

WRITER'S DIGEST

Writing Submissions for Magazines: How to Submit Writing to a Magazine

In this post, we look at how to handle writing submissions for magazines. Whether you write fiction, nonfiction, or poetry, learn how to submit writing to a magazine.

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Submitting to magazines is a great way to break into the publishing world. For starters, magazine credits lend writers credibility, whether they're publishing short stories, poems, or nonfiction articles on a subject. Beyond that, it can be a nice way to earn some money as well.

While all magazines have specific needs and guidelines, there are some universal truths that can help writers find more success. For instance, editors expect queries in certain circumstances, but they handle submissions on spec in another way.

[\(When should writers write on spec?\)](#)

Let's look at how writers can find more success when submitting to magazines.

Writing Submissions for Magazines

The first step in knowing how to approach submissions to magazines is to identify what you're writing. That is, are you writing poetry, fiction, or nonfiction? If you're writing nonfiction, are you writing creative or literary nonfiction, or are you [writing how-to articles](#), informative articles, and/or profiles? Believe it or not, what you intend to write plays a huge role in how you submit.

[\(How to write better titles.\)](#)

So let's look at some of the major categories:

- **Fiction.** When it comes to fiction, magazines expect writers to submit the complete manuscript with a cover letter or note (more on that below). Most short stories run 1,500 to 5,000 words. Anything shorter is usually considered flash fiction or short short stories; some places do accept longer works, but it gets more difficult to find markets.

- **Poetry.** The expectation with poetry is also to submit the complete manuscript with a cover letter. However, most magazines like poets to submit a grouping of poems—most commonly three to five poems in a submission.
- **Nonfiction.** Nonfiction is a little more complicated because it depends on what type of nonfiction you're writing on how you submit. Creative and literary nonfiction, including personal essays, is usually handled in the same way as fiction submissions. That is, submit the complete manuscript with a cover letter. However, articles that teach a skill, deliver information, and/or profile a person, place, or thing often are handled with the query letter (more on that below).

How to Submit a Complete Manuscript

When editors ask for writers to submit complete manuscripts, it usually means that they're going to use the manuscript you submit to make their decisions on acceptance. As such, you need to make sure that the manuscript is polished as much you're able.

[\(Tips for self-editing.\)](#)

But what about that cover letter or note, I hear you ask. That part of your submission package is not completely irrelevant. In fact, it can sometimes be a tie-breaker when two or more pieces are in competition for one publishing slot.

Here are a few tips on handling the cover letter:

- **Address the editor by name if available.** If you can't find the appropriate contact name, "Dear Editor" will suffice. Avoid phrases like "To whom it may concern" and "Dear gentlemen." Also, don't take liberties with editors' names. Anyone who addresses me as "Bob" in their submission receives an automatic hole to dig their selves out of the rest of the submission.
- **Include the title(s) of your manuscript(s).** I added the (s), because editors sometimes wish writers to submit multiple poems or flash fiction stories at once.
- **Include the genre of your submission.** Since the lines can blur at times (especially if you get into prose poetry), make it obvious to the editor what you're submitting: Poetry, Fiction, and/or Nonfiction.
- **Share publication credits and/or awards.** If you've been previously published, share a few of the highlights. And by highlights, I mean three to five publications at most. Same thing with awards. If your work is accepted for publication, you can beef up your bio then, but an editor doesn't need a list of every publication credit you've ever received.
- **Be honest without raising red flags.** If you haven't been published before, that's fine. Don't hide that fact, but also don't call attention to it. That is, avoid writing a sentence or paragraph about how you've never been published before, or how you might be too young (or too old) to get published, or whatever other insecurity you might have. Not trying to downplay insecurities, because we all have them. Just don't include them in your cover letter. It's better to brief and understated than offering several reasons for an editor to think working with you might turn into a headache.

For most editors, the cover letter is something they'll view after liking your manuscript enough to want to learn more about the writer. So a brief cover letter is not going to hurt you in that respect.

Sample Basic Cover Letter

Here's a really basic sample cover letter to a fictional publication for someone with no previous publication credits:

Dear Editor,
Please consider my 2,000-word short fiction, "The Martian in Love." I'm a writer living in Suwanee, Georgia.
Thank you for your consideration,
Robert Lee Brewer

For submissions of multiple poems, don't worry about word count. Just list the titles after your "Please consider my poems, ..."

How to Submit Using a Query Letter

While a cover letter is basically a "more information" correspondence, a query is essentially a sales letter. And you're selling yourself and your ideas. A query is a call to action in which you hope the editor will act to assign you an article to write.

Here are the basic elements of a query letter:

- **Hook.** This can be a fascinating statistic tied to your story. Or a concise, but compelling, anecdote. Even a rhetorical question can work as a hook. The main purpose of this opening sentence is to pique the editor's interest.
- **Pitch.** This explains what it is you want to write. For instance, you may want to write a 1,200-word article titled "10 Easy Stretches to Avoid Hiking Injuries" that fits within a special section of a hiking magazine—or a regional magazine in the Rocky Mountains or Appalachians. Keep it concise, focused, and easy to understand and visualize. Don't load this down with details.
- **More Information.** This is where you can include more details and information about what your article would cover, why it's a great fit for the magazine's audience and anything else that's relevant to the article. While this is technically the "more information" section, try to keep it down to one or two paragraphs (or 50 to 200 words).
- **About You.** As with the cover letter, keep this short and touch on highlights only. Publication credits can be relevant to show your writing expertise. However, if your article is on parenting, a day job as a child psychologist—or, you know, being a parent—could be relevant to showing your subject expertise.

Bonus tip: Include an extra idea or two at the end of your query. Sometimes I don't assign an article, because I've already got coverage or recently published something similar. However, smart freelancers include an extra idea or two at the end of their queries that they don't flesh out. But those ideas have been known to prompt me to let a freelancer know I'm passing on the original pitch, but could you tell me more about this other idea.

Final Thoughts on How to Submit Writing to a Magazine

If you plan to get serious with submitting to magazines, then I think you should put a little thought into organization. That is, keep records of where you submit, what you submit, when you submitted it, when you received a response (if you received a response), what that response is, and any other information related to the submission.

[\(How to track magazine query letters and follow-ups.\)](#)

Also, remember that these are good general guidelines of how to submit to magazines, but always make sure to check specific submission guidelines before submitting to a magazine or online publication. Editors know what they want and how they want it. So follow those guidelines to the letter, whether that's a query or cover letter.

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