

GWRJ Short: The Interview Begins When the Research Does

Jessica Kreul

Jessica Kreul discusses the research practices she engaged in when applying and interviewing for two internship positions through the Department of English at Illinois State University in this GWRJ Short.

In the past two years, I have applied for and been offered two internship positions: one was for the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* (what you're reading right now!), and the other was a production intern position for the Publications Unit, a branch of the English Department which publishes the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter, *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*, among several other publications. When I heard about there being openings for these positions, I immediately began my personal application process with research. I wanted to know more about these internships, the hours I would be working, and the tasks that I would be

The Publications Unit at ISU

For those who may be unfamiliar with this unique entity, "The Publications Unit is a service and instructional branch of the Department of English, which provides editorial, technical, marketing/advertising, graphic design, and desktop publishing/production support associated with several independent literary publications, scholarly journals, and a small fiction press" ("About Us"). The Pub Unit also provides education and practical and work experience for a variety of students in the department interested in scholarly publications, journals, and nonprofit presses (from students in the Publishing Studies sequence, to undergraduate interns, to graduate assistants).

responsible for completing to make sure that I was capable of doing a great job in those roles before I formally applied. Once I applied and was offered the opportunity to interview, my research became crucial as I focused on preparing to speak with the hiring teams and securing these positions.

Preparing for the Publications Unit

In order to prepare for my interview with the Publications Unit, I first conducted research online and became well-versed in each publication that the Pub Unit is responsible for. I also researched the general mission and goals of the Pub Unit. To do this, I used the Publications Unit’s website as my primary source and took notes so that I could study the information and have it easily accessible for reference (Figure 1). According to the ISU Writing Program website, **sources** are “the items that you find and rely on when you are doing writing, genre, and content research,” and they can be “texts you and others have created, your own memories and experiences with writing

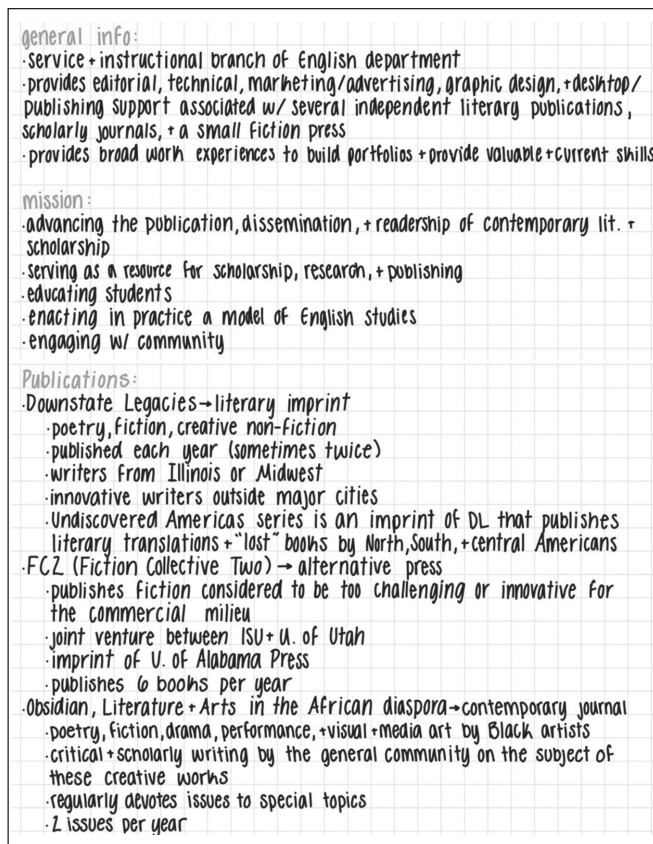


Figure 1: My notes about the Publications Unit from my research.

and particular genres, and academic journal articles or books you find in library databases and other places online” (“Content Research Terms”). While I was doing this research, I attempted to envision myself working on these publications and took note of what I appreciated about each of them and what excited me. For example, I looked at the website for The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter to get more information and scrolled through past issues. I immediately noticed the format and design, which shares many similarities to an actual newspaper, and took note of what I appreciated about it (I remember loving the image placement and font!). At that point, I had only worked on manuscripts that were going to be turned into the traditional book format that we are used to seeing, so I figured working on this newsletter would be a unique experience that would allow me to learn new design skills. Because of this research, I knew that if the conversation steered toward the publications, I would have more to say about them than just the blurbs that are found on the website because I had actually read and interacted with them. I also didn’t know if I would have any sort of say in what projects I got to work on, assuming I was offered the internship, but I wanted to have a notable choice and explanation just in case. This extra consideration in my research process proved to work out in my favor as I am now working on The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter for the second time!

It is a good practice to consult online sources first and read through the organization’s website and find any secondary sources that discuss either the organization/company itself or their internship program. This form of research is called content research. “**Content research** is the practice of seeking, finding, and processing information from a variety of places” (“Content Research Terms”). I learned everything I could about the Publications Unit by looking through their website, the websites for each of their publications, and the Pub Unit’s social medias, all while taking notes on things I thought I would want to remember and be able to talk about. Dedicating time for content research will allow you to enter the interview already knowing the values and goals of the organization and what you would be contributing to as an intern. In my case, it was most helpful for me to

Primary sources

According to the ISU Writing Program’s “Content Research Terms,” “**Primary sources** refer to original objects or documents that contain ‘raw’ material or first-hand information,” meaning “artifacts that you or others have created yourselves.”

Secondary sources

Also found under the ISU Writing Program’s “Content Research Terms,” “**Secondary sources** refer to sources that interpret, comment on, or discuss primary sources.” These are usually “referring to texts that people have written about other texts, including research books, scholarly journal articles, media reviews, and so on.”



Figure 2: The cover of “Title Nine” by Dr. Jenna Goldsmith.

know some specifics about some of the publications that come out of the Pub Unit as that is what I would be working on.

In addition to my online research, I also went through the work that I completed during my time in English 254: Introduction to Professional Publishing, which is a class that is taught by and within the Publications Unit and that also functions as PRESS254. PRESS254 is a chapbook press and publishing workshop where students get hands-on experience participating in different parts of the publishing process from editing to design and marketing, culminating in a finalized, published chapbook at the end of the semester. During my time taking this class and being a part of PRESS254, I got the opportunity to publish the chapbook “Title Nine” by Dr. Jenna Goldsmith (Figure 2)—an insightful and radical collection of poetry that I highly recommend

checking out (shameless plug for Dr. Goldsmith and the Pub Unit, I know!). By going through my past work and using it as a source, I was able to refamiliarize myself with the different steps in the publishing process such as mechanical cleaning (making manuscript-wide changes for formatting, style, and consistency) and the way I had to present edits, along with the different programs in Adobe I had to use for design and image work. I already knew that much of the work that I would be doing in the internship would be similar to the work I completed in English 254 in order to complete the chapbook, so I thought it would be a good idea for me to refresh my memory on the publishing process since it had been a couple of semesters since I’d taken the course. Additionally, this research made me better prepared to talk about my experience with English 254 and how I think I would manage the tasks and workload of the internship, which made me appear as a more knowledgeable, conscientious, and prepared candidate.

Joining *Grassroots*!

The process of applying for and being accepted as a *Grassroots* intern was different from the Publications Unit’s process, but my research methods for preparation purposes were quite similar. I didn’t have to go through a formal interview for *Grassroots*—I applied online and answered some questions. I then received a follow-up email with additional questions to be answered and was offered the internship. As I did with the Pub Unit, I first checked

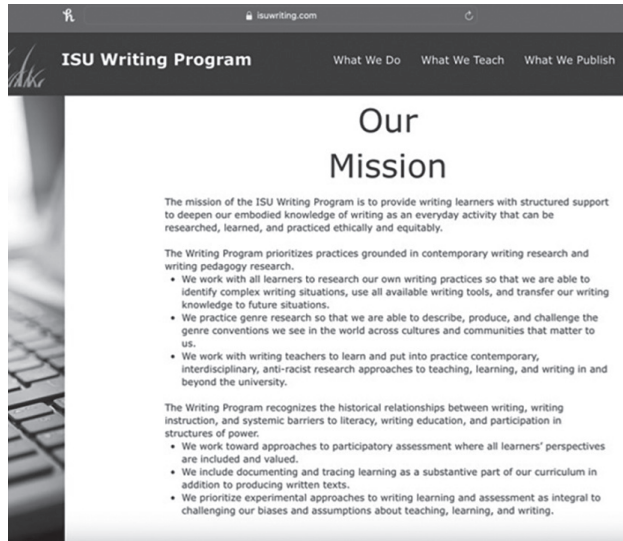


Figure 3: A screenshot of the ISU Writing Program website (“Our Mission”).

the appropriate website—the ISU Writing Program’s site—and read up on everything related to *Grassroots*. I found the most helpful and informative elements to be the Writing Program’s mission (Figure 3), the description of the journal, and the terms and concepts list. These helped me to understand the goals of the journal and the types of articles and genres that I would be working with if I were to secure the intern position. I also viewed previously published journal issues and read several articles. During my reading, I conducted a genre analysis to better understand what a *Grassroots* article requires. The ISU Writing Program defines **genre analysis** as “the practice of breaking down what we see people doing in specific texts in a genre ... When we do genre analysis, we describe the relationship between visible genre features (length, structure, formatting, different modes, language use) and the social goals of those features, including their cultural-historical contexts in specific times and places” (“Genre Research Terms”). So, I was paying attention to the fact that the articles mentioned and discussed multiple terms and concepts, the use of images, and the general structure of how the articles are broken down but flow together. These are examples of **genre conventions**, which are the “characteristics of any kind of text that make it recognizable as participating in a particular genre” (“Genre Research Terms”). The most noticeable and prominent convention was the use of terms. This made it clear to me that *Grassroots* articles could cover a range of topics including crocheting, true crime shows, house hunting, and anything else that can be researched and discussed, but they had to incorporate terms from the Writing Program and inform upon and expand on or analyze those

terms in some way. During my research, I made sure to become familiar with the terms and understand how they function to spread knowledge about writing and research practices. Learning about all these genre conventions is a part of **genre research**, which includes participating in “activity like finding our own examples in a genre and analyzing what people do—and how they do it—in those examples” (“Genre Research Terms”). By reading some of the articles and browsing through the journals, I was able to get a pretty good sense of what the journal was trying to accomplish and what components played a necessary part in that.

This entire preparatory research process made it much easier for me to fill out the internship application and feel confident in my answers as well as answer the follow-up questions because I had come to know the journal so well. Without this initial research, my answers in the application may have been vague and lacking in explicit skills that I could bring to the journal. Once I secured the intern position, the foundation of knowledge that I had created for myself came in handy when it came time for me to actually start working with articles and attempting to develop them. I was aware of the mission of the journal and the conventions that are required of *Grassroots*’ particular research genres, all of which made me feel much more confident and stable as a new intern being assigned journal content for the first time. In this case, research not only helped with the application process, but with the work of the internship as well.

Research as a Stress Reliever

The application and interview process for internships and jobs can be incredibly daunting and filled with stress and anxiety. There is probably no amount of research and preparation that will entirely ease those feelings as it is just within the nature of the application process, especially if you really want that position. Despite the amount of research that I did, I still felt some nerves heading into my interview at the Pub Unit. However, I did find that I was more worried about presenting myself in the best way through my demeanor and appearance as opposed to worrying about what I may be asked and how I will answer, and I think I have my notes to thank for that. There are many reasons why it is incredibly important that you prepare for the interview process any way that you can. Having background knowledge will allow you to enter the interview feeling confident about the position that you are applying for. When I walked into my interview for the Publications Unit, I was aware of what the intern position would require of me and felt comfortable that I would be able to handle the workload and do a great job on the tasks that I was assigned. This allowed me to demonstrate that I was

suited for the position, and it also boosted my confidence when answering questions. Of course, my preparation did not allow me to thoroughly and effectively answer every question that was thrown my way as there were certainly some that I wasn't anticipating. While I did allow myself to panic for a few seconds after being asked these questions, my thorough research process provided me with a foundation of knowledge that I could pull from to piece an answer together, which eased my stress before and during the interview. Through my own experiences, I have found it to be true that research and preparation are crucial for making sure that you are a good candidate and that you can present yourself as one throughout the application process, but especially during an interview. Whether it is applying for an internship or job in editing or accounting, these skills and the ability to conduct productive research can prove to be a massive help in portraying yourself as a composed, knowledgeable, and self-assured candidate, even when the interview nerves take over!

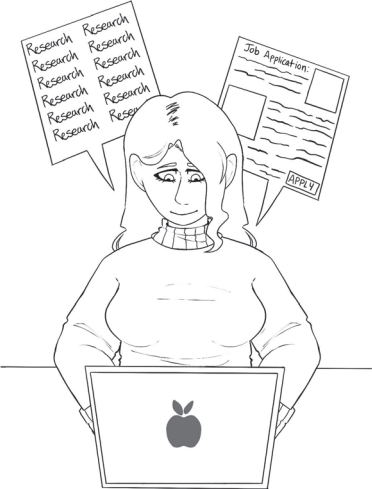
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Jessica Kreul is an undergraduate English major at Illinois State University. She hopes to progress her writing skills before graduating and entering a career in editing. Besides her love of reading and writing, Jessica also enjoys working out, playing "Animal Crossing," and watching movies.



Notes



Drawing by Maddie Silk



Drawing by Grace Betts