



University of Missouri

# MIZZOU

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## Alumni Profile

### Behind-the-scenes editor

Merrill Perlman is one of the most important editors at *The New York Times*. She is also one of the most anonymous.

Perlman, BJ '74, is the director of copy desks, which means she is in charge of hiring, supervising and firing when it comes to the roughly 150 journalists who write headlines; correct grammar, spelling and punctuation; work to ensure both factual and contextual accuracy; and otherwise back up the reporters who receive the prominent bylines.

Those 150 labor throughout the newspaper — at the sports section, the Sunday magazine, the weekly book review, the national desk, the international desk, and so on. Copy editors' names never appear in print, and they are sometimes reviled by reporters with big egos. But without talented copy editors, the *Times* and most other publications would be a mess.

Perlman joined the *Times* in 1983 after working at newspapers in Carbondale, Ill., and Des Moines, Iowa. She started out as a reporter, but, true to her selfless nature, decided that “making others look good was more fun.”

An effusive individual, Perlman tends to stand out among copy editors, not only because of her professional stature but also because so many are introverts. She generously describes copy editors as “people who love to read, love language, love to solve puzzles and who have brains that are sponges and trap bits of information that others may consider useless. Most important, they can retrieve those bits.”

When Perlman left the Chicago suburbs in 1970 to enroll at Mizzou, she had not decided whether to major in journalism or creative writing. “I was kidnapped by journalism students during my first month at Mizzou — well, I went willingly with them for ice cream — walked into the *Maneater* newsroom and knew I was home.”

perlman




Merrill Perlman supervises the roughly 150 journalists who work the copy desks at *The New York Times*.

Now Perlman's home is the most influential newsroom in the world, where she is known as "an editor's editor," the ultimate compliment.

— *Steve Weinberg*

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