Viola Ohler Phillips was born in York, PA on February 4, 1914. Viola, an outstanding student, was valedictorian of her class at William Penn High School in 1931. Her family, like many working families, was poor during the depression. With financial assistance of a relative who owned the York Phone Co. and a scholarship, Viola attended Wilson College, an excellent Presbyterian woman's college in Chambersburg, PA. Viola graduated magna cum laude from Wilson in 1935 with a major in mathematics and minors in Spanish and English.

After graduating, Viola found that jobs were scarce and for a few years and taught night courses in English and Mathematics sponsored by the WPA. In 1939 she applied for a Civil Service job as a “computer.” To prepare for this work, she took a quick course in the operation of a Comptometer, the most advanced calculating machine available at that time. She started work as a computer for NACA, Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory, in October, 1939. There she joined the computing pool, where the women solved difficult problems such as calculating pressure distribution on airfoils, carrying the calculations to eight decimal places.

The computers were located next door to the editorial office. The head of this office, Pearl Young, heard of Viola's background, and would call on her to assist in editing reports when the work load became heavy. Viola enjoyed this work and soon transferred to the editorial office. The work at the editorial office required considerable skill in dealing with people as well as detailed knowledge of English style and grammar. During WWII, large numbers of new engineers were employed who did not have much background in English or the desire for excellence that had been required in NACA reports since the organization was founded. The women had to use their powers of persuasion as well as their knowledge of English to get the reports in acceptable shape.

Viola became head of the editorial office in 1944 when Pearl Young moved to head the editorial office at the Lewis Laboratory in Cleveland. In this position, she had to keep the office running smoothly as well as to resolve arguments with the engineers that frequently came up. Her training in mathematics was valuable in interpreting and clarifying many of the analytical reports that were produced.

Viola married W. Hewitt Phillips in 1947 and retired from the NACA in 1949 when her first child was expected. Viola had three children, Frederick H. Phillips, Robert O. Phillips, and Alice P Check. During their childhood, she was active in the scouts, PTA, PEO, AAUW and in the Women of the Church at the First Presbyterian Church in Hampton.

After the children left home, Viola resumed editing NASA reports as a contractor, work that she could do mostly at home. This work was discontinued when the editorial office became able to handle the work.

Viola and Hewitt took part in the ceremony to dedicate the Pearl Young Auditorium at Langley, and prepared the biography of Pearl Young that now appears on a wall plaque in the building. Viola died on February 23, 1997 at the age of 83.

Biography provided to LaRC in 2017 by Alice Phillips Check (Viola’s daughter)