

## Commissioning – Truths and Myths

Perhaps you've always dreamed of becoming an editor. Perhaps you like the sound of it but aren't really sure what's involved. At the Oxford SYP's September speaker meeting, experienced commissioning editors Sarah Caro (OUP) and Al Bertrand (Blackwell) uncovered the truths and myths of commissioning to an audience of aspiring (and actual) editors.

The first thing we were told is that it's not imperative to have a degree in the subject field you commission in – after completing an English and Drama degree, Sarah Caro worked as a bookseller for Waterstones, an academic rep, and a commissioning editor in Psychology and Sociology for Longman and Cambridge University Press, before moving to OUP to be an economics editor. Of course, it can help in some fields – Al Bertrand, who started out as a Publishing Assistant before becoming Commissioning Editor for Classics and Associate Editorial Director at Blackwell, studied Classics at Graduate School. And it's not all glamour, as some people may think – commissioning involves lots of hard work and dedication, and there are a fair amount of administrative tasks to be done too. Al Bertrand defined commissioning as *all about spending your time on the things that make the biggest difference*. So, once you've landed your first role as an acquisitions editor, how do you start, and continue, to commission successfully?

Sarah and Al recommended these top tips for commissioning:

1. NEVER commission something you don't believe in 100%
2. Do your research – and be prepared to admit you don't know everything!
3. Be creative, focus on your market – always remember your target audience
4. Choose reviewers carefully
5. Identify possible authors, and build and maintain relationships with them
6. When trying to commission a book, sell yourself, sell your company, and do everything in your power to close the deal
7. Manage your authors' expectations
8. Champion your book – and get involved in all aspects of its production, design, sales and marketing.

The truth is that commissioning, paradoxically, is just a small part of the commissioning editor's role. Once a book is signed, and the process of publication begins, it's a whole new story...