Dan and Andrew, they received long term employment through familial and social connections to certain networks or production companies. Andrew was able to begin as a contracted long term post assistant at Flying Bark Productions, through an older classmate, and Dan began as a camera operator, quickly transitioning to assistant editor, for *Big Brother 5* through an aunt. (Emmerson, Ackerman) These beginnings emphasized for me the importance of making connections and maintaining a network. While I cannot rely on parental assistance financially or familial industry ins, this capstone has forced me to begin the process of creating a network. Now, with the advice of my subjects, I have the skills needed to be a present and likable connection and am beginning to learn how to utilize these relationships toward further employment.

A striking similarity in all interviews from this point forward was the hard work required to thrive in a position, regardless of starting point. (Emmerson) Everyone had to be money conscious, practical, and occasionally put up with long and inconvenient working hours. However, not everything was so grueling and complicated. As Dan, M, and Charlotte all mentioned, they believed the most important trait to have in this line of work was likeability and reliability. (Ackerman, Traver) What truly mattered wasn't just doing the work the best, but also being an easy person to get along with. Along with this, being able to deliver as was expected, rather than constantly trying to strive above and beyond, was a successful maneuver. (Ackerman) Dan pointed out that sometimes being too good at one's job, in his case an assistant editor for a reality show, was a good way to halt your opportunities for career progression. Instead, he would strongly encourage anyone to, if given the opportunity, perform clean, reliable work in a timely matter, and after forming this rapport in a working environment, ask to move into a higher position. (Ackerman) Especially for the interviewees in television roles, they found that clear, upfront communication always reaped more opportunities rather than silently creating outstanding work. (Auday) This reinforced the characteristics I need to prioritize if I wish to be successful in postproduction fields. Specifically, it is important to be easygoing, even if that warrants compromise at times, and communicative. These interviews have empowered me to ask for what I want, but also have patience needed to first to prove that I am a qualified and reliable worker. (Emmerson) M and Charlotte even noted how it can actually be helpful to be a woman in this line of work, as it is still rather male saturated, and many employers are eager to diversify fields.

When regarding salary, there were great disparities from position to position. For M and Dan, they discussed standard television rates, as a postproduction assistant, assistant editor, story

producer in reality television, and editor. For M, she began with \$1300 weekly as a post PA for HBO. Both her and Dan began as an assistant editor at \$1500 weekly both for reality and fiction television. (Auday) From there, the numbers differed more strongly. As M transitioned into lead editor work to build enough union hours, her rates ranged from \$500 - \$800 for a number of days. (Auday) Dan on the other hand, eventually transitioned from assistant to lead editor for *Hell's Kitchen* by agreeing to maintain his assistant editor rates but receiving editor crediting. It was only after two seasons of this that he was able to negotiate standard editor pay for his work, at \$850 a day with a \$50 increase each season. (Ackerman) Like Dan, AnaMichele had to take lower pay earlier in her career, as she was building her network and reputation. Often, she'd perform freelance editor work to advertise and run social media for documentaries or films for \$15 - \$18 an hour. In reality though, she feels she deserved closer to \$30 - \$40 an hour for the type of work and quality she was delivering. (Morejon) They both showed me the unfortunate reality that sometimes you have to succumb to lower pay for long term success. AnaMichele was also able to utilize these initially small beginnings into longer term contracts that span thousands of dollars biweekly (though an exact number was not given) for months of employment as a brand manager. Currently she is in a situation like this as a brand manager for a nonprofit in Oregon, where she can afford her cost of living without strife. (Morejon) Charlotte had similar pay post grad, holding freelance social media and line producer positions ranging from \$18 - 20 an hour. However, she was able to use this to get a full-time position at a tech start up doing their marketing and engagement analytics. (Traver) After a year there, she came into her position at APMG, with a salary of \$75,000 a year. Something that stood out to me was the much higher initial pay that was in television editing versus freelance social media work. However, this position was a much larger time commitment, regularly being 10 - 12 hour days five or six days

a week. Freelance work was instead much more flexible, and Charlotte's ultimate position is a rather calm 9 – 5 environment that also includes ample benefits, PTO, and great insurance.

(Traver) These benefits outmatch what is available to a member of the editor's guild, showcasing that there is a give and take quality at all stages of a career. Ultimately, while this information is invaluable for me, I need to think about these different logistics before I can decisively know which route is more desirable.

Lastly, all interview subjects had vital and personal advice that they wished they could give their younger self, but instead gave to me. Key overlaps and takeaways from this section regarded thoughtfulness and patience. As important as it is to ask for what you want, it is more important to go about it in a strategic and favorable way, and to strike at the right moment.

(Emmerson) Thinking things through and having a strong and organized grasp of your finances and financial needs were an absolute must. (Morejon) Additionally, something I hadn't ever thought about, was considering my place in the product as an editor. Before this semester, the majority of my editing work was projects I'd self-directed. However, editing for a director who is not yourself is a much different process. (Ackerman) New sacrifices and choices have to be made, even if you do not always agree with them. Overall, an ability to compromise, while always giving the director the ultimate say is a delicate balance that gets easier from project to project, with more practice. (Ackerman) Hearing about this from my interviewees, was incredibly helpful as I got into editing my short films.

As mentioned, this was the first time I was actively editing short films that I did not personally direct. I feel my informational interviews were instrumental in making this process as efficient and overall successful as possible. Although I consider all three of the directors I've worked with great friends, I cannot pretend every step of the way was easy. There were

incredibly frustrating times. On the 492 I co-edited, the DIT execution was poorly done. Over 3 TB of footage was collected with no reliable foundation implemented to collect and hold all that data. Instead the director and I found ourselves scrambling to clear up enough space on our personal hard drives to store that amount of footage. While this was of course stressful, it was a great learning opportunity for the pre-production investments that must be made, especially before recording something like long form interviews that may span over 13 hours of cumulative footage. (Ackerman)

For the one 490 I edited, I had similar frustrations as well. As we got to the second and third cuts of the project, she had major structural changes she requested be made to the project. While I recut the film these ways to show her, I repeatedly objected to these changes, noting how the thematic impact, pacing, and story was weakened in this new layout. However, I never felt very heard by this director during these occurrences. It wasn't until her classmates brought up these same notes, that she overall agreed and requested the project be changed back. I was incredibly frustrated in the moment, feeling very undervalued as an artistic voice and critic in this process. However, my informational interviewers helped me to see this in a new light. It wasn't that my voice wasn't valued, but rather that my thoughts were given more legitimacy once even more impartial people shared these same thoughts. (Ackerman) Realizing how common of an experience this can be as an editor, helped me to instead find comfort in gaining important experience, rather than feeling like I was wasting time.

Overall, my interviews gave me great, applicable skills as an editor, that helped to aid my editing processes. Additionally, they provided me with contextual background into a larger career in postproduction. My practical experience and informational interviews helped me to better understand myself as a creative and a worker and were invaluable as I began to decide my



next steps post grad. As of right now, I am excited to begin my brand ambassador and engagement specialist position for The Everest Foundation, a healthcare nonprofit. While I am happy to have a role that involves video and creative production skills, I am not incredibly passionate about the company and nonprofit mission as a whole. Therefore, I acknowledge that this is a step toward foundational security, where I can still gain some career experience. Overall, I am completing this capstone with tremendously more knowledge than before, and high hopes for what's ahead.

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