

SUBMITTING YOUR WORK FOR PUBLICATION – A STARTER PACK

1. General Advice.

a. Common sense

- i. RESEARCH ONCE RESEARCH TWICE RESEARCH A THOUSAND TIMES OVER. I hate to say it, but when it comes to your intellectual property, your hard work, and your money, it's best to be cautious. So please use common sense. If something looks fishy, it probably is. If you're not sure about an agency or journal, use MORE THAN ONE resource to verify its legitimacy. And when in doubt, don't engage. There's plenty else out there.
- ii. Read guidelines. No matter who or what organization you're submitting to, they're all going to have specific guidelines. Read them from start to finish. Set up your manuscript. Then READ THE GUIDELINES AGAIN. Some places get so many manuscripts they won't even bother looking at yours if you don't follow their simple directions.

b. Your public persona

- i. Platforms. If you have a platform, any at all, it doesn't hurt to mention it. Are you a columnist in your local paper that sees a wide circulation? Let them know. Have you already been published somewhere? Let them know. If they think you already have an audience, they are more likely to give your work a second look.
- ii. Social media. This is perhaps more important for people seeking avenues into book publishing, however it can't hurt: have a social media presence. Twitter is especially important these days, but Instagram and Facebook are also good to have. If you can, keep up a blog a couple of times a week. Do whatever you can to build traffic/followers for your accounts. If you can proudly tell a prospective publisher that you have several thousand followers, they will sit up and take notice. This is free publicity.

c. Perseverance is key

- i. More likely than not, you will be able to wallpaper your house with the number of rejections you receive. That's okay! But you can't quit. Keep going or you *definitely* won't succeed. If you keep improving your craft, and continue submitting your work, eventually you're going to run across someone who loves your writing. It'll happen. But it takes time.

2. I have a full-length book I'd like to publish.

a. I'm interested in traditional publishing.

- i. Finding an agent. It is rare these days that any publisher, big or small, wants unsolicited manuscripts. So your first step should be finding an **agent**. The best way to find a literary agent is to pick up books that you like, or books that you think would have the same audience as your own. Go to the acknowledgments and mark down who the author's representation is. Search for that agent online, and look into their agency. Any literary agent worth their salt will have specific guidelines on what they want to see in any submission. This is usually a brief description (your elevator pitch), a complete synopsis (cliff notes on what happens), and 5-10 pages or 1-2 chapters. Some accept email, some snail mail, some both.
 1. Twitter. Increasingly agents and even editors hold open markets on Twitter, so it could be a good way to connect. Get advice from popular hashtags like #askagent, find out what agents want under #mswl [manuscript wish list], and prepare your elevator pitch for #pitmad. The latter two have become so big they have their own websites: manuscriptwishlist.com and <http://pitchwars.org/pitmad/>, respectively. While there, read up on Pitch Wars, too, as you could win a chance to work with a mentor in the industry.
- ii. RESEARCH. DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP. Disreputable 'agents' abound who will fleece you for your work. That's why it's best to find agents through books already published and agencies that are established. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) have advice on how best to find an agent and a list of hazardous agencies at www.sfwawriters.org. This is a good place to begin if you're not sure about an agency, but please, never trust just one source.
- iii. What an agent does for you. Once you've found an agent and signed a contract, the agency will help you edit your work and shop it around to various publishing houses and imprints. They have intimate knowledge of the publishing world (it's a small one) so they know which fish are going to bite. They will help you negotiate a deal about rights, royalties, advances, and how many books the house will publish (if it's the beginning of a series). Agents get a cut, but that means the best deal for you is also the best deal for them.
- iv. What a publisher does for you. One of the major things a traditional publishing house can give you is exposure. They have whole teams completely dedicated to marketing their products. They are also often the ones representing you when it comes to foreign rights, digital rights, film rights, etc. (this can vary according to agency). Those displays at B&N right when you walk in? Thank the extra money the publisher has paid. Other things they take care of for you: editing, proofreading, formatting, production, design, and the **risk**. The publisher decides how much to pay you in advance and how many copies to print for sale. If they make more money than your advance? You make more money. If your book doesn't sell? You keep your advance anyway, and the publisher takes the hit.

1. Drawbacks. If that sounds too good to be true, it can be. While a publisher *can* put their full marketing weight behind you, it doesn't guarantee that they will. Giving you an advance and choosing how many copies to print, for them, is like making a bet. How much they bet will vary. If there *is* a profit, they will keep most of it because they invested the most in it (average author cut: 10%).

b. I'm interested in self-publishing.

- i. Find a guidebook. Get a Dummies book or similar for self-publishing. There are many steps to consider, such as whether you want someone else to edit or proofread your work (usually paying a freelancer), etc.
- ii. Pick your platform. Once again, you **MUST RESEARCH**. Lulu and Amazon Self-Publishing are two of the biggest markets, so that's a good place to start. Keep in mind, it is just as easy for a so-called self-publishing company to scam you as a disreputable agency. Make sure you know who owns the rights to your work, and how much printing, etc., is going to cost.
- iii. Design. You have to format all your work. You have to design the cover. Sometimes platforms help you with that (you pay extra), sometimes they won't. This can take some serious skill for it to be done well. Develop those skills or you may have to pay someone to help you. InDesign is a popular program people use.
- iv. Marketing, marketing, marketing. We've all heard the success stories of people selling their novels for 99¢ and making millions. But that is just as rare as becoming a bestseller using traditional publishing. You must market, repeatedly, on multiple platforms. Be present and active in social media and blogging. Pay for online ads. Consult those guidebooks for more tips, and if you can, find other self-published authors and heed their advice. If you want to self-publish for a profit, it's going to become its own job.

3. I have a short story/essay/poem I'd like to publish.

a. Find a journal

- i. Do your RESEARCH. Journals really do run the gamut from big to small, able to pay you or not able to pay you, free submissions and fee submissions. It is so, so easy to get duped into paying money to bad organizations. The reason submissions sometimes cost money is because it helps the journal keep running, as they don't always break even with sales. They also get such a high volume of submissions they need to be able to pay people to sort through them all.

- ii. Set up a Submittable account. Many, though not all, journals these days will ask you to submit your work through www.submittable.com. Do yourself a favor and make an account now so you don't have to worry about it later.
- iii. Books and magazines. There are several good guides out there that you can use as reference. Just remember that what's true at time of printing might not be true months down the line. And never trust just one source.
 1. *Writer's Market* is an example of a book that gets published every year, in a couple different editions (children's writer, etc.). We carry these at the library so check them out any time! The company has a paid online service as well.
 2. *Writer's Chronicle* is a magazine published by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP). It's released six times a year, so should keep you quite up to date on what's new in the writing world. Plenty of journals buy ads in it, too. For more info on the mag and other resources, including an enormous annual conference for writers, agents, and publishers, see awpwriter.org.
- iv. Web resources. When using web resources please remember that the people running the sites do not necessarily vet journals before allowing them to post their calls for submission. The onus of research falls ON YOU.
 1. <https://duotrope.com/> Duotrope is a fantastic resource to help you find the right market for all your written work. Unfortunately it does cost \$5 a month for an individual. However it is an excellent resource and if you're consistently looking for opportunities to submit your work, it is probably worth the cost.
 2. <https://www.newpages.com/> New Pages is a similar resource to Duotrope, and even includes categories like screenplays, comics, and translations. It is free.
 3. <https://www.pw.org/> Poets & Writers is also a great online resource to search for journals—you can even search by subcategory. This is a free service, but there's also a magazine you can subscribe to with their hints and tricks, if desired.
 4. <https://thegrinder.diabolicalplots.com/> The Submission Grinder works differently from the other resources. It is a totally free service in which you keep track of what and where you have submitted your work. With all this data collected, you can see how quick the turn-around is (how long did it take for the journal to respond?), how many people have submitted, what the pay rate is for publication, etc. It looks like they're still building the nonfiction market, but fiction and poetry are a go.

No matter your goals, don't forget to do your
RESEARCH.