During your placement what skills did you gain that will make you stand out at future interviews?
Most of the tasks that I worked on in the office were under time constraints. Unlike a school project, every time I asked for help, I was conscious that I was taking time away from someone doing their own work, so I learned new office skills and familiarised myself with the types of tasks that I had to complete in order to work efficiently under time pressure. The work I was doing was for real publications, which meant that the quality of my work had to be the best I could make it, otherwise I would be wasting everyone’s time. This placement definitely taught me through real world experience how to work under pressure. Oftentimes I would be assigned more than one task at a time, so I would have to organise myself and prioritise what needed to be completed first and how I could combine tasks for maximum efficiency. In a creative job like publishing and editorial, not all solutions to problems are straightforward. Many times when I was searching for pictures, simply typing in the name of the painting or the subject of the photograph was not enough to find the best shot. Searching some obscure picture libraries, or thinking of different search keywords by myself was a seemingly dull but really important problem solving skill that I learned. Mailing books with low resources and scrounging up substitutes, improvising on sending letters or assembling gifts, and inserting comments into manuscripts that fail to correspond to the page numbers are other instances where I had to expand my problem solving skills.

What advice would you give other students interested in similar work?
Go into publishing with an open mind. I don’t think anyone who wants to do publishing but has never worked in the industry really knows what kind of work the job entails. There are a lot of mundane tasks such as mailing or reading articles to find quotes about authors to put on the covers of books. This is especially true for me in this instance, as I worked under an imprint that mainly dealt with non-fiction pieces. The manuscripts that I read were about a wide range of topics, such as neurology and economics, fields that I am not that familiar with. But all the work that you do has a purpose and can widen your outlook on how the industry works, and how society functions as a whole. Also don’t hesitate to ask questions, even when people look busy, because the information they can give you can make both your and their jobs easier in the long run.

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Katherine Wan’s placement was at Penguin Random House UK. Here’s what she said…