



A day in the life of a freelance publisher Emma Anderson

Four years ago, Emma joined us in Torquay as the first publishing student to be awarded a sponsored place at a UKSG Conference.

We catch up with her here to see where life has taken her since then.

My day starts as usual at 6:00 a.m. The tranquillity is sublime and I thrive on this quiet hour before chaos ensues and my three teens leap dynamically out of bed with enthusiasm, joy and love in their hearts, anticipating the delights the day ahead will bring. Sorry, drifted off there for a moment ...

My career in publishing came about really by accident. I had reached a stage in my life where I wanted to try something new, challenging, independent (read all the signs of a mid-life crisis), so I decided on a career change. In my previous incarnations I had worked at the BBC in the archives and regional TV and then had gone on to work for a couple of charities. After scouring the prospectuses of my local universities (Reading, Oxford and Oxford Brookes), I came across a part-time course in Publishing and Language (my first degree was French and German at Portsmouth Polytechnic) and attended interview on the basis that I was not exactly what they were looking for on paper, but they were interested in seeing how I could fit in. Happily, I was accepted and so began a whole new life – two years of part-time study, learning a new trade and even able to incorporate my interest in foreign languages at the same time. What more could I ask. Every day that I went into Brookes, I felt as if a gift had been bestowed – two whole days of study and learning. I only wish I had felt the same way during my first degree.

The decision to become a freelance publisher had its roots in a 'publishing speed dating' event held at Oxford Brookes. Chatting to the young publishers there about options, it became apparent that I was possibly too old to find work in marketing and publicity (even though I can party with the best of them) and that part-time employment with a publisher (all I could feasibly manage with three youngish children at the time) was tricky to find. A little surprised, I decided to go it alone. And I haven't looked back. Kumquat was born.

217 Each day varies enormously but usually starts like today with the opening of e-mail. I generally try to plan the day ahead the previous evening, so that I can organize the structure in advance. I do have what is called these days a 'portfolio career', which means anything can happen. Rather than describe the daily routine (there isn't really one), I thought I would describe here the varied types of work that come my way as a freelance publisher.

I was lucky enough to find my first freelance assignment as editorial assistant for a politics journal *The Political Quarterly* via a Brookes lecturer. It is a job I still relish and has grown in ways I never thought imaginable. As well as the journal side (four issues a year), I am involved in conference and event organizing and working on the annual tome we publish. This year's book, which I am proofreading at the moment and organizing cover details for, is on the Big Society (due out in the Summer) which incorporates politics, philosophy and sociology very neatly. This initial link led to further work on other journals and books with our publisher, Wiley, and to the understanding that the publishing world is a very small one and lots of paths intertwine directly to new opportunities. I now work on a law journal for OUP, and copy-edit and proofread for other publishers and organizations. I get one day 'out' a week at the University of Oxford in the Politics department (a happy spin-off from the journal). Today, I was making the finishing touches to a conference on the Fiscal Squeeze that we are hosting at All Souls which takes place tomorrow, from which a book will emerge next year. It all fits in beautifully.

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Working for other publishers inspired me to go ahead and publish books myself under the name Kumquat Publishing (<http://blog.kumquatpublishing.co.uk/>). Along with some parents from my children's primary school, we created and published Kumquat's first tome *St John's County Primary School Wallingford: Celebrating One Hundred Years of an Oxfordshire Market Town School*. (Admittedly, if I had my time again, I would have chosen a shorter title.) It was a bit of a fundraiser and we received a grant from a local trust for printing it, enabling all the children to receive a copy and also allowing us to sell at our local book shop and museum (and also available on Amazon!).

Working as a home-based freelancer is a real privilege and in many ways a luxury. I work in our small box room, which is now fully furnished with laptop, printer, scanner, radio and plenty of pictures and cards on the walls (in fact, all I really lack is a Jimmy Osmond poster to finish the look). A question that is often asked is whether I feel lonely (as many freelancers do) and I always reply an emphatic "no". In fact, as well as spending the first hour of my day alone, I also cherish the time between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. that I am able to spend in perfect solitude on days like today. I wouldn't say that I have the perfect work-life balance now, but I am nearly there, and I do try and make time for dancing, cycling and exploring my historical interests in the First World War. (One day I WILL finish my thesis on publishing between 1914-1918.) I also fundraise for a local children's charity, Home Start Southern Oxfordshire, to keep grounded and to continue my interest in issues close to my heart. There is a good freelance network in Wallingford and we frequently work on projects together, combining our skills on newsletters, annual reports and briefing publications, to name just a few.

If you are thinking about going along the freelance path, I would wholeheartedly recommend it, but there are some things you may need to consider:

- Are you prepared to work at sometimes inconvenient times with short deadlines?
- Do you enjoy being in your own company for much of the time?
- Would you be able to accept you won't receive sickness/holiday pay?
- Can you take full responsibility for all that you do with little or no support?
- Could you enjoy the freedom of being your own boss?



The logo of Kumquat, Emma's publishing company

- Could you get used to the idea that you no longer need to commute and the only traffic you will come across is the odd electric guitar, bit of Lego, or dolly in the hallway from your bedroom to your office?
- Can you manage your own time and combine it with other parts of your daily life (assemblies, popping to school to check insulin levels, meeting other freelancers)?

If you find you are ticking quite a few of these boxes, then being a freelancer is for you! There is never a dull moment, and if you enjoy keeping many balls in the air at the same time and can glean satisfaction from all you do, you are onto a winner. The mantra "The harder you work, the luckier you are" is one to chant every morning and I am so grateful I bit the bullet.

And now I am off to sharpen my heels and go for an energetic session of modern jive at the local dance emporium.



"... the only traffic you will come across is the odd electric guitar, bit of Lego, or dolly in the hallway ..."