

# the road to publication: strategies & etiquette for submitting to literary journals & magazines

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## // introduction

The process of submitting your writing to literary journals, magazines, and contests can seem daunting. However, with a little research and a plan, it doesn't have to be. This handout and our discussion will focus on discovering the best homes for your work, crafting cover letters, keeping track of submissions, the benefits of social media, and coping mechanisms for those inevitable (though dreaded) rejection letters.

## // terminology

- **masthead:** list of editors, assistant editors, and (sometimes) first readers.
- **guidelines:** a magazine, journal, or contest's set of unique specifications regarding content, word count, manuscript formatting, submission timing, and more.
- **cover letter:** a letter the submitter includes with their submission that typically includes the title, word count, and simultaneous submission status of the piece(s) being submitted.
- **bio:** a brief overview, typically written in third person, of who the writer is, where their work has previously been published, and which awards they have won or for which they have been nominated.
- **simultaneous submission:** a single piece of writing that a writer submits to multiple magazines/journals/contests at the same time (some mags/journals/contests do not allow "sim subs," so always check the guidelines for this).
- **slush pile:** all the submitted (AKA: non-solicited) writing received by a mag/journal.
- **reader:** as with The Louisville Review, many lit mags/journals/contests count on volunteer readers or assistant editors to make the first decisions about submissions received in the magazine's "slush pile."
- **tiered rejections:**
  - **form rejection:** "Thank you for submitting to *Journal Name*. Unfortunately, this piece is not a fit at this time. We wish you the best placing it elsewhere."
  - **positive rejection:** "While this piece is unfortunately not a fit at this time, we hope you will submit more work in the future."
  - **personal rejection:** "While this piece is not a fit at this time, I admired the *[voice/style/etc.]*. I think it could benefit from *[a little of this/a little of that]*. I hope you will consider submitting more work to us in the future."

## // preparing submissions

- **revision & proofreading**
  - It's generally true that a stray typo or two won't cause a journal editor to reject a piece they love, but submitters of messy, unrevised work will likely struggle to receive acceptances.
  - First readers/beta readers: A fresh set of eyes can help spot typos, writerly quirks, and other issues that make a piece feel unready for publication, but which a writer may struggle to see in their own work.
- **manuscript formatting & journal-specific guidelines**
  - *Read and follow ALL guidelines listed by each of the journals to which you plan to submit work!*
  - Typical prose formatting: Times New Roman, 12pt, double spaced, 1" margins, page numbers, name, and email in the top left corner (*unless a journal's guidelines specify otherwise*).
  - Typical poetry formatting: Times New Roman, 12pt, single spaced, left justified (unless the poem's form is intentionally non-left-justified), 1" margins, page numbers, name and email in the top left corner (*unless a journal's guidelines specify otherwise*).
  - It's important to note that some venues read submissions "blind," which means that the editors do not want author-identifying information within the file containing submitted work (no name/email address, no author name in the file name itself). *Always check a journal's site carefully for this information.*
  - Because guidelines vary so much between venues, it can be very helpful to make a spreadsheet or list that contains pertinent guideline information, editors' names, and submission periods for each journal one plans to submit to.

## // resources

- [thereviewreview.net](http://thereviewreview.net)
- [newpages.com](http://newpages.com)
- *poets & writers* ([pw.org](http://pw.org))
- [awpwriter.org](http://awpwriter.org)
- [duotrope.com](http://duotrope.com)
- [submittable.com](http://submittable.com)
- [Twitter](https://twitter.com)
- [rejectionwiki](http://rejectionwiki.com)
- **anthologies**
  - *Best American Short Stories, Poetry, Essays, etc.; Pushcart Prize Best of the Small Presses Anthology; Best of the Net; Best Small Fictions; Best Microfiction.*

## // determining a journal or magazine's quality

- The quality or “prestige” of a literary magazine or journal is subjective in many ways, but there are some practical criteria consider when deciding where to submit your work:
  - How many subscribers does a print journal have? (Find this info at [thereviewreview.net](http://thereviewreview.net) for many print mags.)
  - How long has the mag/journal been publishing?
  - Has work published by the journal been included in anthologies like Best American, Pushcart, Best of the Net, Best New Poets, Best Small Fictions, etc.?
    - If not, that's okay. Another mark of seriousness: the mag/journal routinely nominates work they've published for the prestigious awards that work is qualified for.
  - Do you love the work you see on the mag/journal's pages? This should count for a lot.
    - Some people might disagree with us on some of these criteria—for instance, some writers might consider non-paying venues to be low quality, some might only suggest print publication, etc.—but there are so many fantastic mags out there publishing the freshest voices, and they ought to be viewed as serious.

## // contests vs. regular submissions

- Contests aren't the only way to enter into the publication realm.
- The literary magazine world is huge—from the most famous, longest-running print journals to the smaller, often online-only, literary magazines that are publishing fantastic writing, so there are always calls for regular submissions that may not require a fee and may provide better odds for acceptance and publication.
- Online lit mags rarely charge fees for submissions, which can make it easier to send out multiple stories, poems, or essays to multiple lit mags without breaking the bank.

## // strategies

- **deciding where and how to submit**
  - Never submit work to a journal or magazine in which you wouldn't be proud to see your work published. Even if you aim for a high volume of submissions, it's important to know at least enough about each journal's style
  - Focus your search by aiming for a specific parameter (top tier vs. smaller venues, print vs. online, average response time, etc.).
  - Submit in tiers, with the help of spreadsheets or lists to keep yourself organized.
    - helpful articles:
      - <https://www.janefriedman.com/submissions-literary-journals/>
      - <http://www.thereviewreview.net/publishing-tips/8-reasons-your-submission-strategy-sucks-a-1>

- <https://wordstintoprint.wordpress.com/create-a-tiered-list-of-journals-and-magazines/>
- <http://www.thereviewreview.net/publishing-tips/dont-forget-basics-maintaining-healthy-submissions>
- **the spirited submitter (k.b.'s method)**
  - Send one piece to as many as 10 magazines and journals at a time.
  - Have several pieces out on submission at any given time.
  - Consider aiming for the “100-rejections per year” goal (Kim Liao, *LitHub*: <https://lithub.com/why-you-should-aim-for-100-rejections-a-year/>).
  - Good for those who write a lot or have a lot of finished work that’s ready to be submitted.
- **the meticulous submitter (annie’s method)**
  - Spend a lot of time reading journals, following them and their editors on social media, and compiling detailed spreadsheets with submitting info for each magazine.
  - Break lists into tiers based on estimated acceptance rates found on Duotrope.
  - Send work out when you feel you have a piece that might work for a specific magazine or two.
  - Good for writers who work at a slower pace or who don’t have a big backlog of pieces ready to send out.

## // advice from editors

- [bit.ly/EditorsRoundTable](http://bit.ly/EditorsRoundTable)
- [sararauch.com/the-art-of-landing/](http://sararauch.com/the-art-of-landing/)
- [bit.ly/RealWorldEditors](http://bit.ly/RealWorldEditors)
- We also reached out to the editors we know on Twitter to hear their thoughts on what a good submissions lecture should include. You can read our tweets and all the responses at these links: <http://bit.ly/annietweet> / [bit.ly/kellietweet1](http://bit.ly/kellietweet1) / [bit.ly/annietweet1](http://bit.ly/annietweet1) / [bit.ly/annietweet3](http://bit.ly/annietweet3).

## // conclusion

- Follow the guidelines!
- Read magazines and journals before submitting.
- Revise and proofread.
- Submit often.
- Be patient and don’t respond to rejections.
- ***Follow. The. Guidelines.***