

Submitting Your Work to Literary Journals & Literary Magazines

*See end of document re: book publication

Sections:

Why/Why Not Submit
Finding a Literary Journal
Steps for Submitting

Why submit?

- To share your finished, polished, best work
- To build an audience for your work
- To see your work alongside work you enjoy
- To build your CV/Resume for grad school or a job in the literary community
- To build your CV/Resume to show your interests and motivation in a hobby
- To build your publishing record while searching for an agent/book publisher
- To join and support a community

Why not submit?

- To see if you are good enough
- To find an agent or publisher
- To wow the world
- Because your parent and significant other really likes your work
- Fame! Fortune! Glory!
(These reasons can motivate a writer, but they also can make it harder to research and strategize the submission process)

Finding a Literary Journal:

What is a literary journal?

In general, a literary journal publishes creative writing. These journals can be broad (publishing a variety of things) or they can be tailored for certain audiences (poets, themes, styles, etc.) Some journals publish work online, in print, or in a combination of both. There are well-known and prestigious journals, just as there are new journals bursting into existence every day. Journals are different than magazines in that they don't come out as frequently, their content categories are relatively the same each issue, and they tend to expect a literary audience broad audience. That being said, there are plenty of journals that think of very specific audiences outside of a mainstream literary tradition too.

Your job now is to find the journal for your work—meaning for your style, content, genre, voice, and aesthetics.

How do I find a literary journal?

Undergraduate Journals: There are journals that publish only work by undergraduates. A simple Google search will provide some names. A site supporting literary journals might also have a database such as this one:

<https://www.newpages.com/magazines/undergrad-lit-mags>

Sites for finding journals: Duotrope (a member's only searchable database); New Pages (a literary journal review) or Review Review (another site reviewing lit journals); Poets & Writers' Literary Magazines page.

Genre journal searches: Search "science fiction literary journals" or "horror journal" or "creative non-fiction journal" in order to find some options. Also, Duotrope has a feature that allows you to search by genre.

"Best of" journal searches: You can search "best literary journals" and find a lot of lists with possible places to consider.

Note: "Best of" lists are good for getting a start on exploring journals.

However, they are based on the reviewers' desires, aesthetics, and writing intent. Some journals are "the best" because they pay. Others have a history of publishing things by notable literary writers, but notable does not always mean the best). Some are judged by the length of years running and others by subscriber numbers. Don't limit yourself to journals on someone else's "best of" list—rather, use this lists as a starting point. Or, if you are searching for a best of, get specific: "Best literary journals ranked by appearance in The Best American Short Stories" (for example).

Now what?

READ THE JOURNAL. Read what you can online from the journal. Look up the writers and poets published in the journal. If possible, obtain a copy of the journal through the site or from the library. Do your homework. It's pointless to send your work to a place that doesn't even consider the genre or style you are interested in.

Do I send my work to all the journals I like?

Yes, but first check if the journal allows for "simultaneous submissions." This means you can send your work to multiple journals and if you are accepted somewhere, you can pull your submissions from the other places without a fuss. Because so many places use electronic submissions, this is a lot easier to do than when writers/poets submitted through snail mail. See the "Steps for

Submitting” section for more details.

How do I keep track of my submissions?

You may want to make a “three-tier system”: Pick your top five places (all of which should be of the same caliber) and send to that group. If you are rejected from all five, then pick another five that are the next “tier” down. This way you don’t end up getting an acceptance for some journal you don’t care as much about and have to withdraw your piece from journals you really do care about without having heard back from those journals.

Make sure you are submitting widely and not waiting on just one piece to be accepted. This makes it easier to handle rejection and you want to play the odds here. It takes some juggling.

Remember if you get an acceptance, you need to immediately withdraw that piece from other places. This is an industry standard procedure, which means publishing in two journals or not carefully monitoring your submissions shows a lack of responsibility and respect.

When do I give up?

I know people who have submitted a story or poem dozens of times. One friend was rejected 47 times before his story was published—a story that then won an award and opened the door for more publications. There are a few ways to deal with rejection as part of your writing career/hobby:

1. Pull the piece back and revise or ask someone for some feedback before sending it out again.
2. Keep sending it out anyway.
3. Send out newer stuff instead with intent to visit the older stuff after you’ve seen some acceptances.

If at some point, you do decide it is time to give up on publishing that piece—no worries! Send out newer work. Sometimes a story just won’t be picked up but makes sense in a larger collection of work. Sometimes a piece of writing is the training/draftwork that gets you to the next big piece.

Finally, be patient. Remember that everyone is more likely to be rejected than accepted*. Also remember that the editors reading your work are usually unpaid volunteers. They can be slammed with submissions. They can be tired or cranky. They can also be looking for specific things. You just can’t know. [*The journal databases sometimes show the record of acceptances for each journal].

When not to give up:

Most journals have a standard rejection email, but some also have a personalized rejection option. If an editor likes your work, but the particular piece isn't a good fit for the journal or is not totally ready in the eyes of the editor, they may send you a rejection that asks for more work or encourages you to submit again. THIS IS GOOD!

Steps for Submitting

1. Finalize your story/poem/essay. Proofread it again. And again. Wait two weeks. And read it again. Not all journals read the entire submission. Most journals can discern within the first page (if not the first paragraph or line) the style and potential of the text. So don't expect your reader to get to the end before making a decision. Don't expect them to get through the first few pages before rejecting. You've got to catch your reader immediately.
2. Format correctly. Double-spaced, include your name and email in the header at the top right. Include page numbers. Make sure you give your work a memorable, intriguing title. Center the title. Do not put the title on a separate page.
3. Read the submission guidelines for the work. There are sometimes additional requirements (incl. the word count or file format, for example).
4. Look for a submission fee and decide if you are willing to pay it. There is plenty of debate about this. Should online or only print journals expect a reading fee? Should you only pay if you receive a back copy? Should you only pay for your very favorites? This article shows a few different opinions on submission fees: <http://www.thereviewreview.net/publishing-tips/reading-fees-should-you-submit>
5. Write a submission letter. Simple is better:

“Dear editor,

Thank you for considering my short story, “(NAME OF STORY)” for publication. It is (WORD COUNT) words long and is a work of fiction.

**I look forward to hearing from you,
(YOUR NAME)”**

You may include another line, if you know the editor or if you were urged to send a piece by someone else that knows the editor. If you

are submitting to a theme issue or for a special section of some sort, include that information. If genre is important for your submission, state what the genre is. If you have read their journal and have something important to say about their approach and previous publications, then include a line.

DO NOT give a plot synopsis of your story. Do NOT tell the editor why you wrote it or why you think it should be published. Your time is better spent reading other journals and finalizing more of your work.

Do include your biography note if you have additional publications or areas of study, awards, etc. in fields that relate to the story and to publishing. Bios are usually 100-200 words. I include mine after the sign off, but some people insert it after the first paragraph. You will have a chance to update/revise your biography note if your work is accepted. The biography note in the letter is just to let the editor/readers see that you have experience and to consider the types of journals that are interested in your work. If you don't have other publications, include the school you attend/attended and your major or job title and perhaps where you live. Look at the journals' contributors to get an idea of how to include this information. Prior publications (or lack thereof) doesn't mean you automatically are rejected or accepted. Some people include a detail or two about themselves, but don't try to oversell yourself.

In your submission letter, DO NOT TRY TO BE CLEVER. Everyone thinks they are clever. Everyone tries to be clever. If someone reads 15-100 submissions in one sitting (I read 300 submissions over a weekend once) "clever" stops working. If you are a clever writer, it will show up in the piece you provide. You can't do a whole lot in the letter to make the reader like your submission more, but when you are submitting your work for free, you can certainly do enough damage for it to be ignored.

6. Read over the submission guidelines carefully and submit your work as specified. If a place asks for a hardcopy, then you need to send a SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope). If you want your hard copy back, you need to indicate so in your letter and provide enough postage for them to do so. They will NOT return it or get a hold of you if there is no SASE or if the postage isn't enough. Most people do not expect the hard copy back and simply state: "Please feel free to recycle my hardcopy." But you would still include the SASE for the rejection/acceptance letter. **However, most places use electronic submissions/correspondence anyway.**

7. Keep writing and sending out new work. It may take 3-6 months to hear back from a journal. Don't let the submitting process hold you back!
8. Continue being awesome.

Publishing a book:

Some of the process above is very similar:

- Research presses and publishers (check out Poets & Writers database of presses, look at the presses for the books you like, Google search)
- Read widely to see what is out there
- Ready your manuscript according to the press' submission guidelines
- Make sure your manuscript is the final final final draft

The big difference is in the letter:

Literary Journals just want a basic letter. Presses and publishers, however, ask for specific details about the manuscript. This letter is called a query letter. You may need to write several versions of it as well.

Query Letter:

The letter has one goal: To catch and keep the agent/editor's attention. Make the agent care about (desire! need!) the story and protagonist in prose or themes and arguments in poetry.

The letter often covers these areas:

- Brief plot synopsis in fiction/CNF; brief thematic synopsis in poetry/CNF
- Genre/style (where the work falls in the current literary landscape)
- Why it should be published (Woo your editor!)

You can search "query letter" for examples including examples for certain genres. Remember to read the submission guidelines carefully for additional instructions.

So I then send my manuscript with the query letter?

No. Not always. Occasionally the press will instruct you to send the manuscript with the letter. Usually you need to send in some pages or a chapter. Again, read the instructions carefully. Make sure the sample you send is not only your very best work, but captures the reader's attention. You want them to want (to NEED) to read more.

Then what?

Wait. It could take 3 to 6 months. Some publishers won't reply. In the meantime, work on newer stuff. If you receive rejections, consider revising (if the rejections have any helpful ideas for you). If not, perhaps this is a project

that leads to the next big project. No one says you have to publish your manuscripts in order either.

What about finding an agent?

Finding an agent follows some of the other basics of publishing as well. Research agents, ready your manuscript and letter according to their suggestions and requirements, plan on reaching out to many agents instead of waiting on one, etc. Again, you can Google search to find plenty of resources on how to find an agent or publisher.

How do I keep from giving up or melting into a giant puddle of sadness?

The important thing to remember here is that you are working as a writer/poet when you do these things. A writer is not just a person who sits and writes brilliant things that are then picked up by the wind and distributed the hearts of everyone. A writer must continually publish, promote, and search for opportunities. Part of the job of being a writer/poet is performing these steps. If you can consider it “work” as any other career requires work besides the part that you love, then it becomes more manageable. But if you think of submitting your work and looking for agents as a distraction from writing or (worse) as a reflection of your worth as a writer, then you’ll double the time you spend on each of these tedious steps while tormenting yourself in the process. Instead, set some hours aside each week or every few days for this type of work. Schedule it in so that it becomes part of the routine.

Finally, remember that you love writing. You love it and it means a lot to you, so you will do this “work” portion in order to get to the part you love.

*A note on self-publishing: this is a practice that is becoming more common. There are also publishers who are willing to consider self-published books and there are contests for them as well. Usually genre (horror, YA) books have a better chance at being published by a press after being self-published. Read up on the why’s and why not’s of self-publishing to see if this is a good fit for you. There are plenty of articles and forums out there about it. However, there are some fields (academia or publishing jobs) that won’t consider a self-published work as valid. If you do self-publish, remember this means the marketing and promotion of the work is entirely up to you. Some people are into that, some are not.

HOW TO FIND A LITERARY JOURNAL

A lit journal is a publication focusing on creative writing.



**There are
a lot
of them.**

GOOGLE SEARCH

Start simple. Search for literary journals in your genre or style or region or topic. Ex. look for journals about animals or for undergraduates or Mountain West or sci-fi. Start browsing.



TRY LISTS

Search "best of" lists-- Search within your genres, styles, interests, or community. Ex. search journals for Indigenous authors or best flash fiction journals or hybrid text journals or emerging journals.



DATABASES

- Duotrope
- Poets & Writers
- New Pages
- The Review Review

Search by genre & subgenre, style, word or page count, medium, readership, contributor pay, and so much more.



FEATURED JOURNALS

New Pages & *The Review Review* feature or review issues of literary journals on their blogs. Check out sites and magazines about writing and ollow  the writers and poets you love.



YOUR FAV WRITERS

Your favorite authors publishing in a similar genre and/or style as you may list where they have been published on their author website (publications page) or in the acknowledgements of their book. Checking out those journals is a great way to find new places for your work and to read the work of others!



STRATEGIES FOR SUBMITTING YOUR WRITING



One submission at a time puts a lot of pressure on that one acceptance. Instead ...

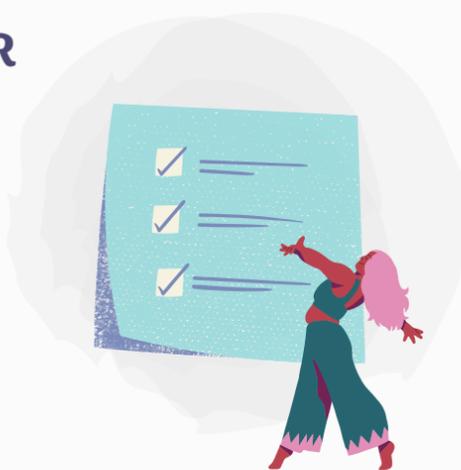
SUBMIT MULTIPLE WORKS

Try to have 3 or 4 submissions out a time. Always look for journals that accept simultaneous submissions



SELECT MULTIPLE JOURNALS FOR EACH WORK TO BE SUBMITTED

Make a list of 9-12 journals for each submission. YES--that's 27-48 journals total. But most journals only allow one submission at a time



SUBMITTING SHORTER WORKS?

Read the journal's submission guidelines. For short works, journals usually require:

3-5 poems per submission

3-5 short prose pieces

(wordcount provided)



CREATE THREE TIERS

For each submission, select three tiers of journals separated as your first, second, and third choice

SUBMIT

For each piece of writing, submit to your top three journals. And ... wait ...



PUBLISH



Once you receive an acceptance, withdraw your submissions from the other journals immediately

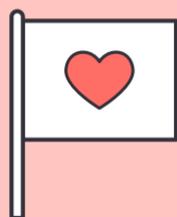


RE-SUBMIT

If your work isn't picked up by any journals in the tier, move to the next tier and submit again

FINAL TIPS

FOR LIT JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS



Select Journals Carefully

Find journals that support *your* submission's style, genre, and voice. This also means reading journals regularly and watching for journal announcements.



Read Guidelines

Read the journal's submission guidelines, which will not only include requirements and process instructions, but also descriptions of what they want to publish.



Simultaneous Submissions

Submit each work to multiple journals and keep track of rejections and acceptances.



Use a Strategy

Submit your work to your top three journals and don't send to the next three unless you receive rejections from all three of your first choice.

Remember to watch for themed issues, open submission times, response timelines, and calls for submission through social media.



Multiple Works at Multiple Places

Keep at least 3 works in rotation. Don't put yourself through waiting for rejections/acceptances one at a time. Also, some journals might reject the piece you sent, but request you send something else or submit again next time directly to an editor.

Keep Going!

**YOU MISS 100% OF THE SHOTS
YOU DON'T TAKE** *WAYNE
GRETSKY

*Rejection is part of the world of publishing.
Don't let it get in the way of greater things!*